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Van der Pas, D.J.; Vliegenthart, R.

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Do Media Respond to Party Conflict? Debates on European Integration in British, Dutch and German Party Manifestos and Newspapers, 1987–2006

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Daphne J. Van der Pas and Rens Vliegenthart

University of Amsterdam

How do policy issues reach the political agenda? This question has received ample scholarly attention over the last decades, yet only recently have researchers explicitly examined the ways in which the agendas of political parties and media interact. This study builds on this ongoing work to examine how the conflict among parties in terms of the policy stances they propose (positional conflict) and the frames they attach to policy issues (discursive conflict) affect media attention. By focusing on party debates on European integration in British, Dutch and German election campaigns between 1987 and 2006 and employing a pooled time-series analysis, the study shows that both positional and discursive conflict among parties boost media reporting on issues. These findings have important implications for our understanding of the dynamics of media attention in relation to particular policy issues, as well as the way in which parties and media interact within election campaigns.

Keywords: party conflict; framing; media agendas; European integration; political issues

The number of policy issues that can potentially reach the political agenda in modern democracies is almost infinite, yet only some issues gain the attention of politicians, journalists and voters. The process of ‘mobilisation of bias’ (Schattschneider, 1960, p. 62) – that is to say the struggle over which policy issues top the political agenda – has attracted widespread scholarly interest from students of both European and American politics (see e.g. Adams, 1997; Carmines and Stimson, 1989; De Vries and Hobolt, 2012; Green-Pedersen, 2007; Kriesi *et al.*, 2006; 2008; Lindaman and Haider-Markel, 2002; Riker, 1982). Most of this work focuses on political parties as they serve as the gatekeepers of parliamentary debate. Moreover, political parties have clear incentives to mobilise particular issues in order to advance their electoral standing. Yet parties are largely constrained by media actors. Media attention is an important prerequisite for parties to reach the electorate. These complex interactions between party and media actors have received only scant scholarly attention. Only recently have political and communication scientists increased their efforts to study how the attention and conflict over policy issues among parties and within the media interact (Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2011; Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006).

This study adds to the existing body of work by examining how parties generate conflict over policy issues in order to influence media attention. We argue that there are at least two forms of conflict in which parties can engage: *positional* and *discursive*. Both are ultimately aimed at winning votes with the goal of securing political office and implementing policy ideals (Strøm, 1990). Positional and discursive conflict differ, however, in character. In the

case of positional conflict, parties distinguish themselves from competitors by carving out distinct issue stances. In the case of discursive conflict, parties fight over the meaning attached to a policy issue – that is to say the framing of the issue. In this study, we explore the extent to which both discursive and positional conflict foster media attention. The article contributes to the literature on the interaction between the political and media agendas, which mostly looks at *salience*, by adding *conflict* among parties in both framing and policy stances as important moderators of salience effects. In this way, our study contributes to the literature which emphasises that political agenda-setting effects are conditional (Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006). It is one of the first studies to explore whether the way parties present their issues in formal communication affects the agenda-setting power of those parties. The study enhances our understanding of why journalists in some instances follow the content of the political agenda more closely than in other instances.

We examine party-media dynamics by focusing on a policy issue that recently generated much contestation – European integration – within three countries: Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The European integration issue constitutes an excellent object of study for our endeavour. EU membership is not a novel phenomenon in Western Europe, but the contestation over European integration is (e.g. De Vries, 2007; 2010; Hobolt, 2009; Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Kriesi *et al.*, 2006; 2008). Exploring the EU issue within the three countries outlined provides us with variation in the extent of conflict over time and space: while conflict over the EU has been extensive in the UK for a long time now, it is still limited in Germany and the Netherlands (De Vries, 2007). In addition, following recent work demonstrating the multidimensional character of the process of European integration (Díez Medrano, 2003; Helbling *et al.*, 2010), we break down the issue into a variety of sub-issues adhering to the different aspects of the integration process. This allows for a more fine-grained analysis of the consequences of party conflict for media attention.

Our study demonstrates that discursive conflict among parties indeed enhances the impact of party attention on media attention for EU issues. Specifically, journalists respond more strongly to issues brought forward by political parties if these parties differ in the way in which they present the issue – i.e. if they are in framing conflict. This finding lends credence to the conclusion put forward by Chong and Druckman (2007, p. 100) that ‘virtually all public debates involve competition between contending parties to establish meaning and interpretation of issues’. However, the other form of conflict we consider – positional conflict – does not significantly increase the transfer of salience from parties to the media. Thus, our findings suggest that parties play a pivotal role in gearing up media attention to policy issues, especially when they put forward opposing frames.

This article unfolds as follows. First, we outline our hypotheses about the ways in which conflicts among parties matter for media attention to policy issues. Next, we introduce our case and the issues relating to European integration in Great Britain, Germany and the Netherlands. Third, we clarify our data collection and coding strategies. In a fourth step, we outline our measures and estimation method. Fifth, we present our empirical results and inspect the robustness of our findings, and finally we conclude by highlighting our main findings and their implications.

Hypotheses

The relationships between the party and media agenda have recently gained more and more scholarly attention. Most of the work to date focuses on agenda-building linkages in which formal and documented aspects of the party agenda (e.g. transcripts of parliamentary debates, oral and written parliamentary questions, and party electoral manifestos) are compared with actual media coverage (see Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006). The focal point of this existing work is the transfer of salience of issues from one agenda to the other: To what extent and under which conditions does an increase in attention for issues on the media agenda result in an increase in attention for the same issue on the political agenda – and vice versa? Unlike previous studies, however, the focus here is not on media content (Thesen, 2013; Van der Pas, 2014), but on the content of party communication. We consider conflict among parties as the key variable in explaining media attention to policy issues. Party conflict is important as it signals to journalists which issues are politically contested and thus worthy of reporting. We argue that at least two forms of conflict among parties exist: *discursive* and *positional*. While positional conflict relates to a competition of ideas about an issue, discursive conflict signifies the divergent meanings parties attach to an issue. Party conflict over an issue, either positional or discursive in nature, is likely to increase the effect of political attention on media attention on that same issue as conflict constitutes one of the most important news values to which journalists adhere – signaling that political attention to this issue is important (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Harcup and O'Neill, 2001). Conflict is an important aspect of political news coverage (Kleinnijenhuis *et al.*, 2007). Issues on which political parties agree are not newsworthy and considered uninteresting to report or to read about (Vliegthart, 2012). If parties express disagreement about an issue, either in the position they take or the framing they use, this is a clear signal for journalists that the issue might be worth reporting. Let us clarify the concepts of positional or discursive conflict among parties and their relationships to media attention in more depth.

Positional Conflict

Positional conflict is at the core of spatial theories of party competition (see Downs, 1957), and relates to the way in which parties attempt to distinguish themselves from their competitors. In the Downsian spatial model of politics, policy preferences of voters and parties are represented as positions in a shared policy space. In this model, parties compete with each other by taking different positions in that space. Greater distances signify more disagreement over policy. Introducing positional conflict is beneficial for parties as their issue positions are an important factor explaining voters' ballot choices – a process referred to as 'issue voting'. The most widely used conceptualisation of issue voting is the proximity model as developed by Enelow and Hinich (1984) in their seminal work *The Spatial Theory of Voting*. This model assumes that voters act rationally and vote for policy proposals that form the basis of future government. The rationale here is that each voter's utility of a party on a particular policy issue is a negative function of the issue distance between a voter and a party. In the case of redistributive attitudes, for example, one would expect voters to cast their ballot for a party or candidate with an issue position on redistribution that is

most proximate to their own. Consequently, by introducing positional conflict, parties offer voters a choice on a policy issue.

Our focus here is on this link between politics and the media. As argued, an important part of politics is the competition between contending parties over the policy positions they take. This disagreement, or conflict, signals to journalists that an issue deserves public attention. Conflict is a key news value that journalists abide by and it determines to a considerable extent how much attention journalists pay to politicians (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Harcup and O'Neill, 2001). Politicians can devote a lot of attention to a policy issue, but if they basically agree on it, this attention is hardly considered newsworthy. Only if conflict exists will journalists consider the issue worth reporting. This expectation is formalised in the following hypothesis:

H1: Positional Conflict Hypothesis: Political attention for an issue is more likely to lead to media attention if parties are in positional conflict over the issue.

Discursive Conflict

Discursive conflict refers to the different meanings – frames – that parties attach to policy issues. Parties not only have to differentiate themselves from opponents in terms of policy positions, but they also need to ensure that policy issues are defined within the terms of what they consider to be the problem at hand and what solutions should be proposed. Put differently, the framing of an issue in accordance with a party platform or doctrine is important for parties (see Hinich and Munger, 1993; Petersen *et al.*, 2010; Slothuus and De Vreese, 2010). The framing of an issue carries the definition of the problem or issue, but also calls more or less explicitly for certain types of solutions (Entman, 1993). Particular ways of framing an issue may be more beneficial to parties, allowing them to force rivals to speak about an issue in their terms. As a result, discursive conflict constitutes an important dimension of party competition.

Though a large array of framing studies have convincingly demonstrated the effects of single frames through experiments, only recently have scholars come to recognise the importance of studying framing outside the laboratory setting and to consider a more realistic situation of multiple frames that may compete (Chong and Druckman, 2007; Sniderman and Theriault, 2004). Furthermore, it is remarkable that no study to date has explicitly explored how *framing* in the political realm impacts *media attention*. Framing – or, more specifically, the divergence in framing – serves as an important indicator of the disagreement that exists among political elites. After all, the use of different frames indicates that political actors emphasise different aspects of the issue, present different definitions of the problem and provide different solutions (Vliegenthart and Van Zoonen, 2011). In introducing alternative frames, parties fight over the terms of the debate. When parties compete in this way they try to make their frame dominant by emphasising it. At the same time, they avoid the frames employed by their competitors (Hänggli and Kriesi, 2010). As media have to make choices about their coverage on the basis of newsworthiness, of which conflict is an important criterion, we again expect a stronger effect of political attention on media attention when competing frames are present. The discursive conflict hypothesis summarises this expectation:

H2: Discursive Conflict Hypothesis: Political attention for an issue is more likely to lead to media attention if parties are in discursive conflict over the issue.

It is worth noting that both hypotheses state that the transfer of salience from politics to the media is more likely to take place under conditions of political conflict. In other words, both posit a *conditional* effect: positional and discursive conflicts are hypothesised to moderate the effect of political attention on media attention. As with any interaction effect, however, there are two complementary readings of it. The fact that political conflict moderates the effect of political salience on media attention necessarily implies that political salience moderates the effect of political conflict on media attention. By consequence, H1 and H2 also imply that political conflict is more likely to generate media attention if an issue is politically salient.

Alternative Explanations of Media Attention

There are several alternative expectations of increased media attention for a policy issue to consider. As well as conflict, negativity is an important news value (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Harcup and O'Neill, 2001). Journalists are known to over-report on negative news (Soroka, 2006). In keeping with this literature, we also expect the media to pay more attention to those issues on which parties express more negative views about the EU. In other words, *predominantly negative stances towards European integration within party communication leads to heightened media attention.*

Moreover, the salience of issues for political parties might also induce more media attention in itself, and not only in interaction with conflict. In the literature, however, there are surprisingly few studies examining agenda-setting effects in this direction, and the few that exist find very limited to no effects of salience among parties on salience in the media (e.g. Bartels, 1996; Vliegenthart, 2007; Wood and Peake, 1998). What is more, if a direct spillover of political attention to the media is expected, it is likely to be short-lived and only prevalent during campaign times (see Brandenburg, 2002; Hopmann *et al.*, 2012). In conclusion, we take political attention into account, but our expectation is that *higher salience of parties towards issues does not (independently of conflict) lead to heightened media attention for the same issues.*

Exploring the Impact of Party Conflict on Media Attention: The Case of EU Issues

We examine the degree to which discursive and positional conflict among parties affects media attention by focusing on the politicisation of European integration in the period 1987–2006. Overall, European integration constitutes an excellent case study as we have witnessed considerable party and public contestation over the issue in the past few decades (e.g. De Vries, 2007; 2010; Hobolt, 2009; Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Kriesi *et al.*, 2006; 2008). Up to the late 1980s, European integration was usually perceived as a foreign policy issue restricted to the realm of international relations. In this view, European integration took place *among*, not *within*, countries of (Western) Europe. Two decades later, this view clearly no longer holds. The transition of the European Community to the EU laid down in the Treaty of Maastricht characterises the transformation from a mere intergovernmental

regime with primarily economic and market-related competencies into a supranational regime with increased political competencies (Hix and Høyland, 2011; Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Steenbergen and Marks, 2004). As EU policy making has extended its scope from market integration to non-economic issues and has thus become more and more multidimensional, the integration process itself is increasingly contested.

Consequently, when studying the nature and impact of European integration either in Brussels or at home, scholars need to take into consideration the institutional complexity, multidimensional character and increased politicisation of the process. The integration process is characterised by geopolitical, economic and institutional, but also increasingly social and cultural, components (see Helbling *et al.*, 2010). In order to do justice to these many aspects, we distinguish thirteen different topics within European integration, which we call 'sub-issues', and trace the conflict over these sub-issues separately through time.

The recent qualitative changes in the European integration process entail that it is no longer a policy issue restricted to the realm of international relations and policy making, but part and parcel of domestic politics. Therefore, we explicitly look at the dynamics among *domestic actors* underlying the increased conflict over EU matters. For this purpose, the political parties in the UK, the Netherlands and (West-)Germany offer a representative picture, first because the three countries differ in the degree of conflict over European integration among parties. While the UK has experienced large-scale conflict for many years now, conflict over the EU is only recent in Dutch politics and still fairly limited in the German case (De Vries, 2007; 2009). Second, all three countries experienced what is often considered the defining moment in conflict over the Europe – the Treaty of Maastricht – and therefore offer variation in space as well as considerable variation over election campaigns in the extent of conflict. Third, since these are all existing EU members, we are not faced with the potentially confounding effect of accession to the EU (as in Eastern European countries, for example), which should lead to exceptionally high attention for EU-related issues (Tillman, 2004).

Data and Methods

Our positional and discursive conflict hypotheses are tested using time-series data on thirteen EU sub-issues from 1987 to 2006 in the UK, the Netherlands and Germany. The sub-issues are listed in Table 1. As discussed, we anticipate that positional or discursive conflict over a certain sub-issue boosts media attention for that same sub-issue. We use party manifestos to gauge party framing and positions on these sub-issues, while we employ one quality newspaper per country as a basis for our media data.¹

Independent Variables: Discursive and Positional Conflict

A content analysis of party manifestos by trained coders was conducted to arrive at measures for positional conflict, framing conflict, negativity and salience of each sub-issue.² Every election, parties release manifestos to clarify their positions on current and recurring issues, and these provide an excellent source to measure party behaviour (Budge *et al.*, 2001). In each manifesto, the coders isolated the statements that concern the EU, and coded the EU sub-issue to which the statement was related. In addition, the coders indicated the position the statement expressed towards the European integration process,

Table 1: EU Issue Sub-categories

1	EU general: European integration, European Commission, European Council, Court of Justice, Parliament, Committee of regions, treaties, referenda, Euroscepticism, EU's democratic deficit
2	Accession of countries to the EU
3	Economy, trade, fiscal stability and policy, European monetary union
4	Foreign policy, diplomacy, defence, geopolitics, human rights
5	Social policy, unemployment, social welfare, urban/rural planning
6	Crime
7	Environment
8	Agriculture
9	Immigration
10	Democracy, local government
11	Education, (information) technology, science
12	Arts, culture and media
13	Moral issues

ranging from favourable (+1) to unfavourable (−1) with neutral in between (0), and the frame used by the party.

For each statement, the coders could choose five non-mutually exclusive frames (each coded 0 if not present, 1 if present): the peace frame, the prosperity frame, the pride frame, the profit frame and the politics frame. The peace frame signifies that EU issues are described in terms of (international) security, diplomacy and/or war and peace; prosperity framing relates to the extent to which EU issues are presented from a social welfare or environmental angle; the pride frame denotes that EU issues are presented from a national identity, ethnic or cultural point of view; within the profit frame the economic or financial aspects of EU issues are mentioned; and a politics frame discusses EU issues from an institutional or political-strategic viewpoint. Via these frames, parties can provide a meaning to each statement concerning a sub-issue in five different ways. Table 2 gives some examples of different framings of the same sub-issue.³

We are interested in two types of conflict among parties: positional conflict, where parties differ in the substantive positions they take; and discursive conflict, where parties are in competition over the actual terms of the debate. In order to get measures for both types of conflict, we use the coded manifesto data to calculate the *conflict* among parties. For positional conflict, we calculate the extent of 'positional polarisation', indicating whether parties diverge in their positions regarding the EU. Similarly, for discursive conflict, we look at 'polarised framing', which captures whether parties are opposed in their framing instead of being similar.

The measure of positional polarisation is built in three steps. First, from the manifesto statements the average position regarding the EU was calculated per sub-issue for each party. These positions vary continuously between −1 (completely negative) and +1 (completely positive). If a sub-issue was not discussed by any party in a year, there is no conflict and the positional polarisation was set to zero.⁴ Then, as a second step, the distances in position between party pairs was calculated, simply by taking the absolute difference in

Table 2: Examples of Statements on Sub-Issue ‘Agriculture’ with Different Frames

<i>Party</i>	<i>Frame</i>	<i>Statement</i>
Labour Party	Profit	‘Because of our success in achieving extensive reforms in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), 2005 will be the first year for decades when farmers will be free to produce for the market and not simply for subsidy.’
Liberal Democrats	Prosperity	‘We will insist on the enforcement of maximum time limits and for transporting live animals in the EU, a stricter timetable for banning veal crates and improved rearing conditions for pigs and chickens across the EU.’
Conservative Party	Politics	‘We will continue to play a leading part in European Community negotiations to reform the CAP.’

position between two parties. Third, based on these distances, the Esteban and Ray (ER) polarisation measure is computed (Esteban and Ray, 1994). The ER polarisation measure takes the size of the parties into account, their distance and the ‘polarisation sensitivity’, which was set at the standard level of 1.3.⁵ The index is calculated for each of the thirteen EU issues in every party system for each election year issue as follows:

$$P_{issue}(\pi, d) = \sum_{a=1}^h \sum_{b=1}^h \pi_a^{1+1.3} \pi_b d(a, b)$$

where:

$P_{issue}(\pi, d)$ is the positional polarisation of the EU sub-issue; π_a is the size of party a, measured by the size of the parliamentary fraction;⁶ π_b is the size of party b, measured by the size of the parliamentary fraction; 1.3 is the value of ‘polarisation sensitivity’ parameter, or α ; and $d(a, b)$ is the distance between party a and party b’s EU positions.

Our second measure of political conflict taps into discursive conflict towards the European integration project. Also for this type of conflict, an ER polarisation index was calculated in three steps. First, for each EU sub-issue, the number of times each of the five frames is used by a party in a manifesto is counted, and then divided by the length of the manifesto, to make these framing counts comparable across parties. Second, from these numbers of frame usage per party manifesto, Euclidean framing distances between parties are calculated.⁷ So, for each pair of parties the distance in framing of each EU issue is calculated in this way:⁸

$$d(a, b) = \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^5 (a_i - b_i)^2}$$

where: $d(a, b)$ is the framing distance between party a and party b on one sub-issue; a_i is the proportion of party a’s manifesto framing the EU sub-issue in terms of frame i; b_i is the proportion of party b’s manifesto framing the EU sub-issue in terms of frame i; and i is the index of the five frames described above. Third, an Esteban and Ray index was calculated on these distances using the same formula as for positional polarisation. If a sub-issue was not discussed (so no frames were coded), the measure was set to zero for no conflict. The

procedure gives a measure of framing conflict for each of the thirteen EU sub-issues in all three countries per election year. This framing polarisation score is higher when parties differ more in the way they frame issues, all else being equal. So, for example, if Labour frames the issue of accession to the EU completely in social terms, and never in economic terms, while the Conservative Party only uses the economic frame, their framing distance will be large and the discursive conflict measured as polarisation high. Moreover, the polarisation is particularly high when parties form two separate camps of framing with about equal weight in party size. Thus, in the previous example, the polarisation is higher if Labour and the Conservatives are of about equal size, and more importantly, it is lower if the Liberal Democrats take a bridging framing position by mixing economic and social frames when discussing accession.

Dependent Variable: Media Attention

This study looks at the response of national news media to party conflict over EU issues, so the dependent variable is the amount of attention news media pay to the specific EU sub-issues mentioned above. As political conflict is measured in election manifestos, we look at the response in the media in the whole subsequent electoral term (from the moment of publication of one election's manifestos to the next). We rely on an elaborate dataset collected earlier containing electronic copies of all articles mentioning the European Union, the European Community or any of its institutions for one quality newspaper per country from the early 1990s to the end of 2006 (Boomgaarden *et al.*, 2010; Vliegthart *et al.*, 2008). For the Netherlands, we have articles from *NRC Handelsblad* from 1991 onwards, for Germany *Süddeutsche Zeitung* from 1992 onwards and for the UK *The Guardian* from 1990 onwards.

Based on the manual coding of the party manifestoes as outlined above, we developed search strings for any of the thirteen sub-issues. Using Will Lowe's *Jfreq*⁹ we constructed a frequency list of all words that were mentioned in any of the statements coded as dealing with a specific sub-issue. From the resulting 13 frequency lists, words were selected that can be considered indicative for the presence of an issue, based on frequency (words that only occur seldom were excluded) and uniqueness (words that occur often in the lists of several issues cannot be used to reliably distinguish one issue from the other and are excluded as well).¹⁰ This procedure resulted in a list of a maximum of ten words per issue (word lists and more detailed information on the procedures are available upon request from the authors). For one sub-issue in each country (moral issues in the Netherlands; arts, culture and media in Germany and the UK) no word met the criteria outlined above and this issue was consequently excluded from further analysis.

Using the search strings, we searched the newspaper database and determined the total number of articles mentioning each issue starting two months before an election (the moment most party manifestoes were published) until two months before the next election (when new party manifestoes were published). This way, the independent variables, taken from the election periods, always precede the dependent variable in time. We do not have complete media data for the first and last election in each country. Consequently, for the first election, we look at the coverage from the moment the newspaper is included in the database until two months before the second election. For the last election, we look at

the period ranging from two months before that election until the end of 2006. The score that is used in the analysis is the *share* (i.e. percentage) of the attention for the EU as a whole that is devoted to a certain EU sub-issue in a given period. Taking the relative amount of attention per sub-issue ensures that trivial changes in the media format (e.g. from broadsheet to tabloid) do not determine the attention score. More importantly, the relative scores reflect the substantive interest at the sub-issue level better, as otherwise the general trend in attention for EU as a whole might be driving the trends in all sub-issues.

We conducted an additional robustness check to test whether the inclusion of a single newspaper is problematic and does not offer an adequate reflection of the public debate that takes place within a certain country. For both the Netherlands (*Volkskrant*, 1995–2005) and the UK (both *The Times* and *The Independent*, the whole period) we used additional quality newspapers that were analysed using the same search strings. The correlation between sub-issue attention in the *NRC* and *Volkskrant* series was 0.90, between *The Guardian* and *The Independent* was 0.91 and between *The Guardian* and the *The Times* it was 0.96. This indicates that – at least for quality newspapers – cross-issue and over-time variation in attention follows very similar patterns, even when the political leaning of those newspapers differs significantly.

Control Variables: Issue Negativity and Salience

We expect that media not only react to conflict, but also to negativism among parties. For each EU statement in the manifestos we recorded whether it expressed a negative position towards the object (i.e. the EU) generally. We assume that when talking about specific EU-related issues, parties are expressing an evaluation of the EU project as a whole. From the EU positions per statement (–1, 0 or 1 for negative, neutral and positive), we calculated a position for each party per sub-issue and then took the average score of negativity/positivity towards the EU for a party system at a given time.

News media attention may also simply follow party attention, so we include the salience of sub-issues within the political system as a second control. Although, based on previous studies, this effect is unlikely, it is important to take it into account because framing polarisation could be expected to be high for politically salient sub-issues. The salience of an EU sub-issue in a party system at a given time is calculated by counting the number of statements addressing a sub-issue in each party manifesto, dividing it by the length of the manifesto, and taking the mean score of all manifestos.

Table 3 summarises the main descriptive statistics for the salience among parties, attention in the media, negativity and the two polarisation measures for each country. As the polarisation numbers are not on readily interpretable scales, the issues with the highest polarisation are displayed as an illustration. On average, both the positional and framing polarisation between parties is lowest in the Netherlands, while German parties stand out for being most positive about the EU in their manifestos.

Estimation Method

Our dataset covers thirteen sub-issues in three countries over five elections (1987–2006). This gives the data time-series cross-section structure, with $N = 36$ ($3 \times 13 - 3$ for the missing sub-issues) sub-issues and $T = 5$ elections. We dealt with this structure by

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics

	<i>Germany</i>		<i>Netherlands</i>		<i>United Kingdom</i>	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>
Media attention (%)	8.33	6.20	8.34	5.45	8.34	3.70
Negativity/positivity	0.486	0.408	0.126	0.407	0.264	0.595
Saliency among parties	0.168	0.214	0.169	0.179	0.116	0.194
Positional polarisation	0.034	0.034	0.018	0.015	0.014	0.021
Framing polarisation	0.039	0.057	0.034	0.028	0.042	0.072
Election years	1990, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2005		1989, 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006		1987, 1992, 1997, 2001, 2005	
Highest framing polarisation	Foreign policy (4) in 1998		EU general (1) in 2006		EU general (1) in 1992	
Highest positional polarisation	Democracy (10) in 1994		Agriculture (8) in 1989		Social policy (5) in 1992	

Note: Saliency among parties (the number of EU statements divided by manifesto length in words, averaged over all parties) is multiplied by 1,000 for readability.

estimating ordinary least squares (OLS) coefficients with panel-corrected standard errors, as prescribed by Beck and Katz (1995). This ensures that the estimation method accounts for both panel heteroskedasticity (different error variances for the different sub-issues) and contemporaneous correlation (some sub-issues are similar and attention for such issues may therefore follow a similar pattern through time, leading to correlated errors). The time variable was numbered such that elections around the same year in different countries were assigned the same number. So, for example, the German elections of 2006, the Dutch elections of 2006 and the British elections of 2005 all were assigned the number 5, so that if something caused a rise in attention for the same sub-issue in all three countries around 2005/2006, the dependence in these observations was taken into account.

A prerequisite for the estimation of the models is that the temporal dependency is removed, which was done in two steps. First, the time-series of the dependent variable were made stationary by differencing the series. This was necessary because non-stationarity may produce spurious results, and as a panel unit root test (Maddala and Wu, 1999) indicated that media attention for EU sub-issues is indeed non-stationary, we used *changes* in media attention as a dependent variable.¹¹ We also differenced the independent variables in order to maintain the same substantive interpretation of the effects as in an un-differenced model. Second, we tested whether the dependent variable, the differenced series of media attention for the EU sub-issues, displayed serial correlation and because this was not the case, we estimated the models without any autocorrelation terms.

To ease the interpretation of the interaction terms in the models, we standardised all variables so that the main effects can be read as the effect of the variable when the other variable included in the interaction is at the mean. Following the recommendations of Brambor *et al.* (2005), we also present marginal effects graphs for the interaction effects. Marginal effect graphs are a convenient way of summarising exactly at which value of

political salience the effects of the polarisation measures become significant and vice versa – which helps to provide a substantial interpretation to our findings.

Empirical Results

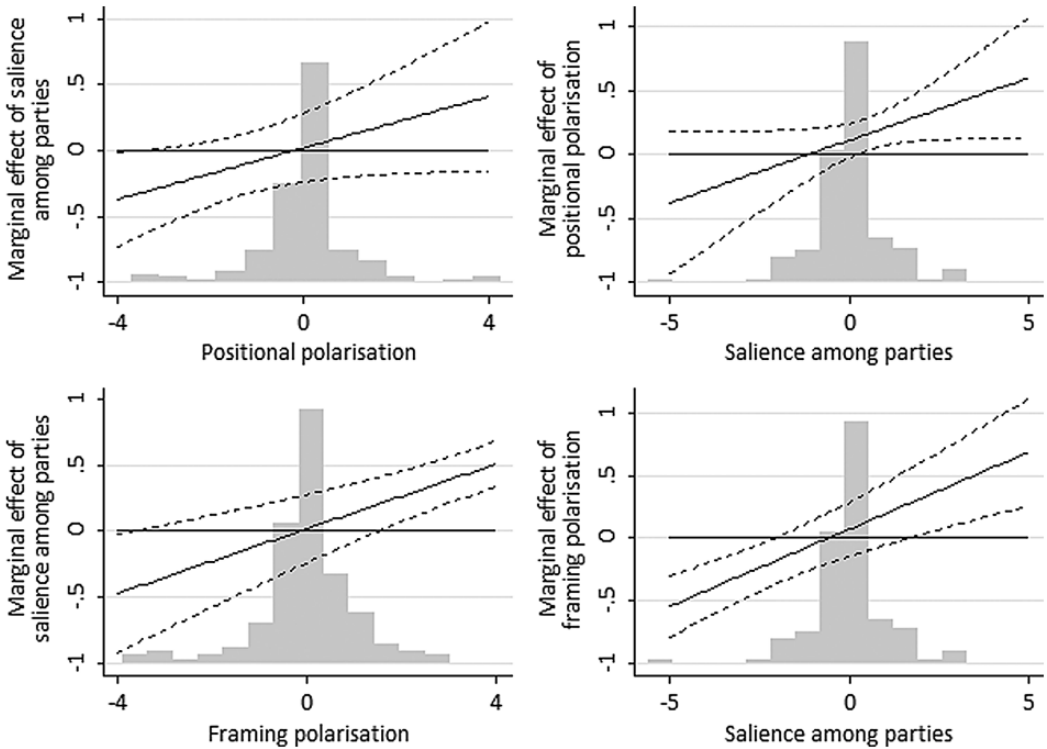
Table 4 displays the estimation results, presented in four models. First, two models are presented for each of the two types of political conflict, positional and discursive, which we operationalise as positional polarisation (model 1) and framing polarisation (model 2), respectively. Second, we present a model exploring the effect of both types of conflict simultaneously (model 3), and the final model presents the results for both types of conflict including the control of positivity/negativity in positions towards the EU among parties (model 4).

Regarding the first type of conflict, H1 stated that positional polarisation increases the effect of political attention on media attention for European integration issues. We see in model 1 that there is indeed a significant interaction between positional polarisation and political salience, but in models 3 and 4, which also include discursive conflict, the interaction is smaller and no longer significant. It seems, therefore, that framing polarisation, rather than divergent positions on the EU, affects whether media take over issues from the political agenda. This is not to say that conflict over policy stances does not matter at all. Figure 1 gives a more complete picture of the effects of positional polarisation and political salience combined, based on model 4. The upper left panel shows the effect

Table 4: Effects on Δ Media Attention for EU Sub-Issues

	<i>Model 1: Positional conflict</i>	<i>Model 2: Discursive conflict</i>	<i>Model 3: Both types of conflict</i>	<i>Model 4: Both types and control</i>
Δ Salience among parties	0.040 (0.116)	-0.015 (0.141)	-0.011 (0.143)	0.019 (0.156)
Δ Positional polarisation	0.087 (0.066)		0.111 (0.058)	0.112 (0.080)
Δ Positional polarisation * Δ salience	0.160*** (0.046)		0.053 (0.041)	0.098 (0.060)
Δ Framing polarisation		0.101 (0.127)	0.083 (0.128)	0.071 (0.130)
Δ Framing polarisation * Δ salience		0.160*** (0.039)	0.143*** (0.036)	0.123*** (0.033)
Δ Positivity about EU among parties				0.119 (0.120)
Constant	-0.045 (0.024)	-0.096* (0.046)	-0.100* (0.046)	-0.081 (0.064)
N (observations)	144	144	144	112
N (panels)	36	36	36	32
Adjusted R ²	0.04	0.08	0.08	0.08
Chi ² (df)	12.86 (3)	31.65 (3)	45.54 (5)	47.63 (6)

Note: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001. Panel corrected standard errors in parentheses. All variables are differenced and standardised.

Figure 1: Marginal Effects Based on Model 4 with 90% CI

that attention among parties has on attention in the media, at different values of positional conflict (with the 90 per cent confidence interval). The histogram displays which values of positional polarisation are in the dataset. At all occurring values of positional conflict, the confidence interval includes zero, confirming that political attention in itself does not lead to media attention and that the effect of political salience does not depend on the level of positional conflict. In the upper right panel, however, we see that positional conflict itself has a significant (and positive) effect on media attention when the moderator, salience among parties, is over the mean (zero). So, although the interaction is not significant, leading to a rejection of H1, in line with our expectations positional polarisation does lead to media attention under the right conditions. To be specific, when parties increase salience of EU sub-issues in party manifestoes, then heightened positional conflicts over an EU sub-issue leads to increasing newspaper coverage concerning these same issues. This holds true even though we control for the overall negativity towards and salience of the EU sub-issue in the party system.

As models 2, 3 and 4 show, framing polarisation has no significant main effect on media attention, but the interaction between political salience and framing polarisation is positive and significant. This is in line with H2, which specified that discursive polarisation

enhances the effects of political attention on media attention. The lower panels of Figure 1 show the marginal effects. On the left, we can see that although framing polarisation functions as a moderator, on average political attention has no effect on media attention. This is consistent with previous studies that found that media do not or hardly follow parties' issue priorities in general. However, we also see that when framing polarisation is very high, the salience of an EU issue among parties does have a significant positive effect on media attention. Likewise, in the lower right panel we can see that when media attention is sufficiently high (approximately over 1), framing polarisation leads to increased media attention. So, in line with our discursive conflict hypothesis, the more political parties engage in a salient struggle over the meaning of an EU sub-issue and use contesting frames, the more attention newspapers pay to the sub-issue.

As well as our two conflict measures, we control for parties' negativity towards the EU, which we also expect to increase media attention. Contrary to our expectation, the results indicate that media attention does not increase as a response to more Eurosceptic positioning of parties. Apparently, parties discussing the EU in a negative light are not regarded as particularly newsworthy. This might be explained by the fact that we employed quality newspapers, which themselves tend not to be Eurosceptic. Most importantly, though, the control for negativity does not change the findings on political conflict. In conclusion, we accept H2 about discursive conflict as a moderator of media agenda-setting by political parties, and we reject H1 but note that positional conflict does directly increase media coverage of an issue if it is coupled with sufficient attention among parties. Thus, the results confirm our expectation that media respond to conflict among parties over issues by paying more attention to these issues, but they appear to do this most strongly for discursive conflict.¹²

Concluding Remarks

Most of the existing work on issue competition within the American and Western European context studies the strategies of political parties in competing about which policy issues top the political agenda (see e.g. Adams, 1997; Carmines and Stimson, 1989; De Vries and Hobolt, 2012; Green-Pedersen, 2007; Kriesi *et al.*, 2006; 2008; Lindaman and Haider-Markel, 2002; Riker, 1982). This study builds on this research to examine the interactions between parties and the media. Specifically, we explore the ways in which two types of conflict over policy issues among parties – positional and discursive – gear up media attention. Examining the effect of party conflict on the media agenda is important because parties, as strategic actors, use conflict over issues to highlight programmatic differences to rally electoral support in order to strengthen their voice in parliament or increase the likelihood that they will be able to enact their policies while in office (Strøm, 1990). Indeed, voters in modern-day democracies often turn to the media to obtain information about parties' policy ideas and activities. Excluding the role of the media in analyses of issue competition is potentially problematic as one runs the risk of ignoring the important gatekeeping role that media actors play in setting the political agenda (Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006). By studying the dynamics of issue competition over European integration among parties and their effects on media attention, this study advances our understanding of the complex interrelationships between the party and media agenda.

We employ data on party debates on European integration in British, Dutch and German election campaigns between 1987 and 2006, and combine this with existing data on media attention for EU issues (Boomgaarden *et al.*, 2010; Vliegenthart *et al.*, 2008). In addition, rather than treating European integration as a single dimension on which parties compete and the media report as done in existing work, we open up the black box of party competition over European integration by disaggregating the issue into thirteen sub-categories. This allows for a more fine-grained understanding of the different positions and frames parties employ regarding European integration issues, which is particularly important given the changes in the integration process over the last decades. We examine the extent to which positional conflict (the stances parties take) and discursive conflict (the frames parties use) affect whether attention for different aspects of European integration among parties spills over into media reporting. By employing a pooled time-series analysis, we show that discursive conflict over European integration indeed enhances the agenda-setting power of politics over the media, while controlling for the degree of negativity regarding the EU among parties.

If parties discuss a political issue in different terms and focus on different aspects, this signals to journalists that the issue is one that parties disagree upon and might be worth reporting. The findings might help explain why previous studies rarely found a direct effect of political attention on media attention, as the political agenda only appears to be adopted by the media when parties compete over the meaning of an issue. Discursive conflict is apparently more pronounced for journalists than positional conflict, which was not found to incur this significant moderating effect. However, positional conflict did turn out to matter in a small way: in instances where there is both a higher level of positional conflict *and* a higher level of salience in party platforms, journalists do respond with increased attention. An explanation for this difference between the two types of conflict might be that framing is a particularly strong means to explicate differences with others (Vliegenthart, 2012). Positions are often less pronounced and, especially in the context of party manifestoes, less saliently indicated. For journalists, it is easier to report on discursive conflict that translates into media coverage in which opposing views are presented.

The finding regarding discursive conflict has important consequences for how we conceptualise party competition and its effects on media reporting. The framing of policy issues is a central feature in media studies (see Entman, 1993), but is largely neglected within the literature on party competition (for an exception, see Helbling *et al.*, 2010). Most studies conceptualising conflict among parties focus on differences in the positions parties take and the salience they attach to policy issues (see e.g. Stokes, 1963; Budge *et al.*, 2001; Laver, 2001). Our findings suggest that the different meanings – that is to say frames – parties ascribe to issues may be equally important. By framing issues in line with the overall programmatic slant of their platform, parties can ensure that policy issues are discussed on their terms and are most relevant to the solutions they propose. In consequence, framing allows parties to suggest that certain solutions are more appropriate or credible. This in turn could have important implications for issue ownership and the degree to which voters associate parties with certain policy issues (Petrocik, 1996). Our findings suggest that the linkages between the framing of policy issues and issue ownership may be a fruitful avenue of further research.

For media coverage, we relied on a single quality newspaper for each of the countries. While we conducted additional robustness checks considering coverage by other quality newspapers, the media analysis remained limited in nature. Future research should take into consideration a wider variety of news outlets – not only tabloid-style newspapers, but also television and online media. We are convinced, however, that results will be similar, given the fact that quality newspapers still act as strong agenda-setters for other media (Vliegthart and Walgrave, 2008) and that this study shows that coverage in different quality newspapers is strikingly similar. A second issue considers the period under consideration: after 2006, the EU went through some turbulent years and the issue of European integration became further politicised due to the economic crisis and the (further) rise of far-right parties which speak out against European integration, such as UKIP in the UK and the PVV in the Netherlands. It is likely that this increased polarisation will further increase media attention on the EU. Indeed, research suggests that at least in the run-up to European Parliament elections, media attention increased substantially (Boomgaarden *et al.*, 2013). Whether the mechanism we unraveled in this article has indeed also been at play in the past few years is a question for future research.

A final topic that constitutes an interesting avenue for further research is the possible endogeneity characterising the linkages between party and media agendas. Here, we have focused on the degree to which party conflict – positional or discursive in nature – boosts the effect of parties on media reporting. Specifying the relationship in this direction seems particularly plausible given the fact that conflict is a key news value employed by journalists. What is more, we made sure that our measure of media attention includes media reporting only in the time period after the electoral manifestos were issued or new ones were drawn up. That being said, it seems reasonable to expect that as party conflict gears up media attention, this increased reporting may in itself result in higher levels or qualitatively different kinds of positional and discursive conflict among parties. It may prove worthwhile to explore these mechanisms more in-depth in future work.

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Notes

- 1 Note that we do not expect that the manifestos have a direct effect on media reporting of the coming electoral terms as they receive only limited readership. However, they are very carefully drafted and are therefore an accurate reflection of the parties’ issue prioritisations, positions and framing.
- 2 The coded manifesto data were provided by Catherine de Vries.
- 3 Note that the intercoder reliabilities calculated on 10 per cent of the coded data both for coders across the different countries as well as within ranged between a Krippendorff alpha of 0.69 and 0.87 for the specific frames used by parties as well as the positions taken on the 13 sub-issues. These scores can be considered more than sufficient. More detailed information can be obtained from the authors upon request.
- 4 We also calculated polarisation scores without setting the elections with no positions on a sub-issue at zero, but treating them as missing, and this yielded similar results. This was also done for the discursive polarisation measure, also with similar results.

- 5 Esteban and Ray recommend an alpha value between 1 and 1.6. We also calculated polarisation measures for the two most extreme values in this range. Results with these measures were very similar, and are available from the authors upon request.
- 6 The size of the parliamentary fraction of the latest election preceding the manifesto was used, but if the party was not yet in parliament this election, the next one was used.
- 7 We also calculated city-block distances, but as the two distances correlated highly and led to the same results, we present only the analyses with Euclidean distances.
- 8 Note that the more salient an issue is (i.e. the more it is mentioned in a party manifesto), the bigger the framing distances are likely to be. This is, apart from substantive reasons, the reason why issue salience is included as a control variable in the models we present later in the article.
- 9 See <http://www.williamlowe.net/software/jfreq/> for more information.
- 10 Specifically, a word was included in a search string of an issue if it met the following criteria: (1) it has a uniqueness score of at least 60 per cent (i.e. from the occurrence of the word in all statements, 60 per cent or more was in statements that were coded as dealing with this specific issue); and (2) it belonged to the ten most frequently used words with an authenticity score of 60 per cent.
- 11 The differences series are stationary according to the same unit root test.
- 12 In addition to the models shown, we checked the robustness of the results in five ways. First, we estimated a model including country dummies as well as one including country dummies and interaction terms with these country dummies and the other explanatory variables to examine if the effects differed significantly between the countries, and they did not. Second, as for framing and positional polarisation, it could be that a negative evaluation of the EU by all parties only affects media if parties pay enough attention to an issue, so to check this we also included an interaction between positivity about the EU and salience among parties. The interaction was not significant, nor was the main effect of positivity at any value of the moderator significant. Third, we included period dummies, one at a time and simultaneously, to see if different scores at different elections drove the results and they did not. Fourth, to inspect the sensitivity to different specifications in terms of serial correlation, we also specified models with a lagged dependent variable, a common ar1 term for serial correlation in the residuals and a panel specific ar1 term; these results led to the same conclusions. Fifth, although the PCSEs (Panel Corrected Standard Errors) can deal with contemporaneous correlation between the errors of different sub-issues to a considerable extent, the same sub-issues in the different countries could possibly be extremely correlated, causing problems in estimation of the errors. We inspected the errors, but the highest correlation in errors between the countries for the same issues was 0.25 for Germany and the Netherlands, which is well within the boundaries of what the technique can handle.

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About the Authors

Daphne van der Pas is a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Department of Political Science, University of Amsterdam. Her research interests include agenda-setting, media, framing, parliamentary behaviour, representation and political leadership. She has published in the *International Journal of Press/Politics* and *Party Politics*. Daphne Van der Pas, Department of Political Science, University of Amsterdam, OZ Achterburgwal 237, 1012DL Amsterdam, The Netherlands; email: d.j.vanderpas@uva.nl

Rens Vliegthart is Professor in Communication Science at the Amsterdam School of Communication Research (ASCoR), University of Amsterdam. His research interests include media-politics relations, media coverage of social movements and businesses, election campaigns, European integration, soccer hooliganism and time-series analysis. Rens Vliegthart, Department of Communication Science, Kloveniersburgwal 48, Amsterdam 1012 CX, The Netherlands; email: r.vliegthart@uva.nl; web: www.rensvliegthart.com