



Department of Political and Social Sciences

Media Systems and Information Environments:

A Comparative Approach to the Agenda-Setting Hypothesis

José António Afonso Santana Pereira

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to obtaining the degree of
Doctor of Political and Social Sciences of the European University Institute

Florence, October 2012

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ABSTRACT

The present dissertation aims at the comparative study of agenda-setting (i.e., the impact of media content for the importance people give to several political and social issues) in Europe. The focus is set on the 2009 European Parliament election campaign period and one of the central objectives is to establish whether or not the media agenda-setting capacity varies from country to country, and why this may be the case. The hypothetical causes of cross-country variability are the nature of the several European media systems (in terms of development of press and TV markets, freedom of press, journalist professionalization, state intervention, media partisanship) and their effects in the informational environment, both from the perspective of the supply (information quality, diversity of agendas) and demand (trust in the media, patterns of exposure). The results show that these macro-level dimensions vary considerably in Europe, and that there is a link between media system dimensions related to political balance and agenda-setting, mediated by information quality.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I - INTRODUCTION

<u>1. Introduction</u>	<u>3</u>
1.1 Goals	6
1.2 Geographical Scope and Time Frame	11
1.3 Data Sources.....	13
1.4 Thesis Overview.....	14

PART II - THEORY

<u>2. Agenda-Setting. Four Decades of Research.....</u>	<u>19</u>
2.1 Political Communication Research Prior to Agenda-Setting	20
2.1.1 The Reaction to the Minimal Effects Paradigm	24
2.1.1.1 Malaise vs. Mobilization/Learning.....	24
2.1.1.2 Persuasion Studies.....	27
2.1.1.3 Agenda-Setting, Priming and Framing.....	28
2.2 The Concept of Agenda-Setting.....	29
2.2.1 Agendas	30
2.2.2 Agenda Capacity	32
2.2.3 Issue Salience, Importance and Relevance.....	34
2.2.4 Linear vs. Non-linear Approaches	36
2.3 First Agenda-Setting Studies and Subsequent Research.....	37
2.3.1 Taxonomies of Agenda-Setting Research.....	40
2.4 The Mechanisms Underlying Agenda-Setting.....	51
2.4.1 The Audience – Learners or Victims?	51
2.4.2 The Media Effect – Intentional or Mediatonal?	53
2.5 The Moderators of Agenda-Setting.....	54
2.5.1 Individual-level Moderators	55
2.5.2 Issue-related Moderators	62
2.6 So What? The Relevance of Agenda-Setting	66
2.7 Agenda-Setting, Spiral of Silence, Uses and Gratifications	70
2.8 Critical Appraisal of Agenda-Setting Studies	71

3. Media Systems and Information Environments.....	75
3.1 The Concept of Media System.....	76
3.1.1 Definition	76
3.1.2 A History of Theoretical Models	78
3.2 Relevant Features of Media Systems	85
3.2.1 Development of Media Markets.....	85
3.2.2 Strength of Public TV	88
3.2.3 Freedom of Press.....	92
3.2.4 Journalist Professionalization	94
3.2.5 Partisanship/Balance	97
3.3 Information Environment	103
3.3.1 Information Quality.....	103
3.3.2 Media Agenda Diversity.....	110
3.3.3 Trust in the Media	110
3.3.3 Exposure	103
3.4 Final Notes.....	113

PART III - MEDIA SYSTEMS AND INFORMATION ENVIRONMENTS

<u>4. Studying Media Systems and Information Environments in Europe, 2009: Hypotheses and Data</u>	<u>117</u>
4.1 Hypotheses.....	118
4.2. Data Sources.....	121
4.3 Variable Operationalization	122
4.3.1 Development of Press Markets.....	122
4.3.2 Public TV Strength.....	125
4.3.3 Freedom of Press.....	125
4.3.4 Journalist Professionalization	129
4.3.5 Partisanship/Balance	131
4.3.6 Information Quality.....	134
4.3.7 Media Agenda Diversity.....	136
4.3.8 Trust.....	134
4.3.9 Exposure	136
4.4 Final Notes.....	139

<u>5. Media Systems and Information Environments in Europe.....</u>	<u>141</u>
5.1 Descriptive Analysis of Media Systems.....	142
5.1.1 Development of Press Markets.....	142
5.1.2 Strength of Public TV	151
5.1.3 Freedom of Press.....	155
5.1.4 Journalist Professionalization	158
5.1.5 Partisanship/ Balance.....	162
5.1.5 Relationship between Media System Dimensions	169
5.2 Analysis of Information Environments.....	175
5.2.1 Quality.....	176
5.2.2 Trust.....	176
5.2.3 Exposure	176
5.2.4 Media Agenda Diversity.....	176
5.3 Final Comments	197
 PART IV - AGENDA-SETTING	
<u>6. Assessing Agenda-Setting in the EU, 2009... ..</u>	<u>205</u>
6.1 Data Analysis Strategy	205
6.1.1 Ranks of Percentages?	210
6.1.2 Selective Exposure	211
6.1.3 Choosing the Issues.....	213
6.1.4 Time	215
6.2 Data Sources.....	217
6.3 Variable Operationalization	220
6.3.1 Independent Variable.....	220
6.3.2 Dependent Variable.....	222
6.3.3 Control Variables	223
6.3.4 Moderators.....	224
 <u>7. The Moderating Effect of Media Systems and Information Environments: Agenda-Setting in the EU</u>	 <u>225</u>
7.1 Issue-focused Analysis.....	228
7.1.1 General Panorama.....	228
7.1.2 Agenda-Setting Analysis with Real World Cues	234

7.2.1.1 Agenda-Setting and Obtrusive Issues.....	238
7.2.1.2 Agenda-Setting and Unobtrusive Issues	242
7.2 Country-focused Analysis.....	249
7.2.1 The European Agendas.....	250
7.2.2 Testing Agenda-Setting	252
7.2.3 Media Systems as Moderators of Agenda-Setting.....	254
7.2.4 Information Environments as Mediators	257
7.3 Audience-focused Analysis.....	261
7.3.1 General Panorama	261
7.3.2 The Impact of Media Systems and Information Environments.....	263
7.4 Final Comments	269
 PART V - CONCLUSIONS	
<u>8. Conclusions</u>	<u>277</u>
8.1 Paths for Future Research.....	280
 REFERENCES	 283
APPENDICES	323

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 2

Table 2.1 – Selected Research Articles on Agenda-setting, 1972-2008.....	47
Table 2.2 – Individual Moderators of Agenda-Setting (summary).....	62
Table 2.3 – Issue Moderators of Agenda Setting (summary).....	65

CHAPTER 4

Table 4.1 – Hypotheses concerning Media System Dimensions’ impact on the Information Environment	121
Table 4.2 – Dimensions of Press Market Development	124
Table 4.3 – Dimensions of Partisanship/Balance	132
Table 4.4 – Dimensions of Information Quality.....	135

CHAPTER 5

Table 5.1 – Correlations between the Indicators of Press Market Development.....	148
Table 5.2 – Differences in the Development of Media Markets in Europe, 2009	149
Table 5.3 – Correlations between Indicators of Media Market Development and Democracy Indexes	151
Table 5.4 – Differences in the Television Market in Europe, 2009	154
Table 5.5 – Correlations between Indicators of PBS Strength, Date of Introduction of Commercial Channels and Democracy Indexes	155
Table 5.6 – Pearson Correlations between Press Freedom and Democracy Indexes, 2009.....	158
Table 5.7 – Differences in the Political Balance of the European Media	167
Table 5.8 – Correlations between Journalist Professionalization and other Dimensions of Media Systems	170
Table 5.9 – Correlations between Press Freedom and other Dimensions of Media Systems.....	172
Table 5.10 – Correlations between TV Market Commercialization and other Dimensions of Media Systems	173

Table 5.11 – Correlations between Partisanship and other Dimensions of Media Systems.....	175
Table 5.12 – Pearson Correlations between Indicators of Information Quality, 2009.....	179
Table 5.13 – Parameter Estimates for OLS Regression of Information Quality on Media System Characteristics – Country Level	182
Table 5.14 – Parameter Estimates for Two-Level MLE Regression of Television Information Quality on Media System and Outlet Characteristics (PIREDEU Sample)	184
Table 5.15 – Parameter Estimates for Two-Level MLE Regression of Newspaper Information Quality on Media System and Outlet Characteristics (PIREDEU Sample)	186
Table 5.16 – Parameter Estimates for OLS Regression of Media Trust on Media System Characteristics – Country Level.....	188
Table 5.17 – Parameter Estimates for OLS Regression of Exposure to News on Media System Characteristics – Country Level	188
Table 5.18 – Parameter Estimates for Two-Level MLE Regression of Exposure to News on Media System and Individual Characteristics	186
Table 5.19 – Parameter Estimates for Two-Level MLE Regression of Exposure to TV News on Media System and Outlet Characteristics (PIREDEU Sample)	186
Table 5.20 – Parameter Estimates for Two-Level MLE Regression of Exposure to TV News on Media System and Outlet Characteristics (PIREDEU Sample)	186
Table 5.21 – Parameter Estimates for OLS Regression of Media Trust on Media System Characteristics – Country Level.....	188
Table 5.22 – Hypotheses Tested: Media System Dimensions	198
Table 5.23 – The Relationship between Media Systems, Quality and Trust	202

CHAPTER 6

Table 6.1 – Four Levels of Analysis of Agenda-Setting Effects	209
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CHAPTER 7

Table 7.1 –Real World Cues – Potential Factors of Issue Salience.....	235
Table 7.2 –TV and Agenda-Setting Effects as Independent – Coefficients of OLS Regressions of Issue Salience on Media Content.....	237
Table 7.3 – Parameter Estimates for OLS Regression of Issue Salience on Media Coverage and Real World Cues - Obtrusive Issues	244
Table 7.4 – Parameter Estimates for Two-Level Logit Regression of Salience of Crime on Media, Real World Cues and Personal Sensitivity.....	248
Table 7.5– Parameter Estimates for OLS Regression of Issue Salience on Media Coverage and Real World Cues - Obtrusive Issues (I)	239
Table 7.6 – Parameter Estimates for OLS Regression of Issue Salience on Media Coverage and Real World Cues - Unobtrusive Issues (II)	241
Table 7.7 – Parameter Estimates for Two-Level Logit Regression of Salience of Social Justice on Media Coverage, Real World Cues and Personal Sensitivity.....	245
Table 7.8 – Parameter Estimates for Two-Level Logit Regression of Salience of Foreign Policy/Defence on Media Coverage, Real World Cues and Personal Sensitivity.....	249
Table 7.9 – Issue Salience in the European Public Opinion, 2009.....	251
Table 7.10 – Top Three Issues in Europe, 2009 – Media Users, Newspapers and Television Newscasts.....	252
Table 7.11 – Parameter Estimates for OLS Regression of Media Influence on Media System Characteristics	255
Table 7.12 – Parameter Estimates for Logistic Regression of Media Influence on Media System Characteristics.....	256
Table 7.13 – Mediation Hypotheses Tested in this Section	257
Table 7.14 – Test of Trust as Mediator of TV agenda-setting.....	258
Table 7.15 – Test of Information Quality as Mediator in TV agenda-setting regressions.....	259
Table 7.16 – Parameter Estimates for Two-Level MLE Regression of TV Agenda-Setting Capacity on Media Systems.....	264
Table 7.17 – Parameter Estimates for Two-Level MLE Regression of TV Agenda-Setting Capacity on Media Systems, With Mediators	265

Table 7.18 - Parameter Estimates for Two-Level MLE Regression of Newspaper Agenda-Setting Capacity on Media Systems.....	267
Table 7.19 - Parameter Estimates for Two-Level MLE Regression of Newspaper Agenda-Setting on Media Systems, With Mediators	268
Table 7.20 - Summary of Results	270
Table 7.21 - Hypotheses Tested: Relationship between Agenda-setting, Media Systems and Information Environments.....	273

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

Figure 1.1 – Media Systems, Informational Environment and Agenda-setting.....	10
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CHAPTER 2

Figure 2.1 – Research Taxonomy according to Number of Issues and Level of Analysis (Adapted from McCombs, 1981)	41
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CHAPTER 5

Figure 5.1 – Qualitative Diversity of Press Markets in Europe, 2009	143
Figure 5.2 – Supply, Circulation and Diversity in Press Consumption in Europe, 2009.....	145
Figure 5.3 – Development of the TV market in Europe, 2009.....	145
Figure 5.4 – Television Market in Europe, 2009: Public vs. Private	152
Audience Shares	152
Figure 5.5 – Television Market in Europe, 2009: State Funding of Public TV	153
Figure 5.6 – Freedom of Press in Europe, 2009	157
Figure 5.7 – Journalism Professionalization in Europe, 2009.....	159
Figure 5.8 – Differences in Journalist Professionalization in Europe	161
Figure 5.9 – Political Balance of the Television and Newspapers in Europe, 2009	163
Figure 5.10 – External Diversity in Europe, 2009.....	165
Figure 5.11 – External diversity of media outlets in Europe, 2009.....	166
Figure 5.12 – Partisan bias by media outlet type, 2009 (Full sample).....	168
Figure 5.13 – Journalism Professionalization, Market Size and Press Freedom, 2009.....	171
Figure 5.14 – Balance in TV, Journalist Professionalization and Public TV Funding, 2009	174
Figure 5.15 – Hard and Soft Content in News Media in Europe, 2009.....	177
Figure 5.16 – Accuracy and Analysis in News Media in Europe, 2009.....	180

Figure 5.17- Media Credibility and Trust in Media in the EU, 2009	187
Figure 5.18- Exposure to News in the EU, 2009	187
Figure 5.17- Media Agenda Diversity in the EU, 2009	187

CHAPTER 7

Figure 7.1 - Correlation between media and public opinion salience conferred to each issue in 27 polities, 2009	228
Figure 7.2 - Correlation between Media and Public Opinion Salience conferred on the European Union, 2009	230
Figure 7.3 - Correlation between Media and Public Opinion Salience conferred to the Government, 2009	232
Figure 7.4 - Agenda-Setting in Europe: The effect of issue obtrusiveness	233
Figure 7.5 - Correlation between Media and Public Opinion salience of 15 issues by country, 2009	253
Figure 7.6 - Correlation between Media and Public Opinion Salience by Media Outlet - Outlets with Moderate to High Correlations	262

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PART I – Introduction

INTRODUCTION

"The power of the press in America is a primordial one. It sets the agenda of public discussion; and this sweeping political power is unrestrained by any law. It determines what people will think and talk about – an authority that in other nations is reserved for tyrants, priests, parties and mandarins."

White (1973, in Newton, 2006, p.228)

In this day and age, the media play a crucial role in the daily lives of most citizens, providing not only information and entertainment but also making them aware of events, personalities and realities that, otherwise, would remain unavailable to them. The key factor in this role of the media is its widespread accessibility. The degree to which people are able to use the traditional media has evolved beyond the initial limits set by social class and purchasing power. The tabloid and free press phenomenon, and the extraordinary dissemination of television and radio sets are examples of this effort and its success. The advent of the new media – and its increasing role in everyday life – has augmented even further the accessibility of information.

The media are also an important actor in the political arena. In the contemporary world, the mass media are the principal sources of political information for most citizens – since the political sphere is essentially out of reach, out of sight, and out of mind for most people (Lippmann, 1922). Politics are complex and remote from the daily experience of the majority; the media, therefore, play a role by helping citizens make sense of it.

In democratic societies, the mass media have other important political functions. They not only contribute to informed citizenship by providing regular, varied, and timely information about important issues, but should also provide an electoral forum for candidates and political parties to present themselves and debate ideas (a free marketplace of ideas, presumably independent of government interference). The media should also serve as a watchdog, scrutinizing the actions of politicians on behalf of the citizens, fostering democratic accountability (Veltmer, 2006; Lange, 2004; Druckman, 2005).

However, the media are also accused of several sins, such as fostering ignorance or incomprehension due to a very fast flow of news; debasing the political discourse leading to political fatigue; mainstreaming and homogenizing society; creating an image of a cruel world, undermining social capital leading to low turnout, decreasing party membership and identification, fostering a focus on packaging over political substance, promoting short-term policy making, shortening political lives – amongst other negative effects (see Newton, 2006, for an excellent schematization of these arguments). Recently, Strömbäck (2008) and Strömbäck & Kaid (2008) have stressed the distinction between mediated politics (a situation in which the media are the main channel for political information, and of communication between political actors and the electorate) and mediatized politics, in which the mass media are not only the mediator, but become independent actors in the political system, to such a degree that their standards of newsworthiness – their media logic – are adopted by the political actors. As a consequence, and as politics becomes increasingly mediatized, we should worry less about the independence of the media from politics and society, but rather about the independence of politics and society from the media.

Some other scholars believe that the role and the effects of the media are negligible. Newton (2006) defines media effects in modern societies as weak forces, denying that the media have either a positive impact in terms of knowledge and mobilization or a strong negative impact in the society. He discusses previous research and points to case studies that support his argument that media effects – positive or negative – are weak, and deflected by more powerful influences on people's attitudes and opinions.

I do not wish to contribute to the discussion about whether the mass media is a villain or a hero. My aim is much more modest: I argue that media can have an impact on the way people see the world that they live in, by ignoring specific facts and events and giving salience and importance to others. These effects may be weak in strength, as Newton (2006) argues. The idea of the media as a super-powerful factor of persuasion and opinion change belongs to the early 20th century. Nevertheless, the media remain relevant for the interaction between citizens and the realm of politics, have consequences (either good or bad) in the electoral sphere and, indirectly, in the functioning of the democratic systems.

This thesis is focused on the agenda-setting¹ power (or, to keep things modest, capacity) of the mass media, that refers to the transfer of saliency of issues from the media agenda to the public agenda (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). More specifically, issues that are heavily covered by the media outlets consumed by specific individuals or a community tend to be considered more important by those specific entities right afterwards, even if one controls for other causes of issue relevance (personal sensibility, real-world events) and deal appropriately with the problem of the direction of causality. Agenda-setting is important because it can have an impact on issue positions, economic perceptions and candidate evaluations, which in turn have a impact upon voting behaviour at elections, as well as for other aspects of political participation.

¹. There is no agreement in the literature about how to write this expression: hyphenised (e.g.: McCombs, 2005) or not hyphenised. It is also possible to find both orthographies in the same work (e.g., Cook et al., 1983; Roessler, 1999). In this thesis, I choose to use the expression "agenda-setting" with a hyphen, following the proponents of this term (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

The agenda-setting hypothesis² is now based upon four decades of research, which has been able to give empirical support to this idea in different countries (although the majority of the research was undertaken in America), contexts (pre-election and routine periods), time frames (cross-sectional vs. longitudinal), issues or sets of issues (from daily-life relevant topics, such as unemployment, to more abstract issues, such as foreign policy), and with different methodological strategies (experiments, survey research, historical analysis, and others). However, there are still some unanswered questions to which the present thesis aims to give an answer.

In the following sub-sections I will present in detail the objectives of the present research, describe the geographical scope and time frame that it covers, and discuss data sources and data analysis strategy. This chapter ends with a description of the structure of this thesis.

1.1 Goals

After reading most of what has been published on this phenomenon in recent decades, my main critique of the agenda-setting research concerns the national focus found in the majority of the studies. Aside from a few notable exceptions, the empirical literature on agenda-setting is almost exclusively composed of single-country analyses – to some extent, those can be seen as a variety of quantitative large-N case studies. These studies are unable to give a satisfactory answer to the question about whether agenda-setting magnitude varies between larger units of analysis (outlets, countries), and the reasons that account for that variance. For instance, the majority of the American literature provides support to the agenda-setting hypothesis, while authors focusing on countries such as Britain or Germany report negative results/minor effects (see Semetko, 2004) and students of Sweden (Asp, 1979), Portugal (Santana Pereira, 2007) or Spain (Lopez-Escobar, Llamas & McCombs, 1998) report convincing empirical

² My work is focused on the agenda-setting phenomenon (and literature) coming from the field of studies on media and public opinion. In fact, there is another agenda-setting research stream, in the framework of policy studies, interested in understanding how political and economic elites form their issue priorities – in other words, how they decide what to decide (Wolfe, Jones & Baumgarten, 2012).

evidence of agenda-setting. The only way to find out if those different findings are due to methodological differences or truly mean that some contexts create less space for agenda-setting effects to occur than others is by implementing a comparative research framework.

There is some consensus about the fact that agenda-setting research needs to tackle the lack of knowledge about the potential moderating role of national-level factors – agenda-setting needs to go cross-national (Dearing & Rogers, 1996; Semetko & Mandelli, 1997). Cross-country studies offer an opportunity to avoid ethnocentric explanations about what is happening in each country, which, according to Semetko, de Vreese & Peter (2000), are fairly common in the field of political communication. The other side of that coin, however, which may also compromise the quality of the research, is naïve universalism (Dearing & Rogers, 1996), that is, the notion that the conclusions drawn from one country apply to any other context. Cross-country studies allow us to see if the interrelations between citizens, media outlets and political parties are dependent upon contextual factors at the country level.

The literature offers some hints about how agenda-setting may be influenced by national-level factors. Considerations about the contingency of media effects in general on contextual factors are present in the literature almost from the beginning, for example in the work of Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet (1944) or Klapper (1960). Media effects are shaped by a number of systemic constraints that have an impact on mass media performance and consumer's behavior. As Popescu (2008, p. 69) puts it, "The content of media messages is the result of a series of societal, inter- and intra-institutional factors and audience pressures. Nor do citizens rely on (receive and accept) mass media information independently of political and social circumstances. If contextual characteristics are systematically associated with message content, (...) and message content in its turn influences effects, then clearly the determinants of content have a bearing on media effects." Norris (2009) also defends that individual-level media effects may be strongly conditioned by specific cultural, institutional or social contexts.

In the case of agenda-setting, national level characteristics are not expected to have a direct impact on this phenomenon, whose nature is mainly psychological. Instead, they are believed to be indirectly associated with agenda-setting, being this relationship mediated by factors that are known moderators of the agenda-setting, as well as by dimensions associated with news production.

The main objective of this research project is therefore to contribute to the agenda-setting theory building process by addressing empirically some of the *lacunae* resulting from the lack of comparative studies of agenda-setting³ and the impossibility of answering research questions outside the case (town, region, and nation) frame. The study of media effects from a cross-country perspective (instead of a single country study) allows for variation in the contingent conditions. The general aim is, therefore, to test the agenda-setting hypothesis with a multilevel approach, crossing individual, media outlet and media system dimensions. This will broaden our understanding of how national-level dimensions (namely those related to the specificities of the media system) moderate this process, but also of the impact that the characteristics of media outlets have on their own power to influence. This objective entails the collection of data on media systems and outlets in 26 countries (27 territories), as well as the use of quantitative data on media (television and press) content and public opinion during the 2009 European election.

The theoretical basis for comparative political communication research are not well established. Only three years ago, Norris asserted that “in contrast to progress in some other fields of comparative politics, the subfield of comparative political communications has not yet developed an extensive body of literature that establishes a range of theoretically sophisticated analytical frameworks, buttressed by rigorously tested scientific generalizations, common concepts, standardizes instruments and shared archival datasets, with the capacity to identify common regularities that prove robust across widely varied contexts” (2009, p. 322). Therefore,

³ There are a few studies of agenda-setting that have used cross-country strategies in their analysis (e.g., Peter, 2003, 2007). However, these studies usually focus on a single issue or theme and use agenda-setting as a framework to understand its dynamics, instead of focusing primarily on the process of agenda-setting.

most of what is done in this thesis is an exploratory exercise that tries to match a recent taxonomy of media systems proposed by Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini with a socio-psychological concept such as agenda-setting.

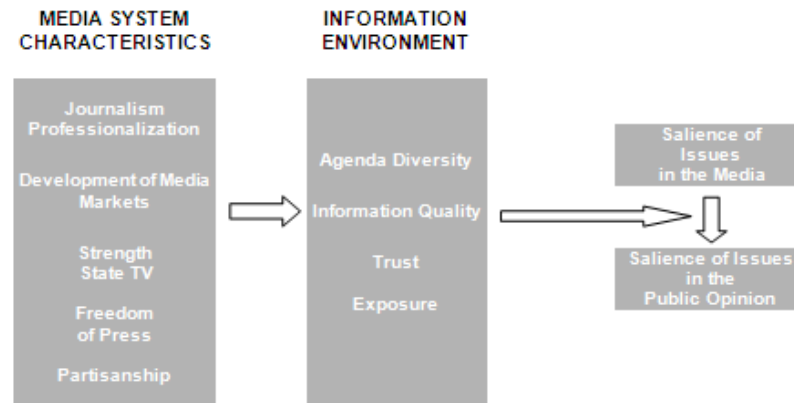
The second objective of this research is to introduce politics into the study of agenda-setting. On the one hand, there are only a handful of studies assessing the potential moderating role of party identification strength on agenda-setting, and at the individual level. Since this process is about learning, consciously or subconsciously, about the degree of importance of the issues that compose our complex modern world, it is reasonable to expect that levels of political bias in the system in general or in specific media outlets may play a role here. On the other hand, other media system dimensions that I deal with in this thesis – namely the freedom of the press and the nature of its constraints – explore the dynamics of the relationship between media and politics.

The model that I will test is presented in Figure 1.1. The general hypothesis to be tested, present in this graphical representation, states that the amount of media coverage an issue is given will have an impact on the importance people assign to it (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

The specific hypotheses about the role of media systems and information environments are presented and discussed in detail in Chapters Four and Seven. *Grosso modo*, I expect that the factors that impact the production and consumption of media messages (development of media markets, strength of public broadcasters, press freedom, partisanship) will moderate the strength of agenda-setting effects, but not directly. I argue that those media system dimensions have an mediated impact on agenda-setting, by impacting upon habits of exposure, the degree of trust citizens have in the media outlets that serve them, the quality of the information they offer, and the diversity of agendas in the market. Trust can easily be understood as varying according to the characteristics of the trusted entity, while patterns of exposure can be influenced by what the market offers in terms on news contents and platforms. On the other hand, quality of the information and diversity of the media agendas are, undoubtedly, associated with the context where that information and those agendas are produced. Trust, exposure, quality and

diversity are believed to be relevant moderators of agenda-setting (Asp, 1979; Wanta & Hu, 1994a, 1994b; Tsfati, 2003; McCombs, 2005). Specific hypotheses about the relationship between these different dimensions will be presented and discussed in Chapters Three, Four and Seven.

Figure 1.1 – Media Systems, Information Environments and Agenda-setting



This study is placed under the umbrella of comparative studies in the field of political communication. There is, however, considerable variation among the comparative studies in this field. For instance, Chang et al. (2001) analysed 151 comparative international communication studies that were published in six important communication journals, placing them in four groups: 1) cross-national comparative (designed at assessing and identifying, to use the sociological jargon, generalities and specificities); 2) cross-time comparative (designed at studying change or stability); 3) cross-national and cross-time comparative (in which stable and dynamic factors are studied at the same time); and 4) comparison of different social units in different points in time (complex and quite rare).

The research reported in this dissertation belongs to the first type. Type 2 studies are, as we have seen, fairly common in the field of agenda-setting, particularly in the United States (Funkhouser, 1973) and Germany (Brosious & Kepplinger, 1992). Type 3 is the natural next step of this research, only possible when the several types of data used in this thesis become available for other time periods. The next European Election Study project may give rise to such data, and the opportunity to answer to new questions concerning the impact of context on media cognitive effects.

1.2 Geographical Scope and Time Frame

The objectives mentioned above are pursued through the study of 26 European Union member-States.⁴ The geographical framing of this research includes, therefore, a sufficient number of countries for a strong statistical analysis of national-level dimensions. But will these dimensions vary, or is Europe a single entity in terms of media systems? Previous research has shown that there are substantial differences in the media systems of Western Europe (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Unfortunately, the authors of this study did not include the most recent member-States of the European Union in their framework, but some literature (e.g.: de Smaele, 1999) underlines the differences between media systems in Central European and South-Eastern countries, and, to some extent, between those countries and Western Europe. Therefore, the assumption of variability within Europe is very likely to be empirically supported.

The time frame of this research is bound by data collection specifications. The media content refers to the 2009 European Parliament (EP) election campaign period – that is to say, the three weeks before the election days (4-7 June). The data on public opinion was collected immediately after the elections; likewise, data on media outlets and media systems were collected in the same period, in order to illustrate the political and media landscape of 2009 in the most coherent and complete way.

But how appropriate is the European Parliament election as a context for the study of political communication? It is known that during campaigns, the structure of the news changes – the share of political news tends to increase both in television and newspapers in the weeks before the election. However, European Elections are frequently described as a collection of national second-order elections, characterized by low turnout, decline of support for governing parties and preference for small and/or new political parties, probably in order to punish the incumbent, or as an expression of sincere voting *vis-à-vis* strategic voting in national first-order

⁴ Luxembourg is not included in the analysis, since it is not possible to measure most media system and media outlet indicators for this country, due to lack of data in Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin (2010). See Appendix 1 and Popescu (2011).

elections (van der Eijk & Franklin, 1996; Reif & Schmitt, 1980; Schmitt, 2005). The 2009 election was no exception, having conformed to the main lines that define second-order elections (Trechsel, 2010; Hix & Marsh, 2011; Marsh, 2011). What this implies is a tendency for second-order campaigning from the main political parties (i.e. low intensity and less resource-consuming; de Vreese, Lauf & Peter, 2007; Gagatek, 2010) and second-order reporting from the media (Wilke & Reinemann, 2007), as well as second-order (i.e. lower) voter interest and attention to the campaign.

I do not believe that this constitutes a problem for this study, the goal of which is not strictly connected to an electoral campaign setting. My goal is not to prove that agenda-setting had a specific – direct or indirect – impact on voting behaviour in the 2009 European elections, but to show that at this specific moment the media had an effect on what issues were considered to be the most relevant in the European countries. Moreover, if I find agenda-setting effects in a setting where the general climate of motivation to collect political information is not particularly greater or stronger than in non-campaign periods, I will be running a test of media effects that will be fairly similar to the several agenda-setting studies conducted in routine times that are described in Chapter Two.

European elections have been studied by teams of political scientists since 1979, and information about media content during campaigns was collected in 1999, 2004 and 2009. However, this study will only focus on the more recent election period. The decision to analyse the 2009 period is connected, first, to the desire to maximize the number of countries in the analysis. The inclusion of the 2004 context would just mean the loss of two cases (Bulgaria and Romania), but these cases are very valuable in terms of media system specificities. In addition, the inclusion of the 1999 context would mean that this research would be restricted to Western Europe. Second, and more importantly, the availability of data from sources other than the several European Election Studies – with respect to media system characteristics in particular – is greater for 2009 than for earlier years.

1.3 Data Sources

The best way of testing causal hypotheses about media messages and public opinion is experimentation. However, the nature of this research makes the use of the experimental method impossible, both for practical and substantive reasons. Media system differences are difficult, if not impossible, to operationalize in experimental terms; moreover, if I decided to manipulate only the media outlet variables, I would still lack the resources needed to replicate the same experimental setting in 27 different contexts, not to mention the 23 national languages involved.

Survey research is therefore the most feasible method for the study of agenda-setting with a comparative perspective. Of course, statistical controls are a less satisfactory way of ruling out concurrent explanations of the phenomenon under study, if compared with random assignment of people to experimental groups. There are always unobservables that may play a role. However, survey research usually has stronger external validity than experimental studies (especially those conducted in laboratory settings), and allows me to contrast different kinds of data of different provenience, representing different levels of analysis.

In what specifically concerns agenda-setting, the evidence needed to support this hypothesis encompasses "...evidence of opinion changes over time in a given section of the public (preferably with panel data), a content analysis showing media attention to different issues in the relevant period, and some indication of relevant media use by the public concerned" (McQuail, 1983, p.197; see also Barabas & Jerit, 2009, for a discussion of the conditions for the establishment of causality in media studies). In medium to large-N studies that include a reasonably large number of countries, it is usually impossible to gather in-depth information about the contextual variables and the association between them and with individual-level factors. Fortunately this is not the case with this study, which is advantaged by the existence of a rich amount of data on public opinion, media content, media system and outlet characteristics.

In 2009, PIREDEU⁵ centralized the collection of data about the European Elections, in a research infrastructure composed by five components: the EES voter survey (with about 27,000 respondents)⁶ and media content collection (of a sample of about 140 outlets),⁷ but also a candidate survey, manifesto study, and context study. This was considered to be the most plausible and reliable source of data on media content and public opinion from all the member-States in 2009. In addition, there are other data sources in this study – those that contribute by offering information about just one or two variables considered in the models tested. These sources are Eurobarometer 72.4 for trust in the media (TNS Opinion & GESIS, 2010), Freedom House for freedom of the press (Freedom House, 2010), World Press Association for newspaper circulation data (WAN, 2010), MAVISE and EAO for television channels and audiences in Europe (EAO, 2010; MAVISE, 2010) and the Expert Survey on Media Systems in Europe for political bias, information quality and journalist professionalization, amongst others (Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin, 2010). These sources will be described in greater detail in the chapters in which the data is used.

1.4 Thesis Overview

In the following chapters I will tackle the subjects of agenda setting, media systems, and information environments in both a theoretical and an empirical way. These chapters are organized into four main sections: Theory (Chapters Two and Three), Media Systems and Information Environments (Chapters Four and Five), Agenda-Setting (Chapters Six and Seven) and Conclusions (Chapter Eight).

⁵ PIREDEU was a pan-European project based at the European University Institute. For more information see www.piredeu.eu.

⁶ Approximately 1,000 respondents in each country.

⁷ In each country, this project collected data on the content of the two most important TV news shows and the three most widely read newspapers. To give an example, for Portugal the three newspapers are *Público* (reference), *Correio da Manhã* (tabloid) and *Jornal de Notícias* (something in between); the TV shows are *Telejornal* (from the public broadcaster RTP) and *Jornal Nacional* (from the private broadcasting station TVI). In the cases of Spain and Germany, the number of outlets was higher than 5.

The first section is, therefore, focused on the theoretical grounds of this research. In Chapter Two, the agenda-setting theory is presented. I begin by offering a synthesis of the research in the field of political communication that was carried out before the advent of the cognitive studies (agenda-setting, priming and framing). Following that, the main concepts in the agenda-setting hypothesis are presented and described, and the most emblematic studies are summarized. Discussions about the dynamics of the agenda-setting phenomenon are highlighted and the moderators that the literature has identified are presented. The relevance of agenda-setting for political attitudes and behaviours is also addressed.

Chapter Three introduces the issue of media systems and their impact on media effects. The definition of media systems is presented, and their most relevant features (development of media markets, commercialization, freedom of press, journalist professionalization, partisanship) are described, as well as their impact on relevant informational environment dimensions (exposure, trust in the media, information quality, agenda diversity).

Chapters Four and Five focus on the media systems and information environments. The first chapter presents some general hypotheses and deals with the methodology used in this thesis to analyse media systems in Europe. In Chapter Five, the media system characteristics are empirically described, in order to confirm the assumption that there is plenty of variation within the European context, and their impact on the information environment is tested.

In turn, Chapters Six and Seven introduce information about agenda-setting in Europe during the 2009 European Parliament election campaign. In Chapter Six, the methodological approach to the agenda-setting hypothesis is set out – the data analysis strategy is presented and discussed, and the data used to provide an empirical test of those assumptions is presented. Following that, in Chapter Seven the agenda-setting hypothesis is tested with data from the PIREDEU research project. Three alternative research strategies are used: an aggregate strategy (which corresponds to the traditional agenda-setting studies conducted from the 1970s onward), a semi-aggregate strategy (audience analysis – see Santana

Pereira, 2007), and an issue-based strategy aimed at testing the competing impact of real-world cues and (in some cases) personal sensitivity. Moreover, the moderating impact of issue characteristics is tested. In this chapter, the central question of this dissertation – the potential moderating impact of media system and information environment characteristics on agenda-setting effects – is addressed.

Finally, Chapter Eight revises the most important findings of this research, debates some shortcomings and methodological concerns, and ends with some suggestions for future research.

PART II – THEORY

AGENDA-SETTING: FOUR DECADES OF RESEARCH

"The press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful much of the time in telling people what to think about"

Cohen (1963, p.13)

The concept of agenda-setting is at the core of a stream of research that has flourished over the last 40 years. But what exactly is agenda-setting? In this chapter, I will explore this key concept in the field of media studies by reviewing and discussing the literature published in the last four decades.

In 1993, Gerald Kosicki declared that "coming to grips with the totality of what has been written about agenda setting is an exceedingly complex task" (p. 101). Writing almost twenty years after Kosicki, I must acknowledge that the task has become even harder. One could argue that, since 1993, several important books seeking to encompass and systematize the most relevant research and theoretical reasoning over the concept of agenda-setting have been published (Dearing & Rogers, 1996; McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 1997; McCombs, 2004). However, the number of studies about agenda-setting has increased substantially since 1993 (see, for instance, Weaver, 2007). As will be explained in the following pages, agenda-setting research is spread over four decades (the first empirical

work was published in 1972) and can be found in several journals within the field of communication (e.g., *Communication Research*) and political science (e.g., *American Journal of Political Science*), as well as thematic pan-disciplinary journals (e.g., *Public Opinion Quarterly*) and several edited books and monographs, some of which are difficult to track. Consequently, the picture of agenda-setting offered here is necessarily incomplete. Nonetheless, I believe that it offers a comprehensive systematization of the main concepts, methodological distinctions, theoretical disputes and empirical results in this field of research.

This chapter is structured as follows. I start by presenting a summary of what happened before agenda-setting reached the world of media effects research. Then, I focus on the definition of agenda-setting, its history, its different approaches, the processes through which it occurs (mediators) and the factors that condition its intensity (moderators), in order to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of this construct. This chapter also includes a comparison of this hypothesis with other media theories – priming and framing, but also spiral of silence or uses and gratifications.

2.1 Political Communication Research Prior to Agenda-Setting

Before introducing the concept of agenda-setting, it may be useful to take a glance at what happened in the field of political communication studies before the 1970s. In fact, there is much to be said. Academic interest in media effects is almost as old as the media themselves. In the first decades of the twentieth century – a time in which newspapers were the mass media *par excellence* in most western societies, while radio and television were in their infancy – scholars believed the media to have a great and immediate impact on public opinion, but no empirical research was undertaken to substantiate that argument (Lundberg, 1926; McQuail, 1983; Sears, 1987).

In the United States, scientific journals such as the *American Journal of Sociology* or the *Journal of Applied Sociology* published some relevant articles on this matter, in which the role and the impact of the media (the press, at

those times) on American public opinion was discussed (Yarros, 1899; Hayes, 1925; Leupp, 1910; all quoted in Lundberg, 1926). Moreover, the cultural production of the time reproduces this perspective. The novels *Brave New World* (Aldous Huxley) or *1984* (George Orwell) are good examples. These pessimistic novels about the future of humanity portray the media as having a preponderant role in the control of the citizens by totalitarian regimes.⁸

This purely theoretical understanding of media effects was discredited in the 1940s and 1950s by Paul Lazarsfeld and his colleagues at the University of Columbia. Their Erie County study found negligible persuasive effects and demonstrated that, rather than changing attitudes, the media were better at reinforcing existing attitudes (Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet, 1944). The team used an innovative and sophisticated research design, interviewing a representative sample of voters in the 1940 American presidential elections (Erie County, in Ohio, was seen to be representative of the country as a whole) six times during a six-month period. Lazarsfeld and his colleagues observed that shifting from one candidate to another rarely occurred, and that only 5 per cent of the participants had changed their vote intention due to the persuasive political messages provided by the media (i.e. newspaper, news magazines and the radio). In fact, they found that the more people exposed themselves to the media, the less their opinions changed – which was explained by the fact that people would engage in selective exposure, choosing which media outlets to use. In 1948, a follow up study conducted in a New York community produced the same results (Berelson, Lazarsfeld & McPhee, 1954). As a result, the hypodermic needle model (or bullet model) initially proposed by the Frankfurt school (see Kitzinger, 2004) gave way to the resonance model of media effects – the messages conveyed by the media would have an impact only when resonating with existing positions (Iyengar & Simon, 2000).

⁸ In fact, some scholars refer to the hypodermic needle model of media effects, postulating strong and homogeneous effects of media exposure on public opinion, as in the 1984 perspective, and to the media in this context as an “Orwellian specter” (Shaw, 1977, 1979; Ramaprasad, 1983).

Drawing on this empirical evidence, the authors of the 1940 Erie County study gave birth to the paradigm of minimal effects, which postulates that, generally speaking, political communication through the mass media is only useful to reinforce previous attitudes due to selective exposure (people would tend to expose themselves to channels of information which agreed with their position, to avoid dissonance with or opposition to their attitudes). Therefore, media exposure would not lead to attitude change, whereas interpersonal communication would assume a greater role in political persuasion (Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet, 1944; Lipset et al., 1954). This second claim of the paradigm is at the core of the two-step flow of communication model which suggests that, in a given community, there are opinion leaders that, on one hand, expose themselves more frequently to the media than most people (first step), and on the other, influence the attitudes and positions of the other members of the community (second step) (Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet, 1944; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955).

This model was widely accepted by the scientific community and continues to be used to understand the media/public opinion dynamics today. An interesting example of a 21st century revisitation of this vintage idea is a recently published work by Pippa Norris and John Curtice. The authors propose that the dissemination of political information offered by the Internet in Britain might occur in the way suggested by the two-step flow of communication, in the sense that political activists browse the party websites (ill-organized and often neglected by the general public), and then disseminate their content, since they are very likely to talk about the election with other people (Norris & Curtice, 2008).

At the same time as the Columbia studies were being conducted, a team of sociologists and social psychologists based at Yale carried out a comprehensive series of experimental studies, designed with the purpose of identifying the factors that condition persuasion: source (e.g. credibility), message (type of argument, order of presentation), channel (written, audio or audiovisual supports) and audience characteristics (individual and socio-cultural factors). This team, led by Carl Hovland, was very successful at isolating those conditions and establishing rules for efficiency in

persuasion (Hovland, 1954). Nevertheless, those studies did not have the same impact for political science as the line of research carried out at Columbia. This is probably because, unlike Lazarsfeld, Hovland studied psychological rather than sociological dimensions, focused on individuals instead of communities, studied persuasion in general instead of political persuasion in its own specificities, and undertook experimental rather than survey research (McDonald, 2004).

At the beginning of the 1960s, the minimal effects paradigm continued to prevail. Klapper (1960), defending the media users' capacity of selective exposure (and related capacities of selective memory and perception), considers that reinforcement is the most relevant form of media impact, and finds poor evidence of persuasion (both in terms of conversion or minor attitude change), but suggests that this might be due to context. The main idea is that the media does not serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effects, but works as a factor within a complex situation. During the following decade, research on media effects, influenced by the advent of television and interested in its potential as a means of political persuasion (McDonald, 2004), was also unable to prove its persuasive role empirically (Sears, 1987); moreover, some studies that found small but relevant effects were overwhelmed by the "minimal effects" idea, being quite circumspect and modest in the discussion of their findings (Zaller, 1996).

The persistence of the minimal effects paradigm for several decades is considered by Larry Bartels as one of the biggest and most notorious embarrassments in the contemporary social sciences. In his words: "The pervasiveness of the mass media and their virtual monopoly over the presentation of many kinds of information must suggest to reasonable observers that what these *media* say and how they say it has enormous social and political consequences. Nevertheless, the scholarly literature has been much better at refuting, qualifying and circumscribing the thesis of media impact than at supporting it" (1993, p. 267). The idea of minimal effects is not only counterintuitive but also counter-factual, if we remember that political actors spend a great deal of effort and money in highly mediatized electoral campaigns.

2.1.1 The Reaction to the Minimal Effects Paradigm

From the 1970s onwards, mostly as a reaction to a frustrating paradigm, political communication shifted away from the classical persuasion studies and produced new theories and perspectives, such as: the uses and gratifications theory, focusing on what people do to the media, instead of the other way around⁹ (Blumler & Katz, 1974); the spiral of silence approach, focusing on the media as provider of information about what opinions are consensual, helping people deal with the fear of social isolation due to expression of unpopular opinions (Noelle-Neuman, 1974); an interesting debate between media malaise and mobilization/learning effects; new persuasion studies (particularly in new democracies), and cognitive studies. I will focus on these last three subjects in the following section; the other will be discussed later in this chapter.

2.1.1.1 Malaise vs. Mobilization/Learning

The term *video malaise* was proposed by Michael Robinson in an article published in the mid-1970s, in which the author argues that watching “public affairs television” (in this case, a documentary) results in an increased sense of malaise, cynicism or detachment towards political actors and institutions. The author was trying to establish a connection between two phenomena that were clearly discernible in the 1960s and 1970s – the decrease of political trust and efficacy and the rise of television news as dominant source of political information in the US. Indeed, Robinson (1976) observed that people who relied predominantly on television for political information had lower levels of internal political

⁹ The extent to which this theory is actually a reaction to the minimal effects paradigm is debatable. The uses and gratifications approach to the mass media stresses intrapersonal needs rather than interpersonal factors to argue that the media do not have a strong impact on public opinion (see Shaw, 1979). This research tradition assumes that the media are primarily sources of diversion, gratifiers of individual needs, and entertaining outlets for personal escape: “Audiences are not passively overpowered by what they read in newspapers, hear on radio, or see on television and at the movies. Instead, people put to their own use and for their own gratification the media content they actively choose to pay attention to” (Shaw, 1979, p. 98).

efficacy and trust in political institutions than those who consumed a more diverse set of media outlets for political news.

Moreover, watching television – which in the early 1980s was mainly considered to be a family activity (McQuail, 1983) – was pointed out as one of the reasons why people were *bowling alone* in the end of the century. In 1995, Putnam argued that in the US television has led to the erosion of social capital (in the sense of dense social networks bound by norms and social trust) and civic engagement, because it fosters time displacement (he argued that television watching is one of the few social and cultural activities that is negatively related to other activities outside the home), or because it creates a “mean world” view (pessimistic views of the human kind) and passivity.

On the other hand, there are several empirical studies showing that the media have a positive impact. For instance, Aarts & Semetko (2003) argue that levels of political interest, discussion and sophistication increased in several countries over time, a phenomenon that is linked to the rise of the media and its educative role. In the same vein, Gunther and Mughan (2000), in the concluding chapter of an edited book analysing the relationship between democracy and media, declare that even if political communications seem to help authoritarian regimes in the short-term, in the long run they help democratization – eroding the credibility and legitimacy of non-democratic regimes, fostering the development of pluralistic attitudes and party alternatives, and contributing to the re-socialization of elites and masses according to the rules and values of democracy.

Shifting from an aggregate to an individual perspective, it is important to quote Stephen Chaffee, who has produced and collected substantial evidence about the positive impact of media use on political knowledge (e.g.: Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986; Chaffee, Zhao & Leshner, 1994; Zhao & Chaffee, 1995; Chaffee & Kanahan, 1997). Norris (2000) reports similar results, while de Vreese & Boorgaarden (2006b) observed gains in terms of knowledge and political participation as a consequence of exposure to media rich in political news content. In addition, Denmark (2002) has found that Australian television offers relevant cues to poorly-

informed citizens, which they use in their vote calculus; and Eveland & Scheufele (2002) noted that, in the context of the 1996 US presidential election, the knowledge gap between citizens with high and low educational backgrounds was smaller in the case of heavy consumers of television news than in the case of light users (see also Jerit, Barabas & Bolsen, 2006). Lastly, Norris & Sanders (2003) observed that media exposure increased levels of knowledge, especially in the case of those with low prior knowledge at the beginning of the study.

At the same time, mobilization receives considerable support in Western Europe (Newton, 1999). Esser & de Vreese (2007) have found evidence of the impact of media exposure (newspaper reading, TV watching and particularly the use of Internet to collect political information) for youth turnout in several European countries. In new democracies, the media seems to enhance political knowledge, foster positive attitudes towards the political actors and encourage electoral participation (Veltmer & Schmitt-Beck, 2006).

The concept of spiral of cynicism (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997) shares the same pessimistic view of the “video malaise” hypothesis, but places the blame largely on the message, rather than on the medium. In fact, it seems that this is the path to follow. Recent research (de Vreese, 2005; de Vreese, 2007; Elenbaas & de Vreese, 2008; de Vreese & Elenbaas, 2008) has found that the impact of news on political cynicism is conditional on the use of strategic frames and that the relationship between cynicism and turnout is unclear (de Vreese, 2005). Accordingly, Norris (2000) and Peter (2007) observed that EU news with negative tones results in negative attitudes towards the EU, but positive tones fosters EU support. Morris (2005) found that the audiences of a highly conservative-biased network (Fox News)¹⁰ can misinform, leading viewers to underestimate the number of casualties in the Iraq war by comparison with non-viewers, in a context where the

¹⁰ Fox News is usually portrayed as being quite biased towards the Republican Party. For instance, there is recent evidence that Fox News did, over a period encompassing two presidencies, show bias in broadcasting poll results about levels of presidential approval, privileging the broadcasting of bad news for the Democratic president Bill Clinton and good news for the Republican President George W. Bush, while other networks (ABC, NBC, CBS) seemed to favour good news for Clinton and bad news for Bush (Groeling, 2008).

incumbent president was Republican. Similarly, Kleinnijenhuis, van Hoof & Oegema (2006) have found that negative news leads to distrust in the political realm, and long term sleeper effects in terms of turnout; and a much quoted article on the effect of negative campaign advertising in the US shows that it reduces turnout intentions and perceptions of political efficacy, but also fosters cynicism about the responsiveness of public officials and the electoral process (Ansolabehere et al., 1994). Therefore, it seems that what can lead to *malaise* is the type (and tone) of the news rather than mere media exposure.

2.1.1.2 Persuasion Studies

Persuasion studies have seen a degree of revival from the 1970s onwards, focusing not only on voter choices but also on the direction of attitudes towards political objects. The revisionists of the minimal effects paradigm attribute the negative findings of past research to methodological factors, such as measurement errors (see Prior, 2009a; Prior, 2009b), lack of variance in terms of the independent variable (media content, which tends to be consistent in short-term), use of exposure to media as proxy of media content, short observation periods, and lack of statistical power of the surveys used in political communication, choice of topics backed by very stable attitudinal stances, and other methodological deficiencies (Bartels, 1993; Zaller, 1996, 2002; Iyengar & Simon, 2000). Media effects would therefore have been underestimated by political communication research.

Focusing on media content also seems to be better than focusing solely on exposure to specific media outlets (see Graber, 2004, or Barabas & Jerit, 2009). For instance, Dalton, Beck & Huckfeldt (1998) found a relationship between the editorial content of newspapers and preferences in the US 1992 presidential election, and stressed the role of local newspapers as cue-providers that can have an impact on voting choices. Della Vigna & Kaplan (2006) noted that the introduction of the conservative-oriented Fox News to certain American towns in the late 1990s increased the vote share of the Republican Party in those cities.

Persuasion studies with strong media effects can be found in several new democracies. For instance, in Hungary, the presence of media effects was strong in the late 1990s, a time at which the party system was still fairly fluid and relatively new to the public¹¹ (Popescu, 2008). Similar results were found in Russia in the early 2000s (White & McAllister, 2006). In Mexico, political news and (to a lesser extent) political advertisements explained voting preferences in the 2000 election (Beltràn, 2007). Finally, in Estonia, Palmaru (2005) found strong causal effects of media content on election results via changes in public opinion, in the period between 1999 and 2003. Fluidity of the political context is the key factor explaining media effects in new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe (Popescu, 2008) or South America (Lawson & McCann, 2004), but the strong impact of media on vote choices in the Italian election of 1994, reported by Ricolfi (1997) and in Gunther & Mughan (2000) can also be explained by fluidity. In fact, those elections took place in a context marked by new electoral laws and important new actors on the political scene, such as Silvio Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* or Umberto Bossi's *Lega Nord*.

2.1.1.3 Agenda-Setting, Priming and Framing

It is within the difficult and frustrating context of the minimal effects paradigm, marked by the inability to find evidence of persuasion, that a new generation of scholars developed a line of research studying media effects other than persuasion (Kosicki, 1993; Takeshita, 1997), focusing on the media's capacity to inform (McCombs, 1981; Rogers, 1993). This effort established a new paradigm, called cognitivist (because it focused on the cognitions of media users, instead of on choices) or journalistic, because it

¹¹ Actually, the media system was also quite fluid. A new system of public broadcasting regulation was introduced in Hungary in 1996, and private nationwide television channels started to operate in 1997. Print media developed rapidly in the later 1980s and early 1990s, both in terms of number and range of publications. In 1994, the impact of public television on feelings and vote for the incumbent parties was strong, but negative. As the media environment became more pluralistic and the political context less fluid, the impact of the television became first positive (probably because now they enjoyed more credibility than before the advent of private TV) and in the end, very much weakened (Popescu, 2008).

was detaching itself from the traditional vision of communication as a way of effectively mobilizing and persuading people, and focusing on the media as a provider of the information citizens need in order to make informed choices (Takeshita, 1997).

The new paradigm gave birth to three interconnected research areas: agenda-setting, priming and framing (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Iyengar, Peters & Kinder, 1982; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). These cognitive effects are ways by which the media influence the way people develop their perceptions of the world and organize their patterns of response (Lippman, 1922). The present chapter addresses the first of these indirect effects of media on public opinion: agenda-setting. However, since there are clear connections and similarities between the three, I will also discuss the relationship of this phenomenon with priming and framing.

2.2 The Concept of Agenda-Setting

The agenda-setting hypothesis was the first to appear in the academic literature on media cognitive effects, and postulates that the amount of media coverage of issues influences people's opinion about their relevance, because they use the salience of an issue in the media as an indicator of its importance (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Thus, the concept of agenda-setting refers to a specific effect of media through which the issue agendas (composed of the most important issues for a given entity) are affected by the content of the media. Therefore, the students of agenda-setting are basically proposing a middle-range theory for the understanding of media impact on issue salience in contemporary societies (Takeshita, 1997).

In this section, I will discuss three relevant features of the concept of agenda-setting: what an agenda is, and how many types of agendas there are in the society; the fact that those agendas have limited capacity; and that media influence can take the form of a transfer of salience from the media agenda to the public agenda, via exposure to newspapers, television and other media outlets. I will also tackle the issue of the linearity of the relationship between media and public opinion: a relevant question that has, however, been insufficiently studied.

2.2.1 *Agendas*

According to Cobb & Elder (1982, in Dearing & Rogers, 1996) an agenda is a set of politically controversial issues that, at a given moment, are seen as legitimate concerns of a given group. James Dearing and Everett Rogers define issues as a series of related events that fit together in a broad category (1988, p. 566) and that are conflictual or have the potential to become relevant (1996). Ramaprasad (1983) and Kwansah-Aidoo (2003) discuss the distinction between issues and events, the latter being subordinate to, or part of, the former. In sum, issues are those social, cultural, economic, or political concerns or ideas which are at any given time considered important, and which are the source of debate, controversy or conflict.¹² Unemployment, transportation, health care and racism are typical examples of issues in the context of agenda-setting studies.

There are essentially four types of agenda: the intrapersonal agenda (composed of the issues that each individual considers important), the interpersonal agenda (the issues discussed between someone and his/her close friends/relatives), the media agenda (composed of the issues present in the media outlets in a given time frame) and the public agenda – the set of issues that receive the community's attention. In this sense, a public agenda (as a set of relevant issues) is at the core of the public opinion, that is here understood as a set of opinions on matters of concern to the community, freely expressed by people outside the government who claim that their opinions should influence or determine the actions of the state (Speier, 1995).¹³

¹² The dimension of conflict is not actually agreed-upon in the literature. For instance, Kosicki (1993) argues that the agenda-setting literature claims to focus on issues in public opinion and media coverage, but mostly studies lists of topics that are specified rather abstractly, such as 'arms control', 'crime', or 'the economy'. The real concern of agenda setting seems to be not the issues but the broad topics in the news. An issue should be something inherently contested – a controversial matter about which there are strong views presented on various sides, but one gets little sense of controversy about the various matters taken up by agenda setting – and that is probably a major shortcoming in the agenda-setting research (see Kosicki, 1993).

¹³ Public opinion is not understood here in contrast with private opinion. My use of this expression in this thesis does not intend to make reference to opinions that are disclosed to others, or noted by others, as it is used in some studies inspired by the spiral of silence framework.

If we take the media agenda as the independent variable, it is possible to consider that agenda-setting can occur at three different levels: intra-personal (e.g. Roessler, 1999; Santana Pereira, 2007), interpersonal (e.g. Weaver et al., 1981; Roberts, Wanta & Dzwo, 2002) and public¹⁴ (*classic agenda-setting*, e.g. McCombs and Shaw, 1972). Research on interpersonal agendas provides answers to Robert Parks' theoretical concerns about media effects on topics of discussion within communities in the 1920s, whereas the other two areas of research are closer to Walter Lippmann's speculations about the media impact on the translation of the world outside into pictures on people's minds (Ramaprasad, 1983).

As with most of the existing literature, the research reported here addresses the classical variety of agenda-setting – the type that refers to the impact of media agendas on public opinion about the importance of issues. Therefore, agenda-setting is defined here as the process through which media have an impact on how public agendas are built, or, in other words, how the media influence which problems will be considered important by a given community – issues that people believe politicians and policy makers should focus on (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In this context, the public agenda is believed to consist of “all issues which (1) are the subject of widespread attention or at least awareness, (2) require action, in the view of a sizeable proportion of the public; and (3) are the appropriate concern of some governmental unit in the perception of community members” (Cobb, Ross & Ross, 1976, p. 127).

The scholars of political communication also study other kinds of interconnections between agendas. Research has shown that the media can also influence the agenda of other media outlets (*intermedia agenda-setting*; e.g.: Roberts & McCombs, 1994; Lopez-Escobar et al., 1998; Lee, Lancendorfer & Lee, 2005; see also Dearing & Rogers, 1996, and Golan, 2006) and the agendas of politicians (*political agenda-setting*; e.g.: Black & Snow, 1982; Cook et al., 1983; Baumgartner, Jones & Leech, 1997; Tedesco,

¹⁴ Some studies were able to differentiate empirically between the intrapersonal and the public/social agenda, and therefore defend the idea that people should be asked about what the most important problem is for them, and what the major problem is for their community (see McCombs, 2005). However, in most cases, the public agenda is assessed by analyzing intra-individual agendas, either at the aggregate or the individual level.

2001; Soroka, 2002; see Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006 or van Aelst & Walgrave, 2010, for a comprehensive literature review).

The separation between these three areas is often thought to be artificial – each sub-type is incomplete and somewhat unsatisfying in itself (Kosicki, 1993). In the same vein, Dearing & Rogers (1996) try to make sense of this diversity by providing a much broader definition of agenda-setting – a process with three steps or areas of interest: the public agenda-setting (link between salience of issues in the media and the issue priorities of the public) policy agenda-setting (impact of media content on the issue agenda of public institutions and officials) and media agenda-setting (the antecedents of media content - who decides what is covered in tomorrow's newspaper or this evening's newscast).

Lastly, if the other agendas are seen as independent variables (and/or the media agenda as dependent variable), many other types of agenda-setting research can be identified (see, for instance, Rogers, 1993; Wanta & Foote, 1994; Dearing & Rogers, 1996; Tedesco, 2001; Brandenburg, 2002; McCombs, 2004; Ridout & Mellen, 2007; Horvit, Shiffer & Wright, 2008).

2.2.2 *Agenda Capacity*

Empirical research has shown that the public agenda has a limited capacity, usually being composed of no more than three to six issues (McCombs, 1981, 1997, 2004), a finding that is in line with classical cognitive psychology research on capacity of immediate memory (seven minus or plus two; Miller, 1956). Moreover, the capacity of the public agenda seems to be fairly stable over time, at least in the US (McCombs & Zhu, 1995). Therefore, agenda-setting is considered to be a zero-sum game, in which issues compete for a place in the agenda – the rise of an issue occurs at the expense of other issues (Zhu, 1992). The use of rank-order correlations in the first studies (e.g. Funkhouser, 1973) had this zero-sum assumption implicit (since the ranks, or percentages of a single issue depend on the salience of the other issues), but this idea was only formally tested by Zhu in 1992.

At the same time, agendas are becoming thematically more diverse¹⁵ – the scenario of two overriding issues consistently mentioned in polls during the 1950s was substituted in a situation where several themes compete for attention (McCombs & Zhu, 1995). A stronger issue competition without an increase in the capacity of the agendas leads to strong issue turnover, which is in line with Downs (1972) perspectives about high volatility and speed in issue cycles.¹⁶ But are all competitors equal? Not according to Brosius & Kepplinger (1995). These German scholars refute the equal-displacement model of issue competition proposed by Zhu (1992) and have observed the existence of «killer issues», that, due to several reasons (personal consequences, danger or threat, change in knowledge, symbolic value, etc) are able to considerably reduce the amount of awareness of the other issues.

Since its capacity is restricted by time, access, and psychological factors (Zhu, 1992), the agenda of a given community is created, at the intra-individual level, as a function of how important a given problem is perceived to be, compared to the other competing issues. That is to say, there is a tremendously high number of problems that affect and preoccupy a given population, but only a few reach this public agenda, by means of a comparative analysis made by each member of that community (Erbring, Goldenberg & Miller, 1980).

The perception of relative importance of a given issue is influenced by the media because people, as cognitive misers, use information

¹⁵ The concept of thematic diversity is proposed by an interesting stream of research on agenda composition under the umbrella of the agenda-setting hypothesis. A few studies extended the understanding of this media effect from simply an impact on what people think about, to how many things (nominal diversity) and how many different things (thematic diversity) people think about (Allen & Izcaray, 1988; McCombs & Zhu, 1995; Wanta, King & McCombs, 1995; Peter & de Vreese, 2003). Research has found that agenda diversity is a factor of age, education, interest in politics, frequency of media exposure, diversity of media used, and diversity of media agendas, but most of these results tend to differ from country to country (see Peter & de Vreese, 2003, for a review of the – few – studies on agenda diversity).

¹⁶ Issues would live five different stages: preproblem (when it has not yet captured public attention), discovery (it becomes suddenly salient to the society), the plateau (when the interest stops increasing quickly, due to the realization of how complex it is), the decline (people get inattentive, frustrated, bored and/or demotivated by the issue) and postproblem (when it falls into a limbo of inattention, even if objective conditions related with him has not changed).

provided by the media as a basis for their judgements, instead of undertaking a more complex and cognitively demanding analysis. How does this happen? The salience given to a certain issue in the media is used as a criterion for evaluating the importance of that issue, either in an automatic or conscious way. Therefore, issues that receive a great amount of media coverage at a given moment have a high probability of being considered important by public opinion some time after (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987).

Media agendas also have restrictions in the number of issues to cover, both in terms of market constraints (money, space, time, news values; see Zhu, 1992) and, of course, audience demands and expectations. Since perfect equity in the way issues are presented is not possible, some political views will be more represented than others. There cannot be, of course, a perfect relationship between events in the real world and the content of media outlets. And that is why it is to be expected that the agendas of people that rely on the media for information will be different from those of people who do not consume political news.

2.2.3 Issue Salience, Importance and Relevance

The key concept of agenda-setting is salience¹⁷ (Iyengar & Ottati, 1994; Dearing & Rogers, 1996): in fact, agenda-setting has been simply defined as a transfer of salience from the media agenda to the public agenda (McCombs, 2004).

In real context studies, this independent variable – salience in media outlets – has been traditionally studied by using media content analysis (for instance, McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Funkhouser, 1973). Experimental studies, in turn, manipulate issue salience through non-obtrusive techniques – in the case of television studies, for instance, the news shows' records are slightly changed in order to make some issues salient, but in such a way that participants do not realise that they are actually watching a

¹⁷ Most studies employ the term salience, but McCombs & Shaw (1972) use the term importance; other studies use the expressions “awareness”, “attention” or “concern” (see Edelstein, 1993).

fake news show (see, for instance, Iyengar, Peters & Kinder, 1982; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987).

With regard to the public agenda, the salience of a given issue is the importance that the community grants it. This dependent variable is traditionally operationalized through questionnaires – either with open-ended questions (namely the notorious Gallup question about the most important problem affecting the nation; McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Behr and Iyengar, 1985) or questions in which people are asked to rate the degree of importance of issues selected and listed by the researchers beforehand (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Brosius & Kepplinger, 1990).

But what does salience actually mean? Kiouisis' (2004, in McCombs, 2005) theoretical explication of media salience identified three dimensions of this concept: attention, prominence, and valence. Following the general lead of content analysis in mass communication research, most agenda-setting studies have emphasized attention – the number of news stories devoted to a particular topic – and, secondarily, the prominence of the news about an issue. For instance, when people read newspapers, they employ information such as article location, title size, visual effects, and article size to guide their judgements; in the case of TV, the amount of air time each issue gets, the use of visual/musical effects, or the position of the issue in the show's alignment (see Iyengar & Kinder, 1987) provide the same kind of cues about how important an issue is. Websites also provide cues to their users (McCombs, 2004). Lastly, valence also has been measured on some media agendas, reflected, for example, in the degree of conflict or its overall positive or negative tone.

What about salience in public opinion? Personal and public agendas are often measured by items that assess the perceived importance of various issues rather than the interest generated by these issues. Why? While in many instances we would expect respondents to attach importance to interesting issues and vice versa, these two dimensions of issue salience (perceived importance and interest) are not likely to coincide for all issues (see Hill, 1985).

On the other hand, Takeshita (2006) points out that salience can have two meanings – the first is the idea of perceived importance, and it is closer

to the use of this term by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, whereas the second (accessibility) is closer to the idea of cognitive accessibility bias. Evett & Ghanem's (2001, in McCombs, 2005) factor analysis of these data identified two dimensions of issue salience, which they labelled social salience and personal salience. Takeshita (2006) quotes research showing that these two meanings seem to be correlated, but are not identical from a theoretical point of view (accessible issues might not be considered important, and vice-versa). Moreover perceived importance (a self-report question) is more valuable for salience (at least for attribute agenda-setting) than a measure of accessibility (response time to stimulus words).

2.2.4 Linear vs. Non-linear Approaches

Is the relationship between media and public agenda linear? Not according to some authors (Neuman, 1990; Watt, Mazza & Snyder, 1992). A linear model allows salience of issues in public opinion to increase infinitely as long as media coverage increases. But there is always a floor and a ceiling for the salience of an issue; in addition, previous research observed that media impact varies over time (Zhu et al., 1993).

To deal with the possible non-linearity of agenda-setting, Watt, Mazza & Snyder (1992) propose a model of gradual decay of effects of media coverage on public opinion. The importance of media coverage for issue salience in public opinion depends both on for how long the issue has been covered in the news, and the recency of strong coverage. Media effects are believed to be bound to vanish, sooner or later, according to those characteristics (Watt, Mazza & Snyder, 1993).

In a different vein, Neuman (1990) proposes a logistic model for crisis issues (e.g. the Vietnam war) and symbolic crisis issues (e.g. poverty) which would follow the dynamics of issue life cycle that Downs (1972) proposes – a period of media coverage without great effects on public opinion, an exponential increase after a specific threshold is crossed, and a period of stagnation of public interest irrespective of a stronger coverage by the media. When the issues are actually problems (for instance, inflation, unemployment), the Downsian logic no longer applies, and a linear relationship between media coverage and public attention is expected.

According to Zhu and colleagues (1993), these models, while seemingly contradictory, are in fact complementary: “Taken together, media coverage at a given point in time has immediate effects which then decline exponentially; however, when accumulated across the entire public, the effects can be seen to increase logistically over time” (p. 13).

2.3 First Agenda-Setting Studies and Subsequent Research

The idea that the media could determine what people consider important can be found in Walter Lippmann’s book, first published in the 1920s, which is considered to be the founding text for communication research (Rogers, 2004). In fact, according to this author, the media are important because they help us to shape our picture of the world beyond our direct personal experiences – and the sphere of politics is, generally speaking, beyond the reach of the common citizen (Lippman, 1922).

In the following years, Robert Park and Harold Lasswell also stressed (albeit in an equally speculative way) the influence of the media in the establishment of an issue agenda (Park, 1922, 1940; see McLeod, Becker & Byrnes, 1974; Saperas, 1987). Even the proponents of the minimal effects paradigm believed that the media were able to grant different status to public issues (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1948, quoted in Kinder, 2003). The statement that Cohen published years later – “the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling his readers what to think about” (1963, p.8), is paradigmatic and inspirational for this research stream.¹⁸

¹⁸ According to Rogers (1993) or Rogers, Hart & Dearing (1997), the epiphany leading to the first agenda-setting study happened when McCombs, inspired by a chat with colleagues in a bar, decided to buy Bernard Cohen’s *The Press and Foreign Policy* (1963).

However, the very first empirical test of this hypothesis was undertaken only in the 1970s by Maxwell McCombs & Donald Shaw.¹⁹ These researchers interviewed 100 undecided American voters living in a small community (Chapel Hill) during the presidential campaign of 1968, and collected data on the content of the nine mass media that served this community during that period. The results showed that the issues that the participants considered most important were, in fact, those that had received more attention from the media. In other words, there were very strong correlations between the issues in the media agenda and in the public agenda (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

In the following decades, other correlational studies were carried out in order to strengthen empirical support for the agenda-setting hypothesis – these included longitudinal studies of small communities, as well as of representative samples of American citizens and other populations. The research carried out by Shaw & McCombs (1977, in McCombs, 1994) is an example of this. The authors aimed at strengthening the internal validity of the results by measuring the independent variable (media content) before the dependent variable (public opinion on issues), and were successful. The longitudinal work done in the United States by Funkhouser (1973) and Germany by Brosius & Kepplinger (1990) provided, respectively, strong and moderate empirical support for the agenda-setting hypothesis. There were, of course, a few studies that failed to observe agenda-setting effects, raising speculation about the possible spuriousness of the relationship between the two agendas. For instance, Iyengar (1979) found weak and confusing patterns of influence between TV content and public opinion, as well as no impact whatsoever of the moderating variables suggested by the literature.

¹⁹ The primacy of McCombs & Shaw (1972) is implicitly contested in McLeod, Becker & Byrnes (1974), in which a conference paper by Jack McLeod on agenda-setting effects during the US 1964 presidential elections is quoted. However, this paper, where the expression “agenda-setting” was not used, was never published, and was therefore almost inevitably bound to be forgotten. In fact, it is not even mentioned in the most exhaustive analysis of agenda-setting research growth over time, whereas the 1972 piece by McCombs and Shaw ranks first in terms of citation rates (Rogers, 1993).

Agenda-setting was also studied in laboratory contexts. Experimental work built up its internal validity, by isolating the independent variable and controlling for the effect of other intervening variables in the process of establishing the public agenda. In the most paradigmatic agenda-setting experiment, conducted by Iyengar, Peters & Kinder (1982), participants were asked to fill in a questionnaire about politics, which included a question on the importance of several national problems (pre-test). In the next four days, they saw a tape of the ABC news show broadcasted on the previous evening. This tape was altered slightly, in order to manipulate the independent variable – the most salient issues in the news programme (defence, pollution, and inflation). In the sixth and last day of the experiment, the participants filled in a second questionnaire, which also contained questions about the importance of several issues (post-test). Iyengar, Peters & Kinder (1982) found that, in the conditions where the news broadcast gave salience to defence and pollution, there was an increase in the importance conferred to these issues from the pre-test to the post-test (there were no results in the inflation condition due to occurrence of a ceiling effect). Therefore, these authors showed that the content of the news had an influence on people's agendas. Subsequent experimental work reached similar results (e.g.: Iyengar & Kinder, 1985, 1987).

Unfortunately, in the real world, dominant messages such as the ones used in those experiments are not very common, at least in the communication flows of democratic societies. In addition, Zaller (1992, 1996) argues that the settings used in most experiments of political communication are too extreme – specially the ones involving political interest. In his words, politics is low key and not involving, causing the manipulation of interest to be excessively artificial. Therefore, the external validity of such studies can be debated.

However, there are also field experiments that were able to provide empirical support to the agenda-setting ability of the media towards both public opinion and policy makers, with a design that respects the rules of experimentation but takes place outside the lab, in a realistic context. For instance, Cook et al. (1983) observed that fraud in home health care became an important public issue due to the media coverage it was given, by

assessing the importance granted to this issue before and after an investigative report on this topic was aired by a national network. Participants had been randomly assigned to exposure to this report in their homes – treatment condition – or to another show airing at the same time – control group.

From the 1970s until the end of the 20th century, academia produced about 300 studies focused on the agenda-setting hypothesis (Dearing and Rogers, 1996; Roessler, 1999). Correlational studies carried out in natural settings strengthened the external validity of this hypothesis, through an almost systematic observation of statistically significant correlations in different populations and contexts (see, for instance, McCombs et al., 2011, for a literature review of agenda-setting studies around the world).

In addition, experimental work built up its internal validity, by isolating the independent variable and controlling for the effect of other intervening variables in the process of establishing the public agenda. From small temporal range studies such as cross-sectional studies, passing by trend studies, panel designs, and arriving at long temporal range studies such as time series designs, research has successfully given agenda-setting a consistent empirical support (Gozenbach & McGavin, 1997).

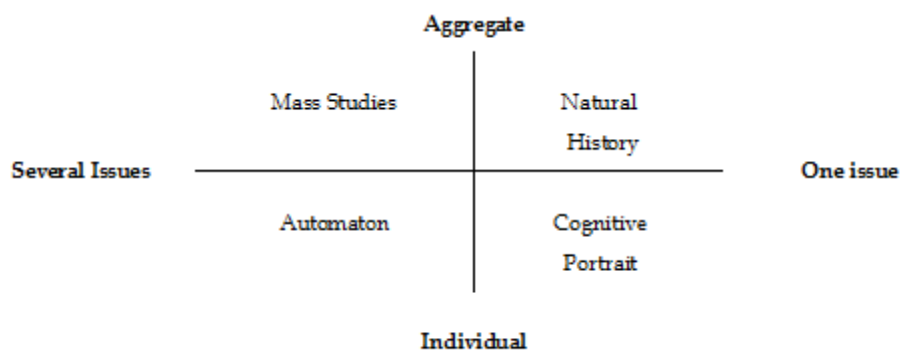
2.3.1 Taxonomies of Agenda-Setting Research

How can we make sense of all this literature? There are taxonomies of agenda-setting research that illustrate the richness and variety of research conducted to date, based on differences in research concerning a) the level of analysis and number of issues, b) the media channel under analysis.

The first of these taxonomies was proposed in 1981 by one of the founding fathers of agenda-setting research, Maxwell McCombs, at the *International Communication Association* meeting in Acapulco, Mexico. According to this Acapulco typology, the research can be systematized in a space shaped by two orthogonal axes – the level of analysis of the agendas (individual or aggregate) and the quantity of issues under analysis (single item or entire agenda) (Figure 2.1).

This space is therefore composed by four fields: a) mass perspective (or issue competition) studies, that focus on several issues with an aggregate approach (e.g.: McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Iyengar & Simon, 1993); b) automaton: the analysis of the importance conferred on several issues by a group, focusing on the individuals that compose that group, and assuming that those will incorporate the media agenda composed by various themes (e.g.: McLeod, Becker & Byrnes, 1974); c) natural history studies, interested in understanding the presence of a given issue on the media and its impact on public agendas by using aggregate data and a longitudinal perspective (e.g. Winter & Eyal, 1981); and d) cognitive portrait: one issue analysed at the individual level, that is, the observation of issue salience from the medium to the user (e.g. Erbring, Goldenberg & Miller, 1980). In the words of McCombs (2004), the most important perspective is the first, since “the ultimate goal of agenda setting theory (...) [is] a comprehensive view of mass communication and public opinion in the life of every community and nation” (p.32).

Figure 2.1 – Research Taxonomy according to Number of Issues and Level of Analysis (Adapted from McCombs, 1981)



In historical terms, aggregate studies were the first to be carried out, with the studies by McCombs and Shaw (1972) or Funkhouser (1973) being the seminal mass studies and Benton & Frazier (1976) or Winter & Eyal (1981) as the first natural history studies. Automaton studies followed. However, this perspective implies that individual agendas would strongly resemble media agendas, an expectation that is fairly close to the hypodermic needle model, and therefore considered unlikely (Ramaprasad, 1983). Indeed, the few automation studies available report

weak to moderate agenda-setting effects – for instance, Roessler (1999) found significant effects for less than 20% of the participants in his study. Cognitive portrait studies are more common than automaton studies, but their results are weaker than those observed with aggregate measures (e.g. Erbring, Goldenberg & Miller, 1980; Hügel, Degenhardt & Weiss, 1989).

This taxonomy was proposed at the outset of this research stream. Therefore, it is not surprising that the path followed by the research since the 1980s made the second dimension fairly useless, since the debate within the community of agenda-setting researchers focused on the decision to study this phenomenon from an aggregate or individual perspective (Eichhorn, 1996, quoted in Roessler, 1999).

Until now, the proponents of the aggregate level of analysis seem to have prevailed – in fact, most of the research conducted was done in an aggregate way (Roessler, 1999). McCombs et al. (2011) noted that, around the world, the most frequent agenda-setting studies are either mass or natural history perspectives. However, since the publication of the paradigmatic study of Erbring, Goldenberg and Miller (1980), that merged individual survey data with the content of the newspaper that each individual read, there is a trend towards “disaggregation in agenda-setting research” (Dearing & Rogers, 1996, p. 92).

What about the media outlets? The discussion about which media would produce stronger effects on public opinion was adopted by agenda-setting research right from the beginning (Weaver et al., 1981; Saperas, 1987; see also Wanta, 1997b). Some authors believe that television is the medium with more potential to influence the construction of reality (e.g. Blumler, 1973, in Saperas, 1987): it leads to passive learning – since it requires little effort to use; it conveys different types of information – sound, sight and motion; it is often perceived to be more attention-grabbing, interesting, personally relevant, emotionally involving and surprising than newspaper content (see Wanta, 1997b, for a review of studies defending stronger TV effects); and, in Europe, the average citizen usually relies more heavily on television than on newspapers for political information (e.g., Norris, 2000).

Iyengar and colleagues (1982, 1987) report strong TV agenda-setting effects in their experiments. Moreover, journalists and politicians in Belgium, the Netherlands and Sweden agree that television is more powerful than newspapers and other outlets (news sites included); in the first two countries politicians attribute more power to newspapers than the journalists do (van Aelst et al., 2008; Strömbäck, 2011a).

Other authors believe that the press would be more effective than television in terms of influencing public agendas. Reading a newspaper takes more effort than watching television: it is more difficult, requires more attention and good reading and interpretative skills – and mental effort is believed to lead to greater learning. In addition, newspapers can be used at one's own pace, are read at different times of the day, and people can return to them as many times as they wish, whereas people have less control over how the TV news are paced and when it is watched (see Wanta, 1997b, for a literature review of studies defending stronger press effects). Moreover, newspapers are better able to inform citizens about candidates' issue positions than television (Robinson & Levy, 1986; Druckman, 2005). Several studies report stronger agenda-setting effects from newspapers than from TV channels (e.g. McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Tipton, Haney & Baseheart, 1975; Benton & Frasier, 1976; Shaw & McCombs, 1977, in McCombs, 1981; Asp, 1983; McCombs, 2004).

There are scholars who have noted that the relative superiority of one of these channels will depend on factors such as the type of issues (e.g.: Palmgreen & Clarke, 1977), audience characteristics such as occupation (Weaver et al., 1981), cognitive resources (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987), motivation (newspapers are used mainly by people actively seeking information, whereas people that do not seek political information learn more from the television; Chaffee & Frank, 1996; Chaffee & Kanihan, 1997), or the quality of the information conveyed (exposure to television do not generate more or less learning than exposure to newspapers, but tabloid newspapers are not associated with learning in Britain during the 2001 election; Norris & Sanders, 2003).

Finally, there are studies that show that time plays a role: television effects happen quickly but can vanish equally as fast, whereas press effects take more time to happen, but lasts longer (Weaver et al., 1981; Wanta & Hu, 1994a; Wanta, 1997b; but see also Iyengar & Kinder, 1987).

The debate on this subject does not only focus on television and newspapers, but also includes the radio and Internet. For instance, Kopacz & Volgy (2005) quote research showing that outlets based on the written word (such as journals and, to a lesser extent, the Internet) would have a bigger impact than audiovisual media (television and radio), since the greater the effort in processing a message, the larger its impact in terms of attitudes and behaviour (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

In practice, this debate produced four types of studies: press agenda-setting (e.g. Erbring, Goldenberg & Miller, 1980; Winter, Eyal & Rogers, 1982), television agenda-setting (Hill, 1985, Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Brosius & Kepplinger, 1990; Watt, Mazza & Snyder, 1993), new media agenda-setting (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002) and multi-channel agenda-setting research, with comparative (e.g.: Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002) or integrative (e.g.: McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Peter, 2003) purposes.

The research displayed in Table 2.1 testifies to the richness in agenda-setting research in the past forty years. The variety corresponds not only to the typologies discussed above, but also to the way the dependent variable was operationalized and measured (open Most Important Problem questions, closed lists in which the participants pick one or several issues, closed lists of issues to be rated by the participants, and even open behaviour – Stroud & Kenski, 2007)²⁰ as well as method (survey research, experimental studies, historical analysis), time (one month, several months, several years) and space (small communities vs. entire countries; US-based research vs. European, African and Middle-Eastern research).

Some of the studies presented below investigated other agendas as independent or dependent variables (especially during the first two decades of research) or second-level agenda-setting, priming and framing

²⁰ See other examples of behaviour as dependent variable in Weaver, McCombs & Shaw, 2004).

effects (particularly in the last twenty years.²¹) In order to reduce complexity in the table, I refer only to those characteristics of the study that directly refer to the classical agenda-setting hypothesis.

Most of the studies on agenda-setting were conducted in the US (Weaver, McCombs & Shaw, 2004), as the table makes clear. This is surely not dissociable from the fact that in the United States, content analysis is helped by the existence of sources of information about media content such as LexisNexis or the Vanderbilt Television News Archive (see Graber, 2004), whereas in other countries such ready-to-use sources do not exist.

A relevant point of the systematization I propose is the fact that I found several studies conducted outside North-America in which agenda-setting has been observed. Semetko (2004) noted that research conducted during election campaigns outside the US have failed to observe agenda-setting effects, giving Britain and Germany (Semetko & Schoenbach, 1994) as examples. However, both the literature review offered by Weaver, McCombs & Shaw (2004), which is more complete and convincing, or the set of studies I present below, mention German, Spanish, Portuguese and other European studies in which evidence of agenda-setting was found.

Finally, Table 2.1 also confirms that there is a national focus in most studies of agenda-setting. With a couple of remarkable exceptions (Peter, 2003, 2007²²; Peter & de Vreese, 2003²³; Soroka, 2003²⁴), the agenda-setting literature is almost exclusively composed of single-country analysis.

²¹ Priming and framing are almost absent from communication journals research articles before 1990. The concepts first appeared in the literature during the 1980s, but the affirmation of these research areas is quite recent (Weaver, 2007).

²² The author focused on television influence on the importance assigned to the issue «European Union» by citizens from the 15 member-States just after the 1999 European elections, using polarization of elite opinions about Europe as a national-level moderator. Agenda-setting depended on the nature of elite opinion – the more EU stories people watched in countries in which political elites disagreed about European integration, the more important they considered European integration. If elite opinion about European integration was consensual, no agenda-setting effects were found (Peter, 2003, 2007).

²³ This study is not actually about mainstream agenda-setting, but about nominal agenda diversity (number of issues in each citizen's agenda) and thematic agenda diversity (number of different issues present in those agendas). The authors study five European countries selected due to their similarities (Denmark, Netherlands, UK, Germany, France), and observed that TV news agenda diversity lead to personal agenda diversity only in Denmark. A drawback of this study is the fact that it is a comparative study where country diversity is not taken into account.

Most of these articles report empirical evidence of agenda-setting. This does not mean that most studies find strong media effects; however, publication bias against negative results cannot completely explain the amount of papers reporting positive results. Even controlling for the possible impact of such bias, evidence of agenda-setting effects is (at least in the USA) rich and convincing.

Even if the countries selected are believed to be the most similar in terms of media system characteristics – dual system, with strong public and private broadcasters – there are within-country differences that should be taken into account.

²⁴ This longitudinal study compares the agenda-setting power of the newspapers in the US and the UK and finds similar agenda-setting effects in both countries.

Table 2.1 – Selected Research Articles on Agenda-setting, 1972-2008

	<i>Type of Study</i> ²⁵	<i>Number of Issues</i> ²⁶	<i>Media Agenda</i>	<i>Public Agenda</i>	<i>Research Design</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Time-frame</i>
McCombs & Shaw (1972)	Mass	Fifteen	Local and national newspaper front pages, national TV network newscasts	Open-ended variation of MIP question	Cross-sectional	USA (Chappel Hill, NC)	1968 Presidential campaign
Funkhouser (1973)	Mass	Eight	Three national news magazines	Open-ended MIP question	Observational (Several time points)	USA	1964-1970
McLeod, Becker & Byrnes (1974)	Automaton	Six	Local daily newspapers	List of six issues, ranked by importance	Cross-sectional	USA (Madison, WI)	1972 Presidential campaign
Benton & Frazier (1976)	Natural History	One (Economy)	News in TV channels, newspapers, news magazines	“Content-free” questions in semi-structured interviews	Observational (cross-sectional)	USA (Minneapolis, MN)	1975
Palmgreen & Clarke (1977)	Mass	55 national issues + 33 local issues	Local Newspapers; National and local TV stations newscasts	Open-ended variation of MIP question (local vs. national)	Observational (cross-sectional)	USA (Toledo, OH)	1973
Winter & Eyal (1981)	Natural History	One (Civil rights)	Most important newspaper (just front page content)	Open-ended MIP question	Observational (27 time points)	USA	1954-1976
Winter, Eyal & Rogers (1982)	Natural History	Three (Inflation, Unemployment, National Unity),	Most important newspaper (just front page content)	Open-ended MIP question	Observational (4 time points)	Canada	1977-1978
Iyengar, Peters & Kinder (1982)	Cognitive Portrait	Three (Defence, Inflation, Pollution)	TV, (manipulated ABC news program)	List of eight issues, whose importance was rates by participants	Experimental (laboratory)	USA (New Haven, CT)	1980
Asp (1983)	Mass	Five	News on TV channels and press	Open-ended variation of MIP question ²⁷	Observational (cross-sectional)	Sweden	1979 election campaign

²⁵ According to the McCombs (1981) typology.

²⁶ For ready-friendliness, the issues covered by the studies are mentioned only for the papers where three themes or less were analysed.

	<i>Type of Study</i> ²⁵	<i>Number of Issues</i> ²⁶	<i>Media Agenda</i>	<i>Public Agenda</i>	<i>Research Design</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Time-frame</i>
Cook et al. (1983)	Cognitive Portrait	One (Fraud in Home Health Programs)	One reportage on the issue, on NBC	Questions about the important of the issue (in general and specific sub-topics)	Field experiment	USA (Chicago Metropolitan Area)	1981
Behr & Iyengar (1985)	Natural History	Three (Energy, Inflation, Unemployment)	TV news shows (CBS)	Open-ended MIP question	Observational (42 time points)	USA	1974-1980
Hill (1985)	Mass and Automaton	Twenty	News shows in national TV networks	Fixed-choice items rated by respondents according to their interest	Observational (cross-sectional)	USA	1977-1978
Anokwa & Salwen (1988)	Mass	Six	Most important newspaper	Open-ended MIP question	Observation (pre-test/post-test) ²⁸	Ghana (Central Region)	1981
Demers, Craff, Choi & Pessin (1989)	Natural History	Five	News shows in national TV networks	Open-ended MIP question	Observational (45 time points)	USA	1974-1986
Hügel, Degenhardt & Weiss (1989)	Cognitive Portrait	Two (Foreign Affairs, Social Security)	Political content on National TV and several newspapers	Open-ended variation of MIP question ²⁹	Observational (cross-sectional)	West Germany	1980
Brosius & Kepplinger (1990)	Mass/Natural History	Sixteen	News programs in main two TV channels	List of 16 political problems	Observational (53 time points)	West Germany	1986
Iyengar & Simon (1993)	Cognitive Portrait	One (Gulf Crisis)	TV news show on international affairs (ABC)	Open-ended MIP question	Observational (7 time points)	USA	1990-1991
Watt, Mazza & Snyder (1993)	Cognitive Portrait	Three (Inflation, Iran, Soviet Union)	Television news shows	Open-ended MIP question	Observational (61 time points)	USA	1979-1983

²⁷ "Thinking of this year's election, are there any issues which are important to you in determining which party you will vote for on election day?" .

²⁸ With a twist. In this case, the dependent variable is measured just once, and the independent variable twice. The idea is that the dependent variable would correlate strongly with media content measured before the survey, but not after.

²⁹ "What political and social problem at this time concerns you the most?"

	<i>Type of Study</i> ²⁵	<i>Number of Issues</i> ²⁶	<i>Media Agenda</i>	<i>Public Agenda</i>	<i>Research Design</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Time-frame</i>
Wanta & Hu (1994a)	Mass	Eleven	Front pages of regional/local newspapers, full content in news magazine, local and national ABC newscasts	Open-ended MIP question	Observational (26 time points)	USA (Jackson County, IL)	1990
Wilke (1995)	-----	One (American Revolution)	One Newspaper	Quotation of documents of the time	Qualitative	Germany	1773-1783
Dalton, Beck, Huckfeldt & Koetzle (1998)	Mass	Several (all related to the campaign)	Newspapers	Open-ended MIP question	Observational (cross-sectional)	USA	1992 Presidential Election
Lopez-Escobar, Llamas & McCombs (1998)	Mass	Six	Regional press and TV channels/programs	Open-ended MIP question	Observational (cross-sectional)	Spain (Navarra)	1995 regional election campaign
Roessler (1999)	Mass, Automaton Cognitive Portrait	Nine	Newspapers, television and radio	List of 9 issues, to re rated in a 5-point scale according to their importance	Observational (cross-sectional)	Germany (Baden-Wuettenberg)	1990
Soroka (2002)	Cognitive Portrait	Three (Inflation, Environment, Debt)	Newspapers (in English and French)	Open-ended variation of MIP question (unstated)	Several (unstated)	Canada	1985-1995
Kwansah-Aidoo (2003)	Natural History	Two Events ³⁰	National media (not described)	Focus groups topics	Qualitative	Ghana	1997
Peter (2003)	Cognitive Portrait	One (The EU)	Newspapers and TV	Open-ended MIP question	Observational (cross-sectional)	15 EU State-members	1999 European Election
Lee (2004)	Natural History	Six (but all related with foreign policy)	Most important newspaper + National TV networks news	Unclear if open-ended or list	Observational (11 time points)	USA	1993-1994

³⁰ In the introduction, the author draws on the differences between issues and events, and decides to focus on the latter.

	<i>Type of Study</i> ²⁵	<i>Number of Issues</i> ²⁶	<i>Media Agenda</i>	<i>Public Agenda</i>	<i>Research Design</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Time-frame</i>
Wanta, Golan & Lee (2004)	Mass	Countries	Four main television networks newscasts	List of 26 countries, rated according to their vital interest for the US	Observational (cross-sectional)	USA	1998
Holbrook & Hill (2005)	Cognitive Portrait	One (Crime)	TV crime dramas	Open-ended MIP question	Experimental and Cross-sectional	USA	1995 and 2000
Sheafer & Weimann (2005)	Cognitive Portrait	Two (Security and peace; Domestic and economic issues)	TV news shows	Open-ended MIP question	Observational (pooled data from 4 surveys)	Israel (Jewish Population)	Electoral campaigns 1996, 1999, 2001 and 2003
Son & Weaver (2005)	Natural History	Two (Candidates, Bush and Gore)	Two most important newspapers front pages; National networks newscasts	Poll standings (vote intentions)	Observational (20 time points)	USA	2000 Presidential campaign
Santana Pereira (2007)	Mass and Cognitive Portrait	Fifty-two (Aggregate); Ten (Individual)	Newspapers and news magazines	Open-ended MIP question	Observational cross-sectional	Portugal	2005 legislative election campaign
Stroud & Kenski (2007)	Cognitive Portrait	One (Presidential campaign)	Most important newspaper and National Network news broadcasts	Refusal rates in surveys about the issue	Observational (about 20 time points)	USA	2004 presidential campaign
Matthes (2008)	Cognitive Portrait	One (Unemployment)	Local newspapers and national TV news shows	Likert scale ³¹	Observational cross-sectional	Germany (Berlin)	2002

³¹ Five-point scale accompanying the sentence "Unemployment is the most important problem in the country".

2.4 The Mechanisms Underlying Agenda-Setting

2.4.1 *The Audience – Learners or Victims?*

As stated earlier, research showed that public agendas have a limited capacity, being usually composed of no more than five issues, and therefore the agenda of a given community is created as a function of how important a given problem is perceived to be, compared to others (Erbring, Goldenberg & Miller, 1980). The perceived relative importance of a given issue is influenced by the media because people naturally economize on their own cognitive resources, using the news as a basis for their judgements, rather than undertaking a more complete analysis (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987).

But is this process conscious or not? The literature on agenda-setting is still debating the subject. Thus, it is possible to find authors who consider the agenda-setting to be a subconscious endeavour and others who believe it is a conscious process.

Since the 1990s, agenda-setting has been understood under the umbrella of the model of associative networks. This theoretical instrument holds that human memory is composed of a set of organized networks of concepts (the nodes), interconnected through pathways, that symbolize substantive elements of rational or emotional meaning, and whose accessibility varies over time (Srull, 1981). When people have to make difficult decisions (for instance, assess the relative importance of several issues), they do not use all the information they have about the subject, but unconsciously use a shortcut known as the «heuristic of availability». This heuristic allows people to save cognitive resources and form judgments based on the information that comes to mind more easily (i.e. that is more accessible). Since accessibility also depends on the frequency and recentness with which the information was used³², the media boost the degree of accessibility of certain issues by covering them regularly (Brewer, Graf & Willnat, 2003; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997).

³² As well as on the importance of the nodes, the number of linkages, and how strongly they are connected to other nodes in the associative network (see Lee, 2004).

Therefore, accessibility in memory is the key mediator in the relationship between media coverage of issues and people's perceptions of their importance. Agenda-setting would be therefore a result of this accessibility bias (see Takeshita, 2006).

In the last decade, this perspective – which understands agenda-setting as subconscious and media users as victims (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987) – was challenged in the literature. There are some researchers who, while agreeing that people do not use all the information they have to assess the relevance of problems, do not believe that people use shortcuts unconsciously (e.g.: Miller & Krosnick, 2000; Kinder, 2003). There is evidence that the MIP question would not elicit an automatic reaction from the respondents – the salience of an issue in news broadcasts or elsewhere is not likely to turn it into a frequently cited concern unless the public judges it to be of genuine importance (Schuman, Ludvig & Krosnick, 1986). Moreover, the role of need for orientation as a moderator of agenda-setting is considered to be an argument against the victim perspective (Takeshita, 2006). For these authors, agenda-setting is a conscious process of learning or inferring the degree of importance of current issues, based on implicit or explicit information provided by the media (for instance, the frequency of coverage of each issue). It is worth noting that McCombs & Shaw (1972) themselves employ the expression “attention and learning effects”.

Takeshita (2006) raises the idea that there might be two types of agenda-setting. Drawing on Miller & Krosnick (2000), who found strong effects for high-knowledge and high-trust people, and weaker agenda-setting effects for others, the author proposes the existence of “a deliberate *genuine* agenda-setting involving active inference and an automatic *pseudo* agenda-setting explained by the accessibility bias” (p. 279).

In 1985, Iyengar and Kinder tested three different hypothesis concerning psychological mechanisms that could explain agenda-setting: counter-arguing (people that critically scrutinize news stories about national problems, quarrelling with the message, would be less likely to alter their priorities, when compared with people that passively accept the news), source credibility (since counter-arguing takes time and effort, people use the credibility of the sources as a cue to accept/reject the

message), and affect (emotional responses to vivid pictures and dramatic stories broadcasted by the TV would increase attention to the news, or directly have an impact on the importance attributed to national problems). A series of four experiments were able to show that the credibility hypothesis was the most supported by their empirical work; regarding affect, the results were mixed; actually, the vividness of stories seems not to contribute to agenda-setting, but to undermine it (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). The counterarguing hypothesis received very weak empirical support (Iyengar & Kinder, 1985). These results would reinforce the understanding of agenda-setting as an unconscious endeavour.

2.4.2 The Media Effect – Intentional or Mediatlional?

The agenda-setting hypothesis presupposes that the priorities of political and interest groups influence the news priorities of the media, which have specific news values and serve particular audiences, and then those priorities influence public opinion (McQuail, 1983). The term “agenda-setting” seems to imply a deliberate attempt on the part of the media to create a certain agenda of issues, the intentionality of this effect remains somewhat unresolved in the agenda-setting research.

In the typology of media effects proposed by McQuail (1983), organized in two orthogonal axes (intentionality vs. non-deliberate effects and short-term vs. long term effects), agenda-setting is characterized as intentional and long-term. Subsequent research has shown that the effects decay in time, depending on the nature of the issue and other variables (Watt, Mazza & Snyder, 1993)³³; however, the first speculation – i.e. the one concerning intentionality – has not yet been confirmed or discredited.

Most agenda-setting researchers opted not to take part in a debate about the role of the press, in which some political communication experts

³³ Agenda-setting seems to be a short-time process. Watt, Mazza & Snyder (1993) observed that agenda-setting strength tends to decrease according to the amount of coverage that the issues have before the time frame considered: the decay being quicker in the case of very long or very short coverage issues. However, depending on the issue at stake, television agenda-setting can decay after 30, 60 or 600 days. Agenda-setting on an obtrusive issue such as inflation seems to last longer than on other issues, irrespectively of their previous coverage.

believe that the media was a neutral observer and reporter of political and social events (and therefore see agenda-setting as a by-product of journalistic activities) or as having a role that includes surveillance of the socio-political environment and political participation fostering political or social reform (Kosicki, 1993).

However, Semetko et al. (1991) are an exception to this general panorama. The authors clearly state that the media have a discretionary ability to shape the public agenda, instead of merely mirroring the ideas of candidates and parties. They find “the proposition that the media merely reflect or mirror an agenda constructed by political spokespersons overly simplistic, some might say bankrupt”. Furthermore, they argue that “such a position clearly obscures the intricate ways in which political messages emerge as the joint product of an interactive process involving political communicators and media professionals” (p. 3). Eilders (2000, 2002) takes the same position in this debate.

At the system level, the discretionary power of the media to set the agenda is defined by the strength of the political party system (strong systems give less space for journalist discretion), degree of commercialization (commercialized media systems are associated with stronger inclinations of journalists to set the agenda but less space to do so), degree of competition for media audiences (more competition leads to more attention to the audience’s interests and less attention to political agendas by the journalists), degree of professionalization of the campaign and cultural differences about how politics and politicians are regarded (less respect leads to more discretionary power) (Semetko et al., 1991).

2.5 The Moderators of Agenda-Setting

At the beginning of the agenda-setting research stream, some authors feared that it would mean a return to the hypodermic needle paradigm by propagating the idea that the media have an immense potential to set the public agenda (see Ramaprasad, 1983). However, this is not the case.

The majority of agenda-setting studies tested hypotheses concerning factors that were thought to moderate its strength – that is to say, the dimensions that might influence the intensity/occurrence of the effect (Baron & Kenny, 1986). This literature shows that agenda-setting is moderated by individual factors such as need for orientation, education, political knowledge, partisanship, trust in the media, degree of exposure and attention to the media and habits of discussion. The audience is not an indistinct, amorphous, entity, but a heterogeneous body – and its heterogeneity can prevent or facilitate agenda-setting. Moreover, issue characteristics may also play a moderating role.

2.5.1 Individual-level Moderators

Need for orientation was the first moderator proposed in the agenda-setting literature (Shaw & McCombs, 1977, in McCombs, 1994; Weaver, 1977 & 1984, in Dearing & Rogers, 1996). This concept encompasses the ideas of relevance and uncertainty (McCombs, 2005). In effect, if there is both a low level of interest about the political and social environment and a low level of uncertainty, need for orientation (and, consequently, the susceptibility to agenda-setting) should be equally low. On the other hand, if an issue has a high degree of interest and uncertainty the correlation between the media and the public agenda should be high. People who believe that being informed about current affairs is important but have a high degree of uncertainty about these issues (i.e. those with a high need for orientation) will be more susceptible to the media content.

Recently, Matthes (2008) proposed a scale of need for orientation, based on an ingenious reconceptualization of this construct, and observed a positive impact of need for orientation on the strength of agenda-setting. However, this kind of scale, which can be very useful in experiments and panel studies specifically designed to study agenda-setting, is not – understandably – present in any of the most important public opinion surveys conducted in the field of public opinion research.

Whenever need for orientation is not possible to operationalize directly, usually scholars use their consequent (degree of **exposure**) as a proxy³⁴, since need for orientation is thought to increase information seeking (Poindexter *et al.*, 2002, in McCombs, 2004; Matthes, 2008; see also Ramaprasad, 1983). In fact, when people want to be informed about what is happening in the world, but feel that keeping up is too hard, they use the media as a way to digest information and reduce complexity. The research on the effects of exposure to the media observed that this factor is positively related to stronger learning, civic engagement and agenda-setting effects, even if attention may be more important than mere exposure (Hill, 1985; Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986; Wanta & Hu, 1994a; Zhao & Chaffee, 1995; Norris, 2002; Drew & Weaver, 2006).

If need for orientation and degree of exposure/attention increase accessibility, political sophistication increases applicability.³⁵ **Education** and **political knowledge** – often used as indicators of the construct political sophistication – are thought to have an impact in agenda-setting. However, in both cases there is no agreement in the literature about the direction of their moderating effect. In the case of education, some authors believe that less educated people will be more influenced by the media, since they do

³⁴ It is also possible to use survey data indirectly to operationalize need for orientation without using a proxy. For instance, people with high interest in politics and low political efficacy are, in fact, people that have a higher need for orientation. Some other studies used vote intention to operationalize the second part of the concept of need for orientation, assuming that people that do not know who to vote for are, generally speaking, more uncertain about the current affairs in the political and social world (e.g. Högel, Degenhardt & Weiss, 1989). I do not think that this assumption necessarily holds true – a highly efficacious and knowledgeable citizen might be uncertain about who to vote for due to a poor offer on the side of the parties, or to a concentration of more than one party around issues that interest and motivate that citizen. Nevertheless, a partial operationalization of need for orientation (using, for instance, only interest in politics) is highly undesirable, because people with high interest in politics can be, *grosso modo*, more (Schönback & Semetko, 1992) or less susceptible to media effects (McLeod, Becker & Byrnes, 1974), for reasons that likely have nothing to do with need for orientation.

³⁵ Price & Tewksbury (1997, in McCombs, 2005) show that when messages are processed, the salient attributes of a message evoke and activate other constructs, which then have an increased likelihood of use in evaluations made in response to the message (applicability effects). Once activated, constructs retain some residual activation potential, making them likely to be activated and used in subsequent evaluations (accessibility effects).

not have the same capacity to analyse critically what is broadcasted possessed by more educated citizens (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987).

Others argue that more educated citizens are strongly influenced because they access information on current issues in the media more attentively and frequently (Hill, 1985; Wanta, 1997a). Lastly, some studies find no effects of education, reporting an homogeneous agenda-setting effect for some issues and lack of agenda-setting for others, independently of the respondents' cognitive sophistication (Zhu & Boroson, 1997), and others maintain that the moderately knowledgeable citizens are the ones that absorb the television issue agenda the most (Denemark, 2002).³⁶

In terms of political knowledge, it is possible to find articles stating that less knowledgeable people will be more susceptible to agenda-setting, since they do not possess any information other than that provided by the media (e.g. Iyengar, Peters & Kinder, 1982), as well as research showing that people with a high degree of political knowledge will be more affected by the media, because they consume it more frequently (Miller & Krosnick, 2000). The existence of a curvilinear relationship between persuasion and political knowledge (Zaller, 1992, 1996) may also be observable between agenda-setting and political knowledge, which would explain the mixed results reported in the literature. It might be that the relationship between these two variables is nonlinear and depends on message-specific traits (such as accessibility, novelty and dissemination) or the information flow.

People with greater political sophistication are, at the same time, those who are more likely to be aware of the content of the media agenda, and those who are less affected by it, having their own agenda (McLeod, Becker & Byrnes., 1974; Weaver et al., 1981). This idea was revisited by John Zaller two decades ago. The author suggested that political awareness increases the probability of receiving messages that are contrary to predispositions, but decreases the likelihood of accepting those messages (Zaller, 1992, 1996). Therefore, in contexts that Zaller describes as medium

³⁶ It is worth underlining that in different countries, the same levels of education (either measured in number of years of schooling or qualifications attained) might not mean the same thing – namely in terms of information and skills (see Dimock & Popkin, 1997). This might explain, at least in part, the lack of clarity about this variable's role.

or low information flows (which probably corresponds to the flow during routine times and second-order campaigns), people with average levels of political awareness (or knowledge) are more likely to be influenced because, on the one hand, they are exposed to political messages more frequently than less sophisticated people, but less capable of resisting influence because their predispositions are weaker than those of the highly sophisticated. Moreover, political knowledge seems to be a better predictor of news awareness, when compared to self-reported media use, interpersonal communication or education (Price & Zaller, 1993).

What about **trust in the media**? Trust is seen as an important moderator of agenda-setting, since it will happen only if the media outlet is seen as trustworthy or reliable; otherwise suspicion will harm the media's potential to influence (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987, Kinder, 2003; Wanta & Hu, 1994b; Miller & Krosnick, 2000; Tsfati, 2003). Accordingly, Zaller (1992) proposes an idea by William McGuire stating that trust is not associated with learning or involvement with the message, but with an openness and willingness to follow opinion leaders. Stigmatized sources are more scrutinized (people tend to guard themselves against them), and therefore their effects are less probable (Petty, Fleming & White, 1999). The same can be said for distrusted sources.

Trust seems to be only marginally related to frequency of media use,³⁷ and its relationship with discussion of news is not clear, depending on the outlet in question (Kiousis, 2001). Moreover, trust in the media seems to be negatively correlated with right-wing partisanship and/or strength of partisanship (Cook & Gronke, 2001; Jones, 2004).

It is worth pointing out that trust is not necessarily connected with bias or bad practice from the media – biased or poor quality media can still be credible for some people. But usually the two seem to be associated – for instance, Italy is a country in which trust in the media is very low (as we

³⁷ Jones (2004) found no relationship between trust and TV or newspaper consumption. Tsfati & Cappella (2003) observed that the relationship is negative when it comes to exposure to mainstream news media and positive when it comes to use of non-mainstream news media. Without this distinction, the effect might not be observed. It is also relevant to say, however, that trust can contribute to selective exposure to the most trusted outlet.

will see later) and, at the same time, has been characterized by *The Atlantic* as a place where fake news and fake interviews are fairly common in the newspapers – even in those reputed to be high-quality, such as *La Repubblica*.³⁸

Competing sources of information about the relevance of issues, such as social networks or party ideology, were also studied by agenda-setting researchers. Let us start with the analysis of **discussion of current affairs** as a moderator of agenda-setting.

The idea that media effects were contingent on patterns of interpersonal discussion goes back to the Katz & Lazarsfeld (1955) two-step flow of communication model. Lazarsfeld and his colleagues portrayed interpersonal communication as a crucial mediator of media effects, in the sense that news is something that will make people talk (Park, 1940), and those conversations would then lead to persuasion.

Recent research focusing on effects other than agenda-setting stresses the same idea: the social network (in the pre-Facebook sense of the term) was the primary source of information, and an important vote factor in the 1992 US presidential campaign (Allen-Beck et al, 2002); and if the information offered by the media is not in accord with the prevailing opinion of the recipient's network, there is a strong chance that it will be rejected (Schmitt-Beck, 2004).

Nevertheless, discussion of current affairs has no clear effect on agenda-setting. Several authors (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Shaw, 1977; Erbring, Goldenberg & Miller, 1980) reported that interpersonal discussion reduced the influence of media, whereas others stress that discussion reinforces the power of the media to set the agenda when people talk about what they have read or seen in the media (thus strengthening the cognitive availability of the issues more frequently covered) and weakens the probability of agenda-setting when discussion focuses on other issues (Wanta & Wu, 1992). Yang & Stone (2003) observed that people that rely on

³⁸ See the article by Michele Traverso, "The Italian Press's Tradition of Fake Interviews", published on *The Atlantic* in April 2011, at <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/04/the-italian-press-tradition-of-fake-interviews/73377/>.

interpersonal communication for information show agenda-setting effects to a greater extent than people who just use the media without engaging in much discussion with friends. This means that interpersonal communication can indeed reinforce media effects on public opinion.

Yet again, other studies found no effects of discussing politics (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987) and still others have seen that it depends on the issue at stake – for instance, interpersonal communication seems to explain most of the salience of domestic issues (Zhu et al., 1993). Moreover, there is evidence about West Germany citizens in 1980 showing that interpersonal communication weakens press agenda-setting power on unobtrusive issues (Hügel, Degenhardt & Weiss, 1989).

Interestingly enough, Weimann & Brosius (1994) tried to adapt the idea of a two-step flow of communication to agenda-setting, identifying influential individuals with a scale of strength of personality, and hypothesizing that the agenda of those people (known by being intense consumers of media outlets) could lead and influence the agendas of the non-influential. The empirical support to this second step was rather mixed; step one was not tested due to lack of information on media coverage of issues in the models. In 1996, the same authors inserted media data into the research design, and tested four different models of relationship between media agendas and those of highly influential people (early recognizers) and the general public – the classical two-step flow model (media influences opinion leaders, leaders influence the rest) and other versions. Once again, mixed results were achieved, the main finding of this study being that interpersonal communication matters and has a role in different directions according to the issues at stake (Brosius & Weimann, 1996).

Party identification is also believed to have a moderating role of agenda-setting. This is a crucial concept in the study of electoral behaviour, and refers to a stable psychological identification with a specific political party. Having a party identification means that people think of themselves as supporters of a party; however, this cognition is not necessarily expressed in voting for that party or assessing its leader in the best way

possible. This concept is not behavioural or emotional, but cognitive, a matter of self-definition (Campbell et al., 1960; Campbell et al., 1986, in Blais et al., 2001). Party identification can be studied in terms of direction (with which party does an individual identify?) and strength (how deep is that identification?).

The moderating role of partisanship in media effects is not a brand new idea. Even Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet (1944) suggested that people with weak party attachments were the ones most likely to be influenced by the media. Indeed, partisanship is believed to be a frame of reference that reduces media agenda-setting effects (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; McLeod, Becker & Byrnes, 1974). Agenda-setting tends to be strong in the case of independents, or nonpartisans, or undecided (see McCombs & Shaw, 1972). There is one study that I can quote (Iyengar, 1979) that did not find effects of partisanship on television agenda-setting in the US.

Party identification is the last in the list of the most relevant moderators of agenda-setting effects. The rationale underlying these moderators implies, in some cases, the existence of causal relationships between them – the more idiosyncratic variables (such as education or knowledge) are believed to explain the issue- or media-related variables (such as exposure, trust or discussion). For instance, Poindexter et al. (2002, in McCombs, 2004) observed that need for orientation is the mediator variable between education and exposure to news programs (in this case, candidate debates on TV), and Santana Pereira (2007) found that education was significantly correlated with discussion of current issues with other people. Additionally, political knowledge seems to be correlated with exposure to television (Norris, 1996; 2000; Newton, 1999; see also Aarts & Semetko, 2003, for a further specification of this hypothesis).

Table 2.2 – Individual Moderators of Agenda-Setting (summary)

<i>Moderator</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Main Source</i>
Need for Orientation	Fosters agenda-setting	Shaw & McCombs (1977, in McCombs, 1994); Weaver (1977 & 1984, in Dearing & Rogers, 1996); Matthes (2008)
Education	Can increase or decrease the magnitude of agenda-setting.	Negative relationship: Iyengar & Kinder (1987) Positive relationship: Hill (1985); Wanta (1997a)
Political Knowledge	Can increase or decrease the magnitude of agenda setting.	Negative relationship: Iyengar, Peters & Kinder (1982); Iyengar & Kinder, 1987 Positive relationship: Miller & Krosnick (1996, 2000)
Trust in the Media	Fosters agenda-setting	Iyengar & Kinder (1985, in Kinder, 2003) Miller & Krosnick (2000) Tsfati (2003)
Exposure and Attention	Positive impact, but attention is more important than exposure.	Hill (1985) Wanta & Hu (1994a, 1994b)
Discussion	Its impact depends on the issues at stake.	Shaw (1977) Wanta & Wu (1992)
Partisanship	Independents are more susceptible to agenda-setting	McLeod, Becker & Byrnes (1974)

2.5.2 Issue-related Moderators

The occurrence or intensity of agenda-setting is also influenced by the characteristics of the issues, since “no one contends that the news media influence the salience of all issues” (McCombs, 1994, p.14). Obtrusiveness, geographical focus and obscurity are some of the issue characteristics explored in this literature.

The most relevant characteristic to deal with is **obtrusiveness**. An issue is obtrusive if the public has direct experience of it, and unobtrusive if the public has no direct contact with it (Zucker, 1978, in Zhu & Boroson, 1997). Usually, international affairs are more unobtrusive than domestic

issues. The impact of media is supposedly greater for one's perceptions of unfamiliar issues, or issues that are complex or unclear, than on perceptions of issues that people have experienced personally (e.g. Newton, 2006). Neuman (1990) proposes inflation as the quintessential obtrusive issue because people are aware of it in their daily lives and thus do not need the media to provide official statistics for them to realize that it is an important issue. Of course, the need for orientation will be greater for issues that are more distant, either in terms of geography or personal experience (McCombs, 1994).

If the results of Behr & Iyengar (1985) and Brosius & Kepplinger (1990) are seen under the light of this concept of obtrusiveness, it is even possible to raise the hypothesis that the nature of issues affects not only the intensity of agenda-setting, but also the direction of causality between the media and public agenda. In the case of the north-American research, the observation of an "agenda-setting in reverse" effect (p. 48), that is to say, the influence of public opinion on the media agenda, happened in just one highly obtrusive issue in the USA during the 1970s – inflation. In turn, Brosius & Kepplinger (1990) found agenda-setting effects in issues such as European politics, defence or environment (not very involving) and an impact of the public agenda on the media in highly important issues such as pensions and crime. Soroka (2002) also proposes different patterns of relationship between the media, the public and the policy agenda according to the nature of the issue.

Obtrusiveness of issues differs from person to person. That is why some authors prefer to talk about issue sensitivity (see Zhu & Boroson, 1997), that is, the degree to which people are personally affected by the issue at stake. For instance, the existence of a union member or unemployed person in the household can be a measure of sensitivity to unemployment, income as a measure of sensitivity to inflation, age and gender as sensitivity to crime or healthcare. Issue sensitivity is a moderator of agenda-setting, in the sense that it can facilitate its occurrence (e.g. Erbring, Goldenberg & Miller, 1980; Iyengar & Kinder, 1985), but not in every single case (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; see also Price & Zaller for similar evidence from outside the agenda-setting theoretical umbrella).

However, the role of obtrusiveness of issues is not crystal clear. As we have seen above, several studies noted that when the issues have a very strong and direct impact on people's daily life, the media effect will be smaller. In this context, the degree of importance of issues will be high due to their relevance to people and independent from the amount of coverage they get in television and newspapers, and vice-versa (Winter, Eyal & Rogers, 1982; Hgel, Degenhardt & Weiss, 1989; Zhu et al., 1993; Watt, Matta & Snyder, 1993; Soroka, 2002; Watt, Mazza & Snyder, 1993). The less personal experience or contact people have with a social environment, the greater the degree of ambiguity and threat posed by that social environment, and therefore the greater their dependence on mass media messages (Ball-Rokeach, 1985). This is known as the obtrusive contingency hypothesis (Lee, 2004). However, other researchers believe that personal experience with an issue can lead people to search for more information about it in the media, thus increasing their exposure and probability of being influenced (Erbring, Goldenberg & Miller, 1980; Demers, Craff, Choi & Pessin, 1989; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). This is known as the cognitive priming hypothesis (Lee, 2004).

In the framework of the associative networks theory, both phenomena are possible – the first hypothesis assumes that the obtrusive nodes are always active and available, whereas the second presupposes that obtrusive nodes need less cognitive work to be activated by means of media coverage, being activated more quickly by the media coverage than unobtrusive issues in the network (Lee, 2004). The natural history of the issues (the amount of time they have been around and their placement in the attention cycle; Downs, 1972) might be an interesting qualification to the relationship between speed of activation and involvement of issues – the recency of the issue in the public sphere may interact with its obtrusiveness and foster/reduce activation speed (Lee, 2004).

The idea of obtrusiveness is connected to the **geographic focus** of the issue. It is argued that agenda-setting will be strong in issues that are international. When issues are local, people depend less on media coverage to be aware of their importance (Tipton, Haney & Baseheart, 1975; Palmgreen & Clarke, 1977). In the case of international news, agenda-

setting is thought to be stronger for issues that presuppose some degree of conflict (e.g. terrorism, crime and drugs) and intervention of the country in the international scene, and weaker in abstract themes such as foreign trade (Wanta & Hu, 1993; see also Soroka, 2003). Citizens' assessments of the incidence of specific problems (unemployment, drug abuse or discrimination) in a small US community were found to be unrelated to the media coverage of such issues, but with the actual rates of incidence computed by agencies and other institutions (Hubbard, DeFleur & DeFleur, 1975). Conversely, the media are able to shape citizens' perception of the importance of foreign nations, by increasing or decreasing the amount of coverage granted to those countries (Wanta, Golan & Lee, 2004).

The third relevant issue characteristic is **obscurity**. Issues that would not be identifiable if they had not received media coverage are those where agenda-setting will be stronger (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). This is in tune with Bartels (1993) observation about issues – persuasive effects are not possible for issues with stable prior opinions, but are stronger for new issues; this implies that agenda-setting is bound to be bigger in the case of new, obscure, issues.

Table 2.3 – Issue Moderators of Agenda Setting (summary)

<i>Moderator</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Source</i>
Personal Experience with Issues	It can have an positive or negative effect on agenda-setting strength	Negative relationship: Winter, Eyal & Rogers (1982), Soroka (2002) Positive relationship: Erbring, Goldenberg & Miller, 1980; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987
Geographical proximity	Reduces agenda-setting strength	Palmgreen & Clark (1977)
Obscurity of Issues	Increases the agenda-setting strength	Watt, Mazza & Snyder (1993) Dearing & Rogers (1996)
Age	Younger issues associated with stronger agenda-setting effects	Watt, Mazza & Snyder (1993)

Finally, Watt, Mazza & Snyder (1993) also suggest issue age as a factor to take into consideration. The authors report that agenda-setting power tends to be stronger in issues at early stages in the issue-cycle (for instance, Iran, which started to be covered in the news at the beginning of

the time frame considered by the authors), compared with issues that are much older (e.g. the Soviet Union, present in the news for at least 35 years before the time frame under study).

2.6 So What? The Relevance of Agenda-Setting

In general terms, agenda-setting is an interesting subject for the understanding of public opinion dynamics; it explains how certain issues get to the top of a population's priorities, with the help of the media which are, in turn, influenced directly or indirectly by politicians and other groups. Moreover, priming studies boosted the perceived importance of the agenda-setting phenomenon for political scientists, since it allowed the drawing of indirect lines between media content and electoral behaviour.

Priming is the mechanism by which the media agenda influences the way people evaluate political actors. Generally speaking, this term refers to the cognitive process through which the recent or frequent activation of a given cognitive schema raises its accessibility at a subsequent moment, when the individual thinks or speaks about something else (Srull & Wyer, 1979). The media – either news shows (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987) and entertainment programs (Holbrook & Hill, 2005), or the press (Iyengar & Simon, 1993) – influence the establishment of an agenda by giving salience to some issues. Afterwards, those issues become more accessible at the moment of naming the most important problems of the country (or other community), but also on subsequent occasions, such as the evaluation of candidates or the assessment of the government's performance (Iyengar, Peters & Kinder, 1982; Iyengar et al., 1984; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990; Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Krosnick & Brannon, 1993; Willnat & Zhu, 1996; Miller & Krosnick, 1996, 1997, 2000; Holbrook & Hill, 2005; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). In other words, issue salience becomes an heuristic for expressing political judgements.

Agenda-setting and priming are understood as being closely connected. On one hand, agenda-setting seems to be a pre-condition for the occurrence of priming (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007); on the other, both processes are based on the same cognitive

mechanism, the heuristic of availability (Scheufele, 2000; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Since priming has an effect on the appraisal of a given candidate's competence and personality, and this variable is, according to the socio-psychological model of vote (Campbell et al., 1960), one of the factors explaining electoral behaviour, there can be an indirect effect of media on vote, mediated by agenda-setting and priming. In 1987, Iyengar and Kinder, in the inferences they make based on the results of their research, stated that the content of the news media can, through priming, make voters oscillate between indecision and strong support towards a given candidate. More recently, Sheaffer & Weimann (2005) carried out an empirical test of this hypothesis of indirect effect on vote, using individual and aggregate data collected in the context of four Israeli elections. The research design included agenda building (definition of the media agenda), agenda-setting and priming (not in the classical sense of influence on candidate appraisal, but directly on voting behaviour), and the authors found empirical support for all these steps of the relationship between media and vote.

The priming hypothesis has known some degree of criticism in the literature. For instance, Lenz (2009) suggests that priming effects are, in fact, learning effects: the author only observed priming effects among individuals who learn party positions on issues and adopt the favourite party's positions as their own. However, Hart & Middleton (2012) recently showed that the priming hypothesis receives stronger empirical support than the projection (or, in the words of Gabriel Lenz, learning) hypothesis.

Issue voting is another relevant way by which agenda-setting can be relevant in political terms. People tend to cast their vote for the party that they believe will best deal with/own the issues that they find to be important (Petrocik, 1996; Bélanger & Meguid, 2008) – and the media can have an impact in this assessment, as we have seen above. Since the impact of social cleavages on vote is declining (Dalton, Flanagan & Beck, 1984; Franklin, Mackie & Valen, 1992; Clark & Lipset, 2001; Gunther & Montero, 2001), it has been posited that the impact of economic concerns is now more

forceful in terms of explanatory power, alongside contextual short-term factors (Kiewiet, 1983; Lewis-Beck, 1988; Anderson, 1995).

A recent study has indeed observed that issue voting in the 2009 EP elections (operationalized as the relative weight of attitudes towards Europe on vote choice) was stronger in contexts where media attention to Europe had been stronger, even controlling for the degree of party conflict about this issue (de Vries et al., 2011).

The work by Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart (2007), even though it did not measure explicitly the public agenda, can be pointed out as an example of this, since the authors observed a strong relationship between the amount of news media reporting immigration-related topics and vote for anti-immigrant parties. In a quasi-experimental natural design, Boomgaarden & de Vreese (2007) noted that the level of media exposure moderated – in this case, intensified – the relationship between a real world event starring immigrants as murderers and anti-immigration sentiment in the Netherlands. However, this requires the assumption that people know the positions of the main parties and candidates on the most important issue – an assumption that might not hold in the case of politically uninformed citizens, but also in the case of the politically knowledgeable (Jenssen, Aalberg & Aarts, 2012). Media can indeed point out the most relevant issues of the day but, according to these authors, rarely highlights the positions of the parties, because citizens are believed to already possess such information.

Moreover, Weaver (1991) observed that the level of perceived significance of a given issue is associated with greater levels of knowledge about that issue, strength and direction of opinion about solutions to deal with it, and **political behaviour** (i.e. writing a letter, signing petitions, attending meetings, deciding to cast a vote according to the issue).

Lastly, a different rationale for the relevance of the agenda-setting phenomenon is proposed by scholars trying to establish a relationship between agenda-setting and **framing**, considering them as two different levels of the same psychological phenomenon. But what is framing? This term refers to the influence of the frame the media gives to a specific issue on the people's opinion about that issue (Lilleker, 2006). To frame a specific

issue is to select some aspects of its complex nature and make them salient, in detriment to others, in order to promote a certain perspective on the issue (Entman, 1993). Several framing studies were conducted in the US context (e.g. Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Kim, Scheufele & Shanahan, 2002; Brewer, Graf & Willnat, 2003; Wanta, Goran & Lee, 2004) and in Europe, assessing either the impact of news frames on attitudes about the European Union (Werder, 2002; Dursun, 2005; de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; de Vreese, 2007; Elenbaas & de Vreese, 2008; de Vreese & Elenbaas, 2008; Vliegenthart, Schuck, Boomgaarden & de Vreese, 2008) or other issues (Lopez-Escobar et al., 1998; Lopes-Escobar, Llamas & McCombs, 1998).

Some authors proposed the existence of a close link between framing and agenda-setting, asserting that the former is not different from a second-order agenda-setting phenomenon (Takeshita, 1997; see Kim, Scheufele & Shanahan, 2002; Yioutas & Segvic, 2003), which is sometimes named attribute-, or second-level agenda-setting. The interest in attribute agenda-setting is shared by several scholars and resulted in a considerable amount of research (McCombs & Shaw, 1993; Ghanem, 1997; McCombs & Estrada, 1997; Kioussis, Bantimaroudis & Ban, 1999; Kim, Scheufele & Shanahan, 2002; Kioussis & McCombs, 2004; McCombs, 2004; Wanta, Golan & Lee, 2004; Dursun, 2005; Kioussis, 2005). Classic agenda-setting refers to the transmission of issue salience from the media to public opinion, whereas this second-order agenda-setting is the transmission of the attributes of those issues (McCombs, 1993, 2004). This is called a second-order phenomenon because it is more complex than classic or first-order agenda-setting, but also because it is thought to have a greater impact on public opinion about a given subject.

Understandably enough, such a close link between agenda-setting and framing phenomena is not widely accepted, and remains a matter of contention in the literature. Some authors contend that agenda-setting and framing are based on different psychological processes; others point out that framing and attribute agenda-setting are different because not all attributes of an issue can be considered to be frames (Sheufele, 2000; Kim, Scheufele & Shanahan, 2002; McCombs, 2004; Sheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Takeshita, 2006; Weaver, 2007).

2.7 Agenda-Setting, Spiral of Silence, Uses and Gratifications

Beyond priming and framing, agenda-setting also speaks to other traditions in the field of political communication. For instance, Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1994) proposed that there is a link between agenda-setting and her theory about the spiral of silence. According to her, agenda-setting creates the issues on which public opinion will be formed. Noelle-Neumann (1994) defines public opinion as a set of “opinions and behaviour in morally loaded areas that can be publicly expressed and shown with the expectation of meeting with approval or, conversely, without running the risk of isolation” (pp.98-99), in sum, opinions that are important for the cohesion of the community. The media would then pre-select the issues about which it is reasonably safe to talk, and the ones that can be riskier in terms of community cohesion. The role of the media as creator of consensus by means of agenda-setting is acknowledged by the founding father of this line of research (e.g. McCombs & Shaw, 1972; McCombs, 1993, 1997; Lopez-Escobar, Llamas & McCombs, 1998).

In turn, Shaw (1977, 1979) suggests that there is a link between agenda-setting and the uses and gratifications theory (Blumler & Katz, 1974), since it results from the people’s need to be informed about what is happening in the world. The theory of uses and gratifications tells us that the decision to use the media is made in order to satisfy needs such as entertainment (escape from routine and daily problems), interpersonal relations (media provide information that is useful for conversation), identity (strengthening of values, self-knowledge) and surveillance (need to get information about important factors that might help in performing a specific task or achieving a given goal (Blumler & Katz, 1974). In Ball-Rokeach’s (1985) more succinct terminology, media is consumed to respond to motives such as understanding, orientation and play.

Media use seems to satisfy the surveillance need, since campaign coverage offers information that audiences can use in order to take decisions about how to vote. However, other needs are also gratified by media exposure during campaigns: the need to know the programs of the

different parties, to know the most important current issues, to assess the political protagonists, remember what are the strong assets of the favourite party, understand who will win the elections, enjoy the excitement around the electoral race, and get material to use in discussions with friends and family (Blumler & McQuail, 1964, in Severin & Tankard, 1998).

2.8 Critical Appraisal of Agenda-Setting Studies

Despite all the research conducted, agenda-setting still struggles with some very important problems. The limitations that Saperas (1987) or Edelstein (1993) underlined two decades ago involved unclear definitions and criterion variables, uncertainty about the time frames and number of issues, or poor knowledge about the effect of individual characteristics in this process. Nowadays, these problems are no longer as relevant as they were twenty years ago – there is a shared understanding of what agenda-setting is, and the amount of empirical work done allow to make educated choices about time spans and number of issues to include in the research design. Moreover, the lack of knowledge on the impact that audience characteristics might have, pointed out by Saperas (1987) is no longer true, as we were able to show in the section about the moderators of agenda-setting.

However, the main critique that can still be made to the agenda-setting hypothesis concerns the direction of causality between the media agenda and the public agenda. It is true that longitudinal and experimental studies were successful in establishing the media agenda as chronologically preceding the public agenda, thus supporting the claim that this process is unidirectional (see, for instance, Iyengar, Peters & Kinder, 1982; Behr & Iyengar, 1985; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Watt, Golan & Snyder, 1993).

Causal direction is typically assessed in a fairly straightforward way, that is to say, the media agenda is measured at time point 1 and correlated with the public agenda measured at time point 2. This is an important weakness (Kosicki, 1993), because causation involves more than mere covariation and time order (in the sense that the cause precedes the effect). Causality also implies control of other potential explanatory factors of the phenomenon under study, which is usually achieved in experimental

studies by randomization of participants in different treatment groups, perfect management of the experimental setting, and statistical control of intervening variables (in the case of survey research).

In other words, in order to demonstrate a media effect (McLeod & Reeves, 1980; in Kosicki, 1993), four steps need to be taken: offer evidence about the media content that causes a particular effect; show that the people supposedly affected have been exposed to that content; control for extraneous variables, rule out competing causal explanations, and specify the mechanisms involved in the effect. The problem of causality will be a constant preoccupation throughout this thesis – I will try to deal with it in the best way possible.

Direction of causality is also an issue in the field of political agenda-setting. Several studies have shown that the media have (or are believed to have) an impact on the political agenda (see Walgrave & van Aelst, 2006; van Aelst et al., 2008; Strömbäck, 2011). In fact, time-series analysis of political agenda-setting shows that the media does have an impact on the political agenda, but the size of the effect is very small. However, studies focusing on politicians' perceptions of media influence show that they tend to consider the media to be a key political agenda setter, sometimes as powerful as the prime minister (van Aelst & Walgrave, 2010; Strömbäck, 2011). Nevertheless, other studies of this phenomenon (e.g. Siune & Borre, 1975; Wanta & Foote, 1994; Brandenburg, 2002; Ridout & Mellen, 2007) show that the relationship is the other way around, i.e. the TV and press respond to *stimuli* from (some) political parties, while their agendas are not influenced by the media outlets. Tedesco (2001) found reciprocal effects between candidate agendas (measured by press releases) and TV newscast agendas in the context of the 2002 US presidential primaries.

Some authors therefore propose a dynamic understanding of agenda-setting, since, in the same period, the media agenda might influence the public agenda on some issues and be influenced by this latter on some other issues (Anokwa & Salwen, 1988; Brosius & Kepplinger, 1990; Brosius & Weimann, 1996; Soroka, 2002). These studies are not a complete critique of the agenda-setting hypothesis, even because, having tested the diametrically opposite causal relation between media and public opinion,

fairly strong media effects on the public agenda were observed regarding certain issues. However, this research line calls attention to the fact that agenda-setting can be a dynamic phenomenon of interchangeable influence between the two agendas, and that a strong test of the agenda-setting hypothesis must include the test of the counter-hypothesis. The test of agenda-setting as a dynamic phenomenon is not possible in my work, since there is just one time point for the media agenda and one time point for the public agenda. Future research into agenda-setting from a comparative perspective, conducted in a context with more variety of information about media content and public opinion, should test this idea of interchangeable effects.

A second line of criticism of the agenda-setting literature has to do with the fact that aggregate approaches have had, and still have, a monopoly in this field of research (Willnat, 1997). Roessler (1999) warns that aggregate studies risk incurring the ecological fallacy, that is to say, to use the relationships between two variables estimated on the basis of group means as an indication that, for each individual, the same relationship would be observed. In the case of agenda-setting, it is important not to forget that the existence of a strong relationship between the salience of issues in the media and its importance for the public agenda does not mean that every individual agenda reflects, in a standardized way, the coverage of the issues by the media. In this study, I will implement and test several strategies of data analysis, using mainly a general aggregate overview of the phenomenon but crossing it with individual-level perspectives. Comparing the results at different levels of analysis will shed additional light on the perks and perils of aggregationism and individualism in agenda-setting research, and provide a balanced picture of this phenomenon in Europe.

A third critique has to do with the national focus of the most every study of agenda-setting effects. Recently, agenda-setting research has been defined as “a bright spot in these scenarios of comparative news studies” (Holtz-Bacha & Kaid, 2011, p. 399), but this is not accurate. It is important to differentiate between the internationalization of a research idea, with studies being conducted in nations other than the US (see Holtz-Bacha &

Kaid, 2011; McCombs et al., 2011) and a genuine comparative research framework, in which several contexts are analysed at the same time, with truly comparable data and a single theoretical and methodological lens. Examples of the latter kind of research do not abound. An exception is the study by Peter (2003), which only found agenda-setting effects for the issue *European Union* in contexts where the political elite was not consensual about Europe.

Most of the empirical literature on agenda-setting reports research focusing in one country. These studies are, of course, very interesting and contribute much to our understanding of the agenda-setting phenomenon, but they are unable to tackle the potential existence of variance on agenda-setting magnitude between countries or outlets or the reasons that account for that variance. I therefore believe that research on agenda-setting needs to tackle this lack of knowledge on national-level moderators, and that the inclusion of media system dimensions in agenda-setting models may be one very fruitful path for research. The following chapter discusses this topic in detail.

MEDIA SYSTEMS AND INFORMATION ENVIRONMENTS

“Most of the literature on the media is highly ethnocentric, in the sense that it refers only to the experience of a single country, yet it is written in general terms, as though the model that prevailed in the country were universal”

(Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p.2)

Several authors suggest that media systems may have an important impact on the strength and nature of media effects (e.g. Noelle-Neuman, 1973; Asp, 1983; Semetko et al., 1991; McCombs, 1994, 2004; Semetko & Mandelli, 1997; Semetko, de Vreese & Peter, 2000; Lawson & McCann, 2004; Peter, 2004; Strömbäck & Kaid, 2008; Strömbäck & Luengo, 2008). For instance, in 1999, Newton stated that media systems characteristics might be the reason why the results he draws from British case are different from the US-focused research. The author acknowledges the need for research tapping such a hypothesis but is aware that this “takes us into uncharted comparative water, which will probably have to be thoroughly explored before much more headway can be made on the issue of mass media effects” (p. 599). Seven years later, the author still calls for a focus on the circumstances in which the media can have weaker or stronger effects, instead of a mere debate on whether they are a powerful force or not (Newton, 2006).

To date, there have been very few empirical tests of the media system's moderating role of media effects. In the case of the agenda-setting research, empirical studies are virtually non-existent. The main contribution of this thesis is, indeed, an effort to shed some light on the potential effects of media systems and their correlates on the strength of agenda-setting. In this context, media systems are believed to function as moderators of agenda-setting effects by means of the informational environment they create. The concept of media systems and the theoretical grounds for their importance in agenda-setting research are discussed in this chapter, as well as the informational environment variables considered relevant in this framework.

3.1 The Concept of Media System

3.1.1 Definition

In this dissertation, a media system is a network of mass media outlets – television channels, press outlets (newspapers and magazines), radio and internet – that exist, interact and compete in a given geographical area, in a given time period, serving the same population, under the same legal framework, and facing identical political, economic and social constraints. Usually these geographic areas are countries but, when cultural and linguistic diversity calls for it, a single country may have two media systems (e.g. Belgium – Flanders and Wallonia). Moreover, when cultural and linguistic proximity allows it, a multi-country media system may arise (the phenomenon of Al Jazeera in the Middle East attests this possibility). Therefore, the focus of this analysis of media systems is placed at the macro-level (McQuail, 1992), while the meso-level (specific sectors, such as newspapers, radios or TV broadcasters) and the micro-level (a single media channel) are units of analysis that allow the characterization of the national media system as a whole.

The idea of media systems as closed national entities may be unpopular in a contemporary, globalized world in which several publishing houses control newspapers or TV channels in more than one country: for instance, Axel Springer in Germany, Poland, Czech Republic,

Hungary and other nations; News Corporation in the USA, the UK, Australia and other nations; the RTL group in Germany, Luxembourg, Austria, the Netherlands and other countries (see Norris, 2009). However, in my opinion, it is still analytically useful to take the national media system as an unit of analysis, since the process of external influence (i.e. Americanization in the case of Western European systems; Italianization or Mediterraneanization in the case of Central and Eastern European systems; see Dobek-Oustrowska & Glowacki, 2008) is surely not of equal dimension in all European nations³⁹ and has probably not yet erased all the differences between systems.

The impact of media system characteristics on several relevant political attitudes and outcomes has seen some interest in the literature. For instance, Adserà, Boix & Payne (2000) found that newspaper circulation is positively related to overall quality of government, lack of corruption and government efficiency in consolidated democracies and negatively related to these outcomes in less democratic regimes. Moreover, Norris & Inglehart (2007) report a relationship between the restrictiveness of the media environment and regime support.

Regarding media system's impact on political attitudes and behaviour, the evidence is considerable: van Kempen (2007) observed that media-party parallelism mobilizes disinterested citizens to vote; Popescu & Toka (2008) found that the diversity of media outlets in a country is related to informed voting; Curran et al. (2009) concluded that the degree of commercialization in the TV subsystem impacts the quality of the news and increases the gap between the political knowledge of the socially advantaged and that of the socially disadvantaged; and Aarts, Fladmoe & Strömbäck (2012) noted that in the UK newspaper exposure did not have an impact on political trust or political knowledge, whereas its impact in Sweden, the Netherlands and Flanders (democratic corporatist systems) was consistent. Moreover, freedom of the press is correlated with several political and democratic outcomes (Becker & Vlad, 2010).

³⁹ For instance, the phenomenon of daily newspapers owned by foreign companies is quite strong in Hungary, Bulgaria and Czech Republic but not observable in Slovenia (Terzis, 2007).

Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that media system characteristics might also play a role in agenda-setting – a phenomenon that is linked both to learning about the relevant issues in the social sphere and decision-making in the political realm, as we have seen in the previous chapter.

3.1.2 A History of Theoretical Models

Several models of media systems have been proposed in the last 50 years. One of the first attempts to deal with all the variability in the media systems throughout the world was the book *Four Theories of the Press* (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 1956). This work proposes four types of media systems, departing from the idea that the social and political structures (in particular, the mechanisms of social control) strongly shape press systems. These types are the libertarian model (characterized by unregulated press, partisan and advocate journalists), the social responsibility model (including public broadcasting, press subsidies and right-to-reply laws), the authoritarian model (strong and direct government control over public broadcasters and press) and the soviet model (identical to the authoritarian model, but linked to the communist ideology).

I find this model historically relevant, but scarcely useful. Seibert and his colleagues published a mainly theoretical work, as its title announces; the empirical cases quoted (the United States, Britain and USSR) are not sufficient to make it a strong comparative analysis of media systems; and this framework was heavily influenced by the Cold War era in which it was produced (see Norris, 2009). Considering how much media systems are prone to change along with shifts in technology and politics, a taxonomy proposed 50 years ago is immensely dated.

In fact, some of the four types suggested could not be traced nowadays in European Union's member-States – the authoritarian model, typical of pre-democratic societies, is absent from a set of countries in which democracy is “the only game in town” (Linz & Stepan, 1996, p. 5). In addition, the soviet model vanished from Europe in the aftermath of the dissolution of the USSR. Moreover, the media are seen by these authors strictly as «dependent variables», in the sense that any change in the media

structure is a consequence of the system of social and political control. Therefore, the possibility that the media can have an impact on itself and on the political and social realm is not considered (for an extensive critique of this theory see Hardy, 2008). However, despite these and other points of criticism, this work continues to be a major reference in the field (de Smaele, 1999).

In 1975, Blumler & Gurevitch proposed four dimensions to analyse the connections between the media and political institutions: the degree of state control over media organizations, the level of mass media partisanship, the degree of integration between media and political elites and the nature of the legitimizing creed of media institutions – or the role of journalists in society (see Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995). This model is very useful even in today's media reality, and has inspired recent theoretical work on the subject, as we shall see below.

Some years later, Martin & Chaudhary (1983) published their model of three media systems around the world, based on their perception of different mass media panoramas in Western, Communist and Third World countries. This work is not very useful for the purposes of this dissertation, for three reasons. First, it is outdated – portraying the media world that existed thirty years ago – and thus hardly adaptable to the current European panorama. Second, to propose a global taxonomy of media systems with just three categories is, as Hallin & Mancini (2004) would put it, like making a photo with too much contrast – the differences between the members of a single category and the similarities between the members of different categories are underestimated. In other words, the categories are just not useful at all. Thirdly, this work is ideologically biased, in the sense that it uses a framework and a vocabulary that is tied to political stances (Varis, 1986), which means that the use of the dimensions at the base of Martin & Chaudhary's (1983) work would probably reproduce that bias in my own research. Several other models produced in the 1980s tend to suffer from the same problem (see Jakubowicz, 2010, for a review of these theories).

In 2004, Pippa Norris proposed a typology of global media systems characterized by two orthogonal dimensions – freedom of press (operationalized by the Freedom House indicator, created on the basis of a comprehensive definition of press freedom) and access to media (measured by an indicator computed with data about newspaper circulation, radio receivers and television sets, online population and internet hosts). However, if one wants to carry out a comparative study of agenda-setting in western countries, the typology proposed by Norris (2004) would lead to a low degree of variance, since the majority of the countries belonging to the European Union and their neighbours would be placed in the *free media/widespread access* category. Therefore, a set of analytical variables that allows for a more fine-grained picture of Europe is needed.

A valuable model of media systems was proposed eight years ago by Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini, in the book *Comparing Media Systems* (2004). They studied the media systems of 16 Western European Countries and North America, assessing them according to four dimensions – the degree of development of media markets (in particular mass circulation press), political parallelism (connections between media and interest groups, such as political parties), the development of journalistic professionalization, and the level of state intervention in the media system.

Based on the variation that these four dimensions presented in the 18 countries under study, Hallin & Mancini (2004) proposed three models of media systems. The first one is the *Polarized Pluralist Model*, or Mediterranean model, which is characterized by low levels of press market development and journalist professionalization, as well as high levels of state intervention and political parallelism between media outlets and political parties. This system would be observable in Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, and, to a lesser extent, France. The second is the *Democratic Corporatist Model*, which scores high on the four criteria and is characteristic of Western and Northern Europe. The third is the *Liberal Model*, which would be present in the US, Canada, Britain and Ireland, presents a highly developed press, a highly professionalized journalistic body, and low levels of political parallelism and state intervention (Figure 3.1; Table 3.1).

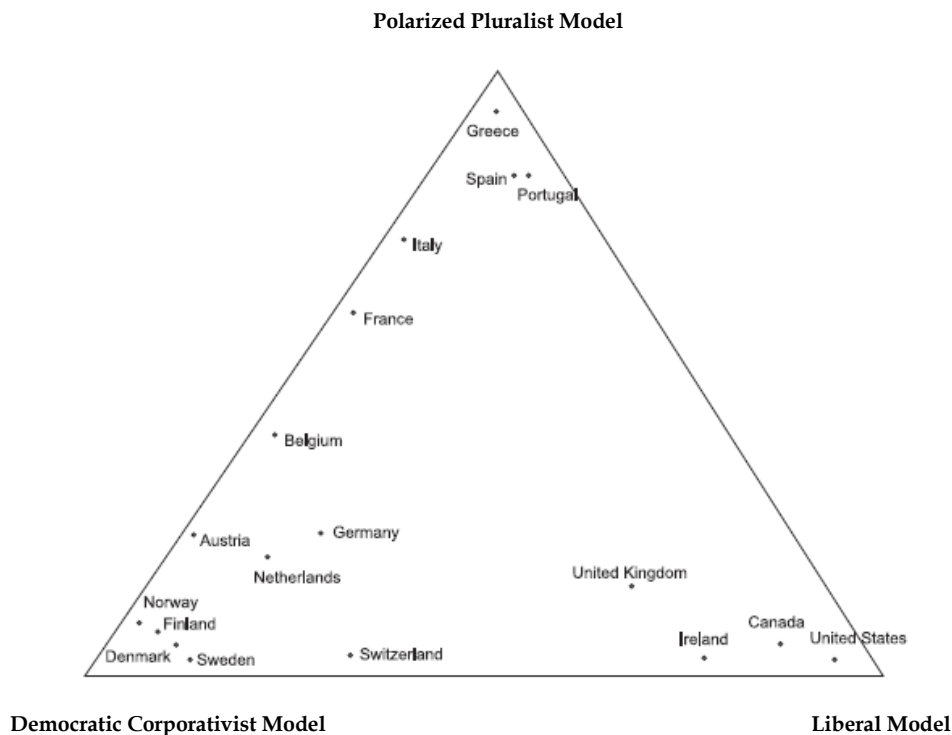
Table 3.1 – The Three Models of Media Systems Described
(Adapted from Hallin & Mancini, 2004)

	<i>Polarized Pluralist</i>	<i>Democratic Corporatist</i>	<i>Liberal</i>
Development of Mass Press	Low	High	High
Political Parallelism	High	High	Low
Professionalization	Low	High	High
State Intervention	High	High	Low

The authors also address the political system correlates of these media models (the role of the state, the nature of formal political systems, the role of interest groups, rational-legal authority vs. clientelism, and moderate vs. polarized pluralism). For instance, they draw a relationship between late democratization, clientelism and the media system characteristics of the countries in the Mediterranean model. But historical factors that have an impact on political systems are also believed to be linked to differences in the media realm: language proximity, historical and economic connections, or religious denomination and its impact on values/literacy rates are believed to be on the basis of the intra-group similarities in the Democratic Corporatist and Polarized Pluralist clusters (see also Papathanassopoulos, 2007; Weibull, 2007).

Hallin & Mancini (2004) are reluctant to use the models as boxes in which to insert the European countries, underlining the considerable imprecision in allocating countries to what they understand to be ideal-types. However, they end up doing this anyway, opening space for one of the main points of criticism levelled at their work (e.g. McQuail, 2006). The other line of criticism regards scope. The book *Comparing Media Systems* does not include the 12 most recent member states of the EU, most of which are Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries. In the last 20 years, those nations have shifted from a strictly defined communist model to undefined post-communist models. This phenomenon might represent an approximation to some European models (Shlesinger, 1995, in de Smaele, 1999), or the creation of hybrids, mixing the ideal-types proposed by Hallin & Mancini in 2004 (Školikay, 2008; see also Voltmer 2008, 2012; Elvestad & Blekesaune, 2008).

**Figure 3.1 – Eighteen Countries Placed in the Three Models of Media Systems
(Adapted from Hallin & Mancini, 2004)**



An educated guess would state that the model by Hallin & Mancini (2004) that is closest to the media realities in those countries is the Polarized Pluralist or Mediterranean model; in fact, it takes just a glance at the political system correlates of this model (late democratization, clientelism, weak rational legal authority, dirigisme as state role) to see the similarities between the central and Eastern countries and third-wave democracies (Huntington, 1991) such as Portugal, Greece and Spain (Wyka, 2008).

However, the analysis of the actual media system characteristics offers a more complex picture. For instance, de Smaele (1999) underlines the differences between the Central European and the Southeastern countries, and speculates about the possibility of the first group of media systems being more European (i.e. more easily integrated into the existing models) than the second group. Blum (2005, in Jakubowicz, 2010) hypothesizes that some eastern European countries might resemble Southern Europe, specially due to their populist-oriented TV sector and elitist press markets, whereas states such as Estonia would be closer to Northern European countries characterized by a public service orientation

both in the broadcasting and print media.⁴⁰ The idea that the Baltic States and most of Central Europe are closer to the Democratic Corporatist model is also present in Hallin & Mancini's (2004) concluding notes. Moreover, Romania is pointed out as being a very problematic media system, characterized by corruption and a feudal spirit (Gross, 2008; Coman, 2009), which detaches it from the general pattern of media in democratic Europe. Finally, Poland would stand exactly between the Polarized Pluralist and the Liberal model, being an example of an interesting mix of polarization and commercialization (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2012).

Three recently published books attest to the relevance of expanding the media system theories to Eastern Europe and/or to the entire World (Dobek-Ostrowska & Glowacki, 2008; Dobek-Ostrowska et al., 2010; Hallin & Mancini, 2012). These books collect a series of essays on media systems in polities as distinct as the CEE countries, Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, South-Africa and Brazil. Those countries are believed to be associated with the polarized pluralist model, albeit representing an extreme example of the model or presenting also characteristics from other models: for instance, the Polish, Russian and Lebanese-Saudi systems would also have (for different reasons) liberal characteristics; Israel is believed to be closer to the liberal models, as far as its national security issue allows, whereas the South-African and the Baltic countries are thought to incorporate liberal, democratic corporative and polarized pluralistic characteristics (Albuquerque, 2012; Balcytiene, 2012; de Smaele, 2010; Dobek-Ostrowska, 2012; Hadland, 2010, 2012; Kraidy, 2012; Peri, 2012; Uce & de Swert, 2010; Vartanova, 2012; Wyka, 2008).

The results of such essays are interesting but some of their conclusions are still tentative (mainly due to research agenda and data comparability reasons). Most of these essays do not try to expand Hallin & Mancini's model, but just analyse a specific country or countries in the light of this model. Borrowing the words of Pippa Norris, they still "follow the older Grand Tour travelogue tradition ('if it's chapter 4, it's Belgium') by

⁴⁰ This idea is not corroborated by Balcytiene (2012), who describes the Baltic public media as weak, its actors as working in a profit-oriented fashion, and the "media logic" as prevailing, even if some arrangements in terms of media self-regulation and PBS independence are present.

presenting separate national cases studies, loosely integrated around some common organizational sub-headings” (2009, p. 322). In sum, research on the media systems in Europe – focusing at least on the EU27 – is needed to shed light on where the CEE countries stand.

Even though it is not free from shortcomings and criticism (see, for instance, McQuail, 2006; Bardoel, 2007; Norris, 2009), the model proposed by Hallin & Mancini (2004) is the most accomplished academic study of media systems in Europe published so far – therefore, it inspires much of the research that will be conducted for this thesis. Since “there is nothing more practical than a good theory” (Lewin, 1952, p. 169), Hallin & Mancini’s (2004) taxonomy constitutes an excellent framework for the empirical study of media systems in Europe. It is worth noting that Hallin & Mancini (2004) only provide a general overview of the media system realities in Europe, rather than attempting to operationalize the four dimensions with empirical indicators, which is seen as a major flaw in their work (Norris, 2009). With the research reported in this thesis, I also aim at contributing to solve this gap in their work.

In my research, I do not use Hallin & Mancini’s findings to divide the European member states in three groups, according to their connection with a media system model. The study by Aarts, Fladmoe & Stömbäck (2012) – or the general pattern of results discussed in Aalberg & Curran (2012) – are good examples of how disappointing it can be to study countries as ideal-types according to the media system category assigned to them by Hallin & Mancini (2004). Instead of making no distinctions between countries in each category, I prefer to analyse the dimensions proposed by these authors as independent, actually intervening, factors of interest.

Therefore, Hallin & Mancini’s (2004) work is important for my research in the sense that it draws attention to four distinct features of media systems whose indirect impact on agenda-setting is, in theory, fairly probable, but has not yet been empirically tested. In the next section, these features, as well as dimensions coming from other taxonomies (i.e., Norris, 2004), and their expected outcomes will be discussed.

3.2 Relevant Features of Media Systems

The properties of national media systems are believed to influence both the supply of news and the public awareness of events in the news (Iyengar et al., 2010). In this section, I discuss those that are, in my opinion and from an agenda-setting perspective, the most relevant properties: development of media markets, strength of the public TV systems, freedom of press, journalist professionalization and internal/external diversity of political viewpoints in the media.

3.2.1 *Development of Media Markets*

The concept of development of the media market is, in Hallin & Mancini's (2004) book, basically debated with reference to the mass circulation press. According to these authors, a developed media market is one where the mass circulation press has been in existence long enough to create habits of consumption amongst different quadrants of the population.

Developed press markets have known massification in the late 19th century/early 20th century, and nowadays display a high level of newspaper circulation. In those contexts, the target of the press is the general population (instead of the political, economic or social elite), and there are no gender differences in newspaper readership, but similar patterns of consumption of electronic media and press (instead of a clear predominance of the latter), a clear separation between sensationalist/tabloid and quality press (instead of a clear predominance of the latter), and a reasonable number of media outlets (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

In sum, a developed press system is found wherever the press is *ipsis verbis* a mass media; the degree of development of this system generates a divide between citizens living in countries where the consumption of press outputs is still exclusive and those living in contexts where it is common; between those residing in countries in which the media supply is restricted and those placed in contexts where supply is wider.

There are great differences in terms of newspaper readership in Europe, with lower levels of readership in Southern Europe than in Scandinavia; interestingly, the average number of minutes per day dedicated to newspaper reading is higher in Ireland, Norway and Finland (more than 40 minutes), than in Portugal, Spain or Greece (less than 20 minutes) (Elvestad & Blekesaune, 2008). Eight years earlier, Pippa Norris (2000) observed similar patterns, and concluded that, in Northern and Western Europe, the advent of audiovisual media has not provoked any kind of decay in the realm of printed media.⁴¹ In those countries, flourishing newspaper markets still exist.

Hallin and Mancini's (2004) focus on press – and neglect of television, radio and internet – could be pointed to as one shortcoming of their conceptualization of media market development (Norris, 2009). Other scholars proposed a more complete interpretation of this concept – for instance, in her analysis of politically relevant dimensions of media systems, Norris (2004) introduces the concept of access to media, which is similar to this concept of development of media markets but includes television, radio and internet.

From a strictly theoretical perspective, either the narrow or the long version of the concept of development of media markets could moderate the cognitive effects of the media, because they refer directly to the degree of availability of different media agendas. The degree of development of press markets might be important for agenda-setting research because it might impact on the agenda-setting power of the press *vis-à-vis* the television through habits of exposure. I expect that someone living in an underdeveloped press market (in which access is difficult, what is offered is less diverse and the habit of newspaper reading are not deeply rooted) will read newspapers less often (and be less influenced by their agendas) than someone living in a developed press market (in which access is easy, offer is diverse and the habit of reading newspapers is widespread),

⁴¹ This would prove that media consumption is not a zero-sum game in which the widespread consumption of a specific medium necessarily means a complete avoidance of others.

because for the latter it is easier/more common to consult newspaper sources to form their picture of the world.

A different hypothesis can be made about the development of the audiovisual market – in countries where the television offer is wide, the single TV channel's agenda-setting power should be weaker. Why? Because the amount of choice in the TV market is believed to be associated with lower exposure to news (Prior, 2007), and lower patterns of exposure usually mean weaker media effects. While levels of development of the press market are believed to increase news consumption, the opposite phenomenon is expected in the case of TV markets, due to the nature and role of this type of medium. In fact, while newspapers offer news to the readers (independently of their relevance for policy and political choices), TV channels may offer contents that have nothing to do with news: films, fiction, contents for children, sports, music, home shopping, etc.

Therefore, in high-choice environments the proportion of people that watch the news, or the frequency of TV news consumption, is probably much lower than in low-choice environments (Prior, 2007). Why? In high-choice settings people with stronger preferences for entertainment can switch from newscasts to entertainment shows, whereas in low-choice environments these entertainment fans may decide to watch the news show anyway, instead of turning the television off, because they enjoy watching television. In other words, there is a stronger negative relationship between preference for entertainment and exposure to news in high-choice environments (for instance, households with cable) than in low-choice settings (Prior, 2007).

In addition, the development of press and TV markets may be associated with the diversity of the media agendas in the country, i.e., the degree by which different outlets give equal space to issues. Semekto and colleagues (1991) believe that the power of the media to set the agenda can vary according to the degree of competition for media audiences: competition, which is higher in contexts composed by several media actors) should lead to more attention to the audience's interests and less attention to politicians' agendas, but we do not know if this may result in more homogeneous or diverse agendas. The diversity of the media agendas is

thought to be an important intervening variable in the agenda-setting phenomenon (Asp, 1983; McCombs, 2005).

There are almost no comparative studies testing the relationship between the development of the press market and strength of media effects. An exception to this is the work by Popescu & Toka (2008), which analysed the impact of the effective number of newspapers⁴² on the press's informational power and the influence of the effective number of television news shows on its power as well. Lastly, other authors have drawn attention to the potential role of the press market development, in the form of theoretical speculations and discussion of single-case studies (e.g. Schmitt-Beck, 2004; Santana Pereira, 2007).

3.2.2 Strength of Public TV

My understanding of PBS strength/commercialization is rooted in the concept of state intervention, which is present in the seminal work by Siebert, Peterson & Schramm (1956). In fact, the most important difference between the libertarian, the social responsibility and the authoritarian/soviet models is that the first is characterized by non-formal relationship between state and media, whereas the second implies an interaction between the two and the latter a strong intervention of the state. This factor, renamed *degree of state control over mass media organizations*, is also present in the Blumler & Gurevitch's (1995) analytical framework.

According to Hallin and Mancini (2004), the strongest form of state intervention in the media system is state ownership, followed by state funding and legal regulation as weaker types of intervention. Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) also take into account the appointment of governing bodies of public service media.

I will focus my interest on the first two indicators to grasp the strength of public television vis-à-vis commercial TV. It is true that state regulation, in terms of laws regulating secondary aspects of media content (anti-libel, anti-hate speech, pro-political pluralism) and regulations about

⁴² These authors adapted the equation at the basis of Laakso & Taagepera's (1979) Effective Number of Parties index, substituting the information on parties' vote share with information about newspapers' readership share/TV news shows audience share.

media ownership, concentration and competition (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), could, theoretically speaking, produce a belief in the fairness of the system and lead to high levels of trust in the media, with subsequent effects on agenda-setting. Moreover, the degree of government control over PBS could be connected with a weaker political impartiality and have also impact in terms of media trust.

However, since legal regulation and PBS ruling bodies' independence are tackled by the concept of press freedom as I operationalize it, this section will focus only on the degree of public broadcast funding and audience. In turn, ownership and funding are used as indicators of the relative strength of public media, or, from the other side of the coin, the relative commercialization/privatization of the market. Therefore, my interpretation of Hallin & Mancini's (2004) dimension of state intervention is covered by this and the following section.

The concept of commercialization is strictly connected with the realm of broadcasting. To start with, the most important form of state ownership of the media is public broadcasting. In Europe, it is not common for the state to own news agencies, newspapers and other media companies, either directly or through public enterprises (Djankov et al., 2003; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; see also Färdigh, 2010). Several authors therefore stress the irrelevance of speaking of commercial vs. public ownership and funding of the press in Europe. I follow the same line of reasoning.

Thirty years ago, the state had a monopoly on broadcasting in the majority of European countries, but nowadays commercial broadcasting is present all over Europe (Semetko, de Vreese & Peter, 2000; Kelly, Mazzoneli & McQuail, 2004), and public service television/radio vary in the degree to which they attract audiences. However, the commercialization 'spree' did not occur simultaneously across Europe: while the UK had a private competitor to the BBC since the 1950s, most European markets have had a public television monopoly until the 1980s (e.g. Italy, the Netherlands) and early 1990s (e.g. Portugal, most Central and Eastern European countries) (Aart & Semetko, 2003; Voltmer, 2000; Popescu, 2008).

In established democracies, state-owned media are seen as performing the public service of informing the population in a complete and accurate way (e.g.: Kriesi, 2004; Schmitt-Beck, 2004). This is probably because they are more or less directly in the hands of a democratically appointed power, whereas private media are run by owners without the same kind of relationship with, and duties towards, the general population. Such a line of reasoning might lead to higher degrees of trust in the media in general in democratic systems where public broadcasting is strong, and therefore a greater potential for media effects. It is from this assumption that the inclusion of this factor in my analysis derives, but with the nuance of distinguishing between the symbolic meaning of state ownership in old and new democracies in Europe.

In Europe, the public service broadcasting system would follow a model characterized by an ethic of comprehensiveness (information, education, entertainment; geographical universality), generalised mandates (that bounds them to their mission of catering for all interests and tastes), diversity, pluralism and range, non-commercialism and a place in politics marked by a contribution to the quality of the democratic process and the independence from political and governmental interests (Blumler, 1992; BRU, 1986, both quoted in Humphreys, 1996). Of course, there are significant differences in how perfectly public broadcasters embody this ideal model (see Hanretty, 2011, for a study on the diversity of PBS independence in Europe).

Nonetheless, if the geographic scope of the research is wider, the role of public ownership tends to be interpreted in a different way. In fact, Djankov et al. (2003) are less enthusiastic about state ownership. In a study of countries far beyond the Western world, they found that countries with more prevalent state ownership of the media have less free press, fewer political rights for citizens, inferior governance, less developed markets, and strikingly inferior outcomes in the areas of education and health. Those results were stronger for newspapers than for television ownership. The authors also report no detectable evidence of any benefits of stronger state ownership of the media. They are defenders of a strong division between public and private – in their view, a government monopoly in the media

would distort and manipulate information to entrench the incumbent government, preclude voters and consumers from making informed decisions, and ultimately undermine both democracy and markets. Because private and independent media supply alternative views to the public, they are believed to enable voters and consumers to choose among political candidates, commodities, and securities – with less fear of abuse by unscrupulous politicians, producers, and promoters. Of course, these ideas are relevant in an international study focusing on established democracies and non-democratic countries, but lack relevance in a context where all countries are democratic (as is the case in my work) and where state newspaper ownership is not a common situation.

Accordingly, but in the realm of individual-level studies, Leeson (2007) observed a negative relationship between state intervention and media effects (other than agenda-setting), but this is most certainly due to the fact that the author has not differentiated between consolidated and new democracies, and his sample was skewed by a greater number of new democracies.

In democratic regimes, the public broadcasters seem to have an important impact in terms of individual-level dimensions. Curran et al. (2009) and Iyengar et al. (2010) found relevant differences in media content according to the weight of public service television – namely, public service devotes more time to hard news on public affairs and fosters more political knowledge. In addition, Aarts & Semetko (2003) suggest that the phenomenon of the *virtuous circle*⁴³ described by Norris (2000, 2002) may be found only in European societies in which people rely largely on public television news; whereas the *spiral of cynicism* (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997) can be a product of commercial television news viewing, because commercial news focuses more on framing politics as a tactical power game than public television (Patterson, 2000). Accordingly, the *spiral of Euroskepticism* is seen as conditional upon the amount of strategic framing present in the news, which varies considerably between countries (de

⁴³ This refers to the fact that people who are more politically aware watch the news and current affairs documentaries on public TV more frequently, and, in turn, repeated exposure to these programmes will increase their levels of civic information (Norris, 2000, 2002).

Vreese, 2007) and media outlets (Elenbaas & de Vreese, 2008). Lastly, empirical research has shown that the less commercialized a particular media system is, the less politics will be portrayed as a game instead of a set of issues (Patterson, 2000). Reporting of polls – stressing the idea of elections as competitions – will be lower in those conditions (Lavrakas & Traugott, 2000, in Strömbäck & Kaid, 2008).

The literature presented above would therefore lead us to believe that, if TV market commercialization will have an impact on agenda-setting, that impact will be negative and mediated by trust and quality of information. In other words, commercialization would lead to weaker agenda-setting effects because it decreases the general levels of trust and quality in the system (or the quality of the information conveyed by the TV channels in particular). Moreover, the lack of quality in the information conveyed by those channels acts as a buffer of agenda-setting effects: either because people automatically create barriers against being influenced that kind of information or because they believe that these contents, in spite of being interesting to watch, are not useful to learn about issue salience. Trust in the media is also a moderator of agenda-setting effects.

3.2.3 Freedom of Press

The freedom of press, one of the pillars of democracy, is a recognized human right. Article 19 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, including freedom to hold opinions and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media.⁴⁴

Freedom of press has been and still is a concern of the European Union and several international organizations (Behmer, 2009; Czepek, Hellvig & Novak, 2009); it is present in a considerable amount of constitutions throughout the World: even if there are differences in terminology or degree, press freedom was guaranteed in 148 out of 160

⁴⁴ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, produced and proclaimed in 1948 by the General Assembly of the United Nations, is available online at the United Nations website. See <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#a19>.

nations in 1994 (Breunig, 1994, in Behmer, 2009). In 1992, UNESCO proclaimed May 3 as the World Press Freedom Day.

But what does press freedom mean exactly? Weaver (1977) considers that freedom of the press has three components: the relative absence of government restraints on the media, the relative absence of nongovernmental restraints, and the existence of conditions that guarantee the dissemination of diverse opinions and ideas to large audiences. My operationalization of press freedom will follow these lines, focusing on political, economic and legal constraints on the freedom of press.

Press freedom is important because “journalism needs to be independent from the state, but also from overwhelming economic interests to provide diverse, complete and correct information to the citizens and enable universal participation in public discourse” (Czepek, 2009, p. 37). According to Norris (2004), freedom of press is one of the two most politically relevant dimensions of media systems, because it “can be expected to influence whether the impact of the news media promotes pluralistic voice and government accountability, or how far it serves to reinforce the power of established interest and state control.” (p. 125). In fact, freedom of press is negatively related to corruption and political longevity of office holders (Besley & Prat, 2001, in Becker, Vlad & Nusser, 2007; Brunetti & Weder, 2003).

In my case, the relevance of press freedom comes from the fact that it might impact upon the degree of trust people hold in media; consequently, trust can play a role as a moderator of media effects, since people are more frequently influenced by messages delivered by what they perceive to be trustworthy sources (Hovland, 1954). In fact, the openness of the media system – that is to say, the degree to which media are in fact independent sources of news and political expression free from the control of the government – is believed to be correlated with stronger media effects on the public agenda (McCombs, 2004; McCombs et al., 2011).

The effects seem to be the opposite in the case of persuasion. The existence of press freedom, even in a small degree, makes it impossible for the media to present a dominant single message – some degree of diversity (either internal or external) must be present. Persuasive media effects are

larger when there is one dominant message consistently and strongly presented over time (a consistent directional bias leading to a one sided information flow, in the words of Zaller, 1992, 1996), and fairly small when at least two competitive and distinct flows of information are present (Zaller, 1996). A study of media effects on EU support, by de Vreese & Baomgaarden (2006a) confirms this assumption. However, an alternative but complementary explanation might exist: fluidity. Popescu (2008) observed that freedom of press fostered a negative relationship between media bias and vote for incumbents in more fluid contexts. The author explains this by the fact that, in the case of democratic countries marked by some degree of fluidity, partisan bias is spotted, analysed, criticized and noted in other media, discussion networks or individual citizens, and voters end up turning against the government.

The history of press freedom varies considerably in Europe, with Sweden, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands and Denmark as pioneers (Weibull, 2007), whereas Southern European and Eastern countries were only able to get rid of censorship quite recently. Moreover, the current legal, economic, historical and social characteristics of each European nation are also believed to cause, directly or indirectly, different degrees of press freedom (Czepek, Hellvig & Novak, 2009). Therefore, there is reason to believe that in 2009 the *status quo* of press freedom was not uniform within the European Union borders.

3.2.4 Journalist Professionalization

Variations in the degree of journalist professionalization are, according to Hallin & Mancini (2004), one of the four most relevant features distinguishing between European media systems. But what do these authors mean by this expression? Simply put, journalist professionalization is the degree by which the practice of journalism reached the level of a profession. This is not meant in the traditional sense of being grounded on a body of specialized knowledge achieved by means of formal and specialized education and training (see Novak, 2009), but essentially in the sense of having a relative degree of autonomy within the media organization (Siebert, Peterson & Schamm, 1956), a low level of

instrumentalization by external actors (political, economical, religious and others), an internal code of professional norms (concerning ethical issues but also practical routines), an orientation towards an ideal of public service, and regulation by the sanction of fellow professionals through professional associations.

Therefore, the more journalists have impersonal rules which govern and – more important – are seen to govern their conduct, the more they will be able to resist political pressure and stress their independent role as information providers. And this can boost the impact of their work in the opinions of the audiences they serve, either by raising levels of trust in the media or by increasing the quality of the information that is offered.

Laitila (1995) undertook an analysis of journalistic codes of ethics currently in use in 30 European countries (including all EU member states, except for Cyprus, Romania and Lithuania). Most of these documents were adopted by the journalists themselves (organized in unions or associations) and came into existence (as new or revised documents) in the 1990s. The author found that the most common principles present in those documents are those that more directly relate to the tripartite nature of media ethics: the quest for truth (truthfulness and clarity of information; considerations about fair ways of gathering and presenting the information); the desire for responsibility (the defence of the rights of the public; journalist and source integrity, the responsibility as creators of public opinion) and the quest for free expression. Most of these ethical issues are also present in UNESCO's list of professional ethics in journalism (Nordenstreng, 1984).

Professionalization is, to a certain extent, connected to (or displayed by means of) journalistic styles. There are several models of journalism in the field of communication studies. Focusing on the United States, Bernard Cohen (1963) divided journalists into neutral and participant styles, whereas Dobek-Ostrowska & Łódzki (2011) recently analysed the dominant style of journalism during the 2009 European Parliament campaign, using a descriptive vs. interpretative framework.

Other studies of national differences in terms of journalist behaviour suggest two relevant dimensions of journalism – autonomy/freedom as a political actor (passive instrument of political actors vs. active and

independent journalist) and position/voice as political actor (neutral vs. advocate of specific sides in a consistent and systematic way) (Patterson, 1998; Donsbach & Patterson, 2004). The first of these dimensions is related to Hallin & Mancini's (2004) conception of journalist professionalization, which I adopt here; the second has more to do with the notion of journalistic or media partisanship. Professionalization and partisanship are related (in quantitative terms, they are probably negatively correlated), and often described as being different extremes of the same dimension of journalism behaviour – journalists can either be closer to professionalism or to partisanship (e.g. Dennis, 1997). However, as the research by Hallin & Mancini (2004) and Donsbach & Patterson (2004) show, this relationship is not strong enough to make us deal with both concepts as belonging to a single construct.

In Europe, it seems that journalist professionalization – in terms of legitimizing creed (Blumler & Gurevicht, 1995) or symbolic role of the journalist as an ideal-type professional – varies considerably. German journalism follows a model in which this profession is seen as a political and intellectual career, and journalists tend to place much value and use much space on their opinion and less on the actual news. By contrast, British journalists see themselves in the role of transmitter of facts, neutral reporters of current affairs (Köcher, 1986). On the other hand, in the French media system, the relationship between journalists and candidates is one of cooperation, and the politicians have more voice in the news than the news professionals (Esser, 2008). The norm and the habit of indexing⁴⁵ is likely to be rather strong in this media system.

In addition, there can be some degree of intra-system variation in terms of journalists' attitudes and their outcomes in terms of professionalization. For instance, considering the US context of the early 1980s, a researcher hypothesized that journalists evaluate public opinion in

⁴⁵ Indexing understands variation in elite consensus as the main cause of variation in news content (Bennett, 1989). According to indexing, "controversy and debate in media content reproduces the debate found among political elites whom journalists regard as decisive in the outcomes of the issues in the news" (Livingston & Bennett, 2003, p. 366). In 1996, the journal *Political Communication* published a special issue on this matter.

different ways, ranging from an elitist perspective (in which public opinion is seen as ignorant, foolish and short-sighted) to a simple-democratic perspective, which sees people as informed, interested and altruistic (Lemert, 1981). Of course, such attitudes must have an impact on how professional journalists are. Unfortunately, this possibility will not be dealt with in this study, due to the lack of data. The assumption is that this intra-country diversity will level out at the country level.

Journalist professionalization is believed to be strongly connected to press freedom, and is seen by some researchers as a dimension of this latter construct, its cause or its effect (e.g., Czepek, 2009; Novak, 2009). For instance, economic constraints to the functions of media workers (i.e. the strength of the profit maximization logic due to increasing commercialization and concentration), is believed to be eroding journalist professionalization in Finland (Salovaara-Moring, 2009).

3.2.5 Partisanship/Balance

In most European countries, balance and impartiality are generally accepted norms on television, and to a lesser degree, the press (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Gunther & Mughan, 2000). However, the degree to which this impartiality actually exists is believed to vary considerably even in democratic countries such as the EU member states. Media partisanship is an undeniable reality in Europe.

Why is partisanship important? Because it can, along with other media characteristics, contribute to a poor information environment. Noelle-Neumann (1973) argues that there are three features of the mass media in contemporary democratic societies that can lead to strong media persuasive effects – ubiquity, consonance and cumulation. Media are ubiquitous because they are available everywhere to everyone interested in using them for information and entertainment; cumulation refers to the continuous coverage of issues for a long time; whereas consonance refers to the tendency of journalists and communicators to use similar viewpoints and emphasis when reporting a specific issue or event.

Why do these factors, in connection with partisan bias, lead to strong media effects? According to Shaw (1979), they increase media's impact on

the formation of public opinion “by reducing, if not eliminating, the chances people have to practice selective exposure when they use the mass media”(p. 103). Peter (2004) has indeed observed that consonant contexts led to strong media effects, and stresses the fact that selectivity is a possibility in dissonant contexts but that it is much harder to avoid undesired messages in consonant contexts.

The concept of media political partisanship (or media pluralism, the other side of the same coin) is therefore central for the understanding of media systems and media effects. It has been present in comparative analyses of media communication since the 1970s (Seymour-Ure, 1974, in van Kempen, 2007; Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995). It is also a very complex concept, whose conceptual interpretations are rich and diverse (see, for instance, Klimkiewicz, 2009, for a review of the concept of media pluralism).

Hallin & Mancini (2004) analyse the idea of media partisanship under the more general umbrella of political parallelism. Inspired by Seymour-Ure’s study of the British press, the authors define this latter concept in two ways, the first definition being system-focused – “the extent to which the media system reflects the major political divisions in society” – and the second outlet-focused – “the degree and nature of the links between the media and political parties” (p.21). Since they were conducting an analysis of media systems, the outcome of their study is basically the placement of the media system (i.e. the country at stake) on a continuum between two poles: high and low degree of political parallelism. For instance, Ireland is considered to have low levels of parallelism, when compared to Italy, Spain or Greece.

Voltmer’s (2000) understanding of partisanship is more complex. This scholar proposes a model of structure of diversity that encompass elements (actors and opinions) and types (formal and informal). The question of qualitative diversity of news content (i.e. partisanship) is considered to be an informal structural characteristic related to the opinions – just one of several factors that contribute to diversity, along with regulations about balance and ownership control, professional standards, and others (Voltmer, 2000).

Both works agree upon the separation between **internal and external diversity** as distinct features of media partisanship. Internal diversity relates to the presence of different political perspectives in the same outlet; whereas external diversity (or segmented pluralism) means that each individual channel is biased in some way and in a given political direction, which, in a context in which there are several outlets with different leanings, results in plurality of viewpoints (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

External diversity “is constituted by a plurality of media actors, each of them representing a particular part of the entire spectrum of political opinions” (Voltmer, 2000, p. 10). Even if individual media are systematically imbalanced in favour of a specific political ideology or party, diversity emerges from the presence and interaction of these actors at the aggregate level. In turn, internal diversity “is realized by any individual medium of a system each covering the whole spectrum of the existing political viewpoints. Internally diverse media exercise a balanced mode of news selection.” (p. 11). How do they manage this? By presenting and supporting various viewpoints of a particular issue or not expressing any kind of preference at all.

Voltmer (2000) stresses that internal diversity is a recent phenomenon that is more common in television than in newspapers, both due to political regulation and the desire to attract large audiences. But there is considerable variation in Europe: the public broadcasting systems in France, Greece and Italy (except between 1975-1994) are considered to have been dominated by the executive, or a single party; whereas countries such as the Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium, Austria, Germany and Italy 1975-1994 presented a multiparty or multigroup domination/influence. On the other hand, British and Swedish PBS were relatively more independent than others (Humphreys, 1996; Hanretty, 2011). Internal diversity is believed to be a stronger or more direct indicator of media pluralism than external diversity (Klimkiewicz, 2009), probably since each outlet creates a plural environment independently of the political stances of its competitors in the market.

In my opinion, the categorization of countries according to the level by which the media system mirrors the diversity in the political system –

external pluralism – can be enriched by the analysis of the specificities of the relationship between the media outlets and the political parties – that is to say, how widespread the internal pluralism is (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

But how can we tap this concept? Even in democratic societies, the media incorporate and display political values and opinions consciously or subconsciously, in an overt or veiled way. Television channels and newspapers might display a clear right-wing or left-wing position in the information they offer, deliberately or not; relationships between journalists and politicians, cases in which journalists are also politicians (or vice-versa), and situations in which there are clear connections between a political party and the outlet (ownership but also sponsorship, collaboration, etc.) contribute to create an image of partisanship for the outlet. At the other extreme, media outlets can try to reach a status of internal pluralism, both by avoiding connections with political groups and by fostering, if not neutrality, then at least balance in their content.

In short, media partisanship is about clarity of party-media ties. Readers can spot partisanship when what they are reading is not objectively written, but there are a series of other relevant indicators, such as ownership or the existence of clear connections between media and political parties or political/politicized organizations (e.g. trade unions, churches; see also Baek, 2009), how common it is for media personnel to be politically active (i.e. serving in public offices or even in parties), or to what degree the career development of journalists depends on their political affiliation (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

How clear is the relationship between partisanship and strict ownership? Media partisanship seems not to be a direct consequence of ownership by political parties. For instance, if in Italy the newspapers and TV channels owned by the Berlusconi family tend to display a right-wing bias, in Spain the political colour of different press outlets is fairly blatant but none are owned officially by any of the political parties that they support (Czepek, Hellvig & Novak, 2009). Moreover, if the media logic were overthrowing the political logic in the newsrooms (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Voltmer, 2006), one would not expect a direct effect of ownership on bias.

However, media concentration is often seen as a threat to plurality of viewpoints/external diversity. In the case of contemporary Italy, the fact that the former prime-minister was also a media mogul caused an informal concentration of channels that gathered around 85% of the TV audiences, and led to events such as directors of public and private channels secretly consulting each other to decide the alignment of the news bulletins and strategies to conceal negative results in local elections/improve the general image of the prime minister (Padovani, 2009). In Europe, Austria or Britain present relevant patterns of monomedia concentration, i.e. the ownership of a specific sector of activity – radio, press, television – is concentrated in few hands (Humphreys, 2009; Thiele, 2009). In turn, Portugal or Italy would be examples of countries in which cross-media concentrations can be observed (newspapers and TV), being exemplified by the business corporation *Impresa* and the Berlusconi family holdings (Padovani, 2009). Concentration can have a negative impact in media freedom and plurality, as well as on the quality of the information conveyed, even if this relationship can be much more complex (Humphreys, 1996; Doyle, 2002; Czepek, Hellvig & Novak, 2009, Klimkiewicz, 2009). Testing the relationship between economic constraints to press freedom and political balance of media outlets will shed some empirical light on how these two aspects work together in Europe.

Media partisanship is, theoretically speaking, independent from journalist professionalization, since it can be either a sign of journalists being used as pawns by owners, editors and politicians, or a sign of the independence of the journalists themselves. Indeed, Noelle-Neumann stressed that the left-wing leaning of journalists is a source of media bias leading to distortions in the perceptions that citizens have of the political world, while George Gerbner attributes media content bias to pressures by conservative owners and their commercial interests (see Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Gerbner (1964) found that, in France of 50 years ago, there was no evidence of independent and non-ideological, apolitical and non-partisan news gathering processes in the commercial press, the so-called independent newspapers being closer to the right-wing than to the

left-wing. Other authors (e.g., Novak, 2009) see journalist professionalization as a correlate of media pluralism.

I also believe that, normatively speaking, media partisanship should not be very strongly associated with freedom of press, since it should refer to political influences and exchanges that do not break the rules of democratic societies in terms of press freedom. It would simply be «business as usual» in the marketplace of ideas. However, other authors are not of the same opinion, and use media content pluralism as an indicator of freedom of press (e.g. Czepek, 2009).

The relevance of media partisanship in my research comes from the fact that, hypothetically, if a given outlet has strong and clear links to a given political party, its cognitive effects may be weaker for the audience, because it may be seen as not being trustworthy. Moreover, blatant partisanship in the system can lead to lower levels of trust in the media.⁴⁶

Unfortunately there are not many studies on the impact that media partisanship has for the strength of media effects. In 2004, in a four-countries/five-contexts comparison, Schmitt-Beck noticed that “conditions for the influence of the mass media are particularly favourable in media systems that are characterised by a significant, though moderate ‘press-party parallelism’, where reporting by a particular media organisation tends to advantage specific parties, but not in such a blatant way that it becomes strikingly obvious for each and every recipient” (p. 318).

My understanding differs from these findings essentially because Schmitt-Beck (2004) derives his conclusions from the study of three countries in which partisanship is high and one in which it is low (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), which is clearly not enough to generalize about the whole European Union. In fact, his conclusion about the nature of press-parallelism effects is based on the fact that he did not find persuasive effects from American newspapers (categorized as non-partisan after a content analysis), but just from European newspapers (moderately partisan).

⁴⁶ Of course, this may not hold if the majority of the audience is highly partisan and shares the political leaning displayed by the newspaper/TV channel. In the USA, where political polarization is very strong, selective exposure is a common reality; in other media systems, however, it may vary considerably.

3.3 Information Environment

The concept of information environment refers mainly to the characteristics of the information provided by the media in a specific country.⁴⁷ Aside from impartiality (achieved either against media concentration or partisan bias in the way the news are reported), news quality (policy-relevant information) is one of the normative standards that Gunther & Mughan (2000) suggest using in analysis of media performance in democratic societies. This dimension will be considered here as one of the most relevant factors describing the informational context, along with the diversity of the media agendas in the national markets.

In addition, the relationship between citizens and the media is also a relevant factor in the informational context. Therefore, my analysis of the informational environment will also deal with trust in the media and patterns of information consumption (or exposure to the news).

Information environments are, of course, much more complex than the picture portrayed by these four dimensions; but unlike my focus on the media systems, the analysis of information environments done in this thesis does not pretend to be exhaustive. Instead, it aims at being parsimonious, focusing only on those features of the informational context that can, according to my theoretical reasoning, have a mediating impact on the relationship between media systems and strength of agenda-setting.

3.3.1 *Information Quality*

Popescu (2008) defines information quality as the volume, depth and complexity of political information that the media convey. Schmitt-Beck (1998, in Popescu, 2008) refers to this concept in a similar way, stressing the amount and degree of intellectuality in their style of presentation. The potential for audiences to learn from the media is the ultimate criterion of information quality.

⁴⁷ This use is different from the one proposed by Jerit, Barabas & Bolsen (2006), who focus directly in the information that people are exposed to in the media, i.e., to the volume of coverage of specific issues in a given time/spacial setting.

Scholars often differentiate between the information quality of the contents broadcasted by public and commercial (private) television, as well as between the content of quality/reference and tabloid newspapers (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Schmitt-Beck, 2004; Popescu & Toka, 2008). This seems to be in line with the structure underlying people's use of these kinds of media – factor analysis has shown that watching television varies along a dimension contrasting public and commercial television news, whereas newspaper reading is structured according to a heavy vs. light, or high-brow vs. low-brow dimension (see Aarts & Semetko, 2003).

Reference newspapers across Europe offer more quantity of news about current affairs (instead of opinion or advertisement) than 'budget' (or tabloid) newspapers, but there are considerable differences between outlets and countries (Heinderyckx, 1999). Accordingly, the visibility of the EU during European election campaigns tends to be bigger in reference newspapers than in tabloids (de Vreese et al., 2006).

In the case of television, the differentiation between public and private is made because state-owned broadcasting is generally understood as providing a service to the community (Kriesi, 2004; Schmitt-Beck, 2004; Popescu, 2008; Jenssen, Aalberg & Aarts, 2012). Therefore, it is more trustworthy than the commercial media, whose levels of trust will vary according to the style adopted by the editorial boards.

There is a considerable amount of empirical support to the idea that public channels provide a better service to the citizens. For instance, the two principal TV channels in Denmark (both public) encompass a greater amount of hard news and a smaller focus on domestic events than the two principal TV channels in the USA (both private); in the UK and Scandinavia, the amount of hard news is indeed higher in public channels than in private ones (Curran, et al., 2009; Aalberg et al., 2010; Iyengar et al., 2010; Aalberg & Curran, 2012a). On the same note, the amount of time dedicated to election coverage and the length of candidate and journalist sound bytes⁴⁸ are greater in public channels than in commercial

⁴⁸ Esser (2008) adopts Daniel Hallin's definition of sound bytes as film segments within a news story that show someone speak without interruption.

broadcasters (Esser, 2008; van Aelst, Thorbjørnsrud & Aalberg, 2012).⁴⁹ Interesting enough, de Vreese et al. (2006) observed that the visibility of the EU in the news during the electoral campaigns of 1999 and 2004 was higher in public broadcasters than in commercial televisions. Finally, Aalberg, van Aelst & Curran (2012) note that in several northern European countries, commercial TV channels offer less prime time news compared to the public channels, and while the latter have maintained or increased the amount of time dedicated to news in peak times between 1987 and 2007, private broadcasters either maintained the low results from the 1980s or further decreased the share of airtime dedicated to news and current affairs.

However, as Schmitt-Beck (1998, in Popescu, 2008) points out, there are some cases in which public broadcasting is not a synonym of quality. For instance, during the 2009 EP election campaign in Poland, an interpretative journalism style was more common in private broadcasters than in the public channel, whose depictions of the EU campaign are mainly descriptive. Moreover, the public broadcaster openly took sides and adopted a militant role, while the other commercial channels displayed a less blatant political bias (Dobek-Ostrowska & Łódzki, 2011). Such patterns – strongly biased public broadcasters and less clearly politicized commercial channels (at least from the perspective of the public) – are a strong characteristic of the Polish television (Filas & Planeta, 2009; Dobek-Ostrowska, 2012). Norris (2009) also considers that “the simple bright distinction between commercial versus state broadcasters became increasingly fuzzy with the growing commercialization of European public broadcasting” (p. 329). Therefore, I prefer not to use this public-private dichotomy, which may hide important differences within each category (Schudson, 2002, in Norris & Inglehart, 2007). Instead, I will focus on the quality of information in the news, using a common set of criteria.

Some of those criteria refer to the hard/soft news dichotomy. In terms of information quality, the terms «soft news» and «hard news» are often used. Tuchmann (1972) defines hard news as those that possess a high level of newsworthiness and demand immediate publication (such

⁴⁹ In this last study, the UK was clearly an exception, with small differences between public and commercial broadcasters.

news is usually associated with politics, the economy or social matters), whereas soft news contains a lower level of substantive information; in other words, hard news reports are policy-relevant, while soft news reports cover policy-irrelevant matters. Several authors (e.g.: Curran et al., 2009; Brekken, Thordbjørnsrud & Aalberg, 2012) have followed this distinction.

However, since the focus of this study is on information quality, I decided to use the traditional definition of hard news but consider soft news (or soft framing of news, to be more precise) to be not the other side of the coin, but a specific type of framing that political issues (and, in general, relevant hard news) get from the media. Hard news tends to be more common in public than in commercial channels and (except for the Netherlands) in elite newspapers than in tabloids (Brekken, Thordbjørnsrud & Aalberg, 2012). In other words, the opportunity costs of exposure to hard news are significantly lower for citizens living under public-service-oriented systems (Iyengar et al., 2010).

Interestingly enough, the preponderance of a specific set of frames is sometimes seen under the light of an evolutionary theory of political journalism. In fact, journalism focusing on political issues is believed to have known three phases in the USA: issue coverage (descriptive, neutral, focused on policies and politicians as main sources), strategic coverage (essentially from 1972 onwards; interpretative, assertive politics seen as a game, focus on campaign controversies, journalists as main sources), and metacoverage (since 1988; self-reflexive, self-analytical, focus on media manipulation and the behind-the-scenes, spin doctors as main news sources⁵⁰). Strategic coverage is still dominant in most Western Countries,

⁵⁰ Metacommunication is defined as the media self-referential reflections on the nature of the relations between political journalism and political public relations, and can take two forms: self-referential news (when journalists turn the spotlights on themselves, treating themselves as the subjects of their political stories – news about media performance, impact, and coverage) and process news (focusing on the strategies and personalities that, at the backstage, try to guide or influence journalists – stories on the campaign behaviour of politicians and efforts to stage problematics, about candidate motivations to act in a given way, or about the relationship between candidates and the press). There is substantial variation in the amount of process news on campaign strategists in reference newspapers in Britain, Germany and the USA – being much lower in Germany than in the other countries, which is explained by the fact that the press is less aggressive, strong and autonomous than the UK press (Esser, Reinemann & Fan, 2001).

whereas metacoverage is stronger in the USA than in European countries such as Britain or Germany (see Esser, Reinemann & Fan, 2001, for a review of this literature).

What is the impact of information quality? First of all, it is expected to have a positive impact on political knowledge. Aarts & Semetko (2003) found that, in the Netherlands, exposure to public television (rich in frequency and intensity of news content) was associated with higher levels of political knowledge (candidate recognition, position of parties on issues, composition of incumbent coalition), and, to a lesser extent, turnout, whereas exposure to commercial television (with lower levels of political coverage, specially during prime time) had a negative impact. In the same vein, preference for public television (rich in hard news) is associated with greater knowledge of EU affairs; in fact, in the EU15 as a whole, even exposure to PBS entertainment shows are associated with higher levels of knowledge than commercial TV viewing; however, this does not hold in Greece, Portugal, Germany, Italy and Ireland (Holtz-Bacha & Norris, 2001). As regards newspapers, Newton (1999) observed that reading British quality newspapers (i.e. broadsheets such as *The Guardian*) had a positive effect on mobilization. In the Netherlands, type of press use (quality vs. popular) is not connected with gains in terms of information, but in terms of both internal and external political efficacy (Aarts & Semetko, 2003).

Quality of information is expected to have an impact on media agenda-setting power, because people use the media for different reasons (Blumler & Katz, 1974). Exposure to media is sought in order to fulfil needs as different as entertainment (to escape from routine and daily problems), interpersonal relations (media offers matters for conversation), or surveillance (media offers information about things that are important for the person, and/or that will help him achieve a certain goal or perform a certain task – like creating/calibrating his personal agenda of issues).

Infotainment-based television and tabloids are probably used most often for entertainment and interpersonal relations motives, whereas quality outlets (both newspapers and television) are certainly more prone to being used for information-gathering. On the other hand, if we assume that agenda-setting is not about active learning but a cognitive,

subconscious phenomenon, the relationship between quality and agenda-setting would be due to the fact that low quality buffers the information's power to influence issue salience judgements. Therefore, the hypothesis is that high-quality media outlets will have a bigger impact on its users' agendas.

In the agenda-setting literature, just a few studies have assessed the impact of information quality. There is a case study of agenda-setting in Portugal, which discovered that the now extinct sensationalistic/tabloid *24 Horas* did not have any agenda-setting power whatsoever, and attributed this to its style – in other words, to the low quality of the information that was offered to its readers (Santana Pereira, 2007). In a television agenda-setting study carried out in the 1980s, there was a negative relationship between agenda-setting and participants saying that the main reason why they watched television was to relax and to escape daily life worries. In other words, people exposed to TV with entertainment purposes (and probably consumed low-information products) were less influenced by the TV channel's agenda (Hill, 1985). Since it is hard to forget the problems of mankind watching an in-dept quality news show, it is plausible to assume that media consumers seeking to escape such things will be more likely to seek exposure to infotainment-like television programmes, or low-brow news shows.

In the broader umbrella of media persuasion effects research, it is possible to find a study from Schmitt-Beck (2004), which observed no differences in the persuasive power of media with high (quality press and public television) and low information quality (tabloids and private television). However, my doubts concerning the generalizability of the results of this study, already expressed in a previous section, as well as the fact that persuasion and agenda-setting are different in nature, prevent me from taking its conclusions as completely valid.

How strongly is quality of information connected with bias? From a normative point of view, quality information is bias-free. However, high-quality information does not necessarily mean neutral information. Recent research shows that people can find useful information in the news even when the tone is negative – they are able to identify negative tones in the

news, but their judgments about the quality of the information are independent of the tone used in the campaign (Sides, Lipsitz & Grossmann, 2010).

3.3.2 *Media Agenda Diversity*

There is no consensus on how diversity of media agendas can have an impact on agenda-setting. In the words of Maxwell McCombs, “a central assumption in this prediction about the demise of the agenda-setting role of journalism is that the media agendas to which members of the public routinely and habitually attend will be highly heterogeneous. This would be a situation almost 180 degrees from the media agendas of the past when members of the public received highly redundant presentations from the news media. For example, the original Chapel Hill study found a median correlation of .71 among the nine news media agendas that were those voters’ dominant sources of news and information” (McCombs, 2005, p. 544). This would be in line with the findings coming from research on persuasion, where environments characterized by similar, one-sided messages tend to produce stronger media effects (Zaller, 1992, 1996; Peter, 2004).

However, if readers of different newspapers and viewers of different TV channels are exposed to the exact same agenda, how can we be sure that exposure to a particular medium makes a difference or not? Some degree of variety in the outlet’s agendas may be a condition *sine qua non* for effects, because if all the media outlets display similar agendas, and the public agenda is very diverse, the grounds for media impact are not met (Asp, 1983).

Independently of the direction of the relationship between agenda-setting and media agenda diversity, I believe that this is a relevant mediator of the relationship between the development of the media markets and agenda-setting occurrence.

3.3.3 *Trust in the Media*

Trust in the media is directly linked to the relationship between users and the media. To trust is to have a high estimation of the competence, honesty, or reliability of the one who is trusted, according to the expectations or norms of the beholder (Kleinnijenhuis, van Hoof & Oegema, 2006). On the contrary, media distrust, or skepticism, is “a subjective feeling of alienation and mistrust toward the mainstream news media. For example, media skepticism is the feeling that journalist are not fair or objective in their reports about society and that they do not always tell the whole story. It is the feeling that mainstream news outlets will sacrifice accuracy and precision for personal and commercial gains. It is the perception that one cannot believe what one reads in the newspaper or sees on television news” (Tsfati, 2003, p. 160).

Source credibility was, in the classical persuasion studies, a fundamental condition for the occurrence of media influence (Hovland, 1954; Zaller; 1992; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993), especially in areas in which people lack deep knowledge and strong motivation – such as politics. Trust can be a cue that helps interpret the messages conveyed by the media (Iyengar & Kinder, 1985). The more an individual trusts the media, the more the media can have an effect, whereas media distrust acts as a barrier against new information and causes people to rely on their predispositions. A recent study has asserted that media distrust leads to weaker economic voting and stronger partisan voting in the USA presidential and congressional elections (Ladd, 2012) – a hint on how the issue *economy* or its coverage in the media may have had a weak impact on vote choice when the media is not trusted.

Trust can be an important moderator of agenda-setting effects, because those will only take place if the media outlets are seen as trustworthy (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987, Kinder, 2003; Wanta & Hu, 1994b; Miller & Krosnick, 2000; Tsfati, 2003).

In this study, trust is not studied at the audience level (i.e. as trust towards specific media channels). This is mainly due to the absence of data, but follows Tsfati’s (2003) definition of mistrust as being a subjective appraisal of the media as a whole. Therefore, trust is defined here as the

existence of a general common understanding of the media as being credible, reliable and trustworthy in a specific country. I am aware that trust is not a systemic factor, but believe that the national levels of trust are a reliable proxy of the same construct at lower levels of analysis.

Trust towards different media subsystems such as press and television can be different in particular countries. For instance, in the contemporary USA, newspapers are believed to be more credible than television; the reverse phenomenon was observed in the 1960s and 1970s (Kioussis, 2001). Differences can also be found within the subsystem: according to Newton (2006), tabloids are generally trusted less than broadsheets, but they do sell much more than reference newspapers.

In the United States, trust in the media has been in free-fall during the last decades (Cook & Gronke, 2001; Jones, 2004; Prior, 2007). Conservative Republicans express more pronounced levels of distrust. Distrust in the media is, however, mostly explained by a decay in general levels of trust in the government (Bennett et al., 1999; Jones, 2004), and use of non-mainstream conservative radio which often accuse the other media of being biased and liberal. In the USA, media trust is also negatively related to tabloid-like news coverage (i.e. a focus on soft news) and media criticism coming from political elites from the party people identify with (Ladd, 2012). In Europe, however, there are no comparative or longitudinal studies on media trust, as far as I know, nor studies focusing of the causes of media trust and distrust.

Trust in the media is believed to be a consequence of press freedom. On the one hand, the current status of freedom of the press might have an impact on how much people rely on the information conveyed by the media; on the other hand, the history of press freedom might also have an important role in shaping trust in the media. For instance, in a social context where people experienced actual censorship from the state, and then democracy came to expose the misdeeds of the previous system, the levels of trust in media are probably lower than in countries that banished censorship a long time ago. Journalist professionalization and political balance may also play a role here.

3.3.4 Exposure

Exposure can be more than a *condition sine qua non* for agenda-setting effects to occur. In fact, the literature points out that the intensity of exposure to the media agenda has a positive impact on agenda-setting, either because it further reinforces the availability of the issue-related nodes that are activated when people watch newsshows or read newspapers, or because it augments the number of occasions to learn about issue salience (see, for instance, Wanta & Hu, 1994a, 1994b).

A considerable amount of research on exposure effects observed that it is not only positively related to stronger learning effects, civic engagement but also to agenda-setting effects, but attention can be more important than exposure (Hill, 1985; Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986; Wanta & Hu, 1994a; Zhao & Chaffee, 1995; Norris, 2002; Drew & Weaver, 2006).

The effect of exposure is, however, often discredited. For instance, Price & Zaller (1993) assert that both exposure and attention are poor measures, because they do not tell us who actually received the news – they were empirically proven to perform poorly as indicators of news reception. Message reception is, of course, more important than mere exposure/attention. According to the authors: “given an equal duration of exposure and equivalent levels of attention to comparable media content, some people always will acquire more information than others, due, for instance, to differences in intelligence, motivation or education” (p. 137). Therefore, the role of frequency of exposure may depend on individual characteristics.

Due to the nature of the present research, exposure is measured at the country and at the audience levels. Therefore, the variables use in the statistical models will represent the intensity of news exposure in general (for media users) and the intensity of exposure to specific media outlets. As in the case of trust, I am fully aware that exposure is not a systemic dimension, but believe that exposure measured at these levels are good *proxies* for individual levels of exposure. Moreover, this is the most appropriate way to address the moderating impact of exposure on agenda-setting as a whole, aggregate, phenomenon.

3.4 Final Notes

In this chapter, the grounds for the analysis of media systems and informational environments, as well as the basis for their potential role as agenda-setting moderators were presented. In the next chapter, several hypotheses about the patterns of media market development, commercialization, press freedom, journalist professionalization, media partisanship, information quality, diversity of media agendas, exposure, and trust in the media, are specified. The data used to measure these dimensions is then presented and the operationalization of each dimension explained. The panorama of the media systems in Europe is presented straight after, opening the way for the empirical test of hypothesis concerning its role in the occurrence and strength of agenda-setting effects.

PART III - MEDIA SYSTEMS AND INFORMATION ENVIRONMENTS

STUDYING MEDIA SYSTEMS AND INFORMATION ENVIRONMENTS IN EUROPE, 2009: HYPOTHESES AND DATA

As stated in Chapter One, the impact of the media environment on agenda-setting is believed to rest on five broad-range dimensions (press freedom, public broadcasting system's strength, development of media markets, journalist professionalization, partisanship) through their immediate correlates – exposure, trust in the media, media agendas' diversity and informative quality of the news. But before testing the relationship between agenda-setting and those contextual factors, it is important to identify the nature of those features of media systems and information contexts, as well as their interdependency, drawing on a set of new data created and collected for this purpose, under the theoretical guidance of Hallin & Mancini's (2004) work.

In this chapter, the hypotheses related to inter-relations between broad-range media system characteristics and their immediate effects are set out, the media system and media outlet data sources are presented, and a description of the variable operationalization procedures is offered.

4.1 Hypotheses

In this section, I will present some generic hypotheses that structured the analysis of a multitude of new data on media systems and associated environments. The hypotheses are not exhaustive, but constitute an interesting point of departure for the descriptive and inferential analysis of this data. Inspired by Hallin & Mancini (2004) and others, I hypothesize that the patterns of development of media markets, journalist professionalization and commercialization will vary considerably within Europe. I expect to find the patterns described below:

- *Development of press markets will be greater in Liberal and Democratic Corporative countries than in Polarized Pluralist nations and, possibly, the 12 new EU member states⁵¹, but development of TV markets will be rather similar throughout Europe (Hypothesis 4.1).* Research has shown that the press market in Northern and Western European countries developed before and to a greater extent than in the South, due to historical and political reasons (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). In Eastern Europe, I expect that, due to their recent history of democracy, the press markets will be no more developed than in Southern Europe. A competing hypothesis would be stating that *there is a correlation between length of the democratic regime and development of the press market in 2009* (Hypothesis 4.2).
- *Public Broadcasting Systems will be weaker in Liberal, Polarized Pluralist and Eastern Countries (Hypothesis 4.3).* Commercialization (in terms of amount of audience share of commercial TVs vis-à-vis public broadcasters) is expected to be higher in the East and South, in which public TV has a history of censorship or, at least, the idea of state ownership might be associated with state control and

⁵¹ These geographical categories are always subject to criticism, and therefore I feel it necessary to declare the reasoning behind their selection. In short, they refer to the categories that derive from Hallin & Mancini (2004) results and a new category including the twelve new-member States (NMS12). As in Hallin & Mancini (2004), France is placed amongst the southern European countries that belong to the Polarized Pluralist model. These categories are used for merely descriptive reasons, and the division of the EU in sub-groups according to their media systems' characteristics will be empirically addressed in the following chapter.

manipulation, as well as on Liberal countries in which the laws of the market and a weaker state intervention might have not protected the public channels as much as in Democratic Corporatist countries. *The degree of commercialization can be, however, connected with the age of the democratic regime and the date of creation of a private TV market in the country* (Hypothesis 4.4), in the sense that new democracies and new markets will display weaker PBS.

- *Freedom of Press will be stronger in older democracies* (Hypothesis 4.5). Older, mature democracies are expected to create the basis for a free media, both in legal, economic and political terms, whereas recent democracies might still have the tics of autocracy and some remaining elite trying to restrain press freedom.
- *Journalist professionalization will be stronger in older than in new democracies* (Hypothesis 4.6), or in *Liberal and Democratic Corporatist nations than in the rest of the continent* (Hypothesis 4.7), as a by-product of an older and stronger press tradition and market, as well as a stronger tradition of respect of the rights of workers.
- Lastly, *Media partisanship* (in the form of lack of neutrality or lack of internal diversity) is expected to be *lower in Liberal systems than in the other groups* (Hypothesis 4.8). According to Hallin & Mancini (2004), the British and Irish broadcasting systems have a long story of neutrality; moreover, the press panorama is close to neutrality in Ireland and to external diversity in the UK (but see Voltmer, 2000). It is not paradoxical to propose a different hypothesis, stating that bias will be *higher in new than in old democracies* (Hypothesis 4.9).

These hypotheses suggest a common pattern, i.e., a normatively more positive situation of media markets in the North and Western Europe than in the other European countries under analysis. However, this does not mean that the four dimensions tackle a single concept, in the sense that one variable would be enough to describe the media systems in the 27 countries. On the contrary, I believe that even if these merely descriptive hypotheses prove to be true, they just refer to a relative structure of relationships between these dimensions – for instance, it can be true that

journalist professionalization and development of media markets is higher in the North than in the South, but the situation of the journalists in Scandinavia can be worse/better than the degree of press development in those countries. Moreover, I expect that a) region will explain just a small amount of the variation in the four dimensions of media systems in Europe, i.e., considerable variation within region is expected; and b) these dimensions will have differential impacts in the informational environment. Regarding the latter assumption, I expect the following patterns (see also Table 4.1):

- *Development of press markets will be linked, on average, with more newspaper reading, while development of TV markets will have a negative effect on broadcast news exposure; both indicators of market development will be associated with more media agenda diversity* (Hypothesis 4.10).
- *Commercialization will have a negative impact of information quality and trust* (Hypothesis 4.11). As stated before, public media are usually seen both by lay people and experts as being responsible for the public service of informing the population in a complete and accurate way (e.g. Kriesi, 2004; Schmitt-Beck, 2004), because they are indirectly in the hands of a democratically appointed power, whereas private media are ruled by entities that do not have the same kind of relationship and duties towards the citizens.
- *Constraints on Freedom of Press, especially those that might be more easily spotted by the average citizen (political constraints), will be linked with lower levels of trust* (Hypothesis 4.12).
- *Journalist professionalization will be linked to more trust in the media* (Hypothesis 4.13) *and more information quality* (Hypothesis 4.14). It is reasonable to expect that the more professionalized the information providers are seen to be, the more people will trust the quality of the media content. If journalists are seen as relatively autonomous, ethic-driven professionals, oriented towards the goal of informing people (the public service norm), their actions and affirmations will merit more credit from the audience than if they are seen as mere pawns instrumentalized by interest groups. In addition,

professionals in general are believed to create products with better quality, hence the hypothesis on the relationship between journalist professionalization and information quality.

Table 4.1 – Hypotheses concerning Media System dimensions’ impact on the Information Environment

	<i>Quality</i>	<i>Media Agenda Diversity</i>	<i>Trust</i>	<i>Exposure</i>
Development of Press Markets	Positive Impact	Positive Impact	---	---
Development of TV Markets	---	Positive Impact	---	Negative Impact
Strength of PBS	Positive Impact	---	Positive Impact	---
Freedom of Press	---	---	Positive Impact	---
Professionalization	Positive Impact	---	Positive Impact	---
Partisanship	---	---	Negative impact	---

4.2. Data Sources

Most of the media system and information environment variables (especially those concerned with partisanship and quality) were operationalized with data collected by the expert survey *Media Systems in Europe*, carried out by a group of researchers composed of Marina Popescu (University of Essex), Tania Gosselin (Université du Quebec a Montreal) and myself. The purpose of the expert survey was to gather data about the media systems in European countries, posing a relevant set of questions to experts in communication studies, public opinion, political communication and electoral behaviour. The questions were posed either at the national level, or in connection with specific media outlets: the most relevant newspapers and TV channels in each country. A detailed description of this expert survey is presented in Appendix 1.

Some other national-level variables – namely, ownership structures, press market development and freedom of press – are measured by data coming from secondary sources (Freedom House, European Audiovisual Observatory, and World Association of Newspapers). The relative contributions of these sources for the set of data used in this research will be explained as each individual dimension is operationalized. Lastly, trust was measured using Eurobarometer data collected in the Summer/Fall of 2009 (TNS Opinion & GEIS, 2010).

4.3 Variable Operationalization

4.3.1 *Development of Media Markets*

In this dissertation, the concept of **development of press markets** in the European Union is operationalized through the use of measures of quantitative and qualitative development for the newspaper market. The most relevant indicators of development of media markets are suggested by Hallin & Mancini (2004) – diversity of choices, balance between use of press and electronic media, the whole population as a target of press products, differences in content and style between reference newspapers and tabloids, and absence of gender gap in newspaper consumption.

Data about the newspaper market in 2009 was retrieved from the World Press Trends report, published by the World Association of Newspapers (WAN, 2010), whereas the data about the TV market in 2009 was collected from the European Audiovisual Observatory (EAO, 2010).

Four measures were built from these two sources: the *Number of Newspapers* which is a simple indicator of the number of alternatives from which citizens can choose (see Voltmer, 2000); the *Average Circulation of Daily Newspapers per Million Citizens* (a proxy for the focus of the press market, i.e. the general population vs. the elite); *Gender Differences*, regarding newspaper reach, and, finally, the *Imbalance* between time watching TV and time reading newspapers. This last variable, inspired by the work of Norris (2000), is fairly similar to Shehata & Strömbäck's (2011a) measures of newspaper vs. television centrism at the country level, and to

the measure used by Aalberg & Curran (2012a) in their most-different cases study of media information environments in Europe.

The qualitative dimension of press market development was operationalized using data collected through the expert survey (Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin, 2010) about the existence of differences between tabloids and reference newspapers. This was measured by a single item (*"There is little difference between the way tabloid and quality newspapers cover public affairs"*).⁵²

In the end, this study tackles five components of the development of press markets (Table 4.2; see descriptive statistics on Appendix 2). In another setting, a strategy of data reduction would be used to reduce the number of variables, and the final variable resulting from that might be used in subsequent analysis. However, considering the exploratory nature of the research presented here, all the specific measures will be used.

The raw variables are used to depict the picture of European media markets from a descriptive perspective, while a condensed version of the media system variables will be used for the inferential statistical analysis. This is so because it is assumed that the effects are small, not dependent of a unit change in the number of outlets, but on a broader difference in the media market structures. For instance, a market in which the number of different titles is low will have a different informational environment than one where the number of choices is high, but the difference between having 12 or 13 titles in the newsstand will be too small to be properly estimated; on the contrary, the difference between having 12 and 120 titles on the market is expected to produce stronger, more visible, effects. The variables were recoded in order to vary between 0 and 1 (by dividing each case's value by the highest value in the empirical range).

Regarding the development of the TV market,⁵³ two variables are used: the *Number of Choices* (the number of national, regional and

⁵² This sentence was presented to the experts with a scale of 0 (Untrue) to 10 (True). The reliability of this measure is particularly high (.86, in a scale from 0 to 1; see Popescu, 2011).

⁵³ It is worth stressing that the division between indexes of development of television and newspaper markets is theory-driven and related to the specific goals and hypotheses of this dissertation. A purely empirical perspective, based on factor analysis, would suggest that the variables under study belong to two different

cable/satellite TV channels available in the country) and the *Proportion of Cable Dissemination* (which reports the percentage of households served by cable or digital cable in the country). Both variables are computed with data coming from the *European Audiovisual Observatory Yearbook* (EAO, 2010).

The descriptive statistics and normality tests for these two variables are made available on Appendix 2. For the inferential tests, these variables were also recoded in order to vary between 0 and 1.

Table 4.2 – Dimensions of Press Market Development

	<i>Variable</i>	<i>Theoretical Range</i>	<i>Empirical Range</i>
<i>Quantitative</i> ⁵⁴	Number of (daily) newspapers	0- ∞	8 to 357
	Average number of daily newspapers circulating each day <i>per</i> million citizens.	0- ∞	82.52 to 457.2
	Consumption Imbalance (Minutes watching TV minus Minutes Reading Newspapers)	0 (equal amount of time reading newspaper and watching TV) to 1440 (24 hours watching TV and 0 minutes reading newspapers)	104 to 220
	Gender Gap in Newspaper Readership	0% (equality) to 100% (full gap)	0 to 20
<i>Qualitative</i>	Difference tabloids/reference papers	0 (not different) to 10 (completely different)	3.13 to 8.31

clusters: the first regards the amount of choice in the market (both in terms of daily titles and TV channels), while the second encompasses information about the size of the audiences (newspaper readers and cable subscribers). These two factors, whose eigenvalues are greater than 1, account for 72.5% in the variance of the variables under analysis. Varimax rotation was used.

⁵⁴ There is not information about newspaper readership for all the 27 contexts under analysis. In fact, the 2010 WAN report on World Press Trends just offers such information for 15 countries. Moreover, information on gender consumption is only available for 23 countries. Therefore, these indicators will be used for descriptive purposes, but not in the inferential models, in order to avoid loss of cases or the use of missing data replacement strategies that would involve imputation of data for a considerable proportion of the cases under study.

4.3.2 Public TV Strength

Voltmer (2000) proposes an interesting way of measuring strength of public-service orientation in broadcasting systems, using information about the percentage of public TVs funding coming directly from the state, and the number of public and private broadcasters. The first measure is an indicator of how public state-owned broadcasters are, whereas the second one tackles the existence of a monopoly or competition in the market.

The first indicator proposed above is accurately reproduced in this thesis, but the second one was built in a different way. Why? The analysis carried out by Voltmer (2000) focuses on 1990, a time when several countries were still without private TV stations; therefore, the author's goal was to contrast monopolistic systems (i.e., those served by public broadcasters only) with dual systems (those in which commercial TV had been introduced). Nowadays, private broadcasters exist in virtually all European countries (see Hardy, 2008, p. 58), and what varies considerably is the capability of public broadcasters to attract audiences in a liberalized market (see Djankov et al, 2003). Therefore, my second measure of public-service orientation is the relative PBS audience, measured by difference between the audience share of public and private (freely accessible) television channels in 2009, varying theoretically from - 100% (fully commercialized market) to 100% (fully public market). The information about audience shares and funding of public broadcasters in the European Union was found in the 2010 yearbook published by the European Audiovisual Observatory (EAO, 2010).

General descriptive statistics and normality tests of these two variables are presented on Appendix 2. For the inferential tests, these variables were also recoded in order to vary between 0 and 1.

4.3.3 Freedom of Press

Due to its complexity, the concept of freedom of press is usually operationalized in cross-country research through the employ of ready-to-use indexes of press freedom (Norris, 2004; Norris & Inglehart, 2007; Popescu, 2008). Behmer (2009) and Becker, Vlad & Nusser (2007) offer a

rather complete perspective on the several sources of information about press freedom available to scholars and the general public.

The Press Freedom Survey is one of the oldest and most often used ways of measuring press freedom. It is an annual assessment of the level of media freedom carried out by Freedom House since 1980, and covers around 200 countries and independent territories. It is based on analysis of *status quo* and events by regional specialists and scholars (Freedom House, 2010). The *Freedom House* index is derived from a fairly comprehensive definition of freedom of press which includes legal, political and economical restraints, and varies from 0 (totally free press) to 100 (totally not free press). Usually, Freedom House reports divide countries in three categories: free press (from 0 to 30); partially free press (from 31 to 60) and not free press (from 61 to 100). The Freedom of Press 2010 data release, which is used in this study, analyses 196 countries and refers to the year of 2009 (that is to say, covers the events that took place in that year).

An alternative measure of press freedom would be the index made available by *Reporters Without Borders*, a NGO aimed at the research of journalist's working conditions. This index also varies from 0 to 100; and higher values also represent greater constraints to press freedom. The 2009 dataset on freedom of press includes 173 countries and refers to events taking place between September 2008 and September 2009. When compared with the Freedom House index, this indicator presents some differences in the way it is built; however, both measures seem to be strongly correlated.

Taking as an example the year of 2009, in the case of the 26 member-States of the European Union studied here⁵⁵, the correlation between the two indexes is very high (Pearson's $r = .83$). Differences in the methodological assessment of press freedom used by these two institutions probably are the reason why this association is not as strong as one would

⁵⁵ Luxembourg was excluded from the analysis due to lack of data on several media system dimensions (see Appendix 1).

expect, considering that they supposedly tap the same concept in the same set of countries.⁵⁶

The descriptive statistics displayed in Appendix 2 show that these two indicators have different means and medians – it seems that *Reporters Without Borders* tend to display a more positive picture of the European context, when compared to the *Freedom House* data. For instance, the *Freedom House* index presents Romania as an outlier case in which the number of constraints to press freedom is much higher than in other European countries, but its depiction by *Reporters without Borders* is, in absolute terms, more positive. The fact that most EU countries are very close to the “totally free” extreme of both scales is very positive from a substantive point of view, but can be problematic in methodological terms, because they might not provide the necessary degree of variation in this independent variable.

From a substantive perspective, both indexes are also problematic in the sense that they try to summarize in one single figure all the conditions that have an impact on the work of the press, sometimes confusing (or assembling) control, regulation and influence. On this side, the *Freedom House* index has the advantage of being broken down into three individual indexes, portraying the legal, political and economic constraints to freedom of press. Therefore, I decided use this index as a measure of *Constraints to Press Freedom*. The analysis will include either the General Constraints measure (the general Freedom of Press index), or the *Political, Legal and Economic Constraints* indexes.

Under the political constraints category, Freedom House evaluates the degree of political control over the content of news media. Issues examined include the editorial independence of both state-owned and privately owned media; access to information and sources; official censorship and self-censorship; the ability of both foreign and local reporters to cover the news freely and without harassment; and the

⁵⁶ In the past, similar degrees of correlation were found between the two scales for a wider set of countries (Becker, Vlad & Nusser, 2007). This is seen as an empirical support to the argument that those indexes, even if measured with different techniques, tap the same construct and provide similar perspectives of the reality in terms of press freedom.

intimidation of journalists by the state or other actors, including arbitrary detention and imprisonment, violent assaults, and other threats. The political environment measure varies between 0 and 40 in the full World sample, and between 3 and 15 in the European Union (Luxembourg excluded; Appendix 2).

The legal constraints category of the Freedom House Index encompasses an examination of both the laws and regulations that could influence media content and the government's inclination to use these laws and legal institutions to restrict the media's ability to operate. This index tackles the positive impact of legal and constitutional guarantees for freedom of expression; the potentially negative aspects of security legislation, the penal code, and other criminal statutes; penalties for libel and defamation; the existence of and ability to use freedom of information legislation; the independence of the judiciary and of official media regulatory bodies; registration requirements for media outlets and journalists; and the ability of journalists to operate freely (Freedom House, 2010). The legal environment index varies, theoretically, between 0 and 30; in the European sample the range goes from 2 to 13.

Finally, the third category examines the economic constraints that the media have to face. This includes the structure of media ownership; transparency and concentration of ownership; the costs of establishing media as well as of production and distribution; the selective withholding of advertising or subsidies by the state or other actors; the impact of corruption and bribery on content; and the extent to which the economic situation in a country impacts the development and sustainability of the media (Freedom House, 2010). This measure also varies between 0 and 30, but in empirical terms the variation is less wide (from 4 to 15). This and the other variables were recoded before their inclusion in inferential models.

4.3.4 Journalist Professionalization

Professionalization of journalists is usually analysed on the basis of two kinds of information: hard statistical data and survey data. Regarding the first, some authors argue that the year of first foundation of a Union of Journalists seems to be a good operationalization of professionalization (e.g.: Curry, 1990, in Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Hanretty, 2011). However, I do not believe that this is the best measure of professionalization available. Some unions may have their roots in communist regimes (and their positive effect in terms of building ethical codes and a sense of profession amongst journalists can be questioned) or may have been proclaimed illegal due to political reasons, even in contexts in which journalism was a strong profession in terms of ethics and legitimizing creed. Moreover, relatively recent unions and organizations might have been active and successful in terms of implementing rules of conduct and professionalism, whereas old, historical associations might have lost this role, having become journalist clubs or journalism museums.

Therefore, other measures are needed. IREX offers a measure of journalist professionalization as a part of its Media Sustainability Index.⁵⁷ The goal of this sub-dimension is to assess if the journalists meet the professional standards of quality, mixing indicators related to professionalization (journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards, do not practice self-censorship, are sufficiently well-paid to discourage corruption) with indicators of information quality (coverage of key events and issues, fair, objective and well sourced reporting, balance between entertainment and information programming, and so on).

However, the Europe and Eurasia report does not cover all the European countries, but just those where media has not yet achieved sustainability, and thus still needs monitoring. Out of the 27 systems analysed in this thesis, just two – Romania and Bulgaria – are covered by the IREX report portraying the *status quo* in 2009 (IREX, 2010).

⁵⁷ IREX, founded in 1968, is an international non-profit organization aimed at improving the quality of education, strengthening independent media, and fostering pluralistic civil society development (IREX, 2010). The methodological report of the Media Sustainability Index (MSI) is available at <http://www.irex.org/resource/media-sustainability-index-msi-methodology>.

The *Worlds of Journalism* research project, based at the University of Munich (Germany), offers data on journalism cultures in 18 countries, collected by its pilot study between 2007 and 2009. However, and once again, this pilot study covers only 4 out of the 27 media systems studied in this thesis. The full study will cover the European Union as a whole (as well as several other countries in the World), which means that in the near future it will be a relevant source of information about journalism.⁵⁸

Subjective appraisals of journalist professionalization from experts in communication and public opinion are also used, and – in my opinion – probably offer a more direct measure of professionalization. The expert survey on media systems in Europe (Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin, 2010) included the following items concerning this matter: *“Journalists in [COUNTRY] are motivated by an ethic of serving the public interest”, “Journalists in [COUNTRY] agree on the criteria for judging excellence in their profession regardless of their political orientations”, and “Journalists have sufficient training to ensure that basic professional norms like accuracy, relevance, completeness, balance, timeliness, double-checking and source confidentiality are respected in news-making practices”*.⁵⁹

Those bits of information are used in a complementary way, in order to fully capture the underlying concept of professionalization. I therefore created an index of journalist professionalization, by averaging the values of those three variables. The Cronbach’s Alpha (a widely used measure of internal consistency) supports the decision of using these items in an aggregate way ($\alpha = .86$). Appendix 2 presents the descriptive statistics for this index: the analysis of the histogram and boxplot charts showed that there is a slight skewness in the distribution towards the lower extreme of the scale; which, from a substantive point of view, is not very flattering to the European journalistic community. The index, which varies between 0 and 10, was recoded in order to vary between 0 and 1 with the same procedure used for the measures presented earlier in this chapter.

⁵⁸ The description of this research project is available online at <http://www.worldsofjournalism.org/index.htm>.

⁵⁹ These sentences were presented to the experts with a scale of 0 (Untrue) to 10 (True). The reliability indexes vary between .88 and .91 (see Popescu, 2011).

4.3.5 Partisanship/Balance

How can partisanship be operationalized? For instance, van Kempen (2007) measured media party parallelism at the system level by regressing party preference (propensities to vote – PTVs) on television and newspaper exposure, and then used the weighted mean of explained variances for party preference. This is, according to me, a complicated and biased way of measuring press-party parallelism – a newspaper is not biased because it explains party preferences, but party preferences may lead to the use of a specific newspaper. What van Kempen (2007) was measuring was the average persuasive strength of television and newspapers.

A more standard way by which it is possible to analyse partisanship is to look at the content of newspapers or TV channels in search of media bias or media leaning (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Popescu, 2008; Baek, 2009). Through a comprehensive content analysis (including perhaps also discourse analysis techniques), it is possible to understand if a specific outlet is neutral, ideological (i.e., clearly left-wing, centre, or right-wing) or partisan (i.e. connected to a specific political party). In the context of this research, such an analysis is not possible, since I am dealing with 228 news media outlets, publishing/broadcasting in more than twenty languages.

Therefore, I will use information collected by the expert survey on media systems (Popescu, Santana-Pereira & Gosselin, 2010), which, in fact allows for a two-fold analysis of partisanship. This dimension is measured at the national and at the outlet level – a strategy that allows the understanding of this dimension and its impact in the classical way (the media-system centered definition of Hallin and Mancini) or in a more innovative way, by identifying links between parties and media outlets.

It is worth noticing that there are two relevant samples of outlets in the present work – the general sample of 228 media outlets (104 newspapers and 124 TV channels) analysed by the expert survey (Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin, 2010), and the 138 outlets (81 newspapers and 57 TV channels) about which the PIREDEU Media Study (EES, 2009b) has collected information on content. Both samples will be described, both for

relevance, but also to see if the PIREDEU sample is in some way different from the more comprehensive set of outlets analysed by Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin (2010).

The expert survey questionnaire contained four questions about partisanship. At the national level, there were two questions: 1 – “*Would you say that all major political opinions in [COUNTRY] are present in the newspapers or rather that only some opinions are present?*” and 2 – “*And how about television, would you say that all major political opinions or that only some political opinions in [COUNTRY] are present in broadcasting?*”. At the media outlet level, we have questions 3 – “*How far is the political coverage of each of the following media outlets influenced by a party or parties to which it is close?*”, and 4 – “*How would you characterize the political colour of each of these media outlets in [COUNTRY]?*”.⁶⁰

The data collected by the battery of questions described above was used to create five measures (Table 4.3). The first two questions constitute two general measures of general *Balance in TV* and *Newspapers* in a specific country, varying from 0 (biased towards some political views) and 10 (all political views present). Recoded versions of these two variables follow the categorization criteria presented for the other variables.

Table 4.3 – Dimensions of Partisanship/Balance

	<i>National Level</i> ⁶¹	<i>Outlet Level</i>
<i>Internal Diversity</i>	Balance in TV Balance in Newspapers	Amount of bias in Outlet Type (Neutral, Internal Diverse, Partisan, Strongly Partisan)
<i>External Diversity</i>	Left vs. Right Incumbent vs. Opposition	-----

⁶⁰ The first two questions were presented with an eleven-point scale, whose anchors were “Only some” at point 0 and “All” at point 10). In the third question, the scale varies from 0 (“not at all”) to 10 (“strongly”). In the question about links between media outlets and parties, the experts were invited to match a list of parties with the most important media outlets in the country. Reliability varies between .77 and .92 (see Popescu, 2011).

⁶¹ Factor analysis supports the organization of these four indicators along two dimensions: external and internal diversity. These two factors account for 75% of the total variance of the four variables under study. Varimax rotation was used.

The third question constitutes a measure of bias of specific outlets, which varies between 0 (unbiased) to 10 (completely biased). The amount of bias at the outlet level has a mean of 4.80 (standard deviation=1.99) for the whole sample and 4.90 (standard deviation= 1.95) for the PIREDEU sample.

Question 4 is useful to operationalize the concept of *External Diversity*, in particular the degree by which, in a given country, the outlets that present a strong bias support at least two parties that are not coalition partners nor at the same side of the ideological divide (left/right). The measures used here refer to the difference between the percentages of partisan outlets favouring left-wing or right-wing parties (*External Diversity Ideology*), as well as between the proportions of outlets favoring incumbent vs. opposition parties (*External Diversity Status*). These variables would vary between -100% and 100%, but since the direction of the bias is not relevant in terms of measuring how externally diverse the media market is in terms of political leaning, the signs were deleted. Therefore, the variables range between 0 and 100, and refer to the amount of distance to the ideal situation where the difference between the proportions of outlets biased towards different political sides would be null. Recoded versions of those variables vary 0 and 1. These and the other two variables created at the national level are described on Appendix 2.

The fourth question is also used to create a typology of media outlets, with four categories – neutral (when the amount of bias is lower than 3); internal diverse (when the amount of bias is higher than three, but the experts mentioned several parties that are from diverse sides of the left/right dichotomy and that are not coalition partners), moderately partisan (when the amount of bias varies between 3 and 7, but at least 50% of the experts referred a single party or coalition) and strongly partisan (when the scores for bias towards a single party or coalition are higher than 7).

The type of outlet is a nominal variable built with information based on intensity of party bias and political colour of TV channels and newspapers. In the whole sample, 20% of the outlets are neutral, 10% are internally diverse, 58% are biased and the remaining 12% are strongly

biased. In the PIREDEU sample, the proportion of neutral outlets is smaller (16%), whereas the percentage of partisan newspapers and channels is a bit higher (62%).

4.3.6 Information Quality

Information quality is measured with data collected by the expert survey (Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin, 2010), both at the country and the media outlet level (Table 4.4).

I started by creating indexes of the amount of hard news and soft news (or soft frames) in each country. The hard news index was composed of the aggregation of four items *“Do the news media in [COUNTRY] focus too much, just enough or too little on... information about economic issues facing [COUNTRY]; information about international affairs; information about policy differences between competing parties and politicians; information about investigative reports on important issues”*; which varied between 0 (too little) and 10 (too much); the middle point means “enough”. These variables were later transformed in order to create an index in which the middle-point is taken as the ideal situation, and the distance from this point is computed. Therefore, it varies between -5 (deficiency) and 5 (exaggeration). The internal consistency of this index indicates a considerable degree of inter-relation between these items (Cronbach’s Alpha= .66).

The soft frames index was created by aggregating the following three items *“Do the news media in [COUNTRY] focus too much, just enough or too little on information about individual politicians, their character and motivations?; information about the sensational aspects of events and stories?; information about politics seen as a game, a horse-race, just a competition for power?”*. This index is measured by the same scale, and also presents a modest, but satisfactory, internal consistency (Cronbach’s Alpha= .61).

The other measures are more specific and refer to the accuracy and amount of analysis in the television and newspapers. At the national level, the specific wording of those questions was *“Independently of the above, would you say that on the whole newspapers/television in [COUNTRY] provide an accurate representation of the facts in public affairs or not at all?”* and *“Thinking now about the analysis of the causes, contextual circumstances, consequences and*

implications of important developments in public affairs, would you say that newspapers provide a lot, enough or rather too little analysis?”. At the media outlet level, a list of outlets was presented alongside the question “To what extent do these media provide accurate information on facts backed by credible sources and expertise?”.

Table 4.4 – Dimensions of Information Quality

	<i>Variable Name</i>	<i>Theoretical Range</i>
<i>National Level</i>	Hard News	-5 (deficiency) to 5 (exaggeration)
	Soft Frames	-5 (deficiency) to 5 (exaggeration)
	Accuracy (TV and Newspapers)	0 (low) to10 (high)
	Analysis (TV and Newspapers)	0 (low) to10 (high)
<i>Outlet Level</i>	Accuracy	0 (low) to10 (high)

Five out of the six national-level indicators of information quality are normally distributed. The exception is the index of hard content news, which seems to be slightly skewed towards the left-hand extreme of the distribution, meaning insufficiency of hard content in news outlets (Appendix 2).

At the media outlet level, the distribution of the accuracy measure across the 228 media outlets (mean= 5.68; standard deviation= 1.62; median= 5.89) is skewed towards higher levels of accuracy. In the case of the smaller PIREDEU sample, the mean accuracy is somewhat higher (mean=5.84; standard deviation=1.66; median=6.18), and the distribution is also skewed towards higher levels of information accuracy.

4.3.7 Media Agenda Diversity

The diversity of the media agenda is operationalized in a rather straightforward way. For each country, I computed the Pearson correlation coefficient between the amount of coverage devoted to 15 major issues in the media outlets for which there is content information available (in most cases, three newspapers and two television channels; see more information on this procedure and the PIREDEU Media Study Data on Chapter Six).

The values were recoded so that a higher score would mean a stronger degree of diversity in the media agendas, or, in other words, a lower degree of homogeneity (in quantitative terms). The descriptive statistics used to characterize this variable are presented in Appendix 2.

4.3.8 Trust

In the model of media effects I explore in this research, trust in the media is considered to be a very important factor, bridging the hardcore media system characteristics and the impact that media content has on public opinion.

The operationalization of trust was one of the main problems of this research design, since the 2009 PIREDEU Voter Study (my primary data source for information on public opinion) does not include questions that would allow for a direct⁶² or indirect⁶³ operationalization of this variable.

There would be two ways to deal with this shortcoming, both including the use of Eurobarometer data. In recent years, Eurobarometer waves regularly included questions about the trust in television, press and radio⁶⁴, and the wave EB 72 (whose data was collected in the autumn of 2009, actually includes these questions. This data can be used to operationalize trust in my model by means of data fusion through statistical matching; this way, I could add individual-level data about media trust to the PIREDEU voter study datasets. Statistical matching is a procedure that allows the fusion of two sets of data, when there is a sufficient number of common variables which allow for a relatively secure inference about the values to import from the donor (in this case, the Eurobarometer dataset) to the recipient (in this case, the PIREDEU voter

⁶² For instance, the question “How much do you trust the following institutions?” followed by a list including the media in general or specific media formats. This is a common operationalization in the Eurobarometer studies.

⁶³ For instance, the question “Do you think that the newspapers/television channels you watch were biased in favor of a specific candidate or party?” This is a common operationalization in the Portuguese National Election Studies.

⁶⁴ It is possible to find data on media trust for all the 27 European Union member-States in the waves EB57.1 and CCEB2002.02 (2002); EB59.1, EB60.1 and CCEB2003.02 (2003); EB61 and EB62 (2004); EB64.2 (2005); EB66.1 (2006); EB69.2 (2008), EB72.4 (2009). EB71.1 (2009) also includes some data on trust in the media, but presented in terms of relative trust (i.e., “which one do you trust the most”), instead of absolute trust. See ZACAT (<http://zacat.gesis.org/>).

study dataset) (e.g. van der Putten, Kok & Gupta, 2002; Rässler, 2002; Vantaggi, 2008). However, this is a very unusual procedure both in the fields of political science and communication research, and the imputation of 100% of missing cases based on similarities between individual interviewees could reduce substantially the validity of any results concerning trust in the media.

The second method consists in operationalizing trust at the national level, creating a *Media Trust* variable based on the average percent of people that affirmed trust the media in the most relevant Eurobarometer wave. In fact, and quoting Popescu (2008), “differences among citizens regarding how much trust they place in the mass media and/or how much credibility various media outlets enjoy with the audience, as well as cross-country differences in overall levels or trust in mass media, are expected to be consequential for the likelihood of media effects” (p. 102). A system-level operationalization of this variable is not, therefore, totally out of the question, even if the results must be read and interpreted differently in order to not incur in ecological fallacy.

Due to the relevance of this factor and the risks of imputing 100% of missing values to the PIREDEU voter survey dataset, I decided to operationalize it at the national level, using the information collected by the Eurobarometer (wave 72.4, implemented in the Fall of 2009; TNS Opinion & GESIS, 2010), but also by the expert survey on media systems (Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin, 2010).

The Expert Survey started by presenting the following sentence “*News media enjoy a lot of credibility in [COUNTRY]*” alongside an 11-point scale (0=untrue; 10= true). This variable needed no transformation for the purposes of this research. On the other hand, the Eurobarometer questionnaire included questions about whether the respondents tend to trust or not to trust a series of institutions, amongst which television, radio and the press. These three indicators, that originally varied from 0 to 100 (depicting the percentage of respondents that trust the TV/press/radio in a given country)⁶⁵ were transformed (i.e., multiplied by a factor of .1) in order

⁶⁵ The percentages that I used to compute the variables are not the ‘valid’ percentages, but the raw percentages, so this measure is quite conservative. If

to vary in a scale from 0 to 10. This was done in order to facilitate the comparison between this measure of trust and the one described above. For substantive and methodological reasons, both variables will be kept in the analysis.

Correlations between those three items are very high (between .63 and .85), and the internal consistency measures suggest that they can be employed in a single index (Cronbach's Alpha = .88). Therefore, the average of those three items was computed, in order to create a general index of trust in the news media. Descriptive statistics are available in Appendix 2.

4.3.9 Exposure

Measures of media exposure based on survey self-reports are usually criticized, being viewed by several scholars (see Zaller, 1992, 1996; Price & Zaller, 1993) as less good than direct observations, media use diaries (as in Hill, 1985), or political knowledge as indicator of propensity to receive media messages (Zaller, 1996). There is usually some measurement error associated with self-reports in surveys, due to memory issues related to the fact that media use are low-saliency behaviours (Price & Zaller, 1993). In fact, how perfectly do people recall the frequency, extent and variety of such an ordinary activity as watching TV, reading a newspaper, or browsing through a news magazine in a waiting room? People then tend to guess, and usually over-estimate their levels of exposure⁶⁶ (Bechtel et al., 1972, in Price & Zaller, 1993; Zaller, 2002; Prior, 2005). In the American case, over-reporting is not random, but explained by factors like age – younger people are usually less accurate in their reports of media exposure (Prior, 2009a).

On a positive note, previous research has shown that questions concerning reporting regular behaviour using the terminology “typical

missing cases were ignored in the computation of relative frequencies, the trust indexes would display higher values.

⁶⁶ Social desirability and satisficing could also play a role – newspaper reporting can be overstated and TV watching understated due to a wish to make a good impression to the interviewer; on the other hand, people might feel that an effort to give an accurate estimate of news exposure is not worthy. Prior (2009b) tested this hypothesis and showed that these factors do not explain inaccuracy in self-reports of media exposure.

week” have more predictive validity than those using other wordings (e.g. past week, etc.) (Chang & Krosnick, 2003). Fortunately enough, those who make decisions on question wording in cross-country public opinion surveys are aware of this, as the 2009 PIREDEU Voter Study demonstrates.

At the country level, my measure of exposure was constructed using PIREDEU (EES, 2009a) data collected by the question – “Q7 – *In a typical week, how many days do you follow the news?*” – and varies between 1 and 7.⁶⁷ Descriptive statistics of this variable are presented on Appendix 2.

The PIREDEU Voter Survey questionnaire also includes other specific questions on the degree of exposure to specific outlets. Data collected with those questions is used to operationalize the intensity of exposure of each particular audience. This variable also varies between 1 and 7, since the respondents who answered “zero days” do not belong to the outlet’s audience.

4.4 Final Notes

In this chapter, the amount, variety and complexity of information collected with the purpose of characterizing media systems and informational environments in Europe have been explored. Either by reproducing and adapting previous indicators, or by creating new ones, all the relevant measures were operationalized at the levels of analysis considered pertinent; moreover, basic statistical tests have shown that, *grosso modo*, these indexes are consistent and vary in the required degree. In the next chapter, all the dimensions presented here are used to create a picture of media systems and information environments in the European Union member states in 2009.

⁶⁷ The original scale varies between 0 and 7, but respondents answering 0 (i.e., that did not use the news media) are not part of this study, since exposure is a *sine qua non* condition for agenda-setting occurrence to take place. This question has a considerably high response rate – only 0.7 of the interviewees refused to answer or confessed they would not know how to answer it, and 2.5% do not use the media at all. The average number of days people follow the media is 6 (more precisely, 6.11) and the standard deviation is close to two days (1.61).

MEDIA SYSTEMS AND INFORMATION ENVIRONMENTS IN EUROPE, 2009

In this chapter, the 27 European media systems under analysis are described, and the relationship between media systems and informational environments is tested. The focus will be put both in the communalities and differences between countries, and I will try to provide a convincing test of the general hypotheses presented in Chapter Four. The following chapters will deal with the relationship between those effects and agenda-setting occurrence and strength.

The chapter is organized in three sections. I start by presenting the general panorama of media systems in Europe, through the use of quantitative data coming from multiple data sources. This section therefore presents a systematic operationalization of Hallin & Mancini's (2004) theoretical and qualitative analysis of media systems in Europe, and is partially inspired by Voltmer (2000); moreover, it allows testing for hypotheses concerning within-Europe differences regarding each dimension and the relationship between media systems and democratic stability.

In the second section, the relationship between the different media system dimensions (development of press markets, journalism professionalization, ownership, freedom of press, press partisanship) is tested. The third and last section of this chapter presents the general patterns of trust, exposure, media agenda diversity and information quality in Europe, and tests hypotheses about the impact of media systems on these measures of the information environment.

5.1 Descriptive Analysis of Media Systems

5.1.1 Development of Press Markets

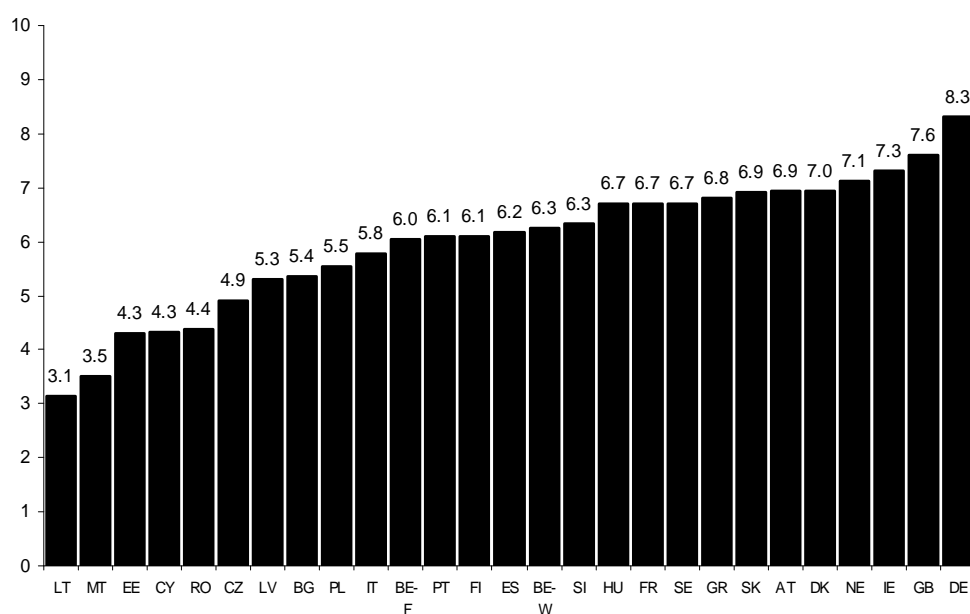
Let us start by tackling the qualitative dimension of development of press markets. On average, there are substantial differences in the way tabloids and reference newspapers address reality (mean of 6.01 in an eleven-point scale). As shown by Figure 5.1, it seems like the panorama varies considerably from country to country – for instance, Germany and, to a lesser degree, the UK and Ireland are countries in which the difference in the content and style of reference and tabloid newspapers is greater. This is not surprising if one considers how vibrant the tabloid press is in Britain (Humphreys, 2009), as well as how particular the style of the German tabloid *Bild* is, *vis-à-vis* the quality press in these countries, which is consumed and seen as reference by most of their neighbours.

The results in Latvia, as well as in Estonia and Lithuania, which also present low levels of qualitative diversity, are in line with what Balcytiene (2009, 2012) describes as the penetration of market-oriented discourse in the print (as well as audiovisual) media, which might have lowered the quality of reference newspapers in a setting where tabloids have a strong stance.

What about quantitative diversity? We know from previous research that, as a whole, Europe is characterized by a high number of newspapers and newspaper readers, compared with the rest of the World (Elvestad & Blekesaune, 2008). In fact, on average, in 2009 there were 58 different daily newspapers in each European country. However, the situation differs considerably from nation to nation (Figure 5.2). On the one hand, in small countries from the South and East of Europe (Malta, Slovakia, Slovenia) the

number of daily titles is lower than 10. On the other hand, Germany has a considerable number of daily newspapers in circulation (357). The landscape in Spain, Italy, France and the UK is also characterized by a great diversity of titles in the newsstands.⁶⁸

Figure 5.1 – Qualitative Diversity of Press Markets in Europe, 2009⁶⁹



Notes:

1. Source: Expert Survey on Media Systems (Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin, 2010). Calculations made by the author.
2. The scale varies between 0 (no differences between reference newspapers and tabloids) and 10 (strong differences between reference newspapers and tabloids).

⁶⁸ Nevertheless, if we weight the number of titles by the size of population, the relative diversity is, of course, much higher in small countries such as Cyprus (but also Finland or Malta), and quite modest in the most populated countries of the European Union (Italy, Germany, Poland, etc.).

⁶⁹ Except for Belgium, the national codes present in this and other pictures and tables are the ISO 3166 Alpha Codes proposed by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). The codes are Austria (AT), Bulgaria (BG), Cyprus (CY), Czech Republic (CZ), Denmark (DK), Estonia (EE), Finland (FI), France (FR), Germany (DE), Greece (GR), Hungary (HU), Ireland (IE), Italy (IT), Latvia (LV), Lithuania (LT), Malta (MT), Netherlands (NL), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Romania (RO), Slovakia (SK), Slovenia (SI), Spain (ES), Sweden (SE), United Kingdom (GB). In the case of Belgium, I use BE-F for Flanders and BE-W for Walloon.

The average circulation of daily newspapers per million citizens gives us an insight into how widespread the habit of newspaper readership is across different European countries, since the publishing houses print and distribute a specific number of newspapers that varies accordingly to their previous sales and current expectations towards their audience.

In 2009, the amount of newspaper circulation in countries in the South and East of Europe was modest, letting us think that the publishers are aware that the number of daily readers (and buyers) of newspapers will not be much different than some figure between 8.3% (Portugal) and 20% (Slovenia) of the entire population. Readership seems to be much stronger in countries such as Austria, Finland, Sweden or the French community in Belgium – here, the values of average circulation vary between 342 and 457 thousand copies per million citizens (Figure 5.2).

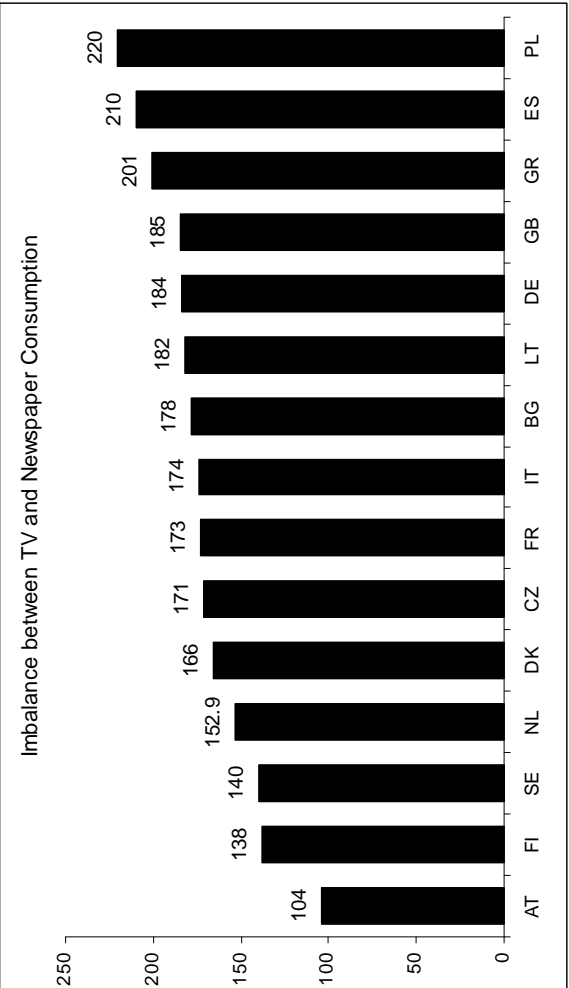
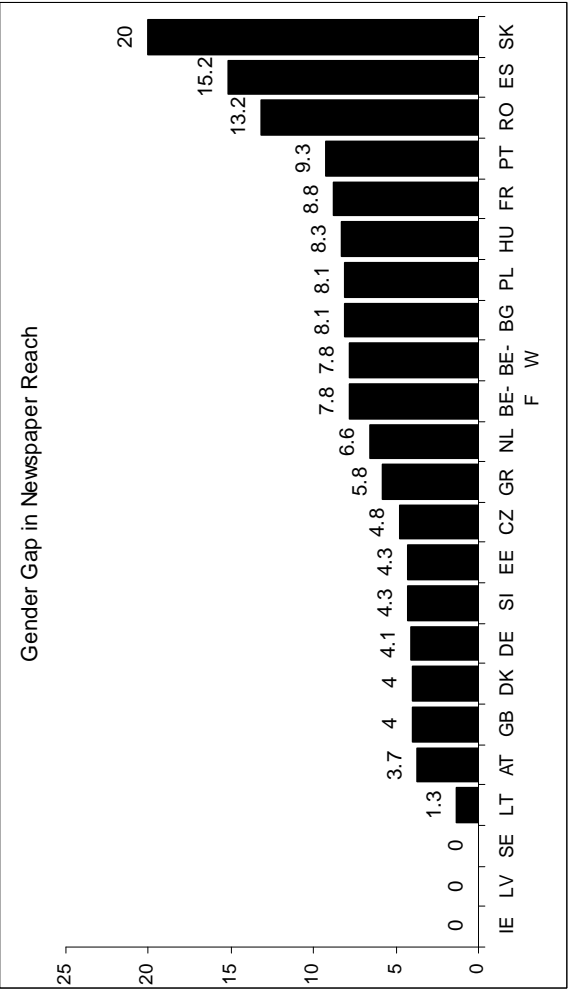
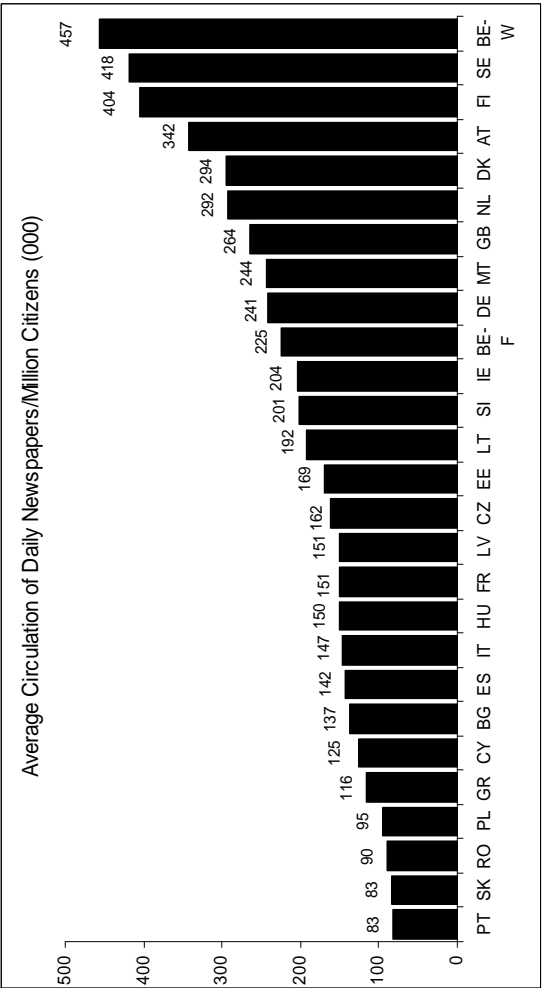
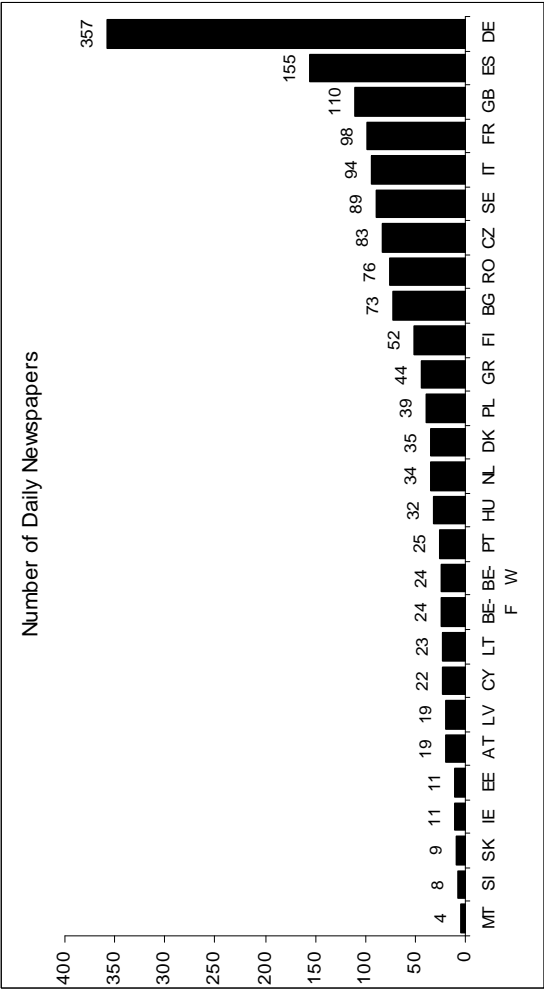
Economic wellbeing seems to play a role here: in 2006, there was a correlation of .43 between GDP per capita and newspaper circulation in 45 European countries (Färdigh, 2010). In 2009, and in the 26 EC countries studied here, this relationship is even stronger (Pearson's $r = .64$; $p < .001$; $N=27$).⁷⁰

Gender gaps are absent in three European countries – Ireland, Sweden and Latvia – and very low in the majority of the other member-states for which we have information.⁷¹ Romania, Slovakia and Spain are the countries in which the printed press reaches women to a considerably lower degree than it reaches men. There is also considerable variance in the balance between consumption of electronic and printed media in the 15 countries for which there is data. At one of the extremes, we find Austria, where the balance is considerably superior to the one found amongst the Polish citizens (Figure 5.2).

⁷⁰ Data on GDP per capita in 2009 was collected in the Eurostat website: <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu>.

⁷¹ As stated earlier, it was not possible to find data for four systems: Cyprus, Finland, Italy, and Malta.

Figure 5.2 – Supply, Circulation and Diversity in Press Consumption in Europe, 2009



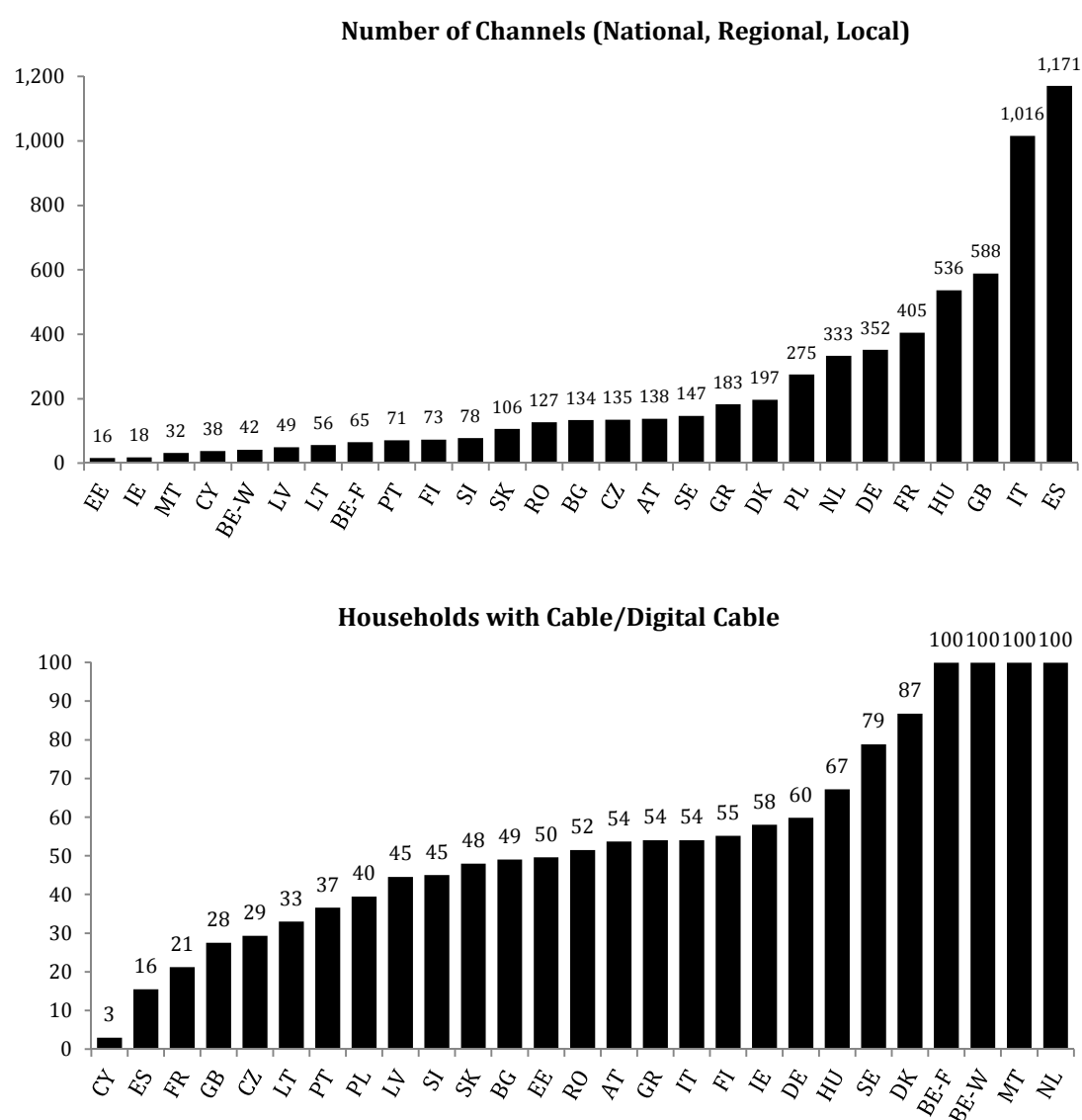
Source: EAO (2010) and WAN (2010). Calculations made by the author.

These results are similar to those reported by Shehata & Stömbäck (2011) based on data collected before 2007, even if the pools of countries are dissimilar. In fact, Austria, Finland and Sweden, which are displayed here as relatively balanced in terms of time spent watching the TV and reading newspapers, are amongst the group of countries that those authors define as having lower levels of television-centrism. Moreover, Greece and Spain, two of the most imbalanced countries in this study, are also those that are portrayed by Shehata & Stömbäck (2011) as being strongly television-centric.

Regarding the television panorama, the results do not support the expectation that in Europe, the degree of development of the television market would be more equitative than the development of the press (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), at least in what concerns number of channels available and proportion of households with access to cable TV. In fact, even if Italy and Spain (two outliers from the point of view of number of choices) are excluded, there is still great variation in the number of channels someone can access from the couch every night. For instance, in three island-States (Ireland, Malta and Cyprus) this figure is considerably smaller than in France, the UK, Hungary or Germany (Figure 5.3). In addition, cable coverage arrives to almost 100% of the population with television access in Malta, the Netherlands and Belgium, while it is much less widespread in Cyprus (Figure 5.3). Interestingly enough, the number of channels and the proportion of households with cable are not significantly correlated ($r=-.23$; $p=.23$).

The number of daily titles is correlated with qualitative diversity – it seems that the amount of choice in the newsstands can be translated into more space for differences in style. The size of press market, measured by the average circulation of daily newspapers per million citizens, is, not surprisingly, inversely related to gender gap and imbalance in media consumption – larger markets are also more gender-balanced and result in a smaller predominance of the TV as the mass medium *par excellence* (Table 5.1).

Figure 5.3 – Development of the TV Market in Europe, 2009



Source: EAO (2010). Calculations made by the author.

The imbalance in the use of newspapers and TV, as well as gender gaps in newspaper use, are associated with higher numbers of TV channels available in the market. Lastly, it is interesting to note that market features associated with amount of choice in both submarkets are correlated: countries with high number of daily titles also have TV panoramas that allow for more choice; in the same vein, the number of cable households is positively associated with the size of the press market (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1 – Correlations between Indicators of Press Market Development

	<i>Diff. Tabloid/ Reference</i>	<i>N Daily Titles</i>	<i>Average Circulation / Million</i>	<i>Gender Gap</i>	<i>Imbalance</i>	<i>Choice TV</i>
N Daily Titles	.40**					
Av. Circ./ Million	.28	.03				
Gender Gap	.01	.03	-.46**			
Imbalance	-.18	.26	-.80***	.52**		
Choice TV	.28	.47**	-.17	.35*	.39*	
Cable Dissem.	.17	-.16	.56**	-.15	.25	-.24

Notes:

1. Source: WAN (2010), EAO (2010); Expert Survey on Media Systems (Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin, 2010). Calculations made by the author.
2. Significance: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .05$; * $p < .10$
3. Ns are of 23 for gender gap, 15 for imbalance, and 27 for the other variables.

Hypothesis 4.1 postulated differences in the degree of press market development in Europe, with the Liberal and Democratic Corporatist countries in a better situation when compared with the Polarized Pluralist and the new EU member states (NMS12). The size of the press market is indeed considerably bigger in the North and West European Countries than in the South and East of Europe ($F(3,26) = 18.85$; $p = .000$). However, as for differences between newspapers and tabloids, even if the means display the hypothesized pattern, the only significant difference is found between the Liberal countries and the Eastern/Southern cluster composed by recent EU members ($F(3,26) = 7.67$; $p = .001$). Moreover, the degree of imbalance between the use of newspapers and television is only lower in the Democratic Corporatist countries, being the Liberal cluster close to the other groups ($F(3,14) = 3.512$; $p = .053$) (Table 5.2).

In the same vein, there are no significant differences in terms of number of titles between the four regions ($F(3,26) = .935$; $p = .440$), even if the number of choices is clearly lower in Eastern Europe than in the other regions. The same can be said about the gender gap – women read newspapers to a much lesser degree than men in Polarized Pluralist

countries and the NMS12 than in the rest of the EU, but these differences are not statistically significant ($F(3,22) = 1.65; p = .211$) (Table 5.2).

Regarding the realm of television, the four systems are not uniform. In fact, it seems that choice is higher in Liberal and Polarized pluralistic systems than in the rest of Europe ($F(3,26) = 3.79; p = .024$), but standard deviations suggest that there are considerable differences within these groups. On the other hand, the proportion of households with access to cable TV is much higher in Democratic Corporativist systems than in the rest of Europe ($F(3,26) = 5.56; p = .005$) (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2 - Differences in Development of Media Markets in Europe, 2009

	<i>Liberal</i> (Ireland, UK)		<i>Dem.</i> <i>Corporatist</i> (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden)		<i>Polarized</i> <i>Pluralist</i> (France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain)		<i>NMS12</i> (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Romania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia)	
	Mean	S. D.	Mean	S. D.	Mean	S. D.	Mean	S. D.
Difference Newspapers	7.46	.20	6.80	.74	6.31	.44	5.06	1.20
Number of Titles	60.5	70.0	79.25	114.47	83.20	51.03	33.25	28.49
Average Circulation	223.80	42.41	334.27	85.48	127.70	28.61	149.92	48.39
Gender Gap	2	2.82	4.85	2.78	9.78	3.93	7.24	5.89
Imbalance	185⁷²	--	147.48	27.36	189.50	18.84	171.93	21.97
Choice TV	303	403.1	168.4	118.9	569.2	496.5	131.83	145.3
Cable Diss.	42.75	21.56	79.29	20.55	36.26	17.94	46.63	22.88

Source: WAN (2010); EAO (2010); Expert Survey on Media Systems (Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin, 2010). Calculations made by the author.

⁷² This value is not actually a mean but the raw value for one of the two cases in this group; I found no information about time spent watching TV vs. reading newspapers in Ireland.

In turn, hypothesis 4.2 postulated that development of press markets would be stronger in older democracies. I use three measures associated with democracy in order to test this, all of them collected from Polity IV. The age and state of democracy are assessed by using the data present on the country reports of the Polity IV research project, which present trends and an analysis of the current situation. The "Polity Score" captures the regime variance in the world on a 21-point scale ranging from -10 (hereditary monarchy) to +10 (consolidated democracy). This project also offers information about the behavior of this indicator since 1946 (which can be used as a measure of stability) and the date of latest political transition in each country.⁷³

The results support this hypothesis only partially (Table 5.3). Age of democracy is indeed positively connected with the size of the media market (measured by the average circulation of newspapers *per* million citizens and the proportion of households with cable television), but not with other indicators of press market development. Moreover, stable democratic regimes are not only associated with bigger markets but also with more qualitative diversity in the newsstands. The current state of things in terms of quality of democracy is not connected with the features of the press market.

In sum, even if not all differences between the four regions of Europe reached statistical significance, some of the comparisons made above support the idea that the press market is more strongly developed in the North and the Western European countries. However, the standard deviations of some of these groups attest the existence of considerable variability within the four regions, which supports the argument that it is better to analyse each country individually instead of creating clusters. It is also worth mentioning that age of democracy and democratic stability are associated with the development of the press market, at least in terms of size of the press market.

⁷³ The Polity IV data used in this chapter is available online at <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>. There is not much variance in terms of degree of democracy in the EU27, but there is some variation in terms of age of democracy in those countries.

Table 5.3 – Correlations between Indicators of Press Market Development and Democracy Indexes

	<i>Polity IV Score</i>	<i>Polity IV Stability Index</i>	<i>Polity IV date of last transition</i>
Diff. Tabloid/ Reference	.24	.50**	-.39
N Daily Titles	.08	-.02	.11
Av. Circulation/ Million	-.06	.63**	-.68***
Gender Gap	.01	-.35	.23
Imbalance	-.02	-.42	.41
Choice TV	.25	.14	.01
Cable Dissemination	-.19	.31	-.61***

Notes:

1. Source: WAN (2010), EAO (2010); Expert Survey on Media Systems (Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin, 2010), Polity IV. Calculations made by the author.
2. Significance: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .05$; * $p < .10$
3. Ns are of 23 for gender gap, 15 for imbalance, and 27 for the other variables.

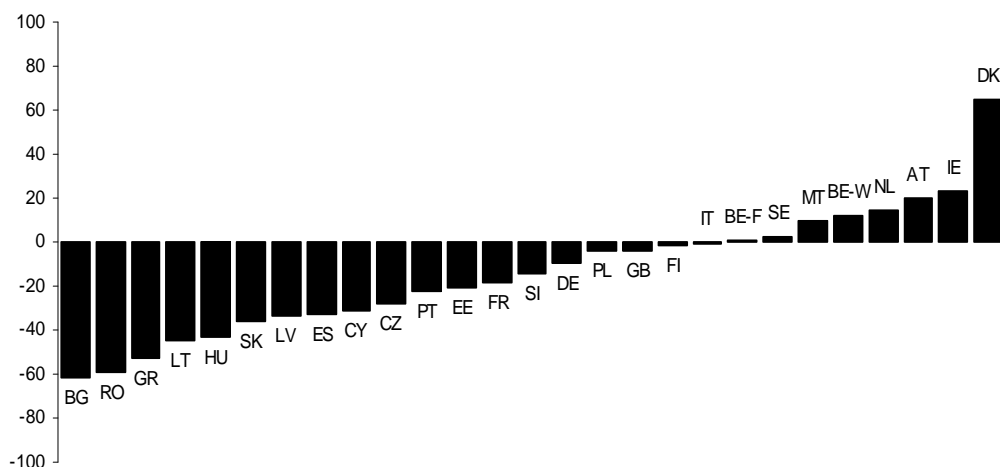
5.1.2 Strength of Public TV

In 1990, several European countries presented a TV panorama in which public broadcasters detained at least 50% of the audience shares, but in countries like Portugal or most Eastern European countries, commercial TV did not exist yet (Voltmer, 2000). In 2009, all European Union countries had private TV channels, a sign that the monopoly of public broadcasters is a thing of the (recent) past. Nonetheless, the relative situation of public and private broadcasters seems to vary considerably in their ability to attract audiences.

The central tendency measures indicate that, in our sample of European media systems, there is a general trend for private channels to have more audience than public broadcasters (Appendix 2). In fact, Figure 5.4 shows that the countries in which public television is stronger than the commercial channels in the audience market are a minority – Denmark, and to a lesser extent, Austria, Ireland, the Netherlands, Belgium-Wallonia, and Malta.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ In some of these countries a significant part of the shares goes to foreign channels, either broadcasted directly for those countries or in countries where the

Figure 5.4 – Television Market in Europe, 2009: Public vs. Private Audience Shares



Notes:

1. Source: EAO (2010). Calculations made by the author.
2. The scale varies between -100 (commercial channels have 100% of audience share in the country) and 100 (PBS channels have 100% of audience share in the country).

Then, we have several European countries where there seems to be an equilibrium between the audiences of public and private broadcasters – Italy, Finland and Flanders are the stronger example of dualism, but the same can be said about audience markets in Sweden, the UK and Poland. The Polish TV market is actually the most dual system of the CEE countries under study; the Polish PBS has been able to compete side by side with commercial broadcasters since the early 2000s (Filas & Planeta, 2009).

The Italian case deserves special attention due to its unusual historical developments. Television in Italy was entirely public until the 1970s, when the proliferation of small commercial TVs offered more diversity of choice to the audiences. However, when Silvio Berlusconi purchased almost the entire commercial network, the result was the creation of a duopoly and a strong division of the audience between private and public (Ricolfi, 1997; Padovani, 2009) that it still observed in the current days, as Figure 5.4 attests.

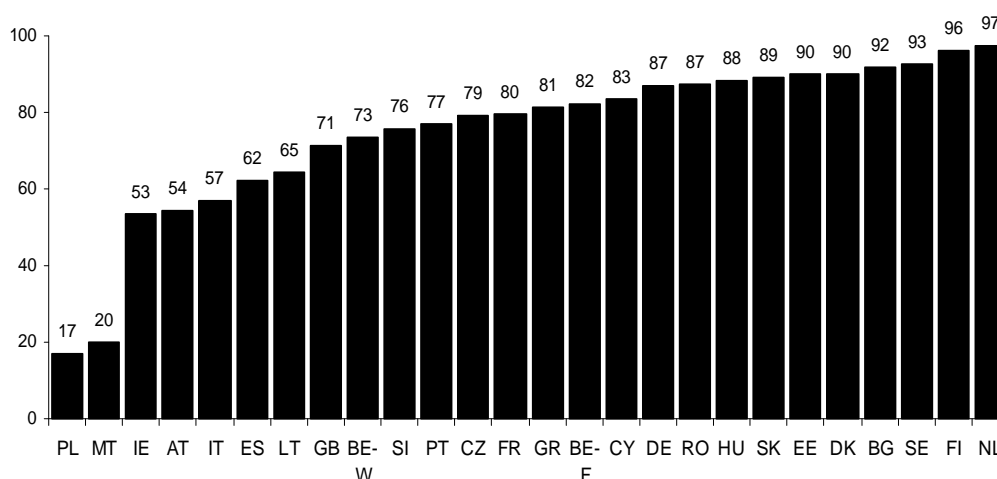
same/a similar language is spoken (e.g.: German channels in Austria; French channels in Wallonia; British channels in Ireland; Italian channels in Malta).

In the other 15 countries, the television market is tendentially commercial. Bulgaria, Romania and Greece are at the extremes of the distribution, characterized by the fact that their private channels have at least more 50 percent points of audience share than the public channels put together.

But how commercial is public television in Europe? A way of establishing this is by seeing how much of the total revenues of the public broadcasters actually come from the State. In the end, a public broadcaster that depends considerably on advertising and private funding is, theoretically speaking, less likely to be different from private networks, since it needs to respond to the same market needs and constraints. In 2009, the majority of the states contributed to at least two-thirds of the total revenues of public broadcasters (Figure 5.5).

The exceptions are Ireland, Austria, Italy and Spain (where there is a greater balance between the amounts of public and private funding) and Poland and Malta, where the public-owned channels are mainly funded by private sources (Figure 5.5).

Figure 5.5 – Television Market in Europe, 2009: State Funding of Public TV



Notes:

1. Source: EAO (2010). Calculations made by the author.
2. The scale varies between 0 (no funding from the state) and 100 (PBS is completely funded by the state).

These two dimensions – audience and funding – are negatively but not significantly correlated (Pearson's $r = -.22$; $p = .287$), which means that there is a slight tendency for public broadcasters to depend more on public funding when the audience market privileges commercial TV channels.

As predicted by Hypothesis 4.3, the television audience panorama in the Democratic Corporatist countries is much less commercialized than in the two clusters formed by Southern and Eastern European nations ($F(3,26) = 8.09$; $p = .001$); but the UK and Ireland are closer to the former group of countries than to the latter. In fact, audience markets in the Liberal and Democratic Corporatist countries are a safe haven for public television, with their PBS channels presenting, on average, 10 and 13 percentage points of advantage *vis-à-vis* the free private channels. Commercial TV, which entered the market in most Southern and Eastern European countries in the last few decades, is stronger than the public broadcasters in the audience market (Table 5.4).

There are no statistically significant differences between the amount of state funding of public broadcasters in these four regions of Europe, even if there is a tendency for funding to be weaker in Liberal countries, when compared to the Democratic Corporatist and, to a lesser extent, the other clusters ($F(2,26) = .985$; $p = .388$) (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4 – Differences in the Television Market in Europe, 2009

	<i>Liberal</i> (Ireland, UK)		<i>Dem. Corporatist</i> (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden)		<i>Polarized Pluralist</i> (France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain)		<i>NMS12</i> (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Romania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia)	
	Mean	S. D.	Mean	S. D.	Mean	S. D.	Mean	S. D.
Relative Audience Funding	9.90	19.09	12.95	22.96	-25.62	19.04	-30.60	21.01
	62	12.73	84	14.46	71.40	11.10	71.71	26.05

Source: EAO (2010). Calculations made by the author.

In sum, it seems that Scandinavian and Western EU countries do present stronger public television panoramas in terms of audience share and independence from advertising, but that Liberal contexts such as Ireland and the UK present broadcasting channels that, even though they operate in a situation of lower state intervention (Hallin & Mancini 2004) and lower funding (Table 5.4), are able to attract, as a whole, a larger audience than the private channels.

The history of introduction of commercial TV in the country does not seem to be related to the relative audiences of public and private channels, or to the amount of funding that the PBS gets from the state. However, public broadcasters do have bigger audiences in stable and older democracies (Table 5.5).

Table 5.5 – Correlations between Indicators of PBS Strength, Date of Introduction of Commercial Channels and Democracy Indexes

	<i>Polity IV Score</i>	<i>Polity IV Stability Index</i>	<i>Polity IV date of last transition</i>	<i>Date of Introduction Commercial TV</i>
Relative Audience	.14	.64**	-.65**	-.15
Funding	-.10	-.04	-.03	-.17

Notes:

1. Source: EAO (2010); Polity IV. Calculations made by the author.
2. Significance: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .05$; * $p < .10$
3. N=27.

5.1.3 Freedom of Press

Europe, as a whole, is a subset of countries in which press freedom is strong, but there are disparities that are worth highlighting. For instance, the Freedom House experts consider that media systems in Italy, Romania and Bulgaria are only partially free, and that Greece is close to the threshold differentiating freedom and partial freedom of press. Romania is the top country in terms of constraints to press freedom both in terms of legal framework, political functioning and economic structure, whereas Scandinavian countries are usually at the other extreme of the distribution. On the other hand, Spain is an interesting case, scoring fairly low in the

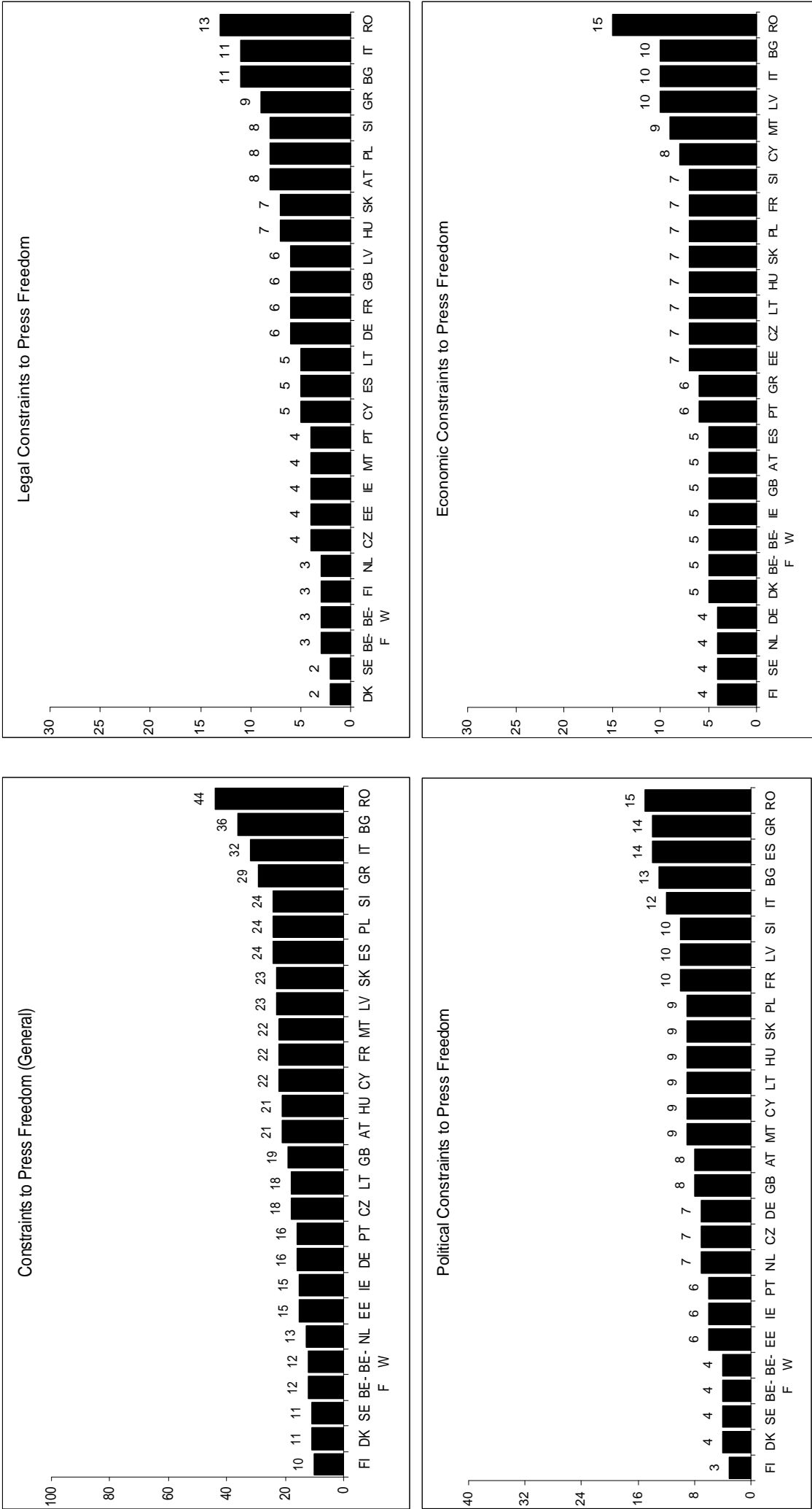
assessment of legal and economic problems impacting freedom, but being amongst the countries where the political sphere interferes more with the way the press works (Figure 5.6).

At the middle point of the distribution, we find countries such as Malta, Cyprus, Hungary, France and Great Britain. These latter two countries are also interesting on their own, since the differences in their objective situation of press freedom assessed by experts (Britain in a slightly better situation than France) are also observed in public opinion data about how free people think that media in their home country are (Kull et al., 2008).

But why are the results for Romania, Bulgaria and Italy so negative? Media elites in Romania are accused of being highly corrupt, even after the accession of the country to the EU (Gross, 2008). The Romanian media system is considered to be just partially free, and marked by things such as attacks against press freedom by state institutions, high number of attacks and threats against journalists, and consolidation of media concentration, instrumentalization of the press, attempts of political control over the National Audiovisual Council, self-censorship and other maladies (Gross, 2008). This is, of course, and fortunately enough, a panorama that is not common in most European countries.

In the case of Bulgaria, intimidation of journalists – by means of legal and illegal actions – was an issue in 2009. Lastly, in Italy, the major problem seems to have been the tremendously high media concentration during the Berlusconi government (while in cabinet, Berlusconi controlled almost all of the broadcast media: the private channels that he owned and the public broadcaster RAI), as well as a difficult relationship between this prime-minister and the press, which occasioned the presentation to the Parliament of legislative initiatives which would have had a limiting impact on media freedom (Padovani, 2009; Freedom House, 2010).

Figure 5.6 – Freedom of Press in Europe, 2009



Source: Freedom House (2010). Higher numbers represent a stronger presence of threats to press freedom.

The legal, political and economic aspects of press freedom are obviously correlated. Legal and political aspects present the strongest relationship (Pearson $r = .82$; $p = .000$), but the correlations between political and economical constraints (Pearson $r = .66$; $p = .000$), or legal and economical instances (Pearson $r = .71$; $p = .000$) are also considerably strong.

Hypothesis 4.5 postulated a relationship between freedom of press and age of democracy. The results are in accordance with the hypothesis – the general situation of freedom of press is worse in less stable, recent democracies. However, the current situation of the democracies in Europe does not explain the press freedom situation, perhaps because it does not vary as much as the other two dimensions (Table 5.6).

Table 5.6 – Pearson Correlations between Press Freedom and Democracy Indexes, 2009

	<i>Polity IV Score</i>	<i>Polity IV Stability Index</i>	<i>Polity IV date of last transition</i>
General Index	-.05	-.43**	.51**
Legal Constraints	.05	-.37**	.47**
Political Constraints	.06	-.45**	.55**
Economic Constraints	-.28	-.50**	.49**

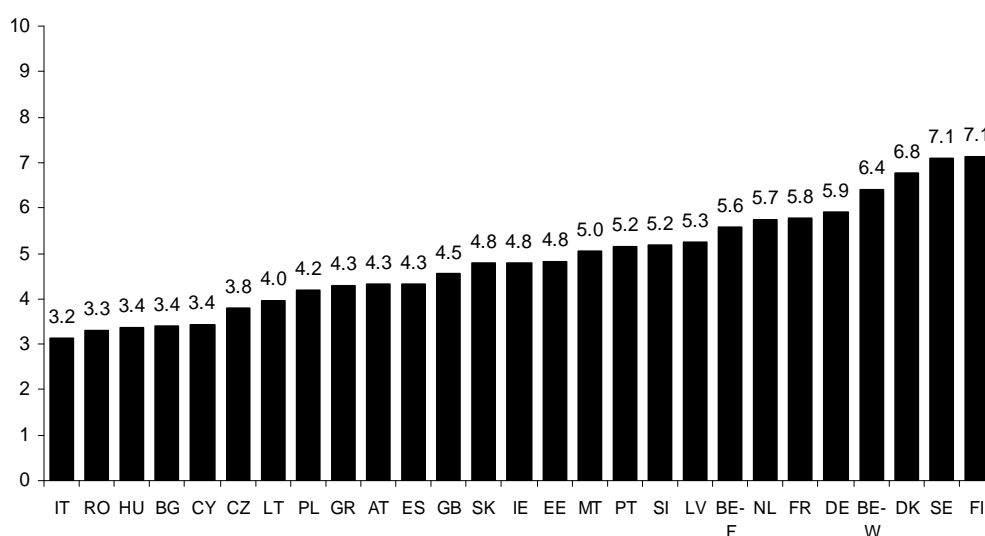
Notes:

1. Source: Freedom House (2010), Polity IV. Calculations made by the author.
2. Significance: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .05$; * $p < .10$

5.1.4 Journalist Professionalization

Levels of journalist professionalization vary considerably in the 27 countries under study. On a scale from 0 to 10, the average value of professionalization for the entire sample is of just 4.87, a little below the mean point of the scale. This means that, *grosso modo*, levels of journalism professionalization in Europe are not particularly high. However, there is a substantial difference between the situation in the EU Scandinavian countries – where the levels of reported professionalization are very high – and the patterns observed for Italy and several CEE states, where the experts were pessimistic about the condition of journalism as a profession (Figure 5.7).

Figure 5.7 – Journalist Professionalization in Europe, 2009



Notes:

1. Source: Expert Survey on Media Systems (Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin, 2010). Calculations made by the author.
2. The scale varies between 0 (no journalist professionalization at all) and 10 (journalists are strongly professionalized).

Differences in professionalization are probably not related to differences in educational background, but with style and the relationship with the realms of culture and politics (Papathanassopoulos, 2007). Italian journalists are described in the literature as close to an ideal-type marked by passivity in their relation with the world of politics, and open support for specific political positions (Patterson, 1998; Donsbach & Patterson, 2004). This is in line with the low degree of professionalization portrayed in Figure 5.7. By contrast, Swedish journalists are rather active – especially in their role of critics of government – but tend to stay away from partisan disputes (Patterson, 1998; Donsbach & Patterson, 2004).

In Poland, where journalists as a profession tend to focus on their own interests, advocate specific ideologies, take sides or at least adopt an entrenched style (Filas & Planeta, 2009; Dobek-Ostrowska & Łódzki, 2011; Dobek-Ostrowska, 2012), journalism professionalization is rated as rather low by the experts. However, some observers do contest that there are two kinds of journalism in Poland: one is strongly professionalized and therefore closer to the Liberal or Democratic Corporativist models and the other – which is majoritarian and, according to some, strongly present in

the public media (Filas & Planeta, 2009) – is weaker in terms of professionalization and puts the country closer to the Mediterranean systems (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2012).

In the same vein, journalists in Romania display low levels of professionalization, which may be due to a lack of organization and solidarity between professionals, weak and inefficient ethic codes, an inadequate professional culture and poor pay for journalists (especially when compared with media managers) (Gross, 2008; Coman, 2009). Accordingly, the evaluation of Czech journalists by the experts resembles the image of incomplete professionalization described by Volek (2010).

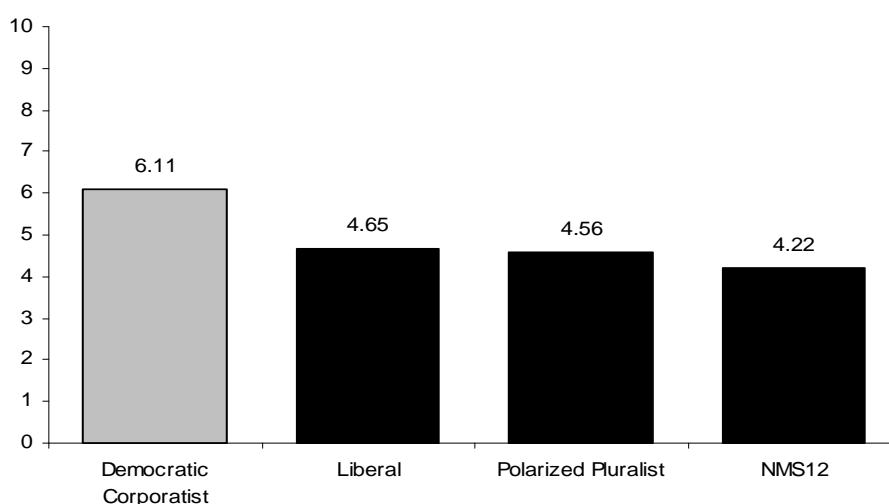
On the other hand, the French news environment has been recently characterized as possessing a weakly professionalized, less independently minded journalistic community: “a journalism that fits the state-centered type of French democracy but may be regarded as inadequate by adherents of a different type of democracy” (Esser, 2008, p. 423), whereas German journalists are described as being actively independent and advocating specific positions, assuming the role of social and political analysts (Köcher, 1986; Patterson, 1998; Donsbach & Patterson, 2004). The measure of journalist professionalization used in this thesis does not support the existence of a different degree of professionalization between French and German journalists. The difference lies probably in the style than in the independence and ethical values shared by such professionals. British journalists are portrayed as neutral and passive, the straightforward type (Patterson, 1998; Donsbach & Patterson, 2004), but they only score average in the journalism professionalization index used here.

Is there a relationship between the current situation of journalism professionalization and the tradition of journalistic codes of ethics? Laitila (1995) provides some information about the date in which the first journalistic codes of ethics were implemented in 18 out of the 27 EU countries. The dates are sometimes directly displayed in the article; in some other cases, the author just refers to the decade of implementation. For instance, the French code was implemented between the World Wars, the British, Czech, Belgian and Dutch documents came to exist in the late 1940s-early 1950s, those of the Iberian countries in the late 1970s (during

the transition to democracy), and most CEE countries substituted the codes of ethics drawn under communist rule with rules mirroring the new democratic context (Laitila, 1995). I performed correlation tests to assess the relationship between the history of ethic codes (measured by a variable displaying the decade in which the first document came into being, in a democratic context) and the current state of journalist professionalization in this sub-set of 18 EU countries (measured by the expert survey index). The results show that these variables are not correlated.

To finish this section on journalist professionalization, I will test the hypotheses proposed in the previous chapter. Based on Hallin & Mancini's (2004) considerations about the situation of journalism professionalization in the transition to the 21st century, it was hypothesized that journalists would be much more professionalized in Liberal and Democratic Corporatist countries than in the rest of the continent. This is only partially true: on the one hand, this last cluster presents a much more positive situation in terms of journalism ethics and rules of conduct than the Southern or Eastern Europe; on the other, journalist professionalization in the Liberal countries is not stronger than in the Mediterranean systems or the NMS12 ($F(3,26)= 8.27; p= .001$) (Figure 5.8).

Figure 5.8 - Differences in Journalism Professionalization in Europe, 2009



Notes:

1. Source: Expert Survey on Media Systems (Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin, 2010). Calculations made by the author.
2. The scale varies between 0 (no journalist professionalization at all) and 10 (journalists are strongly professionalized).

It was also hypothesized that journalism professionalization would be weaker in new democracies, which is confirmed by the data – the correlation between the year of last transition and the degree of journalism professionalization is of .48 ($p=.013$, $N=26$). Democratic stability is also positively associated with professionalization (Pearson's $r=.39$, $p=.047$; $N=26$).

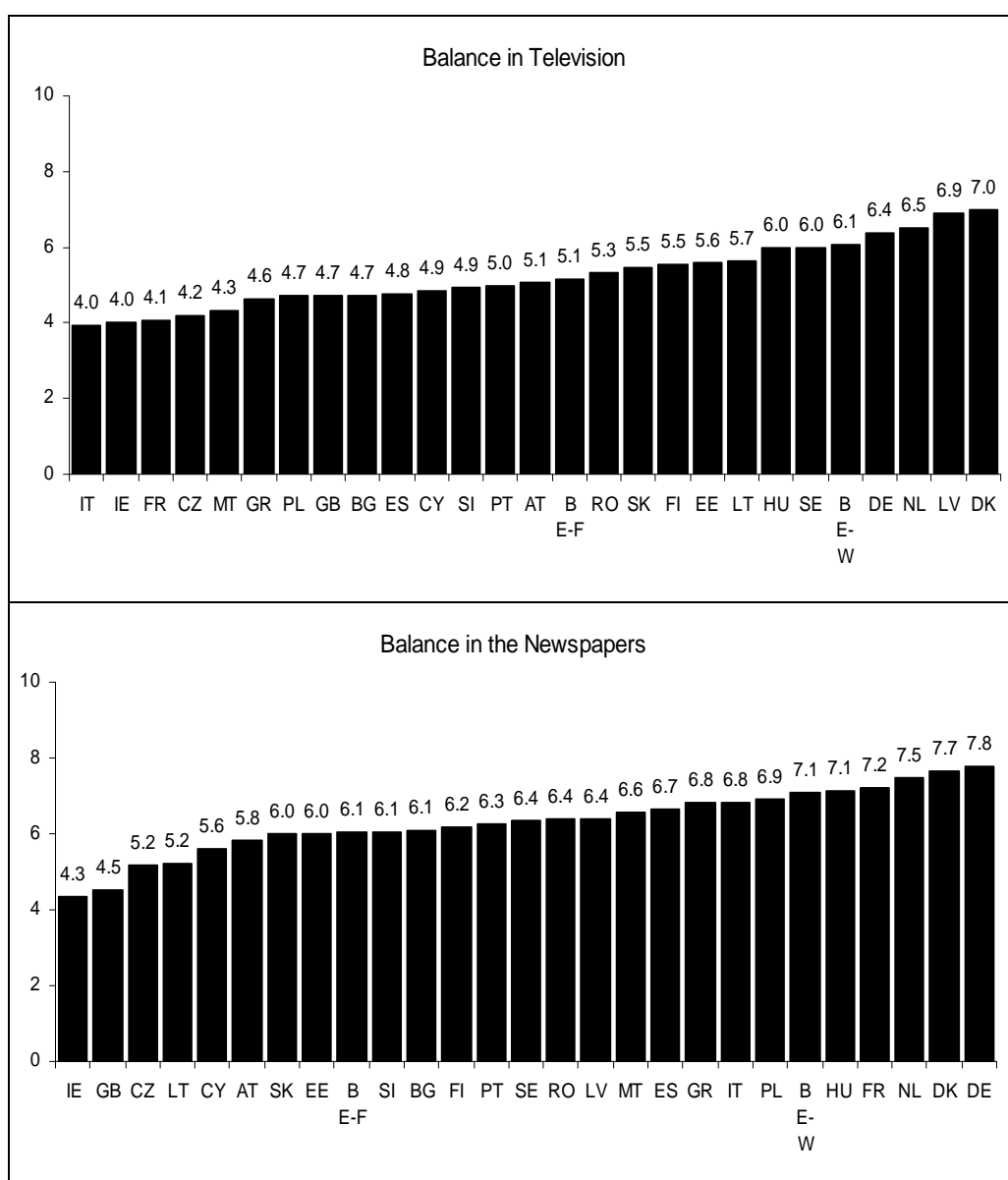
5.1.5 *Partisanship/Balance*

In Europe, the perception of political balance is stronger for newspapers than for the television, a result that goes against the common idea that broadcasters are politically less biased than their printed counterparts. There are a few countries where there is no significant difference between these two perceptions – Ireland and the UK, where the perception of balance of both types of media is relatively low, and Latvia and Lithuania, where such perceptions are equally and comparatively higher (Figure 5.9).

Italian television is, along with the Irish, French and Czech broadcasters, at the bottom of the distribution in terms of the presentation of different political sides and spheres, a situation that cannot be unrelated to the fact that, in 2009, the Italian prime-minister was also the owner of the biggest private broadcasting company in the country – Mediaset. Even if political interference has always been high in the realm of Italian TV, it has given positive fruits in the past – the *lotizzazione* tradition assured pluralism of information and promoted a variety of voices and perspectives in the TV (Padovani, 2009). However, the panorama in 2009 is much more negative than (presumably) it was in the past.

The Danish enjoy more of a balanced television panorama (Figure 5.9). The Polish broadcasters score low and newspapers score high in terms of political balance. This is unsurprising if we bear in mind Dobek-Ostrowska's (2012) recent picture of the Polish media system in the last two decades, in which she describes PBS as "politics over broadcasting system" and newspapers – especially tabloids – as trying "to be neutral because it is better for business" (pp. 34 and 38 respectively).

Figure 5.9 – Political Balance of Television and Newspapers in Europe, 2009



Notes:

1. Source: Expert Survey on Media Systems (Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin, 2010). Calculations made by the author.
2. The scale varies between 0 (strong bias, no political balance at all) and 10 (no bias, strong political balance).

The comparison of these results with previous findings allows the identification of interesting patterns of similarity and difference. For instance, the press system in countries such as Germany, Belgium or the Finland was characterized by a high degree of internal diversity (or neutrality) in 1990 (Voltmer, 2000). The German situation is similar nineteen years later – in fact, Germany is the country where the assessment

of newspaper balance is higher, followed by Denmark and the Netherlands. As regards Belgium, the situation in Wallonia is tendentially more positive than in Flanders; finally, Finland is no longer amongst the countries in which newspaper diversity is stronger (Figure 5.9).

On the other hand, in 1990 the Italian press system had low diversity of content and was marked by almost no internal diversity – the weight of neutral newspapers was close to zero (Voltmer, 2000). The situation seems to have improved considerably since then – even if Italian TV is considered to be poorly balanced, newspapers in Italy were granted a considerably high grade in terms of political balance.

In the UK, during the 1970s and 1980s, most viewers considered that British television was not biased towards a specific political party (Gunter & Svennevig, 1988). On the other hand, the British press from the early 1990s is considered to be partisan: most of the newspapers are traditionally pro-Conservative, but seem to have just a marginal impact in the political sphere (Curtice, 1997; Voltmer, 2000). The experts do see newspapers as biased, but their perceptions on television bias in Britain show that the panorama may have become worse since the 1980s – in fact, there is no difference between the average assessments of the two kinds of outlets in the case of the UK (Figure 5.9).

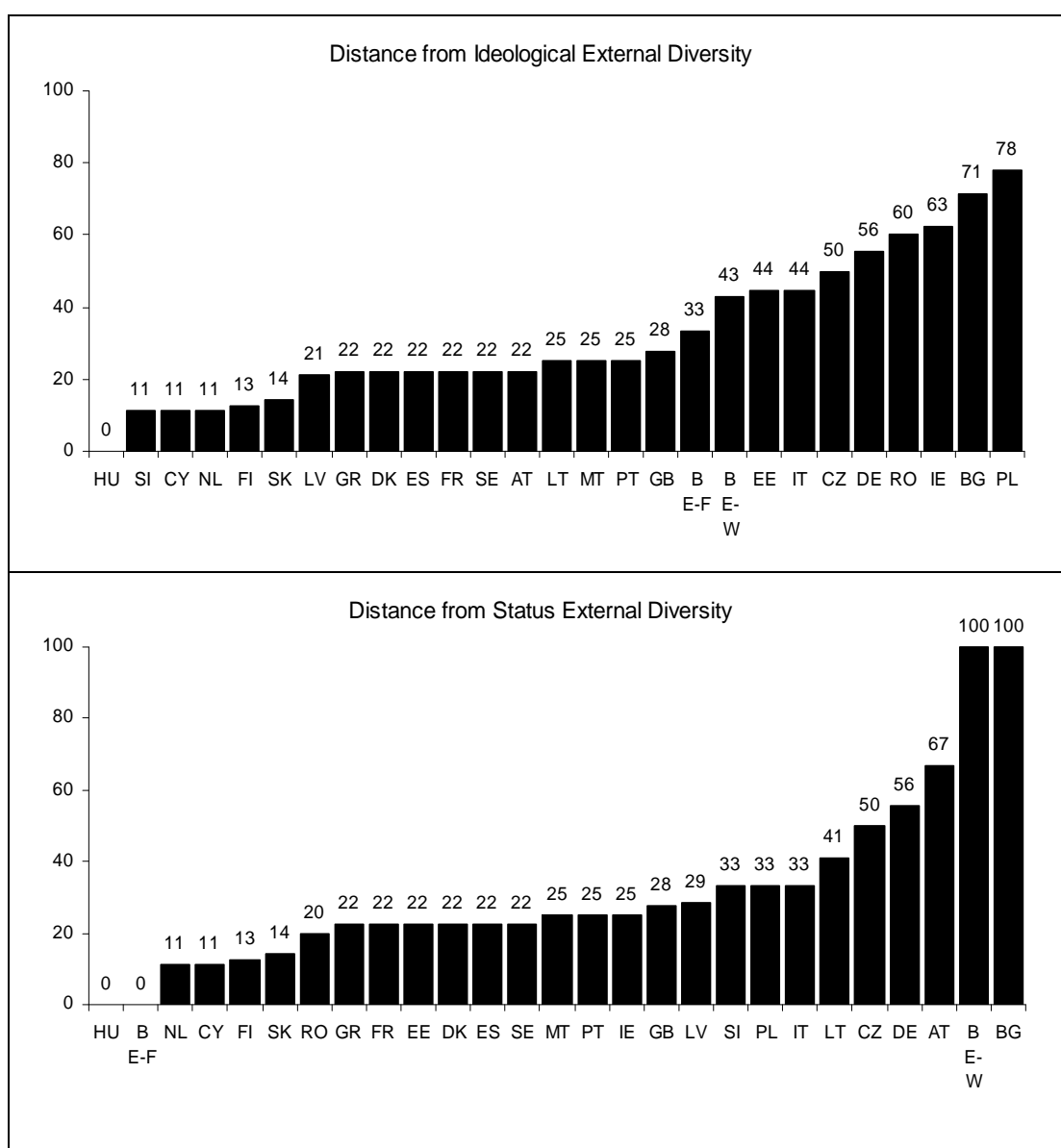
Lastly, the situation in Ireland is fairly similar to what it was twenty years ago in terms of the degree of political internal diversity in the press; on the other hand, Danish and, to a lesser extent, Swedish, Greek and Spanish newspapers seem to be more politically balanced now than twenty years ago (Voltmer, 2000; Figure 5.9).

What about external diversity?⁷⁵ In 1990, Ireland and Greece were at the top of the scale in terms of press diversity (in ideological terms), whereas Sweden and Belgium presented more modest patterns (Voltmer, 2000). The measures of external diversity used here do not refer only to newspapers, so the degree of comparability is compromised. However, Greece is still close to a panorama of external diversity, whereas Ireland is

⁷⁵ External diversity refers to the existence of different partisan outlets in the country, but that are leaned towards different political parties and ideologies, therefore creating pluralism at the system level.

amongst the three European countries where the distance from a balanced situation is greater – in fact, Sweden and Belgium (both communities) now score better in the measure of ideological external diversity than Ireland (Figure 5.10).

Figure 5.10 – External Diversity in Europe, 2009



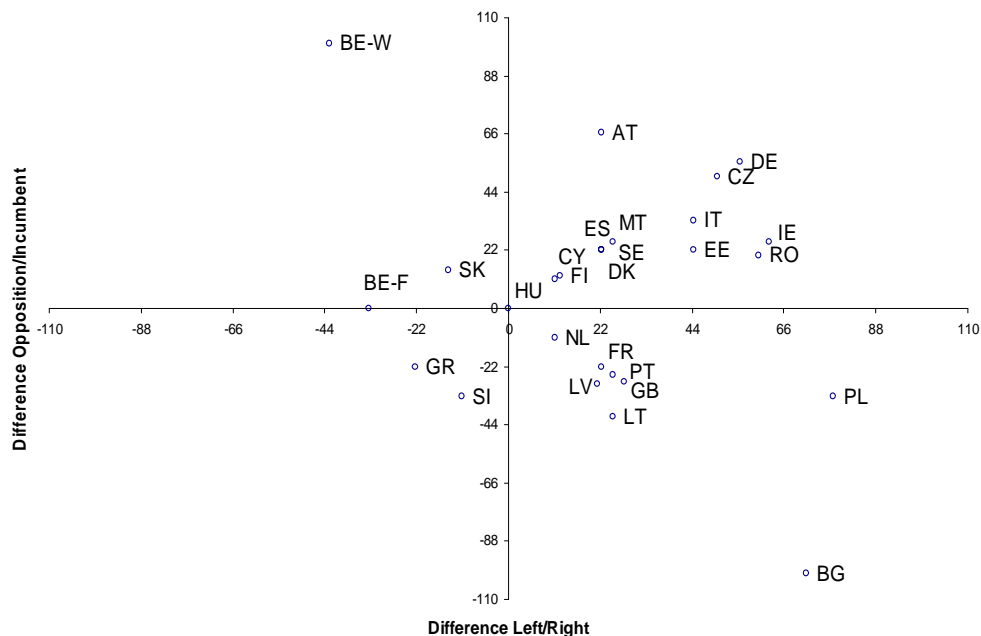
Notes:

1. Source: Expert Survey on Media Systems (Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin, 2010). Calculations made by the author.
2. The scale varies between 0 (diversity is present) and 100 (no external diversity at all).

Hungary seems to be fairly balanced from an external point of view – there is no difference between the number of partisan outlets supporting left and right-wing parties, as well as between those pro-incumbent or pro-opposition parties. Bulgaria, on the other hand, scores quite low on both measures of internal diversity (Figure 5.10).

In Figure 5.11, I present data on external diversity in the 27 European polities, in terms of ideological positions and also incumbent vs. opposition support by partisan outlets. In this figure, the values were not yet transformed in order to represent the distance from an ideal situation (zero difference between the two sides of the spectrum, irrespective of which sides). Therefore, it is possible to see that in most countries the majority of partisan newspapers/channels are to the side of centre-right or right-wing parties – the exceptions are Belgium and Greece. Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia are too close to the ideal point of this scale (0, meaning equilibrium) to be considered biased.

Figure 5.11 – External diversity of media outlets in Europe, 2009



Source: Expert Survey on Media Systems (Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin, 2010)

In terms of the incumbent/opposition divide, there are a greater number of countries in which the partisan media support the incumbent. Wallonia is a true example of this, whereas Bulgaria is an interesting case where all the partisan media identified in this study – including the public broadcaster – presented a bias towards the opposition parties (Figure 5.11).

Unlike what was hypothesized, political balance is considerably lower on TV channels operating in Liberal countries than in Democratic Corporatist nations ($F(3,26)= 6.13$; $p= .003$); in fact, taken together, the UK and Ireland are similar to the Polarized Pluralist cluster in terms of TV political bias. Moreover, the political bias in newspapers seems to be stronger in the Liberal countries than in the other groups ($F(3,26)= 3.46$; $p= .000$). There are no statistically significant differences between the four groups in what regards external diversity, either from the point of view of ideology ($F(3,26)= .517$; $p= .675$) or status ($F(3,26)= .221$; $p= .881$), but the means suggest that ideological diversity is less common in Liberal systems (Table 5.7). These four indicators of media partisanship are not related with current status, stability or age of democracy.

Table 5.7 – Differences in the Political Balance of the European Media, 2009

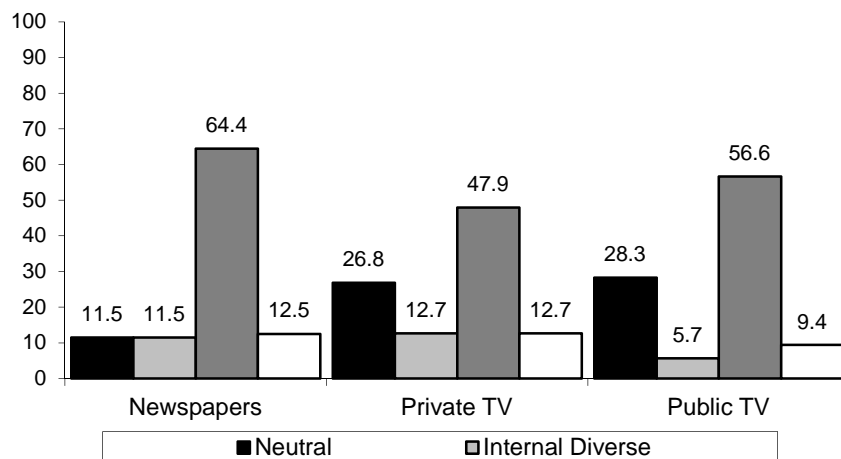
	<i>Liberal</i> (Ireland, UK)		<i>Dem. Corporatist</i> (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden)		<i>Polarized Pluralist</i> (France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain)		<i>NMS12</i> (Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Romania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia)	
	Mean	S. D.	Mean	S. D.	Mean	S. D.	Mean	S. D.
Balance TV	4.37	.52	5.96	.68	4.49	.46	5.22	.76
Balance Newspapers	4.43	.15	6.81	.79	6.76	.34	6.13	.60
External Div. Ideology	45.14	24.55	27.76	15.27	27.22	9.70	34.30	25.71
External Div. Status	26.39	1.97	36.29	34.36	24.99	4.81	31.57	25.42

Source: Expert Survey on Media Systems (Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin, 2010)

The last paragraphs of this section will be used in the description of media partisanship at the outlet level, based on information about content imbalance for two samples: the general sample portrayed by the expert survey (on average, 7 outlets per country) and the smaller PIREDEU sample (on average, 4 outlets per country). In the larger sample, the intensity of bias is just slightly higher amongst the sample of newspapers (mean= 5.03; standard deviation= 1.86) than both private (mean= 4.65; standard deviation= 2.19) and public channels (mean= 4.53; standard deviation= 1.97). These averages are not, however, statistically different ($F(2,227) = 1.366$; $p = .257$). The same pattern is found in the PIREDEU sample.⁷⁶

In terms of type of partisan bias, no statistical differences were found between groups (Cramer's $V = 1.56$; $p = .086$), but it is clear that the number of neutral public and private TV channels is considerably higher than the proportion of neutrality amongst newspapers (Figure 5.12). The same pattern of results is observed in the smaller PIREDEU set of outlets, with the difference that there are no internally diverse public broadcasters in this sample.⁷⁷

Figure 5.12 – Partisan bias by media outlet type, 2009 (Full sample)



Source: Expert Survey on Media Systems (Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin, 2010)

⁷⁶ Newspapers score 5.02 (standard deviation= 1.93), whereas public channels score 4.82 (standard deviation= 1.96) and private channels score 4.62 (standard deviation= 2.03). The differences are not statistically significant ($F(2,137) = .464$; $p = .630$).

⁷⁷ The overall differences are not statistically significant – Cramer's $V = .138$; $p = .510$).

5.1.5 Relationship between Media System Dimensions

In this section, I will address the possibility that the five media system characteristics are not fully independent dimensions (as Hallin & Mancini tend to define them in 2004), but interrelated constructs. I start by analysing correlations between the dimensions under analysis and then focus on specific patterns of relationship. I chose to use correlations for the system-level analysis, instead of regression analysis, because I do not want to establish hierarchical relationships between the dimensions at stake, i.e., decide which ones would be independent variables or causes and which ones would be consequences, or dependent variables. Therefore, no assumptions are made about the directions of causality in this section of the present chapter.

Let us start with journalist professionalization. Legal, political and economic constraints seem to be associated with a lower degree of journalism professionalization, but settings where public broadcasters are able to attract relatively larger audience shares foster professionalization of media workers. Journalist professionalization also seems to be moderately related to political balance in TV and newspapers, degree of cable dissemination in the country and qualitative diversity of the press market (Table 5.8). There are no statistically significant relationships between journalism professionalization and imbalance in use of audiovisual vs. print media, gender gaps, external diversity or number of newspapers.

The relationship between freedom of press and journalism professionalization deserves to be illustrated in more detail. For purposes of parsimony, I will use the general index of press freedom, instead of the three sub-indexes; its correlation with journalism professionalization is – of course – strong and similar to the ones reported for legal, political and economic aspects of freedom (Pearson's $r = -.73$; $p=000$). Romania, Italy and Bulgaria do present similar patterns of low professionalization and an only partially free press, whereas Scandinavian countries – which are considered to have particularly free presses – present high levels of professionalization (Figure 5.13).

Table 5.8 – Correlations between journalist professionalization and other dimensions of media systems

	<i>Journalism Professionalization</i>
Legal Constraints	-.70***
Political Constraints	-.72***
Economic Constraints	-.62**
Balance TV	.50**
Balance Newspapers	.32*
Relative Audience	.60**
Cable Dissemination	.48**
Differences Tabloids/Reference NP	.39**
Average Circulation/Million People	.70***

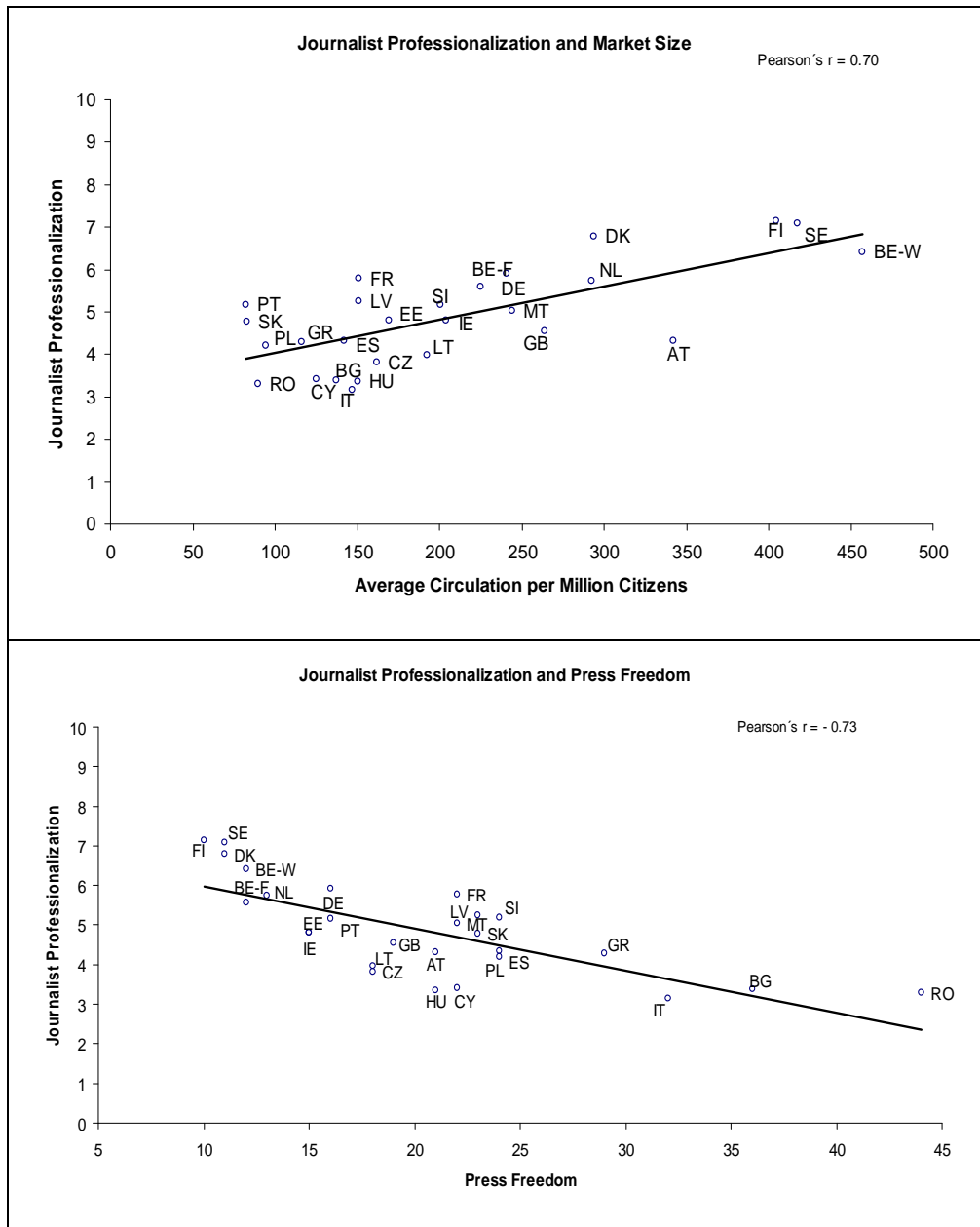
Notes:

1. Only statistically significant correlations are reported in the table.
2. Sources: EAO (2010); WAN (2010); Freedom House (2010); Expert Survey on Media Systems (Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin, 2010). Calculations made by the author
3. Significance: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .05$; * $p < .10$
4. $N = 27$.

What about the relationship between market size and professionalization? Hanretty (2011) reports a relationship between professionalization (measured by year of union formation) and size of press market: bigger – and therefore richer – press companies can afford to contribute to the creation of a well-paid, autonomous journalistic profession. The same pattern is observed with my measures of journalism professionalization (expert opinions) and size of press market (operationalized by the average newspaper circulation per million citizens): bigger markets – such as Finland or Sweden – are indeed associated with more professionalized journalist communities than smaller markets such as Poland or Romania (Table 5.8; Figure 5.13).

Let us now move to the analysis of the relationship between freedom of press and other dimensions. Aside from journalism professionalization, press freedom is also strongly associated with commercialization of the TV market (political, legal and economic constraints are stronger in settings where PBS fail to attract audiences), and market size (greater constraints in smaller markets – a pattern already seen by Nixon in 1960, as reported by Becker, Vlad & Nusser, 2007) (Table 5.9).

Figure 5.13 – Journalism Professionalization, Market Size and Press Freedom, 2009



Sources: WAN (2010); Freedom House (2010); Expert Survey on Media Systems (Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin, 2010). Calculations made by the author.

The differentiation between legal, political and economic aspects of press freedom not only produces differences in the intensity of the relationship between press freedom and other dimensions, but also allows one to see that those aspects might have different correlates. For instance, economic constraints are associated with lower print media qualitative diversity, but political and legal constraints seem not to be connected with

this phenomenon. Therefore, diversity (always in the sense of a stronger investment on quality and depth) may be possible only when there are no economic limits to the work of journalists. Moreover, political interferences in the realm of the press are associated with gender gaps and a stronger imbalance in terms of newspaper reading vs. TV exposure – this may mean that political pressures on the press are easier in less developed media markets, where hard news consumption via print media is not a widespread habit. Lastly, legal and political constraints are moderately and negatively associated with market size and political balance in television, whereas legal impositions are connected with less external diversity (Table 5.9).

Table 5.9 – Correlations between press freedom and other dimensions of media systems

	<i>Legal Constraints</i>	<i>Political Constraints</i>	<i>Economic Constraints</i>
Journalism professionalization	-.70***	-.72***	-.62**
Relative Audience	-.56**	-.67***	-.54**
Balance TV	-.34*	-.37*	---
External Diversity Ideology	.34*	---	---
Differences Tabloid/Reference	---	---	-.60**
Gender Gap	---	.41*	---
Average Circulation/Million	-.55**	-.67***	-.57**
Imbalance	---	.57**	---
Choice TV	---	---	---
Cable Dissemination	-.33*	-.44**	---

Notes:

1. Only statistically significant correlations are reported in the table.
2. Sources: EAO (2010); WAN (2010); Freedom House (2010); Expert Survey on Media Systems (Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin, 2010). Calculations made by the author
3. Significance: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .05$; * $p < .10$
4. N= 15 to 27.

The strength of PBS in the audience market seems to be correlated to journalism professionalization and some indicators of market development, and negatively associated with threats to freedom of press, gender gaps in newspaper readership and imbalance in the use of audiovisual and printed outlets (Table 5.10).

Table 5.10 – Correlations between TV Market Commercialization and other dimensions of media systems

	<i>Public Funding</i>	<i>Relative Audience</i>
Journalism professionalization	---	.60**
Legal Constraints	---	-.56**
Political Constraints	---	-.67***
Economic Constraints	---	-.54**
Differences Tabloids/Reference	---	.37*
Average Circulation/Million	---	.63***
Number of Titles	---	---
Gender Gap	---	-.37*
Imbalance	---	-.46*
Balance TV	.48**	---
External Diversity Ideology	-.32*	---
Cable Dissemination		.52**

Notes:

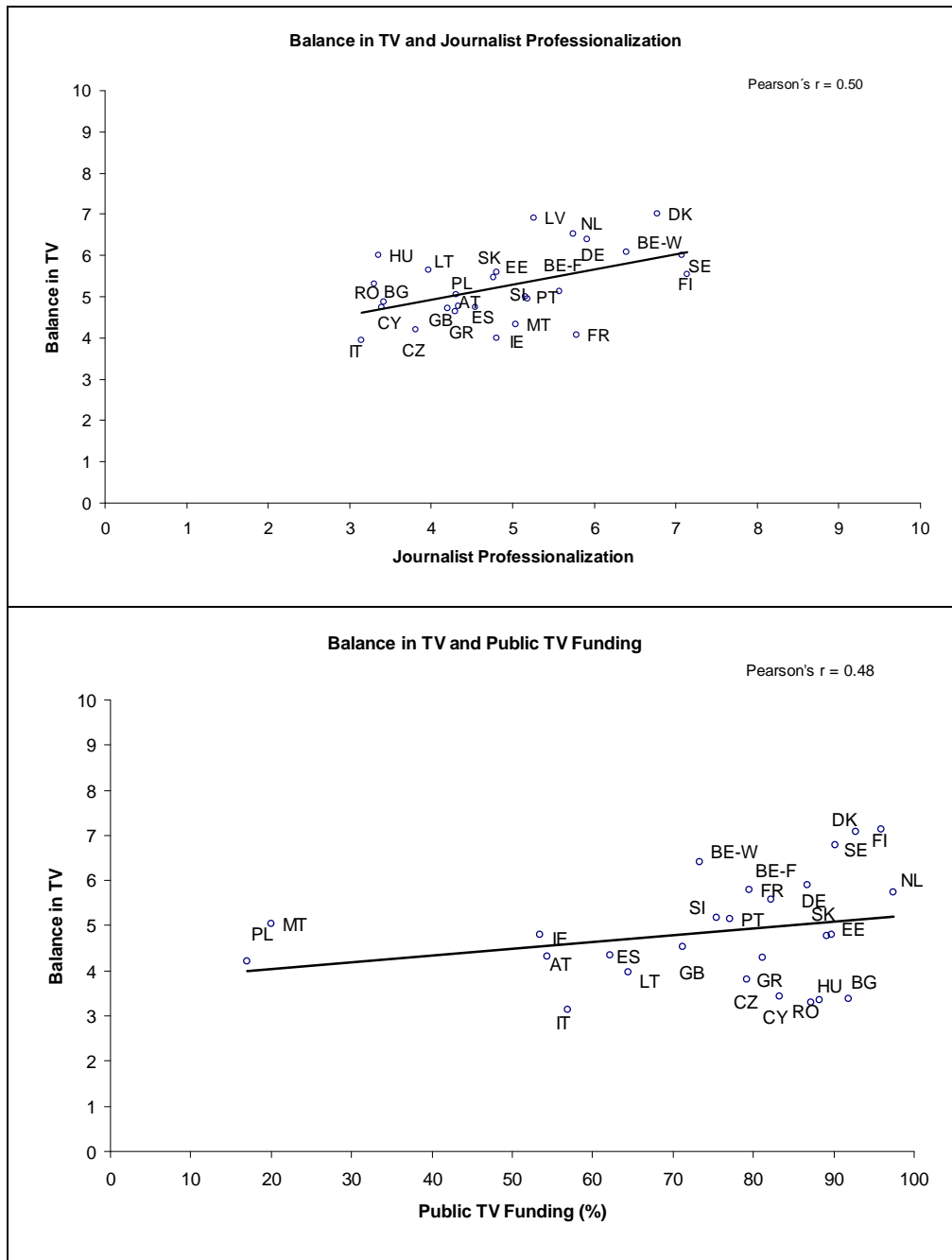
1. Only statistically significant correlations are reported in the table.
2. Sources: EAO (2010); WAN (2010); Freedom House (2010); Expert Survey on Media Systems (Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin, 2010). Calculations made by the author
3. Significance: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .05$; * $p < .10$
4. $N = 15$ to 27.

In the case of partisanship, journalism professionalization is the only – and, I would argue, feeble – correlate of newspaper internal diversity (Table 5.11). However, absence of bias in television news is associated with several other features, such as strong journalism professionalization, minor legal and political constraints, wide press markets and substantial public funding, as well as with deeper differences in content and style by commercial and state-owned broadcasters. Figure 5.14 illustrates the relationship between balance in TV and its two stronger correlates – journalism professionalization and public funding – and shows that, effectively, if outlier cases such as Poland or Malta (which have very low state funding of public channels) were taken from the analysis, the relationship between funding and balance could be even stronger.

The distance from an equilibrium between left- and right-wing outlets is lower in settings where there are few legal constraints to press freedom and higher state funding; external diversity seems to be connected with a lower degree of TV use vis-à-vis newspaper consumption (Table 5.11). External diversity in terms of press support for incumbent or

opposition parties seems not to be correlated with the other dimensions of media systems analysed here.

Figure 5.14 – Balance in TV, Journalist Professionalization and Public TV Funding, 2009



Sources: WAN (2010); Expert Survey on Media Systems (Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin, 2010). Calculations made by the author.

Table 5.11 – Correlations between Partisanship and other dimensions of media systems

	<i>Balance TV</i>	<i>Balance NP</i>	<i>Distance from External Div. LR</i>	<i>Distance from External Div. Status</i>
Journalism professionalization	.50**	.32*	---	---
Legal constraints	-.34*	---	.34*	---
Political constraints	-.37*	---	---	---
Funding TV	.48**	---	-.32*	---
Imbalance	---	---	.47*	---
Average Circ./Million People	.38*	---	---	---
Cable Dissemination	.41**	---	---	---

Notes:

1. Only statistically significant correlations are reported in the table.
2. Sources: EAO (2010); WAN (2010); Freedom House (2010); Expert Survey on Media Systems (Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin, 2010). Calculations made by the author
3. Significance: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .05$; * $p < .10$

5.2 Analysis of Information Environments

Having analysed the variability that the dimensions used to analyse European media systems present in each European country, and explored the relationship between such dimensions, is now time to see if journalist professionalization, development of press markets, strength of TV market, freedom of press and political partisanship shape, at least to some degree, the informational environment, namely the dimensions which are believed to mediate the impact that some media system characteristics may have of agenda-setting strength/occurrence: exposure, trust, quality and diversity.

The analysis will start with a description of the European panorama in terms of information quality, media agendas' diversity, exposure, and media trust, but – since these dimensions are believed to be, to some degree, a consequence of the media system's features in a specific setting – more advanced analytical tools are used to make inferences about their relationship with media system characteristics.

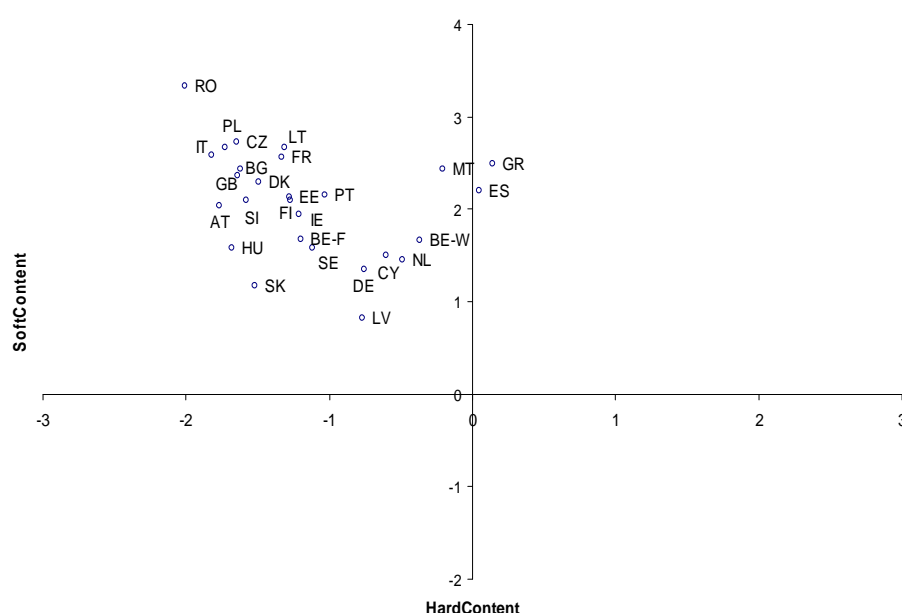
5.2.1 *Quality*

Let us start by analysing the amount of hard news and soft frames concerning the political realm in each of the 27 polities under analysis. Soft frames in news reports vary considerably from country to country (Strömbäck et al., 2011), but Figure 5.15 shows that in most countries experts have reported some degree of dissatisfaction with the amount of hard news and an excessive focus of the media in soft frames when reporting about politics. The only two exceptions to this pattern are Greece and Spain, where, on average, the experts reported a sufficient amount of hard news. It is also worth underlining that there are no countries in which the experts reported soft frames' underrepresentation – there is either enough (as seems to be the case in Latvia) or too much (as in Romania).

Latvia and, to a lesser extent, Germany, Cyprus, the Netherlands and Wallonia are the countries that are the closest to the ideal type in terms of the quality of news situation, displaying at the same time some of the highest amounts of hard news and the lowest presence of soft frames. On the other hand, Romania, Italy and Ireland are characterized by a strong overrepresentation of the soft side of political events, and lack of coverage of hard issues.

The relationship between hard news and soft frames is not linear, as one might expect, but follows more of a U-shaped curvilinear trend. On the one hand, there is Romania, Czech Republic or Poland, where the amount of hard news is highly insufficient and the use of superficial frames strongly present; then we have Latvia or Germany where the amount of soft framing is slightly excessive and the quantity of hard information slightly insufficient; and finally there is Malta, Greece and Spain, where the hard news are enough but there is too much soft content (Figure 5.15). A test of the linear relationship between these two variables produces disappointing results (see Table 5.12).

Figure 5.15 – Hard and Soft Content in the News Media in Europe, 2009



Notes:

1. Source: Expert Survey on Media Systems (Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin, 2010). Calculations made by the author.
2. The scale varies between -5 (the amount of this content is not enough) and 5 (the amount of this kind of content is excessive).

Previous research showed that the amount of news covering electoral campaigns in Britain is greater than in France or Germany (Esser, 2008; Semetko, 2008). However, with my measure of hard news, the pattern observed is different: in fact, the situation in Germany is much more positive than in the other two countries. Since the amount of soft news related to the political realm is much higher in Britain than in Germany, it can be hypothesized that the difference between these two countries in terms of the amount of electoral coverage is due to time spent with soft news pieces depicting the candidates.

A recent study by Brekken, Thordbjørnsrud & Aalberg (2012) allows us to validate and understand better our results for Sweden, the Netherlands, Belgium (Flanders) and the UK. In my analysis, the Netherlands appears next to the ideal point regarding amount of hard news, whereas Sweden and Belgium are a bit below and Britain is close to the countries where the quantity of hard news is insufficient. In the same vein, Brekken and colleagues show that the space dedicated to hard news

in the Netherlands is bigger than in Flanders and Sweden (where it corresponds to around 1/3 of the estimated number of pages) and UK (where it would correspond to 25% of the newspaper).

What about other countries? For instance, in Sweden, the framing of political news as issues is as common as the framing of politics as a strategic game (Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2006). If we translate these results into actual content of political news, we would expect Swedish scores on the measures of hard news and soft frames to be fairly similar – and indeed, they are. The Swedish news media are characterized by a small under-representation of hard issues and a small overrepresentation of soft issues (Figure 5.15).

On the other hand, Strömbäck & Luengo (2008) observed that national election coverage in Sweden and Spain does present similar patterns in terms of framing elections as a game. This is also confirmed here, since those country's indexes of soft news are quite similar. The most important difference is that Spain is portrayed here as having much more focus on hard news than in Strömbäck & Luengo (2008). This might be due both to the difference in time frame (these authors study Spain in 2004, and here the picture was taken in 2009), but also to the fact that my measures of hard news are somewhat different from theirs and – more importantly – independent from the soft news measure.⁷⁸

The second measure of information quality used in this work is a measure of accuracy of the information displayed in the newspapers and television news programmes. Accuracy is not connected with the amount of hard news, but it is inversely correlated with the strong use of soft frames and focus on superficial aspects of politics (Table 5.12).

The third indicator measures the depth and completeness of the analysis offered by the media in Europe. This feature is related to the other measures of information quality, but only partially: the amount of analysis

⁷⁸ The authors use the terms “game framing” (the definition of which is quite similar to my definition of soft news) and “issue framing”, referring to stories that were coded as focusing on issues and issue positions. The measure of issue framing is not independent from the measure of game framing; in fact, both categories are considered to be mutually exclusive, since they take as a unit of analysis a single story. In this dissertation, however, the unit of analysis is the common trend in the general pool of news (assessed by experts).

is just moderately correlated with the quantity of hard news and information accuracy, and not related at all to soft news/frames (Table 5.12).

Table 5.12 – Pearson Correlations between Indicators of Information Quality, 2009

	<i>Hard News</i>	<i>Soft News</i>	<i>Accuracy</i>
<i>Hard News</i>			
<i>Soft News</i>	-.33*		
<i>Accuracy</i>	.24	-.58**	
<i>Analysis</i>	.47**	-.20	.51**

Notes:

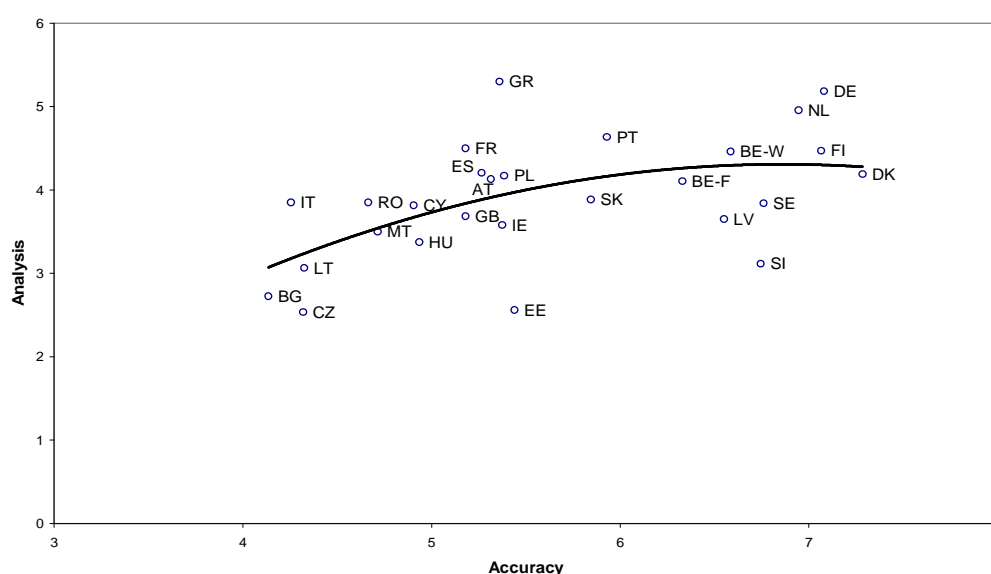
1. Source: Expert Survey on Media Systems (Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin, 2010)
2. Significance: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .05$; * $p < .10$

There is considerable variation in the degree of information accuracy in the European media systems – Bulgaria, Italy, Latvia and Czech Republic offer, on average, relatively inaccurate information, whereas information in Denmark is the most accurate in Europe (Figure 5.16).

In terms of analysis, the general impression is that the quantity of analysis is low across Europe, the degree of superficiality being more problematic in some countries (several of them in Eastern Europe) than others (most of them in Western and Southern Europe). The Bulgarian, Czech and Estonian settings are characterized by very low amounts of analysis of daily events by their media, while Netherlands, Greece and Germany present the higher averages, even if they do not go much above the mean point of the scale.

The relationship between these two variables is rather interesting; especially since one ranges much more widely than the other. Several countries appear as interesting cases in this context – Greece, where levels of accuracy and analysis are similar, and close to the mean point of the scale; and Slovenia, where the information is accurate but superficial; Germany, where the information is accurate and the degree of analysis is satisfactory, and Bulgaria and Czech Republic, where the information offered is both superficial and not very accurate (Figure 5.16).

Figure 5.16 – Accuracy and Analysis in the News Media in Europe, 2009



Notes:

1. Source: Expert Survey on Media Systems (Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin, 2010). Calculations made by the author.
2. The scales vary between 0 (absence of analysis/accuracy) and 10 (strong presence of analysis/accuracy).

How powerful are media systems characteristics in predicting the amount of information quality in the European media? At the national level, six models were tested, one for each dependent variable. The media system model behaved poorly in explaining the amount of hard and soft news and, to some degree, the depth of the analyses offered to the audiences, but explains a considerably higher amount of the variance in information accuracy (Table 5.13).

Before discussing the results, it is necessary to underline that the models where the dependent variable depicts the press or the TV panorama include only the independent variables dealing with structure and partisanship that are specifically related to those subsystems. For instance, in the analysis of TV accuracy, measures of press market development or newspapers' political balance are not used.

Hard news are more frequently present, everything else considered, in media systems in which economic constraints on the work of the press are lower, the press market is homogeneous and there are political influences on the functioning of the press. This latter relationship makes sense if we consider that, irrespectively of the bias, political influence may

mean more time and space dedicated to political affairs. This does not mean that partisan news are hard news by definition, but that the political influence seems to create more space for hard news – probably related to the realm of politics – in the system. On the other hand, the quantity of soft news is not explained by the media system features analysed in this chapter except for balance in TV – it seems that contexts where broadcasts are highly balanced are also characterized by a weaker use of soft frames (Table 5.13). This may mean that biased outlets tend to use these frames more frequently, perhaps as a way to express their political preferences to the audience.

Journalist professionalization and political balance explain information accuracy in newspapers and TV channels. The absence of economic constraints to press freedom also leads to higher levels of accuracy and analysis in the TV realm. The quantity of analysis on newspapers is explained both by political balance and the inexistence of economic constraints to the work of journalists – in other words, balance leads to more analysis, whereas economic menaces tend to reduce the amount of analysis of issues and events in newspapers (Table 5.13).

Table 5.13 – Parameter Estimates for OLS Regression of Information Quality on Media System Characteristics – Country Level

	Hard News	Soft News	Accuracy TV	Accuracy NP	Analysis TV	Analysis NP
Intercept	4.09 (1.45)	8.76 (1.44)	1.41 (1.14)	-.68 (1.15)	.77 (1.43)	-.59 (1.73)
Diff Tab-Ref.	-2.31* (1.18)	-1.58 (1.18)		1.28 (.87)		1.49 (1.30)
Number of Titles	-.27 (.64)	.44 (.71)		-.57 (.55)		-.33 (.82)
Average Circulation	-.41 (.84)	.32 (.83)		-.86 (.61)		-.73 (.92)
Relative Audience	-.09 (.51)	.54 (.50)	.68 (.44)		.64 (.55)	
Public Funding	-.12 (.76)	.52 (.75)	.56 (.67)		.30 (.83)	
Economic Constraints	-3.83** (1.26)	.39 (1.25)	-1.87* (1.15)	.09 (.98)	-1.88* (1.17)	-2.49* (1.46)
Political Constraints	2.69* (1.18)	.92 (1.17)	.59 (1.01)	.14 (.79)	1.55 (1.17)	1.75 (1.17)
Journalist Professionalization	1.78 (1.32)	-.06 (1.32)	2.31* (1.12)	4.55** (1.07)	.79 (1.39)	1.20 (1.60)
Choice TV	-.27 (.67)	-.08 (.66)	-.91 (.87)		-.98 (.71)	
Cable Dissemination	.72 (.65)	-.11 (.64)	-.59 (.52)		-.25 (.65)	
Balance TV	.34 (1.23)	-2.61** (1.25)	-3.64*** (1.13)		2.24 (1.41)	
Balance NP	.80 (1.33)	.40 (1.56)		3.69** (1.02)		4.65** (1.52)
N	27	27	27	27	27	27
Adj. R2	15.4	19.4	77.8	76.8	13.2	49.2

Notes:

1. The variables relative to external diversity, as well as with legal constraints to press freedom, were removed of the model due to multicollinearity issues. In all models the VIF values for each variable are always lower than 4.
2. Significance: *** p < .001; ** p < .05; * p < .10

At the media outlet level, the only piece of data available is about the accuracy of the information offered by each newspaper or TV channel, and its analysis is made by focusing only at the smaller PIREDEU sample, which will be at the core of the analysis presented on Chapter Seven. Public broadcasters appear to convey more accurate information (mean=6.72; standard deviation= 1.05) than newspapers (mean=5.70; standard deviation= 1.88) or commercial TV channels (mean= 5.33; standard deviation= 1.05) ($F(2,136)=6.161$; $p=.003$).

What is the impact of the media systems on accuracy? Tables 5.14 and 5.15 present several models of factors of information accuracy at the outlet level. The first table focus on television channels and the second on newspapers. After the empty model, Model 2 introduces the system-level dimensions of the media realm, Model 3 introduces a measure of political bias of the outlet, and Model 4 controls for outlet characteristics, namely its target⁷⁹, age and (in the case of the TV) public/private nature.

In the case of TV channels, information accuracy is a function of journalist professionalization and political balance of the TV panorama – a pattern of results that confirm the country-level analysis presented above. The inclusion of outlet-level information about political bias erases the explaining capacity of bias at the country level, but not the impact of journalism (Table 5.14). This may suggest that a subsystem panorama characterized by political balance leads to less bias in each single channel, and therefore more accuracy in the information that they provide.

In the country-level regression reported on Table 5.13, I have not observed that the opportunity costs of exposure to quality news are significantly lower for citizens living under public-service-oriented systems (i.e., that quality is higher in those contexts), as Iyengar et al. (2010) or Curran et al. (2012) have. However, the results reported in Table 5.14 confirm that public TVs offer more quality/accurate information than newspapers and private TV's, which is in line with that line of reasoning.

⁷⁹ The variable *Target* differentiates between those outlets that have a small/niche, medium or broad/mainstream target. In the case of TV, it is computed with information about audience share (lower than 5; 5 to 20; more than 20% of share), whereas in the case of newspapers the base information is the circulation per million people (lower than 10 thousand; 10 to 33 thousand; more than 33 thousand copies).

Moreover, accuracy of public broadcasters depend on the depth of economic constraints to press freedom in the country (Table 5.14).

Table 5.14 – Parameter Estimates for Two-Level MLE Regression of Television Information Quality on Media System and Outlet Characteristics (PIREDEU Sample)

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>
Fixed				
Intercept	6.04*** (.16)	4.10** (2.02)	6.05** (1.85)	7.65*** (1.74)
Journalist Prof.		3.18* (1.97)	6.47*** (2.24)	2.87** (1.11)
Economic constraints		-2.56 (1.36)	-2.01 (1.76)	-2.59** (1.29)
Political constraints		1.04 (1.81)	1.65 (1.79)	1.89 (1.28)
Public Funding		-.51 (1.18)	-1.22 (1.22)	-1.87 (1.87)
Relative Audience		-.37 (.78)	-.47 (.77)	-.96 (.64)
Choice TV		-1.18 (.97)	-1.10 (.96)	-1.18 (.72)
Cable Dissemination		.03 (.92)	.34 (.93)	.67 (.65)
Balance TV		2.66* (1.58)	1.32 (2.06)	.80 (1.251)
Political Bias Outlet			-2.44** (1.33)	-3.36** (.99)
Target				.20 (.27)
Outlet Age				2.86 (3.01)
Private TV				-1.45*** (.43)
Random				
Country-level (sigma_u ²)	.01 (.16)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)
Individual-level (sigma_e ²)	1.58 (.24)	1.58 (.25)	1.23 (.24)	.85 (.18)
Wald chi-square	--	21.20**	25.59**	103.04***
Model Fit				
Log-likelihood	-94.43	- 79.43	-74.21	- 63.11
AIC	868.92	859.33	766.34	715.52
BIC	879.21	887.12	834.55	777.15
N Countries/Outlets	27/57	27/57	27/57	27/57

Notes:

1. Standard linear regressions were computed in order to obtain information about possible multicollinearity. Some degree of multicollinearity is expected, but in all models the VIF values for each variable are always lower than 4. Correlation between Balance in the TV panorama and political bias of the outlet is of only -.57.
2. Significance: *** p < .001; ** p < .05; * p < .10
3. All independent variables vary between 0 (low quantity of the dimension) and 1 (high quantity). The dependent variable varies between 0 and 10.
4. Legal menaces to press freedom are not included because they increase multicollinearity in the models.

The results concerning the accuracy of the information provided by the most important newspapers in Europe are presented on Table 5.15. As in the country-level analysis, journalist professionalization is the most relevant factor of quality in the newspapers, but political balance is replaced by political constraints to press freedom. When other things are controlled for, it seems that the existence of political constraints lead to a higher level of accuracy in newspapers – perhaps as a reaction towards the attempted interventions from the political realm? This pattern of results does not change considerably with the introduction of outlet-level variables that also explain accuracy, such as target and age (niche and older newspapers tend to be more accurate than mainstream and more recent titles).

5.2.2 Trust

Media trust /credibility is the second dimension of the information environments studied here. As far as news media credibility goes, most countries are positioned slightly above the mean point of the scale⁸⁰ – in fact, the aggregate average is of 5.78. Finland is the country whose news media are considered to be more trustworthy by their experts (mean=7.90), whereas Italy presents the lower values (mean=3.61). The Eurobarometer data presents a slightly different picture, which is not completely unexpected, since the respondents are different (lay people, instead of experts) and the concepts under measure differ too (credibility of news media in general vs. trust in specific types of media – TV, radio and press).

The aggregate trust index presents, on average, slightly lower values (mean=5.46), and the relationship between the two measures is not as high as one could expect (Pearson's $r = .57$, $p = .002$). Italy and Finland are still at the extremes of this distribution, but now the lowest mean value is observed in Hungary (mean=3.59) and the higher mean value in Slovakia (mean=6.82) (Figure 5.17).

⁸⁰ The scales vary from 0 to 10; therefore, the mean point is 5.

Table 5.15 – Parameter Estimates for Two-Level MLE Regression of Newspaper Information Quality on Media System and Outlet Characteristics (PIREDEU Sample)

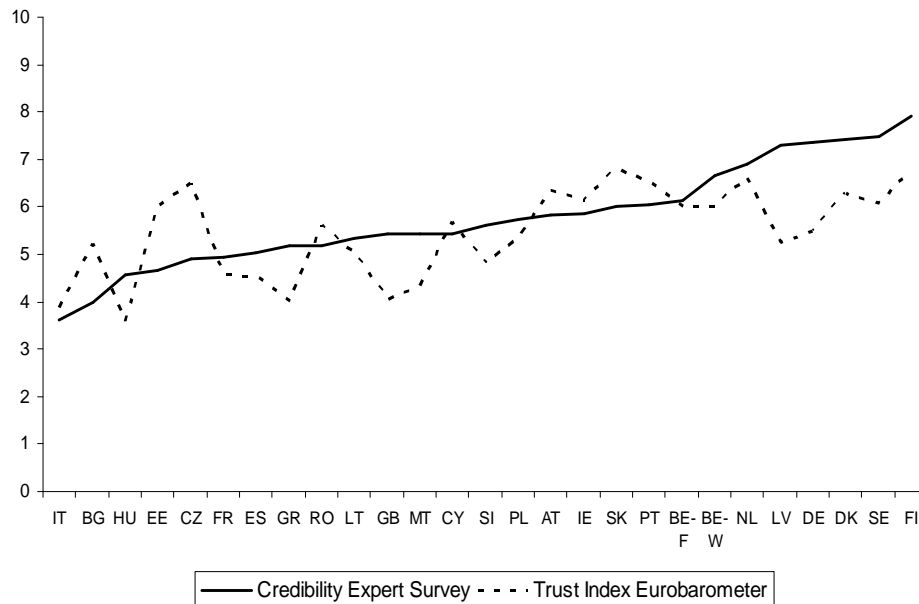
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>
Fixed				
Intercept	5.70*** (.21)	-3.16 (2.42)	-2.53 (2.70)	-1.32 (2.30)
Journalist Prof.		6.86** (2.25)	6.40** (2.32)	6.62** (1.96)
Economic constraints		1.37 (2.05)	1.14 (2.07)	1.05 (1.66)
Political constraints		3.00* (1.64)	3.05* (1.70)	3.08* (1.40)
Average Circ./Million		.03 (1.29)	.23 (1.30)	.07 (1.13)
Number of Titles		-.58 (1.14)	-.51 (1.15))	-.75 (.93)
Diff. Tabloids/Reference		2.46 (1.82)	2.00 (1.89)	-.37 (1.63)
Balance Newspapers		.76 (2.14)	.66 (2.14)	-.19 (1.75)
Political Bias Outlet			-1.09 (1.19)	-1.69 (1.07))
Target				-1.43*** (.29)
Outlet Age				2.81* (1.11)
Random				
Country-level (sigma_u ²)	.01 (.16)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)
Individual-level (sigma_e ²)	3.55 (.24)	2.99 (.49)	2.99 (.49)	1.91 (.33)
Wald chi-square	--	22.22***	23.0**	72.52***
Model Fit				
Log-likelihood	-166.48	- 146.98	-145.46	- 118.62
AIC	338.97	313.96	312.92	263.24
BIC	346.15	337.90	339.27	293.54
N Countries/Outlets	27/81	27/81	27/81	27/76

Notes:

1. Standard linear regressions were computed in order to obtain information about possible multicollinearity. Some degree of multicollinearity is expected, but in all models the VIF values for each variable are always lower than 4. Correlation between Balance in the Newspaper panorama and political bias of the outlet is of only -.17.
2. Significance: *** p < .001; ** p < .05; * p < .10
3. All independent variables vary between 0 (low quantity of the dimension) and 1 (high quantity). The dependent variable varies between 0 and 10.
4. Variables related with legal menaces to press freedom and external diversity are not included because they increase multicollinearity in the models. Variables related with gender gaps in newspaper reading and imbalance between newspaper and TV consumption are not used due to lack of data for all the 27 polities under study.

It seems that the experts might have underestimated the levels of news media credibility in Bulgaria, Estonia and Czech Republic, whereas the evaluations made for Northern Europe, Germany, the UK, Greece, Malta and Latvia are much higher than the Eurobarometer survey data results (Figure 5.17).

Figure 5.17- News Media Credibility and Trust in Media in the EU, 2009



Notes:

1. Source: Expert Survey on Media Systems (Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin, 2010) and Eurobarometer 72.4 (Fall 2009; TNS Opinion & GESIS, 2010). Calculations made by the author.
2. The scales vary between 0 (absence of trust/credibility) and 10 (strong trust/credibility).

The results of the two regression models displayed in Table 5.16 suggest that the idea that political communication experts have of media credibility may be based on different grounds than the feelings of media trust reported by lay people. But let us start from the first models, which regress trust and credibility on the general levels of trust in the political institutions of the country,⁸¹ which is believed to be one major factor of trust in the media (Bennett et al., 1999; Jones, 2004). Indeed, trust in the

⁸¹ This variable is an index composed with data from EB 72.4 relative to trust in political parties, the national government and the national parliament. The raw values, representing the percentage of respondents that “tend to agree” were recoded (i.e., divided by 100) in order to vary between 0 and 1, like the other independent variables in the model. The Cronbach’s Alpha of this index is very satisfactory ($\alpha = .84$).

institutions has an impact on media trust and media credibility, even if the amount of variance explained by this single factor is very low.

The model that includes media system dimensions explains more than two thirds of the variance in the credibility index. The media are more highly credited when journalists are more professional and TV is weakly biased towards political parties; the inclusion of these variables erased the explanatory power of trust in the political institutions. The same model explains less variance in the trust index created with survey data, and the relevant variables are different – the media is trusted more strongly when, all other things controlled for, there are few political constraints on the work of journalists⁸² (Table 5.16).

Table 5.16 – Parameter Estimates for OLS Regression of Media Trust on Media System Characteristics – Country Level

	<i>Credibility</i>		<i>Trust</i>	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Intercept	4.99 (.51)***	.74 (1.33)	4.56 (.43)***	5.90 (1.82)**
Trust Pol. Institutions	2.58 (1.25)*	.23 (1.12)	2.99 (1.31)**	2.81 (1.54)*
Diff Tab-Ref.		.79 (1.09)		-.75 (1.50)
Number Titles		.09 (.70)		-.80 (.96)
Average Circ.		-.08 (.83)		-1.53 (1.13)
Relative Audience		-.36 (.54)		-.16 (.74)
Public Funding		-1.20 (.87)		.53 (1.20)
Legal Constraints		.14 (1.02)		1.30 (1.40)
Pol. Constraints		-.92 (1.17)		-3.73 (1.61)**
Journalism Prof.		4.08 (1.35)**		1.09 (1.85)
Balance TV		3.90 (1.23)**		.53 (1.68)
Adj. R2	6.4	70.6	13.7	28.9
N	27	27	27	27

Notes:

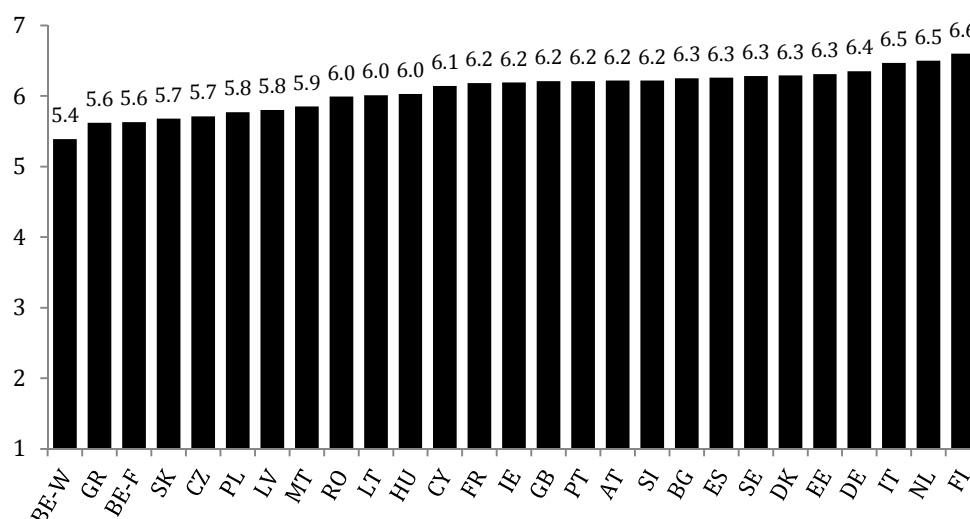
1. The variables relative to external diversity, as well as with economic constraints to press freedom, were removed of the model due to multicollinearity issues. In all models the VIF values for each variable are always lower than 4.
2. Significance: *** p < .001; ** p < .05; * p < .10

⁸² A separate analysis of trust in the press and in TV shows that the former is not explained by any of the variables under study, whereas the separate regression of TV trust on media systems reproduces the pattern exposed above: over and above their general patterns of trust in political institutions, people tend to trust the TV more in countries where there are less political interference in the realm of journalism.

5.2.3 Exposure

At the aggregate level, the levels of exposure to the news media do not vary significantly in the European Union member-States. In fact, the difference between the average intensity of news consumption in Finland (the country whose respondent's are closer to the ideal-type of news junkies; see Prior, 2007) and Belgium-Wallonia (the context where these junkies are less easily found) is of only 1.2 days per week (Figure 5.18).

Figure 5.18– Exposure to news in the EU, 2009



Notes:

1. Source: PIREDEU Voter Study (EES, 2009a). Calculations made by the author.
2. The scale varies between 1 (one day per week) and 7 (seven days per week).

But are these (small) differences explained by media system characteristics? The answer is yes, but only to a certain degree. In Table 5.17, I present the results of a statistical model that regresses intensity of (aggregate) exposure on the media system characteristics that have been used in the previous models. The results show that the explaining capacity of this set of variables is quite low (the model accounts for a small amount of the variance on levels of exposure). In fact, only the factors related with the TV system have an impact on intensity of exposure: in contexts where the levels of public financing of PBS are the highest, the average number of days in which people follow the news is almost one unit higher than in

contexts where PBS is poorly financed by the state. Moreover, when everything else is held constant, commercialized TV settings are associated with lower levels of exposure to news. Unexpectedly, the development of the press market has no impact on general levels of exposure to news.

Table 5.17 – Parameter Estimates for OLS Regression of Exposure to News on Media System Characteristics – Country Level

	<i>Exposure</i>
Intercept	6.05 (.79)
Journalist Prof.	-.13 (.71)
Economic constraints	-.03 (.72)
Political constraints	.36 (.67)
Public Funding PBS	.84** (.43)
Relative Audience	.54** (.28)
Diff. Tabloids/Reference	-.55 (.66)
Number of Titles	.30 (.41)
Average Circ./Million	.10 (.47)
Choice TV	.29 (.38)
Cable Dissemination	-.38 (.37)
Balance TV	-.16 (.71)
Balance Newspapers	-.14 (.89)
Adj. R2	4.1
N	27

Notes:

1. The variables relative to external diversity and legal constraints to press freedom, were removed of the model due to multicollinearity issues. The VIF values for each variable are always lower than 4.
2. Significance: *** p < .001; ** p < .05; * p < .10

Since there is individual-level data available on exposure, it is possible to run the same model in a multilevel context, crossing country-level factors with individual-level patterns of news exposure. This approach also allows for a stronger test of the relationship between media

systems and exposure through the inclusion of control variables: known factors of news exposure such as age, gender, social class, interest in electoral campaigns, habits of discussion and need for orientation (see Atkin, 1972; Prior, 2007; Mattes, 2008; Santana Pereira, 2009). The results of this analysis are reported in Table 5.18.

Model 1 (the empty model) shows that there is a small degree of variance at the country level, whereas the second model that includes our media system variables does not do a good job in terms of explaining that variance. However, *Model 2* confirms and reinforces the country-level regression results – news exposure is still associated with lower commercialization of the TV sub-system and higher state financing of public channels; moreover, the magnitude of its impact is similar to what was reported for the aggregate analysis (Tables 5.17 and 5.18).

Model 3 includes socio-demographic correlates of exposure to the media during election campaigns: age (in years), gender (dummy, 1 being female) and social class.⁸³ Lastly, *Model 4* adds attitudinal and behavioral factors of exposure, such as need for orientation⁸⁴, interest in the campaign⁸⁵ and habits of discussion of political affairs⁸⁶.

⁸³ These factors are measured with PIREDEU Voter Study data (EES, 2009a). Social class is operationalized with data collected with the question “Taking everything into account, at about what level is your family’s standard of living? If you think of a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 means a poor family, 7 a rich family, and the other numbers are for the positions in between, about where would you place your family?”. This index varies between 1 (respondent belongs to a poor family) and 7 (respondent belongs to a rich family).

⁸⁴ Need for orientation is operationalized with data on interest in politics and vote intention in general elections offered by the PIREDEU Voter Study (EES, 2009a). Two questions are used: “Q28 – And if there was a general election tomorrow, which party would you vote for?”, which had 14.3% of the respondents answering that they didn’t know, and “Q78 – To what extent would you say you are interested in politics? Very, somewhat, a little or not at all?”, which had 53% of respondents saying that they are very or somewhat interested in politics. In the sample, 6.1% of the respondents are considered to display a strong need for orientation. In the model, the variable is a dummy differentiating between those respondents and the other media users.

⁸⁵ The original question wording is “Q23 – Thinking back to just before the elections for the European Parliament were held, how interested were you in the campaign for those elections: very, somewhat, a little or not at all?”. The variable was recoded so that higher values mean stronger interest in the campaign; it therefore varies between 1(not at all) and 4 (very).

⁸⁶ This variable was measured by a proxy – a question about discussion of the European Parliament election (“Q18 – How often did you talk to friends or family about the election?”), which was recoded in order to vary between 1 (never) and 3 (often).

Table 5.18 – Parameter Estimates for Two-Level MLE Regression of Exposure to News on Media System and Individual Characteristics

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>
Fixed				
Intercept	6.08*** (.68)	6.35*** (.79)	4.83*** (.69)	4.03*** (.65)
Journalist Prof.		-.12 (.70)	.01 (.61)	.05 (.58)
Economic constraints		-.44 (.66)	-.57 (.58)	-.59 (.54)
Political constraints		.73 (.61)	.78 (.53)	.69 (.50)
Public Funding PBS		.93* (.42)	.83* (.37)	.90* (.35)
Relative Audience		.60* (.27)	.54* (.24)	.46* (.23)
Diff. Tabloids/Reference		-.71 (.66)	-.82 (.58)	-.77 (.54)
Number of Titles		.55 (.37)	.48 (.32)	.45 (.30)
Average Circ./Million		-.09 (.43)	-.20 (.38)	-.31 (.35)
Choice TV		.19 (.28)	.21 (.25)	.18 (.22)
Cable Dissemination		-.33 (.30)	-.40 (.54)	-.39 (.44)
Balance TV		-.27 (.71)	-.34 (.62)	-.34 (.58)
Balance Newspapers		-.40 (.76)	-.37 (.67)	-.26 (.63)
Age			.03*** (.00)	.03*** (.00)
Gender (Female)			-.11*** (.02)	-.10*** (.02)
Social Class			.07*** (.01)	.05*** (.01)
Need for Orientation				.13*** (.04)
Interest in Campaign				.23 (.01)
Discussion Political Affairs				.19 (.01)
Random				
Country-level (sigma_u ²)	.09 (.03)	.09 (.03)	.07 (.03)	.06 (.02)
Individual-level (sigma_e ²)	2.50 (.02)	2.50 (.02)	2.27 (.02)	2.18 (.02)
Wald chi-square		9.04	2546.58***	3526.27***
Model Fit				
Log-likelihood	-47428.86	-47423.59	-44955.27	-44174.49
AIC	94863.72	94978.19	89942.53	88386.98
BIC	94888.13	94978.95	90072.27	88540.91
N Countries/Respondents	27/25230	27/25230	27/24563	27/24384

Notes:

- Standard linear regressions were computed in order to obtain information about possible multicollinearity. Some degree of multicollinearity is expected, but in all models the VIF values for each variable are always lower than 4.
- Significance: *** p < .001; ** p < .05; * p < .10
- All independent variables vary between 0 (low quantity of the dimension) and 1 (high quantity). The dependent variable varies between 1 and 7.
- Variables related with legal menaces to press freedom and external diversity are not included because they increase multicollinearity in the models. Variables related with gender gaps in newspaper reading and imbalance between newspaper and TV consumption are not used due to lack of data for all the 27 polities under study.

The impact of the individual-level factors is in accordance with the results reported by previous research: news exposure is less intense in the case of women, younger citizens and people belonging to less advantaged social groups, and more intense in the case of people that like to discuss political events, were interested in the EP campaign and display considerable levels of need for orientation. Interesting enough, the inclusion of these variables does not erase the impact of the TV subsystem factors on the habits of news exposure (Table 5.18).

What about intensity of exposure to specific outlets? Table 5.22 shows that, in fact, some media system characteristics have an impact on how intense is exposure to newscasts within each TV channels' audience. What seems to matter the most is press freedom, state intervention in PBS by means of funding and amount of choice in the TV subsystem. In fact, when everything else is controlled for, intensity of exposure is stronger in countries where press freedom is less menaced by the actions of politicians. It seems that people tend to watch TV newscasts more often if they feel that there is no political meddling going on, and in contexts where the state strongly finances the PBS.

The effect of cable TV dissemination on network (terrestrial) newscasts exposure is unexpected. Borrowing and adapting the convincing argument exposed and empirically supported by Prior (2007) about the relationship between amount of choices available and news consumption, I expected that less offer in terms of alternatives to news-focused content would lead to stronger habits of exposure to the newscasts. However, the relationship between proportion of households with cable TV and news shows watching is positive. This is probably due to the fact that there is a variable missing in the equation. In fact, the relationship between cable access and news exposure is shaped by relative preference for entertainment – a factor that I cannot insert in the model due to lack of data.

This pattern of results holds even when we control for outlet characteristics such as target, age and nature (public/private). Interesting enough, it seems that private newscasts are associated with lower intensity of exposure vis-à-vis public channels (Table 5.19).

Table 5.19 – Parameter Estimates for Two-Level MLE Regression of Exposure to TV News on Media System and Outlet Characteristics

	Exposure to TV News			
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>
Fixed				
Intercept	4.42*** (.09)	5.43*** (.82)	5.31*** (.95)	5.40*** (1.05)
Journalist Prof.		-.49 (.80)	-.49 (.81)	-.52 (.82)
Economic constraints		-.02 (.48)	-.02 (.52)	-.11 (.51)
Political constraints		-1.51** (.73)	-1.55** (.75)	-1.03* (.86)
Public Funding PBS		2.14*** (.62)	2.11** (.74)	2.04** (.73)
Relative Audience		-.20 (.31)	-.18 (.29)	-.18 (.32)
Choice TV		.19 (.40)	.18 (.40)	.39 (.43)
Cable Dissemination		.67** (.38)	.65** (.39)	.63** (.39)
Balance TV		-.58 (.79)	-.94 (.84)	-1.08 (.89)
Political Bias Outlet			.15 (.56)	-.06 (.58)
Target				.52 (.56)
Outlet Age				-.64 (1.62)
Private TV				-.36* (.21)
Random				
Country-level (sigma_u ²)	.08 (.07)	.01 (.00)	.01 (.00)	.01 (.00)
Individual-level (sigma_e ²)	.31 (.08)	.30 (.06)	.31 (.06)	.29 (.06)
Wald chi-square		24.81**	24.41**	30.32***
Model Fit				
Log-likelihood	-54.50	-43.04	-42.66	-39.56
AIC	177.24	174.78	173.65	149.34
BIC	184.43	195.42	196.43	177.31
N Countries/Outlets	27/57	27/57	27/57	27/57

Notes:

1. Standard linear regressions were computed in order to obtain information about possible multicollinearity. Some degree of multicollinearity is expected, but in all models the VIF values for each variable are always lower than 4.
2. Significance: *** p < .001; ** p < .05; * p < .10
3. All independent variables vary between 0 (low quantity of the dimension) and 1 (high quantity). The dependent variable varies between 1 and 7.
4. Variables related with legal menaces to press freedom and external diversity are not included because they increase multicollinearity in the models.

There is not much to say about the media system's impact on frequency of newspaper readership. Once again, the absence of political constraints to press freedom is the most relevant factor of exposure; interestingly enough, newspapers that hold larger shares of the market are also more frequently read by their audiences (Table 5.20).

Table 5.20 – Parameter Estimates for Two-Level MLE Regression of Exposure to Newspapers on Media System and Outlet Characteristics

	Exposure to Newspapers			
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>
Fixed				
Intercept	3.58*** (.10)	3.58** (1.21)	2.98** (1.31)	2.93** (1.31)
Journalist Prof.		-.42 (1.12)	-.16 (1.15)	-.46 (1.16)
Economic constraints		.70 (1.02)	.84 (1.03)	.74 (1.02)
Political constraints		-1.22* (.72)	-1.42* (.84)	-1.19* (.74)
Diff. Tabloids/Reference		-.48 (.91)	-.23 (.94)	-.37 (.96)
Number of Titles		-.07 (.57)	-.10 (.58)	-.01 (.57)
Average Circ./Million		.88 (.64)	.77 (.65)	.43 (.66)
Balance Newspapers		.76 (1.07)	.81 (1.07)	1.45 (1.07)
Political Bias Outlet			.60 (.46)	.50 (.43)
Target				.34** (.11)
Outlet Age				.21 (.43)
Random				
Country-level (sigma_u ²)	.17 (.08)	.13 (.08)	.13 (.09)	.13 (.09)
Individual-level (sigma_e ²)	.35 (.07)	.35 (.07)	.35 (.07)	.25 (.05)
Wald chi-square		10.79	12.26	24.50**
Model Fit				
Log-likelihood	-85.62	-76.18	-75.19	-61.56
AIC	177.24	172.36	172.37	149.11
BIC	184.43	196.31	198.72	179.41
N Countries/Outlets	27/81	27/81	27/81	27/76

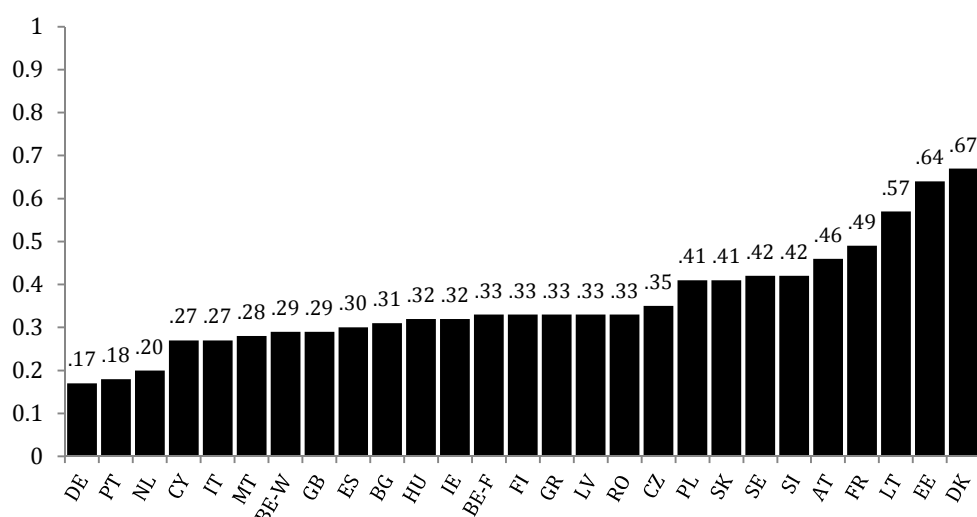
Notes:

1. Standard linear regressions were computed in order to obtain information about possible multicollinearity. Some degree of multicollinearity is expected, but in all models the VIF values for each variable are always lower than 4.
2. Significance: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .05$; * $p < .10$
3. All independent variables vary between 0 (low quantity of the dimension) and 1 (high quantity). The dependent variable varies between 1 and 7.
4. Variables related with legal menaces to press freedom and external diversity are not included because they increase multicollinearity in the models.

5.2.4 Media Agenda Diversity

In each country, the relationship between the agendas of the major media outlets gives us an interesting insight on how diverse these agendas are. Throughout Europe, the intra-country diversity of media agendas varies considerably (Figure 5.19). For instance, in the Netherlands, Portugal and Germany, the agendas of the major TV newscasts and newspapers are quite similar in what regards space devoted to different issues, while in Denmark and two Baltic countries (Estonia and Lithuania) media agendas were considerable more diverse. It is worth noting that, as a whole, media agendas tend to be rather homogeneous in the majority of the European Union member-States (Figure 5.19).

Figure 5.5 – Correlation between Media Outlet Agendas in Europe, 2009



Source: PIREDEU Media Study (EES, 2009b). Calculations made by the author.

The media system characteristics do not explain a great deal of the degrees of diversity or homogeneity of media agendas in the European countries under study. In fact, the only variable that is significantly associated with agenda diversity is relative audience of public broadcasters. In contexts where public channels are stronger than their private competitors, media agendas are more diverse than those produced in highly commercialized systems (Table 5.21).

Table 5.21 – Parameter Estimates for OLS Regression of Media Agenda Diversity on Media System Characteristics – Country Level

	<i>Agenda Diversity</i>
Intercept	.41 (.36)
Journalist Prof.	.12 (.33)
Economic constraints	-.16 (.31)
Political constraints	.23 (.29)
Public Funding PBS	.16 (.19)
Relative Audience	.28* (.12)
Diff. Tabloids/Reference	-.37 (.29)
Number of Titles	-.16 (.18)
Average Circ./Million	-.05 (.21)
Choice TV	-.06 (.17)
Cable Dissemination	-.18 (.31)
Balance TV	.20 (.31)
Balance Newspapers	.01 (.39)
Adj. R2	3.3
N	27

Notes:

1. The variables relative to external diversity, as well as with legal constraints to press freedom, were removed of the model due to multicollinearity issues. The VIF values for each variable are lower than 4.
2. Significance: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .05$; * $p < .10$

5.3 Final Comments

In this chapter, the main features of media systems, and their correlates in terms of the informational environment, were described and their interrelations analysed. The most relevant conclusions are that there is substantial variation in the media systems in Europe, and that the politics under study tend to come together in a way that is not completely different nor completely identical to that postulated by Hallin & Mancini (2004). This is exemplified, for instance, by the fact that the majority of the hypothesis

trying to extrapolate from this theoretical model the description of media system variability are only partially confirmed (Table 5.22).

Table 5.22 – Hypotheses Tested: Media System Dimensions

<i>Hypotheses</i>	<i>Results</i>
4.1 Development of press markets will be greater in Liberal and Democratic Corporatist countries than in Polarized Pluralist nations and, possibly, the 12 new EU member states, but development of TV markets will be rather similar throughout Europe	Partial support: Press markets are indeed larger in Liberal and Democratic Corporatist countries. Consumption imbalance is lower in Democratic Corporatist countries than in the rest of Europe (Liberal systems included). TV markets are not equally developed within the EU: number of choices are lower in the NMS12 and in Liberal countries than in the rest of the continent; Cable dissemination is higher in Democratic Corporative markets
4.2 Development of press markets is correlated with age and stability of democracy	Partial support: This is only true for what regards size of press and cable markets and, in the case of stability, qualitative diversity.
4.3 Public Broadcasting Systems will be stronger in Democratic Corporatist countries than in the other groups	Partial support: Audience for commercial channels is much lower in those countries, but also in the Liberal countries. No significant differences in terms of funding.
4.4 Commercialization is related with the age of the democratic regime and of the private TV market: New democracies and new markets will have weaker PBS.	Partial support: No relationship between age of private TV market and PBS strength. Public broadcasters seem to be able to attract more audience than private channels in stable and in older democracies.
4.5 Freedom of Press will be stronger in older democracies	Support: Freedom of press is indeed greater in older and more stable democracies. Current state of things in terms of democratic quality is not connected to freedom of press
4.6 Journalist professionalization will be stronger in older than in new democracies	Support: Journalist professionalization is indeed stronger in older and more stable democracies
4.7 Journalist professionalization will be stronger in Liberal and Democratic Corporatist countries than in Southern and Eastern Europe	Partial Support: The divide is between Democratic Corporatist countries and the rest of the continent
4.8 Media partisanship is expected to be lower in Liberal systems than in other groups.	No Support: External diversity does not vary between these four groups TV and newspaper bias is higher in Liberal systems
4.9 Media partisanship is expected to be higher in newer than in older democracies	No Support: Neither TV and Newspaper balance nor External diversity measures are connected with age of democracy

However, the differences between their work and my own results must be underlined. My analysis shows the existence of several differences between stable democracies placed by Hallin & Mancini (2004) within the Liberal and the Democratic Corporatist models, and most of the Southern and Eastern European countries. This is in line with the reasoning of Bardoel (2007), according to which in Europe, more than three or four models, there are mainly two clusters of media systems, the most significant differences being found between old and new democracies.

In other words, democratic history seems to be associated to the nature of the media systems. Even if the role of democracy's age and stability as a factors/ correlates of media system's characteristics is only superficially addressed in this thesis, the results are encouraging: stable, older democracies tend to have bigger and more diverse markets, finance their PBS channels to a greater degree, have less commercialized TV settings (from the audience point of view) and display higher levels of press freedom and journalist professionalization (Table 5.22).

It seems that, seen within the framework of the EU, Britain is not very different from other Western Democracies not only in terms of market development and journalist professionalization (its press qualitative diversity is similar to the one found in the Netherlands, the number of titles in the UK and France is virtually the same), but also in terms of TV audience (Britain, Finland, Germany and Belgium are truly dual systems) and press freedom. In fact, there is criticism about Hallin & Mancini's (2004) inclusion of Britain along with the USA and Canada in the Liberal Model, instead of within the democracies of Western Europe (Czepek, Hellvig & Novak, 2009). Norris (2009) defends the idea that "Britain and the the United States seem, at first glance, to have almost nothing in common" (p. 334). My results tend to support the idea that this country is quite close to the other Western democracies. Humphreys (2009), in turn, believes that the British system is rather *sui generis*, as is France, Germany or Italy, but my results show that only Germany seems to constitute a truly *sui generis* media system within the EU.

My analyses also show that there is considerable variation within Southern and Eastern Europe. For instance, the new members of the EU do not form media system types of their own, but are close to several Western or Southern European countries. Baltic countries are close to English language nations such as Ireland and Malta (for instance, in what regards development of the press market, journalist professionalization or legal and political menaces to press freedom). In terms of press development, TV audiences or political balance in the TV, the Czech Republic seems to be close to central Southern countries (France, Italy, Spain).

It is worth noting that the idea that Scandinavian countries have shifted towards the liberal model due to diminishing influences from parties and government in the political content of outlets (Nord, 2008) is supported in this thesis. In Finland, for instance, parties still own newspapers but 95% of them declare to be politically unaffiliated (Salovaara-Moring, 2009) – a declaration that we tend to believe in, considering that the levels of political balance in the Finnish printed media are much higher than in contexts where newspapers do not have such clear connections to political parties.

Another interesting remark concerns the issue of partisanship. Several scholars believe that the modern media are not driven by a political logic, as most newspapers were at the beginning of the mass press (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), but by their own media logic (Veltmer, 2006; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). Some argue that “as politics becomes increasingly mediatized, the important question no longer is related to the independence of the media from politics and society. The important question becomes the independence of politics and society from the media” (Strömbäck, 2008, p. 228). The data presented in this chapter shows that there are relevant levels of political partisanship in several outlets throughout Europe, which, in a way, could be presented as evidence against the proliferation of the media logic argument. However, only a longitudinal analysis of this phenomenon will be able to provide an answer to this question, by testing empirically whether the political partisanship of the press is really decaying vis-à-vis the recent past.

The second relevant point of this chapter is the fact that the informational context in Europe is also very different between countries, and in some degree between outlets in each country. The four dimensions of the informational environment studied here – exposure, agenda diversity, information quality and trust – are connected to several different media system characteristics (Table 5.26). This enhances the possibility of media system characteristics moderation of agenda-setting effects being actually mediated by their outcomes in terms of informational *milieu*. This hypothesis is tested in the next chapters.

Table 5.23 – Relationship between Media System and Information Environment Dimensions

	<i>Quality</i>	<i>Trust</i>	<i>Exposure</i>	<i>Agenda Diversity</i>
Development of Media Markets	Qualitative diversity is associated with less hard news in the system, more space for analysis in newspapers and more accuracy in TV reports.	No effect	Exposure to TV newscasts: higher in countries with stronger dissemination of cable TV	No effect
Strenght of PBS	No effect	No effect	Country Level: Public funding is positively associated with exposure; commercialization has a negative impact Exposure TV outlets: Public funding has a positive impact	Agenda Diversity is weaker in commercialized settings
Freedom of Press	Political constraints to press freedom have a strong positive effect the amount of hard news. Economic constraints to press freedom are related with lower amount of analysis, lower accuracy in the TV realm and less hard news.	Political constraints to press freedom have a strong negative effect on trust	Exposure to TV channels and specific newspapers: negative impact of political menaces to press freedom	No effect
Journalist Professionalization	Positive impact on accuracy (both at country and outlet level)	Strong positive effect on credibility	No effect	No effect
Partisanship	Political bias has a negative impact on accuracy (at the outlet level). Imbalanced press settings are connected with less accuracy and analysis. Imbalanced TV settings are connected with less accuracy and more soft frame use.	TV balance has a strong positive effect on credibility	No effect	No effect

PART IV - AGENDA-SETTING

ASSESSING AGENDA-SETTING IN THE EU, 2009

In the previous section, the focus was put on the media system and information environment dimensions which are believed to moderate the occurrence of agenda-setting in Europe. Before testing this possibility, it is important to address the issue of agenda-setting measurement in a pan-European setting, as well as discussing the operationalization of the relevant variables used for the study of this phenomenon. This chapter will therefore deal with these two points.

6.1 Data Analysis Strategy

The main and most frequent criticism that is made of agenda-setting research has to do with the establishment of causality between the media agenda and the public agenda (e.g. Saperas, 1987; Takeshita, 2006). Causality is related to three different features – the existence of a relationship between the cause (A) and the effect (B), temporal antecedence (causes must happen before the effects) and absence of other explanations of B (which is related with both the concepts of spurious relationship and endogeneity). The first two assumptions are usually easy to deal with, the third being the condition for causality – assuring that B is not caused by factors other than A – the trickier.

The best way of proving that the relationship between A and B is causal is experimentation; indeed, several agenda-setting studies have gone that way. However, several scholars have displayed stronger concerns regarding external validity, reason why survey studies – where causation is harder to test – are so frequent in this field of studies. In the realm of observational studies, the control for other explanations of B may be done statistically or, in order to limit omitted variable bias, through the use of panel data that allows for intra-individual comparisons to be made (see Barabas & Jerit, 2009). This latter approaches combine the strengths of survey and experimental designs (Barabas & Jerit, 2009), but panel data is not always available to the researchers or suitable to all research questions.

The first agenda-setting survey-based research suffered seriously from causality-related problems from several points of view. The first studies tried to convincingly establish a relationship between the media and the public agenda by means of aggregate analysis which did not consider the patterns of media consumption of the citizens – their degree of exposure or their preference for a specific newspaper or TV station (Roessler, 1999). The analysis was done by comparing aggregate data units (the individuals as a homogeneous group, and the aggregate content of several media; McCombs & Shaw, 1972), and therefore checking the actual correspondence between the expressed attitudes and the individual use of media outlets was not possible (Roessler, 1999). The researchers would depart from a list of several issues and test the rank-order correlation between the percentage of people saying that each of them were the most important problem facing the country (DV) and the percentage of articles/news shows covering them (IV). Quite often, there was no space for controls nor a clear distinction between people that actually were exposed to the media and the people that were not (and how often, to which channels, etc.).

Later studies adopted a more sophisticated approach. Instead of analysing the public opinion and the media landscape in general, researchers split their survey dataset according to the newspaper/TV channel people said they watched the most, and did the same to the media content. By doing so, they could test the agenda-setting hypothesis in an

aggregate way, but testing the influencing capacity of different newspapers/TV channels over their own audiences. There is evidence that agenda-setting is stronger when the media variables express the content of the medium that the respondents actually consumed, at least in the case of newspapers (Benton & Frazier, 1976).

According to some authors, the problem with aggregate studies is that the agenda-setting effect probably does not happen to the group in itself, but to the individuals in that group. Therefore, there is the risk of falling into the ecological fallacy (Roessler, 1999). The fact that there is a relationship between the ranking of the issues in public opinion and the amount of news coverage they have received at the community level does not mean that the same association holds at the individual level.

To deal with these problems (causality and risk of ecological fallacy), the literature suggests the individualization of the information about the content of the media. This method, used for the first time by Erbring, Goldenberg & Miller (1980)⁸⁷, consists in transferring the information about the content of the media agenda to the individual level. The independent variable is the percentage of coverage of the issue in the newspaper most read/news show most watched by the respondent, whereas the dependent variable is the reference to that issue as being an important problem.

This analysis, made issue by issue, allows for a stronger statistical analysis through the use of control variables and the direct introduction of individual-level moderators in the analysis (the classical method required the creation of sub-groups, as it is done, for instance, in Santana Pereira, 2007). With this procedure, the agenda-setting hypothesis is confirmed if the reference to the issue at stake as important varies according to the salience it obtains in the media consumed by the respondents. Individual-level analysis of agenda-setting tend to report smaller but consistent results (e.g. Erbring, Goldenberg & Miller, 1980; Roessler, 1999; Santana Pereira, 2007).

⁸⁷ These authors transformed the information about the media agenda into individual data, including it in a dataset in which each case was a respondent to a public opinion survey. By doing so, they were able to control the impact of real world cues (for instance, having unemployed relatives) on the importance conferred to the issues (for instance, unemployment).

Other authors refute the ecological fallacy argument, stating that agenda-setting is aggregate in nature, and therefore conferring full credibility to aggregate approaches. Agenda-setting is believed to be about agendas, and not about specific issues; moreover, its students are “concerned with the effects of one aggregate-level phenomenon (media agenda) on another aggregate-level phenomenon (public agenda)” (Moy & Scheufele, 2004, p. 27). Therefore, since agenda-setting is aggregate in nature, it is not unexpected to find that aggregate studies do not belong to a past in which statistical and methodological tools were less sophisticated and harder to use, but are still conducted nowadays (e.g., Soroka, 2002; Wirth et al., 2010). Nor it is surprising to know that most studies of agenda-setting conducted since 1972 were done in an aggregate fashion (Roessler, 1999; McCombs et al., 2011).

In this dissertation, I reproduce the three strategies of agenda-setting analysis presented above, in order to provide support to the agenda-setting hypothesis and answer different questions about the nature of this process. Moreover, since there is considerable variation between countries in terms of media coverage of issues and the relevance that public opinion confers on them, a different twist to the classical aggregate strategy (this time issue-focused) is also implemented (Table 6.1).

The aggregate analysis (either at the country or audience levels) will allow me to test hypotheses concerning the impact of media systems and information environments on agenda-setting. When the focus of the research is the agenda-setting process and not the substantive interest on particular issues, individual approaches lose relevance, because the processual features of this phenomenon are watered down by the disaggregation. However, these strategies can provide a strong test of agenda-setting because they allow for the inclusion of alternative explanations of issue salience in public opinion.

In sum, in this dissertation issue and individual level strategies are used to prove that the relationship between media content and importance conferred to the issues by the public opinion exists and is not spurious, whereas country and audience-level analysis focus on the process, trying to

understand whether media systems and information environments shape the media's agenda-setting capacity in Europe.

Table 6.1 – Four Levels of Analysis of Agenda-Setting Effects

	<i>Issue-Focused Aggregate Level (N=27)</i>	<i>Issue-focused Individual Level (N=25400)</i>	<i>Country- focused Level (N=15)</i>	<i>Audience- focused Level (N=138)</i>
Independent Variable	Salience of Issue in National Media Outlets (TV and Newspapers) ⁸⁸	Salience of Issue in outlets used by R ⁸⁹	Salience of Issues in the Media	Salience of issues in a given outlet
Dependent Variable	Salience of Issue in National Public Opinions	R named Issue as salient?	Salience of Issues in Public Opinion	Importance of issues for the users of those outlets
Individual level controls	No	Yes	No	No
Real world Cues (country statistics)	Yes	Yes (multilevel analysis)	No	No
Issue-level Moderators	Yes	Yes	No	No
Media System-level Moderators	No	No	Yes	Yes (multilevel analysis)

⁸⁸ The absence of radio in this study has no actual theoretical ground, but it is basically due to the lack of data both in terms of radio content and usage. Radio is a particular kind of medium, because it allows for a virtually continuous exposure (one can listen to it while doing lots of other kinds, which is less possible in the case of TV) and is granted reasonable levels of trust in most European countries. Therefore, it would be interesting to include it in the major panorama of media under study. Regarding internet-based media, I do have data about how often European citizens looked at websites concerning the elections, or whether they used voter advice applications such as the EU Profiler. However, there is no data about the use of the Internet as source of information about current affairs; even if it existed; no data was collected about the content of the major online journals and the most influent blogs. Future research shall be enriched by the inclusion of these two types of media.

⁸⁹ The PIREDEU Voter Survey (EES, 2009a) includes questions about the consumption of the most watched TV news shows and most read newspapers in each country. Therefore, each respondent gets information about the salience of the issues in the newspapers and TV shows that they actually use.

6.1.1 Ranks or Percentages?

How to deal with aggregate information on media and public opinion? In early studies of agenda-setting, both independent and dependent variables were operationalized as rank-order numbers, and not as percentages (see Winter, Eyal & Rogers, 1982). In other words, instead of analysing the percentage of news in a given newspaper with the percentage of readers that have considered the issue important, the researchers attributed a rank to each issue, according to their salience in newspapers and public opinion. For instance, the issue that had had the highest proportion of news would receive the value “1” on the independent variable, the second issue would get the value “2”, and so on; the same kind of code was used for the dependent variable. As a consequence, Spearman Rho was used instead of the Pearson’s correlation coefficient. This strategy is still used by a few students of agenda-setting effects (e.g. Wirth et al., 2010; Tanjong & Gaddy, 1994).

This operationalization is, in my opinion, less valid in a test of the agenda-setting hypothesis than the use of raw percentages. At the core of the agenda-setting hypothesis (i.e. the cognitive processes connected to them) there is the perception of frequency with which the issues are covered by the media, and not actually the rank that a given issue assumes in the set of issues. Moreover, the transformation of percentages into rankings means going from ratio to ordinal variables (which implies the use of ordinal regression techniques instead of the straightforward OLS); it also means transforming intervals with a very diverse amplitude into regular intervals, which means adding measurement error into both independent and dependent variables. For instance, let us assume that the most covered issue got 20% of the news, whereas the second got 9% and the third 8%. Therefore, the interval between the first and the second would be eleven times bigger than the distance between the second and the third issues. This is why I use raw percentages in the analysis of agenda-setting reported in this dissertation.

6.1.2 Selective Exposure

In studies of media effects, endogeneity is a constant threat, and can take several forms. To start with, the relationship between media exposure and vote choice is bound to be influenced by selective exposure. In fact, self-selection, or selective exposure, is one of the minimizing factors of media effects – it is actually proposed as the main factor explaining minimal effects of the mass media (Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet, 1944; Klapper, 1960). Of course, if someone chooses to listen to a specific radio frequency, to watch a specific TV news and/or read a certain newspaper because they deliver a worldview that is similar to one's political attitudes and values, there is not much space for effects – it is the partisanship (or other value-related characteristic) that explains both exposure to media and the individual patterns of political attitudes and behaviour.

Selective exposure is believed to be more important in the case of newspapers: on the one hand, newspapers are believed to be more partisan than television channels; on the other, their consumption implies investment in terms of daily purchase or subscription. Therefore, exposure to TV news in some countries is probably less rationalized in terms of ideological similarities between medium and audience than exposure to newspapers.

In a comprehensive literature review, Sears & Freedman (1967) found some evidence of *de facto* selectivity in the choice of media outlets, but the psychological grounds leading users to select information on the base of their attitude bias are unclear – some people in particular contexts prefer information supporting their views, others express no preference, and others still express a preference for nonsupportive information, explaining selective exposure with factors that are incidental to the degree of support of the information displayed.

Moreover, there is mixed evidence about preference for exposure to congruent information in the 21st century. On the other hand, a study of Fox News, CNN and *The Daily Show* (on Comedy Central) shows that partisan watchers do perceive more bias in programs that do not align with their own political perspective; moreover, partisanship shapes viewers'

perceptions of news content as interesting and informative (Coe et al., 2008). On the other hand, it is not true that everyone prefers to be exposed to news that are in tune with one's predispositions. For instance, Morris (2005) reports that Fox News audiences exposed themselves less to news depicting the Bush administration in a negative light and express a preference for news that shares their own views, whereas CNN watchers express a preference for quality, hard news, such as in-depth interviews with public officials independently of their political colour.

How to deal with selective exposure? Some authors (Aarts & Semetko, 2003; Popescu, 2008) use an instrument designed for capturing the part of media exposure that is explained by the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics and party identification. They regress the independent variable on exogenous variables in the system, so that the predicted values resulting from those regressions will no longer be correlated with the error terms in the equations. The predicted value for television watching derived from the regression using exposure as the dependent variable and socio-demographic variables and direction of partisanship (government vs. opposition) as the independent variables is then used as a «selective exposure-free» measure.

How can selective exposure be an issue on agenda-setting research as much as on research focusing on persuasion effects. Obviously, selective exposure based on issue salience does not make much sense. One can argue that people choose to expose themselves to a specific outlet due to similarities in their political or ideological leaning, but the argument does not hold as much when what is at stake is a potential similarity on lists of issues that have salience. On the other hand, one could also argue that someone decides to buy a specific newspaper because the front-page news covers an issue that is important for that person. Issue-based selective exposure is probably more likely for inconsistent, casual, users of news media, but it does not make much sense in the case of people that usually buy the daily newspaper and/or follow the evening news.

However, there is still a problem: selective exposure based on ideology can have an impact on agenda-setting, harming the establishment of causality between media and public agendas. In other words, the

relationship between issue salience in a media outlet and on its audience's agendas may be spurious: the amount of coverage of a given issue by the outlet, the importance granted to that issue and the decision to read/watch a specific newspaper may all be explained by partisanship or ideology. For instance, an Italian citizen who feels close to the left-wing party *Partito Democratico* probably chooses *La Repubblica* (a highly biased outlet) as his/her preferred newspaper. Sympathizers of this left-wing party grant a great deal of relevance to minority rights; in the same vein, this newspaper (written by left-wing sympathizers who share that same ideological agenda) may give considerable space to minority rights. Therefore, the relationship between high salience of minority rights in *La Repubblica's* contents and on its audiences' agendas would be explained by a third variable: ideology.

Due to the constraints associated with the research conducted for this dissertation, no statistical or design correction for selective exposure is used in this dissertation. Future studies should, however, try to establish: a) how likely is selective exposure for each one of the thousands of media outlets in Europe, and b) whether it has an effect in the way that agenda-setting occurs. If the only outlets to display agenda-setting effects are highly partisan and the majority of their readers/watchers share the outlet's political leanings, then the empirical support to the agenda-setting hypothesis will be easily refutable.

6.1.3 Choosing the Issues

The number of issues focused by an agenda-setting research can vary substantially – from 1 to, for instance, 52 in my analysis of agenda-setting in Portugal (Santana Pereira, 2007). In this research, I wish to have a comprehensive amount of issues, in order to be able, on one hand, to test the agenda-setting hypothesis in an aggregate way with just one time point, and, on the other, to ensure variability of issue characteristics in the individual-level analysis.

How can the issues be chosen? The most reasonable option is to select the issues that really got onto the public agenda – that is to say, that were mentioned by at least 10 per cent of the survey respondents (McCombs,

2004). This allows for sufficient variation in the dependent variable at the individual level. But it is known that those issues are usually the ones where agenda-setting is weaker or even absent, because their salience is not due to media coverage but to other reasons (individual situation, real world cues). In fact, in the case of the PIREDEU Voter Survey, the two most frequently mentioned issues were the economic conditions (53.3%) and unemployment (42.5%). Therefore, centering the agenda-setting analysis in those issues only would probably lead to an excessively conservative test of my hypotheses.

An alternative approach is to choose those issues in which agenda-setting is thought to be stronger, that is to say, the ones that do not have much proximity to the common person in everyday life – foreign policy, EU issues, and so on. However, this would lead to a research focused on strong effects in the relevance conferred to abstract and complex issues by a small subset of the population. I therefore chose issues from right across the continuum between obtrusive and unobtrusive issues.

I also tried to select the issues for which it is possible to control for additional causes of salience in regards to real world cues and personal sensitivity. For instance, unemployment was chosen also because there is information available about the respondent being unemployed, which is a competing factor driving issue salience, beyond the amount of media coverage that it has received in the news.

The PIREDEU's Voter and Media Studies offer a set of 147 topics summarizing the most important problems referred by the citizens, the candidates, and the issues covered by the media outlets in the three weeks of the campaign. Since this is a wide amount of topics, there was the need to categorize some and exclude others. But how?

As McLeod, Becker & Byrnes (1974) wisely remind us, the creation of categories in content analysis involves decisions about number, specificity and origin that are not easy or straightforward. If, on the one hand, it would be interesting to have as many categories as possible in order to strengthen the basis of statistical inference, for parsimony sake the number of issues should be kept as low as possible.

Keeping both concerns (variety vs. parsimony) in mind, and using Dearing and Rogers's (1988) definition of issue (set of related events that fit together in a broad category), I categorized the 147 original issues into 15 broader categories: Economic Situation; Economic Structure and Policy; Unemployment; Health Care; Social Justice; Social Minorities; Immigration; Political Corruption; Government ; European Union; Environment; Crime and Justice; Foreign Policy/Defence; Democracy and Human Rights; Education/Culture. Their correspondence with the original topics in the PIREDEU Voter and Media Studies are presented in Appendix 3.

6.1.4 Time

Time is a crucial element in agenda-setting research. In general terms this refers to the time needed for the media agenda to have an impact on the public agenda of a given community (Saperas, 1987). However, one has to consider not only the time frame *per se*, but also other dimensions: time lag (the period between the measurement of the media agenda and the public agenda), the duration of the media agenda measurement, the duration of the public agenda measurement; some studies also try to identify the optimal effect span, which is the period of time in which the strongest relationship between media and public agenda is observed (Weaver et al., 1981; Watt, Mazza & Snyder, 1993).

Time-lag selection is a very important feature in agenda-setting research, in which the goal is to test a causal hypothesis. A time-lag that is too short will not capture the causal relationship (there is a need for repetition of media content and/or time for sinking in, before effects are observable) whereas a time-lag that is too long is also undesirable because the causal effect could disappear over time if the researcher waits too long to study it (Chaffee, 1972, in Wanta, 1997b)

There is, however, no consensus about any of these aspects of time. The time frame itself depends on the issue and the research agenda that the authors want to put in action – for instance, Winter & Eyal (1981) present a 22-year time frame, but the time period considered by McCombs & Shaw is

considerably inferior. Table 2.1, in Chapter Two, shows how different time frames can be in terms of length.

The time lag is not homogeneous in the literature as well. Brosius & Kepplinger (1990), in their study of television impact on the salience of a series of issues, used a time lag of one to three weeks; in turn, Roberts, Wanta & Dwzo (2002), observed the agenda-setting phenomenon with a much smaller time lag (one to seven days), but some studies about printed press have shown that the time lags can vary between three and ten weeks (see, for instance, Wanta & Hu, 1994a; Wanta, 1997b).

In terms of the optimal effect span, opinions are not in agreement either – some authors report a period of four to six weeks, and others suggest a cycle of two, six months or – in the case of obtrusive issues – even eighteen months (Winter & Eyal, 1981; Watt, Mazza & Snyder, 1993; Roberts, Wanta & Dzwo, 2002). Television seems to involve quicker and short-term agenda-setting effects, whereas the press takes more time to impact the agenda, but its impact tends to last longer (Wanta & Hu, 1994a; Wanta, 1997b).

I had little choice about the time aspects of this research, since my research involves data collected by someone else. However, the features of the timing in the PIREDEU Media Study and Voter Survey seem to fit my needs quite well. To start with, the media agenda was measured for 21 days, which allows for a comprehensive idea of the media content in the 27 EU countries. The lag between the measurement of the media content and the measurement of public opinion is rather small, since the Voter Survey fieldwork started the day after the elections. It would only be possible to use information about the date of media content and survey interview date to manipulate, even if to a very small degree, the time lag and the duration of the media and public opinion agendas' measurement.

This panorama will probably lead to stronger television agenda-setting effects – usually newspapers need more time to have an impact. I am assuming here, of course, that an unmeasured intervening factor (the amount of coverage of issues before the start of the media data collection) will not have an impact. It is a dangerous assumption, but the lack of data makes it impossible to make (and test) a different assumption.

6.2 Data Sources

In the field of media effects studies, it is often difficult to pass from the research question to the empirical research due to absence of data and good indicators of theoretical concepts. Media content is particularly hard to collect and use, in the case of the traditional outlets and also in terms of the new media (considering the amount of information available on the web, what to collect and how to collect it?). Moreover, in comparative studies, the barriers of language make these difficulties even harder. Fortunately enough, the PIREDEU study, with its focus on the 27 EU countries, allows for me to have sufficient variance in the majority of the factors I am interested in. Therefore, in the following chapter, most of the data used comes from the PIREDEU research project, namely the Voter Survey and Media Study.

In the case of the Voter Survey, the data collection was started on the first working day following the 2009 European Parliament elections (4 to 7 June 2009). A thousand successful interviews were conducted in each member-State (van Egmond et al., 2010), mainly via CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing).⁹⁰ Information about sampling techniques, response rates, length of interview and other fieldwork details can be found in the 27 country reports made available at the PIREDEU website. Regarding content, the questionnaires included items about political attitudes, opinions, affiliations and behaviours, amongst which several variables that are relevant for this study – the Gallup question about the Most Important Problem (MIP) facing the country, the degree of exposure to the media, information about which outlets are used the most, and several socio-demographic variables.

The Media Study was designed in order to connect the information collected by the Voter Survey about media use to the actual content of

⁹⁰ There were seven countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia) where representative phone sampling was not feasible. In these countries, 70 percent of interviews were achieved by face-to-face mode, while the remaining 30 percent was achieved by phone. To exclude mode-effects as much as possible, face-to-face interview did not use additional visual aids that, of course, were not available in the telephone surveys (van Egmond et al., 2010).

specific outlets (Schuck et al., 2010). The content analysis was carried out on a sample of national news media coverage in all member-States. In each country, the main national evening news broadcasts of the most widely watched public and commercial television stations were included; moreover, in each country, two quality (i.e. broadsheet) and one tabloid/sensationalistic newspaper were selected. Therefore, the television sample consists of 57 TV news shows (one per TV channel) in the same number of networks, while the newspaper sample consists of 81 different newspapers (Appendix 4).

The data was collected for the three weeks prior to the election (i.e., from May 14 to June 4 in some countries, and from May 17 to June 7 in others, depending on the actual Election Day). There are no relevant problems about missing data in newspaper content, but TV news content in some countries (Portugal, UK, Greece, Romania, Sweden) is severely damaged by a considerable number of broadcast days that were not covered (Schuck et al., 2010). The information about position, size, and type of story, visual aids, as well as about the primary, secondary and tertiary topics (issues) covered and other relevant content information, was registered and coded by a team of native speakers of the languages in which the media messages were conveyed.

All broadcast news items were coded. In the case newspapers, all news items on the first page and on one randomly selected page as well as all stories pertaining particularly to the EU and/or the EU election on any other page of the newspaper were coded. In total, 52,009 news stories were coded in all 27 EU-member countries.

Only daily titles were processed by the Media Study. Daily newspapers are thought to be the dominant type, essential to the processes of political learning and political opinion-building, while weeklies sometimes have relatively lower circulation and less space to cover issues, although they often serve as opinion leaders and have a considerable impact on their readers (Voltmer, 2000; Santana Pereira, 2007).

Moreover, just a small sample of the total offer of newspapers in each country was considered – three newspapers in each country. PIREDEU selected the most relevant (reference/elite/prestige⁹¹ and tabloid) newspapers in circulation in each media system, which are believed to be representative of the content of the press in the country. This assumption is backed by previous research: in the United States, the *New York Times* is frequently selected as the medium to analyse (e.g. Neuman, 1990, Winter & Eyal, 1981; Stroud & Kenski, 2007), even though its circulation is relatively small compared to many other American newspapers and magazines. Why? Because the *New York Times* media agenda is considered to influence the agendas of the other American newspapers (e.g. Dearing & Rogers, 1996; Rogers, 2004; Son & Weaver, 2005). In a similar vein, other studies selected the most important newspaper (in terms of circulation and/or quality) as the best proxy for the press agenda (Anokwa & Salwen, 1988; Winter, Eyal & Rogers, 1982).

The PIREDEU Media Study dataset (EES, 2009b) offers information about articles on front-pages and a randomly selected set of pages in each newspaper. Only front-page news were included in my analysis. Some scholars argue that television newscasts are an audiovisual representation of newspaper front pages; and news usually passes from internal pages (or oblivion) to front pages and TV news shows more or less at the same time (Shaw, n.d., in Ramaprasad, 1983; McCombs, 1977, in Wanta, 1997b). By including only front-page news, the comparison between newspapers and television channels is, therefore, more balanced.

One minor shortcoming of the media dataset produced by PIREDEU is the fact that it does not include media content data about radio and internet. Nevertheless, this does not strike me as being a big problem, since television and press still are the major sources of information about current

⁹¹ In a book edited by Aalberg & Curran and published in 2012, the expression used is elite/prestige, which corresponds to the traditional concept of reference but focus on the status granted to the users of the journal more than the role of the journal itself (i.e., to be a source of reference information). Elite journals selected by this research team for their EU member state cases are the same newspapers that the PIREDEU team selected as being “reference”. Therefore, the terms “reference” “elite” or “prestige” newspapers will be used interchangeably.

issues in the majority of the European Union member-States, as several Eurobarometers have shown.⁹²

6.3 Variable Operationalization

6.3.1 *Independent Variable*

In agenda-setting studies independent variable is the **Salience of a given Issue in the Media**. It basically refers to how frequently it was mentioned in the newspaper or news show (i.e., the number of stories addressing the issue, percentage of time/space devoted to the issue). In real context studies, this variable has been traditionally studied by using media content analysis (for instance, McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Funkhouser, 1973). The same is done here, though the use of the PIREDEU Media Study dataset.

The index of attention given to an issue was planned not to be a simple measure of intensity of coverage, but to combine frequency of coverage and relative prominence in terms of display or placement in the outlet (McLeod, Becker & Byrnes, 1974; Peter, 2003). The PIREDEU dataset includes information about page number, section, type of story, number of visual illustrations, length and location on the page. All stories here considered are front-page stories⁹³, which means that page number and section are not relevant weights. However, the news stories were multiplied by 1 if no visual aids are used, by 1.5 if one visual aid is used, 2 if two visual aids are used, and so on (each visual illustration adds .5 to the weight factor; after 6 visual aids, stories were weighted by a factor of 4). Pieces covering up to $\frac{1}{4}$ of the page were weighted by 1, up to $\frac{1}{2}$ got a weight of 1.5, and so on (each $\frac{1}{4}$ adds .5 to the weight factor). Finally stories presented at the top half of the page were weighted by 2, while those at the second half of the page were weighted by 1. For instance, a piece occupying a quarter of a page, without any pictures or graphs, and located in the lower half of the page counts as one piece, whereas a piece starting on the

⁹² For more details, consult, for instance the latest Eurobarometer reports at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/standard_en.htm.

⁹³ This corresponds to 34.6% of all press news pieces collected by the PIREDEU Media Study.

upper half of the page, occupying $\frac{3}{4}$ of a page and using two visual aids count as 8 pieces ($=1*2(\text{visual aids})*2(\text{size})*2(\text{position})$). The types of article (news story, column/commentary, reportage/background story, editorial, portraits, interviews, bullets, headlines, documentations, maps/pictures/graphs, letters to the editor, quiz) were not used to weight the newspaper articles, since it is not clear which types can lead to stronger visibility of issues or retention in memory.

In the end, the weights did not change significantly this independent variable. The relationship between the weighted and unweighted variables is, in the case of reference rates, of .97 (Pearson coefficient), and in the case of rankings the correlation is perfect. This basically means that the size, position and number of visual aids within issues are very similar. I therefore decided not to use the weighted variables, since they do not add much to the quality of this research.

Regarding television, the dataset offers information about length of newscast and position of newscast in the newscast alignment. In fact, in their television agenda-setting study, Iyengar & Kinder (1987) noted that the first news pieces have the strongest influence on the public agenda. In a similar fashion, Behr & Iyengar (1985) only found agenda-setting effects for lead stories in television news shows; nonlead stories had no effect, perhaps because they were less noticed by viewers, whose attention span is smaller than the duration of a news show – meaning that only the first news item in each news show is received before the audience's attention focus on other things. However, the most plausible reason for this is that people are able to understand that the order by which the issues are presented is not arbitrary, but refers to the degree of importance granted by the editors to each issue that they cover in the newscast (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987).

Stories of less than 10 seconds were weighted by a factor of 1, and each additional second implied an increase of .01 in the weight factor. Position within the news show is also used to weight the pieces. The first story gets a weight of 5, the second a weight of 4.9, and so on (a decrease in primacy in the news show means a decrease of .1 in the weight factor. Those appearing after story 38 got a weight of just 1. Therefore, for

instance, a 3-minute story presented at the beginning of the newscast counts as 8.5 stories [$180 - 10$ seconds (baseline) $=170$; $170 \cdot .01=1.7$; $1 \cdot 1.7(\text{length factor}) \cdot 5(\text{position factor})$]. The relationship between weighted and unweighted variables is also very strong, very close to 1. Once again, the length and position of the news pieces referring to specific issues is probably very similar within issues. Therefore, weighted measures are not used.

6.3.2 *Dependent Variable*

The dependent variable is the **Salience of the Issues in the Public Agenda**. This variable is traditionally operationalized through survey data. The classic open-ended Gallup question about the most important problem affecting the nation, usually referred to as the MIP (Most Important Problem) measure, or its variants, are used in a large proportion of the research on this area (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Behr & Iyengar, 1985), even if it is often criticized as not being the best measure of the public agenda (Rogers, 1993). In fact, questions in which people are asked to rate the degree of importance of a previously selected list of issues (see Iyengar & Kinder, 1987) are less dependent of the interviewee verbal and memory abilities, and can lead to different results⁹⁴. A third possibility is to use the MIP question, with several multiple responses, asking the respondents to pick an issue or, alternatively, to mention other topics. In this research, only the first possibility was available.

As mentioned earlier, the PIREDEU Voter Survey data (EES, 2009a) is used to operationalize the public agenda in my study. The data was collected by the open-ended questions *"What do you think is the most important problem facing [country] today?"*, *"And what do you think is the second most important problem facing (country) today?"*, and *"And what do you think is the third most important problem facing (country) today?"*. The answers are coded according to the issues they portray.

⁹⁴ Schuman, Ludvig & Krosnick (1986) observed that closed questions lead to a concentration of the respondents on the offered possibilities in a greater extent than open-ended questions.

The information retrieved by the MIP questions is used in different ways. In the aggregate analysis, the dependent variable is the percentage of interviewed citizens stating that the issue X was the most important problem facing their country. In the individual level analysis, the dependent variable is a dummy (0= issue not mentioned as the most important problem; 1= it was mentioned as the most important problem).

Needless to say, the measurement of the public agenda is done by taking the survey answers of the interviewees that used the media during the election campaign, since exposure is a *conditio sine qua non* for the occurrence of media effects of any kind.

6.3.3 Control Variables

The focus on issues and the individualization of the analysis opens space for the inclusion of control variables, which is a widespread strategy to deal with the threat of spurious relationships between the IV (issue salience in the media) and the DV (issue importance in public opinion).

But what other reasons may account for a specific issue's salience in public opinion? First, personal sensitivity can be a relevant factor. Depending on the issue at stake, there are material reasons (for instance, being very rich or very poor when the issue is redistribution; being unemployed when the issue is employment; having children when the issue is education) or attitudinal reasons (for example, a strongly anti-EU or pro-EU attitude explains why the EU may be particularly salient for someone) that may explain why a specific problem is mentioned as the most important problem in the country.

Second, over and above personal experience, there are real-world causes of issue relevance (Erbring, Goldenberg & Miller, 1980; Kosicki, 1993; Iyengar & Ottati, 1994), especially in the case of very obtrusive issues (Hubbard, DeFleur & DeFleur, 1975; Demers et al., 1989), but also in the case of distant issues such as foreign policy (Soroka, 2003).

In this dissertation, the individual-level controls related to personal sensitivity *vis-à-vis* the issues are measured with data from the PIREDEU Voter Survey dataset (EES, 2009a), whereas the information concerning the

real world cues comes from different sources (Eurostat, World Bank, others). The list of control variables is presented in the following chapter.

6.3.4 Moderators

The different nature of the 15 issues under study allows me to test the effects of issue obtrusiveness. This is a fairly subjective concept, which usually depends on the setting in which the research takes place, as well as on the characteristics of the participants. However, the degree of obtrusiveness of specific issues can be assessed by a team of independent judges (Lee, 2004), a technique that allows for the testing of inter-coder reliability afterwards and tries to avoid subjectivity in the categorization.

The degree of obtrusiveness of the issues under study was assessed by two independent judges. Obtrusive issues are those that are visible for the majority of the citizens: economic conditions, unemployment, health care, environment, and crime and justice. Unobtrusive issues are both those that have a potential to be blatant, but its inner visibility depends a great deal on citizen or country characteristics (political corruption, immigration, social minorities, education and culture, and social justice) and those that are very abstract or distant, such as democracy and human rights, government, foreign policy and defence, economic policy, and the EU.

The media system and media outlet level moderators were described in the previous sections of this dissertation: development of press markets, commercialization of the TV market, freedom of press, journalist professionalization, political balance, exposure, trust, quality and diversity.

No individual-level moderations will be tested in this dissertation. Despite the fact that there is a considerable number of studies on this matter, some factors are considered important to the agenda-setting phenomenon by some authors and proven irrelevant by others; moreover, some of the moderators presented in Chapter Two (e.g. political knowledge, discussion of public affairs) are believed to buffer or boost the agenda-setting effect, according to the particular study. Considering the goals and characteristics and main goals of the research reported here, there is no space for this kind of analysis, which however must be part of future comparative studies of agenda-setting.

THE MODERATING EFFECT OF MEDIA SYSTEMS AND INFORMATION ENVIRONMENTS: AGENDA-SETTING IN THE EU

In this chapter, the media impact on public agendas is addressed through an analysis of media content and public opinion in 27 different settings. The occurrence and strength of agenda-setting will be tested at different levels, in order to allow for the inclusion of controls and, more importantly, the test of moderating variables.

The main hypothesis is that the salience of issues in the media will have an impact on the perceived importance of those issues in public opinion, even when one controls for other causes of issue salience (Hypothesis 7.1). This hypothesis will be tested separately for the TV and newspapers, due to all the evidence suggesting that these types of media may have impacts of different magnitude (see Chapter Two).

This chapter is organized in three sections, each focusing on different strategies of agenda-setting analysis: issue-focused (aggregate and individual), country-focused, and audience-focused. The general hypothesis is tested in the three sections, while other hypotheses are tested in the section depicting the most appropriate analytical strategy.

The issue-focused section is designed mainly for the test of the agenda-setting hypothesis in a fairly conservative way, via the inclusion of control variables and (at the individual level) the establishment of relationships between media content and opinion about issue salience based on the habits of media consumption reported by the respondents. After establishing that the connection between media and public opinion holds even when other reasons for issue salience are controlled for, the analysis turns to the study of inter-country and inter-audience variability, a setting in which competing factors of issue salience cannot be controlled for, but where it is possible to test hypotheses about the role of media systems and information environments as moderators of agenda-setting.

The following hypotheses depart from the postulate that the patterns of agenda-setting will not be the same in the 27 member-states, or, in other words, that the *strength of the media effect will vary between countries*:

- *Systems with developed press markets will display strong agenda-setting effects* (Hypothesis 7.2); this relationship is not direct, but mediated by information quality, which is higher in developed markets (see Chapter Five).
- *Systems with developed TV markets will display strong TV agenda-setting effects* (Hypothesis 7.3), since this subsystem's development is connected to higher frequency of exposure to TV newscasts (see Chapter Five).
- *Systems with strong public broadcasters are those where the occurrence of TV agenda-setting is higher* (Hypothesis 7.4), either due to the fact that frequency of exposure to news is higher in those settings or because it has an impact on the media agendas' diversity (see Chapter Five)
- *Press freedom has a strong impact on agenda-setting* (Hypothesis 7.5), because it boosts trust and news exposure, as well as the quality of the information offered by the media actors (see Chapter Five).
- *Countries with highly professionalized journalists have a greater probability of displaying agenda-setting* (Hypothesis 7.6), because

professionalization boosts trust in the media and information quality (see Chapter Five).

- For the same reason, *countries with politically balanced media have a higher probability of agenda-setting occurrence* (Hypothesis 7.7).

More specific hypothesis about mediation effects will be drawn further on, based not only on the results displayed in Chapter Five about the relationship between media systems and information environment dimensions, but also on the impact that the media systems will have in the occurrence or magnitude of agenda-setting effects.

The second set of hypotheses is tested at the audience level. The role of source characteristics in the success of persuasive messages, frequently observed in studies focusing on media impact (e.g. Hovland, 1954; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Kopacs & Volgy, 2005; Santana Pereira, 2007; see also Saperas, 1987), cannot be neglected, especially when there is data available. In fact, it can be that the media system by itself has no effect on the occurrence or strength of agenda-setting effects, but that the key factor of agenda-setting variability is connected with the characteristics of the media outlets that people use most often.

Therefore, I propose two additional hypotheses that compete with the those proposed above, which postulate the same kind of effects from the same set of variables, but at the media outlet level. In other words, I expect that media outlets will be more able to set their readers agendas when the information they provide is of high quality (Hypothesis 7.8). In terms of political bias, my hypothesis is that if a given outlet has strong and clear links with a given political party, its agenda-setting power will be weaker. In other words, agenda-setting will be stronger in outlets without a visible political partisanship, i.e. without a clear connection to political parties (Hypothesis 7.9).

Lastly, at the issue- and individual-level, the nature of the issues, namely its obtrusiveness, is thought to moderate the impact that the media have on the public relevance that they are granted (Hypothesis 7.10).

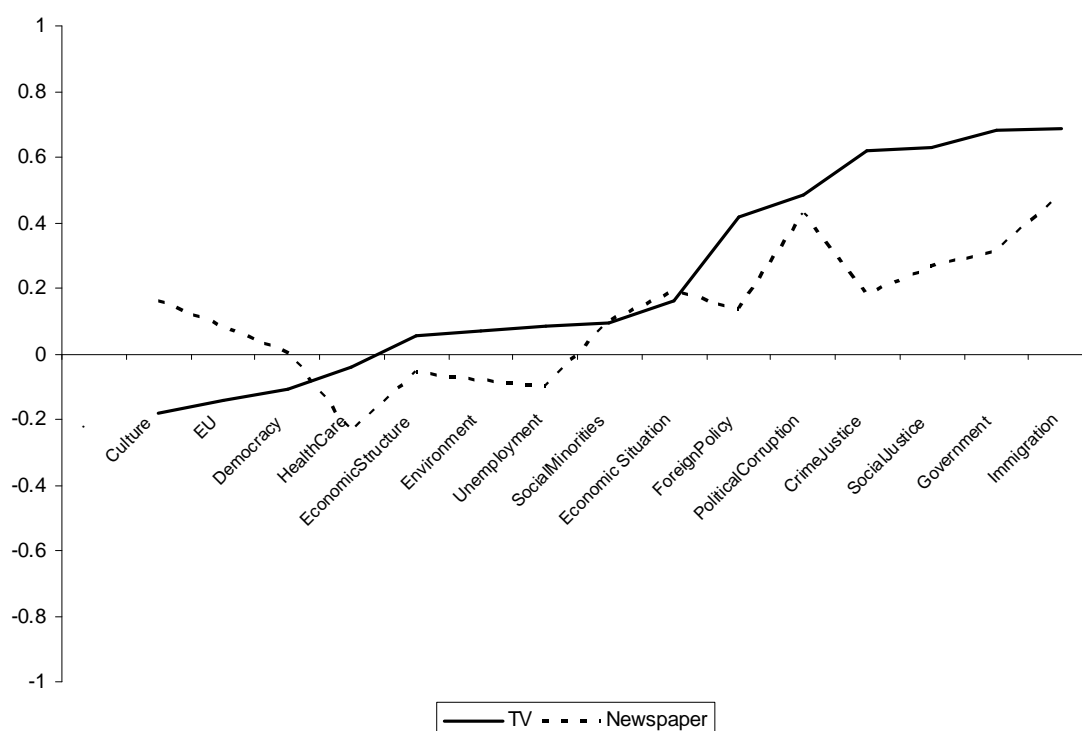
7.1 Issue-focused Analysis

7.1.1 General Panorama

The aggregate analysis of the relationship between public agendas and media content focusing on the 15 issues under study, therefore having each one of the 27 polities as cases, is presented in the following pages.

Figure 7.1 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients between salience of the issue in the media (proportion of news pieces/newspaper front pages depicting the subject) and in the public opinion (percentage of survey respondents mentioning it as one of the MIPs in the country). It is very clear that the variation in the salience of six issues throughout the 27 countries is more strongly associated with television coverage than with newspaper coverage. Such issues are immigration, government, social justice, crime and justice, political corruption and foreign policy. For the other nine issues, the correlation coefficients are lower, thus not providing an empirical support to the agenda-setting hypothesis.

Figure 7.1 – Correlation between media and public opinion salience conferred to each issue in 27 polities, 2009



Source: PIREDEU Voter Survey (EES, 2009a) and Media Study (EES, 2009b). Calculations made by the author.

European Union and Government seem to be rather distinct issues from the point of view of media impact, despite the fact that both deal with the realm of politics and governance. For the EU issue, the agenda-setting effects are small, whereas the impact of the amount of pieces about the government in the TV, and, to a lesser extent, in newspapers, is considerable (Figures 7.1, 7.2, 7.3).

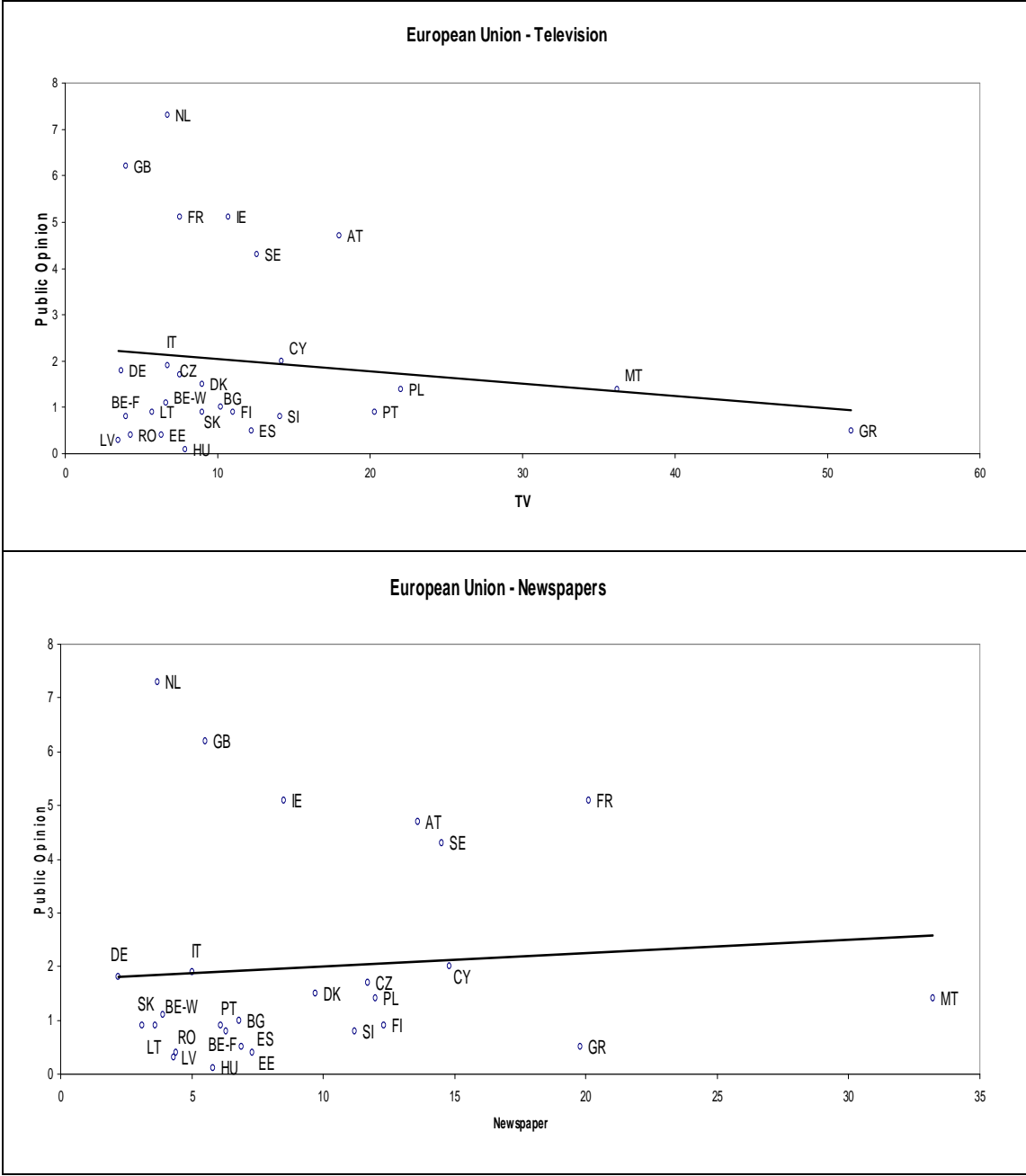
The European Union is rarely depicted in the French, German, British and Dutch media, being present in about 4 percent of the TV news stories during routine times and 10 percent of the stories broadcast just before the European summits (Peter & de Vreese, 2004). What about during electoral campaigns? According to the data presented in de Vreese et al. (2006), the visibility of the EU during the campaign in these countries was low (i.e., inferior to 10% of the news stories in the TV) both in 1999 and 2004. The same panorama is seen in 2009, but these countries are not the only ones in which the EU appeared in less than 10% of the news broadcasted during the election campaign – in fact, more than half of the 27 polities lie below the 10% threshold (Figure 7.2). However, in general terms and compared with previous elections, reference to Europe and the EP elections were not only more positive, more polarized and evaluative (Schuck et al., 2011a; Schuck et al., 2011b), but also more visible in the media in 2009 than in previous years.

In Denmark, the visibility of Europe in the TV news is usually quite high, corresponding to between one fifth (during routine times) and one quarter (during summit times) of all stories broadcast in 2000 (Peter & de Vreese, 2004). In the other countries, visibility varied a great deal but almost never crosses the threshold of 20% of news stories (de Vreese et al., 2006). In 2009, however, the number of stories referring to the EU during the electoral campaign in the Danish media was as low as in the countries described above, not surpassing the 10% level either for television newscasts or newspaper front pages (Figure 7.2).

On the other hand, in the case of television, Greece, and to a lesser extent, Portugal, Poland, Austria or Malta, are settings where the EU got more than 20% in the TV newscasts. In Portugal, the focus on European

issues seems to be even stronger in party campaign materials (ads and posters) than in the media coverage of the campaign (Jalali & Silva, 2011).

Figure 7.2 – Correlation between Media and Public Opinion Salience conferred on the European Union, 2009



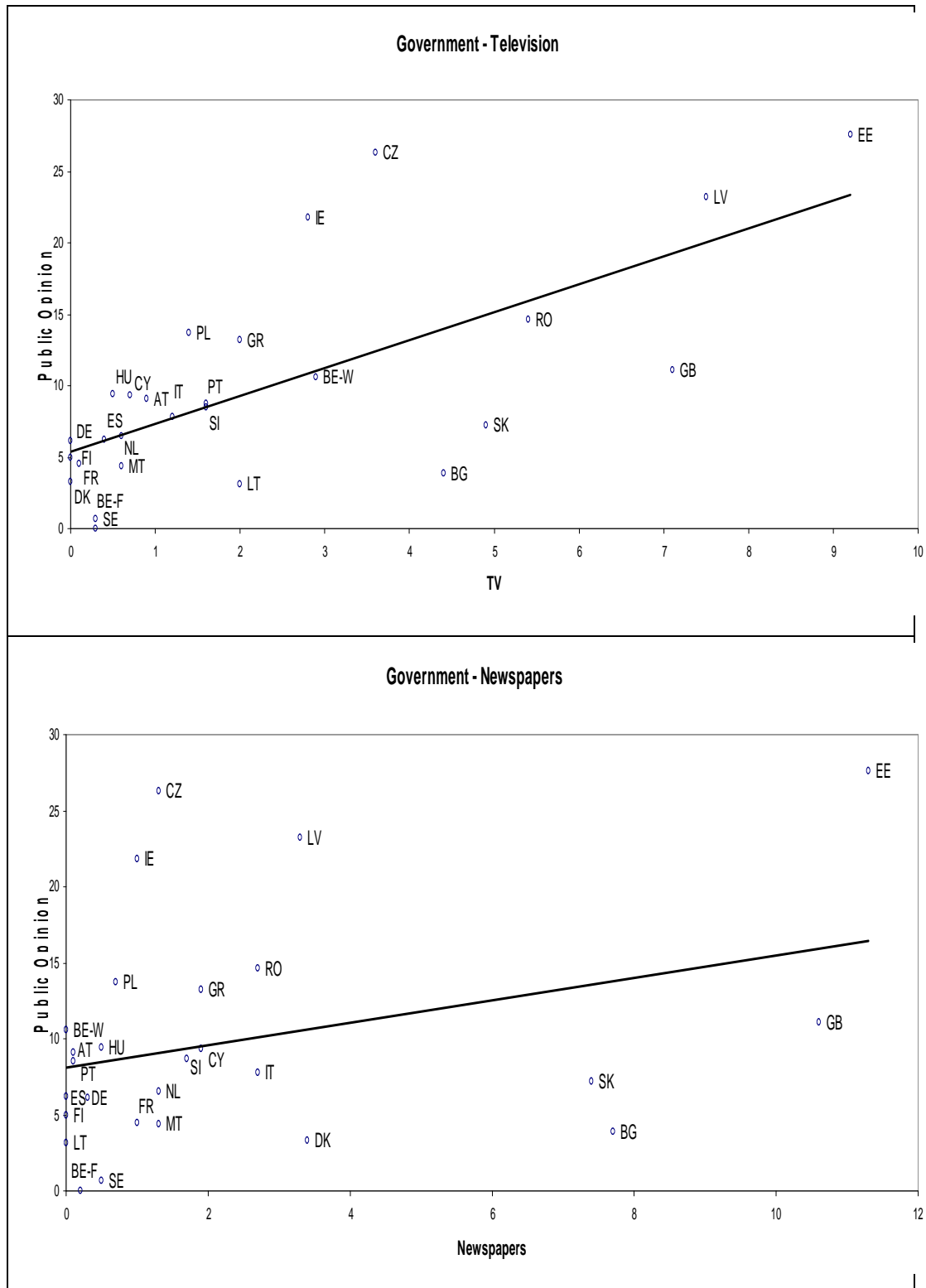
Source: PIREDEU Voter Survey (EES, 2009a) and Media Study (EES, 2009b). Calculations made by the author.

In previous EP elections, the visibility of the EU in newspapers was lower than in television. Moreover, whereas visibility of EU in the TV grew between 1999 and 2004, the inverse phenomenon happened in newspapers (de Vreese, Lauf & Peter, 2007). In 2009, the EU had more space in news broadcasts than in the newspapers in countries such as Austria, Spain, Slovakia, Poland, Portugal, and especially Greece. France and Czech Republic present the opposite phenomenon (more space in the press than in the TV), and in the other polities – the majority – the differences between TV and newspapers are fairly small.

What about the effect of media coverage? The European Union is one of the issues that present a weaker association between media coverage and importance conferred by public opinion. In fact, the coefficient is negative in the case of TV ($r = -.14$, not significantly different from 0), and positive but also indistinguishable from 0 in the case of newspaper front pages ($r = .08$). The absence of agenda-setting effects is particularly noticeable in contexts such as Malta or Greece, where the amount of television and press attention to the EU is very high but only a few citizens consider it to be a relevant issue, or in the Netherlands (the country in which more citizens mentioned the EU as an important problem, but the visibility of such topic in the news was very small) (Figure 7.2). The key finding to this result may be that the EU was depicted as an issue but not as a problem, which would mean that its propensity to become an MIP was low even in high-coverage settings.

With regards to the government, it is an unobtrusive issue that presents a strong agenda-setting effect in this study. Television newscasts seem to have more power in influencing the relevance granted to the strength, stability and efficiency of the governing cabinet ($r = .68$), when compared to newspaper agenda-setting capacity in this issue ($r = .36$). Ireland and the Czech Republic are interesting cases in which the government is viewed as an MIP is very high, despite the low coverage that this issue gets in the TV and newspaper front pages (Figure 7.3).

Figure 7.3 – Correlation between Media and Public Opinion Salience conferred to the Government, 2009

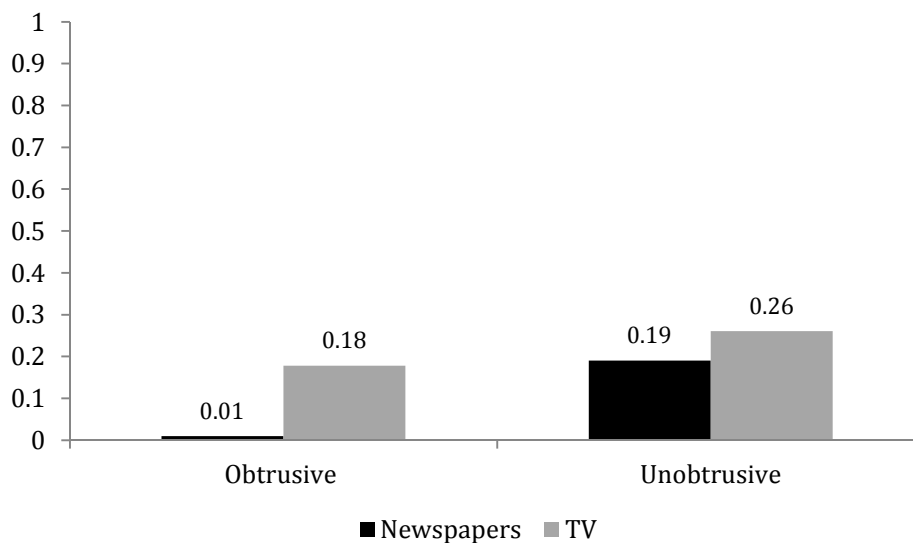


Source: PIREDEU Voter Survey (EES, 2009a) and Media Study (EES, 2009b). Calculations made by the author.

Does the nature of the issues have an impact on agenda-setting capacity in Europe? In the case of the TV, the differences between agenda-setting in obtrusive and unobtrusive issues⁹⁵ are not statistically significant ($t=.464$; $p=.650$), but this medium seems to have a stronger impact on unobtrusive issues than in obtrusive matters (Figure 7.4), even if the intra-group variance is rather high (standard deviations vary between .26 and .31). Regarding newspaper agenda-setting capacity, the results would support a negative relationship between obtrusiveness and strength of agenda-setting, since the coefficients are higher in the case of unobtrusive issues than for the other types of issues ($t=6.319$; $p=.013$) (Figure 7.4).

Interestingly enough, it is only in the case of obtrusive issues that there is a difference between newspapers and TV channel's agenda-setting capacity, with television much better placed than the press ($t=-2.505$; $p=.066$) (Figure 7.4).

Figure 7.4 - Agenda-Setting in Europe: The effect of issue obtrusiveness



Source: PIREDEU Voter Survey (EES, 2009a) and Media Study (EES, 2009b). Calculations made by the author.

⁹⁵ As explained before, obtrusive issues are those that are visible and relevant for the major part of the citizens – economic conditions, unemployment, health care, environment, crime and justice, and government were considered to be so. Unobtrusive issues are distant or abstract – political corruption, immigration, social minorities, education and culture, social justice, democracy and human rights, foreign policy and defence, economic policy, and the EU.

7.1.2 Agenda-Setting Analysis with Real World Cues

In this and the following sections, I will use regression analysis in order to examine the isolated and the competing effects of newspaper and TV content on issue salience throughout Europe, controlling for other factors of issue salience. These controls are, of course, related to the nature of each single subject, and try to tackle the extent by which the issue can be visible to the common citizen independently of his consumption of media products (see Erbring, Goldenberg & Miller, 1980).

For instance, unemployment rates may have a positive impact on issue salience independently of the media coverage because in contexts where those rates are higher, the odds of being unemployed or having friends, relatives or neighbours in that same situation are higher. In addition, the levels of public expenditure on healthcare can be a good proxy for the amount and quality of the service provided to the common citizen (number of hospitals, velocity, efficiency, etc). Crime rates in the country are believed to increase their visibility as a social problem, and, as a consequence, have an impact on how relevant crime is believed to be. Lastly, levels of air pollution can be pretty eloquent about the importance of environmental issues over and above media coverage.

The rationale expressed in the previous paragraph can be applied to the other real world indicators of issue salience (Table 7.1). The goal is not to provide a complete test of factors of issue salience for each one of the 15 subjects under analysis, which would be out of the scope of this dissertation. Instead, the objective is simply to test whether the impact of the media is still observable when real-world causes of issue salience are controlled for. If so, it is reasonably safe to argue that my measures of media content are not mere proxies of the objective conditions of existence leading to higher or lower issue relevance, and that their effect is not spurious.

Table 7.1 –Real World Cues – Potential Factors of Issue Salience

	<i>Real World Control</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Economic Situation	GDP Fluctuation (Eurostat ⁹⁶)	Real growth in the GDP as percentage change on the previous year. This variable is not correlated with GDP per capita (Pearson's $r = .27$; $p = .172$), but it is negatively correlated with unemployment rates (Pearson's $r = -.56$; $p = .002$).
	GDP per Capita (Eurostat)	---
	Unemployment (Eurostat)	Unemployment rate in the Country
Economic Structure/Policy	Same as Above	Same As Above
Unemployment	Same as Above	Same As Above
Health Care	Health Care Expenditure (Eurostat)	As % of the GDP Data for Bulgaria, Cyprus, Latvia, Austria and Portugal is from 2008. No data for Ireland, Greece, Malta, UK and Italy. Not correlated with number of doctors
	Practising Physicians per 100, 000 inhabitants (Eurostat)	Number of practicing doctors per 100 thousand inhabitants in the country. There is no data for France, Portugal, Ireland and Greece. For Cyprus, Finland and Sweden, the data depicts the situation in 2008.
Social Justice	People at risk of Poverty or Social Exclusion (Eurostat)	% of the general Population
	Gini Coefficient (Eurostat)	The Gini coefficient depicts the relationship of cumulative shares of the population arranged according to the level of disposable income, to the cumulative share of the total disposable income received by them. It varies between 0 and 100, and higher values correspond to more inequality in the country.
Social Minorities	Gay Marriage/Partnership Legally Recognized	Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Greece, and Italy do not allow/recognize same sex marriages/partnerships. Dummy variable. No data for Cyprus and Malta.
	Elderly People Risking Poverty (Eurostat)	Share of older persons with a disposable income, before social transfers, below the risk-of-poverty threshold. Pensions are counted as income before transfers. This variable is negatively correlated with the existence of same-sex marriage or recognized partnerships (Pearson's $r = -.47$; $p = .019$), which strengthens the argument that both variables are good proxies for social minority protection
Immigration	Number of Immigrants in Country (Eurostat)	Number of immigrants (in thousands) per 1 000 000 inhabitants. Higher numbers display stronger immigrant visibility. No data available for Greece and Romania.

⁹⁶ This and all the other Eurostat data used in this chapter are available online at <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/statistics/themes>.

	<i>Real World Control</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Political Corruption	World Bank data on Control of Corruption ⁹⁷	This factor varies between -2.5 and 2.5. Higher values denote a better situation in terms of absence of corruption in the political sphere.
Government	World Bank Data on Government Efficiency	This index varies between -2.5 and 2.5, being higher values associated with more government efficiency.
European Union	Old vs. New Member States	Dummy identifying the 12 new EU members whose accession happened in 2004 and 2007.
	% Public Support EU (PIREDEU Voter Survey)	% of survey respondents saying that the country's EU membership is a good thing.
Environment	Air pollution statistics (Eurostat)	Urban population exposure to air pollution by ozone (micrograms per cubic metre day). Higher levels represent stronger levels of air pollution. There is no data available for Cyprus or Malta, and the data for Greece was collected in 2007.
Crime and Justice	Crime Statistics (Eurostat)	Number of crimes reported by the police (in thousands) per 1 000 000 inhabitants. Higher numbers mean stronger criminality visibility. No data available for Ireland.
Foreign Policy, Defence	Expenditure with Defence/Military (World Bank)	As % of the GDP No data for Estonia.
	NATO member	Austria, Malta, Cyprus, Ireland, Finland and Sweden are not NATO members. Dummy Variable
Democracy/ Human Rights	Polity IV Democracy Indexes ⁹⁸	The "Polity Score" captures the regime variance in the world on a 21-point scale ranging from -10 (hereditary monarchy) to +10 (consolidated democracy). No data for Malta
Education/ Culture	% Expenditure with Education (Eurostat)	Data for Greece refers to 2005
	Literacy Levels of Pupils (Eurostat)	Share of 15-year-old pupils who are at level 1 or below of the PISA combined reading literacy scale. Lower levels represent higher quality of the education system. No data available for Malta and Cyprus. This variable is negatively correlated with expenditure in the education sector (Pearson's $r = -.51$; $p = .010$).

⁹⁷ This and all the other World Bank data used in this chapter is available online at: <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.asp>.

⁹⁸ The Polity IV data used in this chapter is available online at <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>.

Let us start by analysing the independent impact of media content on public opinion. Table 7.2 displays unstandardized regression coefficients from OLS regressions, therefore representing the impact of a one-unit increase in the amount of coverage that the issue got in the media on the % of people considering it a relevant problem in the country. Some models included only the relevant media variable, whereas others incorporated the controls presented and discussed above. This set of regression analysis reproduce the patterns already identified with the study of simple correlations, and show that the inclusion of the real-world cues (some significant, and others not, as we will see below, has some impact on the size of the media coefficients, but never compromises its statistical significance (Table 7.2).

Table 7.2 –TV and Agenda-Setting Effects as Independent – Coefficients of OLS Regressions of Issue Salience on Media Content

	<i>Newspapers</i>		<i>TV</i>	
	Basic Model	With Real-World Controls	Basic Model	With Real World Control
Immigration	3.40**	2.22*	6.08***	4.89**
Political Corruption	.42**	.40**	.60**	.53**
Social Justice	1.78*	1.95*	2.66***	2.80**
Government	.73*	.70*	1.95***	1.92**
Crime/Justice	.21	.18	.71**	.77**
Foreign Policy	.14	.16	.40**	.42**
Democracy/H. Rights	.01	-.12	-.29	-.41
European Union	.03	.03	-.03	-.03
Economic Structure	-.13	-.69	.10	-.13
Social Minorities	.32	.07	.12	-.07
Education/Culture	.36	.48	-.41	-.37
Economy	.50	.52	.48	.58
Health Care	-.75	-.71	-.10	-.46
Unemployment	-1.62	-3.98	1.12	1.33
Environment	-1.03	-1.07	.53	1.73
N	27	20-27	27	20-27

Notes:

1. VIF values for each variable are always lower than 2.
2. Significance: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .05$; * $p < .10$

However, considering that newspapers and TV channels coexist and compete in the same media environments and that, for a varying but substantial part of the population, both are used as sources of information about current affairs, an analysis of the competing effects of TV and front

page contents (i.e., inserting both measures in the regression model) is more relevant. The following pages present a set of regression analyses computed at the aggregate level of analysis for 13 out of the 15 issues under study. The two missing subjects are political corruption and government, excluded for methodological reasons.⁹⁹ This analysis is organized in three sections, according to the level of obtrusiveness of the issues at stake.

7.2.1.1 Agenda-Setting and Obtrusive Issues

As explained above, obtrusiveness refers to the easiness of contact with the issue. An issue is obtrusive if the public has direct experience with it, and unobtrusive if the public has no direct contact with it (Zucker, 1978, in Zhu & Boroson, 1997). The obtrusive issues under analysis are the following: crime/justice, the economy, unemployment, health care and environment. Table 7.3 presents the results of the several regression models computed for obtrusive issues.

The media indicators only reach statistical significance in the case of crime/justice. The relationship between the amount of news pieces on criminal and justice-related topics that were broadcast and the proportion of citizens mentioning this issue as one of the MIPs is positive, and holds even when crime visibility is controlled for (Table 7.3).

What about the impact of personal sensitivity? Before providing an answer, a methodological note must be made. In this and the following subsection, I will pick specific issues and analyse them at the individual level, adding to the models individual causes of issue relevance measured with PIREDEU Voter Study data.

⁹⁹ At this country level, the correlation between the amount of newspaper front pages dealing with political corruption and the space that this issue had in newscast is very high (Pearson's $r = .90$), which created problems of multicollinearity in the models. Therefore, it is not possible to test the competing effect of TV and Newspaper coverage on issue salience. The same happens in the case of government (Pearson's $r = .79$).

Table 7.3– Parameter Estimates for OLS Regression of Issue Salience on Media Coverage and Real World Cues - Obtrusive Issues

	Crime/Justice		Economy		Unemployment		Health Care		Environment	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10
Intercept	-3.10 (3.13)	-2.66 (3.51)	45.13 (8.24)	46.77	40.92 (5.87)	20.74 (10.83)	11.20 (2.45)	18.61 (12.48)	6.88 (4.20)	10.71 (6.3)
TV Coverage	.74** (.20)	.78** (.21)	.31 (.65)	.40 (.73)	1.44 (2.80)	2.10 (2.23)	.44 (.58)	-.12 (.86)	2.28 (2.35)	3.35 (2.71)
NP Coverage	-.06 (.19)	-.03 (.21)	.40 (.56)	.37 (.62)	-1.97 (3.37)	-4.44* (2.52)	-1.14 (.80)	-.63 (.99)	-4.00 (4.06)	-4.20 (4.20)
Controls:										
N Crimes/Pop.										
GDP Fluctuation										
GDP <i>per capita</i>										
Unemployment Rate										
N Doctors/Pop.										
Health Expenditures										
Air Pollution										
N	27	26	27	27	27	27	27	20	27	
Adj. R2	33.6	31.8	1.3	2.4	1.6	44.2	2.1	1.8	1.4	1.6
Notes:										
1.	VIF figures for each variable are always lower than 2.									
2.	Significance. *** p < .001; ** p < .05; * p < .10									

In this setting, each independent variable refers to the sum of the space conferred to the issue in newspaper front pages and TV newscasts, weighted by the frequency by which each outlet was used.¹⁰⁰ The underlying assumption is that consumption of several TV newscasts/newspapers has a cumulative effect, whereas consumption of TV and newspapers may have a competing effect. The dependent variable is dichotomic, and identifies respondents that mentioned the issue as being an important problem in their country. Due to the nature of the dependent variable, to the structure of the individual data (clustered in countries) and the inclusion of country-level controls in the equations, I will use multilevel logit regressions.

Aside from socio-demographic characteristics, attitudes towards the issue at stake will be used as controls for issue salience, under the theoretical assumption that attitudes are more stable than opinions and judgements – especially when the attitudinal items are believed to be strong indicators of value orientations. Therefore, despite the fact that the attitudinal scales and the MIP question were posed at the same time, it is reasonably safe to argue that there is no endogeneity here – attitudes may have an impact on the assessment of an issue's importance, or on its accessibility in memory when someone is (formally or informally) faced with a MIP question, whereas the other direction of causality is, in my opinion, rather unlikely.

The obtrusive issue that I chose for the individual level analysis is crime and justice. At the individual level, age (proxy for increased concern with own safety; see Erbring, Goldenberg & Miller, 1980) and extreme attitudes towards the harshness of the country's penal system¹⁰¹ (potentially associated with strong authoritarian vs. libertarian value orientations; see Flanagan & Lee, 2003) are added in the analysis.

¹⁰⁰ The nature of the data used to measure media content restricts the amount of TV news shows to 2 in most polities, 3 in Spain and 4 in Germany. The maximum number of newspapers whose content can be analysed here is 3.

¹⁰¹ The attitudinal item is "People who break the law should be given much harsher sentences than they are these days". The original variable was measured with a 5-point Likert scale; in the model, the variable is a dummy where 1 corresponds to the people that strongly disagreed (1) or strongly agreed (5) with this proposition.

The impact of the newspaper content is still null, and the relevance of TV coverage of crime seems to be smaller at this level of analysis, but is still statistically significant. There are no changes in the impact that media content have on the probability of mentioning crime/justice as a relevant issue before and after the insertion of control variables. However, age and, to a greater extent, holding a strong attitude towards the penal system have a positive impact on the probability of considering that crime is the most relevant problem in the country (Table 7.4).

Table 7.4 – Parameter Estimates for Two-Level Logit Regression of Salience of Crime/Justice on Media Coverage, Real World Cues and Personal Sensitivity

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>
Fixed		
Salience TV	1.07* (.01)	1.07* (.01)
Salience NP	1.00 (.00)	1.00 (.00)
Number of Crimes		1.00 (.00)
Age		1.01* (.00)
Attitudes towards Penal System		1.27*** (.07)
Random		
Country-level (σ_u^2)	.79 (.23)	.81 (.24)
Wald chi-square	6.55*	33.2***
Model Fit		
Log-likelihood	-6566.96	-6010.11
AIC	13141.9	12034.23
BIC	13174.5	12090.7
N Countries/Respondents	27/25406	27/23532

Notes:

1. A standard linear regression was computed in order to obtain information about possible multicollinearity. The VIF values for each variable are always lower than 2.
2. Due to the complexity of obtaining predicted probabilities in multilevel logistic regression models, odds ratios are used in order to allow an easier interpretation of the results.
3. Significance: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

There is not much to say about the other issues – the media indicators do not produce any kind of impact, and most real world cues also prove not to be particularly significant. The reasons for considering the economy, healthcare and the environment relevant problems need to be found elsewhere. The only real world indicator that actually has an impact on

issue salience is the country's unemployment rates – a one percentage point increase in unemployment adds about 3% to this issue's reference rate. Unemployment rates alone account for almost half of the variance in the dependent variable (Table 7.3).

7.2.1.2 Agenda-Setting and Unobtrusive Issues

This subsection focus on unobtrusive issues – those that are very abstract and distant from the everyday live of the average European citizen. In this study, issues such as political corruption, government, the European Union, economic structures and policies, foreign policy and democracy/human rights, immigration, social justice, social minorities and education/culture are considered to be unobtrusive.¹⁰²

Some of the issues placed under this umbrella could be seen as moderately obtrusive issues, since their visibility may depend on country or individual characteristics. For instance, immigration is pretty visible if it constitutes a palpable social phenomenon, but in Eastern European countries such as Poland or Bulgaria the immigration rates are rather low. In the same vein, political corruption is a cancer in some European polities (such as Italy or Romania) but more unfamiliar to Scandinavia.¹⁰³ However, even in favourable contexts, the degree of obtrusiveness of these issues would be rather low when compared with unemployment or crime.

The regressions that deal with the complementary (or competing) impact of TV and newspapers on public opinion are presented on Tables 7.5 and 7.6. Previous evidence would lead us to expect that media effects would be more frequent and strong in this subset of issues than in the case of obtrusive ones, and it seems to be the case: media effects are observed in about half of the unobtrusive issues under study.

¹⁰² The first two issues mentioned above – political corruption and government – are not analysed here, due to methodological problems associated with a perfect relationship between their salience in the TV and on newspapers during the European Parliament election campaign of 2009, which would cause strong multicollinearity issues in the estimated models.

¹⁰³ The Transparency International data on Corruption Perception shows, indeed, that Romania, Bulgaria and Italy are closer to the “very corrupt” end of the continuum, whereas the “very clean” side of the spectrum is inhabited by countries such as Sweden, Finland or Denmark. This data is available online at: http://www.transparency.org/research/cpi/cpi_2009.

For immigration and social justice, the amount of space in the TV has an impact on the proportion of people considering those to be relevant social problems. The impact is, however, much stronger in the case of immigration than in the case of social justice, especially after controlling for real world cues. Whereas it takes two additional percentage points in the amount of news pieces dedicated to poverty in order to increase the reference rate of this issue by 1 per cent, the impact of TV coverage on immigration is almost ten times bigger (Table 7.5).

The newspaper coefficients do not reach statistical significance – if the TV does not speak about immigrants and poverty or social exclusion, newspapers have not much of a say in terms of how many people grant salience to those subjects. The Gini coefficient or the levels of poverty in the country do not have an impact on social justice reference rates, but immigration is mentioned more often in contexts where the immigration rates are higher. In fact, when controlling for media content, an increase of 2000 immigrants per million people raises awareness about this issue in more 1% of the general population (Table 7.5).

If the TV is a relevant agenda-setter for immigration and poverty, newspapers have a stronger impact in terms of how important education and culture are believed to be. A simple model of media effects depicts a positive effect of newspapers and a negative effect of TV content on the reference rates, but the inclusion of controls (about quantity of investment and quality of the educational system) reduces considerably this negative coefficient. In fact, when student literacy levels and expenditure with education (both statistically insignificant) are inserted into the equation, salience in TV is no longer relevant. In the case of newspapers, a 1% growth in the space devoted to these issues increases the proportion of people mentioning them by the same figure (Table 7.5). However, media coverage explains a low amount of DV variance (about 5%), especially when compared with the models computed for immigration (almost 50%) and social justice (about 35%).

Table 7.5 – Parameter Estimates for OLS Regression of Issue Salience on Media Coverage and Real World Cues - Unobtrusive Issues (I)

	Social Justice		Immigration		Social Minorities		Education/Culture	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10
Intercept	5.48 (2.47)	21.52 (11.1)	2.53 (2.17)	.06 (2.53)	4.88 (1.56)	4.81 (3.33)	6.71 (4.54)	4.73 (8.19)
TV Coverage	2.82** (.82)	.64** (.84)	6.43** (1.98)	5.59** (1.98)	.09 (.27)	-.08 (.30)	-.92* (.54)	-.86 (.71)
NP Coverage	-.50 (1.23)	.27 (1.29)	-.37 (1.56)	-.73 (1.48)	.25 (.67)	.10 (.73)	.86* (.51)	1.00* (.56)
Controls:								
Gini Coefficient		-.85 (.50)						
% Risking Poverty		.34 (.24)						
Immigrants/Pop.				.47* (.28)				
Same-sex Marriage						2.54 (2.23)		
Old People Risking Poverty						-.03 (.11)		
Education Expenditure								-.05 (1.10)
Literacy of Pupils								.12 (.17)
N	27	27	27	25	27	25	27	25
Adj. R2	34.9	37.7	42.5	49.2	1.4	2.1	5.9	4.8

Notes:

1. VIF values for each variable are always lower than 2.
2. Significance: *** p < .001; ** p < .05; * p < .10

Table 7.6 – Parameter Estimates for OLS Regression of Issue Salience on Media Coverage and Real World Cues - Unobtrusive Issues (II)

	Foreign Affairs/ Defence		Democracy/Human Rights		EU		Economic Policy	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Intercept	-.36 (1.78)	-2.08 (3.21)	5.21 (2.18)	-56.98 (52.4)	1.88 (.67)	2.17 (1.91)	11.64 (3.83)	23.53 (11.22)
TV Coverage	.51** (.22)	50** (.24)	-.36 (.59)	-.44 (.61)	-.08 (.05)	-.09* (.05)	.18 (.40)	.05 (.45)
NP Coverage	-.18 (.22)	-.15 (.24)	.18 (.68)	.09 (.67)	.11 (.08)	.13* (.72)	-.22 (.50)	-.71 (.53)
Controls:								
Expenditure Military		.24 (.75)						
NATO Member?		.81 (2.22)						
Quality Democracy				1.85 (1.61)				
Year Last Transition				.023 (.03)				
Support EU						.01 (.03)		
NMS12?						-1.94** (.74)		
GDP Fluctuation								-.68* (.43)
GDP <i>per capita</i>								-.08 (.06)
Unemployment Rate								-.46 (.52)
N	27	26	27	26	27	27	27	27
Adj. R2	12.8	12.4	2.0	2.9	1.2	23.4	1.4	2.8

Notes:

1. VIF values for each variable are always lower than 2.
2. Significance: *** p < .001; ** p < .05; * p < .10

The case of the European Union is rather interesting. For the full sample, the results were not significant, but the inclusion of a dummy variable distinguishing old from new member states changes the panorama completely. This dummy has an impact on the EU reference levels, which seem to be lower in the 12 new member States than in the old Europe. In addition, when one controls for it (i.e., when one focus on the EU15), the media do have a (small) impact on the amount of people granting importance to the EU. Interestingly enough, it seems that in a context where the TV would not have covered EU issues at all, the amount of newspaper coverage would have a positive impact on the public opinion reference rates (Table 7.6).

The media seems to matter also to foreign policy and defence's public salience. Independently of levels of military expenditures or NATO memberships, the amount of coverage that this issue had on the TV during the electoral campaign has a positive impact on its reference rates – when everything else is controlled for, a 2% increase in the proportion of pieces focusing this subject raises the percentage of people considering it important in 1% (Table 7.6).

There are also some negative findings to report. Neither the levels of media coverage nor the country situation in terms of gay rights and protection of elderly people explain the levels reference of social minorities as the major problem facing the nation (Table 7.5). In addition, the reference of democracy and human rights is not explained by the proposed model. Regarding economic structure and policy the only relevant factor is GDP fluctuation: the lower the growth rate (or, considering that we are talking about 2009, the bigger the decrease), the higher the relevance of this complex economic argument for citizens. The size of this effect, is, however, rather small (Table 7.6).

Let us now focus on the individual analyses. The issue *Social Justice* refers to concerns about the welfare state and protection of the economically disadvantaged by means of childcare, social housing and pensions in the country. In this case, the respondent's subjective standards

of living¹⁰⁴ and the possession of extreme attitudes about wealth redistribution¹⁰⁵ (potentially linked with strong socio-economic left-wing or right-wing value orientations; see Knutsen, 2009) are believed to increase or display personal sensitiveness with this issue.

The basic media effects model shows us that the negative coefficient for newspaper content, also present in the issue-level analysis, is statistically significant. This would mean that, if the amount of news depicting poverty and social justice subjects in the TV were equal to zero, newspaper coverage of this issue would actually conduct to lower odds of mentioning it as the MIP in the country (Table 7.7).

The full model, that also controls for real world cues and personal sensitivity, shows us that this awkward negative effect of newspaper content is no longer statistically significant. However, TV still plays a role – in fact, an increase of one point in the index of TV coverage raises the probability of considering social justice as an important issue by a factor of 1.3 when the other factors are controlled for.

From the real-world and individuality controls used here, only the latter have a substantial impact on our dependent variable: higher living standards are associated with a lower probability of mentioning this issue, whereas holding a strong attitude about redistribution increases the odds of it being mentioned by 14% (Table 7.7).

¹⁰⁴ This is measured with the question “Taking everything into account, at about what level is your family’s standard of living? If you think of a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 means a poor family, 7 a rich family, and the other numbers are for the positions in between, about where would you place your family?”. This index varies between 1 (respondent belongs to a poor family) and 7 (respondent belongs to a rich family).

¹⁰⁵ The attitudinal item is “Income and wealth should be redistributed towards ordinary people”. Answers to this item were transformed in a variable measuring the existence of a strong positive or negative attitude towards this policy option. The original variable was measured with a 5-point Likert scale; in the model, the variable is a dummy where 1 corresponds to the people that strongly disagreed (1) or strongly agreed (5) with this proposition.

Table 7.7 – Parameter Estimates for Two-Level Logit Regression of Salience of Social Justice on Media Coverage, Real World Cues and Personal Sensitivity

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>
Fixed		
Salience TV	1.03** (.01)	1.03** (.01)
Salience NP	-.96* (.01)	-.97 (.02)
% Population Risking Poverty		1.03 (.03)
Gini Coefficient		-.98 (.07)
Subjective Standard of Living		-.89*** (.02)
Attitude on Redistribution		1.14*** (.04)
Random		
Country-level (sigma_u ²)	.97 (.28)	.89 (.26)
Wald chi-square	16.69**	69.85***
Model Fit		
Log-likelihood	-8857.81	-8273.34
AIC	17723.64	16562.7
BIC	17756.2	16627.3
N Countries/Respondents	27/25406	27/23736

Notes:

1. A standard linear regression was computed in order to obtain information about possible multicollinearity. The VIF values for each variable are always lower than 2.
2. Due to the complexity of obtaining predicted probabilities in multilevel logistic regression models, odds ratios are computed.
3. Significance: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Foreign policy and defence is the last issue that will be studied at the individual level. This allows for the inclusion of a dummy variable assessing whether the respondent was serving in the military when the interview took place. The number of people that were actually on military service in late 2009 is very small in our sample, but this group of people display greater odds of mentioning foreign affairs and defence as the MIP *vis-à-vis* the absolute majority of people whose working situation is different (Table 7.8).

Table 7.8 – Parameter Estimates for Two-Level Logit Regression of Salience of Foreign Policy and Defence on Media Coverage, Real World Cues and Personal Sensitivity

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>
Fixed		
Salience TV	1.02*** (.01)	1.02*** (.01)
Salience NP	1.00 (.01)	1.00 (.01)
Military		3.73*** (2.05)
Military Expenses		1.55 (.44)
NATO		.54 (.43)
Random		
Country-level (σ_u^2)	2.42 (.78)	2.24 (.75)
Wald chi-square	16.40**	30.28***
Model Fit		
Log-likelihood	-3071.7	-2885.6
AIC	6151.4	5785.1
BIC	6183.98	5841.8
N Countries/Respondents	27/25406	27/24406

Notes:

1. A standard linear regression was computed in order to obtain information about possible multicollinearity. The VIF values for each variable are always lower than 2.
2. Due to the complexity of obtaining predicted probabilities in multilevel logistic regression models, odds ratios are displayed instead of coefficients.
3. Significance: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

7.2 Country-focused Analysis

Having demonstrated that, for a considerable number of issues, there is a statistically significant relationship between visibility in the media and salience in public opinion, we can now focus on the main question of this dissertation: is the agenda-setting (as an aggregate process of salience transfer between the media and the public agendas), shaped by the media systems and information environments in which the media outlets and their users interact?

In order to provide an answer to this question, there will be a shift in the level of analysis. In this section, I present the results of a country-focused analysis, in which TV, newspaper and public agendas are taken as a whole and assessed within countries. The agendas at stake include the

issues for which the impact of the media was very strong and also those where no statistically significant impact was found. This is so because I believe that reducing the agenda in order to accommodate only the issues that «work» in the issue-level analysis would artificially increase country-level agenda-setting coefficients. Thus, I took the 15 issues as cases, and tested the relationship between the salience that they had in the media (% of news pieces in the news shows/newspapers) and their importance for public opinion (% of respondents naming them in the survey) in each polity.

7.2.1 The European Agendas

I begin this section by exploring the content of the agendas in Europe. Table 7.9 presents the salience of the 15 issues in public opinion in the 27 European polities. The economic situation and unemployment are, unsurprisingly, the issues most frequently named by the respondents as the main problems in their countries. On the other hand, abstract or distant issues such as the European Union, Foreign Policy or Democracy and Human Rights are seldom mentioned.

It is also interesting to see that some issues seem to have an intrinsic main-problem quality: they are proposed by a substantial proportion of respondents when they are asked about the most important problem, but the proportion of reference decreases in the following two questions. Such issues are economic situation and unemployment. Other issues seem to have a second-level nature – their reference rate is small in the first question, but increases in the others. Such topics are social justice, economic structure and policy, health care, environment, crime and justice, education/culture/language, social minorities and foreign policies. Lastly, some issues are rarely mentioned as being a problem in response to any of the questions – government, immigration, political corruption, democracy and human rights and European Union.

Taken as a whole, the public agenda is different from the other agendas (Table 7.10). In Europe, news broadcasts and newspaper front pages are very similar in terms of issue coverage: both have given particular attention to crime and justice issues, the economic situation and –

since an electoral campaign was ongoing – the European Union. At the same time, and comparatively speaking, issues such as immigration, unemployment, government status or environment have received, *grosso modo*, poor interest from the part of newspapers and television newscasts.

Table 7.9 – Issue Salience in the European Public Opinion, 2009

	% First Problem	% Second Problem	% Third Problem	% General ¹⁰⁶	Rank
Economic Situation	33.7	24.1	16.7	53.3	1
Unemployment	25.5	17	9.7	42.5	2
Social Justice/Policies	3.8	6.5	8	12.5	3
Economic Structure/ Policy	4.7	5.6	6.6	11.9	4
Government	4.7	4.6	4.4	10	5
Health Care	1.7	5.2	7.4	9.9	6
Immigration	3.5	4.6	4.3	9.3	7
Environment	2.4	4	4.4	7.9	8
Crime and Justice	1.9	4.1	5.4	7.9	9
Political Corruption	2.9	3	3.4	6.9	10
Education/Culture	1.1	3.2	5.7	6.8	11
Social Minorities	1.5	2.7	4	5.6	12
Democracy and Human Rights	1.9	2.1	2.5	4.6	13
Foreign Policy/ Defence	.7	1.7	2.2	3.2	14
European Union	.9	.9	1	2	15
Others	9.1	10.6	14.4	21.1	--
N	24710	20593	15049		

Source: PIREDEU Voter Survey (EES, 2009a). Calculations made by the author.

The correlation between newspaper and public opinion salience of issues is stronger (Pearson's $r = .29$) than in the case of TV, whose relationship does not achieve statistical significance (Pearson's $r = .20$).

¹⁰⁶ This data refers to the percentage of respondents that named the issue one of the three MIP questions, independently of the order.

Table 7.10 – Top Three Issues in Europe, 2009 – Media Users, Newspapers and Television Newscasts

	<i>Media Users (%)</i>	<i>Salience Newspapers (%)</i>	<i>Salience TV (%)</i>
First Issue	Economic Situation (53.4)	Economic Situation (32.2)	Crime and Justice (15.7)
Second Issue	Unemployment (42.6)	Crime and Justice (10.7)	Economic Situation (11.3)
Third Issue	Social Justice (12.6)	EU (7.3)	EU (10.8)

Sources: PIREDEU Voter Survey (EES, 2009a), Media Study (EES, 2009b). Calculations made by the author.

7.2.2 Testing Agenda-Setting

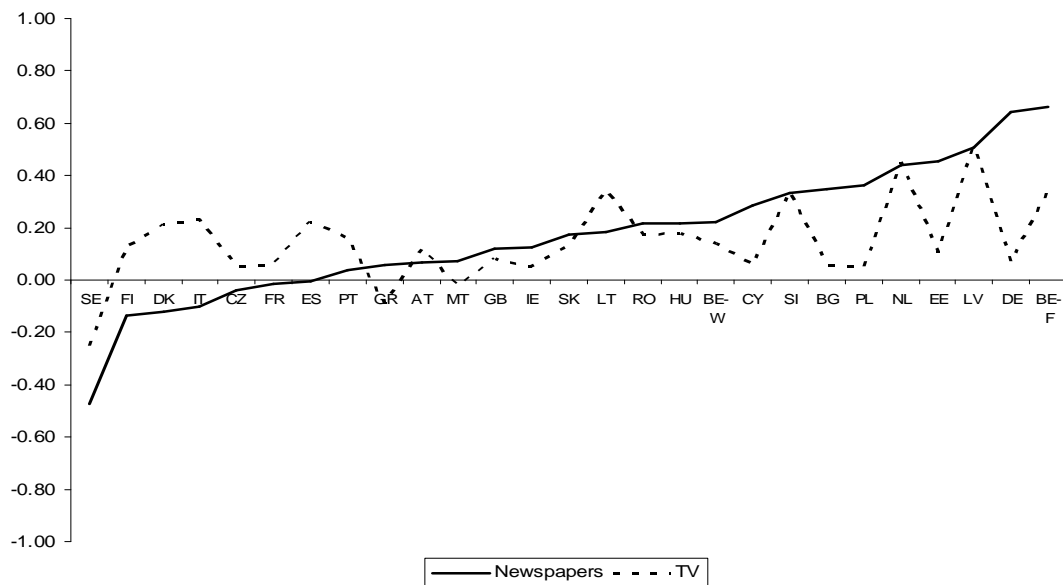
The two simple correlations reported in the previous section offer a very general idea of how the variables of interest correlate. Given the variety of countries, outlets and citizens that are summarized by just a handful of statistics, it would be a poor and risky endeavour to say that agenda-setting took, or did not take place in Europe during the EP election of 2009, even under the umbrella of the aggregate data analysis strategy, based on two simple correlation coefficients.

But even with a sample of 15 cases (i.e., 15 issues), it is possible to test the association between media coverage and public relevance of issues in a more sophisticated manner. A sensible strategy, still in the realm of the classic agenda-setting data analysis strategy (see McCombs & Shaw, 1972), is to measure agenda-setting country by country, since issue salience in public opinion and the media varies considerably between countries. Sometimes this variation is similar to the one in public opinion, and this results in strong correlations between one and the other; some other times the co-variation is lower.

Figure 7.5 displays the Pearson correlation coefficients for the relationship between, on the one hand, the media users' agenda, and, on the other, TV and newspaper coverage of the same issues. The picture shows that newspapers seem to be more relevant agenda-setters than television newscasts.

However, there is considerable variation in the existence and degree of agenda-setting measured in this classical fashion. Eight countries present moderate to high correlations – Slovenia, Bulgaria, Poland, Netherlands, Estonia, Latvia, Germany and Flanders. In the other countries, the measures of association are very weak, and in Sweden there seems to be a negative correlation between the amount of salience that the issues got in the media and how important those problems are for the Swedish people. Regarding television, the correlations are, generally speaking, more modest. Slovenia, Latvia, Lithuania, Flanders and the Netherlands are the five cases where the strength of agenda-setting is greater than .3. In the other cases, the correlations are very weak.

Figure 7.5 – Correlation between Media and Public Opinion salience of 15 issues by country, 2009



Source: PIREDEU Voter Survey (EES, 2009a) and Media Study (EES, 2009b). Calculations made by the author.

7.2.3 Media Systems as Moderators of Agenda-Setting

Can the variation in the media's influencing capacity be explained by the characteristics of media systems and information environments? Tables 7.11 and 7.12 present my first approach to this question – a regression model of each dependent variable (i.e., the correlation coefficients computed in the previous section, raw or recoded) on factors such as development of press markets, TV ownership, freedom of press, partisanship and journalism professionalization.

Two analytical strategies are used: the first focuses on the strength of the relationship between issue salience in the media and in public opinion (varying between -1 and 1), and therefore a straightforward regression is computed. The second strategy focuses on the occurrence of agenda-setting portrayed as the existence of, at least, a small correlation between issue salience in the media and public opinion – logistic analysis is therefore used. Moreover, all models include only independent variables dealing with structure and partisanship that are specifically related to the newspaper and TV subsystems. For instance, in the analysis of TV agenda-setting capacity, measures of development of the press market of political balance of the newspapers are not used.

The regression analysis does not provide interesting results in terms of newspaper agenda-setting capacity, but it seems that the strength of TV agenda-setting depends a great deal of the general levels of political balance in this subsystem. In fact, when the other dimensions are controlled for, a one-point increase in the levels of TV political balance (i.e., going from the theoretical minimum to the maximum value) boosts the correlation coefficient between issue salience in the TV and on public opinion by .74 points (Table 7.11).

Table 7.11 – Parameter Estimates for OLS Regression of Media Influence on Media System Characteristics

	TV Agenda-Setting Power	Newspaper Agenda-Setting Power
Intercept	-.03 (.35)	.33
Diff Tab-Ref.		.02 (.50)
Number of Titles		.15 (.32)
Average Circulation		-.39 (.36)
Relative Audience	.06 (.13)	
Public Funding	-.01 (.20)	
Choice TV	.09 (.17)	
Cable Dissemination	-.04 (.16)	
Economic Constraints	.19 (.31)	.13 (.56)
Political Constraints	-.01 (.31)	-.49 (.45)
Journalist Professionalization	-.24 (.34)	-.41 (.62)
Balance TV	.74** (.35)	
Balance NP		.42 (.59)
N	27	27
R2	25.9	14.9

Notes:

1. In all models the VIF values for each variable are always lower than 3.
2. Significance: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .05$; * $p < .10$

The logistic regression analysis, aimed at assessing more generically the conditions under which agenda-setting occurrence is more probable, confirms and qualifies the results presented above. Political balance is still the most relevant factor of TV agenda-setting: when everything else is controlled for, the country where the TV channels are the most unbalanced in the European context has a 65% lower probability of agenda-setting occurrence than the country with the politically more balanced TV panorama (Table 7.12).

The logistic analysis of newspaper agenda-setting capacity allows us to observe that, even if political balance does not explain the intensity of agenda-setting, it is associated with the odds of its occurrence. When all the other variables are kept at their mean values, going from the minimal value of newspaper political balance (.55) to the maximum value (1) increases the probability of agenda-setting occurrence by 80% (Table 7.12).

Table 7.12 – Parameter Estimates for Logistic Regression of Media Influence on Media System Characteristics

	TV Agenda-Setting Power	Newspaper Agenda-Setting Power
Intercept	-10.18	-4.93
Diff Tab-Ref.		1.08 (4.80)
Number of Titles		.15 (2.55)
Average Circulation		.33 (2.81)
Relative Audience	3.00 (2.05)	
Public Funding	-.26 (3.19)	
Choice TV	2.66 (2.59)	
Cable Dissemination	.49 (2.68)	
Economic Constraints	-.81 (4.52)	6.83 (5.81)
Political Constraints	4.52 (5.03)	-6.10 (4.37)
Journalist Professionalization	.81 (5.52)	-6.58 (5.57)
Balance TV	8.46* (5.36)	
Balance NP		10.52* (6.15)
N	27	27
Pseudo R2	24.7	20.1

Notes:

1. The dependent variable is a dichotomy, being 1 = agenda-setting occurrence.
2. In all models the VIF values for each variable are always lower than 3.
3. Significance: *** p < .001; ** p < .05; * p < .10

7.2.4 Information Environments as Mediators

According to Baron & Kenny (1986), in order to successfully prove the existence of a mediation with survey data, four requirements must be met: 1) the existence of a significant relationship between the IV or independent variable (in my case, media system dimensions) and the DV or dependent variable (agenda-setting strength/ occurrence); 2) the identification of a significant relationship between the IV and the mediator (information environment dimensions); 3) the mediator must be significantly related to the DV in a model that also contains the IV; and 4) the effect of IV on DV must be smaller (or not significant) when the mediator is included in the equation.

The first requirement was tested in the previous section, whereas the second condition was tested in Chapter Five. From the results retrieved in these two sections, I was able to narrow down the list of mediation hypotheses, by excluding the media system dimensions that did not have an impact both on agenda-setting and on trust/quality/exposure/agenda diversity. As a result, mediation paths are only possible between political balance, trust and information quality (Table 7.13).

In the case of trust, the mediation hypothesis states that political balance in the TV sector leads to a higher degree of media credibility, and this has a positive impact on agenda-setting. This hypothesis is not supported by the empirical results: the impact of the media system dimensions on TV agenda-setting occurrence/strength does not change with the inclusion of trust-related moderators, which seem not to be associated with TV agenda-setting at the country level (Table 7.14).

Table 7.13 – Mediation Hypotheses Tested in this Section

<i>Mediator</i>	<i>Mediation Hypotheses</i>
Trust	Balance TV => Credibility => TV agenda-setting
Information Quality	Balance TV => Soft Frames => TV agenda-setting
	Balance TV => Accuracy TV => TV agenda-setting
	Balance NP => Accuracy NP => NP agenda-setting
	Balance NP => Analysis NP => NP agenda-setting

Table 7.14 – Test of Trust as Mediator of TV agenda-setting

	Model 1	Model 2
Intercept	-.29 (.47)	-11.57 (6.74)
Relative Audience	.07 (.14)	2.47 (2.65)
Public Funding	-.01 (.22)	-1.05 (3.47)
Choice TV	.09 (.19)	1.85 (2.86)
Cable Dissemination	-.04 (.17)	-.17 (2.86)
Economic Constraints	.19 (.33)	.24 (4.69)
Political Constraints	-.01 (.32)	5.87 (5.94)
Journalist	-.23 (.47)	4.98 (8.03)
Professionalization	.75* (.48)	13.6* (9.7)
Balance TV	-.03 (.61)	7.62 (10.65)
Credibility		
Trust		
N	27	27
Adj/Pseudo R2	24.5	26.2

Notes:

1. All models have TV agenda-setting as dependent variable, but model 1 is an OLS regression of agenda-setting strength, whereas model 2 is a logistic regression of agenda-setting occurrence.
2. In all models the VIF values for each variable are always lower than 3.
3. Significance: *** p < .001; ** p < .05; * p < .10

Let us now test the hypotheses about the mediating impact of information quality variables. The first two refer to TV agenda-setting, and were empirically tested *via* the regression analyses presented on Table 7.15. The impact of TV political balance on agenda-setting occurrence/strength may happen via soft frames. Since politically balanced TV settings lead to a weaker use of soft frames, television audiences may therefore develop less sceptical attitudes towards the information conveyed by the newscasts and use them to develop their agendas. The second hypothesis would assume that the mediating dimension can be information accuracy, the line of reasoning being similar to the one expressed above: countries in which the TV panorama is politically balanced deliver more accurate information to their audiences, who therefore may feel more at ease with using it in order to establish their issue priorities.

Table 7.15 – Test of Information Quality as Mediator in TV agenda-setting regressions

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Intercept	.12 (.70)	-.42 (.35)	-9.21 (12.0)	-12.95 (5.94)
Relative Audience	.08 (.14)	-.01 (.14)	2.01 (2.32)	1.10 (2.34)
Public Funding	.01 (.21)	-.07 (.31)	-.18 (3.23)	-1.18 (3.51)
Choice TV	.10 (.18)	.18 (.18)	2.63 (2.59)	4.04 (3.21)
Cable Dissemination	-.04 (.16)	.01 (.17)	.48 (2.66)	1.91 (3.35)
Economic Constraints	.25 (.33)	.36 (.33)	-.89 (3.87)	2.87 (5.48)
Political Constraints	.01 (.32)	-.07 (.31)	4.66 (5.40)	3.66 (5.64)
Journalist Professionalization	-.23 (.34)	-.45 (.37)	-.74 (5.30)	-1.26 (6.07)
Balance TV	.62* (.39)	.37 (.45)	7.80* (6.37)	3.91* (5.81)
Soft Frames	-.43 (-.64)		-1.89 (10.45)	
Accuracy TV		.65* (.51)		8.15 (9.81)
N	27	27	27	27
R2/Pseudo R2	27.9	32.5	24.7	21.2

Notes:

1. All models have TV agenda-setting as dependent variable, but models 1 and 2 are OLS regression of agenda-setting strength, whereas models 3 and 4 are logistic regressions of agenda-setting occurrence. Models 1 and 3 test the mediating impact of soft frames, whereas models 2 and 4 test the mediating impact of accuracy and model 5 tests the impact of amount of hard news.
2. In all models the VIF values for each variable are always lower than 3.
3. Significance: *** p < .001; ** p < .05; * p < .10

From these two possibilities, only one is supported by the data. Accuracy in the information conveyed by the TV is positively associated with agenda-setting, and the inclusion of this factor reduces the coefficient for TV political balance and erases its statistical significance (Table 7.15). Therefore, it seems that, in the realm of television, accuracy mediates the relationship between political equilibrium and agenda-setting capacity.

In terms of newspaper agenda-setting, two possibilities were tested: the impact of political balance on the agenda-setting capacity of the press would be explained by the higher levels of accuracy and analysis in the information offered in politically neutral newspaper markets. The first hypothesis is not testable due to multicollinearity issues (the inclusion of the mediator increased the VIF values to unacceptable values, and the coefficients become highly unstable). The mediating impact of amount of analysis is not supported by the data – in fact, the inclusion of this variable in the regression produces few changes to the results reported on the table 7.12. Needless to say, the amount of analysis in the newspapers does not have an impact on agenda-setting occurrence at this level of analysis.

The mediation hypotheses tested above concerned only two out of the four informational environment variables under study. This is so because the media system dimensions that accounted for diversity of media agendas (commercialization) and exposure (development of TV market, strength of public TV, political constraints to press freedom) are unrelated to agenda-setting occurrence/intensity. Therefore, one of the assumptions suggested by Baron & Kenny (1986) for the test of mediation is not met.

However, exposure and media agenda's diversity may have a direct impact on agenda-setting. In the case of TV agenda-setting, results are disappointing: a model that controls for trust (or credibility) and information quality showed no impact of exposure to news or diversity of media agendas. In the case of newspapers, though, diversity of media agendas has a negative impact on the probability of agenda-setting occurrence, which testifies the need for some country-level homogeneity for this phenomenon to occur (McCombs, 2005). In this sample, passing from a situation of extreme homogeneity in the media agendas to a situation of

extreme diversity decreases the probability of newspaper agenda-setting occurrence by 34%. At this national level, exposure has no effects.¹⁰⁷

7.3 Audience-focused Analysis

7.3.1 General Panorama

In this section, agenda-setting refers to the correlation between the agendas of specific media outlets (TV channel's newscasts and newspapers) and the salience conferred by the audience/readership of those outlets to the same set of issues (N=15). The audience/readership groups are composed by people that mentioned having used the outlet during the election campaign at least once a week. This means that my operationalization of audience is rather broad, and, as a corollary, the test of agenda-setting in such an environment is more conservative than one that would include in the audience group respondents with very high levels of exposure.

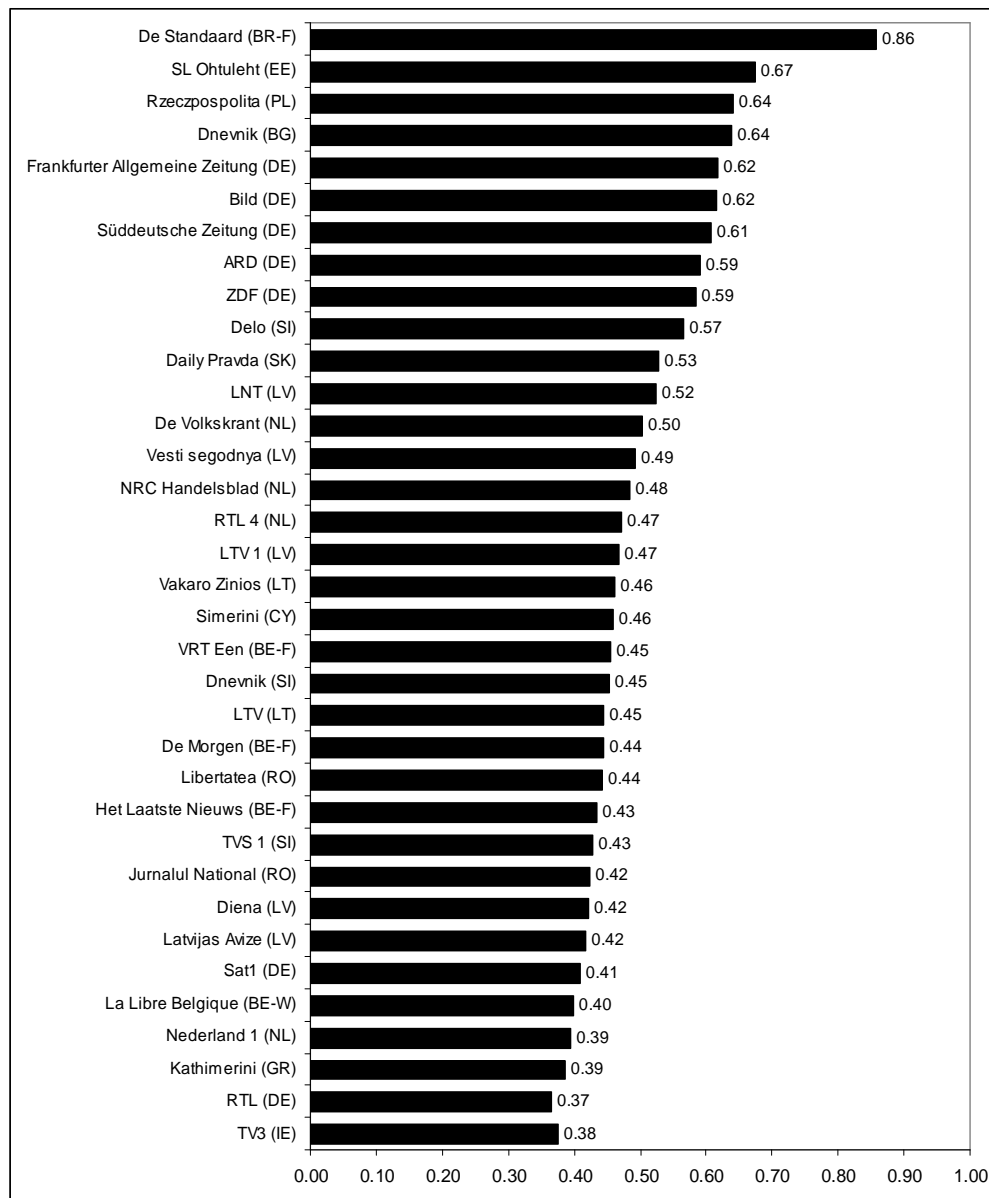
On average, agenda-setting seems to be relatively greater in the case of public channels (mean=.20) and newspapers (mean=.18) than in the case of private channels (mean=.14). The correlations between the outlet agenda and audience agenda are superior to .30 in just 35 out of the 138 outlets under analysis. All German and Latvian outlets under consideration, as well as most of the Flemish (except for the private channel VTM) and Dutch (except for the newspaper *De Telegraaf*) outlets have shown some degree of influence on the people that read/watch them (Figure 7.6).

It is also interesting to note that there are differences in the size of the effects within the countries in which almost all outlets have some degree of agenda-setting capacity. For instance, in Germany, all newspapers (including the tabloid *Bild*) present high coefficients, that are similar to those found for the public broadcasters and superior to those that depict the agenda-setting capacity of private broadcasters such as RTL or Sat1. In the case of Flanders, the reference newspaper *De Standaard* presents a very strong correlation between its contents and the opinions of its audience

¹⁰⁷ Due to space restrictions, this logistic regression is not reported in table format. The pseudo-R² associated to this regression is of 29.9%; the number of factors was 6, and the number of cases was 27.

about issue salience (actually, the stronger association found in the sample of media outlets), whereas the public broadcaster and the other newspapers display modest coefficients, and the private channel VTM seems not to have any agenda-setting capacity. In the case of Latvia and the Netherlands, the differences between outlets are more modest.

Figure 7.6 – Correlation between Media and Public Opinion Salience by Media Outlet – Outlets with Moderate to High Correlations



Source: PIREDEU Voter Survey (EES, 2009a) and Media Study (EES, 2009b).
Calculations made by the author.

7.3.2 The Impact of Media Systems and Information Environments

The TV channels' agenda-setting capacity seems to be exclusively a function of the political balance in the field of broadcasting, as Table 7.16 shows. The positive impact of absence of political leanings on agenda-setting is observed even when several other control variables are inserted in the equation. It is, however, relevant to mention that the agenda-setting capacity of each TV channel here considered does not vary significantly between countries – which may explain why the regression results are so small.

Several mediation hypotheses can be tested at this level. In Chapter Five we learned that TV's political balance is associated with increased media credibility and accuracy (both at the subsystem and at the outlet level), as well as with a lower use of soft frames in political news. From these possibilities, only one is actually supported by the data. Accuracy, referring either to the TV market in general or to the specific TV channel at stake, mediates the relationship between political balance and agenda-setting. This mediation is complete at the subsystem level (i.e. when accuracy in the TV market is included in the analysis, political balance loses its explanatory power) and partial at the outlet level (i.e. when channel accuracy is inserted in the model, the coefficient for balance in the TV market decreases somewhat) (Table 7.17). Neither credibility nor use of soft frames seems to be connected with agenda-setting capacity by the TV channels under study.

Table 7.16 – Parameter Estimates for Two-Level MLE Regression of TV Agenda-Setting Capacity on Media Systems

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>
Fixed			
Intercept	.17 (.03)	-.27 (.33)	-.27 (.37)
Journalist Prof.		-.33 (.31)	-.15 (.33)
Economic constraints		.12 (.31)	.12 (.31)
Political constraints		-.07 (.30)	-.07 (.31)
Public Funding		.01 (.30)	.01 (.20)
Relative Audience		.04 (.13)	.04 (.13)
Choice TV		.06 (.17)	.06 (.17)
Cable Dissemination		.02 (.16)	.02 (.16)
Balance TV		.68** (.34)	.67** (.35)
Political Bias Outlet			-.01 (.15)
Random			
Country-level (σ_u^2)	.02 (.01)	.02 (.01)	.02 (.01)
Individual-level (σ_e^2)	.02 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)
Wald chi-square	---	6.70	6.60
Model Fit			
Log-likelihood	23.19	20.47	19.55
AIC	54.98	32.42	30.85
BIC	59.21	43.76	42.62
N Countries/Outlets	27/57	27/57	27/57

Notes:

1. Standard linear regressions were computed in order to obtain information about possible multicollinearity. Some degree of multicollinearity is expected, but in all models the VIF values for each variable are always lower than 4.
2. Significance: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .05$; * $p < .10$
3. All independent variables vary between 0 (low quantity of the dimension) and 1 (high quantity). The dependent variable varies between -1 and 1.
4. Variables related with legal menaces to press freedom are not included because they increase multicollinearity in the models. Variables related with gender gaps in newspaper reading and imbalance between newspaper and TV consumption are not used due to lack of data for all the 27 polities under study.

Table 7.17 – Parameter Estimates for Two-Level MLE Regression of TV Agenda-Setting Capacity on Media Systems, With Mediators

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>
Fixed				
Intercept	-.44 (.40)	-.36 (.35)	-.30 (.34)	.38 (.66)
Journalist Prof.	-.42 (.35)	-.23 (.33)	-.31 (.41)	-.13 (.32)
Economic constraints	.34 (.31)	.18 (.30)	-.08 (.26)	.22 (.31)
Political constraints	-.14 (.29)	-.10 (.31)	.01 (.24)	-.04 (.30)
Public Funding	-.05 (.19)	.02 (.20)	.05 (.20)	.02 (.20)
Relative Audience	-.04 (.13)	.05 (.13)	.07 (.11)	.07 (.13)
Choice TV	.17 (.17)	.09 (.17)	.11 (.18)	.07 (.17)
Cable Dissemination	.09 (.15)	.02 (.16)	.06 (.17)	.01 (.15)
Balance TV	.21 (.41)	.61** (.34)	.45* (.29)	.49* (.27)
Accuracy TV	.83* (.48)			
Accuracy Outlet		.23* (.13)		
Credibility			.39 (.50)	
Soft Frames Use				-.69 (.59)
Random				
Country-level (sigma_u ²)	.02 (.01)	.02 (.01)	.02 (.01)	.02 (.01)
Individual-level (sigma_e ²)	.02 (.01)	.02 (.01)	.02 (.01)	.02 (.01)
Wald chi-square	10.56	9.74	7.15	8.16
Model Fit				
Log-likelihood	22.13	20.90	21.14	21.55
AIC	26.17	26.03	23.33	21.22
BIC	54.90	54.76	55.30	54.71
N Countries/Outlets	27/57	27/57	27/57	27/57

Notes:

1. Standard linear regressions were computed in order to obtain information about possible multicollinearity. Some degree of multicollinearity is expected, but in all models the VIF values for each variable are always lower than 4.
2. Significance: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .05$; * $p < .10$
3. All independent variables vary between 0 (low quantity of the dimension) and 1 (high quantity). The dependent variable varies between -1 and 1.
4. Variables related with legal menaces to press freedom are not included because they increase multicollinearity in the models. Variables related with gender gaps in newspaper reading and imbalance between newspaper and TV consumption are not used due to lack of data for all the 27 polities under study.

The mediation hypotheses tested above did not include the four informational environment variables under study, since the media system dimensions that accounted for diversity of media agendas (commercialization) and exposure (development of TV market, strength of public TV, political constraints to press freedom) are unrelated to TV channels' agenda-setting capacity. Nevertheless, exposure has a direct impact on agenda-setting. Unlike the country-level account of the relationship between TV agenda-setting and news consumption, a multilevel model that controls for trust (or credibility) and information quality shows that audiences that follow the TV channel's newscast more frequently are also more likely to reproduce that channel's issue agenda. Diversity of media agendas has no impact upon this phenomenon.¹⁰⁸

Let us now focus our attention on the newspapers, and replicate the analytical strategy used so far for the test of hypotheses concerning TV agenda-setting and its connections with media systems and informational environments. The first set of results is pretty straightforward, showing that, independently of the outlet levels of political bias, the only media system dimension that has an impact on newspaper agenda-setting capacity is associated with freedom of press. In fact, the absence of political constraints to press freedom is associated with greater newspaper agenda-setting coefficients. In the European contexts where such threats are greater, the relationship between the audience and the specific newspapers' agendas is, with everything else controlled for, .50 smaller than in a context where political constraints are minor (Table 7.18).

There are two possible pathways of mediation: the relationship between political constraints to press freedom may be due to its impact on hard news or on intensity of exposure to the news. None of these possibilities hold. The amount of hard news has no impact on agenda-setting in the model that controls for several media system characteristics. Moreover, intensity of exposure seems not to be associated with stronger agenda-setting capacity of newspapers in our sample (Table 7.19). For a mediation to be present, these variable's coefficients should be significant,

¹⁰⁸ Due to space restrictions, this regression is not reported in form of table. The coefficient for exposure is of .05.

while the role of political menaces to press freedom in the model should decrease considerably and/or become statistically insignificant. Therefore, there is probably some step missing in the causal chain linking political constraints to freedom of press and agenda-setting capacity.

Table 7.18 – Parameter Estimates for Two-Level MLE Regression of Newspaper Agenda-Setting Capacity on Media Systems

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>
Fixed			
Intercept	.18*** (.04)	.14 (.51)	.27 (.52)
Journalist Prof.		-.24 (.47)	-.29 (.47)
Economic constraints		.43 (.43)	.40 (.42)
Political constraints		-.51* (.24)	-.47* (.24)
Average Circ./Million		-.27 (.27)	-.24 (.27)
Number of Titles		.18 (.24)	.19 (.24)
Diff. Tabloids/Reference		.14 (.38)	.09 (.38)
Balance Newspapers		.35 (.45)	.34 (.44)
Political Bias Outlet			-.13 (.17)
Random			
Country-level (sigma_u ²)	.02 (.01)	.02 (.01)	.02 (.01)
Individual-level (sigma_e ²)	.05 (.01)	.04 (.01)	.04 (.01)
Wald chi-square	--	4.34	5.01
Model Fit			
Log-likelihood	-3.27	-3.11	-3.67
AIC	12.54	26.23	29.39
BIC	19.73	50.17	55.73
N Countries/Outlets	27/81	27/81	27/81

Notes:

1. Standard linear regressions were computed in order to obtain information about possible multicollinearity. Some degree of multicollinearity is expected, but in all models the VIF values for each variable are always lower than 4.
2. Significance: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .05$; * $p < .10$
3. All independent variables vary between 0 (low quantity of the dimension) and 1 (high quantity). The dependent variable varies between -1 and 1.
4. Variables related with legal menaces to press freedom and differences between tabloids and reference newspapers are not included because they increase multicollinearity in the models. Variables related with gender gaps in newspaper reading and imbalance between newspaper and TV consumption are not used due to lack of data for all the 27 polities under study.

Table 7.19 – Parameter Estimates for Two-Level MLE Regression of Newspaper Agenda-Setting Capacity on Media Systems, With Mediators

	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>
Fixed		
Intercept	-.20 (.62)	.22 (.53)
Journalist Prof.	-.41 (.50)	-.25 (.47)
Economic constraints	.73 (.54)	.44 (.43)
Political constraints	-.72* (.41)	-.44* (.34)
Average Circ./Million	-.26 (.27)	.13 (.38)
Number of Titles	.19 (.24)	.18 (.24)
Diff. Tabloids/Reference	.34 (.44)	-.24 (.27)
Balance Newspapers	.27 (.46)	.36 (.45)
Hard News	.47 (.49)	
Exposure to the Newspaper		.03* (.01)
Random		
Country-level (σ_u^2)	.03 (.01)	.03 (.01)
Individual-level (σ_e^2)	.04 (.01)	.04 (.01)
Wald chi-square	5.20	4.63
Model Fit		
Log-likelihood	-2.46	-5.21
AIC	26.92	32.42
BIC	53.25	58.76
N Countries/Outlets	27/81	27/81

Notes:

1. Standard linear regressions were computed in order to obtain information about possible multicollinearity. Some degree of multicollinearity is expected, but in all models the VIF values for each variable are always lower than 4.
2. Significance: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .05$; * $p < .10$
3. All independent variables vary between 0 (low quantity of the dimension) and 1 (high quantity). The dependent variable varies between -1 and 1.
4. Variables related with legal menaces to press freedom and differences between tabloids and reference newspapers are not included because they increase multicollinearity in the models. Variables related with gender gaps in newspaper reading and imbalance between newspaper and TV consumption are not used due to lack of data for all the 27 polities under study.

What about the role of trust and media agenda diversity? As observed at the country-level, diversity of media agendas has a negative impact on the probability of agenda-setting occurrence: once again, newspaper agenda-setting seems to be dependent on some degree of media agenda homogeneity. Trust has no direct impact on the the newspapers' agenda-setting capacity.¹⁰⁹

7.4 Final Comments

The analysis presented at the beginning of this chapter had three main goals: to present the dynamics of relationship between issue salience TV, newspaper and public opinion; to perform a convincing test of agenda-setting, by isolating the potentially confusing impacts of real world cues and personal sensitivity to the issues; and, to test whether issue obtrusiveness shapes the agenda-setting strength/occurrence in the European context.

The results showed that, even with an N as small as 27, media effects were powerful enough to be statistically significant in about half of the issues at stake. The isolated analysis of TV and newspaper agenda-setting capacity shows that the first has a stronger impact in a higher amount of issues. Conversely, the competing/complementary approach showed that, when both TV and newspapers are considered, it is usually the broadcast content that has a stronger impact on issue salience (both at the country and at the individual level) (Table 7.20).

By measuring the media agendas before the public agenda, showing the existence of an association between the two, and controlling for other causes of issue salience in public opinion, I was able to provide sufficient empirical support to the agenda-setting analysis. Surely, a perfect pattern would be to find agenda-setting effects in every single issue at stake, but this result was not expected. As debated before, the occurrence, strength and even direction of causality of the relationship between media coverage and relevance of issues on public opinion depends greatly on the nature of

¹⁰⁹ Due to the secondary nature of this statistical analysis and space restrictions, this regression is not reported in table format. The coefficient for media agenda diversity is of -.13.

the issues. The relationship between newspaper agenda-setting capacity and issue obtrusiveness is negative; the same could be said about TV agenda-setting, but in this case the differences are not statistically significant. Hypothesis 7.11 is therefore confirmed (Tables 7.20 and 7.21).

Table 7.20 – Summary of Results

	<i>Country Level</i>	<i>Audience Level</i>	<i>Issue Level (Aggregate)</i>	<i>Issue Level (Individual)</i>
TV agenda-setting?	Yes, but less frequent than newspaper agenda-setting	Yes, but more frequent in public than in private broadcasters	More frequent than in newspapers; strong effects on immigration, moderate effects in five other issues	Present in the three issues analysed; size of effects is small
NP agenda-setting?	Yes, in about half of the countries under analysis	Yes, and as frequent as in public broadcasters	Less frequent; effects often vanish when TV content is controlled for	In the three issues analysed, no effects when TV controls are inserted
Role of Controls	---	---	Sometimes qualify but almost never erase the role of the media	Sometimes qualify but almost never erase the role of the media
Issue Moderators	---	---	Obtrusiveness play its expected role	---
Media System Moderators	Political balance moderates agenda-setting occurrence	For TV, political balance in the subsystem; for newspapers, absence of political constraints	---	----
Mediation	Accuracy (Only for TV)	Accuracy (Only for TV)	---	---
Direct Impact of Information Environment Variables	Agenda Diversity (Only for Newspapers) Exposure (Only for TV)	Agenda Diversity (Only for Newspapers) Exposure (Only for TV)		

What about the results coming from the country and audience analysis? These sections provided empirical support to the assumption that agenda-setting capacity or magnitude varies greatly between European countries, and also between the major media outlets in those countries.

Moreover, political-related media system dimensions proved relevant for the explanation of why agenda-setting strength and occurrence varies in European countries. It seems that, both in the case of TV and newspapers, political balance in their subsystems is associated with the occurrence of agenda-setting effects, with this phenomenon being more likely in politically unbiased settings than in contexts where political leanings are more evident. But why is balance important for agenda-setting to take place? In the case of TV, the impact of political balance on agenda-setting is mediated by information accuracy; in the case of newspapers, the association is less clear.

Interestingly enough, it seems that the specific level of partisanship of a specific TV channel has no effect on its agenda-setting capacity over its audience, but it is the general panorama in the subsystem (press or broadcasting) that matters. This may be so because, at the audience level, there can be strong similarities between the political leanings of audience and outlets. More than “my favourite TV news show is politically balanced”, what seems to matter is to think “TV channels in my country are fairly unbiased and provide accurate information about current affairs”.

Several hypotheses were drawn about the relationship between media systems, information environments and media effects. Table 7.21 differentiates between those that were confirmed and those that were not.

In the European context, structural dimensions and journalist professionalization seem not to have an impact on agenda-setting, although most of these dimensions explain some of the variation in the levels of exposure to news (choice, low levels of commercialization), information accuracy (press qualitative diversity, absence of economic constraints to freedom, professionalized journalistic body) and diversity of the media agendas (commercialization). While trust seems to matter less for agenda-setting, accuracy of the information provided by the TV does contribute to a stronger incidence of this phenomenon, agenda diversity (which is lower

in commercialized settings) has a negative impact on newspaper agenda-setting, and frequency of exposure (higher in commercialized settings and in contexts where press freedom is higher) is positively associated with TV agenda-setting capacity. Therefore, even if there is not a mediation effect, there are several indirect causal paths that link agenda-setting to structural media system characteristics.

A final note about media types (press vs. broadcasting) is due. The question about which type of media have stronger impacts on the public agenda does not receive a full answer in this dissertation. On the one hand, it seems that it is the amount of TV coverage that matters for the importance conferred by the public to several issues (immigration, government, crime and justice, foreign policy and defence, social justice, political corruption). On the other hand, when agendas are taken as a whole, the public opinion agenda's resemble those of newspapers to a greater degree than those of TV news shows (Table 7.20).

Table 7.21 – Hypotheses Tested: Relationship between Agenda-setting, Media Systems and Information Environments

<i>Hypothesis</i>	<i>Result</i>
7.1 The salience conferred to the issues will be associated with the amount of coverage in TV and newspapers	Confirmed at the four levels of analysis, but varies depending on issues and countries at stake.
7.2 Systems with developed press markets display strong agenda-setting effects. This relationship is not direct, but mediated by information quality	Not confirmed
7.3 Systems with developed TV markets display strong TV agenda-setting effects, since this subsystem's development is connected to higher frequency of exposure to TV newscasts	There is no mediation, but cable dissemination boosts frequency of exposure to newscasts, which in turn is positively associated with TV channel's agenda-setting capacity
7.4 Systems with strong public broadcasters are those where the occurrence of TV agenda-setting is higher, either due to the fact that frequency of exposure to news is higher in those settings or because it has an impact on the media agendas' diversity	There is no mediation, but commercialization is associated with more agenda homogeneity, which boosts agenda-setting in the case of newspapers. Moreover, commercialization reduces exposure to news, which has a negative impact on TV agenda-setting capacity
7.5 Press freedom has a strong impact on agenda-setting, because it reduces trust and news exposure, as well as the quality of the information offered by the media actors	There is no mediation, but political constraints are associated with lower levels of exposure to TV news, and exposure to TV news has a positive impact on those channel's agenda-setting capacity
7.6 Countries with highly professionalized journalists have a greater probability of displaying agenda-setting, because professionalization boosts trust in the media and information quality	There is no mediation, but professionalization leads to more information quality, and this factor has a positive impact on agenda-setting
7.7 Countries with politically balanced media have a higher probability of agenda-setting occurrence	Confirmed
7.8 Outlet accuracy boosts the outlet's agenda-setting capacity	Confirmed
7.9 Outlet bias buffers the outlet's agenda-setting capacity	Not confirmed
7.10 Agenda-setting capacity will be stronger for unobtrusive issues	Confirmed

PART V - CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSIONS

The study of media effects, particularly in Europe, is challenging. Scholars working in this area often face difficulties in finding data on media content or in controlling the quality of the data that is sometimes produced. Moreover, a century of research history with ups and downs, and the ghost of the minimal effects paradigm, teaches us to be cautious and keep our expectations low. The complexity of the media realm and its connections to the political world puts us in a difficult position, torn between the need of controlling for all the relevant variables that may be hiding the small, easy-to-miss, but nevertheless relevant, media effect, and the need to be parsimonious and deliver intelligible feedback to the rest of the academic community. This is the story of this dissertation: a project with several goals, an incredibly complex web of causal chains, moderators, mediators and controls and low expectations about the final outcomes grew into a (relatively) parsimonious account of contextual effects in the field of agenda-setting.

The major goal of the research reported in this dissertation was to contribute to the agenda-setting theory by addressing some of the unanswered questions resulting from the lack of comparative studies of agenda-setting. The underlying objective was therefore to understand the role of national-level dimensions (namely those related to media systems) of the agenda-setting process.

In order to do so, it was necessary to know the specificities of media systems and information environments in the EU. In Chapter Three, the theoretical grounds of this endeavour were established, through the identification of the most relevant theories of media systems in Western Societies, the choice/adaptation of the most relevant dimensions and the argumentation of why those dimensions may matter for the agenda-setting occurrence. Due to the inexistence of a unique source of comparative quantitative data measuring all the dimensions of interest (development of media markets, TV market commercialization, political partisanship, freedom of press, journalist professionalization), a considerable effort was devoted to putting together data taken from several sources and collecting my own data in order to measure the softer dimensions of the media system theoretical model (see Chapter Four and Appendix 1).

The efforts were well rewarded: the main features of media systems, and their correlates in terms of the informational environment, were proven to vary considerably within EU borders. Moreover, not only was I able to prove that there is substantial variation in the media systems in Europe, but also that the polities under study tend to come together in a way which is not completely unlike that postulated by Hallin & Mancini (2004). However, there were some differences between their work and my own: instead of three models of media systems, my results would support a divide between stable democracies in Northern and Western Europe and most of the Southern and Eastern European countries.

The other relevant finding of the analysis of media systems and information environments is the fact that the informational context in Europe is also very different between countries. The four informational environment dimensions – diversity and quality, exposure and trust – are connected to some and, in some cases, several media system characteristics.

The second step of this research endeavour was to measure agenda-setting in different European contexts, in order to test the second assumption of the comparative framework: a substantial degree of variance in the outcome of interest. Writing Chapter Two involved understanding the existing theoretical and empirical literature in the field of agenda-setting, which is quite useful for a full appreciation of this phenomenon

and to make decisions about how to measure agenda-setting in the EU framework. Those decisions, expressed in Chapter Six, lead to four different analysis of this phenomenon, all of which proved that agenda-setting occurrence and strength varied considerably within the EU during the Summer of 2009.

The issue-focused analysis showed that, even with a small number of cases, media effects were powerful enough to be observable in about half of the issues at stake. Moreover, TV seems to play a more important role than newspapers. The isolated analysis of TV and newspaper agenda-setting capacity shows that the first has a stronger impact in a greater number of issues; the competing/complementary approach showed that, when both TV and newspapers are considered, it is usually the broadcast content that has a stronger impact on issue salience. The analysis carried out at the country and audience levels also provided empirical support to the assumption that agenda-setting occurred in Europe both during and in the aftermath of the European Parliament election of 2009. In addition, it was shown that capacity or magnitude varies greatly between European countries, and also between the main media outlets in those countries.

The final step of the research reported here was to see whether media systems and information environments mattered. Generally speaking, some of the dimensions under study proved to have a direct, mediating or mediated impact in the occurrence and strength of agenda-setting, especially in the case of television. To start with, politics-related media system dimensions (political balance, press freedom) proved to be relevant for the explanation of why agenda-setting varies between European countries. It seems that, both in the case of TV and newspapers, political balance at the country level explains the occurrence of agenda-setting effects, with this phenomenon being more probable in politically unbiased contexts.

The information environment seems to matter more in terms of information quality (and, in particular, accuracy), diversity and exposure to news than in terms of general levels of media trust. In the case of TV, the impact of political balance on agenda-setting is mediated by information accuracy, whereas the contexts where the media are more credible or

trustworthy do not display a stronger probability of agenda-setting occurrence. Frequency of exposure is associated with TV agenda-setting effects, whereas homogeneity in media agendas boosts the newspaper's capacity to set their readers' agendas.

In sum, the comparative framework built and used in this dissertation shows that cross-country studies of political communication that do more than controlling for between country variability via country dummies are not only necessary but also possible. Country-level variation can be controlled or accounted for substantive factors related to the setting in which the political communication occurs.

However, there is a series of negative results that need to be mentioned. For instance, the structural dimensions studied here (development of press markets, patterns of commercialization of the TV market) and journalist professionalization, seem not to have a direct impact on agenda-setting vis-à-vis political partisanship and press freedom. The reasons for this may be due a misinterpretation of the position of the five media system dimensions in our funnel of causality. Indeed, it may well be that structural and value dimensions are not correlates of press freedom and political balance, but factors that shape and explain these dimensions, and that their effects on the information environment and on agenda-setting are mediated by partisanship and press freedom. Future theoretical and historical research on media systems should focus more upon the relationship patterns between the several variables used to capture an image of the media landscape, and take this particular hypothesis into account.

8.1 Paths for Future Research

The fact that the most relevant media system dimensions proved to be those related to the interaction between media and politics (one the one hand, political balance; on the other, absence of political constraints to freedom of press) remind us of the close connections between these two powerful actors in modern societies. However, among the shortcomings present in the research reported here, the most relevant concerns the

pictures I built up of the media and political environments. Both worlds can be depicted in a more complete way.

For instance, future studies can bring political system variables into the equation, since the influence of the media is very likely enhanced or diminished by the strength or weakness of other players in the political arena. In terms of agenda setting, what does this mean? Semetko et al. (1991, p. 178) stress that when party systems are more stable and institutionalized, the media have less power to set the agenda during electoral campaigns. Stable party systems tend to insulate the parties from short-term developments; unstable party systems might also cause more need for orientation by citizens (unable to deal with the complexity of a continuously changing political arena), and therefore media agenda-setting effects might be stronger.

Differences in the relative agenda-setting power of media and politicians might also be related to how competitive the political system is, both in terms of getting political power and media attention. That is to say, larger parliaments undermine individual MPs' efforts to set the agenda, since there are several other colleagues trying to do the same; in those contexts, media power would be stronger than in less competitive settings. This idea was presented in a recent article on political agenda-setting (van Aelst & Walgrave, 2010), and its empirical test can also improve the quality of agenda-setting studies.

Lastly, the focus of the current thesis on traditional media may be seen as a weakness of this work. As Aalberg & Curran (2012, p. 3) put it: "Politically relevant information is now more widely available than at any time in the past. But never before has it been so easy to avoid new and current affairs in the media...The rise of cable TV and the Internet have given people greater control over what media they consume. The use of internet does not necessarily mean access to more politically relevant information, since people tend to use the Internet more for their special and personal interests than to consume mass media websites." Accordingly, Takeshita (2006) believes that future agenda-setting research should deal with questions related the media environment, in particular the development of communication technology and increases in amount and

variety of news outlets poses a challenge to agenda-setting and might reduce media effects, due to a fragmentation in the public agenda. Free newspapers were also not a part of this study. This could pose a problem, especially in markets where they occupy a predominant position amongst the most read newspapers, as is the case in the Baltic countries (Balcytiene, 2009).

The research reported in this dissertation prepared the way for subsequent comparative studies of agenda-setting in (and beyond Europe). That was done through the proposal of a specific research design, the creation or identification of relevant data sources, the test of the relationship between agenda-setting and the context in which it happens, and the identification of shortcomings from substantial and methodological points of view. We now know that agenda-setting varies within Europe and have some insight on why that is so. We now know what can be done to reinforce our understanding of this phenomenon. Therefore, let us do it... let us be comparative.

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Appendices

CONTENTS

Appendix 1: The Expert Survey on European Media Systems – Basic Information

Appendix 2: Descriptive Statistics for Media Systems and Information Environment Variables (Raw variables)

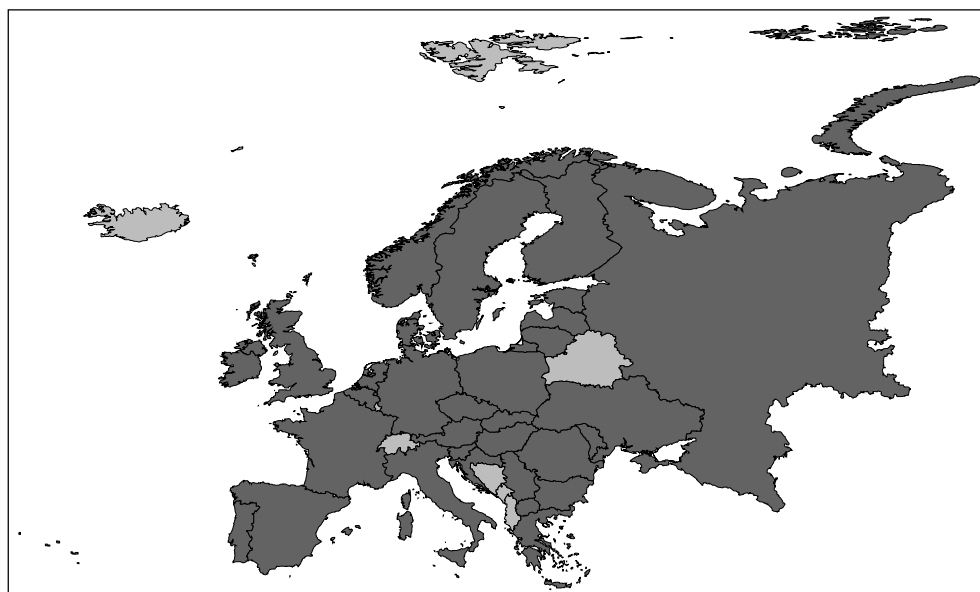
Appendix 3: Issues Included in this Study

Appendix 4: Media outlets whose content is used in this study

Appendix 1: The Expert Survey on European Media Systems – Basic Information

In late 2009, a group of researchers composed by Marina Popescu (University of Essex), Tania Gosselin (Université du Quebec a Montreal) and myself, carried out an expert survey in 33¹¹⁰ European countries, including 26 out of the 27 European Union (EU) member-States¹¹¹ (Figure A). The purpose of the expert survey was to gather data about the media systems in those countries, posing a relevant set of questions to particularly well-informed citizens – academic experts in communication studies, public opinion, political communication and electoral behaviour.

**Figure A – Countries included in the Expert Survey on European Media Systems
(Popescu, Santana Pereira & Gosselin, 2010)**



Notes: Dark grey countries were included. All European countries were part of the survey, except for Iceland, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania and Belarus.

¹¹⁰ The study was conducted in 34 different media systems. Belgium is considered to enclose two different realities – the media and party systems in Wallonia (French-speaking) and Flanders (Dutch-speaking) are independent (see, for instance, the MAVISE reports; MAVISE-EAO, 2010).

¹¹¹ Due to the special characteristics of Luxembourg – namely the inexistence of a public broadcasting entity and the fact the most watched TV channels are foreign or cable TV (MAVISE - EAO, 2010) – this country is not part of the expert survey (see also Popescu, 2011).

The major aim of the expert survey was to operationalize Hallin and Mancini's (2004) model, by measuring the dimensions they propose in a way that would allow a) to capture country specificities hidden by the three ideal-types created by the authors, and b) the inclusion of the media systems dimensions proposed by these authors in quantitative comparative studies, creating data that can be matched with survey data produced by PIREDEU, ESS or INTUNE.

The second goal was to enlarge the scope of media systems research, following a very recent trend in the field and including Eastern European countries – most of which became members of the European Union right after the book by Hallin and Mancini was published. Our geographical scope is wider than the EU borders, in the sense that it also comprises countries that are still not part of the EU but might become member-States in the future (e.g.: Croatia and other countries in the Balkan Peninsula), or relevant neighbours, such as Russia. A third goal was to enrich the study of media systems in Europe by measure dimensions that are not addressed by Hallin & Mancini (2004), such as freedom of press, the role of the media in the society, the quality of the media content or the changes brought by the online news media.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was built during the spring and summer of 2009. Due to the nature of the target population (academic researchers) we decided to produce just one version of the questionnaire, in the *lingua franca* of European scholars – English.

As stated above, one of the major goals of the expert survey on European media systems was to operationalize the mainly theoretical model of media systems proposed by Hallin and Mancini (2004) – therefore, the most relevant dimensions in the expert survey's questionnaire are the development of media markets, journalist professionalization, and political parallelism. Since state ownership is measurable in a very straightforward way (just finding out how many television stations and press companies belong to the state), this dimension

is not part of the expert survey, giving space to another relevant dimension – freedom of press.

In a **developed press market**, the target of the journals are the general population (instead of the political elite), there are similar patterns of consumption of electronic media and press (instead of a clear predominance of the latter), a clear separation between sensationalist or tabloid press and quality press, and a reasonable number of media outlets (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). The expert survey includes some questions that tackle the issue of development – namely the existence of style differences between different types of journals (questions 2, 3 and 5) or between public and private television (questions 26-32).

Journalist professionalization is defined as the degree by which the practice of journalism reached the level of profession. Questions 39-42 were specifically designed to operationalize this dimension.

Hallin & Mancini (2004) analyse the idea of **media partisanship** under the more general umbrella of political parallelism. The expert survey questionnaire operationalizes this dimension both at the country level (questions 6, 11, 12 are about journalism partisanship, air time and physical space given to different parties in general) and the media outlet level (questions 33, 34, 37 and 38 are about the political colour of the outlet and its influence on news content).¹¹²

Finally, **freedom of press**, which is often operationalized through the use of indexes created by international organizations such as Freedom House or Reporters Without Borders (Norris, 2004; Norris & Inglehart, 2007). Our expert survey comprises two questions about freedom of press, one focusing on the country in general (question 4) and other on the influence that media outlet owners have on their news contents (question 35).

¹¹² For each country, we created a list of relevant media outlets and political parties. The political parties considered are those that are represented in the national parliament and had at least 3% of the votes in the previous election. The media outlets are the ones with the biggest shares/sales in the country; the lists were composed by 7 to 10 outlets: newspapers (reference and tabloid, and, when relevant, daily and weekly) and TV channels (public and private).

The expert survey also includes other questions, such as about online news media (questions 8-10), the role of the news media (questions 1, 7, 43-48) and media content quality (13-25, 36).

All questions were reviewed by colleagues who usually work with survey data. Their comments lead to substantial changes in wording and format. The questionnaire was also pre-tested in a small convenience sample, and additional changes were then implemented. The pre-test was especially useful to identify poor wording, typos and small technical flaws, secondary problems that, however, can reduce the participant's motivation to answer the questions and induce drop out (Fan & Yan, 2010).

Table A – List of questions in the Expert Survey
(the empty lines represent a change of page in the online survey)

	QUESTION	Scale	
	News media enjoy a lot of credibility in [COUNTRY]	0 Untrue	10 True
	Citizens can find in-depth reporting and analysis in the news media if they are interested in something	0 Untrue	10 True
	The production costs of hard news content are so high that most news media cannot afford to present carefully researched facts and analyses	0 Untrue	10 True
	Politicians, business people and interest groups influence what the news media report and how by pressurizing and bribing individual journalists	0 Untrue	10 True
	There is little difference between the way tabloid and quality newspapers cover public affairs	0 Untrue	10 True
	The political orientation of the most prominent journalists is well-known to the public	0 Untrue	10 True
	The news media have significant influence on what is discussed by politicians by focusing public attention on particular problems in [COUNTRY]	0 Untrue	10 True
	The internet has made journalism more responsive to the public	0 Untrue	10 True
	The internet has significantly broadened the range of actors who can influence public opinion	0 Untrue	10 True
	Online news media outlets are not yet significant competitors of traditional media outlets	0 Untrue	10 True
	Would you say that all major political opinions in [COUNTRY] are present in the newspapers or rather that only some opinions are present?	0 only some	10 All
	And how about television, would you say that all major political opinions or that only some political opinions in [COUNTRY] are present in broadcasting?	0 only some	10 All
	Independently of the above, would you say that on the whole in [COUNTRY] an accurate representation of the facts in public affairs or not at all-... in the newspapers?	0 not at all accurate	Accurate
	Independently of the above, would you say that on the whole in [COUNTRY] an accurate representation of the facts in public affairs or not at all -... on television?	0 not at all accurate	Accurate
	Thinking now about the analysis of the causes, contextual circumstances, consequences and implications of important developments in public affairs, would you say that newspapers provide a lot, enough or rather too little analysis?-... in the newspapers?	0 too little	5 enough 10a lot of analysis
	And how about television channels, would you say that they present a lot, just about enough or too little analysis of the causes, consequences and implications of important developments in public affairs?-... on television?	0 too little	5 enough 10 a lot of analysis
	Looking at the [COUNTRY]n news media in general, how wide is the range of specialists from different domains presenting expert information and analysis	0 just a few	10 wide range
	And would you say that the different media outlets in [COUNTRY] provide a variety of different stories and information or that the same few things are repeated in nearly all media outlets	0 same few	10 many different
	Do the news media in [COUNTRY] focus too much, just enough or too little on information about economic issues facing [COUNTRY]?	0 too little	5 enough 10 too much
	Do the news media in [COUNTRY] focus too much, just enough or too little on information about international affairs?	0 too little	5 enough 10 too much

	QUESTION	Scale	
	Do the news media in [COUNTRY] focus too much, just enough or too little on information about individual politicians, their character and motivations?	0 too little	5 enough 10 too much
	Do the news media in [COUNTRY] focus too much, just enough or too little on information about policy differences between competing parties and politicians?	0 too little	5 enough 10 too much
	Do the news media in [COUNTRY] focus too much, just enough or too little on information about investigative reports on important issues?	0 too little	5 enough 10 too much
	Do the news media in [COUNTRY] focus too much, just enough or too little on information about the sensational aspects of events and stories?	0 too little	5 enough 10 too much
	Do the news media in [COUNTRY] focus too much, just enough or too little on information about politics seen as a game, a horse-race, just a competition for power?	0 too little	5 enough 10 too much
	Do you think it is true that public television in [COUNTRY], compared to private television channels,...-More political news	0 Untrue	10 True
	Do you think it is true that public television in [COUNTRY], compared to private television channels,...-Wider range of programming	0 Untrue	10 True
	Do you think it is true that public television in [COUNTRY], compared to private television channels,...-More boring programmes for the average viewer	0 Untrue	10 True
	Do you think it is true that public television in [COUNTRY], compared to private television channels,...-More in-depth coverage of politics and public affairs	0 Untrue	10 True
	Do you think it is true that public television in [COUNTRY], compared to private television channels,...-A less sensationalist style	0 Untrue	10 True
	Do you think it is true that public television in [COUNTRY], compared to private television channels,...-More focus on the culture and traditions of minorities in [COUNTRY]	0 Untrue	10 True
	Do you think it is true that public television in [COUNTRY], compared to private television channels,...-More trustworthy information	0 Untrue	10 True
	How would you characterize the political color of each of these media outlets in (COUNTRY)?	List of political parties represented at the national parliament and having more than 3% of the vote share in the previous election	
	How far is the political coverage of each of the following media outlets influenced by a party or parties? (followed by a list of 7-10 media outlets)	0 Not at all	10 strongly
	And how much is the political coverage in the following media outlets influenced by its owners? (followed by a list of 7-10 media outlets)	0 Not at all	10 strongly
	To what extent do these media provide accurate information on facts backed by credible sources and expertise? (followed by a list of 7-10 media outlets)	0 Never	10 Always
	To what extent does each present equally well the arguments of all sides in political debates? (followed by a list of 7-10 media outlets)	0 Never	10 Always
	To what extent does each advocate particular views and policies? (followed by a list of 7-10 media outlets)	0 Never	10 Always

	QUESTION	Scale	
	Journalists in [COUNTRY] are motivated by an ethic of serving the public interest	0 Not at all	10 Very much
	Journalists in [COUNTRY] agree on the criteria for judging excellence in their profession regardless of their political orientations	0 Not at all	10 Very much
	Journalists have sufficient training to ensure that basic professional norms like accuracy, relevance, completeness, balance, timeliness, double-checking and source confidentiality are respected in news-making practices	0 Not at all	10 Very much
	The journalistic content of public television in [COUNTRY] is entirely free from governmental political interference	0 Not at all	10 Very much
	how far do media outlets in general succeed in..... stimulating general interest among citizens in public affairs?	0 Not at all	10 Very much
	how far do media outlets in general succeed in.....providing a forum for politicians and parties to debate in front of citizens?	0 Not at all	10 Very much
	how far do media outlets in general succeed in..... providing a variety of perspectives on the important issues of the day?	0 Not at all	10 Very much
	how far do media outlets in general succeed in..... serving as watchdog scrutinizing the actions of government officials on behalf of citizens?	0 Not at all	10 Very much
	Media coverage of public affairs has a lot of influence on public opinion in [COUNTRY]	0 Untrue	10 True
	Media coverage of public affairs has a lot of influence in political and policy circles in [COUNTRY]	0 Untrue	10 True

The Media Outlets and the Political Parties

The selection of the media outlets in each country respected three criteria: the outlets were chosen based on their audience share/circulation but also in order to represent both public and private channels, as well as reference and tabloid newspapers; moreover, outlets whose content had been collected and analysed by PIREDEU Media Survey had to be represented in the expert survey. Most countries had 9 outlets analysed, with some exceptions (e.g.: Bulgaria=7; Romania =10), which means that there is information about 228 media outlets in the expert survey dataset. Regarding the political parties, we elaborated a list of political parties represented at the national parliament and having more than 3% of the vote share in the previous election. Due to space and reader-friendly constraints, the following table only presents the TV Channels, Newspapers and Political parties from the 27 polities under study in this dissertation; information on the other polities (Croatia, Macedonia, Moldova, Norway, Serbia, Russia, Ukraine) is available in Popescu (2011).

Table B – List of TV Channels, Newspapers and Political Parties in the Expert Survey
(Public Broadcasters are presented in Italics)

	TV Channels	Newspapers	Political Parties
Austria	<i>ORF1</i> <i>ORF2</i> ATV Austria 9 TV Puls 4	Der Standard Die Presse Neue Kronen Zeitung Kleine Zeitung	SPÖ ÖVP FPÖ BZÖ GRÜNE
Belgium Flanders	<i>VRT Een</i> <i>VRT Canvas</i> VTM VT4 2BE	De Morgen De Standard Het Laatste Nieuws Gazet van Antwerpen	CD&V VB N-VA VLD SPA SLP Groenen
Belgium Wallonia	<i>RTBF La Une</i> <i>RTBF La Deux</i> <i>RTBF La Trois</i> RTL-TVI	Le Soir La Dernière Heure La Libre Belgique	MR PS CDH Ecolo FN
Bulgaria	<i>BNT Kanal 1</i> bTV Nova TV	24 Chasa Dnevnik Trud Monitor	GERB BSP DPS ATAKA SDS DSB RZS NDSV
Cyprus	<i>RIK1</i> <i>RIK2</i> ANT1 Sigma Mega	Alithia Fileleytheros Haravgi Simerini	AKEL DISY DIKO KSD-EDEK Evroko KOP
Czech Republic	<i>Ceska televize</i> TV Nova Prima	Blesk Mlada Fronta Dnes Pravo Lidove noviny	ODS ČSSD KSČM KDU-ČSL SZ
Denmark	<i>DR1</i> <i>DR2</i> TV2 TV3 Kanal 5	Dagbladet Politiken Berlingske Tidende Jyllands Posten Ekstra Bladet	Venstre SD DF SF KF RV Liberal Alliance EL - De Rød-Grønne
Estonia	<i>ETV</i> <i>ETV2</i> Kanal 2 TV3 PBK	Postimees SL Ohtuleht Eesti Ekspress Wochenblatt Eesti Päevaleht	Eesti Reformierakond Eesti Keskerakond Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit Sotsiaal-demokraatlik Erakond Eestimaa Rohelised Eestimaa Rahvaliid

	TV Channels	Newspapers	Political Parties
Finland	YLE TV1 YLE TV2 MTV3 Nelonen Sub	Helsingin Sanomat Aamulehti Ilta-Sanomat	KESK KOK SDP VAS VIHR KD SFP PS
France	France 2 France 3 France 5 TF1 M6	Le Monde Le Figaro Libération Aujourd'hui en France	UMP PS MoDem PCF Nouveau Centre Verts FN PRG MPF
Germany	ARD ZDF Sat1 RTL ProSieben	Die Welt Bild Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung Süddeutsche Zeitung	CDU SPD FDP Linke Grüne CSU
Greece	NET Mega ANT1 Alpha TV Alter	Ethnos Kathimerini Ta Nea Eleftherotipia	PASOK ND KKE LAOS SYRIZA Oikologoi Prasinoi
Hungary	M1 TV2 ATV RTL Klub Hir TV	Magyar Hírlap Magyar Nemzet Blikk Nepszabadsag	MSZP FIDESZ SZDSZ MDF JOBBIK LMP
Ireland	RTÉ1 RTÉ2 TV3 TG4	Irish Independent Sunday World Irish Times Irish Daily Star	Fianna Fail Fine Gael Labour Sinn Fein Green Party
Italy	RAI Uno RAI Due RAI Tre Canale 5 Italia 1	Corriere della Sera La Stampa La Repubblica Il Giornale	PDL LN IDV PD UDC PRC PDCI Verdi PS
Latvia	LTV LNT TV3 PBK Latvia	Diena Latvijas Avize Vesti segodnya	Tautas Partija Jaunais Laiks LSP TSP Latvijas Zaļā Partija LPP - Latvijas Ceļš CP - Latvijas Zemnieku Savienība Par Cilvēka Tiesībām Vienotā Latvijā Tēvzemei un Brīvībai /LNNK

	TV Channels	Newspapers	Political Parties
Lithuania	LTV 1 TV3 LNK BTV	Lietuvos Rytas Respublika Vakaro Zinios	TS-LKD TPP Tvarka ir Teisingumas LSDP Darbo Partija LRLS Liberalų ir Centro Sąjunga
Malta	TVM One TV Net TV Smash TV	Nazzjon Orizzont The Times of Malta The Malta Independent	Alternattiva Demokratika Partit Nazzjonalista Partit Laburista Azzjoni Nazzjonali
Netherlands	Nederland 1 Nederland 2 Nederland 3 RTL 4 SBS 6	De Telegraaf De Volkskrant Algemeen Dagblad NRC Handelsblad	CDA PvdA SP VVD PVV GL CU D66
Poland	TVP 1 TVP 2 TVP 3/TVP reg TVN Polsat	Fakt Gazeta Wyborcza Super Express Rzeczpospolita	PiS PO SLD PSL UP PD Samoobrona RP
Portugal	RTP1 RTP2 SIC TVI	Correio da Manhã Público Jornal de Notícias Expresso	PS PSD CDS-PP BE PCP PEV
Romania	TVR1 Pro TV Antena 1 PrimaTV Realitatea TV	Evenimentul Zilei Libertatea Adevarul Jurnalul National Gandul	PSD PDL PNL UDMR PRM PC
Slovakia	STV 1 STV 2 TV Markiza TV Joj	Daily Pravda Nový Čas SME	SMER SDKU-DS MKP SNS LS-HZDS KDH
Slovenia	TVS 1 TVS 2 POP TV Kanal A TV3	Dnevnik Slovenske Novice Delo Večer	SD SDS Zares DeSUS SNS SLS LDS NSI
Spain	TVE1 TVE2 Antena 3 Cuatro Telecinco	El País El Mundo ABC El Periodico	PSOE PP IU UPD CiU PNV

	TV Channels	Newspapers	Political Parties
Sweden	SVT 1 SVT 2 TV3 TV4 Kanal 5	Aftonbladet Dagens Nyheter Svenska Dagbladet Göteborgs-Posten	SAP M C FP KD VP MP
UK	BBC One BBC Two ITV1 Channel 4 Five	Daily Telegraph The Guardian The Sun The Times	Labour Conservative Liberal Democrat SNP Plaid Cymru BNP

Selecting the Participants

In this expert survey, 1826 experts in political communication and public opinion, living and working in 33 European countries (1531 in the EU member-States, Luxembourg excepted), were invited to answer a small online questionnaire about several features of the media system they were living in and dealing with on a daily basis.

The response rate for the 34 polities is of 38.7%. In the case of the 26 member-States – that is to say, the specific dataset I will be using in the next pages – from the 1520 experts that received an invitation to participate in this online survey, 541 decided to participate. Therefore, for the EU-26 the response rate is slightly lower (37.8%) than for the complete set of countries, but it is still quite satisfactory. A considerable amount of countries have response rates that are not particularly difference from the average. However, in France, French-Speaking Belgium, Bulgaria and Greece less than 25% of the invited experts participated in the survey. On the other hand, the response rates in Romania, Lithuania and, particularly, Malta, are very high (Table C).

Table C – Expert Survey on Media Systems: Initial Sample, Number of Participants and Response Rates by Country

	Initial Sample	Participants	Response Rate (%)
Austria	56	19	33.9
Belgium Flanders	67	23	34.3
Belgium Wallonia	51	12	23.5
Bulgaria	45	11	24.4
Cyprus	21	9	42.9
Czech Republic	42	13	31.0
Germany	89	35	39.3
Denmark	67	21	31.3
Estonia	38	17	44.7
Spain	78	33	42.3
Finland	65	30	46.2
France	92	18	19.6
United Kingdom	96	25	26.0
Greece	68	17	25.0
Hungary	55	23	41.8
Ireland	33	14	42.4
Italy	78	23	29.5
Lithuania	41	23	56.1
Latvia	30	10	33.3
Malta	10	7	70.0
Netherlands	61	22	36.1
Poland	43	15	34.9
Portugal	70	22	31.4
Romania	71	38	53.5
Sweden	77	35	45.5
Slovenia	37	18	48.6
Slovakia	40	13	32.5
TOTAL	1521	546	37.8

Source: Popescu (2011).

Building and Launching the Online Survey

When the content of the questionnaire was closed and all decisions about question wording had been made, the team started to build the online framework to collect the data. The expert survey was created through the use of Qualtrics, an online software for survey development, implementation and analysis¹¹³. This software was chosen due to its reliability, user friendliness and possibility of technical support during the building and maintenance of online surveys.

The survey questionnaire was composed by 48 questions in nine pages, preceded by a short welcoming/instruction panel (Figure C). The decision of using a screen-by-screen design instead of a scrolling design (with just one page) was made due to the relatively high number of questions present in the questionnaire. The positive effect of scrolling design on completion time (Couper, Traugott & Lamias, 2001; Toepoel, Das & van Soest, 2008) or completion rates is actually still controversial in the literature (Manfreda et al., 2002, in Toepoel, Das & van Soest, 2008; Fan & Yan, 2010).

The questions were distributed into the pages following two criteria – dimension covered (items measuring the same dimension were presented, as much as possible, together) and answering scale, in order to facilitate the respondent's task (Toepoel, Das & van Soest, 2008; Fan & Yan, 2010). The easier questions (those for which no lists of parties or media outlets were presented) were placed at the beginning and at the end of the questionnaire, whereas the hard questions were placed at the middle. The literature tells us that starting with hard questions (in terms of content or format – for instance, complex tables) cuts the motivation to participate and to complete the questionnaire (O'Neil, Penrod & Bornstein, 2003; Ekman et al., 2007), while putting the hard questions after a relatively long list of easy questions could have the same negative effect.

¹¹³ See a description of the software at <http://www.qualtrics.com/>.

Figure C – The Expert Survey’s Introduction Page

qualtrics.com

Political Information and Media Systems in Comparative Perspective

Thank you for answering our questionnaire on comparing media systems in Europe.

We would be very grateful if you responded to all the questions. We also welcome any comments or information you may find relevant to add. The responses and the comments remain anonymous.

For most questions, we would like to ask you to express your opinion by selecting a single number on a 0-10 scale. The meaning of 0 and 10 is always shown above the scale in the questionnaire.

Survey Completion
0% 100%

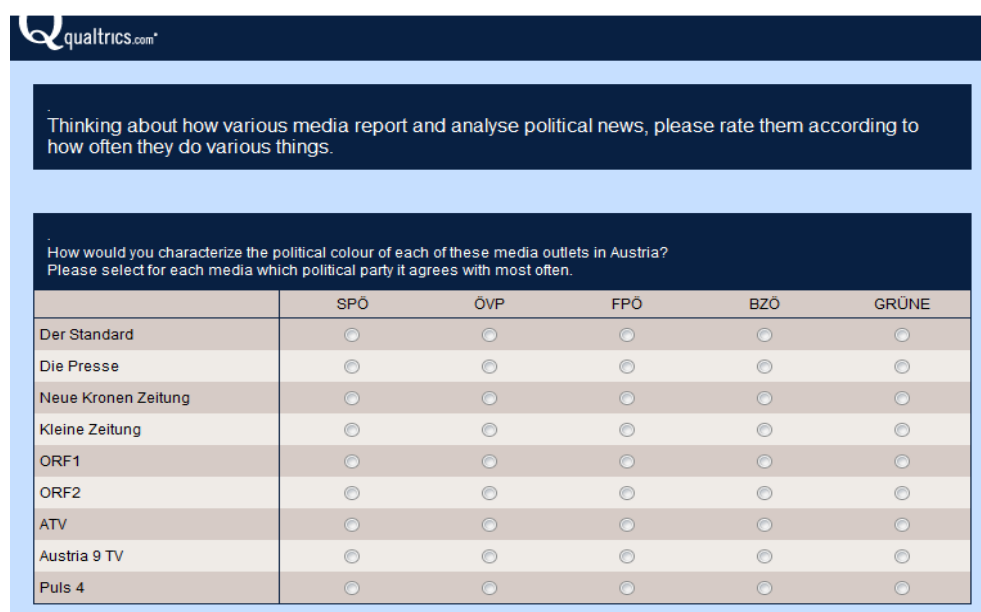
>>

The colours chosen for the survey’s layout are those that offered a bigger contrast between the text and the background, in order to improve general readability. The respondents inserted their answers by means of radio buttons (see Figure D). Radio buttons allow respondents to go through the survey using the mouse, and require less effort than typing a number/word, thus contributing to a greater number of completed questions (Couper, Traugott & Lamias, 2001).

The survey design was interactive, in the sense that the data was not transmitted to the server just at the end of the questionnaire, but as each question was answered, which allowed us to have data from experts that decided not to answer all the questions in the survey.

After completing the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to add comments, either to the survey in general or to a specific dimension or issue considered relevant in their countries’ media systems, and then their participation was thanked.

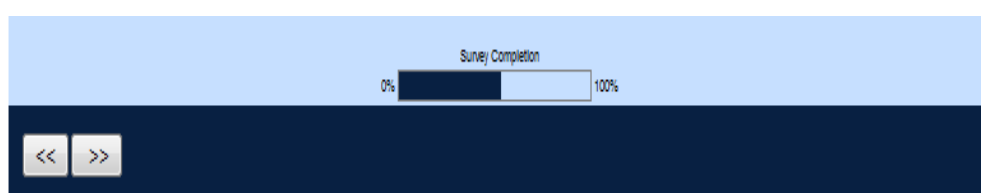
Figure D – A Survey Page (taken from the Austrian Survey)



	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ	BZÖ	GRÜNE
Der Standard	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Die Presse	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Neue Kronen Zeitung	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Kleine Zeitung	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ORF1	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ORF2	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ATV	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Austria 9 TV	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Puls 4	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Throughout the online survey, a progress indicator was present at the bottom of the pages (Figure E), informing the respondent about how close he/she was to the end of the questionnaire. Progress indicators are believed to increase questionnaire completion rates (Couper et al., 2000, in Crawford, Couper & Lamias, 2001; Couper, Traugott & Lamias, 2001).

Figure E – The Progress Indicator at the Bottom of the Webpages



A dataset with names and contacts was used to send the potential respondents an invitation to participate in the expert survey, as well as a link that would send them directly to the survey. This was done on December 15, 2009, and the first completed questionnaires were submitted by the participants in the next day.¹¹⁴ Drawing on the evidence provided by O’Neil, Penrod & Bornstein (2003) – lower dropout rates when people have more spare time (in their case, weekends) – the timing of the survey launch (just before the Christmas break) could not have been better.

¹¹⁴ In the case of Macedonia, the data gathering started later, in May 2010.

The hyperlinks to the survey were individualized, so that there was no need to enter passwords or other kind of identification to fill in the survey – a procedure that boosts response rates (Cook, Heath & Thompson, 2000; Crawford, Couper & Lamias, 2001; Fan & Yan, 2010). Based on the evidence of Porter and Whitcomb (2003), Heerwegh & Loosweldt (2006) or Fan & Yan (2010), and considering the non sensitive nature of the questions in the survey (Joinson, Woodley & Reips, 2007), the invitation e-mail was personalized (including the name of the participant) and the signatures were accompanied by the academic affiliation of the survey authors. The invitation was sent by e-mail, and the probability of it being caught by spam-blocking tools – a constant menace in online surveys (Fan & Yan, 2010) – was reduced by sending individual invitations (instead of one invitation for the whole pool) from a University of Essex e-mail address.

Considering the nature of the population – scholars are, *grosso modo*, colleagues – no incentives were offered. In fact, there is mixed evidence about the impact of incentives (money, prizes, lotteries) on response rate (Cook, Heath & Thompson, 2000; Birnholtz et al., 2004; Fan & Yan, 2010) or completion rate (O’Neil and Penrod, 2001).

Three reminders were sent on January 12, January 25 and May 9. Research shows that sending a third reminder does not have a strong impact on the response rate (Cook, Heath & Thompson, 2000; Fan & Yan, 2010), and in most countries that was the case. In addition, in spite of the advice from Crawford, Couper & Lamias (2001) of sending reminders just some days after the invitation, we decided to broaden the time between the first and the second contacts, in order to not bother the potential participants during their Christmas vacations.

The reminders underlined the idea of scarcity – people were told that they were part of a small selected group, that the deadline was approaching and that the inclusion of their country on the final dataset depends on getting a minimal number of experts to fill in the questionnaire – a strategy that was shown to increase response rates (Porter & Whitcomb, 2003). The last questionnaire was submitted on May 19, 2010¹¹⁵.

¹¹⁵ In the case of Macedonia, the last questionnaire was filled in in June 22, 2010.

Appendix 2

Descriptive Statistics for Media Systems and Information Environment Variables (Raw variables)

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	Min.	Max.	General Amplitude	Outliers?
<i>Diff. Tabloid/Reference</i>	27	6.08	1.18	6.21	3.13	8.31	5.18	None
<i>N Daily Titles</i>	27	60.23	71.29	34.5	8	357	349	Germany
<i>Average Circulation/ Million</i>	27	205.21	106.23	165.58	82.52	457.2	374.68	Belgium- Wallonia
<i>Gender Gap</i>	23	6.5	4.86	5.8	0	20	20	Spain, Slovakia
<i>Imbalance</i>	15	171.92	29.58	174	104	220	116	Austria
<i>Number of Choices TV</i>	27	236.33	291.58	134	16	1171	1155	Italy, Spain
<i>Cable TV Dissemination</i>	25	54.1	26.35	51.5	3	100	87	None
<i>Relative Audience Share</i>	27	-13.01	28.9	-12	-61.2	64.7	125.9	Denmark
<i>Public Broadcasters Funding</i>	26	74.58	20.74	80.5	17	97	80	Malta, Poland
<i>Differences between Public and Private TV</i>	27	6.73	1.13	6.83	4.47	8.77	4.30	Germany, Portugal, Poland
<i>FH General index</i>	27	20.48	7.99	21	10	44	34	Romania
<i>FH Legal index</i>	27	5.82	2.86	5	2	13	11	Romania
<i>FH Political index</i>	27	8.37	3.28	9	3	15	12	None
<i>FH Economic index</i>	27	6.7	2.48	7	4	15	11	Romania (++)
<i>JP Index</i>	27	4.87	1.16	4.8	3.2	7.1	3.9	None
<i>Balance TV</i>	27	5.24	0.86	5.05	3.95	7	3.05	None
<i>Balance Newspapers</i>	27	6.32	0.86	6.36	4.33	7.79	3.46	UK, Ireland

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	Min.	Max.	General Amplitude	Outliers?
<i>External Diversity L/R</i>	27	31.85	20.14	25	0	77.28	77.28	None
<i>External Diversity Inc/Opp</i>	27	31.37	24.74	25	0	100	100	Belgium(W), Bulgaria, Austria, Germany
<i>Hard News</i>	27	-1.16	0.59	-1.28	-2.01	0.14	2.15	None
<i>Soft News</i>	27	2.08	0.56	2.13	0.83	3.34	2.51	None
<i>Accuracy TV</i>	27	5.25	1.13	5.31	2.86	7.14	4.28	None
<i>Accuracy Newspapers</i>	27	6	0.99	6.13	4.27	7.47	3.2	None
<i>Analysis TV</i>	27	3.24	0.72	3.29	1.8	4.56	2.76	None
<i>Analysis Newspapers</i>	27	4.57	1	4.52	2.59	6.29	3.7	None
<i>Media Agenda Diversity</i>	27	.36	.12	.33	.17	.67	.50	Denmark, Estonia
<i>News Media Credibility</i>	27	5.77	1.09	5.61	3.61	7.9	4.29	None
<i>Trust in Media</i>	27	5.46	0.97	5.61	3.59	6.82	3.23	None
<i>Exposure</i>	27	6.08	.30	6.19	5.39	6.60	1.21	None

Notes:

1. Sources: WAN (2010), EAO (2010); Expert Survey on Media Systems (Popescu, Gosselin & Santana Pereira, 2010); Online reports by Freedom House (Freedom House, 2010) and Reporters Without Borders (www.rsf.org); PIREDEU Voter Survey (EES, 2009a); Eurobarometer 72.4 (Fall 2009); TNS Opinion & GEIS, 2010). Calculations made by the author.
2. For normality tests: *** p < .001; ** p < .05; * p < .10
3. No data on gender gap in Malta.
4. No data about Latvia's Public Broadcast funding. In the analysis, it was substituted by the mean value for the total sample. The same procedure was adopted in the case of the variable *Cable Dissemination*, due to the fact that there was no data available for Italy and Greece.

Appendix 3

Issues Included in this Study

(with reference to Original Codes under parenthesis; see EES, 2009, 2009b)

Issue	Original Topics in PIREDEU Voter and Media Studies
Economic Situation	Economic Conditions (4), Interest Rates (6), Inflation (74), Taxes, Trade Wages and Earnings, Stock Market, Business, Bankruptcies, Debt (topics 77-83), Effects of financial crisis (85)
Economic Structure/ Policy	Several points (topics 51 to 72, 76)
Unemployment	Unemployment (75)
Health Care	Health Care (7), National Health Care Service (93) Nursing Services (94)
Social Justice/Policies	Social Justice, Welfare State, Pensions, Social Housing, Child Care (90-92, 95,96)
Social Minorities	In general, handicapped, homosexual, women, old people (topics 110-120)
Immigration	Immigration (5), Multiculturalism (99), National Immigration Policy (105)
Political Corruption	In general, national and in the EU (topics 38-40)
Government	Efficiency, Strength, Stability (topics 37 and 41)
European Union	European Integration (1), European Issues (topics 41-50), Single market (73), Effect of Euro on the Economy (84), European Elections (topics 122-135)
Environment	Environment (2), Climate Change (8), Environmental Protection (86), National Environment Policy (87)
Crime and Justice	Law and Order, National crime prevention, courts (100, 102, 103), Crime story (140)
Foreign Policy/ Defence	In general and towards several countries, imperialism (topics 9-13, 15), military, peace-keeping missions, etc. (14, 16-22), Fight against terrorism (101)
Democracy and Human Rights	In general, several principles (e.g., rule of law, separation church/state, etc.) (topics 23-33)
Education, Culture	Culture, cultural policy (88-89), Education, education policy (97-98), National language policy (121)
Others	The remaining

Appendix 4

Media outlets whose content is used in this study

	News Shows in TV Channels	Newspapers
Austria	ORF1 (public) ATV (private)	Der Standard Die Presse Neue Kronen Zeitung
Belgium Flanders	VRT (public) VTM (private)	De Morgen De Standard Het Laatste Nieuws
Belgium Wallonia	RTBF La Une (public) RTL-TVI (private)	Le Soir La Dernière Heure La Libre Belgique
Bulgaria	BNT Kanal 1 (public) bTV (private)	24 Chasa Dnevnik Trud
Cyprus	RIK1 (public) ANT1 (private)	Filelytheros Haravgi Simerini
Czech Republic	Ceska televize (public) TV Nova (private)	Blesk Mlada Fronta Dnes Pravo
Denmark	DR1 (public) TV2 (public)	Dagbladet Politiken Berlingske Tidende Ekstra Bladet
Estonia	ETV (public) Kanal 2 (private)	Postimees SL Ohtuleht Eesti Ekspress Wochenblatt
Finland	YLE TV1 (public) MTV3 (private)	Helsingin Sanomat Aamulehti Ilta-Sanomat
France	France 2 (public) TF1 (private)	Le Monde Le Figaro Libération
Germany	ARD (public) ZDF (public) Sat1 (private) RTL (private)	Bild Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung Süddeutsche Zeitung
Greece	NET (public) Mega (private)	Kathimerini Ta Nea Eleftherotypia
Hungary	M1 (public) RTL Klub (private)	Magyar Nemzet Blikk Nepszabadsag
Ireland	RTÉ1 (public) TV3 (private)	Irish Independent Irish Times Irish Daily Star
Italy	RAI Uno (public) Canale 5 (private)	Corriere della Sera La Repubblica Il Giornale
Latvia	LTV (public) LNT (private)	Diena Latvijas Avize Vesti segodnya
Lithuania	LTV 1 (public) TV3 (private)	Lietuvos Rytas Respublika Vakaro Zinios

	News Shows in TV Channels	Newspapers
Malta	TVM (public) One TV (private)	Nazzjon Orizzont The Times of Malta
Netherlands	Nederland 1 (public) RTL 4 (private) SBS 6	De Telegraaf De Volkskrant NRC Handelsblad
Poland	TVP 1 (public) TVN (private)	Fakt Gazeta Wyborcza Rzeczpospolita
Portugal	RTP1 (public) TVI (private)	Correio da Manhã Público Jornal de Notícias
Romania	TVR1 (public) Pro TV (private)	Evenimentul Zilei Libertatea Jurnalul National
Slovakia	STV 1 (public) TV Markiza (private)	Daily Pravda Nový Čas SME
Slovenia	TVS 1 (public) POP TV(private)	Dnevnik Slovenske Novice Delo
Spain	TVE1 (public) Antena 3 (private) Telecinco (private)	El País El Mundo ABC
Sweden	SVT 1 (public) TV3 (private)	Aftonbladet Dagens Nyheter Svenska Dagbladet
UK	BBC One (public) BBC Two (private)	Daily Telegraph The Guardian The Sun

Source: Media Study Data Advanced Release Documentation (Schuck et al., 2010).