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Politicians in the Media: Determinants of Legislators' Presence and Prominence in Swiss Newspapers

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In times of increasing “mediatization” of politics, when voters and their elected representatives primarily communicate through the media, the question of who gets into the news and why becomes of the utmost importance. This article examines the determinants of Swiss legislators’ presence and prominence in the print media by focusing on three competing approaches drawn from communication studies. The first approach regards the media as a “mirror” of political reality and argues that the media focus on the most active deputies in parliament. Second, news values theory predicts that “authoritative” politicians in leadership positions get the most media coverage. Third, theories of “news bias” hold that the media privilege legislators who are in line with their own editorial interests. Overall, the statistical analyses show an important leadership effect and provide strong support for the second explanation. While deputies in official functions get the most extensive news coverage, media access can also be won by parliamentary activity. The least support is shown for the news bias theory, although some newspapers try to localize parliamentary news coverage by focusing on deputies from their own media market.

Keywords: *news coverage; selection logic; print media; content analysis; parliament; Switzerland*

In present-day Western democracies, the media are the key intermediary between political actors and citizens. Indeed, few citizens attend political meetings or have personal contact with politicians. Instead, constituents usually learn about the distant world of politics from the media, which represent the single best source of access to the political system for citizens, and their news coverage shapes how political issues and actors are perceived (Iyengar and Kinder 1987). As a consequence, political actors have a vital interest in winning (favorable) media attention for their issues and

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goals. In fact, having a voice in the media is a key political strategy to gain legitimacy and power in the political process. As Schattschneider (1988: 4) has famously observed, "Conflicts are frequently won or lost by the success that the contestants have in getting the audience involved in the fight or in excluding it, as the case may be." It is argued that if political actors are able to bring media attention to their cause and to mobilize public support, they can swing momentum to their side and exert pressure in the policy-making process. It is no wonder, then, that studies have repeatedly cited media coverage as critical to the success or failure of the weakest actors, such as social movements, who use public-related strategies to compensate for their lack of systematic access to the decision-making arenas (e.g., Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993). However, by "going public" (Domke et al. 2006; Kernell 1993), even established institutional actors attempt to reinforce their own position in the policy-making process *if* they fail to realize their goals by traditional means of participation and inside lobbying (e.g., Tresch 2008). Increasingly, then, all kinds of political actors try to use the media as an indirect pathway to influence public opinion, electoral outcomes, and the policy process. In such times of growing "mediatization" of politics (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999), the result is that the struggle for media attention becomes part of a more general contest for political control in the policy-making process (Wolfsfeld 1997: 13).

This competition over media access is heavily guided and constrained by the media's aims, production routines, and selection criteria (Altheide and Snow 1979). Even though the final media story is always a coproduction between journalists and newsmakers (Wolfsfeld and Sheafer 2006: 334), it is the media who decide whom and what to cover. As Strömbäck and Nord (2006: 161) aptly put it, "On the dance floor, the political actors are doing what they can to invite the journalists to dance, but ultimately, it is the journalists who choose who they are going to dance with." In other words, political actors might direct the attention of the media toward particular issues and provide the necessary input for a news story, but the media exercise a good deal of discretion in deciding how to cover events and what voices to include (see also Cook 2005). Given that the media only have a limited "carrying capacity" (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988) and provide a relatively fixed amount of space (in terms of pages, broadcasting time, etc.) for political information, they have to select from among the myriad of daily press releases, messages, and events the ones that seem particularly suitable, newsworthy, or interesting to them. This selection procedure leads to a high level of competition among political actors who vie for media attention, and many empirical studies show that actors are not equally successful in this contest. Despite some cross-national differences according to the dominant political and discursive opportunity structures in a country (Ferree et al. 2002), it is well documented that media attention is generally biased toward high-ranking state actors and resource-rich business organizations, who get preferential access to the media in all countries (e.g., Danielian and Page 1994; Gans 1979). The very actors that dominate the decision-making process therefore seem to be the most acceptable dance partners for the media.

It is, however, less clear how the media select their sources *within* the group of highly relevant political state actors, such as parliamentarians. For them, media access is especially important to secure reelection, but also to strengthen their position in the legislative process and to get in touch with their constituents. Parliamentarians can hardly ever directly interact with the electorate on a regular basis, and the media help them transmit information to their voters. Conversely, they also help voters learn about their elected representatives and hold them accountable. It is therefore crucial to understand how the media transmit information between legislators and constituents and how they decide who gets covered.

This article aims at a better understanding of why the media turn to some parliamentarians with greater frequency than others. To analyze the determinants of legislators' presence and prominence in four Swiss newspapers, this study focuses on three competing approaches drawn from communication studies, which are discussed in the next section. Then, the research design, data, and method are briefly outlined. Finally, the empirical findings are presented and discussed in a concluding section.

Theoretical Perspectives on the Role and Selection Logic of the Media

Media and communication studies offer three competing but not necessarily incompatible theoretical perspectives on the determinants of politicians' visibility in the news. The first perspective regards the media as a "mirror" of political reality and argues that the media cover elected representatives proportionately to their degree of parliamentary activity (e.g., McQuail 1992: 213). The second approach explains media coverage by so-called news factors and predicts that "important" or "relevant" politicians are depicted more frequently in the news (e.g., Galtung and Holmboe Ruge 1965). The third perspective holds that the media privilege parliamentarians whose characteristics and orientations match with their own editorial and market interests (e.g., Staab 1990b). Whereas the first two perspectives share the assumption of a rather passive media and assume a high degree of uniformity in news decisions and coverage, the third approach predicts intermedia differences in news coverage and tends to see the media as an active player in the policy-making system.

Media Coverage as a Mirror of Political Reality

There is little doubt that the dissemination of political information constitutes the primary function of the media today. As face-to-face interaction between political actors and citizens has become increasingly difficult, the media collect, process, and structure political information and make it accessible to a large audience. As conveyors of information, the media can potentially bridge the distance between politicians and citizens and substitute for direct exchanges between the two (Gerhards and

Neidhardt 1991). According to the premises of neutral-informational professional journalism, which is nowadays dominant in most Western democracies (Hallin and Mancini 2004), the media are expected to perform this function as a neutral chronicler and impartial observer of the legislative process. In this view, the media should give an accurate account of important events, actions, and interventions within the institutionalized arenas of the political system and make the political process transparent for the citizen public (e.g., McQuail 1992: 213). To be sure, parliamentary activities compete for media attention with numerous other events and messages, and the level of legislative coverage may vary between different types of media.¹ However, to the extent that they get reported, we should find a high degree of similarity in the coverage among different media, which should all essentially spotlight the same politicians—namely, the ones who intervene in parliament. This expectation is justified for two reasons. In their function as chroniclers, on the one hand, the media are expected to inform their audience about what happens in parliament and to provide a mirror image of the legislative process. On the other hand, parliamentary speeches are so-called genuine events (Kepplinger 1998: 170) that have a proper functionality in the policy-making process. As such, they are neither staged to generate media attention, nor are they directed at specific media.² Rather, they are a by-product of a representative's function in office and therefore available for coverage to all newspapers. From this perspective, then, the media direct their attention to active members of parliament. Seen from a parliamentarian's angle, his or her effort to make the laws should at the same time translate in making the news and give him or her a degree of visibility in the media that is proportional to his or her level of activity in parliament. Of course, parliamentarians' activities in the legislature are likely to be concentrated on a particular policy domain where they have special expert knowledge because of their education or professional background. Hence, it can be expected that a legislator's presence and prominence in the news varies across policy fields and that media coverage of politicians is "compartmentalized by issue" (Danielian and Page 1994: 1060).

To sum up, what is decisive from this theoretical perspective is *what an elected representative does* in parliament. If the media primarily act as chroniclers, then we would expect to see those legislators in the media who participate in the parliamentary debates on a given issue. Such a situation would correspond to a rather passive media that is largely dependent on the external political environment to create its stories. Thanks to institutional-driven news coverage, media reality and political reality would then largely coincide.

Media Coverage as a Product of News Factors

Modern journalism not only relies on professional norms such as impartiality or objectivity but also on common standards of newsworthiness (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 36). "News factors" are such basic criteria of news selection on which all journalists

tend to agree. It therefore comes as no surprise that news value research is commonly regarded as “the most prominent approach to news selection” (Eilders 2006: 5). In the original theory (Galtung and Holmboe Ruge 1965), news decisions are traced back to the specific properties of an event—so-called news factors—that make the event newsworthy and increase its chances of becoming news. The more news factors an event displays, the greater its news value and the higher the likelihood that it will make the news. Such news factors include, among others, the level of conflict related to the message or the actor, the unexpectedness of an event or the novelty of a story, the possibilities for dramatization and personalization, the relevance of an issue, or the elite status of an actor (Galtung and Holmboe Ruge 1965; Schulz 1976; Staab 1990a).

The elite status of an actor, or his or her prominence and prestige, has consistently proven to be an important guideline for the selection of news by the media. Numerous empirical studies in the United States and elsewhere have shown that the media mostly turn to high-ranking state actors in government and to other public officials when writing their stories (e.g., Bonfadelli 2000; Gans 1979; Kamber and Imhof 2005; Sigal 1973). Because their actions directly affect many citizens, state actors actually benefit from an “inherent” news value and get more access to the media. Formal power in the policy-making process therefore easily translates into discursive power in the media, which can further strengthen the political power of an actor and ultimately lead to a self-perpetuating cycle of political influence and media coverage.³ This relationship is summarized by the “principle of cumulative inequality” (Wolfsfeld 1997: 24), stating that those who most need news coverage find it the most difficult to obtain it.

Compared to other kinds of actors (such as interest groups or social movements), parliamentarians as a group display a higher news value and are more interesting for the media. But even among the members of parliament, we can find implicit and explicit hierarchies. While the former refer to factors such as expertise, communication skills, or reputation, the latter are based on official roles and formal competences. For the purposes of this article, this second aspect is of particular interest. In news value theory, the relevance of a politician that justifies his or her inclusion in the news is actually derived from the position he or she holds within the political system. I argue that in the case of national parliamentarians, such positions not only refer to official functions in the parliamentary arena but also to leading positions in the party system and the intermediary sphere of interest groups and social movements. In fact, a pathbreaking study by Kriesi (1980: 691) has shown long ago that at least in Switzerland, the most influential legislators occupy “double functions” in parliament and in the interest group system. In addition to their role as elected representatives in the national parliament, where they might even exercise special functions as leaders of parliamentary committees, for instance, such legislators also act as party chairpersons or head important employers’ organizations, trade unions, or other specialized interest groups. Such parliamentarians have “double loyalties” (Linder 1999: 212),

and this double commitment simultaneously increases their power in the policy-making system. Notwithstanding the media savvy of individual parliamentarians, legislators in official roles and with a formal status in the parliamentary hierarchy or the intermediary system may therefore receive more or better news coverage. From the perspective of news value theory, journalists are likely to presume that what politicians in leading positions say and do is more relevant and more newsworthy than the activities and messages of an average member of parliament. Similarly, it can be argued that the most experienced parliamentarians are considered more newsworthy by the media either because of established relationships with reporters in the capital city or the presumption that greater seniority means more importance in the legislative process. Indeed, empirical studies tend to give credit to these assumptions (e.g., Cook 1986; Kuklinski and Sigelman 1992; Schönbach et al. 2001; Sellers and Schaffner 2007).⁴ Again, we should note, however, that most parliamentarians only have a thematic relevance for the media (Tresch 2008; Wolfsfeld and Sheaffer 2006). A parliamentarian who heads a legislative committee on public buildings, for instance, will not be more present or prominent in the media than any other elected representative in a story about European integration policy. In other words, elite persons with formal functions do not systematically benefit from their structural advantage in the political system. Their news value is issue-specific and facilitates their access to the media only in their particular field of competence.

In short, what is decisive to gain media visibility from the perspective of news value research is not so much what a politician does in parliament but *who he or she is* and what official positions he or she holds.⁵

Media Coverage as a Result of Editorial and Market Interests

Although various studies have shown that news factors indeed serve as journalistic selection criteria and also guide the reception by the audience (Eilders 1997), news value theory has also been heavily criticized for its conception of a passive, apolitical media that mechanically responds to presumably objective characteristics and properties of events and actors. On the one hand, critics have objected that a measurable “objective” reality does not exist. As a consequence, news values cannot be described as given, intrinsic characteristics of events or actors that can serve as intersubjective and culture-free guidelines for the selection of news (e.g., Rosengren 1974; Schulz 1976). On the other hand, it has been argued that news decisions reflect, to an important degree, the media’s own political preferences and interests. In this view, journalists not merely select events because of their “natural relevance” but rather because they serve their own purposes (Staab 1990b: 427–30). In this view, journalists *retrospectively* ascribe news factors to the selected event to justify and objectify their news decisions. Empirically, it was shown that journalists—consciously or not—indeed attribute a higher news value to events (or actors) that are compatible with their own political orientations (Kepplinger et al. 1991; Patterson and Donsbach 1996).

These objections are in line with media bias theory, where bias means “a systematic tendency to favour (in outcome) one side or position over another” (McQuail 1992: 191). This implies a political slant in the selection of news, but not necessarily a distortion. While truthfully reporting the positions and arguments of political actors, the media tend to give disproportionate attention to the positions, issues, and actors that correspond to their own preferences. Such implicit partisanship in the news selection process can be grasped with the concept of “political parallelism,” which most basically refers to “the extent to which the different media reflect distinct political orientations in their news and current affairs reporting” (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 28). Whereas in the Mediterranean countries such orientations become mainly visible in explicit media commentary within the news pages, they manifest themselves primarily in patterns of news selection in Northern and Central Europe (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 183). Empirically, political parallelism has been identified with respect to issue agendas (Eilders 1999); positions and arguments (Schönbach 1977); and, most important for the present purpose, with regard to the visibility and evaluation of political actors in the media (Hagen 1993; Kepplinger et al. 1991).

This literature therefore points to the possibility of a *partisan bias* in media coverage. From this point of view, members of parliament are given differential access to the media according to their party affiliation or their issue-specific political positions. Historically, a very strong partisan press existed in many European countries, including Switzerland, which not only acted as advocate for the goals of specific political parties but also “paralleled” them through close organizational ties and the partisanship of their readers (Seymour-Ure 1974). While the partisan press has progressively disappeared from the 1960s onward, newspapers continue to have ideological affinities with certain political parties and display distinct political tendencies in most European countries (Hallin and Mancini 2004). In fact, many newspapers have a clearly recognizable “editorial profile” that reflects their political identity (McNair 2003: 69) and remains relatively consistent over time. This editorial profile is generally expressed in editorials, which are the “legitimate voice of the media” (Eilders et al. 2004), and measurable on a Left-Right scale (for Switzerland, see Blum 2005: 124). Parliamentarians from political parties with historical affinities for certain newspapers or parliamentarians who share the issue-specific political position of a particular newspaper might therefore get more coverage than legislators who do not fit into a newspaper’s editorial line. Alternatively—and closely related to news value research—it could be argued that the media are primarily interested in controversy and preferably cover parliamentarians from the extremes of the political spectrum. This selection behavior would at the same time disadvantage center parties because they do not easily fit into the contrapunctual format the media tend to apply to their coverage of the news (e.g., Kuklinski and Sigelman 1992: 815).

Political and ideological factors are not the only possible sources of bias, however. Unequal media access might also stem from economic or commercial considerations, which become increasingly relevant to attract a less partisan audience in an

ever more competitive media market. As a consequence, newspapers try to respond to the tastes and preferences of their readership. One way of doing so is to “localize” their news coverage and to turn to legislators from their own market district (Schaffner and Sellers 2003). In Switzerland, such a “*local bias*” is particularly likely given the exceptionally high newspaper density in this country (Blum 2005: 121). Because of the federal system, the print media market was historically organized along cantonal boundaries (Kriesi 1992: 578), and each canton had several local and regional newspapers. More recently, though, the Swiss print media market underwent an important concentration process, which has resulted in a certain homogenization of news coverage within the language regions (Erk 2003: 61). As a consequence, cantonal media markets increasingly lose their significance as audience markets to the profit of the language region (Hungerbühler 2005: 172). Rather than the cantonal origin of a member of parliament, his or her linguistic provenance might therefore be the key to easy media access.

In addition, media coverage often suffers from a *gender bias*, with female parliamentarians having a harder time to make the news than their male counterparts. Many studies in the news bias tradition dealing with media coverage of particular social groups find women to be underrepresented in the news (e.g., Kahn and Goldenberg 1991). This holds also true in the Swiss context, where women are less frequently covered than men both in routine political activity (Bonfadelli 2000: 143) and during election campaigns (e.g., Hardmeier and Klöti 2004).

From this perspective, in a nutshell, it is not so important what a parliamentarian does or who he or she is but *if he or she fits the media's needs*. From this point of view, the media might also turn to authoritative sources or very active members of parliament, but among them, they tend to cover the ones that most closely correspond to their political goals and market interests.

Presence and Prominence in the Media

On the previous pages, the theoretical discussion used the terms of visibility, presence, or prominence in the media almost interchangeably. At this point, some conceptual clarifications are in order. First, one should distinguish between *visibility* and *standing* in the media. Standing means “having a voice in the media” (Ferree et al. 2002: 86) and refers to a political actor being treated as an agent. Actors with a voice appear as speakers in the news and are given the opportunity to explain their policy positions, to address their preferred issues, or to justify their beliefs and problem solutions. Visibility, in contrast, is a more general concept and includes media appearances as a mere object being discussed by others. A political actor can be visible in the media because he or she is addressed by another actor or because his or her actions and messages provoke critical or supportive reactions, that is, positive or negative “resonance” (Koopmans 2004). This kind of presence in the media is certainly important as it confers publicity on an actor, but to the extent that actors without

a voice in the media lack the possibility to define what is at stake on an issue, they also miss a “supreme instrument of power” (Schattschneider 1988: 66).

Second, both standing and visibility can be conceived of as simple media *presence* or, alternatively, as media *prominence*. Empirical studies generally refer to the latter aspect and measure the frequency with which a political actor appears in the news. Media presence, for its part, is hardly ever measurable given that the number of actors competing for media attention is potentially unlimited, but at least unknown. When it comes to parliamentarians, however, we do know our population (i.e., 246 parliamentarians at the national level in Switzerland) and are able to tell who managed to get the attention of the media and who failed to do so. Therefore, it is possible to examine who is in the public eye and who is not and what distinguishes the two kinds of legislators. This conceptual distinction between presence and prominence in the media might constitute an important contribution to the literature that has not yet differentiated between the two dimensions of standing. While all previously discussed theoretical factors can be expected to be relevant for both aspects, their relative impact might vary. For instance, while a speech in parliament might be sufficient to make the news once, it hardly is enough to get more regular coverage and attain some level of prominence in the media. Conversely, experience and status might not be necessary for occasional presence in the media, but they certainly seem important to become a frequent speaker in the media.

Data and Method

This study builds on data drawn from a larger research on mass-mediated communication on European integration policy in Switzerland, covering the period between February 2000 and March 2001 (Tresch 2008). At the time, European integration policy was one of the most salient issues in Switzerland and figured on the top of the political agenda. For one, the Swiss were called to the polls twice. In May 2000 they had to vote on a set of bilateral agreements with the European Union (EU) for a reciprocal opening of the markets in seven specific areas, and in March 2001 they had to decide on the popular initiative “Yes to Europe” asking for immediate membership negotiations with the EU. While the Swiss accepted the bilateral agreements by a large majority of 62.7 percent of the voters, the popular initiative “Yes to Europe” was massively rejected by 76.3 percent of the voters and all Swiss cantons.⁶ Despite the contrasting outcomes, both votes gave rise to very intense campaigns and a higher-than-average electoral participation. In between the two popular votes, in addition, the federal parliament debated on “Yes to Europe” during its summer and autumn sessions in June and September 2000.

The data stem from an extensive content analysis of four Swiss quality papers—*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ), *Tages-Anzeiger* (TA), *Le Temps* (LT), and *Tribune de Genève* (TdG)—which were selected to control for important features of the Swiss

media market, namely, language region and editorial profile. In each of the two main language regions (German- and French-speaking Switzerland), papers from the center-left (*TA* and *TdG*) and from the center-right (*NZZ* and *LT*) were chosen. In addition, these papers differed with respect to their issue-specific positions (*TA* and *LT* being for EU membership, *TdG* and *NZZ* favoring bilateralism with the EU). The data-gathering process followed a two-step procedure. First, all news articles dealing with Swiss European integration policy and published in the national news sections between February 2, 2000 and March 17, 2001 were retrieved (full sample). Second, these news reports were coded by means of “political claims analysis” (PCA) (Koopmans 2002; Koopmans and Statham 1999).⁷ PCA allows for the identification of political opinions expressed by political actors in the media—regardless of the form this expression takes (verbal statement, demonstration, political decision, etc.) and regardless of the nature or the scope of the actor (supranational/national/regional/local government, parliamentarian, political party, interest group, etc.). Ideal-typical claims can be broken down into seven elements—the location of the claim in time and space (where/when), the claimant (who), the form (how), the addressee (at whom), the substantive position on an issue (what), the actor concerned (for/against whom), and the justification (why)—but many claims have a more fragmentary structure and miss one or several elements (Koopmans 2002: 2). This article only uses information about the claimant because it concentrates on the standing of parliamentarians while leaving aside their visibility as addressees.

The members of the Swiss parliament in Bern therefore constitute the unit of analysis, and the main purpose of this article is to explain differences in their media appearances. In total, the empirical analyses are based on 584 claims, with the number of cases reaching a maximum of 177 in the *NZZ* and a minimum of 101 in *TdG* (table 1). At this stage, it is important to underline that these figures refer to the number of times a Swiss parliamentarian appeared as a speaker in the media—be it in his or her function as legislator, be it as a representative of his or her party, or as a head of some other intermediary organization. Therefore, parliamentarians were identified by name rather than organizational affiliation.

The summary statistics in table 1 shed light on the distribution of media presence and prominence among individual parliamentarians. While a relatively high share of claims making in the media is attributable to elected representatives, only a few *different* legislators make the news when it comes to European integration issues in Switzerland. In fact, among the 246 members of parliament, not even half of them appeared in one of the four newspapers. Looking at each paper separately, only about one out of four parliamentarians got a voice, while a silent majority of 75 percent of the national legislators never passed the selection hurdle and were absent from news coverage.

Thus, these figures underline that the media ignore many parliamentarians while turning the attention to the messages and actions of a charmed few. There might be a certain (partisan) pluralism in the news, but at the same time we notice a relatively

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Swiss Parliamentarians' Presence
and Prominence in Four Quality Papers

	All	NZZ	TA	LT	TdG
Number of claims by a Swiss parliamentarian (% of individuals)	584 (44.6)	177 (52.8)	143 (49.0)	163 (37.6)	101 (40.7)
Number of different Swiss parliamentarians (% of 246)	112 (45.5)	75 (30.5)	54 (22.0)	64 (26.0)	57 (23.2)
Average number of claims by a Swiss parliamentarian	5.21	2.36	2.65	2.55	1.77
Maximum number of claims by a Swiss parliamentarian	33	12	10	17	6
Percentage of claims by the ten most prominent parliamentarians	37.2	31.6	49.0	46.0	41.6

Note: NZZ = Neue Zürcher Zeitung; TA = Tages-Anzeiger; LT = Le Temps; TdG = Tribune de Genève.

strong hierarchy in the hit parade of parliamentary voices. Many legislators are absent from media coverage of Swiss European integration policy, others speak out only once, whereas a minority gets more frequent publicity. In fact, all papers taken together, the average number of claims is 5.2, but the most prominently covered parliamentarian made not less than thirty-three appearances as a speaker. In other words, media coverage of Swiss parliamentarians does not follow a normal distribution but is skewed. This requires particular methods of analysis. Media prominence indicates how many times a particular parliamentarian appeared as a claimant on European integration policy in the media. The dependent variable is thus measured by count data. Characteristic for such data is the concentration of events around zero (in the present case, many parliamentarians without media presence/prominence) and few occurrences with high frequencies (i.e., a small number of parliamentarians with high visibility in the media). Although the linear regression model has been applied to count data in this field of study (e.g., Schönbach et al. 2001), this can result in “inefficient, inconsistent, and biased estimates” (Long and Freese 2006: 349), and it is therefore advisable to use models specifically designed for count outcomes. In the present case, (zero-truncated)⁸ negative binomial regression models prove to be more adequate than the better-known Poisson models as they account for overdispersion in the data (Long and Freese 2006: 372–81). No similar methodological problems occur in the case of media presence, which is a dichotomous variable measuring the presence or absence of the 246 Swiss members of parliament and which can be analyzed by means of binary logistic regression models. Table 2 briefly shows how variables are measured.

Most operationalizations are straightforward, and further explanations are unnecessary. PCA offered data on both dependent variables and on parliamentarians' political

Table 2
Operationalization of Dependent and Independent Variables

Dependent Variables	Description
Media presence	1 if a member of parliament (MP) appears as a speaker in the media at least once, 0 otherwise
Media prominence	Number of an MP's media appearances as a speaker
Independent Variables	Description
Mirror image of reality Parliamentary debate (pmtdeb)	Number of speeches by a parliamentarian during parliamentary debate on bilateral agreements with the European Union (summer 1999) and on the popular initiative "Yes to Europe" (summer and autumn 2000)
News values	
Foreign Affairs Committee member (fac)	1 if member, 0 otherwise
Political party leadership (ppleader)	1 if party chairperson or leader of a party group in the national parliament, 0 otherwise
Interest group leadership (igleader)	1 if president of one of the main employers' organizations, trade unions, or specialized interest groups in European integration policy, 0 otherwise
Seniority (seniority)	1 if for more than nine consecutive years in national parliament, 0 otherwise
Editorial and market interests	
Partisanship (party)	0 if Socialist, 1 if Christian-Democrat, 2 if Radical-Democratic, 3 if Swiss People's Party, 4 if other party
Issue-specific position (ispos)	Mean position of each MP on European integration, ranging from -1 to +1
Region (region)	1 if French-speaking, 2 if Italian-speaking, 0 otherwise
Canton (canton)	1 if Zurich (or Geneva, respectively), 0 otherwise
Gender (gender)	1 if female, 0 if male

Note: Variable names are given within parentheses.

values (party affiliation, mean position on European integration policy), geographic origin, and other personal attributes (gender). Note, however, that their position on European integration policy can be computed only when they appear in the media at least once. This variable can therefore only be controlled for in models on media

prominence, but not in the case of media presence. Information on legislators' official roles and functions as well as on their parliamentary activity was collected from the official Web site of the Swiss Federal Assembly in Bern, where one cannot only find details about legislators' (extra)parliamentary mandates and leadership positions but also a complete written record of all parliamentary debates since 1995. Admittedly, speeches in the legislature are a crude measure of parliamentary activity as it neglects important actions such as initiating, proposing, or passing a law (for such a measure, see, e.g., Sheaffer 2001). In the present case, such a fine-grained measure is, however, not necessary because this study focuses on media coverage during the final phase of the policy-making process on the popular initiative "Yes to Europe" and the bilateral agreements with the EU. Regarding political functions and seniority in parliament, it would have been possible to create some index measure (see Wolfsfeld and Sheaffer 2006: 343), but I prefer to test whether all leadership positions have the same impact on a legislator's presence and prominence in the media. Finally, in contrast to other scholars (Payne 1980: 430), I consider membership in the Foreign Affairs Committee as a political function and an indicator of news values theory rather than a parliamentary activity.

Empirical Results

Before examining which of these explanatory variables has the strongest impact on a legislator's presence and prominence in the media, it is worth evaluating the explanatory power of the three theoretical approaches of the media's role and selection logic. This can be done by adding the three sets of variables in a stepwise procedure to the model and comparing the change in the likelihood ratio test for the subsequent regression steps (table 3).⁹ Looking at media presence first, the strong impact of parliamentary speeches is striking. In all papers, a legislator's active participation in the parliamentary debate significantly influences media presence and most strongly changes the $-2*LL$. The explanatory power of the second group of variables, pertaining to a parliamentarian's official positions and functions in the legislative and intermediary systems, is weaker but still significant in all papers. Together, the four variables substantially improve the fit of the model, but to a far lesser extent than parliamentary speeches alone. With regard to the third group of variables—the political orientation and geographic origin of an elected representative—some interesting differences between the language regions appear. Whereas partisanship, region, canton, and gender contribute together to the explication of media presence in the French-speaking papers *LT* and *TdG*, they have no significant impact in the German-speaking papers *NZZ* and *TA*. When looking at media prominence, however, this group of variables loses its explanatory power in *LT* and gains significance in *TA*. All other results equally apply to the explanation of media prominence, although the relative impact of parliamentary speeches is weaker.

Table 3
Likelihood Ratio Tests for Three Subsequent Regression Steps

Explanatory Factors	Media Presence			Media Prominence		
	$\Delta -2*LL$	Δdf	p	$\Delta -2*LL$	Δdf	p
<i>All papers</i>						
1 pmtdeb	58.77	1	.000	16.52	1	.000
2 Model 1 + fac, ppleader, igleader, seniority	13.70	4	.008	30.32	4	.000
3 Model 2 + party, ispos, region, canton, gender	14.70	8	.065	14.20	9	.115
<i>NZZ</i>						
1 pmtdeb	49.35	1	.000	17.60	1	.000
2 Model 1 + fac, ppleader, igleader, seniority	12.05	4	.017	16.56	4	.002
3 Model 2 + party, ispos, region, canton, gender	13.86	8	.085	14.71	9	.099
<i>TA</i>						
1 pmtdeb	49.85	1	.000	3.21	1	.073
2 Model 1 + fac, ppleader, igleader, seniority	14.19	4	.007	10.59	4	.032
3 Model 2 + party, ispos, region, canton, gender	12.93	8	.114	25.19	9	.003
<i>LT</i>						
1 pmtdeb	38.65	1	.000	10.78	1	.001
2 Model 1 + fac, ppleader, igleader, seniority	25.53	4	.000	18.61	4	.001
3 Model 2 + party, ispos, region, canton, gender	20.54	8	.008	7.75	9	.560
<i>TdG</i>						
1 pmtdeb	41.74	1	.000	19.12	1	.000
2 Model 1 + fac, ppleader, igleader, seniority	15.15	4	.004	16.03	4	.003
3 Model 2 + party, ispos, region, canton, gender	20.65	8	.008	24.75	9	.003

Note: Ispos is only taken into account in case of media prominence. pmtdeb = parliamentary debate; fac = Foreign Affairs Committee member; ppleader = political party leadership; igleader = interest group leadership; party = partisanship; ispos = mean position on European integration policy; *NZZ* = *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*; *TA* = *Tages-Anzeiger*; *LT* = *Le Temps*; *TdG* = *Tribune de Genève*.

This initial analysis shows that different factors matter for standing in the news, but the media do not seem to fully exploit their leeway when selecting their sources. In fact, there is hardly any evidence that media decisions are biased toward parliamentarians of a particular partisan color, region, or sex. The newspapers under study rather seem to choose their sources in a way as to reflect current activities and existing hierarchies in

the political system. This would rather support those who see the media primarily as a passive mediator in the policy-making system.

Turning now to the specific impact of the different explanatory variables, table 4 first addresses legislators' *presence* in the media and shows the parameter estimates of the logit model.

The most striking result certainly is the strong effect of parliamentary speeches on the presence of a legislator in the media. The more a parliamentarian participated in the debate on the bilateral agreements with the EU and the popular initiative "Yes to Europe," the higher his or her chances of being covered by a Swiss newspaper. This finding proves that institutionalized politics gets mirrored by the media and suggests that journalists actually fulfill a chronicler's function when reporting from the capitol city. Second, the presumed impact of status, an important element of news value theory, also finds empirical support. In fact, party leadership is in all papers positively associated with the likelihood of overcoming the media's selection hurdle. Especially in German-speaking Switzerland, party chairpersons and parliamentary party group leaders have higher chances of being present in the media than the average member of the national parliament. In French-speaking Switzerland, some additional aspects of political status have a significant, but more limited impact on media presence, too. Everything else being equal, members of the Foreign Affairs Committee; senior members of parliament; and, in both papers, interest group leaders have a higher probability of receiving media coverage than legislators who do not hold any official positions. Third, in all papers but *TA*, Socialists (reference category) have a significantly lower likelihood of being present in news reports on European integration policy than representatives of Center-Right parties. The deviant pattern in *TA* is particularly interesting to the extent that this German-speaking paper leans toward the political Left. It remains an open question, however, whether the paper's editorial profile is really related to the fact that parliamentary members of the Socialist Party have the same chances to appear in *TA* as parliamentarians with a different party affiliation. Finally, the analysis reveals an interesting difference between French- and German-speaking papers with regard to the regional origin of an elected representative. While cantonal origin does not seem to play a role for media presence in any of the papers, a parliamentarian's linguistic provenance is significantly associated with his or her chances of appearing in the news. When controlling for other factors, French-speaking legislators have better chances to get a voice in the papers from their own language region than their German-speaking counterparts. The opposite does not hold true, however. Hence, we can assume that different media tend to take their news decisions following slightly different considerations, even though parliamentary activity and, to a lesser extent, party leadership seem to be helpful guidelines for the selection of news sources for all Swiss newspapers.

Table 5 sheds light on the explanatory power of the above-mentioned factors on media *prominence*. To start with, it is worth underlining that the model produces

Table 4
Unstandardized Logistic Regression Coefficients for Three
Sets of Determinants of Swiss Parliamentarians' Presence
in Four Quality Papers (N = 246)

Variables	All	NZZ	TA	LT	TdG
Parliamentary debate	1.28***	1.02***	0.99***	0.75***	1.00***
Foreign Affairs	0.83	0.31	0.11	1.17*	0.07
Committee membership					
Party leadership	2.14**	2.11**	2.90**	1.90*	1.64*
Interest group leadership	1.18	0.56	0.77	1.62	2.66**
Seniority (> nine years)	0.24	0.56	0.31	0.93*	0.37
Partisanship (SPS)					
CVP	0.97*	1.12*	0.69	1.21*	1.64*
FDP	0.49	0.94	0.41	1.09	1.41*
SVP	1.22*	1.33*	0.32	1.60*	1.60*
Other party	-0.06	0.19	-1.83	0.54	1.12
Region (German-speaking)					
French-speaking	1.17**	0.69	0.21	1.78***	1.68**
Italian-speaking	0.94	1.12	1.32	0.18	0.23
Canton (other canton)					
Zurich (or Geneva)	-0.14	-0.81	0.84	-0.18	0.24
Gender (female)	-0.05	-0.16	0.24	-0.27	0.07
Constant	-2.48***	-3.16***	-3.33***	-3.98***	-4.44***
$\Delta -2LL$	87.17	75.26	76.97	84.72	77.54
<i>df</i>	13	13	13	13	13
<i>p</i>	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Pseudo R^2	.257	.249	.297	.300	.291

Note: Estimates stem from logistic regression models using Stata 9.0. Reference categories are given within parentheses. NZZ = *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*; TA = *Tages-Anzeiger*; LT = *Le Temps*; TdG = *Tribune de Genève*; SPS = Social Democratic Party of Switzerland; CVP = Christian Democratic Party of Switzerland; FDP = Radical Democratic Party of Switzerland; SVP = Swiss People's Party.

p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

significant coefficients despite the low number of cases per newspaper. Compared to the previous models for media presence, however, their explanatory power is weaker. Most interestingly, it can be noted that the level of parliamentary activity is not a good predictor of a legislator's prominence in the media. This result is in line with my hypothesis that parliamentary speeches should primarily determine media presence, whereas factors pertaining to the status and roles of an elected representative should exert more influence on media prominence. During parliamentary debates on particular policy proposals, many legislators only intervene with one or two speeches, which often grant them media coverage. But only a few parliamentarians raise their voice several times during deliberation. Consequently, this variable can hardly contribute to the explication of prominence in the media.

Table 5
Unstandardized Regression Coefficients for Three Sets of Determinants
of Swiss Parliamentarians' Prominence in Four Quality Papers

	All	<i>NZZ</i>	<i>TA</i>	<i>LT</i>	<i>TdG</i>
Parliamentary debate	0.23**	0.09	0.19*	0.23*	-0.01
Foreign Affairs	0.61**	0.70**	0.92**	0.41	0.68*
Committee membership					
Party leadership	1.09***	0.41	0.90**	1.10**	0.32
Interest group leadership	0.75	0.57	1.27**	0.51	1.47**
Seniority (> nine years)	0.65**	0.48*	0.54	0.36	0.99*
Partisanship (SPS)					
CVP	0.81*	0.25	0.98	0.51	1.07
FDP	0.51	-0.32	-0.46	0.06	0.10
SVP	0.39	-0.19	0.08	-0.08	0.84
Other party	0.66	-0.21	-0.81	0.45	0.20
Position on European policy	-0.38*	-0.44**	-0.60**	-0.14	-0.39
Region (German-speaking)					
French-speaking	0.36	-0.23	-1.25*	0.08	-0.71
Italian-speaking	-0.10	0.15	0.12	-0.95	0.62
Canton (other canton)					
Zurich (or Geneva)	0.04	-0.17	-1.02*	0.54	2.08**
Gender (Female)	0.07	0.23	1.01*	-0.08	-0.33
Constant	-0.64	-0.19	-0.62	-0.89	-1.68*
$\Delta -2LL$	61.04	48.87	38.99	37.14	59.90
<i>df</i>	14	14	14	14	14
<i>p</i>	.000	.000	.000	.001	.000
Pseudo R^2	.111	.190	.210	.174	.384
<i>N</i>	112	75	54	64	57

Note: Estimates stem from zero-truncated negative binomial regression models using Stata 9.0. In the case of the *NZZ* and *TdG*, zero-truncated Poisson regression models were estimated because the alpha test did not show evidence of significant overdispersion in the data. Reference categories are given within parentheses. *NZZ* = *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*; *TA* = *Tages-Anzeiger*; *LT* = *Le Temps*; *TdG* = *Tribune de Genève*; SPS = Social Democratic Party of Switzerland; CVP = Christian Democratic Party of Switzerland; FDP = Radical Democratic Party of Switzerland; SVP = Swiss People's Party.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Also consistent with my expectations is the significant impact of several status variables, although their effect is somewhat weaker than anticipated. Contrary to what has been observed in some U.S. or Israeli studies (e.g., Payne 1980; Sheafer 2001), serving in a legislative committee does not lower a Swiss legislator's chances of appearing prominently in the media. While in the Israeli context "investing one's creativity, initiative, and energy in parliamentary activity may help in making laws but might hurt the efforts of making the news" (Sheafer 2001: 725), this conclusion cannot be sustained in the Swiss case. Active participation in parliamentary debates rather increases the likelihood of being included in news coverage, and membership

in the Foreign Affairs Committee moderately, but significantly contributes to attaining prominence in most newspapers. Holding other factors constant, party and interest group leadership as well as seniority each exert a significant influence on a parliamentarian's chances of reaching media prominence in two observed newspapers. Third, party affiliation has no predictive power for media prominence. To be sure, representatives of Center-Right parties have a higher probability to appear in news reports than Socialists. But once the media's selection hurdle has been passed, representatives of all parties have equal chances of being covered on a more regular basis and to become a prominent media source. Hence, there seem to be few remnants of the old partisan press in Switzerland. However, when we take legislators' mean position on European integration policy into account, there is a significant negative effect in German-speaking newspapers. When holding constant other factors, pro-European legislators have a harder time achieving media prominence in German-speaking Switzerland than their more Eurosceptic colleagues. Given that this result holds true for both the *NZZ* and *TA* despite their oppositional editorial profiles, this result should not be interpreted as a sign of political parallelism in their news coverage. Rather, it might reflect the objective balance of power among the political elite in this language region (Tresch 2008). Fourth, it turns out that French-speaking legislators might more readily access the newspapers from their own language region, but they do not enjoy any significant advantages when it comes to media prominence. However, cantonal origin has a very strong impact in *TdG* (and some effect in *TA*). When controlling for other factors, parliamentarians from Geneva seem to have substantially higher chances to feature prominently in *TdG* than legislators from other cantons. But it is important to note that in this paper, the impact of cantonal origin and party leadership is somewhat confounded. In fact, if cantonal origin is omitted from the model, the impact of party leadership on media prominence is significant at the 1 percent level. During the period covered here, leaders of three parties happened to be from Geneva. In case of *TdG*, it is therefore difficult to tell whether the local publicity effect or the leadership effect is decisive when it comes to media prominence, but it seems as if it was the former. Interestingly enough, similar effects cannot be found in *LT*, where the inclusion or omission of the cantonal variable does not alter the coefficient for party leadership. This suggests that in *TdG*, media attention is concentrated on the three party leaders from Geneva, while in *LT*, party leaders in general have good chances to become prominently covered, irrespective of their cantonal origin.

Overall, results for media presence and prominence are relatively similar, but by no means identical. Admittedly, this conceptual distinction can be operationalized only in cases as the one at hand, where one knows the whole population of legislators. Despite some methodological difficulties, however, the differences between empirical findings on media presence and prominence justify the effort.

Conclusion

The aim of this contribution was to analyze Swiss legislators' standing in the print media and to explain why newspapers turn to some parliamentarians with greater frequency than others. This question was addressed from the perspective of three main theoretical propositions on the role and selection logic of the media and tested on original data drawn from a larger research on mass-mediated communication on European integration policy in Switzerland in 2000 and 2001. Conceptually, the article introduced an important distinction between media presence and prominence, the latter referring to the number of times a parliamentarian appears as a speaker in the media.

The empirical analyses gave some interesting insights in the selection logic of Swiss quality papers. Admittedly, this study is limited to the print media, a single issue, and a relatively short time span and cannot be used to provide definitive conclusions about the media's selection logic. In addition, some peculiarities of the Swiss political system—such as consensus democracy and direct democratic institutions—might further limit the external validity of the results. In fact, mass-mediated debates in Switzerland are not structured along the lines of government and opposition but confer visibility to a broad range of partisan actors and other organized groups. In a direct democratic system, there is an increased need for comprehensive political information on issues put to a referendum vote, and parliamentarians are in direct competition with other political actors, such as interest groups or social movements, to draw media attention to their positions and to mobilize citizen support. In such a system, the level of media coverage conferred to parliamentarians compared with other kinds of actors might be lower in Switzerland than elsewhere. Given the relatively high consistency of my results with several U.S. studies (e.g., Cook 1986; Kuklinski and Sigelman 1992; Sellers and Schaffner 2007), I would like to argue that media coverage of national legislators is driven by similar *mechanisms* in Switzerland and elsewhere. First and most important, media access can be won by parliamentary speeches. In fact, parliamentarians who participate in legislative debates have a good chance to get media coverage, even though their activity is not likely to get them in the news on a regular basis, and to simultaneously provide them with media prominence. Second, parliamentary newsmakers tend to be in leadership positions. Party leaders are particularly apt in attracting media attention and often figure among the most prominently covered politicians. In addition, together with seniority, official functions such as membership in legislative committees and interest group leadership are at least in some papers significant determinants of parliamentarians' presence and prominence in the news. This finding suggests that the Swiss media mostly act as passive channels of information in the political system and largely reproduce existing hierarchies and structures of influence. By doing so, they also tend to reinforce them, eventually sparking off a self-perpetuating cycle of coverage and influence. Third, there was little evidence for media bias research and its assumptions on partisanship effects. In French-speaking Switzerland, there were, however, signs of a local publicity effect

driven by market considerations: French-speaking legislators have a better chance to be covered by the media from their language region than German-speaking members of the national parliament. The different impact of this variable on news coverage in the two language regions shows, however, that newspapers do not all work equally hard at “localizing” national parliamentary coverage. More generally, while the same factors tend to serve as guidelines in the selection process of all newspapers under study, their relative impact does vary. Hence, newspapers have some leeway in deciding which speakers get access to their pages.

For elected representatives as for other kinds of political actors, access (whatever its origin) is clearly not sufficient to effectively influence the political process through the media. It might certainly be a precondition, but the framing and tonality of news stories is at least equally important. In other words, visibility in the media is no guarantee for favorable coverage, but it is a first step for those who intend to use the media as a strategic resource in the political system (see Cook 1986: 223). Therefore, political actors not only have to engage in a struggle for media access but also in a contest over framing (Wolfsfeld 1997).

Communication strategies and publicity-seeking activities are important weapons in this cognitive competition and would also be an important explanatory variable. In fact, this article tells us something about the guidelines Swiss media tend to apply when selecting their news sources. It also shows that legislators have unequal chances to get media publicity, but that some parliamentarians have a competitive advantage derived from their official positions and functions. However, this article is not able to show whether some elected representatives can make up for their structural disadvantage by using professional media strategies, as a recent U.S. study seems to suggest (Sellers and Schaffner 2007). In this regard, “*what* a parliamentarian is doing” and “*how* he or she is doing it” might also drive news coverage. Deviant, spectacular, or unexpected events, for instance, emphasize important news values, resonate well with the media’s taste for drama and surprises, and make an elected representative more newsworthy.

Conversely, I cannot exclude the fact that parliamentarians in leadership positions have more extensive communication strategies than other actors. In fact, a recent empirical study shows that the most powerful and high-ranking actors tend to rely more heavily on public- and media-related strategies than their less resourceful competitors (Kriesi et al. 2007). Future research should therefore move in this direction and systematically account for political actors’ media strategies. Such an extension of existing research would improve our understanding of the interaction between politicians and the media. Given that it always takes two to tango, the mechanisms of this interplay should no longer go unnoticed.

Notes

1. Despite a decreasing trend (e.g., Ettinger 2005; Negrine 1999), the parliamentary process gets rather high levels of visibility in the media. Given the binding character of legislative acts and their direct relevance for many citizens, the media tend to allocate many resources for their coverage and specifically

assign journalists to report from the capital city and the Federal Assembly (Blum 1991). Therefore, institutional politics are by many media routinely covered, not least because they serve important news routines because of their predictability and the regularity with which they take place (Tuchman 1980).

2. “Staged” events (Kepplinger 1998: 170) or “pseudo-events” (Boorstin 1980), in contrast, are explicitly generated to attract media attention. Such events (e.g., press releases, protests) primarily have a communicative function and would generally not have happened without the expectation of media coverage.

3. See also the interesting article of Koopmans (2004) who theorizes about self-reinforcing selection processes in the public sphere from an evolutionary perspective. This self-reinforcing effect of media visibility can also be related to the original news factor theory, which regards continuity as a news factor. Behind this is the idea that once something (or someone) has passed the media’s selection hurdle, it will continue to be defined as newsworthy (Galtung and Holmboe Ruge 1965: 67).

4. In the United States, these assumptions are, however, not confirmed for local media coverage (Schaffner and Sellers 2003).

5. It has to be admitted, however, that elected representatives who most actively participate in parliamentary debates are also likely to occupy particular positions within the legislative system.

6. For official results of all referendum votes, see <http://www.admin.ch/ch/d/pore/va/index.html>.

7. I coded a part of the data within the larger project “The Europeanization of Political Communication and Mobilization in European Public Spheres” (<http://www.Europub.com>) that has been sponsored by the European Commission in the context of its Fifth Framework Program (project number HPSE-CT2001-00046). The Swiss part of the study has been supported by the Federal Office for Education and Research (project BBW 00.0455). Tests of intercoder reliability indicated high levels of agreement among coders.

8. Zero-truncated models are used because the analysis of legislators’ prominence in the media only deals with parliamentarians who appear in the media at least once and therefore enjoy some minimum level of prominence. Legislators who never make the news on Swiss European integration policy are excluded from the study of media prominence, but they are obviously included in the analysis of media presence.

9. The starting point of this procedure is the independence model without covariates. When adding a (group of) variables to the independence model, the change in the likelihood ratio statistic ($\Delta -2*LL$) between the initial and the extended model is computed and compared to a chi-square distribution with $J - 1$ degrees of freedom. The extent to which the $-2*LL$ changes permits to evaluate the supplementary explanatory power of each set of variables.

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