

# Should the Media Be More or Less Powerful in Politics? Individual and Contextual Explanations for Politicians and Journalists

PHILIP BAUGUT and SEBASTIAN SCHERR

*The normative question regarding whether the media should have more or less impact on politics, as viewed by politicians and journalists, is important assuming that norms about media influences can influence behaviors. The present study is the first that combines individual and structural factors that explain political actors' and journalists' normative views on the media's influence on politics. Based on a conceptualization of political communication cultures, representative micro-level survey data from more than 600 political actors and journalists within 52 German cities were combined with macro-level indicators for the political and media competition in each city. Multilevel analyses show that interactions between the actors' characteristics and their competitive working conditions help explain their normative evaluations of the media's influence on politics. However, individual characteristics such as actors' role conceptions influence normative views more so than media and political competition do.*

**Keywords** perceived media influence, politicians and journalists, local politics, multilevel analysis, media influence on politics

The media's impact on politics is one of the most prominent topics in political communication research; however, political actors' and journalists' opinions about the power of the media have been rarely studied (Bennett & Entman, 2001; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Strömbäck, 2008). Previous research has mainly focused on how the media shape political actors' behaviors or the political process, and on how the media's influence in politics has changed over time (Esser, 2013; Esser & Matthes, 2013; Strömbäck, 2011b). Research suggests that political actors anticipate and take media coverage into account when making political decisions or when developing campaign strategies (Blumler & Esser, 2018; Maurer & Pfetsch, 2014; Strömbäck, 2008). If political actors increasingly depend on news media, while the media themselves have increasingly gained autonomy from politics, it seems crucial to examine the extent to which the power dynamic between

Philip Baugut is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication Studies and Media Research, LMU Munich. Sebastian Scherr is an Assistant Professor in the School for Mass Communication Research, University of Leuven.

Address correspondence to Philip Baugut, Department of Communication Studies and Media Research, LMU Munich, Oettingenstr.67, LMU Munich, Munich, 80538 Germany. E-mail: [baugut@ifkw.lmu.de](mailto:baugut@ifkw.lmu.de)

the media and politics has changed—in positive or negative ways. This leads to the very normative question of whether more or less media influence on politics is desirable.

From a normative point of view, findings on a stronger media impact on politics seemed to spark more criticism than positive evaluations (e.g., Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). On the one hand, there is no doubt that a flourishing democracy depends on media that connect political elites and citizens (Habermas, 2006). For example, the adaptation to a media logic in terms of personalization (Van Aelst, Sheafer, & Stanyer, 2012) is theorized to attract more citizens. On the other hand, a stronger media impact on politics has been linked to a decline in political and party logic (Brants & Van Praag, 2006; Van Aelst, Maddens, Noppe, & Fiers, 2008) and a shift toward a “media logic” (Altheide & Snow, 1979), which has been noted to dysfunctionally affect political negotiations (Baugut, 2017; Spörer-Wagner & Marcinkowski, 2010). Moreover, concerns include an “Americanization of politics” and a “tabloidization of political journalism” (Elmelund-Praestekaer, Hopmann, & Norgaard, 2011; Esser, 1999; Reinemann, Stanyer, Scherr, & Legnante, 2012).

Despite these conceptual refinements, one highly relevant research gap has surprisingly not yet been addressed: While scholars have measured and normatively discussed the media’s impact on politics, very little is known about political actors’ and journalists’ normative beliefs about whether the media should be more or less powerful in politics. Previous research shows how political actors and journalists perceive *actual* media impact (e.g., Maurer, 2011; Strömbäck, 2011a; Van Dalen & Van Aelst, 2014). However, the question of whether and why political and media actors perceive the impact of the media as *too strong* or *too weak*, that is, from a subjective norm perspective, seems to be important, as theories of action state that norms—among other factors—may have an impact on behaviors (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010; Opp, 1979). In other words, political actors’ and journalists’ normative evaluations of media influences on politics can be hypothesized to shape future behavior, and therefore, seem useful to explain future power shifts between politics and the media. Put differently, in order to understand the media’s role in politics it is necessary to understand the factors that make political actors and journalists believe that the media should have more or less impact on politics. To date, studies have only marginally considered attitudes toward the strength of the media’s impact on politics, with a few exceptions (e.g., Kepplinger, 2009; Van Aelst, Brants, et al., 2008; Vliegenthart & Skovsgaard, 2017; Walgrave, 2008). In particular, one survey of German political journalists and members of parliament (MPs) showed that politicians perceive the media’s impact as *too strong* (Kepplinger, 2009). However, the causes of such normative evaluations have not yet been systematically addressed.

How do political actors and journalists normatively evaluate the media’s impact on politics? And which factors shape their attitudes toward the normative question regarding whether the media *should* have more or less influence on politics? Do individual characteristics such as role conceptions and the actors’ structural working conditions matter? We chose the local level to answer these questions, as it consists of a large number of municipalities that can be regarded as the heart chambers of a flourishing democracy (Napoli, Stonbely, McCollough, & Renninger, 2016; Nielsen, 2015; O’Neill, 1994). Therefore, after introducing the concept of local political communication cultures to describe political communication ecosystems, we will present the results of a survey of more than 600 political actors and journalists nested within 52 German municipalities. Questions covered individual characteristics such as their own professional roles as well as their presumed and normative evaluations of media influences. In a multilevel model,

these individual characteristics were combined with information about the local competitive conditions of the cities. Cross-level interactions between individual and structural characteristics helped us better understand how normative claims about the media's influence on politics emerged.

### **The Concept of Local Political Communication Cultures**

Pfetsch's (2014) concept of political communication cultures considers political communication as a process of interaction between political actors and media actors in relation to a common public audience. These interactions between the actors who can be regarded as parts of a political communication ecosystem (Lilleker, 2014) are informed by their attitudes and norms, and can be referred to as the "political communication culture." Importantly, the understanding of "culture" is psychologically grounded and has been explored in interviews with political actors and journalists (Baugut, 2017; Baugut, Fawzi, & Reinemann, 2017). Political communication cultures are assumed to be affected by structural aspects of both the political and the media systems—for example, by the degree of media competition (Pfetsch, 2014; Pfetsch & Esser, 2014). Importantly, not only structural conditions but also the individual characteristics of political actors and journalists (e.g., experience and presumed media influences on citizens) shape political communication cultures (Baugut, 2017; Baugut et al., 2017).

As recently suggested (Baugut, 2017), the concept of political communication cultures can be applied to the local level, where the norms and attitudes of local MPs and local political journalists form a city's "local political communication culture." However, the peculiarities on the local level (compared to the national level) must be considered. While competition among different media outlets is typical on a national level in Western democracies (see de Vreese, Esser, & Hopmann, 2017), local media structure are shaped by a higher media concentration or even by local newspaper monopolies (e.g., Schütz, 2012). While political competition at the national level (especially within Anglo-Saxon democracies) is characterized by party competition and majority rules, conflicts on the local level are often settled in a consociational and consensus-oriented way (Holtkamp, 2008; Lijphart, 2012). Finally, as opposed to the national level, individual characteristics of political actors and journalists seem to matter more on the local level, where the degree of professionalization is usually lower, and the number of relevant actors smaller (Baugut et al., 2017). Against the backdrop of these local peculiarities, an analysis of the structural and individual influences on normative evaluations of the media's impact on politics seems worthwhile within the "nucleus of democracy."

### **Origins of Normative Evaluations of the Media's Influence on Politics**

Previous research has pointed out that political actors and journalists within and across countries differ in their perceptions of the actual media influences on politics and that those perceptions are shaped by both the actors' structural conditions and individual characteristics (e.g., Kepplinger, 2009; Lengauer, Donges, & Plasser, 2014; Van Aelst, Brants, et al., 2008). It is therefore plausible to assume that normative evaluations of the media's influence on politics will also vary as a function of structural and individual characteristics. Importantly, presumed media influences can shape perceived descriptive norms (see Gunther, Bolt, Borzekowski, Liebhart, & Dillard, 2006), which—for local politics—can be understood as a subjectively perceived local "media standard"

concerning the degree to which political actors and journalists think the media should have an impact on local politics (see Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990).<sup>1</sup>

In turn, normative evaluations of the media's influence on politics are likely to depend on professional characteristics such as professional role conceptions or perceived media influences. These are closely linked to the journalists' and politicians' work. However, non-professional characteristics such as age or gender, which are ideally unrelated to their work (e.g., Brants, de Vreese, Möller, & Van Praag, 2010; Pfetsch, 2014; Reinmann & Baugut, 2014), might become more relevant given the lower number of professional full-time politicians and journalists at the local level; they might also help in explaining normative evaluations of the media's impact on politics.

Concerning the structural conditions, normative evaluations of the media's influence on politics can be assumed to be generally affected by media and political competition, as both impose idiosyncrasies to capture public attention about political issues. Furthermore, both actors' norms concerning the media's influence on politics might be the result of how powerful politicians and journalists think the media should be in order to achieve competitive advantage over other politicians and journalists. In the following, we will theoretically discuss the impact of individual characteristics and structural conditions of both political and media actors on their normative evaluations of the media's influence on politics.

Based on the concept of political communication cultures (Pfetsch, 2014), we assume that both individual characteristics (role conceptions, presumed media influences, socio-demographic characteristics) and structural conditions (e.g., competitive structures) have impacts on political actors' and journalists' norm perceptions. Moreover, what political actors and journalists might consider rational decision making (see, e.g., Landa, 2016) likely depends on both individual characteristics and structural working conditions that shape the actors' interests and therefore their normative evaluations of media influence on politics.

This article focuses on (a) structural conditions, (b) individual characteristics, and (c) interactions across these two analytical levels. As individual characteristics seem to play an important role on the local level where the professionalization and number of actors are lower, it is plausible to assume that not only job-related individual factors like role conceptions and media influence presumptions but also sociodemographic characteristics shape the actors' normative evaluations of the media's influence on politics. Concerning structural conditions, a focus on the impact of political and media competition is promising given the variety of different more or less competitive structures in a large number of cities, making the local level fruitful for political communication research (Baugut & Reinmann, 2013). It is therefore worth paying attention to cross-level interactions between structural conditions in terms of competitive structures and individual characteristics. Given the multilevel structure of our argumentation and data, we use letters as signposts to refer to the two different levels (a – b) and their interactions (c), when introducing our hypotheses.

### *Influences at a Structural Level (a)*

**Media competition.** Structural influences at the local level are usually imposed by a low number of local media outlets or even the absence of media competition (Schütz, 2012). The competitive situation can be assumed to shape the politician-journalist relationship that is often described as mutually dependent (e.g., Van Aelst, Shehata, & Van Dalen,

2010). From a politician's point of view, their dependence on the media seems to increase with a lower number of media outlets, which may end in a powerful media monopoly. Correspondingly, in the case of more and strongly competing media outlets, politicians can benefit from the selection of favorable journalists by arranging exchanges of exclusive information in return for positive publicity (Baugut, 2017). Vice versa, journalists seem to be less dependent on politicians under conditions of a lack of media competition. The assumption that both sides aim to achieve a beneficial power balance, which may be associated with each side's normative evaluations of the media's influence on politics, leads to the following hypothesis:

*a – H1:* The greater the level of media competition in a particular location, the greater the extent to which actors will favor the media having a stronger impact on politics.

Relatedly, one can argue that it is not media competition per se but the actors' perceptions and evaluations of media competition that matters more, and that ultimately explains its effects. Previous research showed that the perceived media competition had a stronger impact on the perceived dependency between politicians and journalists than the actual media competition (Baugut et al., 2017). Therefore, perceptions of the local media competition seem worthwhile to be considered as well when assessing normative evaluations of the media's influence on politics.

**Political competition.** At the local level, due to different municipal codes, political systems exhibiting high levels of political conflict and competition among numerous factions can be distinguished from political systems with a consociational, consensus-oriented character (Holtkamp, 2008; Lijphart, 2012). Previous research on the local level has shown that more competitive municipal codes contribute to the perception that political actors depend more strongly on journalists, as politicians feel the need for favorable media coverage to achieve a competitive advantage (Baugut et al., 2017). It can therefore be assumed that stronger political competition makes politicians believe that the local media should have less impact on politics. Conversely, a more consensus-oriented political system, in which politicians are less dependent on journalists, arguably makes especially the journalists believe that the media should have a stronger influence on politics. We therefore hypothesize the following:

*a – H2:* The greater the level of political competition in a particular location, the lower the extent to which actors will favor the media having a stronger impact on politics.

### ***Influences at the Level of Individual Actors (b)***

**Role conceptions.** Journalists' roles (e.g., Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017) can be defined as societal expectations, which journalists see as normatively acceptable (Donsbach, 2008; Von Den Driesch & Van Der Wurff, 2016). Even though role conceptions are subjective, members of the profession share similar conceptions, and therefore they reflect the institutional role of a profession within a society (Hanitzsch, 2007). Vliegthart and Skovsgaard (2017) discuss explanations for diverging perceptions of media influences between politicians and journalists, arguing that role conceptions matter, as "when assessing whether the media have (too) much influence on politics the normative ideas

about the role media ought to play in democracy and by extension how much political influence they ought to have serve as an important benchmark” (p. 88). Indeed, results from surveys among parliamentary journalists and MPs in five West-European countries show that those journalists who consider the watchdog role of the media as important perceive the media as less powerful (one item among several was: “The mass media have too much political power”; Vliegenthart & Skovsgaard, 2017, p. 92). Possibly, the more journalists want to play an active role, the less they tend to say that the media’s influence is too strong (Vliegenthart & Skovsgaard, 2017). In other words, journalists with an active role conception, defined as “a distinct motivation to change society and to stand up for the disadvantaged” (Scherr & Baugut, 2016, p. 145), arguably have a higher impetus to work toward politics that are more transparent and to improve public life, and therefore they wish for a stronger media influence on politics. However, the wish for stronger media influences on politics might also depend on the degree to which journalists believe that they are able to fulfill their active role.

On the one hand, some journalists might (perceive themselves to) fulfill an active role, and therefore do not want stronger media influence on politics, as (a) they are satisfied with their current role performance and the corresponding media influence on politics; (b) they have experienced negative consequences of strong media influences on politics (such as conflicts with political actors) resulting from their active role performance; or (c) they have learned (and rejected) the lesson that a stronger media influence on politics sometimes comes along with questionable reporting practices.

On the other hand, some journalists might feel unable to perform an active role (e.g., due to editorial constraints). Consequently, they might wish for more media influence on politics in order to reduce the discrepancy between their role conception and the media’s actual influence on politics. Since journalists often perceive discrepancies between their active role conception and role performance (Scherr & Baugut, 2016), it seems likely that they wish for stronger media influence on politics.

In the political domain, political representation has been distinguished as “trustee” or “delegate” (Barker & Carman, 2012; Bowler, 2017), which translates into the question as to whether representatives are more like “leaders” or more like “listeners” (Barker & Carman, 2012). Hence, similar to journalists with an active role, through devoting themselves to civil interests, active political delegates may wish to follow the will of the voters. Especially politicians who want to be the mouthpiece of disadvantaged citizens might use the media’s power to put their issues on the political agenda (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993). Thus, strongly responsive politicians are arguably more interested in a stronger media influence on politics. However, whether or not political actors believe that the media can be helpful for following the will of the voters seems to depend on how the political actors assess media coverage in any given city. A perception of unfavorable media coverage that is more oriented to elites than to ordinary citizens could possibly lead to the wish for less powerful media. However, given that economic pressures require that local news media orient themselves to average citizens’ needs (e.g., Usher, 2018), and given the considerations mentioned here, it is likely that political actors wish for stronger media influence on politics. Against that background, we hypothesize the following both for journalists and political actors:



*b – H1:* More active role conceptions are associated with the actors' normative beliefs that the media should have a stronger impact on politics.

**Presumed media influences.** Presumed media influences (PMI) proved to be an important concept when explaining political attitudes and behaviors of both politicians and journalists (Cohen, Tsfati, & Sheaffer, 2008; Gunther & Storey, 2003; Müller & Hohlfeld, 2017). Conceptually, Tal-Or, Tsfati, and Gunther (2009) argued that our attitudes toward social norms would be shaped by perceptions of how the media influence the public. While research on presumed media influences shows that people do take a stand if there are moral grounds on which to censor the media's undesirable influences (e.g., for pornographic content or pro-smoking advertisements [Gunther, 1995; Gunther et al., 2006]), less evidence is available for normative evaluations of the media's influence on politics.

Concerning politicians, those who presume that the media's influence on the general population is too strong might be more willing to control the media and restrict media influences if these influences are perceived as not desirable for democratic functioning (Dohle, Blank, & Vowe, 2012; Xu & Gonzenbach, 2008). However, whether influences are desirable or not depends on a political actor's interest in a given situation. As the media are basically interested in political conflicts, as the media logic and the party logic may collide especially during negotiations (Spörer-Wagner & Marcinkowski, 2010), and as the literature often describes a rivalry between politics and the media, one can assume that politicians are rather more interested in less media influence on politics (Kepplinger, 2009). Moreover, Walgrave and Van Aelst (2006) discussed politicians' "blame avoidance strategy" (see also Walgrave, 2008)—that is, making the media responsible for political problems, which means that they should be less influential on politics.

Concerning political journalists, those who perceive the media's influence as too weak will arguably wish for the media to control politics more strongly. Bernhard and Dohle (2014) showed that the stronger the media's political influence on the public was perceived to be, the more journalists approved of media restrictions, which implicitly de-evaluates the media's impact. On the other hand, active journalists who presume the media to have a strong impact on citizens can be theorized to approve of strong media influences on politics in order to fulfill their role (Vliegthart & Skovsgaard, 2017). Against this background, we hypothesize the following:

*b – H2:* The actors' presumed media influences are associated with their normative beliefs about the media's impact on politics.

**Sociodemographic characteristics.** Research on the norms, attitudes, and perceptions of political actors and journalists has shown that sociodemographic characteristics such as age and gender—despite the idea that they should be professionally irrelevant—exert very little influence on political communication cultures (e.g., Brants et al., 2010; Pfetsch, 2014). This does not come as a surprise given the high professionalization of political actors and journalists who work at national parliaments. On the local level, however, politicians and journalists show a relatively low degree of professionalism, as local MPs usually work on a voluntary basis, and many join journalism as a sideline (Baugut, 2017). Therefore, sociodemographic characteristics such as age and gender can be assumed to have some impact on the evaluation of the media's influence on politics. We hypothesize the following:

*b – H3:* The actors' sociodemographic characteristics are associated with their normative beliefs about the media's impact on politics.

### *Influences Across the Individual and Structural Level (c)*

Finally, we discuss cross-level interactions between individual characteristics (e.g., presumed media influence) and the structural conditions under which politicians and journalists work together (e.g., media competition) will be discussed. For instance, if individual actors presume that there are strong media influences on citizens, the normative impact of this perception might depend on their working conditions. These might include the competitive structures of both the media and the political systems that have been shown to affect several aspects of the local politics-media relationships (Baugut, 2017; Baugut et al., 2017). Depending on the working conditions, the perceived media influences on politics can be normatively considered as too strong, adequate, or too weak (Kepplinger, 2009; Vliegenthart & Skovsgaard, 2017). Therefore, we hypothesized the following:

*c – H1:* Individual characteristics and structural conditions together have an impact on the actors' normative beliefs about the media's impact on politics.

## **Method**

### *Participants and Procedure*

To test our hypotheses and to answer our research questions on the subjective dimension of the relationship between politics and the media, we looked at the political communication culture on a municipal level. Between March 2014 and July 2014, we conducted a quantitative paper-and-pencil survey of the relevant political actors and journalists from a random sample of municipalities in Germany. We randomly selected every other of the 104 independent urban municipalities in Germany ("kreisfreie Städte";  $N = 52$ ) and identified a total of 1,191 relevant actors within the chosen municipalities using the official city websites and a digital database of all journalists. On the political side, we aimed at recruiting a total of 280 mayors and department heads, 52 city spokespersons, and 530 city councilors. On the side of the media, our aim was to survey a total of 328 journalists consisting of managing editors and journalists from regional newspapers who regularly report on local politics and who can still be considered as the most relevant sources of local political information (see Newman et al., 2017, pp. 70–71). The questionnaire was sent to these actors by post and included a stamped addressed return envelope. Our sample is representative of political actors and newspaper journalists at the municipal level in Germany. A total of 607 participants (457 political actors; 150 journalists) responded and completed the survey, reflecting an overall American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) response rate of 52.6%.<sup>2</sup>

### *Data Structure and Analytical Strategy*

We theorized both individual and structural influences on political actors and journalists, which implies a hierarchical data structure. Our sample provides individual information



about politicians and journalists, stemming from different municipalities in Germany with different political and media-related structures. Hence, individual answers were nested within the municipal context: Individual answers might not only differ because of individual differences across participants, but also as a function of the political and media context. Multilevel data analysis allows us to control for such nested influence structures and it was therefore applied.

At an individual level, our multilevel model uses available information about the participants in order to explain their normative views; at a macro level, the model tries to explain these individual differences in the normative evaluation of the media's influence on politics with contextual information about the municipalities. Importantly, multilevel models allow us to test for so-called cross-level interactions at the same time. Cross-level interactions help us to better understand how contextual factors *together* with individual attitudes influence normative evaluations of how the media's influence should be.

As a first step, a null (= empty) model containing no explanatory variables tells us how much variance in individual answers can be explained within and between municipalities. A significant null model indicates that including variables at different analytical levels is worthwhile. We then included age, gender, and, due to our survey structure, the perceived *actual* influence of the local media on municipal politics in our model.<sup>3</sup> Table 1 provides a descriptive overview of all constructs measured in the overall sample at the individual and structural-municipal level, and for journalists and political actors. All measures will be described in the following paragraphs in more detail for the total sample.

### ***Measures at the Individual Level***

**Normative evaluations of the media's influence on politics.** The main outcome of this study was grounded in answers to the question regarding how strong the influence of the local media on municipal politics *should* be. Political actors and journalists could indicate their answers on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (weaker) to 5 (stronger) with a not specifically marked or named middle position ( $M = 2.76$ ,  $SD = .90$ ;  $Mdn = 3.00$ ).

**The influence of media competition on work.** The influence of media competition on work (ICW) was reflected in answers to the questions for both journalists and politicians regarding how much they believed media competition influenced their work on a daily basis. Participants could give their answers on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from -2 (negative influence) through 0 (neutral) to 2 (positive influence) ( $M = .15$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ;  $Mdn = 0$ ).

**Presumed media influences.** Presumed media influences (PMIs) on citizens were captured by journalists' and political actors' agreement on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to the single item "the local media strongly influence citizens" ( $M = 3.75$ ,  $SD = .82$ ;  $Mdn = 4.00$ ).

**Active role conceptions (ARCs).** Active role conceptions (ARCs) of journalists and political actors were assessed through higher agreement with eight statements set out to reflect an active versus passive role that was also captured on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Items were introduced with a short statement stressing personal relevance to statements such as "... to make the political process transparent," "... to improve the living conditions in our city," or "... to stand up for the disadvantaged in the population,"

**Table 1**  
Descriptive statistics of core measures for journalists and political actors from 52 municipalities in Germany.

	Overall ( <i>N</i> = 607)			Journalists ( <i>N</i> = 179)			Political Actors ( <i>N</i> = 428)		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mdn</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mdn</i>
Level 1: Individual									
Normative Evaluations of Media Influences on Politics	2.8	0.9	3.0	3.4	0.8	3.0	2.6	0.9	3.0
Influence of Media Competition on Work	0.2	1.2	0.0	0.8	1.1	1.0	-0.1	1.2	0.0
Presumed Media Influences on Citizens	3.8	0.8	4.0	3.7	0.7	4.0	3.8	0.8	4.0
Active Role Conception	4.1	0.5	4.1	3.7	0.4	3.8	4.2	0.5	4.3
Perceived Actual Media Influences on Politics	3.8	0.7	4.0	3.8	0.6	4.0	3.7	0.7	4.0
Gender (female)	1.2	0.4	1.0	1.2	0.4	1.0	1.2	0.4	1.0
Age	53.6	10.0	54.0	49.2	7.9	50.0	55.1	10.1	56.0
Level 2: Urban Municipalities ( <i>N</i> = 52)									
Consensual Municipal Constitution	2.0	0.8	2.0						
Effective Number of Factions	4.3	0.8	4.1						
Number of Media	3.0	1.6	3.0						
Media Competition (HHI)	0.9	0.2	1.0						

Note. HHI = Herfindahl-Hirschman Index.

among others ( $M = 4.05$ ,  $SD = .54$ ;  $Mdn = 4.13$ ;  $\alpha = .68$ ). The items were transformed into a mean index.

### *Measures at the Municipal Level*

Macro-level information (i.e., at the level of the municipalities in our sample) provides important contextual information to the individual-level data. We included two indicators for the local political system (effective number of factions, consensual municipal constitution) and two for the local media system (number of media outlets, media competition).

The effective number of factions was obtained from the city's official websites and from statistics published by the Federal Statistical Office ( $M = 4.31$ ,  $SD = .83$ ;  $Mdn = 4.15$ ). A consensual municipal constitution was assessed on a three-point scale developed by Holtkamp (2008) for the German local level. The measure takes into account the different municipal codes and distinguishes three ensuing models of local democracy: a competitive model (35%), a mixed model (35%), and a consensus model (31% of the investigated cities). The number of media outlets available in each municipality was obtained from the German Newspaper Marketing Association (ZMG) and reflects the number of local newspapers, TV programs, and radio stations covering local politics in the municipality ( $M = 2.98$ ,  $SD = 1.57$ ;  $Mdn = 3.00$ ). Higher numbers are arguably indicative of higher competition in the local media market. To address media competition more specifically, we also included the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI), which is calculated by summing the squares of the individual market shares of all local newspapers in the city (e.g., Baker, 2006). Market shares for each city were also collected from the ZMG. The HHI has a maximum value of 1, which represents a newspaper monopoly ( $M = .85$ ,  $SD = .20$ ;  $Mdn = 1.00$ ).

## **Results**

The descriptives in Table 1 indicate that journalists evaluate the actual influence of the local media on politics no differently from politicians ( $t(597) = .964$ ,  $p = .336$ ). Both groups also indicate no differences in how they presume the media to influence the local citizenry ( $t(602) = .948$ ,  $p = .344$ ). However, political actors had a more active role conception than journalists did ( $t(596) = .11.327$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and journalists indicated more strongly than political actors did that the influence of the local media on politics should be stronger ( $t(599) = .10.832$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Moreover, journalists evaluated the influence of the competitive media situation on their work more positively than political actors did ( $t(371) = 7.088$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

To test our hypotheses and to answer our research questions, we now take a closer look at our multilevel model, as depicted in Table 2. At first glance, our findings show that the individual characteristics (a) of politicians and journalists matter more than the cities' structural conditions (b) do when it comes to explaining their normative evaluations of the local media's impact on politics. Our model shows that on the municipal level, the competitive structures of both the political and the media systems did not have a significant impact on whether politicians and journalists felt that the local media impact on politics should be stronger. We therefore reject a – H1 and a – H2. However, we found that the normative evaluations of the impact of the competitive media situation did matter, at least for the work of politicians. The more negative they perceived the influence of the

**Table 2**  
Multilevel model predicting journalists' and politicians' claim for larger influence of local media on politics in 52 German urban municipalities

Larger Local Media's Influence on Politics				
	Journalists		Politicians	
	Null Model	Full Contextual Model	Null Model	Full Contextual Model
	<i>B (SE)</i>	<i>B (SE)</i>	<i>B (SE)</i>	<i>B (SE)</i>
Intercept	3.44 (.07)***	3.50 (.08)***	2.54 (.06)***	2.55 (.05)***
Level 1:				
Individual Influence of Media Competition on Work (ICW)		.018 (.07)		.108 (.04)*
Presumed Media Influences on Citizens (PMI)		-.077 (.11)		-.160 (.08)
Active Role Conception (ARC)		.467 (.22)*		.175 (.08)*
Perceived Actual Media Influence on Politics		.189 (.17)		-.008 (.10)
Gender (female)		-.227 (.17)		-.108 (.12)
Age		-.002 (.01)		.015 (.005)**
Level 2: Urban Municipalities				
Consensual Municipal Constitution		.099 (.10)		-.017 (.06)
Effective Number of Factions		-.094 (.08)		-.045 (.06)
Number of Media		-.049 (.04)		-.041 (.03)
Media Competition (HHI)		.035 (.28)		-.112 (.23)

(Continued)

**Table 2**  
(Continued)

Larger Local Media's Influence on Politics				
	Journalists		Politicians	
	Null Model	Full Contextual Model	Null Model	Full Contextual Model
	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )	<i>B</i> ( <i>SE</i> )
Cross-Level				
Interactions				
ICW x Cons.		-.012 (.07)		-.032 (.06)
Mun. Constit.				
ICW x <i>N</i>		-.001 (.08)		-.040 (.05)
Factions (eff.)				
ICW x <i>N</i>		.008 (.04)		-.012 (.03)
Media				
ICW x HHI		.148 (.31)		-.012 (.20)
PMI x Cons.		.194 (.14)		.015 (.09)
Mun. Constit.				
PMI x <i>N</i>		.306 (.14)*		-.131 (.06)*
Factions (eff.)				
PMI x <i>N</i>		-.002 (.07)		.037 (.05)
Media				
PMI x HHI		-.156 (.50)		.354 (.29)
ARC x Cons.		.735 (.26)**		.119 (.11)
Mun. Constit.				
ARC x <i>N</i>		-.525 (.25)*		-.005 (.09)
Factions (eff.)				
ARC x <i>N</i>		-.029 (.13)		.178 (.07)*
Media				
ARC x HHI		-1.665 (.97)		.890 (.41)*
Random Effects	Var. comp.	Var. comp.	Var. comp.	Var. comp.
<i>Individual level</i>	.695	.523	.726	.689
<i>Country level</i>	.0004	.003	.023	.009
-2 Log likelihood	257.741	262.200	647.215	679.452

Notes. Final estimation of fixed effects with robust standard errors; models based on restricted maximum likelihood (RML) estimates. HHI = Herfindahl-Hirschman Index for market concentration.

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

competitive media situation on their work to be, the less media influence on politics the politicians wished for ( $B = .108$ ,  $SE = .04$ ,  $p = .016$ ). However, we could not observe a similar effect for journalists ( $B = .018$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $p = .831$ ).

On the individual level, a more active journalistic role conception leads to stronger agreement with the statement that the influence of the local media on politics should be stronger ( $B = .467$ ,  $SE = .22$ ,  $p = .045$ ). This is also true for politicians: The more

politicians showed that they had an active role conception, the more they claimed that the local media influence on politics should be stronger ( $B = .175$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $p = .041$ ).  $b - H1$  is therefore confirmed.

Concerning presumed media influence on citizens journalists' PMI on citizens did not have a significant effect on their normative evaluations of local media influences on politics ( $B = -.077$ ,  $SE = .11$ ,  $p = .595$ ). Similarly, we found no significant influence of politicians' PMIs on citizens on their normative evaluations of the media's influence on politics ( $B = -.160$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $p = .063$ ). We therefore reject  $b - H2$ .

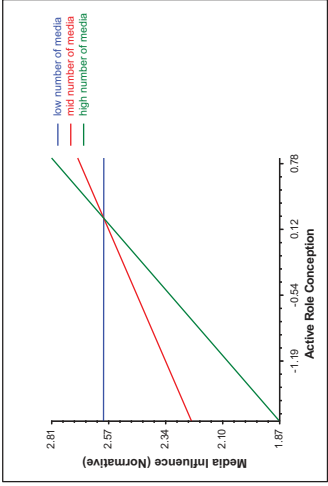
Concerning the impact of sociodemographics, we found that political actors' age had a positive effect on their normative evaluations of the media's influence on politics ( $B = .015$ ,  $SE = .005$ ,  $p = .003$ ), indicating that older politicians wanted the local media to have more of an impact on politics. In contrast, gender did not have a significant effect.  $b - H3$  is therefore partly confirmed.

Finally, we also found some evidence for cross-level interaction effects concerning both media and political media competition, which partly confirms our last hypothesis,  $c - H1$ . In order to interpret the coefficients of the cross-level interactions in Table 2, we visualized them; this can be seen in Figure 1. First, political actors' role conceptions interact with media competition: The more ARCs there are when surrounded by a large number of media outlets, the stronger the politicians' wish was for media influences to be stronger ( $B = .178$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $p = .021$ ). Moreover, the more active the role conception in a more concentrated media market, the more the political actors wished for the media to be more powerful ( $B = .890$ ,  $SD = .41$ ,  $p = .035$ ). Second, journalists' ARCs interact with the political competition. In a political system characterized by a more consensus-oriented constitution, journalists with a more active role conception felt that the media should have a stronger influence on politics ( $B = .735$ ,  $SE = .26$ ,  $p = .008$ ), whereas they wished for less powerful media when the effective number of factions was higher ( $B = -.525$ ,  $SE = .25$ ,  $p = .044$ ).

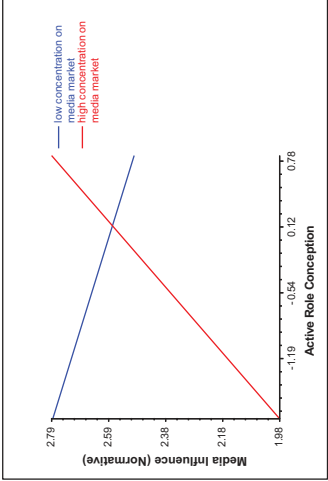
Finally, while for both political actors and journalists we found no direct influence from PMIs on their normative evaluations of the media's influence on politics, they interacted with the local political competition: Again, this interpretation required visual inspection of the graphs for these model equations. It becomes apparent that higher PMIs on citizens go hand in hand with the claim that the media's influence should be weaker ( $B = -.131$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $p = .047$ ), as indicated by political actors with stronger political competition—in our case, indicated by a high number of factions—slightly enlarging this effect. Finally, journalists claim that the media's influence on politics should be greater ( $B = .306$ ,  $SE = .14$ ,  $p = .037$ ) the more they presume that there are strong media effects on citizens, but this effect was mainly driven by a high number of factions in the political system.

## Discussion

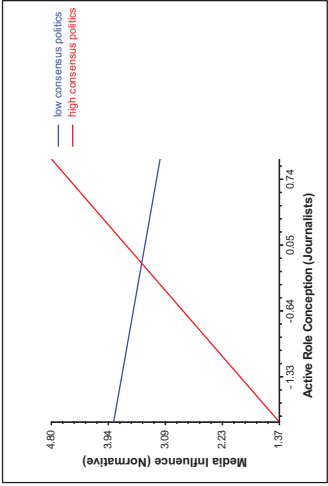
To explain politicians' and journalists' normative evaluations of the media's influence on politics, we surveyed more than 600 political actors and journalists in 52 German cities. In line with the concept of local political communication cultures, attitudes toward the media's influence on politics were associated with both the local political and media-related working structures and individual characteristics. Most importantly, our findings suggest that the local structural conditions alone are not enough to explain both actor



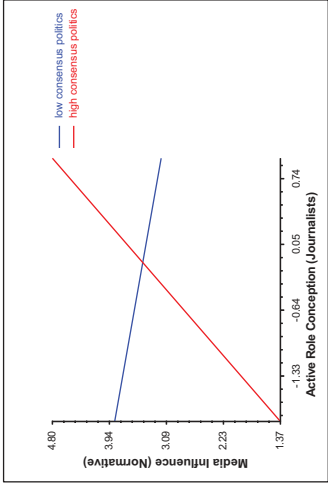
**Figure S1.** Cross-level interaction effect between political actors' active role conceptions and media competition on normative evaluations of media influences on politics.



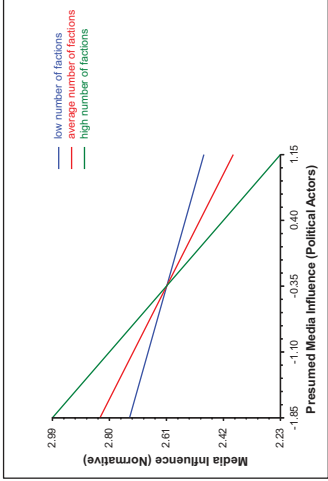
**Figure S2.** Cross-level interaction effect between political actors' active role conceptions and concentration on the media market on normative evaluations of media influences on politics.



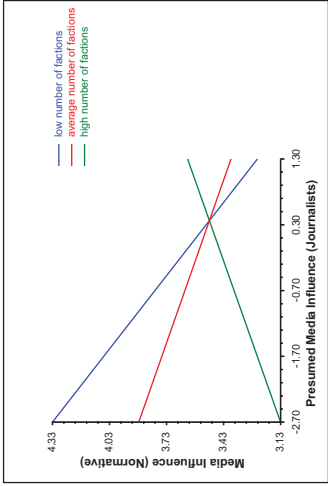
**Figure S3.** Cross-level interaction effect between journalists' active role conceptions and a consensus-oriented constitution on normative evaluations of media influences on politics.



**Figure S4.** Cross-level interaction effect between journalists' active role conceptions and effective number of factions on normative evaluations of media influences on politics.



**Figure S5.** Cross-level interaction effect between political actors' presumed media influences and effective number of factions on normative evaluations of media influences on politics.



**Figure S6.** Cross-level interaction effect between journalists' presumed media influences and effective number of factions on normative evaluations of media influences on politics.

**Figure 1.** Visualization of cross-level interactions.



groups' normative evaluations of the media's influence on politics; instead, competitive structures interact with the actors' individual characteristics.

### *Interactions Between Competitive Structures and Role Conceptions*

Our study provides evidence that an active role conception's influence on normative evaluations of the media's impact depends on local competitive structures: In a competitive, fragmented, and hence, somewhat polarized party system, active journalists wish for less media influence on politics. It might well be that active journalists then experience political actors' efforts to instrumentalize the media, which makes them say that considerable media influence on politics should be reduced. In consensus-oriented political systems, however, active journalists wish for more media influence on politics. This might be due to political actors who are less interested in going public during negotiations to achieve competitive advantage (Baugut, 2017). In an environment that lacks public political conflicts, journalists with an active role conception might feel a need to create conflicts for several reasons. First, mediated conflicts seem to increase journalists' ratings, as political conflicts attract more audience attention than consociational (i.e., consensus-oriented) political processes (Engesser et al., 2014). Second, out of a sense of civic obligation, especially journalists with an active role conception may be interested in political conflicts, as diverging interests mirror the principle of a pluralistic society. Journalists may believe that the achievement of these two goals requires a stronger media influence on politics than is evident in the ability to create conflicts.

Similarly, active politicians wish for more media influence in competitive media environments where they have the opportunity to select media to communicate with. In this case, politicians could find ideologically congruent media. Furthermore, the additional interaction effect of an active role and a higher media concentration (as indicated by the HHI) suggests that active politicians would like to see a political power upgrade for media with a lower market share.

### *Interactions Between Competitive Structures and Presumed Media Influences*

Our study found that PMIs on citizens especially matter in interaction with the effective number of factions in parliament. In a fragmented party system, journalists with stronger PMIs are more supportive of an increase in power for the media as compared to a political system with a lower number of equally strong competitors. Interestingly, this effect is the opposite for politicians: Political actors with stronger PMIs wish for less media influence in a fragmented party system. We interpret this finding as an "influence rivalry" in competitive political environments: Journalists are arguably interested in strong media influences on both citizens and politics, but not for partisanship. Partisanship critics are simply less likely in a fragmented party system that allows for different collaborations between politicians and journalists. However, journalists' interest in powerful media and taking sides may include critical media coverage of some political actors at some point. Consequently, politicians are afraid of competitive disadvantage and wish for less media influence on politics. These explanations are true for the vast majority of political actors interested in positive media coverage. However, there may also be (populist) political actors that benefit from negative news coverage, because negative media reports can be exploited as proof that the elites are against them (Esser, Stepinska, & Hopmann, 2016).

### *The Impact of Individual Characteristics*

In contrast to structural conditions of local political communication ecosystems, individual characteristics also matter alone, when it comes to explaining political actors' and journalists' attitudes toward the media's influence on politics. The relative importance of individual characteristics can be regarded as a peculiarity of the local level (see Pfetsch, 2014). The study shows that the role conceptions of both journalists and politicians informed their normative evaluations of the media's influence on politics. Journalists who want to play an active role in democracy want to exert more influence on local politics. A stronger media impact on politics would probably make them feel that they have achieved an active role. In line with the interpretation provided by Vliegthart and Skovsgaard (2017), one can assume that journalists regard their role conception as a benchmark for their evaluations of the desirable degree of the media's influence on politics. Politicians who want to play an active role in society also indicated that media should be more powerful in politics, maybe to monitor their concerns through the media: Stronger media influences on politics could especially facilitate the media being the mouthpiece of disadvantaged citizens and of media setting the political agenda (Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993).

Our interpretation that the impact of competitive structures alone should not be overestimated on the local level is supported by the finding that the normative assessment of the media competition influences politicians' normative evaluations of the media's influence on politics: Politicians who perceive a more positive impact on their work due to a competitive media situation want to have a stronger media influence on politics, as the competitive situation arguably makes them benefit from arranged exchanges of exclusive information in return for positive publicity. Another example of the significance of individual characteristics is the finding that even a non-professional characteristic such as a politician's age matters: Older politicians wish for stronger media influences on politics, as they arguably have more professional experience and have therefore established closer relationships to journalists they benefit from in the case of a stronger media influence on politics. The significance of individual characteristics on the local level may be partly explained by the fact that, compared to the national level, the degree of the actors' professionalization is usually lower, and the number of relevant actors smaller (Baugut et al., 2017).

All in all, we did not find even one factor that links with journalists claiming that there should be less media impact on politics. Apparently, when asked about their institution's influence on local politics, journalists did not expose the problem of the media's influence being too strong, as this could shed a critical light on their profession's democratic function.

The number of different factors that shape political actors' normative evaluations of the media's impact shows their strategic and opportunistic view of the media's power. On the one hand, politicians expressed concerns about too much media impact on politics when presuming strong media influences on citizens in a more competitive party system. Those concerns might trace back to a fear of unfavorable media coverage. On the other hand, there were also factors that made politicians claim that they wanted stronger media influences. Especially an active political role conception seems to link with an interest in the media's power to push citizen concerns. Put differently, politicians do not fear increasing media influence on politics as long as they can benefit from the media's increasing power. Politicians should therefore not be considered as victims of a stronger media impact on politics.

### ***Limitations***

Clearly, this study has several limitations. First, we measured normative evaluations of the media's influence on politics globally. Given different forms of media impact on politics, we cannot say exactly in which respect the media should be more or less powerful in politics. However, large-scale surveys, as in this study, do not always allow us to capture constructs in a way that the researcher would like. Even though we had to compromise between measurement accuracy and an economic survey among busy experts, we believe that our study could nevertheless make relevant contributions to an under-researched area. Second, we analyzed political communication ecosystems at the local level in Germany, which might raise the question of generalizability. On the one hand, the German system has some particularities—for instance, the federal system assigns high importance to the local level in terms of extensive decision-making powers (Kuhlmann & Bogumil, 2007). On the other hand, the characteristics of local political communication, such as a lower level of professionalization, a smaller number of actors, and politicians' and journalists' status as citizens of the same municipality also apply in other countries (Baugut, 2017; Baugut et al., 2017).

Third, it is important to acknowledge possible non-response and coverage biases. Although the response rate was quite satisfactory for an elite survey, almost half of our sample did not participate. As elites commonly do not respond because of time constraints (rather than, for instance, due to a lack of interest in the topic), we would expect no systematic bias in our sample. In addition, there are no peculiar peaks or troughs in response rates across the 52 participating municipalities. In terms of coverage bias, identification of the basic population was elementary, but we had to rely on journalist databases and city websites, as no comprehensive listing exists of all journalists and political actors. As mayors, department heads, and councilors are all listed on the city websites, this problem did not arise, but we cannot fully rule out the possibility that we may have missed some journalists who actually report on local politics.

### **Conclusion**

Political communication ecosystems like cities can be characterized by politicians' and journalists' attitudes toward media influence on politics. Knowing what factors influence political actors' and journalists' normative evaluations of media influence on politics is important since norms can influence individual behaviors. In the long run, these individual behaviors may contribute to (an increasing) media impact on politics. Our findings highlight that, on the local level, competitive structures of the political and media system are not enough to explain the actors' attitudes toward media influence on politics. The actors' individual characteristics and their interplay with structural conditions matter as well and therefore deserve attention. Importantly, our findings show that the impact of competitive structures on journalists' normative evaluations of the media impact depends on their role conceptions. Further research is needed to analyze how, and under which conditions, these views ultimately affect political actors' and journalists' decision making.

### **Funding**

This work was supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft.

## Notes

1. Presumed media influences seem less relevant to explain injunctive norms (i.e., perceptions about what others believe one should do; see Gunther et al., 2006). In our case, these would translate into perceptions of political actors and journalists about how the media believe they should fulfill their job.
2. The response rates within the different actor groups did not vary substantially: local government: 50.0%; spokespersons: 54.7%; city councilors: 55.1%; and journalists: 45.7%.
3. Participants were first asked about the perceived actual media influences on local politics with a single-item measure, and directly afterwards about their normative evaluation about how they think that the media's influence on local politics *should* be. Hence, we also included the perceptions of actual media influences on local politics in all models.

## Supplemental Material

Supplemental data for this article can be accessed at <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2018.1517844>.

## References

- Altheide, D. L., & Snow, R. P. (1979). *Media logic*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Baker, C. E. (2006). *Media concentration and democracy: Why ownership matters*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Barker, D. C., & Carman, C. J. (2012). *Representing red and blue: How the culture wars change the way citizens speak and politicians listen*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Baugut, P. (2017). *Politiker und Journalisten in Interaktion. Einfluss des Medienwettbewerbs auf lokale politische Kommunikationskulturen [politicians and journalists in interaction. impact of media competition on local political communication cultures]*. Wiesbaden, Germany: Springer VS.
- Baugut, P., Fawzi, N., & Reinemann, C. (2017). Close, dependent, and out of touch with the people? Investigating and explaining local political communication cultures in a multi-level analysis. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 22, 357–379. doi:10.1177/1940161217705470
- Baugut, P., & Reinemann, C. (2013). Taking stock and outlook: The analysis of political communication cultures as a way out of the crises in local communication research? *Studies in Communication | Media*, 2, 401–435. doi:10.5771/2192-4007-2013-3-401
- Bennett, W. L., & Entman, R. M. (Eds.). (2001). *Mediated politics: Communication in the future of democracy. communication, society and politics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Bernhard, U., & Dohle, M. (2014). Do even journalists support media restrictions? Presumed political media influences and the consequences. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 91(2), 250–271. doi:10.1177/1077699014527456
- Blumler, J. G., & Esser, F. (2018). Mediatization as a combination of push and pull forces: Examples during the 2015 UK general election campaign. *Journalism (Online First)*. doi:10.1177/1464884911427803
- Bowler, S. (2017). Trustees, delegates, and responsiveness in comparative perspective. *Comparative Political Studies*, 50(6), 766–793. doi:10.1177/0010414015626447
- Brants, K., de Vreese, C., Möller, J., & Van Praag, P. (2010). The real spiral of cynicism? Symbiosis and mistrust between politicians and journalists. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 15(1), 25–40. doi:10.1177/1940161209351005
- Brants, K., & Van Praag, P. (2006). Signs of media logic: Half a century of political communication in the Netherlands. *Javnost—The Public*, 13(1), 25–40. doi:10.1080/13183222.2006.11008905

- Cialdini, R. B., Reno, R. R., & Kallgren, C. A. (1990). A focus theory of normative conduct: Recycling the concept of norms to reduce littering in public places. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 58, 1015–1026.
- Cohen, J., Tsfati, Y., & Sheaffer, T. (2008). The influence of presumed media influence in politics: Do politicians' perceptions of media power matter? *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 72(2), 331–344. doi:10.1093/poq/nfn014
- de Vreese, C. H., Esser, F., & Hopmann, D. N. (Eds.). (2017). *Comparing political journalism*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Dohle, M., Blank, C., & Vowe, G. (2012). Wie sehen Parlamentarier den Einfluss der Medien? Ergebnisse einer Befragung der Bundestagsabgeordneten [How do parliamentarians see the influence of the media? Results of a survey of the Members of the Bundestag]. *Zeitschrift Für Parlamentsfragen*, 43(2), 376–388. doi:10.5771/0340-1758-2012-2
- Donsbach, W. (2008). Journalists' role perception. In W. Donsbach (Ed.), *The international encyclopedia of communication* (pp. 2605–2610). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Elmelund-Praestekaer, C., Hopmann, D. N., & Norgaard, A. S. (2011). Does mediatization change mp-media interaction and mp attitudes toward the media? Evidence from a longitudinal study of Danish Mps. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 16(3), 382–403. doi:10.1177/1940161211400735
- Engesser, S., Esser, F., Reinemann, C., Scherr, S., Matthes, J., & Wonneberger, A. (2014). Negativität in der politikberichterstattung. Deutschland, Österreich und die Schweiz im Vergleich. *Medien & Kommunikationswissenschaft*, 62(4), 588–605. doi:10.5771/1615-634x-2014-4-588
- Esser, F. (1999). 'Tabloidization' of news—a comparative analysis of Anglo-American and German press journalism. *European Journal of Communication*, 14(3), 291–324. doi:10.1177/0267323199014003001
- Esser, F. (2013). Mediatization as a challenge: Media logic versus political logic. In H. Kriesi, S. Lavenex, F. Esser, J. Matthes, M. Bühlmann, & D. Bochslers (Eds.), *Democracy in the age of globalization and mediatization* (pp. 155–176). Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Esser, F., & Matthes, J. (2013). Mediatization effects on political news, political actors, political decisions, and political audiences. In H. Kriesi, S. Lavenex, F. Esser, J. Matthes, M. Bühlmann, & D. Bochslers (Eds.), *Democracy in the age of globalization and mediatization* (pp. 177–201). Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Esser, F., Stepinska, A., & Hopmann, D. N. (2016). Populism and the media. cross-national findings and perspectives. In T. Aalberg, F. Esser, C. Reinemann, J. Strömbäck, & C. H. de Vreese (Eds.), *Populist political communication in Europe* (pp. 365–380). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Fishbein, M., & Ajzen, I. (2010). *Predicting and changing behavior: The reasoned action approach*. New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- Gamson, W. A., & Wolfsfeld, G. (1993). Movements and media as interacting systems. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 528(1), 114–125. doi:10.1177/0002716293528001009
- Gunther, A. C. (1995). Overrating the X-rating: The third-person effect and support for restrictions on pornography. *Journal of Communication*, 45(1), 27–38. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.1995.tb00712.x
- Gunther, A. C., Bolt, D., Borzekowski, D. L. G., Liebhart, J. L., & Dillard, J. P. (2006). Presumed influence on peer norms: How mass media indirectly affect adolescent smoking. *Journal of Communication*, 56(1), 52–68. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00002.x
- Gunther, A. C., & Storey, J. D. (2003). The influence of presumed influence. *Journal of Communication*, 53(2), 199–215. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2003.tb02586.x
- Habermas, J. (2006). Political communication in media society: Does democracy still enjoy an epistemic dimension? The impact of normative theory on empirical research. *Communication Theory*, 16(4), 411–426. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2885.2006.00280.x

- Hanitzsch, T. (2007). Deconstructing journalism culture: Toward a universal theory. *Communication Theory*, 17(4), 367–385. doi:10.1111/comt.2007.17.issue-4
- Hanitzsch, T., & Vos, T. P. (2017). Journalism beyond democracy: A new look into journalistic roles in political and everyday life. *Journalism*, 19(2), 146–164. doi:10.1177/1464884916673386
- Holtkamp, L. (2008). *Kommunale konkordanz- und konkurrenzdemokratie [municipal consociational and competitive democracy]*. Wiesbaden, Germany: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Kepplinger, H. M. (2009). Rivalen um macht und moral. bundestagsabgeordnete und hauptstadt-journalisten [rivals for power and morality. members of the bundestag and capital city journalists]. In H. Kaspar, H. Schoen, S. Schumann, & J. R. Winkler (Eds.), *Politik - wissenschaft - medien* (pp. 307–321). Wiesbaden, Germany: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Kuhlmann, S., & Bogumil, J. (2007). Public service systems at subnational and local levels of government: A British-German-French comparison. In Raadschelders, J., Toonen, T., Meer, F.V. der, Van der Meer, F.M (Eds.), *The civil service in the 21st century* (pp. 137–151). London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Landa, D. (2016). Debating conceptions of rational choice. *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 18(4), 379–383. doi:10.1177/0951629806067450
- Lengauer, G., Donges, P., & Plasser, F. (2014). Media power in politics. In B. Pfetsch (Ed.), *Political communication cultures in Western Europe. attitudes of political actors and journalists in nine countries* (pp. 171–195). Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lijphart, A. (2012). *Patterns of democracy. government forms and performance in thirty-six countries* (2. ed). New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press.
- Lilleker, D. G. (2014). *Political communication and cognition*. Houndmills, UK: Palgrave.
- Maurer, P. (2011). Explaining perceived media influence in politics. *Publizistik*, 56(1), 27–50. doi:10.1007/s11616-010-0104-3
- Maurer, P., & Pfetsch, B. (2014). News coverage of politics and conflict levels. *Journalism Studies*, 15(3), 339–355. doi:10.1080/1461670X.2014.889477
- Mazzoleni, G., & Schulz, W. (1999). “Mediatization” of politics: A challenge for democracy? *Political Communication*, 16(3), 247–261. doi:10.1080/105846099198613
- Müller, P., & Hohlfeld, R. (2017). How journalists think about media effects—and why we should care. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, 25(2), 88–100. doi:10.1080/15456870.2017.1286343
- Napoli, P. M., Stonbely, S., McCollough, K., & Renninger, B. (2016). Local journalism and the information needs of local communities. *Journalism Practice*, 11(4), 373–395. doi:10.1080/17512786.2016.1146625
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Kalogeropoulos, A., Levy, D. A. L., Nielsen, R. K., & Norton, P. (2017). Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017. Retrieved from: [https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Digital%20News%20Report%202017%20web\\_0.pdf](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/Digital%20News%20Report%202017%20web_0.pdf)
- Nielsen, R. K. (2015). Introduction. the uncertain future of local journalism. In R. K. Nielsen (Ed.), *Local journalism. the decline of newspapers and the rise of digital media* (pp. 1–25). Tauris, UK: Tauris Academic Studies.
- O’Neill, T. (1994). *All politics is local, and other rules of the game*. New York, NY: Times.
- Opp, K. (1979). The emergence and effects of social norms. A confrontation of some hypotheses of sociology and economics. *Kyklos*, 32(4), 775–801.
- Pfetsch, B. (Ed.). (2014). *Political communication cultures in Western Europe: Attitudes of political actors and journalists in nine countries*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave.
- Pfetsch, B., & Esser, F. (2014). Political communication in comparative perspective: Key concepts and new insights. In C. Reinemann (Ed.), *Political communication. handbooks of communication science* (Vol. 18, pp. 97–105). Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Reinemann, C., & Baugut, P. (2014). Political journalists as communicators. The impact of individual characteristics on their work. In C. Reinemann (Ed.), *Handbooks of communication science: Political communication* (pp. 325–348). Berlin, Germany: De Gruyter Mouton.



- Reinemann, C., Stanyer, J., Scherr, S., & Legnante, G. (2012). Hard and soft news: A review of concepts, operationalizations and key findings. *Journalism*, 13(2), 221–239. doi:10.1177/1464884911427803
- Scherr, S., & Baugut, P. (2016). The meaning of leaning: The impact of journalists' political leaning on active role perception and satisfaction with audiences and editorial policy. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 93(1), 142–163. doi:10.1177/1077699015606678
- Schütz, W. J. (2012). Deutsche Tagespresse [German daily press]. *Media Perspektiven*, (11), 570–593.
- Spörer-Wagner, D., & Marcinkowski, F. (2010). Is talk always silver and silence golden? The mediatization of political bargaining. *Javnost - The Public*, 17(2), 5–26. doi:10.1080/13183222.2010.11009028
- Strömbäck, J. (2008). Four phases of mediatization: An analysis of the mediatization of politics. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 13(3), 228–246. doi:10.1177/1940161208319097
- Strömbäck, J. (2011a). Mediatization and perception of the media's political influence. *Journalism Studies*, 12(4), 423–439. doi:10.1080/1461670X.2010.523583
- Strömbäck, J. (2011b). Mediatization of politics: Toward a conceptual framework for comparative research. In E. P. Bucy & R. Lance Holbert (Eds.), *The sourcebook for political communication research: Methods, measures, and analytical techniques* (pp. 367–382). New York, London: Routledge.
- Tal-Or, N., Tsifti, Y., & Gunther, A. C. (2009). The influence of presumed media influence: Origins and implications of the third-person perception. In R. Nabi & M. B. Oliver (Eds.), *The sage handbook of media processes and effects* (pp. 99–112). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Usher, N. (2018). Breaking news production processes in US metropolitan newspapers: Immediacy and journalistic authority. *Journalism*, 19(1), 21–36. doi:10.1177/1464884916689151
- Van Aelst, P., Brants, K., Van Dalen, A., Van Praag, P., de Vreese, C., & Nuytemans, M. (2008). The fourth estate as superpower? An empirical study on perceptions of media power in Belgium and the Netherlands. *Journalism Studies*, 9, 494–512. doi:10.1080/1461670080211413
- Van Aelst, P., Maddens, B., Noppe, J., & Fiers, S. (2008). Politicians in the news: Media or party logic? Media attention and electoral success in the Belgian election campaign of 2003. *European Journal of Communication*, 23(2), 193–210. doi:10.1177/0267323108089222
- Van Aelst, P., Sheafer, T., & Stanyer, J. (2012). The personalization of mediated political communication: A review of concepts, operationalizations and key findings. *Journalism*, 13(2), 203–220. doi:10.1177/1464884911427802
- Van Aelst, P., Shehata, A., & Van Dalen, A. (2010). Members of parliament: Equal competitors for media attention? An analysis of personal contacts between MPs and political journalists in five European Countries. *Political Communication*, 27(3), 310–325. doi:10.1080/10584609.2010.496711
- Van Dalen, A., & Van Aelst, P. (2014). The media as political agenda-setters: Journalists' perceptions of media power in eight West European Countries. *West European Politics*, 37(1), 42–64. doi:10.1080/01402382.2013.814967
- Vliegthart, R., & Skovsgaard, M. (2017). Too powerful or just doing their job? Explaining differences in conceptions of media power among politicians and journalists. In P. Van Aelst & S. Walgrave (Eds.), *How Political Actors Use the Media* (pp. 85–106). Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Von Den Driesch, D., & Van Der Wurff, R. (2016). Role conceptions of public affairs practitioners in The Netherlands. *Public Relations Review*, 42(3), 441–450. doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2015.11.011
- Walgrave, S. (2008). Again, the almighty mass media? The media's political agenda-setting power according to politicians and journalists in Belgium. *Political Communication*, 25(4), 445–459. doi:10.1080/10584600802427047
- Walgrave, S., & Van Aelst, P. (2006). The contingency of the mass media's political agenda setting power: Toward a preliminary theory. *Journal of Communication*, 56(1), 88–109. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00005.x
- Xu, J., & Gonzenbach, W. J. (2008). Does a perceptual discrepancy lead to action? A meta-analysis of the behavioral component of the third-person effect. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 20(3), 375–385. doi:10.1093/ijpor/edn031