Sourcing the News: Comparing Source Use and Media Framing of the 2009 European Parliamentary Elections

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Sourcing the News: Comparing Source Use and Media Framing of the 2009 European Parliamentary Elections

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The relationship between journalists and their sources has been described as an interdependent relationship where each part needs the other. For political actors, this relationship is particularly important during election campaigns, when their need to reach voters through the media is even more urgent than usual. This is particularly true with respect to European Parliamentary election campaigns, as these are often less salient and as people's need for orientation is greater than in national elections. However, there is only limited cross-national research on the media's use of news sources and whether there are associations between the use of news sources and media framing. This holds true for research on election campaigns in general and on European Parliamentary election campaigns in particular. Against this background, this study investigates cross-national differences and similarities in the media's use of news sources in their coverage of the 2009 European Parliamentary election campaigns and the extent to which the use of news sources is associated with the media's framing of politics and the EU. The study draws upon a quantitative content analysis of the media coverage in twelve countries. Findings suggest that there are both important similarities and differences across countries with respect to the use of news sources and that there are cases when the use of news sources is related to the framing of politics and the EU.

KEYWORDS   comparative research, election campaigns, media framing, news management, news source

The relationship between journalists and their news sources has been described as a tug of war. In the words of Gans (1979, p. 117), "while sources attempt to 'manage' the news, putting the best light on themselves, journalists concurrently 'manage' the sources in order to extract the information they want." Journalists and their sources are locked in a relationship where each part needs the other; at the same time, they oftentimes have opposing interests and thus try to develop strategies that will enable them to exercise as much control as possible over, while avoiding being controlled by, the other.

For political actors, this relationship is particularly important during election campaigns, when their need to reach voters through the media is particularly urgent. This is not less true with respect to European Parliamentary

election campaigns. First, being less obtrusive than national elections, the media are an even more important source of information about European Parliamentary elections than about national elections (Kevin 2003). Second, as European Parliamentary elections generally are less salient than national elections (Reif and Schmitt 1980), the need to mobilize voters politically is greater, and in this context, the media are crucial. Third, as people's need for orientation (Weaver 1980) is greater with respect to European Parliamentary in contrast to national elections, the scope for media effects may be greater in European Parliamentary than in national elections.

Whether journalists or their sources have the upper hand in their inter-dependent relationship is a matter of dispute (Gans 2003; Reich 2009; Strömbäck and Nord 2006). Important to note, though, is that most studies on the use and impact of news sources are single-country studies and that most theories implicitly tend to assume that there are few if any important cross-national differences. In fact, while there is little doubt that the activities and use of news sources are important and related to questions about influence, there is only limited cross-national research on the media's use of sources in election campaigns in general, and with respect to European Parliamentary election campaigns in particular. The same holds true for research on how the use of news sources contributes to, or is associated with, media framing. While influencing media framing is one of the main goals for political actors' efforts at news management (Hallahan 1999), research on the association between source use and media framing is still very limited (Dimitrova and Strömbäck 2012).

Against this background, the purpose of this study is to investigate the media's use of news sources, and whether the use of news sources is associated with the media's framing of politics and the EU, in the media coverage of the 2009 European Parliamentary election campaigns. In this context, news sources refer to those who are cited or referred to in news stories. More specifically, the article will investigate and compare (1) cross-national patterns in the use of news sources and (2) the extent to which the use of news sources is associated with the media's framing of politics and the EU. An additional purpose is to investigate whether theories about the media's use of news sources and the association between news sources and the media's framing hold true cross-nationally, as is implicitly oftentimes assumed.

JOURNALISTS AND NEWS SOURCES AS STRATEGIC ACTORS

The perspective guiding this article perceives both journalists and news sources as strategic actors. As such, their behavior is instrumental and based on more or less conscious calculations related to the behavior of other actors. From the perspective of journalists, news sources serve different purposes. Journalists need news sources that can provide easily accessible information high in news

value; are available, reliable and authoritative; reduce uncertainty and provide verification of the news accounts; provide diverse viewpoints; help in analyzing and interpreting events and processes; grant legitimacy to the news; serve as a point of identification; and can express themselves in ways that suit the medium (Davis 2007; Manning 2001; Reich 2009; Sigal 1973; Tuchman 1978).

The kind of news sources that most often fulfill journalists' source considerations are official and high-ranking sources, for example, administration officials, politicians, or other high-ranking officials in public and private organizations (Bennett 2003; Berkowitz 2009; Lawrence 2000; Manning 2001; Shehata 2010; Shoemaker and Reese 1996).

This pattern is dependent not only on journalists' source considerations but also on the strategic interests of official and, not least, political, sources in influencing the news. From the perspective of political actors, influencing the news serves several purposes. Political actors need the media to reach the mass public, influence the media agenda, influence the media framing, influence the public's agenda and cognitive schemas, send signals to other political actors, build public support that can put pressure on other political actors, test policy proposals, and, ultimately, to influence public opinion formation processes (Bennett 2003; Blumler and Gurevitch 1995; Davis 2007; Kernell 2007; Negrine 2008; Strömbäck and Kiousis 2011).

Hence, not only do official sources and political actors fulfill journalists' source considerations to a greater extent than nonofficial sources; they also have greater incentives and more resources to influence the media and consequently devote greater efforts to news management and media relationship building through, for example, providing various news subsidies (Gandy 1982). While there may be variations across countries, following the literature our first hypothesis (H1) is therefore that *across countries, official sources will dominate in the media's coverage of the 2009 European Parliamentary election campaigns.*

That official sources purportedly are the most common source category does not necessarily equal sources being more powerful than journalists. Official sources are a category comprising many different actors with diverging interests. It is not a monolith, and one of the main influences on the part of journalists may in fact be their choice of news sources *within* the overall category of official sources (Davis 2007; Shehata 2010; Wolfsfeld and Sheafer 2006). In the context of European Parliamentary election campaigns, official sources may, for example, include incumbent politicians, candidates for office, party operatives, as well as domestic and international government officials. Since the focus in election campaigns presumably is on those standing for elections, and politicians have the strongest incentives to try to influence the news, it can be expected that politicians will be used as sources more often than other official sources, such as government officials. Thus, our second hypothesis (H2) is that *across countries, politicians will be used as sources more often than other official sources in the media's coverage of the 2009 European Parliamentary election campaigns.*

In the context of European Parliamentary election campaigns, official sources may also include representatives for the European Union, for example, members of the European Commission or different directorates within the EU. However, most research suggests that the media's coverage of European politics not only is sporadic (de Vreese 2003) but also domesticated and mainly focused on national EU affairs. In addition, elections to the European Parliament are generally considered second-order *national* elections (Reif and Schmitt 1980). As such, they are treated differently than national elections not only by voters and parties but also by the media (Maier, Strömbäck, and Kaid 2011; de Vreese, Lauf, and Peter 2007; Kaid 2008; Maier and Maier 2008; Maier and Tenscher 2006). Research on how the media covered previous European Parliamentary elections has consequently shown that "news coverage was more domestically focused than EU focused. The actors featured in news stories about the elections were generally domestic or national political actors and not EU actors" (de Vreese et al. 2006, p. 497). Based on the above, our third hypothesis (H3) is that *across countries, spokespersons for the EU as well as international politicians and government officials will be used as sources less often than domestic political actors*.

Not only official sources matter, however, and although we expect official sources to be the most common source category in the media's coverage of the 2009 European Parliamentary election campaigns, another important source category, albeit of a different kind, are ordinary people. What are ultimately at stake at elections are their votes, and for the media the competition for audiences is crucial. Hence, both political actors and the media have incentives to court ordinary voters. In the case of the media, this may be reflected in an inclusion of ordinary citizens in election news, for example, as commentators on the performances of other actors.

Another important source category is related to the media and journalists themselves. Journalists cover not only the news. Journalists covering a story may in fact also act as a source, for example, through stand-ups where the journalist explains or summarizes what the news is about or its implications, and journalists may interview other journalists in the role of observer or news analyst. This may be part of the media's metacoverage (Esser and D'Angelo 2003) and can be perceived as part of the mediatization of election news. There is, however, only little cross-national research on how often journalists are used as sources in election news. Based on these considerations, we ask (RQ1) *how often are ordinary people and journalists included as sources, and are there any cross-national differences?*

THE IMPORTANCE OF NEWS SOURCES

While the use of news sources is important in itself, it is also important because it influences the news content. Who gets to speak *in the news* ultimately decides what audiences may hear *from the news*. This is why the

question of news sources is also a question of power and influence and why it is important to investigate the impact of the media's use of sources.

Theoretically, the use of news sources may be related to what the news is about and how the news frames various events, issues, processes, or other objects. Not least important is the impact on the media's framing, as research has shown that the media, through framing, may have significant influence on people's opinions, attitudes, and perceptions of reality (Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Iyengar 1991; Price, Tewksbury, and Powers 1997; Schuck and De Vreese 2006). Simply put, news sources may influence media frames, which may have significant effects on audience frames. Still, while there is a substantial literature on framing effects, there is virtually no research on the impact of, or association between, the use of news sources and the media's framing (but see Dimitrova and Strömbäck 2012). Linking the literature on news sources to the literature on media framing thus appears theoretically important and promising.

From the perspective of political marketing, the goal of political actors is to be included in the news or convince the media to accept their preferred frames and, through that route, influence media audiences (Schaffner and Sellers 2010). At the same time, the media themselves prefer frames that are culturally congruent and that may be successful in capturing audiences' attention. From that perspective, certain frames may function as news values guiding news selection. For example, the widely documented tendency of the media to frame politics as a strategic game rather than as issues (Strömbäck and Kaid 2008) can partly or even mainly be attributed to the media's incessant interest in dramatic and attention-grabbing news stories (Patterson 1993; Cappella and Jamieson 1997).

Thus, the media's framing of politics and various issues, events, and processes is the result of attitudes and strategic behavior on the part of both news sources and the media. In abstract, the exact nature and scope of news sources' influence on media framing is a both complex and unresolved issue, not least since frame-building processes are highly contextual and dynamic (D'Angelo and Kuypers 2010; Entman 2004), and since journalists may seek out sources that fit a particular preselected narrative. In this respect, the media's framing should be perceived as a coproduction of news sources and journalists.

The question, then, is not so much whether particular news sources *cause* the media to apply certain frames, but whether there is an *association* between the visibility of different news sources and the media's framing.

To investigate this, we will focus on the media's framing of politics and of the EU: two highly salient aspects of European Parliamentary election news. More specifically, we will use the framing of politics as a strategic game (Aalberg, Strömbäck, and de Vreese 2012; Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Patterson 1993) and pro- versus anti-EU frames as dependent variables.

Starting with the framing of politics as a strategic game, research has shown not only that this framing is very common in election news (Farnsworth and Lichter 2007; Patterson 1993; Strömbäck and Kaid 2008) but also that it

is mainly driven by the media and their interest in dramatic storytelling and quest for stories that grant them a higher degree of autonomy from political actors. While official sources may have the upper hand in the first phase of news production—the news discovery phase—the argument here is that in the second phase—the news gathering phase—journalists have greater influence over the framing of the news (Cook 2005; Reich 2009; Strömbäck and Nord 2006) and may use that influence to frame news according to their own needs and interests. In the words of Zaller (2001, p. 250), "Journalists have an occupational interest in a relatively activist and autonomous conception of journalism, one that offers more than stenographic transcription of what others have said and that has appeal beyond the lowest common denominator of the mass market." From this it follows that journalists seek to substitute what political actors want them to report on with their own perspectives and their own words. The framing of politics as a strategic game rather than as substance offers one prime way for journalists to do just this. While political actors and, presumably, other domestic and international official sources mainly focus on the issues and the substance of politics, journalists tend to frame politics rather as a strategic game and a horse race (Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Patterson 1993; Zaller 2001).

Against this background, we expect the framing of politics as a strategic game to be more common the more journalists are used as sources and less common the more politicians, spokespersons for the EU, and other domestic or international officials are used as sources. More specifically and across countries, we expect there to be *(H4) a positive association between the use of journalists as sources and the framing of politics as a strategic game* and *(H5) a negative association between the use of domestic official sources, spokespersons for the EU, and international politicians or government officials and the framing of politics as a strategic game*.

Turning to the framing of the EU, our expectations are somewhat more ambiguous with respect to cross-national patterns. In some countries the political elite are more in favor of the EU, whereas in other countries, criticisms toward the EU are more prominent. The general pattern, however, is that elites are more in favor of the EU than ordinary people and less influential groups in society. Hence, our general expectation is that there will be *(H6) a positive association between the use of domestic official sources, international official sources, and spokespersons for the EU as sources and pro-EU framing in election news*. In contrast, we expect *(H7) there to be a negative association between the use of ordinary citizens as sources and pro-EU framing in election news*.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA

To investigate the use and impact of news sources during the 2009 European Parliamentary election campaigns, a quantitative content analysis was

conducted. The content analysis includes 12 member states of the European Union: Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. As we are interested in investigating whether the theories of source use and association with media framing hold true cross-nationally, the selection of countries was guided by a desire to include a wide range of countries with different political and media systems.

In terms of media, the content analysis includes the three main television news programs and the two main national broadsheets in each country. Hence, no tabloids are included, which is important to keep in mind. For a full list of included media, see the Appendix. The content analysis includes all news stories published in the selected media during the last three weeks before election day, ending the day before election day, that explicitly referred to the 2009 European Parliamentary election, including stories about voters or the candidates themselves. For newspapers, the reference to the 2009 European Parliamentary election was to be found in headlines, lead paragraphs, or photos, while for television news, the full stories were searched for references to the 2009 European Parliamentary election when relevant news stories were identified. The unit of analysis was single news stories (newspapers) or thematic news stories (television). In total, the content analysis includes 2,476 news stories (Table 1).

When coding the presence of sources, coders were instructed: "For someone to be counted as a source, a statement, facto, or quote must be attributed to him or her." When coding the overall number of sources, all sources—including anonymous—were included, but when coding the number of sources belonging to different source categories, only named sources were included and counted.

When coding sources, a number of source categories were defined beforehand. The source categories used here are *domestic candidates for or*

TABLE 1 Number of News Stories on the 2009 European Parliamentary Election Campaigns

	Newspapers	Television news	*N*
Portugal	196	299	495
Spain	311	162	473
Austria	166	91	257
Sweden	118	95	213
Romania	75	133	208
Czech Republic	109	53	162
Poland	78	79	157
Finland	104	49	153
Italy	68	78	146
Denmark	64	49	113
Germany	42	23	65
United Kingdom	17	17	34
N	1348	1128	2476

members of the European Parliament; *other domestic politicians* (for example, party leaders and members of the national parliament); *international politicians* (politicians from other countries); *ordinary citizens* (people casted as ordinary people); *high-level domestic government officials* (nonelected officials holding a management function or speaking for the whole organization/department); *foreign government officials* (nonelected officials from other countries); *spokespersons for the EU* (including representatives for the commission and other administrative bodies within the EU); and *media analysts or journalists* (aside from the journalist covering a story). For each category, the number of sources was coded.

To investigate the framing of politics as a strategic game, two variables will be used. The coders were asked to indicate (yes/no) whether the news story "deals extensively with politicians or parties winning or losing elections, legislative debates, governing negotiations, or winning or losing in politics generally," and whether it "deals extensively with polls and politicians' or parties' standing in the polls." To investigate the framing of the EU, three pro- and three anti-EU frames were coded. The pro-EU frames asked: Does the story cast the EU as "contributing to peace and freedom," "contributing to economic development," and "contributing positively to the member states"? The anti-EU frames asked: Does the news story cast the EU as "an organization incapable of addressing important problems facing the member states," as "an overly bureaucratic and inefficient organization, costing too much in relation to what it delivers," and "as a threat toward national sovereignty"?

Separate country teams did the coding of the news stories. To check for intercoder reliability, nine newspaper stories and nine TV news stories published by UK media were used. The fact that English is not the mother tongue for most of the coders while the actors in the stories used in the intercoder test were not always familiar to the coders posed a particular challenge in this process. This may have lowered the formal intercoder reliability without necessarily implying lower reliability when coding the own country's news coverage. It was nevertheless decided that only variables with intercoder reliability above .70 (Holsti's formula) would be used for comparative purposes. Variables with lower intercoder reliability were excluded from the analysis.[1]

RESULTS: THE USE OF NEWS SOURCES

Before investigating the hypotheses, some descriptive data are in order. Overall, the number of news sources per news story ranged from 0 to 37. While there were a few cases where the number of sources exceeded 20, the mean number was 2.44 and the median number 2. There were some differences across countries, however. Excluding four extreme outliers, the highest

mean number of sources was found in Poland ($M = 5.23$, $SD = 3.16$) followed by the Czech Republic ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 2.47$) and Denmark ($M = 3.04$, $SD = 2.02$). The lowest mean number was found in Germany ($M = 2.00$, $SD = 2.69$) and Spain ($M = 1.42$, $SD = 1.45$).

Turning to the hypotheses, H1 predicted that across countries, official sources would dominate in the coverage of the 2009 European Parliamentary election campaigns. To investigate this hypothesis, the source categories "domestic candidates for or members of the European Parliament," "other domestic politicians," "international politicians," "high-level domestic government officials," "foreign government officials," and "spokespersons for the EU" were combined into one category and contrasted with how often journalists and ordinary citizens were included as sources. The results are presented in Table 2, displaying both the share of news stories where each source category was present and the mean number of sources belonging to each category per news story.

The results show that official sources were highly common and dominant in the media's coverage of the 2009 European Parliamentary election campaigns. Overall, at least one official source was present in 72.7% of the news stories, while the mean number of official sources per news story was 1.59. In contrast, journalists were included as sources in 8.6% of the news stories while ordinary people were included as sources in 14% of the news stories. Altogether, 5900 sources (not necessarily different ones) were included in the investigated media's coverage of the 2009 European Parliamentary election campaigns, and 3934 of these, or 66.7%, were official sources.

There were large variations across countries, however, although official sources appear to dominate across countries. While official sources were present in more than 80% of the news stories in Italy, Poland, and Portugal, they were present in less than 60% of the news stories in Finland and Germany. Journalists, on the other hand, were extremely common as sources in Romania (48.1%) compared to other countries, followed by the United Kingdom (20.6%). The mean number of journalists as sources was however only 0.08.

With respect to ordinary people, the results show that overall, ordinary people were used as sources in 14% of the news stories, but again there were differences across countries. The highest shares of news stories with ordinary people used as sources could be found in Sweden (27.2%), followed by the Czech Republic (24.1%). The lowest shares, in contrast, could be found in the Romanian (5.3%), Italian (2.7%), and Spanish (1.3%) election coverage.

Turning to H2, this hypothesis predicted that politicians would be used as sources more often than other official sources in the media's coverage of the 2009 European Parliamentary election campaigns. To investigate this, domestic members of or candidates to the European Parliament and other domestic political actors were combined into the category "domestic politicians"

TABLE 2 Presence and Mean Number of Source Categories in the Coverage of the 2009 European Parliamentary Election Campaigns

	Official sources (%)	Official sources (Mean number)	Journalists as sources (%)	Journalists as sources (Mean number)	Ordinary people as sources (%)	Ordinary people as sources (Mean number)
Austria	70.4	1.46	8.2	0.08	10.5	0.10
Czech Republic	75.3	1.69	12.3	0.07	24.1	0.24
Denmark	79.6	2.06	2.7	0.03	20.4	0.20
Finland	44.4	1.04	3.9	0.04	20.3	0.20
Germany	55.4	1.01	3.1	0.03	15.4	0.15
Italy	83.6	1.88	4.1	0.04	2.7	0.02
Poland	84.1	3.97	8.9	0.09	17.2	0.17
Portugal	83.8	1.49	1.8	0.02	20.8	0.21
Romania	62.0	1.05	48.1	0.48	5.3	0.05
Spain	71.0	1.30	1.7	0.02	1.3	0.01
Sweden	69.0	1.47	7.5	0.08	27.2	0.27
United Kingdom	64.7	1.33	20.6	0.20	20.6	0.21
Overall	72.7	1.59	8.6	0.08	14.0	0.14

Note. For *N*, see Table 1. The category "official sources" includes "domestic candidates for or members of the European Parliament," "other domestic politicians," "international politicians," "high-level domestic government officials," "foreign government officials," and "spokespersons for the EU." As more than one as well as no source category may be present in a news story, percentages do not sum up to 100.

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and contrasted to the categories "international politicians," "domestic govern-
ment officials," "international government officials," and "spokespersons for
the EU." The results, expressed in terms of the share of news stories with at
least one source belonging to each source category present, are displayed in
Table 3.

The results show that across countries, domestic politicians were used
as sources more often than international politicians, domestic government
officials, international government officials, and spokespersons for the EU.
Overall, at least one domestic politician was used as source in 64.1% of the
news stories, ranging from a low of 39.9% in Finland to a high of 80% in
Portugal. In contrast, overall at least one international politician was used
as source in only 6.7% of the news stories, ranging from a low of 1.5% in
Germany to a high of 16.8% in Denmark. On an aggregate level, domestic
government officials were used as sources somewhat more often than
international politicians: overall, at least one domestic government official
was present in 7.3% of the news stories. There were great variations across
countries, however, as the Danish media did not use a single source belonging
to the category of domestic government officials, while at least one domestic
government official was used as source in about 20% of the news stories in
Germany, the Czech Republic, and Poland.

While these results lend support to H2, they also emphasize that "official
sources" is a broad and quite heterogeneous category, and while it may be
true that overall, official sources dominate the coverage of the 2009 European

TABLE 3 Presence of Official Sources in the Coverage of the 2009 European Parliamentary
Election Campaigns (%)

	Domestic politicians	International politicians	Domestic government officials	International government officials	Spokespersons for the EU
Austria	60.7	10.9	2.7	0.0	1.6
Czech Republic	61.1	11.1	21.0	0.6	1.2
Denmark	65.5	16.8	0.0	2.7	3.5
Finland	39.9	2.6	3.9	0.0	0.0
Germany	40.0	1.5	20.0	0.0	3.1
Italy	70.5	2.7	16.4	0.0	1.4
Poland	77.7	10.8	22.9	3.2	2.5
Portugal	80.0	4.6	1.6	0.2	0.4
Romania	51.9	5.3	13.5	1.9	0.5
Spain	62.4	5.3	3.2	3.6	1.7
Sweden	59.2	6.6	3.3	0.0	2.3
United Kingdom	64.7	5.9	8.8	2.9	5.9
Overall	64.1	6.7	7.3	1.3	1.5

Note. For *N*, see Table 1. The category "domestic politicians" includes "domestic candidates for or members
of the European Parliament" and "other domestic politicians," and the percentage refers to the share of
news stories with at least one source belonging to these categories present. As more than one as well as
no source category may be present in a news story, percentages do not sum up to 100.

Parliamentary election campaigns, there are differences across countries both with respect to how dominant official sources are and how often different kinds of official sources are included as sources. Simply stating that the media are reliant on or guided by official sources may mask as much as it reveals.

Turning to H3, it was predicted that spokespersons for the EU as well as international politicians and government officials would be used as sources less often than domestic political actors. This hypothesis is also supported by the results, as revealed by Table 3. In fact, considering that the election campaigns were for the European Parliament, it is quite noteworthy that overall, a spokesperson for the EU was present in only 1.5% of the news stories. In some countries, such as Finland, Portugal, and Romania, less than 1% of the news stories included a representative for the EU. This clearly suggests that election campaigns for the European Parliament are highly domesticated and that these elections still are approached as second-order *national* elections rather than trans-European elections.

Further evidence for this can be found in Table 4, which shows the share of news stories with at least one domestic member of or candidate to the European Parliament—that could be classified as domestic European politicians—and the share of news stories with at least one other domestic politician used as source.[2] Considering that the election was for the European parliament, one could expect the media to focus overwhelmingly on members of or candidates to the European Parliament. In some countries, this is indeed the case, but there are also a number of countries where other domestic politicians outnumber European politicians and several cases where other domestic politicians are included almost as often as European politicians. The last column

TABLE 4 Presence of European Versus Other Domestic Politicians as Sources (%)

	Domestic European Politicians	Other Domestic Politicians	Balance
Austria	37.7	35.0	+2.7
Czech Republic	19.1	52.5	−33.5
Denmark	58.4	29.2	+29.2
Finland	35.9	17.0	+18.9
Germany	33.8	7.7	+26.1
Italy	58.9	16.4	+42.5
Poland	63.1	56.1	+7.0
Portugal	66.5	38.0	+28.5
Romania	33.2	21.6	+11.6
Spain	27.1	47.4	−20.3
Sweden	47.9	22.1	+25.8
United Kingdom	35.3	35.3	0
Overall	44.3	35.0	+9.3

Note. For *N*, see Table 1. The category "domestic European politicians" refers to "domestic candidates for or members of the European Parliament." As more than one as well as no source category may be present in a news story, percentages do not sum up to 100.

summarizes the net balance of news stories with at least one European minus at least one other domestic politician included as sources. Based on this measure, the most domesticated coverage could be found in the Czech Republic and Spain, while the most Europeanized coverage could be found in Italy.

The domestic nature of the media's coverage of election campaigns to the European Parliament is also shown by the results (Table 3) relating to how often international politicians or government officials were used as sources. Overall, at least one international politician was included as a source in 6.7% of the news stories, while the corresponding share for international government officials was only 1.3%.

Summing up this part of the analysis, the results have shown that across countries, (1) official sources was the dominant source category in the coverage of the 2009 European Parliamentary election campaigns, (2) politicians were used as sources more often than other official sources, (3) spokespersons for the EU were rarely used as sources, and (4) international politicians and government officials were used as sources less often than domestic political actors. The results also show (5) that other domestic politicians were present as sources almost as often as domestic members of or candidates to the European Parliament, although there were great variations across countries. Overall, these patterns suggest that European Parliamentary elections are still treated as second-order national elections by the media.

RESULTS: THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN NEWS SOURCES AND MEDIA FRAMING

While source use is important in itself, it is also important because it may affect the content of the news stories and more specifically the media agendas and media frames. The focus here will however be on media frames and more specifically whether the use of sources is associated with the framing of politics as a strategic game and of the EU.

To investigate this, two items tapping the framing of politics as a strategic game will be used: whether the news story deals extensively with politicians or parties winning or losing elections, legislative debates, governing negotiations or winning or losing in politics generally and whether it deals extensively with polls and politicians' or parties' standing in the polls. According to H4, there will be a positive association between the use of journalists as sources and the framing of politics as a strategic game, while H5 predicted the opposite pattern for the use of domestic official sources, spokespersons for the EU, and international official sources. The results of a cross-tabulation are presented in Table 5, showing the share of news stories with each subframe present depending on whether different source categories were present.

The results show that on an aggregate level, the use of sources does indeed appear to be associated with the framing of politics as a strategic

game. As predicted by H4, when journalists are used as sources, the news stories are more likely to frame politics as a strategic game operationalized by both a focus on winning and losing and a focus on opinion polls. The association is not strong (Cramer's $V = .096$ and .065), but significant. As predicted by H5, there is furthermore a negative and significant association between the use of domestic official sources and a focus on winning and losing (Cramer's $V = .084$) and on opinion polls (Cramer's $V = .140$). With respect to the use of spokespersons for the EU and the framing of politics as a strategic game, the results go in the direction of the hypothesis, but the difference is not significant. This is probably due to the small number of news stories with spokespersons for the EU included as sources.

The only results that run counter to the hypotheses are related to the impact of international official sources. Contrary to expectations, there was a stronger focus on winning and losing (Cramer's $V = .083$) and a somewhat although not significantly stronger focus on opinion polls when international official sources were included. This may indicate that when the news media in rare cases do cover election campaigns in other countries, the focus is less on the issues and more on how the race is going in these other countries. For example, in several countries the media did stories on the election campaigns in the Netherlands, with a particular focus on the fortunes of the right-wing populist Geert Wilders' Freedom Party, and the UK "expenses scandal" also gained some attention in the media in other countries.

As the number of cases becomes very small when breaking up the source categories per country and frames, it is not appropriate to analyze the data on a country level. The only exception may be with respect to the use of official sources, and a closer analysis of these results (not shown) suggests that overall, the aggregate pattern holds also on a country level of analysis,

TABLE 5 Relation Between Source Use and the Framing of Politics as a Strategic Game (%)

	Focus on winning and losing	Focus on opinion polls	N
Journalists as sources			
–Present	36.8***	21.7***	212
–Not present	22.3	13.6	2264
Domestic official sources			
–Present	21.0***	10.8***	1653
–Not present	28.6	21.3	823
Spokespersons for the EU as sources			
–Present	13.9	8.3	36
–Not present	23.6	14.4	2440
International official sources			
–Present	35.8***	17.1	187
–Not present	22.5	14.1	2289

***$p = .001$.

with the exception of Poland, Romania, and Finland in terms of a focus on winning and losing and of Poland and Germany in terms of a focus on opinion polls. Because of the small number of cases most differences are however not statistically significant.

Nevertheless, overall the results suggest that there is an association between the use of journalists as well as domestic and international official sources and the framing of politics as a strategic game. The next question is whether this is true also of the framing of the EU.

To investigate this, first the three pro-EU frames were combined into one variable tapping whether a pro-EU frame was present, while the three anti-EU frames were combined into one variable tapping whether an anti-EU frame was present. A principal component analysis (not displayed) shows that these frames load on two different factors, and this allows us to investigate the presence of a pro- and anti-EU frame across countries. As a background for subsequent analyses of the association between these frames and the use of different sources, Table 6 shows presence of a pro- and an anti-EU frame in all the countries.

Overall, a pro-EU frame was present somewhat more often than an anti-EU frame, but the most striking result may be how unusual both frames were, particularly considering that this study is about the media coverage of the 2009 European Parliamentary election campaigns. This suggests that in many countries, the EU was not often discussed at all when the media covered the campaigns and again that the campaigns were rather treated as second-order *national* election campaigns.

There were some important cross-national differences, however. A pro-EU frame was least common in the Czech Republic's, the Spanish, and

TABLE 6 Presence of Pro- and Anti-EU Frames in the Coverage of the 2009 European Parliamentary Election Campaigns (%)

	Pro-EU frame	Anti-EU frame	Net balance	N
Austria	3.9	3.1	+0.8	257
Czech Republic	0.6	6.2	−5.6	162
Denmark	11.5	23.9	−12.4	113
Finland	19.6	11.8	+7.8	153
Germany	16.9	10.8	+6.1	65
Italy	22.6	6.2	+16.4	146
Poland	15.3	14.6	+0.7	157
Portugal	1.8	4.4	−2.6	495
Romania	25.5	1.9	+23.6	208
Spain	1.7	1.7	0	473
Sweden	6.6	8.0	−1.4	213
United Kingdom	11.8	25.5	−13.7	34
Total	8.5	6.5	+2.0	

Note. For *N*, see Table 1. Percentages refer to the share of news story with a pro- or an anti-EU frame present in the news story. As both as well as none of the frames may be present in a news story, percentages do not sum up to 100.

the Portuguese media coverage, where it was present in less than 2% of the news stories, and most common in the Romanian and Italian media coverage, where it was present in more than 20% of the news stories. Similarly, an anti-EU frame was least common in the Spanish and the Romanian media coverage, where it was present in less than 2% of the news stories, and most common in the Danish and UK media coverage, where it was present in more than 20% of the news stories. Looking at the net balance, the coverage was most positive toward the EU in Romania and Italy and most negative in the United Kingdom and Denmark.

To investigate whether the presence of pro- and anti-EU frames is associated with the use of various source categories, we first ran simple cross-tabulations. With respect to the presence of a pro-EU frame, the results show only one significant association: when foreign official sources were used, a pro-EU frame was present more often (13.4%) than when foreign official sources were not used (8.1%). The association is however weak (Cramer's $V = .050$, $p = .013$). Turning to the presence of an anti-EU frame, several associations are significant, albeit not always in the direction hypothesized. An anti-EU frame was present more often when spokespersons for the EU were used as sources (25%) compared to when they were not (6.3%; Cramer's $V = .091$, $p = .000$) and more often when international official sources were used (15%) than when they were not (5.9%; Cramer's $V = .097$, $p = .000$). It was also more common when ordinary people were included as sources (10.1%) than when they were not (6%; Cramer's $V = .058$, $p = .004$). The first two of these results are contrary to H6, while the association with the use of ordinary people as sources is as expected.

To further investigate the association between source use and the framing of the EU, we computed a continuous variable based on the three pro- and three anti-EU frames. The values range from –3, indicating that all three anti-EU and no pro-EU frames were present, to +3, indicating that all pro- and no anti-EU frames were present. The value 0 indicates either that there was a balance between the presence of pro- and anti-EU frames or that none were present. Using this measure shows two significant results: when journalists were included as sources, the framing of the EU was significantly more positive ($M = 0.26$) than otherwise ($M = 0.04$, $F = 24.398$, $df = 1$, $p = .000$). In contrast, when spokespersons for the EU were included as sources the framing was significantly more negative ($M = -.167$) than when they were not included as sources ($M = .068$, $F = 5.336$, $df = 1$, $p = .021$). These results were not as expected, particularly not the association between the use of spokespersons for the EU and a negative framing of the EU.

This brings us to the distinction between association and causation. While the results show a negative association between the presence of spokespersons for the EU and the framing of the EU, it is not likely that these sources promoted a negative framing of the EU. It is more likely that these spokespersons for the EU explained or defended the positions or actions of

the EU when being criticized by politicians and other actors. Unfortunately the data do not reveal whether different sources were positioned in an active or reactive role in the media coverage—only whether a fact, quote, or statement was attributed to different sources—but it would be highly surprising if spokespersons for the EU promoted a negative framing.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The overall purpose of this study was to investigate and compare cross-national differences and similarities in the use of news sources and the extent to which the use of news sources was associated with the media's framing of politics and the EU. To briefly summarize the results, they show that across countries, official sources clearly dominated in the media's coverage of the 2009 European Parliamentary election campaigns; that domestic politicians was the dominant source category overall; that international official sources and, importantly, spokespersons for the EU were rather seldom included as sources, and more seldom than domestic official sources; and that official sources as a category is rather heterogeneous and masking important differences across sources within the overall category of official sources. The results have also shown that both ordinary people and journalists were regularly included as sources, although there were great variations across countries.

In terms of the association between source use and the framing of politics, the results showed a positive association between the presence of journalists as sources and a negative association between the presence of domestic official sources and the framing of politics as a strategic game. Finally, in terms of the association between source use and the framing of EU, the results suggest a positive association between the presence of journalists as sources and a positive framing of the EU and a negative association between the presence of spokespersons for the EU and a negative framing of the EU.

These results have several implications for further research and theory-building. First, while the results show that official sources dominate in the media's election coverage, there were quite large variations across countries. Such variations need to be further explored and theorized in future research. Second, the results also show that official sources is a large and heterogeneous category, suggesting that it is time to move beyond a focus on the dominance of official sources per se and toward research and theory that explores differences within the category of official sources and their antecedents. Third, as suggested not least by the association between spokespersons for the EU and negative framing of the EU, associations do not prove causation. Hence, further research needs to further explore and theorize the causal linkages between source activities—active and passive

source selection—and media framing. This requires research that goes beyond content analyses and that combines studies of news production processes and media content (de Vreese 2003; Strömbäck and Nord 2006). Fourth and related, further research is also needed to unearth the extent to which the media coverage, including both source use and media framing, is shaped by journalists and the media themselves rather than by real-world events and the activities of political actors. Stated differently, the "discretionary power" (Esser 2008; Semetko et al. 1991) of the media in their coverage of the European Parliamentary election campaigns, or the mediatization (Strömbäck 2008) of European Parliamentary election news, as well as how it is affected by national-level factors, needs to be further explored.

Fifth and not least important, the results suggest that European Parliamentary elections are still treated as second-order national elections by the media. This conclusion is suggested by the findings that spokespersons for the EU are rarely used as sources, that domestic political actors are used as sources more often than international sources, and that domestic members of or candidates for the European Parliament in many countries are used as sources less often than other domestic politicians, although on average, domestic members of or candidates for the European Parliament was present as sources in about 44% of the news stories, in contrast to 35% for other domestic politicians.

Regardless of the extent to which European Parliamentary elections currently are treated as second-order national elections by the media, it would be misleading to put the blame on the media only. To some extent, the media coverage mirrors the campaigns by the parties and perceptions of voter orientations. To further understand why European Parliamentary elections may be treated as second-order national elections, more so in some countries than in others, research should combine studies on party activities and campaigns, media coverage and voter orientations, and how each of these may contribute to domesticate European Parliamentary elections.

Sixth, and this is a more general conclusion, although virtually everyone agrees that news sources are important and can have a significant impact on news content—including both the media agenda and the media framing—there is in fact only limited theorizing on factors shaping the selection and impact of source use. Gans' account (1979), Bennett's indexing-theory (1990), and Reich's two-phase model (2009) notwithstanding, our general knowledge of the processes through which sources are selected and exert an influence over the media agenda and media framing—and how those processes are shaped by factors on a system- and organization-level of analysis—is arguably still limited. This also calls for more theorizing and theory-building research on source selection, source use, and source impact.

Thus, while this study has moved our knowledge and understanding of source use and source impact in a comparative perspective and in the context

of European Parliamentary election campaigns forward, much more work remains to be done before we have a fuller understanding not only of patterns in source use and source impact but also of the factors shaping those patterns in European Parliamentary election campaigns and beyond.

NOTES

1. There were a few exceptions where intercoder reliability did not exceed .70 but variables are still used, as follows: number of sources (Germany, Austria, Poland, Romania, and Italy); domestic members of or candidates to the European Parliament (Poland, Romania), other domestic politicians (Germany, Spain, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Italy).

2. As a single news story might include both a domestic candidate for or member of the European Parliament and another domestic politician, the sum for the columns in Table 4 does not equal the sum for the category "domestic politicians" in Table 3.

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APPENDIX Media Included in the Content Analysis

Austria: *Die Presse* and *Kurier* (broadsheets); *Zeit im Bild 1*, *Zeit im Bild 2*, *ZiB 24* (public service TV news)

Czech Republic: *Mladá fronta Dnes* and *Právo* (broadsheets); *Události* (public service TV news); *Televizní noviny* and *Zprávy TV Prima* (commercial TV news)

Denmark: *Jyllands-Posten* and *Politiken* (broadsheets); *DR1 TV-Avisen* (public service TV news); *TV 2 Nyhederne* (commercial TV news)

Finland: *Helsingin Sanomat* and *Aamulehti* (broadsheets); *YLE1* (public service TV news); *MTV3* and *Nelonen* (commercial TV news)

Germany: *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (broadsheets); *Tagesschau* and *Heute* (public service TV news); *RTL aktuell* (commercial TV news)

Italy: *Corriere della Sera* and *la Repubblica* (broadsheets); *Tg1* (public service TV news); *Tg5* and *La7* (commercial TV news)

Poland: *Rzeczpospolita* and *Gazeta Wyborcza* (broadsheets); *Wiadomosci TVP1* (public service TV news); *TVN* and *TV Polsat* (commercial TV news)

Portugal: *Público* and *Jornal de Notícias* (broadsheets); *Telejornal* (public service TV news); *Jornal da Noite* and *Jornal Nacional* (commercial TV news)

Romania: *Evenimentul Zilei* and *Rom*ânia Liberă (broadsheets); *Realitatea TV* and *Antena 3* (commercial TV news); *TVR 1* (public service TV news)

Spain: *El País* and *El Mundo* (broadsheets); *TVE1* (public service TV news); *Antena 3* and *Tele 5* (commercial TV news)

Sweden: *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet* (broadsheets); *Rapport* and *Aktuellt* (public service TV news); *TV4 Nyheterna* (commercial TV news)

United Kingdom: *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph* (broadsheets); *BBC1* (public service TV news); *Channel 4* and *Sky News* (commercial TV news)