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The rise of the media punditocracy? Journalists and media pundits in Danish election news 1994–2007

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During recent decades, political communication processes and the relationship between the media and political actors have changed considerably. Important and interrelated trends include a professionalization of political communication and campaigning (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999; Negrine, 2008; Semetko et al., 1991), increasing mediatization of politics (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999; Strömbäck, 2008), increasing media commercialization (Hamilton, 2004; McManus, 1994) and increasing media interventionism (Esser, 2008).

On the one hand, political actors have increased their efforts and, presumably, skills in news management and the provision of information subsidies, aimed at influencing the media's agenda and framing of political actors, events and processes (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999; Negrine, 2008). On the other hand, journalists do not sit still – they 'fight back' (Blumler, 1997: 399). Perceiving themselves under pressure from political actors, media and journalists try to find means to secure their independence and distance to political actors, while simultaneously balancing these means with the need to be perceived as being impartial or objective in the news reporting.

Means to 'fight back' include the adoption of an interpretive journalistic style (Patterson, 1997; Strömbäck, 2007), an increasing focus on the 'why' instead of 'what' in politics (Patterson, 1997; Reinemann and Wilke, 2003), framing politics as a strategic game rather than as issues (Farnsworth, 2007; Patterson, 1993; Strömbäck and Kaid, 2008), increasing visibility of journalists (Esser, 2008; Hallin, 1992), and the use of pundits called in by the media to provide commentary (Horsbøl, 2010; Nimmo and Combs, 1992; Schultz, 2002).

However, the evidence for the trends outlined above is still rather scarce, particularly with respect to countries outside of the US, where most research in this area arguably has been done. Despite the fact that the trends outlined above suggest changes over time, there are in addition only few longitudinal studies. In the case of media pundits and commentators, there is in addition very little systematic data.

Against this background, the purpose of this study is to add to the literature through a systematic and longitudinal investigation of the visibility of journalists, and the use and profile of media pundits. While the visibility of journalists and the use and profile of media pundits do not tell the whole story of changing relationships between media actors and political actors, it is one important part, and by investigating these issues we hope to cast further light on the evolving relationships between media actors and political actors in contemporary democracies. As most of the research in this area has been done in countries that belong to the liberal model of media and politics (Hallin and Mancini, 2004), we have furthermore decided to focus our investigation on Denmark, a country that belongs to the democratic corporatist model of media and politics (Hallin and Mancini, 2004) and hence constitutes a highly different case compared to countries that belong to the liberal model.

Journalists as actors in the news

Numerous studies have shown how political journalism has undergone changes in several countries, suggesting that at least some trends are common across Western democracies (Esser, 2008; Plasser and Plasser, 2002; Strömbäck and Kaid, 2008). Allegedly, the style of political journalism has become increasingly interpretive and less descriptive, with less attention being paid to political issues and more focus on politicians' strategies and tactics (McNair, 2000; Neveu, 2002; Strömbäck and Kaid, 2008; Patterson, 1993). Supposedly, these trends also change who is appearing how in news stories, as journalists and media pundits are now allegedly playing a more dominant role in news reporting by analysing and decoding politicians' 'real' motives.

In studies on political journalism, two major reasons for a development toward a more interpretive style in journalism have been suggested: commercialization of the media markets and a professionalization of politicians' news management (McNair, 2000: 71). First, the increased commercialization of the media creates incentives for journalists to focus on those aspects with which the largest audience can be reached. Hence, it is argued, they focus on the spectacular and sensationalistic side of politics and frame politics as a horse race or strategic game (Patterson, 1993). By focusing on the game and the horse race, journalists can also minimize the risk of being accused of bias,

at least when dealing with 'indisputable' facts such as opinion polls (McNair, 2000: 74). If too much attention was given to issues, possibly showing the strengths and weaknesses of different arguments brought forward by politicians, journalists risk being accused of being partisan in their coverage, and hence of making a part of the audience switch to another channel. Accordingly, analysing election news coverage of the German federal elections during the past 50 years, Reinemann and Wilke (2003) find that journalists predominantly comment on non-political issues, while other actors, mainly politicians, predominantly comment on political issues.

Second, political actors purportedly have professionalized their approaches to the media and their news management (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999; Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999). Especially television is now deemed an important factor in influencing an increasingly volatile electorate, leading political parties to devote more resources to the development of strategies and tactics with the aim of securing extensive and positive media coverage (Neveu, 2002: 30). But journalists do not just report what politicians want them to. Instead, journalists 'fight back' (Blumler, 1997: 399), they 'counter-spin' (McNair, 2000), and they 'seek to control the content of the news and to use this control to maximize their independent and distinctive voice in the news' (Zaller, 1998: 114). Plasser (2005) reports that journalists perceive spin as one of the major problems in political journalism, forcing them to go beyond the 'spinning machine'. Instead of being 'used to pass on what the news massagers have dreamed up' (Blumler, 1997: 399), journalists try to re-establish control over their own product by focusing more on the process than on the substance (Djerf-Pierre and Weibull, 2001; Esser and D'Angelo, 2003; Patterson, 1997; Reinemann and Wilke, 2003; Strömbäck, 2007). The trend towards a more frequent use of the framing of politics as strategy and a horse race has also been shown with respect to Denmark, the case of our study (Binderkrantz and Green-Pedersen, 2008; Hopmann et al., 2008).

In contrast to earlier studies, in this article we will however focus empirically on media pundits and journalists as actors, and whether over time they play a more dominant and interpretive role in news reporting. This focus matters for at least two reasons: first, if media pundits talk more, less media attention can be given to politicians (Hallin, 1992). Second, most of these experts might not be 'real' experts, in the sense that they primarily talk about their own research or areas where they have true expertise. Instead, they now primarily seem to speculate about general developments and politicians' possible but hidden motives (Albæk et al., 2003; Horsbøl, 2010).

Patterson furthermore notes that:

An indicator of [the change towards a more interpretive style in political journalism] is journalists' prominence in today's news. Whereas they were once the relatively passive voice behind the news, they are now at times as active as the newsmakers they cover. (1997: 451)

According to Esser (2008), the visibility of journalists can furthermore be perceived as an indicator of media interventionism (see also Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995; Semetko et al., 1991), which, in turn, is linked to the process of mediatization of politics and the dominance of media logic over political logic (Altheide and Snow, 1979; Mazzoleni, 1987; Meyer, 2002; Strömbäck, 2008). As the mediatization of politics and the dominance of media logic over political logic are perceived as being related to increasing media commercialism (Brants and van Praag, 2006; Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999), our first hypothesis is:

H1: The visibility of journalists will increase over time.

Media pundits in the news

While there are reasons to expect increasing visibility of journalists, the downside of journalists providing their own interpretations is that this might lead to accusations of media bias. Particularly, this accusation suggests itself if the interpretive journalism is focused on policies and the substance of politics. By calling in other journalists, pollsters, former politicians and 'third actors' as media pundits, journalists can however leave the job of analysing and interpreting political events and processes to external expertise (McNair, 2000: 75; Nimmo and Combs, 1992: 115). The need for external pundits can also be explained by increasing immediacy. As noted by Neveu (2002: 35): 'Coming from television ... a pattern of professional achievement based on speed and "live" coverage makes the distance and time for analysis required by "critical expertise" increasingly difficult to achieve.' In a study on how journalists perceive changes in political journalism, Plasser (2005: 56) also notes that commercialization of the media seems to lead to a 'rise of "punditocracy" working against fact-based reporting'.

Whatever the exact causes, research suggests that political punditry by journalists and other actors has been on the rise in at least American, British, Australian and Danish media coverage (Alterman, 2003; Bourne, 2008; Elmelund-Præstekær and Hopmann, 2008; McNair, 2000; Weaver et al., 2004). However, despite this increase in punditocracy and the general interest in explaining how political journalism is changing, surprisingly little systematic empirical research has been undertaken on this new phenomenon, especially outside the US. Most extensive descriptions of media punditocracy are rather anecdotal, and rarely analyse data over time (Bourne, 2008; Schultz, 2002; see also Alterman, 2003; Elmelund-Præstekær and Hopmann, 2008; Nimmo and Combs, 1992; Tunstall, 1996).

In order to substantiate the debate empirically, we will thus investigate to what extent journalists and other media pundits appear in the media as commentators and analysts. Based on earlier research reviewed above, our next hypothesis is:

H2: The appearance of journalists and media pundits as commentators and analysts in the news will increase over time.

As the space inevitably is limited in television news, if H2 is correct, one consequence may be that there is a negative correlation between the presence of journalists and other media pundits as actors in the news with the presence of politicians as actors in the news. Thus, our next hypothesis is:

H3: As the number of appearances by journalists and other media pundits increase in the news, the proportion of politicians as actors in the news will decrease.

Presuming that journalists have become increasingly visible and that journalists and media pundits increasingly appear as commentators and analysts in the news, this trend might lead to changes in the tone of journalism. As noted by Patterson (1997: 452): 'Interpretive journalism also unleashes journalists' skepticism. Given a greater opportunity to express their views of politics, journalists have increasingly attacked the political leaders.' More broadly, if journalists and media pundits in fact increasingly comment and analyse on television, one would expect a decrease of politicians being depicted neutrally and an increase of politicians covered either negatively or positively. This assumption leads us to the following hypothesis:

H4: Over time, politicians will increasingly be depicted either positively or negatively instead of neutrally.

All media pundits are not created equal, however, in the sense that they have the same expertise or perspectives. Most importantly, they might have different political and ideological backgrounds. However, despite all the attention paid to discussions of possible political biases in news coverage in general (Gunter, 1997; Starkey, 2007), and in relation to media pundits (Alterman, 2003; Bourne, 2008; Nimmo and Combs, 1992), we know surprisingly little about the media pundits' political backgrounds. For example, are journalists appearing as commentators primarily affiliated with neutral or partisan media outlets? Do former spin-doctors and the like who analyse politicians' moves and motivations have a history of being advisers to primarily left- or right-wing politicians? Or is the overall picture balanced? As media pundits are asked to *evaluate* politicians and their policies, investigating pundits' political background is clearly relevant.

Answering these questions is not only relevant in discussions about media pundits themselves, but also about journalists writing news stories: Reinemann and Wilke (2003) remind us of the fact that, even though journalists producing a news story might refrain from commenting on politicians directly, they still more or less independently decide who will appear in their news stories.

At least in the US and the UK, media pundits and commentators predominantly appear to have a conservative background (Alterman, 2003; Tunstall, 1996). In Reinemann and Wilke's perspective, these findings could be a sign

of a conservative bias in news coverage. Whether this finding holds true in Denmark as well is an open question, but, based on the research referred to from other countries, our next hypothesis is:

H5: Media pundits primarily have a right-wing background.

Finally, since it is argued that the processes leading to more punditry – for example the mediatization of politics and the increasing dominance of media logic over political logic (Altheide and Snow, 1979; Brants and van Praag, 2006; Esser, 2008; Strömbäck, 2008) – to a considerable extent are a result of increased media commercialism, it could be expected that the trends addressed by the above hypotheses are particularly pronounced in commercial as opposed to public service broadcasting. Thus, our final hypothesis is:

H6: The trends described in hypotheses H1–H4 will appear first and be particularly pronounced in commercial as opposed to public service broadcasting.

Methodology and data

To test the hypotheses above, this study relies on a quantitative content analysis of Danish television news coverage during the last five national elections: 1994, 1998, 2001, 2005 and 2007. The time period includes the last four weeks before election day, and the media included are the main public service and main commercial television news bulletins: *TV-avisen* on the public service channel DR, and *TV2 Nyhederne* on the commercial television channel TV2.¹ As Danish election campaigns last for approximately three weeks, the content analysis covers the whole of the campaigns before the last five elections.

To set the stage and explain our selection of media, a brief overview of Denmark and its broadcasting system is warranted. One of the reasons Denmark was chosen is that it constitutes a highly different case compared to the US and UK, where most of the relevant research in the international literature has been done. Although our study is not a comparative study, selecting a highly different case is a suitable approach when one is interested in learning more about the extent to which findings generated in one setting are applicable elsewhere (Przeworski and Teune, 1970). In addition, in Denmark we find variance on a central variable assumed to be one major cause behind the trends discussed above: commercialization of the media market (Powers et al., 1994).

Until 1988, only one Danish television channel existed, the public service channel Danmarks Radio (Danish Broadcasting Corporation, DR). It is financed by a licence fee and only indirectly controlled by the political system. In 1986, the parliament decided to establish a commercial alternative named TV2/Danmark, which went into operation two years later. Until 2004,

this station received some licence fees but was always mainly and is now solely financed by commercial advertising. Although TV2 is owned by the state and has some public service obligations, its establishment and its development over the years constitutes an example of increasing commercialization of the Danish media market. In addition, employees at TV2 understand their station as an entirely commercial broadcasting station, where the overarching goal of all efforts, including the news coverage, is to maximize the audience.²

At first, the news bulletins on commercial television were no great success. Their popularity, however, increased after only a few years. In terms of viewers, commercial television's news bulletins have been the most watched ever since the beginning of the 1990s, although their lead over the public service news bulletins is not great. In 2006, public service television implemented several changes to their news coverage, announcing that these were driven by market logic and a need to increase its audience share (Claudi et al., 2006; Holm et al., 2008).

Thus, the period covered in this study saw competition between the public service and commercial news bulletins, continuously spurring a process toward finding new ways to gain an edge and increase audience share. This process affected both the public service and commercial television news bulletins (Hjarvard, 2006).

The unit of analysis was individual news stories, defined as a semantic entity. All in all, the content analysis includes 4604 news stories, although the focus in most analyses reported here will be based on those news stories that focused on politicians and the election campaigns as such. This sample consists of 2022 news stories, distributed as shown in Table 1.

The codebook included a number of variables utilized in this study. First, one variable asked about the actors appearing in a news story. Coders were instructed to code all actors that were mentioned, shown or speaking in a news story. A second important variable focused on the appearing actors' backgrounds. Here coders were instructed to code whether the actors were

TABLE 1
Number of political news stories included in the content analysis

	Public service (DR1)	Commercial (TV2)	Total
1994	137	129	266
1998	131	130	261
2001	243	206	449
2005	312	249	561
2007	306	179	485

Note: For 1994 and 1998, the most prominent news bulletin on each channel was included; in 2001, 2005 and 2005 the two most prominent news bulletins on each channel were included.

politicians, journalists, media pundits, etc. Third, for journalists it was coded how they appeared in the news stories, for example whether they were the journalist who produced a news story or appeared as commenting expert. Fourth, for all actors we coded the overall tone with which they were depicted. Specifically, similar to Fournier et al. (2004: 664), coders were instructed to code whether the depiction of each actor seen from the actor's point of view was positive, negative or balanced/neutral. All variables reached acceptable levels of intercoder reliability.³

Findings

The following section will present the results of this study. To keep the analyses simple, focus will be, first, on differences between public service and commercial broadcasting and, second, changes over time.

Journalists' visibility

According to the first hypothesis, the visibility of journalists would increase over time. Table 2 addresses this hypothesis, showing the share of news stories in which the journalists covering the news stories were visible in the stories.

As expected, we find an increase in the visibility of journalists for commercial television – from around 17 percent in the first three elections to 29 percent in the last election in 2007. For the public service news bulletins, however, the picture is less stable but more remarkable: during the 1990s, the share of news stories in which journalists were visible actually decreased, but starting in 2001 the share increased, and remarkably so between the elections in 2005 and 2007. In the latest election, journalists were visible in an impressive 87 percent of the news stories.

How can this finding be explained? The most important reason for the changes with respect to the public service news bulletins is that public service broadcasting, as previously mentioned, decided in 2006 to revise its news

TABLE 2
Share of news stories in which the journalists are visible (%)

	1994	1998	2001	2005	2007
Public service	25	21	10	19	87
Commercial	17	18	17	34	29
<i>N</i> (Public service/ Commercial)	117/114	111/118	195/168	225/180	210/137

Note: Anchors and journalists called in as experts are excluded, figures cover only stories with an identified author.

coverage using a marketing-oriented approach. One change brought about by this make-over was that nowadays, nearly all journalists are shown in a picture on the screen (similar to a newspaper byline). Although being shown with a picture on screen is not necessarily the same as a stand-up, public service television hereby clearly decided to let individual journalists play a far more emphasized and involved role in news reporting (McNair, 2000: 78).

The results shown are rather similar to those found for British broadcasting: even though the overall duration of news personnel on the screen declined from 1975 to 2001, appearances on camera are now 'far more the norm' (Winston, 2002: 16) than formerly. Interestingly, as in Denmark, a difference between public service and commercial news is found in Britain. Also in Sweden, research suggests that the advent of commercial television increased the visibility of journalists both on commercial and public service news bulletins (Asp, 1995). In sum, hypothesis 1 is supported.

Commentary and analysis: news stories and talking heads

With respect to media pundits, it is a category without clear boundaries. Journalists called in to comment on and analyse different events and processes are one kind of media pundit, but the media can also call on former spin-doctors to act as media pundits. However, in contrast to the US (Alterman, 2003), Denmark has no tradition of (partisan) think-tanks. Nevertheless, a number of former minister's aides, spin-doctors, pollsters and (mainly print) journalists, as well as a number of scholars (mainly political or communication scholars), are frequently used commentators on Danish television (Elmelund-Præstekær and Hopmann, 2008; Horsbøl, 2010).

In this analysis, the different kinds of media pundits are treated as one category. In other words, by media pundits we refer to journalists appearing as commentators (who primarily are from other media than the news bulletin in question), former spin-doctors and minister's aides, scholars and pollsters. According to H2, the appearance of journalists and media pundits as commentators in the news would increase over time. Table 3 addresses this hypothesis.

TABLE 3
**Share of news stories with journalists or media pundits appearing
as commentators or analysts (%)**

	1994	1998	2001	2005	2007
Public service	4	8	14	12	10
Commercial	7	15	15	16	13
<i>N</i> (Public service/ Commercial)	137/129	131/130	243/206	312/249	306/179

The results show that the share of news stories in which journalists and media pundits are featured has increased over time, although the trend is neither unidirectional nor linear. Between 1994 and 2001 the share increased in both public service and commercial news bulletins, but since then, the share has declined somewhat. It is however still higher than it was in the early or mid 1990s. Thus, H2 is partly supported. In line with H6, the increase occurred first in commercial news bulletins, and has consistently been somewhat higher in commercial rather than public service news bulletins.

The third hypothesis predicted that the proportion of politicians as actors in the news would decrease as the number of appearances by journalists and other media pundits increase. This hypothesis is addressed by Table 4, which gives a more detailed picture of the share of media pundits and politicians seen speaking in commercial and public service news stories.

The results suggest that for both public service and commercial news bulletins, the share of appearance of media pundits vis-a-vis politicians increased slightly over time. However, the increase appeared mainly between 1994 and 1998 and 2001 and 2005, thereafter the share of media pundits decreased. In fact, the numbers for 2007 are quite similar to 1994. Thus, the results suggest a curvilinear trend. Furthermore, the changes are minor. Presumably, the average viewers hardly noticed them. It could be added, however, that this trend is rather similar to what has been found in neighbouring Sweden (Asp, 1995; Djerf-Pierre, 2000).

The results in Table 4 also show, accordingly, that the relative frequency with which politicians appeared as actors did not decrease over time. In the public service news bulletins it was lower in 2001 than in 1994 and 1998, but then rebounded, and was virtually the same in 2007 as in 1994. With respect to commercial news, the frequency with which politicians appeared as actors was quite stable across the period. Thus, H3 must be rejected.

TABLE 4
Actors shown speaking in political news stories (%)

	1994	1998	2001	2005	2007
<i>Media pundits</i>					
Public service	4	5	15	9	6
Commercial	5	8	11	10	8
<i>Politicians</i>					
Public service	96	95	85	91	94
Commercial	95	92	89	90	92
<i>N (Public service/ Commercial)</i>	156/206	217/241	325/307	490/393	546/324

Note: *N* refers to all media pundits and politicians shown speaking in political news stories.

TABLE 5
Share of politicians or parties depicted with a valenced tone (%).

	1994	1998	2001	2005	2007
Public service	8	14	12	13	10
Commercial	7	14	20	24	12
<i>N</i> (Public service/ Commercial)	386/368	459/460	644/491	864/703	1027/579

Note: *N* refers to all actors referred to in political news stories.

Less neutral tone towards politicians

As shown in Tables 3 and 4, the share of news stories in which media pundits appeared increased somewhat over the years. Has this trend been accompanied by a trend towards news where there is a decrease in politicians being depicted neutrally and an increase in their being depicted in either a positive or a negative light? According to H4, over time it can be expected that politicians would increasingly be depicted either positively or negatively instead of neutrally. Table 5 addresses this hypothesis.

The results show that between 1994 and 1998, the share of news stories in which politicians were depicted either positively or negatively instead of neutrally increased from 7 percent and 8 percent in the commercial and public service news bulletins respectively, to 15 percent and 14 percent. This increase is substantial and, for the two subsequent elections, the share of news stories in which politicians were depicted either positively or negatively instead of neutrally remained stable in the public service news bulletins and continued to increase in the commercial news bulletins. Between 2005 and 2007 something happened, however, and the share shrank from 13 percent to 10 percent in the public service news bulletins and from 24 percent to 12 percent in the commercial news bulletins. Thus, comparing the first election in the study, 1994, with the last election, 2007, the increase was minor and, overall, the trend was curvilinear instead of unidirectional or linear. Overall, then, H4 cannot be supported.

Media pundits' political background

The final hypothesis to be investigated is related to the political background or affiliation of the media pundits. To investigate this aspect, we first excluded foreign journalists who appeared as commentators (two in 1998, five in 2001, and one in 2007). With respect to the other media pundits, they were classified based either on their explicit affiliation, or based on which newspapers they work(ed) for and their political stance. Relevant in this context is that the

journalists from newspapers that appear as pundits usually work as editorial writers or columnists, and thus they can be assumed to share the political stance of their newspapers (Kahn and Kenney, 2002). In cases where journalists work for politically neutral newspapers, or themselves are unaffiliated, they were coded as neutral.⁴ Then the average political stance of the media pundits was calculated on a scale from -1 (= liberal) to 1 (= conservative).

The results show that the similarities between the public service and commercial news bulletins are greater than the differences. On public service news bulletins, the average political stance was .22 ($N = 133$ appearances), whereas for the commercial news bulletins, the average political stance was .28 ($N = 121$ appearances). Thus in both cases media pundits were, overall, more to the right than to the left. In fact, conservative pundits outnumber their liberal colleagues by six to one with respect to appearances in television news.

Hence, critics accusing public service news of being left-wing (see the discussions in Holm, 2007; Starkey, 2007) are correct only to the extent that public service news, in this respect, is slightly less right-wing oriented than commercial news. In both cases, it would be more accurate to accuse the news bulletins of being oriented towards the right, at least in the Danish case under study. It should be noted, however, that, despite the small numbers, the data show an interesting trend: in 1994, we find a more or less balanced picture (there were not many media pundits back then), but over the years, the average background of the media pundits became increasingly conservative. Interestingly though, in 2007, the picture became quite balanced again. The small sample when breaking down the results per election year calls, however, means that care must be taken when comparing across years.

As the majority of the media pundits in the news bulletins were right-leaning politically speaking, hypothesis 5 can be confirmed. Journalists' selection of media pundits was biased on both broadcasting systems. The over-representation of conservative commentators is, interestingly, similar to earlier results found for Germany, where the *Presseclub*, the most prestigious talk show with media pundits, includes more journalists with a conservative rather than liberal background (Schultz, 2002).

Discussion

To summarize the results of this study, they show that the visibility of journalists in Danish television election news has increased over the years (supporting H1); that the share of news stories with journalists or media pundits appearing as commentators has increased (supporting H2); that the proportion of politicians appearing as actors in the news vis-a-vis appearances by media pundits has decreased only very slightly (not supporting H3); that the share of politicians who are depicted either positively or negatively instead of

neutrally has only increased very slightly (not supporting H4), and that media pundits more often than not have a right-wing rather than a left-wing background (supporting H5). In some cases the trends appeared first and were particularly pronounced in commercial as opposed to public service news, but in other cases the trends appeared first or were particularly pronounced in public service news (not supporting H6).

Furthermore, in most cases the results show a curvilinear pattern, peaking at the beginning of the new millennium. Interestingly, the same pattern of trends has been found for the content and framing of election news stories on Danish television (Hopmann et al., 2008). Thus, the unidirectional development, implicitly or explicitly suggested by the literature on the professionalization, commercialization and mediatization of political communication processes, cannot be substantiated in the case of Danish television election news. Overall, the patterns are more complex than is often assumed.

Nevertheless, in the case of this study, these curvilinear trends can most likely be explained by two factors: the existence of strong public service and real-world events. First, after a period when public service feared the introduction of commercial television and copied its newly arrived commercial competitors, commercial television started copying aspects of the public service coverage. A similar dynamic has been shown, for example, in Germany (Pfetsch, 1996), Sweden (Asp, 1995) and the Netherlands (Brants and van Praag, 2006). In media markets with strong public service broadcasting, it can be rational for commercial television to adapt to its public service competitors in order to increase its credibility and audience reach (Pfetsch, 1996). Therefore, assuming that commercialization necessarily and unidirectionally or even linearly leads to a certain (US-American) style of news coverage can be misleading (Brants, 1998; Strömbäck, 2007). As noted by Blumler and Gurevitch (2001: 399): 'it may be asked whether we have been guilty in some of our comparative scholarship of a naïve universalism of Anglo-American proportions'.

Second, prior to the elections in 1998 and 2001, the polls clearly suggested that the opposition would win the elections, which apparently invited the election news not only to describe but also to interpret and analyse the developments. Changes in power are always journalistically interesting, and might tempt journalists to make analyse themselves or call in pundits to help with the analyses. In contrast, the elections of 1994, 2005 and 2007 were more or less foregone conclusions,⁵ which seemed to have tempered the perceived need to analyse and comment on the developments. This reasoning suggests that close races might invite a more interpretive style of journalism, dealing more with the 'why' instead of the 'what' (Hopmann et al., 2008), either in the words of journalists themselves or the words of media pundits called in by the media to comment on and analyse the current developments.

In relation to these trends, real-world facts may also explain the predominance of conservative pundits in election news coverage. Alterman (2003),

for example, suggests that conservative groups are better at promoting their opinions, and that they are more active and better funded. In essence, then, for the media there simply are more conservative pundits to choose from. Recently, Denmark also got its first American-type think-tanks, and they too are located on the political right. Conservative newspapers in Denmark were also first with 'creating' their own media pundits, similar to column writers in the US or the UK.⁶

These possible explanations notwithstanding, the results clearly suggest that one should be careful when drawing general conclusions regarding changes over time and based on research carried out in only one or a few countries. Some trends might be general, but some might not, and some trends might be particularly pronounced in some countries but not in others. The need for caution is particularly great when the research has been carried out only in countries that belong to one particular model of media and politics.

In addition, one needs to consider the possible differences between routine news and election news. In this study we looked at election news coverage, but previous research suggests that there might be significant differences in terms of agenda-setting and framing in media content when routine news and election news are compared (e.g. Binderkrantz and Green-Pedersen, 2008; Walgrave and van Aelst, 2006). Exactly how possible differences between routine news and election news affect the use and visibility of journalists and media pundits is not self-evident, however, and is thus something that should be investigated in further research.

These considerations thus call for more research comparing trends both across time and across countries. Only by comparative and longitudinal research is it possible to reach solid conclusions regarding changes over time and differences and similarities across countries. Comparative and longitudinal research is also necessary to deepen our understanding and knowledge of the antecedents of the media's election news coverage.

While this study is not comparative, it is longitudinal and has shown that, more often than not, the trends are curvilinear rather than unidirectional. Thus, while this study shows that the visibility of journalists and use of media pundits has increased, the reasons might be more complex than is suggested by notions of unidirectional or possibly even linearly increasing commercialism, mediatization or professionalization. This conclusion should by no means be interpreted as if media commercialism, mediatization or professionalization does not matter – we believe they do and that they have consequences for the content of election news – only to suggest that the patterns and antecedents of television's election news coverage are more complex than is often assumed. More theorizing and longitudinal as well as comparative empirical research is hence needed to understand the antecedents and content of election news – including the rise of the punditocracy.

Notes

1. For the last three election campaigns, we coded both major news bulletins on each broadcasting station. For economic reasons, however, we were only able to code one major news bulletin on each broadcasting station for the 1994 and 1998 election campaigns. The differences between the news bulletins on each station are, however, minor (Hopmann, 2009).

2. Source: personal communication with Michael Dyrby, head of TV2's news section, 28 January 2009.

3. How an actor appeared reached a reliability coefficient of .94 (Krippendorff's alpha), actor's background .96, actor type .96, tone toward an actor .75.

4. Conservative actors: working for *Berlingske Tidende*, *Børsen*, *Ekstra Bladet* (due to its coverage on immigration), *Jydske Vestkysten*, *Jyllands-Posten*, *Kristeligt Dagblad* and certain individual actors; Liberal actors: working for *Aktuelt*, *Information*, *Politiken* and certain individual actors; Neutral actors: working for broadcasting news, *B.T.*, *Sermitiak* or free newspapers, magazines, other media, pollsters, and scientists (on newspapers' political stances, see also Hjarvard, 2007).

5. In 1998 and 2001, the centre-left government was expected to lose and finally did. In 1994, 2005 and 2007 it was more or less given that the incumbent would continue as prime minister.

6. Peter Mogensen started much later at *Politiken* than did Thomas Larsen at *Berlingske Tidende* or Ralf Pittelkow at *Jyllands-Posten*.

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