Political Campaigning in the New Europe:
The news coverage of the 2004 European Parliamentary Election Campaign in 25 countries

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Abstract

This article analyses the news coverage of the 2004 European Parliamentary (EP) elections in all 25 member countries of the European Union (EU). It provides a unique pan-European overview of the campaign in each country, based on an analysis of three national newspapers and the most widely watched main evening private and public television news programs in each country in the final two weeks leading up to the elections. The average visibility of the elections in the ‘old’ EU-15 increased slightly in comparison with the previous EP election in 1999. On average, the elections were more visible in the ‘new’ 10 member states than in the ‘old’ 15 EU member states. Public television news and broadsheet papers covered the elections more elaborately than private television news and tabloids in both ‘old’ and ‘new’ member countries. The news coverage in general was more domestically focused than EU-focused. The political personalities and institutional actors featured in news stories about the elections were generally domestic or national political actors and not EU actors. The tone of the news was predominantly neutral. When evaluative, the news in the ‘old’ EU-15 was generally negative towards the EU, while in the ‘new’ countries a mixed pattern was found with the broadsheet press and television news being, on average, positive and tabloid papers, on average, negative. The findings of the study are discussed in the light of the literature on the EU’s legitimacy and communication deficit.
Introduction

The 2004 EP elections were an unprecedented exercise in democracy with more than 455 million voters in 25 countries having the opportunity to vote. The elections took place only weeks after the addition of 10 new member states to the European Union – the largest ever enlargement. Most voters in both the ‘old’ EU-15 member states and the ten new member states experience politics primarily through the media and particularly in the case of low salience, second-order elections, most of what citizens know about the campaign, stems from the media (Bennett & Entman, 2001; Eurobarometer 162).

Empirical knowledge about the media’s coverage EP elections is a prerequisite for assessing the well-being of democratic processes in Europe and to inform the on-going discussion about the EU’s democratic and communicative deficit (Meyer, 1999).

However, structured knowledge about the media’s coverage of European elections is only emerging and we have virtually no knowledge about the way in which news media in the new member countries approach European political and economic topics. This article reports the findings of an unprecedented EU-wide study of the news media’s coverage of the 2004 EP elections. We provide contextual information to understand the campaign in each country and assess the developments in the media’s coverage in light of comparisons with the previous 1999 EP election campaign in 15 EU countries.

The study has three key foci: 1) it analyses the general news environment in Europe during the campaign for the 2004 EP elections and it assesses the visibility and amount of attention devoted to the elections by national news media; 2) it investigates the extent to which national news media represented the elections as a national or European event; and 3) it assesses the tone of the news coverage towards the EU. All of these aspects are
addressed in a comparative fashion. In addition to cross-national comparisons, we
distinguish differences between media, groups of countries, and elections. We compare
the coverage of television and newspapers, public and private networks, and broadsheet
and tabloids. We compare the coverage in the ‘old’ EU-15 countries with the new ten
countries. Finally we compare over time by investigating changes in the coverage
compared to the coverage of the 1999 EP elections.

These data as reported will be a useful resource for researchers examining public
opinion, elections and media influences in the context of the European Union. The study
reports characteristics of coverage across all member states in 1999 and 2004 using
standardized measures across countries and years. The results reported in the paper, thus,
provide values on important contextual indicators. While the results and analysis are
largely descriptive, other researchers can incorporate these measures into their own
research on the European Union.

**News and Information in European Parliamentary Elections**

This study of the news coverage of the 2004 EP elections takes place in the context
of a highly competitive news and information environment in Europe. While television
broadcasters in Europe consisted mainly of publicly funded monopolies in the 1980s, by
2004, all countries in the EU had a dual system of broadcasting with public and private
stations co-existing and competing (Brants & de Bens, 2000). During the past 20 years
the newspaper market in Europe also changed and by 2004 newspaper readership was in
decline though still considerable in many European countries (Lauf 2001). The structural
developments in the news market are important because of the choice citizens have for
finding political news in the available news outlets. The relatively recent competitive
developments in the broadcasting systems of western Europe are for the most part anchored in more than four decades of press freedom and free elections with established party systems and comparatively strong political parties. It is a different story for new Europe, however, with less trust in and weak attachments to political parties, and less credibility attributed to the news media for information about politics.

Documenting media content is relevant because the pattern of news media use and the content of the news in elections may have important implications for citizens’ political awareness, feelings of political efficacy and ability to take part in democratic processes such as elections (see, for example, Aarts & Semetko 2003). Greater visibility of European campaigns tends to be related to higher turnout in European Parliamentary Elections (Banducci and Semetko 2003, 2004) while greater visibility of pro-EU actors tends to influence support for EU membership (Banducci, Karp and Lauf 2002). Looking specifically at how the media can contribute to changes in knowledge about European affairs, De Vreese and Boomgaarden (2005b) demonstrate that exposure to news outlets with high levels of political content (such as public television news and broadsheet newspapers) contributes to knowledge gains and increases the propensity to vote with the strongest effects among those who are already knowledgeable.

Given the influence that EU media coverage can have on mobilization, opinion and knowledge about the EU, there are three central questions about how the media cover the Europe Union and, specifically, the elections for the European Parliament. First, how visible are the elections in the news? Increased visibility of the elections in the news gives voters an indication of the salience or importance of the election. Visible news coverage may give voters information about candidates and party positions. Second, how
European is the coverage of the European parliamentary elections? European parliamentary elections have been characterized as second order *national* elections (Reif and Schmitt 1980). This implies two particular characteristics about the European parliamentary election campaigns: low campaign intensity and national not European issues on the agenda. The content analysis of the news coverage allows us to assess the extent to which coverage of the campaign focuses on EU level vs. national level actors.

Third, what is the tone of campaign coverage; does it tend to portray EU level actors and the EU negatively? The invisibility of the EP in the news and the negative tone in coverage of the EU have been cited as contributing factors to negative attitudes about the EU (Norris 2000b) and low participation in EP elections (Norris 2000a).

**How visible is the EU on the news agenda?**

Coverage of European affairs tends to be cyclical in nature with coverage of the EU virtually absent from the news agenda and then peaking around important EU events to vanish off the agenda again (De Vreese et al., 2001; Norris, 2000). This pattern of news coverage has also been found to apply to EU summits which are pivotal moments for EU decision making and where news coverage of EU affairs is much more visible than during ‘routine periods’ (De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2005a; Peter & de Vreese, 2004; Semetko & Valkenbrug, 2000). During other key events, such as national referendums on issues of European integration, EU news can take up a substantial part of the news agenda, especially in the final weeks of the campaign (De Vreese & Semetko, 2004). During routine periods, i.e. outside the referendum periods and when there are no scheduled events of the magnitude such as for example European Council meetings, EU
politics is marginal in national news (Gerhard, 2002; Peter & de Vreese, 2004; Peter, Semetko & de Vreese, 2003).

Our knowledge about the way in which EP elections specifically are reported is quite limited. The 1979 campaign was virtually absent from the media agenda until the final weeks before the elections (Blumler, 1983, Siune, 1983). No systematic and comprehensive cross-national study of media coverage was carried out until the 1999 EP elections. In 1999, a research team conducted an analysis of the most widely watched television news programs in the then 15 EU member states in the two weeks leading up to the 1999 European elections. The results showed that the average portion of the program (based on time) on the election in the main evening news programs for all EU member states was about 7 percent. Belgium, Britain, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Spain devoted even less than 5 percent of news to the elections. Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, and Sweden are somewhat above average, spending 8% to 13% of news time on European elections (De Vreese et al., 2005; Peter, Lauf & Semetko, 2004).

The visibility of the EP elections matters. Information about key democratic moments such as elections in the news is a pre-requisite for enhancing public awareness and possible engagement in EU politics. Moreover, the EU, faced with challenges of legitimacy and unclear structures for political accountability, is dependent upon media coverage to reach its citizens.

Representative democracy? The absence of EU representatives

In addition to visibility of the elections in the news, the presence of political personalities and actors at the EU level (such candidates for the EP, and EU institutions)
is a necessary condition for the functioning of political representation in a democracy (De Vreese 2002). The visibility and identification of potential representatives is a condition for a healthy democratic process. One of the features of the democratic deficit is that European parliamentary elections are contested by national parties that clash over national or domestic cleavages and not European issues. The second order theory of EP elections (Reif & Schmitt, 1980) posits that EP elections take a secondary role to national politics and are largely contested over national not EU issues. Looking at actors in the news can therefore give us an assessment of whether the news covers European elections as either a national or European contest.

Several studies have investigated the visibility of actors in national election campaigns (e.g. Semetko & Schönbach, 1994; Semetko et al., 1991; van Praag & Brants, 2000). However, we have only scant knowledge about the representation of the EU in the news. Analyses of the 1999 EP elections suggest that EU actors were much less visible than national actors (De Vreese et al., 2005) and this was in particular in countries that were long-standing members of the EU (Peter et al., 2004). This pattern makes it relevant to assess, in the light of the May 2004 enlargement, whether EU actors were evident in the news in enlarged and ‘new’ Europe.

**How negative is the news about the EU?**

News is largely neutral and the number of explicit evaluations is generally limited, but when evaluations are present, they tend to be negative. This pattern is inherent to the news genre and has been demonstrated to also apply to political news (Kepplinger & Weissbecker, 1991). In the case of the EU, this pattern does not appear to be much different. Norris (2000) in her re-analysis of the EU Commission’s media monitor
reports found that news about several EU policies as well as EU institutions tended to be tilted towards negative evaluations. In an analysis of the media coverage of the 1999 EP elections, Banducci and Semetko (2004) found that negative news about the EU matters for democratic participation but not necessarily in the way expected. More negative news about the EU tended to mobilize the electorate up to certain point. However, when negative news became more voluminous an individual’s probability of voting declined. Thus, evaluative media content is an important parameter for assessing the nature of public debates. Evaluative media content provides important cues for citizens’ perception of the EU.

Comparing News Media Coverage across Elections and Countries

Given our extant knowledge about the coverage of European affairs and in particular EP elections, we have the following expectations regarding coverage of the EP campaigns:

First, given the growing importance of the European Parliament in EU decision making (Hix, Raunio and Scully 2003) and the recent enlargement, we expect the visibility of the EP elections in 2004 is higher than in 1999. Given the novelty of the event (Peter et al., 2004), we expect the visibility of the EP elections to be higher in the new member states than in the old EU-15. Based on previous research, we also expect the visibility of the EP elections to be higher on public broadcast news and in broadsheet newspapers than on private television news and in tabloid papers.

Second, characterization of EP elections as second order national elections lead us to expect that news about the EP elections is dominated by domestic political actors. The
second-order perspective on media coverage of European elections (De Vreese et al., 2005) we expect non-EU actors to dominate the news about the elections.

Third, news about the EP elections is mostly neutral and if evaluative, negative in tone. Based on previous research (de Vreese et al., 2005) we expect news, when evaluative, to be negative towards the EU.

**Content Analysis of News Media Coverage During the EP Campaign Period**

To study the news coverage of the 2004 EP elections, a media content analysis was carried out in all 25 member states of the EU.¹ We include in our study two television news programs and three national newspapers from each country. We focus on national television and newspapers as these media are consistently listed as the most important sources of information about the EU for citizens in Europe (Eurobarometer 54-62) and because television and newspapers were the two most widely cited sources in which citizens were exposed to information about the 2004 elections (Eurobarometer 162). In each country we include the main national evening news broadcasts of the most widely watched public and private television station. We also include two ‘quality’/broadsheet and one tabloid newspaper from each country. These media outlets were selected to provide a comprehensive idea about the news coverage in each country.

The analysis included the final three weeks leading up to the elections for newspapers and the final two weeks leading up to the election for television.² For reasons of comparability between media and with the 1999 elections we focus on the final two weeks in this article. For television, our sample consists of 49 television networks (in Belgium two French and two Flemish stations were included; in Finland and Germany four newscasts; in Spain and Poland three newscasts; in Austria, Greece, and Ireland one
newscast). We had to exclude Cyprus (for technical reasons) and Luxembourg (for linguistic reasons). We coded the final two weeks of the campaign (including Election Day and the next day). The analyses presented here exclude the final two days and thus represent the information which was available to citizens in each country during the campaign until the elections. An overview of missing days (due to technical problems) is provided in the Appendix.

For television, we coded the entire news program of each station. Given that the length of news programs in Europe varies (from 15-60 minutes) and given that the number of news stories per program differs too, we base all analyses on length of the individual news story as part of the total length of each news program. Our unit of coding and of analysis is the individual news story, defined as a change of topic, typically introduced by the anchor person. In total, 9,339 television news stories were analyzed. For newspapers, we also used the individual news story as the unit of analysis. We coded all stories on the front page of the newspaper as well as a random page inside the main section of the newspaper and all news stories about the EP elections throughout the newspaper. In the analyses presented here, we use the analysis of the front pages as the base, for reasons of comparability with the study from 1999. The n for this analysis is 8,280.

**Coding procedure.** With supervision and in close cooperation with the principal investigators, coding was conducted by trained and supervised coders. Coder trainers were trained with the codebook for the study developed by the principal investigators. Individual coders were recruited based on their language capabilities. They completed initial training and only when their coding was of sufficient quality (assessed by coder
tests that were matched with master codes completed by the coder trainer team), actual coding commenced. Given the challenges in cross-national content analysis (see Peter & Lauf, 2004), coders were monitored and intra- and intercoder-reliability tests were conducted. The results of these tests were satisfactory (between 80-100% agreement).

**Measures.** Our first measure used here is *visibility of the EP elections*. Each news story was coded for *topic*. Coders utilized a three-layered list of topics to determine the topic of each story. For example, a story about a homicide was assigned a code for ‘homicide’. This specific category was part of a larger category (non-politically motivated crime) which was part of a larger category ‘domestic crime’). News about European elections was designated a range of codes that enables us to identify when a story was about the elections and what the specific topics of these stories were. For the current analysis, we rely on the ‘highest’ level of classification and refer to all EP election news stories collectively. To get a general sense of the news and information environment during the campaign, we recoded the detailed topic coding into broader categories: ‘international conflicts’, ‘social policies’, ‘sport’, ‘crime’, ‘party politics’, ‘economy’, ‘accidents’, ‘culture’, ‘environment and energy’, ‘weather’, ‘security and crime’, ‘foreign policy’ and a ‘miscellaneous’ category.

To tap the *domestic versus European* nature of the story, we relied on the coding of actors in the news. An actor is defined as a person (e.g. MEP candidate), groups of persons (e.g. political party), institution (e.g. national parliament) or other organization (e.g. Red Cross) that is featured in the story. Up to 20 actors per news story were coded. Coders first identified main actor (in terms of importance) and then other actors in order of appearance. Actors have been classified as EU actors, domestic political actors or
other actors. EU actors include MEP candidates as well as the EU president and EU commission members. Domestic political actors are members of the government, spokespersons for government agencies or members of opposition parties. It includes all members of the national parliament. The category of “other actors” includes journalists, celebrities, ordinary citizens and other actors that do not fall into the EU or domestic political actor categories. Coders also noted whether the tone of coverage toward the actor was neutral, negative or positive.

For \textit{tone of the news} we rely on “explicit evaluations of the European Union, its institutions and/or policies”. News was coded for being either neutral (i.e. no evaluation present), negative or positive, predominantly negative or positive or mixed.

\textbf{Data analysis.} In our analyses of the general news environment, the visibility of the elections as well as the tone of the news, we use the individual news story as the unit of analysis. In the analysis of the presence of different actors in the news, we rely on the coding of actors which is the unit of analysis. For each election story, a maximum of 20 actors were coded and across all news stories a total of 19,851 actors were coded.

\textbf{Results}

\textbf{More news about the elections}

We first turn to the \textit{visibility} of the 2004 EP elections in national news media. Looking at television news, we found that the EP elections took up 9.8 percent of the news in the EU in the two weeks leading up to Election Day. The average visibility of EU news in 2004 was higher in the new member states (10.4 percent) than in the old member states (9.2 percent). Of the news about the EU, 80 percent (on average) was devoted specifically to the EP elections.
Figure 1 displays the visibility in television newscasts of news about the EP election and of other EU related news in general during the 1999 and 2004 EP election campaigns. The countries on the left hand side of the Figure (Austria, Greece, Sweden, Portugal, France, Italy and Denmark) were the countries had a viable anti-EU party taking part in the 1999 election (defined as party against further integration taking a minimum of 5% of the popular vote, see Ray 1999). In the middle are the ‘old’ member states that did not have a viable anti-EU party in 1999 (Finland, UK, Ireland, Spain, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands) and on the right hand side there are the new member states that voted for the EP for the first time in 2004. The EU-wide average of 9.8 percent contains significant cross-national variation. In Greece, for example, the elections took up 21% of the news, while in Germany, the elections took up 3% of the news. In addition to Greece, the elections were most visible in Denmark, Slovakia, Austria, and Ireland and took up more than 15 percent of the news in these countries. In addition to Germany, the elections were least visible in Belgium and the Czech Republic with less than five percent of the news devoted to the elections.

On average, in the old member states we found a slight increase from 6.6 percent in 1999 of the news devoted to the EP elections to 9.2 percent in 2004. From the new member states, six out of nine countries analyzed show more than ten percent EU news. Ten of the old member states showed an increase in visibility.

Turning to national newspapers, Figure 2 shows the visibility of EU news on newspaper front-pages, with again the results for the new member states displayed on the
right hand side and the comparison between 1999 and 2004 for the old member states on the left hand side. The picture shown here is slightly more differentiated than on television. Overall in all 25 member states 5.9 percent of front-page stories were devoted to EU news. EU news was most visible in Malta, Cyprus, Greece and Austria. The smallest proportion of EU news on newspaper front-pages was found in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Lithuania with less than four percent.

Whereas in 1999 there were 6.2 percent of front-page stories about EU news in the 15 old member states, this slightly decreased to 5.6 percent in 2004. The four countries with the highest amount of news in 1999 (Portugal, France, Denmark, and Greece) all showed a decrease in visibility. The three countries with the lowest visibilities in 1999 displayed an increase in 2004. Portugal showed the sharpest decrease, from 14 to 5.3 percent and the UK the highest increase from 2.9 to 5.4 percent of front-page stories devoted to EU news.

Comparing the visibility in 2004 in the old versus the new member states, we again see a higher overall visibility on newspaper front-pages in the ten new member states. Whereas in the old member states the overall proportion of EU news stories was 5.6 percent it amounts to 6.1 percent in the new member states. However, the pattern is less clear compared to television news. Of the ten new countries, the two states with the highest visibility in newspapers are the two smallest member states Malta and Cyprus.

Looking at the visibility of EU news in 2004 in public broadcasting and private television news as well as in broadsheet versus tabloid newspapers, we find support for our second hypothesis.
Figure 3 shows that the EP elections were consistently more visible on public broadcasting news programs than on private television news. The elections were also covered more extensively on the front pages of the broadsheet press than on the tabloid press. Moreover, Figure 3 shows that in on commercial television news and in the broadsheet press the new member states gave more room to the elections that the outlets in the old member states. Looking specifically at television news about the elections (which is 79.5 % of all EU news in 2004 and 84.8 % in 1999) and comparing the visibility on public broadcasting news and private television news in 1999 and 2004, we find (Figure 4) that public broadcasters devoted more time to the elections than their private counterparts. This pattern was found in 1999 (with 6.3 percent of public news and 4.9 percent of private news devoted to the elections) and again in 2004 (with 9.5 percent of public news and 4.9 percent of private news devoted to the elections). While the share of EP news on private news remained largely the same in 1999 and 2004, public broadcasters increased the visibility of the elections.

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In conclusion, the media attention for the 2004 EP elections was up compared to the 1999 elections. This increase in visibility was driven primarily by the new countries that devoted a higher share of the news (both television and newspapers) to the elections than the old countries. The overall increase on average was in particular driven by newspapers in Malta and Cyprus and by public broadcasting television news.

We now turn to the general news and information environment in the EU during the campaign. Figure 5 shows a classification of news stories on television news in general issue categories. Figure 6 provides the same classification for all news stories on the front
page during the campaign. In both cases we compare the general news agenda in 2004 to the situation in 1999.\(^4\)

---FIGURES 5 & 6---

Looking at television, Figure 5 shows (as demonstrated above) that the share of EU related news and in particular news about the EP elections was higher in 2004 than 1999. In terms of the time spent on issues in the news, the EP elections in 2004 came further down the list than domestic/social policy, sports, and economy/business, but ahead of party politics, and crime. Coverage of international conflicts decreased considerably, due to the fact that the Kosovo conflict was very high on the news agenda in 1999 and the Iraq conflict did not attract that amount attention in 2004. However, coverage of other international affairs and of terrorism and security issues was notably higher in 2004.

International conflict was far more prominent in 1999 than 2004 (Kosovo in 1999 vs. Iraq in 2004) but in 2004 it is arguably more accurate to sum news about Iraq with security/terrorism and foreign policy/international politics, and this taken together still comes in at less than half of the TV news attention devoted to Kosovo in 1999.\(^5\)

Economic and business news was more prominent in 2004 than in 1999. Turning to the newspaper front pages (Figure 6), there was virtually no difference in the amount of EU-related news between 1999 and 2004.

**European elections: slowly expanding the domestic battlegrounds**

Figure 7 shows the proportion of actors featured in stories about the EP election across the 25 EU member states.\(^1\) A comparison is also made with the actors featured in the coverage of the 1999 EP election. Clearly, in both election years, domestic political

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\(^1\) Figure 7 compares all actors from 1999 to main protagonists in 2004. Comparisons for all actors can be seen in Appendix Table (former Table 1).
actors dominated the coverage of the EP elections. In 1999, four countries (Germany, Ireland, Portugal and Sweden) had either no EU actors in EP election stories or just 1%. The Netherlands was the only country where EU actors were more frequently featured than domestic actors in EP election news and in 1999 there were only two stories on national television news about the elections. This indicates that the second order nature of EP elections was reflected in the news coverage.

---FIGURE 7---

When examining the main political actors, there are some changes evident in 2004. While the coverage is still focused on domestic actors, there was an overall increase in the proportion of EU actors. In several countries, the proportion of EU actors reached or exceeded the proportion of domestic political actors (Malta, Portugal and France). Similar patterns are evident when looking at the other actors in the news stories. Across the member states, countries that show a higher proportion of main protagonists that are EU actors also show a high proportion of other actors that are from the EU. Therefore, while we see that EP election news coverage still predominantly features domestic political actors, there has been an increase since 1999 in attention paid to EU actors.

---FIGURES 8 / 9 / 10---

Figure 8 summarizes the differences in the attention to the different types of actors between new and old member states. We might expect that the new member states would tend to focus more on domestic political actors. This tendency to be less European focused in news coverage may stem from less familiarity of the press in these countries in covering EU issues and therefore a greater reliance on domestic sources. Also, EU actors in the country may be more difficult to identify. However, Peter et al (2004) show that
there tends to be more EU representatives in news in countries that hold EP elections for the first or second time than in countries that have held multiple elections. Figure 8, which averages the types of actors across new and old member states, shows that there are no notable differences between the old and new member states.

Figures 9 and 10 break down the appearance of political actors by the media type. Newspapers tend to show greater numbers of EU and domestic political actors while TV features a greater number of other actors. However, there are few differences between commercial and public service broadcasters (PSB). They tend to feature similar proportion of EU and domestic political actors. We expected that PSB’s would tend to have a greater EU focus but this does not appear to be the case.

---FIGURE 11---

Tone toward the actors was also measured. Explicit evaluations were coded as positive (+1) or negative (-1) or neutral (0) in the absence of evaluations. The tone has been averaged across groups of actors and then rescaled from –100 to 100. Figure 11 shows the average tone toward EU actors only, for simplicity, in each country and across elections. Overall, coverage tends to be neutral in most countries. New member countries show a slightly greater tendency to have negative evaluations of EU actors. On the other hand, among the old member states there tend to be more positive evaluations of EU actors in 2004 than 1999 with the exception of Sweden and Portugal. Comparisons can also be made across types of actors (see Appendix). In 2004, tone toward EU actors tends to be less negative than tone toward domestic actors. In 1999, the tendency was greater negativity toward EU than domestic political actors. In terms of the tone toward
the actors, there appears to be little difference between the main and the secondary political actors.

**With only some malice: more positive news in the new countries**

Turning to the tone of the news towards the EU, we find that most news about the EP elections that made specific reference to the EU was neutral. About 84% of the news mentioning the EU or its institutions did so in a neutral way without making explicit positive or negative evaluations. Looking at the 16% of the news that did contain explicit evaluative content, we create a mean score ranging from minus one (signifying consistent negative evaluations) to plus one (signifying consistent positive evaluations).

Comparing the different media types in the old and new countries yields noteworthy differences. As Figure 12 shows, the average tone in the broadsheet press was negative in the old EU-15 (-.08) but positive (+.01) in the new countries. For the tabloids, the papers in the all countries were negative; -.12 for the tabloids in the new countries and -.13 for the tabloids in the old countries. Looking at public broadcasting news, we found that news in the new countries was, on average, slightly positive (+.02) while, on average negative (-.05) in the old countries. There were no differences in the tone between private television news in the old and the new countries with all stations being marginally positive.

---FIGURE 12---

In addition to an investigation of the tone in different types of media in the old and new member states, it is of interest to assess the tone of the news in each of the member states individually so as to assess the average tone of information available to citizens in each country. Figure 13 represents the average tone in each country. The most negative
news was found in the Greece and Portugal (-20), the UK (-18) and the Netherlands (-17), while the most positive news was found in the Czech Republic (+.02), Cyprus (+.10), and Malta (+.11). Figure 13, moreover, shows that nine of the ten countries with the most negatively slanted news were all from the old EU-15. Conversely, seven of the ten countries with the least negative or even positive news were from the new countries.

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Discussion

Our study of the news media coverage of the 2004 European Parliamentary elections in all 25-member countries of the European Union provides unprecedented insights into the first elections in the enlarged EU. The study includes three national newspapers and the most widely watched main evening private and public television news in each country in the final two weeks leading up to the elections.

From a standpoint of democratic citizenship, a campaign has the potential to inform and mobilize voters to take part in the process of electing representatives. The media play a crucial role in this process. The EU also relies on the media to indirectly strengthen its legitimacy by increasing citizens’ awareness of its activities and policies. In 1999, doubt was raised if the media fulfilled this role (De Vreese et al., 2005). In some countries in 1999, the picture painted of the news coverage of the European elections was gloomy from the perspective of the coverage of the campaign in the most popular media outlets providing citizens with information: The European elections were given relatively low priority in the news, they rarely made the opening of the news bulletins, the coverage was domestic in nature with most stories taking place in the home country and addressing
issues with implications for the home country. Few representatives of EU institutions made it into the news and these EU actors were rarely quoted.

In 2004, we found that the visibility of the EP elections was higher in the ‘new’ 10 member states than in the old EU member states. The elections in the ‘old’ EU-15 increased slightly in visibility compared to the previous EP election in 1999. Public television news and broadsheet papers covered the elections more elaborately than private television news and tabloids in both ‘old’ and ‘new’ member countries.

Our findings dovetail previous research (e.g. De Vreese et al., 2005) in the finding that the 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. However, though the coverage is still focused on domestic actors, there was an overall increase in the proportion of EU actors in 2004. In some countries (e.g., Malta, Portugal and France), the proportion of EU actors reached or exceeded the proportion of domestic political actors. Moreover, countries that show a higher proportion of main protagonists that are EU actors also show a high proportion of other actors that are from the EU. Therefore, while we see that EP election news coverage still predominantly features domestic political actors, there has been an increase in attention paid to EU actors.

Our analysis of the tone of the news coverage corroborate extant research showing that most news is neutral, but when evaluative, the news in the ‘old’ EU-15 was generally negative towards the EU, while in the ‘new’ countries a mixed pattern was found with the broadsheet press and television news being, on average, positive and tabloid papers, on average, negative.
Our study provides empirical evidence in a largely theoretical debate about the EU’s legitimacy and its communicative deficit. The benchmarks provided here, focusing on visibility of elections, the representation of Europe and the evaluative nature of the coverage are important to assess the role played by the media. In addition to these normative reflections, future research needs to also investigate the specific effects the campaign had in European elections. It has previously been demonstrated that television in particular is capable of contributing to turnout in European elections (Schönbach & Lauf, 2002), especially among citizens with lower levels of political interest and awareness who may be ‘trapped’ by having to watch election news on television. Based on the 1999 European parliamentary election, and most previous campaigns, where there was little in the way of coverage of the campaign on main evening television news, uninterested citizens had few opportunities to accidentally come across interesting news about the elections that might boost their interest and awareness (Schönbach & Lauf, 2002).

In relation to the 1999 elections, Banducci and Semetko (2003, 2004) found that the visibility of the EP campaign on television news influenced individuals’ likelihood of voting in the EP election. Greater visibility on the TV news broadcasts that respondents reported watching increased the probability of voting. Contrary to expectations, negative coverage of the EU did not demobilize the electorate. Such questions still have to be addressed for the 2004 elections in the enlarged Europe, but with this study we can assess the coverage of the elections more accurately and detailed than previously.
References


at the annual meetings of the International Communication Association, ICA, May, New York.


Figure 1: Visibility of EU news in television newscasts 1999 and 2004

NOTE: Values are length-based percentages within the countries and election periods. All stories in television newscasts were included. Values display the proportion of news stories about the EP election and about other EU news. 1999 n=4781; 2004 n=9339.
Figure 2: Visibility of EU news on newspaper front-pages 1999 and 2004

NOTE: Values are story-based percentages within the countries and election periods. All stories on newspaper front-pages were included. Values display the proportion of news stories about the EP election and about other EU news. 1999 n=2224; 2004 n=8280.
Figure 3: Visibility of EU news in television newscasts and on newspaper front-pages in 2004

NOTE: Values are length-based percentages within the categories and election periods. All stories in television newscasts and on newspaper front-pages were included. Values display the proportion of news stories about the EP election and about other EU news. Television newscasts n=9339; newspaper front-pages n=8280.
Figure 4: Visibility of EP election and other EU news 1999 and 2004

NOTE: Values are length-based percentages within the categories and election periods. All stories in television newscasts were included. Values display the proportion of news stories about the EP election (blue bars) and about other EU news (red bars). 1999 n=4781; 2004 n=9339.
Figure 5: News environment in television newscasts 1999 and 2004

NOTE: Values are length-based percentages within the election periods. All stories in television newscasts were included. Values display the proportion of the length of the news stories about the issues of the sum of all news stories. 1999 n=4781; 2004 n=9339.
Figure 6: News environment on newspaper front-pages 1999 and 2004

NOTE: Values are story-based percentages. All stories on newspaper front-pages were included. Values display the proportion of news stories about the different issues. 1999 n=2224; 2004 n=8280.
FIGURE 7: actors in the news

- EU actors
- Domestic Political actors
- Other
Figure 8: Types of Actors in EP Election Stories by Old and New Members States
Figure 9: Types of Actors in EP Election Stories by Type of Medium

Figure 10: Types of Actors in EP Election Stories by Type of Broadcaster
Figure 11: Tone of Evaluations of EU Actors (All Actors 1999, Main Protagonists 2004)
Figure 12

Tone of news (explicit evaluations EU, ranging from –1 to +1) by medium type
Figure 13: Tone of news (explicit evaluations EU, ranging from −1 to +1) by country
## The 2004 EP elections in the news in 25 EU countries

### Outlets and missing days

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Outlet</th>
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<td>Austria</td>
<td>ORF, Kronen Zeitung, Der Standard, Die Presse</td>
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<td>Belgium/Flemish</td>
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<td>JT Meteo, Le Journal, La Demierrre Heure, La Libre, La Soir</td>
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<td>Cyprus</td>
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<td>Denmark</td>
<td>TV-Avisen (DRTV1), TV2 Nyhederne, JyllandsPosten, Politiken, EkstraBladet</td>
<td>TVAvisen June 1 / TV2 Nyhederne June 5</td>
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<td>ETV, Kanal 2, Postimees, SL Ohtuleht, Eesti Paevaleht</td>
<td>Kanal 2 June 3, 12</td>
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<td>Finland</td>
<td>Yle, MTV3, Ruutu4, Helsingin Sanomat, Aamulehti, Hufvudstadbladet</td>
<td>Yle June 1 / MTV3 June 4, 6, 7 / Ruutu4 June 1, 2</td>
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<td>Germany</td>
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<td>LatTV, Latvia Televizija June 11</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>BBC1, ITV, The Sun, Daily Telegraph, The Guardian</td>
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</table>
ENDNOTES

1 The study was funded by research grants from the Dutch Science Foundation (VENI and VIDI grants), the European Union’s 6th Framework STREP programme, The Halle Foundation, The Claus M. Halle Institute for Global Learning at Emory University, and the University of Amsterdam, to the principal investigators, Dr. Susan Banducci (Universiteit Twente), Dr. Claes H. de Vreese (Universiteit van Amsterdam), and Prof. dr. Holli A. Semetko (Emory University).

2 This period was chosen because previous research showed that most news was concentrated in the final part of the campaign (Leroy & Siune 1994 and De Vreese et al 2005).

3 It should be noted that a difference in coding during the 2004 study necessitates classifying actors into main protagonists (those actors that were the primary focus of the news story) and other actors (actors that were mentioned in the news story but were not the main focus).

4 For a specification of issue visibility in the individual member states, please refer to the Appendix, which displays the share of these issues by means of the time devoted to them within the newscasts.

5 Again the values for the individual countries can be found in the Appendix.