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IMPROVING HUMAN RESEARCH POTENTIAL  
AND THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC KNOWLEDGE BASE

**Democratic Participation and Political Communication in Systems of  
Multi-level Governance**

## **Media, Mobilization and European Elections**

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## **Introduction**

Much of the research on turnout in European parliamentary elections has focused on explaining why turnout in these elections is low. When comparing European to national elections, explanations have focused on the second order nature of these elections (van der Eijk and Franklin 1996). Voters do not think the European elections matter much or are not given reasons to think they matter much and thus they are less likely to show up on polling day (Reif and Schmitt 1980, van der Eijk and Franklin 1996). Additionally, turnout in European elections is viewed as a product of institutional features such as compulsory voting, weekend voting and concurrent elections. Others acknowledge that attitudes toward Europe play a crucial role in getting voters to the polling place (Blondel, Sinnott and Svensson 1998). Much has been made of the post-Maastricht decline in EU support and some have attributed this to the lack of public engagement and popular debate (Baun 1996, see also Meyer 1999 on the “communication deficit”).

Whether voters don't vote because European elections are not as important as national elections or because they harbor negative views about the EU, one might expect that media coverage during the election campaign can work to either increase awareness of the salience of the elections or improve attitudes about the EU. Some have cited the invisibility of the EP in the news and the negative tone in coverage of the EU as contributing factors to negative attitudes and low participation (Norris 2000a, Norris 2000b). In this chapter, we first examine how the major shifts in the structure of European media systems since the first European Parliamentary election in 1979 have altered the media landscape and have altered the potential influences of the media on turnout. Second, we describe aspects of the new media content during the 1999 EP election campaign. Finally, we examine how variations in television news coverage of the 1999 European elections influence turnout. We begin by discussing the role of the media in mobilizing or facilitating turnout.

### **Media Environments, Information and Turnout**

We would expect media coverage to be greater in elections that are more salient, in contests that are more competitive or intense and when campaign spending is greater. Because most citizens get election information from television, we would also argue that media coverage during campaigns plays an important role in mobilizing voters. In one of the few studies to examine the impact of media coverage on European elections, Blumler et al. (1983) also argue that turnout in the 1979 European parliamentary elections was higher in countries in which there appeared to be more active campaigns.

In the framework of mobilizing and facilitating factors in influencing turnout, it is important to consider two different aspects of media effects. First, the media context should be considered. The media context relates to both the media system and the content of media coverage. Second, individual media use patterns should also be considered. The media context can take on the function of either mobilization or facilitation. Even though the act of voting has been characterized as a “low cost, low benefit” activity (Aldrich

1993), the costs and benefits are not zero and rational citizens are only predicted to vote if the sum of instrumental and expressive benefits exceed the costs of voting; if they do not, rational citizens will abstain. Campaign visibility in the media may play two roles in calculating the costs and benefits of voting. First, media coverage may mobilize voting by increasing the perceived benefits of voting. Mobilizing efforts are traditionally thought of as party activity that encourages supporters to turn out. However, media coverage of elections may also mobilize turnout; increased media coverage of a campaign is likely to bring it to the attention of potential voters. The more visible to campaign, the more likely voters are to perceive the election as important and their vote in the election as important. Much like a telephone call or personal visit from a party canvasser, more visible campaigns can encourage participation but altering the perceived benefits of voting. Second, media coverage may also highlight the costs of not voting, such as if a party's proposed policy is harmful. Increased coverage also makes gaining information about candidate positions less costly. In these ways, media facilitate voting by reducing costs.

While the volume and tone of media coverage can facilitate participation by lowering the costs of getting informed, news media consumption can both enhance the facilitating effects of media coverage and indicate a general interest in news that translates to greater political interest and a greater likelihood of participating in election. This latter media effect indicates that media use is an indication of a general political interest and a predisposition to voting, and media use during a campaign reinforces these tendencies. This perspective is more in line with the early voting study by Campbell et al.:

“Although it requires still less personal energy [than personal discussion], following the campaign through the mass communications media might also be described as a type of informal participation” [1964, p. 51].

If we take following the campaign in the media as an indicator of less formal political participation, it is not surprising that studies that look specifically at the effect of media attention on participation show that it mostly has a mobilizing effect. Even the more general measure of exposure to newspapers and television news tends to emerge as having a positive relationship with mobilization.

### *Media Systems*

In order to take a comprehensive view of the role of the media in European elections, in addition to media content and media audiences, one must take into account the development of media systems in each individual country and the development, or lack of development, of a European media system. The media systems have changed dramatically since the first EP election in 1979. The decline in PSB and a transition to dual systems of broadcasting, change in the audiences for traditional media and the depoliticization of the press have coincided with a period of deepening European integration (see Semetko, de Vreese and Peter 2000). Characteristics of the media system,

such as public financing, cross-media ownership, newspaper partisanship, journalistic traditions, and policies regulating political content in media all have an impact on the public affairs programming and news and information content. In turn, we make the argument and demonstrate below that the informational content regarding the campaign and the visibility of the campaign in the news can influence whether or not voters turn out in elections.

The media environment will largely determine the role that the media play in an election. Access to information by the mass of people - and the mass of voters in particular - differs enormously according to the national context. Voters in one country will not have the same information sources as voters in another country. Access to and the types and amount of information will vary across countries. The type, amount and access to information will be decided by a variety of factors that are related to the media system and political regulation of the media. These factors can be grouped into three categories: ownership structure, political and cultural traditions, the legal framework governing print and broadcast media, regulation of the media during election campaigns and audience characteristics.

### Television

Most European countries, for example, have a strong tradition of state or public ownership of broadcasting. France only legalized private broadcasting in the 1980s and the prohibition against commercial broadcaster in Austria did not change until the late 1990s. This demonstrate that the media environment is also to some degree a legal environment. Almost all countries demand some form of statutory regulation of broadcasting, as a way of ensuring pluralism over the airwaves. Also the degree to which regulation is carried out through independent commission or by parties in government varies across countries. Although there has been increasing deregulation at the national level, there have been several attempts to regulate at the EU level. Proposals by the European Parliament, however, to prevent media concentration and cross-ownership have largely been ignored by the commission. Specifically in relation to media campaigns during election periods, the regulation of broadcasting frequencies, content quotas, and fairness in coverage to have a significant influence on how the broadcasters discharge their responsibilities at election time.

In the early 1980s the public broadcasting model dominated all EU countries (except Luxembourg which never has always had a private broadcasting system): compared to the 40 public channels, there were only 4 commercial stations (Brants and de Bens 2000). Currently, with the exceptions of Austria and Ireland, most countries can be considered dual broadcasting systems with similar numbers of private and commercial stations and similar audience reach on the commercial and private channels. The shift to dual systems has meant changes in the way broadcasting is financed, accountability mechanisms and the mix of programs available to viewers. These consequences will influence the ability of the media to facilitate and mobilize voters at election time.

**Table 1: Changes in National Media Systems in EU Member States**

	1980	1990	2000
Public Monopoly/Govt. Funded	Belgium, Denmark, Sweden		
Public Monopoly/Mixed revenue	Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands, Portugal, Switzerland	Austria, Denmark, Ireland(1) <sup>a</sup> , Netherlands(1), Portugal	Austria <sup>b</sup>
Private Monopoly/Advertising revenue only	Luxembourg (4)	Luxembourg	Luxembourg(4)
Dual System	Italy, UK	Belgium(2), Finland(1), France(3), Germany(4), Greece(4), Italy(6), Spain(3), Sweden(1),UK(2)	Belgium(5), Denmark(2*), Finland(2), France(3), Germany(12), Greece(5), Ireland(1) <sup>c</sup> , Italy(6), Netherlands(4), Portugal(2), Spain(3), Sweden(3), UK(3)

Source: Brants and de Bens (2000) and Siune and Hulten (1998) updated by authors with data from the European Audiovisual Observatory (2002).

Numbers in parantheses represent the number of commercial stations that reach at least 50%of households in the country.

<sup>a</sup> One commercial broadcaster was approved but approved operator not able to raise the necessary capital to begin broadcasting.

<sup>b</sup>Austria is still effectively a public monopoly despite changes to broadcast laws and licensing of commercial broadcasters. Austria, following a finding that it was in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights forallowing ORF to broadcast, changed the law to allow commercial broadcasters to operate. However, the small media market in Austria has prevented any commercial venture from succeeding.

<sup>c</sup> Assume reach is greater than 50 percent of households.

Table 1 shows the transition in media systems from around the time of the first European Parliamentary election to the last election. During the first EP election, the majority of countries were public monopolies and now virtually all EU member states are operating under dual broadcasting systems. The table also shows the increase in the number of commercial stations broadcasting in each country. In parentheses next to each country, the number of commercial stations reaching at least 50 percent of households is listed. In 1980, Luxembourg was the only country to have a commercial broadcast channel operating. While Italy and the UK allowed commercial broadcasting, no commercial channel reached over 50 percent of the households. Currently, all countries, except Austria, have a national terrestrial commercial channel that reaches at least 50 percent of households. Indeed, the number of commercial stations and their reach has increased substantially since 1980.

The table also shows the shifts in the revenue models for public television broadcasters. There are two models of funding for public service broadcasting. First, public service broadcasting can be financed solely by government financing either through the collection of a license fee paid by television viewers or from general revenue resources from the government budget. Currently no European PSB operates solely through government or collection of license fees. The closest to this pure model of government funding is the BBC. While most resources come from license fees, the BBC also collects 15 (?) percent of its revenue from the sale of programs. Advertising contributes only a minimal amount to the financing of Swedish public broadcasting. The second model of public broadcasting financing combines advertising revenue with some form of government funding (license fee or direct transfers from the budget).

There are several consequences of the increasing commercialization of broadcasting for voters and the ability to gather information to make electoral choices. First, there is increasing diversity in viewing choices. More channels translates to more total airtime which increases the diversity of choices for viewers. While there is more choice for viewers, as they turn to different channels there is less commonly shared information or experience. This process has been referred to as audience fragmentation. Second, information that citizens are exposed to may be changing. With more channels, there is greater competition for audiences and public broadcasters must be concerned about maintaining its base of viewers. The assumption is that with the addition of commercial stations there has been an increase in entertainment programming and that public channels have responded to this by also offering more entertaining choices and increasing the entertainment value of news programs. However, when considered together, there has tended to be a general increase in the amount of political information available and no concrete evidence that there has been a “dumbing down” of the political information on public channels (Brants and de Bens 2000, Brants 1998). Despite the lack of change in informational programming, the increasing choices for viewers may mean less attention is paid to news.

With the introduction of commercial channels there has been a decline in audiences for public service broadcasting channels. Table 2 shows the decline in audiences across most in EU member states. The table shows only the change from 1992 to 1999 which is a shorter time period than that displayed in Table 1. Therefore, we only see the possible effects of the growing commercialization of channels during the last ten year period. Despite the shorter time span, there are substantial shifts in the audiences for public channels. The largest declines have occurred in countries that had the most dramatic shifts in the media systems between 1990 and 2000 (see Table 1). For example, the market share for Canal 1 in Portugal dropped by over 30 percent between 1992 and 1999. During this same period, two channels reaching a majority of households were introduced in Portugal. ORF in Austria also had a significant shift in market shares. While no commercial channels were introduced, terrestrial commercial channels from Germany now take up a considerable amount of the market in Austria. With very few exceptions, market shares are declining across all public channels. In most cases commercial stations are reducing the market shares of public channels. These commercial stations are

comprised of terrestrial, cable and satellite channels. The shares of these stations is growing as well as, in some cases such as Spain, the market shares for regional channels.

**Table 2: Change in Market Shares of Public Service Broadcasting Corporations**

		Market Shares		
		1992	1999	% Change
<b>Austria</b>	ORF1	41	24.4	-16.6
	ORF2	32	33.1	1.1
<b>Belgium/Flemish</b>	TV1	25.5	22.6	-2.9
<b>Belgium/French</b>	RTBF1 (la Une)	15.2	17.2	2
<b>Germany</b>	ARD1	21.7	14.2	-7.5
	ZDF	21.3	13.2	-8.1
<b>Denmark</b>	DR TV 1/2	34.7	30.7	-4
	TV2	40.3	36.1	-4.2
<b>Spain</b>	TVE-1 (RTVE)	32.4	24.9	-7.5
	TVE-2/La 2	13.1	8.1	-5
<b>Finland</b>	TV1(YLE)	30	23	-7
	TV2 (YLE)	19	20	1
<b>France</b>	France 2	24	22.3	-1.7
	France 3	13.6	16.3	2.7
<b>UK</b>	BBC1	33.7	28.4	-5.3
	BBC2	10.5	10.8	0.3
<b>Greece</b>	ET-1 (ERT)	11.3	5.6	-5.7
	ET-2/NET (ERT)	6.4	3.9	-2.5
<b>Ireland</b>	RTE-1 (RTE)	36	31.9	-4.1
	Network 2 (RTE)	21	19	-2
<b>Italy</b>	RAIUno	18.9	22.8	3.9
	RAIDue	18.2	15.7	-2.5
<b>Netherlands</b>	Ned-1	14.8	11.2	-3.6
	Ned-2	15.1	16.3	1.2
	Ned-3	14.3	9	-5.3
<b>Portugal</b>	Canal 1 (RTP)	61.5	27	-34.5
	TV2 (RTP)	17.6	5.6	-12
<b>Sweden</b>	Kanal-1 (SVT)	30	21.4	-8.6
	TV-2 (SVT)	26	25.8	-0.2
				-4.8

Source: European Audiovisual Observatory 1995 and 2002

Besides shrinking audiences for public television where the mission is to provide educational and informational programming, there is a concern that public broadcasting, in order to compete with commercial stations, is changing its programming to provide

more entertaining and attractive programs to keep audiences interested. There are two claims being made in this argument. First, that public broadcasting provide more information in its programming. Second, over time the informational content on public broadcasting has declined. Table 3 examines changes in the informational content on public channels and, when available, compares this to similar programming on commercial stations. Clearly there has been no decline in the news and information programming on public broadcasting. Only in Austria between 1991 and 1999 has there been a marked decline in the amount of news and information programming. Most public channels actually show an increase in the amount of news and information. It is clear, however, that public channels do provide more news and information content than public channels. These data do not reveal whether or not the nature of news and information on public channels has actually been altered in order to reflect 'softer' news. If audiences are moving away from public channels and there is less news and information content, citizens will be receiving less current affairs programming. Therefore, changes in audiences viewing habits and changes in the media system most likely serve to reduce the ability of the media to facilitate participation in the electoral process.



**Table 3: News and Information - Programming Output for Public Service and Commercial Broadcasting**

		% of programming devoted to news and information				
		Public			Private	
		1991	1999		1991	1999
<b>Austria</b>	ORF1/2	31.2	22	-9		
<b>Belgium/Flemish</b>	TV1	23.5	30	6.5		
<b>Belgium/French</b>	RTBF1 (la Une)	25.5	24.3	-1		
	RTBF2 (la due)			0		
<b>Germany</b>	ARD1	38.1	42.2	4.1	RTL	18.3 22.7
	ZDF	31.8	41.2	9.4	SAT.1	18.4 18.2
<b>Denmark</b>	TV2	18.3	19.6	1.3		
	DR TV 1/2	21.6	41.1	20		
<b>Spain</b>	TVE-1 (RTVE)	12.3	22.4	10	Antena 3	7.4
	TVE-2/La 2	8.2	8.1	-0.1	Tele 5	7.7
<b>Finland</b>	TV1/2(YLE)	27.8	37.1	9.3	MTV3	25.8 14.4
<b>France</b>	France 2	25.4	34.9	9.5	TF1	25.1 26.9
	France 3	31.2	36.3	5.1	M6	12.3
<b>UK</b>	BBC	32.2	37	4.8	ITV	31.4 32.9
				0	Channel 4	14 16.4
				0	Channel 5	21.8
<b>Greece</b>	ET-1 (ERT)		29.4	29	Megachannel	35.8
	ET-2/NET (ERT)		76.4	76	Antenna 1	43.5
<b>Ireland</b>	RTE-1/Network 2 (RTE)	16.5				
<b>Italy</b>	RAI	16	29	13	Canale 5	36.3 36.6
	RAIDue			0	Italia 1	7.4 10.5
				0	Rete 4	16.4 18.5
<b>Netherlands</b>	Ned-1/2/3 (NOS)	26.9	42.6	16		
<b>Portugal</b>	Canal 1/TV2 (RTP)	15.8	21.8	6	SIC	15
				0	TVI	8
<b>Sweden</b>	Kanal-1/TV-2 (SVT)	23.9	43.5	20	TV3(GB)	24
				0	TV4	15
<b>Average</b>		23.7	33.6	9.9		18.9 21.9

Source: European Audiovisual Observatory 1995 and 2002

### The Press

Newspaper readership has steadily been declining across all European countries. In most countries, newspaper readership has either declined or remained stable. In most countries, however, the decline in readership can be explained by the failure of young people to start and then develop a newspaper reading habit (Lauf 2002). The decline of the partisan press has also meant a weakening of traditional ties between readers and their newspaper.

Also, stable newspaper readers tend to be leaving the national press for local newspapers (Gustafsson and Weibull 1997). Table 4 shows the patterns of reported newspaper readership between 1980 and 2001. These estimates are based on the number of persons in Euro-barometer surveys who say they read a newspaper everyday. Based on these data, there are two countries where there has been an increase of over 5 percent in the number of people saying they read a newspaper everyday – The Netherlands and the former West German part of Germany. In the other countries, readership has stayed stable (less than a 5 percent shift) and in other countries such as Greece, Denmark, Luxembourg and Austria there has been a more substantial decline.

**Table 4: Changes in Newspaper Readership**

	<i>Newspaper Readership</i>				Change 1980-2001
	% who read a newspaper every day				
	1980	1986	1995	2001	
FRANCE	31.9	28.4	30.2	25.7	-6.2
BELGIUM	38.1	28.4	33.8	29.5	-8.6
NETHERLANDS	51.7	42.6	62.9	60.3	8.6
GERMANY-WEST	46.1	60.4	57.6	59.7	13.6
ITALY	27.6	25.2	31.0	30.0	2.4
LUXEMBOURG	70.0	41.0	63.5	55.8	-14.2
DENMARK	67.5	63.1	56.2	53.0	-14.5
IRELAND	45.5	38.0	44.5	45.8	0.3
GREAT BRITAIN	57.7	51.3	57.9	46.7	-11.0
GREECE		43.0	20.9	13.5	-29.5
SPAIN		21.0	27.9	24.0	3.0
PORTUGAL		14.6	14.2	19.6	5.0
GERMANY-EAST			66.8	56.0	-10.8
FINLAND			72.2	66.4	-5.8
SWEDEN			70.0	68.2	-1.8
AUSTRIA			72.4	54.0	-18.4

Sources: Euro-barometer: EB13, EB26, EB43.1, 55.1  
(EU member countries only available at time of survey).

Another way to measure the declining audience for newspapers is to look at the changes in newspaper circulation rates. Table 5 shows the daily circulation figures per 1000 inhabitants. While these figures do not take into account that one single newspaper may be read by a number of people, these figures more clearly show the declining newspaper readership. In some countries the decline has been on the order of 10 percent. Only in the Southern European countries of Italy, Spain and Portugal has newspaper circulation increased. According to Gustafsson and Weibull (1997) increases in readership in these

countries has occurred due to the increase of women in the labor force in the last 20 years.

It is clear that in most countries, the ability for the press to facilitate electoral participation is declining if citizens are turning away from newspapers as a source of information.

**Table 5: Changes in Newspaper Circulation**

	<i>Daily Newspaper Circulation per 1,000 inhabitants</i>				
	1979	1986	1994	2001	1979 – 2001
FRANCE	201	193	237	144	-57
BELGIUM	228	221	321	150	-78
NETHERLANDS	324	311	334	274	-50
GERMANY-WEST	335	344		290	-45
ITALY	94	99	105	105	11
LUXEMBOURG	357	389	384	272	-85
DENMARK	367	367	365	272	-95
IRELAND	216	181	170	154	-62
GREAT BRITAIN	431	397	351	299	-132
GREECE	-	-	156	64	-92
SPAIN	-	75	104	109	34
PORTUGAL	51	41	41	68	17
GERMANY-EAST	517	570	317	-	-200
FINLAND	480	543	473	446	-34
SWEDEN	529	534	483	415	-114
AUSTRIA	349	358	472	300	-49

Source: UNESCO reports and the World Press Report 2002

Overall, the changes in the media systems both in terms of the increasing diversity of channels from which to choose and the changing viewing patterns of the audience suggest that the ability of the media to facilitate voting is not as strong as it once was. At the first European parliamentary election

### **News Media Content: News Coverage during the 1999 European Parliamentary Election Campaign**

While there have been significant changes in the media systems, little is known about how these changes influence the actual content of the news or how European news is covered. To date there have only been a few studies that rely on content data to analyze how European Union (EU) affairs are reported in various media.<sup>1</sup> The published findings reflect a focus on both media effects on opinion and variation in coverage across countries. Some conclusions, from Blumler's (1983) edited volume on the 1979 EP elections, include that the campaigns differed significantly in each country and media coverage tended to produce separate issue agendas in each country. However, some generalizations across the nine countries could be drawn. First, journalists tend to rely on the same sources. Second, voters across all countries tended to tune into television as their main source for election news. Third, social demographic characteristics were related to election media use across countries. Fourth, the EP election was not a highly salient even in any country.

Leroy and Siune (1994) base their analysis of election coverage in Belgium and Denmark on a systematic content analysis of EC issues on television programs in 1979, 1984 and 1989. The study identifies some variables that may influence coverage of EU elections. First, they distinguish between center and periphery in terms of geography and attitude. Countries closer geographically to the center of Western Europe may have greater European rather than domestic coverage of elections. In addition, those countries that have greater EU identity may exhibit greater "European" coverage (see also the McQuail and Bergsma chapter in Blumler's *Communicating to Voters*). Second, the media structure (whether public service oriented or commercial) may influence coverage. Third, because they compare election coverage in three elections, examine the "evolution" of the relationship between the notions of center and periphery and media structure. EP election coverage in Belgium, at the center, did appear more European minded than coverage in Denmark and this difference seems to stem from a greater sense of European identity in Belgium rather than its geographic proximity to the center of European. Changes in the media structure in Denmark did not seem to effect EP election coverage except that the addition of more outlets increased coverage. On the other hand, coverage declined in Belgium. However, both private and public stations tended to see the elections in terms of domestic rather than European events.

Rather than EP elections, Pippa Norris (2000) focuses on the effect of news coverage on attitude toward European integration and more specifically, the Euro. A chapter from this book, "Negative News, Negative Public?" examines the impact of the extent and tone of coverage on political attitudes in the context of the European Union. The main hypothesis is that if news about the EU is overwhelmingly negative, attitudes of people paying attention to the news will be negative. First, Norris addresses the question of whether news about the EU is indeed overwhelmingly negative. Based on an analysis of Monitoring Euromedia reports, approximately 3.4 percent of the evening news was devoted to EU affairs although there was considerable cross-nation variations.

For example, during the period studied, Spanish and British television news devoted twice as much time to EU matters as other stations. Economic and monetary policy dominated the newspaper agenda while foreign policy (the Balkans) dominated television news about the EU. Overall, newspapers tended to have a Euroskeptic bias as did television news. When looking at the effect of the tone of news on public opinion, Norris finds that “the tone of news about the monetary union was strongly and significantly related to diffuse support for EU membership and to specific support for the euro” (p. 200, italics in the original).

The 1999 European Election Study content analysis project draws on both traditions in reporting both variations in news coverage and the effect this has on attitudes and behavior. The content data are unique in that news coverage on television and in newspapers is analyzed in all 15 member countries. To some extent these data also compare over time with the content data collected in 1979 as reported in Blumler (1983). At present, there is no systematic or long-term comparison of media content or effects in EU countries.

#### *Description of Content Analysis Project*

While we focus on the collection of television news coverage in this report, newspaper stories were also part of the sample of media content coded. For the television news coverage, news programs were recorded in the 15 member countries for the four weeks prior to the European parliamentary elections. Due to time and budget constraints only the last two weeks of the campaign were coded according to the full coding scheme established by the European Election Study team at the University of Amsterdam. The first two weeks of the campaign were analyzed in terms of the number of election stories appearing. Coding was completed in each language by native speakers. Coding was completed at the Universiteit van Amsterdam except for Spain, Greece and Italy.

The news programs to be coded were chosen because they were the most widely watched news programs in the country. The news programs were also selected on the basis of public or commercial status; one public service news broadcast and one commercial news broadcast were selected. Therefore, in each country a news program from a commercial station and a news program from a public service station were coded. The exceptions to this are Ireland and Austria where only one news broadcast was coded because no secondary news program existed. In Belgium four news stations (comprising both public and commercial stations) were coded and in Greece three programs were coded.<sup>ii</sup> A more detailed description of stations, program and audiences is given in Appendix A.

For each of the news program, each news story (defined as a “semantic entity” with at least one topic) was analyzed. For each story, the position, length lead in and the structure are coded. The topic, location and location where people are affected were then coded. These latter variables could be used, for example, to examine whether coverage of the EU (EU as a whole is the “location”) has a domestic focus (country is the location where people are directly affected). After this initial screening of topic and location, only political stories were coded. Political stories are defined as mentioning politicians, political groups, political institutions and political organizations or as explicitly mentioning politics (foreign politics, social politics, the economy). Kosovo coverage

tended to dominate the new dring this two week period so Kosovo stories were not coded unless they specifically mention the EU or EP elections.

### **Media Content Variables**

In order to examine the mobilizing impact of television news coverage, we have created indicators of visibility of the EP elections in the news, the presence of party and EU actors in news stories and the tone of coverage. The measures are calculated for each outlet. For the two week period prior to the election, both the proportion of the stories and the proportion of time covering the EP elections was calculated. Only in a few countries is the proportion of time substantially different from the proportion of stories. These differences seem to be due to variations in the structure of news coverage in countries. The indicators of the visibility of EP elections are created using the main topic variable. Additionally, stories that mention the EP elections are also counted in this category.

We have created two variables that measure the presence of domestic and EU actors in news coverage. Actors may not necessarily always be person; governments, institutions and organizations are also considered actors. Domestic actors are comprised of national level actors from political parties or political parties themselves that are not related to the EU. Candidates for the EP and other EU level actors are coded into a separate category.

Table 6 shows the visibility of the campaign on television news according to the number of stories that mention the EP election. The table is arranged to show the differences between coverage on public and commercial news outlets. Countries are listed ranging from least to most visible campaigns on public outlets. The campaign was most visible in Portugal and Greece. Depending on whether the percentage of stories or the percentage of time is considered, over 20 percent of the time of the evening news broadcasts on the main public channels in these countries was devoted to stories that made some mention of the EP election. However, the campaign was not as visible on the commercial stations in Greece. In fact, The EP campaign, overall, was more visible on public news programs.

The campaign on public channels was least visible on stations in Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain, Germany and the U.K. The low visibility is largely true of the commercial stations in these countries as well. However, the public station news in Finland devoted more time to the EP campaign than did the commercial station. The visibility of the EP campaign on Finnish commercial broadcasting ranks along the countries with the lowest visibility.

In a comprehensive analysis of variations of the 1999 campaign visibility, Peter (2003, 47) demonstrates that there are a number of factors related to the prominence of European election coverage. Some factors were related to the actual outlet while other factors are related to the country in which the news broadcast occurs. Public broadcasting were significantly more likely to give the EP election more coverage. This fits with the expectation that public service broadcasting provides more informative content. Countries that had experienced more EP elections also tended to have lower visibility. The nature of elite opinion on the integration issue also affect the visibility of the campaign. There was more coverage in countries where elite opinion is polarized on the

issue of European integration. News values research leads one to expect that news stories that contain conflict will be more newsworthy and gain greater coverage. News editors were likely to cite the lack of newsworthiness of EP elections as a reason why they chose not to cover them (see de Vreese 2003). Other factors such as concurrent elections in Belgium, Ireland and Spain are also most likely related to lower levels of visibility of the EP campaign in these countries.

Table 6 also reports the number of respondents from the October-November 1999 Euro-barometer who said they watched the particular news broadcast being analyzed and that the EP campaign came to their attention via TV news. We would expect that those who watch TV news on the channels that carried more EP campaign news would be more likely to see the campaign on television. In general this is the case. The correlation between the proportion of people seeing the EP campaign and the visibility of the campaign on that news outlet is relatively strong ( $r=.53$  for percentage of time and  $r=.52$  for the percentage of stories).

**Table 6: Visibility of the European Parliamentary Campaign on Television News**

		<i>Public Service</i>			<i>Commercial</i>			
		% Saw Campaign on TV News	% Time	% Stories		% Saw Campai gn on TV News	% Time	% Stories
<b>Belgium/Flemish</b>	Het Journaal; 19.00/VTR	74.7	1.1	1.7	VTM-Nieuws; 19.00 /VTM	68.9	0.5	0.9
<b>Netherlands</b>	NOS Nieuws; 8.00 /NED1	68.5	2.0	1.1	RTL Nieuws; 19.30 /RTL	68.3	7.0	3.3
<b>Spain</b>	Telediario-2; 21.00 /TVE1	44.6	2.1	2.7	Telecinco 20.30 /Tele5	41.7	3.6	5.0
<b>Germany</b>	Tagesschau; 20.00 /ARD	79.6	3.7	5.1	RTL aktuell; 18.45 /RTL	79.7	0.8	2.1
<b>UK</b>	BBC1 Nine o Clock news	54.1	6.2	5.4	ITV	51.5	4.1	5.2
<b>Belgium/French</b>	JT Meteo; 19.30 /La Une News; 18.01 or 21.00	79.3	7.9	5.4	Le Journal; 19.00 /RTL-TV	77.6	7.3	7.3
<b>Ireland</b>	/RTE1	91.1	7.9	8.0				
<b>Italy</b>	TG1; 20.00 /RaiUno	73.5	11.4	10.7	TG5; 20.00 /Canale5	76.4	9.7	8.7
<b>Sweden</b>	Rapport; 19.30 /TV2	88.2	11.6	9.4	Nyheterna; 18.30 /TV4	90.1	13.0	10.0
<b>Finland</b>	Finish news /Yle	88.1	12.5	13.2	News /MTV3	83.8	2.6	3.3
<b>France</b>	Le Journal; 20.00 /F2	79.3	18.0	12.8	Le Journal; 20.00 /TF1	73.7	7.2	5.8
<b>Austria</b>	ZiB; 19.30 / ORF1	86.2	19.2	16.9				
<b>Denmark</b>	TV-avisen; 21.00 /DR1	90.8	19.6	15.5	Nyhederne; 19.00 /TV2	88.9	13.9	9.5
<b>Greece</b>	ET1 news	89.9	23.7	29.9	Ta Nea Tou; 19.55 /Antenna	90.1	3.9	7.0
					Kentriko deltio; 20.00 /Mega	91.6	8.0	12.2
<b>Portugal</b>	RTP1 news; 20.00	88.4	24.5	15.2	SIC news; 20.00	87.3	18.7	10.3
<b>Average</b>		78.4	11.4	10.2		76.4	7.2	6.5

Source: European Election Study



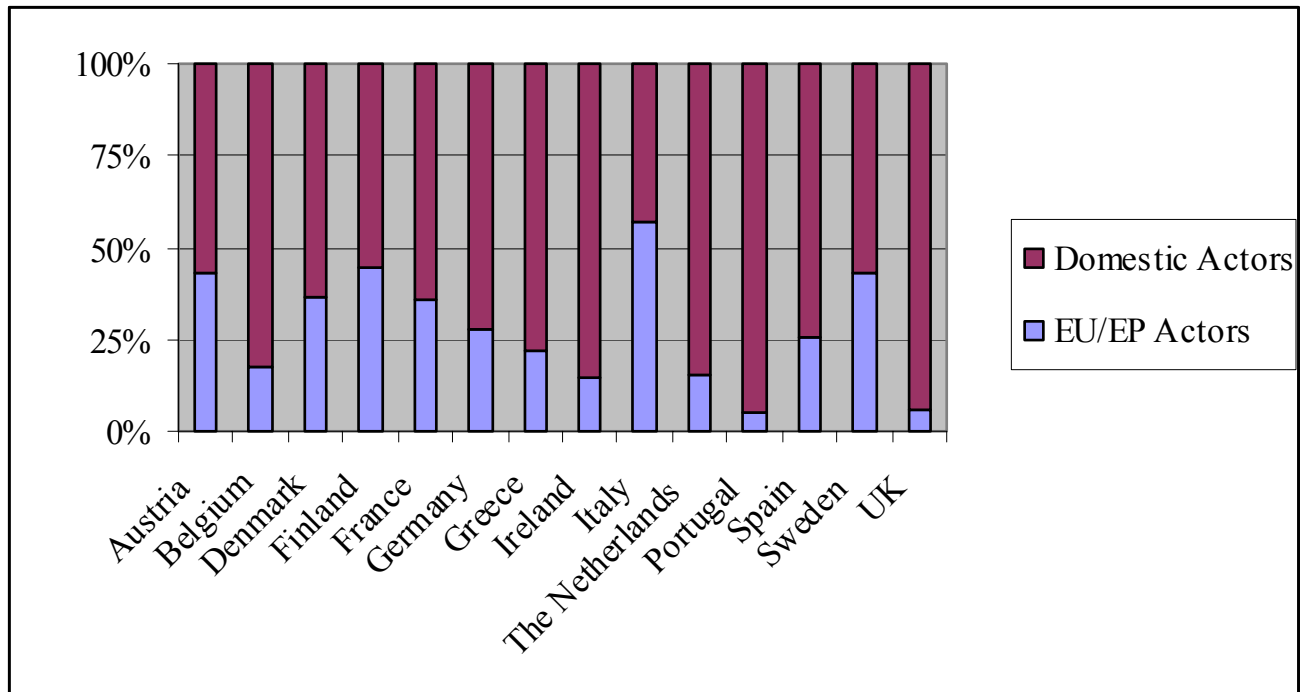
**Table 7: Front Page Visibility of the European Parliamentary Campaign in the Quality Press**

		% who saw campaign in paper*	% of Stories Mentioning EP Election
<b>Belgium</b>	De Standard	62.9	0.0
	La Libre Belgique	62.7	1.7
<b>Netherlands</b>	NRC Handelsblad	80.5	2.3
<b>Finland</b>	Helsingin Sanomat	89.3	2.5
<b>Ireland</b>	Irish Independent	89.6	3.0
<b>UK</b>	Guardian	58.5	3.7
<b>Germany</b>	Frankfurter Allgemeine Ztg	88.4	4.4
<b>Sweden</b>	Dagens Nyheter	86.6	5.1
<b>Spain</b>	El Pais		6.3
<b>Austria</b>	Die Press	89.2	7.1
<b>Denmark</b>	Morgenavisen Jyllandsp.	82.6	7.6
<b>Greece</b>	Kathimerini	85.7	8.0
<b>Italy</b>	Il Corriere della Sera	68.8	9.0
<b>Portugal</b>	Publico	90.6	10.0
<b>France</b>	Le Monde	69.1	12.6

Source: European Election Study

\* This number represents the number of readers of the newspaper who said they saw the campaign in the newspaper.

Table 7 shows similar data for the quality press in each country. Only front pages of the listed newspapers were coded for the 2 weeks prior to the EP election. Therefore, the visibility measure also takes in the prominence of the campaign in these newspapers. The Flemish De Standard contained no front page stories that mentioned the election campaign. The French language La Libre Belgique also carried relatively few stories that mentioned that EP campaign. There is some overlap between countries that had low visibility on television news and those countries that had low visibility on the front page of the quality press – Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and the UK. Greece and Portugal have relatively higher levels of campaign visibility in newspapers as with the television news.



**Figure 1. European Actors and Domestic Actors on TV News**

Tables 6 and 7 point to the visibility of EP elections in the two weeks prior to the campaign by describing the number of stories in which the elections were mentioned. Another way to describe the visibility of the EU and the EP is to examine the prominence of EU and EP actors in the news two weeks prior to the election. Figure 1 compares the proportion of actors in television news who are associated with the EP or the EU and those who are strictly national political actors. MEP candidates are coded as EU/EP actors. Only in Italy does the number of EU/EP actors exceed that of national or domestic political actors.

### **The Effect of Media Coverage on Turnout: Media Mobilization during the 1999 European Parliamentary Campaign**

We examine two main aspects of campaign coverage that may influence turnout in elections – the visibility of the campaign and the tone of coverage. Visibility can lower the costs of obtaining information as well as cue voters about the likely importance of the election. More important elections will receive greater coverage. The tone of coverage can also play a role in mobilizing the electorate. The conventional wisdom has been that negative campaign ads and negative campaign tone demobilize the electorate. The most recent evidence is mixed, however, on this point, and it is by no means clear that negative advertising always demobilizes (see Lau et al. 1999 for a review of research in this area, and the articles by Ansolabehere, Iyengar and Simon, and Wattenberg and Briens in the same special APSR symposium). While we might presume negative news to turn off

citizens from politics in general and thus turn them away on election-day specifically, there are many reasons to expect the opposite effect. While negative news may increase cynicism, negative information tends to be more memorable and therefore better at increasing overall information levels. Kahn and Kenney (1999) demonstrate, for example, that it is only a particular type of negative campaign message, “mudslinging” that turns off voters.

In one of the earliest studies examining the effect of media exposure during a campaign and voting, Glaser (1965) examines whether television is more successful in raising the participation rates of less involved groups; he finds that television viewing and newspaper reading increase participation but he only finds scant evidence that newspapers are better at mobilizing the less involved than television. More recent research suggests that paying attention to the media during a campaign is a good predictor of interest in the campaign (Weaver 1996); however, there is also some evidence that the media can play a demobilizing role in specific elections (Southwell 1990). Others suggest that the media use reinforces engagement in the political system and liken the process to a virtuous circle (Norris 2000b). However, Pinkleton, Austin and Fortman (1998) note that negativity about the media may be an important conditioning factor in the relationship between media use and participation; the potential for media use to be a catalyst for participation is reduced when views of the media coverage are negative. While the relationship between media exposure and campaign interest may seem like a reciprocal or simultaneous relationship, Patterson (1980) suggests that the effect of media exposure on political interest is more powerful than the reverse relationship.

Most studies of media use and turnout tend to focus on the US case, though there is some evidence that tests whether media use influences electoral participation elsewhere. With respect to British elections, Norris et al. show that reading a particular newspaper, *The Sun*, demobilized voters in the 1997 British elections; 30 per cent did not vote while 22 per cent of those who reported reading no newspaper did not vote (1999, 156). When comparing readers of other newspaper to non-readers, they were about as likely to not vote (around 13 per cent). Additionally, they found no evidence that those paying attention to news coverage of the campaign became less likely to vote as the campaign progressed suggesting that negative news coverage does not demobilize (110). Aarts and Semetko (2003) draw on an extensive set of questions about media use employed in the 1998 Dutch National Election Study and find that television news viewing is a significant predictor of turnout or having voted in the last national election, when controlling for political interest, age, and education. A dual effects pattern emerged: those who regularly watch public service channel news were more likely to vote whereas those who watch commercial news were more likely not to vote.

Research on general measures of political engagement suggests that media coverage of politics tends to disengage the public. A number of studies contend that the way the media choose to cover politics contributes to growing cynicism and declining civic engagement (Capella and Jamieson 1997, Patterson 1993, Putnam 1995, for an exception see Uslaner 1998). Coverage of politics in both the U.S. and abroad appears to be increasingly dominated by a focus on political actors and scandal. For example, in

Sweden, politicians are portrayed more negatively today than in the 1950s especially in broadcast media (Miller and Listhaug 1999). The argument follows that this negative coverage may be reflected in an increasingly cynical electorate and may demobilize voters during an election.

However, our concern in this chapter is with how negative news coverage of the European Union influences turnout in elections. The research on negative advertising focuses on attacks on candidates while the research on negative tone focuses on negative coverage of candidates. Part of our research, in contrast, focuses on negative coverage of the European Union, a supra-national institution. Negative coverage may also work to make citizens cynical about a particular institution. Evidence from the U.S. suggests a strong correlation between news coverage of governmental institutions such as congress as cynicism about the institution (Hibbing and Thies-Morse, 1998). Others suggest that citizen distrust of government institutions results from the structural problems illuminated by the media, and not the negativity of the media itself (Norris 2000). Either way, the public cynicism resulting from negative coverage may discourage participation in elections that serve the purpose of selecting members to the institution.

There is some evidence that negative news contributes to negative attitudes about the EU. In one of the few studies of media effects on attitudes toward Europe, Norris (2000b) focuses on the effect of news coverage on attitude toward European integration and more specifically, the Euro. Norris (2000b) devotes a chapter to examining the impact of the extent and tone of coverage on political attitudes in the context of the European Union. Norris addresses the question of whether news about the EU is indeed overwhelmingly negative. Based on an analysis of Monitoring Euromedia reports, approximately 3.4 percent of the evening news was devoted to EU affairs although there was considerable cross-national variation. For example, during the period studied, Spanish and British television news devoted twice as much time to EU matters as other stations. Economic and monetary policy dominated the newspaper agenda while foreign policy (the Balkans) dominated television news about the EU. Overall, newspapers tended to have a Euroskeptic bias as did television news.

When looking at the effect of the tone of news on public opinion, Norris (2000b) finds that “the tone of news about the monetary union was strongly and significantly related to diffuse support for EU membership and to specific support for the euro” (p. 200). However, the extent to which media coverage influences attitudes about the EU is conditioned by the nature of elite consensus on European integration; in particular, where elite opinion is polarized and anti-EU forces are in the opposition there is a greater influence of television news coverage on opposition to further integration (Banducci, Lauf and Karp 2001). To the extent that those who are opposed to the EU tend to turnout at lower rates than those who support the EU, we might expect negative news to contribute to lower turnout. The Blumer volume (1983) on the first European parliamentary elections in 1979 show that both visibility and the partisan nature of the coverage influenced turnout. Greater coverage and more references to party actors in the campaign coverage increased turnout.

### **Who is mobilized? The Contingent Effects of Media**

While few studies examine the differential impact of media on mobilization, there are several theoretical arguments suggesting reasons why we would expect media effects to depend on political awareness, interest and political affiliations. The literature on media and public opinion formation suggests that the effect of media coverage on opinion may be conditioned by factors such as values and political awareness (Zaller 1992). The demobilizing effects of negative advertising are most evident among political independents (Ansolbehere and Iyengar 1995) and the least politically interested (Kahn and Kenney 1999). Additionally, agenda setting effects are most prevalent among the cognitively unsophisticated (Iyengar, Peters and Kinder 1982).

We might expect a similarly conditioned relationship between campaign coverage and turnout. A few studies have examined a conditional relationship between media and participation. Schoenbach and Lauf (2002), following on the work of Blumler (1983), suggest that the least interested citizens may be “trapped” by campaign coverage. From a historical perspective this “trap effect” may explain declining levels of engagement in politics. Prior to the 1980s, in most of Western Europe, citizens had little choice in terms of television viewing options. Exposure to news about the campaign and a subsequent boost in interest may have occurred because viewers were “trapped”, having nothing else to watch, into being exposed to campaign content (see Schoenbach and Lauf 2002). Today, even though viewers have a greater range of channels, less interested citizens may come across campaign coverage and become “trapped” especially when there is a greater volume of media coverage. This effect of being engaged in politics by “accidentally” viewing political content has also been referred to as “falling into news” (Newton 1999). Additional evidence of a “trap” or “falling in” effect has been demonstrated by Baum who suggests that soft news has the potential to bring foreign policy news to an inattentive public as an “incidental by-product of seeking entertainment” (2002, p. 91). The implication is that those who are interested will already be mobilized and, therefore, media mobilization effects will be greatest for those who are least interested.

A second set of studies examines the contingent effect of news frames on the probability of voting. In particular, strategic frames – where stories present the news in terms of games, war or focus on winning and losing (Capella and Jamieson 1997) – demobilize non-partisans and the cognitively least sophisticated (Valentino, Beckmann and Buhr 2001). Because the strategy based frame dominates campaign news coverage (Patterson 1993), this experimental evidence does not bode well for turnout. These results echo the findings regarding the differential impact of negative advertising on mobilization. The experimental evidence is suggestive; the contingent effects found by Valentino and his colleagues are not small (a self-described non-partisan exposed to a strategy based story was half as likely to vote as a partisan exposed to the same story) but the effects do not reach traditional levels of significance. Additionally, the difference in the mobilizing effects of issue versus strategic frames was not significant. Furthermore, the contingent effects of media coverage should be investigated outside experimental settings if possible.

## Expectations

This discussion of the contingent effects of media on turnout lead us to several hypotheses about the effect of media coverage in European elections. Theories about how media coverage reduces the costs of voting by making information readily available or by increasing awareness about the benefits of voting (possibly in a close race), lead us to expect that the volume of coverage will be positively related to the probability of voting. We have outlined some evidence that suggests that a negative tone to the coverage will demobilize and that strategic framing of EU news during the campaign may also reduce the likelihood of voting. Second order explanations of low turnout stress that EP elections are really national affairs and voters do not vote in them because they are unimportant. This tends to be reflected in media coverage of EP elections as well (Leroy and Siune 1994 and Kevin 1999). Therefore, we might also expect as the visibility of the EU increases relative to the visibility of national governments in campaign coverage, more voters will be mobilized to vote in EP elections.

Because previous studies have also examined the role of exposure to news during the campaign, we also examine the role of media use in European elections. Our expectations are that, because news use is tied to political interest, self-reported exposure to news should not contribute anything independent of political interest and the context of campaign coverage to mobilization.

There are several contingent effects that we test. First, we expect that the positive effect of the volume of coverage will depend on engagement in the political process as well as self-reported exposure to news. Based on Zaller's (1992) model of opinion change we might expect that those who are somewhat interested in politics may be the most effected by media coverage because they are both easier to mobilize and more likely to be exposed to the news media content. However, if viewers "fall into" or are "trapped" by campaign coverage, we might expect that it is the inattentive public that may be most effected by media coverage particularly. As well, strategic framing of news may reinforce disengagement among those who are least attentive.

Values and political predispositions may also condition the relationship between media effects and mobilization. Values may lead one to either accept or reject the communication message (Zaller 1992). For example, visible election news indicating the salience of the election may resonate with those citizens who are more favorable toward the EU and might reinforce the tendency to vote. Therefore, we would expect the volume of news coverage to enhance participation among those most favorable. On the other hand, the negative tone of the news may further reinforce negative attitudes about the EU and lead to a lower probability of voting.

## Data and Methods

It has been difficult to test these contingent effects outside of the laboratory because of the lack of available content data. We, however, use data about the visibility and tone of the campaign in television news on 21 different outlets across 14 EU member countries.<sup>1</sup> Except for the studies examining turnout in U.S. Senate elections, variations in media content are not examined across units in order to test the effects of variations in election coverage. The 1999 EP elections and the content data collected across 14 countries allows a unique opportunity to examine the impact of media content across many different contexts. The content data were collected during the last two weeks of the campaign in 14 of the 15 member countries and cover the major evening news broadcasts. This sample allows considerable variation in the volume and tone of coverage. We also draw on survey data that was collected in each of these 14 countries in the first Euro-barometer survey conducted after the 1999 EP election (EB52, October 1999).

From the content data, we measure the volume of campaign coverage as the percent of stories that mention the EP election campaign. We also compared this with an indicator of volume that measured the percent of time taken up with stories mentioning the EP campaign but this did not vary substantially from the aforementioned measure. From the content data, we also measured the tone of coverage toward the EU by taking the average tone per outlet (each story that explicitly evaluated the EU was coded as being positive, neutral/mixed or negative) and weighting by the number of stories making the evaluation. Therefore, higher numbers on the tone measure indicate a more positive tone toward the EU. The percentage of EU stories that used a strategic frame was also drawn from the content data. Finally, an indication of whether the campaign news coverage had an EU focus or a national focus was calculated by taking the percent difference in the number of EU actors and national actors quoted or referenced in stories about the EU. Each of these indicators was calculated for each outlet and accumulated across the two weeks of coverage prior to the election date. The range of values is given in the appendix.

Our next task is to determine to what content the respondents in the survey were exposed. The survey data asked respondents which news broadcasts they watched regularly. Therefore, in order to merge the content data with the survey data, we assigned values for the media variables from the outlets coded in the content analysis to the individuals who said they watched the particular outlet regularly. For example, a British respondent who said she watched the BBC 9 o'clock news regularly was assigned a value of 3.8 for visibility (3.8 percent of news stories in the two week period were about the campaign) and a respondent who said he watched ITV news regularly was assigned a value of 4.1.<sup>2</sup> In the cases where a respondent indicated that she watched both stations regularly, we assumed that one news broadcast was watched a day. Therefore, rather than summing the values for the indicators across the two outlets we took the average value between the

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<sup>1</sup> Luxembourg has been dropped from the analysis due to the lack of content data.

<sup>2</sup> We also tried weighting these content indicators by the number of days spent watching television news which gives the indicators more variation. This did not change the results.

two outlets. Of course, in some countries respondents may have watched a news broadcast that was not included in the content analysis. Individuals who do not watch at least one of the outlets coded were not included in the analysis. Dropping those who didn't watch one of the coded broadcasts only reduces the size of the sample by 515 respondents (out of a starting sample size of around 16,000).

The other indicators we use from the survey data are self-reported voting in the 1999 EP election, attitudes about the EU, attention to political news, media exposure and general socio-demographic information. The respondents evaluation of his or her country's membership in the EU serves as the indicator of EU attitudes. To measure the effects of individual media use on the probability of voting, we use how often the respondent watches television news and reads a newspaper. We have also controlled for the effects of other types of mobilization efforts. Specifically, we control for the effects of party mobilization on the probability of voting. In the multivariate models, we also control for the effects of electoral rules such as weekend voting, compulsory voting and we also control for whether a concurrent national or local election was held at the time of the EP election.

### **Results of Media Effects Analysis**

Table 8 displays the contingent effects of attention to politics on media mobilization in the 1999 EP elections. The first variable, political interest, shows that the more visible the campaign on television news, the more likely one is to vote overall. However, the strongest effects appear to be for those who paid little attention political news; less than 40 percent of those with low interest reported voting when campaign visibility was low compared with nearly 55 percent when campaign visibility was high. The effects of campaign visibility on those paying 'some' and 'a lot' of attention to political news, in other words those with more political interest, was also in the same direction, with about eight percentage points difference between the low and high visibility campaigns. In sum, the more visible the campaign in television news, the more people went to the polls to vote, though the extent of the effect varied by level of political interest. Among those with little interest in the campaign, the difference in turnout could be up to fifteen percentage points between low and high visibility campaigns.



**Table 8: The Contingent Effects of Media Mobilization on Turnout in EP Elections: The Effect of Political Interest**

		% Reported Voting		
		<u>Visibility of Campaign In news</u>		
How much attention to political news		Low	Medium	High
		Little	39.8	38.2
	Some	53.3	62.8	61.7
	A lot	70.5	75.7	78.7
		<u>Tone Toward EU During Campaign</u>		
		Negative	Neutral	Positive
	Little	43.3	39.0	38.7
	Some	54.4	59.1	61.5
	A lot	71.3	72.9	80.2

Source: Eurobarometer 52 and European Election Study Content Analysis.

Tone toward the EU in campaign news is a second measure of campaign coverage. This appears to have been unimportant for those with low attention to political news, but important for those with higher levels of interest. Those who indicate they pay a lot of attention to political news were more likely to vote when tone toward the EU in the news coverage was positive, and less likely to vote when it was negative. The reverse is the case for those who paid little attention to political news, though the gap between the percentage voting under negative and positive tone conditions was considerably smaller than for those who paid more attention to news. As with the studies of negative campaigns, our results give some suggestion that those who are less politically engaged tend to be demobilized in European elections by negative news.

In Table 9, we examine how attitudes toward the EU condition the effect of media content on reported voting in EU elections. An initial examination of these tables revealed that there was little difference in the patterns for those who thought EU membership was a “bad thing” and those who thought it was neither good nor bad. Therefore, we have collapsed evaluations of EU membership into the two categories of “bad/neutral” and “good thing” so that the interpretation is easier. As for the volume of campaign coverage, there is some evidence that those who are least disposed toward the EU are more mobilized by the volume of coverage than those who think it is a good thing. We might expect that those who supported the EU would be less resistant to the volume and content of messages about the EU. We might also expect media coverage to reinforce pre-existing attitudes about EU membership. As such, media coverage would tend to

reinforce the probability that those favorable toward the EU are more likely to vote and those opposed are less likely to vote.

The first part of Table 9 shows that reported turnout among those opposed to EU membership increased 14 percent when visibility increased from low to high, but reported voting increased only 9 percent among those who support EU membership. The slightly stronger effect of campaign visibility for those opposed to the EU suggests a greater mobilizing effect among this group. However, looking at the tone of coverage, more positive coverage does more to mobilize EU supporters but has no effect on those who are neutral or opposed to EU membership. As the results show, among those who view EU membership favorably, exposure to positive coverage, as opposed to negative coverage, increases reported turnout by over 12 percent. There is no increase among those opposed to the EU.

**Table 9: The Contingent Effects of Media Mobilization: The Effect of EU Attitudes**

		% Reported Voting		
		<u>Visibility of Campaign In news</u>		
Country's membership in the EU is?		Low	Medium	High
		Bad/Neutral	44.2	49.7
	Good	66.2	72.3	73.3
		<u>Tone Toward EU During Campaign</u>		
		Negative	Neutral	Positive
	Bad/Neutral	48.4	47.6	47.8
	Good	66.1	68.1	78.7

Source: Eurobarometer 52 and European Election Study Content Analysis.

The prominence of the strategic frame shows a slight mobilization effect for those who think EU membership is a good thing; as the visibility of the frame increases, turnout also increases. However, the difference in reported turnout is only slight. Among those opposed or neutral about EU membership, the greatest mobilization effect occurred when the strategic frame was of medium visibility. There is a slight demobilizing effect among this group when the use of the strategic frame is at its highest level. There is a clear pattern of mobilizing effect of EU focus in campaign coverage for those who are not favorable toward EU membership; reported turnout is over 14 percent higher when coverage was the most EU focus as compared to the least EU focus. There is also a mobilizing effect among those who think membership is a good thing, but the increase in reported turnout is not as great.

These initial results do suggest that attention to politics and attitudes toward the EU condition the effects of media coverage on participation in EU elections. The results from this initial analysis do indicate that the effects of volume of coverage and the tone of coverage on turnout are particularly affected by attention to politics and attitudes toward the EU. In particular, the results for tone of coverage indicate that positive EU coverage mobilizes those who are interested whereas negative news mobilizes those who are uninterested. However, visibility has a greater mobilization effect than tone on those who pay the least attention. The visibility of the campaign also mobilizes but this effect tends to be greater on those who are opposed to the EU; contrary to expectations, the media coverage does not appear to reinforce the likelihood of not voting. On the other hand, more positive coverage does little to bring those to the polls who are opposed to the EU.

In order to control for other individual and contextual factors that mobilize and facilitate voting in European parliamentary elections, we estimate separate models first testing overall media effects and then testing for the contingent effects displayed in Tables 8 and 9. In addition to the variables used in Tables 8 and 9, we control for electoral rules that facilitate voting (weekend voting, concurrent local or national election at the same time as EP election and compulsory voting) and individual factors that may be related to turnout (age, education and gender). Also, individual level indicators of news media use (self-reported days watching TV news and reading a newspaper) have been included in the model.

A model testing for the overall effects of media coverage on turnout is displayed in Table 10. The model in Table 10 also includes an interaction between the amount of coverage and the tone of coverage. From a preliminary analysis of the data, it appeared that the most visible campaign coverage tended to be in countries where a euro-skeptic party was viable in national elections. Given the tendency of the news media to focus on conflict, we might expect that if elite opinion is divided on the issue of EU integration and there is a vocal anti-EU party, then coverage of European elections would be greater. The tone of coverage might also become more negative if anti-EU positions are being covered during the campaign. This suggests that the effect of the tone of coverage may differ depending on the visibility of the campaign.

The results suggest that both campaign visibility and the tone of coverage are important mobilizing forces. As expected, the more visible the campaign is, the greater likelihood of voting. Unexpectedly, the main effects for tone of coverage shows that more positive coverage tends to demobilize voters. If we consider that negative news is more memorable and, thus, more likely to mobilize, the direction of the effect for tone of coverage is to be expected. Negative news may also be better at making potential voters aware of risky policies or positions that parties take. However, because we include the interaction between tone and visibility in the model and it is a significant effect, we must take into account the interactive effects when considering the overall effects of tone and visibility. The interaction between tone and visibility suggests that as the campaign becomes more visible, the negative effects of positive tone are weakened. On the other hand, the positive effects of visibility become stronger as tone becomes more positive. Because the interaction term is the product of two interval measures, we have plotted the predicted effects of this interactive effect in Figure 2 to ease interpretation. In order to calculate the predicted value, we set the values for the variables not in the figures to their means or modes. In order to calculate the different lines, we used the actual range for the volume of coverage and tone (see Appendix). Figure 2 shows that when the campaign is least visible, positive tone has an overall negative effect on the probability of voting, but when the campaign is most visible, more positive tone mobilizes participation. Conversely, negative tone tends to demobilize the more visible as the overall campaign coverage becomes most visible. The bottom of the figure shows the effect of visibility contingent upon the tone of coverage. When evaluations of EU membership are most negative, the visibility of coverage demobilizes the electorate. Therefore, we see evidence that some negativity in EU election coverage can mobilize when coverage is low or

moderate but that extremely visible coverage coupled with a negative tone can demobilize.

While tone and visibility are significant effects in the model, the extent to which campaign coverage focuses on the EU or frames EU news strategically does not appear to play a role in mobilizing or demobilizing the electorate in EP elections. Likewise, days spent viewing television news, once attention to political news and television news content are held constant, does not further mobilize citizens. On the other hand, there is some evidence that reading newspapers can further mobilize although we have no measure of newspaper content to explore this further. Both attitudes toward the EU and electoral rules also play an additional role of mobilizing voters.

**Table 10: Probability of Voting in EP Elections: Impact of Media Coverage**

	Coef.	robust s.e.	
Volume of Coverage	0.10	0.02	**
Tone of Coverage	-0.16	0.10	
Tone*Volume	0.02	0.01	*
Days TV News Viewing	0.07	0.07	
Days Read Newspaper	0.08	0.04	
EU Membership Good Thing	1.05	0.16	**
Attention to Political News	1.14	0.06	**
Age	0.01	0.00	**
Female	0.03	0.05	
Education	0.03	0.06	
Compulsory	1.10	0.14	**
Weekend Voting	0.46	0.24	<sup>a</sup>
Concurrent Election	0.96	0.15	**
Contacted by Party during campaign	0.64	0.14	**
Constant	-3.35	0.32	**
% Correctly Classified	60.3		

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , <sup>a</sup>  $p = .055$

N= 10,426

pseudo  $R^2 = .12$

We also tested all of the contingent effects displayed in Tables 8 and 9. We estimated eight separate models testing interactions between attention to political news and attitudes toward EU membership and each of the four indicators of media content. Because we did not assume that the effect of the media content increased linearly as attitudes became more positive or political interest increased, we tested the interactions using dummy variable representing the categories of EU attitudes (EU membership is a good thing versus EU membership is a bad thing) and political interest (low attention to

political news versus high attention to political news). The product of the dummy variables and the media content indicators were then added to the models to test for interaction effects. As such, the residual category are those with “middle” levels of attention or who are neutral about EU membership and the main effects of the media indicator represent the effect of the media content for those in the middle categories.

Only one interaction was significant – the effects of campaign visibility tend to depend on how much attention one pays to political news. We have not reported the results of the eight separate models and only report the significant interaction effect in Table 10. The results for the interaction between attention to politics and visibility indicate that the effects of media content are greatest when attention to political news is lowest. The effects are illustrated in Figure 2 when facilitation efforts are low and when they are high. Low facilitation conditions are when the EP election is held during the week, when no other election is held concurrently and when voting is not compulsory. High facilitation conditions indicate when these factors are present. Both figures illustrate the stronger effects of campaign visibility for those who pay little attention. Of course, those paying little attention are always less likely to vote but as the campaign becomes more visible, this group of individuals show a greater increase in probability of voting across the range of the visibility of the campaign than those who pay a lot of attention and are exposed to the same amount of news. The difference between the low and high facilitation conditions demonstrates that when voting is facilitated by electoral rules and voting tends to be higher, there is less room for the effects of media mobilization. The figures also show that these differences, while statistically significant, are not large.

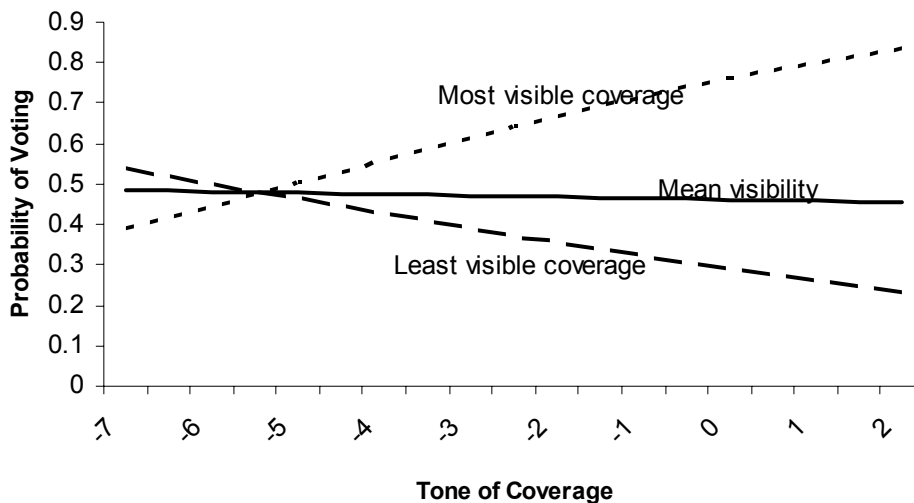


Figure 2. European Parliamentary Election Campaign Coverage: Visibility, Tone and the Probability of Voting

**Table 4: Probability of Voting in EP Elections: Attention to Politics and the Contingent Effects of Campaign Visibility**

	coef.	robust s.e.	
Volume of Coverage	0.02	0.01	**
Tone of Coverage	0.01	0.01	
	-		
Days TV News Viewing	0.04	0.06	
Days Read Newspaper	0.08	0.05	
EU Membership Good Thing	1.07	0.16	**
Age	0.01	0.00	**
Female	0.03	0.05	
Education	0.04	0.06	
Compulsory	1.17	0.13	**
Weekend Voting	0.45	0.27	
Concurrent Election	0.92	0.14	**
	-		
Low Attention to Politics	0.81	0.12	**
High Attention to Politics	0.74	0.07	**
Volume*Low Attention	0.04	0.01	**
	-		
Volume*High Attention	0.02	0.01	**
Contacted by Party during Campaign	0.64	0.14	**
	-		
Constant	2.17	0.27	**
% Correctly Classified	60.6		

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , a  $p = .052$

N= 10,426

pseudo  $R^2 = .12$

## Discussion

In this paper we were primarily concerned with describing the media systems in the EU member states and the structural changes in these systems that have taken place since the first EP election in 1979. We see that viewers have more choices in terms of media outlets and this may alter the amount of information they receive about politics in general and the EU and EP elections specifically. Changes in the media environment are also

related to changes in the relationship between citizens and the traditional media. Citizens are watching less public television and reading fewer newspapers which lowers the probability of being exposed to political information. In the first EP election, more people would have been likely to see the one or two public channels that were carrying news coverage of the election. In the most recent election, the diversity of commercial stations has led to a fragmented audience, certainly in respect to political information.

We were also interested in establishing the extent to which campaign visibility in the news, and the tone of coverage about EU actors, actually matters when it comes to an individual's decision to vote in the 1999 EU parliamentary elections, an election in which turnout reached all time lows in many countries. We were also interested in understanding how the impact of the decisions taken by news people to make the campaign visible in the main evening television news, to report campaign activities in a favorable or unfavorable manner, to frame election news strategically, and to focus stories on the EU, were affected by whether an individual paid a lot or a little attention to news, and approved or did not approve of the EU. Previous research on turnout in EU elections has emphasized contextual influences such as compulsory and Sunday voting, as well as support for the EU, as important variables for predicting turnout but little has been said about the relative influence of these variables in comparison with campaign news variables and media use variables in the context of EU elections.

Our multivariate analysis reveals that campaign visibility and the tone of coverage are important mobilizing forces, but that strategic framing and EU focus are not important for mobilization when all other possible influences are controlled for. We also find that the effect of visibility and tone of coverage are dependent upon one another. Overall, the main effects of tone suggest that positive rather than negative news demobilizes the electorate. However, in the case of EP elections, when the campaigns are highly visible, negative news can demobilize citizens. Many pages in scholarly journals have been spent decrying the demobilizing effects of negative campaigns in US elections. Our findings suggest that highly visible campaigns where the tone toward a particular institution tends to be negative can have a demobilizing influence. Our results are contrary to some of the recent evidence about the mobilizing effects of negative advertisements and campaigns, but do square with the most recent findings of Lau and Pomper (2001) who find in an examination of 143 U.S. Senate elections that moderate levels of negativity mobilize electorates but extremely high levels of negativity can demobilize.

With respect to the interaction between an individual's attention to politics and the visibility of the campaign on television news, the results indicate that the effects of media content are greatest when attention to political news is lowest. Irrespective of whether or not other contextual conditions facilitated participation, campaign visibility displayed stronger effects on those who pay little attention. Those who paid little attention are always less likely to vote, but as the campaign becomes more visible on the main evening television news, this group of individuals show a greater increase in probability of voting across the range of the visibility of the campaign in comparison with those who pay a lot of attention and are exposed to the same amount of news. Therefore, our results suggest that the least interested are "falling into" campaign engagement and mobilization.





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## Appendix: Description of Variables

### Country Level

Weekend voting (1=yes, 0 = no), compulsory voting (1=yes, 0=no) and concurrent elections (1=yes, 0 = no).

### Outlet Level Source: 1999 European Election Study, Television News Coverage

In the survey, respondents were asked to identify which news programs they watched regularly. Based on the answers given, the media content measures for the outlet indicated were merged with the individual survey data.

**Volume of Coverage:** Percent of all news stories that mention the EP election (range: .4 to 20.75).

**Tone of Coverage:** If country's membership in the EU was evaluated, the tone of the evaluation was coded as being favorable (+1), neutral (0) or unfavorable (1). The sum of the evaluations is used as the indicator of tone of coverage (range – 7 to 2)..

**EU Focus of Coverage:** The political actors in each EP election news story were coded and identified as either EU or national actors (or other). The percent of EU actors of the total EU and national actors is used as the indicator of EU focus (range: 0 to .94).

**Use of Strategic Framing:** A series of five questions regarding the appearance of factors that characterize strategic framing were asked about each story. If the story used one of these characteristics was coded as using a strategic frame. The number of stories using the strategic frame is used as the indicator (range: 0 to 73).

### Individual Level Source: EB52

**Days TV News Viewing, Days Read Newspaper:** About how often do you watch the news on television? Read the news in daily papers? 0'Never' .25'Less Often' .5'Once or twice a week' .75'Several times a week' 1'Everyday'

**EU Membership Good Thing:** Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY'S) membership of the European Union is ...? 0'Bad thing' .5'Neutral' 1'Good thing''.

**Attention to Political News:** In general, do you pay attention to news about each of the following? POLITICS? 0'No attention at all' .5'A little attention' 1'A lot of attention'

**Contacted by Party During Campaign:** At the European election, last June, parties and candidates campaigned for votes. For each of the following, please tell me whether their campaigns came to your attention in that way, or not? - PARTY WORKERS CALLED TO YOUR HOME TO ASK FOR VOTES 0'No' 1'Yes''

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i See Blumler (1983) and more recently there is Leroy and Siune (1994) and Norris (2000). A report is being completed on European Parliament coverage by the European Institute for the Media (see Deirdre 1999). A few manuscripts have also resulted from this project (Robertson 2000 and Berganza).

ii While only one news broadcast was coded per day, we assume that similar news coverage occurred on the stations other news broadcasts. This assumption becomes important when merging the content data with the survey data. In some countries, rather than asking which news broadcast a respondent regularly watched, only the station was asked. For example, in Greece whether a respondent watch Mega news, ET1 news and/or Antenna news is recorded while the 19:55 broadcast on Antenna and the 20:00 broadcast on Mega is coded in the content analysis.