The Mediatization of Second-Order Elections and Party Launches: UK Television News Reporting of the 2014 European Union Campaign

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Using the United Kingdom as a case study to explore the degree to which news about a second-order election is mediatized, this comparative content analysis examines television news coverage of the 2014 European Union elections. Evidence of mediatization was stronger on the most commercially driven bulletins, with an overwhelming emphasis on the game frame and a more interpretive approach than the most public service–orientated broadcaster (the BBC). However, qualitative analysis revealed that the BBC pursued a more mediatized form of journalism. Developing a close textual analysis of how broadcasters reported party campaign launches—representing what we call key "mediatized moments"—we argue that a more qualitative approach to assessing media and political logics can complement comparative quantitative studies about mediatized politics.

Keywords: second-order elections, mediatization, media systems, content analysis

Interpreting the mediatization of politics has become a popular scholarly pursuit in recent years. Since Strömbäck's "Four Phases of Mediatization" (2008) was published, it has accumulated more than 350 citations, and empirical research applying and extending this concept has flourished. Moreover, an edited book—Esser and Strömbäck's *Mediatization of Politics* (2014)—has advanced the concept beyond specialized journals to a wider audience, with leading scholars considering how the mediatization of politics can be applied in different contexts. Although the book's focus was on different dimensions of mediatization—from journalistic framing to agenda setting—empirically the 12 chapters were informed by either political coverage generally or presidential or general elections. The European Union (EU) elections, however, were not considered. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of articles in specialized journalism, communication, or politics journals refer to presidential or general elections to explore the mediatization of politics.

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Needless to say, in advanced Western democracies elections and their respective campaigns are subject to considerable variation. Political scientists, for example, differentiate between elections by labeling them either first- or second-order (Reif & Schmitt, 1980). The status of first-order is assigned to presidential and general elections, because citizens interpret both as being more significant and influential than second-order polls, which relate to EU or local elections. This perception is reflected by levels of citizen participation; in most European countries, for example, first-order elections attract significantly more electoral interest than second-order events.

Research examining the reporting of EU campaigns has discovered first-order elections typically attract more coverage (Maier, Strömbäck, & Kaid, 2011). Of course, it is difficult to assess whether low media prominence is a symptom of, or a causal factor in, the lower turnout generally associated with second-order elections. However, as cross-national studies have identified, differences exist in the degree to which other EU countries report on pan-European elections (Schuck et al., 2013). Public attitudes such as Euroskepticism (where citizens disapprove of EU institutions) have been advanced as a possible explanation for the comparative level of coverage between nations (Maier et al., 2011). Further still, the political culture of different countries and the degree to which political parties are integrationist or nationalist can influence coverage of the EU elections. Media systems can also influence the volume and agenda of EU coverage, such as how far countries rely on commercially orientated media or news produced by public-service broadcasters.

In this study, we interpret the mediatization of political news in UK national television news coverage of the 2014 EU elections. Because the mediatization of politics has largely been predicated on analysis during first-order elections, our exploratory content analysis is designed to explore how far coverage of a second-order election is mediatized. We also consider the mediatization of politics in a more qualitative way by focusing on the journalistic treatment of party political campaign launches. The United Kingdom provides an interesting case study to explore how the media report a second-order election. On the one hand, it is considered one of the most Euroskeptic countries, with political parties appearing increasingly hostile to greater political integration and a largely anti-EU national newspaper market.[1] On the other hand, UK broadcasting is closely regulated by public-service values and includes the BBC, considered to be one of the most impartial and independent suppliers of news and political programming. However, there are differences in the degree to which public-service regulation shapes competing television news bulletins. Our examination of BBC, ITV, Channel 4, and Channel 5 bulletins can therefore deliver a comparative assessment of how far political news is mediatized between broadcasters with different public-service obligations in second-order elections.

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[1] Evidence of Britain's Euroskepticism can be found at http://yougov.co.uk/news/2014/05/12/swing-eurosceptic-right/ and at
http://www.ippr.org/assets/media/images/media/files/publication/2011/10/euroscepticism-in-the-uk_Oct2011_8138.pdf.

The Mediatization of Politics and Second-Order Elections

Strömbäck's "Four Phases of Mediatization" (2008) has become the dominant framework for interpreting the systemic impact of media in politics. Put briefly, the first phase is fulfilled when the media represent the dominant source of information, and a second phase is reached when the media secure independence from political institutions. It is generally agreed that most advanced Western democracies meet both of these criteria. Phase three, meanwhile, considers how far the content of political news is determined by media or political actors, and the final phase asks how far politics—both in terms of institutions and politicians—is driven by media influence.

The focus of our study is on phase three—considering how far television news during the 2014 EU campaign coverage was shaped by political parties and politicians compared to how far the media set the agenda. A key measure to interpret mediatization is the way that politics is framed. A political logic, for example, represents news about party political policies and issues (Esser, 2013). Media logic, by contrast, pursues news about the strategic game of politics, such as stories about party leadership, the private lives of politicians, the conflict within and between parties, and opinion polls or campaign strategies.

Although the selection of campaign news can indicate the mediatization of election reporting, *how* television journalists report can also demonstrate how actively they interpret coverage. So, for example, a longitudinal study examining Danish television news coverage of elections (1994–2007) found that journalists or media pundits "appearing as commentators" (Hoppman & Strömbäck, 2010, p. 954) had increased, representing a departure from more fact-based journalism toward a more interpretative style. Of course, this has been a long-standing critique of reporting U.S. presidential elections, where—it has been observed—journalists have become more analytical and judgmental in their campaign coverage (Patterson, 2002). But there are important cross-national differences that affect the degree to which opinion and fact can morph into interpretation. Strömbäck and Dimitrova (2011), for example, show the visibility of journalists in U.S. television news election reporting was far greater than in Swedish coverage. In particular, U.S. journalists reported live-to-camera in 77% of stories—privileging their perspectives over politicians—compared to just 13% in Sweden. Because Swedish broadcasting was bound by impartiality requirements and operated within public-service guidelines, U.S. journalists had greater freedom to opine and interpret the political world. In the United Kingdom—the object of our study—all broadcasters must abide by strict impartiality requirements. Although this might prevent explicit bias in coverage, it does not necessarily prevent journalists from interpreting political news (Cushion & Thomas, 2013).

Managing the proportion of airtime granted to politicians and political parties is widely seen as the most robust way to ensure balance and impartiality in television coverage during elections. After all, the more time politicians are given to voice their opinions on-screen—widely described as "sound bites"—the less their message is mediated to potential voters. Consequently, examining the length and total airtime politicians speak on camera is a key measure in mediatization studies; it can reveal how far a political logic (conveying party messages) informs coverage compared to the editorial line pursued by journalists (following a media logic). So, for example, whereas the average length of sound bites on U.S. network news during the presidential elections was 43 seconds in 1968, by 1988 it had dropped to just 9

seconds (Hallin, 1992). In the 2000s, studies continue to show the length of sound bites remains under 10 seconds during presidential elections (Farnsworth & Lichter, 2011). Of course, increasingly sophisticated technology allows journalists to quickly edit sources into packages. However, it also means journalists have become more interventionist in their approach, either by juxtaposing briefer sound bites or by using new technology to appear on-screen in live formats. Moreover, as television news has become generally more visual, another variable used to assess mediatization is what Bucy and Grabe (2007) label "image bites," where politicians appear on-screen but are not necessarily heard. Using this convention, journalistic logic is seen to trump political logic, representing a mediatization of election reporting (Esser, 2008).

As previously acknowledged, however, many of the core trends in mediatization identified so far (the framing of politics, the degree of journalistic interpretation, the verbal and visual sourcing of politicians) have largely been predicated on the analysis of first-order elections such as presidential or general elections. Of course, the razzmatazz surrounding U.S. presidential campaigns and the resources invested in them far exceed the sums and attention associated with second-order elections.

As a consequence, a low-key election campaign might garner less media attention toward party political spin tactics and news management, opinion polls, or horse-race reporting along with other characteristics of the strategic game frame instead focusing on policy deliberations. In addition, politicians might have increased opportunities to contribute more to news coverage, elevating their role and voice. Alternatively, because second-order elections are considered to be of lower significance than first-order campaigns, conceivably broadcasters with different public service obligations and market pressures could downsize coverage or focus on newsworthy aspects of the coverage that prioritize the strategic game frame. Because the mediatization of politics is typically associated with more market-driven media (Esser, 2013), our comparative study of television news bulletins operating under varying degrees of commercial influence and lighter regulation can reveal the extent to which public-service broadcasters can resist the temptation to report mediatized politics.

Previous cross-national studies of EU election reporting reveal that it was given lower editorial priority among commercial television broadcasters compared to their public-service counterparts (de Vreese, Banducci, Semetko, & Boomgaarden, 2006). Indeed, a comparative study of the 2002 general election and the 2004 EU election in Swedish media concluded not only that the latter was given second-order treatment but that there was a greater emphasis on the game frame than on more substantive issues both in coverage generally and on public-service media in particular (Strömbäck & Nord, 2008). However, although cross-national or domestic studies have explored the reporting of EU election campaigns (see Schuck et al., 2013, for example), few campaigns have been interpreted through a mediatization framework (a notable exceptions is Strömbäck et al., 2011). Moreover, according to Van Noije, Kleinnijenhuis, and Oegema, understanding mediatization in an EU context "is largely limited to the realm of theoretical speculation" (2008, p. 455). In short, the degree to which UK television news is mediatized during a second-order election—the 2014 EU campaign—could be distinctive from the prevailing literature focused on first-order elections.

Our study is designed to put second-order elections under the mediatized spotlight, interpreting how the 2014 EU elections were reported by UK evening bulletins operating under different public-service

and commercial obligations. Rather than relying exclusively on quantitative indicators to interpret the degree of mediatization in election coverage (as most studies generally do), we offer a brief qualitative case study to examine the tug-of-war between political and media logics.

Method and Sample: Developing a Comparative
EU Election Study of Public-Commercial TV News

To develop a comparative assessment of the degree to which political news was mediatized during the 2014 EU elections in the United Kingdom, we draw on an exploratory content analysis of campaign coverage on early-evening television news bulletins. Our approach does not rigidly test hypotheses, but instead systematically explores the nature of second-order election coverage using standard measures and a more qualitative approach. We examined the following UK television news programs: Channel 5 at 5:00 p.m., BBC at 6:00 p.m., ITV at 6:30 p.m., and Channel 4 at 7:00 p.m. Although online and social media have increased their reach in recent years, television news in the United Kingdom remains overwhelmingly the most popular source of information (Ofcom, 2014) and the most trusted format (Cushion, 2011).

The BBC is a public-service broadcaster, and ITV, Channel 4, and Channel 5 are commercial public-service broadcasters with specific license agreements that, to varying degrees, oblige them to cover national and international affairs with peak-time bulletins (including the early-evening slot). The BBC holds the most public-service broadcasting responsibilities and is subject to close regulatory scrutiny by the BBC Trust. Ofcom is the commercial regulator and operates more of a light touch approach, but it still expects public-service obligations to be fulfilled. ITV and Channel 5 are shareholder-owned; Channel 4 remains state owned, but its regulatory conditions state that it should be distinctive, innovative, and experimental. Its news provision reflects this remit, such as its extended hour-long bulletin (the others are between 20 and 25 minutes long and have both early-evening and later formats). Channel 4 is considered the most highbrow of the commercial channels, focusing on international affairs and more serious news topics. Although ITV's regulatory requirements have reduced in recent years, Channel 5 is a relatively new channel that launched in 1997 and has perhaps had the most editorial freedom, pursuing a mostly tabloid agenda.

Our selection of these four broadcasters can be interpreted as representing a sliding scale of public–commercial responsibilities; the BBC is regulated most by public-service obligations, followed by Channel 4 and its flagship hour-long news bulletin. ITV news attracts the most viewers after the BBC and is more market orientated than Channel 4 but is arguably subject to closer scrutiny than Channel 5's bulletins, which have evolved with less editorial oversight than these other broadcasters. Channel 5 is the least-watched bulletin—its audience is composed of the lowest socioeconomic demographic—but Ofcom still considers it to be an important part of the news mix. It was beyond the scope of the study to include Sky News, which—as an entirely commercially driven channel—could have been compared with output produced by public-service broadcasters.

The time frame for our study was determined by the start of election campaigning, and subsequently we monitored coverage for five weeks prior to Election Day. Although the election was

mentioned, substantive stories only began appearing around four weeks before the poll, when the main political parties launched their campaigns. Our specific time frame ran from April 22 to May 22, 2014, and our unit of analysis was every election-related news item on the early-evening UK national bulletins, including references to local or general elections.

The term *news item* does not refer to a single *story* about an EU issue or campaign, but rather the *conventions* used to report them. Based on a previous study (Cushion & Thomas, 2013), we identified a number of different conventions used to convey news stories. First, in "anchor packages," an anchor presents a stand-alone item (typically lasting no longer than 30 seconds). In "edited packages," journalists narrate over an edited report, generally supported by visual images and on-screen sources. Third, "live two-ways" describe the interaction between reporters and anchors, or a reporter live-talking into a camera outside the studio. Next, a "studio discussion" refers to the interaction between the anchor with journalists or other invited guests. Rather than interpreting news by stories, analysis by news item allows a more detailed analysis of how journalists communicate campaign coverage and can thus be used to measure the mediatization of election reporting. So, for example, while edited packages typically rely on sources, live two-ways promote journalist voices and may include a greater degree of interpretation. Of course, reporters can interpret coverage within an edited package, such as in a final piece to camera. But UK political editors, such as the BBC's Nick Robinson consider the edited package convention to be more factual and descriptive than interpretive (Robinson, 2012).

Our units of measurement were developed to interpret the degree of mediatization in election news. This included examining the volume and length of different news items, the type of political news (primarily policy or game type), and the sources used to inform coverage, including sound bites and image bites. A greater degree of mediatization would be evidenced, for example, if coverage was largely conveyed by journalist-centered items or framed by an interest in the game frame, a preponderance of image bites, or the limited opportunities for political sound bites. Taken together, these are relatively well-established indicators of mediatization. Although previous mediatization of politics studies have quantified whether news is primarily interpretive or descriptive (Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2011), in our pilot study we found it difficult to reliably decide whether a whole item fell clearly into one of these categories. For example, lengthy edited packages had both factual aspects (juxtaposing policy positions) and interpretive elements (final piece to camera). To address this difficulty, our analysis considers some edited packages in more qualitative analysis. However, since live two-ways tend to be more interpretive than other types of news items (Robinson, 2012), we use this as a comparative measure in the study.

Because the EU campaign takes place in the context of ongoing news about national and local politics (including the council elections held on the same day), our unit of analysis was not exclusively related to EU elections. Accordingly, we coded whether an item was primarily about the EU, local, or national politics, but we counted all election news in our study, because we considered that, to some degree, it was connected to the EU elections since it was broadcast during the campaign period. If the EU campaign was diluted by other elections, we interpreted this as a reduction in its political logic, representing a greater degree of mediatization. In total, 139 election news items were examined. Using Cohen's kappa (κ) to test the reliability of our data, over 10% of the sample was recoded by a second

coder, and all variables fell into the "substantial" or "almost perfect agreement" categories (Landis & Koch, 1977).[2]

Rather than relying on quantitative measures alone, the final part of our analysis examines how EU election party campaign launches were reported across UK television news bulletins. In our view, election campaign launches represent important "mediatized moments," a time to examine whether a political or media logic was pursued by broadcasters. After all, campaign launches are moments when parties can explain their policy agendas far ahead of Election Day. By comparing the style, language, and balance of how the campaign launches were portrayed—or even omitted—this qualitative approach provides a close textual examination of the mediatization of election news between broadcasters. Our overall research question asks:

RQ: *To what degree was news about the 2014 EU elections mediatized by different television news bulletins operating under different public-service obligations and market pressures?*

Putting Second-Order Elections Under a Mediatized Spotlight

We found that bulletins with the most public service obligations—BBC and Channel 4—dedicated more airtime to the elections than the more commercially oriented broadcasters. As shown in Table 1, Channel 4 spent the most time reporting the elections, but because its bulletin was more than double the length of the BBC's evening broadcast, coverage appears roughly equal in relative terms.

Table 1. Number of News Items and Total Time Spent
Reporting the 2014 Elections on UK Television News.

	BBC	ITV	CH4	CH5
Number of news items	39	31	52	17
Election airtime	53 min 18 sec	33 min 56 sec	128 min 40 sec	18 min 12 sec

The least regulated broadcaster, Channel 5, aired the least amount of news about the election, approximately half the time allocated to it by ITV. The commercial broadcaster coverage of the elections featured more references to local and other election campaigns. So, for example, 61% of BBC items were overwhelmingly about the EU election; ITV (54.9%), Channel 5 (52.3%), and Channel 4 (37.5%) supplied less-focused coverage and diluted it with news about other campaigns. In other words, there was less sustained attention paid to the EU election on the more market-driven broadcasters.

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[2] More specifically, intercoder reliability scores for each variable were: 90.4% for the type of news item (election news or not), 91.8% for game or policy, 90.4% for the six news conventions, 97.9% for sources, 93.1% for sound bites, and 100% for image bites.

The most striking comparative difference between broadcasters was in the framing of election news. As Table 2 reveals, whereas more than three-quarters of BBC coverage was policy related (78.3%), most election reporting on the commercial bulletins was shaped by the game frame. In particular, ITV coverage was predominantly framed by a game-type focus (92.4%), leaving little time to substantively address policy issues.

Table 2. Time and Percentage of Time Devoted to the Strategic Game Frame and Policy Frame in Reporting the 2014 Elections on UK Television News.

	BBC	ITV	Channel 4	Channel 5	Total
Strategic game frame	11 min 35 sec	31 min 22 sec	90 min 7 sec	10 min 2 sec	143 min 6 sec
	21.7%	92.4%	70.0%	55.1%	61.1%
Policy frame	41 min 43 sec	2 min 34 sec	38 min 33 sec	8 min 12 sec	91 min 0 sec
	78.3%	7.6%	30.0%	44.9%	38.9%

In further isolating the game frame, we found a strong focus (in the case of the two most commercially driven bulletins ITV and Channel 5) on what has long been defined as "horse race" coverage (Aalberg et al., 2012). These include references to opinion polls, speculation about a party's prospects (noticeably UKIP, an anti-EU party), and public opinion about particular actors (notably the leader of the Labour Party). This spilled over to a conflict framing between parties or internal divisions (for example, when UKIP's youth chair quit the party). There was another strong emphasis on the personalization of politics, with attention focused on candidate values and integrity, such as the motivations and approach of UKIP's leader Nigel Farage. Channel 4, in particular, chose its own daily topics during the election, such as highlighting campaigns in other European countries. Put another way, the editorial selection of election news was driven by Channel 4's media logic rather than by the logics of political party agendas or campaigns.

The way that party campaign launches were framed as primarily game type was also interesting to observe (see Table 3). Rather than leading with details about a policy agenda, journalists interpreted party launches according to a campaign angle (analyzed in detail later).

***Table 3. Time and Percentage of Time Devoted to Game Type Frame
Items in Reporting the 2014 Elections on UK Television News.***

	BBC	ITV	CH4	CH5	All
Campaigning strategies	38 sec **5.5%**	/	7 min 59 sec **8.9%**	2 min 56 sec **29.2%**	11 min 33 sec **8.1%**
References to chosen daily topics determined by broadcaster	1 min 42 sec **14.7%**	2 min 0 sec **6.4%**	19 min 39 sec **21.8%**	21 sec **3.5**%	23 min 42 sec **16.6%**
Party spin/public relations/news management	21 sec **3.0%**	/	28 sec **0.5%**	/	49 sec **0.6%**
Horse race/opinion polls	2 min 6 sec **18.1%**	16 min 43 sec **53.3%**	14 min 21 sec **15.9%**	5 min 14 sec **52.2%**	38 min 24 sec **26.8%**
Political tension/in-fighting	/	2 min 25 sec **7.7%**	13 min 34 sec **15.1%**	51 sec **8.5%**	16 min 50 sec **11.8%**
Campaign launch	3 min 8 sec **27.1%**	3 min 7 sec **9.9%**	8 min 28 sec **9.4%**	15 sec **2.5%**	14 min 58 sec **10.5%**
Candidate values/integrity	3 min 40 sec **31.6%**	7 min 7 sec **22.7%**	25 min 38 sec **28.4%**	25 sec **4.1%**	36 min 50 sec **25.6%**
Total	11 min 35 sec **100%**	31 min 22 sec **100%**	90 min 7 sec **100%**	10 min 2 sec **100%**	143 min 6 sec **100%**

Note. Figures in bold are the percentage of all game frame time on each channel.

In considering how television news bulletins conveyed election coverage generally, we found that that broadcasters relied to a great extent on live two-ways and, in the case of Channel 4, studio discussions to emphasize the game frame rather than the pursuit of a policy angle (see Table 4). In other words, a journalistic-centered convention—live reporters on camera—promoted the game frame above policy. Despite the BBC being overwhelmingly policy oriented, for example, none of its issue-based coverage was conveyed in the live two-way format. Instead, edited packages or anchors presented all news about policy issues.

Table 4. Time and Percentage of Time of Conventions Used in Reporting Game and Policy Items in 2014 Election Coverage on UK Television News.

	BBC		ITV		CH4		CH5	
	Policy	Game	Policy	Game	Policy	Game	Policy	Game
Time	41 min 43 sec	11 min 35 sec	2 min 34 sec	31 min 22 sec	38 min 33 sec	90 min 7 sec	8 min 12 sec	143 min 6 sec
Anchor only	5.7%	11.2%	28.6%	11.4%	/	1.4%	5.1%	15.1%
Anchor image	2.1%	11.5%	/	1.9%	/	7.6%	/	4.2%
Anchor package	2.1%	6.3%	/	0.7%	11.1%	2.0%	2.5%	5.5%
Reporter package	90.1%	48.9%	71.4%	71.6%	50.0%	67.5%	92.4%	45.7%
Live two-way	/	22.1%	/	14.4%	0.6%	5.2%	/	29.5%
Studio discussion	/	/	/		38.3%	16.3%	/	/
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Channel 4's use of studio discussions—no other broadcaster employed this convention—emphasized policy much more than other live conventions. This was largely due to its hour-long format, which allowed some policy issues to be deliberated at greater length than in other evening bulletins. On closer analysis, our study reveals that the selection of different types of television news convention can influence the degree to which politicians featured in coverage. As shown in Table 5, the ratio of political sources shaping a new item (measured by sound bites as well as when journalists reference an unseen actor) was higher on edited reporter packages across all broadcasters compared to other conventions, such as live two-ways. Interestingly, the BBC—the UK's main public-service broadcaster—tied with Channel 5 for the lowest average ratio of sources per live two-way item.

Table 5. Ratio of Sources Informing News Items in 2014 Election Coverage on UK Television News.

	BBC	ITV	CH4	CH5	
	Average source per item	Average source per item	Average source per item	Average source per item	Total averages
Anchors	0.67	0.53	0.60	0.67	0.61
Reporter packages	1.10	2.20	1.94	1.6	1.70
Live two-ways	0.33	0.75	0.75	0.33	0.57
Studio discussions	/	/	0.88	/	0.88

Table 6 shows the total airtime granted to various social actors during the election campaign.[3] What stands out is the BBC's distinctive sourcing strategy compared to its commercial counterparts. Contrary to most mediatization studies, the views of politicians onscreen were higher on the market driven broadcasters—Channel 4 (9.6%) and ITV (14.1%)—as opposed to the BBC (7.8%). Only Channel 5 gave less proportional time to politicians. However, with the exception of Channel 4's hour long format, the average length of political sound bites was the highest on the BBC.

Table 6. Airtime Granted to Political Sound Bites, Image Bites, Citizen Bites, and Journalists in 2014 Election Coverage on UK Television News.

	BBC	ITV	CH4	CH5
Total time devoted to election news across channels	53 min 18 sec	33 min 56 sec	128 min 40 sec	18 min 12 sec
Politicians in sound bites				
Total time politicians appear in sound bites	4 min 10 sec	4 min 47 sec	12 min 19 sec	56 sec
% of total election news time that politicians appear in sound bites	**7.8**	**14.1**	**9.6**	**5.1**
Average length of political sound bite (sec)	20.8	13.0	22.4	14.0
Politicians in image bites				
Total time politicians appear in image bites	6 min 6 sec	7 min 12 sec	9 min 1 sec	2 min 57 sec
% of total election news time that politicians appear in image bites	**11.4**	**21.2**	**7.0**	**16.2**
Journalists in two-way conventions				
Total time of two-way conventions	2 min 33 sec	4 min 31 sec	4 min 57 sec	2 min 58 sec
% of total election news time that journalists appear in two-way conventions	**4.8**	**13.3**	**3.8**	**16.3**
Average length of two-way conventions	51.0 sec	67.8 sec	66.8 sec	59.3 sec
Citizens in sound bites				
Total time citizens appear in sound bites	6 min 52 sec	1 min 44 sec	6 min 54 sec	14 sec
% of total election news time that citizens appear in sound bites	**12.9**	**5.1**	**3.8**	**1.3**
Average length of citizen sound bites	8.1 sec	8.7 sec	10.6 sec	2.0 sec

Note. The percentages do not add up to 100%, because we isolated the proportion of time different broadcasters allow politicians or citizens to appear in sound and image bites, or journalists in two-way conventions.

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[3] We excluded set-piece interviews with party leaders because some were far longer—notably Channel 4— than others, distorting the sound bite average and making it difficult to compare between broadcasters.

Channel 4, and, to a lesser extent, the BBC, relied on image bites less than commercially-driven broadcasters did. Indeed, despite its longer bulletin, Channel 4 had the least visual coverage of politicians, choosing instead to let them speak for themselves. ITV, by contrast, spent almost the same amount of time picturing politicians airing their views on camera. Overall, the mediatization of political actors both verbally and visually during the 2014 election appeared more prominently on the most market-driven and least regulated bulletins, ITV and Channel 5.

The mediatization of election news on the most commercial bulletins was reinforced by the proportion of time reporters were used in the live two-ways (16.3% on Channel 5 and 13.3% on ITV). As previous studies have found (Cushion & Thomas, 2013), live two-ways promote a more interpretive approach to political journalism, and this was reflected in both ITV's and Channel 4's coverage. So, for example, when ITV's political editor Tom Bradby was asked by a news anchor why UKIP had not been unduly damaged by various controversies, he replied, "I think in part because we live in a very Eurosceptic country" where "I think that a lot of people think that the mainstream parties don't necessarily represent their views" (April 29, 2014). Channel 5's interpretive license was demonstrated by its political editor Andy Bell's assertion about party political leadership: "the big problem for Ed Miliband though, is if he comes second in the election next week, in this stage in the electoral cycle with a general election just a year away, he really should be coming first" (May 16, 2014). By contrast, the BBC and Channel 4 relied far less on two-way coverage (4.8% on the BBC and just 3.8% on Channel 4). Channel 4's hour-long format allowed live reporters to pontificate on-screen at length (66.8 seconds, on average); the BBC's two-ways were the shortest (51 seconds).

However, one of the most distinctive features of election coverage was the higher priority the BBC gave to the voices of citizens in what are widely known as "vox pops." On the commercial broadcasters, citizen voices were barely heard, representing just 1.3% of the total of all election coverage on Channel 5 compared to 12.8% of all election coverage on the BBC. Indeed, the BBC's proportion of what might be labeled "citizen bites" was almost equal to the overall time granted to political sound bites. Furthermore, in edited packages—the most sourced type of convention (see Table 5)—the average ratio of citizens informing the BBC (2.9 citizens per item) exceeded that of politicians. But as the data in Table 6 also reveal, this was explained by the limited time citizens contributed to an edited package (on average, in just 8-second bites, far less time than is granted to political sound bites). However, in debates about the mediatization of politics, the role of citizens has not been meaningfully theorized or empirically considered in election coverage. As Witschge has pointed out, in debates about the mediatization of politics, "there is little attention for the role of audiences in the theory and little space for their inclusion as active recipients or producers of content" (2014, p. 345). Within the dominant mediatization framework, then, should the inclusion of citizens in television news bulletins represent a political or media logic?

At face value, representing citizens might appear a democratic form of expression. After all, the public are given the opportunity to directly address their concerns and anxieties. However, on closer inspection, rather than setting the agenda, citizens were mostly asked to react to politically loaded questions. Take, for example, the line of questioning adopted by the BBC's political editor, Nick Robinson, when interviewing citizens about the EU and immigration control at Beverley Racecourse (April 30, 2014). Rather than a neutral, "What are your feelings about immigration?," the question posed was much more

leading: "Is immigration too high?" This was reinforced by supplementary questions, such as "If stopping immigration would mean getting out of Europe, would you actually vote to come out of Europe? And you might vote for UKIP?" The following day, on a cross-channel ferry, Robinson was discussing the UK's relationship with the EU with a group of British lorry drivers (May 1, 2014). Once again, the question would be difficult to define as impartial: "Have you had enough of the EU?"

This more qualitative assessment of coverage suggests the BBC adopted a more mediatized approach than our overall quantitative picture painted. We develop this analysis further by focusing on a mediatized moment—the campaign launches—to help characterize the nature, style, and tone of political coverage.

Mediatized Moments:
The Flexing of Journalistic Muscle During Campaign Launches

During an election campaign, the launch of a party's campaign represents an important moment in political logic (Esser, 2013). The launch not only showcases the key policy priorities of parties ahead of Election Day but can reflect how far the media will either reproduce this message, interpret it, or sideline it entirely. Moreover, how a launch is covered—whether focusing on game-type elements (campaigning tactics, horse-race reporting, and so on) or on a policy agenda—can help convey whether a media or political logic was pursued.

Using this analytical framework, at first glance a quantitative analysis would conclude the BBC was the least mediatized, because it reported the most campaign launches and covered them in the most policy-driven way. In total, the BBC had 13 campaign items—8 policy-related and 5 game-type items; Channel 4 reported 8, equally split between game and policy. ITV covered 5 items—3 policy-related and 2 game-type, and Channel 5 reported just 2 items—1 policy and 1 game item. As a consequence, the BBC covered the widest range of parties, including the minor parties, such as the BNP, Independence from Europe, the English Democrats, and Greens. With the exception of Channel 4's coverage of the Green's campaign launch, the commercial broadcasters covered only the major parties. Indeed, Channel 5 only reported the Conservative launch. The Labour Party's launch was not explicitly dealt with in coverage by ITV (images were used, but no reference was made to it), whereas Channel 4 ran coverage without interpreting it as a launch with an overriding message. In contrast, the BBC covered all the major party launches.

However, although the BBC had the most substantive and serious policy-driven approach to campaign launch coverage, comparatively speaking its reporting style arguably represented a degree of mediatization similar to its commercial counterparts. The reporting of UKIP's launch and the questioning of its leader Nigel Farage was a case in point. A brief flavor of the line of questioning pursued by BBC, ITV, and Channel 4 journalists demonstrates the interpretive approach the BBC—along with the other broadcasters—adopted. Coverage centered on UKIP's campaign poster that read "26 million people in Europe are looking for work. And whose jobs are they after," alongside a picture of a finger pointing out to imply it would be the British people.

BBC April 22, 2014—UKIP launch poster campaign
Reporter package with political editor Nick Robinson

Nick Robinson voiceover: *Open and sensible are not amongst the words his opponents are using to describe posters like this . . . that suggest millions of potential immigrants from the EU are after your job. I asked Mr Farage why unemployment was falling here and elsewhere just months after his last warning that millions of Romanians and Bulgarians were on their way . . .*

Nick Robinson to Nigel Farage: *Your poster says that many millions of people are threatening people's jobs, and I'm putting it to you that since the borders were "opened"—using your language—unemployment is going down and the numbers of jobs in the economy are going up . . . it's a scare story . . .*

[**Farage** answers]

Nick Robinson to Nigel Farage: *What's happened to all those Romanians and Bulgarians taking people's jobs?*

Nigel Farage: *We don't know—the borders only fully came down—*

Nick Robinson to Nigel Farage: *You don't know?*

Nick Robinson voiceover: *Another UKIP poster claims that you are funding a celebrity lifestyle for the Eurocrats . . . I suggested to Mr Farage that that could include him, as he and his wife had received several million pounds in EU funds since he became a member of the European parliament . . .*

Nick Robinson to Nigel Farage: *Your wife is German—she's your secretary—she's paid for by the British taxpayer . . .*

[**Farage** answers]

Nick Robinson to Nigel Farage: *Is your wife taking someone else's job though?*

[**Farage** answers]

Nick Robinson to Nigel Farage: *Why isn't she taking a British person's job?*

[**Farage** answers]

Nick Robinson to Nigel Farage: *No British person could work for you as your secretary?*

[**Farage** answers]

Nick Robinson to Nigel Farage: *You don't think anyone is capable of doing that job?*

Nick Robinson voiceover: *It wasn't very long ago that David Cameron was dismissing UKIP as fruitcakes and loonies and closet racists . . . and yet today, Nigel Farage says he believes he can win the European elections, and in Westminster, there are a lot of people who think he may well.*

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ITV April 22, 2014—UKIP launch poster campaign
Reporter package with political reporter Chris Ship

Chris Ship voiceover: *Nigel Farage launched UKIP's European election campaign . . . one of the posters shows a construction worker begging—the result, say UKIP, of unlimited cheap labour—another implies twenty six million Europeans are after your jobs…*

Chris Ship to Nigel Farage: *Nothing like a good bit of scare mongering is there—to play on people's worst fears before an election . . .*

[**Farage** begins to reply]

Chris Ship to Nigel Farage: *Twenty-six million aren't coming to take your job as you put it . . .*

[**Farage** begins to reply]

Chris Ship to Nigel Farage: *That's wrong . . .*

[**Farage** replies]

Chris Ship to Nigel Farage: *Net migration from the EU last year was 70,000—that's nothing like twenty six million—it's plain wrong.*

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Channel 4 April 22, 2014—UKIP launch poster campaign
Reporter package with Simon Israel, with introduction by anchor Matt Frei

Matt Frei introduction: *Politicians have labeled them as divisive, offensive and even racist—a Cardinal has chipped too saying they are alarmist—tonight Nigel Farage, though, is defending UKIP's European election posters insisting they are a hard-hitting reflection of reality . . .*

Simon Israel voiceover: *The one [advert] unveiled was the mildest of the 4 ads . . . others to go out have more potent messages . . . there's the one which claims that British workers are hit*

hard by unlimited cheap labour and another implying that Europe's 26 million unemployed are after British jobs.

Simon Israel speaking to camera: *Immigration is the issue in this campaign. It's inherent in every statement in UKIP's posters and is mentioned in virtually every other line spoken by its leader, and it resonates in Northern towns up here . . .*

Simon Israel to Nigel Farage: *Can you explain why the tag of racist and nasty seems to follow you around and your party?*

[**Farage** replies]

Simon Israel to Nigel Farage: *But all you seem to be talking about is either keeping people out or kicking people out.*

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A purely quantitative analysis of campaign coverage might conclude that broadcasters largely adopted UKIP's political logic of harsher immigration policy making and withdrawal from the EU (e.g., a policy item). However, a closer textual reading of campaign launch coverage might conclude that reporters pursued an approach consistent with the characteristics of media logic (Strömbäck, 2008). On the BBC and ITV, in particular, UKIP's campaign message (that stricter border control would lead to enhanced British job prospects) was not just covered; it was emphatically uncovered and skeptically conveyed by some robust journalistic questioning and reframing of UKIP's campaign agenda. Indeed, journalists were visible in shot—a measure of mediatization (Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2011)—facing up to Nigel Farage and verbally challenging the premise of UKIP's campaign message. Put a different way, rather than simply reproducing UKIP's immigration policy in a straightforwardly descriptive way—one that might be quantified as being "mediatization-lite"—broadcasters, including the BBC, pursued a combative and interpretive form of journalism. Without contrasting coverage in more qualitative detail, we would suggest that relying on a quantitative approach (as many mediatization of politics studies do) might have skated over the BBC's adversarial and nondeferential treatment of UKIP policy.

Interpreting Mediatized Politics in Second-Order Elections

Using a range of standard quantitative measures, our content analysis revealed that broadcasters with the strongest public-service responsibilities reported the 2014 election in the least mediatized way. The BBC, in particular, supplied the most focused coverage, editorially pursuing an issue-based agenda and relying overwhelmingly on edited packages to communicate. By comparison, the more commercialized broadcasters paid less attention to this second-order election, focused to a much greater extent on game-type stories, and mixed coverage with other campaign news. ITV and Channel 5 can be singled out for relying the most on journalist-centered conventions, such as live two-ways and image bites, to open up opportunities for journalists to talk over images of politicians in edited packages.

But how can these findings be more broadly interpreted? We began this study by asking whether second-order elections were more or less likely to mediatize political content than first-order elections. A headline quantitative picture clearly showed EU election coverage was highly mediatized, with a large proportion of the strategic game frame—most strikingly on ITV (91.2%) and Channel 4 (70%)—shaping the election agenda on commercial broadcasters. In the 2010 UK general election, by comparison, analysis by Deacon and Wring (2011) found that game-type aspects of the campaign constituted less than half of all coverage. With the exception of Channel 4 due to its longer format, political sound bites were shorter than in television coverage of previous general elections (Deacon, Wring, & Golding, 2006). In other words, second-order elections appear more mediatized than first-order elections in a UK context.

However, this quantitative picture alone does not fully convey BBC political journalism during the 2014 EU elections. Most strikingly, politicians were given the least time to air their views on the main public-service broadcaster, with citizens used as vox pops to almost the same degree. Although this appears to be a more inclusive way of representing "the public," we suggest that it reflects a media logic because of the limited time citizens could articulate their views and the loaded line of questioning. Put more provocatively, citizens were used as pawns by the BBC's political editor to pursue an editorial agenda that the strict impartiality laws in UK broadcasting would have mitigated.

A more qualitative approach to the mediatization of politics was further developed by focusing on the party campaign launches. We suggested that the launches could be seen as significant "mediatized moments" during an election, which can help reveal to what extent and in what ways broadcasters interpreted a key point in an election cycle when parties uncovered their agendas. In a strictly quantitative sense, the BBC once again stood out as the least mediatized, covering both major and minor parties and reporting the most policy-orientated coverage. However, a close textual examination of the BBC's, ITV's, and Channel 4's coverage of UKIP's campaign launch suggested the main public-service broadcaster matched—and perhaps even exceeded—the degree to which the party's campaign strategy was interpreted. Rather than straightforwardly conveying the party's pitch, the BBC's political editor visibly confronted the party leader and skeptically reinterpreted the logic of the campaign message. Scratch below the quantitative surface, in other words, and the BBC's coverage appears more mediatized than at first glance.

Indeed, this more interpretive than descriptive approach to journalism can reflect the mediatization of politics. As Strömbäck et al. point out, "an interpretive journalism style is perceived as one indicator of mediatized election news coverage" (2011, p. 169). Our comparative analysis of party launches also demonstrated that this more interpretative form of reporting was pursued by ITV and to a lesser extent Channel 4. However, rather than interpreting this measure of mediatization in a commercialized or sensationalist way, we would argue that it represented an important journalistic intervention, de-spinning UKIP's tactics and subjecting immigration policy to some robust scrutiny. Esser and Umbricht (2014, p. 244) have similarly suggested a "more interpretative news style is not bad *per se* and may even contribute to an enriched public sphere as long as it is applied more to covering 'policy' than 'process.'" However, their cross-national examination of newspapers also showed "that 'process'-related interpretation is on the rise everywhere while 'policy'-related interpretation is on the decline—a trend that warrants future attention" (Esser & Umbricht, 2014, p. 244).

Our study of UK public-service broadcasters revealed that the interpretation of policy continues to be an important journalistic style that may not have been fully appreciated in previous quantitative studies. In our view, the concept of "mediatized moments" could become a useful litmus test for scholars to interpret a pivotal time in the third phase of mediatized politics when coverage could be subjected to close textual analysis. But it could also be developed in cross-national studies. Although our UK focus found reporters flexing their editorial muscles during campaign launches, comparative studies in less interventionist countries—say, in France or Sweden— could reveal a less mediatized news media environment.

In making sense of how and why the elections were mediatized differently by broadcasters, our final point relates to the relationship between public attitudes and journalistic framing. While representative surveys consistently reveal the UK ranks as one of the most Euroskeptic countries, plenty of evidence indicates that many people are misinformed about its institutions and policies (Eurobarometer, 2011). From a news value perspective, public disengagement and misunderstanding might explain the low editorial priority granted to the EU elections by commercial broadcasters. Or, to paraphrase Blumler and Gurevitch (1995), commercial broadcasters largely adopted a pragmatic approach to election reporting, with the EU Parliament holding limited *inherent* democratic value.

Although the BBC reported the elections to the greatest extent, its coverage also appeared to be infused by a degree of Euroskepticism. Take, for example, the BBC's use of vox pops and its leading and limited range of questioning (e.g., "Have you had enough of the EU?"). Understood in the language of mediatization debates, on the one hand this might be interpreted as an autonomous media institution leading the campaign agenda and reflecting widespread Euroskeptic views. On the other hand, it could represent a political logic from indirect pressure caused by anti-EU parties such as UKIP. Either way, as an impartial public-service broadcaster, the BBC—or its commercial counterparts—in our view could have remained an independent and autonomous editorial force at various points in the campaign by enlightening rather than pandering to political or public hostilities. As journalist John Lloyd (2014) put it when responding to a question about how EU reporting could be improved: "you could reasonably expect more context i.e., more explanation . . . quite a lot of the spot news . . . for most people they simply don't understand. It is difficult to do context, especially if you're got 2–3 minutes on television. Nevertheless, that's the one place I think you could make a bit of difference".

 Of course, there were moments when journalistic explanation was on display during EU election campaign coverage, such as in party launches. But, overall, we would agree with Lloyd that there was limited explanation of policy issues from journalists during the campaign. This was evident most strikingly in live two-way reporting, since almost all of it was game-related. Perhaps because of the impartiality constraints, the BBC was reluctant to promote a more interpretive form of journalism during the election campaign. But this format of reporting can deliver context and explanation about substantive issues without necessarily breaching impartiality requirements. From this perspective, it could be argued that a greater degree of mediatized coverage—asking journalists to help interpret the world of EU politics— during second-order elections might enhance political reporting if it focuses not just on the game frame but on the broader policy agenda.

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