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# Political Information Opportunities in Europe: A Longitudinal and Comparative Study of Thirteen Television Systems

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## Abstract

This study examines the supply of political information programming across thirteen European broadcast systems over three decades. The cross-national and cross-temporal design traces the composition and development of political information environments with regard to the amount and placement of news and current affairs programs on the largest public and private television channels. It finds that the televisual information environments of Israel and Norway offer the most advantageous opportunity structure for informed citizenship because of their high levels of airtime and a diverse scheduling strategy. The study contributes to political communication

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research by establishing “political information environments” as a theoretically and empirically grounded concept that informs and supplements the comparison of “media systems.” If developed further, it could provide an information-rich, easy-to-measure macro-unit for future comparative research.

### **Keywords**

political information environment, comparative research, broadcast systems, incidental learning, news and public affairs coverage

This study contributes to a new line of research that has begun to establish that “information environments” matter for news exposure and political knowledge in society. Until recently, most research on news consumption focused on individual-level factors arguing that citizens’ attention to political information is a matter of personal resources and motivation, like education and political interest. It is as if the research community implicitly assumed that contextual factors, such as the political information environment citizens belong to, do not matter. But news exposure and knowledge vary significantly between different countries and there is good reason to believe that political information environments matter for the degree of news consumption and the level of citizen involvement in a society (Blekesaune et al. 2012; Jerit et al. 2006; Shehata and Strömbäck 2011).

Important milestone studies into this direction attempted to identify central differences between political information environments in the United States and Europe, and compared the United States first to Switzerland (Iyengar et al. 2009) and later to Great Britain, Denmark, and Finland (Curran et al. 2009). Both studies found that the public service–dominated European broadcast systems deliver higher levels of political information in their nightly TV programs and foster greater knowledge of public affairs among viewers. The more market-driven and entertainment-centered television system of the United States, on the other hand, was shown to offer smaller amounts of hard news and to trigger less awareness for public affairs in the audience. However, there were not only differences in content but also in programming strategy. European television systems were found to be more successful in reaching broad sections of the audience, getting even “disadvantaged groups to join in the national ritual of watching the evening news” (Iyengar 2010: 283). This is mainly achieved by transmitting news programs at multiple times throughout the evening, making it more likely for viewers to encounter public affairs information (Curran et al. 2009).

The important studies by Iyengar et al. (2009) and Curran et al. (2009) rely on limited country samples and lack a cross-temporal, longitudinal component. This was corrected by a study by Aalberg et al. (2010), which compared the United States to five European countries over a twenty-year time span from 1987 to 2007. The most commercialized broadcast system, the United States, offered the leanest menu of political information during prime time whereas the five democratic corporatist broadcast systems from Northern Europe demonstrated resistance to “subordinating the needs of

democracy to profit making” (Aalberg et al. 2010: 14). Our own study builds on the strengths of the analysis by Aalberg while also remedying some of its weaknesses by expanding the sample size from six to thirteen countries and the period under investigation from twenty to thirty years. It also explores further central arguments developed by Iyengar et al. (2009) and Curran et al. (2009). Our larger country sample allows us to do so across all three media systems as classified by Hallin and Mancini (2004) instead of just the two as in the previous studies. Our study pursues four goals:

- First, to describe the long-term development of the political information environments in thirteen European broadcast systems based on systematic comparative data;
- second, to explain differences in political information opportunities with contextual data stemming from media system, market, and policy research;
- third, to assess the prevailing underlying trends and contrast them with commonly shared assumptions in the literature on this subject; and
- fourth, to identify those national TV environments that provide the most favorable opportunity structures to access political information at multiple points throughout an evening’s viewing experience.

## **Opportunity Structures in Political Information Environments**

The functioning of democracy relies on an informed citizenship, but not all media systems provide the same kind of opportunity structures for high levels of information supply and consumption. The concept of opportunity structure is seldom used in media research (for exceptions, see, Gamson 2004a, 2004b; Whiting and Stanfield 1972) although it allows context-sensitive analysis of the “openings, barriers and resources” of national media systems for informed citizenship (Eisinger 1973: 12). Drawing on Tarrow (1994: 85), we define opportunity structures as access points in the political information environment that provide incentives for people to enter the news discourse. These windows of opportunity can be small or large, offering either high obstacles or multiple options for becoming and staying informed. Differences in the size and number of these opportunity windows are assumed to affect the ability of audiences to access and generate social capital resources (Maloney et al. 2000).

If windows of opportunity refer to the availability of political information, then the frequency with which political information is made available in an information environment is an important macro-structural condition for political learning (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Prior 2007). We see the “political information environment” as a mediated public space through which political information flows. Despite policy initiatives to open up for cross-border television (e.g., from the European Commission) and the emergence of transnational networks (such as Euronews or BBC World), the primary political information environment is still a territorially enclosed space within the boundaries of the nation state (Price 2002). It is a space that often has distinct linguistic and cultural characteristics, one that is underpinned by a series of normative

expectations about the role and function of the media, and one that is regulated according to a set of guidelines. In all national political information environments, television plays a crucial role. Television has been at the heart of national political and cultural life in many democracies for much of the latter half of the twentieth century. In Robin's words, television has "assumed a dual role, serving both as the political public sphere of the nation state, and as the focus for national cultural identification" (2009: 109). Although viewership is declining slightly, television is still the main and preferred source of political information for citizens. In a recent Eurobarometer survey, 67 percent of EU citizens sampled preferred to get their political information from television, compared to 45 percent from newspapers, 29 percent from radio, and 27 percent from the Internet (2009).

We define political information environment as the quantitative supply of news and public affairs content provided to a national audience by routinely available sources. For the purpose of this study, we will focus on the single most widely used source of political news in Europe, television. This televisual information environment tends to be dominated by certain program genres, chief among them conventional newscasts, but also news magazines, political talk shows, as well as discussion and interview programs. The amount, mix, and timing of these shows can produce a favorable or unfavorable opportunity structure for political information provision and consumption. Favorable opportunity structures are determined not only by the sheer volume of information programs but also by their extensive distribution throughout the TV schedule, their integrative placement between popular shows, and their allocation to an attractive timeslot. Such a programming strategy offers the best chance of reaching and engaging "inadvertent" audiences. These are viewers who had not planned on watching the news but cannot help encountering them while awaiting delivery of their favorite entertainment program (Robinson 1973: 426). The ability of capturing inadvertent audiences is said to be a defining characteristic of European public service television because news programs are broadcasted more frequently during times of peak viewing, thus assuring that even less motivated citizens encounter the news (Curran et al. 2009; Iyengar et al. 2009). The democratic value of reaching inadvertent audiences was first recognized by Blumler (1970: 83), who praised it as a smart "trap" for catching and educating the politically uninterested. The central theoretical underpinning of the trap effect is incidental learning (Schoenbach 2008; Schoenbach and Lauf 2002). Today, its relevance can be illustrated with the concept of the "monitorial citizen" who scans rather than reads the information environment, and who engages in surveillance rather than purposeful information-gathering (Schudson 1998: 310). Multiple program slots provide better opportunities for monitorial citizens to perform their civic role.

The second theoretical foundation for our contextual analysis is the structure-conduct-performance paradigm with roots in industrial organization theory. Its application to media markets is discussed and approved in the media economics literature (Wirth and Block 1995) and the comparative broadcast systems literature (D'Haenens and Saeys 2007). The basic assumption of the structure-conduct-performance paradigm is that structural features of the systemic, economic and political context

determine the market conduct of broadcasters, and that this conduct in turn determines media performance. Put differently, the programming strategies of TV broadcasters (conduct) determine the frequency and length of their news and current affairs output (performance), which constitutes a core component of the national political information environment (McQuail 1992, 2010).

Our study is interested in identifying those macro-level structural factors that account for cross-national differences in the size and shape of information opportunity windows in Europe. This aspect has received little attention in the predecessor studies by Iyengar et al. (2009), Curran et al. (2009), and Aalberg et al. (2010) – all of which focus more on the relationship between political information supply and citizens' demands. Put differently, previous studies were more interested in the effects of political information environments on citizens whereas we are more interested in their antecedents.

Antecedents that will help explain differences and similarities in European political information opportunities come from three macro-level areas: media systems research, media markets research, and media policy research.

## **Comparing Political Information Environments**

We start from the general observation that the changing nature of the European television landscape is characterized by an increase in the number of channels, the decline of public service broadcasting monopolies, and a transition to “dual” systems with public and private sectors side by side. The implications for political communication environments shall be investigated by developing several hypotheses that posit relationships between structure and performance from a systems-oriented, market-oriented, and policy-oriented perspective.

With regard to media systems research, our starting point will be the tripartite classification by Hallin and Mancini (2004) that has also come to use for differentiating broadcast systems (Puppis, d'Haenens, and Saeys 2007; Terzis 2007). They argue that southern European “polarized pluralist” systems are characterized by a low-circulating newspaper press and high popularity of television viewing. The audiences' greater preference for watching TV over reading papers has far-reaching consequences in these countries. In an effort to capture and keep large audiences, southern European television channels are expected to focus more heavily on mass-appealing, entertainment-oriented programs that are also attractive to advertisers. The data reported in Table 1 identifies Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain as falling into this category: little preference for newspapers (column 10), high preference for TV (column 9), and a programming philosophy that attracts high levels of advertising (column 8). “Savage deregulation” of the broadcast sector in these countries meant that commercial channels were introduced without any obligations regarding public affairs coverage, and that public channels ceased being public entities because they were made dependent more and more on advertising revenue (see Hallin and Mancini 2004: 124-26). We therefore expect these broadcast systems—all characterized as “polarized pluralist” by Hallin and Mancini—to air fewer political information programs than, specifically, Northern European

**Table I.** Structural Parameters of Televisual Political Information Environments

Columns	1		3		4	5	6		7		8	9	10
	Launch Years of the Two Largest Public Channels Content-Analyzed	2 Launch Years of the Two Largest Private Channels Content-Analyzed	Number of Competing Domestic Free-to-Air Channels in 2007 <sup>a</sup>	All Public Channels: Accumulated Market Share in 2007 <sup>b</sup>			All Public Channels: Change in Market Share to 1995	All Public Channels: Revenues in 2007 from ...		Household Fee, Public or State Funds			
Austria	1955 (ORF1) 1961 (ORF2)	2003 (ATV)	3	44%	-20%	48%	52%	22%	149	332			
Belgium (Flemish)	1958 (BRT1/ Een) 1977 (BRT2/Canvas)	1989 (VTM)	3	40%	+17%	64%	36%	36%	170	161			
Germany	1954 (ARD) 1965 (ZDF)	1984 (RTL) 1985 (SAT.1)	21	48%	+8%	86%	14%	26%	208	283			
Great Britain	1936 (BBC1) 1964 (BBC2)	1955 (ITV1) 1982 (C4)	20	50%	-4%	81%	9%	27%	218	307			
Greece	1967 (ET1) 1968 (ET2/ NET)	1989 (Mega) 1989 (Antenna)	9	16%	+7%	93%	7%	46%	248	131			
Israel	1968 (C1) <sup>d</sup>	1993 (C2) 2002 (C10)	3	7%	-15%	92%	8%	36%	220	583			
Italy	1954 (RAI1) 1954 (RAI2)	1980 (Canale5) 1982 (Rete4)	16	42%	-6%	50%	50%	52%	230	103			
Nether- lands	1951 (Ned1) 1964 (Ned2)	1989 (RTL4) 1995 (SBS6)	15	31%	-8%	68%	32%	20%	186	270			
Norway	1960 (NRK1) 1996 (NRK2)	1988 (TV Norge) 1992 (TV2)	9	41%	-2%	95%	5%	21%	145	571			
Portugal	1957 (RTP1) 1968 (RTP2)	1992 (SIC) 1993 (TVI)	4	29%	-16%	76%	24%	56%	210	67			

(continued)

**Table I. (continued)**

Columns	1		3	4	5	6		7	8	9	10
	Launch Years of the Two Largest Public Channels Content-Analyzed	Launch Years of the Two Largest Private Channels Content-Analyzed	Number of Competing Domestic Free-to-Air Channels in 2007 <sup>a</sup>	All Public Channels: Accumulated Market Share in 2007 <sup>b</sup>	All Public Channels: Change in Market Share to 1995	All Public Channels: Revenues in 2007 from ...		Household Fee, Public or State Funds	Advertising, Commercial Enterprises	Adspend for Television Sector as Percentage of Total Adspend (2007) <sup>c</sup>	Average TV Viewing per Person in Minutes/Day (2007)
Spain	1956 (TVE1) 1965 (TVE2)	1990 (Antena3) 1990 (Tele5)	6	37%	-16%	10% <sup>c</sup>	90% <sup>c</sup>	43%	223	106	
Sweden	1956 (SVT1) 1969 (SVT2)	1987 (TV3) 1991 (TV4)	13	36%	-15%	93%	7%	20%	157	436	
Switzerland (German)	1953 (SF1) 1997 (SF2)	1994 (TeleZürli) <sup>e</sup> 1995 (TeleBärn) <sup>e</sup>	2	35%	-1%	62%	38%	16%	139	338	

Sources: European Audiovisual Observatory; Television International Key Facts by IP; Israeli Audience Research Board; World Association of Newspapers.

a. Excluding foreign channels, local channels and smaller digital channels.

b. Note that Germany, Great Britain, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland launched additional thematic public channels whose market shares are included in 2007 data.

c. These Spanish figures are from 2005. A funding reform in 2007 led to a revenue ratio of 51% (public funds) to 49% (advertising) in 2009.

d. Israel has only one public TV channel.

e. There are local channels. Since Switzerland had no nationwide commercial TV channel in the years analyzed (one went bankrupt before 2007 and another was founded after 2007), we coded the two largest local channels.



“democratic corporatist” systems where TV is tailored less to the interests of the advertising industry (hypothesis 1).

Another argument developed by Hallin and Mancini (2004) is that transnational processes like liberalization, marketization, and technological change are unavoidable and anonymous forces that are driving all media systems in the same direction of the liberalistic model (McQuail 2004). In fact, Papathanassopoulos and Negrine’s (2011) study of European broadcast systems reports “greater similarities than had existed previously” in TV performance (p. 19). We therefore conclude that a thirty-year analysis of political information supply across European television markets should show a growing convergence, with its various national developments merging around one transnational trend line (hypothesis 2).

Besides systems convergence there is market convergence. This refers to the widely shared assumption that the introduction of private, “for-profit” broadcasters has brought an increase in commercial orientation within the national television systems. The thesis of market convergence predicts that public service broadcasters will abandon their information programming profile and adopt scheduling and programming strategies from their new, audience-winning commercial competitors (Meier 2003; Siune and Hulten 1998). Yet empirical support for such a race to the bottom has been hard to establish. In fact, comparative studies across EU member states (Hajok and Schorb 1998) and across U.S. local markets (Belt and Just 2008) found no support for it. Thus, contrary to commonly held expectations but in line with trends reported in the study by Aalberg et al. (2010), we expect the arrival of commercial competitors to actually enlarge the supply of political information (hypothesis 3).

Another factor of the market structure that is assumed to influence the supply of political communication is market competition (Bagdikian 2004; McManus 2009). The competition data in Table 1 (column 3) allows us to distinguish two groups of markets, one with fewer than 10 and one with more than 10 directly competing domestic terrestrial channels. Political economy literature leads us to expect that lower degrees of competition will correlate with higher levels of news and current affairs programming (hypothesis 4).

A further prominent factor is ownership. As found in previous studies, we expect public broadcasters to air larger amounts of political information programs than private broadcasters (hypothesis 5a), not least because of the Reithian mission “to inform, entertain and educate.” We further expect private channels, if they air political information at all, to rely more heavily on cheaper-to-produce genres like “news in brief,” “political talk,” or “discussion shows”; public service broadcasters, by contrast, are expected to rely more on fully fledged, conventional “newscasts” and longer “news magazines” (hypothesis 5b). However, in line with the convergence hypothesis stated above, we expect a shift over time in public channels from more expensive to cheaper program genres, thereby moving into the direction of private channels (hypothesis 5c).

A related factor is funding, and we expect differences in the performance of public channels depending on their dependence on advertising revenues. The funding information in Table 1 (columns 6–7) leads us to expect that the public channels in Austria, Italy, and Spain air more advertiser- and audience-appealing entertainment programs

(because of their high dependence on commercial income) and offer only below-average levels of news and current affairs programs (hypothesis 6).

The third sphere of influence, besides systemic and market parameters, refers to media policy. Government regulatory policies either aim to shield broadcasters from market influences (as in the case of public service channels), or to oblige them to strike a balance between their commercial interest and the broader public interest (as in the case of private channels that are under public supervision or subject to license evaluations) or to correct the deforming impact of unrestrained market forces on performance on fully commercialized channels (with policy interventions to rectify market failure). In several European countries, the government keeps its distance from broadcasters, grants them a fairly high degree of autonomy, restricts itself to setting broad framework conditions, and otherwise relies on self-regulation and internal control. This, for example, is true in Great Britain and Germany. But there are countries where a more active regulatory approach prevails (Israel, Norway), or where—after a long phase of savage deregulation—drastic corrective changes were initiated that have led to noticeable changes in the profile of individual channels or broadcast organizations (Greece, Portugal, Spain). In line with the structure–conduct–performance model, we expect policy-related leverage on structure to ultimately influence performance, here in the form of traceable dynamics in the political information supply (hypothesis 7).

We conclude with an open Research Question. A great achievement of European TV systems is said to be how they allure inadvertent audiences into the news discourse by frequently airing political information on the most popular channels so that it is almost inevitable that audiences will encounter a newscast at some point (Bennett and Iyengar 2008; Curran et al. 2009; Iyengar 2010). The United States is presented as the counterexample where ABC, CBS, and NBC air their newscasts simultaneously. However, we believe that these authors' characterization of the European situation is an overgeneralization. We will use our sample of thirteen European countries to examine whether this supposedly diverse approach is indeed standard practice in Europe, or whether there are different types of scheduling practices, some rich and diverse (“typically European”) and others reduced and concentrated (“typically U.S.-American”).

## Method

This study focuses on TV news and news-related current affairs broadcasts in different countries over time. Data from the following thirteen countries is included in the analysis: Austria, Belgium,<sup>1</sup> Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland.<sup>2</sup> The periods under investigation are the years 1977, 1987, 1997, and 2007. We opted for a straightforward approach that would enable highly similar data collection and coding in all countries. For each year, one constructed week<sup>3</sup> was coded for the two most widely watched public service channels, and additionally (if applicable) for the two most widely watched commercial channels of each country at the time. The most widely watched channels are usually “generalist” channels that cater for the whole population and follow a universal program strategy of which political information programs are an important component. In

most European societies, TV news is still regarded as a reputational good, and “generalist” channels (both private and public) use their information program portfolio to maintain a serious image that gives them legitimacy in a public debate that is often critical of their performance. Our analysis disregards the increasing number of “specialist,” thematic channels that aim at smaller audiences (like children, sports fans, hobby cooks, movie lovers) and have no ambition in the news business. For an overview of the included channels, see Table 1.

“Political information supply” was operationalized as the availability of news and current affairs programs on these channels. This information was collected from TV guides that we obtained online or via national archives. The following program genres were included in the analysis: conventional “newscasts,”<sup>4</sup> longer “news magazines,”<sup>5</sup> “political interview/discussion/or talk shows”<sup>6</sup> as well as “news in brief.”<sup>7</sup> We excluded popular talk shows, soft news programs, political satire programs, and nonperiodic reports as they are not “political” in a traditional, narrow sense. It is worth reiterating that we are interested in the “opportunity windows” that generalist, full-service channels in the various countries offer to their audiences so that they encounter political information. We therefore measured the length and frequency of information programs but not their actual content. We are thus interested in the potentiality of national TV audiences to “jump” (or monitorial citizens to “fall”) into the political information discourse. Our study is not concerned with possible differences in the *quality* of program content—a point we will revisit in the Conclusion.

The unit of analysis is the individual program broadcasted in prime time and measured in minutes. Prime time is defined as the period from 6:00 P.M. to 12:00 A.M. and only minutes in that time frame are included. Within this six-hour prime-time window, there are cross-national differences as to when “peak” prime time is, and we will account for such differences in the interpretation of our results where relevant. It is also important to note that for commercial channels a percentage of the time was deduced to exclude time spent on advertisements. These and other decisions on the actual program time are obviously rough estimations, but were taken after careful considerations, diligent background research, and close interaction with country experts.

## Results

When we speak in the following of “political information supply” in the thirteen broadcast systems, we refer to the cumulative length of newscasts, news magazines, news in brief, and political interview/discussion/talk shows per average week on the two largest public and the two largest private channels with a general-interest program profile between 6:00 P.M. and midnight. In addition to the raw number in minutes, Table 2 is accompanied by a chart that depicts the national trend lines graphically. To make the chart easier to read, we used “smoothed” lines based on cubic spline interpolation. This is a statistical technique offered by Microsoft Excel that is recommended for “crowded” graphs (for details, see Klasson 2008). This technique reduces fluctuation to show a smoother pattern without much distortion since the lines still pass exactly through each data point (1977, 1987, 1997, 2007). Another advantage of

this technique is that it does not force a universal curve function (like linear, logarithmic, or polynomial regression lines) onto thirteen very different national dynamics. We used this function also for Table 4.

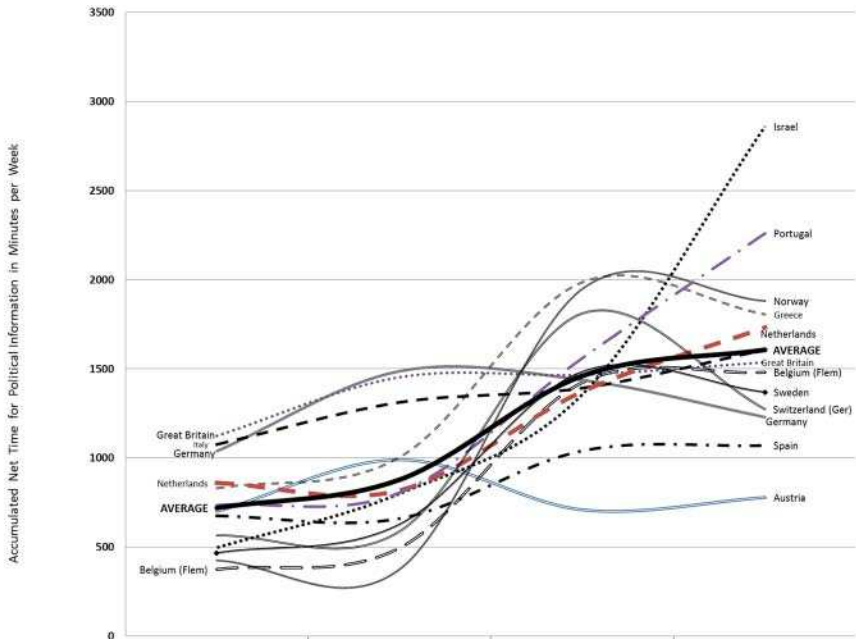
The data in Table 2 demonstrate that at no point in the thirty-year history do the country patterns of political information supply match the country groupings of Hallin and Mancini's (2004) media system typology. In particular, the developments of Portugal, Greece, Spain, and Italy run counter to the stereotype of a diminished supply in the South; neither in 1977 nor in 2007 did the "polarized pluralist" systems cluster at the bottom of the league (see Table 2). Instead, we must conclude that there is no direct, short-cut relationship between system type (structure) and airtime for political information programs (performance). We thus reject hypothesis 1 and acknowledge that the story must be more complex.

Hypothesis 2 expected growing convergence of information supply levels because of similar external influences onto European broadcasters. To test whether the various national developments are indeed merging, we examined the degree in variability across the thirteen trend lines. A suitable indicator for variability is the "coefficient of variation," which represents the ratio of the standard deviation to the mean in each decade.<sup>8</sup> As can be seen from the bottom row of Table 2, the Variation Coefficient fell slightly from 35 percent in 1977 to 23 percent in 1997 (indicating growing convergence) before variation grew again to 33 percent in 2007. We nonetheless conclude that the general trend hints more to convergence than divergence. This becomes particularly obvious when the public channels are singled out (see Table 4). Public channels in Europe have become more and more alike in their information supply as indicated by the falling Variation Coefficient from 32 percent (1977) to 22 percent (2007) in the bottom row of Table 4. This can be read as further evidence that hypothesis 2 is supported.

Yet there are still huge cross-national differences, which warrant a more detailed analysis. Hypothesis 3 addresses the question of whether the introduction of commercial channels had expanding or compressing effects on the lengths and frequencies of political information programs. As can be seen from the "Average" trend line in Table 2 (and the bold black line in the accompanying chart) as well as from the individual country lines, the development clearly goes toward enlargement. The steepest increase occurred between the mideighties and midnineties when commercial TV stations began entering European TV markets. Instead of the marginalizing of political information programming we see growth, and instead of commercial channels promoting a race to the bottom we see extension. The introduction of commercial channels has led to a growth of information supply. This confirms previous findings by Aalberg et al. (2010) and supports hypothesis 3 about the positive impact of commercial TV.

The cross-national differences depicted in Table 2 warrant further observations. In 1977, the three countries starting with the highest level of information supply on their leading channels were Great Britain, Italy, and Germany. They are all part of the "first wave of deregulation" where the early introduction of commercial channels contributed to a larger overall number of available information programs until the early 1990s. Whereas early deregulation in these countries meant more channels and thus more

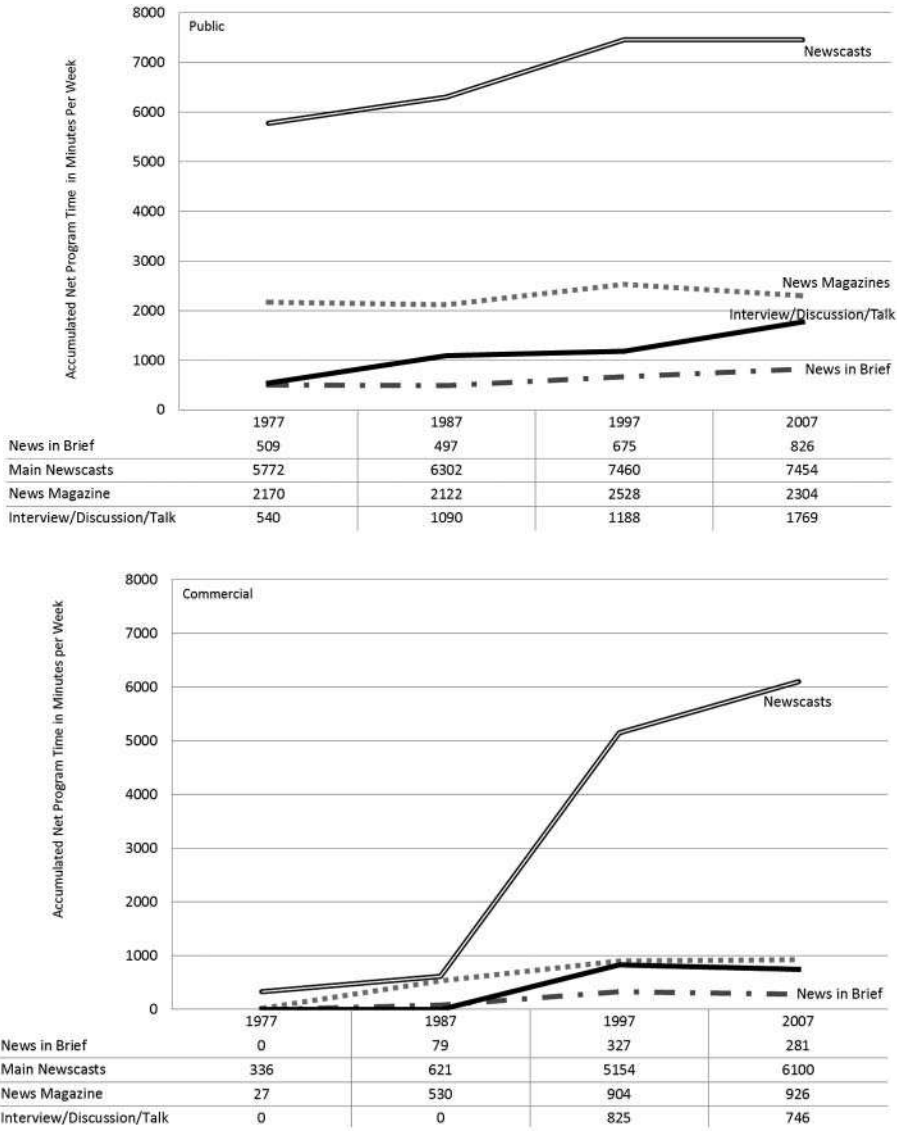
**Table 2.** Political Information Supply on the Largest Public and Commercial TV Channels Combined (in Minutes), 6:00 P.M. to 12:00 A.M.



	1977	1987	1997	2007
Austria	700	990	709	778
Belgium (Flem)	375	495	1423	1481
Germany	1038	1487	1437	1229
Great Britain	1124	1453	1467	1537
Greece	830	1004	1986	1806
Israel	497	800	1356	2861
Italy	1076	1312	1392	1607
Netherlands	860	818	1372	1732
Norway	425	375	1948	1881
Portugal	735	805	1560	2260
Spain	675	660	1040	1070
Sweden	465	625	1484	1369
Switzerland (Ger)	565	588	1811	1274
Average	720	878	1460	1607
Standard Deviation	252	357	343	535
Variation Coefficient (in %)	35	40	23	33

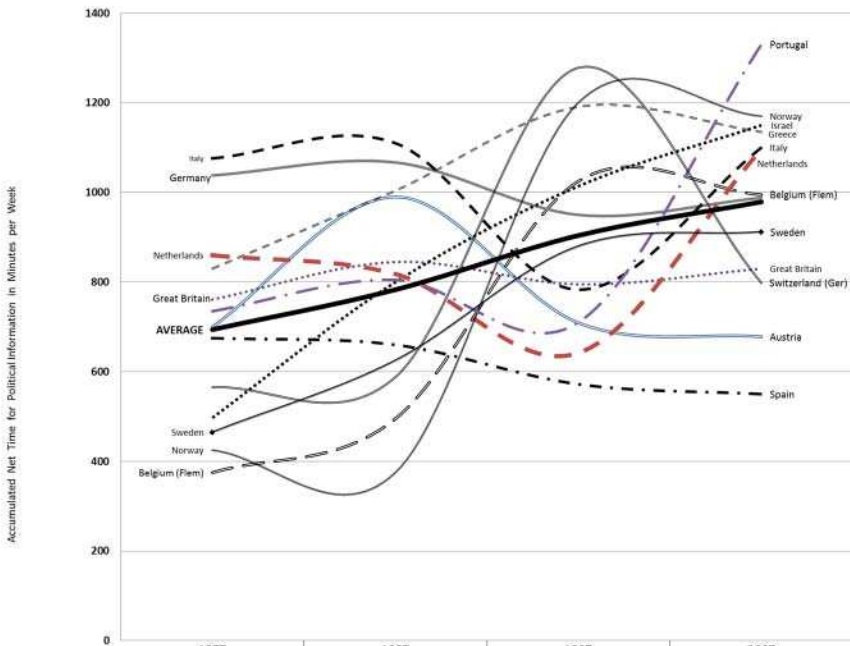
program options in the beginning, it also favored the emergence of an early equilibrium between public and private channels and a lack of big changes in programming in later phases. Another country warranting further commentary is Israel, which shows the highest cumulative information supply in Table 2. This country’s setting, development, and culture have made it a “country of news junkies” (Ben-Rafael 2001) where being informed is a value in itself, debating public issues a national passion, and where news programs are the most watched genre on television (Katz 2009). In particular the

**Table 3.** Supply of Political Information Programs on Public Channels (top) and Commercial Channels (bottom) in Thirteen European Countries (in Minutes), 6:00 p.m. to 12:00 a.m.



new private channels (founded in 1993 and 2002) were eager to feed this appetite and provide an average of three hours' prime-time news and analysis every day in the country's many languages. A last country worth noting is Austria, which shows the lowest cumulative information supply in Table 2. It is one of only two European countries (together with Switzerland) where the public TV sector was never complemented

**Table 4.** Political Information Supply on the Two Largest Public TV Channels, 6:00 P.M. to 12:00 A.M.



	1977	1987	1997	2007
Austria	700	990	709	678
Belgium (Flem)	375	495	1025	995
Germany	1038	1067	950	988
Great Britain	761	845	795	830
Greece	830	1004	1191	1135
Israel	497	800	1014	1150
Italy	1076	1110	783	1100
Netherlands	860	818	642	1096
Norway	425	375	1200	1170
Portugal	735	805	710	1330
Spain	675	660	572	550
Sweden	465	625	880	912
Switzerland (Ger)	565	588	1278	798
Average	694	783	904	979
Standard Deviation	223	226	227	219
Variation Coefficient (in %)	32	29	25	22

by a sector of nation-wide commercial channels. Domestic commercial channels did not gain traction because of too small an advertising market, the powerful influx of foreign TV from same-language neighbor Germany, and a government’s media policy style that has been unambiguously skeptical of the virtues of private television (Trappel 2010). From the case of Austria, one may conclude that a lack of nationwide commercial channels contributes to an under-performance in political information supply—particularly if the public channels also underperform in terms of news provision (as Table 4 indicates).



Another powerful determinant for political information supply seems to be market competition. Here we will confine our examination to 2007 as this is the only year for which we have competition data (see Table 1, column 3). If we relate the data on channel competition to the 2007 data on program output (see Table 2) it emerges that markets with a high number of rival channels (like Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Spain) provide smaller levels of news and current affairs than markets with fewer channels (like Israel, Portugal, Norway, Greece). Austria and Switzerland are exceptions for reasons indicated earlier. We take this relationship as lending support to Hypothesis 4.

Hypothesis 6 explores the effects of public versus private channel ownership. Our study confirms previous research in that our data (as reported in Table 3) also show higher levels of political information programs on public than private channels. Since this is true for most (yet not all)<sup>10</sup> countries and years, hypothesis 5a is supported. Hypothesis 5b, however, which expects commercial channels to rely more heavily on cheaper-to-produce genres like “news in brief” or “political talk,” is disconfirmed. As can be seen from Table 3, commercial channels have adopted over time the same mix of program genres that had proved successful on the public channels. The bulk of political information is broadcast via conventional “newscasts.”<sup>11</sup> Ranking a distant second on both private and public channels are longer “news magazines,” followed by “political interview/discussion/talk shows” in third place. The short, headline-like “news in brief” format plays a peripheral role (see Table 3). In fact, if one is to find increases in low-cost formats like news flashes or talk shows, one must not look at private but public channels. On public channels, both formats have been growing continuously whereas the more expensive and substantive news genres have stayed stable at best. This presents us with a mixed picture for hypothesis 5c. Yes, there is a very slight tendency for public channels to go down the lighter route but the main trend goes the other way, with private channels adopting the proven genre mix of the public channels.

Hypothesis 6 addresses the important factor of funding. It expects public service broadcasters whose budgets are heavily dependent on advertising revenues and other forms of commercial income to perform poorer in their political information supply than less advertising-dependent public channels. The data in Table 4 lend some support to this hypothesis. Two advertising-dependent broadcasters, Spanish TVE and Austrian ORF, perform particularly weakly. Other broadcasters that reduced their informational program output in the 1990s and pursued a more entertainment-oriented, advertising-friendly approach (Italian RAI and Portuguese RTP) were prompted to a change of course through regulatory intervention. The highest amounts of political information programming are aired by public broadcasters that are traditionally financed almost exclusively by public or state funds (from Norway, Greece, and Israel; see Table 4). We take this as moderate support for hypothesis 6.

Picking up on the importance of government regulation, hypothesis 7 expects media policy to influence performance also, usually as a corrective measure against disapproved market influences. The highest amounts of political information supply in 2007 are found on Israeli, Portuguese, Norwegian, and Greek channels. For Israel and Norway, this can be explained by public service obligations imposed not only on



public but also on *private* channels. For example, the Israeli private broadcaster Channel 10 and the Norwegian private broadcaster TV2 were set up as hybrids, with a detailed public service mandate but with funding from advertising. In Israel in particular, the government is very involved in all aspects of broadcast programming, obligating private channels to extensive public affairs coverage (Katz 2009). In Portugal and Greece, where public broadcasters faced a dramatic economic and identity crisis after market shares plummeted, RTP1, RTP2, and ET1 have been restructured with the governments' blessing to provide, among other things, an information-rich program (Papathanassopoulos 2010; Sousa and Pinto 2005). Similar picture in Spain where public broadcaster TVE was stamped "obsolete and deficient" in 2005 by a government-installed, independent expert commission; a subsequent restructuring also involved changes in the programming strategy, the implications of which are not yet reflected in our data (León 2010). In summation, we conclude that media policy decisions, in close interaction with market forces, are another formative influence on the shape and size of televisual political information environments.

Our final research question addresses perhaps the most interesting aspect, namely, the scheduling strategies in the thirteen television systems. Scheduling strategies can offer viewers *multiple* entry points to the news universe, or only *one*. The latter implies a reduced and impoverished opportunity structure for incidental news learning. This happens if the scheduling strategy of "pure blunting" is employed whereby TV channels duplicate the program offer of their rivals in the same time slot (Lin 1995; Litman 1979). This is common among U.S. networks that all air their national news programs at 6:30 P.M. Eastern Time, 5:30 P.M. Central Time. Viewers who miss this early-evening time slot will not be offered another access point for national and international news until the next day. This practice came about for economic reasons as it allowed the networks to keep the successive peak viewing time clear for entertainment programs. The expansion of channels in Europe was not left to market mechanisms alone (as in the U.S. where the most-watched cable channels offer no news) but accompanied by public policy considerations that led to the establishment of new regulatory bodies overseeing commercial channels for their contribution to informed citizenship (Papathanassopoulos and Negrine 2011). The difference in philosophies on both sides of the Atlantic has had important implications for levels of news consumption and political knowledge—which are both *lower* in the United States than in European countries—as documented by Curran et al. (2009) and Iyengar et al. (2009; see also Iyengar 2010). Our study follows the argumentation of these recent cross-national studies and not the argumentation of an U.S.-only study by Prior (2007) who finds merit in the old one-entry-point practice of the U.S. networks because it restricted choice in the pre-cable TV era. Recent U.S.-European comparative research suggests that "pure blunting" hinders monitorial citizens from having inadvertent news encounters, particularly if the news programs are aired in fringe time.

We examined the most widely watched, "generalist" channels in all thirteen countries for their scheduling strategies. We only looked at the placement of conventional "news-casts" (main evening or late evening news programs) for this analysis—in line with the underlying theoretical argument. We disregarded "news in brief," "news magazines,"

and “discussion/interview/talk shows” because of their different format and function: they do not aim to the same degree as newscasts to provide a broad, substantive, nonsubjective synthesis of the day’s relevant events and political developments.

We found five types of scheduling practices (see Table 5). The most diverse opportunity structure for capturing inadvertent audiences is found in Belgium, Great Britain, Israel, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden. Here, TV viewers of the big general-interest channels find a high number of access points to straightforward news coverage. Both public *and* private channels air their news broadcasts at different times throughout the evening. The public service channels in these countries offer at least two (Belgium, Great Britain, and Netherlands) and in most cases three time slots for news: early evening (starting at 6:00 P.M. or 7:00 P.M.), mid-evening (starting at 8:00 P.M. or 9:00 P.M.), and late evening (starting at 10:00 P.M. or 11:00 P.M.). The third time slot was usually added in the 1990s (except in Belgium, Great Britain, and Netherlands) when new competitors entered the scene. The private channels in all six countries contributed positively to increased competition by also devoting two or three time slots to newscasts, and always picked new, not-yet-occupied time slots. The public channels usually kept the starting times of their news programs throughout the thirty-year period, with the exception of the Belgian Channel Eén and Israeli Channel 1, which both shifted a news program to 7:00 P.M. in order to directly counter a commercial competitor (“pure blunting”). At some commercial channels, there was a tendency to push later news programs even further out of peak viewing time (on British ITV and Belgium VTM) or drop them altogether (Dutch SBS6) but the overall picture in these countries with regard to scheduling practice is differentiated and option-rich.

Next in rank is Germany, a peculiar case with an unusually diverse scheduling strategy by two strong, directly competing public service channels, and a rather poor performance by private channels (Table 5). Public channels ARD and ZDF offer widely watched and well-respected news programs at 7:00 P.M., 8:00 P.M., 9:45 P.M., and 10:30 P.M., and have done so almost unchanged for the past thirty years. The private channels tried out many time slots for their news programs in the 1980s but without much success and eventually scrapped all news programs between 7:00 P.M. and midnight. In an attempt that can be described as part imitation, part differentiation both private channels decided to air their main evening news shows at 6:30 P.M. and 6:45 P.M., respectively, just ahead of the flagship newscast of ZDF that opens the public channels’ nightly news offensive at 7:00 P.M. In summation, the two competing public channels offer a well-spread-out fare of much-viewed programs, but viewers of the private channels will not encounter any news between 7:00 P.M. and 12:00 A.M. Private channels thus provide few opportunities for capturing inadvertent news audiences.

Portugal and Greece also have a rich supply of news, surpassing several other countries in program time, but their big channels lag behind in viewership shares and scheduling diversity. In both countries, the public service channels offer two time slots for news: early evening (starting at 8:00 P.M. or 9:00 P.M.) and mid-evening (starting at 10:00 P.M. or 11:00 P.M.). The programs in the later slot were relaunched and extended in the 1990s, in part as a result of government intervention. It is noteworthy that the southern European countries have later “peak” prime times, with the latest, in Greece and Spain, starting at

**Table 5.** Opportunity Structure of National TV News Environments for Capturing Inadvertent Audiences

	Belgium, Great Britain, Israel, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden	Germany	Greece, Portugal	Austria, Switzerland	Italy, Spain
Number of exclusive time slots for public TV news	2–3	4	2	2	1
Number of exclusive time slots for private TV news	2–3	1	1	1	1–2
Scheduling strategy of private TV news: Imitation of diversification of time slots	Clear diversification	Mild diversification	Mild diversification	Imitation	Imitation
Opportunity structure of public/private news environments for capturing inadvertent audiences	+++++	++++	+++	++	++

10:00 P.M. The public channels in Portugal and Greece have their second time slot (starting at 10:00 P.M. or 11:00 P.M.) in the heart of prime time, which cannot be said of the private channels in these two countries. At first, the big private channels tried out many slots for their news programs but soon decided to concentrate all news on just one slot starting at 8:00 P.M. The 8:00 P.M. slot in Greece is well outside peak viewing time, which is not ideal for accidental news encounters. In Portugal, the private newscasts at 8:00 P.M. coincide with the newscast on public RTP, which reduces news watching opportunities for people tuning in later. In summation, the opportunity structure for inadvertent audiences is smaller than in the countries discussed so far (Table 5).

In Austria and Switzerland, the private channels are too weak to substantially enrich the political information environment. The public channels have enjoyed quasi-monopolies as domestic providers of national and international news for the past thirty years. They offer two time slots for news: early evening (starting at 7:00 P.M. or 7:30 P.M.) and midevening (starting at 9:50 P.M. or 10:00 P.M.), with the second slot being

extended from fifteen to thirty minutes in the 1990s. Otherwise, there is remarkable stability in the scheduling practice of ORF and SRG. The fragile private channels add little diversity to scheduling. Austrian ATV airs news only once, in the same time slot as public ORF (starting at 7:20 P.M.). Swiss TeleZüri and TeleBärn air their hyper-local private newscasts very early (6:00 P.M.) and then repeat them several times. Repeating is an interesting way of offering audiences more access points but the substantial gain of re-runs remains questionable.<sup>9</sup>

The leanest opportunity structure for inadvertent audiences—at least based on the criteria used here—is to be found in Italy and Spain (Table 5). Here we find the “typical U.S. American” model with all the big channels airing their main news programs only once, and airing them simultaneously in the same time slot. The Italian public broadcaster RAI carries its flagship newscasts from 8:00 P.M. to 9:00 P.M., and the Spanish public network TVE from 9:00 P.M. to 10:00 P.M. Occasional attempts in previous decades to offer a second time slot for newscasts have all been abolished. The same is true for the private channels. In Spain, both private channels air their news in the same slot as the two public channels; in Italy, one of the two private channels broadcasts at least one hour earlier (at 7:00 P.M.). In summation, we find the Italian and particularly the Spanish televisual information environments to follow the least spread out scheduling practices. But it must be emphasized that the picture would change if the programs of additional, smaller channels—beyond the big four—were taken into account, though this would be true for all countries involved.

## Discussion

Our study is the first large-scale cross-national, longitudinal study of political information opportunities in Europe. Table 6 summarizes the main results of this study by tying them back to the structure–conduct–performance paradigm. With regard to hypothesis 1 (see first row of Table 6) we conclude that Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) typology is unsuitable for categorizing differences in information program output of television systems. Many still rely on an “old” typology distinguishing public monopolies, private monopolies, and dual systems (with various subtypes; cf. Siune and Hulten 1998) and tried to marry this with components from Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) classification and Puppi’s (2009) differentiation between large and small media systems (see Papathanassopoulos and Negrine 2011). In sum, a satisfying solution for broadcast systems is still pending.

Reviewing the development of TV information programs of the past thirty years, our findings for hypothesis 2 indicate only a small tendency of European convergence (see second row of Table 6)—particularly the European public broadcasters were found to align their scheduling practice. By and large, however, we have to concur with Papathanassopoulos and Negrine’s (2011) assessment that broadcasters “in Europe still function as national media, despite attempts to bring them closer in terms of either regulatory systems or content” (p. 11). The main trend overwriting almost everything else is the positive contribution of the newly established commercial channels to the supply of information programs (see third row of Table 6). While this contradicts an important

assumption of the political economy literature, several other assumptions of the political economy literature are supported: Strong competition, private ownership, and heavy dependence on advertising are less than ideal conditions for a multifaceted supply of information programs (see results for hypotheses 4 to 6 in Table 6). Particularly in the Mediterranean polarized pluralist broadcast systems, negative outcomes of savage deregulation led to corrective measures by media policy makers or self-initiated readjustments of program profiles by some channels (results for hypothesis 7).

With regard to our final research question (see last row of Table 6), our study is the first to systematically examine scheduling practices across a wide range of European channels. This analysis relates to the concept of inadvertent audiences that has become a prominent feature in the current comparative political communication literature. In a recent influential article on the “changing foundations of political communication,” Bennett & Iyengar (2008: 719) stated again that Scandinavian broadcasters offer their newscasts at “multiple points during the programming day, making it more likely that relatively apolitical viewers manage to encounter public affairs information on at least a sporadic basis.” Our findings let us conclude that this argument should not be overgeneralized. It is, indeed, true for Scandinavia, but the opportunity structures for capturing inadvertent audiences in some other European countries are not much more advantageous than on the broadcast networks in the United States.

Notwithstanding the complexity of the relationship between structure and performance (see also Fu 2003) we are convinced that our study contributes substantially to the new line of contextual analysis in political communication research. Previous scholarship paid little attention to context and has only recently begun to explore how contextual attributes of media systems, markets, and policies influence political information environments. These environments constitute the contextual opportunity structure for individual viewers and their chances of being well informed. For normative and empirically supported reasons, it is desirable that citizens learn about relevant public issues in order to make informed and effective choices about the exercise of state power. In addressing this issue, we have found previous scholarship to distinguish three determinants for news learning opportunities (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Luskin 1990; Prior 2007): first, the *media environment*, particularly the frequency with which information is made available; second, people’s *content preferences* for information rather than entertainment; and third, a sense of *civic duty* as citizens to be informed about the major issues of the day. Notably, the study by Curran et al. (2009) indicates that—at least in the European context—people’s content preferences and sense of duty are in part a socialization outcome of the *media environment*. Growing up in a broadcast system where the most-watched channels provide multiple options for news encounters does seem to affect people’s long-developed appreciation for information programs, and a sense of social obligation to follow it. This is in line with Sunstein’s (2001) theoretical argument that preferences “are a product, at least in part, of social circumstances, including existing institutions, available options, and past choices” (p. 106).

Growing up in a commercially driven, privately owned TV environment that faces only diminutive regulation—as is the case in the United States—can hardly be compared with the situation in many West European countries (Papathanassopoulos and

**Table 6.** Overview of Results on the Relationship between “Structure” and “Performance” of Televisual Information Environments

Structure	Performance
Membership of polarized pluralist media systems (as opposed to liberal or democratic corporatist broadcast models)	Does not correspond with similar group differences in political information supply. It does, however, correspond weakly with different models of scheduling practice (hypothesis 1)
Border-transgressing, Europe-wide trends of liberalization, marketization and technological change of broadcast systems	Correspond with transnational convergence trends in political information supply (hypothesis 2)
Expansion of television market through introduction of commercial channels	Corresponds with increase in political information supply within national TV environment (hypothesis 3)
Strong market competition between large numbers of rival channels	Corresponds with lower levels of political information supply within national TV environment (hypothesis 4)
Channel structure: Ownership and funding	
Public structure of TV channel	Corresponds with higher levels of political information supply (hypothesis 5a)
Commercial structure of TV channel	Corresponds with lower levels of political information supply, but does not correspond with higher level of cheaper-to-produce program genres like “political talk” (hypothesis 5b)
Over-time relationship between public and private channels	Corresponds with mutual convergence: strong trend of commercial channels to adopt same-genre mix of information programs as established public channels; slight trend of public channels to adopt more cheaper-to-produce genres (hypothesis 5c)
Public channels that depend heavily on advertising revenue	Corresponds moderately with lower levels of political information supply (hypothesis 6)
Media policy decisions regarding the structural setup of channels in order to “correct” for underperformance	Corresponds with higher levels of political information supply after intervention (hypothesis 7)
“Dual” structure of European broadcast systems mixing (often still strong) public service channels with (partly regulated) commercial channels	Does not universally correspond with a differentiated, option-rich scheduling practice that captures “inadvertent audiences” easily. In fact five scheduling models emerge (Research Question).

Negrine 2011). An important difference between Western Europe and the United States is, as Prior (2007) points out, that the expansion of channels and the expectations toward programming strategies in Europe has not been left entirely to market forces but addressed also as a matter of public policy (p. 282). These different contextual conditions have led us to follow a different theoretical understanding of political information opportunities than the one offered in Prior’s (2007) U.S.-only study; our research is closer to the cross-nationally comparative work by Curran et al. (2009) and Iyengar et al. (2009; Iyengar 2010) instead.

We analyzed the programming practices of the largest and most viewed European TV channels but freely admit that we cannot say anything about actual consumption of these information programs. Using *access to information* as a proxy for *consumption*

*opportunity* is certainly a simplification but one that previous studies have also used (see Prior 2007: 255-88). By focusing on information opportunities, we have been very cautious not to overstate our findings in terms of actual consumption (see Wonneberger 2011 for an example of how the actual use of political information remained high also with widened choice). This study is also silent on the actual content of the information programs that were aired since 1977, and its potential variation over time. What do we know about cross-temporal and cross-national differences in news content? Unfortunately very little. Some countries have experienced characteristic changes, others remarkable stability with regard to the framing and issue-orientation of news, but discrepancies in coding these content features have prevented us from drawing reliable conclusions for our own study (see the extensive discussion in Strömbäck and Kaid 2008). One of the rare systematic comparative analyses investigating changes in the provision of hard and soft news over time and across countries is Brekken, Thorbjørnsrud, and Aalberg's (2012) study. They examined three nonconsecutive weeks of press and broadcast news output in 2008 and 2009 in Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Great Britain, and the United States. They found that hard news was not significantly lower in Britain and the United States compared to the continental European countries, and that differences between commercial and public television channels in Europe were relatively small. They also found, like Curran et al. (2009) before them, that the share of hard news is greater than soft news in both television and newspapers across European channels, although the share of soft news is rising (Curran et al. 2010). We conclude that there is a clear need to investigate the quality of information content more and we consider this a natural next step to this analysis. Existing research so far gives us little indication though that differences across time and channels are so vast that meaningful comparisons are no longer possible.

Within the limitations stated, we see an important contribution of our study in its attempt to advance contextual media analysis by clarifying the concept of political information environment and relating it to two other theoretical frameworks, the structure–conduct–performance paradigm (McQuail 1992, 2010) and the opportunity structure approach (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Gamson 2004a). We tried to incorporate contextual variables as explanatory factors into a hypothesis-driven, comparative design. The most visible result of our analysis may be a ranking of televisual information environments with regard to the frequency of political programs and their accessibility to viewers: Israel and Norway come off very well because of extensive time slots and a high degree of scheduling diversity whereas Spain and Austria come off less well as a result of smaller program windows and lower scheduling diversity.

Our description of the long-term developments in programming illustrates the complexity and national variability of European broadcast systems. Generally speaking, our analysis indicates an overall upward trend in the availability of political information programs and the positive contribution of commercial channels to this development. The introduction of commercial TV has led—on average—to an increase in airtime for informational programs. It is an important qualification to the all-downhill-from-here attitude toward commercial television painted in some popular accounts of the writing on this subject. The overall increase in political information programs on the most-watched



general-interest channels in Europe may also be a reflection of an ongoing public debate about the role of television in democracy that pressurizes both private and public channels to pay tribute to their informational role.

That does not mean that commercial influences have only welcoming effects. After all, we also found that public channels that are heavily dependent on advertising revenues offer fewer information programs than public channels that are not, and that fully advertising-financed private channels offer usually the least amounts.

Another one-size-fits-all explanation (besides commercialization) that has developed a life of its own in the writing on this subject could also be contextualized. The Hallin and Mancini (2004) typology turned out to be of only limited use for differentiating political information environments. This may indicate that comparisons of broadcast models must take other dimensions into account than those put forward by Hallin and Mancini (2004). We would like to encourage future scholars to pursue our line of research as we believe that political information environments may become a valuable concept for comparative political communication research. They have the advantage of being less abstract, closer to actual news providers and news consumers, and easier to operationalize and measure. They combine macro-level institutional factors with micro-level supply and demand factors and can be easily related to existing multilevel models of comparative political communication research (see Norris 2009).

In addition to the limitations pointed out already, it has to be kept in mind that we only looked at the “big four” channels in each country; this may underestimate the measured supply in those few countries with early channel expansion. Since our analysis tells us little about the quality of information provided, it may be that the positive effect of the growing amount of information is at least partly wiped out by rising levels of soft news that are of little democratic value. As stated, only a large-scale content analysis of news over time and across different countries could address these concerns.

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### **Notes**

1. Belgium consists of two language-bound political information environments, and we analyzed only Dutch-speaking Flanders, where the majority of viewers (60 percent) and media organizations are based.



2. Switzerland consists of three language-bound political information environments, and we analyzed only German-speaking Switzerland, where the majority of viewers (70 percent) and media organizations are based.
3. We did not take a natural week out of each year but rather constructed an artificial week that consists of one randomly selected Monday per year, one randomly selected Tuesday per year, and so on. When one of the selected days fell within a one-month period before national elections, a different day was sampled.
4. "Newscasts" were defined as "main evening newscasts," airing five to seven times a week between around 6:00 P.M. and 9:00 P.M. and lasting fifteen to thirty minutes in northern and thirty to sixty minutes in southern Europe. Roundups and summaries of the day's national and international affairs are at the core of this format. Typical examples are the ARD Tagesschau and RAI 1's Telegiornale Uno. We also included "later evening newscasts" in this category that usually air between 10:00 P.M. and 11:30 P.M. as a follow-up to the earlier main news program. These later news programs review the day's top stories and usually offer more extensive interviews or more detailed background reports. Typical examples are the ARD Tagesthemen or the ITV News at Ten. Business news and showbiz news programs (also if presented in a hard news format) were not considered as conventional news programs.
5. "News magazines" last between thirty and sixty minutes and usually air on a weekly basis, although daily news magazines exist in some countries. This format offers explanations, background information, interviews, and in-depth analyses of news stories and events that have recently occurred or are ongoing at the time. The central aim is not to cover all the top stories of a day or week, but to set some thematic priorities and analyze them in detail. News magazines focus less on straight news but emphasize feature reports and analyses as well as in-depth investigations. This format clearly differs from regular news broadcasts where the emphasis is on immediate dissemination, often with a minimum of analysis. Typical examples of news magazines are BBC1's Panorama; BBC2's Newsnight; ORF's Report and ZDF's Frontal 21.
6. Political "interview/discussion/talk shows" are defined as programs that are based on a sequence of interviews with one guest at a time, or on a discussion setting with several guests debating a single theme at the same time. Talk shows are somewhat less structured than interview or discussion programs. Guests invited to a talk show (e.g., politicians, experts, victims) comment subjectively on a specific issue or a mix of current events and affairs, sometimes supplemented with short videos introducing new topics or guests. For talk shows to be included, at least half of the regular guests must be politicians or at least half of the topics discussed must be on conventional politics. Political interview/discussion/talk shows last usually between thirty and ninety minutes and are usually aired weekly.
7. The "news in brief" format is characterized by short, headline-centered reports on current events and affairs. Nonanalytical snapshots of information without analysis, interviews, and background information are at the center of this genre. The news in brief format usually last between one and five minutes at the most. An example is the news bulletin on BBC1 at 7:57 P.M.
8. For example, the computation for 1977 is  $252 : 720 = 0.35$  or 35 percent; this figure is found in the bottom line of Table 2, which is labeled Variation Coefficient.
9. To prevent distortion of the Swiss data, we coded only the first two re-runs of any repeated information program.

10. In some European countries, the second public channel is profiled as the supplementary “daughter” channel of the first public channel, thus offering a very different program menu in order not to cannibalize the ratings of the “mother” channel. As a result, BBC2, NL2, RTP2, and TVE2 all offer smaller time windows for informational programs than the biggest commercial channel in Great Britain, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain.
11. For detailed characterizations of “newscasts,” “news magazines,” “political interview/discussion/talk shows,” and “news in brief,” see earlier endnotes.

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