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OPPOSING THE GOVERNMENT BUT GOVERNING THE AUDIENCE?

Exploring the differential mediatization of parliamentary actors in Switzerland

Nino Landerer

This article operationalizes the mediatization of politics by comparing the expressed preferences toward the mass media between different groups of members of parliament (MPs) in three conflicted legislative decision-making processes in Switzerland. Different from elections, MPs face a more pronounced tension between audience-oriented and policy-oriented activities in legislative decision-making processes. It is argued that MPs are “mediatized” when they express a preference for audience-oriented activities. Audience-oriented activities are aimed at resulting in coverage by the mass media outlets with the broadest reach and include (1) the preference for symbolic issues, (2) a negotiation strategy that is focused on tough bargaining, (3) image-oriented media activities, (4) symbolic interventions in parliament, and (5) a high use of staged media activities. It is hypothesized that MPs of the pole parties engage more in audience-oriented activities than MPs of the center-right parties, as this is an integral part of their quasi-opposition strategy. The quantitative results of face-to-face interviews with 50 high-ranking MPs of the parliamentary committees confirm the hypothesis. The operationalization of audience orientation in five dimensions diversifies the understanding of the concept of mediatization in the political realm. The article concludes that a potential populist challenge to democracy consists in the mutually beneficial symbiosis between audience-oriented political actors and commercially oriented media companies.

KEYWORDS audience orientation; decision-making; mediatization; parliament; policy orientation; political parties; populism

Introduction

Scholars analyzing the mediatization of politics often emphasize the complexity of the interactions between politics and the news media (Kunelius and Reunanen 2012; Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999; Strömbäck 2011a). In this context, to get a better understanding of how different elected political actors try to use and how they perceive the news media will advance the empirical research on the mediatization of politics (Strömbäck 2011b; Van Aelst et al. 2008).

This article operationalizes the mediatization of politics by comparing the expressed preference for audience orientation between different groups of members of parliament (MPs) in three legislative decision-making processes in Switzerland. Given their electoral constraints and limited newsworthiness when compared to members of the government (Elmelund-Praestekaer, Hopmann, and Norgaard 2011; Kepplinger 2002), MPs are the most likely to be affected by audience considerations. Different from electoral campaigns, MPs

face a more pronounced tension between audience-oriented and policy-oriented activities in legislative decision-making processes. Since there is no pre-defined, absolute level at which political actors can be considered as mediatized, the empirical analysis aims to detect differences in the relative level of audience orientation between MPs of different party groups. The article therefore raises the following research question: Are different groups of MPs in Switzerland equally audience-oriented (i.e. mediatized)?

Conceptualizing the Mediatization of Politics

The mediatization of politics has been conceptualized in a growing body of literature (Esser 2013; Hjarvard 2013; Kunelius and Reunanen 2012; Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999; Strömbäck 2008; Strömbäck 2011a; Strömbäck and Esser 2009; Strömbäck and Van Aelst 2013). It is often defined as a process by which political institutions and actors gradually become dependent on and adapt to the media and their logic (Altheide and Snow 1979; Hjarvard 2013; Lundby 2009). Mediatization is to be differentiated from media effects research insofar as it is more holistic and conceptually also includes the anticipating adaption of political actors to media considerations that is difficult to measure empirically (Kepplinger 2008; Van Aelst et al. 2013). In his important contribution, Strömbäck (2008) has conceptualized the mediatization of politics as a gradual, four-dimensional process with an increasing dominance of the media and their logic. The first dimension concerns the degree to which politics is mediated. Hence, it asks whether the media are the dominant source of information between the political system and the public. The degree to which the mass media are independent from political institutions represents the second dimension. The third and fourth dimensions of mediatization focus on whether, and to what degree, media content and political actors are mainly governed by “political logic” or “media logic.” Mediatization of politics thus takes place when political actors are mainly governed by “media logic” instead of “political logic.” The fourth dimension of mediatization will be the focus of this article.

Expanding on this framework, Landerer (2013) has argued that neither media nor political logic can be reduced to a singular dimension. Rather, *both* political and media actors are driven by normative and market considerations *to different degrees*. Mediatization of politics in this account refers to “the predominance of audience-oriented market logic over normative logic in political actors’ behavior” (Landerer 2013, 253) and implies that political actors are more concerned with their audience than with a particular policy process in question. The distinction between audience orientation and policy orientation is inspired by Müller and Strøm (1999), who distinguished between *office* and *policy* as two ultimate goals (intrinsic pursuits) that are difficult for political actors to combine. The trade-off exists because consistency in certain policies is likely to come at the cost of future electoral success, in particular if political actors target more volatile voters through specific campaigns in the independent mass media. *Policy orientation* refers to “the effort to find solutions for politically defined problems by means of programs for action” (Meyer 2002, 12) and is ultimately about “finding long-term solutions to substantial issues” (Esser 2013, 164).

The concept of *audience orientation* combines two necessary and complementary elements that drive political actors’ behavior: the first aspect is political actors’ permanent anticipation of voters’ short-term preferences as expressed in opinion polls. This is the “electoral logic” (Landerer 2013), or “politics” aspect (Esser 2013), inherent to a particular

set of political actors, whereby the emphasis is on the *permanent* anticipation of *short-term* preferences. Secondly, and in order to communicate to the potential voters, these political actors adapt to, or anticipate, commercial media's selection criteria. This is the media-induced component. Hence, the motivation is political, but the means are streamlined (and thus influenced) by a particular set of media considerations.

Audience in this account describes a floating and therefore broadly targeted electorate whom political actors are unlikely to reach through their traditional party channels but for whom they need to go through the independent mass media.¹ And in order to get into the independent mass media, political actors have to adapt to, or anticipate, these media organizations' selection criteria. In a world which is in the process of being integrated economically and technologically, these selection criteria have become increasingly commercially oriented (Hamilton 2004; Herman and McChesney 1997; Landerer 2013; McManus 1994). Because of their competition with profit-oriented media companies for airtime and their financial accountability to the public, this also holds true for public broadcasting companies to some degree.

Hence, audience orientation² points toward the primacy of a special kind of electoral orientation, of which only the first component is inherent to the political system: audience-oriented political actors permanently react to the demands of the audience as reflected in opinion polls. Secondly and crucially, audience-oriented political actors permanently anticipate the requirements of the mass media with the broadest possible reach, thereby adapting to the commercially driven selection criteria of these media companies. They thus follow the audience instead of leading and defending their political ideals (this is the "electoral" aspect). And they adapt to the particular selection criteria of commercially oriented media organizations in order to reach that same audience (this is the "mediatization" aspect). In this article, the mediatization of politics is therefore measured through the degree of expressed audience orientation in political actors' behavior in day-to-day decision-making processes.

Dimensions of Audience Orientation

Whereas indicators for newsworthiness and "media logic" have been well-developed in the literature on the mediatization of news content (Esser 2008; Galtung and Ruge 1965; Strömbäck and Dimitrova 2011; Strömbäck and Esser 2009), comparable indicators for the political realm are still scarcely operationalized (see e.g. Kunelius and Reunanen 2012). As stated above, audience orientation implies a general preference of political actors for issues and strategies that are likely to resonate well with commercially oriented, tabloid media because they expect to reach the broadest possible electorate through them. Put differently, audience-oriented MPs constantly asks themselves *how to get into the news outlet with the widest possible reach*. In order to operationalize the mediatization of politics in such a framework, five different dimensions of audience orientation are laid out below.

Symbolic Issue orientation: A first, important dimension of audience orientation is the preference for issues that are, on the one hand, not directly linked to the bill under discussion and that are, on the other hand, likely to resonate well with the mass media. Meyer (2002, 70) described this preference for symbolic issues as "placebo politics, acting out some role for the purpose of make-believe." He argued that one may think of symbolic politics "as strategic action offering no arguments and establishing no real connection

between its aesthetic semblance and the essential reality toward which it points." The crucial distinction between symbolic and substantial politics lies in the deception, the populist "make-believe," that a particular symbolic intervention will solve real social problems. MPs' preference for issues that are likely to stir emotional reactions and mobilizing effects is therefore an expression of audience orientation. Similar to the mass media's preference for episodic and concrete frames rather than thematic and abstract ones (Lyengar 1991), a distinction is made between issues that have more of a symbolic and emotional importance in a particular legislative process and issues that are more substantially linked to the problems addressed in a bill.

Bargaining preference: In the literature on negotiations, a distinction is made between bargaining and problem-solving actors, whereby the "essential, defining difference ... seems to lie in their respective focus on self-interest versus common interests" (Elgström and Jönsson 2000, 685). In this article, a bargaining attitude is considered to be a dimension for audience orientation and a problem-solving attitude is considered to be a dimension of policy orientation in a given decision-making process. It is argued that the more a political actor is interested in problem-solving, the more he or she is willing to accept a negotiated solution, to favor compromise, and to include different actors in the process. Bargaining actors tend to favor programmatic coherence, target their own voters, and insist on their own positions. It is expected that the salience of this distinction increases even more in conflicted political decision-making processes, as actors find it more difficult to accept compromised solutions in public negotiations (Spörer-Wagner and Marcinkowski 2010; Stasavage 2004).

Image orientation: The use of media instruments by MPs does not necessarily indicate an increased audience orientation by political actors *per se*. Put differently, it is not only the number of interviews or TV appearances in which a political actor takes part that indicates if a political actor is audience-oriented but also MPs' expressed goals *within* their media-related activities that are considered to be an indicator for MPs' attitudes with regards to a particular process. If a political actor points out the – in his or her view – central aspects of the debate and wants to signal his or her own convictions to the population, this is an expression of a policy-oriented attitude toward the process, although in an outside-oriented strategy (Kriesi, Tresch, and Jochum 2007). If an actor stated that he or she wanted to use the media in the process primarily to increase the number of sympathizers and improve the party image, this is an indication of audience orientation.

Symbolic political interventions: Parliamentary decision-making processes provide different political instruments for MPs to modify or amend a bill that is under discussion or to start new initiatives. The more consequential a political instrument, the higher the parliamentary hurdle to get the instrument passed and hence the higher the cost for the MP. Based on the theoretical reasoning that audience-oriented MPs do not have a substantial interest in the process but that they participate in the process for publicity and electoral reasons, a distinction between substantial and symbolic political instruments is made (for this distinction, see also Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006). The use of political instruments that do not require an endorsement by other MPs and that only result in a written or public answer by the administration, such as interpellations and questions, are considered to be instruments that have more of a symbolic value. Of course, they are symbolic only in comparison to actual legal amendments to and modifications of a draft

bill, which require the endorsement of both chambers in order to enter into force and hence a considerable investment of time and effort from the involved MP.

Staged media relations: An important activity for any MP is the diffusion of information on the decision-making process through the mass media. But not all channels of diffusion are equally adequate for transmitting information about complex political processes. In their interaction with the media, MPs can therefore favor different formats: whereas some favor “staged” and “interactive” relations with the media through TV appearances, press conferences, public reunions, and letter-to-the-editor actions, others might favor more “private” contacts and interviews with journalists and a “feeding” relation through written press releases. Whereas the personal contacts with journalists enable political actors to explain complex facts, the more staged interactions are considered to be an indicator of audience orientation, because they are well orchestrated and have a tendency to focus on individuals and drama rather than on content and facts (Manning 1996).

Hypothesis and Research Design

As there is no pre-determined, *absolute* threshold or level at which politics can be considered as mediatized, it is preferable to compare the *relative* levels of mediatization, either across time, across different political systems, or between different groups of political actors. For the empirical analysis of the mediatization of politics in Switzerland, the following question is raised: Are parliamentary actors of different party groups equally audience-oriented (i.e. mediatized)?

Considering political actors’ different newsworthiness and strategies, it is unlikely that all political actors are mediatized to the same degree (Elmelund-Praestekaer, Hopmann, and Norgaard 2011; Strömbäck 2008; Thesen 2013). In their article on the political conditionality of mass media influence, Green-Pedersen and Stubager (2010, 677) argued that “opposition parties react with words [to media attention], whereas government parties must react with policy measures, which renders opposition reaction more likely [and] one could expect government parties to be less responsive to media attention” (see also Vliegthart and Walgrave 2011). In Mair’s (2009) account, opposition parties can act more “responsively” and are less bound to act “responsibly” than government parties. In particular, coalition governments will have to find compromised solutions through agreements beyond their party lines and hence will have a preference for confidential and consensual political negotiations.

Members of the opposition parties are freer in their options and will therefore try as much as possible to appeal to the requirements of commercially oriented mass media. In this situation, a mutually beneficial situation arises for audience-oriented political actors and commercially oriented mass media, as they both have an interest in conflict, people, and simple symbolic messages (Landerer 2013). Put differently, whereas MPs of the governing parties are bound to policy-oriented behavior in order to strike a compromised deal, members of opposition parties are likely to be more audience-oriented in order to reach a broad audience through the independent mass media.

In Switzerland, considered as the “best example” of a consensus democracy by Lijphart (1999, 33), the four major party groups are all part of the federal government. Together, the four governmental parties also hold almost 83 percent of the seats in the parliament. For over 40 years the composition of the seven-seat government (Federal

Council) had remained unchanged. In this grand coalition, known as the “magic formula,” the Liberals (PLR), the Christian Democrats (PDC), and the Social Democrats (PS) held two seats each and the Swiss People’s Party (UDC) held one seat (Klöti et al. 2007). The Green Party (PV) was and remains the largest real opposition party.

The rise of the Swiss People’s Party in the last 20 years, however, changed the constellation and led to a less stable governmental coalition with *ad hoc* center-left and center-right majorities in parliament (Varone et al., [under review](#); Sciarini, 2014). In this process, the party system in Switzerland “has become more polarized and has lost some of its consensual character” (Kriesi and Trechsel 2008, 97). This ongoing polarization has to some extent “normalized” the extreme Swiss case of a consensual democracy (Vatter 2008) and led to decision-making processes with a less consensual and more competitive character. Although the Swiss People’s Party’s experiment with a “real” opposition role failed (Church and Vatter 2009), the right and left “pole” parties (UDC, PS) now play a clear game of duplicity, opposing the Federal Council in 9 out of 10 popular votes between 2003 and 2007 (Sciarini 2011, 214).

Considering this opposition role of the pole parties in recent years, it is expected that audience orientation is an integral part of the quasi-opposition strategy of MPs of the pole parties. MPs of the center-right parties, which were successful in 80–90 percent of the votes in parliament between 1995 and 2006 (Schwarz and Linder 2006), are expected to be more “governmental” and to prefer relatively confidential political negotiations. Hence, it is important to take a closer look at the parliamentary actors’ expressed preferential setting with regards to audience orientation, and the following hypothesis is formulated:

H1: MPs of the pole parties express a higher preference for audience-oriented activities than MPs of the center-right parties.

In order to analyze the mediatization of politics in the framework presented above, the focus is on legislative decision-making processes, not on electoral campaigns (Figure 1). Different from electoral campaigns, the role of the news media is more ambiguous in legislative processes, because MPs face an inherent tension between policy-oriented (substantial) and audience-oriented (symbolic) activities (Binderkrantz and Green-Pedersen 2009; Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006). Whereas in electoral campaigns a party can *ex ante* promise a program that combines audience-oriented and policy-oriented goals, in legislative decision-making processes MPs are forced to distance themselves from their voters and approach opposing parties, if they are interested in reaching a compromise and thus a majority in parliament. This tension becomes even more salient in decision-making processes with a high level of political conflict.

Methodology

In order to test the hypothesis, face-to-face interviews were conducted with MPs involved in three conflicted legislative decision-making processes in Switzerland. Although there is some variation among the processes with regards to level and type of conflict, the three processes were selected for their overall high level of conflict. The final votes in the National Council (lower chamber with 200 members) are taken as the indicator for the *level* of conflict and the differential coalitions in the three processes indicate different *types* of conflict (Table 1).

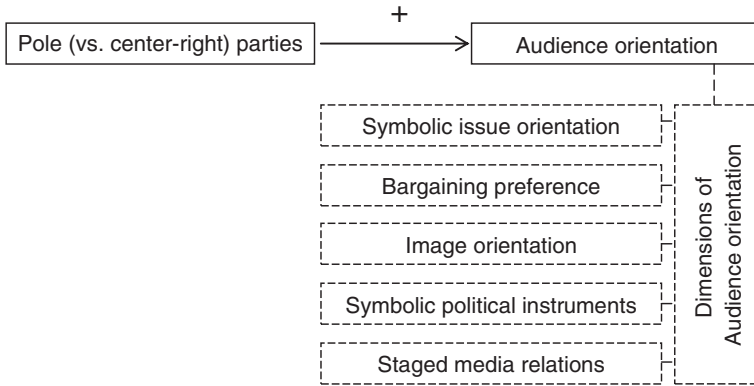


FIGURE 1
Research design for the mediatization of politics

Since all of the three processes were highly debated in the mass media, MPs were facing substantial public pressure to provide the media with information and make the process as transparent as possible. However, none of the parties had a majority, and therefore all were forced to move from their ideal position if they wanted to see the bill adopted. This situation created the tension, mentioned above, between audience-oriented (symbolic) and policy-oriented (substantial) activities faced by each MP individually and as a member of a political party.

The selection of MPs for face-to-face interviews was based on, first, their membership in the preparing committee for a bill and, secondly, on their participation in the parliamentary debate about it. Membership in the committee ensures that MPs are well informed on the substance of and their party’s position on the process in question. Usually, each party group selects at least one speaker who is a high-ranking member of the committee and who “informs” the party’s position in a particular process. The selected MPs represent a varied sample of the 246 members of the Swiss parliament, including members of all parliamentary groups (see sample structure in [Appendix A](#)). In total, 76 MPs were contacted and 50 were finally interviewed, which equals an average response rate of 66 percent. The interviews were conducted with 50 members of the committees of both the upper (15) and the lower (35) chambers between September 2011 and December 2012. Sixteen MPs were interviewed on the “too-big-to-fail” banking legislation reform, 20 MPs on the handicapped insurance reform, and 14 MPs on the taxation agreements.

In order to test the hypothesis that pole parties are more audience-oriented than the center-right parties, the answers of MPs from the Social Democrats, the People’s Party, and the Green Party (pole parties) were compared to the answers of Liberal, Christian Democrat, Green Liberal, and Conservative Democrat MPs (center-right parties). The five

TABLE 1
Legislative decision-making processes, final votes, and majority coalitions

Decision-making process	Yes/no votes in the National Council	Majority coalition
Banking legislation	137/46	Center-left
Handicapped insurance	125/57	Center-right
Taxation agreements	109/76	Center (+ left renegades)

different dimensions of audience orientation were operationalized separately (see [Appendix B](#) for a detailed description of the operationalization of the five dimensions of audience orientation). An independent sample *t*-test was used to determine whether significant differences in audience orientation existed between MPs of the pole parties and MPs of the center-right parties. The quantitative and qualitative results of these interviews are presented and discussed in the next section.

Results and Discussion

The results in [Table 2](#) display the mean scores of the two party groups for each of the five dimensions. The results should not be compared *among* the different dimensions, as the indices on which they are based differ considerably (see operationalization in [Appendix B](#)). Hence, the fact that, for example, the mean score for *symbolic interventions* is considerably lower than for *image orientation* is related to the differential design of the indices. What is comparable are the differences between the mean scores for MPs of the center-right parties and MPs of the pole parties *within* each dimension.

As laid out above, the absolute levels of audience orientation should only be considered with great caution, and the empirical focus lies on the relative levels between the different groups. In this regard, the fact that the pole parties, which are more audience-oriented, score only slightly above the neutral mean of 0.5 and hence did not express a strong preference for audience-oriented activities can only be considered as an indication of a low overall level of audience orientation, not as an empirical test.

However, the results provide consistent support for the hypothesis on the differences across parties: as expected, MPs of the pole parties expressed a significantly higher preference for symbolic issues (1), for a bargaining-oriented negotiation strategy (2), and for image-oriented goals in their media activities (3) than MPs of the center-right parties. MPs of the pole parties also referred more often to the use of symbolic interventions (4) than MPs of the center-right parties. Finally, MPs of the pole parties also referred significantly more often to staged media relations (5) than MPs of the center-right parties. Hence, the hypothesis can be confirmed insofar as members of the Social Democrats, the Swiss People's Party, and the Green Party were on average more audience-oriented than members of the Liberal Party, the Christian Democrats, the Green Liberals, and the Conservative Democrats.

TABLE 2

Five dimensions of audience orientation: expressed preferences of center-right and pole parties

Dimensions	Center-right parties (N = 23)	Pole parties (N = 27)	p
Symbolic issue orientation	0.39 (0.33)	0.58 (0.23)	0.030 ^a
Bargaining preference	0.28 (0.18)	0.52 (0.23)	0.000
Image orientation	0.45 (0.22)	0.57 (0.22)	0.055
Symbolic interventions	0.07 (0.17)	0.19 (0.28)	0.072 ^a
Staged media relations	0.34 (0.22)	0.46 (0.25)	0.078

Values are means with standard deviations in parentheses; 0 = minimum, 1 = maximum audience orientation.

^aSince homogeneity of variances was violated, as assessed by Levene's test for equality of variances ($p < 0.05$), separate variances and the Welch-Satterthwaite correction were used for these variables.

This quantitative comparison between the expressed preferences of the center-right and the pole-party MPs indicates that there are consistent differences in audience orientation between the two groups. Beyond these broad comparisons, the answers from the face-to-face interviews provided more qualitative insights into how MPs argued and how they perceived the process. The quotes presented below are exemplarily selected to point out a particular argument made in the interviews.

Symbolic issue orientation: As defined earlier, an issue in a particular debate is considered as symbolic when it is, on the one hand, not directly linked to the bill under discussion and, on the other hand, likely to resonate well with the mass media and the voters. In the handicapped insurance case, for example, misuse was considered as a symbolic issue, as it was not an adequate means to substantially decrease the insurance's debt and it was likely to stir an emotional reaction in the public. As a Social Democrat MP put it: "Of course we should punish misuse, but the efforts to do that and the actual benefits for the pension are completely disproportional" (MP 12). The symbolism of this issue therefore lies in the disproportion of the measure and the knowledge that misuse stirs an emotional public reaction. Similarly, in the too-big-to-fail banking regulation bill the topic of bankers' high bonuses is not actually related to the problem of the systemic relevance of large banks. A Social Democrat MP confirmed that the remuneration debate "played a role mainly in the political process" (MP 29) and the debate on social justice but not in the stability of the Swiss financial system, which the bill actually addressed. However, in relation to the 2008 financial crisis and the saving of the largest Swiss bank, high managers' salaries were likely to stir emotional public reactions and hence represented a good topic for generating public attention. Finally, in the taxation agreements case, it was the topics of Swiss sovereignty, the automatic exchange of information, and stolen CDs with data of bank clients that stirred a relatively strong public reaction. However, the taxation agreement would not provide a solution for these issues. As a Green Liberal MP argued, the agreements "are precisely designed to prevent the automatic exchange of information" (MP 39). Regarding the debate on data brokering, too, a Liberal MP criticized that "we cannot prevent the acquisition of stolen CDs; the taxation agreement has nothing to do with that" (MP 45). Hence, in these exemplary statements MPs confirm the assumption used for the quantitative analysis that certain topics in the parliamentary debate are raised for reasons of audience orientation rather than to solve the problem that is addressed in the particular bill.

Bargaining preference: In the negotiation dimension, the comments made by MPs also confirmed that pole party members are oriented toward bargaining rather than problem-solving. A member of the Swiss People's Party, for example, was proud that his party "did not only accept but actually *sought* conflict" (MP 5). Another MP of the same party phrased the position more diplomatically but with the same intransigent bottom line: "Compromise was made at a point where we could not possibly agree" (MP 33). By contrast, the few comments made by the MPs of the center-right parties tended toward the problem-solving approach: a Liberal MP stressed that his party "tried to reach the broadest possible consensus" (MP 7); and a Christian Democrat MP emphasized that her party "tried to find solutions" (MP 17). These exemplary statements show that the recurrent problem of social desirability in interviews did not prevent MPs from revealing opposing perspectives on

negotiation behavior and also show that MPs of the pole parties were actually keen to emphasize their tough bargaining attitude.

Image orientation: With regards to the image orientation dimension, the difference revealed in the quantitative comparison between the center-right and the pole parties also shows in the statements made by the MPs. A Green MP admitted that “of course increasing the number of members always plays a certain role” (MP 21). And an MP of the Swiss People’s Party emphasized: “Clear positions always help to shape the image. But it needs a huge effort to run against all the others.” He furthermore deplored that fact that “this was not an emotional topic” and that hence it was “impossible to increase the number of members” or sympathizers in this debate (MP 49). In these statements, both the image-building preference and the attempt to increase the number of supporters are exemplified.

Symbolic political instruments: Concerning the political interventions, one MP of the Christian Democrats exemplarily deplored that interpellations were used for symbolic reasons: “These were rather political interventions, as the technical considerations were mainly made by the banks. [Interpellations] were therefore rather political instruments to increase the visibility” (MP 46). By “political” the MP explicitly meant that these interventions did not contribute to the substance of the debate but were rather meant to show the public that these political actors were “doing something.” This is exactly what is meant by symbolic interventions: not the substantial modifications in the text but the “placebo politics” that Meyer (2002) criticized.

Staged media relations: To an additional question of *how* MPs used the media to reach their goals in political decision-making processes, actors from the center-right and the pole parties responded differently. MPs of the center-right parties tended to see the strategic use of the media as something rather negative. One MP deplored that parliamentary actors get into the media “through their permanent willingness to provide information immediately. They have to comment on everything, have to be reachable at any time, have to have an opinion on everything. And they know how to wrap this opinion in juicy words” (MP 25). MP 27 criticized that “one cannot admit to gray” but that a “black-and-white orientation” is necessary to get into the news. This complicates compromises between political actors. Another MP complained that “Social Democrats and People’s Party can play the opposition role. The media strengthen the pole [parties]. [The media] always think it is necessary to simplify complex issues” (MP 9). Thus, in the view of center-right MPs, the difficulty in accessing and using the media for their goals seems to lie in the complexity of their solutions. They generally perceived the media and the public as an obstacle rather than as an opportunity to reach their goals.

On their side, MPs of the pole parties seem to have a more pragmatic attitude toward the media. For them, the media and political actors’ use of them are simply part of the political process. As one MP put it, “the media need politicians—and vice versa. There is a clear interdependence” (MP 41). In a similar account, MP 22 argued that “it is a process of giving-and-taking, a sort of symbiosis, a mutual instrumentalization.” With respect to the question of how political actors get to use the media, MP 48 of the Swiss People’s Party stressed how important it is “to send a short, concise message,” as “this forces the media to discuss the issue.” And a Social Democrat considered increasing “tabloidization” even as a positive process, because in the past “only the Federal Council managed to [access the

media]. Today, more people have access to the media due to ‘tabloidization.’ NZZ is not the leading journal anymore. This is—generally speaking—a good process” (MP47).

The exemplary quotations presented above complement the result from the quantitative comparison between the two groups of parliamentary actors and support the hypothesis that members of the pole parties are, in general, more audience-oriented than the members of the center-right parties. Whereas MPs of the center-right parties considered the media as an obstacle, for MPs of the pole parties, the media were simply an additional tool in the political decision-making process. Furthermore, center-right MPs deplored the fact that they could not explain complex issues in more depth. They would have preferred closed negotiations without the involvement of the media, and they criticized MPs who used their access to the media for image-related activities. MPs of the pole parties in turn considered the evaluation of the emotional potential of issues, personalized interactions, and vote-seeking in decision-making processes as “part of the game” between political and media actors. In doing so, they showed signs of audience orientation as laid out in the different dimensions presented in this article.

Conclusion

In this article, the mediatization of politics is operationalized as the expressed preference of parliamentary actors for audience-oriented activities in five dimensions. The findings provide strong support for the general hypothesis that members of the pole parties would express a greater preference for audience-oriented activities than members of the center-right parties. Members of the pole parties considered symbolic issues as more important, had a more bargaining-oriented negotiation strategy, and were more image-oriented in their media-related activities than MPs of the center-right parties. Furthermore, pole party MPs claimed to use more symbolic interventions and organize more staged media activities than center-right MPs. For pole parties it seems that audience orientation is an integral part of their dual strategy as both governmental and opposition parties, in which they use the “audience option” more often and more consistently than the center-right parties. The latter are more wedded to the relatively closed Swiss model of confidential consensus-seeking.

The findings presented here add to the literature on the mediatization of politics in several ways. First, the article operationalizes the mediatization of politics in Strömbäck’s (2008) fourth dimension, namely the mediatization of political actors, by specifying five different dimensions of MPs’ expressed preferences and activities. This diversifies the conceptual understanding and contributes to the empirical analysis of the mediatization of politics in general. Second, the hypothesis that members of the opposition are more audience-oriented than members of the government, which has been raised in the literature on agenda-setting and mediatization, is tested empirically. The results of this study show that in the Swiss context MPs of the pole parties, which, although part of the government, often assume the opposition role, are indeed more audience-oriented than members of the center-right parties. Finally, the theoretical argument that elected political actors have electoral incentives to anticipate the requirements of commercial media even during day-to-day decision-making processes (Landerer 2013) provides a more nuanced picture of the drivers of the mediatization of politics: it is the combination of vote-seeking political actors and commercial media logic that is most likely to result in the mediatization of politics. From the conceptualization presented above it also becomes clear that a potential populist

challenge to democracy consists of the mutually beneficial symbiosis between audience-oriented political actors and commercially oriented media companies.

The empirical analysis of the Swiss case is interesting in a comparative perspective because it is a consensual hard case: the double options of popular initiatives and facultative referenda require a political culture that is strongly oriented toward broad and deep consensus-building, and the general level of audience orientation is expected to be lower than in majority systems. This article's normative stance is not that audience orientation is problematic *per se*; however, it does question the contribution of permanent campaigning to substantial and stable outcomes in legislative decision-making processes. Substantial political negotiations should be oriented toward stable, long-term solutions and not toward the symbolic, ultimately populist, "make believe" of the voters. This is true for political decision-making processes in general, but it is particularly true in Switzerland's fragile, decentralized, and multi-ethnic context.

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NOTES

1. In spite of what Manin (1997, 224) argued, political actors do not necessarily become more autonomous in "audience" democracy than in party democracy: whereas they were constrained by party considerations in the latter, in the former they adapt to a particular set of media considerations.
2. *Audience-orientation* is to be differentiated from *outside-* or *public-orientation*: outside- or public-orientation (see e.g. Kriesi, Tresch, and Jochum 2007) simply implies the use of instruments that involve the mass media and that are hence "outside" the parliamentary (committee, plenum) process. The use of the media can be both for *policy* reasons (to put outside pressure on involved actors in the process) and for *electoral* reasons (in order to increase chances for future electoral success). Audience-orientation, however, is conceptualized as a particular, permanent electoral orientation. Empirically, these two concepts are most certainly difficult to separate from each other, as political actors may not reveal their motivations easily in interviews.

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Appendix A

Sample Structure: Parties' Share of Seats in Parliament and Sample Structure

Party group	Share of seats in parliament		Interview respondents	
	Seats	%	N	%
Swiss People's Party	62	25.2	10	20
Social Democrats	57	23.2	13	26
Christian Democrats	44	17.9	10	20
Liberal Party	41	16.7	10	20
Green Party	17	6.9	4	8
Green Liberals	14	5.7	1	2
Conservative Democrats	10	4.1	2	4
Total	245	99.6	50	100

One member of the Parliament is not a member of any party group (Mauro Poggia, MCG).

Appendix B

Dimensions and Variables of Audience Orientation

As stated in the theoretical part, the concept of *audience orientation* as defined in this paper consists of *five different dimensions*. Each of the five dimensions is an index ranging from 0 (not audience-oriented) to 1 (strongly audience-oriented). The five dimensions are not weighted, although the number of variables per index varies. The detailed operationalization of each dimension is presented below.

1. Symbolic issue orientation

This is a case-specific dimension. For each of the three decision-making processes, MPs were asked to rate several case-specific statements (considered as symbolic/emotional in the respective decision-making process) according to their

importance on an ordinal five-point scale: "How important were the following aspects in the [*specific decision-making process*] for you?" (1 = not important, 5 = very important):

<i>Handicapped insurance case</i>
Make misuse of pensions more difficult
Allow handicapped insurance pensioners to live in dignity
Punish misuse of pensions more severely
<i>"Too big to fail" banking regulation case</i>
Restrictions on variable remunerations (bonuses)
Introduction of a holding structure
<i>Taxation agreements case</i>
Stop protecting the Swiss banking system
Avoid Swiss surrender with regards to bank secrecy
Promote the automatic exchange of information as an alternative solution
Prevent the acquisition of stolen CDs with data of bank clients

For the *symbolic issues* dimension of audience orientation, the mean value for the nine variables was calculated for the interviewed MPs, and the five-point scale was transformed into a scale with a range from 0 (no symbolic orientation) to 1 (strong symbolic orientation).

2. Bargaining preference

For the *bargaining preference* dimension, four variables were selected, and MPs were asked to indicate their preference between two opposed extremes on a continuum (an ordinal scale from 1 to 5):

<i>"What was more important for your party?"</i>
To include all [political] actors in the negotiations (1) or select explicitly (5)?
To seek alliances (1) with other parties (and concede in some points) or to follow a coherent party policy (5)?
To find a compromise (1) or to stick to the own position (5)?
To serve society as a whole (1) or to stay loyal ones one voters (5)?

The low end (1) of the continuum represents a general problem-solving attitude, whereas the high end (5) is meant to measure a general preference for bargaining. "3" is considered as neutral between the extremes. For the "bargaining preference" dimension of audience orientation, the mean value of the four variables was calculated for the interviewed MPs, and the five-point scale was transformed into a scale with a range from 0 (problem-solving) to 1 (bargaining).

3. Image orientation

For this dimension, MPs were asked to rate the statements below on a five-point ordinal scale, answering the following question:

"Which were the goals of these media-related activities?" (1 = not important, 5 = very important)
Improve the party image.
Increase the number of members/sympathizers.
Increase the salience of/attention towards the topic.

For the *image orientation* dimension of audience orientation, the mean value for the three "image" variables was calculated for each MP, and the five-point scale was transformed into a scale with a range from 0 (no image orientation) to 1 (strong image orientation).

4. Symbolic political interventions

In order to analyze the preference for symbolic political interventions, MPs were asked to indicate the political interventions they had used in the decision-making process. As argued in the theoretical part of the paper, *interpellations* and *questions* are primarily symbolic interventions in the Swiss parliament. MPs using these interventions scored 1 (cumulative), and MPs who used neither of the two scored 0. From this, the mean use of the two symbolic political instruments was calculated for the *symbolic political interventions* dimension of audience orientation.

5. Staged media relations

The *staged media relations* dimension is an index of five activities which MPs had used in a particular decision-making process:

"Which of the following media related instruments did your party use in the [specific decision-making process]?"
Public meetings / podium speeches
Letter-to-the-editor actions
Press conferences
TV appearances
Blogging

MPs who stated in the interview that their party had used all these five media-related instruments scored 1 (cumulative), and MPs who used none of the five scored 0, and the mean score was calculated for each MP and then aggregated at the party level. From this, the mean use of these five media-related instruments was calculated, for the *staged media relations* dimension of audience orientation.