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### CHALLENGES TO POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS IN THE MEDIA: COMMERCIALIZATION, FRAMING, AND PERSONALIZATION

Due to an increasing interdependence between mass communication and political processes, the role of media in political campaigns generated much debate. In this paper, we identify commercialization, framing and personalization as three key challenges to the way the media face political campaigns. We theoretically derive three hypotheses, one for each of those challenges. Based on data from expert interviews as well as from a content analysis, the validity of each hypothesis is surveyed. The results do not confirm an assumed lack of providing campaign relevant news in the media coverage as proposed by considering the media as purely commercially driven organizations. Further they demonstrate the use of different frames for the presentation of competing positions in a political debate. Finally, personalization appears as an important strategy of news selection, focusing on a small number of prominent actors.

*Keywords:* political campaigns, commercialization, framing, personalization, media coverage.

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## 1. Introduction

The role of mass media in contemporary political campaigns has generated much debate (e.g. De Vreese & Semetko 2004; Jarren & Donges 2006; Kamps 2007; McCombs & Shaw 1972/1973; Mutz 1998; Patterson 1980; Semetko 2004). It is generally argued that the media at least partly fail to serve the public interest, because they do not provide diverse, carefully investigated and well-balanced political information (Hamilton 2004; McManus 1994; Meier & Jarren 2001). This might be true for entertainment-oriented media such as most television networks and the tabloid press, but, as Page (1996: 7) points out, extensive political information is available elsewhere in the system. Postman (2004: 4) states that, while technology now permits a constant flow of unedited and unrelated facts, this information has lost the overarching narrative that helped to guide citizens on how to process such information. The media's constant flow of information is traditionally edited by journalists, the narrators of modern times. Therefore, media act as an opinion leader or cue giver, as many of the messages potential voters receive about candidates and issues do not come directly from political activists, but from the news media (Kepplinger 2007: 3). Political actors need the media to convey their messages to their voters, who need information to make meaningful decisions. Thus not surprisingly, a professionalization of the communication by political actors can be noted as an ongoing process (Donges 2008). However, the interdependence between political actors and the media remains a rather conflictive relationship (Altmeyden, Röttger & Bentele 2004).

We identify three challenges in modern political campaigning which the political and media actors involved have to be carefully aware of: Commercialization of the media, framing, and personalization. Based on three different theoretical strands within media and communication science, these challenges become interlinked when we look at political campaigns. Institutionalized political campaigns are limited in duration with a clear beginning and a clear end, include specific arguments and actors and are an important part of the involvement of voters in democratic processes. Thus, political campaigns are well qualified as a framework for our research.

Due to the fact that media companies are economically driven, they have to take commercial issues into their consideration. Thus, the media business becomes more and more commercialized (Meier & Jarren 2001). The media use new tactics to attract the public. In the coverage of political campaigns, characters become more important than the issues they are talking about. This is especially true for election campaigns, where the “horse race” between candidates is covered much more intensively than issues (Iyengar, Norpoth & Hahn 2004) but personalization can be found in direct-democratic campaigning as well. Finally the media do not only convey information but they put it into a broader context, they frame the facts. Therefore political arguments are used to promote definitions and interpretations judged by reference to certain standards, e.g. moral or economically driven standards. Our main research question is: How is the media challenged by commercialization, personalization and framing when they cover political campaigns?

The paper is structured as follows: First, we focus on the theoretical framework surrounding the three aspects of the challenges to political campaigns. Second, we present specific details on direct democratic campaigns in Switzerland, as well as on the campaign that we selected for this analysis, before describing our methodology. Third, we present empirical results for the three aspects separately. Finally, we present specific conclusions.

## 2. Commercialization

Mass media are normatively expected to provide relevant, diverse, pluralistic, and carefully investigated information to the public. Furthermore, the media should place relevant information within a broader context. In this respect, media play a vital role in the functioning of democratic societies, as they substantively inform citizens about politics. However, media – especially privately owned media – are also economically driven institutions and need to behave in an economically rational manner. These two conflicting tasks – contributing to the functioning of deliberative democracy and being commercially successful – challenge media companies to find a balance “between the public interest and their own financial self interest” (Picard 1998: 337). The two tasks are inextricably

linked with each other; only financially strong companies have the resources to act independently and to offer a wide range of information.

In the scientific debate, there is a broad consensus that media are increasingly oriented toward economic goals, rather than on their contribution to the functioning of deliberative democracy (Picard 1998; Siegert, Meier & Trappel 2005). This process is referred to as the commercialization of the media, i.e. the strengthening of the economic influence on structures and functioning of the media system, especially by the advertising industry, and consequences for media production, employees, communication processes and the audience, and, more generally speaking, in respect to the cultural, economic and political environment (Saxer 1998: 10 ). Cost control is becoming more important: outsourcing of parts of the production chain is expected to help to minimize costs, the number of staff in newsrooms is shrinking, external sources such as Public Relation (PR) are becoming more important, and costly investigation of topics is restricted (Siegert, Rademacher & Lobigs 2008). As a result, optimizing cost efficiency is gaining dominance over optimizing the quality of the product. Or as Picard (2005) states, commercial pressure is coming to dominate content decisions. Media companies see their audiences increasingly as consumers who can be targeted as different groups, rather than as citizens to be kept informed (Gandy 2004). "News that sells" has become the maxim in many news rooms (Hamilton 2004). This leads to the "homogenization of information and ideas" (Picard 1998: 209), and the range of opinions reflected in media reporting shrinks (Entman 1989). At the same time, media create advertising-friendly content to attract more advertising. Boundaries between advertising and editorial content are fading, and media are becoming increasingly dependent on advertisers. Consequently, they become vulnerable to outside pressure. Picard (2005: 346) summarizes this situation, "in the heavily commercialized environment of media, content increasingly marginalizes information and discussion of community, national, and world, issues in the pursuit of entertainment and diversion that may attract audiences and advertisers that can produce higher income."

In summary, one of the starting points of our analysis is the widely agreed fact that media organizations must be seen not only as journalistically oriented organizations, but also as economically oriented. As

these two orientations are largely incompatible, each media organization is obliged to choose its own set of tradeoffs. The focus of our study is to analyze the correlation between these tensions and the way the media cover political issue campaigns. With our focus on issue rather than election campaigns we aim to follow a perspective, which has not yet been discussed sufficiently in the scientific debate about commercialization. Thus, we derive the following hypothesis, which we call the hypothesis of the supply problem:

*“The media do only insufficiently provide the public with the campaign information needed for voting on the campaign issue.”*

### 3. Framing

The theoretical and empirical concept of framing is receiving increasing interest from communications researchers (Tewksbury & Scheufele 2007). However, most framing scholars agree that there is a mismatch between the quantity of empirical studies and the quality of the theoretical and conceptual work in this field (Dahinden 2006; Entman 2007; Tewksbury & Scheufele 2007). Entman developed the following classic definition of framing, which can be considered a point of reference (1993: 52): “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment and recommendation for the item described.”

This description encompasses the following four key elements of a frame: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment/recommendation. The definition of frames can be operationalized in a convincing manner (see Table 1), because it is both sufficiently specific to be used in content analysis, and sufficiently open to be adapted to any issue of public controversy.

Political campaigns can be regarded as social learning processes: When a new political issue is put on the public agenda, political actors try to frame the topic in such a way that maximizes the support for their own position. There is an intensive debate in public relations research to what extent the media follow the framing of the political actors or not (which

*Table 1: Typology of General Frames*

<i>Frame</i>	<i>General problem definition, causal interpretation</i>	<i>Key values for</i>
Conflict	There is a conflict of interest about this issue between various social actors.	Distributional equity, power balance
Economics	The issue is presented from an economic perspective.	Efficiency, effectiveness
Progress	Scientific knowledge plays a key role in the presentation of the issue.	Expertise, truth
Moral	The issue is debated on the background of moral, ethical and legal questions.	Moral, legal and ethical standards
Episodic	The issue is presented from the personalized perspective of an individual.	Emotional (sympathy, antipathy)

Source: Dahinden 2006; Iyengar 1991; Semetko & Valkenburg 2000

will not be discussed here), but it can be stated, that the media control the selection of content and that at least some of the frames promoted by political actors are adopted by the media in their characterizations and presentations of the political decision in the media content. This media framing influences to a certain extent how individuals make sense of new information, how they frame the issue and what decisions they finally take. In this paper, we are not able to analyze all these steps of the framing process. We will focus on a key step, say the framing of the issue in the media, what we consider as a suitable indicator for the observation of the framing competition between political actors. Our second hypothesis is as follows:

*“In media outlets, political actors differ in their framing of the same political issue: The political opponents do not make reference to the same key values (e.g. moral or economic), but rather select those frames and their associated values that have the potential to maximize the support for their position.”*

#### 4. Personalization

Personalization in terms of customization is widely used in a positive way when it comes to customized marketing strategies, service commitments, knowledge management, and learning practices, among others (e.g. Centre for Educational Research and Innovation 2006; Sense 2007; Surprenant & Solomon 1987; Tseng & Piller 2003). The conception as well as the perception of personalization, i.e. the increasing focus of the media coverage on persons rather than issues (Jarren & Donges 2006: 353), changes with the analysis of media influence and mass communication content with regard to politics and political campaigning.

The discussion of mediatization of political coverage by various scholars (Entman 2008; Gunther & Mughan 2000; e.g. Hallin 1991; and for various country-specific reports and [theoretical] findings see Swanson & Mancini 1996; Thompson 1995) offers more than a glimpse of a potential change in politicians' "handling" of the media, or their efforts to influence coverage conveyed by the media, and vice versa. Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999: 251) even assume that the language of politics has been married with that of advertising, public relations, and show business. In addition, these authors argue that mass media attention rules, production routines, selection criteria, and molding mechanisms are well known in the world of politics, and political actors are able to adapt their behavior to media requirements. Personalization strategies are seen to be part of such processes and necessities.

Personalization in the media is often associated with the emergence of political television coverage. Analyzing the democratic political process in Germany, Kaase (1994) argues that television, with its emphasis on the individual, may depoliticize politics and the political process itself in the eyes of citizens, in the long run. Boll (1995: 136) states that intensive use of TV (and the new media) by parties results in increasingly personalized campaigns, projecting some politicians as the only individual choice of competence and quality. Competing parties can either follow the path of the personalized campaign, or passively lag behind it. However, strengthened by TV coverage, these trends are also observed in "classical" newspaper reporting.

Changes in the content and presentation styles of news are indicators of the way in which the public perceives the political process today.

Tabloidization, or the adoption of presentation styles used by tabloids and magazines, is introduced as an operational concept to measure these changes. Tabloidization tendencies can occur in content (decrease in policy coverage), form (e.g. more personalization), and style (e.g. shorter sequences) (Donsbach & Büttner 2005). Or as Bek (2004: 377) points out, the personalization of politics can be seen in news items that focus on the human dimension of politicians. Personalization and simplification of complex matters are important elements of media strategies. Hence, personalization is presumed to be an essential method for conveying highly complex political information to laymen audiences, and it therefore establishes a specific kind of relationship between everyday life and politics (Heinrich 1998: 339; Holtz-Bacha, Lessinger & Hetesheimer 1998: 241; Weiß 2002: 285, 292). Many studies have analyzed the growing importance of horse-race- or character issues in election campaigns. But there is a lack of studies which focus on the degree of personalization in issue campaigns. Our aim is to make a contribution to clarify the amount of personalization used in issue campaigns. From the above discussion, we derive the following hypothesis, which we call the hypothesis of personalization strategy:

*“The strategy of selection within newsrooms is geared to a small number of prominent actors, therefore personalization may become evident.”*

## 5. Political Campaigns in Switzerland

The Swiss political system of direct democracy provides favorable conditions for NGO's and other political actors to place new issues on the official political agenda that are then voted on by Swiss citizens (Linder 1994). As a result, Swiss citizens are exposed to political campaigns much more often (about a dozen issues per year) than citizens in other democratic countries, who typically vote once every legislative period.

This paper focuses on a specific type of participation, the referendum (for a comprehensive discussion of other instruments see e.g. Linder 1994).

The asylum policy was subjected to three referenda in Switzerland in 1987, 1999 and most recently (as examined in this paper), the referendum on the new law of asylum of September 24th, 2006. This law was

initiated by the minister of justice of the time, a member of the right-wing “Swiss people’s party” (SVP). Accordingly, it is not surprising that the new law was intended to tighten the asylum policy through various procedural requirements. The law passed the deliberation and decision making process in parliament and the government, but it was opposed by a coalition of left-wing parties, churches, and charity organizations via referendum. This left-wing coalition was also supported by several centrist politicians from the Christian Democratic Party, and by several prominent business managers. Compared to other votes in Switzerland, there was an especially intensive political campaign around this referendum. For example, a group of 700 artists was formed to actively oppose the law. Nevertheless, the restrictive law passed the popular vote without much difficulty: 67.8 % voted “yes,” and only 32.2 % voted “no” (Bundesrat 2006).

## 6. Method

To examine the referendum campaign against the law of asylum through the lens of our hypotheses, we chose a media sample consisting of 18 high-circulation newspapers (13 in German speaking Switzerland, 5 in French speaking Switzerland), as well as the main newscast and news-magazines of Public Service TV, both in German and French speaking Switzerland. Our examination employs two methods: First we conduct structured interviews with editors-in-chief and leading business managers of the media organizations, as we contend that both professional groups are relevant to journalistic output. It is insufficient only to focus on editors, especially if we talk about commercialization. We tried to interview each expert twice, once before and once after the referendum vote. Overall, we conducted 28 face-to-face interviews before the referendum (each lasting about one hour), and 25 follow-up interviews after the referendum, over the telephone (each lasting about 10 to 15 minutes). Our questionnaire consisted of different sets of questions, including questions about the allocation of resources, the media brand positioning, and the importance of political news coverage. Our second method is content analysis. We collected a census of campaign-relevant articles in the above-mentioned newspapers, as well as campaign-relevant TV newscasts. The underlying

sample period consists of 16 weeks, starting in June, and ending on September 24th 2006, the day of the vote, leading to a total of 1487 coded newspapers issues, 232 evening newscasts, and 16 TV newsmagazines. Our codebook consisted of different sets of qualitative and quantitative variables, including campaign-relevant arguments and actors and the framing of the content (see Tables 1 and 2)<sup>1</sup>. More about the coding and the amount of articles and newscasts can be found in the following sections focusing on the results.

## 7. Findings

### 7.1. Commercialization

The hypothesis of the supply problem which we derived from the scientific debate about commercialization of the media states that the media do only insufficiently provide the public with the campaign information needed for voting on the campaign issue. How can we operationalize this hypothesis in the concrete case of a referendum campaign? Further, do our empirical results support the assumption?

As a first step we examine the media coverage itself. Although we cannot give the percentage of coverage on the referendum campaign as a proportion of the overall news coverage, our content analysis shows that with an absolute coverage of 1001 print articles and several TV stories on Public Service broadcasting during the 16-week timeframe, the issue of the referendum campaign was covered quite intensely.

The weekly distribution of the analyzed articles and newscasts shows that rather few articles were published during the first 11 weeks, with a subsequent increase in the following two weeks of the census. The peak appeared four weeks before the day of the vote. These weeks of a peak were followed by a significant decline in the final week. Concerning the number of articles per media outlet, different Swiss regions offered varying degrees

<sup>1</sup> The authors point out that this project is a part of the ongoing research module “Changing processes and strategies of political participation and representation” of the National Centre of Competence in Research (NCCR) “Challenges to Democracy in the 21st Century” – a research instrument of the Swiss National Science Foundation.

of coverage in campaign-related reporting; however, all analyzed Swiss regions received coverage. With regard to the various languages spoken in Switzerland, it can be stated that in German written newspapers, the average number of articles is about 0.8 per issue; in French written newspapers, the average number of articles is just above 0.5 per issue.

From a media economics perspective, there is an alternative way to operationalize the supply problem, namely by allocation of (scarce) editorial resources. Media coverage represents the output of a news organization, and thus can be considered as the result of the invested editorial resources, such as manpower or time. The allocation of these resources provides clues on the quantitative importance of political news coverage to media management in general, and of news coverage of the referendum campaign in particular. The production of political news coverage is a complex and multidimensional activity that cannot be standardized. Thus, we cannot state that allocation of more resources automatically leads to a quantitatively and qualitatively higher amount of news coverage. However, we do assume a relationship between invested editorial resources and the quality and quantity of the output. Therefore we asked media representatives how editorial resources are distributed among the various editorial departments, and how the allocation of these resources takes place.

We found that almost all experts consider political news coverage important or very important regarding investments in the coverage of politics and of political issue campaigns in particular, both absolutely and in comparison to other news segments. Only experts from the free newspapers, a newspaper category that has gained considerable importance in Switzerland over the last several years, do not consider political news coverage essential. Generally, there are also some critical statements questioning the commitment to political news coverage, for example by assuming that coverage of national politics has become less important during the last several years. Here we should note that this is only partly true for the public service TV, as political coverage is one genuine task of the public service TV in Switzerland. However, as one third of the budget of the Swiss public service TV is funded by advertising and sponsoring, economic considerations play an important role, too. Confirming our assumptions with regard to journalistic production, the experts are able

to quantify the editorial resources used for political news coverage in only a very limited way. Some answers do hint at the fact that the practice of detailed planning and budgeting in the media business is limited.

Still another approach to operationalize the supply problem from a media economics perspective is the strategic positioning of a media organization. The relevant question in this context is how qualitatively important political news coverage in general, and news coverage of a specific referendum campaign in particular, is to a media organization's management. In order to examine this question, we attempted to determine whether the experts regarded political coverage as part of their brand identity, and thus a core competence of their media organization (Siegert 2001: 133ff, 2002: 192ff). For newspapers and magazines, brand identity is something like the philosophy of the media outlet. The outlet represents a certain journalistic philosophy, including the basic objectives of a title, which runs like a thread through every new edition, allowing for a particular positioning in the market (Schroeder 1994: 26f). Consequently, we asked the media managers what role marketing considerations and the positioning of the brand play in the process of allocation of editorial resources for political news coverage. The results show once more that nearly all interviewed experts consider political news coverage and coverage of referendum campaigns in particular to be very important. For most of them, political news coverage is a crucial part of their brand identity and a core competence. Only experts representing the free newspapers do not consider political news coverage to be essential for their brand identity. Some regional newspapers seem to place their focus increasingly on the coverage of regional and local issues, partly at the expense of coverage of national politics. One expert puts it as follows: "The most important change during the last years was the increase of the resources for the local news department, in fact at the expense of the national, of the international, and of the business news department." In the case of the Swiss public service TV, this is obviously rather different. Public service TV in Switzerland has a clear mandate ("Leistungsauftrag") to cover political issues. Public service TV in Switzerland is primarily focused on stories with a national relevance and only partly reflects regional and local issues. However, the few programs focusing on regional and local issues are not in our sample.

As we can see, political news coverage still is one of the most important competences of most of the media. This result is supported by the already mentioned fact that the amount of coverage in the referendum of the asylum-law was pretty high.

## *7.2. Framing*

In this paper, we operationalize frames by means of arguments that are put forward within the debate. Arguments are evaluative statements that inform about the position of a political actor (pro, contra) by promoting a specific problem definition and causal interpretations that are judged by reference to explicit moral or other standards. The following statement was a key argument in the debate and can serve as an illustration for how arguments are used as indicators of frames: “The new, tightened law of asylum should be rejected because it is breaking with the humanitarian tradition of our country.” This argument can be decomposed into the four key elements mentioned in Entman’s (1993: 52) frame definition:

- Problem definition: tightened law of asylum
- Causal interpretation: (no explicit information in this argument)
- Moral evaluation: break with humanitarian tradition
- Treatment/recommendation: reject the law

We identified frames through a multi-step process that combines inductive and deductive approaches: In a first step, we inductively identified a total of 89 individual arguments that were found in the media content. It is obvious, that the media coverage also reports the arguments and positions of input material, speeches and press conferences of the campaign-relevant political actors. These arguments were paraphrased into a more general wording and then used as a coding scheme for all media. Second, these arguments were inductively grouped into a total of ten lines of argumentation. Each line of argumentation was used by both camps, either in a pro or a contra version of the argument. Third, these lines of argumentation were deductively linked to a typology of general frames (see Table 2). This combination of bottom-up and top-down approaches has several advantages: The bottom-up steps provide a close link between the specificity of the issue and the frames that are identified. The top-down

step helps to link the specific case study to more general and abstract concepts. And the stepwise procedure provides full transparency to the researcher and reader.

Table 2 shows the results of the content analysis by contrasting the lines of argumentation of the pro and contra sides.

Analyzing the results in Table 2, we highlight the following four points: Out of the catalogue of ten lines of argumentation, the campaign focused on only the three lines that were addressed by both camps with more than

*Table 2: Lines of Argumentation by the Two Sides*

<i>Lines of argumentation</i>	<i>General Frame</i>	<i>Pro camp</i>	<i>Contra camp</i>
keeping humanitarian tradition	Moral and legal	12.1 %	33.5 %
improving efficiency of implementation	Economic	17.3 %	8.6 %
reducing attractiveness for asylum seekers	Economic	30.3 %	18.0 %
reducing crime	Moral and legal	5.8 %	7.8 %
protecting national labor market	Conflict	1.4 %	0.5 %
reducing impacts on schools and health system	Economic	4.7 %	2.9 %
keeping general legal standards	Moral and legal	6.4 %	9.5 %
reducing discrimination and xenophobia	Moral and legal	5.2 %	3.9 %
reducing costs for cities	Economic	0.1 %	1.8 %
personal attack on opponents	Individual	8.0 %	6.0 %
other arguments		8.9 %	7.7 %
Total		100.0 %	100.0 %
N (Absolute number of arguments per camp)		1165 (35 % of all arguments)	2149 (65 % of all arguments)

Source: own data; Chi-Square Test: Pearson Values: 3314; degrees of freedom: 21; two-tailed level of significance: .000

50 % frequency. These key lines of argumentation could not be monopolized by either side, rather, they were contested. Each key argumentation was followed by a counter-argumentation from the opponent.

It is not surprising that the frequencies of the lines of argumentation differ between the two camps. On the one hand, the pro-camp's two most important arguments – the new law is “reducing the attractiveness for asylum seekers” (30.3 %), and is “improving the efficiency of the implementation” (17.3 %) – can both be assigned to an economic framing of the asylum issue. On the other hand, the main line of argumentation of the contra camp can be labeled as a moral and legal framing of the problem. From this opposing point of view, the main argument against the new law is its conflict with the “humanitarian tradition” (33.5 %). The next argument is a negation of the main argument of the opponents (“reducing the attractiveness for asylum seekers”) (18 %), followed by “keeping general legal standards” (9.5 %).

While two general frames (economic, moral) were very prominent in our data, other general frames were rather rare (conflict, episodic) or completely absent (progress).

Political campaigns can be regarded as competitions between two or more actors aiming to maximize support for their positions among citizens. From that point of view, it is not only important to know which frames (say: rows in Table 2) have gained how much attention, but also how much media space was dedicated to each of the positions in the conflict (say: columns in Table 2). These columns can be regarded as the bias dimension of framing (Entman 2007). The last line in Table 2 shows the absolute number of observations and highlights that the media coverage was by no means balanced: The ratio of pro to contra argument is 35 % to 65 %.

### *7.3. Personalization*

Regarding the hypothesis of personalization strategies, we registered a total count of 1178 actors in newspapers and television during the analyzed campaign period. The numerous actors depend on the selection criteria respectively the operationalization of the term actor. We define actors as all appearing individuals or groups that express their opinion in at least one argument, articulating support or non-support with respect

to the new law of asylum. Actors are therefore not limited to politicians, parties, or any other campaigning group, but may include, for example, the author of a letter to the editor. Excluding 227 letter writers, 965 arguing politicians, parties, campaign groups, and journalists remain in our sample. In the majority of cases, these specific actors are mentioned only once, that is, in one newspaper article or once in a television report, whereas the top ten appearing actors aggregated 280 coder recordings, nearly 30 percent of all coder recordings (see Table 3).

The largest number of mentions is credited to Christoph Blocher, the minister of justice during the referendum campaign, and a highly influential member of the right-wing "Swiss people's party" (SVP).

Blocher "acted" in 97 articles or television reports, giving 347 arguments in favor of tightening the asylum policy. The leading opponents, Ruth Dreifuss and Markus Rauh, argued 47 respectively 24 times, giving

*Table 3: Top Ten Actors*

<i>Actors name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>"Acted" in articles (frequency)</i>	<i>Offered arguments (frequency)</i>
Christoph Blocher	pro	97	347
Ruth Dreifuss	contra	47	138
Markus Rauh	contra	24	79
Karin Keller-Sutter	pro	21	55
Claude Ruey	contra	21	50
Ueli Maurer	pro	19	47
Chistophe Darbellay	pro	14	24
Eduard Gnesa	pro	14	36
Hans-Jürg Fehr	contra	12	45
Micheline Calmy-Rey	contra	11	44
		280	865
Top five proponents		165 (58.93 %)	509 (58.84 %)
Top five opponents		115 (41.07 %)	356 (41.16 %)

Source: own data

138 respectively 79 arguments against the more restrictive asylum policy in the analyzed media. Therefore, the pro-referendum Blocher can clearly be regarded as the dominant actor during the campaign. Comparing the performance of proponents and opponents within the top-ten actors list (including five actors from each camp), the proponents subsume 59 percent of articles and arguments, whereas the opponents subsume 41 percent of both figures.

Concerning the estimation of the importance of political actors during this specific campaign, the media experts also identified Christoph Blocher as the dominant advocate, and churches and charitable organizations as groups, plus Ruth Dreifuss and Markus Rauh as individuals, as the most important opponents.

## 8. Discussion and Conclusion

Our first hypothesis, the hypothesis of the supply problem, states that the media do only insufficiently provide the public with the campaign information needed for voting on the campaign issue. Both our results from content analysis, as well as from expert interviews do not hint at such a supply problem. On the contrary, our findings draw a picture of a nearly ideal Swiss media landscape from a normative point of view, at least for the concrete case of the observed referendum campaign on the law of asylum. However, the confrontation between the 'pessimistic' theory of commercialization and the 'optimistic' point of view of the media experts must not be seen as a final result from this project, but as a conceptual starting point for further research in the context of the commercialization debate.

Our second hypothesis, the framing hypothesis, suggests that political actors differ in their framing of a political issue and that these differences can be found in the media representation of the competing camps. On the background of our findings, our second hypothesis is supported. As there is no direct impact on the voting results, further reflection and consideration is needed. Is this an illustration of weak media effects? However, we note the following competing explanations for this result that can be considered as starting points for further research. The supporters of the new law framed the debate in an economic perspective, and although they

received substantially less attention in the media, it might have resonated better with the existing schemas and predispositions of the voters than the moral and legal framing of the opponents of the new law.

Our third hypothesis, the hypothesis of personalization strategies, argues that the strategy of selection within newsrooms is geared to a small number of prominent actors. As the data show, personalization is truly an important strategy, and political parties and campaigners increasingly personalize their strategies while adapting to the changing media environment, a circumstance that Schultz et al. (2005: 68) described. Although we record a large number (965) of arguing actors, the top-ten counted are individual actors – not groups or parties – and subsume about 30 percent of that count, giving the most prominent protagonists an advantage within the media coverage. This personalization strategy is more often applied by the pro camp, the proponents of the tightening of Swiss asylum policy. The question of imbalance seems to be more complicated than that of personalization as a whole and – as Entman (1989: 33) points out – much more complex than either news critics or defenders have acknowledged.

Our results demonstrate why it is important to monitor the challenges of commercialization, framing, and personalization in the media. Especially for understanding the effects of the general trend towards the highly important role of the media in the democratic process on the one hand and media organizations that are more and more economically driven on the other. Our findings show, that a popular statement like “the media are only interested in economic success” is not supported when it comes to political news coverage in Switzerland. Our research helps to understand the challenges the media face in this respect. However, it is important to continuously monitor the complex interdependence of political actors and the media. As we have shown, referendum campaigns are an appropriate object to study this interdependence. In the past, research has been very focused on election campaigns. However, this focus should be extended to referendum campaigns and issue-specific debates in the future.

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