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### PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR WP8

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## PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(Conceptual Framework for WP8)

### Research on parliamentary agenda-building

Do the media determine political agendas? From the political science field, the majority of the work around this question has been developed in the United States (Baumgartner, Jones, & Leech, 1997; Edwards & Wood, 1999; Jones & Baumgartner, 2005; Walker, 1977) and more recently in different European countries (for example in the U.K. -Davis, 2007 & 2009-; Denmark -Green-Pedersen & Stubager, 2010-; Belgium -Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2010 & 2011; Walgrave, Soroka, & Nuytemans, 2008; Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006- and in Germany –see e.g. Eilders, 1997). Most of the studies have been carried out in non-violent conflict contexts and, in this sense, the INFOCORE project offers an opportunity for innovation.

Some studies ascertain the existence of considerable media effects in political agendas (Cook et al., 1983; Edwards & Wood, 1999; Gilberg, Eyal, McCombs, & Nicholas, 1980; Protess et al., 1987; Trumbo, 1995; Wood & Peake, 1998). Others deny that the media have much impact at all (Kingdon, 1984; Pritchard & Berkowitz, 1993; Walker, 1977; Wanta & Foote, 1994), so available results on this question are mixed and contradictory. Scholars have not yet succeeded in formulating a clear answer. As Walgrave et al. (2008, pp 814-15) state, ‘we have accumulated relatively little knowledge about the magnitude of this effect or the conditions under which this effect increases or decreases’. The answer may be different in the diverse national contexts. In fact, as these authors mention (2008, p. 815): ‘We also know little about political agenda-setting effects outside the United States, as very few studies have focused on other countries. As political agenda-setting occurs in specific national institutional contexts and as these contexts dramatically differ across countries, we have every reason to expect that agenda-setting dynamics in general, and the media’s role in it differ across countries’.

Several studies conducted during the last 35 years on the agenda-building model regarding parliamentary debates consider the conditions determining whether a given issue enters or not into the discussions. Some of these studies show that media is not always the most decisive factor to take into account to understand the process of construction of the parliamentary agenda (Green-Pedersen & Stubager, 2010; Jones & Baumgartner, 2005; Walker, 1977). Table 1 summarizes some of the most important circumstances pointed out by different authors as being related to political-agenda-building:

TABLE 1

Circumstances affecting issues' entrance into parliamentary agendas		
Issue-related	Media-related	Politics-related
It is an older item (Cobb & Elder, 1971)	Style of issue coverage: it receives unambiguous reporting clearly defining the problem and pointing toward solutions (Protess et al., 1987)	Non-election time (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006)
It impacts on a large number of people (Walker, 1977)	It is made accessible by media. Consonance and focusing (Eilders, 1997)	Close to personal traits of political actors (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006)
It addresses a serious problem (Walker, 1977)	Style of issue coverage: negativity (Baumgartner et al., 1997)	Present in the party program/manifesto – Issue ownership, especially within opposition MPs (Green-Pedersen & Stubager, 2010; Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2011)
It has an easily understood solution (Walker, 1977)	Covered mainly by newspapers (Walgrave et al., 2008)	It fits strategic interest of political parties (Green-Pedersen & Stubager, 2010)
It is obtrusive (Zucker, 1978)	Media devote attention to it (Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2011)	Present in ministerial meetings (Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2010)
Its indicators are severe (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005)		Present in the government-agreement (Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2011)
It is sensational or related to justice/crime (Walgrave et al., 2008)		

#### *Factors influencing the parliamentary agenda*

There are three kinds of factors that can contribute to the success of an issue struggling to reach a parliamentary agenda: 1) the characteristics of the items; 2) the media coverage; and 3) the political context in which the debate takes place.

**1) Characteristics of the items.** Seven characteristics can improve the chances of an item entering the parliamentary agenda:

- a) It is an older item. Cobb and Elder conclude that if an issue has previously reached the agenda, it will be given priority again by the decision makers (1971, pp. 906-907). So, this tendency would indicate that 'older' items have easier access than 'new issues' to institutional agendas.

- b) It has relevant consequences. It is necessary to assess the relevance or the consequences linked to the issue. In this sense, as Jones and Baumgartner note, signals from the environment can sometimes be a decisive factor for policymakers to allocate attention to a subject. So, objective indicators of a problem, especially when they are severe, would partially explain why political elites decide to discuss a given issue. However, this is more evident for some particular cases, such as economic subjects, than for others, such as criminal justice. According to these authors, 'we can predict with more certainty governmental response from the intensity of the signal when the threat is extensive and can result in electoral changes than when it is not' (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005).
- c) It has an impact on a large number of people. Walker shares a similar point of view. This researcher pointed out that an issue would more probably be discussed by political actors if it impacts on large numbers of people (1977, p. 430). This way, its attractiveness for members of parliament would increase notably.
- d) It is a serious problem. In addition, another important feature to take into consideration is the problem addressed by the issue: it must be serious, evident, and based upon creditable sources of information (Walker, 1977, p. 431).
- e) It has an easily understood solution. If there is a problem, it must be solved: 'the case for inclusion on the agenda will be greatly strengthened if an easily understood solution exists for the problem being addressed' and, again, it should be comprehensible and rooted in honorable or prestigious origin (Walker, 1977, p. 431).
- f) It is an 'obtrusive issue'. This characteristic is very close to one of the factors analyzed by Walker in relation to the amount of people affected by an issue. In this sense, the so-called 'obtrusive issues' are those that affect nearly everyone and with which we can have some kind of personal experience (for example, social security, inflation, unemployment, crime). They would appeal easily to the political elite's attention (Zucker, 1978).
- g) It is a sensational or justice-and-crime related issue. According to a study conducted by Walgrave et al., (2008, p. 832) about media effects on political agenda-setting, sensational and justice-and-crime-related issues have larger effects than other kind of subjects (environmental, social or economic). They also conclude that media effects are stronger for certain issues (law and order, environment) than for others (foreign policy, economic issues). This is their result for a test of six clusters of issues.

**2) Media coverage.** Media-related circumstances constitute the second block of factors that can explain why certain issues attract attention of parliamentary members while others fail to do so. In this case, there are several contingencies that must be observed, from the level of **attention devoted** to the subject by the media to the kind of media outlet or type of treatment related to the coverage of the issue. First of all, it seems clear that the fact of receiving media attention determines the issue's entrance into the political agenda. As Vliegenthart and Walgrave showed: 'The more attention the media devote to an issue, the more attention will be devoted to that issue in parliamentary questions' (2011, p. 7).

However, the relationship between media coverage and political attention is more complex and other studies have delved into this issue. Thus, Eilders, who agrees in recognizing the media effects on politicians' attention allocation –'political actors also need the media to observe public affairs [...] collect information on issues and opinion through the media' (1997, p. 3)- considers that it is especially important to take into consideration two aspects regarding media coverage. On the one hand, we should note that if different media agree to devote coverage to the same issues, the effects would be stronger on members of Parliament's (MP) selection of issues. Eilders calls it 'focusing': 'The degree of correspondence on the issue dimension'. On the other hand, it is also important to assess how similar media commentaries about a given issue are, which would also make them very influential. Eilders calls it 'consonance'. He presents it as an evaluative dimension related to the 'correspondence of opinion' (1997, p. 13).

Eilders analyzed the editorial content of leading German **newspapers**. He found that the kind of media outlet where the issue appears is crucial. In this sense, although some scholars have pointed out the power of television in modern democracies, other researchers have proved that newspapers have a greater effect regarding parliamentary agenda-setting. Eilders explains that surveys among political actors in Germany 'support the significance of newspapers for their political work' and almost half of the federal and 'country'-representatives 'view the national prestige newspapers as important or very important for their parliamentary work' (1997, p. 12). This perspective is reinforced by the results obtained by Walgrave et al. in Belgium. They showed that newspapers exert more influence than TV (2008, p. 827), a fact that these authors relate to some singular features of newspapers: more in-depth and complete coverage, more credibility, and more flexible and easy processing of paper material (Ibid., pp. 818-819).

Finally, there are some studies that indicate how important the kind of treatment by the media is about a given issue. Some **styles of coverage** seem to be more appealing than others. Thus, unambiguous reporting clearly defining the problem and pointing toward solutions might, for example, bear more agenda-setting power than ambiguous and less dramatic coverage with many 'ifs', 'mights', and no self-evident solutions (Protess et al., 1987). Another kind of potentially influential coverage is the one that focuses on negativity. As Baumgartner et al. and other scholars have shown, negative coverage has more

political agenda-setting effects (1997), as people usually expect their representatives to react to subjects portrayed or framed as problems needing some solution.

This media influence on political debates could be especially prominent on '**chosen issues**' where election by policy makers is discretionary. In his study on how the U.S. Senate Agenda was set, Walker (1977) offered a typology of items that could be extended to the reality of any institutional parliamentary agenda. In his classification, Walker proposed four divisions depending on the degree of discretion that politicians would have to decide whether one particular issue should or should not attract their attention. In this sense, we can distinguish between: 1) periodically recurring problems; 2) sporadically recurring problems; 3) crises, or pressing problems; and 4) the chosen problems. If we agree that the first three categories require inevitably to be taken into account by politicians, it is justified that our main interest will remain on the last group of issues. The selection of them will depend on several conditions or circumstances like media action, as it has been outlined by several authors.

**3) Political context.** The third group of circumstances that must be observed are those related to the political context: period of time (e.g., election campaign), political parties' position, and political programs and manifestos. The studies carried out have focused their attention on media and political agendas during both campaign periods and routine political times. The results are different for each period. As Walgrave and Van Aelst recall, 'during campaigns, the media's impact on candidates' and parties' agenda is limited or even absent' (2006, p. 96), so 'electoral context makes it more difficult for the media to set the political agenda and to focus autonomously on issues that are not brought forward by parties or candidates' (Ibid., p. 97).

Other factors from the political context are directly related to political actors, from both a personal and an institutional perspective. **Personal traits** seem to affect the way they allocate attention to some issues while ignoring others. They are usually specialized in some fields, have a singular personality, own concerns, a personally sensitive issue, and a personal experience (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006, p. 103).

From an **institutional** point of view, there are several features concerning political parties and institutional positions that are also very relevant when we evaluate the options of a given issue to be addressed in a parliamentary debate. First of all, it is necessary to point out that an issue covered by the media will probably attract attention from political parties 'when the issue is one that political parties would have an interest in politicizing in the first place' (Green-Pedersen & Stubager, 2010, p. 664). In other words, if the subject fits party competition logic, it will be taken into consideration by MPs. This idea is very close to the concept of '**issue-ownership**', meaning that, in some sense, parties 'own' certain issues and, therefore, the electorate considers them to be the best to handle these issues (Green-Pedersen & Stubager, 2010, p. 667). These items tend to appear in their particular programs and manifestos because parties express in these documents the importance they attribute to each issue (Vliegthart & Walgrave,

2011, pp. 10-11). The allocation of attention to these themes is particularly important within opposition parties, who try to politicize these issues against the government in a dialectic struggle.

Following this logic, it seems reasonable to expect that if an issue is related to the politics undertaken by the government it will have more options to enter into the parliamentary agenda. Thus, if a given subject appears in the government agreement –an usual document in countries such as Belgium containing the government's main policy pledges- or if it is present in the ministerial meetings that usually take place every week, it will become an issue that opposition parties cannot ignore. That is because, like it or not, government sets the political agenda on a weekly basis when cabinet meets (Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2010, p. 325; 2011, p. 6).

#### *Models of agenda-building: who takes the initiative of an issue in the political debate*

Along with the circumstances surrounding the issues that end up being incorporated into the parliamentary agenda, it is also important to know which actors begin their promotion and what dynamics they follow until taken into consideration. According to Cobb, Ross, and Ross (1976), we can identify three different models of agenda-building. The first one, called the **outside initiative model**, refers to the process articulated by a group outside the formal governmental or political institutions' structure that wants to exert some kind of pressure in order to expand an issue and reach the public and the political agenda. In the second category, the **mobilization model**, the issues are initiated inside the government or the political institution and, later, decision makers try to expand them from the political to the public agenda to obtain support to implement a policy. The last one, known as the **initiative inside model**, describes the processes by which the public is kept apart from the agenda-building process. In these cases, the initiating group, which is inside the governmental agency or the political institution, has frequent access to political decision makers, does not want the issue on the public agenda, and looks for a successful and quick implementation.

### **Key constructs and theoretical definitions**

In WP8 we are concerned about the influence of the media in parliamentary debates in the context of violent conflicts. This question raises **seven essential theoretical paradigms and concepts** that we will address in order to empirically analyze the content of parliamentary debates and its relationship with media discourse: 1) the agenda-building process; 2) the issue-attention cycle (that implies a **diachronic** overview of parliamentary debates over time) and the politics of attention; 3) the 'mediatization of politics'; 4) the political agenda-setting process; 5) evidential claims; 6) interpretative frames; and 7) agendas for action.



**1) The agenda-building model.** The agenda-building approach helps to understand which actors – including the media- and what kind of circumstances are relevant when policy makers decide on the issues to be discussed in institutional arenas like a Parliament. This model has been studied by many prominent scholars within the media studies and political sciences fields. The first analyses about this phenomenon took place in the 1970s and were conducted by American researchers (see e.g., Cobb et al., Walker, 1977). Some years later, other scholars, especially from 2000 onwards, have studied similar processes in European countries such as Germany (Eilders, 1997), Belgium (Walgrave et al., 2008; Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2010), Spain (Berganza, 2009) and Denmark (Green-Pedersen & Stubager, 2010; Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2011).

Agenda-building studies have focused on different kinds of agendas, mostly on media and political ones. In the first case, researchers have analyzed mainly how the media agenda is affected by, first, real-world conditions and events, and second, activities of political actors (e.g., Berganza, 2009, p. 61). In the second case, they have studied the influence of different factors that participate in the configuration of the political agenda: media agenda/coverage, public agenda, real-world indicators, personal experiences, and interpersonal communication (Rogers & Dearing, 1987). The first of these, the media influence, is the one that represents more interest for our project. We are more interested in the analysis of how policy agendas are built, a phenomenon that sometimes has also been called the **political agenda-setting process**.

On the other hand, agenda-building is a theoretical concept related to the process that allows some issues to conform to a particular agenda (Cobb & Elder, 1971; Cobb et al., 1976). In this sense, the analysis of the building of a given list of issues implies the study of the agents and forces that intervene and determine the final selection of subjects that must receive attention from different kind of actors. The research into agenda-building can take into consideration how media or policy agendas are created or formed. This last case is the one we will focus on in the INFOCORE project and has already been addressed by different scholars. Most of them agree it is necessary to identify the main elements that are involved in the building of political agendas: media agenda, public agendas (adopting the form of demands of various groups), real-world events and indicators, research community, other political actors, personal experiences, and interpersonal communication. Some authors have also called this process political agenda-setting (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006; Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2010).

**2) The politics of attention.** In this regard, our concern is mainly linked to the reasons why some issues receive **political attention** in Parliaments and others do not. Among all the issues that are published by newspapers or broadcasted by radio and TV stations, only some appear in the parliamentary agenda.

As some authors have pointed out, **attention** is a limited resource that can be allocated just to some of the issues and problems around us. Public officials, as parliamentary members, are a good example of



how it is necessary to choose among the different themes that could be part of their agendas and discussions. Like other people, their attention is not always the same and, as Downs (1972) explained, it could be determined, at least partially, by a generic **‘issue-attention cycle’**. According to this, we can distinguish five different stages in the sequence of public attention:

- a) Pre-problem stage (‘highly undesirable social condition exists but has not yet captured much public attention’). The media show some indifference to the issue and, when it reports it, it does it in a not very serious way, adopting sensational or moral frames. To get the required public attention, the problem will need to be covered by the media in other terms.
- b) Alarmed discovery and euphoric enthusiasm (combination of alarm –the public becomes aware of the evils of a particular problem- and confidence –most people believe that society will be able to solve the problem). The amount of journalistic coverage about the problem increases greatly and it becomes a regular feature in the media’s agenda. The issue is considered seriously, as a real and important threat, and it appears in prestigious media outlets.
- c) Realizing the cost of significant progress (individuals identify the sacrifices needed). The media contribute to the public debate around what are the possible measures (economic, personal...) to solve the problem and what resources must be allocated to find solutions.
- d) Gradual decline of intense public interest (discouragement, threats, boredom...).
- e) Post-problem stage (the issue enters a prolonged limbo). The media return to the issue sporadically, performing the recall function.

It is expected that the attention of MPs will follow a similar dynamic to the one that has just been described. Nevertheless, it seems obvious to think that, although politicians could share common sources of information with ordinary citizens, their particular environment –where agenda-setting is clearly competitive and conscious (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006, p. 99)- will probably modify their ‘issue-attention cycle’ and that is one of the questions we should address in our study. Anyway, apart from the different circumstances affecting this particular arena, both politicians’ and citizens’ contexts are clearly exposed to the media, and not only exposed but affected by them.

Politicians’ behaviors and especially their attention, also plays a crucial role in the configuration of the political or policy agenda. As Edwards and Wood consider, ‘attention to issues is both a precursor to agenda-setting and an indicator of issue strength in a restricted agenda space’ (1999, p. 327). If an issue does not attract enough attention, it will never be discussed in the political arena. But getting political attention is not an easy task. Politicians, as presidents or MPs, cannot take into consideration every subject that is present in other arenas (public, media...) and to know how –and by whom- their attention

is directed is hard work. Political attention is always discriminating: ‘**Selective attention** is far and away the most important cognitive limitation that influences political choice. Human cognitive processing capacities are constrained by a “bottleneck” of short-term memory that allows us to attend to only limited elements of the environment at any given time’ (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005). That is why, before characterizing a problem (issue-definitions) and seeking solutions (policy alternatives), politicians must resolve a first and decisive question: what issues deserve my time? Thus, it is obvious that attention is a prerequisite for political decision-making.

According to Jones & Baumgartner (2005), government institutions usually offer inefficient responses precisely because they are involved in an ‘information-rich environment’ that makes decision-makers ignore important things ‘until they are forced to catch-up’. Besides the human cognitive architecture and the institutional design within which politicians develop their task, media have a vital role in this process. So, studying media reception becomes a very important point in our research project.

As reception studies have shown, we cannot approach political actors as passive individuals who respond automatically to media messages. Politicians, as any other kind of audience, are not mere consumers of information. On the contrary, they interpret the news messages and actively contribute to the communication process, by accepting, negotiating or rejecting the meaning embedded in the media texts. In this sense, we should understand political actors as ‘**interpretative communities**’ (Hall, 1980).

**3) Mediatization of politics.** In fact, the phenomenon known as ‘mediatization of politics’ tries to explain this situation: how today, political dynamics depend, basically, on media rules. According to Strömback (2011, p. 378), mediatization of politics can be described as ‘a process of increasing media influence in all aspects of politics. The more mediatized politics has become, the more important news organizations become for opinion formation, the more news content is governed by media logic, and the more political institutions and actors take media into continuous consideration and adapt to, or adopt, media logic’.

The process of mediatization of politics, according to Green-Pedersen & Stubager, is difficult to dispute (2010, p. 663). The mediatization of politics is not the same as the mediation of politics. As Strömback and Esser explain (2014, p. 244), we should understand mediatization as a ‘social change process in which media have become increasingly influential in and deeply integrated into different spheres of society’ while mediation would be a ‘more neutral act of transmitting messages and communicating through media’. As a result, mediatization of politics is ‘a long-term process through which the importance of the media and their spill-over effects on political processes, institutions, organizations and actors has increased’.

We can distinguish four different phases of the mediatization process. Following Strömback (2008), these four stages, applied to Western democracies, would be:

- 1) Mass media constitutes the most important source of information and channel of communication between the citizenry and political institutions and actors (it corresponds to the concept of mediated politics).
- 2) Media have become more independent of governmental or other political bodies and, consequently, have begun to be governed according to the media logic, increasing its influence on the institutional level.
- 3) The independence of the media has further increased. Political and other social actors have to adapt to the media, rather than the other way around.
- 4) Political and other social actors internalize news values and allow the media logic and the standards of newsworthiness to become a built-in part of governing processes.

In this sense, it is important to take into account to what extent **media logic** (professional practices and norms, commercialism, and technological formats) is gradually replacing **political logic** (rules regulating political process, definition of problems, implementation of policies...). In other words, it is crucial to assess media influence in the political sphere, a concept that goes further than media effects as it refers to 'all activities and processes that are altered, shaped or structured by media or the perceived need of individuals, organizations or institutions to communicate with or through the media' (Strömback & Esser, 2014, p. 246).

**4) The political agenda-setting process.** On the other hand, the agenda-setting model drives attention toward the issues that are finally taken into consideration by political actors in the parliamentary debates. In this sense, items will be identified (first level of agenda-setting theory) and also their frames (second level, McCombs & Evatt, 1995). The aim is to establish correlations between issues and frames in the media and the political agendas.

Media and political scholars have analyzed several types of agendas. In this sense, we could distinguish public, formal, media, and policy agendas. According to Cobb et al. (1976, p. 126), **public agenda** 'consists of issues which have achieved a high level of public interest and visibility', while **formal agenda** should be understood as 'the list of items which decision makers have formally accepted for serious consideration'. Not all issues of the formal agenda receive serious attention from decision makers, as is the case with 'pseudo-agenda items'. The public agenda can also be conceptualized as the salience of policy problems for the mass public (Soroka, 2002) or 'the set of policy issues to which the public attends' (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005, p. 301).

Public and media agendas share a common characteristic: **both are exogenous to the policymaking process** (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005, p. 253). If opinion polls are a good indicator of the issues dominating the public agenda, the coverage by the media reveals what issues compose the media agenda.

In accordance with Edwards and Wood, the **policy agenda** would be quite similar to the formal agenda, as it would comprise ‘the set of issues that receive serious attention by policymakers’ (1999, p. 327). So, we would not talk about issues that are accepted for serious consideration but about the subjects that finally receive it. Therefore, we agree with Eilders (1997), who considers policy agenda to be the issues that are especially salient among political actors, and also with Walgrave et al. (2008, p. 815), who assert that the **political agenda** is ‘the list of issues to which political actors pay attention’. Policy agendas would include, in this sense, the parliamentary or congressional agenda as well as the executive or government one. That is the reason why some scholars state that there is no such thing as the political agenda but only an **archipelago of different loosely associated political agendas**: ‘All political actors have their own agenda; some even have several agendas that are more or less independent from one another’ (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006, p. 94).

The relations established among the different agendas have been analyzed by researchers since the 1970s. Agenda-setting and agenda-building are the main concepts that have emerged from these works. The first one was proposed by McCombs and Shaw (1972) and indicates that there is a clear correspondence between the issues prioritized by the media and the main concerns among the citizens. As Eilders points out, ‘agenda-setting research indicates that the media’s relevance assignments –indicated by the frequency and prominence of presentation– corresponds with the issue salience in perceptions of the audience’ (1997, p. 5).

Parliamentary debates are shown as a clear example of a **symbolic political agenda**: they do not need to have real policy consequences to the extent that, in principle, these discussions merely show concern about a particular matter by asking parliamentary questions or addressing it in a speech (Walgrave et al. 2008, p. 817). Symbolic agendas, like parliamentary ones, are expected to be more reactive to media coverage than more substantive, tangible agendas, like the ones dealing with lawmaking, budgetary allocations, sanctioning, and nominations.

Thus, it is necessary to study the deliberative results of these debates (oral questions, interpellations, speeches...) in order to determine the impact of media discourse on these symbolic but political actions. The research of this material must be oriented to the analysis of different discourse properties, mainly evidential claims, interpretative frames, and agendas for action.

**5) Evidential claims.** These relate to ‘what is known’ about a given reference object as well as the ‘the limits of this knowledge’ and can affect actors’ attitudes to a given situation, shaping their evidential beliefs.

**6) The interpretation frame.** It can be approached as a product of news reception, built upon evidential beliefs/claims, for which they provide a coherent interpretive context that allows the significance of the claim/belief to be recognized. A frame can be understood as a reconstruction of information received

from the news story into a more or less coherent and meaningful whole. Audiences build their own interpretation of an event or issue. They extract the parts that correspond with their pre-existing attitudes, experiences, and their needs and expectations, leave out the parts that do not, and make conclusions as to why things happened (Schaap, 2009).

**7) Agendas for action.** We could say that these are prospective discursive constructions that postulate specific goals that must still be achieved (Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2013). They appear related to the treatment recommendation dimension of interpretive frames. This last element is especially crucial when we are studying conflicts, understood as situations ‘in which actors use conflict behavior against each other to attain incompatible goals and/or to express their hostility’ (Bartos & Wehr, 2002, p. 22) and conflict responses and resolution, whose most important aim is to transform actual or potentially violent conflict into peaceful (non-violent) processes of social and political change. In this task, Parliaments can emerge as arenas where key statements and ideas regarding the right response can be exposed and debated.

### **Empirical definitions concerning ‘frames’**

The study of news discourse from a quantitative perspective requires operationalizing those issues that we want to submit to analysis by finding relevant indicators. In this sense, news frames have been empirically defined in recent research in order to be able to detect and measure them. Only by adopting this point of view might it be possible to find correlations and inter-influences between journalistic coverage and parliamentary discourses.

Media and political scholars have focused their attention on several and recurrent frames. These are some of the most common and interesting (generic) frames whose analysis can be relevant for our project:

- Conflict frame. This frame emphasizes conflict between individuals, groups or institutions. It is particularly frequent during election campaigns, when elites try to simplify their discourses. It is constructed through the language of wars, games, and competition (Valkenburg, Semetko, & de Vreese, 1999, p. 551). Some variables that allow us to identify this frame are:
  - o Is there disagreement between parties, individuals, groups or countries?
  - o Does one party, individual, group or country reproach another?
  - o Does the story/speech refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the issue?
- Human interest/dramatization frame. It is oriented by the aim of personalizing, dramatizing, and emotionalizing the news. It usually brings an individual’s story or an emotional angle to the presentation of an event, issue or problem (Valkenburg et al., 1999, p. 551). It points to the

efforts towards the evocation of emotions by expressing anger, excitement, highlighting dramatic consequences, polarization, sensationalization (Lengauer, Höller, & Seeber, 2014, p. 144). Some variables that allow us to identify this frame are:

- Does the story/speech emphasize how individuals and groups are affected by the issue or problem?
  - Does the story/speech provide a human example or a human face on the issue?
  - Does the story/speech use adjectives showing feelings of outrage, empathy or caring, sympathy or compassion?
- Responsibility frame. Messages framed this way attribute responsibility for causing or solving a problem to the government or to an individual or group (Valkenburg et al., 1999, p. 552). Some variables that allow us to identify this frame are:
- Does the story/speech suggest that some particular actor is responsible for the issue or problem?
  - Does the story/speech suggest that some actor has the ability to alleviate the problem or issue?
  - Does the story/speech suggest that the problem or issue requires urgent action?
  - Does the story/speech suggest solution(s) to the problem or issue?
- Economic consequences frame. The issue is presented in order to outline the economic consequences for an individual, group, institution, region or country (Valkenburg et al., 1999, p. 552). Some variables that allow us to identify this frame are:
- Is there a mention of the costs or the degree of expense involved?
  - Is there a reference to the economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action?
  - Is there a mention of financial losses or gains, now or in the future?
- Negativity frame. A political report can be classified as being predominantly positive or negative in tone, irrespective of specific topics or actors discussed and involved (Lengauer, Esser, & Berganza, 2011, p. 183). To identify this frame, we should look at whether the story has a negative tone, if it shows a pessimistic outlook, and if it focuses on conflict or on incapability or misconduct (Ibid., pp. 183-185). Some questions that allow us to identify this frame are:
- Does the report convey primarily a positive, negative, balanced or neutral impression of politics, political records, conditions or views?
  - Does the story convey primarily optimistic, pessimistic or balanced outlooks on politics or are no indications referring to political outlooks identifiable?

- Does the report convey primarily conflicting, consensus-centered or balanced impressions of politics, political records, conditions, and views, or are no indications referring to political conflict and consensus identifiable?
- Does the report convey primarily indications of incapability, capability or balanced impressions of politics or are no elements referring to political incapability and capability identifiable?
- Horse race/Game/Strategy frame. This represents politics as a strategic game and politicians appear as competitors. Politics are, in this way, depoliticized. It focuses on aspects of political competition, horse racing, strategies, and odds (Lengauer et al., 2014, p. 143).

## Research agenda in parliamentary debates

### 1. *Parliamentary agenda-building: how MPs decide which issues to discuss*

The main challenge we face is to know how MPs from the countries of interest to the project decide which set of issues they want to discuss in their legislative chambers. In this regard, we will focus on oral questions, interpellations, and speeches addressed by parliamentary members of the following institutions: The Knesset (Israel), Palestinian Legislative Council (Palestine), People's Council (Syria), National Assembly (Serbia), Assembly of Kosovo (Kosovo), Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia (Macedonia), National Assembly (Democratic Republic of the Congo), National Assembly (Burundi), European Parliament (EU), Bundestag (Germany), National Assembly (France), and the House of Commons (United Kingdom).

Analyzing the minutes and records that reflect how debates are carried out within these institutions, we should be able to identify the main issues the members of the different parliaments address their attention to. In this way, we could determine the subjects that conform to every of these symbolic agendas, pointing out if they are stable along the time frames studied or if they show multiple and distinct themes.

Once we have identified the most important issues making up these parliamentary agendas, we should move forward and try to identify the reasons why political actors decide to allocate attention to these items while ignoring others. In this sense, we must ask two relevant questions: what is the origin of these issues, and what are their main characteristics. As we have already pointed out, there are several sources that influence political actors in the task of deciding which subjects must be taken into consideration (media coverage, real-world indicators, public agenda, personal experience...). Thanks to the work done by other team members, we will be able to establish relationships between the issues that dominate parliamentary debates and those other questions that are present in mass media coverage, social media, lay



or public, and non-governmental organizations. This map of links will offer us the necessary information to indicate which force is the most influential in setting parliamentary agendas.

But, as we said, there is a second important question we should address: do the issues debated in parliament arenas regarding violent conflicts share any special characteristics? Are there circumstances that make it easier for them to enter these specific institutional arenas? Our main goal is to improve the existing knowledge about which modulators are involved in political agenda-building and, especially, what kind of media coverage appears more effective in attracting parliament members' attention.

We will study gender and women's rights related issues. Although often they are made invisible, women tend to suffer more cruelly than anyone the effects of armed conflicts. However, they frequently also stand out as activists and fighters for a peaceful resolution to war. INFOCORE's commitment to the role of women in these contexts requires us to give special attention to the way in which these issues are addressed by all actors responsible for public discourse: media, politicians...

Summarizing, our main categories of analysis regarding this point are:

- a) What issues are covered in the parliamentary debates?
- b) Are these issues stable over time or do they vary from a diachronic point of view?
- c) Characteristics of the issues: is it an older item? Has it relevant consequences? Does it impact on a large number of people? Is it a serious problem? Has it an easily understood solution? Is it an obtrusive issue? Is it a sensational or justice-and-crime related issue?
- d) Who takes the initiative over an issue in the parliamentary debate?  
What is the model of agenda-building? (Outside initiative model, mobilization model or initiative inside model)  
Have the issues debated in parliament arisen previously in different arenas? (Media agenda, social media, lay public...).
- e) Can the inclusion of the issues be affected by the political context from an institutional point of view? (issue-ownership)
- f) What is the salience of gender and women's rights related issues?

## 2. *Discussed issues main features: evidential claims, frames, and agendas*

One the most important tasks regarding this work package is the study of the evidential claims, interpretive frames, and agendas for action present in the issues that appear in parliamentary debates. It is through the research of these elements that we will have the chance to deepen our understanding of how political actors build their own discourse about the issues that have attracted their attention. Thus, it is especially interesting and stimulating to check, for example, what are the most common frames employed by parliamentary members regarding violent conflicts.

For this, it is essential to look for frames that have already been empirically validated, as we have pointed out in the previous pages. This way, it will be possible to analyze from a quantitative perspective the huge amount of minutes and records gathered in order to discover and detect the most salient interpretive frames used in legislative arenas. Once these frames are identified, measured, and analyzed it will be possible to compare these results with those obtained by the team responsible for studying media coverage. Are there mutual influences? In which direction? Are influential media frames constructed by journalists or are the most effective ones spread by other actors that media use as informative sources? All these questions will need to be addressed in our analysis in order to explain frame dynamics and frame flows between these different –but interrelated– spheres.

Summarizing, our main categories of analysis regarding this point are:

- g) What are the frames of the issues covered in the parliamentary debates? ( conflict frame, human interest/dramatization frame, responsibility frame, economic consequences frame, negativity frame, horse race/game/strategic frame)
- h) Are there correspondences between these issues' frames and the ones present in media coverage?
- i) Who promotes these frames? (Journalists, social actors, political actors, NGOs, lobbies, citizens...)
- j) What are the evidential claims of the issues covered in the parliamentary debates? ( conflict frame, human interest/dramatization frame, responsibility frame, economic consequences frame, negativity frame, horse race/game/strategic frame)
- k) Are there correspondences between these evidential claims and the ones present in media coverage?
- l) What are the agendas for action of the issues covered in the parliamentary debates? (conflict frame, human interest/dramatization frame, responsibility frame, economic consequences frame, negativity frame, horse race/game/strategic frame)
- m) Are there correspondences between these agendas for action and the ones present in media coverage?
- n) Is media influence on parliamentary agendas higher in some kinds of news outlets (newspapers) than in others (TV channels)?

### 3. *Patterns of information diffusion: any common trends among different countries?*

Finally, it is important to take advantage of one of the major strengths of the project: the diachronic analysis of different countries in different violent conflicts. As we saw during the literature review, analysis carried out so far on political agenda-building has focused on very few countries and on certain periods of social and political stability (only affected by election calls). Therefore, this project represents a unique opportunity to conduct research that addresses comparatively such diverse national contexts that, however, face situations with such similar and dramatic consequences.

In this sense, we have to analyze whether the different regions reveal some data that could explain common patterns about how information linked to war situations is diffused and adopted by political actors in parliamentary arenas. Therefore, we should determine if there are some circumstances that allow media frames to be consolidated thanks to their adoption and re-use by political relevant actors regardless of the specific national context.

It is also fundamental to detect when parliamentary actors, through their speeches and debates, reflect the constructive or destructive role of news content received. By studying this influence, it will be possible to establish the degree of political mediatization in each of the contexts analyzed and to indicate also if news content promotes conflict escalation or conflict resolution through its influence on parliamentary debates.

Summarizing, our main categories of analysis regarding this point are:

- o) How is the issue-attention-cycle of MPs through the time frames analyzed? Can we differentiate different phases? (Downs, 1972)
- p) Are there common patterns in the way MPs adopt war-related news content among the different countries studied?
- q) What is the degree of political mediatization in the different national contexts?

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