Attack and Defend!
Explaining Party Responses to News

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PhD Dissertation

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Politica

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ISBN: 978-87-7335-156-7

Cover: Svend Siune
Print: Juridisk Instituts Trykkeri, Aarhus Universitet
Layout: Annette B. Andersen

Submitted 31 August 2011
The public defence takes place 25 November 2011
Published November 2011

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Preface

Although there's often a tendency to overstate the history or 'roots' of one's project when it draws to a close, I still would like to thank Tor Midtbø at the Department of Comparative Politics, University of Bergen. In what seems (or is) ages ago, I came to him with an idea for a Master's project. He obviously didn't think much of it (it was something about cleavages in the Norwegian parliament, I think), and sent me away. But I did not leave empty-handed, as he lent me his copy of Dearing and Rogers' *Agenda-Setting,* urging me to consider 'spicing up' my idea. So I did, and I guess he felt obliged to supervise me after that.

After finishing in Bergen and moving to Stavanger, a job at Rogalandsforskning (now IRIS – International Research Institute of Stavanger) offered an opportunity to continue working with political science. I owe thanks to my colleagues there (whom I look forward to working with again!), and to Einar Leknes and Gottfried Heinzerling for allowing me to develop my interest for political agenda-setting – supporting trips to conferences etc. – even though IRIS had no one else interested in this field nor any funding for it. Also, their economic support for the Ph.D. itself has been crucial to the continuation of the project.

At IRIS, particularly Hilmar Rommetvedt bears some of the responsibility for me ending up in Aarhus, as he included me whole-heartedly in a project on Scandinavian corporatism, which in turn introduced me to Peter Munk Christiansen and Asbjørn Sonne Nørgaard – who again led me to Christoffer Green-Pedersen. Christoffer assisted me in every possible way when I moved to Denmark. He and Peter Bjerre Mortensen, my co-supervisor, have provided excellent support all the way through. I know it is customary to say that the people who receive thanks and acknowledgements bear no responsibility for any faults or omissions in one's final product. But in the case of Christoffer and Peter, I'm reluctant to do so. Of course, I do not for one moment seriously argue that they should be held accountable for my mistakes or less convincing arguments or interpretations in this book – it is only my attempt at illustrating their invaluable role in the project and to credit them for whatever contribution might be in it!

The Department of Political Science at Aarhus University has been a most stimulating and welcoming workplace. On every level, the institution and the people in it are dedicated to building a strong but warm environment for research and teaching. I owe thanks to Birgit Kanstrup, Inge Rasmussen and Berit Møller for all sorts of help with accounts and technical issues. If it is pos-

sible to understand some of the language in this book, it is because of Annette B. Andersen's excellent editing (Cheers!). Ph.D. coordinator Peter Munk Christiansen was there when I needed his assistance, and the two successive heads of department, Jens Blom-Hansen and Thomas Pallesen, offered flexible and innovative solutions when I, together with my family, had to move back from Aarhus to Stavanger after the first year.

A number of people have contributed to the project through the two superb institutions of paper presentations in the Comparative Politics Section and the PhD group respectively. Now that I'm leaving the Department, I can only rely on the usual conferences – which of course are fun, but nowhere near as helpful and constructive as the comments you will get when presenting in Aarhus. Besides these presentations, during which all attendants (none mentioned, none forgotten) had useful input, I have also benefited from the advice of Asbjørn Sonne Nørgaard and Thomas Pallesen in their 'lecture-tainment' show (undersold as a PhD course on 'Social Science as a Craft'). Outside the Department, or more precisely via its impressive network, I have received excellent and inspiring suggestions from Torill Aalberg, Frank Baumgartner, Amber Boydstun, Jamie Druckman, Bryan Jones, Pascal Sciarini, John Street, Rens Vliegenthart and Stefaan Walgrave.

4 colleagues have had to share office with me during these years. I am grateful to Morten Brænder, Henrik Seeberg, Lene Aarøe and Simon Calmar Andersen for enduring my uncontrollable desire for Danish pastry and cakes in the afternoons (although, some of them are partly responsible for this), and for accepting 'the Norwegian' and adjusting their pace of speech! I have learned a lot about what it means to be a dedicated researcher and teacher, as well as a good colleague and person through them. I am especially grateful to Morten and his family for welcoming me and my family to Aarhus. And also to Camilla, who has functioned as my 'støttekontakt' during the last two years, making sure I left the office now and then for some decent food and good company. The same goes for Marie, who even trusted me with her house!

Finally, this dissertation is for my parents and to the memory of my sister Hanne – brave, smart and loving – who did not get to finish hers. My greatest debt of gratitude is owed to Tonje and to my kids Mari, Alfred and Einar. Tomorrow I'm coming home -without having to leave again immediately.

Aarhus, August 2011

Gunnar Thesen

Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Mediatized or partisan lobsters?

The purpose of this dissertation is to explain why political parties respond to news. The idea that the mass media hold political agenda-setting power is hardly controversial, and has long since become a standard reference when social scientists, journalists, politicians and citizens speak about media and politics. Through assigning 'political relevance and importance to social problems by selecting and emphasizing certain issues and neglecting others' (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999: 251), the media influence several aspects of democratic politics. Stories illustrating the *importance* of the media's agenda-setting influence are easy to come by. In Denmark, the enactment of the Action Plan for the Aquatic Environment ('Vandmiljøplanen') in 1986 has become a defining example in this respect (cf. Skou Andersen and Hansen, 1991). In early October that year, the Danish Broadcasting Corporation's TV-news broadcast showed a bucket of dead lobsters from a fisherman's catch in the Kattegat. In the debate that followed, agricultural emissions of nitrate causing oxygen depletion were identified as the culprit. In a matter of weeks, an ambitious and costly plan to halve these emissions was passed in Parliament, even though the problem was not new and, as it later turned out, the solution was partly at odds with scientific research.

This example has been used to argue that politics has become *mediatized* (cf. Skou Andersen and Hansen, 1991; Togeby et al., 2003) in the sense that problems which fit the media format of conflict, simplification and drama are more likely to attract political attention. There is little doubt that politics is, and has been for a long time, *mediated*. The media are the 'most important source of information and channel of communication between the citizenry and political institutions and actors' (Strömbäck, 2008: 236), and consequently politics takes place in, or is communicated by, the media. However, the question is, as noted by Green-Pedersen and Stubager (2010b: 326), whether this necessarily means that politics takes place on media terms, and that the media have colonized politics and marginalized parties (cf. Meyer, 2002). Returning to the dead – and possibly mediatized – lobsters, Green-Pedersen and Stubager suggest that this is also a story about party competition and opposition success in politicizing a favourable issue. To the social democratic and left-wing parties in opposition at that time, the issue of

environmental problems was both a high priority and a strong card in the issue competition with the government. Thus, the opposition responded quickly and with force, prolonging and intensifying both the news debate and the political debate. The resulting policy consequences could in other words also be attributed to the way the mediated problem of dead lobsters fitted a partisan and party competition logic (Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2010a: 676).

The dissertation continues on this track, examining media influence on political agendas from the perspective of party and issue competition. Before presenting its main argument, I will very briefly summarize state of the art political agenda-setting research and introduce a puzzle that inspired my model.

1.2 The conditionality of political agenda-setting (and the puzzle of news tone)

The example above shows how the media might influence politics, but also highlights how empirical observations resist straight forward interpretations and only make sense within a theoretical framework. The scholarly literature on political agenda-setting, which the present study addresses, concentrates on the degree to and ways in which the media agenda influences the agendas of political actors. Most agenda-setting research focuses upon the media's ability to change the issue priorities of the *public* (cf. McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Behr and Iyengar, 1985; McCombs, 2006). Although increasing in recent years, the volume of *political* agenda-setting research is still surprisingly modest (cf. Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006; Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2010b) – leaving a gap in theoretical perspectives needed to study and understand buckets of lobsters and mediatization of politics. Much attention has been devoted to the question of who leads whom in the media-politics relationship (cf. Edwards and Wood, 1999; Bartels, 1996; Brandenburg, 2002). There is no lack of anecdotal evidence pointing to a strong link between journalists and politicians, like the telling story of a Danish newspaper strike in 1981, which prompted a near stop to the parliamentary question hour (Ellemann-Jensen, 1982). To be sure, we all experience the consequences of the opposite effect every summer during the 'silly season'. When political institutions are at recess, news value criteria and the media agenda change dramatically.

Acknowledging the reciprocal nature of the relationship, underlying the respective examples of the newspaper strike and the 'silly season', political

agenda-setting have gradually shifted attention from the question *whether* media influence politics, to *when* or *under which conditions* (Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006). Yet, systematic knowledge about the contingencies of media's agenda-setting influence is still scarce and often inconclusive. What we do know is that agenda-setting effects vary across issues. In order to explain this, and come closer to an understanding of why news attention generates political attention, different studies have developed and tested several issue typologies. The main results indicate that concentrated policy responsibility or institutional ownership makes news influence more likely, as witnessed by presidential responses to foreign policy relative to domestic issues (Wood and Peake, 1998); dramatic and sensational issues like crime and environment are more prone to media effects than for instance undramatic and abstract issues like taxes and public sector reforms (Soroka, 2002; Walgrave et al., 2008); loss of domestic policy influence through processes of multi-level governance increases media influence on parliament, as seen in relation to EU-dominated issue like environment and agriculture (van Noije et al., 2008); media coverage more often sparks party attention when it deals with issues that the parties care about or 'own' (Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2010a; Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2011a).

Although different in many respects, what these perspectives share is an emphasis on *issue typologies.* No doubt their positive results document the fact that characteristics of social problems are a key factor to political agenda-setting. Nevertheless, the issue typology or issue attribute approach fails to include a most important distinction when it comes to social problems: How are they developing? The probability that news attention will spur a political response is estimated on the basis of quite broad typologies of issues and social problems, without considering how these problems are covered in the news and what this coverage tells us about the present state of the problems.

In other words, the dissertation was partly motivated by a theoretical puzzle: How come no one asked whether the news was bad or good? With this omission, existing perspectives on political agenda-setting seem to ignore both common-sense wisdom about media and politics, as well as established knowledge about party behaviour from other fields of study. The essence of the model in the dissertation attempts to confront this neglect, appreciating that parties use news attention in their competition with each other, that government power makes some parties more responsible for social problems than others and that this directs their attention to different news tones in political communication. In the next section, the main features of this model are presented and discussed briefly.

1.3 The argument in brief

Cut short, the core claim is that opposition parties will respond to bad news because they reflect negative developments in social problems that the government could be held responsible for. Illustrated in terms of lobsters, the key to the opposition's reaction was more than anything the fact that they were dead. Thus, I argue that opposition strategy towards the media agenda is influenced by a wish to politicize negative news attention and link it to the opponent in office. The government, on the other hand, has a dual strategy. First, a *proactive* one in which it responds to good news because this could politicize policy success. Continuing with an example from the *second* Action Plan for the Aquatic Environment, evaluations in 2003 suggested it had a positive effect in reducing the run-off from farming. The government was quick to respond, claiming credit and positive attention (cf. Section 8.4.2).

The second strategy is *reactive*, as the government is forced to attend to negative developments when news explicitly addresses its policy responsibility, threatening to ruin its image as responsive and competent. Returning to the first Action Plan and the dead lobsters, the Danish Society for Nature Conservation played an important role (cf. Skou Andersen and Hansen 1991; ATV, 1990). In a TV-broadcast, its president delivered the following message directly to the Minister of Fisheries and the Danish people: 'Why wait two months? The Parliament meets in ten days, after the autumn break, why does the government not start by proposing a program for action – how long do we have to wait?' (ATV, 1990: 32). A bucketful of lobsters were dead, but many more would share their destiny if something was not done.

The dissertation is built around these strategies arguing and presenting evidence that party competition, policy responsibility and issue ownership explain *why* parties respond to news and, consequently, *which* news they respond to. Although to different degrees, parties compete for votes and political power (cf. Downs, 1957; Robertson, 1976; Strøm, 1990), with the result that one or several gain office while one or several constitute the legislative opposition. Both the competition per se and its outcome in terms of the distribution of policy-making powers matter for political agenda-setting. In their competition, 'mediated realities' (Strömbäck, 2008: 238) or media depictions of social problems, and the implicit or explicit attribution of responsibility for them come to dominate the opposition-government game and how the players relate to the media agenda.

The government has the authority to influence which problems the state should confront and how they should be solved. If it fails to live up to this responsibility and is 'unable to supply some average level of satisfaction to its

supporters' (Easton, 1976: 436), its position in office will be lost. Lacking policy-making influence, the opposition is left with the scrutinizing function of parliament (Norton, 2008), enjoying 'the ability to hold the executive to account and ensure that it is required to explain and justify its actions – and inactions – before the representatives of the people' (Baldwin, 2004: 302). These two very different roles of political parties affect their interests and attention in relation to social problems, and ultimately inspired the 'attack and defend' label given to the model of political agenda-setting in the dissertation. Free of responsibility but hoping to replace the present government, the opposition *attacks* government actions to show its inability to handle its responsibilities. Bad news, reflecting negative developments in social problems for which the government is implicitly responsible, is an important element in these attacks. The government, on the other hand, must *defend* its actions and the legitimacy of its position in office. Good news, reflecting positive developments in social problems, serves this task and proves the opposition wrong.

When news explicitly ascribes responsibility for negative developments to the government, the respective incentives of government and opposition response change. Blame attributions leave less or even no doubt about who is responsible for a specific problem, consequently increasing the probability that bad news will 'stick to the government'. In the case of the opposition, attack should therefore become even more attractive. For the government, however, blame attributions fundamentally change its strategy, highlighting the dual strategy underlying government responses to news. The legitimacy of its position in office is not only dependent on its ability to direct attention to positive results. If the government appears inattentive to social problems, its image as a responsive and competent problem solver is threatened. The argument here is that the scales tip in favour of response when news explicitly attributes blame to the government, as such stories are harder to escape and potentially more damaging.

The attack and defend model furthermore acknowledges the perspective that parties have different issue priorities and issue strengths in party competition, as illustrated by the opposition's preference for environmental problems in the lobster story. The expectation is therefore that both opposition and government are more likely to respond to news on issues they 'own'. The theory of issue ownership (Petrocik, 1996) holds that a party's history of political prioritization, competence and policy results on a specific issue generates an electoral advantage because the public comes to think of the party as more capable than others of handling it. The application of the ownership theory in recent political agenda-setting studies (cf. Green-

Pedersen and Stubager, 2010a; Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2011a) will be moderated in this study, however. Specifically, I argue that the value of ownership of a specific problem hinges on a party's present policy responsibility and the state of the problem in question. Thus, opposition parties are ill-advised to politicize owned issues when news reflects positive developments, as long as this could bring the public's attention to government success, which in turn would threaten opposition ownership. Put bluntly, if a new catch of lobsters were alive and well, they would have little value as a means of attacking the government and politicizing opposition issue strengths. An opposite modification is expected for the government who either ignores negative reports in the media or responds when forced to answer attributions of blame. Consequently, it is in no position to prioritize owned issues when news is bad. Instead, the government is free to activate ownership strengths when news is good and the pressure to respond is low or non-existent.

The study could inform the discussion about 'mediatized politics', where politics is said to be 'continuously shaped by interactions with mass media' (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999: 250). The substance of these interactions is to a large extent unclear. The findings presented in this book, where political agenda-setting is appreciated as a part of party competition, show overall strong support for the view that 'politics matters' in two empirical studies of party responses to news stories in Denmark. The suggestion is that in the case of political agenda-setting, the media-politics interactions are clearly structured by distinct party strategies. First, relating to the competition between opposition and government, meaning that party responses to news reflect the fight over office – and the responsibility which accompanies it. Second, relating to the electoral importance of issue strengths and issue competence, meaning that party responses to news also reproduce the dynamics of partisan politics.

1.4 Structure of the dissertation

Chapter 2 reviews earlier research on political agenda-setting, focusing on studies that have examined the conditions under which the media agenda influences the agendas of political actors. I distinguish between two main perspectives, the first relying on concepts from the field of *public* agenda-setting and the second emphasizing the *political* contingencies of the process under study. At the end, I discuss two important gaps in the literature; its lack of comparative perspectives on the role of policy responsibility; and its static predictions following an inability to appreciate that the state of a social

problem is more important than the issue category to which the problem belongs.

Chapter 3 addresses these gaps. Drawing on a combination of recent agenda-setting research, literature on parliamentary opposition, party competition, party rhetoric and negative campaigning, blame avoidance and non-policy valence events, I develop the attack and defend model outlined in the previous section. During the course of these discussions, propositions on opposition and government responses to news tone, blame attributions and issue ownership are specified. The end of the chapter is devoted to the challenge that heightened media attention poses for the model, and especially the government's ability to prioritize positive news and ignore negative developments.

In Chapter 4, the two empirical studies from Denmark – a large-N study of radio news broadcasts in 2003-2004 and a medium-N study of newspaper coverage in the same period – are documented in detail. I present an argument for studying agenda-setting on the news story level, and discuss the operationalization and measurement of dependent and independent variables from the attack and defend model. Finally, the application of Denmark as a case is considered.

Chapter 5 bridges Chapter 4 and the subsequent empirical analyses in Chapter 6 and 7 by presenting the collected data from the large-N study. It focuses on the independent variables and describes the characteristics of the news agenda in terms of for instance tone and blame attributions. Also, I look at how the segment of the news agenda to which the parties respond – politicized news – distinguishes itself from news that does not capture political attention.

In the next two chapters, the attack and defend model is applied on the large-N sample. Results for the opposition (Chapter 6) and the government (Chapter 7) are presented and discussed separately. Using multivariate regressions where news saliency and the endogenous influence of party attention on the media agenda is controlled for, I find that opposition parties are more likely to respond to negative stories, and even more likely to respond when stories contain attributions of blame. The effect of ownership is more modest, but opposition parties do nevertheless prioritize owned issues overall and even more so when news negativity rises. The probability of government response, on the other hand, increases when news negativity decreases. At the same time, support for its dual strategy is found as explicit attributions of blame make the government talk also when the media cover negative developments in social problems. Findings do not indicate that the government is able to favour owned issues regardless of news tone. But when news be-

comes increasingly positive, the effect of ownership on government response rises.

Chapter 8 uses the medium-N study to validate and challenge the results obtained in the previous two chapters. First, case examples from, and bivariate analyses of, a sample of 30 newspaper stories reinforce and illustrate the main finding that the opposition prefers bad news while the government prefers good news. Second, case examples, bivariate and multivariate analyses of 15 highly salient stories, find that the government is unable to ignore negative developments when media attention is intense and persistent. However, looking at the day-to-day variation in news content and party responses for these stories, I find that the government (and the opposition) is able to maintain its original strategy by timing its involvement to when a story is most favourable. Thus, when highly salient news takes a positive turn, government response increases while the opposite holds true for opposition parties. Finally, attributions of blame have the same effect during the course of a highly salient story debate as the effect observed when comparing *different* stories in the large-N study. In other words, when newspaper coverage features explicit government criticism, both opposition and government response are intensified.

Chapter 9 addresses two challenges to the results of the attack and defend model. First, rival explanations are empirically examined via a test of issue typologies discussed in the review chapter. Neither the public agenda-setting perspective underlying Stuart Soroka's (2002) model, nor a political agenda-setting perspective stressing the electoral importance of economic issues disturb the main conclusions of the dissertation. Second, the question whether consensus and minority politics reduces opposition attacks is investigated by studying an opposition party (Danish People's Party) which was the parliamentary support party of the Liberal and Conservative coalition government. Results indicate that support parties still attack, despite exercising considerable impact on public policies. However, the fact that some attacks disappear from their repertoire leads to the conclusion that actual policy responsibility, and not only position in office, impacts the way parties respond to news.

The two final chapters summarize and present the conclusions of the dissertation. Chapter 10 draws together the empirical findings and discusses their strength in terms of internal and external validity. Chapter 11 concludes and suggests key implications for those literatures on which the attack and defend model draws on, focusing upon political agenda-setting, party and issue competition, issue convergence and party dialogue, and, finally, the mediatization of politics.

Chapter 2
Perspectives on if, when and why media matter for political agendas

This chapter reviews the literature on political agenda-setting, paying specific attention to how the contingencies of media influence on political agendas are handled theoretically and empirically in extant research. I argue that there are two main perspectives in the relatively limited body of research on media's political agenda-setting power. The first is heavily influenced by public agenda-setting, the strand of research sparked by McCombs and Shaw's (1972) influential study on how the media set the public agenda. It stresses the assumption that media influence is contingent upon how issues are perceived by the public. Partly in response to this, the second perspective concentrates on characteristics of political actors and institutions, and examines how these affect the agenda-setting process.

The chapter starts with a brief section reviewing answers to the question *whether media matter*, before elaborating upon the two perspectives on *when media matter* sketched above. Next, I discuss what I consider the most sustainable and promising perspective to be followed up in political agenda-setting research, as well as the two major weaknesses in the literature's approach to why and when media attention affects political agendas: its lack of comparative perspectives on the role of policy responsibility in agenda-setting processes; and its static nature following an inability to acknowledge that issues on the media agenda, at a specific point in time, represent the current status of ever-changing social problems that political actors and institutions process.

Note that the chapter concentrates on studies dealing explicitly with media influence on political agendas, leaving aside the literature which tries to explain media (cf. Boyle, 2001; Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2008) or public agendas (cf. McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Behr and Iyengar, 1985; McCombs, 2006). Furthermore, the dissertation and the review are occupied with routine-times politics, meaning that studies covering campaign dynamics (cf. Brandenburg, 2002, 2006; Semetko et al., 1991; Roberts and McCombs, 1994) are of less interest. Finally, other adjoining literatures outside the agenda-setting tradition which inform this study, but primarily investigate different research questions, will be discussed in Chapter 3 as part of the development of the dissertation's model of political agenda-setting.

2.1 Do media influence politics?

The growing, but still limited, number of studies on media's political agenda-setting power has devoted a great deal of attention to the question of 'who influences whom'.[1] Results vary in terms of the direction and the strength of the causal relationship between media and politics. Several early contributions to the literature arrived at the conclusion that media exercise a relatively weak or even non-existent impact on political agendas. In one of the first political agenda-setting studies, Walker (1977) attributes changes in US traffic safety policies to the widely accepted social indicator of traffic deaths, arguing that 'The newspaper was reacting to events, not stimulating the controversy or providing leadership' (ibid.: 435). Kingdon's quote on media influence after studying the US federal government echoes Walker: 'The media report what is going on in government, by and large, rather than having an independent effect *on* governmental agendas' (1995: 59). A couple of subsequent investigations of media influence in US politics draw the same conclusion of weak impact, for instance on local public spending (Pritchard and Berkowitz, 1993) and on the presidential agenda (Light, 1982; Wanta and Foote, 1994). A similar notion of limited media influence is implicit to Bennett's notion of 'indexing' (1990), where he argues that individual, organizational and economic dynamics of news production make the media '*index* the range of voices and viewpoints [...] according to the range of views expressed in mainstream government debate about a topic' (ibid.: 106). The first European study, on the relationship between newspaper agendas and party manifestos in the Netherlands, reached the same media-sceptic conclusion. In fact, for a set of economic issues, Kleinnijenhuis and Rietberg (1995) found the political agenda to be negatively affected by media attention.

Lately, however, the number of studies pointing to considerable impact of media attention on political agendas has surpassed the 'media-sceptic' ones. Again there is, at least at the outset, a distinct overweight of studies on US policymakers. For instance, the President's agenda has been found to be influenced by the media in several studies (Gilberg et al., 1980; Bartels, 1996; Wood and Peake, 1998; Edwards & Wood, 1999), as has the agenda of the Congress (Cook and Skogan, 1991; Trumbo, 1995; Bartels, 1996; Baumgartner et al., 1997; Edwards and Wood, 1999). The results from these predominantly

[1] For instance: Edwards and Wood (1999), Who Influences Whom? The President, Congress, and the Media; Bartels (1996), Politicians and the Press: Who Leads, Who Follows?; Brandenburg (2002), Who Follows Whom? The Impact of Parties on Media Agenda Formation in the 1997 British General Election Campaign.

quantitative approaches have been matched by qualitative case studies. Most notably, two large projects, each comprising six cases, indicate considerable media effects on US politics. Linsky's (1986) six cases show how Washington policymakers interpret media attention as an indicator of public attention, and that media coverage affects the successful adoption and implementation of policies. In the second project, a set of innovative field experiments documented how investigative reporting generated considerable political attention and policy measures (Cook et al., 1983; Protess et al., 1991).

Outside the US context, evidence of media influence on political agendas in non-election times has been presented for Canada (Soroka, 2002), Belgium (Walgrave et al., 2008; Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2011a; 2011b), the UK and the Netherlands (van Noije et al., 2008), Denmark (Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2010a; Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2011b) and Norway (Thesen, 2007). The above mentioned non-US studies are all based on extensive issue coding of media content and the activities of parliament. However, the conclusion of media influence drawn on the basis of time-series modelling of agenda content has recently been reinforced by surveys of both journalists and politicians. For instance, Walgrave (2008) concludes that 'Political and media elites in Belgium answer the question whether the mass media matter for the political agenda with a loud and clear 'yes'' (ibid.: 456). A conclusion which also travels to other small, parliamentary democracies like Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands (Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2011).

2.2 When do media influence politics?

Although they differ in theoretical perspectives and empirical conclusions, all contributions above acknowledge the highly reciprocal nature of the news-politics relationship. In theory then, it is really not a question of *whether* media influence politics, rather *when* or *under which conditions*. In this respect, Walgrave and Van Aelst's (2006) contingent agenda-setting model represents a step forward. They argue that political adoption of news stories or media's issue attention is dependent upon media input variables, such as issue type and media outlet, and political context variables such as institutional rules, political configuration and election or routine times politics.

Some of these contingent processes have been studied, while others remain nearly unexplored. Based on studies covering campaigns (cf. Brandenburg, 2002; Semetko et al., 1991; Roberts and McCombs, 1994), Walgrave and Van Aelst note that *election times* are characterized by a different

agenda-setting dynamics where the media mostly report what political actors do without influencing political agendas (cf. Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006: 95-98). A main result regarding differences in *media outlet* is that newspapers exert more agenda-setting influence, but that this influence is mediated by TV news (Bartels, 1996; Roberts and McCombs, 1994). Eilders (2000) stresses that congruence, in the form of a persistent and consonant framing of the same issue, is required if the media are to have a strong impact on political agendas. Investigations of how *political configuration*, or the 'government-opposition game', impacts on agenda-setting mechanisms have barely started. Vliegenthart and Walgrave (2011a) find that opposition status raises media influence significantly, but their investigation is restricted to MPs only and therefore fails to cover the actions or context of government as a political actor and institution outside of parliament.

The contingent factor which has drawn most attention in the literature on media's agenda-setting power has been *issue type*. Issues constitute the very core of the agenda-setting process, and should of course be expected to influence the dynamics of it. The few political agenda-setting studies examining several issues support, more or less explicitly, the notion that agenda-setting varies for different issues (Edwards and Wood, 1999; Soroka, 2002; Walgrave et al., 2008; Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2010a). For instance, the media seem to exert more agenda influence on foreign policy issues than on domestic issues, while crime and justice are among the domestic issues on the political agenda most affected by changes in media attention. So we know, with some degree of confidence, that agenda-setting varies for different issues. But why? The literature provides two main theoretical explanations of such issue variance. The next section critically discusses the first one, which I've labelled 'public issue attribute models' because of their focus on how issues are perceived in the public. The subsequent section then points to a different set of studies, labelled 'political issue attribute models' due to their emphasis on how issues are perceived by political actors. Specifically, I elaborate on the use of issue ownership in a small group of recent agenda-setting studies.

2.2.1 Public issue attribute models

Among the limited set of political agenda-setting studies which explicitly theorize why issue variance matters, Stuart Soroka's (2002) thorough investigation of agenda-setting dynamics in Canada deserves attention. His typology of issues, and the expectations derived from it, has proven empirically useful also in subsequent analyses (Walgrave et al., 2008). Furthermore, as it

reflects core theories applied extensively in public agenda-setting, I shall focus on Soroka in this section on public issue attribute models. Soroka's typology is a synthesis of three issue categorizations. The first one is the concept of obtrusiveness (Zucker, 1978), or level of direct experience with an issue. This has been a most influential tool for explanations of issue variance in public agenda-setting studies. The core understanding of how the obtrusiveness attribute shapes media effects is that 'the less direct experience individuals have with a given issue area, the more they will rely on the news media for information and interpretation in that area' (ibid.: 227). Consequently, the media agenda should matter more for unobtrusive issues. The second typology separates abstract from concrete issues, stating that the former will be subject to less media effects 'because individuals find it difficult to attach salience to something they don't comprehend' (Yagade and Dozier, 1990: 4-5). The concept of abstract/concrete issues is built on the individual's ability to visualize or picture an issue in his/her mind. Based on survey data, Yagade and Dozier characterize drug abuse and energy issues as concrete, while nuclear arms and budget deficit are examples of more abstract issues. The third categorization posits more agenda-setting effects for issues including dramatic events or high levels of conflict, a contention which has received empirical support in public agenda-setting studies (MacKuen and Coombs, 1981; Wanta and Hu, 1993).

Soroka contributes to the study of issue dynamics in agenda-setting by combining these concepts in a new typology and, furthermore, by trying to adapt this typology to the features of policy agendas and not only to the media and public agenda. He arrives at three issue types, underlining that they are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive (2002: 20). *Prominent issues* are said to be obtrusive and concrete. They affect 'a significant number of people directly', are real-world led and should accordingly not be characterized by media effects. Soroka's own study contains two such issues, namely inflation and unemployment. *Sensational issues* are also concrete, but in contrast to prominent issues they 'have little observable impact on the vast majority of individuals' (ibid.: 20-21). Instead, they have a dramatic character which enhances their value as news stories. This mix of attributes should produce the most media effects. Examples of sensational issues are, in Soroka's analysis, AIDS, crime and environment. *Governmental issues* are also unobtrusive, and can be both abstract and concrete. In the latter case, governmental issues can be distinguished from sensational issues by their lack of 'exciting or dramatic element' (ibid.: 21). Soroka classifies debt & deficit, national unity and taxes as governmental, and posits a policy-led agenda-setting dynamic for these issues.

Several arguments can be directed at the theoretical foundation, design and application of this typology. The following discussion concentrates on the theoretical weaknesses, only briefly commenting on other challenges. The main point relates to Walgrave and Van Aelst's (2006) claim that political agenda-setting studies have been dominated by public agenda-setting perspectives. This is undoubtedly illustrated in Soroka's issue typology. His initial goal is to combine and adapt earlier works on public issue attributes to better suit the analysis of how policy agendas are created. But due to his interest in the expanded agenda-setting model, where the aim is to analyze relationships between the public, policy and media agenda, he is unable to take the necessary steps. The study spans agenda-setting influence on very different actors and consequently he attempts to build an issue typology which can be used to predict issue reactions for very different audiences. The adaption to policy agendas is therefore rather modest, consisting mainly of translating individual level issue attributes to the aggregate level; instead of talking about how individuals react to issues he talks about how issues affect a majority or a significant number of individuals. In effect, he ends up relying on the same logic as the existing public agenda-setting typologies. Political reactions to media coverage are implicitly framed as equal to, and contingent upon, the cognitive micro-processes by which individuals come to react differently to news coverage. Although more consideration should have been put into the shift from individual to national level, it is a fact that some issues affect a larger share of the population than other issues.[2] And since parties tend to choose strategies which could win votes, they will have incentives to concentrate attention in accordance with the public. But there are no such attempts at tying the concepts of obtrusiveness and concreteness to political logics, and no explicit and in-depth discussion of how media effects can be explained by the strategic behaviour of political actors (cf. Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006). Ultimately, applying the typology in studies

[2] Another problem with this aggregation is that the level of direct experience with an issue necessarily differs across any larger group of people. This does not preclude efforts to aggregate, but there are no clear and consistently applied guidelines for categorizing issues on the aggregate level. Consequently the reliability of the approach is low. For instance, taxation is placed in the governmental category containing unobtrusive issues. This appears to be a counterintuitive categorization, as there are few other issue areas where more people have direct experiences. Instead, the small changes in tax rates during the period of investigation are emphasized, suggesting that issue type is confused with issue salience. Demers et al. (1989) show how this mix has been a common feature of obtrusiveness studies all the way back to Zucker (1978).

of political agenda-setting means explaining the actions of political organizations or institutions as if they were individuals.

The Soroka typology is also vulnerable due to the fact that several disputed concepts are combined in a new typology, which then by simple logic extends their ambiguities and complicates the task of sorting out and determining the effects of the different theoretical arguments. Two examples illustrate this. First, Demers et al. (1989) postulate, and find evidence for, an exact opposite obtrusiveness effect (cognitive priming model) than the one argued by Zucker and applied by Soroka. The conflict stems partly, in my opinion, from Soroka's and others' inability to differentiate between the effect of obtrusiveness on the two different processes of agenda-setting and opinion formation.[3] There is a distinct difference between arguing that direct experience of an issue prevents media attention from causing public *attention* to this issue, and arguing that direct experience prevents media influence on public *opinion* about this issue.[4] In fact, it is not unlikely that even though I have a lot of direct experience with an issue, news about this issue might be very important for it to rise on my agenda (as also argued by Demers et al. 1989). Second, the different concepts of the typology overlap in ways that complicate the interpretation. For instance one might expect that obtrusiveness, which is thought to diminish media effects, will increase an individual's ability to visualize issues, the defining character of concrete issues which are said to enhance media effects. The fact that obtrusiveness and concreteness together define the prominent issue category makes it a tough exercise to interpret Soroka's results with regard to their distinct effects on the agenda-setting process. The combination of concepts might thus backlash: something has been explained, but we cannot be sure of what.

The diffuseness of the issue typology is further accentuated by its unclear relation to the dimension of time, or put differently, the ambiguity surrounding how or when an issue changes from one category to another. Soroka starts out by specifying that issue attributes vary not only according to issues, but also across time. However, time variance mechanisms are not explored in any depth and the typology remains a static issue description. The political prioritization of environmental issues will always be considerably affected by media attention, while attention to taxes will always be immune to media

[3] For a discussion of the differences between agenda-setting and framing, see Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007).

[4] Perhaps best illustrated by the most used quote in the agenda-setting literature: 'The press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about' (Cohen, 1963: 13).

coverage. Although he does not explain time variance mechanisms in the initial discussion of the issue typology, Soroka includes re-estimations of some models using periods with relatively low levels of inflation and unemployment (2002: 100-102). Compared to the original estimations, media effects rise. This is interpreted to mean that the prominence of an issue, in the 'real world', is negatively correlated with the level of media effects. Although it becomes unclear whether media effects are related to the characteristics of an issue or simply the level of attention the issue seems to be subject to, this does provide interesting clues to how real world changes condition media effects. This also highlights the ambitious and valuable contribution of Soroka's study. Comparing agenda-setting patterns across issues and time, for the public, policy and media agenda, while controlling for real world factors, is nothing less than impressive. The ambition, however, is also the central cause of weakness in his project. When trying to explain three agendas by the same theory on issue variance gaps will necessarily appear, making the typology an inevitable target of critique from those with more modest goals.

2.2.1 Political issue attribute models

Walgrave and Van Aelst's (2006) contingent model of political agenda-setting constitutes a theoretical break with the public issue attribute models discussed above. They point to how most political agenda-setting research 'implicitly draws upon theory and hypotheses of public agenda-setting research supposing that politicians and the public react the same way on news, but they do not' (2006: 99). Public and political agenda-setting differ in many important respects, the latter being a behavioural macro-process and the former being a cognitive micro-process (cf. Pritchard, 1992: 108). Any model of political agenda-setting should therefore explicitly focus on characteristics of political actors and institutions and study how they affect the agenda-setting process. This is also the essence of the 'political issue attribute models', the second main group of theoretical explanations why media's political agenda-setting effect varies across issues. The general argument is that issue variance in political agenda-setting is not necessarily best explained by the issues themselves, i.e. their dramatic or sensational nature, or their connection with the public (i.e. their obtrusiveness). Instead, agenda-setting differences across issues can be explored with more payoff by considering how issues are linked to different aspects of politics.

Although expressed most explicitly in Walgrave and van Aelst's review and theoretical contribution, and later empirically addressed most explicitly by Green-Pedersen and Stubager (2010a) and Vliegenthart and Walgrave

(2010; 2011), the US literature on foreign policy agenda-setting contains some of the first examples of political issue attribute models. Edwards and Woods (1999) find a unidirectional relationship for foreign policy issues where presidential attention is affected by the media, and not the other way around. They conclude that 'our findings are consistent with our theorizing about the effect of the media on public opinion and the incentives this provides the President for addressing the issues raised in the media' (ibid.: 342). But as they also find media effects on domestic issues, although in this case bidirectional, there is no explicit attempt to explain why this theorized process should work differently for different issues. Wood and Peake (1998) reach similar results for media effects on presidential attention to foreign policy issues, without including an empirical comparison to domestic issues. They do, however, discuss their findings in light of differences in attributes of domestic and foreign policy issues, highlighting that 'the foreign policy agenda operates in the context of a *continually* unfolding drama' (ibid.: 182). The studies apparently share features with the public issue attribute perspective, focusing on the media's impact on public opinion and the dramatic nature of foreign policy issues as causes of political agenda-setting patterns. Still, Wood and Peake do bring up the fact that responsibility of foreign policy rests primarily with the president, in contrast to the plurality of actors influencing domestic policy issues. From this perspective, institutional ownership of issues could be seen as one of the theoretically important variables behind foreign policy agenda-setting studies. Transparency regarding political actors' responsibility for a certain issue type is likely to make these actors react to news on these issues. When several political actors share responsibility, political reaction to media attention might be slow or even non-existent (Pritchard, 1992).

Recently a similar mechanism has been proposed in a European context, suggesting that issues where 'institutional ownership' has partly been transferred to EU should exhibit stronger media influence in national settings (van Noije et al., 2008). The argument relates to theories of multilevel governance as a process whereby national parliaments lose authority and hence their ability to control the political agenda: 'The national parliament is irrefutably the institution that saw its sphere of influence most seriously compromised if only for its limited options of receiving updated information about EU affairs' (ibid.: 461-462). Consequently, for EU dominated issues such as agriculture and environment conditions favour stronger media influence on parliamentary agendas than parliamentary influence on media agendas. Data from the Netherlands and the UK largely supports this expectation.

From a party perspective though, studies of the political conditionality of media's agenda-setting influence have been long in coming. A recent study attempts to improve this by bringing new issue characteristics into play when studying media influence on the agenda of the Belgian Parliament (Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2011a). First, an argument predicting more media effects for issues which have been incorporated in government agreements is outlined. These agreements contain the main policy pledges of the government, a list of issue priorities so to speak. Vliegenthart and Walgrave expect government MPs to act upon media attention for these issues in order to follow up the pledges, prioritizing and building an image of issue competence. The opposition, on the other hand, would have an interest in using media attention to dismantle such an image, and is therefore also expected to prioritize issues from the agreements. The results show no support for this expectation. However, the theoretical argument behind the hypothesis should not be written off with the empirical evidence at hand. The proposition is based on the assumption that 'opposition parties know they can hurt the government amidships when they are able to challenge it on issues that have been announced in the government agreement' (ibid.: 1036). A reasonable argument, but nevertheless one which the study is not necessarily capable of examining. The opposition's ability to hurt the government through its policy pledges hinges on how the issues from the government agreements are covered in the media. Given good news, the opposition would be wise to keep quiet. But if an issue to which the government promised to pay special attention is receiving negative media coverage, the opposition can be expected to strike.

Second, Vliegenthart and Walgrave pick up where Soroka left off attempting to construct a new and more political issue categorization. Their typology is based on a combination of two distinctions, between endogenous and exogenous issues, and between consensual and divisive issues. The latter relates to the concept of political cleavages, the argument being that divisive issues are more crucial to the political competition in a party system. Accordingly, they should structure party attention to the media agenda. The former distinction separates issues coming from outside and issues coming from within the political system and society's main institutions. The expectation is that endogenous issues should matter more for parliament's news responses. Although this argument is explained very briefly, it seems (implicitly) to rest on the assumption that parliament monitors the institutions producing the endogenous issues and should as a consequence be more likely to respond when these receive media attention. Results show only limited and unstable support for these mechanisms. The fact that the two distinctions

are combined in their typology, strangely fusing a perspective on social cleavages and the issue structure of party competition with a perspective on the institutional origins of issues, could explain the mixed results. Furthermore, as parliament itself is arguably the core political institution in society one might just expect MPs to be part of a policy-, and not media-led agenda-setting mechanism for endogenous issues.

The last, and arguably most promising, 'political issue attribute' which has just started to be explored in political agenda-setting is issue ownership (Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2010a; Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2011a). The theory of issue ownership simply asserts that a party develops 'ownership' of an issue when the electorate believes it to be more capable than other parties in handling it (Petrocik, 1996). Consequently, parties campaign to increase the saliency of 'their' issues because this will produce an electoral benefit. The theory is closely linked to both Budge and Farlie's saliency theory of party competition (1983) and Riker's dominance principle (1996), as they all lead to the expectation that 'during campaigns parties promote issues on which they hold a long-standing reputation for competence' (Green and Hobolt, 2008: 462). Focusing on Petrocik, issue ownership is mainly portrayed as stable over time, or as a 'critical constant'. Exceptions exist, but they are defined as 'short-term leases' of ownership due to special conditions or events (i.e. war, unemployment) influencing the incumbent parties' ability to handle the job.

Two recent agenda-setting contributions find stronger media effects on party agendas in parliament for owned issues. Green-Pedersen and Stubager (2010a) investigate the relationship between media agenda and the opposition's parliamentary questions in a Danish context. Their central hypothesis is that media attention only generates opposition attention in parliament when the issue in question is owned by the opposition. The data largely supports this hypothesis, leading to an interesting conclusion in light of the issue attribute model discussed above: 'Issue effects are thus generally not stable over time, as the issue characteristic logics would predict; instead, they shift over time in ways that are largely predictable from an issue ownership logic' (ibid.: 675).

Green-Pedersen and Stubager (2010a) conceptualize ownership from the perspective of the *electorate*, implicitly stressing the vote-seeking element in the ownership theory. In contrast, Vliegenthart and Walgrave (2011a) emphasize *party claims to ownership* in their recent paper on political agenda-setting in the Belgian parliament. Thus, they examine how the parties' *own* issue attention (in manifestos) affects their responses to media attention. They reach the same positive results, but nevertheless miss out on

the crucial component in the ownership concept: voter evaluations of perceived party competence or credibility. It could therefore be regarded as a party mandate (Budge and Hofferbert, 1990), instead of an ownership, explanation of media effects on parliamentary party agendas. On the other hand, they capture some of the policy-seeking root of the ownership theory: Parties own issues because they have directed policy attention towards them, devoted resources to addressing them, shown that they care about these issues and that they perform on them. Ownership therefore indicates that a party would want to address an issue, and it is this prioritization and intention that could be measured in party platforms. Anyway, the expectation is identical to that of Green-Pedersen and Stubager (2010a), meaning that media attention to an owned issue is more likely to be followed by party reactions than media attention to an un-owned issue. In other words, the basic issue strategy remains the same whether it emphasizes the vote-seeking or the policy-seeking aspects of the ownership theory. And as the two applications reach the same results, the suggestion is that party responses to news stories are motivated by both policy and vote-seeking ambitions.

2.3 Comparative perspectives on policy responsibility?

The two major weaknesses of the literature concern, to different extents, both the public and the political issue attribute perspectives on political agenda-setting. The first relates to the unclear, nearly absent, role of policy responsibility and the lack of comparative perspectives addressing it. The second, discussed in the next section, regards the limitations, and often static nature, of the issue attribute explanations put forward. Looking at the former first, the question of government power and who holds it is either superficially involved or more or less ignored in extant research on political agenda-setting. The study of agenda-setting processes is by definition a study of political influence. But even though agenda-setting concentrates on the exercise of power, on how actors are able to change each others' priorities, few studies reflect on how these processes are affected by the distribution of policy-making powers and the responsibility that comes with it.

Among the exceptions, Vliegenthart and Walgrave (2011a) test what opposition and position status mean for parliamentary agenda-setting. But this still doesn't add up to a truly comparative model of policy responsibility in political agenda-setting, as it only looks at the relatively insignificant actions of government MPs and not at government itself. Walgrave et al. (2008) in-

vestigate media influence on both parliament and government, but primarily from a who-leads-whom perspective. The study does not offer a comparative theoretical perspective on the role of government power when parties direct their attention to news. Rather, differences observed are attributed to the argument that media effects should be weaker for substantial policy agendas (government) than for symbolic policy agendas (opposition). Green-Pedersen and Stubager's (2010) issue ownership contribution brings party competition into play when examining why opposition parties follow media attention. This perspective, then, models agenda-setting as a competition for votes and, consequently, office. Still, the question of who holds office and the power to make policies, and how this affects party competition and agenda-setting patterns, is not fully integrated in these studies.

One reason is that they focus only on the opposition, that is, only on the agenda-setting mechanism of parliamentary institutions dominated by opposition MPs. This leaves a sizeable gap in our knowledge about the media's agenda-setting influence on government.[5] A gap which is all the more critical considering that the object of study is the political agenda-setting influence of the media. If we do not examine those in office, this quantity will remain largely unknown regardless how many opposition studies are performed. Furthermore, the neglect of government agendas also makes it easier to overlook competitive mechanisms of central importance to political agenda-setting. Parties compete for votes, office and policy influence. Elections provide votes to be exchanged for legislative weight and, if sufficient, government status (Strøm and Müller, 2003: 19ff). Arguably, the single most important contextual factor of party competition within a political system at any point in time is the outcome of these exchanges after the previous election. That is, constraints of party behaviour vary at the most between those who are in office and those who are not. When only the latter are examined, comparative perspectives on the role of office and policy responsibility are not as accessible as they could be. The agenda-setting literature has promoted a shift of focus, 'from the issue of power to the power of issues' (Dearing and Rogers, 1996: 78). Not neglecting the contributions this shift has delivered in terms of comparative research on different issues and how issue content matters, it is nevertheless worth reflecting on what is lost in this transition and what could be gained by re-focusing on power, or more precisely government power. Comparing opposition and government, taking into ac-

[5] Helms (2008) points out that a lack of studies on the media-executive relationship also characterizes research outside the agenda-setting tradition.

count differences in policy responsibility, thus seems to be an important step forward in terms of modelling political agenda-setting.

2.4 Static explanations of a dynamic process?

The second major weakness in extant political agenda-setting research is the lack of dynamic predictions that necessarily follows when fixed issue typologies dominate the field. Ironically, time-series modelling has been the preferred design and tool to test and develop more or less static theories of changes in issue attention. Of course, these models have produced insights into who influences whom and their perspectives and predictions allow for changes across time. But nearly all this variation comes as a direct consequence of changes in the issue composition of the media agenda. In the case of the public issue attributes perspectives, different political actors are expected to respond in the same way at different points in time. When a sensational issue gets media attention, it will most likely get political attention, while governmental issues are less likely to climb the agenda as a consequence of news attention. Granted, this makes up a dynamic theory on the agenda-setting effect of fixed issue categories, highlighting that changes in media coverage cause political attention for some issues but are inconsequential for others. But it entails a marginal role for political choice in the process of political agenda-setting.

The issue ownership perspective introduces a dynamic element, theorizing a specific mechanism that intervenes in the direct effect of the media agenda on the political agenda. Thus, ownership enhances the probability of political response to news attention. Overall though, the ownership model of political agenda-setting remains largely static. Agenda-setting patterns might change with shifts in office, as a new government and a new opposition stress their favourite issues. But while in office, or opposition, a party will politicize news according to the same formula throughout the term. In effect, the current ownership application is unable to explain clearly rational, and frequently occurring, party behaviour. For instance, Green-Pedersen and Stubager (2010a: 675) find a deviation from their hypothesized ownership effect when the right-of-centre opposition did not prioritize news on economic issues in the period from 1993 to 2001. They note briefly that this could be explained by a boom in the Danish economy at the time. This suggestion deserves more attention, and hints at a fundamental mechanism in the relationship between the media agenda and political actors: it makes no sense for parties in opposition to politicize a good issue development, regardless of whether it is sensational, prominent or owned.

The position of issue typologies in the agenda-setting literature is not undeserved, and they no doubt provide knowledge about how policy substance shapes agenda-setting. Consequently, I will include them as alternative or supplementary explanations of news responses in the empirical part of the dissertation. However, explaining a dynamic issue agenda with static issue typologies limits the predictive abilities of extant agenda-setting models. The predicted outcome is always the same when a sensational, or an owned, issue climbs the media agenda. These perspectives attribute a lot to fixed and semi-fixed issue typologies, and depict a political process where political actors have a limited role. The reason, I argue, is that they fail to recognize that issues on the media agenda are representations of social problems. Or more precisely, at any given point in time, issues on the news agenda represent the current status of ever-changing social problems that political actors and institutions process. Is it not reasonable to assume that parties are interested in what news tells them about the most recent developments in a problem – whether they were negative or positive – and not only in whether news is about crime or environment?

The review provides pointers as to the potential importance of dynamic news information in agenda-setting models, for instance in the failure to find media effects for issues from government agreements (Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2011a) and the 'missing' ownership effect during an economic boom (Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2010a). In both cases, news tone would have been crucial to a more precise prediction of party response because it could indicate how the (social) problem in question, whether from the government's list of pledges or from the opposition's list of ownerships, was developing. The importance of media tone is not a novel idea in agenda-setting (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993: 51), but it has nevertheless occupied a marginal role in the research on medias' agenda-setting power. In the next chapter, the two weaknesses identified in this review are confronted in a model of party responses to news attention where the political contingencies perspective in extant research is developed to include policy responsibility as the key factor affecting opposition and government preferences for different tones – and consequently, news stories – in political agenda-setting processes. Thus, information and political preferences are brought together, as suggested by Baumgartner et al. (2011: 952), in a model that appreciates both signals from the environment and the 'politics matters' thesis.

2.5 Summary

Despite a relatively low number of empirical studies, the literature on political agenda-setting has contributed substantially to our understanding of why some issues receive political attention while others don't and, specifically, how the media influence this process. Results suggest that concentrated policy responsibility or institutional ownership makes news influence more likely, as reflected by presidential responses to foreign policy relative to domestic issues (Wood and Peake, 1998). In the case of domestic policy, attention to dramatic and sensational issues like crime and environment is more easily affected by news, while issues like taxes and government reforms more often move up the political agenda following policy initiatives (Soroka, 2002). Moreover, multi-level governance, as in relation to EU-dominated issue like environment and agriculture, makes parliaments more open to media influence (van Noije et al., 2008). Finally, the most recent findings show how parties are more likely to politicize news coverage on owned issues, reflecting a mix of vote-seeking (Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2010a) and policy-seeking (Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2011a) party strategies.

The critical section on the public issue attribute model (cf. Section 2.2.1) clearly suggests that, from my perspective, some of the above results produce a less satisfactory explanation of why issue features matters in political agenda-setting. Most importantly, Soroka's issue typology does not serve as a theory of why the political actors at the heart of the agenda-setting process are influenced by media coverage. The political issue attribute models remind us that political agenda-setting research examines the effects of media attention on the issue priorities of political actors. But applications are few, and there is an apparent need for new theoretical perspectives and more political modelling of agenda-setting processes. This is especially striking when analyzing party responses to news. The literature on political parties and party competition is rich with theories offering predictions of strategies that vary, both across parties and in different contexts. Yet, in much political agenda-setting research, parties have either been ignored or expected to react more or less uniformly to media attention. As a starting point then, the political issue attribute models offer a more promising perspective, where parties and political strategies are part of the equation.

Chapter 3
An 'attack and defend' model of party responses to news

Drawing on the insights of existing research, and at the same time attempting to mend the weak spots discussed in the previous chapter, this chapter develops an 'attack and defend' model of political agenda-setting by the media. The model views political agenda-setting as a central part of the competition between opposition and government. That is, parties' relation to the media agenda is part of their fight over political power and at the same time affected by the outcome of this competition – the distribution of policy-making powers and the responsibility which accompanies it. The model argues that policy responsibility explains why parties respond to news – making it possible to propose which news attributes prompt opposition and government reactions. In the context of party competition for votes and political power, the state of social problems on the news agenda (as portrayed through good and bad news) and the attribution of responsibility for them come to dominate the opposition-government game and how the parties in this game relate to the media agenda.

Two strands of literature should be credited from the start. They are less directly involved in the deduction of the propositions, but nonetheless crucial to the assumptions and arguments in the dissertation. First, the model is inspired by research on party and issue competition (cf. Budge and Farlie, 1983; Petrocik, 1996; Carmines, 1991; Green, 2007; Green-Pedersen, 2007) where parties are argued to compete by drawing attention to preferable issues, and not only by assuming different positions on the same issues (cf. Downs, 1957). Thus, the propositions on party responses developed below are based on the assumption that parties will choose different issues or stories from the news agenda, according to whether they constitute strength or weakness in party competition.

Second, research on policy change dynamics focusing on the key role of information (cf. Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005) has influenced my thinking. News is essentially new signals from the environment to the political system, new information on the state of a social problem that might or might not be interpreted as relevant to policy-making (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005: 55) – or, for that matter, to party competition. Appreciating this, it becomes necessary to consider which types of informa-

tion, which elements of new signals that are most important for parties and policy-makers. From the perspective of this dissertation, I assume that parties care more about what news signals tell us about recent developments and the present state of problems, than which issue category a problem belongs to. Thus, the conceptualization of a 'winning issue' (cf. Carmines, 1991: 75) most common to the literature on party and issue competition, emphasizing issue ownership (cf. Petrocik, 1996), is downplayed at the expense of the argument that policy responsibility and news tone determine whether parties see news as favourable or not. Hence, I assume that parties compete by drawing attention to preferable issues, but that the state of, and responsibility for, social problems constitute the strongest indicators of what a preferable issue is.

Finally, my understanding of what media influence through political agenda-setting is, deserves a comment. News institutions as political actors in representative democracies in some ways serve as functional equivalents to for instance interest groups or political parties. That is, they act as mediators located between the private sphere and the state, communicating specific interests or specific social problems to the political system and its actors. Of course though, on several crucial points the media differ from interest groups and parties. Most importantly, the link between news institutions and the interests or problems mediated by them is weak, uninstitutionalized and grounded in a commercial, rather than a democratic, principle. Those interests, opinions or problems that at any point in time are deemed newsworthy will be communicated. Although some groups or individuals might receive more media attention than others, the concept of media influence nevertheless involves a broad and continuously changing mediation of a variety of interests, opinions and problems in society. Consequently, when I talk about media influence in political agenda-setting I'm interested in the success of the media as a *general* mediator of problems or interests in society – unlike influence exerted through for instance corporatism, lobbyism or democratic representation whereby *specific* groups of individuals are able to affect politics via interest groups or political parties.

This could perhaps be illustrated by Cook's several points when debating Kingdon's (1995) conclusion that the media mainly magnify issues: 'Kingdon was partially right. To the extent that journalists wait for authoritative sources to do or say newsworthy things, their role in agenda setting is unlike that of other political actors'. Yet, on the other hand 'the news media do more than reflect or merely pick and choose from among what others are doing' (Cook, 2005: 12). Although sources might control information and access, journalists 'decide whether something is interesting enough to cover, the context in

which to place it, and the prominence the story receives' (ibid.). When claiming that media holds political agenda-setting power then, and that media affects politics, I see their influence as reflecting a combination of their role as part selectors and magnifiers of issues originating with other actors and part negotiators of these issues' 'newsworthiness' (ibid.).

The argument of the model is built up and presented in four steps. First, the core assumption on the role of policy responsibility is substantiated through a discussion of different contributions on the possibilities and constraints of opposition and position status. Second, the implications of this assumption are presented, specifically related to a shift of focus from typologies of issues to issue developments and the dynamic nature of social problems. Drawing on agenda-setting research as well as literature on party rhetoric, negativity effects and negative campaigning, I develop the core proposition of the study holding that the opposition attacks using news negativity, while the government defends by politicizing positive news. Third, I discuss how explicit attributions of blame to the government change the game by intensifying incentives for opposition attack and forcing government to deviate from its good news response pattern. Fourth, I present a modified perspective on how the electoral issue strengths of parties influence agenda-setting patterns, and finally I reflect on the limits to the scope of the attack and defend model suggested by theories on issue convergence and heightened media attention.

3.1 Political agenda-setting and the government–opposition game. Attack and defend

Repeating the conclusion from the literature review, systematic knowledge on 'the power of issues' has accumulated, while limited attention has been paid to how government power affects agenda-setting mechanisms. The actors at the heart of this study, political parties, perform several functions in the policy process including recruitment, mobilization, interest aggregation and intermediation. Their defining function in representative democracy is, however, that they have to rule and take responsibility for ruling (Katz, 1987: 4). It is through 'their roles as operators of government' (Klingemann et al., 1994: 9) that parties serve to link the demands of the citizens with the making of policies. Whether they play this role of government, or that of opposition, is absolutely decisive. Parliamentary democracy as a chain of delegation offers greater policy influence, and hence accountability, to governing parties than to opposition parties (Müller et al., 2006: 21; Strøm and Müller

1999: 23). Although parliament passes legislation, government dominates the policy-making process mostly initiating laws and relying on its parliamentary base for support and on 'its' bureaucracy to implement them. Thus, being in government means that parties have authority to influence what the state does (and does not do) in order to confront the many problems in society. Along with this power comes, of course, responsibility. The democratic institution of elections, which delivers the government its delegated powers in the first place, also allows for accountability by providing the opportunity to hold parties responsible (cf. Powell, 2000). And responsibility extends not only to what the incumbent government has or should have done. The public, interest groups, media and, not to forget, the opposition hold the government accountable for policy problems 'even if the government bears no direct responsibility for these problems, and even though many of them may not be amenable to government solutions in the first place' (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2010: 262).

The opposition, meanwhile, is left mostly with the scrutinizing and not the policy-making function of parliament. Thus, the first consequence of parliamentary opposition, as Norton (2008: 244) notes, is that 'opposition parties are significant actors in exposing Government to public challenge and oversight, but least effective in affecting outcomes of public policy'. Far from implying opposition only as a weak adversary of government though, this instead means that government strengths in law-making are met by opposition strengths in agenda-setting. '(T)he opposition has only its word' as Klingemann et al. (1994: 28) put it. Or more precisely, the opposition utilizes the non-legislative activities of the legislature (parliamentary questions, interpellations and debates) as agenda-setting tools in issue competition, and do so to an increasing extent (Green-Pedersen, 2010). By way of its words then, the opposition enjoys 'the ability to hold the executive to account and ensure that it is required to explain and justify its actions – and inactions – before the representatives of the people' (Baldwin, 2004: 302).

In sum, the two roles of political parties, as opposition and government, naturally affect their attention. In policy-making terms, the shift from position to opposition status is one of degradation. It entails losing an attacking position in the shaping of political solutions to society's problems. But in terms of political attention and agenda-setting, the loss of policy-making powers is replaced by an attacking position in the public debate and party competition on recent issue developments, the present state of social problems and the attribution of responsibility for them. Attention in these debates is mostly devoted to what the government has done, is going to do or should have done. But, of course, parties bring different perspective to the debates, re-

flecting strategies that are aligned with their position in or outside of office. The opposition *attacks* government actions to show how it is incapable of handling its responsebilities. Government *defends* its actions and the legitimacy of its position in office, and argues why it was (is) the right thing to do.

3.2 Policy responsibility and party preferences for good and bad news

The argument in this section is simply that the differences in constraints and opportunities between opposition and government also affect political attention to news. When policy responsibility is regarded as a fundamental determinant of party behaviour, and the process of agenda-setting is seen from the perspective of party competition, news tone becomes crucial. As mentioned at the end of the review in Chapter 2, this is because the tone of media coverage reflects the state of the problems on the agenda. The two examples from the most recent political agenda-setting research on the lack of ownership effects during an economic boom (Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2010a) and the failure to identify government and opposition use of media attention to government pledges, illustrates why this information is necessary to the players in the opposition-government game (cf. Section 2.2.1). Consequently, news tone should be vital to the modelling of political agenda-setting. More generally, negativity effects, or asymmetric responses to negative and positive information, have been demonstrated in several fields of research (cf. Soroka, 2006). Most notably, there is ample evidence that negative information has a greater impact on how voters assess candidates and parties (cf. Lau, 1985; Holbrook et al., 2001). In political agenda-setting, Baumgartner et al.'s (1997) study of media influence on congressional agendas shows that negative news has a more powerful effect. The model developed here draws on these findings, but points to a more nuanced way in which news tone matters for the agendas of political actors.

The essence of the theoretical model in this dissertation is the link between political agenda-setting and party competition. In short, the assumption is that parties politicize news as part of party competition. And in party competition, strengths and weaknesses decide. The question then becomes what those strengths and weaknesses are? The first tenet of this model, introduced above, emphasizes how policy responsibility affects party attention. That is, party strengths and weaknesses could be distinguished from the perspective of policy responsibility for issue developments. Because government holds policy responsibility, news reflecting positive issue develop-

ments and progress on social problems constitutes government strength in party competition. Being in opposition implies the opposite. The primary task of opposition parties, and one they are institutionally equipped to perform, is to challenge, criticize and control government. News reflecting negative developments feed this task, while good news is counterproductive.

This basic, but potentially powerful, mechanism has been hinted at in political agenda-setting (Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006: 103). But so far a theoretical explanation as to why news tone would matter, and empirical investigations of how opposition and government respond differently to news tone are strangely missing. The argument presented here shares features and draws inspiration from the US literature on agenda-setting and policy change that focuses on the role of information and attention (cf. Jones and Baumgartner, 2005). The most important attribute of information in politics, from the perspective of policy responsibility, is that it is 'not neutral; it creates winners and losers' (ibid.: 17). Yet, apart from the ownership perspective, the issue typologies used to conceptualize information in agenda-setting research are almost exclusively neutral. Empirically then, to learn about tone in political communication we must therefore turn to other fields of research. Studies of political campaigning confirm the fundamental difference in opposition and government use of positive and negative rhetoric. US research on political advertising has found that challengers, or candidates trailing in the polls (Skaperdas and Grofman, 1995), are more likely to produce negative political ads than incumbents (Fridkin and Kenney, 2004: Kahn and Kenney, 1999; Hale, Fox and Farmer, 1996). In a parliamentary setting, Håkansson (1999) has shown how Swedish opposition parties are more negative than government parties over a fifty year period; Elmelund-Præstekær (2010) finds the same pattern in Danish party ads and manifestos across four recent elections. The basic mechanism where party preferences for a specific tone in political communication are explained by policy responsibility is thus well documented by party campaign behaviour across political systems, party ideology and time. Also, there are compelling arguments why this should be the case between campaigns. For instance, Weaver (1986: 391) notes how 'opposition parties in parliamentary systems can do little other than generate blame, for they cannot hope to have an effective voice in formulating policy. In countries with Question Time or its equivalent, this blame-generating process has become highly institutionalized.' Mirroring the literature on parliamentary opposition, this illuminates how the context of opposition status provides a more or less constant incentive for criticism and negative rhetoric also outside election campaigns. It seems a

reasonable extension of these findings to expect the same fundamental mechanism to apply in party responses to news attention.

In other words, if information creates winners and losers, then surely political parties will have preferences regarding what type of news they would like to see and attend to. As argued above, government power determines who might lose and win as a consequence of information. Opposition parties want to attack and are especially attentive to bad news potentially portraying the government as losers. The government is looking to score on good news, drawing attention to itself as a winner, claiming credit and proactively defending the legitimacy of its policy responsibility. Hence the model incorporates policy responsibility induced information preferences in its explanation of why parties respond to news attention, aiming to improve the predictive abilities of extant agenda-setting explanations.

The main implications of the above discussions can be summed up in what constitutes the first core proposition, for both opposition and government, in the 'attack and defend' model of political agenda-setting:

> [$P1_{Attack}$] Opposition response to news attention is more likely when news mediation of negative developments in social problems increases;
>
> [$P1_{Proactive\ defence}$] Government response to news attention is more likely when news mediation of positive developments in soical problems increases.

3.3 Policy responsibility and attributions of blame. The two-dimensional strategy of government

The core proposition above summarizes the strategies preferred by opposition and government parties when exposed to good and bad news, based on their radically different level of responsibility for public policies. This next step in the argument, emphasize how two specific (but related) features of news content have an amplifying and counteracting effect on the preferred strategies of opposition and government respectively. Basically, the assumption is that the government has a two-dimensional strategy of news response. The opposition, being out of office, is generally not in a position to claim credit for positive issue developments.[6] The government, on the other hand, cannot afford to ignore bad news indefinitely. Thus, this section is

[6] The most common exceptions being when opposition parties have participated in the policy-making process, for instance through policy settlements with the government, or through recently having occupied office and implemented a relevant policy change.

mostly focused on pinpointing why and when government shifts from its primary strategy of proactive defence and good news response, to a secondary strategy of reactive defence and bad news response.

The decisive factor in the shift of government response strategy is, in accordance with the main theoretical tenet of the model, policy responsibility. More precisely, it is transparency or visibility of government responsibility that lays the foundation for situations in which the government responds to negative news attention. The starting point of this mechanism is the argument presented above; government prefers to pay attention to positive news and ignore negative news because this conveys a government capable of handling the job. This latter choice, of ignoring bad news, largely corresponds to the option of problem denial in the blame-avoidance literature. The apparent appeal of which, is that 'if it can plausibly be maintained that there is no real problem, then the issue of blame cannot arise' (Hood et al., 2009: 697). Once this is not the case, and for some reason or other (see below) government cannot plausibly maintain that there is no problem, the primary government strategy is substituted. The reason is that the concept of responsibility in politics is at odds with a strategy of problem denial, but instead derives its meaning from the ability to respond to, and successfully deal, with policy problems. If a government desires a favourable competence image, it must therefore attend to bad news under certain circumstances. The two sections below elaborate on how the ideal government option of 'bad news denial' is easily disturbed by two types of blame attributions that figure in political news.

3.3.1 Substance blame

As noted earlier, the role of the government easily attracts a lot of negative attention, regardless of whether the government is in fact responsible for the issue developments observed. All else equal though, it is easier to 'get off the hook' if someone else is responsible or no one blames you. An economic downturn attributed to international trends is less of a government liability than one in which the government budgets and financial policies are held accountable. In other words, the possibility of protecting an image as competent despite going through a testing time varies according to formal responsibilities or responsibility attributions. The former expectation would in agenda-setting terms mean that formal responsibility increases the likelihood of political responses to issue attention in the media. This has been theorized and empirically examined in extant agenda-setting research (Pritchard, 1992; Wood and Peake, 1998). Unfortunately, there is a lack of

theoretical and empirical investigations about the effect of responsibility attributions on the news responses of political actors. The blame-avoidance literature approaches the topic when looking at how government ministers choose between different presentational strategies during media blame crisis (Hood et al., 2009). But the models and empirical investigations focus on exactly these specific situations of heightened attention in which responsibility already has been attributed. Consequently, there is no variation on my independent variable of interest, as they instead concentrate on the actors' choice of, and success with, blame-management strategies once the 'firestorms' have started.

However, some inspiration can be drawn from the extensive body of research on economic voting showing that responsibility attributions are taken into consideration when people process information about economic conditions (cf. Lau and Sears, 1981). For instance, Rudolph (2003) finds that the probability of presidential approval decreases as voters attribute responsibility for worsening economic conditions to him. Given government parties that are informed about this mechanism, and at the same time seek to maximize votes, responsibility attributions should play a decisive role in shifting government strategy from problem denial to problem admission – or from ignoring bad news to responding to it. If blame attributions are left unanswered, the government stands to be punished. In these cases, it is better served by trying to rewrite the incriminating version of the story found in the media, a version most likely supported by the opposition, hoping to influence public perception of the problem in question.

Attributions of blame are also expected to increase the probability of opposition news politicization. The reason is more or less the same, although with opposite motivations in mind. That is, the probability of government escaping blame decreases as responsibility is explicitly assigned in news coverage. This attracts opposition attention, not only because of the improved likelihood of successfully generating negative government attention. But also because it presents a less costly agenda-setting opportunity where the opposition itself doesn't have to come up with a link between a negative issue development and government (in)actions. Instead, it can point to a ready-made argument presented in the news coverage. Consequently, the following should be expected:

> [$P2_{Attack}$] Opposition response to news attention is more likely when news contains blame attributions;
>
> [$P2_{Reactive\ defence}$] Government response to news attention is more likely when news contains blame attributions.

3.3.2 Non-policy valence blame

The perspective above refers to blame attributed to government on the basis of negative issue developments. Implicitly then, as in most studies on blame, the focus is on explicit criticism of the government due to policy substance. In contrast, the second issue context in which the preferred government strategy of bad news response is challenged, relates less to policy substance and more to what Clark (2008: 112) labels a 'nonpolicy-related aspect of valence, namely parties' images with respect to competence, integrity and unity'. Much to its advantage, political agenda-setting research has concentrated on the policy content of issues and the way this 'issue-substance' shapes agenda-setting patterns. However, Clark's recent study of electoral outcomes in West-European democracies demonstrates that non-policy valence events significantly affect vote shares, and furthermore that 'the magnitude of the electoral effects of valence, as measured here, are similar to those estimated to be caused by shifts in parties policy positions in a number of studies' (ibid.: 122). In other words, events indicating lack of integrity and competence matter for party perceptions and support among voters.

Again, there is so far little research to indicate whether this also matters for party strategies in electoral competition and agenda-setting. Nevertheless, several arguments could be made that it does. The concept of valence issues originates with Stokes (1963, 1992) and is defined as issues 'on which parties or leaders are differentiated not by what they advocate but by the degree to which they are linked in the public's mind with conditions or goals or symbols of which almost everyone approves or disapproves' (Stokes, 1992: 143). The valence concept has mainly been put to use on policy issues where parties or candidates hold more or less identical positions, but also covers values to which we expect politicians to adhere, such as honesty, trustworthiness and competence. The potential of news questioning government competence or integrity derives from the fundamental character of these values. Parties, and their constituencies, often disagree on how to handle social problems. But no party and no voter would disagree that political representatives should be able to deal with these problems in a competent and honest manner, regardless of which political solution is chosen. If not, the question whether elected leaders are fit to govern is inevitably raised. And unlike for instance failed economic growth, which often can be (more or less credibly) attributed to external factors like international economic trends, the blame for non-policy valence failures is virtually impossible to escape.

Moreover, such events display properties that satisfy several requirements of news value (cf. Galtung and Ruge, 1965), and also correspond to defini-

tions of events that trigger media hypes (Wien and Elmelund-Præstekær, 2009). This, together with their potential political costs, in opinion polls, elections and office positions, makes it timely to study agenda-setting dynamics of news relating more to party images of competence and integrity than to policy substance. However, it is an oversimplification to assume that examples of incompetence etc. are completely detached from policy content. In fact, these events often provide opportunities for the opposition to link issue developments more directly to government (in)actions, thus questioning government competence both in general and in the specific issue area in which the event is set. In this process, the visibility of government responsibility again encourages political response to news attention.

Several arguments as to why non-policy valence events have become more important in politics are presented in the literatures on personalization of politics (Karvonen, 2010) and political scandals (Thompson, 2000). For instance, the declining importance of social cleavages and the convergence of parties' policy positions stimulate competition on other dimensions of political life. Furthermore, scandals have become ever more present in the political field facilitated by the rise of journalism, and especially investigative journalism, as a professional field and the diffusion of new information and communication technologies (ibid.: 31ff). A combination of push and pull thus shifts attention from policy substance to personal characteristics of politicians. Although these perspectives refer to changes over a long period, a development this dissertation does not touch upon, they still support the expectation that party images of integrity and competence matter in party competition.

Although related to different aspects of negative news attention, the underlying motivations of opposition and government responses to non-policy blame mirror those discussed for substance blame. Consequently, the second proposition on blame also expects opposition attack and government reactive defences:

> [$P3_{Attack}$] Opposition response to news attention is more likely when news questions government competence or integrity;
>
> [$P3_{Reactive\ defence}$] Government response to news attention is more likely when news questions government competence or integrity.

3.4 Policy responsibility and moderated party preferences for owned news

The theoretical explanation of ownership effects in political agenda-setting and the empirical results confirming them were reviewed in the previous chapter, so there is no need for a detailed repetition of the issue ownership theory and how ownership affects which news issues parties would like to politicize. I see no reason to change Green-Pedersen and Stubager's (2010) basic hypothesis, also confirmed by Vliegenthart and Walgrave (2011a), about opposition parties' preferences for news on owned issues. In the government case, there are no ownership results from the context of political agenda-setting to draw on thus far. However, the original theoretical perspective (cf. Petrocik, 1996) suggests that the same strategy should apply more or less equally across incumbents and challengers. Although set in a different context of campaigning, as opposed to the routine-times politics studied here, I do not initially differentiate between expectations for ownership effects on government and opposition news response. The argument fuses the two perspectives on issue ownership so far applied in political agenda-setting, acknowledging that ownership affects issue attention for both policy- and vote-seeking reasons. Consequently, parties have an interest in owned issues *per se*, believing that these are policy problems especially deserving of attention. And they have an interest in owned issues *per quod*, knowing that they stand to win electoral support if these issues become salient. Summing up, the fourth hypothesis (on the third core predictor) thus expects issue ownership to play a part in opposition attacks and government proactive defence:

> [$P4_{Attack}$] Opposition response to news attention is more likely when the mediated problem belongs to owned issue groups;
>
> [$P4_{Proactive\ defence}$] Government response to news attention is more likely when the mediated problem belongs to owned issue groups.

However, several arguments could be made that this 'traditional' ownership perspective in political agenda-setting should be moderated. Looking at government first, the finding that parties respond to the issues they own (Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2010a; Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2011a) does not fully take into account the decisive impact of policy responsibility. Government was not examined, and the constraints (and opportunities) of government power were naturally not part of the theoretical arguments. Basing my model on exactly such considerations, I have so far argued that pol-

icy responsibility directs government attention to good news [$P1_{\text{Proactive defence}}$], but that blame attributions force the government to respond also when news is less positive [$P2/P3_{\text{Reactive defence}}$]. Two implications of this combination of strategies should be noted. First, given that bad news dominates the media agenda, which I will examine in Chapter 5, the government is consistently and continuously more dependent on its reactive than its proactive strategy. That is, it is forced to enter issue debates more often rather than entering them on its own accord. This means that the government's ideal strategy of attending to those positive *issue developments* that could produce credit is downplayed. But it also affects the government's ability to prioritize *issue types* that would serve to its advantage. Accordingly, and extending the argument of Green-Pedersen and Mortensen (2010) who find opposition parties to be more flexible and able to focus on favourable issues, governing parties are not necessarily at liberty to respond more often to news from owned issue areas. In fact, if they actually manage to do so, their partisan issue emphasis is, in theory, partly explained by negative issue developments on these issues promoting them on the agenda of the media and the opposition.

This limitation of government choice when responding to news attention is reinforced by its obligation and capacity to act substantially when policy problems occur. Unlike the opposition, which is mostly restricted to symbolical action, the government can, and is expected to, propose and implement policy solutions. In short, the government is evaluated on the basis of actions, not only words. This suggests a larger role for current issue developments, and consequently a smaller role for long-term issue reputations in government strategies towards the media agenda. Such a mechanism could be explained by the task of governing, which in itself reduces the importance of ownership profiles. Government as a representative institution implies a broad connection to the electorate, transcending the limited constituency links underlying many issue ownerships. Regardless of the actual impact of this normative imperative[7], it still means that governments are held responsible for all policy areas and not only their pet projects. Finally, the agenda-setting literature has also argued that incumbents use their position to neutralize opposition strengths by prioritizing opposition issues while in office (Sulkin, 2005). This issue uptake hypothesis would predict an opposite or, to

[7] Mortensen et al. (2011) compare executive speeches across the UK, the Netherlands and Denmark, and find support for the contention that policy responsibility is more important than partisan preferences in the shaping of executive agendas.

the extent that the strategies are combined, at least a diluted ownership effect compared to the one proposed in [$P4_{Proactive\ defence}$].

In sum, there are competing expectations regarding the impact of ownership on government response to news. I nevertheless retain the original proposition, which has received support in the case of opposition parties (cf. Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2010a). To accommodate the arguments above, I instead propose a moderated effect of issue ownership on government news responses. Again, the key factors are policy responsibility, news tone and blame. As argued above, the government mainly responds to bad news when it has no other choice. Of course it is then left with little influence on which issue from a predominantly bad media agenda it will pay attention to. The government is, however, occasionally presented with opportunities to activate the public's favourable competence evaluations through responses to positive news coverage. These are arguably the most plausible contexts in which electoral issue strengths could be put to use by the government. In these cases, no one demands a response and government parties are at liberty to pick the stories that suit them well in party competition. From the ownership perspective this would be issues it is already perceived to be good at in an attempt to shift attention to the government's strengths (and opposition weaknesses). These issues presumably played a part in winning office in the first place. Consequently, governing parties are most definitely held accountable for developments on these issues. Highlighting positive issue developments on these issues is tantamount to saying 'Look, we did what we said we would. We are (still) competent, you can trust us'.

Opposition parties are expected to operate more freely in agenda-setting and party competition (cf. Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2010). They generally face less pressure to respond, even when news highlights negative developments in social problems. Consequently, they are more able, in theory, to prioritize according to their particular issue preferences and ownerships. Nevertheless, the usefulness of opposition politicization of own issues also hinges on the state of the problems on the agenda and the tone of news coverage. But, in accordance with the policy responsibility and news tone logic of [$P1_{Attack}$], this contingency is opposite of the one proposed for the government. Again, the interesting exception from the ownership pattern in Green-Pedersen and Stubager's findings illustrates my argument. If the economy is booming, opposition parties are not well advised to push this issue up the agenda. Even though they care about the issue, and are deemed as more competent, this will only strengthen the government's reputation on economic issues. In other words, news tone moderates ownership effects in the sense that elements of news negativity should be part of

opposition attacks that aim to politicize opposition owned issues from the news agenda.

The two theoretical perspectives on policy responsibility and issue ownership are thus a dynamic addition to each perspective's predictive powers. For instance, the static ownership proposition that parties are expected to respond more often to their own issues fails to acknowledge that the value of issue ownership is affected by issue developments. Or turned around, the more dynamic news tone proposition could still profit from acknowledging that electoral issue strengths enhance the attraction of favourable news tones. In sum, they combine to produce a fifth proposition on opposition attack and government proactive defence:

> [$P5_{Attack}$] Opposition response to news attention for owned issues is more likely when news negativity increases;
>
> [$P5_{Proactive\ defence}$] Government response to news attention for owned issues is more likely when news positivity increases.

3.5 Issue convergence and issue waves. Limits to the scope of 'attack and defend'?

The attack and defend model was developed with a broad population in mind. Inspiration is drawn from research and theories across different party systems, with different media systems. The simplicity of the model's argument, and also the key to its wide scope, lies in the emphasis of policy-making power and, ultimately, the linking of good and bad news to government responsibility. Thus, it is meant to apply in representative democracies with two or more parties competing for votes, one or several of which are in office and one or several of which are in opposition. Of course, the applicability of the model will vary according to the distribution of policy responsibility, and differences should therefore be expected (across systems or time) when political and institutional contexts change. However, these discussions will wait until after the main empirical tests of the model. For now, a couple of theoretical challenges to the propositions above, affecting *the within system* application of the model, deserve attention.

The concept of issue overlap or issue convergence in party competition (Sigelman and Buell, 2004, 2009; Sides, 2006; Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2010) has been used to question the implications of ownership theory, posing the question whether electoral issue strengths really cause parties to avoid issue dialogue. Contrary to what the ownership theory sug-

gests, parties do not necessarily compete more by 'issue avoidance' than by 'issue engagement'. For instance, Sigelman and Buell's study of presidential campaigns in the US from 1960 to 2000 showed that 'a high degree of similarity in the issue emphases of the two sides appears to have been the norm in these campaigns' (2004: 650). Green-Pedersen (2007) finds considerable issue overlap between party families in Western Europe. Several authors note how overlap is sometimes unavoidable due to the severity of policy problems (Budge and Fairlie, 1983: 129) or even desirable from a 'Downsian' perspective on issue competition (Baumgartner et al., 2011: 958).

To this, one should add the reservation that the ownership theory is, initially, a perspective on party strategies in political campaigns or electoral behaviour. To my knowledge, agenda-setting research is among the few literatures in which ownership is applied in the study of routine-times politics. Originally, the theory explains the issue priorities of party (or candidate) campaign strategies and behaviour. Furthermore, the strategies or behaviour under study are set in a context where agenda-setting is generally acknowledged to be policy, and not media led (cf. Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006). One should be open to the possibility that issue ownership might have different behavioural implications for parties' responses to news between elections than it has for their proactive agenda-setting initiatives close to elections. On the other hand, there seems to be a solid enough base to build on, given the empirical results in recent studies (cf. Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2010a; Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2011a). Also theoretically, through the notion of 'permanent campaigning' (cf. Blumenthal, 1982), there are convincing arguments why campaign and routine times do not necessarily differ that much. Finally, it is a very reasonable assumption that party responses to the news agenda are motivated by a wish to exercise influence 'right back', that is, on the public agenda via the news agenda.

The arguments above suggest that proponents of the ownership theory in agenda-setting processes should be careful not to overestimate its impact. There is, at the very least, a need to contextualize ownership effects in political agenda-setting research. The moderated ownership perspective of the attack and defend model, expressed in the interactions of [$P5_{Attack}$] and [$P5_{Reactive\ defence}$], is an attempt to do so. In addition, I will use the opportunity to examine the strength of ownership compared to other political contingencies. Not only is it important to develop a more precise understanding of when and why ownership matters. It is also an important supplementary goal of this investigation to gauge the impact of issue ownership, once the presumed key role of policy responsibility has been included in the agenda-setting equation.

Next, literature on issue convergence and agenda-setting also contains a challenge to the very core of the attack and defend model relating to policy responsibility and news tone. Especially, it is the government's proactive strategy of ignoring bad news and responding to good news that seems to walk into trouble. Several different contributions point to how highly salient news should provide a tough test for this proposition. The term 'riding-the-wave' or 'issue ridership', coined by Ansolabehere and Iyengar in their study of the effectiveness of campaign advertising (1994), offers a theoretical account of convergence in which the media agenda plays a part. As opposed to ownership, ridership hypothesizes that parties or candidates should focus on issues the public cares most about at a given point in time. Ansolabehere and Iyengar argue that this is done most efficiently by responding to issues that dominate the news, issues that are 'especially timely and newsworthy' (ibid.: 337). Sides explains the theoretical motivation as a wish to 'appear responsive to the public's concerns, regardless of an historical reputation or claim to 'ownership'. Salient issues are likely to motivate voter decision making, and a party that has not made an effort to speak to that issue may be perceived as indifferent' (2006: 412).

Eilders' (1997) concept of congruent and persistent media coverage hints at something of the same. If all media outlets are focusing persistently on the same issue, (and frame it in the same way,) this should be conducive to strong media effects on party agendas which again would mean that government has to respond to bad news. Moreover, the agenda-setting literature has demonstrated the consequences of heightened issue attention, and for instance shown how 'media help create situations which make increased government attention almost unavoidable' (Baumgartner et al., 1997). Baumgartner and Jones (1993: 20) also note how 'Important political questions are often ignored for years, but during certain periods almost every general media outlet features similar stories prominently. […] Each time there is a surge of media interest in a given topic, we can expect some degree of policy change'. In other words, front-page news, media hypes or issue waves attract the attention of parties and politicians with policy-making powers.

Green-Pedersen and Mortensen's (2010) notion of a systemic party system agenda theorize this from another perspective, arguing that an agenda is 'a structural phenomenon in the sense that it constrains the relevant actors at any given time. They must address the issues that are *prominent* on the agenda; at the same time, however, they compete to influence the composition of the agenda' (ibid.: 260). They go on to show that this constraint applies more for parties in government, while the opposition is free of responsibility and therefore more inclined to follow its own preferences rather than

those that come with the party system agenda. Thus, for the government, ignoring a *prominent* issue because of its attention to negative issue developments is hardly a viable option. This would mean retracting from party competition on the most salient issues on the party system agenda, signalling to the voters that they don't have any solutions worth communicating. Furthermore, ignoring such news would include letting go the opportunity to influence how the problem is perceived (Jerit, 2008) and, consequently, which solutions are most likely to win support. Klingemann et al. (1994: 29) note something of the same, pointing to how politicians are constrained by the outside world 'in the sense that problems that are being discussed, particularly in the media, cannot be entirely ignored by any major party. To try to do so is to risk failing to make an appeal to new voters and to dishearten older supporters by displaying the party's irrelevance to modern developments'.

Highly salient news, then, introduces an even harder test of the attack and defend model, making it crucial to examine if government can politicize positive news attention to its advantage during 'media storms', 'hypes' or 'issue waves'. No explicit propositions are developed on the basis of the heightened media attention perspective. Nevertheless, my argument is that there is room for both perspectives, and that parties are able to compete while converging. On the one hand, I expect the calculus applied by government parties in agenda-setting to operate somewhat in accordance with the principle suggested by Downs (cf. discussion in Baumgartner et al., 2011: 958), shifting government attention to where the media, and hence, the voters are. On the other hand, I argue that the assumptions of the attack and defend model still play a role. Even though parties might have to respond, they have a choice regarding when and with how much attention. After all, what defines this top part of the media agenda is intense and prolonged coverage, often stretching over several weeks and usually involving several (or all) news outlets. Thus, to the extent that news tone and the presence of blame vary during each issue wave, parties have the opportunity to respond strategically by timing their engagement to when news is most favourable. Consequently, I argue that the proposed behavioural imperatives of policy responsibility, expressed in [$P1_{\text{Proactive defence}}$] (and [P2/P3]) should still apply.

3.6 Summary

The attack and defend model of political agenda-setting is a unified proposition on opposition and government responses when confronted with news on different issues, with different tones and with or without different types of blame attributions. Table 3.1 repeats each proposition on news tone, blame

attribution and issue ownership in the model, for opposition and government respectively. I will not comment on them again, but instead summarize the model by underscoring how it attempts to fill the gaps identified in the literature review.

First, it is a political perspective where media influence on political agendas is explicitly modelled as politicization of social problems. This means that issues on the media agenda are conceived of as reflecting social problems which political actors at any point in time will or will not process. Consequently, issue categories are of interest only to the extent that they link political actors to social problems. In contrast to the public issue attribute perspective (cf. Section 2.2.1), this has been convincingly attempted through recent applications of issue ownership in political agenda-setting studies (Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2010a; Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2011a). This approach is thus part of the argument put forward in the present model. However, any static issue typology, whether 'political' or not, cannot tell us the current state of the problems on the agenda. This information is absolutely crucial to whether and how political actors process these problems. In the optic of the attack and defend model, this simple and straightforward assumption necessitates a (re)turn from the 'power of issues to the issue of power'.

Table 3.1. Attack and defend propositions on opposition and government response to news

X	Strategy	X→Y
News tone	$P1_{Attack}$	Opposition response more likely when negativity increases
	$P1_{Proactive\ defence}$	Government response more likely when positivity increases
Substance blame	$P2_{Attack}$	Opposition response more likely when substance blame present
	$P2_{Reactive\ defence}$	Government response more likely when substance blame present
Non-policy blame	$P3_{Attack}$	Opposition response more likely when non-policy blame present
	$P3_{Reactive\ defence}$	Government response more likely when non-policy blame present
Issue ownership	$P4_{Attack}$	Opposition response more likely when news is owned
	$P4_{Proactive\ defence}$	Government response more likely when news is owned
Ownership X Tone	$P5_{Attack}$	Opposition response for owned news more likely when negativity
	$P5_{Proactive\ defence}$	Government response for owned news more likely when positivity

Less figuratively speaking, the model proposes a comparative perspective on the role of government power and party competition in the politicization of social problems on the news agenda. The two very different roles of parties, as opposition and government, structure their attention. In the competition to remain in or regain office, information on the development of social problems holds opposite implications for the competitors. This is why news

tone matters. If news is good, reflecting positive developments, the government is advantaged and able to proactively defend its policies and position in office. If news is bad, reflecting negative developments, the government is disadvantaged while the opposition can attack and draw attention to the government's inability to handle the job. Policy responsibility then, and the dynamic information on how social problems are developing, is more essential than what type of issues or problems are on the agenda. The propositions on blame attribution further underline this, pointing to how visibility or explicit communication of responsibility for negative developments enhances opposition attacks on the one hand, while prompting government to stop ignoring and start processing the problem in question.

A final note should be made regarding the differences and similarities in government and opposition strategies. The proposition on news tone, [P1], predicts opposite reactions from the two actors which seem to justify the use of the different labels (attack vs. defend). While the ownership expectation ([P4]) reflects similar causal mechanism for the opposition and the government, it does on the other hand entail a divergence of party attention as they of course own different issues. Furthermore, it is assumed that opposition and government use their electoral issue strengths for different purposes, which is clearly underlined by the opposite expectations for moderated ownership effects [P5]. The two propositions on blame attributions, [P2] and [P3], do however provoke opposition and government responses to the same issues. Two points illustrate why I nevertheless insist on providing their expected behaviour with different labels. First, again, the motivations underlying their response are assumed to differ, as the opposition is advantaged by such news while the government would rather been without negative attention linked to its policy responsibility. Second, a core point regarding blame attributions is the way in which they force the government to fundamentally change its response behaviour, while encouraging the opposition to keep doing the same. In sum, and to the extent that results show support for these propositions on party responses to news, I think it is a qualified interpretation to regard them as part of opposition attacks and government (proactive and reactive) defences in political agenda-setting and party competition.

Chapter 4
Design and data

Two empirical studies are used to test the propositions and the underlying theoretical perspectives of the attack and defend model. Both have Denmark as a case, and both include measurements of the media agenda, the government agenda and the opposition agenda. The first is a large-N study, sampling more than 2000 stories from the radio news agenda of approximately one year. In this study, opposition response was measured by tracking down each of these news stories in the opposition's questions in parliament, while the government's response was proxied through references to the news stories in the Prime Minister's weekly press meeting. The second study is a medium-N study, consisting of two samples: 15 highly salient news stories from the radio news agenda described above; and 30 less salient stories from the same material. Each story was followed in 5 national newspapers, totalling over 800 news articles and 200 days of newspaper coverage. Inspired by political claims analysis (cf. Koopmans, 2002), opposition and government responses to news were measured through their claims in the newspaper articles.

This chapter discusses the choices made when collecting these data and operationalizing the concepts of the attack and defend model. It is divided into three parts. First, a discussion of issue definitions and issue operationalizations as found in previous research provides the argument for an important methodological choice in the dissertation; studying issue attention with news stories as the analytical unit of observation. In the second part, concepts from the theoretical model are operationalized, discussing advantages and limitations of the chosen sources, measurements and collection procedures. This includes a discussion of the two different designs applied in the dissertation (large-N and medium-N) and presentations of simple descriptives for the measured agendas. Third, I discuss how well Denmark as a case, and the chosen time period, fits the underlying theoretical assumptions of the model.

4.1 Deconstructing issues. News stories as units of study in agenda-setting

An agenda consists of two dimensions; time and relative importance. Most often the cross-sectional agenda-setting dimension of relative importance is

referred to as an 'issue hierarchy' (Dearing and Rogers, 1996:2), where each issue's ranking at a specific point in time is decided by the attention paid to, or importance attached to, this issue compared to others. However, the question of what an issue is has not been discussed at length in most agenda-setting contributions. This is not because there exists an intuitive and common understanding of how to define issues, the actual cases (or units of study) to be placed in the two-dimensional grid that constitutes an agenda. In fact, the agenda-setting research format has been applied to explain the rise and fall of distinctly different objects of attention on the political agenda. These units, ranging from events to 'proper issues' or broad issue groups and policy topics or sectors, are loosely connected in the sense that they represent different levels of abstraction in a broad concept of social problems. But they are of course also different, and thus hold different implications for empirical investigations. Two main approaches to issue definitions can be discerned in the literature.

First, several of the early studies on political agenda-setting (cf. Cobb and Elder, 1971; Cook et al., 1983; Linsky, 1986; Protess et al, 1987; Bartels, 1996) conform much closer to the definition of issues as social problems receiving mass media coverage (Dearing and Rogers, 1996:3). The promise of cross-issue generalization might be low, but these studies operate with a 'bottom-up' generated concept of issues that produces other advantages. It is the social problem itself that defines the boundaries of the issues, and so issues are constructed as meaningful units to which those attributes thought to affect the agenda-setting process can be precisely and reliably attached. The best way to understand this is to compare with the second approach to the issue concept. In the latest generation of political agenda-setting research (Walgrave et al, 2008; Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2011a, 2011b; Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2010a), issues are implicitly equated with policy topics. Measures of the media agenda and the political agenda are aggregated into top-down and pre-defined issue groups, before typically studying the relationship between the two agendas through time-series modelling. The studies are unique in that they sample the entire agenda of their selected operationalizations of the media and political agenda across a very long time-frame. Often offering generalizable results, both across issue groups and time, this approach is nevertheless hampered by its crude measure of media effects relying on covariation in agendas for quite large issue groups. These issue groups in many cases contain several social problems, which may differ radically on issue attributes relevant to the explanatory models proposed in the studies. For instance, the broad topic of 'Economic conditions' in Green-Pedersen and Stubager's study (2010a) contains

amongst others the issues of inflation, taxes, state of the economy, unemployment and unemployment benefits. These are issues that do not easily fit into the same category, for instance with respect to ownership or obtrusiveness. This limits the precision with which the causal argument is tested, and also restricts the possibility of studying causal mechanisms below the issue group level.

The present study was designed to incorporate strengths from both traditions. Media effects are therefore examined on the level of individual news stories in the two separate studies of the dissertation, at the same time making sure to sample the complete media agenda in at least one of them. The operationalization of issues as news stories draws on the definition of issues as social problems receiving media attention. However, while many agenda-setting studies often aggregate issues, my design admittedly disaggregates or deconstructs the theoretical concept of issues. Shaw distinguishes between events and issues, defining the former as 'discrete happenings that are limited by space and time' and the latter as 'involving cumulative news coverage of a series of related events that fit together in a broad category' (1977, cited in Soroka, 2002: 5-6). What I'm studying then, is in fact the components of issues (Soroka, 2002: 6). To give an example, global warming constitutes a 'proper' issue, a problem in contention among a relevant public, not limited by time or space. On the news story level, the issue of global warming consists of time and place specific events or statements – such as news on new research, suggested legislation, international agreements etc.

Although it increases data collection costs, the 'issue components approach' offers advantages. By simple logic, following a definition of issues as unlimited in time and space requires a deconstruction of issues in order to study agenda changes empirically. Some have deconstructed according to fixed time intervals, leaving the applied issue concept (be it issues or issue groups) in place: thus annual, semi-annual, monthly or weekly measurements of issues (or issue groups) are typical ways of studying how indiscrete social problems rise and fall on the political agenda. But if stories are the components of issues, they represent a less random way of deconstructing issues. It is a theoretically preferable design, because it opens up the possibility to study meaningful components of the issue concept. Components to which variables like tone or framing can be meaningfully and reliably attached, allowing for research on how combinations of news story characteristics (the state of social problems) and issue characteristics (the types of social problems) shape the agenda-setting process.

4.2 Operationalizing the attack and defend model

The 'attack and defend' model presented in the previous chapter is in this chapter operationalized in two different, but supplementary, ways in order to secure a valid investigation of its propositions. The two resulting empirical studies, from which the results are presented in Chapters 5 to 9, both have Denmark as a case (cf. Section 4.3). Both include measurements of the media agenda, the government agenda and the opposition agenda. And both use the news story approach to issues in their investigation of media's political agenda-setting influence. In the following, I introduce them more thoroughly, discussing the benefits and drawbacks of their operationalizations of the media agenda and the party agendas. Both sections finish off with a presentation of the measured dependent variables of opposition and government response. Section 4.2.3 discusses the operationalization of independent variables in both studies. Note that the descriptives of the measured independent variables are presented later. In Chapter 5, the independent variables of the large-N study are used to describe the characteristics of the news agenda. The independent variables of the medium-N study are introduced briefly prior to the empirical analyses in Chapter 8.

4.2.1 The large-N study

In the first design, referred to as the 'large-N study', the *media agenda* was measured through Danish radio news broadcasts (twice daily) from the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR), which in this period held a de-facto monopoly on national radio news. The perfect measure of media agenda would of course include different outlets, like newspapers, TV, internet as well as radio. The cost of such a data collection would render it impractical and ultimately, to the extent that the interest here lies not in comparing media outlets, inefficient. Also, studies indicate a high degree of similarity in issue content across different outlets (cf. Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2008). Admittedly, the choice of media indicator for the large-N study was made easier by the availability of previously coded material. As part of the Danish agenda-setting project (www.agendasetting.dk), DR radio news broadcasts were used to build a media database including issue content codes of radio news items. Availability aside, the underlying argument for choice of indicator is the same as that used in the agenda-setting project (Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2007). As the goal was to create a measure of the national news agenda that was valid, while still allowing me to sample all issues on the media agenda, radio news offered several advantages. Studies of the

Danish media system point to the influential role of these broadcasts in linking the agenda of morning papers and evening TV news (Lund, 2002), making them 'the best single source for measuring the agenda of the mass media in general' (Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2010a: 668). Furthermore, surveys indicate that DR's 12 o'clock news reached 1 million, out of just above 5 million, Danish citizens, making it 'an obvious choice as a media indicator' (Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2007: 3). In order to also cover stories surfacing in the afternoon, the 6.30 news were added.

Although a set of variables were available for radio news items in the existing database, several of the content variables relevant to my model were not coded in the agenda-setting project. Thus, for the nearly 4000 radio news items in the sample[8], content coding was performed on the basis of a summary of each broadcast available on text. The summaries contain a short text for each news item in the broadcast, typically 2-4 sentences in which the content of the item is introduced (each variable coded is further explained below). On the one hand, this reduces the validity of the coding of for instance news tone and blame attributions as more nuances and more statements would have been revealed had the full radio news broadcasts been used as a basis for content coding. On the other hand, the summaries capture the core of the news item, thus providing the strongest clues as to the general tone of the item and the most important statements or actions covered in it. Furthermore, this sampling of news item content, where the full details of the stories were left out, allowed me to collect a large-N material suitable for generalizable conclusions. In sum, the collected media data represents a sample of the entire radio news agenda, excluding only international news where Denmark or Danish actors were not involved, in a ten month period from 2003 to 2004, covering all 12 and 6 o'clock radio news broadcasts from the Danish Broadcasting Corporation.

The *opposition's agenda* was proxied through the institution of parliamentary questioning, used to control the government but at the same time broadcasting and building party profiles (Wiberg and Koura, 1994). Parliamentary questions are set in an institutional framing forcing the government

[8] International news concerning foreign countries where Danish actors or interests were not involved, were excluded from the sample. Note that a news item here refers to a single feature from a radio news broadcast (equivalent to for instance a single newspaper article). As discussed later, items constituted the coding unit in the data-collection process but were subsequently aggregated to news story level. A news story in the context of this dissertation thus means a collection of news items, whether from the radio news broadcasts or newspapers, that cover the same event, statement or action.

to respond, thus facilitating direct communication between opposition and government. In consequence, and because this institution is transparent and easily accessible in its content (Q&A), parliamentary questions are attractive both for the opposition and for the news media. Studies show that such non-legislative activities do in fact work as instruments of political agenda-setting for the opposition (Baumgartner, 1989; Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2010), and that issues structure the questioning behaviour of MPs (Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2011b). Furthermore, the dramatic rise in non-legislative activities across West European parliaments could be interpreted as an indication of the increased importance of party competition (Green-Pedersen, 2010), in which politicization of news plays a crucial role. Also, the fact that parliamentary questions have been used extensively, and successfully, in the agenda-setting research which I'm addressing (cf. Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2010a; Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2011a; Soroka, 2002) supports the choice of indicator. Although there are differences in other parts of the design, this shared feature strengthens the reliability of comparisons between the current study and previous research.

There is less to draw on when operationalizing the *government agenda*, as political agenda-setting has paid considerably less attention to this actor. The fear of null findings has made (substantial) government agendas a less attractive dependent variable to the study of media effects, compared to the more volatile and impressionable opposition agenda. Among those who do include government, Vliegenthart and Walgrave (2011a) use MPs from government parties to proxy a type of governmental agenda. As discussed earlier, this doesn't really capture the institution of government, which of course relies on its parliamentary base, but nevertheless should be measured outside a parliamentary setting. Another set of agenda-setting studies have applied executive speeches, delivered at the start (and the end) of a parliamentary session, as a measure of the governmental agenda (Mortensen et al., 2011; John and Jennings, 2010). While it clearly offers a good starting point for studies of long-term changes in political attention towards broader issues or policy topics, it is not suitable for studying the 'micro-foundations' of political agenda-setting and examining how government responds to individual news stories.

Some agenda-setting research has focused more on policy measures, like budgets, spending and law-making (cf. Protess et al., 1987; Cook and Skogan, 1991; Pritchard, 1993). Again, though, this is slightly off target when we are interested in political attention and party competition. This interest dictates that the measure should capture aspects of government behaviour, which is highly visible in political communication, while at the same time not

excluding government attention that does not necessarily lead to policy change. Press releases arguably fit this description but nevertheless pose other problems. In Denmark, the type of content and the regularity of press releases vary considerably across ministries. While some use them to inform about where the minister is going and which meeting the minister is attending, others more often deal with substantial policy issues. The press releases from the Prime Minister's Office, which could have been used as a proxy to avoid an 'inter-ministerial bias', are for instance not very informative of the government's issue attention. Instead, the Prime Minister's – and the government's – most important arena (at least since 2001) for communicating with the public is the weekly press meetings at his office. I have therefore used this institution to measure government attention, partly inspired by US studies on presidential agenda-setting that examine speeches or presidential press meetings (cf. Edwards and Wood, 1999).

In a Danish context, the Prime Minister's weekly press meeting was introduced by Liberal PM Anders Fogh Rasmussen when he came to power in 2001. The meetings are typically held 11.30 every Tuesday at the Prime Minister's Office, during approximately the same period as Parliament is seated (September to early June). On average, press meetings are skipped one week a month as the PM is occupied with visits or other meetings. The press meeting takes place right after the weekly ministerial conference, and starts with a 10-20 minute speech by the PM. He mainly focuses on three to four types of information in this speech. First, a selection of issues discussed at the ministerial conference is presented. Mostly, this covers policy initiatives being prepared for legislation or administrative review. Second, he spends some time communicating more freely on one or two topics of choice. In the period under study, this was typically international events (war, EU, conferences and agreements), large domestic policy initiatives or salient but comparatively smaller issues on the agenda. Third, he announces upcoming visits or appointments to high positions in the public administration. After his speech, for which he has a manuscript, 30-40 minutes remain for questions from the press.

The government agenda in this study was measured through references to the sampled news stories in the speech part of the meeting. I have not utilized the Q&A part of the meetings in my coding, because it is a part of this institution where the PM is left with practically no choice as to which issues he would like to pay attention to. The late introduction of this institution, and the fact that there are several gaps in available records, affected the choice of time period for the large-N study. Focusing on having measures of both opposition and government the potential period of study was limited to 2003-

2004 or after 2006. As the radio news database stops in 2003, the former period was chosen due to lower data collection costs.

Regarding the choice of government indicator in the large-N study, it should be noted that the press meeting in itself constitutes a media effect on politics. The wish to 'go public' (Kernell, 1997), to communicate government policies in the media, is what inspires these institutions. This does not represent a problem to the study. Rather, when the task is to examine how news affects party attention in the context of opposition and government competition for votes and power, the purpose and nature of the press meeting matches the visibility and simplicity of parliamentary questions far better than other possible measures of the government agenda. The main drawback of the measure is that it only captures what the PM says, and only what he says in one specific context. In this way, the measure is not as extensive as one could wish, neglecting those parts of the government's issue attention expressed through other ministers or even MP spokespersons on different policy topics. To a certain extent, this is alleviated by the fact that the PM represents the whole government. He divides his attention among the different ministries, as his comments to the agenda of the ministerial conference show. Therefore the measure should still qualify as a government agenda and not only a PM agenda. The lack of extensiveness primarily means that the agenda space is very limited compared to the parliamentary questions from the opposition, a challenge which is met by the second empirical study presented below (cf. Section 4.2.2).

Regarding the results of the models explaining the Prime Minister's references to news stories (cf. Chapter 7), I would therefore like to underline that they are less reliable at the extremes of the concept of party response. In other words, it is a reasonably safe indicator of government response but less accurate when used to measure 'no' response or 'high' response. This means that the empirical models in the study concentrated on explaining the presence of response (or response decision, see below), for both opposition and government. Thus, I do not have to differentiate between 'low', 'medium' and 'high' response, which would have compromised the reliability of the government results. On the other hand, it is still a problem for 'no' response conclusions. When this proxy says that the government ignored a story, another more extensive measure, based on supplementary information, could have reached another conclusion. Far from dismissing the measure, my point is

only that we should be careful with our conclusions when we interpret government strategy as one of ignoring bad news.[9]

Table 4.1. The measured agendas of the large-N study

	Agenda space	Response agendas
Whose agenda?	Total no. of units on the agenda	No. of units coded as news response
Media	2161	
Opposition	5507	230**
Government	155*	62

*In the 24 sampled press meetings, the PM addressed 155 different events, stories, policies etc.
** For these 230 stories left opposition parties tabled 796 parliamentary questions.

As mentioned, the study was designed to capture media effects on the level of individual news stories. The radio news, for which the Danish agenda-setting project provided date/time and issue content of each item,[10] therefore served as the point of departure for the data collection process. Each individual news item constituted the coding unit for which the independent variables (more on these in Section 4.2.3) were assigned values based on a summary of the item. As the subsequent unit of analysis was to be news stories, and not individual news items, the coding process also involved identifying items concerning the same news story. The main guideline in this work was to make sure that specific events, actions or statements (time and place specific), and not recurring social or political problems, determined the grouping of individual items. For instance, news items on unemployment figures are produced regularly, but even though they are thematically identical, they are separate news stories based on different events. The news items that are generated when new figures are released, debating different aspects of unemployment and containing interviews of different actors, thus belong to the same news story – from the perspective of this dissertation. If other news items at the same time deal with unemployment, for instance

[9] This is also why the large-N sample is less suited to examine government responses in the context of highly salient news. To assess the applicability of attack and defend posed by these stories, it is crucial to actually establish whether or not government responded. This question is therefore investigated using the medium-N sample of highly salient news, where the government measure is much broader (cf. Section 4.2.2).

[10] Cf. www.agendasetting.dk and Green-Pedersen and Stubager (2007). The database covers 1984-2003. Thanks to Christoffer Green-Pedersen for providing access to these and the other data from the Danish agenda-setting project. For the period from January to May 2004, I coded issue content on the basis of the same principles (www.agendasetting.dk/files/uploaded/83120071051081.pdf).

due to layoffs at a specific workplace, with no indication that the item is related to the new unemployment figures, this would be coded as a separate story. In this way, the grouping of individual news items into stories was based on a judgement whether they were triggered by the same events, actions or statements.

For each story coded in the radio news, the opposition's questions[11] and the Prime Minister's speech at the press meetings[12] were thoroughly read to check whether the story had made it to the opposition and government agenda in the following four weeks. For the whole period in question, a total of 5507 questions and 24 press meetings containing 155 Items from the Prime Minister's speeches were repeatedly checked. Three dependent variables were produced in this process. Opposition response to news stories was measured in two ways: as a response *decision* variable with one or more parliamentary questions indicating response (and no questions indicating no response); as a response *intensity* variable indicating the number of parliamentary questions tabled. Because the theoretical argument rests on the two bloc nature of Danish politics, opposition responses are limited to the left opposition (Social Democrats, Social Liberals, Red-Green Alliance and Socialist People's Party) of this period in which Denmark was ruled by a Liberal and Conservative coalition. Government response was measured as a response decision variable with one or more references to the story in the PM's speech indicating response, and no references indicating no response.

Table 4.2. Descriptives of the measured response agendas, the large-N study

Dependent variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Min-Max
Opposition response decision	.106	.308	0-1
Opposition response intensity	.368	1.793	0-30
Government response	.028	.167	0-1

Finally, it should be noted that the micro-level design of this study includes a different approach to the link between news and political agendas than the one found in many recent political agenda-setting studies. More specifically, for each sampled news story the coding process involved a judgement on the relationship between the news agenda and the political agenda: Was

[11] Data on the parliamentary questions for spring 2003 was made available through the Danish agenda-setting project. For the 2003-2004 session data from the Folketing's web archive was collected (http://webarkiv.ft.dk) to supplement the existing database.

[12] Video recordings of the press meetings were made available by Local Eyes TV and Ritzaus Bureau. Thanks to Jakob Funder at Local Eyes TV.

the story followed up by a political response from the opposition and/or the government? As the study is at news story level, a simple issue group similarity between the news story and an item on the political agenda would not do. The parliamentary question or PM's press meeting had to deal with the exact same event, action or statement defining the news story. In order to substantiate a causal relationship, the political response had to occur after the news story.[13] So instead of establishing the causal link between the media agenda and the political agenda on the basis of time-series modelling of monthly or weekly changes in attention to issue groups, the study deconstructs those issues and 'forwardtracks' each individual story on the news agenda when this link is investigated.

Admittedly, this approach is time consuming and limits the period covered in the study. As mentioned, one of the strengths of recent agenda-setting studies is that they cover agenda changes over long periods. Nevertheless, operating on the micro-level, the present study might compensate for the potentially biased representation of the state of social problems that follow when we concentrate on a relatively short period. Using employment as an example, the period under study (2003-2004) was characterized by high unemployment relative to the years before (1999-2002) and after (2005-2010), but still clearly below the level at the start of the 1990s. But focusing on each individual story allows me to capture the many 'ups and downs' that nevertheless occur within the period. The design thus produces a relevant empirical basis for exploring the propositions in the model.

4.2.2 The medium-N study

The second study, referred to as the 'medium-N study', examines opposition and government response dynamics, as played out during the course of 15 highly salient and 30 less salient news stories in five national Danish newspapers. The study was designed to supplement and improve on the features from the large-N study. Two considerations were especially prevalent: the validity of the proxy of government agendas; and the theoretical challenge posed by perspectives on heightened media attention (cf. Section 3.5). Regarding the former, the main drawback of the large-N study is its thin measure of the government agenda. When the attack and defend model was operationalized the second time around, it was important to use the opportunity to get a more extensive indicator of government issue attention. Briefly speaking, the chosen design measures the media agenda through newspa-

[13] The assumption of causality, and especially the threat of endogeneity, is discussed in depth in connection with the empirical analyses.

per stories, and the opposition and government agenda through their 'claims' (this concept is presented below) in the newspaper articles of these stories. Claims from the PM, all other ministers and MP spokespersons from governing parties are included in the government measure. In this way, the lower number of cases allows for a test of a more complete operationalization of government responses, supplementing the prime-ministerial focus in the large-N analysis and ensuring a more valid comparison of opposition and government in the dissertation.

The second consideration, inspired by the theoretical perspectives on 'issue waves', 'spikes of attention' or 'media hypes', encouraged a closer look at the most salient news stories. This provides an opportunity to evaluate how the propositions of the model could contribute to the knowledge on the peaks of attention, which occupies an important role in the literature. Furthermore, the medium-N study offers an opportunity to counter the potential objection that may be raised against the large-N study as covering too many cases in which the phenomenon under study, party responses to news, is extremely unlikely to occur. Both the highly salient and the less salient samples were consequently selected from among news stories that were considered 'political in nature' (see below), making sure that the medium-N study focused specifically on the part of the news agenda to which political responses could potentially be expected.

Returning to the details of the design, the national Danish news agenda was in this study measured through five national newspapers. The wish to investigate agenda-setting mechanisms in-depth for a handful of stories was decisive. Wanting to follow the day-to-day development of the news stories, making sure to code as many claims from opposition and government as possible, newspapers were an obvious place to look. This is the 'traditional' media outlet which holds the most agenda space, and accordingly fewer claims from the political debate are filtered out than in radio or TV news. Choosing newspapers as a media indicator thus meant that the large-N operationalization was supplemented, and that the propositions of the attack and defend model would be tested in a second relevant media outlet. The five newspapers selected secure variation in format and content (quality vs. tabloids) and political leanings. The three quality papers are *Berlingske Tidende*, *Jyllands-Posten* and *Politiken*, the two tabloids are *B.T.* and *Ekstra Bladet*. This set of newspapers has been used as a measure of the media agenda in previous studies. For instance, Wien and Elmelund-Præstekær (2009) apply the same set in their study of media hypes. Although the papers are no longer closely tied to political parties, Wien and Elmelund-Præstekær note how they have a partisan history: 'Berlingske Tidende has had a con-

nection to the Conservatives, while Politiken has had close ties to the Social Liberals and Jyllands-Posten builds on the libertarian ideology. Regarding the tabloids, B.T. is considered blue-collar workers' newspaper, while Ekstra Bladet is intended to appeal to white collar workers and tradespeople' (2009: 189-190).

As mentioned above, the medium-N study is based on two samples. The first contains 15 highly salient news stories, the second 30 less salient stories. Both samples were selected on the basis of the material collected for the large-N study. The advantage is that the large-N dataset provided a sample of the entire news agenda from a given period, and so both a random selection of representative cases combined with a theoretical selection based on saliency and tone could be applied. The latter approach was used for the 15 highly salient news stories. Of the 2161 news stories in the large-N radio news dataset, 15 stories were selected from among the 79 featuring more than 5 news items.[14] Furthermore all 15 stories were 'political in nature', that is, they in some way involved policy issues, political or administrative actors or institutions at local, regional or national level. Of the top 5 pct. stories in the large-N sample, the percentage of bad news was 65. To match this, 10 highly salient bad stories and 5 highly salient good stories were selected. Finally, the 10 bad and 5 good stories were selected to reflect the variation in saliency among the top 5 pct. of the stories on the news agenda. Thus, the sample includes highly salient stories receiving 'low', 'medium' and 'high' attention in the radio news broadcasts, with the average number of news items at 13 compared to 11 for the top 5 pct. of the radio news stories.

The second sample of 30 less salient stories, included to validate the findings from the large-N study, was also drawn among 'political' news. To ensure sufficient contrast to the first sample, the selection was furthermore restricted to stories where a maximum of two radio news items had been broadcast. The percentage of bad news for this subset of the radio news data was 60, and so a representative sample was put together containing 18 randomly selected bad stories and 12 randomly selected good stories from the large-N database.

Following the selection of stories, I developed a search profile on each story from the available information in the radio news data. The profiles were then used to retrieve newspaper articles from the 5 selected papers in the full text database Infomedia. The number of hits for each story was manageable, as the radio news both contained the start date of the story and

[14] This corresponds to the 95th percentile of the saliency variable in the large-N sample.

specific keywords that in combination were highly indicative of an article that should be in the sample. Based on the literature on media hypes (Wien and Elmelund-Præstekær, 2009: 196-197), the maximum length of coverage to be included in the data set for each story was set to three weeks. After filtering out articles that did not concentrate on the story in question, and had turned up in the results typically due to a brief mention of it, the resulting news article material counted 712 articles on the 15 highly salient stories and 89 articles on the 30 less salient stories.

The next step in the collection was to code the independent variables and dependent variables in the model based on the number and content of the collected articles. The former is further explained in a section below, while the latter, that is the measurement of the opposition and government agenda, is detailed here. Party responses to news are in this study proxied through opposition and government 'claims' in the media. The approach is inspired by political claims analysis (PCA, cf. Koopmans, 2002), where claims are seen as 'units of strategic action in the public sphere' that 'consists of the expression of a political opinion by some form of physical or verbal action, regardless of the form this expression takes (statement, violence, repression, decision, demonstration, court ruling etc)' (ibid.: 2). A slightly more accessible definition points to three main types of opposition or government references that indicate the existence of a claim in a newspaper story. The first, and most easily detected, are direct quotes from the opposition or the government. Second, references to something a political actor has said, suggested, criticized, supported, defended, voted for or against etc. In other words, the presence of verbs indicating purposive strategic action on behalf of opposition or government. And third, references to such action through the use of substantives describing the format of a claim, such as 'statement', 'decision', 'suggestion', 'report', 'speech', 'letter' etc. Speculations regarding what a political actor might do, as well as attributions of motives, attitudes or opinions of a political actor that are not accompanied by a reference to an actual statement/action from the actor itself, do not count as instances of claim-making.

Several clarifications are in order if the rather abstract concept and coding of claim-making is to be successfully communicated. First, it is worth underlining that it is, of course, only a proxy of party response. This means for instance that the coding does not involve an attempt to reconstruct the 'true' public debate, or identify each underlying unique and original statement or action that generated one or more newspaper mediations of the claim. That is, all claims identified in a newspaper article are coded as one unit even though different claims present in different news articles or newspapers on

the same day might have their origin in the same unique statement or action. Furthermore, claims are not the same as individual statements. An actor might put forward several statements in a speech, but they are counted as one claim as long as they are made in the context of one strategic action in the public sphere. To accommodate the party focus of the model, claims have been coded on party level. In practice, this has involved the registration of what is originally in PCA-terms one claim shared by two or more parties ('Party A and B voted against …') as equal to the number of parties sharing the claim. Otherwise, the indicator's representation of opposition (or government) response intensity would be compromised.

In combination, this adds up to a limit of one potential claim per opposition party for every article on a news story. Addressing the competition between government and the *left* opposition, as in the large-N study, the opposition's agenda is thus measured as the total number of claims from Social Democrats, Social Liberals, Red-Green Alliance and Socialist People's Party in the newspaper articles covering the story. To qualify as a claim, it must originate with an MP, the central party organization, the parliamentary party group or the party leader. Claims from local or regional politicians are not coded. For the government, exceptions from the 'one claim per party rule' have been tolerated in order to capture the diversity of government actors. Claims from the PM, all ministers, party leaders or MP spokespersons from the two parties in government (Liberals and Conservatives) have been registered as unique units in the dataset. The measure of government response could therefore reach a total of 5 possible claims (2 parties x 2 positions (MP or minister) + 1 PM) for each article on each story.

Table 4.3. The measured agendas of the medium-N study

Sample	Whose agenda?	Agenda space (for the selected stories)*	Response agenda (total no. of actual claims):
Less salient stories (N=30)	Media	89	-
	Opposition	356	35
	Government	445	44
Highly salient stories (N=15)	Media	712	-
	Opposition	2848	414
	Government	3560	467

*For the media: no. of articles covering the story. For the government: the maximum theoretically possible no. of claims for a story, which is 5 (2x2+1), multiplied with the no. of articles. For the opposition: the maximum theoretically possible no. of claims for a story, which is 4 (4x1), multiplied with the no. of articles.

The measured agendas of the two medium-N samples are presented in Table 4.3. For the altogether 45 stories, 801 newspaper articles have been coded, in which 960 opposition and government claims (from the 4 left opposition parties and the 2 government parties including their ministers) were registered.

The most challenging aspect of the medium-N data collection is that party responses to news are measured *in* the news. As a result, independent variables are potentially contaminated by the dependent variable. It was therefore important to code news tone without taking into account potential government or opposition claims in the article. Another potential source of bias in the medium-N approach is that news selection criteria (cf. Cook, 2005) come to influence which claims from which parties receive newspaper coverage. The most influential actors in policy-making get more news attention (cf. Danielian and Page, 1994), and thus ministers will be considered more newsworthy than opposition MPs.

I will therefore be careful when comparing the levels of opposition and government response. However, their respective response patterns under changing news contexts could still be compared. And more generally, the government-biased response measures of the medium-N study could serve as a useful contrast to the opposition bias of the response measures in the large-N study. Finally, political actors are 'chased' by a response-hungry media and this undoubtedly affects their attention and the choice of stories they respond to. Nevertheless, each actor is in a position to refuse to comment on a news story. This, together with the fact that many party claims in the media are initiated by proactive party behaviour, supports the assumption that parties are sufficiently free to choose which claims to make – thus making it a plausible measure of a party's issue attention in the public debate.[15]

Table 4.4. Descriptives of the measured response agendas, medium-N study

Sample	Whose agenda?	Mean	Standard deviation	Min-Max
Less salient stories (N=30)	Opposition	1.17	1.66	0-6
	Government	1.47	1.65	0-8
Highly salient stories (N=15)	Opposition	27.6	28.2	0-103
	Government	31.1	33.9	1-128

[15] A correlation of .740, significant at the 1 pct. level, between opposition claims and opposition response through parliamentary questions is indicative of a valid measurement in both studies.

Descriptives of the two resulting measurements of the dependent variables in the medium-N study are summarized in Table 4.4.

Finally, a comment that concerns both the large-N and the medium-N study. In Walgrave and Van Aelst's review (2006), a distinction between symbolical and substantial political agendas is drawn, depicting media effects on the former as 'trivial and irrelevant since they are void of any political consequences' (ibid.: 95). Parliamentary questions, speeches at press meetings and also a large share of claims in the public sphere would belong more to the symbolical side of this continuum, reflecting the dissertation's focus on political attention. However, I would like to add that it is a curious contention, especially in studies of political communication, that 'symbolical' agendas have little political consequence. First, they represent measures of political attention. And although attention does not constitute a sufficient condition of policy change, the agenda-setting literature points to attention as a more or less necessary condition of policy change: 'To be clear, not all problems that get attention in the political system are solved, but we know one thing for sure: The only problems that do get solved are the ones that get attention' (Boydstun, 2008: 2).

Second, and even more important, the point of departure in this study is an interest in agenda-setting and party competition, rather than in public policies.[16] In this respect, media effects on party attention might have important electoral consequences, shifting support to and from parties, while at the same time producing no policy change at all – neither immediately, nor necessarily after a new legislature or a new government is in place. Such shifts still belong clearly to the notion of 'political consequences', especially from the perspective of party competition. In other words, all party responses to news are in this study of equal importance regardless of their potential to change policies. It might not even concern policy-making as such, as illustrated by the propositions on so-called non-policy blame. Summing up, I'm interested in responsive party behaviour belonging to the political agenda in which party competition takes place: the broader political agenda in society, stretching over both political institutions and the media. This is the agenda over which party competition is fought, and in which electoral strategies should be reflected if parties are to win support.

[16] This is also the case for Green-Pedersen and Stubager (2010a) and Vliegenthart and Walgrave (2011a).

4.3.3 Independent variables

In this section, the operationalizations of the independent variables in both the large-N and the medium-N study are discussed. Differences between the coding for radio (large-N) and newspaper news (medium-N) are only commented to the extent that they are of substantial interest. The variable operationalizations presented here are those developed for and utilized in the coding process. The variables applied in subsequent empirical chapters might differ due to recodes etc. Prior to the presentation of empirical results in Chapter 5, 6 and 7, applied variables are therefore briefly explained.

The key independent variable in the attack and defend model, news mediation of negative and positive developments in social problems, is measured through the *news tone* (*good, bad and neutral)* of the radio news items and newspaper articles.[17] The different behavioural implications of news for government and opposition proposed in the model stem from the assumption that government is linked, through its policy responsibility, to the negative and positive developments portrayed in news content. The coding of news tone is therefore done from the point of view of government, directly addressing the role of policy responsibility and the competition between opposition and government as theorized in the argument. The operationalization draws on Baumgartner and Jones' (1993: 51) coding of news content: 'if you were an industry leader [minister], would you be pleased or unhappy to see such a title?' Obvious examples of 'unhappy' ministers would be in situations with news about increasing inflation, industry closures, crime, accidents, spread of new diseases and so on. However, also stories featuring issue developments that aren't unanimously accepted as negative might qualify as bad news. For instance, if the story features a negative perspective on something with which the government might be content, and this perspective is not contradicted with arguments voiced by actors external to the government, then it is categorized as bad news. The assumption is that the minister in charge would have preferred different news content or no story at all.

Moving on to what constitutes good news, a minister receiving news on rising employment, economic growth, reduced hospital queues etc. would no doubt be 'pleased'. Two additional types of news content have consistently been coded as good news. First, items which report government action in response to a policy problem are thought to portray a responsive and able government. There could often be opposition critique that the government's policy measure is 'not enough' or 'too late'. But as long as this is not backed

[17] Cf. Table A.1.1 of the Appendix for more examples of good, bad and neutral stories.

by voices external to the opposition (i.e. experts or interest groups), and the positive elements are given more attention in the news item, the items are still categorized as good. Second, news on broad agreement about, support for, or settlements on, government policies has also been registered as positive.

Neutral news is typically indicated by one of two situations. First, the article or radio news item contains both good and bad information and could not be said to be unambiguously biased in either direction. Second, the article or radio news item would most likely not bring about a clear sensation with the receiving minister, for instance due to the story's limited influence on Danish interests or citizens, or because the impact of the event or statement that the story communicates is still inconclusive. Summing up, the news tone variable applied in the subsequent empirical chapters measures news negativity as the percentage of bad news items (radio news items or newspaper articles) for a particular story.

The attack and defend model developed propositions regarding two specific contexts in which government is forced to leave its preferred strategy of responding to good news, and the opposition's inclination to politicize bad news is reinforced. The first concerns *substance blame attributions.* Both studies measure this concept through the presence of government criticism in news items. The word 'criticize', or its synonyms, need not be used in the text, but it should contain references that point to conditions, actions or intentions which the sender/addresser clearly sees as censurable and for which government is blamed. The variable thus covers attribution of responsibility for something the government shouldn't have done, something it should have done or something it is going to do but should refrain from doing. The coding distinguishes between responsibility attributions exogenous and endogenous to the party competition, meaning that it is registered whether the criticism is voiced by the opposition or critical actors outside the opposition-government game. Conclusively, the substance blame variable applied in the empirical analyses is a dummy variable indicating the presence of explicit government criticism in radio news or newspaper stories.[18]

The second context in which government is forced to respond to, instead of ignore, bad news relates to what was labelled *non-policy (valence) blame*. The measurement is based on Clark (2008) and is meant to capture news that questions the policy-neutral values that politicians want to be identified with and are expected to live up to. Two values are in focus here:

[18] The application of this variable varies somewhat in Chapter 6, 7 and 8. This will be explained in the relevant chapters.

competence and integrity. The former typically relates to failures or deficiencies in the making or implementation of policies, failures that transcend party differences on policy substance or policy positions. One example is the so-called 'TDC case', named after the telecommunication company involved, where a tax-hole which the previous government had proposed to close was ignored by the ministry and ended up costing the state a total of 973 million DKR. Other indicators of incompetence is when the government is criticized by recognized and credible actors like the European Human Rights Court, or when proposals or statements are withdrawn shortly after they were issued, reflecting poor judgement or a lack of strategic foresight. The latter value, integrity or honesty, most often concerns stories with an element of scandal or breach of promises. Examples cover economic infidelity, tax-fraud, professional misconduct and preferential treatment. The distinction between stories featuring just 'standard' bad or negative attention and stories challenging government competence or integrity is admittedly blurry. However the coding process passed tests of inter-coder reliability, and the analyses should therefore be able to inform us about the impact of these two very different, but related, types of negative news attention. Concluding, the non-policy blame variable applied in the empirical analyses is a dummy variable indicating the presence of challenges to government competence or integrity in radio news or newspaper stories.

Issue ownership is central to the propositions of the attack and defend model. As discussed in Chapter 2, agenda-setting studies have used different indicators of ownership with some stressing the electorates perspective and the vote-seeking aspect of the theory (Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2010a) and others focusing on the policy-seeking root of ownership (Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2011a). In accordance with the former study, I have chosen to measure ownership through the competence images of parties in the electorate. Among the advantages of this approach is the fact that it centres on the crucial role of public opinion in the ownership concept, yet still allowing interpretations that see party prioritization of owned issues as the outcome of *both* vote- and policy-seeking aspirations. The alternative, measuring ownership with manifesto data, is weak on the former. As an example, it is compromised by the tendencies for parties to increase attention to issues that are rising on the public agenda or their competitors' agenda (cf. Green-Pedersen, 2007). For instance, increased focus on immigration in Social Democratic manifestos following the right-wing's success in politicizing this issue does not equal issue ownership.

The coding of ownership is based on results from the Danish election surveys (1998, 2001 and 2005[19]) measuring the issue competence images of the two blocs through several elections (Goul Andersen, 2003). As these survey questions tap voters' images of the two blocs (Social Democratic or bourgeois led coalition) for issue groups or areas, ownership is coded on issue group level using the existing issue content coding of the radio news database.[20] The resulting ownership variable thus indicates whether a Social Democratic or bourgeois led coalition holds ownership of the issue group to which the news story belongs. Issue groups without documentation of ownership or a clear advantage to either bloc have been coded as unknown/balanced. The course features of this pattern show Social Democratic ownership of unemployment, environment, social welfare, health and housing.[21] The Liberal and Conservative government of the period owned economy, trade and industry, crime, justice and immigration. Summing up, the ownership variables to be applied in the empirical analyses are dummies (one for opposition, and one for government) indicating whether the radio news or newspaper story in question belonged to an owned or an unowned issue.

The political contingencies perspective underlying the attack and defend model is developed partly in opposition to the *public issue attribute* perspective discussed in Chapter 2. The dismissal of the latter is largely based on a theoretical objection, arguing that such a perspective ignores the strategies and motivations of the political actors at the heart of the agenda-setting process. Nevertheless, it has proven empirically valid and will be included in some of the following analyses as a partly competing and partly supplementary explanation of political agenda-setting (cf. Chapter 9). Following the most common application of public issue attributes in the field, I use Soroka's typology of governmental, prominent and sensational issues. Prominent issues are concrete and affect a significant number of people directly, like health care, unemployment and education. Sensational issues are also concrete, but have little observable impact on most people, as for instance in the case of crime, environment and immigration. The governmental type covers unobtrusive issues with little drama and no directly observable consequences for the majority of the public, exemplified by issues re-

[19] Made available from www.surveybanken.aau.dk by The Danish Election Project.

[20] The issue groups in the dataset are the ones applied in the Danish agenda-setting project. It is a modified version of the coding system of the American policy agendas project (www.policyagendas.org), and is made up of 26 main categories and 60 subcategories.

[21] Cf. Table A.2.1 of the Appendix for details on the ownership coding.

lated to political system, government administration, public finances, and (in a Danish context) defence and foreign policy. These issue types have been assigned on issue group level (cf. Soroka, 2002; Walgrave et al. 2008; Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2010a), and will be applied in Chapter 5.

Besides the main explanatory variables presented above, the empirical models include *news saliency*, which is measured as the number of radio news items or newspaper articles for a story. This is of course an important control variable as the relationship between news saliency and political agendas is well established in the agenda-setting literature. It captures the original core agenda-setting idea, which subsequent research has tried to explore further through for instance different issue attribute perspectives (cf. Chapter 2). Furthermore, the intensity of news attention could easily be linked to one or several of the independent variables of interest. Previous studies have shown a tendency for news negativity to increase as attention rises, and the material collected here also shows a positive correlation between number of items broadcast and the presence of blame attributions (cf. Chapter 5). Excluding news saliency could therefore potentially bias the conclusions of the attack and defend model.

Finally, the operationalization of the attack and defend model should acknowledge the reciprocal nature of the media–politics relationship.[22] Taking this challenge seriously, the data collection included two variables that could tap the politics to news relationship by measuring political involvement and initiation of news stories by opposition and government. The first, respectively labelled *Opposition involvement* and *Government involvement*, simply indicate the presence of, or reference to, opposition or government statement or actions in a news story. The second, *Opposition initiation* and *Government initiation*, produce a more narrow measure based on an assessment of whether the involvement coded in the above variable was a decisive trigger of the news story in question. For instance, when the government presented a new action plan to fight obesity or when a new book by the PM (re)introduced the idea of an increased retirement age. Thus, the code indicating government (or opposition) initiation reflects the judgement that the story in question would not have entered the news agenda (at that specific time) had it not been for the involvement of the government (or the opposition). Chapter 6 and 7 only apply the latter variable, proxying political initiation of news, as the first (*Government/Opposition involvement*) is too broad and arguably fits better as a measure of party response than it captures the

[22] The specific challenges this brings in terms of the endogenous influence of politics on news are further discussed in each of the empirical chapters.

politics to news relationship. Nevertheless, the substantial results of the chapter are fully reproducible when we apply the more general measure of opposition and government news involvement as a control variable.

Finally, the quality of data collection was checked through an inter-coder reliability test for both the large-N and the medium-N study. The process started with an initial training session where I gave the student coder instructions on the codebook, illustrating with examples. Then we continued by separately coding 3 smaller test samples. After each sample had been coded, a new training session took place to compare results and discuss differences. The formal test was then conducted on random samples containing 313 radio news items for the large-N study and 46 newspaper articles for the medium-N study. Results were satisfactory, showing a sufficient similarity in coding as indicated by Krippendorff alphas ranging between 0.79 and 0.91 for the content variables.[23]

4.3 Denmark as a case?

Chapter 3 briefly mentioned how the attack and defend model was developed with a broad population in mind. Its linking of policy responsibility, party competition and political agenda-setting is thus meant to apply in representative democracies with two or more parties competing for votes, one or several of which are in office and one or several of which are in opposition. Of course, the mechanisms investigated are not equally protrusive in every political system (and for every political party). I will address this partly via a couple of supplementary empirical analyses in Chapter 9 and in a discussion of the likely consequences when exporting the model in Chapter 10. For now, I focus on the choice of Denmark as a case and to what extent it could be said to satisfy the assumptions underlying the model.

To start with, I would like to stress that an important objective of this dissertation is to examine political agenda-setting from a 'micro-level' perspective. Arguably, as discussed in Section 4.1, I test the causal mechanisms on the level where they are played out, so to speak: in the media's attention to news stories and the political parties' reactions to them. Furthermore, the model emphasizes a 'contextualized' agenda-setting process where dynamic issue information is taken into account: news stories are examined according to how they reflect the state of social problems, and not only on the basis of which issue category they belong to. This constitutes part of the

[23] Results for each variable are presented in Table A.3.1 and Table A.3.2 of the Appendix. Thanks to student coder Søren Thaysen Andersen.

study's strength, giving new (and systematic) knowledge on the micro-foundations of political agenda-setting. The downside of the chosen micro-level design, that cross-country comparisons were too costly and out of reach, is therefore bearable.

The dissertation thus restricts its empirical investigation to Denmark. Apart from good data availability, the fact that Denmark (and other small, parliamentary democracies) has acted as empirical basis of some of the arguments I discuss, suggested that it was a preferable case to examine. However, the quality of Denmark as a case depends on whether characteristics of the political system and the media system match those that define the target population of the attack and defend model. As mentioned, this population is wide, and Denmark is no doubt part of it. Nevertheless, it is important to evaluate how well the model assumptions and perspectives fit the case in order to perspectivize the conclusions of the empirical analyses. In this respect, three related discussions seem relevant.

First, the preferred reference when drawing the link between media agendas and political agendas is the 'mediatization of politics' thesis based on theories and empirical findings from both political science and communication studies (cf. Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999; Strömbäck, 2008). In Chapter 10, I discuss how different aspects of the findings in the Danish case could be expected to change across media systems (cf. Hallin and Mancini, 2004). For now, I only point to the fact that the media-politics relationship in Denmark conforms (at a minimum) to the first phase of mediatisation (Strömbäck, 2008). In other words, politics takes place and is communicated in the media. In light of the present study, it is especially the combination of the media's role as agenda-setters vis-à-vis public opinion and their role in communication between parties and voters that explain why parties pay attention to the media agenda. And so it is, above all else, the role of the public – 'without which the very concept of political communication in representative democracies is unconceivable' (Helms, 2008: 30) – that makes the media able to influence political agendas, and vice versa. Through their dual role as news consumers and voters, they tie together the media agenda and the political agenda; constantly consuming news, reinforcing or re-evaluating their opinions on parties and, consequently, their voting decisions. High newspaper circulation and a high political participation suggest that these roles are, if anything, more protrusive and integrated in Denmark than in countries where circulation and participation are lower. Thus, if parties want to compete for votes on different issues, it is of vital importance that a manifestation of their issue strategy is visible in their relation to the media.

Second, when arguing that policy responsibility is at the heart of these strategies, the extent to which media are able to communicate – and the public is able to understand – the distribution of policy-making powers becomes crucial. If voters are uncertain of who's to blame, they are less susceptible to the strategies of attack and defend which therefore will lose some of their value. Consequently, shared or diffused policy responsibility through for instance consensual (minority government) politics thus limits the applicability of the model. Not only indirectly, by obscuring public comprehension of where 'the buck stops'. But also, and even more important, directly, by including opposition parties in policy-making effectively barring them from criticizing government on (at least) the agreed upon policies.

Third, if elections are less competitive and the public's role as voters less important, the incentives for vote-seeking party strategies towards the media should decrease. Although acknowledging parties as policy-seekers, the model admittedly emphasizes votes and office as dominant party goals. The depicted process of agenda-setting is one where parties are opportunistic actors, strongly inclined to use media attention to claim credit or discredit their opponent. However, through their respective strategies opposition and government still serve to pursue and debate social problems that rise on the media agenda. Nevertheless, due to the focus on party competition and vote-seeking opportunism, it should be expected that the intensity with which parties attack and defend proactively varies in accordance with the level of electoral competition between parties.

Despite a multi-party system with clear consensual features, Danish party competition has nevertheless been characterized by two blocs of parties providing clear government alternatives (Green-Pedersen and Thomsen, 2005) and a convergence of office- and vote-seeking strategies (Green-Pedersen, 2002: 37). Moreover, in the period under study, government power had just shifted from a social democratic led coalition (Social Democrats and Social Liberals) to a bourgeois coalition (Liberals and Conservatives) reflecting truly competitive elections. The assumptions regarding both vote-seeking party strategies and a clear and transparent allocation of policy responsibility should therefore be sufficiently satisfied. Arguably, Denmark in fact constitutes a conservative test of the model. Scandinavian opposition parties have been relatively influential (Gallagher et al., 2006: 390), which together with strong consensual and corporatist traditions (cf. Lijphart and Crepaz, 1991; Lijphart, 1999; Siaroff, 1999; Armingeon, 2002) potentially decreases both the dominance of vote-seeking and the visibility of policy responsibility compared to for instance the Westminster system. If the model works in the Danish setting, it should in theory be likely to apply even better in a pluralist

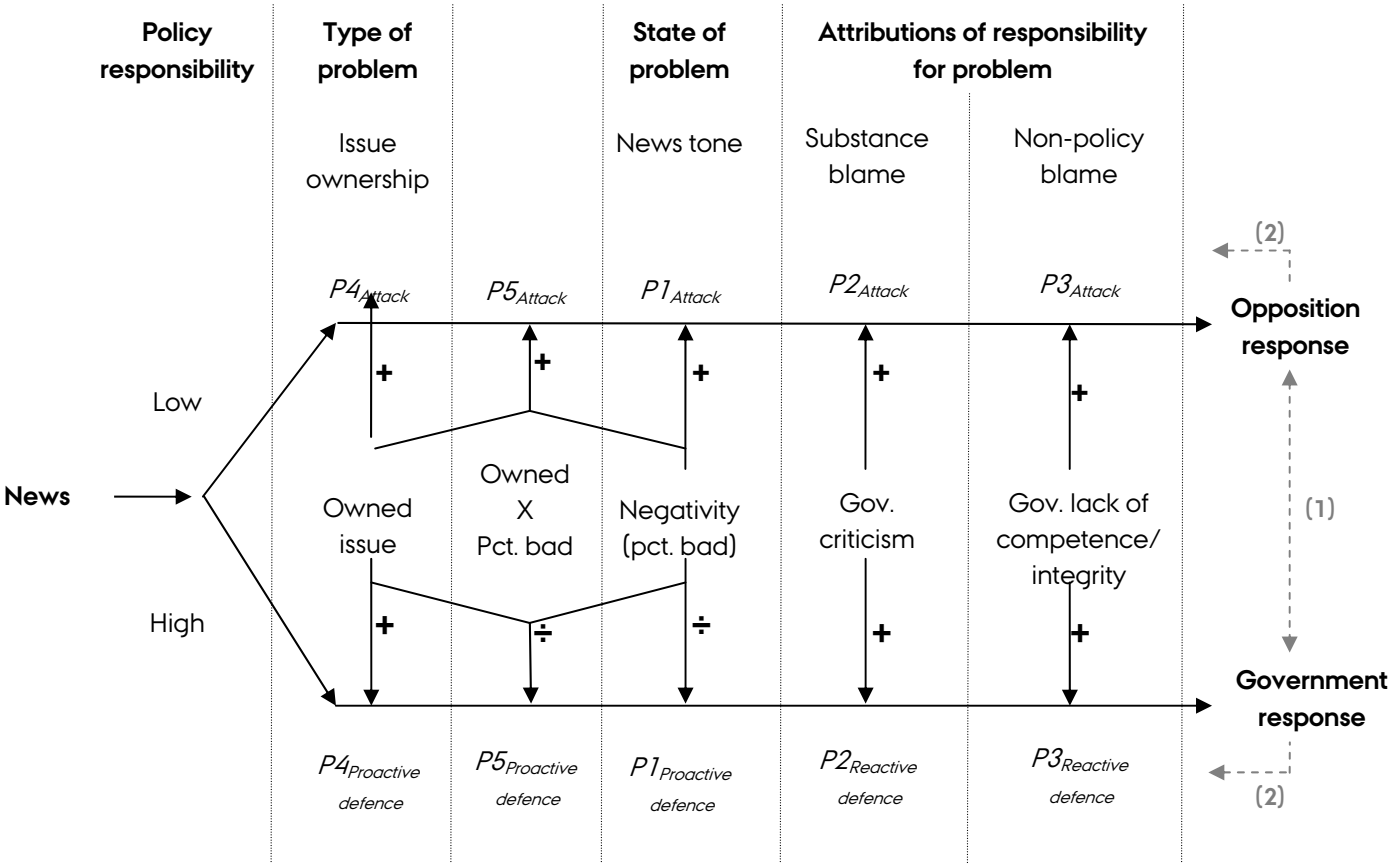
and majoritarian system. Note, however, that the period under study deviates from previous years in Danish politics. The bourgeois coalition government had, with the Danish People's Party as a right-wing support party, the potential to negotiate majority solutions without including the left-opposition parties. The question whether this type of opposition influence, taking part in a larger share of policy-making, yields changes in the observed attack behaviour will be addressed through supplementary analyses in Chapter 9.

4.4 Summary

Figure 4.1 illustrates the attack and defend model, and summarizes its theoretical perspectives, propositions and corresponding operationalizations. Note that the figure, in line with the argument of the dissertation, concentrates on the hypothesized causal effect of the type of social problems (issue ownership), the mediated state of social problems (news tone) and the attributions of responsibility for social problems (substance blame and non-policy blame), on opposition and government response to news. Bearing in mind the discussion and operationalization of party initiation of news, the empirical analyses will also address how the endogenous politics to news relationships (the arrows marked (2)) affect the depicted news to politics relationships. Furthermore, it is assumed (although not explicitly proposed) that each actor is influenced by its opponent. This opposition-government dynamics of the political agenda-setting process (see arrow marked (1)) will also be examined empirically.

The following chapters present and analyse the collected data-sets of the large-N and medium-N studies. In Chapter 5, the characteristics of news and politicized news are briefly described on the basis of the large-N radio news sample, before the sample is applied to investigate all propositions for opposition and government respectively in Chapter 6 and 7. Next, the medium-N sample is presented and analysed in Chapter 8, with focus on validating the conclusions on news tone [P1] and blame attributions [P2/3] while at the same time exploring how heightened media attention affects party strategies towards the news agenda.

Figure 4.1 Theoretical perspectives, operationalizations and propositions of the attack and defend model



Chapter 5
Characteristics of news and politicized news

This chapter begins the presentation of the collected empirical material. The purpose is first of all to describe what news looks like in terms of the independent variables of interest in the dissertation. For instance, what tone characterizes the media agenda and how often does it feature different types of blame attributions? Second, as a small step towards the causal analyses in the subsequent chapters, I look at how politicized news distinguishes itself from news which political actors do not respond to. The large-N study provides the most representative sample of the dissertation, and I will therefore concentrate on the descriptives of the variables in this study. The characteristics of the medium-N samples will be presented later, prior to the analyses and discussion of this study in Chapter 8.

5.1 Tone, blame and issue ownership in news

Table 5.1 presents descriptive statistics for each variable in the large-N sample. Putting the focus on tone, ownership and blame attributions on hold for a second, I start with the variables measuring the role of parties as initiators of news stories. As can be observed in the first two rows of the table, there is a substantial difference between opposition and government. While the stories in the radio news sample relatively often refer to opposition directly or indirectly (in 15 pct. of the cases[24]), they are only triggered by opposition statements or actions in 5 pct. of the cases. Government figures ever more prominently on the news agenda. 28 pct. of the sampled stories mention some government action or statement, in the broadest sense. Although this is only crucial to the initiation of stories in 13 pct. of cases, it still constitutes a very visible and influential role for government in the making of news. The difference between the two actors makes sense, both from the perspective of parties and the media. Using their position in office to present and implement new policies, parties in government most often score higher than the opposi-

[24] When measured by the Government/Opposition involvement variables (cf. Section 4.3.3 for details). The descriptives of these two variables, which indicate any sort of opposition and government involvement in news stories, are not reported here.

tion in terms of news value (cf. Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Price and Tewksbury, 1997).

On average, the typical radio news story features 1.78 broadcast news items. There is however a great range in news attention, with the most salient story being covered in 50 broadcast items. Most stories are nevertheless relatively short-lived, and 69 pct. and 17 pct. stop at 1 and 2 items respectively. This tells the story of a broad news agenda, spreading its attention to a large number of news stories which do not necessarily hold the potential to stay there for long. Arguably, this is also an indication that the selection of stories is less marked by the competitive markets of newspapers and TV-channels, which further underlines the applicability of *Radioavisen* as a representative measure of the entire national media agenda. Of course, there is also considerable variation and concentration of attention, illustrated by the 5 pct. receiving 5 to 50 items of attention.

Table 5.1. Descriptives of variables applied in the analyses of the large-N sample (N=2161)

Variable name	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Opposition initiation	0.05	0.21	0	1
Government initiation	0.13	0.33	0	1
Saliency	1.78	2.38	1	50
Issue ownership: opposition	0.30	0.46	0	1
Issue ownership: government	0.31	0.46	0	1
News tone	63.02	38.56	0	100
Blame attributions: substance*	0.12	0.33	0	1
Blame attributions: substance (non-opposition)**	0.07	0.26	0	1
Blame attributions: substance (opposition)***	0.04	0.21	0	1
Blame attributions: non-policy valence	0.02	0.14	0	1
Opposition response	0.11	0.31	0	1
Government response	0.03	0.17	0	1

* This blame variable, including opposition generated blame, is applied in the government models.
** This blame variable, excluding opposition generated blame, is applied in the opposition models.
*** This blame variable, with only opposition generated blame, is applied as a control in the opposition models.

Moving on to the core independent variables in the attack and defend model, the sample shows an even mix of government and opposition owned issues on the radio news agenda. 31 pct. of the stories belong to issues on which government is rated more competent than opposition, while the opposite holds true in 30 pct. of the cases. Consequently, the overall news agenda does not come with a built-in electoral advantage for either actor in

the period under study. And in fact, for 39 pct. of the stories, there is no head-start for either of them, as this is the share of the agenda for which competence images are more balanced or uncertain/unknown. Admittedly, this reflects the many blind spots in our knowledge on how the electorate rates the two opposing blocs. Future research on public opinion may reveal left- or right-wing ownerships for issue groups which were either found, or assumed, to be balanced. But for now, the 'unknown' category contains a mix of issues, such as energy, transportation, research, civil rights, culture and sports, for which at least in the Danish case there is no intuitive reason to expect that ownership plays a large role. Hence, from the outset, the issue composition of the news agenda might limit the scope of issue ownership as a moderator of media influence on party agendas. Not of course if news stories from the unowned issues mentioned above consistently are less likely to be politicized. But *when* unowned stories attract opposition or government attention, the ownership perspective (at least in its present application) has little to offer.

The average share of negativity in the sampled radio news agenda is 63 pct. Measured alternatively, nearly 48 pct. of the stories are more bad than good, with 31 pct. neutral (50 pct. bad) and only 21 pct. more good than bad. With the reservation that the present study approaches news negativity from the perspective of government, the collected radio news data nevertheless confirms the 'common' knowledge holding that media tend to concentrate on negative issue developments. Moreover, negativity increases as stories attract more attention. For the most salient 5 pct., the average tone is 65 pct. bad. Note, however, that the increase is not very pronounced, and in fact the positive correlation between news tone and news saliency is weak and insignificant (see Table 5.2 below). There are several reasons why this is to be expected. First, the short-lived bad stories (typically with 1-2 radio news items) often close off at 100 pct. negative attention because the coverage is too limited to allow for more nuances. Fewer sources are used and fewer actors are interviewed. The stories that keep getting attention often expand in terms of sources used and actors involved, naturally creating a more diverse picture – even when the overall tone might clearly be bad from the point of view of government. From the perspective of news desks, bad issues on which no one disagrees lack a fundamental characteristic that sustain media interest. In other words, conflict is one of the central drivers of news attention (cf. Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Hernes, 1978), and this naturally means that the most salient bad news seldom reaches a share of 100 pct. negative coverage. Anyway, it is important to remember that the distinction between level of attention (saliency) and tone of attention is made for ana-

lytical purposes, and that there should be little doubt that negativity is considerably higher for the stories at the top of the news agenda. Think only of what government would like to see; a 100 pct. bad story that only features 1 radio news item, or a 75 pct. bad story consisting of 12 radio news items? This point aside, according to the attack and defend perspective, the overall outlook of the media agenda is better suited for opposition attacks than for the government strategy of proactive defence.

Table 5.1 shows descriptives for four blame attribution variables, as the opposition and government models presented in the next two chapters differ slightly in the way substance blame is included. However, I will only comment on two of them here. First, we see that the average share of news stories that contain blame attributions (from either the opposition or other actors) is 12 pct. Politics and, more precisely, explicit government criticism is thus an integral part of news attention, a characteristic which again speaks to the many potential agenda-setting advantages that opposition parties might activate with their responses. Similarly, although to a clearly lesser extent, the media agenda also contains a noticeable proportion of stories that bring blame for non-policy valence events into play. Hence, 2 pct. of the stories challenge government competence or integrity explicitly, presenting opportunities for those who argue that parties and ministers in office are unfit and unable to handle their responsibilities.

At the bottom of Table 5.1, descriptives of the two dependent variables were also included. The opposition tables parliamentary questions to 11 pct. of the stories, while the Prime Minister uses his weekly press meetings to comment on 2 pct. The considerable variation is, as discussed in the previous chapter, a result of the differences in agenda capacity of the two institutions used to measure opposition and government response.

Finally, I look briefly at how the news agenda is characterized by combinations of the independent variables from the attack and defend model. Table 5.2 shows pair-wise correlations for most of the variables applied in the large-N analyses of the subsequent chapters.[25] The relationship between tone and saliency was already discussed above, so I will only briefly comment on the rest of the associations in the table. The first thing to notice is the consistency with which blame attributions in news stories associate with the rest of the independent variables. There are in fact positive and strongly sig-

[25] For simplicity, the two core blame attribution variables indicating substance and non-policy blame were combined. Also, the dependent variables of opposition and party responses were not included, even though they are used as independent variables to estimate opponent influence on government and opposition response respectively. Full correlation matrices are included in the appendix.

nificant relationships between blame on the one hand, and saliency (.243), opposition (.159) and government initiation (.275) and news tone (.248) on the other. Substantially then, government criticism is a characteristic of news that co-occurs with negative and salient stories initiated by political actors. In terms of issue ownership, however, there is no such association.

Table 5.2. Correlations of independent variables in the large-N sample (N=2161)

	Saliency	Opposition initiation	Government initiation	News tone	Blame attributions	Ownership: opposition
Opposition initiation	.060***					
Government initiation	.154***	.263***				
News tone (pct bad)	.022	-.034	-.117***			
Blame attributions*	.243***	.159***	.275***	.248***		
Ownership: opposition	-.046**	-.011	-.035	.062***	-.015	
Ownership: government	-.002	-.009	-.013	-.006	.019	-.436***

Significant at *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10.

Next, also variations in saliency appear closely linked to several other news characteristics. Stories receiving a lot of news attention are more likely to be opposition and, especially, government triggered. The same is true for blame attributions, as already mentioned. Perhaps more surprising is the observed negative and significant association between opposition ownership and news saliency. The correlation is not strong (-.046), however, and, as indicated by the insignificant and even weaker correlation of saliency and government ownership, it is part of a pattern where issues that are not owned by any of the blocs tend to get slightly more coverage when saliency increases. Only one more ownership correlation, linking changes in news tone to opposition ownership, is found to be significant. Interestingly, the chances that news stories belong to opposition owned issues increase as news become more negative. Still, the correlation is again weak (.062) and does not change the overall conclusion that ownership profiles are more or less independent of other characteristics of news.

Having covered most combinations of the independent variables in the sample, one final point should be noted. News tone, which first of all is significantly linked to blame attributions in the present sample, is also negatively associated with government initiation of stories. Put differently, news initiated by government is more often positive, or less negative. On the one hand, this suggests strength through government influence in the early stages of agenda-setting processes. On the other, we have also seen that the same set of government initiated stories more often contain blame attri-

butions. In other words, and summing up, there are several interesting and potentially influential relationships of news characteristics that should be taken into account when we model and interpret why parties respond to news stories.

5.2 Tone, blame and issue ownership in politicized news

This section compares stories to which the parties respond with the rest of the news agenda, serving as a descriptive introduction to the causal analyses to come. That is, before zooming in on the hypothesized relationships between independent and dependent variables, I simply provide an overview of what characterizes news that captures political attention in contrast to news that does not. Starting with news tone this time, Table 5.3 below exhibits a substantial difference between the stories the opposition responds to and the rest. The typical story that turns into a parliamentary question from an opposition party approaches a negativity of 80 pct. (78.5). In contrast, stories that remain off the opposition's agenda have an average news tone of 61 pct. bad, producing a strongly significant difference of 17 percentage points. The opposite pattern is found for government. The stories the Prime Minister responds to are more positive than the stories he does not comment on in his weekly press meeting. The latter have an average negative attention share of 63 pct., while the former are slightly more positive at 59 pct. The nearly 4 percentage point difference is not significant, however, which hints at the consequences of a dual government strategy prescribing attention to more positive stories as well as to negative stories that include blame attributions.[26] Comparing news tone across the two actors' response agendas though, the nearly 20 percentage point difference is clearly significant.

Moving on to issue ownership, there are less distinct differences between politicized news and the rest of the stories. Although the stories that the opposition respond to comprise slightly more owned stories, 33 pct. against 29 pct. for the rest, the difference does not qualify as statistically significant. In the government case, differences go the opposite way meaning that news which captures the Prime Minister's attention is actually less often govern-

[26] Accordingly, a significant difference in tone between the government politicized and the government ignored news agenda should surface when we control for government criticism or challenge to government competence/integrity. This contingency is supported in the data, where the percentage of good news is significantly higher for stories to which the government responds when we look at stories with and without government criticism separately.

ment owned compared to stories to which he does not respond. Again, the difference is not significant, though. In sum, there is little initial evidence that politicized news carries the 'ownership signatures' of the respective parties that politicize them.[27]

Table 5.3. Means and difference of means for independent variables across stories with or without opposition and government response. Large-N sample (N=2161)

	Opposition response			Government response		
	yes	no	difference	yes	no	difference
Opponent response	0.10	0.02	0.08***	0.37	0.10	0.27***
Opposition initiation	0.08	0.04	0.04**	0.12	0.04	0.07**
Government initiation	0.27	0.11	0.16***	0.38	0.12	0.26***
Saliency	3.64	1.57	2.07***	5.80	1.68	4.12***
Ownership	0.33	0.29	0.04	0.28	0.31	-0.03
News tone	78.51	61.18	17.33***	59.33	63.13	-3.80
Blame: substance	0.45	0.09	0.36***	0.42	0.12	0.30***
Blame: non-policy	0.14	0.01	0.13***	0.10	0.02	0.08***
N	1931	230		2099	62	

Significant at *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10.

Table 5.3 shows a significantly higher presence of blame attributions in politicized news for both blame variables, and in both the opposition and government case. For instance, while substance blame is present in 9 pct. of the stories that do not make it to the opposition's agenda, nearly every other (45 pct.) story that becomes a parliamentary question from the opposition contains government criticism. The same pattern, although not as pronounced, is found for the presence of non-policy substance. Challenges to government competence or integrity are present in only 1 out of 100 'un-politicized' news stories, but for politicized news, the level of non-policy blame reaches 14 pct. A comparison of the stories off and on the Prime Minister's agenda yields identical results, in sum suggesting that blame attributions will be a crucial predictor in the models explaining opposition and government response to news stories.

Regarding saliency, Table 5.3 shows that for both opposition and government, the level of attention of news stories that were politicized was sig-

[27] Bearing in mind the proposition that the impact of ownership is moderated by news tone, an interaction pattern emerges when we look at good and bad news separately (not shown). Thus, stories to which the government responds belong significantly more to owned issues when they are more good than bad, and significantly more to opposition owned issues when they are more bad than good.

nificantly higher than the rest. The typical story the opposition reacts to is covered in 3.6 radio news items, while the rest of the stories on average figure in 1.6 items. The difference is strongly significant, but still only half of the corresponding difference for the government. The stories that make it into the Prime Minister's speech at the weekly press meeting had on average been broadcast in 5.8 radio news items, which is 4 more than the mean coverage of stories that remain 'unpoliticized' by the government. While the opposition reacts to news after approximately 3.5 features have been broadcast, the Prime Minister will not join the debate until on average 2 more features have been aired. This of course reflects the different measures applied, as the agenda space of a single Prime Minister necessarily is more limited than that of several opposition parties.

The last point also partly explains why opponent response figures much more prominently in the stories politicized by the government compared to those which the opposition attends to. However, it is still worth noticing that the difference is significant for both actors. The typical politicized news story is consequently characterized by a much stronger interest from the opponent than those which remain off the political agenda. The two variables measuring how parties contribute to the initiation of news point to some of the same pattern. For instance, while only 4 pct. of non-politicized stories in the opposition case are triggered by opposition statements or actions, the politicized stories have a corresponding share of 8 pct. As noted in the previous section, government initiation is more common than opposition initiation. And as Table 5.3 shows, this is also reflected in the sense that opposition response stories are substantially more characterized by government initiated stories than by those they themselves have triggered. 27 pct. of the stories that opposition parties turn into parliamentary questions originated in something the government said or did. Conversely, the government case shows that although government response stories are characterized by more opposition involvement than the rest (12 vs. 4 pct.), they are first of all centred on the government's own policy initiatives or statements (38 pct.).

Summing up, the typical news story that parties respond to is salient and characterized by more negative than positive attention. Furthermore, it is relatively often dominated by the presence of political actors. Either in the form of blame attributions through government criticism or challenges to government competence or integrity; or in the sense that stories originate with government and opposition statements or actions. Government and opposition response stories vary mainly according to news tone, the latter typically predominantly bad and the former more balanced. The next three chapters will explain how these patterns of politicized news come about.

Applying a combination of multivariate regression models, bivariate analyses and case examples, the proposed relationships of the attack and defend model are tested and illustrated on the large-N sample of radio news (Chapter 6 and 7) and the medium-N samples of newspaper coverage (Chapter 8).

Chapter 6
Attack! Opposition responses explained

This chapter presents results of the large-N study, concentrating on the extent to which they support the propositions on opposition responses to news stories. It starts out by recapitulating the core argument, while at the same time specifying the multivariate regression models to be applied in the subsequent analyses. The empirical analyses then begin with a section on the core hypotheses, investigating how news tone, blame attributions and issue ownership affect political agenda-setting. After this, the opposition-government dynamics inherent in the attack and defend model are examined by looking at how government initiation of, and responses to, news stories affect opposition politicization. Next, the core relationships are assessed in light of the control variables, discussing the way news saliency and the endogenous influence of opposition attention on the media agenda impact the proposed attack and defend model. Following this, opposition response *intensity* is analyzed in order to validate the key relationships found in the preceding explanation of opposition response *decision*. Finally, results are summarized and conclusions drawn on the validity of the proposed attack mechanisms in the attack and defend model.

6.1 Argument in brief and model specification

The broader design of the dissertation and its two main empirical studies, including the use of news stories as units of analysis, case selection, operationalization of concepts, measurements of variables and methodological issues, was discussed in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 presented the characteristics of the collected samples and the descriptives of the variables to be used for empirical modelling in the present chapter. This section takes the next step and specifies the model to be tested. First, the operationalized concepts of the model and their hypothesized relationships are presented in the form of an attack equation. This part focuses on recapitulating the argument behind the core propositions on how news tone, blame attributions and issue ownership affect opposition responses to news. Second, I discuss two additional independent variables of interest in the equation relating to opposition-government dynamics and specifically how government influences opposition politicization. Third, controls for 'third variables' are presented, together

with discussions on the major challenges to the estimations of the attack equation. A brief reminder of the structure of the dataset could, however, be helpful before entering these discussions. The large-N dataset samples the radio news agenda in Denmark for approximately one year. Nearly 4000 radio news features were content coded and aggregated to 2161 units of analysis on news story level. Opposition response was measured by tracking down each of these news stories in the opposition's questions in parliament, producing nearly 800 responses spread over 230 news stories.

6.1.1 The attack equation

The attack and defend model links political agenda-setting and party competition and argues that policy responsibility and issue ownership explain why parties respond to news and consequently, to which news stories they respond. In the competition for votes and political power, the mediated state of social problems – communicated through good and bad news – and the implicit or explicit attribution of responsibility for them are the most crucial determinants of the opposition-government game and how the parties in this game relate to the media agenda. Having measured the theoretical concepts of the attack and defend model in Chapter 4, the model can now be written in the form of the following (attack) equation:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{OppResp} &= \alpha + \epsilon \\ &+ \beta1*\text{Tone} + \beta2*\text{BlameS} + \beta3*\text{BlameN} + \beta4*\text{Own} + \beta5*\text{ToneXOwn} && \text{(Attack)} \\ &+ \beta6*\text{GovInit} + \beta7*\text{GovResp} && \text{(Opponent influence)} \\ &+ \beta8*\text{Sal} + \beta9*\text{OppInit} + \beta10*\text{BlameOpp} && \text{(Controls)} \end{aligned}$$

where

α is the intercept and ϵ is an error term,

OppResp is opposition response to the news story measured as a dummy variable indicating the tabling of parliamentary questions,

Tone is news tone measured as the percentage of bad radio news items broadcasted about a story,

BlameS is substance blame measured as a dummy variable indicating the presence of government criticism from outside the opposition,

BlameN is non policy valence blame measured as a dummy variable indicating whether the story challenges government competence or integrity,

Own is issue ownership measured as a dummy variable indicating that the opposition is perceived to be most capable of handling the issue group to which the story belongs,

ToneXOwn is the interaction term of news tone and issue ownership,

GovInit is government initiation of stories measured as a dummy variable indicating whether the story was triggered by a government statement or action,

GovResp is government response to news stories measured as a dummy variable indicating whether a story was referred to in the PM's weekly press meeting,

Sal is news saliency measured as the number of radio news items broadcasted about a story,

OppInit is opposition initiation of stories measured as a dummy variable indicating whether the story was triggered by an opposition statement or action,

BlameOpp is substance blame from the opposition measured as a dummy variable indicating the presence of government criticism voiced by the opposition, and

β 1-β 10 are estimable parameters.

The core expectations of the model presented in Chapter 3 could thus be expressed as a set of testable propositions regarding the size of the estimated parameters from the 'attack' part of the above equation:

First, $[P1_{Attack}]$ translates into $\beta 1 > 0$, meaning that the estimated parameter of the news tone variable should reflect a significant and positive impact on opposition response. In other words, opposition response is more likely when news is bad. The argument is that opposition parties compete by drawing attention to news mediation of negative developments in social problems (implicitly) reflecting poorly on the way government handles its policy responsibilities. News stories that cover negative issue developments from the point of view of government thus offer an opposition advantage in party competition and political agenda-setting.

Second and third, $[P2_{Attack}]$ and $[P3_{Attack}]$ translate into $\beta 2 > 0$ and $\beta 3 > 0$, meaning that the estimated parameters of the substance blame and non-policy blame variables should reflect a significant and positive impact on opposition response. In other words, opposition response is more likely when news stories attribute blame to the government, either through criticism related to policy substance or through non-policy valence events challenging government competence or integrity. The argument is that these stories leave little, or even no, doubt as to who is responsible for a specific problem, and present a ready-made attack argument and opportunity. According to the attack and defend perspective then, they bring with them an opposition advantage by improving the chances that bad news will 'stick' to the government.

Fourth, $[P4_{Attack}]$ translates into $\beta 4 > 0$, meaning that the estimated parameter of the issue ownership variable should reflect a significant and positive impact on opposition response. In other words, opposition response is more likely when news stories belong to owned issue groups. The argument is that parties care about these issues and would like to see them prioritized in policy-making. At the same time, they stand to win electoral support if 'their' issues become salient. As media attention influences the issue atten-

tion of the public, parties should work to influence the composition of the media and public agenda in order to profit from their electoral issue strengths.

Fifth, [$P5_{Attack}$] translates into $\beta 5 > 0$, meaning that the estimated parameter of the interaction between news tone and issue ownership should reflect a significant and positive impact on opposition response. In other words, opposition response to owned issues is more likely when bad news attention increases. The argument is that the opposition will jeopardize its electoral issue strengths if they politicize good news stories on owned issues, as this could help build the image of government competence and threaten opposition ownership.

Finally, the attack and defend model assumes, as argued repeatedly, that political agenda-setting and the media-party relationship is an integral part of party competition. The main implication of this perspective could be found in the arguments above expecting parties to use news stories and their characteristics to their advantage in the opposition-government game. However, a political agenda-setting model aiming to compare opposition and government also needs to take into account how the strategic choices of the competitive players of this game affect each other. Thus, in order to model the opposition-government dynamics more explicitly in the explanation of opposition response, I include two variables measuring government initiation of, and response to, news stories which could be found in the 'Opponent influence' part of the above equation. Together with the analyses on government response in the next chapter, this element of the model will be able to identify whether there is an alignment between opposition and government attention, and whether this is mostly related to the opponent's early or late engagement in news story debates.

6.1.2 Control variables and the threat of misspecifications

Regarding regression diagnostics, the general rule has been to only comment on the most important challenges of the model specification and leave out the details for aspects that are not characterized by specific problems. This section concentrates on the perhaps most serious threat to the estimations presented here, and also to agenda-setting models in general, namely the endogenous influence of politics on media attention. The fact that influence flows in both directions between political actors and the news agenda, and that this most likely leads to an overestimation of the media's agenda-setting effect in extant research, was already introduced in Chapter 4. Taking this challenge seriously, the data collection therefore included two efforts to

reduce, control and empirically assess the level of endogeneity in the models. First, although the data is analyzed as a cross-sectional material, the coding of the independent and dependent variables has an in-built time-serial dimension. Put simply, the (alleged) effect – party response – is measured after the (alleged) cause(s) – news story and its contents.

Second, however, if the 'cause of the alleged cause' belongs to the notion of the alleged effect, the problem persists. In other words, if a party action or statement, other than that covered by this study's measurement of party responses, triggered the news story in the first place, and the party proceeded to respond by way of a parliamentary question, then my estimates of the impact of the independent variables will still be biased. Quite simply, even though it looks like for instance news tone or blame attributions produce party response, it is first of all related to something the opposition said or did prior to, or in the early stages of, the story's appearance on the news agenda. Consequently, the data collection was designed to include two measures of the opposition's prior interest in a news story. The operationalization of the variables is described in Chapter 4. Briefly speaking, the first (*Opposition initiation*) provides a measure of prior interest in a news story and indicates whether the news story in question was initiated by the opposition.

The second variable was originally part of the substance blame variable, which was later divided according to whether attributions were put forward by the opposition or by other actors. The resulting dummy variable, *Blame from opposition,* is positively associated with both the dependent variable and independent variables of interest. Together with *Opposition initiation*, it is therefore entered as a control variable in the attack equation, in order to explicitly model important parts of the endogenous influence of opposition attention on news characteristics. In sum, the design of the study and the specification of the model should reduce the potential bias of the subsequent estimations. The actual empirical assessment of the impact that the politics to news relationship has will be discussed when the results are presented.

The last control variable to be included in the model is news *saliency*. The relationship between news saliency and political agendas is well established in the agenda-setting literature, as it of course captures the original core agenda-setting idea which subsequent research has tried to explore further through for instance different issue attribute perspectives (cf. Chapter 2). Furthermore, the intensity of news attention could easily be linked to one or several of the independent variables of interest. Previous studies have shown a tendency for news negativity to increase as attention rises, and the

material collected here also shows a positive correlation between the number of features broadcasted and the presence of blame attributions. Excluding news saliency could therefore potentially bias the estimates of the news tone and blame attribution parameters of the attack equation. As with the variable measuring opposition initiation of stories, the actual empirical impact of news saliency, in itself and in combination with the independent variables, will be examined more thoroughly through step-wise expansions of the model and also mediation analyses (Section 6.4). There are of course theoretically informed alternative explanations of *y* (party responses to news) in the literature, like for instance Soroka's issue typology. But as they are not (initially) expected to influence any of the *x's* (news tone, blame attributions and issue ownership), and thereby not threatening the estimation of the relationships in the attack and defend model, they will receive a separate treatment in Chapter 9.

6.2 News tone, blame attributions and issue ownership

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the design of the large-N study led to the construction of limited dependent variables (response (1) vs. no response (0)) for both opposition and government. The large-N analyses therefore concentrate on whether or not parties respond to news attention rather than the intensity with which they react. Apart from Section 6.4, where the response intensity of opposition parties is analyzed, the large-N models therefore concentrate on explaining whether parties respond.[28] Hence, multivariate logistic regression is used to estimate the parameters of the attack equation in Section 6.1. Based on the specifications discussed above then, five multivariate logistic regressions explaining opposition responses to news stories were run on the large-N dataset. Table 6.1 presents the results of the five models.[29]

[28] Remember also that the medium-N study, reported in Chapter 8, deals with the amount of attention (claims) that parties pay to news stories.

[29] A test of nonlinearity indicated that the relationship between the logit of opposition response and the news saliency variable was nonlinear. Graphical inspection of the relationship between saliency and the dependent variable revealed that this was due to the flattening of increase in probability of news response that occurs when saliency becomes extreme. That is, the probability of response already approaches 1 (.93) when 13 news features have been broadcasted. Running models where only stories with 13 or less features had been broadcasted did not change the results, and neither did the application of a transformed saliency variable. To ease the interpretation of results, and include the most salient 0.5 pct. stories in the sample, the chapter therefore reports the results of the original model.

Table 6.1. Logistic regressions, dependent variable is opposition response to news stories (0=no response, 1=response)*

			Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV	Model V
Controls	Saliency		0.196***	0.204***	0.181***	0.185***	0.185***
			(0.031)	(0.032)	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.033)
	Opposition initiation		-0.369	-0.321	-0.391	-0.408	-0.414
			(0.332)	(0.341)	(0.354)	(0.354)	(0.354)
	Blame: from opposition		1.827***	1.427***	1.435***	1.460***	1.466***
			(0.254)	(0.263)	(0.288)	(0.289)	(0.289)
Opponent influence	Government initiation		0.604**	0.841***	0.764***	0.774***	0.775***
			(0.196)	(0.204)	(0.215)	(0.215)	(0.215)
	Government response		0.585†	0.735*	0.651†	0.657†	0.649†
			(0.348)	(0.348)	(0.357)	(0.358)	(0.358)
Attack	News tone (pct bad)	*[P1]*		0.014***	0.011***	0.011***	0.010**
				(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
	Blame: substance	*[P2]*			0.905***	0.913***	0.913***
					(0.228)	(0.227)	(0.228)
	Blame: non-policy	*[P3]*			2.323***	2.376***	2.383***
					(0.399)	(0.401)	(0.402)
	Issue ownership	*[P4]*				0.327†	0.151
						(0.168)	(0.435)
	Ownership X Tone	*[P5]*					0.002
							(0.005)
	Constant		-2.813***	-3.851***	-3.747***	-3.836***	-3.780***
			(0.106)	(0.225)	(0.226)	(0.231)	(0.261)
	N		2,161	2,161	2,161	2,161	2,161
	Pseudo R square		0.122	0.149	0.189	0.192	0.192

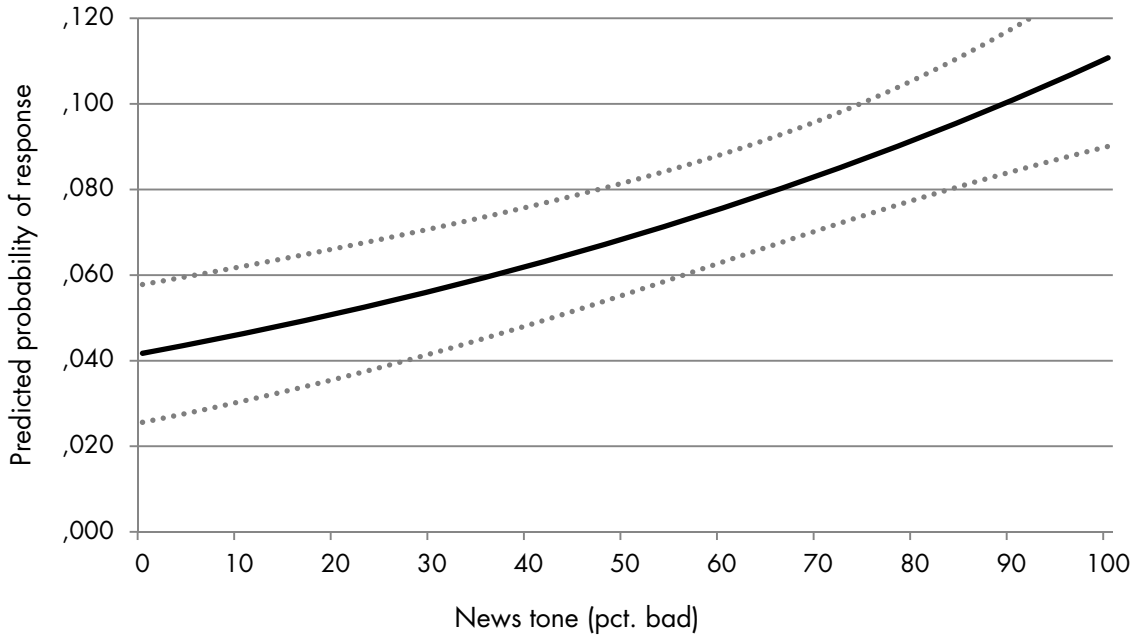
*Standard error reported in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, † p<0.10.

Overall, the attack and defend model receives support and produces a reasonable fit to the data with a pseudo R square of .19. The estimated parameters β1 to β4 are all significant and with the right sign, suggesting that news tone, both types of blame attributions and issue ownership perform in accordance with the attack propositions. Only β5, the coefficient of the interaction term, falls short of significance, failing to provide initial support for [$P5_{Attack}$].

However, the simple and straightforward interpretation following linear regressions, where the increase in the dependent variable is constant for all values of *x*, is not appropriate after logistic regressions. In such nonlinear models, 'the effect of each variable on the outcome depends on the level of *all* variables in the model' (Long and Freese, 2006:3). Consequently, the coefficients of logistic regression should only be used to interpret the sign and

significance of an independent variable's effect. The size of this effect, the increases or decreases in probability of response per unit change in *x*, is non-constant. To give a more complete interpretation of the results in Table 6.1, I therefore estimate predicted probabilities of a successful outcome – that is, opposition response – for every observation in the sample at substantially interesting values of the independent variables. These estimations are based on Model IV (in grey), which includes all variables of interest not counting the interaction term. The mean predicted probabilities are then displayed in tables and figures, which together with the sign and significance of the coefficients provide the tool by which each proposition of the attack and defend model is assessed.

Figure 6.1. Predicted probability of opposition response to news stories as news negativity rises*



* Estimated with model IV, Table 6.1. Rest of independent variables set at their mean.

Assessing the proposition on how news tone affects opposition behaviour first [$P1_{Attack}$], Figure 6.1 shows the predicted probability of opposition response as the share of bad news features broadcasted about a story rises. Holding all other variables at their mean, the likelihood that opposition parties will politicize a news story containing only good features from the point of view of government is just above 4 pct. When negative attention rises to 50 pct., and the overall tone is balanced, the probability of opposition response approaches 7 pct. Finally, when negativity reaches 90 pct., the results indicate a parliamentary question following up the story 1 out of 10 times.

Thus, a switch from a one-sided good story (.042) to a one-sided bad story (.111) almost triples the chances that opposition parties react to news attention. This suggests that news tone is an important factor conditioning the political response to media's news coverage, as also witnessed by the significant increase in model fit when tone is entered into the equation in Model II (Table 6.1).

Table 6.2. Predicted probabilities of opposition response for news stories with and without opposition ownership and blame attributions*

	Blame: substance	Blame: non-policy	Ownership
with	.164	.465	.096
without	.073	.075	.071
difference**	.091*	.390*	.025†

* Estimated with model IV, Table 6.1. For each variable's estimation, the rest of the independent variables were set at their mean.

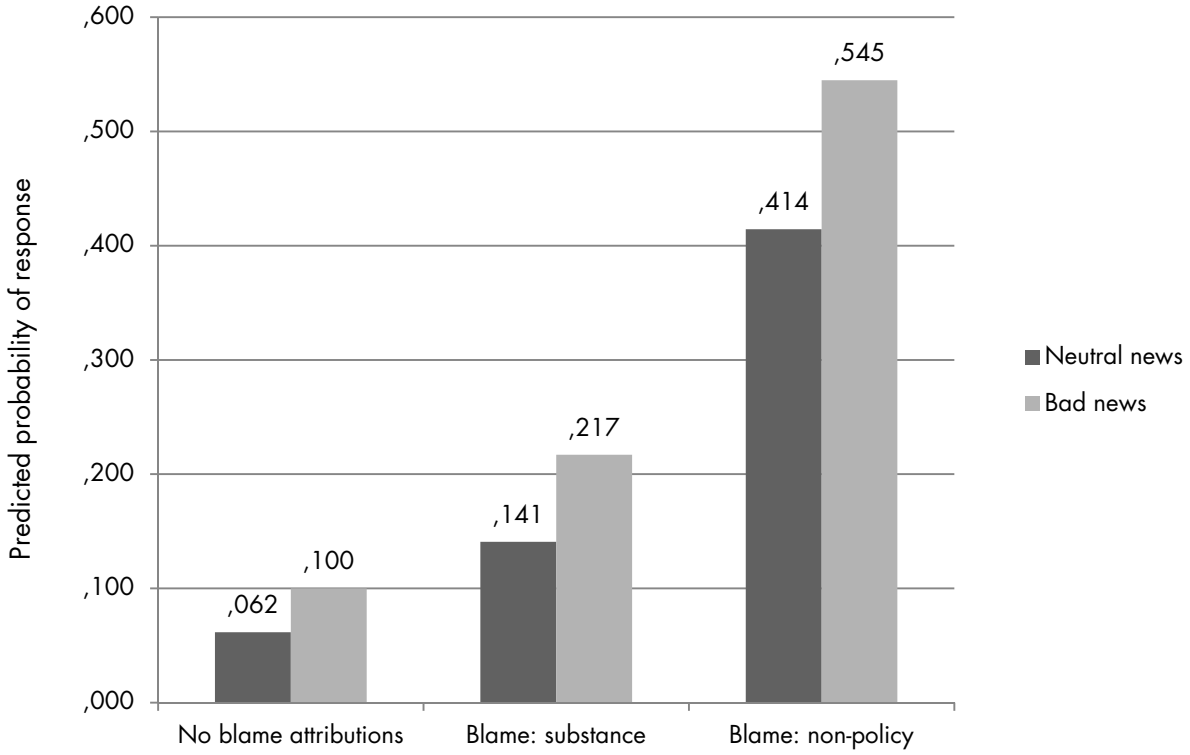
** Equals marginal effect. Significant at * $p<0.05$, † $p<0.10$.

Moving on to the propositions on blame attributions [$P2_{Attack}$] and [$P3_{Attack}$], Table 6.2 displays the predicted probabilities of opposition response for news stories with and without the two types of attributions. Looking at substance blame first, a news story without government criticism relating to political or policy substance will provoke an opposition reaction in 7 out of 100 cases (.073). However, if some actor other than the opposition voices criticism of the government during the coverage of a news story, the probability of opposition response is doubled. In these cases, and when all other variables are held at their mean[30], opposition parties will table a parliamentary question for every sixth story (.164). The positive impact on the dependent variable is even more pronounced when news contain non-policy blame attributions, as is shown in the second result column of Table 6.1. Stories that challenge government competence or integrity, for instance when ministers are caught lying or serious incompetence/malpractice in policy-implementation or making is uncovered, are 39 percentage points more likely to make it to the opposition's agenda than stories without such elements. In fact, the presence of non-policy blame attributions raises the probability of opposition response to 47 pct., even when all other variables are at their mean. Both types of attributions make policy responsibility clearly visible and consequently have a decisive impact on the political agenda-setting process as also the great leap of model fit in Table 6.1 (from Model II to Model III) implies. Bearing in

[30] Cf. Table 5.1, Chapter 5, for the respective means.

mind that news stories containing government criticism from the opposition itself are filtered out and applied as a control variable in the model, the results provide fairly strong support to the expectation that explicit attributions of blame exogenous to the opposition-government competition are an important predictor of opposition politicization.

Figure 6.2. Predicted probabilities of opposition response for neutral* and bad news with and without blame attributions**



* Stories with 50 pct. bad features defined as 'Neutral news', and 100 pct. bad as 'Bad news'. As the combination of good news (0 pct. bad) and blame attributions does not occur in the data set, the figure only presents probabilities of neutral and bad news.
** Estimated with model IV, Table 6.1. Rest of independent variables set at their mean.

Before examining the relationship between news tone and blame attributions, and the implications this might have for the causal model, it is worth looking more closely at a handful of scenarios based on the combination of different news tones and different blame attributions. Figure 6.2 displays the predicted probabilities for six types of news stories, combining neutral and bad news with no blame, substance blame and non-policy blame respectively.[31] Again we see that blame attributions, and especially non-policy re-

[31] All radio news items that contained blame were coded as bad. But because radio news items were aggregated to story level, it is possible even for predominantly

lated blame, produce the highest probabilities, while the shift from neutral to bad news (when there is no blame attributions) prompts a more modest reaction. Still, even when blame has been attributed, changes in news negativity play an important role increasing the likelihood of opposition politicization by 8 to 14 percentage points. Evidently the combination of high shares of negative news attention and explicit focus on government responsibility for the developments receiving media coverage is a strong predictor of whether or not opposition parties would want to transform a news story into a parliamentary question.

There is indeed a close connection between the two independent variables to which I have devoted my attention so far. Empirically, the previous chapter showed that news negativity is significantly and positively correlated with blame attributions (cf. Section 5.1). Although this is of no concern as far as producing unbiased estimates,[32] the causal interpretation of the estimated coefficients deserves some further attention. In this discussion, I do not argue that one of these news characteristics precedes the other from a time-serial perspective, thus making a straightforward assumption about which might be interpreted as a mediator in their combined impact on the dependent variable of news responses. Instead, my interpretation of their relationship starts with the notion that the blame variables add to the information, or precision of the information, fed to the model. News tone constitutes a considerable information improvement to agenda-setting models relying on issue categories and their saliency. But blame attributions take it one step further, providing more details of news content, and more specifically of bad news content. In other words, the concept of attributing blame to the government does not go together with good news. And so this characteristic of news stories is a sub-dimension of news which is *not good* from the point of view of government. Arguably then, the element of blame attributions offers a clue as to why bad news actually matters for opposition response. This information 'hierarchy approach' determined the order in which the news tone and blame variables were entered into the model and is also the basis for interpreting their role in the causal dynamics of the model.

I have already pointed to the increased predictive capacity of Model III (Table 6.1) compared to Model II where only news tone is accounted for. The

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good stories to feature blame as long as they include a minimum of 1 bad news item.

[32] Neither do other correlations among the independent variables violate the assumption of regression models (cf. Table A.4.1 of the Appendix for a correlation matrix). Measures of multicollinearity through the Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) are all well below any critical value.

second and highly interesting change to note, from the perspective of causal dynamics, is how the coefficient of the news tone variable is reduced from .014 to .011 when substance and non-policy blame enter the equation. The decrease is suggestive of a mediated effect, from tone via blame attributions to news response. A simple mediation analysis confirms this suggestion, finding significant effects both from news tone directly to response and indirectly through the two blame attribution variables.[33] In fact, 47 pct. of the total effect is mediated according to these results. Substantially, the implication is that policy responsibility plays a fundamental role in political agenda-setting thus strengthening the support for the attack and defend model. More precisely, attributions of blame in news stories go a considerable way towards explaining why news tone matters when parties decide to respond to media attention.

Turning to the third core proposition, regarding the impact of issue ownership on opposition politicization of news [$P4_{Attack}$], the positive coefficient of Model IV (Table 6.1) initially confirmed the expected relationship. Opposition parties do respond more often when news stories belong to issues the public thinks it is best equipped to handle. On the other hand, the modest size of the coefficient suggests that there are clear limits to the impact that this particular aspect of parties' issue competition has on opposition strategy towards the media agenda. Looking at the predicted probabilities of opposition response for owned and unowned issues (Table 6.2 above), this picture of a significant but relatively less important relationship is again confirmed. Opposition response rate for unowned issues, again keeping other variables at their mean, is approximately 7 pct. (.071). When the opposition enjoys ownership there is a slight increase, resulting in 1 out of every 10 (.096) owned news stories making it to the opposition's agenda.

Comparing ownership and news tone more directly, Table 6.3 combines the two and presents predicted probabilities for owned and unowned news stories with a good and bad tone respectively. Two characteristics of the table should be noted. First, there is a continuous rise in response likelihood from unowned good news (.038), over owned good news (.052) all the way to unowned bad news (.102) and owned bad news which will turn into an opposition parliamentary question in nearly 1 out of 7 cases (.136). This overall result fits nicely with one of the key assumptions of the attack and defend model, which is that parties care more about what type of attention a

[33] I use a Stata programme, *binary_mediation*, for the mediation tests. It is based on the product of coefficients approach, with modifications appropriate for dichotomous outcomes (cf. Kenny, 2008).

news story generates than what type of issue it generates attention for. Issue type, here represented by the ownership theory,[34] matters – bringing a news story closer to the opposition's agenda. But news tone is always more important. Whoever owns an issue, bad news is clearly more prone to opposition politicization than good news. Second, the increase in response probability due to issue ownership when news is bad (.034) is more than double that found when news is good (.014). Although the coefficient of the interaction between ownership and news tone was insignificant (Table 6.1), this suggests that there still could be something to the expectation that these two variables moderate each others' effect on news response.

Table 6.3. Predicted probabilities of opposition response for different values of ownership and news tone*

		News tone**		
		Good	Bad	difference
Ownership	Not Opposition	.038	.102	-.064
	Opposition	.052	.136	-.084
	difference	-.014	-.034	

* Estimated with model IV, Table 6.1. Rest of independent variables set at their mean.

** News tone values set at their minimum (0 pct. bad, defined as Good) and its maximum (100 pct. bad, defined as Bad).

Before examining this more in-depth, a couple of potential weak spots in the interpretation so far of a significant but relatively low ownership impact should be discussed. First, it could be argued that the variable suffers from a handicap as it is measured on issue group level unlike the news tone and blame attribution variables which are all operationalized on the story level. On the other hand, this is not only a design-induced handicap of ownership impact in political agenda-setting. The theory of issue ownership operates on issue level, and cannot be applied to predict differences in outcome for different news stories within the same issue group. For instance, media focus on positive developments in the labour market and increases in employment will most likely not trigger opposition interest to the same extent as news about lay-offs or increased unemployment. Issue ownership is, however, the same in the two situations. This fixed feature of the ownership perspective, and of issue attributes perspectives in general (i.e. Soroka's typology), and its lack of predictive power in fact motivates the choice of analytical level and the focus on mechanisms related to policy responsibility in this dissertation

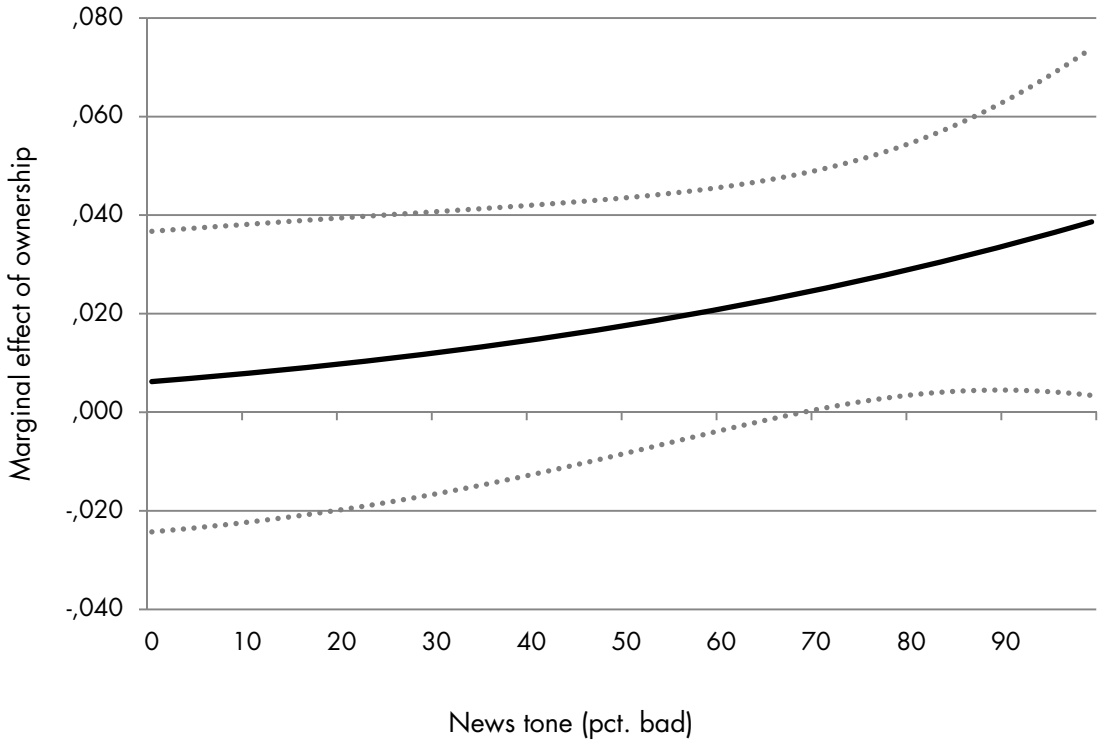
[34] Other issue perspectives, most importantly the Soroka typology, are examined in Chapter 9 which focuses on competing explanations.

(cf. Chapter 3). My argument is, then, that the drawback the ownership perspective experiences when competing to explain news responses is in part a reflection of its limitations.

The second matter potentially influencing the estimated balance between ownership and other predictors is the considerable gap in empirical documentation of issue ownership. The election surveys used to code each issue group according to ownership covers a limited range of issues, leaving quite a few where we simply do not know how the electorate rates the two blocs. In order to check how this might distort the estimated models in this chapter, identical regressions were run on a reduced sample containing only news stories that sort under 'known' ownerships. For the 1313 stories left in the sample, out of originally 2161, very few changes are observed. The same coefficients are significant, and the size of most effects remains substantially the same. The ownership effect does, however, increase, from .327 to .418, but is still less influential when compared to news tone and blame attributions. Indeed, this does not preclude the possibility that issues which are yet to be placed in ownership categories might show a different agenda-setting pattern. Nevertheless, the 'unknown' category is a mix of issues where images of party competence are at least assumed to be more balanced, such as energy, transportation, research, civil rights, culture and sports. It is therefore unlikely that this pattern should be one where ownership plays a stronger role.

Finally, a possible addition to the simple and modest additive impact of issue ownership in party responses to news is found in the interaction proposition [$P5_{Attack}$] of the attack and defend model. The interaction of news tone and issue ownership was included in Model V to investigate whether the effect of ownership on response is in fact conditional upon news being bad. Remember that the coefficient of this interaction term had the right sign, indicating a tendency for opposition parties to respond more often to owned issues when news is bad. Although the coefficient was insignificant, the size and significance of the interaction should be examined across the range of the two variables before rejecting the proposition all-together (Brambor et al., 2006). Consequently, Figure 6.3 is included to show the marginal effect of issue ownership on predicted probability of response as news negativity shifts across its full range from 0 to 100 pct. The dotted lines represent the upper and lower confidence level, and the effect is significant only as long as both are above (or below) the zero line. Applying a 10 pct. confidence level, we see that the proposed moderating role of news tone only holds when news negativity exceeds 69 pct.

Figure 6.3. Marginal effect of issue ownership on opposition response to news stories as news negativity rises.*



* Estimated with Model V, Table 6.1. Rest of independent variables set at their mean.

The substantial interpretation of this result should first of all underline the relatively modest size of the interaction effect. Second, the limited applicability of the interaction should be taken as a sign that news negativity is an almost necessary condition of opposition response to media attention. As a consequence there is hardly any opposition politicization of news when negativity is below 50 pct., with only 25 out of the 230 opposition responses. But when we look at the stories receiving more than 70 pct. negative attention (which comprises nearly half the sample (47 pct.) and two thirds of the opposition responses), each 1 pct. increase in negativity produces a small but increasing boost in attention to stories belonging to owned issue groups compared to unowned issues. At 70 pct. news negativity, 2 percentage points separate the probabilities of owned and unowned issues becoming news. At 100 pct. news negativity, the difference reaches 4 percentage points.

6.3 Opponent influence and the impact of control variables

In this section, I concentrate on the two remaining groups of variables applied in the estimation of the attack and defend model, found in the 'Oppo-

nent influence' and 'Controls' parts of the equation in Section 6.1. First, I briefly discuss the opposition-government dynamics of the model in terms of how opposition behaviour relates to government initiation of news and government response to news. Second, I examine the impact of the three control variables in the model. My interest is not primarily how news saliency, opposition initiation of stories and blame attributions from the opposition affect opposition behaviour towards the media agenda. Rather, the intention is to get a better grasp of how these variables affect the impact of my independent variables of interest, that is, news tone, blame attributions and issue ownership, and to see how the latter compare against the former. Finally, I try to assess the extent to which the endogenous influence of opposition attention on news characteristics constitute a threat to the attack and defend model.

To capture the opposition-government game in the attack and defend model, two variables measuring government initiation of and response to news stories were included in the preceding estimations (see the 'Opponent influence' part of the equation). The resulting coefficients in Model IV, Table 6.1, are both positive and significant. Opposition politicization of news is positively associated with the way the Prime Minister distributes his attention at his weekly press meeting, and with the news stories that are triggered by government actions or statements. As far as the predicted probabilities (not shown), the effect of government behaviour at the two different stages of news story coverage have approximately the same impact on opposition behaviour. Stories not initiated by the government and stories that the Prime Minister ignores at his press meetings both produce an opposition reaction 7 pct. of the time. But if government engages, either early or late, the likelihood that opposition parties will use the story in a parliamentary question doubles.

Regarding the first type of government influence on the opposition's agenda, the government initiation variable could meaningfully be said to precede opposition response decisions. Thus, the model seems to support an important role for government in media-centred party competition, suggesting that those in office have the means to influence the news agenda in early stages of issue/story coverage and, indirectly, the attention of opposition parties. Of course, the same could be the case for the opposition, and thus a conclusion on whether this important role also constitutes a leading role will have to wait until the opposite dynamic has been tested in the next chapter. Regarding the second type of opponent influence, through the government's responses to (and not its initiation of) news stories, the material at hand does not allow for conclusions on who leads this positive association of government and opposition attention. But it does show that opposition

parties are more likely to direct their attention to stories that the Prime Minister also addresses.

Moving on to the three control variables, results across all five estimated models in Table 6.1 are consistent in terms of significance and signs. Results indicate that news saliency has a significant and positive impact on the propensity of opposition response. Opposition initiation of a story on the other hand does not influence the likelihood that this story will turn into a parliamentary question. In fact, the negative sign of the coefficient suggests prior opposition involvement to decrease the likelihood of later opposition response. However, the relationship is far from significant. Moreover, it should be understood in light of the strong positive effect of opposition blame attributions to which the opposition initiation variable is positively associated (Pearsons r of .245).[35] A news story that contains attributions of blame to the government, from the opposition, raises the chances of opposition response from 7 to 25 pct. holding the rest of the variables at their mean.[36] In sum, opposition blame attributions in news stories and high levels of attention very often go together with opposition responses. Evaluating their combined impact, opposition parties are likely to respond 38 pct. of the times when news is highly salient and contains blame attributions from the opposition.[37]

The core propositions of the attack and defend model, and their impact on opposition response behaviour, should therefore also be judged against the strong effect that news saliency and opposition blame attributions have on party responses. The first indication of how the independent variables of interest perform in this competitive context is provided by the measures of model fit (cf. Table 6.1) displaying a substantial improvement in pseudo r square from Model I to II, and from Model II to III. Second, it is useful to estimate predicted probabilities of response for different values of the attack and defend variables when significant control variables are at their most influential levels. Figure 6.4 displays the results of such estimations, based on Model IV from Table 6.1.

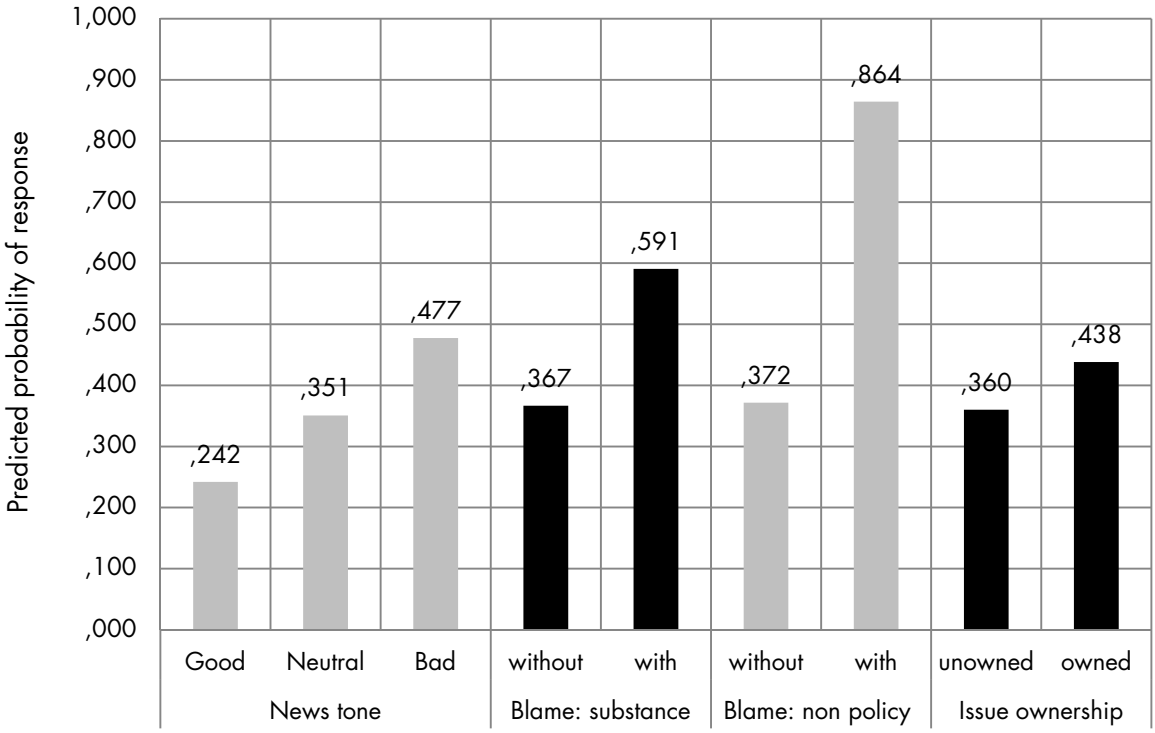
[35] Running Model I without this strong predictor, the sign of the opposition initiation coefficient changes. Also, a mediation analysis suggests that opposition blame attributions do mediate some positive influence from prior opposition story initiation to opposition response.

[36] Estimated on the basis of Model IV, Table 6.1. Dummy indicating presence of substance blame from opposition set to 1. Rest at their mean.

[37] Estimated on the basis of Model IV, Table 6.1. Saliency set to 5 news items, corresponding to the 95th percentile of the saliency variable. Substance blame from opposition set to 1. Rest at their mean.

Looking at news tone first, both the shift from good to neutral and from neutral to bad produce an increase in response probabilities of approximately 12 percentage points. Even when 'control conditions' are most favourable, news tone makes a substantial difference and increases the likelihood of opposition response from just below 24 pct. for good stories to 48 pct. for bad ones. This is equally true for the presence of substance blame in news, which together with the impact of the control variables pushes the response probabilities well above the 50 pct. line (.591). In cases when high saliency and opposition blame attributions go together with challenges to government competence or integrity (non policy blame), opposition response is predicted in an almost deterministic sense (.864). The additional explanatory force of issue ownership is again more modest, although the 8 percentage point increase is still significant.

Figure 6.4. Predicted probabilities of opposition response when attention is high and opposition attributes blame*



** Estimated with Model IV, Table 6.1. Saliency set at 5 radio news items. Blame from opposition set at 1. Rest of independent variables at their mean.

In sum, the proposed relationships of the attack and defend model do play a role in media's agenda-setting influence on opposition parties. Not only in a marginal sense, but also when compared to the fairly strong impact of news saliency and opposition blame attributions on opposition response behaviour. Moreover, the combination of the control variables and the attack and

defend model is able to identify a set of circumstances under which opposition parties are very likely to react to news attention. As shown in Figure 6.4, the presence of both control and attack attributes produces predicted probabilities of response that approach and surpass 50 pct. for news tone, blame attributions and issue ownership.

Apart from their role as a basis against which the impact of my independent variables of interest can be compared, the control variables should also be examined to understand and validate the causal dynamics of the attack and defend model. The first question that arises from this perspective relates to the influential role of news saliency in political agenda-setting processes. It is of course the case that the dependent variable of these models, party responses, explains parts of the observed variations in news attention. A story that provokes no political reaction is less attractive from the point of view of news institutions, and the medium-N material reported in Chapter 8 also shows that opposition and government claims in newspaper articles affect the attention and tone of coverage the following day. Thus, in order to validate the results presented in this chapter, identical regressions to those reported in Table 6.1 were run, applying a recoded saliency variable where all radio news features broadcasted after the first opposition response (parliamentary question) were excluded. Although the size of coefficients changes somewhat, their sign and significance stay the same, indicating that this particular aspect of the reciprocal relationship between news attention and political agendas does not seriously distort the estimated results.

Also pertaining to saliency, we have seen from the empirical documentation available in this material (cf. Section 5.1) that news negativity and blame attributions tend to go together with longer and more intense news coverage. As in the discussion of how blame attributions explain, or mediate, some of the effect that news tone has on party response (cf. Section 6.2), the assumption here is that news tone and blame attributions both offer more precision to the model. Hence, changes in the saliency coefficient when these news attributes enter into the equation (in Model II and III) are interpreted as documentation of why increases in news attention matter for opposition responses. The saliency coefficient is practically unchanged from Model I to II where news tone is included, indicating that news negativity in itself does not explain the effect attention has on opposition behaviour. Rather, as the move from Model II to III suggests, blame attributions provide a more likely clue as to why saliency matters. The saliency coefficient is reduced from .204 to .181 when substance and non policy blame are accounted for, and a mediation test estimates that approximately 17 pct. of the saliency effect impacts opposition response indirectly through the presence of

blame attributions. Remembering also that a substantial share (50 pct.) of the news tone effect runs through blame attributions, the models in this chapter seem to provide several important nuances to extant understanding of political agenda-setting. More specifically, the attack and defend model explains why policy responsibility makes news tone and blame attributions essential to the agenda-setting process, at the same time offering a further explanation of the agenda-setting effects that previous studies have attributed to news saliency (and issue categories) alone.

The next question to be discussed is how the potentially endogenous influence of opposition initiation of, and blame attributions in, news stories impact the estimated coefficients of the attack and defend model. As discussed earlier, several measures have been taken to limit the chances that the attack and defend model ascribes changes in political attention to the influence of news, when in fact the causal influence flows in the opposite direction. First, a time lag was applied in the data collection so that the media variables were measured before opposition and government response. Second, to capture party behaviour and interest in the news stories prior to the measures of party responses, I coded whether opposition parties were crucial to the initiation of a story and whether they voiced blame attributions in the media coverage of the story. By entering these variables (Opposition initiation and Blame from opposition) into the models applied, the analyses above give some clues as to the actual impact of these endogenous processes of the media to politics relationship. As shown in Models I to V, Table 6.1, of the two politics to media relationships, only opposition blame attributions affect the likelihood of opposition response. Given the strength of this coefficient, and the fact that it can be considered as preceding the independent variables of interest, I run mediation tests checking the extent to which this aspect of opposition behaviour could be said to explain some of the estimated effect of news tone on opposition response. Results show a significant indirect effect equalling 20 pct. of the total impact of news tone on the outcome. A similar conclusion could be drawn when opposition blame attributions are excluded from Model IV, as the original estimate of news tone is slightly lower (.011 vs .013) prior to this exclusion. Substantially, there are indications that the attack and defend model overestimates the influence of news tone in political agenda-setting. However, the larger share of the model's predictive capabilities seems justified even in light of the strongly reciprocal relationship between media and politics.

6.4 Opposition response *intensity* explained

The large-N material also contains information on the number of parliamentary questions tabled for each story in the radio news sample. Using this to measure response *intensity* as the count of parliamentary questions from opposition parties, the validity of the response *decision* models that are at the centre of the dissertation was tested by running several negative binomial regressions including the same set of independent variables.[38] These supplementary explanations of news influence on opposition attention are reported in Table 6.4.

Several aspects of the results are identical to the explanation of opposition response decision offered in Section 6.2. Again, the estimated parameters β1 to β3 are all significantly above zero. The effects of news tone, substance blame and non policy blame on the intensity with which the opposition responds to news are thus in accordance with the propositions of the attack and defend model. Furthermore, as was the case with the logistic regressions in Table 6.1, the parameters of Government initiation and Government response are consistently positive and significant across Model I to V. The number of opposition questions following up a news story, and not only the decision to start asking questions, is thus positively associated with early and late government engagement in the story.

The one difference to notice is the change in the parameter of the issue ownership variable which does not merit statistical significance in Model IV, Table 6.4. Also, an inspection of the marginal effect of ownership on opposition response intensity across the range of the news tone variable shows that news negativity at no point moderates the impact of ownership. In other words, both the additive [$P4_{Attack}$] and the multiplicative [$P5_{Attack}$] proposition on issue ownership must be rejected. These results yet again point to the weaker impact of electoral issue strengths when the opposition decides whether to act on news attention. Nevertheless, in the light of the previous positive results of the ownership perspective, both in this study (Model IV, Table 6.1) and in other recent studies (cf. Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2010a; Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2011a), the substantial interpretation should be that issue ownership does matter when opposition parties decide which stories they would like to prioritize. However, the intensity of opposition reactions to these stories, the number of parliamentary questions opposition parties use to address them, is only explained by news negativity and blame

[38] Because the dependent count variable was overdispersed (variance larger than the mean), negative binomial regressions were chosen (Long and Freese, 2006).

attributions and not significantly related to whether or not the opposition enjoys ownership.

Table 6.4. Negative binomial regressions, dependent variable: response intensity (no. of opposition questions tabled)*

			Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV	Model V
Controls	Saliency		0.304***	0.321***	0.285***	0.284***	0.284***
			(0.053)	(0.051)	(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.047)
	Opposition initiation		-0.210	-0.039	0.149	0.155	0.133
			(0.419)	(0.407)	(0.381)	(0.381)	(0.382)
	Blame: from opposition		1.663***	1.286***	0.956**	0.953**	0.954**
			(0.385)	(0.360)	(0.354)	(0.353)	(0.353)
Opponent influence	Government initiation		0.462†	0.744**	0.787**	0.772**	0.782**
			(0.250)	(0.254)	(0.242)	(0.242)	(0.243)
	Government response		1.062*	1.387**	1.116**	1.118**	1.089**
			(0.449)	(0.430)	(0.413)	(0.413)	(0.415)
Attack	News tone (pct bad)	*[P1]*		0.018***	0.014***	0.014***	0.013***
				(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
	Blame: substance	*[P2]*			0.863**	0.888**	0.894***
					(0.269)	(0.271)	(0.271)
	Blame: non-policy	*[P3]*			1.889***	1.908***	1.916***
					(0.467)	(0.466)	(0.467)
	Issue ownership	*[P4]*				0.134	-0.151
						(0.179)	(0.438)
	Ownership X Tone	*[P5]*					0.004
							(0.005)
	Constant		-2.252***	-3.641***	-3.548***	-3.573***	-3.494***
			(0.136)	(0.248)	(0.237)	(0.240)	(0.262)
	N		2,161	2,161	2,161	2,161	2,161
	Pseudo R square		0.0626	0.0834	0.101	0.101	0.101

*Standard error reported in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, † p<0.10.

6.5 Summary

In this chapter, the attack part of the attack and defend model was put to the test using the large-N sample of radio news and the corresponding measures of opposition responses in the form of parliamentary questions following up the news stories. Summarizing the results, three main points should be noted. First, news tone and blame attributions, both in the form of government criticism related to policy substance and in the form of challenges to

government competence or integrity, most definitely play a crucial contingent role in the media's agenda-setting influence on opposition parties. Their impact on opposition responses to news stories is consistently significant and strong across different estimations, making it very hard to reject the three first attack propositions ([P1], [P2] and [P3]) of the model. To illustrate, a one-sided bad news story ascribing blame to the government will make it to the opposition's agenda in nearly 1 out of 4 cases (and more than every second case for non policy blame). News mediation of negative developments in social problems constitutes government weakness in party competition, because position in office is accompanied by policy responsibility. In other words, government is to blame if something is not right, and paying attention to bad news helps the opposition broadcast the message of government weakness to the public. The fact that explicit responsibility attributions enhance this pattern provides further evidence of the decisive impact of policy responsibility in the part of the opposition-government game that centres on media attention. Another result pointing to the same conclusion is the way blame attributions were found to explain almost half the effect of news tone on opposition response. Again, the implication is that news on the negative state of a problem matters because it implicitly or explicitly brings up the question of who's to blame. In sum, the theoretical focus on policy responsibility and party competition which underlies the propositions on news tone and blame attributions seems justified.

Second, the part of the attack and defend model focusing on how parties prioritize news mediated problems according to their reputation of competence in the electorate also receives support, if not to the same extent as the above propositions. Both ownership propositions, [P4] and [P5], resonate with the empirical material. When the opposition enjoys ownership, chances of a news response are significantly higher although the observed difference in probabilities is much lower than for the two other core predictors. Also, the examination of the marginal effect of ownership as news negativity rises finds that opposition parties tend to make more use of electoral issue strengths the more negative stories get, a finding which was applicable for half the sample, that is, the range between 70 and 100 pct. negativity. But this multiplicative addition to the model does not raise the probability of opposition politicization a lot. Moreover, the supplementary analyses of response intensity fail to produce support for the ownership perspective. The conclusion is therefore that ownership matters for which stories the opposition goes for, but not for the level of attention they invest in these stories. More generally, the fact that news tone and blame attributions 'beat' owner-

ship also speaks to the added value that the policy responsibility perspective brings to existing models of political agenda-setting.

Third, the attack models indicate that both early and late government involvement in news stories influences opposition politicization. The former result, where government initiation of stories positively affects chances of a parliamentary question from opposition parties might not be a total surprise. However, awaiting the estimations of the opposite relationship in the next chapter, it does at least point to the way policy responsibility also brings with it agenda-setting opportunities. These might not always develop in a positive direction for government, as the media, the opposition and other actors put their spin and perspectives on the initial government statements or actions. Still, they are an expression of agenda strength, reflecting the fact that what government does often turn into news. Furthermore, the result showing that the Prime Minister's responses positively affect the propensity of an opposition reaction suggests that opposition and government attention to news stories are linked. The next chapter will show if this link is reciprocal, and whether opposition responses also have an impact on government response.

Finally, the measures taken to specify a model that takes account of important control variables and the always imminent threat of endogeneity in political agenda-setting research, in my opinion, produce conclusions that are more trustworthy than what is normally the case in the literature. As noted in Section 6.3, the impact of the independent variables of interest stand up to the strong influence of news saliency and the politics to news relationship measured through opposition initiation of, and blame attributions in, stories. And although mediation tests point to some overestimation of the influence of news tone in political agenda-setting, there is no indication that the attack and defend model produces explanations of opposition agenda-setting that are strongly biased.

Chapter 7
Defend! Government responses explained

Moving on in the presentation of the large-N results, this chapter examines the extent to which they support the propositions on government responses to news stories. As the previous chapter, it starts by specifying the multivariate regression model applied in the subsequent analyses, in a section which also includes a brief repetition of the core argument of the defend part in the attack and defend model. Note that the two equations, of attack and defend respectively, are close to identical with regard to the independent variables included. Therefore, some of the questions raised in Section 6.1 will not be fully readdressed here. The structure of the empirical part is also similar, beginning with a section on the core hypotheses and proceeding with discussions of the opposition-government dynamics and the influence of control variables. Finally, results are summarized and conclusions drawn on the validity of the proposed defend mechanisms in the attack and defend model.

7.1 The defend equation and argument in brief

As hinted in the introduction above, several aspects of the specification of the attack model apply equally to the defend model. Accordingly, this section is mostly dedicated to recapitulating the propositions on government responses, as these vary substantially from those in the previous chapter. Either directly in their expectations for the estimated parameters from the defend equation, or in the argument underlying the propositions. Issues regarding control variables and possibilities of misspecifications will mostly be debated in the sections presenting the empirical results, to the extent that they differ from the opposition analyses. Some repetitions are nevertheless unavoidable, and I therefore once again quickly remind the reader of the structure of the empirical material to be examined. The large-N dataset samples the radio news agenda in Denmark for approximately one year and contains information on 2161 news stories. Government response was measured through references to the news stories in the Prime Minister's weekly press meeting, totalling responses for 62 news stories.

In Chapter 3, I discussed how the literature on political agenda-setting lacks comparative perspectives on the role of office and policy responsibility in agenda-setting processes. This study aims to build a model of political

agenda-setting that rests on party competition and includes and explains media influence on both opposition and government attention. One of the strengths inherent to this approach is that the same theoretical perspectives are applied to model both actors' news responses. Or put differently, the model uses the opposition-government game as its point of departure and seeks to explain agenda-setting by the two actors' strengths and weaknesses in their competitive relationship. As argued repeatedly, policy responsibility and issue ownership are key factors determining these strengths and weaknesses for both opposition and government. In modelling terms, the consequence is that the independent variables of the defend equation are more or less the same as those found in the attack equation. The defend part of the model can be written in the following form:

$$GovResp = \alpha + \epsilon$$

$$+ \beta1*Tone + \beta2*BlameS + \beta3*BlameN + \beta4*Own + \beta5*ToneXOwn \quad \text{(Defend)}$$

$$+ \beta6*OppInit + \beta7*OppResp \quad \text{(Opponent influence)}$$

$$+ \beta8*Sal + \beta9*GovInit \quad \text{(Controls)}$$

where

α is the intercept and ϵ is an error term,

GovResp is government response to news stories measured as a dummy variable indicating whether a story was referred to in the PM's weekly press meeting,

Tone is news tone measured as a the percentage of bad radio news items broadcasted about a story,

BlameS is substance blame measured as a dummy variable indicating the presence of government criticism (including criticism from the opposition),

BlameN is non policy valence blame measured as a dummy variable indicating whether the story challenges government competence or integrity,

Own is issue ownership measured as a dummy variable indicating that the government is perceived to be most capable of handling the issue group to which the story belongs,

ToneXOwn is the interaction term of news tone and issue ownership,

OppInit is opposition initiation of stories measured as a dummy variable indicating whether the story was triggered by an opposition statement or action,

OppResp is opposition response to the news story measured as a dummy variable indicating the tabling of parliamentary questions,

Sal is news saliency measured as the number of radio news items broadcasted about a story,

GovInit is government initiation of stories measured as a dummy variable indicating whether the story was triggered by a government statement or action, and

$\beta 1$-$\beta 9$ are estimable parameters.

The core expectations regarding government response could next be expressed as a set of testable propositions regarding the size of the estimated parameters from the defend part of the above equation:

First, [$P1_{\text{Proactive defence}}$] translates into $\beta 1 < 0$, meaning that the estimated parameter of the news tone variable should reflect a significant and negative impact on government response. In other words, government response is more likely when news is good. The argument is that government competes by drawing attention to news mediation of positive developments in social problems (implicitly) reflecting government competence and ability in handling policy responsibilities. From this perspective, good news stories offer a government advantage in party competition. They enhance positive evaluations in the electorate and thereby represent a proactive strategy by which the legitimacy of present government is defended.

Second and third, [$P2_{\text{Reactive defence}}$] and [$P3_{\text{Reactive defence}}$] translate into $\beta 2 > 0$ and $\beta 3 > 0$, meaning that the estimated parameters of the substance blame and non policy blame variables should reflect a significant and positive impact on government response. In other words, government response is more likely when news stories attribute blame to the government, either through criticism related to policy substance or through non-policy valence events challenging government competence or integrity. These stories reduce the likelihood that government will get off the hook without suffering. To prevent damages, and at the same time be, or appear to be, responsive and competent, government is forced to switch from proactive defence to a secondary strategy of reactive defence and bad news response.

Fourth, [$P4_{\text{Proactive defence}}$] translates into $\beta 4 > 0$, meaning that the estimated parameter of the issue ownership variable should reflect a significant and positive impact on government response. In other words, government response is more likely when news stories belong to owned issue groups. The argument is that parties care about these issues and would like to see them prioritized in policy-making. At the same time, they stand to win electoral support if 'their' issues become salient. As media attention influences the issue attention of the public, parties should work to influence the composition of the media and public agenda in order to profit from their electoral issue strengths.

Fifth, [$P5_{\text{Proactive defence}}$] translates into $\beta 5 < 0$, meaning that the estimated parameter of the interaction between news tone and issue ownership should reflect a significant and negative impact on government response. In other words, opposition response to owned issues is more likely when good news attention increases. The argument holds that government mainly responds to bad news when it has no other choice (cf. [P3] and [P4]). Of course then,

there is little room to prioritize between negative stories, for instance according to ownership based preferences. The most plausible context in which electoral issue strengths could be put to use by the government is therefore when news is good. In these cases, no one demands a response and government parties are at liberty to pick the stories that suit them well in party competition.

Returning to the dynamic core of the attack and defend model, the defend equation explaining government response includes measures of early and late opposition attention in the course of the story debate. As in the attack chapter, the idea is to capture partly how the strategic choices of the competitive players of this game affect each other. Thus, the model contains two dummies, the first indicating whether news stories were initiated by something the opposition said or did, and the second whether opposition parties respond to the stories. Together with the results showing government influence on opposition response in the preceding chapter, these variables will be used to tap the degree of alignment between opposition and government attention. Moreover, together with corresponding results from the previous chapter, the present analyses will look for discernable patterns indicating who leads whom at the early and late stages of news story debates.

The five first parameters on the 'Defend' line of the equation – news tone, the two blame types, issue ownership and the interaction of ownership and news tone – are nearly identical to those used in the attack equation. Only one detail separates the two models in this respect. The substance blame variable used in the current chapter includes stories with government criticism voiced by the opposition. Remember that these stories were filtered out from the variable used to estimate the effect of blame attributions on the propensity of opposition parties to table parliamentary questions on news stories. The intention was to limit overestimation of news influence on party attention, as these stories (together with stories initiated by the opposition) were regarded as better proxies of opposition influence on news than of the opposite.

Consequently, instead of estimating ten parameters, three of which were controls, the defend equation has nine parameters: the first five, used to test the propositions on news tone, blame attributions and issue ownership; two measures of opposition attention found on the 'Opponent influence' line, expressing the same idea as in the attack chapter on how every player is affected by the choices of their opponent; and finally, the two (instead of three) control variables. First, news saliency, to which the discussions from Section 6.1.2 on omitted variable bias and the reciprocal relationship between media and politics apply equally here. Second, government initiation

of news stories to which the discussions about the threats of endogeneity from Section 6.1.2 also still apply.

7.2 News tone, blame attributions and issue ownership

As in the previous chapter, five multivariate logistic regressions are used to model the influence of the parameters of the defend equation on the limited dependent variable indicating government news response. Table 7.1 presents the results of the five models. Offhand, the results support some of the core propositions in the attack and defend model and suggest a reasonable fit to the data reflected in a pseudo R square of .16 (Model V). The estimated parameters β1, β2 and β5 are all significant and with the right sign, suggesting that news tone, blame attributions focusing on policy substance and the interaction of issue ownership and news tone perform in accordance with the defend propositions. However, β3 and β4 do not merit statistical significance, indicating that the propositions on the unmoderated effect of ownership [$P4_{Proactive\ defence}$] and on news that challenge government competence or integrity [$P3_{Reactive\ defence}$] should be rejected.

Bearing in mind that the coefficients of logistic regressions do not tell the whole story, this chapter also makes use of predicted probabilities of a successful outcome – that is, government response – when passing judgement on the defend propositions from Section 7.1. Apart from the estimation of the marginal effect of ownership when news tone changes [$P5_{Proactive\ defence}$], these estimations are based on Model IV (in grey), which includes all variables of interest not counting the interaction term. Note that the probabilities are consistently lower than in the opposition case. This is primarily related to differing agenda capacity of the institutions used to measure government and opposition attention. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the Prime Minister addresses approximately 5-8 issues in the speech at his weekly press meeting, adding up to a considerably lower number of response opportunities than that found in the institution of parliamentary questioning. I will therefore not focus on differences in the level or size of effects when comparing opposition and government.

Considering the proposed effect of news tone on government response first [$P1_{Proactive\ defence}$], Figure 7.1 shows the predicted probability that the Prime Minister will address a news story in his press meeting as the share of bad news rises. When all other variables are at their mean, the likelihood that government will politicize a news story which from its perspective is

completely negative is 1.5 pct. When the overall tone is balanced, the probability of response reaches 2.1 pct. And finally, when news is all good results indicate a government response in just above 3 pct. of the cases. The changes are small in absolute terms, but the movement across the range of the news tone variable is nevertheless accompanied by a doubling of the chances that government reacts to news coverage. News positivity thus contributes explaining media influence on government attention.

Table 7.1. Logistic regressions, dependent variable is government response to news stories (0=no response, 1=response)*

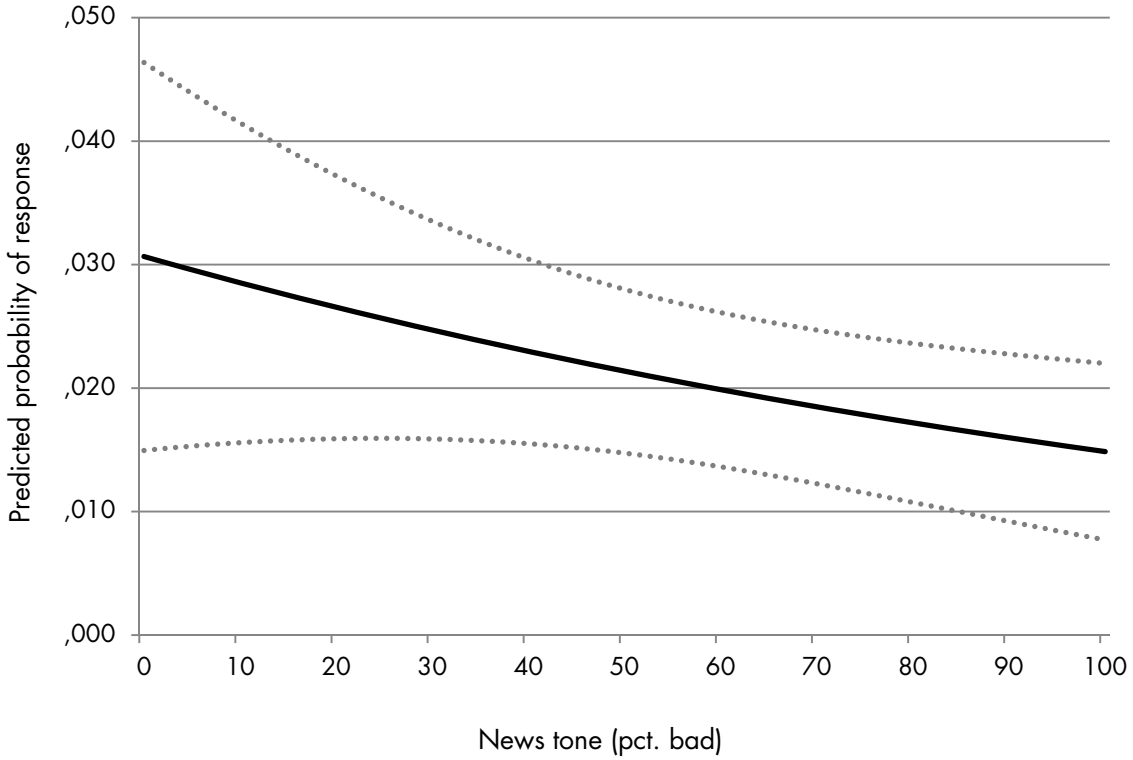
			Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV	Model V
Controls	Saliency		0.168***	0.168***	0.149***	0.148***	0.152***
			(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.033)
	Government initiation		1.016**	0.965**	0.748*	0.744*	0.755*
			(0.312)	(0.316)	(0.328)	(0.328)	(0.330)
Opponent influence	Opposition initiation		0.367	0.370	0.293	0.292	0.301
			(0.465)	(0.465)	(0.464)	(0.464)	(0.466)
	Opposition response		0.890**	0.952**	0.683†	0.674†	0.652†
			(0.319)	(0.327)	(0.355)	(0.357)	(0.358)
Defend	News tone (pct bad)	*[P1]*		-0.003	-0.007†	-0.007†	-0.002
				(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.005)
	Blame: substance	*[P2]*			0.926*	0.936*	0.932*
					(0.385)	(0.387)	(0.387)
	Blame: non-policy	*[P3]*			0.205	0.211	0.224
					(0.600)	(0.600)	(0.601)
	Issue ownership	*[P4]*				-0.101	0.762
						(0.302)	(0.501)
	Ownership X Tone	*[P5]*					-0.016*
							(0.008)
	Constant		-4.397***	-4.188***	-4.020***	-3.985***	-4.323***
			(0.196)	(0.290)	(0.288)	(0.305)	(0.374)
	N		2,161	2,161	2,161	2,161	2,161
	Pseudo R square		0.139	0.140	0.152	0.152	0.159

*Standard error reported in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, † p<0.10

Note, however, that the initial inclusion of the news tone variable in Model II, Table 7.1, does not significantly increase the model fit, and that the estimated parameter of news tone in this step is low and insignificant. Only after including blame attributions does this change, as the coefficient increases and passes the 10 pct. significance level. Substantially, this makes sense.

Remember that the defend model is two-dimensional, containing a proactive and a reactive government strategy. In other words, government mixes bad news and good news responses. Leaving out the blame variables, which are predictors of reactive defence, distorts the estimation of the proactive defence to be predicted by the news tone variable. Model III, where blame attribution is entered, therefore is able to distinguish the two strategies.

Figure 7.1. Predicted probability of government response to news stories as news negativity rises*

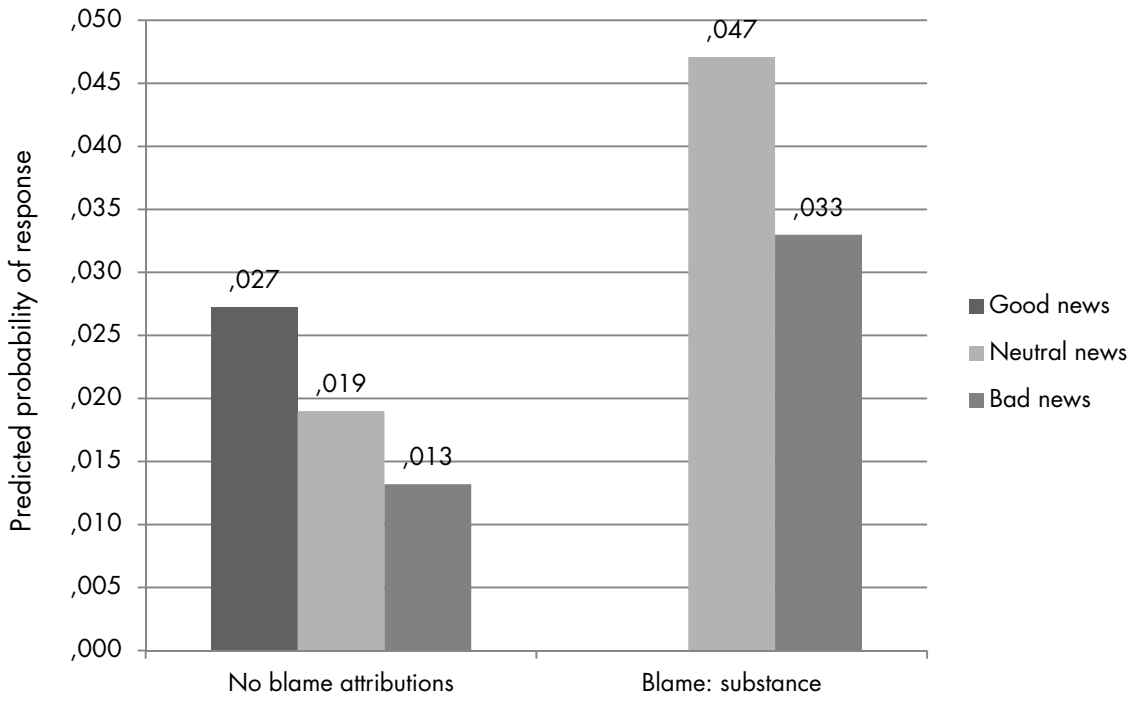


*Estimated with Model IV, Table 7.1. Rest of independent variables set at their mean.

Continuing with the blame variables, and the propositions that criticism related to policy substance [$P2_{\text{Reactive defence}}$] and episodes of incompetence or lack of integrity [$P2_{\text{Reactive defence}}$] force government to respond, we have seen that only the former expectation could be sustained by the empirical evidence. It seems as if government will ignore the attention generated by for instance ministers caught lying or other apparent examples of failure to comply with commonly accepted values of integrity, honesty and competence. The previous chapter found opposition parties eager to prioritize these stories on their agenda. Nevertheless, there is no indication that the Prime Minister systematically addresses these stories trying to defend the image of government, or the specific ministers involved, against opposition attacks

and negative news attention. When attributions of blame focus on policy substance, the picture of a reserved Prime Minister and an unaffected government changes. Thus, news without substance blame will only be picked up by the government in about 2 out of 100 cases (.017), while news with government criticism of this kind is likely to reach the Prime Minister's press meeting twice as often (.043). There is also an increase in model fit following the expansion from Model II to III, Table 7.1. But unlike in the opposition case, it is not significant. Consequently the conclusion is that the defend side of the model, with its focus on policy responsibility, news tone and blame attributions, make a positive but more modest contribution to the understanding of the political agenda-setting process.

Figure 7.2. Predicted probabilities of government response for good, bad and neutral* news with and without substance blame attribution**



* Stories with no bad features defined as 'Good news', 50 pct. bad as 'Neutral news' and 100 pct. bad as 'Bad news'. As the combination of good news and blame attributions does not occur, the figure only presents probabilities of neutral and bad news when blame attributions are present.
** Estimated with Model IV, Table 7.1. Non-policy blame set at zero, rest of independent variables set at their mean.

Next, I look more closely at news stories that combine different tones with the presence or absence of substance blame attributions. Figure 7.2 shows the predicted probabilities of five types of news coverage contexts.[39] The first

[39] I do not show show predicted probabilities of insignificant parameters from the models.

point of note is that increases in news positivity matter substantially also when blame has been attributed, as is illustrated by the two bars above 'Blame: substance'. Nearly every twentieth (4.7 pct.) neutral story containing government criticism will be commented on by the government. If news attention is decidedly bad though, the Prime Minister is less eager to answer to attributions of blame, with a response probability of 3.3 pct. The second point of note is that the two strategies of proactive and reactive defence, related to news tone and blame attributions respectively, indeed work to pull government behaviour in opposite directions, but that the latter seems to exercise a more forceful influence on government attention. Thus we observe in the figure that news with blame attributions and only bad radio broadcasts are more likely to engage the government (.033) compared to one-sided good news without blame (.027). However, in comparison to the relative strength of blame attributions in the opposition analyses, the impact of the two predictors is more evenly matched in the explanation of government responses.

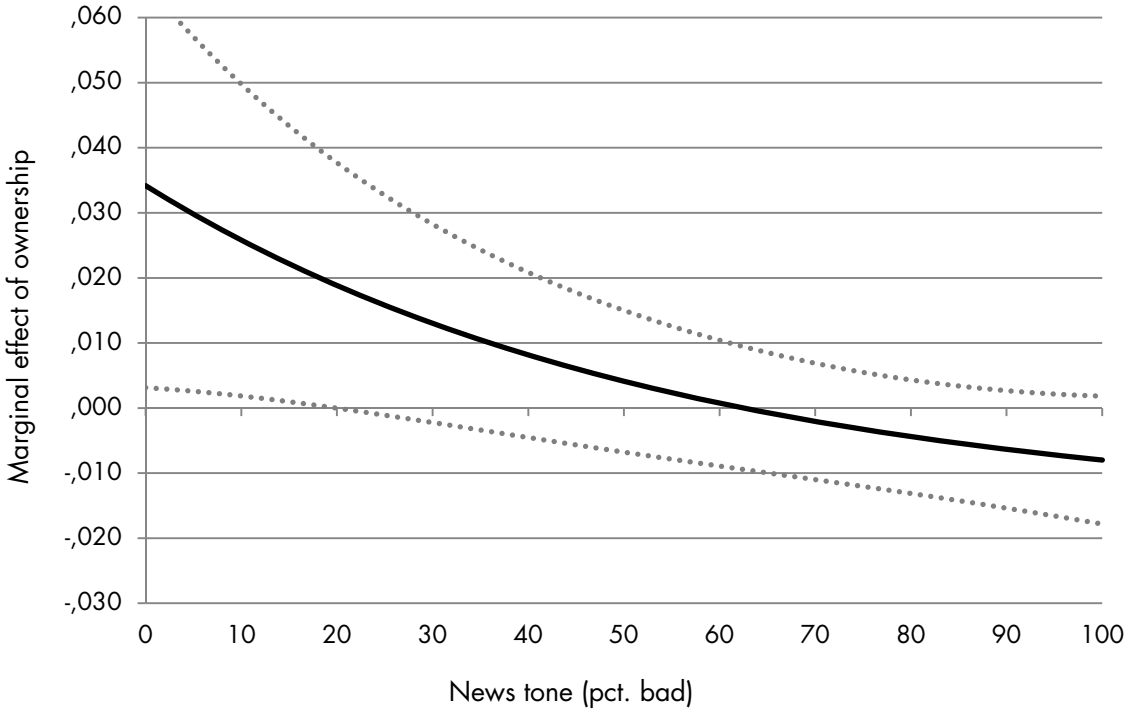
The logistic regressions reported in Model IV, Table 7.1, clearly rejected the proposition that issue ownership, in itself, influences the choices of government in political agenda-setting [$P4_{\text{Proactive defence}}$].[40] Although unexpected, this is nevertheless in accordance with the ranking of influences on party responses to news that the attack and defend model is built on. As in the opposition case, although ownership there was found to significantly predict response, the suggestion is that parties care more about whether news is good or bad than what type of issue it generates attention for. However, the notion that ownership matters also when media influence government attention, should not be fully dismissed. [$P5_{\text{Proactive defence}}$] argued that good news stories provide the most promising setting in which government could put its electoral issue strengths to use. As displayed in Model V, Table 7.1, the interaction term between ownership and news tone is negative and significant, meaning that government-owned issues are in fact more likely to be politicized as news become more positive. In light of the rejection of [$P4_{\text{Proactive defence}}$], this modified perspective on the impact of issue ownership in political agenda-setting seems to be worthwhile.

Although the interaction term was significant, the size and significance of the interaction should be examined across the range of the two variables to better understand the nature of the moderated effect (cf. Brambor et al,

[40] The coefficient changes sign, from negative to positive, when considering only the stories with clear ownership. However, it is still far from significant and this should therefore not disturb the conclusion.

2006). Figure 7.3 therefore presents the marginal effect of issue ownership on predicted probability of response as news negativity shifts across its full range from 0 to 100 pct. Remember that the dotted lines represent the upper and lower confidence level. Applying a 10 pct. significance level, we see that the proposed moderating role of news tone only holds when news negativity is below 20 pct.

Figure 7.3. Marginal effect of issue ownership on government response to news stories as news negativity rises.*



* Estimated with Model V, Table 7.1. Rest of independent variables set at their mean.

The range over which the interaction is applicable covers 20 pct. of the news stories in the large-N sample. Although this limits the contribution of the moderated ownership perspective, two points should be noted. First, the actual marginal effect in this range is quite comparable to the size of the other defend parameters. For instance, in the cases where news is all good, stories belonging to government-owned issues are 3.4 percentage points more likely to be addressed in the Prime Minister's press meeting compared to unowned ones. As news becomes less positive, this ownership boost deteriorates. At the 20 pct. bad news mark, owned issues lead over unowned issues by 2 percentage points. This development continues until the point when news is two-thirds negative; after that unowned issues are more likely to be selected. As pointed out above, the marginal effect above 20 pct. bad news is not significant. Substantially though, and this is the second point, this sup-

ports the expectation that issue ownership is used as a basis for news politicization only when stories are overwhelmingly good.

Overall then, the issue preferences inherent to the ownership concept do exercise some impact on government politicization, if only when news is mostly good from the point of view of the government. However, news in general, and salient news even more so, is rarely that positive. For instance, of the 109 stories in the sample for which 5 or more radio news features were broadcasted, 90 pct. have a negativity share above 20 pct. Government use of the ownership advantage is thus fairly restricted when compared to the opposition.

7.3 Opponent influence and the impact of control variables

The two remaining groups of variables from the attack and defend model, found in the 'Opponent influence' and 'Controls' parts of the equation in Section 7.1 and the corresponding rows in Table 7.1, will be discussed in this section. First, I look at the opposition – government dynamics of the model, or more precisely, how government response is influenced by what the opposition does at the early and later stages of a story. Second, the impact of the two control variables in the model will be elaborated upon. The focus will be on assessing the defend mechanism related to news tone, blame attributions and ownership in light of news saliency and government initiation of news. And also, on how the endogenous influence of the latter affects the estimated results.

As discussed in Chapter 6, the idea behind the 'opponent influence' part of the specified model is to explicitly model the opposition-government dynamics of ongoing news story debates. Put differently, the attack and defend model not only explains how the 'rules' of the opposition-government game work in political agenda-setting by theorizing a link between policy responsibility and party preferences towards different news characteristics. It also acknowledges that how the game unfolds, and specifically what your opponent does, will impact a player's choices with regard to news response. Turning then to the two estimated parameters of opponent influence, Model IV (Table 7.1.) only provides support for one of them. Whether a news story follows in the wake of an action or statement by the opposition seems to have no bearing on government politicization. Interestingly, the corresponding estimation of the influence of government initiation on opposition response was highly significant and positive in the opposition analysis. A tentative in-

terpretation would be that government leads this stage of the agenda-setting process. Position in office is accompanied by a stronger ability to impact the news agenda, and opposition attention is in turn significantly affected by the stories which are rooted in government actions or statements. However, this government advantage should be interpreted with care. The ability to set the media agenda is not accompanied by the power to determine the tone or the framing of the news story. It is the case, and this makes sense, that the stories initiated by government are more positive than the rest (cf. Table 5.3, Chapter 5). But a substantial share is still negative, with 28 pct. exclusively bad and 35 pct. more bad than good. Furthermore, government-initiated stories also clearly contain more blame attributions (cf. Table 5.3, Chapter 5). Moreover, as attention increases, government seems far less able to control the tone. For the most salient government-initiated stories, 55 pct. are more bad than good. It is these 'government rooted' stories, and not the lowly salient or predominantly good ones, to which the opposition mostly directs its attention. Consequently, government is typically not capable of converting its early agenda-setting advantage into politicization of positive issue attention.

Unlike opposition initiation, later opposition engagement in news story debates, measured through opposition response, is positively associated with the way the Prime Minister distributes his attention in his weekly press meeting. Looking at the predicted probabilities,[41] stories ignored by the opposition produce a government reaction 1.8 pct. of the time. If the opposition picks up a story, chances double and the probability of a government response reaches 3.6 pct. Bearing in mind the corresponding result in Chapter 6, the fact that positive opponent influence is confirmed with both the attack and defend equations, clearly suggests that the news agenda invites to issue and story dialogue through mechanisms other than those expressed in the overlapping strategies of opposition attack [$P2/P3_{Attack}$] and government reactive defence [$P2/P3_{Reactive\ defence}$].

Moving on to the 'controls' part of the defend equation, results across all five estimated models in Table 7.1 are consistent in terms of significance and signs. Both news saliency and government initiation of stories have a significant and positive impact on the propensity of government response. In sum, government triggering of news and high levels of media attention are, relatively speaking, very often observed prior to the Prime Minister addressing a

[41] Estimated on the basis of Model IV, Table 7.1. Dummy indicating opposition response set to 0, then to 1. Rest at their mean.

story. Evaluating their combined impact,[42] government likelihood of response approaches 6 pct. for highly salient news (5 features broadcasted, corresponding to the 95th percentile of the saliency variable) that was triggered by a government statement or action. In comparison, stories lacking both these control aspects only stand a 1.6 pct. chance of getting onto the government agenda.

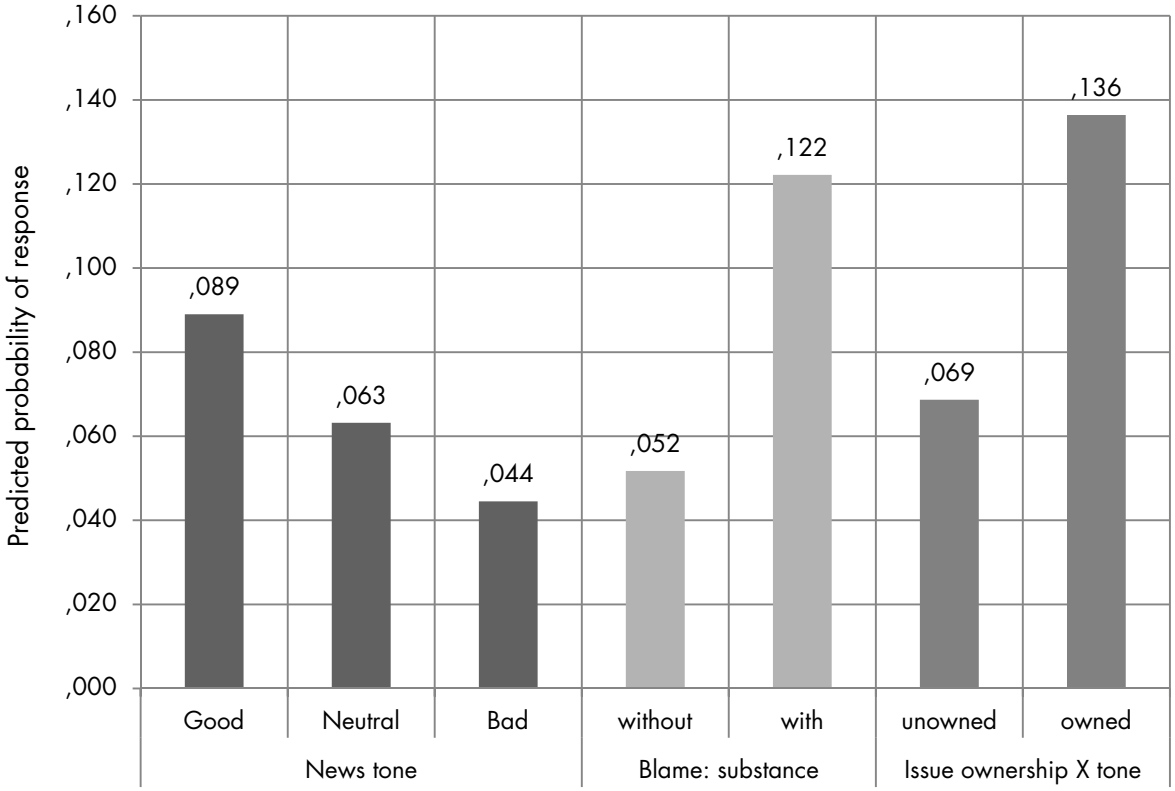
As in the previous chapter, the core propositions of the attack and defend model should be discussed in the light of the strong control predictors. To start with, the measures of model fit provided in Table 7.1 do suggest that the defend variables contribute to an increase in the precision with which political agenda-setting is modelled. However, this improvement is less pronounced than in the opposition case. The implication is that policy responsibility, although offering some initial agenda-setting advantages, provides less leeway for government to follow the strategies suggested by the attack and defend model. Compared to opposition parties, who seem more flexible and more at liberty to follow up stories framed in beneficial ways, government relations to the news agenda are relatively speaking more influenced by a combination of their own policy initiatives (Government initiation) and changes in news saliency. Still, this does not mean that the defend part of the model should be rejected. News tone, blame attribution and the interaction of ownership and tone are all significant predictors. To further contextualize their impact, I have estimated predicted probabilities of response for different values of the defend variables when the two control variables are at their most influential levels. Figure 7.4 displays the results, based on Model IV from Table 7.1.

The results show a clear pattern in government response behaviour, again illustrating the two opposite strategies of proactive and reactive defence. Looking at news tone first, the shift from good to neutral and from neutral to bad is followed by a decrease in response probabilities of approximately 3 and 2 percentage points respectively. Even when the two controls are 'turned on' the proactive defence strategy of good news politicization accounts for substantial differences in outcome. Thus, 1 out of every 11 good stories captures government attention (.089). Continuing to reactive defence and government response to negative attention, the presence of substance

[42] Estimated on the basis of Model IV, Table 7.1. Saliency set to 5 news items, corresponding to the 95th percentile of the saliency variable. Dummy indicating government initiation set to 1. Rest at their mean. When news is extremely salient and 11 features are broadcasted (corresponding to the 99th percentile), the response probability reaches 13 pct.

blame in salient and government-triggered news raises the response probability even higher. These stories stand a 12 pct. chance of government reaction, representing a 7 percentage points increase when compared to blame-free news. Finally, the moderated effect of issue ownership also delivers a convincing contribution to this model of media's agenda-setting influence on government attention. Evaluated at its maximum, that is when news is one-sidedly positive from the government's point of view, owned issues (.136) are clearly more prone to politicization than unowned ones (.069).

Figure 7.4. Predicted probabilities of government response when attention is high and stories are initiated by government*



* News tone and blame estimated with Model IV, Table 7.1. Saliency set to 5 news items. Dummy indicating government initiation set to 1. Rest at their mean. Probabilities for the interaction term, issue ownership X news tone, estimated with Model V, Table 7.1. Saliency set to 5 news items. Dummy indicating government initiation set to 1. Probabilities shown when news tone is good (0 pct. bad). Rest at their mean.

In sum, the proposed relationships of the attack and defend model do play a role in media's agenda-setting influence on government parties. There are tendencies indicating a closer balance between control variables and the theorized relationship behind the defend parameters in the model, at least when compared to the opposition. But the contribution of the policy respon-

sibility perspective is far from overshadowed by the strong impact of news saliency and government initiation of news. It nevertheless remains to be seen whether the endogenous influence captured by the latter variable forces a more moderate interpretation of the above findings.

Before examining this, the question whether news saliency also complicates the causal interpretation of the attack and defend model should be dealt with. Admittedly, political attention to news stories contributes to increasing their media coverage. As in the previous chapter, I therefore run identical regressions to those reported in Table 7.1 applying a recoded saliency variable where all radio news features broadcasted after the first government response (Prime Minister's reference to the story at his weekly press meeting) were excluded. Substantially, the results for the defend mechanisms stay the same, in terms of the signs and significance of the estimated coefficients. The only noteworthy change concerns the opponent influence aspect of the model, measured through the Opposition response variable. In the re-estimations explained above, this parameter is no longer significant. Seeing that the three variables of saliency and opposition and government response are closely connected, I should perhaps be careful not to overemphasize the opponent influence aspect of the defend equation. Still, it should be underlined that the re-estimations proved no serious threats to the core of the model as a consequence of the strong and reciprocal relationship between news attention and political agendas.

The positive correlation between high levels of attention and the presence of blame attributions in news (cf. Section 5.1), furthermore makes it appropriate to ask whether the latter could explain some of the strong effect that the former has on government responses. As with the mediation tests in the previous chapter, the assumption is yet again that blame attributions offer more precise information with which to model responses, and specifically with which to explain particular aspects of salient stories that make government react. Hence, the observed change in the saliency coefficient, dropping from .168 to .149, when blame attributions are entered into the equation (in Model III), is indicative of a mediated effect. A mediation test estimates that approximately 16 pct. of the saliency effect impacts government response indirectly through the presence of substance blame in news. Remembering that the picture was more or less the same for the relationship of saliency and blame effects in the opposition models, this again corroborates the conclusion that the attack and defend model offers a clearer understanding of political agenda-setting by emphasizing the fundamental role that policy responsibility and party competition play for the parties that take part in these processes.

Finally, I need to address the potentially endogenous influence of government initiation of news stories on the attack and defend model. Once again I will briefly repeat the precautions taken to restrict the possibility that the model ascribes changes in political attention to the influence of news, when in fact the causal influence flows in the opposite direction. First, a time lag was applied in the data collection so that the media variables were measured before opposition and government response. Second, to capture party behaviour and interest in the news stories prior to the measures of party responses, a variable (Government initiation) indicating whether government statement or actions were crucial to the initiation of a story was included. Interpreting this variable's estimated parameter provides a proxy of the actual impact of the endogenous processes of the media to politics relationship. Across all five models in Table 7.1, the coefficient is significant and positive. The size is, however, noticeably reduced as blame attributions are included in Model III. Redoing the step-wise inclusions in the opposite order results in a decrease in the substance blame parameter (1.183 to .936) when the government initiation variable is entered. Running a mediation test supports the suggestion that a considerable proportion (38 pct.) of the effect that early government story involvement has on later government response runs through blame attributions. This should be interpreted as an indication that some of the apparent effect of explicit government criticism in news is likely to be better explained by prior government interest and engagement in stories.

Comparatively then, the indications that the attack and defend model overestimates the influence of news characteristics in political agenda-setting are stronger in the government than in the opposition case. More specifically, a more than marginal share of government responses to news is explained by their prior interest in the topics of the stories. This prior attention from government is a central cause behind the rise of these stories on the media agenda, and later government response should therefore not necessarily be attributed the tone or presence of blame in them. As a last step in the validation of the results of this chapter, I therefore re-estimate the defend model, filtering out all the stories initiated by the government. In the resulting sample of 1888 news stories (compared to the original 2161 stories), the model fit is markedly reduced. However, all independent variables of interest, as well as the measure of opponent influence, retain their signs and still qualify as statistical significant predictors of government attention. The contribution provided by the attack and defend model, proposing a proactive and a reactive government strategy towards the news agenda, therefore

seems to stand also when trying to account for the strongly reciprocal relationship between media and politics.

7.5 Summary

In this chapter, the defend part of the attack and defend model was put to the test using the large-N sample of radio news and the corresponding measure of government responses in the form of references to the news stories in the Prime Minister's weekly press meeting. Results are less clear-cut than in the opposition case, rejecting two of the five propositions from Section 7.1. Nevertheless, the analyses still muster support for the three core expectations related to news tone, blame attributions and issue ownership. Patterns compatible with a strategy of proactive defence are clearly present in the data-set, as good news is significantly and positively related to government response [P1]. In the constant stream of news stories, much of which mediates the state of social problems in a negative way while at the same time addressing government responsibility, positive news constitutes government strength in media-centred party competition. It has the potential to build and defend the government's competence image and the legitimacy of its position in office. Policy responsibility then, as witnessed by the opposite mechanisms observed for opposition and government parties, is accompanied by a shift in attention and a stronger preference for positivity in political communication.

In the second proactive defence strategy to be supported, government behaviour conforms to the expectation that good news offers a context in which issue ownership could be put to use [P5]. Increases in news positivity make it more likely that government will prioritize stories that belong to 'their' issues. And when the share of bad radio news features is below 20 pct., the marginal effect of issue ownership makes a substantial difference comparable to the impact of other predictors in the model. On the other hand, news, and especially salient news, is rarely that good. This, together with the fact that ownership alone proved to be an insignificant predictor of government politicization [P4], suggests a stronger restriction on government (compared to opposition) use of the advantages of electoral issue strengths. This point aside, results from the large-N study so far suggest that government and opposition strategies of proactive defence and attack, based on news tone and ownership, together work to increase the gap between what government and opposition parties talk about.

The positive results with regard to [P2] substantiates the expectation that parties in office shift from proactive to reactive defence when news contain

blame attributions. [P3] was rejected, indicating that the impact of blame is mostly explained by government criticism relating to policy substance, and not to non-policy valence events challenging government competence or integrity. Ignoring is no longer as attractive as for regular bad news, because of the explicit link these stories make between government and negative developments in social problems. In order to restore public confidence in government, be responsive and display responsiveness, the Prime Minister is therefore more inclined to respond to negative news attention when it contains government criticism. The ability of the defend estimations to distinguish between the two opposing strategies of proactive and reactive defence is in itself strong testimony to the theoretical argument underlying the model. As shown in Table 7.1, news tone is not initially a significant predictor of what government is likely to do (Model II). But when blame attributions are accounted for (Model IV and V), both strategies are empirically observable. By means of a fairly simple framework, concentrating on policy responsibility, issue ownership and party competition, it is thus possible to make sense of the relatively speaking complex motivations and contexts underlying how government relates to media reflections of social problems. Results confirm the dual strategy. Government response is more likely as news becomes more positive, but when a news story attributes responsibility for a problem to the government, the attention of the Prime Minister is easier to catch even though news is bad.

Next, the positive results of the opponent influence part of the estimated models point to the same preliminary conclusion as in Chapter 6. That is, when faced with the media agenda, opposition and government distribute their attention in ways which are positively associated. Although characteristics like news tone and ownership foster divergence in opposition and government agendas, an underlying force of alignment brings the two actors closer together. It could be argued that this only reflects the composition of the investigated sample, where numerous politically irrelevant news stories are mixed with stories holding political potential. That is, the actors are not primarily reacting to each other. Instead the alignment comes about as a consequence of both actors prioritizing a set of stories which might be labelled 'political in nature'. To determine the validity of this objection, I constructed a subset of the sample including only stories which either directly or indirectly involve public authorities (on national, regional or local level) or the making of, or implementation of, their policies. The remaining sample of 829 stories gives further evidence of the strength of the attack and defend model. Not only because the opponent influence part is confirmed (in both the attack and defend estimations) after excluding the cases that are most likely to

be ignored by political parties,[43] but also because the other general features of the original opposition and government estimations remain intact.

Finally, it was noted that government initiation of news was a significant predictor of opposition response, while opposition initiation did not qualify as such in the explanations of government response. This corresponds to an 'early' agenda-setting advantage of government being able to influence the news agenda directly and the attention of the opposition indirectly. In light of the overall results, one implication is that the two actors have different strengths in political agenda-setting, and that they calibrate their strategies towards the media accordingly. Government uses its position in office to 'plant' stories on the media agenda, or less intentionally, they initiate news coverage by way of their statements and actions. Meanwhile parties without government power are less likely to spark news coverage, and instead follow up those parts of the media agenda which are likely to weaken government and benefit themselves. Although one would initially think of the former approach as a more powerful one, the drawback comes in the form of less control of the content and tone of the news attention that follows in the wake of government initiatives. Opposition parties on the other hand can, and must, wait until stories break. By then, the tone of the coverage is of course a known quantity, with the consequence that opposition parties can exercise more control over the characteristics – if not the actual story – that they choose to politicize.

As underlined in the conclusion of Chapter 6, the measures taken to specify a model that takes account of important control variables and the reciprocal relationship between media and politics, in my opinion, produce conclusions that are more trustworthy than what is normally the case in the agenda-setting literature. Results show that the impact of the independent variables of interest stands up to the strong influence of news saliency and the politics to news relationship measured through government initiation of stories. On the other hand, is it also evident that government exercises a considerable agenda-setting influence on the media. Consequently, mediation tests point to a noticeable overestimation of the influence of blame attributions in political agenda-setting. Still, the defend model stands also when endogenous processes are taken into account in various ways. In sum, although overestimation is most likely present, the validations strengthen confidence in the results of the chapter.

[43] The 'political in nature' sample holds 71 and 80 pct. of government and opposition responses respectively.

However, some drawbacks of the large-N analyses are not easily addressed through additional estimations on the same material. First of all, the comparison between opposition and government is in want of a more comparable empirical measurement of the two actors' responses to news. Each of the two measures applied above, opposition parliamentary questions and the Prime Minister's weekly press meeting, makes sense in a study of media influence on party attention. Thus, they could also be used to compare. The validity of this comparison would nevertheless increase if the proxies of party responses were more similar or even identical. The next chapter, reporting the results of the medium-N study, answers this objection. Moreover, it offers an opportunity to test the core propositions of the attack and defend model through the use of another media outlet, national newspapers. Finally, through its focus on the day-to-day coverage of a smaller number of highly salient issues, it provides a context for testing the special conditions posed by heightened media attention.

Chapter 8
Validating and challenging the attack and defend model

The fourth empirical chapter presents the results of the medium-N study, where the decisive role of policy responsibility in political agenda-setting is re-examined in another news context. Tracing the day-to-day coverage of a handful of stories in five national newspapers, the applicability of the attack and defend model is tested outside the radio news institution. Using identical, and more extensive, measures of response for parties in as well as outside office allows for more direct comparisons. Hence the chapter presents and discusses opposition and government models – and case examples – together where possible. Instead of repeating the core argument, the second section re-introduces the design of the medium-N study, including a brief overview of the samples to be analysed. The results are then presented in two main empirical sections. The first focuses on the task of validating and illustrating the results on news tone and blame attributions[44] of the large-N radio news study by means of case examples from, and bivariate analyses of, a sample of 30 newspaper stories. In the second I look closer at 15 highly salient stories, using case examples and bivariate as well as multivariate analyses in order to confront the challenge that heightened media attention poses to the attack and defend model. First however, the purpose of the study should be detailed.

8.1 Purpose of the medium-N study

Three main considerations dominated the design of the study. First, the purpose was to provide a basis for validating the results of the large-N study, this time in the context of news story coverage in national newspapers. Even more important than the change in media outlet was the effort to capture a

[44] The medium-N study concentrates on news tone and blame, leaving out the proposition related to issue ownership. Ownership effects have been established in the literature, while the impact of policy responsibility is new and in need of more documentation. Furthermore, in comparison with the other predictors the large-N study found more modest contributions of the ownership variable. As it also operates on the issue level and does not vary during the course of news stories debates, it was assumed that ownership effects would be difficult to detect when looking at a smaller sample of stories, and their day-to-day coverage.

broader picture of the government agenda. Thus, building on political claims analysis (Koopmans, 2002), the study coded claims from both government ministers and leading government MPs (spokespersons on the relevant policy topics) found in the news coverage of the selected stories. I will not repeat the concept of claims in detail (cf. Chapter 4), but simply say that it is a proxy of party responses to news stories covering *direct quotes* as well as *references to actions or statements* by opposition and government actors. The investigation of government through the Prime Minister's weekly press meeting was in this way supplemented with an extensive measure in the present study. In addition, by operationalizing both opposition and government responses as claims in newspaper articles, their respective agenda-setting patterns were more comparable.

The second main consideration was to acquire a close-up picture, or rather several, of the political agenda-setting processes under study. In this respect, the chosen design holds a couple of advantages. For instance, the selection of stories that were 'political in nature', meets the possible objections that might be raised against the large-N study for including the entire media agenda – and thus, a considerable amount of stories that would never make it to any political agenda. Furthermore, the design of the study opens for more details, both in the form of case examples illustrating the core mechanisms, and in the form of analyses of day-to-day news story coverage and party responses.

Last but not least, the third main purpose was more theoretical. In Chapter 3 I discussed previous perspectives on heightened media attention, variously labelled media hypes, issue waves or 'spikes of attention', suggesting that such stories are too important to be ignored. The collected large-N radio news material shows that 63 pct. of government responses and 83 pct. of opposition responses come when news is more bad than good. But when news is highly salient,[45] this apparent gap closes considerably and 86 pct. of government responses and 96 pct. of opposition responses follow in the wake of bad news. This, together with the fact that they more often provoke reactions from both opposition and government, suggests two important aspects of highly salient news. First, the almost self-evident fact that these stories account for much of the observed media effects in previous, and the present, agenda-setting research. This is of course because they capture the core agenda-setting idea, where surges of attention in one agenda 'spill

[45] Highly salient defined as the top 5 pct. of the measured news agenda, thus covering 109 stories with 5 or more radio news items broadcast (equalling the 95th percentile of the saliency variable).

over' to others. Second, they hold a challenge for the attack and defend model. More precisely, it is the assumptions regarding government strategies which are under pressure. If highly salient news is simply too important to be ignored, then what about the government strategy of responding to good while ignoring bad news [$P1_{\text{Proactive defence}}$]?

Highly salient news, then, introduces an even harder test of the attack and defend model, making it crucial to examine if the government can politicize positive news attention to its advantage during 'issue waves'. The argument here acknowledges the implications of these perspectives expecting all parties to attend to the top stories on the news agenda. I nevertheless argue, and show, that the assumptions of the attack and defend model still hold. Even though parties might have to respond, they still have a choice regarding when and with how much attention. What defines these stories is their intense and prolonged coverage, often stretching over several weeks and usually involving several (or all) news outlets. Thus, as noted earlier, many sources and perspectives are communicated, which will often bring about variation in news content. When news tone and blame vary, parties are in a position to respond strategically to news by timing their engagement in the story dialogue. Consequently, the proposed behavioural imperatives of policy responsibility expressed in [$P1_{\text{Proactive defence}}$] (and [$P2/P3_{\text{Reactive defence}}$]) should still apply, leading the government to increase its response on those days when reflections of social problems are more positively portrayed in news coverage. As in previous models, opposition parties are expected to do the opposite. To approach this within story variation, the highly salient news story sample will be disaggregated into daily newspaper coverage (see below).

8.2 Design and sample characteristics

All variables belonging to the attack and defend model were operationalized and discussed in Chapter 4. This section therefore concentrates on explaining and presenting the different samples that were constructed and applied in the empirical analyses of the medium-N study. Based on the considerations presented in the previous section, two samples were drawn containing 15 highly salient and 30 less salient news stories respectively (cf. Chapter 4). Moreover, one of the main arguments in the dissertation is that political agenda-setting processes should be studied systematically on a sub-issue or micro-level, approaching the variation to be found within issue categories but without restricting the empirical and comparative scope to longitudinal changes for single cases. In nearly the same way as the large-N

study deconstructs issues into stories, the highly salient sample was therefore disaggregated in order to examine how government and opposition parties time their responses during heightened media attention. Day was chosen as the time unit by which to study the dynamics of these stories. Most of them contained daily newspaper coverage throughout the three weeks that were defined as the maximum coding period. Both intensity of coverage and tone of coverage exhibited substantial variation from day to day within each story in the sample. This suggested that changes occurred rapidly and that the development of the stories need not be studied on, for instance, a weekly basis with a slower change rate in mind. The resulting day-to-day sample thus contains a total of 167 days of newspaper coverage for the 15 stories.

Table 8.1 presents the three samples in the form of simple descriptives of the variables applied in the empirical sections below. The two story-level samples indeed live up to their respective labels as less and highly salient, with a mean number of newspaper articles of 3 and 50 respectively. Interestingly the share of bad news was slightly higher in the less salient sample. This is not totally unexpected, as previously discussed in Chapter 5.[46] However, while the less salient sample covers the full range of news tone values (0-100), there are in fact no one-sided good stories in the highly salient sample where news negativity ranges between 29 and 98 pct. Moreover, 73 pct. of the highly salient stories are more bad than good, compared to only 60 pct. in the less salient sample. Note also that the share of bad news rises (to 68 pct.) when the highly salient stories are disaggregated into daily news coverage. The reason is that bad stories last more days and thus make up a larger share in the day-to-day sample than in the story-level sample.

Table 8.1 clearly shows how highly and less salient news can be differentiated in terms of blame attributions. Only 20 pct. of the less salient stories contain government criticism or challenges to government competence or integrity. In the sample of highly salient news, all but 1 story contain some form of blame attributions lifting the mean value of this dichotomous variable

[46] Less salient bad news more often reaches 100 pct. negativity due to fewer sources and perspectives being used in the typical short-lived coverage of 3-4 newspaper articles from the 5 national dailies in the sample. Another aspect of the top stories that often brings about a more diverse tone in news attention is the fact that these stories are followed up by independent/internal news production in each of the national news papers. Less salient stories might also be reported in several papers, but the news production is then more often dominated by the text delivered from news agencies. For the top-stories, each paper will devote resources and space, producing commentaries, editorials and interviews. And because the papers have different political leanings, they often bring different perspectives to the debate.

to 0.87. Furthermore, the corresponding share in the day-to-day sample was substantially lower (54 pct.), indicating that although most of these stories at some point in time contain blame attributions there is still plenty of variation in the coverage of stories from day to day.

Table 8.1. Descriptives of variables applied in the analyses of the three medium-N samples

Variable name	Less salient sample, N=30 stories			Highly salient sample, N=15 stories			Highly salient sample, day to day, N=167 days		
	Mean	Std. dev.	Min-	Mean	Std. dev.	Min-Max	Mean	Std. dev.	Min-Max
Opposition response	1.17	1.66	0-6	27.6	28.2	0-103	2.44	3.76	0-20
Government response	1.47	1.66	0-8	31.1	33.9	1-128	2.80	5.66	0-53
Government initiation	0.07	0.25	0-1	0.47	0.52	0-1	0.41	0.49	0-1
Saliency	2.97	1.75	1-7	47.5	32.4	10-122	4.26	5.18	1-35
News tone (pct. bad)	65.30	42.00	0-100	63.9	21.1	29-98	68.00	32.6	0-100
Blame attributions*	0.20	0.41	0-1	0.87	0.35	0-1	0.54	0.50	0-1

* Combination of substance and non-policy valence blame.

In terms of the role that government plays in triggering news stories, this is much more visible in highly salient news where 47 pct. are initiated by government statements or actions compared to only 7 pct. in the less salient sample. Also, the same considerable difference is found for the two dependent variables of opposition and government response. The mean number of coded claims from opposition and government actors in the less salient sample was 1.2 and 1.5 respectively. But during heightened media attention, these averages rise to +/- 30. Remember though, that the way claims are coded means that the possibility of overestimating response increases when news attention increases.[47] Making a simple re-coding, dividing the number of claims by the number of newspaper articles will seriously underestimate the level of response. Nevertheless, such a measure still shows a higher mean response for highly salient news, indicating that the original claims variables are more than functions of the number of news articles.

[47] The set of claims coded for each story is not a reconstruction of the actors' participation in the news story debate. For instance, the presence of the same statement in two different newspapers counts as two claims. When news coverage intensifies then, and for instance 5 newspapers follow a story, the number of claims is likely to be more boosted than for those stories that are only covered in 1 or 2 papers. A more 'true to life' reconstruction of the statements and actions of all opposition and government actors involved, for 45 stories covered in more than 800 newspaper articles is not an achievable goal for this project. And as I do not focus on comparing the intensity of responses in the two samples, it would also have been of questionable value.

Before proceeding to the empirical analyses it should be noted that endogeneity could more easily disturb the results here than in the large-N study. The fact that parties influence the media agenda and that it is often hard to determine the direction of causality means that the literature on political agenda-setting most likely tends to overestimate news influence on party agendas. The problem specific to the medium-N study is, however, that the dependent and several of the independent variables of interest are measured in the same newspaper articles. As detailed in Chapter 4, and briefly repeated above, direct quotes and references to actions or statements by opposition and government actors in newspaper articles were coded as claims. Consequently, the challenge lies in distinguishing the political claims in an article from the coding of the article's tone. The attack and defend model holds that issue developments, portrayed through news tone, influence the propensity of opposition and government response in different ways. But it is also a fair assumption that government and opposition claims affect the news tone of articles, thereby biasing the conclusions on the causal relationship under study.

To meet this challenge, the tone of the news article was to be coded separately from the claims of the political actors. In practice this meant that quotes or references to actions or statements from the opposition and the government were ignored in coding of tone. However, while this could help the coder it doesn't deal with the problem that those who produce the articles might be influenced by the political claims to be reported in them. In order to check the validity of the sampled data, I therefore ran several analyses on a specially designed version of the data set. For each story, I randomly divided the articles that were printed each day in two subsamples (as long as there were at least four articles on the story that day). One group was used to measure news tone and blame attributions; the other was used to measure government and opposition responses. In this way, the independent and dependent variables were not measured in the same articles, thus avoiding the most imminent threat of news tone being severely influenced by government or opposition claims. Results of regressions on this validation data-set confirm the main conclusions of the multivariate analyses in Section 8.5.[48]

[48] The number of units was reduced, as I only included the cases where a story was covered in at least four newspapers on a specific day. Still, in the government models both the news tone variable and the blame attribution variable are significant and with the right sign. In the opposition models, the blame variable is significant and positive. The news tone coefficient initially shows the expected sign, but becomes insignificant when blame attributions are entered in the model. Consider-

8.3 Validation: Tone, blame and party responses in newspaper stories

Chapter 6 and 7 found news tone to matter for both opposition and government responses to stories. Consequently, the assumed role of policy responsibility in determining party preferences towards good and bad news was supported. The current section uses one of the two medium-N samples, containing 30 less salient stories, to validate and elaborate on this aspect of the attack and defend model. Looking at news tone and party responses first, Figure 8.1 displays the average number of opposition and party responses for stories with different shares of negative attention. The overall pattern corresponds closely to the expectations for both opposition [$P1_{Attack}$] and government [$P1_{Proactive\ defence}$]. In the former case, the dark grey opposition bars show an increase in responses as news negativity grows. When stories are overwhelmingly positive from the point of view of government (Good), MPs from opposition parties rarely engage with claims in the newspaper coverage (0.11). However, news that reflects negative issue developments incurs opposition attention more often and more intensively, averaging nearly 2 responses per story (1.82). In the case of the government, the light grey bars indicate a converse relationship. Admittedly, MP spoke-persons and ministers from government parties become more involved when news is Good/Neutral (3.00) than when news is predominantly positive (2.11). But at 'the other side of neutral', newspaper coverage musters far less attention decreasing gradually to less than one response (0.82) for stories that are predominantly negative. The resulting picture thus forms an expressive x-shape in the figure with the two opposite response patterns crossing each other.

Note, however, that it is only for the really bad news that the opposition engages more than the government. As discussed in Chapter 4, one should be careful when interpreting the absolute number of claims by the two actors. For instance, there are editorial processes at play, in which position in office increases news value and possibly boosts the number of government claims relative to opposition claims. However, the same pattern emerges when the response variable is recoded to measure response for each story relative to the maximum attention paid to a story in the less salient sample (6 for the opposition, 8 for the government). Thus, one could see that the gov-

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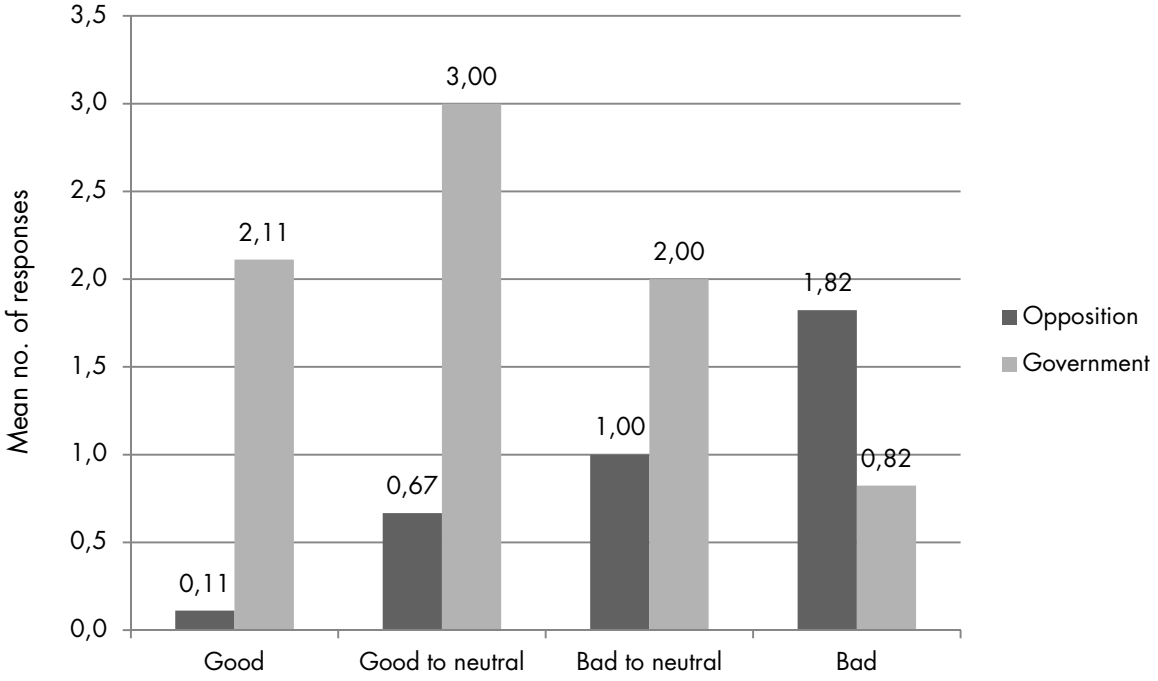
ing the significant and high correlation between the two variables, and between the two variables and opposition response respectively, this suggests that blame attributions mediate some of the effect that news tone has on opposition response. A mediation test supports this interpretation, as was also the case in the large-N opposition analyses in Chapter 6.

ernment does take part in the debates on bad news, while the opposition stays out of good news, as another indication of the more complex nature of government behaviour. From the attack and defend perspective, this conforms to the strategy of reactive defence, which makes sense of government response to bad news as long as stories contain blame attribution.

Figure 8.1. Mean no. of opposition and government responses for Good, Good to Neutral, Bad to Neutral and Bad news stories (N=30)*



* Good = 0-25 pct. bad, Good to Neutral = 26-50 pct. bad. Bad to Neutral = 51-75pct. bad. Bad = 76-100 pct. bad.

The above documented relationships can also be witnessed through the significant and fairly strong correlations between news tone and party responses, showing .431 for the opposition and -.370 for the government. Moreover, even when we control for news saliency and the presence of blame attributions in multivariate regressions, the same significant and positive versus negative effects appear. In combination with the large-N results, there seems to be solid empirical documentation emphasizing news tone as an important predictor of divergent patterns in opposition and government responses to news stories.

To show how these mechanisms play out in news story debates, and further substantiate the attack and defend claim of my model, a few case ex-

amples will be described briefly.[49] First, when news about a 25 pct. reduction (from 2002 to 2003) in the number of asylum seekers coming to Denmark broke in February 2004, this was undoubtedly good news for a government who was championing tougher immigration policies. Furthermore, it was framed favourably in terms of government responsibility. A report by an independent economic research institute pointed to the considerable expenditure cuts due to government imposed restrictions on immigration. News was good, and government was responsible. Throughout the coverage of the story, the opposition remained quiet. The government on the other hand, did not let this opportunity pass. The Minister for Employment from the Liberal Party went on record, commenting the reduction. As to the label of proactive defence, which this example illustrates, his comments clearly served the function of credit claiming, proactively building the public image of a competent government: 'It is satisfactory to see that the government's policies have had such a direct effect'.[50] News attention was nevertheless not sustained, which illustrates the restrictions of proactive defence as a way of politicizing government success.

Countering the argument that the above example could be attributed to issue ownership (as immigration belonged to the government), the next story suggests the same mechanism for the traditionally opposition owned issue of health care. News came out in April 2003 that waiting time, and waiting lists, for several hospital procedures had been considerably reduced following a supplementary budget appropriation by the government. The Liberal Minister for Health was quick to claim credit and generate attention to the fact that the government prioritized health care with results: 'The saline injection has worked'[51]; 'This is a very fine and a very satisfactory result'.[52] Again, the opposition stayed out of the debate, a strategic choice perfectly in accordance with the attack and defend perspective. Even though it has traditionally been associated more positively with health care issues than the parties in government, a possible engagement and attack in the context of government success would allow the government to sustain the positive news attention generated by the story. Ignoring, cheating the media of a conflict angle on the story, is the best way to battle the government advantage that positive news brings with it.

[49] All case examples in the chapter have been drawn from the same medium-N samples as those applied in the bivariate and multivariate analyses.
[50] Claus Hjort Frederiksen (L) to *Jyllands-Posten*, 8 February 2004.
[51] Lars Løkke Rasmussen (L) to *Politiken*, 28 April 2003.
[52] Lars Løkke Rasmussen (L) to *Berlingske Tidende*, 29 April 2003.

The tables are turned in the stories that feature negative attention. In September 2003, *Jyllands-Posten* described how the Danish forces in Iraq engaged in operations before the medical personnel had an operative field hospital.[53] During one of these missions, a civilian Iraqi was shot and killed. The field doctor later informed that he would have been unable to save the man, partly because of severe injuries and partly because his equipment was still in containers. The story, belonging to the traditionally right-wing and government owned issue of defence, attracted considerable attention from the left-wing opposition. Parliamentary spokespersons on defence from the Social Democrats and the Red-Green Alliance engaged, tabling parliamentary questions and issuing statements in the media. The attack strategy is clearly reflected in the following quote: 'Hopefully, the defence minister has a damn good explanation'.[54] Which he of course might have had, but he was reported to be on holiday and did not comment on the story, which (at least in the media) had disappeared by the time he was back.

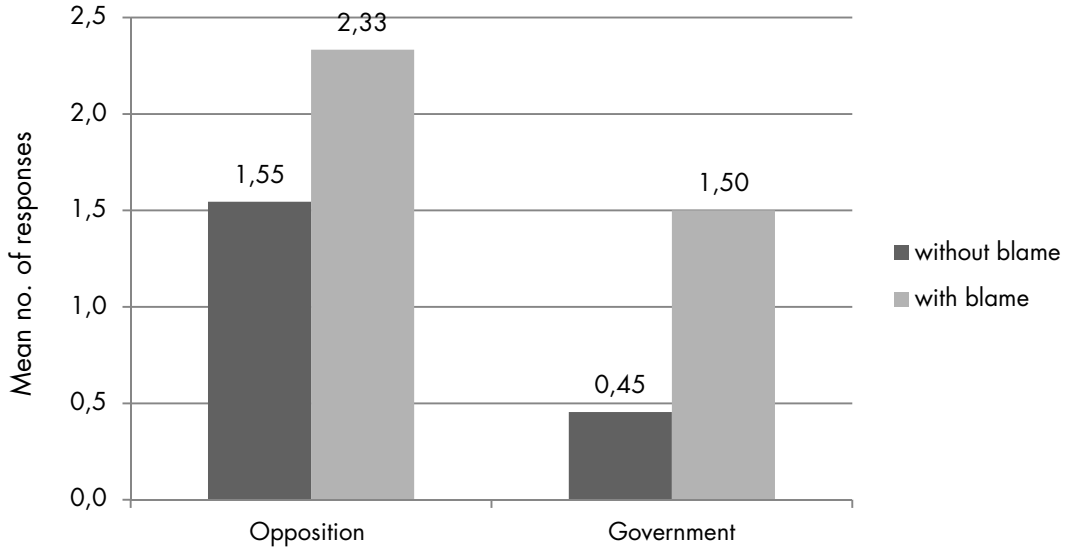
Turning to blame attributions, only 6 of the 30 selected stories in the less salient sample feature explicit government criticism of either non-policy or policy substance character.[55] Low presence of blame attributions seems a defining character of news that accumulates little attention. In the large-N sample of stories from which the current sample was drawn, news saliency rises steadily along with government criticism. This point aside, of the 6 stories attributing blame all had a decidedly bad news tone with more than 75 pct. negative articles in the total story coverage. Controlling for news tone, Figure 8.2 presents the average number of opposition and government responses to the subset of bad news, with and without blame attributions. That is, it shows party responses to stories with and without government criticism when news contains more than 75 pct. negative newspaper articles. Looking at the two government bars in the figure, there is little doubt that attributions of blame draw government players onto the field. On average, government MPs and ministers produce only half a claim (0.45) when bad stories are blame free. When they're not, this figure rises to one and a half.

Also opposition parties respond to the presence of explicit government criticism voiced from outside the opposition. While blame-free stories are met with approximately the same number of responses (1.50) as the government musters for stories with blame (1.55), the latter type of stories increases the opposition response rate to 2.33 claims per story. Note, however,

[53] *Jyllands-Posten*, 13 October 2003.
[54] Social Democratic MP Per Kaalund, to *Politiken*, 13 October 2003.
[55] Consequently, and to limit the loss in degrees of freedom, the two variables are combined in the medium-N analyses.

that the blame effect on opposition response is slightly less pronounced, with the result that the difference in means is not statistically significant. When the means test is redone without controlling for news tone, using the whole sample (N=30), the difference becomes significant. This reflects the close relationship between news tone and blame attributions (Pearson's r of .420*), and the fact that they affect opposition response in similar ways. In other words, the opposition is already inclined to respond when news is predominantly bad. Bearing in mind the results of Chapter 6, chances are that blame attributions mediate some of the effect that news tone has on opposition response.

Figure 8.2. Mean no. of opposition and government responses for Bad stories with and without blame attributions (N=17)*



* Difference for government is significant at the 5 pct. level, Difference for opposition insignificant.

Summing up, the proposition that government shifts from ignoring to responding when bad news explicitly tells the story of government responsibility [P2/P3$_{\text{Reactive defence}}$] is supported. The same tendency is visible although not to the same extent, in the opposition case, suggesting that government criticism fuels opposition attacks [P2/P3$_{\text{Attack}}$]. It is however complicated to sort out the effects of news tone and blame attributions in the opposition case, as the number of stories is low, and the variables are positively related to both each other and opposition response respectively. I will return to this in multivariate regressions of the day-to-day coverage of highly salient stories below. For now, I instead provide case examples illustrating the most important force of blame attributions in news stories, which is their ability to make government talk.

When news is more bad than good, the government prefers silence in nearly 40 pct. of the cases. If the stories contain explicit government criticism though, ignoring is not a strategy in use. In September 2003, the 'Council for the Socially Exposed' released a report accusing the government of letting down the weakest in society. The chairman of the Council claimed that the government was 'giving with one hand, and taking with the other'.[56] More precisely, the Council acknowledged some government measures for drug addicts and the mentally ill, but argued that reductions in social benefits and an initiative to sell out public housing made the weakest worse off. The government was quick to react, and both the Minister for Social Affairs and the Minister for Employment engaged. The former responded that the Council had lost track of several details in government policies, and together with the latter used the opportunity to point to and explain how the government was fighting poverty and unemployment. It was argued that the lowering of cash benefits would help more people into the labour market, and that the sale of social housing would finance new housing projects.[57] In terms of the dual government strategy towards the media agenda, the fact that government ministers responded, and the manner in which they did, corresponds to the typical reactive defence of the attack and defend model. Negative attention explicitly questioning the way government handles its responsibilities is met by explanations and counter-arguments, demonstrating responsiveness and at the same time defending the legitimacy of government policies.

The second case example is also from the Iraq war. But unlike the first example where Danish forces were deployed before a field hospital was operative, this case features strong and explicit government criticism from outside the opposition. The story, from November 2003, centred on a claim by the Red Cross that the Danish government violated basic human rights in their operations in Iraq. The President of the Danish Red Cross was quoted saying that the government 'did not live up to international principles on crucial points', as the basic needs of the civilian population were not secured. Furthermore, the criticism involved the Guantanamo camp, which at that time held a Danish citizen. Attacking the government's reassurance that all international rules were complied with for the Danish detainee, the President of the Red Cross argued that this was 'down-right wrong'.[58] To this decidedly negative attention generated by a credible actor in international politics and humanitarian aid, both Liberal Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen and

[56] Preben Brandt to *Politiken*, 17 March 2003.
[57] *Jyllands-Posten*, 17 September 2003.
[58] Karup Pedersen to *Politiken*, 8 November 2003.

Conservative Minister of Foreign Affairs Per Stig Møller produced responses. The latter claimed that Denmark, relative to its population size, was the country doing second-most to secure peace and stability in Iraq.[59] The former, a bit more defensively, underlined in relation to the government's reassurance about the Danish detainee that 'I did not speak in judicial terms. What I'm saying is that after the visits by Danish authorities to Guantanamo, it is our understanding that he is treated in accordance with the principles that apply in international conventions'.[60] In comparison to the first Iraq case, the role of blame attributions in making government react to news attention is again decisive. Furthermore, the government actors' responses correspond to the label of reactive defence, suggesting that party strategies in political agenda-setting are both competitive and shaped by policy responsibility.

8.4 Challenge: Attack and defend during heightened media attention

Turning to the second sample in the medium-N study, consisting of the newspaper coverage of 15 highly salient stories from the radio news dataset, the relatively straightforward story line presented thus far becomes more complicated. While the first section below looks at how this plays out at the story level, focusing specifically on the consequences for government strategies in the face of intense media attention, the next (Section 8.4.2) examines if and how parties are able to time their responses strategically in accordance with the core propositions of the attack and defend model. Finally, in Section 8.4.3, I discuss if opposition and government parties are able to influence each other during these debates, and whether policy responsibility impacts their commitment to them.

8.4.1 Highly salient news and party responses on story level

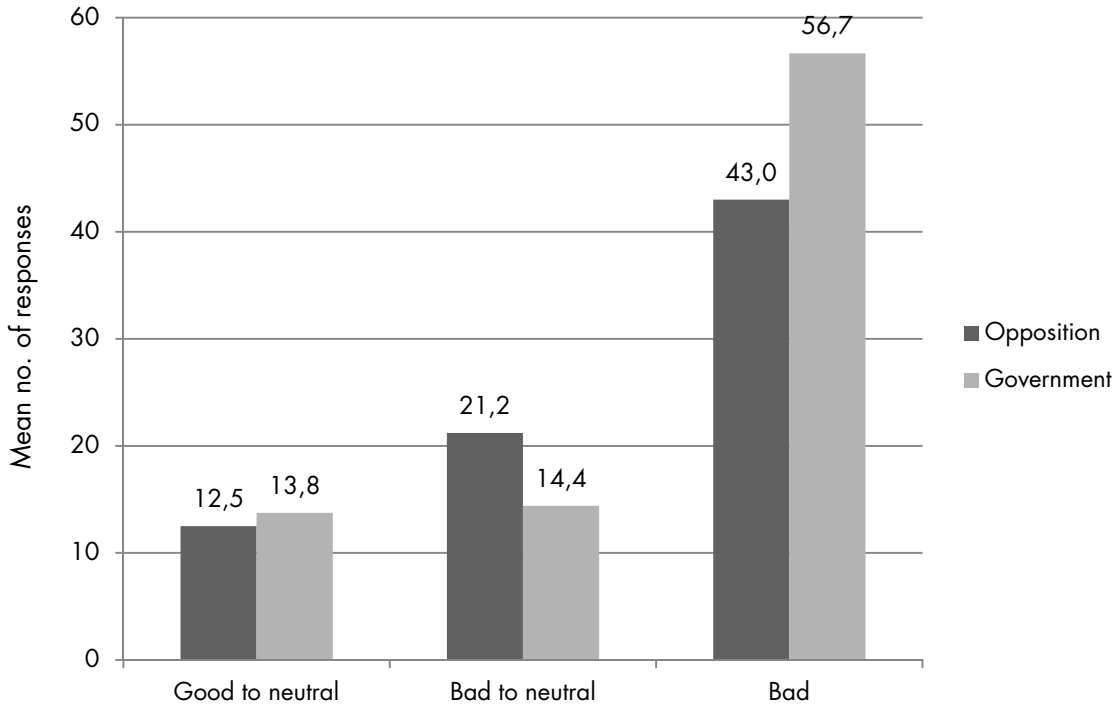
The claim that some issues are too important to ignore (cf. Section 3.5) seems a suitable description of the agenda-setting pattern found for highly salient news in this medium-N study. For the 15 selected stories, government is registered with claims in all cases while opposition misses out on only 1. It does not matter whether news is mostly good or bad, advantaging government or opposition respectively. As long as a story occupies the very top of the agenda, attracting a considerable amount of media attention over a longer period of time, both actors are likely to engage. There is, however, a great

[59] Møller (C) to *Politiken*, 9 November 2003.
[60] PM Fogh Rasmussen (L) to *Politiken*, 9 November 2003.

deal of variation in the *level* of attention paid to these stories (cf. Table 8.1, Section 8.2). Thus, the next question that should be dealt with is whether high saliency not only rules out the strategy of silence (implicitly part of both [$P1_{Attack}$] and [$P1_{Proactive\ defence}$]) but also disturbs the proposed negative relationship between news negativity and government response.

Starting out with the hypothesized relationship of news tone and party responses, Figure 8.3 presents the average number of opposition and party responses (claims) for news with different shares of negative attention. Again, as in the two large-N chapters and the less salient sample above, the opposition behaves in accordance with the expectation [$P1_{Attack}$] of the attack and defend model. The dark grey opposition bars rise gradually as news becomes more negative. On average, opposition MPs appear with 12.5 claims in good to neutral news stories. When stories are predominantly bad, this number rises to 43 (difference significant at the 10 pct. level). Although this conforms to [$P1_{Attack}$], it still brings some nuances to the explanation of opposition news responses in the sense that also stories with a positive and a balanced framing will engage MPs from opposition parties.

Figure 8.3. Mean no. of opposition and government responses for Good to Neutral, Bad to Neutral and Bad news stories (N=15)*



* No Good (0-25 pct. bad) stories in the highly salient sample. Good to Neutral = 26-50 pct. bad. Bad to Neutral = 51-75pct. bad. Bad = 76-100 pct. bad.

In the government case, these supplementary nuances in the expected news tone and party response relationship are replaced by an alternative explanation. The light grey bars indicating government claims per story portray the opposite relationship of the one expected in [$P1_{Proactive\ defence}$]. When news is good to neutral, government behaviour appears indistinguishable from that of the opposition. Following an insubstantial and insignificant rise when news is bad to neutral (from 13.8 to 14.4 mean responses), claims from government ministers and MP spokespersons explode when news is mostly bad. On average, 57 claims are registered in these circumstances, which is significantly higher than for the two other news tone categories. The same pattern is clearly visible when we look at the correlations between news tone and party responses, suggesting strong positive relationships for both the opposition (.546) and the government (.592) significant at the 5 pct. level although the sample size is fairly low (N=15).

So far then, it looks like the context of highly salient news introduces changes to the opposition-government game in political agenda-setting. Most notably, this is reflected by the government being unable to use its preferred strategy of proactive defence [$P1_{Proactive\ defence}$]. The interpretation is that good news prioritization is not an option when attention is high. The government wishes to 'appear responsive to the public's concerns' (cf. Sides, 2006: 412), and when pressure mounts this is an overriding strategy. Of course, this is not only a question of 'appearances'. If government fails to engage in highly salient negative news debates on social problems, they cannot hope to influence the public's perception of them. Furthermore, from the viewpoint of both efficient government and democratic responsiveness, government could be expected to distribute its attention according to the severity of social problems. Thus, as news get worse, government increases its' response. As shown repeatedly, this is not the case when media attention is *not* high. The government's wish to be, or at least appear, responsive is thus weighed against the strategy of proactive defence and good news prioritization [$P1_{Proactive\ defence}$]. When only some people are looking the latter is heavier, but when all eyes are on government the scales tip in favour of responsiveness.

In contrast to the less salient stories, the present sample is characterized by high levels of blame attributions. Only one of the 15 stories at no point features government criticism. Of the 14 stories that do, the opposition engages in 13 while the government responds to all. Thus, it could be that the positive relationship between bad news and government response is partly explained by the virtually constant presence of blame in highly salient news. This would be in accordance with the shift of government strategy expected

in [P2/P3], and indicate a more specific reason why saliency seems to precipitate the similar opposition and government patterns observed in Figure 8.2. To tap this supplementary explanation, the association between news tone and government responses was examined while controlling for the *level* of blame in news stories. The response pattern found when the presence of blame attributions is low (not shown[61]) was nearly identical to that for government response in Figure 8.2 where all stories were included. That is, the positive relationship between news negativity and government response is still there even for the highly salient stories with less government criticism. The nearly ever-present character of blame attribution during heightened media attention is no doubt part of the reason why government does not defend proactively on story level [P1]. The above results do however support the notion that it is not only about blame, suggesting that the special circumstances of highly salient news most likely also relates to the mere *level* of attention they get from the media, the public and political actors, and not necessarily only the content of it.

Summing up, during issue waves, media storms or media hypes, response is practically given, and high saliency thus effectively bars the strategy of silence. Furthermore, the government prioritizes responsiveness over politicization of news positivity, and thus the expected proactive defence strategy does not hold. However, there is more to both highly salient news and political parties than portrayed so far. The next section therefore focuses on whether government is able to find other ways to activate the potential advantages that endured and intensive news attention might hold.

8.4.2 Highly salient news and the timing of party responses

How, then, should the challenge that heightened media attention presents to the attack and defend model be approached? The argument here is closely related to one of the core ideas of the dissertation, which is deconstruction of issue categories. Bearing in mind the discussion on news stories as units of analysis from Chapter 4, agenda-setting research on issue or issue group level is not geared to explain variation on the news story (or other sub-issue) level. In nearly the same way, the news stories at the top of the agenda at-

[61] The dummy indicating presence of blame could not differentiate between the stories in the sample. Instead, a variable measuring the number of news articles containing government criticism, relative to the total number of articles, was used to divide the stories in two groups of low level and high level blame. The option of running multivariate regressions was not attractive considering the low number of cases (N=15) and problems with multicollinearity.

tracting intensive and persistent coverage hide considerable variation in their day-to-day developments (cf. Section 8.1). Of course, this does not invalidate the finding that government in fact does respond more to bad than to good stories when attention is high. But it might just still conceal the alternative ways in which parties are able to apply attack and defend strategies in party competition and agenda-setting once a news story keep getting intense media coverage.

The first step when approaching the increased complexity that intensive and persistent news coverage brings with it, is to look at an illustrative case example. In late 2003, an environmental success story attracted media attention. The Action Plan for the Aquatic Environment (cf. Chapter 1), which was implemented to combat pollution of lakes and wetlands, received a favourable evaluation. The National Environmental Research Institute of Denmark (DMU) led the evaluation, finding for instance a halving of nitrogen emissions to water. The goals of the plan were mostly fulfilled. In this early and positive phase of the news coverage, the government figured prominently through statements from the Liberals' spokesperson on environmental issues in parliament,[62] the Prime Minister[63] and the Minister for the Environment. The latter was quoted saying 'this is a very positive development. It shows that persistent and enduring measures produce results, and that it is possible to improve the aquatic environment with a responsible, balanced effort'.[64] Considering that the plan was passed during the previous government (admittedly through a broad settlement containing the present government parties), and carried out by the agricultural sector, this was as far as he could go to claim credit.

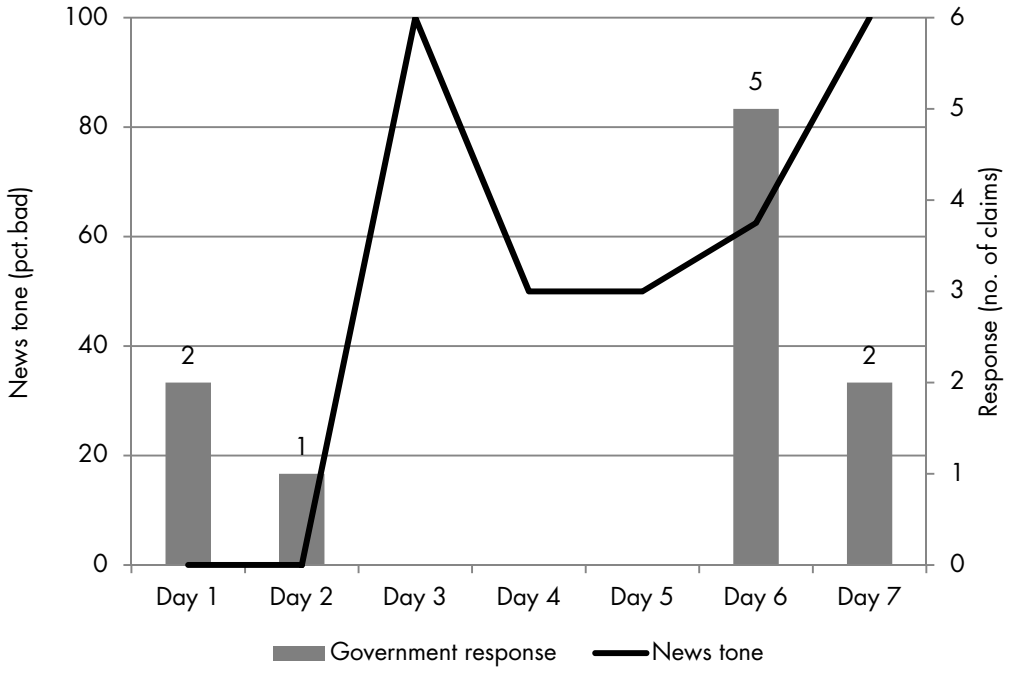
A few days later, however, the tone of the story changed as local measurements from several areas showed a much lower reduction in water emissions. In the first two-three days following this turn, the government retreated and was not heard from. But when the story continued to attract attention, focusing on a combination of the uncertainty surrounding the evaluation and expectations for the next aquatic environment plan, the government could not keep silent. The Minister for the Environment again engaged, but this time in a different tone: 'The agricultural sector today dumps so much phosphorus that it accumulates in nature. That's why emissions must be brought down'.[65] Other ministers and MPs also responded, and the overall development of the story in terms of news tone and government claims is illustrated in Figure 8.3.

[62] MP Eyvind Vesselsbo (L) to *Jyllands-Posten*, 2 December 2003.
[63] Fogh Rasmussen (L) to *Jyllands-Posten*, 5 December 2003.
[64] Schmidt (L) to *Berlingske Tidende*, 2 December 2003.
[65] Schmidt (L) to *Jyllands-Posten*, 12 December 2003.

At day 1 and 2 of the story, when all is good, the government is there to bask in the success. Then, when news turns bad at the end, from day 3 to day 5, the government disappears before reappearing with force to exhibit responsiveness and explain how to fix the problem.

It is not the longest and most intensive news story debate in the sample, but it does illustrate the substantial day-to-day variation in news tone and party responses. Admittedly, not all stories experience such a total turn in tone of coverage. Nevertheless, it reveals how the government manages to defend proactively by timing its responses to when news is positive. Still, government attention most definitely answers to negative developments as well, indicating the complexity of government motivations when facing news attention. To this, one has to add the role of blame attributions, the influence of opposition choices and the possibility that government response at one point most likely commit government to stay in the debate until the problem is resolved or somehow fades away. A more systematic examination of the attack and defend in highly salient news, taking into account several influences and also at which stage the debate is in, is therefore needed.

Figure 8.4. News tone and government responses across 7 days of coverage of the story about The Action Plan for the Aquatic Environment



As explained earlier, disaggregating the present sample, using days of newspaper coverage as the unit of analysis, offers such an opportunity. To assess the validity of the propositions on news tone and blame attributions, a set of multivariate regression models were therefore run using daily news

content and daily opposition and government response as independent and dependent variables respectively. Both dependent variables are overdispersed count variables, meaning that negative binomial regression is the preferred alternative (Long and Freese, 2006:372). Furthermore, as the data has a multilevel structure where days of news coverage and the corresponding opposition and government claims are nested in news stories, multilevel models were appropriate. Accordingly, the story-level focus of the dissertation is partly retained, accounting for unobserved variation through story specific intercepts.

The news tone (pct. of bad newspaper articles from the point of view of government) and blame attributions (dummy indicating presence of either substance or non-policy blame) variables investigate propositions [P1] and [P2/P3] respectively. Apart from the control variable measuring news saliency (no. of articles for a story on a given day), the opposition-government dynamics perspective from the large-N chapters is followed up by including opponent response in the models. Finally, acknowledging that the modelled process is likely to be highly autoregressive, lagged values of the dependent variable are part of both the attack and the defend equation. This reduces the number of units in the estimations. On the other hand, it takes into account how response one day is not only a function of the latest developments in the story at that point, but also dependent on the level of attention a party paid to this story the previous day. Moreover, it allows me to discuss whether policy responsibility restricts the flexibility of parties in government, relative to those outside office, when they debate highly salient news. A related topic is investigated by the inclusion of the count variable *Day of coverage*, indicating the progression of a story. It ranges from 1 (1st day of coverage) to 21 (21st day of coverage), and could provide further insights into how the two actors time their responses to news. Not from the perspective of when the news tone is most favourable, but in terms of whether they start out responding intensively and gradually back off or rather await news developments more carefully and finish off by paying more and more attention.

Table 8.2 displays the results of the four models run, two explaining opposition and two explaining government response. Looking first at the core proposition that policy responsibility determines the effect that news tone has on party responses ([$P1_{Attack}$] and [$P1_{Proactive\ defence}$]), the results seem to provide general support. In the opposition case, bad news attention for a

specific story on a specific day significantly increases the number of opposition claims for the same story on the same day. [66]

Table 8.2. Multilevel negative binomial regressions, dependent variable is opposition and government response (no. of claims)

		Opposition		Government	
		Model I	Model II	Model I	Model II
Saliency		0.089***	0.083***	0.076***	0.074***
		(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Day of coverage		-0.003	-0.001	0.028*	0.031*
		(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Lagged dependent		0.005	0.007	0.039***	0.037***
		(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Opponent response		0.003	0.003	0.112***	0.108***
		(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.014)	(0.014)
News tone (pct bad)	[P1]	0.011**	0.008†	-0.002	-0.005†
		(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Blame attributions	[P2/P3]		0.441†		0.397*
			(0.264)		(0.186)
Constant		-1.203**	-1.201**	1.145	1.700
		(0.463)	(0.462)	(0.860)	(1.325)
N		123	123	123	123
Number of groups		14	14	14	14
Wald chi2		49.65	52.97	365.2	371.1

*Standard error reported in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, † p<0.10.

For ease of interpretation, I have computed the percentage change in the expected counts for both a one unit change and a standard deviation change in the x's, holding all other variables constant. These are based on Model II for government and opposition respectively, and are displayed in Table 8.3. According to this, a 1 percentage point increase in news negativity is followed by a 0.8 pct. rise in opposition response. In light of how this variable varies in the sample, this effect naturally increases relative to that of the other predictors when judged on the basis of a standard deviation change in news tone. Consequently, a 32.6 percentage point change in news tone (for

[66] Ideally, the time-dimension of this sample could have been a starting point for vector autoregression (VAR) models thus taking more completely into account the interdependencies of the dependent and independent variables. However, the sample has a multilevel structure, and to my knowledge there is no available software that can estimate multilevel VAR models.

instance from just under 30 pct. to just above 60 pct.), decreases or increases the number of predicted opposition claims with 27 pct. The positive effect of news tone holds across both opposition models, although the effect is somewhat reduced (.011 to .008) when including blame attributions in model II (Table 8.2, 2nd opposition column). As noted in the large-N analyses of opposition response, this indicates that the presence of government criticism offers part of the explanation why negative news attention makes opposition parties respond and engage.

Table 8.3. Percentage changes in response after 1 unit and 1 standard deviation change in independent variables*

		Pct. change in response after 1 unit change in x		Pct. change in response after 1 SD change in x	
x	Std.dev	Opposition	Government	Opposition	Government
News tone	32.59	0.82	-0.53	26.76	-17.27
Blame attributions	0.50	55.45	48.70	27.73	24.35
Opponent influence**	3.76/5.66**	0.30	11.36	1.72	42.75
Lagged dependent**	3.76/5.66**	0.71	3.82	2.66	21.62

*Computed on the basis of model II (government and opposition), Table 8.2.

**The first SD is for opposition response. The second SD is for government response.

In the two government models, the opposite is the case. That is, the hypothesized effect of news tone on government response only reveals itself after the inclusion of blame attributions. In model I, where these are left out, the news tone variable has the expected negative sign. The effect is nevertheless weak and does not merit statistical significance. This is achieved in model II, as the estimated news tone parameter increases while the standard error remains the same. Again, this imitates the large-N analyses, and again it should be interpreted as a consequence of the dual strategy of government. In the first government model, what could have been a negative effect of bad news on government response is disturbed by cases where government response to negative coverage is in fact due to government competence or integrity being challenged or government being criticized. When this mechanism is taken into account in model II, the two government strategies of proactive defence (good news response) and reactive defence (bad news response) are both revealed. The former induces a 0.5 pct. decrease in government claims when news negativity increases by 1 percentage point; or, alternatively, a reduction of over 17 pct. when the tone changes by one standard deviation. Finally it should be stressed that this proactive defence pattern of government should be understood from a

'within story perspective'. As demonstrated in the section above, government does pay more attention to those highly salient stories that are more negative. What the current section shows is that the government is nevertheless able to increase its' engagement at times when a news story, whether predominantly good or bad, has a more favourable tone.

Moving on to the propositions regarding the effect of blame attributions on opposition [$P2/P3_{Attack}$] and government response [$P2/P3_{Reactive\ defence}$], the respective coefficients are significant and have the right sign in both cases (model II for opposition and government, Table 8.2). When a story changes then, from one day to the next, in the sense that new information criticizing government on policy substance or challenging government competence or integrity is brought forward, both will increase the intensity of their response and engage with more actions or more statements in the public debate over the story. Blame attributions seem to exercise almost equal influence on political agenda-setting as an instrument of opposition attacks, and through the government strategy of reactive defence. Holding all other variables constant, a change from a blame-free story to one including blame increases opposition response by approximately 55 pct. The same change in news content clearly affects the number of government claims as well, although the rise is somewhat smaller (49 pct.).

Summing up on the role of policy responsibility, news tone and blame attributions in party responses to news, the highly salient sample of the medium-N study both add some nuances to, and validate, the conclusions from the large-N analyses in Chapter 6 and 7. First, these stories with their high level of attention and almost invariable presence of blame attributions effectively restrict government from applying its strategy of proactive defence [P1] in the same way as for other parts of the news agenda. This is evident by the fact that they do not ignore any of the 15 stories, but even more so by the observed positive relationship between news negativity and government response on story level.

Second, the present section has shown how government still manages to maintain the strategy of both proactive [P1] and reactive defence [P2/3] by timing and adjusting its responses during highly salient news story debates. In other words, when a story experiences a positive turn – or, at least a decrease in negative attention – the government could be expected to increase its attention. And when a story that did not feature attributions of blame, suddenly does, the government will respond with more claims.

Third, in the case of the attack part of the dissertation's model, the medium-N study consistently supports the proposition that opposition parties increase their activity as news negativity rises [$P1_{Attack}$] and when stories ex-

plicitly link government to negative issue developments [$P2/3_{Attack}$]. Overall then, the strategies of attack and defend continue to direct the political attention of government and opposition parties, also when media attention is high.

8.4.3 Opponent influence and the duration and development of response commitment

This last section briefly discusses how policy responsibility influence the opposition-government dynamics of highly salient news debates, and the respective actors' commitment to stay engaged once media attention persists. Remember that the two previous chapters found opposition and government to distribute their attention to news in ways which were positively associated. While that result points to convergence of the two actors' attention to news *stories* on the agenda, the medium-N sample of highly salient stories offers an opportunity to see how this opponent influence dynamics plays out for their respective *timing* of news response during news debates stretching over several days. Copying the approach in Chapter 6 and 7, the multivariate regressions explaining government and opposition response above (cf. Table 8.2) included the number of opponent responses as independent variables. As can be seen from model I and II (Opposition), the coefficient representing government influence on opposition response fails to reach significance. Government engagement does not seem to affect the opposition, who is free to direct its attention to other matters or raise other challenges for the government when government enters the story debate. In the government models, opponent influence is significant and positive. In fact, for every additional opposition claim, the number of government claims increases by 4.6 pct.

It seems as if the dialogue that these news stories foster is characterized not only by differences in government and opposition timing of responses, but also by greater opposition influence on the government than vice versa.[67] Elaborating the finding that opposition and government attention tend to align, the present result again suggests a key role for policy responsibility in the opposition-government dynamics of political agenda-setting. The opposition is at liberty to ignore government claims in party dialogue on news stories, while the combination of extreme news attention and policy

[67] Conforming to the results of Green-Pedersen and Mortensen's (2010) study of opposition and government parties relation to the 'party system agenda' (cf. discussion in Section 11.3)

responsibility forces the government to strengthen its response when the opposition engages.

Next, the time variable *Day of coverage,* included in the models presented in Table 8.2, provided an opportunity to examine how the typical opposition and government response development for longer news stories look. As witnessed by the estimated parameters, news story duration has a positive and significant effect on government response. In percentages, one more day of coverage lifts the number of government claims by nearly 4 pct., which is to say that a news story stands to gain 25 pct. more governmental attention after 7 days of coverage. For the opposition though, there is no significant impact of news story duration. In other words, government starts slowly and then increases its attention as stories continue, in contrast to the opposition, for which no discernable pattern can be found.

In the light of the attack and defend model, the interpretation is that policy responsibility induces a stronger commitment for government parties to increase their attention as highly salient news debates progress. The opposition has no responsibility and its initial response is therefore not restricted by any hope that the storm will blow over, nor is its later story engagement caused by a need to solve the problem. In sum, whether a story is at its start or end is of little importance for opposition response levels. The government on the other hand, faces specific strategic considerations because of its responsibility. Initially, the government might hope that a story will fade away, leaving response at a low level and waiting to see whether government ministers need to be involved. But when attention and pressure persist, those with policy responsibility can be expected to increase their engagement until the problem is solved or otherwise cleared away.

Supplementing this discussion, the respective results for the lagged dependent variable in the government and opposition models point to a similar consequence of policy responsibility. Opposition response is not significantly affected by their choices the previous day, as a standard deviation change in their response of 3.8 claims only induce a 2.7 pct. change in opposition response the following day. The corresponding change in government claims, on the other hand, raises government response the next day by more than 20 pct. The suggestion is that the opposition has a more flexible agenda where it might engage in a debate one day, and then jump off and direct its attention elsewhere for instance when the tone changes or when the debate moves from a 'problem' to a 'solution' stage. What matters is, ultimately, whether a story offers a good attack opportunity compared to other stories on the agenda. If it does, and the opposition at some point decides to re-

spond, it is not obliged to continue paying attention when a new and better story turns up.

The government is not in the same way able to suddenly stop responding. Simply jumping on, only to jump off again before a story is 'finished' is not that easy. Bearing policy responsibility means that it will have to be part of highly salient news story debates throughout all stages. It might start off more carefully, but once it becomes involved it stays on the chosen path, so to speak, often having to increase its response as the story continues to attract attention.

Together, this section's findings showing opposition influence on government, increased government commitment (results for Day of coverage) and the autoregressive nature of government response, substantiate the decisive role attributed to policy responsibility in the attack and defend model of political agenda-setting. In all three examples, the observed behaviour of opposition and government is compatible with their respective roles as attackers and defenders of policy responsibility and legitimacy. When media coverage is intense, and all eyes are on the government, the opposition enjoys the power to command responses from the ministers in charge. The latter might initially hope that the news attention will blow over, but when it doesn't, they are increasingly likely to engage. Free of government power and responsibility, the opposition is less constrained by what its opponent does, and also by what stage the story is in.

8.5 Summary

The purpose of the medium-N study presented in this chapter was to validate, illustrate and challenge the results of the large-N study. Summarizing the results, the study does manage to offer further support for, as well as nuances in, the proposed role of policy responsibility in political agenda-setting. The expectation that opposition and government parties have divergent preferences for the mediated state of social problems, expressed respectively in [$P1_{Attack}$] and [$P1_{Proactive\ defence}$], is again sustained. As case examples and statistical models show, opposition MPs use both less and highly salient bad news to attack; in the former case, by ignoring good news and politicizing bad stories; in the latter case, by timing their responses to when the stories are most negative. The government, on the other hand, is able to defend proactively when news is short-lived, responding to positive issue developments and ignoring negative media attention unless the stories explicitly criticize the government. But government MPs and ministers are confronted with a challenge in the face of high levels of media attention. In the context

of highly salient news, party responses to news seem more or less given, and so parties are left with the choice of when (and not whether) to respond. Still, the results above suggest that the government is more inclined to respond when negativity decreases. The strategic use of a favourable news tone, from both the opposition and government, leads one to conclude that they are able to compete while converging.

On the other hand, news which criticizes the government or challenges government competence or integrity pushes the two agendas, and the timing of their story engagements, closer together. The effect of blame attributions found in the large-N study, supporting [$P2/3_{Attack}$] and [$P2_{Reactive\ defence}$], is confirmed by the shift in government strategy, from proactive to reactive defence when less salient news contains explicit government criticism. Furthermore, blame clearly lifts both opposition and government responses during heightened media attention, as demonstrated by the way parties vary their daily attention to the highly salient stories. Substantially, this suggests that these characteristics of news stories increase the chances of a 'real' story dialogue between opposition and government. Instead of having a debate where parties engage at different times, responding to different pieces of information or different aspects of the story, you get a debate where opposition and government responses are more likely to be identically timed and thus more likely to focus on the same aspect of the news story.

Chapter 9
Competing explanations and the impact of shared responsibility

This chapter empirically addresses two supplements or potential challenges to the results of the attack and defend model. The first section looks at a set of competing explanations of party responses to news, which for reasons of parsimony were neglected in the preceding analytical chapters. Several of the approaches discussed in the review in Chapter 2 are tested to explore whether public or political issue attribute models help explain why opposition and government pay attention to news. The second section uses an alternative way to examine the role of policy responsibility in political agenda-setting. Studying an opposition party that has acquired considerable policy influence as a parliamentary support party of the government, the extent to which characteristics of consensual and minority politics impact opposition attacks could be discussed.

9.1 Issue typologies vs. attack and defend

The results so far clearly indicate that news tone and blame attributions are important predictors of party responses to news, and consequently the models' assumption that policy responsibility occupies a central role in political agenda-setting is supported. However, the model and results also acknowledge that issue typologies matter. So far this has only been tested through the perspective of issue ownership. Less influential than other core predictors, ownership was still found to affect both opposition and government politicization. The two sections below follow up the empirical investigation of issue typologies, first by including Soroka's public issue attribute typology and then by testing a political issue attribute perspective.

9.1.1 Public issue attribute explanations

The issue typology developed in Soroka's comprehensive study of agenda-setting dynamics in Canada (2002) was discussed at length in Chapter 2. The main conclusion was that this model is dominated by perspectives from public agenda-setting studies, and that it lacks an explicit and convincing theoretical mechanism linking issue types and political reactions. Consequently, I did not apply this potentially competing perspective in the main

empirical models of the dissertation. Considering the positive results obtained by means of his typology, and the considerable influence of his work, it is nevertheless useful for the conclusions of the present study to deal with this example of a public issue attribute model also empirically. The analyses below start with a brief look at whether and how key independent variables in my model could be linked to the issue types in Soroka's model. Subsequently, the Soroka issue categories are added to the multivariate attack and defend models reported and discussed in Chapter 6 and 7. As a reminder, I will first recapitulate the basic features of the typology and how it was operationalized here.

Combining three earlier issue typologies from public agenda-setting research, Soroka distinguishes between three types of issues (2002: 19-22) illustrated in Table 9.1. Prominent issues are concrete and affect a significant number of people directly. These characteristics make for a real world-led agenda dynamic, meaning that media effects should be minimal. Sensational issues are also concrete, but have little observable impact on most people. This, together with a dramatic character, should produce the most media effects. Finally, governmental issues are also unobtrusive (do not affect a significant share of the public) but lack exiting or dramatic elements. Media effects are not expected and instead political actors lead agenda changes.

Table 9.1. Definitions and examples of governmental, prominent and sensational issues

Type	Definition	Examples of issues
Governmental	Unobtrusive, undramatic, abstract or concrete	Political system, government administration, public finances, public reform
Prominent	Obtrusive, concrete	Unemployment, health, labour market, education, social welfare,
Sensational	Unobtrusive, concrete, dramatic	Environment, crime, immigration

The coding of the above issue types is done on the issue group level in the large-N sample of radio news,[68] and is based on previous work applying the Soroka typology (cf. Soroka, 2002: 19-31; Walgrave et al. 2008: 820-821;

[68] This is the same approach used for coding issue ownership, utilizing the existing issue content coding of the radio news database. The issue groups in the dataset are the ones applied in the Danish agenda-setting project. It is a modified version of the coding system of the American policy agendas project (www.policyagendas.org), and is made up of 26 main categories and 60 subcategories.

Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2010a: 669). The main issues in the prominent category are thus unemployment, health, labour market, education, energy, transport[69], social welfare and business. The sensational category is dominated by issues like environment, crime, immigration and (at the time of the Iraq war) Danish foreign policy. The governmental type covers issues related to political system, government administration, public finances and (in a Danish context) defence policies. Based on the Soroka model, the expectation is that news belonging to the governmental issue category should be less likely to receive attention from government and opposition parties. Before investigating this, I will use the opportunity to look closer at how these issue types relate to key variables in the attack and defend model.

Table 9.2. Correlations between Soroka's issue types and independent and dependent variables of the attack and defend model*

		Governmental	Prominent	Sensational
Independent variables	Saliency	.033	-.051*	.026
	News tone	-.058*	.030	.025
	Blame attributions	.028	-.056*	.036
Dependent variables	Opposition response	.002	.000	-.001
	Government response	.018	-.029	.015

*Significant at * p<0.05.

The top half of Table 9.2 shows correlations between three independent variables in the present study and each of the three issue types. Of the nine associations, only three are significant. Furthermore, all 3 significant relationships are weak with a correlation coefficient ranging between -.051 and -.058. Two points could be noted about this. First, the typology is largely independent of the theoretical framework of this dissertation. Prominent issues differ somewhat, both in terms of a lower level of attention and less presence of blame. And governmental issues are on average more positive than the others. But overall, these small differences do not add up to a systematic bias in how governmental, prominent and sensational issues are covered in the media.

[69] Green-Pedersen and Stubager (2010) place transport in the sensational category due to for instance accidents. In the radio news data I have used, the more dramatic and sensational news on transport is coded in a special subcategory containing different types of accidents and catastrophes. I have therefore defined transport as a prominent issue, as it is indeed a field with which a majority of the public has direct experiences. The subcategory of accidents was included in the sensational issue group.

Extending this result, the second point is that previous agenda-setting conclusions applying the Soroka typology would likely not change much if the important predictors of news tone and blame attributions would have been included. This is not to say that no changes *could* occur. Note that both governmental and prominent issues, which are not expected to be media-led, have negative relationships with variables that increase news effects in my models (saliency and news tone). Maybe then, the finding that media matters less for parliamentary attention to governmental issues (cf. Walgrave et al., 2008) is partly explained by a systematic tendency for news coverage of these issues to be more positive. Perhaps the difference in observed media influence between sensational and governmental issues would even diminish or become insignificant if news tone was included. Leaving the ifs and buts aside, I should emphasize that there are no strong indications that this would be the case. Rather the main conclusion so far is that the Soroka typology and the attack and defend model both theoretically and empirically (seem to) relate to different aspects of the agenda-setting process.

Next, the question is whether the typology still has some merit in the micro or story level agenda-setting processes sampled in my study. The bottom half of Table 9.2 presents the correlations between the two dependent variables of the large-N study and the three issue types. As we can see, all associations are extremely weak and none are significant. Off hand, the combinations of public issue attributes in the Soroka typology have no bearing for neither government nor opposition politicization of news.

To assess whether they nevertheless could exercise some influence when independent and control variables of the attack and defend model are taken into account, several multivariate regressions for both opposition and government were run. Table 9.3 displays the results for the former actor, with the first model (I), labelled 'Attack', showing the estimated Model IV from Table 6.1 in Chapter 6. The second model (II), labelled 'Issue type', includes only saliency and the Soroka typology to get an impression of whether issue type affects opposition response to news when we control for level of attention. The answer is clearly no. Both prominent and sensational issues lift opposition response slightly compared to governmental issues (reference category), but neither difference is significant. The third model, labelled 'Issue type + Attack', combines all variables still without suggesting any role for the issue types. Note also that all but one of the estimated parameters stay nearly identical to the original attack model. While the main part of the attack model thus stands, the effect of issue ownership is reduced only just missing out on statistical significance ($p < .125$). The reason could be that

opposition ownership correlates with the issue types, as a majority of the left opposition's issues are prominent (unemployment, welfare, health etc).

Table 9.3. Logistic regressions, dependent variable is opposition response to news stories (0=no response, 1=response)*

		(I) Attack	(II) Issue type**	(III) Issue type + Attack
Saliency		0.185***	0.273***	0.186***
		(0.033)	(0.032)	(0.033)
Opposition initiation		-0.408		-0.401
		(0.354)		(0.355)
Blame: from opposition		1.460***		1.464***
		(0.289)		(0.290)
Government initiation		0.774***		0.776***
		(0.215)		(0.215)
Government response		0.657†		0.660†
		(0.358)		(0.359)
News tone (pct bad)	*P1*	0.011***		0.011***
		(0.003)		(0.003)
Blame: substance	*P2*	0.913***		0.921***
		(0.227)		(0.228)
Blame: non-policy	*P3*	2.376***		2.389***
		(0.401)		(0.402)
Issue ownership	*P4*	0.327†		0.277
		(0.168)		(0.181)
Prominent			0.105	0.122
			(0.175)	(0.204)
Sensational			0.020	-0.019
			(0.201)	(0.221)
Constant		-3.836***	-2.850***	-3.877***
		(0.231)	(0.166)	(0.259)
N		2,161	2,161	2,161
Pseudo R square		0.192	0.115	0.192

*Standard error reported in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, † p<0.10.
** The governmental issue type, for which least media effects are expected, is used as a reference group.

Table 9.4 displays the corresponding results for government response, with the first model (I), labelled 'Defend', showing the estimated Model IV from Table 7.2 in Chapter 7. The second model ('Issue type') again includes only saliency and the Soroka typology. The coefficients of the issue types are insignificant, clearly suggesting that government response is not affected by the issue types. Interestingly, both prominent and sensational issues have

opposite signs of those of Model II, Table 9.3. In other words, government is more likely to prefer governmental issues (reference category) over especially prominent ones. As mentioned, the difference is not significant and I will not dwell on it. Instead, turning to Model III ('Issue type + Defend') where all variables were included, we still see that the issue types fail to reach significance. And importantly, no changes from the original defend model (I) can be detected.

Table 9.4. Logistic regressions, dependent variable is government response to news stories (0=no response, 1=response)*

		(I)	(II)	(III)
		Defend	Issue type**	Issue type + Defend
Saliency		0.148***	0.209***	0.147***
		(0.032)	(0.030)	(0.032)
Government initiation		0.744*		0.745*
		(0.328)		(0.326)
Opposition initiation		0.292		0.273
		(0.464)		(0.465)
Opposition response		0.674†		0.695†
		(0.357)		(0.358)
News tone (pct bad)	*P1*	-0.007†		-0.007†
		(0.004)		(0.004)
Blame: substance	*P2*	0.936*		0.924*
		(0.387)		(0.386)
Blame: non-policy	*P3*	0.211		0.175
		(0.600)		(0.598)
Issue ownership	*P4*	-0.101		-0.184
		(0.302)		(0.316)
Prominent			-0.295	-0.203
			(0.322)	(0.331)
Sensational			-0.007	0.118
			(0.348)	(0.359)
Constant		-3.985***	-3.937***	-3.899***
		(0.305)	(0.260)	(0.367)
N		2,161	2,161	2,161
Pseudo R square		0.152	0.100	0.153

*Standard error reported in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, † p<0.10.

** Governmental issues, for which least media effects are expected, are used as a reference group.

Summing up, this empirical test of Soroka's typology on news story level produced results in contrast to the theoretical expectations in the literature. Admitting that the typology is mostly descriptive and sometimes hard to apply, Soroka suggests that in the future 'identifying empirical measures of issue at-

tributes that allow for a more accurate and well-founded prior classification of issues might be a worthwhile endeavour' (2002: 118). Walgrave et al. (2008) nevertheless copy Soroka's issue typology in their exploration of media's agenda-setting power in Belgium. Positive results lead them to conclude that the issue types 'give some reasonable purchase on the question of which issues should be most open to media effects. As these issue findings match previous outcomes in other countries, we believe them to be more or less generalizable'. Challenging their conclusion, I would say that vagueness in theory, application and results suggest that 'less' fits better than 'more'. Neither opposition nor government response to news stories seem influenced by the public issue attributes used in Soroka's typology. Instead, the attack and defend parameters remain largely unchanged, thus increasing the validity of the findings in Chapter 6 and 7. The next section investigates whether this is also the case when we include political issue attribute perspectives.

9.1.2 Political issue attribute explanations

While issue ownership effects were already investigated, other political issue attribute perspectives reviewed in Chapter 2 have not yet been empirically assessed. The question is whether they offer alternative explanations of party responses to news, thus reducing the strength of the attack and defend model, or rather serve as supplements to the theoretical framework established in the dissertation. This section briefly discusses one potentially competing explanation, which does not figure in extant political agenda-setting research but rests on strong theoretical arguments and empirical observations from other fields of study.[70] The perspective rests on the assumption that some issues are of crucial importance to the electorate, and hence, their voting decision. The literature on economic voting shows that economic issues have such a standing (cf. Lewis-Beck and Paldam, 2000). The effect of economic conditions on the vote is conditioned both by the direction in which the economy is developing (cf. Alvarez et al., 2000) and different aspects of political context (cf. Bengtsson, 2004). Although minority governments and a

[70] Two of the political issue attribute perspectives reviewed in Chapter 2 were also tested, but results and discussions are not included. The first relates to development of multilevel governance whereby national parliaments have lost influence on EU issues (van Noije et al, 2008), while the second concerns foreign policy as an example of government institutional ownership of issues (cf. Wood and Peake, 1998; Edwards and Wood, 1999). Results indicated support for the expectation that the government prioritizes these issues, while the opposition is unaffected. Most importantly though, neither perspective changed the original attack and defend estimations.

fragmented party system are thought to decrease the economic vote, it is still potentially decisive. An extensive comparative study of 19 countries and two decades finds the electoral volatility due to economic voting in Denmark to be very close to the mean (cf. Duch and Stevenson, 2005). A one-unit decrease in economic evaluations[71] was estimated to reduce the vote share of the PM's party by nearly 5 pct. It should therefore be a fair assumption that economic issues are central to the Danish electorate, and that both opposition and government parties have to attend to economic issues in order to be serious contenders the next time the electorate casts its votes.

The question from a political agenda-setting perspective is whether this also affects their responses to news. For both opposition and government models, displayed in Table 9.5 and 9.6 respectively, a dummy variable indicating economic issues was included to test this.[72] The first model in each table, labelled 'Attack' and 'Defend' respectively, represents the original estimations from Chapter 6 and 7. As in the tests of the Soroka typology above, the second model ('Economic') then includes only news saliency and the economic issues dummy. Finally, Model III, labelled 'Economic+Attack' and 'Economic+Defend', considers the effect of economic issues when controlling for all variables in the attack and defend model. Looking at opposition first (Table 9.5), the estimated coefficient of the economic issue dummy is significant and positive in both models displaying a tendency for opposition parties to respond more to economic issues, even when we control for saliency and all the other predictors in the model.

Note that the 'base' model (II), only controlling for saliency, does not prescribe more predictive power to economic issues than the full model (III). Substantially this would support a conclusion where the two different perspectives are supplementary explanations of opposition news politicization. This is reinforced by the fact that opposition prioritization of economic issues does not seem to come at the cost of the influence of news tone, blame and issue ownership. The only substantial change from Model I to III is that the influence of government response on opposition response becomes insignificant. The corresponding change is also found in the government models (Table 9.6), and will be commented below.

The interaction term applied in Chapter 6, testing whether the effect of ownership on opposition response was moderated by news tone [$P5_{Proactive}$

[71] Economic evaluations based on survey question asking whether the economy over the last year has gotten much better, somewhat better, stayed the same, somewhat worse, or much worse (cf. Duch and Stevenson, 2005: 396).

[72] This includes issues on the economy in general, employment and unemployment, taxes, inflation etc.

$_{attack}$], was not included in Table 9.5. However, supplementary analyses found the same support for [P5] also when the presumed importance of economic issues was accounted for. Overall then, the attack part of the dissertation seems to withstand the challenge from this particular operationalization of a political issue attribute linking electoral issue importance to party competition and political agenda-setting.

Table 9.5. Logistic regressions, dependent variable is opposition response to news stories (0=no response, 1=response)*

		(I) *Attack*	(II) Economic	(III) Economic+Attack
Saliency		0.185***	0.267***	0.186***
		(0.033)	(0.031)	(0.033)
Opposition initiation		-0.408		-0.392
		(0.354)		(0.355)
Blame: from opposition		1.460***		1.430***
		(0.289)		(0.290)
Government initiation		0.774***		0.793***
		(0.215)		(0.215)
Government response		0.657†		0.559
		(0.358)		(0.360)
News tone (pct bad)	*P1*	0.011***		0.011***
		(0.003)		(0.003)
Blame: substance	*P2*	0.913***		0.883***
		(0.227)		(0.228)
Blame: non-policy	*P3*	2.376***		2.416***
		(0.401)		(0.403)
Issue ownership	*P4*	0.327†		0.352*
		(0.168)		(0.169)
Economic			0.779**	0.822**
			(0.272)	(0.301)
Constant		-3.836***	-2.736***	-3.908***
		(0.231)	(0.102)	(0.233)
N		2,161	2,161	2,161
Pseudo R square		0.192	0.076	0.196

*Standard error reported in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, † p<0.10.

For the government (Table 9.6), news attention to economic issues also increases the probability of a response. In this case, two noticeable changes in the parameters from the original defend model (I) could be detected. First, the effect of opposition response on government response deteriorates and becomes insignificant. The same pattern emerged in the opposition models above. This could indicate that their respective influence on each other

could be explained by overlaps in specific issue preferences. That is, the government does not respond because the opposition does, but because they have a special interest in the issue which is shared by the opposition. It is not unexpected for economic issues to show some divergent patterns in party competition and agenda-setting.[73] Running both the opposition and the government models without economic issues, I find that the opponent influence part remain intact for both actors. The suggestion is that economic issues are especially important to both, and that the agenda choices of their opponent lose importance. For other issues, the government and the opposition seem more vary of what the other one is doing.

Table 9.6. Logistic regressions, dependent variable is government response to news stories (0=no response, 1=response)*

		(I) *Defend*	(III) Economic	(III) Economic+Defend
Saliency		0.148***	0.212***	0.150***
		(0.032)	(0.030)	(0.032)
Government initiation		0.744*		0.763*
		(0.328)		(0.332)
Opposition initiation		0.292		0.307
		(0.464)		(0.475)
Opposition response		0.674†		0.482
		(0.357)		(0.368)
News tone (pct bad)	*P1*	-0.007†		-0.007†
		(0.004)		(0.004)
Blame: substance	*P2*	0.936*		0.926*
		(0.387)		(0.392)
Blame: non-policy	*P3*	0.211		0.365
		(0.600)		(0.612)
Issue ownership	*P4*	-0.101		-0.601†
		(0.302)		(0.355)
Economic			1.680***	1.869***
			(0.360)	(0.436)
Constant		-3.985***	-4.244***	-4.036***
		(0.305)	(0.179)	(0.310)
N		2,161	2,161	2,161
Pseudo R square		0.152	0.127	0.180

*Standard error reported in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, † p<0.10.

[73] Cf. Green-Pedersen and Mortensen (2010: 271-273) who find several differences in opposition-government relationships to the party system agenda when excluding economic issues.

The second change when comparing Model I and Model III (Table 9.6), is that a negative and significant ownership effect surfaces. Most likely this is because several economic issues are owned by the government. Regression diagnostics do not indicate that the level of association between the two variables constitutes a problem for the model. But, as in the case with opponent influence, supplementary analyses confirm that the change is specific to economic issues.

More important than the two changes mentioned above, is the fact that the interaction between ownership and news tone is still significant (not shown). The main conclusion for ownership effects on government response in Chapter 7, supporting the expectation that government uses its ownership advantage mostly when news is good [$P5_{Proactive\ defence}$] thus stands. In addition, both the news tone [$P1_{Proactive\ defence}$] and the substance blame [$P2_{Reactive\ defence}$] variables retain their size and significance. None of the main conclusions from Chapter 7 are in other words threatened.

9.2 Political agenda-setting under shared responsibility

This second section of the chapter discusses and empirically models a situation in which opposition parties have considerable policy influence through the role as a parliamentary support party for a minority government. This is an important supplementary investigation for several reasons. First, the results give valuable information on the agenda-setting impact of consensus politics and minority government. Second, to the extent that shared responsibility is found to impact the attack patterns of the opposition, this would yet again speak to the decisive role of policy responsibility in political agenda-setting.

The question whether support parties with policy influence attack will be addressed by focusing on an opposition party which so far has been excluded from the empirical analyses in the dissertation. The core argument in the attack and defend model divides parties into two groups, those in office and those outside. The opposition-government game central to the dissertation's claim has until now focused on the competition between the government and those opposition parties that are on the same side of government (in terms of the left-right dimension) – and, who could form an alternative coalition without governing parties. Empirically, this was in Denmark in 2003-2004 a competition between a Liberal and Conservative coalition government and a left-of-government opposition including the Social Liberals, the Social Democrats, the Socialist People's Party and the Red-Green Alliance.

But multiparty systems regularly produce a political landscape where opposition parties are situated on both sides of the government. In the Danish case, the space to the right of government was at the time occupied by the Danish People's Party (DPP), one of the successful members of the New Right party family. It has won considerable electoral support during the recent decade, mainly based on its restrictive position on immigration and its tough position on crime. On the block level, a bourgeois-led coalition enjoys ownership of these issues compared to a social democratic-led coalition. But like its sister parties across Europe, it is DPP that commands the most preferable competence evaluations on immigration and crime on the right-wing of Danish politics.[74] What makes DPP even more interesting is the fact that it has served as the parliamentary support party of the Liberal and Conservative coalition government since it took office in 2001. In terms of policy responsibility, DPP has been able to negotiate several settlements and budgets that satisfy many of its core policy goals. Still, it remains outside office and the question is thus to what extent it might profit from the same context that influences the agenda-setting strategies of other opposition parties: It is without government power and can choose to attack the government when negative issue developments surface on the media agenda.

The results of multivariate regressions of DPP response to news stories are presented in Table 9.7. Several interesting features should be noted. First, we see that issue ownership does in fact matter and that stories relating to owned issues are significantly more prone to DPP politicization than others in both models. This further corroborates the proposed impact of ownership on opposition response [$P4_{Attack}$] by documenting the effect on an opposition party with a very different ownership profile. Moreover, although the interaction coefficient between news tone and ownership is insignificant, a closer examination (not illustrated) reveals that when news negativity exceeds 50 pct., DPP significantly prioritizes own issues over others. This marginal effect of ownership on news continues to rise as the news tone approaches 100 pct. negativity, providing additional support for the proposition on moderated ownership effects in political agenda-setting [P5].

Next, the news tone variable is positive and strongly significant, proving that negative news exercises a positive influence on the likelihood of DPP response. The indication is that policy influence of the kind held by support parties does not disturb the basic government–opposition divide as far as opposition preferences for news negativity is concerned. The government is

[74] These issues have therefore been coded as DPP owned issues in the subsequent analyses.

fair game, not only for its alternative coalition but also for the part of the parliamentary opposition that secures its place in office. A possible interpretation, deserving of future research attention, is that opposition parties separate agenda-setting strategies from policy-making strategies in order to maximize vote-seeking and policy-seeking ambitions respectively.

Table 9.7. Negative binomial regressions, dependent variable: DPP response intensity (no. of opposition questions tabled)*

			Model I	Model II	Model III
Controls	Saliency		0.382***	0.385***	0.385***
			(0.097)	(0.084)	(0.084)
	Opposition initiation		0.855	1.229†	1.207†
			(0.654)	(0.635)	(0.634)
Opponent influence	Government initiation		-0.659	-0.225	-0.225
			(0.499)	(0.508)	(0.505)
	Government response		-3.211*	-3.129*	-3.113*
			(1.500)	(1.409)	(1.405)
Attack	News tone (pct bad)	*[P1]*		0.013**	0.012*
				(0.004)	(0.005)
	Blame: substance	*[P2]*		-0.231	-0.222
				(0.462)	(0.463)
	Blame: non-policy	*[P3]*		1.728*	1.744*
				(0.863)	(0.865)
	Issue ownership	*[P4]*		1.110***	0.797
				(0.337)	(0.805)
	Ownership X Tone	*[P5]*			0.004
					(0.010)
	Constant		-3.545***	-4.844***	-4.775***
			(0.225)	(0.419)	(0.445)
	N		2,161	2,161	2,161
	Pseudo R square		0.0389	0.0690	0.0692

*Standard error reported in parentheses. *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05, † p<0.10.

On the other hand, the coefficient of substance blame falls short of statistical significance. One of the most important strategies of opposition attack (cf. Chapter 6) is thus of no use for the support party studied here. Interestingly, it is also negative, suggesting a tendency (although not significant) for DPP to shy away from stories where responsibility for bad news is attributed to the government. Part of the reason might very well be that a substantial number of the news stories containing government criticism also touch upon DPP responsibility. This result hints at the restrictions on DPP politicization choices, or more generally the agenda-setting costs of policy making influence through the role as a support party. The stories which for other opposition parties are

especially attractive will often be self-incriminating for opposition parties supporting the government. The same logic apparently does not apply when news features non-policy valence blame, which produces a clearly positive and significant effect on DPP response. The explanation is that these stories are characterized by their focus on the way politics is 'performed' and, hence, on the failures and missteps of specific officeholders (most often government ministers), seldom involving neither actions nor positions of government's parliamentary supporters outside office.[75] In other words these stories present occasions where DPP response is often risk-free, because it bears no responsibility for the lack of integrity or competence shown by the government.

A last noteworthy result is that government attention negatively affects DPP reactions to news stories. The implication is that the government-opposition dynamics, after all, work differently between the government and its support parties. Although the government must tolerate that DPP is free to attack, the negative relationship between what the government and DPP attends to means that neither seems preoccupied with each other's issue priorities. Government could be argued to ignore the attacks of its support party, knowing that it still can count on these MPs when proposing policies to the parliament. Instead, it answers to the attack of the left opposition as votes lost in this direction are more likely to shorten its stay in office.

9.3 Summary

Two purposes explain the empirical supplements included in this chapter. The first, specific to Section 9.1, was to tap other potential predictors of party responses to news and see whether the results of the attack and defend model still stand. Results suggest that they do and that rival explanations mostly serve as supplements to the attack and defend perspective. Combined with the fact that three different political issue attribute tests deliver results somewhat in accordance with expectations (cf. Section 9.1.2 and footnote 69), the validity of the sampled data and the causal explanations produced by the attack and defend model is strengthened.

The second purpose, specific to Section 9.2, was to see if and how opposition attacks change when the core assumption of an either-or division of policy responsibility between government and opposition is challenged. The answer is that opposition parties still attack, even though they are in a posi-

[75] Of course, such stories emerge for all parties, not only those in office. But the center of attention here is government, and consequently the non-policy valence events related to other parties have not been coded.

tion to influence policies and consequently do hold some responsibility for the development of social problems. But some attacks seem to lose their importance. Results thus suggest an interesting nuance to the attack and defend model. It is not only position in office that counts. Actual policy responsibility impacts the way parties respond to news. As a support party, DPP was found to uphold the bad news response [$P1_{Attack}$] originally proposed to affect the left opposition of government. But there was no indication that blame attributions focusing on policy substance triggered the hypothesized attack strategy of [$P2_{Attack}$]. Besides highlighting an interesting feature of the case at hand, the results could provide some pointers when we discuss whether other periods or other political systems, with a different distribution of policy-making influence, are likely to be more or less marked by attack and defend strategies towards the media agenda. This is a task for the next chapter, where the findings are summarized and their internal and external validity are discussed.

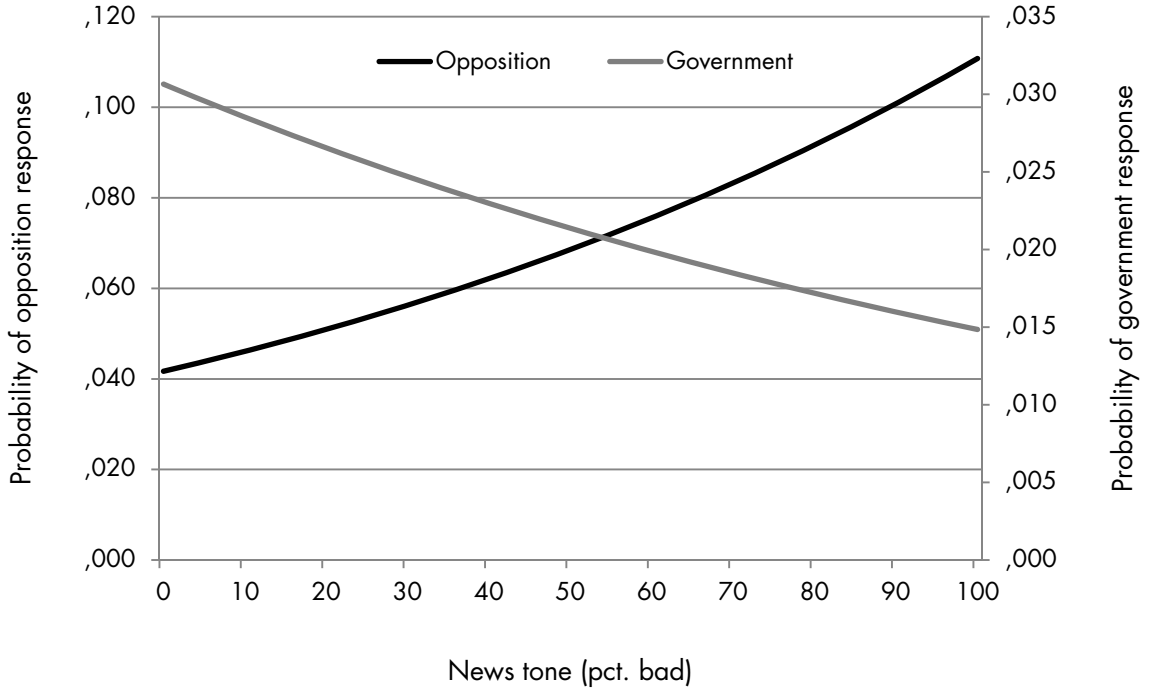
Chapter 10
Summary of findings

In this chapter, the empirical results are summarized and interpreted in the light of the attack and defend model's perspective on political agenda-setting. Opposition and government were treated separately in the presentation of the large-N study. I will therefore use the following sections to draw together the empirical analyses in Chapter 6, 7 and 8, comparing opposition and government results more directly in both discussions and figures illustrating the main findings. The summary is organized according to the attack and defend propositions (cf. Table 3.1, Chapter 3), but will also include a discussion of the observed opponent-influence dynamics in the above-mentioned chapters. At the end of the chapter, I focus on the internal and external validity of the findings, discussing the strength of the causal conclusions in the study and the task of generalizing them to other political-institutional contexts.

10.1 News tone – [P1]

Starting with news tone, the basic argument put forward was that policy responsibility directs opposition and government attention in different directions. Thus, the first core proposition holds that opposition parties attack using news negativity as testimony of a government unable to deal with social problems [$P1_{Attack}$], while government parties defend proactively using news positivity as evidence of success and problem-solving capacities [$P1_{Proactive\ defence}$]. The results are illustrated in Figure 10.1, using the estimated models of opposition (Chapter 6, Table 6.1) and government (Chapter 7, Table 7.2) to depict the relationship between news negativity and party response. Overall, the x-shaped figure clearly supports the core expectation of the dissertation: When news worsens the opposition responds, and when news gets better the government responds. Note that the two y-axes on opposition and government response are scaled differently to stress that differences in levels are not directly comparable because of variation in measurements (opposition parliamentary questions vs. the Prime Ministers' speech at the weekly press meeting). The gradient of the news tone parameters (which of course will vary at each value of x) in the two estimations are nonetheless reasonably close, indicating that the relative impact of news tone on opposition and government news politicization is of a comparable size.

Figure 10.1. Predicted probability of opposition and government response to news stories as news negativity rises*



*Estimated with Model IV, Table 6.1 (opposition), and Model IV, Table 7.2 (government). Rest of independent variables set at their mean.

The impact of news tone is supported through both the attack and the defend models of the large-N study, and furthermore validated and illustrated by case examples from, and bivariate analyses of, the less salient news sample in the medium-N study (cf. Section 8.2). It does seem that tone is slightly more decisive to opposition politicization, as the inclusion of this variable contributes with more predictive powers in opposition models (cf. Table 6.1, Chapter 6) than it does in the government models (cf. Table 7.2, Chapter 7). This could be indicative of a more fixed government agenda, where attention is to a larger extent determined by its own policy initiatives and the 'chores' of office. It is also reasonable to assume that changes in tone are less influential for the government due to its dual strategy, producing a mix of good and bad news response. For now, however, I would like to underline that although news tone perhaps exercises less agenda-setting influence through government proactive defence than opposition attack, the results should also be interpreted considering the two separate propositions as part of one unified argument on the *differences* in government and opposition behaviour. Put differently, the more complex motivations of government in this process could arguably have resulted in findings where the government was seemingly unaffected by news tone, or even positively affected by

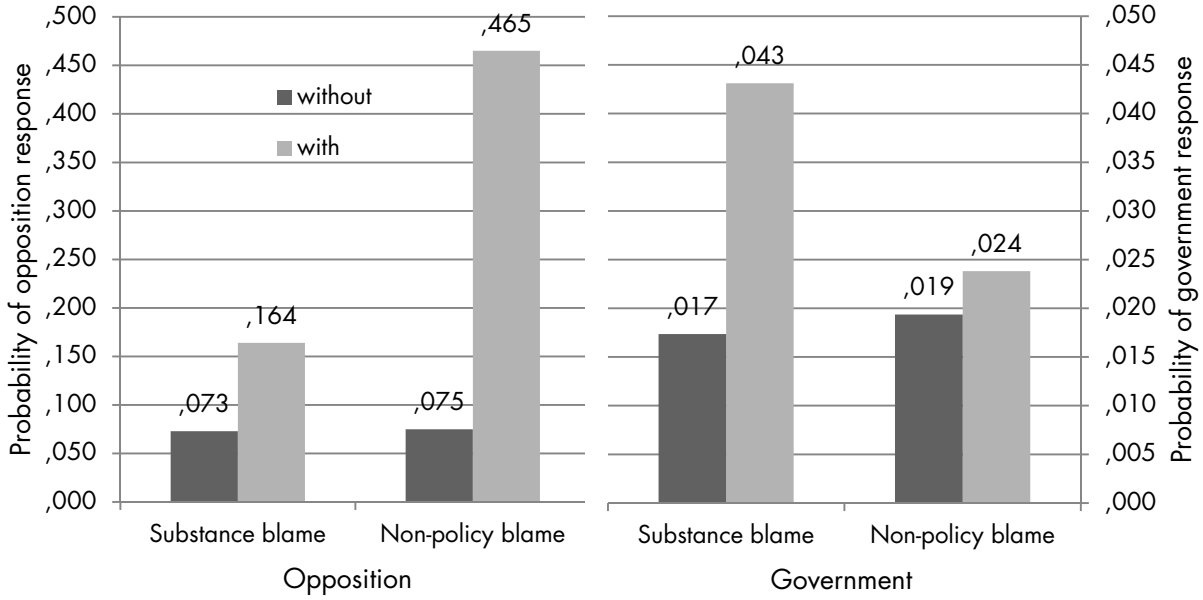
negativity. As long as opposition association with bad news was clearer and stronger I would still have been content, and still able to argue that policy responsibility holds different implications for opposition and government response to news tone. Instead, the present study shows that not only do opposition and government strategies differ; they also conform to the separate and independent expectations of [$P1_{Attack}$] and [$P1_{Proactive\ defence}$], finding that news positivity and negativity significantly lift government and opposition politicization respectively. Thus strong support is found for the role that policy responsibility plays, linking government to the state of social problems, and making news tone matter when opposition and government respond to news.

In Chapter 8 (Section 8.4), the question was whether this result was equally valid in the context of intensive and prolonged media coverage thought to produce issue waves which all parties have to respond to. On the story level, there were clear indications that such news provoked similar reactions from opposition and government (cf. Figure 8.2, Section 8.4). That is, the hypothesized proactive defence and good news prioritization by the government did not match the observed link between tone and response for the 15 selected stories, and in fact ministers and government MPs paid more attention to highly salient bad news than to highly salient good news. Not only then does heightened media attention make it hard for the government to ignore issues, it also induces a reactive defence pattern (similar to that proposed in [P2] and [P3]). The visibility and pressure that high media attention brings with it thus changes the way the government respond to news. However, the government is able to combine this particular type of responsiveness to highly salient and negative developments in social problems with the original strategy of proactive defence and politicization of positive news attention. The analyses of the daily development of these stories indicate that both opposition and government meet story waves by timing their responses to when the news tone is most preferable. So, the likelihood and intensity of government response increases when stories take positive turns, while the opposite holds true for opposition response. The convergence of party attention to news that follows when stories receive prolonged coverage in other words does not prevent parties from competing, engaging in manners that correspond to the proposed strategies of the attack and defend model.

10.2 Blame attributions – [P2] and [P3]

The next two propositions of the model elaborated on the role of policy responsibility in political agenda-setting and focused on how response patterns change when blame for negative developments receiving media coverage is explicitly attributed to the government. For the opposition, the basic argument was that attributions reinforce the motivation for attack, as they increase the chances of making bad news 'stick to the government'. For the government, being explicitly criticized for censurable developments in social problems decreases the chances of escaping blame. Ignoring becomes less attractive and would furthermore mean that the government cannot counter the blame arguments in the news. Instead, the government is expected to shift strategy from a proactive to a reactive defence.

Figure 10.2. Predicted probabilities of opposition and government response for news with and without substance and non-policy blame attribution*



* Estimated with Model IV, Table 6.1 (opposition), and Model IV, Table 7.2 (government). The remaining independent variables were set at their mean.

Two types of blame were investigated, one relating to policy substance [P2] and the other to so-called non-policy valence events [P3]. Figure 10.2 repeats results for both opposition and government based on the models from Chapter 6 and 7.[76] Looking at substance blame first, explicit government criticism more than doubles the probability of opposition and government

[76] Note that the two y-axes on opposition and government response are scaled differently to stress that differences in levels are not directly comparable (due to variation in measurements).

response, delivering strong support to both [$P2_{Attack}$] and [$P2_{Reactive\ defence}$]. The expectation of a dual strategy of government, including both proactive strengthening of the public's perception of government success [$P1_{Proactive\ defence}$] and reactive defence and responsiveness to negative developments [$P2_{Reactive\ defence}$], is therefore confirmed.

In the case of non-policy blame, that is, news questioning government competence or integrity, findings were mixed. Although the government responds more when non-policy blame is present in news, the difference is insignificant, suggesting that the Prime Minister does not systematically answer such accusations. While [$P3_{Reactive\ defence}$] thus should be rejected, the opposition on the other hand clearly prioritizes the agenda-setting advantages brought on by news that challenges government integrity or competence. These stories are perfectly tailored news material because they have an identifiable culprit, relate to commonly accepted values in both politics and society and hold the potential to end political careers. The fact that this also matters for opposition politicization, as expected in [$P3_{Attack}$], could be interpreted as part of a 'true' mediatization of politics. No doubt, dishonesty, malpractice or gross incompetence deserves political attention. But the comparatively strong effect that non-policy blame has on opposition response at least points to a subset of issues for which the logics of media and (opposition) politics seem highly compatible.

As with news tone, blame attributions proved to affect opposition and government timing of responses during highly salient stories (cf. Table 8.2, Section 8.4). Overall then, the results on blame attributions are positive with three of four propositions supported and comparatively strong effects. This further strengthens my confidence in the core role attributed to policy responsibility in political agenda-setting. First, because mediation tests suggest that blame attributions explain some of the effect that news tone has on opposition response (cf. Section 6.2), indicating that their success as predictors is at least partly related to the same contextual aspect of the opposition-government game in political agenda-setting, that is policy responsibility. Second, because the results show how explicit presence of blame matters, implicitly suggesting that the positive results obtained for news tone are in fact correctly understood by reference to the distribution of policy-making powers and responsibility.

10.3 Issue ownership – [P4] and [P5]

The attack and defend model also included issue ownership as a predictor of party responses to news. Fusing the arguments put forward in recent po-

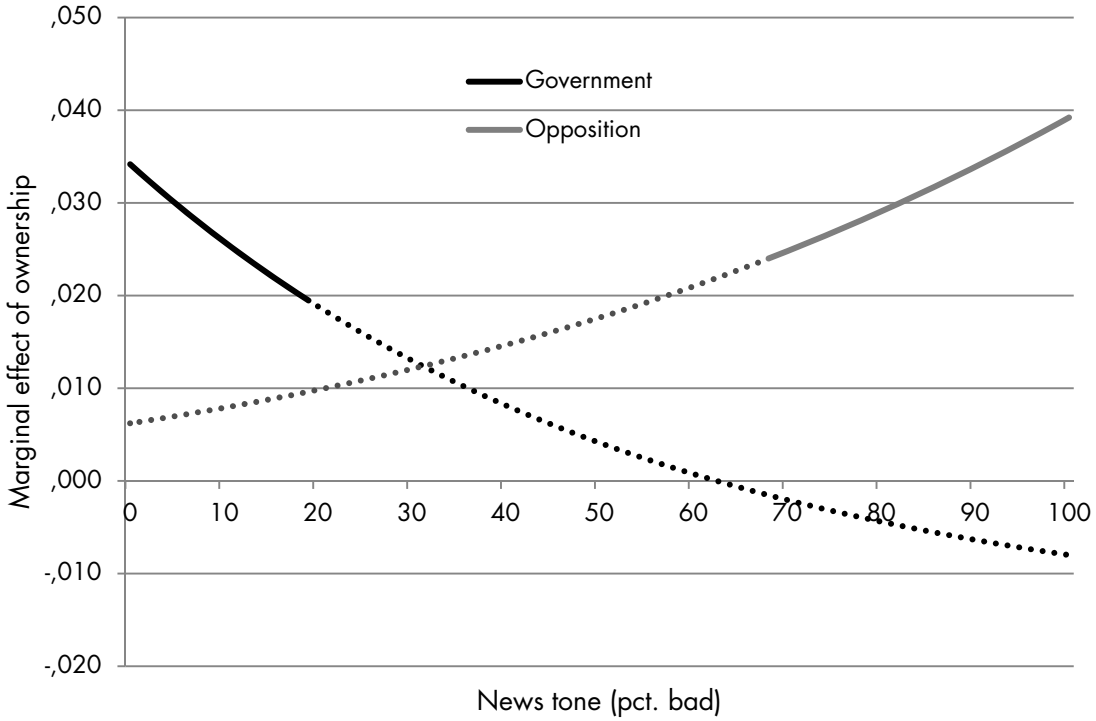
litical agenda-setting studies (Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2010a; Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2011a), the expectation was that opposition [$P4_{Attack}$] and government [$P4_{Proactive\ defence}$] should prioritize news where they have a reputation of competence, both because they care about these issues and because they stand to win electoral support if owned issues become salient. The analyses of Chapter 6 and 7 only produce support in the opposition case. Thus opposition parties are more likely to respond to news stories that belong to owned issues. But even so, the strength of this agenda-setting effect is comparable neither to that of news tone nor to the effect of blame attributions. In this respect, the result supports the contributions of this study's shift of focus from 'the power of issues to the issue of power'. The claim that parties care more about the type of attention (positive vs. negative) a news story might give, than about which issue type it could serve to politicize seems justified. Re-phrased with the perspectives of the attack and defend model in mind, this is because political actors conceive of the media agenda as reflecting social problems. Problems for which the government is ultimately responsible, and which therefore will be processed quite differently depending on both the present state of the problem and a party's present position in or outside of office.

The government initially seems unaffected by its history of issue competence and electoral issue strengths when attending the news agenda. Thus the ownership perspective, previously untested on government actors in political agenda-setting, does not fit the way the Prime Minister responds to news stories. On the one hand, the rejection of [$P4_{Proactive\ defence}$] in combination with the support for [$P1_{Proactive\ defence}$] (and [$P2_{Reactive\ defence}$]), further underlines the above-mentioned dominance of tone (and blame) over issue type. However, the influence of ownership on government news response should not be dismissed yet. The attack and defend model proposed a moderated perspective on the impact of issue ownership in political agenda-setting. In accordance with [P1], the basic argument holds that policy responsibility, and consequently news tone, moderates the way parties make use of their respective issue strengths in political agenda-setting. Figure 10.3 illustrates the results of the interaction terms included in Chapter 6 (Model V, Table 6.1) and Chapter 7 (Model V, Table 7.2), testing [$P5_{Attack}$] and [$P5_{Proactive\ defence}$] respectively.

Again, as with news tone in Figure 10.1, we find the characteristic x-shape suggesting the opposite ways in which the two actors are able to prioritize 'their' issues on the news agenda. Although the proposed interactions only hold at the extremes of news tone (where the lines are solid), they combine to produce confirmation of the moderated ownership perspective. Sub-

stantially, opposition parties do not politicize owned issues when news reports positive developments, as this could prove to link their opponent – holding policy responsibility – to the positive changes on the problem in question. Instead, significant and increasing opposition prioritization of owned news is only observed when news is predominantly negative. The opposite modification is observed for the government, selecting own issues over others only when news is predominantly positive. Negative news induces no such ownership prioritization, most likely because it either ignores it [P1], to escape blame, or is forced to respond to it [P2] to answer to blame. But when news is good, the government is under less pressure to respond and able to pursue its preferred issues and play its electoral issue strengths.

Figure 10.3. Marginal effect of issue ownership on opposition and government response to news stories as news negativity rises*



*Estimated with Model V, Table 6.1 (opposition) and Model V, Table 7.2 (government). The remaining independent variables are set at their mean. Note that effects significant at the 10 pct. level are represented by a solid line.

A final point, regarding news tone, blame and ownership, is that the results indicate a stronger role for these predictors in opposition news politicization. The government was found to be comparatively speaking more affected by news saliency and their own initiation of news stories, with the result that news tone and blame attributions made a positive but more modest contribution to the understanding of government response. Furthermore, the fact

that news is less often good (cf. Chapter 5) restricts the ability of government to use its strategy of proactive defence through good news response [P1] and prioritization of owned issues [P5]. A combination of the characteristics of news and the constraints of office position, thus render political agenda-setting more favourable to opposition parties than the parties in government. However, the way in which the two actors influence each other should also be taken into account.

10.4 Opponent influence in party politicization

The dissertation models party responses to news as an opposition-government game, where each actor chooses the strategies that enhance their strengths and reduce their weaknesses in party competition for votes and office. However, it is reasonable to assume that not only the rules of the game (read; the respective constraints and opportunities of the actors), but also the game itself (read; the choices of your opponent) will influence outcomes. To accommodate this, variables measuring opponent initiation of and response to news were included in the models explaining government and opposition response. Two main results could be emphasized. First, the two large-N chapters found government initiation of news to significantly lift the probability of opposition response, while government attention proved unaffected by opposition news initiation. Substantially, this was interpreted as an 'early' agenda-setting advantage of government. Through its policy statements and initiatives, the government exercises considerable influence on *which stories* will enter and climb on the news agenda. To this it should be added that although the government thus holds an early agenda-setting advantage, it cannot control the content of news coverage for those stories that are triggered by its initiatives, especially when they attract considerable attention (cf. Midtbø, 2011: 239-241). As the media, the opposition and other actors put their spin and perspectives on the initial government statements or actions, a significant share of them comes to feature negativity and blame attributions, illustrating the inevitable resistance that dilutes this agenda-setting advantage. Opposition parties, on the other hand, respond to many of these stories and are less likely to exercise a corresponding impact on government attention as they do not trigger news coverage to the same extent. Instead, in light of the overall results, they can and do control *which news tone* and which issue developments they politicize.

Second, the large-N results show that opposition and government distribute their attention in ways which are positively associated. That is, government responses positively affect the propensity of an opposition reaction,

while opposition reactions have the same effect on government responses. Note that these results were found controlling for the strong influences of news saliency, the core attack and defend mechanisms and the endogenous news to politics relationship, and that they were also confirmed when tested only on news considered 'political in nature'. Arguably then, it seems highly likely that one actor's choice of whether or not to respond is in part a function of what the other actor does or is expected to do (although not in the case of economic issues). The empirical material does not allow for an investigation of who leads whom in this relationship. But an interesting finding from corresponding tests on the sample of highly salient news nevertheless suggests an answer (cf. Section 8.4). When stories *have* reached both opposition and government agendas, the day to day engagement of the government in the following news story debate does not seem to affect opposition responses. The daily choices of the opposition, increasing or decreasing its story engagement, are however positively linked to government responses. Consequently, the alignment of attention observed in the daily development of highly salient news is most likely a result of opposition influence on government, and not vice-versa.

In conclusion, the opposition-government dynamics of the political agenda-setting models explored here again suggest a key role for policy responsibility. By virtue of its policy-making power, the government can influence the distribution of opposition attention indirectly by triggering news coverage. The opposition is nevertheless free to prioritize those government-initiated stories that receive negative attention, thus reducing government profit from this early agenda-setting advantage. Furthermore, it can ignore government claims in party dialogue on news stories, while the combination of heightened news attention and policy responsibility forces the government to respond when the opposition engages.

10.5 Internal validity

Table 10.1 repeats the findings showing support for 8 of the 10 propositions in the dissertation. The strength of this support and the internal validity of the causal conclusions drawn above should also be summarized, however. Several features of the theoretical model, design and empirical analyses render the conclusions a probable depiction of causal relationships in political agenda-setting processes. I will concentrate on three main points. First, the whole task of estimating causal effects must rest on a plausible perspective on the mechanisms that link cause and outcome (cf. Gerring, 2004: 348-349). In this respect, the large-N study is advantaged by what I consider a

basic and common-sense link: those who hold responsibility, and would like to keep doing so, are likely to emphasize that things are good; those who do not hold responsibility, but would like to, are likely to stress that things are bad. This intuitively recognisable mechanism strengthens the causal interpretation of the observed empirical patterns in the dissertation. Furthermore, there are no huge gaps in the path from x to y, and all steps on the way are reasonably well covered in the operationalizations of the theorized mechanisms. These considerations are also part of the reason why in-depth case investigation does not dominate Chapter 8, which instead uses a combination of more quantitative analyses and case examples to validate the findings of the large-N study. Although they do not provide additional information about causal mechanisms, the examples nevertheless highlight the way political actors respond. The way their statements centre on responsibility for the developments covered in the news, in addition to the rather explicit language of attack and defence applied, corroborate the causal mechanism of the attack and defend model.

Table 10.1. Results for the attack and defend propositions on opposition and government response to news

X	*Strategy*	*X->Y*	*Support*
News tone	$P1_{Attack}$	*Opposition response more likely when negativity increases*	+
	$P1_{Proactive\ defence}$	*Government response more likely when positivity increase*	+
Substance blame	$P2_{Attack}$	*Opposition response more likely when substance blame present*	+
	$P2_{Reactive\ defence}$	*Government response more likely when substance blame present*	+
Non-policy blame	$P3_{Attack}$	*Opposition response more likely when non-policy blame present*	+
	$P3_{Reactive\ defence}$	*Government response more likely when non-policy blame present*	÷
Issue ownership	$P4_{Attack}$	*Opposition response more likely when news is owned*	+
	$P4_{Proactive\ defence}$	*Government response more likely when news is owned*	÷
Ownership X Tone	$P5_{Attack}$	Opposition response for owned news more likely when negativity increases	+
	$P5_{Proactive\ defence}$	Government response for owned news more likely when positivity increases	+

Second, leaving causal *mechanisms* aside, the fact that the two studies find similar *effects* also of course strengthens the internal validity of the causal inferences regarding news tone and blame attributions in the study. Furthermore, the potentially competing explanations, based on both public and political issue attribute perspectives (tested in Chapter 9) at best provide supplementary explanations of party responses to news. With the exception of ownership effects on opposition response after including an economic issues dummy (just missing out on statistical significance), the estimated attack and defend parameters are not depressed, which is another testimony to the sustainability of the model. This could also be said about the important control variable of news saliency. No doubt, the level of news attention proved an important predictor of party responses. And extreme saliency does, as witnessed in Section 8.4, radically change government strategies on the story level. However, 'original' strategies are still kept alive through the timing of news responses within stories. In addition, the large-N opposition and government models show respectively no and limited traces of change in the estimated attack and defend parameters when news saliency is included. Rather, it is the case in the opposition models that news tone and blame attributions partially explain why saliency actually matters for opposition politicization. Concluding on saliency then, although an indispensable aspect of any agenda-setting model (as it of course captures the position of an issue or story on the news agenda), there are strong indications that political agenda-setting is much more than a simple signal-response process – and that the hypothesized causal relationships of the attack and defend model constitute a valid explanation of how political logics enhance or reduce signals, so that some stories become politics while other remain only news.

Finally, I have repeatedly pointed to the reciprocal nature of the media-politics relationship, and the possibility that endogeneity produces an overestimation of news influence in political agenda-setting. The empirical models therefore included variables that capture some of the ways political actors influence news coverage, in order to sort out effects that are unlikely to fit the proposed news to politics relationships of the attack and defend model. Results point to differences between the strength and nature of endogenous influences in opposition and government responses to news. In the former case, the opposition's own attributions of blame to the government proved to significantly lift the probability that they later would table a parliamentary question following up the story. Although tests rendered overestimation probable due to this relationship, there was no indication that the level of bias threatened the conclusions on opposition attacks. In the latter case, overestimation was more visible as a substantial share of government re-

sponses was found to be linked with its initiation of news coverage. However, re-estimations excluding these cases that arguably fit the notion of indexing or political influence on media agendas better, confirmed the conclusions on government reactive and proactive defence.

10.6 Exporting the model

In Chapter 4, I discussed Denmark as a case and how it is situated in terms of the core assumptions underlying the attack and defend model. This section approaches these discussions from the perspective of external validity. In other words, I address the question of how the results summarized above are most likely to change when the model is applied outside the present empirical context. Three core features of political and social systems are important in this regard; the distribution of policy-making power and responsibility, the level of competition in a party system and the characteristics of the media system.

Relating to the first, several political institutions affect the *distribution of power* in representative democracies, for instance electoral systems, presidentialism, federalism, decentralization and corporatism (Lijphart, 1999). I will not address all here, but concentrate on a few examples that most directly deal with the sharing of power between the government and opposition parties. For those institutional devices that are left out of the discussion, the general point is nevertheless assumed to apply: Namely that sharing of power, or public confusion or misconceptions about the distribution of policy-making power, is expected to diminish the role of attack and defend strategies in party competition and political agenda-setting.

The applicability of the model in other words hinges on the ability of the public to comprehend who's in charge and who could be blamed for negative developments in social problems (or credited for positive turns). Generally, this is made easier when the distribution of policy-making powers is clear and transparent. Even more important is the fact that sharing of policy influence between government and opposition parties provides a mechanism by which party competition and conflict could be handled and reduced (cf. Christiansen, 2008). Thus in political systems with strong institutions or traditions of power sharing, both push and pull forces possibly reduce the protrusiveness of attack and defend mechanisms.

Denmark, together with Norway and Sweden, has been characterized by a great dominance of minority governments and a high level of opposition influence (Gallagher et al., 2006: 388-391). Furthermore, it is regarded as an example of consensus politics, with strong interest group involvement

through corporatist institutions (cf. Lijphart and Crepaz, 1991; Lijphart, 1999; Siaroff, 1999; Armingeon, 2002) and extensive use of policy settlements (cf. Christiansen, 2008) between government and opposition. In Chapter 9, I discussed the special case of the Danish People's Party (DPP), an opposition party enjoying considerable policy influence as a parliamentary support party for the government in the period under study. Results showed that while this position affected the use of some attack strategies (substance blame), others were unchanged (news tone, non-policy blame). Extending these findings, a plausible suggestion would be that periods or systems with a strong opposition constantly negotiating policies with a minority government – like Norway, Sweden and occasionally Finland and Ireland – will be less characterized by 'news-based' opposition attacks compared to majoritarian systems (see below). Furthermore, government is less vulnerable to attacks because responsibility is shared and voters may be more confused about who should be blamed. A possible result could be that it downplays responses to salient news on negative developments, especially if there are specific issues where the opposition has been clearly influential in policy-making and where this is widely known to the public.

It is however important to stress that the ability of minority governments to rule through bloc majorities (cf. Green-Pedersen and Thomsen, 2005), will secure stability and transparency in the opposition-government game of multiparty systems. The strong results of the Danish case from 2003-2004 is thus most likely to become weaker if conditions of bloc politics are not met. For instance, when there is no extreme party holding coalition potential or when the loyalty of centre parties' government support is weak, government will more often cooperate with parties that would have preferred another government (ibid.). In this context, minority politics could be become sufficiently blurred with regards to power and responsibility, making the nature of political agenda-setting less competitive.

Pivotal party systems (Keman, 1994) exemplify such a situation, and are characterised by one (or several) coalition party that manages to stay in office by changing coalition partners. Possibly, the results on DPP might speak to agenda-setting dynamics in this context. The situation is of course not the same, in particular because it is not a centre party but instead a parliamentary support party at the right-wing. But there are still similarities. An opposition party in a pivotal system knows it might find itself in a coalition with one of the governing parties within a short period of time. This is arguably close to the perspective of DPP, which does not exclude a near-future position in office with the Liberals and Conservatives (although especially the latter appears very reluctant). Consequently, the implication is that where and when

parties switch between cooperating and competing – like for instance in Germany, the Netherlands, Austria and occasionally also Denmark[77] – some strategies of opposition attack could be expected to lose importance. For instance, when an opposition party and a party of the present governing coalition has a recent history of shared responsibility for policy-making on a specific issue or problem, it could be risky for the opposition party to attack the government by means of news reflecting recent negative developments in the problem. Or, from the perspective of future coalition bargaining, an opposition party might be less inclined to attack government parties with which it could form a government compared to those which are expendable partners if this new coalition constellation should take office. On the other hand, the DPP case also illustrates that parties are good at separating vote-seeking and policy-seeking strategies. Thus, as in the case of DPP, opposition parties are able to fulfil their role as a critical adversary of government even though they soon might come to (or at least hope to) share office with one or several of the parties currently in government.

Despite the fact that Denmark, as a consensual political system, constitutes a conservative test of the attack and defend model, there is strong evidence that my competitive agenda-setting model applies. One of the main points in this generalization is thus that majoritarian or two-party systems where executive power is concentrated to one-party majority governments (Lijhphart, 1999) – for instance the United Kingdom, New Zealand (pre-1996), Australia, Canada and the United States – will be more prone to the attack and defend type of party strategies vis-à-vis the media agenda. The case of the U.S. is, however, also affected by the separation of powers not found in parliamentary democracies. Voters elect both the President and the two legislative chambers, thus delegating authority to competing agents (Müller et al., 2006: 21). Especially when government is divided and the President's party does not enjoy a majority in Congress, the U.S. system approaches coalition government in multiparty systems (Fiorina, 1991: 240). Parties must compromise either on each policy issue or across issues, and voters face a less clear and transparent distribution of responsibility when something is wrong. From the perspective of the two parties, the competitive character of political agenda-setting could be reduced if the majority party and the presidential cabinet are able to establish a stable and effective relationship. On the other hand, divided government could also spur legislative

[77] The Social Liberals has switched between joining or supporting left- and right-wing government coalitions (cf. Green-Pedersen and Thomsen, 2005: 158; Skjæveland, 2003).

gridlock (Edwards III et al., 1997), increasing the level of conflict and perhaps also the use of news negativity in party competition.

The point that attack and defend will be more pronounced when fewer parties compete in elections is also the main conclusion in terms of how the *vote-seeking* aspect of the model affects its applicability in other party systems. The general argument is that the competitive and vote-seeking behaviour that characterizes the attack and defend model will decrease as the stakes of party competition are lowered. Strøm notes that 'Electoral competitiveness is the aggregate uncertainty of electoral contests as perceived by party leaders. [...] And the greater the electoral competitiveness, the more keenly parties pursue votes' (1990: 582). Electoral systems are a key factor in this equation, as single-member districts raise the premium on votes when compared to systems of proportional representation in which parliamentary seats are distributed more in accordance with vote shares. Thus, two (and two and half) party systems are characterized by more competitive elections than multi-party systems, and so the attack and defend model would in theory apply even better outside the institutional setting of PR.

At the other extreme, systems where government power has been held by the same party (or coalition) for a long period of time risk having elections where the result is given. Also, if elections hold limited potential to change the distribution of government power, like in the special case of Switzerland where the same parties formed the governing coalition from 1959 to 2003, parties' vote-seeking aspirations are likely to suffer in competition with policy-seeking goals. The agenda-setting strategies observed in the Danish case could therefore be less important in these settings, where government parties are expected to stay in office and opposition parties are expected to stay outside.

In addition, the vote-seeking assumption also implies that when elections draw closer competition increases. The routine times patterns of attack and defend observed here could thus be amplified by election campaigns. But elections change the context of political agenda-setting, and studies examining the media-politics link during campaigns have consistently found less, or even no, effect of news coverage on political agendas (cf. Semetko et al., 1991, Brandenburg, 2002). On the other hand, when parties know a new election and a new campaign is approaching (either because of fixed-terms or because the incumbent is running out of time), there is still a possibility that media influence on party agendas might be substantial (cf. Thesen, 2007) and that increased party competition could be reflected in more 'attack and defend'.

Finally, it is assumed that the target political system of the attack and defend perspective is *mediatized*, to the extent that the competition between the opposition and the government is almost exclusively communicated by the media. But the degree of mediatization (cf. Strömbäck, 2008) and the nature of media systems (cf. Hallin and Mancini, 2004) varies, and this could be expected to impact how often and how strongly parties in a political system embrace the strategies studied here. For instance, the more independent the media are from politics, the higher the level of commercialism in news production. This in turn, as illustrated in the 'fourth phase of mediatization' (Strömbäck, 2008: 239-241), fuels the development of 'permanent campaigning' and a situation in which mediated realities take precedence over actual realities. In order to be responsive, political actors must therefore constantly attend to the problems that feature in the news, as these become the dominant representations of the real-world challenges facing society. In consequence, mediatization increases the incentives of political parties to respond to news, lowering the threshold of news politicization and increasing the impact of the attack and defend model. By means of the same process, news that more easily fits news value criteria in a highly commercialized and competitive news market will flourish. As mentioned, non-policy valence events could be regarded as one such type of news, meaning that the influence of mediated scandals and incompetence is likely to increase along with mediatization and commercialization.

Applying Hallin and Mancini's model of media systems (2004) the developments above are likely to be most visible in the North Atlantic or Liberal model, including countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and Ireland. Here, a low level of state intervention and the early and overwhelmingly dominant development of commercial newspapers suggest a more pronounced mediatization compared to the North/Central or Democratic Corporatist model and the Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralist Model. Interestingly, the hypothesized empirical consequences of exporting the attack and defend model thus overlap considerably assessed from the respective perspectives of policy responsibility and the distribution of policy-making powers, vote-seeking parties and electoral competitiveness, and mediatization of politics. Besides indicating that these features obviously are closely connected, this strengthens the conclusion of this section: the strong results in the Danish case are likely to be echoed in other corporatist or consensual democracies and strengthened in liberal and majoritarian democracies.

As a final note, I would like to add that although the model could not be expected to provide an equally suitable description of political agenda-

setting across systems, several developments point to its potential relevance throughout Western democracies. There is widespread agreement that electoral volatility has increased (cf Pedersen, 1979; Rose and McAllister, 1986) and, although more disputed, that traditional class voting has declined (cf. Franklin et al., 1992; Knutsen, 2006). Several of the answers to what has come instead centre on different aspects of issue voting, while issue competition at the same time seems to have experienced an almost 'universal' rise (Green-Pedersen, 2007; 2010). Together with the professionalization of politics (Mancini, 1999), the personalization of politics (Karvonen, 2010), the decline of mass parties (Katz and Mair, 1994), the rise of 'catchall' (Kirchheimer, 1966) or 'electoral-professional' (Panebianco, 1988) parties and the 'triumph of the liberal model' of media systems (Hallin and Mancini, 2004), they constitute prominent debates in political science that through different arguments and paths share at least one implication: the role of the media-politics link is increasingly strong and increasingly similar in democratic politics. Of course, how this is manifested in party competition and political agenda-setting across different political-institutional contexts is still a question for future research.

Chapter 11
Conclusions and implications

Concluding the dissertation, this chapter translates the empirical findings in light of the literatures that inspired the attack and defend model. Key implications for political agenda-setting, party and issue competition, issue convergence and party dialogue are suggested and debated. At the very end, the broader theme of mediatization of politics, introduced via a 'bucket of lobsters' in Chapter 1, is revisited and discussed. First, however, an overall conclusion will be drawn.

11.1 Not one, but *two* processes of news selection

In this dissertation I have argued that parties use news mediations of social problems in their competition with each other, that office position makes government parties more responsible for social problems than opposition parties and that this directs their attention to different news tones in political communication. On the one hand, the opposition was expected to attack, responding to bad news because they reflect negative developments in social problems that the government could be held responsible for. On the other hand, the government was expected to defend the legitimacy of its position in office by a dual strategy. First, a *proactive* one in which it responds to good news because this could politicize policy success. Second, a *reactive* strategy, as the government is forced to attend to negative developments when news explicitly addresses its policy responsibility and threatens to ruin its image as responsive and competent.

Furthermore, the different issue priorities and issue strengths of parties, conceptualized through issue ownership, was argued to bias opposition and government response in favour of 'their own' issues. Finally, the idea of a moderated ownership effect was put forward, claiming that the impact of issue ownership on party responses to news is conditioned by policy responsibility and the state of the problem in question. Thus, I anticipated that opposition parties' use of electoral issue strengths was (partly) dependent on news negativity, otherwise risking to politicize government competence or success and undermining opposition ownership. In contrast, the government is unwilling and unable to prioritize owned issues when news is bad as they are either hoping to avoid negative attention or pressured to respond to it.

Instead, I proposed that the government would apply its issue strengths when news is good and the pressure to respond is low or non-existent.

The previous chapter summarizes the findings and shows strong support for the above expectations (cf. Table 10.1). When drawing the overall conclusion, I think the results accommodate a dual implication for the understanding of the media-politics relationship in political agenda-setting. On the one hand, the substantial agenda-setting effects that were identified clearly point to how the media agenda sets the basic parameters of the opposition-government game. When news institutions mediate a problem at the expense of others, and emphasize specific perspectives on recent developments or its present state, some parties will be advantaged while others will suffer a handicap. The media's political agenda-setting power is thus an integral part of party competition. Furthermore, we know that political attention is needed to solve problems (cf. Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005). Finding that the attention of political parties is influenced by the political relevance and importance attached to social problems by the media thus indicates the substantial potential of policy impact through the media's political agenda-setting power.

On the other hand, I have argued that party competition, policy responsibility and issue ownership explain why parties respond to news and, consequently, which news they respond to. This claim is emphatically supported, indicating that politics matters and that partisan preferences shape both the media-politics interactions per se and, by implication, the possible policies spurred by these interactions. Even though a non-trivial amount of the social problems communicated in the media come to attract political attention, parties are still in a position to select those they care most about or that serve their interests well. Far from claiming that the media's selection and depiction of problems prior to politicization is irrelevant, my point is simply that a broader perspective on the agenda-setting influence of the media should appreciate both these *processes of news selection*. We know much about the latter through research on news value criteria, but less about the political selection of news. This study suggests that it is a crucial contingent factor in the media-politics relationship, and demonstrates how only a couple of party political perspectives will increase the precision with which news politicization could be predicted. First, relating to the competition between opposition and government, meaning that party responses to news reflect the fight over office – and the responsibility which accompanies it. Second, relating to the electoral importance of issue strengths and issue competence, meaning that party responses to news also reproduce the dynamics of partisan politics.

Although stressing that party competition is an important key to understanding political agenda-setting, I would like to add that the attack and defend model also incorporates more aspects of news content than previous studies considering mostly issue typologies. By focusing on news tone, substance blame, non-policy blame and the role of political actors in news triggering, I address characteristics of stories that influence their news value – and not only their political value. More generally, I see this as way in which information could be further integrated with political preferences in the study of political agenda-setting. Baumgartner et al. (2011) note how the role of information in politics is underappreciated, and argue that 'in many situations where preferences and rules are fixed for all practical purposes, information is the key 'moving part' for understanding policy change' (ibid.: 952). Appreciating this, I have moved beyond the dominant agenda-setting conceptualization of information that places social problems in issue categories, and built a model where a more dynamic aspect of news information plays the lead role. Fusing dynamic information with a political perspective, arriving at institutionally (government office) and partisan (party competition and issue ownership) based information preferences of political actors facing the mediated state of social problems (news tone and blame), is my answer to Baumgartner et al.'s call for more research on 'linkages among information, events, institutions, and preferences' (ibid.).

The sections below concentrate on literature-specific implications of the results, offering details to the overall conclusion that news has considerable influence on political attention, but that this influence is contingent upon its ability to fit a political logic.

11.2 Political agenda-setting

Starting with political agenda-setting, one of the main lessons is that this is a process in need of political modelling. In this sense, the present study picks up the thread from recent contributions (cf. Vliegenthaart and Walgrave, 2010; Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2010a). Whether operating on the issue level or on sub-issue levels, political agenda-setting studies will benefit from applying established knowledge about political actors, institutions or processes. This does not mean that the public should be disregarded, as the media's strength in political communication rests on their role as the most important source of communication between the public and political actors (cf. first phase of mediatization, Strömbäck, 2008: 236). Rather it means that it is of less interest how individuals process news if it cannot be linked to a specific behavioural macro-process of politics. Consider for instance the com-

peting explanations tested in Chapter 9. While expectations vary, both categories of prominent issues and economic issues are based on the assumption that they somehow are more important to the public. The former stops at this, consequently containing several issues where the public experiences issue developments directly. The latter continues to address the role that such issues might play in voting decisions, and hence parties' vote-seeking strategies, arriving at a specific political link between economic news and party responses. Results suggest that this is a worthwhile approach that deserves more attention in future research.

Turning to the more concrete contributions of the study, especially three aspects deserve to be mentioned. First, the dissertation delivers empirical evidence on how government attention is influenced by the news media. Outside the US context and focus on presidential agenda-setting, this has scarcely been an object of study in political agenda-setting. Some studies have touched upon government MPs (cf. Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2011a), but this does not capture government per se, only the restrictions and opportunities of its parliamentary base. Walgrave et al. (2008) include a 'true' government measure (weekly ministerial decisions), but are theoretically most concerned with the differences between media influence on symbolic (parliament) and substantial (government) political agendas. Here, I make no such distinction and instead model how news shapes the political attention of government and opposition. I will not repeat the results, but simply say that they show considerable impact of news on the government. In one way, the implicit understanding in previous work that media influence on the government is weak or even non-existent is therefore only partly true. When studying the political *attention* of opposition and government, instead of comparing so called symbolic opposition agendas to substantial government agendas, it is evident that the media agenda has consequences for both actors - even though these consequences are different.

Next, the attack and defend model also contributes with a more precise explanation of why it is that news matters to political actors. The original core agenda-setting idea that news saliency affects the importance that political actors attach to an issue underlies all contributions discussing and documenting media influence on political agendas. Studies focusing on issue variation suggest that this is more true for some issues than for others; nevertheless they do not sufficiently bridge the considerable gap between the x (news saliency) and the y (political response). In this regard, the findings here provide an interesting supplement explaining the journey from the news agenda to the political agenda more closely. In both the government and the opposition case, blame attributions were found to mediate some of the

effect that news saliency has on party responses. Thus, news saliency matters partly to the extent that it feeds opposition with ammunition to attack and hold the government responsible for negative developments in social problems. In terms of existing research, this for instance suggests why Vliegenthart and Walgrave (2011a) as well as Green-Pedersen and Stubager (2010a) find considerable media effects on the opposition.

At a more general level, an important take away point is the return from 'the power of issues to the issue of power', to turn Dearing and Rogers 'slogan' on its head (1996:78). Agenda-setting studies have no doubt provided valuable insights into how issue attributes matter, rendering some issues on the news agenda more prone to politicization than others. The present study, however, argues a refocusing on power, and the findings clearly support this approach. Starting out with the arguably most basic yet fundamental division in party competition, between those in office and those outside, the attack and defend model concentrates on how policy-making powers and policy responsibility direct opposition and government attention to different news tones. Implicit in the refocusing on power is the notion that political actors see issues on the news agenda as reflections of social problems (which they could or could not process). Research has addressed the way politicians use news as a surrogate for public opinion (cf. Pritchard, 1994; Linsky, 1986). My assumption here is similar and overlapping, but connects political actors more specifically to news representation of problems instead of news representation of public opinion. The most important aspect of both assumptions is that they direct attention to how political actors perceive news, thus providing a platform from which reflections on political responses to news could start. In my case, arguing that they see news as representations of social problems, the most important question regarding the news agenda is what it tells us about the state of, and responsibility for, social problems.

From this perspective, stressing policy responsibility and the state of social problems, examples of null findings or exceptions in extant research make sense. As in the case where media effects on opposition MPs are not present for issues from the government agreements (Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2011a, cf. Section 2.2.1), where the inclusion of the attack and defend perspective could have revealed whether the opposition nevertheless used news portraying *negative* developments to discredit the government on the issues it had committed to. Likewise, I show that the exception from the ownership effects found in Green-Pedersen and Stubager's study (2010a, cf. Section 2.2.1) is part of a systematic pattern where the value of ownership is contingent upon how the issue in question is developing. Political perspectives on issue variation are important, but a comparative perspective on pol-

icy responsibility provides a strong addition to extant explanations of political responses to news.

The study also delivers an argument for thinking of and studying political agenda-setting systematically below the issue or issue group level. This is again related to its comparative perspective on government power and the subsequent role of news tone in news politicization. The findings show support for my assumption that parties care more about what kind of attention and what kind of development in social problems that news highlight, rather than which issues or problems it focuses on. Applying this lesson in future research, we should be open to the possibility that some explanations of news responses might be hard to get at when we operate on the issue level. Thus, I would argue that political agenda-setting studies might profit from deconstructing issues to meaningful components such as news stories and events, instead of only studying agenda-setting by more or less arbitrarily disaggregating issues or issue groups through time-serial modelling of weekly, monthly, semi-annual or annual agenda changes. Ideally, the combination of both approaches, only carefully started in the medium-N study, should occupy a larger place in future research, allowing us to come both theoretically and empirically closer to the causal mechanism that drives political agenda-setting.

11.3 Party and issue competition

Moving on, the remaining sections bring up possible implications for other fields of research, while still touching upon agenda-setting contributions where relevant. The literature on party and issue competition (cf. Budge and Farlie, 1983; Petrocik, 1996; Carmines, 1991; Green, 2007; Green-Pedersen, 2007) was a core inspiration for the attack and defend model. Its main argument is that parties compete less by assuming different positions on the same issue, than by drawing attention to the issues that are favourable to them. The dissertation has, in the same way as recent agenda-setting studies (Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2010a; Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2011a), incorporated this idea through the propositions on ownership effects in political agenda-setting. The positive results indicate that this perspective is helpful for understanding routine times party behaviour in response to the media agenda, thus reaching beyond its original campaign scope where it has been used to explain party strategies and electoral outcomes.

Even more interesting, though, is the special 'twist' put on the party and issue competition perspective in the attack and defend model. Two points should be noted. First, the model introduces a different perspective on what

'favourable' issues are in party competition. By using policy responsibility as a starting point, the simple idea is that good news constitutes government strengths while bad news constitutes opposition strengths in agenda-setting. Moving competition one level down, from ownership of social problems to responsibility for the state of problems, Carmines' observation still applies: 'Strategic politicians, in short, attempt to maintain their power by being associated with winning issues' (1991: 75). In other words, the attack and defend framework is a distinct model of party and issue competition. The only difference is that the state of social problems, in combination with party responsibility for it, serves as an important supplementary indication of a 'winning issue'. A supplement which at least in agenda-setting proved more decisive than long-term images of party competence. Given the positive results in the present context, it might be that also research on party campaigning and vote decisions could approach issue competition from the perspective of 'winning issues' applied here. A highly successful parallel to this would be the massive body of research on the economic vote, where key questions relate to how the economy is doing and who's responsible for it.

Second, the attack and defend model combines the 'traditional' ownership approach with the state of and responsibility for social problems perspective. As summarized in the previous chapter, the results are convincing, showing that the effect of ownership on government and opposition response is moderated by good and bad news respectively. One implication is that what Petrocik (1996) labels 'short-term' leases of ownership (due to unfavourable events) are in fact systematically important to the way government applies its electoral issue strengths in party competition and political agenda-setting. Moreover, looking to issue competition in electoral studies, Belanger and Meguid (2008) recently demonstrated how the influence of issue ownership on voting decisions is contingent upon the salience of the issue in question. Perhaps this contingency could be elaborated to include dynamic issue information on the actual, or perceived, state of social problems. Whether studying party responses to news in between elections, party campaign strategies or vote choices, the idea that the value of ownership to a social problem depends on its mediated, 'real world' or subjectively perceived state, seem worthy of more research attention.

Finally, I will briefly collect two remaining implications of the research presented here that relate more indirectly to party and issue competition. First, supplementing Clark's (2008) solid evidence that non-policy valence events depress the vote shares of political parties, I find that party, and not only electoral, behaviour is affected. In fact, the attack and defend model presents a possible link between these events and their electoral impact. My

results show that stories where government competence or integrity is challenged are, comparatively speaking, extremely likely to be picked up by opposition parties. By using these events for what they are worth, the opposition not only sustains media interest but also conveys the message to the public that these issues are important in politics. To the extent that opposition attacks are successful, the coverage of these stories will be prolonged and the image of the government as incompetent or outright dishonest will stick. The timing, severity and amount of such stories, combined with the opposition's reaction to them, is thus likely to influence the degree to which the government will suffer when the electorate is to hold it accountable at the next election.

Second, the results of the study contribute to research on party rhetoric and negative campaigning (Skaperdas and Grofman, 1995; Fridkin and Kenney, 2004; Håkansson, 1999; Elmelund-Præstekær, 2010). Not only do opposition (challenger) and government (incumbent) ads and manifestos differ in tone; the same difference applies in their responses to news in between elections. In sum, there is overall a convincing empirical basis for a general claim that policy responsibility and office position determine party preferences for positive and negative tones in political communication.

11.4 Issue convergence and dialogue

Partly in response to the ownership focus in the literature on party competition, a sub-topic has developed in recent years questioning the assumption that parties compete by emphasizing different issues, pointing to considerable issue overlap or convergence between parties (Sigelman and Buell, 2004; Damore, 2005; Sides, 2006; Green-Pedersen, 2007). Moving beyond descriptions of the balance between overlap and avoidance, the question of under which conditions parties converge or engage in dialogue has attracted more and more attention (Simon, 2002; Brasher, 2003; Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2010). The results of the previous chapters feed directly into this discussion and point to how media-fuelled party competition leads to both divergence and story dialogue.

The dissertation argues that opposition strategy towards the media agenda is all about attack, while the government switches between a proactive and a reactive defence. The consequences in terms of agenda convergence and opposition and government dialogue in party competition are very different. The combination of preferred strategies, where the opposition attacks using bad and owned news and the government defends proactively using good and owned news, means that the media's agenda-setting

influence drives party agendas apart. But when news contains blame attributions and/or is highly salient, the government is forced to react to negative issue developments with the result that media attention has a positive impact on issue dialogue in party competition.

Besides highlighting the role of the media in party dialogue and convergence, the results suggest that news attention structures issue competition and influences the type and tone of those issues that become subject to dialogue between opposition and government. As mentioned above, dialogue is facilitated by negative news featuring blame attributions. Seeing that these stories also encourage politicization of opposition-owned issues, media-fuelled issue engagement will often take place when the government is doubly disadvantaged. First, dialogue is more likely when the news tone is bad, reflecting a situation with negative development in social problems for which the government will often be blamed. Second, dialogue is more likely when the electorate's image of opposition and government competence favours the former. The problem-oriented nature of news attention and the mechanisms of government and opposition response thus seem to facilitate a specific context in which dialogue in party competition is more favourable to those outside of office. From the perspective of political agenda-setting then, opposition parties have more opportunities and stronger incentives to join or initiate dialogue.

Both the proposition on issue ridership (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1994) and results showing that saliency increases dialogue (Simon, 2002) are supported by the medium-N study, where heightened media attention is found to induce responses from both opposition and government.[78] In fact, based on the empirical material investigated here, it seems as if parties have no choice but to engage. The pattern also corresponds to the notion of a 'party system agenda' (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2010), and supplements by showing how media influence on opposition and government fits the picture. Regarding the different constraints and opportunities of opposition and government, their conclusion is strikingly close to what the present study finds: 'According to the model, opposition parties have more opportunities to focus continually on issues that are advantageous to them, whereas government parties are compelled to respond to issues brought up on the party system agenda. By controlling the party-system agenda, the opposition par-

[78] The same pattern is found in the large-N study. But its measures of opposition and government response are not to the same extent comparable, thus making it a less valid basis from which to judge 'true' dialogue. However, the fact that both studies operate on the story level makes them more intuitive measures of dialogue than studies that measure dialogue on the issue level.

ties can thus 'force' governments to address issues' (2010: 273). The similarity suggests a crucial role for the media agenda in party and issue competition, a role which deserves more attention in future research on dialogue and convergence.

Finally, it has been noted that participation in issue dialogue should not only be seen as the result of a forced reaction. Jerit (2008) finds that parties are likely to profit from stressing the same considerations, instead of only selectively highlighting the aspects of an issue where they are advantaged. The medium-N study of day-to-day coverage, although not able to address the success of party involvement, contributes in a similar fashion by moving beyond the question of whether parties dialogue to studying *how* they do it in the context of highly salient issues. More specifically, it offers a perspective on the conditions under which parties are more likely to address the same aspects of a story compared to when they are more likely to emphasize different aspects. Again we see that news negativity, but also story duration, has different effects on opposition and government, decreasing the likelihood that parties will respond at the same point in time during a news story debate. Thus, chances that opposition and government direct their attention to different developments in the debate and different pieces of information increase. In contrast, attributions of blame increase the likelihood of simultaneous party responses meaning that story debates more often will take the shape of true party dialogue. In consequence, the mix of developments in stories or problems and the way these are communicated in the news affect not only the level of convergence, but also the character of dialogue in party competition.

11.5 Mediatization of politics?

The fact that politics is mediated and that the media is the 'most important source of information and channel of communication between the citizenry and political institutions and actors' (Strömbäck, 2008: 236) is the cornerstone for any perspective on media influence or media effects in political communication. The concept of mediatization is, however, a more useful tool by which to distinguish the level of media influence on politics. Strömbäck (2008) defines four stages of this process, where the degree to which the media is independent from political institutions and the degree to which politics and media are governed by media logics determine how mediatized a political system is. These important societal changes deserve attention also when we interpret studies of political agenda-setting. Admittedly, there are good reasons why my study does not speak directly to this literature and its

definition of mediatized politics. For instance, the attack and defend model does not investigate longitudinal changes in party responses to news and is therefore not able to address the dynamic process of mediatization. Moreover, the model belongs to a media effects tradition where issue content is in focus, in contrast to the emphasis on form or format inherent in the concept of mediatization (Hjarvard, 2004; Altheide and Snow, 1991). Nevertheless, the effort should still be made to understand the studied process of interaction between the news media and political parties by reference to the framework of mediatized politics.

Central to the model developed here is the 'politics matters' thesis, a feature which is shared by the agenda-setting research stressing the political contingencies of agenda-setting (Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006; Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2010a). The political contingencies perspective thus sets the basic parameters of the model, and results have been interpreted as an outcome of distinctly political logics. The traditional agenda-setting focus on media effects is thus to some extent replaced by party strategies and party manoeuvring. Such a view on the media-party relationship resembles mediated politics, or at most the second phase of mediatization (Strömbäck, 2008: 236-237), implying that political actors still hold the upper hand (at least when it comes to the question of issue content).

However, there is a danger of overstating the strength of parties in agenda-setting. At a general level I have no trouble accepting the perspective that modern politics is undergoing a process of mediatization. Politics is increasingly dependent on and 'continuously shaped by interactions with mass media' (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999: 250), and, as noted earlier, the very measures of political attention applied here could partly be seen as products of this process. Furthermore, it is misleading to depict the media agenda, exclusively, as a pool of random issues from which politicians can pick whatever they like. Thus it should be stressed that although parties are guided by what they consider to be 'winning' issues when they respond to news, the mediated reality presented in the news – filtering out some problems and not others, communicating or framing some aspects of problems and not others – exercises a considerable influence on which problems political actors process and how they do it. To the extent that the media agenda serves as a source of the opposition's and government's respective preferences for negative and positive messages, the implication is that the overall climate and content of news coverage impacts the climate and content of the opposition-government game in a political system. In other words, although I see party responses to news as politically grounded, their ability to make use of these strategies is dependent on the media system in which

they operate. Thus, more negativity, substance blame and non-policy blame in the news mean more of this in party competition. And opposite, less negative reporting, less government criticism and scandals mean less of this in party competition.

The perhaps most concrete example of mediatization in this dissertation relates to the so-called non-policy valence events, a type of conflict that overfulfills news value criteria, with less focus on policy substance and implicitly more on form. Although they sometimes have important consequences for political processes, they are far from always relevant neither to policy-making nor to the communication of own strengths or opponent weaknesses in party competition. The fact that they are central to opposition politicization, in combination with their effects on electoral outcome (Clark, 2008), suggests to me that they are a true example of mediatization of politics where a logic more native to the realm of the media comes to colonize politics (cf. Meyer, 2002).

A more fundamental challenge to my emphasis on a strong party-driven element in the agenda-setting process is the possible objection that what I consider to be a political logic (relating to policy responsibility and party competition) in the mediatization optic rather would be defined as political actors' internalization of a media logic (Strömbäck, 2008: 237-240). Essentially this is a difference of perspectives that is not easily overcome. But, in this respect, I think that what the present and other recent agenda-setting studies could offer is a broader understanding and more extensive conceptualization of political logics. Strömbäck notes how the concept of political logic is less developed than the concept of media logic (ibid.: 233). It has received some attention though, and he points to Meyer, one of the proponents of the media vs. political logic distinction, who argues that political logic has a policy dimension – 'the effort to find solutions for politically defined problems by means of programs for action' – and a process dimension – 'the effort to gain official acceptance of one's chosen program of action' (Meyer, 2002: 12). My argument here is that the latter dimension is downplayed in the literature on mediatization, and that by including theories of party competition the realm of politics could be expanded. Or alternatively, that conclusions on mediatization seem to rest on empirical observations from the process dimension, while what counts as 'political' – and which is pit against the invasion of a media logic in 'the effort to gain official acceptance' – is defined with the policy dimension in mind.

More specifically, I argue that what is often regarded as central to a media logic, for instance simplification and the emphasis on conflicts (cf. Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Hernes, 1978), is also inherent to politics – and espe-

cially to party competition. This is of course not a novel idea, but it does seem to play a secondary role in arguments about mediatized politics that instead stress the 'policy dimension' and the defining features of policy-making and implementation. Thus, I question whether the fact that parties use the media as an arena and source of their conflict-centred competition should necessarily be interpreted as an adaption to, or adoption of, a media logic. The fact that party competition is a process where political communication and the media is highly important, does not in itself imply that the 'politics as a horse race'-framing (Mazzoleni, 1987) is exogenous to a political logic. Rather, I think that it is a question of compatible logics, and that the strongest media-politics interactions will take place when their respective interests overlap. Returning to the example from the introductory chapter, the lobsters became politics because they were both mediatized *and* partisan. To the media, they offered a good story, representing a large and complex problem through *one* dramatic and alarming image. But it was because the mediated reality fitted the competitive nature of the opposition-government game – highlighting negative developments in a social problem owned by the opposition, and explicitly addressing government responsibility – that political attention was captured and legislation passed.

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Appendix

A.1 Examples of news coding

The coding of news tone – as either good, neutral or bad – was done from the point of view of government. The main guiding rule was to take on the role as a government minister, based on Baumgartner and Jones' (1993: 51): 'if you were an industry leader [minister], would you be pleased or unhappy to see such a title?' Table A.1.1 presents typical good, bad and neutral stories, exemplified with keywords from the summaries used to code the radio news items. While Table A.1.2 displays keywords of typical items coded as containing substance and non-policy blame.

Table A.1.1 Examples of good, bad and neutral stories

Good	Bad	Neutral
Traffic, fewer speeding offences	Wage-earners fear of losing work increase	Prohibition against photographing in courts ('defence lawyers applaud, while the press protests')
Fewer people die of cancer	Security problems at Barsebäck (nuclear plant)	
Great potential for voluntary mergers of municipalities	House prices and inequalities across Denmark	Upturn to come ('economic rise next year [...] But the treasury will lack 27 billion DKR')
Great user satisfaction with court-sponsored mediation	Fewer burglaries solved	
Fewer work-related accidents	More traffic accidents	Al Qaeda crushed, risk of terror ('Al Qaeda nearly crushed, still the risk of international terror as high as ever')
Regions get control of recent years rise in expenses	Negative growth in Denmark	
Record entrepreneurship among immigrants	Children get to much sugar	UN climate conference, Russia ('did not get an answer to the big question: will Russia accept the Kyoto-agreement?')
DSB trains are on time!	Agriculture, farms close down as never before,	

Table A.1.2 Examples substance blame and non-policy valence blame

Substance blame	Non-policy valence blame
National Audits Office critiques Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs	Minister for the Environment accused of giving preferential treatment to friends
Bill proposal, civil agents, critique	Minister for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries spoke falsely about number of pigs
Government fails on gender equality	UN criticizes Danish immigration law
Unemployment, government passive	Decline in taxation revenue, miscalculations
Early retirement plan, critique	Breach of promise, home care service for the elderly

A.2 Issue ownership

The coding of issue ownership was based on results from the Danish election surveys measuring the issue competence images of the two blocs (Social Democratic or bourgeois led coalition) through several elections (Goul Andersen, 2003). In accordance with my emphasis on both the policy-seeking root and the vote-seeking aspect of ownership (cf. Section 3.4), I wanted to capture ownership over more than just one term. I thus applied ownership codes to the existing issue groups of the radio news database using the election surveys from 1998, 2001 and 2005. Table A.1.2 presents ownership, as well as the number of news stories, for each issue.

Table A.2.1 Coding of issue ownership

Issue	Bourgeois	Unowned/ unknown	Social democratic
Economy, general	19	0	0
Employment and unemployment	0	0	16
Public expenses, budgets, economic, national debt etc.	6	0	0
Taxes	32	0	0
Balance of payments, export, foreign investments, exchange rates, devaluation, customs etc	17	0	0
International economy	6	0	0
Civil liberties	0	40	0
State church	0	14	0
Immigration	73	0	0
Health	0	0	216
Agriculture	47	0	0
Food, food industry	0	0	38
Fisheries	11	0	0

- continues -

Issue	Bourgeois	Unowned/ unknown	Social democratic
Labour market, general	0	0	72
Work environment, occupational injuries etc	0	0	23
Labour market policy, supplementary education/in-service training etc	0	0	10
Redundancy pay, transfer incomes, partial pension	0	0	3
Unemployment benefit, sickness benefit	0	0	7
Education, general	0	21	0
Primary and lower secondary school	0	33	0
Secondary school	0	10	0
Upper secondary school, education grants	0	20	0
Culture, sports	0	77	0
Environment	0	0	89
Planning and resource	0	6	0
Energy	0	34	0
Traffic, transport, infrastructure	0	136	0
Law and order, crime	246	0	0
Social welfare and family, general	0	0	18
Care of older people, housing for older people	0	0	10
State pension, other benefits for older people	0	0	7
Family policy, families with children, children's conditions	0	0	48
Housing	0	0	41
Business, industry and consumer issues	156	0	0
Defence, general	37	0	0
Danish security policy	25	0	0
Catastrophes, accidents, civil preparedness	0	27	0
Research, technology, IT and telecommunications	0	63	0
Mass media and the press	0	24	0
Foreign affairs, general	0	36	0
Danish foreign policy, diplomacy and relations with other countries	0	93	0
Danish foreign aid	0	0	20
EU	0	88	0
Greenland and the Faroe Islands	0	14	0
Public sector, general	0	0	19
Central local relations, regional policy, local policy	0	46	0
Politics, general	0	65	0

A.3 Inter-coder reliability

The quality of data collection was checked through an inter-coder reliability test for both the large-N and the medium-N study. The formal test was conducted by comparing my own coding with that of a trained student coder, on random samples containing 313 radio news items for the large-N study and 46 newspaper articles for the medium-N study. Results are presented in Table A.1.4 and A.1.5, which display Krippendorff alphas (Krippendorff, 2004) for variables in the large-N and medium-N study respectively.

Table A.3.1 Measure of inter-coder reliability, large-N study (N=313 radio news items)

Varible	Krippendorffs Alpha
News tone	0.83
Substance blame	0.82
Non-policy blame	0.79
Government involvement	0.85
Opposition involvement	0.97

As Table A.3.1 shows, the variables measuring opposition and government initiation of news were not part of the inter-coder reliability tests. The reason is that they were not operationalized and applied at the time of the testing. Instead, I was using the broader measure of the politics to news relationship at this point in the project – that is, government and opposition involvement in the news. Admittedly, the initiation variables could be expected to show a lower inter-coder reliability as they include a judgement on whether the opposition/government involvement triggered the news story. On the other hand, the empirical results from the large-N material do not change substantially when using the two broader measurements (Government / Opposition involvement) instead of the initiation variables (Government / Opposition initiation). The overall conclusions regarding how endogeneity affects the estimated models therefore seem sufficiently substantiated.

Table A.3.2 Measure of inter-coder reliability, medium-N study (N=46 newspaper articles)

Variable	Krippendorffs Alpha
News tone	0.86
Substance blame	0.80
Non-policy blame	0.91
Government response (claims)	0.86
Opposition response (claims)	0.89

A.4 Correlations of independent variables

Table A.4.1 Correlations among independent variables in opposition models, large-N study (N=2061)

	Saliency	Opposition initiation	Substance blame from opposition	Government initiation	Government response	News tone	Substance blame	Non-policy blame
Saliency	1							
Opposition initiation	.060***	1						
Substance blame from opposition	.235***	.245***	1					
Government initiation	.154***	.263***	.245***	1				
Government response	.280***	.055**	.139***	.127***	1			
News tone (pct bad)	.022	-.034	.140***	-.117***	-.016	1		
Substance blame	.109***	.014	-.061***	.153***	.057***	.186***	1	
Non-policy blame	.172***	.049**	.248***	.017	.096***	.106***	.127***	1
Ownership	-.046**	-.011	-.020	-.035	-.020	.062**	.003	-.025

Significant at *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10.

Table A.4.2 Correlations among independent variables in government models, large-N study (N=2061)

	Saliency	Government initiation	Opposition initiation	Opposition response	News tone	Substance blame	Non-policy blame
Saliency	1						
Government initiation	.154***	1					
Opposition initiation	.060***	.263***	1				
Opposition response	.269***	.149***	.054**	1			
News tone (pct bad)	.022	-.117***	-.034	.139***	1		
Substance blame	.243***	.276***	.160***	.340***	.247***	1	
Non-policy blame	.172***	.017	.049**	.288***	.106***	.365***	1
Ownership	-.002	-.013	-.009	-.019	-.006	.020	-.001

Significant at *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10.

Table A.4.3 Correlations among independent variables in opposition and government models, medium-N study (N=167)

	Saliency	Day of coverage	News tone	Blame attributions	Opposition response
Saliency	1				
Day of coverage	-.021	1			
News tone (pct bad)	-.008	.046	1		
Blame attributions	.236***	.011	.505***	1	
Opposition response	.486***	-.005	.198**	.250***	1
Government response	.771***	.105	.092	.245***	.506***

Significant at *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10.

English summary

The dissertation seeks to answer why political parties respond to news. The purpose is to explore how opposition and government strategies condition the influence of the media agenda on political attention, and thereby address the broader concept of mediatized politics from a political perspective.

Previous research has shown that some issues from the media agenda are more prone to politicization than others. But systematic knowledge about the conditions under which media can influence political agendas is still surprisingly scarce. There is a lack of political perspectives on why news becomes politics, and extant studies often rely on static issue attributes when explaining the dynamic process of agenda change. Building on recent contributions pointing to the political contingencies of this process, I develop an 'attack and defend' model of political agenda-setting. The model argues that parties use news mediations of social problems in their competition with each other, that government power makes some parties more responsible for social problems than others and that this directs their attention to different news tones in political communication.

Opposition parties are expected to *attack*, responding to bad news because they reflect negative developments in social problems that the government could be held responsible for. The government, on the other hand, is expected to *defend* the legitimacy of its position in office by a dual strategy. On the one hand, a *proactive* one in which it responds to good news because this could politicize policy success. On the other hand, a *reactive* strategy, as the government is forced to attend to negative developments when news explicitly addresses its policy responsibility and threatens to ruin its image as responsive and competent. Media depictions of social problems through good and bad news, and the implicit or explicit attribution of responsibility for them, thus come to dominate the opposition-government game and how the players relate to the media agenda.

Furthermore, the model acknowledges that parties have different issue priorities and issue strengths in party competition. Both opposition and government are therefore more likely to respond to news on 'their' issues, believing that these are problems that deserve special attention and hoping to benefit from their positive reputation on these issues in the electorate. Finally, I argue that the impact of these issue ownerships on party responses to news hinges on policy responsibility and the state of the problem in question. Thus, opposition parties are ill-advised to politicize owned issues when news reflects positive developments, as this could bring the public's attention to gov-

ernment success and undermine opposition ownership. An opposite modification is expected for the government, who is more eager, and at liberty, to prioritize owned news when it reflects positive developments and the pressure for a government response is low.

The dissertation is built around these strategies arguing and presenting evidence that party competition, policy responsibility and issue ownership explain *why* parties respond to news and, consequently, *which* news they respond to. The findings presented in this book, show overall strong support for the view that 'politics matters' in two empirical studies of party responses to news stories in Denmark. From the perspective of mediatized politics, the suggestion is that in the case of political agenda-setting, media-politics interactions are clearly structured by distinct party strategies. First, relating to the competition between opposition and government, meaning that party responses to news reflect the fight over office – and the responsibility which accompanies it. Second, relating to the electoral importance of issue strengths and issue competence, meaning that party responses to news also reproduce the dynamics of partisan politics.

Norsk resumé

Avhandlingen forsøker å svare på hvorfor politiske partier responderer på nyheter. Formålet er å undersøke hvordan opposisjons- og regjeringsstrategier betinger den innflytelse som mediene har på politisk oppmerksomhet, og derigjennom å belyse det bredere spørsmål om politikkens medialisering fra et politisk perspektiv.

Tidligere forskning har vist at noen saker fra medienes dagsorden har lettere for å bli politisert enn andre. Men systematisk kunnskap om de betingelser som fremmer medieinnflytelse på politiske dagsordener er fortsatt overraskende begrenset. Det mangler politiske perspektiver som kan forklare hvorfor nyheter blir politikk, og mye av den eksisterende forskningen benytter seg av statiske sakskarakteristika når dynamiske endringer i den politiske dagsorden skal forklares. Med utgangspunkt i nyere studier som vektlegger den politiske betingethet i disse endringsprosessene, utvikles det i denne boken en 'angrep og forsvars' modell for politisk agendasetting. Modellen argumenterer for at partier bruker nyhetenes fremstilling av sosiale problemer i deres konkurranse med hverandre, at regjeringsmakt gjør noen partier mer ansvarlige for sosiale problemer enn andre og at dette i kombinasjon styrer partienes oppmerksomhet i retning av ulike toner i politisk kommunikasjon.

Opposisjonspartier forventes å *angripe*, ved å reagere på dårlige nyheter fordi de reflekterer en negativ utvikling i sosial problemer som regjeringen kan holdes ansvarlig for. Regjeringen, på sin side, forventes å *forsvare* seg og legitimiteten av sin posisjon i regjering ved hjelp av en todelt strategi. For det første, en *proaktiv* strategi hvor de responderer på gode nyheter fordi det kan politisere politisk suksess. Og for det andre, en *reaktiv* strategi hvor regjeringen presses til å vie negative hendelser oppmerksomhet når nyheter eksplisitt adresserer regjeringens politiske ansvar og truer med å underminere dens image som lydhør og kompetent. Medienes fremstillinger av sosiale problemer, gjennom gode og dårlige nyheter, samt den implisitte og eksplisitte tilskrivelsen av ansvar for disse problemene, blir på denne måten dominerende for konkurransen mellom opposisjon og regjering, og for hvordan partiene forholder seg til medienes dagsorden.

Videre anerkjenner modellen at partier har ulike saksprofiler og saksstyrker i partikonkurransen. Både opposisjon og regjering er derfor mer tilbøyelige til å respondere på nyheter fra 'deres egne' saker, fordi de mener at disse sakene fortjener særlig oppmerksomhet og fordi de håper å dra nytte av at velgerne anser dem som best skikket til å løse problemer på

saksfelt som de 'eier'. Endelig argumenterer jeg for at den effekt som sakseierskap har på partienes nyhetsrespons er avhengig av politisk ansvar og den tilstand eller utvikling som det aktuelle problem er i. Opposisjonspartier er ikke tjent med å politisere eide saker når nyheter formidler en positiv utvikling, da dette vil kunne gjøre opinionen oppmerksom på at regjeringen synes å ha suksess og dermed underbygge opposisjonens eierskap. En omvendt interaksjon forventes for regjeringen, som helst ønsker, og er fri til, å prioritere eide nyhetssaker når de formidler en positiv utvikling og presset på en regjeringsreaksjon følgelig er lavt.

Avhandlingen er bygget rundt disse strategiene og presenterer bevis for at partikonkurranse, politisk ansvar og sakseierskap forklarer *hvorfor* partier responderer på nyheter, og dermed også *hvilke* nyheter de politiserer. Resultatene i denne boken viser en gjennomgående sterk støtte til tesen om at 'politics matters' i to empiriske studier av partiers nyhetsrespons i Danmark. I lys av perspektiver rundt politikkens medialisering, antydes det dermed at når det gjelder politisk agenda-setting så er interaksjonene mellom medier og politikk tydelig strukturert av distinkte partistrategier. For det første, knyttet til konkurransen mellom opposisjon og regjering, hvilket betyr at partiers nyhetsrespons gjenspeiler kampen om regjeringsposisjon – og det politiske ansvar som følger med regjeringsmakt. For det andre, knyttet til den betydning som sakseierskap har for valg og stemmegivning, med den konsekvens at partiers nyhetsrespons også reproduserer partipolitiske skillelinjer.