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First examiner: Prof. dr. Kees Aarts, University of Twente, Enschede
Second examiner: Martin Althoff, University of Münster

Personalisation and Publicity

Presidentialisation on the occasion of the Elections to the European Parliament in 2014

Christin Apenbrink
BA Public Administration (Special Emphasis: European Studies)

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Declaration

I declare on oath that I authored the following paper independently and without assistance and that I only used the resources indicated in the paper. All extracts that have been copied from publications analogously or literally are marked as such.

Münster, 18 June 2015



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(Christin Apenbrink)

Table of Contents

Abstract	4
Abbreviations	5
1. Introduction.....	6
Media coverage on European Parliament elections.....	7
The conceptualisation of personalisation.....	8
Transferring the concept to the European level.....	9
Limitations	10
Research question & hypothesis	11
2. Methodology	12
Research design	12
Operationalisation	14
3. Empirical Research	16
Comparing the election of the President of the Commission in 2009 and 2014	16
Statistical Results	17
Testing the first hypothesis.....	17
Testing the second hypothesis.....	20
Discussion	24
4. Conclusion	25
Bibliography.....	26
Annex.....	29

Abstract

Democratic politics rely on publicity. Publicity in turn, strongly depends on the consideration of principles dominating mass media. Especially the European Union is up to its presence in media coverage, since it is at risk to remain a rather abstract arrangement of institutions irrelevant to citizens' everyday life. The following study will shed light on the impact of a particular institutional innovation embedded in the Elections to the European Parliament on news coverage. In 2014, for the first time each fraction in the European Parliament was requested to announce its own pan-European candidate for the Presidency of the Commission. Afterwards, the European Council nominated the presidential candidate according to the majority circumstances resulting from the parliamentary elections. Referring to the theory of 'presidentialisation' (Poguntke & Webb, 2005) it will be argued that the presidential candidates are expected to be centred in media coverage and thus, contribute to a higher degree of personalisation in the election campaign. By means of news reporting in two German newspapers the assumptions will be tested. Therefore, the elaboration of a methodological framework capable to indicate a certain degree of personalisation in newspaper articles is required. The framework is worked out according to various methodological approaches currently applied in research. The application and statistical evaluation of the indicators will lead to plausible research results. After a critical discussion a conclusion will be given comprising an outlook for future research projects.

Abbreviations

ALDE	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Group
CDU	Christian Democratic Union of Germany
CSU	Christian Social Union in Bavaria
FDP	Free Democratic Party
EGP	European Green Party
EPP	European People's Party
GUE/NGL	European United Left/Nordic Green Left
PES	Party of European Socialists
SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany

1. Introduction

Nowadays, politics is almost exclusively conveyed through media coverage. In fact, the press, television and the internet create the public sphere, which citizens perceive as 'politics'. Therefore, politicians are forced to adapt their communication strategies to media principles (Sarcinelli, 2002).

The demands of 'media society' (Saxer, 1998, p. 53) are not only challenging national democracies but also the political system of the European Union. Actually, it turns out to be even more difficult to generate media attention at the European level (Nehlig, 2005). This shortfall is largely due to the fact that European politics in general and the European Parliament elections in particular are commonly considered to be less deciding than national political affairs (Reif & Schmitt, 1980). Nevertheless, there is a chance to extend the attention paid to European issues through elaborated communication strategies.

Sure enough, the European Union sprang into action in 2014, when for the first time the President of the Commission was not only confirmed but also selected according to the majority circumstances resulting from the European Parliament elections. Due to the institutional change codified in the Lisbon Treaty, it was possible to establish the presidential candidates as pan-European leading candidates during the election campaign (European Parliament, 2013).

As theory will show, presidential candidates are expected to be more attractive for news reporting than national candidates contesting a seat in the European Parliament. Thus, the institutional change might have affected the presentation of national and pan-European leading candidates in media coverage. Therefore, the research question reads as follows: *How did the strengthening of the European Parliament in electing the President of the Commission influence the news coverage on the European Parliament elections in 2014?*

The study will start with a theoretical approximation to the object of investigation. First of all, the communicative deficits of the European Parliament elections will be clarified more detailed. Afterwards, the concept of personalisation, which might be adjuvant in the European context, shall be introduced. As personalisation is a term comprising a broad range of facets, it will be narrowed down to the concept of 'presidentialisation'. This concept possesses explanatory power in analysing the news coverage on candidates running for the Presidency of the Commission. Anyhow, the introduction of the concept is innovative in terms of applying it to the European level. Therefore, it requires the discussion of certain institutional criteria concerning the European political system.

The theoretical considerations will lead to the formulation of the research question and two concrete research hypothesis, which will be investigated in the empirical part. To find evidence for the research question, media coverage on the European Parliament elections in 2014 will be analysed in a first step comparing the extent of news reporting on national and pan-European leading candidates. In a second step, news coverage on the election campaign in 2014 will be checked against reporting in 2009. In this way, it will be possible to comprehensively evaluate the impact of the institutional change on personalised news reporting.

The focus of this study will be set on coverage through the printed press. Even though the media system is developing in a dynamic way, traditional print journalism remains an influential communication channel in creating public opinion (Reinemann & Wilke, 2005). Therefore, two German quality newspapers, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, will serve as empirical base.

The empirical research will rely on a methodological framework, which is largely based on former studies conducted to measure a certain degree of personalisation in political communication.

The results will deliver important insights for the research question and confirm the correspondent hypothesis. First of all, the institutional change occurring in 2014 affected news coverage, since a stronger focus set on presidential candidates can be testified. Furthermore, an overall increase in personalised news reporting will be determined comparing media coverage on the European Parliament elections in 2009 and 2014. The findings will be discussed critically taking normative and methodological limitations into account. The conclusion will summarise the major results and give an outlook for potential future research projects.

The observation of personalised news reporting on European elections is a relevant topic of investigation, since personalisation might work as a solution for communicative deficits of the European Union. As personalisation facilitates the communication of complex issues (Sarcinelli, 2008) and the Union is commonly alleged for acting in a non-transparent and abstract way, the communicative tool might help to equalise these problems. The results will be of practical relevance as they provide important implications for the European Union's publicity.

2. Theory

Media coverage on European Parliament elections

It was already claimed that personalisation in the context of news reporting on the European Union in general and the European Parliament elections in particular is desirable, as recipients perceive European issues as rather abstract and complex topics. Personalisation may help to overcome this communicative difficulty. In the following chapter the deficit of publicity for the European Parliament elections shall be discussed from a theoretical point of view.

Election campaigns are news events, which largely consist of emotional and dramatised discourses staged for the media. Therefore, from a communicative perspective, election campaigns are classified as relevant news events (Kaase, 1998).

European Parliament elections turn out to evoke different media reactions than election campaigns usually do. Since the first direct European Parliament election in 1979, the campaigns have always failed to gain sufficient media attention (Nehlig, 2005). In case that the elections were considered in news reporting, they were often framed in a national context, which contradicts the idea of a pan-European public sphere (European Parliament, 2013).

Tömmel (2008) argues that the lack of media attention for European Parliament elections is caused by politicians themselves. As they do not expect that the elections will create extensive attention and relevant changes in power constellations, parties choose lower-ranking candidates and limit their campaigning effort. Consequently, the media show restricted dedication to European Parliament elections.

On the other hand, the lack of media attention can also be explained due to the public's limited interest. European Parliament elections are commonly termed as 'second order elections' (Reif & Schmitt, 1980), which implies that the elections are perceived as less deciding than first order (national) elections. The European Parliament elections seem to be irrelevant to voter's everyday life as European issues are commonly noticed as abstract and complex. The fact that the chosen candidates are rather unknown is limiting the public's attention as well.

Complex issues on the one hand and a lack of candidates attractive for personalised news reporting on the other seem to be the major points reasoning the communicative troubles of the European Parliament elections.

Reinemann and Wilke (2005) point out that a lower degree of personalisation turns out to be a specific feature of European Parliament elections. Wiorkowski and Holtz-Bacha (2005) go a step further arguing, that the limited potential for personalisation in European Parliament elections causes a lack in media attention.

In 2014, for the first time, pan-European leading candidates were introduced in the European Parliament election campaign. In the following, it will be explained why these candidates might be more interesting for media coverage than national candidates.

The conceptualisation of personalisation

It will be assumed that the institutional modification concerning the election of the President of the Commission invigorated personalised news reporting on the European Parliament elections. Therefore, the phenomenon of personalisation shall be conceptualised in a first step.

There is no standard definition on political personalisation in mass media to be gathered from literature. In fact, the term describes a phenomenon with a wide range of facets.

On the base of various theoretical concepts a systematic scheme of different forms of personalisation in media coverage was elaborated by Van Aelst et al. (2011). Accordingly, the term can be classified in two major categories: 'Individualisation' and 'Privatisation'. While the first dimension encompasses those types of personalisation, which deal with a stronger focus set on individual actors, the second category describes the increased presentation of personal aspects in media.

Both dimensions are divided in two subcategories. 'Individualisation' is classified in 'General' and 'Concentrated visibility' (Van Aelst et al., 2011, p. 207). The former characterises a shift of attention from parties to individual politicians. The latter defines a specific concentration of media coverage on leaders. 'Privatisation' is divided into two different levels of intensity. In a first stage, the media is focussing on personal characteristics, which are not directly connected with political traits. In a second step, attention is paid more intensively to the politician's private life.

The ambition of this study will be to analyse the impact of the first fully public election of the President of the Commission on news reporting. As head of the Commission, the President is a powerful executive politician. Thus, he or she can be identified as a leading person. Therefore, the concept of 'Concentrated visibility' may be illuminating. The subdimensions of 'Privatisation' could be feasible as well. As the research focus is rather on the general presence of the candidates in news reporting than on the specific way they are presented, 'Privatisation' will be not be covered specifically.

The analytical scheme elaborated by Van Aelst et al. (2011) is narrowed down to the dimensions of personalisation in mass media. However, the concept of 'Concentrated visibility' is originally based on the broader theory of 'presidentialisation' (Poguntke & Webb, 2005), which shall be elucidated in the following.

'Presidentialisation' determines the dynamic phenomenon of increasing concentration on leading politicians occurring in Western societies (Poguntke & Webb, 2005). According to Poguntke and Webb (2005) 'presidentialisation' presents itself in three central arenas of democratic government, which they refer to as the 'executive face', the 'party face' and the 'electoral face' (p.5). While increasing executive power indicates 'presidentialisation' in the 'executive face', the 'party face' becomes manifest in the autonomy of the executive leaders vis-à-vis their party members. Finally, the 'presidentialisation' in the 'electoral face' crystallises in election campaigns - either in politically initiated leadership campaigns or in the focus set on leading candidates in news reporting (Poguntke & Webb, 2005). As this study will deal with the 'presidentialisation' of the candidates running for the Presidency of the Commission, the focus will be on the 'electoral face'.

The process of 'presidentialisation' occurs irrespective of the regime type. Indeed, presidential forms of government favour the personalisation of political leaders, but the phenomenon can be testified in

parliamentary systems as well. Therefore, the process is also referred to as 'de facto presidentialisation' (Poguntke & Webb, 2005, p.5).

Presidential and parliamentary systems differ most in one decisive aspect: the election of the executive. While in presidential systems the president is elected directly by the public, the executive in parliamentary systems emanates from the parliament. As a result of stronger public legitimacy, the executive in presidential systems is furnished with a high degree of institutional autonomy, which makes it more accessible for features of 'presidentialisation' (Poguntke & Webb, 2005).

In the following it will be argued to what extent the European political system corresponds either to the presidential or the parliamentary regime type. In addition, the impact of the institutional change during the election campaign in 2014 is elaborated.

Transferring the concept to the European level

The theory of 'presidentialisation' was originally framed in a national context analysing the personalisation of political leaders such as a country's President or Prime Minister (Poguntke & Webb, 2005). Transferring the concept to the European level requires the discussion of a few theoretical aspects. Especially the classification of the European political system either as parliamentary or presidential type is raising questions.

First of all, the relation of the European Parliament and the Commission is not equal to the distribution of competences between national parliaments and governments. The Commission is a technocratic institution, which is rather controlled by the European Council and the Council of Ministers than by the European Parliament. Thus, the Commission works as the executive of the member states of the European Union in the first place (Tömmel, 2008).

However, the Commission is provided with a couple of autonomous competences. It is the only institution capable to initiate the legislative procedure. Furthermore, the Commission possesses comprehensive executive and representative authorities. Indeed, the formal competences are limited, but in practice, also due to informal networking and strong leading personalities, it turns out as a powerful executive institution. As the institutional roles of national governments and the Commission show similarities, the function of the President of the Commission is comparable to the position of national heads of government (Tömmel, 2008).

Discussing the regime type of the European Union, the institutional change, which appeared first on the occasion of the European Parliament elections in 2014, has to be taken into account. In 2014 the President of the Commission was regularly suggested by the European Council and elected by the European Parliament afterwards. But in contrast to former elections, the European Council considered the majority circumstances resulting from the European Parliament elections when selecting a candidate for the office of the President (European Parliament, 2013). The non-transparent nomination, conducted in former elections, was not in line neither with presidential nor parliamentary features of a democratic system. The newly invented institutional practice strengthened the competences of the Parliament (Schilling, 2014). Thus, the institutional change extended the parliamentary features of the European political system.

Nevertheless, the institutional change also enhanced the public legitimacy of the President of the Commission (Schilling, 2014). Consequently, even though the institutional innovation meant a major step towards a parliamentary system, it has also been a key factor in setting a stronger focus on the presidential candidates in the election campaign. According to the theory of 'presidentialisation', the personalisation of leading candidates running for the Presidency of the Commission, indeed, would have been more pronounced in a presidential system, where the executive is elected directly by the public. However, the parliamentary election of the President in 2014 was the first fully transparent voting procedure concerning the President of the Commission. This made it possible to involve the presidential candidates in the election campaign. In this way the institutional change meant not only

an extension of parliamentary features, but also a step forward in democratic regards. Therefore, a necessary requirement for the phenomenon of 'presidentialisation' was set in 2014.

Limitations

Poguntke and Webb (2005) argue that the extent of electoral 'presidentialisation' cannot be fully explained by institutional factors, as the phenomenon occurs in all systems ranging from presidential to parliamentary forms. In fact, the regime type sets boundaries to the degree of 'presidentialisation', but within these institutional limitations other variables identified as 'contingent' and 'structural' factors play a key role (Poguntke & Webb, 2005, p.5).

'Contingent factors' encompass individual characteristics of politicians, which favour either a low or a high degree of 'presidentialisation'. 'Structural factors' are broad developments occurring below the institutional level. According to Poguntke and Webb 'structural factors' have more explanatory power on the degree of 'presidentialisation' than characteristic features of politicians. Thus, the former will be clarified more detailed in the following.

'Structural factors' include the 'internationalization of political decision-making, the executive's search for enhanced steering capacity over the state, the changing structure of mass communications, and the erosion of traditional political cleavages' (Poguntke & Webb, 2005, p.2). Especially the latter two are relevant in the context of electoral 'presidentialisation'.

Changes in the structure of mass communication mostly point to the increasing market orientation of mass media. According to Hallin and Mancini (2004) there are three different types of media systems existing in Western societies, called the 'Polarized Pluralist Model', the 'Democratic Corporatist Model' and the 'Liberal Model'. While the first two categories are dominantly European types, the third one is represented by North Atlantic countries. The authors claim that there is increasing convergence between the different categories all of them tending to the 'Liberal Model'. This type is characterized by a lesser degree of state intervention in mass communication. Instead, news coverage on political issues is strongly shaped by economic principles (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

It is commonly stated that especially personalised topics are catchy for media recipients. Sarcinelli (2008) argues that personalisation reduces complexity. In this way, political topics are simplified and more concrete to the recipient. Considering the general process of commercialisation in mass media, it is reasonable to suppose that personalisation is increasingly important. In fact, not only personalisation in general, but also 'presidentialisation' in particular, are dynamic processes of cumulative significance.

Not only changes in the media system itself, but also societal factors have to be taken into account when analysing the process of personalisation in election campaigns. Actually, especially news coverage on political issues is affected by social developments. In the last decades all parties, irrespective of their political orientation, had to record drops in their voter base. This is due to the aforesaid 'erosion of traditional political cleavages' (Poguntke & Webb, 2005, p.2). The process is embedded in the broader trend of increasing differentiation and individualisation in society. As a direct result, formerly strong ties of voters and political parties are decreasing. The social changes make the parties rethink their communication strategies. Especially in election campaigns a stronger emphasis is set on candidates, as charismatic politicians seem to compensate declines in partisanship. This process is also reflected in media coverage (Kamps, 2007).

Even though the electoral face of 'presidentialisation' is to a certain extent affected by 'contingent' and 'structural factors', its degree is determined by institutional factors in the first place (Poguntke & Webb, 2005). Therefore, despite the presence of limiting factors, it is reasonable to assume that the institutional change, introduced on the occasion of the European Parliament elections in 2014, affects personalised news reporting.

Research question & hypothesis

According to Poguntke and Webb 'presidentialisation' is less pronounced in parliamentary than in presidential systems. Differing between parliamentary and presidential forms of government the core assumption of the theory is, that the degree of personalising leading candidates depends to a certain extent on the mode the executive is elected. Indeed, the degree of personalising leading candidates is higher in presidential systems, but for sure, parliamentary elections mean a stronger incentive for electoral 'presidentialisation', than non-public procedures. In this way, the institutional change implemented in 2014 did not mean a relocation between presidential and parliamentary forms of government, but a shift from a non-transparent to a fully public election process. Thus, the point of departure of this research project is an extension of the theory elaborated by Poguntke and Webb. It will be argued that electoral 'presidentialisation' occurs by shifting from a limited public to fully public election procedure of the President of the Commission.

Electoral 'presidentialisation' presents itself in personalised election campaigns initiated by political communication strategists as well as in news reporting centralised on leading candidates. As a quote by the European Parliament reveals, the European Parliament election campaign in 2014 was planned to set a strong focus on the candidates running for the Presidency of the Commission: 'In the expectation that those candidates will play a leading role in the parliamentary electoral campaign, in particular by personally presenting their political programme in all the EU Member States European political parties are called on to nominate their own pan-European candidates' (European Parliament, 2013). Analysing the extent of 'presidentialisation' in the European Parliament election campaign would consequently not generate surprising results. Furthermore, a personalised campaign does not imply yet what is actually discussed in public. Therefore, the focus will be set on investigating to what extent 'presidentialisation' appeared in news reporting.

Since personalisation is not to occur for the first time in the European Parliament elections in 2014, the concept of 'presidentialisation' is chosen to narrow down the broader phenomenon to a concrete facet. It is reasonable to expect that the new opportunities for 'presidentialisation' introduced in 2014 intensified personalised news reporting, as pan-European candidates running for the presidency of the Commission seem more attractive for media coverage than national candidates contesting a seat in the European Parliament.

Thus, the research question will be the following: *How did the strengthening of the Parliament in electing the President of the Commission influence the news coverage on the European Parliament elections in 2014?*

The research question permits the deduction of two hypothesis. According to the theory of 'presidentialisation' the presidential candidates are expected to appear more prominent in the news than those candidates contesting a seat in the European Parliament. Thus, the first hypothesis will be *'In 2014 news reporting on leading candidates running for the Presidency of the Commission is more intense than media coverage on national leading candidates contesting a seat in the European Parliament'* (H1).

In case that the phenomenon of 'presidentialisation' can be verified, a second step will be to figure out if the new focus set on pan-European leading candidates meant an increase in the degree of personalised news reporting on European Parliament elections. In search for proof, it will be necessary to compare the news coverage on the European Parliament elections in 2014 with the presentation of former European Parliament elections in mass media. For this purpose, media reporting on European Parliament elections in 2009 and 2014 will be contrasted. If the total degree of personalised news reporting on presidential and national leading candidates turns out to be more intensive in 2014 than media coverage on leading candidates in 2009, there will be evidence for the second hypothesis, which reads as follows: *'Due to the nomination of leading candidates running for the Presidency of the*

Commission the total degree of personalised news reporting on national and pan-European candidates for the European Parliament elections intensified' (H2).

As already stated above, intensified personalised media coverage in conjunction with the European Parliament elections is desirable as it might help to overcome the communicative deficits of the European Union. Setting a strong focus on pan-European leading candidates has the potential to turn European Parliament election campaigns into a less abstract and first order news event.

3. Methodology

Research design

The empirical part will consist of two major research steps. First of all, a closer look will be taken at news reporting on the European Parliament elections in 2014. Secondly, media coverage on the European Parliament elections in 2009 and 2014 will be compared. While the first step serves to find proof for the phenomenon of 'presidentialisation' in news reporting, the second step will be taken to analyse the effect of 'presidentialisation' on personalised news reporting in general. Thus, the first analysis is a necessary requirement to conduct the second step. As the study encompasses two different points in time – the European parliament election campaigns in 2009 and 2014 – the research design can be classified as longitudinal study.

Critics might argue that to investigate the effect of the institutional change occurring for the first time on the occasion of the European Parliament election in 2014, the suggested points in time are methodologically difficult. This is due to the fact that institutional changes tend to unfold their full effect firstly after a longer period of time. Anyhow, it could also be argued the other way around that the first fully public election of the President of the Commission enjoys a recency bonus in media coverage.

Somehow or other the time points were chosen to keep the influence of confounding variables as small as possible. As already stated above, not only institutional criteria but also 'contingent' and 'structural factors' have an impact on the degree of 'presidentialisation'. The influence of 'structural factors' can be held down by focussing on a short time period, as the impact of societal and media changes appearing between 2009 and 2014 is expected to be rather small.

Anyhow, 'contingent factors' might have a strong influence, as confounding variables irrespective of the chosen time frame. This is due to the fact that candidates running for the Presidency of the Commission might gain more media attention as a result of their national prominence. Presidency candidate Martin Schulz, who is a well-known German politician, is expected to be more prominent in German news reporting than his major rival Jean-Claude Juncker, who is less established in the German public. José Bové and Ska Keller, presidential candidates of the European Greens, might have gained media attention due to their German origin as well. This limitation can only be reduced by collecting data from newspapers of different national origin. As such a survey would exceed the extent of this study, it is important to take the deficits into account when evaluating the empirical results.

Comparing the European Parliament elections in 2009 and 2014 the temporal distance to national elections has to be considered as well. The European Parliament elections in 2009 were taking place four month in advance of the Bundestag elections. Therefore, they were bound to be perceived as second order elections. By contrast, the European Parliament elections in 2014 occurred eight month after the Bundestag elections in 2013. Hence, it is reasonable to expect that the elections were noticed rather independent of national elections.

The absence of national elections in the near future might bring forward news reporting centred on pan-European candidate in 2014. National candidates contesting a seat in the European Parliament in 2009 presumably have taken a back seat in news reporting in favour of candidates for the following Bundestag elections. Therefore, the two chosen points in time might overemphasise the research results.

The following results are based on articles published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in a four weeks period before the European Parliament elections in 2009 and 2014. This comprises the time frame from 11th of May till 7th of June 2009 and 28th of April till 25th of May 2014. The chosen time frame is adopted from other studies conducted to investigate election campaigns. Usually a four weeks period before the election day is chosen as relevant phase of the election campaign (e.g Reinemann & Wilke, 2005). In this period campaigning activities as well as news reporting culminate.

To analyse the news reporting two German quality newspapers were selected. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* as well as the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* are nationwide daily papers. Both comprise regional as well as extensive weekend editions. Since regional news reporting might distort the research results, local editions will be excluded from the empirical enquiry. However, the detailed editions published in the weekends will be taken into account. In the political dimension the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* can be classified as liberal-right. In contrast, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* is tending rather to the left (Nafroth, 2002). Therefore it can be assumed that the results will not be strained due to political imbalance.

Nevertheless, critics might argue that the chosen empirical base is one-sided only considering the German press. In fact, this might be a major limitation of the empirical study. Anyhow, a broader empirical base including newspapers published in different European countries would exceed the aimed extent of this research project.

The choice of a newspaper as representative media for analysing the phenomenon of personalisation can also be evaluated critically. Other mass media such as television are known to be more amenable for personalisation (Holtz-Bacha, 2014). Despite these facts, newspapers are suited for the following empirical study. Since especially quality newspapers are expected to report on the European Parliament elections and its candidates even though they do not gain outstanding attention in overall media coverage (Gattermann, 2015), the empirical base is assumed to give evidence to the set up hypothesis.

Analysing the extent of ‘presidentialisation’ in the European Parliament elections in 2014 and comparing the degree of personalisation in 2009 and 2014, articles either namely referring to national leading candidates or candidates running for the Presidency of the Commission mentioned in the context of the European Parliament elections will be identified as units of analysis. Thus, the population will consist of all articles published in a four weeks period before the European Parliament elections in 2009 and 2014 referring to the presidential or national leading candidates. In total 137 articles will meet the criteria for analysis.

To clear out any methodological misconceptions the relevant candidates are listed in the following:

European Parliament elections 2009	European Parliament elections 2014	
National leading candidates	Candidates running for the Presidency of the Commission	National leading candidates
<p>Hans-Gert Pöttering [Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU)]</p> <p>Martin Schulz [Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD)]</p>	<p>Jean-Claude Juncker [European People’s Party (EPP)]</p> <p>Martin Schulz [Party of European Socialists (PES)]</p>	<p>David McAllister [Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU)]</p> <p>Martin Schulz [Party of European Socialists (PES)]</p>

Rebecca Harms / Reinhard Bütikofer (Alliance '90/The Greens)	Ska Keller / José Bové [European Green Party (EGP)]	Rebecca Harms (Alliance '90/The Greens)
Lothar Bisky (The Left)	Alexis Tsipras [European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL)]	Gabriele Zimmer (The Left)
Silvana Koch-Mehrin [Free Democratic Party (FDP)]	Guy Verhofstadt [Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Group (ALDE)]	Alexander Graf Lambsdorff [Free Democratic Party (FDP)]
Markus Ferber [Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CSU)]		Markus Ferber [Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CSU)]

Table 1: own illustration according to Schilling (2014)

Operationalisation

In section one personalisation was conceptualised as electoral 'presidentialisation'. The term describes the phenomenon of a stronger focus set on leading candidates running for an executive office than candidates contesting a seat in parliament. To investigate the phenomenon of 'presidentialisation' it will be necessary to operationalise personalisation in a first step. Only when clear indicators for the degree of personalisation are elaborated, 'presidentialisation' can be measured comparing the personalisation of candidates either contesting a seat in the European Parliament or running for the Presidency of the Commission. For further understanding it is important to note that the 'degree of personalisation' will not indicate the general degree of personalised news reporting during the election campaign, but the degree of personalisation of the afore mentioned candidates within the chosen units of analysis. This limitation is necessary, since a general degree of personalisation in news reporting would be difficult to measure. In case an article is not mentioning the candidates relevant to this study, this does not imply that the article is not personalised at all. In fact, there are many other personalities involved in the European Parliament elections ranging from national to European politicians, who are not running for any office in the elections. Therefore, it is necessary to stress that the population is limited to articles either mentioning the national candidates or the pan-European presidential candidates.

The central question is how personalisation respectively 'presidentialisation' becomes visible in the chosen newspaper articles.

Analysing the news researchers usually differ between formal and content-related features of articles (e.g. Merkle, 2015). Formal criteria encompass aspects such as the communicative setting and linguistic realisation, whereas content-related aspects refer to the statement of an article (Landert, 2014). As already stated above, this study will concentrate on the extent of 'presidentialisation' and not on the way the particular candidates are presented. Therefore, formal aspects will be of stronger relevance than content-related criteria.

First of all, the degree of personalisation will be classified by counting the number of namely mentions of candidates within an article. In case candidates are mentioned in the headline this will be of higher value than a reference within the main body. The number of mentions will be scored proportionally to the total number of words of the article. This method is more valid than an absolute number to identify the actual degree of personalisation within an article (Landert, 2014). Of course, names are only counted in case the politicians are mentioned as candidates for the European Parliament elections.

The extent of personalisation also depends on the type of article. Especially interviews serve as ideal instrument to centre on personal aspects, whereas other forms, such as news or reportages, show less potential in this regard (Reinemann & Wilke, 2005).

Another way to expand the presence of a person is the use of direct speech. To measure the volume of direct speech within an article, Landert (2014) suggests to calculate the percentage of words within quotation marks.

Images are an effective instrument of personalisation as well. Actually, most images attached to an article picture an individual (Landert, 2014). Classifying the degree of personalisation graduations will be made by evaluating if the candidate is pictured all alone, with his/her partner, rivals, party members or citizens (Merkle, 2015).

Furthermore, the degree of personalisation can be intensified through the location of an article within the newspaper. An article placed at the front page gains more attention than news placed on any other page of the paper (Holtz-Bacha & Wiorkowski, 2005). Since the location of an article is not a direct instrument of personalisation but an intensifier, it will not be scored with own points. Instead, it will increase the total points to a certain percentage.

The following scheme serves to clarify the criteria of evaluation.

Indicator	Values	Scores
(A) mentions of the candidates	(A1) mentions in the main body	0 – 100 (corresponding to the percentage of mentions proportional to the total number of words)
	(A2) mention in the headline	0 – 100 (corresponding to the percentage of mentions proportional to the total number of words; one mention counts four times)
(B) Type of article	(B1) Interview	20
	(B2) Other	0
(C) Direct speech	(C1) Yes	0 – 100 (corresponding to the percentage of words in quotation marks proportional to the total number of words; words are counted double, direct speech in headline are counted four times)
	(C2) No	0
(D) Images picturing candidates	(D1) Alone / with partner	15
	(D2) Rivals	10
	(D3) Citizens	10
	(D4) Party members	5
(E) Location of the article	(E1) Front page	(Total score) x 2
	(E2) Other	0
Total score		XX

Table 2: own illustration according to Holtz-Bacha & Wiorkowski (2005), Landert (2014), Merkle (2015), Reinemann & Wilke (2005)

4. Empirical Research

Comparing the election of the President of the Commission in 2009 and 2014

The introduction of leading candidates running for the Presidency of the Commission in 2014 meant a major difference to former elections.

Although the idea of a more democratic debate on presidential candidates was already present in 2009, the European parties did not designate their own candidates in the forerun of the parliamentary elections. Only the Conservatives (EPP) suggested a second mandate for José Manuel Barroso, whereas the social democrat's fraction S&D failed to make terms on nominating a leading candidate (EurActiv, 2009a). Not until the European Parliament elections had taken place S&D head Martin Schulz announced to reject the reelection of Barroso (EurActiv, 2009b). Instead, the S&D supported the candidacy of liberal former Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt. Even though the suggestion was also favoured by the European Liberals (ALDE) and the European Greens (EGP), the discussion finally shut down (EurActiv, 2009c). When the European Council nominated Barroso for the presidency in June, the Parliament adjourned his confirmation till September. Only after making a few concessions to the liberal and social democratic deputies, and not without the consistent push of the Council, Barroso was finally confirmed for a second mandate (EurActiv, 2009d).

The former way to appoint the President of the Commission made it almost impossible to connect the presidential election to the parliamentary election campaign. The major debate took place after the European Parliament elections and did not depend decisively on majority circumstances in parliament. Therefore, the early announcement of presidential candidates and strengthening of the parliamentary competences in the forerun of the European Parliament elections in 2014 meant a major step towards a public debate on the Presidency of the Commission.

In 2014, the EPP announced its candidate for the Presidency of the Commission on 7th of March after the former Luxembourgian Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker stood up to his party colleague Michel Barnier. Martin Schulz, the former and current President of the European Parliament, was nominated as presidential candidate of PES on the party's congress, which took place on 1st of March 2014. Already in December 2013, the European left-wingers (GUE/NGL) announced the head of the Greek left-wing party SYRIZA, Alexis Tsipras. The European Liberals appointed their fraction head, the afore mentioned Guy Verhofstadt. The European Green's candidates, Ska Keller und José Bové, were elected in a grassroots democratic procedure, which, however, failed to generate extensive participation (Schilling, 2014).

With 221 seats the EVP won the European Parliament elections in 2014 (European Parliament, 2014). Thus, according to the Lisbon Treaty Jean-Claude Juncker was the legitimate presidential candidate to be nominated in the European Council. Nonetheless, resistance arose in the run-up to his nomination. Not only the British Prime Minister David Cameron, but also the Hungarian head of government, Victor Orbán, rejected his election (n.d., 2014). Not until Juncker's major rival, Martin Schulz, announced his unrestricted support for him, and the majority of parliamentary fractions proclaimed to accept no other candidate than Juncker, the Council finally designated Juncker for the Presidency of the Commission (Meier, 2014). On 15th of July 2014, the Parliament assigned Juncker as President of the Commission based on a large majority (Stabenow, 2014). Thus, in 2014 the European Parliament proved that the institutional innovation codified in the Lisbon Treaty actually extended its competences referring to the election of the President of the Commission.

Looking at the presidential candidates in 2014 it is worth mentioning that Martin Schulz candidate not only for the Presidency of the Commission in 2014. He was also the national leading candidate for the German social democrats in 2009 and 2014, which might reason his presence in news reporting to a certain extent. In addition, he is prominent due to his former and current function as President of the European Parliament. His major rival, Jean-Claude Juncker, may gain attention due to his former prominent function as chairman of the Eurogroup. News reporting might centre especially on the competition between Schulz and Juncker as they are the two major rivals representing the largest fractions in the European Parliament, EPP and S&D (Gattermann, 2015).

Irrespective of individual attention advantages it will be expected that presidential candidates are generally more prominent in news reporting than national candidates contesting a seat in the European Parliament. In case the presence of presidential candidates exceeds the extent of news reporting on national candidates, it is also reasonable to compare the degree of personalisation in news reporting in 2009 and 2014. Due to the impact of 'presidentialisation' the total degree of personalised news reporting on candidates in 2014 is expected to be more extensive than in 2009. In the following, it will be examined to what extent the assumptions can be verified evaluating the empirical data.

Statistical Results

Testing the first hypothesis

The ambition underlying this study is to analyse how the strengthening of the European Parliament in electing the President of the Commission influenced the news coverage on the European Parliament elections in 2014. The first hypothesis referring to the research question was phrased as follows: *'In 2014 news reporting on leading candidates running for the Presidency of the Commission is more intensive than media coverage on national leading candidates contesting a seat in the European Parliament'* (H1).

The overall tendency of personalised news reporting is indicated by the total degree of personalisation, which is portrayed in the following chart.

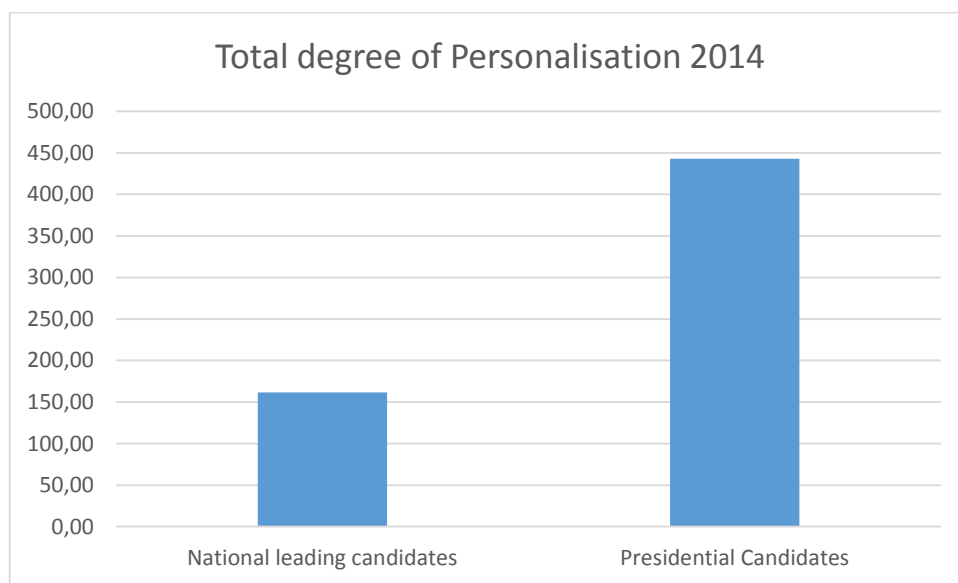


Figure 1: own illustration

Comparing the news coverage on candidates either contesting a seat in the European Parliament or running for the Presidency of the Commission, the latter are clearly centred in news reporting. While national leading candidates score a degree of 161.52, presidential candidates are focussed to a degree of 442.94. Thus, media attention for the presidential candidates is more than twice as high as personalised news coverage on national leading candidates.

Anyhow, looking at the mean degree of personalisation the impression of an overall dominance of presidential candidates in news reporting has to be revised.

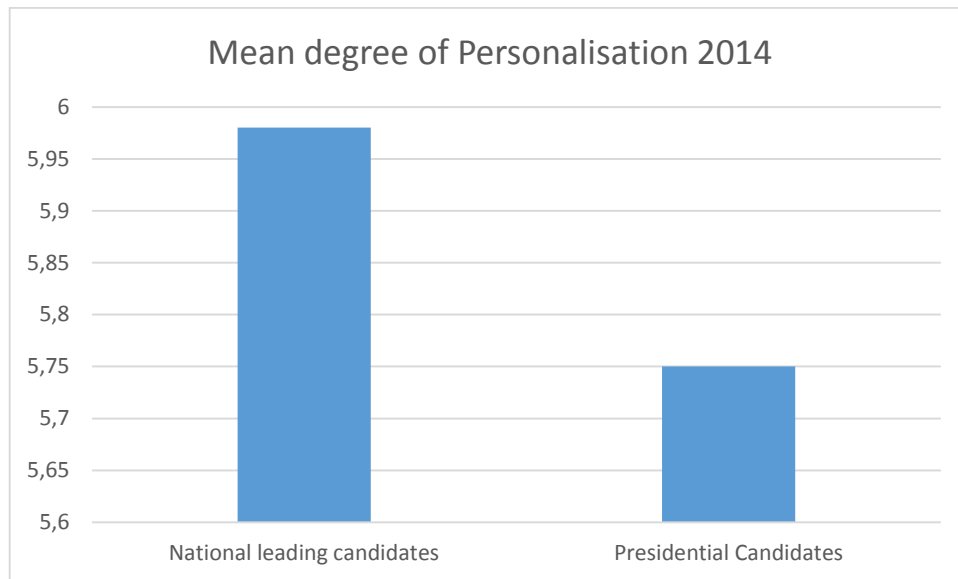


Figure 2: own illustration

At first glance, it is irritating that the mean degree of personalisation of national leading candidates exceeds the degree of presidential candidates. In fact, the mean degree gives evidence on the way of news reporting on the different candidates.

The total degree differs tremendously due to the fact that presidential candidates are personalised in many articles. Actually, in a four weeks period before the European Parliament elections national leading candidates appeared in 27 articles, whereas 77 articles referred to the presidential candidates. Anyhow, a strong presence in overall news reporting does not necessarily imply a high degree of personalisation within each article. Lower variation concerning the mean value indicates that personalised news reporting on presidential candidates is not more intensive within particular articles than coverage on national leading candidates.

Thus, the vast difference in total degrees is due to the fact that the total number of articles dealing with presidential candidates outmatches the news coverage on national leading candidates. Looking at the mean national leading candidates are even slightly more centred in particular articles than presidential candidates. Hence, the strong variation in the consideration of the total and mean degree indicates a difference in the quantitative and qualitative presentation of candidates in news reporting. Whereas the consideration of the total degree is essential to proof the core assumption of 'presidentialisation', the mean degree sheds light on the qualitative dimension of personalised news reporting, which serves rather for clarification than as necessary proof.

To sum up comparing the total degree of personalisation there is clear evidence for the first hypothesis. The mean degree might shows a different tendency, but is not a decisive indicator for this study.

Nevertheless, the consideration of general differences in news reporting on national leading and presidential candidates is not satisfactory to verify the first assumption. To fulfil this purpose the research results have to be interpreted more detailed comparing the results per candidate.

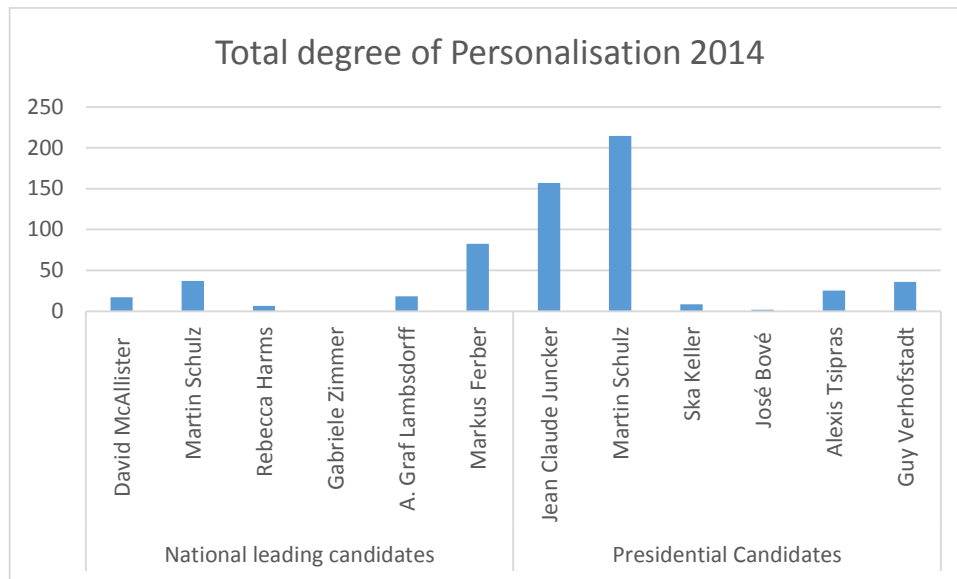


Figure 3: own illustration

Matching the individual degree of personalisation of national and pan-European candidates the first hypothesis cannot be accepted without limitations anymore.

Among the six candidates running for the Presidency of the Commission there are major differences in the extent of media attention paid to them. As already assumed, Martin Schulz and Jean-Claude Juncker were the two candidates of major interest in news reporting. It was also expected that Schulz was more prominent than Juncker due to his large familiarity in the German population. In fact, he scores a personalisation degree of 214.71, whereas Juncker lays behind with a degree of 157.03. Guy Verhofstadt and Alexis Tsipras were able to generate a certain degree of media attention as well. Ska Keller and José Bové though were rarely named. Thus, neither the expected 'national' nor the 'presidential bonus' for the candidates of the European Greens can be testified.

None of the national candidates were able to generate more media attention than the presidential candidates Schulz or Juncker. Anyhow, Markus Ferber scored an extraordinary high degree of personalisation, which amounts to 82.34. This result should be examined critically, since coverage in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* might have centred on Ferber for other reasons than his status as national leading candidate. The national edition of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* comprises a special column on the federal state of Bavaria. Since Ferber represented the CSU in the European Parliament elections, which is a dominant party in Bavaria, his outstanding attention might be due to his special consideration in the particular column. Comparing the degree of personalisation in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* the assumption can be verified.

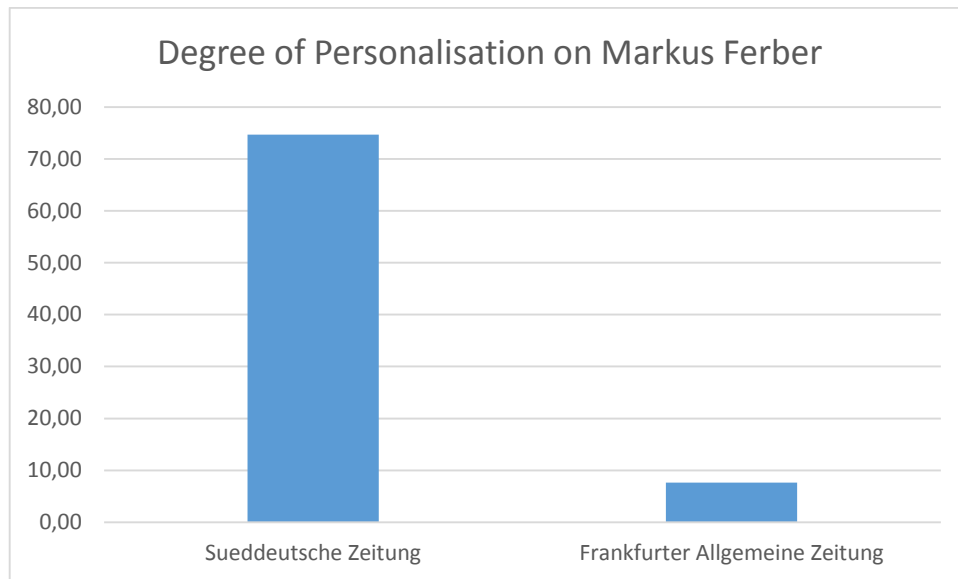


Figure 4: own illustration

While the degree of personalisation of Ferber in the news coverage of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* is distorted, no extraordinary attention is paid to him in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.

Nevertheless, other national leading candidates were able to generate a respectable amount of personalised news coverage as well. Also as national leading candidate, Martin Schulz was often present in news reporting. Actually, his degree of personalisation exceeded the attention paid to all presidential candidates except of Juncker and himself in the presidential role. Other national leading candidates, such as David McAllister and Alexander Graf Lambsdorff, were at least more centred in news reporting than the presidential candidates of the Greens, Ska Keller and José Bové.

At first glance, this observation is weakening the presumption that presidential candidates gain more attention in media coverage than national candidates. In fact, the result does not necessarily contradict the core assumption of 'presidentialisation'. The only candidates running for the Presidency of the Commission, who were representing potential majorities in the European Parliament, were Schulz and Juncker. In contrast, Verhofstadt, Keller, Bové and Tsipras were not considered as realistic claimants for the Presidency of the Commission, since their parties were not expected to gain sufficient votes. Thus, 'presidentialisation' seems to require that the candidates have a realistic chance to win the majority.

Therefore, the first hypothesis can be verified, even though a few limitations have to be admitted.

Testing the second hypothesis

The first hypothesis was considered to be a necessary requirement for examining the second hypothesis. Therefore, the second assumption will be analysed in the following.

Since 'presidentialisation' in the context of the European Parliament elections in 2014 can be proven and presidential candidates are expected to be more attractive for news reporting, it is reasonable to assume that in 2014 personalised media coverage on candidates intensified. Thus, the second hypothesis was stated: '*Due to the nomination of leading candidates running for the Presidency of the Commission the total degree of personalised news reporting on national and pan-European candidates for the European Parliament elections intensified*' (H2).

In search for evidence for the second hypothesis a comparison of the degree of personalised news coverage on the candidates in the context of the European Parliament elections in 2009 and 2014 is required.

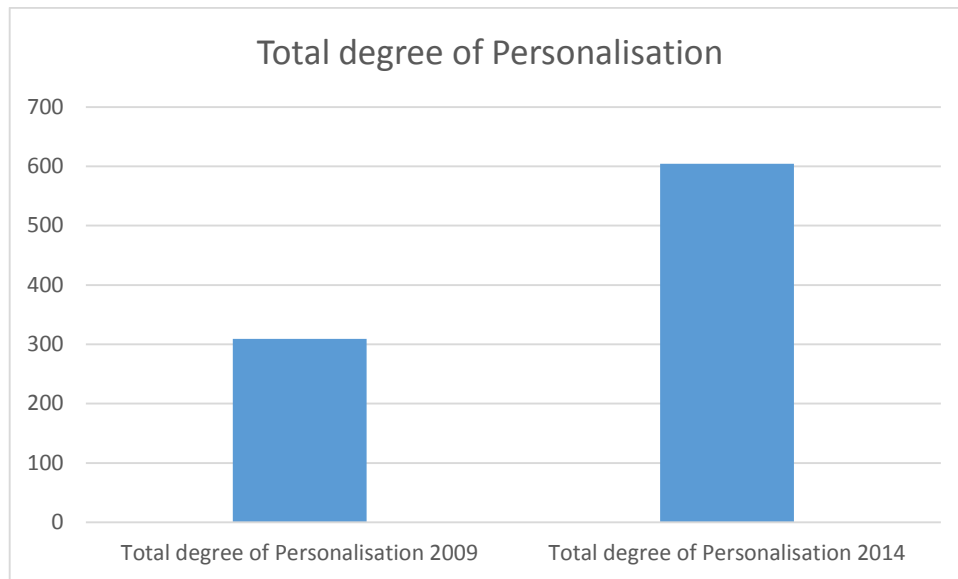


Figure 5: own illustration

Considering the sum of personalisation on national leading and presidential candidates in 2009 and 2014 personalised news reporting in 2014 obviously intensified. While the candidates running for the Presidency of the Commission or contesting a seat in the European Parliament were personalised altogether to a degree of 309.11 in 2009, the results for 2014 almost doubled amounting a degree of 604.46. Since this is a rather superficial contemplation, the vast difference will be examined more detailed in the following.

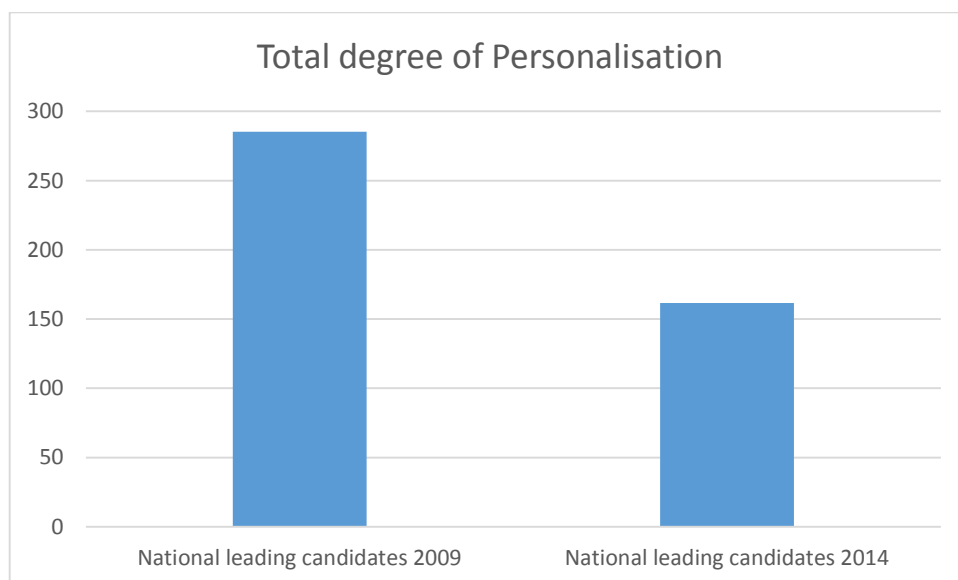


Figure 6: own illustration

Comparing the total degree of personalisation on national leading candidates in 2009 and 2014, news reporting on national candidates decreased in 2014. This observation is not contradicting, but rather supporting the assumption stated in the second hypothesis. While national candidates played a major role in the European Parliament election campaign in 2009 (see Figure 7, annex (1)), the nominated candidates in 2014 were replaced by the presidential candidates in media coverage (as shown in the

prior chapter). Since the presidential candidates are more attractive for news reporting, this explains the general increase in personalised news coverage.

Considering the individual degree of personalisation in 2009 and 2014, strong variation in media coverage on national candidates can be testified.

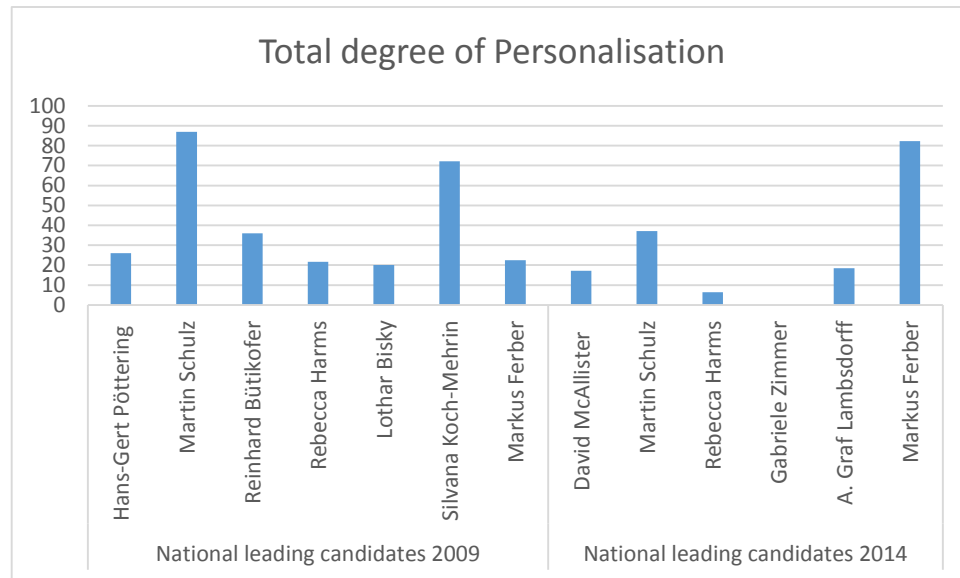


Figure 8: own illustration

In 2009, particularly Martin Schulz and Silvana Koch-Mehrin, leading candidate of the German Liberals, gained media attention. Schulz had already been in 2009 a prominent politician relevant for news reporting. Silvana Koch-Mehrin was set in the focus of media coverage due to lasting accusations concerning her attendance in plenary sessions (e.g. Stabenow, 2009). Therefore, the results show that negative incidents may increase personalisation as well. In contrast, the leading candidate nominated by the German conservatives, Hans-Gert Pöttering, almost disappeared in news reporting. As clarified earlier, the European Parliament elections in 2009 were taking place three months previous to the Bundestag elections. Thus, it can be assumed that Angela Merkel, strong head of the German CDU and Federal Chancellor, displaced her less prominent party colleague in news coverage.

In 2014, the only candidate, who gained extraordinary media attention was Markus Ferber, but as already clarified above, his results turn out to be distorted due to the special emphasis of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on Bavarian issues.

Therefore, an overall trend to less media attention can be testified not only in a general contemplation, but also in the individual comparison of news reporting on national leading candidates. Analysing the degree of personalisation on presidential candidates in 2009 and 2014 the general tendency is not that clear.

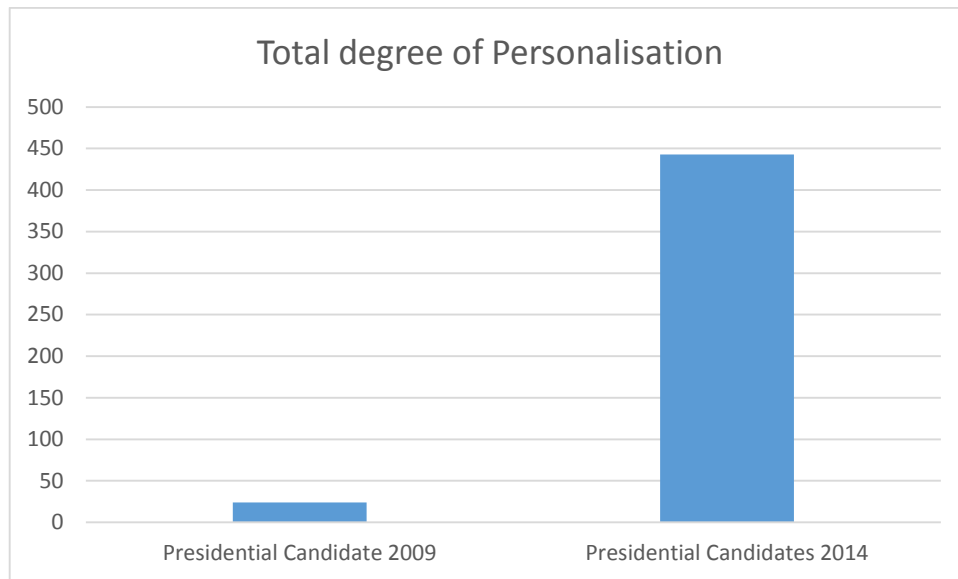


Figure 9: own illustration

Due to already clarified varying circumstances the personalisation of presidential candidates in 2009 and 2014 is rather difficult to compare. In 2009, José Manuel Barroso was the only announced candidate for the Presidency of the Commission in the run-up to the election day. As his election was rather independent of the majority circumstances resulting from the European Parliament elections, he rarely occurred in news reporting in matters of the election campaign. In total, only five articles published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* referred to Barroso in the context of the European Parliament elections. In contrast, news coverage in 2014 completely changed. First of all, instead of one there were six candidates potentially relevant for news reporting. Secondly, the candidacy of these persons was directly linked to the results of the European Parliament elections. Therefore, the total degree of media coverage on presidential candidates in 2014 tremendously exceeded the personalisation of the single candidate in 2009. Nevertheless, limitations occur gazing at the results more carefully.

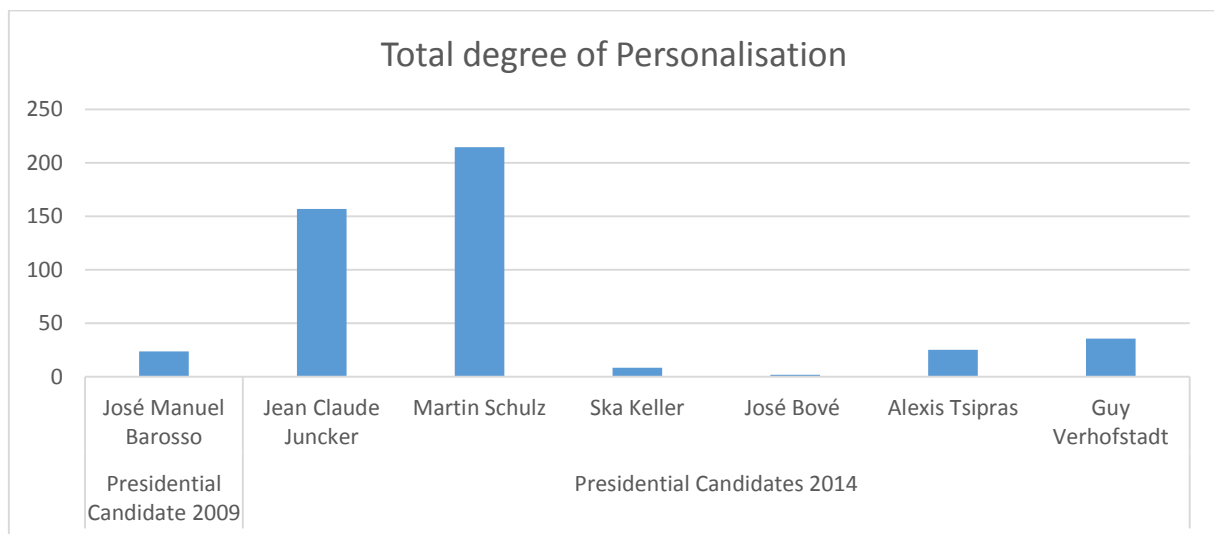


Figure 10: own illustration

The degree of personalisation in news reporting on Schulz, Juncker, Verhofstadt and Tsipras in 2014 outmatched news coverage on Barroso in 2009. Keller and Bové though were not as present in news reporting as the former candidate. Therefore, a general increase in news reporting per presidential candidate cannot be testified. However, the seemingly dominance of Barroso in news coverage in comparison to the Green candidates can be explained due to the fact that he was the only potential candidate for the Presidency of the Commission. Since he did not share his attention with other candidates, articles dealing with Barroso in the context of the European Parliament elections naturally focussed exclusively on the only presidential candidate. The fact that he was considered only in five articles is weakening his dominance as well.

It is rather illuminating to compare the sum of news coverage on presidential candidates in 2014 with the degree of personalisation of Barroso in 2009. Since the total degree in 2014 amounted 442.94, whereas Barroso as the only candidate in 2009 scored a degree slightly higher than 20, the second hypothesis can be verified as well.

Due to the phenomenon of 'presidentialisation' news reporting on the presidential candidates in 2014 dominated media coverage. As the candidates for the Presidency of the Commission were more attractive for news reporting and also quantitatively superior, the total degree of personalised news reporting tremendously increased in 2014.

Discussion

The empirical results show that personalised news reporting extended in 2014 in comparison to 2009. In a normative perspective these results can be evaluated either positive or negative.

Opponents of personalisation in election campaigns might argue that a strong focus set on candidates is simplifying and trivialising politics. In the worst case, media coverage turns into a 'horse race' (e.g. Wilke & Leidecker, 2010), which describes a way of news reporting centred on the election competition itself. Whereas issues with regards to content are eclipsed, candidates' winning margin and shortfall in gaining votes are in centre of coverage. Thus, a high degree of personalisation might come along with a decrease in information and content.

On the other hand, the communicative deficits of the European Union clarified in the theory-chapter might necessitate the invention of new communicative strategies. Advocates of personalisation might counter that personalised news reporting on the European Parliament elections is more desirable than barely-there coverage. Furthermore, opponents major objections can be refuted by stating that personalisation can also support the communication of relevant information. For instance, Adam and Maier (2010) argue that a debate on candidates can help EU-citizens to better understand politics in the European Union.

As stated earlier, the European Union is not only lacking general media attention, but also news reporting dissolved away from national contexts. Since European issues are often framed in national political affairs, the creation of a pan-European public sphere is hindered. Pan-European presidential candidates might work as a solution for this communicative difficulty.

Not only in a normative dimension but also in methodological regards the results require further discussion. The limitations of this study were elucidated comprehensively. Especially the narrow empirical base, consisting of merely two German newspapers, was reviewed critically. Nevertheless, the research results are in line with other studies, which refer to a larger empirical base. For instance, Gattermann (2015) researched on the degree of personalisation in the European Parliament elections in 2014, analysing news reporting cross-nationally. She points out that the French and German press reported most extensively on the election campaign, whereas British media paid less attention to the event. Despite of differences regarding the extent of news reporting in general, the phenomenon of 'presidentialisation' occurred in almost every country considered in the study. Therefore, the empirical results of this study are supported by Gattermann's extensive research.

5. Conclusion

The starting point for this study were the European Parliament elections in 2014, which appeared different to former elections due to a decisive institutional change. In 2014, for the first time, all fractions in the European Parliament were requested to nominate a presidential candidate as pan-European leading candidate in the run-up to the election day.

In this way an empirical case for the theory of 'presidentialisation' was created. The theory claims that strong leaders are more centred in politics than their lower ranked colleagues. This applies amongst others for election campaigns and their reflection in news reporting.

Therefore, it was asked to what extent the institutional change affected media coverage concerning the European Parliament elections in 2014. According to theory it was assumed that media attention in 2014 shifted from national to pan-European leading candidates. In case that 'presidentialisation' occurred, it was also reasonable to suppose that the introduction of presidential candidates boosted personalised media coverage at large compared to former European elections.

In search for evidence an empirical study based on two German quality newspapers was conducted. In a first step news reporting on national leading and presidential candidates in the European Parliament election campaign in 2014 was compared. The total degree of personalisation of presidential candidates exceeded the attention paid to national candidates significantly. However, looking at the individual degrees separately a few limitations to the general claim had to be admitted. Only those presidential candidates representing a possible majority in the European Parliament, were stronger set in focus of news reporting than national candidates. Anyhow, news coverage on the two major rivals on the presidency, Martin Schulz and Jean-Claude Juncker, outmatched media attention paid to national candidates many times over. Therefore, the first hypothesis could be confirmed.

The verification of the first hypothesis was the necessary requirement to examine the second one. Therefore, the next step to take was to contrast media coverage in 2014 with reporting in 2009. The empirical results revealed a clear tendency towards more personalisation in 2014.

To avoid any false conclusions the results were interpreted carefully and critically discussed. Anyhow, the findings were clear. They testified the presence of 'presidentialisation' in the European Parliament elections in 2014 and proved a total increase in personalised news reporting on national leading and presidential candidates in the recent elections.

It was argued that personalisation in the context of European election campaigns is desirable for reasons of simplicity and concreteness. Especially the concentration on pan-European candidates was evaluated as a positive effect since such a focus might contribute to the strengthening of a European public sphere. Therefore, the results contain important implications for the publicity of European Parliament elections.

The empirical research could be a starting point for further research projects investigating the phenomenon of 'presidentialisation' in the context of the European Parliament elections on a broader empirical base. In fact, this aspect was the major limitation to the study. Either different types of mass and social media, a more representative choice of newspapers or media stemming from various European countries could be a reasonable extension of the empirical base at hand. Since the personalisation of pan-European candidates could have a special impact concerning the creation of a pan-European public sphere, this assumption deserves further attention in future research projects.

The European Parliament elections in 2014 appear as a turning point in the development of a European communicative strategy. It seems that aspects of publicity were neglected for decades. However, the Lisbon Treaty codified an attempt to overcome the communicative weakness of the Union. The introduction of pan-European leading candidates meant a major step for stronger personalisation and publicity. Of course, the intentions invigorating the institutional change cannot be limited to communicative interests. In the first place, the introduction of presidential candidates was a major step to further democratization. But since democracy largely relies on publicity, media resonance is an important point to consider.

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Annex

(1)

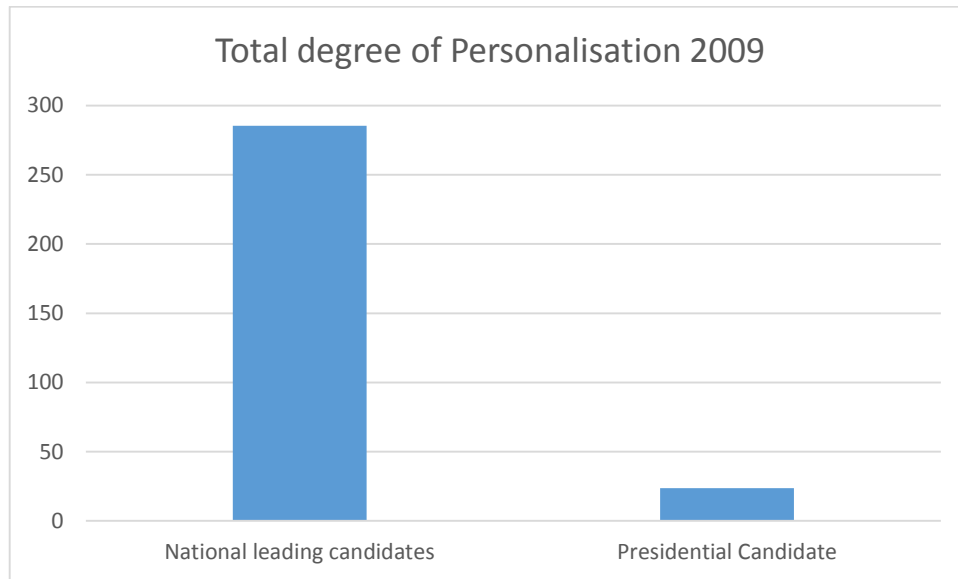


Figure 7: own illustration

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