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Why do civil servants experience media stress differently and what can be done about it?

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Abstract:	Pressure from the media affects the daily work of bureaucrats and induces 'media stress', with potentially critical effects on the quality of public policy. This article analyses how bureaucrats' daily work has been adapted to the media ('mediatised') and which groups of bureaucrats experience the most media stress. Reporting the results of an original and large-scale survey (N=4,655) this article demonstrates that levels of media stress varies amongst different groups of civil servants. In turn, its analysis suggests that media stress is more pronounced in the Netherlands than in Norway, is more concentrated in the lower rungs of administrative hierarchies and is related to media pressures on organisations. By untangling the underlying logic of mediatisation and dynamics of media stress, this article makes an important contribution to extant scholarship and also provides a series of practical recommendations.
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Why do civil servants experience media stress differently and what can be done about it?

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Abstract

Pressure from the media affects the daily work of bureaucrats and induces 'media stress', with potentially critical effects on the quality of public policy. This article analyses how bureaucrats' daily work has been adapted to the media ('mediatised') and which groups of bureaucrats experience the most media stress. Reporting the results of an original and large-scale survey (N=4,655) this article demonstrates that levels of media stress varies amongst different groups of civil servants. In turn, its analysis suggests that media stress is more pronounced in the Netherlands than in Norway, is more concentrated in the lower rungs of administrative hierarchies and is related to media pressures on organisations. By untangling the underlying logic of mediatisation and dynamics of media stress, this article makes an important contribution to extant scholarship. At the same time, by drawing attention to the way in which those civil servants who are actively involved in media work experience less media stress, this article provides a series of practical recommendations regarding the coupling of policy and media work in bureaucracies.

Key words

Mediatization; media-stress; policy work; governance

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Introduction

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2 Politicians and bureaucracies operate in the constant limelight of the media in contemporary
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Politicians and bureaucracies operate in the constant limelight of the media in contemporary
monitory democracies (Keane 2009). The academic literature has so far focused mostly on
the impact of news media on politics, politicians and policy processes (Djerf-Pierre & Pierre
2016; Bekkers et al. 2011a), yet the media also have strong impacts on bureaucrats and
bureaucracies (Schillemans & Pierre 2016; Klijn & Korthagen 2017). The daily work
rhythms inside bureaucracies have been adapted to the logics of the media where civil
servants develop proactive strategies that anticipate the media agenda (Thorbjørnsrud et al.
2014a: 412). Government organizations and agencies actively present themselves in
favorable frames in the media (Schillemans & Jacobs 2014) in order to boost their reputations
(Boon et al. 2019).

Mostly under the banner of ‘mediatization’, scholars have recently explored news media
effects on various types of bureaucracies (Fredriksson et al. 2015; Garland et al. 2017;
Maggetti 2012; Salomonsen et al. 2016; Schillemans 2016; Thorbjørnsrud et al. 2014b).
These literatures clearly document *that, why and how* the work of public bureaucracies has
become mediatized in the sense of having been adapted to the outside media context. Less
clear, however, are the *effects* of mediatization inside governments on civil servants and on
the efficacy of government itself (Garland 2017: 3). This poses the question whether the
mediatization of work inside bureaucracies actually ‘matters’? If the media indeed have a
strong impact on bureaucracies, this should leave a tangible imprint on the daily activities of
civil servants.

Mediatization theory describes how the institutional logic of the media ‘penetrates’, ‘affects’,
becomes ‘integrated’ or even ‘colonizes’ other societal institutions (Cook 2005; Hjarvard
2013; Mazzoleni & Schulz 1999; Strömbäck 2008). A mediatized bureaucracy then implies
that civil servants have to cope with and handle different institutional logics and behavioral

1 expectations. As institutional logics are contradictory, this can potentially lead to stress,
2 possibly even to fear for, the media, as has indeed been documented to exist amongst various
3 civil servants (Bekkers et al. 2011a; Garland 2017; Klijn et al. 2016; Schillemans 2016). This
4 article sets out to explore the relationship between the mediatization of the daily work of civil
5 servants, specific individual and organizational characteristics, and the extent to which they
6 experience media-stress. The central question is: who is afraid of the media (in public
7 bureaucracies), or, who experiences media-stress?

8 This is important, as media is known to be a major stressor for individuals and stress has
9 many negative effects on job performance and thus, potentially, on the quality of public
10 policies (Bouckenooghe et al. 2005; Michie 2002). Knowing where in the bureaucracy
11 media-stress is most prevalent helps to gauge the effects of media inside bureaucracies but
12 may also help bureaucracies to target effective ways of coping with media.

13 The article is based on a large-N survey (N= 4655), distributed amongst civil servants with
14 policy-making and operational tasks in the Netherlands and Norway. The survey contains
15 questions relating to the ‘penetration’ of the media in the daily activities of civil servants and
16 questions on media-related stress, in combination with information collected on national
17 backgrounds, different types of bureaucracies and professional positions.

18 We find that media-stress is distributed unevenly across different types of bureaucracies and
19 is more pronounced in the Netherlands than in Norway. We also find that bureaucrats who
20 are more attuned to the media (more media use and media awareness) are more stressed yet
21 that media-stress is lower for those actively participating in media-work. The theoretical and
22 policy- implications of these findings are discussed in the concluding section.

23 **Mediatization of daily work**

1 Over the past decade, ‘mediatization’ has been an incredibly powerful ‘sensitizing concept’
2 (Hjarvard 2013, p. 4; Lunt & Livingstone 2016: 464-5) with which scholars have analyzed
3 the role and impact of the media in various non-media settings, including politics (Couldry &
4 Hepp 2013; Esser & Strömbäck 2014). Strömbäck (2008: 236-240) has argued that the
5 historical process of mediatization denotes a sequential trajectory of four phases. It starts with
6 the media becoming (the most) important source of information for societal actors and media
7 subsequently operating ever more independent from governments. The media then have
8 developed into an important and distinct social institution. In the third phase of the historical
9 mediatization process, the media affect other societal organizations and institutions. In our
10 case this would refer to the media affecting how bureaucracies operate and what bureaucrats
11 do on a day-to-day basis. In Strömbäck’s fourth phase of mediatization, organizations
12 internalize the external media rules. This can lead to ‘amalgamation’, when the core activities
13 of the organization become amalgamated with media-related activities or can even lead to
14 ‘substitution’, in which public communication substitutes for core organizational activities
15 (Schulz 2004: 88-9).

16 In the literature on the mediatization of politics, the news media are still important even in the
17 age of social media. The news media are generally associated with the press and television,
18 yet in its modus operandi there are very strong links to social media and vice versa. The mass
19 media are for instance found to still play an important role in “strengthening the frames that
20 micromobilizing individuals produce” (Bekkers et al. 2011b: 217). Research on media use by
21 civil servants suggests that the use of mass media and social media are strongly related
22 (Djerf-Pierre & Pierre 2016). Digital and social media have strengthened the penetrative and
23 intrusive capacity of the media as a social system affecting other social systems and have
24 become part of ‘hybrid media systems’ (Chadwick 2014) in which traditional and social
25 media feed into each other and exert ever more pressure on other institutions. This paper thus

1 focuses on the impact of news media, acknowledging that the news is (re)distributed via
2 physical, digital and social media channels.
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7 Mediatization describes how societal institutions or organizations change and integrate the
8 media in their own processes (Esser 2013: 158; Hjarvard, 2013). Media have an impact by
9 “changing the rules of the game” (Maurer & Pfetsch 2014: 340). This is a macro-institutional
10 process, yet, when we ‘descend the ladder of abstraction’ (Deacon & Stanyer 2014: 1040),
11 the mediatization of bureaucracies on the meso-level should leave a tangible imprint on the
12 daily activities of civil servants on a micro-level.
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21 Many recent studies suggest that politicians and policy-making have, to varying degrees,
22 adapted to the logic of the media (Elmelund-Præstekær, et al. 2011; Garland et al. 2017;
23 Kunelius & Reunanen, 2011; Thorbjørnsrud et al. 2014a). Research for instance documents
24 that the interactions between politics, bureaucracies and the news media are a struggle for
25 dominance or control (Casero-Ripollés et al. 2014; Hepp et al. 2015; Isotalus & Almonkari
26 2014) between institutions with “overlapping interests but different purposes” (Savage &
27 Tiffen 2007: 84). This struggle involves making compromises, negotiating (Figenschou &
28 Thorbjørnsrud 2015a) and outright bargaining (Spörer-Wagner & Marcinkowski 2010).
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41 Politicians reportedly adapt to the logics and agenda of the media (Van Santen et al. 2015:
42 59) yet, by doing so, they simultaneously try to regain control over media coverage
43 (Driessens et al. 2010). Conversely, it has also been documented that the media have to give
44 up some control and autonomy in order to deal with political logics (Orchard 2018). This
45 enduring conflict signifies the unresolved value conflict between the institutional logics
46 (Maurer & Pfetsch 2014).
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55 Bureaucrats face even more complex tensions under media pressure than politicians although
56 they are less exposed than politicians. Traditionally, squaring classic, Weberian
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1 administrative values with politics and politicization is already an important institutional
2 balance that civil servants, at least in Northwestern European democracies, have to strike
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4 (Salomonsen et al. 2016). Working in government departments means having to find a
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6 proficient method of balancing bureaucratic and political values (Figenschou &
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8 Thorbjørnsrud 2015a). Salomonsen et al. (2016) analyzed the involvement of policy-making
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10 civil servants in strategic communication by the Danish government. They show that strategic
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12 communication aims to contribute to organizational goal-achievement and conclude that
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14 “involvement in a minister’s strategic communication is part and parcel of a functionally
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16 politicized – and hence politically savvy – civil service.” This involvement goes hand in hand
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18 with increased central and political control over government communication and operations
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20 within bureaucracies (Salomonsen et al. 2016; Schillemans 2016). Garland (2017) recently
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22 described how the clash between external media logics and internal administrative logics may
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24 produce tensions, even disdain, inside bureaucracies. For policy staff, public relations is
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26 generally seen as a “soft option” and as “toys for the minister”. There is a “them and us
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28 attitude” between communications staff and policy staff (Garland 2017: 178). This is, again, a
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30 sign of unresolved inter-institutional conflict between media values and the administrative
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32 values to which civil servants adhere.
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41 In this article, we focus on the mediatization of the daily work of civil servants as the
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43 inclusion of media-related activities and concerns in their daily practices. We focus on
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45 *organizational* adaptation; not communicative adaptation (Strömbäck & Van Aelst 2013:
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47 344), by looking at ‘activities’ (Landerer 2014), ‘habits’ (Garland et al. 2017: 11), and
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49 ‘doings’ (Driessens et al. 2010) of ordinary civil servants. We see three ways in which the
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51 daily work of civil servants may become mediatized.
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55 A first indication of the mediatization of work is active, professional *media use* by civil
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57 servants, underscoring that the media have become an important source of information
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1 (Strömbäck 2008). Civil servants spend some of their time following twitter, listening to the
2 radio, scanning news sites or broadcast teletext. It is generally seen as important to “know the
3 news” (Schillemans 2012) and the media have become “institutionalized and normalized
4 within state bureaucracies” (Garland et al 2017: 1), producing a “hyper-sensitive
5 bureaucracy” (ibid, p. 5). The media can be a valuable source of information for bureaucrats
6 as journalists have forms of access which are not available to public actors for legal reasons
7 (De Graaf & Meijer 2019: 88). As such, the media can be important organizational ‘inputs’
8 for civil servants (Salomonsen et al 2016; Schillemans 2016).

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19 Secondly, mediatization can also be a ‘mental state’ of anticipating the media in one’s daily
20 activities as a form of *media awareness*. Landerer (2014: 306) for instance showed that
21 ‘audience oriented MP’s’ constantly ask themselves how to get into news outlets with the
22 widest possible reach with what they do. This mirrors Maurer and Pfetsch’s (2014: 340)
23 conclusion that “it becomes normal for political actors to consider how media actors will
24 behave when they design political strategies or make decisions” (see also Salomonsen et al.
25 2016: 211; Kunelius & Reunanen 2011). A high level of media awareness logically results
26 from operating in a media saturated policy environment in which news media and social
27 media often “surprise” policy makers (Bekkers et al. 2011a: 25) and media operate as
28 external accountability forums for bureaucracies (Maggetti 2012).

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Finally, bureaucrats may also participate in active media work, when they help write speech
dots or press releases, do background talks with journalists, gather information in response to
media queries, or play a part in media campaigns. Salomonsen et al. (2016) have shown that
some bureaucrats do indeed play a role in strategic communication. Djerf-Pierre and Pierre
(2016) suggest that active media work is mostly performed by the most senior civil servants.
Schillemans (2012) documents that some bureaucrats may shun the spotlights of the media as
they are concerned about the pressures this gives while others actively seek publicity. Active

1 media work is performed to boost organizational reputations (Boon et al. 2019), also in
2 response to challenges through (social) media (Bekkers et al. 2011a).
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4 All in all, we thus contend that the mediatization of daily work can manifest itself in three
5 ways: media use, media awareness and media work. In the methods section we describe how
6
7 we have measured these three sub concepts of mediatization.
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11 **Media-stress**

12 The mediatization of daily work implies that bureaucrats are faced with the challenge of
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14 “amalgamating” (Schulz 2004) demands, rules and expectations stemming from different
15 institutions. This results in conflicting expectations, as is for instance evidenced by a Dutch
16 police officer stating: “It is difficult to keep citizens as your friend, do your job well, and
17 follow all the rules” (De Graaf & Meijer 2019: 89). Psychological research generally shows
18 that institutional- and value conflicts can lead to stress for employees (Bouckenoghe et al.
19 2005). A recent overview of studies on ‘coping’ in policy implementation, shows that
20 bureaucrats have been found to resort to many normatively, personally or operationally
21 dysfunctional coping mechanisms under the stress of unresolved institutional value conflict
22 (Tummers et al. 2015). These same coping mechanisms – for instance ‘moving away from
23 clients’ – have also been found for policy makers facing disruptive forms of micro-
24 mobilization via social media (Bekkers et al. 2011a).
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27 Media-stress is likely to manifest itself in the form of feelings of fear and anxiety related to
28 the media. Bureaucrats may also express negative views towards the media (Klijn 2016;
29 Thorbjørnsrud et al 2014a;). Prior research shows that people may experience the media to
30 be ‘hostile’ and disproportionately negative when ‘their’ cause is portrayed in the news
31 (Perloff 2015; Vallone et al. 1985).
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1 The media can be a source of stress as they are difficult to control, and their agendas and
2 stories may affect the fate of a policy. This is a source of distress and frustration for civil
3 servants (Thorbjørnsrud et al. 2014). Furthermore, the media are also often believed to report
4 unfavorably about bureaucracies. Popular pejorative stereotypes about lazy, unresponsive,
5 careless or inefficient bureaucrats are readily invoked by some of the press (Cook 2005: 88;
6 Van de Walle 2004). The public administration literature on the role of the media tends to be
7 quite negative “in the sense that media is perceived as an uncontrollable nuisance, alien to the
8 logics [emphasis added] of policy and steering” (Klijn et al. 2016: 1053).

9 Workplace stress in general is related to a number of factors (Michie 2002) with clear
10 significance for the impact of media on bureaucrats: time pressures, work overloads, lack of
11 control, and role conflicts.

12 The media now work on a 24/7-basis and put considerable *time pressure* on bureaucracies to
13 meet their deadlines (Boon et al. 2019). This is clearly exacerbated by social media regularly
14 “surprising” policymakers with the swiftness of events (Bekkers et al. 2011b). The time
15 pressure can easily lead to *work overloads* for non-communication staff in public
16 bureaucracies, for whom media use, -awareness, and -work are likely to come on top of
17 existing responsibilities and duties. Working with the media implies struggling for *control*
18 (Hepp et al. 2015) and also to some extent playing by the rules of the media. Working with
19 the media, thus, means giving up some control which is an important source of workplace
20 stress. Also, by amalgamating policy work with media work, bureaucrats may experience
21 *role ambiguity* and *role conflict*, again theoretically relating to stress.

22 All in all, the driving forces of media-stress are unresolved value conflict, unpredictability,
23 loss of control, time pressures, and work overloads related to the media. Our first hypothesis
24 (H1) is then that civil servants whose work is more mediatized (higher media use, media
25 awareness and media work) will also experience more media-stress.

Institutional predictors

Beyond the mediatization of daily work, media-stress will also be dependent on individual characteristics of the person and on institutional characteristics of the organization in which (s)he works. In this section we develop additional hypotheses relating macro (country differences) and meso-level (organizational differences) predictors of media-stress. In addition, several individual level factors (such as age, gender) have been used as control variables and some will turn out to be relevant in our analyses.

Macro-level: national differences

The mediatization of bureaucracies is a general process of adaptation to the media which may take on different forms, depending on specific institutional settings. So far, most studies of the mediatization of political phenomena have been single country studies, although there are important exceptions (Magin 2015; Schillemans 2016; Strömbäck & Dimitrova 2011; Van Santen et al. 2015). By comparing the mediatization of relevant political and policy processes, the concept can be better adapted to specific contexts (Ekström et al. 2016) and be further developed as a ‘concept of difference’ (Deacon & Stanyer 2014). In our study, we have looked at civil servants in Norway and the Netherlands; two established, affluent and advanced parliamentary democracies in which civil servants have relatively strong and protected positions in the policy process. The administrative systems in both countries are comparable on most important HRM-indicators (OECD 2012).

The Norwegian media can theoretically be expected to be more stressing for civil servants than the Dutch media as the pressure from the media is likely to be higher. Some of the national newspapers in Norway are tabloidesque (Cere et al. 2015), and in comparative studies the Norwegian media are found to report more personalized and human interest

1 stories than newspapers in other countries (Figenschou & Thorbjørnsrud 2015b). A recent
2 comparative study of top-level civil servants further showed a relatively high media
3 awareness in Norway, compared to six other advanced democracies, including the
4 Netherlands (Overman et al. 2018). Journalists are also reported to be relatively powerful in
5 Norway compared to other countries, again including the Netherlands (Van Dalen & Van
6 Aelst 2014). Against this background, we hypothesize (H2) that media-stress is higher in
7 Norway than in the Netherlands.

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19 *Meso-level: organizational differences*

21 Bureaucrats work in different types of organizations with varying levels of media visibility
22 and media pressure. Previous studies have indicated several organizational characteristics
23 which triggering media coverage and, thus, theoretically generating more media pressure.
24 The early work on agencies and media by Deacon and Monk (2001) showed that size matters
25 and that the biggest organizations generally attract most media attention. The type of task
26 also matters for the amount of media scrutiny. Bureaucracies providing direct services to the
27 public are more visible and easier to understand, evaluate and criticize (Boon et al. 2019;
28 Schillemans 2012). The location of the main office is also relevant. Research in Sweden
29 indicated a significant relationship between organizational mediatization and the location of
30 the main office. Organizations outside of the greater Stockholm area were less visible in the
31 news and less focused on the media in their internal procedures (Fredriksson et al. 2015).
32 And in a recent study, Boon et al. (2019) showed that legally independent agencies are
33 among those that generate more media coverage.

34 Following up on this, we distinguish between central government departments and semi-
35 autonomous agencies (Schillemans 2012), including regulatory authorities (Maggetti 2012).
36 In both countries, policies are prepared and coordinated in central government departments

1 while they are delivered by agencies with some operational or financial autonomy (Verhoest
2 et al. 2016). This may have an impact on the relationship between bureaucracies and the
3 media, as has been addressed in earlier studies (Boon et al. 2019; Salomonsen et al. 2016;
4 Schillemans 2016). Central government departments operate more closely to the political
5 game and feature more prominently in the news than the average agency. Earlier studies
6 found that the level of media attention for specific agencies differs widely, and that some
7 agencies are regularly scrutinized by the media and prioritize media-related work while many
8 other agencies experience little to no pressure and reporting from the media (Deacon & Monk
9 2001; Fredriksson et al. 2015; Schillemans 2016). For some agencies, the media are a
10 powerful external source of accountability and scrutiny (Maggetti 2012) while others operate
11 out of sight in a ‘pastoral world’ (Pollitt et al. 2004). This suggests that media pressure and,
12 theoretically, media-stress, are likely to be experienced to quite different degrees by civil
13 servants, depending on the media salience of their organization. A civil servant working for
14 the immigration department would theoretically experience most pressure and, thus, be most
15 likely to experience media-stress (Figenschou et al. 2017). The media are also biased towards
16 authorities, towards the “powerful”, and can be expected to report much more on central
17 government departments led by politicians than on separate agencies (Korthagen 2015).
18 Following this logic of media pressure one would, on average, hypothetically expect (H3)
19 civil servants working for central government departments to experience more media-stress
20 than their colleagues in agencies.
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51 *Organizational position*

52 A person’s hierarchical position in the organization may also affect the media-stress (s)he
53 experiences. We distinguish between civil servants supervising others and civil servants who
54 do not. For civil servants at higher levels in the organization, it can be assumed that broader
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1 issues, including the media, demand their attention than ‘just’ their specific policy task. We
2 know that hierarchy has an impact on the values of civil servants and that top public
3 administrators cope with more complex value systems (De Graaf 2010). Supervising
4 administrators work more closely to the political center and may thus feel the weight of the
5 media pressure more strongly. The media are probably more relevant for supervising than for
6 non-supervising administrators, which makes it hypothetically more likely that higher level
7 civil servants experience more media-stress (H4). However, by focusing on the
8 organizational position of individuals, their coping abilities with media as an external stressor
9 also becomes important, which suggests a competing logic to media stress. Supervisors
10 generally have to cope with more diverse value-conflicts than operational civil servants and
11 may be better at coping than regular staff. Also, by being in a supervisory position, those
12 bureaucrats may experience more control and agency in their work, also in relation to the
13 media and the responses by ministers and other political actors. Agency and control are
14 crucial in relation to workplace stress. The competing hypothesis based on expected
15 individual coping ability would then be the opposite of H1. We additionally hypothesize (H4)
16 less media-stress for civil servants with supervising tasks.

41 **Methods**

42 This paper investigates the impact of the mediatization of civil servants’ work on the media-
43 stress they experience. We do so on the basis of a survey distributed in public bureaucracies
44 in Norway and the Netherlands. Overall, there are a few important differences between
45 Norway and the Netherlands, mostly related to the media and the role of journalists, as
46 described above when we develop the second hypothesis. The main goal of our research
47 design is to transcend country-specific patterns in the analysis of the mediatization of work
48 and media-stress which greatly adds to their generalizability. In the analysis, differences
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1 between the two countries will be reported although we focus mainly on over-arching
2 commonalities. Additionally, the research design allows us to compare media fear between
3 the two countries.
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7 Empirically, the paper draws on two surveys conducted in Norway and the Netherlands. The
8 survey was translated by a bilingual researcher. We used online survey tools provided by
9 Questback to design, distribute and collect the surveys. In Norway, the survey was sent to
10 five ministries and 28 agencies late 2015 and early 2016. We approached all ministries to
11 negotiate access and received e-mail lists from five (out of 16) ministries (Ministry of
12 Defence; Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Justice; Ministry of Research
13 and Education). For the agencies, e-mails were mainly available on their websites. After four
14 reminders, we obtained a response rate of 40% from the ministries and 28 percent from the
15 agencies. In total, 3103 civil servants responded to the survey in Norway¹.
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19 In the Netherlands, the survey was distributed early 2016 through three channels. The first is
20 an existing panel of civil servants willing to participate in research, representing both central
21 government departments and agencies (“Flitspanel”). Here the response rate obtained was 41
22 percent, with 1401 responses. Additionally, two large agencies with highly diverse task
23 portfolios working in one of the policy areas of central concern were surveyed in order to
24 increase the number of responses from agencies. Here, email-lists were received, focusing on
25 (senior) policy staff and supervisors. The response rates obtained after three reminders was
26 53%. In total, 1552 civil servants filled out the survey in the Netherlands.
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29 *Measurements*

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31 *Dependent variable: media-stress.* The survey contained six questions in which respondents
32 were asked for assessments of how they saw the media, how their organization handled the
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¹ In addition to the number of respondents reported here, we also received responses from communications staff in the Netherlands and Norway. Those respondents have been excluded from the analysis.

1 media and questions relating to media-related negativity, stress and anxiety. Five of those
2 were negatively correlated to the mediatization of daily work. Three of the five remaining
3 items were related. The items refer to “often being anxious that cases come out in the media
4 before they are completely finalized”, the perception that “media is hostile to bureaucracy”
5 and the assertion that “pressure from media causes fear to make mistakes”. An additive index
6 was calculated combining these three variables.
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17 *Independent variable: mediatization of daily work*
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19 The questions on the mediatization of daily work were based on earlier surveys (Salomonsen
20 et al. 2016; Schillemans 2016), and aimed to tap into specific, concrete, measurable
21 dimensions in which the media ‘out there’ could affect mental states of and specific behaviors
22 by bureaucrats. Originally, the questions were devised to measure four ways in which the
23 media could possibly penetrate the work practices of civil servants. The factor analysis
24 however revealed three distinct underlying factors, making immediate theoretical sense. The
25 questions appeared at various places in the survey routing, so the factor structure is not a
26 battery effect.
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39 The three sub-dimensions are media use, media awareness and media work.
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43 [Table 1]
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49 *Media use* refers to the extent to which civil servants see and use the news as an important
50 source of information for their work (Salomonsen et al. 2016; Schillemans 2016). The items
51 are whether respondents agree that “it is important to follow media in my work” and “media
52 covers information that is often important for my work”.
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Media awareness refers to the extent to which the media are mentally present while civil servants are doing their daily work. The media are then mentally ‘present’ in the minds of civil servants as political actors (Kunelius & Reunanen 2011; Landerer 2014). The items are whether “it is important in my job to understand the media” and whether people “consider how a case may appear in the media”.

Media work relates to the extent that non-media staff directly engage in customary media work (Salomonsen et al. 2016). Here, non-media staff engage in directly media-related activities, thus theoretically ‘substituting’ (Schulz 2004) non-media-work for direct media-work. Items refer to participating in “writing speech dots / flakes in connection with media inquiries or media initiatives” and “responding to media inquiries and work with media initiatives are a natural part of one’s work”.

Macro and meso level variables

Beyond the mediatization of their work, respondents come from different organizational and professional backgrounds which has an impact on how they see the media and on media-stress.

To begin with, we collected data from Norway (N= 3103) and the Netherlands (N= 1552), meaning that the Norwegian respondents stand for quite precisely two thirds of total responses. This means that the Norwegian responses dominate the sample. The important relations between variables, however, are also visible in the Dutch sample. Furthermore, participants either worked for central government departments (N= 1605) or attached, semi-autonomous government agencies (N= 3048). Now two thirds of our respondents represent agencies, which makes sense in so far that in both countries agencies employ more staff than central governments. Finally, we asked respondents to indicate whether or not they had a supervising position, which almost half of the sample does (49% vs. 51%). This figure as

1 such is somewhat unrepresentative. On the one hand it means an over-representation of
2 supervisors. This, on the other hand, could also be a response bias, as highly educated
3 respondents may over-report the extent to which they supervise others as this is socially
4 desirable. Furthermore, this somewhat tilted balance with too many chiefs and too little
5 Indians is also to some extent an outcome of our sampling procedure, where we were looking
6 for (senior) policy officials and not for support staff and were furthermore dependent on
7 access provided.
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10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 *Individual factors*

20 We collected *individual* level factors as controls. We asked for the age in years of
21 respondents and the number of years of experience in the organization. For the Norwegian
22 sample we also had gender but this was not available throughout for the Dutch sample.
23 Various individual level factors are probably also related to media-stress and would be
24 important to incorporate in future studies. We were however limited in the amount of
25 questions we could ask in the Dutch sample and have therefore focused on the mediatization
26 and institutional variables of interest to our central research question. The Norwegian sample
27 contained more individual level factors and we will mention some of them in the discussion.
28 As dependent and independent variables are drawn from the same survey, we risk common
29 source bias. We ran the Lindell and Whitney test (2001), where an unrelated question from
30 the survey is utilized as a marker. We used a question about lawful proceedings as a
31 bureaucratic value for civil servants, and Pearson's r were below .10 for all correlations. We
32 also performed a factor analysis with dependent and independent variables. It shows that the
33 first underlying dimension explains only 24% of the variance, again suggesting that the
34 problem of common source bias is limited.
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Results

Mediatization of daily work: a mixed bag

This paper started with some, mostly qualitative, accounts of the mediatization of bureaucracies and public agencies (Bekkers et al. 2011a; Djerf-Pierre & Pierre 2016; Garland et al. 2017; Klijn et al. 2016; Maggetti 2012; Schillemans 2012; Thorbjørnsrud et al. 2014b). Together such studies have shown that media have a strong impact on bureaucracies on an organizational level with impacts on individuals. We now open up the organization further to analyze the mediatization of civil servant's daily work by measuring their professional media use, media awareness and direct media work. Table 2 below gives a first overview of our findings.

[Table 2]

The table shows that there is a decent variation on all three indices. The means though differ quite strongly, with a very low mean for media work suggesting that most respondents simply do very little direct media work, although there are some clear exceptions in our data. There seem to be firewalls between the communications people preparing media initiatives by bureaucracies and most of the policy staff preparing or delivering the policies.

The means are much higher for media use and media awareness, suggesting this is fairly relevant for Dutch and Norwegian civil servants, albeit with quite some variation. The 4655 civil servants in our sample, then, are on average fairly mediatized in terms of using media as a source of information and having the media in the back of their minds while working, yet, they are mostly at arm's length from doing real media work. The media, thus, are a real but not overbearing or all-encompassing presence in the professional lives of civil servants,

1 which aligns with findings in other studies on the relative weight of the media for bureaucrats
2 (Waterman et al. 1998: 24; Overman et al 2018: 9). Our findings also imply that there is an
3 important distinction between professional media use and media awareness on the one hand,
4 which are both quite wide-spread amongst our respondents, and performing media work on
5 the other, which is quite rare. This is going to be an important distinction further on.
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14 **Media-stress**

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16 The media are often portrayed as external intruders in public administration (Klijn et al.
17 2016) and may invoke media-stress. We have measured media-stress with items stressing
18 ‘anxiety’, ‘hostility’, and ‘fear’. Table 3 below provides an overview of our findings on
19 media-stress.
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29 [Table 3]
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34 The table shows that our respondents indeed on average suffer a bit from media-stress. Yet
35 the stress is again, as with the mediatization of work, not at all at a dysfunctionally high level.
36 Underneath the overall picture of media-stress, almost half of the respondents agree
37 (strongly) that they can be anxious that cases will come out in the media before they are
38 completely finalized. A third of the respondents further (strongly) agreed that media pressure
39 produced fear of making mistakes. This fear as such is actually quite productive and will
40 probably decrease the actual number of mistakes made. When fear is overbearing, however, it
41 may produce problematic doses of stress and could lead to unsavory responses. Finally, a
42 smaller number of respondents (around 25%) agreed that the media is hostile to bureaucracy.
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56 The reassuring news for public administration scholars would be that the average media-
57 stress-level is not too high. The data do however also suggest that at least some media-stress
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1 is widespread among bureaucrats and that some individual respondents are terribly stressed.

2 This begs the question how media-stress can be explained?
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7 **Antecedents of media-stress**

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9 To analyze the antecedents of media-stress, we performed a stepwise regression analysis
10 relating the three dimensions of the mediatization of daily work (media use, media awareness
11 and media work), some institutional predictors (country, type of organization) and some
12 individual characteristics (hierarchical position, age, years of experience) to media-stress.
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14 Several of these factors were related to media-stress in the analysis. We first provide the
15 general overview in table 4 and will then discuss the four hypotheses in turn including some
16 reflections.
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34 *Mediatization and media-stress: two logics*

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36 Table 4 shows that all three sub-dimensions of the mediatization of daily work are
37 significantly related to media-stress, as we hypothesized (H1), yet not all in the same
38 direction. The picture turns out to be more complex than originally envisaged.
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40 In line with our hypothesis, the analysis suggests that civil servants who use the media much
41 more as an input to their work and who are more aware of the media while doing their work
42 are also more media-stressed. This pattern is reminiscent of results from agenda-setting
43 studies. The agenda-setting effect of the media is generally speaking strongest on those
44 individuals who listen, read and watch more media (McCombs 2004). This suggests that at
45 least some of the media-impact results from how people handle media and attribute
46 importance to media. The media does not so much (or not only) enforce its logic upon the
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1 civil service, they are also ‘invited in’ by individuals with a strong orientation towards and
2 awareness of the news.
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4 The pattern however totally reverses when people actually participate in media work on a
5 regular basis, which only a small minority of our respondents do. The civil servants doing
6 most media work turn out to be significantly less media-stressed. This is at odds with our
7 hypothesis.
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10 Upon reflection it seems that working with the media may take away some of the factors
11 leading to media-stress. The finding may suggest that bureaucrats who are routinely involved
12 with media work learn to understand the media and find effective ways of coping (Bekkers et
13 al. 2011a). By having to balance conflictual institutional demands on a regular basis they may
14 learn to reconcile and balance ensuing practical and value conflicts. Also, by being actively
15 involved bureaucrats may get a stronger sense of control which may also lower media-stress.
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17 The simplified lesson to take away from this for civil servants is: ‘if you want to stand the
18 (media) heat, get into the (media) kitchen’. We should note, though, that the increase in
19 explained variance is limited, when introducing the three dimensions of the mediatization of
20 daily work. This suggests that country (and the other organizational level variables) are
21 strong predictors of media stress.
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44 *Country differences: surprising Dutch media-stress*

45 Beyond the mediatization of work, our second hypothesis (H2) was that Norwegian civil
46 servants, due to the characteristics of the media system, would be more media-stressed than
47 their Dutch colleagues. Table 4 however clearly shows this hypothesis has to be refuted. The
48 Dutch respondents - surprisingly - express more media-stress than Norwegian respondents.
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50 This was unexpected, because Norway has a stronger tabloid tradition (Cere et al. 2015), with
51 more soft news and human interest stories (Figenschou & Thorbjørnsrud 2015b), stronger
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media concerns by civil servants (Overman et al. 2018) and more powerful media (Van Dalen & Van Aelst 2014). Nevertheless, the Dutch civil servants seem to be consistently more stressed than their Norwegian colleagues. We ran the multi-variate regressions on each country separately (see table A1 in the appendix). Interestingly, media work and media awareness is significant in the Norwegian case, media use is significant in the Netherlands. Leadership position and type of organization is only significant in Norway.

One should be careful in interpreting such country differences. It could be that the original question in Norwegian sounds stronger to the native ear than its Dutch translation. It could also be the case that Norwegians are simply less outspoken in their judgments, so that it would take more in Norway to answer strongly affirmative to a question.

Having said that, however, it could well be the case that our survey taps into a real difference. A related study comparing Dutch to Australian civil servants showed the same pattern. The objective reasons for stress were much higher in Australia (more coverage, more negativity, tabloids) while the subjective perceptions of media-pressure in the Netherlands turned out to be much higher (Schillemans 2016). This may suggest that media-stress is to some extent an in-group phenomenon (see Perloff 2015), developed and shared in professional communities and only partially coupled to the ‘objective’ external media pressure experienced.

Organizational differences: most media-stress in central government

As expected, we find that departmental staff experience significantly more media-stress than their counterparts in more ‘pastoral’ (Pollitt et al. 2004) agencies. This is precisely as was expected and confirms our third hypothesis (H3). This makes sense, as central government departments work much closer to the political power center and its political games. Their work is also much more salient for the news media and subjected to much larger numbers of media stories. And also, not unimportant, the media will be familiar with the names of most

1 departments while most agencies, with some notable exceptions (Deacon & Monk 2001;
2 Schillemans 2012), remain unknown to the average public and work out of sight, out of
3 reach, of the media. Against this background, it is only logical that bureaucrats in government
4 departments are more stressed about the media than most of their colleagues delivering and
5 implementing policy. This is in line with expectations about the stressing impact of media on
6 bureaucracy (Klijn & Korthagen 2017), and the general assumptions in the mediatization of
7 politics literature (Esser & Strömbäck 2014). An increase in media pressure exacerbates the
8 institutional value conflict between bureaucracy and media, resulting in media-stress,
9 explaining the higher media-stress in central government departments.
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24 *Individual differences: leading is coping*

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26 Finally, in line with our expectations, we find that civil servants with supervising
27 responsibilities experience less media-stress than non-supervising civil servants (H4). The
28 hypothesis was based on the expectation that supervising staff would be more exposed to
29 media, also given their closer proximity to political decision-making, and would be more
30 affected by “media surprises”. Although they experience more media-pressure and have to
31 deal with more complex value conflicts, supervising civil servants experience less media-
32 stress. This suggests that, as part of their supervising role, they have learnt to cope with
33 different value systems and they may simply be better at handling such tensions. Also, in line
34 with our reasoning regarding the effects of media work, supervisors may have a much
35 stronger sense of agency in their work which may make the media ‘out there’ seem less
36 threatening and stressing. The logic of individual coping ability and agency, summarized in
37 H4’, then seems to be more important than proximity to political decision-making and
38 exposure to media-pressure, which was our contrasting hypothesis here (H4).
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1 The other individual variables had no effect in our model. There was no relation between age
2 and media-stress nor years of experience in an organization and media-stress. In the
3
4 Norwegian data there was a significant relation between media-stress and gender, though
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6 (gender was not systematically available in the Netherlands). It turned out that women were
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8 less media-stressed than men. We would not know how to explain this interesting finding but
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10 it suggests that much more can be learnt about the antecedents of media-stress when we zoom
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12 in on individual-level factors. Our explanatory power is fine ($R^2 = .11$) but there is still a lot
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14 left to explain. It would be valuable for instance to take personal characteristics of civil
15
16 servants into account. One could for instance expect that some of the big-5 personality traits
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18 (Barrick & Mount 1991), notably ‘neuroticism’ and ‘openness to experience’, are related to
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20 media-stress. It would also make sense to relate media-stress to more generic professional
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22 attitudes found in civil servants, such as public service motivation (Perry 1996) or fatalism
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24 (Klijn et al. 2016). This however needs to be taken up in subsequent research.
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34 **Conclusion and Discussion**

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36 Now who is afraid of the media? Against the background of the institutional value conflict
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38 between bureaucratic values and media demands, this paper has sought to find out which civil
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40 servants experience more media-stress than others. The analyses confirmed most of our
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42 hypotheses and suggest that various logics are at play.
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46 There is first of all a logic of *media* (and political) *pressure*. Those bureaucrats working for
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48 the central government departments operating more closely to the spotlights of the media,
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50 also experience more media-stress. There is secondly a logic of *media focus*. Those
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52 bureaucrats reading, watching and listening more to the news (media use) and who are more
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54 aware of the media while working (media awareness) also experience more media-stress.
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58 There is thirdly however also a logic of *learned skill* or *coping ability*. Bureaucrats doing
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1 more media work and bureaucrats with supervising positions seem to have learnt to cope with
2 the conflicting demands from the media and subsequently experience less media-stress.
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4 Overall, we conclude that mediatization is indeed related to media-stress, yet not, as the
5 different logics above suggest, in a one-dimensional way.
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9 There are some important limitations to and reflections on our findings. To begin with, we
10 were restricted in collecting data on the individual and organizational level in the two
11 countries. As a consequence, various potential explanations of media-stress on the individual
12 and organizational level were not included in the survey which could have provided further
13 explanations. For instance, we found significant differences between organizational
14 backgrounds of the respondents but were not able to use further theoretically relevant
15 organizational variables, such as organizational size, type of task or location of the main
16 office (Boon et al. 2019). And on the individual level, additional variables such as media
17 training, personality traits or fatalism (Klijn et al. 2016) could be relevant. Such
18 organizational or individual variables can potentially influence our results as they could be
19 both related to the independent and dependent variables.
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36 Secondly, the paper is theoretically framed on the generic concept of mediatization yet
37 focuses on two countries only which raises the issue of generalizability. Generally, some care
38 has to be taken in interpreting findings from specific settings and also in interpreting cross-
39 country comparisons. As results relate to earlier studies (Garland et al. 2017; Salomonsen et
40 al. 2016; Schillemans 2016; Thorbjørnsrud et al. 2014b;) and insights extend and build on
41 existing scholarship, we believe our findings may at least generalize theoretically and could
42 inform subsequent studies in different settings.
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53 Finally, both in survey research in general as in mediatization studies in particular, the issue
54 of causality is always complex. Scholars in mediatization have explained how processes of
55 adaptation to media should not necessarily be interpreted as strict responses to an external
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pressure; there can also be processes of reverse causality. Sometimes adaptation to the media could also be the product of mimetic isomorphism (Donges & Jarren 2014: 189) or other institutional or organizational factors (Fredriksson et al. 2015; Salomonsen et al. 2016). The surprisingly high level of Dutch media-stress could be related to this. Even more strongly, mediatization can also be the product of conscious strategic actions by the mediatizing entity itself, in fact rendering it “self-mediatization” (Esser 2013: 162), where strategic objectives coincide with adaptation to the media (Strömbäck & Van Aelst 2013: 345).

Beyond the explanations we sought, we believe that our findings have normative, theoretical and policy-relevance.

The mediatization of politics literature started out from an explicitly *normative* concern about the undue and undesirable influence of media on politics (Mazzoleni & Schulz 1999). The public administration literature is equally concerned with the disruptive effects of the media on public policies (Klijn & Korthagen 2017). In both literatures, some authors fear that hegemonic media logics crowd out or supplant ‘homegrown’ institutional logics of politics and administration with detrimental effects. In this context, we believe that our findings provide a welcome comfort to those concerned authors. The levels of media-stress we saw in this study are not terribly high. The media has an active presence in the daily work performed in public bureaucracies, yet this effect is not all-encompassing and does not overrun traditional bureaucratic practices and seems to have become normalized (cf. Salomonsen et al. 2016). At the same time, the paper also shows that some bureaucrats are (way) more media-stressed than others and helps to understand when and why this is the case.

In the *theoretical* debate about the mediatization of political phenomena, we have aimed to provide a modest but important contribution. The expansive mediatization literature has in recent years attracted criticisms and been dubbed in one of the strongest contributions as a ‘concept of no difference’ (Deacon & Stanyer 2014; Ekström et al. 2016). In this paper we

1 have specified and contextualized what mediatization – adaptation of people’s work inside
2 public bureaucracies to the logics of the media – could mean in tangible ways. We have used
3 the concept in a purely descriptive, non-normative sense (Hjarvard 2013: 18; Schulz 2004),
4 describing variance in media use, media awareness and media work. As such, this paper has
5 been able to capture “differences” in mediatization and to explore some of the underlying
6 logics and dynamics. This is crucial for scholars aiming to understand the real antecedents of
7 mediatization and the concrete ways in which the media environment becomes integrated and
8 changes public bureaucracies.

9 Finally, we believe our findings have potential policy implications. Every bureaucracy faces
10 the challenge of coupling internal policy processes to external communications about those
11 policies. Ideal-typically, bureaucracies can deploy two organizing principles. The first
12 strategy could be dubbed a *firewalling* strategy, where the organization buffers the core of its
13 policy work from the external media by insulating policy work from media work. In this
14 scenario, bureaucrats do as little media work as possible and their work will not be
15 mediatized. The second strategy could be dubbed *filtering*, where organizations carefully
16 expose and integrate policy staff to some media work, almost as a sort of a vaccine, to
17 accustom them to the media and to balance institutional demands (and when the filters fail
18 and media work takes precedence, this could be called *flooding*). Both strategies are found in
19 public organizations and we find advocates of both strategies in the literature and amongst
20 civil servants (Klijn et al. 2016; Sanders et al. 2011). Our research now suggests that, in lieu
21 of media-stress, the fire-walling policy seems to offer most potential. When bureaucrats are
22 highly aware of the media and use much media this is associated with media-stress, yet once
23 they get into the media-kitchen and take part in some of the media work, they are much less
24 stressed. This suggests that it would be helpful for policy-making civil servants to participate
25 in some of the media work in order to reconcile conflictual institutional demands from

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bureaucracy and the media. When media-stress is a problem, including bureaucrats in media
work can be part of the answer.

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Table 1 Factor Analyses Mediatization of Daily Work, Norway and the Netherlands
Principal axis factoring

		Factor (eigenvalue)		
		1	2	3
		(1.2)	(2.7)	(1.1)
Media Work	Q35: Writing speech dots / flakes in connection with media inquiries or media initiatives	.83	.14	.10
	Q76: Respond to media inquiries and work with media initiatives are a natural part of my work	.80	.27	.08
Media Use	Q78: Its important to follow media in my work	.25	.83	.08
	Q79: Media covers information that is often important for my work	.25	.79	.12
Media Awareness	Q16: Qualification - understand media	.24	.35	.71
	Q26: Values - Consideration of how a case may appear in the media	-.23	.42	.67
	Q65: How often do you have to interrupt work due to media inquiries	-.23	.36	-.73

N=3716-4452

Table 2 descriptives mediatization indices Norway and the Netherlands

(all 5-pt. scales, range 1-5)

	Min	Max	Mean	Median	SD	Valid N	Miss ing	Cronbach' s Alpha	Nr of items
Media work	0	7	1.77	1.00	1.77	3469	1259	.62	2
Media use	0	8	5.11	6.00	1.98	4364	364	.80	2
Media awareness	0	8	4.82	5.00	1.80	4073	655	.56	2

Table 3: media-stress Norway and the Netherlands, descriptives

(α : .54 all 5-pt. scales, range 1-5)

	Min	Max	Mean	Median	SD	Valid N	Missing	Nr of items
Media stress index	0	12	6.27	6.00	2.30	2641	2087	3
Items media stress index (in %)			1	2	3	4	5	N
Anxiety that cases come out in the media before they are completely finalized			9.2	12.8	26.0	40.9	11.1	3032
The media is hostile to bureaucracy			6.7	23.7	44.0	20.3	5.2	3885
Pressure from media causes fear to make mistakes			11.3	22.9	27.6	31.1	7.1	3872

Table 4: The antecedents of media-stress

OLS regression, entries are b-coefficients. St. dev in parentheses

	Model 1	Model 2
Constant	5.81*** (.23)	4.80*** (.27)
Age (in years)	.00 (.01)	-.01 (.01)
Experience	-.07 (.11)	-.05 (.11)
Leadership position	-.24** (.12)	-.32*** (.12)
Organization type	.19* (.10)	.22** (.11)
Country	1.31*** (.11)	1.18 *** (.12)
Media work index		-.06** (.03)
Media use index		.11*** (.03)
Media Awareness index		.18*** (.03)
R ² (adjusted)	.08	.11

***p < .01. **p < .05. *p < .10.

Table A1: The antecedents of media-stress, Norway and the Netherlands
 OLS regression, entries are b-coefficients. St. dev in parentheses

	Norway	Netherlands
Constant	5.08*** (.32)	5.57*** (.59)
Age (in years)	-.01* (.01)	.01 (.01)
Experience	.05 (.14)	-.11 (.18)
Leadership position	-.32** (.16)	-.25 (.17)
Organization type	.30** (.15)	.14 (.16)
Media work index	-.08** (.05)	-.05 (.05)
Media use index	.06 (.04)	.22*** (.05)
Media Awareness index	.23*** (.04)	.07 (.06)
R ² (adjusted)	.03	.04

***p < .01. **p < .05. *p < .10.