

## **Media-Political Parallelism as an Indicator in Studying Mediocracy**

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**Abstract:** In media&political studies, media-political parallelism (MPP) has become an established subject of research. But there's no academic consensus either on its methodological implications for democratic representation studies or on shared methodology of MPP research. Some scholars have pointed out to political parallelism as a negative perversion of politically relevant features of media systems; others have detected positive influence of partisan content on political mobilization. Nonetheless, MPP has become a criterion in comparative media systems and political communication studies.

We propose a methodology of quantitative measurement of MPP in comparative perspective in the context of mediocracy studies. Based on previous research, seven parameters of measurement are proposed. Four 'primary' parameters are measured by superposition of graphs of party parliamentary distribution and media consumption figures within political spectrum. Three national cases (Germany 1998, UK 2005, Italy 2006) are investigated to show variations of the methodology. For estimation of party policy positions, The Manifesto Project dataset is used; for media, a special scale is created.

Nationally, in all the cases except the right-hand side of the spectrum in Germany in 1998, media spread follows electoral spread. This may have two explanations: either newspapers follow the position of 'median voters' or have a degree of influence upon voting behavior (which seems more probable). In Italy, political papers show results very different from generalist papers and illuminating in terms of national political discourse. Comparatively, the UK proves to have the highest parallelism but, contrary to expectations, Germany equals Italy or shows even higher parallelism. Methodologically, non-statistical secondary data on perceived media bias show results comparable to data gathered by empirical research and may be used for comparative studies. In case of Britain, estimated readership figures show predictability similar to average circulation figures.

**Keywords:** *Mediocracy, Mediated Democracy, Comparative media studies, Media-political parallelism, Political spectrum*

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### **Introduction**

#### **1.1 Recent research on media-political parallelism**

In media&political studies, media-political parallelism (MPP) has already become an established subject of research within democratic representation studies. Yet there's no academic consensus upon either more or less well-discussed methods of research or methodological implications for democratic studies, as evidence of both negative and positive MPP effects has been provided. Nonetheless, MPP has become a criterion in comparative media systems studies and political communication research (Hallin&Mancini 2004; Dobek-Ostrowska&Głowacki 2008; Nord 2008; Pfetsch&Esser 2008), though severe criticism has been expressed as to applicability of the concept to non-Western media systems (Voltmer 2008; Hallin&Mancini 2012).

Under the notion of parallelism there lies the idea of the party-political spectrum getting ‘mirrored’ by the ‘false mirror’ of a given media segment – say, newspapers of national circulation or national TV channels (Voltmer 2000), *or* a structural and content replication of one spectrum in the other: ‘What Seymour-Ure and other early comparative analysts meant by party press parallelism was the degree to which the structure of the media system paralleled that of the party system’ (Hallin&Mancini 2004: 27). If we use the simplest depiction of a spectrum, the linear one, the idea of MPP may be simplistically outlined by Fig. 1.

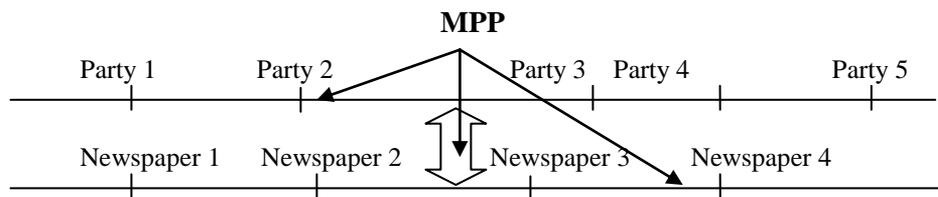


Figure 1. Studying media-political parallelism: three zones of research

Research on MPP as ‘press-party parallelism’/‘party-press parallelism’ started in 1970s (Seymour-Ure 1974; Blumler&Gurevitch [1975] 1995) and originally was mostly theoretical. In early 1990s, first empirical works on MPP were focused on the close but yet not identical topics of media bias (on the level of a media segment) (Vorster 1988; Kleinnejinhuis 1990) and media diversity (see Voltmer 2000). The first notable empirical attempt was performed by T. Patterson and W. Donsbach in 1993 (Patterson&Donsbach 1993); in late 1990s, MPP is studied more and more though the name of the phenomenon is not yet firmly established (Dimitras 1997; Newton&Brynin 2001). MPP studies receive a new impetus when in 2004 D. C. Hallin and P. Mancini publish their influential ‘Comparing Media Systems’ (Hallin&Mancini 2004) where they make MPP a criterion in comparing democratic media systems – though leaving out of the book the method(s) of exact calculation of political parallelism, as they call it. The book draws attention to the concept, and a range of national-oriented research papers appears (among others, Van Kempen 2006, 2007, 2008; Bayram 2010; Çarkoglu&Yavuz 2010; Prokhorov 2011). Today, the nation-states covered by nationally-bound research on MPP include the UK, Germany, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Sweden, Greece, and Turkey.

But even if the number of countries is substantial, there’s no shared or even discussed methodology of measurement of MPP; moreover, there’s no shared idea of what MPP really is. Researchers focus on three major issues: (1) how and where MPP manifests itself; (2) how to measure it in national and comparative perspective; (3) what democratic effects it produces in terms of democratic representation and how to measure them (often instead of MPP itself).

As to (1), Hallin and Mancini claim MPP may be traced in media content, organizational connections between media and political parties or other kinds of organizations, partisanship of media audiences, and journalistic role orientations and practices (Hallin&Mancini 2004: 28). Similarly, H. van Kempen suggests that MPP ‘is discernible in the media contents, in the ownership of the news media, in the affiliations of journalists, owners, and managers, and in readership patterns’ (Van Kempen 2008: 29). This, seemingly, suggests that, within an MPP research scheme, we do not need to pay attention to the political spectrum itself but, rather, analyse the political spread of media and that of their audience. For us, both these assumptions seem disputable. First, to be able to judge whether the political spread of media is ‘parallel’ to the political spectrum, we need to know what the political spectrum itself looks like; that is, we

need a clear methodology that would describe the political spectrum in comparative perspective. By far, none of the MPP researchers searched for a valid method of this sort. Second, we argue that audience's preferences should be taken out of the primary MPP research, as we cannot yet be sure what goes first: political polarization of media consumption according to pre-formed ideological alignment of media or, rather, editorial chase for 'median' or particularly ideologically-aligned reader (the research question known as 'chicken and egg problem', see Newton&Brynin 2001). To our mind, media-audience political adjustment is always a two-way process, with questionable and varying proportions of contribution from both sides. Whatever vector of influence be greater, the primary research question in MPP studies is the extent and form of 'mirroring' of political spectrum by media; be this established, the next step could bring in suggestions on connections between the 'mirror' and, e. g., electoral results or political involvement of the audience. Of course the very sense of studying MPP is detecting its democratic effects – that is, tracing the influence of the 'mirror' in audience behavior. Almost all the authors try to create a methodology that would analyse such influences without reconstructing the 'mirror' itself; we would, rather, suggest that there has to be a method that would indirectly involve political spread of the audience and focus more on the configuration of parallelism, as it may provide more hints in understanding the nature of MPP in both comparative and longitudinal perspectives.

We also need to note that MPP has to be separated from media bias and media diversity studies. In media bias studies, political positions of media constitute the *object* of research; taken together, 'individual 'biases' of particular media outlets within a media segment form a *means* of reconstruction of the media-political 'mirror'. Media diversity studies (see Voltmer 2000), though very clear in democratic implications, can only tell whether there *is* overall left-right democratic balance in political preferences of media or not – and, perhaps, whether the misbalance is bigger in this or that country; but it cannot tell if the detected (mis)balance corresponds to the political spectrum itself (which can be misbalanced just as well) and, in its turn, to the audience spread; neither we know what media outlets in particular are responsible for possible misbalances.

As to (2), in studying newspapers, various methodologies have been used to reconstruct the political positions of media as reflected in framed news content in a media segment (Norris et al. 1999; Eilders 2000, 2002, 2008; Pfetich et al. 2004; Berkel 2008) as well as in comments content (Brandenburg 2006; Brandenburg&Van Egmont 2008), self-positioning of newspapers via claims analysis (Wring&Deacon 2010), causal relations between political affiliation of media and electoral result (Newton&Brynin 2001) or political mobilization (Van Kempen 2007: 303) including voter turnout (Van Kempen 2008), between configuration of government and political polarization of press (Bayram 2010) etc. Content analysis and structural analysis was used; as the first option is considered resource-consuming and hard to perform cross-nationally (Van Kempen 2008: 29), structural features of media market or secondary data were drawn. This is one of the two features that may undermine the importance of findings in all those works, as the nature of relations between structural and performance features in a media system remains subject to further research (McQuail 1992). The second feature is that these attempts do not belong to any middle-range theory/concept except widely understood concept of democratic performance of media; this is why their results cannot be compared and combined, and they do not develop MPP analysis far enough to make MPP an *indicator of democratic development of a media system*, as Hallin and Mancini would wish, or an *indicator of state of a democracy itself*, as Turkish results (Bayram 2010) suggest.

As to (3), MPP democratic effects detected so far are divided into positive and negative ones. Among those positive, there's the above-mentioned growth of political mobilization and of voter

turnout (Van Kempen 2007, 2008). Another positive effect is that of political pressure upon policing institutions: as Eilders (2000) notes, political system tends to listen to the media system only when there's critical amount of pressure, and this means that issues that media perceive as demanding public advocacy can shift the media more to the left or right in a given moment, depending on whether the issues themselves belong to the left or right agenda. Thus, such pro-left or pro-right orientation of a media segment in a given moment does not necessarily indicate any stable misbalance but may indicate unanimity in issue interpretation. Negative effects are discussed within mediacritical discourse and are based on media effects theories, as inadequacy of representation of political spectrum in media may change electoral results and party support towards less representativity and less rationality.

As one and the same structural feature of media system causes both positive and negative effects in one and the same democracy, one could suggest that different understandings of MPP may lie in the background. Indeed, when positive effects are discussed, authors speak of *open* political affiliation of media within the advocacy paradigm of content production; when negative effects are discussed, they speak of *hidden* political affiliations and biases that contradict with the liberal-democratic paradigm of arbitrage which implies a set of norms (political neutrality, objectivity etc.) and standards (separation of fact and comment, giving voice to both sides of the conflict etc.) that, in theory, should lead to 'zero' bias. In reality, three types of political parallelism may be detected: 1) 'open' parallelism in (pro)party media that, allegedly, causes growth of political involvement and political discussion; 2) 'inborn' parallelism caused by the process of news judgment, agenda-setting and issue framing so that it creates inevitable structural biases in news content, biases that become traditional and form a historic structural premise for democratic diversity of media content; 3) 'hidden' parallelism as a result of improper practices of the media that, in words, proclaim devotion to the liberal ideal.

## **1.2. The research scheme: media-political parallelism in the context of mediacracy studies**

Thus, we need to create a methodology that would: 1) form itself within a higher-level concept of media&political studies; 2) focus upon 'mirror' aspects rather than MPP effects; 3) be realizable with primary (content analysis) or secondary (including non-verified) data about media affiliations; 4) distinguish between 'open' and 'hidden' parallelism; 5) be replicable in longitudinal and comparative perspectives, that is, be quantitative in nature. In other words, we need a methodology that would establish media-political parallelism as an indicator of democratic development a media system and, perhaps, as that of the democratic condition of a given polity.

For the first task, we have put our research on MPP in the context of mediacracy studies (Puyu&Bodrunova 2012). Our premise is that, in established democracies of today, politics is no longer possible without involvement of media who become the 'inevitable third element' between political system and citizenship (Ansolabehere et al. 1993), thus creating media(ted) democracies (Bennett&Entman 2000; Graber 2002: 266). Of two approaches to mediacracy (Bodrunova 2010a), the 'marketing' one describes mediacracy as a meaningful distortion of mediademocracy, the latter being an ideal type of political regime. In a mediacracy, *fusion and intertwining of politics and media* in procedures and interests creates threats to rational choice, public control over decision-makers, and political competition. Thus, development of mediacratic trends is inversely proportional to development of democracy; index of mediacraticization, in its turn, may be one of parameters in measuring quality of democracy. Earlier, we had elaborated such an index, with MPP parameters among its indicators (Puyu&Bodrunova 2012: Chapter 2).

Under the ‘umbrella’ concept of mediacracy, media-political parallelism has to be understood as ‘hidden’, mediocratic parallelism not stipulated by the liberal paradigm. Our understanding of mediacracy implies that a media system is a self-reliant social sub-system similar to politics and free in decision-making inside itself; this allows for a substantial degree of independency for editorial offices in their choice of political judgment and alignment. We deny perception of formally independent media as a pure channel of messaging for political and pressure agents; and thus ‘open’ parallelism cannot be a sign of mediocratic practices, but presence of media bias in formally neutral newspapers or on public service TV is a clear indicator of mediocratic fusion of elite and media – and, in this status, can help measure quality of democracy across countries and time periods: *the higher the level of ‘mediocratic’ MPP, the more quality of democracy is affected.*

To create a research scheme, we analysed the components of MPP suggested by theorists and re-structured them according to our notion of ‘mediocratic’ parallelism (see Table 1).

Table 1. Components of media-political parallelism in major comparative media systems studies and political communication research and parameters proposed for mediacracy studies

Components by researchers	(1)	(2)	(3)	Proposed components
Financial involvement of parties into administration of media	x			‘Open’ and ‘hidden’ political affiliations as reflected in media content (a configuration parallel to politics)
Level of partisanship / political bias in media (as reflected in media content)	x	x	x	
Party affiliation of media consumers	x		x	-
Role of state in controlling media		x		-
Level of integration of media-political elite (organizational ties and political activity of journalists)		x	x	1. Party affiliation and political activity of journalists 2. Analysis of self-perception and political preferences of journalist community and editors
Nature of legitimation of media system (complex of normative&role beliefs of journalistic community)		x	x	

Source: (1) Seymour-Ure 1974; (2) Blumler&Gurevitch 1995: 62; (3) Hallin&Mancini 2004: 27–28.

Further on, we’ll understand political parallelism in media as the *phenomenon of mediocratic* (leading to lowering of rationality of political choice&control and other mediocratic effects) *‘mirroring’ of political spectrum by a media segment via deviation of content of generalist and/or specialized media from zero level of political bias.* Growth of procedural and financial ties between politics and media, as well as party affiliation and political preferences of journalists and editors, may be considered not another form of political parallelism but *underlying factors* affecting media content. Political polarization of media audience may be (at least partly) considered as a *consequence* of polarized media content.

Having examined both Table 1 and all above-mentioned empirical research, we’ve developed a seven-parameter general scheme of MPP analysis (see Fig. 2). Parameters 1, 2, 5 and 6(a) should be considered *primary MPP parameters*, as they allow describing configuration of political parallelism in given time in a given polity. The parameters are measured by superposition of graphs of party parliamentary distribution and media consumption figures within political spectrum (see the case studies in Results). Other parameters help understand the nature of national traditions of political parallelism and additional features of national-specific MPP.

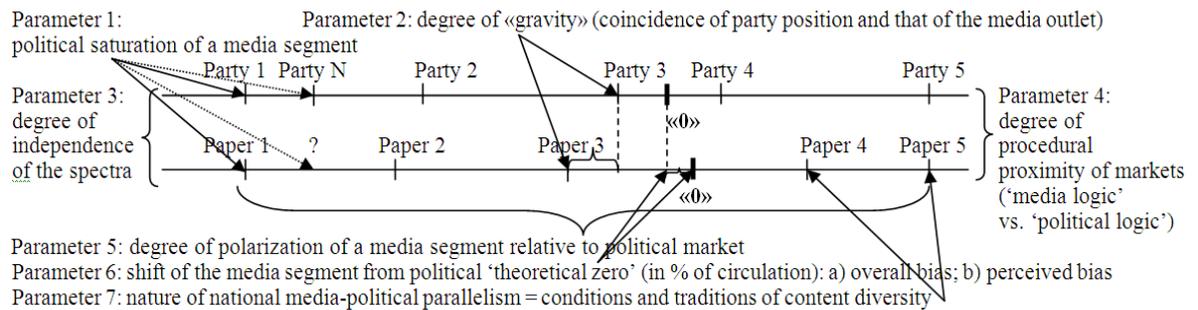


Figure 2. Parameters of MPP research

To test the primary MPP parameters, the following hypotheses have been developed:

- 1) majoritarian democracies show more MPP than consensual democracies;
- 2) use of combination of primary and secondary (verified and non-verified) data on political affiliations of media can produce meaningful results similar to pure content analysis data in its predictability;
- 3) the methodology that we propose may be based on the data of varying nature: exact placement of media on a left-right scale and more rough placement of media within 'ideological families' or just on the 'left' or 'right';
- 4) there may be difference in MPP in various media segments of the same type of media, thus media type ('the nature of a medium', in McLuhan's way) is not a major MPP determinant;
- 5) for newspapers, estimated actual readership figures show more predictability of electoral result than official circulation figures.

## Methodology

Quantitative measurement of MPP is made by index-like description of the superposed graphs according to the four primary MPP parameters (see Table 2).

Table 2. MPP measurement methodology

Parameter N	Wording	Indicator
Parameter 1	Political saturation of media market: parties with no say	Saturated: 0 Not saturated: 1
Parameter 2	Degree of 'gravity' of political parties	Extremums of the graphs: do not exist/coincide: 0 are on the same side of coordinate space: 1 are in the same zone of the spectrum: 2
Parameter 5	Overall political polarization	Polarization of the graphs does not match: 0 Polarization of the graphs matches: 1
Parameter 6a	Overall shift of media market relative to 'theoretical zero'	Left-right variation*: less than 10% of the readership or circulation: 0 10% to 30% of the readership or circulation: 1 over 30% of readership or circulation: 2

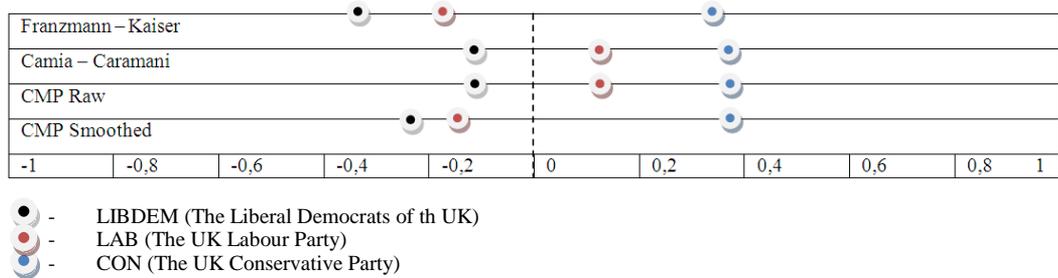
\*- the figures are oriented to earlier research on media diversity (Voltmer 2000) but are subject to further discussion.

To construct the graphs that are to be analysed, we need a one-dimensional ('left-right') scale of political spectrum suitable for both politics and media. This constituted a range of

methodological issues: (1) Party positioning on a left-right scale: choice of positioning method and of the method of interpretation of raw data on estimated party positions. (2) Constructing a more rough scale for media, as there's no comparable primary data on political saliency in media content similar to the data already collected in political research, and as the data constitute at least five levels of precision: 'left/center/right/independent/none', 'radical-left/left/center-left/center/center-right/right/radical-right', party family affiliation ('green' or 'liberal'), party/coalition affiliation equal to 'open' parallelism; exact positioning of a numerical right-left scale based on content analysis results. (3) Superposition of the scales for politics and media.

(1) In politics, of all possible measurement systems for estimating party policy positions, we've selected machine-coded content analysis technique, as it is very well developed and provides raw data for practically all democracies that can be subject to MPP research. We've used the dataset of The Manifesto Project (TMP, <http://manifestoproject.wzb.eu>) to place parties on the left-right scale of (-1; 1). But placing parties according to TMP data is a methodological problem in itself, as existing methods of interpretation of TMP data vary in precision and result (Hans&Hoennige 2008: 38). Leaving aside Bayesian methods and using the UK 1997 and Germany 1998 as cases, we've tested four interpretative methods based on structural equations: Kim – Fording (1998) that equals the method suggested by the TMP group (Laver&Garry 2000), Franzmann – Kaiser (2006), NCCR Democracy group method (Camia&Caramani 2010) and a combined method: Kim – Fording 'smoothed' via a smoothing procedure suggested by Franzmann and Kaiser (it takes into account the average legislature period and the party position during the three consecutive electoral cycles). For the results of test party positioning, see Fig. 3a (the UK 1997) and 3b (Germany 1998); CMP is abbreviation from 'Comparative Manifestos Project' (ex-TMP).

a)



b)

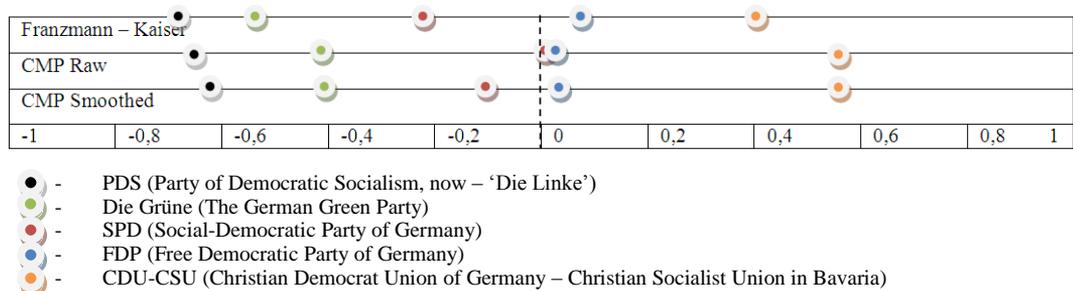


Figure 3. Testing four methods of extraction of party positions from the TMP dataset of 2011: the cases of the UK (1997) and Germany (1998)

Source: a) Appendix 1, Table 1; b) reconstruction upon (Franzmann&Kaiser 2006: 175–177).

The results suggest that Kim – Fording method should be chosen (its formula equals formulas by Laver – Garry and by Camia – Caramani), as it confirms ‘centripetal slide’ of the British parties in 1997 known from other sources (Lees-Marshment 2001; Bodrunova 2010c) and polarizes the whole spectrum to a lesser extent. Franzmann – Kaiser shifts the whole spectrum to the left in both cases, and even if this method pretends to be the most precise as it takes into consideration nationally-specific left-right spread of saliency issues and has an inherent smoothing procedure, shortcomings of this procedure and the very nature of regression analysis make us prefer the simpler method. As to the ‘smoothed’ Kim – Fording, it provides results in between the two main methods; but due to the lack of clarity on how to use the smoothing for the latest elections (as there’s no ‘surrounding’ electoral cycle after the latest elections) we leave this for further discussion.

(2) To create a scale for political spectrum in media, we had to incorporate into (-1; 1) scale the two diapasons that corresponded to the nature of the data on perceived media bias in various sources: 1) radical left – left – center-left – center – center-right – right – radical right; 2) main party families’ diapasons (in Europe), as, e. g., social democrat parties may be considered left or center-left depending on national tradition. Out of over a dozen works on European party families including the TMP suggestion, we have chosen eight most widespread and massively supported party families, namely communist (far left), socialist / social democrat, green, liberal, agrarian, Christian democrat / religious, conservative, nationalist (far right).

To create these two additional spectra, we superposed results of three researches on mean party family positions in Europe. The first research is McDonald, Mendes and Kim’s who, in their turn, combine TMP party family positions on 79 parties with the results derived of the three major expert surveys: Mair&Castles in 1984, Laver&Hunt in 1992, and Huber&Inglehart in 1995 (McDonald et al. 2006: 11). The two other sets of results are produced by NCCR Democracy group: these are the results based on TMP data and those based on mass surveys, namely Eurobarometer and European Social Survey (Camia&Caramani 2010). Thus, we superpose the results derived with all the most advanced types of methodology by authoritative groups of scientists (machine-coded analysis by the Oxford political school, most notable expert surveys, and mass surveys with regular repetition and high reputation) and from all sorts of sources: documents (party manifestos), expert community, and audience.

The resulting means for McDonald *et alii*’s four datasets were calculated via simple mean. Results of the NCCR research were re-scaled from (1; 10) to (0; 10) via a standartization procedure  $RL_s = (RL - 0,5) \times 10/9$  and then transposed to (-1; 1) scale (see Appendix 1, Tables 2 and 3). For the results of our superposition, see the Fig. 3a (‘pure’ party family positions) and 3b (standard deviations). Final diapasons for party families were found by simple superimposition of standard deviations; diapasons from ‘radical left’ to ‘radical right’ were assigned with the scale step of 0,05 according to the mean ‘pure’ party family positions. The resulting scale stays below the Fig. 3b; agrarian party family is excluded from the final list due to the lack of comparable data.

(3) As party spectrum and media spectrum coordinate spaces have to be two-dimensional (for parties: absciss – (-1; 1) left-right scale for TMP numbers, ordinate – number of places in the national electable house of parliament or assembly; for media – (-1; 1) left-right scale with two additional diapasons, ordinate – circulation/readership figures), we have to superpose them. We’ll do that in the way that enhances visualization of the graphs without affecting them.

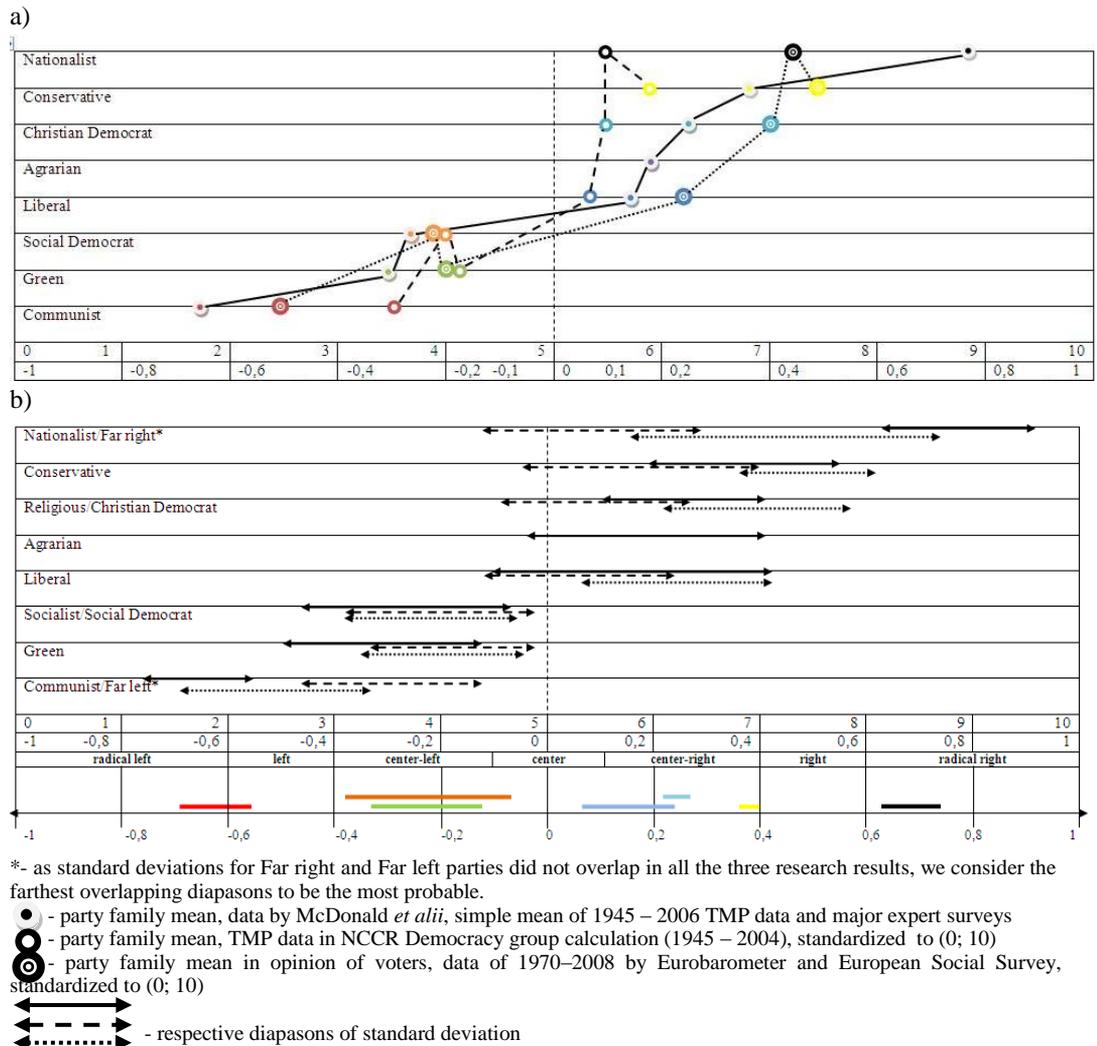


Figure 3. Political spectrum for media: superimposition of (a) ‘pure’ party family positions and (b) standard deviations in three research datasets

Source: McDonald *et al.* 2006: 11; Camia&Caramani 2010: 42, standardization ours.

## Results

To test our hypotheses, three case studies, each with its own sub-methodology and interpretation of results, have been conducted. They include the UK of 2005, Italy of 2006 and Germany of 1998. Party spread that constitutes 95% or more of the house is considered.

### 3.1. The case of the UK 2005

Being an ‘ideal gas’ for media bias researchers, the UK national newspapers have, for long, been studied extensively in terms of their political bias and party affiliations. Many authors claimed very high political bias in the UK papers (Curtice 1999; Deacon *et al.* 2001: 109;

Newton&Brynin 2001: 267; Denver 2003: 138; Brandenburg 2006: 158; Brandenburg&Van Egmont 2008: 3); there seems to be a general consensus on it, though this consensus rests mainly on data provided by general election readers and guides where qualitative reconstruction of the papers' political positions deriving from their own claims is stated but no quantitative method of analysis seems to be used (see, e. g., Scammell&Harrop 2005; Scammell&Beckett 2010).

If we look at the data stated in guides to elections and elections readers we will realize that, in perception of authors, there's at least temporal, if not causal, relationship between the aggregate party affiliations of the British national press and electoral preferences of its audience: the party which won the elections always received a (seemingly) greater endorsement by the press throughout the last 20 years, as well as in some earlier cases (like in the case of the famous 'Tory press' in 1970–80s). Perhaps this is why, in the works aspiring to define the electoral influence of the UK papers, indicators of their party allegiance are often used as independent variables, as if the party affiliation were already established (see, e. g. Norris 2006). There're several works only that try to assess in a verified way the actual political distribution of newspapers via content analysis (Norris et al. 1999; Brandenburg 2006; Brandenburg&Van Egmont 2008). But neither in these works nor in the official reports by the UK Electoral Commission (<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk>; see, e. g. Deacon et al. 2005 where claims analysis is used to define positions of individual papers, and content analysis is provided for aggregated market segments only, not individual papers) one could find any attempt to place individual newspapers within any kind of a spectrum or a simple left-right scale.

As we do not have the data of this kind, in the case of UK 2005, we will follow the previous research and will be guided by the notion of party support (rather than ideological alignment) according to the model of 'structural parallelism' known from the early-20<sup>th</sup> century Denmark where each of four parties had a supporting newspaper in every big city (Prokhorov 2010: 43). We will focus on defining the proportions of aggregate 'endorsing' average daily circulation and/or estimated readership in the segment of national newspapers, rather than on placing them on the scale individually (which would be, nonetheless, the preferred option).

According to our hypotheses, our case study will, thus, have three parts. In general, we focus on the electoral cycle of 2001–2005 with the elections of May 5, 2005 but also reconstruct the 'parallel' structures of other years if necessary.

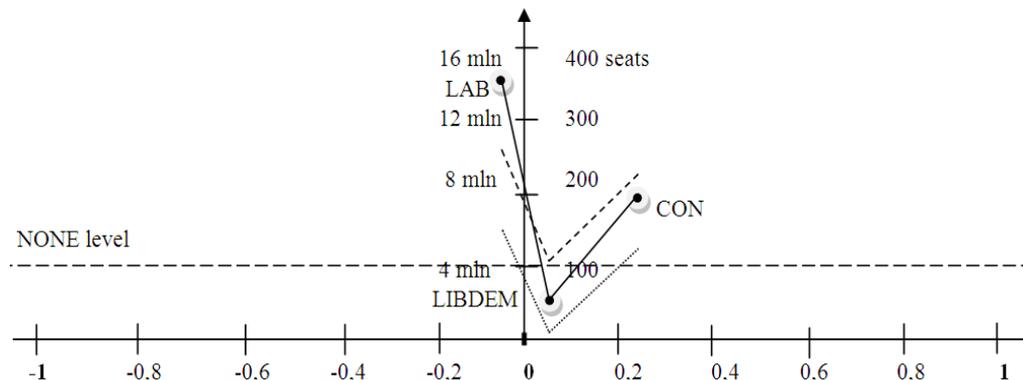
First, we'll examine the relationship between the political spread and newspaper spread. To do this, we'll use TMP data to place the parties on the scale, and the data by Wring and Deacon (2010) who have conducted claims analysis and determined two parameters: the subject of endorsement (which party is endorsed by which paper) and degree of endorsement (very weak – weak – moderate – strong – very strong). To use Wring&Deacon's data for estimating the amount of 'endorsing' circulation, we make two methodological assumptions that operationalize their data for our research. First, we re-shape the scale 'very weak – very strong' to a scale with 0,2 step regarding the percentage of average daily circulation of a given newspaper. In other words, if a paper makes a 'very weak' endorsement claim we will consider that the endorsement will be noticeable in some content only (roughly 20%); for a 'weak' claim, the endorsement will take place in less than a half of the content (40%); for 'moderate' claims, over a half of the content will be engaged (60%); 'strong' claim pretends for 80% of the content, as the other parties are much less promoted, yet not all the content is engaged; 'very strong' claim means the paper does not tolerate any other party-aligned content (that is, 100% of the content is engaged).

Next, we consider that endorsing a party for 20% in 100% of the circulation is equal to endorsing a party for 100% in 20% of the circulation. We're well aware of the shortcomings of such assumptions but we do not have other options of recalculating the data, as we're not aware of exact method used by Wring and Deacon.

Our second methodological assumption is that, if, say, 40% of the content is endorsing one party that does not mean that the remaining 60% is balanced or neutral. As we're aware of 'structural biases' that naturally emerge from newsgathering and content production, we will consider the 'remaining' circulation to endorse all the parties in our case (three, for the UK: the UK Labour Party (LAB), The British Conservative Party (CON), and the Liberal Democrats / Liberals of the UK (LIBDEM)) with equal probability. This means that, for an individual paper, the calculation of probabilistic endorsement will look the following way: if we know that the paper endorses Labour weakly, it will mean that the probabilistic spread of its daily circulation will be LAB 0,4+0,2=0,6 of the circulation, CON 0,2, LIBDEM 0,2; at the same time, we have no right to suggest that all the content is necessarily biased towards some party; the actual endorsement, at the same time, may be LAB 0,4÷0,6, CON 0÷0,2, LIBDEM 0÷0,2. In the best case, it is, thus, LAB 0,4, CON 0, LIBDEM 0, which suggests that the amount of neutral circulation is 60%. For the papers that claimed to remain neutral, the same principle applies; their endorsement distributes as 0,33 per each of the three parties in the probabilistic spread and counts as 0 for the actual spread. In Appendix 1, Table 4 we've calculated the actual endorsement circulation for LAB, CON and LIBDEM papers and the amount of 'neutral' copies which are constituted by the papers that claimed to stay neutral ('None' in the Table) plus the remaining circulation of those papers which endorse parties to the extent lesser than 1,0. The actual endorsement spread is formed with no reference to the 'neutral' circulation; the probabilistic spread is formed with the respect of the 'neutral' circulation distributed in equal proportion between all the parties endorsed, as our abovementioned assumption implies.

For this part of the case study, we've reconstructed the spreads not only for 2005 but for all five electoral cycles of 1992–2010. This helps prove the long-standing tradition of the 'almost structural' parallelism in the British press and to check which spread (the actual one or the probabilistic one) is closer to the electoral spread of parties.

Empirical base of this part of the British case includes all paid-for generalist newspapers, both dailies and Sundays, of national circulation that are included in the Wring and Deacon's research, which constitutes 19 titles (excluding *The Daily Star Sunday*, as well as *i* paper); free, London-only and 'nations' papers are excluded. The reconstruction for all five electoral cycles may be found in Appendix 2, Figure 1; here, we'll reproduce the 2005 graph only (see Fig. 4).





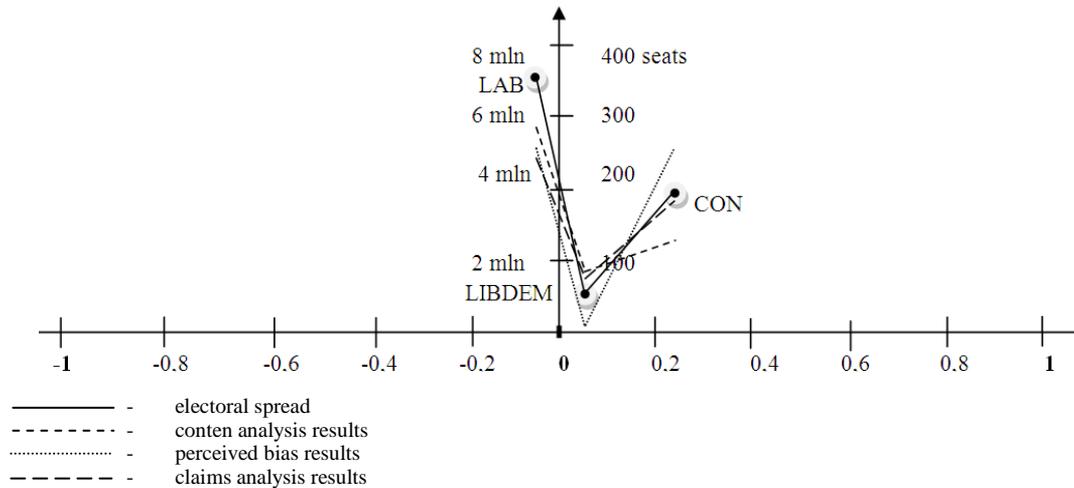


Figure 2. Media-political parallelism in the UK newspapers in of 2005: content-analysis, perceived bias, and claims analysis results superposed

The graphs show that, indeed, claims analysis stays the closest to the electoral spread and thus, arguably, shows higher predictability. This may be explained by the fact that a newspaper is perceived by the reader not as a collection of media texts but as a unified opinion leader.

The third part of the British case is dedicated to comparing data of various nature on media reach, namely data on average daily circulation officially provided by the UK Audit Bureau of Circulation (<http://www.abc.org.uk/Certificates-Reports/Audit-reports/>) and data on estimated average readership (<http://www.mediauk.com>). Empirical base of this part of the British case includes all paid-for generalist newspapers, which constitutes 19 titles excluding *The Daily Star* and *i*, as stated above.

As one case may be too vulnerable to potentially flawed data on estimated readership as well as to inconsistencies of the method, we've conducted research for 2005, 2010, and the whole period of 1992–2010. To define the party stands for these years/periods, we combined all sorts of information sources, such as Political Handbook of the World (Banks et al. 2005–2006: 1240; Banks et al. 2009: 1423), research on comments content (Norris et al. 1999: 27–28; Brandenburg 2006: 172–174; Brandenburg&Van Egmont 2008: 18;), claims analysis (Deacon et al. 2005: 35; Wring&Deacon 2010: 444), quantitative-qualitative reconstruction of newspaper positions by the General Election reader (Scammell&Harrop 2005; Scammell&Beckett 2010; for earlier years, the data from Butler&Kavanagh's readers is summarized in Leach et al. 2011: 35), data from political communications textbooks (McNair 2003: 58–59), a self-published research book on e-democracy in the UK (Segell 2001: 34), opinion of BBC journalists (BBC 2005). For mean positions of the newspapers, see Appendix 1, Table 6.

For calculation of the respective amounts of circulation endorsing this or that party, we've calculated by simple mean the correlation between average daily circulation and estimated readership based on the data on circulation in 2010 by Audit Bureau of Circulation and mean figures of 2009–2011 for the estimated readership. The correlation is roughly 2,75, though with notable difference in circulation/readership ratio between up-market quality papers, mid-market and red-top tabloids (see Appendix 1, Table 7b). This 2,75 step has been taken up to

superpose the ordinate axes of the coordinate space and to calculate the estimated readership in 2005 and 1992–2010.

For 2005 and 2010, party positions were known from TMP data; for 1992–2010, we've taken as mean party positions the 'smoothed' party positions of 2001, as the 'smoothing' procedure provides a chance to integrate all the 1992–2010 positions into the calculation and gives a more precise result than simple mean as it also integrates the respective length of legislatures. As in the previous case, we've calculated probabilistic spreads of circulation basing on the idea of probabilistic equal dispersion of non-biased circulation among the three political parties.

In the Appendix 2, Fig. 2 the resulting graphs are constructed; here, we reproduce just that of 2005 as our major focus (see Fig. 4), in order to calculate on tis basis the MPP index for the UK.

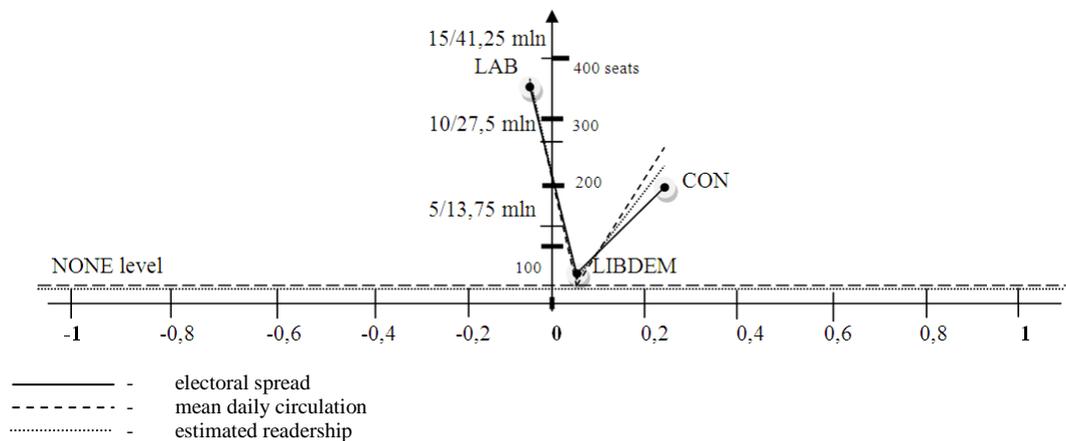


Figure 4. Media-political parallelism in the UK in 2005

The graphs in Appendix 2, Fig. 2 suggest some interesting results. In concordance with our hypothesis (5), the 2005 graph can be interpreted the way that estimated readership, indeed, shows slightly better predictability than average daily circulation, but the two other graphs do not support this statement fully. In some cases, average daily circulation shows better predictability (as measured by visual proximity to the parties' graph). As there was no decisive result, we've looked at the spreads by format segment, as we presupposed in hypothesis (4) that various market segments may produce differing MPP index values; if so, there may be a clearer difference between circulation and readership. The resulting 2005 graphs for traditional British newspaper market segments (quality newspapers, mid-market and red-top tabloids) are shown in Appendix 2, Fig. 3. But the results on circulation vs. readership are, again, dubious; the substantial interpretation for Fig. 2 and 3 in Appendix 2 seems much more interesting than the methodological result.

These graphs may be interpreted in the following way. If graphs for 2005 and 2010 clearly show signs of 'structural parallelism', the spread for 1992–2010 visualizes the 'over-support' of the Conservative party in longitudinal perspective. Thus, the famous 'Tory press' phenomenon (McNair 2009: 98) may still exist and even persist, and equally (in)famous 'weathercock' behavior of the tabloid newspapers bears more of a symbolic meaning of tactical change (Puyu&Bodrunova 2012: Chapter 5) rather than that of a gradual shift towards leftism. In fact, as for the 2005, the pendulum of the popular tabloids was, to an extent, compensated by both

quality papers and (especially) mid-market tabloids, namely *The Daily Mail* and *The Daily Express*. If the red-tops show opportunistic behavior, the long-persistent preferences within the two upper segments of the newspaper market allow the Conservatives to feel safer long-term.

The MPP index for the UK of 2005 appears to be high (see Table 3).

Table 3. MPP index for the UK of 2005

Parameter	Indicator	Value
Parameter 1	Not saturated	1
Parameter 2	Extremums are situated in the same zone of the spectrum	2
Parameter 5	Polarization of the graphs matches	1
Parameter 6a	Left-right variation between 10% and 30% of the readership	1*
<b>MPP index for the UK of 2005</b>		<b>5 of 6</b>

\*- shift to the right from 'theoretical zero' is 16,1% of estimated readership (*calculation ours.* – S. B.).

*Substantive interpretation of the British case:*

1. The data point out to the highest level of political parallelism, similar to the classic Danish example of 'structural parallelism' or 'open' parallelism when newspapers declare political affiliations. Moreover, the UK papers support political parties rather than express views ideologically close to the parties' positioning. This suggests a fundamental inclination of the UK newspaper market to the model of external pluralism (contrary to the tradition of its assessment as a part of the liberal, or North American, model of media systems (Hallin&Mancini 2004: 62)) and to a mixture of arbitrage and advocacy journalism, rather than pure arbitrage (Ibid.).
2. Though we did not take into account small parties of the UK we know of their existence; but their positions have no chance to be expressed by the national papers. This is why we consider the newspaper market not saturated politically; existing practices create high barriers for positions other than Labour, Conservative or LibDem to get any substantial coverage.
3. The configuration of media graphs replicates the political graphs in the period of 20 years, which may be interpreted in two ways: either newspapers seek to follow their traditional 'median reader' (thus paying less attention to professional standards than to economic outcomes of their work), or there is, indeed, a degree of influence upon electoral choice – and this seems more probable. Though there's limited evidence of the 'Sun effect' (Land&Lenz 2008; Puyu&Bodrunova 2012: Chapter 5), overall electoral influence in the UK was detected in several works on 1970s, 1990s, and years 2000.
4. Analysis of mean political preferences suggests that the phenomenon of the 'Tory press' is destroyed to a lesser extent than it may be deduced from the claims analysis, and 'weathercock' behavior of the red-top tabloids has a big chance to be either counterbalanced by more stable Conservative preferences of high-market dailies and Sundays or further enhanced by those.
5. In audience-oriented format segments, MPP configuration is not the same. In 2005, the quality newspapers provided the most balanced results; both blue-top and red-top tabloids showed more than evident political preferences (the former to the Conservatives and the latter to Labour).

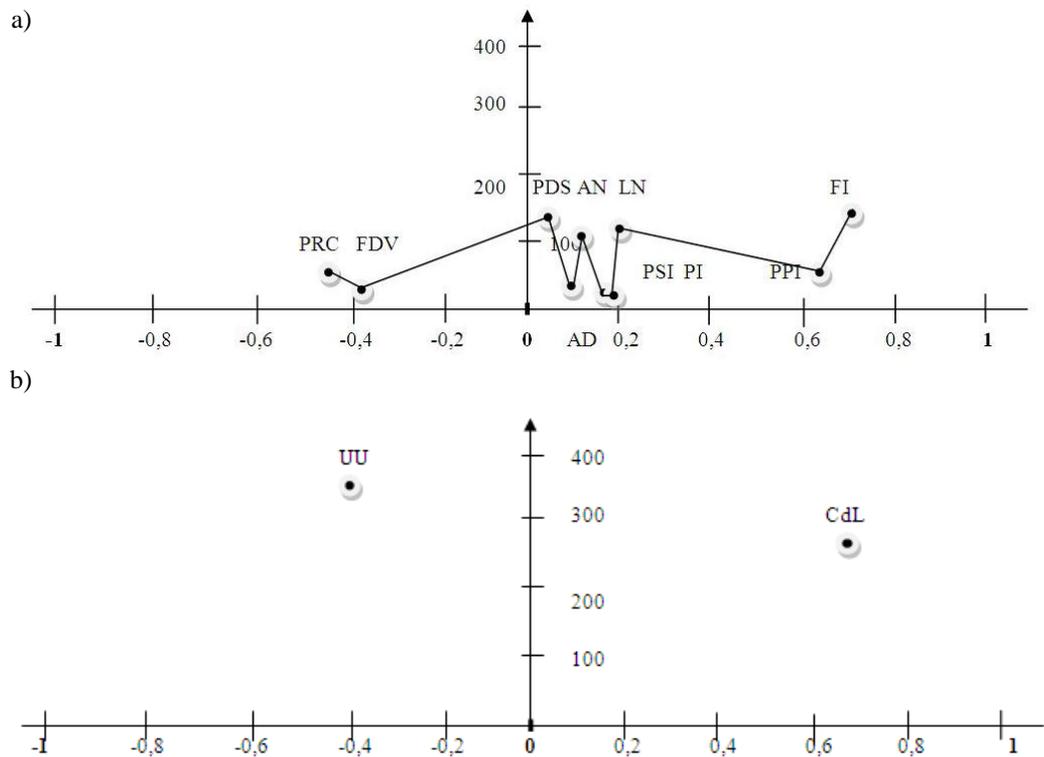
*Methodological interpretation of the British case:*

1. Both average daily circulation and estimated readership figures show acceptable levels of predictability if we just visually assess the proximity of political and media graphs; but we cannot be sure whether the former or the latter show better predictability. Perhaps this needs a more refined methodology, though for our purposes this level of predictability is enough.
2. Though circulation vs. readership ratio varies across audience strata ('high, mid, low markets'), format-specific research did not show any varying predictability levels.
3. High degree of political parallelism is there when extremums of the graphs stay within one segment (e. g. 'center-left') of the media scale.

### 3.2. The case of Italy 2006

In search of a comparable yet differing ‘model’ country, we’ve chosen Italy of 2006, as the UK and Italy have much in common, like very similar mean voter position (Kin&Fording 2003: 99), and some differences, like mean government position which is average European in Italy but the most ‘left’ in the UK (Kim&Fording 2002: 195). 2006 was chosen, as it was the closest to 2005 and both election cycles were analysed after TMP method had changed to machine coding and could be ‘smoothed’ if necessary.

But in case of Italy 2006 we’ve run into an unusual problem. The TMP have coded the manifestos of the two major coalitions (‘Casa delle Libertà’ on the right and ‘Unione d’Ulivo’ on the left) only, and the spread appeared scarce and insignificant. Reconstruction of the party spread of 1994 (just after the establishment of the Second Italian Republic and of the new party system) showed that, in 12 years, under ‘center-left’ and ‘center-right’ notions coalitions were formed that stand close to reformed communism (Partito Rifondazione Comunista) and radical populism (Forza, Italia!); thus, the bipolar communist – conservative system (Bull&Newell 2005) persisted (see Fig. 5). For TMP data on the party positions, see Appendix 1, Table 8.



AD – Alleanza Democratica; AN – Alleanza Nazionale; CdL – Casa delle Libertà; FDV – Federazione dei Verdi; FI – Forza, Italia!; LN – Lega Nord; PDS - Partito Democratico della Sinistra; PI – Patto per l’Italia; PPI – Partito Popolare Italiano; PRC – Partito Rifondazione Comunista; PSI – Partito Socialista Italiano; UU – Unione d’Ulivo.

Figure 5. Party-parliamentary spread in Italy of 1994(a) and 2006(b)

To check if the Italian newspapers follow this bipolarism, we examined 44 papers of various format, field, reach and periodicity oriented more or less to generalist (social&political) agenda; they formed six clusters (national generalist -----; pluriregional generalist ---; regional generalist - - - - -; economic dailies — — —, Catholic dailies .....; political press — — — — —). The structure of the Italian newspaper market is much less centralized than that of the UK, and regional patterns do not follow the patterns of media consumption in Rome and other big cities; in this case, we have a chance to examine whether newspaper clusters varying by reach (national, pluriregional, regional), agenda&topics (generalist/*omnibus*, economic) and ‘value affiliation’ (religious, political/‘of opinion’) show similar patterns of MPP.

We’ve collected information on political bias in Italian newspapers from 11 sources including both those academic (like PHW 2009 or Bodrunova 2010b), political blogs of right and left orientation, and non-verified user-generated sources (like Yahoo.Answers, Nations Encyclopedia, or Wikipedia). In these sources, indicators of political bias were of four types: left/right/none, of a scale segment diapason (e. g. ‘center-right’), of a party family diapason (e. g. ‘liberal’), party affiliation (e. g. ‘official newspaper of Lega Nord’). Due to varying data on content bias, we reduced them to five meanings: left (Sin), center-left (CSin), center (Cen), center-right (CDes), right (Des); we have only five segments mentioned, as there was no press marked ‘radical’, communist and separatist papers being called ‘left’/‘right’. The methodology, thus, allows to estimate the political preferences of the clustered newspapers only approximately; to calculate more precise positions of the clusters in diapasons from Sin to Des, we had to calculate the mean position on (-1; 1) scale within each segment of the scale taking into account the party family / party affiliation of all the papers in the cluster. But this would not be universal for all of the papers, as some of them are marked ‘left’ or ‘right’ only, and would deprive the graphs of clear visibility and comparability. To measure MPP in the clusters defined above, we’ve taken a route different for the UK case and have calculated the percentage of circulation in each cluster that belongs to left, center-left, center, center-right, and right segment, marking the ‘segment’ in its middle. Thus, CSin mark stays in the middle of the ‘center-left’ scale segment.

One more assumption, of a more problematic nature, is made. As we do not have enough data on newspapers’ positions for 2006, we use data ranging from 2004 to 2011, which provides us with only an averaged estimation of political positioning of newspapers. According to several interviews with Italian journalists, politicians and political scientists made by the author in Italy in 2006 just before the elections, including an interview with the notable political editor and columnist of *Il Corriere della Sera* Franco Venturini and chair of the department of political science of University of Bari AntonGiulio de’Robertis, the press in 2006 experienced a voluntary shift towards a more pro-berlusconian position straight before the elections, as everyone felt there was no alternative to him as prime minister; this silent consensus, though, was not supported by the electoral result which gave to Berlusconi and Prodi absolutely equal percentage that differed 0,01% only. Our own research (Prokhorov 2011) shows, as well, that even if in 2006 the press seemed to drift towards the right edge, content analysis proves that all the three major papers – *Il Corriere*, *La Repubblica*, *La Stampa* – were to the left of the ‘theoretical zero’, whereas in 2008 *Il Corriere* and *La Stampa* went even more to the right and were well to the right of the zero point. Thus, for 2006, a mixture of data exists; in this case, it would be reasonable to look at averaged political affiliations in Italian newspapers, to have a starting point for further, more refined research. Exact and estimated data on newspaper circulation and alleged party affiliations, as well as our calculations of mean party affiliations for each newspaper in the sample, may be provided upon request.

Fig. 5a shows our results for all six clusters; Fig. 5b superposes three of them with the positions of the major coalitions.

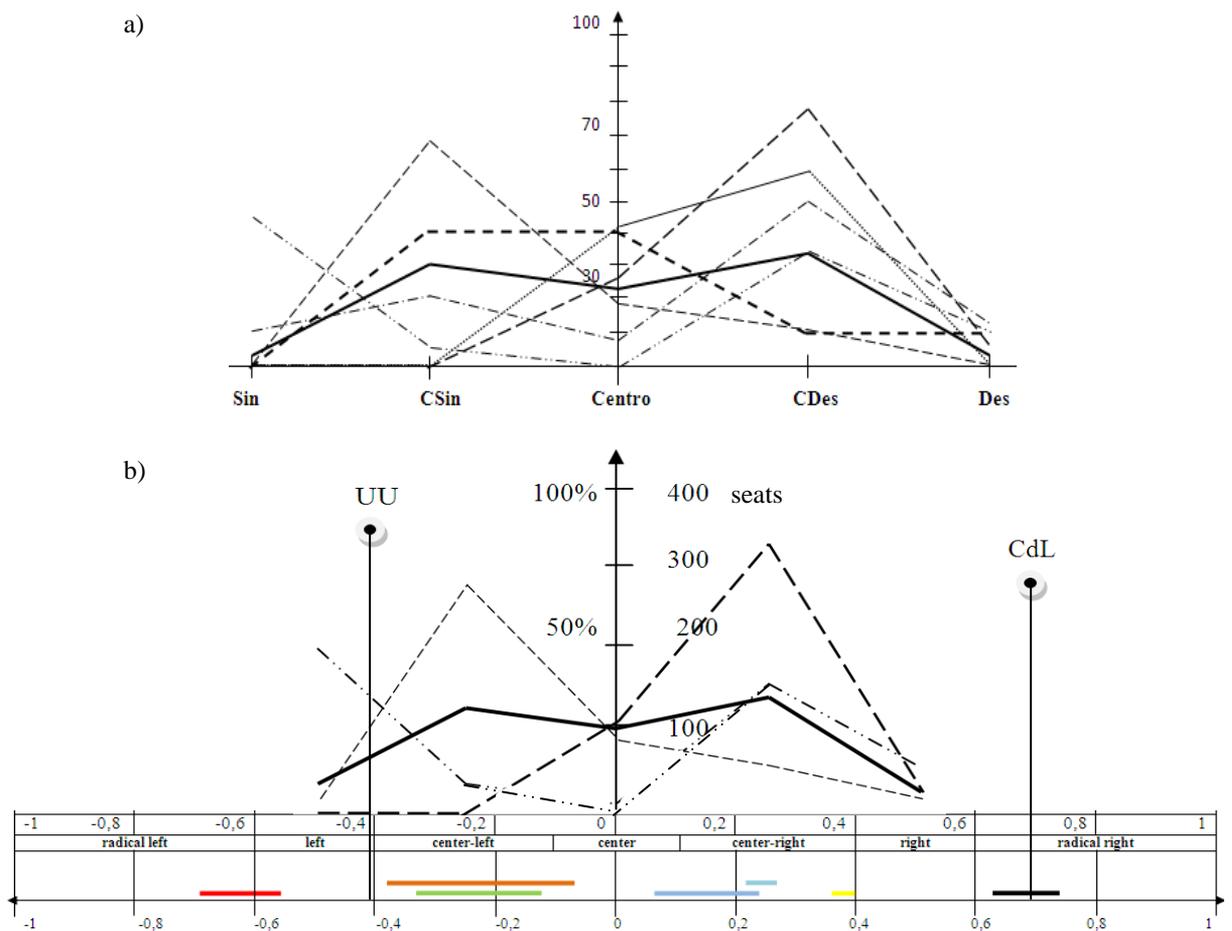


Figure 6. Media-political parallelism in Italy in 2006:  
overall newspaper spread, national, pluriregional dailies and political press

According to the Fig. 6, we can judge the overall spread, as well as any of the chosen clusters. If we are to compare Italy in 2006 with the UK in 2005, then we need to look at the national dailies; but we can also incorporate other papers into our analysis by looking at the overall spread. It is also interesting to look at the political press, as the results in this segment are strikingly different from national and pluriregional papers.

In case of national dailies, the parallelism is rather high, namely 4 of 6, as the segment appears not saturated and strongly shifted to the left. But if the Unione d'Univo coalition is left indeed, the press tends to be rather center-left, and the graph does not follow the bipolarism, being unipolar. A very similar, but mirroring, situation is evident in the pluriregional press, with 0 levels of political support on the left part of the spectrum (see Table 4a). Despite the fact that, in minds of many observers, being right for an Italian newspaper in the recent past meant supporting Berlusconi and his party and coalition, the position of the press seems to be closer to the center. Though we admit that these results may be distorted by vague definition of what is 'right' and 'center-right' in our sources; maybe the right segment of the graph is, in reality,

closer to ‘right’ rather than ‘center-right’ if both mean supporting ‘Forza, Italia!’. But anyway the CdL coalition is so far-right in TMP data that it stands even beyond the right.

A different picture is drawn by the political, or ‘values&opinion’ press (see Table 4b). Despite of a multitude of political movements and organizations close to the political center, for the political press, Italian centrists seem non-existent. In this newspaper cluster, the fundamental cleavage of the First Republic (that of communists vs. Christian democrats) seems to be reproduced, as almost half of the circulation is ‘right’ and close to the Partito Rifondazione Comunista rather than to Partito Democratico as of the heart of the Unione d’Ulivo (with a notable exception of ex-communist *Unità* who has been supportive of PD for years by now). Due to the dip of the graph in the center and coincidence of the peak in ‘right’ segment with the Unione’s position the MPP index is medium (3 of 6). We consider the polarization of the political press graph to be lower than that of parties, as CdL demonstrates a radical position hardly supported even by the closest allies (except, of course, *Il Giornale* directed by Paolo Berlusconi) – again, if for our sources being ‘center-right’ does not mean supporting Berlusconi.

Perhaps thanks to such a diversified pattern of party-political support by newspaper cluster, the overall MPP index is unexpectedly low (1 of 6). The overall spread is smoother than one could expect, and appears well balanced, with no outstanding peaks or gaps, with center almost as well embraced as the leftist and rightist positions (see Table 4c). We consider the newspaper market saturated even if CdL is not directly supported: almost every party and movement has a chance to be heard or has its own paper, CdL and ‘Forza, Italia!’ definitely more than others.

Table 4a. MPP index for Italy of 2006: national/pluri-regional dailies

Parameter	Indicator	Value
Parameter 1	Not saturated	1
Parameter 2	Extremums are situated at the same side of the spectrum	1
Parameter 5	Polarization of the graphs does not match	0
Parameter 6a	Left-right variation over 30% of the circulation	2*
<b>MPP index of 2006</b>		<b>4 of 6</b>

\*- for national dailies, the shift to the left from ‘theoretical zero’ is 71,5% of weighted-mean daily circulation; for pluri-regional dailies, the shift to the right is 100% (*calculation ours.* – S. B.).

Table 4b. MPP index for Italy of 2006: political press

Parameter	Indicator	Value
Parameter 1	Not saturated	1
Parameter 2	Extremums are situated at the same zone of the spectrum	2
Parameter 5	Polarization of the graphs does not match	0
Parameter 6a	Left-right variation under 10% of the circulation	0*
<b>MPP index of 2006</b>		<b>3 of 6</b>

\*- the shift to the left from ‘theoretical zero’ is 3,86% of weighted-mean daily circulation (*calculation ours.* – S. B.).

Table 4c. MPP index for Italy of 2006: overall spread

Parameter	Indicator	Value
Parameter 1	Saturated	0
Parameter 2	Extremums are situated at the same side of the spectrum	1
Parameter 5	Polarization of the graphs does not match	0
Parameter 6a	Left-right variation under 10% of the circulation	0*
<b>MPP index for Italy of 2006</b>		<b>1 of 6</b>

\*- shift to the left from ‘theoretical zero’ is 4,71% of weighted-mean daily circulation (*calculation ours.* – S. B.).

*Substantial interpretation of the Italian case:*

1. The MPP index of Italy is unexpectedly low, which is due to the tradition of open claims of political support close to the advocacy paradigm with simultaneous variety of political press, the pro-right (conservative- and Catholic-oriented) regional press counterbalancing the left (liberal-democratic) national press, and the overall amount of circulation spread in equal proportions between right and left. If we look at national dailies or at the biggest-circulation press, the misbalances in political endorsement become clear; but the overall picture, contrary to the big-circulations only, is much more balanced than this country of polarized pluralism always provoked us to think. In the second half of the 2010s, the Italian press, contrary to 1990 and 1970 (Votmer 2000: 23–24), appears balanced in its passionate allegiances.
2. Extremums of the overall graph are low but still visible on both sides of the spectrum; this means that the ‘Italian split’ is reflected in the MPP structure.
3. National press (clearly leftist) opposes and compensates regional press (clearly rightist) but they both tend to be much less radical than the coalitions themselves. Though this might be due to the lack of clarity of terms of ‘right’/‘center-right’ and ‘left’/‘center-left’, this fact may anyway be interpreted as a sign of health when we consider generalist press.
4. Results on national dailies correspond with earlier research (Patterson&Donsbach 1993) which showed Italy as the only country of five where journalists of the national press were basically left-wing. This may be considered as a proof of the claim that personal political positions of journalists have correlation with the content and claims of the newspapers; this, in its turn, may be a supporting argument in the question whether journalists’ political views are a factor limiting their choice of a job place.
5. Even today, the political press still fully supports the communist – conservative split. This poses a question of real change in public discourse in the Second Italian Republic, as the polarization of political press is rather high, and more radical positions tend to have bigger circulation. In cases of political polarization, as Sartori (1976: 135) noted, ‘cleavages are likely to be very deep... <and> consensus is surely low’, whereas in moderately polarized party systems ‘there is greater acceptance of the fundamental shape of political order’ (Hallin&Mancini 2004: 60); polarized pluralism ‘tends to undermine a conception of the “common good” transcending particular ideological commitments’ (Ibid.: 61). In such cases, the role of radical political press may be negative rather than positive: the revolutionary idea of necessity of the ‘brave new world’ is constantly perpetuating in such media and is thrown into the public sphere and public discussion undermining constructive efforts directed to perfection of existing order. In Italy of the recent years, as it appears from the analysis, this radical split of political papers is compensated by both national (center-left) and regional (center-right) press, but if one of these two major poles shifts to the opposite (e. g. national press becomes more of center-right, which is possible due to the ownership affiliations) this counterbalance would stop working and the public sphere may become more polarized.

*Methodological interpretation of the Italian case:*

1. Territorial and thematic clusters do show varying patterns of MPP, so our hypothesis (4) is supported.
2. Political press shows clearer picture of current political cleavages and may provide hints to current public discourse, even if its circulation is much lower than that of nation-wide papers; it has to be analysed separately.
3. Combination of national, regional and ‘value&opinion’ press may be analysed as well, but there needs to be a methodology of weighting the respective circulation, as political press may have influence per copy stronger than that of generalist press.

### 3.2. The case of Germany 1998

Germany of 1998 is the only case for which scaled content analysis data are available (Eilders 2002), though they include five pluriregional newspapers only (*FAZ*, *taz*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Die Welt*, and *Frankfurter Rundschau*). Here, we also used ‘smoothed’ positions calculated by Franzmann and Kaiser (2006: 175–177) – see Fig. 7 and Table 5. So, the graphs for Germany are, arguably, the most precise of all the three cases studied. Though we consider pluriregional papers only, in the case of Germany this is a legitimate comparison, as there are no big generalist newspapers of the all-German scale. We use the data on circulation that are provided in (Litvinenko 2011: 14–16) based on the German Audit Bureau of Circulation for 2000. The ‘black year’ of the German newspapers was 2001; before that, decline in number of copies was almost insufficient, so it is quite legitimate to use the data of 2000 for 1998.

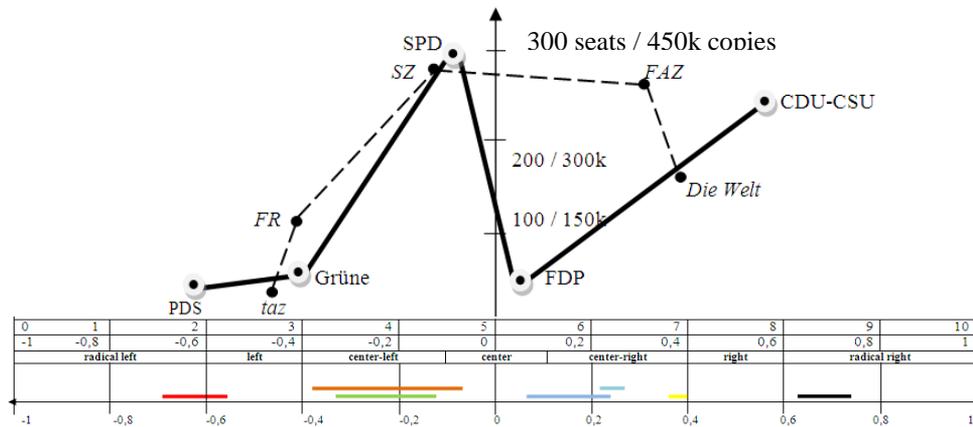


Figure 7. Media-political parallelism in Germany in 1998

Table 5. MPP index for Germany of 1998

Parameter	Indicator	Value
Parameter 1	Not saturated	1
Parameter 2	Extremums are situated in the same zone of the spectrum	2
Parameter 5	Polarization of the graphs does not match	0
Parameter 6a	Left-right variation under 10% of the circulation	0*
<b>MPP index for Germany of 1998</b>		<b>3 of 6</b>

\*- shift to the left from ‘theoretical zero’ is 2.3% of weighted-mean daily circulation (*calculation ours.* – S. B.).

*Substantial interpretation of the German case:*

1. The MPP index for Germany appears average but not low, perhaps due to the lacunas on both edges of the media spectrum, on one hand, and traditional face-off of *FAZ* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, on the other.
2. The lacunas on left and right edges may be explained by Eilders’s idea of ‘obliteration of differences’ under pressure of shared agenda.
3. The party most closely followed by a newspaper won the elections. There’s an evident difference between very closely positioned SPD and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, on one hand, and CDU-CSU staying far more to the right than the traditionally conservative *FAZ*, on the other. Perhaps it could be recommended to parties to look at the positions and agendas of their supporting newspapers to better orient themselves to their voters’ positions.

## Discussion

Thus, our hypotheses were mostly proved:

(1) The majoritarian UK showed higher MPP rate than ‘semi-majoritarian’ polarized Italy and corporatist Germany. When national/sovraregional (as for Germany) newspapers are compared, Germany performed better than Italy showing lower MPP; but Italy showed unexpectedly good result in mediocratic MPP when we considered clusters beyond just national dailies. Perhaps such an approach inevitably leads to detecting more balanced results, as political press tends to cover the whole spectrum. As we already said it is also unclear how to judge the importance of various clusters within the general circulation figures. For Italy, we did not weight the shares of generalist and political press while calculating the overall spread; a methodology for doing this should be proposed in future. Contrary to expectations, Germany showed substantial level of mediocratic MPP. It cannot be explained by existence of politically biased tabloid press as it was not involved in the research; but it can be explained if we consider the evident face-off of *FAZ* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and closeness of the latter’s position to electoral results.

(2) Secondary data on perceived media bias (though, for the purposes of this research, they were simplified substantially in case of Italy) may be used for MPP analysis.

(3) With our three-level (-1; 1) scale (exact positioning, ‘left-to-right’ diapasons, party family diapasons), rough data can be used to estimate the positions of newspapers. A much more important factor is that of time, as the UK case shows, as ‘weathercock’ (in the UK) and conformist (in Italy) behavior of newspapers as aggregated opinion leaders may lead to substantial changes in configuration of MPP. Also, as there are several works that insist on cyclical nature of polarization of national political spectra in Europe (Volkens&Klingemann 2002; Volkens 2006: 58; Litvinenko 2008; Bodrunova 2010c) we recommend to compare MPP cross-nationally within time diapasons of maximum five years, as beyond this time slot the meaning of the (-1; 1) scale may be different. It is also true that within a definite time slot similar factors of a global scale (like the global economic recession or natural disasters) may influence agendas of national elections in a similar way.

(4) There is clear difference in MPP by segments of newspaper market: results vary by geographical spread, format, and subject area.

(5) Across audience segments, estimated readership figures showed predictability similar to exact circulation figures. What of the two should be the source of primary reference remains subject to further research.

We can’t help noting that many of our calculations (some of which were left out of the text) are at least disputable. Thus, our calculation of diapasons for the media scale probably needs a better method than simple mean and superimpositions. Then, we twice used TMP data in the calculation (separately and in combination with expert surveys’ results). But expert surveys always create wider party spectra than TMP data (Gabel&Huber 2000: 102); we thus tried to ‘smooth’ the survey data by combining them with TMP. Our use of the media scale is too simple as well: for newspapers with open party affiliation, we never calculated a position within a party family diapason but placed them more roughly within, say, ‘center-left’ or ‘right’ segments. We also did not weight properly the academic sources vs. non-verified sources, all of them (in case of Italy) having the same say (which should not be true). More defects may be found; the work has just started and needs to be continued. Our results, though, provide a possibility of quantitative comparative MPP research both within and beyond mediocracy studies.

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