

decision-making procedures are presented differently in consensus-democracies compared with more competitive systems like Germany.

4.2. Method

Section 4.2.1 describes the sample that was used to investigate the media coverage of political decision-making processes in Switzerland and Germany. The operationalization of variables is presented in Section 4.2.2. Section 4.2.3 contains information on how the content analysis was conducted.

4.2.1. Content Analysis Sample

In order to include media with different qualities, a broadsheet, a regional paper, and a tabloid from each nation were included in the sample. The selection criterion was circulation, so the sampling unit consists of papers with the highest circulation. For Switzerland, these are “Neue Zürcher Zeitung” (“NZZ”, WEMF³⁸ 2005: 150.945), “Tages-Anzeiger” (236.569), and “Blick” (262.262). For Germany, “Süddeutsche Zeitung” (“SZ”, IVW Q1/2008³⁹: 450.201), “Freie Presse” (IVW Q3/2006: 336.968) and “Bild” (paid circulation IVW Q2/2006: 3.599.652) were chosen. Television newscasts were also investigated. The main evening news on German public television, “Tagesschau” (average of 9.73 million viewers per day), and the main evening news on Swiss public television, “Tagesschau” (average of 1 million viewers per day), were selected for the analysis. Since this study focuses on the media presentation of political decision-making processes, the analysis of media content is based on the newspapers’ front pages and the pages on national politics. Letters to the editor were not analyzed in the study.

The newspapers were investigated in a longitudinal perspective, because this study is interested in possible differences in media coverage patterns at different points in time. In order to exclude “special times” in the context of elections, articles from the second years of the legislative term were chosen as a time of regular political decision-making. Newspaper editions from 1964/65, 1984/85 and 2003/2004, 2004/2005 were examined.⁴⁰ The time comparison allows us to observe any potential specific patterns in contemporary news coverage. The patterns observed in contemporary media presentations will serve as a guideline for the development of the

38 WEMF (“AG für Werbemedienforschung”) is an advertising media research institute in Switzerland.

39 IVW (“Informationsgemeinschaft zur Feststellung der Verbreitung von Werbeträgern e.V.”) is advertising media research institute in Germany.

40 As a time of regular political decision-making, a one-year period beginning with the second year after the election of the German Chancellor and the election of the Swiss Federal Council (after the elections for the National Council), was chosen.

experimental stimuli in Section 6.2.2. By random selection, ten percent of all newspaper editions in the selected coding periods were chosen. After excluding all Sundays and national holidays, a sample of 10 percent of all editions makes 30 or 31 editions per coding period and newspaper, so in total 428 issues were examined. Table 4.1 gives an overview of the content analysis sample.

Based on the selected newspaper editions, all articles that were considered relevant for the purpose of this content analysis were coded. More precisely, all articles that address political decision-making processes and problem-solving procedures on the national level within the legislative (parliament, commissions etc.), the executive branch (cabinet, minister etc.), or the administration were coded.⁴¹ In total, then, 633 articles from newspapers (366 articles from German papers, and 267 articles from Swiss papers) from the basis of the analysis, as Table 4.1 shows.

In order to probe whether the newspapers have a unique perspective on political decision-making in the government and parliament (cf. Mutz & Reeves, 2005, p. 2), the results are compared with findings from an analysis of political television news. For financial reasons, the analysis of television newscasts was restricted to the current time period. More precisely, newscasts within the period from 12/10/2004 to 12/09/2005 for Switzerland and within the period from 11/22/2006 to 11/21/2007 for Germany were investigated. In total, 175 newscasts from German television's evening news and 90 newscasts from Swiss television's evening news were coded.

41 An article was coded if the headline or the lead of the article contains a reference to a political institution or political actor and the article refers to political decision-making and problem-solving procedures. Thus the article might not only refer to decision-taking, but also the preparation of decisions and their implementation. If the article mentions more than one institution or actor, those article contents that refer to the institution or actor receiving the most attention were coded.

Switzerland			Germany		
Election of government			Election of chancellor		
Election Day: Election Day: Election Day:			Election Day: Election Day: Election Day:		
12/12/1963	12/7/1983	12/10/2003	10/17/1963	3/30/1983	10/22/2002
Coding period			Coding period		
12/12/1964 -	12/7/1984 -	12/10/2004 -	10/17/1964 -	3/30/1984 -	10/22/2003 -
12/11/1965	12/6/1985	12/9/2005	10/16/1965	3/29/1985	10/21/2004
NZZ	NZZ	NZZ	SZ	SZ	SZ
28	45	60	54	62	100
Blick	Blick	Blick	Bild	Bild	Bild
15	8	31	27	16	31
		Tages- Anzeiger			Freie Presse
		80			66
Total articles	Total articles	Total articles	Total articles	Total articles	Total articles
43	53	171	81	78	207

Note. Entries are number of coded news articles

Legend. For the coding period between 12/12/1964 and 12/11/1965, 28 articles from the "NZZ" and 15 articles from "Blick" were coded, resulting in an amount of 43 articles in total for the period of 1964/1965.

Table 4.1. Content Analysis Sample

4.2.2. Codebook and Reliability

The codebook was used for the analysis of print and television news and encompassed four variable blocks. First, formal aspects were considered (name of publication or broadcasting channel, length, placing, journalistic genre, and use of quotations). Second, thematic aspects were coded (political institution, type of decision-making processes, policy cycle, and policy field). Third, references in media coverage to various aspects of political decision-making processes were coded. And fourth, the media's attention to aspects of political legitimacy was coded. The codebook for the analysis of television newscasts⁴² was largely the same as the press codebook but includes some additional variables on images and pictures and vari-

42 The introductory or concluding moderation and the actual news report were coded as two separate articles.