

BARRIERS TO RECOVERY: CONTINENTAL CRISIS AND MEDIA THREAT INFLATION

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ABSTRACT: From the wars in Vietnam and Iraq to the Arab Spring, recent history is full of examples of how media outlets interact with government processes to shape public opinion and constrain the practical avenues policymakers may take in domestic and international affairs. The recent European financial crisis cedes a unique opportunity to study both how media commentary is formulated and the effects it has on the policy choices of governments in international economic affairs. This work, through analysis of original data drawn from case studies of six media outlets in two countries over the course of the recent sovereign debt crisis, seeks to contribute to the field an understanding of the role that such outlets play in influencing popular perception of international issues during times of crisis. With reference to the literature on the press in political and foreign policy affairs, it is found that outlets are incentivised to inflate particular national or international components of reported affairs based on different economic states of affair. These findings have significant implications for the formulation of policy in the future, particularly in the European Union, where continuing integration of political and economic processes requires a delicate balance of emphasis on international prosperity and sovereign interests.

KEYWORDS: Media, Public Opinion, European Union, Sovereign Debt Crisis, Economic Stability

INTRODUCTION

The global financial crisis, starting with stock market crashes in 2008 and continuing to this day, has strained the budgetary processes of numerous countries around the world. In Europe, rising government debt and the difficult task of coordinating fiscal countermeasures in the eurozone have, since late 2009, led to the gradual intensification of social and political unrest aimed at finding a fix to several overarching issues. Despite the barriers-free

nature of trade, demographics and financial institutions in the European Union (EU), the ongoing crisis over the state of sovereign debt has brought both the political and monetary union on the continent closer to fragmentation than ever before.

At the most basic level, while countries across Europe suffer from a commonality of responsibility to address the economic problems of the Union, not all member states have experienced a commonality of the situation. In contrast to the gradual recovery of many, some economies have suffered through drastic austerity measures, requiring bailout financing and continued stimulus attempts. In Greece, continued economic shocks and failures of fiscal governance have led to social uprisings and a change of power. Similar circumstances in Portugal, Spain and other countries across Europe contrast with France, the UK and Germany (to name a few), where more disciplined implementations of austerity measures, while painful, have largely led to steady market recoveries.

The contrasting circumstances raise a significant question: has Europe's near-fragmentation only been economic in nature? The clear reality of such situational differences across Europe, existing as a function of common economic and institution imperatives, indicates that the social effects of the crisis in countries across the eurozone has been different, not only in terms of responses to the crisis, but also in terms of perspectives on the future role of the EU and the single currency. After all, populations have, to greater or lesser degrees, been coping with common problems and burdens that should, in theory, be shared equally by all.

Economic crises affect countries differently; they are exposed to varying domestic and international economic conditions. However, as the case of the EU's sovereign debt crisis highlights, there can be considerable difficulties when it comes to the measurement of social discrepancies surrounding the treatment of similar issues across countries. As a result, this essay seeks to construct and analyse a particular relationship between the role of print media in reporting socio-political issues and changing economic conditions at the national level.

The constraints of print media outlets, necessarily distributively tied to the geographic area in which they operate, allow us to examine the relationship between national economic issues and the transformation of the frames through which the public views them.

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This work asks if print media frames questions and issues of Europe's economic health differently depending on the national origin of the publication. If so, do such media outlets suggest a nationally-based discrepancy in the way in which different populations yet view the role of the EU and the eurozone?

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A broad look at the comparative health of national economies in Europe over the past three years of the crisis may indicate some likely trends in the representative nature of print media framing across national borders. After all, the framing of issues in those countries that have fared relatively better in the crisis, still affected as they are by ties through the common currency to poorer-performing countries, would logically focus increasingly on the actions and problems of other states. In contrast, media framing of similar issues in poorer-performing countries may be more likely to focus on the role of systemic institutions as the country becomes more dependent on coordinated international action to stave off disaster. These hypotheses will be tested below.

The research undertaken in this essay could help policymakers, both within and beyond the eurozone, understand the social ramifications of economic policies enacted in culturally-diverse regions that are economically interdependent. Through understanding of the results of the cross-country content analysis in this study, European policymakers may, as they move forward towards closer fiscal union in the future, be able to more accurately understand how social perspective, as represented by framing from mass-distribution media outlets, manifests itself in the political and economic machinations of different members of the eurozone. Perhaps most importantly, this research could help policymakers understand the role of media outlets as a mechanism through which popular opinion is transmitted to the higher levels of political governing. Ultimately, this could aid in the formulation of socio-economic policies that are better designed to efficiently and fairly aggregate interests and integrate economic processes across borders.

This work proceeds in four stages: First, I begin with a discussion of the existing literature on issue framing and the role of the media in influencing the direction of social and political actions on economic and international issues. Next, I present data coded from six major circulatory print media outlets in two European countries with very different experiences over the course of the crisis – Ire-

land and Germany. Here, I test the above hypotheses by highlighting trends in the media framing of economic issues across time, paying particular attention to differences in the portrayal of the EU's structures and institutions versus the actions of fellow member states and nationally-based organizations. In the third section of this essay, I ask whether or not crisis conditions can be said, in line with supporting literary theory on competing frames of the media, to alter the delivery of perceptions in reporting. Moreover, I propose an alteration of existing theory for explaining the media framing during economic crises. In particular, I discuss the implications of trends in both the Irish and German media case studies. Finally, I conclude by scrutinising the outcomes of this case study analysis, identifying ways in which the theoretical trends discussed can affect future policy formulations and suggesting methods for conducting further research in the future.

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FRAMING AND THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN AGGREGATING SOCIAL INTERESTS

In the field of political communication, the role of the media in establishing the “frames,” meaning the contextual lens through which the public views a myriad of issues, is well studied. Numerous authors have contributed to the understanding of the complex relationship between the various factions of the press, the public and the government. In this section, I establish a basic position of understanding the ways in which media organisations choose to engage in the framing of different issues and the role they play in shaping, aiding and constraining the policy decisions and paths of governments. This basic position will take some reference from recent changes to socio-political circumstances in the EU. Ultimately, an understanding of the motives and capacities of media organisations is necessary to fully complement a test of changing reporting behaviours over time and build a theory of media-crisis reaction with appropriate literary context.

In the above introductory section, it was proposed that countries faring better over the course of international crises, in this case the economic crisis over sovereign debt in the EU, over time would see the focusing of popular attention on those aspects of the international system that are most relevant to national interests

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(and vice versa, with focus instead going to relevant domestic concerns). While it is logical that the public may generally refocus on those aspects of political-economic policy, insofar as it affects the interests of individuals that are most in need of repair or revision, does the frame constructed by media organisations as they report news reflect this?

First, it is necessary to frame the role of the media in modern, globalised societies appropriately. In political economic terms, the modern media could be said to act as one of several societal “gateways” through which the public is affected by national and international happenings.¹ Furthermore, the media acts as an outlet for popular sentiment that could potentially influence national policy.

The basis for these assertions lies in the fact that the path that today’s states have taken to reach the current level of globalised interconnectedness has greatly altered traditional barriers through which domestic populations interacted with the world. In the immediate post-Second World War period, the US led in the construction of a multilateral trade regime that focused on government responsibility for correcting inefficiencies in free markets and guaranteeing full employment. Though this led to high economic growth in the non-communist world, the currency crises and stagflation in the 1970s and 1980s led to a reversal of focus on such matters. As a result, the international system slowly began to refocus on the spread of neoliberal reforms, including the privatisation of state-owner enterprises, tax reforms and other measures that increased the autonomy and effective influence of private sector forces.²

Embedded liberalism, as Ruggie called the first post-war system, emphasised shared norms connected to certain public sector-driven practices.³ The effective result of such policies on a global scale was the spread of high growth economic practices that ceded control of domestic processes to governments; governments could, in effect, buffer at the border to shelter domestic society from the turbulence of international markets. However, neoliberal reforms around the world, most especially in Europe with the formation of the monetary union, essentially served to decouple economic processes from domestic control, causing the clash of social conventions and mechanisms for broadcasting desires at national levels. Though floating exchange rate regimes allow many countries to affect some measure

of control during bust periods, the EU's monetary union in particular showcases the new multi-level approach that some countries must cope with when dealing with economic matters⁴⁵

This work argues that, with diminished government capacity to shelter society and represent the abilities of the country to influence economic circumstances, the media in Europe has taken on a strong and popularly representative position in society that aggregates interests and accurately presents popular sentiment.

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Elsewhere in the field, significant literary evidence reveals that media focus is largely defined by its relationship to government. Early work on "indexing" – meaning the reporting of news based on a broad survey of information coming from various source types – indicates that because of the common appearance of government commentary as experts on most subjects, all news sources are likely to report a government-centric viewpoint.⁶ Authors like Bennett have expounded this relationship by arguing that media outlets are simply optimising the reach of their limited resources, as well as responsibly delivering the most appropriate and important information from representatives to their democratic readership.⁷

In 'Competing Images of the Press,' Thrall lays out three particular camps of belief about the actions and role of the media when it comes to government relations – the lapdog, the watchdog and the attack dog.⁸ Proponents of the first school tend to see the media as a mouth of the government and an institution that exists to follow the line of the party.⁹ Others believe that the press acts more like a watchdog, wisely drawing scrutiny and attention to those areas of government responsibility that require popular oversight. Both of these camps contrast sharply with believers in the attack dog media, in which news organisations see it as their task to relentlessly ridicule and critique the actions of politicians so that leadership of the country is constantly in question.¹⁰

Each of these "images" of the press represents a view on how media organisations frame a variety of issues that are related to the government. These camps are particularly pertinent in the context of this essay's research, as any perceptible alteration of the frame in which news and coverage of particular issues is presented is likely to correspond with one or more of the above camps. However, with these images in mind, it is necessary to consider the circumstances of European integration and the diminished role government play,

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to some greater or lesser degree, in buffering society and acting as a gateway to international and economic affairs. The data used below to measure framing as it has occurred over the course of the sovereign debt and wider financial troubles will be analysed from each of the three “image” perspectives in order to gauge the applicability of each to media-government relations during periods of crisis.

EUROPE IN CRISIS: THE CASE STUDIES

As a precursor to the analysis of more inclusive samples of media from across the eurozone in the future, this work’s examination of framing and perception in the media focused on sources from two countries that represent opposite ends of the range in terms of success in weathering and recovering from the global financial and European sovereign debt crises—Ireland and Germany. In doing so, this work establishes a lens and framework through which other studies review the relationship between media reporting and government policy in political economic matters.

These countries were selected for several reasons:

Firstly, both are members of the eurozone. Because the pressures of reform are likely to be less present in countries outside of the monetary union, even within the EU, research performed using data from other countries in such a small-n test may have ended in skewed results.

Secondly, both occupy opposite ends of the economic spectrum within the eurozone. By calculating a debt-to-Gross Domestic Product ratio, it is clear that Ireland and Germany are representative of those countries in the EU able or unable to reign in spending and implement appropriate austerity measures. Over the course of Europe’s sovereign debt crisis, from late 2009 until October 2011 when this study was performed, Ireland’s debt oscillated between 85% and 95% of GDP, while Germany’s hovered between 55 and 60%.¹¹

This study looked at the three largest newspapers in both Ireland and Germany by circulation. As a result, a final factor influencing the choice of these countries and their newspapers was that:

Thirdly, Irish and German sources, while clearly representative of countries with vastly different economic experiences, are either primarily published in English or are popular enough that print editions are multi-lingual. This helped control for human errors from

translation.

The newspapers involved were: the *Irish Independent*, *Irish Examiner* and *Irish Times* in Ireland and *Bild*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in Germany.¹² Together, these newspapers reach between 10-24% of the adult populations of each country on a daily basis. It is worthwhile noting that *Bild*, in particular, reaches almost 5 million people daily and dwarfs the circulatory power of any of its peer outlets. Nevertheless, *Bild* is still limited by the geographical confines of its physical circulation reach in Germany.

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Focus in this survey was placed on headline stories from the one month period that included the onset of the sovereign debt crisis and the first major bailout initiatives from 23 May 2011. For the purposes of comparing results, further data was coded from the same sources for the one month period starting on 01 September 2011. This second period included the resurgence of major financial difficulties in various eurozone states, including Greece, Ireland and Spain. The applicability of articles in each newspaper over those periods was based on a clear discussion of international and national economic health as the main topic(s) involved, with each being coded to gather data on the perspectives expressed and information presented therein.

Specifically, each article was placed into categories by area issues (domestic politics, global financial crisis, EU politics, etc.). Data was drawn through a simple count of mentions of international institutional names and organizations versus their corresponding national counterparts (e.g. The European Commission vs. The Italian Prime Minister or the Portuguese Central Bank). Furthermore, each article was coded so as to gauge the tone in which it was delivered, with positive and negative adjective usage noted alongside the use of statistical citations that trended positively or negatively.

The point of coding each article in this manner and drawing these particular types of data lay in the applicability of the perception of the international processes at work in Europe held by the average citizen. In terms of answering the question of whether or not media-reported viewpoints and biases changed over time during crisis periods relative to observable economic circumstances, it was logical to focus on a very basic dichotomous methodological data collection regime and rely on straightforward cross tabulations and

graphical models that provided simple means for view contrasting trends.

CASE STUDY FINDINGS

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In this section I discuss the results of the six sets of coding regimes. Coding of articles from across the two single month periods proceeded without hitch and focused, as discussed above, on the relevant media portrayal of the perception of international versus national institutions and associated individuals. Using a basic set of coding rules for judging sentiment that directly referenced each of these mentions and any use of statistical models, data was also drawn that indicated positive or negative positional representation of the issues being discussed. Neutral or descriptive phrases were discounted and statistical models were deemed to be positive or negative only if the data being presented described a > 66% discrepancy for poll data and above or below a 30% discrepancy in the trends detailed for economic statistics (e.g. Survey responses show that 75% disapprove of government spending cuts or unemployment went down from 10 to 7 %). It is also noteworthy that circulation numbers across all publications declined over the course of the period by at least 10%, something that was most notable in Ireland where the Irish Times and Irish Examiner lost almost a third of their readership. All results were coded and all models estimated using Stata 12.0.

RESULTS

The range of articles surveyed in this test was broad. In both countries and across all six newspapers were a variety of different article types. In general, it was found that each newspaper reported on at least one issue or presented at least one headline news story every day that was related in some way to the global or European economic crisis or its domestic manifestations. For the bigger newspapers, particularly *Bild*, the *Irish Independent* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the number of articles that addressed such issues was higher.

Using Stata, the results for each newspaper were correlated with each other and then coded into indices. This was done for all data coded out of each article and allows us get the bigger picture drawn by the data from each country during both of the two one-month periods.

The first indices portray the total number of articles in each

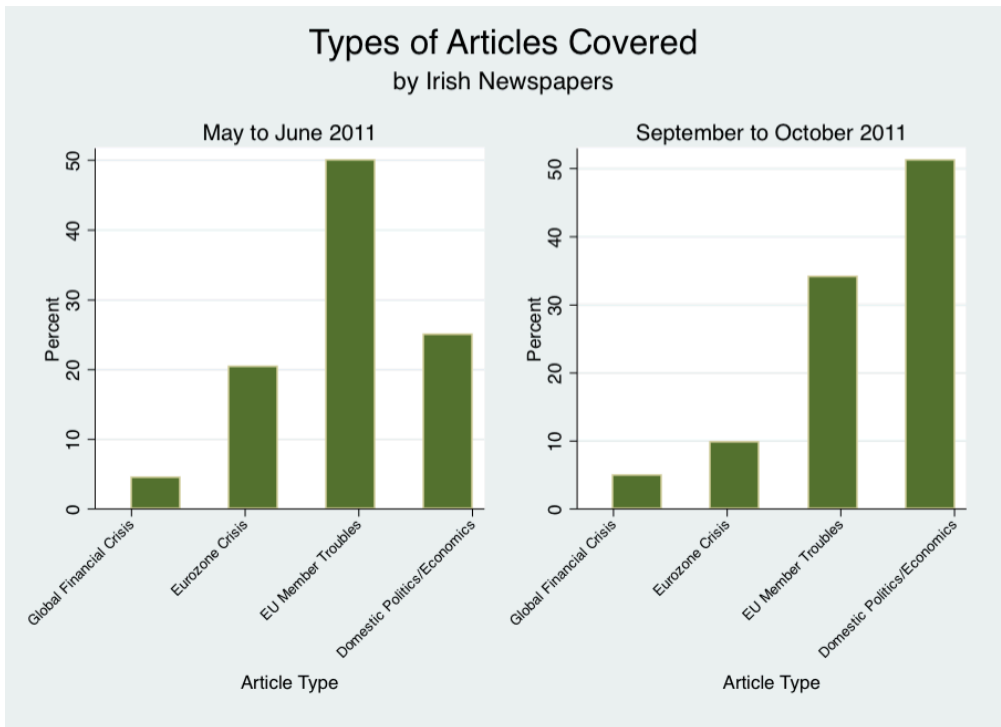
country by type. For the purposes of discriminating between the contextual circumstances in which each mention of international or national institutions was made, each piece was coded into one of the four following categories:

1. Global Financial Crisis,
2. Sovereign Debt/Eurozone Crisis,
3. Political/Economic Troubles of ther EU Member States
4. Domestic Political/Economic Troubles.

Graphic 1

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In Ireland, there was a fairly clear trend in the types of articles

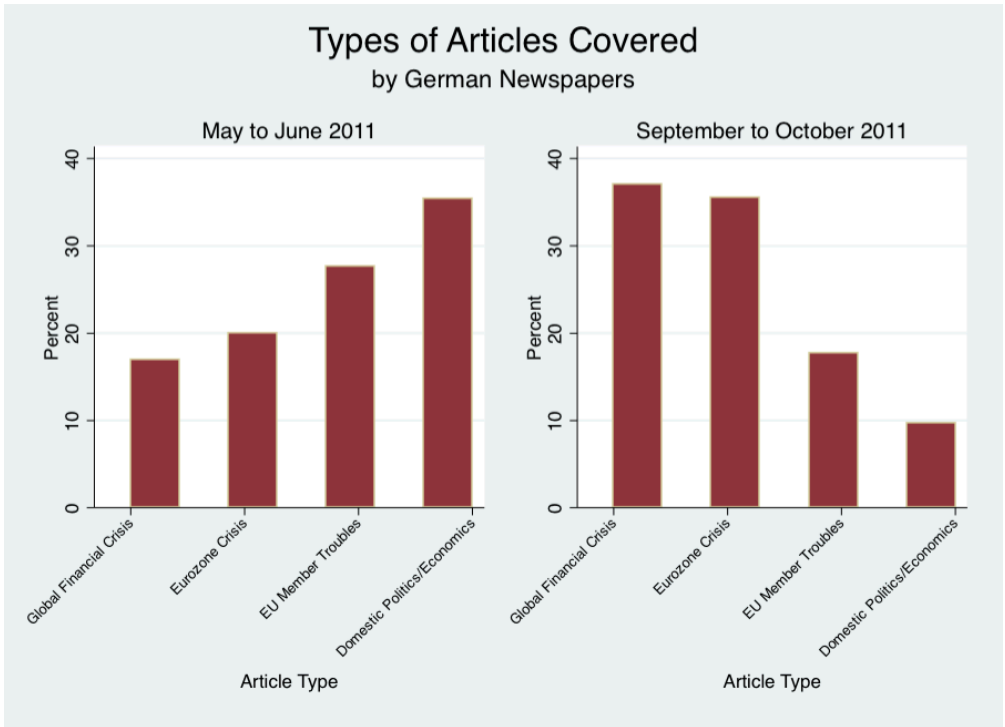


covered over the course of the two periods. While focus on the global financial crisis was low during both periods, as Graph 1 shows, there are several interesting changes that indicate framing shifts for Irish print media outlets.

Articles focused on the Eurozone Crisis in period one represented about 20% of all coverage on political-economic matters. By

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period two, this had nearly halved to a little over 10% of coverage. While it is interesting to note that period one, starting on 23 May 2011, included the first major bailout initiatives in several eurozone countries, this is still a sharp shift away from focus on international affairs. Perhaps more importantly, there is a stark shift in article focus from coverage of the political-economic troubles of other nations in the EU to domestic reportage. Between the two periods, the number of articles devoted to describing issues and events related to the affairs of other EU countries fell by almost exactly a third from 49–33percent while, at the same time, the number of pieces devoted to the description and analysis of domestic affairs more than doubled from 24 to 52% of all coverage.



Graphic 2

In Germany, trends between the two periods, in terms of the types of articles covered, were noticeably different and certainly more drastic than those in Ireland. These trends existed across all newspapers in Germany and were coded into a country-specific index, similar to Ireland. In all instances across all types of articles,

there was at least a 30% change in month-long coverage patterns. This was higher in most cases.

Between 23 May and 23 June 2011, media focus on the global financial crisis was relatively low, representing about 18% of all coverage on political-economic affairs. Similarly, focus on the eurozone crisis itself was low, 20% of all coverage. Other news categories, namely those focusing on domestic political issues (35%) and happenings in other EU member states (27%) made up the remainder of all coverage. These figures for news coverage of specific issues during the first month period indicate that the huge economic difficulties being experienced in Greece, Ireland and elsewhere, while of great interest and concern, were clearly as of yet weakly associated with the broader eurozone and global financial crises which, at this time, could still be said to be in a phase of slow recovery.

During the second month-long period, between 01 September and 01 October 2011, these coverage statistics drastically change. Focus on the global financial crisis jump to 37% of all coverage – the most of any category of article – while reportage of the eurozone crisis saw a no less impressive leap to 35% of all coverage. On the other end of the spectrum, news stories analysing both individual EU member economic and political troubles and domestic issues plummeted, with reporting of the former falling by a third to 18% and the latter by 75% to represent just under a tenth of all stories covered.

To recall the above hypothesis, countries weathering and performing better economically over the course of the global financial and eurozone crises would logically see an associated shift in perspective that focuses on the problems of others (and vice versa), as it is those other states that continue to cause downturn in international systems. To preliminarily analyse these hypotheses on the basis of changing article focus over the two month-long time intervals presented here, it would seem that media outlets in Ireland – where markets were seen to perform poorly over the period – reported significantly less on matters related to international affairs. Conversely, Germany, whose economy recovered strongly over the course of the period and was somewhat immune to the debt problems plaguing the EU's weaker economies, saw a drastic shift in media focus away from domestic politics and towards issues and relationships in the international arena. These findings may indicate a need to reject the null hypotheses.

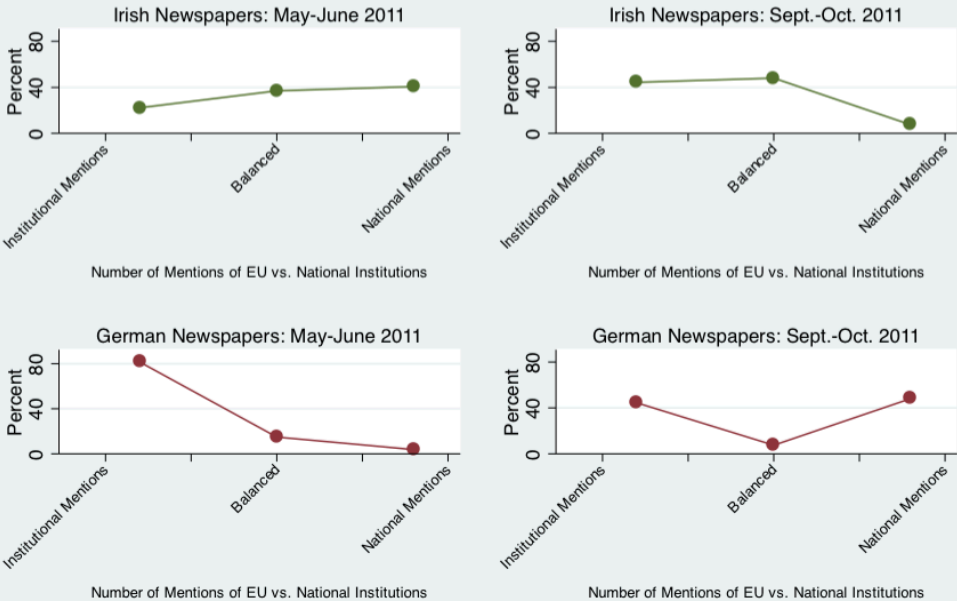
However, this study also drew data about article content and disposition towards particular issues, something that may help re-

fine our understanding of the overall trends that appeared in both countries.

In both countries, and across all six newspapers, there were fairly clear trends in terms of mentions of international versus national institutions (and associated individuals) over the two time periods. As Graph 3 shows, Irish print media outlets between May and June 2011 tended to mention institutions of international organisations and of other nations in relatively balanced doses. In the later time period this changed. Stories that solely mentioned international institutions, which had been the lower in terms of appearance in earlier stories, accounted for more than 45% of all articles in September. While there were a similar number of news stories that had references to the institutions of other countries alongside international actors, the most drastic change was the near 100% (42% of all mentions down to 2%) drop in the number of stories that solely referenced individuals, institutions or groups associated with EU member states.

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Percent Mentions of EU Vs. National Institutions Between May-June and Sept.-Oct. 2011



Graphic 3

In Germany the trends between the two time periods were even more striking. Articles in all three newspapers between 23 May and 23 June 2011 were dominated by mentions of international organisations and associated individuals. Of the articles from which data was coded, 82% solely mentioned international figures and institutions while articles providing balanced international-national outlooks and those solely reporting on national figures made up a far smaller, 14% and 4% respectively, portion of coverage.

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In the second period of analysis, the market share of coverage of each of the categories of mentions shifted. With almost no balanced coverage of both international- and nation-level actors (5%), articles solely mentioning EU and global institutions nearly halved to just 42% and those mentioning national players spiked to 53% of all reported.

Here, with respect to the hypotheses that have been proposed in this test, it is clear that focus shifted in both countries from one type of actor to another. In the context of the above shifts over the two periods in both Ireland and Germany, this media data may suggest a twofold perspective on the economic and political machinations within each country.

In Germany, where media outlets clearly switched the focus of reporting away from international institutions and towards the troubles and happenings of other countries, articles became increasingly focused on topics of broader global affairs over the time period. This indicates that, although the direct objects of discussion and analysis in German newspapers were nations and associated groups, reporting was contextually based on addressing topics more broadly related to the regional and international crises. This was further seen during testing as a cross tabulation of the trends of distribution of different types of mentions across newspapers with the overall tone of each article broadly indicates that Germans, as represented by these news outlets, had international institutions framed positively during period one. This remained the same in period two, though the much higher number of references to other countries was associated with negative adjective use and an overall frame that was more highly critical.

The data also suggests the opposite trend in Ireland, where articles talked increasingly about domestic and localised troubles in other EU member states as a function of the international institutions that likely were seen as the primary means for enacting situational change. Here, the framing of issues across Irish newspapers

was an exact reversal of the trend seen in Germany, with a positive outlook on national figures and other countries during the first period shifting to the trend of using overwhelmingly negative grammatical mechanisms in conjunction with discussions of the international system.

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Finally, testing included the coding of usages of statistics and polling data as journalistic means of information conveyance (see Table 1 below). In Irish media outlets, there appeared to be no change in the use of overwhelmingly negative data in association with article content. The usage of negatively-disposed statistics remained the same, even as content and framing changed, perhaps indicating simply that the severity of the economic circumstances in Ireland over the period of the crisis has not changed; only perceptions of the actors involved, the potential sources of relief and the framing of the issues themselves became different over time.

In Germany, the amount of used data negatively associated with the topics being covered in articles rose by over 40%. Taken in the context of the other results of this study and with respect to the hypotheses, this indicates that the external recessionary effects of the global and eurozone crises, while contrasting with steady domestic economic growth during both periods, were increasingly seen as related to Germany interests, at least in terms of media coverage on the issue.

Table 1

The Use of Statistical Data in Newspaper Articles
by Positive or Negative Connotation

| Ireland | May-June 2011 | | September-October 2011 | |
|--|---------------|-------|------------------------|-------|
| | Freq. | % | Freq. | % |
| Data Negatively Associated With Article Content | 22 | 81.48 | 22 | 75.86 |
| Data Positively Associated With Article Content | 5 | 18.52 | 6 | 24.14 |
| Germany | | | | |
| Data Negatively Associated With Article Content | 17 | 36.96 | 29 | 78.38 |
| Data Positively Associated With Article Content | 29 | 63.04 | 8 | 21.62 |

Overall, the results of this study yielded a variety of conclusions

about the nature of media reporting in the countries involved. Moreover, the data provides us with much insight into mechanisms of frame-shifting during crisis periods and could be the proof-of-concept test for a much larger-n test of countries, both within in out-side the eurozone. On the surface, the hypotheses proposed above seem to be supported by the results. To recap, the hypotheses are as follows:

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The framing of issues in those countries that have fared relatively better during periods of international crisis would logically focus increasingly on the actions and problems of other states.

In contrast, media framing of similar issues in poorer-performing countries may be more likely to focus on the role of systemic institutions as the country becomes more dependent on coordinated international action to stave off disaster.

Despite high amounts of topic-level focus on international issues in Germany and domestic/national-level happenings in Ireland, the tone and content emphasis of articles coded across the two one-month time periods leads me to fail to reject these null hypotheses, as there was a clear shift in the framing of media coverage along the lines proposed above.

DISCUSSION

In the case of Europe's sovereign debt crisis and the disparate experiences of countries across the eurozone, framing of broad issues in print outlets, tied as they are to geographical circulatory areas, can be used to determine what sources are most crucial to the functioning of the media and the portrayal of the news. After all, if it can be assumed that the media is a gateway through which governments and their subject populations interact and view each other, it is highly important to understand how the informational frames of the media are formed.^{13,14,15}

In this study, the data collected showed that media portrayal of different issues, particularly of the effects of domestic political-economic troubles, shifted over time in both Ireland and Germany, with the former largely focusing with concern and negative sentiment on international institutions and the latter focusing negative crisis-based sentiment on domestic- and other country-level matters.

Why did media outlets cover news stories and portray issues in both countries, often referencing similar content, in these ways? The literature on the role of media framing, particularly with respect to the government, may have some answers.

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There are certainly a variety of observed trends that could explain such shifts in focus by newspaper outlets. As Bennett (and others) argued, limited resources on the part of media organisations tend to consolidate the significant effect that resorting to indexed and government-centric information sources have in influencing the content of the media.¹⁶ In Germany and Ireland, this would fit with the observed trends of the study. Media focus in both countries changed to frame economic problems as a function of those institutions that were of greatest import to both domestic and broader international economic troubles. In the case of Germany, increasingly negative articles were run from May to October that emphasised the role of individual countries in the world, particularly in the EU, in causing systemic economic issues and preventing a broad recovery. In Ireland, those same countries met with a more positive reflection, but were overshadowed by primarily negative coverage of the international system and the failures of institutions.

However, given that the media coverage studied here represents commentary on internationally-induced economic matters and that works in the literature on political communication have shown that governments are almost never able to lead the media and dictate the content of press outlets, is it not perhaps more reasonable to say that the limited resources of such organisations will be spent canvassing official sources of information?¹⁷ Considering the reality that information on the crisis primarily comes from beyond the country, media outlets in European countries may logically look elsewhere, from the reports of other countries governments and international institutions to multinational statistics research organisations that are set up to look at such matters across borders, for perspective.

The works of Herman and Chomsky, arguing that media firms are most highly motivated and incentivised to bias coverage of events based on potential for profit, supports the idea that media outlets in crisis contexts will be driven to seek information most conducive to securing a favouring and profitable environment to operate in.¹⁸ In the two countries studied here, this implies differ-

ent things. In Ireland, focus on domestic- and country-level problems as a function of international institutions is the logical outcome of crisis-driven media coverage policies because outlets have an interest in securing the conditions for the domestic recovery of the marketplace.¹⁹ Moreover, as the supranational nature of the EU insulates media organisations to a large degree from the backlash of institutions that come under closest scrutiny, there is little reason for balanced coverage. In Germany, the opposite focus on other countries as a function of the problems of the international system is similarly logical, as media outlets have an interest in preventing future domestic downturn from the spread of foreign problems. In the German case, this may imply congruency with government policies in terms of focus on fixing international issues for which the country is seen as a regional leader, but different with respect to the fact that profit-centric media policies likely bias domestic perceptions of international issues through framing, thus diminishing the representative control of policy that the government has.²⁰ Finally, these trends toward outlet-centric framing practices are further reflected in both countries by two factors that came out of this study. First, the overwhelming use of statistical data from non government sources across both periods, particularly in Irish newspapers (three quarters of the 82% of all articles in period 2 with respect to half of the 47% in period 1 indicates that there was an obviously high level of reliance on information sources whose only criteria was issue relevance, not government linkage. Secondly, the significant decline in readership for each paper over the period between May and October (over 10% in all cases and around 30% for both the Irish Times and Examiner) indicates that, from a business perspective, there are clear incentives for media organisations to support framing on certain issues that are popular and could improve their operational climate.

A final set of conclusions seem relevant to the operation of media outlets in framing issues during crisis periods here, particularly with respect to Germany and Ireland during the global and sovereign debt crises. Thrall's proposal that the views of the media can be split into three distinct groups based on intent – the watchdog press, the attack dog press and the lapdog press – pertinently describes beliefs about how media organisations focus their efforts to provide a certain type of coverage.²¹ However, since it is argued here

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that media organisations are incentivised by profit and by their own ability to influence the flow of information as a gateway between governments and the public, it would perhaps be most fitting to link the mentality of the “dogs” with that of intentional threat inflation^{22,23}

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For both countries, there is a distinct change their stance relative to the government could be labelled. In Germany, where media coverage initially focused on the troubles of other countries in the context of problems in the international system, outlet-level concerns about profits could certainly have led to the use of frames that, by supporting the German view that domestic reforms were needed in other countries, essentially represented an attack dog mentality. Though German media coverage of issues fell closely in line with domestic government commentary on the crisis, this research argues that lack of government influence over the processes of frame construction in media organisations and strong economic performance relative to other states make an attack dog definition of mentality with respect to other countries most apt.

Similarly, in Ireland, though framing of issues domestically and abroad as a function of international institutions fell closely in line with government commentary on the crisis at most points, the high number of mentions of non-government sources of statistical and poll information indicates that there was no causal link leading from government processes to media coverage. Rather, this and declining readership numbers would again imply that media organisations are motivated to construct certain frames during crisis situations based on what is thought to be popular and what will ultimately be beneficial for the future operation of outlet business. In other words, in Ireland over the period, print media outlets shrugged off the patronage of government-centric information sources and perspectives to frame issues from the watchdog position.

Ultimately, this study implies that, given an assumption of media-centric frame construction, there exists a phenomenon of “media threat inflation” during crisis periods, in which organisations act as the drivers of national perspective in the context of their own needs.

The result of this is that there are implications for future research. A broader sample of countries would certainly allow future studies to control for the situational significance of Ireland and

Germany either being in abject crisis or being a leader of the economic area responsible for dealing with the crisis. Those countries that have experienced middling to good recoveries would be good candidates for a further media study.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Barriers to Recovery

The results of this study have many implications for future research into the behaviour of media organisations during crisis periods. Data gathered from news sources in both nations studied indicates a direct correlation between economic performance across the period of the global financial and sovereign debt crises and the orientation of media coverage. It is clear that, over time, media organisations were incentivised to construct different methods for framing news articles. This essay, through testing and analysis in which the researcher's null hypotheses failed to be rejected, argued that the unique political-economic makeup of the EU, and precipitous changes in the economic and circulatory circumstances of each newspaper over the period studied, indicates that frame construction is outlet-centric and, thus, premised entirely on the interests of media organisations. To expand upon this analysis in the future, it would be appropriate to undertake a similar study with regards to a greater number of countries, controlling for a broader range of crisis-based political-economic circumstances and compensating for any biases that result from only drawing from English language sources.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this study has significant implications for the formulation of both economic and social policy, particularly in the EU, in years to come. In Europe, where increasing divergence of sovereign political economic issues has already stressed the processes of international economic governance and forced alterations of the fiscal and monetary structure of the system, the phenomenon of media threat inflation observed in this study represents one aspect of a broader dynamic in which nationally-based interest groups, particularly private-sector market-driven entities, may not be incentivised to promote mechanisms of international integration. Though a natural occurrence in any free market system, such interest group activities pose significant obstacles

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to the development of relationships institutionally defined more by their supranational applications than country-specific relevance. As seen during the sovereign debt and broader eurozone crises of the past years, the manifestation of this effect is especially evident with relation to policies that, in the short-term, benefited some international actors over others.

Ultimately, future policies of both domestic and international stakeholders must aim to ameliorate the effects of geographically-constrained interest groups as they are motivated to act on interests that constrain government reliance on non-biased popular opinion. After all, without the appropriate interplay between international and domestic concerns, between social and economic processes, how can a paradigm-spanning institution like the EU hope to construct an appropriately distributed system of accountability and support for coping with future iterations of what has undoubtedly been the continent's greatest challenge of fragmentation in over half a century?

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NOTES TO PAGES

- 1 See Livingstone and Lance Bennett, (2003), 'Gatekeeping, Indexing, and Live-Event News: Is Technology Altering the Construction of News?' *Political Communication*, 20, pp. 363-380.
- 2 For information on neoliberal reforms in the post-WWII period, see Beth A. Simmons, Frank Dobbin and Geoffrey Garrett (2004), 'Introduction: The International Diffusion of Liberalism' *International Organization*, 60, pp. 781-810.
- 3 See John G. Ruggie (1982), 'International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order,' *International Organization*, 36:2.
- 4 For a reading into decoupling and the unique variation that the process of the EU represents in neoliberalism see Christoph Hermann (2007), 'Neoliberalism in the European Union,' *Studies in Political Economy*, 79.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Livingstone and Bennett (2003), pp. 363-370.
- 7 Lance Bennett (1990), 'Toward a Theory of Press-State Relations in the United States,' *Journal of Political Communication*, 40:2.
- 8 See Trevor A. Thrall (2000a), *War in the Media Age*. Hampton Press; and

- Trevor A. Thrall (2000b) *Competing Images of the Press*, University of Michigan Press.
- 9 Thrall (2000b), pp. 6-9.
 - 10 Ibid, pp. 15-16.
 - 11 Data for GDP and debt is derived from the IMF World Economic Outlook Database available at: <<http://www.imf.org/external/data.htm>> (last accessed 12 December 2012).
 - 12 Archival information for newspaper sources may be found at: <www.independent.ie>, <www.irishexaminer.com>, <www.irishtimes.com>, <www.bild.de>, <www.sueddeutsche.de>, and <www.faz.net>.
 - 13 Melvin DeFleur and Margaret DeFleur (2009), *Mass Communication Theories: Explaining Origins, Processes, and Effects*, Allyn & Bacon.
 - 14 David Manning White (1950), 'The "Gate Keeper": A Case Study in the Selection of News,' *Journalism Quarterly*, 27, pp. 383-391.
 - 15 Livingstone and Bennett (2003), pp. 363-370.
 - 16 See Bennett (1990), pp. 118-125.
 - 17 See Robert Elegant (1981), 'How to Lose A War: The Press and Viet Nam,' *Encounter*, 57:2, pp. 73-90. See also Andrew Mullen and Jeffery Klaehn (2010), 'The Herman-Chomsky Propaganda Model: A Critical Approach to Analysing Mass Media Behaviour,' *Sociology Compass*, 4:4.
 - 18 See Herman and Noam Chomsky (1988), *Manufacturing Consent*, NY: Pantheon Books, pp. 1-36.
 - 19 Ibid, pp. 28-34.
 - 20 Again, such diminution of government control over components of the propaganda-related mechanisms of the press, as a result of national crisis and interest group-response, is well studied though with focus on conflict-based catalysts. See Elegant (1981), pp. 73-90.
 - 21 Thrall (2000b), pp. 5-7.
 - 22 Though originally used as a conceptual term by Chaim Kaufmann with respects to the Bush Administration's successes in selling the idea of War in Iraq, threat inflation is relevant in this case, describing the manner in which media outlets are incentivised to maximise their operational potential by highlighting aspects of the news that will resonate well with the reading and buying population. See Chaim Kaufmann (2004) 'Threat Inflation and the Failure of the Marketplace of Ideas: The Selling of the Iraq War,' *International Security*, 29:1, pp. 5-48.
 - 23 Thrall (2000b), pp. 9-13.

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