

The Accuracy of Representatives' Public Priority Perceptions

Stefaan Walgrave
Karolin Soontjens
Julie Sevenans

Political representatives take their perception of what the citizens want into account when legislating, deliberating or undertaking political action. Representatives' perception of public preferences is one of the tracks via which representation comes about—the other classic track being electoral replacement through a correctly voting electorate (Miller & Stokes, 1963). The relevance of elite perceptions for democratic representation is straightforward: because of re-election motives, and supposing that their actions are visible to the public at large or at least to the segments they care about out of electoral considerations, representatives act in line with their perception of what the public wants. Most of the vast body of work on dyadic representation and roll-call voting is implicitly based on the idea that elected elites somehow form a more or less accurate perception of what the voters in their district want and care about and then act accordingly (see for example: Soroka, Penner, & Bidook, 2009; Ansolabehere & Jones, 2011). A handful of studies has explicitly measured the perceptions of elected politicians in different political systems. Invariably, these studies found those perceptions to exert a substantial influence on real political action (e.g. in the US: Miller & Stokes, 1963; in France: Converse & Pierce, 1986; in Belgium, Canada and Israel: Walgrave, Vos, Soroka, & Loewen, 2016). So, elite perceptions of public opinion matter for democratic representation, they form one possible track of how representation comes about.

However, research examining the *accuracy* of representatives' perceptions of public opinion is exceedingly scarce. Many questions remain: Are elite perceptions of what the public wants generally accurate? Are some individual representatives better at gauging the public's wishes than others? Are elite perceptions maybe more accurate with regard to some issues than to others? And, if elites' perceptions are to some extent inaccurate, perhaps some specific groups' wants are more accurately perceived than the wishes of others? These questions are empirically and normatively important, we believe. Were elected politicians to hold inaccurate perceptions and were those perceptions systematically skewed in favor of certain population groups, then representation would likely be inadequate and biased. Even if politicians' true aim was to act according to the general public's wishes, the incorrectness of their perceptions could directly affect the democratic quality of their representation.

The present study tackles this gap in the representation literature. We build a theoretical framework of elites' perceptual accuracy and empirically examine the questions outlined above. We use novel evidence on actual public priorities and elites' perceptions thereof across three countries with widely diverging political systems—Belgium, Canada and Israel. In each country, a parallel survey of politicians and citizens was fielded asking respondents about their own (citizens) and about their perception of the public's priorities (elites) for political action. To be clear, our study deals with the *priorities* for action and not

with the positional preferences of citizens. Priorities for political action were asked *not* with regard to general issue categories but with regard to specific, recent and salient real world events, as reported by the national media. Concretely, we asked citizens whether they wanted politicians to follow up on these real world events with political action in parliament or government, while we asked politicians whether they thought the public wanted them to follow up on the same events.

We find that, in the three countries under study, representatives' perceptions of what events the public cares about are quite strongly associated with what the public actually wants. So, it is not the case that politicians' guesses are widely off; they generally have a good sense of what the general public wants them to undertake action upon. Still, there is perceptual inaccuracy and, especially, a great deal of variance in perceptual accuracy to be explained. We find no systematic differences between individual representatives, though. Only elites who adopt a delegate role perception (in contrast to a trustee role perception) hold more accurate perceptions. Besides that, most representatives seem to share a similar sense of what the public cares about. The characteristics of news stories we confronted the politicians and citizens with seem to matter more. Politicians' estimates of what the public cares about are more accurate when the news stories they are queried about have a negative valence and are politically conflictual. Negativity and conflict lead to more accurate elite perceptions. Additionally, and most importantly, the priorities of some population groups' are closer to politicians' perception of what the public as a whole cares about; one could say that politicians 'project' the priorities of these groups onto the whole population. Concretely, it are the priorities of younger, of the highly educated, of the politically interested, and of the media-attentive citizens that get a larger weight when politicians form themselves a perception of what the public as a whole wants.

Our study contributes to the central debate about unequal representation. The evidence suggests that the widely demonstrated inequality in representation could partly be the consequence of simple perceptual inaccuracy. Previous research suggests that politicians do not *want* to represent the preferences of the weaker groups in society, because these groups are not voting, are less attentive to politics, or have less financial resources. We add that unequal representation most likely also is a matter of representatives' *capacity* to perceive what the weaker groups want from them; politicians are surrounded by highly educated, politically interested, and sophisticated citizens. This is where they get their cues from about what the public at large wants and this leads to biased perceptions.

REPRESENTATIVES' PERCEPTIONS OF PUBLIC PRIORITIES

Although the perceptions of individual politicians matter for their representative behavior, there is a dearth of work focusing on the origins and accuracy of representatives' public opinion perceptions. The pioneering study by Miller and Stokes (1963) sparked a short-lived interest in elite perceptions but the topic disappeared again from the agenda of representation scholars until it recently witnessed a modest revival. Miller & Stokes (1963)

themselves, drawing on a US Members of Congress survey, were one of the few who actually collected data on representatives' perceptions of their district's opinion. They found the accuracy of representatives' perceptions of their district's preferences to vary across issues and representatives. A small but older body of work subsequently tackled elite's perceptions of voters (Hedlund & Friesema, 1972; Clausen, 1977; Clausen, Holmberg, & deHaven-Smith, 1983; Converse & Pierce, 1986; Granberg, 1987; Granberg & Holmberg, 2002; Holmberg, 1999). Notwithstanding a single study in the 2000s (Norris & Lovenduski, 2004), only recently the perceptual path of democratic linkage has been rediscovered in studies by Belchior (2014) in Portugal and by Broockman and Skovron (2015) in the US.

Although a clear benchmark of perceptual accuracy was not offered, the only common conclusion this small body of work seems to have reached is that elites' perceptions of public opinion are not very accurate (Broockman & Skovron, 2015). They are biased by, what some of these authors call, wishful thinking (e.g. Holmberg, 1999). Uninformed about the actual opinions of voters, elites rely on their own opinion about an issue and attribute it to the voters at large. Some of this work has also found, in line with Miller & Stokes' (1963) initial study, that elites' success in making sense of public opinion is unevenly distributed across issues. Some suggested that when issues are salient or 'politically charged' (e.g. Hedlund & Friesema, 1972) or when the public has homogeneous ideas (Clausen et al., 1983) representatives' estimates are more accurate. But these suggestions were not picked up and replicated in other work. Additionally, political systems play a role, an isolated study contended: elites' estimations are more accurate in systems that promote direct legislator-voter links (Clausen et al., 1983). Most importantly, this work has not been successful in explaining the often substantial accuracy *differences* across representatives (e.g. Clausen et al., 1983; Holmberg, 2007). The two most recent studies suggested that ideology may play a role here. Belchior (2014) finds in Portugal that individual differences in accurately estimating the public's wishes are correlated with ideology and in an impressive recent study of US state legislature candidates, Broockman and Skovron (2015) show that conservative candidates hold less accurate estimations compared to their more liberal counterparts. Yet, this study does not offer a theoretical explanation for its results.

So, basically, the field has not made much progress since Miller & Stokes (1963) published their influential account more than 50 years ago. There is some perceptual inaccuracy, there is variation across representatives, and there is variation across issues. But why? What explains that some representatives are more accurate in their estimations of what the public wants than others, why are perceptions less far off for some issues and for certain groups in the population? These questions are almost entirely unanswered. Apart from being rare—altogether we are talking about less than a dozen studies in a period of more than half a century—work on elites' estimations of the public's wishes has remained theoretically underdeveloped and scattered. A systematic theoretical account explaining elite perceptions and variation in elite perceptions is lacking.

EXPLAINING REPRESENTATIVES' PERCEPTIONS

The accuracy of representatives' perceptions of what the public wants can be explained on three different levels, we argue. First, features of *representatives* play a role, making some representatives more attentive and more capable of assessing what the public wants. Second, features of *issues* could matter as well, with some providing more opportunities and/or incentives for representatives to get to know what the public thinks about them. Third, the preferences of some *population segments* are probably more visible for representatives, and they may be more motivated to get informed about these specific groups' preferences, which then leads to a generalization of these groups' preferences to the population as a whole. In sum, our account holds that the accuracy of representatives' perceptions of public opinion is a function of elites' willingness and capacity to correctly assess what the public wants them to take action upon. We formulate a number of hypotheses regarding the effect of some specific variables on each of these three levels of explanation. Note that our willingness and capacity account allows to generate more hypotheses than the eight we present below, but we only present hypotheses here that we can test with our data.

Which individual representatives have a higher capacity and display more willingness to learn about the public's priorities? The classic typology of representational roles distinguishes trustees, whose aim is to act on behalf of the citizens' interests but who do not aim to react on the public's short term preferences on the one hand, from delegates who see it as their task to respond as directly as possible to the public's preferences (Mansbridge, 2003). Although extant work has not been able to show that these role conceptions actually matter for representatives' perceptual accuracy (e.g. Holmberg, 2007), we think such a link to be plausible. Representatives who consider it as their goal to transform the public's preferences into policy should be more willing to gauge those preferences accurately. More generally, the large literature on representational roles hardly found these roles to affect any type of actual legislative behavior. This is one of the reasons legislative role theory went out of fashion in political science after booming in the 1980s; roles did not seem to matter in the real world (Gross, 1978; Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012). Yet, we think it makes sense to expect that legislative roles matter for the perceptions representatives hold. Hence our first hypothesis: *Representatives adhering to a delegate role conception hold more accurate perceptions of public priorities than representatives adhering to a trustee role (H1).*

With regard to the capacity of politicians to be correctly informed about the public's priorities for action, experience could play a role. The longer a politician has held a representative mandate, the more she has had experience with gauging what the public thinks to be a priority. Whether politicians actually learn how to assess public opinion while being on the job or rather whether those politicians with a better sense of public opinion are more easily reelected leading to more experience as a consequence, is not what interests us here but both these possibilities seem plausible. Anyway: *Representatives with more years on the job hold more accurate perceptions of public priorities than representatives with less political experience (H2).*

Also with regard to differences in covered events, our second explanatory level, the willingness and capacity of representatives to learn about what the public finds important may vary. For some events, the priorities of the population may simply be more visible, and representatives may bother more about being correctly informed. For instance, previous work has shown that humans in general tend to react in asymmetric ways to negative compared to positive or neutral information (Soroka, 2014). People in general have a strong and hardwired tendency to consider bad news somehow more ‘appealing’ and important than good news. This applies as well to politicians; research has found that bad news disproportionately leads to attention in parliament. Negative news inspires especially opposition politicians who can use it to challenge the government (Thesen, 2011). So, there are reasons to expect that this deeply entrenched tendency to prioritize bad news over good news brings the real popular preferences and elites’ perceptions of those preferences closer together. In other words, citizens rate negative stories as being more important and politicians incorporate this tendency in their estimation of how much the public cares. Our hypothesis is: *Compared to positive or neutral news stories, the accuracy of representatives’ perceptions of public priorities is higher for negative stories (H3).*

A similar reasoning can be developed with regard to conflictual stories. Work in communications has showed that conflict draws ordinary citizens’ attention (Neumann, 1990; Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992) and that it has a mobilizing effect on voters (Schuck, Vliegenthart & De Vreese, 2014). Politicians as well, have been found to react more strongly on conflictual information compared to non-conflictual information, for example in their priorities in parliament (Sevenans & Vliegenthart, 2015). This should apply even more when the conflict is political in nature: there is more to lose or win for political actors. For stories that imply a political conflict, elites have more incentives to assess the public’s preferences accurately. Additionally, as conflict mobilizes voters, it may also be the case that with regard to conflictual stories the public’s preferences are more easily observable. Follows the hypothesis: *Compared to news stories that do not entail political conflict, the accuracy of representatives’ perceptions of public priorities is higher for stories that are politically conflictual (H4).*

On the third explanatory level, the level of the citizens whose priorities are gauged by politicians, the logic is similar: politicians can more easily perceive the preferences of some groups and they are also more motivated to get it right for some groups. Being more exposed to the preferences of these groups and lacking input about other groups, they project the former’s preferences to the whole population. In the broad field of representation, there is a growing interest in representational inequality—the fact that some groups are better represented than others. Current wisdom holds that the interests of weaker groups, such as groups with lower incomes (e.g. Bartels, 2008) or people with less years of formal education (e.g. Soroka & Wlezien, 2008), are less well represented in parliament and government. These studies suggest that there is a systematic bias in favor of stronger social groups in what representatives *do*. We hypothesize that the same bias also applies to how representatives *perceive* the preferences of the public as a whole. The preferences of stronger social groups

are simply more visible for politicians than those of weaker groups. Belonging themselves to a specific social class (mostly middle class) and being socially embedded in certain social circles it is to be expected that politicians systematically, when they make a guess about what the public in general considers to be a priority, overweigh the importance 'their own sort of people' attribute to events while they 'underweigh' the priorities of societal groups they have less affinity and contact with. Additionally, it could also be that politicians' explicit aim is to foremost represent people who are like themselves, which makes them even more attentive to the priorities of these similar citizens. Politicians being still predominantly men and on average highly-educated we formulate the following two hypotheses: *Compared to the political priorities of women, the political priorities of men are closer to what representatives consider to be the general population's priorities (H5). Compared to the political priorities of the lower-educated, the political priorities of the higher-educated are closer to what representatives consider to be the general population's priorities (H6).*

Finally, politicians get their information about popular preferences in different ways. They can consult opinion polls, talk to their constituents, read and watch the news media, listen to lobbyists, interact with interest groups, or chat with their hairdresser (Herbst, 1998). All these sources can inform politicians about what the public wants. The chance that politicians are especially confronted, through these sources, with the priorities of those who have a high interest in politics is large. Indeed, the low politically interested are less active in making their priorities heard; they talk less about politics, do not share their political opinions online, do not write letters to the newspaper, have less interest groups who intervene on their behalf etc. (see for example: Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995). In their foundational study, Miller and Stokes (1963, pp. 54–55) contended that elites' perceptions of public preferences may be wrong because they are mainly confronted with the 'engaged segments' of the public that do not hold representative preferences. In two recent studies, Miler (2007, 2010) has showed that when US Congressmen look at their district they primarily see specific segments of their constituency, namely those who donate money to their campaigns and those who actively contact them. In other words, we expect the priorities of those with higher levels of political sophistication to be relatively easier to read by politicians and thus to get a greater weight when they think about the priorities of the public at large. Applied to the two measures of political sophistication we have at our disposal in this study, we expect: *Compared to the political priorities of the low politically interested, the political priorities of the high politically interested are closer to what representatives consider to be the general population's priorities (H7). Compared to the political priorities of the low news consumers, the political priorities of the high news consumers are closer to what representatives consider to be the general population's priorities (H8).*

DATA AND METHODS

The study draws on three datasets: (1) evidence from a three-country survey with elected representatives, (2) data from a similar citizen survey, and (3) a content analysis of news

stories. To start with, between March and August 2015, we conducted a survey of elected representatives and citizens in three countries; Belgium, Canada and Israel. In Belgium, we questioned 113 members (including ministers and party leaders) of the national parliament (75% response rate), 106 of the Flemish regional parliament (88% response rate) and 50 of the Walloon-Brussels regional parliament (53% response rate). In Canada, 45 national parliament members (15% response rate) were surveyed and 31 members of the Ontario provincial parliament (29% response rate). In Israel, 65 (ex-)members of the national parliament participated (41% response rate)¹. Although response rates vary substantially across countries, with a total of 410 successful elite surveys and a global response rate of 46%, our dataset is exceptional (see for example in comparison to another recent comparative elite survey: Deschouwer & Depauw, 2014).

The countries of Belgium, Canada, and Israel were chosen because of their widely diverging electoral systems. Canada has a first-past-the-post system in which each constituency is represented by one MP only. Israel forms the ideal-typical opposite case: it has only one, national electoral circumscription and all 120 Members of the Knesset are elected in the entire country. Belgium is the middle case: it has a proportional multimember district system with on average about fifteen MPs elected per district (but with some differences between regional and national parliaments). These differences in electoral systems may translate in different incentives for politicians to make accurate guesses of what the population at large wants. In the Israeli case, MPs are incentivized to take the whole country's population into account when making guesses about what 'the' people want, while in the Canadian case it is in MPs' interest to be mainly informed about what the voters in their own constituency want. The limited number of only three country cases in our study does not allow for a careful dissection of institutional effects. We view the diversity of our country sample mainly as a test of the robustness and generalizability of our findings, across a limited number of very different political systems.

Instead of asking politicians (and citizens, see below) about their prioritization of general issue domains as is common practice in public opinion research more generally (Wlezien, 2005), this study assesses elite perceptions of the public's priorities regarding a large number of very specific events, embedded in news stories. In fact, we draw on actual media stories—events or problems attracting real media attention—and ask politicians about their estimation of how important they thought the public at large would find these particular topics to be. The key advantage of using actual media stories about a very specific event or problem is that we can be confident that both groups, politicians and citizens, are thinking about the same thing when answering the priority questions. Indeed, the use of broad issue categorizations is based on the untested assumption that everyone is thinking about the same

¹ In the Israeli case, 18 of the 65 Members of the Knesset (MK) actually were ex-MKs. The reported response rate is calculated for the actual MPs only. Israeli national elections were held on the 17th of March 2015, right before the start of the interview period. We decided to start with interviewing some ex-MK right after the elections; these people were not re-elected just a few weeks before. We supposed they would still be able to respond to our questions as if they were still seated in the Knesset. The other 47 Israeli interviews were with actual MKs, some of them were brand new to the job.

phenomenon when they, for example, state that ‘the economy’ is the most important issue. Moreover, we know that news media form an important source of information for politicians (Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2016) and that politicians react to media coverage by, for example, asking parliamentary questions or taking position in response to media topics (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006). Additionally, media stories deal with current affairs, they are not overly technical, they are publicly accessible, and they regularly deal with issues the public cares about. This makes that one can sensibly ask both politicians and citizens about their prioritization of mediatized problems or events as both may have heard about them and might be reasonably expected to have a meaningful opinion regarding their priority.

This study is based on a novel survey instrument which presents politicians (and citizens) with seven different news stories that had been prominent in the news—on the front page of the main newspaper(s) in each country (*De Standaard* and *Le Soir* in Belgium, *Montreal Gazette* and *Toronto Star* in Canada, and *Ha’aretz* in Israel)—in the five weeks preceding each interview. Just a short summarizing tagline was shown to participants. Examples of such tagline are: *Air Canada flight A320 crash-lands in Halifax after landing short of the runway; only one of 138 on board sustained serious injury* (Canada, *National Post*); *Le Canada enverra environ 200 soldats en Ukraine pour aider à la formation des forces armées ukrainiennes* (Canada, *Montreal Gazette*); *Two stabbings and an attack in Jerusalem and Hebron in one day* (Israel, *Ha’aretz*); *The number of sick leave days for teachers has reached its highest level since 2009, with burn-out and stress as the most important causes* (Belgium, *De Standaard*). These taglines were not necessarily identical to the actual newspaper titles, but rather short summaries of these major media stories. Since the interviews took place over a period of several months, the design had a ‘rolling’ structure: for every interview a new random sample of seven stories was drawn from the (rolling) population of all stories from the five weeks before the interview. Stories all dealt with domestic issues.

Following each news story, politicians were asked a series of questions. After a question whether they had seen, read or heard about the story—in 2,093 out of the 2,779 stories (75%) the answer was positive—we asked politicians whether they thought if the citizens wanted them to undertake political action upon the news story: “*To what degree do citizens want politicians to take action (upon the story)*”? The answers could range from 0 (no action wanted by citizens) to 10 (action wanted by citizens). So, we are interested in how politicians are rating the political priority citizens attribute to recent events.

In addition to the elite survey, we implemented a random sample population survey in each country, at the exact same time (rolling through the interview period), asking citizens about the exact same media stories as we surveyed the elites about. The only difference was that while we asked politicians to rate seven stories, citizens were asked to rate only six stories. In total, 6,210 citizens were surveyed (Belgium: 2,189; Canada 2,902; Israel: 1,119). Sampling and surveying was done by *SSI* in Belgium and Canada and by *iPanel* in Israel. Our population samples are representative in terms of gender, age and education level. Recall of the stories by citizens (49%) was much lower than recall by politicians (75%), which makes perfectly sense knowing that politicians are insatiable news consumers. The crucial question

tapping respondents' priority of the events encapsulated in the news stories reads as follows: "To what extent do you want politicians to take action upon this topic?" (0=no action wanted; 10=action wanted).

Having at the same time a measure of people's *real* priority of the events encapsulated in news stories and a measure of politicians' *estimation* of citizens' priorities regarding the same stories, we can calculate the accuracy of representatives' perceptions of public priorities. The importance citizens attribute to those events may be inaccurate for two reasons: politicians can overrate or they can underrate the public priority of a certain event covered in a news story. Since this study is interested in accuracy as such and not in the direction of the error, our dependent variable grasps the absolute difference between citizens' appraisal and politicians' perception of citizens' appraisal. As we aim to explain accuracy and not inaccuracy, we inverse the value of the dependent variable called *Perception Accuracy* with a value of '0' pointing towards the most inaccurate perception (citizens say the story is very important to them while politicians think the story is not important at all for citizens, or vice versa) and a value of '10' pointing to perfect perceptual accuracy (politicians' estimation being spot on).

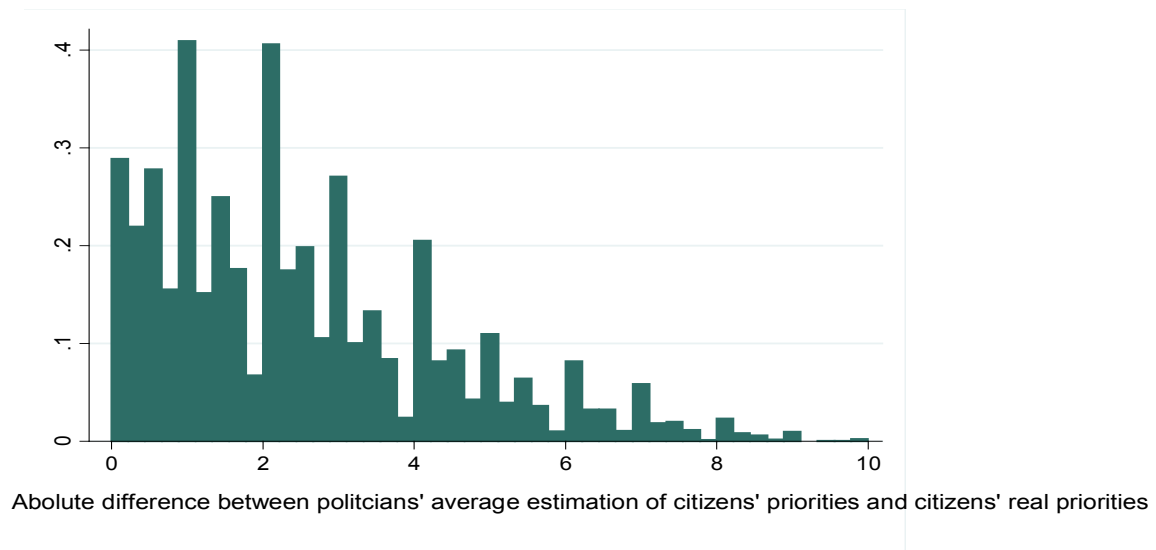
We are interested in differences across politicians, in differences across news stories, and in differences across citizens. The dataset is too complex to run models that allow variance on the politician, the story and the citizen level at the same time. So, we run several consecutive models in which, first, the citizen level is fixed (average score) and the politician and the story level is variable and then models in which the politician level is fixed (average score) but the citizen and the story levels are variable. For each of the analyses we use pooled datasets in which media stories are nested within politicians and citizens consecutively; we therefore estimate multilevel linear regression models. In total, 2,068 politician-story combinations are generated. Due to missing answers in the elite survey, the total number of cases varies around 1,934 combinations. In total, the responses of 407 politicians are used in the analysis. The same missing value-problem occurs with regard to the citizen survey. When conducting analyses with merely citizen level variables as independents, due to missing values, the total number of cases varies around 31,119 instead of the overall number of 31,899 citizen-story combinations. When conducting analyses which contain variables at the story level, the amount of combinations included is further reduced to 15,260, thereby merely including citizens who have seen, read or heard about the news story.

Because of the rolling structure of the data collection—especially interviewing politicians took a long time with sometimes days or weeks between interviews—the number ratings per story differs strongly. On the citizen side, the average story was rated by 41 citizens. On the politician side, things are more problematic as we have a much smaller sample that was not interviewed in an even way through the interview period. In total, 62 out of the 380 stories were only rated by one politician. This is problematic in the sense that the 'average' score of politicians used to calculate the dependent variable is then merely based on one observation, which could lead to idiosyncratic noise. To test whether this affects the results, we ran the analyses again excluding these 62 once-rated stories. Results of these analyses

were as good as identical to the models reported below. Therefore, we decided to keep the thinly rated stories on board and to draw on the broadest possible evidence.

Figure 1 below contains the frequency distribution of the dependent variable using the mean scores of politicians' priority perceptions with citizens real scores per story (N=380 stories). Across all stories and citizens, the average politician's guess of how much the public wants political action is 2.48 points off on a 0 to 10 scale. It is hard to say whether this implies a high or low level of perceptual accuracy, but politicians' guesses seem to be rather accurate. In a small number of cases, politicians' estimations are highly incorrect; in merely 10% of all cases, their guesses are more than 5 points off. For the large majority, politicians' guesses are between 1 and 3 points off. Further, the inaccuracy of politicians' guesses is caused both by overestimations and by underestimations (not shown in graph). Overall, however, politicians seem to slightly overrate the priority citizens devote to the events covered in the news stories they are shown. The importance citizens devote to such a story is estimated by politicians to be marginally higher than it is the case in reality (mean=-.04). Finally, Figure 1 shows that there is quite some variance to be explained.

Figure 1 – Frequency distribution of the dependent variable *Perception Accuracy*



The surveys of representatives and of citizens also contained measures of the independent variables of interest and of a large number of control variables. The exact question wording and the categorization of these variables, as well as their descriptives, can be found in **Table 1** below

Table 1 – Variable descriptions and descriptives

	Variable Name	Question Wording/Calculation	Answer Categories	N	Mean	S.D.	Min.	Max.	
DEPENDENT VARIABLE	Perception Accuracy	Reversed (-10) absolute difference between citizens' real priority and politicians' perception of this priority		31,899	2.48	1.90	0	10	
	Role Perception (H1)	What do you think is the right balance a politician should have?	0. Act on their behalf, but make own decisions (trustee) 10. Do exactly as citizens demand (delegate)	395	3.20	1.73	0	10	
	INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	Political Experience (H2)	The amount of years on the job, based on a politicians' year of first election		407	7.76	7.51	0	47
		Top Politician	Is the politician a party leader, minister or state secretary at the moment?	0. No 1. Yes	407	.09	.28	0	1
	POLITICIANS	Local Politician	Is the politician an alderman, mayor or member of a city council at the moment?	0. No 1. Yes	407	.47	.50	0	1
		Government-Opposition	Is the politician a member of an opposition or a government party?	0. Opposition party 1. Government party	407	.53	.50	0	1
		Left-right Ideology	Is the politician a member of a right-wing or left-wing party?	0. Left 1. Right	407	.55	.50	0	1
		Specialization	Where do you place yourself on this continuum with regard to issue specialization?	0. I specialize in one or two policy areas 10. I focus on a wide range of issues	398	5.13	2.53	0	10
		Negative News (H3)	Average amount of negativity in all the (titles of the) articles about the same news story	0: The title is neutral in tone 1: The title is explicitly negative in tone, i.e. announces bad news for the country.	380	.27	.35	0	1
		Political Conflict (H4)	Average amount of conflict in all the articles about the same news story	0. No conflict 1. Conflict (with/without political actor)	380	.39	.43	0	1

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES STORIES	Prominence	Number of articles about the same story when (1) they deal with the exact same topic and when (2) the event they cover, is set on the same geographical location		380	4.4	5.57	1	54
	INDEPENDENT VARIABLES CITIZENS	Popular Newspaper	Does the story get coverage in a popular newspaper as well. In Belgium we added <i>La Libre Belgique</i> and <i>Het Laatste Nieuws</i> , in Israel <i>Yedioth</i> and in Canada <i>Montreal Gazette</i> and <i>Ottawa Citizen</i>	0. No 1. Yes	380	.53	.50	0
Gender (H5)		What is your gender?	0. Female 1. Male	6,157	.50	.50	0	1
Education (H6)		What is your highest level of education?	1. No education 2. primary education 3. Secondary education 3. Higher education (no university) 4. University	6,163	3.92	.91	1	5
Political Interest (H7)		To what degree are you interested in politics in general?	0. Not at all interested 10. Very interested	6,149	5.85	2.76	0	10
CONTROL VARIABLE	News Media Use (H8)	Sum of frequency of the use of newspapers, television news, online newspapers and radio news	1. Never 2. Sometimes 3. Regularly 4. Often	6,114	10.31	2.70	4	16
	Age	Calculated by using respondents' year of birth		6,107	45.11	16.5	18	91
	Country		1. Belgium 2. Israel 3. Canada	2,172 1,117 2,865				

Our third source of data is an in-depth content analysis of the full newspaper coverage of the 380 news stories the politicians and citizens were confronted with. Remember that we selected the stories for inclusion in the surveys based on their being front page stories of the main broadsheet newspaper in each country. These specific newspaper articles often form only the tip of the iceberg of all newspaper coverage, with some stories attracting media wide attention for days before and after publication on the front page of the reference broadsheet. In addition to the newspapers we used to select the news stories in the first place, some other newspapers in the three countries (see Table 1) were searched for stories linked to our initial linchpin story and all news items dealing with the same event or problem occurring at the same time were scrutinized in great detail on a number of dimensions that form our story level independent variables. All articles regarding the 380 stories amounted to 1,678 content-analyzed newspaper articles. The content analysis generated the independent variables of interest *Negative News* and *Political Conflict* as well as the control variables at the story level *Prominence* and *Popular Newspaper*. Descriptions of these variables can be found in Table 1.

RESULTS

Our dependent variable is the difference between the actual priorities of citizens—on which stories reported in the news they *want* politicians to undertake political action—and the perceptions of representatives of those priorities—on which stories do elites *think* the public wants them to undertake political action. Consequently, the accuracy of politicians' perceptions is caused by variance in their perceptions and by variance in the actual priorities of citizens. In order to better understand what causes *Perceptual Accuracy*, we need to examine first what drives public priorities and politicians' perceptions thereof. Therefore, before testing the hypotheses in the next section, we here estimate separate models predicting public priorities and elite perceptions of those public priorities.

What determines whether the public finds an event covered in a news story a political priority? **Table 2** below presents the evidence of three multilevel models including variables at the citizen level and at the story level.

Table 2 – Determinants of public priorities

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Coef.(s.e.)	Sig	Coef.(s.e.)	Sig.	Coef.(s.e.)	Sig.
<i>Citizen level</i>						
Gender	-.35 (.05)	.00	—		-.31 (.05)	.00
Education	-.07 (.03)	.01	—		-.08 (.03)	.01
Political Interest	.19 (.01)	.00	—		.13 (.01)	.00
News Media Use	.06 (.01)	.00	—		.04 (.01)	.00
Age	.00 (.00)	.16	—		.00 (.00)	.71
Country (ref = Israel)	—		—		—	
Belgium	-.24 (.07)	.00	.12 (.16)	.48	.19 (.17)	.27
Canada	.09 (.06)	.14	.35 (.17)	.04	.43 (.18)	.02
<i>Story level</i>						
Negative News	—		.60 (.16)	.00	.59 (.16)	.00
Political Conflict	—		.33 (.13)	.01	.32 (.13)	.02
Popular Newspaper	—		.03 (.11)	.78	.04 (.12)	.75
Prominence	—		.01 (.01)	.54	.01 (.01)	.38
Constant	4.37 (.15)	.00	5.75 (.18)	.00	4.80 (.26)	.00
Var. between resp.	1.32		.91		.93	
Var. within resp.	2.45		2.65		1.21	
AIC (0-model = 5,084)	5,010		5,087		5,013	
Total N	31,119		15,560		15,265	
N respondents	6,031		5,248		5,144	
N stories	380		380		380	

There are quite some variables affecting whether a specific citizen finds a specific event covered in a news story to be needing political action, but the overall explanatory power of the models is small. Men, on average, think the stories are less of a political priority, and the same applies to the higher educated (this finding can be explained by the correlation of education with political interest, as education has a positive effect when leaving political interest out of the analysis). The more people are interested in politics and the more they follow the news, the higher they rate the political priority of the stories they were asked about. At the story level as well, two variables exert influence. If the story covered in the media contains bad news, then citizens tend to attribute more importance to it. The same applies to stories that entail political conflict: they make people consider it being a higher priority for political action. It does not matter whether a story is reported in different media outlets (*Popular Newspaper*) nor whether it has received a lot of coverage (*Prominence*).

Similar analyses with regard to representatives' perceptions of the public's priorities can be found in **Table 3** below. Do we find comparable predictors of how elites estimate the public's priorities to be?

Table 3 – Determinants of representatives' perceptions of public priorities

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Coef.(s.e.)	Sig.	Coef.(s.e.)	Sig.	Coef.(s.e.)	Sig.
<i>Representative level</i>						
Role Perception	.04 (.04)	.41	—		.03 (.04)	.43
Political Experience	.01 (.01)	.34	—		.00 (.01)	.60
Gender	.26 (.15)	.10	—		.20 (.14)	.16
Top Politician	-.05 (.26)	.85	—		.12 (.24)	.61
Local Politician	-.13 (.19)	.50	—		-.13 (.17)	.46
Specialization	-.02 (.03)	.53	—		-.00 (.03)	.95
Government/opposit. Party	-.42 (.18)	.02	—		-.38 (.16)	.02
Right-wing Party	.04 (.17)	.84	—		-.02 (.16)	.91
Country (ref = Israel)	—		—		—	
Belgium	-.38 (.25)	.13	-.09 (.26)	.74	.14 (.33)	.66
Canada	-.19 (.25)	.44	.07 (.29)	.82	.10 (.33)	.76
<i>Story level</i>						
Negative News	—		.23 (.27)	.39	.27 (.29)	.35
Political Conflict	—		.69 (.22)	.00	.72 (.23)	.00
Popular Newspaper	—		.28 (.19)	.15	.28 (.20)	.17
Prominence	—		.02 (.02)	.29	.02 (.02)	.33
Constant	6.29 (.37)	.00	5.55 (.25)	.00	5.33 (.45)	.00
Var. between resp.	.77		1.19		.69	
Var. within resp.	2.54		2.28		1.32	
AIC (0-model = 6,032)	5,864		6,032		5,863	
Total N	1,934		1,996		1,934	
N respondents	395		407		393	
N stories	380		380		380	

There is less going on in these models. Hardly any variable has a significant effect on politicians' perceptions of public priorities. On the politician level, government party politicians do estimate the public's preference for political action to be higher than opposition party members. Maybe they feel more pressure of public opinion to act than opposition party representatives do? And, on the story level, representatives believe the public cares more about stories that entail political conflict. We saw the same effect of *Political Conflict* in the citizens' models in Table 2. For the rest, no variables exert any influence on politicians' public priority perceptions.

Now that we have an idea of what drives actual public priorities and the perception of those priorities by politicians, we can proceed with examining the accuracy of politicians' perceptions. As explained above, the dependent variable is the absolute and reversed

(subtracted from 10) difference between actual and perceived public priority per news story. **Table 4** below presents the evidence. It contains four multilevel models predicting *Perceptual Accuracy*. The first and second model are politician models; citizens are kept at their mean and there is only variation at the politician and the story level. The third and the fourth model are the citizen models; there is only variance at the citizen level and at the story level, while for the politicians a simple mean across all politicians with regard to every story is taken.

Table 4 - Determinants of representatives' public priority perceptions accuracy

	Model 1 Politicians	Model 2 Politicians	Model 3 Citizens	Model 4 Citizens
	Coef.(s.e.) Sig.	Coef.(s.e.) Sig.	Coef.(s.e.) Sig.	Coef.(s.e.) Sig.
<i>Representative level</i>				
Role Perception (delegate) (H1)	.05 (.02) .02	.05 (.02) .02	—	—
Political Experience (H2)	.00 (.01) .86	.00 (.01) .90	—	—
Gender (man)	.03 (.08) .70	.03 (.08) .73	—	—
Top Politician	.10 (.14) .48	.13 (.13) .33	—	—
Local Politician	-.01 (.10) .91	-.02 (.10) .83	—	—
Specialization	.00 (.01) .96	.00 (.01) .06	—	—
Government Party	-.11 (.09) .23	-.12 (.09) .18	—	—
Right-wing Party	.02 (.09) .82	-.00 (.09) .98	—	—
Country (ref = Israel)	—	—	—	—
Belgium	.26 (.13) .05	.38 (.15) .01	.55 (.04) .00	.49 (.05) .00
Canada	.13 (.13) .32	.18 (.15) .24	.32 (.04) .00	.17 (.05) .00
<i>Story level</i>				
Negative News (H3)	—	.30 (.12) .01	—	.17 (.04) .00
Political Conflict (H4)	—	.14 (.09) .12	—	.23 (.05) .00
Popular Newspaper	—	-.01 (.08) .87	—	-.01 (.03) .71
Prominence	—	-.00 (.01) .88	—	-.00 (.00) .99
<i>Citizen level</i>				
Gender (man) (H5)	—	—	-.11 (.03) .00	-.05 (.03) .16
Education (H6)	—	—	.04 (.02) .01	.04 (.02) .04
Political Interest (H7)	—	—	.05 (.01) .00	.01 (.01) .07
News Media Use (H8)	—	—	.01 (.01) .02	-.00 (.01) .99
Age	—	—	-.00 (.00) .00	-.00 (.00) .01
Constant	1.90 (.20) .00	2.08 (.22) .00	3.19 (.09) .00	2.98 (.15) .00
Variance between respondents	.45	.40	.75	.53
Variance within respondents	1.28	.35	1.74	.62
AIC (AIC empty politician model = 6,830 and AIC empty citizens model = 62,277)	6,620	6,620	61,090	61,086
Total N	1,934	1,934	31,119	15,265
N respondents	395	395	6,031	5,144
N stories	380	380	380	380

Note: coefficients with p<.05 are marked in bold.

Let us start with looking at the country differences. Although we argued that we should be very careful with drawing comparative conclusions based on only three country cases, in most

models in Table 4 the Canadian and especially the Belgian politicians do significantly better than the Israeli ones in estimating public priorities. Note that the differences between the Belgian and Canadian MPs are not significant—we ran the analyses taking the Canadian group as the reference category and found no difference between Canadians and Belgians. We find Israeli representatives to be systematically less accurate in their estimates of what the public wants. It is hard to come up with an explanation for that fact; is it a matter of the Israeli electoral system that makes members of the Knesset less capable of reading public opinion or it rather is a matter of Israeli public opinion being more elusive and harder to read for politicians? Or, maybe this is a methodological artefact as the stories selected in the three countries are not comparable. We do not know, for instance, whether media coverage in the three countries is similar or even whether the three newspapers we chose to select stories from are comparable. Therefore, we consider the three countries primarily as a test of whether our findings are generalizable to countries with different political and media systems and with different public opinions rather than as a measure of systemic differences in how politicians across countries assess public priorities.

In Model 1 and Model 2, politicians' *Role Perception* seems to matter. Hypothesis 1 thus gets confirmation from the evidence. Representatives who consider it their role to carry out the public's preferences (delegates) hold more accurate perceptions than those who say to act on behalf of the citizens (trustees). The difference is small but significant. On the 10-point scale of politicians' role perceptions (going from trustee towards delegate), the 10-point accuracy scale goes up by .05 point with every step. *Political Experience* does not matter, though. It is not the case that more experienced politicians have (developed) a better sense of what the public wants. Hypothesis 2 is rejected. A whole series of control variables on the representative level do not produce significant effects either. Top politicians do not do better than ordinary politicians; national politicians with an additional local mandate do not do better than politicians with only a national mandate; specialized politicians are not better guessers; and the same applies to right-wing or to government politicians. This last finding contradicts previous work (e.g. Belchior, 2014; Broockman & Skovron, 2015) suggesting that ideology is associated with the accuracy of elites' perceptions. All in all, there do not seem to be too much systematic differences between representatives.

We formulated two hypotheses on the story level and they both get (although partially) support from the evidence. First, as predicted by Hypothesis 3, *Negative News* leads to more accurate perceptions. Negative stories inspire the public to attribute greater political priority to them (see Table 2) and this seems to bring the perceptions of politicians closer to reality. Negativity thus increases the chance of adequate representation, it is significant in all models. If politicians are confronted with negative news instead of neutral or positive coverage, the accuracy scale grasping public importance goes up with no less than .3. When citizens on the other hand read about negative events, the 10-point accuracy scale goes up with .17. The other variable of interest on the story level is *Political Conflict*. Confirming Hypothesis 4, the public priority of news stories that imply a conflict between political actors is estimated systematically more accurate by representatives (although not significant in

Model 2). Political conflict increases the importance citizens attribute to the news story (Table 2) *and* it increases the importance as perceived by politicians (Table 3). The overall effect in Model 4 is significant: When citizens are confronted with news stories entailing political conflict, the 10-point accuracy scale goes up with .23. So, conflictual stories increase the odds of democratic representation. The visibility of public opinion probably goes up with conflict, as well as the efforts politicians undertake to assess what the public wants.

Now, we look in models 3 and 4 at differences across citizens. The results in these models are a little harder to understand. The politicians are kept constant here and the question is how politicians, taken together, estimate the public priority of each event encapsulated in a news story: do their priority perceptions come closer to the priorities of specific population groups? We argued that this could point to a projection mechanism: the priorities of some groups are projected onto the priorities of the population as a whole. Hypothesis 5 held that men's priorities would dominate women's. But this is not the case, even the opposite is true in the two models of interest. The hypothesis must be rejected. Somehow politicians take women's priorities more into account when they develop ideas about how the population thinks about a specific event. This finding could be explained by the fact that women generally perceive stories as more important than men. Additionally, politicians generally slightly overrate public priorities, which is why women's priorities turn out to be better guessed.

The three other citizen-level hypotheses do receive support from the data. The priorities of the higher educated are projected onto the population as a whole, confirming Hypothesis 6. We argued that this effect is probably due to the fact that politicians themselves are higher educated and are personally surrounded by the higher educated. For every step on the 5-point education scale, the 10-point accuracy scale goes up by .04. The same pattern appears with regard to *Political Interest* (Hypothesis 7): the priorities of the highly interested dominate politicians' perceptions of public opinion as a whole. It is actually the case that the priorities of the politically interested are more easily observable for elites and/or that elites put greater effort in getting to know this group's opinion. For every step on the 10-point political interest scale, the 10-point accuracy scale goes up by .05. Hypothesis 8 expected that those who consume a lot of news—another measure of political sophistication—would have more impact on the priorities politicians attribute to the population as a whole. Again, the evidence seems to corroborate the hypothesis, at least in Model 3. With every step on the 16-point scale that grasps citizens' media consumption the accuracy scale goes up by .01. So, we find again the same pattern of some population segments, the politically stronger, to have more impact on what politicians think the population as a whole wants.

All models presented so far drew on an aggregated dataset including all observations in all countries together. To further and more formally test whether the results found in the aggregate analyses combining the data in the three countries apply to the countries separately, we ran the analyses showed in Table 4 again for each of the countries independently. Results are to be found in **Table A1-3** in the appendix. Some of the aggregate results seem to be confirmed in each country separately, but this is certainly not always the

case. With regard to the representative level variables, the same pattern occurs in the different countries. The variable role perception is not always significant, but the coefficients do point in the same direction.

The pattern regarding the news story features is more messy, which is probably related to the fact that the number of stories shrinks considerably when doing separate country analyses (In Belgium, the number of news stories is 151, in Israel 70 and in Canada 159). Additionally, the messiness is also caused by the fact that the selected news stories differ according to the country at stake. In Canada, for example, the average level of political conflict in media stories is much higher (.53 compared to .44 in Israel and only .27 in Belgium). In Israel, the news is much more negative with an average score of .48 compared to .29 in Canada and only .17 in Belgium. These differences in news stories may also change the way politicians in the three countries process conflictual and negative news and how they project the importance they devote themselves to these types of news to the public at large. We find a strong effect of negative news in Israel, while the fact that news stories contain political conflict seems to only be of importance in Canada. Whether stories got covered in the popular press—remember that this variable had no effect in the aggregate analyses—merely matters significantly in Belgium (but in the two other countries as well it goes in the same direction). With regard to the prominence of news stories, coefficients are not significant, but they also point in the same direction in the three countries.

At the citizen level, similarly messy results are generated when splitting up the aggregate results per country. The positions of educated and politically interested citizens are projected onto the entire population in many models (though the effect is not significant in all countries). Age only matters in Canada and gender is merely of interest in Belgium.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

We know from previous work that the perceptions politicians hold about what citizens want them to do matter, both theoretically and empirically. Theoretically, these perceptions form one of the most important ways in which democratic representation can come about. Empirically, there is an emerging literature showing that elite perceptions are consequential and exert considerable influence on what representatives undertake in reality. Notwithstanding the obvious importance of representatives' perceptions, there is remarkably little work about the accuracy of elites' perceptions of public opinion. This study tackled this important void in the representation field.

We outlined a theoretical framework to start thinking about politicians' perceptual accuracy. Politicians' accuracy depends on their willingness to correctly assess the public's preferences on the one hand, and on their capacity to do so on the other hand. Politicians' willingness and capacity, we argued, depends on features of politicians themselves, on features of the news story they gauge the public's priority of, and on subgroups of the population. In other words: some politicians are more than others willing and able to correctly estimate the public's preferences, for some events more than for other, and for some

population group's preferences politicians are more willing and able to take them into account when making up their mind about what the population as a whole wants.

This framework was tested drawing on a novel design implemented in three countries with widely diverging political systems. On all three levels of explanation, some predictors significantly affected politicians' perceptual accuracy but the overall explanatory power of our models remained limited. So, our framework holds the track but more work needs to be done.

Summarizing, there are few systematic differences across representatives in their perceptual accuracy. Overall, it is not the case that politicians' guesses are widely off. On the contrary, we found politicians in the three countries to be quite good at guessing what their voters want them to take action upon. Interestingly, though, the representational role politicians adhere to—whether they want to faithfully translate the populations' wishes into political action or rather act in the interest of citizens—does matter. Representatives with a delegate role definition have a better sense of what the public wants. This is a relevant finding since previous work on role definitions did not find role definitions to exert any measurable impact on what politicians do. We find that roles matter for how politicians look at reality.

Previous work found that perceptual accuracy varies across issues but it was hardly able to come up with an explanation of what it is in issues that matters. Our evidence suggests that news stories with a negative valence and stories entailing political conflict lead to better perceptual accuracy. When events are defined as problems and when there is a political battle going on about them, then politicians are more motivated to correctly assess public opinion and probably public opinion itself is more easily readable as well. In sum, negativity and conflict produce better representation or, at least, they generate more accurate elite perceptions that, in turn, may lead to more democratic representation.

Our most interesting findings relate to representational inequality. We found proof of the fact that politically stronger groups—the highly educated, the politically interested and the news attentive citizens—exert a disproportionately large effect on what elites consider to be the preferences of the population as a whole. When representatives are asked to make up their mind about what the public at large considers to be a political priority, they primarily look at the preferences of the strong and project those on the population as a whole. Our evidence offers a novel perspective to the booming literature on unequal representation. The worse off are not just less well represented in representatives' *deeds* but already in the preceding *perceptions* representatives hold. What emerges from our data is that there is an initial perceptual bias against the priorities of the lower educated or the politically inactive. So, part of the unequal representation in behavior is probably caused by underlying unequal perceptions. As far as we can tell, our study is the first to show that representational inequality may actually be co-produced by biased perceptions of political elites (see also: Miler, 2007, 2010).

The largest limitation of our work is that while our theoretical framework distinguished the willingness from the capacity of politicians to get to know what the public wants, our measures did not allow to demarcate both mechanisms in an empirical fashion. In fact, most predictors of perceptual accuracy we used here (e.g. negatively valenced stories) can be

considered as proxies of both politicians' willingness and of their capacity to correctly perceive popular preferences. Further work should definitely include measures that more clearly tap into one of the two mechanisms. Another limitation is that we only looked into the priorities for action, while a good deal of representation is related to the positional preferences of citizens. It remains to be seen whether politicians' perceptions of the public's positional preferences suffer from the same biases.

In closing, we believe to have showed a way forward for research about elites' perceptions of public opinion. There is very little research on elite perceptions, although it is evidently important for democratic representation. What representatives think about the people they represent is to some extent biased in a predictable and systematic fashion. These biases in elite perceptions deserve more attention from political scientists than they received so far².

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² For next versions of the paper, here are some thing we might consider. Control for issue content; it may be the case that there is more overweighing and/or overrating for some issues than for others. For example, it may be the case that for economic or financial issues the priorities of the higher educated matter more than for social or welfare issues. Control for the distribution of public opinion; it could be that for some stories there is a bimodal distribution which may affect how politician perceive the priority. Interact the receiver and news story features; it could be, for instance, that the lower educated are after all better 'perceived' when it comes to prominent (and thus rather visible) news stories. Another option may be to disaggregate on the politicians' side to check whether some groups of voters match some groups of politicians (e.g. female-female). Or, test a motivated reasoning argument and see whether politicians' guesses are more far off when it comes to issues their party is the owner off.

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APPENDIX: SEPARATE COUNTRY ANALYSES

Table A1- Determinants of representatives' public priority perceptions accuracy in Belgium

	Model 1 Politicians	Model 2 Politicians	Model 3 Citizens	Model 4 Citizens
	Coef.(s.e.)Sig.	Coef.(s.e.)Sig.	Coef.(s.e.)Sig.	Coef.(s.e.) Sig
<i>Representative level</i>				
Role Perception (delegate) (H1)	.07 (.03) .03	.07 (.03) .02	—	—
Political Experience (H2)	-.00 (.01) .50	.00 (.01) .56	—	—
Gender (man)	.09 (.10) .37	.08 (.09) .38	—	—
Top Politician	.06 (.17) .73	.08 (.17) .66	—	—
Local Politician	-.01 (.10) .92	-.01 (.10) .89	—	—
Specialization	.01 (.02) .50	.01 (.02) .46	—	—
Gov./opp. Party	-.17 (.12) .14	-.17 (.11) .13	—	—
Right-wing Party	.17 (.12) .14	.14 (.12) .22	—	—
<i>Story level</i>				
Negative News (H3)	—	-.02 (.17) .92	—	.20 (.14) .17
Political Conflict (H4)	—	.19 (.12) .09	—	.15 (.11) .19
Popular Newspaper	—	.02 (.10) .85	—	.24 (.09) .01
Prominence	—	-.02 (.02) .25	—	-.03 (.02) .09
<i>Citizen level</i>				
Gender (man) (H5)	—	—	-.13 (.06) .02	-.12 (.05) .03
Education (H6)	—	—	-.01 (.03) .65	-.00 (.03) .89
Political Interest (H7)	—	—	.02 (.01) .03	.02 (.01) .05
News Media Use (H8)	—	—	-.01 (.01) .41	-.01 (.01) .20
Age	—	—	-.00 (.00) .40	-.00 (.00) .30
Constant	1.66 (.27) .00	1.62 (.27) .00	2.09 (.17) .00	2.13 (.18) .00
Variance between respondents	.45	.22	.68	.36
Variance within respondents	1.24	.42	1.61	.59
AIC (empty politicians model = 4,457; empty citizens model = 24,808)	4,334	4,339	24,465	24,462
Total N	1,281	1,281	6,299	6,299
N respondents	262	262	1,933	1,933
N stories	151	151	151	151

Note: coefficients with p<.05 are marked in bold.

Table A2- Determinants of representatives' public priority perceptions accuracy in Israel

	Model 1 Politicians	Model 2 Politicians	Model 3 Citizens	Model 4 Citizens
	Coef.(s.e.)Sig.	Coef.(s.e.)Sig.	Coef.(s.e.)Sig.	Coef.(s.e.) Sig
<i>Representative level</i>				
Role Perception (delegate) (H1)	-.09 (.06) .12	-.10 (.05) .06	—	—
Political Experience (H2)	.02 (.02) .31	.02 (.01) .27	—	—
Gender (man)	-.22 (.25) .37	-.22 (.22) .33	—	—
Top Politician	.17 (.29) .56	.17 (.27) .53	—	—
Local Politician	—	—	—	—
Specialization	-.01 (.04) .83	-.01 (.04) .72	—	—
Gov./opp. Party	-.37 (.27) .17	-.41 (.25) .10	—	—
Right-wing Party	.07 (.25) .79	.09 (.23) .70	—	—
<i>Story level</i>				
Negative News (H3)	—	.87 (.30) .00	—	.50 (.21) .02
Political Conflict (H4)	—	.07 (.24) .76	—	.01 (.18) .95
Popular Newspaper	—	-.00 (.25) .99	—	.11 (.17) .53
Prominence	—	.01 (.01) .42	—	.00 (.01) .53
<i>Citizen level</i>				
Gender (man) (H5)	—	—	-.13 (.08) .09	-.12 (.08) .12
Education (H6)	—	—	.09 (.05) .04	.08 (.04) .07
Political Interest (H7)	—	—	.04 (.02) .04	.04 (.02) .02
News Media Use (H8)	—	—	.01 (.02) .48	.02 (.02) .34
Age	—	—	-.00 (.00) .72	.00 (.00) .66
Constant	1.56 (.54) .00	2.01 (.54) .00	3.30 (.27) .00	3.71 (.31) .00
Variance between respondents	.49	.44	.49	.52
Variance within respondents	1.38	.40	1.38	.67
AIC (empty politicians model = 1,076; empty citizens model = 22,554)	1,008	1,008	21,811	21,806
Total N	282	282	282	3,597
N respondents	58	58	58	1,058
N stories	70	70	70	70

Note: coefficients with p<.05 are marked in bold.

Table A3- Determinants of representatives' public priority perceptions accuracy in Canada

	Model 1 Politicians	Model 2 Politicians	Model 3 Citizens	Model 4 Citizens
	Coef.(s.e.)Sig	Coef.(s.e.)Sig	Coef.(s.e.)Sig	Coef.(s.e.) Sig
<i>Representative level</i>				
Role Perception (delegate) (H1)	.07 (.04) .12	.07 (.04) .08	—	—
Political Experience (H2)	-.02 (.01) .04	-.02 (.01) .01	—	—
Gender (man)	-.03 (.19) .86	-.03 (.16) .87	—	—
Top Politician	.03 (.43) .94	.20 (.36) .58	—	—
Local Politician	— ³	—	—	—
Specialization	-.01 (.04) .83	.06 (.03) .05	—	—
Gov./opp. Party	-.37 (.27) .17	.01 (.17) .97	—	—
Right-wing Party	.07 (.25) .79	-.38 (.17) .03	—	—
<i>Story level</i>				
Negative News (H3)	—	.18 (.21) .39	— .44	.12 (.15) .44
Political Conflict (H4)	—	.20 (.17) .25	— .01	.33 (.13) .01
Popular Newspaper	—	.18 (.22) .44	— .45	-.12 (.16) .45
Prominence	—	-.15 (.08) .06	— .22	.07 (.06) .22
<i>Citizen level</i>				
Gender (man) (H5)	—	—	.03 (.06) .28	.06 (.06) .28
Education (H6)	—	—	.04 (.06) .05	.06 (.03) .05
Political Interest (H7)	—	—	.00 (.01) .65	-.01 (.01) .65
News Media Use (H8)	—	—	.00 (.01) .79	.00 (.01) .79
Age	—	—	-.00 (.00) .02	-.00 (.00) .02
Constant	1.80 (.29) .00	1.71 (.32) .00	2.46 (.19) .00	2.55 (.23) .00
Variance between respondents	.32	.53	.69	.63
Variance within respondents	1.33	.04	1.81	.60
AIC (empty politicians pol. = 1,297; empty citizens model = 14,824)	1,297	1,281	14,741	14,741
Total N	371	371	5,369	5,369
N respondents	75	75	2,153	2,153
N stories	159	159	159	159

Note: coefficients with p<.05 are marked in bold.

³ Omitted because of multicollinearity.

