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TITLE

Why should parental leave policies (not) be implemented?

A frame analysis of French-speaking Swiss press articles: 1999-2009

Research paper

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SWISS NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

The National Centres of Competence in Research (NCCR) are a research instrument of the Swiss National Science Foundation.



Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research

* A similar version of this Working Paper has been published in *Population Review*, (2010) 49(2), where the accent is placed on the status of fertility discourse in media coverage.. It can be accessed at http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/population_review/v049/49.2.valarino.html. Please cite the journal article.

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Abstract

This paper analyses the media coverage of parental leave policies (*parental* and *paternity* leaves) in Swiss French-speaking press articles from 1999 to 2009. Switzerland is one of the rare European countries, which has no statutory *parental* or *paternity* leave. The aim is to describe the mediatisation of these policies and to analyse the arguments in favour and against their implementation. We proceed with a content analysis of 579 press articles, as well as a frame analysis on a subset in which parental leave policies are the central theme (N=206). Results show that *paternity* leave is the predominant public issue addressed in the dataset. A mediatisation peak was reached in 2007, following an initiative of a member of the Federal executive to implement a short *paternity* leave. Parental leave policies are predominantly represented in a positive light. The primary positive frame is economic, in which leaves are represented as serving the interests of companies. Involved fatherhood and gender equality are also frequently mentioned as positive frames. The main negative frame presents parental leaves policies as secondary measures which are not truly necessary. Also, financial costs, for the employers and for society at large are frequently mentioned. We discuss the predominance of the economic frame in the media coverage of parental leave policies and suggest future avenues of research on parental leave policies in Switzerland.

Keywords

Parental leave policies | Gender | Media analysis

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****LIVES Working Papers is a work-in-progress online series. Each paper receives only limited review. Authors are responsible for the presentation of facts and for the opinions expressed therein which do not necessarily reflect those of the Swiss National Competence Center in Research LIVES.**

1. Introduction¹

In 2009, Switzerland was one of the only countries member of the Council of Europe that had no legal provision for parental leave (Wall, Pappamikail, Leita, and Marinho, 2009, p. 36). However, the past decade has seen a rapid increase of political projects in favour of the implementation of parental leave policies at the federal level. Moreover, several private and public organizations have started implementing leave for their male employees. The emergence of parental leave policies in the Swiss political and economic spheres has been covered by the media. We are interested in the ways in which parental leave policies are represented – or framed – in the written French-speaking press. Are they presented in a negative or positive way? What arguments are used in the media to justify or reject parental leave policies' implementation?

So far, no research has examined the representations of parental leave policies in the Swiss media. Nonetheless, media coverage is an important component of public opinion formation (e.g. Gamson and Modigliani, 1989; McCombs and Shaw, 1972), as well as policy action (e.g. Bacchi, 1999; Yanovitzky, 2002). Thus, media representations of parental leave policies could possibly play a key role in the future development of the policy. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the production of meaning around parental leave policies in press articles published from 1999 to 2009.

To begin with, an overview of the Swiss context is proposed. Secondly, we define what frame analysis is, and we justify having chosen it as the theoretical approach for interpreting the empirical data. Thirdly, we describe our data and methodological approach. Fourthly, we provide a quantification of the media coverage of parental leave policies and the frames mobilised in favour of and against parental leave policies. Finally, we conclude by summarising the main results and suggest future avenues of research.

2. The Swiss context

2.1 Population policies

Public policy interventions in family issues in Switzerland are rather limited. In 2005, the percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) allocated to family and youth policies was only 1.3% (Office Fédéral de la Statistique, 2008). In comparison with other European countries, Swiss family policies are extremely moderate. A governmental report on families in 2004 (Office Fédéral des Assurances Sociales, 2004) included explicit recommendations to develop family policies.

Federal² maternity leave was implemented in 2004 only; it grants mothers 80% of their salary for 14 weeks. This policy is the result of sixty years of political struggles and four consecutive failures in popular votes³ (Aebi, Dessoulavy, and Scenini, 1994; Dafflon, 2003; Pannatier, 2000; Sutter, Belser, Chaponnière, and Salazar Pesenti, 2001). The late adoption of maternity leave has delayed claims for paternity and parental leave. Only since 2004 have parliamentary propositions in favour of (paid or unpaid) paternity and parental leaves been increasingly addressed at the federal level. Recently, the Federal committee of coordination of family issues has proposed a six-months paid parental leave (Baumann *et al.*, 2010).

The past decade has also seen an increasing number of private companies (Canning Wacker and Dalla Palma, 2005)⁴ and public administrations (Charvoz, 2010; Fuchs, 2004b, 2008) granting fathers short paid paternity leaves as well as unpaid parental leaves. These leaves - implemented on a voluntary basis or negotiated with labour unions - are financed entirely by work organisations. Currently (2010), the Swiss federal law⁵ entitles male employees to a minimum of one day of paid time-off in case of fatherhood.

2.2. Family patterns

Switzerland belongs to a group of industrialized countries with fertility rates well under replacement level. In 2009, the total fertility rate (TFR) was 1.5 children per woman⁶. Although it has been increasing slightly since 2001, the general trend has seen a constant decrease since the 1960s (Office Fédéral de la Statistique, 2009a). In parallel, the mean age at which women have their first child has been increasing. It reached 31 years in 2008 (Office Fédéral de la Statistique, 2009b); almost two-thirds of women were 30 years old or over when they had their first child (Office Fédéral de la Statistique, 2009a). Andersson (2008) suggests that countries with the most traditional family practices, such as high marriage rates, low divorce rates and low out-of-wedlock birth rates, show the lowest fertility rates. In Switzerland, marriage is the preferred living arrangement for couples entering parenthood (Le Goff and Ryser, 2010). The number of births out-of-wedlock remains low (17.1% of total births in 2008) in comparison to other European countries (Office Fédéral de la Statistique, 2009b).

The most common heterosexual family organisation in Switzerland is “modernised family traditionalism” (Levy, Widmer, and Kellerhals, 2002). It is a modified version of the male breadwinner model where the female partner contributes to family finances, but to a lesser extent than the male. She remains mainly in charge of family life and duties. In 2008, women in households with at least one child under seven spent 59 hours per week on family and domestic tasks, whereas fathers allocated 32 hours (Office Fédéral de la Statistique, 2009c). Comparatively to other European countries, Switzerland shows a high rate of female employment (71.6% of women of working age) (Wall et al., 2009, p. 17). However, the majority of them work part-time. Among the total active population (15-65 years), 57% of women were working part-time in 2008 compared to only 13% of men (Office Fédéral de la Statistique, 2008). This proportion rises to 65.7% when considering women living in couple with at least one child between 7 and 14 years old⁷.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Frame analysis

We analyse the constructions of meaning in press articles devoted to parental leave policies. We pay particular attention to the ways in which they contribute to their construction as public problems or not (Blumer, 1971; Cefaï, 1996; Hilgartner and Bosk, 1988; Kitsuse and Spector, 1973). To do so we use *frame analysis* in a social constructionist perspective. *Frame analysis* is frequently applied in media sociology (e.g. Gamson and Modigliani, 1989) and in political science (e.g. Verloo, 2007). “Framing” refers to the ways in which the media and the audience attribute particular meanings to events and to how they are organised. On the one hand mass media have a strong impact by constructing reality, and on the other hand these effects are limited by the interaction of the audience with the messages and their interpretation of them (Scheufele, 1999, p. 105).

Entman defines *framing* as follows: “To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (1993, p. 52). Similarly, for Gamson and Modigliani (1989), media discourse is a set of “interpretive packages” that give meaning to an issue. These “packages” or “framings” are manifold and give rise to controversies.

Framing processes of issues can be part of their *agenda-setting* (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). *Agenda* refers to the “awareness of the existence of an object and the relative importance we think it has; it takes the form of a hierarchical list of themes of preoccupation” (Charron, 1995, p. 81, our translation). An efficient framing allows the attracting of attention and the interest of the

political, media, and/or public spheres. It positions an issue at the top of the corresponding agendas. The process consists of transforming any difficult situation (there are an infinite number of them) into a public issue.

However, the space within political and media agendas is limited, as is public attention. Potential public problems are therefore in competition with one another (Jones and Baumgartner, 2004). They depend to a large extent on the mobilization of efficient *causal stories* by actors who are active in the framing processes (Stone, 1989). These actors aim at depicting a situation as unacceptable and attribute the responsibility to individuals or groups: "Problem definition is a process of image making, where the images have to do fundamentally with attributing cause, blame, and responsibility" (p. 282). The resolution of the problem is often presented as involving state intervention. However, agenda setting does not operate on logical bases; the most serious situations are not necessarily on top of the agenda. Quite the opposite, agenda-setting is influenced by power relations, which take place between informants (sources), the media, and the interactions between them (Reese, 1991).

For the purpose of this paper, we concentrate on the place of parental leave policies on the *media* agenda and on their framing through media production. We address the mediatisation – in other words the coverage by the media – of parental leave policies in two ways. First, we assess the number of articles published about the issues and describe the context of enunciation (e.g. the newspaper and the section in which the articles were issued). Second, we analyse the various positive and negative framings of parental leave policies and the meanings attached to them.

The framing of parental leave policies

Parental leave policies are emerging issues in Switzerland and only few studies have addressed this topic yet (Brandalesi, 2010; Fuchs, 2004a, 2008; Grandjean, 2008; Mayor Genevay, 2005). As there exists no research on the media representations of parental leave policies, we present some observations of the framing of parental leave policies in the political sphere.

Grandjean (2008) analysed parenthood representations in maternity and parental leave policies' debates at the Parliament from 1945 to 2004. She observed that in the 1940s, the debates about family policies were oriented towards the strengthening of the male breadwinner status. In the 1980s, a progressive political proposition (leftist and feminist) was debated and antagonist representations of gender relations were opposed (roughly, egalitarian vs. essentialist). Finally in the 1990s, gender relations were not problematised. The debates were very much centred on the financing of the maternity leave (pp. 64-66). In an analysis of the 1999 proposition of a maternity leave (which was rejected by popular vote), Pannatier (2000) also highlights the centeredness of the debates on the financing of maternity leave. She concludes that this framing had the effect of silencing issues such as social justice, work and family reconciliation and gender relations in the public and political spheres.

3.2 The written media in Switzerland

Written media are important vectors of information and representations in Switzerland. The press has been through important upheavals due to the competition of other media, such as the Internet. This trend has led to the reduction in the number of newspapers (daily and weekly).⁸ However, this concentration of media does not seem to have much affected the reading habits of the population residing in Switzerland, as the local newspaper take-up remains relatively high.

Newspapers are the most read written media in Switzerland (Office fédéral de la statistique, 2010). In 2008, 97% of the residing population over 15 had read newspapers and seven persons out of ten had read them intensively (5 to 7 days a week) (p. 5). In international comparison, Swiss residents have relatively intense reading habits. Out of 17 European countries, Switzerland ranked

6th with regard to the percentage of population reading on average half an hour to an hour per day⁹.

4. Data and methodology

The dataset includes 579 press articles published in nine daily newspapers in the French-speaking part of Switzerland¹⁰ (see Appendix). We present hereafter the characteristics of the dataset:

- Target readership: three newspapers are supra-regional, with a Swiss French-speaking identity. Among them, one is a reference newspaper and the two others are broad public newspapers. Six are published in a specific French-speaking canton and share a regional identity (Amez-Droz, 2007).
- Access: eight newspapers are sold, and one (supra-regional) newspaper is free.
- Time period: articles were published between January 1st, 1999 and December 31st, 2009. A ten-year coverage is a good compromise to give a reasonable overview of the yearly evolution of press articles and to identify key moments in the mediatisation of parental leave policies and their construction as a public issue.
- Data collection: articles were collected via media databases¹¹. They contain at least once the keywords “paternity leave” or “parental leave”.
- Data limitation: only three newspapers have been digitised and archived since 1999 in the databases. Four newspapers are covered exhaustively from 2006 to 2009, and two newspapers only for 2008 and 2009.

The analysis of the mediatisation is conducted on the total dataset (579 articles). A set of attributes was selected in order to perform the content analysis (see Table 1). In the first step, the aim is to describe parental leave policies’ mediatisation with these attributes and to outline their status on the media agenda. In a second step, a frame analysis is conducted on a subset of the total dataset (206 articles). This subset includes only articles, which address centrally paternity or parental leave. It represents 36% of the total number of articles (see Table 2).

Table 1. Attributes and criteria for the content analysis of press articles

Attributes	Criteria
Newspaper	<i>Le Matin; Le Temps; 24 Heures; Tribune de Genève; La Liberté; Le Nouvelliste; Quotidien Jurassien; Express/Impartial; 20 Minutes</i>
Year of publication	1999; 2000; 2001; 2002; 2003; 2004; 2005; 2006; 2007; 2008; 2009
Section in the newspaper	front page; editorial; international; national; regional; economy; society; letters to the editor; in brief; sports; other
Public issue (central issue addressed in the article)	paternity leave; parental leave; maternity leave; social policy; reconciliation measure; equality; other
Related theme (general thematic context of the article)	politics; companies; parental role representations; fertility; other
Politics level	foreign; federal; canton level; municipality level; mixed level (federal, cantonal and municipal); lobby

For the frame analysis, we exclude articles where other public issues are at stake, such as maternity leave, social policies, reconciliation measures, equality and other public issues. The reason is that

because these articles only address parental leave policies secondarily, they are not relevant for analysing the ways in which parental leave policies are framed.

Table 2. Dataset (and subset) by public issue

Public Issue	Number of articles	Percentage of total dataset	Analysis performed
Parental leave	46	8	Frame analysis
Paternity leave	160	28	
<i>Parental leave policies subset</i>	206	36	
Maternity leave	33	6	-
Social policy	119	20	
Reconciliation measure	57	10	
Equality	28	5	
Other	136	23	
<i>Various public issues</i>	373	64	
Total dataset	579	100	Content analysis

The management and coding of the dataset were processed with specific software designed for qualitative data analysis (NVivo 8). It allows to qualitatively code and classify a large number of texts according to their content, and at the same time to perform a few quantitative analyses (counting and distribution of attributes and codes). The qualitative coding of the articles was mainly inductive, following the main principles of coding adopted in a grounded theory approach (Strauss, 1987). However, the following thematic axes were defined *a priori* and coded following a top-down procedure: the discourses in favour of or against proposals to implement parental leave policies and the representations of fathers and fatherhood in the articles.

The coding was done in several stages, from more generic to more subtle specifications of the content. Codes were reorganised hierarchically until the coding grid became stable. One advantage of using software is the combination of a quantitative approach with a qualitative insight of the data. For instance, we present on the one hand an overview of the frequency of discourse coded as positive and negative frames. On the other hand, we are able to analyse the construction of meaning in these frames. This is possible thanks to the rapid connection of single extracts with the source articles in which they are embedded. Therefore, this software also presents the advantage of reducing the risk of context and meaning loss.

5. Results

First, we describe the mediatisation of parental leave policies and their status as public issues over the last decade. We describe the year of publication and the public issues addresses. We also report the context of publication of the articles according to the following attributes: related theme, section, and newspaper. Then we analyse their public trajectory, pinpointing the main events that triggered the media productions analysed here. Finally, we present the different frames mobilised in the French-speaking Swiss media.

5.1 Media coverage of parental leave policies

○ Year of publication

The first remarkable result of our investigation is that a significant proportion of articles about parental leave policies were published in 2007. Approximately one-third (32%) of all the press

articles in our dataset and almost half of the subset (45%) were issued during this year. Since 2002, the volume of articles released on the topic has been increasing continuously, reaching a climax in 2007. In 2008, the number of articles fell by more than half, although in 2009, it rose again slightly (see Figure 1).

- Public issue

The main public issue addressed in the total dataset is *paternity* leave. It is the main topic in 28% of the articles, whereas *parental* leave only concern 8% of the total dataset. 20% of the articles address *social policy* measures in general. In this case, *paternity* leave (more than *parental* leave) is mentioned as one of the many diverse social policies that could benefit workers, together with salary increases, job protection, family allowances, reduced working hours and extended length of maternity leave. These articles often describe negotiations between labour unions and employers. Policy measures addressing the *reconciliation* of work and family represent 10% of the all articles. In these articles, parental leave policies are presented as ways of better balancing work and family obligations. Finally, the “parental leave” and “paternity leave” keywords appear in articles that address *maternity leave* and *equality* (6% and 5%, respectively). Approximately one-fourth of the articles did not specifically treat a theme relevant for our research and were coded as *other* (not shown in Figure 1).

- Related theme

The “parental leave” and “paternity leave” keywords are primarily reported in articles addressing *politics* (66%). Among *politics* articles, almost half of the articles concern *federal level* politics (42% of *politics* articles), 26% concern politics at the *canton level*, and 15% concern *foreign* politics (politics of foreign countries or exterior Swiss politics). Other politics sub-themes are less represented in the data: *municipality level* politics and *lobby* (7% each) as well as *mixed levels* and *other* (2% each). Apart from articles addressing *politics*, they are divided between the following related themes: *companies* (13%), *parental role representations* (11%), *fertility* (4%), and *other* (7%).

The comparison of *paternity* and *parental* leave articles’ distribution by related themes reveals interesting elements. *Paternity* and *parental* leave articles are treated in approximately equivalent proportions in relation with all the themes, except for three criteria. First, only *paternity* leave is addressed in articles related to *companies*. Second, *parental* leave is a central topic in articles that recount *foreign politics* (75% of total parental leave policies articles). Third, *parental* leave is also central in articles that tackle *fertility* issues (86% of articles), which is not the case for *paternity* leave articles.

- Newspaper’s section

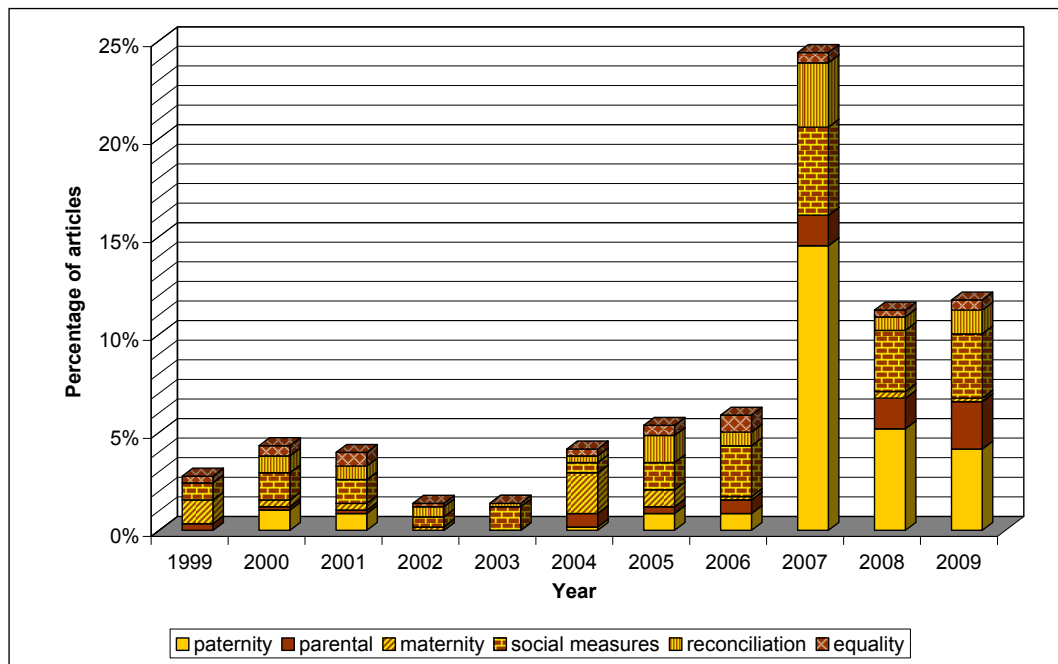
The articles of the total dataset are mainly published in *national* (24%) and *regional* (23%) sections. The rest of the articles are distributed in equivalent proportions among the *editorial* section (which also entails comments and opinions of journalists), the *letters to the editor*, the *international*, the *in brief*, and the *economy* columns. The analysis of the distribution of subset articles reveals that *paternity* leave is predominantly addressed in the *national*, *regional*, and *in brief* columns, whereas *parental* leave is mostly represented in *international* columns.

- Newspaper

There are important differences in the coverage of the issues according to the newspapers’ target audience and identity. From 1999 to 2009 for supra-regional titles, the reference newspaper *Le Temps* published 24% of the total articles, whereas the broad public newspaper *Le Matin* covered only 13%. The comparison between five regional newspapers¹² from 2006 to 2009 reveals that there are significant coverage differences. *La Tribune de Genève* (25%), *24 Heures* (25%), and *La Liberté* (27%) – newspapers of respectively the cantons of Geneva, Vaud, and Fribourg – have

published more articles on parental leave policies than have *Le Nouvelliste* (16%) and *Le Quotidien Jurassien* (8%).

Figure 1 – Percentage of articles published by year and by issue



5.2 Key events of the media agenda-setting

Between 1999 and 2009, articles related to *parental* leave were covered mainly under the international current affairs section of the newspapers analysed here. There were just a few articles concerning *parental* leave projects at the national or local level, contrary to *paternity* leave, which was significantly present on the agenda. Between 1999 and 2006, the mediatisation of parental leave policies was not regular and its fluctuation depended largely on the kind of events that were transformed into “news”. These events mainly concerned foreign countries (notably France, Germany, Austria, and Italy) and the recent modifications of their *parental* leave schemes.

During several weeks in 2007, *paternity* leave reached a priority position on the media agenda. The triggering factor for this peak was the initiative of the federal counsellor Doris Leuthard¹³ in January of 2007, aimed at implementing a paid five-day and an unpaid twenty-day paternity leave for civil servants of the Ministry of the Economy. This announcement was transformed in the following days into a political affair. Some 40 articles covered the emerging public issue between January 9th and 19th 2007. The consequence was the opening of a debate on *paternity* leave and a gain in visibility of the issue. Thanks to the public attention it received, the issue of *paternity* leave emancipated itself from the event that had led to its mediatisation. Articles tended to depart from the political affair and provided more general information on existing *paternity* leave measures in Switzerland in public administrations and in private companies. This change can be interpreted as a rise in potential public attention for *paternity* leave, which was exploited by the media. Other elements confirm this interpretation. First, some media conducted small surveys among their audience to assess public opinion about *paternity* leave (M_20070114_LM¹⁴). Second, journalists asked political actors to position themselves with regard to *paternity* leave implementation within political interviews (M_20071105; 2;_3;_4).

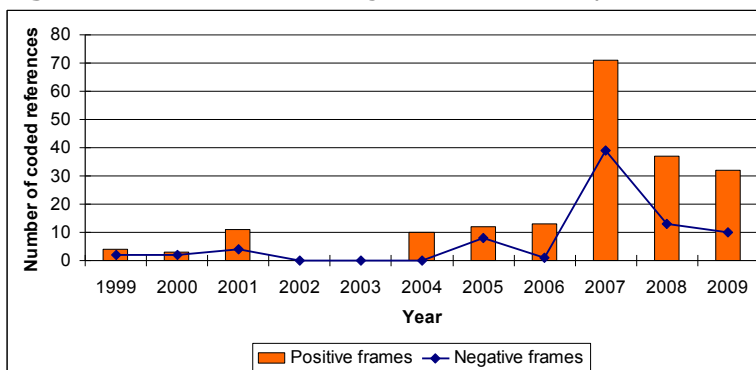
This mediatisation peak did not last long. At the end of 2007, the articles of our dataset followed current affairs with respect to *paternity* leave, such as newly implemented leaves in companies and in public administrations, collective labour agreements, and political projects at the federal level. The volume of articles in 2008 was less than half as important as in 2007. The *parental* leave

schemes of European countries came back onto the media forum, particularly the German case. A group of Swiss associations (masculine, religious, feminist, youth, and family) put *paternity* leave back on the agenda by supporting a federal law in 2008. This civil society initiative is fairly isolated in the mediatisation of parental leave policies and represents an important element for the analysis of social actors' mobilisation. Finally, in 2009 parental leave policies were covered slightly more than in 2008, but the mediatisation still followed external inputs. Overall, parental leave policies have dropped sharply on the media agenda-setting.

5.3 Positive and negative frames of parental leave policies

Between 1999 and 2009, parental leave policies were generally framed in a positive light. The number of coded references in the subset with a positive tone toward the implementation of parental leave policies is more important than those with a negative one (see Figure 2).

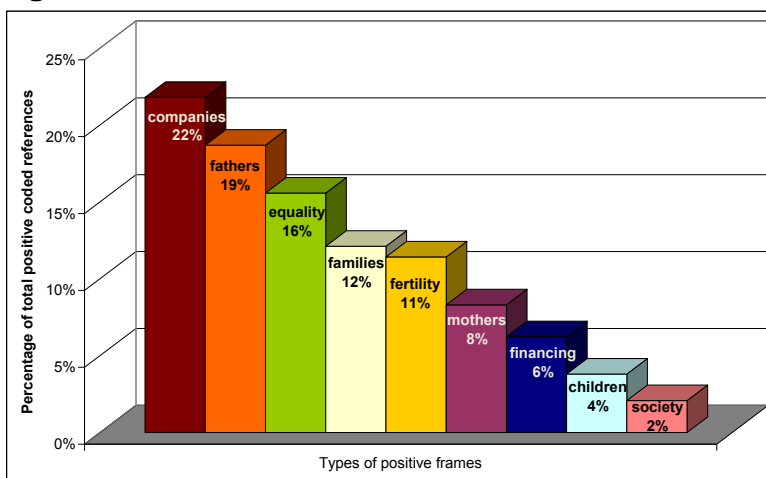
Figure 2 – Positive and negative frames of parental leave policies – subset



Positive frames

The most frequently identified positive frames in the subset present parental leave policies as potentially advantageous for work organisations (22% of the positive frames), for fathers (19%), and for equality (16%) (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 – Positive frames – subset



○ Company benefits frame

The dominant positive frame is economic. It consists of stressing – by using the economic lexical field - the advantages that parental leave policies represent for public and private employers. *Paternity* leave in particular is framed as a means of securing the loyalty of employees and increasing their motivation and productivity. Fathers are described as being unproductive after the birth of their child “because of the emotional shock” (M_20000401_LT). They are also represented

as being better employees if they have taken part in the birth of their child because they are said to have developed useful competences for the company. Expert discourse – however unspecified – is used to ground these opinions:

In Northern Europe, it was proved that paternity leave is beneficial to employers, in public administrations or private companies, because the return on investments is obvious: reinforcement of the employee's loyalty, increase of motivation, stimulation of the will to undertake, decrease of absenteeism, stability of the family unit, etc.¹⁵

[M_20090318_TG_2]

There are two variations of the *company benefits frame*. The first one refers to *paternity* leaves that have been implemented on a voluntary basis by work organisations. The frame stresses the merits of *paternity* leave due to the positive effects it has on the image of the company. In addition, in the context of a shortage of a highly qualified workforce, *paternity* leave is said to facilitate recruitment. Leaves are represented as being flexible and not causing any organisational problems. Public employers develop specific arguments in this particular frame. On the one hand, they consider *paternity* leave as a way of enhancing their competitiveness with the private market in recruitment processes (where companies are often more generous in terms of social privileges and salaries). But on the other hand, they are also framed as wanting to set an example to the private sector companies. As public employers, they should provide model work conditions.

The second variation of the *company benefits frame* refers to statutory *paternity* leaves. It stresses the fact that medium-sized and small companies should be on an equal footing with large ones. The promoters of this frame argue that introducing a federal law would enable these companies to grant a *paternity* leave because it would be financed through direct wage-based taxes. Small and medium-sized companies are said to be currently disadvantaged in the recruitment process because they cannot offer the same range of social benefits as larger national and international companies.

- Involved fatherhood frame

Parental leave policies are framed as being advantageous for fathers, in particular for their relationships with their children. But the frame takes slightly different forms according to the type of leave addressed. Articles that address *paternity* leave in Switzerland present the policy as beneficial because it gives fathers the possibility to take care of their children. In this case, involved fatherhood is considered to reflect the aspirations of fathers themselves. In articles addressing *parental* leave in foreign countries, the policy is represented as an incentive to fathers to invest more in family life, through leaves that are reserved for them (often referred to as "fathers' quotas").

A common element of the *involved fatherhood frame* is the concept of father-child bond. Parental leave policies are considered a means for fathers to develop an emotional bond with their children. Expert discourse and shared representations are used to justify this assumption: "The importance of the role of the father in the child's development" is represented as an observable and scientifically established fact (M_20010613_LM_2).

- Gender equality frame

The *gender equality frame* can be principally identified in articles on *parental* leave. As mentioned above, a variation of the *involved fatherhood frame* presents parental leave schemes as designed to enhance fathers' uptake rates. Articles that cover Germany's *parental* leave often use the *gender equality frame* to represent the transformation of family structures and practices as an objective. An egalitarian division of tasks is set as a goal:

On the playground, in front of schools, in the tram, in the famous Biergarten Prater,¹⁶ young men pushing the pram as perfect routine is now a common image in the neighbourhood. It's the parental leave effect¹⁷ (M_20081031_LT).

The use of the *gender equality frame* in the Swiss context addressing *paternity* leave issues reveals a significantly different meaning: gender equality refers to "mothers' and fathers' equality of rights". *Paternity* leave is represented as the fulfilment of equal social rights between women and men. The implementation of *paternity* leave is seen as the legitimate access of fathers to allowances they have been excluded from. This variation of the equality frame conveys the idea that *paternity* leave is necessary, not because it can foster fathers' involvement in childcare, but because it is just that men are entitled to it as much as mothers.

Negative frames

The *secondary measure frame* gathers the majority of negative representations of parental leave policies (26% of the negative references). The arguments rejecting parental leave policies because of the disadvantages they represent for *companies* represent 22%. The other frames that we could identify are *state intrusion* (18%), *unsatisfactory projects* (15%), and *cost for society* (11%). *Disruption of traditional roles* (5%) and *against mothers* (3%) are minority frames. The latter will not be further developed, as it is scarcely used and only concerning Austria's parental leave scheme.¹⁸

- Secondary measure frame

The main negative frame of parental leave policies consists of denying their necessity and presenting them as secondary measures. Some discourses suggest that parental leave policies are not a priority in comparison with other social insurance measures that need to be stabilized financially. Another element of this frame is the priority of other family policies, such as childcare structures and part-time work options. They are presented as more useful and important than parental leave policies. Moreover, in some articles published before 2004, the fact that maternity leave did not exist at the federal level was presented as a major drawback to the implementation of parental leave measures. Finally, parental leave policies are said not to be urgent because fathers and male employees do not demand them. These elements all support the *secondary measure frame*, which presents parental leave policies as acceptable ideas and hypothetical projects that should, however, be rejected at the present time.

- Unsatisfactory project frame

The *secondary measure frame* combines with the *unsatisfactory project frame*. Here again, the principle of parental leave policies is not contested in itself, but is rejected for a number of reasons. The freely implemented parental leave policies are criticised because they create inequalities between employees of different companies and between companies themselves. Small and medium-sized companies cannot compete with larger ones. In some other cases, parental leave policies are said to be unrealizable because of legal constraints. Finally, further critiques concern the length of leaves, which are considered to be too long.

- Companies' interests frame

The *companies' interests frame* is part of a broader *economic frame*, which is central among the critiques of parental leave policies. Parental leave policies are represented as going against employers' interests because of the additional costs they represent. The *companies' interests frame* makes extensive use of the lexical field of "burden" and "constraint". Employers are represented (through interviews and transcribed direct discourse) as victims constrained to finance new policies. Even when neutral financial options are considered, organizational problems are given as explanations for the rejection of parental leave policies. The absence of an employee is represented as a threat to the company's "organisational balance" (M_20051020_LT).

- Cost for society frame

Under the overarching *economic frame*, we also identified a *cost for society frame*. Parental leave policies represent costs for society at large and taxpayers. This frame is used by individuals (expressed through letters to the editor and a survey of the readership), as well as by political actors, as shown in this excerpt from an interview referring to the implementation of *paternity* leave for civil servants of the federal administration¹⁹:

But the national Counsellor for the canton of Schaffouse does not intend to grant “a pay rise and saddle the taxpayers with it”, as he said²⁰ (M_20070111_LT).

Negative *economic frames* also tend to underline the fact that some parental leave policies propositions do not entail any financing plans. This lack of financial information contributes to discredit parental leave policy projects. Conversely, when parental leave policies are presented as reasonable and financially viable, the *economic frame* becomes positive. Projects are considered to be more concrete and, thus, feasible.

- State intrusion frame

This frame interprets parental leave policies as the institutionalisation of practices that should best be organized within the family unit. It calls on the lexical field of “constraint”; e.g. the use of vocabulary such as “interfere”, “constrain”, and “impose attitudes”. The title of an interview with a Federal Counsellor illustrates such coercive representation:

“I am in favour of a real paternity leave.”

MICHELINE CALMY-REY The President of the Confederation asks men to take charge of domestic tasks (M_20070318_LM).²¹

The *state intrusion frame* is only used to reject the projects of statutory paternity and/or parental leaves. The freely implemented parental leave policies are encouraged and social partnership is represented as the best option. Companies and labour unions should negotiate social measures because parental leave policies are seen as specific measures out of many possible others. This frame promotes a liberal vision of the economy in which collective actors and markets develop common solutions and the state interferes as little as possible.

- Disruption of traditional roles frame

This frame rejects parental leave policies because they go against the traditional male breadwinner role. However, it is seldom used. It rests on an essentialist notion of masculinity and femininity. It is mobilised, for example, by Austrian conservatives in this excerpt: “It is not the role of politics to constrain a man to change diapers if he does not do it naturally²²” (M_20051208_LT). It is also used by a Deputy from the Swiss People’s Party in the canton of Jura²³:

Dominique Baettig (UDC), who was categorically opposed to this “costly gadget” of paternity leave, regretted that “one wants to impose attitudes that are not desired”. Stating that “in the animal kingdom the father is sometimes excluded”, he brought about shocked murmurs and some outraged reactions²⁴ (M_20071025_QJ).

6. Conclusion and discussion

To summarize we will highlight the six main results of our research and point out suggestions for future research on parental leave policies in Switzerland. Firstly, *paternity* leave is the main public issue at stake in the French-speaking media. The fact that *parental* and *paternity* leaves are barely addressed simultaneously in press articles suggests that they are in competition with one another.

In the Swiss context, where no parental leave policies exist (except for maternity leave), *paternity* and *parental* leaves are framed in the media as alternative, and not complementary family policies. In our view, the fact that “fathers” – rather than “parents” – are predominantly represented as (potential) leave recipients is striking and should in our view be investigated further. What does it tell about gender relations? We propose to tackle this question by conducting a discourse analysis of the data and analysing the representations of fathers in the media²⁵.

Secondly, the mediatisation peak was reached in 2007, and since then, the presence of parental leave policies altogether have fallen gradually off the media agenda. The triggering factor for the 2007 peak was a top-down process, initiated by the claim of a Federal counsellor to implement a five-day paid *paternity* leave for civil servants. Interestingly, it is the federal executive body which has contributed the most to publicise the issue of parental leave policy in Switzerland in the last decade. Public and private work organisations granting parental leave policies have also been generally covered. Less represented in the media coverage are the parliamentary interventions on parental leave policies and the actions undertaken by lobbies in favour or against parental leave policies. In order to understand whether this is the result of gatekeeping and selection processes from the media (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996), or if it reflects the actual actions undertaken by political actors and lobbies, further investigations are needed. In order to analyse the framing of parental leave policies in the public sphere, interventions stemming from the legislative body as well as from the economy and the civil society should be taken into account.

Thirdly, the fact that positive frames of parental leave policies are more frequent than negative ones suggests that an overall positive representation was spread during the last decade in the media. The predominant positive frame is the representation of parental leave policies as a measure to serve the interests of companies and employers. We would like to underline the fact that in this frame, freely implemented leaves are represented as possible alternatives to statutory parental leave schemes. It is not clear what consequences this framing will have for their development as statutory rights. On the one hand, public and private work organisations contribute to publicise (the lack of) *paternity* leave in Switzerland. They put the issue on the media agenda, and possibly on the federal political agenda. On the other hand, the positive representation of work organisations which implement leaves could also play against a federal statutory *paternity* leave. It could be argued that this intermediate solution should be encouraged, leaving social partners to negotiate. This argument is observed through the relative frequent presence of what we have called the *State intrusion frame*. Analysing whether this frame is mobilised or not in political debates about parental leave policies would allow to address this issue.

Fourthly, the positive frames *involved fatherhood* and *gender equality* are significantly mobilised. This indicates that the emergence of parental leave policies in the public space triggers gender equal discourses and alternative representations of family patterns including involved fathers. However, this observation should be interpreted cautiously. Indeed, we have seen that *paternity* leaves are presented as *rights* that fathers should be entitled to and not necessarily as tools to enhance father involvement. This latter variation of the *gender equality frame* – which stresses incentives for father involvement – was observed mainly in articles covering *parental* leave in other countries than Switzerland. We can link these observations with the fact that comparatively, the Swiss population has a fairly liberal conception of the role of the State (Armingeon, 2001, pp. 151-152), and that State intervention in the so called “private sphere” is regarded in a rather negative way (Ballestri and Bonoli, 2003; Bühler, 2004; Dafflon, 2003). Here again, a thorough discourse analysis of the data with regard to fatherhood and parental roles’ representation can address this question.

A fifth element we would like to highlight is that the majority of negative frames present parental leave policies as *secondary measures* and as not constituting political priorities. This frame reflects

Switzerland's approach to family policies, "shaped across time by scattered measures which superpose like by sedimentation" (Dafflon, 2003, p. 24, our translation). Family policies are presented as being in competition with one another. For example, in the data parental leave policies are sometimes represented as being in competition with childcare structures and part-time work, options which are deemed more appropriate in order to achieve work and family life reconciliation.

Finally, the *companies' interests* and those of the society at large are presented as being put at risk by parental leave policies. This suggests that there exists an overarching *economic frame*, which is ambivalent. Companies' interests and benefits are arguments used both in favour and against parental leave policies. In its negative variation, the *economic frame* constructs categories of individuals whose interests are in opposition, for instance tax payers versus recipients and employees versus employers. This predominance of the *economic frame* echoes with the analysis of the political debates in the 1990s on the implementation of a maternity leave (Grandjean, 2008; Pannatier, 2000). At that time, social expenses and financing plans were at the heart of the political considerations, excluding debates on issues such as social justice and the sexual division of work (Pannatier, 2000, p. 105). Moreover, the acceptance in 2004 of a federal maternity leave was said to have succeeded thanks of a wide party coalition (including the majority of right wing Members of the Parliament) and the support of the labour market (Commission fédérale pour les questions féminines, 2010).

In the Swiss context - characterised by a direct democracy - consensus is an essential key in the welfare state development (Armingeon, 2001; Häusermann, 2006; Kübler, 2007; Martin, 2002). Lobbies - among which powerful economic lobbies - are important actors of Swiss policy-making processes (Papadopoulos, 1997). This could explain why the *economic frame* is widely used; thus highlighting the advantages for the economy and work organisations of a *paternity* leave would represent the best chances of introducing an embryonic form of leave (may it be freely implemented). Again, further data such as political debates and interviews with key collective actors would be needed to analyse whether the *economic frame* is a central component in discourses about parental leave policies.

To conclude, although this paper has a descriptive aim, the analysis of the positive and negative frames proves to be a fruitful exploratory approach. It shows how on the one hand the positive frames are oriented toward a consensus building by stressing the advantages of parental leave policies at large (for companies, fathers, gender equality, families, fertility rates, mothers and - but significantly rarely - children). On the other hand, we observe how oppositions between collective actors (e.g. employers and employees), social measures (e.g. parental leaves and part-time work), institutions (the welfare state and the family), and sometimes individuals (men and women) are constructed in the negative frames. The ways in which parental leave policies are framed in the public sphere can contribute to shape future policymaking and public opinion (e.g. Bacchi, 1999; McCombs, 2004; Verloo, 2007; Yanovitzky, 2002). Analysing the framing of parental leave policies in the public sphere and its consequences in terms of consensus building or constitution of antagonist categories is particularly relevant in the Swiss context. Indeed, it is probable that in the medium to long term, the Swiss electorate will be called to vote on parental leave policies. The recent proposition²⁶ stemming from the Federal commission of coordination of family issues in favour of a six-months paid parental leave (Baumann *et al.*, 2010) is likely to trigger important public debates.

Notes

1. A first version of this paper was presented at the Chaire Quételet Conference on "Politiques de population en Europe et en Amérique du Nord" in November 2009 in Louvain-la-Neuve (Belgium). The authors thank Manuel Tettamanti, Nicky Le Feuvre, Ester Lucia Rizzi and two anonymous reviewers from Population Review for their comments.
2. Switzerland is a federal state and is organised in three political levels: the communes, the cantons and the Confederation.
3. Citizens may request that the People decide on an amendment they want to make to the Constitution. 100 000 signatures must be collected in maximum 18 months in order for a *popular initiative* to be accepted. Federal legislation, decisions of parliament and certain international treaties are subject to an *optional* referendum if 50 000 citizens request so. These two political instruments lead to popular votes. They characterise Switzerland's direct democracy.
4. In September 2010, we conducted an explorative analysis of a sample of collective labour agreements, which revealed that approximately 20% of them granted a paid paternity leave of a week or more to their employees. Unfortunately, to date, no report has provided an overview of the special leave entitlements granted by private work organisations.
5. Code des Obligations, Art. 329, Al. 3.
6. <http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/fr/index/themen/01/01/key.html>
7. <http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/fr/index/themen/20/05/blank/key/Vereinbarkeit/01.html> (statistics for 2009)
8. Office Fédéral de la Statistique. Indicateurs des médias – Indicateurs. La presse écrite – Offre de la presse. Retrieved 25, 10, 2009, from <http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/fr/index/themen/16/03/key/ind16.indicator.16010201.160201.html>
9. <http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/fr/index/themen/16/03/key/ind16.indicator.16010302.160105.html?open=160006#160006>
10. Considering the linguistic and cultural differences among the four linguistic regions, a comparison of the mediatisation and framing of parental leave policies in these regions would be meaningful. We start with the analysis of one them, the French-speaking region.
11. Lexis Nexis, Europress and Swissdox.
12. All regional newspapers except "*l'Express/L'Impartial*".
13. Since August 2006, Doris Leuthard has become one of the seven federal counsellors (executive power) in charge of the Ministry of the Economy. She is a member of the Christian Democrat party.
14. This identifier designates the date of publication of the source article as well as the newspaper in which it was published (in this case the article was published the 14th of January 2007 in the newspaper *Le Matin*). Refer to the appendix for the list of the newspapers' abbreviations.
15. Original source: "En Europe du Nord, il a été démontré que le congé paternité est bénéfique pour les employeurs, administrations publiques ou entreprises privées, car le retour sur investissement est évident: renforcement de la loyauté du collaborateur, augmentation de sa motivation, stimulation du goût d'entreprendre, diminution de l'absentéisme, stabilité de la cellule familiale, etc."
16. Typical German outdoor restaurant terrace where beer is served.
17. Original source: "Sur les places de jeu, devant les écoles, dans le tram, dans le fameux Biergarten du Prater, les jeunes hommes poussant le landau en parfaits routiniers font désormais partie de l'image du quartier. C'est l'effet du congé parental."

18. Austria's parental leave scheme is negatively framed because it is said to keep mothers away from the job market for too long a period and to cause negative side effects on their careers.
19. In addition, we can observe that here paternity leave is described as "an increase of salary".
20. Original source: Mais le conseiller national radical schaffhousois n'entend pas accorder de "hausse salariale sur le dos des contribuables", selon sa formule.
21. Original source: "Je suis pour un vrai congé paternité" MICHELINE CALMY-REY La présidente de la Confédération demande aux hommes de s'occuper du ménage.
22. Original source: "Ce n'est pas à la politique de contraindre un homme à changer les langes, s'il ne le fait pas naturellement".
23. The Swiss People's Party is a national conservative party. At the federal level, it is the most-represented party in the National Council, with 31% of seats since 2007 (<http://www.parlament.ch/e/wahlen-abstimmungen/parlamentswahlen/wahlen-2007/diezahlen/Pages/default.aspx>).
24. Original source: Dominique Baettig (UDC), qui s'est opposé catégoriquement à ce «gadget coûteux» que serait le congé paternité, regrettant qu' "on veuille imposer des attitudes qui ne sont peut-être pas souhaitées", rappelant que "dans le règne animal le père est parfois exclu", a déclenché des murmures choqués et quelques salves indignées.
25. This analysis has been undertaken and some results were presented at the ESFR conference in Milan in 2010 (Valarino and Bernardi, 2010).
26. The report was released on the 26th of October 2010. As a reminder, the results presented here do not include the media coverage of this event, as they stop at the end of the year 2009.

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Appendix

List of the newspapers in the dataset:

Newspaper title (and abbreviation)	Covered since	Number of articles	% of the number of total articles	Supra-regional (S) /Regional (R)	Average circulation in 2009 (as a rough guide) ²⁶
<i>Le Temps</i> (LT)	1999	141	24	S	45,506
<i>24 Heures</i> - 4 editions (24H)	2005	103	18	R (Vaud)	81,566
<i>Tribune de Genève</i> (TG)	1999	107	18	R (Genève)	56,333
<i>Le Matin</i> - 2 editions (LM)	1999	76	13	S	252,450
<i>La Liberté</i> (LL)	2005	73	13	R (Fribourg)	38,761
<i>Le Nouvelliste</i> (LN)	2006	41	7	R (Valais)	41,996
<i>Quotidien Jurassien</i> (QJ)	2006	22	4	R (Jura)	20,016
<i>20 Minutes</i> - 3 editions (20M)	2008	8	1	S	229,729
<i>Express/Impartial</i> (E/I)	2008	8	1	R (Neuchâtel)	35,479