

Politicians under Investigation:  
The News Media's Effect on the Likelihood of Resignation

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## **Abstract**

This paper studies the effect of news media on the probability of resigning from office of politicians being subject to criminal investigation. Using data on cases in which the political immunity of German representatives was lifted, we find that resignations are more common when the media covers the case intensely. The amount of this news coverage, in turn, depends on the availability of other newsworthy, exogenous events. Therefore, we instrument for coverage of liftings of immunity with the overall news pressure. We estimate the causal effect and find that a change from no coverage to the mean coverage increases the likelihood of resignation by 6.4 percentage points. The effect is likely driven by the crowding out of reports on politicians with the same ideology as the newspaper, rather than reports on representatives with different political leanings. There is no evidence that the reporting affects the chances of conviction.

*Keywords:* News media; Political accountability; Prosecution; Resignation

*JEL classification:* K14; L82

## 1. Introduction

On September 1, 2014, Christine Haderthauer, head of the Bavarian State Chancellery, resigned over the so-called Model Car Scandal; her company sold model cars built by mentally ill prisoners. Haderthauer and her husband had been under investigation for fraud, malfeasance, and tax evasion, and her political immunity was lifted. At first, the investigations did not result in any personal consequences, despite the persistent demands from the opposition. In July of that year, neither the Bavarian Minister-President, Horst Seehofer, nor the party executive saw the necessity for such steps, and Haderthauer remained in office. In the following month, the pressure from the press and the parliamentary opposition grew too much, and Haderthauer finally resigned. In her resignation speech, she stated that the experiences with the news coverage in the previous weeks raised concerns that her office and the political agenda related to it were compromised.<sup>1</sup>

This example illustrates how the media can raise public awareness, exercise its role as a watchdog, and contribute to political accountability. However, it is important to note that the Haderthauer case took place when the parliament was on summer break and political news was scarce: It could be argued that the investigations were a convenient business opportunity for news outlets to catch the attention of their audiences. What if the investigations had taken place at a different time—for instance, when the parliament was in session, perhaps debating the implementation of a new, highly controversial law? As an even more extreme example, what if the investigations had occurred right after a major catastrophe, such as the Fukushima nuclear disaster? It is conceivable that the media would have focused on these competing, potentially more newsworthy events, paying less attention to the Haderthauer case, and the politician might still be in office.

To determine whether the media affects the likelihood that a politician under criminal investigation will resign, we consider cases in which the immunity of German national and state representatives was lifted. A lifting of immunity is always related to criminal prosecution, an event that is usually newsworthy to the public. It is reasonable to assume that politicians under investigation lose approval in the electorate. However, citizens do not have any direct means to react to the new situation. Until the following election, it is very difficult in Germany to lose the political mandate by external forces. The Federal Elections Act regulates the attainment and loss of membership of the National Parliament. An expulsion from the party is also hard to achieve

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/modellauto-affaere-haderthauer-ruecktritt-im-wortlaut-a-989316.html>.

because of rights granted by the Act on Political Parties. Thus, resignation is the most common way for early termination of a political mandate, office, or function.

The media can be a key factor in this environment. First, coverage of a lifting of immunity raises public awareness and possibly provides details about the severity of the alleged offense. Because of the role model function of representatives, many voters consider (allegedly) criminal behavior incompatible with the fulfillment of a political mandate. Voters also want to make sure that politicians act in the best interests of their constituents, as opposed to their own selfish or special interests. If the party or parliamentary group of the accused does not condemn the criminal behavior, voter approval likely declines. It can be a reasonable strategy for the political allies to dissociate themselves from the accused, to avoid or minimize the potential loss in popularity. Powerful forms of dissociation are public demands to step down or to enforce the resignation by other, often covert tactics. Second, increased public awareness might induce political donors to pull back their support if they are afraid that the misbehavior of an individual politician might damage their own reputations. A company that frequently donates to a specific party, for example, might refrain from future support of the party to avoid the risk of losing customers. Third, media coverage provides arguments and possibly leverage for the opposition or other political rivals. If, for instance, the votes of one party are required in parliament to pass a law, this party might condition its compliance on the resignation of the accused. Finally, journalistic investigations might uncover new details, further incriminating the accused and strengthening the case of the prosecution, which in turn would also increase the likelihood of resignation.

In our empirical setting, we cannot distinguish between these and other potential channels of media effects. However, we are able to evaluate whether the probability of resignation of German delegates is higher when the media reports more intensely about the lifting of immunity. To test this hypothesis, we use parliamentary databases and publicly available information to identify all cases in which the immunity of a parliamentary member was lifted between January 1, 2005, and December 31, 2014. Full-text archives of the most important German national daily newspapers *Bild*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Handelsblatt*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Die Tageszeitung*, and *Die Welt* are searched for corresponding news coverage. We also investigate whether a politician resigned in the course of the lifting of immunity from a political post, duty, or function.

Identification of a causal effect faces endogeneity problems though. It may indeed be the case that stronger media coverage of some liftings of immunity leads to a higher probability of resignation. However, it is also plausible that cases with an initially higher likelihood of resignation catch more media attention. Both observations, more coverage and a higher probability of resignation, might be influenced by unobservable determinants, such as the severity of the offense. We address this problem by instrumenting for media coverage with a news pressure variable, as Eisensee and Strömberg (2007) propose in the context of disaster relief. Our main news pressure variable is based on the length of the cover story of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*: Evaluation of more than 3,000 daily issues shows that the number of characters of the cover story increases substantially when newsworthy events occur.

Across all specifications, we find a positive and statistically significant relationship between news coverage and the probability of resignation. For the day after the lifting of immunity, we also find that the corresponding coverage is crowded out by other newsworthy events. This effect mostly pertains to the extent of the coverage rather than the editorial decision of whether or not to cover a case. Instrumenting with the overall news pressure, our baseline specification indicates that a change from no coverage to the mean coverage increases the likelihood of resignation by 6.4 percentage points.

To assess the implications of our findings, we also check whether the politicians in question are found legally guilty. The data suggest that the media is able to anticipate convictions, as these cases receive more news coverage initially. However, there is no evidence that verdicts are affected in a causal way or that convictions are related to the decision to stand down. The latter result suggests that strategic and moral considerations might be more important than legal ones when politicians resign.

In addition, we check whether the effects depend on the ideology of the newspapers. Considering the German multi-party system, we partition the outlets and the politicians in our sample into five ideological groups. This categorization allows us to evaluate if the first- and second-stage estimates differ when comparing ideological matches and mismatches of politicians and newspapers. The estimates suggest that there is only a crowding out of coverage on politicians who have the same ideology as the reporting outlet. In contrast, newspapers do not cut reports on representatives with different political leanings. This finding suggests that the occurrence of other

newsworthy events is a welcome excuse not to cover the lifting of immunity of politicians who are ideologically close. Cases involving ideologically distant politicians instead offer valuable news material for an ideologically slanted newspaper, such that competing events are irrelevant, unless these events are particularly newsworthy.

Previous research discusses the role of voter information for political accountability (e.g., Besley, 2005, 2006; Ferraz and Finan, 2008, 2011; Persson and Tabellini, 2000). More specifically, several studies investigate the effects of media on elections (e.g., Adena et al., 2015; Besley and Prat, 2006; Chiang and Knight, 2011; DellaVigna et al., 2014; DellaVigna and Kaplan, 2007; Enikolopov et al., 2011; Falck et al., 2014; Gentzkow, 2006; Gentzkow et al., 2011; Larreguy et al., 2015; Martin and Yurukoglu, 2014; Schroeder and Stone, 2015; Strömberg, 2004a). We extend this literature by providing evidence of media effects that take place aside from elections. By estimating the impact of news coverage of liftings of immunity on the likelihood of resignation, we show that the media can help hold representatives accountable before the regular end of their mandate or function. Because we investigate the behavior of representatives, our study also relates to the literature on the effects of media on policy making (Besley and Burgess, 2002; Eisensee and Strömberg, 2007; Snyder and Strömberg, 2010; Strömberg, 2004b) and political elites (Arceneaux et al., 2016; Campante and Hojman, 2013; Clinton and Enamorado, 2014; Garcia-Jimeno and Yildirim, 2015).

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The next section provides background information on political immunity in Germany. Section 3 describes the data and the identification strategy. Section 4 presents the estimation results and various robustness checks. Afterwards, we discuss potential effects on the chances of conviction as well as the role of newspaper ideology. The last section concludes.

## **2. Political immunity in Germany**

A fundamental principle of the German democracy is the “free mandate” (Article 38 Basic Law). It is central to the rights of each member of the National Parliament (*Bundestag*) as well as the state parliaments (*Landtage*). The mandate states that delegates are subject only to their conscience and not bound by any external instructions. To protect the free mandate, each delegate benefits

from the rights of indemnity and immunity (Article 46 Basic Law). Indemnity guarantees free speech in parliament, with the exception of offensive comments. Immunity grants members of parliament protection from any judicial and police measures.

Unlike indemnity, the immunity right can be lifted by a special parliamentary committee.<sup>2</sup> Thus, a member of parliament can only be prosecuted or arrested after the parliament grants authorization, if the delegate is not immediately arrested during the commission of acts.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the national parliament approves—for the duration of a parliamentary term—a few instances in which prosecution can take place against its members without the need for an explicit decision to lift the immunity. This arrangement merely requires that the investigating authorities inform the parliament about their intentions 48 hours before taking actions. Several judicial and police measures, such as searching premises, pressing charges, or arresting a politician, are not covered by the general approval. These measures are only allowed after the lifting of immunity has been requested by the investigating authority and granted by the responsible parliamentary committee.

However, the lifting of immunity does not automatically result in the loss of the mandate, as the Haderthauer case shows. In Germany, the revocation of a political mandate is hard to achieve during the parliamentary term. According to the Federal Elections Act, a member shall lose his or her membership only on six occasions: (1) if the attainment of membership is invalid, (2) if the election result is newly established, (3) if he or she fails to meet the prerequisites for permanent eligibility for election, (4) if he or she resigns, (5) if the Federal Constitutional Court rules that a member's party or party branch is unconstitutional, and (6) in case the member dies. Between 1990 and 2015, for instance, there were no cases in which the mandate was revoked. In addition, party expulsion proceedings are hardly ever successful because party members are well protected by the Act on Political Parties.

Lifting someone's political immunity is always related to prosecution, which might be a newsworthy event, as the constituency would likely be interested in the circumstances of the act and the related allegations. However, the lifting of immunity is not mandatorily tied to the loss of

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<sup>2</sup> On the national level, the Committee for the Scrutiny of Elections, Immunity and the Rules of Procedure (*Ausschuss für Wahlprüfung, Immunität und Geschäftsordnung*) is the guardian of members' immunity. On the state level, each parliament has a separate committee for that purpose.

<sup>3</sup> The state parliaments of Brandenburg and Hamburg are exceptions to this rule. In contrast with the other states, members of these parliaments do not have the immunity right. Instead, immunity may be granted by parliament on special request.

the political mandate. As forced withdrawal is quite uncommon due to legal regulations, a politician's resignation is the most common way to prematurely end the term in office or other political functions. We assume that the media are a key player in this environment, because they can exert public pressure on politicians and therefore potentially contribute to the decision to step down.

### **3. Data and identification strategy**

#### *3.1. Liftings of political immunity*

We use the public databases of the German Parliament and the state parliaments, respectively, to identify all cases in which the immunity of a member of parliament was lifted, based on a request (*Beschlussempfehlung*) by the responsible committee. Liftings of immunity not covered by a general parliamentary authorization are always documented in the parliamentary databases because of the administrative process related to them. However, documentation varies across national and state parliaments. Some states do not announce the name of the politician in question. These cases are considered as anonymous liftings of immunity. In compiling the data, we distinguish between two procedural steps: the decision on the request taken by the special committee and the final decision on the lifting of immunity made by parliament. As the separate institutions are usually in session on different dates, the time between these two acts can vary. The press covers not only the final decision by the parliament but also the decision to request the lifting of immunity. Therefore, one case may cause press coverage at two points in time.

Unfortunately, the databases of the national and state parliaments do not reliably document cases that are subject to a general authorization rule, because no active decision making is required. The president of the parliament has to be informed and the investigations may start if no objections are raised within the next 48 hours. To identify these cases, we rely on publicly available information using press archives and search engines. These external sources add 71 cases to the 198 ones documented in the parliamentary databases, for 269 observations in total between 2005 and 2014. We conduct a robustness check to show that the inclusion of the non-official information does not affect our results.



We do not control for the reason of the lifting of immunity, because there is no objective way to compare different offenses, nor is it feasible to somehow weight them according to normative principles. Even among judicial experts, the evaluation of most cases is highly controversial, and for the same case, there are often different verdicts at the various instances of jurisdiction. However, we determine whether the politicians are convicted for the criminal offense that led to the lifting of immunity. In addition, we distinguish politically motivated from other offenses. Politically motivated offenses are usually based on some form of protest, such as an illegal demonstration against nuclear energy or against right-wing extremism. Other politically motivated offenses, for instance, involve the incitement to hatred or the dissemination of propaganda material of unconstitutional organizations. Approximately 40% of the alleged offenses are politically motivated, and none of the politicians resigned (cp. Table 1, variable “protest”). We also distinguish between cases at the national and state levels and consider whether the politician is a minister or not. Both variables likely affect the newsworthiness of the case because liftings of immunity at the national level and cases about ministers are more relevant to the electorate. Finally, we construct an election cycle variable that measures the number of months until the next national or state election, respectively, at the time of the lifting of immunity. A resignation might be more salient when representatives have just been elected, whereas voters may be satisfied to simply have politicians renounce their candidacy when elections are close. In addition, the extent of news coverage on corrupt politicians might increase over the election cycle (Garz and Sörensen, 2017; Latham, 2015).

### *3.2. Resignations*

Our dependent variable, resignation, indicates whether the politician resigned in the course of the lifting of immunity from a political post, duty, or function. This includes resignation as governmental office holder (e.g., state minister), party office holder (e.g., general secretary, treasurer, spokesperson), and member of the national or a state parliament (cp. Table A1 in the Online Appendix). We only consider resignations that are obviously connected with the lifting of immunity; for example, if the resignation speech explicitly states that the criminal behavior is the reason for stepping down. With these criteria, we record 17 resignations, six of which occurred immediately (i.e., within one day after the decision) and the others up to 480 days later. Cases in

which the person resigned before his or her immunity was lifted are not included in this selection (i.e., politicians sometimes anticipate the lifting of immunity and the consequences). We do not consider it a resignation if a politician renounces his or her candidature or if a representative is dismissed by the party. Moreover, we assume that there were no resignations in case the immunity was lifted anonymously, because these cases were not covered by the media. The robustness section contains a check to show that this assumption is unproblematic.

It could be argued that the analysis is limited by the small number of resignations. In addition to the restrictions mentioned previously, the modest amount can be explained by the severity of many transgressions. Politicians often commit only minor offenses that do not result in a resignation, such as driving under the influence or insignificant cases of tax evasion. The same applies to politically motivated offenses, which are usually an act of defiance and also do not lead to a resignation. From an empirical point of view, the small number of resignations could increase the influence of outliers. In the robustness section, we therefore emphasize tests dealing with potential distortions of the results due to extreme observations.

We argue that news coverage on the day after the request/decision may affect the likelihood of resignation even over longer time horizons. Because criminal investigations do not automatically have immediate, personal consequences, we do not initially impose a restriction on the time between the lifting of immunity and the resignation. First reactions to accusations are often driven by defense mechanisms and denial. Future events, such as elections, new incriminating evidence, or court decisions, might prove to be the last straw to break the camel's back towards a resignation. To account for the time factor, we construct three versions of our dependent variable: (1) resignation after the lifting of immunity (binary); (2) resignation within one day after the lifting of immunity (binary); and (3) resignation weighted by the amount of time since the lifting of immunity, where resignations within one day after the act equal 1, later resignations equal the square root of  $(1/\text{number of days since the act})$ , and all other cases equal 0.

### *3.3. News coverage of liftings of immunity*

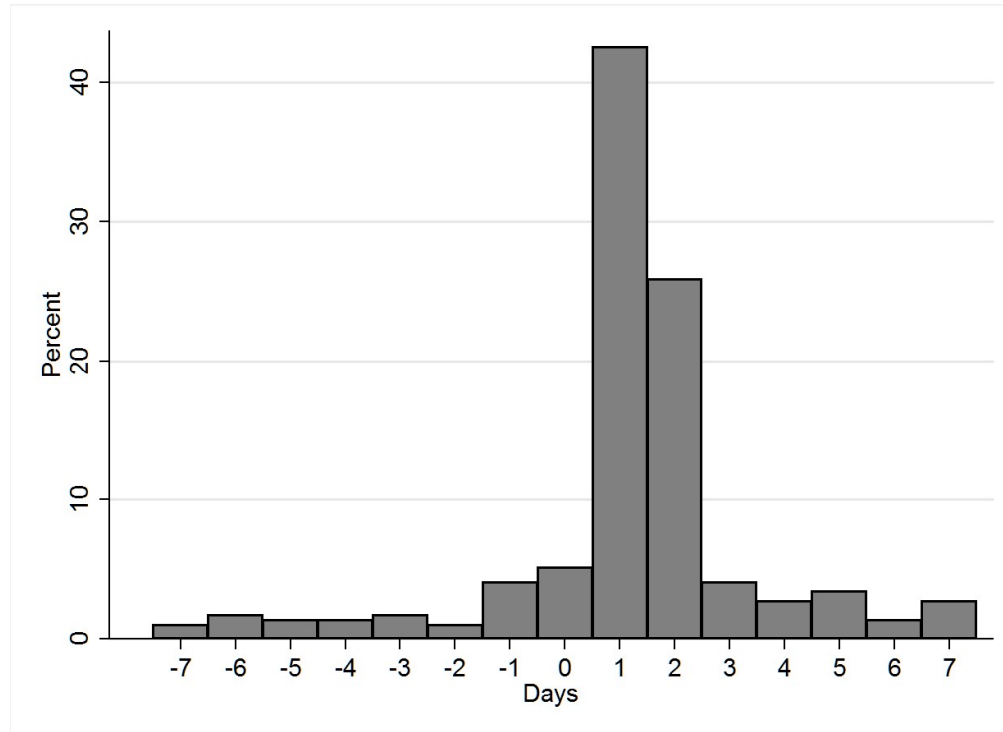
Our explanatory variable of interest is the amount of news coverage on the lifting of immunity. We use the electronic archive of Spiegel Publishing, which is based on the DIGAS database by

Axel Springer Syndication, to conduct keyword searches on full-text press articles. Our sample of newspapers comprises the six highest-circulation daily national German newspapers *Bild*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Handelsblatt*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Die Tageszeitung*, and *Die Welt*. This selection is fairly representative of the political news landscape in Germany. Having by far the highest circulation, *Bild* provides tabloid news. As the leading quality newspapers, *Frankfurter Allgemeine* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung* are often responsible for setting the intermedia agenda. Our sample also covers the political spectrum well, with *Die Tageszeitung* on the left side and *Die Welt* on the conservative side. It would be optimal to add other types of media to the sample, such as online news portals, newscasts, or local outlets. Unfortunately, for the period under consideration, the lack of consistent data prevents such additions. This is not likely a problem though, as the German media landscape is rather concentrated, often resulting in very homogeneous news coverage (KEK, 2015).

We extract all articles that contain the first and the last name of the politician in question, based on our list of cases, plus the German word for immunity (“Immunität”, truncated at the end). These search parameters are very narrow, but they guarantee that almost only true articles on liftings of immunity are extracted. With this procedure, we consider 715 news reports in total. Using only the last name and the word immunity, for instance, would lead to the retrieval of too many false positives, because German last names sometimes also represent verbs or are too common. We also tested truncated versions of the word investigation (“Ermittlung”) instead of immunity but discarded this approach as well because of the large amount of irrelevant reports. However, in the robustness section, we present results based on extracting articles by merely searching for the first and the last name of the politician in combination with the date of the lifting of immunity.

The time-wise distribution of these articles indicates a clear publication pattern. As Fig. 1 shows, news coverage is most pronounced on the day after the request or decision to lift the immunity. Our strategy to identify causal effects depends on the crowding out of this news coverage by other newsworthy events. Because of the publication pattern and the transitory nature of crowding-out effects, we consider only the reports that are published the day after the request/decision; for longer time windows, the crowding-out effect is much more difficult to detect because it averages out.

**Fig. 1.** Timing of publication of articles on liftings of immunity, seven days before and after the request/decision.



We use four different measures of news coverage of liftings of immunity: (1) sum of characters, (2) sum of characters divided by the page number, (3) number of articles, and (4) covered yes/no (binary). The sum of characters is the most detailed measurement, indicating the volume of the article; it is sensitive to small changes within the coverage. Second, we divide the sum of characters by the page number of publication, to give articles placed in the front of the newspaper a greater weight than those appearing in the back, as these likely attract greater attention of readers.<sup>4</sup> As another alternative, we merely use the number of articles to measure the intensity of the reporting. Finally, a binary variable that indicates whether a case was covered or not can be considered as the most basic way to capture news coverage. Robustness checks also include estimates based on a relative measure, which pertains to the ratio of news coverage to the volume of individual newspapers issues.

<sup>4</sup> Other aspects of varying importance of individual reports are editorial pages, columns, and op-eds; however, our data do not contain any information to distinguish opinion pieces from other reports. We do not believe that this is a problem though, as the German press is much less inclined to provide explicit opinion than the press in other countries. For instance, German newspapers rarely endorse political candidates.

### 3.4. News pressure

We expect a crowding out of reports on liftings of immunity by other newsworthy events. In particular, we assume that two identical cases have a different chance of being covered by the media depending on the general news pressure. A case has a greater chance of being covered when little other newsworthy material is available. We use the number of characters of the cover story of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, as documented by DIGAS, to construct our measure of news pressure. An evaluation of this measure shows that the length of this newspaper's cover story captures the difference between days with low and high news pressure very well. Over the whole period, the number of characters increases substantially when newsworthy events occur. We exclusively rely on the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* because the other newspapers in our sample do not or barely exhibit such a pattern.

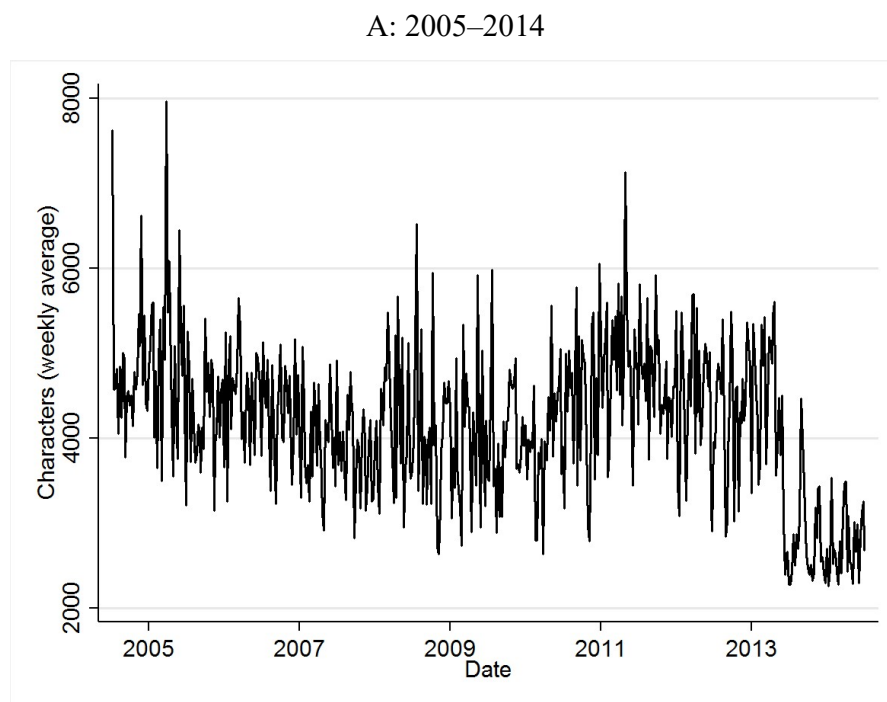
The newspaper's mean cover story is 4,443 characters long, whereas a top cover story can reach up to 14,158 characters. Table A2 in the Online Appendix illustrates this pattern by showing each year's largest cover stories. The list mainly includes political coverage that refers, for instance, to major election results, as well as important domestic issues, foreign affairs, and economic policy events. A few top cover stories report about extraordinary disasters and catastrophes, such as the downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 over Ukraine or the 2010 Earthquake in Haiti. Furthermore, some top cover stories report on terrorist attacks and armed conflicts, such as the 2013 Rabaa massacre in Cairo or the 2012 Turkish military intervention in Syria. Due to the newspaper's political focus, major sports events, such as Germany winning the soccer world cup, do not appear as top cover stories.

Fig. 2 illustrates the variation in the news pressure variable over time. In Panel A, we plot the weekly average between 2005 and 2014. There are two structural changes in the composition of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* front page, one in 2007 and one in 2013. In October 2007, the newspaper introduced a cover picture on the front page, which led to a permanent reduction in the length of the cover story. In November 2013, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* stopped continuing its cover story on another page of the newspaper. Until that date, the cover story had sometimes continued on page 2 or 3, leading to a longer cover story on average. We include weekday, month, and year fixed effects in the regressions to account for this type of variation. In

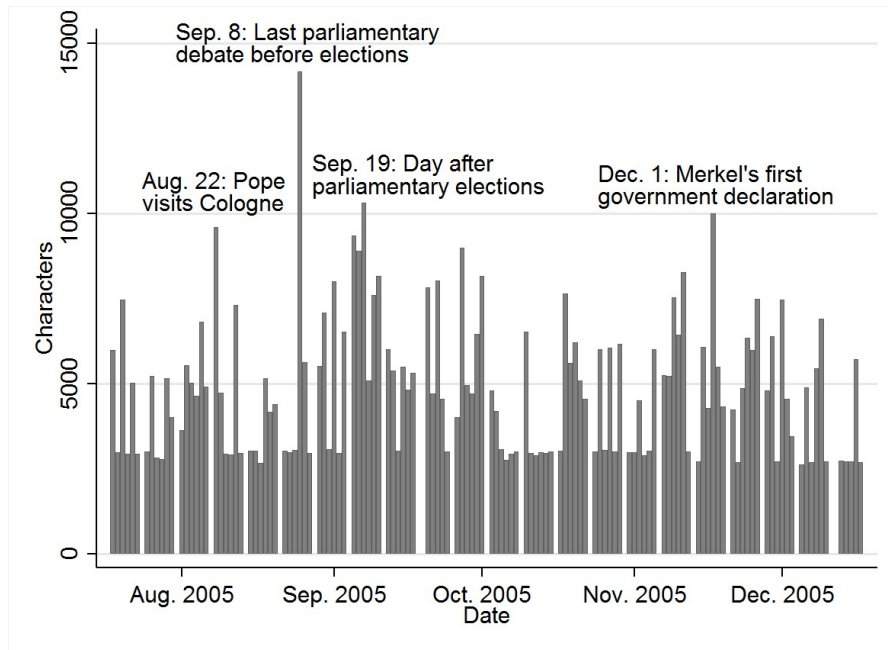
addition, the robustness section provides a test to show that the results do not substantially change when using the occurrence of the most important German disasters as an alternative measure of news pressure.

Panel B of Fig. 2 shows a segment of the period under investigation to illustrate daily differences in the news pressure. As the bars indicate, the standard minimum length of the cover story is slightly above 2,500 characters. The newspaper occasionally deviates from this standard. Between August and December 2005, examples of such extensions included the first visit of the Pope to Germany in nine years, the last parliamentary debate before the elections to the Bundestag (which is traditionally a crucial campaigning event), the day after the elections, and Angela Merkel's first declaration after forming the new government.

**Fig. 2.** Length of the cover story of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*



## B: August–December, 2005



**Table 1**  
Summary statistics.

	All cases				Only resignations after the lifting of immunity			
	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Resignation before the lifting of immunity	0.04	0.20	0	1	0.00	0.00	0	0
Resignation after the lifting of immunity	0.06	0.24	0	1	1.00	0.00	1	1
Resignation within 1 day	0.02	0.15	0	1	0.35	0.49	0	1
Resignation weighted by number of days	0.03	0.15	0	1	0.45	0.44	0	1
Coverage (sum of characters)	887.91	3053.80	0	28111	5752.12	9178.89	0	28111
Coverage (sum of char./page number)	288.17	1257.45	0	16408	2127.18	4114.05	0	16408
Coverage (number of articles)	0.47	1.24	0	11	2.35	3.06	0	11
Case covered (binary)	0.19	0.40	0	1	0.59	0.51	0	1
News pressure (number of characters)	4443.28	1856.42	1907	14158	4028.18	1366.95	1907	6143
Election cycle (months until election)	28.06	16.28	0	59	24.35	17.48	0	56
Request	0.39	0.49	0	1	0.12	0.33	0	1
Protest	0.39	0.49	0	1	0.00	0.00	0	0
National level	0.19	0.39	0	1	0.41	0.51	0	1
Minister	0.03	0.16	0	1	0.18	0.39	0	1
Convicted	0.49	0.50	0	1	0.59	0.51	0	1
Convicted or deal	0.63	0.48	0	1	0.94	0.24	0	1
	N = 269				N = 17			

We provide summary statistics of the main variables in Table 1. Each case of lifting of immunity was covered with 888 characters on average, whereas this number amounted to 5,752 characters when the politician later resigned (see also Fig. A1 in the Online Appendix). Our news pressure variable had an average of 4,443 characters. In cases entailing a resignation, however, the average cover story of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* was only 4,028 characters long.

### 3.5. Validity of the instrument

Certain conditions need to be fulfilled for our identification strategy to be valid. First, the overall news pressure must have a significant effect on the intensity of the news coverage of liftings of immunity. Previous research suggests that this is an unproblematic assumption. When other newsworthy events cause a congestion of the news agenda, there is a crowding out of disaster news (Eisensee and Strömberg, 2007), scandal coverage (Nyhan, 2014), campaign coverage (Garcia-Jimeno and Yildirim, 2015), and reports about unemployment (Garz, 2017). We present evidence that this relationship also holds for coverage on liftings of immunity.

Second, the news pressure variable must be uncorrelated with any other determinant of the probability of resignation, and it must not have any effect on this probability other than through the news coverage of liftings of immunity. After controlling for obvious differences between cases and temporal patterns (i.e., weekday, month, and year fixed effects), there is no reason for the instrument not to meet these conditions.

Durante and Zhuravskaya (2016) show that Israeli authorities strategically time their attacks on Palestine in accordance with predictable newsworthy events, to minimize negative publicity.

Could a similar behavior also be relevant in the context of our study? That is, could the investigating authorities or the responsible committees time the decision to lift someone's immunity on the basis of predictable newsworthy events? We believe that this is very unlikely. The underlying procedures are highly regulated by different laws and administrative rules. The investigating authorities usually have to organize their work according to certain deadlines and fixed session dates of the relevant parliamentary committees. For instance, the Council of Elders determines the session weeks of the German Parliament, and the presidents of the committees set their session dates according to this schedule.



The data confirm these considerations. In Table 2, we regress the number of liftings of immunity per day on the overall news pressure on the same day and the surrounding days. For current values, two lags, two leads, or both, the estimates suggest that the relationship is not significantly different from zero for more than 3,000 issues of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the timing of the requests and decisions is independent of our instrument.

**Table 2**  
Liftings of immunity and news pressure.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
News pressure (thousand), t	0.0049 (0.0043)	0.0045 (0.0044)	0.0051 (0.0044)	0.0048 (0.0044)
t + 1		0.0079 (0.0050)		0.0081 (0.0050)
t + 2		0.0007 (0.0039)		0.0010 (0.0039)
t - 1			-0.0018 (0.0043)	-0.0020 (0.0043)
t - 2			-0.0036 (0.0043)	-0.0039 (0.0043)
Observations	3037	3035	3035	3033

Notes: Dependent variable: daily number of liftings of immunity. OLS estimates. All models include a constant and weekday, month, and year fixed effects. Newey-West standard errors (in parentheses) have been corrected for autocorrelation up to order 14.

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

Table A3 in the Online Appendix provides further support. Here, similar to DellaVigna and Pollet (2009), we check whether liftings of immunity are more likely to occur on Fridays, when people are distracted by the upcoming weekend. Politicians in power could try to take advantage of this distraction and manipulate the timing of the lifting of immunity accordingly. However, the estimates do not suggest that this is the case. Finally, we check whether predetermined, yearly fluctuations in our measure of news pressure could drive the results. For this purpose, we regress the amount of news about liftings of immunity on the values of the news pressure variable exactly one, two, and three years ago. Table A4 summarizes the results of this placebo test, according to which past values of news pressure do not significantly affect the current news output.

## 4. Results

We first discuss the relationship between coverage of liftings of immunity and the likelihood of resignation. Afterwards, we estimate the causal effect in this relationship using the exogenous variation provided by the overall news pressure. The end of this section contains a series of robustness checks to test the validity of our most important assumptions. Throughout, we prefer to use linear probability rather than probit models. Linear probability models allow for the consistent estimation of the relationship under weaker assumptions than probit models, and they provide a larger set of tools for the statistical diagnosis in the instrumental variable approach. To ensure that our instrument is uncorrelated with the residuals, we control for a number of other factors potentially influencing the probability of resignation. In particular, we control for the election cycle, the party affiliation of the politician, whether he or she is a minister, whether it is a case at the national or state level, whether the cause of reporting is the formal request to lift the immunity (as opposed to the actual decision), whether the offense is politically motivated, and whether the politician resigned before the act. All models also contain weekday, month, and year fixed effects to account for further temporal influences and seasonal patterns.

### *4.1. Relationship between coverage on liftings of immunity and resignations*

Table 3 shows correlations between different measures of resignation and news coverage of liftings of immunity. In the baseline specification (Column 1), we ask whether resignations correlate with the number of characters the newspapers devote to the individual case on the day after the request/decision. This relationship is positive and statistically highly significant: 1,000 extra characters increase the likelihood of resignation by approximately 3.2 percentage points. We confirm this finding when using only immediate resignations (Column 2) and resignations weighted by the amount of time between the lifting of immunity and the resignation (Column 3). The estimates also remain stable when we alter the measurement of the news coverage: Weighting the number of characters by the page number of the corresponding article (Column 4), counting the number of articles (Column 5), and determining whether or not the case has been covered (Column 6) all lead to positive and statistically significant coefficient estimates. With an R-square value of 0.40, our preferred specification in Column 1 provides the best model fit.

**Table 3**

Relationship between news coverage and the likelihood of resignation.

	(1) Baseline	(2) Within 1 day	(3) Weighted	(4) Baseline	(5) Baseline	(6) Baseline
Sum of characters (thousand)	0.0319*** (0.0075)	0.0226** (0.0100)	0.0212** (0.0095)			
Sum of char. (th.)/page number				0.0648*** (0.0193)		
Number of articles					0.0705*** (0.0194)	
Covered						0.1573*** (0.0529)
Election cycle	-0.0001 (0.0010)	0.0005 (0.0007)	0.0005 (0.0007)	0.0000 (0.0010)	-0.0001 (0.0010)	-0.0002 (0.0010)
Request	0.0045 (0.0241)	0.0172 (0.0201)	0.0101 (0.0190)	-0.0138 (0.0247)	0.0170 (0.0248)	0.0422 (0.0304)
Resignation before	-0.1730*** (0.0576)	-0.0870** (0.0435)	-0.0882** (0.0420)	-0.1635*** (0.0600)	-0.1788*** (0.0568)	-0.1865*** (0.0615)
Protest	-0.1664*** (0.0510)	-0.0584* (0.0349)	-0.0703** (0.0338)	-0.1572*** (0.0505)	-0.1760*** (0.0509)	-0.1949*** (0.0539)
National level	0.0535 (0.0455)	0.0142 (0.0317)	0.0134 (0.0310)	0.0548 (0.0464)	0.0399 (0.0452)	0.0841* (0.0498)
Minister	0.0305 (0.2124)	-0.1448 (0.0972)	-0.0228 (0.1395)	0.1123 (0.1923)	0.0988 (0.1965)	0.2928 (0.1826)
R-square	0.4019	0.2925	0.3281	0.3853	0.3942	0.3649

Notes: OLS estimates. N = 269. All models include a constant and party, weekday, month, and year fixed effects. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

#### 4.2. Effect of news pressure on coverage of liftings of immunity

We use two-stage least squares (2SLS) to estimate the causal effect of news coverage on the probability of resignation. Table 4 provides the first-stage estimates, i.e., the effect of the overall news agenda on the amount of coverage of liftings of immunity.<sup>5</sup> An increase in our news pressure variable – e.g., 1,000 extra characters in the cover story of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* – leads to a statistically significant decrease in the sum of characters devoted to coverage of liftings

<sup>5</sup> See Fig. A2 in the Online Appendix for an illustration of the bivariate relationship between both variables.

of immunity by 199 (Column 1). We find a similar significant effect when using the weighted sum of characters (Column 2) and the natural logarithm of the news variable (Column 3).<sup>6</sup> Two mechanisms can explain this finding. First, a crowding out of news coverage might occur because of newspapers' space restrictions, which they face on a day-to-day basis. If the reporting of another newsworthy event uses up the available printing space, the coverage of a lifting of immunity will be shorter. Second, newspapers' limitations in human resources might lead to a crowding out of news coverage. In the presence of other newsworthy events, journalists and editors will possibly devote less effort to researching and writing about a lifting of immunity.

**Table 4**  
Effect of news pressure on coverage of liftings of immunity (first stage).

	(1) Sum of characters (thousand)	(2) Sum of characters (th.)/page number	(3) Log(sum of characters/1000 + 1)
News pressure (thousand)	-0.1991** (0.0808)	-0.0777** (0.0350)	-0.0422** (0.0203)
Election cycle	0.0038 (0.0094)	-0.0000 (0.0029)	0.0002 (0.0023)
Request	0.0684 (0.4830)	0.3071 (0.3371)	-0.1998** (0.0799)
Resignation before	1.4931* (0.8067)	0.5939 (0.3682)	0.5243** (0.2324)
Protest	0.1554 (0.3624)	-0.0592 (0.1550)	0.1545 (0.0996)
National level	1.7008*** (0.6484)	0.8153** (0.3784)	0.3586*** (0.1372)
Minister	10.2566*** (3.6661)	3.8014* (2.0393)	1.4444*** (0.3849)
Kleibergen-Paap Wald rk F- statistic	6.0790	4.9252	4.3135
R-square	0.5164	0.4527	0.4548

Notes: OLS estimates. N = 269. All models include a constant and party, weekday, month, and year fixed effects.

Robust standard errors in parentheses.

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

<sup>6</sup> When using the number of articles or the binary measure of news coverage as the dependent variable, the coefficient has the correct negative sign but lacks statistical significance (cp. Table A7 in the Online Appendix). We presume that the lack of significance is the result of these dependent variables being much cruder measures of news coverage. This implies that the crowding out of news coverage takes place at a rather subtle level. Other newsworthy material does not affect the decision of whether a lifting of immunity is covered so much as the extent of the coverage.

Looking at the control variables, we see that the amount of news coverage rises significantly if the politician in question is acting at the national level, and especially if he or she is a minister. According to the baseline specification in Column 1, for example, a case at the national level involves around 1,700 additional characters and being a minister more than 10,000.

#### *4.3. Effect of news coverage on the likelihood of resignation*

Table 5 shows the second-stage estimates. Again, we specify models with three alternative dependent variables and different measures of news coverage. According to the baseline specification in Column 1, an increase of 1,000 characters in the coverage of liftings of immunity raises the resignation probability by 7.2 percentage points.<sup>7</sup> The IV coefficient is more than twice as large as the one estimated by OLS in Table 3, Column 1. With 2SLS, we estimate the average magnitude especially for the cases that barely have a chance to be covered by the media on days with normal or high news pressure, whereas the OLS estimate refers to the average value for all cases. Therefore, the larger coefficient in the 2SLS specification implies that the media effects are stronger for the cases that are only covered when the overall news pressure is particularly low. It is also worthy to note that the standard error of the coefficient quadruples from 0.008 in the OLS case to 0.033 when using 2SLS, which implies that the estimation uncertainty increases when only using the variation in the news coverage that is caused by the instrument. The size of the coefficient in Column 1 implies that an increase from no coverage to the mean coverage (887.9 characters) raises the probability of resignation by 6.4 percentage points. According to the log specification in Column 5, which is less vulnerable to outliers, a 10% increase in coverage shifts this probability by 3.4 percentage points. For all specifications, the Kleibergen-Paap F-statistic on the exclusion of the instrument is below the often-used reference point of 10. Thus, our coefficients of interest might be biased from the potentially weak correlation between the news pressure variable and the coverage of liftings of immunity. We therefore rely on the Anderson-Rubin F-statistic and p-value—which are robust to weak instruments—to evaluate the statistical

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<sup>7</sup> Fig. A3 in the Online Appendix provides additional support for this finding. Inspection of the distribution of the amount of news coverage confirms that cases with resignations receive more attention than cases without, after we instrument with news pressure.

significance of the effect of news coverage on the likelihood of resignation. Accordingly, this effect is significant at the 5% level, except for the coefficient in Column 3, which is significant at the 10% level.

**Table 5**  
Effect of news coverage on the likelihood of resignation (second stage).

	(1) Baseline	(2) Within 1 day	(3) Weighted	(4) Baseline	(5) Baseline
Sum of characters (thousand)	0.0723** (0.0326)	0.0437* (0.0224)	0.0408* (0.0219)		
Sum of characters (th.)/page number				0.1853* (0.0951)	
Log(sum of characters/1000 + 1)					0.3408** (0.1690)
Election cycle	-0.0002 (0.0010)	0.0004 (0.0007)	0.0005 (0.0007)	0.0001 (0.0010)	0.0000 (0.0011)
Request	0.0052 (0.0282)	0.0176 (0.0168)	0.0105 (0.0165)	-0.0467 (0.0452)	0.0783* (0.0423)
Resignation before	-0.2359*** (0.0835)	-0.1197* (0.0632)	-0.1186** (0.0601)	-0.2380** (0.0956)	-0.3067** (0.1215)
Protest	-0.1750*** (0.0514)	-0.0629* (0.0363)	-0.0745** (0.0351)	-0.1528*** (0.0487)	-0.2165*** (0.0638)
National level	-0.0148 (0.0683)	-0.0214 (0.0475)	-0.0196 (0.0470)	-0.0429 (0.0785)	-0.0140 (0.0749)
Minister	-0.3921 (0.4363)	-0.3646 (0.2862)	-0.2270 (0.2961)	-0.3548 (0.4373)	-0.1426 (0.3213)
Kleibergen-Paap Wald rk F-statistic	6.0790	6.0790	6.0790	4.9252	4.3135
Anderson-Rubin F-statistic	4.5922	3.9812	3.5535	4.5922	4.5922
Anderson-Rubin p-value	0.0332	0.0472	0.0607	0.0332	0.0332
R-square	0.2749	0.1993	0.2529	0.1700	0.1947

Notes: 2SLS estimates, using news pressure as an instrument. N = 269. All models include a constant and party, weekday, month, and year fixed effects. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

It is useful to consider reduced-form estimates to further evaluate the magnitude of the effect. Table A5 in the Online Appendix shows regressions of the resignation variable on the news pressure instrument. According to the baseline version of the resignation variable in Column 1, a

one standard deviation increase in news pressure (1856.4 characters) lowers the probability of resignation by 2.7 percentage points.<sup>8</sup> Comparing uneventful and particularly newsworthy days is another way to think about the magnitude. The standard minimum length of the cover story of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* is slightly above 2,500 characters (cp. Fig. 2, Panel B). This number can increase to more than 10,000 characters for the most newsworthy stories (cp. Table A2). The difference of 7,500 characters implies a reduction in the probability of resignation of approximately 10.8 percentage points.

#### 4.4. Robustness

##### 4.4.1. Alternative samples

To begin, we check whether the effects survive when the sample is modified (see Table A6 in the Online Appendix). First, we re-estimate the baseline specification with a smaller sample of only 214 liftings of immunity. We exclude all cases in which the parliamentary databases do not report the name of the politician in question (i.e., the anonymous cases). These cases are not covered by the media, but we cannot rule out the possibility that these politicians resigned. Thus, we exclude these cases from the sample, which does not affect the results. Second, we exclude all cases that are not documented in the official databases of the respective parliaments. Information obtained from media reports and other public sources might not be as reliable as the institutional information. The exclusion reduces the number of observations to 198, and we find a larger effect of the news coverage on the likelihood of resignation; the magnitude increases to 11.8 percentage points. This increase is plausible because cases not documented in the parliamentary databases are subject to general authorization rules, which often cover minor offenses, such as driving under the influence and hit-and-runs with material damage only. Third, we exclude two cases that received exceptional amounts of public attention. As Fig. A2 indicates, the six newspapers in our sample devoted the largest amount of characters (28,111) to Christine Haderthauer, the former head of the Bavarian State Chancellery. With 27,987 characters, the other extreme case refers to Christian Wulff, Germany's former president. Both politicians resigned shortly after their immunity was

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<sup>8</sup> The semi-partial correlation coefficient of the instrument is  $-0.0926$ , which implies that news pressure explains 0.86% of the variance in the resignation variable, after accounting for the contribution of the covariates (the entire model explains 33.2%). Fig. A4 provides a graphical representation of the reduced form.

lifted. To verify that our results are not driven by these two cases, we run our baseline model without the corresponding observations. The estimated effect remains significant at the 5% level, and its magnitude slightly increases to 8.2 percentage points.<sup>9</sup> Fourth, the baseline sample includes 11 cases in which the politicians stepped down before the lifting of immunity. In general, we prefer to keep these observations because they increase the relevance of the first stage. However, the last robustness check in Table A6 confirms that the results hold when excluding these 11 cases from the sample.

#### *4.4.2. Modification of the news coverage variable*

The next set of robustness checks addresses modifications of the news coverage variable (see Table A7 in the Online Appendix). In addition to the estimates based on the number of articles and a binary measure of news coverage – which are not statistically significant – we evaluate a relative measure of news coverage. As Puglisi and Snyder (2011) argue, the volume of the newspapers varies across outlets and issues. Thus, our absolute measure might not optimally capture differences in the amount of reporting. For this reason, we construct a relative measure by dividing the character count by the number of pages of the newspaper issue in which the individual article was published, before calculating the case-specific amount of coverage. However, variation in the volume of the newspapers does not make a great difference here; the absolute and relative measures of news coverage turn out to be very similar (bivariate correlation = 0.9896). As a consequence, the robustness check using the relative measure confirms the previous results. Furthermore, we verify our search parameters used to retrieve relevant newspaper articles. To construct the baseline measure, we search the press archive for articles that contain the first and the last name of the politician in combination with the word immunity. As these parameters are very narrow, we find barely any false positives. To check whether our results could be biased due to overly narrow search parameters and the consequential omission of relevant articles, we construct an alternative measure by collecting all articles that contain the politician's first and last name, but not the word immunity and were published the day after the lifting of immunity. These

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<sup>9</sup> Excluding the two outliers decreases the mean and standard deviation of the news variable to 684.5 and 1951.3 characters, respectively. It is also possible to show that the media effect survives when we exclude the observations with resignations one at a time from the sample (see Fig. A5). That is, we can rule out that our results are driven by any single resignation.



search parameters result in the retrieval of almost twice as many articles, including a much larger share of false positives. At the same time, the broader search syntax extracts few additional true positives, so the resulting measure is most likely less reliable than the baseline news coverage variable.<sup>10</sup> The corresponding robustness check in Table A7 confirms the previous findings, though in a less convincing way. The effect of news pressure is still significant at the 5% level, but the F-statistic on the exclusion of the instrument decreases, and the effect on the probability of resignation is estimated less precisely.

#### 4.4.3. Alternative instrument

In another series of robustness checks, we consider an alternative instrument (see Table A8 in the Online Appendix). We can rule out the possibility that our news pressure variable – the length of the cover story of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* – is directly affected by the amount of the coverage on liftings of immunity; over the whole period of investigation, this coverage has never been the cover story. However, it might be that the coverage outside the lead article affects the length of the cover story in a negative way. We cannot be certain about that, but we can check the robustness of our findings using the occurrence of major natural and technological disasters. We use the EM-DAT disaster database to compile a list of the worst disasters between 2005 and 2014 in Germany (cp. Table A9). Using the alternative instrument does not change our results. The first-stage coefficient, which is significant at the 5% level, suggests that the occurrence of a disaster decreases the news coverage by approximately 2,706 characters. The effect of the news coverage on resignations is still positive and significant, though the magnitude decreases slightly (6.7 percentage points). Including both the disaster and the news pressure instrument allows us to test for over-identifying restrictions. With a p-value of 0.8961, Hansen’s J indicates that the instruments do not correlate with the error term, which supports the validity of the identification strategy.

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<sup>10</sup> We randomly select 10 cases to evaluate the performance of both searches. In this sub-sample, the share of false positives amounts to 0% in the case of our baseline measure. The alternative search parameters result in 60.0% false positives, while the number of true positives only increases by 20.0%. The larger number of false positives is often caused by the politicians being in the news for reasons other than the lifting of immunity. For instance, the immunity of Patrick Döring was lifted at the same time he became the general secretary of the liberal party. Many reports on that day addressed his new role, without mentioning the lifting of immunity or the related transgression.

#### *4.4.4. Miscellaneous*

We present a last set of robustness checks in Table A10 in the Online Appendix. First, we evaluate an alternative approach to calculate the standard errors of the coefficients. Because our sample comprises both requests to lift someone’s immunity and final decisions, some politicians appear more than once with the same case. To account for intra-case correlation, we estimate the model with cluster-robust standard errors. However, these standard errors are very similar to conventional ones, which implies that cluster correlation is not a concern. Second, we conduct a placebo test by using the indicator of resignations that occurred before the lifting of immunity as the dependent variable. If our results are meaningful, the coefficient should not be significant, because media effects from the coverage on the day after the lifting of immunity are chronologically impossible. The outcome of this test is as expected. The estimate is close to zero and insignificant, while the first stage of this specification still indicates a crowding out of the news coverage. Finally, considering the time-wise distribution of the articles in Fig. 1, we evaluate whether a crowding out of news coverage occurs on the second day after the lifting of immunity. For this purpose, we construct equivalents of the news pressure and news coverage variables for day two. The resulting estimates in Table A10 indicate neither a crowding-out nor significant effects on the probability of resignation.

### **5. Convictions**

A major and possibly unsatisfying conclusion of the findings is that political accountability is subject to a large random component. Depending on unrelated events, some politicians are forced to step down, while others are able to stay in office, even if they committed identical transgressions. Therefore, it remains unclear whether and to what extent news outlets—as watchdogs—enhance welfare. Media might actually help remove corrupt politicians, in which case society benefits. However, news coverage might also have negative welfare effects by causing “innocent” representatives to resign, such as when minor transgressions are turned into a scandal because there is not much else on which to report. While the welfare implications remain ambiguous, it is possible to check whether the media pays more attention to politicians with high

chances of conviction. If the media enhanced political accountability, the news coverage should emphasize cases in which a conviction can be anticipated. For this reason, we determine whether the representatives were found guilty (i.e., conviction by a court or acceptance of a penalty order), were found not guilty (i.e., either by verdict or because the charges were dropped), or were offered a deal (i.e., termination of the proceedings under certain conditions, such as paying a fine). We are able to collect this information for 176 cases; in the other cases, the politicians remain anonymous or the proceedings are pending.

Table A11 in the Online Appendix summarizes the results of regressing the binary variables of whether the politician was found guilty (Columns 1 and 3) or was found guilty or accepted a deal (Columns 2 and 4) on the news and resignation variables. As Column 1 shows, there is a statistically significant, positive correlation between the amount of the news coverage and the likelihood of conviction. However, when instrumenting with the news pressure variable, we do not find a significant effect (Column 3). That is, the press does not affect the likelihood of a politician being found guilty, but it does anticipate the chances of conviction. Regarding the resignation variables, we do not find a robust relationship to the judicial outcome (only one of eight coefficients is statistically significant). Therefore, anticipation of legal guilt is not a factor in the decision to stand down, which suggests that strategic and moral considerations might instead be important.

## 6. Newspaper ideology

Previous research shows that coverage on corrupt politicians can be biased by newspapers' political leanings (e.g., Latham, 2015; Puglisi and Snyder, 2011). It is therefore necessary to evaluate whether the effects discussed in this study differ depending on the ideological match between the representatives and the outlets in the sample. Specifically, we check whether such matches or mismatches affect the first and second stage of our model. Following Friebe and Heinz (2014) and Dewenter et al. (2016), we partition politicians and outlets into five categories: right-center (members of the conservative party; *Bild*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, and *Die Welt*), left-center (members of the social democratic party; *Süddeutsche Zeitung*), left-green (members of the left-wing and the green parties; *Die Tageszeitung*), economic-liberal (members of the liberal party; *Handelsblatt*), and other (independent politicians and those belonging to the nationalist,

communist, and pirate parties; no match with a national newspaper). From this categorization, we construct two additional versions of the baseline news coverage variable: The first version measures the news coverage of ideological newspaper–politician matches (e.g., the reporting of the right-center newspapers on politicians from the conservative party), and the second measures the news output of ideological mismatches (e.g., right-center newspaper articles on politicians who are not members of the conservative party).

Table A12 in the Online Appendix provides the resulting OLS and IV coefficients. The estimates are similar to the baseline specification in terms of the ideologically matched news coverage. In the first stage, the effect of news pressure on coverage of liftings of immunity is significant at the 5% level. In the second stage, the impact of news coverage on the likelihood of resignation has a larger magnitude but is estimated less precisely. In contrast, we do not find any effects in the case of reports on politicians with different political leanings than the newspaper. There is no statistically significant crowding out by other newsworthy events, so there cannot be a causal effect of this news coverage on the likelihood of resignation (the corresponding coefficient is insignificant and larger than 1, which is implausible in linear probability models). An interpretation of these findings is that newspapers are not disposed to cut the length of reports on liftings of immunity to create space for other newsworthy events, if these reports deal with ideologically different politicians. In the case of representatives who share the newspapers' ideology, the outlets are willing to sacrifice resources. However, with the German multi-party system, ideological differences between politicians and newspapers are less clear-cut than in other countries, such as the United States. For instance, the political positions of the two largest German parties—the conservatives and social democrats—have been particularly similar in the last few years, especially during the grand coalitions between 2005 and 2009 and since 2013. Therefore, some caution is necessary when interpreting the results related to the newspapers' ideology.

## **7. Conclusion**

We present systematic evidence of the effects of news coverage on the probability of politicians stepping down from a political post, duty, or function. We find that a representative is more likely to resign in the course of the lifting of immunity if there is a large amount of corresponding press coverage. A shift from no coverage to the mean of the coverage increases the likelihood of

resignation by 6.4 percentage points. We show that the variation in the news coverage, in turn, depends on how congested the overall news agenda is. These results are robust to several changes in variable measurement, sample selection, and estimation method. The effect is mostly driven by the crowding out of coverage on politicians who have the same ideology as the reporting newspaper, as the outlets do not cut reports on representatives with different political leanings. We do not find evidence that the press affects the chances of a subsequent conviction of politicians under investigation.

Previous research on the role of media for political accountability focuses on effects through voting. This study complements that research by investigating the effects that occur aside from elections. In particular, our findings suggest that the media might help to hold corrupt politicians accountable before voters can do so at the ballot box. This kind of accountability is subject to a random component though. Depending on the overall news agenda, some politicians have to resign, while others can remain in office, even if they committed identical transgressions. Based on reduced-form estimates and back-of-the-envelope calculations, the probability of resignation could be more than 10 percentage points lower, when comparing the most newsworthy events in the sample with average, uneventful days. A major implication of the randomness is that political and judicial institutions need to be designed in a way that politicians' immunity cannot be lifted in accordance with predictable news events. If the authorities or committees in charge are able to manipulate the timing, it would be possible to minimize the public pressure for political allies and maximize it in the case of opponents.

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## Online Appendix to “Garz/Sörensen: Politicians under Investigation - The News Media’s Effect on the Likelihood of Resignation”

Table A1: Resignations related to liftings of immunity.

Name	Party	Level	Date of request/decision	Date of resignation	Resignation as/from	Coverage (sum of characters)	News pressure (amount of characters)
Billen	CDU	State	02.09.2010	07.01.2010	Duties in parl. group	1,347	3,806
Billen	CDU	State	29.06.2011	07.01.2010	Duties in parl. group	1,198	7,898
Cakici	Left	State	03.05.2010	22.11.2010	Party	874	3,789
Döring	FDP	State	17.02.2005	18.06.2004	All duties	5,652	2,972
Eichelbaum	CDU	State	05.10.2012	28.01.2014	Head of judiciary committee	0	3,943
Fleischer	CDU	State	13.06.2009	11.02.2010	State secretary	0	5,358
Friedrich	CDU	National	24.02.2014	14.02.2014	Minister of agriculture	0	2,471
Gebhardt	Left	State	22.03.2005	02.04.2005	Member of parliament	0	5,419
Güller	SPD	State	28.11.2013	28.05.2013	Head of parl. group	0	2,264
Güller	SPD	State	04.12.2013	28.05.2013	Head of parl. group	490	2,242
Haderthauer	CSU	State	29.07.2014	01.09.2014	Head of state chancellery	28,111	2,894
Hartmann	SPD	National	02.07.2014	02.07.2014	Party speaker for domestic affairs	8,874	2,416
Jullien	CDU	State	06.10.2005	17.01.2006	Treasurer/exec. Secretary of parl. group	0	4,541
Kühn	FDP	State	03.01.2012	29.12.2011	Head of parl. group	0	7,368
Madl	CDU	State	02.06.2009	02.06.2009	Parl. group	1,268	4,714
Nieting	CDU	State	30.03.2005	31.03.2005	Member of parliament	3,226	5,120
Petke	CDU	State	16.10.2006	15.09.2006	General secretary of party	0	5,197
Rupprecht	SPD	State	24.01.2011	27.01.2011	Minister of education	0	5,486
Schmid	CSU	State	07.05.2013	25.04.2013	Head of parl. group	6,983	4,125
Stächele	CDU	State	13.07.2012	12.10.2011	Speaker of parliament	9,203	2,269
Stettner	other	State	25.01.2012	25.01.2012	Parl. group	0	4,346
Tauss	SPD	National	05.03.2009	06.03.2009	Duties in party	12,825	2,272
Tauss	other	National	08.09.2009	30.05.2010	Party	3,022	6,143
Tauss	other	National	09.09.2009	30.05.2010	Party	7,316	1,907
Uhl	SPD	National	15.12.2006	29.05.2007	Member of parliament	4,283	5,134
Weigel	SPD	National	01.06.2005	02.05.2007	General secretary of party	0	2,757
Winkelmeier	other	National	18.01.2007	13.02.2006	Parl. group	0	7,760
Wulff	CDU	National	16.02.2012	17.02.2012	Federal president	27,987	2,240

Notes: The list includes 11 cases in which the politician stepped down before the lifting of immunity and 17 cases with a subsequent resignation. Individual politicians can have more than one table entry if the lifting of immunity was first requested and then decided (e.g., Billen) or because the immunity was lifted more than once (i.e., Tauss).

Table A2: Each year's top three cover stories, according to the number of characters.

Date	Characters	Headline	Topic/Event
25.09.2014	6,476	Obama ruft die Welt zum Kampf gegen IS auf	Obama's speech in UN General Assembly regarding IS
19.07.2014	6,165	Trauer und Entsetzen über Flugzeugabschuss	Malaysian Airlines MH17 flight incident
11.12.2014	5,950	Streit in Amerika über brutale Verhöre	Publication of SSCI's report on CIA torture
16.08.2013	8,452	Muslimbrüder demonstrieren auch nach dem Massaker weiter	Rabaa massacre in Cairo
23.09.2013	8,172	Union gewinnt Bundestagswahl klar	Results of German parliamentary elections
15.04.2013	8,041	EU will stärker gegen Steuerflüchtlinge vorgehen	Resolution against tax evasion at EU summit
05.10.2012	9,911	Parlament gibt Erdogan die Erlaubnis für Militäreinsätze in Syrien	Turkish parliament approves military intervention in Syria
26.07.2012	9,524	Karlsruhe verlangt weitere Wahlrechtsreform	German Federal Constitutional Court decision on electoral law
05.04.2012	8,790	Keine Nachtflüge am Frankfurter Flughafen	German Federal Administrative Court decision on night flights
27.10.2011	12,042	Bundestag stärkt Kanzlerin vor EU-Gipfel den Rücken	German Parliament backs up Merkel's plans for EU summit
20.08.2011	9,733	Erziehermangel bremst Ausbau der Krippenplätze	Lack of pre-school teachers
23.09.2011	9,131	Benedikt XVI.: Politik muss dem Recht dienen und Unrecht	Benedict XVI's speech in German parliament
13.12.2010	10,042	Stockholm entgeht nur knapp einer Katastrophe	Prevention of terrorist attacks in Stockholm
29.04.2010	8,490	Strauss-Kahn: Griechenland braucht 120 Milliarden bis Ende	Financial support for Greece
18.01.2010	8,329	Die UN sprechen von der größten Katastrophe in ihrer Geschichte	Earthquake in Haiti
17.10.2009	9,573	Noch liegen Schwarz und Gelb weit auseinander	Coalition negotiation after elections to German parliament
31.08.2009	9,219	Schwarz-Gelb und Rot-Rot fast gleichauf	Results of German state elections
02.09.2009	8,852	Merkel: Verantwortung Deutschlands steht am Anfang von allem	WWII memorial in Danzig
17.10.2008	9,799	Bund und Länder verständigen sich auf Rettungspaket	Agreement on bailout (German financial markets)
08.09.2008	8,103	Steinmeier Kanzlerkandidat - Beck tritt zurück	Steinmeier candidate for chancellorship
08.02.2008	7,629	Erdogan: Ludwigshafen bietet die Chance für einen Neubeginn	Severe house fire in Ludwigshafen
13.07.2007	10,839	Merkel weist "Ultimaten" türkischer Verbände zurück	National integration scheme/summit
08.11.2007	8,691	Abdullah: Nicht über Frieden reden, sondern den Frieden festigen	State visit of Saudi Arabian King
14.05.2007	8,319	Die kleinen Parteien legen kräftig zu	Results of German state elections
05.12.2006	8,677	Steinmeier lockt Syrien mit Angeboten aus der EU	German foreign minister Steinmeier meets Syrian president Assad
18.12.2006	8,250	Angriff auf das Büro von Abbas	Attack on Palestinian president Abbas
18.09.2006	8,147	Verluste für Rot-Rot	Results of German state elections
08.09.2005	14,158	Letzte ordentliche Sitzung des 15. Deutschen Bundestags	Final parliamentary debate before elections to German Parliament
21.09.2005	10,314	Merkel bestätigt Fischer wartet ab	Exploratory talks after elections to German Parliament
01.12.2005	9,985	"Mehr Freiheit wagen" Die Kanzlerin verspricht Taten	Merkel's first government declaration

Notes: The table is based on all issues of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* published between 2005 and 2014.

Table A3: Liftings of immunity and day of the week.

	(1) All cases	(2) Only politicians from a govern. party	(3) All cases	(4) Only politicians from a govern. party
Friday	-0.0175 (0.0158)	-0.0098 (0.0065)	-0.0176 (0.0158)	-0.0098 (0.0065)
News pressure (thousand)			0.0050 (0.0044)	-0.0012 (0.0021)
Observations	3037	3037	3037	3037

Notes: Dependent variable: daily number of liftings of immunity. OLS estimates. All models include a constant, as well as month and year fixed effects. Newey-West standard errors (in parentheses) have been corrected for autocorrelation up to order 14.

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

Table A4: Current news coverage and past values of news pressure.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
News pressure (th., same day one year ago)	-0.1355 (0.0947)		
News pressure (th., same day two years ago)		-0.0601 (0.0883)	
News pressure (th., same day three years ago)			-0.0486 (0.1028)
R-square	0.5153	0.5878	0.5103
Observations	246	209	192

Notes: Dependent variable: news coverage on liftings of immunity (thousand characters). OLS estimates. All models include a constant and party, weekday, month, and year fixed effects, as well as the full set of control variables (output omitted). Robust standard errors in parentheses.

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

Table A5: Reduced-form estimates.

	(1) Baseline	(2) Within 1 day	(3) Weighted
News pressure (thousand)	-0.0144** (0.0067)	-0.0087** (0.0044)	-0.0081* (0.0043)
Election cycle	0.0001 (0.0010)	0.0006 (0.0007)	0.0006 (0.0007)
Request	0.0102 (0.0277)	0.0205 (0.0268)	0.0133 (0.0246)
Resignation before	-0.1280** (0.0546)	-0.0545 (0.0392)	-0.0576 (0.0390)
Protest	-0.1638*** (0.0513)	-0.0561 (0.0345)	-0.0681** (0.0332)
National level	0.1082* (0.0554)	0.0530 (0.0439)	0.0498 (0.0425)
Minister	0.3497* (0.1796)	0.0834 (0.1494)	0.1915 (0.1498)
R-square	0.3318	0.1932	0.2463

Notes: The table shows OLS regressions of the outcome (different versions of the resignation variable) on the instrument (news pressure). N = 269. All models include a constant and party, weekday, month, and year fixed effects. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

\* p < 0.10, \*\* p < 0.05, \*\*\* p < 0.01.

Table A6: Robustness checks (alternative samples).

	Without anonymous cases		Only cases from official government databases		Without Haderthauer and Wulff		Without resignations before the lifting of immunity	
	Coverage (1. stage)	Resignation (2. stage)	Coverage (1. stage)	Resignation (2. stage)	Coverage (1. stage)	Resignation (2. stage)	Coverage (1. stage)	Resignation (2. stage)
Sum of characters (thousand)		0.0790** (0.0349)		0.1180*** (0.0393)		0.0815** (0.0402)		0.0828* (0.0486)
News pressure (thousand)	-0.2492*** (0.0905)		-0.1366** (0.0675)		-0.1608*** (0.0616)		-0.1529** (0.0736)	
Kleibergen-Paap Wald rk F-statistic		6.1981		3.2870		5.7971		3.6627
Anderson-Rubin F-statistic		5.3300		4.8292		4.0123		3.2447
Anderson-Rubin p-value		0.0221		0.0294		0.0464		0.0730
R-square	0.5493	0.2518	0.4656	0.3496	0.3619	0.2075	0.5210	0.2350
Observations	214	214	198	198	267	267	258	258

Notes: IV estimates. All models include a constant and party, weekday, month, and year fixed effects, as well as the full set of control variables (output omitted).

Robust standard errors in parentheses.

\* p < 0.10, \*\* p < 0.05, \*\*\* p < 0.01.

Table A7: Robustness (modification of the news coverage variable).

	Number of articles		Covered		Coverage relative to newspapers' volume		Search parameters: first name + last name + date	
	Coverage (1. stage)	Resignation (2. stage)	Coverage (1. stage)	Resignation (2. stage)	Coverage (1. stage)	Resignation (2. stage)	Coverage (1. stage)	Resignation (2. stage)
Number of articles		0.3453 (0.2648)						
Covered				2.5699 (5.4444)				
Sum of characters, relative to newspaper volume						0.0022** (0.0010)		
Sum of characters (thousand), alternative search parameters								0.0147* (0.0087)
News pressure (thousand)	-0.0417 (0.0341)		-0.0056 (0.0126)		-6.4024*** (2.4102)		-0.9808** (0.4772)	
Kleibergen-Paap Wald rk F-statistic		1.2755		0.1696		6.0069		3.5952
Anderson-Rubin F-statistic		4.5922		4.5922		4.5922		4.5922
Anderson-Rubin p-value		0.0332		0.0332		0.0332		0.0332
R-square	0.4494	-0.6846	0.3614	-9.4333	0.5261	0.2516	0.1455	-1.7029

Notes: IV estimates. N = 269. All models include a constant and party, weekday, month, and year fixed effects, as well as the full set of control variables (output omitted). Robust standard errors in parentheses.

\* p < 0.10, \*\* p < 0.05, \*\*\* p < 0.01.

Table A8: Robustness (alternative instrument).

	(1) Coverage (1. stage)	(2) Resignation (2. stage)	(3) Coverage (1. stage)	(4) Resignation (2. stage)
Sum of characters (thousand)		0.0665** (0.0338)		0.0690*** (0.0251)
Most severe disasters (dummy)	-2.7062** (1.2065)		-2.3109* (1.2297)	
News pressure (thousand)			-0.1601** (0.0740)	
Kleibergen-Paap Wald rk F-statistic		4.2830		4.3174
Anderson-Rubin F-statistic		3.6982		3.6968
Anderson-Rubin p-value		0.0557		0.0263
Hansen's J, p-value				0.8961
R-square	0.5192	0.3088	0.5257	0.2949

Notes: IV estimates. N = 269. All models include a constant and party, weekday, month, and year fixed effects, as well as the full set of control variables (output omitted). Robust standard errors in parentheses.

\* p < 0.10, \*\* p < 0.05, \*\*\* p < 0.01.

Table A9: Most significant natural and technological disasters in Germany (2005–2014).

Disaster	Deaths	Damage (USD)	Time	
Cold wave	10	-	22.01.2006	01.02.2006
Transport Accident Lathen	23	-	22.09.2006	02.10.2006
Storm	11	5,500,000	18.01.2007	28.01.2007
Storm	7	-	23.01.2007	02.02.2007
Transport Accident Hannover	20	-	04.11.2008	14.11.2008
Love Parade Duisburg	19	-	24.07.2010	03.08.2010
Floods	4	12,900,000	03.06.2013	13.06.2013
Storm	-	4,800,000	27.07.2013	06.08.2013

Notes: The table shows all events that are listed in the top three of German disasters in the following categories: (a) natural disasters, number of deaths; (b) natural disasters, damage in USD; (c) technological disasters, number of deaths; and (d) technological disasters, damage in USD. Events for which no specific time window can be assigned are skipped. The time frame covers the day of the event plus the following 10 days. Source: EM-DAT International Disaster Database of the Center for Research on Epidemiology at the Catholic University of Louvain.

Table A10: Robustness (miscellaneous).

	Standard errors clustered by case		Placebo: explaining resignations before the lifting of immunity		Crowding out on day 2 after the lifting of immunity	
	Coverage (1. stage)	Resignation (2. stage)	Coverage (1. stage)	Resignation (2. stage)	Second-day coverage (1. stage)	Resignation (2. stage)
Sum of characters (thousand)		0.0723** (0.0318)		0.0191 (0.0393)		
Sum of characters (thousand), second day after the lifting of immunity						-0.5574 (4.2079)
News pressure (thousand)	-0.1991*** (0.0733)		-0.2050*** (0.0754)			
News pressure (th.), second day after the lifting of immunity					0.0000 (0.0002)	
Kleibergen-Paap Wald rk F-statistic		6.2790		6.3239		0.0153
Anderson-Rubin F-statistic		4.8994		0.1987		1.4859
Anderson-Rubin p-value		0.0280		0.6562		0.2241
R-square	0.5164	0.2749	0.5089	0.2062	0.3297	-247.9910

Notes: IV estimates. N = 269. All models include a constant and party, weekday, month, and year fixed effects, as well as the full set of control variables (output omitted). (Cluster) robust standard errors in parentheses.

\* p < 0.10, \*\* p < 0.05, \*\*\* p < 0.01.



Table A11: News coverage, resignations, and convictions.

	(1) Convicted (OLS)	(2) Convicted or deal (OLS)	(3) Convicted (IV, 2. stage)	(4) Convicted or deal (IV, 2. stage)
Sum of characters (thousand)	0.0265** (0.0129)	0.0078 (0.0124)	-0.0499 (0.0852)	0.0727 (0.0853)
Resignation before	0.1646 (0.1915)	-0.0221 (0.2069)	0.3223 (0.2511)	-0.1563 (0.2416)
Resignation after	0.0845 (0.1608)	0.3339*** (0.1075)	0.3495 (0.3439)	0.1084 (0.3101)
Election cycle	-0.0041 (0.0027)	-0.0049* (0.0026)	-0.0046* (0.0027)	-0.0045* (0.0024)
Request	0.1082 (0.0842)	0.0782 (0.0805)	0.1253 (0.0814)	0.0636 (0.0877)
Protest	-0.0818 (0.1419)	-0.1843 (0.1333)	-0.0387 (0.1434)	-0.2210* (0.1271)
National level	-0.0508 (0.1125)	-0.2148* (0.1115)	0.0554 (0.1464)	-0.3052* (0.1576)
Minister	-0.3252 (0.2227)	-0.3303 (0.2087)	0.4031 (0.8534)	-0.9502 (0.8469)
Kleibergen-Paap Wald rk F-statistic			4.3508	4.3508
Anderson-Rubin F-statistic			0.3123	0.6190
Anderson-Rubin p-value			0.5772	0.4328
R-square	0.4062	0.3836	0.2804	0.2858

Notes: N = 176. The dependent variable “convicted” takes the value of 1 if the politician was found legally guilty and 0 otherwise; “convicted or deal” takes the value of 1 if the politician was found guilty or was offered a deal to terminate the criminal proceedings. The 2SLS regressions use news pressure as an instrument for coverage on liftings of immunity. All models include a constant and party, weekday, month, and year fixed effects. Robust standard errors in parentheses.

\* p < 0.10, \*\* p < 0.05, \*\*\* p < 0.01.

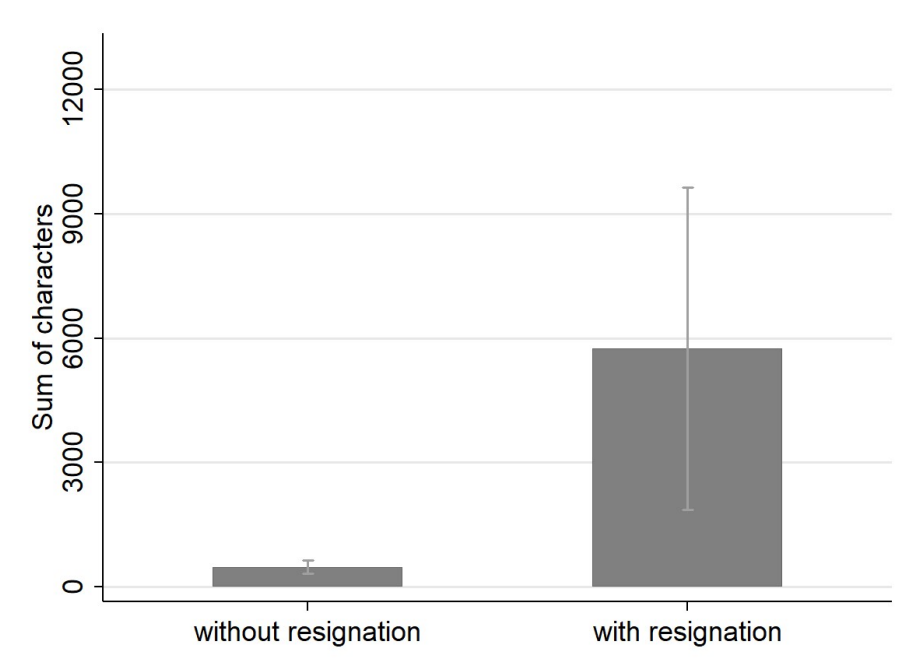
Table A12: News coverage and resignation, by newspaper ideology.

	Ideological matches			Ideological mismatches		
	(1) Resignation (OLS)	(2) Coverage (IV, 1. stage)	(3) Resignation (IV, 2. stage)	(4) Resignation (OLS)	(5) Coverage (IV, 1. stage)	(6) Resignation (IV, 2. stage)
Sum of characters (thousand), only same-ideology coverage	0.0453** (0.0185)		0.2095* (0.1160)			
Sum of characters (thousand), only different-ideology coverage				0.2345*** (0.0449)		1.2336 (0.9838)
News pressure (thousand)		-0.0688** (0.0298)			-0.0117 (0.0093)	
Kleibergen-Paap Wald rk F-statistic			4.5461			1.3512
Anderson-Rubin F-statistic			4.5922			4.5922
Anderson-Rubin p-value			0.0332			0.0332
R-square	0.3553	0.5909	-0.0664	0.4066	0.3808	-1.1076

Notes: N = 269. Same-ideology coverage refers to reports on politicians who have the same ideology as the newspaper, whereas different-ideology coverage only captures reports on representatives whose ideology deviates from that of the outlet. Ideological politician–newspaper matches are determined by classifying representatives and outlets into the categories right-center, left-center, left-green, economic-liberal, and other. All models include a constant and party, weekday, month, and year fixed effects, as well as the full set of control variables (output omitted). Robust standard errors in parentheses.

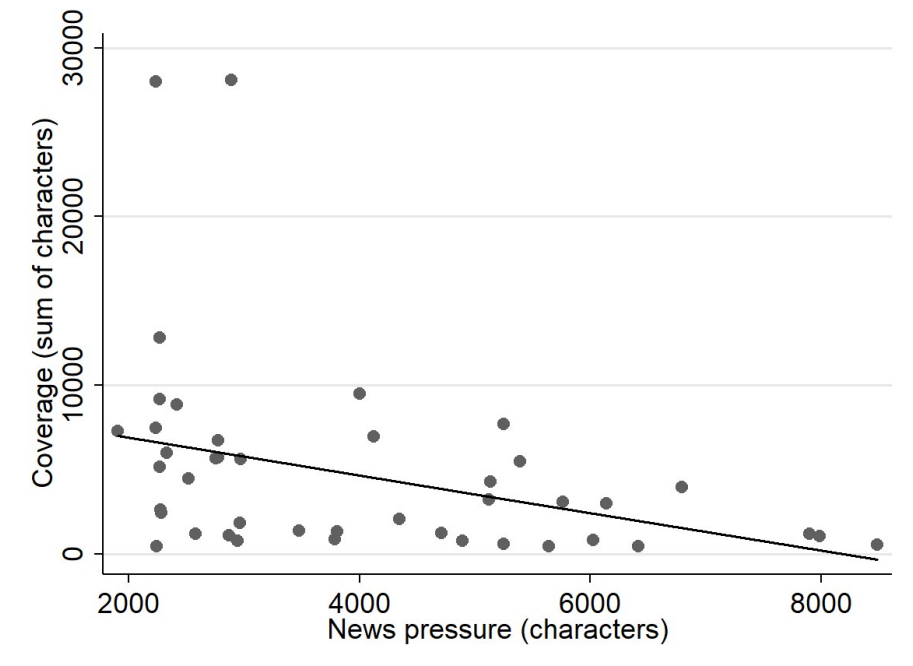
\* p < 0.10, \*\* p < 0.05, \*\*\* p < 0.01.

Figure A1: Coverage of liftings of immunity, by resignation status.



Notes: The figure compares the average amount of news coverage for cases in which politicians resigned after their immunity was lifted with cases in which they did not resign. The error bars represent the 90% confidence interval.

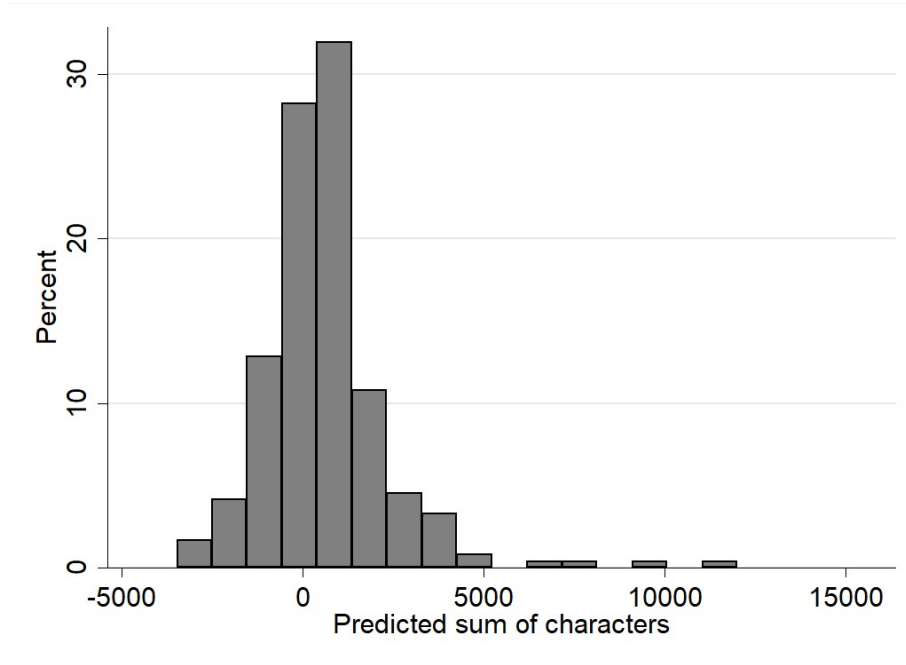
Figure A2: Coverage of liftings of immunity and news pressure



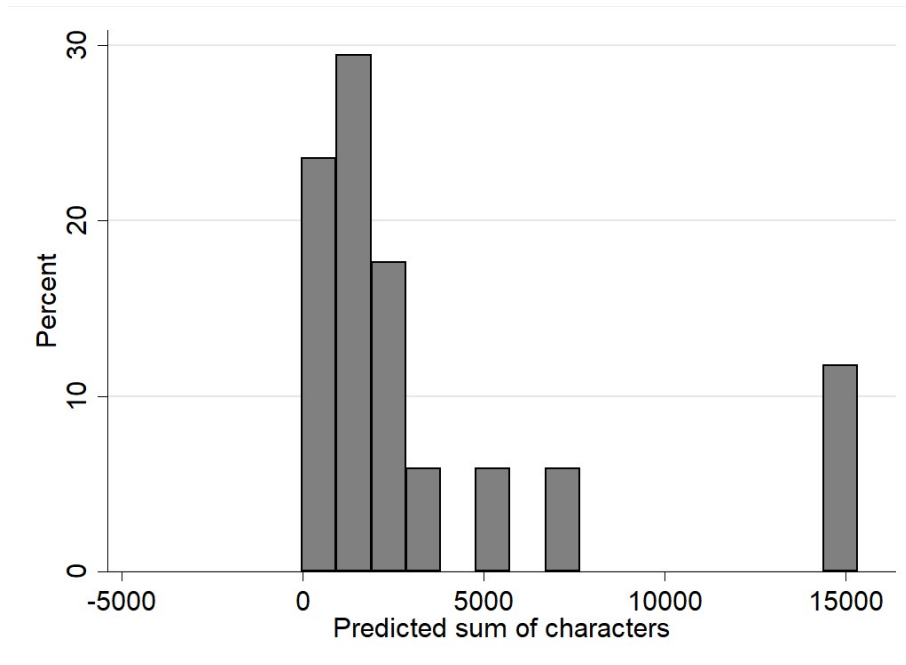
Notes: The data shown in the figure include only cases that were covered by the newspapers in the sample.

Figure A3: Predicted amount of news coverage, by resignation status.

A: Without resignation

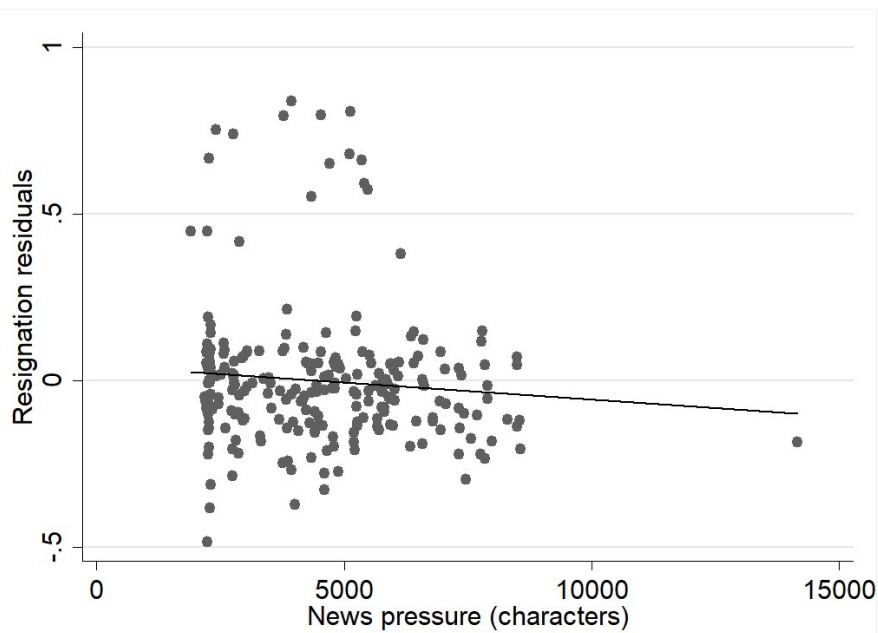


B: With resignation



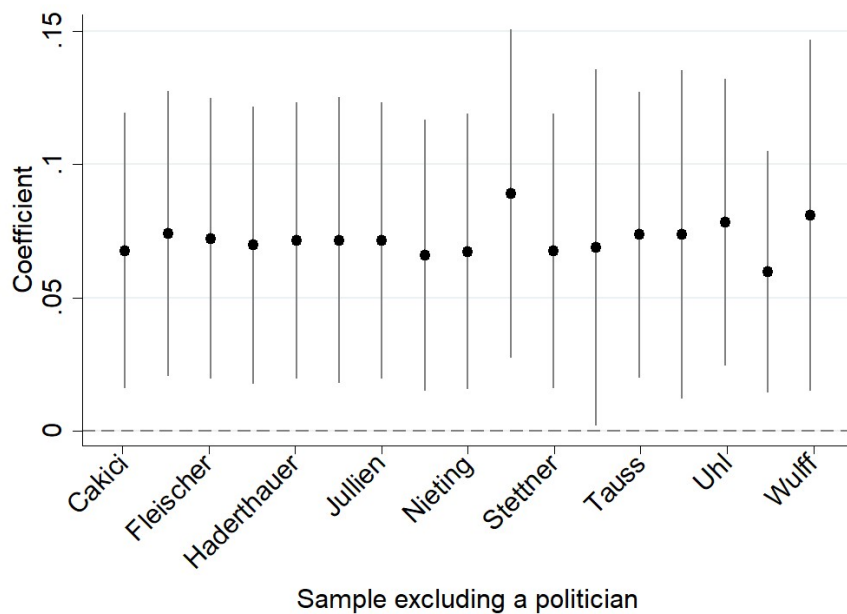
Notes: The figure shows distributions of the predicted sum of characters of news coverage on liftings of immunity. Panel A refers to cases in which politicians resigned after their immunity was lifted, whereas Panel B relates to cases in which they did not resign. The predictions are based on a regression of news coverage on the news pressure instrument; a constant and party, weekday, month, and year fixed effects; and the full set of control variables (see Table 4, Column 1, in the main text).

Figure A4: Resignation residuals and news pressure.



Notes: The figure shows the actual values of the news pressure variable and the residuals from a regression of the baseline resignation variable on a constant and party; weekday, month, and year fixed effects; and the full set of control variables.

Figure A5: Effect of news coverage on the probability of resignation (different samples).



Notes: The figure shows IV estimates of the coefficient of the news coverage variable similar to those presented in Column 1 in Table 5 of the main text (including the full set of fixed effects and the control variables). In contrast with the baseline specification, the coefficients are obtained after removing one case with a resignation at a time. From the left to the right, the estimates are alphabetically ordered by the name of the excluded politician. The vertical spikes represent the 90% confidence interval.