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## Fertility Discourse in Parental Leave Policies' Media Coverage: A Frame Analysis of French-speaking Swiss Press Articles from 1999 to 2009

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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 investigate the status of a *fertility frame* – the mobilisation of discourse relating to fertility issues – among the various arguments used to justify or reject parental leave policies. 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 main 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 *fertility frame* is only moderately used in articles covering Swiss news on *paternity* leaves. Conversely, the *fertility frame* is largely mobilised in articles covering *parental* leave in other countries. We discuss some interpretations of this discrepancy and suggest future avenues of research on parental leave policies in Switzerland.

### Keywords

Parental leave, paternity leave, media, discourse, fertility, Switzerland

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## Introduction<sup>2</sup>

The recent developments of parental leave policies<sup>3</sup> in Europe have led to a renewed interest in the effects of these particular types of family policies on fertility behaviour. For instance, research has shown that parental leave uptake by fathers has positive effects on second and third births in Sweden (Duvander & Andersson, 2006, p. 262) and Norway (Duvander, Lappegard, & Andersson, 2010). To date, there is little agreement on the direction and the strength of such effects (Thévenon & Gauthier, 2010). In a literature review on the topic, Gauthier (2007) concludes that the effects of family policies on childbearing behaviour are not conclusive. This could be partly due to the heterogeneity of policies and the time frames considered (Gauthier, 2007), as well as to measurement issues (Neyer & Andersson, 2007).

This paper examines the ways in which the Swiss French-speaking<sup>4</sup> media portray the relation between parental leave policies and fertility. In 2009, Switzerland was one of the only countries (together with Monaco & Bosnia and Herzegovina) in the Council of Europe that had no legal provision for parental leave (Wall, Pappamikaail, Leitao, & 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.

In the paper, we address the following questions: what arguments are used in the media to justify or reject parental leave policies' implementation? Are pro-natalist arguments mobilized? 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 & Modigliani, 1989; McCombs & 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 the Swiss French-speaking press from 1999 to 2009.

To begin with, an overview of the Swiss context is proposed. Second, we define what frame analysis is, and we justify having chosen it as the theoretical approach for interpreting the empirical data. We provide some examples of how the media in other countries depict fertility topics. Third, we describe our data and methodological approach. Fourth, we provide a quantification of the media coverage of parental leave policies and the frames mobilised in favour of and against parental leave policies. In a separate section, the place of fertility discourse in the press articles is analysed. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of the results comparing the frames used in Switzerland and in other countries.

## The Swiss context

### *Fertility and 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 woman<sup>5</sup>. Although it has been

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<sup>2</sup> The authors thank Manuel Tettamanti, Nicky Le Feuvre, Ester Lucia Rizzi, and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

<sup>3</sup> We use "parental leave policies" to refer both to parental and paternity leaves. Parental leave is usually a gender-neutral leave to be shared between parents (some countries have "quotas" for fathers – and sometimes for mothers). Paternity leave is usually "a short period of leave to be taken immediately after the birth, concurrently with maternity leave" (Moss & Deven, 2006, p. 262). In order to clarify when we discuss a specific type of leave, we use *italic* style (e.g. *parental* leave).

<sup>4</sup> Switzerland is composed by four linguistic macro-regions: German-speaking, French-speaking, Italian-speaking, and Romansch-speaking regions.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/fr/index/themen/01/01/key.html>

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 & 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, & 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). Compared 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 old<sup>6</sup>.

### *Institutions and fertility behaviour*

Scholars stemming from various disciplinary backgrounds such as social demography, economy and political science propose complementary explanations by linking the gender division of paid and unpaid work with fertility rates. McDonald (2000) poses that fertility can fall to the very low levels observed today in Southern European and South East Asian countries in societies where gender equity is high in individual-oriented institutions (e.g. education, the economy and politics), whereas it remains relatively low in family-oriented institutions. On the contrary fertility rates stabilize around replacement levels in more coherently egalitarian contexts (e.g. Scandinavian countries) where equality is pursued both in the public and the private sphere and the State generously supports work and family conciliation<sup>7</sup>. According to McDonald’s framework, the institutionalization of gender equity in the public sphere only, as it is the case in Switzerland, would promote lower fertility by increasing alternative avenues to satisfaction, status, and prestige.

On the same line, Esping-Andersen (Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1999) offers an institutional theory focused on Western welfare state regimes. He identifies institutional clusters that combine different types of labour markets, the state and the family. In Esping-Andersen’s view, low fertility “springs from the incapacity of women to harmonize careers and family obligations” in contexts where the defamiliarization process (where the state absorbs the responsibilities traditionally relegated to the family) is not sufficient (1999, p. 5). Switzerland is usually described as a conservative welfare regime with liberal traits (e.g. Armingeon, 2001; Bertozzi, Bonoli, & Gay-des-Combes, 2005). Therefore its low fertility rate can also be explained by its low level of defamiliarization.

Rindfuss et al. (2003) also stress *institutional variations* which are likely to influence fertility behaviour, such as the availability, acceptability, accessibility, quality, and cost of childcare; the market substitutes for goods and services formerly produced within the household; the labour market

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/fr/index/themen/20/05/blank/key/Vereinbarkeit/01.html> (statistics for 2009)

<sup>7</sup> One exception in this schema is represented by the major English speaking countries (e.g. England, Australia and the US) which show replacement fertility rates but little state subsidized family policies. However, this can be explained by the important and inexpensive offer of market childcare in these countries (Bonoli & Reber, 2010). On US’s fit with McDonald’s theoretical framework, see also Bonoli (2008, p. 68).

accommodations (e.g. flex time); gender role flexibility and men's contributions to housework and childcare; and public policy interventions (e.g. family leaves).

These institutional arguments are consistent with those of social demographers (DiPrete, Morgan, Engelhardt, & Pacalova, 2003; Kravdal, 1992; Rindfuss & Brewster, 1996) and economists (see Easterlin, 1980, 1987). They argue that changes in gender relationships in the direction of greater equality at the level of social norms and regulations increase automatically the opportunity-cost of mothers. Caring for children becomes relatively "more expensive" in terms of foregone labour market opportunities and in turn it influences fertility behaviour.

### Population policies

For what concerns public policy interventions in family issues in Switzerland, they 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.

Federal<sup>8</sup> 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 votes<sup>9</sup> (Aebi, Dessoulavy, & Scenini, 1994; Dafflon, 2003; Pannatier, 2000; Sutter, Belser, Chaponnière, & 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 & Dalla Palma, 2005)<sup>10</sup> and public administrations (Charvoz, 2010; Fuchs, 2004, 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 law<sup>11</sup> entitles male employees to a minimum of one day of paid time-off in case of fatherhood.

State intervention in family issues has been legitimated by demographic arguments mainly during World War II (Dafflon, 2003, p. 50). This period coincided with the acceptance of a federal article in favour of families in the Swiss Constitution. These arguments faded away between the 1950s and 1980s, as the period was prosperous and marked by a "baby boom". Pro-natalist arguments rose again at the beginning of the 80s, revealing concerns about innovation and inter-generational solidarity (Dafflon, 2003, pp. 58-64).

Dafflon notes that officially fertility arguments were not decisive in policy-making (p. 59). In 1999, the official position of the government was to consider fertility rates as too low but not to intervene

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<sup>8</sup> Switzerland is a federal state and is organised in three political levels: the communes, the cantons and the Confederation.

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> Code des Obligations, Art. 329, Al. 3.

through special measures (Stark & Kohler, 2002). In 2002, the Federal council answered a question concerning the gap between fertility rates in Switzerland and in France in the following terms: “France is one of the rare countries in Europe where traditionally clear birth rate objectives are set. The consensus is general, both in the political sphere and in society [...]. This position is totally opposed to that of Switzerland, where the rejection of state policies in fertility behaviour is very clear”<sup>12</sup>.

Wanner (2008, p. 146) explains the state’s cautious approach by arguing that fertility is considered as belonging to the private sphere and that it is traditionally left out of the government’s priorities. Several other scholars have acknowledged the particular cultural trait of Switzerland, where state intervention in issues considered as “private” is deemed inappropriate (e.g. Armingeon, 2001; Ballestri & Bonoli, 2003; Dafflon, 2003).

## **Theoretical framework**

### 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 & Bosk, 1988; Kitsuse & 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 & 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 & 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 & 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 & 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).

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<sup>12</sup> Official Bulletin, 14.06.2002 ([http://www.parlament.ch/f/Suche/Pages/geschaefte.aspx?gesch\\_id=20021013](http://www.parlament.ch/f/Suche/Pages/geschaefte.aspx?gesch_id=20021013)), our translation.

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.

We will analyse specifically the *fertility frame*; that is the use of fertility-related arguments to support or reject parental leave policies. The mediatisation of the *fertility frame* will allow a better understanding of the status of fertility issues in Switzerland. It will also uncover the representations of the relation between parental leave policies and fertility behaviour. Paternity and parental leaves are in some cases analysed separately because neither policy is in force yet. Therefore, both leave types are potentially in competition.

### *Fertility issues in the media*

Existing research on fertility issues in the media reveals that the context and the historical period have a significant effect on the way they are depicted. In the United States, population issues were framed as representing a threat of overpopulation until the end of the 1980s (Wilmoth & Ball, 1992). However, a recent media analysis in several industrialised countries reveals that it is, rather, under-replacement levels of TFR that raised concern in the late 1990s: “Emerging is an active popular debate about the causes and consequences of low fertility levels, as well as a shift from popular alarm over too many people to fears of too few” (Stark & Kohler, 2002, p. 535). In the same way, in Italy (Krause & Marchesi, 2007) and Great Britain (Brown & Ferree, 2005), the media tend to represent low fertility rates as serious problems<sup>13</sup>.

Stark & Kohler’s research (2002), conducted in 1998-1999, includes Switzerland in the sample. The results suggest that low fertility issues are poorly covered in the Swiss media in comparison to other countries. Ranking all of the 11 countries they considered according to the coverage rate of fertility issues, Switzerland, together with New Zealand and the United States, were the last three.<sup>14</sup> Following the trend of other countries, most Swiss articles did consider low fertility negatively. However, Switzerland differs in that the articles mainly recount low fertility issues in other European countries rather than treating this as a national issue. This contrasts with the other countries, where “the debate over low fertility seems to be primarily a domestic concern” (p. 546). Finally, the results of this study indicate that in the Swiss articles, the lack of family policies are given as reasons for low TFR, showing an existing relation between family policies and fertility frames. Therefore, family policies are presented as interventions that could realistically reverse fertility trends. For this paper, we analyse the relationship between parental leave policies – which are specific family policies – and fertility issues.

### *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).<sup>15</sup> 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.

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<sup>13</sup> In these contexts, fertility issues are also linked to nationalist concerns and fear of immigration.

<sup>14</sup> Ranks were calculated after having standardized for the number of sources used and the number of articles published (for details see Stark & Kohler, 2002, p. 543).

<sup>15</sup> 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>

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 6<sup>th</sup> with regard to the percentage of population reading on average half an hour to an hour per day<sup>16</sup>.

## Data and methodology

The dataset includes 579 press articles published in nine daily newspapers in the French-speaking part of Switzerland<sup>17</sup> (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 1<sup>st</sup>, 1999 and December 31<sup>st</sup>, 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 databases<sup>18</sup>. 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

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

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

<sup>16</sup>

<http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/fr/index/themen/16/03/key/ind16.indicator.16010302.160105.html?open=160006#160006>

<sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> Lexis Nexis, Europress and Swissex.

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). 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.

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).

**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	
<b><i>Parental leave policies subset</i></b>	<b>206</b>	<b>36</b>	
Maternity leave	33	6	-
Social policy	119	20	
Reconciliation measure	57	10	
Equality	28	5	
Other	136	23	
<b><i>Various public issues</i></b>	<b>373</b>	<b>64</b>	
<b>Total dataset</b>	<b>579</b>	<b>100</b>	Content analysis

However, the following thematic axes were defined *a priori* and coded following a top-down procedure:

- discourse in favour of or against proposals to implement parental leave policies
- status of fertility arguments in these discourses
- representations of fathers and fatherhood

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.

## 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.

Media coverage of parental leave policies

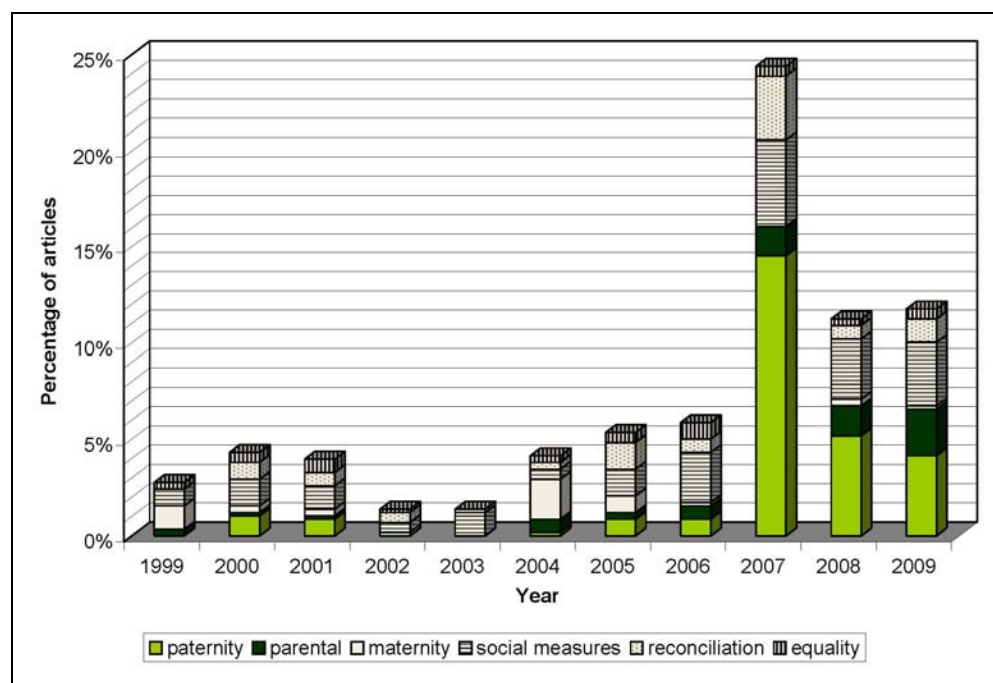
- **Year of publication**

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).

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



- **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 newspapers<sup>19</sup> 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%).

#### 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 Leuthard<sup>20</sup> 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 9<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> 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

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<sup>19</sup> All the regional newspapers except *l'Express/L'Impartial*.

<sup>20</sup> 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.

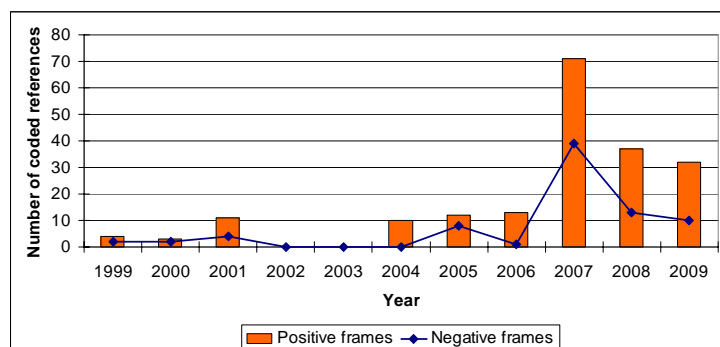
opinion about *paternity* leave (M\_20070114\_LM<sup>21</sup>). Second, journalists asked political actors to position themselves with regard to *paternity* leave implementation within political interviews (M\_20071105;\_2;\_3;\_4).

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.

### 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**

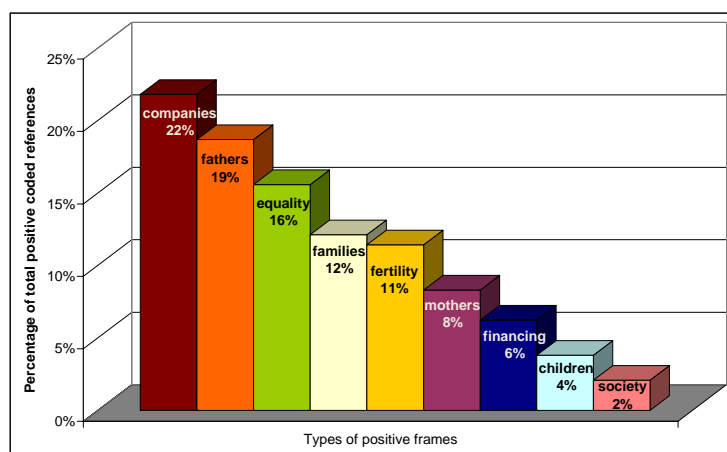


### Positive frames

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). Below, we detail the most mobilised frames, and develop the *fertility frame* (11%) in a further section.

<sup>21</sup> 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 14<sup>th</sup> of January 2007 in the newspaper *Le Matin*). Refer to the appendix for the list of the newspapers' abbreviations.

**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.<sup>22</sup> (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.

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<sup>22</sup> 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.”.

- **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,<sup>23</sup> young men pushing the pram as perfect routine is now a common image in the neighbourhood. It’s the parental leave effect<sup>24</sup> (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.<sup>25</sup>

- **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

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<sup>23</sup> Typical German outdoor terrace of a restaurant, where beer is served.

<sup>24</sup> 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.”

<sup>25</sup> 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.

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 administration<sup>26</sup>:

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 said<sup>27</sup> (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.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> In addition, we can observe that here paternity leave is described as "an increase of salary".

<sup>27</sup> Original source: Mais le conseiller national radical schaffhousois n'entend pas accorder de "hausse salariale sur le dos des contribuables", selon sa formule.

(M\_20070318\_LM)

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 naturally<sup>29</sup>” (M\_20051208\_LT). It is also used by a Deputy from the Swiss People’s Party in the canton of Jura<sup>30</sup>:

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 reactions<sup>31</sup> (M\_20071025\_QJ).

### The fertility frame

Fertility is the central theme in only 4% of the articles of the total dataset. The *fertility frame* is used to argue both in favour of parental leave policies and against them. In 11% of the coded references in the subset, the fertility frame was presented as a frame in favour of the implementation of parental leave policies. Low fertility is represented as a threat for societies and is said to have negative effects on the economy and on the possibility of financing social insurances. The articles discussing Germany’s current affairs are particularly prone to propose frames where low fertility is seen a dramatic problem with serious consequences such as “the disappearance of the population” (M\_20090416\_TG). The articles reporting Switzerland’s situation frame a far less apocalyptic scenario, insisting on the imbalance in the population structure and on the mismatch between fertility preferences and practices:

Population policy is not only an issue that concerns society, but also the economy. Our companies need arms and a highly qualified workforce. And yet, in Switzerland, the number of desired children is higher than the number of children born. Statistics show that our country is no exception in birth rate decrease<sup>32</sup> (M\_20060414\_LM).

*Fertility frames* are more typical for articles discussing *parental* leave (26 references) than those addressing *paternity* leave (9 references). In the former, *parental* leave is either presented as the solution to ensure high fertility rates or as one of the instruments of an efficient population policy able

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<sup>28</sup> 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.

<sup>29</sup> Original source: “Ce n'est pas à la politique de contraindre un homme à changer les langes, s'il ne le fait pas naturellement”.

<sup>30</sup> 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>).

<sup>31</sup> 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.

<sup>32</sup> Original source: Or la politique familiale n’est pas simplement un problème de société, mais également un problème de l’économie. Nos entreprises ont besoin de bras et de personnel qualifiés. Or, en Suisse, le désir d’avoir des enfants est plus important que le nombre d’enfants à naître. Les statistiques montrent que notre pays n’échappe pas à la dénatalité.

to maintain future generations. The causal relation is clearly stated. In other excerpts, we observe that the causal relation between *parental* leave and fertility is only implied. This frame typically juxtaposes both propositions, as in this title published in *Le Temps*:

Germany wants babies again  
BIRTH RATE. Parental leave for fathers<sup>33</sup> (M\_20071215\_LT)

*Parental* leaves are represented as a means to fight against low fertility rates, but their absence is not considered to be the cause of a low fertility. Causes would be, rather, the economic conjuncture and the difficulty of reconciling work and family obligations. *Fertility frames* extensively make use of the example of foreign countries to illustrate the causal relation between parental leave policies and high fertility rates. Scandinavian countries are predominantly cited as examples, along with France, Austria, and Germany. Leave schemes in foreign countries are compared and sometimes listed in rank order. They are referred to as models that Switzerland should draw inspiration from. Thus, such comparisons are used to portray the existing lag between these models and the Swiss situation. Finally, foreign models are used to put the federal law projects concerning *paternity* leave into comparative perspective. The comparison of the length and cost of the projects with existing European *parental* leaves legitimises the proposals in the eyes of their sponsors.

However, *fertility frames* are also used to illustrate the drawbacks of parental leave policies. In these cases, the ability of leaves to affect fertility rates is called into question. As the causal relation is jeopardized, parental leave policies are discredited and are no longer considered to be legitimate family policies. In particular, articles about *parental* leave in Germany fall into this category. Reforms would be tools to fight against low fertility to the point that the stagnation of fertility rates is considered to be a failure of the parental leave scheme itself and of its sponsor, the Minister of Family of the German government.

In 2007, Germany was 19<sup>th</sup>, way behind Ireland and France. Even behind Switzerland (1.46). And yet, Ursula von der Leyen was already claiming victory. Slightly too soon. This is quite unfortunate for the minister who wanted to be the first person in the past ten years to have positively influenced the statistics. Her ministry had vigorously tried to persuade Eurostat, the European office for statistics, to reconsider its calculations. Anyhow, Ursula von der Leyen wants to prove the beneficial effects of her policies: a parental leave of fourteen months covered at 67% of the last wage, the increase of child care structures, and a campaign to encourage fathers to invest more in the children's education<sup>34</sup> (M\_20090812\_LT).

## Conclusion

*Paternity* leave is the main public issue at stake in our dataset. 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.

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<sup>33</sup> Original source:

L'Allemagne a de nouveau envie de bébés  
NATALITE. Congé parental des pères.

<sup>34</sup> Original source: En 2007, l'Allemagne arrivait au 19e rang, loin derrière l'Irlande et la France. Et même derrière la Suisse (1,46). Or déjà Ursula von der Leyen criait victoire. Un peu trop tôt. Plutôt fâcheux pour la ministre qui comptait précisément se présenter comme la première à avoir fait remonter les statistiques depuis dix ans. Son ministère a fait des pieds et des mains pour persuader Eurostat, l'office européen de la statistique, de revoir ses chiffres. Qu'importe, Ursula von der Leyen veut prouver les effets bénéfiques de sa politique: le congé parental de quatorze mois avec 67% du dernier salaire assuré, l'augmentation du nombre de crèches, une campagne pour que les pères s'investissent davantage dans l'éducation des enfants.



Positive and negative frames of parental leave policies are intertwined in every article. This can be partly explained by the standard journalistic practice of juxtaposing opposing viewpoints, the “balance norm”<sup>35</sup> as Gamson & Modigliani put it (1989, p. 8). Yet, for analytic purposes here we decided to present positive and negative frames separately in order to compare them and highlight the predominant ones.

Positive frames of parental leave policies are more frequent than negative ones. The predominant positive frame is the representation of parental leave policies as a measure to serve the interests of the companies and the 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. The *involved fatherhood frame* and the *gender equality frame* are also significantly mobilised. Interestingly, *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.

The majority of the negative frames of parental leave policies present them as *secondary measures* and as not constituting political priorities. Another frequent negative frame is the *state intrusion frame*, where parental leave policies are pictured negatively because they represent interventions in family life. Finally, the *companies’ interests* 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. The *fertility frame* proved also to be ambivalent. It is mobilised both in negative and positive frames, but to a relative extent only in comparison with the other frames identified.

The comparison of the frames according to the national context covered reveals interesting differences. In articles reporting Swiss news, the *company frame* is predominantly mobilised whereas the *fertility frame* is seldom mobilised. The interests of (private and public) employers are the principal arguments that structure – positive as well as negative – frames. The opposite pattern is found in articles addressing *parental* leave from an international perspective. *Fertility frames* are mobilised significantly in articles addressing *parental* leaves in other countries, and the *company* frame is barely mobilised. The *fertility* frame represents *parental* leaves as desirable family policies because they act upon alarming low birth rates. Sometimes however, a *counter-fertility frame* was identified, questioning or rejecting the potentially positive effect of parental leaves on fertility rates.

## Discussion

After discussing a few interpretations for the differential use and importance of frames in our dataset, we address the question of competing policy proposals and agendas. Finally, we propose further avenues of research on the emergence of parental leave policies in Switzerland.

The sporadic reference to what we called the *fertility frame* in national news could relate to the Swiss tradition of non-intervention of the state in all that concerns family matters, particularly issues like the division of labour among partners and childcare. As fertility issues are considered as out of the political realm, these shared cultural references would result in a moderate mobilisation of the *fertility frame*. In addition, it could well be that the social science inconclusive debate about the effects of family policies on fertility rates contributes to decrease the use of the *fertility frame*. This is reflected by the mobilisation of a counter-fertility frame.

Another possible interpretation refers to the public perception of *paternity* leave (the predominant public issue addressed). It could well be that *paternity* leaves are considered as less related to fertility

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<sup>35</sup> It should be noted that Gamson & Modigliani stress the fact that often competing positions are limited in number and that “illegitimate” challengers are not sought by journalists.

behaviour than *parental* leaves are. One reason is the duration of paternity leaves, which is generally shorter than that of parental leaves. Alternatively, this low “fertility-value” attributed to paternity leave could be due to the fact that fertility behaviour is seen more in relation to women rather than to men. In this view, parental leave would be more related to fertility rates because women can benefit from them, whereas paternity leave would not be perceived as influencing fertility behaviour because it concerns only men<sup>36</sup>.

The predominance of an *economic frame* in articles covering *paternity* leave in Switzerland is reflected by the dominant use of the *company benefits frame*, the *companies’ interests frame* and the *cost for society frame*. It echoes with the analysis of the debates in the 1990s on the implementation of maternity leave (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 (p. 105). Moreover, the acceptance in 2004 of a federal maternity leave was said to have succeeded because of a wide party coalition (including the majority of right wing Members of the Parliament) and the support of the labour market. Notably, the Deputy who proposed the maternity leave scheme was also the President of the union of small and medium companies (Dafflon, 2003). The importance of lobbies – among which powerful economic lobbies - in policy-making processes in Switzerland would explain why the *economic frame* is widely used. Highlighting the advantages for the economy and work organisations of the implementation of *paternity* leave would represent the best chances of introducing an embryonic form of leave (may it be freely implemented). In the Swiss context - characterised by a direct democracy – consensus is an essential key of welfare state development (Armingeon, 2001; Ballestri & Bonoli, 2003; Häusermann, 2006; Kübler, 2007; Martin, 2002). Therefore, it seems that the *economic frame* is a central component of a consensus building.

We would like to discuss the different place of *paternity* leave in comparison with *parental* leave on the media agenda. It should be noted that at the federal level *parental* and *paternity* leaves nearly received the same amount of political attention by MPs. The exploration of parliamentary interventions between 1999 and 2009 revealed that *parental* leave was claimed seven times and *paternity* leave eight times<sup>37</sup>. Furthermore, it is not clear whether paternity and parental leaves have the same status in the labour market arena. A study conducted on work organisations in two French-speaking cantons revealed that approximately the same proportion of companies was granting (paid) paternity and (unpaid) parental leaves (Canning Wacker & Dalla Palma, 2005). However, a lack of data does not enable us to assess precisely the priority given to parental and paternity leaves in companies<sup>38</sup>. We would like however to highlight the fact that the media coverage seems to have mainly reacted to the claim made by a member of the executive power in 2007 in favour of a *paternity* leave.

This suggests also that parental and paternity leaves seem to be in competition with one another, as they are never addressed simultaneously in press articles. During the coding process, it was always possible to determine which leave type was the main public issue at stake. This suggests that in the Swiss context, where no parental leave policies exist (except for maternity leave), *paternity* and *parental* leaves are framed as alternative - and not complementary - family policies in the media.

Meaning production around parental leave is not limited to that observed through the media. Research on the topic needs to enter the political and the economic spheres. What is the status of parental and

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<sup>36</sup> This common perception is opposed by numerous studies (Bernardi, Le Goff, & Ryser, 2010; Caporali, Bernardi, & Valarino, 2009; Mills, Mencarini, Tanturri, & Begall, 2008; Rizzi, Judd, White, Bernardi, & Kertzer, 2008) showing positive effects of father involvement in childcare and domestic tasks on fertility behaviour. Other studies have also shown the positive impact of fathers’ parental leave uptake on fatherhood involvement (e.g. Haas & Hwang, 2008; Nepomnyaschy & Waldfogel, 2007; Seward, Yeatts, Zottarelli, & Fletcher, 2006). The mediatisation of such causal links could possibly redefine paternity leave framing.

<sup>37</sup> This observation was made on the basis of the analysis of parliamentary interventions archived on <http://www.parlament.ch/f/suche/pages/curia-vista.aspx>. A keyword research with « parental leave » and « paternity leave » was conducted.

<sup>38</sup> There exists no report on special leave entitlements in private work organisations on a national level.

paternity leaves on the corresponding agendas? What is the place of fertility discourse in relation to other discourses in the construction of parental leave policies as public issues? A better knowledge of the various and competing frames mobilised in these spheres (media, politics and economics) is relevant. The ways in which policy problems are represented have concrete consequences on the public policies which are proposed, voted, adopted or rejected in a democracy (e.g. Bacchi, 1999; Blumer, 1971; Cefaï, 1996; Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988; Kitsuse & Spector, 1973; Verloo, 2007; Yanovitzky, 2002).

The competing frames which emerge from these discourses are likely to influence which kinds of leave schemes are deemed legitimate for the public opinion. Who is considered a legitimate recipient of parental leave (e.g. parents versus fathers; biological versus adoptive parents)? To which degree shall leaves be institutionalised (state regulated versus freely implemented)? Shall they be financially compensated and if so, how much (at which percentage of earnings), and for how long (week(s) versus months)? These questions are likely to come to the fore when parental leave policies schemes will be debated and eventually voted by the Swiss electorate. The six-months paid parental leave proposition, which just emerged at the time of revising this paper (Baumann et al., released in October 2010)<sup>39</sup> suggests that the framing of the issue has barely started.

## 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) <sup>40</sup>
<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

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<sup>39</sup> The media coverage of this proposition is not part of the present analysis (our dataset comprises press articles published between 1999 and 2009).

<sup>40</sup> "Recherches et études des médias publicitaires (REMP)": [http://www.remp.ch/fr/pdf/Bulletin-2009\\_F.pdf](http://www.remp.ch/fr/pdf/Bulletin-2009_F.pdf)

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