Coffey 2011) and interviews with party elites in Europe (Hellwig 2012, 206) confirm that politicians consciously stress globalization constraints on their own behavior. Additionally, changes in the institutional setting are found to have predictable moderating effects on the responsivness of policy to public opinion. For instance, Sattler, Brandt, and Freeman (2010) show that before central bank independence, British fiscal and monetary policies were re- sponsive to aggregate voting intentions and government approval ratings but, after central bank indepedence, monetary policy was no longer responsive. Interestingly, however, Sattler, Brandt, and Freeman (2008) find mutual responsiveness between public opinion and policy outputs, despite a lack of responsiveness in policy outcomes such as inflation and economic growth. That this responsiveness is observed outside real economic outcomes is accredited to the difficulty of identifying the effects of policies in open economies.

Given that public perceptions of the institutional context have been shown to affect po- litical consequences of the economy, it is puzzling that scholarship on the domestic politics of economic globalization has largely neglected a serious inquiry into political communication and the mass media in particular. Scholars of American politics have shown that national policymakers actively engage in strategies of “blame avoidance” through the mass media (Weaver 1986; Jacobson and Kernell 1983), diffusing blame horizontally toward other equals or vertically upward in the chain of authority (McGraw 1990, 1991).2 Variation in blame attributions, in turn, has predictable effects on how individuals judge both policies and policymakers (McGraw, Best, and Timpone 1995). Other work has shown that under cer- tain conditions mass media can diffuse blame through issue framing (Iyengar 1987; Iyengar 1991), depoliticize personal experience in favor of sociotropic perceptions (Mutz 1992), and exacerbate inequalities in political participation (Norris 2000). More generally, a formidable and highly critical tradition of observers have advanced richly argued but largely untested propositions converging on the expectation of profoundly antidemocratic tendencies in the

2Hood (2002, 20) suggests that by lowering the potential costs of communicating malign policy effects to harmed groups, mass media may increase the incentives for politicians to avoid blame. See also Hood et al. (2009).

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modern mass media (Herman and Chomsky 1988; Adorno 1991). In light of these currents, it is a surprising omission in previous research on the domestic politics of globalization that testimony by party elites in research interviews (Hellwig 2012, 206-07) and via the mass me- dia (Hellwig and Coffey 2011, 420-21) is more often cited as evidence of room-to-maneuver constraints than questioned as possible strategic communication or media bias. Especially because evidence for opinion-policy responsiveness in open economies can be observed apart from and despite the objective economic effects of policy (Sattler, Freeman, and Brandt, 2008), a necessary next step in studying the domestic politics of globalization is to theo- rize more specifically how political communication—in particular, the mass media—directly and indirectly affects the relationship between objective patterns of economic openness and domestic political outcomes.

2 Theory and Hypotheses

A central premise of this article is that issues of economic openness have been socially constructed by elite opinion-leaders as an external and objective process, typically known as “globalization,” which shapes policymakers’ room-to-maneuver (Hay 2002; Hay and Smith 2005; Hay and Rosamond 2011). The novel and central theoretical claim of this article is that the mass media diffuse responsibility for policies of economic liberalization over and above whatever diffusion of responsibility is created by the objective realities of economic openness. The warrant for this claim is straightforward: the mass media amplify and extend the reach of elite-sponsored social constructions beyond the reach they would have in the absence of mass media. This section develops the reasoning which moves from this premise to the central claim and then deduces a series of hypotheses regarding how mass media should be expected to affect individuals’ perceptions of economic openness, blame attributions for national problems, and ultimately the decisions of national policymakers.

Previous research amply demonstrates that the dominant social construction of economic

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globalization is that of an external, objective pressure on policymakers—an image of eco- nomic globalization which commands a relative consensus among elites. In addition to the multiple studies by Colin Hay and associates on elite discourse from multiple European countries, empirical evidence for an elite consensus is also ample from other research on the domestic politics of globalization, which finds that party elites consistently invoke “room to maneuver” constraints in research interviews (Hellwig 2012, 206-07) as well as media messaging (Hellwig and Coffey 2011).3

Given this elite consensus regarding the dominant social construction of globalization, standard theories of media coverage lead to the expectation that the media will tend to amplify this particular social construction. The “indexing” theory of news coverage suggests that the distribution of news coverage on a particular political issue will tend to follow the distribution of elite opinion on that issue (Bennett 1990; Zaller and Chiu 1996; Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston 2006). Given the dominant elite perspective on globalization, namely that it is an external and objective process impinging on national policymaking rather than a product of national policymaking, an indexing theory of news coverage would suggest that mass media is more likely to represent economic globalization as an external constraint on policymaker autonomy rather than alternative critical narratives attributing responsbility to governments for negative consequences of globalization. Adding to the indexing theory the general responsibility-diffusing tendencies inherent to mass media discussed above, such as its episodic nature and its tendency to amplify political elites (who are known to actively avoid blame), the overall implication is the expectation that mass media will amplify the dominant construction of economic globalization as an external pressure which imposes itself on domestic policymakers, rather than an outcome of policymaking for which policymakers might be held responsible.

3In their study of The Guardian, The Times, The Daily Telegraph, and The Independent from September 2008 to May 2009, Hellwig and Coffey find that most statements from the incumbent Labor Party diffused blame for the 2008 financial crisis toward the United States, the global financial system, and domestic bankers, although toward the end of the period under study the Labor Party appeared more willing to publicly take blame. Conservatives were more likely to blame the government than Labour. SeeHellwig and Coffey 2011, 420-421.

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