Politically Relevant Intimacy:
A Conceptual and Empirical Investigation

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The trends of media personalization and intimization, alongside the growing recognition of the intricate relationship between the private and public spheres, raise complex questions about the ways in which politicians' private lives are linked to the political realm. This article develops the term *politically relevant intimacy,* referring to texts in which matters of the public sphere are being tied to the discourse surrounding politicians' personal lives. We identify two major types of political relevance—issue based and conduct based—and apply this framework to a comparative analysis of mediated manifestations of politicians' intimate lives in Israel and the United States. Differences in level and type of politically relevant intimacy are found between news coverage and Facebook posts, as well as between the two countries. No significant differences are found between female and male politicians. We discuss implications for future research and for the citizenry in democracies.

Keywords: political relevance, personalization of politic, public/private divide, news media, social media, U.S., Israel

In April 2016, viewers of CNN's Town Hall were introduced to the plans and desires of Caroline and Catherine Cruz, daughters of Texas senator and candidate for the Republican presidential nomination Ted Cruz. Viewers learned that Caroline was going to have a Build-a-Bear birthday party and that the two girls would like to invite pop star Taylor Swift to the White House if their father is elected president (LoBianco, 2016). These details were also tweeted by CNN, and follow-up stories appeared in various media outlets.

The special attention given to Cruz's daughters is an illustration of the growing tendency of the media to cover the personal lives of politicians (Stanyer, 2013). In earlier scholarship, such coverage was regarded as inane, trivial, and essentially nonpolitical (e.g., Franklin, 1994; Postman, 1987; for a review, see Adam & Maier, 2010). However, against the background of changes in media and political cultures (e.g., Corner, 2000; Williams & Delli-Carpini, 2011), as well as reconsiderations of the public–private divide in democratic theory (e.g., Fraser, 1990; Weintraub & Kumar, 1997), there has been a growing recognition of the potential political relevance of information about the intimate lives of politicians,

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particularly in cases where personal aspects and public matters are woven into each other (e.g., Langer, 2007; Van Santen & Van Zoonen, 2010; Van Zoonen et al., 2007). Indeed, Caroline and Catherine were also mentioned by various actors in discussions of their father's political stances. For instance, Cruz's comment that if his daughters were gay he would love them just as much was discussed by *The New York Times* in connection with his opposition to gay marriage (Haberman, 2015). Cruz himself referred to his being a father of two little girls in justifying his support for legislation in North Carolina according to which a person must use the bathroom corresponding to the gender on his or her birth certificate: "I'm not terribly excited about men being able to go alone into a bathroom with my daughters" he said (Zezima, 2016, para. 3).

Despite the scholarly recognition of the complex interconnections between the private and the public in the political sphere, we know little about the contexts in which the practice of binding the personal and the public occurs, as well as about the different discursive manifestations of this practice. Accordingly, this study examines how and under what conditions the intimate and the public are being tied together in mediated discourse. It has two main purposes: first, to provide an analytical framework for analyzing this phenomenon, based on a conceptual and operational development of the term *politically relevant intimacy,* and second, to examine this phenomenon from a comparative perspective. Specifically, we examine manifestations of politically relevant intimacy in the news coverage of the personal lives of Israeli and U.S male and female politicians, as well as in their personal Facebook pages.

Coverage of the Private Lives of Politicians: Personalization and Intimization

Mediated discourse on the intimate lives of politicians is often associated in academic literature with the broader phenomenon of *media personalization*. Media personalization is defined as a process in which the focus of the media shifts from political groups (e.g., parties) to individuals (e.g., candidates, leaders, politicians) and their personas (Rahat & Sheafer, 2007). This process takes two main forms: the first is individualization, which is the growing focus on leaders and political individuals at the expense of parties and government institutions (Van Aelst, Sheafer, & Stanyer, 2012). The second is what Rahat and Sheafer (2007) term *privatization*—or what Langer (2010, p. 61) calls "the politicization of the private persona"—which is the growing media attention to the personal characteristics of politicians on the one hand, and to their personal lives on the other.

The latter aspect of privatization—the focus on politicians' private lives—was labeled *intimization* (Stanyer, 2013). Stanyer defines intimization as "a revelatory process which involves the publicizing of information and imagery from what we might ordinarily understand as a politician's personal life—broadly defined" (p. 14). This definition is based on Corner's (2000) model of the spheres in which politicians operate. Corner suggests that politicians operate in three different but overlapping spheres: the sphere of political institutions and processes, in which political actors take on public duties; the sphere of the public and the popular, which is a mediated sphere (i.e., it relates to the visibility of politicians in the media); and the private sphere, which includes politicians' personal biography, homes, friends, leisure time, and so forth. The overlap, or in other words the flow of information between the private sphere and the sphere of the public and popular, is what constitutes intimization (Stanyer, 2013).

Notably, the notions of personalization, privatization, and intimization tend to assume a process of change over time (i.e., growing media attention to personal dimensions). However, the body of literature on these phenomena shows mixed results regarding the actual increase in the media's focus on personal aspects (for a detailed review, see Van Aelst et al., 2012). With regard to intimization, for example, some studies show a trend of growing attention to the private lives of politicians in the media (e.g., Den Herder, 2013, in the United Kingdom, France, and the Netherlands; Langer, 2007, in the United Kingdom; and to some extent, Stanyer, 2013, in the U.S., United Kingdom, Italy, Australia, Spain, and France), while others found no such trend (e.g., Rahat & Sheafer, 2007, in Israel). The focus of this study is not on the changes over time in the coverage of politicians' private lives but on the discursive practices associated with this type of coverage. Hence, we use the term *intimacy* rather than the process-oriented term *intimization*.[1]

A question that needs to be addressed is what constitutes the private lives of politicians. In their attempts to outline the boundaries of the personal lives of politicians, as opposed to their public lives, scholars refer to varied areas of life. Langer (2007), for instance, uses an index of five variables: family, personal appearance, lifestyle, upbringing, and religion. Errera's examination of the coverage of politicians' personal lives focuses on six domains: love life, health, home, family, former life, and personal finance (cited in Stanyer, 2013). Van Aelst et al. (2012) propose to examine four areas when conducting a study comparing the coverage of personal life in different cultures: family, former life and upbringing, leisure time, and love life. Despite the diversity, two areas repeat in almost every classification: family and upbringing (Stanyer, 2013). These are also the two areas on which this study focuses.

Politically Relevant Intimacy

In the past, media's attention to politicians' personal lives was generally perceived as having negative effects on public discourse in democracies. As Adam and Maier (2010) describe in a review of the normative arguments underlying academic discourse on personalization, coverage that is more personal was often assumed to involve less information about issues. This kind of coverage was "believed to trivialize and depoliticize the public sphere, diminish the quality of political information, and distract from the 'substance' of politics" (Langer, 2010, p. 71).

However, this line of argument relies on two questionable assumptions. The first one has to do with the very act of delineating stories about issues as containing "good knowledge" while regarding stories about image or persona as containing "inadequate knowledge." Although often regarded as insubstantial, personal characteristics can serve as important shortcuts in the process of evaluating candidates (Dalton & Wattenberg, 1993; Miller, Wattenberg, & Malanchuk, 1986), especially given the complexity of the political decision making process in the contemporary information environment (Adam & Maier, 2010), and particularly when these personal aspects might be relevant to effective performance (Shabad & Anderson, 1979). Moreover, sometimes an issue-based evaluation may turn out to be inadequate compared to an image-based evaluation. A candidate could be an enthusiastic advocate of a

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[1] We use the term *intimacy* in the sense of "something of a personal or private nature" and not in that of close relationships (*Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*).

certain policy, but it does not mean that he or she has the competence to implement this policy once elected. Therefore, in some cases it may be more rational to rely on information about personality (Popkin, 1991).

Second, scholars have challenged the dichotomous view of political issues and personality while emphasizing the interrelations between the two categories (e.g., Van Santen & Van Zoonen, 2010). Indeed, a study which examined the Dutch media during election period found that news articles featuring politicians were more issue based than articles focusing on parties (Oegema & Kleinnijenhuis, 2009). These findings suggest that greater focus on individuals compared to political groups does not necessarily mean that issues are neglected. Furthermore, some scholars point out the ways in which intimate content is woven into public matters. Studying televised portraits of Dutch politicians, Van Santen and Van Zoonen (2010) demonstrate how personal narratives are "primarily articulated through the political ideas, activities, and goals of the guest politicians" (p. 64). Based on an analysis of the press coverage of British political leaders, Langer (2010) argues that personal information is often used in the formation of public persona, as well as in legitimizing policy, substantiating ideological commitments, and emphasizing political values. By using an intimate aspect, a politician can simplify a complicated issue and gather support for a planned policy (Holtz-Bacha, 2004).

The approach that treats public and personal narratives as interrelated can also be tied to the strand of scholarship that seeks to explore the political relevance of media contents that are traditionally considered nonpolitical, such as entertainment content or soft news (e.g., Baum, 2002; Baym, 2010; Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2009; 2013; Van Zoonen, 2005; Williams & Delli Carpini, 2011). As suggested by Williams and Delli Carpini (2011), the political relevance of media texts should not be assessed based solely on genre or topical focus. Rather, politically relevant contents are those that "shape opportunities for understanding, deliberating, and acting on (1) the conditions of one's everyday life, (2) the life of fellow community members, and (3) the norms and structures of powers that shape these relationships" (p. 122). Accordingly, texts that cover the private lives of politicians should not be considered politically irrelevant a priori. Instead, attention should be paid to instances in which private lives are discussed in connection with matters concerning the conditions, norms, values, issues, and structures that shape public life.

It should be noted that in regarding a text as politically relevant (or as lacking political relevance), we do not intend to determine the significance of a particular matter. Nor do we claim that a text that is considered politically relevant is by definition valuable for democracy. Indeed, Williams and Delli Carpini stress that politically relevant texts may also discourage democratic citizenship (by promoting cynicism or apathy, for instance) and thus a text may be "politically relevant but not democratically useful" (Williams & Delli Carpini, 2011, p. 287). However, it is the *potential* for understanding, deliberating, and acting on political matters that makes a text politically relevant. Our purpose in this article is to try to identify those instances in which the intimate details are discursively linked to the public world, based on the assumption that such links potentially facilitate audiences' engagement with the political issues under discussion or their evaluations of specific politicians.

Although researchers have recognized the potential political significance of binding of the intimate and the political, the conditions under which this practice occurs remain to be investigated. In particular, previous studies that closely examined media representations of the intimate lives of politicians in relation to political narratives and cultures tended to focus on specific case studies and national contexts (e.g., Langer, 2007, 2010; Van Santen & van Zoonen, 2010; Van Zoonen, 2000; Van Zoonen et al., 2007). Our study seeks to contribute to this literature by systematically examining different types of politically relevant intimacy (issue based and conduct based; see below) across different contexts. The comparative contexts include gender (female vs. male politicians), political-media system (U.S. vs. Israel), and medium (news coverage vs. social media pages). Each of these three dimensions may explain variations in the manifestations of politically relevant intimacy.

Gender

Many of the studies that examine gendered differences in the coverage of male and female politicians found that the media tend to focus more on the personal lives of female politicians than on their male counterparts (e.g., Bystrom, Robertson, & Banwart, 2001; Trimble, Wagner, Sampert, Raphael, & Gerrits, 2013). Furthermore, research has highlighted the ways in which the media differently relate to the personal lives of female politicians compared to male politicians. Because of the dichotomous division into private and public spheres, and the corresponding dichotomous division into femininity and masculinity, coverage of politicians' personal lives highlights the differences between female and male politicians. It is argued, for example, that coverage of female politicians' personal lives tends to bring out their "odd" and "unusual" choice to assume public office instead of private fulfillment (Van Zoonen, 2006, p. 299; see also Bystrom, 2006).

The fact that women are associated with the private sphere may lead to differences in levels of politically relevant intimacy for male and female politicians. As women are regarded as being in charge of the private sphere, the emphasis on private aspects creates new opportunities for female politicians to discuss public matters. Female politicians may be seen as those who can discuss firsthand the challenges in education, health programs, the difficulties of women in the labor market, and so on. Male politicians, on the other hand, may be viewed as connected to the private sphere, and therefore might discuss the wife and kids, but are not considered to be in charge at home. In line with this argument, we postulate that a higher rate of politically relevant intimacy will be found in items referring to the personal lives of female politicians compared to their male counterparts.

Political-Media System

Some characteristics of political systems were found to be associated with levels of media personalization and intimization. For example, in a presidential system, where the head of state is elected in direct elections, the media's focus tends to be on presidents and presidential candidates, whereas in a parliamentary system, where the number of seats of each party in the assembly determines the governing body, the focus is on parties (Kriesi, 2011). Another relevant characteristic is the type of electoral system. While an open-list system allows intraparty personal competition to be part of general elections, a closed-

list system allows only for interparty competition, namely, competition among parties. As the media adapt to these institutional arrangements, they adjust their focus accordingly (Rahat & Sheafer, 2007).

Nonetheless, the media also play an active role in this process. Occasionally, the issue rises of whether intimate details—especially those dealing with romantic and sexual relations—constitute public interest. In this regard, Stanyer and Wring (2004) suggest two types of culture. In the first type, which includes countries such as the U.S. and the United Kingdom, the act of disclosure of private information is seen as legitimate, "especially where politicians use their personal lives for publicity purposes" (p. 6). In the second type, which includes countries such as France and Spain, journalists are usually restrained when it comes to publicizing private information about politicians, even when the details are known in the journalistic community. This restraint can be attributed to various factors, such as journalistic norms, restrictive laws, and the public's normative perceptions of the significance of this type of information.

Variance in intimization levels in different political-media systems may in turn lead to differences in levels of politically relevant intimacy within texts that report on the private lives of politicians. In political-media systems where the personal lives of politicians have little public significance in themselves, owing to institutional and cultural factors, a journalist may clarify why this kind of information is politically significant to the general public. In other words, the relevance of stories about the private lives of politicians will have to be made more explicit than in countries where such stories are more common to begin with. In the same manner, in countries in which intimization is more prevalent, and the personal lives of politicians are considered a legitimate journalistic subject, the personal story is considered newsworthy per se. Therefore, we postulate that countries of lower intimization rates will show higher rates of politically relevant intimacy compared to countries of higher rates of intimization.

Medium: News Media Versus Personal Pages on Social Media

To a large extent, intimization in the news media is a product of reciprocal relationships between politicians and journalists. Politicians are willing to disclose some aspects of their personal life when they believe it might help them to garner public support (Stanyer, 2013), and journalists are interested in attracting readers by publishing this kind of information (Stanyer & Wring, 2004). At the same time, technological developments now enable politicians to communicate directly with their audiences. Personal pages in social networks have become a platform for self-presentation for politicians (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013; Lillekerab & Koc-Michalskac, 2013), a place where they can deliver their messages to the public as well as to journalists, who use these pages as a source of information (Parmelee, 2014). As such, politicians' personal pages in social networks allow us to examine how politicians themselves attempt to bring together the personal and the public. Moreover, because politicians are aware of journalists' potential interest in their posts and of the consequent possible follow-up stories in the news media (Conway, Kenski, & Wang, 2015), their personal pages can shed light on how they would have liked the news coverage of their personal lives to look like. Our focus in this study is on Facebook pages, where politicians' emphasis on personal aspects is greater than in other platforms, most notably Twitter (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013).

In which medium (the news media or Facebook pages) will levels of politically relevant intimacy be higher? On the one hand, because social media platforms are more personal by their nature, it is reasonable to expect that their personal content will involve fewer political aspects. Moreover, because on Facebook politicians are not limited by space and other journalistic constrains, and because they act as their own editors, the content they publish does not necessarily need to be assessed through the prism of public concern. On the other hand, as entertainment becomes a news value in itself (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001), stories about the personal lives of politicians might be considered newsworthy in the traditional news media, even if they do not address public matters. Furthermore, it may be that the higher level of control over the content in social media will enable politicians to strategically interweave the political and the intimate (to the extent that it is perceived as effective). There are thus contrasting expectations about the relationship between medium and politically relevant intimacy.

Method

This study is based on a content analysis of media texts that referred to the personal lives of politicians. The corpus of analysis consists of texts that were published in newspapers and on the personal Facebook pages of 24 male and female politicians from Israel and the United States during 2012.

Israel and the U.S. were selected as representing different political-media systems in relation to the relevant dimensions for levels of personalization and intimization. The United States has a presidential system and a direct vote system, where the focus is on the candidates. Moreover, as was mentioned above, politicians' personal lives are considered fair game by media outlets. It should also be noted that previous studies have found high levels of intimization in this country (e.g., Stanyer, 2013). Israel, on the other hand, is a parliamentary state, with a closed list system, where there is a greater focus on parties than in presidential systems. Although it has not been systematically studied, some commentators have also pointed to local journalists' reluctance to disclose private information about politicians, especially when it deals with extramarital romances and sexual tendencies (Benziman, 2013, 2014). Furthermore, the Israeli news culture has been greatly shaped by the prolonged state of conflict, leading, among other things, to the prevalence of "hard news" and matters of the public sphere over matters of the private sphere (Peri, 2004, 2012). Finally, levels of intimization in Israel were found to be low (Rahat & Sheafer, 2007).

The year-long sampling period was decided upon to capture a sufficiently large number of items that referred to politicians' personal lives. It should be noted that 2012 was an election year in both countries—a period that may be characterized by a heightened discourse about both public matters and politicians' private lives.

For the examination of references to the personal lives of politicians in news coverage, three leading national newspapers, representing a mix of highbrow and popular newspapers, were chosen in

each country: from the U.S., *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *USA Today*;[2] and from Israel, *Haaretz, Israel Hayom*, and *Yedioth Ahronoth*.[3] In addition, we examined the personal Facebook pages of each of the 24 politicians that were included in the study. Facebook was chosen because of its high popularity in both countries. According to a Pew research center study, 67% of U.S. Internet users ages 18+ used Facebook in 2012 (Duggan & Brenner, 2013). In Israel, approximately 70% of all Internet users had a Facebook account at that time point (Dror & Gershon, 2012).

For each country, we selected six female and six male politicians, based on their general media visibility. This selection strategy was aimed at creating a rich-enough sample and to allow a comparison of two countries with different political systems.[4] General media visibility was measured by a review of the number of references to national-level politicians in major media outlets during 2012. For the U.S., that included references to the president, the vice president, the Republican Party's nominees for president and vice president, U.S Senators and candidates for Senate seats in the 2012 election, leaders of the House of Representatives, and cabinet members. For Israel, the review included references to all Israeli MPs (including the prime minister and ministers), ministers that are not MPs, and leaders of the parties that participated in the election. The six most visible male politicians and the six most visible female politicians in each country were selected for the sample, excluding the Israeli Prime Minister and the U.S. President and Republican nominee for president (as their level of visibility is disproportional with regard to other politicians and their inclusion can bias the analysis). It should also be noted that the general level of media visibility of female politicians was lower than that of male politicians.

To create the corpus of analysis, consisting of items that include references to the personal lives of politicians, we applied a keyword-based search in digital archives of the U.S. and Israeli newspapers, and manual search of all posts in the politicians' Facebook pages. Based on the suggestion of Van Aelst et al. (2012), as well as the overlapping criteria in different classifications of politicians' private lives (see

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[2] In 2012*, USA Today* and *The New York Times* were ranked second and third, respectively, on the list of Top 25 U.S. newspapers (by circulation; Alliance for Audited Media, 2012). *The Washington Post* was ranked only eighth, but was selected for its central role in the coverage of U.S. politics.

[3] According to a TGI survey, in the second half of 2012, *Israel Hayom* and *Yedioth Ahronoth* were ranked first and second most circulated newspapers, respectively. *Haaretz*, which is considered Israel's elite newspaper, was ranked fourth (see Avraham, 2013).

[4] Selecting the politicians based on their official seniority and/or comparable positions in the two political systems creates a situation in which there is hardly news coverage in the selected national newspapers for some of the politicians. It should be noted that selecting the politicians to be included in the sample based on general media visibility does not constitute sampling on the dependent variables, as our examination is of coverage surrounding the personal lives of politicians and not the overall coverage. Furthermore, we selected 12 other random politicians (three female and three male politicians from each country) in order to compare the rates of articles that refer to the private lives of politicians in the study's sample and in this random group. In both samples, approximately 3% of the items refer to the personal lives of politicians, based on the criteria employed in this study. However, the average number of personal items per politician is larger in the study's sample.

Stanyer, 2013), two aspects of the personal lives of politicians were examined: family and upbringing.[5] Based on a review of a sample of news articles and Facebook posts that related to politicians, we identified the terms that reoccurred in articles that referred to the politicians' personal lives and formulated a key-word search list. The list was finalized following a process of evaluating the precision and recall of the search terms, and adjusting the list accordingly. Each aspect of personal lives includes generic terms (such as *children* or *alma mater*), as well as specific names (such as the names of the politician's children, or the name of the college the politician attended).

Table 1 presents the number of retrieved items per politician. In total, 1,112 items were included in the sample, of which 930 (83%) were newspaper articles and 182 (17%) were Facebook posts. There were 379 (33%) items that referred to the personal lives of female politicians and 733 (67%) that referred to their male counterparts' personal lives. Finally, 673 items (60%) referred to U.S. politicians and 439 items (40%) referred to Israeli politicians.

Table 1. Sample Composition.

Gender	Country	Name of politician	Number of items*
Female	U.S.	Hilary Clinton	101
		Susan Collins	7
		Dianne Feinstein	2
		Claire McCaskill	30
		Nancy Pelosi	18
		Elizabeth Warren	80
	Israel	Zahava Gal-On	7
		Limor Livnat	13
		Tzipi Livni	65
		Miri Regev	8
		Shelly Yachimovich	47
		Hanin Zoabi	1
Male	U.S.	Joe Biden	112
		John Boehner	10
		John Kerry	24
		John McCain	70
		Harry Reid	14
		Paul Ryan	205
	Israel	Ehud Barak	89
		Yair Lapid	101
		Avigdor Liberman	29
		Shaul Mofaz	54
		Gideon Sa'ar	13
		Eli Yishai	12
		Total	1112

* Newspaper articles and Facebook posts combined.

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[5] Van Aelst et al. (2012) suggest two more aspects: leisure time and love life. Those aspects were excluded from this study because of slightness of references in the Israeli media. Yet, to some extent, those aspects are present in the corpus when they are woven into other aspects, for example, when a politician went on a vacation with his or her family.

Measures of Political Relevance

The main purpose of the coding was to identify politically relevant intimacy within each text: that is, to capture those instances in which personal and public matters are linked. Operationally, politically relevant intimacy was defined as a case in which (a) the personal content is tied to public issues, political values, opinions and policies and/or (b) the personal story is tied to political conduct, strategies, practices, and traits.

This definition relies on a preliminary qualitative analysis in which we identified two different ways in which the personal might be linked to the public. One way is what we term *issue-based politically relevant intimacy*. This includes items in which the private and the personal details of a politician are used to demonstrate, stress, justify, or criticize political issues, stances, values, or policies. For instance, ascribing the positions of a politician regarding redistributive reforms to her impoverished upbringing, or discussing her objection to abortions in the context of her struggles with her own pregnancy are cases of issue-based politically relevant intimacy. The second way is *conduct-based politically relevant intimacy*, which includes items that tie the personal to politicians' conduct and performance in the public realm or to their characteristics and traits (see the discussion above regarding the political relevance of these dimensions). For instance, this type of political relevance can be achieved by comparing the ways in which a politician treats his children to the ways in which he treats his employees, or by linking his determined character to his father's parenting style. Thus, each of the two aspects of the personal lives of politicians that we focus on in this study (family and upbringing) can be linked to each of the types of politically relevant intimacy. The question is in which context (issues or conduct) these aspects are invoked.

Coders were asked to determine whether each of the two types of political relevance—issue based and conduct based—were present in the text. Notably, while potentially any type of information can be interpreted as politically relevant, our focus was only on explicit links between the intimate and political/public realms. This approach is motivated not only by the constraints of content analysis but also by the desire to capture the ways in which political and media actors themselves connect the two realms in public discourse. The binary variable of political relevance was constructed using the two yes/no questions referring to issue-based and conduct-based intimacy. If at least one of the two types of politically relevant intimacy was present in the item (i.e., issue based, conduct based, or both), it was considered as politically relevant. If neither was present (i.e., the answer was "no" to each of the two relevance questions), it was coded as lacking politically relevant intimacy. One hundred thirty-five items (12% of the sample) were double coded for evaluating intercoder reliability. Cohen's kappa coefficient was .78 for issue-based political relevance, .73 for conduct-based political relevance, and .75 for the derived variable of general politically relevant intimacy (*p* < .001 for all variables).

Findings

Of the 1,112 items that were analyzed, 666 (60%) fall within the category of politically relevant intimacy (i.e., include issue-based political relevance and/or conduct-based political relevance). Correspondingly, 446 (40%) of the items are lacking explicit political relevance. Table 2 presents the

results of a logistic regression predicting politically relevant intimacy.[6] Contrary to our expectation, gender was not found to be a significant predictor of politically relevant intimacy. Uncontrolled bivariate analysis (using crosstabs and chi-square) also did not reveal significant differences between male and female politicians with regard to their politically relevant intimacy levels. However, both political-media system and medium were significant predictors of politically relevant intimacy.

Table 2. Logistic Regression Analysis Predicting Politically Relevant Intimacy.

	Odds Ratio	95% CI
Medium (newspapers)	2.22**	[1.57, 3.13]
Political-media system (Israel)	1.43*	[1.10, 1.85]
Gender (female)	1.15	[.88, 1.50]

N = 1.112. **p* < .01. ***p* < .001.

With regard to cross-country differences, the odds of politically relevant intimacy appearing in items that discussed the personal lives of Israeli politicians were 1.4 times those of having politically relevant intimacy in items that discussed the personal lives of U.S. politicians, when controlling for medium type and gender (Wald test = 7.25, *df* = 1, *p* < .01).

A comparison of the following posts, which were published on the personal pages of U.S Senate candidate Elizabeth Warren and Israeli minister of foreign affairs Avigdor Lieberman, may highlight a manifestation of politically relevant intimacy. Both politicians relate to time they spent with their granddaughters:[7]

> My granddaughters had a wonderful time taking the ferry to Provincetown yesterday. The highlight of the day for the girls was Lewis Brothers Homemade Ice Cream. (Warren, 2012)

> I just came back from a long weekend in the Negev, which I spent with my family: my wife, daughter, sons and two little granddaughters Choshen-Lev and Yarden. We were hanging around Ein-Akev springs and Nitzana, watching eagles and deer, and I particularly enjoyed encountering real Zionism: we met a wonderful group of newcomers from the former USSR in Nitzana, had a tour in Moshav Kadesh Barnea, I spoke with the locals in Revivim, met with young adults from NGOs, and we were hosted in family farms, which we as a country must support. And to those of you who gripe and wonder "Where did the good old Israel go? Where did Zionism and goodness go?" I recommend going to the Negev, to visit family farms and see Zionism at its best, and meet great people. (Lieberman, 2012)

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[6] Because of the nested nature of the sample, we also ran a logistic regression with robust standard errors. The levels of significance of the three predictors (medium, country, gender) remained within the same categories (*p* < .001 for medium, *p* < .01 for country, and nonsignificance for gender).

[7] Quotes from Hebrew texts throughout the article were translated into English by the authors.

Both texts discuss recreational family activities, which apparently have nothing to do with the political world. Yet, while Warren's story focuses on the personal aspect[8] (and therefore was considered as nonpolitically relevant item), in Lieberman's story, political values are woven into the family experience: According to this narrative, the places he and his family visited are not just vacation destinations but actually represent "Zionism at its best." It is the family vacation—and not a formal governmental visit—which makes him state that Israel as a country should support such places.

Medium was also found to be a significant predictor of politically relevant intimacy. The odds of politically relevant intimacy appearing in newspaper articles which discussed the personal lives of politicians were 2.2 times the odds of politically relevant intimacy appearing in Facebook posts that discussed the personal lives of those politicians, when controlling for country and gender (Wald test = 20.49, $df = 1$, $p < .001$).

The wedding of U.S. Senator Susan Collins serves as a useful case to demonstrate differences in politically relevant intimacy between Facebook posts and newspaper coverage. Collins got married in the summer of 2012. On her wedding day, a terse greeting including a picture of the bride and groom was posted on Collins's Facebook page. A few days earlier, a story on the imminent wedding was published in *The Washington Post*. The report described how the couple met, discussed the wedding preparations, and raised the issue of whether the bride would wear white. However, the honeymoon was discussed in the following terms:

> But the couple will take a honeymoon. Collins, who has never missed a Senate vote, cast her 5,000th consecutive vote in July. The wedding and honeymoon were timed for the August recess so she won't break her Ripken-like streak. ("Trying for Low-Key," 2012, p. C2)

By discussing the personal story of her wedding, this article highlights Collins's qualities as a politician. The readers are not informed about the political views of Collins (what she votes for or against); rather, this text emphasizes the senator's dedication to her work (i.e., conduct-based political relevance).

A further examination of the relationship between politically relevant intimacy and medium type (newspaper items vs. Facebook posts) revealed an interesting pattern. It seems that the two types of political relevance are differently manifested in each medium: First, conduct-based political relevance was found to be more prevalent in newspapers than in Facebook pages. As shown in Figure 1, whereas 68.5% of the newspapers articles with politically relevant intimacy consisted of conduct-based political relevance, only 21.2% of the Facebook posts in the same category consisted of this type. The relationship is significant ($\chi^2 = 70.388$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$). With regard to issue-based political relevance, Figure 1 shows an almost mirror image: 78.8% of the Facebook posts with politically relevant intimacy consisted of issue-based political relevance, compared to 42.3% of newspaper articles in the same category. The rate of

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[8] Some readers may link Warren's story to her political persona or values (e.g., support of local businesses), but such interpretations are beyond the scope of this study, which focuses on the ways in which the private and the public are explicitly linked by politicians and journalists in public discourse.

issue-based politically relevant intimacy was thus higher in the Facebook posts than in the newspaper articles. The relationship is significant (χ^2 = 39.621, *df* = 1, *p* < .001).
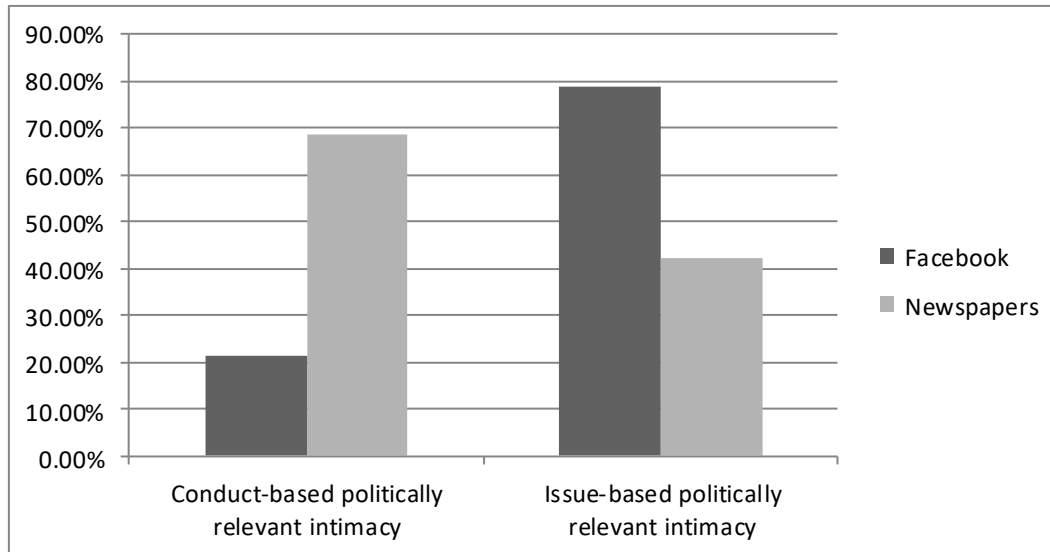

Figure 1. Types of politically relevant intimacy by medium.

The next two examples, referring to the upbringing of Israeli politician Shaul Mofaz, illustrate how personal information is linked to different types of political relevance in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* and in Mofaz's Facebook page. The first excerpt is taken from an opinion column that was published in *Haaretz* in the light of a political scandal in which Mofaz, then leader of the Kadima Party and leader of the opposition, announced the accession of his party to the government, just a short time after pledging not to join the Coalition. This act caused great turmoil in Israel, and Mofaz's credibility was severely damaged. In this excerpt, Mofaz's personal background—his current as well as his childhood residence—is used to portray his character:

> Among ordinary people, like Mofaz's neighbors in Cochav Yair or the residents of the streets where he grew up in Eilat, this kind of behavior is, at the very least, immoral. But a politician is not an ordinary person. (Oren, 2012, para. 5)

While this link constitutes conduct-based politically relevant intimacy, the same background was used a few months afterwards by Mofaz himself in his Facebook page to stress his view on welfare programs, thereby constituting issue-based relevance:

> I used to be there, now I read about it on the alternative poverty report of Latet organization. I read that 50% of minors whose families are under the poverty line have to

go out and work, and I recall those Saturdays when I used to work, simply in order to earn enough money to pay for a bus ride from the boarding school in Nahalal to my home, once in every three months. . . . We are being told that our standard of living has increased over the last 50 years, but poverty is still with us. It shouldn't be like that. I feel shame. We deserve a more compassionate government. (Mofaz, 2012, n.p.)

Discussion

This article has developed the notion of politically relevant intimacy and examined its manifestations in different contextual conditions. As described above, more than half of the items that referred to the personal lives of politicians tied the personal and the public, producing either conduct-based or issue-based relevance. This finding supports the idea that high levels of intimate content do not necessarily mean the prevalence of apolitical content. Often, reference to personal lives raises societal, public, and political themes. In many cases, matters that influence the everyday lives of individuals and social groups—from budget cuts to the creditability of political representatives—are articulated through personal stories.

The analysis also shows that the rate of politically relevant intimacy varies across media and countries: higher rates of politically relevant intimacy were found among newspaper stories compared to Facebook posts, and among items that related to the personal lives of Israeli politicians compared to those that related to the personal lives of U.S. politicians. However, the hypothesis that items that related to the personal lives of female politicians would show higher levels of politically relevant intimacy compared to male politicians was not supported. The lack of significant gender differences might be explained by the countervailing forces at play: on the one hand, as was suggested above, women politicians are considered as those who are supposed to represent the private sphere in public discourse. On the other hand, this expectation might cause female politicians to deliberately avoid tying the personal and the public. Such an avoidance can be interpreted as an attempt by female politicians to liberate themselves from this traditional gender role, or as reflecting the tendency of successful female politicians to protect the traditional boundaries between the private and the public more than their male counterparts do (see van Zoonen, 2006).

In addition to the findings regarding the overall level of political relevance, the study also revealed an interesting pattern with regard to the manifestation of the two types of political relevance within different media. While the personal lives of politicians tended to be linked to political conduct in newspaper stories, in the Facebook posts they tended to be issue based. The differences between newspaper stories and Facebook posts in the levels of both general politically relevant intimacy and the two types of politically relevant intimacy might be interpreted in two different ways. The first emphasizes the characteristics of the medium. As social networks are by nature more personally oriented than newspapers, it also makes sense that the personal content that is published in politicians' Facebook pages would tend to remain on the personal level more than in newspapers, which in turn strive to connect the private and the public.

The second perspective emphasizes the authors of the texts. We may attribute the differences in the overall level of politically relevant intimacy, as well as in the levels of the different types of political relevance, to the fact that the content in both media was created by different actors. While politicians may wish to separate their personal lives and public practice, journalists may wish to tie those aspects together. Moreover, when politicians tie the personal and the public in their Facebook pages, they prefer to do so by emphasizing political values, stances, issues, and policies. This resembles the tendency of politicians to focus more on issues than on image in another self-presentation platform: political ads (Johnston & Kaid, 2002; Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 1994). At the same time, the prevalence of conduct-based relevance in newspaper articles relating to the personal lives of politicians may reflect the general tendency of traditional mass media outlets to focus more on political strategies, motives, and characteristics than on issues (see Aelberg, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2012, for a review).

Notably, however, this study cannot disentangle the medium from the type of author, as the Facebook materials include only politicians' personal pages (and not other authors), whereas the newspaper stories also include direct speech of politicians. Further research is needed to isolate the influences of author and medium. In addition, future research should also examine and compare manifestations of politically relevant intimacy in other types of media, in particular audiovisual media. Such an examination can be especially valuable given the important contribution of television to the phenomenon of political personalization (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999).

From a theoretical point of view, the notion of politically relevant intimacy can be seen as a bridge between the traditional liberal separation of the public and the private realms, and approaches that challenge the dichotomous distinction between the private and the public, particularly from a feminist perspective. From this perspective, the categories of private and public are viewed as cultural constructions, which are often used to delegitimize specific topics and interests (Fraser, 1996). Furthermore, this binary construction obscures the ways in which the two spheres impact each other, and in particular how the public sphere is shaped by matters that supposedly belong to the private domain (Lister, 1997). While the idea of politically relevant intimacy foregrounds the interrelations between the two domains and the potential relevance of the private to public matters, it still rests on the distinction between the private and the public. It does not deny the constructed nature of these categories, but suggests that given the existence of these categories in public discourse, it is important to systematically examine the ways in which political actors, journalists, and other social actors connect the two domains.

Finally, an issue that needs to be addressed is the democratic significance of texts that bind together the intimate and the public: how does this kind of content contribute to citizens' political knowledge and their decision-making processes? On the one hand, the confluence of private and political content might hinder knowledge acquisition and contribute to political cynicism. Such consequences would be in line with studies on the detrimental effects of soft news (e.g., Boukes & Boomgaarden, 2015; Prior, 2003). Yet other scholars (e.g., Gans, 2009; Van Zoonen, 2005) are less concerned about the process of blurring the boundaries between "hard" and "soft" news and between "political" and "personal" content, and highlight its potential in encouraging engaged and informed citizenship. There is evidence to suggest, for example, that personalized messages delivered by politicians are more recognized and memorable

than depersonalized messages (Lee & Oh, 2012). The framework developed in this article can guide future research into the complex relationships between politically-relevant and democratically useful intimacy.

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