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Party Manifestos and Party Competition in Belgium: the Environmental Issue

Introduction

Many countries in Western Europe witnessed in the last decades the emergence and electoral success of parties focusing on the environmental issue, i.e. the green parties. In line with the post-materialist hypothesis (Inglehart, 1977), the environmental issue particularly demonstrates the change of the societal values for these countries' populations. Environment became nowadays a key political issue as is present in most electoral campaigns, from European to local elections. Even if green parties have been widely identified as niche parties 'owning' the issue of environment, this issue is also present in mainstream and other niche parties' positions.

This paper relies on quantitative data from the content analysis of party manifestos in Belgium. Electoral programs of the main Belgian parties in the Parliament between 1977 and 2007 have been coded according to the CAP (*Comparative Agenda Project*) coding frame. Regression models allow us to position these parties on the issue of environment, to identify niche parties and their property on that issue, and to compare their positions over time, across party families and across regions. Following the emergence and the electoral success of green, this paper will study ideological convergence and the contamination of the migration issue on the mainstream parties' manifestos, based on different theoretical patterns of competition. We will identify the parties that have been by 'contaminated' by the issue and that have been the most affected by the electoral success of the green party.

This paper intends to demonstrate that the environmental issue is not only 'owned' by the green parties, but also that other political parties do compete for that issue in their manifestos. In other words, the objective of this paper is to explain positions of these (non-green) parties on the environmental issue. Many differences are to be observed across time and across parties. For example the Flemish socialist party (SP) dedicates in 1999 8.47% of its manifesto to the environmental issue while the neighbouring (and most important competitor) Flemish Christian-democrat party (CVP) only allocates 0,76% of its electoral platform to the same issue for the same elections. Since parties not only compete for votes and office but also for issues, our main assumption is that party positions on environment in Belgium are influenced by the electoral competition around the – successful – green parties.

This paper is structured into four main sections. The first one presents the state of the art regarding the analysis of party positions on the environment in party manifestos, with an emphasis on previous analyses of the Belgian case and on green parties. In the second section, the interaction of these parties with the other parties will be emphasized, mainly in terms of electoral success. Based on the behaviour of the green party and its electoral fortunes and on theoretical frames, different patterns of party competition will be identified. Our main hypotheses will be derived from these expected patterns of party competition on the environment. An additional hypothesis will be also formulated regarding a specific party family, i.e. the socialist parties, as it is expected that not all parties would react the same way to party competition on the environment. The third section will briefly present our data on party manifestos in Belgium and the main dependent, independent and control variables that will be used on our models. The last section will consist in the empirical verification of our main hypotheses, based on panel data regression models. The main findings will be presented and discussed in this final section.

I. The environment issue in party manifestos

Following the seminal works of Budge and Farlie (1983) and Budge, Robertson and Hearl (1987), the analysis of party positions based on the content of the electoral programmes has grown in size in political science. Particularly, the development of research designs based on manifesto analyses consequently accelerated after the publication of the findings and the dataset of the Manifesto research group (MRG, also known as the Comparative Manifesto Project) (Budge et al., 2001; Klingemann et al., 2006). Party manifestos are therefore often used to explain numerous political phenomena such as electoral results, policy outputs or coalition formation processes. More recently, researchers focused on methodological innovations, attempting to use computer-assisted methods of content analysis of party documents.

The issue of the environment occupies a specific space in numerous analyses of the content of the party manifestos, either as single-issue focus (see for example Neumayer, 2004 and Katsanidou, Gemenis, 2010) or as an issue among several other issues or policy domains, with the exception of studies focusing on the left-right dimension or on purely socio-economic elements. The environmental issue is not only of interest for researchers focusing on environmental policy but also for those analysing electoral behaviour, party systems and party competition. Indeed, the emergence of that issue sustainably transformed politics in Western Europe as it is mainly linked to the birth and success of green parties.

In this first section, we will successively discuss three elements characterising the environmental issue in party manifestos: environment as a new issue, as a valence issue and as owned by the greens parties. Elements from the Belgian case will be used to exemplify these characteristics.

Environment has often been considered as a new issue, especially when one focuses on the evolution of party positions since WWII. Its appearance in the political arena can be traced to the early 1970s. In the Dutch cases, environment is already considered as an important issue since the 1970s. Dittrich (1987: 213) demonstrated that this issue managed to access the top 10 issues in the Dutch party manifestos in 1971. Using the CMP database and the category of “Environmental protection” (code 501), we observe that, in Belgium, this issue manages to significantly pass over the 1% threshold of attention by a large party (CVP) in 1968 only.

Before that date, this issue has always been almost totally absent from the party manifestos. But since 1971, almost every significant Belgian party dedicates more or less attention to the issue of environment. This attention did not decrease over the years and is still today one of the main campaign issues.

Valence issues are defined as “issues where only one course of action is popular and it would be electoral suicide for a party to endorse an opposing position” (Budge, 2001: 52). Some of the most used examples are democracy, criminality or unemployment. Compared to the position issues where policy alternatives are possible (think for example about budget or migration policies), valence issues are unanimously considered by political parties as issues where there exists a consensus among parties on the desired final outcome. Environment is therefore often used in the literature as an example of valence issue (see for example Budge, 2001; Laver, 2001), since not a single party advocates the abandonment of environmental protection or favours pollution. All parties agree that environment should be protected. For De Vries, Giannetti and Mansergh, “no sane party would actually state that it wants to destroy the environment” (2001: 204). But admittedly, differences among parties can be located on the policy tools that will be used to reach the goal of environmental protection. Analysing party manifestos for the European elections between 1979 and 2009, Teperoglou, Tsatsanis (2010) empirically demonstrated that, in the German and Dutch case, environment could be considered as a valence issue.

Nonetheless, using the world values survey, expert surveys, CMP data and qualitative evidence from party manifestos, Katsanidou and Gemenis (2010) concluded that one might clearly differentiate pro-environmental from anti-environmental parties in Germany, Spain, Norway and the UK. These anti-environmental parties are usually to be found among the radical (or extreme-) right parties. Using CMP data, Franzmann and Kaiser (2006: 170) also confirmed that environment moved from valence issue to saliency issue with the entry of the green parties in parliament. But, since these parties are also considered as niche parties, i.e. single-issue parties, that the emphasis given to the environmental issue in their manifesto is not as large in other manifestos and that we are mainly concerned with the relations between the green and the mainstream parties, we believe that these anti-environmental parties do not mitigate the conclusion that environment is a valence issue.

Green parties have always been associated with the environmental issue. It is widely known that their core ideology and even identity relies mainly on this issue (see for example Aspinwall, 2002; Warwick, 2002). Meguid (2008: 44) considers green parties as niche parties that focus on the environmental issue. Teperoglou and Tsatsanis (2010: 21) confirmed that, in the German case, the growth of the green party is linked to the emergence of the issue of environmental protection. Similarly, the Dutch case demonstrated that even if, on the average, the Dutch manifestos scores low on that issue, the position on environmental protection of the green left party differentiates it from other parties (De Vries, Giannetti, Mansergh, 2001: 207) and it contributed to the green party electoral performance (Kleinnijenhuis, Pennings, 2001: 175).¹ Using CMP data, Petry and Pennings (2006: 106) witnessed that the French Greens

¹ Using another method for analysing the same election years in the Netherlands (content analysis of newspapers and TV news bulletin), Kleinnijenhuis and Pennings (2001: 170) confirmed that environment not a very salient campaign issue (at least in 1998). Nonetheless, they also observed that the parties emphasizing the most the environmental issue are in 1994 the PvdA (Social Democrats) with 2,5% and in 1998 the VVD (Conservative Liberals) with 6,6%. The green party respectively scores with 0,8% and 1,7% on the same issue. The explanation given by Kleinnijenhuis and Pennings is that the PvdA controlled the ministry of environment in the government (2001: 173).

were outliers on this issue but that other parties recently made more references to the environment. In addition, in their analysis of the European party groups, McElroy and Benoit (2007) observed more attention to the environment in manifestos of the parties belonging to the green group than in any other parliamentary group.

There are basically no criteria to distinguish a niche party from another type of party but the analysis of the content of the party manifestos can reveal differences in the priorities drawn by parties. In the Belgian case, the two green parties dedicate a much larger attention to environment in their manifestos than any other party. On the average on the period 1977-2007, the Flemish green party allocates 11,51% of the content of its party manifestos to direct references to the environment while the same issue receives 2,37% of attention among the other Flemish parties. The same pattern is observable on the French-speaking part of the country. On the average on the 1985-2007 period, the French-speaking allocate 2,94% of their manifestos to the environment while this figures raises to 9,61% in the case of the French-speaking green party. These figures are relatively stable across elections.

II. Party competition on the environmental issue

Party competition based on the assessment of party positions has been a topic largely dealt with in political science literature. Two main competing hypotheses have been developed, based on two opposing theoretical patterns of party competition. Party positions – and consequently, analyses of the content of party manifestos – have been mainly used for explaining the electoral successes and defeats of political parties. Both theories – spatial theory and saliency theory – focus on such explanatory patterns, arguing that party positions matter in the electoral results of party. But party positions have been seldom used for explaining the content of the party manifestos itself, i.e. as a dependent variable rather than an independent one. In this paper, we will reframe both theories in order to explain party positions on the environmental issue.

The goal of our paper is to explain the positions of the various political parties (including the green parties in some of our models) on the issue of the environment. Our main assumption is that the electoral success of the green parties, combined with their large attention to the environmental issue, has an impact on the position of (all) the other parties on that issue. This assumption basically relies on the fact that the electoral success of green parties directly threatens the other political parties and that these parties may adapt their strategy in order to face that new electoral challenge. Regarding the different strategies parties can adopt regarding a successful niche parties, our hypotheses will broadly corresponds to the two main theories of party competition, i.e. spatial theory and saliency theory.

Indeed, party competition is narrowly linked with policy issues. Parties are identified in connection with specific issues and patterns of political competition heavily rely on those issues. In other words, the spaces of party competition are defined by party positions on salient policy issues over which parties compete (Krouwel, van Elfrinkhof, 2009; Louwerse, 2009). Some theories directly link the parties and the voters with specific issues, such as the issue ownership theory, according to which parties are credible and reliable on certain issues and voters would vote for these parties that ‘own’ the issues.² In addition, the importance of issues in today’s party competition is linked to the decreased importance of party ideology

² However, there is a large difference between the fact that a party emphasizes an issue and the fact that he owns it. In the voters’ minds, parties can own an issue without emphasizing it and vice-versa.

(Walgrave, De Swert, 2007). According to Elmelund-Praestekaer, “issues play an important role in contemporary election campaigns, because voters to an increasing extent choose a party according to the party’s position on specific issues rather than its ideological position” (2011: 209).

The spatial theory originates from the seminal works of Black (1948) and Downs (1957). Their theory of party competition relies on the concept of the median voter. Political parties should adapt their position in order to get closer to the median voter’s position. Later, the spatial theory has been enlarged around the relative position of voters and parties. The classical spatial theory assumes that voters make decisions through a comparison of their own preferences on issues and the positions of parties on the same issues. A person votes for the party nearest to him on his issues. Consequently, the spatial theory of party competition implies that parties are vote-maximizers and that they offer the electorate the policy packages that are closest to the voters’ own preferences.³

The pattern of party competition derived from the spatial theory is a direct confrontation between parties (Petty, Landry, 2001). Indeed, since political parties compete in the same voter’s space and since voters vote according to the position of parties on certain salient issues, parties will compete with each other on the (same) specific issues. Two similar phenomena can be hypothesised, based on this confrontational pattern of party competition, based on the voters’ position or on the winning party’s position. First, if political parties compete for the very same issues, according to the voters’ position, the theory expects to witness party convergence on these issues.⁴ The parties will tend to adopt a policy position on the same issues.

Secondly, if a party manages, via a specific position on an issue, to attract votes, the theory expects to witness issue contamination. This contamination implies that, in the case of a new issue successfully relayed by a party or in the case of an electoral success of a niche party, the political parties will consequently increase their attention to this issue. In other words, political parties will ‘copy’ the position of the winning party on the issues that have been identified as owned by this party or that are known to be responsible of its success (Smirnov, Fowler, 2007). The strategy of the parties adopting the positions of the winning party’s issue or of the party successfully relaying the new issue similarly may be labelled as accommodative (parties offer the same policy on the same issue) or adversarial (parties offer diverging policies on the same issue) (Meguid, 2008).

As a result, the main hypothesis of our paper in line with the spatial theory is that the electoral threat represented by the green party (especially when it manages to attract voters from other parties) is fought by the other political parties in a confrontational way. Independently on the chosen strategy (accommodative or adversarial), we expect to witness that parties will increase their emphasis of the environmental issue following the electoral success of the green party.

H1. (Confrontational hypothesis) Political parties will emphasize the environment issue in their manifestos when the green party is electorally successful

³ These original models only care about winning elections. They have been adapted in order to explain other political phenomenon, such as policy outcomes (Wittman, 1973; Smirnov, Fowler, 2007).

⁴ Party convergence has been empirically confirmed by numerous studies. See for example: Budge, Robertson, 1987; Mair, 1995; Caul, Gray, 2000; Arzheimer, Carter, 2006.

But this hypothesis of manifesto adaptation following the success of the green party, may be split according to the degree of electoral threat represented by the green party. Following Meguid (2008: 100), the larger the electoral threat represented by the green party, the larger the focus will be on the green party issue. Indeed, the share of votes lost by each party is crucial when evaluating the impact of the green party success. A party would not react the same way if it loses or wins votes while the green party grows in size. Therefore, we further develop our hypothesis, combining the green party success and the electoral success of its competitors.

H1a. Political parties will emphasize the environment issue in their manifestos when they are electorally defeated and when the green party is electorally successful.

H1b. Political parties will not emphasize the environment issue in their manifestos when they are electorally successful and when the green party is electorally successful

The saliency theory has been mainly developed by Budge, according to which “parties talk past each other” (1987: 24). The basis of this theory is that, contrary to the spatial theory, parties do not compete by opposing each other, but by selectively emphasizing certain (specific) issues. The pattern at stake here is a party position divergence. Parties compete with each other by putting forward their political priorities rather than struggling on the same political issues. In other words, parties, through their manifesto, try to promote their ‘ownership’ on some key issues and priorities. This theory is based on the assumption that parties compete by emphasizing policy issues that give them electoral advantages and by ignoring those issues that belong to other parties or play down issues they view as unfavourable. This type of strategy has been labelled as ‘dismissive’ strategy by Meguid (2008), i.e. parties avoid talking about other parties’ owned issues.

Other studies (see for example Klingemann, 1987, Petry, Landry, 2001; Katsanidou, Gemenis, 2010; Van der Brug, 2001) demonstrated that the actual pattern of party competition is rather a mixed one. Party strategies display a mix of confrontational as well as dismissive characteristics. Depending on the issue at stake, on the nature of parties that compete and on a series of contextual variables, parties may decide on different strategies and adapt the content of their manifestos accordingly. The most important variable in this regard is the type of issue. As emphasized earlier, valence issues are issues all parties agree on the final outcome while position issues consist in issues on which parties take different (and sometimes diverging) stands. In this regard, position issues are more often associated to confrontational strategies while valence issues are associated with the saliency theory (Kitschelt, 1994; Budge, 2001; Alonso, Gomez, 2010; Katsanidou, Gemenis, 2010).

In line with the saliency theory and the fact that the environment is widely considered as a valence issue, our hypothesis concerning the patterns of party competition on the environmental issue implies that political parties will avoid talking about this issue and will continue focusing on their own issues. On the contrary, the stronger the green party and the larger its emphasis on the environment, the less the other parties will focus on the green party issue. It is expected that the emergence of a niche party focusing on the environment (i.e. the green party) will lead to a decrease of attention to that issue in the other parties’ manifestos.

H2. (Dismissive hypothesis) Political parties will downplay the environment issue in their manifestos when the green party is electorally successful

Similarly to our first hypothesis, the electoral threat represented by the green party is relative to the electoral loss witnessed by its competitors. The effect of the green party success on the other parties' manifestos has to be combined by an assessment of the electoral defeat of its opponents.

H2a. Political parties will downplay the environment issue in their manifestos when they are electorally defeated and when the green party is electorally successful.

H2b. Political parties will not downplay the environment issue in their manifestos when they are electorally successful and when the green party is electorally successful

Finally, in our attempt to explain how and why political parties emphasize the issue of environment in their electoral manifesto, we hypothesize that not all parties react the same way the emergence and electoral success of the green parties. Indeed, certain parties are more prone to adapt their manifestos accordingly than others, mainly depending on their party family or their policy position on other dimensions. In their analysis of party competition in Spain, Torcal and Montero (1997) demonstrated that the traditional communist and socialist parties managed to integrate the environmental issue (it become a core issue in their manifesto) and won their competition with the green parties. For the Dutch case, Kleinnijenhuis and Pennings (2001) observed that the labour party PvdA emphasised the environment issues, in order to compete with the SP and the GroenLinks for the left-wing voters. More generally, Kitschelt (1994) found out that socialist parties cannot ignore the issue of environment and "have to fight over these issues and absorb them in a more encompassing structured set of appeals". Similarly, Neumayer (2004) found evidence that left parties deal more with the environment than right-wing parties in their manifesto.

In its analysis of electoral success of parties following the entry of new parties in the space of party competition, Tavits (2008) observed that the parties located in the neighbourhood of the new party lose more votes than others. These parties are expected to react more heavily to the electoral threat of the new party than others. But in its analysis of the electoral fortunes of niche parties, Meguid (2008) demonstrated that all mainstream parties – whatever their position in the space of competition – are concerned by the electoral success of these niche parties, i.e. in our case the green parties. "Competition is no longer restricted to ideologically proximal parties. Parties can affect the competition of challengers anywhere in the political arena" (Meguid, 2008: 22) Nonetheless, we still expect that the emergence and electoral success of a party focusing on the environmental issue have a different impact on parties according to their ideology and position in the space of competition. Following previous findings, we hypothesise that the socialist party family will react more actively to the green party success than any other party family.

H3. Socialist parties will emphasize the environment issue in their manifestos when the green party is electorally successful

III. Data and variables

In this section, we will briefly present the data we will use in our attempt to explain the content of party manifestos regarding the environmental issue as well as our main dependent, independent and control variables.

3.1. Data

In the framework of a research project aimed at analysing the positions of the Belgian political parties, a systematic thematic coding of the content of the party manifestos was set. Inspired by the original work of Baumgartner and Jones (1993), the Belgian agenda setting project⁵ uses a slightly adapted version of their topical codebook to identify and track issue attention within several policy agendas (of parties, parliament, government, media, etc.) from 1977 to 2008. The codebook contains over 250 topic codes, organized by main topic category.

Party manifestos were coded per quasi-sentence, a procedure used by the Manifestos Research Group's CMP handbook (Budge et al., 2001). This coding procedure consists of identifying all the issues put forward in a document. So, if several ideas are expressed within a larger sentence, they would all be coded. This procedure applies very strict rules with respect to identifying such core ideas or quasi-sentences and was carefully executed. In addition, our coding procedures allows a multiple coding for the same quasi-sentence and various dummy variables were also added allowing us to identify pledges, titles, references to other parties, etc. About 250,000 quasi-sentences were coded, with an average of 2,435 per manifesto.

Regarding our time frame, 1978 can be considered as the starting point of contemporary Belgian politics. Up to 1968, the three mainstream parties displayed united and bilingual structures but, in a period of 10 years (1968-1978), the Belgian unitary party system became totally regionalised as each mainstream party split into two independent parties (one Flemish, one French-speaking). These events had an important impact on various aspects of the Belgian political arena, among which party positions. In our research, we therefore decided to focus on this contemporary period, starting with the elections preceding the split of the last mainstream party in 1978⁶ up to the 2007 federal elections, i.e. the 10 legislative elections that occurred from 1977 to 2007.

Regarding our case selection, we included all parties that were at least represented in three elections in the federal House of Representatives, i.e. 13 parties: two Christian-Democrats, two Social-Democrats, two Liberals, two Greens, two Extreme-right and three Regionalists. With the exception of the French-speaking PS, Ecolo and FN, all other parties changed their name within the observed period. In addition, many electoral alliances or cartels were formed, as well as few party splits, but the structure of the party system remained quite stable over time. We have therefore coded the content of the manifestos of about nine to 11 parties for each election year.⁷ Our database therefore consists in the content of 107 party manifestos on about 250 different policy issues and spread of 30 years.

3.2. Dependent variable

Our dependent variable consists in the amount of attention dedicated to environment in the Belgian party manifestos. Different methods can be used to quantitatively measure differences

⁵ This project, under the direction of Prof. Stefaan Walgrave (University of Antwerp) for the Belgian case, is financed by the European Science Foundation (ESF) and consists of a collaboration between several European countries, including Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

⁶ The 1977 manifesto for the Social-Democrat PS and SP is still common.

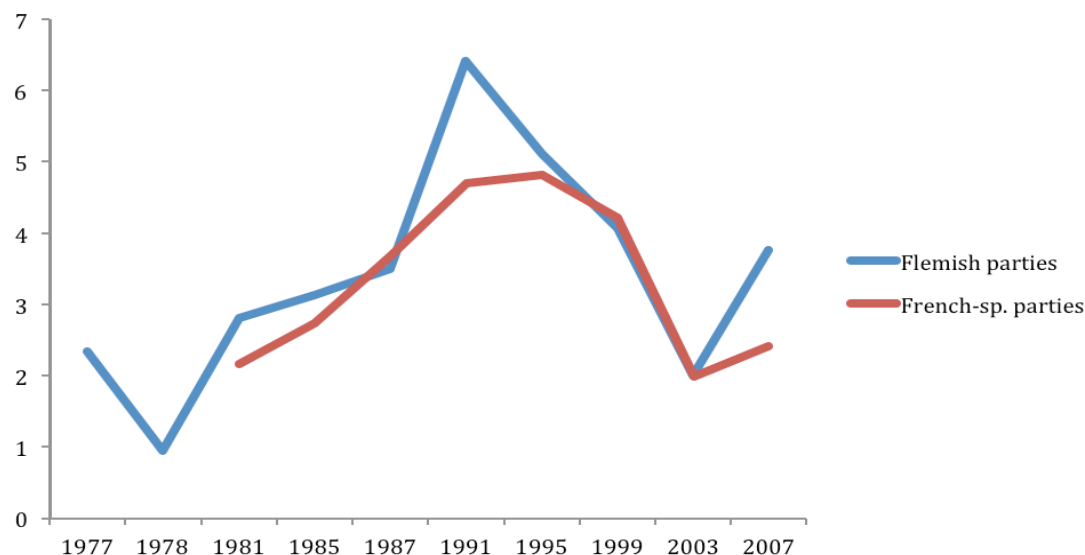
⁷ We are missing the party manifestos of the FN for 1995 and 1999 (this party represented respectively 2,28% and 1,45% of the votes for these two elections). French-speaking manifestos for the elections of 1977 and 1978 are still being coded at the time as we speak.

between parties on one single issue in party manifestos: counting words, sentences, paragraphs, pledges, etc. Similarly to the CMP frame, we measured this attention as the percentage of policy arguments or quasi-sentences in each manifesto that are directly related to the environmental issues. As indicated above, the CAP codebook comprises about 250 policy issues. Among these various issues, no less than 14 sub-categories directly deal with environmental issues.⁸

In the Graph 1, we present the relative importance of the environmental issue in the two Belgian party systems, representing the average attention to that issue in all significant Flemish and French-speaking manifestos since 1977. Both trends are weighted by party electoral strength (in % of the total number of votes at the national level). We observe that environment is an relatively important issue the Belgian electoral campaigns as it represents on the average and since 1981 respectively 3,85% and 3,34% of the content of all Flemish and French-speaking party manifestos. Obviously, differences are to be observed among parties, between the total absence of the issue in party manifesto of VU in 1985 to the 22,17% of importance in the case of Agalev in 1991.

Assessing the overall trends towards more or less emphases on environmental issues in the party manifestos, we observe that, in the Belgian case, party manifestos do indeed increase over time in both party systems until the beginning of the 1990s. Even if we have missing data for the French-speaking parties for the elections of 1977 and 1978, these evolutions occur rather in parallel. Environment occupies on the average between 1% and 3% of the content of the manifestos in the 1977-1985 period, then this issue grew to an average of 4-5% in the nineties, decreased to about 2% of attention in 2003 and regained in vigour at the occasion of the last observed election in 2007.

Graph 1. Average attention to environment in the party manifestos (in %, weighted by party size), 1977-2007



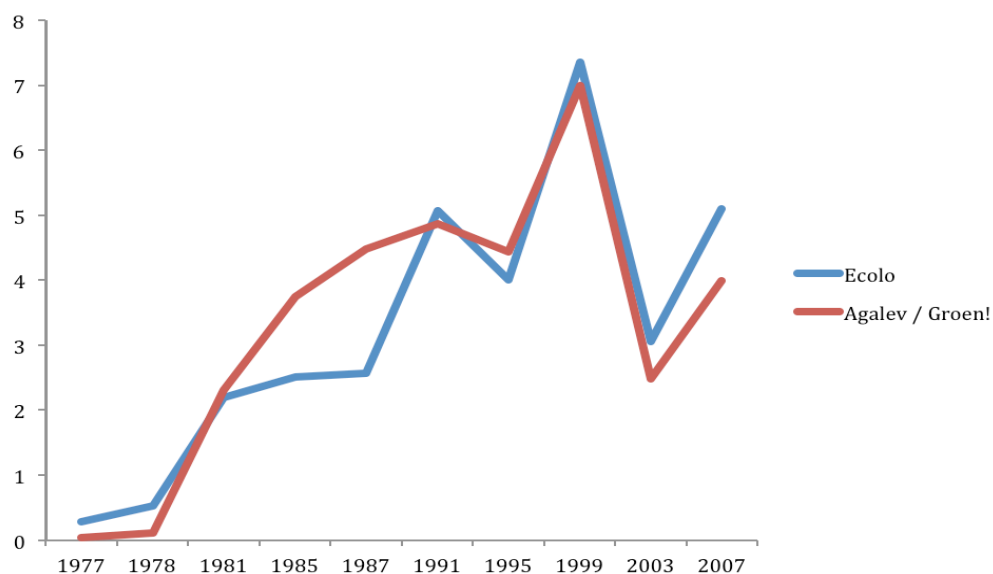
⁸ Sub-categories 700 : General (including combinations of sub-categories); 701 : Drinkable water quality; 703 : Waste management; 704 : Toxic, chemical & radioactive material; 705 : Air pollution; 707 : Recycling; 708 : Domestic dangers; 710 : Coast and sea pollution; 711 : Soil and waters protection; 712 : Technical risk; 720 : Nature protection; 721 : Animal protection; 798 : Environmental R&D; 799 : Others; 407: Environmental problems in agriculture.

3.3. Independent variables

Our first independent variables deal with the green party. Our main hypotheses regarding party competition on the environmental issue (H1 and H2) rely primarily on the electoral success of the green party in each party system. We developed two different indicators of the electoral strength of the green party. The first one, similar to Meguid, 2008, consists in its absolute electoral result (in % of the votes at the national level) (*Green Party Size*), while the second (*Green Party Success*) measures the electoral trend in the results of the green party since the last elections ($e_0 - e_{-1}$). These two measures will allow us to determine whether the green parties represent an (growing) electoral threat for the other parties in each party system.

Indeed, the two Belgian green parties witness an important electoral success since their first participation in a national election in 1981⁹, even leading to a participation in the coalitions in regional and national cabinets. Given the high party fragmentation in Belgium, electoral results of – for example – 5% of the votes at the national level represent an important threat for the other parties. In 1999, Ecolo managed to become the third largest French-speaking party in electoral importance with a result of 7,43%. But their electoral fortunes are not linear, even if witnessing parallel results (with the exception of the years 1985 and 1987). They obtained successive electoral success from 1977 to 1999, with a significant recess in 1995. In 2003, they performed badly, going back to their results of the early 1980s, before winning votes again in 2007.

Graph 2. Electoral performance of the two green parties (in % of the votes at the national level, 1977-2007)



As indicated above, the green parties can be considered as niche parties. Their core issue is the one of environmental protection. Our indicator of the importance of this issue in the green party manifestos (in percentage of the whole number of quasi-sentences in each individual manifesto) is another important independent variable. In our hypotheses of party competition, this variable is important since it is associated with the electoral success of the green parties. The more important the coverage of the environment issues, combined with an important

⁹ Even if the current party Ecolo was officially founded in 1980 and Agalev (Groen!) in 1979, we added to our database the results of their respective forerunners (*Wallonie-Ecologie* in 1977 and 1978, as well as EcoloG and Agalev in 1977 and 1978).

electoral success, the more the other parties are expected to react to this threat. The variable of environment emphasis will be combined with the green electoral results in e_0 (*Green Party Size X Environment*) and in $e_0 - e_{-1}$ (*Green Party Success X Environment*).

The Table 1 and 2 indicate the relative amount of attention given to the environmental issues in the Flemish and French-speaking green parties. On the average, the two green parties dedicate respectively about 11,38% and 10,05% of the content of their party manifestos to that issue. With no exception, this is much more than any other parties and for every single election since 1981. In addition, the environmental issues are the most covered policy area in the green parties manifestos. In the second positions, we often find social policy issues, economic policy issues as well as education or youth policy. Even if there is no criteria in the literature that allows us to distinguish niche parties from other parties, these figures confirm that, in the Belgian case, the two green parties can be considered as environmental niche parties.

Table 1. Environment in Agalev / Groen! manifestos (1981-2007)

	1981	1985	1987	1991	1995	1999	2003	2007	Average
General	4,35%	2,59%	2,92%	6,71%	3,20%	4,52%	4,22%	3,15%	3,96%
Drinkable water quality	0,15%	0,27%	0,09%	0,25%	0,77%	0,64%	0,14%	0,00%	0,29%
Waste management	0,45%	0,27%	1,22%	1,78%	1,26%	0,74%	0,20%	0,14%	0,76%
Toxic, chemical & radioactive material	0,15%	0,94%	1,15%	2,57%	0,37%	0,45%	0,43%	0,96%	0,88%
Air pollution	0,30%	1,10%	1,94%	2,53%	0,86%	1,66%	1,19%	2,69%	1,53%
Recycling	0,00%	0,43%	0,40%	0,25%	0,09%	0,42%	0,08%	0,17%	0,23%
Domestic dangers	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,10%	0,58%	0,09%
Coast and sea pollution	0,00%	0,35%	0,40%	0,52%	0,00%	0,13%	0,34%	0,29%	0,25%
Soil and waters protection	0,00%	0,08%	0,18%	1,34%	1,09%	0,81%	0,01%	0,00%	0,44%
Technical risk	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%
Nature protection	0,30%	0,55%	0,43%	1,86%	0,06%	0,76%	0,21%	0,50%	0,58%
Animal protection	0,30%	0,24%	0,12%	0,35%	0,00%	0,82%	0,89%	1,71%	0,55%
Environment R&D	0,00%	0,08%	0,03%	0,05%	0,03%	0,27%	0,15%	0,41%	0,13%
Others	0,00%	0,43%	0,67%	1,29%	0,34%	0,73%	0,13%	0,50%	0,51%
Environmental problems in agriculture	1,50%	0,82%	0,67%	2,67%	1,52%	0,95%	0,70%	0,60%	1,18%
Total	7,50%	8,15%	10,22%	22,17%	9,59%	12,90%	8,79%	11,70%	11,38%

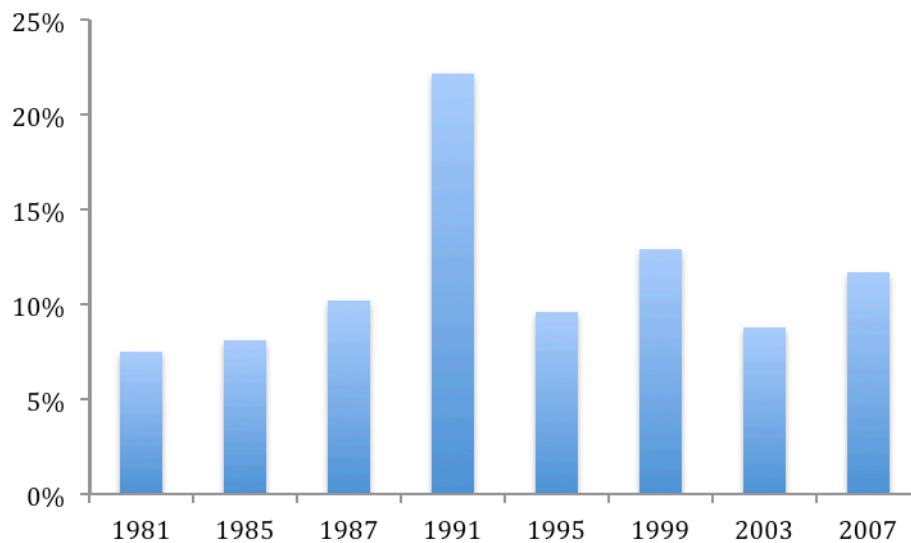
Table 2. Environment in Ecolo manifestos (1981-2007)

	1981	1985	1987	1991	1995	1999	2003	2007	Average
General	0,42%	1,67%	6,92%	1,50%	1,92%	1,56%	1,84%	1,71%	2,19%
Drinkable water quality	0,00%	0,22%	1,89%	0,41%	0,12%	1,56%	0,11%	0,26%	0,57%
Waste management	3,52%	0,15%	1,89%	1,85%	0,00%	1,56%	0,21%	0,21%	1,17%
Toxic, chemical & radioactive material	0,61%	0,00%	1,89%	0,59%	4,67%	1,37%	0,21%	0,51%	1,23%
Air pollution	0,97%	0,15%	1,89%	1,62%	0,72%	1,41%	1,69%	1,83%	1,28%
Recycling	0,55%	0,00%	0,00%	0,35%	0,00%	0,27%	0,00%	0,12%	0,16%
Domestic dangers	0,12%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,30%	0,05%	0,14%	0,08%
Coast and sea pollution	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,35%	0,00%	0,23%	0,11%	0,22%	0,11%
Soil and waters protection	0,30%	1,23%	0,63%	0,29%	0,00%	0,23%	0,16%	0,02%	0,36%
Technical risk	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,03%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%
Nature protection	0,00%	0,15%	0,00%	0,65%	0,00%	1,56%	0,42%	0,38%	0,39%
Animal protection	2,42%	1,81%	0,00%	0,06%	0,00%	0,34%	0,00%	0,60%	0,65%
Environment R&D	0,00%	0,73%	0,00%	0,26%	0,24%	0,11%	0,00%	0,94%	0,29%
Others	4,24%	0,00%	0,00%	1,18%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	1,61%	0,88%
Environmental problems in agriculture	0,00%	1,23%	0,63%	0,38%	1,92%	0,57%	0,53%	0,12%	0,67%

Total	13,15%	7,33%	15,74%	9,52%	9,58%	11,06%	5,32%	8,67%	10,05%
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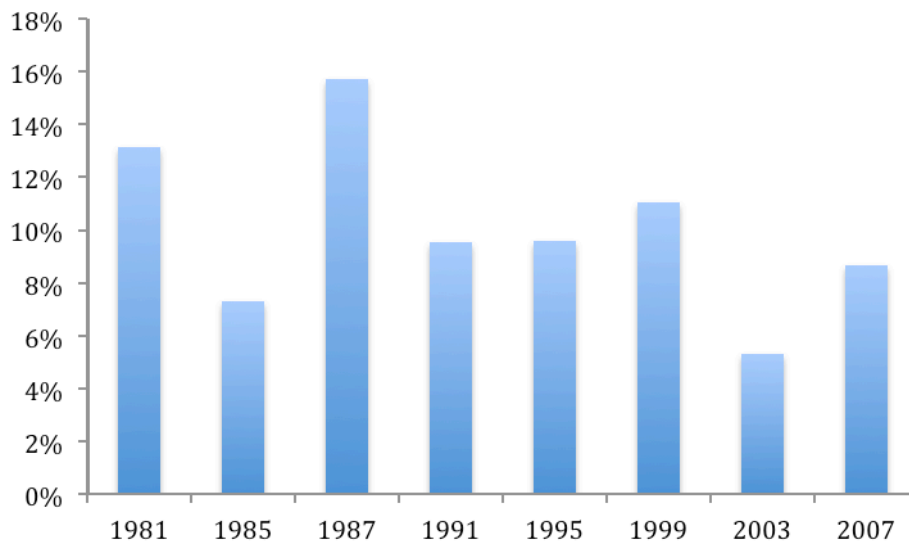
The analysis of the evolution over time of the environmental issues in the green parties manifestos does not deliver clear patterns since the importance given to environment fluctuates across elections. The evolution of the manifestos of the Flemish green party is marked by the importance of that issue in the 1991 manifesto, as the environment been more emphasized in this manifesto than in any other one. If we consider the 1991 manifesto as an outlier and remove it from the graph, the observed trend for the remaining seven elections is clearly that of an increase of the attention to environment over time since the party creation ($R^2 = .435$) (see Appendix).

Graph 3. Environmental issues in Agalev / Groen! manifestos (1981-2007)



Concerning its French-speaking counter-part, Ecolo, the observed trend is rather opposite. The importance of the environmental issue does not grow over time, but seems to be less emphasized in more recent elections, below 10% of attention, with a remarkable low score in 2003 (5,32%). Nonetheless, even if the trend has an R^2 of .242, this pattern is not linear over time and is mainly marked by ups and downs.

Graph 4. Environmental issues in Ecolo manifestos (1981-2007)



One of our main explanatory variable concerns each individual party's electoral success or defeat. Spatial models often used the argument of the electoral successes and failures as an explanation for moving its position in the direction of the median voter, of other competitors or even to more extreme positions. Budge, Ezrow, and Mc Donald (2010) found evidence that the electoral success of a party is important to predict its policy moves. When the party gains votes, it will continue in the same policy direction, while when it loses votes, it will reverse its position and emphasize different issues. Similarly, Smirnov and Fowler (2007: 18) hypothesized that a winning party will move its manifesto to a more extreme position, i.e. it would move away from the median voter and get closer to its preferred policy. The other parties would also move into the direction of the winning party.

We believe that winning or loosing elections (*Party Defeat*) has an impact on the content of the electoral manifesto. We expect that a party that lost the elections will focus on new issues (i.e. the environmental ones) especially when the green parties are successful while a winning party should not change its manifesto strategy and keep on emphasizing the same policy issues. We operationalised this variable by looking at the difference between the elections results of a party since the last elections ($e_{-0} - e_{-1}$). Since parties are perfectly aware of the results of the opinion polls that precede the elections, or are at least able to identify the main electoral trends concerning their party, we believe that looking at the electoral evolution since the last elections is a good proxy for assessing whether the party is in era of electoral decline or success.¹⁰

Government participation is another key variable in the explanation of our models, even if it can somehow be related to party size (see control variables) and electoral success. The variable of government participation has often been used as a dependent variable explained by the content of the manifestos (i.e. parties that are close ideologically are more likely to form a coalition – see for example Aarts, MacDonald and Rabonowitz, 1999; Lowerse, 2009), but also as independent or control variable (see for example Tavits, 2008). According to Budge

¹⁰ For the period anterior to the linguistic split of the mainstream parties (i.e. before 1978 for some of these parties), we assessed their electoral results based on a calculation of the votes in the different constituencies: the ones in Wallonia (that is mainly French-speaking), the ones in Flanders (that is mainly Flemish-speaking) and the ones in Brussels (i.e. bilingual constituencies), distinguishing between French-speaking and Flemish votes.

and Farlie (1983), government record is important for understanding the issues of an electoral campaign. A party in the opposition should emphasize specific issues as a way to put the government in difficulty but analyses of the Spanish case taught us that there is no influence of government participation (Alonso, Gomez, 2009). In addition, manifestos from governing parties display an “inability to provide distinct programmatic positions in the government functions” (Kritzinger, McElroy, 2010: 24) and Marks et al. (2007) expect that the positions of the governing parties tend to be less radical and less innovative than opposition ones.

Still, we believe that government participation plays a significant role in explaining the content of party manifestos and more particularly the emphasis put on environmental issues. Similarly to Marks et al. (2007), we expect that the manifestos of parties in government have to develop policy positions on every issue dealt with their government (especially concerning the policy related to the portfolios held by their ministers). Opposition parties may choose the topic they focus on more freely. We therefore hypothesise that – combined with other variables such as electoral success and green party success – opposition parties would more largely emphasize the issue of environment since they are less constrained than governing parties. We operationalised this variable (*Opposition*) in a simple way, i.e. using a dummy variable, independently from the amount of portfolios held by each party and from its participation in regional cabinets.

But this indicator does not entirely reflects the reality if the majority vs. opposition divide in Belgium. Not all parties participate to federal cabinets and some of them – for example the extreme-right parties, due to the *cordon sanitaire* strategy – never entered such governmental coalition. And we expect that being in the opposition for the last 30 years or for only one legislature (i.e. four years) is not experienced the same way by a party. Indeed, due to the Belgian consociational system, many mainstream – but also some niche – parties are prepared to enter the federal cabinet. This preparation should, among others, mean that their positions and issues should be regarded as acceptable by other parties, i.e. their manifesto should not be too extreme but rather look similar to the one of a governing parties. On the other hand, parties that stayed for decades in the opposition should dedicate their manifesto to more narrow positions and to criticisms of the government actions. As a result, we expect that parties that stayed a long period of time in the opposition are more adaptive and are able to dedicate more attention to environmental issues than parties that other parties. This variable (*Years in Opposition*) has been operationalised based on the number of years a party spent into the opposition since its last government participation.

A variable included in our model concerns party families. In order to verify whether some parties belonging to certain party families are more prone to emphasize environment than others, we introduced party family dummies for the two christian-democrats, the two social-democrats, the two liberals, the three regionalists and the two extreme-right parties.¹¹ As outlined above, parties may react differently to the green party threat, depending on their ideology and their policy closeness to the green parties. According to the literature on niche parties (see for example Meguid, 2008), it is expected that other niche parties – such as extreme-right and regionalist parties – would focus their manifesto on very small number of core issues and would be less reactive than mainstream parties the green party electoral fortunes. In the Belgian case, the mainstream parties receive the label of ‘traditional’ parties. The traditional parties are the three political parties (then party families since 1968-78) that dominated the party system since the end of the 19th century. Not only certain party families

¹¹ A green party dummy was also added to our first series of models.

should be more adaptive to the environmental issue in their manifesto, but it is expected that traditional party families should as well be more reactive to green party threats than niche parties. We created a dummy variable (*Traditional*) opposing traditional parties and niche parties.

Finally, we would like to observe whether the party competition on the environment issue is influenced by external events and, more particularly, by the socio-economic environment. The core of the post-materialist hypothesis relies on the relation between the socio-economic situation of a population and its values. Wealthier populations should be more prone to defend post-materialist values and, among them, the environmental protection. Indeed, changes in the economic environment have an impact on the party positions and, by definition, the content of its party manifesto. It is the case of the economic crisis (Kitschelt, 1994), of the changes in the global economy (Caul, Gray, 2000; Haupt, 2010) and of the changes in the national socio-economic circumstances (Kerr, 1987; Mastropaolo, Slater, 1987) that have proven and significant impact on party positions. But one has to notice that parties do not react the same way to changes in their environment (Kitschelt, 1994; Haupt, 2010).

Among the economic indicators that could have an impact on the attention to environmental issues, we tested for the Belgian case the impact on party positions of three of the most widely used economic indicators: unemployment, inflation and GDP (for previous use of the indicators in the analysis of party positions, see for example Kitschelt, 1994; Caul, Gray, 2000; Tavits, 2008). The graphs presenting the evolution of the unemployment rate in Belgium and the emphasis in party manifestos on the environmental issue (see Appendix) demonstrate that both phenomena seem to be linked. Globally, we observe that the higher the unemployment on the Belgian territory, the lower the emphasis to the environment, especially in the case of the Flemish parties (including the Flemish green party). These findings basically confirm the post-materialist hypothesis according to which favourable economic situation foster the attention to the environmental issue. Similarly, figures about the annual growth of the GDP seem to be related to the emphasis of the environment in the Flemish party manifestos.

We operationalized these variables using the official statistics of year preceding the elections (y_{-1}) because the release of the official statistical figures occurs at the beginning of the next civil years, i.e. months after the election. Especially since their release is often accompanied by a large media coverage, they are expected to have a large impact on parties at the time of their release. In addition, party manifestos are not drafted a few days before the elections, but months (sometimes even more) before. At that time, the party is therefore only aware of the data for the previous year and bases its manifestos on these figures. Our six different indicators are the unemployment rate (y_{-1}) *Unemployment*, the variation of the unemployment rate since previous year ($y_{-1} - y_{-2}$) *VarUnemployment*, the inflation rate (y_{-1}) *Inflation*, the variation of the inflation rate since previous year ($y_{-1} - y_{-2}$) *VarInflation*, the GDP per capita *GDP* and the GDP growth rate ($y_{-1} - y_{-2}$) *GDP growth*.

3.4. Control variables

Some other variables have been used in our models in order to control for different phenomena. These control variables are language, party size and manifesto length.

A characteristic of the Belgian electoral systems is its scission according to linguistic lines. Broadly speaking, Flemish parties do not address French-speaking voters and vice-versa, even

in the officially bilingual city of Brussels. Since the split of the traditional political parties into language-based sister parties (between 1968 and 1978), manifestos are no longer released in both languages and not even translated. Language is in this framework an important variable as it allows distinguishing Flemish from French-speaking parties. Indeed, it is likely probable that Flemish parties react differently from French-speaking parties to the emergence and electoral success of a green party within the two distinct party systems. Even if we do not observe distinct patterns between Flemish and French-speaking parties regarding the importance given to the environment (see Graph 1 above), the observed differences in the electoral success of the two green parties and their different emphasis to the environmental issue across time may induce different reactions from the other parties. Overall, both trajectories seem to be closely related. The elections of 1981, 1985, 1987, 1995, 1999 and 2003 witness about the same attention to environmental issues in Flemish and French-speaking party manifestos. With two non-significant exceptions (1987 and 1999), the Flemish parties always dedicate on the average more attention to that issue than the French-speaking ones. The larger emphasis observed in 1991 for the Flemish parties is mainly due to the high attention to that issue in the green party manifesto. This variable *Language* has been operationalized as a dummy variable.

The size of each party (*Party Size*) has been measured through its electoral strength. The party size, calculated in percentage of the votes at obtained elections, is a good proxy for party size.¹² In our hypotheses, party size is not of prime importance since it is rather its electoral faith that could explain its emphasis on the environmental issue. Nonetheless, we will control for party size in our models.

Finally, we will control for the length of the manifesto. Indeed, previous empirical analyses with the same data (Dandoy, 2011) demonstrated that manifesto length matters when one wants to analyse its content. The content of a party manifesto is not similar if it is a small or a large manifesto. We therefore included a variable based on the number of coded quasi-sentence in each manifesto (*Manifesto Length*).

IV. Results

In this section, we will test several models in order to explain party attention to environmental issues in their manifestos. The structure of our data is a cross-sectional times series one, under the form of a panel (same parties at different points in time). Since our dataset might be troubled by autocorrelation and/or heteroscedasticity, we opted for regression models with panel-corrected standard errors (PCSE). Given the fact that we have maximum 10 observations for each party, we choose for the Prais-Winsten estimation.¹³

¹² A variable based on the amount of seats gained by each party that can be hardly used in absolute or in relative terms (i.e. in variation of the number of seats since previous elections). The reform of the federal parliament in 1993 brought among others a decrease of the amount of seats in the House, from 212 to 150. As a result, and with the exception of the FN that gained one additional seats as this party doubled its electoral results, all Belgian parties lost seats between the 1991 and the 1995 elections. In addition, the seats in the parliament are divided according to their linguistic regime (Flemish vs. French-speaking) in specific constituencies. As a result, a Flemish and a French-speaking party receiving the same amount of votes will not receive the same amount of seats.

¹³ The Prais–Winsten estimation is a technique managing the serial correlation of type AR(1) in a linear model. It is basically a modification of the Cochrane–Orcutt estimation in the sense that it does not lose the first observation of each individual (i.e. party) and, as a result, leads to more efficiency.

Before testing our different hypotheses and models, we ran a control model. In this model, we included our three control variables (see section 3.4.), i.e. language, party size and manifesto length. Only one control variable appears to be significant: the size of the party, based on its electoral results. This coefficient is negative while remaining modest, meaning that an increase of 1% in the size of the party leads to a decrease of attention to environment of 0,15% in its manifesto. In other words, smaller parties dedicate slightly more attention to environment than larger parties. The fact that the two green parties remained relatively small during the observed period may explain this result. Overall, the model explains poorly the attention to environment ($R^2 = .065$). Interestingly, none of the other two control variables is significant. Environmental emphasis is not related to the language of the party, neither to the length of its manifesto. The constant appears to be the most significant variable in this model.

Table 3. Control Model (Model 0). Prais-Winsten regression, heteroskedastic panels corrected standard errors. Dependent variable: Percentage of attention to environmental issues.

		Coefficient	Heteroskedasticity-corrected Standard Error
Control Variables	Language	24.39696	78.42097
	Party Size	-.152188*	.0675722
	Manifesto Length	.0107395	.0206593
	Constant	446.7353***	87.02593
	N	95	
	Groups	13	
	R^2	.0654	
	Wald χ^2	5.38	

Note: *** $\rho < 0.001$; ** $\rho < 0.01$; * $\rho < 0.05$

The first model we tested concerns the economic environment. Since environment issues are linked to the post-materialist values in the society, we expected that the parties would dedicate more attention to environment in periods of economic wealth or growth. But our contextual demonstrate that none of our six economic variables can be linked to the attention to environment in the Belgian party manifestos. The percentage of the manifestos that are devoted to the environment issues is not affected by the unemployment rate, the inflation or the GDP per capita. Even if the effect of the constant on the model remains important and significant, the party size variable also remains significant.

Table 4. Economic contextual Model (Model 1)

		Coeff.	Het-corr. Std. Err.
Economic Variables	Unemployment	-.1657517	.1994629
	Δ Unemployment	.3406094	1.545828
	Inflation	-.162408	.172938
	Δ Inflation	-.1521464	.4602995
	GDP	-4.41e-08	3.85e-08
	GDP growth rate	2.22e-07	3.11e-07
Control Variables	Language	31.42611	78.23512
	Party Size	-.151185*	.068824
	Manifesto Length	.0089556	.020627
	Constant	697.1713**	268.1259
	N	95	
	Groups	13	
	R^2	.1039	
	Wald χ^2	11.32	

Note: Prais-Winsten regression, heteroskedastic PCSE. *** $\rho < 0.001$; ** $\rho < 0.01$; * $\rho < 0.05$

Our second set of models deals with the variables concerning the niche parties and the party families. As indicated above, we expected to witness a difference between traditional (mainstream) parties and niche parties as far as the attention to the environment is concerned. Model 2 confirms that the traditional parties (i.e. the christian-democrats, the socialists and the liberals) significantly emphasize less the environment issues than the so-called niche parties. Overall, the environmental category is 1,71% less important in the manifestos of the traditional parties than in the ones of the niche parties. Unsurprisingly, the variable of the party size is no longer significant since most of the niche parties are in fact small parties.

The second model (Model 3) has a strong explanatory power when dealing with the content of the party manifestos, as it explains about 40% of the variation of our dependent variable. It is not the status of mainstream vs. niche party that explains the attention to the environment, but rather the fact that some parties belong to certain party families. Among the different party family dummies, the most important – and significant – one is the Green party dummy. Indeed, green parties overall dedicate 5,12% more attention to the environment in their manifesto than any other party. These findings confirm our previous observations (see section 3.3) according to which the two Belgian green parties (Agalev/Groen! and Ecolo) are indeed niche parties focusing on the environmental issue. This variable alone is responsible for the large explanatory power of the model since none of our control variables appears to be significant.

Table 5. Niche Party / Party Family Model (all parties)

		Model 2	Model 3
Niche Variables	Traditional	-171.6136* (89.03636)	-
	Christian-Dem.	-	-85.61116 (66.20144)
	Liberal	-	-75.12525 (74.04268)
	Regionalist	-	-87.17075 (93.25088)
	Green	-	512.7398*** (151.2946)
	Extreme-right	-	-173.2746 (94.08356)
Control Variables	Language	-23.00569 (82.17656)	41.66848 (69.92046)
	Party Size	-.0544187 (.0724317)	-.0217232 (.0508827)
	Manifesto Length	.0133942 (.0204623)	-.0149052 (.0177222)
	Constant	480.6756*** (91.91865)	370.4046*** (95.81214)
	N	95	95
	Groups	13	13
	R ²	.0818	.3935
	Wald chi ²	7.22	23.91

Note: Prais-Winsten regression, heteroskedastic PCSE. *** $\rho < 0.001$; ** $\rho < 0.01$; * $\rho < 0.05$. The Socialist dummy was omitted in Model 3 because of collinearity.

But since we are interested in the emphasis to the environment in the manifestos of the parties in reaction to the emergence and success of the green parties, we re-ran the same models, excluding the two green parties (it drops our number of observations to 79). The results of our Model 4 indicate that the traditional (mainstream) vs. niche party variable is no longer significant in the. Overall, the traditional parties (christian-democrats, socialists and liberals)

do not dedicate more or less attention to the environmental issue than the niche parties (regionalist and extreme-right ones). Moreover, the party size variable is again not significant. Its effect in the control (Model 0) was probably due to the inclusion of the green parties in the analyses.

Interestingly, the Model 5 reveals the importance of the socialist party family dummy. Among the remain party families (once the greens are excluded), this dummy is significant and positive. It means that, *ceteris paribus*, that the portion of the manifesto of the socialist parties dedicated to the environment is larger by 1,9% than in the other parties' manifestos. It basically confirms Kitschelt (1994) and Neumayer's (2004) findings according to which the socialist parties (the left parties in the case of Neumayer) cannot ignore the issue of environment and integrate it in their manifestos. More than any other party family, the socialist parties include this include among their programmatic priorities. In addition, this dummy variable reduced the importance of the constant while improving the overall explanatory power of the model ($R^2 = .132$).

Table 6. Niche Party / Party Family Model (excluding Green parties)

		Model 4	Model 5
Niche Variables	Traditional	75.48286 (59.44885)	-
	Christian-Dem.	-	108.8704 (76.42476)
	Socialist	-	190.7021* (85.68469)
	Liberal	-	123.3399 (76.76832)
	Regionalist	-	99.17765 (74.30849)
Control Variables	Language	71.40684 (49.52345)	80.89397 (48.83383)
	Party Size	-.0526405 (.0440772)	-.0606347 (.0449168)
	Manifesto Length	.0021469 (.0114897)	.001665 (.0111551)
	Constant	214.8003*** (53.38836)	153.1811* (68.71093)
	N	79	79
	Groups	11	11
	R ²	.1058	.1322
	Wald chi ²	2.83	6.05

Note: Prais-Winsten regression, heteroskedastic PCSE. *** $\rho < 0.001$; ** $\rho < 0.01$; * $\rho < 0.05$. The Extreme-right party dummy was omitted in Model 5 because of collinearity.

In the next models, we tested two further hypotheses, related to government participation and to the electoral fortunes of each party. According to the first one, we expected that parties in the opposition at the time of the drafting of their manifesto would take more extreme stances than parties in government and would therefore focus more largely on the environmental issues. Our Incumbent Model demonstrated the majority vs. opposition status does not a play a role in the manifestos' emphasis on environment, neither does the period of time a party remained in the opposition. Both variables are non-significant (as well as the one of party size), indicating that being inside or outside the cabinet does not influence the share of a party's manifesto dedicated to environmental issues.

Similarly, but slightly more surprisingly, the electoral fortunes of a party are not linked with its emphasis on environment. We expected that losing the elections (especially in a large way) would lead to a renovation of its electoral platform and that it would include new and/or yet poorly emphasized issues, such as the environmental one. The results of our Electoral Model demonstrated that the variable of electoral defeat is not significant. In other words, a party that is about to lose the elections (compared to the previous ones) did not change the priorities of its manifesto, at least not in the direction of more or less environmental concern. Again, this is proven to be true while controlling for language, party size and manifesto length.

Table 7. Incumbent (Model 6) and Electoral (Model 7) models

	Incumbent Model	Electoral Model
Opposition	26.94724 (58.69061)	-
Years in Opposition	2.802648 (3.838184)	-
Party Defeat	-	-.1897688 (.1111714)
Control Variables		
Language	46.87486 (46.55679)	53.82182 (44.63667)
Party Size	-.0186077 (.0385623)	-.0227217 (.037081)
Manifesto Length	.0038533 (.0116086)	.0039167 (.0109759)
Constant	219.3849*** (56.60518)	245.0253*** (47.09642)
N	79	79
Groups	11	11
R ²	.0963	.1194
Wald chi ²	2.03	4.39

Note: Prais-Winsten regression, heteroskedastic PCSE. *** $\rho < 0.001$; ** $\rho < 0.01$; * $\rho < 0.05$

Our final model concerns the party competition. This model allows us to test our two competing hypotheses concerning the reaction of the Belgian parties to the emergence and electoral success of the green parties. As observed in Model 8, parties dedicate a larger share of their manifesto to the environment when the green party is strong. An increase of 1% of the size of the green party from the same party system leads to an additional 0,23% to the percentage of the environmental category in the manifestos of its competitors. These results may appear modest, but when one thinks about the example of a green party that moves from 5% to 15% of the votes, it would lead to an increase of the share taken by the environment in the other parties' manifestos by 2,3%. When one knows that on the average the Flemish and French-speaking parties allocate between 2% and 3% of the content of their manifesto to that issue, it would mean that a party that scored 2,5% on that issue would reach 4,8% when the green party moves from 5% to 15% of the votes. In our example, the share of attention to that issue almost doubled following the increase of the green party size.

Surprisingly, the variable of the green party electoral fortune does not play a role in this model. The fact that the green party (i.e. the party that focused the most on the environmental protection) wins or loses the elections has no implication on the attention to that issue in its competitors' manifestos. It is not the electoral success of a green party that matters, it is size. The larger the green party, the more important the impact it will have on the emphasis on environment in the other parties electoral platforms.

In Model 9, we added the variable of party defeat (previously used in Model 7). We expected that a successful green party, combined with an electoral defeat for the green party competitor, would need to a programmatic adaptation of its manifesto in favour of the issue of the green party, i.e. the environment. Indeed, we observe that the variable of Party Defeat is negative, significant and, as the variable of green size, relatively important. A party that is about to lose the elections (when compared to the previous one) will tend to emphasize the issue of environment in its manifesto. More precisely, a party that lost 1% of the votes increases its share of attention to the environment issue by 0,24%. As in the previous model, the variable of the green party size remains positive and significant.

Overall, even if this model has a weak explanatory power and if the constant remains the most important component, we can conclude that the emphasis on the issue of environment in the party manifesto is somehow a consequence of both party electoral defeat and green party size. These weak results are somehow in favour with our first hypothesis (H1a - Confrontational hypothesis) according to which political parties will emphasize environment in their manifestos when the green party is electorally successful and when these parties lose the elections. In that sense, our main hypothesis about dismissive strategies (H2) has to be rejected. Nonetheless, our models demonstrate that it, in this process, is not the green party electoral fortune that matters but rather its size in terms of share of the votes. No matter its electoral fortune, it is the electoral strength of the green party that plays a role.

But this model has to be completed by our findings in previous models. More specifically Model 5 indicated the importance of identifying the party family dummies and, particularly, the socialist party family. We added these different party family dummies into Model 10. The results are striking. First, the variable of party defeat is no longer significant while the size of the green party remains an important explanatory variable. Second, one added variable proved – similarly to Model 5 – to be significant and positive. The dummy variable for the socialist party family is proven to have a large effect on the dependent variables: socialist parties dedicate more attention to the environmental issues in their manifestos than other party families. Overall, their attention to that issue is larger by 1,78%. Third, mainly thanks to this dummy variable, the model has a larger explanatory power than previous models: it basically explains more than 20% of the variation of the dependent variable. Finally and surprisingly, the constant is no longer significant. In other words, it means that the party families dummies – and more particularly the socialist party family dummy – now cover the constant effects observed earlier. In other words, we may argue that the emphasis on environment in the socialist manifestos remains constant, independently on any other phenomena (their own electoral defeats, the success of the green party, etc.). Alternatively, it means that our model is more powerful, not because we added more variables, but because these added variables cover more variation of the dependent variable.

We finally controlled these interesting findings by adding to our variables the share of the green party manifestos allocated to the environmental issues. As indicated above, the green parties are niche parties focusing on the environment issue and we may expect that a variation in this emphasis could have an impact on the competitors' reactions. We run the same models but with variables combining the green party size and green party success with the percentage of attention to the environmental issue in their manifesto. We expected that the combination of larger size and/or electoral success with a larger emphasis on the environment would lead to an increase to the attention to the same issue in the other parties' manifestos.

Our results (Model 11) similarly demonstrate that the party defeat and the green party success (combined with environmental attention) do not play a significant role in the model. But, on the other, the variable of green party size combined with its attention to the environment is positive and rather large. Any additional unit in our independent variable would lead to an increase in the dependent variable of 1,54%. In other words, this variable is significant and has now a larger effect than party size alone. The combination of green part size and focus on environment also significantly increased the explanatory power of the model ($R^2 = .17$) compared to the Model 9.

Model 12 confirmed the importance of the variable of the green party size combined with its attention to the environment. The subsequent increase of the dependent variable following a one point increase of this independent variable is of 1,59%. A large green party focusing on the environment in its manifesto produces a larger attention to the same issue in its competitors' manifestos. The other variable in this model that plays a role in explaining the percentage of attention to the environment in the Belgian party manifestos is the socialist party dummy. The emphasis to this issue is overall larger 1,74% for the two socialist parties, compared to parties from other party families. This control model has an explanatory power of above 20%, similar to Model 10. It means that most of the added explanatory power observed between Model 9 and Model 11 has been taken over by the socialist party dummy.

Table 8. Party Competition model

		Model 8	Model 9	Model 10
Party Competition	Green Party Size	.2322175* (.106477)	.2286624* (.097239)	.2283041* (.1089275)
	Green Party Success	-.0370572 (.1358974)	-.1140384 (.1330868)	-.0918856 (.137406)
	Green Party Size X Environment	-	-	-
	Green Party Success X Environment	-	-	-
	Party Defeat	-	-.2356231* (.1105089)	-.1387559 (.1145825)
	Party Families	Christian-Dem.	-	-
	Socialist	-	-	178.8357* (81.01837)
	Liberal	-	-	110.8411 (73.09324)
	Regionalist	-	-	89.51993 (78.9837)
Control Variables	Language	36.08645 (44.34657)	34.5438 (41.55297)	63.5684 (46.82316)
	Party Size	-.0175667 (.0393423)	-.0227798 (.0405835)	-.0543397 (.04282)
	Manifesto Length	-.0026828 (.0116406)	-.0041476 (.0110073)	-.0062321 (.0110596)
	Constant	192.0393*** (52.03744)	204.9572*** (50.16782)	118.4349 (73.91477)
	N	79	79	79
	Groups	11	11	11
	R ²	.0911	.1018	.2186
	Wald chi ²	6.28	12.63	13.55

Note: Prais-Winsten regression, heteroskedastic PCSE. *** $\rho < 0.001$; ** $\rho < 0.01$; * $\rho < 0.05$. The Extreme-right party dummy was omitted in Model 3 because of collinearity.

Table 8. Party Competition model (continued)

		Model 11	Model 12
Party Competition	Green Party Size	-	-
	Green Party Success	-	-
	Green Party Size	.0001541*	.0001587*
	X Environment	(.0000775)	(.0000742)
	Green Party Success	-.0000846	-.0000994
	X Environment	(.0001584)	(.0001519)
	Party Defeat	-.1778227 (.1124296)	-.161458 (.1130767)
Party Families	Christian-Dem.	-	89.10753 (77.80036)
	Socialist	-	174.95* (83.86439)
	Liberal	-	112.7249 (72.78197)
	Regionalist	-	82.19833 (76.64195)
Control Variables	Language	46.42657 (45.33824)	72.48023 (47.85221)
	Party Size	-.0260767 (.0375636)	-.063095 (.0446596)
	Manifesto Length	.0007457 (.0109969)	-.002452 (.0106845)
	Constant	217.2817*** (50.12059)	140.9169 (71.98979)
	N	79	79
	Groups	11	11
	R ²	.1699	.2124
	Wald chi ²	8.23	13.47

Note: Prais-Winsten regression, heteroskedastic PCSE. *** $\rho < 0.001$; ** $\rho < 0.01$; * $\rho < 0.05$. The Extreme-right party dummy was omitted in Model 5 because of collinearity.

Discussion

The objective of this paper was to explain the positions of the Belgian political parties on the issue of the environment. This issue is important in the national elections campaign agenda for the last two decades but variation across parties, regions and over time have been observed. Our main assumption was that the electoral success of the green parties – that were clearly identified as the ‘owners’ of the environmental issue – had an impact on the position of the other parties on that issue. This assumption basically relies on the fact that the electoral success of green parties directly threatens the other political parties and that these parties may adapt their strategy in order to face that new electoral challenge. Based on a quantitative analysis of the party manifestos in Belgium for the last three decades, this paper demonstrated the importance of party competition in understanding parties’ environmental attention.

Our main hypothesis was that the pattern of party competition had a significant impact on the content of party manifestos. Leaving aside voter’s positions, both spatial and saliency theories define party competition mainly as the consequence of the electoral fortunes of political parties and, more precisely, on the electoral success of the party that ‘owns’ the issue at stake. Two competing hypotheses have emerged based on these theories, one arguing that parties will be ‘contaminated’ with the successful party and will mimetically adopt its position, the

other expecting that parties will avoid dealing with the issue of the successful party and will on the contrary focus on their core issues.

Our models concerning the environment displayed a modest explanatory power but robust results since PCSE model were used, controlling for heteroskedasticity between panels and for autocorrelation within panels. These results demonstrated that party competition in Belgium is rather confrontational (H1), i.e. parties tend to adopt the same position as the one of the winning party. This mimetic behaviour is particularly observed when the party that 'owns' the issue is a large party, whatever its electoral fortunes. These results are even more appealing as it basically concerns an issue that is widely known to be a valence one (reinforcing the expectations to witness a dismissive pattern of party competition). To extend a bit our conclusions, we can state that, even if a green party loses the elections, the content of the manifestos of the competing may largely remains equal as far as the environment issue is concerned since it is the size of the green party that matters, not its electoral defeat. In other words, the threat that green parties represent is not coming from the success but from their (relative) size in the party system.

But not all parties react the same way to the green party strength. We presented evidence that, behind the green parties, socialist parties dedicate the largest attention to that issue. If most of the parties do indeed increase the space dedicated to environment in their manifestos when the green party is strong, the emphasis in the socialist party manifestos remains constant or, at least, independent on the electoral fortunes of the green party. To go further, one may wonder whether environment can be viewed as an issue that belongs to the core identity of the socialist parties. If environment is indeed a core socialist issue, patterns of party competition in Belgium might be reframed. Given the fact that socialist parties exist long before the green parties, one has to wonder whether the contamination hypothesis on environment has not to be reversed. Do socialist parties and their electoral successes influenced the position of the green parties on environment? Further analyses are necessary to identify the party(ies) that brought the new issue of environment into the political agenda before the emergence of the green parties.

Finally, the most interesting results presented in this paper come from the variables that do not play a role in explaining the content of the party manifestos. Our models demonstrated that the economic context do not participate in the explanation of party emphases on environment. The manifesto sections on that issue seem to be decoupled from any indicator of the economic situation of the country. In addition, empirical evidence demonstrated that being a large or a small party, being in government or in opposition, or even losing or winning the elections do not has a significant impact on party emphasis on environment. Surprisingly, very few regional differences (Flemish vs. French-speaking party systems) have been observed, probably because both green parties had parallel electoral fortunes and produced the same effects on party competition.

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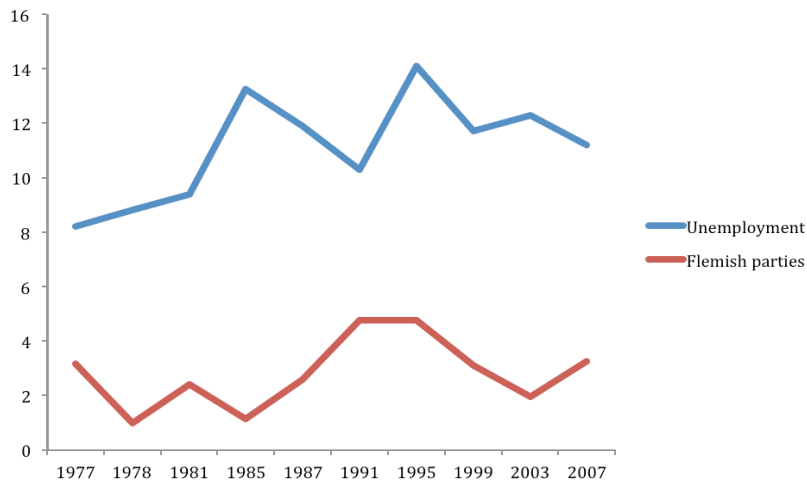
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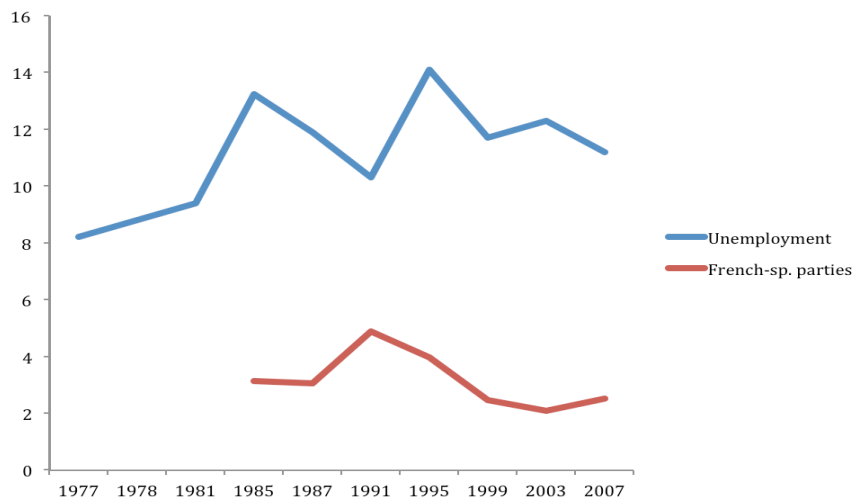
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Appendix

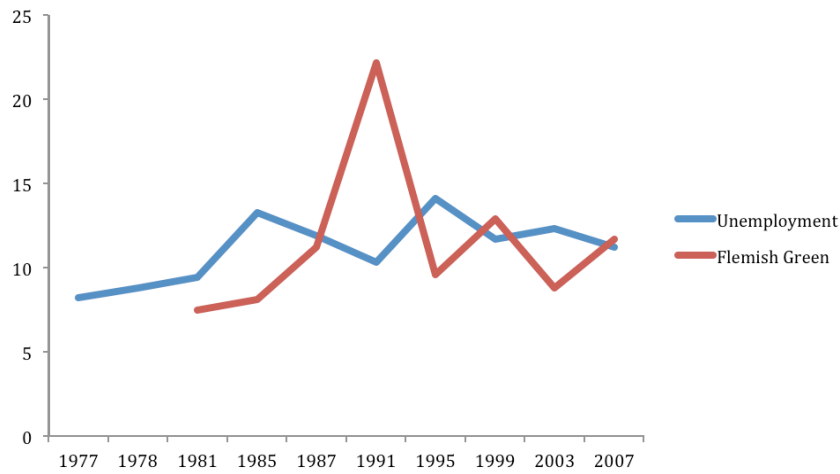
Graph: Unemployment rate and importance of environment in Flemish party manifestos (in %, 1977-2007)



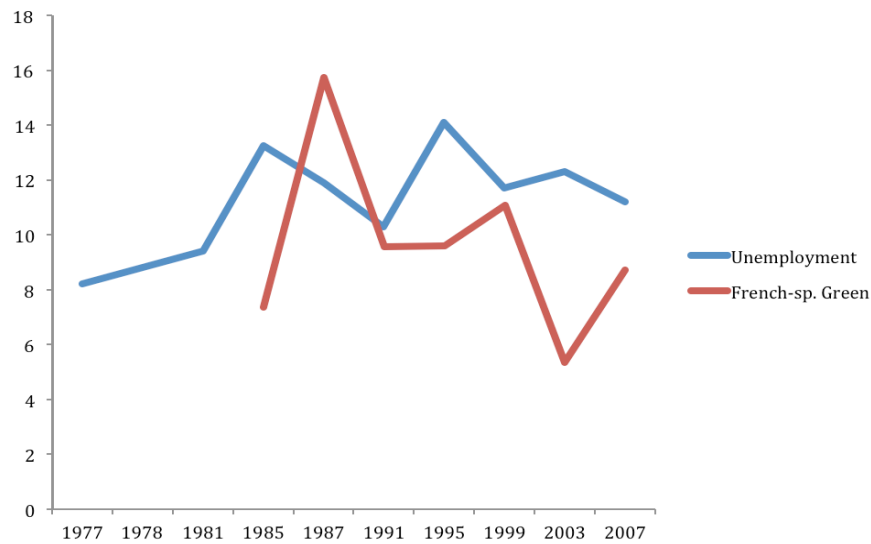
Graph: Unemployment rate and importance of environment in French-speaking party manifestos (in %, 1985-2007)



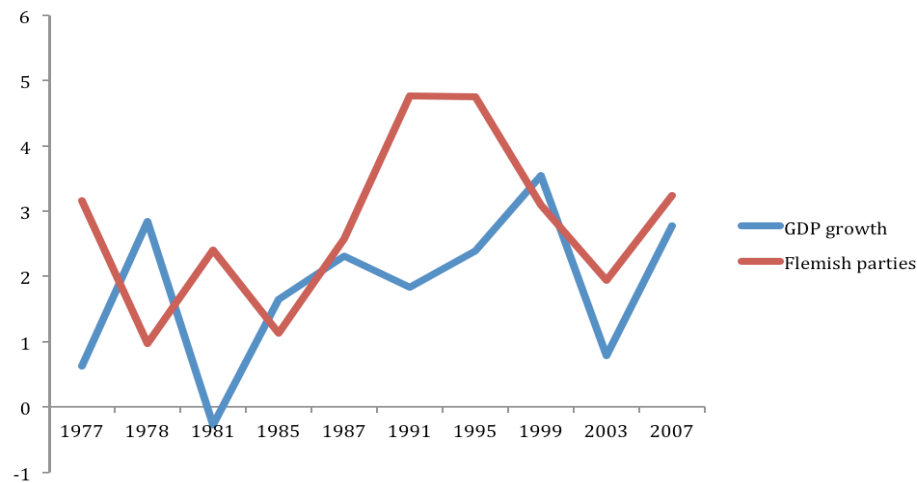
Graph: Unemployment rate and importance of environment in Flemish green party manifestos (in %, 1981-2007)



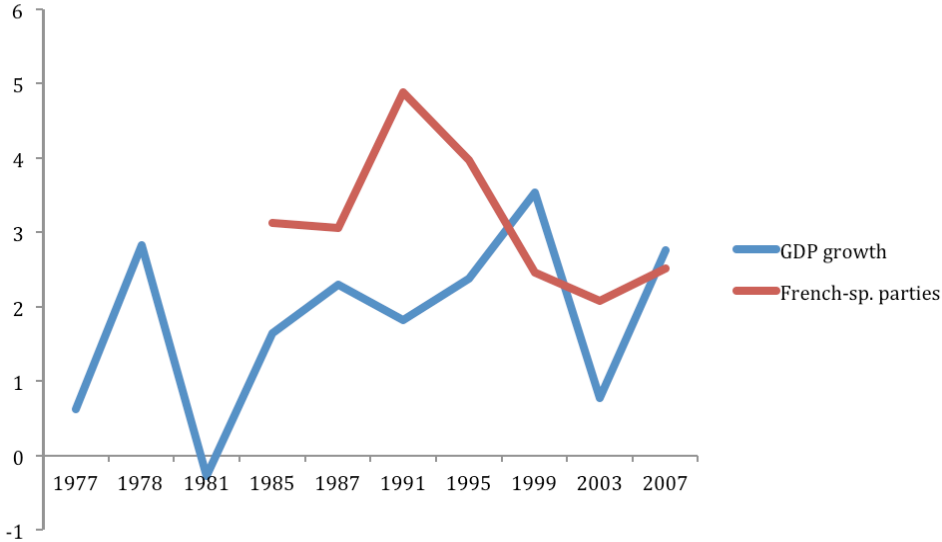
Graph: Unemployment rate and importance of environment in French-speaking green party manifestos (in %, 1985-2007)



Graph: GDP growth rate and importance of environment in Flemish party manifestos (in %, 1977-2007)



Graph: GDP growth rate and importance of environment in French-speaking party manifestos (in %, 1985-2007)



Graph: Environmental issues in Agalev / Groen! manifestos (1981-2007, excluding 1991)

