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Party Manifesto Strategies in Multi-level Settings

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Recent comparative and empirical analyses criticized the second-order election model and highlighted some of its shortcomings. In addition, its poor applicability in the Belgian case (mainly concerning national and regional elections) has been demonstrated. Yet, few alternatives to this model based on the demand-side explanations (i.e., the observation of aggregated voting patterns) have been suggested. This paper analyses relationships between elections across levels of government from the supply-side, i.e., from the party perspective, and focuses on the characteristics of the manifestos drafted by those parties. Based on three sets of indicators (presence, length and content of a manifesto), I measured the first-orderness of Belgian party manifestos (1999-2014). I conclude that the first-orderness of a manifesto is affected by joint manifesto strategies, by the electoral calendar and by an asymmetrical institutional design.

The second-order election model

When one wants to analyse elections across tiers of government, the second-order model is often an obvious choice. This model supposes that there exist a hierarchy between elections, i.e., some elections are perceived by voters, candidates and observers as more important than others. The second-order election model echoes earlier work on US Congressional mid-term elections (Miller and Mackie, 1973; Tufte, 1975) and US scholars have labelled these elections as "barometer" elections (Anderson and Ward, 1996) or mid-term "referendums" (Simon et al., 1991; Simon, 1989; Carsey and Wright, 1998).

The literature on the second-order model identifies one type of elections as "first-order": the national elections. By extension, all other elections (European, subnational, second chamber and by-elections) are considered as "second-order". Based on their analysis of

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voter's behaviours, Reif and Schmitt (1980) hypothesize that voters use their vote according to national issues and actors because there is "less at stake" in second-order elections. Originally, Reif and Schmitt aimed at explaining patterns observed in the first European Parliament elections. They were inspired by the work of Dinkel (1977) on German *Länder* elections who was in turn influenced by the US literature on mid-term elections (Reif, 1997). The idea of these mid-term elections is that every election, i.e., including Congress, state and local elections, are subordinate to the (first-order) presidential election and are used by voters to send a signal to the party of the president. Nowadays, the US literature takes the mid-term loss as a given and tries to explain the magnitude of this loss.

The classic second-order model developed by Reif and Schmitt (1980) relies on the analyses of voting patterns and on comparison of different types of elections in a given country. They hypothesized that (1) turnout in higher in first-order elections than in second-order ones; (2) governing parties lose votes; (3) small, new and opposition parties gain votes; (4) voters' propensity to behave in these ways follows a cyclical logic; they are most likely to do so at the mid-point between elections that produce national governments, and less likely to do so soon after, or in the run-up to, an election that produces a national government. Because there is generally less at stake in second-order elections compared to first-order elections, voters are less inclined to cast a vote in second-order elections. And the voters who do turn out then use second-order elections to send a signal to the party in office by voting for the party in the opposition or to vote for new and/or small parties. Since the electoral behaviour in second-order elections is shaped by political factors in the first-order arena, voters use second-order elections to express satisfaction or disappointment towards politics in the first-order elections. In other words, second-order election results can be largely explained by observing which parties are in government or in opposition at the first-order level.

Reif and Schmitt (1980: 8) stated that second-order elections may be found in the case of the European elections but also in the local, regional, second chamber and by-elections. European election research has repeatedly found that second-order election mechanisms are at play in elections to the European Parliament (Reif and Schmitt, 1980; Reif, 1985; Marsh, 1998; Hix and Marsh, 2007, 2011). But on the other hand, these studies have also found that the loss for national governing parties is more noticeable in bi-polar party systems (Reif, 1985) and countries with genuine alternation of parties in the national government (Marsh 1998).

Recently, several authors applied the second-order model to regional elections (see for example Pallares and Keating, 2003; Dupoirier, 2004; Floridia, 2010). For example, in their discussion of regional elections in Austria, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Italy, Spain and the UK, Jeffery and Hough (2006: 252) conclude that "the general finding, then, is that most sub-state elections do indeed appear to be second-order, subordinate to voters' considerations

of state-level politics". Other regional election studies confirmed some of the hypotheses of the second-order model. Turnout in higher in first-order (national) elections than in second-order (regional) elections (Pallares and Keating, 2003; Schakel and Dandoy, 2014), government parties tend to lose vote shares while opposition, new and small parties gain more votes in regional elections (Jeffery and Hough, 2003; Pallares and Keating, 2003), and the extent to which government parties lose and opposition parties win vote share varies according to the placement of the regional election in the national electoral calendar (Jeffery and Hough, 2003).

However, the second-order election model has also been challenged. The same set of studies concludes that the degree to which regional elections may be considered second-order varies substantively. Canadian elections are considered to be clearly non-second-order (Jeffery and Hough, 2009: 231) and even if regional elections in Western Europe are frequently second-order, it is not in a uniform way across countries (Dandoy and Schakel, 2013), confirming individual country studies (see for example Pallares and Keating, 2003, Dupoirier, 2004, or Tronconi and Roux, 2009). More precisely, turnout in some regions of Switzerland, Denmark and Italy is higher for regional than for national elections and the regions which hold elections non-simultaneously with other elections report higher turnout rates than those regions which hold their elections at the same date (Schakel and Dandoy, 2014). With respect to government party losses Schakel and Jeffery (2012) conclude that only 18 per cent out of a total of 2,933 regional elections clearly follow second-order predictions.

Another set of critiques of the original second-order model argues that individual-level data should be used instead on aggregated ones. Many aspects of the voting behaviour cannot be grasped by the analyses of election results and authors such as Irwin (1995), Rohrschneider and Clark (2008) or Van Aelst and Lefevere (2012) for Belgium use individual-level data. These latter authors observed that, compared to national elections, regional elections were clearly second-order in 1995 and 1999, that they obtained a "first-order flavour" in 2004 and became first-order in 2009 (2012: 9).

Analysing second-order elections in Belgium

The analysis of the second-order election effects in the Belgian case based on the classic model of Reif and Schmitt (1980) leads to important methodological challenges. Belgium constitutes a peculiar case when dealing with subnational institutions and actors and the application of the second-order model to this country opens the door for interesting conclusions.

Belgium is a complex country. Since legislative elections are organised for six different levels of government (municipal, provincial, regional, community, federal and European, not to mention the elections for the upper chamber up to 2014), one can hardly rank them from first-order to sixth-order elections. In addition, and depending on the territory, a Belgian would vote for five, six or seven different assemblies.[2] If the elections for the Flemish community are considered as first-order by some voters, this is not the case for the French-speakers in Wallonia and Brussels as they simply do not vote for the community elections. As a result, the identification of first-, second- or third-order elections might highly vary across territories.

The first hypothesis of the second-order election model concerns turnout. The model implies that second-order elections are characterized by lower turnout compared to the first-order ones. Since voting is compulsory in Belgium, one does not expect to observe different turnout across types of elections. Turnout is very stable not only over time but also across types of elections. In other words, voters do not participate more in national than in regional or European elections and figures fluctuate between 89 per cent and 94 per cent of electoral participation.

Besides turnout, the second-order model hypothesizes gains for the opposition, new and small parties but losses for the governing parties in the first-order arena. However, this hypothesis relies on (1) a clear definition of the national and the subnational arenas and (2) the clear identification of the governing and the opposition parties at the first-order (national) level.

Belgium is nowadays composed of six territorially overlapping federated entities: three regions and three communities (article 1 of the Constitution). Belgian federalism is unique because it not only comprises two different kinds of (competing) subnational entities (regions and communities), but also because of its outstanding degree of asymmetry. The subnational entities do not enjoy the same legal status and extent of autonomy and they are responsible for different sets of competences. One can therefore argue that the Belgian institutional system is fully asymmetrical, meaning that all sub-national entities are unique with regard to their powers and competences. The asymmetry between the entities goes beyond the institutions. For example, regions and communities are not equal in size. One of them (Flanders) gathers the majority of the Belgian population rendering the Belgian case

[2] Between 1995 and 2010, French-speakers in Brussels voted for five assemblies (municipality, region, House, Senate and Europe), Dutch-speakers in Brussels voted for six assemblies (municipality, region, community, House, Senate and Europe), Dutch-speakers in Flanders voted for six assemblies (municipality, province, community, House, Senate and Europe), French-speakers in Wallonia voted for six assemblies (municipality, province, region, House, Senate and Europe) and German-speakers voted for seven assemblies (municipality, province, region, community, House, Senate and Europe).

even more unique since – to my knowledge – in no other country in the world one single region concentrated the (absolute) majority of its population into one single region.

Regions and communities are also not equal regarding their constitutional status. The Flemish region and community were merged, meaning that the Flemish parliament, government and public administration exercise all the competences delegated to both types of sub-national entities. In the South of the country, such equivalent does not exist since Wallonia consists of one region but two communities (the French- and the German-speaking community). However, adding to the complexity of the institutional landscape, a significant number of regional competences have been transferred from the Walloon region to the German-speaking community (monuments and sites, employment policy, police and the supervision of local authorities) and from the French-speaking community to the Walloon region (cultural and education matters, sports infrastructures, tourism, social promotion, health policy, family policy, social welfare and integration).

Although the Brussels region was constitutionally recognized in 1980 it was established only in 1989, i.e., nine years after the two other regions. In addition, the Brussels region faces certain limitations to its autonomy. Similarly to the German-speaking community, the Brussels region does not dispose of a constitutional autonomy. Moreover, due to its bilingual status, both Dutch- and French-speaking communities are competent for policy domains pertaining to the Dutch- and French-speaking populations residing in the Brussels regional territory. These community policies are coordinated by language-based community committees and by a joint community committee. The Dutch- and French-speaking communities delegated some of their competences (mainly related to education and culture) to these committees.

As a result, the stakes of a regional or community election vary by definition across the Belgian territory. Compared to national elections, community elections in the German-speaking community (70.000 inhabitants) do not have the same importance as the subnational elections in Flanders (that concerns both the region and the community and gathers more than 6 million inhabitants). In other words, a small Flemish party would look "national" while the largest German-speaking party will always remain "regional" (if not local). If one remembers that a policy issue in Flanders concerns the majority of the Belgian population and becomes *de facto* a "national" issue, the definition of what is "national" and "regional" is rather blurred.

Moreover, the Belgian party system presents one typical characteristic when compared to other federations: there are no federal (or national) parties. Since the split of the three major statewide parties between 1968 and 1978 (the Christian-democrats, the socialists and the liberals), not one statewide party managed to win elections and to obtain seats in the

federal parliament. All the political parties that were created after 1978 – it concerns the extreme-right, green and populist parties – are organized at the community level and explicitly represent the interests of only part of the Belgian population. Due to the split of the national parties and the creation of new parties in each linguistic community, the Belgian party system is highly fragmented; the effective number of parties in the federal parliament was 8.42 in 2010. As a result, one cannot talk about first-order (national) parties since they all should be considered as second-order (regional). Voters cannot punish national parties in second-order elections because there are simply no national parties.

In addition, the identification of a governing party vs. an opposition party is rather complex. Because of the multi-level government formation dynamics and the constitution of congruent coalitions (Roberts, 1989; Swenden, 2002; De Winter et. al, 2006; Deschouwer, 2009), the composition of the coalitions of the subnational entities replicates the federal coalition. Combined with particularities of the electoral calendar (see below), this has as consequence that cabinets are often oversized (i.e., including parties that are not numerically necessary for having a viable coalition). This practice was particularly well entrenched until the elections of the federal and subnational assemblies became non-simultaneous in 2003. Since that date, the rule of the congruent coalitions across levels of the state has not always been followed, meaning that different parties now govern at different levels.

As a result, one might say that there are no longer opposition parties in Belgium. With the obvious exception of the Flemish extreme-right party VB (because of the *cordon sanitaire* strategy) and of the small Brussels-based regionalist party FDF, all other Belgian parties are in government at the regional or federal level.[3] The voter cannot punish the governing parties and reward the opposition parties simply because all parties are in one way or the other in government. In sum, the application of the second and third hypotheses of the second-order model in the Belgian context is unlikely. One cannot say whether national governing parties lost votes and whether national opposition parties gained votes, simply because there are no national parties and because one cannot clearly identify governing and opposition parties.

The fourth hypothesis of the second-order model concerns the electoral calendar and the position of the second-order in the first-order electoral cycle. Reif and Schmitt (1980: 10) theorized a link between government party loss at mid-term in the national election cycle and the "relatively higher mobilisation of opposition support" for second-order elections. In later studies on European elections, several authors have demonstrated the influence of the

[3] I.e. the CD&V (in federal, Flemish and Brussels cabinets), sp.a (federal, Flanders), Open VLD (federal, Brussels), N-VA (Flanders), Groen (Brussels), PS (federal, Wallonia, Brussels), MR (federal), cdH (federal, Wallonia, Brussels), Ecolo (Wallonia, Brussels).

national electoral cycle on the election outcomes and turnout rates (Flickinger and Studlar, 2007; Franklin, 2001; Mattila, 2003). When European elections are held close to the upcoming national elections, citizens vote more actively. Similarly, the impact of the general elections cycle on the regional electoral outcomes is also of prime importance (see for example Fauvelle-Aymar and Stegmaier, 2008; Pallarés and Keating, 2003).

Just as the institutional landscape, the Belgian electoral calendar is rather peculiar. Since 1999, the regional and community elections are held on the same day as for the European elections (article 117 of the Constitution). With the exception of the Brussels (1989) and German-speaking (1974-1990) elections, the first regional and community elections occurred simultaneously with the federal elections in 1995 and in 1999. As a result, there are three different types of elections with regard to electoral cycles. The first group includes the 1995 subnational elections, which were held at the same date as federal ones. A second group of subnational elections, those held in 2004 and 2009, contains subnational elections which were held together with European elections. Finally, in 1999 and 2014, subnational elections were held together with federal and European elections.

As a result (see Table below), one can hardly analyse the calendar effects (i.e., the position of the second-order elections in the first-order ones) since regional and European elections are held at the same time, and sometimes even organised on the same day as the federal ones (1995, 1999 and 2014). One cannot disentangle the effects of these other elections on the observed electoral outcomes, not to mention the fact that some voters vote for both the regional and community elections on the same day (Dutch-speakers in Brussels and German-speakers in Wallonia).

Table. Simultaneous elections in Belgium (1995-2014)

Date	Regional elections		Community elections		Federal elections	European elections
	Brussels	Wallonia	Dutch-speaking (Flanders)	German-speaking		
21/05/1995	x	x	x	x	x	
13/06/1999	x	x	x	x	x	x
18/06/2003					x	
13/06/2004	x	x	x	x		x
10/06/2007					x	
07/06/2009	x	x	x	x		x
13/06/2010					x	
25/05/2014	x	x	x	x	x	x

The alternative: the supply side

The verification of the second-order model in the Belgian case brings along severe empirical and methodological limitations. Instead of looking at voting behaviour and at aggregated election results (the so-called demand-side), this paper proposes to look at the supply-side of the second-order phenomenon. Elections are not only considered as of a first- or second-order character by voters but also by parties and candidates. In our view, second-order effects can be observed when looking at the parties and candidates' behaviour and positions and see in how far they invest resources in first- or second-order elections. Data on the importance of second-order elections can, for example, be derived from (1) party leaders and/or candidates surveys, where the respondents are asked about their preferred policy level, strategies and priorities; (2) speeches and discourse analysis of campaign communication of party leaders and main candidates; (3) campaign expenses; (4) campaign communication strategies, via for example the party press releases; (5) political elite career patterns, i.e. if many ministers and MPs to go from one level to another or if their career is targeted to a specific policy level; (6) multi-level candidate strategies, i.e. whether a regional MP or minister is candidate at the national elections or vice-versa; (7) party manifestos; etc. Among those indicators, probably the best way to analyse whether an election is considered as important by a candidate or a party is to look at its positions during the electoral campaign and, more precisely, at its electoral platform.

A manifesto – or electoral platform – clearly serves as election propaganda (Ray, 2007: 17; Louwerse, 2009: 3) and contributes to the electoral success of the party (Budge, 1987: 15). Not only the manifesto is viewed as a vote-catching device (Klingemann, 1987: 300; Bara, 2005: 585) but also as a way to give coherence to a party's election campaign (Hearl, 1987: 257). Similarly, and in the framework of the mandate model, the manifesto can be used as a way to inform voters about party policy preferences (Tegenbos, 1974: 426; Klingemann, 1987: 300; Budge, Laver, 1993: 503; Ray, 2007: 17; Louwerse, 2009: 3; Daubler, 2010: 12-13). Franzmann and Kaiser view manifestos as "information shortcuts" (2006: 171) – or as a statement of the party's ideology and philosophy (Ray, 2007: 17) – signalling a general ideological stance of a party to the voters. If the party manifestos can be used as a way to communicate with the voters (in order to get more votes), with the other parties (in order to be included in the government), with its party members and elected officials (in order to strengthen party unity and to implement a coherent policy in the forthcoming years), manifestos can also be used as a way to communicate with interest groups and key societal partners (Daubler, 2010: 12-13). Manifestos can be assessed as a way to accommodate demands from these groups into a large ideological package (see above for the definition of a manifesto) since they are necessary for the different policies and political stages: from the voter's mobilisation to the policy implementation.

In addition, party manifestos constrain and determine the choices and the future actions of the party (Budge, 1987: 15), including the different party actors such as the party leader, ministers, MPs, elected officials and representatives. According to Hearl (1987: 257), the manifesto of a party provides some kind of anchor for this party's post-election activity. Whether in government or in the opposition, the manifesto still serves as an ideological basis, as a reference point or merely as an inspirational document for the party's – and its leaders and members – future policy preferences. In this regard, a party manifesto is viewed as a guide for policy-making in the parliament and/or in the government throughout the following legislative period (Tegenbos, 1974; Bara, 2005; Daubler, 2010). More particularly, the manifesto often stands as a basis for post-electoral negotiations (Tegenbos, 1974; Budge, 1987; Dittrich, 1987; Louwerse, 2009; Daubler, 2010). The formation of the coalition for the new cabinet requires a portfolio allocation and often the drafting of a coalition agreement. Even if other phenomena also have to be taken into account, both processes partly rely on the party policy preferences as outlined in the manifestos.

As a result, the analysis of party manifestos appears as a valid way to assess the importance that a party attaches to certain elections, in its different aspects: attracting votes, communicate with key groups, constrain coalition formation and future public actions and policy decisions. In this paper, I analyse party manifestos in Belgium for European, national, community and regional elections since 1999.

By doing so, I challenge previous knowledge about election campaigns and manifestos in Belgium. As a consequence of the electoral calendar (i.e., elections often occur on the same day), "In such a setting it is extremely difficult to produce a differentiated campaign, taking into consideration the different competencies at the different levels. The parties did indeed go for one single campaign" (Deschouwer, 2000: 126). Yet, I believe that parties do use manifestos as a strategy to communicate the importance of an election to the voters, the media, other parties and interest groups, that differences can be observed across elections, across parties and over time and that some lessons can be learned regarding the "second-orderness" of elections.

I expect that the hierarchy of elections is not stable over time and space and I therefore developed a set of hypotheses that contribute at explaining the observed changes in first-orderness of elections. The first hypotheses deal with the institutional settings and the electoral system while the last two hypotheses deal with expected regional and ideological differences.

First, the introduction of European elections in 1979 and of regional elections in 1995 all over the Belgian territory is *de facto* a crucial step in the analysis of the second-order model. Not only the voters but also the parties need to adapt to this new electoral opportunity. One

could expect that parties would need time to adapt their campaign strategy and their electoral platform. In the first elections (1995 and 1999), parties should focus on the policy level where they have an expertise (i.e. the national or federal level) and gradually acquire experience in the other (new) political arenas. Consequently, I expect that, given the political uncertainty of the new institutional features (i.e. the introduction of regional elections):

H1. The national manifesto remains first-order during the first years / elections

However, the regional and community parliaments existed long before 1995. At that time, two electoral systems co-existed. For most of the Belgian territory, a system of 'double mandate' was set up, meaning that national MPs acted at the same time as regional MPs based on a four-years national term. As a result, between 1971 and 1981, the community parliaments (which were called 'cultural community councils' at that time) were composed by all the national MPs (in both the House and the Senate) from the same language group meaning that Flemish national MPs also had a seat in the Flemish parliament and similarly the French-speaking national MPs occupied a seat in the parliament of the Walloon region. Between 1981 and 1995, the community parliaments were composed by directly elected national MPs from the same language group (the coopted senators were excluded). Two sub-national entities held direct regional elections before 1995: the German-speaking community since 1974 (with a consultative status until 1986), which followed the four years term of the national elections, and the Brussels region since 1989 with six years terms for regional representatives. As a result, the regions and communities were already a political fact and most of the party manifestos during the 1980s and early 1990s already covered regional and community issues.

H2. Sub-national manifestos threaten the first-orderness of national manifestos when a regional tradition exist prior to the first elections

Third, the elector calendar is important for the understanding of the second-order model (see above). The decision to organise European, federal and regional election in Belgium at different dates implies that European and regional elections would no longer be "in the shadow" of the federal elections campaign. As a result,

H3. European and Sub-national manifestos are second-order when elections occur simultaneously with national elections

Fourth, if the creation of a federation in 1993 and the introduction of regional elections in 1995 constituted a crucial step in the decentralization of the country, Belgium recently witnessed other territorial reforms. In 1999, 2001 and 2014, regions and communities received more competences (mainly agriculture, foreign trade, oversight on local authorities

and development aid) and regional taxes were increased from eight to twelve per cent and the distribution of VAT and income tax to the communities was based on the contributions to the shared tax. These reforms constituted a fundamental step towards fiscal autonomy for the regions. As a result, the gradual regionalization of the country should lead to an increased importance of the regional elections compared to the national ones.

H4a. The larger the regional autonomy, the more sub-national manifestos become first-order

In addition, as outlined above, the Belgian subnational system is fully asymmetrical: some regions and/or communities are stronger than others. As a result, one might expect to witness first-order regional elections in strong regions and second-order regional elections in weaker regions. In the Belgian institutional system, Flanders can be considered as a strong subnational entity while the German-speaking community and the Brussels region are weaker subnational entities. This is confirmed by the Regional Authority scores obtained by these different subnational entities (Hooghe, Marks, Schakel, 2010).

H4b. Strong sub-national entities have first-order manifestos

Finally, the type of parties that participate in the elections has to be taken into account. Any analysis based on manifesto research needs to control for ideology and policy preferences. More particularly, when dealing with regional and federal elections, one should not forget that some parties specifically aimed at obtaining more autonomy (if not independence) for their region or community. This is the case of the Flemish nationalist party N-VA and of the independentist extreme-right party VB (and to a lesser extent of the regionalist FDF in Brussels region). The policy agenda of those parties implies that they will tend to consider regional elections as first-order and federal elections as second-order. In addition, these policy preferences have an impact on the preferences of other parties from the same party system. An electorally strong regionalist party will produce an increase of the attention to regional issues in the party manifestos of the other parties (Dandoy, 2012). Concerning the European elections, all Belgian parties are generally considered as pro-EU and there is not party that specifically aimed at obtaining more autonomy for the EU.

H5. Sub-national manifestos tend to be first-order when the party system contains a (strong) regionalist party

A multi-level manifesto strategy

The following sections present a short analysis of the European, national and regional party manifestos since 1995. The analysis of these party manifestos will be performed in three

different steps. The first step concerns the question whether parties have a distinct manifesto for each election while the second one analyses the length of those documents. In a third step, I perform a quantitative analysis of the content of the party manifestos for the European, federal and regional elections by creating an indicator of the importance of each policy level. These steps broadly correspond to some of the indicators used by Werner and Lacewell (2012) in their comparative analysis of the US state and national manifestos. Similarly, they "examine the extent to which state parties act independently from national-level parties by using content analytical party platform data" (2012: 535).

Federal vs. European and regional party manifestos

The analysis of the presence or absence of a specific manifesto for some regions or some levels of decision-making can be useful in order to grasp the importance a party attaches to a specific region or decision-making level. Even if ethno-regionalist parties do not always participate in national elections in some European countries (Schrijver, 2006, Barrio et al., 2009) for strategic, ideological or financial reasons, in Belgium, all main political parties participate in federal and European elections, including regionalist parties.

In 1995 and 1999, the federal, regional and European (in 1999 only) elections occurred on the same day. As a result, most of the parties wrote a single and common manifesto for these simultaneous elections (De Winter, 2006: 86-7). The following parties drafted a common manifesto for the 1995 and/or 1999 elections: CVP (1995, 1999), SP (1995), Agalev (1995), VB (1995, 1999), VU-ID21 (1999), PS (1995, 1999), PSC (1995, 1999), Ecolo (1995) and FN (1995, 1999). But the titles and structures of these manifestos prevent the researcher to disentangle the three policy levels and to evaluate the importance of a specific level of decision-making among these mixed manifestos. Indeed, the titles of these manifestos often refer to the election date and to legislative (or parliamentary) elections broadly defined.[4] Furthermore, the analysis of the structure of those manifestos often makes impossible to distinguish clear policy levels at the chapter or even at the section level. These joint manifestos prevent the clear identification of first- and second-order elections. As a result, even if hypothesis H1 has to be rejected for most parties, hypothesis H2 cannot be tested.

Yet, some interesting information can be collected from parties that did not draft a common manifesto. For example, the PRL-FDF wrote four separate manifestos in 1995: a federal manifesto, a Walloon regional manifesto, a Brussels regional manifesto and a French-speaking community manifesto. Similarly, the VLD wrote three manifestos in 1999: a federal

[4] An exception is the manifesto of Ecolo in 1999 as the document includes sections that explicitly refer to the regional (Walloon and Brussels) and European elections within a manifesto that clearly discusses the federal level. As a result, these federal elections can be considered as the first-order election for that party in 1999.

manifesto, a Flemish manifesto and a European manifesto. The SP in 1999 wrote a EU manifesto beside the joint (federal and regional) manifesto.

Between 2003 and 2010, all main political parties in Belgium draft separated manifestos for the European, federal and regional elections (H3). The non-simultaneity of these elections contributed to this evolution compared to 1995 and 1999. Even when in an electoral alliance with another party (for example, the electoral alliance of the CD&V and the N-VA for the 2007 federal elections), parties tend to draft completely separated federal manifestos besides the common electoral platform. In 2014, the trend is reversed: most of the parties seem to draft joint manifestos: first results indicate that the Flemish parties sp.a, VB, N-VA and Groen will publish joint manifestos for the four elections. Yet, on the French-speaking side, the PS also draft a joint manifesto for all elections, except for Brussels, and Ecolo will draft a joint federal-Walloon manifesto. Compared to the separated manifestos of the 2004 and 2009, there is no doubt that the simultaneity of the federal elections had an impact on the party strategy, especially in Flanders. As in 1999, where elections were simultaneous with federal ones, joint manifestos become the rule rather than the exception.

However, it is not the case for all European and regional elections. All Belgian political parties participate in the European and regional elections but do not always publish EU- and region-specific (or community-specific) manifestos. In our view, it reveals the symbolic importance that the party attaches to the EU and to its region and/or community and contributes to its second-orderness.[5] For example, the small extreme-right party FN did not produce manifestos for the regional elections of 2009. This absence of region-specific manifestos is more frequent in the Flemish side of the country. The fact that the extreme-right and Flemish nationalist party VB did not produce a specific manifesto for the Brussels regional elections in 2004 and 2009 (and probably 2014) is not a coincidence. It underlines the lack of interest for Brussels as a region as the party's ideology sees Brussels as an inherent part of the Flemish region. The same explanation applies for the absence of a Brussels regional manifesto in 2004 in the case of the Flemish nationalist N-VA while it is more surprising in the case of the Flemish socialists (sp.a). Unsurprisingly, all Belgian parties drafted a EU party manifesto for the elections of 2004 and 2009. In 2014, first results indicate that only the French-speaking parties will draft separate manifestos for the Brussels elections. Brussels is no longer a priority in the North of the country when regional and community elections are organised simultaneously with the federal ones.

The manifestos for the French-speaking community deserves some comments. The parliament of the French-speaking community is not directly elected but composed of the representatives from the French-speaking parliamentarians from the Walloon and Brussels regional parliaments. In other words, there are no elections for the French-speaking

[5] For example, the Open VLD used the Dutch version of the ELDR manifesto as its electoral platform in 2009.

community. Yet almost all French-speaking parties draft a manifesto for this level of government in 2004 and 2009, with the exception of the FN and cdH[6] in 2009 and FN in 2004 and Ecolo in 2009 that wrote a common manifesto for the Walloon region, the French-speaking community and Europe. This is rather surprising that parties spend a lot of time and energy drafting an electoral platform for an institution this is not elected. In that sense, one of the main functions of a manifesto – i.e., attract some votes – is *de facto* not present in the case of the French-speaking community. First results from 2014 indicate that there will not be any separate party manifesto for this institution.

Manifesto length

The variation of the length of party manifestos does not have to be proven and many authors observed that there are significant differences in manifesto length across time, countries and parties (see for example Klingemann et al., 1994). Among 19 countries, Belgium is ranked 8th in manifesto length between 1970 and 2005 (Daubler, 2010: 10). An obvious proof that length matters when one wants to analyse manifestos is the fact that almost every scientific research uses proportions rather than absolute figures. Length is expected to have an impact on the number of electoral pledges, the diversity of issues dealt with in a manifesto, etc. At the same time, length has often been considered as a weakness in the analysis of party manifesto. Regarding the Comparative Manifesto Project, Krouwel and van Elfrinkhof (2009) observed a large influence of the length of a manifesto or of the number of coded quasi-sentences, but the same reasoning also applies for computer-assisted methods such as the *Wordscores* technique that is said to work best with texts with the same length.

Yet, only a small number of empirical research projects have integrated the length variable in their model, mainly using it as a control variable (see for example Marks et al., 2007, Duncan, Van Hecke, 2008). A few other studies used manifesto length as an independent variable (see for example McCluskey, 2008, Hans and Hönnige, 2008). According to Gabel and Huber (2000), the length of manifestos is a critical variable for the validity of data. Among other variables that make a "good" manifesto, manifestos should be large enough to produce enough data. In their meta-analysis of manifesto-based approaches, these authors found out that manifesto length is the only variable that matters in explaining residuals in the positional models, with the exception of country dummies and extreme parties.

The analysis of the length of the different manifestos in Belgium delivers interesting results (for more information about the analysis of length in Belgian manifestos, see Dandoy, 2011; Dandoy et al., 2013). I observe large differences across parties and across communities. On average, French-speaking manifestos are much longer (from two to four times longer,

[6] The party included sections concerning the French-speaking community within its two regional manifestos.

depending on the election) than the Flemish ones at both the federal and the regional level (see Table 2). And the two Christian-democrats and the two green parties published the longest manifestos, followed by the socialists and the liberals. Comparatively, extreme-right and populist parties produce small manifestos. Compared to other policy levels (federal and regional), manifestos for the EU elections are much shorter in 2004 and 2009.

Interestingly, the manifestos for the regional elections of 2004 in Flanders were on the average shorter than the ones drafted one year earlier for the federal elections. However, in 2009, the manifestos for the regional elections became significantly longer than the ones for the federal elections in both 2007 and 2010. This is particularly true in the case of the VB, LDD and more surprisingly sp.a. On the contrary, the Brussels region seems is far from being a priority for Flemish political parties as the average length of the manifestos for Brussels are more than three times shorter than the ones for the simultaneous elections in Flanders in 2009. Overall, manifesto length clearly indicates that the priority for Flemish parties is now moving in the direction of the Flemish community elections, when compared to the federal elections. Since 2007, the Flemish community elections gradually lost their second-orderness (compared to the federal elections) and can even be considered as first-order elections. If federal elections are not clearly second-order elections in Flanders, this obviously the case for the Brussels regional elections.

The pattern is different for the French-speaking parties. The federal elections remain the level with the largest manifestos, followed by the Walloon regional elections. Compared to the Flemish parties, the Brussels regional elections are not considered as less important (probably because of its demographic weight – one fourth – among the French-speakers). In addition, there are no clear differences when comparing across parties, with the exception of the liberal party (MR) that – on the average – allocates more attention to the federal elections than the regional ones.

Content analysis

The third step of our analysis concerns an analysis of the content of the party manifestos for the federal and regional elections, using a computational content analysis approach (Krippendorf, 2004), i.e., the so-called 'dictionary method'. This type of computer-assisted content analysis consists in the transformation of a text into representations. The text is analysed according to theories of representation and of signification that are presumed to operate within the context of the text.

The dictionary approach is based on taxonomy, meaning that texts can be represented on different levels of abstraction. It therefore implies comparing the analysed texts not in terms of words (or any other unit of analysis) but in terms of their categories of meanings (for

example word families, lemmas, etc.). The technique relies on a computer-based thesaurus or dictionary according to which the text is coded into abstract categories. As a result, it combines the human building of dictionaries containing some a priori defined signal words with the computer coding of texts. For Krouwel and van Elfrinkhof (2009: 16), this technique is close to hand-coding procedures (using a predetermined coding scheme), but at the word level. The form of linguistic representations is crucial in the content analysis (Krippendorf, 2004). Among the different methods of content analysis, the word is the most used unit of analysis (Ray, 2001: 150) and an analysis at the sentence level ignores linguistics and the importance of the use of some words and concepts. The key assumption is that actors do not use words randomly. Concerning political parties, it is argued that these actors will use some words more often and others less often or even never.

The most important element in this dictionary approach is not the coding procedure and the reading of the manifesto itself, but the establishment of the dictionary. The dictionary construction is a deductive process that requires a large dose of researcher's intervention (Ray, 2001: 155). The different steps in the establishment of the dictionary are the use of long reference texts of two extreme parties as pool of keywords (De Vries, Giannetti, Mansergh, 2001: 193), the comparison of the frequencies of the words in the two texts, the selection of the words used much more in one text than in another, and the assignment of these words to categories, using prior knowledge and identification of a word as belonging to one party. The dictionary construction is also an iterative procedure since words lists can be modified during the course of analysis. In this paper, I use the Yoshikoder[7] software. An advantage of this computer-assisted content analysis lies in the fact that one or several issues or categories can be selected, in order to have a limited or a broader view of the content of the manifesto. In addition, a statistical comparison of the selected documents is possible and, as with any other computer-assisted content analysis, an internal check for reliability is possible.

[7] Yoshikoder is an open-source software, officially defined as a 'cross-platform multilingual content analysis program'. It has been developed by Will Lowe as part of the 'Identity Project' at Harvard's Weatherhead Center for International Affairs. With this software, the researcher can construct and view keywords-in-context and is able to input content analysis dictionaries. The outputs of the software consist in a summary of documents, either as word frequency tables or according to the content analysis dictionary made by the researcher. The method uses individual words as units of analysis and is based on a dictionary building (as in Laver and Garry, 2000), meaning that the words belong to (hierarchical) categories. Yoshikoder allows three levels of hierarchy. Ideally, every defined category that is associated with a policy direction and its opposition (its antithesis) is also part of the dictionary, transcending the pure saliency. This dictionary analysis can also be applied to the results of a concordance, i.e., a visualisation of the words in their local contexts (semantic, grammatical, etc.). Yoshikoder basically allows two functions. The first one concerns the establishment of frequency counts of both key words and categories of words (words can be clustered into different dimensions and that the categories themselves can be analysed in terms of relative frequency). The second function concerns the establishment of a 'keywords-in-context analysis'. This type of analysis consists in a listing of all the occurrences where a particular word is mentioned in a text. This function is very useful for examining the word in its context, semantic sequence or even language.

Based on this content analysis, my aim is to measure whether the policy preferences in each manifesto can be related to the European, federal or regional level. In other words, in how far do the federal manifestos deal with regional and European issues and topics, in how far do the regional manifestos deal with federal and European actors, etc.? I analyse party manifestos for the simultaneous elections of 1999, 2004, 2009 and 2014. Concerning regional elections, I choose to analyse only the main region/community for each party, that is Flanders for the Dutch-speaking parties and Wallonia for the French-speaking parties. I will also briefly analyse Brussels regional election manifestos.

In order to build an indicator of the content of each party manifesto regarding federal and regional issues, I use Laver and Garry's method (2000), according to which the position of a party *(P)* on an issue *(i)* equals the relative balance of federal (*fed*) and regional (*reg*) text units, taken as a proportion of all text units on this issue.

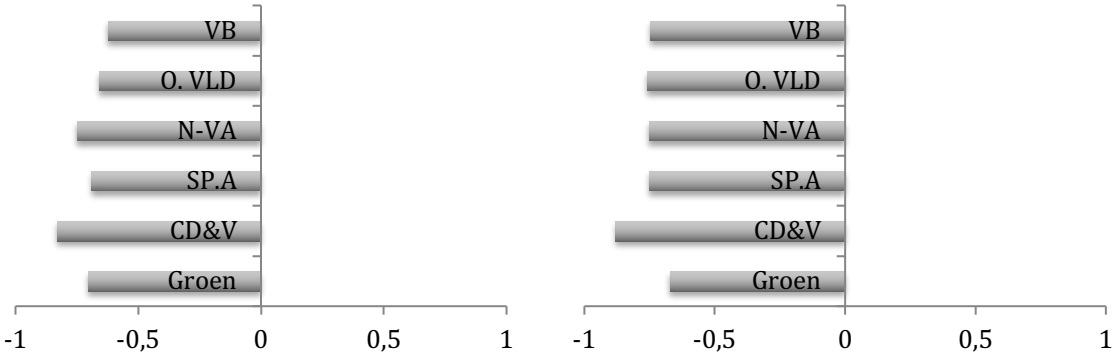
$$P_i = (P_{i\,fed} - P_{i\,reg}) / (P_{i\,fed} + P_{i\,reg})$$

Based on this indicator, I am able to represent the importance for each party of the references to federal and regional issues. This indicator varies between 1 and -1, the maximum (+1) meaning that all references to a policy level concern the federal level, while the minimum (-1) is reached when all the references to a policy level concern the regional / community level. This indicator will also be used to measure the relative attention to European issues compared to federal and regional ones.

In my preliminary analyses, I briefly discuss the regional manifestos. Do manifestos for regional elections also discuss federal issues or are they mainly dealing with the regional level? Graph 1 and 2 provide a clear answer. Regional / community elections in Flanders are almost exclusively focused on the regional issues and actors. This is true for all parties and for both 2004 and 2009 elections. As a result, these elections were clearly dominated by regional concerns and the federal level of government was almost completely left aside and poorly mentioned. Based on this indicator of the references made to policy levels in manifestos, the regional elections can clearly be considered as first-order elections in 2004 and 2009 in Flanders.

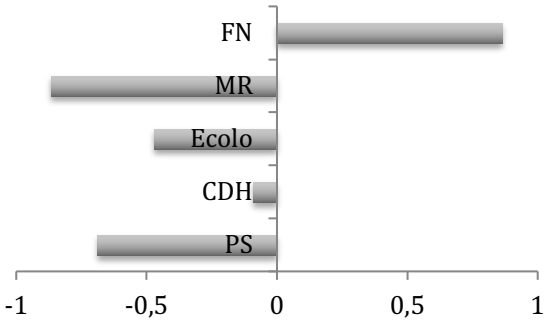
Graph 1. 2004 regional elections

Graph 2. 2009 regional elections

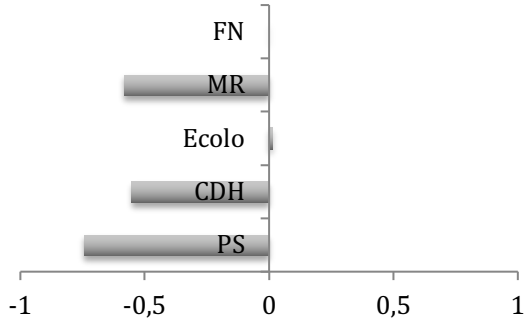


The analysis of the content of the regional election manifestos for the French-speaking parties (Graph 3 and 4) delivers similar results than for the Flemish parties, even if to a lesser extent. The regional elections are mainly about regional issues and actors and the federal level is poorly mentioned. Exceptions are to be found in the median position of the CDH in 2004 and of Ecolo in 2009. Both parties allocate similar attention to federal and regional issues. The small French-speaking extreme-right party FN is also an exception, but its 2004 regional manifesto was heavily "inspired" by its 2003 federal manifesto. The party did not draft a party manifesto in 2009. Overall, keeping these exceptions in mind, manifestos for the Walloon regional elections demonstrate that these elections can be labelled as first-order elections in 2004 and 2009.

Graph 3. 2004 regional elections



Graph 4. 2009 regional elections



Finally, the analysis of the manifestos written for the Brussels regional elections challenges our previous findings. First, we have seen above that not all parties presented an electoral platform for these elections. Second, the length of the manifestos for those elections indicated that these documents are not a priority for (mainly Flemish) political parties. Yet, our content analysis of the Brussels manifestos reveals that they deal only with regional issues and poorly emphasize national issues (see Graph 5 and 6 in the Appendix). With the small exception of the cdH in 2004 (and in 2009), all parties refer exclusively to the regional and community levels when dealing with policy levels. The federal level of government is simply absent from the Brussels manifestos. Still, it does not mean that Brussels regional

elections are first-order and that federal elections are second-order. On the contrary, it reinforces the comparatively weak autonomy of the Brussels region since regional and community items in these manifestos also refer to the other (larger) regions and communities. To some extent, the focus of the Brussels manifestos on regional and community issues reinforces the first-orderness of the Flemish and Walloon elections compared to the federal ones.

Discussion

The second-order model remains a powerful tool for identifying and analysing hierarchy between elections. Yet, this model is mostly based on the demand-side of an election (i.e. the voters behaviour) and do not take into account party strategies.

- In some cases (eg. Belgium), it is difficult to verify it
- Solution: Looking at the supply-side of an election
- Among other sources of information, manifestos can be analysed to verify the first-orderness of an election

Manifestos are important in a campaign. But:

- Parties do not always write manifestos for each election (eg. Brussels region)
- Parties also draft manifestos for non-directly elected institutions (eg. French-speaking community)

I tried to measure the first-orderness of manifestos (first- vs. second-order manifestos) by looking at three indicators:

- Presence of a manifesto for each election / region
- Manifesto length
- Content: References to national vs. regional issues

Factors that have an impact on the first-orderness of a manifesto:

- First elections: joint manifesto regional-national levels
- Electoral calendar: non-simultaneous elections lead to separate manifestos
- Asymmetrical institutional design: Flemish manifestos being slightly more first-order; Brussels manifesto are more second-order

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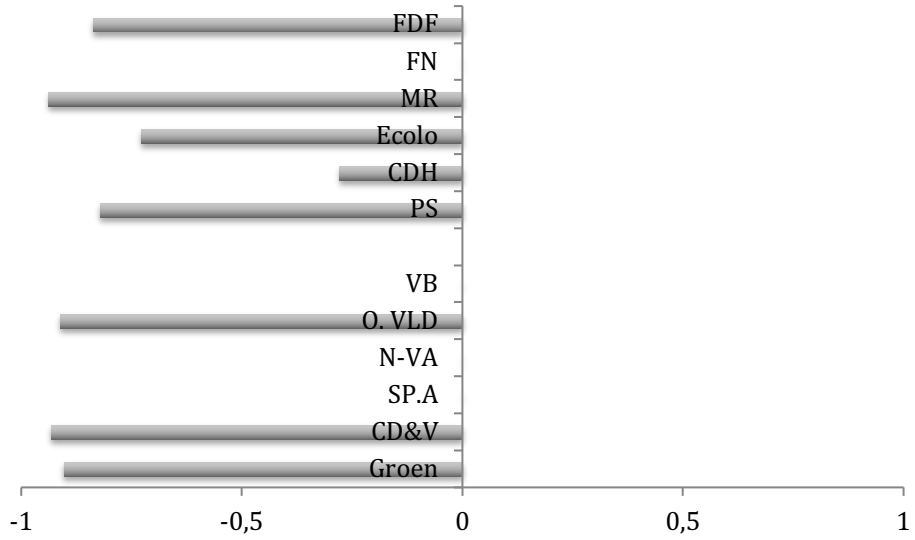
Graph 5. 2004 Brussels regional elections



Graph 6. 2009 Brussels regional elections

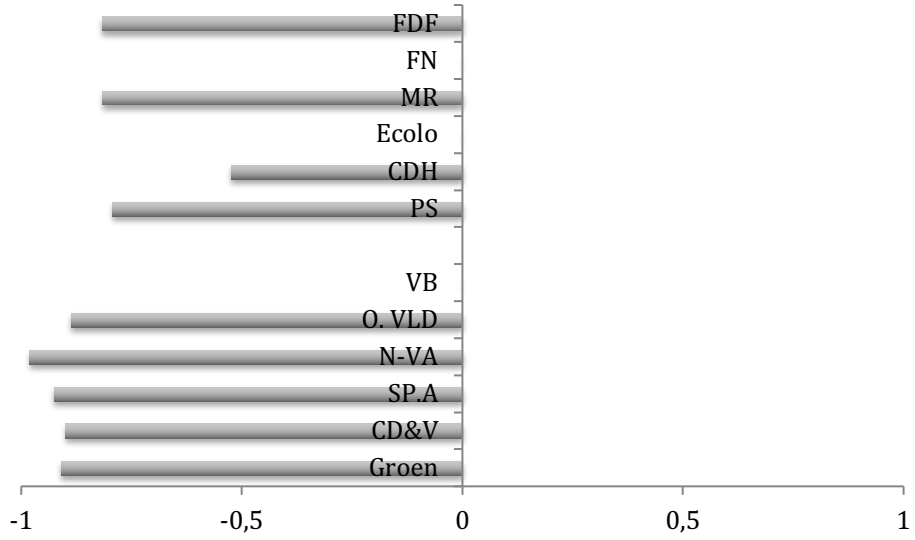


Table 1. Length of manifestos in 1999 (in number of words)

	1999 Europe	1999 Flanders / Wallonia	1999 Federal	1999 Brussels	1999 French-sp. Community
Flemish parties					
CD&V (CVP)			17.789		
sp.a (SP)	14.319		10.775		
Open VLD (VLD)			25.950		
Vlaams Belang (VB)			97.253		
N-VA (VU-ID21)			34.329		
Groen (Agalev)			47.327		
French-speaking parties					
PS			22.913		
MR (PRL-FDF-MCC)			64.563	12.000*	
Ecolo			26.578		
cdH (PSC)	2.656		14.015		
FN			6.519		
Total					

Note: * estimation. For the calculation of the total, I artificially split the manifestos into equal parts

Table 2. Length of manifestos in 2004 and 2009 (in number of words)

	2004 Flanders / Wallonia	2004 French-sp. Community	2004 Brussels	2004 Europe	2009 Flanders / Wallonia	2009 French-sp. Community	2009 Europe	2009 Brussels
Flemish parties								
CD&V	32.186	-	14.300	8.924	38.555	-	5.319	23.263
sp.a	39.052	-	-	11.182	62.950	-	8.834	28.626
Open VLD	6.631	-	18.207	*	31.462	-	1.370	21.971
Vlaams Belang	23.939	-	-	*	62.699	-	17.995	-
N-VA	10.239	-	-	2.808	43.698	-	17.603	5.209
LDD	-	-	-	-	20.339	-	9.836	6.338
Groen	35.893	-	23.064	7.653	117.215	-	23.744	23.322
French-speaking parties								
PS	94.199	79.075	49.331	24.652	52.407	47.242	19.688	45.613
MR	987	73.854	1.015	5.816	81.824	45.481	13.908	72.927
Ecolo	11.102	16.634	27.816	7.281	342.038			67.974
cdH	74.109		68.493	17.213	173.349	-	24.367	161.903
FN	6.930				-	-	-	-
Total	330.647	171.873	204.536	87.262	798.511	206.736	256.677	457.146

Note: * missing. For the calculation of the total, I artificially split the manifestos into equal parts.

Table 3. Length of manifestos in 2014 (in number of words)

	2014 Europe	2014 Flanders / Wallonia	2014 Brussels	2014 Federal	2014 French-sp. Community
Flemish parties					
CD&V			?		
sp.a			117.309		
Open VLD			?		
Vlaams Belang			?		
N-VA			?		
LDD			?		
Groen			197.097		
French-speaking parties					
PS			69.848	187.102	
MR	?	31.899	54.279	?	?
Ecolo	13.242		1.432		
cdH			13.063		
FDF		31.917		?	
PP			?		
Total					

Note: * provisional document