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Regionalist Parties and Immigration in Belgium

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Introduction

In Belgium, immigration is an important policy issue that has been highly politicized. Immigration is not only present in extreme-right parties' discourses, but also in the electoral platforms of other parties, often articulated with issues such as the economy, education, and culture. This chapter demonstrates that, even if extreme-right parties are leading the debate on this issue, regionalist (and liberal) parties also significantly emphasize this issue. Not only do these parties pay more attention to this issue than other party families, but they are also less influenced by the strength of extreme-right parties. The position of the regionalist parties on immigration is more a question of ideology than party competition and is often combined with the parties' main political interests, that is, the decentralization issue and the linguistic conflict between Flemish and French-speaking parties.

This chapter relies on a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the content of party manifestos in Belgium. Electoral platforms of the main parties in the Belgian national/federal Parliament between 1977 and 2007 have been analysed, allowing us to position these parties on various policy issues, including immigration, and to compare their positions over time and across party families and regions.

This chapter is structured into five main sections. The first section briefly presents the main characteristics of the Belgian party systems and the challenges of analysing party positions on immigration. The second section discusses the role played by extreme-right parties in these issues and the expected position of the regionalist parties. The third section analyses the content of party manifestos, tests whether the extreme-right parties 'own' the issue of immigration and distinguishes between

different types of immigration issues. The last two sections test the impact of party competition on party positions and whether ideology can explain why parties associate some policy issues with immigration.

Immigration in multilevel Belgium

For the students of stateless nationalist and regionalist parties and of immigration issues, Belgium is a fascinating case. It relies on a peculiar and fully regionalized party system, characterized by the presence of both strong extreme-right parties and strong regionalist parties. In addition, the competence on immigration policy remains at the federal (national) level despite recurrent demands to allocate it to the regional (or community) levels (see Chapter 4 by Adam and Jacobs for more details).

The Belgian party system presents one unique characteristic when compared to other federations: there are no federal (or statewide) parties. The Belgian electoral system is divided 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 three major statewide parties between 1968 and 1978 (the Christian Democrats, the socialists, and the liberals), not one statewide party has managed to win elections and to obtain seats in the federal Parliament. All of the political parties that were created after 1978 – primarily the extreme-right parties, green parties, 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 statewide 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 after the elections of 2010.

As a result, it might be better to speak of two party systems – the Flemish and the French-speaking ones – rather than of one party system in Belgium. Even in the bilingual electoral constituency of BHV (this territory contains the Brussels municipalities as well as the municipalities of Halle and Vilvoorde, which are officially bilingual), parties are organized and compete along linguistic lines. Very few lists provide candidates from both language groups for the federal elections and bilingual lists are forbidden for the regional elections in Brussels.

Although the regional party systems within Belgium contain different parties, at the party family level, we may observe similar characteristics and structures. For example, after the federal elections of 2010 the

Flemish- and French-speaking party systems were composed of one Christian Democrat (*Christen-Democratisch & Vlaams* – CD&V in Flanders and *Centre Démocrate Humaniste* – CDH in French-speaking Belgium), one socialist (*Socialistische Partij Anders* – SP.A and *Parti Socialiste* – PS), one liberal (*Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten* – Open VLD and *Mouvement Réformateur* – MR), one regionalist (*Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie* – N-VA and *Fédéralistes Démocrates Francophones* – FDF), one extreme-right (*Vlaams Belang* – VB and *Front National* – FN), one green (*Groen* and *Ecolo*), and one populist party (*Libertair, Direct, Democratisch* – LDD and *Parti Populaire* – PP).¹

Probably the most important critique formulated against the academic analysis of party positions concerns the fact that it is difficult to compare party systems across countries as each country constitutes a different institutional, political, electoral and socioeconomic environment in which parties compete, directly influencing the content of the party manifestos. In Belgium, the political environment at the federal level is exactly the same for the Flemish and the French-speaking parties, allowing a robust comparison between these two party systems.

The analysis of party positions on immigration in Belgium is rather peculiar since one of the main Flemish parties, the *Vlaams Belang* (previously named *Vlaams Blok*), oscillates between being a regionalist party and an extreme-right party. Indeed, its birth is linked to the Flemish regionalist party (*Volksunie*), and one of its most prominent programmatic claims concerns decentralization and, ultimately, the independence of Flanders (Billiet and De Witte, 1995; De Winter and Dumont, 1999; Evans et al., 2001). But at the same time, many comparative studies based on the analysis of party manifestos have confirmed that this party belongs to the extreme-right party family and – together with the FN – can be labelled as anti-migrant party (Phalet and Krekels, 1998; Newman, 1997; Van der Brug, Fennema and Tillie, 2005: 537). Billiet and De Witte confirmed in their analysis of the 1991 party manifestos that ‘one of the major issues of the programme of that party: negative attitudes towards immigrants’ (1995: 193) and Maddens and Hajnal (2001) go even further when stating that the VB has to be considered as a single- or near single-issue party on the immigration issue in 1991 and 1995. Yet, previous studies have observed that, in its first years of existence, the extreme-right Flemish party largely emphasized the decentralization issue, and Coffé (2005) has demonstrated that this party made a clear choice in favour of immigration after 1987. Still, claims of Flemish independence remained one of the party’s most prominent characteristics over the years (Walgrave, De Swert and Dandoy, 2002; see

Chapter 11 by Erk in this volume). *A contrario*, the analysis of regionalist parties in Belgium seldom includes the issue of immigration.

Overall, not only are the issues of decentralization and immigration linked in the case of the *Vlaams Belang* (VB), but the electoral fortunes of the parties alleged to be the owners of these two issues – the regionalist and extreme-right parties – seem to be linked to the evolution of the two Belgian party systems. Figure 10.1 shows the electoral results of the main regionalist and extreme-right parties in each party system over the years. The two party families clearly display opposite trends. While the regionalist parties gradually lost strength since 1974 (almost in a linear way in the case of the Flemish regionalist party until 2007), the extreme-right parties witnessed important electoral successes. In this framework,

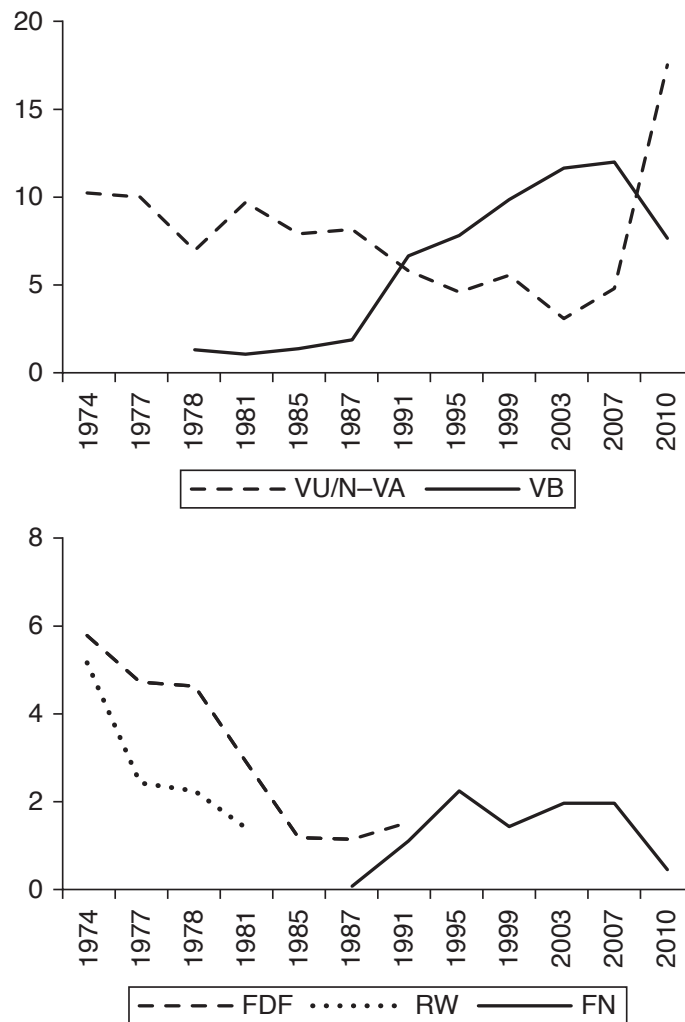


Figure 10.1 Electoral success of extreme-right and regionalist parties (1974–2010), in per cent

the analysis of party positions on the immigration issue, following these successes of the extreme-right parties, seems to be particularly relevant.

Immigration and party positions in Belgium

Extreme-right parties and immigration

Among the different issues that are addressed during electoral campaigns that allow us to distinguish between parties, immigration is often considered as a new issue since the 1980s and the early 1990s in several Western European countries (McElroy and Benoit, 2007: 21). The issue of immigration occupies a specific space in numerous analyses of the content of the party manifestos, either as a single-issue focus (see, for example, Van der Brug, Fennema and Tillie, 2005; Arzheimer and Carter, 2006) or as an issue among several other issues or policy domains. This is not only of interest to researchers focusing on immigration policies but also to those analysing (and explaining) electoral behaviour, party systems, and party competition. Indeed, the politicization of immigration has transformed politics in Western Europe, and it has been mainly linked to the emergence and success of extreme-right parties.

Extreme-right parties are considered as niche parties focusing mainly on the immigration issue (see, for example, Meguid, 2008). Guibernau (2010: 10) states that 'anti-immigrant sentiment and, in some instances, open hostility towards immigrants describe radical right-wing parties'. In addition, and in contrast to their mainstream competitors, extreme-right parties have been able to take up these new issues in a more pronounced and radical way, which has often translated into success (Spies and Franzmann, 2010).

The Belgian extreme-right cases have been widely covered, mainly in comparative terms (with the exception of Phalet and Krekels, 1998). These authors, as well as Newman (1997) and Van der Brug, Fennema and Tillie (2005) confirm through their analysis of the manifestos of the two extreme-right parties in Belgium² – VB and FN – that these parties can be labelled as anti-migrant parties. The presence of immigration issues in their manifestos is highly salient. In their quantitative analysis of the content of Flemish party manifestos between 1991 and 2004, Walgrave and De Swert (2004) observe that VB dedicated more attention to immigration and asylum issues than any other party.

However, even if these parties appear to be the 'owners' of the immigration issue, they also might own or be considerably strong on other issues. Maddens and Hajnal (2001) believe that since 1995, the VB has

broadened its appeal by emphasizing or incorporating other policy issues including decentralization (see above), law-and-order and/or crime (Billiet and De Witte, 1995; Evans et al., 2001; Walgrave, De Swert and Dandoy, 2002; Delwit, 2002; Van der Brug and Fennema, 2003; Coffé, 2005; Ignazi, 2006; de Lange, 2007), national identity (Newman, 1997; Ignazi, 2006), family policy (Billiet and De Witte, 1995), morality (Billiet and De Witte, 1995; Ignazi, 2006), and anti-politics or anti-establishment issues (Billiet and De Witte, 1995; Walgrave, De Swert and Dandoy, 2002; Coffé, 2005; De Winter and Baudewyns, 2009).

In Flanders, the VB was created in 1978 by the merger of two small radical-nationalist movements that were disappointed by the policies of the Flemish regional party (VU). Originally, its ideology was primarily focused on decentralization issues, that is, more autonomy and even independence for the Flemish region. But gradually it developed other policy positions, among others an anti-immigrant position. In contrast, the French-speaking counterpart of the VB, the FN has no roots in a Walloon or French-speaking regionalist movement. The FN was basically created in 1985 as a 'sister party' to the eponymous French extreme-right party of Jean-Marie Le Pen. Since the very beginning, the ideology of this party was clearly directed against migrants, even though the first party manifesto was only drafted for the 1991 elections. The FN participated for the first time in the national elections in 1987.

Yet even if they 'own' the issue, extreme-right parties are not the only ones paying attention to the immigration issue. The literature argues that the positions of other parties on immigration are linked to the success of the extreme-right parties (Givens and Luedtke, 2005; Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; Meguid, 2008; Guibernau, 2010). Indeed, according to the party competition model, the electoral success of extreme-right parties has an impact on the positions of all of the other parties on the immigration issue. This assumption basically relies on the fact that the electoral success of extreme-right parties directly threatens the other political parties and that these parties may adapt their strategy in order to face the new electoral challenge. They may either increase (confrontational strategy) or decrease (dismissive strategy) their attention to the issue. Yet, some studies (see, for example, Klingemann, 1987; Petry and Landry, 2001; Katsanidou and Gemenis, 2010; Van der Brug, 2001) have 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. In addition, not all of the parties react in the same way to the emergence and electoral success of extreme-right parties, and certain parties are more likely to adapt their positions

accordingly than others, mainly depending on their party family, their ideology, their initial position, or even their policy positions on other dimensions.

Regionalist parties and immigration

If scholars have often tried to link the effects of decentralization or federalism with the success of extreme-right parties (see, for example, Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; Spies and Franzmann, 2010), then the opposite relationship – that is, linking immigration issues with the success of regionalist parties – has been rarely done. Nonetheless, Hepburn (2009) links the regionalist parties with the issue of immigration, identifying economic, ideological, party competition, and statewide influences on the relationship between the two. She states that ‘immigration has become a mobilising issue for stateless nationalist and regionalist parties, which have sought to protect and advance regional identities and interests’ (Hepburn, 2011: 523).

There are three main regionalist parties in Belgium. Their most important electoral results were obtained in the early and mid-1970s and they participated in several national and regional governments. In Flanders, the Flemish regionalist party *Volksunie* (VU) was created in 1954 and demanded more autonomy for Flanders within a Belgian federal state. Later, the radicalization of the party’s ideology led it to support the independence of Flanders. In 2001, the party was split into the N-VA and *Spirit*. The latter has been in an electoral alliance with the Socialists and Greens, while the former is nowadays considered the heir of the VU.

On the French-speaking side, both the Brussels and Walloon regions have witnessed the emergence of regionalist parties. In Brussels, the *Fédération des Démocrates Francophones* (previously *Front démocratique des Francophones*, FDF) was created in 1964 with the aim of defending the interests of the French-speaking population in and around Brussels against the Flemish majority. Between 1992 and 2011, the FDF created a long-lasting and stable electoral alliance with the French-speaking liberal party. In Wallonia, the *Rassemblement Wallon* (RW) was founded in 1968. The party’s ideology was based on demands for the creation of a federal Belgium, and it basically disappeared from the national political arena in 1985 when this aim was soon to be achieved. Most of its former elites and members rallied towards the socialist or liberal parties.

Very few studies have empirically analysed regionalist party positions on immigration in the Belgian case. One exception is Coffé (2005), who observes the ‘marriage’ of Flemish nationalist-separatism and a strong position on immigration. Similarly, Hepburn (2011) observes

that, among the Flemish parties that adapted their party positions on the immigration issue following the electoral fortunes of the Flemish extreme-right party, the left-wing regionalist party *Spirit* adopted a more inclusive pro-immigrant position. Concerning the right-wing N-VA, Pauwels (2011) confirms that, even if the Flemish extreme-right party remains the principal 'owner' of the immigration issue, that issue is also relevant to voters of the N-VA.

Immigration issue in party manifestos

Owning immigration

Inspired by the original work of Baumgartner and Jones (1993), the Belgian Agenda Setting Project³ uses a slightly adapted version of their topical codebook to identify and track issue attention from 1970s onwards. Aimed at analysing the positions of the Belgian political parties, the Project set a systematic thematic coding of the content of the party manifestos. The codebook contains about 250 topic codes, organized by main topic categories. Party manifestos were coded per quasi-sentence, a procedure similarly used by the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP). These coding procedures allow multiple coding for the same quasi-sentence, and various dummy variables were also added, allowing us to identify pledges, titles, references to other parties, and so on. Among the various coded issues, no less than eight subcategories directly deal with immigration issues.⁴ This high number of immigration items contrast with previous studies that used approximated indicators (see, for example, Van der Brug, Fennema and Tillie, 2005; Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; Meguid, 2008).

I analyse the manifestos of all of the parties that were represented in at least three elections in the federal House of Representatives, which equals 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 *Parti Socialiste*, *Ecolo*, and *Front National*, all of the other parties changed their names within the observed period. In addition, several electoral alliances were formed, as well as some party splits, but the structure of the party system remained rather stable over time. The content of the manifestos of about 9 to 11 parties for each election year were coded. The data therefore comprises the content of exactly 100 party manifestos on about 250 different policy issues for over more than 30 years. About 250,000 quasi-sentences were coded, with an average of 2,435 per manifesto.

This data on Belgian party manifestos allows us to test different hypotheses concerning party positions on migration. The first hypothesis of this chapter concerned the extreme-right parties' ownership of the immigration issue. The data shows that the extreme-right parties are the leading parties when emphasizing immigration in their manifestos. Table 10.1 shows that the percentage of attention to that issue in their manifestos is significantly higher than any other party family, to a great extent confirming their 'ownership' of that issue (on average 8.79 per cent in the case of the Flemish extreme-right party VB and about 10 per cent in the case of its French-speaking counterpart FN). In addition, immigration occupies a much larger place in the Flemish manifestos than in the French-speaking ones. With the exception of the socialist party family, each Flemish party dedicates on average more attention to this issue than its French-speaking sister party. In both party systems, the manifestos of the liberal and the regionalist parties display a relatively high emphasis on immigration.

Table 10.1 Average attention to immigration in party manifestos (1981–2007)

Party family	Flemish parties		French-speaking parties	
Christian Democrat	CVP/CD&V	1.84%	PSC/CDH	1.62%
Socialist	SP/SPA	1.11%	PS	2.36%
Liberal	PVV/Open VLD	4.16%	PRL/MR	2.61%
Regionalist	VU/N-VA	3.17%	FDF	2.89%
Green	Agalev/Groen	2.13%	RW	0.74%
Extreme-right	VB	8.79%	Ecolo	1.62%
Weighted average ^a		2.97 %	FN	10.11%
				1.96%

^aWeighted by each party's electoral strength (in % of the total number of votes at the national level).

Nonetheless, when looking at specific elections, ownership of the immigration issue is not as clear-cut as expected. Table 10.2 displays the leading party emphasizing immigration in its manifesto per election year. If as expected the extreme-right parties dominate the immigration 'market' since their first measurement (in 1978 for VB and in 1991 for FN), it is not the case for each individual election. In 1995, the Flemish liberal party dedicated more attention to this issue (8.42 per cent) than

the extreme-right party (5.32 per cent), as well as the regionalist N-VA in 2007 with 11.76 per cent (the VB follows with 8.15 per cent). On the French-speaking side of the linguistic border, it is surprisingly the green party that dedicates more attention to immigration in 2007 with 5.31 per cent (the FN with only 1.84 per cent).⁵

Table 10.2 Leading party emphasizing immigration in its manifestos (1977–2007)

Election year	Flemish parties		French-speaking parties	
1977	Regionalist	1.25%	–	–
1978	Extreme-right	8.98%	–	–
1981	Extreme-right	4.06%	Liberal	2.09%
1985	Extreme-right	9.95%	Regionalist	3.34%
1987	Extreme-right	8.37%	Regionalist	3.37%
1991	Extreme-right	13.61%	Extreme-right	13.38%
1995	Liberal	8.42%	Extreme-right	12.73%
1999	Extreme-right	9.58%	Extreme-right	14.29%
2003	Extreme-right	11.11%	Extreme-right	8.33%
2007	Regionalist	11.76%	Green	5.31%

Immigration control vs. migrant integration

Extreme-right parties do pay more attention to immigration issues than any other party, but can they be considered the owners of this issue? Policy positions regarding the immigration issue diverge not only in terms of salience (that is the degree of attention to the issue in manifestos) but also in terms of policy sectors of immigration. Givens and Luedtke (2005) identify two main types of immigration policy: immigration control and migrant integration.⁶ Immigration control basically concerns policy areas around illegal immigration, political asylum/refugees, family reunification, and legal labour immigration/visas. As indicated by its name, migrant integration deals with citizenship and anti-discrimination aspects of integration. These two types of policy may be emphasized differently by different parties (or party families) according to their ideological profile (for example, immigration control may refer to the issue of law-and-order, while migrant integration may refer to the idea of multiculturalism) and to different patterns of party competition.

In the coding process, and in similarity to Givens and Luedtke (2005), I differentiate between the two types of position on immigration,⁷ allowing us to explore whether the extreme-right parties own both policy

types of immigration issues in their manifestos. One might expect that right-wing parties compete with the extreme-right party on the 'control' of immigration, while left-wing parties dedicate more attention to the 'integration' side of immigration. Table 10.3 demonstrates that extreme-right parties in Belgium own both types of immigration issues in both party systems. They clearly allocate more attention to these policy issues than any other party.

We also observe two additional elements. First, the Flemish parties allocate on average more attention to both types of policy immigration in their manifesto than the French-speaking parties. Second, if right-wing parties score better than left-wing parties concerning immigration control, we do not observe more attention to integration policies in the manifestos of the left-wing parties. On the contrary and, besides extreme-right parties, the greatest attention given to this type of policy issue is observed in the manifestos of the liberal party in Flanders (1.79 per cent), followed by the regionalists (1.43 per cent), and the regionalist FDF (0.81 per cent) in French-speaking Belgium.

Table 10.3 Average attention given to immigration control and integration in party manifestos (1981–2007)

	Flemish parties		French-speaking parties	
	Immigration control	Immigration integration	Immigration control	Immigration integration
Christian Democrat	0.90%	0.64%	0.49%	0.62%
Socialist	0.34%	0.67%	0.90%	1.01%
Liberal	1.76%	1.79%	1.05%	0.49%
Regionalist	1.33%	1.43%	0.57%	0.81%
Green	1.03%	0.82%	0.38%	0.03%
Extreme-right	3.58%	4.05%	0.50%	0.58%
			4.66%	1.44%

Regression model

In order to verify the ownership hypothesis of the extreme-right parties on immigration issues, I use a regression model based on panel data with party family dummies, as well as control variables: language, party size, and manifesto length. As discussed above, the distinctive characteristic of the Belgian electoral system is its scission according to linguistic

lines. Since the split of the traditional political parties, manifestos are no longer released in both languages and are not even translated. In this framework language is an important variable as it allows us to distinguish Flemish from French-speaking parties.

Confirming the findings of Adam and Jacobs in Chapter 4, distinct patterns between Flemish and French-speaking parties are observed regarding the importance given to immigration (see Tables 10.1 and 10.3). Overall, the emphasis on the issue of immigration appears to be rather stable in the case of the French-speaking manifestos (around 2 per cent of attention), while the Flemish manifestos poorly emphasize that issue between 1977 and 1987, then increase their attention to above 5 per cent in 1991, 2003, and 2007. These trends confirm that the Flemish parties always dedicate on average more attention to this issue than the French-speaking parties. The greater emphasis observed since 1991 for the Flemish parties is mainly due to the high attention to immigration in the extreme-right party manifestos.

The size of each party is measured by its electoral strength and calculated as a percentage of the votes obtained in elections. Finally, I control for the length of the manifesto as previous empirical analyses with the same data (Dandoy, 2011) demonstrate that manifesto length matters when one wants to analyse its content. The content of a party manifesto is not similar in a small or a large manifesto. I therefore include a variable based on the number of coded quasi-sentences in each manifesto.

The results displayed in Table 10.4 confirm that the extreme-right parties in Belgium can indeed be considered as the 'owners' of the immigration issue. The observed coefficient is strong and positive, meaning that overall, the immigration category is larger by about 7.5 per cent in the manifestos of the extreme-right parties than in the green party manifestos (the latter having the lowest level of ownership).

This first model delivers additional results since another party family is significant: the liberal party family. Its coefficient is positive, meaning that the manifestos of these parties contain more references to immigration than other parties. The immigration category is larger by 2.2 per cent in the liberal manifestos than in the green party manifestos. A partial conclusion might be that the ownership of immigration by the Belgian extreme-right parties is not as clear as expected and that the liberal party family might compete with the extreme-right party on this issue. In addition, none of the control variables appear to be significant.

As indicated above, the two types of policies – immigration control and migrant integration – may be emphasized differently by different

Table 10.4 Immigration ownership model

		Immigration (all issues)	Immigration control	Immigrant integration
Party families	Christian	40.26033	–	49.52739
	Democrat	(74.54952)		(30.70797)
	Socialist	29.12886 (77.5253)	–14.01396 (26.16765)	64.72467 (33.73872)
	Liberal	220.8868* (96.45432)	79.7991 (40.8669)	100.2327* (39.38912)
	Regionalist	119.0173 (80.21754)	34.77617 (64.84999)	46.60756 (27.05031)
	Green	–	0.06367 (43.60049)	–
	Extreme-right	753.167*** (105.7087)	326.1532*** (73.67298)	239.5033*** (40.9028)
Control variables	Language	43.26207 (56.74694)	23.88561 (33.32535)	93.87739*** (22.87821)
	Party size	–0.04785 (0.07041)	0.00087 (0.04637)	–0.06267* (0.02822)
	Manifesto length	0.01067 (0.00982)	0.00523 (0.00578)	0.00466 (0.00415)
	Constant	150.3468** (55.04835)	46.68964 (54.11669)	33.17691 (22.49077)
	N	100	100	100
	Groups	13	13	13
	R ²	0.5383	0.3875	0.4802

Note: Prais-Winsten regression, heteroskedastic PCSE. *** $\rho < 0.001$; ** $\rho < 0.01$; * $\rho < 0.05$. Green party family dummy as reference category for the model including all issues and for the immigrant-integration model. Christian Democrat party family dummy as reference category for the immigration control model.

parties, according to their ideological profile and to different patterns of party competition. The division of the immigration policy domain into more specific policies will allow us to test whether extreme-right parties can be considered as the ‘owners’ of both policies.

The results indicate that extreme-right parties are the leading party when dealing with both types of immigration policies. These parties allocate significantly more attention to the issues of immigration control and migration integration than the socialist and Christian Democrat parties. Even if the liberal party dummy is significant in the model concerning migration integration, it does not mitigate the conclusions. When looking at more specific public policy proposals (on integration and control), the extreme-right parties can still be considered as the party family ‘owning’ the issue. Still, two control variables are significant in

the ownership model concerning migrant integration: party size and language. Smaller parties dedicate more attention to migrant integration, as well as the Flemish parties. In the case of the latter, Flemish parties allocate about 1 per cent more attention to this policy issue than the French-speaking parties, independent of their party family.

Party competition

In a second model, I test the reaction of the Belgian parties to the emergence and electoral success of the extreme-right parties. Party competition on immigration is primarily determined by the electoral success of the extreme-right party in each party system. Two different indicators of the electoral strength of the extreme-right party are developed. The first one consists of its absolute electoral result (percentage of votes at the national level), while the second measures the electoral trends in the results of the extreme-right party since the last elections ($e_0 - e_{-1}$). These two measurements allow us to determine whether the extreme-right parties represent a (growing) electoral threat for the other parties in each party system.

Table 10.5 indicates that parties dedicated a larger share of their manifestos to the immigration issue when the extreme-right party was strong. An increase of 1 per cent in the size of the extreme-right party leads its competitors to increase their attention to the immigration issue in their manifestos by an additional 0.4 per cent. These results may appear modest, but when one thinks about the example of an extreme-right party that increases its vote share from 5 per cent to 15 per cent of the votes, this increase leads to an increase in the attention given to immigration in the other parties' manifestos by 4 per cent.

Surprisingly, the other two variables of party competition do not play a role in this model. Whether or not the extreme-right party wins or loses an election has no bearing on the attention given to that issue by its competitors. It is not an extreme-right party's ability to win elections that matters, it is its size. The larger the extreme-right party, the stronger the impact it will have on the emphasis on immigration in the other parties' electoral platforms. Concerning the variable of party defeat, we observe that this variable is positive but not significant. Whether a party loses the election does not have a significant impact on its emphasis on immigration in its manifesto. The explanatory power of the model reaches almost 50 per cent, meaning that about half of the variation of the preferences to emphasize immigration in party manifestos is explained by the variables. In sum, the emphasis on the issue of immigration in party manifestos is a consequence of extreme-right party size:

political parties will emphasize immigration when the extreme-right party is electorally successful.

Language appears to be significant but, surprisingly, negative. This means that the French-speaking parties dedicate more attention to immigration than their Flemish counterparts. It is likely that, *ceteris paribus*, some of the attention to immigration in the French-speaking manifestos is not grasped by the extreme-right party size variable, probably because the French-speaking party system witnessed the absence of an extreme-right party in 1981 and 1985.

The model also confirms that different processes are at stake, depending on the party family. The mainstream right-wing (the liberals) and the regionalist parties dedicate more attention to immigration than parties

Table 10.5 Party competition models

		Immigration (all issues)	Immigration control	Immigrant integration
Party competition	Party defeat	0.01524 (0.08782)	0.04316 (0.05253)	-0.03933 (0.03638)
	Extreme-right party size	0.42622*** (0.07051)	0.23247*** (0.04440)	0.14779*** (0.02888)
	Extreme-right party success	0.12375 (0.19339)	0.049264 (0.12278)	0.06686 (0.08029)
Party families	Christian Democrat	-27.65324 (68.34842)	-6.12738 (31.64432)	-
	Socialist	-31.39506 (73.33536)	-17.7121 (37.81988)	22.47279 (19.22406)
	Liberal	152.3261* (73.70205)	64.37312 (37.16406)	69.13854** (25.6625)
	Regionalist	122.1166* (63.56518)	36.66459 (39.95194)	72.68411* (29.66295)
	Green	-	-	23.43901 (28.73248)
Control variables	Language	-186.56** (58.75801)	-79.01712* (33.01889)	-45.03119 (25.12233)
	Party size	0.04170 (0.05401)	0.01826 (0.02895)	0.02065 (0.02491)
	Manifesto length	-0.00462 (0.00868)	-0.00396 (0.00510)	0.00018 (0.00360)
Model summary	Constant	105.5896* (50.55027)	26.27659 (22.55996)	1.57021 (31.66811)
	N	86	86	86
	Groups	11	11	11
	R ²	0.4918	0.4183	0.4565

Note: Prais-Winsten regression, heteroskedastic PCSE. *** $\rho < 0.001$; ** $\rho < 0.01$; * $\rho < 0.05$. The green party family used as a reference category, except for the immigration integration (Christian Democrat party family dummy as reference category).

from the reference party family⁸ (by 1.52 per cent and 1.22 per cent respectively in the liberal and regionalist manifestos). But the most important element is that this attention is independent from the party competition variables around the extreme-right party, unlike the greater emphasis on immigration that was found in the manifestos of the Christian Democrat, socialist, and green parties in reaction to the size of the extreme-right.

Similarly, the models specifically concerning immigration control and migrant integration confirm previous findings regarding the patterns of party competition on immigration issues. The size of the extreme-right parties has a positive and significant impact on the amount of attention that the other parties dedicate to immigration in their manifestos. The stronger the extreme-right party, the larger will be the emphasis on both the control and integration policy issues. For both types of immigration policy, the liberal party family – as well as the regionalist party for the migrant integration policies – dedicate more attention to these issues in its manifestos than the reference party family.

Associating immigration with policy issues

In this section, I test Odmalm's (2012) hypothesis according to which parties assimilate immigration in policy issues where they have a strategic advantage. Odmalm considers immigration as an orthogonal issue and he argues that 'Parties need to assimilate – and frame – immigration so it corresponds to the position on the conflict dimension where they have a strategic advantage' (Odmalm, 2012: 3). In other words, parties play primarily to their strengths. Therefore, I test this hypothesis according to which a party's position on immigration corresponds to their ideological position (left vs. right and 'old' vs. 'new' politics) where they have a strategic advantage. In his analysis of UK manifestos, Odmalm links the immigration policy issue with other policy issues. For example, when dealing with immigration, the Labour Party focuses on economic and social aspects, the Liberal Democrats with human rights and labour-market concerns, while the Conservatives associate immigration with safeguarding the population from disease (immigrant health checks) and to maintaining sovereignty (Odmalm, 2012: 15).

In this chapter, I adopt the same perspective. Immigration is not only framed in correspondence with the party's position on the main cleavages, but the way in which immigration is framed corresponds to its position on other policy issues and, more particularly, on policy issues where the party has a strategic advantage. In the Belgian case – and in similarity to the UK case – this means that parties associate immigration with their classic left-right positioning and with their 'owned' policy issues.

The Belgian party manifestos have been coded according to a principle of multiple coding, which allows the coder to attribute a primary policy issue code to each quasi-sentence, as well as a second and third code. As a result, the data can test the co-occurrence of policy issues in manifestos alongside immigration. Tables 10.6 and 10.7 present the three main priorities of the Belgian parties aggregated for the 1977–2007 period.

The results confirm Odmalm's hypothesis. Parties in Belgium discuss the immigration issue in relation to policy issues that are close to their 'owned' issues or issues where they have a strategic advantage. The green and mainstream parties (Christian Democrat, socialist, and liberal) do emphasize issues of democracy and rights. A qualitative analysis of the manifestos reveals that they primarily relate to the debate on the voting rights for migrants, a debate that has been very salient since the end of the 1990s. The French-speaking mainstream and green parties also emphasize issues related to international relations when discussing immigration. This is related to the importance of development aid in their manifestos as a way to deal with immigration. Social policy, housing, and education are also important issues when discussing immigration for the socialist, Christian Democrat, and green parties but also – and more surprisingly – for the liberal and regionalist parties.⁹

More interesting is the attention to law-and-order issues. As expected, this issue is associated with immigration in the manifestos of the extreme-right and liberal parties and, in the French-speaking case, in

Table 10.6 Most important policy domains associated with immigration: Flemish parties

Christian Democrat	Democracy and rights 17%	Education 14.4%	Community issues 11.8%
Socialist	Democracy and rights 17.2%	Education 16.2%	Social policy 16.2%
Liberal	Law-and-order 17.3%	Democracy and rights 14.9%	Education 13.8%
Regionalist	Community issues 21.1%	Housing 13.7%	Culture 12.6%
Green	Democracy and rights 20.8%	Social policy 17.6%	International relations 9.5%
Extreme-right	Law-and-order 38.4%	Democracy and rights 15.2%	Social policy 8.8%

Table 10.7 Most important policy domains associated with immigration: French-speaking parties

Christian Democrat	International relations 20.3%	Law-and-order 18.8%	Community issues 12.5%
Socialist	International relations 22.4%	Government and administration 17.5%	Democracy and rights 16.1%
Liberal	Democracy and rights 21.5%	Social policy 20%	Law-and-order 15.4%
Regionalist	Community issues 18.6%	Social policy 16.9%	Law-and-order 13.6%
Green	Democracy and rights 21.1%	Government and administration 15.5%	International relations 14.1%

Note: Figures for the extreme-right French-speaking party (FN) are not displayed because the N is not large enough.

the manifestos of the regionalist and Christian Democrat parties. In the case of the Flemish extreme-right party, it even concerns more than one-third of the items related to the immigration issue. Most of these references to law-and-order issues link the migrants with behaviour that (potentially) threatens public order and discusses the overrepresentation of migrants in crime statistics.

Finally, decentralization issues (that is, issues related to the linguistic tensions between the Flemish and French-speaking parties and to demands for more regional autonomy and a territorial state re-organization) are connected to immigration in the manifestos of the regionalist parties (21.1 per cent for the Flemish and 18.6 per cent for the French-speaking regionalist parties) and are also salient in the immigration sections of the manifestos of the Christian Democrat parties. These issues are not very salient in the case of the VB, confirming its ideological profile as an extreme-right party rather than a regionalist party.

Conclusion

This chapter sought to understand party positions in Belgium on the immigration issue and more particularly the positions of the regionalist parties. As in many other Western countries, immigration became an electorally salient issue with the rise of the extreme-right party, which focuses specifically on this issue and which has had a significant impact on the other parties' electoral platforms. Based on a quantitative and

qualitative analysis of the party manifestos in Belgium during the last three decades, this chapter demonstrated that explaining the presence of immigration in those manifestos remains a complex issue.

First, the extreme-right parties are identified as the 'owners' of the immigration issue. Interestingly, these parties allocate more attention to immigration than any other party in its two dimensions (immigration control and migrant integration). One does not observe that the issue of integration is particularly more salient in the left-wing party manifestos. Yet, this extreme-right ownership of immigration is not as clear as expected. Two other party families – the liberal and regionalist parties – also emphasize this issue significantly more than other parties. Furthermore, in 2007 and in election years where the extreme-right party did not compete, the regionalist parties are the parties that allocate the most attention to this issue.

Second, the results indicate that party competition has had a significant impact on the content of party manifestos, that is, Belgian parties tend to increase their attention to immigration when the extreme-right party is electorally strong. This is true for all party families, with again the exception of the liberal and regionalist parties. If it is naïve to believe that regionalists are not influenced by the electoral strength of the extreme-right party, the models show that independent party family effects are at stake here. Yet, the positions of the Belgian regionalist parties on immigration are partly explained by the fact that they are regionalist parties. In other words, independently of the success of the extreme-right party – so, on the basis of their own electoral success, their position in the government, or in the opposition, and the external environment – the regionalist parties will continue emphasizing immigration in their manifestos. In this regard, immigration can be viewed as an issue that belongs to the core identity – or ideology – of the regionalist parties. When distinguishing between types of immigration policies, regionalist parties react to the electoral success of the extreme-right parties regarding immigration control issues but they have their own separate policy agenda regarding integration issues that is not affected by extreme-right party attention to immigration. In sum, migrant integration is an issue that is specific to the regionalist parties' manifestos, independently of the evolution of the party system.

Third, political parties frame immigration in different ways, associating immigration issues with their preferred policy issues. The results confirm Odmalm's hypothesis but bring an additional element. Extreme-right and liberal (right-wing) parties do associate immigration with law-and-order issues, while the regionalist parties focus on the decentralization

issues when dealing with immigration. In that sense, it explains earlier findings. Regionalist parties are fairly unreactive to the electoral success of the extreme-right parties, they have a distinct ideology on immigration and this ideology is closely connected to the parties' preferred issues, that is, decentralization and the linguistic conflict between Flemish and French-speaking parties.

In addition, the analyses of party manifestos on immigration reveal regional differences. Independently of the strength of extreme-right parties, French-speaking parties allocate less attention to immigration than Flemish parties. It is likely that different political cultures and attitudes regarding immigration exist in Flanders and in French-speaking Belgium, but these differences may also be partially explained by a different economic and demographic context in each region. Flanders is a good example of a flourishing economy that does not need to attract migrant workers, even though the region has an ageing population and fertility rates lower than in other regions. Concerning culture and language, an important share of migrants that arrive in Flanders speak French and not Dutch – for example, migrants from former French and Belgian colonies and, to a lesser extent, skilled workers coming to work for the European Union and other international organizations.

These findings call for further research. If immigration is indeed a core regionalist issue, then the analysis of immigration issues in the Belgian party systems must be re-framed. Given the fact that regionalist parties emerged in Belgium about two decades before the extreme-right parties,¹⁰ one has to wonder whether the contamination hypothesis on immigration should not be reversed. Have regionalist (and probably also mainstream right-wing) parties and their electoral success influenced the position of the extreme-right parties on immigration? Further analysis is necessary to identify the party (or parties) that brought the new issue of immigration onto the political agenda before the emergence of the extreme-right parties.

Notes

1. Unlike the two other communities, the German-speaking community does not display a separate (and third) party system. Apart from the regionalist *ProDG* (and to a lesser extent *Vivant*), all parties present in this community are sub-regional branches of the French-speaking parties.
2. In their analysis of the Belgian case, Ignazi (2006) also included the UDRT while Meguid (2008) included Agir.
3. This project, under the direction of Prof. Stefaan Walgrave (University of Antwerp) for the Belgian case, is financed by the University of Antwerp and

the European Science Foundation (ESF) via the FWO. The coding management has been supervised by Jeroen Joly (University of Antwerp) and Régis Dandoy (University of Zurich).

4. Subcategories 201: Racial discrimination and discrimination against ethnic minorities; 900 : General (including combinations of subcategories); 929: Migration and Labour; 930: Migration and Integration ; 931: Refugees and Asylum-seekers; 932: Access to Nationality; 933: Illegal Migration and Deportations; 999 : Others. The only aspect of immigration that is not taken into account in these subcategories relates to the education of immigrants and asylum-seekers' children since it is part of a larger issue (Sub-category 603 – Education for less favoured persons).
5. The weak score of the French-speaking extreme-right party for the 2007 elections can be explained by a clear manifesto strategy to display immigration issues as 'censored' in the party manifesto, i.e., not displaying the manifesto chapter dedicated to the issues. As a result, I could not code the pledges and policy proposals on migration.
6. This distinction is even more relevant in the Belgian case since some aspects of the immigrant integration have been allocated to the regions and communities, while immigration control remains in the hands of the federal authority (see Chapter 4 by Adam and Jacobs for more details).
7. Leaving aside the general and the 'other immigration issues' category, I gathered the three categories 'Racial discrimination and discrimination against ethnic minorities' (item 0201), 'Migration and labour' (item 0929) and 'Migration and integration' (item 0930) in the 'Migrant integration policy' while the 'Migrant control' concerns the three categories of 'Refugees and Asylum-seekers' (item 0931), of 'Naturalisation' (item 0932) and 'Illegal migration and deportation' (item 0933).
8. In comparing across party families in the regression model, we have to determine which party family is the 'reference' family, i.e., the point of reference in order to understand the others. In this case, the reference party family is the green party family.
9. The Flemish extreme-right party (VB) also allocates 8.8 per cent of its immigration attention to social policies.
10. The Flemish regionalist party (VU) was founded in 1954 while the French-speaking FDF and the RW were founded in 1964 and 1968, respectively. Their most important electoral results were attained in the early and mid-1970s.

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