The Electoral Effects of Green Government Participation:
A Comparative Analysis

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Introduction

Is government participation good for green parties? Those following recent coverage of the electoral decline of the German Greens may come to the conclusion that, once Greens have entered national government, their future electoral prospects look extremely bleak.

Green participation in government has now become a fairly ‘normal’ phenomenon. In Western Europe, the cases of Finland (1995), Italy (1996), France (1997), Germany (1998) and Belgium (1999) where greens are currently part of coalition governments provides ample opportunity to study the electoral effect of green incumbency. We can also venture further afield to consider the effect of green ‘toleration’ of a minority government, this applies to the current situation in Sweden (1999) and New Zealand (2000).

The involvement of seven green parties in national government raises a series of new research questions. In this paper, I am trying to address one of these questions: what impact does government participation have on green electoral support? There are number of theories, drawn from electoral sociology, that make rather contradictory predictions. Governmental incumbency can have beneficial effects, it can also destroy a party’s electoral standing. In the next part, I will look a little more closely at possible hypotheses. I am restricted, however, in terms of the type of hypotheses we can actually test. Therefore, this paper has predominantly an exploratory character, raising questions rather than answering them. What we need is some initial understanding of the type of relationship that needs to be explored. Where there are data, however, I will look at them to see what conclusions can be drawn. There are essentially three types of data that we have available to illuminate the impact of governmental participation on electoral performance.

First, there are actual election results: how are green parties that take part in national government faring at the ballot box? At the level of national parliamentary elections, the data available are rather sparse, for the simple reason that only one green party had to face parliamentary elections after a term in office, namely in Finland in 1999. However, all other green parties had to face European elections (except Belgium were they coincided with the national elections) after taking office which could be seen as a type of test of their electoral popularity. Ideally, also regional and local election results could be analysed, but often national voting figures are not available for comparative purposes.

Second, there are national opinion polls that track the electoral standing of all parties, in some countries on a monthly basis. These data provide a good indication of the development of the standing of the parties before and after entering government.

And thirdly, there is the possibility of tracing the effects of government with the help of cross-sectional data. In a previous paper on this topic co-authored with Mark N Franklin (Rüdig and Franklin 2000), some first results of the third
The European Election Study (EES) that was conducted at the time of the 1999 European elections in June, were reported. With the increasing length of the green governmental experience, more cross-sectional data suitable for an analysis of green incumbency effects should become available in the coming years. This paper does not report any analyses of any cross-sectional data, but the potential use of this approach for further research strategies will be discussed below.

Theory
In a classical article published almost 20 years ago, Richard Rose and Thomas T. Mackie posed the question of whether governmental participation was an asset or a liability in electoral competition (Rose and Mackie 1983). In a sweeping empirical survey covering all Western democracies, Rose and Mackie analysed the post-incumbency electoral performance and governmental fate of parties from 1948 to 1979. Overall, they found that government parties are more likely to lose votes than to win votes after a period in office. Despite this, most government parties losing votes still remain in government. In coalition governments, it was not common for all government parties to lose, more frequent was a mixture of success and failure. In a follow up study covering the years 1980 to 1993 restricted to Western Europe, Mackie (1996, p. 174) found that the negative electoral impact of incumbency was increasing: 81% (as opposed to 61% in the 1948-79 period) of government parties lost votes, the average loss increased from −1.0% to −4.1%.

A later comparative analysis of the electoral effect of incumbency was undertaken by Wolfgang Müller and Kaare Strøm (1997). Evaluating the results of 13 case studies of the birth, development, and impact of coalitions, Müller and Strøm briefly look at the electoral impact of incumbency. They come to very similar conclusions as Rose and Mackie. There is no clear-cut electoral effect of incumbency. The majority of government parties lose votes, but some also win additional support.

Incumbency itself is obviously not a decisive variable for the electoral and governmental fortunes of individual parties. While the balance of international experience tends to suggest that incumbency is more likely to be a liability than an asset, there must be intervening variables that determine the actual impact on incumbency for particular parties. Are particular types of parties more likely to be negatively or positively affected by incumbency? To what extent does the effect of incumbency depend on the ups and downs of economic cycles? And are particular institutional features, for example electoral systems, associated with the effects of incumbency?

Reviewing past comparative and national studies of incumbency, which factors would expect us to predict a negative or a positive incumbency effect for green parties?

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1For detailed information on the 1999 European election study, see http://www2.trincoll.edu/~mfrankli/EES.html.
Predictions of a positive effect of incumbency focus particularly on the resources that governmental parties can command. Continuous media presence, the use of governmental information services, the authority of holding public office, of representing the State, of speaking and acting for ‘the country’ can bestow benefits on government parties their opponents may find difficult to counteract. Particularly where governmental respectability and ‘statesmanship’ are personalised, the incumbency advantage appears to be particularly strong: the ‘chancellor bonus’ in Germany is one obvious example. Another case where all the emphasis is on incumbency advantage are Congressional elections in the United States (cf. Mondak 1995; Cox and Katz 1996).

For challenger parties like the Greens, the process of entering government could be expected to involve a substantial improvement of their political resources. In terms of conventional politics, government participation gives Greens the opportunity to acquire a degree of political respectability and authority that was impossible to acquire as ‘outsider’ opposition parties representing a small majority of the population.

Furthermore, government participation potentially provides the opportunity for green parties as ‘institutionalised social movements’ to put into practice ideas that they have advocated for a very long time without a realistic chance of seeing them implemented. Supporters of green party aims that might have wavered in decisions to support the party in opposition on the grounds of the low probability of their political effectiveness can now vote green conscious of their ability to have a real political impact.

The question of the evaluation of the political impact of government parties opens up another line of argument: incumbency could be expected to be beneficial to government parties if their reign was associated with actual or perceived economic gains (cf. Sanders 1996; Johnston and Pattie 1999). The potential ability of government to manipulate the economic cycle to make boom periods coincide with elections is one additional resource to be considered. Governments, of course, are not beyond claiming credit for economic success during boom periods and blaming external factors outside their control during recession.

But to what extent can an economic theory of voting be expected to apply to green parties? While green party ideology could be expected to be more concerned with ‘post-materialist’ issues, it could be argued that Green parties also cannot afford to preside over economic decline and crisis. Greens, perhaps more than other parties, need a favourable economic climate to be in a position to find majorities for environmental policies that are often not universally popular, such as ecological taxation. Furthermore, the idea that Greens are exclusively concerned with environmental issues is as inappropriate now as it was before: Greens not only have policies on all other issues, but they also have managed to extend their identity to some of these areas, in particular civil rights, the rights of minorities, and the advocacy of a racially tolerant, multi-cultural society. Also social issues, such as unemployment and welfare
state reform, have been put at the centre of green election campaigning in the 1990s. The German Greens, at the beginning of their term of national office, declared that they mainly wanted to be judged after four years by the contribution they have made to combating unemployment.

A ‘respectable’, policy effective green party participating in a government successfully riding the economic cycle might thus be expected to benefit from its incumbency position. But how likely will Green parties be able to achieve such a position?

Green parties started their life as challengers to the establishment, as parties that wanted to affect important social and political changes, parties that put certain issues such as nuclear energy or nuclear weapons beyond the usual realm of compromise. The entry of such a new generation of challenger parties is thus potentially less ‘normal’ than other processes of coalition formation. Are green parties capable of accepting compromise politics, even in areas of their identity politics? If not, the stability of such coalitions is likely to be low, a factor that has continuously been aired by the Greens’ political competitors. The demands of being good and reliable coalition partners, of demonstrating ‘governmentability’, are likely to conflict with the policy aims of the party, however.

The evaluation of green party performance in government could be expected to differ, perhaps rather substantially, from the evaluation of other parties. The evaluation of green government performance by green voters could be expected to focus on a range of ‘green’ issues, such as nuclear power, climate policy, transport policy, genetic engineering, sustainable development, and the like. German surveys continue to show that the Greens only have a substantial policy credibility in environmental policy. The 1990s have seen the salience of environmental issues decline fairly steadily which provides a rather hostile social environment for some green policy ideas. This potentially puts the Greens into a very difficult position. Greens might be able to claim credit for some environmental ‘gratis effects’, such as environmental benefits of structural economic changes and economic policies not primarily motivated by environmental considerations. But in many target areas of green policies, there are strong vested interests to overcome. Compromises in these areas may be necessary to maintain governmental office but may have severe electoral costs as green core constituencies become alienated from green government parties.

The Greens are especially vulnerable as their direct responsibility is mainly limited to the Environment Departments whose administrative responsibilities involve dealing with environmental problems but without having any control over the production of these environmental problems. In all five cases, Greens have, at least initially, been kept out of key portfolios such as economic and industrial policy, fiscal policy, agricultural policy, and, except in Belgium, transport policy. Events that, before entering government, might have helped green parties to mobilise more support might now backfire: environmental

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2 See, for example, the various Landtag Elections reports for 1999 and 2000 at http://www.infratest.de.
disasters and accidents could now expose green environment minister and challenge their competency claims. However, the appointment of Greens as ministers responsible for agriculture in both Germany and Italy raises interesting possibilities, particularly at the time when concern about food safety and reform of agricultural practices is high on national agendas. It will be interesting to note whether the Greens can use the widespread public concerns in these areas to their electoral advantages.

The Greens’ participation in government also threatens to alienate the ‘anti-establishment’ protest vote that Greens have been benefiting from in many countries. To combine a ‘realistic’ role in government with a ‘challenger’ position might conflict with the desire to dispel the notion of instability that potentially is associated with the Greens. Pragmatic compromise politics also imposes limits to the extent the Greens could continue to portray themselves as essentially out of tune with ‘the system’. The Greens could thus be hard pressed to hang on to the anti-establishment vote, particularly amongst the young, as they begin to be perceived and to act as an integral party of ‘the establishment’.

Finally, we also have to consider the role of Greens as small coalition parties. Factors that apply to incumbent candidates or to one-party government, conditions that have dominated US and UK politics, are not necessarily applicable to coalition government. As Rose and Mackie (1983) pointed out, in coalition governments it is more common for some government parties to lose votes and for others to win votes. This means that the distribution of credit and blame amongst the government parties is likely to be an extremely influential factor in determining the electoral effect of incumbency.

Some of these hypotheses could be tested on a national basis, analysing the fortunes of green parties over time. Analytically more exciting, however, is the cross-national (or the cross-regional) approach, particularly if there are clear cross-national variances in the outcomes of green incumbency.

There are potentially two types of factors that a comparative analysis of green party incumbency effects would need to take into account, in addition to the factors already mentioned: institutional factors of party and electoral politics outside the influence of green parties; and the internal factors of party politics that may make Green parties more or less effective developing strategies and in reacting to opportunities and be relevant.

First, there are variances in the institutional design of individual countries which may make it easier or more difficult for Greens to do well in post-incumbency elections. Different electoral systems open up different opportunities and challenges. As far as national parliamentary elections are concerned, the five countries under study can be divided into two separate groups: on the one hand, there are in France and Italy where majority voting systems dominate; and Belgium, Finland and Germany where different types of proportional representation systems are in operation.
In the case of France and Italy, small parties like the Greens can only hope to win any representation if they are part of ‘pre-election’ coalitions with larger parties. In both cases, the Greens entered such pre-election coalitions. In terms of their post-incumbency elections, the key factor for continued success is to remain in this pre-election coalition as the Greens will be unable to gain parliamentary representation on their own. The Italian Greens are too small to have a realistic chance of winning seats in the proportional part of the elections. With their current poll standing, the French Greens are unlikely to win any seats in the National Assembly on their own. In this situation, the Greens are presented to the electorate not as a separate party to vote for, but only in the form of green candidates representing a broader electoral alliance. The voter will thus be confronted not primarily with a with a green candidate but with a candidate representing the ‘majorité plurielle’ or the Ulivo alliance. This will ensure continued parliamentary representation, but also means that the Greens are very closely tied to the overall performance of the government and its evaluation by the electorate. If the key to post-incumbency success in these cases is staying in the pre-election coalition, then this strategic position may impose a rather different set of conditions on their operation in government. On the one hand, the Greens’ bargaining power may not be very great if their coalition partners, through their unilateral action, could condemn the Greens to an uncertain fate as an extra-parliamentary force. On the other hand, these coalition partners will only have an interest in continuing the arrangement if they believe that they will derive some benefit from it. The smaller the Greens are or are becoming, the less attractive it will be to enter costly compromises to keep them in government. Here, other elections, in particular European and regional/local elections, where the Greens are able to prove their strength independently, can become important factors.

In the other three countries, the strategic conditions of the Greens are rather different. They have entered parliament, and government, on their own steam, and they have to fight subsequent elections on their own. This could mean a higher bargaining strength, but also, perhaps, higher expectations from their voters about what they could achieve. There are some differences in the detailed electoral conditions that also could have important effects on the Greens’ post-incumbency electoral performance. In Additional Member Systems (AMS) with a 5% threshold as the one employed in Germany, the electoral performance of the smaller coalition partner can depend very heavily on Leihstimmen (‘borrowed votes’) from the supporters of the large coalition partner. As none of the two major parties is likely to win an outright majority, it is often far more important for the large coalition partner to ensure the electoral survival of its smaller partner than to maximise its own vote. This provides an incentive to split the two votes: some supporters of the larger coalition partner will only cast the first vote (for the constituency party candidate) for ‘their’ party candidate, and give the second (decisive) vote to the party of the small coalition partner to ensure that it surpasses the 5% hurdle. In particular the FDP has benefited from split voting in the past. Whether or not the Greens can benefit from it very much depends on the alternative coalition options of the larger coalition partner. In the case of Germany, the (re)emergence of the FDP as a potential coalition partner of the SPD is playing
an important role in political strategy. Where the Greens are the only coalition partner available, they can benefit from ‘borrowed’ second votes of the SPD: in the case of Schleswig-Holstein, the February 2000 regional elections have illustrated that point: without the borrowed SDP votes cast to ensure a continuation of the SPD-led coalition, the Greens would not have been able to gain representation.

These examples underline an important point: coalitions are not just made in government. The typology developed by Vernon Bogdanor (1983, p. 4), distinguishing between various types of electoral, parliamentary and governmental coalitions, is particularly relevant here. A strong linkage between all three types of coalition, as in Italy and France, can protect the Greens in some circumstances, but might also expose them if the political climate turns against the coalition or if the major coalition partners see more costs than benefits in maintaining the coalition.

Another feature that might be important is the personalised nature of PR voting in Belgium and Finland. In Belgium, voters can, in Finland, voters must choose between different candidates of the same party. In a post-incumbency ‘blame game’ there may be strong incentives for the Greens to distance themselves from their role in government, voting for particular candidates may thus allow ‘Greens’ to vote ‘green’ but at the same time express criticism or approval of its governmental performance by voting or not voting for particular candidates.

The second type of factor that might affect post-incumbency performance concerns the internal life of green parties. To what extent do Greens develop strategic capabilities to make the best use of their opportunities? To what extent are they able to communicate effectively, and thus win the ‘blame game’? The communicative challenge for Greens is quite difficult. They have to demonstrate that they can achieve something in government, but at the same time they have to defend and justify their compromises; they have to demonstrate political credibility while at the same time maintain public support on core green issues and mobilise that support in elections.

The choice of issues as key bargaining topics during coalition negotiations is likely to be crucial; the Greens need a combination of ‘winning issues’ to demonstrate that they are making a difference, and long-term core issues to motivate continuing support in government and beyond. In government, green parties also are likely to be more under the spot-light of public attention on economic issues. The type of issues green parties select to fight on might thus be an important element in assessing the electoral performance of greens after government.

Another important internal factor is internal party organisation. As advocates of ‘grass roots democracy’, green parties started life with rather unconventional, decentralised organisational structures. Many elements of these structures already came under pressure before entering government in efforts to improve the electoral competitiveness of Greens. As incumbent government members, the communicative challenge is perhaps even stronger, and a series of attempts
have been made to change aspects of green party organisation to make them fit for government. To what extent post-incumbency success of Greens is related to the success or failure of internal party reform is an interesting empirical question that has not been systematically researched (but see Rihoux 2000).

I have raised a large number of questions and formulated potential hypotheses to be pursued. The empirical evidence we have available only allows us to shed some light on a small number of them. In this paper, I concentrate on establishing first the effects of green incumbency. On the basis of the evidence available, one may speculate on the likely plausibility of particular explanations. I will now first look at the electoral performance of green parties, and then go to discuss polling evidence.

**Post-Incumbency Electoral Performance**

How well have green parties done at the ballot box after they entered government? In Table 1, I have compiled the results of green parties since 1987 in the five countries which currently have Greens in government. The first impression is that there is no uniform development in the fortunes of green parties over the last ten years. It appears that national factors play an important role in determining the ups and downs of green fortunes at particular times. Admittedly, the inclusion of European elections in which green parties do generally rather better than in national elections may artificially increase the degree of volatility displayed, but the differences in national fortunes are clear to see.

--- Table 1 about here ---

Overall, the Italian Greens appear to have the smallest degree of public support. Their best result at the European elections of 1989 was the combined result of two lists. Their subsequent merger did not succeed in maintaining their combined electoral strength, and electoral support for new united green federation could not break out of a narrow 2-3% band. The Italian Greens thus appeared to be decline well before their role in government began. The change in electoral system that was brought about by the collapse of the Italian party system produced a major challenge to their survival. The system adopted first for the 1994 elections combined a first-past-the-post system electing 75% of Italian deputies with a proportional element elected the remaining 25%. But as the threshold for obtaining seats in the proportional part of the elections was set at 4%, this represented a formidable challenge for a party that had never obtained this level of support before. It was thus absolutely vital for the Greens to be able to join an alliance with other parties, making green candidates the representative of the main left-wing alliance in enough constituencies to ensure representation in parliament. In 1994 and 1996, the Greens were successful with this strategy, in both cases failing by quite a wide margin to attain the 4% needed to obtain seats in their own right in the proportional representation part
of the election (Mény and Knapp 1998, p. 53). Since entering government in 1996 as part of the Ulivo alliance, the only national test they faced were the European elections of 1999. Here, they obtained their worst result ever in a national election, 1.8%, which indicates that their long-term decline since the late 1980s appears to have continued. In 1999, the Greens clearly were not helped by a strong showing of their old rival, Pannella’s Radical Party which benefited from its European list being headed by the high-profile Emma Bonino (Natale 1999).

The other main loser of the 1999 European elections were the German Greens who were quite content just to make it again into the European Parliament by scoring above 5%. Their result of 6.4% was marginally down on their 1998 General Election result, although it was achieved on a much lower turnout. In the German case, we can detect a fairly steady downward spiral that set in just before the 1998 elections and has continued unabated after the Greens entered federal government with the SPD. This is also demonstrated by regional election results since early 1998. In every regional election, the Greens have been losing votes (see Figure 1).

--- Figure 1 about here ---

The link between incumbency and electoral performance is, however, rather tenuous. At the time of the 1998 General Election, the Greens were coalition partners of the SPD in four German Länder: Hesse, Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg, and Northrhine-Westfalia. The Greens spectacularly lost the Hesse elections in February 1999 which resulted not only in the Red-Green coalition being replaced by a CDU/FDP government but also to the loss of the SPD/Green majority in the German Upper House, the Bundesrat. The Greens lost quite heavily in all other remaining regional elections of 1999 where they had either been in opposition or not been represented in the parliament at all: Bremen, Brandenburg, Saarland, Thuringia, Saxony, and Berlin. Also in Schleswig-Holstein, in February 2000 at the height of the CDU party finance scandal, the Greens could not avoid losing almost 2%, despite a massive mobilisaton of resources from the national party in an effort to stem the tide against the Greens. Fortunately for the Greens, these losses were light enough for them to re-enter the parliament and continue their coalition with the SPD. One important factors that helped them was the introduction of a two-vote AMS system, allowing vote splitting that worked in favour of both the SPD and the Greens as the reelection of the sitting government was high on the agenda of voters.  

Also in Northrhine-Westphalian elections, in May 2000, the Greens managed to hang on in government despite losing votes in the elections. Here, the problem was more a personality conflict between SPD-Premier Clement and Green agriculture and environment minister Bärbel Höhn who barely remained on speaking terms after a prolonged conflict over the future of the Garzweiler II.

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lignite mining project. Clement won that fight, but seemed frustrating at constant backbiting and conflictuous behaviour from the Green coalition partner. After the election, Clement theoretically had the possibility to form a government with the Free Democrats who, under their media star Jürgen W. Möllemann, had re-entered the Landtag in force. While Clement might have preferred a coalition with the FDP, the SPD nationally was unwilling to send such a strong signal of an intention to change coalition partner. Presumably under pressure from Schröder, Clement reluctantly entered a rather grim negotiation process in which the Greens seemed willing to accept almost any compromise to stay in power. The result was a renewal of the SPD-Green coalition. Compared with the turmoil of the first coalition period, the second has been rather uneventful. Apart form the tricky Garzweiler issue which poisoned the atmosphere in the coalition, the 1995 election had brought a number of ‘fundamentalists’ or ‘left’ greens into the regional parliament who had strongly attacked many of the compromises the party leadership had made. None of these internal critics has been re-elected, essentially because they had been frozen out of promising list positions by the party activists, and thus the constant criticism from within the green coalition partner has effectively disappeared.

Looking at the post-incumbency vote at regional level in Germany, the picture is quite mixed also before 1998. Table 2 shows the fate of the Greens in all post-incumbency regional elections. In only three cases, Hesse in 1995, Schleswig-Holstein in 2000 and Northrhine-Westfalia in 2000, the Greens continued in government after a period of incumbency. But the loss of government is not necessarily linked to a loss of votes; instead, we can observe a very mixed picture.

---- Table 2 about here ---

While the German Greens appear to be suffering quite a serious electoral crisis at present, the data tell a rather different story for both France and Finland. In France, the party and its electorate appears to have seen the 1997 entry into parliament and government at one stroke as a major success. The Greens have not suffered at the polls and have been able to benefit from the generally favourable evaluation that the French public has made of the Jospin government. Since entering government in 1997, the Greens have faced two major electoral tests. One were the regional elections of 1998. The Greens had done extremely well in the previous regional elections in 1992: Les Verts had achieved 7.19%, its electoral rival Generation Ecologie 7.09%, with a total green vote (including various independent ecologist candidates) of 14.7% nationally and 212 regional councillors elected under the Proportional Representation system employed for these elections. (Boy et al. 1995). One Green (Les Verts), Marie-Christine Blandin, was elected President of the Region of Nord-Pas-de-Calais. Since then, the green scene had changed markedly. The 1992 success led to the two major green parties, Les Verts and Generation Ecologie (GE), to present a joint list in the 1993 National Assembly elections. After failing to achieve a breakthrough with no green representatives elected in 1993, this alliance fell apart. And within Les Verts, those advocating
a political alliance with the Left joined enough strength to change the party’s main electoral strategy, with those disagreeing with this change around Antoine Waechter leaving the party to form another group, the Mouvement Ecologistes Independants (MEI). The new alliance with the Socialists was put into practice in the National Assembly elections of 1997 when the PS did not contest 29 constituencies in exchange for the Greens fielding no candidates in 106. As a result, eight green representatives were elected (Boy 1997).

The Greens in 1998 had to contest the regional elections against GE, MEI and a range of other independent groups and parties claiming to be the true representative of the green movement. The independent ecologists only scored 2.8% nationally, just winning 7 seats (GE 3 seats, MEI 2 seats, others 2 seats). Les Verts did somewhat better, claiming 5.7% nationally and 70 regional council seats. In the cantonal elections taking place at the same time, the green score was 7.6% (1992: 11.1%, 1994: 7.8). Compared with 1992, these results were quite creditable, but they again indicated that the levels of support in the late 1990s cannot match the green record of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The second major electoral test were the European elections of June 1999. Here, the Greens faced competition from a list headed by Antoine Waechter of MEI. As their head of list, the Greens had recruited Daniel Cohn-Bendit, who had come to prominence in the 1968 student movement and who had played a leading role in the German Greens, associated with the Realo wing of the party whose leading light is his close friend Joschka Fischer. Cohn-Bendit fought a very visible campaign, for example openly challenging the French nuclear industry. While some of his actions may have been seen with concern by the party leadership anxious not to alienate their coalition partners, they appeared to provide a platform to secure a good European result. The Greens’ result, a very good 10.8%, could be seen a personal triumph for Cohn-Bendit rather than a judgement on the achievements of the Greens in the Jospin government. On the other hand, surveys have generally shown that the Green environment minister, Dominique Voynet, still has a substantially more positive standing amongst voters, including green voters. Daniel Boy has argued that the Greens did so well in 1999 because of their loyalty in government, making them an acceptable choice for many former Socialist voters (Boy 1999).

Finally, in 2001, the Greens did very well in the municipal elections in France. There are no national share of the votes reported for these elections, but overall, the Greens did extremely well in supporting the lists of the ‘gauche plurielle’, becoming more vital than ever for the Socialists as an ally to help them win elections. In terms of outright wins, the Greens did not score any sensational successes. They had one mayor and now have two. Dominique Voynet was head of a ‘gauche plurielle’ list, and thus effectively candidate for mayor, in Dole but lost quite decisively.

Most successful as Greens in government in electoral terms have been the Finnish Greens. After four years of government participation, the Greens

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4 These results are taken from the website of the French Greens, http://www.verts.imaginet.fr/regionales.html.
managed to increase their share of the vote in the national elections of 1999, and re-entered the government again for a further four year period. Also the 1999 European election brought a very good result for the Greens. The relatively poor showing of their presidential candidate in 2000 does not appear to be indicative of any loss of the support for the party as its poll standing remains stable. In addition, the Green also polled very well in local elections in 2000: the national share of the vote was 7.7%. In 1996, shortly after entering national government, the result had 6.3% which had been marginally down on the 1992 result of 6.9%.

One aspects of the Finnish electoral system is that it employs open lists, i.e. voters vote not only for a party but they vote for individual candidates on a party list, and the share of a party’s overall vote going to individual candidate determines who of which party list is actually elected to parliament. This system provides for the opportunity to express a personal choice which also party leaders and government ministers have to submit themselves to. In the case of the Greens, it is not unusual for their ‘leaders’ to fail at the ballot box. In 1999, the Green Environment Minister in office since 1995 failed to be elected to parliament. The green voter in Finland thus had the opportunity to express his/her dissatisfaction with individual party members in a very individual way, without necessarily voting against the green party as a whole. This particular device could help the Greens in Finland. In terms of the ‘blame game’, it can be left to the voters to decide whether the green government performance is approved of. That is not an option in closed-list PR systems such as the one employed in Germany.

The Belgian Greens are the most recent arrival in federal government. After national elections coinciding with the European elections, the Greens entered government in June 1999. They have not had to face any national electoral test since, apart from local elections, but the opinion poll rating since taking office suggests continuingly high public support. The Belgian Greens certainly benefited from the general confidence crisis in Belgian government that had arisen over the 1990s, particularly since the Dutroux affair of 1996. In particular Ecolo developed a strong profile in this context. The 1999 elections saw a general shift away from the two big blocs that had dominated government, and the Greens benefited from this. In the immediate context of the European elections, a scandal over food safety also raised a specific environmental issue. Hooghe and Rihoux (2000) furthermore point to the more professional campaigning style that the Green parties adopted for the 1999 campaign.

Polling Evidence

If one looks at the development of the poll standing of green parties over the years, the evidence generally supports the electoral record of green parties. But

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6 We are grateful to several people for helping us to acquire opinion poll data; they include Benoît Rihoux, Mario Diani, Hannu Ilkas, Renato Mannheimer, Patrick Dumont and Tim Bale.
the poll evidence allows us in some cases to evaluate more closely how popular or unpopular the Greens have become after recent elections.

The green party most troubled by its governmental experience appear to be the German Greens (see Figure 2). Their poll rating has declined quite sharply since early in 1998. While the Greens enjoyed steady support in the 10-12% range in the mid-1990s, in 1998 they dropped to the level of a 5-7% party, perilously close to the 5% hurdle. And the Greens have not been able to break out of that band, not even in the wake of the CDU party finance scandal or Renate Künast’s ministerial. While the Greens in March 2001 had two of the three most popular politicians in Germany in their ranks, the Politbarometer survey found a slightly more positive public mood towards the Greens but no evidence of a higher green vote.7

--- Figure 2 about here ---

At the other end of the spectrum, we can observe the cases of Finland (Figure 3) and Belgium (Figure 4). The Finnish case is perhaps the most remarkable. After a first high point at the time of the rise of European issues in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Greens had entered something of a decline in the mid-1990s, and their 1995 result of 6.4% came right the end of this downturn. However, their subsequent entry into government appears to have boosted their popularity. After the initial burst of enthusiasm, the poll rating declined somewhat, but continued to be stable and ensure an even better result in the 1999 parliamentary election, confirming their role in government. Since then, the Greens have gone from strength to strength, with marked increases in their poll standing in late 2000 which appear to be continuing into 2001.

--- Figure 3 about here ---

The development of the Belgian Greens follows a somewhat similar pattern. In the mid-1990s, their fortunes appeared to be in decline as environmental issues receded from the agenda; but they picked up support starting in 1996 in the specific circumstances of the crisis of the Belgian state that came to dominate Belgian politics at that time. The boost of support peaked before the 1999 elections when support for Greens appeared to be receding. The 1999 election result, however, lifted green support again to a higher level. Since then, the polls available suggests the Greens are stabilising around the election figures. There are some important differences between the regions: while AGALEV is holding its position fairly steadily at the level of the election result, ECOLO could achieve further growth in its poll rating. This is particularly pronounced in Brussels where its rise is continuing into 2001, while in Wallonia the initial rise has now stopped, and recent polls show a light decline, returning ECOLO here to its 1999 election result level.

--- Figure 4 about here ---

7 For results of Politbarometer surveys, see http://www.zdf.msnbc.de
France is another green success story, a remarkable turnout after the disappointments of previous years. On the basis of the BVA surveys published in Paris Match, it is difficult to judge the exact level of support for Les Verts before the 1997 elections because only figures for all ecologist candidates are reported. For about a year after the 1997 elections, no legislative polling results are reported either. But starting in 1998, there is good time series of data available with monthly figures for both Les Verts, as part of the government coalition, and for other ecologist candidates that are not allied with the Jospin government.

The Les Verts figures since 1998 are quite respectable. The Greens peaked in 1999 around the European elections, but since then have kept a fairly steady level of support between 6 and 8%. With that type of popular support, the Greens will be in a good position to reach a good deal with the Socialists and improve their representation in the National Assembly in 2002.

--- Figure 5 about here ---

Turning to Italy, this is a case where the polling evidence holds little comfort for the Greens. The ISPO poll data reported in Figure 6 show a remarkable level of volatility over a ten year period. While the Greens occasionally manage to reach heights of five to six percent ratings, their standing has declined markedly since 1998. Consulting figures produced by other polling organisations for 2000 and the beginning of 2001, this decline appears to be continuing. Polling data for the Greens by the CIRM agency from October 2000 to February 2001 shows them hovering between 2.5 and 1.5%, the later figure being reached in both January and February 2001.

--- Figure 6 about here ---

In February 2001, the Greens formed an electoral alliance with the Social Democrats, another mini-party who support level, according to CIRM, stood at 0.5% in February 2001. Another polling organisation, DATAMEDIA, published some first polling result for the new Green/Social Democrat alliance called ‘Il Girasole’, the sunflower. The figures for 12 March 2001 are 2.5%, for 19 March 2001 2.0%, so at present there is little indication of a bonus effect as a result of the new alliance.\(^8\)

**Comparison ‘Coalition’ vs Toleration**

One potential way of assessing the impact of involvement in coalitions is to compare the poll ratings of green parties that are part of coalition governments with green parties that are only supporting minority governments. The main argument against coalitions is that green parties have to take responsibility for the programme of the entire government. Where Greens lose out in negotiations with their coalition partners, they usually still are expected to

\(^8\) All CIRM and DATAMEDIA results are reported at http://www.sondaggipoliticoelettorali.it
defend the results of the negotiations. This is one possible source of electoral support as traditional green supporters turn away in disappointment.

For parties ‘tolerating’ a government, this problem should not arise. Their support for a government is more limited, tied to particular policy for example, and the Greens would have some considerable leeway to take their stance on key policy issues, even if that clashes with the approach taken by the government. The ‘toleration’ model thus might offer the best of two worlds: all the benefits of being ‘relevant’ and having an impact, and having to take no responsibility for the unpopular government policies.

--- Figure 7 around here ---

Looking at the case of Sweden (Figure 7), we have a fairly long time series for the poll standing of the Swedish Greens going back to the 1980s. But the result is rather disappointing. The Greens are just going along fairly steady in 2000 and early 2001, normally about the 4% mark which, of course, is crucial because that is the threshold to be taken to secure representation. So there is no evidence from the Swedish case to suggest that ‘toleration’ necessarily leads to greater support.

--- Figure 8 about here ---

Also the case of New Zealand is by no means conclusive (see Figure 8). Here, the data available are much poorer than in the Swedish case, with only two time points immediately before the General Election. During 2000, polling levels remained stable between 4% and 5%. This is not disastrous, but indicates that the ‘toleration’ agreement certainly has not led to a major boost of support for the Greens.

**Future Research**

The analysis I have been able to present is really very basic. What else could be done? First, it would be interesting to compare the development of poll ratings of all green parties in- and out of government. Some green parties out of government are doing extremely well at the moment. So, for example the Austrian Greens, currently have a rating of 13%, well up on their latest election results and potentially the source of a Red-Green majority in Austria. Simple comparisons of poll ratings, however, are probably of little value. To compare like with like, one would need to compare the development of a green party under similar background conditions, as defined, for example, by economic variables and indications of issue salience. This implies the construction a basic model of green electoral support and its variation over time. Time series analysis would certainly offer several opportunities for the analysis of both national and cross-national variation over time. This might be a first step to isolate the impact of ‘incumbency’.

A second possibility would be to use cross-sectional data on voting intentions to analyse the impact of incumbency. In Rüdiger and Franklin (2000), some first

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9 See [http://www.news.at](http://www.news.at)
results using the European election study data from 1999 were reported. One interesting variable to look at here was the potential voting variable pioneered by the European election study (see Van der Eijk and Franklin 1996). Comparing ‘potential’ green voting in 1999 with 1994, in Germany, Belgium and Finland, the data provide strong evidence that the German Greens are suffering most under their role as government parties. Two Fifth of all German voters in 1999 could not imagine ever voting for the Greens in national elections. The contrast to the Finnish Greens is particularly stark: the Finns enjoy much stronger potential support and are only completely rejected by 20% of the voters.

Another variable analysed was the between green party support and evaluation of government policy. Both the French and the Finnish potential green vote was found to be essentially independent of any particular evaluation of governmental performance. That is not the case for the German Greens: their potential voters are supportive of the government’s immigration policy, for example, but remain critical of environmental policy.

There are many other possibilities to use cross-sectional data to shed more light on changes in green voting. The Eurobarometer data may in future be used to track changes in green voting patterns and allow us pinpoint the sources of green voting loss (or increase) more precisely.

Conclusions

The main result of our study of the electoral impact of government incumbency of green parties is that there is substantial variation in national experiences, and that German case of uniform decline is not typical for green parties in government.

In line with previous general studies of the role of incumbency for coalition governments (Rose and Mackie 1983; Müller and Strøm 1997), there is no clear-cut effect of incumbency one way or the other in the case of the greens. Also in the green case, incumbency itself is thus not likely to be sufficient to predict green electoral fortunes: green governments have been ‘re-elected’ in Finland, and in two German Länder. Government participation clearly thus not pose an insurmountable challenge.

The challenge remains to explain these substantial differences in green government experience. One can speculate about the influence of many different variables. In most cases, we do not as yet have the data to test potential hypotheses. The results we have available suggest that the type of green involvement in government does not appear to be crucial. Greens in pre-electoral coalitions can be very popular (France) or unpopular (Italy). Even keeping a distance from government by only tolerating a minority government does not guarantee rising voting support (Sweden, Finland).

There are many possible hypotheses of how to explain the stark contrasts
between Finland and Belgium, where the Greens have been rising in the polls, and Germany which provides a picture of almost complete doom and gloom. Is it expectations, personalities, policies, internal structure, the type of green voter or external factors like economic conditions or issue salience? Is there a set formula to combine governmental participation and electoral success? That seems unlikely, but the explanation of these variations of green fortunes in government remain a fascinating challenge for future green research.
REFERENCES


FIGURES

Table 1: Green Electoral Performance 1987-2000*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Election</th>
<th>Country Type ¹</th>
<th>Italy</th>
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<td>3.3</td>
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</table>

*Bold underlined election results signify the beginning of national government participation.

1) EE European Elections, PARL National Parliamentary Elections, PRES Presidential Elections.
2) Combined national results of ECOLO and AGALEV.
3) Combined result of two competing lists, Federazione dei Verdi 3.8%, Verdi Arcobaleno (Rainbow Greens) 2.4%
4) Combined result of Die Grünen in West and East Germany and Bündnis ’90 in East Germany. 1987 and 1989 results for West Germany only.
5) Combined result of Les Verts and Generation Ecologie; in 1993, both parties formed an alliance with only one green candidate in most constituencies; in 1994, both parties competed against each other: Les Verts 2.9%; Generation Ecologie 2.0%.
6) Result for Les Verts as part of the Socialist Bloc; other independent ecologist candidates obtained 2.7%.
7) Result for the list Daniel Cohn-Bendit (Les Verts). A rival ecological list, headed by Antoine Waechter (Mouvement des écologistes indépendants MEI) polled 1.5%.

Sources: Green Party websites.

Table 2: Electoral Impact of Green Land Government Incumbency 1985-2001
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Partner(s)</th>
<th>Year(s)</th>
<th>Result (Change)</th>
<th>Election Status</th>
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<td>1989-90</td>
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<td>SPD</td>
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<td>-2.9%</td>
<td>Government</td>
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</table>

Notes:
1) The SPD formed a minority government in 1983, ‘tolerated’ by the Greens. In 1985, the Greens entered a formal coalition.
2) New elections necessary to elect a new parliament for a unified Berlin.
3) First figure compares 1990 combined result of the Greens and Alliance ’90 for the unified Berlin with the 1989 result of the Greens for West Berlin; the second figure compares the votes of the Greens of West Berlin in 1989 with the Greens/Alliance ’90 vote in West Berlin only.
4) In 1990, Bündnis ’90 and the Greens were separate parties that competed in the Brandenburg elections against each other, with Bündnis ’90 (Alliance ’90) entering parliament with 6.42% of the vote and forming a coalition with the SPD. The Greens scored only 2.84% and were not represented. In 1993, Alliance ’90 and the Greens joined together at federal level to form a new party, Alliance ’90/The Greens, also competed in Brandenburg as one party in 1994. The figure given is the change between the 1994 result and the combination of both parties’ results from 1990.
5) Minority government, tolerated by the PDS (Ex-Communists).

Figure 1: Change of Share of the Vote for German Greens in National and Regional Elections, 1998-2001

Source: Focus, No. 10, 4 March 2000, p. 21; Der Spiegel, 12 March 2001; http://www.wahlrecht.de
Figure 2: German Greens Poll Standing 1996-2001

Source: Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, Politbarometer [as complied in http://www.wahlrecht.de]
Figure 3: Finnish Green Poll Standing, 1987-2001

Sources: Taloustutkimus Oy (Finnish opinion poll institute); 1987-1996 data provided by Hannu Ilkas, Taloustutkimus Oy; data from 1996 to February 2000 as compiled in http://www.verkkouutiset.fi. Data from March 2000 to March 2001 are Taloustutkimus poll results, supplied by Rusto Kankaanpää of Vihrea Liitto by email, 5 April 2001.
1) Figures were compiled separately for Belgium’s three federal regions. In Wallonia, the data represent the figures for the party ECOLO and in Flanders for AGALEV.
For Brussels, only figures for ECOLO are available; in Flemish speaking parts, AGALEV would be the ecological representative but their votes are only available as part of aggregated figure for other parties. [Brussels is about 90% French speaking].
The data given for May 1995 and June 1999 are the actual parliamentary election results.

Source: Data compiled from La Libre Belgique (Walloon daily newspaper) by Patrick Dumont and Pierre Baudewyns, Université Catholique de Louvain (Unité de Science Politique et de Relations Internationales; Point d’appui Interuniversitaire sur l’Opinion publique et la Politique (PIOP)).
Figure 5: French Greens Poll Standing, 1994-2001

In the period from December 1994 to March 1996, the BVA results as reported in Paris Match report results separately for Génération Écologie and Les Verts. From April 1996 onwards to the May 1997 elections, the BVA survey only reports results for a category ‘écologistes’, thus making it impossible to distinguish between the support for Les Verts, allied with the Socialists, and other, independent ecological candidates. Between May 1997 and October 1998, Paris Match does not report any voting intention data. From November 1998 to May 1999, the data reported refers to voting intention for the 1999 European elections. Since June 1999, the data reported refer to voting intentions in legislative (National Assembly) elections. Since October 1998, BVA reports separate voting intention results for Les Verts, as part of the ‘majorité plurielle’ government coalition, and for ‘other ecological candidates’. The ‘all green’ results plotted are the sum of both figures to allow comparison to the pre-1997 period.

Figure 6: Italian Greens Poll Standing, 1994-2000

Source: Data compiled by Instituto per gli Studi sulla Pubblica Opinione (IPSO), supplied by Professor Roberto Mannheimer, IPSO, Milan.
Figure 7: Poll Standing Miljöpartiet, 1987-2001

Figure 8: New Zealand Green Party, Poll Standing November 1999-December 2000