Mass media, party manifestos and governmental agreements in Belgium in the 1990s: an exploratory Qualitative Comparative (QCA) and regression analysis

1 The research project « Political Agenda Setting in Belgium » was granted by the SSTC / DWTC (Belgian Federal Services for Scientific, Technical and Cultural Affairs). It was carried out by S. Walgrave (coordinator, UA), L. De Winter (promoter, UCL), P. Stouthuysen (promoter, VUB) and M. Swyngedouw (promoter, KUL).
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Introduction

[Introduction will be completed in spoken presentation]

Mass media effects on the political agenda are still a hotly debated topic. The problem is that there is seldom data which really allows one to try and test the presence of such (direct or indirect effects) – hence the question is still broad open.

The aim of this paper is to try and evaluate the direct effects of the media on the governmental agenda (the coalition agreement), but also its indirect effects (through its impact on the elaboration of party electoral programmes) and to identify potential interaction effects of the media and parties on the governmental agreement. To pursue this aim, we have very rich data at our disposal: fine-grained data covering several agendas in the Belgian context, from 1990 to 2000.

This paper also pursues a methodological agenda: try to exploit QCA (Qualitative Comparative Analysis) for an exploratory analysis, and see what it brings out in contrast with some regression analyses.

Both on the substantive and methodological side, we should stress that this is an exploratory paper. Many of the analyses are still tentative and incomplete. Our intention is to revise and prolong them soon on the basis of the discussions in the Uppsala workshop.

1. Review of relevant theoretical and empirical literature

According to Bartels (1993: 267), ‘the state of research on media effects is one of the most notable embarrassments of modern social science’. The earliest studies of campaign communication (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944) set the main brand of empirical research in the field: media effects on electoral choice (and more generally on public opinion). Both these seminal analyses and following contributions concluded that the direct effects of the media on electoral behaviour were minimal: media only reinforce pre-existing preferences of voters for a party or a candidate, they do not make them change their mind; while floating voters on the other hand cannot be said to be influenced in their choices either, as they appear to be much less attentive to the news media than the predisposed voters. Although these studies were originally performed on panel surveys in the U.S., and despite advances in research designs and methods, contemporary empirical research in European countries came to similar results (Curtice and Semetko 1994). There thus seems to be a clear disjuncture between these findings and how elites perceive the impact of the media on public opinion, as politicians engage in ever more professionalized, media-oriented campaigns.

One of the reasons why elites do consider that the media have a strong impact on public opinion may well be their role in terms of agenda setter: the media may not be powerful enough to tell people what to think, but may be successful in telling people what to think about (Cohen 1963). Although agenda-setting research in the U.S. has provided some

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2 The ‘minimal effects’ or ‘reinforcement, not change’ thesis also seems to hold in terms of public cognition (political knowledge) or attitudes (like trust in politicians), as no significant positive or negative effect has yet been documented on the basis of panel surveys.

3 And, while in power, increasingly recourse to ‘spin-doctors’ in order to improve their image in the media.
empirical support for the hypothesis that issues that are most prominent in the news media are also those considered as the most important in public opinion, this claim has still to be empirically validated in other political settings. According to Semetko (1996), this is because the U.S. party system is much weaker than the party systems of western Europe. Hence, journalists have more discretion in the setting up of the campaign agenda and politicians less opportunities to influence it because U.S. politics is not all about partisan politics (Semetko et al. 1991). The few empirical analyses of media effects on the political agenda and on the reverse causal relationship (political agenda effects on media contents) rather than on public opinion we know about indeed show that national media contents in the U.S. had more influence on the executive branch and congressional activities than the other way round (Bartels 1996), whilst the political agenda had a greater influence on the media agenda than the inverse in the Netherlands (Kleinnijenhuis and Rietberg al. 1995). Despite Semetko’s warnings about the likelihood of poor results for studies of media agenda setting direct effects on perceptions of issue salience by other actors, especially in countries where the party system is strong, we want to investigate such media effects on political official discourse in Belgium. We find this kind of study challenging and exciting for two main reasons. First, as proved by reviews of past agenda setting research and recalled by Walgrave, Nuytemans and De Winter (2004), not much is yet known about media effects on the political agenda. Second, based on our knowledge of the Belgian case we argue if we are able to find evidence of media effect, in terms of changes in issue priorities, on party and/or governmental agendas in that country, such an agenda setting power is likely to be greater in other political settings or using broader conceptions of agenda setting.

Hence, the aim of this paper is to evaluate the direct effects of the media on the governmental agenda (the coalition agreement), but also its indirect effects (through its impact on the elaboration of party electoral programmes) and to identify potential interaction effects of the media and parties on the governmental agreement. Before going on presenting the agendas we will work on, specifying models and theories that may guide our analysis, deriving hypotheses or addressing methodological questions, let us first make clear what this paper is not about.

First, even though we are aware that parties and candidates can be important sources of news during electoral campaigns, and that they may even influence the contents of the media even in non-electoral campaign times, we will not try to systematically assess the political agendas’ impact on media content in this paper, but rather consider media as a ‘pure’ independent variable affecting both the governmental agenda (direct effects) and the party agenda (in order to address potential indirect or interaction effects on the governmental agenda). The main model we have in mind is thus a bottom-up model inspired by representative democracy theories: although political parties can be seen as representative of ‘the political agenda’ at large, they are also, much akin to the media, attentive to real-world events and issues put forward by pressure groups, social movements, etc. and both can thus be seen as reflecting somehow public discourse. In this paper, we want to measure both the effects of the media on the two ‘political agendas’ (parties and government) and the effects of both ‘low agendas’

4 Notice that Semetko (1996) argues that the lack of convincing evidence for this hypothesis is also partly due to the fact that the notion of agenda setting as ‘media effects on public perceptions of issue salience’ is too narrow to be operative.

5 Apart from reliance on the minimal concept of Granger causality, not much of these two analyses is comparable (time periods, issues, operationalizations of the ‘political agenda’ are different). The results, such as the negative effect of the media agenda on the political (party) agenda whilst the inversed relation showed a positive link in the Netherlands, nevertheless appear quite clear.

6 Kleinnijenhuis and Rietberg (1995) used this kind of data (proportions of issue emphasis in party programmes) as their ‘political agenda’ variable.
(media and parties) on our ultimate ‘high agenda’ (governmental). In other words, although we will try to disentangle media and party effects on the governmental agreement but also look for potential interaction effects, the question of the influence of party manifestos on the media will not treated as such in this paper.

Second, although the question of the effectiveness of electoral representation and responsive government is at hand, the evidence presented here will be indirect, since direct indicators of voters’ or public opinion preferences are absent of the analysis. Hence, the first step that would be to check the congruence in terms of issue priorities between citizens and either the media or the political parties will not be scrutinized. As explained by Walgrave, Nuytemans and De Winter (2004), this is due to the lack of public opinion surveys asking the standard question of the ‘most important problem’. We will thus concentrate on the next step, that is the influence of the media and party manifestos as partially reflecting public opinion priorities on government.

Third, this paper does not tackle the question of ‘media effect’ or ‘partisan effect’ on governmental action (outputs and outcomes, that may take the form of decisions of the Council of ministers, legislation, budgets or real-life socio-economic indicators in a period during which a given government is in power) but rather on what the components of the government have agreed on as a declaration of intent for the whole legislature at the time of the formation of the government. As there are contrasting views on the role of coalition agreements (‘real policy agendas’ versus simple ‘window dressing’, see below), our conclusions in terms of media and party influence cannot a priori be generalized to the field of government outputs and outcomes. If coalition agreements are mere symbolic politics, we would expect, according to existing empirical analyses, that media influence would more important on these documents than on government real actions. Conversely, we would expect party influence to be more important on government actions than on the ‘symbolic’ government agreement, despite the fact that party manifestos can be considered as rhetoric exercises as well. In any case, due to their location in the policy cycle process (issue identification and solution formation), party manifestos and coalition agreements are likely to be more affected by the media agenda than governmental actions (policy adoption and implementation) are (Linsky 1986).

1.1. Media effect on party programmes (model 1, see below)

The study of the contents of party programmes received a boost with the emergence of rational choice theories of party competition and electoral behaviour, most notably Downs’
seminal *Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957) that suggests that political parties adapt their electoral messages according to the existing or changing preferences of the voters, in order to gain more support. In order to test spatial models of party competition according to which party policies will converge to the position of the median voter or the proximity hypothesis of electoral behaviour, measures of party positions were needed. Because party manifestos are the most authoritative statements of parties’ policy positions (as they are usually endorsed by sovereign party bodies, they bind all members of the party and thus reduce uncertainty for voters and potential partners on the behaviour of party representatives in power), analyzing the contents of these documents seemed to be the best way to measure such a position. But the assumed rationality of parties in attempting to maximize their vote or office-seeking goals depends on their good knowledge of public opinion positions. The same goes for the assumed rationality of voters in trying to maximize their policy preferences by voting for the party that is the closest to these preferences: are voters sophisticated or informed enough to make these rational choices? A number of empirical analyses show that it is usually not the case, and the usefulness of party manifestos in terms of information provided to voters is also questionable due to the tiny proportion of voters who read these documents.

Proponents of manifesto data research (Budge et al. 2001; Klingemann et al. 1994) respond that party programmes are publicized official documents that are read by commentators and journalists and party preferences are thus brought to the public through the media during electoral campaigns.\(^9\) Kleinnijenhuis and De Ridder however warn that ‘the news reflect party programmes, but it is not their mirror image’ (1998: 414) as the daily news is shaped by the campaign tactics and dynamics that are considered as newsworthy by journalists and press owners, and to a much lesser extent by the saliency of issues in the different programmes. What is of interest in the present paper is that the causal relationship may well work in the opposite direction in non-campaign periods: party leaders and drafters of party manifestos may be informed about public opinion preferences and perceptions of real-world events through the media and elaborate their programmes accordingly. Parties would then be responsive to public opinion through the media.

Yet, the alternative to rational choice theories on party competition and electoral behaviour, that points to long-standing cleavages and party alignment (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Bartolini and Mair 1990), also posits an important convergence between public opinion and party position. Opposing these two brands of literature on this specific point would thus be artificial.\(^{10}\) Seen as intermediate agents between society and the State, parties selectively aggregate and articulate public demands on the basis of the main cleavages present in society. Although new dimensions of competition have appeared (e.g. post-materialism), issue-voting and personal candidates’ appeal have become more important in voters’ choices in the last three decades than in the past, the main determinants of electoral choice in most Western European countries (and especially in Belgium with deep-rooted multiple cleavages) remain ‘heavy’ sociological variables (social and economic status, religion, language, etc.) and related attitudes (role of the State in the economy, ethical positions, etc.). Hence, major and long-standing parties still have an incentive to mobilize their own electorate instead of chasing potential floating voters (Rorschneider 2002), and thus avoid to change radically policy priorities or positions that were at the core of the party’s heritage. They are also linked more or less explicitly with social groups and organizations serving as relays and supporting

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\(^9\) In Belgium, the official electoral campaign lasts 40 days (there must be 40 days between parliamentary dissolution and the elections), but when elections are not anticipated unexpectedly, parties make their manifestos public about three months before the elections.

\(^{10}\) Indeed, historical cleavages are often at the heart of issue ownership (Kleinnijenhuis and De Ridder 1998).
their appeal in the public, and cannot thus simply change their policy package without taking these linkages into account. Finally, changes in policy packages may threaten internal cohesion, both vertically (parties are not made up only by professionals, who may be more office or vote-oriented, but they are also made of simple members and this rank-and-file is usually more committed to policy) and horizontally (when internal factions exist, they also constrain the balance of issues and positions taken by the party). Another reason why parties should act as risk-avoiding organizations in terms of policy adaptation is that they are usually identified as ‘owners’ of specific issues by the public, and not credible on others (see below). On the other hand, as the number of voters with no party loyalties increase (long-standing determinants seem less effective on younger generations and some previously faithful voters may become unattached due to discontent of their party’s performance), major parties must also be attentive to preferences of these floating voters unless new parties will capitalize on channelling these new demands and discontents. Again, parties may well be informed of changes of preferences through the media.

Altogether, both the rational choice and the sociological-historical approach show that political parties perform an intermediate function between public opinion and government, and either because parties are vote-seekers that adapt their positions to the median voter’s or because parties have to mobilize their own electorate, the party agenda as a whole should reflect the public agenda. In a country where referenda are prohibited by the Constitution and where opinion polls are –compared to other Western democracies– rather rare, it is all the more likely that party leaders learn about the preferences of the public opinion mostly through the media (Walgrave, Nuytemans, De Winter 2004).

A number of variables may account for the amount of change in party manifesto from one election to the other: internal causes, like a change in leadership, or external ones, like the rise of issues through civil society movements, opinion polls, but also shocks, like a serious defeat in the previous elections, etc. Beyond typologies of political parties (cadre party, mass party, catch-all party, cartel party, etc.), empirical analyses of party change mainly deal with leadership and organizational change, rather than with the other aspect of a party’s face, its ideological identity and policy packaging (in electoral manifestos). To our knowledge, the main comparative study tackling the latter issue was made by Janda et al. in 1995. They looked at changes in issue emphasis (by correlating data on successive party manifestos coded according to the Manifesto Research Group coding scheme) in Britain, Germany and the U.S. and showed the effect of electoral results in the previous elections on party manifesto change from one election to another: a poor electoral performance is ‘virtually necessary’ to produce major change in policy packaging. On the other hand clear electoral victories can be expected to provide strong confirmation for the victorious party platform and to confer a strong policy mandate. Clear electoral victories are however quite rare in multiparty systems, and in such systems where coalition government is the norm, parties may already play down some of their claims in their manifestos in order to make allowances for potential coalition partners (see below). Yet, as Rorschneider (2002) points out, to date not much is known about the elaboration of party programmes and the factors that may influence this process. This is all the more so for the Belgian case, even though the number of parties in competition should have had, in principle, stimulated research.

Here (as a first step in the analysis of media effect on political agendas) we want to study the impact of one of these potential factors, namely media agenda, on changes in party manifestos. As Janda et al. argue: ‘… parties display different identities to voters over time. In publicized cases of scandals or corruption, parties may not have much control over the face
that voters see. Otherwise, parties consciously try to shape their images so that the public sees what the parties want’ (1995: 172). What the parties want the public to see is, at least partly, that the parties are responsive to public demands. If we use media as a proxy for public opinion preferences, changes in issue emphasis in party manifestos should be somehow affected by issue emphasis in the media. This would be in line with the bottom-up view of party competition developed by Downs and followers, as party manifestos contents should in the long run converge in their quest for electoral gains. But this could also be understood in the framework of issue ownership theory which stresses that parties selectively emphasize issues where they feel they have a good reputation (amongst their electorate but even with regard to the voters at large) and de-emphasize others in which they do not have a comparative advantage. The difference is that in Downs’ conception, parties take different positions on important issues but finally converge to the median voter position and that in Budge and Farlie’s (1983) approach saliency of issues matter instead of positions as parties do not usually confront opposing policy stands during electoral campaigns, but rather ‘talk past each other’ as they emphasize different issues on which they expect to have a good reputation of competence (the issues they ‘own’). But even in the latter case, we would expect that if the issues most owned by a party did not appear in the media agenda for a while, this party would de-emphasize them somehow to the benefit of other issues more present in the press.

Iyengar and Kinder (1987) argue in their ‘theory of priming’ that parties cannot expect electoral rewards for being the owner of an issue if that issue is not present in the media. According to these authors, voters tend to take the relative saliency of issues in the media as a ranking of the most important problems facing society at one point in time, and will vote for parties that are recognized as the most competent in dealing with issues that are most emphasized in that ranking. This is consistent with the fact that elections force voters to choose among comprehensive policy platforms. Unless the electoral system allows for some form of inter-party panachage or transferable votes, voters cannot go shopping around for specific proposals. They can only support or reject entire programmes. In the words of Schedler (1998: 205) ‘…one man, one vote, not one issue, one vote’. Media may thus well help voters choose between these policy packages by emphasizing some issues instead of others. Priming may also be the mechanism through which party leaders are influenced by the media when drafting their party manifestos.

Scholars analyzing the relationships between the media and political agendas point out that in order to identify effects on the latter one has to examine a long time period. As party manifestos are issued every four years, the aggregation of media contents over a period covering roughly these four years may be a good operationalization of our independent variable if we want to tackle primacy effects. If we expect more recency effects, that is that we have reason to believe that party manifesto drafters are more influenced by media contents of the last months, we have to take a shorter period, like the last year before election due date. As the media (and public opinion) are likely to react to the policies put forward by the government throughout the legislature, we study primacy effects by aggregating media contents from the signing of the governmental agreement at the beginning of the legislature (preceding elections) and the theoretical date of publication of party manifestos, that is three months before the new elections are held. On the other hand, many authors have shown a popularity cycle for governments, starting sometimes with a ‘honeymoon period’ or a period in which media and public opinion forgive potential errors of the fresh team, but often ending with more critics as outcomes of governmental policy become apparent at the end of the legislature. Opposition parties and independent mass media are indeed the primary guarantors

11 See the electoral systems at work in Luxembourg or in Ireland for instance.
of electoral memory for voters, as they can point to the non-fulfilment of promises made by incumbent parties (Schedler 1998). New issues may also naturally come from the media (and public opinion) as governments usually choose concentrate on a few visible priorities but have to leave others almost untouched for most of the legislature. Hence, if some recency effect is at hand, it should be identifiable by looking at the aggregation of media issues in the last year before new elections are held.

In their review of evidence on political communication and of campaign effects on electoral behaviour, Iyengar and Simon (2000) point to a problematic assumption in the few time series studies that incorporate measures of media content: all voters in a given campaign are assumed to have received an identical message. One reason why this assumption is problematic is that all citizens are supposed to be fed with the same amount of information, whilst there is a wide variation in terms of frequency of TV news attendance and even more in terms of readership. It is also all the more likely to be empirically false in Belgium: first, in a federal country news contents can differ a great deal between federated entities; second, as these news are broadcasted or published in different languages, only a minuscule percentage of citizens watch or read both Flemish and French-speaking media. Whether the federal and multi-lingual character of Belgium renders the link between the media of one federated entity and the parties of the same federated entity more important than the link between an aggregated measure of national media and the parties is an empirical matter. That hypothesis will not be systematically tested in the present paper but exploratory analyses will be performed. As we are here dealing with the relationship between the media and political parties however, we can assume that the people (especially party elites) who participate to the drafting of electoral programmes are well informed, or at least that the variation in terms of media consumption is much smaller than amongst citizens at large. We may also expect that, due to their occupations party leaders are more receptive to written press than TV news, as they are more rarely able to follow the latter.

Note that media (and/or public opinion) impact on party manifestos need not be spectacular, making the issues most emphasized by party A at election $t-1$ disappear completely in party A’s manifesto at election $t$ because of a lack of attention on the media, to the benefit of issues that much lower ranked by party A at time $t-1$. If issue ownership theory holds, we have to look at finer changes, and our coding of entire electoral programmes allows for such an analysis as it respects the zero-sum game form of changes of issue salience assumed by the original agenda setting approach.

1.2. Media and party effect on governmental agreement (models 2, 3 and 4, see below)

The governmental agreement agenda sets the priorities of the government for the whole legislature. In Belgium and in most countries using an electoral system with proportional representation, most of the time no single party is able to reach a majority in parliament on its

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12 Because elections are mostly fought –except for Brussels– in mono-lingual constituencies and up until 1999 national elections were taking place on the same date as elections for the federated institutions.

13 Because the party programmes we coded were either strictly designed for the national elections or at least comprised all the party’s policy proposals in the areas of competence of the national State.

14 A governmental agreement should be distinguished from the government declaration the incoming Prime minister reads when he presents the new cabinet for the first time to parliament. Declarations are much shorter and less detailed documents.
Hence, coalition governments are the rule rather than the exception, and as governmental agreements are one of the products (together with the allocation of ministerial portfolios) of negotiations between delegations of the parties of the coalition, they are supposed to reflect the programmatic stances of the parties that are coalescing. Even though some scholars are sceptics about the importance of coalition bargaining and the drafting of such documents for future government policy, most empirical studies support the view that these negotiations are real policy-making arenas. As showed in the volume edited by Müller and Strøm (2003), coalition agreements tend to grow in length and detail and in most countries they are central instruments for coalition policy making. Contrary to what is argued by sceptics, they mostly cover substantive policies, not distribution of jurisdictions or procedural matters. In their case studies on the Netherlands (Thomson 1999) and both the Netherlands and Belgium (Timmermans 2003) some scholars have showed that coalition agreements contain issues that are salient to the member parties and for which they have formulated policy pledges, even when they disagree on the solution of such issues. Hence, they do not just focus on non-divisive issues (Klingemann et al. 1994 had argued before that coalition agreements omit most contentious matters). On the contrary, during the negotiations the pledges most salient to each party end up being included in the agreement.

Regarding their potential policy impact, although coalition agreements are never legally binding, in practice they often are as they bind together all bodies of the coalescing parties: they are signed by all party presidents of the coalition but then party MPs and rank-and-file endorse this document in participation congresses. This party investiture is therefore a crucial moment for making agreements stick, not only between parties, but more importantly, also within parties (De Winter, Timmermans, Dumont, 2003). In Belgium, the coalition agreement heavily constrains the parliamentary agenda, as majority MPs are forced to stay in the line of what was decided during the coalition formation process. For the Dehaene I (1992) and II (1995) governments, a line in the coalition agreement made it clear that issues that did not appear in the governmental agreement could only be politicized by majority representatives with the explicit consent of all other majority parties, in order to avoid alternative majorities as in the case of the de-penalization of abortion in 1990. As to the influence of coalition agreements on policy outputs, Thomson (1999: 226) showed for the Netherlands that parties’ election pledges supported in the coalition agreement were significantly more likely to be enacted than those that are not. Given the similarities between the two political systems and the record of government agreement length held by Belgium (more than 43,000 words for the Martens VIII government in 1988 see De Winter, Timmermans, Dumont 2003; Müller and Strøm 2003), it is reasonable to assume that such a research on Belgian data would yield similar results.

As argued earlier, the media could be a (or ‘the’) channel through which parties gain knowledge of the preferences of public opinion. In the Responsible Party Model (for a discussion, see Thomassen 1994), the will of the majority of the electorate may translate into

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15 There is a growing tendency in West-European governments to draft a government policy agreement, from 33% in the 1940s to 81% in the 1990s (Müller & Strøm, 2003)
16 Coalition cabinets and parties have in addition set up a variety of mechanisms to facilitate the smooth implementation of these agreements, to solve conflicts over their interpretation, to formulate an answer to issues that were not anticipated by or included in the agreement or to amend these agreements without jeopardising the coalition's survival.
17 When the party of the Prime minister did not manage to prevent that bill to be voted on.
18 Interestingly, Thomson (1999) also showed that the pledges that were most salient in coalition parties’ manifestos were more likely to be supported in the government agreement, but not more likely to be enacted in policy actions.
government policy if parties are indeed responsive to public opinion (model 4). Parties compete for votes on the basis of policy programmes, formulate alternative platforms and promise to translate them into governmental policies if voters give them a chance to do so. The extent to which they manage to implement (or rather, manage to make their most salient issues figure in the coalition agreement) their promises is an empirical matter we will tackle below. The main theoretical claim about this second step (the party-policy link) of the general Responsible Party Model is that of the ‘party mandate’ (model 3). According to the latter, parties that win the elections and form a government will not renege on their promises and will try to implement their electoral programme as much as possible (opposition parties’ most salient issues will be at least less translated into policy). Let us reformulate the assumptions required for the functioning of the general Responsible Party Model (often criticized for being unrealistic see Green and Shapiro 1994) according to issue salience theory. Government responsiveness through the political representation of public opinion interests by parties is possible if:

1) voters can choose between at least two parties that differ with regard to the problems they claim to be able to solve when elected;
2) parties are sufficiently cohesive to be able to effectuate these claims;
3) voters are concerned about problems;
4) voters are aware of differences in issue emphasis of the parties;
5) voters choose the party that they believe will best be able to deal with the problems central to them; (Schmitt and Thomassen 1999: 116)

Hence, government responsiveness to public opinion (the media being our proxy for public opinion preferences) is indirect as it passes through political party filters. Requirement 1, although already identified by the cross-national analysis provided by the Manifesto Research Group (see Budge, et al. 2001) will be evaluated for the period at stake in Belgium in the empirical part of this paper. Features 2 and 3 have been found present in Belgium by national parliamentary (see for instance the figures for investiture votes in government formation in De Winter, Timmermans and Dumont 2003) and election studies (PIOP-ISPO analyses of post-electoral surveys). Although requirements 4 and 5 may still be considered as controversial, we argue that the possibility of voters’ identification of parties with specific issues is much more realistic than their knowledge of differences in party positions on a wide number of issues. In the words of Schmitt and Thomassen (1999: 116): ‘Effective representation is no longer indicated by the congruence of policy preferences between party elites and party voters, but by the congruence of political agendas of representatives and represented’. What is to reminded is that if parties are competitive and cohesive, representative democracy should in principle assure that an indirect impact of public opinion on government exists.

Thus, as a dependent variable, the contents of the government agreement could be explained first and foremost by the agenda of parties, be they quite close to public opinion preferences or quite distant from the latter (model 3). But which parties’ priorities are the most reflected in coalition agreements? Can we speak of a weighted (by size) influence of each coalition party, as would be predicted by game theoretic models such as Gamson’s (1961). Are formateur parties advantaged by their specific position, as neo-institutionalist approaches would (Baron 1998)? Do ‘unnecessary’ (in order to reach a majority in parliament) parties receive less policy pay-offs than necessary ones, as would be suggested by the minimal winning solution concept of Riker (1962)? Do experienced parties negotiate better? Do traditional parties that stayed for long in opposition before going back to government get compensated for that? If governing elites aim at representing the median voter, a feature that may characterize consensus democracies such as Belgium, we may also expect, that some of the opposition
parties’ most salient issues make their way to the government agreement.\textsuperscript{19} Previous research on the link between party manifestos and government policy intentions (but using government declarations, that are much shorter statements, and using an inferred left-right scale for both manifestos and these documents) showed that in Belgium, the Christian-democrats clearly dominated their partners in terms of policy pay-offs (Hearl 1992).\textsuperscript{20} But even though from an empirical and theoretical point of view coalition agreements emerge as one of the main institutions that make collective coalition cabinet viable and in spite of the fact that recent comparative efforts have been undertaken (e.g. Laver and Budge 1992; Warwick 2001; Müller and Strøm 2003), the practical working of government formation and policy formulation remains to a large extent a black box.

But a direct relationship between public opinion (through the media, if we consider that public opinion reacts to the contents of the media or that governing elites anticipate that public opinion will react and adapt policies accordingly) and the government may also exist, regardless of how well parties reflect voters’ preferences and influence government policy (model 2). This form of government responsiveness may be desirable when unexpected events occur and government has to take action even though political parties have no programmatic answer to the (new) issue at stake. Typically, with the variables analyzed in this paper, government agreements may contain issues that have not been stressed (or to a much lesser extent) in the drafting of party manifestos because the event or issue emphasis in the media was not yet perceptible at the time these party documents were published. The time between party manifestos publication and the signing of the coalition agreement (on average four months in the 1990s in Belgium) may thus especially leave room for a direct impact of ‘public opinion’ (the media) on the governmental programme. If the four months of media contents between party manifesto publication and the signing of the government agreement have an effect ‘priming theory’ (Iyengar and Kinder 1987) parlance, this would be considered as a recency effect. Long term, primacy effects may be at work, and we will test these by using aggregation of media contents for the full legislature. If tests confirm these hypotheses, that would mean that government is responsive to changes in issue emphasis in the media. Otherwise, other factors determine more strongly the agenda of the government.\textsuperscript{21}

Indirect effects may be evaluated through the analysis of the influence of the media on party programmes, the impact of party programmes on the governmental agreement, and the comparison with the results of the direct effects of the media on the governmental agreement. Through small-n analysis techniques, we may also be able to spot interaction effects of media and party programmes on the governmental agreement (model 4).

\textsuperscript{19} The few analyses on indicators of government actions (policy outcomes), such as government spending or inflation rates (De Grauwe 1983, 1987; Klingemann et al.) tend to support the view that Belgian cabinets aim at governing close to the position of the median voter.

\textsuperscript{20} Policy outputs of coalition bargaining are the area in which the least amount of empirical testing of competing theoretical expectations has been generated. In a recent article, Warwick re-evaluated the mixed pieces of results of the Laver and Budge (1992) edited book in the light of new empirical tests. He found that, if controlled by other independent variables, weighted mean of cabinet parties is very close from coalition declaration. The most interesting results are the following: contrary to what recent models would have predicted, the deviation towards the position of the formateur is almost inexistent (very weak and weakly significant). The moderating tendency of government declarations plays a role, too, as the weighted mean of all parties represented in parliament is the most powerful in moving coalition position away from the weighted mean of cabinet partners.

\textsuperscript{21} If media merely followed the government agenda, priorities of the latter should dominate the content of the former, and change or stability in issue ranking between two consecutive governmental agreements would have to be entirely explained by other factors than media content.
2. Presentation of the models to be tested

We thus have a series of 4 models to be tested:
Model 1 - Media effect on party manifestos;
Model 2 - Media effect on government agreements;
Model 3 - Party effect on government agreements;
Model 4 - Full model: Media and party effects on government agreements

2.1. Operationalization of the outcome variables

For all the outcome variables, what we are trying to account for are the largest shifts in issue salience in the ‘outcome’ agenda between ‘t – 1’ and ‘t’. In practical terms, we have two such outcome agendas:

- party manifestos (model 1), for which two changes are to be accounted for (issue emphasis shifts between 1991 and 1995, and issue emphasis shifts between 1995 and 1999), times 10 as for each case we analyse the manifestos of 10 parties.

- government agreements (models 2-3-4), for which two changes are to be accounted for (issue emphasis shifts between 1992 and 1995, and issue emphasis shifts between 1995 and 1999).

Both party and governmental agendas were coded using the same methodology. As briefly explained in the Appendix, the data collection was made through the coding of each sentence of the 10 main Belgian party manifestos drafted for the federal elections of 1991, 1995 and 1999; the same can be said for the government coalition agreements that were elaborated after these elections.

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22 In QCA terminology, an “outcome” is the equivalent of the “dependent” variable, but it is not, technically speaking, a dependent variable in the statistical sense (De Meur & Rihoux, 2002).
23 These are the ten parties represented in the Federal Parliament in the whole decade. Six Flemish parties: Socialistische Partij (SP – Socialist), Christelijke VolksPartij (CVP – Christian-democrat), Vlaamse Liberalen en Democratcn (VLD – Liberal), Agalev (Greens), Vlaams Blok (VB – Extreme right) and Volksunie (VU – Flemish nationalist). Four French-speaking parties: Parti Socialiste (PS – Socialist), Parti Social Chrétien (PSC – Christian-democrat), Parti Réformateur Libéral (PRL – Liberal) and Ecolo (Greens). The VU formed a cartel with ID21 in the 1999 elections while the PRL formed a cartel with the FDF (Front Démocratique des Francophones) in 1995 and with both FDF and MCC (Mouvement du Citoyen pour le Changement) in 1999.
As basic QCA (see below) tests require dichotomous data, we operationalized the outcomes as follows:

- ‘1’ code: largest increases in issue emphasis (+ 1% or more);
- ‘0’ code: largest decreases in issue emphasis (- 1% or less [e.g. -1.5%, etc.]).

We have thus left aside smaller all the issues where shifts were of a smaller amplitude than 1% between ‘t-1’ and ‘t’. On average with the data at hand (Belgian government agreements of the 1990s), a positive (or negative) shift of 1% emphasis corresponds to 6 or 7 sentences more (or less) coded for the relevant category. This, in turn, can be pictured as roughly one paragraph.

We expect that concentrating on these significant changes of issue emphasis will help us identify whether or not agenda effects seem to be at work. We argue that this type of analysis is needed in an exploratory phase of a research programme. Including shifts of smaller amplitude than the ones we are concentrating on may introduce ‘noise’ in the analysis, and this fear is reinforced by the fact that an important number of categories are never mentioned in our dependent or independent variables. However, with the main research design chosen here, the number of ‘cases’ to be explained is of course restricted, and although we are here only exploring these relationships, we may want quantitative tests on larger datasets. This the reason why we will concentrate mostly on our QCA analyses of ‘extreme shifts’ but also provide results of classical regression analyses on all issue categories in order to check whether our findings appear to be robust.

Hence, in our QCA analyses, we will mainly try to understand why are some issues abandoned, or at least much less emphasized, in these ‘outcome’ documents in the four years that separate ‘t-1’ to ‘t’ (for instance between the government agenda of 1995 and the government agenda of 1999). But the core of our empirical analysis certainly is the quest for ‘positive’ agenda setting effects, that can be identified by looking at positive shifts of issue emphasis in the outcome variables. As manifesto documents and government agreements typically have to cover a high number of policy issues, issues that are significantly more emphasized at time t (with regard to time t-1) may be attributable to the importance of these issues in our independent variables whilst for these that receive less attention (than at time t-1) the explanation may simply reside in the ‘zero-sum’ nature of the game of issue emphasis rather than in a negative impact of our independent variables. We will nevertheless perform both types of analyses, but mostly concentrate interpretation efforts on these positive relationships.

Note that all the relative emphasis data were re-computed in order to exclude the categories “domestic affairs of foreign countries” (code 402) and “catastrophes in foreign countries” (code 404) for all the agendas used here (including the media). These issues codes were part of the original database but were considered typically media-codes, hardly relevant for the political agendas, as the latter typically deal with domestic politics and international issues, not other countries’ internal affairs. We therefore re-calculated new relative figures based on the databases made in absolute terms concerning the media, the parties and the government agreements.

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24 We will fine-tune both our operationalizations (for instance, using 0.5% shifts instead of 1% on our dependent variables) and our models designed for QCA and quantitative tests at a later stage of the research.
2.2. Operationalisation of the condition variables

Media effects:

We have aggregated Flemish and French-speaking TV channels and Flemish and French-speaking newspapers in order to construct 4 ‘media agendas’ (see the Appendix for more information on the selection of newspaper titles and TV channels):

- Flemish TV
- French-speaking TV
- Flemish newspapers
- French-speaking newspapers.

We have then built different periodisation logics for each model, as follows:

Periodisation for model 1:

- **Model 1A** (times 2 : before the 1995 and 1999 elections): aggregation of media contents for the whole legislature up until 3 months before elections (approximate time of the publication of manifestos);
- **Model 1B** (times 2 : before the 1995 and 1999 elections): aggregation of media contents for roughly the last year of the legislature up until 3 months before elections, hence the last 12 months before manifestos are issued (elections minus 15 months to elections minus 3 months) to get a full year media content. This is a rather arbitrary cut, but this may reflect the effect of ‘rather recent’ media content, i.e. the issues that dominated the media in the last year of the government, a period that may be the one in which new issues are relayed by the media or criticisms on the incumbent government becomes more important, due to its position in the policy cycle.

Periodisation for model 2:

- **Model 2A** (times 2 : before the 1995 and 1999 governmental agreements): aggregation of media contents for the whole legislature up until the new coalition agreement is signed;
- **Model 2B** (times 2 : before the 1995 and 1999 governmental agreements): aggregation of media contents for the last 12 months before the new coalition agreement is signed (coalition agreement date minus 12 months);

Periodisation for model 4:

- **Model 4** (times 2 : before the 1995 and 1999 governmental agreements): aggregation of media contents for the period between the publication of party manifestos (3 months before elections) and the signing of the new coalition agreement (roughly four-five months of media contents) to gauge whether the media may have an effect that is not already indirectly taken over by parties (if the latter are indeed influenced by media contents);

For each of the periodisations specified, we coded ‘1’ for issues that represented 1% or more of the relevant media agenda and ‘0’ for all the issues that were below this 1% threshold. Table 1 provides information about the number of issues above this threshold.

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25 In QCA terminology, a “condition” is the equivalent of an “independent” variable, but it is not, technically speaking, an independent variable in the statistical sense (De Meur & Rihoux, 2002).
Table 1: Number of issues above 1% in the media (1991-1999)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 1A</th>
<th>1992</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>1999</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers FR</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newspapers VL</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV-news FR</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV-news VL</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEAN</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24.25</td>
<td>24.75</td>
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<tr>
<th>Model 1B</th>
<th>1992</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>1999</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Newspapers FR</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers VL</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV-news FR</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV-news VL</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEAN</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers FR</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newspapers VL</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV-news FR</td>
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<td>23</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV-news VL</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>MEAN</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>24.75</td>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Newspapers VL</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV-news FR</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>TV-news VL</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEAN</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
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<table>
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<th>1999</th>
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<td>Newspapers VL</td>
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<td>TV-news FR</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>TV-news VL</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>MEAN</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>24.25</td>
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As mentioned in the Appendix, we have some ‘gaps’ in our media-database due to a number of reasons. As a consequence, we do not have data at all for the weeks 1 to 104, 249 to 260 and 383 to 384 in both French-speaking and Flemish TV-News (the starting point in our database is the 1st January 1991 and thus constitutes ‘week 1’; the end point is 31st December 2000, week 522).

Party effects:
As mentioned earlier, we have coded party manifestos for 10 political parties. For each party manifesto, in line with what was done for the dichotomisation of the media agenda, we coded ‘1’ for issues that represented 1% or more. Table 2 provides information on the number of issues above this threshold.
Table 2: Number of issues above 1% in party manifestos (1991-1999)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agalev</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVP</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VB</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VLD</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VU</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecolo</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRL</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In model 3, a first version of the ‘mandate theory’ is tested by looking at the effect of coalition parties on the government agreement, in order to spot whether some parties (either the largest, the most experienced, etc.) manage to have more influence than others. Four parties participated in the 1995-1999 government (CVP, PSC [respectively Flemish and French-speaking Christian democrats] plus SP and PS [respectively Flemish and French-speaking Socialists]). We have no less than six parties for the 1999-2003 coalition: again the SP and PS but this time with the Flemish and French-speaking Liberals (VLD and PRL) and the Flemish and French-speaking Greens [Agalev and Ecolo]. But in model 3 we also test a ‘party agenda’ model that is based on the idea that governments not only reflect coalition parties’ preferences but also try to represent the median voter. Thus, issues emphasized by opposition parties may to a certain degree be part of government agreements. Hence, in this variant, we enter all 10 party conditions in the model in order to check whether the general ‘party mandate theory’ is strong (coalition parties indeed have more influence than opposition parties on the contents of government agreements) or mediated by these considerations.

In model 4, we have to restrict our analysis to coalition parties only, as we introduce the four media conditions in order to test both party and media effects on government agreements.26

3. Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) in a nutshell27

To perform an exploratory analysis on these data, we have opted for Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA), a non-statistical (but formal) approach and method initiated by Charles Ragin (Ragin, 1987; De Meur & Rihoux, 2002; Rihoux, 2003). As QCA is not (yet) a widespread method, and as it moves away quite a lot from standard statistical methods, it is probably useful to provide a short presentation of it.

The key philosophy of QCA as a technique is to “(start) by assuming causal complexity and then (mount) an assault on that complexity” (Ragin, 1987: x). The tool used for this purpose is Boolean algebra, the algebra of logic.

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26 It is not reasonable to expect interpretable results from an analysis with a N below 20 and a number of conditions as high as 14.
27 For resources on QCA and linked methods (including an exhaustive bibliographical database with applications, in political science & several other disciplines, etc.), see the COMPASSS international resource site: http://www.compasss.org.
In a nutshell, the researcher must first produce a raw data table, in which each case displays a specific combination of conditions (with 0 or 1 values) and an outcome (with 0 or 1 values). The software then produces a truth table that displays the data as a list of configurations. A configuration is a given combination of some conditions (each one receiving a 1 or 0 value) and an outcome (receiving a 1 or 0 value). A specific configuration may correspond to several observed cases and different cases may display the same configuration.

Then the key step of the analysis is Boolean minimization—that is, reducing the long Boolean expression (which is expressed by the truth table) to the shortest possible expression (the minimal formula, consisting of one or several terms called prime implicants; see below) that unveils the causal regularities in the data. This minimization procedure is performed by a software which uses specific minimization algorithms.

Finally, it is up to the researcher to interpret this minimal formula.

It should be noted that a QCA minimal formula is very different from the results of a statistical analysis (e.g. regression): each prime implicant in the minimal formula defines a deterministic path: all cases which display the features of the prime implicant necessarily follow the same path (i.e. have the same outcome value). What QCA does (in contrast with all statistical procedures) is identify “local” regularities (i.e. gathering clusters of cases), each one of which is deterministic. According to the QCA “paradigm”, one should not lay too much emphasis on the number (or proportion) of cases covered by each prime implicant: a path which is “less traveled” (e.g. by only one case) is not considered a priori as less relevant than a path which is “more traveled” (e.g. by 10 or 15 cases). Hence this is clearly a break away from a probabilistic perspective.

QCA is a quite specific technique which suits our needs for this analysis:

- it develops a conception of causality that leaves room for complexity, through ‘multiple conjunctural causation’. This implies that: (1) most often, it is a combination of conditions that eventually produces an outcome; (2) several different combinations of conditions may produce the same outcome; and (3) depending on the context, on the ‘conjuncture’, a given condition may very well have a different impact on the outcome. This, in turn, implies that different causal paths—each path being relevant, in a distinct way—may lead to the same outcome (De Meur & Rihoux, 2002: 28-30). In this type of analysis, we can trace back different causal patterns for different issue categories (our ‘cases’) of the same outcome ‘type’ (issues characterized by positive emphasis shifts and those characterized by negative emphasis type). This is consistent with issue ownership theory we referred to earlier, as we can expect that positive emphasis shifts in the government agreement on quite different issues come from quite different combinations of conditions because parties are supposed to be clearly distinctive in terms of policy package.

- it is designed to analyze a ‘small N’ of cases (such as the ‘strongest variations’, i.e. the most significant shifts in issue emphasis we are trying to tap and account for);

- it can be used for different purposes. Two of its key purposes are hypothesis-testing (theory-testing) and data exploration. The first use is much more frequent. For this research, QCA can be a useful tool to explore our data and test some hypotheses as well. The concrete way to do this will be to test a large number of models with QCA. The first step will consist in looking for contradictory configurations. A contradictory configuration is one whose outcome is, in some cases, equal to 1 (present) and in some

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28 For these analyses, we have used the TOSMANA software, version 1.101 [see: http://www.tosmana.org/]. For more details on other software, see http://www.compasss.org/Softwares.htm.
cases equal to 0 (absent), while displaying the same values on the conditions. When such a logical contradiction is found, there are two options: either A/ the researcher concludes that the model is “falsified”: indeed, if there are many contradictory configurations in the truth table, this means that the conditions which have been selected (at least in the way they have been operationalized) do not allow one to ‘explain’ the outcome value; or B/ (if there aren’t too many contradictions), in order to move on and proceed with the full minimization procedure, the researchers first tries to “solve” these contradictions; e.g. by adding other conditions, by modifying the operationalization, etc.

Finally, we should say a few words on QCA notation, which basically follows “classical” Boolean algebra notation:

- “+” stands for the logical operator “OR”
- “∗” stands for the logical operator “AND”
- UPPERCASE letters stand for the “1” value (“large”, “present”, etc.)
- lowercase letters stand for the “0” value (“small”, “absent”, etc.)

Thus, for instance, the following minimal formula:

\[ \text{CONDITION1} \times \text{condition2} + \text{condition1} \times \text{CONDITION2} = \text{OUTCOME} \]

should be read as follows:

“the outcome is present when [condition1 is present AND condition2 is absent] OR when [condition1 is absent AND condition2 is present]”

4. Tests of Model 1- Media effect on party manifestos

Testing the influence of media on party manifestos implies taking each party separately and studying the impact the mass media as a whole may have on it. Testing each party manifesto with each media for the two studied periods would be painstaking for this exploratory analysis. Moreover, despite the fact that Belgian political parties are only responsible to their community-based (Flanders or French-speaking Belgium) electors, political elites should be aware of the preferences of both communities as reflected in their media if they have national ambitions. National political elites are almost obliged to read newspapers or follow TV-news in both languages (or at least MP assistants or ministerial cabinet collaborators may report on news in both communities) if they are to take decisions (or react to decisions) that are applicable to both communities.29 The top of a political career in Belgium is still a position at the federal level, which implies such a behaviour. Hence, as we are concentrating our analysis on the federal level, the hypothesis tested here is that both the Flemish and French-speaking media may have an effect on each and every party manifesto.

The tables in Appendix 4 summarize the series of 40 QCA tests which have been performed, i.e. models 1A and 1B, for all 10 parties, and for the 1995 and 1999 manifestos.

We observe that, for 38 models out of 40, most cases correspond to contradictory configurations. This means, simply, that the 4 conditions included in the model, i.e. the 4 media agendas (as they have been operationalized, at least) do not suffice to “explain” the

29 Moreover, gaining access to medias from the other side of the linguistic border can be a political asset, even inside its own community. The non-elector of today can be the citizen of tomorrow.
presence (“1” value) of the outcome. For model 12, for instance, one of the least contradictory models (see right below), there are still 2 contradictions “covering” 13 cases out of 23:

- the \([A3JF99 * a3jv99 * a3tf99 * a3tv99]\) combination leads to a “1” outcome for case [263] (“employment policy”) and to a “0” outcome for case [165] (“Budget”);
- the \([a3jf99 * a3jv99 * a3tf99 * a3tv99]\) combination, i.e. the “0” value for all 4 media agendas, leads to a “0” outcome –which is intuitively OK- for cases [91, 121, 171, 184, 191 and 311], but it leads to a “1” outcome (which is counter-intuitive) for several other cases : [21, 177, 179, 266 and 301].

Only for two models (model 12 : Media on PSC 1999, +1%; and model 33 : Media on SP 1995, +1%) is the proportion of contradictions less extreme. In principle, in these two models, there are still too many contradictions to move forth and proceed with the minimization procedure. We have however done the minimization, as this is only an exploratory analysis.

This allows us, for model 12 for instance, to reach the following statement (first part of the minimal formula) : the “1” value for cases 41, 102, 134, 189 and 221 is “explained” by the “1” value for A3TF99 (i.e. French-language TV agenda). Although we should not waste too much time on the interpretation of this result, it is quite reasonable to think that the PSC, a centre party but also the smaller party of a centre-left coalition, had to put more emphasis on some ‘rightist’ issues such as ‘public order’ or ‘organisation of police and justice’ -that were high on the media agenda- in its manifesto after a particularly painful legislature for incumbent parties (the Dutroux affair also led to a much publicized agreement on the reform of the police and justice between governmental parties and the biggest opposition parties, the Liberals, thus including the PRL which is the rightist competitor of the PSC).

However, there are still too many contradictions in these models, so the overall negative conclusion (“falsification”) of our QCA analysis must be kept at this point.\(^{30}\) We nevertheless checked two more specifications for the relationship between media and party manifestos.

First, we tested a model with disaggregated media data in order to check whether 1) contrary to what was assumed in the hypothesis above, parties respond only to their media scene, i.e. that Flemish parties mainly follow the Flemish media, and that French-language parties mainly follow the French-language media; 2) within each linguistic community, there may be different effects according to the type of media operators (public service v/s private; different newspapers etc.). We only tested this model on the party manifesto drafted by the French-speaking Ecolo in 1995 and 1999, using the periodisations of model 1A and 1B.\(^{31}\) The French-language media sources, the public service TV RTBF, the private sector TV RTL, the “Le Soir” newspaper and the “La Libre Belgique” newspaper are thus the 4 conditions selected to ‘explain’ Ecolo’s shifts in issue emphases. This test on 32 issues nevertheless triggered between 25 and 30 cases for which there were contradictions, depending on the

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\(^{30}\) It would not make sense to test other models with a lower threshold (like 0.5%), as all contradictory configurations with the “+1%” threshold would still be there (we would only add cases, but not “solve” the existing contradictions). Neither does it make sense to restrict the conditions to Flemish media for Flemish parties, and French-speaking media for French-speaking parties –at least not in the current operationalization- as this would further worsen the problem of contradictions (if we suppress 2 conditions out of 4, we have a “shorter” model, hence even more chances to obtain contradictions…).

\(^{31}\) Note from the authors : this is just a preliminary test. The reason why we chose this particular party is because previous QCA tests (on other data) yielded some encouraging results.
model and the year. Hence, this analysis did not lead to more promising results than the one with aggregated data.\(^{32}\)

Second, we performed more traditional statistical tests of causal relationships between media data and all party manifestos. These confirmed the main trends of our QCA analysis. The average variance of issue emphasis in party manifestos explained by the media is, according to linear regression tests,\(^{33}\) a mere 14\% (mean R square = .142). Despite this overall low degree of explanation, we must point out a few lessons learned from the 40 tests we ran. Globally, there are few differences between models: the model 1A and the model 1B explain the relation with an average of 14.9\% and 13.3\%. The hypothesis of a more important ‘recency’ effect can be therefore rejected. Quite unexpectedly, in 1995, the average explanatory capacity of the models reaches 16.7\% but goes down to 11.6\% in 1999. The context in which the 1999 elections were held, after a number of events in the legislature (the Dutroux affair, the Agusta-Dassault cases of corruption, etc.) would have suggested a higher influence form the media (and public opinion).

The differences among parties are much more remarkable. The issue saliency in both Flemish and French-speaking Christian-democrats manifestos is respectively explained by the media at comparable rates, 19.8\% and 20.3\%. The Socialist and Green party manifestos are less influenced by the media than the others: an average of 8.3\% for the SP, 10.8\% for Agalev, 11\% for the PS and 12\% for Ecolo. Note that taking each election and model separately, the variation between parties is even greater. The PSC party reaches a 28\% score in 1995 with the model 1B (and 26\% with model 1A), while a mere 5\% of the SP manifesto of 1999 is explained by the media in both models 1A and 1B.

The two less contradictory QCA models mentioned above (models 12 and 33) do not stand as different from others in regression analyses. Even if those two parties are the extreme cases in terms of percentages in some models, the model 1A for 1999 gives a score of 15\% for the PSC and the model 1B for 1995 explains 9\% of the SP’s party manifesto. The analysis of the beta coefficients however shows for the PSC a significant\(^{34}\) positive relation with the two French-speaking media’s (.365* and .424*), and a significant negative relation with the Flemish TV-News (-.807*). On the other hand, the too low R square score of the SP model for 1995 indicates in this case non-significance for all coefficients.

On the whole, different specifications and different techniques did not lead to the discovery of significant media influence on the drafting of party manifestos. We will run regression analyses controlling for autocorrelation (including the distribution of issue emphases of government agreements at ‘t-1’) in a new version of this paper (this kind of analysis will be performed for all other models in the present paper).

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\(^{32}\) We only tested a disaggregated version of this media-party model in a regression analysis, but the R square was smaller than for the aggregated one (with media data from both communities).

\(^{33}\) Including all categories in our database (re-calculated relative emphases excluding categories 402 and 404 as explained earlier), and not issue emphasis shifts.

\(^{34}\) Significant coefficients are represented as follows:
- *** if less than .001
- ** if less than .01
- * if less than .1
5. Tests of Model 2 - Media effect on government agreement

First we are testing model 2A (aggregation of media contents for the whole legislature up until the new coalition agreement is signed).

For the 1995 governmental agreement, we are thus testing the following model (N = 19):
- for the “1” outcome:  GA9295+1 = AAJF95 + AAJV95 + AATF95 + AATV95
- for the “0” outcome: ga9295+1 = aajf95 + aajv95 + aatf95 + aatv95

We have two contradictory configurations, which cover 14 cases. Hence we cannot proceed further with minimization, and we can falsify this model.

For the 1999 governmental agreement, we are thus testing the following model (N = 17):
- for the “1” outcome:  GA9599+1 = AAJF99 + AAJV99 + AATF99 + AATV99
- for the “0” outcome: ga9599+1 = aajf99 + aajv99 + aatf99 + aatv99

We have three contradictory configurations, which cover 14 cases. Hence we cannot proceed further with minimization, and we can falsify this model.

Secondly, we are testing model 2B (aggregation of media contents for the last 12 months before the new coalition agreement is signed; i.e. coalition agreement date minus 12 months).

For the 1995 governmental agreement, we are thus testing the following model (threshold set at +1%; N = 19):
- for the “1” outcome:  GA9295+1 = 12AJF95 + 12AJV95 + 12ATF95 + 12ATV95
- for the “0” outcome: ga9295+1 = 12ajf95 + 12ajv95 + 12atf95 + 12atv95

We have two contradictory configurations, which cover 15 cases. Hence we cannot proceed further with minimization, and we can falsify this model.

For the 1999 governmental agreement, we are thus testing the following model (threshold set at +1%; N = 17):
- for the “1” outcome:  GA9599+1 = 12AJF99 + 12AJV99 + 12ATF99 + 12ATV99
- for the “0” outcome: ga9599+1 = 12ajf99 + 12ajv99 + 12atf99 + 12atv99

We have two contradictory configurations, which cover 12 cases. Hence we cannot proceed further with minimization, and we can falsify this model as well.

As an overall conclusion, we conclude that none of the tests for model 2 can corroborate it (neither model 2A nor model 2B). Further work should still be done to “solve” the large number of contradictory cases.

Linear regression analysis performed on model 2A shows that the latter explains 23% of the influence of media on government agreement in 1995. The TV news are the only significant media. The coefficients are positive for the French-speaking TV (.919**) but negative for the Flemish one (-.988**). The government agreement of 1999 is clearly less well explained by this model. The influence of the media reach a mere 14% and the coefficient are only slightly significant: .735* for the Flemish newspapers, -.775* for the Flemish TV and .368* for the French-speaking TV.
As far as the model 2B is concerned, the percentages of explanation are even smaller. In the 1995 case (R square = .20), the Flemish TV news coefficient is -1.007*** while the French-speaking TV and the Flemish newspapers respectively get .587** and .646*. For the 1999 case, only one variable has a significant coefficient (12% of explanatory capacity): the Flemish newspapers with a score of .515*.

These two different models confirm the conclusions of regression analyses for model 1, namely that the hypothesis of a so-called ‘recency’ effect is not supported. However, we can notice that, globally, French-speaking newspapers have no influence on the content of the government agreement and that the three other aggregated variables (both Flemish TV and Newspapers and French-speaking TV) only have a marginal influence (when Flemish TV has a significant effect, it is negative).

If we run analyses controlling for autocorrelation in the dependent variable (thus including the preceding government agreement in the model), a mandatory step if we are to address causal relationships even if we are using the minimal concept of Granger causality, we see that the explanatory capacity of our model drastically increases, revealing the influence of autocorrelation phenomenon in the relationship between media and government agreements. The model 2A for 1995 goes up to a R square of .706 (instead of a bit more than .20) with the coefficients of the French-speaking TV news still significant (.746***) and the Flemish TV news (-.501**) still significant but negative. The French-speaking newspapers are also significantly but negatively related (-.375*). In 1999, the same model reaches approximately 72% but none of the coefficients are significant. As far as the model 2B is concerned, it is in 1995 less explanatory than in 1999 with ‘only’ a R square of .688, but with coefficients for the French-speaking and Flemish TV news respectively at .391** and -.397*. In 1999, only the French-speaking newspapers coefficients are significant (.199*) but the model as a whole explains the government agreement at a 73% level. Globally, adding the previous agreements in our models increase the overall average explanation capacity of model by 75.6% and, in each of them, the coefficient of this previous agreement approximates the average score of .718***.

Altogether, these exploratory tests of media effects on both our political agendas point to insufficiency of the primacy of issues in the media agendas for explaining positive (and negative) shifts of emphasis in party manifestos and governmental agreements. A number of comments can also be made, although we are quite aware of the provisional character of this analysis and its limitations in terms of techniques and the operationalizations of variables employed:

- although these political agendas are of the ‘symbolic’ (versus ‘action’ see above) type, they do not seem to be influenced by the contents of the media;
- if media ranking of issues is understood as a proxy for public opinion preferences, parties are not responsive to these preferences when they draft their manifestos; this thus falsifies the bottom-up model of political representation;
- when we control for autocorrelation in regression analysis, we see that the main determinant of government agreement at time ‘t’ is government agreement at time ‘t-1’. 35
- in terms of contradictions, we have seen that some specifications of the models using party manifestos as outcome variables led to more promising results than analyses of media effects.

on government agreement; this may be an indication that the government agreement in Belgium is not the product of a mere ‘ritual dance’ and thus a pure symbolic document (otherwise, we would have expected more promising avenues of research for media impact) but much more the output of real policy bargaining sessions intended to have policy repercussions in the course of the legislature; this interpretation, which is in line with country specialists’ studies (De Winter, Timmermans, Dumont 2003) will be put to further testing in the following section.

6. Tests of Model 3 - Party effect on government agreement

As argued earlier, the effect of political parties’ agendas on the government agreement is at the heart of a number of theories that posit that ‘parties do matter’ for government policy. Empirical tests of the ‘party mandate’ generally point to a positive relationship between political parties’ preferences -particularly the parties that form the coalition- and government policy. In some countries, and indeed in Belgium, empirical tests of a more general ‘partisan effect’, taking into account all parties represented in parliament in order to verify whether governments try to locate their policy position close to that of the median voter, do indeed illustrate that opposition parties may also have an effect on government policy (intentions, in our analysis). We even expect more influence of opposition parties in the 1990s than in the periods tested by other scholars, as the aggregate percentage for the three traditional party families has never been so low than in the past decennia, due to the electoral breakthrough of (almost) single issue parties (both Green parties and the Vlaams Blok). Hence, if our analysis does not provide promising results for the models tested here, we should be suspicious about either our operationalization of variables or on the technique used. This is the reason why regression analyses will supplement QCA tests in this section as well.

6.1. For the 1995 government agreement (4 coalition parties : PS, SP, PSC, CVP) :

Model for “1” outcome : GA9295+1 = CV951 + SP951 + PS951 + PC951

With an N of 19, we obtain many contradictions (3 contradictory configurations covering 13 cases); hence we cannot pursue the analysis further. Two contradictions (covering 10 cases), in particular, are quite problematic as they correspond to ‘pure’ situations as far as the 4 conditions are concerned :

- first contradiction, covering 7 cases : the “1” value for all 4 conditions leads to the “1” outcome value for 5 cases (which is OK), but it also leads to the “0” outcome value for cases [71] (“organization of the State”) and [178] (“social policy”). It thus looks as if that coalition parties regarded these two issues as amongst the most important in their respective manifestos but that the 1995 government agreement nevertheless mentioned these issues much less than its predecessor. This is understandable for the question of the organization of the State, as the previous government devoted much time on institutional reforms and even managed to formally transform Belgium into a federal country (St Michael’s agreements in 1992). Despite this, demands for more regional autonomy came from Flanders especially and French-speaking parties reacted defensively to these demands in their respective manifestos. The question was thus high on the agenda of political parties (it is to be reminded that Belgium is composed of –at least– two distinctive party systems, as both Flemish and French-speaking
representatives are elected by respectively Flemish and French-speaking voters [see De Winter and Dumont 1999]; it is thus electorally rewarding for these parties to take ‘extreme’ positions on institutional or linguistic issues as they cannot be sanctioned by voters from the other Community), but was ‘put into the fridge’ by coalition parties during the formation of the government. It may seem more surprising to see that the same pattern is found for the issue of social policy, especially as the ideological orientation of the government was centre-left. However, given that the Socialist parties were not in electoral or psychological good shape due to the first steps of enquiry for corruption (the Agusta-Dassault affairs) and that, perhaps as a consequence of this, the main aim of the government (an especially its Prime minister Dehaene, a Christian-democrat) was to comply with the criteria of the Maastricht Treaty in order to enter the Monetary Union (more cuts in public spending were thus needed for reducing both the deficit and public debt), such a pattern does not contradict with our knowledge of the context;

- second contradiction, covering 3 cases: the “0” value for all 4 conditions leads to the “0” outcome value for 1 case (which is OK), but it also leads to the “1” outcome value for cases [262] (“labour status and modalities”) and [341] (“energy policy”).

Linear regression analysis of provides more information: manifestos of coalition parties explain almost 50% of the 1995 government agreement (R square = .497). Some parties had both a significant and large influence on the issue saliency distribution in the coalition document. The Flemish Christian-democrats (CVP) have the greatest influence with coefficients reaching .407**, while the PSC and the PS have respectively coefficients of .273* and .278*. Beta coefficients for the SP are not significant. Testing the same model controlling for autocorrelation in the dependent variable gives R square of .717. Only the PS coefficient remains significant (.250*).

6.2. For the 1995 government agreement (with all 10 parties)

Even with 10 conditions for 19 cases (i.e., in theory, a lot of diversity between cases), we still obtain 3 contradictory configurations, involving 6 cases:

- contradiction involving 2 cases: a “0” value for all conditions leads to a “1” outcome for case [262] (“labour status and modalities”). This was of course already the case with coalition parties only. Hence, the positive emphasis shift for this issue in the government agreement is clearly due to other factors than party competition. As this category was not high on the media agenda either, we should look at other potentially influential actors such as trade unions, to explain this result.

- contradiction involving 2 cases: a “1” value for all conditions leads to a “0” outcome for case [178] (“social policy”). See the interpretation for the previous model above.

- contradiction involving 2 cases: a “1” value for all conditions except for one (AG951 = 0) leads to a “0” outcome for case [71] (“organization of the state”). See the interpretation for the previous model above. It is quite normal to see that only Agalev, that is certainly the Flemish party the least extreme on linguistic/institutional issues, does not emphasize this question in its manifesto.

36 Except in the Brussels constituency.
At a further stage of our exploratory analyses, these contradictions should be lifted. As these contradictions only cover 6 cases (which is still too much, in principle), for the sake of the exploration, we can pursue the analysis and proceed with the minimization.

If we disregard these contradictions (they are not treated by the software), we thus obtain the following minimal formulae ("logical cases" included for the minimization):

- **"1" outcome:**

  In the course of the minimization procedure, we need to select some prime implicants by hand. We have opted to choose, as priority, "1" values for governmental parties, and "1" values for "non-traditional" parties (Greens and VB), as we expect a positive influence of both coalition and opposition parties if governments want to satisfy the median voter:

  - to "cover" case 341 ("energy policy") : 4 possibilities, all 4 including EC951. Chosen : [vb951 * EC951];
  - to "cover" case 134 ("organisation of justice and police") : 6 possibilities, all 6 including SP951. Chosen : [SP951 * ec951 * PS951];
  - to "cover" case 128 ("European economic and industrial policy") : 5 possibilities, all 5 including VB951. Chosen : [VB951 * v951 * PC951]

  We thus obtain the following minimal formula:

  \[
  \text{GA9295+1 = vb951 * EC951 + pr951 * PS951 + SP951 * ec951 * PS951 + VB951 * v951 * PC951}
  \]

  \[
  (341) + (141,189,152) + (134) + (128)
  \]

  Apart from the positive impact of Socialist parties (particularly the PS), that are part of the coalition, on a number of important issues, such as Economic policy or Health, we can see that an issue emphasized in Ecolo’s manifesto was also a new priority for the government. This is also the case for the Vlaams Blok, but shared with a coalition party and for an issue that is not at the core of the VB’s manifesto, contrary to that of Ecolo’s (energy policy).

- **"0" outcome:**

  We have also selected some prime implicants by hand (we have opted to choose, as priority, "0" values for governmental parties, and "1" values for "non-traditional" parties (Greens and VB), as we expect a relatively higher congruence between coalition parties and the government agreement than between opposition parties and the latter:

  - to “cover” cases 18,165,166,173 : 2 possibilities : [sp951 * VL951] or [sp951 * PR951]. We have chosen [sp951 * VL951], as we assume that items supported by the VB are more electorally “profitable”;

---

37 NB : « Logical cases », or « remainders » are configurations which are not observed in the data, but which are used by the software to obtain a more parsimonious minimal formula.

38 NB : a « prime implicant » is a term of the minimal formula. Each prime implicant is a “short” combination of conditions (a “regularity”) which “covers” a certain number of configurations (and thus a certain number of observed cases). Whenever the software has no reason to prefer a prime implicant over the other (e.g. when 2 prime implicants of the same “length” cover the same number of configurations), it is up to the researcher to select prime implicants “by hand”, relying on his/her substantive or theoretical knowledge.

39 NB : between brackets, under each term (« prime implicant ») of the formula, the cases that are « covered » by each term.
- to “cover” case 125 : 2 possibilities : [CV951 * vb951] or [vb951 * PC951]. We have chosen [CV951 * vb951], as we assume that the CVP has a stronger negotiating position that the PSC.

Thus the following minimal formula :

\[ ga_{9295+1} = \]
\[ CV951 \times vb951 + sp951 \times VL951 + SP951 \times ps951 + (125) + (18,165,166,173) + (83+102) \]

For most of the issues, it is indeed an opposition party (VLD) that sees its priorities decreasing in salience in the government agreement. However, we also see that two coalition parties (CVP and SP) did not either manage to influence the drafting of the coalition agreement for mostly international issues. Despite this, Dehaene II government was the cabinet that made Belgium’s entry in the Monetary Union possible (in 1991-2, the fall of the Berlin wall, the drafting of the Maastricht Treaty and the first Gulf War were high on the agenda; this is because of this exceptional context that some of these issues were in comparison less salient in 1995).

Using the same 10 parties, the regression analysis can explain 66% (R square = .662) of the content of the agreement, that is to say more than the coalition parties alone (50%). In this exercise, unsurprisingly, two parties belonging to the coalition stand out, that is CVP with coefficients reaching .698*** and SP with .366***. Amongst opposition parties, only two seem to have a positive and significant impact: the VB (.315*) and the PRL (.163*). The others affect the contents of the coalition agreement negatively, like the VU (-.466***) and Agalev (-.291**). Controlling for autocorrelation in the dependent variable, the explanation capacity of our model grows to 75%, with three significant coefficients: the SP with .260**, CVP with .351* and negatively the VU with -.256**.

6.3. For the 1999 government agreement (6 coalition parties : PS, SP, PRL, VLD, Ecolo, Agalev)

Model for “1” outcome : \( GA_{9599+1} = SP_{991} + PS_{991} + PR_{991} + VL_{991} + EC_{991} + AG_{991} \)

With a N of 17, we still obtain one contradictory configuration, covering 4 cases. This configuration corresponds to the absence (“0” value) of all 6 conditions (000000). For 3 cases (73, 101, 262), this combination leads to a “0” outcome, but for one case (135) this leads to a “1” outcome (which is counterintuitive). This case 135 stands for “private international law” (mixed marriages, nationality, foreigners’ rights, political asylum seekers, visa policy).

One way to try and solve this contradiction would be to add one seventh condition, VU991, as the VU also has a strong profile on these specific issues (quite close to that of Agalev), and as this party was in fact part of the (Flemish) regional coalition formed in 1999. However, adding the VU does not solve this contradiction.

If we disconsider this contradiction (the corresponding cases are simply not treated in the minimization procedure), we can proceed with the minimization (“logical cases” included for the minimization).

NB : selection of prime implicants by hand.
- to “cover” cases 12, 18, 21, 142, 166, 189 and 266: we have chosen: [AG991 * sp991] and [vl991 * EC991], as these 2 prime implicants are also the “shortest” implicants which allow to cover these 7 cases;

- to “cover” cases 266 (“labour conditions”) and 283 (“mobility and transportation”), we had 4 possibilities: [AG991 * pr991], [SP991 * pr991], [EC991 * pr991], and [pr991 * PS991]. In other words: always the absence of the item for the French-speaking Liberals (PRL), combined with the presence of either of the 4 following parties: Socialists (PS or SP) and Greens (Ecolo or Agalev). We have selected [SP991 * pr991], as the SP is arguably the party amongst these 4 parties which has been able to capitalize on both the “labour” and “mobility” fronts, contrary to Agalev or even the PS and Ecolo (the latter two received the respective portfolios).

We obtain the following minimal formula:

$$GA9599+1 = AG991 * sp991 + SP991 * pr991 + vl991 * EC991 (12,18,21,166) + (266,283) + (142,189,266)$$

It is striking that issues that were high on the Green parties’ agendas and not part of the priorities of larger coalition parties like the VLD and the SP account for most of the positive shifts of emphasis in the government agreement of 1999. This contradicts hypotheses of proportional weights in policy pay-offs and those that relate to the poor negotiating skills of newcomers. On the other hand, these first results are in line with electoral results (as the Greens were the only real winners; they almost doubled their number of seats in parliament) and with the generally favourable image for Greens-owned issues (because of the food scandal that took place shortly before the elections) that probably led larger parties to give the government agreement such a coloration.

- “0” outcome:

In the minimization procedure, there is no need to choose prime implicants by hand. The minimal formula is as follows:

$$ga9599+1 = ag991 * ec991 * PR991 + SP991 * VL991 * PR991 (123,165) + (134,181,141)$$

Apparently, the French-speaking Liberals seem to have lost in terms of policy bargaining in the drafting of the government agreement, as at least 5 of their most salient issues have been less emphasized in 1999 than in 1995 (although that was a government in which they did not participate). This conclusion can also be drawn from the analysis of the minimal formula for the “1” outcome above. This would be in line with what country specialists say about Liberal parties in Belgium: they are more office-oriented than policy-oriented, and thus more inclined to policy sacrifices than other parties (De Winter, Timmermans, Dumont 2003), in order to strengthen their bargaining position in terms of ministerial portfolio allocation, the other main output of government formation.

The regression analysis we performed triggers quite different conclusions. The six coalition party manifestos explain almost 68% (R square = .676) of the coalition agreement. The PS has the greatest influence on the issues presented in the agreement with a coefficient of
.693***. He is followed by the PRL (.243**), that appeared to be one of the losers of the policy bargain in the QCA analysis, and Agalev (.244*). On the other hand, Ecolo (together with the VLD, largest party and party of the Prime minister, and the SP) presents non-significant coefficients although it seemed to trigger important positive shifts in the coalition agreement in our QCA test. If we control for autocorrelation in the dependent variable, the R square goes to .818 with only one party’s coefficient strongly significant (the PS with .373***), and three other coalition parties reach .172**. The others (Agalev and the VLD) are non-significant.

6.4. For the 1999 government agreement (all 10 parties)

For the “1” outcome:
This time (as opposed to the 1995 data; see above), there are no contradictory configurations. The minimal formula obtained is:

\[
\text{GA9599+1} = \text{AG991} \times \text{SP991} + \text{VB991} \times \text{PR991} + \text{VL991} \times \text{EC991} \\
(12,18,21,166) + (135,283) + (142,189,266)
\]

The most interesting finding here is that we see, combined with a “0” value for the French-speaking Liberals [pr991] a “1” value for [VB991], i.e. the high salience of two issues for the main protest (and non-governmental) party (the Vlaams Blok) that translates into a positive shift of emphasis in the government agreement: these issues are “private international law” [135], which includes the highly symbolic issue of asylum seekers, and “mobility and transportation” [283] (which is less connected to the VB “favourite themes”, in principle, but that is nevertheless in line with its demand for the regionalisation of important public services). Interestingly, if we only add the VB as seventh party to the 6-party model (above), we obtain a contradiction-free model. Hence the model “6 governmental parties + the VB” is the shortest contradiction-free model. Quite logically, if we minimize this 7-party model, we obtain the same minimal formula as right above.

For the “0” outcome:
There are no contradictory configurations.

Selection of prime implicants by hand: we need to choose either one of the 3 following prime implicants to “cover” case [165] (i.e. “Budget”): [ag991 * SP991], [SP991 * ec991], and [SP991 * ps991] (i.e.: always the “1” value for the SP, combined with the “0” value for either of the 3 following parties: Agalev, Ecolo and PS. We opt for the third implicant (i.e. the one implying the 2 largest parties, the PS and SP).

The minimal formula obtained this way is:

\[
\text{ga9599+1} = \\
\text{SP991} \times \text{ps991} + \text{ag991} \times \text{vb991} \times \text{ec991} + \text{SP991} \times \text{VL991} \times \text{PR991} \\
(165) + (73,101,123,262) + (134,141,181)
\]
Once again, the Vlaams Blok comes out as the only non-governmental party included in the minimal formula, and, as above, we can test a 7-party model (the 6 coalition parties + the VB) without any contradiction (hence this is also the shortest contradiction-free model).

The Vlaams Blok not only had a positive agenda setting power in the drafting of the 1999 government agreement but also some form of negative power, as the coalition parties did not de-emphasize issues that are high on the agenda of this protest party. This is an interesting finding, since it shows that the VB indeed plays a role in Belgian politics or at least is an important constraint for the governmental agenda.

Once again, as right above, we can test a 7-party model (the 6 coalition parties + the VB). As right above, we also obtain this way the shortest contradiction-free model, which yields the same minimal formula as right above.

Like in 1995, the introduction of the opposition parties in our regression analyses slightly increases the explanatory capacity of our model. The 10 Belgian parties explain practically 72% (.715) of the agreement while the six coalition parties contribute to 68% of the influence. The study of each party coefficients shows that government party PS reaches .660*** but is followed by an opposition party (at the federal level only, as this party was part of the Flemish regional government), the VU (.327**). The PRL, that appeared to be a loser of the policy bargain, is however the only of the remaining parties with a positive and significant coefficient (.175*). Controlling for autocorrelation in the distribution of emphases in the previous agreement, we go up to 84% level of explanation with coefficients of PS of .390*** and .200* for Agalev. The VLD still gets a negative effect (-.159*) whilst the PRL displays a coefficient of .150* and the VU .144*.

7. Tests of Model 4 – Media and Party effect on government agreement

Reminder in terms of periodisation : = aggregation of media contents for the period between the publication of party manifestos (3 months before elections) and the signing of the new coalition agreement (roughly four-five months of media contents) to get a “net” effect of the media.

7.1. For the 1995 government agreement (4 Media & 4 coalition parties)

- “1” outcome :

With a N of 19, there are no contradictory configurations.

The choice of prime implicants (by hand) is quite complex. Only one prime implicant is pre-selected : [3ajf95 * SP951] for cases 141, 261, 263 and 189. Using a stepwise procedure and applying the same rules as above (see previous sections, we obtain the following minimal formula:

\[
GA9295+1 = 3ajf95 * SP951 + cv951 * PS951 + 3ajf95 * 3atf95 * ps951 + 3ATF95 * SP951 * PS951 + (141,261,263,189) + (152) + (128,262,341) + (134,189)
\]
The “party” component seems to play a much stronger positive role than the “media” component, except for cases 134 and 189 where an interaction between party and media (French-speaking TV) is needed to trigger a positive issue emphasis shift in the government agreement. All party positive impacts come from Socialist parties.

- “0” outcome:

There are no contradictory configurations.

To “cover” some cases, we need to make two choices by hand:

- to cover cases 53, 83 and 102, we can choose between 2 prime implicants: \([3AJV95 \times ps951] \) and \([3ATF95 \times ps951]\); i.e. in both cases a combination of a “1” value for a mass media source and of a “0” value for a party (the PS). The cases are the following: 53 “powers and role of the government”, “international relations”, and 102 “international security”. We have no decisive reason to clearly opt for one of these two prime implicants; hence we leave room for two distinct minimal formulae;

- to cover cases 165 (“Budget”), 166 (“Taxes”) and 173 (“Migration and integration of immigrants”), we can choose between 2 prime implicants: \([CV951 \times sp951 \times PS951]\) and \([sp951 \times PS951 \times PC951]\). As case 173 is a more salient issue in Flanders (with the CVP being the main party) and as a prime implicant containing a “1” score for both a Flemish- and a French-speaking party is a stronger predictor of a “1” outcome, we opt for \([CV951 \times sp951 \times PS951]\).

Hence we obtain two minimal formulae, alternatively.

The first one is:

\[
ga9295+1 = 3AJF95 \times 3atf95 + 3ATF95 \times ps951 + CV951 \times sp951 \times PS951
+ (18,125,71,178) + (53,83,102) + (165,166,173)
\]

and the second one (only the second term differs) is:

\[
ga9295+1 = 3AJF95 \times 3atf95 + 3AVJ95 \times ps951 + CV951 \times sp951 \times PS951
+ (18,125,71,178) + (53,83,102) + (165,166,173)
\]

As a converse conclusion of the results for the “1” outcome, it seems that media agenda does not have much influence on the government agreement, as most of the issues in these minimal formulas were high on the media agenda (especially the French-speaking media, see formula 1) but were nevertheless less emphasized in the 1995 government agreement than in the one from 1992.

Traditional statistical tools bring complementary elements for the comprehension of the whole model. Taking into account the four coalition parties and the four medias in 1995, 53% of the relationship between government agreement and media combined with party manifestos can be explained by linear regression. If we add the opposition parties into this model, we go up to a 69% of explanatory capacity. More precisely, taking only coalition parties and media in our model, the coefficients are, as expected, significant for the largest parties CVP (.349**) and PS (.325*). This is in line with Gamson’s (1961) prediction of proportional weighted
influence and also for the neo-institutional explanation of higher influence for formateur (CVP) parties. Surprisingly (compared to our QCA results), the French-speaking newspapers also have a positive and significant influence (.293**). The enlargement of the model to opposition parties, give basically the same weight for the French-speaking newspapers (.265**) and confirms the influence of coalition parties CVP (.642***) and SP (.369***). Some opposition parties have a negative impact, the VU (-.468***) and Agalev (-.285**), but others like the VB (.299*) and the PRL (.195*) have a positive one.

7.2. For the 1999 government agreement (4 Media & 6 coalition parties)

Reminder for the periodisation : = aggregation of media contents for the period between the publication of party manifestos (3 months before elections) and the signing of the new coalition agreement (roughly four-five months of media contents) to get a “net” effect of the media.

- “1” outcome :
With a N of 17, there are no contradictory configurations. We obtain the following minimal formulae (choosing the “shortest” combination of prime implicants which cover all cases) :
First possibility :
\[
\text{GA9599+1} = 3\text{AJF99} * \text{pr991} + \text{AG991} * \text{vl991} + \text{sp991} * \text{EC991} \\
(283) + (21,189,266) + (12,18,142,166)
\]
Second possibility (only one prime implicant differs) :
\[
\text{GA9599+1} = \text{AG991} * \text{sp991} + \text{vl991} * \text{EC991} + \text{VL991} * \text{pr991} \\
(12,18,21,166) + (142,189,266) + (283)
\]

Again, we find that a positive agenda setting power for both the Green parties. Only in the second minimal formula do we find another coalition party (the VLD) with such an effect. The media only accounts for such a positive effect on one issue. It is intriguing to find that the media agenda in question is coming from the French-speaking part of the country (which is the minority part in terms of population) and that the issue at hand is transport and mobility, a problem much more relevant in densely populated Flanders.

- “0” outcome :
There are no contradictory configurations (as opposed to the 1995 data; see above).

The choice of prime implicants (by hand) is more complex:
- to cover case 101 (“Belgian defence and weaponry”), we have to choose between 6 prime implicants : [3ajf99 * 3AJV99], [3ajf99 * 3ATF99], [3ajf99 * 3ATV99], [3AJV99 * ag991], [3ATF99 * ag991], [3ATV99 * ag991]. We note that, in all 6 of those prime implicants, the “media” component plays a key role. It is difficult to make
a clear choice of the one implicant which should be kept. As the Greens (Agalev in particular) did not really play a leading role in the negotiations, we have chosen one of the first 3 prime implicants, namely \([3ajf99 \times 3AJV99]\), i.e. the one which contrasts the written (newspaper) media; “0” value on the French-speaking side, and “1” value on the Flemish side (indeed, this issue is a clear “winner” for Flemish parties in pre-electoral periods).

- to cover cases 123 (“European integration”) and 165 (“Budget”), we have to choose between 4 prime implicants: \([3ajf99 \times ec991 \times PR991]\), \([3ajv99 \times ec991 \times PR991]\), \([3atf99 \times ec991 \times PR991]\), \([3atv99 \times ec991 \times PR991]\), and \([ag991 \times ec991 \times PR991]\). In other words: all these 5 prime implicants combine a “0” value for Ecolo, a “1” value for the PRL, and a (changing) third “ingredient”. As European affairs and (to a lesser extent) budgetary affairs are usually not so salient in electoral campaigns (and hence not so much in the media), we opt for the only one of the 6 prime implicants which only has to do with party manifestos: \([ag991 \times ec991 \times PR991]\).

Hence we obtain the following minimal formula:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ga9599+1} &= 3ajf99 \times 3AJV99 + ag991 \times ec991 \times PR991 + SP991 \times VL991 \times PR991 \\
&+ (123,165) + (134,141,181)
\end{align*}
\]  

Compared to 1995, the 1999 model tested through regression analysis reaches a better R square (.704). This score does not change much when adding the opposition party manifestos in our model (73%). This could have been expected as this coalition is composed of 6 parties instead of 4 for 1995. Moreover, as its participants range from the left to the right (in coalition research parlance, this is an unconnected coalition), they are supposed to cover most of the differences in issue emphasis (if we follow the issue ownership theory) in the whole party system. In fact, few variables display a significant coefficient. These are the PS (.722***), Agalev (.252**), the PRL (.219**) and the Flemish TV news (-.244*), but the latter has a negative effect. In the enlarged model, the VU is the only opposition party (but this party participated in the Flemish regional government) that obtain significance (.277*), while none of the four different media aggregated datasets reaches that level. Two coalition parties remain statistically important: the PS with .678*** and PRL with .162*.

If we take autocorrelation into account, the model increases its explanation capacity of our models by 16.6%. The previous government agreement gets in all the tested models an average coefficient of .493***. More precisely, in 1995 in a model comprising the four media and the four coalition parties (plus the 1992 government agreement), the R square goes to .728. We get significant coefficients for the PS (.284*) and for the French-speaking newspapers (.188*). In the enlarged model (with the opposition), we get a overall explanation of 77% and the coefficients for the following parties or media are significant: VU (-.271**), SP (.270**), CVP (.330*), PS (.221*), French-speaking newspapers (.197*) and PRL (.137*). In 1999, the overall explanatory capacity of the model grows to an R square of .840 if we only analyse coalition parties together with media. Some of these variables display a significant coefficient: the PS with .382***, the Flemish newspapers with .236**, the Flemish TV news -.225*, Agalev .216*, VLD -.139* and finally the PRL .120*.
8. Preliminary conclusions

[will be expanded in the spoken presentation]

The aim of this exploratory paper was to evaluate the direct effects of the media on the governmental agenda (the coalition agreement), but also its indirect effects (through its impact on the elaboration of party electoral programmes) and to identify potential interaction effects of the media and parties on the governmental agreement.

We still have to reconsider most analyses, as well as all the (still preliminary) conclusions of the numerous tests we have performed (both QCA and regression) – in this first draft, we have had no time to do so. Here is a (selective) list of points that come out [will be expanded in the spoken presentation]:

- We have, altogether, found little (or no) direct impact of the media agenda on the government agreement.

- Party effect on governmental agreement: some parties come out much more strongly than others (especially the CVP in 1995 and the PS in 1999); we have also found a specific effect of the Vlaams Blok (extreme right-wing party; opposition) on some issues.

- Also in terms of party effect on governmental agreement: there is more effect when more parties join the coalition (which is quite logical), both through QCA and regression analyses. However, some parties which come out (on some issues) in the QCA analyses (such as Ecolo, the PSC and the VLD) do not come out (statistically) with the regression analyses. This should be further investigated.

- Some opposition parties seem to have been quite influential (more in 1995 than in 1999), especially the VU (and the VB, to a lesser extent; see above).

- We have found no « recency effects » (see models 1 and 2).

- Through the regression analyses, we come to the (preliminary) conclusion that Model 4 (66% on average) does not explain more variance of governmental agreements than Model 3 (64%). Hence the specific effect of the mass media is marginal (there is a light effect of French-language newspapers in 1995), and there is no cumulative effect of media and party influence.

Roughly:

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mass Media</th>
<th>17%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party Manifestos</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Agreements</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

17% 14% 64%
What we still need to do [some first indications will be given in the spoken presentation] is to systematically compare and “cross” our two avenues for data exploration: following a dichotomized, deterministic and « small N » logic (with QCA), and an interval-scale, probabilistic, and « large N » logic (with regression analysis). It seems that we learn from both logics. This effort should be pushed further, both by refining each type of analysis and by really confronting the two logics.

References

Appendix 1

1. Government Agreements and Party Manifestos

The governmental agreements coded are the federal agreements of 1992 (Dehaene I), 1995 (Dehaene II) and 1999 (Verhofstadt) ones. Due to the time gap between the 1988 governmental agreement (Martens VIII) and the first data gathered for other agendas (beginning 1991), we did not code the Martens VIII agreement. Notice that the Volksunie, which was part of the Martens VIII government, left the coalition in 1991, triggering the formation of a Martens IX cabinet. As there was no new coalition agreement due to the proximity of elections, we did not code any other document than the three referred to earlier.

The time periods that were used for the drafting of these governmental agreements are as follows:
- 1991: Elections on November 24th; Dehaene finally succeeds at forming a centre–left (CVP-PSC-SP-PS) coalition; the government is sworn in on March 7th.
- 1995: Elections are held on May 21st; Jean-Luc Dehaene (CVP) is appointed formateur; the centre–left (CVP-PSC-SP-PS) cabinet is sworn in on June 23rd.
- 1999: Elections are held on June 13th; on July 24th, the cabinet of a rainbow (VLD-PRL-SP-PS-AGALEV-ECOLO) coalition is formed with Guy Verhofstadt (VLD) as Prime Minister.

Those elections also determined the date of publication of the manifestos. When elections are not anticipated unexpectedly, parties make their manifestos public about three months before the elections and that is the case in 1991, 1995 and 1999.

The unit of analysis is the sentence or the semi-sentence in case two or more issues can be traced in the same sentence. Whenever enumerations were found and separated by either “ - ” or “ ; ”, parts of the ‘sentence’ were coded separately (if manifesto drafters use these separators, it seems reasonable to consider that they do so in order to put emphasis on each separately).

The total N-value of the governmental data-file is 1810. Per government agreement, the N sentences are distributed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>685</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>1810</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The total N-values in the party manifestos:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AGALEV</td>
<td>712</td>
<td>1242</td>
<td>2586</td>
<td>4540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CVP</td>
<td>899</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>1278</td>
<td>2927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECOLO</td>
<td>3052</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>1698</td>
<td>5090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRL</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>1248</td>
<td>1830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td>1268</td>
<td>1077</td>
<td>851</td>
<td>3196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSC</td>
<td>584</td>
<td>673</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>1913</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>2932</td>
<td>776</td>
<td>557</td>
<td>4265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VB</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>1426</td>
<td>4831</td>
<td>6527</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VLD</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>1339</td>
<td>1929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VU</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>1730</td>
<td>1848</td>
<td>3813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>10601</td>
<td>8537</td>
<td>16892</td>
<td>36030</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Together with the party manifestos agenda, the governmental agreement agenda only gives data for three points in the 1991-2000 period. This is an important feature that will constrain some time-series analyses.

The governmental agreement is not an exhaustive document of all what is to be implemented during the legislature (it is even enshrined in the documents of 1991 and 1995). Some issues are not tackled because there is no consensus between the coalition parties or because there is no urgency to negotiate on them all. Coalition agreements are thus documents comprising the priorities (either because some parties wanted to tackle the issue or because there was an emergency to deal with it) on which government parties have agreed. Moreover, the length of the coalition agreements studied differs, which also means that in shorter documents either there were less issues tackled or the same number of issues was present but less space was devoted to each of them. The same methodological remarks can be made as far as party manifestos are concerned.

2. Media

The data we use for the media agenda consists out of two major parts: the coverage of newspapers and the television news-broadcasts. The selection of the specific media within these two groups, was hard. Fruitful discussions in the network-meetings resulted in the following selection:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspapers</th>
<th>TV-news broadcasts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flanders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Morgen</td>
<td>VRT (19h30/19h00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Het Laatste Nieuws</td>
<td>VTM (19h00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Standaard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French-speaking Community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Soir</td>
<td>RTL (19h00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Libre Belgique</td>
<td>RTBF (19h30)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Flanders:

We opted for these three newspaper several reasons:

1. Previous research with the same newspapers in our research-group (with obvious positive consequences for the availability of the newspaper copies)
2. The representation of the three main ideological groups in the Flemish society (De Morgen for the socialist, Het Laatste Nieuws for the liberal and De Standaard for the
catholic ideology). Despite of the general trend of depilarization in society, and media especially, we think this could be a (minor) factor to explain differences in coverage of newspapers, worth taking in consideration.

3. This allows us to take up both broadsheets (quality newspapers) and a “tabloid” or popular newspaper. Generally, broadsheets are considered to have more relevance for the policy makers (and influence on the policy-making process) than tabloids, even if the latter have many times more readers\textsuperscript{40}. But in this agenda-setting-project, we also try to make a link with the agenda of the public, which could be influenced more by the tabloid newspapers, even if it was just because it’s mostly the only kind of paper people read. The taking-in of a tabloid newspaper also enlarges the relevance and possibilities of our media-database for other applications outside the field of agenda-setting.

4. De Standaard is the largest “quality-newspaper” in Flanders (almost 100.000 copies every edition), with a very high relevance for the policy-makers and the other media. De Morgen is a smaller “quality-newspaper”, but recovering: it’s number of sold copies has been rising considerably during the last years of the nineties (upto about 65.000 in 2000). Also interesting about De Morgen is that research has shown that with some elements of the newspaper’s coverage (large pictures for example), De Morgen tend more to the tabloid-newspapers (Walgrave & Manssens, 2000). Het Laatste Nieuws is the largest tabloid in Flanders, with 330.000 copies sold every day in 2000. Since there was no budget or time for encoding more tabloid newspapers, we went for the largest, best available and ideologically fitting tabloid. With more funds available, we would have considered Het Nieuwsblad and Gazet Van Antwerpen as the first alternatives, but both are considerably smaller in copies/day than Het Laatste Nieuws and both their (historical) orientations are catholic.

The two TV-news-broadcasts are chosen for the following reasons:

1. The Commercial channel VTM (most) and the public channel VRT are the only companies who where continuously showing news-broadcasts for a large public during the research period. More specifically for the public channel, the TV1 (first channel) broadcasts are taken, since they are (at least recently) intended for a broader public. The TV2/CANVAS-news has been through a structural change during time, and has in addition to that no comparable counterpart for the commercial broadcaster, and is therefore not an option.

2. The 19h-version of the news is the most viewed news-broadcast, and the only one broadcast at the exact same time of the evening every day (unlike the late news).

3. Local news broadcasts were to some extent available (TV-Brussel), but encoding them was not financially attainable, and hardly relevant for the project. They also do not have the range that the selected channels have, and often exist as a complementary/secondary news source.

French-speaking Community:

We opted for two newspapers : Le Soir and La Libre Belgique, for the following reasons :

\textsuperscript{40} Maxwell McCombs, the founder of the agenda-setting concept, found in his study with Shaw that for example in the United States, the (broadsheet) New York Times alone was sufficient to measure the media-agenda, since all the other media had almost perfect correlations with this newspaper.
La Libre Belgique: it is considered as “the” reference quality newspaper for decision-makers, (although not so many copies of it are sold). Therefore it can be expected to have the largest influence on decision-making. It also has a rather right-of-center orientation, rather “belgicist”, and also has a Christian/Catholic background, though less obvious during the last few years. Finally, it is quite comparable with De Standaard, and hence will open the way for some fruitful comparative (North/South) analyses.

Le Soir can also be regarded as “quality” newspaper, but the key reason why we chose it is that it has the largest audience (readership) in the French-speaking Community. Therefore, it gains the most visibility among the public, and at the same is also considered as important by decision-makers. It is quite complementary with La Libre Belgique, as it is rather pluralistic in party/political terms, with quite a few left-of-centre journalists though, and with a more “francophone” (non-belgicist) profile.

We also seriously considered to include La Dernière Heure/ Les Sports (the most read newspaper among the French-speaking Community, along with Le Soir), but eventually decided not to for 4 reasons: a/ budgetary reasons; b/ the fact that La Dernière Heure has changed it’s format to “tabloid” during the research period; c/ the fact that a certain (certainly not negligible) proportion of La Dernière Heure/ Les Sports mainly purchases this newspaper for the “Les Sports” section. Hence, one may assume that the “real” readership of this newspaper’s main (non-sports) page is substantially lower than that of Le Soir; d/ it has a clear Liberal (PRL (MR)) party-political orientation.

The French speaking TV news broadcasts were selected in a similar way as the Dutch speaking TV news: one public, one commercial news broadcast, with the addition of the time-gap: since there is a 30 min starting-time difference, people can watch both TV news broadcasts after each other. In addition, the RTBF and RTL news broadcasts reach, by far, the largest news audiences in French-speaking Belgium.

The sources we used are:
- For the newspapers: The paper copies of the newspapers, either from our own archive, or copied from microfilm, available in the Antwerp City Library and in the Bibliothèque Générale des Sciences Humaines at the UCL.
- For the TV-news broadcasts: We did NOT encode the video-material itself. We used the encoding of a private company Auxi-press, partly (since 1998) available at the centre of Communication studies from Louvain-La-Neuve, the rest we purchased at a reasonable price. Guarantees have been asked and obtained for the quality and continuity of the by Auxi-Press encoded data. They encoded the news-broadcasts of both parts of the country in the same way: for every item one or two lines, catching the content of the item, the people that were interviewed and the length of the item.

Encoding three complete newspapers every day for 10 years was of course not a realistic option (in budgetary terms). Concessions had to be done on both the amount of encoded newspaper days (frequency of measurement) as the amount of articles per newspaper.

To limit the tedious and expensive encoding task, we have chosen to take the coverage of the newspapers of four of the six newspaper-days every week (there are no Sunday-editions of newspapers in Belgium). We originally planned to encode only half of the newspaper copies, alternating the days of the week. Previous research on Belgian newspapers showed, however that Saturday’s newspapers contain considerably more political news, and we chose
to include all Saturday’s papers. Since this agenda-setting project aims at explaining the political agenda, also the Monday’s papers seemed indispensable: in Belgium Sunday’s TV-news shows regularly set the political agenda for the following week. Moreover, Monday’s papers contain two days of exceptionally interesting news (e.g. in combination with the protest-agenda that often take place in the weekend) (Rucht & Neidhardt, 1998). Therefore, we preferred to take four, instead of three days of each week, leaving us the choice between Wednesday’s and Friday’s newspapers or Tuesday’s and Thursday’s newspapers. A preliminary test proved that Wednesday’s and Friday’s newspapers contain more political news than Tuesday’s and Thursday’s newspapers, and together with the better and more equal dispersion over the week, this led us to omitting the Tuesday and Thursday-newspapers in our encoding.

The other limitation of the (too) large amount of articles, is situated within the selected newspapers, concerning the question how much of the coverage of each newspaper was encoded. To stay within the budget, we had to limit this amount drastically till about five-maximum ten articles per newspaper. This is grossly the amount of articles on the front page, which made it easy to decide: only the front-pages of the newspapers were encoded. This is also defendable, because it contains the –for the newspapers- most important stories and it has a high visibility-rate by the readers. We are well aware that the omitting of for example large reports or big interviews inside the political news pages of the newspapers are a loss, but mainly, they are also announced on the front pages, not unusually even with a summary-article.

Concerning the TV-news broadcasts, we did not structurally omit any days of the week (including Sundays), since the pre-encoding by Auxipress made the work easier and faster. We also encoded the themes of all the items in the news, not just the headlines. These are important factors to keep in mind while comparing between newspapers and TV-news. The news broadcasts aren’t comparable with the newspapers on a day by day basis, since they newspapers are printed and read at a different time of the day than the TV-news. The Saturday-paper, is that the TV-news of Friday evening, or Saturday evening? Probably a combination of both, with the complicating factor that the media also influence each other all the time.

Despite all our efforts to complete encoding of the media-agenda to the largest extent possible, our dataset suffers of, mostly small, discontinuities, who are not all solvable.

- Some data are unavailable and just not traceable anymore. This is mostly a problem for the TV-news broadcasts, since the Auxi-press data consist holes often caused by technical problems and (most likely) by bad archives. Mostly this is just one or two days (holidays are especially frequent in this case), but one period is specifically problematic because of its length of three full months: October-November-December 1995. There are no records of these data, and it is unrealistic and spurious to start encoding that period using the real video-material.
- Some data are not yet available. This is the case for e.g. the TV-news broadcasts of May 1998.
- Some missing data, like single missing days for one of the three newspaper (for whatever reasons), will not be “hunted” for in other libraries. Their missing does not cause any vital problems for the data-base continuity, and the research to get them, would take more time than the information is worth.
Taking this into account, together with the fact that the non-existence of newspapers and TV-broadcasts because of strikes within the editorial staff does also count as a missing, leaves us with a database with a missing percentage of 10.52% for the newspapers, and 14.08% for the TV-news-broadcasts.

Not part of this missing rate, are the missing years 1991 and 1992 for the TV-news-broadcasts. This is also a period we cannot retrieve (Auxi-Presse does not have data before 1993), but since it’s in the beginning of the period, we just cut that of for the TV-media-data, and don’t count it as “missings” in the missing rate. But they are definitively missing. As a result of this, we have only 8 years of TV-news and 10 years of newspapers-data.

The N-values are distributed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>VRT</th>
<th>VTM</th>
<th>Total Flemish</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>3120</td>
<td>3815</td>
<td>6935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>3276</td>
<td>3685</td>
<td>6961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2456</td>
<td>2955</td>
<td>5411</td>
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<td>1996</td>
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<td>4129</td>
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<td>1997</td>
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<td>3641</td>
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<td>7815</td>
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<td>2000</td>
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| TOTAL| 28738 | 26965 | 55703           

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Taking newspaper reporting and television news together, we dispose of a media content dataset that contains almost 190,000 news items spread over a ten year period (1991-2000).

Some restrictions are to be made:

1. A consequent amount of articles not encoded: The following five categories of articles were not encoded further, just counted. The reason for this is substantial time-profit without losing any politically relevant articles. The number of articles about royalty (everything that has to do with royal families, foreign or domestic, except for the institutional matters) ; the number of articles about sport (all results, transfers, predictions, match analyses,… without sport policy relevance) ; the number of articles about celebrity (everything about famous people, foreign or domestic, low or high culture) ; the number of articles faits-divers (domestic accidents and house fires, funny stories, trials fro the Guinness book of Records, etc. It’s not impossible that politicians are mentioned is this category) ; the number of articles not determinable due to lack of information (sometimes it is not determinable about what the article handles. This is often the case for teaser articles, referring to larger articles inside the newspaper).

2. The presence of reports on criminality. Newspapers and television give very much attention to crime, and more specifically on (spectacular) crime acts (robberies, riots, theft, vandalism, rape, murder cases, etc.). These are “issues” that can not occur in most other agenda’s, where criminality is mostly limited to crime-policy, or maximum the general feeling of insecurity. This is a first restriction, because these codes (41, 188, 1371, 1372, 1373, 1374) weigh seriously on the percentages of media-attention of other issues, especially for the more “popular” media (up to 25% crime !)

3. Another, similar, problem is the continuous presence of the code 402, Domestic policy of foreign countries. This is another typical media-code, because it’s hardly relevant

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for the most other agenda’s. This brings us to the second, more general problem of the policy level (multi-level problem). We work at the federal level, and some agenda’s just have federal data (Government Agreement), while others have also regional items, European items and even items which do not fall under the powers of any European or Belgian instance (Media).

4. Despite all our efforts to work completely the same way, the French-speaking and the Dutch-speaking media-agenda might not be completely encoded the same way. A few trouble area (difficult issues to encode) could be encoded differently, without us knowing it at the present time. Therefore, the datafiles need to be synchronised, and changes in the future (recodings) should be as much as possible happen in both datafiles.

5. The limitation to four newspaper days and the fact that the encoding only contains the front pages of the newspapers, is a restriction. The choices are understandable and defendable, but we are not sure that there are no systematic errors because of these choices.

6. The lay-out and concept of some of the newspapers has changed over the years of the research period. E.g. La Libre Belgique in 1993, De Morgen and De Standaard in the beginning of the nineties, with serious consequences for the amount of articles, and even the content of the front page articles.
Appendix 2 : list of issue codes (141)

010. INSTITUTIONAL ASPECTS OF THE ROYAL HOUSE
011. POLITICAL SYSTEM
012. STATE REFORM, POLITICAL POWER AND INTERCOMMUNITY CONFLICTS
014. POLITICAL THEORY
015. POLITICAL [ PARTY] IDEOLOGY
016. PARTY ORGANISATION
017. LOBBYING, MOVEMENTS AND CIVIL SOCIETY
018. POLITICAL CULTURE
021. ELECTIONS

031. COMPOSITION OF PARLIAMENT & PARLIAMENTARY PROCEEDINGS
033. POWERS AND ROLE OF THE PARLIAMENT

051. COMPOSITION & EXECUTIVE PROCEEDINGS
053. POWERS & ROLE OF THE GOVERNMENT

071. ORGANISATION OF THE STATE
073. MULTI-LEVEL RELATIONS

082. INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS & GOVERNEMENTAL ORGANISATIONS
083. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
086. INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC AFFAIRS
087. INTERNATIONAL TRADE
088. INTERNATIONAL MONETARY AFFAIRS
089. INTERNATIONAL NON GOVERNEMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

091. DEVELOPMENT AID

101. BELGIAN DEFENCE & WEAPONRY
102. INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

121. EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS
122. COMMUNITY LAW
123. EUROPEAN INTEGRATION
124. ENLARGEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
125. EUROPEAN FINANCES
126. EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY
127. EUROPEAN AGRICULTURAL POLICY
128. EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND INDUSTRIAL POLICY
129. EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

131. SOURCES OF THE LAW
132. CIVIL LAW
133. FAMILY LAW
134. ORGANISATION OF JUSTICE AND POLICE
135. PRIVATE INTERNATIONAL LAW
136. RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS
137. CRIME
1371. VARIOUS CRIMES
1372. CORRUPTION & FRAUD
1373. THEFT
1374. CRIMES AGAINST INDIVIDUALS
1375. ESCAPE FROM PRISON

041. PUBLIC ORDER
138. SOCIAL LAW
141. ECONOMIC POLICY
142. ECONOMIC SUPPORT OF THE GOVERNMENT
144. ECONOMIC SYSTEM
147. ECONOMIC ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC CLIMATE
148. TRADE POLICY
149. PUBLIC CONTRACTS
150. TARIFS AND PRICES
152. CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR AND PROTECTION
153. PROMOTIONS AND COMMERCIALS
154. DISTRIBUTION

161. MONETARY POLICY
162. FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS AND CREDIT
163. FINANCIAL POLICY
164. INSURANCE
165. BUDGET
166. TAXES

171. FAMILY
172. CONCEPTION AND CONTRACEPTION
173. MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION OF IMMIGRANTS
174. POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHY
175. SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND CULTURE
177. WELL-BEING
178. SOCIAL POLICY
179. SOCIAL LIFE
180. YOUTH POLICY
181. CRIME POLICY
183. NARCOTICS
184. SOCIAL EXCLUSION, POVERTY AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION
187. SEX-RELATED ISSUES
188. SEX-RELATED CRIMES
189. HEALTH POLICY
190. TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING
191. HOUSING
192. SUICIDE
193. DISAFFECTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE
194. DEATH
195. ASYLUM

201. SPORTS (POLICY)
202. ENTERTAINMENT AND DIVERSION
203. TOURISM
204. CULTURE AND PATRIMONIUM

212. RELIGION
221. EDUCATION POLICY AND ORGANISATION
222. PEDAGOGICAL METHOD

231. COMMUNICATION- & INFORMATION POLICY
232. MEANS OF COMMUNICATION
233. DOCUMENTATION
235. DATA PROCESSING
236. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY INFORMATICA
237. TELECOMMUNICATION
238. MEDIA
241. SCIENCE

251. COMPANY POLICY AND ORGANISATION
254. COMPETITION

261. DISMISSIONS & PENSIONS
262. LABOUR STATUS AND MODALITIES
263. EMPLOYMENT POLICY
264. UNEMPLOYMENT
265. LABOUR MARKET
266. LABOUR CONDITIONS
267. SOCIAL DIALOGUE

281. TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS
282. TRAFFIC REGULATIONS
283. MOBILITY AND TRANSPORT

291. WAIST
292. SOIL AND UNDERGROUND
293. ATMOSPHERE
294. WATER
295. NOISE
296. FAUNA
297. FLORA
298. GENERAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY
299. CLIMATE
300. ENVIRONMENTAL DISASTERS
301. ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS RELATED TO ENERGY
302. RADIATION
303. BIOHAZARDOUS CHEMICALS
304. BIO-ETHICS

311. AGRICULTURE POLICY
312. TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF AGRICULTURE
315. ANIMAL WELFARE
317. FORESTRY
318. FISHING
319. FOOD

333. MATERIALS
334. INDUSTRIAL PROCESSES
335. QUALITY NORMS (IN INDUSTRY)
336. TECHNOLOGY
337. (INDUSTRIAL) RESEARCH AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY
338. INTERNATIONAL SPACE TECHNOLOGY

341. ENERGY POLICY

351. INDUSTRIAL POLICY
354. SPECIFIC INDUSTRIES

403. INTERIOR DISASTERS
Appendix 3 : list of variables labels (104)

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EC9195+5 1% variation of ECOLO manifesto between 1992 & 1995
EC951   Categories above 1% in Ecolo manifesto of 1995
EC9599+1 1% variation of ECOLO manifesto between 1995 & 1999
EC9599+5 1% variation of ECOLO manifesto between 1995 & 1999
EC991   Categories above 1% in Ecoło manifesto of 1999
GA9295+1 1% variation of gov agreements between 1992 & 1995
GA9295+5 0.5% variation of gov agreements between 1992 & 1995
GA9599+1 1% variation of gov agreements between 1995 & 1999
GA9599+5 0.5% variation of gov agreements between 1995 & 1999
PC9195+1 1% variation of PSC manifesto between 1992 & 1995
PC9195+5 1% variation of PSC manifesto between 1992 & 1995
PC951   Categories above 1% in PSC manifesto of 1995
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PC9599+5 1% variation of PSC manifesto between 1995 & 1999
PC991   Categories above 1% in PSC manifesto of 1999
PR9195+1 1% variation of PRL manifesto between 1992 & 1995
PR9195+5 1% variation of PRL manifesto between 1992 & 1995
PR951   Categories above 1% in PRL manifesto of 1995
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PR9599+5 1% variation of PRL manifesto between 1995 & 1999
PR991   Categories above 1% in PRL manifesto of 1999
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PS9195+5 1% variation of PS manifesto between 1992 & 1995
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PS9599+5 1% variation of PS manifesto between 1995 & 1999
PS991   Categories above 1% in PS manifesto of 1999
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SP9195+5 1% variation of SP manifesto between 1992 & 1995
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VB9195+5 1% variation of VB manifesto between 1992 & 1995
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VB9599+5 1% variation of VB manifesto between 1995 & 1990
VB991   Categories above 1% in VB manifesto of 1999
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VL9195+5 1% variation of VLD manifesto between 1992 & 1995
VL951   Categories above 1% in VLD manifesto of 1995
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VL9599+5 1% variation of VLD manifesto between 1995 & 1999
VL991   Categories above 1% in VLD manifesto of 1999
VU9195+1 1% variation of VU manifesto between 1992 & 1995
VU9195+5 1% variation of VU manifesto between 1992 & 1995
VU951   Categories above 1% in VU manifesto of 1995
VU9599+1 1% variation of VU manifesto between 1995 & 1999
VU9599+5 1% variation of VU manifesto between 1995 & 1999
VU991   Categories above 1% in VU manifesto of 1999
## Appendix 4

### Model 1A (whole legislature up until 3 months before elections)

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<th>Conclusion</th>
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<td>Falsified</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Media on CVP 1995, $+1%$</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>$CV9195+1 = A3JF95 + A3JV95 + A3TF95 + A3TV95$</td>
<td>Yes (3 contrad. = 22 cases)</td>
<td>Falsified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Media on CVP 1999, $+1%$</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>$CV9599+1 = A3JF99 + A3JV99 + A3TF99 + A3TV99$</td>
<td>Yes (2 contrad. = 16 cases)</td>
<td>Falsified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Media on Ecolo 1995, $+1%$</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>$EC9195+1 = A3JF95 + A3JV95 + A3TF95 + A3TV95$</td>
<td>Yes (2 contrad. = 29 cases)</td>
<td>Falsified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Media on Ecolo 1999, $+1%$</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>$EC9599+1 = A3JF99 + A3JV99 + A3TF99 + A3TV99$</td>
<td>Yes (3 contrad. = 29 cases)</td>
<td>Falsified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Media on PRL 1995, $+1%$</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>$PR9195+1 = A3JF95 + A3JV95 + A3TF95 + A3TV95$</td>
<td>Yes (4 contrad. = 27 cases)</td>
<td>Falsified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Media on PRL 1999, $+1%$</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>$PR9599+1 = A3JF99 + A3JV99 + A3TF99 + A3TV99$</td>
<td>Yes (3 contrad. = 26 cases)</td>
<td>Falsified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Media on PS 1995, $+1%$</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>$PS9195+1 = A3JF95 + A3JV95 + A3TF95 + A3TV95$</td>
<td>Yes (2 contrad. = 12 cases)</td>
<td>Falsified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Media on PS 1999, $+1%$</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>$PS9599+1 = A3JF99 + A3JV99 + A3TF99 + A3TV99$</td>
<td>Yes (2 contrad. = 11 cases)</td>
<td>Falsified</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Media on PSC 1995, $+1%$</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>$PC9195+1 = A3JF95 + A3JV95 + A3TF95 + A3TV95$</td>
<td>Yes (3 contrad. = 18 cases)</td>
<td>Falsified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Media on PSC 1999, $+1%$</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>$PC9599+1 = A3JF99 + A3JV99 + A3TF99 + A3TV99$</td>
<td>Yes, but less (2 contrad. = 13 cases)</td>
<td>Falsified (to a certain extent)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Min. formula for “1” outcome (6 cases), with “logical cases” :  
$A3TF99$ [cases 41,102,134,189,221]  
$+ A3JV99 * A3TV99$ [cases 102,134,189,221,195] |
<p>| 13. Media on SP 1995, $+1%$ | 22 | $SP9195+1 = A3JF95 + A3JV95 + A3TF95 + A3TV95$ | Yes (3 contrad. = 17 cases) | Falsified |
| 14. Media on SP 1999, $+1%$ | 30 | $SP9599+1 = A3JF99 + A3JV99 + A3TF99 + A3TV99$ | Yes (2 contrad. = 25 cases) | Falsified |
| 15. Media on VB 1995, $+1%$ | 15 | $VB9195+1 = A3JF95 + A3JV95 + A3TF95 + A3TV95$ | Yes (2 contrad. = 12 cases) | Falsified |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Model 1B (last year of legislature up until 3 months before elections)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16. Media on VB 1999, +1%</td>
<td>A3TF95 + A3TV95 cases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Media on VLD 1995, +1%</td>
<td>VL9195 + A3JF95 + A3JV95 + A3TF95 + A3TV95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Media on VLD 1999, +1%</td>
<td>VL9599 + A3TF99 + A3TV99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Media on VU 1995, +1%</td>
<td>VU9195 + A3JF95 + A3TV99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Media on VU 1999, +1%</td>
<td>VL9599 + A3JF99 + A3TV99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Media on Agalev 1995, +1%</td>
<td>AG9195 + 153JF95 + 153JV95 + 153TF95 + 153TV95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Media on Agalev 1999, +1%</td>
<td>AG9599 + 153JF99 + 153JV99 + 153TF99 + 153TV99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Media on CVP 1995, +1%</td>
<td>CV9195 + 153JF95 + 153JV95 + 153TF95 + 153TV95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Media on CVP 1999, +1%</td>
<td>CV9599 + 153JF99 + 153JV99 + 153TF99 + 153TV99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Media on Ecolo 1995, +1%</td>
<td>EC9195 + 153JF95 + 153JV95 + 153TF95 + 153TV95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Media on PRL 1995, +1%</td>
<td>PR9195 + 153JF95 + 153JV95 + 153TF95 + 153TV95</td>
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<tr>
<td>29. Media on PS 1995, +1%</td>
<td>PS9195 + 153JF95 + 153JV95 + 153TF95 + 153TV95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Media on PS 1999, +1%</td>
<td>PS9599 + 153JF99 + 153JV99 + 153TF99 + 153TV99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Media on PSC 1995, +1%</td>
<td>PC9195 + 153JF95 + 153JV95 + 153TF95 + 153TV95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Media on PSC 1999, +1%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 33. Media on SP 1995, +1% | 22 | SP9195 + 1 = 153JF95 + 153JV95 + 153TF95 + 153TV95 | Yes, but less (2 contrad. = 13 cases) | Falsified (to a certain extent). Minimal formula for “1” outcome (5 cases), with “logical cases”:
153jf95 * 153tv95 [cases 181,238] + 153JF95 * 153TF99 * 153TV95 [cases 136,178,263] |
| 34. Media on SP 1999, +1% | 30 | SP9599 + 1 = 153JF99 + 153JV99 + 153TF99 + 153TV99 | Yes (3 contradict. = 25 cases) | Falsified |
| 35. Media on VB 1995, +1% | 15 | VB9195 + 1 = 153JF95 + 153JV95 + 153TF95 + 153TV95 | Yes (2 contradict. = 13 cases) | Falsified |
| 36. Media on VB 1999, +1% | 19 | VB9599 + 1 = 153JF99 + 153JV99 + 153TF99 + 153TV99 | Yes (2 contradict. = 13 cases) | Falsified |
| 37. Media on VLD 1995, +1% | 25 | VL9195 + 1 = 153JF95 + 153JV95 + 153TF95 + 153TV95 | Yes (2 contradict. = 22 cases) | Falsified |
| 39. Media on VU 1995, +1% | 31 | VU9195 + 1 = 153JF95 + 153JV95 + 153TF95 + 153TV95 | Yes (6 contradict. = 29 cases) | Falsified |
| 40. Media on VU 1999, +1% | 26 | VU9599 + 1 = 153JF99 + 153JV99 + 153TF99 + 153TV99 | Yes (3 contradict. = 21 cases) | Falsified |