

THE IMPACT OF DOMESTIC FORCES ON FOREIGN POLICIES

A STUDY OF PARTY AND MEDIA INFLUENCES IN BELGIUM

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*The only wisdom we can hope to acquire
Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless.*

T.S. Eliot

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PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

“The main instrument of which the Prime Minister disposes, is determining the agenda and the timing. [...] He is the boss in the governmental kitchen: he determines the menu, he decides what goes into the fridge, he puts the pots in the oven and determines the baking time. He also has the right to fend off busybodies from his kitchen”¹

- Former Prime Minister J-L. Dehaene (2000: 26)

As former Belgian Prime Minister Jean-Luc Dehaene argues in his well-known style, his Prime ministerial power was not derived from formal authority to impose his will onto others. By determining the agenda, not only does the Prime Minister – and by extension the government – decide which issues will be attended to, but he also determines which issues are *not* dealt with – the ones that go “into the fridge”. Dehaene’s analogy perfectly represents what agenda-setting and this research are about: determining what is on the menu. While the dominance of the executive branch in foreign policy is generally recognized in most countries, power is about more than having the ability to choose among available policy alternatives. Determining the issues on the agenda affects the people involved in the issues that are dealt with. However, while this may be the goal, it is impossible for the executive branch to determine its own agenda all of the time, especially in an international environment that is constantly changing and impossible to control. The main question, then, is what determines the governmental agenda. This question is the central theme throughout this dissertation, as I explore how political parties and news media are able to influence the policy agenda.

¹ Personal translation.

Studying foreign policy decision-making from an agenda-setting perspective is relatively new, as foreign policy behavior has traditionally been studied at the system level (between states) or at the level of the decision unit (the small group of decision-makers). The dominance of (neo-) realist theory and the heavy research focus on conflicts within international studies have contributed to these trends (Fordham, 1998a). The realist perspective considers States as unified rational actors who pursue their interest in the most cost-efficient – or rational – way (Morgenthau, 1948: 13-15; Waltz, 1979). In this perspective, the interest of a country is expressed and understood in terms of power and is seemingly agreed upon by all. Therefore, explanations of foreign policy behavior are sought at the system level: the relative power of the states and the interactions between them (Waltz, 1979; Holsti, 2004: 313-319). Hence, realist theory discards important societal actors, like political parties, the media and public opinion, as well as main features of the political system and the decision-making process (Kaarbo and Ray, 2010: 141) and, for long, held back research on the domestic forces in foreign policymaking. According to such a perspective, the foreign policy of (smaller) countries, like Belgium, would be passive and reactive (Cohen 1987; Sulton 1987: 20; Zahariadis 1994, as cited in Hey, 2003: 6).

However, as Hey (2003: 6) points out, reality offers quite a different picture. If we were to examine the different policy subdomains that constitute Belgium's foreign policy today, the system level, by itself, would not be very helpful. For example, Belgium's policies towards and within the European Union – definitely its most important relationship – generally require and reflect a broad internal consensus and, thus, agreement among the governing political parties. More specifically, Belgium's stand on the European financial and monetary crisis (spending cuts or growth creation) reflects a broader governmental and societal consensus. Development aid, another important subfield of Belgium's foreign policy, must be among the most heavily planned of all policies. Military interventions, then again, are so exceptional, especially among small states, that their decision-making dynamics can hardly be considered to be representative of a country's entire foreign policy action. Moreover, the system level cannot, by itself, explain important decisions like the withdrawal of Belgian troops from Rwanda in 1994, or why Belgium did not participate in the Iraq War of 2003 while the Netherlands did. Hence, it seems hard, but also counterproductive, to maintain the claim that small state foreign policy is reactive and dependent on the system level. Furthermore, we will see that the national interest can

be understood from different ideological perspectives and is not as stable as realist theory would suggest.

With the end of the Cold War, security issues were no longer the dominant foreign policy concern for most states – whether small state or great power – and small state passiveness and dependency have increasingly been put into question. As a result, the potential of domestic influences on foreign policy were increasingly explored. Among those important contributions, Robert Putnam (1988) showed how the domestic and international levels interact through international negotiations and Joe Hagan (1993) demonstrated how domestic and institutional features affect countries' foreign policy behavior.

Yet, many international relations students had already challenged the notion of the state as a unitary actor whose national interest is determined by the system structure. They recognized the importance of domestic considerations in studying foreign policy (Holsti, 2006: 327). Students of such a *foreign policy approach* are convinced that the international behavior of a country can best be understood by looking at what goes on inside states (Kaarbo and Ray, 2010: 141-142), with particular attention to policymakers and the decision-making process (Holsti, 2006: 327).

The theoretical perspective of *foreign policy decision-making* (FPDM), tries to explain policy outcomes by looking at the particular dynamics within the decision unit. Studying the way decisions are made is important, as the decisional process can affect the outcome (Hermann, 2001: 75; Mintz and DeRouen, 2010: 4). The FPDM approach unveils the dynamics that lead to specific decisions and focuses on aspects like leadership and group dynamics (Janis, 1982; Hermann and Hermann, 1989; Maoz, 1990; Hermann, Stein, Sundelius and Walker 2001). It also takes into account the environment in which the decision is made, the perceptions of those in charge, as well as domestic politics.

However, the aim of this research is to take a step back and look at how issues got onto the governmental agenda in the first place. In his theory on foreign policy change, Charles Hermann (1990) noted that the organizational structure of government tended to prevent change. He concluded that “any foreign policy change must overcome normal resistance in political, administrative, and personality structures and processes”, among which “bureaucratic inertia and standard operating procedures” (Hermann, 1990: 8). Agenda-setting theory offers an explanation of why policy changes are so hard to achieve, on one hand, but also unravels the dynamics

that lead to occasional large policy changes, on the other. Moreover, it also allows us to explain the specific role of different political actors, and how they affect each other, within this process.

Early on, Cobb and Elder (1971: 264) emphasized the importance of political parties and the media in promoting an idea, in addition to their direct access to decision-makers. This research focuses on these two main actors and examines whether, and how, they have been able to influence and direct the Belgian foreign policy agenda from 1978-2008 throughout the different stages of the policymaking process. Foreign policymaking is, thus, studied from a public policy perspective, using a theoretical agenda-setting framework and methodology. Foreign policy is hereby understood and defined as “a goal-oriented or problem-oriented program by authoritative policymakers (or their representatives) directed toward entities outside the policymakers' political jurisdiction” (Hermann, 1990: 5).

AGENDA-SETTING

Most of the time, policies are quite stable, changing only slightly from one period to the next one. In 1964, Aaron Wildavsky advanced the concept of incrementalism as to explain policymaking and policy changes. He showed how budgets from one year were based on those of the previous year with minor adjustments. For long, incrementalism was considered as the best available explanation of the policymaking process. However, incrementalism could not explain the occasionally large shifts in policy that also occur. In their punctuated equilibrium theory, Baumgartner and Jones (1991, 1993) explain how the same institutional setup causes both types of policy changes. The implementation of policies is usually delegated to subsystems for reasons of efficiency. Subsystems are groups of elites who benefit from the existing structural arrangement and generally consist of elected officials, career civil servants and interest groups (Kingdon, 1995: 33). Since these subsystems want to remain in power and maintain their benefits, they will try to prevent policy changes that would affect them. Given their advantageous position, they can set the rules in such a way as to prevent others from raising issues and contesting the current policies that keep them in place. These subsystems frame the policy debate (our understanding of a problem) in a way that confirms their competence and excludes alternative solutions – and the groups that advocate them. As one such subsystem receives increasing attention, the others may mobilize to maintain the status quo and prevent large

changes that would affect them (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993). This process, called negative feedback, is the main mechanism behind incrementalism and explains, for example, why Congo has remained one of Belgium's top foreign policy priorities, given the large and strong subsystem and the great interest of benefits shared among politicians, bureaucrats and NGOs.

Yet, large policy changes can occur when the understanding of an issue changes and other, powerful, political actors become engaged. Changing the understanding of an issue (its policy image) and its possible solutions can cause previously uninterested people – among whom powerful political actors - to get involved in the debate and breaking the power of a subsystem. Once this happens, the policy change will not be a small, incremental adjustment, but a disproportionately large switch (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993, Jones and Baumgartner, 2005). With this process of positive feedback, a short, sudden spike in attention can alter policy disproportionately. Such a change in the understanding of a policy issue can have different reasons or sources. It can, for example, be obtained by sudden or steady attention by an influential political actor – like political parties or media – or as a result of a major focusing event (Birkland, 1997; 1998). With the former, a policy advocate works hard to promote a policy alternative and make it acceptable. Then, when the right opportunity comes along, the advocate's alternative may be considered as an appropriate solution. This involves changing how an issue is understood and framed. With the latter, a major event imposes itself on the agenda, as a main priority to all political actors at the same time, due to its focal nature. These are the type of events that cannot be ignored and are often seized by policy advocates to impose their alternative solution (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Birkland, 1997; 1998). As a consequence, the policy change will not be a slight, incremental, correction of the current policy, but will be a disproportionate change.

So, to push for alternative policy solutions, advocates will try to 'promote' their idea to different political actors in the hope of turning them into allies of their cause. The two mechanisms of policy change (policy advocacy and focusing events) show that an issue can reach the political agenda in different ways and influences on the political agenda can occur at different moments of the policymaking process. Baumgartner and Jones' punctuated equilibrium (1993; 2005) has been examined and confirmed in numerous studies, on various issues and in many different countries (see for example Baumgartner, Green-Pedersen and Jones, 2006 for budgets in France;

Breunig and Koski, 2006 for budgets in the U.S.; Walgrave, Varone and Dumont, 2006 for different political agendas in Belgium and Jones et al., 2009 on different political agendas in the U.S., Denmark and Belgium). However, little attention has been paid to the agenda-setting mechanisms in foreign policymaking and to the role of different actors within this process – especially outside the U.S.

The agenda-setting framework, used here, offers both the theoretical and methodological tools necessary to study the impact of political parties and media on Belgium's foreign policy over a period of several decades. *Agendas* are the lists of priorities of political actors. *Saliency* is the central element to agenda-setting research and refers to the relative importance of an issue on an agenda. Using the core activities of a political actor (for example budgets for governments, questions for Parliament or newspaper articles for media), it is possible to make a list of priorities for each actor at a given time. This only requires a simple count of the number of times particular policy issues are addressed, as a proportion of the total number of issues being treated – its salience. This gives us a measure of attention for each actor, which can then be compared. This way, it is possible to study priorities over time and across actors, but also to study the influence one actor's priorities has on another's. Using time lags between these agendas allows for cautious causal statements of influence, as changes in attention from one actor affect that of another. Different types of activities of one actor also enable the study of the evolution of priorities throughout the policymaking process. It is this agenda-setting approach that allows this research to map party priorities to those of the government in an early phase of policymaking, as well as to map media priorities to policy outputs in a later phase. It also enables the study of the evolution of the government's policies priorities from its formulation to its implementation.

Given the different nature of political parties and media, and the way they express their priorities, the role and influence of these actors is studied separately, according to the policy phase and the way in which they are regarded to influence policy most. The power of political parties is most prominent through the electoral cycle, whereas the media can exert their influence at any time. Hence, as every political party expresses its policy priorities univocally and in a similar fashion before the elections of the relevant, federal, policy level (once every four years), their influence is likely to be greatest right after these elections, during the negotiations of a new government. During this policy formulation phase, parties negotiate and bargain to include certain

issues or measures into the government agreement, the program that outlines the policies to enact during the coming legislature. Conversely, newspapers and television news are able to shift attention and express their priorities on a daily basis. Hence, media can draw attention to ongoing debates and this way also pressure the government during the policy decision phase.

POLITICAL PARTIES

Through democratic representation, political parties constitute the main vehicle between citizens and the governing process. Yet, unlike media and public opinion effects studies, research on the role of political parties in foreign policy never developed into a proper research tradition and studies are rather scarce. Despite overwhelming evidence that parties are among the most important political actors in many Western societies (Klingemann, Hofferbert and Budge, 1994; Budge, Klingemann, Volkens, Bara and Tanenbaum, 2001; Thomson, 2001; McDonald and Budge, 2005; Mansergh and Thomson, 2007; Costello and Thomson, 2008), the role of parties in foreign policy has largely remained neglected. Generally, the influence of parties on policy is studied using party manifestos. Before general elections, parties express their priorities and preferences in these programs to attract voters and show how their policy plans are different from those of the other parties. This is the best, and perhaps only, measure and opportunity to study party influences. First, because it is a rather infrequent occasion where all the parties express their vision on all the issues of importance to them and, secondly, because elections are rare moments where a party is united, especially since many manifestos are approved by party members at conferences.

Studies examining the congruence between what parties set out to do in their programs and what they actually do once in office, have found that for majoritarian systems (where – usually – only one party is in government) the manifestos of the winning parties are good predictors of the policies that are carried out (Bara, 2005; Mansergh and Thomson, 2007). For coalition governments, this is significantly lower. For those governments, the coalition agreements are equally good predictors of future policies (Thomson, 2001; Walgrave et al., 2006; Mansergh and Thomson, 2007; Costello and Thomson, 2008; Moury, 2011). Despite the widespread use of manifestos as a measure for party preferences, to my knowledge, no prior study has systematically examined the influence of parties on the executive foreign policy

agenda during the policy formulation phase. Valuable efforts have been made to assess the role of parties on (US) congressional voting (Kesselman, 1961; 1965; McCormick and Wittkopf, 1990; Meernik, 1993; Fordham, 1998a; Howell and Pevehouse, 2007) and to examine the influence of junior coalition parties on specific foreign policy decisions in Germany and Israel (Kaarbo, 1996; Barnett, 1999). These studies all point to the important conclusion that parties have different positions on foreign policy and that this can bring about conflict, both in Parliament and government.

Yet, U.S. dominated research tends to focus on decision-making during crises, limiting the research scope at the executive level to group dynamics and leadership. Foreign policy decision-making in coalition governments as decision units remained largely understudied. While coalition governments mostly behave like cohesive single groups, when opposition rises, coalition dynamics come into play whereby the members of government also act as delegates of their respective political parties (Hagan 1993; Hagan, Everts, Fukui and Stempel, 2001). In such a scenario, established rules among the negotiating partners determine how likely a conflict may escalate or not (Hagan et al., 2001). In her analysis of conflictual foreign policy decisions in Germany and Israel, Kaarbo (1996) identified a number of factors empowering junior coalition partners; like their internal unity, the threat to leave the coalition and the locus of authority.

The goal of this study is to assess the influence of political parties on foreign policy at an earlier policymaking stage, during government formation. During this policy formulation phase, it seems most appropriate to consider negotiators as bargaining decision units, as Kaarbo (1996) and Hagan et al. (2001) did. Given the importance of government agreements in coalition countries, like Belgium (Timmermans, 2003; Walgrave et al., 2006; Moury, 2011), examining the first official document of a newly installed government seems like an essential first step in understanding the role of political parties in making foreign policy.

MEDIA

Much like political parties, media play an important role in the democratic process, as they are important conveyers of information between politics and citizens. Hence, too an important extent, the influence of media on policymakers is indirect, through the public. By selecting what's newsworthy, media influence what people perceive to be

important (Iyengar and Kinder 1987). The public (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Page, et al., 1987; Entman, 1989; Jordan and Page, 1992; Soroka, 2003; Wanta, Golan and Lee, 2004), but policymakers, too (Cook et al., 1983; Protesse et al., 1987), tend to consider a topic or country as more important once it has been on the news. Moreover, for foreign news, which does not directly affect them, the public largely depends on the international media for information. Therefore, some argue that mass media, as the primary agent between the public and policymakers, would be most influential in directing executive preferences (Soroka, 2003).

The end of the Cold War presumably also ended the anti-communist alliance between journalists and policymakers. It also brought an end to the anti-communist financial and logistic support to a number of dictatorships around the world, leading to an increase in regional and ethnic conflicts (Nacos, Shapiro and Isernia, 2000). The American interventions in Iraq (1991) and Somalia (1992) sparked a debate about the role of the media in American foreign policy. A number of scholars and experts suggested that television images of starving people had increasingly influenced American foreign policy and military or humanitarian interventions. Bernard Cohen claimed that the media had “demonstrated its power to move Governments” (Cohen, 1994: 9). Amidst the American intervention in Somalia, George Kennan warned against “policy involving the uses of our armed forces abroad, [...] controlled by popular emotional impulses, and particularly ones provoked by the commercial television industry” (Kennan, 1993). Due to their almost global presence, the instant coverage and often graphic images of ongoing events, the media, and television in particular, were believed to have gained such great influence over the public that, through them, they were able to influence foreign policy decision-making. This media effect on foreign policymaking came to be known as the CNN-effect. Yet, despite strong claims of such an effect, most studies were unable to confirm its existence and most authors downplayed or plainly refuted previously assumed media effects (Robinson, 2001; Gilboa, 2005) in specific cases such as Somalia (Livingston and Eachus, 1995; Mermin, 1997; Robinson, 2001) and Northern Iraq (Livingston, 1997).

In fact, most studies confirmed Lance Bennett’s indexing theory (1990), which argues that the media only reflect ongoing debates among political elites, and are, thus, reflecting the political agenda instead of setting it. As media get a large portion of their information through official government channels, according to hegemony theorists, the “narrow ideological boundaries” within which official information is

spread, prevents any democratic deliberation (Entman, 2004: 9). So, if news media contest a given policy and ‘push’ for an intervention, this is only because elites from inside the government have previously voiced such an option. Cook (1998) claims that media are a political institution and an instrument of the government. Along those same lines, Herman and Chomsky’s propaganda model (1988) argues that media are actually ‘used’ to promote governmental policies or build support for preferred policy options. While these studies focused on the ‘who leads whom’ question, more interactive models of media effects research were more successful in explaining how media impact policy. Robinson (2002) found evidence that media effects could occur whenever there was ‘policy uncertainty’ regarding a specific issue. In such cases, media could build a frame sympathetic with the victims, urging policymakers to act.

Quantitative agenda studies examining the interactions between the media, the President and Congress found the American President to be reactive to the media (Wood and Peake, 1998). However, they did not find the President to direct or influence media attention. Both media and Government were responsive to international events and attention was found to be incremental – based on previous levels of attention. Consequent research demonstrated that the President was more active on domestic issues than on foreign policy issues where he mostly reacted to international events and media attention (Edwards and Wood, 1999). The work of Wood, Peake and Edwards showed the relevance and importance of studying foreign policy agenda-setting in a systematic and quantitative way. Yet, one of the shortcomings of their studies was that their measure of policy was only rhetorical (speeches and press statements) and not substantial policy with concrete consequences. Pritchard and Berkowitz (1993) argue that policymakers have two types of policy agendas; a symbolic and a resource (substantial) agenda. They claim this distinction is important, as they found their resource agenda (i.e. financial crime policy allocations) not to be sensitive to the impact of media. In their review of the literature, Walgrave and Van Aelst (2006) noted that most studies finding an impact of media on policy used symbolic measures of policy, like speeches and press statements. In Belgium, Dandoy and Varone (2005) found the budgets – the most ‘resource’ of all agendas – to be unrelated to any other governmental or parliamentary agenda between 1991 and 2000.

The last decade, however, a number of researchers examined media effects on foreign aid budgets. They found media attention to have an important influence on the

subsequent aid allocations to developing countries in a number of large donors like the U.S. (Van Belle and Hook, 2000), France, (Rioux and Van Belle, 2005), Japan (Potter and Van Belle, 2004), the UK and Canada (Van Belle, Rioux and Potter, 2004). Given the small number of military operations in which Belgium is involved, development assistance budgets provide for a great opportunity to quantitatively assess the impact of media on policy outputs in a comparative way and over a long period of time.

GOALS AND PLAN OF THIS STUDY

The *first*, general, goal of this dissertation is to assess and understand the role of domestic forces in foreign policymaking, notably that of political parties and news media. Political parties and news media are expected to play a key role in the democratic process of representation in foreign policy; the former as the main relay between the public and the governing process and the latter as the main conveyers of information between citizens and politics. General political representation and media effects have been thoroughly investigated, however, but not with respect to foreign policy. Hence, this first objective relates to the question and the debate on whether foreign policy is carried out in a proverbial ivory tower by elites, far from the considerations and realities of the people, or whether foreign policy obeys to the same democratic principles that make other policies responsive to the wishes and demands of the public. Given that we do not know a lot about the role political parties play in the foreign policymaking process, the specific goal of the first empirical part is to find out whether parties influence policy, to what extent and why certain parties have more influence than others. The explicit goal for the media studies of the second empirical part, then, is to examine whether news media affect policy and, if so, which conditions enable or enhance such effects. Different types of media effects (short-term and long-term) are explored.

A *second*, and related, objective is to find out how a foreign policy issue climbs up or down the ladder of political attention. While a great many issues require attention from the government, why are certain issues attended to while others remain neglected? Through the study of the influence of different actors, as well as other determinants, at different stages of the policymaking process, the goal is to find out why attention to specific issues or foreign countries increases or declines over time. While the focus in answering this question remains on political parties and news

media, the role of a number of other actors and considerations are also examined. In foreign policy matters, it is always important to take into account the influence of non-governmental organizations and civil servants. Likewise, if we want to find out why the government pays more attention – or money – to certain developing countries, it is crucial to take into consideration the conditions prevailing in those countries, as well as the nature of their relationship with Belgium. So, the goal of this study is to understand how all of these explanations contribute to the rise and fall of foreign policy issues on the policy agenda.

The *third* goal is of a more theoretical and methodological nature. The agenda-setting framework, used throughout this research, offers the possibility to examine the role of different domestic actors – as well as other determinants – within the foreign policymaking process in a systematic way and over a long period of time. Hence, as we gain new insights about foreign policy decision-making, this research also serves as an important test of the applicability and usefulness of the agenda-setting framework in studying foreign policy. The empirical sections will reveal whether agenda-setting is a suitable approach to answer the specific research questions of the different studies; whether one overarching theoretical framework can tell us how distinct actors influence policymaking at different stages of the decisional process. The agenda-setting approach offers promising comparative prospects, as it can also be applied to different political and institutional contexts or to other policy domains to examine how different policy environments affect the policymaking dynamics.

Chapter 1 explains the theoretical principles of agenda-setting and the mechanisms of policymaking in more detail: what prevents and enables policy change. It shows how policymaking is mostly an incremental process whereby policy changes only slightly from a previous period. This is mostly due to the delegation of policymaking to policy subsystems – groups of people who prevent changes to maintain the benefits they acquire from the current situation. Changes occur when a powerful political actor gets involved or when attention is focused on the subsystems' failing rather than on their competence. Given the central focus on the agenda-setting power of political parties and news media, I extensively explain how both actors are able to direct political attention to policy issues and bring about policy change.

Chapter 2 details the foreign policymaking process in Belgium. A brief history of Belgium's recent foreign policy should provide the reader with an idea of what Belgian foreign policy is about and how its focus and organization has shifted over

the years. Second, and most importantly, I focus on the formal competences, the customs and the specific role of the main actors and institution involved in the decision-making process, and how they interact with each other.

The methodological chapter 3 supports the methodological sections of the different empirical studies in parts II and III. Given the limited space to detail the research methods in each individual study, the goal of this chapter is to enhance the general understanding of how the data has been collected and transformed before being analyzed. The most important methodological choices that have been made along this process are also justified and explained in detail.

To follow up on this methodological section, chapter 4 offers an extensive description of the data. More specifically, the evolutions of the policy priorities of the most important political agendas are scrutinized. The general purpose of these descriptive analyses is to provide the reader with a better sense of what the data is about, what it looks like and which research possibilities it generates.

The first empirical section of my dissertation (Part II) focuses on government formation and the central role of political parties. First, I examine whether government agreements reliably reflect the policy priorities of the coming legislature throughout the entire four-year period in chapter 5. This study examines the importance of the government agreement as both a source and a constraint for new policy initiatives and, thus, establishes the value of the coalition formation as a policy agenda. To do so, the congruence between the policy priorities of the government agreements and those of the yearly state of the union speeches and ministerial councils are analyzed over time. Considering that the government agreements are used as a policy measure and dependent variable in the ensuing study in the following chapter, it is essential to confirm their status as policymaking arenas first.

The government agreement is a central document in this first empirical part. Usually, budgets and legislation are the best measures of policy. However, these measures are not best suited to ‘capture’ foreign policy, as it is not carried out through budgets or laws. Yet, aside from this practical consideration, the main reason for choosing the government agreement as policy measure is twofold. As chapter 1 and 5 demonstrate, there is a strong theoretical link between party priorities expressed before the elections and the priorities of the government, as formulated during coalition formation. Secondly, chapter 5 demonstrates that the government agreement is a reliable and valid measure for future policies.

In chapter 6, I examine which parties are most successful in influencing the foreign policy priorities of the newly formed government during the coalition negotiations. While the role of political parties in foreign policy has generally received little attention, the influence of parties at this crucial stage of the policymaking process has, so far, been completely neglected. The temporal sequence of events – manifestos are issued before elections and, then, winning parties come together to form a government and draft the coalition agreement – provides for a unique opportunity to examine the party-political dynamics that lead to foreign policymaking.

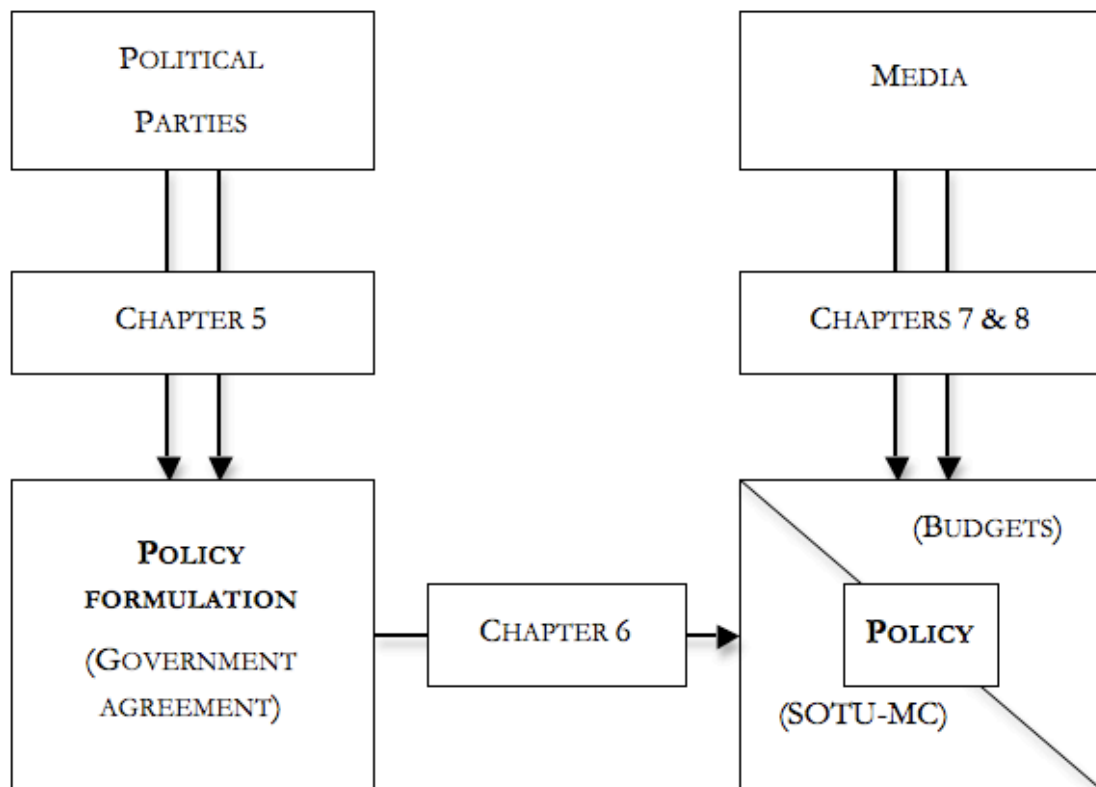


Figure 1.1 Outline of the study

The second empirical section (part III) explores the potential media effects on foreign policy, as well as the conditions under which they occur. First, chapter 7 examines whether development aid budgets are responsive to media attention and whether this is because or despite bureaucratic behavior. I examine Van Belle et al.’s (2004) claim that bureaucracies try to be responsive to the media, whose preferences reflect and influence those of the public. They allegedly do so to avoid scrutiny and sanctions from elected officials, who themselves need to meet the demands of the public. By comparing the overall aid budgets to that portion exclusively decided by

the administration, as well as to the part decided by non-governmental actors, I examine bureaucratic responsiveness directly and explore the dynamics behind media responsiveness.

In Chapter 8, I assess the differential impact of long-term and short-term media exposure on emergency assistance to affected countries. The allocation of emergency assistance is hereby modeled as a two-stage process where the short-term bursts of attention get a specific issue on the agenda while long-term media exposure impacts the amount of money that will eventually be allocated. This demonstrates that media attention can also impact policy in a different and subtle way. Moreover, the comparison of the results from the studies in chapter 7 and 8 serves as a test for Robinson's (2002) policy uncertainty hypothesis, according to which media has more impact in a decisional environment of uncertainty. While both types of aid are bureaucratically decided, they differ greatly in their predictability and in the degree to which they are planned.

Finally, the conclusion assesses the contributions of this research to our understanding of how foreign policy is conducted in general, and in Belgium in particular. I evaluate what we know about the impact of political parties and media in driving foreign policy change. I address what this study and its specific theoretical and methodological agenda-setting framework have taught us that we did not know before, especially with respect to the goals set out above. I will, then, also explore the limits and shortcomings of this study and its approach.

1 FOREIGN POLICY AGENDA-SETTING AND CHANGE: A THEORETICAL REVIEW

AGENDA-SETTING AND THE FOCUS ON ATTENTION: DECIDING WHAT TO DECIDE UPON

In studying policymaking and politics, there is a general tendency to focus on one aspect of power: the making of decisions. Yet, 'If you want a policy to be adopted, you first have to get decision-makers to talk about it' (Princen, 2009: 1). This summarizes the essence of agenda-setting, as well as its importance, rather well: deciding what to decide upon. Before policy-makers can decide on any given matter, it first has to gain a critical threshold of attention to reach the political agenda. Only then can a decision be made. This is the first main principle of agenda-setting: attention precedes decisions. Different actors and institutions each have their own set of issues that they consider to be important. These lists of priorities, or *agendas*, function like filters: while society faces an almost unlimited number of problems, attention of policy-makers is scarce, as they cannot attend to all these problems at once. This scarcity of attention is the second main principle of agenda-setting.

The concept of bounded rationality implies that organizations can only focus on one issue at a time (Simon, 1957, 1983) and that a selection needs to be made among all those issues while others are being delegated. Therefore, policy subsystems are created to allow political institutions to process a greater number of issues at the same time (parallel vs. serial processing). As a result, most policymaking is delegated to policy subsystems: groups of experts working on specific issues. Policymakers' scarcity of attention also highlights the importance of those issues attaining the institutional agenda, as well as the high status of this agenda. The combination of these two principles is at the centre of agenda-setting theory and emphasizes the crucial role of setting the agenda in the policymaking process; whoever controls the

political agenda, determines which issues are attended to, who is affected and which actors are involved. Hence, agenda-setting is a first step in the distribution of public goods.

Yet, despite a recent increased interest in agenda-setting, these ideas are far from new. In what is often considered as precursors of agenda-setting, Schattschneider (1960) and Bachrach and Baratz (1962) argued that power is not only expressed through the decisions made by one set of actors, and affecting the others. They claimed that power also lies in the process directing political attention and determining on which issues decisions need to be made: the locus of conflict. Directing the locus of conflict determines the scope of conflict (who is affected by the issue) and the actors involved (who gets a say in the debate) (Schattschneider, 1960) and corresponds to what Bachrach and Baratz (1962) called the second face of power, whereby the first face relates to the actual decision-making. This process is essential to political power and policymaking, as it helps maintain those in power and exclude others. In order for a policy to be changed, it first needs to be talked about. Since decision-makers have an interest in remaining in power, they do so by focusing on 'safe' issues that do not jeopardize the existing status quo. This status quo implies that a relative majority supports the set of priorities imposed by those in power – priorities that exclude conflictual issues and their advocates. Focusing solely on safe issues advantages the decision-makers and excludes issues that could be divisive among the decision-making unit or – worse – emphasize the relevance and competence of other groups or alternative decision-makers. Hence, decision-makers try to dominate the political agenda, a crucial first step in decision-making, as it benefits them. Moreover, by managing the scope of conflict they prevent these groups from gaining attention and reaching the political arena. So, as influence and access are unevenly distributed, the system favors some while disadvantaging others (Cobb and Elder, 1971).

A rather extreme example of this is the Belgian dioxin crisis of 1999 where it was found that specific food supplies in Belgium (mainly chicken) had high levels of a toxic called dioxin because they had been fed motor oil. Though the dioxin levels never threatened public health, with only a few months to go before the federal elections, initially, the government wanted to avoid attention to the issue. When it finally came out, public attention was immense. The event inevitably drew attention to the incompetence and mismanagement of the concerned ministers and the government as a whole. This translated into a major defeat for the ruling Christian

democrats and a victory for the green parties. More importantly, the event led to a major policy shift with the creation of a *food agency*, responsible for controlling the food chain.

Therefore, to bring about the possibility of change requires an expansion of the scope of conflict; getting more people involved and changing the status quo. As a silent majority of the people may not express themselves or have an opinion on a dormant issue, proponents of change will try to show those previously uninvolved people how an issue affects them and why they should care, as this can tip the current balance of power with respect to a specific debate. Thus, reaching the political agenda is a complex process that can depend as much on decision-makers' will to devote attention to an issue as their attempts to ignore it (Cobb And Elder, 1971). "Pre-political, or at least pre-decisional, processes are often of the most critical importance in determining which issues and alternatives are to be considered by the polity and which choices will probably be made" (Cobb and Elder, 1971: 903).

Hence, the second face of power (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962), the process that grants certain issues attention and ignores others, is a key element to understanding policymaking. Cobb and Elder (1971: 906-908) identified two principles that bias the composition of the institutional agendas and limit the issues being considered and, thus, the groups involved. A first source of bias is the tendency of decision-makers to pay attention to those issues previously attended to (for example cyclic issues, like budgets, or issues that have not yet been resolved), making the agenda inert and incremental. This makes it very hard for new issues to reach the institutional agendas. A second source of bias originates from the fact that decision-makers themselves are the most important actors in getting an issue onto the political agenda. For this reason, access to those policymakers is crucial. These sources of bias correspond to the two main foci in agenda-setting research, where the first concentrates on the role of agenda-setting in the policy process (how does the system prevent or enable certain issues to reach the institutional agenda) and the second on the role that actors and institutions play in the agenda-setting process (who influences whom) (Walgrave and Green-Pedersen, 2013 forthcoming).

Hence, agenda-setting research can be conceived as "the study of the rise and fall of issue salience over time, and of the relationships between actors' agendas" (Soroka, 2002: 5). Agendas are hereby best understood as lists of issues to which actors pay attention; a "ranking of the relative importance of various public issues"

(Dearing and Rogers, 1996: 2). *Salience* is the central concept and refers to the relative importance of an issue on one's agenda. This means that those issues to which a political actor or institution pays more attention are considered as more important by this actor/institution.

Without political attention no notable change can occur and the status quo will remain in place. Yet, while some issues are propelled and impose themselves onto the political agenda by their very dramatic and urgent nature, most issues take time and have to struggle their way up the political agenda. Natural disasters like tsunamis and heavy earthquakes or extraordinarily violent events, like 9/11, draw so much attention that they cannot be ignored and require urgent political reaction. Given their broad public interest (expansion of the scope of conflict), such events also attract new actors into the debate, with unpredictable consequences. However, for most issues, it takes a lot of time and effort to expand the scope of conflict, tip the balance and, this way, to become a priority on the governmental agenda.

The next parts of this chapter offer an overview of the recent agenda-setting literature on policymaking and policy change. It is important, at this stage, to note that the goal of this study is *not* to test the agenda-setting theory directly. The goal of this theoretical review is twofold. The first objective is to explain how policy issues reach the governmental agenda and how policy changes come about. In other words, to describe the mechanisms that drive and prevent policy changes. The second, and most important, goal of the general theoretical review is to explain the importance of policy entrepreneurs, like political parties and media, within this process. Therefore, after reviewing the role of agenda-setting in the policymaking process, I explain the specific, driving, role of political parties and media in foreign policymaking in more detail.

WHAT MAKES AN ISSUE'S TIME COME?

As noted in the previous section, the institutional biases – incremental issue attention on one hand, and the fact that policy-makers make up their own agenda, intentionally blocking out certain issues, on the other hand – cause the political agenda to change only slowly. In his study of the U.S. budgetary process, Wildavsky (1964) pointed to the incremental nature of budgets, explaining how current budgets are mostly based on last year's budgets. The decisions being made and the policies adopted are not

new, but mostly variants on previously adopted issues (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993: 5). Yet, while incrementalism seemed like the best available alternative to explain the bulk of budgetary changes for long, it could not explain the large, and often disproportionate, policy changes that also occur. In 1984, Kingdon, a student of Wildawsky, claimed that “instead of incremental change, a subject rather suddenly ‘hits’, ‘catches on’, or ‘takes off’ “ (Kingdon, 1995: 80)².

Baumgartner and Jones’ punctuated equilibrium theory (1991; 1993) accounts for such changes by demonstrating that incrementalism prevails when policymakers ignore signals for policy correction over a long period of time, resulting in policy stability. However, as these calls for change increase and reach a critical threshold, the resulting policy adjustment is often disproportionate in order to ‘catch up’ with these calls for correction. Hence, the punctuated equilibrium theory explains both policy stability and change through the processes of negative and positive feedback, respectively.

POLICY EQUILIBRIUM: THE POLITICS OF SUBSYSTEMS AND NEGATIVE FEEDBACK

It would be wrong to conceive of policymaking as a responsibility or competence confined to the highest ranked members of the executive. Political systems do not sustain conflict or discussions on every single issue at the highest level, as this would entail extremely inefficient policymaking. As I previously noted, due to the bounded rationality of political actors, most policymaking is delegated to policy subsystems. As new issues emerge, new institutional structures are also being created. This process of subsystem delegation applies to most policy issues most of the time (True, Jones and Baumgartner, 2007: 158). Subsystems are constantly being created and destroyed. However, if/once strong enough, they try to build up their independence (Meier, 1985) and prevent change, imposing a “conservative and incremental process” (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993: 6; see also Jones, Baumgartner and Talbert, 1993) by using similar mechanisms of exclusion as those previously described by Schattschneider (1960) and Bachrach and Baratz (1962).

In Belgian foreign policymaking, for example, an important policy subsystem deals with the policies related to its former colony, now the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Ever since acquiring the colony in 1908, Congo has always remained a key focus of Belgian foreign policy, even after its independence in 1960. From 1908

² Kingdon’s “Agendas, alternatives, and public policies” of 1995, used here, is the second edition of his seminal work from 1984.

until its independence, Belgium had a proper ministry of colonies. Today, Congo is the largest recipient of Belgian foreign aid and the Belgian military is involved in several operations in the country³. Hence, a large number of people work on this issue, constituting a powerful policy monopoly. Policy ‘monopoly’ might be a strong formulation for what others may call “iron triangles, policy whirlpools, and subsystem politics (Griffith, 1939; Redford, 1969 in Baumgartner and Jones, 1993: 7). The policy monopoly might be less impermeable than its name might suggest. However, I consistently use this formulation, as it also used as such in Frank Baumgartner and Bryan Jones’ *Agendas and Instability in American Politics* (1993), one of the main theoretical grounds of this research. Such a policy subsystem not only consists of civil servants, but also of experts from NGOs, academics and the media, experts whose work is related to Congo and who benefit – directly or indirectly – from the existing Belgian policies.

Subsystem can become policy monopolies when they are dominated by a single interest, meaning that all those involved share the same goals and benefit from the existing subsystem. In the example of the Congo subsystem, civil servants’ job may directly depend on their specific expertise, while NGOs and academics may rely on funding from the government. They will try to maintain the status quo and keep Congo as a high priority, for example through befriended journalists whose main expertise is also related to the former colonies. Hence, a lot of people share an interest in keeping the status quo when it comes to Congo. Policy monopolies are subsystems that have been able to impose their political understanding of a policy (its frame, the implications and possible solutions) and have developed an institutional structure, responsible for policymaking, reinforcing their grip on that understanding (Jones et al., 1993). The purpose of such monopolies is to become exempt from external scrutiny and discussions on the political understanding of the policy by convincing others that only their expertise qualifies to make decisions on the given matter (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993: 5-8). Policy monopolies are associated with a powerful and popular image or idea that relates closely to core political values (like safety, fairness or progress), which are not easily questioned. These policy images are used by the subsystem to justify its existence and actions.

³ For an overview, see <http://www.mil.be/ops-trg/subject/index.asp?LAN=nl&ID=932>

Dominating the policymaking process within a specific domain enables policy monopolies to impede large changes. The groups in power obviously want to remain in power and they have the means and resources to do so. Resistance to change can stem from a desire to pursue policy achievements or from a personal interest to maintain one's job (Huitema and Meijerink, 2010: 24). When an issue and its advocates receive attention, the existing subsystems mobilize to counter this effect. This mechanism of countermobilization (as one subsystem mobilizes, others react) is the basis of the negative feedback process and tends to prevent large policy changes. This way, the initial shift in attention will be reduced and its final effect will only be minimal. "So, the agenda might be quite volatile, but the alternatives policymakers consider and the actual proposals they are prepared to enact might represent much less dramatic changes" (Kingdon, 1995: 83). Hence, negative feedback is the source of the equilibrium, the stability in policy, causing the system to be self-correcting, as the changes are merely small policy adjustments (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993).

To make the abstract processes of policy equilibrium and negative feedback more concrete and specific to the Belgian foreign policymaking context, let us, again, consider the example of the Congo subsystem. Members of the subsystem pride themselves on their exclusive knowledge of the region, its history, the multitude of actors and their respective interests. This expertise is also recognized internationally, with Belgium being the reference when it comes to matters related to the region and its continued violent conflicts. Let us now, for argument's sake, assume that the policy monopoly is associated with the policy idea/image that Belgium has a responsibility towards Congo and its people due to their shared history. In addition – and still hypothetically – it is believed that the best and only way to exert influence, express criticism and urge Congolese leaders for necessary reforms is by keeping good relations with the regime, however corrupt and incompetent it may be. Due to its unique expertise and the low interest of major powers in Congo, it is believed that Belgium plays a crucial role in the development of Congo. People from outside the policy monopoly do not possess the required expertise and are not fit to assess the many important stakes and consequences involved. Thus far, the subsystem has been able to convince the decision-makers and the public of this policy image and reinforce its independence. Questioning this policy image of how best to deal with Congo – as former minister of foreign affairs De Gucht did at several occasions throughout his

mandate – generates a lot of criticism and alternative policy images are quickly thwarted through all possible channels.

So, when groups mobilize to increase political attention to an ‘under-attended’ country or issue, and their demands for increasing investments gain ground, the existing subsystems can countermobilize to prevent their share of aid from decreasing (as suggested by Baumgartner and Jones, 1993). If an increase in aid is considered, financial resources will need to be found from other, existing projects. However, as each subsystem defends its own interest, the money found to be reallocated, if any, will only represent a small change from the previous distribution. This is, in sum, how subsystems and the mechanisms of negative feedback work and tend to prevent large shifts in policy. However, as the next section details, it is this same institutional configuration that also occasionally enables major shifts from the current policy due to the mechanisms of positive feedback.

POLICY CHANGE: POSITIVE FEEDBACK THROUGH CHANGES IN POLICY IMAGE AND VENUE SHOPPING

So, who or what determines the political agenda and decides which issues require the highest form of attention and are, thus, ‘eligible’ for change? While incrementalism and the politics of subsystems had long been the prevailing explanation in policymaking, they could not account for the occasional strong policy shifts that also occur. In his seminal work of 1984, Kingdon (1995) demonstrated the power of agenda-setting in bringing about such changes. Major shifts in policy require a number of conditions to be fulfilled at the same time, creating a “policy window”. These policy windows provide an opportunity for advocates to bring forth their preferred idea or solution and require (1) a minimum level of attention, (2) an alternative policy image or solution to be considered and (3) a specific political climate that is open for change (like a shift in public opinion or elections) (1984 in Kingdon, 1995).

Baumgartner and Jones (1991; 1993; 2005) show how disproportionately large policy shifts can come about through the interaction between changing policy images and policy venues. Policy venues are institutions or groups with the authority to make decisions regarding an issue. As the previous sections have argued, policy stability does not derive from a broad societal consensus, but rather from a consensus among those holding power – the policy monopoly. The key to more significant policy

changes are (1) changing the way an issue is generally understood and approached and (2) reaching one of the relevant political actors where an issue can catch on to spread. To undo the existing stability requires involving the previously uninterested and uninvolved. These mechanisms are very similar to what Charles Hermann (1990) describes in his theory on the domestic sources of foreign policy change. Here, he argues that domestic politics can affect a change in policy as (a) “the attitudes or beliefs of the dominant domestic constituents undergo a profound change” or when (b) “issues become a centerpiece in the struggle for political power” (Hermann, 1990: 7).

Since policy images sustain subsystems and allow them to keep out proponents of a different policy course, redefining the way an issue is understood is key to expanding the scope of conflict. To do so, it is necessary to defy the supporting policy image that keeps subsystems and monopolies from being questioned or scrutinized. To increase its impact, an alternative policy image can benefit from a negative tone towards the existing policy, stressing its inadequacy. In their research on the American death penalty policy, Baumgartner, De Boef and Boydston (2008) show how the rate of executions only started to drop after the issue had been reframed from its (un)constitutionality to its fairness – the fact that many innocents have been wrongfully sentenced to death. In Belgian foreign policy, examples of such broad shifts do not abound. Indeed, foreign policy issues are not subject to much public debate.

One example of the effect of a changing policy image is Belgium’s development aid policy towards Palestine. Belgian aid to the Palestinian territories had not been particularly high throughout the 1980s and 1990s and had only changed incrementally until 2001. Yet, over the years, the image of the Palestinians as perpetrators slowly changed to that of victims. A number of events added to this evolution. After winning the elections and setting up a right-wing government in 2001, a lawsuit for war crimes was introduced in Brussels against Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. The Belgian War crimes law (*genocidewet/ loi de compétence universelle*) allowed this as it stated that the Belgian court had universal jurisdiction over such crimes⁴ (Rosoux, 2002). Though no case was pursued, relations with Israel deteriorated⁵. The issue was heavily debated and directed attention to Israeli policies. Then, after Israel had

⁴ The law was eventually scrapped under major American pressure.

⁵ De Standaard, July 06, 2001; July, 27, 2001

attacked the Palestinian territories (and destroyed installations funded by the EU), politicians, as well as the media, became increasingly critical of Israel's hawkish and disproportionate behavior towards Palestinians, speaking of international isolation⁶. By this time, NGOs and other stakeholders had been promoting this alternative image for a while, yet without serious policy consequences. In 2002, however, after a decade of steady but small increases, aid flows almost tripled from 4,735,782€ to 12,400,000€. As Kingdon (1995) argues, interest groups do not wait until a problem arises to promote an alternative solution – these are readily available. “More often, solutions search for problems” (Kingdon, 1995: 86).

Given that different venues can be associated with different policy images of the same question, policy advocates will try to appeal to other, more accessible, venues (Baumgartner and Jones, 1991, 1993). Thus, policy advocates on the losing side will move from one venue to another, according to their perceived efficiency in an attempt to gain “attention of potential allies not currently involved in the issue” (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993: 36). This may enable an alternative image to catch on, break the monopoly of the ruling subsystems and bring about change. NGOs, for example, try to reach out to different policy-makers using different approaches to convince them of their understanding of an issue. This ranges from writing letters to MPs to an occasional meeting with the minister of foreign affairs. This is a slow process and though MPs can rarely make a difference individually, an idea might catch on and spread among other policymakers through various channels, like their party or through the media.

This interaction between policy image and policy venues is called positive feedback (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; True et al., 2007) and refers to the rapid spread of an idea among different policymakers. This eventually causes the decision-making of an issue to move from the subsystem to the executive level, resulting in major policy shifts (True et al., 2007). Indeed, the subsequent policy reaction is almost never proportionate to the initial shift in attention (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005). So, while negative feedback dampens the external shocks to the system, small inputs can amplify and grow to entail major policy consequences through a process of positive feedback.

⁶ De Standaard, April 09, 2002

To summarize negative and positive feedback, let us reconsider the previous example of Belgian aid policy towards Palestine. While interest groups have been lobbying greater support to the Palestinians for decades, the negative image of Palestinians as terrorists, killing innocent Israelis, prevailed. Meanwhile, interest groups, like NGOs, continued to lobby consecutive governments, individual ministers, MPs and media to advocate their cause. However, this mobilization was not able to change the policy course drastically. Even if some MPs or even a specific minister were sensitive to this cause, they would have to convince the other parties and ministers, as well as the existing subsystems to give up part of their funds, which did not happen. Hence, changes in aid to Palestine throughout the 1980s and 1990s, were rather incremental. However, slowly, the policy image shifted from seeing Palestinians as terrorist to considering them as victims. As more MPs from different political parties became sensitive to the Palestinian cause, so did the political parties themselves, the media and, with them, public opinion. Hawkish Israeli policies certainly contributed to this evolution, as did the small diplomatic row of early 2002. However, it is the change in policy image combined with the advocacy to different policy venues that ultimately led to a drastic change in aid policies towards Palestine, making it among the top 10 recipients by 2003.

FOCUSING EVENTS

The process of changing policy image and venue shopping, described above, generally takes a lot of time – if it occurs at all. A single, major, event can, sometimes, circumpass these slow mechanisms and impose an issue onto all the political agenda(s) at the same time, creating a policy window that enables significant policy change. Focusing events often represent crises in a given policy domain that policymakers cannot ignore. However, for an event to be ‘focal’, its causes (what or who) and impact (is it dangerous or not) need to be clear and unambiguous (Birkland, 1997; 1998). Moreover, through the coverage of graphic images, media can support the effect of such events (Birkland, 1997: 12-14; Walgrave and Vliegenthart, 2010). Yet, for focusing events to have a potential policy impact, interest groups need to be well organized to exploit the event (Birkland, 1997; 1998; Kingdon, 1995). Whenever there is a well-organized advocacy coalition (against the existing subsystem in place), its impact will depend on the ambiguity of the dangers caused by the event (Birkland, 1998).

The dramatic and negative nature of focusing events usually indicates that something is wrong and that the current policy is failing. This temporarily freezes the institutional advantages policy subsystems have, enabling other interest groups to plea their case and demand a change in policy (Birkland, 1997). Yet, some policy domains seem more prone and sensitive to focusing events (Kingdon, 1995: 95). While some policies tend to affect people at an individual level (e.g. health and education), others can impact large groups of people at the same time (e.g. transportation and natural disasters). The impact of the former mostly needs to happen through statistics (x number of affected people over a period of y months or years), while the latter affects so many people at once that the issue instantly becomes political. Foreign policy is considered to be particularly event-driven (Wood and Peake, 1998) and media is essential for events or issues that happen abroad, since we rely heavily on media for information.

POLICY ENTREPRENEURS

Those advocating alternative policies are often referred to as policy entrepreneurs. They often invest a lot of time, effort and money in promoting these alternative policy solutions (Kingdon, 1995: 122-123) – and not only during periods of crises. They do so, either for future personal rewards (office payoffs), to affect policy or just because they enjoy ‘the game’ (Kingdon, 1995: 122). Policy entrepreneurs are not confined to a specific policy venue and can come from inside or outside the government. In addition to pushing an idea higher up the agenda, Kingdon (1995) advances two main tasks for entrepreneurs.

The first task consists of ‘paving the way’ for an alternative idea. For an alternative idea to be considered during a crisis or a focusing event, entrepreneurs need to make it accepted/acceptable within the policy community. This way, when an opportunity for change (or policy window) occurs, this idea is perceived as the most appropriate alternative solution. Thus, entrepreneurs are looking for problems to link their solution to, as an idea is being pushed even when there is no opportunity for change (Kingdon, 1995: 127-130). Entrepreneurs try to ‘soften up’ the general, as well as the specialized, public to their idea. This can, for example, be achieved through speeches, press releases, private meetings and (official) reports.

Second, at the opportune moment, entrepreneurs need to be able to take advantage of the situation and define the problem and the failing policies and advance the

advocated solution to the right venues. “Entrepreneurs try to make linkages before windows open so they can bring a prepackaged combination of solution, problem, and political momentum to the window when it opens. (Kingdon, 1995: 183). The qualities of entrepreneurs lie in their ability to make themselves heard, their political connectedness and their persistence.

HOW DO POLITICAL PARTIES AND NEWS MEDIA FIT INTO THIS STORY?

Political parties and media are crucial elements of the democratic process. Each in their own, specific, way, they link society to policy and policymaking, since they have the ability to reach all layers of society. As such, they are able to recognize and translate what is important to the public (or publics) and convey these demands to decision-makers. Their importance then depends on the responsiveness of policymakers and their readiness to pay attention to them. As we have just seen, policymaking, and policy change in particular, requires attention. To bring about significant policy change requires attention from those who make the decisions. The previous sections have explained how issues can capture such political attention and how hard this effort usually is. A great amount of pressure needs to build up before decision-makers feel the urge to reorganize the distribution of public goods and tamper with the equilibrium of existing interests.

To gain attention and reach policymakers, political parties and media go about in very distinct ways. The most important difference between these two actors lies in their political agenda-setting intention. Inspired by their respective ideologies political parties purposefully present a policy program to the voters, which emphasizes certain policy issues and problems and offers solutions and alternatives. Hence, their goal to change certain policies – often those most important to them – is very explicit and widely acknowledged. To attract voters, these political parties try to be responsive to what is important to the public. So, when making up their manifestos, parties want to appeal to citizens by offering solutions to problems they care about. Hence, parties need to be in touch with their electorate. This happens directly, through their members, but also through contacts with civil society, NGOs and other interest groups.

The programs of political parties include specific foreign policy priorities and proposals. While parties do not engage in a policy debate with each other in their manifestos (Robertson, 1976; Budge, Robertson and Hearl, 1987; Riker, 1993), they

do offer different policy solutions for similar problems, often within different frames. Hence, right-wing parties are likely to propose spending cuts to stimulate employment, while left-wing parties may suggest tax rates to guarantee certain economic stimuli. Hence, in this example, the problem of the economy entails different policy solutions, according to the policy image in which they were framed. While parties can also serve as policy venues for certain ideas, here, political parties are considered in their role of policy entrepreneur, pushing for specific policy options.

This distinction between parties in their policy preferences or alternative solutions is an important element of *party government*. Party government is an elusive concept of party democracy, explaining how political parties translate the preferences of the electorate into public policies. Mair (2008: 225) defines party governments as “democratic polities [...] when a party or parties wins control of the executive as a result of competitive elections, when the political leaders in the polity are recruited by and through parties, when the (main) parties or alternatives in competition offer voters clear policy alternatives, when public policy is determined by the party or parties holding executive office, and when that executive is held accountable through parties” (based on prior definitions from Rose, 1969; Katz, 1987 and Thomassen 1994 in Mair, 2008).

In Belgium, political parties are very powerful, as they are involved in every stage of the policymaking process (De Winter, Della Porta and Deschouwer, 1996; De Winter, 1996; De Winter and Dumont, 2006). This situation of *partitocracy* “refers to some kind of ‘degeneration’ of party government, to something that is not legitimate” (De Winter et al., 1996: 217) and undermines the “ideal-type chain of parliamentary delegation in many ways, insofar as political parties play a predominant role at each stage (De Winter and Dumont, 2006: 972). Given their size and nature, political parties can often reach many levels of society, from the general public to major business owners and from party affiliated civil servants to ministers. Hence, they are important and powerful conveyors, but also creators, of ideas and solutions (policy images). So, given their openness to policy ideas and their access to other, powerful, policy venues, political parties play a crucial role in the mechanisms of policy change. Especially in case of government participation, parties can surely affect future governmental policies. While I acknowledge that important individuals – both from inside or outside the government – can be powerful policy advocates or agenda-

setters, in this doctoral research, I focus on parties and government as collective entities.

Similar arguments may apply to the role of media in the decision-making process. They, too, can reach all layers of society; even members of the government since, they too, need to be informed on what is going on in the world. However, the way media influence the policymaking process is very different from that of political parties. Most of the time, media do not act as policy entrepreneurs with their own agenda. There is no greater political or policy purpose behind news articles or their selection. However, like parties, by selecting what is newsworthy, media can direct attention to problems and potentially failing policies while also highlighting policy alternatives – their own or those of policy entrepreneurs. News media also draw attention to focusing events, which do not affect us directly and often happen miles away, usually accompanied by graphic images. By doing so, they can bring previously uninterested people to consider certain issues as problematic.

Hence, media can expand the scope of conflict through high levels of coverage over a certain period of time, making it impossible for policymakers to ignore a problem. In addition, they can also put forward alternative policy solutions or ideas, ‘fed’ by people or groups who oppose the current policies. Given the power of the media to willingly select news among a variety of news stories and to choose to provide exposure to specific issues and policy alternatives, they are also considered in this study as policy entrepreneurs. Even though this research acknowledges that the role of the media is more that of a conveyer of other people’s ideas and alternatives, by emphasizing certain issues over others, they influence what people and, more importantly, policymakers perceive to be important.

In the end, the influence of attention from these policy entrepreneurs depends on the responsiveness of policymakers; the signal to decision-makers has to be so loud and clear that the message cannot be ignored. The policy priorities and alternatives of political parties cannot be ignored after a major and convincing victory. Similarly, political and societal issues receiving much and continued attention from different media outlets, often require political attention. Within this process of democratic responsiveness, political parties and media play a key role. The next sections detail the specific role of these actors and their agendas within the policymaking process. First, I explain how political parties try to represent their voters by enacting as much of their policy program as possible. I offer an overview of the link between political

parties and policymaking and, specifically, on what we know about their role in foreign policymaking. Then, I review the debate and empirical research on the role of the media in foreign policy and how these have advanced our knowledge of how media influences foreign policymaking.

POLITICAL PARTIES AND FOREIGN POLICY

“Citizens typically [do] not make most policy decisions themselves, they often do not even select or instruct the actual decisionmakers, but delegate in ways that can be disconcertingly indirect.” (Strøm, 2006: 55) Central to the conduct and the study of politics are thus the concepts of *delegation* and *accountability* (Strøm, Müller and Bergman, 2006). Delegation occurs “between two (or more) parties when one, designated as the agent, acts for, on behalf of, or as representative for the other, designated the principal, in a particular domain of decision problems” (Ross, 1973: 134). Delegation allows principals to achieve their goals at a reduced personal cost and effort. (33). Generally, there are three main motivations for political delegation: (1) principals do not have the capacity to carry out all the responsibilities and tasks bestowed upon them; (2) principals do not always possess the required competence (e.g. the technical knowledge) to carry out every one of their tasks; and (3) when a group needs to make a collective decision, it cannot simply aggregate the preferences of each individual (this is known as a collective action problem). That is why citizens delegate authority to elected representatives who, in turn, delegate to the government. The government then delegates to its individual members who, finally, delegate to civil servants. Parliamentary democracy thus entails a chain of delegation with citizens at one end and civil servants on the other (Müller, Bergman and Strøm, 2006).

Accountability, however, is harder to define. Delegation of authority comes with a risk that the agent does not carry out the task according to the principal’s interest or preference: agency loss. “Agency loss is the difference between the actual consequence of delegation and what the consequence would have been had the agent been ‘perfect’.” (Lupia, 2006: 35) Given the long chain of delegation from the citizen to the civil servant, there is a true risk of accumulated agency loss. Accountability

refers to the mechanisms of a principal to exert control over an agent⁷. “Governments are accountable if citizens can discern representative from unrepresentative governments and can sanction them appropriately” (Manin, Przeworski and Stokes 1999: 10). Parliamentary democracies differ in the “directness of delegation” (i.e. more or less links in the delegation chain) and the challenge is “to ensure effective representation” (Strøm, 2006: 66). To reduce the risks of delegation and a potential lack of representation, parliamentary democracies rely on political organizations: parties.

Political parties have different ways of limiting agency loss and ensuring proper political representation. Through their central control, parties can align agents at different stages of the delegation chain (e.g. MPs, members of the executive and sometimes even civil servants). This makes it possible for parties to present the voters with “a package of candidate agents whose policy preferences are fairly well understood, and whose behaviour will be strictly policed by this semi-public organization” (Strøm, 2006: 67). These candidates have been vetted extensively and have most often proven their party loyalty. This form of parliamentary democracy is the known as the aforementioned *party government*.

THE ELECTORAL PROCESS AND THE PROGRAM TO POLICY LINK

One of the main questions this study addresses is how political parties are able to determine future governmental policies. “Political parties are the major actors in the system that connects the citizenry and the governmental process” (Klingemann et al., 1994: 5). Parties identify the issues that are important to the public (often as expressed through media and civil society) and work out policy alternatives. Party programs are the collection of these proposals into a coherent package that can be presented to the voters. So, as key conveyers between public demands and governmental policies, political parties are essential in this representation process, guaranteeing that policies are in accordance with public preferences. Hence, the link between parties and policy is a central question to any democracy, as “democracy should entail popular specification of public policies” (McDonald and Budge, 2005: 8). That is why “the congruence between what parties say and what governments do is important in the theory of representative democracy” (Klingemann et al., 1994: 1).

⁷ Accountability can also be understood as the degree to which an outcome corresponds to the interest of the principal (Lupia, 2006: 35)

In his seminal *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, Anthony Downs (1957) elaborates on how and why political parties will try to adjust policies to (median) voter preferences. He states that politicians are only interested in holding office and voters are interested in getting those policies carried out that correspond best to their preferences or interest. Hence, in their pursuit for office, politicians will formulate propositions and propose policy programs to attract voters and voters will vote for the party whose policy program best corresponds to their position. Yet, while this suggests that parties adjust their policies to the public, Budge et al. (2001) show that parties generally distinguish themselves in left-right terms and that these differences are quite stable. So, as the positions of parties relative to each other remain stable, this offers a clear choice for the voters who will elect parties based on their preferences. So, parties remain within the confines of their ideology and do not simply adjust to the voters. Instead, the voter chooses among clear and known policy choices (Budge et al., 2001).

Once elected, we assume that the governing party or parties will try to implement as much of the promised policies, as an incentive to win the next elections. But is this truly the case? Do parties in government execute the policies they promised in their manifestos? The impact of parties on governmental policies is generally considered to be a double function: a general agenda-setting function and a more specific mandate function. The first pertains to the assumption that the preferences of political parties are reflected in the policies of the ensuing government, even if those parties will not become part of the government. Such an effect can occur when different parties prioritize similar policies, for example when a specific ‘niche’ party – a party focusing mainly on a single issue or a limited number of issues – grows considerably, or when a losing party remains significantly large. The second function relates specifically to the role of majority parties and suggests that the winner(s) of the elections receive a mandate from the voters to carry out their policies. Such a mandate theory implies that the governmental policies correspond most to the program of the party or parties who will form a government (Klingemann et al., 1994).

A lot of research has been done on the democratic link between electoral preferences and government behavior. In the following sections, I detail the two most important approaches studying this ‘program to policy’ link and what these studies have thought us. We can distinguish these studies into two main research traditions, each with a different methodological approach: pledge studies and policy position

studies. These two research streams need to be seen as complements of each other rather than as competing or alternative explanations. This research uses yet another approach, agenda-setting, based on policy priorities, which is relatively similar to that of policy position studies. The specific methodological implications – the advantages and shortcomings – of the different approaches can be found in chapter 3, where I extensively discuss and explain the methodological options made in my doctoral research.

Pledge studies

A first body of literature focuses on the implementation of concrete electoral promises; policy pledges. These studies identify specific electoral proposals in party programs and examine whether, and to which extent, these promises have been carried out over the course of a full legislation. Thomson (2001: 180) defines pledges as “statements in which parties express unequivocal support for proposed government policy actions or non-actions that are testable”. This definition corresponds to Royed’s (1996) definition and stresses testability to obtain valid measurements of pledge enactment. Subsequent research operationalized their measures based on this definition (Mansergh and Thomson, 2007; Costello and Thomson, 2008; Moury, 2009; 2011). An example from the Christian democratic CD&V 2007 manifesto:

Certain competences managed by ‘foreign affairs’, like conflict prevention, society construction and emergency assistance, need to go back to development cooperation.⁸

In general, governmental parties have a good record of keeping their promises, especially in single party governments where one party can carry out its agenda with little if any compromise at all (Rallings, 1987; Royed, 1996). Indeed, it is even easier to implement promises when the executive and legislative branches correspond, like in the UK, contrary to possible oppositions, as often happens in France and the US. Table 1.1 provides an overview of the studies examining the extent to which pledges from party and government programs are enacted in a variety of countries. The countries are ranged according to the effective number of parties – from the least number of parties down (Lijphart, 1999: 76-77). Countries like the UK and Canada, with parliamentary majorities are able to enact around 75 % of their program policies seemingly effortless (Rallings, 1987). The institutional setup and the consequent

⁸ Personal translation.

power sharing between a republican presidency and a democratic Congress lower the enactment rate in the U.S. in the period at study (Royed, 1996).

Table 1.1 Review of pledge enactment rates (at least partially fulfilled) for party and government programs from previous studies

Country	Years	Party Program (avg. % implemented)	Government Program (avg. % implemented)	Yearly gov. policy statements (avg. % implemented)	Author(s)
UK	1945-1979	73 %* (Gov. parties)		83 %	Rallings, 1987
	1979-1987	85 % (Gov. party) 24 % (Opp. party)			Royed, 1996
Greece	1981-1985	70 % (Gov. party)			Kalogeropoulou, 1989
Canada	1945-1979	72 % (Gov. party)		83 %	Rallings, 1987
US	1969-1972	66 % (Gov. party)# 65 % (Opp. party)			Pomper and Lederman, 1982
	1980-1988	50 % (Gov. party)# 60 % (Opp. party)			Royed, 1996
Spain⁺⁺	1989-2004	54 % (Gov. party) 35 % (Opp. party)			Artés and Bustos, 2008
Ireland⁺	2002-2007	65 % (Gov. parties) 40 % (Opp. parties)	77 % (of governing party pledges in Gov. Prog.)		Costello and Thomson, 2008
	1977-2002	50 % (Gov. parties) 45 % (Opp. parties)	63% (of governing party pledges in Gov. Prog.)		Mansergh and Thomson, 2007
Belgium	1992-1995 & 1999-2003		78 %		Moury, 2009; 2011
The Netherlands	1989-1994 & 1998-2002		69 %		Moury, 2009; 2011
	1986-1998	57 % (Gov. parties) 33 % (Opp. parties)	82% (of governing party pledges in Gov. Prog.)		Thomson, 2001
Italy	1996-1998 & 2001-2005		54 %		Moury, 2009; 2011

* 64 percent if we include the three Parliaments that lasted less than two years

+ Only socio-economic pledges (43)

++ The study compares pledge enactments of the CiU as a simple opposition party (1989 & 2000) to its support of a minority government (1993 & 1996).

Governing party refers to the party controlling Congress. During this period, the governing party (Democrats) did not hold the Presidency. After 1986 Congress was divided with a Republican Senate.

Although the simplification of table 1.1 hides the complexity behind government formations or the policymaking process of each individual country, it is clear that coalition parties have to compromise and see comparably less of their pledges enacted into policy (Thomson, 2001; Mansergh and Thomson, 2007). Coalitions are most often formed through a process of government negotiations, which can be quick and effective or slow and exhausting. Throughout these negotiations a government agreement is often drafted to ensure the backing of every participating party, as well as their members and constituents (e.g. their parliamentary fractions). As table 1.1 shows, it is through these government programs that coalition parties are mainly able to achieve an enactment rate that is comparable to parties forming single party majorities (Costello and Thomson, 2008; Moury, 2009; 2011). As those parties do not have the constraints of coalition and compromise, their manifestos function as government agreements. Throughout all of the studied countries, there is one constant: majority parties have higher enactment rates than opposition parties, even though certain coalition parties have lower rates than certain opposition parties in majoritarian countries. This confirms the agenda-setting function of political parties in general, and the mandate theory related to governing parties.

Pledge studies have been relatively successful in explaining and predicting government behavior in different types of countries. By doing so, they examined a central question of democratic theory according to which governmental policies are carried out in line with public preferences through party competition and elections (Budge et al., 2001:8). However, a number of critical remarks need to be noted about the exclusive focus on pledges.

First, policy pledges only represent one aspect and a limited part of parties' electoral policy programs. Throughout 1945-1974, Rallings (1987) identified on average 35 pledges per manifesto in Britain (ranging from 15 to 57) and 15 in Canada (ranging from 1 to 39). For the Canadian 1968 elections, only one firm pledge was found (for the liberal party). Hence, in certain cases, it is hard to argue that pledges optimally represent a party's full policy program. Indeed, focusing on pledges only, in many cases discards most of the manifesto despite the fact that every sentence in these programs has its purpose and is carefully considered (Budge, 2001 in Laver: 56). In her critique of Budge et al.'s (1987) use of all manifesto sentences to measure policy emphasis, Royed (1996) stresses that the Republican Party's 1984 platform contained 1380 sentences but only 89 pledges were counted. While she argues that the

majority of these sentences are irrelevant, it could also be argued that excluding them is discarding valuable information given the effort and study put in the entire manifestos. While a phrase like “we plan to improve relations with Congo” would not be considered as a pledge, it does contain a precise and possibly meaningful commitment.

Second, examining the distribution of pledges across the various policy domains in different countries (see for example Royed, 1996 and Bara, 2005) begs the question whether certain policy domains are more prone to specific pledges than others. Depending on the political context and institutional configuration of a particular country, certain policy domains may be more conflictual and divisive than others and, therefore, entail a more vague rhetoric. In the Belgian manifestos, for example, the foreign policy sections contain, on average, more specific policy proposals⁹ than the other policy domains.

A third, and related, critical observation is that all pledges are considered to be of equal value. It is not unlikely that most policy pledges are small commitments that are easy to achieve once in office. Especially in countries with coalition governments, it can be expected that commitments concerning particularly divisive issues are discussed in a vaguer way in manifestos as their execution cannot be achieved without the consent of the other parties. Making bold statements can, thus, be considered counterproductive and can serve as ammunition for future opposition. Hence, it is still debated whether those pledges that are enacted are the smallest and easiest one to fulfill (Budge et al., 2001: 8)

Fourth and final, the number of identifiable pledges can vary greatly, depending on the strictness of the definition. Applying Rallings’ (1987) strict definition, Bara (2005) counts 50 and 33 pledges for the winning conservatives on the 1979 and 1983 elections, respectively. In her analysis, Royed (1996) identified 92 and 88 pledges, respectively, for those same elections – sensibly more than Bara, using the same manifestos. Hence, what constitutes a pledge varies according to (the strictness of) the definition.

As mentioned, the studies in chapter 4 and 5 use a very different approach to link political parties and government whereby the amount of attention to each policy is used to derive lists of priorities. Hence, party manifestos and government declarations

⁹ Proposals are not to be confused with pledges. For a definition, see chapter 3.

are considered in their entirety and each part (pledge or not) is considered equally. This approach is more similar to the *emphasis* approach, used to derive policy positions, as the next section will show.

Policy emphasis studies

In the 1980s, a large comparative project was set up to examine the evolution of political parties and their impact on policy, by studying the emphasis on policy issues in party manifestos. Based on David Robertson's work on manifestos (1976), the Comparative Manifesto Project's (CMP) innovative approach consisted of (a) examining political parties using their entire electoral manifesto, (b) over a large period of time and in many countries, by (c) coding these manifestos per policy topic, and (d) deriving policy positions from policy emphasis (Budge et al., 1987). The CMP examines policy positions using entire manifestos and not only pledges, as they argue that "party programmes are carefully considered and finely honed documents, so no sentence appears in them without a purpose" (Budge, 2001b: 79). Moreover, different studies found that parties do not engage in a policy debate in their manifestos. Instead, parties stress issues that voters associate with them and on which they are considered to be relevant and competent (Robertson, 1976; Budge et al., 1987; Riker, 1993). "The issues that parties 'own' are those on which they have a track record of carrying out the most popular preference – cutting taxes and observing financial orthodoxy in general, extending social services, seeking peace et cetera" (Budge and Bara, 2001: 62). Parties generally do not oppose popular preferences 'owned' by other parties. Instead, they tend to minimize the sections dealing with policies and preferences 'owned' by other parties and emphasize those policy options they are (successfully) associated with (Budge et al., 1987). Hence, by examining the number of sentences dedicated to a specific policy domain, we obtain the policy preferences of parties and what they truly stand for. Policy positions (most often left-right), then again, are calculated from these preferences and can then be compared per party, over time and across countries.

These policy positions also allow scholars to match (ideological) party movements to governmental policy changes, as pledge studies have done. To do this, parties' policy positions are matched to those of subsequent governments. In one of the first such attempts, Laver and Budge (1992; Budge and Laver, 1993) linked party programs to government programs or declarations in Western coalition democracies

(Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg, Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy). They did so by measuring the ideological distance (left-right, but also on the different policy dimensions) between parties and government – in and out of office. In terms of policy payoffs, parties generally benefit from being in government, as the government's policy position is closer to theirs when in government. This is particularly the case for those countries where there is a clear alternation between (left and right) electoral coalitions – mainly the Scandinavian countries. Thus, parties do not only seek office rewards, but are also motivated to carry out their policies once in office. Though the programs of parties in government tend to be closer to the government programs in most cases, some parties' come closer to their preferred policies when in opposition. In Belgium, the results are somewhat confusing; while the traditional parties see their participation pay off, the regionalist parties see more of their preferences included when they are not part of the ruling coalition (Laver and Budge, 1992; Budge and Laver, 1993). Before the rise of regionalist parties, governments alternated between centre-left coalitions of Christian democrats and socialists and centre-right coalitions between liberals and Christian democrats. The straightforwardness of the alternation between these coalitions allowed their policies to be more responsive in left-right terms. Hence, Laver and Budge's research validated the notion that governing parties receive a mandate from the voters to carry out their preferred policies, but it also supported the general agenda-setting role attributed to parties around election time.

In subsequent analyses of national budgets in 10 Western democracies (Britain, Australia, Canada, France, the United States, Sweden, Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium), Klingemann and his colleagues (1994) confirmed that parties, and especially winning parties, predict policy outcomes very well. So, as parties present different policy programs to the voters at the elections, the winning party or parties receive a mandate from the electorate that is reflected in the subsequent policies. This, again, suggests that the policy process is a democratic one. These results are less clear in Belgium and the Netherlands where, perhaps, the necessity for compromise and consensus weakens the link between parties and government policies.

Extending the mandate theory, McDonald and Budge (2005) claim that elections are not about who wins but rather about identifying the median voter position. This median position can be derived from "the distribution of votes over the various policy

alternatives offered by parties” (McDonald and Budge, 2005: 5). Election results also indicate which party comes closest to this position. So, according to them, election results reflect a median (left-right) position of the policies the electorate wants. This implies that even single party majority governments will not simply carry out their program, but try to respond to the demands and the preferences of the majority (which is often not the same given that many majorities are manufactured by the electoral system). This would mean that elections are a means of communicating the median voter position rather than selecting a government, even though the elections also generally empower the median party. As with pledge studies, there are also a number of critical remarks and observations concerning emphasis studies and their ability to study the link between parties and policy.

The first critical note is the exact reverse of the first remark on pledge studies; that emphasis studies take into account all sentences, including mere rhetoric and historic contextualization. As such, this first point is more a matter of opinion than an objective critique. As mentioned above, pledge and emphasis studies are useful complementary approaches to improve our understanding of how electoral preferences are translated into policies.

A second and more important critique pertains to the calculation of the policy positions of parties and its validity. In calculating these positions, the CMP usually takes into account most, but not all policy issues (Budge et al., 2001). By doing so, they may discard policies that seem crucial in defining the left-right position, such as immigration, nationalism and the environment in Belgium. Examining policy positions according to expert surveys on numerous issues, Benoit and Laver (2006) could only explain 40 percent of the CMP’s variance. Though their respective left-right scales clearly measure the same thing, there are still many outliers. For Belgian parties, for example, the CMP (Budge et al., 2001) places both Ecolo (the francophone greens) and Vlaams Blok/Belang (the Flemish nationalist) at the centre-left. Benoit and Laver argue that inclusion of those issues by the CMP would have provided other, more similar, estimates.

As Hooghe, Marks and Wilson (2002: 976) argue, “the past two decades have seen the rise of issues concerned with lifestyle, ecology, cultural diversity, nationalism, and immigration”, which has led to an issue dimension in addition to the traditional left-right cleavage. This dimension is often referred to as the postmaterialist/materialist dimension (Inglehart, 1990). Hooghe et al. (2002) conceptualize this ‘new politics’

dimension as a green/alternative/libertarian (GAL) pole on one hand and a traditional/authoritarian/nationalism pole on the other. This dimension is found to be an important cleavage (in addition to the left-right) in explaining political parties' position on EU integration (Hooghe et al., 2002; Marks et al., 2006). Hence, which policy issues need to be included to calculate left-right positions is debatable and perhaps dependent on the specific country context at study.

Nevertheless, in consecutive comparisons between left –right estimates of several expert surveys and that of the CMP, it was found that CMP estimates highly corresponded to those of expert surveys (McDonald and Mendes, 2001), but better captured over time and cross-country variation (McDonald, Mendes and Kim, 2007). Indeed, the most important shortcoming of expert studies is that it does not capture the changes over time very well, as experts tend to have a rather fixed image or perception of parties' (left-right) policy positions. Assessing the validity of their expert survey on parties' specific EU positions, Hooghe et al. (2010) also found high correspondence between their measure of preference and that of the CMP and Benoit and Laver (2006).

Summing up, the bulk of evidence suggests a strong link between what political parties set out to do if/when in office and the policies they end up carrying out. Several authors have showed that partisan politics matter, as political parties are able to influence or steer the economy or public policy in general (Budge and Keman, 1990; Keman, 1993; Schmidt, 1996). Moreover, results from both pledge and emphasis studies confirm that parties affect the policies of the subsequent government after the elections. In general, government parties are better able to influence government policies than opposition parties. The observation that opposition parties are nonetheless also able to obtain policy payoffs and see some of their pledges carried out confirms that parties' electoral responsiveness not only occurs through the mandate given by the voters to the winners of the elections, but also through an agenda-setting effect of all parties. Evidence from both streams of research shows that government parties in majoritarian countries are able to enact more of their program than parties in coalition countries. However, if we consider manifestos of the former to be comparable to government agreements of the latter, both policy programs reach similarly high enactment rates. Therefore, it seems fair to conclude that political parties are responsive to voter demands and carry out voters' preferred policies. So, we can assume that parties translate demands from voters into policies and inquire

them for a mandate to resolve the problems in a way that is clear and known to the electorate. Winning parties then try to carry out these policies.

Agenda-setting as an alternative approach

This research uses a straightforward agenda-setting approach, which circumvents most critiques of the pledge and emphasis studies. Using policy priorities, derived from the policy salience, I am able to examine how the policy priorities of one actor affect another or evolve over time. This approach is quite similar to that of the CMP, but avoids the second critique, as it use the lists of priorities as such and does not convert them into policy positions. Hence, influence occurs when greater attention to an issue (higher priority) from political parties leads to an increase in attention from the government. In the methodological chapter 3, I review the different methodologies and explain the advantages and shortcomings of the agenda-setting approach in more detail.

As we have seen, policy position and pledge studies have successfully examined the link between political parties to government activities. However, most studies did not distinguish between different policy domains, like foreign policy. The main goal here is to understand the role of political parties in foreign policymaking at the onset of a new government. The reason for examining the role of political parties during government formation is both theoretical and practical. First, government formation, right after the elections, is a rare moment where parties function as a united entity and where negotiators function as delegates of their party while, once in government, ministerial loyalty also lies with the government. Second, the outcome of these negotiations, the government agreement, is primarily determined by the preferences and priorities of the political parties and is, at that moment, less affected by possible external influences, like public opinion and media.

Hence, we can assume that if policies are formulated in the government agreement, it is because of the specific influence of one or several parties. This is also a great practical advantage since government formation provides for a relatively controlled environment with little extraneous variables. The straightforward setup – parties present a program to voters and come together after the elections to form a government – should, thus, allow for straightforward interpretations about which parties influence foreign policy formulation most.

PARTIES AND FOREIGN POLICY

The following section offers an overview of what we know about the role of political parties in foreign policymaking. First, the review addresses why political parties, along with other domestic actors, have so long been ignored by mainstream international and foreign policy studies. Then, I detail the literature on presidential and congressional party affiliation in the U.S. to demonstrate the relevance of studying the influence of political parties in foreign policy. Finally, I look at the more specific studies on foreign policy decision-making in coalition governments during foreign policy conflicts. Even though these studies do not examine coalition bargaining during the government formation (but once the government is installed), the findings of these studies are very important and relevant, as members of government tend to act as delegates of their parties during such governmental conflicts – like during government formation.

So, despite the heavy attention and many studies on the role of political parties in general, as well as the increasing recognition of the role of domestic forces in foreign affairs, research on the role of political parties in foreign policy has remained scarce. Unlike media effects – and public opinion – studies, research on the role of political parties in foreign policy never developed into a proper research tradition and studies are rather rare. As explained in the introduction above, realist theory for long impeded the study of domestic influences in general. As the main theoretical paradigm in international relations, it posited that the state was a unitary actor pursuing its interest in the most cost efficient way (Morgenthau, 1948; Waltz, 1979). This interest was assumed to be self-evident and explanations for foreign policy behavior were sought at the system level (the international context and the behavior of other countries) and at the decisional level (the decision unit involved in specific matters – usually crises). Opposition to an administration's foreign policy was attributed to “the misunderstanding of international conditions or partisan opportunism” (as noted by Fordham, 1998a: 362).

In the US, it was long considered immoral to take into account domestic considerations, like elections or constituencies, when deciding upon foreign policy matters (Halperin, 2006: 62-83) since “politics stop at water's edge.” This perception of foreign policymaking was in line with the general belief that foreign policy was bipartisan – or at least that it had been until the Vietnam War (Meernik, 1993; Rosati and Scott, 2010: 362-383). Such notions further fed the idea that the investigation of

the role of parties in foreign policy was inconsequential, even though, as we will see below, this notion of a bipartisan foreign policy never really existed.

Partisan Foreign Policy in the U.S.

At the executive level, foreign policy mainly depends on the President's policy priorities and preferences, as well as those of his closest aids (Peterson, 1994; Dobson, 2001; Wittkopf, Jones and Kegley, 2008: 327-365; Rosati and Scott, 2010: 56-61). In deciding on the use of force, some have found domestic and political considerations to be as important as international factors (Ostrom and Job, 1986; James and Oneal, 1991; DeRouen, 1995; 2000; Smith, 1996; Wang, 1996). Fordham (1998b) also stresses the importance of specific economic conditions, sensitive to particular parties and their constituencies, as inflation (for Democrats) and unemployment (for Republicans) increase the likelihood of use of force by 'their' President. Of course, the president's forcefulness in carrying out his preferred policies also depends on the willingness of the American Congress.

Research on congressional roll calls in the U.S. from 1945-1988 shows that voting has become less bipartisan (supported by both parties) over time (McCormick and Wittkopf, 1990; Meernik, 1993), even though partisan voting has always been present (Kesselman, 1961; 1965; Fordham, 1998a; Howell and Pevehouse, 2007). During the early Cold War era, Kesselman (1961; 1965) found that a number of members of Congress changed their foreign policy voting behavior according to the President's party affiliation, although there was no shift in policy (steady internationalist). McCormick and Wittkopf (1990) observed that bipartisanship had generally declined since Eisenhower and Kennedy, with variations among their successors. However, party affiliation is only one part of the story. While certain members of Congress voted in a partisan way, others were more coherent and voted in a more consistent ideological fashion (McCormick and Wittkopf, 1990). In his study on congressional foreign policy voting at the onset of the Cold War (1949-1950), Fordham (1998a) confirms that support for the administration's course was partisan and ideological, but also economically inspired. Senators from states with competing interests (e.g. Asian oriented banks, large corporations with few international investments) tended to oppose Truman's large European investments. Hence, congressional foreign policy, too, is shaped by partisan, ideological and economic interests and considerations.

Foreign Policymaking in Coalition Governments

The ideological oppositions found between political parties – even in the U.S. – did not generate a research agenda on the role of political parties in foreign policy at the executive level, especially not outside the American context. Hence, we are still left to wonder what can we learn from this and how this helps us understand how foreign policy is made outside the American context – like in countries with coalition governments? The answer is quite discouraging, given that these studies only examine decision-making in times of crises and conflict (as noted by Kaarbo and Beasley, 2008: 71) and do not consider individuals as delegates of their respective parties – as is often the case in coalition governments (Hagan 1993; Kaarbo, 1996: 502-503; Hagan et al., 2001). Indeed, the formulation (and sometimes also the implementation) of foreign policy in many Western coalition governments requires negotiations between different political parties or their delegates (ministers). Thus far, we know very little about the role of political parties in foreign policymaking in coalition governments, despite the important role they have been found to play in general policymaking in numerous Western democracies (Laver and Budge, 1992, Klingemann et al., 1994, McDonald and Budge, 2005).

So, what *do* we know? A first obstacle in assessing the role of parties is defining the decision unit: do coalition governments make decisions as a single group (where ministers have ample autonomy from their respective parties and allegiance lies with the government) or rather as a coalition (negotiating from the party's point of view with considerably less autonomy) (Hagan et al., 2001; Hermann, 2001)? The type of decision unit involved in making foreign policy affects the nature of that policy (Hermann, 2001: 75). While most coalition governments behave like single groups most of the time, when opposition rises, political parties are likely to get involved, changing the decision dynamics to that of a coalition where ministers behave like different entities, according to their party's stance (Hagan, 1995; Hagan et al., 2001). However, it needs to be noted that strong leadership can facilitate or enhance single group decision units among coalition cabinets (Hagan, 1993). Since my research examines the influence of political parties during government formation, where the different members act as delegates of their respective parties, the dynamics found during foreign policy crises at the executive level are extremely relevant. Indeed, within both situations, the decision unit behaves as a coalition and not a single group.

In their analysis of foreign policymaking in the Netherlands, Hagan et al. (2001) examined how the Dutch government dealt with internal division and political polarization concerning the deployment of NATO nuclear cruise missiles, as a consequence of popular opposition. Generally, foreign policymaking in the Netherlands was “an elite affair in which critical issues were handled by a sub-group of cabinet ministers with responsibilities for foreign affairs”, enabled by “well-established norms of interparty cooperation and intraparty discipline” (Hagan, 2001: 183). Hagan et al. (2001) detail the dynamics that are typical to divided coalition governments and emphasized the importance of well-established rules governing decision-making, preventing escalation into a deeper crisis. As I will explain in more detail in chapter 2, the Belgian coalition decision-making process is similar to that of the Netherlands, generally managed at the core of the government and politically polarized exceptionally during crises.

Often, smaller coalition partners can outsize their weight and determine the course of the coalition. This is especially the case in two-party coalitions where the “minority in cabinet may retain some power if its party is pivotal in the legislature, namely if the withdrawal of its support is able to bring down the government (Laver and Schofield, 1990: 55). To distinguish these junior coalition parties from what is traditionally understood as pivotal parties, Kaarbo (1996) uses the term “critical” junior parties¹⁰. In Germany, for example, Hofferbert and Klingemann (1990) showed that the manifesto of the smaller, pivotal, FDP was a better predictor of foreign policy spending than the policy program of the larger coalition partner or even the government declaration, with an extremely high explanatory power ($R^2 = .80$). Through structured case studies, Kaarbo (1996) explored the conditions under which these junior coalition partners are able to impose their policy position on a number of conflictual foreign policy problems in Germany and Israel. She found that whenever the locus of authority (where the decision was made – at the cabinet or ministerial level) was to the advantage of the junior coalition partner, its stance prevailed. Unity within the junior partner, as well as the threat of leaving the coalition, was critical in winning the policy debate. The lack of internal unity, on the other hand, can also be

¹⁰ Traditionally, a pivotal party is understood as a large center party that can “determine whether it wants to govern with the major left or right-wing party” (Green-Pedersen, 2002:15). Given the difficulty to form a government without them, pivotal center parties enjoy great bargaining power and generally dominate government formation and legislation (Green-Pedersen, 2002:15; Keman, 2002: 105; Strom and Müller, 2008: 28). In the context of coalition bargaining *here*, a “critical” junior party is a smaller party that has great bargaining power within a coalition, as it can decide to leave the coalition and help form another majority.

used to impose a policy option, at the threat of leaving the coalition (Kaarbo and Lantis, 2003).

In Barnett's (1999: 17) analyses of the political process leading to the Oslo Accords, he found that "the articulation of the Israeli national identity, and how that identity is tied to a national interest and the possibility of peace, is profoundly shaped by the nature of party and coalition politics". A peaceful and negotiated solution thus depends on the vision that different parties advance – and the policies associated with it – as well as the ruling coalition's dependence on extreme parties. Hence, through their analyses of coalition decision-making in Germany and Israel, Kaarbo (1996) and Barnett (1999) confirm the crucial role of political parties in important foreign policy decisions in Germany and Israel. More importantly, these studies confirm that decisions are not contingent on power of the numbers or size, as parties other than the largest are able to impose their policy preferences on the government. Hence, it is useful to examine which parties influence the policies formulated during coalition negotiations and try to find patterns in this influence.

THE AGENDA-SETTING POWER OF THE MEDIA

INTRODUCTION

Media play an important role in politics in general, and in foreign policy in particular. Yet, after more than a century of debate, the exact role of the media – whether and how it affects foreign policy – is still not clear. Do media report foreign policy news critically or are they controlled by the political structures they cover? The role of media in foreign policy is closely linked to the democratization of foreign affairs and, thus, to the impact of public opinion on politicians and their consequent behavior. Generally, media are considered to be a conveyor between politics and public, as they are expected to inform the public of what goes on in the world, on one hand, and relay the main concerns of the public to the politicians, on the other. As we will see, due to its particular nature, foreign policymaking and its relationship with the media and the public, holds a moral, even ideological, dimension where progressive minds demand democratic principles to be applied while conservatives dread any involvement of external opinions they consider as inferior.

At the onset of the 20th century, without press agencies and reporters abroad, news media depended heavily on government sources. To ensure the stream of inside

information and future stories, journalists maintained good relations with their government sources, resulting in an environment of cooperation, rather than in critical reporting (Taylor, 1997: 60). Lord Northcliffe, founder of the Daily Mail and later in charge of the British government's department for enemy propaganda, stated that "God made people read so that I could fill their brains with facts, facts, facts—and later tell them whom to love, whom to hate, and what to think" (1922 in Taylor, 1997: 59). Given the spirit of cooperation among politicians and reporters, Lord Northcliffe's quote presents a rather negative, almost conspiracy-like, image of the relationships between politics, media and the public throughout the first major part of the previous century.

Given the potential consequences of foreign policy conduct, like war and peace, support from the public is a crucial element for decision-makers (Morgenthau, 1948: 100-101). With the devastating impact of the two World Wars, involving the public in such matters might have been considered as a welcomed evolution. After the First World War, former U.S. Secretary of State Elihu Root (1922) recognized the democratic deficit in foreign policymaking and conceded that there was "a general conviction that there has been something wrong about the conduct of diplomacy under which peoples have so often found themselves embarked in war without intending it and without wishing for it and there is a strong desire to stop that sort of thing. Democracies determined to control their own destinies object to being led, without their knowledge, into situations where they have no choice". He believed that educated publics, through information and involvement at every decision-making stage could prevent politicians in democracies from making erroneous decisions, like going to war.

However, many experts, like Walter Lippmann (1922, 1925), were very skeptical about the common man's capability and willingness to be preoccupied with such matters, given his preoccupation with the demands of daily life. Moreover, Lippmann was very critical about the ability of the media to inform the public about true 'facts', as he believed that reporters, like all people, look at the world with their own preconceptions – stereotypes. The development of polling and public opinion research initially confirmed the pessimistic views about the public's perception of foreign policy (Almond, 1950, Lippmann, 1955). This led to a postwar consensus on the nature and power of public opinion, sometimes referred to as the Almond-Lippmann consensus (see Holsti, 1992), and summarized as follows: (a) "Public opinion is

highly volatile and thus it provides very dubious foundations for a sound foreign policy; (b) public attitudes on foreign affairs are so lacking in structure and coherence that they might best be described as "non-attitudes" and (c) at the end of the day, however, public opinion has a very limited impact on the conduct of foreign policy" (Holsti, 1992: 442)¹¹.

In a similar vein, realist academics and experts feared for and warned against an increasing influence of the public in foreign policy matters, as they considered world affairs and diplomacy to be far too complex to be discussed and decided publically. Morgenthau argued that the government should lead and not follow public opinion, since "the rational requirements of good foreign policy cannot from the outset count on the support of a public opinion whose preferences are emotional rather than rational" (Morgenthau 1978: 558). Instead, foreign policy needed to be conducted with a long-term vision by a small number of elites who were fully knowledgeable of the broader range of interests of the country.

As increasing democracy and political accountability throughout the 20th century had required that important decisions would be legitimized, governments attempted to control and influence the media agenda (Taylor, 1997: 61). As the main news source (Sigal, 1973; Gans, 1979; Bennett, 1990; Mermin, 1999, Livingston and Bennett, 2003) governments were able to influence not only the flow, but also the frame of the news (Entman, 1989). However, as former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger argues, over the years, the relationship between government and media are believed to have changed from "an atmosphere of trust and shared confidences [...] to a state of almost perpetual inquest which, at worst, can degenerate into a relationship of hunter and hunted, deceiver and dupe" (1977 in Taylor, 1997: 58). It is suggested that the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal exacerbated this evolution, as the trust between media and government deteriorated (Taylor, 1997). However, over 20 years after Kissinger's assertion, and almost 70 years after Lord Northcliffe's, Entman (1989a: 20) still claims "government sources and journalists join in an intimacy that renders any notion of a genuinely 'free' press inaccurate". The recent media scandal in the UK surrounding media mogul Rupert Murdoch also suggests that government and media are still too heavily intertwined. In 2012, Alastair Campbell, close advisor to former British Prime Minister Blair, claimed that Murdoch had personally called

¹¹ Later studies found public opinion to be rather sensible and stable (Casparly 1970; Mueller 1973; Page and Shapiro 1992; Wittkopf 1990; Holsti, 1992; 1996; 2006; Aldrich et al., 2006).

Blair (godfather to Murdoch's daughter) to urge him to pursue the war with Iraq¹². Similarly, former British Prime Minister Major claimed that Murdoch had threatened to withdraw the support of his many media outlets during the 1997 election campaign if Major would not shift his European policy course¹³.

Yet, beyond ideology and anecdotic evidence, what is actually *known* about the influence of media on policy? In 1963, Bernard Cohen first conceptualized how the impact of media works by stating that “the press [...] may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about” (1963: 13). This implies that media affect people's agendas – their issue priorities. In what is regarded as the first public agenda-setting study, McCombs and Shaw (1972) examined which public policy issues were considered most important to undecided voters during an election campaign. They confirmed Cohen's agenda-setting hypothesis that media influence the public's assessment of which issues are important. Numerous scholars followed in further exploring the influence of news media on public opinion and policy (-makers). Most of these subsequent – general, non-foreign policy – studies confirmed that media attention influences what is perceived to be important by the public (see for example Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Page, et al., 1987; Jordan and Page, 1992; Soroka, 2003; Wanta et al., 2004), as well as by policymakers (Cook et al., 1983; Proress et al., 1987). Hence, these agenda-setting studies contradicted the long prevailing belief that news media only had *minimal effects*; that is, merely reinforcing existing preferences (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955; Klapper, 1960 in Entman, 1989a: 75). However, Entman (1989ab) argued that telling people what to think about, through information selection, also affects what people think, thus changing their attitudes.

Media are believed to exert most influence on unobtrusive issues, like foreign affairs, considering they do not directly affect the population. As the public largely depends on the international media for information, some suggest that mass media, as the primary agent between the public and policymakers, would be most influential in directing executive preferences (similar arguments have been made by Mermin, 1999 and Soroka, 2003).

¹² The Independent, 16 June 2012.

¹³ The Wall Street Journal, 12 June, 2012.

MEDIA AND FOREIGN POLICY: THE CNN EFFECT

At the end of the Cold War, most countries had yet to adjust to the new international order, conceive a new global policy strategy and define their own role in it. With the end of the Cold War also came an end to the alleged “ideological bond uniting policymakers and journalists” (Robinson, 1999: 301), created by a longstanding anti-communist consensus. New technological evolutions in the field of communication – most notably satellite correspondence and real-time coverage – reinvigorated the debate on the role of the media in foreign policy (Nacos et al., 2000). Media were believed to have embarked the U.S. on a number of military and humanitarian interventions that were seemingly at odds with America’s general foreign policy interests. Experts, practitioners and academics alike suggested that, since Vietnam, television images of starving people had increasingly influenced American foreign policy and military or humanitarian interventions. Like Lippmann and Morgenthau had done decades before them, many warned against a policy that would be driven by the passion of the day (see for example Kennan, 1993; McNulty, 1993 and Hoge, 1994).

Technological advances had altered decision-making and communication at home and abroad: global, real-time, and 24h news cycles had changed the way governments deal with international events, speeding up the decision-making process and limiting reaction time (McNulty, 1993). This could possibly prevent fully informed and well-considered statements or judgments or, even worse, pressure governments towards undesired and ill-conceived policies, like military or humanitarian interventions. James Hoge Jr., at the time editor of *Foreign Affairs* (1994), therefore, urged policymakers to lead and provide for sound foreign policies, as the media would lead in the absence of a persuasive governmental strategy. Among the most cited illustrations of this evolution were the Ethiopian famine of 1984, the Chinese crackdown on students at the Tiananmen Square in 1989, the Russian coup of 1991 and the defense of Kurdish refugees in Northern Iraq in 1991. Yet, it is without doubt the military intervention in Somalia of 1992 that sparked most debate and ensuing academic interest. In his now famous editorial “Somalia, through a glass darkly”, George Kennan (1993) deplored an intervention that had not been discussed in Congress, would only provide temporary relief and would not affect the root causes of the problem, and this at a great financial cost (little did he know that 18 soldiers would die a couple of days after his publication). However, his greatest criticism was

directed at the policymakers and the public who had accepted this intervention, under the influence of the media, and television in particular. He argued that “the reaction would have been unthinkable without this exposure. The reaction was an emotional one, occasioned by the sight of the suffering of the starving people in question.”

This media influence is widely referred to as the CNN effect and is understood as a loss of political control by the government, implying that decisions follow media attention and not governmental attention or internal debate (Livingston and Eachus, 1995). Livingston (1997) further defined and conceptualized the CNN effect and identified three ways in which media can impact policy. *First*, media, and especially live coverage, increased the speed of decision-making, as it had now become almost impossible to withhold a reaction to an important event for long. The current fast pace of decision-making is often contrasted to the time the Kennedy administration enjoyed in handling the Cuban crisis (Livingston, 1997; McNulty, 1993). *Second*, media could jeopardize the achievement of desired foreign policy goals by impeding policy development or implementation. This could be done by focusing on negative emotional aspects, decreasing domestic support for a given policy. While the American government had been successful in preventing reporters from covering the negative aspects of the war in Iraq (Bennett and Paletz, 1994), they were unable to prevent the premature withdrawal from Somalia after the death of American soldiers. Similarly, public outcry after the death of 10 soldiers contributed to the withdrawal of the Belgian forces from Rwanda in 1994, preventing them from carrying out their peacekeeping mission. Another way the media can obstruct the implementation of policy is by divulging key information about an operation or policy that would endanger the security of those involved. *Third*, and perhaps most importantly, media can set the policy agenda, by raising the prominence of an issue. This crucial aspect of the CNN effect implies that media coverage co-determines what is important and, thus, governmental policy priorities. Once engaged in such a ‘media logic’, all three aspects could be at play, leading to a hasty intervention with consequences and sacrifices for which the public was not prepared, possibly ending in policy failure.

However, despite the great anecdotal argumentation, most evidence quickly and convincingly discarded the CNN effect as a potential explanation for humanitarian interventions. Several studies showed that the interventions in Somalia (1992) and Northern Iraq (1991), so often used as examples of the existence of a CNN effect, were not a response to intensive media coverage or demands of an emotional public.

Instead, Somalia had been on the government's agenda for a while, with very low media coverage. While Mermin concedes that "there is no reason to doubt that the appearance of Somalia on American television just before major changes in U.S. policy [...] influenced the decision of the Bush administration to act", he wonders "why Somalia appeared on television in the first place" (1997: 385-386). It was, in fact, policymakers who had tried to get the issue in the media to sensitize the public (Livingston and Eachus, 1995; Mermin, 1997). So, major television networks only started paying attention to the subject after it had already generated interest of Washington's foreign policymakers for a while. If anything, it is the relatively *low* media attention, before any intervention was considered, that is most surprising (Livingston, 1997: 9; Mermin, 1997; Robinson, 2001). Once the wheels were set in motion, television coverage contributed to the emergence of Somalia on the political agenda. However, this was only possible with the help of political allies.

INDEXING THE NEWS

Hence, most empirical studies confirmed Bennett's indexing theory (1990) and Herman and Chomsky's (1988) propaganda model of media – government relations. Both theories are based on the observation that the media's main sources are official (government) sources (Sigal, 1973; Gans, 1979; Bennett, Gressett and Haltom, 1985; Bennett, 1990; Mermin, 1999, Livingston and Bennett, 2003) – a finding persisting despite technological evolutions and increasing live coverage (Livingston and Bennett, 2003). Reliance on government sources is driven by an economic imperative and because of the legitimacy official sources provide (Entman, 1989a: 18). Bennett (1990) contends that media evaluate the relevance and importance of a story/issue through the political attention it receives. Political attention thus serves as the best legitimization of news coverage. In this perspective, responsive politicians are supposed to reflect and represent the opinions of the broader public. When they fail to do so, by reporting on the available opinions, media inform the public, who can then reward or punish their representatives through the electoral process. However, in those instances where stable majority opinion in society is excluded or marginalized, Bennett (1990) argues that the media should switch from indexing to "watchdog press" modus. He demonstrates that the media failed to do so and narrowed the scope of opinions by indexing official voices in the US' policy towards Nicaragua from

1983-1986. By doing so, the media silenced majority opinion that was opposed to the administration's policy.

Thus, indexing theory offers an explanation of the journalistic selection process whereby coverage is cued by politicians and criticism is kept "within the bounds of institutional debate, however narrow or distorted those bounds may become" (Bennett, 1990: 121). Hallin (1986) had found a similar pattern with respect to coverage of the Vietnam War, where media only became critical once high officials in Washington had started to oppose the war. However, it was Bennett (1990) who proposed a general theory of press – politics relations, explaining behavior of actors at all levels, from the boardroom to the individual journalist. The press was found to be similarly passive and manipulated by the administration in its coverage of the Iraq Wars of 1991 (Bennett and Paletz, 1994) and 2003 (Bennett, Lawrence and Livingston, 2007). Indexing dynamics are expected to be prevailing in military decisions, foreign affairs, trade, and macroeconomic policy-areas because of their role in advancing state power as well as the corporate economic interests involved (Bennett, 1990: 122). Moreover, Herman considers foreign policy to be especially vulnerable to "news management" by the government, given that there seldom are domestic constituencies defending their interests and contesting government propaganda (1993: 23). In this view, governments can use the media to spread their message to the public and, as Schattschneider's (1960) would put it, expand the scope of conflict to a previously uninterested audience (Livingston and Eachus, 1995: 424). In the following years, a great number of studies confirmed the indexing hypothesis, leading Miller (2007: 11) to conclude that "the indexing hypothesis [...] is at present the backbone theory of the small standing literature on media effects on government". Among the most valuable contributions to the validation and refinement of indexing were studies from Zaller and Chiu (1996) and Mermin, 1999.

Zaller and Chiu (1996) analyzed all major (35) U.S. foreign policy crises from 1945-1991 and found very high correlations between the degrees of *hawkishness* vs. *dovishness* of Congress and coverage in the media. After having dismissed alternative explanations (such as media compliance by politicians to avoid risks or common culture), they concluded that "reporters 'index' coverage to the range of opinion that exists in the government" (1996: 392). While recognizing the causal limitations of their study, Zaller and Chiu were nonetheless able to establish a general pattern of similarity between media and politics, consistent with indexing, over a long period of

time. Mermin, however, argued that confirmation of the indexing theory required more evidence than just the correlation between the official debate and the viewpoints expressed in the news media (1999: 3-16). This correlation is, in itself, not surprising and even justifiable as conflict inside the government is often newsworthy and considering government declarations often constitute “diplomatic events that demand coverage” (Mermin, 1999: 5). Thus, to establish whether coverage is truly confined to the bounds of official debate, it needs to be evidenced that “critical perspectives [...] are ignored or marginalized in the news if not first expressed in Washington” (5). To do so, Mermin (1999) compared news coverage of conflicts where political elites disagreed to ones where there was a consensus in Washington¹⁴. He found that critical perspectives in the former corresponded to elite disagreement where critical perspectives in the latter almost disappeared altogether. It is in those cases where a political consensus exists that media are expected to find critical voices, which they failed to do. Notable exceptions were coverage of cases where NATO allies expressed disagreement (Libya) or where there were large anti-war demonstrations (Gulf War – January 1991), which deviated slightly from the general indexing pattern.

MISSING THE POINT?

A common criticism of these media effects studies is that ‘media influence’ has often been too narrowly defined. Most of the CNN and indexing research examined who had “originated” (Mermin, 1997: 386) or “triggered” (Robinson, 1999:302) attention to a specific foreign policy situation or event. Hence, these investigations have focused on *sources* of news media rather than on their potential *impact* (Robinson, 2001). However, as Livingston (1997) argued, media influence is certainly not limited to the act of directing attention. So, if news coverage is indexed to reflect elite perspectives, does this mean media have no influence at all? Focusing exclusively on which actor was the first to pay attention to a specific issue entails the risk of wrongly overlooking and discarding any media effect (similar arguments have been expressed by Robinson, 2002; Spencer, 2005 and Miller, 2007).

In an effort to combine the CNN and indexing hypothesis, Robinson (1999; 2000; 2002) advances a ‘policy-media interaction model’ where *policy uncertainty* determines the dynamics at play. Early students of the CNN effect had already

¹⁴ The conflicts where there is elite disagreement are Grenada (1983), the Gulf War (November 1990), Somalia (1993) and Haiti (1994). The conflicts upon which there is a consensus are Libya (1986), Panama (1989), the Gulf War August (1990) and January (1991).

emphasized the importance of a clear directing policy (Shaw, 1996; Strobel, 1997). Robinson argues that media influence can occur when “policy is uncertain and media coverage is framed so as to be critical of government and empathizes with suffering people” (2000: 613). Policy uncertainty is hereby defined in familiar agenda-setting terms as “a function of the degree of consensus and co-ordination of the sub-systems of the executive with respect to an issue” (2002: 26). Entman (2004: 12) refers to a similar concept as the ‘unity’ among the different players within the administration¹⁵. So, when the government displays a lack of determination, creating policy uncertainty regarding a specific issue, it cannot feed the media with a story and a specific angle or frame. At those times, media can create a critical frame, sympathizing with the suffering victims and pressure the government to act. Critical coverage in such a scenario is indexed, reflecting elite disagreement (Robinson, 1999; 2000). However, when the government decisively pursues its own policy, it will use its resources and credibility to impose its vision on the media without deviating from the planned policy course, despite potential critics. Robinson’s systematic case studies indeed suggest that elite dissensus, policy uncertainty and critical news frames towards the government constitute the conditions in which a CNN effect may occur (2002: 31). More recent studies and reviews have all tended to adopt a more interactive understanding of how media influences foreign policy and move beyond exclusive examinations of who triggered attention (Bahador, 2007; Miller, 2007; Bahador, 2011).

A series of quantitative agenda-setting studies examined the interactions between the American President, media and Congress beyond the question of who ‘pulled the trigger first’. Their initial study of attention to three major foreign policy topics (Soviet Union, the Arab-Israel conflict and the Bosnian conflict) found the President to be reactive to the media (Wood and Peake, 1998). The President, however, did not affect media attention on foreign policy issues. Both media and government were responsive to international events and especially to the issues they had attended to in the past. Edwards and Wood compared the President’s ability to direct the attention of media and Congress on several foreign and domestic policies (Edwards and Wood, 1999). They also found the executive to be responsive to media attention and

¹⁵ Shaw’s understanding of policy uncertainty refers to a broader political climate, like the end of the Cold War (1996). Some have argued that 9/11 and the ensuing ‘war on terrorism’ had temporarily ended this broader conception of policy uncertainty due to the decisiveness of the Bush administrations and the narrow frame within which foreign policy was defined (Robinson, 2005).

international events, and unable to direct attention of Congress or media. The President's inability to set the agenda was stronger on foreign policy issues than on domestic issues. The President was only able to direct attention when attention was not already high (Peake, 2001). A major shortcoming of these studies, however, is that executive attention was measured through the President's speeches and press briefings. One can thus question to which extent this rhetoric represents actual policy and whether the same dynamics apply to decisions with policy consequences.

A CNN EFFECT ON FOREIGN AID?

A second main shortcoming of media effects studies in foreign policy is the definition of its object; do the CNN effect or indexing only apply to military and humanitarian interventions or does it pertain to foreign policy in general? Gilboa (2005) noted that students of the media effects in foreign policy, and specifically of the CNN effect have consistently used different definitions. While some argued that the CNN effect is about the media's ability to influence governments to pursue military intervention during humanitarian crises (Robinson, 2002: 2), others defined the CNN effect as "the way breaking news affects foreign policy decisions" (Schorr, 1998 in Gilboa, 2005: 29).

Despite the discouraging findings concerning the role of media in military interventions, a number of scholars investigated the impact of media attention on foreign aid and emergency assistance. By doing so, they tested the CNN hypothesis on a far less salient or prominent policy issue than military interventions. These authors found media to impact yearly distributions of aid in a variety of major donor countries like the U.S. (Van Belle and Hook, 2000; Drury, Olson and Van Belle, 2005), France, (Rioux and Van Belle, 2005), Japan (Potter and Van Belle, 2004), the UK and Canada (Van Belle et al., 2004). Contrary to emergency assistance where media effects seem likely, considering the intense bursts of media attention and the often explicit nature of the imagery, it is rather surprising to find such media effects on foreign aid, given its low political and public salience and the bureaucratic nature of its decision-making. So, if attention from news media is able to increase the perceived importance of individual countries and, thus, influence aid allocations to those countries, it is likely that media also play a role in more salient or politically sensitive issues, like participation in international humanitarian operations, for example.

Though it does not neatly fit the indexing vs. CNN debate, the study of development and humanitarian assistance provides for a great opportunity to study media effects in a systematic and comparative way. As the literature review indicates, so far, students have tended to study the same cases over and over again. Zaller and Chiu's (1996) study of 45 years of conflicts – luckily – only provided 35 cases. Using foreign aid allows us to examine the influence of media coverage on policy for hundreds of countries per year while systematically taking into account other considerations like strategic and economic motives. Moreover, several authors have pointed to the more general foreign policy trends that can be concluded from studying aid policies (see for example Hook, 1995; Noël and Thérien, 1995; Meernik et al., 1998; Schraeder et al., 1998; Van Belle, 2004). As aid programs and their determinants strongly vary between countries and change over time, they show how these changes and differences correspond to more general shifts in foreign policy priorities and to the way countries adjust to a changing international context and position themselves accordingly. While Schraeder et al. (1998), for example, show that security interests during the 1980s mainly played a role “among American and French policymakers—representing states with aspirations to global political leadership” (and not for Sweden and Japan), Meernik et al., 1998 found security-driven goals to have decreased in importance in the American aid program after the end of the Cold War.

Another important advantage is that the study of foreign aid allows comparing decision-making dynamics across countries in a policy domain where policy outcomes are measured in the same way: money. Hence, we overcome another major problem of the existing media effects debate; that it does not apply to political contexts other than the US. Moreover, and unlike previous quantitative agenda-setting studies (like Wood and Peake, 1998; Edwards and Wood, 1999; Peake, 2001), such studies examine media effects on substantive (budgets) and not symbolic agendas (rhetoric). In other words, aid budgets allow for the systematic and comparative study of policy outcomes and not just policy intentions.

However, the theoretical framework Van Belle and his co-authors (2004) offer to explain why the distribution of foreign aid is influenced by general media coverage seems counterintuitive, if not flawed. They argue that elected officials, as well as bureaucrats, respond to media, who are considered to reflect and influence the public. Public officials try to be responsive to their electorate to get (re-)elected. Hence, to keep track of what is on the public's mind and respond to their concerns, they turn

to newspapers. According to their rationale, elected officials will make sure that aid is distributed according to public preferences to avoid electoral sanctions. Therefore, they will make sure that larger contributions are made to countries that receive important media coverage and that financial support is not ‘wasted’ on low salient countries, considered unimportant by the public. The media play a crucial role in increasing a country’s salience and pressuring the government to act. Therefore, these authors argue, politicians have a strong interest in keeping the foreign aid distributions in accordance to the public’s priorities and to avoid great disparities between them. This first assumption of their rationale is very similar to that of the original CNN effect.

However, foreign aid decision-making is very different from the centralized and leader-driven decision-making during crises and conflict situations, upon which the CNN effect literature is based. Foreign aid decision-making does not involve a large number of elected officials and is known to be very bureaucratic (Van Belle et al., 2004: 23-24), especially in countries with uninterested and uninformed legislators (Lancaster, 2007: 20), like Belgium. Between 1995 and 2008, on average, members of the Chamber of Representatives devoted less than .8% of their attention (proportional number of interpellations and oral and written questions) to the Belgian foreign aid policies. Hence, a theory on foreign aid responsiveness to media needs to explain why both politicians and bureaucrats respond to media. Complex bureaucratic organizations are traditionally considered to limit the impact of individual (leadership-driven) decision-making (Allison and Halperin, 1972; Holsti, 1976; Rosati, 1981). Bureaucracies function according to their own logic and expertise and are not considered to be very responsive to political and public pressures (Van Belle et al., 2004: 24). Yet, agency theory research showed bureaucracies to be, in fact, responsive to their political environment in different areas (Weingast, 1984; Wood and Waterman, 1991, 1993; Waterman, Rouse and Wright, 1998).

The second assumption of Van Belle et al.’s (2004) theoretical framework concerns the responsiveness in delegating authority to these unelected officials. In line with agency theory, they argue that bureaucracies (agents) try to be responsive to public preferences, expressed through the media. They do so to avoid being scrutinized and perhaps even sanctioned by elected officials (principals). Criticism from the public may lead elected officials to sanction the bureaucracy, for instance by cutting back or cancelling certain projects or agencies. To maintain their

independence, bureaucracies try to act according to public demands and use media as a proxy for those demands (Powlick, 1991, 1995). While a media effect in these different countries has indeed been found, it is hard to examine whether it is truly a consequence of this chain of delegation from public through media to politicians and, finally to bureaucrats. This chain of delegation was never examined directly. Hence, the assumption that bureaucrats respond to media was only concluded indirectly from (a) the observation that media influences foreign aid and (b) the fact that foreign aid decision-making is highly bureaucratic. Hence, there is no clear and direct evidence that media influences foreign aid because of the assumed bureaucratic responsiveness.

In fact, both assumptions are based on the belief that the public cares about foreign aid allocations and is informed about how much which country gets. Eurobarometer data from 2003-2012 reveals low public concern for foreign policy/defense issues. Responding to “what do you think are the two most important issues facing (OUR COUNTRY) at the moment?” the EU’s general public concern for defense/foreign affairs never exceeds 2%. Similar public interest is found in Belgium and France. After a peak in interest around the war on Iraq, British concern dropped to a similar level. It would, then, be surprising to see politicians invest their efforts in these issues. Moreover, it is even harder to explain why bureaucrats whose employment does not depend on political considerations would turn to the media to determine the distribution of foreign aid.

Using specific aid allocation data, the study in chapter 7 disaggregates foreign aid to isolate that specific part of foreign aid that is decided by bureaucrats exclusively, with minimal or no political interference. Hence, this study examines the impact of media on a measurable part of foreign policy and tests Van Belle et al.’s (2004) bureaucratic responsiveness hypothesis directly. Moreover, the study of foreign aid makes it possible to test the influence of media beyond the American context and compare media effects across countries – one of the major shortcomings of classic CNN effect studies. The study in chapter 7 also finds Belgian development assistance to respond to media fluctuations. However, I show that this is *not* due to bureaucratic responsiveness.

Chapter 8 examines the long-term and short-term effects of media exposure on emergency assistance. The politics of emergency assistance are markedly different from the general decision-making process of development aid, of which it is a subset. Emergency assistance consists of aid in response to a humanitarian crisis, most often

caused by natural disasters or violent conflicts. These circumstances lead people to flee their homes and seek refuge in camps, in the hope of finding shelter and food there. Media coverage has also been found to impact levels of emergency assistance (Simon, 1997; Olsen, Carstensen and Høyen, 2003; Drury et al., 2005). The study in chapter 8 analyzes two stages of decision-making. First, the initial selection decision to allocate aid to a specific emergency (the agenda-setting stage) and, secondly, the decision that determines how much aid will be granted (the allocation stage). I find that short bursts of media coverage influence the selection of emergencies while long-term coverage influences the amount that will eventually be granted to a specific country. Emergency assistance is mainly a bureaucratic matter. Hence, comparing the dynamics of emergency assistance to that of the bureaucratically decided part of aid from chapter 7 allows us to test the impact of policy uncertainty. While there exists a general consensus with respect to bureaucratic aid, it is harder to predict which emergency situations require assistance most. This uncertainty, combined with the often-graphic nature of humanitarian news coverage makes emergency assistance more sensitive to media effects.

2 BELGIAN FOREIGN POLICYMAKING

Before moving to the methodology and the empirics of this research, it seems appropriate to briefly detail the main elements of Belgian foreign policymaking. The goal is to show how the foreign policy decision-making rules and procedures relate to the agenda-setting theory on policy change described in the previous chapter. First, I briefly lay down the key interests and topical foci of Belgian foreign policy. Then, I explain the decision-making process and how it is organized through the different actors involved. Given the little prior research on the Belgian decision-making process, particularly in the field of foreign policy (Moyse and Dumoulin, 2011: 5), I complement the literature with information gathered through a series of interviews with members from the administration and other experts¹⁶. Information used from these interviews was always crosschecked through the other interviews or corroborated with existing literature. The preparatory schemes of the semi-structured interviews carried out during personal meetings can be found in appendix I.

BELGIAN FOREIGN POLICY: CORE THEMES AND GOALS

Traditionally, economic diplomacy and European politics are considered as the main pillars of Belgian foreign policy. Both domains are directly linked to Belgium's vital interests: economic wealth and protection from the dominance and pressures of greater countries (Coolsaet, 2001; 2007). From its independence in 1830 until the First World War, Belgium's action abroad was driven by its industrial elite to develop

¹⁶ For reasons of confidentiality, I will not disclose the names of the interviewees. The interviews include:

- (a) Two interviews by phone with a long-time and high ranked civil servant at the chancellery of the prime minister who has provided me valuable information on the Government, the Core Cabinet and the Ministerial Council.
- (b) Two personal meetings with a Belgian ambassador, who has held numerous high profile posts, including at international organizations. He has also been member of different ministerial cabinets. He informed me on the daily management of foreign policy, the role of the Government and its interactions with the FPS and the embassies.
- (c) A personal meeting with a high-ranked civil servant and former staffer of the cabinet of development cooperation on how decisions are made within the cabinet and the administration, particularly in the field of development aid.
- (d) Several interviews and meetings by phone as well as extensive email exchanges on development aid, disaster relief and specifically on their respective budgets.
- (d) A personal meeting with a high ranked civil servant within the FPS, charged with management of emergency assistance, on disaster relief and how the government and the administration reacts to these events.
- (e) A personal meeting with a lobbyist from a Flemish NGO on the relations between NGOs and different bodies of the government and the administration.

its economic and financial interests and to maintain a stable society that would consolidate their position. As an export oriented country, the search for new consumer markets for Belgian products was the main goal (Coolsaet, 2001). To shelter itself from its quarrelling greater neighbors, the young Belgian country adopted a strict neutrality policy. This neutrality was actually imposed on Belgium by the Treaty of London of 1839 and was guaranteed, along with Belgium's security, by Great Britain and Prussia (Coolsaet, 2001).

After the Second World War, the pursuit of economic welfare and political independence was sought through supranational institutions (Criekemans and Duran, 2011: 8). While this entailed a loss in national sovereignty, the benefits largely outweighed this cost (Coolsaet, 2001: 334-335). As large countries had to concede more competences and authority, in absolute terms, supranational institutions were considered to be the best way to resist the dominance of the larger countries. As supranational institutions decreased the gap between large and small countries, membership would prevent Belgium from depending on its large neighbors (Coolsaet, 2007: 6; 2011: 3). Moreover, institutions like the European Community/Union and NATO were unique opportunities for smaller countries to take part in the deliberation and decision-making of issues that were usually exclusively decided by great powers. Hence, the neutrality policy that sought to maximize independence was replaced with a policy that implied greater involvement. While the European project needed to improve Belgium's economic position, NATO's purpose was to guarantee its security. At the end of the Cold War, with the disappearance of the communist threat, and greater European integration, the EU became to be considered as the more appropriate actor to serve its security goals, at the expense of the Atlantic Alliance (Coolsaet, 2007; Coolsaet and Nasra, 2009; Moyses and Dumoulin, 2011: 14-15). Belgium remains a champion for further European integration and claims Europe needs to be more autonomous internationally and thus militarily, it needs to stay internationally credible and relevant (Coolsaet, 2007: 57-72).

The last decades, the process of European integration got intertwined with state reforms, as nationalist forces sought to undermine the Belgian level to cede competences and sovereignty from the national to the European and regional level (Coolsaet, 2001: 555-576). Generally, foreign policy has been able to withstand the process of de-federalization. However, following the fourth state reform of 1993, important parts of Belgium's federal foreign trade competences have gradually been

delegated to the regions. According to the *in foro interno, in foro externo* principle, regions and communities carry out the external relations for those competences they hold in the “domestic arena” (Criekemans, 2006; Criekemans and Duran, 2011). Hence, Belgian regions are now responsible for their export promotion and for attracting investments. Though Belgium has maintained its share of trade within European borders, it lost ground beyond and has not been able to find new markets in growing economies (Coolsaet, 2004; 2007). While the regions are recognized at the European level, their representatives have a hard time reaching the highest level of decision-makers outside the EU. Moreover, the regions do not dispose of a broad network of connections, like the federal diplomacy does. In 2000, an agreement had also been made on the de-federalization of development policy. Important stakeholders, like NGOs, academics and the OECD strongly opposed this decision, which would increase operational costs and decrease overall efficiency (Coolsaet, 2007: 4). As a consequence, this delegation never took place and the proportion of aid contributed by the non-federal entities combined never exceeded 10% of the total budget.

Next to economic diplomacy and European politics, a third important focus of Belgian foreign policy is Central Africa (Coolsaet, 2001; Criekemans and Duran, 2011; Vlassenroot and Hoebeke, 2011). Due to its colonial history, Belgium has always remained deeply involved in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa. However, during the 1990s, Belgium’s Africa policy suffered major setbacks – breaking ties with President Mobutu of Zaire and the Rwandese genocide – leading to a severe loss of enthusiasm towards the ravaged region (Vlassenroot and Hoebeke, 2011). According to Coolsaet (2001: 523-524), it was the realization that there was no longer a vital interest in Central-Africa that led to a declining interest.

It was not until the new Verhofstadt government in 1999, and especially after the death of Laurent-Désiré Kabila, that Congo regained its place among Belgium’s top foreign policy priorities (Vlassenroot and Hoebeke, 2011). Since, the Belgian commitment has taken on several forms over the years, from major development assistance to military involvement. The former colony of the Democratic Republic of Congo (RDC) and the mandate territories Rwanda and Burundi have steadily remained among the top five recipients of Belgian development aid throughout the last decade. Belgium has been military involved in the region and is currently engaged in a number of military operations in Eastern Congo, among which, the UN’s

MONUSCO. Known for its expertise, Belgium has tried to draw international attention to the Great Lakes Region through international organizations. Hence, as President of the rotating EU Presidency, Belgium was able to successfully put Congo on the European agenda (Rosoux, 2002; Coolsaet and Nasra, 2009; Vlassenroot and Hoebeke, 2011). However, Coolsaet and Nasra (2009) suggest that the EU's involvement is largely dependent on that of its member States (in this case, Belgium) and, thus, has suffered from the recent lack of coherent policies towards Congo. This lack of coherence was a consequence of diverging domestic approaches between the critical Flemish (notably former minister of foreign affairs De Gucht) and the more pragmatic Francophones (especially Michel, former minister of development cooperation) and was gratefully exploited by the Congolese.

In 1999, an important shift in the domestic political landscape had entailed a renewed, modern, but most of all moral, Belgian foreign policy (Rosoux, 2002; Coolsaet and Nasra, 2009). Yet, the domestic quarrels between Belgium's major communities at home have discredited this moral stance, as well as one of Belgium's major selling points: its ability to broker consensus. These domestic problems between the two main communities, and the long government formations, have also highlighted the necessity for a strong coordinating Prime Minister and a new long-term vision for Belgium's place in the world (Coolsaet and Nasra, 2009).

EXECUTIVE DECISION-MAKING

As in most democracies, the executive branch is in charge of establishing Belgium's foreign policy. The various competences of foreign affairs are divided among different portfolios. While most competences belong to a minister, others are carried out by state secretaries. The allocation of these competences is done after the coalition negotiations and is the last step before the installment of the new government. It is most often a strategic attribution made in function of the (parliamentary) weight of the different parties and can sometimes even be a compensation for decisions or concessions made during the negotiations.

Table 2.1 Distribution of foreign affairs competences after (federal) elections

	Prime Minister		Foreign Affairs		Defense		Foreign Trade		Development Aid		European Affairs	
1981-1985	Martens (V)	CVP	Tindemans	CVP	Vreven	PVV	<i>De Clerq / Gol & Kempinaire</i>	PVV / PRL PVV	<i>Goossens / de Donnée</i>	<i>PRL / PRL</i>	<i>De Keersmaeker</i>	<i>CVP</i>
1985-1987 1987-1988	Martens (VI / VII)	CVP	Tindemans	CVP	de Donnée	PRL	<i>Decroo & Knoops</i>	PVV PRL	<i>Kempinaire</i>	<i>PVV</i>	<i>De Keersmaeker</i>	<i>CVP</i>
1988-1991 / 1991-1992	Martens (VIII / IX)	CVP	Tindemans/ Eyskens	CVP	Cöeme	PS	Urbain	PS	Geens / Derycke	SP	<i>De Keersmaeker**</i>	<i>CVP</i>
1992-1995	Dehaene	CVP	Claes / Vandenbroucke	SP	Delcroix / Pinxten	CVP	Urbain	PS	<i>Derycke</i>	<i>SP</i>	Urbain	PS
1995-1999	Dehaene	CVP	Derycke	SP	Wathelet / Poncelet	PSC	Maystadt / Di Rupo	PSC / PS	Moreels	CVP	-	-
1999-2003	Verhofstadt	VLD	L.Michel	PRL	Flahaut	PS	<i>Chevalier / Neyts</i>	VLD	<i>Boutmans</i>	Agalev	-	-
2003-2007	Verhofstadt	VLD	L.Michel / De Gucht	VLD	Flahaut	PS	Moerman / Verwilghen	VLD	Verwilghen / De Decker	VLD / MR	<i>Simonet / Donfut</i>	MR / PS
2007-2008	Verhofstadt / Leterme	CD&V	De Gucht	VLD	De Crem	CD&V			C.Michel	MR	<i>-***</i>	-

Note: Italic= State Secretary. Bold= part of a larger portfolio

** State Secretary Lizin (PS) was appointed to prepare Belgium's European Presidency.

*** State Secretary Chastel (MR) was appointed to prepare Belgium's European Presidency.

As Table 2.1 shows, throughout the last three decades, Belgium has always had a minister of foreign affairs (MFA) and of defense (MOD), while development aid has been the charge of a state secretary most of the time. Yet, since 2003 a ‘proper’ minister has been in charge of development cooperation, as it has become an increasingly important policy domain with increasing financial and human resources. Foreign trade, then again, has often been part of a minister’s broader portfolio. Due to a relatively recent regionalization, at the federal level, this competence has been added to the competences of the Minister of foreign affairs or to the Prime Minister’s. Since foreign trade became a regional competence, at the federal level, it mostly entails the coordination among the various policies and agencies at the different levels. The picture is less clear for European affairs, which has sometimes required a state secretary, but has also been off the grid at times.

As the next sections will show, decision-making is a complex process with various actors whose responsibilities intertwine and overlap. The empirical studies of this manuscript examine external influences on executive policymaking. However, the two empirical sections greatly differ when it comes to the way policy is made. In the first part, the policies studied completely fall under the collective responsibility of the government. Hence, the policies at study cannot be attributed to one or several individuals, but to the government as a whole. In the second section, responsibility of policymaking lies with several actors, also from outside the government. Within the government, the most important actors are the minister or state secretary in charge of development cooperation and the bureaucracy. Hence, it is important to detail the rules and procedures of foreign policy decision-making in Belgium to understand the empirical studies – and their differences – within a broader decision-making context.

THE GOVERNMENT

The government is charged with establishing and carrying out the foreign policy. In close collaboration with the administration, it is responsible for the conception of a general foreign policy that responds to both the needs of the country’s external challenges and the demands of its population. As events occur on a daily basis, it is almost impossible to think them through thoroughly, discuss them with all the government partners and then frame an official reaction in a way acceptable to media and public. Hence, the general foreign policy and its guidelines need to be as coherent as possible and the administration needs to be well organized and well coordinated in

order to react quickly and within well-defined policy margins (Thuysbaert, 1995: 29-30).

The conception of foreign policy for a new government begins after the elections with the government agreement. The preciseness and concreteness of the government agreements is necessary to maintain a stable government throughout the four-year legislation (Timmermans, 2003: 5-6). That is why government agreements have traditionally been considered as “policy bibles”; documents that need to be followed rather strictly to ensure the proper functioning of the coalition. Over the last twenty years (1991-2009), government agreements have tended to increase in length (Timmermans, 2003), but remained stable with respect to their diversity, possibly reflecting the increasing necessity to make larger and more precise agreements to guarantee the coalition’s stability.

Once a new coalition is installed, it is the government’s responsibility to carry out the government agreement and implement the agreed upon policies. In Belgium, foreign policy is usually not the highest priority for most political actors, media or public (Moyses and Dumoulin, 2011). It is rather inconspicuous and uncontested, which makes it a highly governmental issue (Walgrave, Soroka and Nuytemans, 2008). This means that the issues are not directly observable by the public and that they are also not sensational enough to be picked up by the media (Soroka, 2002: 21-22). The public’s lack of concern (Eurobarometer¹⁷), as well as the low interest from the Parliament (De Vos and Rooms, 2006: 11), lead to relatively isolated and low scrutinized foreign policies. This implies that ministers of foreign affairs generally dispose of a large margin of maneuver, as long as the policies remain within the confines of the government agreement. However, politically sensitive issues cannot be decided by the MFA and require a broad consensus within the government (Moyses and Dumoulin, 2011: 42). There are three main bodies where such a consensus is sought: the Policy Coordination Working Groups (PCWG, formerly known as 'Inter-cabinet Working Groups')¹⁸, the Core Cabinet (known as the *Kern*) and the Ministerial Council.

Before going into the specific decision-making procedures, it seems useful to provide some background information on the terminology that is used in the next

¹⁷ Eurobarometer data show that, on average, no more than 1% of the Belgian public believes foreign policy and defense issues to be among the two most important problems the country is facing between 2003 and 2012.

¹⁸ Portal Belgium.be – Official Information and Services.

http://www.belgium.be/en/about_belgium/government/federal_authorities/federal_government/strategic_cells_and_secretariats_government_members/

sections. The administrative Copernicus reforms¹⁹ (1999-2003) considerably complicated the pretty straightforward terminology that was previously used – and perhaps the administrative structure too. After the reforms, the ministerial cabinets (the immediate staff of a member of the government) have been replaced by a secretariat and policy cells. Nevertheless, the term cabinet is still widely used. As a consequence, the Inter-cabinet Working Groups were renamed Policy Coordination Working Groups. Many ministries became Federal Public Services (FPS), but not all of them. Hence, there is a FPS Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, commonly called FPS Foreign Affairs, with a department for each subdomain, but there is still a genuine Ministry of Defense.

The Ministerial Council

Officially, the ministerial council is the main political arena where deliberations are held and decisions are made. As one of the epicenters of Belgian politics, “the Council of Ministers is composed of no more than fifteen members. With the possible exception of the prime minister, the Council of Ministers is composed of an equal number of Dutch-speaking members and French-speaking members.” (Art. 99 of the Belgian Constitution²⁰) Formally, the Constitution stipulates that state secretaries do not form part of the Council of Ministers (Art. 104) so, officially, they only participate in cases involving their competences. However, since the first Dehaene government in 1992, state secretaries partake in every council and the entire council²¹. Held weekly on Friday, the Council debates and takes decisions upon consensus, thereby confirming or testing the political coherence of the government²². Article 69 of the Special Law of 8 August 1980 stipulates that the government decides upon consensus on the matters that belong to its competencies²³. Since the workings of the Ministerial Council are not constitutionally defined, the government uses the *‘practical instructions concerning the functioning of the government’* as guidelines. According to these instructions, to involve all government members, the ministerial

¹⁹ Brochure of the Federal Public Service Personnel and Organization
http://www.google.be/url?sa=t&rc=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=6&cad=rja&ved=0CEgQFjAF&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.fedweb.belgium.be%2Fnl%2Fbinaries%2Fbroch_copernicus_nl_tcm120-17107.pdf&ei=ARodUafTBurY0QX6xICIDQ&usg=AFQjCNFRMFUXEFvm5C_xBoRFGqVgWanntA&sig2=_S-wtWqZKPnLLx44xGVPkw&bvm=bv.42452523,d.d2k

²⁰ An English version of the Belgian Constitution can be found here:

http://www.dekamer.be/kvvcr/pdf_sections/publications/constitution/grondwetEN.pdf

²¹ As stated in the archives of the websites of former Prime Ministers Verhofstadt and Leterme and also confirmed through personal communication with a collaborator from the Chancellery of the Prime Minister.
(http://archive.verhofstadt.belgium.be/nl/working/council_min.html and <http://archive.letermeii.belgium.be/de-ministerraad>).

²² Official Website of the Belgian Prime Minister: <http://premier.fgov.be/de-ministerraad>

²³ http://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/cgi_loi/change_lg.pl?language=nl&la=N&cn=1980080802&table_name=wet

council has to agree on all subjected proposals of royal or ministerial decrees to which its intervention is legally required and on all issues whose content or consequences have political or budgetary repercussions (Dewachter, 2003: 199; Devos, 2006: 386). Appendix II lists the type of issues that need to be discussed by the ministerial council²⁴. These guidelines are extremely similar to the ones internally communicated to ministers at the beginning of every legislature and deal with the competences of the ministerial council in a very concrete way. Moreover, they also instruct members of the government on how to prepare and submit files in a very detailed way.

While it was not always clear in the past what belonged to the advice of the Council or the judgment of an individual Minister (Thuysbaert, 1995: 333; Dewachter, 2003: 199), nowadays, more and more decisions need to be approved by the entire government, in part as a consequence of growing mistrust among coalition members²⁵. Moyses and Dumoulin (2011: 42) argue that an explicit governmental consensus is required on all politically sensitive decisions. So, for those issues, a minister depends on the consent of his colleagues. Debates last until consensus is reached, to assure common responsibility for all governmental decisions. However, in practice, consensus means that the minority subjects itself to the point of view of the majority – or resigns (Dewachter, 2003: 209). Moreover, there also exists a quid pro quo attitude where preventing decisions for others will not help you get their approval afterwards.

About approximately 80% of the decisions made in the Ministerial Council are communicated to media and public through press releases (De Swert, Dandoy and Nuytemans, 2005: 227). Only cases upon which a consensus could be reached are communicated, to preserve the stability and discretion of the government. Sensitive cases - strategic or secretive – dealt by the Ministerial Council are never communicated. The majority of Ministerial Council foreign policy decisions are “preventive diplomacy” allocations for projects “concerned with conflict prevention and peace building in accordance with specific thematic and geographical priorities of Belgium’s foreign policy”²⁶. The demands of these allocations are so well prepared

²⁴ Taken from the archive of the Website of former Belgian Prime Minister Leterme:
<http://archive.lettermeii.belgium.be/en/node/2832>

²⁵ This can be seen in the increasing type of decisions that require the council’s approval in Appendix II and was confirmed through the interviews.

²⁶ Official Website of the Federal Public Service (FPS) for foreign affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation:
http://diplomatie.belgium.be/en/policy/policy_areas/peace_and_security/conflict_prevention_and_peacebuilding/

and previously discussed that they are not heavily debated, but merely ratified in the Ministerial Council.

The Council's approval is required for budgetary allocations²⁷, except for development assistance. The global budget for development assistance is only discussed during the yearly general budget negotiations and its content (who gets money and in which sectors) is never debated during these negotiations. Most other – non-budgetary – foreign policy decisions do not need to be decided in the Ministerial Council and belong to the discretion of the Minister of foreign affairs and the Prime Minister. To make the meetings more efficient, a distinction is made between agenda points A and B since the first Dehaene government in 1992. The A points have been agreed upon beforehand and simply do not require any debate, while the latter points are being discussed (Dehaene, 2000: 30).

The Core Cabinet and informal interministerial meetings

Most issues agreed upon in the Ministerial Council are actually never deliberated or discussed there. In fact, for most decisions consensus was reached during prior meetings, like the policy coordination working groups and the Core Cabinet, making the Council somewhat of a “ratification machine” (Dewachter, 1992: 290-296; Claes, 2000: 40; Moyse and Dumoulin, 2011: 44-45). The Core Cabinet is an informal meeting between the Prime Minister, the Vice-Prime Ministers (usually one for each coalition party) and other members of the government involved in the issue at hand²⁸. While all cabinets have technical policy cells related to the competence of their own Minister, vice-Prime Ministerial cabinets also have general policy cells, controlling the policies of all the other Ministers²⁹. The Vice-Prime Ministers act as representatives of their respective parties (Dewachter, 2003: 198) and, given the small number of participants, the Kern is the most efficient place to forge consensus before an issue is sent to the Ministerial Council (Moyse and Dumoulin, 2011: 43-44). Here, the Prime Minister plays a leading role in finding a compromise.

For highly sensitive issues and in times of crises, the Kern is where the first discussions take place. Specific matters will be discussed during several (special) Kern meetings, depending on the issue. The issue will, then, not be discussed at the Ministerial Council before an agreement is reached in the Kern. Over time, the Kern

²⁷ See Appendix II for more information on the decisions mandatory for the Ministerial Council

²⁸ Official Website of the Belgian Prime Minister: <http://premier.fgov.be/de-ministerraad>.

²⁹ Dewachter (2003: 216) describes how cabinets of Vice-Prime Ministers originally served to shadow other parties' ministers. Over the years, and with the splitting of the party system, the number of Vice-PMs has increased (Claes, 2000: 34).

has become the most important decision-making arena (Devos, 2006: 389; Moyses and Dumoulin, 2011: 43-47). Certain issues can also be dealt with during informal interministerial meetings (Dewachter, 1992: 295-296; Moyses and Dumoulin, 2011). Belgian participation in military operations, for example, are first discussed between the PM, the MFA and the MOD (Moyse and Dumoulin, 2011: 12, 34). Before 1992, regular meetings, called ministerial committees, were held to debate and decide upon policy-specific areas. These meetings were somewhat like 'sub-ministerial councils' and also existed for foreign policy. In 1992, however, Prime Minister Dehaene abolished all of them. As a result, the debates that took place in these meetings went back to the ministerial council (Coppieters, 2009), as these committees were not replaced. Since the ministerial council gradually became a 'ratification machine', the center of the discussions has moved to the policy coordination working groups (Coppieters, 2009).

The Policy Coordination Working Groups

The policy coordination working groups are the first line of consultation between different ministries or departments. They are held for every proposal of royal decree and include representatives from the concerned ministers, every Vice-Prime Minister and from the Prime Minister to debate, amend or change these proposals. These meetings are necessary to assure fluent workings of the kern and the ministerial councils and represent the first moment of consensus building. If a compromise cannot be reached here, the policy proposal is sent to the kern (Moyse and Dumoulin, 2011: 45). If there is still no agreement after this, the working group general policy is the last resort to come to a solution. This working group includes the president of the chancellery of the Prime Minister, the secretary of the Ministerial Council and the directors of the general policy cells (chiefs of cabinets). A consensus in this working group has to be confirmed in the core cabinet before being sent to the ministerial council (Devos, 2006: 387-388). For specific foreign policy matters where the government has to take a politically important decision or position (e.g. sending troops abroad), ad hoc inter-ministerial meetings are held, including all government members involved (De Vos and Rooms, 2006: 117; Moyses and Dumoulin, 2011: 40).

The Minister of foreign affairs

With the assistance of his staff and the administration, the minister of foreign affairs is responsible for the execution of the foreign policy and for Belgium's action abroad.

However, it is not always clear how much autonomy the MFA has in exerting his function. Dewachter (2003: 200), for example, argues that ministers of foreign affairs, especially, are known to make decisions on their own. Foreign policy decision-making is more centralized than many other policy domains for reasons of efficiency and effectiveness (De Vos and Rooms, 2006: 115). This centralization is considered necessary and is mainly due to the nature of foreign affairs itself, as many issues require a sense of urgency and expertise, and can therefore not be dealt with collectively (Dehaene, 2000; Dewachter, 2003: 200). Moreover, foreign policy is not subjected to the ideological (left-right) divisions that are typical to most issues and is not heavily scrutinized by the public. During the Martens VIII government (1988-1991) international issues were treated like domestic matters, which is rather exceptional. Former Prime Minister Dehaene – then Vice-Prime Minister and Minister of institutional reforms – recounts how it was nearly impossible, and extremely inefficient, to search for a consensus on international matters (Dewachter, 2003: 201-202). During his own time as a Prime Minister (1992-1999), he believed in the individual responsibility of his ministers (Dehaene, 2000). It is then up to the minister to involve the other members of government in their policies.

Other authors, then again, emphasize the collective nature of Belgian governmental decision-making (Timmermans, 1994; De Winter and Dumont, 2006). The collective responsibility of the cabinet offers the members of the government a veto power over policies proposed by others. Given the large “ministerial cabinets for general policy” of the Vice-Prime Ministers – one for each coalition party – it is increasingly hard for any member of the government to step out of line and carry out policies that are not backed by the entire government. As the margin of manoeuvre also depends on the mutual trust within the government (Thuysbaert, 1995: 333), the discretion of individual members of government is believed to have decreased over time. Given the increasingly broad range of measures that need to be debated or approved collectively by the Ministerial Council, this does not leave that much leeway to any individual, including the MFA. Moreover, De Winter and Dumont (2006: 273) argue that civil servants dispose of more autonomy in the departments of defense and foreign affairs.

Furthermore, the role of the MFA is believed to have declined due to the successive delegation of competences to the federated entities and to the European level Coolsaet, 2001. As the competences of foreign affairs have been scattered across other ministerial departments (economy, environment, finance, etc.) and other

governmental levels (Europe, regions and communities), intensive coordination is required. They contend that the MFA maintains the coherence of policies. While Moyse and Dumoulin (2011: 14-15) argue that the MFA regained prominence as a coordinator of Belgium's foreign policies, others argue that this coordinating role has gone to the PM (Coolsaet, 2007; Coolsaet and Nasra, 2009), in fact further decreasing the power of the MFA (Interviews).

The Prime Minister: Primus Inter Pares

The Prime Minister is the captain of the team and, as such, needs to create the conditions that are necessary to carry out the governmental project. Given that the members of the government did not choose each other to work with and come from different political parties and ideologies, it is important for the PM to create an atmosphere of trust. Dewachter (2003: 214) argues that this trust can only come about by allowing the individual ministers to carry out their policies within the confines of the common project while offering advice and support to anticipate or overcome any problems that might occur in the ministerial council. As chief of the executive, the PM does not impose decisions or solutions by means of authority, but settles disagreements through consensus, to maintain the stability of his coalition (Dehaene, 2000; Dewachter, 2003: 215).

The role of the PM is said to have increased over the years, both in general policymaking as in foreign policy specifically (Dehaene, 2000; Thuysbaert, 1995: 333; Devos, 2006: 383; Coolsaet, 2007; Coolsaet and Nasra, 2009). The reasons for this evolution are both domestic and international. First, Belgium's regionalization efforts require increasing coordination of the Prime Minister between the policies at the federal and federated levels (Devos, 2006: 383). As the regions have realized the limits of their own capacities in dealing with foreign entities, especially in the field of trade, the federal level regained importance as the central axis of foreign policy (Coolsaet, 2007; Klem and Kester, 2011) Second, the growing domestication of European politics moved the center of gravity of European affairs from the MFA to the PM (Dehaene, 2000; Devos, 2006). The role of the PM grows as international issues increasingly affect the domestic area. Moreover, the increasing number of top-level meetings among heads of government and heads of State – especially EU Council meetings – require the presence of the Prime Minister.

In the field of foreign policy, the role of the PM is particularly important when there is no explicit hierarchy within the government (De Vos and Rooms, 2006: 116). When, for example, the MFA is also a vice-Prime Minister, he is a member of the Core Cabinet. As the most important arguments are settled there, the minister of foreign affairs' presence gives him a marked advantage vis-à-vis other foreign policy executives. However, when this is not the case, it is up to the PM to seek for consensus – as it is in other matters.

The Prime Minister does not have a specific administration for foreign affairs. For matters related to foreign policy and external relations, he has two diplomatic advisors who are in close contact with departments from the Federal Public Service and with the embassies abroad to inform and advise him (De Vos and Rooms, 2006: 119). These advisors are chosen by the Prime Minister and generally come from within the Belgian diplomacy. Over the years, the influence but also the necessity for an actively intervening Prime Minister has grown, as his coordinating role is key to a coherent and efficient foreign policy (Coolsaet and Nasra, 2009).

THE FEDERAL PUBLIC SERVICE FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation is the administration that assists the ministers and state secretaries in the execution of Belgium's foreign policies and manages its external relations. The administration is in charge of the preparation and execution of the policies set out by the government, as well as of the daily management of Belgium's external relations (Thuysbaert, 1995: 29). Defense is managed by a separate ministry with its own administration. The minister of defense is responsible for managing the military, but is not in charge of the international security policy, which is the responsibility of the minister of foreign affairs.

The FPS has six main, topical, Directorates-General: Bilateral affairs (DGB); Consular affairs (DGC); Development cooperation (DGDC); European affairs; (DGE); legal affairs (DGJ) and multilateral affairs (DGM) (see Figure 2.1 for an organization chart of the FPS). There are also five, administrative, staff directions: budget and management (B&B); personnel and organization (P&O); press and communication (P&C); Protocol and Security (P) and finally the direction Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The heads of the directorates report to the President of the Direction Committee, who is in charge of the daily

management and coordination of the different Directorates-General and staff directions within the FPS³⁰. (S)he is in close, and almost daily, contact with the Ministers.

The FPS is charged with maintaining the consistency of Belgium's actions abroad by coordinating among the different actors. The administration carries out the policies laid out by the government. The FPS represents the country abroad and promotes its image. Finally, it is also responsible for providing assistance to nationals abroad³¹. Next to the ministry and the FPS Foreign Affairs, the diplomatic and consular posts constitute the third component of the Belgian foreign policy administration (De Vos and Rooms, 2006: 121). The main tasks of the diplomats are to represent the country abroad or at international organizations whereas the consuls have a more commercial and economic role. Foreign policymaking and directing attention to issues or evolutions can either be a top-down or a bottom-up process. The former implies that information and assignments come from the ministerial cabinet and require the administration to inform about an issue or execute a policy measure. The latter refers to information, suggestions and proposals made by the experts from the administration to the political decision-makers due to the technical demands and expertise of the changing international environment (Thuysbaert, 1995: 344).

³⁰ Official Website of the Federal Public Service (FPS) for foreign affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation: http://diplomatie.belgium.be/fr/sur_lorganisation/organigramme_et_structure/s/index.jsp

³¹ http://diplomatie.belgium.be/en/about_the_organisation/mission_and_goals/index.jsp

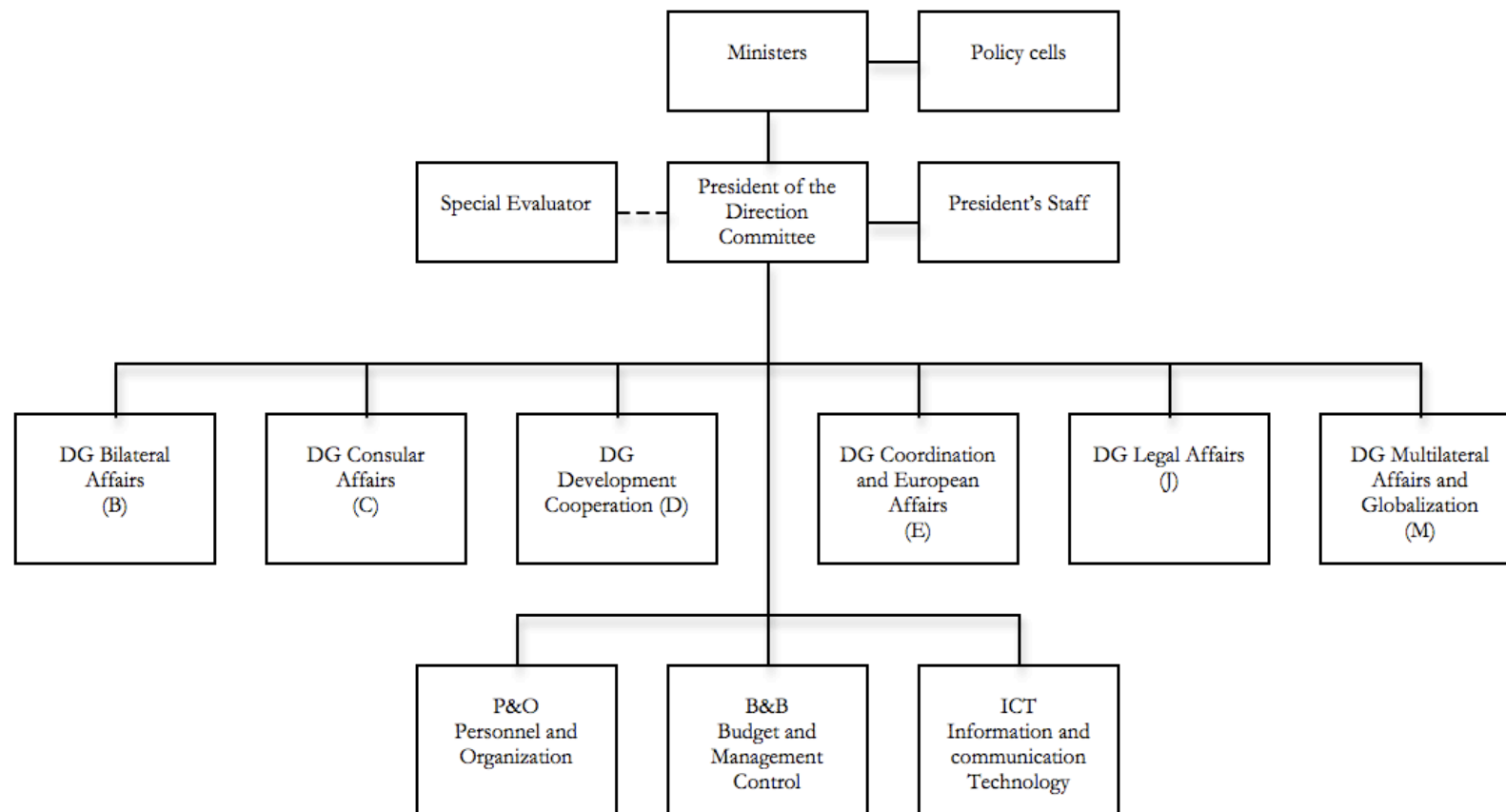


Figure 2.1 The organizational chart of the Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation³²

³² http://diplomatie.belgium.be/fr/binaries/Organigram - ALG - Fr_tcm313-95097.pdf

The FPS is charged with maintaining the consistency of Belgium's actions abroad by coordinating among the different actors. The administration carries out the policies laid out by the government. The FPS represents the country abroad and promotes its image. Finally, it is also responsible for providing assistance to nationals abroad³³. Next to the ministry and the FPS Foreign Affairs, the diplomatic and consular posts constitute the third component of the Belgian foreign policy administration (De Vos and Rooms, 2006: 121). The main tasks of the diplomats are to represent the country abroad or at international organizations whereas the consuls have a more commercial and economic role. Foreign policymaking and directing attention to issues or evolutions can either be a top-down or a bottom-up process. The former implies that information and assignments come from the ministerial cabinet and require the administration to inform about an issue or execute a policy measure. The latter refers to information, suggestions and proposals made by the experts from the administration to the political decision-makers due to the technical demands and expertise of the changing international environment (Thuysbaert, 1995: 344).

Studies 3 and 4 (chapters 7 and 8) examine the influence of media within the Directorate General for development cooperation. Both studies mainly focus on bureaucratic policy outputs, with a rather limited role for the minister or state secretary in charge. In no way is a consensus of the ministerial council required. Extraordinary emergencies may entail exceptional high-level involvement of the executive. After the 2005 Tsunami, for example, the ministerial council agreed on a proposal made by the ministers of finance and budget to support charity actions through tax deductions. However, executive involvement is very uncommon.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

While several institutional reforms de-federalized parts of the Belgian foreign policy to the regional level, all in all, it has been able to resist the constitutional evolution of delegation rather well. Applying the principle *in foro interno, in foro externo*, Regions and Communities are responsible for the external relations with respect to their own, 'domestic', competences (Art. 167, 1°) since the Saint-Michel agreements of 1993 (Criekemans, 2006; Criekemans and Duran, 2011). Within these margins, federated entities can sign international treaties with sovereign countries, international

³³ http://diplomatie.belgium.be/en/about_the_organisation/mission_and_goals/index.jsp

organizations and other regional entities. Treaties have to be submitted to all the parliaments of the respective signatories. Exclusive treaties only concern a federated entity. After parliamentary approval, the regional and community governments decide whether and when to ratify the treaty. For mixed treaties, involving both federal and federated levels, the federal government is charged with the ratification after approval of the respective Parliaments (Clement, D'Hondt, Van Crombrugge and Vanderveeren, 1993: 39-43).

Of the decentralized competences, foreign trade is the most important one: “the Institutional Reform Act of 8 August 1988 states that Belgium’s three Regions are responsible for determining policy with regard to foreign markets and exports, without prejudice to any national policy to coordinate and promote foreign trade and to cooperate in that area”³⁴. The three Regions consequently established agencies promoting international trade. After the Saint-Michel agreements of 1993, foreign trade was further regionalized. Today, the federal level mainly focuses on examining the investment climate, informing potential investors and more importantly, coordinating Belgium’s trade policies throughout the different entities. Here, the FPS Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation plays a key role, along with the FPS Finance and the FPS Economic Affairs.

Belgium’s federal system is unique, as there is no hierarchy among the different levels. To coordinate the policies, two consultation committees have been created. The interministerial conference for foreign affairs (*Conférence interministérielle “Politique étrangère”/Interministeriële Conferentie “Buitenlands Beleid”*) is a regular meeting between federal, regional and community Ministers, headed by the foreign affairs minister (De Vos and Rooms, 2006: 118). The purpose of these meetings is consultation and coordination. The conference deals with issues like the ratification of international treaties, European policy, representation at international organizations, etc. The consultation committee (*overlegcomité/Comité de concertation*) is a regular meeting between the Prime Minister and the Ministers-President of the Regions and Communities. Consultation and coordination here concerns more general policies. Foreign policy issues are on the agenda when coordination at different levels of governance is required (De Vos and Rooms, 2006: 118). In certain, rare, instances, the federal government, through the ministerial council, can object to the (planned)

³⁴ http://diplomatie.belgium.be/en/policy/economic_diplomacy/division_of_powers/index.jsp

treaty of a Region or Community. Its procedure is then suspended for 30 days while the interministerial conference tries to find a consensus on the matter (Clement et al. 1993: 42). If a consensus is reached within 30 days, the suspension is lifted. If not, the suspension remains³⁵.

Finally, it needs to be noted that the decentralization efforts of foreign policy throughout the period at study is not expected to affect the analyses of this research as I do not investigate specific trends over time. The time frames of the analyses carried out in chapters 5 and 6 always remain within the electoral cycles of maximum four years. Moreover, development aid and emergency assistance, examined in chapters 7 and 8, have barely been affected by the different state reforms (Coolsaet, 2007).

PARLIAMENT

As in most democratic systems, the Parliament has a controlling function over the policies being carried out by the executive. However, given the strong party discipline among the parties who form the parliamentary majority of the government, many argue that the role of the Parliament is to pass decisions made by the executive (De Winter and Dumont, 2000; Dewachter: 2003: 223). For most foreign policy decisions, parliamentary approval is not required (Thuysbaert, 1995: 30; Moysse and Dumoulin, 2011: 24). Hence, influence is mostly exerted through the respective parties of the Members of Parliament (MP) (De Winter and Dumont, 2000: 123; Moysse and Dumoulin, 2011: 24).

To perform the parliamentary control, there are several means and moments that correspond to the different policymaking phases. Yet, most government actions and decisions can only be judged a posteriori (Thuysbaert, 1995: 30). Only members of the Chamber are able to control and ask accountability from the government or from a minister³⁶. The goal is not to debate every measure taken by the government in Parliament. The first, important, moment is the installation of the new government. Article 101 of the Constitution stipulates that the Chamber has to cast a vote of confidence to the new government³⁷, by simple majority. This government making

³⁵ There are four possible grounds for the permanent suspension of a treaty: (1) the co-signatory is not recognized by Belgium; (2) Belgium does not maintain diplomatic relations with the co-signatory; (3) from a decision or action of the State it appears that the relations between Belgium and the co-signatory are broken, suspended or seriously threatened; and finally (4) the planned treaty is conflicting with Belgium's international or supranational obligations.

³⁶ Before the parliamentary reforms of 1995, members of the Senate were also able to control the Government.

³⁷ Official Website of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives:

http://www.dekamer.be/kvvcr/showpage.cfm?section=/pri/competence&language=nl&story=competence.xml&rightmenu=righ_t_pri

power is called the political control and is a way to examine and debate the future general policy intentions of the newly installed government. A similar way for Parliament to control the global foreign policy (as any other policy) is the budgetary control. This vote is mandatory (Art. 74, 3° of the Constitution) and the Chamber is assisted in this task by the Court of Audit (*Cour des comptes/Rekenhof*), whose members are elected by the Parliament.

A more frequent and ‘immediate’ way to control the policy are interpellations and written and oral questions. Together, they constitute the policy control. Interpellations are a way to demand one or several members of the government to justify or defend particular actions (or lack thereof): specific situations, statements or policy measures³⁸. Most interpellations are ‘sent to’ and treated in public commissions, except when it concerns matters of high political importance or public interest. In those cases, they are treated during plenary parliamentary sessions. A particular element about interpellations is that they can be concluded by a motion³⁹. In this sense, they constitute a stronger instrument for members of Parliament than oral and written questions, which are informative and directed to a specific minister and not to the entire government. Questions can be addresses both in commissions and in plenary session. When multiple questions in plenary session concern the same topic, they are moved from “question time” to the debate section. Another constitutional instrument (Art. 56 of the Constitution) for members of Parliament and senators to exert control are the committees of inquiry (*onderzoekscommissie/commission d’enquête*)⁴⁰. These committees hold the same competences and investigative instruments as a legal investigation. They can call on witnesses, interrogate them under oath, confront witnesses with each other’s statements, seize documents and demand search warrants. The most recent important foreign policy related committees of inquiry have been the Lumumba committee and the Rwanda Committee. The former investigated the role of Belgian policymakers in the capture and assassination

³⁸ Official Website of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives:
http://www.dekamer.be/kvvcr/showpage.cfm?section=/pri/competence&language=nl&story=competence.xml&rightmenu=righ_t_pri

³⁹ Among the different types of motions, we distinguish: (1) a simple motion, moving to the order of the day; (2) a motion of distrust, where Parliament removes its confidence in a Minister or the Government; (3) a constructive motion of distrust, where Parliament not only withdraws its confidence in the Government, but also proposes an alternative; and finally (4) a motion of recommendation that does not concern the confidence in the Government but makes a recommendation with respect to its policy.

⁴⁰ Official Website of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives:
http://www.dekamer.be/kvvcr/showpage.cfm?section=/pri/competence&language=nl&story=competence.xml&rightmenu=righ_t_pri

of Patrice Lumumba, former Prime Minister of Congo, in 1961 and the latter examined the failed Belgian policies during the Rwandan genocide in 1994. Finally, international agreements need to be submitted to the Parliament of the level of governance of the signatory (federal, regional or community level).

In conclusion, given the low public interest in foreign policy, there is little to no electoral profit to gain for members of Parliament from profiling themselves on these issues. Moreover, in the Belgian parliamentary system with its high party discipline, MP's from majority parties are already highly restrained. As a consequence, parliamentary control is generally considered weak (Dewachter, 1992: 296-297; Rihoux, Dumont and Dandoy, 2005: 130), and not only with respect to foreign policy. Varone et al. (2005) claim that policy evaluation in Belgium is generally low and impeded because of partitocracy (see also De Winter and Dumont, 2006: 972), the weakness of Parliament (*vis-à-vis* the government) and the process of regionalization. Such a low parliamentary involvement and scrutiny considerably increases the executive's autonomy in foreign policy matters.

3 METHOD AND DATA

A COMPARATIVE AGENDA-SETTING FRAMEWORK

As we have seen in the theoretical section, the agenda-setting approach entails a number of methodological possibilities, but also certain restrictions. Here, I explain the advantages and limits of this method, but we also discuss the general methodological approach of the studies carried out here, as this has required a number of important choices. Though most of these choices seem obvious or natural, it is important to justify and explain them. Study-specific methodological decisions, like case and issue selection, and statistical methods, are detailed in the individual study chapters. Several methodological approaches have been used and developed to study the evolution of an issue on one or more agendas, as well as to examine the influence of different agendas on each other, over long periods of time. So, depending on the research focus, agenda-setting provides specific methodological solutions (qualitative and quantitative), ranging from in-depth case studies to large-scale statistical time-series analyses. Central to these different types of questions is the concept of attention; whether the goal is to find how new issues reach the political agenda (as in Kingdon, 1995) or to track changes in national budgets over time (see for example Jones and Baumgartner, 2005). Translated to research terms, attention is conceptualized as the saliency of issues on an agenda. Simply put: counting how often an issue occurs on an agenda – compared to other issues – provides for a valid and reliable indication of its relative importance on that agenda.

LONGITUDINAL CROSS-SECTIONAL COMPARISONS

Issues – Issues have commonly been defined as “a conflict between two or more identifiable groups over procedural or substantive matters relating to the distribution of positions or resources” (Cobb and Elder, 1972: 82) or, in less technical terms, as a “social problem” (Dearing and Rogers, 1996: 3). When studying a large number of issues on more than one agenda, and over a longer period of time, it becomes practically impossible to measure salience using qualitative research methods. So, to

track attention on a broad range of issues from one agenda to another, a topic codebook is used, allowing each agenda item to be categorized according to its policy domain. A similar saliency approach was developed and validated by the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) in their study of the evolution of political party positions, using manifestos (Budge et al., 1987; Klingemann et al., 1994; Budge et al., 2001; Laver, 2001). Such a quantitative methodological approach allows us to move beyond case studies and unravel the dynamics between actors on all policy issues (cross-sectional), over time (longitudinal) and across different countries (comparative). Though case studies still hold great value in theorizing how actors influence each other, in a way, this quantitative approach functions like an aggregation of case studies. Moreover, given the limited agenda space, some issues get ‘crowded out’ of the agenda because other issues gain prominence. Attention is close to zero-sum and, attention to one issue is most likely at the expense of other issues. This is a crucial element to understanding the agenda and how issues fade, which is very well captured with a quantitative agenda-setting approach (Baumgartner, Jones and Wilkerson, 2011). The marked advantage of the CAP approach and codebook over that of the CMP is that it allows for the study of specific policy domains, since the CAP codebook is more detailed (249 policy codes compared to 56 for the CMP). Hence, it is possible to study the evolution and determinants of a policy subdomain, like foreign policy (constituted of 31 different policy issues – see below).

Actors – Political actors hereby refers to all actors, individual or collectively organized, that invest efforts to maintain a status quo or bring about change with respect to a given issue. The combination of focusing on issue saliency, on one hand, and using policy topics to categorize issues, on the other, provides for promising research perspectives. The greatest advantage of this approach is that it enables us to track, match and compare issues among actors whose activities are fundamentally different in nature, as is the case in this research manuscript. How else, for example, would it be possible to examine the influence of media attention on foreign aid policy (see chapters 7 and 8)? Assessing this relationship qualitatively would almost be impossible, extremely hard to validate and has therefore, to our knowledge, never been done. While, in the case of media, attention corresponds to newspaper articles, with budgets, attention is expressed in amounts of money. Nevertheless, they are both a form of attention and represent the priorities of the corresponding actor. In a

comparable example, the agenda-setting approach – similar to that of the Comparative Manifesto Project – enables the study of the influence of political parties on the government (chapter 6). Though previous studies have been able to match policy pledges from political parties to ensuing legislation, these pledges only represent a fraction of the entire party program. Hence, the agenda-setting framework has enabled researchers to effectively examine the influence of a wide range of actors and institutions on each other, within the policymaking process, over a large period of time.

Countries – Moreover, this methodological approach also allows for comparison across countries, despite important differences in the institutional setup and in the workings of the institutions themselves. Baumgartner et al.'s (2009) comparison of governmental processes in the US, Denmark and Belgium is one of the best examples of how useful and straightforward this comparative approach can be (for other examples on comparative work, see Green-Pedersen, 2007; Jones et al., 2009; Breunig, 2011; Jennings, Bevan and John, 2011; Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2011a). It is this comparative framework that allows us to compare the findings from the studies in chapter 7 and 8 to those found in many other countries like the US, France, Japan, Canada (Van Belle and Hook, 2000; Potter and Van Belle, 2004; Van Belle et al., 2004; Rioux and Van Belle, 2005) and, hopefully, many more to follow. The – admittedly ambitious – goal of the studies presented there, is to serve as an improved basis for future comparative research.

Time – Crucial to understanding how policymaking works and evolves is examination and comparison over time. Like other policy domains, foreign policy is not immune to a changing world and a changing context in which policies are carried out. So, comparison over time also enables us to study how such changes impact the decision-making process. Another typical time-related feature (and advantage) of agenda-setting research is the use of temporal sequences, and particularly of time lags. Though this technique is certainly not exclusive to agenda-setting, it is of crucial value in this type of research. The temporal sequence refers to the fact that attention from one agenda precedes that of another and can also be induced by including lagged independent variables. When theoretically supported, this temporal sequence allows for cautious, but often robust, causal inferences. In the first part of this research, for example, party preferences, expressed before the elections, precede the formation of the government and the ensuing coalition agreement. Considering the purpose of

party manifestos and the way coalition governments are formed, it is theoretically safe to assume that correspondence of the program of any given party with the coalition agreement is a measure of influence – suggesting causality.

SETTING UP AGENDAS - DATA COLLECTION AND ISSUE CODING

HOW TO MAKE AN AGENDA?

To constitute the agenda of the actors studied in this research and find out what their priorities are, their core activities were inventorized, measured and then coded according to their policy content. The data used for this research was collected by and for the Belgian Agendas Project at the University of Antwerp, led by professor Stefaan Walgrave. Over the course of this project, members of the research team have included Anne Hardy, Brandon Zicha, Tobias Van Assche and myself. The documents and data used to make up the agendas have been carefully selected, as they have been extensively used, studied and validated by previous studies before our own research endeavour. Hence, the studies discussed here fit into and contribute to existing theoretical and methodological debates.

A first phase of constructing these agendas was obtaining the raw documents: each political party's manifesto and all the government agreements from the past 30 years, the yearly policy declarations (state of the unions) from their introduction in 1993 onwards, media data since 1987 and ministerial council reports from 1990. Once gathered, these documents were digitized and reformatted from pdf images to text, to be uploaded to Amcat/iNet, the content analysis software created and developed by Wouter Van Atteveldt (Free University of Amsterdam). This software allowed us to distribute documents to students and thus manage and monitor the entire coding process. Trained and paid student coders then received these documents and were able to code the material at the appropriate unit – at the article level for newspapers and ministerial councils and at the sub-sentence level for manifestos, government agreements and state of the union speeches. In addition, the Amcat software makes it possible to look for key words within the uploaded texts, allowing for qualitative assessments and checks of the data. Students were trained to code these raw data on their policy content during the initial intensive coding trainings and the subsequent regular feedback sessions. Coder groups were trained on the codebook first and then trained separately per type of document that they would later code. Thus, students

coding media articles received different trainings from those coding manifestos and government agreements.

ISSUE CODEBOOK

Three of the four studies of this doctoral research make use of issue codes to track attention from political actors to specific policy domains. To categorize these policy domains, the main activities of the different actors are coded using a comprehensive topical codebook. Baumgartner and Jones (1993) designed the original codebook for their Policy Agendas Project, initially to code legislation and budgets. For their Dutch agendas project, Arco Timmermans and Gerard Breeman translated this codebook and adapted it to fit the Dutch political and societal context. This version was then adapted to the Belgian context. Subsequent collective efforts have improved it, while safeguarding the comparability of the different codebooks. Specific country projects can introduce new codes, if necessary, as long as these codes can be aggregated into existing categories, hence preserving their comparative quality. Table 3.1 presents the different major policy categories. These major categories are each subdivided into specific (minor) policy topics, totaling 249 Minor topics (for a complete overview of all the policy codes, please consult appendix III.) The most notable adjustments made in the Belgian codebook vis-à-vis the original American version, are the introduction of a major immigration (9) and art & culture (23) category, as well as a specific minor topic addressing the relations between different levels of government and different regions or communities (2001). From those 249 minor topics, 31 issues related to foreign trade, defense, foreign affairs and development aid were selected to constitute foreign policy priorities (see chapter 6).

Table 3.1 Major Topics of the Comparative Policy Agendas Project Codebook

1. Macroeconomics	13. Social welfare
2. Civil rights, minority issues, civil liberties	14. Community development and housing issues
3. Health	15. Banking, finance, domestic commerce
4. Agriculture	16. Defense
5. Labor, employment, and immigration	17. Space, science, technology, communications
6. Education	18. Foreign trade
7. Environment	19. International affairs and foreign aid
8. Energy	20. Government operations
9. Immigration	21. Public lands and water management
10. Transportation	23. Art and Culture
12. Law, crime, and family issues	

Once the documents for each agenda have been collected, digitized and uploaded into our coding management software, Amcat, they are distributed to student coders. Though all agendas are coded on a number of variables, the single most important aspect that needs to be coded is the issue content. To avoid erroneous coding in case of doubt, the main coding rule is to code policy means over ends. Given the explicit purpose to link attention of different agendas, it is crucial to code the issue as it would be translated into policy. So, if a news article reports on a measure to lower the speed limit on the highway for environmental purposes, it needs to be coded as a transportation issue. This is the only way to ensure that issues can be traced reliably from one agenda to another. This rule is maintained and carried out across all agendas research projects.

While the previous sections offer a general description of how data from political actors is collected to set up corresponding agendas, the next two sections detail the specificities of different types of agendas. Political agendas and the media agenda are constituted using different types of documents at different time intervals. The government agreements and the state of the union speeches are drafted every four years (in principle) and every year, respectively. Media, however, pay attention to numerous issues on a daily basis, whereas ministerial councils happen weekly. Hence, they also require a number of specific coding rules and guidelines. The next sections therefore explain why certain documents are selected and used to constitute a specific actor's agenda(s), how they have been coded and which methodological choices this entailed.

POLICY DOCUMENT CODING

Policy documents refer to those types of rich documents that contain a broad spectrum of policy statements. Given their extensive format (from tens of pages up to several hundreds for the longest party manifestos), they can deal with a broad range of policy issues in detail. In this particular research, it pertains to the party manifestos, the government agreements and the yearly state of the union speeches, used in the first empiric part. To code these documents, specifically, the Belgian Agendas Project relies on coding procedures that are very similar to those developed by the Manifestos Research Group (CMP) to study political parties (Budge et al., 1987; Klingemann et al., 1994; Budge et al., 2001; Laver, 2001). This implies coding these documents into

fixed policy categories at the sentence level to obtain a measure of policy emphasis through the proportion of attention to each policy issue. These procedures entail a number of important choices that we discuss in further detail here.

DOCUMENT SELECTION

First, the CMP, as most party scholars, uses manifestos to assess party preferences. While highly ranked party officials continually make statements throughout election campaigns, manifestos are the only statements representative of the entire party that are also comparative across parties and over time. While parties can also express policy priorities through other ways, like press statements, parliamentary activities or during topical congresses, these different measures do not provide the comparability of party manifestos. Parliamentary activities, for example, can be influenced by a party's participation in the coalition and (online) press statements do not provide for a long time series and can also be affected by a party's government participation. With respect to foreign policy priorities, specifically, so few topical congresses have been organized that they do not enable the study over different parties or across time. Manifestos, on the other hand, express party opinions, preferences, priorities and commitments in a large number of policy domains, including foreign policy. Moreover, individual politicians will try not to stray from it and media take their cues from these documents to know what the party stands for (Budge, 2001: 51). "So, it can be singled out as a uniquely representative and authoritative characterization of party policy at a given point in time" (Budge, 1987: 18). While this was not really a controversial option, and several authors had used manifestos before the CMP (see for example Ginsberg, 1976), theirs was one of the first large scale efforts to map political parties over time and across countries. Nowadays, using manifestos to measure party preferences or priorities is widely spread and as good as uncontested. Yet, as I have noted earlier in chapter 1, expert survey studies also map preferences of parties by asking experts to allocate a left-right score to each party or on different policy domains for every party (see for example Castles and Mair, 1984; Laver and Hunt, 1992; Huber and Inglehart, 1995 and Benoit and Laver, 2006). The main shortcomings of this valuable approach were (a) that it does not capture over-time variation very well and (b) that it cannot go back in time and only provides a short and often incoherent time series (Gabel and Huber 2000), given that they only started

in the early 1980's with Castles and Mair's survey (1984). Moreover, such studies do not seem like the best alternative to define the priorities of political parties.

It is important to note that the same selection criteria are applied to explain the use of the government agreements and the yearly governmental policy statements as measures for the government agendas, as used in this research. Indeed, the government agreements and the state of the union speeches are the only occasions where the government, as a whole, expresses its policy priorities on a particularly wide array of policies, and in a comprehensive manner. Of course, there are other, theoretical, reasons for choosing these specific documents. The government agreement, for example, follows the elections and is the consecration of efforts initiated by parties before the elections. Political parties try to include as many of their issues and solutions as possible in the government agenda. Hence, the relationship between these two agendas is a logical starting point to examine the influence of parties on policy. A more detailed theoretical justification of the agenda selection is provided in the different studies.

ISSUE EMPHASIS

The second, and most important, methodological decision taken by the CMP was to analyze the emphasis parties put on certain policies instead of confronting the ideas or positions they have towards particular policy domains or towards each other. The saliency theory (Robertson, 1976), on which this decision is based, "implies that the most important aspect of the documents is the degree of emphasis placed on certain broad policy areas, rather than each party's support for, or opposition to, a specific policy within these areas" (Budge, 1987: 24). Supporting the saliency theory is the observation that parties do not engage in such a policy debate in their manifestos (Robertson, 1976; Riker, 1993).

In fact, parties are associated with certain issues and policy solutions. (Extreme) right parties, for example, are generally associated with strict immigration and law enforcement. However, voters will not think of these parties when they are concerned with the environment. To attract the voters, parties know it is unwise to emphasize unpopular policy solutions or issues that are associated with other parties. Indeed, parties cannot simply adjust their policy positions according to the current ruling popular policy position, as this would severely affect their credibility. "Taken to extremes, this constraint might mean that each party has only one position that can be

taken on the spatial continuum and thus must wait for voters to do the moving” (Klingemann et al., 1994: 24). In addition, prioritizing another party’s core issues may lead to greater electoral success for that party. Therefore, given these existing associations, parties will try to emphasize only those issues from which they can benefit electorally.

In Belgium, for example, the traditional parties will try not to make immigration the stake of the elections, as this would most likely benefit the extreme right party. Conversely, in its manifesto, the extreme right will explicitly try to make it the main issue of its campaign. So, instead of engaging in a policy debate, parties put forward ‘their’ issues and solutions and neglect the other issues in their manifestos. This implies that their priorities better reflect what parties stand for than their specific policy positions. Budge (1987) supports this argument with the observation that on average about 10% of the sentences of the manifestos examined in the different countries explicitly mentioned other parties or their policies. For this reason, the CMP chose to code how much the parties emphasize different policies in their manifestos, instead of examining their specific position on each policy issue (Budge et al., 1987; Klingemann et al., 1994; Budge et al., 2001; Laver, 2001).

PRIORITIES VERSUS PREFERENCES

It is important to stress that, despite the similar approach, the goals of the CAP and the CMP are fundamentally different. While the former aims to capture the issue priorities of different actors and/or institutions, the goal of the latter is to assess policy positions based on the preferences derived from issue salience. So, once the salience for the different issues is obtained, CAP scholars use this to make up a list of relative importance. The CMP group, however, moves beyond this and derives a policy position from this salience. One of the main ambitions of the CMP was to map and examine party positions on policy spaces. Factor analyses confirmed the left – right dimension as the main policy dimension on which to position political parties (Budge, 2001: 55).

To map parties on this policy space, initially, the CMP only coded the saliency of the different policy issues. Their rationale for this was that most issues are valence issues where only one position was possible “because of overwhelming perceptions of its moral superiority or obviousness or rightness” (Budge, 2001: 60). This means that if a party was not associated with a particular issue and its popular solution, that party

would not try to argue for an alternative solution but rather neglect the issue and emphasize its own issues and the popular policies associated with those. So, parties would only mention the environment to promote it (as opposed to destroying it...), stress taxes exclusively to reduce them, or emphasize education only to invest in it. This implies that left wing parties would avoid taxation and stress welfare issues while right wing parties would emphasize tax cuts at the expense of other issues like, for example, the environment. “If the assumption is correct that varying emphases on issues are by and large the only way that parties express their policy differences, it follows that the only way to get at these is by measuring the relative saliency given to them in the manifestos” (Budge, 2001: 58).

For this reason, the CMP originally did not discriminate between positive and negative references – for or against an issue or policy (Budge, 2001). Directional coding of a limited number of issues was only introduced as internal checks to test the saliency and valence assumptions (Budge, 2001: 58). However, even though these checks showed that these issues were predominantly included in only one direction (for or against) and, thus, that directional coding was not necessary, over time, directional coding has been used so extensively that they have almost become part of the standard procedure. The fact that their coding is no longer purely salience based is one of the greatest criticisms on the CMP’s approach. Budge counter argues that the validity of the obtained data and, thus, of the coding procedures has been confirmed over and over again (Budge et al., 1987; Klingemann et al., 1994; Budge et al., 2001; Laver, 2001). As noted earlier, there is, indeed, a rather good fit between left-right positions derived by the CMP and most expert surveys (McDonald and Mendes, 2001; McDonald et al., 2007; Hooghe et al., 2010). The discrepancies found between CMP estimates and those of Benoit and Laver (2006) were most likely due to the fact that the CMP did not include immigration, nationalism and environment in their left-right measure.

However, while validity concerns of the CMP policy estimates are important for the theoretical link between parties and policy, discussed in chapter 1, they are not relevant to the way the data is obtained and used by agenda scholars. First, the large coding scheme used here includes all policies and thus avoids overlooking relevant policies. Second, and most important, agenda studies do not derive policy positions, but only preferences. Making up parties’ agendas is, methodologically speaking, less demanding on the data than determining party preferences. Indeed, measuring policy

positions through directional policy preferences is a very important step that entails methodological and theoretical constraints on data coding that assessing ‘simple’ priorities does not. It is this step – deriving policy positions from a mix of preferences and priorities – that is criticized, but not applied by agenda scholars. So, given that directional coding delivers valid data for parties’ policy positions, it is fair to assume that pure salience coding offers at least as valid a measure for party priorities.

SENTENCE LEVEL CODING

The decision to study policy emphasis has yet another methodological implication. To examine the policy emphasis in the different documents, I chose – as did the CMP before us – to code policy documents at the sentence level, since sentences are the most natural grammatical unit in most languages. In further accordance with the CMP coding procedures, I also chose to code every sentence – whether central or peripheral to an argument – and not just policy pledges. To examine the evolution of parties, pledges are hard to use since they can change in format or formulation over time. “Specific pledges will change so much over 30 or 40 years [...] that any analysis of trends has to group these into invariant categories” (Budge, 1987: 19). That is why I use the invariant policy categories from Baumgartner and Jones (1993), described above. Hence, as the formulation and format of pledges changes over the years, policy topics allow us to reliably categorize them over time.

Although policy pledges have proven particularly useful in studying the extent to which parties carry out their program (Thomson, 2001; Mansergh and Thomson, 2007; Costello and Thomson, 2008, Moury, 2009; 2011), pledges generally represent only a small fraction of the entire document. Indeed, the aforementioned studies show that manifestos generally only provide for a relatively low number of pledges – especially when only including concrete and specific pledges (Bara, 2005). Data from our manifesto coding suggests that, on average, only 20% of all (quasi) sentences are what is considered ‘specific proposals’. Given this rather loose definition, we can expect the proportion of pledges to be considerably lower. In addition, given the care with which the manifestos are prepared and drafted (Budge, 2001: 56), using pledges leads to a great loss of valuable information. Moreover, as certain policy domains are more prone to firm policy commitments than others (Bara, 2005), using pledges might offer a distorted representation of an actor’s true priorities. Let us assume, for argument’s sake, that environmental issues are addressed in a more concrete way than

safety issues are and that, for an equally lengthy text, the environmental part delivers twice the number of pledges. Hence, the pledges would suggest that environment is twice as important as safety issues are. However, in our hypothetical example, it could just be that the nature of the policy allows for more concrete commitments in one policy than in the other. So, even though one policy domain is covered in a more rhetorical way, it is fair to assume that every line in such manifestos – or any other type of document for that matter – is carefully considered (Budge, 2001: 56). Therefore, using only pledges would mean discarding most of the information, especially considering the low proportion of pledges generally found in most manifestos.

CODING PROCEDURES

Student coders coded the manifestos using the iNet software. The software pre-identifies individual sentences to be coded. Specific rules are applied for those long sentences with multiple policy ideas. When a long sentence is subdivided into two or more arguments or ideas (for example separated by punctuation), the coder cuts the sentence in several parts and codes each part. The iNet coding software makes it possible to cut sentences into different parts and allocate codes per sentence. Before coding, student coders are trained for weeks, using an extensive handbook. Most of the procedures concern the cutting of sentences into sub-units and using the coding software. Here, I briefly review these procedures. After having logged onto iNet using their private account, coders select a manifesto that has been attributed to them. The screen cap in Figure 3.1 shows what they then see next. Clicking on the manifesto (1) unfolds the full content of this manifesto. The coder then sees the text, sentence by sentence on the right side of the screen (2). Clicking on a sentence allows the coder to access this unit (3) and code the different variables corresponding to this sentence (4). Whenever necessary, a sentence can be split into different “quasi-sentences”. An additional coding unit (3) is then created per quasi-sentence. Students can save their coded material and come back to it whenever they choose to do so.

Given the complex procedures, it is hard to calculate intercoder reliability with the traditional Krippendorff alpha measure. Since coders first have to split the sentences when necessary, certain coders end up with more units than others. Therefore, I calculated the correspondence of the coding distributions at the lowest coding level (specific topic codes per quasi-sentence) for those manifestos that were coded by

multiple coders (20). The average Pearson correlation is .77 and all correlations range between the exceptionally low .57 and .91. Given the detail and the large number of possible codes, this is a very satisfying result. In her reliability tests of the CMP data for 39 coders, Volkens (2001: 39) obtained an average Pearson's R of .72 for the coding of 56 categories. Correlations were higher for longer manifestos and among the most experienced coders. Where possible, those manifestos coded by the most experienced coders were selected. The full coding procedures, as taught to coders, can be found in appendix IV.

Once finished, the coded data are downloaded in csv format by the research team. These data thus contain the policy code per quasi-sentence for every election year per party. The data is then reformatted to obtain the proportional attention to each individual policy issue – this is the number of sentences for each issue code as part of the total number of sentences. Data of each party is then added to obtain one file with all the parties for each election. The same procedures are applied to the government agreements and the state of the union speeches. The different datasets are then joined to obtain a single master file.

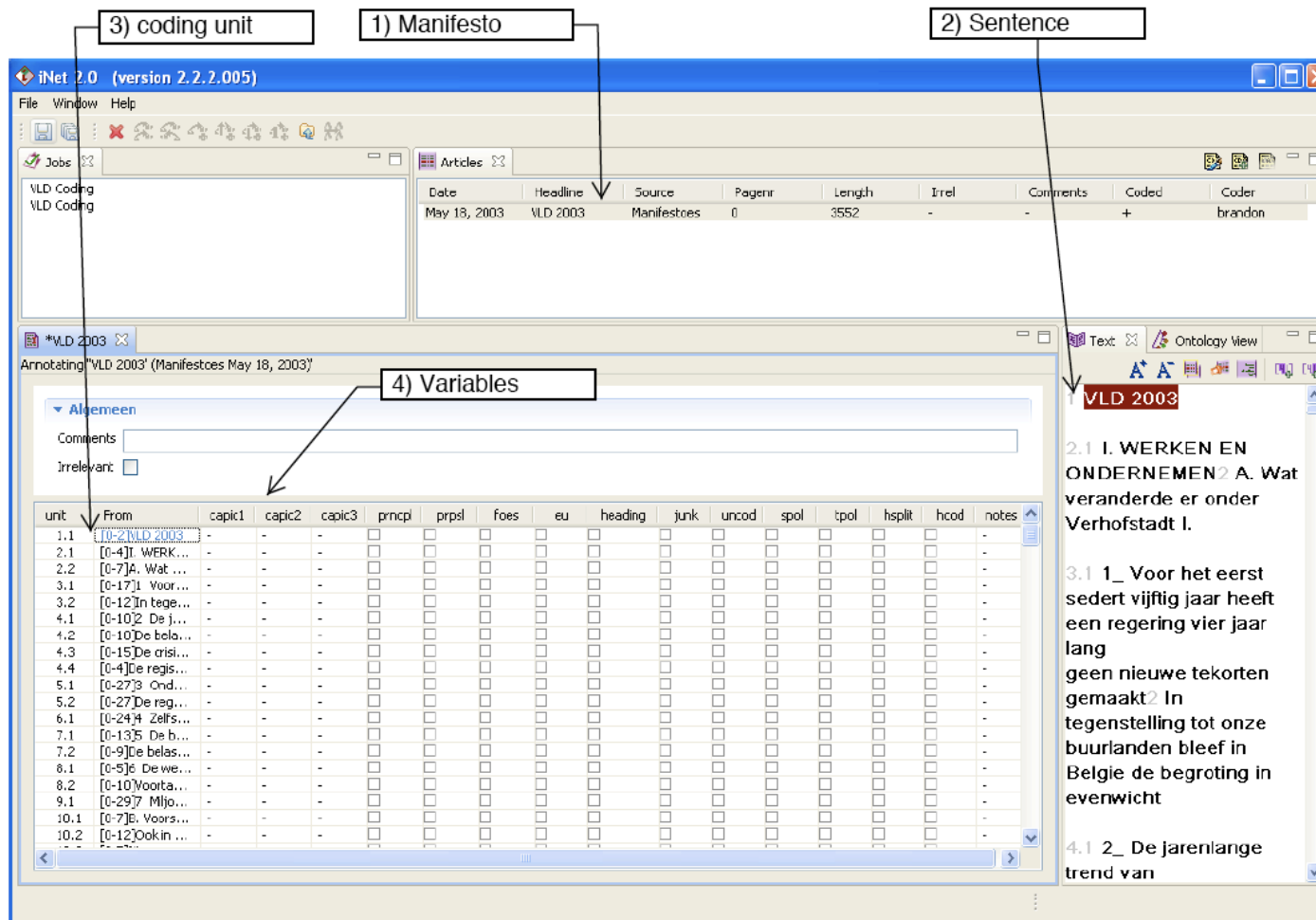


Figure 3.1 Image of iNet's online coding software and the corresponding party coding procedures

MEDIA ANALYSIS

The second empirical section examines the impact of news media content on Official Development Assistance and humanitarian aid. Since these studies analyze what determines attention within a specific policy domain, the policy is disaggregated by looking at the different recipient countries. So, within each policy (foreign aid and emergency assistance), I look at the allocations to each country. Concretely, I track whether media attention to developing countries leads to increased policy attention to those same countries in the form of aid allocations while controlling for a number of other determinants. Generally speaking, the analysis of news media content requires considerably less specific methodological decisions than manifesto analyses. Put (very) simply, I look at the number of newspaper articles mentioning a recipient country and assess the effect it has on the subsequent allocations. Yet, despite the great similarities between the analyses carried out in chapters 7 and 8, the data is actually very different and has been collected in a fundamentally different way. In chapter 7, the impact of the news media is measured through the general exposure of a recipient country in the newspaper. The analysis in chapter 8 requires issue specific attention to countries (only news articles on disasters), as it examines whether specific news coverage of humanitarian disaster affects aid to the affected countries. Hence, the former uses data of country exposure in the media obtained through a key word search while the latter uses manually coded media data. The different coding procedures are explained in greater detail below.

DOCUMENT SELECTION

To examine the impact of media, both studies of the second empirical section use newspaper articles as a measure of media attention. Due to the heavy requirements of the media data (over 20 years of data for study 3 and manually coded data for study 4), it was only practically and financially possible to carry out these studies using the front section of one newspaper from the Flemish majority community – *De Standaard*. This is an unfortunate but important shortcoming of this research. On one hand, it does not allow us to compare different types of outlets (newspapers versus television news) and, on the other hand, it does not provide us with the media priorities from both main communities (Flemish and French). Though admittedly problematic, media studies are often carried out using only one outlet - usually the

leading newspaper. American studies usually use the *New York Times*, British studies the *Times* and French use *Le Monde*.

The use of a single news outlet is not only common in general media studies (Wolfe, 2012), but also in foreign policy (Wood and Peake, 1998; Edwards and Wood, 1999) and foreign aid studies, specifically. Indeed, the use of a single quality newspaper is particularly common among those studies examining the media influence on foreign aid, on which studies 3 and 4 (chapters 7 and 8) are based (Van Belle and Hook, 2000; Potter and Van Belle, 2004; Van Belle et al., 2004; Rioux and Van Belle, 2005). Much like the *New York Times* in the U.S. or *Le Monde* in France, *De Standaard* is the leading newspaper in the Dutch speaking part of Belgium, read by political elites and with a great influence on other media outlets (Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2008). As such, *De Standaard* has consistently been used in agenda-setting research.

In addition, it could also be argued that the front section of the newspaper (from 2004 onwards, this is the first three pages) does not represent the entire news media agenda. However, given the practical and financial limitations, I prefer to use the front-page section rather than to sample articles from the entire newspaper. As Boydston argues, “the eight or so stories appearing on this page each day occupy the topmost echelon of societal awareness—the core of attention” (2013, forthcoming). Moreover, these are the articles people pay most attention to and those people generally read first. Hence, it can be expected that the impact of front-page coverage would be greater than coverage in later sections of the paper.

To gauge the extent of this single outlet problem, I examined the correspondence of *De Standaard* to that of the other news outlets for which we have data (1999-2008). This comparison revealed that ten years of yearly foreign country coverage of *De Standaard* greatly corresponded to that of all the other major outlets, including those of the French community. Yearly country mentions in *De Standaard* highly correlate with those from Flemish (.90 for VRT and .84 for VTM) and Francophone television news (.81 for RTL and .88 from RTBF). Country coverage of *De Standaard* thus correlates at 0.81 with the most dissimilar outlet; Walloon private television broadcasting RTL. Hence, even though it clearly would have been better to have at least one outlet from the French community, at least at the yearly aggregated level, the front-page section of *De Standaard* seems to be a valid representation of the overall country priorities of the media. In addition, *De Standaard* was found to cover

more foreign news stories on humanitarian disasters than the most popular newspaper (Vandemoortele Francken and Swinnen, 2007). As shown in the descriptives of chapter 4, the front section offers a great amount of foreign news and the correlations show that this front section corresponds to the full television agendas.

GENERAL SALIENCE CODING PROCEDURES

As mentioned earlier, the two media studies of this research use different sets of data. The first study (chapter 7) examines whether the general and overall media exposure of a country brought it to be considered as more important and whether this leads to greater aid allocations. Thus, it is important to measure media attention in a way that captures a country's overall salience. In other words, it is essential to assess the general exposure of a country in the media. To do this, key word searches identified and counted the number of articles mentioning potential recipient countries. These queries were designed to leave out sports-related articles. The advantage of this method is that it allows us to make an inventory of simple mentions of a country without having to manually code all the data. Nevertheless, this method does require two major time consuming and expensive steps. First, it necessitates having all the data digitally. The extensive work of getting newspapers digitized is the reason that only De Standaard data is available, as it is the only newspaper digitized over a long enough period of time (1987-2008). A second important step is to test the key words that will inventorize countries. I decided only to include articles with explicit country mentions and not mere references. Preliminary pilot studies revealed that including indirect references, such as nationals or adjectives had no additional value and actually resulted in too many false positive hits. Hence, to make sure that the key word searches capture every reference and no incorrect references, per country, I began with the largest possible list of key words to narrow it down in subsequent phases.

```
kongo zaire "drc" congo AND NOT "Brazzaville" AND NOT "football" AND  
NOT "red devils" AND NOT "game"
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The example above shows that it does not suffice to include "Congo" as a key word to obtain what is needed. Indeed, some countries are referred to in different ways, like Congo (e.g. the DRC or Congo) or changed names over the examined period (e.g. Congo used to be called Zaire). Hence, broad inclusion of search terms guarantees that no news articles are overlooked. At the same time, most of the news

items incorrectly included pertain to sport items. Although most sport items are excluded using the word “wedstrijd” (game), a number of additional words were also included to exclude those items. In Dutch, it is hard to imagine sport coverage without the word “wedstrijd”. In this example, we look for any reference to kongo, zaire, drc and congo, excluding articles with the words Brazzaville, football, red devils or game. This key word testing process was performed for each individual country. The iNet/Amcat software enables us to extract this data automatically and deliver the data in excel format in almost no time. It is important to stress that this procedure allows us to reliably obtain data that is akin to similar previous studies.

ISSUE SPECIFIC CODING PROCEDURES

The data used for study 4 in chapter 8 is collected in a different way and has been coded manually. The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of media attention to humanitarian disasters. So, as media data needs to be policy-specific, the goal is to identify countries involved in stories on natural disasters. Therefore, after the raw data was digitized, students coded the specific policy content of the news item, up to two countries involved and a battery of additional variables that have not been used here. One issue code was attributed to each news article. The countries involved in the news items were also coded. If several countries were involved, the first country would be the one initiating the interaction or, if this was not clear, the country where the story or the event took place. The second country would then be the one undergoing the action of the first country. This means that if a country is mentioned but is not central to the story, it is not included in the data. This is the major difference with the data obtained through key word searches. Here, the purpose is to identify the countries that are involved in a news item, as opposed to mere mentioning. Krippendorff's alpha showed high average intercoder reliability for coding the major topic ($\alpha = .82$) as well as for identifying the main country ($\alpha = .86$). Intercoder reliability was lower for the second country involved ($\alpha = .59$). This was most likely due to those stories where the interactions were not clear (who initiates the action or whether too many countries were involved). The former is not expected to be a major problem in the case of humanitarian aid. Moreover, in only 17% of disaster related stories is there a second country involved. Hence, it is safe to assume that the data coding is reliable and valid.

Figure 3.2 shows the coding software for newspaper articles. The procedures are similar to, but less complicated than, those for manifestos. After logging on to the iNet software, the student coder selects the article that will be coded (1). The content of the article then appears at the right side of the screen (2). The variables, including the issue code and the two countries involved in the news item, need to be assigned on the left side of the screen (3). Though study 4 only uses issue and country codes, a wide range of additional variables are also coded for other research purposes. The coded material is then downloaded into a csv file. Once the data is joined together, it is transformed into proportional attention to each specific or major policy issue per year. The combination of issues and countries allows us to distinguish country attention on specific types of stories – in this case humanitarian disasters. The transformations of all data, as well as all the statistical analyses were performed using the statistical software STATA.

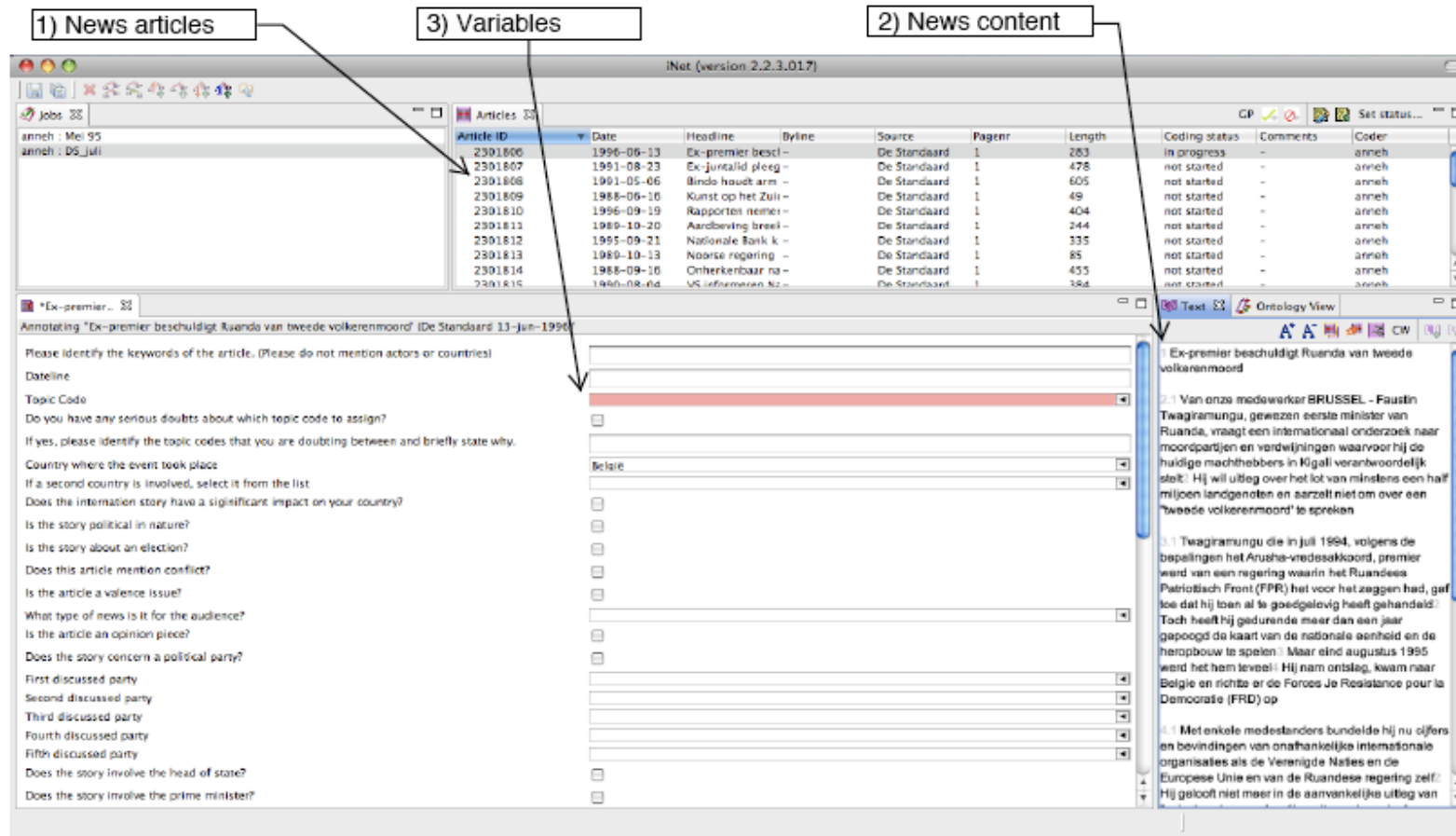


Figure 3.2 Image of iNet's online coding software and the corresponding media coding procedures

BUDGETS

The second empirical section examines the influence of media on policy, as measured through official development assistance (ODA) budgets. The challenge in using these budgets was primarily in disaggregating them. For this reason, I chose not to use the data available on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) website, as this provides very little detail. The data obtained through the federal public service of foreign affairs offers every detail available on the money that has been allocated through any possible channel. Hence, this dataset tells us who gives how much of what through whom and for whom for which purpose. In other words, the data holds information on:

- Which agency's budget money is spent from and, thus, which governmental level (federal, regional, communal, etc.).
- Which organization spends the money. Is money spent through NGOs, university programs, international organizations, or other third parties, or is it spent on a bilateral government program?
- Which country receives the allocation.
- Which sector the aid is spent on. This can, for example, be education, health, civil society, agriculture etc.
- The amount of aid spent at the lowest unit (per program, per country, per organization,...).

With this information, it is possible to select the source of funding and the organization that carries out a program (as in chapter 6), as well as select the goal of aid, its 'sector' (see chapter 7). Statistical data management tools easily aggregate the data to obtain the amount of aid spent to individual countries per year.

Study 3 compares total and bureaucratic aid to examine if and how media influence aid decision-making. The person in charge of these budgets at the DGD and myself identified which allocations were decided and initiated by the administration, primarily by looking at the source of the spending and the organization through which aid is distributed. These decisions were based on internal information and memos on, as well as specific knowledge of, these specific programs. To ensure the objectiveness of my colleague from the DGD, he was not informed of the purpose of this study. In addition, I controlled the decision rules in advance (were all the right programs included) and I also checked afterwards whether these criteria provided for a good fit

once applied (again, to verify whether all the right programs were included and none wrongfully excluded). This provided for a reliable and valid measure of total and bureaucratically decided aid. In study 4, similar rules were applied to sort out those allocations that were attributed in response to humanitarian disaster.

To conclude, table 3.2 shows what the ‘final’ data look like before being analyzed. This is after the different datasets have been merged, cleaned and structured. It shows the dependent (total, bureaucratic and non-bureaucratic ODA, resp.) and independent variables (news media, trade balance, GDP per capita and former colonial status) for Afghanistan from 1993-2008, as used in chapter 7. The full dataset contains these data for each country stacked one after another.

Table 3.2 Structure of the data for Afghanistan and Algeria from 1993-2008

Country	Year	ODA	Bur.oda	Non-bur.oda	Media	Trade	GDP	Colony
Afghan	1993	115743	0	115743	4	-4853180	336.68	0
Afghan	1994	146118	0	146118	10	-2.53e+07	250.73	0
Afghan	1995	99338	96194	3.144	4	-8581820	372.83	0
Afghan	1996	11463	0	11463	6	-9805090	354.33	0
Afghan	1997	967732	0	967731	1	-1.07e+07	335.12	0
Afghan	1998	14935	0	14935	13	-6344690	315.65	0
Afghan	1999	0	0	0	5	-6373160	299.85	0
Afghan	2000	3.511	0	3.511	4	-1.05e+07	292.76	0
Afghan	2001	5909157	1135473	4773685	86	2621780	288.41	0
Afghan	2002	8337594	1375837	6961757	24	1572410	502.91	0
Afghan	2003	3014940	630719	2384222	23	-622820	548.55	0
Afghan	2004	6106422	4115510	1990912	24	731980	585.95	0
Afghan	2005	3924783	2699874	1224910	23	8164780	662.69	0
Afghan	2006	6295970	5494550	801420	41	8112500	713.7	0
Afghan	2007	7906508	3811333	4095174	31	1.08e+07	797.4	0
Afghan	2008	7016409	2600739	4415670	52	5223330	.	0
Algeria	1993	5196203	1353531	3842672	2	-1.82e+08	3000.05	0
Algeria	1994	1520714	910176	610537.8	16	-6.63e+07	2920.99	0
Algeria	1995	6109753	5246516	863237	15	-1.10e+08	3010.64	0
Algeria	1996	1.12e+07	3766025	7453357	6	-1.55e+08	3298.89	0
Algeria	1997	4826824	3955318	871506	11	-2.40e+08	3260.05	0
Algeria	1998	4.221.627	3233872	987755	7	-8.86e+07	3185.92	0
Algeria	1999	6176414	5658644	517770	6	-1.44e+08	3383.43	0
Algeria	2000	1.412.992	731423	681568.6	4	-4.25e+08	4056.22	0
Algeria	2001	7630577	739352	6891226	3	-7.54e+07	4059.33	0
Algeria	2002	1566891	408615	1158276	1	-6.88e+08	4178.65	0
Algeria	2003	4248304	2145146	2103158	8	-8.51e+08	4718.02	0
Algeria	2004	1.00e+07	488631	9523465	1	-7.42e+08	5198.7	0
Algeria	2005	1.25e+07	1377081	1.11e+07	3	-1.13e+09	6291.14	0
Algeria	2006	1.09e+07	2880384	7996294	5	-1.46e+09	6911.84	0
Algeria	2007	1.01e+07	2590693	7557068	5	-5.53e+08	7267.52	0
Algeria	2008	6984403	2984841	3999562	7	-5.16e+08		0

4 AN EMPIRIC ANALYSIS OF THE EVOLUTION OF FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES

The previous, methodological, chapter explained how the data for this research has been collected and to what purpose it is used. Yet, to gain a better insight in what the data looks like, this section explores the different agendas in a more descriptive way. The purpose of this chapter is to obtain a deeper understanding of how the government, political parties and media deal with foreign policy issues, where their priorities lie and how they change over time. This should then provide the reader with a better sense of the data and numbers used in the ensuing empirical studies in the following chapters.

GOVERNMENT AGREEMENTS

The conception of the foreign policy for a new government begins during the government negotiations, generally after elections. As we have seen in chapter 1, the outcome of these negotiations, the government agreement, is generally considered as a good predictor for future policies (Walgrave et al., 2006), with a high enactment rate of the policy pledges (Thomson, 2001; Mansergh and Thomson, 2007; Costello and Thomson, 2008, Moury, 2011). Moreover, results from the study in chapter 5 show that the foreign policy sections of the government agreements contain more pledges than the other parts of the document. So, what exactly constitutes foreign policy and to what extent the government agreements truly reflect governmental priorities of a domain that is generally considered hard to measure and quantify?

To offer the best possible understanding of what foreign policy in the government agreements looks like, and how this changes over time, table 4.1 displays and compares a selection of issues that are dealt with in three consecutive government agreements from 1995 to 2003, covering governments with different party

compositions. While this selection of issues is not at all exhaustive, I have chosen to include all those issues that are clearly defined and can, thus be identified within the different government agreements. The main idea was to take all those issues from the middle government agreement (1999) to see which issues have gained their place on the agenda, compared to 1995, and which issues have fallen off the governmental agenda in 2003. This shows which issues the government agreements deal with and how the agreements change from one legislature to another. The selection has then been summarized and translated to English. A table including the full and original text in Dutch can be found in appendix V.

So, the first policy priority in table 4.1, for example – “Deepening of the EU in a federal way” – is an almost permanent priority for each Belgian government from 1995 to 2003, as it has remained on the agenda. The second, however, (the “timely conversion of EU directives”) was only a governmental priority in 1999. Table 4.1 also shows which international organizations and countries are emphasized in the agreement. It seems fair to conclude from this table that the content of the government agreements (1) greatly vary from one legislature to another and (2) include a wide range of specific and non-specific policy priorities and preferences. Indeed, while some policy promises are rather rhetorical, as for example the “respect of human rights as central pillar of foreign affairs”, others, such as the increase in aid budget to 0.7%, are clear and precise.

Table 4.1 Foreign policy priorities in the government agreements from 1995-2003

1995	1999	2003
EUROPEAN UNION		
V	Deepening of the EU in a federal way	V
	Timely conversion of EU directives	
	Maintain the principle of equality of each member state	
-	A plan to prepare the Belgian Presidency of the UE...	-
- V	... in agreement with Parliament and the federated entities	-
V	Generalize the voting by qualified majority	V
V	Increase the co-decision of the EP in all legislative matters	V
	Individual responsibility for Commissioners vis-à-vis the EP	
	Each member state has the right to one Commissioner	
V	Reinforce the role of the Commission	
V	Right of the EP to take legislative initiatives when the Commission fails to do so	V
V	Every official language <i>in</i> the Union is an official language <i>of</i> the Union	

GLOBAL		
V	Respect of human rights as central pillar of foreign affairs	V
	Maintain bilateral and multilateral efforts for peace and security	
	Focus on international economic relations and international cooperation	
-	- The Balkan region	- V
-	- Middle and Eastern Europe	-
- V	- Sub-Saharan Africa	- V
-	- North-Africa	-
-	- Peace process in the Middle East	- V
UN		
V	UN as most useful instrument to tackle international problems	V
PEACE AND SECURITY		
- V	- EU	- V
- V	- WEU	-
- V	- NATO	- V
-	- OESC	- V
- V	- Council of Europe	-
-	- UN	-
V	Common (EU) Foreign and Security Policy	V
V	Integrate the WEU capacity into the EU.	
V	Arms control and disarmament	
V	Anti-personnel landmines	V
	Ban biological weapons	
	Conventional arms control	
	Nuclear disarmament	V
	Illegal weapons trade	
V	Support peace-keeping operations	V
FOREIGN ECONOMIC RELATIONS		
	Build stronger economic relations abroad	
	Evaluation of existing (trade) instruments	
	Involve companies in the promotion of trade	
	Improve image of Belgium to regain foreign markets after dioxine crises	
	Improve image of Belgium to foreign investors	
	Provide risk capital for investments in non OECD countries	
	Promote fair trade	V
V	Reform international financial institutions like IMF and World bank	V
DEVELOPMENT		
V	Increase aid budget (to 0,7% of GDP)	V
V	Improve co-decision in multilateral cooperation	
	Attention to macro-economic interventions like budget and balance payment aid	
V	NGOs as privileged partners	
	Promote collaboration with the regions, provinces and municipalities	V
	Untied aid	
V	Help relieve (bilateral) debts	V
	Update Ministry of foreign affairs, foreign trade and international cooperation	
SERVICES		
	Efficient services at diplomatic and consular posts for citizens abroad	
	Make voting abroad more efficient	

Note: V = the same issue is mentioned in this government agreement

While government negotiations are recognized as a true policymaking arena (Peterson and De Ridder, 1986), and the resulting agreements as good predictors for future policies (Walgrave et al., 2006; Moury, 2011), one could question whether this is also the case for foreign policy specifically. Measuring foreign policy has generally proven to be a hard task. However, foreign aid has to be one of the rare policy domains that are uniquely measurable and quantifiable. Even though these budgets do not necessarily correspond to the quality of aid or to its nature (aid can be allocated to different sectors, like education or health services and many more), ultimately, development aid is mostly a matter of money. Plotting the number of sentences dedicated to development aid in each government agreement (as a proportion of the total government agreement, and multiplied by 100) and the corresponding budgets for those years (in millions of U.S. dollar) shows that these two follow a similar trend over time (see figure 4.1).

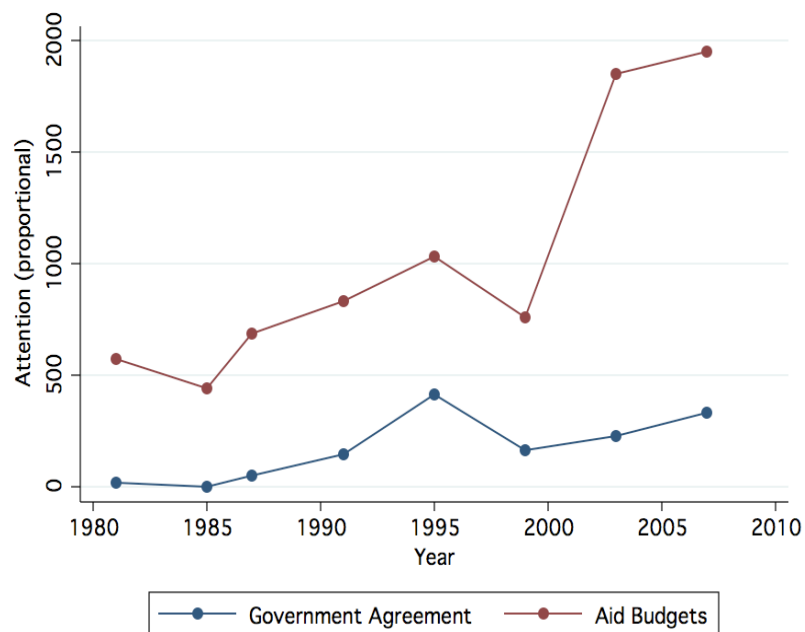


Figure 4.1 Government attention to international development on the government agreement (*100) and the total foreign aid budget (in millions of U.S. dollar)

Moreover, the correlation between the two agendas is .69, which is very high, given that budgets are usually disconnected from other agendas (Dandoy and Varone, 2005). In their study examining the influence of different policy agendas on each other in Belgium (budgets, legislation, government agreements, party manifestos, parliamentary activities, but also demonstrations and media), Walgrave et al. (2006) found budgets to correlate highest with legislation at a mere .13. Hence, all these

signs suggest that government agreements, though imperfect, are a true policymaking arena and a valid measure for future policies.

The next figures present the attention to the main subdomains of foreign policy in the government agreement from 1979 to 2008. These policy domains correspond to the different competences generally attributed to ministers and state secretaries in Belgium. These figures should offer an optimal view of how the Belgian governmental foreign policy priorities have evolved over a longer period of time. Figure 4.2 displays the attention to the different foreign policy subdomains, as a proportion of the entire governmental agenda, and shows how it changes over time. On average, foreign policy issues take up about 13% of the total governmental agenda space. However, as figure 4.2 shows, this fluctuates heavily, with an exceptional low 2% in 1985 and an equally exceptional high of 25% in 1992.

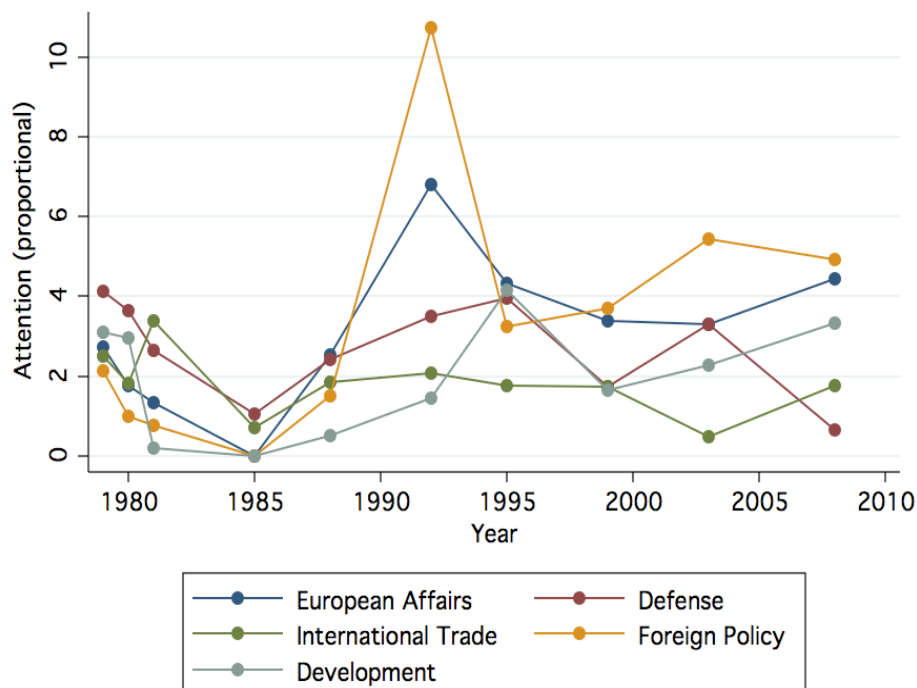


Figure 4.2 Government attention to foreign policy issues, as a proportion of total governmental agenda (all policy issues)

Compared to the other decades, the government did not seem to consider foreign policy as a particularly high priority during the 1980s. The lowest level of attention to foreign policy issues was in 1985. Naturally, it is harder to explain the absence of certain policies than their presence. Yet, in his memoirs, former Prime Minister Wilfried Martens claims that during the government formation of 1985, the

negotiators were mainly preoccupied with reducing the deficit (Martens, 2006: 424-439). This may explain why the only policies that are dealt with in the government agreement – aside from reviving the economy, managing inflation and structurally reducing the deficit – are social and family policies.

The different foreign policy issues found their way back to the government agenda in the 1990s and 2000s. In 1992, the relative importance of foreign policy issues was considerably higher than in any other year of the time series. In a uniquely short government agreement, every individual subpolicy was covered. Two main events possibly explain why foreign policy was so important in 1992. First, the relatively high attention reflected the opportunities of a changing world with new democracies, after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet-Union. Second, the government of 1992 was installed exactly one month after the Maastricht Treaty was signed (7 February 1992). This was the beginning of a new era for the European Union, with increasing integration and the creation of a monetary union. The influence and competence of the European Union would no longer be limited to economic issues from that point on. Furthermore, in the beginning of the 1990s, there was a strong belief that a new era had begun, in which countries would convert to democracies, inequalities between north and south would be resolved and with a renewed interest in human rights to. It was a brief period of revived idealism with a strong reliance on international organizations.

Figure 4.3 shows the distribution of issues *within* foreign policy. In other words, it presents attention to the different foreign policy subdomains as a proportion of the total foreign policy agenda. Here, too, we observe large changes in the topical policy distribution from one government agreement to another. A first observation is the rise in relative attention to defense and international trade. Yet, considering the generally low attention to foreign policy issues in 1985, this peak does not truly reflect a rise in attention, as the proportion of the full agenda in figure 4.2 shows. Instead it is the consequence of the lack of attention from the government to the other foreign policy issues. In this respect, the government agreement of 1985 is rather exceptional. Second, from the late 80's onwards, attention to European affairs has remained relatively high and steady around one third of the total attention attributed to foreign policy. This reflects the high and enduring importance and involvement of the European Union in domestic matters, but also the permanently evolving nature of the European institutions. A third observation is the general decline in attention to

international trade. This is not unsurprising given the institutional reforms and regionalization of this competence, first in 1988, then further in 1992. Finally, there is also a slow but steady trend of increasing attention to international development, albeit with a few ups and downs along the road.

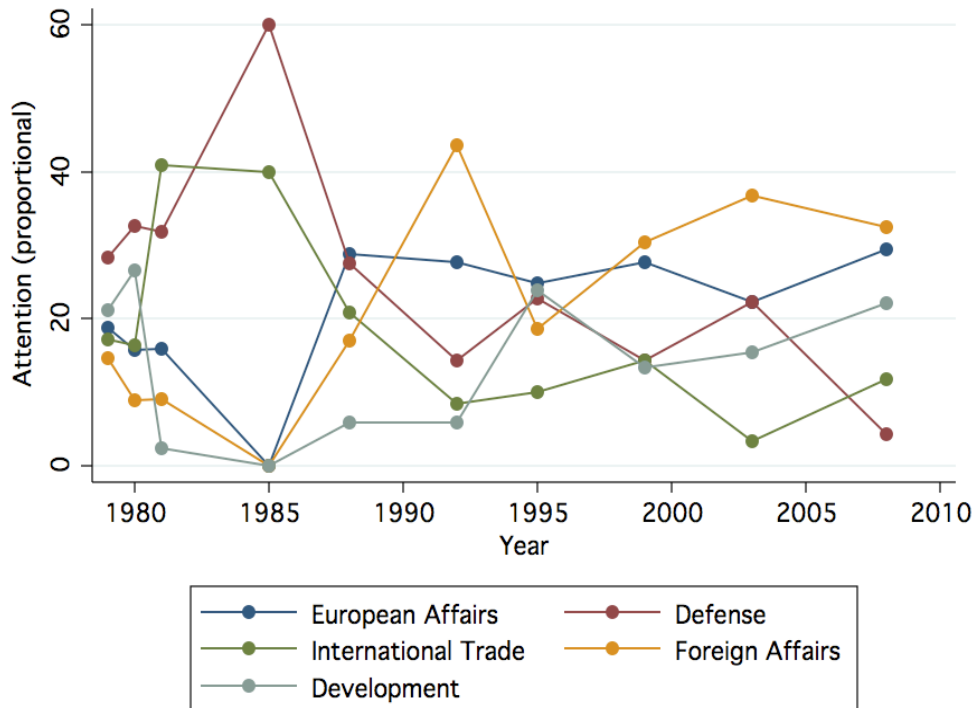


Figure 4.3 Government attention to foreign policy issues, as a proportion of the total foreign policy agenda

PARTY ATTENTION

Given the theoretical link between government agreements and political parties, as well as the fact that their data is gathered in a similar way, it seems most appropriate to continue the data exploration with the foreign policy priorities of the political parties. First, we look at the cumulated attention to the different foreign policy domains of all the parties together. Figure 4.4 shows the evolution of the main foreign policy topics as a proportion of the total attention spent to all policy issues (aggregated over all parties). The first, and perhaps most important, observation is that attention from parties to foreign policy issues is not constant and changes considerably over time. Attention to policy domains in this figure is not really zero-sum – in principle, they can change independent from each other – but it is nevertheless dependent on the total agenda space and attention paid to other, non foreign policy, issues. General foreign policy, for example, appears to have increased

in relative importance in party platforms, seemingly at the expense of defense. From the early 1990's, general foreign policy has received a share of attention of, on average, about 6%, defense 3,5% and trade only 1,3%, totaling on average almost 11% of the total party agenda space. In comparison, most agenda space is spent on the functioning of our institutions and the organization of the public administration (on average 24%), followed by the economy (12%) and social affairs (11%). Hence, combined, foreign affairs ranks fourth and is far from being a marginalized topic for political parties. However, it is important to note that, in figure 4.4, development cooperation and European affairs are included in the general foreign policy category, as they are originally included as minor topic codes into the major 'foreign policy' category.

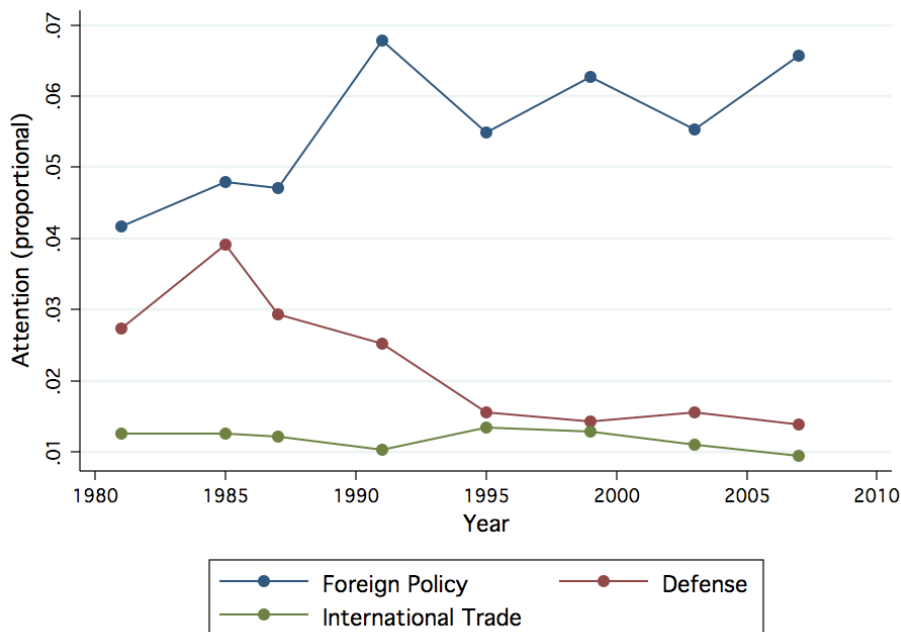


Figure 4.4 Party attention to foreign policy issues, as a proportion of the total party agenda (all policy issues)

To better understand trends in attention, as well as certain short-term shifts, we look at the distribution of specific foreign policy sub-domains within foreign policy. Hence, figure 4.5 shows that the share of general foreign policy issues and European affairs increased (though not steadily) over the last decades, with a strong peak for European affairs in 1999. It is important to note that the European affairs category only refers to the intrinsic workings of the EU, its enlargement and integration. All other policy issues linked to the European decisional level are categorized according

to the policy issue and not the policy level. In 1999, the exceptionally high levels of attention to the European Union were related to the rotating Presidency of the EU Council and its preparations. Surprisingly, it seems that the EU Presidency was a higher priority for the political parties than it was for the government (see figures 4.2 and 4.3). Or, alternatively, political parties thought they could gain popularity by emphasizing the European Presidency.

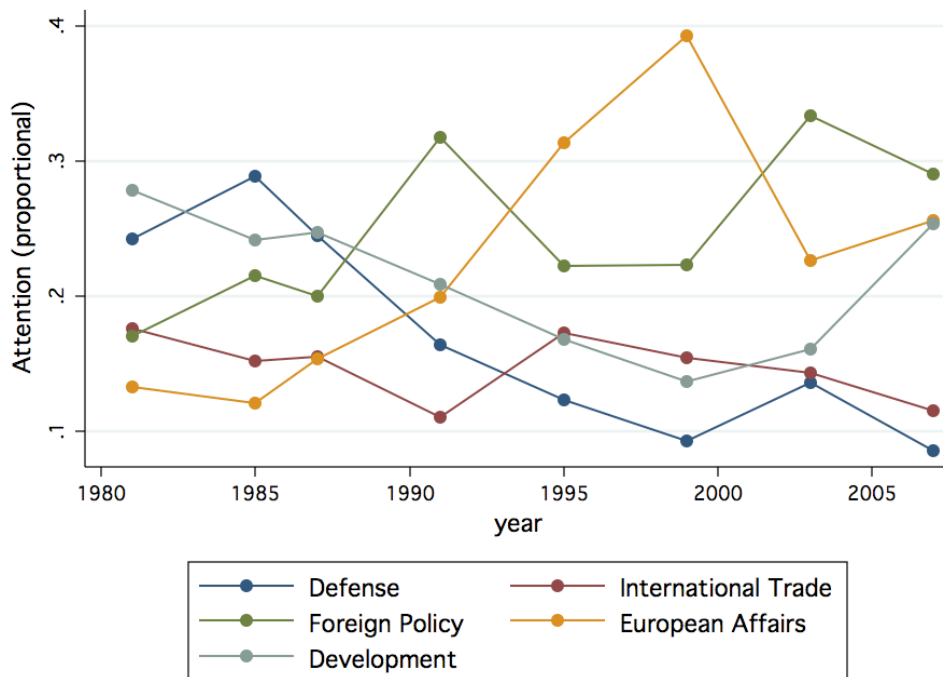


Figure 4.5 Attention from all parties to different foreign policy subdomains, as a proportion of total foreign policy attention

While general foreign policy issues have increased in importance, this ascension has not been a steady climb, with two discernible peaks: one in 1991 and another in 2003. The first, sharp, increase in general foreign policy matters in the 1991 manifestos corresponds to the change in global politics and the uncertainty after the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union. The Flemish Green party, for example, stated “the end of the Cold War was a big relief for the North, and especially for Europe. The Peace movement and Third World Organizations gained new hope.” The peak in foreign policy attention in 2003, then again, reflects the attention to the so-called war on terrorism, the participation to the intervention in Afghanistan and the just recently started war in Iraq, dominating the foreign policy debate – seemingly at the expense of European affairs, which could only decrease

after its continued ascension through the 1990s and its peak in 1999. Since we are dealing with proportions, this implies that other policy areas had to witness a decrease in their share of attention. Hence, the second, converse, trend is the rather steady decrease of the proportion of international trade, development cooperation and especially defense issues. Yet, while the decline seems persistent for trade and defense, this is not the case for development aid, which saw an increase from 1999 onwards, corresponding to an increase in actual budgets. The war on terrorism also briefly reinvigorated the interest in defense issues that had been decreasing steadily since 1985.

These high levels of attention to defense in 1985 and 1981 are due to a peak in attention to arms control (as verified at the specific topic level). This increase is a clear answer to the worries of the Belgian population about the presence of nuclear arms on Belgian soil and in Europe in general. This is a clear, and rather rare, example of political agenda-setting from the public, which is able to direct political attention to this issue after a number of large protests between 1979-1985 (Van Laer, 2009) and, so, increase tensions between coalition partners. Strikingly, while this issue is relatively high on the agenda of almost every party (see figures 4.8 and 4.9), not a word is mentioned in the government agreement of 1981 and 1985.

Figures 4.6 and 4.7 detail the evolutions of issue attention for each individual Flemish and francophone party, respectively. While the differences in attention distribution among the parties are clear, most of these distributions confirm the same trends from the general party agenda: (1) an increase in attention to European affairs; (2) a relative increase in attention in general foreign affairs with two distinct peaks in 1991 and 2003; (3) a renewed interest in development aid after a steady decline until 1995; (4) the fall in attention to defense issues after the 1980s, except for 2003, and finally (5) a decreasing interest in international trade for most parties.

When we compare attention from Francophone and Flemish parties, as part of the foreign policy agenda, t-tests reveal no significant differences. In fact, the averages in relative attention paid to the different subtopics are strikingly similar. However, when looking at the proportion of foreign policy among the entire party agenda, we see that Flemish parties pay more attention to foreign policy as a whole. This is not due to a particular policy domain, as Flemish parties seem to pay relatively more attention to defense, trade and foreign policy. Finally, ideology does not determine whether parties pay more or less attention to foreign policy. However, if we categorize parties

in left and right wing parties – according to their ideological position, using CMP data - we see that left wing parties pay slightly more attention to general foreign policy issues (including European affairs and development) while right wing parties pay more attention to international trade (both findings were found at the .05 level).

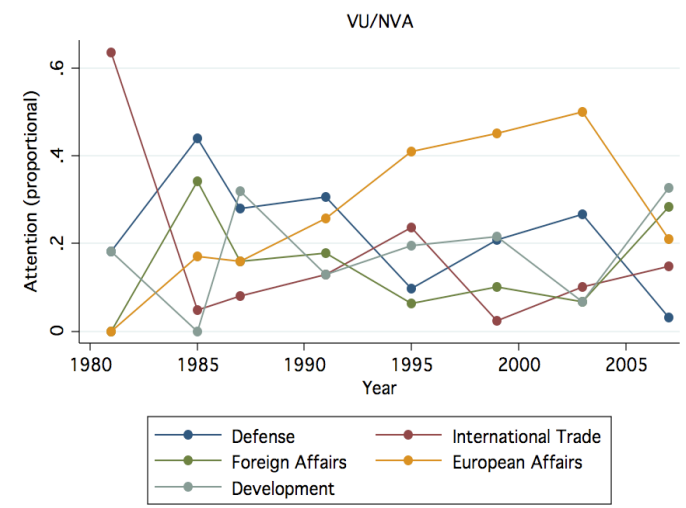
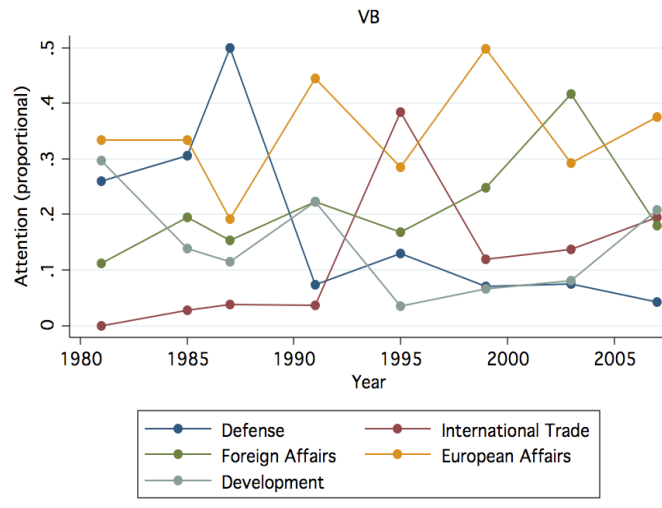
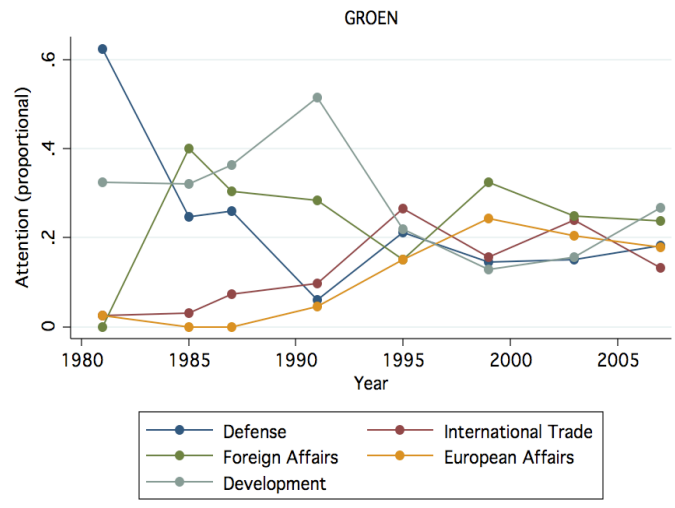
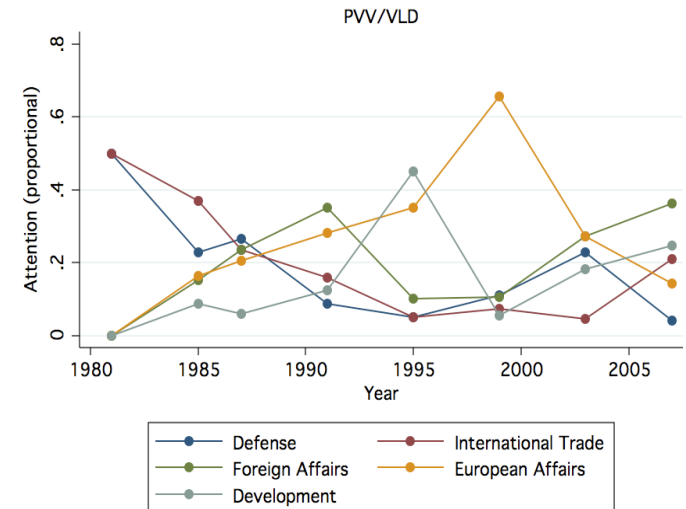
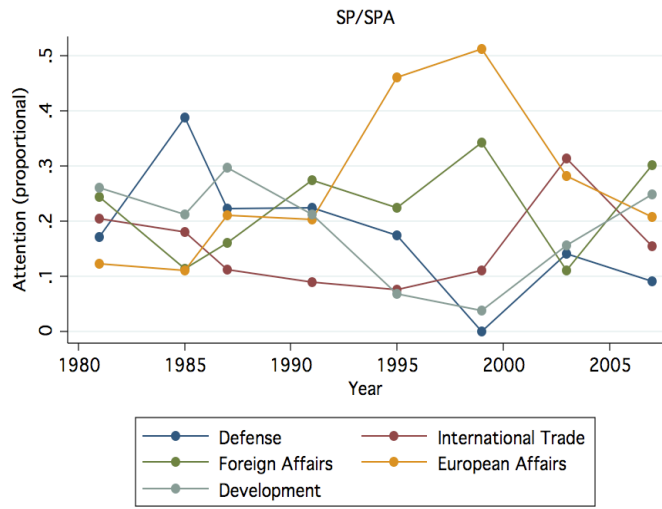
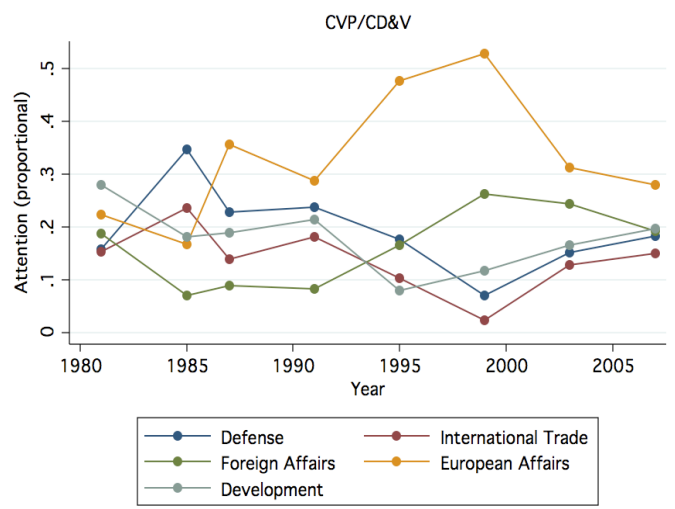


Figure 4.6 Topical distribution of party attention to foreign policy - Flemish parties

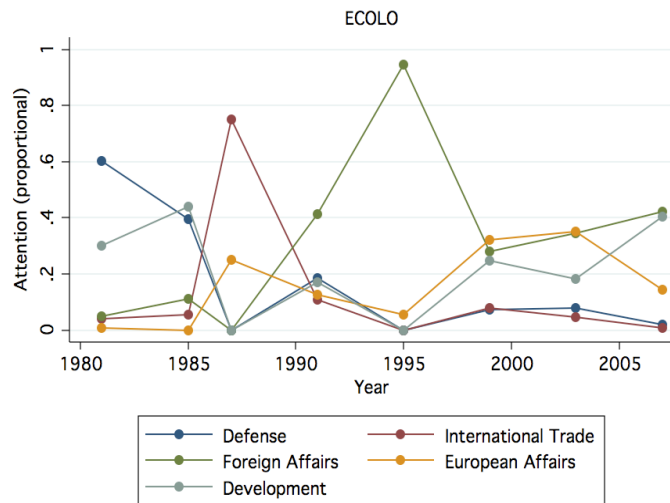
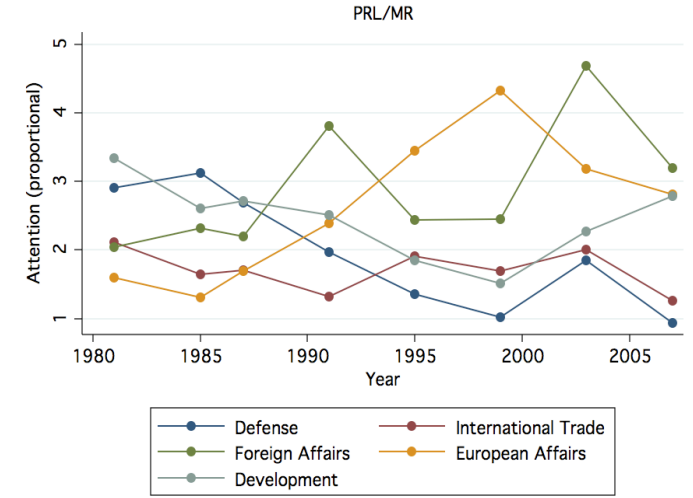
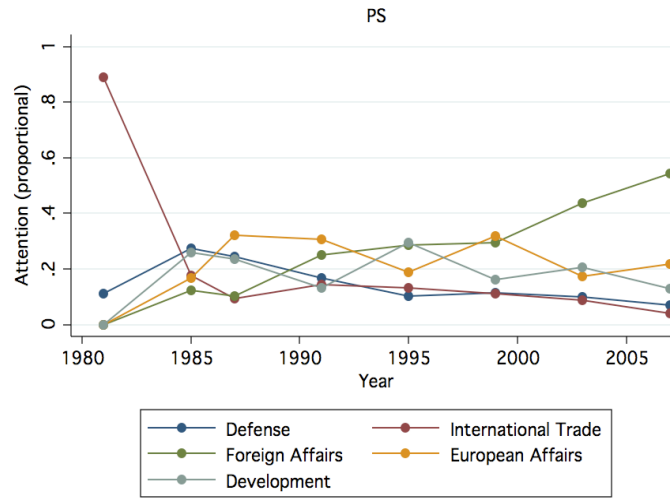
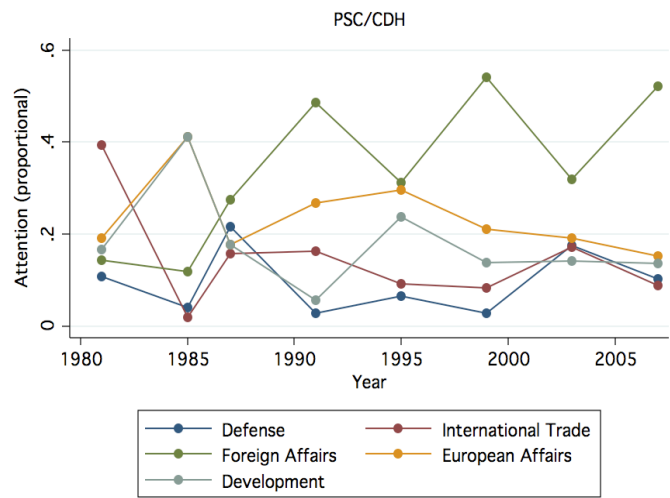


Figure 4.7 Topical distribution of party attention to foreign policy - Francophone parties

MEDIA ATTENTION

This section examines the general trends in media attention to specific foreign policy issues and to foreign countries, using front-pages of De Standaard, Flanders' main quality newspaper. I first examine the distribution of media attention to foreign policy issues and then look at the distribution of issues within specific foreign policy subdomains. Since these analyses require coded data, trends can only be explored from 1999-2008 for which coded data is available. Then, attention to specific foreign countries is examined using key word searches of countries and their derivatives, providing attention to specific countries from 1987-2008. Given the focus of this research on developing countries, only those countries are included in the figures displayed. Figure 4.8 shows the general evolution of foreign news coverage in De Standaard and displays the total number of front-page news items (blue line), the total amount of foreign news (red line) and the ensuing proportion of foreign news, as part of the total agenda space. To be able to compare these trends, the proportional data has been amplified by 100 and the total amount of foreign news by 10 for visual purposes.

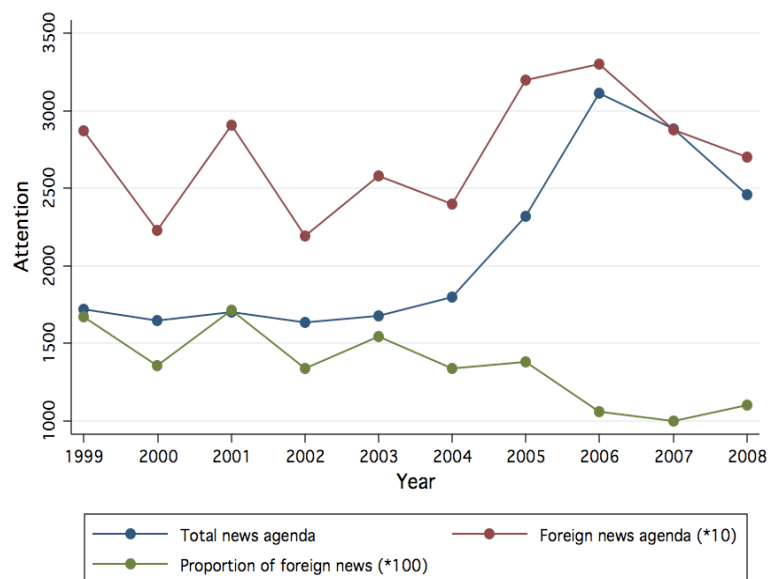


Figure 4.8 General evolution of foreign news coverage from 1999-2008

While the total news space has increased due to a change in format in 2004, increasing the number of front-page news items, the proportion of coverage dedicated to foreign news has followed a slight, but steady negative trend. Though at first sight this change in format seems to be responsible for this negative trend, other studies have also found a decrease in the proportion of foreign news coverage in other outlets,

like public and commercial television (Wouters, De Swert and Walgrave, 2009). However, relative distributions still allow for a reliable comparison of attention between policy issues over time. Moreover, since the second empiric part of this study (dealing with the impact of media) uses proportional distributions between countries, there is no worry that the decline in foreign news coverage will affect the analyses, given that the media ‘pie’ for foreign news has remained relatively constant.

When we look at the proportional distribution of news coverage within the foreign policy agenda space (figure 4.9), it is clear that two main policy areas dominate the foreign news agenda: general foreign policy and defense. The attacks on 9/11 sparked a renewed interest in defense issues in 2001, with a peak in 2003 with the Iraq war. The rise in attention to European affairs in 2004 and 2005 corresponds to the drafting and ensuing rejection of the European constitutional treaty by French and Dutch voters. Nevertheless, European affairs generally receive little media attention, especially given its impact on daily life and domestic policies/politics – not to mention the presence of the European institutions in Brussels. International trade and issues related to development aid and developing countries never generate much enthusiasm from the media.

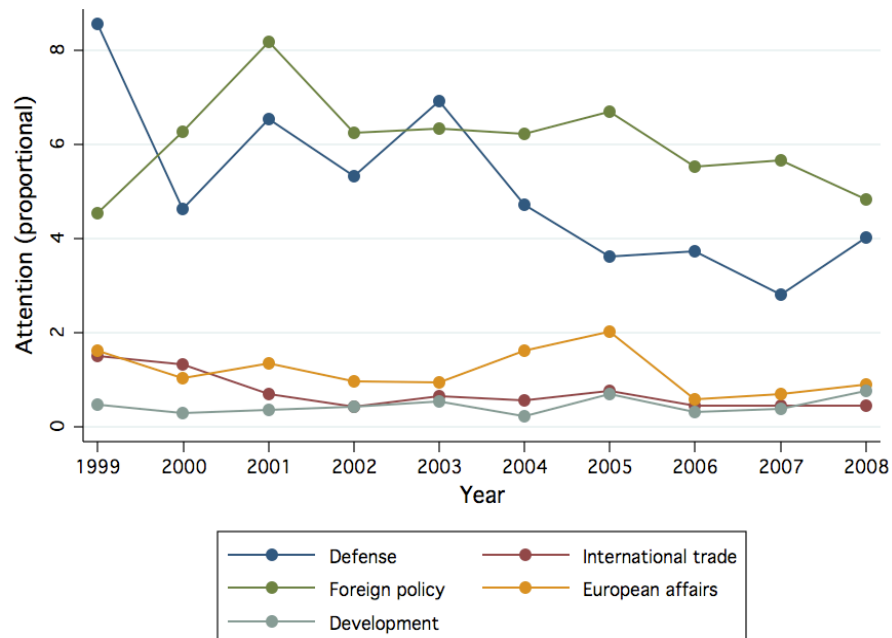


Figure 4.9 Media attention to foreign policy subdomains, as a proportion of total foreign policy attention

When we compare the parties' agenda (figure 4.5) to that of the media, it is clear that attention from parties is more evenly distributed among the different foreign policy issues. Media tend to focus on more sensational issues and leave aside less jaw-dropping stories on European affairs and issues related to development.

Looking at the topical distribution *within* the policy subdomains provides valuable information and offers a better understanding of the media agenda. Figure 4.10 shows that, within the general foreign policy category, two issues clearly dominate the media agenda: general foreign policy and international terrorism. In a media context, general foreign policy issues refer to those issues that cannot be otherwise categorized and mostly pertain to the nature of the relations between two or more countries or Belgian's position towards a specific event or situation. Attention to international terrorism clearly imposed itself on the agenda after the events surrounding 9/11 and has remained relatively high throughout most of the decade, with a distinct peak in 2004. This peak relates to the sectarian terrorist attacks in Iraq, a year after the American invasion. EU affairs ranks in third, after which it is hard to distinguish the different issues.

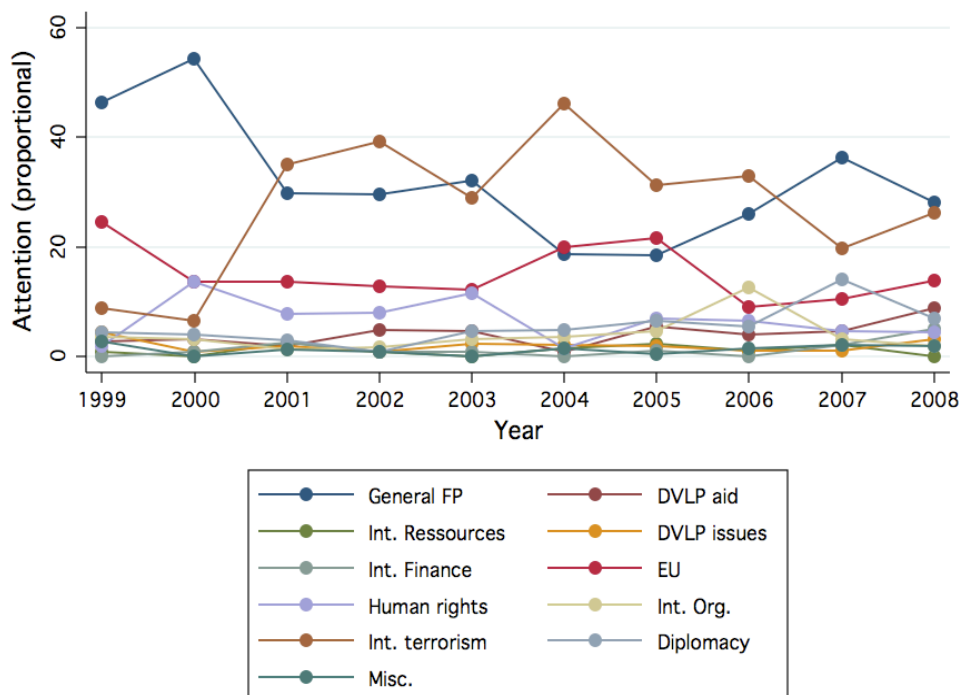


Figure 4.10 Proportional media attention to specific foreign policy issues

When it comes to defense issues (figure 4.11), a similar pattern emerges, whereby the most sensational issue – war related news – by far gets most of the coverage. The war in Afghanistan generated a lot of media attention, especially in 2001 and throughout 2002. A high level of attention was maintained in the following years due to the subsequent war in Iraq. The increasing problems of the Alliance in Afghanistan again contributed to the high coverage around 2006. The high levels of ‘arms control’ coverage reflect the UN weapons inspections prior to the American invasion of Iraq.

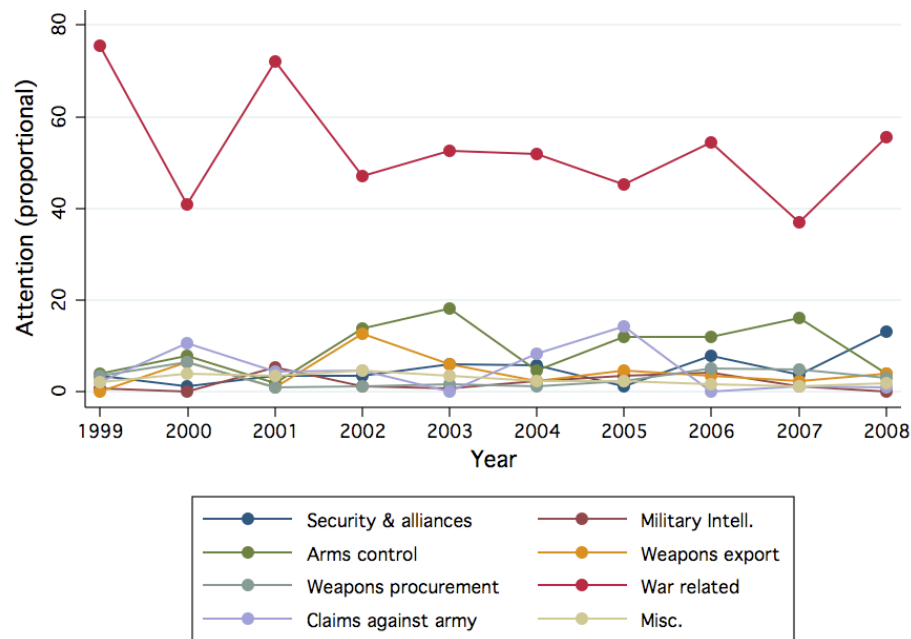


Figure 4.11 Proportional media attention to specific defense issues

Figure 4.12 tracks the media attention to the seven countries that received the highest peaks in total media coverage in one year between 1986 and 2008. Media attention is measured using key word searches, as has been done in chapter 7 (see chapter 3 for more information on the use of key word searches). The 1990s are characterized by high coverage of these particular countries. We observe that all those countries were involved in brutal conflict, except for Iran, whose nuclear programs was at the centre of the debates. The high peak of attention to foreign news in 1991 seems to be explained by a number of conflicts escalating at the same time, notably the American response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the independence of Croatia from the Yugoslav Federation and the ensuing war with Serbia.

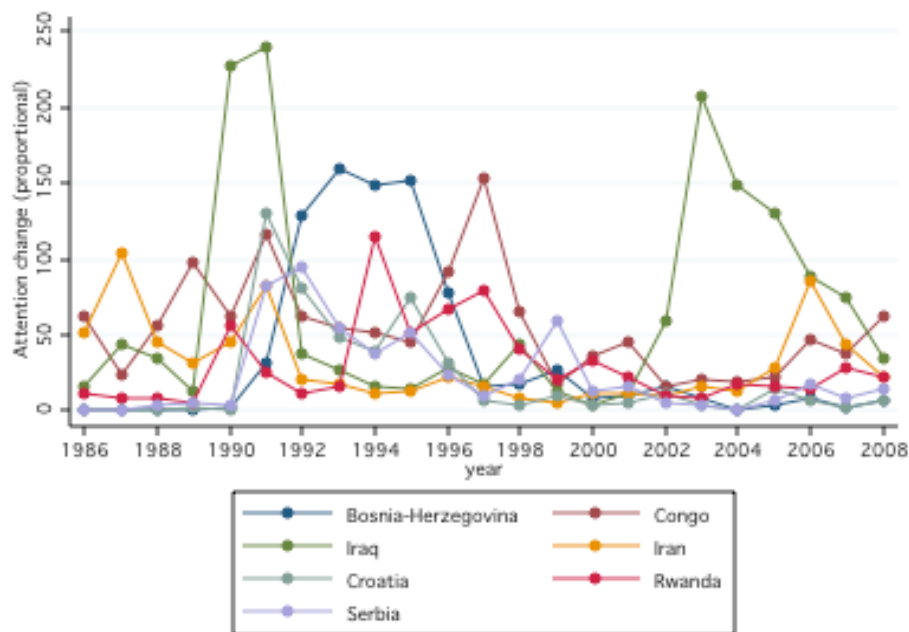


Figure 4.12 Evolution of front-page newspaper attention to those countries with the highest peaks in attention

After the end of the Cold War, a number of high-tension regions saw the support of one of the two dominant powers (the U.S. or the Soviet-Union) decline or even vanish. This removed the main incentives for certain elites to ‘behave’ and unleashed conflictual forces with often devastating results. So, while the early 1990’s was marked by a number of large-scale and very violent conflicts, it is not clear whether the decline in foreign news, previously observed in figure 4.10, merely corresponds to the reality or reflects the combination of declining events and a loss of interest.

To make the data as visually concrete as possible, figure 4.13 shows the evolution of total Belgian Official Development Assistance and front-page newspaper attention from 1993-2008 for six specific recipient countries. For graphic purposes, the aid budgets are expressed 0.1 millions (and in millions for Iraq). Aside from this change in proportion, this is the exact same data that is used in chapter 7 to examine the influence of news media coverage on aid budgets. The purpose of figure 4.13 is not to hastily derive conclusions with respect to the research questions addressed in this research. Indeed, these are only time series for 6 of the 118 countries analyzed in chapter 7. Nevertheless, without the other explaining variables that may come into play and the sometimes complicated statistical models, figure 4.13 provides a preview of how these rich data will be used later on.

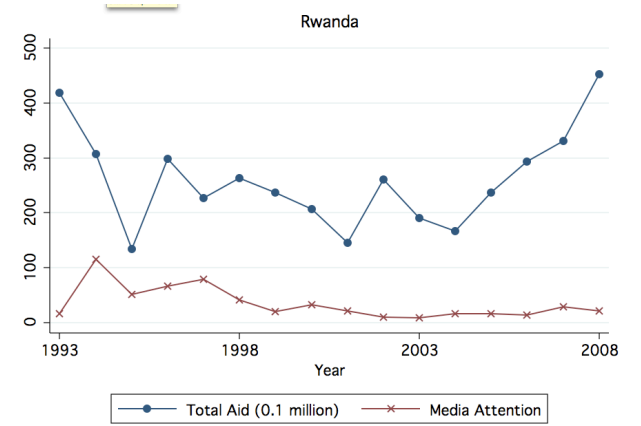
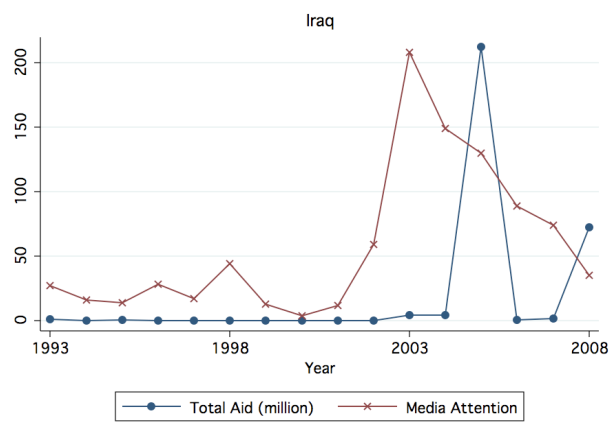
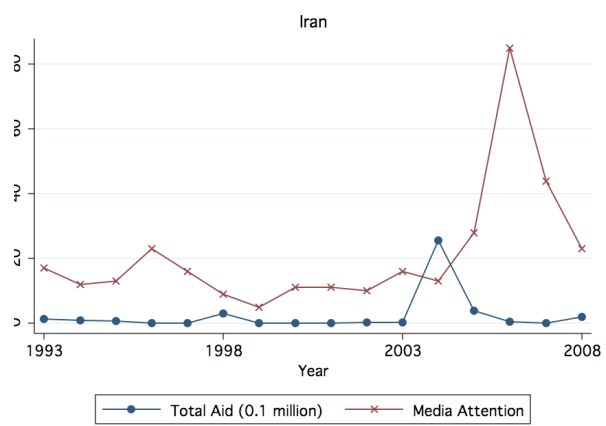
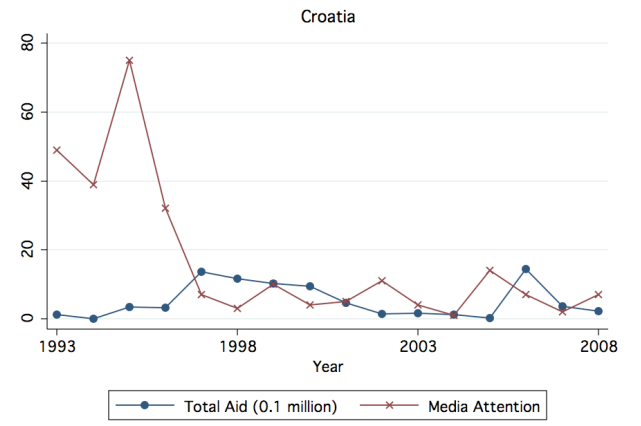
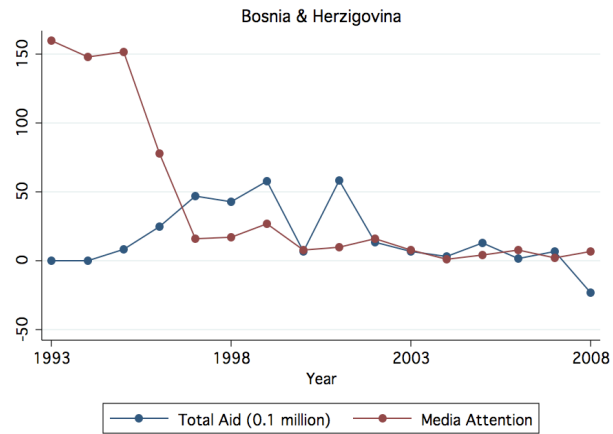
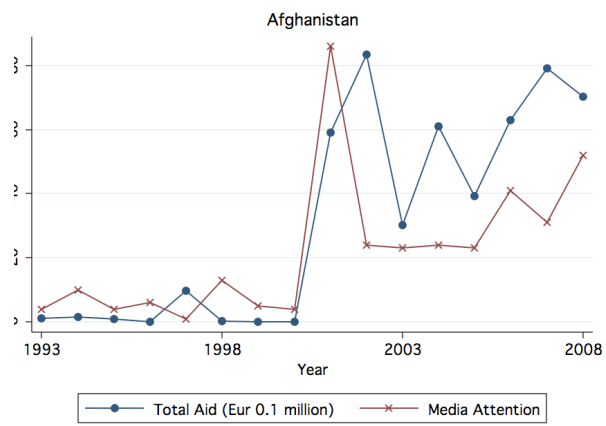


Figure 4.13 Evolution of Belgian aid and media attention to specific recipient countries (1993-2008)

A number of these time series provide examples of cases where media attention precedes increases in aid allocation. The most obvious examples are the media attention to the War in Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. As a consequence, aid subsequently increases to both Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. A similar pattern can be observed for Rwanda in 1994 and for Iraq in 2003. However, these examples also show that media is only one part of the story. On one hand, despite media attention, aid does not increase accordingly for Iran where other considerations and interests come into play. On the other hand, aid remains high for Rwanda despite modest media attention from the end of the 1990s onwards. Here again, other, perhaps strategic, considerations dominate.

After having reviewed most of the data that is used in the next chapters of this research, it seems fair to conclude that (a) the different agendas discussed here display a lot of attention to foreign policy issues and that (b) the distribution of attention to specific policy domains greatly varies over time. The distribution of attention to foreign policy issues – specific or not – also varies from one actor to another, depending on the nature and purpose of their activities. Hence, it is clear that governments, parties and media do not necessarily prioritize the same issues at the same time. Moreover, within a specific type of agenda, political parties, we also observe large differences in policy priorities between them. Hence, as these figures demonstrate that attention to foreign policy varies between actors and over time, this suggests that it is useful and meaningful to study and understand what drives these differences and how different actors influence each other.

PART TWO

**POLITICAL PARTIES AND FOREIGN
POLICY**

5 DOES THE COALITION AGREEMENT'S GRIP ON POLICY FADE OVER TIME? AN ANALYSIS OF POLICY DRIFT IN BELGIUM

ABSTRACT

Government agreements are known to be important sources for future policies in many different coalition countries. Moreover, they also limit policy initiatives from outside the government agreement. However, little is known about how this 'grip' of coalition agreements over policies evolves over time. Throughout the legislative term, new policy issues arise and public demands change. If governments are responsive, they will address these issues, leading to increasing divergence from the government agreement: policy drift. Hence, the central question this study addresses is whether changing evolutions in society lead to a fading grip of the coalition agreement on policy, causing policy drift vis-à-vis the initial policy program. Using an agenda-setting approach, I map the policy priorities of the government agreements to two measures of policy priorities from 1992-2006: ministerial council decisions and state of the union speeches. Although there is 'room' for policy issues from outside the coalition agreement, I do not find policy drift in any of the two policy measures, as deviation from the 'original' policy priorities does not increase over time. Hence, this study finds that the government agreements maintain their impact, both as a source and a constraint, on future policies throughout the legislature.

INTRODUCTION

In democracies where governments are formed by a coalition of political parties, there is a strong need for clear and binding policy guidelines. If every coalition partner wants to implement its preferred policies and electoral pledges, the management of the decision-making process within the cabinet would lead to political chaos. The solution

found in many countries relies on negotiating a government agenda and drafting policy documents *prior* to installing a new government. These documents appear to be vital, not only for the survival of the cabinet, but also for obtaining strong and coherent governmental policies. The coalition agreements and the subsequent policies are part of this political process of negotiating the main policies and the important political decisions that will accompany the daily life of the government. According to this perspective, the governmental policy agenda is a result of the electoral cycle whereby parties propose policy preferences and alternatives through their manifestos, which they carry out if they are elected (Rallings, 1987; Klingemann et al., 1994; 2006; Royed, 1996; McDonald and Budge, 2005; Mansergh and Thomson, 2007; Costello and Thomson, 2008).

Government agreements, negotiated by the coalition partners of the new government, play a crucial role in policymaking in coalition governments. They have been found to be a very important source of future policies in a variety of countries, as the policy pledges included in these documents are very likely to be enacted (Thomson, 2001; Mansergh and Thomson, 2007; Costello and Thomson, 2008; Moury, 2011). Moreover, government agreements also constrain the future policy initiatives of the members of the government in order to maintain its stability (Moury, 2011). In addition to the impact on policy and its coherence, government agreements also unite parties with different ideological backgrounds and ensure that coalition ‘sticks’. Hence, government agreements are essential to government stability in most coalition countries and it is crucial that government agreements maintain their impact over the members of the coalition and their policies. Inclusion of new issues often requires new negotiations and, thus, the risk of fights among coalition partners.

However, throughout the legislative term, governments are faced with unpredictable issues, focusing events and new evolutions in society – issues that could not have been foreseen and included in the governmental program. Agenda-setting research of the last two decades shows the importance of such events and evolutions in policy change, in addition to elections (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005; Birkland, 1997; Baumgartner *et al.*, 2011). Agenda-setting theory argues that policymaking is an incremental process, alternated by short periods of disproportionate policy change, which cannot always be anticipated or initiated by political parties or the government (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993). Walgrave *et al.* (2006) examined both perspectives in Belgium and confirmed that they need not be

seen as competitive explanations. They found that, while government agreements were the best predictors of overall policy priorities of the governments (i.e. legislation), “external pressure” (media coverage, demonstrations and parliamentary scrutiny) performed best at explaining the yearly changes in policy.

So, if governments take into account new issues throughout the four-year legislative term, this should affect their policy priorities. Hence, it can be expected that, over time, the priorities of the government are adjusted and increasingly diverge from those they expressed at the onset of the legislature. However, to this day, we know very little about the impact of government agreements over time. Therefore, the main goal of this study is to examine whether the ‘grip’ of the coalition agreement on the government’s policies fades over time and, thus, whether policy drift occurs.

Thus far, most scholars mainly focused on the government agreement to examine whether specific policy pledges from the government agreement had effectively been implemented. One of the shortcomings of these studies is that they only focus on a relatively small fraction of the government agreement – specific and testable policy pledges – while neglecting the remainder of the document. As a result, a majority of valuable information, including vaguer promises or untestable intentions, has been completely ignored. Moreover, previous studies did not investigate the time aspect of policy implementation; are policies implemented evenly throughout the legislature, at the beginning or at the end of the legislature? Using an agenda-setting approach, I examine how the policy priorities of the government at the onset of the legislature correspond to those of the policies actually implemented throughout the four-year term. Agenda-setting allows us to assess the policy priorities of the government using the entire policy document and not just a selection. It is then possible to track these governmental policy priorities throughout the policymaking process – from the expression of intent to the actual decision – and from one year to another. Hence, this approach is very complementary to the aforementioned pledge studies.

I study the case of Belgium, a small Western-European partitocracy, over a period of 16 years, from 1993-2006, including four legislatures. More specifically, I test whether the grip of the government agreement fades over time, leading to policy drift. I examine whether the correspondence in policy priorities between the government agreement and the weekly ministerial councils, as well as the yearly state of the union speeches, decreases throughout the legislature. Shrinking correspondence would hereby imply shifting priorities and, thus, policy drift. The ministerial council

constitutes the policy agenda that is closest to the end of the policymaking process, as it includes both legislative governmental initiatives and budgetary decisions. The annual state of the union speeches accompany the voting of the next budget and leave more room for rhetoric. Hence, it presents the government with an opportunity to revisit its policy priorities in function of current events.

However, I do not find policy drift on any of the policy agendas, which means that the government agreement maintains its grip on policy throughout the entire legislature. Issue attention in the coalition agreement also predicts attention from the ministerial councils and the state of the union speeches. Although there is also clearly agenda space that is not determined by the government agreement, most importantly, the degree to which attention from the government agreement can predict attention in the policy agendas does not decrease over time. Since no policy drift occurs, this implies that the government agreement is not only a source for future policies, but also a constraint on new initiatives, withstanding external pressures on policymaking. While the state of the unions offer slightly more leeway to include new issues or exclude certain priorities of the government agreement, this does not change or increase over time. Hence, the government agreements define certain margins within which the government communicates and acts.

PUBLIC DEMANDS AND POLICYMAKING

There are a number of ways through which public demands, like shifts in concerns, changing preferences and other types of evolutions in society may be translated into political priorities and make their way onto the policy agenda. Probably the most straightforward way is through the electoral process. An abundance of authors have studied policymaking and policy change as a function of the electoral cycle in which political parties and government play the main roles (see for example Klingemann *et al.*, 1994; McDonald and Budge, 2005). Before the elections, parties propose policy programs in which specific policy issues are addressed, along with alternative solutions. Since the goal is to attract voters, parties will try to appeal to citizens by proposing programs that respond to their concerns. While most voters do not read these programs, they are often used as cues by news media to inform the broader public and generate relevant policy debates. Attention from all parties serves a certain agenda-setting function, as specific policy issues are emphasized. Winning parties,

however, are considered to receive a ‘mandate’ from the voters to carry out those policies. Once in office, parties try to carry out their electoral programs. In coalition countries, governments carry out the government agreement, negotiated by the coalition parties during government formation.

GOVERNMENT FORMATION AND COALITION AGREEMENT

Coalition agreements are the result of negotiations between the parties that form the future government coalition. It contains – in an often-detailed way – the main public policies that will be carried out by the government during the coming legislative term, regarding all policy domains and sometimes including an executive calendar. In addition, procedural rules can be included like, for example, preventing government parties to seek alternative majorities in parliament. The length of the term of the government can be mentioned, either as a reference to an anticipated end of the government⁴¹ or as an agreement to maintain the existing coalition beyond the next elections, as was the case for the Tindemans IV cabinet in 1977, wanting to realize a state reform spread over two terms. Processes and methods of decision-making, conciliation or conflict resolution are also mentioned in the government agreements. Finally, it is not rare to observe that the issue of repartition of the patronage resources and “politization” of the administration (nominations and promotions of civil servants) is addressed in these documents (Dumont and De Winter, 1999: 34-35).

The negotiation style and drafting process of the government agreement can vary greatly from one negotiation to another (Timmermans, 2003: 34), depending on the political environment, the personality of the *formateur* (the leader of the negotiations and likely future Prime Minister), the parties included and the balance of power between them. In one formula, the *formateur* presents a basic document to the other negotiators - drafted by his party or a pre-agreement between (some) parties -, which is then successively amended. Yet, negotiations can also proceed in (1) a sequential way, whereby issues are treated successively; (2) a synchronic way, where several issues are dealt with in a parallel process by specific task groups (party related expert negotiators other than the party presidents⁴²; or (3) in a gradual way, leaving politically tougher and more sensitive issues for a later phase of the negotiations process after mutual trust has been built up. Regardless of the adopted strategy, the

⁴¹ As recently observed in the case of the Verhofstadt III cabinet that paved the way for the Leterme I cabinet in 2008.

⁴² For example, the presidents of both federal chambers were in November 2007 appointed by the King as negotiators regarding community and state reform issues. These specific negotiations were done in parallel to the negotiation of the government’s agreement leading to the formation of the Leterme I cabinet.

most important issues are always negotiated between the party presidents and not 'just' by other expert negotiators.

Negotiating the content of this agreement is generally considered as the most time consuming step of government formation, most often requiring several weeks. The next steps in the government formation – portfolio allocation, confirmation of parties' participation at party congresses, the oath of office and confidence vote – are generally shorter and only take a few days. The length of the Belgian government agreements has increased over time, confirming a more general trend observed in Europe (Müller and Strøm, 2003). This is rather surprising given the successive delegation of power and competences from the federal to the European and regional levels since 1970, which should have decreased the length of these agreements. In Belgium, the increasing length seems to be a consequence of increasing mistrust between the members of the coalition.

Most empirical studies support the view that these negotiations are real policy-making arenas (Peterson and De Ridder, 1986); they mostly cover substantive policies and barely focus on the distribution of jurisdictions or on procedural matters. In case studies on the Netherlands (Thomson, 1999) and both the Netherlands and Belgium (Timmermans, 2003), coalition agreements have been shown to contain issues that are salient to the coalition parties and for which they have formulated policy pledges, even when they disagree on the solution of these issues. Hence, government agreements not only focus on non-divisive issues, leaving out most contentious matters, as Klingemann *et al.* (1994) suggested. In fact, those pledges most salient to each party tend to be included in the agreement (Rihoux *et al.*, 2005) to avoid fights among the coalition partners and display the image of a decisive body that will make a full four-year legislative term.

Although coalition agreements are not legally binding, they have an important political and policy impact, as they bind together several bodies of the coalition parties. First, they are signed by the party president of each coalition partner, after which party MPs and members endorse the agreement and, thus, government participation at specific party congresses. This party investiture via the congresses is a crucial step in making agreements stick, not only between parties, but also within parties (De Winter *et al.*, 2000). In Belgium, the coalition agreement heavily constrains the parliamentary agenda, as majority MPs are forced to stay in line with what has been decided during the coalition formation process. For both Dehaene

cabinets (1992-1995 and 1995-1999), the coalition agreements indicated that issues that were not included in the government agreement could only be politicized by majority representatives, with the explicit consent of the majority parties, to avoid alternative majorities (Rihoux *et al.*, 2005).

Many studies have demonstrated the impact of the GA on policy outputs. In the Netherlands and Ireland, Thomson and colleagues demonstrated that the electoral pledges expressed by parties in their manifestos were more likely to be carried out if they were included in the government agreement (Thomson, 2001; Mansergh and Thomson, 2007; Costello and Thomson, 2008). They found the enactment rate of those pledges to be as high as those of government parties in single party governments, like the US and the UK (Rallings, 1987; Royed, 1996). Moury (2011) directly examined the pledges issued in the government agreements and found high enactment rates for pledges from the government agreements in Belgium (69%), the Netherlands (69%) and Italy (54%). However, she also found the government agreements to be very constraining, as very little initiative could be taken outside the agreement. In other words, from all the *important* decisions taken by the cabinets or by the individual ministers, a large majority originated from the government agreement (except for those decisions in response to unpredictable events).

This is particularly interesting, as the constraining power of the government agreements – the degree to which it excludes policy issues and alternatives from outside the agreement – has not received much scholarly attention. While we know that the government agreement is a program of policies to be carried out, it is also a commitment from the signatory parties that entails certain restrictions. Coalition parties generally pride themselves on being reliable coalition partners and usually try to avoid open disputes, as voters appreciate parties who are consistent, but most of all reliable. Operating within the boundaries of the government agreement is the most straightforward way for a party to show it is a reliable partner. Moreover, although prior pledge studies have convincingly demonstrated the importance of the government agreement, especially as a source of policy, their analyses gave little to no indication as to its impact over time. That is why the main goal of this study is to explore and understand the impact of the government agreement on policy over time.

POLICY DRIFT AND THE POLICY 'GRIP' OF THE GOVERNMENT AGREEMENT

Since the coalition agreement is drafted before the beginning of the legislature, it cannot possibly take into account everything that will happen during the legislature. Agenda-setting theory emphasizes the forces and dynamics that explain how issues become societal problems, requiring governmental attention, independently from the electoral process (see for example Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005). Policymaking is understood as a generally incremental process whereby issues become policy concerns when the understanding of an issue and its solution changes and when important political actors become involved. This means that as the frame and understanding of a given issue changes, it starts to become perceived as a problem. As more and more people change their perception of that issue, more people become involved, among whom politically powerful actors. A change in the image of an issue, combined with the involvement of political actors, then often entails a disproportionately large change in policy.

As mentioned, these dynamics occur independently of the electoral process and are likely to affect the governmental agenda. That is why the goal of this study is to examine how the strength of the grip of the government agreement on policy is affected by issue intrusion. "Issue intrusion is the emergence of a previously unappreciated issue into a stable policymaking system." (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005: 68) As new issues arise and need to be dealt with, it can be expected that the policy priorities of the government increasingly diverge from those set out at the onset of the legislature and recorded in the government agreement.

To assess the influence of the government agreement throughout the legislative term, I examine policy drift vis-à-vis the government agreement. Policy drift is hereby conceptualized as increasing issue divergence in the policy priorities over time, as compared to the initial priorities expressed in the government agreement. Hence, drift indicates a fading impact of the government agreement. Policy drift can imply two main dynamics: decreasing implementation of the government agreement and/or increasing incorporation of new issues from outside the government agreement. As time in office proceeds, the government, or certain of its members, can insist on re-evaluating and re-negotiating several aspects of the government's priorities. Hence, drift occurs when the impact of issue attention from the government agreement on policy attention decreases over time.

Conversely, the absence of policy drift means that the government agreement maintains its influence or grip on policy: both as a source and as a constraint. This implies that most policy comes from the government agreement on one hand and that new policy initiatives not included in the government agreement tend to be avoided or blocked. Hence, examining policy drift and the constraining power of the government agreement tells us a great deal about policymaking in coalition countries, as it informs us on how governments deal with new issues and shifts in policy priorities. Governments have to choose whether to address new issues – sometimes at the risk of a government falling – or to leave them for the next elections and the next government? Policy drift is due to a variety of reasons or “external pressures” (Walgrave *et al.*, 2006) and builds up over time, as these new issues accumulate.

SOURCES OF DRIFT

Agenda-setting literature suggests that policy change is not necessarily a consequence of the electoral process, as new issues often impose themselves onto the governmental agenda. “Elections matter, but so do many other factors.” (Baumgartner *et al.*, 2011). As an issue gets redefined (understood through a different frame or perspective), more people may come to see it as a problem and the advocated policy as a solution. Once such a new idea gains prominence among the public and different policymakers, the wheels are set in motion for policy change and the ensuing change will likely be disproportionately large (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993, Jones and Baumgartner, 2005). Many different causes can lead an issue to the governmental agenda and bring about shifts in priorities. “Problem attention can be inspired by media coverage, public discontent [or] changes in the real world as these are monitored by government officials” (Baumgartner *et al.*, 2011). The three causes of drift elaborated next are expected to decrease the constraining power of the government agreement.

A first source of drift is focusing events. Such events are often ‘shortcuts’ to gaining prominent attention and reframing a policy problem and its solution. Birkland (1998) defines focusing events as “an event that is sudden; relatively uncommon; can be reasonably defined as harmful or revealing the possibility of potentially greater future harms; has harms that are concentrated in a particular geographical area or community of interest; and that is known to policymakers and the public simultaneously (Birkland 1997; Kingdon 1995, 94–100).” Hence, while certain issues can be ignored, a focusing event simply cannot, as their impact and the potential harm

they can cause in the future require immediate governmental action. Focusing events can, thus, draw major attention to specific policy problems and impose new issues onto the governmental agenda (Birkland, 1998; Kingdon, 1995). Policy advocates will then try to exploit this situation by reframing the issue problem in a different, advantageous, way to promote their policy alternative (Birkland, 1997; 1998). This way, issues that were not included in the government agreement can impose itself onto the government agenda. A prime example of this was the closing of nuclear power plants in Germany due to a nuclear catastrophe in Japan in 2011 and increased antinuclear sentiments and protests. Hence, such focusing events can be the source of new policy initiatives.

A second possible source of drift is indicators of popular support, like elections results at other governmental levels or (popularity) polls. A majority party at the national level can suffer an important defeat at other, regional or local, elections. This party may then feel the pressure to compensate this defeat by profiling itself among the coalition partners to avoid further electoral defeats. This can be done by emphasizing a party's own policy issues and achieving 'policy successes' before the next elections. Conversely, a party that wins the elections can try to take advantage of this strengthened position and require a larger role within the majority or impose a number of issues that have proven important during those elections. Hence, elections at one level can influence the policies at another level.

Still in an electoral perspective, policy priorities in the year of the next elections are likely to deviate most, as it is the last opportunity for the majority parties to implement specific policies. So, as parties start to compete with each other, they might want to stress certain policies. As parties attempt to profile themselves in the government due the proximity of the elections, they may demand the inclusion of issues dear to their electorate. Certain parties may want to show their voters that, within the government, they are paying attention to those issues they believe to be the most important. As a result, we would then observe drift away from the initial government agreement and its priorities.

This study examines policy drift on two very distinct policy agendas: the ministerial council decisions and the yearly state of the union speeches. The ministerial councils represent the weekly activities of the government and its members. Ministerial councils are among the best measures of policy attention, as they include both budgetary and legislative decisions. Moreover, since it pertains to actual decisions that

will be implemented, councils are situated at the end of the policymaking process. SOTU speeches, then again, are declarations that are linked to the parliamentary vote on the budget of the coming year. Through this speech, the government expresses its policy priorities for the next fiscal year. Hence, these speeches are the opportunity for the government to update its priorities vis-à-vis the government agreement. To gain a better insight into how the different policy agendas come about, the next sections detail the procedures and formalities of the ministerial councils and the state of the union speeches.

THE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

Officially, the Ministerial Council is the main political arena where deliberations are held and decisions are made. The Council is held weekly on Friday and is composed of no more than fifteen members. “With the possible exception of the prime minister, the Council of Ministers is composed of an equal number of Dutch-speaking members and French-speaking members” (Art. 99 of the Constitution). Though State Secretaries are formally only present for those matters involving their competence, common practice shows that they participate in the entire Council⁴³ since 1992. The council debates policy decisions and current events and takes decisions upon consensus, thereby testing and the political coherence of the government. Article 69 of the Special Law of 8 August 1980 stipulates that the government decides upon consensus on the matters that belong to its competencies. Given that the Ministerial Council, as an institution, as well as its procedures are not constitutionally defined, the *‘practical instructions concerning the functioning of the government’* are used as guidelines. These instructions state that, to involve all government members, the Ministerial Council has to agree on all subjected proposals of royal or ministerial decrees to which its intervention is legally required and on all issues whose content or consequences have political or budgetary repercussions (Dewachter, 2003: 199; De Vos, 2006: 386). Moysse and Dumoulin (2011: 42) state that an explicit governmental consensus is required for all politically sensitive decisions. For those issues, a minister depends on the consent of his colleagues. Debates thus last until consensus is reached, to assure common responsibility for all governmental decisions. However, in practice,

⁴³ (http://archive.verhofstadt.belgium.be/nl/working/council_min.html and <http://archive.lettermeii.belgium.be/de-ministerraad>).

consensus means that the minority subjects itself to the point of view of the majority – or resigns (Dewachter, 2003: 209).

Though some argue that the ministerial council has become a ratification machine, due to different prior consultation moments, the ministerial council is still the arena where all the policy issues are voted upon, which means that they represent the policy actions of the government very well – even if the actual consensus may have been forged before. Since neither public nor press can attend the actual ministerial council meetings, we rely on the press briefings issued by the press office of the government. To preserve the stability and discretion of the Government, only those agenda items where a consensus could be reached are communicated. Certain sensitive cases - strategic or secretive – dealt by the Ministerial Council are never communicated on. Walgrave *et al.* (2005: 227) compared the press releases to the actual ministerial council agendas and found that more than 80% of all the agenda items of the Ministerial Council were reported on through press releases. The ministerial councils can be considered as the best proxy for the governmental policies, as they include both legislative and budgetary decisions. Hence, this is the most suitable policy measure to examine whether policy drift from the government agreement has occurred over time.

STATE OF THE UNION SPEECHES

In Belgium, the yearly State of the Union speech or policy statement consists of a declaration made by the prime minister in front of the Chamber, outlining the main policies and issues that are going to be dealt with by the cabinet during the following legislative year. This declaration is linked to the budget and takes place at the opening of every parliamentary session (on the second Tuesday of October – Art. 44 of the Constitution). The length and style of this document varies, depending on the Prime Minister. So, contrary to many other countries where similar political/policy statements exist (see for example the throne speeches in the UK and the Netherlands), this declaration is not presented by the head of State but by the prime minister. Given its recent introduction in Belgian politics – with a first occurrence in 1993 – the scope and political importance of these speeches can be considered as political practice and is not ‘imbedded’ in the constitution or the legislation.

The SOTU is discussed during the plenary session, usually during two days (the second Wednesday and Thursday of October) and is also submitted to a vote of

confidence (following art. 133 of the parliament's internal House rules). Since the introduction of the SOTU into Belgian federal politics, all recorded votes of confidence have been positive. Compared to the traditional government agreements, the SOTU speeches are a relatively recent phenomenon and are therefore not yet covered by the scientific literature on Belgian politics. Similar queen speeches have been used as policy agenda for research in the Netherlands (Breeman *et al.*, 2009) and the U.K. (John and Jennings, 2010; Jennings *et al.*, 2011). However, In Belgium, we cannot yet assess its significance as a governmental agenda at this point. The reactions of the main political actors and the media coverage suggest that its political weight has grown over time. What we *do* know is that the SOTU constitutes an opportunity for the government to adjust its policy priorities for the next year and provide policy solutions to current societal concerns, since the SOTU is linked to the next budget and its priorities.

Therefore, any deviation from the initial government agreement can be considered as a policy change. The SOTU speech is also an opportunity to rally the different coalition parties around a common policy document and a vote of confidence in the House. Furthermore, it is also a way for the cabinet to communicate its priorities for the next parliamentary year to the public. Hence, state of the union speeches mix policy statements with rhetoric. The meaning of policy drift on the SOTUs depends on drift in the ministerial councils; while drift on both might imply that the function of the SOTUs is to update the policy priorities of the government, drift on the SOTU exclusively would suggest that these speeches hold more rhetorical than substantive policy value. Hence, comparison of both policy agendas may reveal the way Belgian governments deal with new issues and how they communicate on them.

DATA AND METHOD

To assess policy drift, I examine whether the influence of the government agreement on the ensuing policies decreases over time. To do so, I match the policy priorities of the government agreement to those of the subsequent yearly state of the union speeches and to those of the ministerial councils. If governments pay attention to new issues, over time, this should affect their priorities vis-à-vis the original government agreement. Policy priorities are obtained by taking the relative issue emphasis on each policy domain. Hence, I use the entire policy programs to measure priorities, and not

just a fraction of all sentences. This agenda-setting approach allows us to compare and match the policy priorities of different actors – or different activities of the same actor – and across time.

All the government agreements, state of the union speeches and ministerial councils from 1993-2006 have been coded on their thematic policy content. This coding was done using a version of Baumgartner and Jones' (1993) topical codebook that has been adjusted to the Belgian context. These topic codes enable us to identify and match policy priorities from the government agreements to the state of the union speeches and the ministerial councils. The codebook contains over 242 specific policy topic codes, organized by main policy category, of which there are 23 (for a complete list of these topics, see appendix). For the GA and SOTU, all documents were coded at the sentence level, in accordance with the procedure described in the Comparative Manifesto Project's coding handbook (Budge *et al.*, 2001). This coding procedure consists of identifying all the issues put forward in a document. So, if several ideas were expressed within a larger sentence, they would all be coded. This procedure entails very strict rules with respect to identifying and coding the policy ideas and issues, which were carefully executed.

There is a clear upward trend in the size of the government agreements during the observed period, despite the increasing devolution of powers from the federal to the federated levels. In terms of coded material, government agreements tend to get longer over time (from about 500 coded sentences in 1992 to 1500 in 2003). This trend does not seem to be affected by the number of parties in the coalition or the political 'color' of the prime minister. The length of the SOTU, however, seems rather stable over time. This is probably due to the fact that it has to be read by the prime minister in the parliament, preventing large variation in its length (they range from 193 sentences in 2003 to 430 sentences in 2005).

To assess the priorities of the ministerial council, the press releases for each meeting were coded. Press releases were retrieved through the online archive of the national press center from 1996 onwards. Data from before 1996 was obtained through its paper version predecessor, the summary of the weekly press releases, called *Facts (Feiten or Faits)*. Most often, each council agenda item has its own specific statement, which was then coded on its policy content. On average, each meeting had about 18 agenda items and each year about 39 ministerial councils were held. If we look at the distribution before and after 2000, it seems that the government has increasingly

communicated its decisions (an average of 15 versus 22 items, resp.). The number of agenda items per meeting has remained stable after 1996, except during the election years of 1999 and 2003, where it is slightly lower. During the coalition negotiations of the future government, the government of current affairs cannot take new policy initiatives.

After coding these documents, the number of sentences or agenda items devoted to the specific policy areas are transformed into proportionate measures of attention. For the weekly ministerial councils, these proportions are aggregated and calculated at the yearly level. This provides us with the relative attention to all the policy areas, which can then be compared from one agenda to another. Hence, there are two dependent variables – the SOTU speeches and the ministerial councils – and the unit of analysis is the proportional attention paid to each policy category at the yearly level. Attention from the GA remains constant throughout the legislature, as there is only one measurement every four years.

A two-stage heteroscedastic regression model analyzes the impact of the government agreement on the state of the unions and ministerial councils and examines whether the content of these documents tends to ‘drift’ away from the government agreement over time. The first stage explains to what degree issue attention from the GA determines policy attention in the SOTU speeches and ministerial councils of each of the coming four legislative years, like a regular regression model, but correcting for possible heteroscedasticity caused by the time variable. Hence, we look at the proportional policy attention for each legislative year. The second stage of this model then examines whether the years in office can explain the variance of the dependent variable of the first stage – in this case, does it increase over time. In other words, can time explain differences in issue divergence, if any, between the independent (GA) and dependent variables (SOTU and MC)? Finally, we compare the findings on these two policy measures.

With respect to the central research question of this study; if policy drift is observed, this indicates that the impact or grip of the government agreement fades over time. Conversely, if drift is not observed, this suggests that the government agreement remains stable as a source for future policies and as a constraint on new initiatives from outside the government agreement. Hence, drift – increasing policy divergence from the government agreement – is key to the research question of this study.

RESULTS

Tables 1 and 2 display the correlations between the policy priorities of the government agreement and the ensuing state of the unions and ministerial councils for each year at the major topic level. The correlations in both tables show fairly large correspondence in issue priorities between the government agreement and ensuing policy for most years. If we use a cut-off of .6 as a measure of good correspondence, 8 out of 14 years correspond really well in Table 1, with an average of .58. The lowest correlation in Table 2 is .67, with an average of .78. This means that the broad policy priorities laid out in the government agreement match the ensuing policies really well. However, even though these correlations vary over time, there does not seem to be a clear trend or pattern in these changes, and certainly not a systematically decreasing one.

Table 5.1 Correlations (Pearson) between the 23 specific policy priorities of the government agreement and the state of the unions for each year (1992-2006)

GA	SOTU 1	SOTU 2	SOTU 3	SOTU 4
1991			1993	1994
			0.8561	0.6407
1995	1995	1996	1997	1998
	0.4889	0.6526	0.7088	0.6886
1999	1999	2000	2001	2002
	0.7766	0.5203	0.6579	0.3647
2003	2003	2004	2005	2006
	0.3079	0.6483	0.4468	0.4177

Note: $p < .05$; $N=23$.

Table 5.2 Correlations (Pearson) between the 23 specific policy priorities of the government agreement and the ministerial councils for each year (1992-2006)

GA	MC 1	MC 2	MC 3	MC 4
1991		1992	1993	1994
		0.7799	0.7638	0.6867
1995	1995	1996	1997	1998
	0.6938	0.8201	0.6783	0.6796
1999	1999	2000	2001	2002
	0.7736	0.8433	0.8402	0.7988
2003	2003	2004	2005	2006
	0.8722	0.8398	0.8072	0.7860

Note: $p < .05$; $N=23$.

When we look at the correlations at the lower policy level with 242 issue categories in Tables 3 and 4, it is clear that correspondence between the policy priorities of the government agreement and those of the state of the unions and ministerial councils are considerably lower. The priorities of the government agreement and the state of the

union speeches correlate on average at .42. While the ministerial councils best matched the government agreement at the major policy level, at the most specific issue level, they only correlate on average at .32. This is similar to the correlations found by Walgrave et al (2006) between the government agreement and legislative outputs. Again, no systematic pattern seems to emerge. However, it indicates that there is more room for issues from outside the government agreement. Therefore, the statistical analyses are performed at this most specific policy level.

Table 5.3 Correlations (Pearson) between the 242 specific policy priorities of the government agreement and the state of the unions for each year (1993-2006)

GA	SOTU 1	SOTU 2	SOTU 3	SOTU 4
1991			1993	1994
			0.4622	0.4287
1995	1995	1996	1997	1998
	0.3960	0.4281	0.5655	0.4612
1999	1999	2000	2001	2002
	0.5217	0.3866	0.3471	0.2268
2003	2003	2004	2005	2006
	0.3463	0.4895	0.4848	0.3175

Note: $p < .001$; N=242.

Table 5.4 Correlations (Pearson) between the 242 specific policy priorities of the government agreement and the ministerial councils for each year (1993-2007)

GA	MC 1	MC 2	MC 3	MC 4
1991		1992	1993	1994
		0.2459	0.2095	0.1619
1995	1995	1996	1997	1998
	0.2587	0.4356	0.4774	0.2929
1999	1999	2000	2001	2002
	0.4319	0.4136	0.3181	0.3796
2003	2003	2004	2005	2006
	0.2250	0.3551	0.3152	0.2712

Note: $p < .001$; N=242.

Next, a two-stage multiplicative heteroscedastic regression model with a lagged dependent variable is carried out to control for cross time dependence. The unit of analysis is the proportional attention to each policy issue for each year. This means that we are dealing with pooled data, which considerably increases the N of the analyses. A lagged dependent variable is therefore introduced to account for autocorrelation, as attention from the dependent variables is not independent from one year to another. The first stage estimates the impact of the emphasis on the 242 policy issues in the independent variables (the government agreement and a lag of the dependent variable) on that of the state of the union speeches and ministerial councils,

respectively, like in regular regression models. The second stage then estimates the variance of the first stage using another explanatory variable: time. If, indeed, policy drifts away from the government agreement over time, this would imply that deviation from the mean (variance) would systematically increase. So, the second stage explains the variance, using the time at which the speech was given or the council decisions were taken, in number of years after the government agreement (government duration).

Table 5.5 Two-stage heteroscedastic regression model predicting policy attention on SOTUs and ministerial councils (1st stage) and drift away from the government agreement (2nd stage)

		SOTU	MC
		Coef.	Coef.
		(SE)	(SE)
Stage 1: explaining attention (mean)	Lag_DV	.56*** (.01)	.84*** (.01)
	GA	.33*** (.02)	.03*** (.01)
	Cons.	.06** (.02)	.05*** (.01)
Stage 2: explaining drift (variance)	Time	-.04 (.02)	-.13*** (.02)
	Cons.	.42*** (.06)	-1.13*** (.06)
N		3388	3388
Pseudo R2		.1520	.4878
VWLS R2		.4289	.7337

Note: ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

The regression results in table 1 show that the variance does not increase with the age of the government. Hence, the ‘age’ of the government does not diminish the degree to which attention to a topic in the GA predicts attention to that same policy topic in the SOTU or the Ministerial council. Results suggest the opposite for the ministerial councils; in other words, the government agreement is better able to predict policy attention in the last years than in the first years. Thus, and contrary to the expectations, it is safe to conclude that no policy drift, away from the government agreement, occurs throughout the legislature. So, the government agreement maintains its grip on policy throughout the entire legislature. The absence of policy drift implies that the agenda space for issues from outside of the government remains stable or even

decreases over time. This means that the government agreement remains as strong a constraint on policy initiatives in the end as in the beginning.

In addition, the first stage of the regression also shows that the GA is not only a constraint, but also an important source of policy attention. Indeed, attention in the government agreement is a significant predictor of ensuing policy attention. This is especially strong in the first model where a 1% increase of attention to a topic in the government agreement leads to a .33% increase in attention in the SOTU, taking into account attention in the previous SOTU speech. This is considerably lower for the ministerial councils (.03%), where incrementalism is more important.

Given the inert nature of the policy agendas, and particularly the ministerial councils – implying that governments tend to make decisions on the same issues from one year to another – there is less margin or agenda space left for the government agreement to influence these priorities. Moreover, the explained variance of the second model is high, which means that the independent variables are very successful in predicting ministerial council attention at the yearly level. VWLS R^2 is used to explain the variance because it provides a measure that is more similar to the R^2 of a regular regression. The lower R^2 for model 1 suggests that the SOTU speeches are more volatile and leave more room for issues from outside the government agreement to be included. However, and most importantly, the inclusion of new issues and policies does not increase over time.

DISCUSSION

The strength of government agreements has been demonstrated through pledge studies in a number of coalition countries, over and over again (Thomson, 2001; Mansergh and Thomson, 2007; Costello and Thomson, 2008; Moury, 2011). These studies have convincingly shown that political parties and governments tend to enact the policies they promise to implement at the onset of the legislature. Coalition formation is thus considered as a true policy arena and the resulting government agreement as a solid policy agenda (Peterson and De Ridder, 1986; Timmermans, 2003). Yet, while these studies confirm the impact of the government agreements, especially as a source for future policies, they do not tell us about the constraining impact of the government agreement or about its impact on policy throughout the legislature. The alternative research method used here, agenda-setting, is certainly not a new approach. However,

its great advantage is that, by examining the relative issue emphasis of each policy domain, it is able to compare the policy priorities of different actors – or different activities of the same actor – over time.

Hence, this technique allows us to examine whether the impact of the government agreement over policy changes over time, using the full policy agendas and not just a selection. By examining whether policy drift occurs, it is also possible to investigate this constraining power of the government agreement over time. Policy drift is conceived of as increasing ‘intrusion’ of new issues on the policy agenda and, thus, increasing divergence in policy priorities from the initial policy program, over time. The fact that drift is not observed means that the proportion of policy issues from outside the government agreement does not increase, confirming the constraining power of the coalition agreement. This is an important finding, as the strength of the impact of the government agreement in part determines the coherence and stability of coalition governments. Thus far, little empiric research had been done on the strength of the government agreement over time. The findings of this study suggest that members of the government, under impulse of their respective parties, generally do not take risks as mutual trust has settled in or as new elections near.

The statistical analyses show that coalition agreements do not lose their impact on the ensuing policies of the government over time. In fact, government agreements maintain a constraining grip on the policies the government carries out, even at the end of the legislature. This prevents policy drift – away from the original policy priorities – to occur, as suggested by Moury (2011). The analyses also confirm the government agreement as a policymaking source for the annual state of the union speeches and to a lesser degree for the weekly ministerial council meetings. Both measures of policy showed correspondence with the government agreement with respect to their policy priorities. The analyses confirm that the government agreement is not only a source for future policies, but also a constraint on new initiatives from outside of the agreement. The fact that no drift is observed can only indicate that policy promises are implemented at a steady rate and that the proportion of issues from outside the agreement also remains stable throughout the legislature.

To expect that the prime minister or ministers of particular parties would increasingly try to impose their policy priorities, as the government proceeds is not an unreasonable assumption. Certain parties can feel pressured to act after bad polls or lost elections at another policy level. Or, conversely, they might feel confident after

positive election results or polls, and try to take advantage of their renewed electoral ‘weight’. However, Belgium’s consociational democracy presupposes power sharing between political actors to maintain government stability over time. Within this perspective, the respect of the initial policy agreements (even after a number of years) is the real cornerstone of the pacification of political tensions in a multi-segmented Belgium. As no ‘policy drift’ could be observed as the government ages, this implies that the government agreement in Belgium truly is a key document to grasp the federal government’s policies and priorities. Moreover, the GA not only has a significant impact on the ensuing policies, it also maintains a grip on the policy space for new issues and policy changes that might appear during the cabinet’s term.

It needs to be noted that such change is more likely to occur in a country with many policy venues – unlike Belgium, where parties are the main political actors – where an idea can catch on and spread (Walgrave and Varone, 2008). As a partitocracy, where parties are among the most powerful political actors (De Winter *et al.*, 1996), policymaking in Belgium might be less sensitive to outside pressures than other countries. Moreover, the important cleavages in Belgian society (ideological and linguistic) emphasize the necessity of a strong and constraining governmental policy program. Hence, the findings of this study are mostly relevant to other countries governed by parties and especially countries with divided societies and governments. Nevertheless, this study markedly improves our understanding of how the government agreement is able to maintain its influence on policy over time, both as a source and as a constraint. As a consequence, the results found in this study are relevant for coalition governments, where government agreements are a crucial element for the governments’ survival. Moreover, the agenda-setting approach has proven to be very useful in mapping policy priorities across different agendas and over time, while not having to discard valuable information from the policy programs.

Finally, these findings, and particularly the comparison between the two policy agendas, tell us a great deal about the communication of the Belgian governments. This comparison, complemented by the knowledge of how the two policy measures come about, informs us on how the government’s communication (SOTUs) relates to its actions (MCs). Since the correspondence between the government agreement and the state of the union speeches remains stable over time, this suggests that the state of the union speeches, while confined by the government agreement, are not ‘misused’

by the government as a mere communication instrument and can, therefore, also be considered as a genuine policy agenda in Belgium.

6 THE DIFFERENTIAL INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL PARTIES ON FOREIGN POLICY FORMULATION IN BELGIUM

ABSTRACT

In their attempt to explain foreign policymaking, scholars have almost consistently neglected political parties. Foreign policy was long believed to be apolitical and supported by all parties across the political spectrum. Moreover, foreign policy is believed to be largely driven by external events and, thus, highly unpredictable. Nevertheless, many subdomains of foreign policy, like trade and development, are heavily planned by governments. Yet, despite the growing recognition of domestic influences on foreign policy, and despite the thriving general literature on the link between parties and policy, foreign policy scholars have failed to explore whether and how political parties establish foreign policy. Political parties are the main drive behind policy and, to study their influence on the governmental foreign policy agenda, we examine what determines the congruence between parties' manifestos and the ensuing government agreements from 1979 to 2008. We find that majority parties and parties with more negotiation experience have more impact on the content of the coalition agreements than other parties. Larger parties also have more influence than smaller parties and, finally, left wing parties also have more influence on the foreign policy program.

INTRODUCTION

In countries where coalition cabinets are the rule rather than the exception, the need for clear and binding policy guidelines is very strong. Since coalition parties want to implement specific policies and electoral pledges, managing the decision-making process within the cabinet would lead to political chaos without such guidelines. This is also true for foreign policy, where unpredicted events abroad often require a quick

and decisive response. It is, of course, impossible to consider every event thoroughly and discuss them with all the coalition partners and communicate an official reaction in a reasonable amount of time. Hence, there is a clear need for coherent general foreign policy guidelines that allow the executive, as well as the administration, to react promptly within well-defined and agreed-upon policy margins. So, in many countries, future governments rely on the negotiation of a governmental agenda and the drafting of policy documents prior to the government formation (Müller and Strøm, 2000). These documents appear to be vital, not only for the survival of the cabinet, but also for obtaining strong and coherent government policies (Timmermans, 2006).

Government formation provides a unique opportunity to study the influence of parties on policy, since it is one of the rare moments where political parties can be considered as unitary actors. Individual parties have no loyalty to pay towards a government or a coalition and speak as united entities at the negotiation table. Through their manifestos, approved by members at party conventions or general assemblies, parties ‘univocally’ express their official priorities and preferences in light of coming elections and potential government negotiations. Issued before the elections, they are also a form of advertisement to the public, containing policy pledges to be executed if/when in government (Rihoux et al., 2005). Given their purpose and timing, manifestos constitute a unique opportunity and instrument to study the impact of political parties on the executive agenda and numerous authors have already confirmed this impact in a variety of policy areas (see for example Budge and Laver, 1993; Klingemann et al., 1994; Royed and Borrelli, 1999; Caul and Gray, 2000; Keman, 2007; Crête and Diallo, 2009).

Due to the dominant focus on war and conflict in international relations studies, as well as the long prevailing (realist) assumption that international relations and foreign policy needed to be studied at the systemic level, very little is known about the role of political parties or party politics in foreign policy. So, while the potential impact of domestic determinants on foreign policy is itself no longer the subject of debate (see for example Putnam, 1988 and Hagan, 1993), very little research has examined the influence of political parties on the governmental foreign policy priorities. In a rare analysis on the role of political parties in the decision-making process, Kaarbo (1996: 502) showed that conflicts over foreign policy often occur between coalition partners in coalition governments and, thus, that party politics matter. We argue that conflicts

also occur at an early stage, before specific events occur, and in particular during the important coalition agreement negotiations.

As foreign policy has too long been considered outside the realm of party politics, our ambition is to bring foreign policy and political parties into the same equation. The main goal of this study is threefold; first, we examine whether political parties influence the foreign policy agenda and, secondly, which political parties are most successful in defining and shaping the foreign policy priorities of a newly formed government. Finally, we want to understand and explain why certain parties are more successful in determining foreign policy than others. To do so, our study examines the influence of political parties on thirty years of government formations – from 1979 until 2008 – in Belgium. Government agreements can be considered as a first bottleneck from party priorities to policy and are excellent predictors of policy outcomes in countries with coalition governments (Walgrave et al., 2006; Costello and Thomson, 2008; Moury, 2011). To explain the success of political parties in influencing the governmental agenda, we rely on two types of explanations; factors related to the negotiation process, and characteristics of the party itself.

We find that political parties have an important impact on the foreign policy priorities of the government agreement. Yet, the influence parties have on the foreign policy agenda greatly differs from one party to another, as well as within parties from one year to another. Results indicate that parties who participate in the government negotiations have more influence than the other parties. However, prior negotiation/government experience (years in government) is even more important than the mere participation. Among the party related features, we find that parties on the ideological left have more impact on the foreign policy priorities than right wing parties, even though they proportionally do not pay more attention to these issues than right wing parties. The size of the party also matters, as bigger parties have more influence.

The study of these dynamics in the Belgian context is useful and relevant for different reasons. First, Belgium is known for its consensual democracy and coalition formation, often including a large number of parties and varying in its composition. This variation in composition is of great value to this type of research and one of the main reasons to examine Belgium (Timmermans, 2006: 264). So, the Belgian case offers great potential for studying the influence of political parties. Belgium is a prime example of a partitocracy (De Winter, 1996; De Winter et al., 1996; De Winter and

Dumont, 2006) where political parties hold great power over political life, and especially for countries with coalition governments. Yet, while this might imply that the Belgian case is particularly sensitive to party effects, it needs to be noted that foreign policy is not among the most salient issues in Belgian politics. Belgium conducts a low contentious foreign policy, similar to most other small and medium Western powers, with comparable interests and means. However, as Eurobarometer figures suggest, in most countries public opinion cares more about foreign policy and defense issues than in Belgium. Hence, if political parties are found to be influential in establishing foreign policy in Belgium, this would likely also be the case in countries that care more about foreign policy, like for example the Netherlands and Denmark (see Eurobarometer figures). Hence, we believe our model provides great potential for comparative research.

FOREIGN POLICY: WHERE IS THE PARTY?

For long, the dominance of the realist paradigm in international relations hampered the study of domestic sources of foreign policy behavior and, thus, discouraged the study of political parties in a foreign policy context. As (neo-) realist theory regards the state as a unitary rational actor, looking out to maximize its interest in the most cost-efficient way (Morgenthau, 1948: 13-15; Waltz, 1979), analyses were only considered “relevant” at the system-level (Waltz, 1979; Holsti, 2004: 313-319). In this perspective, the national interest was not political and almost self-evident. Nowadays, the potential influence of domestic sources on foreign policy is widely recognized and documented. Studies on the impact of media and public opinion abound and have developed into mainstream research traditions. Yet, despite the increased attention to those domestic determinants, the link between political parties and foreign policy remains largely understudied. This is rather surprising considering the important and well-documented role parties have generally been found to play in most Western democracies, and especially on coalition governments (see for example Laver and Budge, 1992; Klingemann et al., 1994; McDonald and Budge, 2005).

In his case studies on the role of political parties in military interventions and European integration, Rathbun (2004) stresses and demonstrates that ‘the national interest’ depends on who defines it, and that political parties define the national interest according to their respective ideas and ideology. Research on the role of

parties in foreign policy decision-making mainly focused on the policy implementation phase (after the government was established). Research on congressional roll calls in the US, found that voting on foreign policy had become less bipartisan (supported by both parties) over time (McCormick and Wittkopf, 1990; Meernik, 1993), even though partisan voting had always been present (Kesselman, 1961; 1965; Fordham, 1998; Howell and Pevehouse, 2007) – contrary to popular belief. Kaarbo (1996) and Barnett (1999) also found partisan conflicts to occur at the cabinet level in coalition countries like Germany and Israel. In Germany, small parties were found to be very efficient in imposing their policy preference on the larger coalition partner (Hofferbert and Klingemann, 1990; Kaarbo, 1996). So, all these studies point to the important role of political parties on foreign policy.

To examine the influence parties have on foreign policy systematically, it would be most useful to evaluate the impact party priorities have on policy outcomes, like budgets or legislation, as has been done to assess the role of parties on policy in general (see for example Klingemann et al., 1994; McDonald and Budge, 2005; Walgrave et al., 2006). Yet, while this makes sense when studying overall governmental attention to legislation or budget distributions on all policy issues, foreign policy is hardly measurable through either budgets or legislation. Foreign policy rarely consists of legislation and budgets are only valid measures of development assistance priorities. Therefore, to examine the influence of political parties on foreign policy, we examine their impact on the government agreement.

Indeed, in most countries with coalition governments, the influence of parties occurs at an earlier stage, before cabinet negotiations or parliamentary votes, during government formation. Foreign affairs issues are subject to the same dynamics as domestic issues and can, thus, cause debate or conflict among coalition partners. As Kaarbo (1996) points out, government negotiations not only determine the ensuing policies, but the survival of the cabinet can also depend on it. Hence the need for a priori arrangements and guidelines between governing parties to reduce potential conflict among the coalition partners and a possible fall of the cabinet. Though this might seem unlikely, considering the generally low public interest, in 2010, the Dutch Balkenende IV cabinet fell over a decision to participate in a military mission in Afghanistan.

Most coalition governments, like Germany, The Netherlands and Belgium, make up such government agreements prior to government installment (Timmermans, 2003:

12-13). Given that they contain the main public policies that will be carried out by the future government regarding all policy domains – often in great detail and with concrete proposals – they are of great value for the study of the impact of political parties on policy, including foreign affairs.

THE PROGRAM TO POLICY LINKAGE

Prior empirical research indicates that party manifestos are the only publicized official documents that present party preferences and priorities on a wide range of issues and allow for a comparative and longitudinal analysis (see for example Klingemann et al., 1994, 2006; Budge et al., 2001). In most countries, political parties draft a manifesto before elections, which are used to assess the party agenda, since other potential sources of party positions, such as speeches or press releases, do not exhibit the same characteristics of comparability. Given the primary objective to attract votes, party manifestos are considered as accurate representations of parties' ideal societal vision and their translation into governmental policies and priorities. According to mandate theory (Birch, 1975; Klingemann et al., 1994), winning parties receive a 'mandate' from the voter and should not renege on their campaign promises but instead try to implement their electoral program as much as possible while in power. Therefore, given the purpose of party manifestos, as well as the temporal proximity between their publication and government formation, they constitute excellent potential explanations and predictors of future policies.

One way to examine the influence of parties on policy is to derive ideological policy positions (on a left-right scale), based on the emphasis of different policy issues in party manifestos. This technique, championed by the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) then allows us to 'match' these party positions to the subsequent governmental policies. Different large-scale CMP studies found majority parties to influence government programs and declarations (Laver and Budge, 1992; Budge and Laver, 1993) as well as policy budgets (Klingemann et al., 1994, 2006; McDonald and Budge, 2005) in a variety of countries. This means that governments composed by more left wing parties, for example, enact policies that are also more left leaning.

Table 6.1 Review of pledge enactment rates (at least partially fulfilled) for party and government programs from previous studies

Country	Years	Party Program (avg. % implemented)	Government Program (avg. % implemented)	Yearly gov. policy statements (avg. % implemented)	Author(s)
UK	1945-1979	73 %* (Gov. parties)		83 %	Rallings, 1987
	1979-1987	85 % (Gov. party) 24 % (Opp. party)			Royed, 1996
Greece	1981-1985	70 % (Gov. party)			Kalogeropoulou, 1989
Canada	1945-1979	72 % (Gov. party)		83 %	Rallings, 1987
US	1969-1972	66 % (Gov. party)# 65 % (Opp. party)			Pomper and Lederman, 1982
	1980-1988	50 % (Gov. party)# 60 % (Opp. party)			Royed, 1996
Spain⁺⁺	1989-2004	54 % (Gov. party) 35 % (Opp. party)			Artés and Bustos, 2008
Ireland⁺	2002-2007	65 % (Gov. parties) 40 % (Opp. parties)	77 % (of governing party pledges in Gov. Prog.)		Costello and Thomson, 2008
	1977-2002	50 % (Gov. parties) 45 % (Opp. parties)	63% (of governing party pledges in Gov. Prog.)		Mansergh and Thomson, 2007
Belgium	1992-1995 & 1999-2003		78 %		Moury, 2009; 2011
The Netherlands	1989-1994 & 1998-2002		69 %		Moury, 2009; 2011
	1986-1998	57 % (Gov. parties) 33 % (Opp. parties)	82% (of governing party pledges in Gov. Prog.)		Thomson, 2001
Italy	1996-1998 & 2001-2005		54 %		Moury, 2009; 2011

* 64 percent if we include the three Parliaments that lasted less than two years

+ Only socio-economic pledges (43)

++ The study compares pledge enactments of the CiU as a simple opposition party (1989 & 2000) to its support of a minority government (1993 & 1996).

Governing party refers to the party controlling Congress. During this period, the governing party (Democrats) did not hold the Presidency. After 1986, Congress was divided with a Republican Senate.

Using a very different approach, pledge studies examine whether – and to what extent – parties keep their promises, once in office. An overview of prior research (Table 6.1) shows how these studies consistently confirm the importance and relevance of party manifestos and/or government agreements. They found single party cabinets (UK and US) – whose manifestos can be considered as government agreements – to be more effective in carrying out policy pledges, and especially effective in a country with very centralized powers, like the UK (Rallings, 1987, Royed, 1996). While coalition parties did not seem to perform that well at first glance, looking at party pledges included in the government agreements considerably increased the pledge enactment rate of governing parties in coalition governments. In The Netherlands, the enactment rate for governing parties increased from 57% to 82% (Thomson, 2001: 88) after inclusion in the government agreement, a rate comparable to the one found in the UK. Similar results were found in coalition governments in Ireland (Mansergh and Thomson, 2007) where the government agreement proved to be one of the best predictors of pledge enactment (Costello and Thomson, 2008). Moury (2011) also found relatively high enactment rates for all pledges from the government agreement (not just those of the majority parties) in Belgium (78%) and the Netherlands (69%) and slightly lower ones in Italy (54%).

Using an alternative – agenda-setting – approach, Walgrave et al. (2006) studied the role of political parties in policymaking in Belgium, examining the congruence between different political and policy agendas by means of correlations. While external pressure indicators (parliamentary attention, media coverage and protests) were found to predict yearly changes in legislation best, government agreements were the best predictors of overall issue attention throughout the entire legislation, confirming the findings of the pledge studies.

Hence, it seems fair to conclude that party manifestos and government agreements are not just rhetoric tools of parties to attract voters. Instead, they bear significant influence on the policies of the future government. Moreover, coalition agreements do not merely focus on non-divisive issues or omit the most contentious matters, as Klingemann et al. (1994) suggest. In fact, they include issues that are most salient to coalition parties (Thomson, 1999; Timmermans, 2003; Rihoux et al., 2005) to avoid clashes along the way and reflect the image of a decisive, united, body that will make it through the full four-year term (Timmermans and Moury, 2006). As a result, like Peterson and De Ridder (1986), we consider government formation as a policymaking

arena and the government agreement as a policy agenda (as do Timmermans and Moury, 2006).

Taking into account the problems in quantifying foreign policy outcomes, discussed above, the government agreement constitutes an ideal proxy to measure government priorities and examine the role political parties play throughout the policy formulation phase. Moreover, the foreign policy sections of the government agreement on average contain more specific proposals than the other policy domains combined⁴⁴.

GOVERNMENT FORMATION IN BELGIUM

Government agreements “constitute the basis of what is presented officially by the prime minister when the new government takes office, the government program or declaration” (Timmermans, 2003: 12). Negotiating the content of the government agreement thus constitutes the most intensive step towards establishing a new government and requires an important amount of time, often taking several weeks. The drafting process and the style of negotiating the government agreements vary greatly (Timmermans, 2003: 34) according to the political environment, the personality of the formateur (the person appointed to form a new government and likely future Prime Minister), the negotiating parties and the balance of power between negotiators. Although coalition agreements are not legally binding, they often have an important impact as they bring together several bodies of the coalition parties: they are signed by all party presidents of the coalition after which party MPs and party members endorse this document during participation at party congresses and general assemblies. This party investiture via the congresses is therefore a crucial step in making agreements stick, not only between parties, but also within parties (De Winter et al., 2000). In Belgium, the coalition agreement heavily constrains the parliamentary agenda, as majority MPs are ‘forced’ to stay in line with what has been decided during the coalition formation process.

As we mentioned, very few studies have investigated the link between the foreign policy priorities of political parties and those of the government. This study explores this particular relationship, examining party manifestos and government agreements from 1979-2008. The lack of prior research and the great potential in studying party effects on government entails a large number of questions and ensuing hypotheses.

⁴⁴ Sentences were also coded to distinguish between concrete proposals and vague rethoric. The concept of proposals is similar to that of pledges, but its definition is less strict: we defined a proposal as concrete and testable.

The extensive time frame of this study, with different coalitions, ingoing and outgoing parties, offers a unique opportunity to explore and answer these questions. Indeed, not all parties have the same influence on the government agreement. Some parties are key players and should have a larger influence on the content of this document than others (Debus, 2008: 516). The first goal is to identify which parties are most influential when it comes to establishing the foreign policy agenda of the future government. Second, we want to find out whether there exists a pattern to this influence. Our hypotheses regarding the relation between parties and government are grouped into two separate sets of hypotheses; the first set is related to the negotiation process while the second covers party-related features.

EFFECTS RELATED TO THE NEGOTIATION PROCESS

Not every party takes part in the government formation negotiations. Some parties – like extreme-right parties – are a priori excluded from these negotiations⁴⁵ in Belgium, while others (chose to) remain in the opposition. Those parties forming a new government are considered to receive a mandate from the voter to carry out their policies once in office (Klingemann et al., 1994). As we have just noted, political parties – and particularly mainstream parties – were closer to the government agreement when they were part of the majority (Laver and Budge, 1992; Budge and Laver, 1993). In Belgium, Rihoux et al. (2005) examined the link between party manifestos and government agreements between 1991 and 1999 and also found that coalition parties had more influence on the governmental agenda than opposition parties. Hence:

H1: Majority parties have more influence on the foreign policy priorities of the GA than opposition parties.

Throughout recent Belgian political history, certain parties have participated more frequently in the government formation process than others, like the Flemish and French-speaking Christian-democrat parties, for example. This differentiated participation in previous cabinets and government formation makes that some parties accumulated more negotiation and government experience than others. This means that certain parties have a lot of expert negotiators from previous government negotiations who know the negotiators from the other parties very well; they know

⁴⁵ A 'cordon sanitaire' was established by all Belgian political parties in order to prevent the extreme-right parties from entering national and regional cabinets.

how they negotiate, what their strengths and weaknesses are and, especially, how to deal with them to obtain the most out of the negotiations. Timmermans (2006: 273) also stresses the importance of former negotiators as most qualified exegetes regarding coalition agreements. Those parties with lots of government experience that are not included in the government formation also have more experience in finding ways to influence policy. As a result;

H2: Parties with a large government/negotiation experience have more influence on the foreign policy priorities of the GA than the other parties.

The advantage of negotiation experience can also be policy-specific. The government portfolio's are only allocated at the end of the government formation process – that is after the formal acceptance by each party body (party general assembly, congress, etc.) of the content of the government agreement and after all partners have signed the coalition agreement. Hence, incumbent parties are expected to have a larger impact on the content of the GA. In Belgium, Budge and Laver (1993: 517) observed that parties were closer to the government agreement when they were in government than when they were not. While general incumbency – having been part of the former government – can be a determining factor of the influence a party has on the GA, here, we disentangle incumbency and look at the cumulative number of foreign affairs-related incumbent positions.

Indeed, those parties holding the key foreign affairs portfolios are expected to weigh more heavily on the foreign policy priorities expressed in the GA. Therefore, we expect to observe incumbency effects concerning the foreign affairs portfolios dealing (in)directly with foreign affairs (the minister of foreign affairs, the minister of defense, the minister of foreign trade, the minister / state secretary⁴⁶ of development aid and the minister / state secretary of European affairs). Table 6.2 offers a detailed overview of the portfolios held by the different parties at the time of the government formation. Therefore;

H3: Parties holding a larger number of foreign policy related portfolios (among which the ministers of foreign affairs, defense, foreign trade, development aid and/or European affairs) at the time of the negotiations have more influence on the foreign policy priorities of the GA than other parties.

⁴⁶ The foreign affairs-related state secretaries (junior ministers) are often 'attached' to the minister of foreign affairs.

Table 6.2 Incumbent Ministers at time of the GA drafting

	<i>Prime Minister</i>		<i>Foreign Affairs</i>		<i>Defense</i>		<i>Foreign Trade</i>		<i>Development Aid</i>		<i>European Affairs</i>	
	<i>Name</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Party</i>
<i>1979</i>	Vanden Boeynants	PSC	Simonet	PS	Vanden Boeynants	PSC	De Bruyne	VU	Outers	FDF	-	-
<i>1980</i>	Martens	CVP	Simonet	PS	Desmarests	PSC	Urbain	PS	Eyskens	CVP	-	-
<i>1981</i>	Martens	CVP	Nothomb	PSC	Swaelen	CVP	Urbain	PS	Coens	SP	-	-
<i>1985</i>	Martens	CVP	Tindemans	CVP	Vreven	PVV	Kempinaire	PVV	<i>de Donnée</i>	<i>PRL</i>	<i>De Keersmaeker</i>	<i>CVP</i>
<i>1988</i>	Martens	CVP	Tindemans	CVP	de Donnée	PRL	Knoops	PRL	<i>Kempinaire</i>	<i>PVV</i>	<i>De Keersmaeker</i>	<i>CVP</i>
<i>1992</i>	Martens	CVP	Eyskens	CVP	Cöeme	PS	Urbain	PS	Derycke	SP	<i>De Keersmaeker</i> <i>Lizin</i>	<i>CVP</i> <i>PS</i>
<i>1995</i>	Dehaene	CVP	Vandenbroucke	SP	Pinxten	CVP	Urbain	PS	<i>Derycke</i>	<i>SP</i>	Urbain	PS
<i>1999</i>	Dehaene	CVP	Derycke	SP	Poncelet	PSC	Di Rupo	PS	Moreels	CVP	-	-
<i>2003</i>	Verhofstadt	VLD	Michel	PRL	Flahaut	PS	Neyts	VLD	<i>Boutmans</i>	<i>Agalev</i>	-	-

Note: *Italic*= State Secretary.

The negotiations leading to the coalition agreement and the formation of a new cabinet are headed by the *formateur*. This formateur – who most often becomes the Prime Minister of the newly formed cabinet – not only leads the negotiations but is also expected to have a significant impact on the content of the GA. As head of the government, the prime minister has a function of external representation abroad (for example participation in EU summits). Therefore, it is fair to assume that the formateur has a larger influence than other negotiators on the content of the GA regarding foreign affairs issues. Moreover, since the formateur does not theoretically represent the interests of his party at the negotiation table, another representative of his party also attends the negotiations. Finally, the formateur tends to belong to the largest party in parliament and thus in the cabinet. The relative weight of his party over the other parties relies on both the higher number of seats in the Lower House and the higher number and greater quality of portfolios in the federal cabinet. Using an inferred left-right scale, Hearl (1992) found that the CVP, the party of the prime minister in Belgium, largely dominated its partners in terms of policy pay-offs. As a result, the party of the formateur is expected to have a larger influence on the government foreign policy agenda than the other political parties.

H4: The party of the formateur has more influence on the GA than the other parties.

PARTY RELATED EFFECTS

In addition to the variables related to the coalition formation process, we also expect certain parties to have a larger impact on the government priorities than others because of features related to the party itself. Coalition theory stresses the importance of the programmatic position of the parties and more particularly their central position (Budge and Laver, 1993: 502). A central programmatic position is often associated with a higher probability of becoming an important player during negotiations. Debus (2008) includes this programmatic position in his definition of the concept of key player. Moreover, Budge and Laver (1993: 501) empirically found the party controlling the median legislator to be a policy dictator. As mentioned, in Belgium, Hearl (1992) found the CVP – the main centrist party – to be the most influential party. Hence;

H5: Parties at the centre of the left-right scale have more influence on the foreign policy priorities of the GA than the other parties.

McDonald and Budge's (2005) median voter theory claims that elections are not only about who wins but also about identifying the median voter position. Election results indicate which parties come closest to this position. In this perspective, the government carries out the policy preferences of the biggest parties, as those are expected to represent the median voter best. As some opposition parties are bigger than certain majority parties, governments will also try to take into account the preferences of those parties and the voters they represent. This is also the basis of consociationalism. Table 6.1 shows that governments not only enact pledges from parties that constitute the majority. Pledges from opposition parties are enacted as well. It is also for this reason that Rihoux et al. (2005), for example, found the extreme right party to have an important influence on the Belgian government agreements between 1991 and 1999. As a result, we argue that:

H6: Large parties have a larger influence on the GA than smaller parties.

Finally, we believe that parties who pay more attention to foreign policy issues in their manifesto will have a larger influence on the government agreement. The analysis of the electoral platforms allows us to measure whether foreign policy is an important policy domain for each party. Though Karboon (1996: 523) did not find issue salience to lead to a higher influence of junior parties in the German and Israeli cases during the policy implementation phase, we still expect that those parties will try to have a larger impact on the content of the GA regarding these issues during the policy formulation phase.

H7: Parties that dedicate more attention to foreign policy issues have more influence on the foreign policy priorities of the GA than other parties.

DATA AND METHOD

The content of all the party manifestos and government agreements at the national level from 1979 to 2008 has been coded at the quasi-sentence level using an adapted version of Baumgartner and Jones' (1993) policy issue codebook. Only those parties obtaining at least one seat in the Lower Chamber are included in the analyses⁴⁷.

⁴⁷ Except for the UDRT/RAD (three seats in 1981 and one seat in 1985) and ROSSEM (three seats in 1991). On the other hand, two parties with no direct representation in the Lower Chamber were included in our models. Groen! Was included in 2003 even though they did not obtain any seat after those elections. N-VA was also included in 2007 because of its success in these elections (8 federal MPs) and its later success in the 2010 elections, even though they were still in an electoral alliance with the CD&V in 2007.

Student assistants coded the documents after extensive training and with continued feedback. 31 issues related to foreign trade, defense, foreign affairs and development aid have been selected out of about 250 specific policy domains to measure the foreign policy agenda. Within the defense category, those issues of a strictly domestic nature were removed. Hence, our codebook not only includes the various subfields of foreign policy, but also allows detailing these sectors into specific sub-issues, which means that our detailed and encompassing codebook is particularly suited for the analysis of party preferences regarding foreign policy.

Our empirical analyses are carried out following a two-step procedure. First, descriptive and correlational analyses detail which parties' foreign policy priorities correspond best to those of the government agreements. These correlations are then used as a measure of influence and a regression model explains what determines this influence in a systematic way for all the parties. Ideally, we would also perform this regression on government parties only. However, the limited number of observations (40) does not allow for such analysis. To compensate for this shortcoming, additional bivariate tests are carried out on majority parties only to test the importance of the independent variables after the coalition partners have been selected.

We proceed as follows: first, the absolute counts of our 31 foreign policy categories are transformed into percentages, providing us with a list of proportional priorities for each party and each election year *within* the foreign policy section of the manifestos. Taking into account the nature of the data and our goal to compare relationships between the different parties and government across time, we use Spearman rank correlations (ρ) to study how well foreign policy priorities across the different parties match those of the government. Spearman rank correlations are chosen over standard Pearson correlations because the distribution of attention to foreign policy issues is distributed unevenly. As certain issues (e.g. European affairs and general foreign policy) receive considerably more attention than others, Pearson correlations might overestimate the correspondence between the different agendas. Moreover, rank correlations are very suitable for capturing correspondence of priorities.

The temporal link (elections before negotiations), as well as the purpose of party manifestos (express priorities and positions) makes these correlations a good indicator of influence. So, the higher the correlation between these two agenda's, the larger the influence a party has on the foreign policy priorities of the governmental agenda. Correlations are commonly used in the analysis of party manifestos (see for example

Janda, Harmel, Edens and Goff, 1995; Petry and Landry, 2001; Gabel and Hix, 2002; Netjes and Binnema, 2007; or Ray, 2007).

In the second phase, we perform multivariate explanatory analyses using these correlation scores as the dependent variable to find out what determines the differential influence of parties. Our data consists of observations about manifestos that are not independent, meaning that they are observed for the same parties over time and manifestos are observed for different parties but for the same election. Our models therefore have to take into account that our data is depending on both party and time. It basically consists of pooled cross-sectional time series data – panel data. Moreover, since our dataset might be troubled by autocorrelation and/or heteroscedasticity, we opt for regression models with panel-corrected standard errors (PCSE).

The independent variables are grouped into two batches; negotiation variables and variables related to the parties. The first group includes a majority dummy indicating whether a party is included in the negotiation process or not. A second variable determines the negotiation and government experience of a party and is based on the number of years spent in government since 1945. A third variable, called IR incumbency, consists of a cumulative index of the portfolios related to foreign affairs (including the ministerial portfolios of the minister of foreign affairs, defense, foreign trade, development aid and/or European affairs). Finally, a formateur dummy indicates whether a party delivered the formateur of the negotiations leading to the government.

With respect to the party related aspects, the ideological position of a party is assessed on a left-right scale, for each party system – Flemish and French-speaking – as calculated by the Comparative Manifestos Project. The party size is measured in terms of the percentage of votes obtained at the corresponding elections. The percentage of votes is chosen over the number of seats, as it provides more nuance; two parties can, for example, have the same number of seats without having the same percentage of votes. Finally, the variable ‘IR specialist’ is based on the saliency of the 31 foreign policy codes in each individual party manifesto, as a proportion of the entire manifesto. This assesses to what extent a party is invested in foreign policy.

Additionally, three control variables are tested. A language dummy variable controls for the effect of the two party systems; that is whether Flemish or French-speaking parties have a larger impact than parties from the other linguistic community. As its name suggests, the variable ‘time since elections’ measures the number of days between the elections and the signature of the coalition agreement. It is reasonable to

expect greater correspondence between parties and government as more time and effort is invested in drafting the agreement. Finally, Length ratio controls for the length of the different documents and has been measured as the ratio of the length (in number of coded units) of the party manifesto to the length (in number of coded units) of the coalition agreement. As longer documents may emphasize a greater variety of issues, greater correspondence in the length ratio of the manifestos and the government agreement may entail a better match in the issue emphasis

RESULTS

The rank correlations between party and government priorities (table 6.3) show that influence on the government agreements greatly differs from one party to another, as well as over time. Correspondence ranges from -.13 for the Flemish green party in 1981 (least agreement) to .95 for the Flemish liberals in 1991 (most agreement). Table 6.3 also shows that most parties have similar priorities to those of the future government, as expressed through the correlations. About 60% of the parties have a high influence ($\rho \geq .70$), which is fairly high, considering the 31 specific foreign policy issues. Notwithstanding, there is still a lot of variation. These results suggest that political parties matter when establishing the foreign policy priorities in the government agreement and indicate that certain parties have more influence than others. Hence, as party priorities and their correspondence with the government agreement differ, it seems useful and relevant to analyze what exactly determines these differences in correspondence.

Table 6.3 Spearman rank correlations between foreign policy priorities of political parties and government agreements

Year	cdv	cdh	spa	ps	vld	mr	groen	ecolo	nva	fdf	vb	fn	rw
1979	.88	.	.86	.	.59	.	.	.	.35	.	.80	.	.87
1980	.93	.	.86	.	.58	.	.	.	.47	.	.73	.	.90
1981	.34	.73	.28	.59	.25	.12	-.13	-.09	.61	.19	.21	.	.17
1985	.11	-.00	.05	.07	.25	.46	-.08	-.09	-.04	-.10	-.02	.	.
1988	.84	.67	.50	.79	.72	.52	.11	.71	.69	.51	.60	.	.
1992	.76	.92	.75	.91	.95	.27	.20	.64	.80	.81	.91	.82	.
1995	.91	.86	.86	.82	.90	.77	.71	.03	.92	.	.77	.53	.
1999	.84	.76	.76	.86	.74	.87	.91	.92	.81	.	.75	.80	.
2003	.89	.74	.76	.82	.92	.75	.83	.94	.85	.	.87	.83	.
2008	.92	.79	.90	.61	.64	.89	.83	.72	.89	.	.84	.64	.

Note: Grey background for majority parties

We ran a series of concurrent models based on our two sets of explanatory variables (Table 6.4). Our dependent variable is the degree of association between party manifestos and government agreements, as measured through the aforementioned rank correlations of the saliency of the 31 foreign affairs policy issues. The first model (Model 1) examines the impact of factors related to the negotiation process on the link between electoral platforms and government agreements. We find that parties included in the negotiation process have more influence on the GA than those who are not (H1). However, this variable is not shown in our explanatory model here, as it correlated too highly with the negotiation experience of parties. This is because governments are generally made up from the same traditional parties. So, we ran two separate models (one with a 'majority' variable and another one with 'negotiation experience') and decided to keep the model with the largest explanatory power ($R^2=.23$ vs. $R^2=.19$). Experience in prior government negotiations thus affects the impact of a party on the government agreement (H2); the more experienced a party, the higher its influence. Per additional year in office, the correlation – and influence – of the party on the GA increases with .04. Yet, when we only take into account majority parties and divide parties into two groups – according to their government experience (more or less than the mean experience) – we see that government experience no longer plays a role.

Next, we argued that the parties holding the foreign affairs portfolios at the time of the negotiations of the GA would have a larger impact on its content than the others parties (H3). Our analyses do not confirm this hypothesis. Moreover, among negotiating parties, too, incumbency does not increase a party's influence on the GA. Contrary to our expectations, the party of the formateur is not able to exploit its position in terms of policy rewards (H4). Perhaps foreign policy is one of the policy domains where the party of the formateur makes concessions, as part of the greater government deal.

The second set of hypotheses tests the impact of party related variables on the influence parties have on the government agreement (Model 2). When it comes to party ideology, we consistently find that left wing parties have more influence on the government agreement, and not the central parties, as we hypothesized (H5). This is not due to a bigger investment in foreign policy issues, as the manifestos of left wing parties do not proportionally contain more foreign policy issues. The greater influence of left wing parties is marginally significant ($p=.07$) in model 2 and persists among negotiating parties. The size of a party also matters, as it increases the correlation by

.016 for each additional percent of the votes (H6). However, among negotiating parties, the size of the party no longer seems to matter. This suggests that size mainly matters to be included in the negotiations. Finally, those parties paying relatively more attention to foreign policy issues generally do not have a higher influence on the ensuing foreign policy agenda (H7). However, investment in foreign policy pays off once a party is included in the coalition negotiations.

Table 6.4 Regression results explaining the congruence between party manifestos and government agreements

		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
		Coef. (SE)	Coef. (SE)	Coef. (SE)
Negotiation Variables	Negotiation Experience	4.75* (1.86)	-	2.85 (1.92)
	IR Incumbency	35.11 (35.89)	-	-
	Formateur	8.17 (75.99)	-	-
Party / Election Variables	Left-right	-	-3.42 (1.93)	-3.63* (1.80)
	Party Size	-	16.33*** (4.88)	10.89* (5.29)
	IR Specialist	-	5.70 (8.27)	-
Control Variable	Length Ratio	-.47*** (.09)	-.54*** (.10)	-.52*** (.09)
	Constant	585.16*** (47.21)	494.47*** (85.61)	541.07*** (54.63)
	N	102	102	102
	# Parties	13	13	13
	R ²	.23	.26	.26

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

Of the three control variables, only one has a significant and consistent impact: the length ratio between the manifesto and government agreement. Both documents are more alike when the differential in terms of absolute number of references to foreign policy issues is smaller. Flemish parties do not have a significantly larger impact on the content of the GA than French-speaking parties or vice-versa. The time between the elections and the establishment of the government agreement also does not affect the degree to which parties are able to influence its content when it comes to foreign policy.

Model 3 includes the four variables that have a significant impact on the influence parties exert on the governmental foreign policy agenda. The goal of this third model is to verify whether these variables exert their influence independently from one

another. This is an important step, as the number of observations does not allow us to reliably test all the independent variables together. Model 3 confirms the importance of all the variables except for negotiation experience. Negotiation experience and size correlate at .62, because the same, large, parties always tend to form governments.

Overall, the three explanatory models presented here manage to explain a fair amount of variation of the dependent variable ($.23 < R^2 < .26$). Moreover, a number of negotiation and party variables are revealed to play an important role in explaining why some parties are able to exert more influence on the government agreement than others. To summarize our findings, it seems clear that a first crucial step for parties is to take part in the government negotiations. Once included in these negotiations, left wing parties and parties invested in foreign affairs are better able to impose their priorities in the government agreement.

DISCUSSION

As parties set forth different policy priorities and preferences in their manifestos to seek the vote of the public, certain parties are more successful in imposing their priorities onto the next governmental program than others. Through the examination of party manifestos and government agreements in Belgium over a 30-year period, we observed that a large number of parties' foreign policy priorities correspond to those of the following government, confirming the influence of political parties on foreign policy. Moreover, our multivariate analyses confirm a number of well-known findings of coalition theory. Hence, large parties with cabinet experience and those participating in the negotiation process have a higher influence on the content of the government agreement than other parties. More surprisingly, left wing parties systematically have more influence on the governmental foreign policy program.

A prominent element of the consociational pattern of policy formulation relates to the specific position of the party of the formateur. The role of this party is often that of a broker between the negotiating parties whereby prime ministers are expected to assume a role of policy coordinator and arbitrator (Timmermans, 2006: 277). Instead of using its privileged position to impose its policy views onto the government agreement, the party of the formateur may favor consensus among the negotiators and concede policies to small and even opposition parties. One could argue that foreign policy is too unpredictable and dependent on current events to include specific policies

in the government agreement. Foreign policy statements contained in the government agreement would then be kept purposefully vague to allow the Prime Minister to regain influence afterwards. However, our data do not support this thesis. As we previously mentioned, the foreign policy section of the government agreements contain significantly more concrete proposals than other policy domains (combined). Hence, we can assume that the concessions made in foreign policy are solid and specific. Alternatively, one could also hypothesize that the central parties and the parties of the formateur mainly care about socio-economic issues (or other sensitive policy issues) and leave the initiative to other parties on other types of issues, such as foreign policy, as a compromise.

Finally, we believe that this study confirms the relevance and importance of studying political parties and their influence in the field of foreign policy. This study demonstrates that political parties, especially once elected into a new government, are able to determine or shift the foreign policy course of a country. Descriptive and correlational results confirm Rathbun's argument (2004) that the interest of a country can be interpreted in different ways, depending on the ideological and ideational inclination of the coalition partners, and changing over time. As political parties can exert their influence at different moments – not only during government negotiations, but also in Parliament (McCormick and Wittkopf, 1990; Fordham, 1998; Kesgin and Kaarbo, 2010) or in cabinet negotiations (Kaarbo, 1996; Barnett, 1999) – we argue and urge for more research on the role of political elites, parties and party politics in the field of foreign policy.

A first challenge will be to examine the influence of parties using a two-stage approach to better match the realities of the post-election dynamics and gain an even better insight in the influence of those parties negotiating the new coalition, specifically. In addition, a future research agenda should also include comparative studies to increase the generalizability of these findings. Belgium is a particularly grateful country to study the impact of political parties, given that it is a partitocracy where parties are involved at every stage of the policymaking process (De Winter et al., 1996; De Winter and Dumont, 2006). However, as we have argued earlier, if political parties are heavily invested in foreign policy in a country like Belgium where this is not among the most contentious or salient issues, we may expect to find similar effects in countries where foreign policy is considered more important – even if political parties hold less power than in Belgium.

PART THREE

MEDIA AND FOREIGN POLICY

7 DO THE MEDIA INFLUENCE FOREIGN AID BECAUSE OR IN SPITE OF THE BUREAUCRACY? A CASE STUDY OF BELGIAN AID DETERMINANTS.

ABSTRACT

Bureaucrats are considered to play a determining role on how much media signals influence the allocation of foreign aid. As foreign aid decision-making is assumed to be a predominantly bureaucratic matter, bureaucratic responsiveness to media has often been concluded from the observation that foreign aid responds to media attention. Yet, studying this bureaucratic responsiveness directly has proven to be a challenging task due to the difficulties in quantitatively measuring bureaucratic activities. This study examines the different determinants of Belgian foreign aid to specific countries per year from 1995-2008 and addresses the question of bureaucratic responsiveness to media directly by isolating aid that is exclusively decided by the bureaucracy.

INTRODUCTION

With millions of people depending on foreign aid for development or sheer survival, knowing what determines aid allocation decisions in donor countries is clearly an important question; especially since many OECD countries have vowed and achieved to increase their financial contributions to 0.7% of their annual national budgets. The motives and grounds on which donor countries distribute aid to developing countries have mostly been understood and studied according to the traditional paradigms in international relations; realists consider aid to be an instrument within the broader foreign policy to pursue its strategic interest; idealists see aid as a moral responsibility of richer countries, whereas the less influential neo-Marxist theorists believe donors offer aid for commercial returns. Several authors have pointed to the fact that domestic determinants, like media and public opinion, have largely been neglected by these

traditional theories (see for example Lancaster, 2007: 3-5; Mavrotas and McGillivray, 2009: 6-7). During the last decade, however, a number of studies found domestic news media to influence foreign aid allocations in a number of major donor countries (Van Belle and Hook, 2000; Van Belle et al., 2004; Rioux and Van Belle, 2005). The authors of these studies argue that this media effect occurs due to bureaucratic responsiveness to news media. Accordingly, bureaucrats try to be reactive to news media - as the best available proxy for public opinion - to avoid scrutiny and sanctions from elected officials who, themselves, have to meet the demands of the public to get re-elected. Hence, increased media attention to specific countries leads to higher aid allocations to those countries. So, while media scholars and political scientists have struggled to find evidence of media effects in many policy domains, research on foreign aid determinants suggests substantial political and, more importantly, bureaucratic reactions to media attention. Understanding the mechanisms behind this media effect and the attribution of responsiveness (*who is responsible; politicians or bureaucrats?*) is a crucial element to the theory on media effects and administrative behavior. Noting that the link between media and civil servants is underexplored, this study argues that media can exert influence through, but also despite, the bureaucracy. So far, bureaucratic responsiveness was mainly deduced from the assumption that civil servants generally dominate foreign aid decision-making and the fact that aid had been found to respond to media attention.

First, using a new dataset drawn from the Belgian Official Development Assistance (ODA), this article shows that studying media influences on foreign aid at the highest aggregated level (*total aid*) can lead to hasty and incorrect conclusions regarding the mechanisms by which the media generates responsive changes in aid allocation. While total aid to recipient countries does respond to fluctuations in media attention, analyses of disaggregated allocations show that the impact of media in Belgium is not necessarily due to bureaucratic initiatives (*bureaucratic aid*), but can also be the result of aid allocations spent by non-governmental actors, like NGOs, international organizations and universities (*non-bureaucratic aid*). Second, this study improves the existing empirical model (Van Belle et al., 2004) by including real world events in the recipient countries (natural disasters and violent conflict) and controlling for important domestic and international structural changes over time. Van Belle and Potter's analysis of Japanese aid allocations (2011), for example, point to the importance of changes at the international level. The relatively long time series of this study (1995-

2008) allows for such a comparison and shows that both domestic (administrative reforms) and international evolutions (9/11) can alter existing policymaking dynamics. I find the influence of media before 2001 to be in greater part due to bureaucratic responsiveness. However, in subsequent years following 9/11, this media effect seems to a larger degree to be a consequence of non-bureaucratic initiatives. Furthermore, aid distributions seem highly responsive to the economic needs of recipient countries, and are negatively related to trade considerations. Strategic motives also still seem to matter, as more aid is given to former colonies Congo, Rwanda and Burundi, as well as to francophone countries. Real world indicators, like violent conflicts and natural disasters, mainly affect aid flows after 2001.

The analysis of the determinants of foreign aid allocations and the role of media effects in particular, is important and relevant, as aid budgets represent a unique opportunity to assess and examine foreign policy – or at least certain aspects of it – in a quantifiable way (see Meernik, Krueger and Poe, 1998; Van Belle et al., 2004 for similar arguments). As aid needs to be understood in a broader policy context, recent increases in Belgian allocations to Afghanistan and Iraq, or the recent partnership with the Palestinian authorities, can be seen as reflections of more general policy shifts. Moreover, it allows for the analysis of media effects in a straightforward and uncomplicated policy environment. As Van Belle (2003) points out, compared to other (foreign) policy domains, foreign aid is generally more one-dimensional, whereby (public and media) preferences mainly consist of either more or less aid to specific countries, rather than preferences over the specifics of how aid is allocated on the ground in recipient countries.

MOTIVES OF FOREIGN AID

TRADITIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Since the late fifties, foreign aid has been the subject of continued debate. Its goals, as well as its determinants and efficiency, have been heavily theorized and scrutinized. Several authors have noted that the study of foreign aid has mostly been conducted within traditional international relations perspectives, with very little to no attention for domestic determinants (see for example Thérien and Noël, 2000; Van Belle et al., 2004: 8-15; Lancaster, 2007: 3-5; Mavrotas and McGillivray, 2009: 6-7). The main paradigms, through which foreign aid has been examined, differ mainly in the

perception of whose interest foreign aid really serves: the donor or the recipient country. Among the first to theorize the purpose of foreign aid, realists perceived aid as an instrument of foreign policy, serving the donor country's strategic interests (Morgenthau, 1962). In this perspective, foreign policy actions are taken to maximize these interests (Korb, 2008: 27-29), regardless of the socio-economic needs and developments of recipient countries. During the cold war, different types of foreign aid served as incentives or bribes to developing countries to remain in one's 'sphere of influence' (Morgenthau, 1962). An often-cited illustration of such a strategic motive is the disproportionately large aid flows allocated by the U.S. to its important allies Egypt and Israel (Alesina and Dollar, 2000; Lancaster, 2007: 80). Several studies confirmed the importance of these strategic motives, as greater aid flows were allocated to countries vital to donors' foreign policy, (McGillivray and Oczkowski, 1992; Hook, 1995; Alesina and Dollar, 2000; Rioux and Van Belle, 2005; Kuziemko and Werker, 2006). Commercial motives suggest that aid is donated in exchange for privileged trade partnerships or investment opportunities for companies from the donor country (see Mavrotas and McGillivray, 2009: 6). Neo-Marxists claim that rich countries donate foreign aid to maintain control over and exploitation in poor recipient countries, where aid is seen as a way to structurally sustain the existing inequalities among nations. Such a commercial motive is mostly assessed through the levels of trade between donor and recipient (Dudley and Montmarquette, 1976; Cingranelli and Pasquarello, 1985; Meernik et al., 1998; Van Belle et al., 2004).

By the 1970's aid had become a common aspect of relations between industrialized and poor countries (Lancaster, 2008: 45) and, as the world changed, so did the motives and purposes of aid. With the end of the cold war, the role of strategic motives is believed to have declined (Meernik et al., 1998; Korb, 2008: 30). Liberal (internationalist) theorists challenged the 'donor-interest centered' realist and Marxist assumptions and perceived of foreign aid as an end to itself, guided by humanitarian considerations. As a result, scholars increasingly focused on the link between aid allocations and the economic, democratic and human rights performance of the recipient country, with varying results (Cingranelli and Pasquarello, 1985; Meernik et al., 1998; Schraeder, Hook and Taylor, 1998; Alesina and Dollar, 2000; Van Belle and Hook, 2000; Alesina and Weder, 2002). It is important to note that the different perspectives on aid often do not need to be seen as mutually exclusive and studies using variables corresponding to the different motives have found support for all three

views, with different motive patterns for different donors. Yet, it is striking that none of those theories took into consideration the influence of domestic forces, like media and public opinion, on foreign aid.

MEDIA EFFECTS ON FOREIGN AID

After the end of the cold war, a number of scholars and experts claimed that news media had gained great influence over foreign policy, due to the instant, global and often graphic coverage of people in despair (Kennan, 1993; McNulty, 1993; Cohen, 1994: 9-10; Hoge, 1994). As the primary agent between the public and policymakers, media attention influences what is perceived to be important by the general public (see for example Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Page, Shapiro and Dempsey, 1987; Jordan and Page, 1992; Wanta et al., 2004), as well as by policymakers (Cook et al., 1983; Protesse et al., 1987). This is especially true for matters that do not affect people directly and for which they rely on media for information, like foreign affairs (Soroka, 2003). This media influence on foreign policy is often referred to as the “CNN effect” and is understood as decision-makers’ “loss of policy control to news media” (Livingston and Eachus, 1995: 413). However, despite the volume of anecdotal evidence, most systematic analyses quickly and convincingly discarded the CNN effect as a potential explanation for humanitarian interventions. Several studies showed that the intervention in Somalia in 1992 (Livingston and Eachus, 1995; Mermin, 1997; Robinson, 2001) and in Northern Iraq in 1991 (Livingston, 1997), so often used as evidence of a CNN effect, were not in reaction to intensive media coverage or demands of an emotional public.

Hence, most empirical studies confirmed Lance Bennett’s indexing theory (1990). Indexing is based on the observation that the media’s main news sources are official (government) sources (Sigal, 1973; Gans, 1979; Bennett et al., 1985; Bennett, 1990; Mermin, 1999, Livingston and Bennett, 2003). Hence, news coverage is cued by politicians, and criticism is kept “within the bounds of institutional debate, however narrow or distorted those bounds may become” (Bennett, 1990: 121). As a result, the press is found to be passive and manipulated by state administrators (Hallin, 1986; Bennett and Paletz, 1994; Bennett et al., 2007). Yet, despite the discouraging findings on the influence of media on humanitarian interventions, a number of scholars investigated the impact of media attention on foreign aid - a far less salient or prominent policy issue. Surprisingly, these authors found that media appears to

influence the yearly aid distributions in a variety of important donor countries, like the U.S. (Van Belle and Hook, 2000; Drury, Olson and Van Belle, 2005), France, (Rioux and Van Belle, 2005), Japan (Potter and Van Belle, 2004), the UK and Canada (Van Belle et al., 2004).

THE BUREAUCRATIC RESPONSIVENESS HYPOTHESIS

Changes in foreign aid distributions have clearly and consistently been associated with shifts in news media attention. Considering the generally low political and public attention to foreign aid and the bureaucratic nature of its decision-making, such a media effect is rather surprising. Foreign aid decision-making is markedly different from the centralized and leader-driven decision-making during crises and conflicts, upon which the CNN effect literature is based. Foreign aid decision-making is a process that does not involve many political elites, like members of the executive or elected officials. In most countries, the bureaucracy plays an important role (Van Belle et al., 2004: 23-24), especially in countries where “legislators are uninterested and uninformed in aid issues” (Lancaster, 2007: 20). As a consequence, a theoretical framework explaining media effects on foreign aid needs to account for both the political and bureaucratic aspect of responsiveness to media.

Van Belle et al.’s theory (2004) is based on a principal-agent relationship between politicians (principals) and the bureaucracy (agents), whereby civil servants carry out policies on behalf of politicians. Traditionally, complex bureaucratic organizations are considered to limit the impact of individual (elite) decision-making (Allison and Halperin, 1972; Holsti, 1976; Rosati, 1981). As they function according to their own logic and expertise, far from the spotlights, they are not considered to be very responsive to political and public pressures, casting doubt on their democratic quality. Scholars using the principal-agent framework, however, found bureaucracies to be responsive to their political environment in different policy areas (see for example Weingast, 1984; Wood and Waterman, 1991; 1993; Waterman et al., 1998). Van Belle et al.’s framework is a refinement of the principal-agent model, “positing that the news media provide a common referent that both principals (elected officials) and agents (bureaucracies) use to judge the current or expected demands from the domestic political arena” (2004: 266).

Hence, bureaucracies try to meet the demands of the public to avoid being scrutinized or sanctioned by elected officials. Criticism for failing to attend to particular countries that the public might deem important drives elected officials to sanction the bureaucracy, for instance by cutting back or cancelling certain projects or agencies. Different actors, like NGOs, interest groups or news media, might attract attention – and critique – for inefficient spending or spending that does not match public preferences. So, to maintain their independence, or sometimes even their survival, bureaucracies will try to act according to public demands. Bureaucrats use media as a proxy for foreign policy demands (Powlick, 1991; 1995; La Balme, 2000), even though this might not be the most accurate measure for public opinion and merely reflect preferences of media elites. So, as a country gets high levels of news coverage, it will be perceived as more important and bureaucrats will try to adjust financial support at the expense of less prominent countries.

Since elected officials are accountable to the public, politicians, too, have an interest in keeping aid distributions in accordance with the public's preferences and avoiding criticism. To get (re-)elected, public officials try to be 'in tune' with their electorate and also turn to newspapers to keep track of what is on the public's mind and respond to their concerns. To avoid electoral sanctions, elected officials will thus ensure that aid is distributed according to public preferences by guaranteeing that large contributions are made to countries deemed important/needy and that financial support is not 'wasted' on countries considered unimportant by the public.

Yearly foreign aid distributions have been found to respond to prior media attention in numerous donor countries (Van Belle and Hook, 2000; Van Belle, 2003; Potter and Van Belle, 2004; Rioux and Van Belle, 2005) and, given the disappointing results of media effects on foreign policy outcomes in general, these findings are rather remarkable. Yet, the causal mechanisms developed by Van Belle (2003; Van Belle et al., 2004) to explain these media effects – bureaucratic responsiveness – have been concluded inductively and indirectly from (a) the observation that media influences foreign aid and (b) the assumption that foreign aid decision-making is dominated by (domestic) bureaucracies. Considering the difficulties in isolating the strictly bureaucratic part of the decision-making process in quantitative research, this core argument is hard to examine. Thus, there is no clear and direct evidence that media influences foreign aid due to bureaucratic responsiveness. While most of these studies acknowledge the diversity of agencies within each foreign aid administration, prior

investigations of the causal link between media and bureaucracies did not fully take into account the different sources from and through which ODA is funded and their specific decision-making processes. Multilateral aid, for example, is spent through international organizations, like the UN or, for European countries, the European Commission. Such multilateral contributions can be earmarked (whereby its destination is decided by the domestic bureaucracy) or core funding (allocated by the international organization itself). Non-governmental organizations, like NGOs and universities can also apply for funds, whose destination is then determined by the organization and not the bureaucracy.

While media responsiveness of the highly bureaucratic humanitarian aid agency has also been used to confirm and demonstrate the robustness of the bureaucratic responsiveness hypothesis, both programs are also dissimilar, with disaster relief being event driven (Van Belle, 2003: 270-271). Hence, responsiveness of the disaster relief agency cannot be used as evidence of the responsiveness of a totally different administration, driven by its own logic and procedures. Potter and Van Belle's (2004) study on Japan's bilateral aid confirms that disaggregation of aid leads to a better understanding of its dynamics; they found bilateral aid only to be responsive to media coverage in the form of grants, (as opposed to loans). Hence, examinations of total levels of aid have, thus far, too much been equated to examining *the* bureaucracy. Using specific data that isolates foreign aid that is exclusively decided by the bureaucracy in Belgium, I examine bureaucratic responsiveness to media priorities directly by comparing the effects of these signals on total, bureaucratic and non-bureaucratic ODA. This allows us to assess whether ODA responsiveness is a consequence of bureaucratic responsiveness.

DATA AND VARIABLES

To examine the determinants of Belgian foreign aid allocations and particularly the impact of news media, I use a similar approach to that of prior studies (Van Belle et al. 2004; Potter and Van Belle, 2004; Rioux and Van Belle) in order to maximize comparability. With the primary objective to explain the influences on the yearly variations in ODA, this study only examines the second stage of the two-stage foreign aid allocation process (Van Belle et al., 2004; Rioux and Van Belle, 2005) – the first stage being the initial selection of recipients among all countries (Cingranelli and

Pasquarello, 1985; McGillivray and Oczkowski, 1992; Meernik et al., 1998). Analyses are thus limited to the pool of 118 countries having received ODA at least once between 1995 and 2008, as inclusion of non-recipient countries (like Belgium's rich neighbours) would distort the impact of the independent variables on foreign aid (Rioux and Van Belle, 2005). Hence, the unit of analysis is the annual aid spent by the Belgian government to a specific developing country. A pooled cross sectional analysis with panel corrected standard errors is applied to explain these yearly allocations, using panel data (Beck and Katz, 1995). The panels are countries, which gives us 118 panels of 14 years of aid. To account for autocorrelation, a lag of the dependent variable (ODA) is included.

First, the impact of media is compared between total, bureaucratic and non-bureaucratic aid to test the main bureaucratic responsiveness claim in the Belgian decision-making context. The hypothesis that overall aid is influenced by media coverage can only be confirmed if both total and bureaucratically decided aid are exclusively responsive to media attention. The effect of the independent variables is examined using a two-year lag to take into account the pace of the decision-making process. This means that media attention occurs and 'builds up' in year t_2 , at which moment the initiative is taken to submit aid projects for funding. Then, in the following year, the project is prepared and submitted to the administration in year t_1 . Finally, project funding is approved in year t and is then included in the database. Various government sources confirmed this timing for both governmental and non-governmental project applications. Moreover, tests using different time lags of the independent variables show that the two-year lags on the independent variables best match the decision-making process. None of the models used in the analysis show signs of multicollinearity among the independent variables.

FOREIGN AID

The dependent variable is Belgian Official Development Assistance, allocated to specific countries per year, as obtained through the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DGD). These data are the allocations to each recipient country per fiscal year and have been converted to 2008 constant Euros to control for inflation. DGD collaborators, along with the author, identified those specific programs that were exclusively managed by the DGD bureaucracy to isolate what is here referred to as bureaucratic ODA. Though this is not the only share of ODA where

bureaucrats are involved, it is a clearly delineated part of ODA where decision-making lies exclusively within the bureaucracy. The data used here can also be found in yearly aggregated format on the OECD website under commitments. Allocations were included in the dataset once they were approved. It is often argued that commitments correspond better to the decision-making than disbursements, and that they are considered to be more ‘sensitive’ to short-term dynamics, like increased media attention (McGillivray and Oczkowski, 1992; Van Belle and Hook, 2000; Van Belle et al., 2004: 39). The sections below describe the different types of aid used to examine bureaucratic responsiveness.

Total ODA – In 2009, Belgium had the 14th largest aid program in absolute numbers (1.87 billion Euro) and the 6th relative to its GNI (0.55%) (OECD Peer Review, 2010: 16). The content of these allocations are never negotiated or voted upon by the government. Belgian ODA is spent by and through a number of agencies and organizations, most notably the ‘Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs’ (72%), and its Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DGD) (Figure 7.I). With 66% of total ODA spent in 2008 (or 82,5% of all spending at the national level), the DGD is clearly the key foreign aid player.

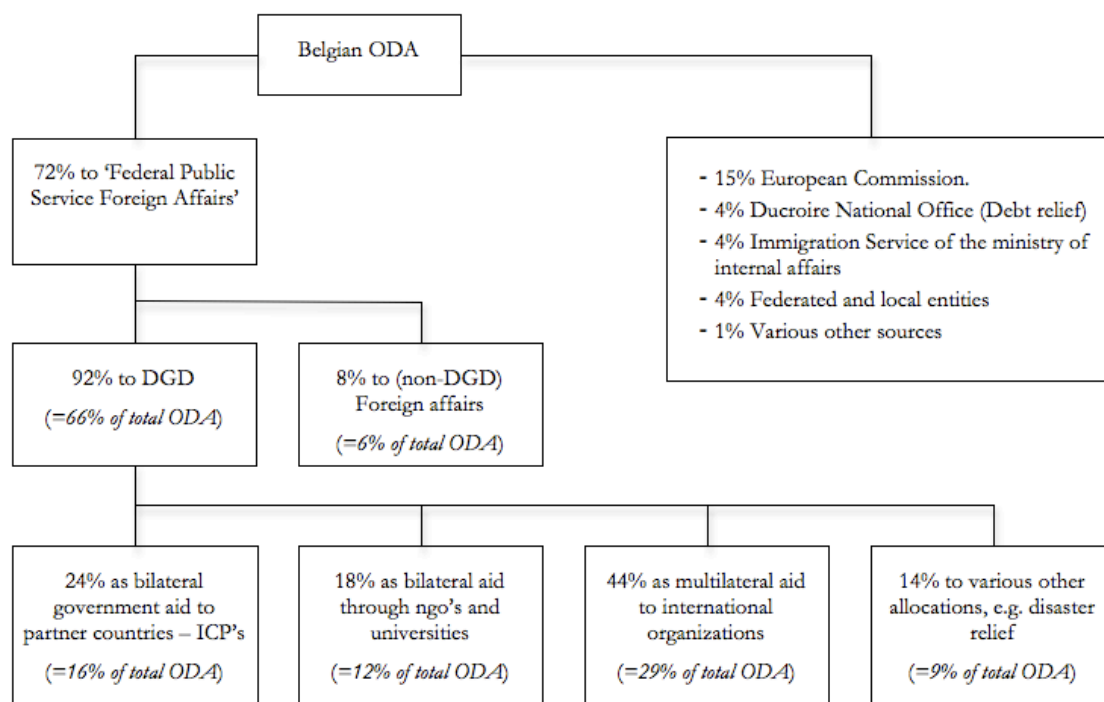


Figure 7.1 Organizational Chart of the Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Co-operation and its proportional ODA spending in 2008.

Bureaucratic ODA – Between 1995 and 2008, bureaucratic aid represented, on average, 25% of the total aid spent and mainly consisted of direct governmental bilateral aid (50%) and earmarked multilateral aid (20%). Governmental bilateral aid mainly comprises the multiannual Indicative Cooperation Programs (ICP), which represented about 16% of total ODA in 2008 (figure 7.1). Since 2001, the ICP's determine the allocations to partner countries for the following four years. The programs are prepared by an independent government agency; the Belgian Development Agency (BTC). This is to increase neutrality and objectivity in the preparations of the program allocations (Holvoet and Renard, 2002). Their preparation is strictly managed and regulated and takes between one and two years to ensure that aid is spent on projects that will improve local needs in a sustainable way and to guarantee that the long-term perspective of the projects is respected. Once the preparation of the ICP's is completed, these allocations do not require further governmental approval. This legal framework limits the role of the minister to that of a manager, supervising procedures, but also severely limits the possibilities for external forces, like media and politics, to influence these aid allocations. Moreover, the extensive ICP preparation procedures make it almost impossible for the administration to respond to immediate (and sometimes rapidly changing) priorities of the public and the media.

Non-Bureaucratic ODA – This is the biggest part of Belgium's foreign aid and its final destination is not determined by the Belgian bureaucracy. Most of the non-bureaucratic aid consists of core multilateral funding (on average 45%). Contrary to earmarked funding, these allocations contribute directly to the international institutions' proper budget. In 2008, 40% of total Belgian ODA was spent to multilateral agencies' core budgets, well above the DAC's average of 26% (OECD Peer Review, 2010: 15). Most of the multilateral aid goes to European institutions and to the International Development Association (IDA) of the Worldbank. Belgium is represented on the boards of these international financial institutions [...] through the FPS Finance, while DGD only has an advisory role" (OECD Peer Review, 2010: 15). NGOs, universities and scientific institutions total about 25% of the non-bureaucratic aid spent between 1995 and 2008. Finally, a little less than a quarter of non-bureaucratic aid is spent through other government ministries and at the regional, provincial or even local level (see also figure 7.1).

MEDIA

The impact of media, the main independent variable, is examined using news articles from the front section of De Standaard. An automatic index search identified and counted the number of articles involving the selected countries at the yearly level, excluding sports and other soft news. Time and resource constraints limited the full analysis to this single media outlet. While this is not the most popular newspaper, it is the leading newspaper in Belgium's largest Flemish community and has consistently been used for agenda-setting research (Walgrave et al., 2008; Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2011b). In addition, a pilot study matching the coverage of foreign countries in De Standaard to coverage in television news from four different networks (two public and two private broadcasters and two Flemish and two Walloon broadcasters) from 2001-2008 revealed extremely high correlations. Country coverage of De Standaard correlated at .82 with its most dissimilar 'competitor': Walloon private television broadcasting RTL. Analyses performed using these television data from 2001-2008 did not reveal any differences. Hence, it is fair to assume that the newspaper data used here reflects the general coverage and salience of countries in Belgian media. General coverage (salience) has consistently been used in previous research and has been found to have more impact than any other type of media attention (Van Belle and Hook, 2000; Potter and Van Belle, 2004; Van Belle et al., 2004), like coverage of unrest or coverage with a negative tone (Rioux and Van Belle, 2005). Therefore, and in line with previous research (Van Belle and Hook, 2000; Potter and Van Belle, 2004; Van Belle et al., 2004; Rioux and Van Belle, 2005), media is expected to impact the total ODA allocations.

REAL WORLD INDICATORS

Real world indicators are used to ensure that the effects of the independent variables are not the byproduct of external events or structural changes in the decision-making environment. These events are controlled for in two ways. First, I include information on disasters and violent conflicts in the explanatory models. Disasters and conflicts are the important causes of hardship in developing countries. To account for the impact and severity of disasters, I use the number of casualties it has caused, as recorded by the CRED disaster database. Data on military conflict were obtained through the Uppsala Conflict Data Program and consist of an aggregated measure of the intensity of the conflicts in which a country is engaged. Conflicts can be both state and non-

state based and are considered active if there are at least 25 battle-related deaths per calendar year. The intensity of violence per conflict ranges from ‘1’ or minor conflict (less than 1000 battle related deaths) to ‘2’, full war (minimum of 1000 deaths). As one country can be involved in several conflicts, the intensity levels have been aggregated. While the impact of disaster is expected to be positive, conflict will likely reduce aid to specific regions.

Second, to account for structural changes, I control for the possible impact of two important domestic and international events on the dynamics of aid decision-making over time. A first such change is the structural reforms of the Belgian aid administration, implemented by 2001. Belgium’s 1999 law on international cooperation redefined the goals and standards of foreign aid and also limited the number of bilateral partner countries (originally 25, reduced to 18 in 2004) to maximize the efficiency of the spent aid. Moreover, it structurally reformed the administration into separate agencies and introduced new and strict procedures for aid allocations. I hypothesize that these reforms made the administration more autonomous and less sensitive to external considerations.

The impact of changes at the international level is also examined, as the impact of media can change over time. Research on American and Japanese disaster relief shows that media influences disappeared after the end of the Cold War in both countries (Van Belle, 2010; Van Belle and Potter, 2011). It is argued that the end of the Cold War entailed policy uncertainty, which altered the framework in which media was able to successfully impact foreign policy. The 9/11 attacks, however, are said to have established a “counterterrorism ‘New World Order’ framework”, removing the policy uncertainty of the 1990s and enabling the news media to exert its influence again (Van Belle, 2010: 103). If changes at the international level have affected Belgian foreign policymaking, aid is expected to be more heavily influenced after 2001 than before. The effects of these changes are assessed with a simple pre/post comparison of the effect of the dependent variables and represent a unique opportunity to study and compare the impact of media and administrative behavior in two distinct decisional environments.

TRADITIONAL AID MOTIVES

Economic needs – Traditionally, the economic well-being of a country is measured using the Gross Domestic Product per capita (GDP) (McGillivray and Oczkowski,

1992; Alesina and Dollar, 2000; Drury et al., 2005). GDP per capita accounts for the humanitarian/idealist motive and has consistently been found to impact foreign aid distributions in a variety of donor countries (Van Belle and Hook, 2000; Van Belle, 2003; Van Belle et al., 2004). Data were obtained through the Centre for International Comparisons of Production, Income and Prices at the University of Pennsylvania (Heston, Summers and Aten, 2009).

Trade Balance – The use of trade balance as an indicator for economic and commercial motives (Marxist/globalist perspective) is also in line with previous studies, which did not find an influence of trade in France (Rioux and Van Belle, 2005) and the U.S. (Van Belle and Hook, 2000) and a negative impact in Japan (Potter and Van Belle, 2004). Data were obtained through the National Bank of Belgium and were only available from 1993 onwards, limiting the scope of the analysis.

Strategic interests – Belgium's strategic interests are measured in two ways. First, a dummy variable asserts whether a recipient country is a former colony. Former colonies, as well as other types of allegiances, have been found to be important determinants of ODA (Dudley and Montmarquette, 1976; Alesina and Dollar, 2000; Rioux and Van Belle, 2005). Belgium has three former colonies: the Democratic Republic of Congo (RDC) Rwanda and Burundi, who rank among the top five aid receivers in 2008 (OECD Peer Review, 2010). Second, I assert whether recipient countries share a common language with Belgium. Previous studies on Canada and France (Rioux and Van Belle, 2005) used the affiliation of recipient countries to the *Francophonie* (the French speaking community) to measure strategic interests. In Belgium, French speaking executives and civil servants traditionally dominated the ministry of development cooperation. Develtere and Michel (n.d.) argue that this affected the selection of recipient countries to the advantage of French speaking countries. Over the years, the balance has been restored which has led to increased aid to South Africa and Suriname (Develtere and Michel, n.d.: 119-120).

RESULTS

MEDIA AND BUREAUCRATIC RESPONSIVENESS

The determinants of total, bureaucratic and non-bureaucratic aid are compared across time in Table 7.1 and 7.2. They show that preceding media attention influences the yearly changes in total aid allocations to recipient countries in Belgium, as was

expected based on prior studies in other donor countries. Perhaps the most important finding is that total ODA responsiveness does *not* necessarily imply bureaucratic responsiveness to media. Table 7.2 compares the different subsets of aid before and after 2001 and presents a more complex picture of media responsiveness.

Contrary to previous studies (Van Belle, 2010; Van Belle and Potter, 2011), I find media to influence yearly aid allocations during the post-Cold War period of the 1990s. The results in table 7.2 demonstrate that this media impact is indeed the result of bureaucratic responsiveness to media, even though it is only found at a marginal significance level ($p < .1$) for both types of aid. However, given the clear directionality of the expected media effect, one-sided testing ($p/2$) would provide additional confidence in the media effect. In the post 9/11 period, however, media attention continues to influence total aid allocations despite the absence of bureaucratic responsiveness. After 2001, media responsiveness lays in non-bureaucratic aid, determined by multilateral institutions, NGOs and scientific institutions. This means that the bureaucratic responsiveness hypothesis does not hold in the Belgian context after 2001 and that total levels of aid can be responsive to news media despite the bureaucracy. Bureaucratic responsiveness can be mistakenly concluded when only examining total levels of aid.

The impact of media on total aid is consistent and strong, as one newspaper headline entails an average increase in total ODA of €156,900 between 1995 and 2008. While 594 of the 1792 cases (or 33%) received no media attention, on average De Standaard dedicated 6 cover stories per country per year. Eight cases received over 100, implying that media can have a very large impact on the yearly changes of foreign aid allocations in Belgium, even in a post-Cold War era. Media responsiveness increased after 2001; not only is its influence on total ODA more significant ($p < .001$), it also amplified considerably (from €22,000 to over €460,000 per headline).

Hence, the second major finding of this study is that, as argued by Van Belle and Potter (2011), determinants of aid are not fixed and appear to change over time, as they are influenced by international and – in this case also – domestic structural changes. Van Belle (2010) suggests that the increase in media responsiveness after 2001 is due to the changed international context. He argues that the events following the attacks of 9/11 removed the policy uncertainty of the post-Cold War period and established a new and stable counterterrorism framework. Within this framework, media is able to play a larger role. However, though the results from table 7.1 and 7.2

do not contradict this thesis, it is as good as impossible to find direct empirical evidence to causally attribute the increased impact of media to these international structural changes. Moreover, the suggested changes are believed to create a new ‘decisional model that should be evidenced by an increase in explanatory power of the statistical model (Van Belle, 2010). This, however, is not the case, as the R^2 's decreased after 2001, except for bureaucratic aid. The decrease in bureaucratic responsiveness, however, is more clearly attributable to the administrative reforms. After these reforms were implemented by 2001, bureaucratic ODA became more incremental, with last year's budget as the most important predictor ($z=17.63$) and with a very high percentage of overall explained variance ($R^2=84\%$). This incremental effect is in part due to the fact that bilateral governmental aid has been determined for a fixed period of four years after 2001 and that earmarked multilateral contributions have also been limited to a smaller number of countries. As a consequence, bureaucratic aid has become almost insensitive to external determinants.

Table 7.1 Results of Regressions with Panel-corrected Standard Errors Explaining Total, 'Bureaucratic' and 'non-bureaucratic' ODA (1995-2008)

	Total Aid			Bureaucratic Aid			Non-bureaucratic Aid		
	Coef. SE	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>	Coef. SE	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>	Coef. SE	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
Media	.1569 .0342	4.59	.000	-.0010 .0025	-0.42	.676	.1612 .0283	5.69	.000
GDP/cap	-.0002 .0000	-7.27	.000	-.0000 .0000	-5.50	.000	-.0002 .0000	-6.29	.000
Trade	-.0000 .0000	-2.15	.032	-.0000 .0000	-1.70	.088	-.0000 .0000	-1.95	.051
Colony	31.2647 2.8940	10.80	.000	3.1883 1.0278	3.10	.002	23.1338 1.8703	12.37	.000
Language	1.8709 .6372	2.94	.003	.1259 .0254	4.96	.000	1.1058 .5959	1.86	.063
Conflict	-.0808 .1919	-0.42	.674	.0189 .0347	0.54	.587	-.0993 .1398	-0.71	.477
Disaster	.0000 .0000	0.17	.869	.0000 .0000	4.31	.000	-.0000 .0001	-0.04	.965
Lag_oda	.3258 .0683	4.77	.000	.9139 .0386	23.69	.000	.2720 .0531	5.13	.000
Constant	1.825 .4191	4.35	.000	.1450 .0667	2.17	.030	1.0983 .3334	3.29	.001
R^2	.25		.000	.77		.000	.17		.000
N	1631			1631			1631		

Note: Results are in millions of Euro.

Table 7.2 Results of Regressions with Panel-corrected Standard Errors Explaining Total, 'Bureaucratic' and 'non-bureaucratic' ODA (1995-2008)

	1995-2001								
	Total Aid			Bureaucratic Aid			Non-bureaucratic Aid		
	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
	(<i>SE</i>)			(<i>SE</i>)			(<i>SE</i>)		
Media	.0220	1.79	.074	.0102	1.70	.090	.0126	1.36	.172
	.0123			.0060			.0093		
GDP/cap	-.0001	-3.55	.000	-.0000	-3.07	.002	-.0001	-3.22	.001
	.0000			.0000			.0000		
Trade	-.0000	-1.65	.099	-.0000	-2.28	.022	-.0000	-1.54	.123
	.0000			.0000			.0000		
Colony	5.7354	2.31	.021	1.4877	2.09	.037	4.4823	2.33	.020
	2.482			.7131			1.9236		
Language	1.1899	2.20	.028	.5009	2.22	.026	.5912	1.93	.054
	.5409			.2255			.3064		
Conflict	.1807	0.74	.459	.1077	1.16	.245	.0244	0.12	.908
	.2443			.0927			.2114		
Disaster	-.00007	-0.98	.327	-.0000	-0.83	.405	-.0000	-0.59	.555
	.00007			.0000			.0000		
Lag_oda	.5305	3.29	.001	.6473	4.77	.000	.4095	2.28	.023
	.1614			.1356			.1796		
Constant	1.2420	2.93	.003	.3419	2.43	.015	1.0216	3.00	.003
	.4234			.1404			.3407		
R ²	.46		.000	.59		.000	.29		.000
N	811			811			811		

	2002-2008								
	Total Aid			Bureaucratic Aid			Non-bureaucratic Aid		
	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Coef.</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
	(<i>SE</i>)			(<i>SE</i>)			(<i>SE</i>)		
Media	.4626	3.01	.003	.0024	1.09	.275	.4565	3.01	.003
	.1538			.0022			.1517		
GDP/cap	-.0003	-5.34	.000	-.0000	-1.14	.252	-.0002	-4.55	.000
	.0000			.0000			.0000		
Trade	-.0000	-1.14	.255	-.0000	-0.33	.738	-.0000	-1.02	.310
	.0000			.0000			.0000		
Colony	62.2507	5.45	.000	5.5736	2.04	.041	47.6307	4.66	.000
	11.4317			2.727			10.2183		
Language	2.830	4.54	.000	.1065	2.35	.019	2.0339	3.58	.000
	.6240			.0452			.5679		
Conflict	-.6624	-1.87	.061	-.1004	-1.28	.201	-.4907	-1.25	.211
	.3537			.0785			.3922		
Disaster	.0000	0.03	.976	.0000	4.32	.000	-.0000	-0.15	.879
	.0000			.0000			.0000		
Lag_oda	.2421	3.50	.000	.9507	17.63	.000	.2053	3.99	.000
	.0692			.0539			.0515		
Constant	1.7266	3.22	.001	.0892	0.84	.403	.7292	1.69	.092
	.5360			.1068			.4325		
R ²	.30		.000	.84		.000	.22		.000
N	820			820			820		

Note: Results are in millions of Euro.

DETERMINANTS OF AID

During the post-Cold War period (1995-2001), Belgian aid seemed somewhat disconnected from the domestic events and developments in the recipient countries, as suggested by the real world indicators, conflict and disasters. This changed after 2001, when less total aid was given to countries that were involved in violent conflict(s) and, at the same time, more bureaucratic aid was given to countries that had suffered from natural disasters. In addition to the clear impact of media, ODA was also heavily and consistently determined by humanitarian and strategic considerations. The GDP per capita, sharing a common language and the former colonial status of recipient countries consistently determined levels of aid across all models and time periods. Per decrease of \$1 in GDP per capita, countries received about €240 more aid. This has increased from €150 in the post-Cold War period to over €340 in the subsequent post 9/11 years. Given the large differences in GDP per capita between countries, it could be argued that the humanitarian motive has become one of the most important predictors of total Belgian aid. Belgium now also gives more aid to those countries with which it shares a common language. Most often these are French-speaking African countries. Those countries receive almost over 1.8 million € more aid than other countries throughout the entire period. Moreover, Belgium's former colonies consistently receive more aid: from €6 million in the troubled 1990s, to a tenfold of €60 million more aid in the 2000s. Aid, however, is not economically motivated, as Belgium's trade balance did not positively affect its aid disbursements throughout the period at study. In fact, Belgium gives significantly more aid to those countries from which it imports more goods.

While the determinants of total and non-bureaucratic aid are fairly consistent over time, this is less the case for bureaucratic aid. The administrative reforms effectively changed these dynamics. After 2001, bureaucratic aid is as incremental as can be (€1 in one year guarantees €0.95 the next year) and is almost insensitive to external considerations. Due to the centralization of efforts (bilateral aid goes to a limited number of 18 fixed countries), changes in bureaucratic aid are no longer influenced by the economic conditions of a recipient country, as they had been before 2001. However, most likely there is a selection bias, since most bureaucratic aid is already allocated to some of the poorest countries. Hence, there is little room left for variation on the basis of this variable. Since the administrative reforms roughly correspond to a

coalition change in the federal government after the elections of 1999, I also examined the influence of attention in party manifestos and the federal government agreements. As these documents mainly focus on Belgium's former colonies and the overall ODA budget, they did not affect aid allocations. Hence, it is safe to assume that the changes found here are due to the administrative reforms and not to domestic politics, especially given the extremely low political interest in development issues.

DISCUSSION

The analyses presented here show that media exerts influence on Belgian foreign aid both through and despite bureaucrats, depending on the period that is studied. The role of the bureaucracy in the process that enables news media to influence foreign aid has, thus far, been investigated too indirectly and too superficially. Bureaucratic responsiveness was mainly deduced from the evidence that foreign aid responded to media attention and the assumption that aid decision-making was dominated by bureaucrats. This research extends the valuable existing body of work (Van Belle and Hook, 2000; Potter and Van Belle, 2004; Van Belle et al., 2004; Rioux and Van Belle, 2005) and its most important contribution is the direct investigation of media effects on the bureaucratic subset of ODA. The different analyses indicate that bureaucratic responsiveness to media cannot be concluded on the basis of total ODA responsiveness. Examining bureaucratically decided total aid provides direct evidence of bureaucratic responsiveness in the 1990s. However, it also reveals that the bureaucracy is no longer responsible for this media effect after the administrative reforms. These administrative reforms have considerably increased bureaucratic independence and made the administration almost insensitive to external influences. Yet, this lack of bureaucratic responsiveness is not reflected in the total aid budget, which is even more influenced by media attention in this post 9/11 period.

Furthermore, this study confirms that decision-making dynamics and the importance of certain determinants of aid change over time and, therefore, confirms the importance of examining policymaking dynamics within coherent time frames (Van Belle and Potter, 2011). Changes in these dynamics can be caused by disruptive events that affect the existing international environment, like the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, but it can also pertain to a structural policy change or an extremely complicated administrative reform, as was the case in Belgium. It is

clear that these reforms brought about a complete reprioritization of the determinants of bureaucratic ODA, with concentration of efforts as a main drive. The reforms also increased the incremental nature of bureaucratic aid, where allocations are decided for periods of four years. Nevertheless, and despite a decline in bureaucratic responsiveness, the impact of media increased on the total ODA. To a certain degree, this confirms Van Belle's (2010) suggestion that media effects on foreign policy were suppressed in the 1990s and that the post 9/11 period again provided a steady international counterterrorism framework – a new World Order – in which media could again exert its influence, as it had done before the end of the Cold War. However, this claim has not been examined thoroughly and supporting evidence has, so far, only been found in U.S. disaster relief (Van Belle, 2010). Further comparative research is thus certainly required, especially given the difficulties to examine such a claim.

The ODA decision-making process and its procedures, as described here, also prove to be far too complex and involve too many actors and levels to make general inferences on the role of one specific actor or institution using aggregated, total, ODA allocations. Therefore, this study advocates a deeper study and understanding of how aid allocations come about to obtain a better fit between analysis and decision-making process. Considering the many different sources and destinations of foreign aid, it is crucial to identify the many actors and institutions who (co)determine where money will eventually end up. The large portions of Belgian ODA transferred to the European Commission or spent through international organizations in 2008 are exemplary of decision-making beyond the national bureaucracy. Moreover, the allocation procedures and the timing of the decision-making are also crucial in making causal inferences about the influences on aid decision-making. While previous studies made remarkable efforts to assess and describe the different departments involved in ODA, more effort needs to be done to capture their specific allocation procedures, essential to understanding their outcome.

In addition, this study also confirms the importance of a number of traditional determinants and motives of foreign aid. The explicitly stated goal of poverty reduction in the target countries steadily remains an important factor in the distribution of aid. Belgium also respects the DAC guideline not to link aid to trade. Higher allocations to the former colonies and to countries with which Belgium shares a

common language suggest that strategic motives to maintain influence in those countries are still at play.

In conclusion, this study improves our understanding of how media exerts influence on policy outcomes and sheds light on the specific role of the bureaucratic behavior in this process. As a typical rich Western democracy, the importance of the study of Belgian ODA and its determinants also lays in its general comparability to a number of other resourceful donors like Sweden, Norway, Denmark and The Netherlands, countries with limited international influence, but prominent aid programs. At the same time, this study also urges to continue the study of these complex dynamics, as we cannot yet generalize these specific findings on bureaucratic responsiveness beyond the specific Belgian context. As foreign aid decision-making differs from one country to another, in depth understanding of these processes and procedures are crucial to the required comparative research agenda.

8 DISENTANGLING MEDIA ATTENTION: THE DIFFERENTIAL IMPACT OF SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM MEDIA COVERAGE ON BELGIAN HUMANITARIAN AID DECISION- MAKING

ABSTRACT

If news media are able to exert influence on policy, it is most commonly believed to do so through its agenda-setting function, by putting issues on the political agenda after sudden peaks of attention. Yet, despite the assertion of agenda-setting theory that policy changes occur through steady advocacy of policy alternatives (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993), very little attention has been paid to the long-term effects of media exposure. The analysis of the two-stage decision-making process of humanitarian aid allocations shows that short-term and long-term media attention to specific countries affect decision-making in a different way. While short-term attention mainly determines which countries receive assistance, long-term attention affects the mount of assistance granted. Differences are also found between responses to natural disasters and conflicts.

INTRODUCTION

While it appeals to our instincts and logic that humanitarian aid should be spent according to the urgency and the needs of affected local populations, assistance is rarely the outcome of calculated and proportionate reactions to the consequences of occurring events, like disasters or conflicts. In fact, most of the time a variety of exogenous factors and considerations come into play and determine which countries

receive humanitarian aid and how much. To this day, we still do not know what those exogenous factors are and what, in the end, determines humanitarian aid.

Following the extensive research on the CNN effect – the impact of news media on humanitarian interventions - and the ensuing studies on the effects of media on foreign aid, Drury, Olson and Van Belle (2005) examined the impact of media and other determinants on disaster relief in the U.S. from 1964-1995. This was the first systematic effort to explain the decision-making process of a subset of humanitarian assistance in a comprehensive way, and over such a long period of time. In addition to the magnitude of the disaster and political/strategic motives, they found news media to have an important impact on these aid allocations. Considering the rather limited predictability of natural disasters and emergency situations, assistance policy is very reactive, which prevents planned and incremental decision-making. This makes humanitarian assistance considerably more susceptible to external influences than other (foreign) policy subdomains.

To explain why certain countries receive assistance while others do not, and why some countries receive more aid than others, this study investigates the determinants of Belgian humanitarian aid from 1999-2008. Little is known about the political agenda-setting effect of media outside the United States (Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006). This is true for general effects of media on politics, but even more so for the influence of media on humanitarian assistance. While media dynamics are expected to differ from one country to another – depending on the political and media system – Belgium is a particularly interesting case because of its closed political system. As a prime example of a partitocracy (De Winter et al., 1996; De Winter and Dumont, 2006), Belgium is ruled by political parties at all political levels and, thus, Belgian governments are “not particularly receptive to new issues that pop up in the media” (Walgrave et al., 2008: 3). Walgrave et al. (2008) argue that such a closed political system does not offer many alternative policy venues besides the government, which is ran by the political parties. Therefore, Belgian politics are expected to be less sensitive to media effects, which makes Belgium a “tough test for the mass media’s political agenda-setting power.” (Walgrave et al., 2008: 3). Moreover, the relatively long time-series and richness of the data enable the study of both long-term and short-term media effects. Yet, while Belgium may be considered as a hard case due to its political system, its humanitarian aid policies do not differ significantly from those of its fellow OECD members.

Building on the work of Drury et al. (2005), assistance allocation is considered as a two-stage decision-making process, where the first stage corresponds to the initial decision to grant aid and the subsequent stage determines how much aid is allocated. This two-stage decision-making process represents a unique opportunity to examine the impact of media attention and other determinants at different stages of the policymaking process. The explanatory model introduced in this study consists of three main explanations for humanitarian aid: (i) short-term and long-term media coverage, (ii) the objective needs of the affected country and the extent to which it can manage the consequences of disaster, and finally (iii) the strategic importance of a recipient country to the donor's foreign policy interests.

The main contribution of this study is that it unveils the different ways in which news media influence the policymaking process, in this case in response to dramatic foreign events. As most media studies focus on short or medium-term media effects (for a similar observation, see Walgrave and De Swert, 2002), this study also examines the long-term effects of media exposure. The relevance and importance of long-term media attention is derived from agenda-setting theory, which argues that major policy changes do not simply occur randomly. Instead, steady efforts are made by policy entrepreneurs to advocate a certain issue or policy solution (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993). To obtain an important change in policy, the way an issue is understood and framed needs to change, so that the alternative policy solution, advocated by policy entrepreneurs, becomes more attractive. Change is then brought about through either venue shopping – addressing different powerful political actors until the alternative policy solution gets picked up – or by a focusing event that draws major attention from all political actors (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993). Hence, agenda-setting also emphasizes the importance of long-term advocacy. Rare studies have confirmed the differential impact of long-term media coverage on the public (Walgrave and De Swert, 2002), as well as on political actors (Walgrave and Lefevere, 2010).

This study examines the different influences of event-related peaks of attention and non-specific long-term media exposure on humanitarian assistance allocations. Findings confirm that short-term bursts of media coverage following a focusing event are effective in putting a specific situation on the governmental agenda. The different dynamics of short-term and long-term media exposure, however, show that the impact of media is not confined to this agenda-setting function. Through repetition and cumulative exposure, long-term media attention generates a general sense of

importance of a country, which leads to larger allocations in the second stage of the decisional process. Furthermore the initial, agenda-setting, phase is influenced by the involvement of recipient countries in violent conflict and former colonies are also more likely to receive aid. In addition to long-term media coverage, the second stage of the decision-making is determined by the number of casualties and short-term media attention to violent conflicts in recipient countries. Again, former colonies receive more aid.

DETERMINANTS OF HUMANITARIAN AID

As practitioners have mainly focused on the practical conditions and the implications of humanitarian assistance, little systematic and comparative research has been carried out to understand the grounds on which donor countries determine the levels of aid spent in reaction to natural disasters and violent conflicts. Hence, little is known about the international response to natural disasters (McEntire, 1999) and what determines humanitarian aid from richer to developing countries. This is, in part, due to the assumption that humanitarian assistance is apolitical and, thus, spent in response to the objective needs created by a crisis (for a similar argument, see Drury et al. 2005).

Similarly, Bryer and Cairns (1997: 367) argue that “humanitarian aid should always be driven by the impartial assessment of need, unbiased by either the host government or its opponents, and regardless of the race, creed, nationality, or politics of the intended recipient”. Hence, the severity or impact of an event on the local population has traditionally been considered as the most important determinant of humanitarian assistance. To measure the impact of humanitarian situations, and particularly natural disasters, most studies use the number of casualties or people affected (injured or homeless). Previous research has used combinations of these measures to assess the immediate impact and the consequent needs following disasters, and all of them found the impact of natural disasters to be an important and consistent predictor for assistance allocation (first stage) (Drury et al. 2005; Eisensee and Strömberg, 2007; Strömberg, 2007; Van Belle and Potter, 2011), as well as the amount of aid (second stage) (Simon, 1997; Drury et al., 2005). The Belgian administration in charge of humanitarian aid – the Directorate General of Development Cooperation (DGD) – explicitly states the goal to provide “immediate support to populations facing severe

food shortages as the result of any kind of crisis” (Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs).

Hence, humanitarian assistance is not only provided in response to natural disasters. In fact, many such food shortages occur in refugee camps, as a consequence of violent conflicts. However, the relationship between the needs caused by conflicts and the assistance granted is not as straightforward as it is in the case of natural disasters. In fact, humanitarian aid in conflict zones has been, and remains, a sensitive and controversial question within the humanitarian field. Not only are conflict zones perilous by themselves, the dynamics of conflicts also severely jeopardize assistance effectiveness. Even worse, assistance can be used by warring factions and intensify the conflict. Several authors have pointed to the potential perverse effects of humanitarian assistance and how it can prolong military conflicts (Anderson, 1996; 1999; Bryer and Cairns, 1997; Stewart, 1998; Rigby, 2001). Most often, NGOs have to weigh the benefits of assistance against these negative side effects. In certain cases, they have to decline interventions or revert to specific – but less efficient – types of assistance to reduce such risks (Bryer and Cairns, 1997; Rigby, 2001). Similar considerations may apply to governments who will try to avoid exacerbating conflict. While certain NGOs will still decide to intervene, out of principle and despite these negative considerations (Anderson, 1996), it is not clear how governments, under public and media pressure, will respond when negative outcomes or side effects are expected.

Related to the objective needs of a country affected by disaster or conflict, is the extent to which it can manage the aftermath of such an event by itself; its resilience. In other words, does a country dispose of the necessary material and financial resources to deal with the consequences of a crisis and, thus, provide for the needs of its own population? The level of development of a country constitutes a good indicator of its ability to cope with these extreme conditions, as richer countries often dispose of better infrastructures and a more efficient government administration. The gross domestic product per capita is most commonly used to measure economic development (McGillivray and Oczkowski, 1992; Alesina and Dollar, 2000; Rioux and Van Belle, 2005) and has been found to influence the allocation of disaster relief (Drury et al., 2005; Strömberg, 2007). In addition, low economic development has also consistently been associated with higher levels of development aid (Van Belle and Hook, 2000; Van Belle, 2003; Van Belle et al., 2004). Hence, economically less

developed countries are generally more likely to receive aid and get more aid than countries that are better off.

Despite the assumption that humanitarian aid is apolitical, Drury et al. (2005) found that America's allies were more likely to receive disaster assistance than the other countries. Analyzing the importance of donor-recipient relations in disaster relief, Strömberg (2007) found a number of political and strategic factors to be important determinants of both the decision to grant aid and the amount of aid donated. Most importantly, donor countries are more likely to give aid and grant more aid to former colonies (Strömberg, 2007). In Belgium, former colonies are consistently acknowledged as foreign policy priorities by every consecutive government. Next to the stakes Belgium has in the region, it also disposes of a particular and unique expertise on the matters and dynamics of the Great Lakes region. Belgium's three former colonies, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Burundi are, and have been for a while, among the top five recipients of Belgian foreign aid (OECD, 2010). Moreover, studies on the determinants of Official Development Assistance (ODA) have found former colonies and political/strategic allies to receive more aid than the other countries in a variety of donors, like the US, the UK (Van Belle et al., 2004) and France (Rioux and Van Belle, 2005). A second determinant that accounts for strategic and political considerations is a common language between donor and recipient country. Strömberg (2007) found that, in addition to former colonies, those countries with which the donor shared a common language, also received more aid.

So, while a fair amount of attention has been paid to individual determinants of aid and the local conditions of recipient countries, little systematic research has been done on the determinants of humanitarian assistance and its decision-making dynamics. Moreover, these dynamics are expected to differ from one country to another, but also to change over time, as the international environment in which decisions are made also changes (Van Belle, 2010). The importance of strategic considerations, for example, has been found to have decreased after the end of the Cold War (Meernik et al., 1998) and believed to have regained importance after the attacks of 9/11 (Korb, 2008: 30).

The main goal of this study is to reveal the different influences short-term peaks of media attention and long-term media exposure have on humanitarian aid decision-making. Therefore, the explanatory model presented in this study integrates the influence of media alongside the more 'traditional' determinants. The different determinants of assistance reflect complex dynamics and are expected to play a role in

different stages of the decision-making process. Yet, due to the scarce literature, it is not always possible to hypothesize how and in which stage(s) a specific variable will exert its influence. Finally, it is important to note that this study examines Belgium's response to two distinct types of crises – natural disasters and conflicts – and compares the role of media in reaction to these different events. While humanitarian assistance in Belgium is given in response to both types of events, it is essential to distinguish between these events and compare the dynamics that lead to policy change. Given the central focus of this study on media attention, the next section reviews what we know about the role of the media in foreign policymaking, and humanitarian assistance in particular.

MEDIA AND HUMANITARIAN AID

The main question addressed here is whether and how media attention to a specific country increases the likelihood and/or the amount of humanitarian assistance it will receive. The impact of media on foreign policy received a great deal of attention the last two decades after a number of scholars claimed that media coverage of suffering people had increasingly influenced American foreign policy, at times leading to humanitarian and military interventions (Kennan, 1993; Cohen 1994: 9-10). This controversial impact of media on foreign policy, referred to as the CNN effect, refers to the influence of news media due to 24-hour news cycles and the almost immediate transmission of on the spot coverage (Livingston and Eachus, 1995; Livingston, 1997). However, most studies found that humanitarian interventions, like Somalia (1992) and Northern Iraq (1991), did not occur in reaction to media attention. Instead, policymakers had started paying attention to these issues before the media had (see for example Livingston and Eachus, 1995; Mermin, 1997; Mermin, 1999; Robinson, 2001). Moreover, those quantitative studies that found media to impact policymakers only found such effects on symbolic measures of policy, like press statements of the executive or discussion on Congress (Wood and Peake, 1998; Edwards and Wood, 1999).

Yet, despite the negative results regarding the CNN effect, a number of scholars examined the impact of media on foreign aid and found media coverage to influence the yearly distributions of aid in important donor countries like the U.S. (Van Belle and Hook, 2000), France, (Rioux and Van Belle, 2005), Japan, the UK and Canada

(Van Belle et al., 2004). Although humanitarian assistance and foreign aid are fundamentally different in nature, similar dynamics have been shown to apply. The marked advantage of studying humanitarian assistance is that it enables us to examine the impact of media on reactions to major international crises and, in a way, test the CNN hypothesis in a quantitative and systematic way.

Short-term media attention – Olsen et al. (2003) found that media exposure played an important role in the allocation of humanitarian aid in response to natural disasters and complex emergencies. Drury et al. (2005) were among the first to investigate the impact of news media on disaster aid in a systematic way and over a long period of time (1964-1995). They found that media coverage increased the likelihood of receiving aid but also the amount of aid given by the United States. Strömberg (2007) confirmed that, in addition to the objective needs generated by the crisis itself, media attention increased the probability of receiving aid, not only in the US, but also in each DAC member country (Development Assistance Committee).

The disproportionate, and sometimes intense, reactions of sympathy from the public and the media towards the victims of humanitarian emergencies put great pressure on governments to act. The government has a strong interest in showing its responsiveness towards the public's priorities and advocate for attention to those issues perceived as important by their electorate. To know what exactly is on the public's mind, they turn to media, as an indirect expression of public opinion (Van Belle et al. 2004). In Belgium, recent research shows that 72% of the federal politicians agree that media decides which issues are important (Van Aelst et al., 2008).

An important characteristic of humanitarian assistance is the uncertainty surrounding the governmental policy and its political environment. In his work on the CNN effect, Robinson (1999, 2002) identifies policy uncertainty as one of the main conditions for media effects to potentially occur. Policy uncertainty is hereby defined as “a function of the degree of consensus and co-ordination of the sub-systems of the executive with respect to an issue” (Robinson, 2002: 26). Media appear to be most influential in those cases where the government does not have a clear policy or when there is disagreement over the appropriate actions to be taken. In those instances, media is not guided by official voices and this void can then be ‘filled’ by opinion-makers from or through the media. Considering the relatively unpredictable nature of disasters and conflicts, as well as the way media and public respond to them,

humanitarian assistance policy is characterized by uncertainty. Furthermore, and contrary to CNN studies on military interventions, the cost of humanitarian assistance is considerably low and often limited to financial efforts. Hence, this makes humanitarian aid susceptible to media effects, which, in turn, makes it suitable to study the different ways in which media can exert influence.

Van Belle (2010) counter argues that policy uncertainty is not determining for media effects to occur. His analysis suggest that the policy uncertainty at the international level, created after the end of the Cold War, suppressed the steady framework in which media could exert influence on foreign policy. The attacks of 9/11 and the ensuing War on terror created a new stable framework where media could again influence policy. However, it is important to note that Van Belle (2010) defines policy uncertainty as an international political environment (Cold war and post-Cold War) whereas Robinson defines uncertainty as disagreement among the decision unit (2002). While the data used here do not allow for comparison before and after 2001, this study can reveal whether media has an impact on emergency assistance in Belgium after 2001. In light of the compelling evidence from previous studies, I expect media to influence humanitarian assistance.

Long-term media attention – When studying media effects, most quantitative studies use media attention that is either specifically related to an event (Drury et al., 2005) or aggregate media attention to a country at the yearly level (Van Belle et al., 2004). However, media studies rarely examine the effects of long-term media exposure, beyond one year. Agenda-setting theory argues that large policy changes can occur either through a major focusing event (Birkland, 1997; 1998) that is often followed by major media attention, or through steady attention by an influential political actor (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993). With the latter, policy advocates work hard to promote an issue and its policy alternative. NGOs, for example, will try to make politicians, as well as the broader public aware of their cause through public and media campaigns. This is often a long-term process that cannot be captured by short-term media attention.

In their analysis of media influences on voting intentions, Walgrave and De Swert (2002) found that long-term media attention to right-wing issues increased voting intentions for the right-wing party in Belgium. They argue that agenda-setting is a long-term and cumulative process "caused by emphasizing the same topic over and over again, year after year." Walgrave and Lefevere (2010) found that political parties

reacted differently to short-term (1-6 months) and long-term (6-12 months) media attention. They found overall levels of attention in party programs to correlate higher with long-term attention while changes in attention – compared to the previous program – corresponded more to short-term levels of media attention. Despite the rough measures of influence used in both studies, these findings suggest that political actors, as well as the public, are also sensitive to long-term media exposure.

While media influences what people believe to be important (Iyengar and Kinder, 1987), conversely, media also reflect what is on the public's mind. This public has relatively stable preferences towards other countries (Jones, Van Aelst and Vliegthart 2011). As a market oriented business, media often select news stories in accordance with the public's interests (Underwood 2001). Hence, media are considered as a good indicator of general public preferences. Long-term media exposure thus determines *and* reflects which countries the public finds important, as a more stable measure compared to short-term attention. The study of humanitarian aid allocations provides an excellent opportunity to examine the policy impact of long-term media exposure to specific countries at different stages of the policymaking process.

DATA AND METHOD

This study examines the different determinants of humanitarian aid that is allocated by Belgium in response to emergency situations; natural disasters and military conflict. Hence, only developing countries in which a disaster *or* military conflict occurred are included in the database. Developing countries are those countries that are eligible for Official Development Assistance, as defined by the OECD. Other, non-developing countries were excluded, as those richer countries are not eligible for humanitarian aid. Hence, the dependent variable is humanitarian aid spent by the Belgian government and the unit of analysis is the amount of aid per country in a given year. Data from 1999-2008 has been obtained through the Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DGD) of the Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs. Humanitarian aid consists of food aid, emergency aid (including immediate post-emergency or short-term rehabilitation aid) and aid to prevent natural disasters. Assistance allocations are aggregated at the yearly level and adjusted for inflation.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Short-term media coverage – Front-page news articles on natural disasters and conflicts were selected from Flanders' main newspaper, De Standaard. Then, the affected countries were identified and coded from 1999-2008 for each year, providing us with two measures of short-term attention: disaster and conflict news coverage. Time and resource constraints limited the analysis to this single media outlet. However, much like the *New York Times* in the U.S. or *Le Monde* in France, De Standaard is the leading newspaper in Belgium, read by political elites and with great influence on other media outlets. De Standaard is the leading newspaper in Belgium's largest community and has consistently been used for agenda-setting research (Walgrave et al., 2008; Vliegthart and Walgrave, 2011b). Moreover, the coverage of foreign countries in De Standaard and other media outlets revealed extremely high correlations. Country coverage of De Standaard correlated at 0.82 with the most dissimilar outlet. Thus, it is fair to assume that the newspaper used here greatly corresponds to the coverage of countries in Flemish and Walloon television news, both public and private broadcasting. In addition, De Standaard was found to cover more foreign news stories on humanitarian disasters than the most popular newspaper (Vandemoortele et al., 2007).

Long-term media coverage – To gauge long-term media exposure, an index was created using the cumulative salience of each country over the preceding five years. This means that long-term exposure for any given country in year t corresponds to the sum of general media attention of the five years preceding year t . General media attention is captured using key word searches of every developing country. This five-year rule provides an index that is stable over time, but also allows for variation that occurs over time. While specific media attention to disasters, its severity and post-impact conditions refer to the power of media to direct attention and set the agenda (Moeller, 2010), long-term media attention reflects the more stable general preference and perceived importance of a country. Moreover, a five-year measure atones the possible effect of bias of extraordinary or cyclic events, like elections, that do not necessarily reflect stable preferences. Long-term coverage, as conceptualized here, is a similar concept to cultural proximity, as it reflects the interest Belgium has in other countries, measured through the inclination of media to cover certain countries over others. Long-term coverage correlates at 0.34 with media attention to conflicts and .17

with media coverage of disasters. Hence, it is fair to say that these measures are independent and capture different concepts.

Objective needs and ability to cope – Data on the occurrence and main features of disasters between 1999 and 2008 was obtained through the Emergency Events Database (EM-DAT) of the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) at the Université catholique de Louvain. For a disaster to be included in this database at least one of the following criteria had to be fulfilled: ten (10) or more people reported killed, hundred (100) or more people reported affected, the declaration of a state of emergency or a call for international assistance. These criteria allow for a more objective database where inclusion is not a political decision (Kahn 2005). Additionally, I also discarded those disasters without casualties from the dataset. As events can occur at any time of year, a correction has been made for those disasters that happened in the second part of December by transferring them onto the next year, as it is highly unlikely that a decision is taken and budgeted within two weeks. Though the database only partially depends on official records, it is the most complete and most reliable dataset available and considering the recent time frame of this study, concerns of underreporting should be minimal (Strömberg, 2007).

The CRED disaster database includes the main characteristics of the recorded disasters. The number of casualties and the number of people affected are used to assess the severity and impact of the natural disasters. The *number of casualties* is the number of people confirmed as dead and persons missing and presumed dead. Official figures are used when available. A second measure of disaster severity is the *total number of affected victims*, which corresponds to the sum of people injured, homeless and those requiring immediate assistance during a period of emergency; it can also include displaced or evacuated people, but does not include those killed. In addition, the gross domestic product per capita (GDP) is used to assess the *economic wealth* and, so, the resilience with which a country can face and manage the consequences of disasters. GDP data are obtained through the World Bank.

Data on military conflict are obtained through the Uppsala Conflict Data Program and consist of an aggregated measure of the intensity of the conflicts in which a country is engaged. Conflicts can be both state and non-state based and are considered active if there are at least 25 battle-related deaths per calendar year. The intensity of violence per conflict ranges from ‘1’ or minor conflict (less than 1000 battle related deaths) to ‘2’, full war (minimum of 1000 deaths). As one country can be involved in

several conflicts, the intensity levels have been aggregated whenever a country is involved in more than one conflict.

Political considerations – Two measures are used to assess the political and strategic motives of decision-makers. A first variable determines whether Belgium and a recipient country share a common language. Van Belle et al. (2004) and Rioux and Van Belle (2005) have used a similar measure to account for the strategic motives of Canada and France, respectively. Moreover, in their review of Belgian development aid, Develtere and Michel (119-120) argue that the dominance of French speaking civil servants in Belgium affected the selection of recipient countries to the advantage of French speaking countries. Data on common language has been obtained through the Centre d'Etudes Prospectives et d'Informations Internationales (Mayer and Zignago, 2005). Second, a dummy variable differentiates Belgium's three former colonies, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Burundi, from all the other recipient countries.

METHOD

A zero-inflated Poisson regression (zip) with robust standard errors is used to examine the impact of the different determinants on humanitarian assistance. ZIP regressions adequately model count variables with excess zeros (Lambert 1992). As only a fraction (17%) of the countries affected by natural disasters in a given year receives assistance, the dependent variable is zero for most of our cases. As previously noted, the allocation of assistance is a process of two interrelated stages (Cingranni and Pasquarello 1985; Drury et al. 2005), whereby the initial decision to grant aid and the allocation of the amount of assistance need to be studied separately. A ZIP model enables the study of these processes independently within one model. First, a logit regression models the excess zeros and examines why certain countries receive humanitarian aid while others do not. This corresponds to the first, binary, stage of the decisional process. In the second stage, a Poisson regression examines the amount of assistance granted to those countries receiving aid only. Zip models are similar to Heckman selection models, but are less restrictive as they do not rely on the associated normality assumptions (Heckman 1974).

RESULTS

The first phase of a ZIP model explains the excess zeros. Since we are interested in explaining those cases that actually receive aid, the values of the coefficients have been inverted to avoid confusion regarding their direction. The coefficients from both stages can, then, be interpreted in a similar way, explaining how and why humanitarian assistance is obtained. The results of the analysis, presented in Table 8.1, reveal different dynamics between the two stages of the decisional process. Most explaining variables only affect humanitarian aid at one specific stage of the decision-making process, with the exception of media attention to conflicts, the economic development of the recipient countries and the former colony dummy. Of the 772 cases – countries in a given year – 209 were involved in military conflict and only 24 were not affected by a natural disaster.

STAGE 1: WHO GETS ASSISTANCE?

Media coverage of a crisis is important in determining whether a country is granted assistance or not. Media headlines are rare and only 109 of the 772 cases receive at least one front-page newspaper headline, and only four cases get ten or more headlines, with an exceptional 28 articles for Afghanistan in 2001. So, as headlines are rare; one front-page news coverage increases the likelihood of humanitarian assistance. This suggests that Belgian media are particularly successful in drawing governmental attention to hazardous situations in specific countries. This finding confirms the broad consensus on media's agenda-setting function whereby they are most efficient in influencing the public and policy-makers in directing attention to what is important. As expected, long-term media coverage does not influence the likelihood of humanitarian assistance, as governmental attention is more driven by specific coverage that is relevant to the ongoing event.

Real world indicators offer a mixed view, as the severity of disasters does not increase the likelihood of emergency assistance while the intensity of armed conflict does. Only 17% of the 748 cases (countries per year) affected by natural disasters receive aid and the severity of the disaster does not affect the probability of assistance. The likelihood of aid, however, does increase as conflicts intensify; from 30% for low intensity conflicts to 39% for more violent conflicts, compared to 11% for countries not entangled in military disputes. However, those countries that are involved in too many violent conflicts (only 14 cases) are less likely to receive aid (27%). This

suggests that too much violence prevents effective aid operations. Finally, cases that are both involved in conflict and struck by natural disasters are as likely to receive aid as other countries implicated in conflicts.

The resilience of a country, as measured by its economic development, is also a decisive factor in this first stage of the allocation process and, so, countries with a lower GDP per capita are more likely to receive humanitarian assistance than those countries that are better off. Per difference in GDP/cap of US \$10, the probability of aid increases with 1%. While this may appear small, given the large differences in GDP/cap between developing countries, poorer countries are considerably more likely to receive aid. GDP/cap has the highest z-value of all independent variables ($z = -4.50$).

Table 8.1 Zero-inflated Poisson regression model explaining humanitarian aid

	<i>Stage 1</i> <i>Aid or not</i>		<i>Stage 2</i> <i>How much aid</i>	
	Logit coefficient (SE)	<i>p</i>	Poisson coefficient (SE)	<i>p</i>
Media disaster	.7329 .2551	0.004	.0664 .0417	0.112
Media conflict	.1078 .0503	0.032	.0359 .0138	0.009
Media long-term	.0013 .0019	0.519	.0017 .0008	0.023
Casualties	-.0000 .0000	0.623	.0000 .0000	0.000
Total affected	-.0000 .0000	0.674	.0000 .0000	0.399
Conflict intensity	.2188 .0931	0.019	.0239 .0660	0.717
GDP/capita	-.0006 .0001	0.000	-.0002 .0001	0.020
Common language	-.0439 .2821	0.876	-.1904 .1755	0.278
Former colony	3.4118 .7941	0.000	1.3390 .2135	0.000
Constant	-1.2843 .2084	0.000	13.7590 .1786	0.000
N	772		133	
Wald Chi-square	519.67			
Chi-square prob.	0.000			

The second most powerful explaining variable for the first stage is of a more political nature. Belgium's former colonies are more likely to receive aid, compared to the other countries. In addition to the strategic and political nature of these decisions, it is important to emphasize that the Great Lakes Region has been devastated by rebellious military conflicts throughout the entire period at study. Hence, some of the humanitarian assistance has become almost structural, given the relative permanent refugees and refugee camps. The fact that countries with which Belgium shares a common language are not more likely to receive aid suggests that assistance might not be so political after all.

STAGE 2: HOW MUCH ASSISTANCE?

Table 8.1 shows that the assistance developing countries receive, is not determined by the same dynamics as the initial decision to grant aid. An important finding is that long-term media attention increases the amount of assistance, as expected. This suggests that high levels of news coverage in the five years preceding a crisis increase the esteemed importance of a country and the ensuing aid. Even over a period of five years, front-page news coverage is rather rare and most cases (over 50%) do not get more than 10 headlines. Nevertheless, about 14% of the cases get over 50 headlines and in 2008 Iraq had long-term media coverage of 650 headlines. So, while one article only increases aid with .2%, it can still make an important difference in assistance. Yet, this is not the only difference between both decisional stages; while specific (short-term) media attention to disasters only affects the first stage of the decision, (short-term) coverage of conflicts plays a role in both stages, as it also determines how much assistance is allocated.

The real world indicators show that, unsurprisingly, there are other differences between assistance in response to disasters or conflicts. The intensity of a violent conflict only determines the initial decision to grant aid, but does not affect the amount of aid. Conversely, the number of casualties caused by natural disasters did not draw governmental attention in the first decisional stage, but co-determines the amount of aid allocated in response to a disaster. Given that there is no sign of multicollinearity, one explaining variable does not obscure the effect of another.

Recipient countries (N=133) receive, on average, about 1.6 million Euro. However, a closer look at the distribution of assistance shows that more than 60% of the cases receive less than 1 million Euro with a distinct peak around €500,000. Only nine cases

received over €5,000,000 with an exceptional 12,5 million Euro for Congo in 2000. As Congo appears 10 times among the 15 highest recipient cases, along with other former colony Burundi (3 times), it is clear that former colonies do not play in the same league as the other countries. They are far more likely to receive aid and also get considerably more than any other country. Whether recipient countries share a common language does not make any difference in the second stage either.

DISCUSSION

The literature on media effects indicates that it is hard to interpret and generalize what is actually known about the influence of media on policy. This is due to the important differences between policy issues and countries, but also because of the different measures researchers use to assess the policy agenda (Dearing and Rogers, 1996). Pritchard and Berkowitz (1993) argued that policymakers have two types of policy agendas – a symbolic and a resource (substantial) one – whereby only the symbolic agenda is sensitive to media attention. In their review of the literature, Walgrave and Van Aelst (2006) confirmed that most studies finding an impact of media on policy used symbolic measures of policy, like speeches and press statements. This was also the case for foreign policy studies; while quantitative studies found media attention to direct presidential and congressional attention, using statements and speeches (Wood and Peake, 1998; Edwards and Wood, 1999), CNN and indexing studies did not find media to influence executive decisions (Livingston, 1997). Prior investigations of American humanitarian aid (Van Belle, 2003; Drury et al., 2005; Van Belle, 2010) have revealed the potential of media effects on humanitarian aid, which is not surprising given the often graphic nature of media coverage to such events.

Therefore, development aid, and specifically humanitarian assistance, provides for a unique theoretical and methodological opportunity to assess the influence of media attention on a substantial measure of policy – budgets. The two-stage analysis allows us to uncover the black box of decision-making to a small degree, but in an important way, as it reveals that news media not only possess a strong short-term agenda-setting impact, but also influence which countries are considered important in the long run. The importance of long-term media exposure is a phenomenon that has largely been understudied and deserves more scholarly attention. While little is known about long-term media attention, this study not only shows that long-term media coverage is very

different from the short-term exposure that is traditionally used to examine media effects, but it also indicates that these two different measures of media attention affect policy in a substantially different way. As Baumgartner and Jones (1993) argue in their agenda-setting work, major policy change often requires long-term advocacy to alter the way an issue and its policy solution is understood. Hence, steady media coverage is one way to increase the perceived importance of an issue. Although the two-stage analysis of this study does not perfectly match the complex decision-making process described by Baumgartner and Jones (1993), it does confirm the importance of agenda-setting through focusing events, as well as long-term advocacy. Hence, the power of the media is not restricted to its agenda-setting function and policy changes are greater when focusing events are combined with steady attention.

A number of studies have suggested that media effects had disappeared during the 1990s (Van Belle, 2010; Van Belle and Potter, 2011) to reappear with the War on terror after 9/11. As this study only examines humanitarian assistance from 1999-2008, it is not possible to make statements about changes in the decision-making dynamics. Nevertheless, this study does confirm the existence of media effects on humanitarian aid after 2001 in Belgium. Whether this qualifies as confirmation of the existence of the CNN effect depends on its definition, as allocating humanitarian assistance holds considerably less constraints and cost than sending military troops. So, while some argue that the CNN effect is about the media's ability to influence governments to pursue military intervention during humanitarian crises (Robinson, 2002: 2), others have a broader understanding of the CNN effect as policy that is shaped by the influences of news (Spencer, 2006). Livingston and Eachus (1995), then again, talk about "elite decision makers' loss of policy control to news media", a definition that is rather hard to apply and verify.

Belgian humanitarian assistance is allocated to alleviate the suffering of people as a result of any kind of crisis and, as the analyses provided here reveal, the governmental response to natural disasters and military conflict follows distinct logics and dynamics. This is not surprising given the fundamentally different nature of these events. Short-term media attention plays an important agenda-setting role in drawing governmental attention and selecting a specific crisis, whether natural disaster or conflict. At this stage, the severity of the situation only determines the likelihood of assistance for conflicts and not for disasters. The amount of assistance is also determined by different dynamics, as short-term media coverage increases the assistance for conflicts

but not for disasters. The amount of assistance for disasters is determined by its severity (the number of people killed).

Finally, while Belgium has a rather peculiar political system, with its own brand of federalism, and dominated by political parties, its humanitarian policies are akin to that of many other Western countries. Most importantly, most other Western European countries are also member of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) whose primary goal is to discuss aid issues and improve its efficiency. Moreover, most of these countries are also part of the European Union. Hence, these countries are 'subject' to the same influences, guidelines and goals when it comes to aid – and especially emergency assistance. Hence, as Walgrave et al. (2008) argued: if news media are able to exert influence in a politically closed system like Belgium – as it has in the United States (Van Belle, 2003; Drury et al., 2005) – a similar effect might also be found in other West-European donor countries.

CONCLUSION

POLITICAL PARTIES AND MEDIA AS CONVEYERS OF PUBLIC DEMANDS

Foreign policy decision-making is a complex and multifaceted process, involving multiple actors and institutions, dealing with long-term ambitions, as well as short-term urgencies. The degree to which these matters are decided in accordance to or in function of domestic considerations has been the subject of a long-standing debate and, to this day, we know very little about the responsiveness to domestic forces in foreign policymaking.

There are a number of ways through which public demands, like shifts in concerns, changing preferences and other types of evolutions in society may be translated into political priorities and make their way onto the policy agenda. By addressing the role of domestic actors in making foreign policy in Belgium, as I set out to do at the beginning of the research, we also explicitly inquire into the democratic nature of these policies and its policymaking process. Indeed, one of the main tasks of political parties is to pick up, convey and transform public demands into a political agenda and matching policies to respond to these demands. The media, as their name indicates, are an important instrument in this process, as they inform policymakers about these public demands and also inform the public on the actions of policymakers. As such, they are a flexible and dynamic indication of what goes on in society; what the public finds important and what is their preferred solution to resolve these matters.

Over the years, different streams of research have developed in their attempt to explain this democratic phenomenon, depending on their focus of how policy and policy changes come about. Unfortunately, however, these different branches of research have evolved independently from each other, as they offer a rather distinct understanding about why governments carry out the policies they do. These different understandings imply a focus on different aspects of policymaking and therefore, on different political actors. Although both research strands do not exclude each other or

their respective theoretical fundamentals, there has been little to no interaction between them nor has there been much theoretical integration of both theories.

The ‘party political’ research tradition (proponed by Klingemann et al., 1994; McDonald and Budge, 2005 among others) argues that policy and policy change are a function of the electoral cycle in which political parties play the main role. So, before the elections, parties propose policy programs in which specific policy issues are addressed, along with alternative solutions. Since the goal is to attract voters, parties will try to appeal to citizens by proposing programs that respond to their concerns. While most voters do not read these programs, they are often used as cues by news media to inform the broader public and generate relevant policy debates. Attention from all parties serves a certain agenda-setting function, as specific policy issues are emphasized. Winning parties, however, are considered to receive a ‘mandate’ from the voters to carry out those policies. Once in office, most parties have been found to effectively carry out their electoral promises.

Agenda-setting theory, on the other hand, focuses on the way issues become societal problems, requiring governmental attention (see for example Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005). These scholars claim that policymaking is a mainly incremental process and governments, therefore, deal with the same issues from one period to another, regardless of the electoral cycle. Issues then become policy concerns when the understanding of an issue and its solution changes and when important political actors become involved. This means that as the frame and understanding of a given issue changes, it starts to become perceived as a problem. As more and more people change their perception of that issue, more people become involved, among whom politically powerful actors. A change in the image of an issue, combined with the involvement of political actors then entails a large change in policy. However, in essence, both perspectives deal with how public concerns are translated and transformed into policies.

So, while the former tend to ignore governmental responses to ongoing real-world changes and events throughout their legislative terms, the latter neglect or downplay the impact of the electoral cycle on the ensuing distribution of public goods. This also entails that they tend to ignore the role of certain actors, associated with specific policymaking processes; in this case, for example, media and parties, respectively. However, while these two perspectives do not exclude each other’s theoretical principles (Baumgartner et al., 2011), there has been very little interaction or

communication between both strands of research. This research, however, integrates the party political perspective into the broader agenda-setting framework.

The main theoretical reason for doing so is that agenda-setting theory, with its key focus on attention and priorities, offers a broader and more flexible theoretical framework, in which the party political perspective and the electoral cycle can more easily be incorporated, as chapter 1 and 3 demonstrate. Agenda-setting provides a more dynamic understanding of policymaking that makes it possible to incorporate the rather static perspective focusing on the electoral cycle. So, agenda-setting offers more flexibility, as it acknowledges that policy changes can occur at any moment throughout the legislature and not only after elections, allowing us to study the influence of different actors, like news media, Parliament, pressure groups, etc.

If we try to frame the electoral cycle within an agenda-setting perspective, parties attempt to impose their preferred policies by explaining why something is a problem (changing the policy image of an issue) and how it should then be solved (the preferred policy alternative). Hence, elections can accelerate or intensify the classic agenda-setting mechanisms like venue shopping and positive feedback. With respect to venue shopping, policy advocates can lobby parties to include certain issues in their policy program and, if one party refuses, maybe another one will. However, once an issue gets picked up and finds itself on one party's agenda, a mechanism similar to positive feedback can cause other parties to address the issue too. Therefore, throughout my dissertation, I have attempted to demonstrate that these two perspectives can easily coexist and explain different aspects of the policymaking process and policy change.

Yet, the agenda-setting framework not only offers advantages from a theoretical point of view, but also methodologically. By focusing on attention and issue priorities, rather than preferences or policy positions, agenda-setting enables an easy integration of different actors into one explanatory framework. Although policy preferences, as used by many CMP scholars, provide for a useful tool for matching policies proposed in manifestos with those of the government, not all policy emphasis is directional. Media, for example, emphasize a wide variety of issues, among which many relate to governmental policies. While journalists can be biased in their coverage (Patterson and Donsbach, 1996), they are not expected to select stories according to their own political orientation – what is known as selection or gatekeeping bias (D'Alessio and Allen, 2000). Even though newspapers in Belgium were known to be partisan,

especially with its pillarized society, it is unlikely that today's media outlets would ignore good stories, as the commercial logic has come to dominate (Underwood, 2001). Hence, the 'neutral' nature of issue *priorities* enables us to compare agendas from one actor/institution to another, within a same actor over time and within one actor across different stages of the policymaking process. Chapters 5 and 6 show all of these possibilities, which enabled us to see how governmental policies evolved across different stages of the policymaking, from its formulation to making the decision.

The straightforward use of issue salience and policy priorities also allows us to 'dissect' the extensive policymaking process and examine different stages. So, while the first empirical part (chapters 5 and 6) focuses on policy formulation during government formation, the second empirical part (chapters 7 and 8) examines the influence of media on policy outcomes in the more specific subfield of development aid. Hence, the use of an extensive policy codebook with many very specific policy categories makes it possible to 'zoom in' on specific policy subdomains. In fact, throughout the different studies, the governmental foreign policies are examined at an increasing level of specificity. So, as chapter 5 focuses on the distribution of general policy issues throughout the legislature, chapter 6 specifically focuses on the issue priorities within foreign policy, across its different subdomains. Then, as chapter 7 assesses the determinants of the distribution of development assistance, chapter 8 looks at a specific subfield *within* development assistance: humanitarian aid. This increasing level of specificity is what allows us to gain a deeper understand of how the influence of particular actors work.

So, the first, and central, question addressed in this doctoral research relates to the role and influence of two important actors in many Western democracies, and particularly in Belgium. The agenda-setting approach used in this research was able to examine and demonstrate the influence of news media on political outcomes in foreign aid, in addition to the important role political parties play in establishing the broader foreign policy priorities and guidelines during government formation. The findings of the empirical studies present a generally positive picture, whereby both political parties and news media succeed pretty well – each in their own distinct ways – in influencing the political agenda and the ensuing policies. Indeed, while political parties and news media seem to influence policy at different stages of the policymaking process, they also differ strongly in the mechanisms through which this influence is exerted.

FOREIGN POLICY FORMULATION AND THE ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES

Though elections and shifts in government do not necessarily imply that the course of each policy domain alters dramatically, they do provide the new government with a unique opportunity to change or reaffirm policy priorities and preferences. Therefore, during government negotiations the new coalition partners will try to include as many of their policy priorities as possible into the new government agreement. Although civil servants guarantee the consistency of the foreign policy and ensure that the country's interests are upheld on a day-to-day basis, this research has shown that new governments can and do seize this opportunity to bring forth new priorities – and how. In chapter 4, for example, we've seen how governments have first neglected and then reprioritized development assistance and what effect this has actually had on the budgets for development aid. Moreover, I show that governments do have a say in foreign policy matters and that they do so in a concrete way, not just in rhetoric but also in precise policy pledges.

Before examining the specific role of political parties in foreign policymaking during the policy formulation process, chapter 5 examines the strength of the grip the government agreement maintains over the governmental policy priorities throughout the legislature. The agreement brokered by the negotiating parties has to be enacted and implemented in the ensuing years. Hence, inspired by the work on policy pledges and particularly Moury's (2011) work on the constraining power of the government agreement, the question raised in chapter 5 is whether political parties return to their natural state of competition and drift away from their common project; the government agreement when carrying out policy. Previous studies had already confirmed the value of government agreements as a *source* for future policies to be implemented (Thomson, 2001; Mansergh and Thomson, 2007; Costello and Thomson, 2008; Moury, 2011). Additionally, Moury found evidence suggesting that the government agreement also functions as a *constraint* on future policies; preventing new initiatives unless they were initially included in the government agreement.

To examine this constraining power, I examined whether policy drift, away from the initial government agreement, occurred in the yearly state of the union speeches and the weekly ministerial councils throughout the legislature in a quantitative way, over four different legislatures from 1993-2007. This was done by matching the policy priorities expressed in the government agreement to those of the ministerial council

decisions and the state of the unions from one year to another. The results presented in chapter 5 confirm the importance of government agreements for future policies, but also show that the government agreement, indeed, works like a straitjacket throughout the full legislative term, preventing large shifts in policy priorities over time. So, as the decisions being made by the government are in high accordance with the priorities laid out by the coalition partners during the government negotiations, the key point here is that this high correspondence does not decrease over time.

So, given this central position of government formation as a policy arena and the firm grip of the GA on future policy priorities makes it all the more interesting and relevant to find out and understand how these priorities are formulated in the first place. Here, obviously, political parties play a key role. A basic element of the nature of party politics is that parties differ in what they believe to be the most important problems and how to resolve these. In chapter 4, we see how foreign policy priorities differ from one party to another, how these evolve over time, but also how these priorities can come together to form one ‘party agenda’. As mentioned above, Belgium’s renewed investment in development aid after 1999 corresponded to an increased interest in foreign aid expressed in the government agreement. While this increased interest was not uniformly observed in parties’ individual manifestos, it was clearly observed at the aggregated level (all parties combined). So, in addition to individual party agendas, there is also *a* party agenda. During the coalition negotiations political parties come together to draft a common project.

Therefore, in a second phase, chapter 6 examines the influence of political parties in establishing this coalition agreement. However, the ambition of the different studies, both individually and combined, is also to better understand the process behind these findings. Hence, the goal is to find patterns in the way parties succeed in imposing their foreign policy priorities in the government agreement. So, not only do we observe that parties care about foreign policy and that they matter when drawing the policy lines during the policy formulation phase, we now also know which parties are most successful in influencing the foreign policy content of the coalition agreement. Although the small sample size of the study excludes a two-stage approach to examine the influence of negotiating parties only, it was still possible to discern a pattern of this influence. While party politics scholars have already uncovered a number of these dynamics with respect to policymaking in general, the influence of

parties on foreign policymaking, specifically, and especially at this stage have never been studied.

The results of chapter 6 confirm a number of traditional hypotheses: as expected, larger parties, majority parties and those with more negotiation/government experience are more successful in imposing their priorities onto the next government than the other parties, except for the formateur's party. This suggests that the leader of the negotiations and expected future Prime Minister acts as a mediator between the different negotiating parties and tends to compromise on foreign policy. It is often said that the party of the Prime Minister has to pay a heavy price for this position. Hence, it can be expected that this party has to make concessions in a number of other policy domains as well. Among negotiation parties only, it pays off to invest more in foreign policy issues. Yet, the most surprising pattern found in chapter 6 was the greater influence of left-wing parties on the government's foreign policy priorities. Left-wing parties also have more impact among negotiating parties only, indicating that foreign policy might be an ideologically divisive issue in Belgium, as suggested by Klingemann et al. (1994: 222-239).

So, agenda-setting allows us to track the policy priorities of the government through the decision-making process, from policy formulation, over to the moment where the budgetary priorities are set (state of the union speeches) and policies are carried out (ministerial council decisions). It also enables us to zoom in at a specific policymaking moment – government formation – and assess the influence of political parties while discerning a pattern of influence. However, while these are important achievements, a number of shortcomings and consideration of this first empirical part also require attention.

A first, general, shortcoming is that the findings of this research are only relevant for countries with coalition governments where political parties are dominant actors in political life, and society in general. Indeed, the findings of these studies do not apply to single party governments where foreign policy, as any policy for that matter, is not negotiated among different parties or fractions. In those countries, pledge studies have demonstrated the importance of holding office and controlling Parliament. However, Belgium is far from being the only multi-party system and not the only country where political parties are deeply entrenched in society. This implies that more research needs to be done to confirm these findings across other, similar countries.

A second limit of this first empirical part, and more specifically for chapter 5, is that no particular policy measure allows for an investigation of the grip of government agreements in foreign policy specifically. As the state of the union speeches do not address all topics in enough detail, there is not enough variation to study one policy domain specifically. The ministerial council decisions, then again, do not include all foreign policy decisions. The specific distribution of foreign aid, for example is not decided in the council. Finding an optimal policy measure when examining a specific policy domain is a rather general problem, However, it is particularly problematic for foreign policy, as it is seldom translated into legislation and is not very well reflected in budgetary decisions either (diplomatic initiatives, for example, do not necessarily require financial efforts). Hence, the power of the government agreements is examined through the distribution of major policy topics and not among specific foreign policy issues. That is also one of the reasons why the influence of political parties is not examined on foreign policy outcomes, but indirectly through the influence of the government agreement on policy decisions. As we will see below, this can only be solved by examining specific subdomains of foreign policy, like foreign aid, where budgets are an optimal reflection of the policies.

THE EFFECT OF MEDIA ATTENTION ON AID DISTRIBUTIONS

The second empirical section picks up where the first part left off, with political decisions being made and implemented. Inspecting the outcomes of decision-making in a specific policy domain, like development assistance, or subdomain, like humanitarian aid, allows for the investigation of external influences between the policy formulation phase and its actual execution. As the previous section has shown, during the policy formulation phase specific policy priorities and promises are made. However, this does not mean that every detail of every policy is discussed and detailed. Hence, it is important to have a good understanding of how foreign policy is conducted on a daily basis. That is why chapter 2 not only details the formal aspects of foreign policy decision-making, but also the customs and habits of everyday policymaking with respect to foreign affairs, specifically. Therefore, when the government agreement stipulates that development assistance needs to reach the 0,7% level of Belgium's gross national income, it will not specify how much aid each individual country needs to receive. The government agreement may decide on an

increase in particular types of aid, like humanitarian aid or food aid. It might also commit to increased aid to a certain region or even a specific country, like the Great Lakes or Congo. However, the decision of who gets how much largely lies in the hands of expert bureaucrats, in agreement with the minister's administration.

So, as we move closer down the policy stream towards policy implementation, we also further zoom in on specific parts of Belgium's foreign policy: Official Development Assistance and Humanitarian Aid and their specific distributions to each individual country. To explain yearly changes in aid distributions, chapters 7 and 8 in the second empirical section examine the influence of news media, alongside a battery of other important determinants and motives. Looking at the media coverage of each recipient country before the allocations were made enables the study of media influence on these decisions. Media effects have consistently been found in foreign aid programs in the U.S. (Van Belle and Hook, 2000), France, (Rioux and Van Belle, 2005), Japan (Potter and Van Belle, 2004), the UK and Canada (Van Belle et al., 2004). Yet, here too, the goal is to unveil the process that facilitates this effect.

To many, this responsiveness of foreign aid to media coverage is believed to be a consequence of bureaucratic responsiveness (Van Belle et al., 2004). Their rationale is that bureaucrats respond to media – serving as a proxy for public preferences – to avoid control and sanctions from elected officials who, in turn, are under the direct scrutiny of the voters. However, this bureaucratic responsiveness was only deduced from (a) the finding that media had an impact on foreign aid, and (b) the knowledge that aid is mostly bureaucratically decided. Chapter 7 shows that the influence of media coverage on overall aid is not automatically a consequence of bureaucratic responsiveness, since total foreign aid can be influenced by media attention when the bureaucratically decided part of aid is not. A large part of the aid budgets is only approved by the bureaucracy, while its destination is determined by other actors, like universities and NGOs. Additionally, the economic needs of recipient countries are also main drivers of aid and, as affirmed in every government agreement and each official policy statement, former colonies remain privileged recipients of Belgian aid.

Thus, chapter 7 reveals that the news media have an influence on aid allocations, even after controlling for additional explanations, like real-world events or strategic and economic considerations. It also shows that these dynamics can change over time, whether this is due to internal institutional/organizational reforms or due to evolutions at the international level. So, an additional advantage of the explanatory agenda-

setting model applied here is that it easily integrates other explanatory variables. Moreover, it also enables comparison across time and between countries. Hence, it is possible to compare these findings to those observed in the many other countries. This is particularly useful in order to make general statements on the influence of changes at the international system level on media dynamics, such as the end of the Cold War or the War on terrorism.

Once media effects have been found, we can also start investigating the conditions and the ways in which these effects come about. First, the study in chapter 8 examines the differential effect of long-term and short-term media exposure on aid allocations in response to humanitarian disasters. These two different types of media attention allow us to examine two key principles of agenda-setting theory: the agenda-setting effect of focusing events through short-term bursts of media attention, and the effect of positive feedback through long-term media exposure. Moreover, the long-term effects of media attention are largely understudied, as the main focus lays on media's short-term capacity to put an issue on the political map. However, we observe that both types of exposure have a different effect on the decision-making process: while short bursts of attention to humanitarian disasters increase its likelihood of receiving assistance, long-term (non-disaster) exposure increases the amount of money those countries get through our familiarity with certain countries (who we like most?). Hence, I find that media can impact decision-making in different ways. Of course, other factors were also decisive in both stages: NGOs also served as agenda-setters directing attention to problem zones in the first stage, while the number of casualties played a key role in deciding the amount of assistance. Poorer countries and former colonies are systematically advantaged throughout the entire decision-making process.

Comparison of the media effects between these two studies also enables the investigation of a condition often found crucial for media influences to occur: policy uncertainty (Robinson, 2002). A first indicator that policy uncertainty matters is the observation in chapter 7 that the media impact on bureaucratic foreign aid disappears as the formal allocation rules get stricter, removing policy uncertainty. However, the most important indication of the importance of policy uncertainty is found in the fact that news media still impact humanitarian aid at a time where they have ceased to influence bureaucratic aid. Hence, both between issues as over time comparison suggest that policy uncertainty matters, as claimed by Robinson (2002).

So, in addition to political parties, media are also found to influence foreign policymaking, albeit at another stage of the decision-making process and in a different way. Again, while these studies have contributed to our knowledge on the way media are able to influence policy (through which decision-making channels) and through which mechanisms (short-term agenda-setting and long-term advocacy), there are also a number of limitations and shortcomings to these studies.

A first limitation of this research is that it cannot account for the ‘directional’ or ‘positional’ aspect of certain media messages. As mentioned above, one of the main advantages of agenda-setting is the straightforward use of attention. Since media messages are not meant to emphasize certain political preferences or represent a political agenda, agenda-setting is very suitable to deal with this type of attention. However, this also means that, by focusing on priorities, agenda-setting reduces media coverage to its topical content, discarding valuable information, like, for example, the tone (is it negative or positive towards a topic or country), the intensity and the target (who is it aimed at) of the message. Coverage on the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, can focus on the harsh conditions of everyday life, but it can also stress the political corruption and the safety problems. While both types of coverage draw attention to the same country, the former might be more likely to stimulate increasing aid than the latter. Even though both studies control for the local conditions by accounting for natural disasters and violent conflict, the media message itself is not directional and only measured as attention. However, it needs to be stressed that directional coding would, in fact, not make sense for media messages, as the large majority of news articles are neutral. Moreover, the key interest here is knowing what political actors and media talk about, on which policy issues they focus. Methodologically, this implies that certain (negative) media effects might be missed (i.e. negative attention leading to a decrease in budgets). Hence, if an impact from one actor on another is found, this is despite such type 2 errors (i.e. not finding a media effect while one actually did occur).

A second shortcoming of this study pertains to the potential interaction between media coverage and institutional country priorities, particularly relevant to chapter 7. Indeed, the explanatory model used there does not account for a possible interaction whereby media mainly reflect changes in priorities that were previously initiated by the administration itself. This would mean that, as the aid priorities change, this is reflected in media attention, which would then later be confused with media influence

as aid continues to rise. Given the way policymakers use media and vice-versa, this credible hypothesis. However, statistical tests showed that aid commitments do not affect media coverage of the following year. Moreover, since the statistical models in chapter 7 use 2-year lags to examine the effect of news media, in addition to a lag of the dependent variable, this adds credence to the direction and causality of these findings.

CONCLUSION

At the onset of this research, the goal was to examine the influence of two notable domestic actors in foreign policymaking in Belgium and to find out how an issue can gain political attention to become a policy priority. I find that both political parties and media strongly influence foreign policy. However, they exert this influence in different ways and at different stages of the policymaking process. The influence of political parties during the coalition formation is very clear and straightforward: as the principal – and only – negotiators, the future coalition partners make up a common policy program in which each party tries to include as much of its priorities and preferences as possible. This is also the case for foreign policy. Then, this government agreement is carried out. The influence of news media, however, is more covert and subtle and can be exerted at any moment. This influence on policymaking can manifest itself through civil servants, especially in the occurrence of unpredictable events when there are no clear existing policy guidelines. While media are successful in drawing political attention to specific issues and events, like natural disasters and violent conflicts, they also influence the intensity of the political reaction (in the case, humanitarian assistance) through long-term media exposure. Additionally, media can also influence foreign aid policy through the intermediary of non-governmental actors, as media affect the destination of aid projects these actors submit.

So, this research has demonstrated the importance of domestic forces, and political parties and media in particular, in understanding how a country conducts its foreign policy and interacts with other countries. It also confirmed the value of agenda-setting as a theoretical approach and a research method. Focusing on issue attention and policy priorities enabled us to observe the role of political parties in laying down the foreign policy guidelines, as well as the impact news media have at the moment decisions are made and implemented.

With respect to agenda-setting as an approach, each chapter has shown different advantages and limits of the theory and its methodological framework. However, every single study has demonstrated that agenda-setting allows for the examination of the influence from one actor to another through their respective policy priorities. Since it is possible to measure these priorities at different points in time, we can also map the evolution of a variety of issues within one agenda or examine the influence between agendas over time. Combined, this allows us to track attention within a same actor across different stages of the policymaking process, as has been done in chapter 5. The particular approach used here, with its extensive codebook covering 249 specific policy categories also allows to zoom in at specific decision-making moments. Hence, this research has examined policymaking down the policy stream at an increasingly specific policy level.

Moreover, the explanatory agenda-setting models easily integrate other, alternative explanations. With respect to media, for example, it is possible to obtain a more ‘net’ effect, as other possibly confounding variables are controlled for. This is particularly useful when explaining decision-making where real-world events can blur ‘true’ media effects. As such, especially the statistical models used in chapters 7 and 8 are aggregations of cases, telling us who influences whom over a long period of time. While these explanatory models do not allow for the in-depth analysis that case studies do, they do provide us with clear identifiable patterns across these numerous cases. Such a quantitative approach to foreign policy is innovative, as it is very rare, especially in a non-U.S. context and using actual policy outcomes instead of rhetoric.

Finally, in addition to the specific limitations that have been addressed in the different subsections above, I also need to address a number of general shortcomings in this manuscript. A first such limitation is that this research, as most research, is only partial, as it does not capture the entire decision-making reality. It cannot in an exhaustive way account for the influence of *all* political and non-political actors who possibly play a role at one point or another in the policymaking process. Since this research indirectly deals with the democratic nature of foreign policymaking and the responsiveness of policy to public demands, the main lacuna is the simple absence of public opinion. The main reason for this is that the available public opinion data do not provide information on specific foreign policy priorities or preferences. Unlike in many other countries, there are no long time-series of opinion data on a variety of

issues. Hence, this important shortcoming could not be resolved and was, therefore, addressed indirectly through political parties and media.

However, the public is not the only actor of importance that could not be integrated in this research. Pressure groups, like NGOs for example, try to influence policy by lobbying policymakers directly or through public and media campaigns or street protest. At this point, the political or policy effect of these activities is not yet known. Hence, to further improve our understanding of how foreign policy comes about, it seems necessary for future research to examine whether and how these organizations are able to influence policymaking.

Another important domestic force is the bureaucracy. Kingdon (1995: 33-34) argues that civil servants are able to influence the policy formation through their longevity (they are not politically appointed), their expertise and their relationships with other experts, such as policymakers and interest groups. However, “career civil servants are not important in agenda-setting, relative to other participants, but they have more impact on alternatives and yet more on implementation.” (Kingdon, 1995: 42-42). Baumgartner and Jones’ (1993) punctuated equilibrium theory considers civil more as inhibitors than proponents of change. While the Belgian policymaking context is clearly different from the American one, in Belgium, too, civil servants implement decisions rather than making them, even though they might enjoy a certain degree of freedom when it comes to the policy alternatives. Even if personal staffs of the Prime minister and the Minister of foreign affairs include civil servants, decisions remain political. From a methodological point of view, it is extremely hard to measure bureaucratic activities. Chapter 7, for example, emphasizes the importance of bureaucrats by examining bureaucratically decided aid. However, it is as good as impossible to separate bureaucratic activities as an independent variable from policy outcomes, the dependent variable given their proximity in the policy stream. Hence, and as mentioned in the introduction, the government – along with political parties – is considered as one collective entity.

This brings us to a second general shortcoming; the importance of powerful individuals in foreign policymaking. While chapter 2 stresses the increasing importance of collective decision-making, as trust among coalition partners has decreased, it certainly does not deny the possible agenda-setting impact of powerful individuals, most notably the Minister of foreign affairs and the Prime minister. Although important decisions need to be discussed and decided collectively, it is not

unthinkable for a minister to promote new issues or priorities. It would, then, be interesting for future research to examine whether members of the government can move towards policy dictatorship and, if so, under which conditions.

A third general limitation to this research is the lack of integration of supranational organizations and their influence. However, of the different supranational ‘candidate’ influences, a number can easily be discarded. The impact of the United Nations, for example, is as good as inexistent, especially in a country like Belgium. Although NATO has more impact on certain important foreign policy decisions, this influence only pertains to a very small scope of decisions that involve military participation. Moreover, when deciding on participation to military actions, domestic considerations are most often also taken into account. While the European Union has gained an increasing importance in Belgian policymaking and legislation, the integration of European foreign policies has, so far, seriously lagged behind. While intensive efforts are being made to come to more unified European foreign policies, especially within international organizations, the impact of the European Union on the foreign policies of its member states remains minimal. So, the only major international organization lacking is the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), where guidelines are drafted to improve foreign aid efficiency and aid coordination among its members. However, there is no operationalizable way to account for the influence of these DAC meetings and the coordination of aid policies among its members, especially not in a quantitative way.

A fourth limitation becomes apparent when we reconsider figure 1.1 in the introduction. The two main actors studied here separately – political parties and media – do not operate in a distinct environment or political reality. While political parties take into account the media to communicate with the public, news media also look at parties for relevant news on current political activities. Hence, the two actors interact. Media, for example, has been found to have a weak, but significant, influence on party manifestos (Rihoux et al., 2005; Walgrave and Lefevre, 2010). Media coverage has also been found to influence the weekly parliamentary questions of MP’s (Walgrave et al., 2008; Vliegthart and Walgrave, 2011). Media itself, however, is not determined by parliamentary activities, except for foreign affairs and environmental issues (Walgrave et al., 2008). Hence, future research will have to include the role of

parliamentary activities, not only as a frequent measure for party preferences, but also as a proper intermediary policy agenda.

Finally, there are also limits to the generalizability of this research, and particularly with respect to Belgium as a case, since not all countries have multi-party systems where political parties play such a central role. If any, this would mainly have consequences for the first empirical part of this research. It implies that the importance of political parties on foreign policy, and possibly also the impact of the government agreement, as found here, might not apply to certain countries, or that they are likely to be smaller. On the other hand, Belgium's foreign policies are similar to that of many medium and small-sized West European countries, like, for example, the Netherlands, Luxemburg, Ireland, Denmark and Switzerland. While each of these countries has its particular institutional setup, many of them are also multi-party systems (Lijphart, 1999: 76-77) or countries where parties have an important influence. In trying to categorize types of foreign policy behavior, a number of authors stressed the importance of physical size, economic development and political openness (political accountability) (see for example Rosenau, 1966; East, 1973; East and Hermann, 1974; Duval and Thomson, 1980). First, as medium and small-sized West European countries, they are not great powers with disproportionate ambitions and, thus, share similar – minor – security concerns that are mostly dealt with at the supranational level. Moreover, most of these countries operate within a similar environment shaped by the European Union and are exporting countries with similar commercial and trade interests. They can all be considered as rich countries with large aid programs and regularly consult to conform to common aid standards. Finally, they are all democracies with high political accountability. So, while these countries can certainly chose different foreign policy paths, they do operate in a similar policy environment and share similar foreign policy interests and priorities, which they can pursue in different ways.

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