

# The making of the (issues of the) Vlaams Blok

## The media and the success of the Belgian extreme-right party<sup>1</sup>

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As in many European countries, a strong extreme-right wing party thrives in Belgium. The Vlaams Blok (VB) is only active in the northern, Dutch-speaking part of the country, but dominates the political discourse in the French-speaking part as well. It is the outspoken enemy, the devil in party disguise, for all other Belgian parties. The pariah of Belgian politics VB is contained in a so-called *cordon sanitaire*. Unlike in other European countries (e.g. Austria, Italy, Denmark, The Netherlands...), all parties solemnly agreed not to cooperate with the VB under any circumstance and on any political level. That turns the VB into a fundamental opposition party. It is focussed on winning elections, not on getting office or on realising its policy programme (Müller & Strøm, 1999). Civil society too, took up arms against VB: some of the biggest Belgian demonstrations in the 90s were directed against VB and the antiracist movement is very active (Van Aelst, 2000). The public television channel adopted a charter that encourages its journalists to be extremely critical towards the VB and to avoid excessive media coverage of the party (*De VRT en de democratische samenleving*). Government's official antiracist organisation (*Centrum voor Gelijkheid van Kansen en Racismebestrijding*) sued the party for trespassing antiracist law and in April, 2004 the party was in fact condemned by the court but it went into appeal.

In electoral terms the party seems unstoppable. In fact, the party grew with *every* general election since 1981, that is, by now, in six consecutive national elections. Especially in the 90s the party gradually expanded. Major breakthrough came with the 1991 general elections, later labelled Black Sunday. The share of extreme-rights votes more than tripled and also in 1995 and 1999 the party grew larger. At the latest general

elections, in 2003, VB soared to 17,2% of the votes<sup>3</sup>. In some regions and cities VB has a third of the votes and is by far the largest party. Due to the fragmentation of the Belgian-Flemish party landscape, at least three parties have to join forces to form a workable majority. The fear for a further growth of VB overshadows plenty of policy debates and tends to paralyse decision-making and parties routinely accuse each other of fuelling VB's successes with certain political initiatives or of emulating VB's reprehensible political rhetoric.

The spectacular rise of the VB in Belgium has inspired many political scientists to investigate its causes. Remarkably, very little research has been devoted to the *supply* side of the VB puzzle. The VB is a professionally led party, with lots of money, an unusually clear political position, strong and verbally skilled politicians, without internal disputes and, above all, with a smart, omnipresent and pronounced populist communication strategy, entirely suited to touch the antipolitical strings in the population at large (Jagers & Walgrave, 2003). Although scholarly attention for the supply side is badly needed, that is not the focus of the present article. We rather side with the studies focussing on the *demand* side of the VB riddle. Especially the voters' role has received much scholarly attention (Swyngedouw, 1992; Elchardus, 1994; Maddens, 1994, 1998; Billiet & Swyngedouw, 1995; Billiet & De Witte, 1995; Elchardus & Pelleriaux, 1998; Swyngedouw, 2001). Basically, like elsewhere where extreme-right parties flourish, the discussion focuses on whether the VB voters actually voted *for* something (a party, a candidate, a programme, an issue...) or only *against* something (the other parties, the system, the establishment...)(Billiet & De Witte, 1995). In other words: is a VB vote an ideological vote or just an expression of protest (Van der Brug et al., 2000)? In this debate, plenty of research has focussed on

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<sup>3</sup> We will always use the national election results for one of the two national chambers, i.e. the lower house (de Kamer). Only the results for the Flemish part of Belgium will be considered, since the two main regions, their party systems and electoral arenas are completely separated. In the French-speaking part of Belgium, there is an extreme right party as well, the Front National (National Front), but it has known less success and lost votes in the 90s.

the alignments of opinions conducive to a VB-vote. Within this literature some claim that the VB is the manifestation of an underlying value shift, while others argue that it is the expression of changing issue preferences and saliency. It is the latter strand that we will pursue. In contrast to previous studies, we will not draw upon cross-sectional individual level analyses based on survey evidence, but rather on a longitudinal and aggregate research design, well aware of the potential hazards of this trail, and on a combination of survey data and media content evidence. Since this kind of design is new in extreme-right research we will not rely on extreme-right party literature but on general theories of agenda-setting and issue voting.

From its breakthrough onwards, the role of the mass media in the success of the VB, has been at the heart of a vivid political debate in Belgium (Billiet, Swyngedouw, Carton, 1993). Belgian politicians, movement leaders and journalists have blamed the media for giving the floor to VB politicians and for overstressing the themes of the VB. They contend that negative and cynical reporting is nurturing antipolitical feelings in the public at large. Strangely enough, no systematic scientific research focussing on the mass media's role in the making of the VB has been undertaken. Although there is a general debate on mass media and extreme-right going on since a few years (see among others: Mazzoleni, 2003), most VB scholars kept silent about mass media and restricted themselves to safer voter surveys avoiding the slippery causality associated with media studies. Especially the news media are regularly under fire. That is one of the reasons why we, in this contribution, confine ourselves to the news media, although it is possible that fiction and news shows as well could produce a breeding ground for extreme-right votes (Street, 2001). Theoretically, news media could be related to a party's success in three ways: (1) the party (or its politicians) gets lots of (positive) coverage; (2) the issues of the party are overexposed; (3) the framing of the news (in general) favours the party. Through party attention, issue coverage and

frames, news media might influence the public and fuel, or obstruct, party success. In this paper, we will focus on the second track: media attention for VB's issues may have increased over the years and this might have contributed to the success of the party. Thanks to a large agenda-setting project, we have at our disposal a vast media content dataset covering the whole 1991-2000 period. This database allows us to test our issue-making hypothesis empirically based upon a longitudinal time-series analysis.

The basic quest of this paper is straightforward: *do the media contribute to the electoral success of the VB by stressing typical VB issues?* To answer this question, we proceed in four chapters. In the first part, we elaborate the theories underlying the 'media-makes-the-issues'-hypothesis combining agenda-setting theory with issue-ownership. Subsequently, the issues the VB owns are determined using two sources: party manifestoes of the Flemish parties and voters' motives in the 90s. Next, longitudinal content analysis of television news and newspapers is conducted, to check whether these characteristic VB issues were frequently, and increasingly, covered in the media in the 90s. Finally, merging media content with electoral growth of the VB in a time-series analysis, permits us to establish, with the necessary prudence, whether or not there is any relationship between party issues, news content and electoral success.

## MEDIA, ISSUES AND VOTERS

Classic agenda-setting theory claims that the amount of media-attention for an issue influences the perception of that issue among the public (see among many others: Cohen, 1963; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Dearing & Rogers, 1996). Mere quantitative media attention for an issue, produces issue concern in public opinion. One of the central discussions in agenda-setting theory is the time lag problem (Winter & Eyal 1981). Our claim is that the *long lasting* news media attention for VB issues might have

contributed to the electoral success of the VB. The idea that the steady and cumulative repetition of issues drives the public's issue priorities is at the heart of the classic theory and implies a longer time perspective and not an immediate public's response (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). Yet, most studies within the agenda-setting perspective focus rather on short-term influences with issues becoming top priorities in no time and dropping back to a normal level only shortly afterwards (Downs 1972). For the public and the media agenda are zero-sum games: an issue can only gain importance by pushing aside other issues and new issues are always fighting their way up (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988). Surveys, then again, show that the public's concern is not that capricious at all. The same issues hang on for a long time among people's policy priorities. This remarkable issue stability might be explained by the repetitive, 'normal' media attention for these main issues. Our longitudinal data permit us to focus on these long-term effects, beyond peak agenda-setting caused by temporary media hypes.

The issue-ownership thesis claims that certain parties are considered by the voters at large as best placed to deal with a certain policy question (Petrocik, 1990; 1996; Narud & Valen, 2001). Parties are credible and reliable on certain issues, they are considered as sincere and expert on these issues and not on others. Some issue-ownerships are only short term, but most of them seem to be stable and it is difficult for parties to claim a new issue or to get rid of an old issue (Maddens, 1994; Petrocik, 1996; Masket, 2000). As more voters' votes are determined by issues, instead of party loyalty or deep ideological affiliations, issue-ownership has become a strong weapon on the electoral market (Dalton et al., 1984; Carmines, 1991). Budge & Farlie (1983), for example, showed empirically that parties won elections when their issues were high on the public's agenda. Voters are only able to consider a handful of issues at the same time (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Moreover only important issues really affect political behaviour and voting but these important issues are limited in number. People's

viewpoint on policy themes may remain relatively stable over time, but their perception of issues' importance is changing all the time (Page & Shapiro, 1992). This makes public agenda-setting, drawing the public's attention to some issues, a decisive process for the political behaviour of citizens, in particular for casting their vote. By combining the issue-ownership thesis with agenda-setting theory can the media be considered as affecting voting behaviour.

Some authors distinguish sophistication levels (Lane, 1962). Sophisticated voters are able to keep an eye on more issues at the same time, they contextualise issues in a multi-dimensional issue space. Less sophisticated voters, in contrast, only bother about a few issues and do not relate these issues, they hold a fragmented view of politics (Maddens & Hajnal, 2001). Sophisticated voters, also, more consider difficult issues - technical, temporary and less symbolic - than non-sophisticated voters (Carmines & Stimson, 1980). Voter sophistication is associated, among others, with education. The Belgian election surveys consistently show that VB voters are the least schooled of all electorates (Billiet et al., 2001). That leads us to the hypothesis that VB voters are probably less sophisticated and only take into account a few and relatively easy issues. This makes them especially susceptible for agenda-setting by the media. That is further underpinned by Merrill & Grofman's (1997) contention that the issue-ownership model applies best to challenging and non-incumbent parties. Since the VB is an eternal opposition party, the electoral results of this party could be more determined by issue voting and agenda-setting than the electoral scores of other parties.

Because issues are foremost made by the media, and issue saliency influences voting decisions, partisan election campaigns are designed to get the party's issue via the media onto the public's agenda and into the voters' heads. Scholars coined the concept of priming to refer to the fact that media coverage for some issues leads voters to take those issues into account in their evaluation of political actors (Iyengar & Kinder,

1987; Ansolabehere et al, 1991). Consequently lots of scholarly attention has been devoted to the agenda-setting battle during campaigns (e.g. Norris, 1997; Norris et al., 1999; Kleinnijenhuis et al., 1995; Dalton et al., 1998). Yet, we believe that there is some ground to take not only election times into consideration when discussing agenda-setting and party success. In most studies on agenda-setting and electoral party success, the news' issues are in fact recorded for only a shorter period from six weeks up to, exceptionally, one year before election day (e.g. Narud & Valen, 2001; Norris et al, 1999; Norris, 1997; Kleinnijenhuis et al., 1995; Dalton et al., 1998). These studies try to examine short-term media effects during the campaign. Our dataset covering a ten-year period permits us to examine long term and accumulated effects. We believe the distinction between day-after-day, cumulative news effects resulting from a prolonged exposure on the one hand, and campaign-specific, short-term news effects on the other hand, to be crucial. Election campaigns are unusually politicised times. Political parties, candidates and media go overdrive and arouse political attention of the voters. At the heydays of the campaign, political messages cannot be avoided. The campaign activates and stimulates voters' political attitudes, but it is likely that those opinions on issues, at least partially, originated long before, that is: in non-election times. Repeated and steady exposure to news media content could have a *diffuse* influence on attitudes and opinions, like a slow socialization process (Norris et al, 1999). One could even argue that the typical campaign dynamic arouses political interest, but at the same time closes people off from new issues. As they are politically activated, people make up their mind and turn to a (their) party, like the partisan reinforcement studies stated (Lazarsfeld et al., 1944). This implicates that they are less receptive for new issues popping up during the campaign. Parties and candidates are in charge during elections, or at least try harder to be in charge, and structure the media environment by controlling information. Consequently, the agenda-setting power of the media could even be *less* in election than in non-election times. Indeed, many



election studies failed to establish media effects (Norris et al. 1999). Dalton et al. (1998), confronted with similar results for the US 1992 presidential elections, speculate on the limited agenda-setting capacities of the media *in election times*, compared to more free agenda-setting by the media in a normal political context.

#### DETERMINING VLAAMS BLOK'S ISSUES

To determine the issues VB owns, we proceed in two steps: we undertake a party manifesto analysis and we explore the subjective answers of VB voters in the Belgian national election surveys. Inspired by the seminal work of Budge, Robertson and Hearl (1987), all sentences and semi-sentences in the three party programmes of the VB issued during the 90s (1991, 1995 and 1999) were assigned to issues. Comparability between the years is guaranteed by the use of an identical codebook and the fact that the same coder encoded all manifestoes.

Party manifestoes, however, are not all-revealing of how a party really behaves. Parties can have a balanced programme, touching many different policy themes and issues equally but only focus on a few issues in their political activities and communication (for a British example see: Norris et al., 1999; for scattered evidence on VB campaigning: Govaert, 1992). Moreover, we must take into account the voter's *perception* of a party's issues. After all, it is they who cast votes for VB. We undertook a secondary analysis of the VB voters' answers on the open vote motivation question (Belgian national election surveys of 1991, 1995 and 1999). Our analysis relies on secondary evidence and draws the previous studies' coding and issue classification. The advantage of open questions is that respondents only express salient motives and usually limit themselves to one motive. There are no recollection effects typical for closed questions. TABLE 2 contains the four issues most mentioned by VB voters.

Other analyses of VB voters based on closed (and scaled) questions, refer to exactly the same four issues. Billiet & De Witte (2001) established, in a logistic regression on the 1999 national election study, that the attitudes associated with these four same issues were *the* best net attitudinal predictors for a VB vote, checking for traditional sociodemographic and attitudinal variables. Yet the evolution of issue salience in the VB electorate over the three elections must be interpreted with caution: the 1991 data were recorded in a post election survey months after the actual election, while the 1995 and 1999 evidence comes from exit-polls conducted immediately after casting the ballot. As a consequence, we expect the 1991 post election survey answers to be affected by what happened between the elections and the interview: respondents discussed the elections with friends and family, they changed the perception of their own vote and were confronted with election accounts in the media (Swyngedouw & Beerten, 1996; Billiet & De Witte, 1995). Hence, the 1991 answers are probably less valid and overstate the importance of immigration issues and antipolitical issues, both issues extensively ‘blamed’ for the VB breakthrough immediately after the 1991 elections. On the other hand, a study of Meersseman and Swyngedouw (2002) testing this ‘election interpretation bias’-hypothesis for 1999, revealed no important effects of media coverage on the post facto motivations.

[Table 1 and 2 about here]

What do the Tables 1 and 2 reveal? First: the same four issues come to the fore in party programmes and among voters: Flemish nationalism, immigration, antipolitics and criminality/crime policy. Although these issues, except for criminality, represent rather marginal policy domains, they cover a large part of the VB programmes (35.9%). These topics go to the heart of the VB issue profiling during the 90s. The voters of the VB too refer abundantly to these four issues when asked to motivate

their vote (72.7%). Except for these issues, VB voters hardly refer to any issue at all. In fact, they seldom refer to any other possible voting motive (e.g. the candidates, the ideology or image of the party). Furthermore VB voters are much more inclined to vote for issue reasons. In 1999 the VB held far most issue-ownerships of all Flemish parties (Swyngedouw et al., 2001). While in the electorate at large only 17.1% of the motives referred to issues, this fraction escalated to 48.8% among VB voters (figures not reported in table)(Maddens & Hajnal, 2001). In sum, the VB is an outspoken issue party which makes agenda-setting by the mass media relevant for explaining its successes.

Second, knowing that issue ownership is most powerful when it is exclusive, are there any opponents challenging the VB on its issues? We lack comparative analyses for the Flemish parties' manifestoes but we do have comparative figures on voter motives. These show that the issue-ownership of the VB comes near to perfection for immigration. Throughout the whole period the VB had exclusive claims on this issue without any competitor, it is a textbook example of issue ownership. The crime issue is relatively new, but at the end of the 90s the VB possessed it firmly and exclusively. Although VB promotes straightforward Flemish separatism it is not the owner of Flemish nationalism in the eyes of the voter. Although a significant part of its voters are driven by nationalism (5.6%), the VU largely (26.1%) outweighs the VB. Antipolitics, finally, is still another story. The VB voters referred considerably more to it than any other electorate, but also the voters of the Flemish green party Agalev referred to antipolitics frequently as did those who voted blanco or who invalidated their ballot (87.9%)(Swyngedouw et al., 2001). So we end up with two strong issue ownerships, an eternal (immigration) and a new property (crime), and with two mixed ownerships, a major (antipolitics) and a minor possession (Flemish nationalism).

Third, VB's issue ownership evolved in the 90s. Both manifestoes and voters display a parallel up-down-up movement. The party determinedly positioned itself on these themes in the 1991 elections, then loosened its claim on them slightly in 1995, to repossess them firmly at the 1999 general elections. There seems to be an evolution towards issue differentiation, especially among the voters and, only slightly, in the manifestoes. The VB gradually ceased to be a single-issue party, almost exclusively centred on the immigration theme. It succeeded in branching out and turning into more than merely an anti-immigrant party. By 1999 it had considerable claims on crime, to a lesser extent on antipolitics and even on the nationalist issue. At the same time the party managed to chase the other parties away from its issues and to convert these policy questions into almost exclusive hunting grounds.

Fourth, the different issues may well represent complementary party electorates forming four 'layers' of voters sedimented on the VB shore. Flemish nationalism was the original VB theme and it was probably the main motive for its early adopters in the 80s. It continues to attract some voters and still gets a considerable share of manifesto space. Anti-immigration may well be the most distinctive issue of new extreme-right parties in Western Europe in general (for an overview see: Billiet & De Witte, 1995). Yet, in Flanders we record a *decline* of the immigrant issue over the years. Sure, it remains the most mentioned issue among VB voters, but gradually the VB emphasized the immigrant topic less... and the voters appeared to have followed their party (or vice versa). After its electoral upsurge in 1991, building on the immigrant issue and providing the party with its second layer of voters, there was less electoral gain to be booked with this issue, and the party just consolidated its anti-immigrant voters.

In terms of the antipolitics issue, the evolution of voters and programmes does not go hand in hand. Antipolitics was only moderately present in the manifestoes but it has always been very important for the voters. This inconsistency might be traced back to

methodological limitations. Antipolitics is more a political diagnosis than it is a therapy and we expect election programmes to be chiefly devoted to therapy (policy proposals). Moreover, antipolitics is probably more a question of rhetoric and framing than of issues. Measuring antipolitics in open answers of voters is problematic too. Antipolitics is an ambiguous issue that is difficult to operationalise consistently<sup>4</sup>. Anyhow, from 1995 to 1999 antipolitics gained importance, perhaps delivering a third layer of voters.

The crime issue is the newest fishing ground, depositing a fourth sediment of voters. Strangely enough the 1991 VB voters did not mention the crime issue at all. Most likely the crime theme was still part of the overarching immigrant issue, as Billiet (1993) suggests. VB voters simply equalled immigrants with crime and did not bother to mention crime separately. Indeed, Billiet & De Witte's (1995) research on the 1991 elections based on closed (and scaled) questions, shows that attitudes on crime/crime policy effectively *did* distinguish the VB electorate from the other parties' electorate already in 1991 (see also Billiet & De Witte, 2001). Crime matured during the 90s and appeared gradually to have attracted more VB voters while, more importantly, no serious challengers turned up. All other parties left this ever more important theme in the hands of the VB. In the programmes too crime had taken over the central role that the immigrant issue played before in the party manifestoes. By 1999, it had become *the* VB theme. Most likely, the crime issue can be held responsible for a considerable part of the growth of the VB in the 90s, generating a fourth layer of VB voters.

Recapitulating, we can state that (1) the VB is a typical issue party mainly attracting voters on the basis of issues; (2) that the VB has a consistent issue profile in manifestoes and among its voters; (3) that the VB has got an especially strong and

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<sup>4</sup> Under the heading antipolitics we brought together motives that mentioned political scandals (bribery, sleaze...), that referred to revenge on the political elites, to political powerlessness and to political disappointment. The problem is that the 1991- and the 1995-1999-coding categories of these issues were not identical. This most likely overrates the antipolitics issue in 1991. In sum, our antipolitics measure is less valid.

exclusive grip on immigration and crime topics, and to a lesser extent on antipolitics topics and Flemish nationalist issues; (4) that the issue ownership of the VB sharpened and diversified in the 90s; (5) and that, in particular, immigration and crime seem to have been important for the electoral success of the VB in the 90s. What about the media and these issues then?

#### AGENDA-SETTING OF VLAAMS BLOK ISSUES ON TELEVISION AND IN NEWSPAPERS

Our media evidence contains three Flemish newspapers, tabloids and broadsheets with different partisan leanings (*De Standaard*, *De Morgen* and *Het Laatste Nieuws*), and the two major television channels, one public broadcasting (TV1) and the other commercial (VTM). For the newspapers we encoded all front-page stories, with exception of the newspapers that appeared on Tuesdays and on Thursdays<sup>5</sup>, from January 1, 1991 till December 31, 2000. In total this amounted to 5958 newspapers<sup>6</sup> containing 36.729 different news stories. The encoding of the newspapers articles through physical browsing was carried out by trained and strictly supervised encoders<sup>7</sup>. We opted to rely on the internationally widely employed and hierarchical EUROVOC-

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<sup>5</sup> To limit the tedious and expensive encoding task, we originally planned to encode only half of the newspaper copies, alternating the days of the week. Previous research on Belgian newspapers showed that Saturday's newspapers contain more political news (Cuyt & De Swert, 1999), and we chose to include all Saturday's papers. Since the project for which the data were recorded aims at explaining the political agenda, also the Monday's papers seemed indispensable: in Belgium Sunday's TV-news shows regularly set the political agenda for the following week. Moreover, Monday's papers contain two days of news (Rucht & Neidhardt, 1998). We were left with two possibilities: Wednesday's and Friday's newspapers or Tuesday's and Thursday's newspapers. A preliminary test proved that Wednesday's and Friday's newspapers contain more political news and therefore we omitted the latter in our encoding.

<sup>6</sup> Despite considerable efforts, we could not lay hands on all newspaper copies, but fortunately the missing editions (105 or 1,7%) are randomly spread throughout the whole period.

<sup>7</sup> Training and selection of the encoders took place in two phases. First a group of 16 encoders was trained drawing upon media data for one year only (1997). Overlap between encoders was organised so that the systematic comparison of the differences in encoding could be recorded. When differences were encountered, the supervisor checked the encoder's work and corrected the faulty codes. The tests were conducted for two separate groups of variables: formal and interpretative variables. The formal errors included forgotten or wrongly reported dates, forgotten variables, non-existing categories... The interpretative errors are errors concerning the EUROVOC-encoding. After three months of test encoding, the encoders with less than 10% errors were hired to encode the remaining nine years of media data, while still being closely monitored. For the bulk of the work the mean error coefficient was respectively 3.79 interpretative and 1.61 for formal coding per encoder per hundred items.

thesaurus<sup>8</sup> designed for encoding all EU-documents and originally containing 6075 different ‘descriptors’. We adapted EUROVOC to our needs and limited the different codes to a total of 143. We selected and regrouped these in four codes corresponding to the four issues the VB is associated with while maximally matching the public opinion and party manifestoes data<sup>9</sup>.

For television the main news programmes in prime time (7.00 p.m.) were encoded. Unfortunately we only had television data from 1993 onwards. We encoded the news shows on the basis of written summaries produced by a commercial firm (*Auxipresse*). In total 5062 news broadcasts were covered by the same encoders<sup>10</sup>. Not only the main news items but *all* televised news items were scrutinised, resulting in a television news content database with 59,887 news items.

Newspaper reporting and television news together, we dispose of a media content dataset containing 96,616 news items spread over a ten-year period (1991-2000). Since the breakthrough of the VB took place in 1991, our data do not permit us to examine the VB’s first electoral victory and we have to confine ourselves to the further growth of the VB from 1991 onwards. Television news items are weighted according to the amount of seconds devoted to the item. Newspaper stories are weighted according to

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<sup>8</sup> For more information on this thesaurus see: <http://europa.eu.int/celex/eurovoc/>

<sup>9</sup> Under the heading Flemish nationalism, we coded stories about the ongoing state reform, language battles (even physical), discussions on the so-called ‘*faciliteiten*’ around Brussels, the ‘Voeren’-discussion, de *IJzerbedevaart*, nationalist demonstrations or stories on the Flemish nationalist movement... Under the immigrants issue, we captured all coverage of migration, integration of immigrants, seasonal migration, illegal immigrants, immigrants and crime, asylum seekers, asylum centres, regularisation of illegal immigrants... The antipolitics issue was far most difficult to code consistently. We chose to consider bribery, corruption, political scandals, the discussion on the cumulating of political mandates, the wages of political personnel, the defecting of politicians, forced resignation of politicians after political mistakes... The crime topic refers to news about criminality itself: arson, vandalism, fraud, theft, car jacking, assault, robbery, burglary, escape from prison, football hooliganism, street riots, paedophilia, rape, sexual assault and the judicial lawsuits on these topics. We omitted white-collar crime since the VB is particularly focussed on blue collar crime.

<sup>10</sup> Some news programmes were missing: 13.3% of the news programmes were not covered, and unfortunately, for some periods data are completely lacking: October-November-December 1995 and the first 10 days of May 1998. These missing data are not retrievable in any form comparable to the *Auxipresse* data.

the size of the article<sup>11</sup>. In GRAPHS 1-4 all longitudinal media data are presented. For reasons of graph surveyability and because of their very similar issue attention levels we merged both TV time-series.

[Graphs 1, 2, 3, 4 about here]

Concerning the Flemish nationalist issue, all media show a consistent pattern of diminishing coverage. As the Belgian state was further sold out to the two main regions throughout the 90s, the nationalist/language battle slowly withered and almost disappeared from the media agenda at the end of the 90s. Apart from in the Flemish nationalist newspaper *De Standaard*, the nationalism issue never attracted considerable coverage (maximum 2%). The coverage of immigrant themes was definitely expanding in our ten-year period. *De Morgen* emphasizes immigrant topics most, but it defends a clear pro-immigrant stance. The spectacular rise of the immigrant theme from 1996 onwards is caused by the successive asylum crises that affected Belgium. Immigrant issues succeeded in getting more media exposure than the Flemish nationalist issues (maximum 4,5%), but immigration was not a central theme in the news. Antipolitics, in contrast, was an extensively covered issue in all media. By and large media attention for antipolitics outweighs both previous issues. *Het Laatste Nieuws* spent 12.3% of its front-page stories to antipolitics in 1995, but the other media kept their end up too and featured antipolitics issues largely. At first sight there is no clear rise or decline in antipolitics attention, only a huge exposure in the middle of the 90s when the so-called Agusta-Dassault scandal was culminating. Antipolitical stories continued to fascinate the media, both newspapers and TV-channels, for some more years (1996-1997-1998), but then suddenly dwindled in the election year 1999. The first thing that comes to

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<sup>11</sup> The weighting or non-weighting of the newspaper items gave almost no difference. But still we opted for using the following weight factors: very long articles: 10; medium articles: 7; very short articles: 1. The tiny weight factor for the small articles is justified, because it really concerns *very* small articles on the front page, sometimes not more than just a few lines referring to an inside story.



mind when we look at the charts on crime is the massive coverage of the crime topic. Again, the popular *Het Laatste Nieuws* proves itself unbeatable with almost consistent scores above 20% of front-page crime news. The other newspapers and TV-stations as well are in good shape on this topic. Crime is not only the VB's issue most covered in the Flemish media, but it features among the most covered topics in general, only surpassed by international news. Crime is big news. Especially 1996 and 1997 were 'criminal years': it were the heydays of the Dutroux-case, a criminal drama with horrifying child abuse and murder. A never seen media frenzy broke loose (Walgrave & Manssens, 2000). After this exceptional period, the criminality wind did only drop at a very slow pace. Taken as a whole, media attention for crime grew during the 90s. In all newspapers together, average crime coverage went up by 53% from 1991 (5.8%) to 2000 (8.9%). On television the increase was 46% from 1993 (5.4%) to 2000 (7.9%). Crime was even becoming bigger news!

Combined with the evidence on party manifestoes and voters the media content analysis suggests, again, that especially immigrant and crime coverage may have played a role in the electoral growth of the VB in the 90s. Immigration and crime are the exclusive property of the VB. There was considerable media-attention for them and their coverage increased through the 90s. Moreover, the ups and downs in media coverage were more or less consistent across all media. After all, media effects are probably stronger when *all* media champion or neglect the same issues at the same time, creating a common and ubiquitous news agenda. We expect Flemish nationalism to play a negligible role: its not exclusively owned by the VB, the media's ups and downs are less consistent across the five media, it receives little attention and it's coverage has been diminishing. Antipolitics takes an intermediary position. Although there was extensive, slightly rising and consistent coverage, the fact that this issue was

not firmly in VB hands and that our measure of antipolitics was less solid, raises doubts about its relevance.

#### ARE THE MEDIA RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE VB?

Let us now embark upon the trickiest part of our study. If it is true that some VB themes got more media attention during the 90s, can we substantiate that this media coverage contributed to VB success? Except for linking longitudinal panel survey data that tap media consumption on the one hand, and longitudinal media content data on the other, evidencing any media effect is extremely difficult. But even in this ideal scholarly world, it is almost unfeasible to disentangle correlation and causation without a truly experimental design. Auto selection makes people to watch or read the media they like... and the media they like are in turn the media that affect them, but what was first: their choice or the medium's effect?

To establish at least an association between media attention and VB results, we will draw upon time series analysis. We dispose of a detailed, day by day measure of our independent variable, news media coverage. Yet our dependent variable, VB success, is only measured at few points in time: the three general elections in the 90s. We chose to rely on the most regular Belgian opinion poll tapping voting intentions, carried out by INRA and published every three months in the French-speaking Belgian daily *La Libre Belgique* since the beginning of the 90s. Using the INRA-poll from March 1993 till December 2000 we obtain 32 observation points. We opted to limit our analysis to the period for which we have newspaper *and* television data: January 1993-December 2000. Commercial surveys are not always reliable but we are only interested in the evolutions of voting intentions, not in the exact (predicted) score of a party. INRA uses a weighting procedure based on socio-economic features *and* on previous voting.

This last element is somewhat problematic since respondents' answers on the 'previous vote'-question tend to be less reliable and this affects the recorded change in future behaviour. Yet we had no other solution as the unweighted data were simply not available. In GRAPH 5 we depict the INRA-voting intentions, together with the real election results of the VB from 1991 onwards. Both the level and the trend of polled intentions and real ballots are similar, which reassures us to consider the INRA-poll as a fairly reliable proxy for VB success.

[GRAPH 5 about here]

In a first, exploratory analysis we calculated simple bivariate correlations between, on the one hand, attention for VB issues in the three months and twelve months periods before the polls, and VB voting intentions on the other. The correlation matrix is shown in TABLE 3.

[TABLE 3 about here]

Most coefficients are not significant, due to the limited number of observations. Yet, aggregate analyses tend to result in higher correlations than individual-level analyses. Obviously voting behaviour is codetermined by many other factors and is not only dependent on the attention for the party's issues in the media. The media agenda is constantly wavering, with issues climbing up the agenda and falling down only shortly afterwards. Yet, the media's agenda setting might be a long-term process, slowly and cumulatively getting issues in someone's head, steadily drip-by-drip influencing people's issue concerns. This long-term assertion is sustained by the overall higher coefficients for the 12 months periods compared to the 3 months periods: people's voting intentions are more strongly linked with media coverage the whole year before

the survey, than with media coverage just a few months before the survey. As expected, Flemish nationalism can be discarded. Some of its coefficients may be significant, but they are all negative: the more the media report on Flemish nationalist issues the more the VB score goes *down*, or vice versa. Unmistakably, the coverage of immigrant issues is most strongly, and consistently positively, related with VB success. When the media report more on immigrants and asylum seekers, more voters express a preference for the VB in the subsequent poll. For all media this association seems sound and solid, even if some correlations for *De Morgen* and *Het Laatste Nieuws* are not significant. If there is any association at all between antipolitics issues and VB scores, it's a negative one: when attention for antipolitics issues rises, the VB stagnates, or even goes down. Crime attention is consistently positively (except for *De Morgen*) associated with VB voting, but none of the bivariate crime coefficients are significant. In a nutshell: the bivariate correlations suggest that especially immigration is the number one candidate linking media issue coverage with VB election results. Crime might be a secondary suspect. Probably, antipolitics and Flemish nationalism play no role at all and can be dismissed.

People are confronted with more than one issue at the time, and they are not only exposed to one medium, as bivariate analyses assume. Moreover, it is quite possible that an issue's weight in determining a VB vote varies over time, conditional upon the long- or short-term exposure and depending on the medium. One issue or one medium might take over from another and there could be interaction effects between issue coverage, with issues and/or media reinforcing or neutralising each other. That is why we opted, in a second analysis, to estimate multivariate linear regression models in a time series design. VB scores are the dependent variable. The independent variables are media coverage of the four issues in the four media during four different preceding three months periods. The number of observations varied between 32 and 29

depending on the periods covered by the analysis. Evidence on both TV-stations was merged because they followed an almost identical coverage pattern. TABLE 4 contains the results.

[TABLE 4 about here]

Not surprisingly Flemish nationalist coverage and antipolitics played no role at all. Consequently, all models are based on immigration and crime. Focussing on immigration the first model yields an adjusted  $R^2$  of 0,56 explained variance. It confirms the bivariate findings. Although crime received much more overall media attention than immigration News coverage of immigration is the best, and an excellent, predictor of VB votes. Immigration was more firmly and, particularly, for a longer time owned by the VB. This suggests that the strength of the issue ownership more than the amount of issue coverage plays a role.

In terms of media, the picture is puzzling. We expected the more popular media to be most closely related to VB voting intentions given the fact that the VB electorate itself clearly prefers popular media like *Het Laatste Nieuws*<sup>12</sup>. Yet it is especially *De Standaard's* immigration coverage that turns out to be an astoundingly good predictor of VB scores. Yet VB voters hardly read *De Standaard* at all! How to explain this paradox? A typical feature of (Belgian) broadsheet papers is their continuous reporting: their coverage oscillates much less than the popular newspapers. In particular, *De Standaard*, the most broadsheet-like newspaper among the three, hardly follows short-term media hypes (Manssens & Walgrave, 1998). This steady and continuous issue coverage fits

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<sup>12</sup> In 1998 Elchardus & Hooghe (Elchardus et al., 1998; Hooghe, 2002) gathered Flemish survey data on TV-watching and newspaper readership. They also gauged voting behaviour. Respondents watching and reading popular media are especially prone to vote for the VB. Of the VB voters 48.9% chose VTM as their favourite TV-station against only 22.0% VRT-viewers. And while watching *VTM* these VB voters do not ignore the *VTM*-news programmes: 87.4% of them watches the news often or very often. 54.4% of the VB electorate reads *Het Laatste Nieuws*, in sharp contrast to the 4,2% *De Standaard* and the 0.0%(!) *De Morgen* readership. We would like to thank Marc Hooghe for kindly putting these figures at our disposal.

statistically better with slowly changing voting intentions. Moreover, immigration news in *De Standaard* is closely linked with the immigration news in other media<sup>13</sup>. This means that the immigration coverage of *De Standaard* acts as a sort of representative for immigration coverage in all Flemish media. Indeed, if we replace the *De Standaard* immigration coverage with, for example, TV's immigration coverage in the same periods, we obtain a model with only slightly less predicting power (adjusted R<sup>2</sup> of 0,49). *De Standaard* simply fits statistically best and conceals all other media's effects in a multivariate model, but immigration news in other media too is significantly associated with VB voting.

The first model contains no short-term (month 1-3) but only middle-term (month 4-6 and 7-9) and long-term (month 10-12) lagged effects. As hypothesized, public agenda-setting of immigration issues appears to be a slow and cumulative process with long time lags. Apparently, the Belgian public needs a few months before it realises what is going in terms of immigration and before it adapts its party preference accordingly.

The first model suggested that crime coverage hardly plays a role at all. Yet crime is a broad category with tens of thousands of news items and containing many different sorts of criminality. We broke up the large crime category in different crime types. We hypothesized that especially all kinds of petty crime, theft and violence, would be associated with VB votes and that heavy crime and sex-related offences would be less important. The second column of TABLE 4 contains the results of this second linear regression model drawing upon specific crime coverage indicators. Crime coverage *does* play a role. Yet, it is not crime coverage in general but news about theft (burglary, carjacking, robbery etc.) that is closely associated with VB success. Furthermore and as expected, crime coverage in the most popular tabloid-like newspaper, with scores of crime coverage, yields the best predictors. Theft coverage in *Het Laatste Nieuws* cannot

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<sup>13</sup> The bivariate correlation coefficients of *De Standaard's* immigration coverage with *De Morgen's* immigration coverage were 0,67, with *Het Laatste Nieuws* 0,64 and with TV 0,76.

be considered a representative of theft coverage in the other newspapers, it concerns a sui generis *Het Laatste Nieuws* effect. Again, there is a considerable lag between news about theft and changing voting intentions. Like immigration issues, agenda-setting of crime issues is no instant process either. Crime coverage takes a few months to percolate through.

Merging the first and the second model, we obtain a model with immigration *and* theft displayed in the last column of TABLE 4. Immigrant and theft coverage effects prove to be compatible and give both added value to the overall strong model (adjusted  $R^2$  0,67). Immigration *and* crime matter at the same time. The other popular media in our analysis, both TV-stations, take over the role played before by *Het Laatste Nieuws* concerning theft coverage and yield powerful predictors. Just like *Het Laatste Nieuws*, both Flemish TV-channels spent lots of broadcast time to crime and especially theft issues, and both channels increased their theft coverage during the 90s. Consistent with previous analyses, the long-term agenda-setting claim is underpinned and the strongest effects prove to be lagged. It takes months before increased (or decreased) issue coverage affects VB voting intentions.

We can conclude our analysis. The (potential) election results of the VB can statistically solidly be linked with the media's coverage of two issues: immigration and theft. A large part of VB's success can be 'explained' by these two topics and their coverage in two (three) media during three periods preceding the poll. The time series analysis suggests that media's attention for those issues could have had an impact on the results of the party during the 90s. These media effects are not immediate, longer time lags are in play. Not all media play the same role. Concerning immigration, almost all media seem to have played a similar role (hiding behind *De Standaard*). In terms of crime, especially popular media like *Het Laatste Nieuws* and both national TV-channels

might have contributed to the VB's success. That antipolitics and Flemish nationalist issues proved to play no role at all, suggests that in particular the strength and the exclusiveness of the issue ownership determine whether a party gains votes when its issues are covered in the media. Although we cannot proof causality, these results suggest, at the very least, a firm correlation between issue coverage of immigration and crime (theft) and VB success.

## DISCUSSION

We substantiated a solid association between extreme-right success and media coverage of immigration and crime (theft). Yet we did not deliver any conclusive proof for causation from mediatised issues towards VB success. We have not rendered decisive evidence that the extensive and rising media attention for VB themes has contributed to its growth. Let us touch upon some alternative explanations and counter some evident objections.

First, the strong association between immigration and crime coverage followed by VB voting cannot simply be reversed into a model with first VB success and only *afterwards* media attention for its issues. We tried to estimate such regression models in a time series design using all available variables, but this only lead us to a weak model<sup>14</sup>. So, we cannot 'predict' VB voting intentions based on issue coverage after the poll. Our evidence, hence, suggests that there first was issue attention in the media and only then VB success. Still, this is no indisputable proof that issue coverage caused the VB success, but it is at least more plausible.

Second, we could be dealing with a classic spurious relationship caused by a third factor. The public's prior issue concerns for crime and immigration, for example,

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<sup>14</sup> The best model we got consisted out of immigration coverage on TV in the three months following the poll and sex-related crime coverage on TV in the same period. But it yielded only an adjusted R<sup>2</sup> of 0,28 (with a probability of 0,0037).



could cause media attention for these issues *and* produce VB success at the same time. To test this statistically, we need reliable time series of public issue priorities covering the same ten-year period. But these data are not available. Apart from three ISPO surveys in 1991, 1995 and 1999, no one asked a representative sample of the Belgian population the classic issue saliency question on a regular base.

Third, we lack basic data on the real world. It is possible that actual crime rates went up and that problems linked with immigration became worse during the 90s. If that were the case, the media could not be held responsible for the VB growth since they just reported the objective facts. In that case the real world would cause VB success, not the media. Concerning immigration, some scattered data are available. The number of non-Belgian inhabitants in Flanders did not go up during the 90s, but the number of asylum seekers did. VB voting intentions and the number of official asylum applications in the months before the poll strongly correlate (0,79;  $p < 0,01$ ). That suggests that not the media's immigration *coverage* but the *real* number of asylum seekers fuels VB success. However, in a multivariate linear regression model in which the immigration coverage in *De Standaard* was combined with the asylum seekers figures, the strength of the real world indicator diminished strongly and the *De Standaard's* issue coverage remained significant. Hence, the actual world plays probably a role, but media coverage still contributes significantly to VB votes. This is probably due to the fact that the immigration issue is much broader than the problem of asylum seekers. Moreover, immigration and especially asylum are for most people unobtrusive issues: a lot of people do not experience these problems in their own lives; they only read and hear about it via the media. Crime and theft is another story. They are obtrusive issues with which much more people get personally confronted. Unfortunately, Belgian crime statistics are utterly unreliable and discontinuous. Police and judiciary reform during the 90s resulted in more active and proximate policing with changing data collection procedures and a complete lack of fine grid data as a

consequence. We simply do not have reliable measures of crime and/or theft in Flanders during the covered period and cannot test whether the association between crime (theft) coverage and VB results is spurious. Moreover, statistical indicators of the real world as well, are only proxies for real world experience and are not identical with what people experience in their lives.

In short: an ideal research design capable of checking for all kinds of spurious relationships would consist of four groups of variables: (1) reliable real world indicators for the issues concerned, (2) a detailed account of the media coverage of these issues, (3) a recurring measurement of the public's concern for these issues and (4) a regular voting intention account. For this contribution, we only had (2) and (4) at our disposal. Still, the strong link revealed in the time-series models suggests that something is going on, and that some media might effectively contribute to the growth of the VB. Instead of a unidirectional effect, we are most probably confronted with a bi-directional, mutually reinforcing relationship whereby people voting for the VB choose the media most in line with their attitudes, and these media in turn strengthen these attitudes and issue priorities in a sort of reinforcing circular dynamic.

We can assume that not only in Belgium news coverage of immigration and crime has been mounting during the last decennium. Not in all countries in which this is probably the case, though, do strong extreme-right parties prevail. In the UK, notorious for its relentless and crime-focussed gutter journalism, for example, extreme-right never got a foot on the ground. The point we want to make is that media attention for extreme-right themes *as such* does not bring about electoral successes mechanically. It is the interaction between a party's communication, the institutional constraints, the public's concerns and the media's issue coverage that determines those parties' success. Only further systematic comparative research can

shed light on this causal entanglement. Media should be interacting with someone or something to produce any effect.

GRAPHS AND TABLES

TABLE 1: Issues in the VB's party manifestoes 1991-1999 (in %)

	<b>1991</b> (N=126)	<b>1995</b> (N=1425)	<b>1999</b> (N=4598)	<b>Average 1991-1999</b>
<b>Flemish nationalism</b>	13,0	6,4	11,3	<b>10,2</b>
<b>Immigration</b>	15,6	5,3	6,5	<b>9,1</b>
<b>Antipolitics</b>	3,3	4,1	5,3	<b>4,2</b>
<b>Crime/crime policy</b>	10,5	11,0	15,4	<b>12,3</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>42,4</b>	<b>26,8</b>	<b>38,5</b>	<b>35,9</b>

TABLE 2: Issue motives of the VB (VB) electorate 1991-1999 (in % of all mentioned motives to vote for the VB) compared to the same issue's motives for the party electorate mentioning these issues second most<sup>15</sup>

	1991		1995		1999		Average VB 1991-1995
	VB	other	VB	other	VB	other	
<b>Flemish natio.</b>	4,0	30,9 (VU)	5,4	32,5 (VU)	7,4	14,9 (VU)	<b>5,6</b>
<b>Immigration</b>	50,2	5,9 (Aga)	33,0	1,8 (Aga)	26,8	1,3 (Aga)	<b>36,7</b>
<b>Antipolitics</b>	32,2	21,6 (Aga)	20,9	9,9 (Aga)	22,4	15,6 (Aga)	<b>25,2</b>
<b>Crime</b>	0,0	0,0	4,8	0,2 (SP)	10,8	0,6 (VLD)	<b>5,2</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>86,4</b>	-	<b>68,5</b>	-	<b>76,4</b>	-	<b>72,7</b>

<sup>15</sup> The figures in this TABLE 2 are secondary data, drawn from other sources: for 1991 from Billiet et al., 1993 and Billiet, 1993; for 1995 from Swyngedouw et al., 1997; for 1999 from Swyngedouw et al., 2001. For reasons of comparability over the years, some cells contain aggregated data based on more detailed initial figures. Comparison over the years has to be undertaken cautiously. In 1991 and in 1995-1999 somewhat different coding schemes were used, especially concerning our (regrouped) antipolitics issue. In addition the 1991 issue concerns were recorded in a survey carried out months after the election; the 1995-1999 issue motives were recorded in an exit poll immediately after the voters cast their ballot. This probably overrated the antipolitics issues in 1991. The column percentages in the table do not add up to 100% because respondents could give more than one motive, although most of them limited themselves to only one reason. VU stand for Volksunie, the Flemish nationalist party. Aga stands for Agalev, the Flemish green party. SP stands for the Flemish socialist party. VLD stand for the Flemish liberal party. The VB electorate was most prone to decline collaboration at the survey. Swyngedouw & Beerten (1996) assume that especially antipolitical voters refused participation.

TABLE 3: Simple bivariate Pearson correlations between media attention for Flemish nationalist, immigrant, antipolitics and crime issues (in three months and twelve months preceding the poll) and VB voting intentions (N=32 for 3 months periods and N=29 for 12 months periods)

	<i>Het LaatsteNieuws</i>		<i>De Morgen</i>		<i>De Standaard</i>		All Newspapers		VTM		TV1		All TV-channels		All Media	
	3m	12m	3m	12m	3m	12m	3m	12m	3m	12m	3m	12m	3m	12m	3m	12m
Flemish. nationalism	-0,35**	-0,50***	-0,12 <sup>NS</sup>	0,00 <sup>NS</sup>	-0,19 <sup>NS</sup>	-0,27 <sup>NS</sup>	-0,28 <sup>NS</sup>	-0,40**	-0,24 <sup>NS</sup>	-0,40**	-0,19 <sup>NS</sup>	-0,33*	-0,21 <sup>NS</sup>	-0,38**	-0,25 <sup>NS</sup>	-0,38**
Immigration	0,25 <sup>NS</sup>	0,66***	0,16 <sup>NS</sup>	0,32*	0,48***	0,75***	0,35**	0,61***	0,39**	0,66***	0,52***	0,76***	0,45**	0,73***	0,42**	0,72***
Antipolitics	-0,12 <sup>NS</sup>	-0,15 <sup>NS</sup>	-0,12 <sup>NS</sup>	-0,26 <sup>NS</sup>	-0,12 <sup>NS</sup>	-0,08 <sup>NS</sup>	-0,16 <sup>NS</sup>	-0,18 <sup>NS</sup>	0,09 <sup>NS</sup>	-0,24 <sup>NS</sup>	-0,12 <sup>NS</sup>	-0,44**	-0,00 <sup>NS</sup>	-0,33*	-0,11 <sup>NS</sup>	-0,40**
Crime	0,18 <sup>NS</sup>	0,26 <sup>NS</sup>	-0,13 <sup>NS</sup>	-0,16 <sup>NS</sup>	0,14 <sup>NS</sup>	0,09 <sup>NS</sup>	0,09 <sup>NS</sup>	0,11 <sup>NS</sup>	0,15 <sup>NS</sup>	0,17 <sup>NS</sup>	0,23 <sup>NS</sup>	0,03 <sup>NS</sup>	0,20 <sup>NS</sup>	0,11 <sup>NS</sup>	0,15 <sup>NS</sup>	0,08 <sup>NS</sup>
All issues	0,05 <sup>NS</sup>	0,02 <sup>NS</sup>	-0,20 <sup>NS</sup>	-0,40**	0,06 <sup>NS</sup>	-0,02 <sup>NS</sup>	-0,02 <sup>NS</sup>	-0,15 <sup>NS</sup>	0,27 <sup>NS</sup>	0,16 <sup>NS</sup>	0,22 <sup>NS</sup>	0,14 <sup>NS</sup>	0,26 <sup>NS</sup>	0,15 <sup>NS</sup>	0,11 <sup>NS</sup>	0,01 <sup>NS</sup>

NS = not significant

\* = significant on a 0,10 level

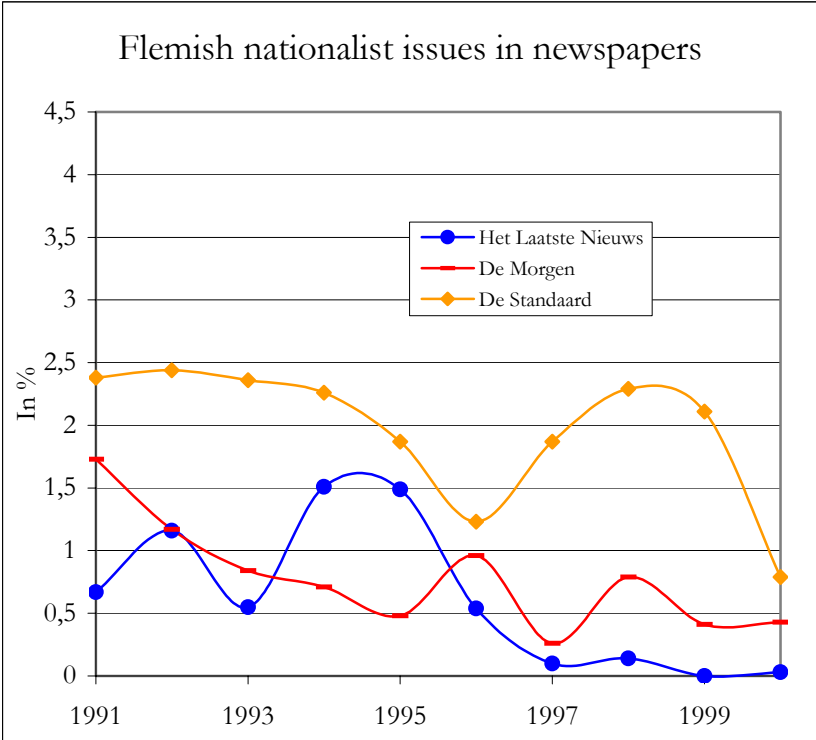
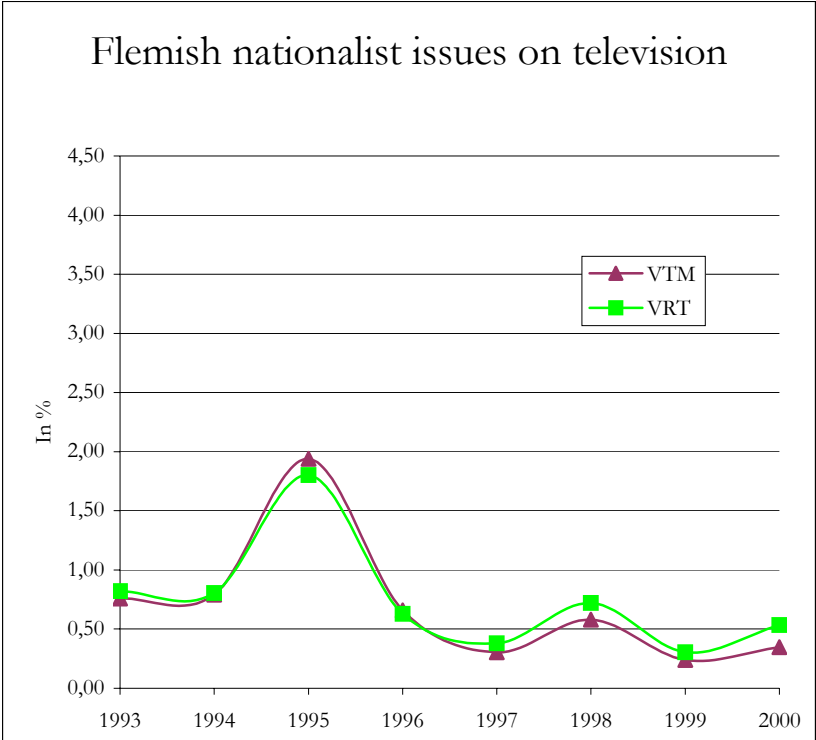
\*\* = significant on a 0,05 level

\*\*\* = significant on a 0,01 level

TABLE 4: Estimates of linear regression model predicting VB scores (INRA voting intentions). Time series design January 1993-December 2000 (N=29).

	Model I		Model II		Model III	
	Coefficient	Prob.	Coefficient	Prob.	Coefficient	Prob.
Immigration coverage <i>De Standaard</i> (4-6 months before poll)	0.355844	0.0001	-	-	0.418114	0.0001
Immigration coverage <i>De Standaard</i> (7-9 months before poll)	0.213828	0.0849	-	-	0.233539	0.0362
Immigration coverage <i>De Standaard</i> (10-12 months before poll)	0.408269	0.0000	-	-	-	-
Theft coverage <i>Het Laatste Nieuws</i> (7-9 months before poll)	-	-	0.308269	0.0015	-	-
Theft coverage <i>Het Laatste Nieuws</i> (10-12 months before poll)	-	-	0.392510	0.0004	-	-
Theft coverage TV (7-9 months before poll)	-	-	-	-	0.595124	0.0096
Theft coverage TV (10-12 months before poll)	-	-	-	-	0.881959	0.0001
Constant	12.18341	0.0000	11.58764	0.0000	9.192044	0.0000
R-squared	0.610239		0.509086		0.717305	
Adjusted R-squared	0.563467		0.471323		0.670189	
Prob(F-statistic)	0.000025		0.000096		0.000003	

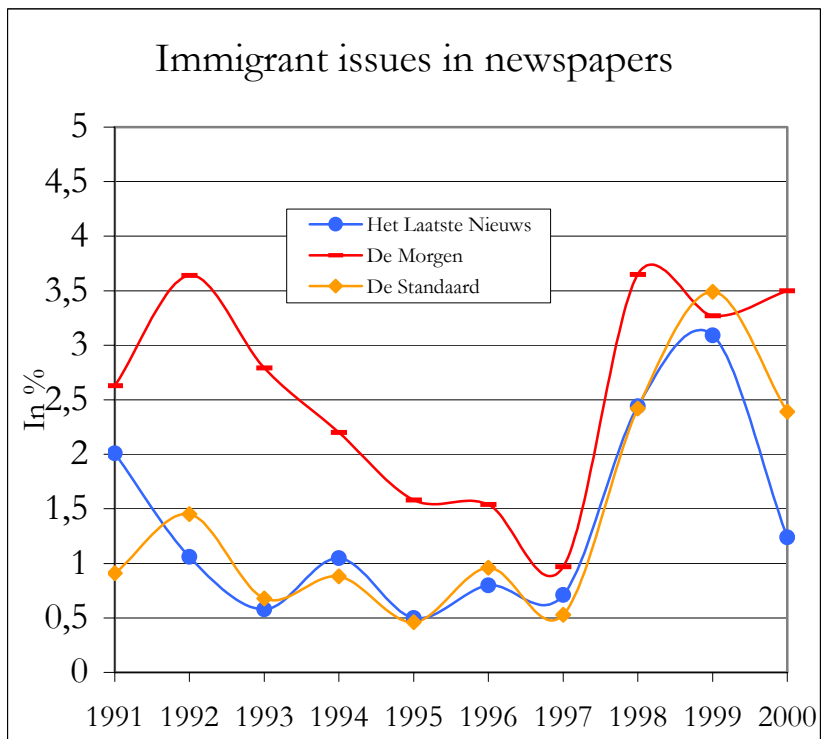
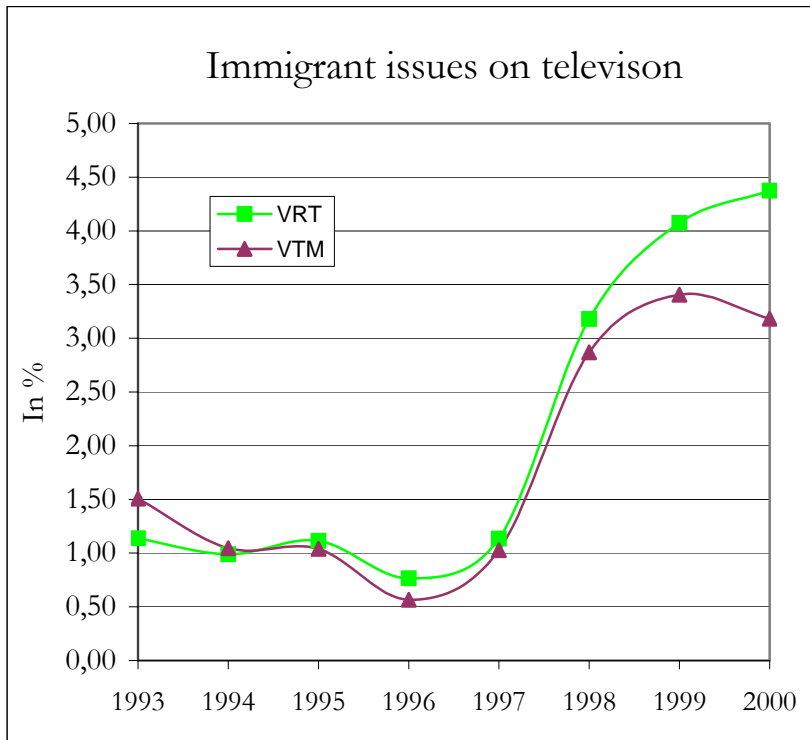
GRAPH 1: Media coverage Flemish nationalist issues (in %)<sup>16</sup>.



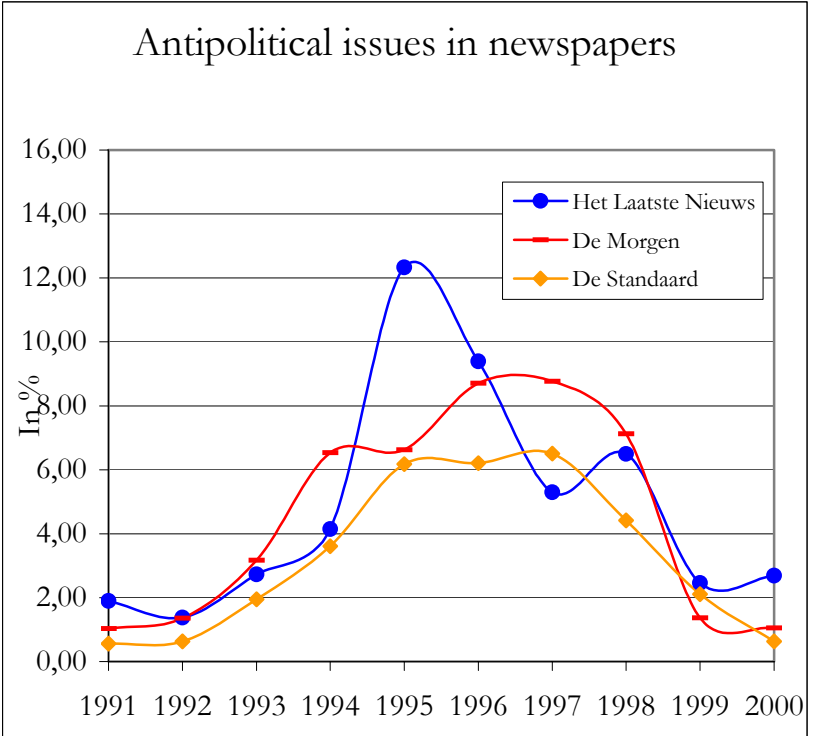
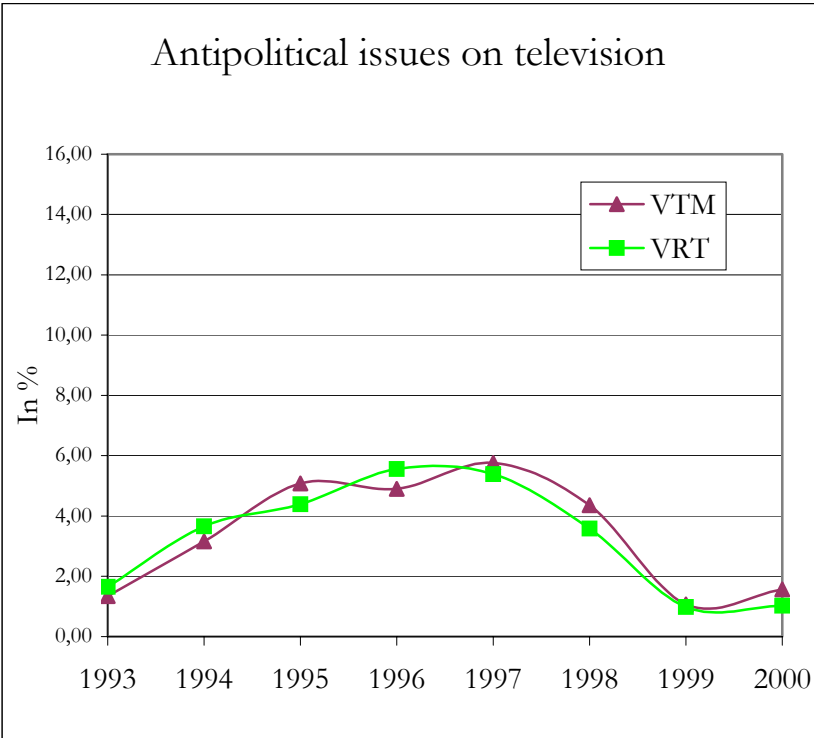
<sup>16</sup> The N-values are: VTM: 27.636; TV1: 32.251; *Het Laatste Nieuws*: 9880; *De Morgen*: 12.366; *De Standaard*: 14.473. The N-values of the subsequent years are: 1991: 4.228; 1992: 4.211; 1993: 10.872; 1994: 11.216; 1995: 8.972; 1996: 10.920; 1997: 11.870; 1998: 9.668; 1999: 10.689; 2000: 13.446.



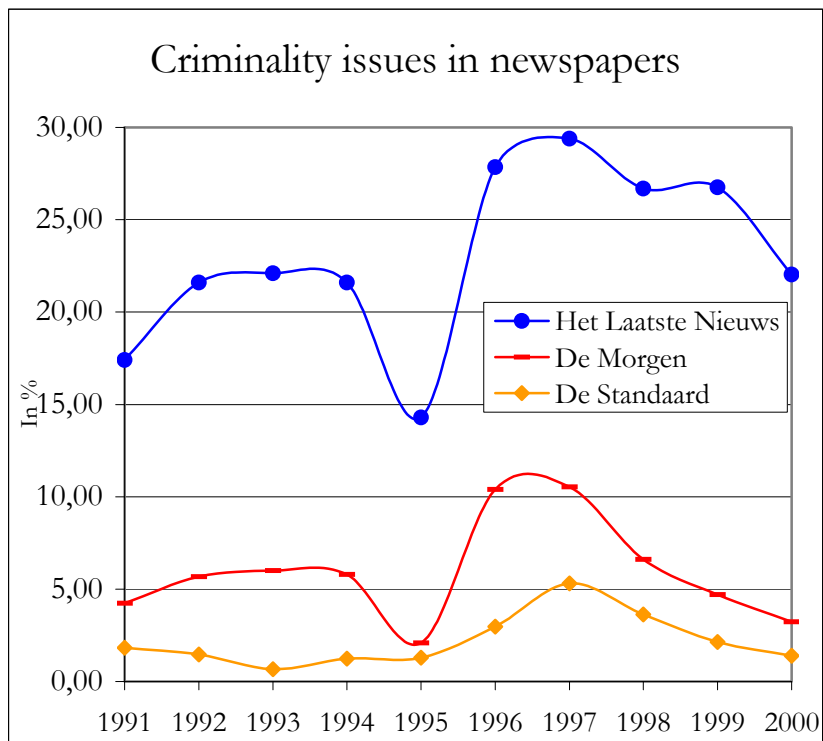
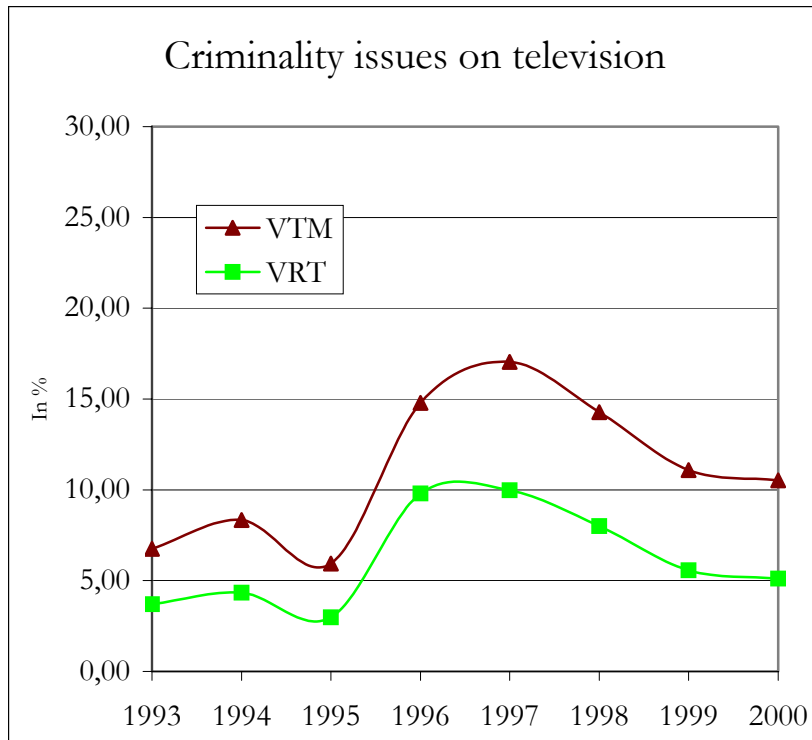
GRAPH 2: Media coverage of immigrant issues (in %)



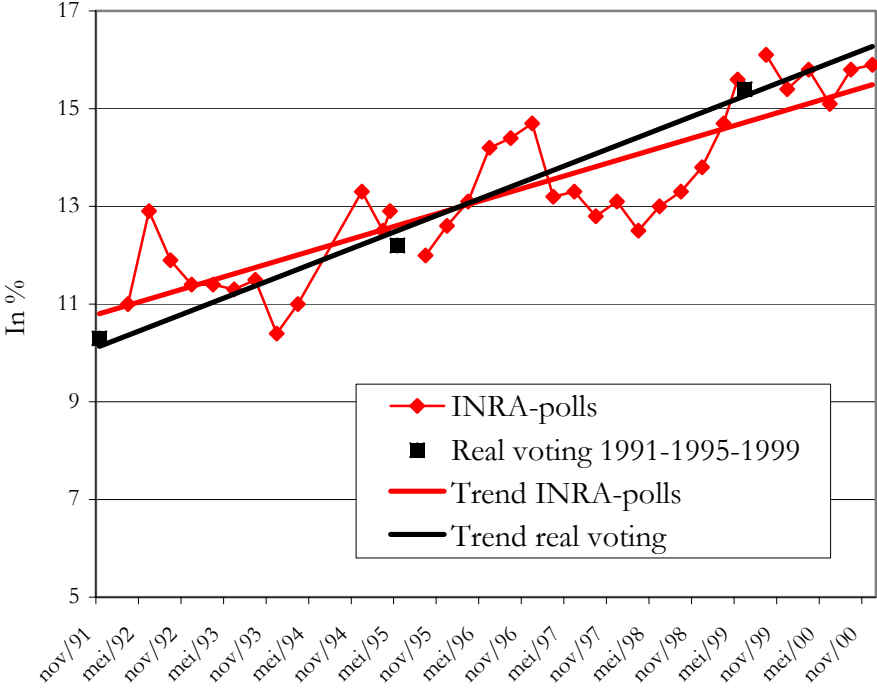
GRAPH 3: Media coverage of antipolitics issues (in %)



GRAPH 4: Media coverage of crime issues (in %)



GRAPH 5: Voting intentions for the VB (INRA-poll – three months period) and real voting for the VB in the 90s (in %) with linear trendlines



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