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Chapter 1: Studying campaigns and their effect on voter decision making

On June 7th of 2009, regional and European elections were held in the three regions that constitute Belgium, a small country in Western Europe. In Flanders, Wallonia, and the Brussels region millions of voters went out and cast their ballot. As is the case in many democracies, they did so after intense campaigning by the politicians and parties. Due to the specific nature of the Belgian polity, regional elections in Flanders and Wallonia are in fact completely separate from one another¹. As a consequence, Flemish and Walloon voters went to the ballot after campaigns that ran different courses: they were presented with different parties and politicians to choose from, and the events that shaped the campaigns differed substantially. This dissertation studies the way in which these voters decided which party to vote for, and how media coverage of the campaigns affected this process. Though the campaigns differed, we expect that media coverage of both campaigns had similar effects on voters. In this introductory chapter, we first discuss the theoretical framework underlying these expectations. Then we formulate the two research questions, followed by the research design and an overview of the remainder of the manuscript.

1.1 Elections, Campaigns, and Voters

Elections are a key event. Every few years, a large number of people all engage in the same behavior: they go out and cast their vote. Whether turning out to vote is mandatory or not, the turnout is often seen as an important indicator of democratic legitimacy. The electoral process through which the legislative and executive bodies are chosen facilitates the inclusion of the electorate as a whole into the political process. “*The electorate becomes part of the legitimating structure*” (Lipset, 1994, p. 492). Free and fair elections are one of the key prerequisites for (new) democracies. Elections give the people an opportunity to have a say in the political system. Yet, while all voters engage in the same act they are often thinking about different things when they mark the ballot. Understanding why and how people decide which party or candidate to vote for remains one of the key questions in political science.

¹ In the Brussels region both Flemish and Walloon parties compete, but these elections will not be covered in this dissertation.

The run up to the election is closely linked to the study of voting behavior. From the seminal work of Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1944) onwards, electoral campaigns have always been somewhat of a paradox. While the media and politicians spend impressive amounts of resources during the campaign, the academic world is still debating the extent to which this has an effect on voters. In the US Lazarsfeld and colleagues (1944) concluded that the social environment was a key factor in explaining voting behavior. This left very little room for campaign effects. *The American Voter* further enhanced the minimal effects view (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960). At the same time, Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) work became the reference work for West-European studies on voting behavior. Though these three books have a substantially different view on what drives voting behavior, they all found long-term factors to be the key factor. Lazarsfeld and colleagues focused on the social environment, Campbell and colleagues used long term psychological factors, and Lipset & Rokkan's view was based on long-standing cleavage structures. As such, short term campaign effects could only be marginal.

However, during the last three decades, the electoral behavior and party systems in Western Europe have drastically changed. Traditional parties saw waning support, new parties championed different causes that could not be mapped onto the traditional cleavages, and voter loyalty declined (Franklin & Mackie, 1989; Kriesi et al., 2008). Similar trends emerged in the United States, and traditional theories of voting behavior were increasingly questioned (Nie, Verba, & Petrocik, 1976; Thomassen, 2005, p. 4). These events reinvigorated the study of electoral campaigns. As the electorate became more volatile, academic efforts to find campaign effects surged (Brady, Johnston, & Sides, 2006). Whereas most voters used to be fully decided at the outset of the campaign, this shifted towards a later moment, sometimes even Election Day itself (NES, 2010; Walgrave, Lefevere, & Hooghe, 2010). Such a shift creates more possibilities for campaign effects, because time of vote decision is a key mediator of campaign effects. Campaigns have become increasingly relevant as a means of political mediation (Farrell & Schmitt-Beck, 2002, p. 3). The study of campaign effects has traditionally focused on voting *behavior* (either turnout rates or actual vote choices), but the perspective has broadened: campaigns can affect the behavior but also the attitudes, perceptions, opinions and knowledge of voters (Norris, 2002). This dissertation follows suit, and studies how campaigns affect the decision making process of voters. More specifically, we assess to what extent media coverage of campaigns primes the heuristics that voters use.

Understanding the relation between campaign information and electoral decision making is important for several reasons.

First, we must tackle this question to answer part of the *why* question. Why do voters decide to vote for party / candidate X? Because we look at the way information is processed we focus to the decision making *process* instead of its outcome (the vote choice). Models that predict voting are useful, but should be complemented by models that try to understand the reasons and causes of the vote choice.

Second, knowing how voters make up their mind is crucial if we want to understand campaigns. The political parties and candidates try to reach voters in various ways in the conviction that this improves their electoral score. If we fail to comprehend how the voter is incorporating this information into his or her reasoning, we may never fully understand the way campaigns matter for the democratic process at large. For example, studies that criticize the mud-slinging of the modern campaign may need to re-assess the way in which voters interpret this information (Popkin, 1991). A similar vein of thought is to be found in critiques of Ansolabehere and Iyengar's (1995) evaluation of negative campaigning (Brooks, 2006; Geer, 2006). Voters are not stupid. To understand the actual impact of these changes, we need to account for the way voters perceive, process and ultimately incorporate campaign information.

Finally, understanding how campaign information and decision making interact matters in a broader perspective as well. Come Election Day, political actors immediately frame the electoral result as they see fit. This study hopes to disentangle whether some of the claims, which are often based on what was being discussed in the media, are overstated. Is what is in the media identical to what mattered to voters? If the representatives aim to represent the voters' preferences to the best of their ability, understanding why they were chosen should matter. In short, the interaction between campaign information and the individual decision making process is a crucial link in the electoral and democratic process. As such, it is an important object of study.

1.2 How do voters decide?

In order to reach a decision, a voter needs to know what his *options* are (the parties or candidates) and have *information* that is relevant for at least one of them (Gigerenzer & Goldstein, 1996). Then, (s)he needs to reach a decision based on a certain *decision mechanism*. These steps combined form the decision making process. The term process points towards the inherent dynamics and sequential nature of its components. First the voter must acquire information on which (s)he can base his or her decision, only then can (s)he decide using a certain decision mechanism. Therefore, the process approach to voting offers a suitable theoretical framework to study how information acquisition during an electoral campaign has an effect on or is integrated in the decision making process of the voter (Lau & Redlawsk, 2007). Of crucial importance is the decision phase, in which a mechanism is used to reach a decision based on a given set of information on the different options available.

The decision mechanisms allow voters to make a choice in the first place. Voters must decide based on the information available to them at the time of the decision, but the decision mechanism will have a large impact on the outcome (Gigerenzer & Goldstein, 1996). The reason for this is that the decision mechanism causes only part of the information to be retained, while discarding the rest. This approach builds on the bounded rationality framework, which was a reaction to the purely rational choice model. In the rational model of voting the decision process is a rational process in which the expected utilities of the parties are weighed against one another. All information available is used to calculate an expected utility for each party. Once this is done, the decision is easy: pick the party with the highest expected utility (Harrop & Miller, 1987). The reference work for the rational choice model is that of Downs (1957), but he acknowledged that several basic assumptions were empirically flawed. For example, the rational choice model assumes that *information is costless*. This assumption cannot be sustained because acquiring information is never costless and requires effort and time. For example, a voter who is studying a party's programme, is losing time he could spend doing something else. Even if most citizens have basic knowledge about politics, the assumption of full information is never warranted. Rational choice theories also expect that users vote based on a utility-maximizing mechanism. The assumptions that are made to arrive at such an expectation are far from realistic. As Van der Eijk, Van der Brug and Franklin (2006) show, not all voters are picking the party to which they ascribe the highest

expected utility. Psychological decision making theory asserts that several mechanisms may be in play at the same time (Herstein, 1981). If we assume that expected utility is the final calculus on which the decision is based, different information may have caused biases in the expected utilities in the first place. Given that the cognitive capabilities of voters are limited, not all information can be taken into account.

According to the bounded rationality framework, voters are rational – to an extent. The basic assumption of bounded rationality is that, in general, decision makers do not aim for the perfect decision, but for a good enough decision (Simon, 1985). Voters are unable to process all the information available to them (Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1991). Instead, the decision making process is the result of a low information rationale in which not all information is taken into account. Popkin (1991) describes heuristic processing during electoral campaigns: voters often do not go out and look for information. Instead they just pick it up as they go along, disregarding some bits of information while retaining other bits. The bounded rationality framework posits that the decision mechanisms that voters use, are heuristics. Heuristics, or cognitive shortcuts as they are sometimes called, are decision mechanisms that limit the amount of information that is taken into account. They are used all the time, even to the point where they are almost unavoidable (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973, 1974). Their advantage is that they allow voters to reach a decision. If voters had to take all information into account before deciding, they would probably never decide because the cognitive load would be too high (Lau & Redlawsk, 2007). Heuristics limit what information is taken into account; for example, only the most recent information is considered, or the most accessible information. The main drawback is that disregarding information may lead to biased or suboptimal decisions. Nevertheless, the fact that cognitive heuristics are used all the time has been well-established in psychology, and the key concepts have found their way to political science (Sniderman et al., 1991). If we assume that heuristics are the mechanisms at work, this affects the way we should understand campaign effects.

1.3 Heuristics and Information processing

We assume that a voter is deciding based on a ‘set of information’, upon which a decision mechanism (heuristic) is applied to reach a decision. This information comes from various sources such as conversations with parents and friends, reading newspapers, and so on. The key point this dissertation argues is that heuristics matter; not just for decision making, but for campaign effects as well. Heuristics are mechanisms that disregard certain information. As we show later on, they do this by assessing the *applicability* of information to the decision. Applicability is the (perceived) relevance of information to the decision. If information is not considered applicable to the decision at hand, it will be ignored. During the 2009 campaign, the economic crisis was a big issue in the news. Whether exposure to coverage on this issue influenced voter decision making depends on whether voters thought that the crisis was relevant to the decision of voting. It may be information that is very available to voters, but they may disregard it because they feel it is irrelevant in the polling booth. We argue that heuristics partially determine whether such information is deemed relevant, or not. Because of this, we expect that heuristics will moderate the priming effect of the mass media.

Priming theory, together with agenda setting and framing, constitutes one of the key models to understand campaign effects (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Weaver, 2007). The basic idea of priming is that considerations which get more attention in the mass media become (more) important in the voting decision (Druckman, 2004). Because we assume that heuristics influence the way media coverage is interpreted², this dissertation posits slightly different assumptions. In general, these considerations will become more important. This is what research has found. But for some voters, the priming effect will be less outspoken compared to other voters, because the priming effect is moderated by pre-existing heuristics.

Imagine two fictional voters to clarify this point. Eric does not care for politics, and is unwilling to spend a lot of time deciding who to vote for. His decision mechanism is simple, yet effective: he will vote for the party he picked last time. Eric uses the habit heuristic. Because only one piece of information is relevant given his heuristic (his previous vote choice), the information that is generated by the campaign is unlikely to have any effect on his decision making process. The heuristic prevents the campaign from having an effect and the

² By determining which information is considered applicable.

odds of Eric's decision making becoming primed by the campaign are slim. The situation is different for Susan. She is mainly focused on the candidates, and her decision will depend mostly on the people running in the election. Though she is not extremely interested in politics either, she does want to make a well considered choice. More specifically, she wants to pick someone that she thinks would perform adequately. As the election draws closer she watches the news and takes note of the candidates that are running; if she spots someone that seems like an adequate policymaker she takes note. Come Election Day she decides to give her preferred candidate a preference vote. The potential for campaigns to have an effect on her is far greater compared to Eric, who basically ignores information. However, the potential effect is dampened by her prior heuristics as well. Susan cares about politicians; information regarding the latest polls or comparisons of policy stances between parties will probably be judged as inapplicable.

As these examples show, we argue that the impact of heuristics may extend beyond the decision phase. Pre-existing heuristics may moderate and interact with the priming effect of electoral campaigns. If at the start of the campaign you feel that who is running does not matter as much as their policy positions, this will affect the way you evaluate (new) information. Heuristics act as a filter of information (Fuyuan, 2004; Lau, 1989). Information on the character of the main candidates will be disregarded because you deemed it inapplicable. Issue debates, however, will most definitely catch your eye. The heuristic (issues) will remain constant, but new information will be used within that heuristic. The point is that how a voter decides before the campaign even starts will determine what information will stick, and thus whether or not s(he) is susceptible to priming by the mass media. And 'how a voter decides' is governed by heuristics. Thus, we do not merely expect that media attention to issues, politicians and parties primes voters. We also expect that the effect is moderated by pre-existing heuristics: the priming effect will be reinforced for information that matches with prior heuristic use, whereas mismatching information will have no, or limited effects.

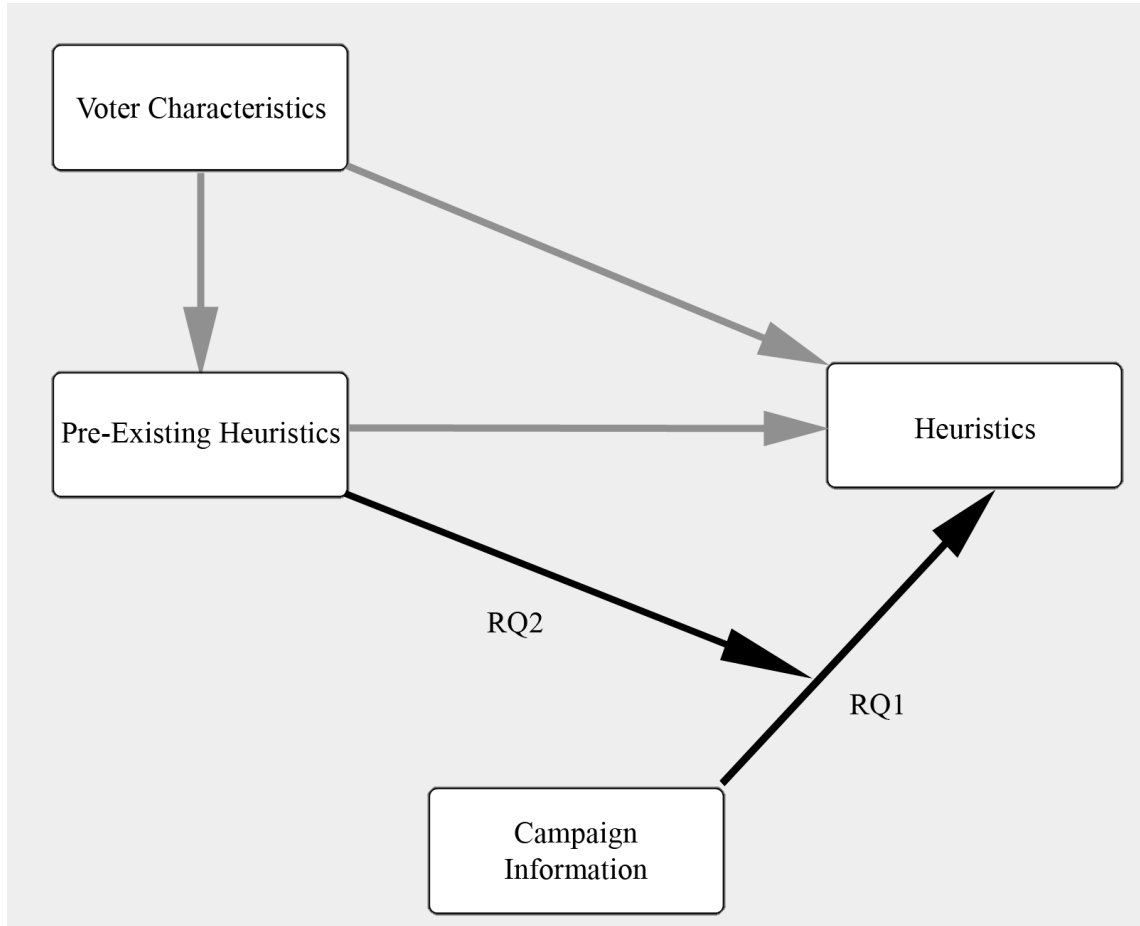


Figure 1-1: Graphic overview of research questions regarding priming effect of information on heuristic use

Figure 1-1 depicts the two basic research questions of this dissertation. Does media coverage of the campaign prime heuristic use among voters (RQ1)? And does prior heuristic use moderate this priming effect (RQ2)? As should be clear from these two research questions, this dissertation combines two schools of thought. One is rooted in political psychology, and more specifically the bounded rationality model. The bounded rationality model posits that for most decisions it is impossible to take all relevant information into account. Instead, the human mind operates through shortcuts, or heuristics, that limit the information taken into account. The other school of thought is political communication, with a distinct focus on the model of priming (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Priming theory states that considerations which are given more media attention (e.g. specific issues) become ‘primed’ among voters. That is, they are given more weight in the overall voting decision. Though in most prior work both schools have been kept within their own domains (the way in which decisions are made, and

the way in which campaigns affect voters, respectively), it would serve the discipline to combine theoretical frameworks. Both schools have amply demonstrated that their theoretical frameworks capture part of the bigger picture; the current dissertation aims to advance research on voter decision making by updating priming theory with assumptions based on the bounded rationality framework.

This perspective is innovative in two ways. First, we broaden the perspective on campaign effects literature by looking at the interaction between heuristics and actual campaign information. By keeping heuristics center-stage, but moving away from the laboratory, we hope to assess to what extent heuristic use is altered in a real campaign setting. Our understanding of the dynamics between heuristics and information acquisition would benefit if we could break free from experimental design settings. It is hard to generalize the findings of existing experimental research, and it is difficult to integrate this type of research within the broader (often survey-based) electoral research tradition. Second, campaign effects literature used to focus on outcomes, for example turnout and aggregate vote share of parties. More recently, the campaign effects literature started to look at more subtle campaign effects – not merely on behavior, but also on knowledge and attitudes (Norris, 2002). In their review of possible ‘campaign effects’ Brady, Johnston and Sides (2006, p. 8) point to the fact that *‘campaigns can shape public opinion by making certain issues or considerations salient to voters’*. Several authors have studied the priming effect of political campaigns: voters may be ‘enlightened’ by electoral campaigns, rather than converted (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990; Scheufele, 2000; Druckman, 2004; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Many research efforts have looked into issue salience, but we broaden the perspective by focusing a broad variety of heuristics. For example, we are interested in looking at the priming effect of campaigns on the issue heuristic (RQ1); but it is of substantive interest to many scholars to know how this affects the fate of other heuristics. Furthermore, prior heuristic use cannot be disregarded when looking at campaign effects. Voter heterogeneity is an often discussed topic in electoral studies. Why then would we assume that priming works across the board, regardless of the weights given to various heuristics before the campaign (RQ2)? Thus, this study will enhance the understanding of the interaction between voters and the information flows of electoral campaigns.

Now that the theoretical perspective underlying the dissertation has been discussed, we arrive at the question of how we will empirically test them. How do we go about measuring heuristic use, a concept that we can never directly observe? In other words: how do we open the black box of the voters' mind (Lodge, Stroh, & Wahlke, 1990)?

1.4 Survey Research Methods

The staple of studies of campaign effects has used survey research to study voters. Though other methods such as electoral geography exist (see for example Johnston, 2005), survey research is one of the most often-used methods. From the 1940's onwards, survey research has been the method of choice for studying the mass opinion. Probability samples made it possible to use the data obtained through survey methods to answer questions regarding the general (voting) population (Czaja & Blair, 2005). Most of the seminal works have used the method and national election studies remain the mainstay of electoral research (DPES in the Netherlands, ISPO / PIOP studies in Belgium, BES in United Kingdom, and so on). . Several factors caused the electoral field to focus on national election studies (NES), but the matter of fact is that NES are the dominant methodology in most of Western European and US based electoral research (Thomassen, 2004). Experimental methods are able to show us the individual mechanisms that shape voting behavior (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Lau & Redlawsk, 2001a, 2007), but to make inferences about entire voting populations, most studies resort to survey methodology. This work also relies on survey data: we use panel survey data combined with a content analysis of media data (see Chapter 4).

Given the survey method, the choice of which questions to ask becomes crucial. While both open-ended and closed-ended questions have their (dis)advantages, closed-ended questions are dominant. The loss of open-ended questions and the related advantages they offer has been discussed but it never gave rise to a fundamental debate (Van Holsteyn, 1994). While open-ended questions are still used with some regularity for non-causal attitudes (such as the most-important-problem question), open-ended causal reports detailing the voters' motives have all but disappeared from modern-day electoral surveys. These causal reports are judged to be unreliable, incomplete, and invalid indicators of the true reasons that shape voting behavior (Rahn, Krosnick, & Breuning, 1994). They were still somewhat common in the beginning of survey research but their numbers have declined up to the point where they are

only rarely present in surveys. Due to this evolution, people's own accounts have lost a place in the analysis of voting behavior. This in itself would not be troublesome if it had advanced the field substantially, but political scientists still face the same fundamental problems when approaching voting behavior through closed-ended questions. Causality can never really be ascertained; voter heterogeneity is still problematic; the shortcomings of behavioristic approaches are difficult to circumvent. The field, it seems, is still struggling with some fundamental issues that probably will not be solved in a foreseeable time.

"... perhaps some other game should be played ... we might learn more about why people vote in the ways that they do by asking them."

(Shapiro, 2002, p. 611)

Voters' own opinions should be revisited. Whereas political science has quickly dropped the use of such open-ended causal reports, the field of psychology is still debating their use (see Costall, 2006; Overgaard, 2006; Petitmengin & Bitbol, 2009; the discussion regarding White, 1988). The problems of causal reports tie into the larger debate on introspection. The seminal work of Nisbett and Wilson (1977), 'Telling more than we may know', is the common starting ground to dismiss causal reports. In the current dissertation we develop a counterargument: voters have a distinct advantage over researchers in understanding their own (voting) behavior. Psychology is still undecided on whether the biases invalidate the measure, or not. If the field where the cognitive sciences originated is undecided on the matter, perhaps political science should reconsider. Open-ended questions offer advantages over closed-ended questions. They are closer to real-life conversations: nobody replies to 'do you want to go out and eat something?' using an agree-disagree scale. They can bring to light considerations that closed ended questions would miss if the researcher did not think of them. More importantly, if they are used correctly they do not impose a predesigned theoretical framework upon the respondent. Most importantly, a causal report has an added advantage over any other method: it is brought to us by the voter himself. No external observant can look inside a voters mind but the voter himself. This advantage alone should give us reason to (re)consider the use of causal reports. In Chapter 5 we discuss the full range of possibilities offered by an open-ended causal report.

This dissertation will use the causal reports of voters to measure their heuristic use. The bounded rationality model of voting has given scholars a new perspective on voting, but

methodological problems limit the ability to assess the role of heuristics within the decision making process. We believe an alternative method can be of use. As such, we will apply measures of reliability and validity to these causal reports before moving on to the second empirical part of the dissertation, in which we only retain the coded heuristics extracted from the causal reports.

While reliability of a measurement can be assessed in a systematic way, measurement validity requires a good understanding of what we *should* be measuring (Adcock & Collier, 2001). Following the Adcock and Colliers approach we focus on measurement validity: do the scores applied through coding of causal reports meaningfully capture the heuristics used in the voters' decision making process? This logic implies that we can only start validation of the measurement after our typology of possible heuristics has been completed. We therefore leave the discussion on measurement validity aside for now and will return to it in Chapter 5, where we sketch the debate within psychology and political science and assess measurement validity through three types of validation (construct validity, content validity and discriminant / convergent validity).

1.5 Research Setting and Design

To test our hypotheses, we use two data sets that were collected in the run up to the 2009 elections in Belgium. On the 7th of June 2009, both regional and European elections were held; as we made clear, we focus on the regional elections of the Walloon and Flemish parliament. We test our hypotheses on two completely separated electoral campaigns, featuring different parties, politicians, issues, and voters.

The first dataset we use (PVPS2009) is a panel survey among a representative sample of Flemish and Walloon voters, who were interviewed a first time a few months prior to the elections, a second time in the final two weeks before the elections, and finally several weeks after the elections. This allows us to look at change at the individual level, rather than mere aggregated change. The second dataset (Content2009) is a content analysis of two Flemish and two Walloon newspapers. Almost all articles were coded, indicating which issues they dealt with, which politicians were mentioned, whether they dealt with the elections, and so on. The period that was coded matches the period between the first interview of the first PVPS2009 wave and the actual elections. In short, we have a good indicator of what types of

information were visible in the mass media during the time the PVPS2009 survey took place. This allows us to test whether media coverage of issues, politicians and parties primed heuristic use among Flemish and Walloon voters. In Chapter 4 we discuss the research setting and design.

1.6 Overview of the dissertation

Chapter 2 discusses the voters' decision making process. Though we focus on the bounded rationality framework, it is important to understand how prior approaches to voting behavior have shaped the framework. Nevertheless, the chapter has a clear focus on theories depicting voters as (bounded) rational actors. This does not imply that other theories are less important, but for this dissertation the bounded rational theory is the most important because it introduces the concept of heuristics. The second half of chapter 2 discusses the various heuristics we distinguish. Chapter 3 adds the electoral campaign: whereas Chapter 2 focused merely on how voters decide through heuristics, the subsequent chapter develops specific hypotheses for the interaction between the heuristic use and campaign information. To this end, we discuss what types of information an electoral campaign typically generates, and why the mass media are such a crucial channel through which information is disseminated among voters. After discussing campaigns from this information-based perspective, we turn to the models of agenda setting, framing and priming. Finally, we develop theoretical links between heuristic use and priming theory: how do heuristics moderate the priming effect, and are heuristics themselves susceptible to change? Following this, Chapter 4 discusses the research setting and design.

Chapter 5 deals with the debate on causal reports, and their measurement validity for heuristics. The debate on the use of causal reports in academia should be understood as part of a larger debate on introspection (Costall, 2006; Danziger, 1980). Can humans explain their own behavior or not? The debate on introspection in general pertains to the use of causal reports, and we therefore broaden the literature review to include this debate as well. The second part of the chapter deals with the measurement validity, which we assess using mainstream validation criteria. The subsequent empirical chapters depart from the assumption that the codes we assigned to the causal reports are valid indicators of heuristic use by voters.

In Chapter 6, the aim is to get a feel for the two electoral campaigns upon which our model will be tested. Through descriptive analysis we familiarize the reader with the parties, politicians, and issues that were central in the 2009 regional campaigns.

In Chapter 7: Priming the Process we test the hypotheses regarding the priming effect of the mass media on heuristic use by voters, as well as the hypotheses on the moderating effect of prior heuristic use on the priming effect. Finally in Chapter 8 we draw conclusions and discuss the implications for future research.

Chapter 2: Voter decision making

2.1 Models of Voter Decision Making

2.1.1 - The psychological versus the sociological approach

The history of modeling voter decision making is dominated by several models. We briefly discuss the main models, before focusing on models that regard individuals as (bounded) rational actors, which are the basis for this study. The first encompassing model was the Columbia model (Lazarsfeld et al., 1944) in which group ties and social identities were the key explaining factors. Ironically, the authors were initially interested in the effects of electoral campaigns on voting behavior, but came to the conclusion that campaigns had little to no effect on the average voter. Rather, the social group of the voter was the main driving force of electoral choice (Knoke, 1974, p. 92). In Western Europe, Lipset and Rokkan (1967) also focused on sociological explanations. Social class, religion, and age caused the emergence of a pillarized party system that mapped onto sociological cleavages. Electorates had stable alignments to parties. As such, party electorates were stable over time. Dunleavy and Husbands (1985) extended this approach towards a radical model. In this model, peoples' party choice reflects their position in the social hierarchy (Harrop & Miller, 1987). Our approach is incompatible with the radical model: it rejects individual considerations and our focus is on just these considerations.

The Michigan model of voting gave more importance to socio-psychological factors: party identification was the most important variable in the model (Campbell et al., 1960). Party identification denotes the long-term feeling of attachment voters develop with a political party. It is internal to the individual voter: to identify with a party does not imply being in a certain social group. Party identification limits the effect of campaigns because it influences campaign information through selective exposure and acceptance. Voters prefer to read articles or view programs about their preferred candidate (selective exposure), and when positive information on the opposing candidate does reach the voter, it may quickly be dismissed (selective acceptance). The role of party identification in the Michigan model changed over time. Ultimately the model expected that party identification steered the perception of voters on three short term forces: attitudes towards issues, candidates and group

benefits. The Michigan model struggles with issues of causality. Whereas group affiliations are at least temporally precedent to vote choice, party identification may be strengthened due to preceding vote choices (Harrop & Miller, 1987, p. 158).

Both the Michigan and the Columbia model set the agenda of voting research in the following decades. That said, in Western Europe party identification had been less central in the analysis of voting behavior. Here, the seminal work was that of Lipset and Rokkan (1967) which focused on cleavages to explain voting behavior. The cleavage model shaped the European approach to voting behavior, but over the last few decades electoral behavior has begun to change (Thomassen, 2005, p. 8). In the US literature the authors of 'The Changing American Voter' challenged the conclusions drawn by its predecessor (Nie et al., 1976). As the American electorate showed signs of change, Nie and colleagues argued that the conclusions of the American Voter were perhaps correct for that period, but needed reassessment. Scholars increasingly started to question the dominant models of electoral choice because of the electorates' increased volatility. In a comparative study on voting behavior in 6 Western-European countries between 1944 and 2001, Klingemann (2005, p. 48) concludes that *'there is a tendency for increased levels of volatility over time in all countries under study'*. Drummond (2002) noted that the increases in volatility are more outspoken in some countries than others, but found support for the thesis that in the US volatility increased too.

This increased volatility sprouted a number of explanations, most notably the notions of dealignment and realignment (Flanagan & Dalton, 1984). Realignment implies the rise of new cleavages which causes shifts in party systems, thereby decreasing stability. Dealignment suggests that rather than becoming structured along different lines, the impact of cleavages as such was waning (Miller, 1991). In more recent work Kriesi (2008, p. 38) argues that *'dealignment based on the dissolution of traditional cleavages is expected to be temporary'*. It is beyond our study to discuss these larger trends in great detail. For our purposes, the important consequence of these changes is that they spurred attention for different explanations of voting behavior.

2.1.2 - Voter rationality models

The rise of electoral volatility sprouted various new theories on voter decision making. The rational choice model was originally inspired by Downs' (1957) work on rational voting. It specifically opposes the 'socio-psychological' models. Voters are not acting as they do because of long term sociological or psychological determinants. Instead they act as rational actors that seek to fulfill their self interest (Enelow & Hinich, 1984). The key goal is achieving maximal utility from a decision, and voting is no different in this respect (Davis, Hinich, & Ordeshook, 1970). Therefore, voters need to be aware of what is in their own self interest, and evaluate the options in light of how they would serve this self interest (Enelow & Hinich, 1984). To calculate the expected utility for all options, a voter has to be fully informed. This is not hard to imagine in a simple economic situation: suppose a man can choose between a 50 per cent chance to win 10.000 euros (A), and a 100 per cent chance to win 6000 euros (B). In this case he has full information on both possible outcomes, and can be expected to make the rational choice (B³). Regarding party choice, given that the voter would be fully informed and would be striving for maximal value, the assumption is that for each of the alternatives (being parties or candidates) the 'sum' of their policy outcomes is calculated. Once this has been calculated for each of the alternatives, the alternative with the highest value for the individual is picked.

Though rational voting is always prospective (the goal is to maximize future utility), scholars of this school debate whether the utility is calculated based on retrospective or prospective considerations. In the latter case, voters would simply be 'throwing out the rascals' if the incumbent did not perform up to par (Miller & Wattenberg, 1985). Alternatively, the voter could be looking forward and make inferences about future policy outcomes. V.O. Key's (1961) work was very influential in the field, since he explicitly focused on the retrospective aspect of the evaluation, while Downs emphasized both retrospective and prospective evaluations. Downs, and later Fiorina (1981) both assume retrospective evaluations to serve as indicators of future performance (Miller & Wattenberg, 1985, p. 360). Overall, the implicit

³ Option A gives an average outcome of $10.000 * 0.5 = 5.000$, Option B gives an average outcome of $6.000 * 1.0 = 6.000$. For more information on the full line of thought, see Bernoulli (1954)

focus of both the retrospective and prospective models has been on policy: being a rational actor, voters should be considering issues as the key determinant of utility.

Psychological research on decision making challenges the assumptions of the rational choice model on several grounds. These critiques can be summarized into five points: 1. Acquiring information is never without cost. 2. Even in situations of full information humans are prone to errors. 3. Humans have limited cognitive capabilities. 4. Narrowing utility to policy outcomes is unwarranted. 5. If humans act out of self interest, rational voting is suboptimal. The first point is easy to argue because information acquisition is hard and involves making tradeoffs. Consumer research in economics deals with this issue to a great extent (Smith, Venkatraman, & Dholakia, 1999). The key cost of information involves time. Time spent acquiring relevant information cannot be spent doing something else. Such ‘opportunity costs’ are impossible to avoid. In experiments on information search, time is deliberately limited to simulate this trade-off. Bluntly put, time is precious, and so is information. Therefore, information is never costless.

Critiques 2 and 3 are related to each other. Even fully informed decisions are subject to bias. Tversky and Kahneman (1974) ‘challenged’ the assumptions of rational choice by showing that there are substantial biases and heuristics at work. The human being is not fully rational, even when asked to decide on simple economic risk problems. The expected utility function central to rational choice theory was found lacking. Even in a situation of full information people made mistakes and showed inconsistencies in their behavior (one time risk-avoiding, another time risk-seeking). These biases and errors are caused by the cognitive limitations of humans (critique 3). Humans are cognitively limited, and therefore can never take every bit of information into account (Herstein, 1981; Simon, 1985). Cognitive limitations are caused by limited long- and short term memory capacity. Short term memory is limited to 7 items, give or take two (Miller, 1953). In more recent work the limit was actually said to be even lower (Cowan, 2001). While this is probably too crude an assessment of the real capacity of short term memory, it does indicate that there are limits to what one can ‘take in’ at any given time. The human span of attention can only focus on a limited amount of information, and everything beyond this attention span does not get noticed, let alone remembered. Long term memory, on the other hand, has a nearly unlimited storage capacity but is limited in its ability to recall the stored information. The possibility of biased recall is problematic because various

intervening factors may influence what is recalled (Fournier, Nadeau, Blais, Gidengil, & Nevitte, 2001; Civettini & Redlawsk, 2009).

The fourth point of critique was that policy was the only relevant ‘utility’ in the rational choice model. Other than the fact that it is extremely difficult to assess the expected policy outcomes in terms of personal utility, this implies that the goals of the individual are policy-oriented. Self-interest would induce the voter to pick the choice that yields the best policy outcome. Voters can have other goals that have nothing to do with policy (Simon, 1985, p. 79). The final point of critique is that, most of the time, it would be irrational to spend a lot of time deciding. The reason for this is that in an average election, the chance that a vote is crucial in deciding the election is low. If the voter is acting out of self interest, he would not go out and vote in the first place (Bendor, Diermeier, & Ting, 2003; Franklin, 2004). And if he were to go out and cast his vote, its extremely low impact on the ballot result would make it irrational to really think it through:

“If everyone spends an additional hour evaluating the candidates, we all benefit from a better-informed electorate. If everyone but me spends the hour evaluating the candidates and I spend it choosing where to invest my savings, I will get a better return on my investment as well as a better government” (Popkin, 1991, pp. 10-11).

Enter the bounded rationality framework that develops a model of voter decision making that tries to remedy most of the critiques voiced against the ‘pure’ rationality model.

2.2 Bounded Rationality and Fast & Frugal Decision Making

The roots of the bounded rationality framework are found in Simon’s (1955, 1985) work on rationality in political science. Simon challenged the approach taken by the rational choice model by arguing that the models’ assumptions were unwarranted from a psychological point of view. People were not out to make the best decision, instead they aim for a ‘good enough’ one. People aim to satifce, rather than optimize. Simon proposed a broader interpretation of rational behavior as ‘*behavior that is appropriate to the specified goals in the context of a given situation*’ (Simon, 1985, p. 294). This is a far cry from what classic rational choice would interpret as rational behavior, since it does not imply an optimal choice. After all, the goal could be a ‘good enough’ decision. The key point Simon wanted to get across was that

classic rationality was in dire need of a reality check. Simon's work inspired new theories in various fields (especially in economics, sociology, and political science); in political science the concept of bounded rationality rapidly became a new model of voting behavior (Popkin, 1991; Kuklinski & Quirk, 2000; Lupia, McCubbins, & Popkin, 2000; Sniderman et al., 1991).

Simon asserts that while citizens are limited in their knowledge of politics, they still try to decide in a rational way. The name given to this type of behavior was bounded rationality. As we stated earlier, the bounded rationality framework tries to remedy the critiques voiced against the rational choice model.

2.2.1 - Information acquisition

The first critique was that information was costless. The bounded rationality framework addresses this problem in various ways. Popkin (1991, p. 22) states that most information is acquired without effort: a man watches a woman get robbed, and decides that the government policy on crime is lacking. Relevant information is 'picked up along the way' (Popkin, 1991, p. 63). This remedies the 'information without cost' critique to some extent, but we cannot ignore that voters sometimes do look up information. In such cases, it is not picked up at random. Popkin makes a first attempt by distinguishing issue publics, i.e. parts of the electorate that are interested in specific policy areas. A more encompassing view is that the heuristics used by the voter shape the way (s)he will likely look for information. To take the robbery example: that voter would not only consider crime policy to be lacking, he would probably spend more attention to crime news in general. Information search and decision making are interconnected. Literature on chronicity refers to the way in which some individuals have cognitive structures that allow them to process relevant information efficiently (Lau, 1989; Bargh & Thein, 1985; Higgins, King, & Mavin, 1982; Higgins, 1996). Because information acquisition is shaped by chronicity, campaign information will have to pass this 'filter'. Information fitting the cognitive structure will get accepted more often (or processed more easily), and has a higher chance to be retained. Furthermore, literature on the impact of individual goals on information acquisition also states that the latter steers the former (McGraw, Milton Lodge, & Stroh, 1990)⁴.

⁴ We will return to this point when we discuss the interaction between external campaign information and the decision process in Chapter 3.

2.2.2 - Heuristics and biases

The second critique was that even in situations of full information, people's decisions were sometimes wrong (at least from a rational choice point of view). According to Tversky and Kahneman (1974) the explanation is heuristical processing. A heuristic is a cognitive shortcut that allows people to make choices in uncertain conditions. But these shortcuts were also used in situations of full information, which sometimes led to 'wrong' results. Depending on the decision to be made, some information was retained and other information was disregarded: heuristics imply a cognitive reduction of the information that is used in the decision. The way this 'cognitive reduction' is achieved by deciding based on simple rules of judgment⁵ (Mondak, 1993).

Heuristic reasoning may explain why the rational choice model fails to explain real life decision making processes. Voters can use either a full information rule, in which they process all relevant information on the decision, or they can use heuristics (Payne, Bettman, & Johnson, 1993). The bounded rationality framework opts for the latter. Some heuristics are so embedded in human decision making that they are almost inescapable, and several reasons can explain why heuristics are so omnipresent in decision making. First, people make use of heuristics in everyday life, since cognitive limitations affect all aspects of their lives (Lau, Andersen, & Redlawsk, 2008). Why would politics be any different? Second, heuristics have proven their worth⁶. They allow people to make everyday decisions that are reliable (most of the time), while giving them little thought. It would go against intuition not to use these effective rules in a domain where the need for cognitive efficiency is high. Third, heuristics allow people to avoid trade-offs. In a fully informed (vote) choice a lot of pros and cons have to be taken into account. It is very likely that there is no perfect alternative, but merely an alternative that is better than the others. If the decision maker limits the information involved, the perceived amount of trade-offs is reduced. If you do not know what you are missing, there is no feeling of diminished value (Payne et al., 1993; Tetlock, 2000). Summing up, heuristics

⁵ Judgments are different from decision in that they do not involve choosing among multiple options. Rather, a judgment is an evaluation of a single object.

⁶ Lau, Andersen and Redlawsk (2008) argue this by means of evolutionary theory: if these cognitive shortcuts wouldn't have proven effective, they would simply cease to exist.

are present in everyday decision making, and these effects extend well into the voting decision. By including heuristics in the framework, bounded rationality can explain the mistakes that even fully informed people make.

2.2.3 - Utility in terms of voters goals

Critiques 4 and 5 undermine the assumption that voters merely act out of self-interest. The expected utility function is focused on policy outcomes, but individuals value other things as well: social acceptance by a group, internal values, citizenship, and so on. The expected utility function is very narrow in this respect. A framework that wants to comprehend the decision making process of voters must allow for other goals than economic self-interest: Simon (1985) accounts for this in his definition of ‘rationality’: rationality is acting in line with your goals, within the context of the decision.

Goals of voters steer the decision. They are the *why* of the decision, the direct and immediate cause. The *why* (goal) of a decision is closely related to the *how* (mechanism) of the decision. This is also encompassed in the rational choice model. A voter is acting out of self interest (*why*), hence he calculates his best option using the expected utility function (*how*). The current study focuses on the *how* part of this process, but as strategy is governed by the goals one wants to achieve, covering this first step will help us answer another crucial question: what do the voters want?

2.3 Types of Heuristics

Heuristics imply cognitive reduction. Some information is discarded in order to reach a decision. Tetlock (2000, p. 240) points to the fact that heuristics should be seen as being on the ‘satisficing’ end of the spectrum. The bounded rationality framework was heavily influenced by psychological research on heuristics (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; 1974), which is focused on those heuristics that allow people to make quick (and easy) decisions. Political science has substantially broadened the concept of heuristics. They are choice *mechanisms*, just as decision strategies are. Within the bounded rationality framework, every choice mechanism implies cognitive reduction (Rosema, 2004, p. 73). What types of such choice mechanisms does the literature distinguish? Various authors picked up the idea of heuristics and developed various hypotheses on the choice mechanisms that voters could use

(Rosema, 2004; Popkin, 1991; Lupia et al., 2000; Sniderman et al., 1991; Lau & Redlawsk, 2001b, 2007). We distinguish 9 heuristics that are used in the vote choice.

2.3.1 - Politician heuristic

Voters using the politician heuristic decide based on the individual politicians representing the parties. Various scholars have argued that the personalization of election campaigns in Western Europe has been increasing continually, whereas others have argued the opposite (Karvonen, 2010). Personalization is defined in many ways, but the key aspect is that individual politicians are becoming more important for parties, media and voters: mass media focus more on the political leaders, the public gives greater weight to individual politicians when casting a vote, and political parties structure their campaigns around a few candidates. In a recent study Hayes (2009) found no evidence of increased importance of candidates among voters in NES data across several decades; this finding resonates with prior findings that nuance the assumption that politics have become more personalized.

Regardless of whether personalization is on the rise or not, it serves little argument that at least some part of the electorate *does* decide based on individual politicians (Hayes, 2009). Especially in presidential elections, where the competing actors are individuals, the politician will arguably weigh more heavily than the party (e.g. in the United States). Nevertheless, in a multi-party context individual politicians are more of a cognitive ‘shortcut’ than they are in an electoral setting where individual candidates are the actual object of the vote choice. In a recent study among Dutch voters Van Holsteyn and Andeweg (2010, p. 6) found evidence that around 9% of the voters do indeed ‘put politician over party’. Belgian data using voting motives reports around 10% of voters referring to specific politicians (Meersseman & Swyngedouw, 2002, p. 121).

Swanson and Mancini (1996) pose that electoral behavior is determined in large part by the connection a voter has with a candidate. For some voters, the fact that politicians matter can also be explained by the loosened connection between voters and parties, which is caused by the weakening position of parties as structuring agents (Kriesi et al., 2008). Individual politicians may constitute a new reference point for modern day vote choice. The general evaluation of candidates may serve as an important cue for other, more specific judgments

such as policy stances (Mondak, 1993, p. 171). As such, the individual politician may become the reference point of the voters' decision process.

Within the politician heuristic, only information regarding the politicians is taken into account, which implies cognitive reduction. Either they are voting for the politician they like best (Brody & Page, 1973, pp. 10-11), or they are voting against a specific politician: this is in line with Rosema's (2004) approach of insincere voting. Vote choice cannot be interpreted merely in terms of likes, but dislikes as well. A voter that votes for X because he dislikes the party leader of party Y is using information about the politician in his decision making process⁷. Note that we purposely call it the politician heuristic and not the candidate heuristic. The reason for this is that politicians who are not running for election may nevertheless be taken into account by voters. For the Belgian polity, this is especially so because both the regional and federal elections should be considered first order elections (see Van Aelst & Lefevere, 2009 for a more elaborate argument on why we believe this to be the case). As such, both the federal and regional levels are highly visible among voters. In the regional elections, politicians active at the federal level may matter for voters, and vice versa. Disregarding such non-candidates as a possible heuristic would not reflect what is actually occurring among voters.

Information on politicians, especially regarding their personality is mostly acquired through the media. Because we are interested in the priming effect of the mass media upon heuristics, this heuristic is one of the prime types in the typology that is likely to be impacted by external information.

2.3.2 - Endorsements

This choice mechanism builds on the sociological model of voting behavior: voters can make up their mind in an election by listening to people from their social circle. They '*vote for the party other people say they should vote for*' (Rosema, 2004, p. 84). This heuristic implies that voters take cues from their social circle in order to reach a decision. The voter is delegating

⁷ Note that the way we measure heuristics will definitely lower the amount of 'against another politician' mentions. We ask respondents 'why would you vote for this party' and not 'why would you not vote for another party', which leads to more arguments in favor of the preferred party.

his decision to a third party. Even Downs acknowledges the fact that delegating the actual vote choice is possible – after discussing the voting process he states that *‘every one of these steps except the last can be delegated to someone other than the voter himself’* (Downs, 1957, p. 209). We distinguish four subtypes of the endorsement heuristic: three are related to the social environment of the voter (family, friends and acquaintances) and one refers to organizational endorsements.

Regarding the direct influence of the social environment, the Columbia model (Lazarsfeld et al., 1944) already argued that significant others matter. Perceived opinions of others (especially those close to the self) are key components in the formation of judgments and decisions (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Endorsements by the immediate social circle are less subject to influence from electoral campaign information, as they are obtained through interpersonal communication. These types of endorsements may have a very large impact because the source of the endorsement is oftentimes trusted, which may increase acceptance of the information. Within families, voting preferences are often similar. For example, husbands and wives often adapt to the others’ voting behavior (Coffé & Need, 2010), and Lazarsfeld and colleagues already indicated that parents often pass their preference on to their children.

Endorsements by organizations are also used in (electoral) decision making (Forehand, Gastil, and M. A. Smith 2004); in the United States presidential elections, such endorsements are important in showing support by certain social groups (Lau and Redlawsk 2007). For example, women’s rights groups may publicly announce that they support one of the candidates, which clearly links him or her to a part of the electorate. Wells and colleagues (2009) showed in a US context that voters do pick up endorsements and incorporate them into their thinking. In West European politics endorsements by unions and interest groups also matter. In Belgium and the Netherlands pillarisation caused various organizations and institutions to adhere to one ‘pillar’ (Van den Bulck, 1992; Wintle, 2000). Though pillarisation has weakened, these ties may matter nonetheless. For example, if the socialist union endorses the socialist party president, this provides cues for voters. Special interest groups, such as the environmental movement, may also affect vote choices by endorsing certain parties. Christin and colleagues (2002) argued this for Swiss referenda, and

experimental evidence on US presidential vote choices also indicates that interest group endorsements do matter (Nownes & Neddenriep, 2010).

2.3.3 - Government and Opposition

According to models of retrospective voting, the function of elections is to hold the past government accountable and to provide the future government with a mandate. This heuristic focuses on that function: who governs, and who opposes? Either the voter is focusing his choice on how the government and opposition performed, or he is focusing on who he would like to see in power (and who he would not like to govern). In Rosema's (2004) typology of heuristics this type of reasoning is split up among two heuristics – incumbent approval and election outcome preference. However, this type of distinction blurs the conceptual clarity as it combines several types of information (on candidates, for example in the government leader preference) with information on the government and the opposition as such. According to us, using a separate G&O heuristic clarifies the object that is used as a clue: either the incumbent / future government, or the incumbent / future opposition. Many scholars agree that the government as such is an actor that voters can evaluate: this is the core of what incumbent approval entails (Miller & Wattenberg, 1985). Did government achieve, or did it fail? And what should the future government do? This type of heuristic has a clear temporal aspect to it: voters can look forward or backward when they look at government. For the typology the key distinction for the government and opposition heuristic is *what* the voter is looking at. Naturally, evaluating (expected) government and opposition performance could be closely related to an evaluation of the parties or politicians that take seat in government. In a multiparty environment this nevertheless becomes harder for voters, as the responsibilities are more difficult to assign. Furthermore, the government is often depicted as a separate institution that 'acts as one', making the existence of a heuristic based on the general evaluation of government and opposition feasible. In a multiparty system, having a preference for the next government usually means having a preference for a certain coalition. This makes predictions on the future government somewhat harder (since the actual coalition possibilities are often only clear after the elections), but voters are still able to vote for a party knowing that this may increase the chances of a certain coalition. Experimental research on the Belgian case has indicated that pre-electoral coalition information is taken into account (Gschwend & Hooghe, 2007). As such, the choice mechanism is at least partially based on the preference for

a certain coalition. Many scholars have looked at the way voters evaluate government; it is the basic line of thought explicated in Miller and Wattenbergs' (1985) 'throwing the rascals out' argument. In addition to the evaluation of the incumbent government, voters can also vote based upon their evaluation of the opposition. The opposition may impress voters by putting issues on the government agenda. Though it is true that the majority has a distinct media advantage, the opposition gets a say as well, enabling voters to form some kind of evaluation too (Walgrave & De Swert, 2005a, 2002). Furthermore, some voters vote for parties that have virtually no chance of making it into the majority. These voters may be expressing their preferred coalition by voting for the opposition.

The retrospective literature mainly focuses on the past: it rests upon the assumption that voters look backward in time when they cast their vote. According to this literature, voting is a means of punishing or rewarding the incumbent coalition (Kiewiet & Rivers, 1984). On the other side of the temporal dimension is the prospective voting model. The debate concerning retrospective versus prospective voting motives is perhaps best captured by the following quote:

“But does the electorate really consider a challenger’s program and promises for the future, or do voters merely throw the incumbent administration out if it is unable to produce satisfactory outcomes to the nation’s problems?”(Miller & Wattenberg, 1985, p. 360)

In other words, which end of the temporal dimension is most important in people’s heads when they cast their vote? The retrospective voting model originates from Downs’ (1957) theory of the rational voter, comparing incumbent government to its challengers and making a rational decision between the two. It states that voting behavior is in large part evaluative. This means that voters do not examine the promises of candidates and parties, but instead look at how the incumbent party or candidate performed, and vote accordingly (this idea was not that new: Kiewiet and Rivers (1984) even quote the Old Testament for such evaluations). This type of reasoning may include a strategic vote (defined in this case as an insincere vote, which is a vote for a party that is not the most preferred one (Rosema, 2004)). Because the criteria is a preferred coalition, keeping another party out the coalition is also using the same choice mechanism. One reason for this is that the most preferred party may not be large enough to be a true ‘threat’ to the current coalition, while a lesser preferred party could

become large enough to break the coalition. The key criterion in this type of decision making is still the future government coalition.

2.3.4 - Group interests

Deciding through the group heuristic means that a voter is voting for a party because it defends the interests of a group in society; we distinguish between economic, social, ethnic and geographic group interests. This type of heuristic is missing from Rosema's (2004) typology, but representation of social or economic groups is inherent to West European politics. General groups in society, such as blue- or white collar workers, are traditionally defended by left- and right-wing parties. Being a member of such a broader group in society may provide voters with clues as to who to vote for; the distinction with the endorsement heuristic should be clear: the endorsement heuristic relies on the endorsements made by actual organizations or the social circle, whereas the group interest heuristic uses societal group membership as the cue. Many voters associated parties with certain groups in society (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). Though the impact of cleavages on voting behavior may have waned, the impact of group membership on voting behavior has a long tradition in political sociology (Evans, 1999). Such long standing associations may act as cues, which can then guide vote choice (Lau & Redlawsk, 2007, p. 232). Iguarta and Chen (2009) show that ethnic group cues embedded in media content can act as heuristic clues with regards to framing effects. Cleavage theory mainly focuses on economic (blue collar versus white collar groups), religious (Christian versus State) and social divides⁸. Traditional parties may benefit more from this type of heuristic reasoning, as they are closely linked to certain groups: the socialist parties were traditionally linked to the working class, whereas the liberal parties represented the self-employed and white collar workers. On the other hand, newer parties such as the Green and extreme right parties may have emerged on the basis of the post-materialistic divide, which is more value-bound. As such, use of the group heuristic may vary between party electorates.

In representation theory, many authors stress the importance of constituency service. Though electoral rules may affect the importance of these incentives for MPs, voters may prefer

⁸ Especially in a formerly highly pillarized country such as Belgium, these types of broader group ties may still be important choice mechanisms for a large part of the electorate (Airo, 2004).

parties with local ties because they feel those parties will represent them better in parliament (Carey J.M. and Shugart M.S. 1995). In this way the geographic group may also constitute a choice mechanism.

2.3.5 - Habit

Habit formation is one of the core psychological concepts that allow humans to cope with a cognitive overload (Ajzen, 2002). In all aspects of life people are quick to use recurring patterns to deal with certain tasks; it seems unlikely that voting would be an exception. Voters ‘*get set in their ways*’ as they get more experience voting (Franklin, 2004, p. 21). Though this type of decision making may seem shallow at first, Downs acknowledges that it can be ‘rational’ use this type of heuristic:

“Finally, some rational men habitually vote for the same party in every election. In several preceding elections, they carefully informed themselves about all the competing parties, and all the issues of the moment; yet they always came to the same decision about how to vote. Therefore they have resolved to repeat the decision automatically without becoming well-informed, unless some catastrophe makes them realize it no longer expresses their best interests.” (Downs, 1957)

In their study of the emotional underpinnings of the vote, Marcus and MacKuen (1993) show that in absence of emotional arousal, habitual patterns dominate the voting decision. From a psychological point of view this is perfectly understandable: as humans only have the ability to pay attention to a limited amount of things at once, they are forced to rely on habits for many things. Given that for a lot of voters the interest and knowledge of politics is relatively low, the fact that they form a habitual voting pattern is natural.

2.3.6 - Magnitude

This heuristic focuses on one thing: the parties (perceived) electoral share, similar to Rosema’s ‘party size preference heuristic’ (2004, p. 77). Two possible prospects may be of importance to the voter using this heuristic: either the voter fears the existence of the party is in jeopardy (because the electoral share is too small), or the voter wants to vote for a large / small party. In both cases the information taken into account has to do with the *magnitude* of the party. Information on the size of parties can be inferred by past elections, or by looking at

the polls. Commentators often mention this threshold when discussing the polls, so voters receive plenty of information to make use of this heuristic. Lau and Redlawsk (2001b, p. 954) refer to this as well: *“Polls provide ‘viability’ information, ..., polls can help the voter eliminate several alternatives from consideration”*. Voters may cast a vote for a party struggling with the threshold if they believe the party has a chance of survival. However, the effect could also work the other way around. If voters believe the party does not stand a chance, they may switch towards a party that does.

Similarly, voters may specifically choose to vote for a small or large party. This may be because of a coalition preference (see above), but also because of the mere appeal of a smaller party (being ‘the underdog’). The reason voters may prefer a large party are varied: a large party may be more prone to break the incumbent coalition, or may be likely to become the leading party in the next coalition. Furthermore, some people simply prefer larger parties because they want to ‘vote for the winner’, as Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) already noted. The cue for all these considerations is still the perceived magnitude of the party. Again, Lau and Redlawsk imply this when they state that *“Seeing a candidate leading in the polls provides a type of ‘consensus information’ that could motivate a voter who had previously rejected or ignored a candidate to more closely consider that candidate”*. Voters may pick up these indications that a party or candidate is winning, and reconsider based upon the perceived increase in magnitude.

The government & opposition heuristic might overlap with this heuristic: a parties (perceived) electoral share may act as an impedance or stimulus to government participation. Larger parties are more likely to enter government, and vice versa. However, the two heuristics differ in that a voter using the g&o heuristic is not deciding on the magnitude of the party *per se*, but the perceived possibility of the party entering government or opposition. Information regarding magnitude may affect these perceived possibilities, but the actual information that is crucial in deciding who to vote for differs.

2.3.7 - Issues

The issue heuristic is focused on issues; voters using this decision strategy base their vote upon the policy stance on one (or several) issues. For example, a voter who finds tax cuts primordial would be inclined to pick the party that has an issue stance that stresses tax cuts. This is the heuristic that Popkin (1991, p. 28) refers to in his description of issue publics: *'a part of the population that 'cares a great deal about a particular issue, and is therefore likely to pay attention to it''*. Models of issue voting often stem from rational choice models; even though issue voting is the most 'optimal' decision strategy in terms of expected utility, it still implies a cognitive reduction. Not all issues are weighed against one another, simply because this type of trade-off reasoning is far beyond the human capabilities (Tetlock, 2000). Furthermore, the knowledge upon which an issue vote is based may still be biased: voters may have wrong perceptions about the parties' stances on a certain issue. So while it is the most 'rational' decision strategy, it must still abide by the basic assumptions of the bounded rationality framework.

Issue ownership provides voters with cues that enable them to choose parties that they 'match' with. Issue ownership refers to the fact that specific political parties are identified by the public at large with specific policy issues. As a consequence, they are considered to be the most competent party to deal with those issues (Petrocik, 1989, 1996). Such ownerships are in part spontaneous associations, presumably created through the parties' tradition of giving certain issues a lot of attention (Walgrave, Lefevere, & Tresch, 2011). Though citizens may be unaware of a parties' position on all issues, they are more likely to be aware of the parties' positions on 'owned' issues. Furthermore, if a party owns issues that are also very salient among its electorate, these two factors reinforce one another and create higher policy position congruence between voters and parties on those issues (Walgrave, Lefevere, Pepermans, & Nuytemans, 2011, pp. 22-23). Both issue ownership at the parties' end and issue salience at the voters' end are heuristic cues that enable voters reach bounded rational voting decisions.

Policy, or issue voting has been studied extensively; it is now clear that issue importance does matter for certain parts of the electorate, and has an impact on electoral choice (Fournier, Blais, Nadeau, Gidengil, & Nevitte, 2003; Krosnick, 1990; McGraw et al., 1990). As such, it is safe to assume that issues can be a choice mechanism.

2.3.8 - Ideology and Values

Ideologies present voters with a general framework: ideologies are an encompassing package that presents a general belief system to voters (Sniderman et al. 1986, 406). Ideology is a relatively simple way to achieve cognitive reduction since a voter does not need to know the specific policy stances of a party: it provides a clue regarding the general policy direction a party is likely to take (Lau & Redlawsk, 2007, p. 232). However, as Sniderman et al. (1986, 424) indicate, most of the voters may not even fully understand what a given ideology represents. Especially lower educated voters may be misreading the label of ideology and choosing parties that they do not match with on a policy level. This points to the fact that ideology as a choice mechanism is very much a heuristic: it reduces a lot of information on several policy preferences to a single belief system. Converse (1962) found that the general public's ability to structure attitudes and beliefs into a larger framework is limited. Though other scholars have found such attitudes to be stable and integrated, they also found evidence that there is considerable variation among the electorate (Bartle, 2000). Therefore, the old adagio 'garbage in, garbage out' still holds true. If the underlying beliefs regarding the ideological framework are biased or wrong, the end result of the decision will also be biased. This is beyond the scope of our research though. Ideology presents voters with a relatively simple heuristic in that it represents an integrated frame of thought. As such, it fits within a bounded rationality approach to decision making.

2.3.9 - Party (preference heuristic)

Voting for the most preferred party is a well-established decision heuristic. In our view, the key is that the party in itself is seen as the core concept upon which the decision is based. We distinguish several ways in which party preference can be established: party identification, party image, constituency service, (expected) party performance, and voting against another party.

Party identification is one of the classic concepts that have been used to explain and predict voting behavior⁹. If a voter sees himself as a Republican, it is very likely he'll pick the Republican Party come Election Day. Party identification / affiliation has been used from the

⁹ See also our discussion on models of voting behavior on page 28.

first voting studies on and still counts as one of the primordial explaining factors for voting behavior. In Western Europe party identification did not take such a central role, but empirical evidence does show that for some parts of the electorate, party identification is a decision heuristic. Using British and German data Zuckerman and Brynkin (2001) argue that identification is a stance that voters take towards parties, and as such identification becomes a consistent rule.

“Party identification, viewed from the perspective of low-information rationality, is an informational shortcut or default value, a substitute for more complete information about parties and candidates” (Popkin, 1991, p. 14)

The fact that the party with which the voter identifies is a ‘default value’ points to the stability of the heuristic; Marcus, Neumann, and Mackuen (2000) even argue that party identification is a habit or a standing decision. In our typology we distinguish party identification from the habit heuristic. ‘True’ habitual voters may not have a strong connection (identification) with a party, but only repeat their prior behavior. In contrast, the rule for party identification is to vote for the party with which the voter has the strongest association. The resulting vote choice may be equally stable over time, but the information that it is based upon is different. A looser type of party identification is general party preference. In this case the voter does not fully align himself with a party, but rather takes the general ‘feel’ of the party into account. This is what Rosema (2004, p. 81) describes in his discussion of the party preference heuristic: vote for the party you like best. A similar concept is that of the ‘running tally’ that is mentioned in the on-line model of voting: the overall evaluation of the party is captured in the general image of the party (Brody & Page, 1973).

Party preference can also be established through constituency service. Constituency service occurs when the voter received a service from the party, and rewards the party in turn with his vote. Note that we also mentioned constituency service in our discussion of geographical group interests. The key difference is that here, the cue is service given to the voter him- or herself. Voters can also evaluate how the party did, or how they expect it to do in the future; this type of performance based voting differs from the government heuristic in that the party is the object of evaluation.

Voting against another party is, in our typology, also seen as an indication of party preference. Rosema (2004, p. 81) only treats voting for the most preferred party as such; as we use the party concept as the main distinctive concept for this type of heuristic, a voter voting against another party is still using information regarding parties to make up his mind. For example, if a voter expresses discontent with party Y and therefore decides to choose party X, the voter is still making his choice based upon parties (instead of future expectations, candidates, or some other type of information).

2.4 Heuristics and the Decision Making Process

Now that we have distinguished between the various choice mechanisms that voters can use, it must be made clear how these heuristics tie into the larger decision making process. We assume that heuristic use is unavoidable: cognitive abilities are limited, and not all information can be taken into account. Therefore, heuristics must be used to filter out some of the information so that a decision can be reached. Given that heuristics are used, a first important point to be made is that voters can use a combination of multiple mechanisms at any given time: a voter may be taking both party *and* group interests into account – effectively using two heuristics.

Of note is that some heuristics are likely to overlap: for example, voters taking magnitude into account are effectively voting based on the perceived electoral strength of the parties. The presence of this information enhances the possibility that other heuristics are also used. Yet another possibility is that one heuristic is used to limit the choice set of possible parties (e.g. ideology is used to limit the choice set to left-wing parties), and another is used to pick one from the choice set (Rosema, 2004, p. 85). We do not formulate a limit on the number of different choice mechanisms that can be used at any given time.

Second, a heuristic as such can be two different things: though we conceptually consider it to be a (static) choice mechanism, which is applied to a set of information, it actually becomes a *process* once it is applied. All information that is relevant to the decision is brought to the fore, and the heuristic is used to sort through and filter out information. This has implications for the extent to which it can be measured. Measuring the process as it occurs is beyond this dissertation, simply because it cannot be directly measured. We can only measure it indirectly

through its post-hoc ‘fallout’. Because this is tied to the way we measure heuristics, we pick up this point again in Chapter 5.

Thus, in the decision making process a given set of information is processed by one or several heuristics, thereby filtering out information. Based on the information that is retained, the most preferred alternative is picked. The way heuristics filter out information is dealt with in the next chapter, because it has implications for the way new information is acquired. This chapter discussed how voters achieve cognitive reduction through the use of heuristics. In our discussion we purposely left out most of the discussion on how voters go about acquiring new information. More specifically, we are interested in the extent to which the mass media coverage during an electoral campaign affects voters. In the next chapter, we develop a working set of hypothesis on how mass media coverage of the campaign affects voters’ heuristic use, and how prior use of certain heuristics affects the acquisition of new information.

Chapter 3: Electoral campaigns and the decision making process

Heuristics filter the information that is taken into account in the decision making process, but can also have an influence on the way new information is processed (Lau, 1989). The current chapter develops hypotheses on the interaction between the information from mass media coverage of the electoral campaign, and the heuristics that voters use. Priming is the key concept. Priming refers to the finding that during electoral campaigns the mass media can alter the relative importance of various considerations (such as issue positions or candidate images) in the formation of judgments and decisions. Priming provides a theoretical framework that includes campaign communications and the decision making process. Because the role of heuristics in the priming process has not yet been studied, two arguments will be developed based on other, related studies. The first argument is that exposure to mass media information can prime heuristics. That is, heuristics can either start to matter in the decision making process, or become more important if they were already present. The second argument is that pre-existing heuristics moderate the priming effect, because they determine what information is considered relevant.

As the elections approach, political parties increase their efforts to get information out to the public. Coverage of politics in the mass media also increases, making 'campaign times' distinctly different from 'normal times'. Direct evidence in which mass media coverage of politics during 'campaign' periods is compared to 'regular' periods is scarce, but the evidence that does exist suggests higher attention to politics during campaign periods (Van Aelst & De Swert, 2009; Van Aelst, Thorbjørnsrud, & Aalberg, 2011). Furthermore, parties try to communicate with voters directly by placing advertisements in newspapers, by running ads on television, by distributing flyers, or by going out on the street and talking to voters. Also, voters do not just passively absorb information. Interpersonal communication spreads information among the electorate. This leads to an increased dissemination of political messages originating from the parties and media. Thus, electoral campaigns cause a substantial increase in the supply of political information. We focus on the effects of information from mass media communications because this is the primary source of political

information for most voters (De Vreese, 2010; Hopmann, Vliegenthart, De Vreese, & Albæk, 2010).

3.1 Campaign Communications

Information from electoral campaigns only affects voters if they are not exposed to it. *'The campaign events just listed do not influence public opinion simply because they occur. Instead, they derive their influence from the amount and type of information they generate'* (Holbrook, 1996, p. 15). Information, the term we will use in the remainder of the chapter, is the meaningful content of the message. Campaigns are essentially a means of disseminating information about the election to voters.

In this study, we focus on a period of three months before the elections. This 'campaign period' indicates the time span during which campaign events take place. The official length of campaigns varies between countries because of the electoral rules. In some countries the competitors in the electoral struggle can only 'campaign' (for example, run ads) during a specific time period (Holtz-Bacha & Kaid, 2006). However, several scholars doubt whether this official delineation of the campaign period is an accurate delineated of the actual campaign. Parties and candidates do not just rally the troops in the run up to an election. Instead they integrate campaigning into their everyday activities and the battle for the voter becomes a permanent effort that is punctuated by elections (Ornsteinn & Mann, 2000; Brendan J, 2007). This view of permanent campaigning as a continuing process rather than something that is limited to a specific period prior to a ballot has implications for anyone that wants to delineate a 'campaign period': if campaigning is perpetual the concept of a campaign period becomes obsolete (Norris, 2002; Schmitt-Beck & Farrell, 2002).

However, the arrival of mass communications further complicates this picture. Though parties and candidates can be permanently campaigning, their efforts are in vain if they do not reach the public. Because the mass media are the key source of information for most voters, the way they cover campaigns matters (De Vreese, 2010). In the months and weeks before the elections, the share of political coverage in the news increases (Van Aelst & De Swert, 2009; Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006). Thanks to the general increase in political news, otherwise

unknown candidates or parties get a chance to present themselves in the run up to the elections. Furthermore, election-specific broadcasts and segments are often reserved to the final weeks of the campaign. This creates the possibility that the public is aware of 'the campaign'. Because of this, this study will still delineate a campaign period.

Both a 'long' and 'short' campaign can be distinguished (Norris, Curtice, Sanders, Scammell, & Semetko, 1999). The long campaign covers a greater time period, but is less intense. The reason for this is that media tend to concentrate election coverage such as debates and special programs to the final weeks of the campaign. In the long campaign the elections are already 'present' but attention to them is still limited. The short campaign is the period in which attention to politics peaks. Usually this is operationalized as the final 2 to 3 weeks of the campaign. The long campaign is harder to distinguish, and ranges from over a year in length to a few months. For two reasons, this study defines the long campaign as the final 3 months before the elections. First, this is the official limitation¹⁰. Second, it fits with the research design¹¹. The short campaign entails the final three weeks of the campaign, which roughly coincides with the specific election coverage of the public broadcaster in Flanders, which started on May 15th¹².

3.1.1 - Campaign communications: an overview

Norris (2002) provides a good overview of the information channels through which campaign information can reach voters (see Figure 3-1).

¹⁰ On a side note, this period is also used to mark the period in which politicians have to indicate their campaign spending.

¹¹ Because it coincides with the timing of the The Partirep Voter Panel Survey (see Chapter 4).

¹² On May 15th, 2009 the first 'election-specific' program aired on the public broadcaster.

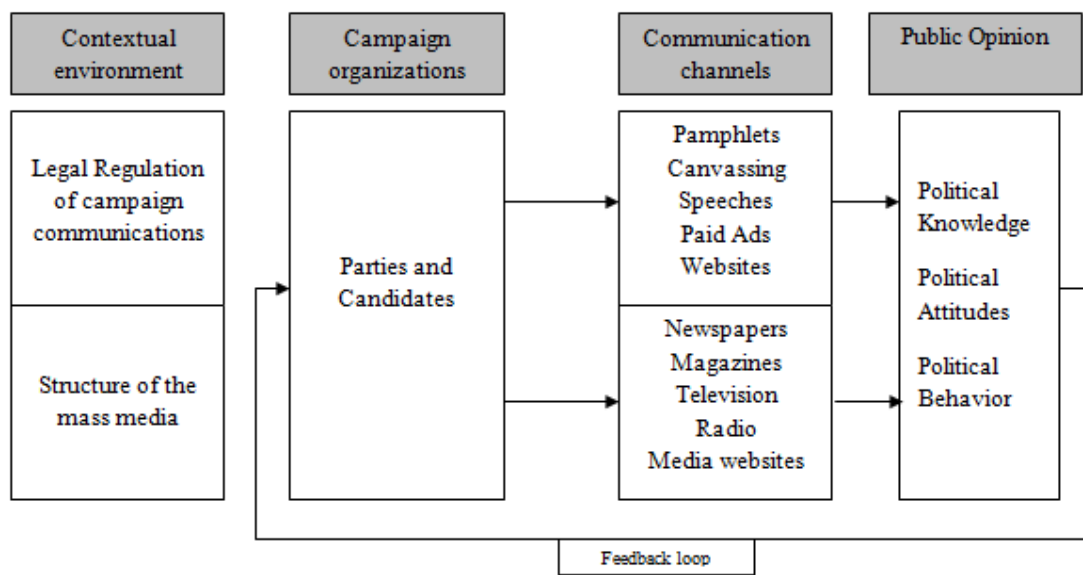


Figure 3-1: Overview of campaign communications (Norris 2002).

The mass media are the prime source of political information for most citizens (De Vreese, 2010). Though newspapers may offer more in-depth information, the ability of television to reach large parts of the public gives it a dominant position in informing the public. This holds true in both Western Europe and the United States, though the culture of campaign coverage differs to some extent. However, to a large extent the differences between countries are not specific to campaign coverage, but are a consequence of larger and more fundamental institutional differences (see Hallin & Mancini, 2004). When the particular research setting is discussed in Chapter 4, an overview of the Belgian contextual environment will be presented. Parties and candidates have their own means of communication with voters. As the elections approach they increase their communication efforts by staging press conferences, canvassing, going out on the streets to meet voters, and so on. Due to the limitations that most West-European countries impose, the possibilities for parties to publish advertisements in the mass media are limited compared to the US. Consequently, in these settings the level of parties' own communications pales when compared to the coverage generated by the mass media. However, the fact that parties increase their communication efforts makes them an easy and often-used source of information for the mass media. Studies of agenda setting have shown that, especially in campaign times, the mass media's agenda is in part determined by what

issues parties deem important (Hopmann, Elmelund-Praestekaer, Vliegthart, de Vreese, & Albaek, 2010; Roberts & McCombs, 1994; Sweetser, Golan, & Wanta, 2008).

Direct party communication and mass media communications are the two sources of information that are external to the electorate. The fact that interpersonal communication is absent from Norris' model is somewhat puzzling, because interpersonal conversations are also campaign communications. Though they seldom introduce new information, these channels of communication often serve to confirm, discuss or discredit information obtained through the mass media and party communications (Druckman, 2004). Such information is evaluated within the interpersonal networks of individuals. This 'filter hypothesis' was developed by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) and was corroborated in a study by Schmitt-Beck (2003) in various countries.

Channels of communication such as the mass media, direct party communications and interpersonal conversations distribute information. Though these three channels probably capture all the ways in which information can reach voters, what matters most for our purposes is what types of information are generated by an electoral campaign. Electoral campaigns generate various types of information. This information only has an effect if it is picked up by the voter and used.

Interpersonal communication disseminates messages that are sent out by parties and candidates and the mass media among the public. Parties, candidates and the mass media are the main sources of new information. Since it is argued earlier that the use of heuristics is a necessity (to deal with the overload of information), we discuss only information that is relevant to one of these heuristics. Some information is relevant to some heuristics, but irrelevant to others. A news item on the image of a candidate is relevant to voters using the politician heuristic, but mostly irrelevant to other heuristics. Of course campaign coverage is almost always mixed – a *candidate* talks about an *issue*. A *party* is predicted to reach a certain *magnitude* in parliament based on a given poll result. Nevertheless, the bits and pieces of information that are contained within these messages are distinct from one another, if only in the way they are understood by the public.

Various authors have distinguished different types of information. Just, Buhr and Crigler (2003) distinguished between parties, candidates, issues and horse race news. Lau and Redlawsk (2007) used a typology that contained issues, persons (or candidates), endorsements by organizations, party, and 'horse race and hoopla'. Kleinnijenhuis et al. (2003) use different types of statements that can be communicated: they regard those regarding political actors (candidates or parties) and issues as being relevant to electoral research, but further specify statements regarding success / failure and conflict as well. De Vreese (2001, p. 163) regards 'news about candidates, parties, planned election events, polls, formation composition or news making reference to the election or the campaign' as campaign news, using a typology developed by Van Praag and Van der Eijk (1998).

We distinguish five types of information that will be present in the mass media. Regardless of the political system, both *parties* and *politicians* will be featured in media coverage during campaign times. Wlezien (2010, p. 101) argues that it is the political system that determines which one dominates, but the fact remains that both will be featured. Party information is information regarding the organization of the party as a whole, the inner operations, and so on. In the run up to the elections, parties increase their efforts of staging 'campaign events' to attract media attention. Information regarding politicians can be quite diverse, ranging from news about a politician's performance record to his or her specific stance on a certain issue. Media coverage not only deals with politicians that are actually running in the elections (candidates), but can also include politicians that are not running but supporting the campaign, or highly ranked politicians that are featured even though they are not running.

A third type of information concerns *government and opposition*. Most models of voting indicate that the evaluation of government can be an important factor to decide who to vote for. Both parties and mass media offer voters ample information regarding this heuristic: the actions undertaken by government and opposition are covered extensively. Incumbent governments often enjoy a visibility advantage (Walgrave & De Swert, 2002, 2005a). Although government and opposition are essentially positions taken by parties and candidates, media can (and do) cover these entities 'as such': during electoral campaigns the performance of the incumbent government is judged not merely by the performance of its parts (the ministers and parties), but also as a whole. Retrospective voting models often refer to 'the

government' as a whole as well. Because this allows voters to vote using this type of heuristic, it is important to keep track of this type of information.

A fourth type is *issue* information. By communicating with voters, parties have an opportunity to show voters which policy positions they occupy. This can result in clear alternatives for voters, causing them to take these issues into account when considering parties. However, issues that are salient but that are not linked to politics in the media may still have an impact on voters' decisions. For example, if the unemployment issue becomes important in the media due to a large number of layoffs, this issue may become an important consideration in voters' mind. This effect can occur regardless of whether parties had a clear position on how to deal with the issue, or whether the campaign as such dealt with it. Issue information encompasses both issues that are being dealt with within the campaign, and those that are not: the background news agenda. Models of issue voting, both directional and proximity, rest upon the assumption that voters keep track of policy positions and vote accordingly.

The final category, information on *winning and losing*, has been called many different things: horse race and hoopla, polls, strategic news, success and failure. The common denominator of this type of information is that it gives clues regarding the electoral strength of the parties and candidates: who is winning, and who is losing (in the polls)? The effect of polls on voting behavior (especially strategic voting) has received plenty of scholarly attention (for an overview, see Sonck, 2010). To vote strategically voters need information regarding the expected electoral result: if their most preferred party would not gain enough support to obtain a seat in parliament, voters may switch to a party that they do not necessarily prefer most, but that has a reasonable chance to get into government (Rosema, 2004). A similar argument can be made for parties that run the risk of not making the voting threshold: their voters may abandon ship and vote for a more viable party (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001b, p. 954). Voters could do this based on the prior electoral result, but presumably they take polls into account. Poll information is treated as a specific type of news that gives clues to voters regarding the (perceived) magnitude of the party (Irwin & Van Holsteyn, 2008). Additionally such information can cue voters regarding possible future government coalitions.

Summing up, campaigns can be seen in a variety of ways, but for the purposes of this study the view of campaigns as generators of messages that are directed towards voters is most fruitful. By communicating with voters, parties try to convince voters to vote for them. They do this directly by means of posters, flyers and so on, but also indirectly through the mass media. We distinguished several types of information: information on the political actors (parties and politicians), the distribution of power (government and opposition), the issues or policy positions of the actors, and information on winning and losing.

3.1.2 - Campaign effects

A campaign effect occurs when information generated by an electoral campaign affects voters by altering or confirming their knowledge, attitudes or behavior. Note that stability can also be an effect, if the lack of campaign information had led to a change. In this case, campaigns are reinforcing rather than altering attitudes, behavior or knowledge (Holbrook, 1996). Throughout the empirical study of campaign effects, one constant has been that they have been hard to find. Getting an answer to the question 'do campaigns matter' is not easy (Wlezien, 2010). Lazarsfeld and colleagues (1944) set out to study the effect of campaigns on vote choice, only to be met by a stable electorate that seemed almost impervious to change. Subsequently, the basic idea about campaign effects was that they were minimal at best. The previously reigning image of campaign information entering the voters' mind through a hypodermic needle was abandoned, and the minimal effects model dominated campaign literature for decades (Klapper, 1960 is probably the culmination of this body of literature). Campbell and colleagues (1960) further built upon the minimal effects theorem, but their successors pointed at changing patterns in the electorate (Nie et al., 1976). The electorate became more volatile, not just in the US but around the globe (Kriesi et al., 2008). This ignited a new surge in the campaign effects literature, which was further enhanced by the broadened scope of effects studies. In recent decades, the focus of campaign effects has shifted away from the search for behavioral changes (e.g. switching voters) towards more subtle, attitudinal changes. For example, the important model of agenda setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) is linked to campaign effects studies because it implies that mass media can

affect issue salience in the public. In the next paragraph we focus on a media effect that originated within the agenda setting model and is crucial for this study: priming.

3.2 Priming the Process

The basic idea of priming is that the supply of information generated by an electoral campaign primes voters to give these considerations more weight in the decision making process. For example, if media coverage deals with the issue of employment to a great extent, this may prime the employment issue: the employment issue will gain importance in political judgments and decisions. If priming has occurred, a voter will weigh the issue of employment more heavily in his electoral considerations. Therefore, the model links information from electoral campaigns to decision making. Priming, framing and agenda setting are among the most well established media effects in political communication (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 10). Agenda setting theory focuses on the increased salience of issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Priming makes the link with political evaluations: judgments and decisions.

Most of the research on priming focuses on judgments or evaluations. Evaluations are distinct from decisions¹³. Nevertheless, priming research has broadened the focus towards decisions (Sheafer, 2007). There is little reason to expect that the priming effect, which is built upon the assumptions of accessibility and applicability, would not apply to decisions. If both causal mechanisms do create the priming effect in judgments, the same principles could easily apply to all kinds of evaluations. Furthermore, decisions are often preceded by judgments, for example in the on-line model of voting. Prior to deciding, the overall score of each party or candidate is calculated (a judgment). Subsequently, a decision is made by weighing the various alternatives against one another (McGraw et al., 1990). Even if we concede that priming only occurs in judgments this would still indirectly affect the decision.

The types of considerations that have been studied in priming research vary, but a large part of the literature has focused on issue considerations. This is mainly due to the fact that the

¹³ An evaluation or judgment is made for one object, for example the president. A decision is made between various alternatives.

introduction of priming into political communication occurred as an extension of agenda setting theory (Miller, 2007). While agenda setting theories are concerned with the relative salience of certain issues, priming links the relative importance of considerations to judgments or decisions. Several studies have broadened the perspective to compare the relative importance of different considerations. Druckman (2004) compared issue considerations, considerations regarding candidates, and strategic considerations. By combining an exit poll with content analysis of the media content leading up to the election, he was able to show that respondents that followed the campaign (dubbed 'campaign voters') gave more weight to issues and candidates that had received the most media attention. Mendelsohn (1994, 1996) compared issue, party and candidate considerations. These types of considerations are sufficient for media effects studies, because the types of information generated by the media are predominantly issue, candidate, party, or horse race related. Van der Brug (2004, p. 211) argues that "*priming is not restricted to issues ... but applies to all determinants of party choice*". Priming research may benefit from a broadened perspective that looks at how media can alter the relative weights of different types of considerations, not just issue-related ones (Roskos-Ewoldsen, Roskos-Ewoldsen, & Carpentier, 2002). Following prior research, we investigate priming effects on politicians, parties and issues.

3.2.1 - Accessibility and Applicability

Both priming and agenda setting were built upon accessibility. By increasing the accessibility of certain issues (agenda setting) or considerations (priming), their relative weight increased (Druckman, Kuklinski, & Sigelman, 2009, p. 495). The focus on accessibility was based on the psychological literature at that time (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). While Iyengar and Kinder were correct in their assessment of psychological literature at that time, Druckman and colleagues (2009) point to the evolution in the debate within psychology that occurred after this assessment. Priming as it was used in political science continued to build on the underlying assumption of increased accessibility. Meanwhile, psychology debated whether priming occurred through increased accessibility or increased applicability.

Why priming occurs may seem trivial because the key point is that it occurs in the first place. However, correctly identifying the underlying mechanism has two important implications.

First, the concept of priming risks becoming something different in political science and psychology, which hampers interdisciplinary efforts. Second, the underlying mechanism has implications for hypothesis building. If priming operates through increasing accessibility, the effect occurs because exposure to information from the mass media increases the chance of activation from memory. Put differently, priming would occur because the primed information is 'fresh' in memory (Higgins, 1996). In this scenario, the time gap between exposure and decision is crucial. The more time passes before the decision is actually made, the greater the possibility that the primed material fades to long term memory, nullifying the priming effect. For example, when a voter is watching a television report on the state of the economy, the hypothesis is that if priming occurred the economy weighs more heavily in that voters' subsequent electoral evaluations. The importance of the underlying mechanism becomes clear if we look at *when* we expect the priming effect to occur. If accessibility is at work, the effect should be most potent only moments after exposure, and it would fade as time passes by. Most experimental studies indeed found mostly short term effects (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). However, survey-based studies found effects that were persistent – not just minutes or hours after exposure, but days. Druckman's (2004) study is an example: the observed effects are not just short term, but they occur as a real life campaign progresses over days, weeks and months. These mixed results cannot be explained by accessibility alone¹⁴. More recent work in psychology nuanced the 'more attention equals more accessibility equals more importance in judgment' line of thought that dominated the political communication research on priming (Althaus & Kim, 2006; Miller & Krosnick, 2000). This has led scholars to distinguish applicability as a second causal mechanism.

If applicability governs the priming mechanism, priming would occur because exposure to media information increases the degree to which a stimulus and a stored knowledge construct are perceived as applicable to one another. In other words, exposure to the stimulus increases its perceived relevance to a judgmental task (Higgins, 1996). This means that a link is

¹⁴ Arguably, accessibility *could* explain these results: for example if the economy remains salient in the mass media for longer periods of time, the short term effect would continually prime the economy. However, the explanation offered by the applicability mechanism is, in our opinion, far more likely.

established between certain information (e.g. the state of the economy) and a judgment (e.g. the evaluation of the candidate). If applicability is at work, the time gap is less important: once information is deemed relevant, this link is likely to persist (Domke, Shah, & Wackman, 1998). Applicability can explain the empirical results obtained in survey research: the most important factor is not recency of exposure, but frequency. The more political news focuses on certain issues, the more likely it is that these issues are deemed as relevant or applicable to the voting decision. Scholars call this a 'big message' effect: the more, the better. This idea is echoed in the gradient hypothesis (Miller & Krosnick, 1996, p. 81). Memory works through associative links between constructs. Exposure to the media will activate certain constructs, which in turn activates the constructs it is linked with: a ripple effect. However, it will likely diminish the impact of other constructs when a judgment or decision has to be made, because only so much can be taken into account¹⁵. The more frequently a link is activated, the stronger it becomes, regardless of time considerations.

Applicability and accessibility are probably two roads to the same destination. The more recent information was taken in (accessibility) and / or the more frequent it was taken in (applicability), the more likely the information will prime. Of course applicability and accessibility do not operate by means of a hypodermic needle; their effects are moderated through several factors. These factors can be inherent to the message or to the receiver. Table 3-1 gives an overview of the main moderators that have been identified.

¹⁵ The link between the activation or priming of 'constructs' and heuristics is already apparent here: as one type of construct becomes linked to the decision, this adversely affects other constructs. This is what bounded rationality describes as information trade-offs.

Moderator	Accessibility	Applicability
Message		
Tone (Lodge and Taber, 2000; Price & Tewksbury, 1997)	X	X
Relevance to the task (Althaus and Kim, 2006)		X
Trust in the media (Miller and Krosnick, 1996)	X	X
Receiver		
Political knowledge (Miller and Krosnick, 1996)	X	X
Political interest (Althaus and Kim, 2006)	X	X
Degree of attention to the stimulus (McQuail, 2005:472)	(X)	X
Motivations, prior value commitments (Domke et al., 1997)		X
Need for Orientation (Matthes, 2005; McCombs, 2004, p. 67)	X	X
Other		
Social norms		X
Party preference		X

Table 3-1: Overview of variables that moderate the various causal mechanisms underlying priming.

We did not include exposure to the information as a moderator. This is a necessary condition for priming to occur (Arceneaux & Johnson, 2007). Once this precondition is fulfilled several moderators can have an effect, regardless of the underlying mechanism. At the receivers end, the degree of attention to the stimulus is crucial for any media effect (McQuail, 2005, p. 472). The more attention is given to information, the more likely it is to be retained in short-term memory. Political interest is distinguished from attention, though they would likely influence one another: an individual with greater political interest is more likely to pay attention to political information. Thirdly, political knowledge moderates the effect of new information. The knowledge that a voter already has at his disposal will influence how new information is received. People with a greater 'base' of information will be better able to judge the quality and relevance of new information, which may increase or decrease the priming effect. People with less political knowledge will have less information to counter argue what the new information tells them, and thus the priming effect among those individuals might be greater (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Finally, the motivations of the individual and his or her prior values will shape the perception of new information (Domke et al., 1997). Individuals can

have varying goals; a simple distinction could be made between individuals that seek information to reach an objective decision, and those that look for information to support an established decision (Taber, Lodge, & Glathar, 2001, p. 208). The former will try to remove bias, consider all options, and so on, while the latter will ignore information that does not fit the pre-established outcome. These types of filtering will influence the information that is seen as relevant to the decision, and therefore influence what information will be able to prime the individual.

Finally, need for orientation is the most important contingent condition for agenda-setting effects (Matthes, 2005; McCombs, 2004, p. 67). Need for orientation refers to the tendency of an individual to seek information about an issue in the news media. With regards to priming, need for orientation has been given less attention. However, it is likely that need for orientation also affects priming because this effect partly rests upon the same underlying causal mechanism as agenda setting (accessibility). The building blocks of need for orientation are relevance and uncertainty. Weaver et al. (2004) measured need for orientation through interest in the campaign, a measure of relevance, and consistency of the vote, an indicator of uncertainty. Uncertainty could probably also be measured as being undecided on who to vote for, because undecided voters are more likely to look for information in order to reach a conclusive decision (Fournier, Nadeau, Blais, Gidengil, & Nevitte, 2004). Regarding the properties of the message, if it frames the information in such a way that its relevance to the judgment or decision is more clearly stated the message will be more likely to prime (Althaus & Kim, 2006); an economic report will be less likely to prime if no link to the candidate is established in the message frame. This is not to say that absence of the correct frame will prevent priming altogether, but a frame that provides clues to the relevance of information for a decision will aid in priming.

The role of tone is important for accessibility, since the presence of tone leads to increased attention to the message. This is especially so for negative tone: *“bad is stronger than good”* (Miller, 2010, p. 889). Negative information is given more attention, which increases its accessibility. It is also more deeply processed, increasing the probability that ties between the information and the act of voting are established, thus indirectly increasing applicability. During electoral campaigns, mass media have a definite preference for bad news (Miller,

2010, p. 887). Among others, Willnat (1997) and Sheafer (2007) concluded that tone also affects priming effects.

Source credibility plays a role in most media effects. If the source is not trustworthy it is likely that the individual will block the message through the process of selective perception matter (Fischer, Jonas, Frey, & Kastenmüller, 2008; Miller & Krosnick, 1996). Usually, higher source credibility increases the effect of a message (but see Pornpitakpan, 2004).

Finally, party preference is a moderator of applicability. For example, if a voter is set on choosing the Green party at the next election, most of the information regarding parties that s(he) would not even consider has no relevance and is not applicable to the decision. The pre-existing attitudes towards the parties will have a moderating effect on whether some messages will prime the voter, or not. Only messages regarding parties that can be considered as being in the 'choice set' of the voter are able to prime voters. This paragraph provided an overview of a variety of established moderators. The next paragraph will add another factor to the equation: heuristics.

3.3 Priming of Heuristics

Two arguments are developed. The first argument argues that heuristics can become primed. More specifically, the more voters are exposed to mass media information, the more likely they will start using heuristics that operate on the information promoted by the information environment. The second argument predicts that the heuristics used by a voter at the start of the campaign will moderate the priming effect of the mass media. External information can prime so that it is available to the voter at decision time. However, before being used in the decision the individual will judge the relevance of the information (Price & Tewksbury, 1997). Pre-existing heuristics determine which information is deemed (ir)relevant, thereby moderating the priming effect. For example a voter who is using the habit heuristic at the outset of the campaign will ignore most of the available information and is not as susceptible to priming by the mass media even if s(he) is highly exposed to information. Voters using the issue heuristic or any other heuristic which already uses information that is available through

the mass media will be more susceptible to priming by mass media coverage. The heuristics will remain constant, but the information upon which they operate will shift.

3.3.1 - Priming of (information within) Heuristics

The first argument deals with the established theory that media coverage of election campaigns primes voters. Applicability assumes that voters are active consumers of information. When they need to make a decision they filter out irrelevant information, with heuristics being the guiding factor. However, during electoral campaigns the supply of information is biased towards considerations or heuristics. Mass media coverage focuses on issues, politicians, parties, the government and horse race news. Though other heuristics may also get attention¹⁶, the majority of the information is only relevant for some of the 9 heuristics. If the most accessible information exists of ‘campaign-fed’ information, the heuristics that can be applied upon it are limited. This can in turn cause a shift in the heuristics that are used. This effect assumes that campaigns can affect the passive filtering. By determining what information can be recalled or is accessible, mass media coverage primes voters’ heuristics.

This argument is based on what happens *before* information can be judged by heuristics. Voters only think of some types of information (issue, candidates, and so on), which restricts them to use certain heuristics. If you cannot recall any issue positions when you have to make a decision, voting based on that heuristic is unlikely. Theoretically, applicability and accessibility are the two possible reasons why we expect that only limited types of information will be recalled¹⁷. Applicability precedes activation; constructs that are not

¹⁶ Group interests may be triggered by slogans (e.g. ‘For the Flemish people!’). Habit can also be triggered by campaigns: parties can posit themselves as ‘the traditional party’, thus trying to keep their habitual voters loyal. Endorsements by organizations, such as the unions, can get coverage as well.

¹⁷ Note that in the actual measuring no distinction between the two possible causes is possible. This is merely a theoretical argument to explain why we would expect this effect to occur during electoral campaigns. Distinguishing the specific causal mechanisms underlying the effect is beyond the empirical means of this study. Nevertheless, a first step is showing that the expected effect takes place. If it does not then there is little refining left to do.

considered relevant are not activated. As was discussed earlier, information is stored in long-term memory by means of a network of associated constructs (Miller & Krosnick, 1996). When voters start to think about who to vote for, they activate information that is accessible and applicable. For example, voter x decides based on endorsements at the start of the campaign. Voter x is nevertheless quite interested in politics and watches debates and electoral coverage on television. The predominant topics of such coverage would deal with issues, candidates, parties, government, and polls. It is obvious that such coverage would (implicitly) convey the message that these types of considerations are *relevant* to the vote. Althaus and Kim (2006) state that when messages explicitly link to the task at hand, they are more likely to prime. Put differently, the underlying message permeating this electoral coverage is that such information is applicable to the voting decision. Voter x may start to feel that the issues and candidates *are* applicable to his decision after watching election coverage, effectively priming the issue and politician heuristic.

The concept of the information environment fits with this reasoning (Jerit, Jason Barabas, & Toby Bolsen, 2006). If the general supply of information leans towards certain issues political knowledge on these issues increases. This means that people start linking the information portrayed in the information environment to political outcomes. Hopmann, Vliegthart, De Vreese en Albaek (2010) already showed that the visibility of parties and the tone towards them in the information environment can have an impact on party preference. Similarly the argument here is that the content of the information environment will cause shifts in the public towards those considerations that are promoted (explicitly or implicitly) as applicable for vote choice.

The information environment is also important for the second reason why we expect that the big message effect will occur. Research has shown that the availability of information has a substantial role in the acquisition of political knowledge (Delli Carpentini & Keeter, 1996). The electorate learns about politics through the media, and the general focus of the media determines what people learn about. Thus, we also expect that heuristics will be primed by mass media coverage because the supply of information determines the considerations people learn about, which in turn determines the heuristics that have a higher chance of being accessible. Agenda setting theory, which is built upon the accessibility mechanism, assumes a

zero-sum game at play: when media direct attention to an issue, this leads to diminished attention for and salience of other issues (Sheafer & Weimann, 2005, p. 351). Increased accessibility of one type of consideration will presumably lead to decreased accessibility of other considerations. Therefore, if the information environment focuses on certain considerations, these will be more accessible in the minds of voters – and be more likely to become activated.

This leads us to believe that the predominant information types that are ‘pushed’ by the information environment of an electoral campaign will prime voters to use heuristics operating on these types of information. Therefore, our first general expectation is that voters who use heuristics that operate on information promoted in the information environment will be reinforced as the campaign progresses, and keep using these heuristics. Voters not using such heuristics will be more likely to switch towards heuristics that are promoted by the information environment. Therefore, controlling for prior heuristic use, we expect that the probability of using such campaign-promoted heuristics will increase. The odds of switching will increase as exposure to information increases. This results in the first set of hypotheses. Prior research has found priming effects with regards to several considerations, most notably issues and candidates. This dissertation focuses on priming effects on three heuristics: issues, parties and persons¹⁸.

H1politician: over the course of the campaign, voters voting for a party with highly visible politicians are more likely to use the politician heuristic compared to voters voting for a party with less visible politicians.

H1politician_m: the politician priming effect is greater for voters with high media exposure compared to voters with low media exposure.

¹⁸ Though it would undoubtedly be interesting to test priming effects on other heuristics, we limit our focus due to data limitations. We only have good measures for these types of information, whereas we have either no, or limited measures for government and opposition visibility, magnitude (polls), groups and so on. Furthermore, these three heuristics are used by large parts of the electorate, as we discuss in the empirical chapters.

H1politician is based upon the assumption that some parties will enjoy greater visibility in the mass media; depending on a parties' size and the extent to which it obtains positions of power (e.g. participates in government) media tend to spend more time covering their politicians. For these parties, information regarding the politician heuristic is more available, and thus more likely to prime. Because we expect that media information will prime voters, exposure to such information should increase the priming effect (*H1politician_m*). Additionally we expect that the information used within the politician heuristic will shift towards those politicians that enjoy greater visibility.

H1politician_i: over the course of the campaign, highly visible politicians are more likely to be used within the politician heuristic compared to less visible politicians.

Similarly, we formulate two hypotheses for the party heuristic. We expect among voters voting for highly visible parties, the use of the party heuristic will increase as the campaign progresses. Furthermore, we expect that exposure to mass media information will increase the priming effect.

H1party: over the course of the campaign, voters voting for parties that are highly visible are more likely to use the party preference heuristic compared to voters voting for less visible parties.

H1party_m: the party priming effect is greater for voters with high media exposure compared to voters with low media exposure.

Within the party heuristic, we cannot distinguish between different parties that might be used. We only expect that highly visible parties will prime voters to use that party. As such, we do not have a hypothesis regarding the priming of specific information within the party heuristic; conversely we do have such an expectation regarding the issue heuristic.

H1issues: over the course of the campaign, voters are more likely to use the issue heuristic.

H1issues_m: the issue priming effect is greater for voters with high media exposure compared to voters with low media exposure.

Hlissues does not formulate its expectation based on the preferred party of the respondent. For example we do not expect that voters voting for some parties will be more likely to use the issue heuristic compared to voters for other parties. The reason for this is that contrary to the politician heuristic, our measurement of media content makes it impossible to discern between the 'issue visibility' of a given party. As such, our general priming expectation merely states that in general, voters are more likely to use the issue heuristic, and that this propensity increases as media exposure is greater. We do, however, formulate a hypothesis regarding the information used within the issue heuristic.

Hlissues_i: *over the course of the campaign, issues that are highly salient in media coverage are more likely to be used within the issue heuristic compared to less salient issues.*

3.3.2 - Heuristics as moderators of priming

The second argument is that the use of heuristics prior to the campaign will moderate the overall priming effect. Heuristics filter out information to achieve cognitive reduction. This is what bounded rationality is all about: because not all information can be taken into account some of it must be discarded. The bounded rationality framework is built upon the assumption that people are not able to decide based on all the relevant information (Simon, 1985). Information can be discarded passively and actively. Information is passively discarded before it enters working memory. Long term memory is organized as a network of interlinked nodes: (Miller & Krosnick, 1996). As such, if you think about voting only constructs that are linked to that construct are activated. Both applicability and accessibility affect these links: applicability causes long term connections to be established, whereas accessibility can establish a short-term connection. These connections will determine what is passively discarded, and what is not. Price and Tewksbury (1997) argue that people also actively discard information. Just because you remember something when you have to make a decision does not mean you will include it in the decision. Accessibility may cause you to remember that a candidate you saw on television made a funny remark, but this does not mean that this information is included in the decision you make. Price and Tewksbury go on to argue that relevant information will be retained, while irrelevant information will be left aside. We argue that pre-existing heuristics determine active discarding of information.

Discarding information implies reduction: some information is retained, some is not. What links the model of priming to bounded rationality is that in both cases the underlying processes are reducing the information being considered. The link is especially important if we consider priming. In bounded rationality and priming the *relevance* of the information is crucial. Bounded rationality stresses that people have neither the time nor ability to process all information, and depending on their goals (a good enough decision versus an optimal one) they use different heuristics. Priming stresses that people “...*may suppress the use of inappropriate information and seek out information in order to fulfill their processing objectives*” (Price & Tewksbury, 1997, p. 193). Therefore, we can link the bounded rationality framework to the priming theory by focusing on the heuristics that voters use: they are the benchmark against which new information is judged to be relevant or not. And subsequently whether it is used in the decision or not.

In another body of literature the connection between studies of media and the psychological processes underlying information processing has been made by Entman (1989, pp. 77-78) when he discusses the interaction between schemas and external information: “*Schemas direct attention to relevant information, guide its interpretation and evaluation, ... , and facilitate its retention*”. He then makes the link with studies of media: “*Rather than resisting or ignoring most new or dissonant media reports, the information-processing view predicts, people may often respond more positively to media messages. ... If salient, the person processes the news according to routines established in his or her schema system. Processing may lead the person either to store the information or to discard it*”. Both schemas and heuristics organize people's thoughts by keeping or discarding bits and pieces of information. Within the bounded literature itself various authors also made this point, albeit indirectly. Popkin (1991) talks about issue publics and argues that part of the electorate considers some issues to be more relevant than others. Lau and Redlawsk (2007) show how we can make inferences about the decision making process based on the information that people assess. They do so based on the assumption that people seek information that they deem relevant. Put differently, they seek information that fits their heuristic(s). Heuristics moderate priming. After activation from long term memory into short term memory, they guide voters in their assessment of relevance.

H2: The heuristics used by a voter at the start of the campaign will moderate the priming effect of the media. Voters using heuristic x will be more easily primed by information applicable to heuristic x.

Based on previous research we expect that the content of mass media coverage during an electoral period consists mainly of issue or policy positions, information about the candidates and parties, information about the way government is doing, and poll information (Just et al., 2003). These types of information may prime voters to use certain considerations, if they fit the heuristics of those voters¹⁹.

3.3.3 - Factors that in- or decrease the priming effect

We expect that prior heuristic use will moderate the priming effect of mass media information (H2). However, over the course of hypothesis building we came across four factors that may in- or decrease the priming effect of the mass media: the extent to which information is linked to the elections, tone, voter uncertainty, and exposure to other information sources.

In order for information to prime a certain heuristic, it must either information be relevant for the decision, or must be easily accessible from memory. Althaus and Kim (2006) argue that the context of the information can in- or decrease the perceived applicability and accessibility. Issues that are mentioned in media coverage dealing with the upcoming elections are more directly linked to the elections compared to issues that are dealt with in the foreign news section. Similarly, politicians that are very visible in the mass media, but are never mentioned in relation to the upcoming elections, are not linked to those elections. A good example of this would be the role of the American president in mid-term elections. The president himself is

¹⁹ To give an example, suppose a voter used the politician heuristic to make up his mind when we ask him who he would vote for, a few months prior to the elections. The fact that his decision making process is focused on candidate information will act as a filter to assess information. If he was to watch the television report on the economy he would be unlikely to use this information. It may be information that is easily accessible, but is not deemed relevant. On the other hand, suppose he was to watch a television report about the leading candidates and their personalities, this type of information would be both accessible, and would pass the filter of relevance of the politician heuristic.

not up for election, but by attending rallies of candidates that are running he is linking himself to the elections nevertheless. These clues, embedded in the mass media coverage, can increase or decrease the perceived applicability of information. With regards to electoral decision making, the key factor that increases applicability is the establishment of a link to the upcoming elections.

H3: the more information is linked to the elections, the greater its priming effect will be.

A second factor that can explain why priming occurs is accessibility. The tone of the information can increase its accessibility. Tone is especially relevant when we consider two of the heuristics we will focus on – politician and party. The amount of tone may increase the attention paid to a politician. Whether positive or negative, if tone is present it may attract readers' attention to the politician, thereby increasing information accessibility and thus the probability of priming. *"Because the media priming theory is based on the assumption that both the issue salience and the semantic content of a news story lead to the activation of prime-related knowledge, we might expect that the tone of a news story (positive, negative, or neutral) can influence what kind of prime-related ideas come to mind as the result of media exposure to certain issues"* (Willnat, 1997, pp. 62-63). The more tone is present, the more the content will 'stick' in memory. Negative tone may increase accessibility of negative or positive feelings towards certain politicians, Willnat goes on. In his 2007 article, Sheaffer shows that evaluative tone matters for both second-level agenda setting effects and priming. Furthermore, evaluative tone in issue-related content impacts the evaluation of incumbents; the effect of tone is therefore indirect. Here we look at the direct evaluation of evaluative tone with regards to politicians. We expect that the effect will also hold for party-related information. Parties that are evaluated more positively or negatively will be more likely to be remembered because the information will be more accessible in memory. Consequently, it will be more likely to prime.

A third factor that we believe will increase the likelihood that a voter will (not) become primed, is the level of (un)decidedness at the start of the campaign. Campaigns are often aimed at undecided voters, since they are presumably most susceptible to persuasion: *"Research and conventional wisdom suggest that undecided voters are especially prone to*

campaign persuasion” (Kosmidis & Xezonakis, 2010, p. 604). The degree to which a voter is undecided will determine to what extent he is still open to accept campaign information. However, experimental findings suggest that even reportedly ‘undecided’ voters already hold implicit attitudinal preferences for opposing choices that predict future vote choice well (Arcuri, Castelli, Galdi, Zogmaister, & Amadori, 2008). Thus, voter (un)decidedness should be taken with a grain of salt: presumably most voters have some preference but do not commit to a final choice just yet. Even though such ‘hidden’ preferences may predict the vote well, in various countries voter (un)decidedness has proven to be an important factor to predict susceptibility to campaign influences. Chaffee and Rimal (1996) found evidence that time of vote decision does impact upon campaigns persuasive effects on voters. Similarly, Denmark (2005) showed that in the 2001 Australian elections, time of vote decision mattered for the importance of issues upon the vote choice as well. Fournier et al. (2004) presented similar results for Canada. Kosmidis and Xezonakis (2010) found support for their argument that late deciders will be more likely to base their vote choice upon considerations that become salient during the campaign. There is ample evidence that being undecided, and thus being a late decider, increases the odds of being susceptible to campaign effects.

H5: the more undecided voters are, the greater the priming effect will be.

A final factor that we expect will influence the priming effect of heuristics is exposure to other sources of information. We focus on interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication entails the conversations voters have with their social circle: friends, family, acquaintances and so on. In the broader literature on voting, the importance of the social circle is well established from Lazarsfeld onwards. Regarding media effects the two-step flow of information by Lazarsfeld and Katz (1957) incorporated interpersonal communication by means of opinion leaders, who spread mass media information to the broader public. In more recent work, the impact of interpersonal communication upon decisions and judgments also has been discussed (Beck, Dalton, Greene, & Huckfeldt, 2002). More specifically, Mendeholson (1996) addressed the impact of interpersonal communication on the priming of issues and candidates during a presidential election campaign. His results indicate that interpersonal communication often tempers the priming effect.

H6: being engaged more in interpersonal communication decreases the priming effect.

Rounding up, there are ample reasons to believe that mass media information will prime heuristics. In the literature on media effects and information processing there are plenty of indirect references to the central argument presented here. The fact that the determinants of information processing will determine media effects upon that processing is not far-fetched; the argument focuses on an under-explored link between two dominant models in political communication studies. Naturally, the evidence will make or break the argument that was developed here. The next chapter will deal with the research design used to test these hypotheses.

Chapter 4: Research setting and methods

We use two data sets to test the hypotheses. Data collection for both took place in the run up to the 2009 regional elections in Flanders and Wallonia, the two largest regions in Belgium. This chapter discusses the case selection and research design. In the first part of the chapter Belgium and its most relevant aspects are discussed. Following this we discuss the research design, data gathering and operationalization of key variables.

4.1 The Research Setting: Belgium

4.1.1 - General overview of the Belgian polity

Belgium is a small West-European democracy with almost 11 million inhabitants. Since its establishment as an independent state in 1830 it underwent a slew of institutional reforms. It is a parliamentary democracy with a multiparty system which is common in West European countries. Being a very open country in terms of trade, Belgium is influenced by trends sweeping across most West-European countries (Fitzmaurice, 1995, p. 1). In this regard, Belgium is a run-of-the-mill democracy, which makes it a good case from which conclusions can be generalized. However, one aspect of Belgium makes it unique: Belgian federalism is of a special kind, effectively combining two types of federalism into one. We devote attention to this issue because the 'split nature' of the Belgian polity returns in both the political and media systems, and more importantly in public opinion in the various regions as well.

The Belgian polity underwent various changes since its inception. In a series of state reforms, several competences have been transferred away from the federal level towards the regions and communities. The subnational level is comprised of both regions, which are based upon geographical borders, and communities, which are based on linguistic borders (Sinardet, 2007, p. 41). This results in a complex division of competences. In effect, Belgian federalism combines two types of federalism into one. On the one hand, the regions (Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels) are the result of territorial federalism. This type of federalism was a key demand of the Walloon movements that strived for socioeconomic autonomy. Conversely, the communities (Flemish-, French- and German-speaking) reflect the Flemish movements'

search for cultural autonomy. Regions and communities overlap: for example some parts of the Flemish and French communities stretch into the Brussels region. Belgian federalism is also asymmetric as a result of the different tendencies in Flanders (cultural autonomy) and Wallonia (socioeconomic autonomy). In Flanders, all competences have been centralized in the government of the community. In Wallonia, this is unthinkable and both community and regional government are still autonomous from one another (Devos, 2006, p. 12). Nevertheless, the Walloon community and regional boards have identical compositions, and the community board is not subject to elections. The regional board is therefore often dubbed the Walloon parliament, and in our further discussions mentions of the Walloon government and parliament refer to the regional board and government.

The asymmetrical nature of the Belgian federalized state has resulted in various governments and elections to appoint them. At the most local level, there are municipal elections every six years (the last ones were held in 2006). Going up from there, the regional elections are held every 5 years (last election in 2004). Finally, the federal parliament and senate are elected every 4 years (last election in 2010). Leaving the local level aside, Belgium has six governments. The federal government, Flemish, Walloon and Brussels government, French community government, and Germanophone government.

The key consequence of the federal nature of Belgium for the current study is that Wallonia and Flanders are in essence two different contexts, at least insofar as the party landscape, media landscape, and public opinion are concerned. This divide runs along linguistic borders. Media rarely reach voters in the other community, parties do not campaign in the other community, and Flemish and Walloon public opinion are divergent on a lot of issues (Billiet, Maddens, & Frogner, 2008). Though there is a German minority, its impact is minimal at best. It is safe to say that the dominant dynamics of Belgian politics are stimulated by the differences between Flanders and Wallonia (Devos, 2006, p. 12). Most of the electoral laws are equal in both regions. As such, both regions are separate cases that operate on largely the same institutional contexts. In the current study we will therefore be looking at two largely separated electoral campaigns. The following paragraphs will give an overview of four essential aspects of the broader context within which the 2009 regional elections took place: the electoral regulations, the political landscape, the media system, and public opinion.

4.1.2 - Electoral regulations

Belgian elections operate under a system of open list proportional representation, which is used in many countries²⁰. Each party has to submit a list of candidates several months prior to the elections. The list includes both effective candidates and substitutes. The place on the list is an important factor in getting elected or not, because places high up on the list get support from the so-called list votes. List votes are one of the options available to voters. If a voter agrees with the sequence of candidates on the list, s(he) can cast a list vote. Another option is casting a list vote in combination with one or more preference votes for either effective candidates or substitutes. What voters cannot do is cast preference votes for candidates of different parties, as is the case in Ireland or Switzerland. Doing so invalidates the vote. Thus, the key choice that voters have to make is between *parties*: voters can give preference votes for individual candidates, but they all have to be a member of the same party. Finally, voters can also cast a blank vote (Deschouwer, 2009).

In the regional elections parties run in several constituencies, with a varying amount of seats in each constituency depending on the amount of inhabitants. Parties must submit lists in all constituencies if they want to run in the elections. In Flanders, five of the six constituencies are identical to the provinces (number of seats in parentheses). The sixth constituency is that of the 19 Brussels municipalities. In this constituency, both Flemish and French lists can be proposed (Vlaams Parlement, 2010). The Walloon parliament, being the regional sub government, is elected entirely in the region of Wallonia. In Wallonia, the 13 constituencies are smaller as they, in contrast to the Flemish constituencies, were not merged together into provinces.

Once all the votes have been collected, seats are assigned according to the D'Hondt system, which slightly favors large parties. A voting threshold of 5 per cent was introduced in the federal elections of 2003. This introduced a real risk to several smaller parties. For example, in the 2003 elections the Flemish greens lost all seats in the federal parliament. To determine the specific candidates that obtain a seat, preference votes are taken into account, but list votes

²⁰ Finland, Sweden, Netherlands, elections for the European Parliament in most EU countries, and so on.

favor those higher up on the list. The total number of list votes is halved, and then distributed among the candidates that do not meet the minimum number of votes to obtain a seat from the first place on the list downwards. After the seats have been assigned, government formation commences. The largest party usually takes the initiative (FOD Internal affairs, 2010).

The elections are preceded by a legally established campaign period of three months. During this period politicians cannot participate in entertainment shows on television, and spending is limited. However, in practice only the last three or four weeks of the campaign are really intense (Van Aelst, 2007). Belgium is not really different from most other West-European countries in this regard, though the fact that the day of the election is known a long time in advance (as the parliament cannot be dissolved prematurely) removes the strategic advantage that some government parties sometimes have since they can call for elections whenever they wish. Compared to the presidential elections in the US their duration is very short; the absence of primaries greatly cuts down on the length. On the other hand, the fact that many governments have to be elected cuts down on the time between elections. For example, in 2003 federal elections were held, followed by the 2004 regional elections. Then in 2006 municipal elections were held, followed by federal elections in 2007. In the past decade only a few years did *not* have elections.

Parties in Belgium traditionally use a variety of methods to spread their message. All campaign expenses combined cannot exceed a legally imposed ceiling, though parties can and do move funds to individual candidates. After the elections, candidates and parties are obliged to submit their expenses for review to the appropriate commission (Maddens, Weekers, & Fiers, 2007). Campaign expenses are comparatively low compared to US elections, though the 2009 elections did mark a high point in campaign spending of political parties (Maddens, 2010; Maddens, Weekers, Put, & Vanlangenakker, 2010). Overall, the role of parties' own communications in directly reaching voters seems limited: most of their efforts must reach voters through mass media coverage.

4.1.3 - Party landscapes

At the time the 2009 elections were held, 9 Flemish and 5 Walloon parties had representatives in a regional or federal parliament. Parties are the key actors in the Belgian polity, which is often seen as a textbook example of a partitocracy (Deschouwer, 2004, p. 215; Deschouwer, de Winter, & della Porta, 1996). The Belgian party system is highly fragmented. In fact, it is one of the most fragmented party systems of any modern democracy (De Winter, Swyngedouw, & Dumont, 2006, p. 933). This is in part due to the fact that all former traditional party organizations have split up into a Flemish and Walloon party. Furthermore, several new parties have emerged in the last few decades. Parties only compete in part of the country because Flemish parties and Walloon parties do not compete for voters, except in the Brussels region which is bilingual.

Until 1965, the Belgian party system consisted of three parties: the Christian-Democratic party (PSC-CVP²¹), the Socialist party (PSB-BSP²²) and the liberal party (PL-LP²³). From this moment on, the number of parties steadily rose, creating a highly fragmented party system, especially in Flanders. A first change in the party system that existed in 1965 was the emergence of the ethno-regionalist parties: VU (Volksunie) in Flanders, RW (Rassemblement Wallon) in Wallonia, and FDF (Front Démocratique des Francophones) in the Brussels region. The rising importance of the linguistic differences stirred conflict within the traditional parties, and one after another these parties split up into separate branches. The Christian-Democratic party split in 1968, followed by the Liberals in 1972 and the Socialists in 1978. From this moment on, there were no more parties that ran for election in the entire country. After this, newcomers to the party landscape were the xenophobe regionalist party VB (Vlaams Belang), poujadist UDRT-RAD (Union Démocratique pour le Respect du Travail – Respect voor Arbeid en Democratie), and the Green parties Agalev (Flemish) and Ecolo (Walloon). The Flemish regionalist party VU later split up into two parts, Spirit and N-

²¹ Christelijke Volkspartij (Dutch speaking part) – Parti Social Chrétien (French speaking part)

²² Parti Social Belge (French speaking part) – Belgische Socialistische partij (Dutch speaking part)

²³ Parti Libéral (French speaking part) – Liberale Partij (Dutch speaking part)

VA (Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie). Several other parties managed to obtain seats now and then, but the above parties managed (for the most part) to be consistently represented in one or more parliaments. In 2007 LDD (Lijst Dedecker) a Flemish right-wing Populist Party built around chairman Jean-Marie Dedecker managed to obtain several seats.

The Flemish party system is the most fragmented one of the two. One reason for this is the electoral success of several ethno-regionalist parties. Nevertheless, the fragmentation is not the only thing that is different between the Flemish and Walloon party landscapes. The proportion of votes obtained by ethno-regionalist parties is far greater in the Flemish party system. In general, the Flemish traditional parties have seen their electoral market share wane over time. This is especially true for the Christian-Democratic party CVP: between 1965 and 1987 they always received between 40 and 50 per cent of the vote. After 1987 their vote share dropped to 39 (1991), 29 (1995), 22 (1999) and 21 (2003) per cent, an all time low. Furthermore, 1999 was the first time since 1958 that the Christian-Democratic party was not represented in any coalition as they were replaced by a Purple-Green coalition, which consisted of the Liberal, Socialist and Green parties. After 2003 CVP changed its name to CD&V, indicating an increased awareness of the linguistic issue. Furthermore, they formed an electoral cartel with N-VA, one of the two ethno-regionalist parties that sprouted from the dissolved VU. The VU, which was the first Flemish ethno-regionalist party, had peaked in 1974 with 22 per cent of the vote. However, after several rounds of negotiating and the accompanying trade-offs that had to be made, its vote share dropped in 1987, 1991 and 1995. Internal struggles resulted in a split: N-VA and Spirit were the ideological siblings. Spirit joined the socialists in a cartel in 2003, which eventually dissolved after the 2007 elections. After a name change to SLP (Social Liberal Party), the party went to the voter independently in 2009. Its counterpart, N-VA, only managed to get one representative elected in the 2003 elections. Faced with the threat of the voting threshold, they formed a cartel with the Christian-Democrats in 2004 and 2007, which led to a revival of both parties, and a return to the Flemish (2004) and federal (2007) government for the Christian-Democrats.

Since the split in 1978, the Flemish socialist party SP had a relatively stable electoral share. That is, until 1995, in which its share dropped to 20 and then to 14 per cent in 1999. The 1999 elections were the worst score ever for the socialists. It still entered government after this

defeat. Helped by the cartel with Spirit, the party had a revival in 2003 under the guidance of Steve Stevaert, the party president at that time. In 2004 and 2007 its electoral share dropped again, and the cartel split after the 2007 elections.

The Flemish liberal party split from its Walloon counterpart in 1972. Under the name PVV (Party for Liberty and Progress) it saw both success and defeat in the elections after the split. Ideologically, it underwent significant changes as it started to adopt many progressive points of view on several ethical issues - abortion, euthanasia, and so on. In 1992 the party was renamed into VLD, which became Open VLD in 2007. For the period between 1987 and 2007, the undisputed leader of the party was Guy Verhofstadt, who was the incumbent prime minister of the federal government in 2007. However, in 2007 the party suffered a substantial defeat and lost the leading position in the Flemish landscape to the Christian-Democratic party. At this point in time the party is ideologically in the center. However, its economic point of view is still decidedly liberal. The liberal party was plagued by internal struggles from 2004 onwards: Jean-Marie Dedecker, a political outsider that had joined the party as a famous sports coach, turned out to be a major electoral force. In the 2004 elections for party president, he unexpectedly received 38 per cent of the vote when running against the candidate put forward by the leaders of the party. After the 2006 municipal elections he was expelled from the party. Subsequently, he founded his own party, LDD (Lijst Dedecker) in 2007 only months before the federal elections. Again unexpectedly, his party managed to obtain 5 seats in parliament, and 1 in the Senate. Ideologically, LDD is far more right-wing than the liberal party from which he was expelled. The fact that there was an electoral 'gap' between the center parties VLD, CD&V and the extreme right VB may have helped in bringing about the unexpected success (Pauwels, 2010, 2011; Van Aelst, Nuytemans, Lefevre, & Walgrave, 2007).

The extreme right VB (*Vlaams Belang*, or Flemish Interests) is special in many ways. Since its inception as a more fundamental alternative to the VU, it has never entered government. It is a pure opposition party that is systematically blocked from government by the other parties in a 'cordon sanitaire' (Pauwels, 2011). It has extreme right-wing stances on the issues of immigration and crime, which form the staple of its policy positions. Though it is fiercely anti-Belgium, and wants a separate Flemish nation-state, its electorate mainly chooses the

party because of its positions on the crime and immigration issues (Swyngedouw, 2001). Its breakthrough elections were those of 1991, where it increased its share of seats from 2 to 12²⁴. The electoral peak was reached in the 2004 regional elections, in which the party got 24 per cent of the vote. The 2007 elections were a disappointment, as the party lost one representative in the federal chamber. It was the first election in which the party did not gain any votes or seats.

Finally, the Green party Agalev was founded in 1982. It originated from the social movement with the same name. Ideologically, it was (and for the most part still is) focused on various environmental issues. It steadily rose to a political party with some weight, which culminated in their seat at the negotiation table for an important state reform treaty²⁵. So far, the electoral peak of the party occurred in 1999, not surprisingly after the dioxin crisis. The party entered the resulting coalition, but suffered a major setback in the next federal elections in 2003: the party, which was part of the government that installed the voting threshold, did not manage to attain the 5 per cent mark and lost all representatives at the federal level. This defeat triggered a fundamental introspection within the party, resulting in a name change to Groen!. Furthermore, the party only now officially had a party president. In the 2004 and 2007 elections, the party managed to regain some seats in both the regional and federal parliament, though its electoral share is still far from what it had been in 1999.

The Greens parties are the most cooperative across the linguistic border. Though they only came into being after the de facto regionalisation of the party systems, they have an extensive network of collaboration (Swenden, Brans, & De Winter, 2008). They are the only two parties that consistently try to work together; for example, Groen! And Ecolo form a united parliamentary faction, and they have agreed to be a package deal when it comes to federal coalition making: either they are both in, or both out. Ecolo is the Walloon counterpart of Groen!. Its name stands for “*Écologistes Confédérés pour l'organisation de luttes originales*”. In the Walloon party landscape, it is a relatively small player though its electoral share is

²⁴ These elections were subsequently dubbed 'Black Sunday'.

²⁵ The Sint Michiels treaty in 1992.

larger than that of Groen!. Its electoral track record is similar to that of its Flemish counterpart with a peak in 1999, then suffering a setback in 2003 (though they did not lose all seats at the federal level).

The French socialist party PS (*Parti Socialiste*, Socialist Party) was the dominant party in the Walloon landscape for a long time. In the 2007 election it lost the leadership to the liberal party MR-FDF. Until that election the PS had been the largest party in Wallonia. In the last couple of years the battle between PS and MR for the leadership of the Walloon landscape has been an important dynamic, especially since defending the interests of the own community became an important campaign element in both regions (Pilet & Haute, 2008, p. 548). However, contrary to what occurred in Flanders, the Walloon traditional parties managed to retain fairly strong positions in the electoral market.

The French liberal party PRL (*Parti Réformateur Libéral*, Liberal Reform Movement) underwent a series of changes that would eventually lead to the establishment of the MR (*Mouvement Réformateur*, Reform Movement) of which the former PRL would become a part. The first step was the establishment of the cartel PRL-FDF. The FDF (*Front / Fédéralistes Démocratique des Francophones*, Francophone Democratic Front / Federalists) is an ethno-regionalist party that focuses on the defense of the interests of Francophone inhabitants of Brussels. Later on, the MCC (*Mouvement des Citoyens pour le Changement*, Citizens' Movement for Change) also joined this group. Eventually, in 2002 the MR was established. Ideologically, the liberal party underwent similar changes as its Flemish counterpart. It evolved from a strict libertarian party towards a more centrist, social liberal model though still retaining right-wing ideas.

The Walloon Christian-Democratic party CDH (*Centre Démocrate Humaniste*, Democratic Humanist Center) split from its Flemish counterpart after a linguistic crisis concerning the University of Louvain. At the time it was called PSC (*Parti Social Chrétien*, Social Christian Party). Its electoral share dwindled, which led to an internal crisis in 1999. This resulted in a name change to CDH in 2002 after much internal debate. Ideologically, it differs substantially from the Flemish counterpart in that it is now a humanist party. The Christian reference in the name was dropped, which caused a number of members to form their own

party. The 2003 elections did not really bring much avail, as the number of seats in parliament further dropped. After the success in the 2004 regional elections, CDH returned to several regional coalitions. The 2007 elections were also successful, and the party joined the subsequent coalition.

FN (*Front National*, National Front) is an extreme right party. Since its foundation in 1985 it managed to obtain seats in the regional / federal parliaments at several points in time. However, it continually suffered from internal struggle, which severely hampered its electoral fortunes. Its ideology is decidedly anti-immigrant, nationalist, and populist. Its vote share is relatively small, and due to the fact that it is blocked from government by a *cordon sanitaire* as well, its role is generally limited.

4.1.4 - Government coalitions

It is beyond the scope of the dissertation to discuss all government coalitions that were in effect up until the 2009 regional elections. The discussion will be limited by the most critical coalition shifts that set the stage for the 2009 elections. The fate of the federal government, which was theoretically not up for election in 2009, was closely intertwined with that of the regional governments. As is the case in most federal countries, the elections at one level get part of their meaning from the other levels. Belgian governments were traditionally made up of the same coalitions at both the federal and regional level. In 2004, this tradition was broken when the regional coalition in Wallonia became PS / CDH, whereas the federal coalition consisted of PS / MR on the Walloon side (Deschouwer, Delwit, Hooghe, & Walgrave, 2010, p. 7). This caused a stir in the federal coalition, and sparked an intense rivalry between PS and MR for the market leadership in Wallonia. In the 2007 federal elections MR managed to become the largest party in Wallonia. However, the party did not manage to create a coalition without its rival (see further). Note that CD&V was still aligned with N-VA in the run up to the 2007 elections. After negotiations on the state reform failed and no compromise could be reached, the cartel finally split on September 22nd 2008²⁶.

²⁶ The cartel ended insofar as the national and regional level is concerned. At lower levels the ties between the two parties were not always cut.

The Flemish regional parliament had always included CD&V until the 1999 elections. At this point, a Purple-Green coalition (Socialists, Liberals and Greens) was established. After the 2004 elections the Greens left the coalition, and CD&V entered government once again under the leadership of Yves Leterme. In the 2007 federal elections CD&V-N-VA won, which caused shifts in the Flemish regional government: Leterme moved to the federal level, and Kris Peeters became the Flemish government leader.

Whereas the Flemish coalition shift occurred without hiccups, the 2007 elections started two years of turmoil at the federal level. Leterme had been elected in a cartel with the Flemish regionalists, and after a campaign in which the necessity of a state reform was heavily stressed. After the 2007 elections several months of (unsuccessful) negotiations gridlocked the federal level, and eventually led to the split of the CD&V-N-VA cartel. 6 months after the federal elections, the former Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt eventually established an interim-government on December 21st. On March 20th the coalition was replaced by a coalition consisting of Open VLD, MR, CD&V, CDH and PS led by Leterme. After an affair concerning the Fortis bank the government resigned but was immediately succeeded by a coalition led by Herman Van Rompuy. This was the federal government coalition at the time the 2009 elections were held. Because no agreement regarding the state reform had been reached, this would become an important issue in the 2009 regional campaign.

4.1.5 - The Belgian media landscape

Most voters get their information on politics through the mass media, especially television (De Vreese, 2010). In Hallin and Mancini's (2004, p. 145) typology of media systems, the Belgian media system is categorized as lying partway between democratic corporatist and polarized pluralist models. While they note that the Belgian media landscape is segmented along linguistic lines, they do not differentiate between the two regions in most of their analyses. Both regions have seen similar trends: in both regions commercial broadcasters were only allowed in the last 2 decades and newspapers used to have strong partisan ties. However, after the introduction of commercial television broadcasters, the Flemish television landscape has quickly fragmented, whereas the Walloon landscape is still divided between a public, a commercial, and a foreign (French) broadcaster. Furthermore, Flemish and Walloon

media are separate media systems. The written press has been divided in French and Flemish media for a long time, in televised media the diversion has occurred more recently (Sinardet, 2007; Sinardet, De Swert, & Dandoy, 2004).

In essence, these developments have created two separate ‘information environments’ (Jerit et al., 2006). We already explained that Flemish and Walloon political parties and candidates do not compete. Additionally, the divided media systems create separate campaign settings, because they devote little attention to the ‘other’ campaign (Sinardet, 2007). Parties and candidates thus wage their campaigns within the Flemish or Walloon information environment. Voters get some information on how the electoral race is going in the other region, but not a lot. The Walloon and Flemish media systems should therefore be discussed as separate entities.

4.1.5.1 Flemish media landscape

Print media²⁷ are controlled by three groups. Corelio controls the newspapers *De Standaard* (a quality newspaper) and *Het Nieuwsblad / De Gentenaar* (two popular titles). De Persgroep, the second large group, controls the newspaper with the largest volume: *Het Laatste Nieuws*. The group also owns *De Morgen* (a quality newspaper) and *De Tijd* (a quality newspaper with focus on economic and financial news). Finally, Concentra controls regional newspapers: *Het Belang Van Limburg* for the province of Limburg and *Gazet van Antwerpen* for the Antwerp province. In those regions these two newspapers enjoy relatively high volumes. Overall, readership figures are low compared to other democratic corporatist countries (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 145).

²⁷ We only discuss newspapers here, not magazines because we do not use magazines in the content analysis.

Newspaper	Volume
<i>Corelio</i>	
De Standaard	98.848
Het Nieuwsblad / De Gentenaar	245.668
<i>De Persgroep</i>	
Het Laatste Nieuws / De Nieuwe Gazet	348.684
De Morgen	68.618
De Tijd	48.751
<i>Concentra</i>	
Gazet van Antwerpen	132.661
Belang Van Limbrug	112.867

Table 4-1: Overview of Flemish Newspapers (source for volume estimates: CIM 2010).

In countries with such a media system, there are, or used to be strong links between newspapers and political parties: in Belgium, this was also the case. For example, De Standaard was linked to the Christian Democrats, whereas De Morgen had a socialist profile. However, these ideological tendencies have waned over time, as is the case in many democratic corporatist countries (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, pp. 143-144). This is also true for the Walloon print media market, which we discuss in the next paragraph.

The Flemish television market was dominated by the public broadcaster until 1989, when the first privately owned broadcaster, VTM, entered the market. At that point the Belgian public broadcaster had already split up into two separate entities in 1960: BRT for Dutch viewers and RTBF for French-speaking viewers²⁸ (see Sinardet, 2007 for a more elaborate review of these events). Later on the Flemish broadcaster adopted a more explicit ‘Flemish’ name: VRT, short for *Flemish Radio and Television*. Up until the arrival of VTM, the television market was dominated by the public broadcaster. After this the Flemish media landscape saw the arrival of various additional commercial broadcasters²⁹. However, VRT and VTM still dominate the landscape: of the 25 most watched programs of 2009, 19 entries are programs that aired on the public broadcaster, and the other 6 aired on VTM (CIM, 2010). Furthermore, for political news these two broadcasters are probably the only two sources of regular political

²⁸ BRT: *Belgische Radio en Televisie* RTBF: *Radio Télévision Belge Francophone*

²⁹ VT4, Kanaal2 (later renamed to 2BE), KanaalZ, Vitaya, VijfTV, various music channels and 11 local broadcasters.

news: the news broadcasts of these two broadcasters are the most watched and are consistently listed in the top 10 most watched programs (CIM, 2010).

4.1.5.2 *Walloon media landscape*

The Walloon newspaper landscape is also dominated by a small amount of groups. The largest is the Rossel group, which owns *Le Soir* (quality newspaper) and also publishes the regionalized newspaper *Sud Presse*. IPM, the second group in Wallonia, publishes *La Libre Belgique* (quality newspaper) and *La Dernière Heure* (popular newspaper). Finally, Mediabel publishes *Vers L’Avenir*.

Newspaper	Volume
<i>Rossel</i>	
Le Soir	83 050
Sud Presse	114.286
<i>IPM</i>	
La Libre Belgique	42 859
La Dernière Heure	65.022
<i>Mediabel</i>	
Vers L’Avenir	93,235

Table 4-2: Overview of Walloon Newspapers (source for volume estimates: CIM 2010).

The democratic corporatist layout of the media system also results in (waning) political parallelism between print media and political parties. While ideological tendencies used to be outspoken, the differences in media coverage have decidedly weakened in recent generations.

Similarly to what occurred in the Flemish television landscape, when the television market opened up RTBF was faced with additional competition. However, prior to this the French channel TF1 had already been a competitor since it also broadcasted in French. This is an important difference with the Flemish television landscape: whereas the international competition from French broadcasters has always been strong in Wallonia, the same cannot be said for the Dutch broadcasters in Flanders (Ward, 2004, p. 25). The first Walloon-based private broadcaster was RTL/TVI, which started in 1987. Though no additional competitors entered the market, RTL/TVI did start a number of additional channels: Club RTL focused on youth programs, and PlugTV which focuses on music and youth programs. Parallel to Flanders, Wallonia also has 11 regional broadcasters. Contrary to the Flemish situation, the public broadcaster does not dominate the Walloon landscape: of the 25 most watched

programs of 2009, only 3 were aired on RTBF channels. However, reach of the news broadcasts of RTBF and RTL/TVI is almost equal.

4.1.6 - Public opinion

Public opinion in Flanders and Wallonia differ from one another (Billiet et al., 2008). We only cover these differences in very broad terms here: in Chapter 7 we discuss the differences in heuristic use, which is most relevant for our research. Billiet and colleagues (2008, p. 916) argue that two separate societies have developed '*primarily as a result of this media gap*' we discussed in the preceding paragraph. Sinardet (2007) found evidence that in some media broadcasts the Flemish and Walloon identities are indeed suggested to be independent (and sometimes conflicting).

Furthermore, education and culture, two important policy domains regarding the formation of opinion, were among the first policies to be transferred to the subnational levels. These policies thus began diverging several decades ago: this may also have increased the differences between public opinion in Flanders and Wallonia. These 'diverging societies' obviously result in different attitudinal tendencies: for example, the level of Flemish people that only identify with Belgium was 12 per cent, compared to 31 per cent of Walloons (Billiet et al., 2008, p. 916). The data gathered in the run up to the 2009 elections (discussed in the next paragraph) shows that opinion on a variety of issues differs, though it should be noted that the aggregate distributions of some opinions differ only very slightly. The distribution of various issues for voting preference³⁰ differs between the two samples. Most importantly for our study, we will show that the use of various heuristics differs substantially between the two regions (see Table 7-1 on page 162).

The fact that public opinion is different, as well as the party and media systems, leads us to the conclusion that when we discuss the 2009 Flemish and Walloon electoral campaigns, we are in fact discussing two separate cases. The voters differ, the parties differ, and the media

³⁰ For example, for 31 per cent of Flemish respondents the financial crisis was the most important issue for deciding who to vote for compared to 41 per cent of Walloon respondents. Conversely, social security mattered most for 23 per cent of Flemish respondents, compared to 13 per cent of Walloons.

outlets differ. As a result, our research design was developed to study these two cases separately.

4.2 Research Design

The current study utilizes two sources of data. One of these is a survey (PVPS), the other a content analysis of Flemish and Walloon media (Content2009). We discuss each data set in turn.

4.2.1 - Partirep voter panel survey (PVPS)

4.2.1.1 General description, sample design, and field work

The PVPS was financed by the IAP attraction pole project Partirep³¹, and set out to study (changes in) the political behavior and attitudes of the Belgian voting population in the run up to the European and regional elections in 2009. Since one of the goals was to measure changes in behavior and attitudes during the campaign, a panel design was adopted. In total, PVPS consisted of three subsequent waves, two pre-electoral and one post-electoral; the initial wave utilized CAPI, the two following waves used CATI. Wave 2 of the PVPS was aimed at measuring attitudes and behavior right before the elections, whereas the third and final wave was used to measure post-electoral attitudes and voting behavior. The field work itself was executed by TNS Media, under supervision of the Partirep team and the author. The field work for the PVPS was conducted between the end of February 2009 and the end of August 2009³². Below we present a brief description of the sample design and field work for the three waves, but a far more elaborate description is available in appendix on page 256.

³¹ IAP Attraction pole projects are aimed at promoting cooperation between several universities. The Partirep acronym is a combination of Participation and Representation – the two forces in society the project wishes to study. Five universities participate in the Project: UA (University of Antwerp), VUB (Free University of Brussels, Flemish), ULB (Free University of Brussels, French), KUL (Catholic University of Louvain), and UL (University of Leiden, the Netherlands).

³² Field work for the first wave commenced on February 21st, but the first actual interviews were conducted on February 24, 2009. The final interviews of the third wave were conducted on August 24, 2009.

The initial sample consisted of 4363 addresses which were obtained from the Rijksregister. The sample was geographically clustered to lower field work costs. The first wave had to cope with higher non-response than was anticipated. Because of this, an additional sample of 500 addresses in problematic clusters was drawn from the Rijksregister. When field work for wave 1 ended, 2331 interviews had been completed successfully, a response rate of 48,3 per cent. The lengthy field work period of roughly 2,5 months has an advantage: because the ‘time gap’ between waves 1 and 2 varies between respondents, so does exposure to information. As we show later on, we account for this in our calculation of the media content variables in the models. Only respondents that agreed to participate in the two follow up interviews were contacted for waves 2 and 3. 88 per cent of the sample agreed to the follow up interviews, which was crucial for the panel design.

Since both waves 2 and 3 operated largely on the same principles, they are discussed in tandem. The initial sample for both waves were those respondents that participated in the first wave and agreed to participate in the follow-up telephone surveys (N=2057). The CATI method allowed for a short field work period: wave 2 started two weeks prior to the elections and ended the day before the elections. Wave 3 fieldwork was also planned to last only a few weeks. For wave 2, out of 2057 respondents 1845 were interviewed: a response rate of 90 per cent. Non-response was mainly due to the interviewer not being able to contact the respondent in the 2-week time frame. The field work for wave 3 met more non response, mainly due to the fact that summer vacation begun right in the middle of data collection. Because of this, the field work period was extended and the amount of contact attempts per respondent was increased. Field work on wave 3 was ceased on August 24th, 2009. At this time, out of 2057 respondents 1698 had been successfully interviewed, which is a response rate of 83 per cent.

4.2.1.2 *Sample representativeness and weighting*

The sample of the first PVPS wave had a response rate of 48 per cent, so non-response was substantial. Furthermore, the sample was subject to bias compared to the Flemish / Walloon populations (see appendix for some tables on this). Because of this, we use proportional weights in our analyses that correct for various socio-demographic variables and vote choice

in the 2007 elections unless otherwise noted. A more elaborate discussion on the weights used and their calculation method is available in appendix on page 260.

4.2.1.3 *Operationalization of key variables*

The PVPS contained a plethora of questions, but only a few are of importance to the current dissertation. The full questionnaires for all waves can be downloaded on the projects' website³³. Here we discuss only the question that was used to measure heuristics, but all question wordings are available in appendix from page 290 onwards. Furthermore, we address variable measurements in our empirical chapters when we use them.

This study uses causal open-ended questions on voting motives to measure heuristics. Using open-ended questions offers both advantages and disadvantages. These aspects will be discussed to a great degree in Chapter 5. Here, the focus is on explaining how the questions were asked (and why) and how the subsequent reports were coded to indicate which heuristics were mentioned.

In all waves, the open-ended question immediately followed the question on voting preference (waves 1 and 2) or behavior (wave 3). To limit the influence of other questions on the answers of the open-ended questions, the question was positioned as early in the questionnaire as possible. In wave 1, the question immediately followed the socio-demographic battery of questions. The reason for not having the question entirely up front is that demanding someone's voting preference as the first thing in a questionnaire is a sure-fire way to stop most interviews short. It is common practice to start a survey by means of a few simple questions, and socio-demographic variables are usually suitable for this. When were you born? Are you married? What is the highest educational degree you achieved? These types of questions serve not only as interesting (in)dependent variables, but also as introductory questions (Campagnelli, 2008). Once the question-answer routine is established, more sensitive subjects such as voting preference can be dealt with. In waves 2 and 3 the question was preceded by several questions on media use during the campaign – again to start the survey with a few 'light' questions.

³³ www.partirep.eu

Table 4-3 gives a basic overview of the sequence of the wave 1 questionnaire in which voting preference and the causal open ended report were surveyed. For full question wording, see page 292 in appendix.

Interviewer: if the elections for the [Flemish][Walloon] parliament were to be held today, and you would thus have to make a choice, on which of the following parties would you vote?

(randomized list of parties)

Interviewer: You indicated that you would vote for [name of party] for the Flemish / Walloon Parliament. People often have a variety of reasons to vote for a certain party. Can you explain to me, in your own words, why you would vote for this party?

[If respondent answers with: “the best party” ask “why is it the best party?”]

[If respondent refers to “government” ask “which government do you mean exactly?”]

[If respondent refers to “policy” ask “which policy do you mean exactly?”]

Table 4-3: Overview of wave 1 and 2 PVPS question sequence for voting preference and open-ended causal report.

This sequence was also repeated in the second wave. The open-ended question was designed and formulated to optimize causal reporting by the respondents. The first sentence repeated the party name to the respondent, to ensure that the respondent remembered the choice that was made. The second question explicitly validates any and all reasons: by stating that it is common that ‘people’ have a variety of reasons, it is implied that many different reasons are valid. This sentence was added as a means to reduce socially desirable answers (Campagnelli, 2008). The third and final sentence of the question then asks why the respondent would vote for the party. Party was chosen as the object of choice, because this is the choice that voters have to make in the polling booth. The aim of the question wording was to probe this choice, though it undoubtedly raises the amount of answers in which party-related motives are mentioned. Because the Belgian electoral system uses an open list system in which parties are the key choice (though preference votes can be given to candidates *within* each party), party had to be the object of choice in the question wording.

During the training, interviewers were instructed to probe respondents for more information after the initial answer. Based on previous research efforts, three specific probes were added to help specify exactly what the respondents meant. Firstly, many respondents simply answer ‘because it is the best party’, an answer which yields very little information. Secondly, government is often mentioned in answers, but due to the federalized nature of the country it is often unclear whether this signifies the federal, regional, or local level. Thirdly, the general policy of a party / candidate / government is often mentioned. To know whether the respondent is talking about the general policy, or rather a specific policy subdomain (e.g. environment, taxes, and so on) a probe was added as well. The answers of the respondents had to be written down as they were speaking; interviewers were specifically instructed to use the words of the respondent him- or herself. For example, “the respondent found the government performance lacking” was not allowed. The reason for this is that it would add another bias to the report. Question wording in wave 2 was identical³⁴.

After all the reports had been collected, they were assigned codes to indicate which heuristics were mentioned in the report. Up to three different heuristics could be assigned to each report. The maximum of three was set based on previous research in a Belgian context (Beerten, Billiet, Carton, & Swyngedouw, 1997; ISPO & PIOP, 2003; ISPO/PIOP, 2006). This indicated that the vast majority of respondents did not provide more than three separate ‘voting motives’. The coding scheme was developed based on the typology of Chapter 2. Coders first had to indicate which heuristic was mentioned. Then, through the use of several subcategories the specific information contained within each heuristic was classified. Appendix B: provides the full codebook, as well as details on how the coding itself was done, and an overview of the operationalization of the heuristics. It is highly recommended that the reader reads through the codebook. It provides a good overview of what types of answers were assigned which heuristic codes, and why. Naturally, the rules to decide which codes to assign to an answer were based on the typology developed in Chapter 2. Table 4-4 gives a

³⁴ In wave 3, the question wording was slightly different, because it had to be retrospective; because we only use the actual ‘campaign’ waves of the PVPS survey we do not discuss the wave 3 question in more detail.

(short) overview of what types of answers were coded as what types of heuristics. Again, the full codebook gives a more encompassing overview.

Heuristic	Types of answers coded as this heuristic
Endorsements	<i>“My parents voted for them”, “Most of my friends like them”, “we know people that speak highly of them”, “Family tradition”.</i>
Government & Opposition	<i>“Because the coalition did a good job”, “I want the Verhofstadt government to return”, “to bring about change”, “they are a good opposition party”</i>
Groups	<i>“We are self-employed”, “they support the working man”, “they are attentive to the poor”, “they defend the interests of the Flemish people”.</i>
Habit	<i>“Habit”, “out of habit”, “tradition³⁵”, “I always vote for them”.</i>
Magnitude	<i>“Because they’re winning”, “they need to make the threshold”, “they are losing and need the support”, “I want to vote for a big party”.</i>
Ideology	<i>“Liberal”, “socialism”, “their ideology”, “they are democratic”, “Christian-Democratic values”, “against the left”.</i>
Issues	<i>“Their program”, “the economy”, “tax reductions”, “they’re though on crime”, “these immigrants need to go”, “we need to save the planet”.</i>
Party	<i>“I feel connected to them” (identification), “they feel right for me” (image), “they are doing a good job” (party performance), “against party X”, “I am a member of CD&V” (member), “they helped me out when I needed a building permit” (constituency service)</i>
Politician	<i>“Bart Dewever”, “Their leader is capable”, “they’ve got good people to run the country”.</i>

Table 4-4: examples of causal reports that were coded, per heuristic.

The author coded the reports for all waves (N=5874³⁶). Then, to establish a measure of inter coder reliability, a student coder double coded all wave 1 reports (N=2010 after dismissing empty and invalid answers). The codes consist of two ‘levels’: heuristics, and the specific type of information used within that heuristic. For example, if the report read “Because I like Bart De Wever” it would get assigned code [1] at the top level to indicate the politician heuristic, code [104] at the second level to indicate a politician of N-VA, and code [10408] for Bart De Wever. The codes are nested, so the top level code limits the codes one can select on levels 2 and 3 – which is only natural since they designate the information used within the heuristic. Considering that we are interested in the priming of heuristics (and their mediating role), the key issue regarding reliability is the top level: do these codes reliably indicate the

³⁵ The reason to code tradition as habit was made because most of references to tradition seemed to suggest continuity (and thus habit).

³⁶ Wave 1: 2331 reports, wave 2: 1845 reports, wave 3: 1698. Note that some of the reports were empty, or were assigned codes that were later assigned missing values (e.g. an incomprehensible answer will not be used in the actual analysis), resulting in a lower N value.

heuristics that the report mentions? Using the double coded causal reports we calculated two sets of nine dummy variables, each indicating whether the coder had coded a given heuristic as being present in the causal report. We calculated Cohen’s kappa³⁷ (κ) and the nominal Krippendorfs Alpha (α) (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007) by comparing the dummy for the authors’ codes with the student coders’ codes. Results are displayed in Table 4-5.

Heuristic	Agreement	Expected Agreement	κ	α
Endorsements	97%	67%	0.9	0.9
Government & Opposition	97%	88%	0.7	0.7
Groups	93%	74%	0.7	0.7
Habit	95%	81%	0.8	0.8
Ideology	89%	67%	0.7	0.7
Issues	91%	61%	0.8	0.7
Magnitude	99%	97%	0.7	0.8
Politician	95%	73%	0.8	0.8
Party	83%	56%	0.6	0.6

Table 4-5: Inter coder reliability scores for Heuristic codes.

As the table shows, inter coder reliability is high across the board. For 8 out of 9 heuristics α is .7 or greater; given that Krippendorff’s α is a conservative measure of reliability, we feel that our inter coder reliability of these heuristics is definitely acceptable. Further cause for this is that, to our knowledge, no prior studies have attempted to extract heuristic use from open-ended causal reports. Given that these reports are often (very) short, entailing no more than 1 or 2 sentences, we interpret the fact that we predominantly find α scores of .7 and upwards as a sign that the overall coding procedure generated reliable codes. One heuristic might be problematic: α is only 0.6 for the Party heuristic. One reason for this is that there is more interpretation required when assigning reports to this heuristic. “*Because they are doing a good job*” implicitly refers to the party, but it is – in contrast to the other heuristics – rare to find explicit mentions of ‘the party’ in the answer. This introduces the necessity to interpret some of the answers, whereas most other heuristics can be coded according to more strict rules (see also the codebook in Appendix, page 263).

In our analysis, we take this into account, especially with regards to our study of priming effects on the party heuristic. Mentions of the party heuristic are likely to be just that, but the

³⁷ Values were calculated using the freeware online tool ‘ReCal’.

codes are less reliable than those obtained for other heuristics. Note that reliability is a separate concept from validity. In the validity analyses, we use the codes given by the author. After double coding the answers and calculating the reliability scores, we looked in-depth at the mismatching party heuristic codes. In the authors' opinion, almost all of the mismatches occurred in those cases where respondents vaguely referenced identifying with the party (e.g. "I've always felt attached to them from since I was young"). The student coder sometimes did not notice the party identification logic. In our opinion, such reports should nevertheless be coded as mentioning the party. In the subsequent analyses, we therefore use the author codes.

This being said, the ultimate goal is to achieve a *valid* measure of heuristic use by respondents: high inter rater reliability means little if the codes are not valid. In the validity analysis in Chapter 5 we will assess whether assigning the party heuristic code to these reports has affected the validity of the measure. Inter coder reliability is a means to the goal of measurement validity; we find that but for one heuristic, reliability was high. For the party heuristic, we found what was causing the slightly lower reliability ratings, and will take this into account when assessing the results.

4.2.2 - Content analysis of the media

To map the content of the media coverage of the campaign, newspapers articles were coded using a coding scheme that allowed a match between heuristics and media content. As it was impossible to code *everything*, we had to make a selection in the number of newspapers as well as the sample of articles.

4.2.2.1 Selection of media outlets

As we showed in our earlier discussion of the media system on page 86, the media landscape in Belgium is separated into a French and Dutch subsystem. As such, a separate sample design for both language sectors was developed³⁸. The content analysis only studied newspaper content. The reasons we did not opt to code both television and newspapers are

³⁸ The content analysis was a cooperation between the UA and ULB Partirep teams. Funding for the coding was provided by Belspo (www.belspo.be). Promotors of the project were Jean-Benoît Pilet (ULB) and Stefaan Walgrave (UA). The research itself was monitored by Régis Dandoy (ULB), the author and Dave Sinardet (UA).

mainly budgetary and time constraints. However media copy one another in the search for content, especially during campaign times. Inter media agenda-setting theories have amply shown that media influence each other (Lopez-Escobar, Llamas, McCombs, & Lennon, 1998). This effect was found in various issue subdomains: foreign news (Golan, 2006), drugs (Reese & Danielian, 1989). During electoral campaigns, parties and candidates are able to set the media agenda as well (Roberts & McCombs, 1994; Sweetser et al., 2008), which is in part due to the fact that campaign times bring about specific dynamic in the media. As political coverage increases, journalists suddenly have to come up with material to fill the gaps. Parties and candidates, who are staging events non-stop, are a perfect source. This makes campaign times distinctly different from regular periods in terms of coverage (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006). Given this, we have ample reason to assume that who and what is covered in the newspapers, was also given comparable attention in television news. We did have Flemish ENA³⁹ data at our disposal. The ENA codes all television news broadcasts on the main public (Eén) and commercial (VTM) broadcasters in Flanders. The key drawback of this data is the absence of Walloon media data, which is the reason we do not use it in our analysis. However, we can compare the television data to the newspaper data to get an idea of the differences between the two types of media. Two comparisons are possible: politician visibility (which is the indicator used in our analysis of politician priming) and issue visibility (which is the indicator used in issue priming). We calculated the top 20 most mentioned politicians in the Content2009 dataset and the ENA dataset for the entire period (February 21st – June 6th). Table 4-6 presents the top 20 for the Content2009 dataset, and the corresponding positions these politicians occupied in the ENA dataset⁴⁰.

³⁹ Electronic News Archive, <http://www.nieuwsarchief.be/>

⁴⁰ Note that we do not compare the ‘visibility’ measures, but rather the rank orders. The reason for this is simple: ENA codings are different: a politician that is visible but does not say anything or does not have his name mentioned, is not coded. In comparison, our measure does code this as a ‘mention’. Furthermore, the medium is entirely different which makes the raw visibility measures incomparable.

Politician	Position Content2009	Position ENA	Difference
Peeters Kris	1	1	0
Van Rompuy Herman	2	2	0
Dedecker Jean-Marie	3	6	-3
Leterme Yves	4	16	-12
Verhofstadt Guy	5	17	-12
De Gucht Karel	6	3	3
Vandenbroucke Frank	7	4	3
Somers Bart	8	7	1
Van Mechelen Dirk	9	8	1
Dehaene Jean-Luc	10	26	-16
Vandeurzen Jo	11	41	-30
De Wever Bart	12	14	-2
Van Brempt Kathleen	13	11	2
De Clerck Stefaan	14	15	-1
Vijnck Dirk	15	31	-16
Anciaux Bert	16	27	-11
Tommelein Bart	17	10	7
De Padt Guido	18	5	13
Gennez Caroline	19	19	0
Ceysens Patricia	20	21	-1

Table 4-6: Comparison between visibility of politicians in ENA data and Content2009 data.

Of the 20 most often mentioned politicians in the Content2009 dataset, 15 also appear in the top 20 of the television data. Though the rank order differences may appear large, one should consider that the Content2009 dataset contains over 500 unique Flemish politicians. Except for one politician (Jo Vandeurzen), the top 20 most often mentioned politicians in the newspapers are all contained within the top 30 of television broadcasts. Furthermore, for most of the politicians the difference in positions between the two datasets is not more than 3 places. As a final test, we compared the rankings of the politicians that were mentioned in both datasets (N=156): Spearman's rank order correlation coefficient was 0.74 ($p < .000$), which suggests very high similarities in the visibility of politicians. A possible explanation for the differences that do occur is the fact that television has election-specific news programs, which lowers the attention to the elections in the regular news broadcasts. This is evidenced in the lower ranks of the two European frontrunners (Jean-Luc Dehaene and Guy Verhofstadt). In our opinion, this further strengthens the case for newspaper data: including only television news data would underestimate the visibility of some politicians since they are also visible in election specific coverage. Considering that the Content2009 dataset contains over 500 unique politicians, the fact that the most often mentioned politicians are so similar between the two

datasets only strengthens our expectation that coding only newspaper data does *not* affect our results regarding politician priming.

In a similar vein, we calculated the rank orders of the 19 issues that are used in assessing issue priming⁴¹. Then, we did the same for the ENA data⁴². Table 4-7 provides the (differences in) rank orders⁴³.

Issue	Position Content2009	Position ENA	Difference
Economy and Financial crisis	1	2	-1
Crime	2	1	1
Employment	3	10	-7
Health care	4	7	-3
Mobility	5	6	-1
Operation of Justice, Police and Army	6	4	2
Political culture and Political scandals	7	13	-6
Culture	8	5	3
Education	9	12	-3
Environment and Energy	10	8	2
Social policy	11	9	2
International relations	12	3	9
Communitarian issues	13	16	-3
Europe	14	14	0
Asylum Seekers and Immigration	15	15	0
Budget	16	17	-1
Religion	17	11	6
Taxes	18	19	-1
Housing	19	18	1

Table 4-7: Comparison between issue salience in ENA data and Content2009 data.

Though there are differences in issue salience, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient for these ranks is 0.78 ($p < .000$), which indicates a substantial correlation in the relative general salience of issues. Of the issues with larger rank order differences, we would only consider

⁴¹ We calculated the overall absolute visibility of issues, then ranked the issues based on this measure.

⁴² The ENA codebook contains a lot more issue codes than the content2009 codebook, so we had to aggregate these codes into larger issue codes to allow comparison. We do not list this aggregation to keep this analysis succinct, but the list of codes that were aggregated is available from the author upon simple request.

⁴³ As with politicians, we cannot compare the 'raw' issue salience scores: ENA only allows 3 issue codes per item, whereas we allow each issue to be scored (e.g. was the environment issue mentioned, was mobility mentioned, and so forth).

employment to be really all that much different: the other issues had lower visibility (<10%) and were very close to one another, so rank order differences do not mean all that much. However, we cannot compare the percentage scores, since the ENA coding scheme only allowed 3 issues per article, which significantly lowers the salience of all issues, making the raw percentage scores incomparable. Nevertheless, the issue ranks do correlate to a large extent. Because the ENA data does not have a separate dummy to indicate political news that is similar to ours, we cannot calculate the same figures for political salience, but the evidence presented definitely shows that limiting the coding to only newspapers would not have affected the outcomes regarding issue and politician priming in the Flemish elections. We do not have data to compare party visibility (this was not coded in the ENA), but we are quite confident that, given the relative visibilities of the most visible politicians, these results would indicate high similarities as well.

Because of this the content analysis of the media focused on newspapers. For both Flanders and Wallonia we selected similar newspapers: one popular, tabloid-like newspaper (Het Laatste Nieuws (HLN) and La Dernière Heure (LDH)), and one quality newspaper (De Standaard (DS) and Le Soir (LS)). Table 4-8 gives an overview of the newspapers included in the analysis.

Newspaper	Description
De Standaard	Broadsheet quality newspaper, with extensive coverage of political news.
Het Laatste Nieuws	Popular newspaper and also the most tabloid-like. It has the highest circulation of the Flemish newspapers.
La Dernière Heure	Popular newspaper, with a focus on news and sports.
Le Soir	Quality newspaper, with extensive political coverage.

Table 4-8: Overview of Newspapers included in the Content Analysis.

The content analysis covered the period from the start of the PVPS fieldwork (February 21st) until Election Day (June 7th). In Flanders, all newspapers in this period were coded; in Wallonia, 4 newspapers were not coded in time for the analyses. However, since only 4 newspapers were not coded, the impact of this deficiency is very small.

4.2.2.2 *Coding procedure*

Through several meetings, a shared coding procedure was established for the Walloon and Dutch coding. Again, we only discuss the main steps involved, the full codebook is found in appendix, page 279. In principle, each article⁴⁴ in the newspaper was to be coded. The reason we did not code just the political articles was that we also wanted to know which per cent of the coverage was political in nature, and which was not. The total amount of coded items was 24.501⁴⁵. After it was determined that an item had to be coded, the coder first had to code some general properties of the article: was it an opinion piece / article / advertisement, the size of the item, page on which it appeared, and so on. Then a few general topical indicators of interest followed: was the main topic domestic, mixed or foreign news⁴⁶? Did it mention politics? Did it mention Europe? Did it mention the EP elections? Did it mention the regional elections? These dummy variables were later on used to distinguish EP election news, regional election news, and political coverage.

Next, the coders had to assign issue codes to the items. Our analysis used the series of codes that indicated whether various issues were mentioned or not. We use 20 issue codes: asylum seekers and immigration, budget, communitarian issues, crime, culture, economy and financial crisis, education, employment, environment and energy, Europe, health care, housing, international relations, mobility, operation of justice, police and army, political culture and political scandals, religion, social policy, taxes, other (spatial structuring, disasters, ...).

⁴⁴ Opinion pieces and advertisements by the political parties were also coded, but a separate variable indicated the type of article (regular coverage, opinion piece or political ad).

⁴⁵ De Standaard: 5.837 items, Het Laatste Nieuws: 7.638 items, Le Soir: 5.781 items, La Dernière Heure: 5.245 items.

⁴⁶ 'Mixed' news was an article on a foreign country, in which Belgian people were featured extensively. This middle category covers articles such as the visit by a Belgian minister to the United States, Belgian people having an accident abroad, and so on.

Following this, coders had to indicate which politicians were mentioned in the item. For each politician, tone had to be coded using both an overall tone measure and negative / positive tone measures⁴⁷. The overall tone measure indicated whether the item was generally good, neutral or bad news for the politician. If both good and bad news was present, this was coded as neutral. Coders were instructed to be restrictive: only deviate from the neutral category if the tone of the coverage was very clear. The separate positive / negative tone measures could be used more liberally: if positive / negative tone was present, these dummy variables could be used. Finally, if the politician was visible in a photograph, this was coded using a separate dummy.

Next, coders had to code mentions of parties; mentions of a party name behind one of their politicians such as “Kris Peeters (CD&V)” were *not* coded as party mentions. Only separate mentions were coded as ‘party’ mentions. Furthermore, we also included the aforementioned tone measures for parties. For example, if a poll mentioned that a certain party was losing voters, this was negative news, and vice versa. Internal struggle was bad news, and so on.

4.2.2.3 *Inter coder reliability*

The Flemish coding was done by 4 coders, of which the author was the reference coder. The Walloon coding was done by 4 coders as well, and supervised by Régis Dandoy who was also the reference coder. To calculate inter coder reliability, one newspaper was double coded for each combination of coders (Coder 1 – reference coder, Coder 2 – reference coder, and so forth), which is roughly 100 items per combination.

The inter coder reliability for mentions of politicians and parties was high across the board: Krippendorff’s α was never below .8. Given that this is a relatively easy thing to code, we did not expect anything less. Tone was an entirely different matter: because assessing positive or negative tone is notoriously difficult, we had instructed coders to be very restrictive. We instructed coders to leave the overall tone scale (negative, neutral or positive) on the default ‘neutral’ value unless the slant of the news was very clear. In the double coded newspaper this

⁴⁷ Due to miscommunication, part of the Walloon data only contains the overall tone measure. Therefore, we only used this overall tone measure in our analysis.

resulted in a very low amount of actual tone codings: for one coder, of the 79 politicians that were mentioned in the double coded articles, only 14 were coded as being mentioned positive or negative. While this restrictiveness undoubtedly helped increase the inter coder reliability, it should be noted that the use of this scale underestimates the amount of tone that is present. However, because the overall tone measure is absent in the Walloon data we cannot use the more liberally coded tone dummies. Thus, the reader should keep in mind that our tone measures underestimate the amount of tone that is present. That being said, the inter rater reliability for the tone measure was, all things considered, acceptable. The α ranged between 0.8 for one coder, to 0.7 for two others, and 0.6 for one coder. Keeping in mind that tone is difficult to code, we feel that the reliability is quite good.

For the general topical indicators (political news, EP election news, regional news), the inter rater reliability was slightly lower, with the lowest α score for any coder being .6. The errors that occurred for these dummies did not have a pattern: we suspect that the errors were due lack of attentive coding and forgetfulness. To remedy this, we further stressed that coders should take breaks from coding, and use the keyboard to code the first set of indicators⁴⁸.

Assessing issue inter rater reliability proved to be somewhat problematic: because we had opted to double code 'only' one newspaper per coder combination, some of the 20 issue codes used in the current dissertation did not appear in the double coded datasets (or only one time). For these issues we could not compute the inter rater reliability measures. However, the results for the issues that did yield measures, the results were encouraging: inter rater agreement was never below 90 per cent, and for almost all issues and all coders Krippendorff's α scores were .7 or above. We therefore only discuss the instances where inter rater reliability was lower than this threshold.

For one coder, the α was .6 for the issues of religion and Europe. Regarding religion, the cause for lower α scores was that religious terrorism was coded only as crime. Furthermore,

⁴⁸ As the appendix shows, the coding form was constructed in such a way to allow the coder to run over the various fields using the tab key. This increases the accuracy of the coding, because it is less likely that a field will be missed.

religion as such did not appear in a lot of articles (around 1-2 per cent, see Chapter 6). Given these results, we amended our instructions to coders, and specifically added the instruction to code religious terrorism as both crime and religion. For the analysis for this dissertation, we think that this lower reliability has little to no actual effect: the religious terrorism articles were mostly in foreign news, which is not withheld in any priming analysis. For the Europe issue, the lower Krippendorff score was caused by the fact that the coder was less prone to code an article as ‘covering Europe’ than the reference coder was. Another coder had one problematic α score (.6) for the issue ‘Operation of Justice and Police’. This was caused by disagreement between the coder and the reference coder on foreign news articles: the coder subsequently received feedback to remedy the wrong interpretation of the codebook⁴⁹, but we did not amend the codebook itself since none of the other coders seemed to have interpreted this the wrong way. Finally, one coder had a score of .5 on the employment issue. She interpreted the employment issue too narrowly, and we gave specific feedback (using examples from the double coded newspaper) to correct the problem. Subsequent monitoring of this coder indicated that the issue had been resolved. Again, the codebook was not adapted because the other coders did not show any signs of problems on the employment issue.

Overall, the reliability measures are acceptably high: our indicators for party and politician mentions are very reliable (as expected), as are the issue codes. The tone measure attained good reliability, but this was enabled in part by being very restrictive.

⁴⁹ Most of the disagreements came about due to the coder mistakenly coding military interventions as ‘operation of justice and police’.

Chapter 5: Causal reports

Measuring heuristics is no easy or trivial task. Studies of voting behavior and decision making have various ways of going about their research. Surveys measure variables that are assumed to be related to voting; experimental approaches observe changes in preferences based on different stimuli; qualitative interview approaches dig deeper into the respondent's reasoning. What all these approaches have in common is that they are all trying to get inside the voter's mind. To determine the heuristics that people use, we use an open-ended question asking people to describe the reasons they vote for a party: a causal report.

Before we commence the actual discussion of the drawbacks and advantages of causal reports, conceptual clarity is a necessity. We will use voters' causal reports as indicators of the heuristics used in the voting decision. Such reports have been given various names: voting motives, shallow introspections, voters own experiences of the causes. While these terms all point to properties of causal reports, we prefer the term 'causal report' as it specifies to two key features. First, it is a *report* or a verbal narrative that is presented by the respondent. Many such reports exist, for example reports of causal influence, process, attentional focus, intention, hypothesis or rationalizations, and so on (White, 1988). All these reports are the result of introspection by the respondent, because the respondent must give us a description of his own mental states. Second, it is aimed at eliciting *causes* of behavior.

Answering this question demands introspection⁵⁰ of the respondent, which is an approach that has both avid supporters and critics. The critiques on this type of method mostly deal with people's inadequacies: people are unaware of the things that led them to a certain decision and are prone to rationalize (Niemi, Whitten, & Franklin, 1992; Rahn et al., 1994), their reports may be swayed by events that occurred after they took the decision, and so on. The classic article in this respect is Nisbet and Wilson (1977) which is the most often cited work on introspection (Johansson, Hall, Sikström, Tärning, & Lind, 2006). While some of these critiques are valid, people's own reports may have been too easily dismissed. People do

⁵⁰ Introspection is similar to attribution, but we will speak of introspection in the remainder of the dissertation. Attribution theory is concerned with the way in which people explain behavior, both of themselves *and others*.

(sometimes) fool themselves and the perception they have of their own decision making is by definition biased and incomplete. On the other hand, what people are telling us is not complete nonsense: often there is logic in their reports. The problem is determining to what extent these reports are biased, either by internal or external sources.

Using causal reports to determine people's voting motivations is not new, and is still used (De Winter & Janssens, 1988; Den Ridder, 2007; Fuyuan, 2004; Meersseman & Swyngedouw, 2002, 2003; Swyngedouw, Meersseman, & Billiet, 2001; Van Holsteyn, 1994; Van Holsteyn & Irwin, 2000). The technique is both deceptively simple (we just ask them why they did it) and horribly complex (but what are they telling us?). Though it has flaws, so have many of the other techniques that are being used today. Most of these flaws and biases stem from the simple fact that a decision as such cannot be directly observed, only the *outcome* of the decision can (in this case: the vote choice) (Visser, 1998, p. 8). Causal reports have, among others, two key advantages compared to other types of measures. First, they are presented to us by the voters themselves. Voters are best placed to explain their own behavior. Second, causal reports give us a different measurement because of the way the question is composed. We first discuss the broader technique of introspection before addressing the advantages and disadvantages of causal reports themselves.

5.1 Introspection

Since we use respondent's causal reports of their behavior we discuss the implications this technique may have on the results of the study. Though the question itself may be specific to our research field (i.e. political science) introspection has been used in a broad field of study. However, its history and development are closely intertwined with the history of psychology.

5.1.1 - The history of psychology: thesis, antithesis and synthesis

Psychologists often view the history of their field as consisting of three phases. First the mind of the individual took center stage, and introspection was the prevailing technique. The first revolution occurred when behaviorism rejected the technique because of its lack of validity and reliability. To avoid the sticky matter of the mind, they shifted attention to behavior.

Pavlov's dogs are a good example of this movement. In the final phase attention shifted back to the mind with the emergence of cognitive psychology. The experimental techniques developed by the behaviorists provided a rigorous methodology, but the mind once again took central stage (Costall, 2006).

As Costal (2006) puts it, this story takes the form of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. The dominant methodology, it seems, was developed through the ages, with increasing sophistication as a result. Seen this way, introspection is (or at least should be) a thing of the past. Superior techniques have replaced it, and the technique itself lacks validity and reliability.

However, this view on psychology's history is flawed. Cognitive psychology did not really establish a 'new' framework, but instead extended the behaviorist approach. Costall reflects upon more problems concerning cognitive psychology, but we focus on just one specific data related problem. New terms were introduced, but the data coming out of these experiments was ultimately based on behavior. An example from political psychology would be the work by Lau and Redlawsk (2007). They try to solve the problem of 'how voters decide' according to the approach taken by cognitive psychology: the different decision strategies voters use (in their mind) are mapped onto information gathering behaviors. These behaviors are measured, and inferences about the mind are made. For example, if an individual shows issue-information seeking *behavior*, the inference about the *mind* is that s(he) is deciding based on the issue heuristic. While these may be plausible inferences, they rest upon the basic assumption that there is a close link between behavior and the mind.

This is not meant to be a critique of the above technique, but it does show the vulnerability of the approach. When trying to explain the workings of the mind based on behavior, the link between mind and behavior becomes crucial: *how to link 'behavioral' data and claims about mind?* (Costall, 2006, p. 638). Shapiro (2002, p. 611) refers to a similar problem in political science, whereby scholars assume complex workings of the mind behind 'objectively' measured behaviors. The economic models of voting often suffer from this problem. We can predict the electoral *behavior* in the United States based on simple economic indicators. What these models cannot and should not do is try to explain how these economic indicators played

a role in people's *minds*. The paramount issue stays the same: when trying to explain the mind through behavior, tread carefully.

5.1.2 - Critiques on the use of introspection

Introspection is not a perfect technique either. The earlier sketch of the history of psychology perhaps gave the impression that introspection was the dominant methodology in the first phase. While the technique was widespread, it was by no means uncontested. During the nineteenth century discussions on its validity and reliability were being held. Also, the arrival of behaviorism did not mean the end of introspection. The technique continues to be used. We discuss the main problems that may hinder introspection.

A first argument against introspection is that actual 'observation', as is customary in the natural sciences, does not occur. This is because the individual who is giving the introspective report cannot split him- or herself in two: the observer and the observed are the same (James, 1890). This argument was raised against introspection from its inception. Comte (1835, p. 36 as translated in James (1890, p. 188)) gave the following critique on the technique:

“The thinker cannot divide himself into two, of whom one reasons whilst the other observes him reason. The organ observed and the organ observing being, in this case, identical, how could observation take place? This pretended psychological method is then radically null and void.”

John Stuart Mill (1865, p. 50) gave the following, equally firm, reply:

“M. Comte would scarcely have affirmed that we are not aware of our own intellectual operations. We know of our observings and our reasonings, either at the very time, or by memory the moment after; in either case, by direct knowledge, or not (like things done by us in a state of somnambulism) merely by their results. This simple fact destroys the whole of M. Comte's argument. Whatever we are directly aware of, we can directly observe.”

From these quotes the chasm within psychology is apparent, and it still persists today. One side claims that it is impossible and unnecessary to describe inner experience (behaviorism

being the prime example), the other side claims that the inner experience is vitally important, and (relatively) easy to describe (Hurlburt & Heavey, 2001).

But there was discussion within the group of supporters of introspection as well. Time was an important point of argument. For example, suppose individual X is introspectively describing his thoughts. He thinks of a tree. Only *after* he thinks of the tree, can he observe that he did. The fact that observation and the observed cannot occur at the same time spurred some debate on how to deal with this. Mill, who was one of the figureheads of the English introspection school, proposed retrospective introspection as a solution. The German school rejected this attempt. Retrospective observations had to be based on memory, which in introduced the possibility of motivated reasoning.

Motivated reasoning, often referred to as post-hoc rationalization, is considered a prime source of bias in introspective reports. Motivated reasoning occurs when an individual adapts his or her reasoning to fit the conclusion that was reached. Kunda (1990, p. 480) argues that *'there is considerable evidence that people are more likely to arrive at conclusions that they want to arrive at, but their ability to do so is constrained by their ability to construct seemingly reasonable justifications for these conclusions'*. People are prone to justify a decision made at an earlier time, by adapting and thus biasing their reasons for doing so.

This phenomenon can be partly explained by the cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957): just as a smoker is likely to dispel the possible health consequences, he is likely to provide himself with justifiable reasons for smoking. The underlying cause of this might be that the actual reasons (being addicted) are inconsistent with the self-image of the smoker (being in control of oneself). Dissonance is said to occur only when the outcome is seen as a negative, a threat to the self – it can therefore only explain part of the motivational reasoning that is occurring (Cooper & Fazio, 1984).

Another cause of motivated reasoning may be that people like to be perceived as reasonable and socially apt beings. They attempt to be rational and construct a justification of their decision, which would sound convincing to a casual observer. *'...they maintain an "illusion of objectivity"'* (Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1987, p. 333). People search their memory selectively, only looking for beliefs and attitudes that support their conclusion. Individuals do

not always realize that their reasoning is biased because they are searching only part of their memory, which makes it hard to avoid this type of bias. Whether systematic, in-depth processing will remove the directional bias remains another topic of discussion in the psychological literature (Kunda, 1990).

5.1.3 - The ‘demise’ of introspection

Most of the arguments against introspection were raised against it since its conception. Around 1910, the debate shifted rather drastically. The debate for and against introspection became polemic, which is largely due to Titchener and Watson, who were both faulty of using dogmatic reasoning (the former in favor of his own version of introspection⁵¹). Watson’s paper from 1913, which is regarded as the classic behaviorist manifesto, was not the first attack on the use of introspection, but it was by far the most direct (Watson, 1913). Danziger (1980) argues that Watson’s critique did not uncover any new faults of introspection. Instead, it shifted the debate. What was psychology about? Was it about the mind, or about the demands of practice? The former had always been the main focus of research, but Watson argued that the applied problems had to take precedence. For these research questions, introspection was an inappropriate technique. New research domains became popular in the scientific community, and introspection was simply not compatible with them.

“What gives me hope that the behaviorist’s position is a defensible one is the fact that those branches of psychology which have already partially withdrawn from the parent, experimental psychology, and which are consequently less dependent upon introspection are today in a most flourishing condition. Experimental pedagogy, the psychology of drugs, ... , and psychopathology are all vigorous growths. ... For a ‘pure’ psychologist to say that he is not interested in the questions raised in these divisions of the science because they relate indirectly to the application of psychology

⁵¹ Introspection as it was practiced by Titchener failed, according to Danziger (1980: 257), because it insisted on leaving out any reference to meaning during the introspection. An important point Danziger makes is that this type of introspection was *not* representative for the other types of introspection. When Titchener’s method was deemed inadequate, an unjust generalization was often made, and introspection was rejected in its entirety.

shows, in the first place, that he fails to understand the scientific aim in such problems, and secondly, that he is not interested in a psychology which concerns itself with human life.”

(Watson, 1913, pp. 167-168)

This is not to say that introspection is without fault; as we said the technique has its flaws, but so does every other methodology. A close overview of the historical circumstances shows that the main reason the technique lost its luster lies not in its intrinsic problems, but in the shift towards a different type of research question.

“Introspection was less a victim of its intrinsic problems than a casualty of historical forces far bigger than itself”

(Danziger, 1980, p. 259)

5.2 Introspection in Political Science

Theoretically, introspection is almost unavoidable in survey research. Whether it is an open or closed question, when we are asking people for their attitudes they are giving us an introspective report. The difference between these ‘common’ introspections and causal reports is that the latter requires a greater cognitive effort from the respondent. The faith we can or cannot have in the technique then comes to depend on the faith we have in the human’s cognitive abilities. Can people accurately describe the reasons for their own behavior?

Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) used the answers to just these questions quite often in their description of (lack of) campaign influence. The authors often quoted the respondents’ descriptions of the reasons for their behavior during the campaign to illustrate points made in graphs, and to provide further evidence. Still, people’s own reports were used and their veracity was never really debated. Sixteen years later, the skepticism towards peoples’ causal reports had risen considerably. When Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes (1960) discuss their theoretical framework, people’s own reports were considered irrelevant.

“The CPS⁵² researchers from the very beginning decided that they could safely disregard voters’ own explanations for their votes on the grounds that voting is such a complex matter that most people do not understand why they vote.”

(Jacobitti, 1979, p. 398)

The CPS researchers probably had reasons for this rather drastic decision. The discussion on introspections’ flaws and biases clearly indicates its limitations and their main theoretical advancement, the so-called ‘funnel of causality’, stated that the vote choice was ‘caused’ by long- and short- term forces upon the individual. For example, the socialization of an individual was a long term influence that helped establish a ‘baseline’ for future voting behavior. If a voter was raised in a family that voted Republican, he would be much more likely to become a Republican voter as well. Several other long (and short) term causes were distinguished, and formed a model that had the shape of a funnel, with several causes spiraling down towards the voting behavior. It is interesting to note that Campbell, Converse and Miller do discuss the difference between predicting and understanding electoral behavior. However, they arrive to the conclusion that trying to understand voting would lead to an overly heterogeneous model. Anything and everything can be a cause.

“We cannot afford to build an explanatory model that treats each case as a distinctive phenomenon, with unique mechanisms at work. A systematic theory must be able to accept a set of data pertaining to any individual case and provide an ultimate prediction of behavior.”

(Campbell et al., 1960, p. 23)

Pragmatically, developing measures to operationalize such a model almost by definition excluded these all-encompassing open-ended questions. If researchers aim to measure the precise (causal) relation between a number of variables and the dependent variable, they have to get separate measures for each variable. The answer to one open ended question would hardly fulfill this requirement. As we discussed in the preceding chapter, most respondents give no more than three ‘voting motives’.

⁵² Center for Political Studies (University of Michigan).

Therefore, several separate measures were developed to operationalize the different elements of the funnel of causality. These were measured using closed-ended questions, allowing the researchers to get a measurement of the respondents' attitudes. One of the key advantages of a closed-ended approach is that it restricts the attitudinal response of the respondent to a few categories. This results in a fitting measurement for the model and it reduces the cognitive load for the respondent⁵³. Though this still required some 'introspection' of the respondent, it was very limited. The respondent is still giving his view on things, which requires him or her to think about his own reasoning about the attitude. This type of 'introspection' and the corresponding bias cannot be avoided in any question posed to respondents. However, for clarity we will assume that there is no substantial introspection required for these closed questions.

Still, the reigning methodology for studying voting behavior became the use of such models. However, this does not solve the problem of understanding what is going on in a voters mind. Scholars using such models must attempt to make a model based upon theoretical assumptions, and then put them to the empirical test. Rosema pinpoints the crucial shortcoming of this method in his discussion of issue voting:

“Another important point is that if empirical analysis shows that a relationship exists between voters' policy preferences and their vote choice, this does not imply that the issue in question as such had an impact.[...] Analysis could then show that policy preferences with respect to abortion predict vote choice well, while not a single voter thought about that issue when deciding for whom to vote.”

(Rosema, 2004, p. 38)

The advantage of such models is that they allow researchers to account for a multitude of 'causes' at once. Contrary to the paradigm conflict in psychology, this larger debate concerning the methodology is mostly absent in political psychology (but see Geer, 1991; Jacobitti, 1975; Rahn et al., 1994). Some authors do acknowledge that the meaning that

⁵³ To some extent, as some closed-ended questions are without doubt equally (if not more) difficult than the open-ended question on voting motives.

political actors attribute to their own behavior is something of interest (Eulau, 1963, p. 6), but the issue was never really gave rise to much debate. One of the explanations is purely pragmatic: the loss of open-ended questions in survey research.

As Van Holsteyn (1994) discusses in great detail, the loss of open ended questions has been a steady trend in survey research in general. The theoretical criticism voiced against introspection in general was only one of the reasons for this. Another often-heard criticism was the high cost of open-ended questions (Geer, 1991). During the interview the cost involved mainly the higher duration. The interviewer has to write down the answer of the respondent, which takes more time than simply marking an answer to a closed-ended question. After data collection is complete, open-ended questions need to be coded into categories before they can be used in data analysis. This further heightened the cost.

Whatever the reason, the use of open-ended questions in survey research has seen a steady decline. Though open-ended questions are still commonly used in ‘the most important problem facing the country’ (MIP) items, open-ended causal reports have mostly vanished from questionnaires. Some recent studies still use causal reports (Gilens, Vavreck, & Cohen, 2007; Hayes, 2009), but overall their presence in academic literature has waned. In the next paragraph we list the advantages and disadvantages of open-ended causal reports, and show that their drawbacks do not necessarily outweigh their strengths.

5.3 An Assessment of Open-Ended Causal Reports

Open-ended causal reports are a mix of two measurement techniques: open-ended questioning on the one hand, and causal reporting on the other. Both techniques have implications for the results that are obtained. We will tackle the consequences of using an open-ended technique, before moving on to those of using a causal report. Once the (dis)advantages have been listed, we can assess the validity of the method by analyzing whether the codes that we assign meaningfully capture the ideas contained in the corresponding concepts (Adcock & Collier, 2001).

5.3.1 - Open-ended questioning – advantages and disadvantages

We already stated a key disadvantage of using open-ended questions in survey research: the costs implicated in their use. However, this disadvantage is mostly pragmatic and does not affect their scientific value. This makes the disadvantage of cost somewhat irrelevant so we do not discuss it further.

Open ended causal reports have various disadvantages. A first is comparability. Open-ended questions often result in a wide array of different answers, making them harder to use in analysis. Respondents may formulate their answers in different ways (e.g. less or more elaborate). As a remedy answers are often coded into several categories. However, if the answers are not long enough the chance that they are wrongly coded or interpreted increases. Closed-ended questions do not have this disadvantage, because they provide the answering categories the respondents can choose among. However, this only holds insofar that all respondents interpret the question and categories the same way. If not, we are in fact comparing different answers without knowing it. Comparability also requires that the coding schemes match; surveys in different countries may result in vastly different coding schemes. Taking the MIP question as an example, the issues that are considered 'relevant' probably differ between countries. The question is whether a more accurate representation of reality outweighs the aspect of comparability.

Secondly, though open-ended questions seem more natural they can be quite taxing, both for interviewee *and* interviewer. On the interviewee side, open-ended questions can provide an opportunity to 'speak their mind'. If a respondent is not that articulate this may cause distress, or lead to short and less usable answers. Answering the question may not be taxing to the respondent, but if answers are coded or treated differently simply because of the respondents' answering capability this may have negative implications for the results. For the interviewer open-ended questions are also taxing. Whereas closed-ended questions lead to yes/no or categorical answers, open-ended questions often result in narratives. These narratives have to be written down or entered in the CAPI / CATI system. Furthermore, this has to be done fast

if none of the narrative is to be lost⁵⁴. A second level of complexity is added when we take probes into account. For example, in the Partirep survey the interviewers were instructed to probe if respondents answered 'because it is the best party'. The follow up question was 'why is this the best party?'. For the researchers, this type of probing provides considerable extra information because 'the best party' covers many possible reasons. But the interviewer has to remember that s(he) has to probe, figure out when to ask the follow-up question, and so on. Writing down the narrative, combined with probing can make open-ended questions more taxing for interviewers. To avoid such problems researchers can select only experienced interviewers and provide them with extensive training. Furthermore, question formulation should be as clear as possible to lessen the burden on the respondent.

Thirdly, open-ended questions may yield a lot of information, but not all of it is relevant. A respondent may seize the opportunity given by the MIP question to start explaining his personal problems. This information is not of interest to the researchers. Again, interviewers will have to try and elicit information that is relevant. Note also that open-ended questions can be 'too open'. Asking a respondent what 'what are you thinking about' will result in such a wide array of information that the results will be all but unusable (Van Holsteyn, 1994, p. 22). It is therefore important that open-ended questions are focused and as clear as possible so that respondents give as much relevant information as possible. Then again, these types of criteria are equally valid for closed-ended items: question(naire) design must be done with care, or the results will suffer.

Another shortcoming of the open-ended format could be that the first answer is not the most important one. An open-ended question may yield the first answer that 'pops up' in the respondents' mind. This does not have to be the most important one (this is especially relevant when we think about the question on the most important problem facing the country). Research by Geer (1991) countered this argument for the MIP question, but other scholars believe that the point is valid for many other types of questions (Rahn et al., 1994) If we cannot be sure that respondents are mentioning all the relevant information, how do we know if the unmentioned information is really unimportant for the respondents? Eliciting 'top of

⁵⁴ Note that recording devices can be used to circumvent this, but in the PVPS survey these were not available.

mind' information is inherent to open-ended questions: they retrieve information that is salient. While this is a drawback, the closed-ended alternative can provide respondents with unwanted information (e.g. prime their answers and so on). Furthermore, closed-ended questions have the drawback of another confounding factor: sequential effects. Based on the prior closed-ended items, respondents may adapt their answer.

Finally, some scholars argue that the fact that answers given by respondents sound valid may give the perception of 'true knowledge': if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck and sounds like a duck, it is probably a duck. Such face validity is not a guarantee for measurement validity, which is the criterion we will be using (Adcock & Collier, 2001). Then again, this pertains to all survey items: just because it looks good does not mean that it is. The validity of *any* type of question should be tested, but as Adcock and Collier state this is often neglected.

The drawbacks of open-ended questions are many, but their impact can be circumvented through a well considered research design (see the preceding chapter) and validation of the measure. What do open-ended causal reports have to offer? Open-ended questions have a plethora of advantages in comparison to closed-ended (batteries of) items. A first advantage already mentioned earlier is that an open-ended question does not limit the range of responses. Take, for example, the MIP question "*in your opinion, what is the most important problem facing the country at this time?*". If this type of question had to be translated to a close-ended question, the researcher would have to come up with a list of issues. This in itself is not that hard to do, but creating a list that encompasses all the answers he would get if he had asked the open-ended question is difficult. An open-ended question circumvents this problem by allowing the respondents to answer with the issue they come up with. Taking the MIP example, the problem concerning closed-ended questions would not be solved even if a comprehensive list of issues was available to the researcher. Leaving aside the fact that an encompassing list would exponentially increase the cost of the closed-ended question⁵⁵, dissolving the cost disadvantage of the open-ended question, the fact that the respondent has

⁵⁵ Such a list would still have to be *read*, either by the interviewer or the interviewee, the time it would take to ask the question would greatly increase. Furthermore, separate measurements of the importance of each issue on a likert scale would greatly increase the amount of questions.

to pick one issue causes problems. What if a respondent had in mind an answer in which two issues were mixed (e.g. the waste problem makes me concerned about the national health)? Marking either 'health' or 'waste' would not capture what the respondent is trying to tell us. Open-ended questions do not have this problem since they collect the information as it presents itself.

In exploratory research, open-ended questions are often the method of choice because of another advantage: if a researcher suspects the existence of underlying dimensions but does not know what they are (yet), an open-ended question ensures that no information is missed. In such a situation, batteries of closed-ended items would only be useful if they capture the underlying dimensions (Van Holsteyn, 1994, p. 23).

A third advantage of open-ended questions is that they do not provide the respondent with information that has the potential to distort the answer. In the MIP example, a respondent that is read a list with possible issues may very well change his answers based on what he hears. Whether this is desirable or not is not the point. The point is that it cannot be avoided. In contrast open-ended can often avoid this. Suggesting answers may lead respondents to reconsider, or feel uneasy expressing what they meant to say. Take the causal report question on reasons for voting: a respondent that was going to say he did not really care for politics and simply picked the party because his parents did so, might be inclined to change his answer to 'ideology' or 'issues' if he were read a list of possible reasons. The reason for this is social desirability: people often seek approval by their peers, and they do not wish to come across in an unfavorable way. Being read a list of reasons may cause the respondent to think he *should* be considering them in his vote choice (Wilson & Nisbett, 1978).

For the respondents themselves, open-ended questions have various advantages as well. First of all, these questions allow the respondents the answer in their own words; they do not have to remember the answering categories but can just answer the question. On the other hand, open-ended questions are less prone to be misunderstood or misinterpreted. And if they are, the answers usually reflect that they were and the interviewer can intervene. As Van Holsteyn argues, open-ended questions more closely match actual conversations: not a lot of conversations consist of questions and yes/no or agree/disagree answers. An open-ended

question cues for a more elaborate answer by design, and does not interrupt the flow of the interview. In an interview dominated by closed-ended items, an open-ended question is often a welcome change. Respondents do not have to think in the frame put forward by the researcher, which is cognitively taxing. Instead an open-ended question offers respondents a chance to speak their mind.

Finally, open-ended questions allow the interviewer to probe for more information. While a first answer may be short, the interviewer can be instructed to probe for more reasons, ideas, and attitudes. This yields broader answers that provide much more information than a closed-ended question would have. In short, open-ended questions have a lot of things going for them.

All in all, open-ended questions have only few disadvantages. They do not always yield the information we want, and respondents may not be providing us with all the relevant information. On the other hand, they offer something closed ended questions will never deliver: answers that are not limited by the imposed categories nor limited in their length. Respondents can state their answer in their own words, and can voice things that did not even occur in the scholars' mind.

5.3.2 - Causal reports – advantages and disadvantages

In order for causal reports to be of use, a basic premise is that the report made by the actor (the respondent) should be a more accurate description of the 'real' causes than the report made by the observer (the scientist). We focus on the Nisbett and Wilson's seminal article to guide our overview. The Nisbett and Wilson approach to test this requirement is to compare the actual effects of a given stimulus by looking at the stimulus – response relationship. Following this, the causal reports of respondents are compared to these results. "*The accuracy of the reports thus elicited is assessed by comparison with the 'actual' effects as measured by the experimenters*" (White, 1988, p. 24). The problem with this approach is that it makes it comparatively easy to falsify the premise of causal reports: it assumes that the stimulus – response relation is the 'actual' effect. It does not take into account that the actor is an active

participant, and may have other causal powers residing in him that mediate the stimulus – response relationship. Take the example by White (1988, p. 25):

“At a certain point in a church service the minister may say 'let us pray', following which everyone in the congregation goes down on their knees. We may also observe that the kneeling behaviour occurred only after this command. The ANOVA-type inference here would be that the behaviour was caused by the command. But one could say with equal validity that the cause of the behaviour was the knowledge, shared by all participants, that going down on one's knees is a conventional part of the act of praying in a church service.”

Actors are superior to observers in terms of knowledge of their intentions. Therefore, their report may validly refer to these causal powers, in the form of intentions or reasons (White, 1988). Reasons can be causes, but they should not be taken as being one and the same (Jacobitti, 1979). This distinction is important, because the dominant methodological focus is on eliciting the *causes* of behavior (Meadwell, 2008, p. 13). Consequently, some scholars have mistakenly assumed that causes are reasons, and vice versa. Shapiro (2002) noted this when he criticized the superfluous nature of some findings that were based on regression models. Scholars sometimes mistake a high correlation for causal influence, without taking into account other explanations. Observers can only make educated guesses about the causes of behavior based on the available data, but they cannot directly access the events that occur in the actors' head.

We start with the assumption that causal reports *are* actual descriptions of the heuristics used by voters. After all, because they are the actor, voters have some distinct advantages over the observers: they have direct access to the object of study (the decision making process), knowledge about their previous behavior, knowledge about idiosyncratic personal theories, and so on (White, 1988, p. 31). Because of what it is, a causal report offers us information that already bypasses several obstacles that other measurements could never circumvent. They are a unique source of information that cannot be obtained in any other way. This advantage is unique to causal reports, and of substantial value. We will discuss the biases that affect the

report: biases introduced by limitations of the actor, and biases caused by the social context of the interview setting.

5.3.2.1 *Limitations of the actor*

The actor giving the causal report is human, and is therefore cognitively limited. Recalling information from memory enables the actor to give an accurate causal report. However, the capability of actors to do this is restricted: short term memory has finite capacity, and long term memory is limited in its ability to recall stored information at will (Civettini & Redlawsk, 2009; Cowan, 2001; Lodge et al., 1990). The general agreement is that the accuracy of all verbal reports, including causal reports, is restricted by the capacity of short-term memory. Though many thoughts reach the awareness level, if they cannot be recalled at the time the report is given they will not be included in the report (Ericsson & Simon, 1980). What is retained in short-term memory then? Emotions play an important role: if something is more 'vividly' stored in memory, it is more likely to be recalled (Civettini & Redlawsk, 2009). Chronicity may also affect recall: in short, it refers to the fact that recall differs between individuals because of the way in which information is categorized. Chronic constructs are long standing categorizations that have evolved in the mind of the individual (Higgins & King, 1981). Higgins and King further distinguish several other factors that may affect recall: recency of activation, frequency of activation, salience, and so on. All in all, many factors may affect what is recalled in the verbal or causal report.

However, as White (1988) states, much of the recall issue has to do with retrospective causal reports that are made some time after the actual event. For example, retrospective causal reports on the voting decision that are asked in a post-electoral survey several days (or weeks) after the actual ballot. However, the causal reports we use are surveyed immediately after the respondents indicate their current preference⁵⁶. This already downplays the impact of recall. Furthermore, the cognitive load placed on the subjects in the experiments that were used to invalidate causal reports was quite heavy, sometimes even excessive. For example, in Nisbett and Bellows (1977) the subjects were required to read three pages of information and make

⁵⁶ The wave 3 reports are an exception to this, but are not used in this dissertation.

several subsequent judgments before any report was made. Several scholars argue that the effects of memory may be more complex than Nisbett and Wilson assumed. For example, reaching a decision in itself may become information that resonates with the process itself, destroying any chance of a causal report. This contention was never dealt with, and as White (1988, p. 28) argues, the studies that critique causal reports based on selective recall must first rule out this possibility before arguing that memory is causing the bias. The fact that the outcome of the decision may affect recall is likening to the post-hoc rationalization hypothesis (Rahn et al., 1994). This feedback effect caused by the output of the decision making process is very difficult to assess, and the possibility that it is occurring can never completely be ruled out.

Though recall may still be biased because some information does not reach the awareness level, we argue that memory matters to a lesser extent for this dissertation. The goal is to measure not causes, not reasons, but the *process* by which a decision is reached. If we were interested in causes of the voting behavior, the critique on causal reports would apply since all causes are unlikely to be retained. Akin to the argument put forward by the proponents of the on-line model of voting, the attitudes towards parties and politicians that shape voting behavior may be retained whereas not all information that shaped them is (McGraw et al., 1990). Nonetheless, when we ask respondents to pick a party they *are* deciding. The information that is recalled and therefore used in the decision is in itself relevant because we argue that it provides insight into the decision making process – more specifically the heuristics that voters use. What heuristic *can* be applied depends on the information that is available come decision time; and availability to the individual implies awareness and recall.

The fact that asking 'why' provides information gives the impression that these types of causal reports can provide access to the decision making process. This type of face validity is not enough. It can be argued that processes cannot be accessed by introspective causal reports. According to Nisbett and Wilson they cannot: the process is already done by the time the interviewer gets to ask the 'why' question, and therefore the causal report is too late to allow for direct access. In psychological literature, many scholars critique this approach because what is entailed within the concept of 'process' is never defined in the Nisbett and Wilson study. The definition by Rich (1979, in White, 1988, p. 15) that "*process answers 'how' and*

content answers 'what'” provides some clarity. A heuristic in itself is content; it only becomes a process in its application. This is a similar argument of that made by White (1988, p. 15) regarding (decision) rules in general: “*a rule in itself is not a process by this convention, but the application of a rule on a particular occasion might be. Ability to report the rule itself would not, however, imply awareness of the process of using it.*”⁵⁷. The contention that processes cannot be measured through causal reports is correct to some extent, but this does not imply that the content entailed within them is. And as far as content is concerned, the Nisbett and Wilson argument is moot. Therefore, causal reports can be used to measure heuristics: not as processes, but as content.

5.3.2.2 Biases introduced by the social context of the interview

The interview context may bias the results in three ways⁵⁸: 1. the context may cause wrong assumptions about shared knowledge 2. The actor may be borrowing information from the context to explain his own behavior, instead of using internal information. 3. The actor may be influenced by social norms (White, 1988). The first bias occurs when an actor is assuming several beliefs, values, and attitudes that caused the decision. For example, an actor stating that he chose the Green party ‘because of the party leader’ may be assuming that the observer knows that the actor also agrees with their stance on environmental policy. The actor is not wrong in assuming this, but the problem is that a key cause is missing from the report. This disadvantage is similar to the incompleteness of open-ended questions, in that the respondent is not giving all relevant information. However, in a causal report this problem is further enhanced: while other closed-ended items may help us in the case of some open-ended

⁵⁷ The fact that process is such a blurry concept makes it hard to falsify the Nisbett and Wilson argument. In more recent publications the distinction between content and process was further abandoned: Wilson (1985) talks about ‘mental states’, Wilson and Stone (1985) of ‘knowledge of the workings of one’s own mind’. Abandoning this distinction may be a pragmatic step, but it is not necessarily a correct one (White, 1988, p. 17).

⁵⁸ We discuss interview bias upon causal reports in general. Some of these biases are present for *all* types of questions, not just open-ended causal ones, but we decided to list all possible biases here anyway to keep the ‘interview biases’ in one place.

questions, in causal reports the causes of behavior are often so diverse that no list of close-ended items will provide an adequate criterion variable.

The second source of bias is hard to circumvent, since respondents are likely to take in information at all times. The closed-ended alternative is not an option, and therefore this type of bias is almost impossible to circumvent. Probing and using follow-up questions may offer a partial solution though.

The third source of bias is caused by the social norms inherent to the interview: a voter wants to appear as a rational being, which may cause him to answer differently. Social desirability has an effect on all types of questions: if we were to ask a respondent about his drinking behavior we might run the risk of getting a low estimate. Reporting sexual activity, criminal infringements, and so on all have a high probability of being subject to social desirability bias: *“Most of us believe that the public opposes the use of illicit drugs, supports voting in elections, and favors regular exercise. Sensitive questions ask, in effect, whether we have violated such norms”* (Tourangeau, Rips, & Rasinski, 2001, p. 257). One could argue that our type of causal report is not probing for sensitive matters; revealing the product of the decision making process is far more sensitive a question, as party preference is thought to be a private matter. Furthermore, we use an open-ended question, which is far less likely to induce socially desirable responses. Respondents are not faced with a list containing issues, ideology and so on: reasons that might be seen as 'rational' and therefore desirable. Instead, the question specifically states that 'people have many different types of reasons to pick one party over another'. This sentence was introduced with the specific purpose of lowering social desirability bias.

Causal reports have advantages and disadvantages; if we manage to limit the sources of bias we discussed earlier the advantages may easily outweigh the drawbacks. The question is whether this can be achieved. Our focus therefore shifts towards validity, and how to assess it.

5.4 Empirical Evidence: A Test of Causal Report Validity

Before we set out to determine whether or not campaign information primes the heuristics used by voters, we focus on a preliminary question: are the codes that were assigned valid indicators of heuristics? The aim of this paragraph is to establish the measurement validity of the assigned codes. We test three types of validity: content validity, discriminant / convergent and construct validity⁵⁹. Content validity deals with the extent to which an indicator represents the universe of content entailed in the systematized concept being measured. Content validity was already assessed in the discussion of the code book: the measurement yielded codes for all the heuristics we expected to be used by voters. As such, the measurement is a valid content measure of our typology. At this point we must assume that the code book consists of valid indicators and move on towards the other types of validity. However, we can conduct one additional test of content validity that we only could perform after coding was complete. In order for our measurement to be a valid indicator, it should behave as a heuristic would during an electoral campaign. As we argue below, a final test of the content validity then becomes a test of stability of the codes through time.

To test construct validity, we test whether the measurement empirically associates with other indicators in a way that conforms to theoretical expectations about their interrelationship. Discriminant / convergent validity assesses whether the measurement of alternative indicators converges (correlates) with the measurement that is assessed. Additionally, it tests whether the measurement under assessment weakly correlates with the indicators of a different concept in comparison to the convergent indicator (Adcock & Collier, 2001, p. 540).

⁵⁹ Note that another type of validity exists: criterion validity (does the measurement empirically associate with other 'criterion' variables that measure the concept?). The problem with criterion variables is that they do not exist for heuristics: no direct measures for heuristics exist, so we are unable to compare our measurement to any criterion.

5.4.1 - Stability over time

How stable are the codes that we assigned if we compare them over time⁶⁰? If the codes are valid measurements of heuristics, they should exhibit a tendency for stability throughout time for two reasons. First, we will be comparing the same individuals' responses over a relatively short period of time. Though not impossible, it is unlikely that the respondents changed fundamentally over this short period: their basic beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, social environment, and so on may have changed somewhat, but overall the changes should be relatively minor. As such, the decision *maker* has not undergone fundamental changes.

Secondly, the decision set is unchanged between waves because the same parties are competing. The decision that has to be taken is also identical as well because in both wave 1 and 2 the voter had to express his current party preference *if the election were to be held on that day*⁶¹. All in all, most of the relevant aspects of the decision in wave 1 are similar to that of wave 2. Naturally, some things have changed: most notably the respondents were exposed to new information, new information that may have caused them to change their mind. Therefore we expect some answers to have changed. But because many aspects are unchanged, there should also be a substantial portion of unchanged answers.

Heuristic	Flemish voters		Walloon voters	
	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 1	Wave 2
Endorsements	20%	13%	17%	10%
Government and Opposition	8%	5%	6%	7%
Groups	14%	10%	15%	13%
Habit	7%	10%	10%	8%
Magnitude	2%	2%	1%	1%
Ideology and Values	18%	13%	16%	16%
Issues	27%	30%	28%	34%
Party	29%	32%	34%	33%
Politician	19%	17%	10%	9%
N (Cases)	864		694	

Table 5-1: Per cent of cases that were coded as having a given heuristic.

⁶⁰ This is distinct from inter coder *reliability*, which was assessed in Chapter 4.

⁶¹ We disregard wave 3, because these were collected after the elections – and we are interested in effects during the campaign.

At the aggregate level at least, the distribution of heuristics throughout the sample seems to be stable; for most of the heuristics the differences are small. Spearman's rank order Rho was 0.97 and 0.96 for the Flemish and Walloon voters respectively. Exceptions are the large drop in mentions of endorsements, and the increase of issues. These changes are present in both the Flemish and Walloon sub sample. Regarding endorsements, the drop in both regions actually is what we should expect: at the start of the campaign voters refer to advice from significant others. As the campaign gets under way and political information is disseminated among voters, they are able to use different heuristics, which causes the drop we observe. That said, on the aggregate level things are stable. These results are a first indication that the codes are stable throughout time, and exhibit behavior that is similar to what we would expect from heuristics.

We ran a similar aggregate analysis for the time dimension as well: for each heuristic, two dummy variables could be checked to indicate whether a reference was made to the past (e.g. *'my parents told me to vote this way when I was growing up'* or *'they have arranged some things for me in the past'*) or the future (e.g. *'because I want to see how they'll perform'*, *'I think they'll bring about the necessary changes for Wallonia'*). A lot of these time references are closely interlinked with certain heuristics: mentioning the magnitude heuristic almost by necessity refers to the future election outcome. Mentioning the government or opposition likely refers to either the past coalition, or the future coalition, and so on. We can therefore look at the amount of references to the past and future for each heuristic, and compare them across waves 1 and 2. Figure 5-1 presents the results for each wave.

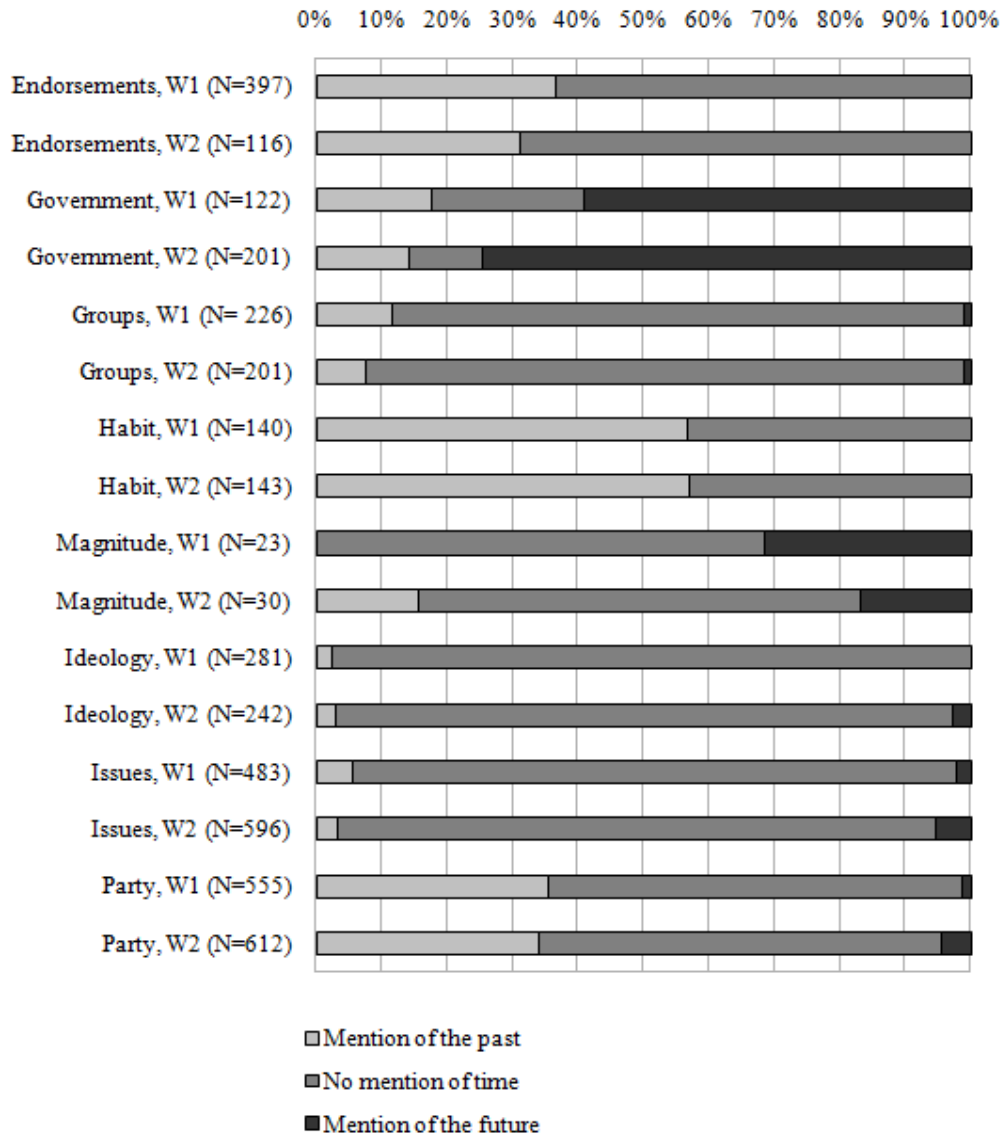


Figure 5-1: Mentions of Time for each Heuristic, per Wave.

Again, these aggregate data exhibit mostly stability: certain heuristics are correlated to certain time dimensions, and this relationship persists through time. Furthermore, for most heuristics the time dimension makes sense, so in this respect the face validity of our measurement seems warranted. The government and opposition heuristic has the most references towards past and future; if we consider that retrospective voting mostly focuses on the incumbent government ('throwing the rascals out') the presence of references to the past is only logical (Miller &

Wattenberg, 1985). References to the future increase in wave 2 with more than 10 per cent. This also adds to the face validity of the measure. As the campaign gets underway, the focus shifts towards the future government or coalition; again this makes sense. The other heuristic that is clearly associated with future references is the magnitude heuristic. Since this heuristic is clearly built upon the expected electoral result this is an expected result. Somewhat unexpected is the presence of references to the *past*. With the low N (30) we must be careful about generalizing, but these past references seem to be caused by the fact that people voting based on the threshold are doing this because of earlier (past) experiences; for example, in the 2003 federal elections the Flemish green party did not make the threshold in most electoral districts. Their voters are likely to have this in mind when they are thinking about the upcoming election as well. Most of the other heuristics only seldom have references to the future; though differences across the waves are small, for all but one heuristic (magnitude) the relative amount of references to the future increases as the campaign progresses.

References to the past are far more abundant, probably because people have more information on the past than they have on an uncertain future. Three heuristics have high amounts of past references: habit, endorsements and party. Habits are formed throughout the lifespan. Furthermore, in causal reports habitual voting is often phrased as “*I voted like this the last time*”. Habituation occurs based on previous experiences, so this correlation is only natural (Ajzen, 2002). The same holds true for endorsements because they have to have occurred in the past in order for them to be used in the heuristic. A large proportion of the endorsements is based within the family, and the fact that the parental endorsements usually occurred when the respondent was growing up accounts for a large part of these references. Explaining the correlation between the party heuristic and past references is somewhat more complicated. On the one end is the fact that being a member or identifying with a party is often rooted in the past (e.g. “*I’ve been a member every since I started working*”, “*I’ve been a socialist all my life*”). On the other hand, references to parties' policies are often based on the immediate past.

For example, the Flemish nationalist party N-VA was often credited for keeping their promises since the last election⁶². These types of reports often contain past references.

Overall, the conclusion based on the aggregate data is that the codes are relatively stable throughout time. However, we have not yet looked at *individual*-level change. Because the open-ended causal reports could contain up to three codes, not only the reported heuristics can change, but also the amount. For example, a respondent that mentions the party and issue heuristic in wave 1 only mentions the issue heuristic in wave 2. At first sight, one might say that this respondent changed: his codes changed between waves 1 and 2. However, the fact that he did not mention the party heuristic anymore can be explained in two ways: either he is not using the heuristic anymore, or the open-ended format of the question caused him to only report the most salient reasons he could muster. If the former is true the measurement is accurately tracking changes at the individual level. If the latter is true, these changes are caused by the measurement. Lodge, McGraw and Stroh (1989) argued that respondents are unlikely to probe their memory; Geer (1991) rebutted this finding using experimental research on the most-important-problem question in the NES. We first look at how many people are actually changing their set of heuristics between waves 1 and 2. Table 5-2 presents the results for the entire sample, since we do not have any reason to expect there to be different dynamics for Flemish and Walloon respondents.

Category	Per cent	N
Respondents that did not change	17	244
Respondents that changed	83	1206
Total	100	1450

Table 5-2: Number of People that (did not) change Heuristic between Waves 1 and 2

The individual level indicator shows that a lot of changes occurred: 83 per cent of the respondents' codes had changed between wave 1 and 2. Table 5-2 does not give us any information on the extent of the changes: a respondent may have completely changed heuristic, or he may have changed some of his heuristics. Table 5-3 presents how many respondents changed completely, changed partially, and did not change at all.

⁶² In the 2007 election, N-VA formed a cartel with CD&V. After the elections, the cartel eventually split because the parties had divergent visions regarding the way in which a state reform was to be obtained. N-VA took a firm stance on the matter, which eventually led to the dissipation of the cartel.

Category	Per cent	N
Respondents that did not change	17	244
Respondents that changed partly	38	558
Respondents that changed completely	45	648
Total	100	1450

Table 5-3: Number of People that did not change, changed some, and changed all of their Heuristics between Waves 1 and 2.

Almost half of the respondents (45 per cent) changed all of their heuristics over the course of a few months. Individual level stability is not high, but the mere fact that someone stops mentioning a heuristic does not invalidate the codes that *were* assigned. It might mean that those voters stopped using, or started using, different heuristics. Underlying these changes, heuristics may very well be persistent; to test for this we conducted several binomial logistic regressions. The dependent variables were dummy variables, indicating whether a heuristic was mentioned (1) or not (0) in wave 2. We predict the values of the dummy variables based on 9 dummy variables, one for each heuristic in wave 1 (the other category was the reference category in each regression). This way, we are testing whether heuristics at time X can be predicted based on the heuristics at time X-1. Table 5-4 reports the results for all 9 regression models.

<i>Heuristics W1</i>	Endorsements (Pseudo R²: .12)	G&O (Pseudo R²: .07)	Groups (Pseudo R²: .09)
Endorsements	1.37 (.22) ***	-0.27 (.41)	-0.28 (.27)
G&O	-1.59 (.64) *	1.75 (.31) ***	-0.81 (.52)
Groups	-0.37 (.30)	-0.24 (.38)	1.65 (.23) ***
Habit	0.12 (.29)	0.05 (.59)	-0.08 (.34)
Magnitude	-0.78 (.73)	0.60 (.71)	-1.30 (1.07)
Ideology	-0.43 (.25) +	-0.40 (.36)	-0.02 (.26)
Issues	-0.72 (.27) **	0.15 (.31)	-0.42 (.25)
Party	-0.44 (.25) +	0.01 (.26)	-0.13 (.24)
Politician	-0.57 (.31) +	0.65 (.33) +	-0.40 (.29)
Intercept	-1.94 (.23) ***	-3.02 (.29) ***	-2.11 (.24) ***
Log Likelihood	-472.383	-325.077	-489.195
<i>Heuristics W1</i>	Habit (Pseudo R²: .09)	Magnitude (Pseudo R²: .06)	Ideology (Pseudo R²: .09)
Endorsements	0.56 (.24) *	-1.56 (.88) +	-0.54 (.24) *
G&O	-0.68 (.46)	-0.37 (.87)	0.34 (.31)
Groups	-0.21 (.31)	0.25 (.62)	-0.06 (.26)
Habit	1.57 (.26) ***	-0.83 (1.09)	-0.40 (.34)
Magnitude	0.28 (.67)	2.30 (.68) **	0.29 (.58)
Ideology	0.07 (.24)	0.37 (.59)	1.47 (.19) ***
Issues	-0.67 (.29) *	0.04 (.56)	0.19 (.20)
Party	-0.02 (.25)	-0.16 (.59)	-0.04 (.20)
Politician	-0.33 (.33)	-0.28 (.68)	-1.16 (.31) ***
Intercept	-2.43 (.23) ***	-3.96 (.66) ***	-1.99 (.21) ***
Log Likelihood	-423.279	-124.159	-562.975
<i>Heuristics W1</i>	Issues (Pseudo R²: .09)	Party (Pseudo R²: .04)	Person (Pseudo R²: .07)
Endorsements	-0.70 (.21) **	0.13 (.18)	0.13 (.24)
G&O	-0.08 (.27)	0.45 (.24) +	-0.76 (.39) +
Groups	0.03 (.21)	-0.20 (.21)	-0.32 (.27)
Habit	-0.76 (.28) **	0.42 (.23) +	-0.29 (.32)
Magnitude	-0.41 (.61)	0.22 (.45)	-0.18 (.83)
Ideology	-0.30 (.17) +	0.37 (.17) *	0.16 (.27)
Issues	1.17 (.15) ***	-0.06 (.15)	-0.11 (.24)
Party	-0.16 (.15)	1.04 (.14) ***	0.04 (.21)
Politician	-0.25 (.21)	0.36 (.18) *	1.57 (.22) ***
Intercept	-0.84 (.15) ***	-1.27 (.15) ***	-2.17 (.22) ***
Log Likelihood	-856.238	-903.379	-543.920

Table 5-4: Results for 9 binomial logistic regression models (N = 1558). Dependent variables are dummies indicating whether a heuristic was mentioned in wave 2 (1) or not (0). Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. += $p \leq .10$ *= $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

The pattern emerging from these regressions is clear: for each regression, whether or not a heuristic is mentioned in wave 2 is best predicted by the presence (or absence) of that heuristic in wave 1. This pattern emerges across the board, and is further evidence that the codes are not random in any respect. Even more striking is the pattern that is emerging from these regressions. If we look at the regression that predicts the issue heuristic in wave 2, three heuristics reach high levels of significance: endorsements, habitual voting and issues. As expected mentioning the issue rule in wave 1 increases the odds of it being mentioned in wave 2. On the other hand, mentioning either endorsements or habitual voting *lowers* the odds of

mentioning issues. If we take the issue heuristic to be the best possible proxy for rational choice (issue-based) decision making, the fact that it contrasts clearly to habits and endorsements is theoretically viable. Downs (1957) stated that the decision could be delegated by depending on the endorsements of others; in a similar fashion, habitual voting is also opposed to rational choice. Instead of constantly reevaluating a decision, habitual voters made a decision to vote for a given party and then continue to stick with that preference until further notice. Table 5-4 shows that there is a strong underlying pattern that behaves as heuristics should. All in all, the stability of the measurement seems to indicate that it is indeed measuring heuristics: the findings are as expected, both on the individual and aggregate level. Furthermore, the time dimension maps onto the assigned codes as well, and changes on the time dimensions can be explained in a logical fashion.

5.4.2 - Convergent / Discriminant validity

The third wave of the Partirep survey included a series of closed ended questions probing the importance of several possible reasons for the vote choice⁶³. As stated before, such questions have many drawbacks such as an increased risk of social desirability, but they are the only available variables to test this type of validity. Though they were surveyed at a later time, we can still test whether respondents that stopped mentioning a heuristic assigned less importance to the heuristic compared to respondents that kept mentioning the heuristic. The expectation is, of course, that ceasing to mention a heuristic leads to a lower importance of the heuristic. In table 8 we compare four groups: respondents that never mentioned a certain heuristic, respondents that ceased to mention it, respondents that started to mention it, and respondents that consistently mentioned the heuristic in waves 1 and 2. We report the percent of respondents within each group that rated the closed-ended item as very important on a Likert scale. Because closed-ended items can easily be marked as being 'important' (and thereby overestimate the number of respondents that truly find a reason important), we only focus on the most important category.

⁶³ Each question was preceded by 'To what extent was this important when determining your vote choice?'. Then a list with possible reasons followed, for example 'the people on the list'.

	Per cent of respondents within this category rating the item as very important			
	Both waves	Only W1	Only W2	Never mentioned
“Because of one or more people on the list”				
Politician	32%	25%	35%	18%
N	59	108	98	877
“Because most of the people in my setting vote for this party”				
Endorsements	25%	17%	16%	11%
N	68	143	58	862
“Because the party has a chance to enter government”				
G & O	38%	45%	50%	46%
N	29	64	48	1001
“The party defends the interests of a group to which I belong”				
Groups	44%	34%	44%	27%
N	61	102	75	895
“Out of habit; I've always voted for this party”				
Habit	35%	42%	35%	18%
N	34	62	74	962
“Because I want this party to make the voting threshold”				
Magnitude	50%	46%	33%	40%
N	4	13	18	1112
“The ideology, the basic values of the party”				
Ideology	67%	50%	50%	39%
N	72	131	93	848
“The parties' position on specific issues”				
Issues	43%	46%	40%	37%
N	166	137	199	642
“The image of the party appeals to me”				
Party	27%	25%	28%	22%
N	178	201	199	567

Table 5-5: Rating of closed-ended Items on Reasons for voting for a Party for different Groups of Respondents.

If we look at the number of respondents that ceased to mention a heuristic and compare it to the number of people that always mention the heuristic, for 6 out of 9 rules the percentages are lower. In other words: for those heuristics, respondents that ceased to mention a heuristic in wave 2 attributed less importance to that heuristic on the wave 3 item. Nevertheless, the relationship is far from perfect: drops are small, and for three heuristics the percentages increase (habit, government and opposition, and issues). We therefore cannot completely rule

out the possibility that ceasing to mention a heuristic can be attributed to the mere fact that respondents forgot to mention it. Still, for the majority of heuristics there is a decrease in the assigned importance of the heuristic. Adding to this is the fact that for 8 out of 9 heuristics, the respondents that mentioned the heuristic in both waves were more likely to mark the corresponding closed-ended item as most important compared to respondents that never mentioned the heuristic (first and last column of the table). The one case where this is not the case, is the government and opposition heuristic. For this heuristic, we were forced to use the best possible item (a chance that the party enters government), but this item does not capture the entire heuristic by far. Overall, this table provides further evidence that ceasing to mention, or not mentioning a heuristic at all reflects actual changes. This is similar to the finding of Geer (1991) that open-ended questions do not just measure what is salient in the respondents mind.

The convergence criterion is clearly fulfilled: for all but one heuristic the number of respondents that rated the closed-ended item as very important is substantially higher in the group of respondents that mentioned the corresponding heuristic in an open-ended question. In the case of the only heuristic where this was not the case (Government & Opposition), the closed-ended item was quite specific and did not encompass the entire heuristic, which probably accounts for the result. The fact that we had to resort to using only the 'very important' category on the closed-ended items because a lot of respondents rated items as important only strengthens the open-ended measurement.

5.4.3 - Construct validity

We assess the construct validity through a series of bivariate analysis that compare one or more indicators of heuristics with variables that can be expected to be associated with them. This is similar to what Van Holsteyn (1994) did, though the fact that we deal with heuristics severely limits the range of variables we can compare with. Thus, we only validate those heuristics for which good associating variables are available. A first analysis is observing whether the age of the respondents is associated with the heuristics they use. Younger voters have had less opportunity to 'get set in their ways', and as such the heuristics should be more likely to change through time. Therefore, we expect younger voters to be less stable than older voters. Comparing the amount of 'heuristic switchers' among the various age groups (not in

table) yields mixed results: the differences are small, and while the amount of unchanged respondents is lower compared to four of the five other age groups, the oldest category of voters is apparently *most* prone to change. This test might be an indication that our codes lack validity. To further test whether the association with age is problematic, we tested whether certain heuristics are mentioned more often by younger or older voters. Younger voters have had less experience with the political sphere, and as such can be expected to rely more on endorsements (especially by their parents). On the other hand, older voters should have more knowledge about the political sphere and therefore rely more on the party, issues and ideology heuristics⁶⁴. As they have built up a track record of voting, habitual voting should score higher as well.

	< 21	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61 <
Endorsements	26%	17%	16%	18%	18%	22%
G & O	6%	3%	11%	10%	6%	6%
Groups	10%	10%	12%	20%	12%	15%
Habit	5%	5%	7%	6%	11%	14%
Horse race	3%	3%	1%	1%	1%	2%
Ideology	13%	18%	19%	15%	19%	16%
Issues	38%	44%	30%	26%	23%	19%
Party	22%	28%	35%	30%	32%	32%
Politician	4%	11%	14%	11%	20%	18%
N	75	194	264	249	301	367

Table 5-6: Per cent of Respondents that mentioned a given Heuristic in Wave 1, for six Age categories.

Most of the results confirm the expectations: endorsements score higher in the youngest age category, followed by a relatively stable distribution across the other five categories. Habitual voting follows an inverse trend: this heuristic is more frequent in the two oldest age groups, whereas it is relatively evenly distributed across the other groups. Unsurprisingly, the two youngest age groups score lowest. On ideology and party the youngest group scores lowest as well, which is as expected. The only odd result is the issue heuristic: younger voters are more likely to vote based on the issue heuristic.

Habitual voting can be compared with several other questions. In the first wave of the survey respondents were asked to indicate whether they had ever voted for another party in the past. This type of question measures long term stability of voting behavior. For habitual voters we

⁶⁴ On average, the youngest category of voters (younger than 21) got 1,6 out of 5 political knowledge questions right in the Partirep survey. For the other categories the results were: 21-30 (1,8), 31-40 (2,0), 41-50 (2,2), 51-60 (2,1), 61 and older (2,3).

expect higher rates of long term stability. Results confirm this: of those voters using the habit heuristic at the start of the campaign, only 37 per cent indicated ever having voted for another party. Conversely, for voters not using the habit heuristic this was 66 per cent. Short-term stability is measured through a dummy variable that indicates whether the respondent switched party preference between one of the panel waves or not. In line with the findings regarding long-term stability, we found that habitual voters switched party 35 per cent of the time, compared to 47 per cent for non-habitual voters. These results clearly show that at least for the habit heuristic, our measurement is meaningfully associated to other independent variables.

For the politician heuristic, we looked at the amount of respondents that cast a preference vote. In the third and final wave of the PVPS survey respondents were asked whether they cast a list vote, or whether they voted for specific candidates on the list. Voters mentioning specific politicians cast a list vote only 30 per cent of the time, whereas this was 45 per cent for non-politician voters. These results confirm the measurement validity for the politician heuristic as well.

Issue voting is more difficult to assess: some voters are voting for the general programme of the party, while others are clearly voting based on one or more issues. No other variables encompass the entire issue heuristic in a single question. However, in wave 1 all respondents were asked to indicate the most important issue with regards to their vote preference from a list of 10 issues, which could be mapped to the specific issues used within the issue heuristic⁶⁵. The percentage of issue voters (for those 10 issues) that also indicated this issue as being the most important issue in the closed-ended question was then calculated. The results are presented in Table 5-7.

⁶⁵ Mobility (matched to subcode 'Mobility'), social security (subcode 'Social policy'), culture (subcode 'Culture'), environment (subcode 'Environment and Energy'), taxes (subcode 'Taxes'), immigration (subcode 'Asylum seekers and immigrants'), crime and justice (subcode 'Crime'), employment (subcode 'Employment'), state reform (subcode 'Communautairian'), and the financial crisis (subcode 'Economy').

Per cent of respondent marking the closed item as ‘most important’ among respondents that...			
	did <i>not</i> mention the issue in the causal report	did mention the issue in the causal report	N of respondents mentioning issue
Crime	8%	40%	10
Culture	1%	0%	1
Financial crisis	36%	43%	30
Employment	12%	21%	28
Environment	5%	43%	155
Immigration	4%	20%	90
Mobility	1%	0%	5
Social policy	18%	26%	19
State reform	6%	32%	34
Taxes	4%	27%	15

Table 5-7: Per cent of Respondents mentioning the Issue as the most important one, for Respondents mentioning the Issue in the open-ended Causal Report and those who did not.

Again, the results show a clear association between the two measurements that is as expected for almost all issues; the only exceptions are culture and mobility, but due to the extremely low N (1 and 5, respectively) these results should be discarded rather than interpreted as counter evidence. For all other issues the amount of respondents indicating the issue as the most important one is always larger in the group that was coded as utilizing the issue heuristic on that specific issue. These results confirm the construct validity for the issue heuristic.

Thus far, we tested and confirmed the construct validity for a variety of heuristics: our measurement of the issues, habit, politician and endorsement heuristics seems to be valid. For the other heuristics we do not dispose of adequate ‘comparison’ variables, so we do not attempt to validate these heuristics using lackluster comparisons. Because we already found that the discriminant validity was good, the codes are stable through time, and the time indicators associate meaningfully with the codes, the overall conclusion is that our measurement is a valid indicator of respondents’ heuristic use. Therefore, we can now start to assess how these heuristics change as the campaign progresses. More importantly, we can test how exposure to information interacts with the heuristics. The next chapter explains the important events of the 2009 campaigns, with a focus on the visibility of issues, politicians and parties because our hypotheses focus on priming effects of these three types of information.

Chapter 6: The Flemish and Walloon electoral campaigns

This chapter examines the information environment and voting intentions of the public in the Flemish and Walloon election campaigns. We first give a short overview of the winners and losers, and the most important campaign events. Then we focus on the persons, issues and parties that were most visible in the mass media. Based on the hypotheses formulated in Chapter 3, we expect that these types of information primed voters' heuristic use.

6.1 The Flemish Electoral Campaign

As Chapter 4 already discussed, both the Flemish and Walloon electoral campaigns were largely autonomous from one another. Nevertheless, they did share two common issues. First off, the fact that Flemish and Walloon parties were essentially in deadlock over the state reform had caused a government crisis at the federal level. This had been nullified to a certain extent by the formation of an impromptu government, but had caused the split of the cartel between CD&V, the Flemish Christian-Democrats and N-VA, the Flemish Nationalists. The issue of state reform, as well as the troubles at the federal level did seep through to the regional campaign. Second, the economic and financial crisis was still at its peak: in both Flanders and Wallonia the economy was in bad shape. The economy had high visibility in mass media coverage, and in both regions the political parties had to address the issue. Nevertheless, the dynamics of both campaigns diverged on many other things. One of the explanations for these differences is the difference in the party landscapes of both regions.

6.1.1 - The Flemish campaign from the parties' perspective

The 2009 regional campaign occurred at a time when the Flemish party landscape had undergone significant changes, especially on the right. One of the causes for this increased tension on the right was the fact that it had become quite crowded in recent years. To illustrate this, Table 6-1 presents the aggregate vote shares for the various parties in the previous regional elections (2004), federal elections (2007) and finally the 2009 regional elections.

Party	2004	2007	2009
Christian Democrats (CD&V)	<i>26.1</i>	<i>29.6</i>	<i>22.9</i>
Greens (Groen!)	7.6	6.3	6.8
Flemish Nationalist (N-VA)	-	-	13.1
Social-Democrats (Sp.A)	<i>19.7</i>	<i>16.3</i>	<i>15.3</i>
Social-Progressives (SLP)	-	-	1.1
Extreme Right (VB)	24.2	19.0	15.3
Liberals (Open VLD)	19.8	18.8	15.0
Neo-Liberals (LDD)	-	6.5	7.6
Extreme Left (PvdA)	0.6	0.6	1.0
Other	2.0	2.9	1.9

Table 6-1: Election results for 2004 regional elections, 2007 federal elections (Chamber), and 2009.

The table shows the expansion of the Flemish party landscape. In 2004, only 5 parties managed to get elected representatives in parliament (the extreme left was, and still is, under the voting threshold). The figures in italics indicate cartel scores: in 2004 and 2007 the Christian-Democrats formed a cartel with the Flemish Nationalists, and the Social-Democrats formed a cartel with the Social-Progressives. In the 2007 elections, a new party emerged and immediately obtained a substantial amount of votes: the Neo-Liberal faction. The Neo-Liberal party had come into existence after its leader, Jean-Marie Dedecker, had been evicted from the Liberal party. In 2009, no less than 8 parties had a reasonable chance of getting elected representatives in parties, and of those only the Social-Progressives failed to do so. Table 6-1 shows several other long-term tendencies that are noteworthy: the Christian-Democrats were doing quite well, and though they scored lower in 2009 this score was obtained without the cartel. Its former cartel partner managed a score of 13.1 per cent. After the elections, both former cartel partners were designated as the victors of the 2009 elections. After the 2007 elections, the cartel split during the subsequent federal governmental negotiations, but it seems neither of the two parties was punished for this. Meanwhile, the Liberals, Extreme Right and Social-Democrats were in decline. Up until 2004 the Liberals and Social-Democrats formed the regional government coalition; at the federal level their coalition was broken in 2007. Finally, the Neo-Liberal faction increased its vote share between 2007 and 2009, but because polls had given them a higher vote share in the run up to the 2009 elections, this was still deemed a defeat.

Table 6-1 only looks at the inter-election changes, but for this dissertation the intra-campaign changes during the 2009 campaign are of more interest. The PVPS2009 survey, being a panel survey, allows us to look at the relative vote shares of the Flemish parties at three points

throughout the campaign. Table 6-2 shows the aggregated vote shares for each of the PVPS2009 waves, as well as the reported voting behavior of the sample in 2007. We weight the data for various socio-demographic variables, as well as previous voting behavior. The last column contains the actual election results for reference.

Party	2007	W1	W2	W3	2009
Christian Democrats (CD&V)	27.8	21.1	20.6	21.6	22.9
Greens (Groen!)	6.0	5.7	7.3	6.3	6.8
Flemish Nationalist (N-VA)	-	5.7	8.5	12.5	13.1
Social-Democrats (Sp.A)	14.6	16.2	13.9	13.6	15.3
Social-Progressives (SLP)	-	0.5	1.0	1.2	1.1
Extreme Right (VB)	18.1	13.0	12.6	14.5	15.3
Liberals (Open VLD)	17.4	16.1	16.3	14.0	15.0
Neo-Liberals (LDD)	5.7	11.2	12.6	7.3	7.6
Extreme Left (PvdA)	0.7	0.6	0.5	0.5	1.0
Empty vote	4.4	6.4	4.4	4.5	-
Did not / Will not vote	2.9	0.5	0.9	2.2	-
Refusal / Other / Do not Know	2.4	3.2	1.4	1.9	1.9

Table 6-2: Aggregate vote shares for Flemish parties in PVPS dataset (N=827).

The big aggregate shifts are situated on the right, and in the short campaign. In the long campaign (W1-W2), aggregate shifts are relatively small. Sp.a lost votes, whereas the other parties remained relatively stable. Various parties did not lose votes between W1 and W2, but were still down compared to the 2007 elections: especially the extreme-right was down, whereas the LDD had managed to double in size compared to its surprise victory in 2007. Nevertheless, all in all the long campaign brought about little aggregate shifts. This changed in the short campaign. According to the PVPS data, the Flemish Nationalists managed to further increase their vote share from 8 per cent to 12 per cent during the short campaign; the Neo-Liberals and Liberals both suffered an electoral defeat, dropping 4 per cent and 2 per cent respectively. Whereas the inter-campaign shifts gave rather stable scores for the Neo-Liberals between 2007 and 2009, the intra-campaign shifts show that the Neo-Liberals actually *lost* a lot of votes during the short campaign. The Extreme Right party did not lose much during this period, so their losses should be considered long-term. On the left, intra campaign shifts are very modest even in the short campaign – the Greens and Extreme Left remained constant. The Christian Democrats remained the largest faction, and saw little or no aggregated shifts.

With regards to heuristic use we already saw in Chapter 5 that aggregated data can mask underlying shifts. This also holds for vote shares. Table 6-3, taken from (Walgrave et al.,

2010), shows the amount of PVPS respondents that switched preference between waves 1 and 3 of the PVPS survey.

	Christian Democrats	Greens	Flemish Nationalists	Social-Democrats	Extreme Right	Liberals	Neo-Liberals
Christian Democrats		↗ 5 2 ✓	↗ 17 5 ✓	↗ 4 ✓	↗ 5 4 ✓	↗ 9 13 ✓	↗ 0 10 ✓
Greens	↗ 2 5 ✓		↗ 6 0 ✓	↗ 4 13 ✓	↗ 0 ✓	↗ 6 3 ✓	↗ 0 3 ✓
Flemish Nationalists	↗ 5 17 ✓	↗ 0 6 ✓		↗ 2 10 ✓	↗ 5 8 ✓	↗ 1 13 ✓	↗ 1 21 ✓
Socialists	↗ 7 ✓	↗ 13 4 ✓	↗ 10 2 ✓		↗ 4 0 ✓	↗ 3 6 ✓	↗ 0 3 ✓
Extreme Right	↗ 4 5 ✓	↗ 0 0 ✓	↗ 8 5 ✓	↗ 0 4 ✓		↗ 6 6 ✓	↗ 5 16 ✓
Liberals	↗ 13 9 ✓	↗ 3 6 ✓	↗ 13 1 ✓	↗ 6 3 ✓	↗ 6 6 ✓		↗ 5 5 ✓
Neo-Liberals	↗ 1 0 ✓	↗ 3 ✓	↗ 21 1 ✓	↗ 3 0 ✓	↗ 16 5 ✓	↗ 5 5 ✓	

Table 6-3: Amount of PVPS respondents switching between Flemish parties between waves 1 and 3 (Source: Walgrave, Lefevere and Hooghe, 2010).

The above table shows that the party of Jean-Marie Dedecker was losing voters to almost all parties. They lost to the Christian Democrats, the Extreme right and most notably the Flemish Nationalists. The Liberals lost to the Flemish nationalists, and slightly to the Christian Democrats. The Flemish nationalists attracted voters from all parties, while losing almost none. The Social-Democrats lost to both the Greens and Flemish Nationalists. Though the aggregated data gave little to no changes for the Christian-Democrats, the panel data reveals that they were actually losing a lot of voters to the Flemish Nationalists, just like everyone else. However, the influx from the Neo-Liberals largely compensated for this. The Neo-Liberals clearly lost during the campaign, as did the Liberals to a lesser extent: they were both in bad shape. Two campaign events can partially explain this: the private investigator (PI) affair, and the affair Dirk Vijnck (DV).

The mass media got wind of the PI affair on April 17, 2009. The leader of the Neo-Liberal party, Jean-Marie Dedecker, had hired a PI to investigate one of the leaders of the Liberal party, Karel De Gucht. Both politicians had a deep grudge against one another: De Gucht had been one of the driving forces behind Dedeckers' expulsion from the Liberal party. The PI had to investigate De Gucht, his son, and his wife's involvement in a sale and lease back operation during the time the Liberals were in government with the Social-Democrats. When the news hit the front pages, it was almost universally condemned as a hit below the belt and

generally a bridge too far⁶⁶. Adding insult to injury, the PI had indirectly been paid by taxpayers' money. Dedecker had transferred party funds to one of his own companies in order to pay the PI. He suddenly found himself isolated, with all the other parties uttering negative comments on his way of doing things.

The PI affair led to the DV affair. On April 20, 2009 the unknown Neo-Liberal MP Dirk Vijnck left the Neo-Liberals and joined the Liberal party because of the PI affair⁶⁷. Dedecker was star struck, the Liberals were rejoicing. Bart Somers, the party president, staged a press conference to present their newly attained MP. Thus far, the Neo-Liberals were clearly in a negative spiral, whereas the Liberals were going strong: they had been the victim in the PI affair, and now scored a symbolic victory by stealing one of Dedeckers' MPs. Making things worse for the Neo-Liberals was the fact that losing Vijnck decreased their parliamentary faction from 5 members to 4, which lowered their subsidy substantially (by 250.000 euro). The DV affair only became an affair on May 4, 2009. Vijnck decided to *switch back to the Neo-Liberal party*. This not only earned him the title of most opportunistic politician of 2009, it was also a marked defeat for the Liberals, and Bart Somers in particular. But in addition to this, Dedecker got his hands on the secret contract that was signed by Vijnck and Somers at the time Vijnck went to the Liberals⁶⁸. The DV affair did not help Dedecker, but it definitely hurt the Liberals. Bart Somers was quickly replaced as forerunner by Dirk Van Mechelen. However, the damage had been done: "*The brand Open VLD is freefalling*" (De Standaard, May 12, 2009).

The Flemish Nationalists, on the other hand, were happily attracting voters from all parties – but (Neo-) Liberal ones in particular (see Table 6-3). Three possible reasons can explain their success: their tough stance during the 2007 federal government negotiations, their leader Bart De Wever, and a few missteps by the other parties. The fact that they took a tough stance

⁶⁶ "*Repugnant and frightening*" (Johan Vandelanotte, Socialists), "*Gestapo practices.*" (Karel De Gucht, Liberals).

⁶⁷ "*You do not hire a private investigator as a liberal. I hope to have rejoined a true liberal party now*" (Dirk Vijnck in De Standaard of April 21, 2009)

⁶⁸ This contract stipulated that Vijnck would be guaranteed a job until 2015, receiving the wage of an MP or a member of a cabinet.

during the state reform negotiations was appreciated by their core electorate; it ultimately led to the dismantling of the cartel with the Christian Democrats⁶⁹. Second, before and during the 2009 campaign Bart Dewever had been rising in popularity. His appearance on the popular quiz *'De Slimste Mens'* (loosely translated: 'the smartest human') had put him on the map for a lot of voters. In a poll the day before the elections, he obtained the 4th place in the politician pop-poll, after Guy Verhofstadt (Liberals), Jean-Luc Dehaene (Christian-Democrats), and Kris Peeters (Christian Democrats). As we will show later on, in the PVPS data voters often explicitly refer to him as a heuristic to vote for the party. The other parties also helped the Flemish Nationalists, albeit unwillingly. Various politicians from other parties created feasible opportunities for the party to position itself at center stage⁷⁰.

The Christian-Democrats remained the biggest party, and Kris Peeters was designated as the big victor. Again, a key factor is that the losses to the Flemish Nationalists were compensated by a large influx of (Neo-) Liberal voters. The Social-Democrats suffered a defeat, but this appears to be external to the 2009 campaign: the party had been on the decline since 2004, and the intra-campaign changes do not indicate that the party lost all that much, but they did not manage to attract voters either. Finally, the Greens only attracted voters from the Social-Democrats, but did not manage a big step forward due to losses to the Flemish Nationalists. Given that the Walloon Greens were the big victors in Wallonia; this again shows just how separate the two elections are.

⁶⁹ Who, surprisingly, were not punished for their more compromising stance on the same issue. The reason for this is probably the simple fact that the regional campaign leader, Kris Peeters, had stayed well clear from the federal troubles.

⁷⁰ First, Karel De Gucht (Liberals) made a slip when he stated that the Flemish Nationalists were ideologically closer to the Liberals than the Social-Democrats were. Many opinion makers signaled this to be a sign that the Liberals were hoping to form a government with the Flemish Nationalists. As such, a vote for the Flemish Nationalists would not be in vain. In a reaction to this, Frank Vandenbroucke (Social-Democrats) launched an attack on the Flemish Nationalists, effectively positioning them in the middle of the debate. Finally, a few days before Election Day, Jean-Luc Dehaene urged voters *'not to vote for small parties'* because it would lead to a fragmented party landscape. Naturally, Bart De Wever was eager to jump at the opportunity: he accused the Christian-Democrats of being patronizing to the voters.

Media visibility can play a substantial role in winning or losing elections. If voters do not know who you are they are unlikely to vote for you. Furthermore, we expect that party visibility will prime voters to use the party heuristic when deciding which party to vote for. Fortunately, in the Content2009 dataset separate ‘party’ measures were included, which indicate the times a party was mentioned in addition to mentions of party politicians. Combining these two measures gives us an indication of the relative visibility of the parties during the campaign. Table 6-4 gives an overview of the absolute amount of party mentions and the corresponding percentages. We then compare these percentages to the vote shares of the parties to get an idea of the media (dis)advantage for each party.

Party	# mentions	% mentions	% votes in 2009
Christian-Democrats (CD&v)	3838	27.1	22.9
Greens (Groen!)	810	5.7	6.8
Flemish-Nationalists (N-VA)	967	6.8	13.1
Social-Democrats (Sp.A)	2495	17.6	15.3
Social-Progressives (SLP)	329	2.3	1.0
Liberals (Open VLD)	3646	25.7	15.0
Neo-Liberals (LDD)	1315	9.3	7.6
Extreme Left (PvdA)	762	5.4	15.3
Total	14162	100.0	

Table 6-4: Media visibility and vote shares of the Flemish parties.

The Liberals and Christian-Democrats have high media visibility when we compare it with their final electoral result in 2009. For most of the other parties, media visibility is proportional to the ultimate electoral result, with two exceptions: the Flemish Nationalists and the Extreme Right. Especially the Extreme Right has to deal with a very low visibility compared to its electoral share, but this is a traditional finding in Flemish data (Van Aelst, 2006; Walgrave & Deswert, 2004). The Liberals and Christian-Democrats combined account for over 50 per cent of the party mentions in the mass media during the 2009 campaign; with the Social-Democrats included these three parties account for 70 per cent of the party mentions in the mass media. Thus, the traditional parties do have a marked advantage here.

Again, the reason we focus on party visibility is the expectation that this will prime their respective electorates to use the party heuristic. We now turn to two other information types that are relevant for, and thus likely to prime, heuristics: politicians and issues.

6.1.2 - The politicians of the Flemish regional campaign

In total, the Flemish newspaper codes in the Content2009 dataset contain mentions of 538 unique Flemish politicians. Naturally, not all politicians are given equal attention: the parties opted to focus on a select few politicians in their own communications, in the hopes that the mass media would follow suit (Lefevere & Dandoy, 2010). Table 6-5 shows the 20 politicians with the most references for the entire coded period in the Content2009 dataset (February 21st until June 6th). We present the absolute amount of mentions (weighted), the per cent of mentions for that politician in *all* articles and the per cent of mentions in *campaign* articles.

Politician	Party	Amount of mentions	% mentions in all articles	% mentions in campaign articles
Peeters Kris	Christian-Democrats	866	5.1%	5.8%
Van Rompuy Herman	Christian-Democrats	802	4.7%	4.3%
Dedecker Jean-Marie	Neo-Liberals	788	4.6%	5.6%
Leterme Yves	Christian-Democrats	773	4.5%	3.7%
Verhofstadt Guy	Liberals	762	4.4%	4.7%
De Gucht Karel	Liberals	753	4.4%	3.4%
Vandenbroucke Frank	Socialists	639	3.7%	3.3%
Somers Bart	Liberals	461	2.7%	4.0%
Van Mechelen Dirk	Liberals	437	2.6%	3.5%
Dehaene Jean-Luc	Christian-Democrats	399	2.3%	2.4%
Vandeurzen Jo	Christian-Democrats	379	2.2%	1.3%
De Wever Bart	Flemish Nationalists	367	2.1%	3.1%
Van Brempt Kathleen	Socialists	309	1.8%	1.6%
De Clerck Stefaan	Christian-Democrats	291	1.7%	0.5%
Vijnck Dirk	Neo-Liberals	277	1.6%	2.2%
Anciaux Bert	Socialists	245	1.4%	1.4%
Tommelein Bart	Liberals	240	1.4%	1.0%
De Padt Guido	Liberals	239	1.4%	0.4%
Gennez Caroline	Socialists	309	1.3%	2.2%
Ceysens Patricia	Liberals	202	1.2%	0.7%

Table 6-5: Flemish party politicians most often mentioned in Flemish newspapers (total amount of mentions in all articles: 17.135. In campaign articles: 7.712).

While no one politician really dominates, 17 of them belong to the three traditional parties. As expected, the leader of the largest party takes the crown; as the absolute measure indicates Kris Peeters (Christian Democrats) had a slight visibility advantage compared to all other politicians. The difference with Prime Minister Herman Van Rompuy is slight, but increases as we only take campaign articles into account. The fact that he was the leading figure is

probably enhanced by the so-called chancellors' bonus because he was the incumbent government leader (Walgrave & De Swert, 2002, 2005a). The smaller parties such as the Greens and Social-Progressives had to endure low visibility in the mass media: neither of them is represented in the list. The Extreme Right, though it represents a relatively large share of the electorate, is not represented either; this is traditionally so in Flemish media (Walgrave & Deswert, 2004). The Neo-Liberal party seems overrepresented: with Dedecker it has a very highly visible politician. Other than the visibility caused by the PI and DV affairs, two plausible explanations can be found. One, the Neo-Liberal party is in essence a one-man party, and journalists routinely focus on the person of Dedecker. Second, in the polls at the start of the campaign the party sometimes received scores upwards of 10 per cent, which may have caused journalists to spend more time covering the party. Various politicians who were not running in the regional elections were also highly visible (e.g. Guy Verhofstadt and Jean-Luc Dehaene, who were running in the EP elections). Furthermore, several politicians who were mainly active at the federal level are highly visible as well: Herman Van Rompuy (prime minister at that time), Stefaan De Clerck (federal minister) and Yves Leterme (the former federal prime minister). If we compare the percentages in the last two columns, it becomes clear that some of these politicians enjoyed some visibility in the general coverage, but less when the actual campaign was being discussed. For example, Herman Van Rompuy was the second most visible politician in the general coverage, but drops to 6th place in the campaign coverage. The reason we include this measure is that for voters, the extent to which a politician is linked to the regional elections can constitute an important clue to assess applicability of that politician to the decision to be made (H3).

Not all attention is good attention. Tone measures included in the Content2009 dataset give an idea of the overall evaluation of the politicians. We focus on the party leaders mentioned in the previous paragraph, and a few other highly visible candidates. Figure 6-1 plots the mean tone for these politicians. For each mention of a politician, a coder had to indicate whether the overall tone was positive (+1), neutral (0) or negative (-1). By drawing the mean we can get an idea of the overall tone: negative means indicate overall negative tone, positive means indicate overall positive tone.

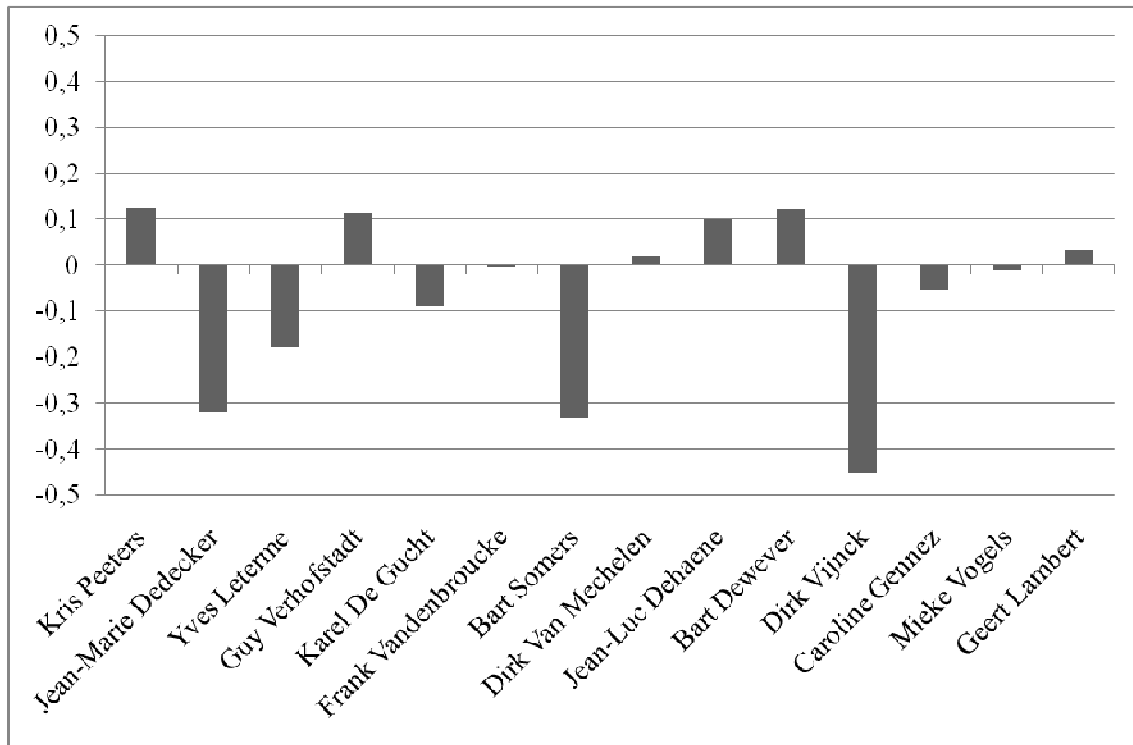


Figure 6-1: Overall tone for key Flemish politicians.

The PI and DV affairs have a clear negative impact upon all those involved. Vijnck has the lowest score, but was generally less visible – and not a leading candidate by any means. The implications for Dedecker (-0.3) and Somers (-0.3) were far greater; Karel de Gucht suffered some damage but it is only small compared to the negative coverage Somers and Dedecker had to endure. Positive tone is also present, but negative tone clearly dominates: mudslinging attracts media attention. Yves Leterme (Christian-Democrats), the former prime minister and victor in the 2007 elections was often mentioned in a negative way as well. The European heavyweights, Guy Verhofstadt (Liberals) and Jean-Luc Dehaene (Christian-Democrats) enjoyed relatively positive coverage, as did Kris Peeters. For Guy Verhofstadt this would suggest that he managed to steer clear from the affairs in which his party was entangled at the time.

6.1.3 - The issues of the Flemish regional campaign

The economy was an overarching issue during the entire campaign period. The impact of the economic crisis affected the debates in the political sphere: most parties focused communications on economic policy. For example, the Greens who traditionally focus on softer issues such as the environment and social policy now ran a campaign that focused on the ‘Green economy’. The Liberals traditionally focused on the economy, but did so even more in the 2009 campaign. Ads ran by the party in the last week of the campaign invariably started with sentences such as “*The crisis is hitting hard. ...*” (Ad featuring Guy Verhofstadt), “*The Crisis is causing uncertainty. ...*” (Ad featuring Dirk Van Mechelen), and so on. The Christian-Democrats campaigned with the slogan “*Strong in Difficult Times*”, clearly referencing to the crisis. The Social-Democrats warned voters about the upcoming cutbacks if a right-wing government was to come into power with the slogan “*Now more than ever*”. Again, the underlying reasoning being that the crisis would cause such cutbacks. Even the Flemish Nationalists included the crisis in their slogan, though the focus was still predominantly on an independent Flanders: “*Stronger Flanders, less Crisis*”. Next to the economy, various other issues got attention. The Content2009 dataset allows us to look at the predominance of a variety of issues. Table 6-6 presents the predominance of 20 issues during the campaign, both for general coverage and campaign-specific coverage.

Issue	% mentions general coverage	% mentions campaign coverage
Economy and Financial Crisis	24.1%	21.9%
Crime	17.2%	3.1%
Employment	10.1%	10.5%
Health care	9.2%	3.7%
Mobility	8.1%	5.5%
Operation of Justice, Police & Army	8.1%	3.2%
Political Culture & Scandals	6.8%	21.7%
Culture	5.9%	2.6%
Education	5.9%	3.5%
Environment & Energy	5.7%	6.9%
Social Policy	5.5%	8.1%
International Relations	4.2%	1.9%
Other	4.0%	3.1%
Communitarian	3.4%	15.6%
Europe	2.5%	2.5%
Asylum seekers & Immigrants	2.4%	5.7%
Taxes	1.8%	3.8%
Budget	1.8%	5.3%
Religion	1.8%	0.7%
Housing	1.3%	0.8%
N	19185	2157

Table 6-6: Mentioning of issues in Flemish newspapers, for general and regional campaign coverage.

The economy was the dominant issue in both general coverage (24%) and the campaign (22%). This finding is further enhanced by the amount of references to employment (10% and 11%), an issue that is closely linked to the state of the economy. While other issues were certainly present, the state of the economy was an overarching issue in the Flemish news coverage, and constituted an important framework for the general campaign. For a variety of other issues large gaps between the general and campaign coverage are noticeable; crime, quite a salient issue in the general coverage, was almost absent in the regional campaign coverage. On the other hand the communitarian troubles were the third largest issue in the campaign-specific coverage, whereas they ranked among the low salience issues if we look at the general coverage. This high salience of the communitarian issue in the regional campaign coverage could partially explain the success of the Flemish Nationalists. Finally, the DV and PI affairs added to the campaign presence of both political culture and political scandals. In the Flemish regional campaign coverage, this issue ranked second and was preceded only by the economy. Finally, it is noteworthy that education (3%) and mobility (5%), both key regional policy domains, were almost absent in the campaign coverage. This again suggests that the key issue was the economy, and all other issues had to take a step back.

Summing up, the Flemish electoral campaign centered on a few key issues (the economy in particular), politicians (Kris Peeters and Jean-Marie Dedecker were especially visible candidates), and two affairs. Naturally, this overview does not cover everything that happened in the campaign, but it does capture the important events and issues that had the greatest potential priming effect on voters' heuristic use.

6.2 The Walloon regional campaign

As we stated earlier, the economic crisis was a dominant issue. Because it was so dominant, almost all the parties adopted their discourse and general campaign message to at least partially address the issue. However, in Wallonia an ongoing struggle between the Social-Democratic party PS (*Parti Socialiste*) and the Liberal party MR (*Mouvement Réformateur*) became the other key factor in the campaign. The underlying cause was the fight for the market leadership in Wallonia which had been going on for several years. The relationship between the two leaders, Didier Reynders (Liberals) and Elio Di Rupo (Socialists) was unfriendly at the start of the campaign. During the campaign, it further deteriorated. In the Flemish campaign, when Liberals and Neo-Liberals were busy hurting one another, a third party (Flemish Nationalists) ended up benefiting. In Wallonia, the Greens were benefitting from the mudslinging between Liberals and Social-Democrats. Meanwhile, the Christian-Democrats did not manage to attract many voters, which may be due to the lack of visibility they received.

6.2.1 - The campaign from the parties' perspective

Table 6-7 shows the aggregate vote shares for the parties for the last regional elections (2004), federal elections (2007) and the 2009 regional elections.

Party	2004	2007	2009
Christian Democrats (CdH)	17.6	15.8	16.1
Greens (Ecolo)	8.5	12.8	18.5
Social-Democrats (PS)	36.9	29.5	32.8
Liberals (MR)	24.3	31.2	23.4
Extreme Right (FN)	8.1	5.6	2.9
Other	4.6	5.1	6.3

Table 6-7: Election results for 2004 regional elections, 2007 federal elections (Chamber), and 2009.

In 2004, the PS was still the undisputed market leader in the Walloon party landscape, with a score of nearly 37 per cent of the electorate. The Greens were still recovering from an

electoral defeat in 2003 after their participation in the federal government coalition. The Liberals were now a significant political force, with 24 per cent of the electorate. In 2007 the dynamics of the Walloon party landscape were shaken; for the first time ever the PS was no longer the biggest party in Wallonia. The crown was claimed by the MR, led by Didier Reynders. The Social-Democratic defeat of 2007 was caused by a series of scandals concerning corrupt party members at various levels, something that would plague the party in the 2009 campaign as well. During the 2007 campaign, the Liberals – who were in a government coalition with the Social-Democrats – started criticizing the PS corruption, essentially stating that the reason Wallonia was doing bad was the PS dominance. It is during this campaign that relations between the two parties took a turn for the worse.

The relation between the Liberals and Social-Democrats continued to deteriorate throughout 2007 and 2008⁷¹. As the 2009 campaign started, opinion makers were predicting that after the federal level, MR would overtake PS at the regional level as well⁷². The bickering between the parties quickly increased: for example, Didier Reynders called the PS *infréquentable* among other things, upon which the PS threatened to leave the federal government. Ultimately this resulted in the two party presidents stating that they would never enter government with the other (Huis Clos, 23rd of May). Meanwhile, the Greens were soaring high in the polls; at the start of the campaign they were attributed 19.5 per cent of the vote (Vers L’Avenir, 17th of March). Their leader Jean-Michel Javaux did not mingle in the mudslinging based on current and past affairs, instead focusing on future prospects of change⁷³. Throughout the Walloon campaign, the rise of the Greens was an important factor

⁷¹ After the 2007 elections the Liberal leader, Didier Reynders, was appointed as *informateur*, an important symbolic feat. However, after months of unsuccessful negotiating, the Social-Democrats ultimately joined the federal impromptu government. The Walloon Liberals had been trying to block this from the get-go.

⁷² Note that in a poll released on the 17th of March, PS was attributed 29 per cent, losing 7 per cent but retaining market leadership. MR only obtained 25 per cent. Nevertheless, the battle between MR and PS was generally considered to be the most important campaign event. A week earlier, Di Rupo had announced he would be the *regional* frontman – and not the European one. This was interpreted as a clear signal that the regional market leadership was at stake, and the Social-Democrats were focusing all their assets on the regional elections (Sud Presse and RTBF, 10 March, 2009).

⁷³ Green ads featured slogans such as “*Ni à gauche, ni à droite ... En AVANT !*” (“*Not the left, not the right, but FORWARD!*”).

in the campaign as well: because PS and MR excluded cooperation amongst them, the Greens would in all likelihood become the ‘kingmaker’ after the elections. Finally, the Christian Democrats were neither gaining nor losing. Thus, in the long run the Social-Democrats were on the decline, with the Liberals trying to overtake them; the Greens were enjoying a rebound which had been going on for a longer time. And the Christian-Democrats struggled to remain in the spotlight. Given these long-term trends, the PVPS2009 data allows us to look at the strengths of the various parties at various points in the campaign. We also report the 2007 voting preference as it was given by the PVPS respondents for reference: this allows us to see which parties were up, and which parties were down at the start of the long campaign.

Party	2007	W1	W2	W3	2009
Christian Democrats (CdH)	13.3	10.3	16.9	13.5	16.1
Greens (Ecolo)	10.9	18.4	21.0	16.1	18.5
Social-Democrats (PS)	26.1	27.4	25.2	28.7	32.8
Liberals (MR)	27.0	20.4	24.8	19.7	23.4
Extreme Right (FN)	3.8	2.2	1.8	2.6	2.9
Empty vote	5.9	8.3	3.8	7.2	-
Did not / Will not vote	3.1	2.8	2.9	2.7	-
Refusal / Other / Do not Know	9.9	10.2	3.6	9.5	6.3

Table 6-8: Aggregate vote shares for Walloon parties in PVPS dataset (N=685).

The Social-Democrats had not recovered from their 2007 defeat at the start of the campaign, and continued to drop between waves 1 and 2 of the survey. Conversely, the Liberals were down as well, but gained strength over the course of the long campaign (wave 1 – 2). Possible reasons that explain this further weakening of the Social-Democrats are two political scandals that surfaced in the weeks and months prior to the campaign. A first affair was a trip by a group of MPs to the United States in the beginning of April; because it was considered a business trip it was fully paid for by taxpayers’ money. When the news broke that the MPs wives were joining them on the trip, various opinion makers voiced heavy criticism. Such an excursion during an economic crisis was not-done. It was led by José Happart, but Jean-Claude Van Cauwenberghe was undoubtedly the most hurt by the affair. A few days after their return, he was asked whether it was not a bad signal to go on such a trip in times of crisis. His answer was “*Wallonia has had trouble making ends meet in the past, and we did not get criticism then*” (Le Soir, 16th of April). The affair quickly backfired, and Di Rupo voiced heavy criticism towards Van Cauwenberghe.

However, the big affair was that of Didier Donfut. At the time the affair became public, he was the Walloon minister of Health, and third on the list of the party in the Mons-Borinage

district. At the end of April, newsmedia picked up the news that he was being questioned by the internal commission of the party with regards to overly cumulating appointments and fraud (De Morgen, 29th of April). Apparently, while he was a minister he was also earning roughly 120.000 euro each year as head of his consultancy firm. The opposition parties immediately jumped at the case, and started criticizing him and the PS in general⁷⁴. Roughly two weeks later he was forced to resign. The MR especially used the case to solidify its assertion that the PS was the cause of many wrongdoings. In the PVPS data we indeed see that three other parties managed to increase their vote shares waves 1 and 2, whereas the PS was clearly on the decline. However, the PVPS data also show a reverse movement in the short campaign (wave 2 – 3).

For example, the Christian-Democrats increased their vote share substantially between the start of the campaign and the end (wave 1 – 2), but ultimately saw a drop in the final two weeks of the campaign; this is the same fate that befell the Greens, who saw a marked drop between waves 2 and 3 of the PVPS survey. Opinion makers attributed this to a ‘rally around the flag’ movement among Social-Democratic voters at the end of the campaign. Those voters had switched to the Greens during the campaign, but when they noticed that the PS was in trouble they ended up switching back. At the aggregate level we already find some evidence for this: the Social-Democrats lose additional voters between waves 1 and 2, but rebound in wave 3. When we looked at the net flows between the parties for the various waves, this suspicion of a last-minute shift toward the Social-Democrats is confirmed: between waves 2 and 3, the Social Democrats attracted 36 voters from the other three parties, while losing only 7. 36 per cent of the influx of voters came from the Greens, 35 from the Christian-Democrats and 24 from the Liberals. So, the Social Democrats did manage to gather an impressive amount of additional support in the final 2 weeks of the campaign. Nevertheless, they gained voters from the three other parties, so the influx came not just from the Greens. It seems that the Christian-Democrats lost a substantial amount of voters because of this as well; perhaps the battle between MR and PS was so dominant that the other parties could not put themselves in the spotlight. Table 6-9 presents the relative visibility of the various parties in the Walloon newspapers, as expressed by the per cent of party mentions and their respective vote shares in 2009.

⁷⁴ Ecolo even called for a reassembly of the parliament to investigate the affair (De Morgen, May 12th).

Party	# mentions	% of mentions	% of vote in 2009
Christian Democrats (CdH)	1922	20.9	16.1
Greens (Ecolo)	1328	14.4	18.5
Social-Democrats (PS)	3301	35.9	32.8
Liberals (MR)	2574	28.0	23.4
Extreme Right (FN)	63	0.6	2.9
Total	9188	100.0	-

Table 6-9: Media visibility and vote shares of the Walloon parties.

The two antagonists PS and MR were getting more attention than their respective vote shares, but this also holds for the Christian-Democrats who ended up losing voters at the end of the campaign. The Greens were somewhat underrepresented. Nevertheless, the relative visibility of the parties is actually quite representative of their vote shares, and over- or underrepresentation is less noticeable here than it was in the Flemish media. One further explanation for these results is government participation. PS was represented in all governments, and thus enjoyed the most media visibility. The same goes for CDH, which might explain their ‘overrepresentation’. The two other parties, MR (federal) and Ecolo (regional) were only part of the coalition at one level.

6.2.2 - The politicians of the Walloon regional campaign

In mass media coverage parties are often represented by politicians who give quotes and present the party standpoint to the public. Knowing which politicians get more visibility is important if we wish to link mass media coverage to the heuristics used by voters, because more often than not the politician heuristic is focused on specific politicians. In Table 6-10 we present the results for Walloon politicians in Walloon newspapers.

Politician	Party	Amount of mentions	% mentions in all articles	% mentions in campaign articles
Reynders Didier	Liberals	1,045	10.6%	11.0%
Di Rupo Elio	Social-Democrats	636	6.5%	9.9%
Milquet Joëlle	Christian-Democrats	561	5.7%	6.7%
Donfut Didier	Social-Democrats	307	3.1%	4.4%
Onkelinx Laurette	Social-Democrats	296	3.0%	1.7%
Demotte Rudy	Social-Democrats	268	2.7%	3.5%
Van Cauwenberghe Jean-Claude	Social-Democrats	258	2.6%	2.3%
Michel Louis	Liberals	250	2.5%	2.9%
Javaux Jean-Michel	Greens	228	2.3%	4.3%
Daerden Michel	Social-Democrats	220	2.2%	1.8%
Marcaurt Jean-Claude	Social-Democrats	213	2.2%	2.3%
Happart José	Social-Democrats	187	1.9%	1.1%
Picqué Charles	Social-Democrats	185	1.9%	2.6%
Magnette Paul	Social-Democrats	169	1.7%	1.9%
Dupont Christian	Social-Democrats	164	1.7%	1.0%
Lizin Anne-Marie	Social-Democrats	161	1.6%	1.2%
Antoine André	Christian-Democrats	155	1.6%	1.4%
Fonck Catherine	Christian-Democrats	131	1.3%	1.5%
Durant Isabelle	Greens	122	1.2%	2.2%
Kubla Serge	Liberals	120	1.2%	1.4%

Table 6-10: Walloon party politicians most often mentioned in Walloon newspapers.

More than half of the politicians in the list are Social-Democrats: the party had an extensive array of frontrunners because it participated in government at all levels. Many of the politicians in the list are (former) ministers. Within the Liberal party, almost all attention is focused on the leader Didier Reynders, who tops the list with a significant visibility gap. The fact that he combined the function of campaign leader, party leader, vice prime minister at the federal level is reflected here: he for 40% of all mentions of politicians of his party⁷⁵. Note also the similarity in his overall and campaign percentages: Reynders enjoyed both general and campaign specific visibility. Compared to the Flemish figures, Reynders was extremely visible: for example, the most visible Flemish politician, Kris Peeters, had only 5 per cent overall visibility. Comparatively, the attention for PS politicians is more spread out, though Di Rupo still has more than double the amount of mentions compared to the next Social-Democrat in the list, Didier Donfut. The scandal and his demission were heavily publicized,

⁷⁵ Of the 2612 mentions of MR politicians, 1045 (40%) are for Didier Reynders.

but as we will see not all attention is feasible. Van Cauwenberghe was featured intensively as well, but of note is the lower amount of mentions in campaign articles. The demission of Donfut arrived closer to Election Day, and was often linked to the upcoming elections as a consequence. The Christian-Democratic leader completes the top-3; behind them, there is a big gap. Surprisingly, the leader of the Greens ranks only 8th. Given that Ecolo was given such a high share of the vote in the polls, this is surprising. Again, this might be due to the fact that the battle between PS and MR dominated the mass media.

Figure 6-2 presents the average tone for the top 10 of politicians: this includes all the party presidents, as well as a variety of politicians who were involved in the affairs.

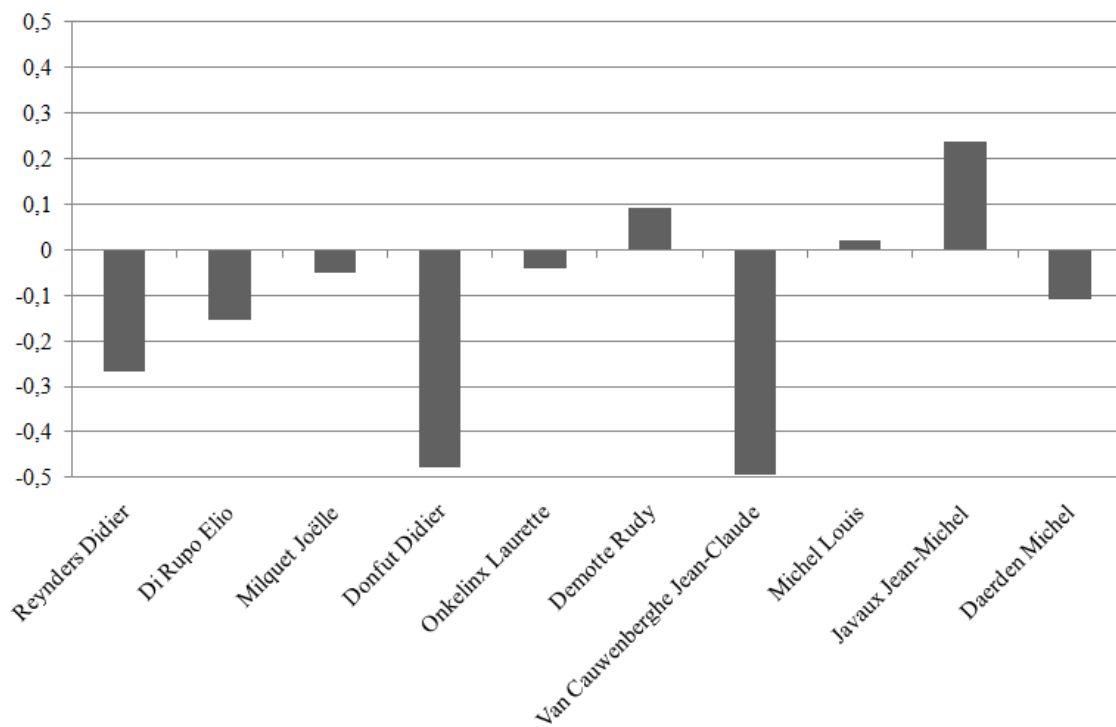


Figure 6-2: Overall tone for key Walloon politicians.

The effect of the affairs is clearly noticeable for both politicians involved, but apparently Di Rupo could limit the damage. Conversely, Reynders had the most third-most negative tone of all politicians displayed. Most probably, his frequent attacks towards the PS resulted in ‘return fire’ from PS politicians. Again, as with the Flemish news coverage, negative tone clearly dominates; the two politicians have clear positive tone. The leader of the Greens did not mingle in the mudslinging, and was not attacked much by the other parties. Furthermore,

because they were up in the polls the Greens in general enjoyed a positive tone throughout the campaign. Rudy Demotte, the Walloon regional prime minister, enjoyed positive overall tone as well. He enjoyed, as did Kris Peeters, quite a lot of visibility as the regional government leader. Furthermore, he apparently managed to steer clear of the scandals in the PS.

6.2.3 - The issues of the Walloon regional campaign

When we look at the issues that were salient in the Walloon newspapers, a lot of similarities emerge: the economy was the overall dominant issue, and this seeped through to the campaign coverage. Crime, being an issue in the regular coverage, is completely absent campaign-wise. However, the affairs were actually the dominant issue in the Walloon campaign coverage with more than a third of the campaign articles referencing either the issue of political culture or political scandals.

Issue	% mentions general coverage	% mentions campaign coverage
Asylum Seekers and Immigration	2%	2%
Budget	3%	5%
Communautarian issues	4%	13%
Crime	17%	2%
Culture	3%	2%
Economy and Financial crisis	19%	23%
Education	5%	9%
Employment	8%	11%
Environment and Energy	6%	9%
Europe	4%	6%
Health care	9%	3%
Housing	2%	4%
International relations	7%	2%
Mobility	8%	6%
Operation of Justice, Police and Army	13%	5%
Political culture and Political scandals	10%	33%
Religion	2%	2%
Social policy	3%	8%
Taxes	2%	5%
Other (spatial structuring, disasters, ...)	4%	2%
N	17424	2256

Table 6-11: Mentioning of issues in Walloon newspapers, for general and regional campaign coverage.

Similarly, the communitarian issue was one of the key issues in campaign coverage as well; the gridlock at the federal level had raised the issue salience in both regional campaigns. Nevertheless, it goes without saying that the salience of the economy and scandals dominated the Walloon campaign. This is further evidence that the Donfut and Van Cauwenberghe

affairs did become important campaign events. Again, we see that big regional competences such as education (9%) and mobility (6%) received relatively little attention: the impact of the economy, combined with hefty political struggle over the various affairs presumably forced the other issues into the background.

Thus, there exist a lot of similarities in both the general and campaign specific issue coverage across the linguistic border. However, it remains to be seen whether and how the voters used this information to reach a decision. In the next chapter, we discuss the use of the various heuristics within the Flemish and Walloon electorates. Because we expect that prior use of heuristics will impact heavily upon the priming effect of the information generated by electoral campaigns, the current chapter uncovered various interesting findings. First, the issue coverage in the two regions was largely identical: the economy dominated, both campaigns had their fair share of political scandals, and the communitarian issue was certainly present in the campaign. Second, in both campaigns the attention for politicians is spread over a large amount of politicians. That said, the Walloon media attention was decidedly more focused on a select few: Reynders and Di Rupo had a decided visibility advantage in campaign-related articles. Nevertheless, as far as the information environment goes, the overall trends seem to be similar; if our expectations are correct, their effect will be largely determined by the recipients.

Chapter 7: Priming the Process

In this chapter the key hypotheses of the dissertation will be analyzed: does campaign coverage in the media prime the decision making process of voters (RQ1)? And does the use of heuristics at the start of the campaign moderate this effect (RQ2)? Before looking at priming effects of mass media information upon heuristic use, we first look at which heuristics matter in the first place.

7.1 Heuristic use among Voters

Table 7-1 looks at the per cent of the Flemish and Walloon electorate that used a certain heuristic at the start of the campaign (W1). Because we found that our codes do indeed capture all the content of over 95 per cent of voters' causal reports, these figures give an accurate report of actual heuristic use (see also Chapter 4). The codes sum to over 100 per cent because our coding scheme allows for up to 3 different heuristics per respondent⁷⁶.

Heuristic	Flanders (N = 1071)	Wallonia (N = 939)
Endorsements	21%	17%
Government & Opposition	8%	5%
Groups	14%	16%
Habit	7%	10%
Ideology	17%	16%
Issues	27%	28%
Magnitude	2%	1%
Party	28%	32%
Politician	18%	10%

Table 7-1: Heuristic use among Flemish and Walloon voters (W1).

Heuristic use in the two electorates is largely comparable, but there are some differences in the predominance of the various heuristics. We only discuss the heuristics for which we will be looking at priming effects: politician, issues and party⁷⁷. These were among the most often

⁷⁶ In wave 1, 49% of the respondents' answers only contained 1 heuristic, 37% gave 2 heuristics and 14% gave 3. In wave 2, the amount of heuristics was somewhat lower: 57% gave only 1 heuristic, 31% gave 2, and 12% gave 3.

⁷⁷ We include the other heuristics in the table to get an idea of the relative importance of the issue, politician and party heuristics.

used heuristics at the start of the 2009 campaign. Notably the party heuristic was the most often used. Question wording probably induced a few respondents to answer using party-related considerations, thus increasing its relative share⁷⁸. Nevertheless voters essentially had to decide between *parties* and not individual candidates. It is therefore to be expected that a heuristic dealing with the actual object of choice was used by a large part of both electorates.

The politician heuristic was more important in Flanders (18%) than it was in Wallonia (10%). A plausible explanation is offered by the party landscapes: as we show later on, heuristic use differs greatly between party electorates. LDD and N-VA voters are especially prone to use the politician heuristic. Such new parties are absent in Wallonia. Note that this was the situation at the start of the 2009 campaign. In Chapter 6 we indicated that the media coverage in both Flanders and Wallonia featured a large array of politicians. Though the coverage was more thinly spread over a larger number of politicians compared to, for example, presidential elections, some politicians still had marked visibility advantages. The absolute amount of politician voters was substantially lower in Wallonia than it was in Flanders, but this does not alter our expectation of finding politician priming effects of media coverage (*H1politician* and *H1politician_i*). Issue voting (in general) was used by a quarter of the Flemish and Walloon electorate. This should not be interpreted as a sign that all these voters were thinking about specific issues when they cast their ballot. A big part of this heuristic exists of references to the general program of the party: 8% in Flanders, and 9% in Wallonia⁷⁹. Our expectation is that media coverage of the campaign further enhanced this by priming the issue heuristic among the electorates (*H1_issues* and *H1_issues_i*).

Next, we observe the aggregate evolution of the various heuristics during the campaign. Table 7-2 presents the percentages for PVPS respondents who participated in waves 1 and 2.

⁷⁸ We already discussed this and other possible explanations when we assessed question wording and inter coder reliability for the party heuristic (see page 94 and following).

⁷⁹ Though based on the actual answer these were coded as issue voting because the party program contains the policy positions of a party, we cannot rule out that some of these voters did not think about the actual program when they answered.

Heuristic	Flanders (N = 864)		Wallonia (N = 694)	
	W1	W2	W1	W2
Endorsements	20%	13%	17%	10%
Government & Opposition	8%	5%	6%	7%
Groups	14%	10%	15%	13%
Habit	7%	10%	10%	8%
Ideology	18%	13%	16%	16%
Issues	27%	30%	28%	34%
Magnitude	2%	2%	1%	1%
Party	29%	32%	34%	33%
Politician	19%	17%	10%	9%

Table 7-2: Heuristic use among Flemish / Walloon voters, for wave 1 and 2 of the PVPS survey.

Two heuristics became less used by voters in both regions over the course of the campaign: endorsements and groups. One explanation is that they were replaced by other heuristics, or lost importance and ceased to be mentioned as a result. Because of the way we measure heuristics, we cannot assess whether they in fact lost importance. We can only know that according to our measurement, they were no longer used in the decision making process. The fact that these heuristics were less used at the end of the campaign does signal that heuristic use did evolve over a relatively short period of only 3 months. Whereas endorsements and groups became less pronounced, the issue heuristic was the only one that clearly increased in importance during the campaign. Since we expect an issue priming effect, this result is promising. The changes we see in other heuristics are either small or different in the two regions. Ideology dropped with 6% in Flanders, whereas it stayed constant in Wallonia; use of the habit heuristic increased in Flanders, and dropped in Wallonia; the list goes on. This indicates that not only were the absolute starting amounts of heuristic use different between the two regions, so were changes in heuristic use as well. Though aggregate changes are relatively small, we already showed in our validity tests that aggregate change conceals a lot of change at the individual level (see page 127).

Various parties attract different types of voters; older parties may have had more time to build up a core electorate of habitual voters, whereas newer parties may have to resort to popular

politicians or issue niches. In Table 7-3⁸⁰ and Table 7-4 we examine the heuristic use among voters, per party.

Heuristic	CD&V	Groen	N-VA	Sp.A	VB	Open VLD	LDD	Overall
Endorsements	38%	3%	6%	32%	8%	25%	5%	21%
G&O	3%	11%	4%	5%	15%	4%	20%	8%
Groups	9%	3%	9%	28%	15%	19%	2%	14%
Habit	16%	1%	2%	12%	2%	6%	0%	7%
Ideology	27%	15%	16%	22%	6%	18%	8%	18%
Issues	12%	67%	29%	21%	51%	19%	28%	27%
Magnitude	1%	12%	0%	1%	0%	2%	1%	2%
Party	26%	15%	43%	21%	25%	33%	33%	28%
Politician	17%	1%	35%	10%	2%	21%	43%	18%
N	305	69	91	200	91	202	103	1061

Table 7-3: Heuristic use among Flemish voters, per party.

The last column presents the average heuristic use for the voters of the Flemish parties presented in the table. The traditional parties obviously attract most of the habitual and endorsement voters; because these parties have existed for a longer time, we can expect that their core electorates contain more voters that have been voting for them for a long time (habit), and more voters that have been advised by their parents and significant others to vote for them. Interestingly, the government parties (CD&V, Sp.A, Open VLD) score low on the G&O heuristic; Groen!, VB and especially LDD attract much more such voters. Looking at the actual reports, these parties are seen by voters as opposition parties that control and correct the majority. The discourse of VB and LDD specifically focuses on this point; VB is the stereotypical opposition party, and LDD sees itself as a ‘whipping party’. Apparently a substantial part of their voters take this into account. The predominance of economic groups within the group heuristic is reflected in the high scores for the traditional left-right parties Open VLD and Sp.A; these attract white- and blue-collar voters, respectively. The extreme right also has a substantial amount of group voters, but these references are either to ethnic (especially immigrants) or geographical groups (Flemish people). The three traditional parties again have high scores of ideological voters; liberalism, Christian-democratic values and socialism are often mentioned references. These parties have relatively well established

⁸⁰ We omit two parties (SLP and PvdA) because there were only very small amounts of respondents we would have to base our percentages upon (4 respondents for SLP, and 6 respondents for PvdA).

ideological schemata, which are apparently better known among voters. Likewise, the ecological and Flemish Nationalist ideologies score high among their respective parties.

Issue voters mostly vote for new parties; the Green party is the archetypical one-issue party, and it shows. Almost 70% of their voters decide based on issues, and almost all of them mention the environment. The other strong issue electorate is that of VB, with immigration and crime as primordial issues. The Flemish nationalist voters often focus on the communitarian issue, which is also an expected result. Lijst Dedecker also attracts many issue voters, who almost invariably mention political culture; *“for them [LDD voters], Jean-Marie Dedecker is the white knight who has to clean out the stables.”* (translated from Carl Devos, April 18th 2009⁸¹). We saw earlier in Chapter 6 that LDD became caught in a political scandal. Taking into account that roughly one fourth of the LDD voters talked about political culture at the outset of the campaign may help understand the subsequent decline of LDD. The fact that the scandal involved the parties’ leader, who was determining the voting behavior many LDD voters, probably increased this effect. The politician heuristic was used by 43 per cent of the LDD voters; *all* of them reference Jean-Marie Dedecker. The notion that LDD is a ‘one man party’ is confirmed in our data.

Several other parties also depend on politicians to attract a substantial part of their electorate; N-VA (35%), Open VLD (21%), and CD&V (17%). As we saw earlier, these parties had relatively highly visible politicians. Finally, one party has higher than average party mentions: N-VA. The party had a very favorable party image: decent, sturdy, loyal to promises made, and so on. These types of references reflected on the party as a whole, which translated into a high amount of party image codes. Finally, magnitude mattered for one party only: the Greens had been decimated in the 2003 elections, dropping below the voting threshold in all constituencies. They still floated around that threshold, and 10 per cent of their voters explicitly took this cue into consideration.

⁸¹ Opinion piece of Carl Devos: <http://www.deredactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws/archief/2.1222/politiek/1.508913>

Heuristic	PS	MR	CdH	Ecolo	Overall
Endorsements	26%	22%	19%	3%	18%
G&O	2%	4%	6%	11%	5%
Groups	27%	23%	9%	2%	17%
Habit	16%	12%	10%	0%	10%
Ideology	11%	14%	34%	13%	16%
Issues	12%	22%	14%	61%	28%
Magnitude	1%	0%	1%	2%	1%
Party	28%	27%	22%	46%	32%
Politician	8%	9%	23%	6%	10%
N	329	223	140	227	919

Table 7-4: Heuristic use among Walloon voters, per party.

The Walloon data shows very similar patterns. The traditional parties attract more endorsement and habit voters. Because they were on the political stage for a longer time, they had more time to build up a core electorate. Ecolo has high degrees of issue voters (61%) and party voters (46%). Like N-VA in Flanders, Ecolo enjoyed a very positive image among voters, which shows in the statistics for the party heuristic. The party heuristic is well-represented among all parties however, with almost a quarter of the voters using the party preference heuristic. Identical to Flanders, the left-right parties attract group voters as well; again blue- and white-collar references dominate. In Wallonia none of the parties was threatened by the voting threshold, and subsequently the magnitude heuristic was seldom used.

The main difference between Flanders and Wallonia is the difference in the politician heuristic. Across all parties the use of this heuristic is lower; the only party with a significant amount of politician heuristic voters is CDH; references are mostly spread out over Joëlle Milquet and Melchior Wathelet. In comparison to Flemish voters, Walloon voters depend far less on specific politicians to decide who to vote for. Based on our experience coding the reports, the traditional parties in both Flanders and Wallonia depended on endorsements and habitual voters. However, in Flanders these heuristics were more often accompanied by references to leading politicians of the parties, whereas these references were mostly absent among voters for traditional parties (especially MR and PS) in Wallonia. This might be an indication that the impact of the endorsement and habit heuristics is greater, but this is tentative evidence at best.

Regarding other heuristics, the differences are small. One such heuristic were the pattern is almost identical is that of the issue heuristic. The Green parties get a very high issue score (over 60 per cent), whereas the other parties have only moderate to small amounts of issue voters. MR still has some issue voters, especially on the tax issue. These results show that heuristic use differs among the party electorates: the traditional parties depend more on groups, endorsements and habit; newer parties depend on issues, politicians, or the parties' image. In the next paragraphs, we test whether mass media primed heuristic use among these different (party) electorates.

7.2 Key hypotheses

The first set of hypotheses is built upon basic priming theory: campaigns prime voters give more weight to considerations that are salient in the mass media (Druckman, 2004). Translated to our typology of heuristics, the expectation is that:

H1: Mass media information primes heuristic use among voters.

H1_i: Mass media information primes the information used by voters within the heuristic.

H1_m: Exposure to mass media information mediates the priming effect.

Put simply, we expect an overall 'big message' effect (H1); if electoral campaigns provide voters with clear clues as to which heuristics matter, voters exposed to the electoral campaign (through the mass media) will become primed to use those heuristics at the expense of other heuristics. Our data allows us to look at priming effects on the politician, party and issue heuristic:

H1politician: over the course of the campaign, voters voting for a party with highly visible politicians are more likely to use the politician heuristic compared to voters voting for a party with less visible politicians.

H1politician_i: over the course of the campaign, highly visible politicians are more likely to be used within the politician heuristic compared to less visible politicians.

H1politician_m: The politician priming effect is greater for voters with high media exposure compared to voters with low media exposure.

For the issue heuristic, our data do not allow us to discern overall ‘issue visibility’: each item that was coded received an issue code (we return to this later on). Therefore, our basic priming hypothesis states that, *ceteris paribus*, we expect the use of the issue heuristic to increase over the course of the campaign.

H_{issue}: over the course of the campaign, voters are more likely to use the issue heuristic.

Our data does allow us to look at the visibility of different specific issues. We expect that mass media will prime highly visible issues among voters (*H_{issue_i}*) and that this priming effect is moderated by exposure to the mass media (*H_{issue_m}*).

H_{issue_i}: over the course of the campaign, highly salient issues are more likely to be used within the issue heuristic compared to less salient issues.

H_{issue_m}: the issue priming effect is greater for voters with high media exposure compared to voters with low media exposure.

We cannot test the use of specific bits of information within the party heuristic, and only expect that the more parties are visible in the mass media, the more this will prime the party heuristic among their voters. Thus, we have two hypotheses regarding the party heuristic.

H_{party}: over the course of the campaign, voters voting for parties that are highly visible are more likely to use the party preference heuristic compared to voters voting for less visible parties.

H_{party_m}: The party priming effect is greater for voters with high media exposure compared to voters with low media exposure.

Whereas the above hypotheses are built upon basic priming theory, H2 focuses on the effect prior heuristic use will have on priming. In Chapter 3 we developed a second key hypothesis: prior heuristic use will moderate the priming effect. For our study, prior heuristic use is measured at the start of the campaign. The reason for this expectation is that prior heuristic use determines the way new information is evaluated. If we assume that applicability matters, prior heuristic use will determine which new information will be deemed applicable (or relevant), and which information will not. Therefore, H2 states that:

H2: The heuristics used by a voter at the start of the campaign will moderate the priming effect of the media. Voters using heuristic x will be more easily primed by information applicable to that heuristic.

A first analysis is looking at the changes in the use of heuristics throughout the campaign separately. Can media exposure and content explain changes in the decision making process, controlling for other known explaining factors? And are these changes mediated by the process that existed at the start of the campaign? After this, we add the other heuristics into the model to assess whether they affect issue, politician and party priming.

7.3 Politician priming in the 2009 elections

As we saw in the previous chapter, not all politicians were equally represented in the media coverage of the 2009 campaign: some politicians got more visibility than others. A variety of reasons can help explain why this was the case. In general, politicians that occupy, or occupied, positions higher up the hierarchical ladder of power get more attention. In Belgium, (ex-) ministers and especially the prime minister account for a large proportion of quotes on television news (Walgrave & De Swert, 2002, 2005b). The Content2009 data show that these patterns also existed in the newspaper media coverage for the 2009 campaign: though a lot of politicians managed to get some attention, most of the attention in Flanders and Wallonia focused on a select group of politicians. Furthermore, when we cumulate the amount of mentions for politicians by party, we find that the electoral strength of the parties was related to media attention for their politicians. For example the Flemish Christian-Democrats, being a large party in government, received much more attention than the Flemish Greens. Again, these trends were similar in both regions.

The way media reported on politicians was similar, but between the Flemish and Walloon electorates we found substantial differences in the use of the politician heuristic. At the aggregate level, 18 per cent of Flemish voters used the politician heuristic at the start of the campaign compared to 9 per cent of Walloon voters. Regardless of its absolute presence we expect that mass media priming (*H1politician*) will occur in both Flanders and Wallonia. To test *H1politician*, we therefore estimate a binomial logistic regression model. Before discussing the results, we discuss the construction of the (in)dependent variables; in

subsequent models the procedures will be largely identical, so this extensive discussion is a one-time occurrence. For exact question wordings for all variables, see page 290 in appendix.

The dependent variable is a dummy for using the politician heuristic (1) or not (0) at the end of the campaign. This measurement was obtained through the aforementioned causal reports in the wave 2 interview, which took place somewhere in the final two weeks of the campaign. All models we estimate contain several control variables: prior use of the politician heuristic in the first wave (1) or not (*Politician heuristic W1*), *age* (in years), *sex* (1: male, 2: female), *education* (1: lower or no education, 2: high school, unfinished, 3: high school, finished, 4: higher education). For clarity, we only report the estimates for age, sex and education in appendix since we do not have any hypotheses regarding these variables. They are only included as controls.

The variables of interest for testing *H1politician* are media content on the one hand, and exposure measures on the other. In the second wave, respondents were asked about their exposure to various types of mass media. Because the Content2009 dataset consists of newspaper article codings, exposure to *newspapers* is added. However, we do expect the content of newspapers to be somewhat similar to what is being covered on television. Furthermore, television is still the most important source of political information for most voters. Therefore, we also add exposure to *television* as a separate exposure measure. Both variables are coded on a 6-point scale, ranging from never being exposed to the media outlet to being exposed everyday of the week.

Constructing the media content variable involves making various decisions: what types of articles are relevant? Which time period should be taken into account? And finally, which specific indicators should be used? The underlying concept we want the media content variable to represent is the visibility of politicians in the news. The time period to be considered varies among campaign studies. Some studies only use a few days prior to the date the respondent was surveyed (Hopmann et al., 2010), others use periods of several weeks (Jerit et al., 2006). Furthermore, sometimes the measures of relevant content also take into account the fact that information decays after a while – by giving older information less weight in the measure. The underlying assumption is that people forget information as time passes (Lodge, Steenbergen, & Brau, 1995). Following Schrott and Meffert (1996, pp. 10-11) we develop two sets of media content measures: one takes the entire period between the first

and second interview into account, and disregards information decay (long term information, abbreviated as LTI). This measure therefore captures visibility over the course of the long campaign. The other looks at short term information⁸²: a time period of three weeks of information (21 days) prior to the second wave interviews, with a decaying function that halves the weight of the information for each day extra prior to the wave 2 interviews (short term information, abbreviated as STI). We ran separate regression models for STI and LTI content.

As for type of content, we disregard political ads and foreign news. Political ads were removed because we are mainly interested in the effect of visibility in mass media coverage, rather than visibility in parties' own communication. It should be noted that the amount of ads (92) in the dataset is very small anyway compared to the amount of articles (24501). Mixed news, which is news on another country than Belgium but in which Belgian politicians are featured extensively, is included as well as domestic news. Foreign news articles are omitted. We do not take individual newspaper exposure into account, because the Content2009 dataset does not contain data on all newspapers⁸³. We calculate the media content for all respondents by combining the content of both newspapers, resulting in an overall score of newspaper visibility. When calculating the measures, we weight the data so we take article size and placement into account. This is the same weight we used in the analyses for Chapter 6.

Finally, which indicator should be used to assess the visibility of politicians in the news? Party choice is a key variable here: it is not the mere visibility of all politicians that matters,

⁸² Contrary to Schrott and Meffert, we do not take only the day before the interview into account. Rather, we use a 21-day period with a very strong decaying function (50 per cent decay, per day). This is closer to the power decay model described by Logde, Steenbergen and Brau (1995). They found evidence that the half time is approximately a week; however this would bring the LTI and STI measures very close to each other, since the time between interviews varies greatly and is sometimes only a few weeks to begin with. Because of this, we opted to apply a stronger decay function: short term information, in our model, is really *short* term.

⁸³ For example, if a PVPS respondent indicated reading De Standaard, we do not take only newspaper articles from that newspaper into account. While this would undoubtedly improve the measure for those respondents, we only have 2 newspapers in each region: for all the respondents for which we do not have exact newspaper data we would have had to calculate proxy measures using a mix of the newspapers we did have at our disposal. We feel that this would not help much, and instead opted to calculate the measure in the same manner for all respondents.

but the visibility of politicians of the party that the respondent prefers. For example, for a CD&V voter, visibility of Sp.a politicians may matter, but it is unlikely to be a reason to vote for CD&V. This is enhanced by the way the dependent variable was collected: we asked why respondents vote for the party they currently prefer – even if politicians of other parties were highly visible, they are very unlikely to be mentioned (and subsequently coded) in the answer to such a question. If we were to include those politicians in the dataset, we would unjustly lower the odds of media content priming the wave 2 heuristic use. Hence, we use a measure in which only the politicians for the preferred party are taken into account. One indicator, *absolute visibility*, measures the absolute amount of mentions of politicians for the preferred party (because the longer a respondent is exposed to media content between waves, the more visibility cumulates), the other is a relative measure. The relative measure, *relative visibility*, ranges from 0 (corresponding with 0 per cent) to 1 (100 per cent). For example, if for a CD&V voter the newspapers within the time frame included 500 politician mentions, of which 100 were CD&V politicians, this voter would get a relative visibility score of .2. The idea behind the relative measure is that it is not merely the cumulative visibility of politicians that matters; if politicians of *other* parties are very visible as well, the effect diminishes. The relative measure operationalizes this relative visibility.

Table 7-5 reports results for three models with the LTI measures. The first model tests the direct effects of both visibility measures on the probability of using the politician heuristic. The second model adds multiplicative interaction terms for the exposure measures and media content. The expectation is that both measures enhance each other in affecting the probability of using the politician heuristic (*H1politician*). Finally, in model 3 we add a three way interaction with the use of the politician heuristic at the start of the campaign. In other words: does the set up of the decision making process at the start of the campaign mediate the priming effect (*H2*)? The reason we separate the three models is that adding multiplicative interaction terms to the model severely impacts the meaning of the constitutive terms, so they lose most if not all of their substantive meaning (Brambor, Clark, & Golder, 2006). Because we are interested in looking at the direct priming effect of media visibility, as well as the mediating impact of exposure and prior use of the politician heuristic, we estimate a series of models. All data are weighted for various socio-demographic variables and voting behavior in the 2007 elections. We only report the coefficient estimates for interactions that are of substantive interest, but all constituting interactions were included in the models (e.g.

politician heuristic wave 1 * newspapers in model 3). For readers interested in the full reported tables and log likelihood statistics, see Table E-1 and Table E-2 in appendix.

<i>Flemish respondents (N=863)</i>	Model 1 (Pseudo R²: .10)	Model 2 (Pseudo R²: .11)	Model 3 (Pseudo R²: .13)
Politician heuristic W1	1.62 (.25) ***	1.72 (.47) ***	5.70 (2.14) **
Relative visibility (LTI)	-3.71 (2.40)	-6.20 (9.97)	-7.96 (13.31)
Absolute visibility (LTI)	0.00 (.00) *	0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
Newspapers	0.02 (.06)	0.14 (.11)	0.19 (.14)
Television	-0.05 (.08)	0.04 (.15)	0.24 (.20)
Absolute visibility (LTI) * Newspapers		0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
Absolute visibility (LTI) * Television		0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
Relative visibility (LTI) * Newspapers		-1.44 (1.15)	-1.21 (1.45)
Relative visibility (LTI) * Television		1.74 (1.97)	1.79 (2.35)
Politician heuristic W1 * Absolute visibility (LTI)		0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
Politician heuristic W1 * Relative visibility (LTI)		-0.47 (4.75)	-12.32 (25.40)
Politician heuristic W1 * Absolute visibility (LTI) * Newspapers			0.00 (.00)
Politician heuristic W1 * Absolute visibility (LTI) * Television			0.00 (.00)
Politician heuristic W1 * Relative visibility (LTI) * Newspapers			-0.43 (2.23)
Politician heuristic W1 * Relative visibility (LTI) * Television			2.56 (4.52)
<i>Walloon respondents (N=692)</i>	Model 1 (Pseudo R²: .04)	Model 2 (Pseudo R²: .08)	Model 3 (Pseudo R²: .12)
Politician heuristic W1	1.12 (.41) **	0.72 (.78)	2.96 (2.71)
Relative visibility (LTI)	-0.32 (1.70)	-6.25 (5.46)	1.23 (6.48)
Absolute visibility (LTI)	0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
Newspapers	-0.04 (.08)	0.19 (.16)	0.18 (.19)
Television	0.08 (.12)	0.00 (.20)	-0.06 (.24)
Absolute visibility (LTI) * Newspapers		0.00 (.00) **	0.00 (.00) *
Absolute visibility (LTI) * Television		0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
Relative visibility (LTI) * Newspapers		1.46 (.84) +	0.94 (.83)
Relative visibility (LTI) * Television		0.32 (1.01)	-0.05 (1.10)
Politician heuristic W1 * Absolute visibility (LTI)		0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00) *
Politician heuristic W1 * Relative visibility (LTI)		4.47 (5.38)	-16.18 (16.64)
Politician heuristic W1 * Absolute visibility (LTI) * Newspapers			0.00 (.00) *
Politician heuristic W1 * Absolute visibility (LTI) * Television			0.00 (.00)
Politician heuristic W1 * Relative visibility (LTI) * Newspapers			2.30 (4.50)
Politician heuristic W1 * Relative visibility (LTI) * Television			3.91 (3.54)

Table 7-5: Priming of Politician heuristic between W1 and W2 of the PVPS survey. Statistical estimates obtained from logistic regression analysis. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. += $p \leq .10$ *= $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

If we observe model 1, the cumulative effect of politician visibility is substantiated for the Flemish respondents: the greater the absolute amount of references to party politicians in the mass media, the higher the probability that voters who have a preference for that party will rely on the politician heuristic as the campaign draws to a close – even when controlling for using the politician heuristic at the start of the campaign. Relative visibility is insignificant, as are the exposure measures. In Wallonia, neither the absolute nor the relative visibility measures have significant coefficients. Thus, the direct priming effect cannot be substantiated here.

Because we expect that exposure to mass media mediates the priming effect (*H1politician_m*), we add interaction terms between absolute / relative visibility and exposure to television and newspapers in model 2. Among Flemish voters, none of the two-way interactions are significant; this suggests that in the Flemish campaign the priming effect of the mass media was direct, and unmediated by exposure to mass media. In Wallonia, on the other hand, two of the four exposure – visibility interactions are significant; absolute visibility * newspaper exposure is highly significant ($p < .01$). Whereas we did not find a direct priming effect in Wallonia, we definitely find evidence of an indirect priming effect through media exposure. Thus, *H1politician* gets empirical support. For our hypothesis regarding the mediating role of exposure to the mass media (*H1politician_m*), we find mixed evidence. In Wallonia, exposure mattered, whereas it did not in Flanders. Because the mediating effect of mass media exposure may be lessened when we take long-term information into account, we estimated the same models with the STI indicators. Full tables are reported in Appendix (Table E-3 and Table E-4). Taking only STI into account, we found no direct or mediated priming effect in Flanders. In Wallonia, we found slight evidence but all things considered the short term effect is considerably weaker compared to the findings of Table 7-5. Overall, these results confirm the overall priming effect of the politician heuristic (*H1politician*), and provide some evidence for the mediating effect of mass media exposure (*H1politician_m*).

With regards to H2, model 2 provides some initial tests through the two way interactions between the wave 1 politician heuristic and both visibility measures. In neither Wallonia nor Flanders these interactions are significant, suggesting that contrary to what we expected, prior use of the politician heuristic does *not* mediate the priming effect. In model 3, only one of the four interaction effects in Wallonia is significant, and in Flanders none are significant. These

results strongly suggest that contrary to what we expected, prior heuristic use does not matter. Rather, what matters is visibility over a longer period of time. However, the reader should keep in mind that we are only using aggregated visibility measures at this point: we do not differentiate among specific politicians, but only compute the combined visibility for all party politicians. Using the STI indicators (tables in appendix), some of the three-way interactions with politician heuristic wave 1 were significant, but results do not point in one conclusive direction: the signs are opposite for both visibility measures, so we cannot yet draw a firm conclusion regarding H2. Thus far we found that prior heuristic use has either no (LTI) or mixed results (STI) on the priming effect.

7.3.1 - Digging deeper: within heuristic changes

Thus far, we have tested whether mass media content primes voters to use the politician heuristic. Though we have looked at changes within individual respondent's use of the politician heuristic, we have not looked at the information used within that heuristic (*H1politician_i*); in other words, did the media prime which specific politicians and candidates voters were thinking about when they used the politician heuristic? One respondent may have made a simple reference to the general politicians of a party, whereas another respondent utilized one specific individual to make his choice. As we discussed in Chapter 6, in both the Flemish and Walloon campaign coverage there existed large 'visibility gaps' between politicians. In Wallonia, Didier Reynders (MR) was by far the most visible politician, with over a 1000 (weighted) mentions. Given this, we would expect MR voters to be more likely to start mentioning him than a less visible politician. Thus far we did not differentiate among politicians. Rather, we simply cumulated the amount of mentions for all politicians of a given party. In our next analysis we take specific politician visibility into account.

To do such an analysis, multilevel analysis is needed. The unit of analysis is no longer the respondent as such, but the mentioning of a specific politician by a respondent. For example, a N-VA voter would be represented by several cases: the first indicating whether he mentioned Bart De Wever (1) or not (0), the second whether he mentioned Frieda Brepoels, and so on. To clarify what such a dataset looks like and why we need multilevel analysis, Table 7-6 shows the layout of such a dataset.

Case	Respondent	Party W2	Age	Politician	Mention W1	Mention W2	Visibility
1	1	CD&V	18	Peeters Kris	0	0	6.2
2	1	CD&V	18	Vervotte Inge	1	1	4.9
3	1	CD&V	18	Leterme Yves	0	1	0.3
4	1	CD&V	18	Thyssen Marianne	0	0	3.0
5	2	LDD	50	Dedecker J-M	0	1	1.9
6	2	LDD	50	Verstrepen Jurgen	1	1	8.0
7	3	N-VA	30	Dewever Bart	1	0	19.1
8	3	N-VA	30	Brepoels Frieda	0	1	2.5
9	4	SLP	75	Lambert Geert	1	1	0.2
10	5	Sp.a	21	Gennez Caroline	1	0	10.0
11	5	Sp.a	21	Smet Pascal	1	1	0.3
12	5	Sp.a	21	Lieten Ingrid	1	1	3.0
13	5	Sp.a	21	Tobback Louis	0	0	1.9
14	5	Sp.a	21	Janssens Patrick	0	0	0.3
15	5	Sp.a	21	Anciaux Bert	0	1	3.0
...

Table 7-6: Example of Multilevel Dataset on Politicians.

This way, we can compose a dataset that allows us to look at shifts at the individual politician level (Mention W1 -> Mention W2), and enter media visibility of each specific politician into the dataset (Visibility in the Media). However, the nature of this type of dataset would lead us to underestimate the standard errors for variables at the respondent level. Taking the example dataset of Table 7-6, notice that age is fixed for each respondent, but due to the fact that each respondent is represented by multiple cases, the standard errors of the regression coefficients for age would assume it varied over the amount of *cases*, not *respondents*. That is, if we do not use multilevel modeling techniques. Therefore, we estimate fixed effects, random intercept models using Stata's xtlogit procedure⁸⁴, using a logit link and binomial distribution. As with the prior analysis, we estimate separate models for the LTI and STI media content indicators. The dependent variable is whether a respondent mentions a politician (1) or not (0). To keep the amount of cases from exploding, we do not add all possible politicians from any given party. Instead, we only include politicians that were mentioned in either the first or second wave of the PVPS2009 dataset. Because of this, the amount of cases varies depending

⁸⁴ The xtlogit procedure was chosen because it allows the use of weights, which is necessary to correct for non-response bias in the PVPS2009 sample, and is the fastest procedure for estimating random-intercept models (and we will not be using mixed effects models). The obtained estimates were almost identical to those obtained by xtmelogit and gllamm, and substantive conclusions remained unaltered when we estimated some models with those procedures.

on the party the respondent chose: if s(he) is an N-VA voter, he is represented in the dataset by two cases, one for mentioning Bart Dewever and one for mentioning Frieda Brepoels. If a respondent chose Sp.A, s(he) is represented by 8 cases, and so on.

We discuss the LTI measures first. Table 7-7 and Table 7-8 each report three models⁸⁵, for Flemish and Walloon respondents (full tables with all interactions are reported in appendix: Table E-5 and Table E-6). Model 1 estimates the direct priming effect of absolute and relative visibility. Model 2 adds two-way interactions, so we can get an idea of the mediating effect of mass media exposure upon the priming effect. Finally, model 3 adds three-way interactions that allow us to test H2. We add three media content variables: *absolute visibility* of the specific politician, *relative visibility* of the specific politician (compared to other politicians of the same party), and *relative visibility of party politicians* (compared to all politicians of all parties). The first variable looks at the direct effect of being mentioned a lot in the media; the second is aimed at the prominence compared to other politicians of the same party. If a politician is mentioned a lot, but so are a lot of other politicians of the same party, the odds of visibility priming voters may be lowered. Finally, the visibility of all party politicians relative to all politicians of all parties is included because we need a control measure that takes into account how visible politicians of other parties were.

⁸⁵ We do not mention the intercept-only model or the model with just the control variables, but model 1 improves the model fit significantly compared to both models.

Parameter	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Politician heuristic W1	0.37 (.33)	1.71 (.53) **	-2.43 (2.07)
Specific Politician W1	1.80 (.49) ***	2.23 (.51) ***	2.35 (.46) ***
Absolute visibility (LTI)	0.00 (.00) **	0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
Relative visibility (LTI)	7.79 (1.40) ***	4.86 (2.26) *	1.53 (2.68)
Relative visibility of party (LTI)	3.30 (2.98)	2.97 (2.97)	2.56 (3.23)
Newspapers	-0.04 (.06)	-0.30 (.13) *	-0.55 (.20) **
Television	0.00 (.08)	-0.11 (.16)	-0.18 (.20)
Relative Visibility (LTI) * Newspapers		0.18 (.29)	0.51 (.37)
Relative Visibility (LTI) * Television		0.59 (.39)	1.04 (.47) *
Absolute Visibility (LTI) * Newspapers		0.00 (.00) *	0.00 (.00) **
Absolute Visibility (LTI) * Television		0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
Politician heuristic W1 * Absolute Visibility (LTI)		0.00 (.00) *	0.01 (.00) *
Politician heuristic W1 * Relative Visibility (LTI)		-2.61 (1.33)	6.21 (4.93)
Politician heuristic W1 * Newspapers * Relative Visibility (LTI)			-1.46 (.89)
Politician heuristic W1 * Television * Relative Visibility (LTI)			-0.53 (.63)
Politician heuristic W1 * Newspapers * Absolute Visibility (LTI)			0.00 (.00)
Politician heuristic W1 * Television * Absolute Visibility (LTI)			0.00 (.00) **
<i>Random effects</i>			
Level 2 (respondent) variance	0.56 (1.18)	1.18 (2.02)	0.00 (.34)
Log likelihood	-383.665	-375.561	-362.017
N	4367/843	4367/843	4367/843

Table 7-7: Campaign priming of Politician heuristic among Flemish respondents: multilevel statistical estimates. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. * = $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

Parameter	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Politician heuristic W1	-0.63 (.98)	0.46 (1.08)	4.06 (5.81)
Specific Politician W1	3.68 (1.19) **	4.76 (1.34) ***	5.76 (1.73) **
Absolute visibility (LTI)	0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.01)	0.01 (.01)
Relative visibility (LTI)	-1.01 (1.32)	0.98 (3.29)	3.26 (3.03)
Relative visibility of party (LTI)	-3.96 (2.16)	-3.23 (2.22)	-7.00 (2.86) *
Newspapers	-0.24 (.12) *	-0.10 (.18)	-0.13 (.23)
Television	0.10 (.14)	-0.09 (.20)	-0.03 (.27)
Relative Visibility (LTI) * Newspapers		0.08 (.68)	-0.21 (.51)
Relative Visibility (LTI) * Television		-0.38 (.64)	0.48 (.65)
Absolute Visibility (LTI) * Newspapers		0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
Absolute Visibility (LTI) * Television		0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
Politician heuristic W1 * Absolute Visibility (LTI)		-0.01 (.01)	-0.05 (.04)
Politician heuristic W1 * Relative Visibility (LTI)		-1.79 (4.32)	36.19 (34.68)
Politician heuristic W1 * Newspapers * Relative Visibility (LTI)			-5.60 (5.55)
Politician heuristic W1 * Television * Relative Visibility (LTI)			-4.30 (8.18)
Politician heuristic W1 * Newspapers * Absolute Visibility (LTI)			0.01 (.01)
Politician heuristic W1 * Television * Absolute Visibility (LTI)			-0.01 (.01)
<i>Random effects</i>			
Level 2 (respondent) variance	0.23 (1.61)	0.44 (1.01)	0.00 (.18)
Log likelihood	-128.454	-124.337	-110.116
N	2258/760	2258/760	2258/760

Table 7-8: Campaign priming of Politician heuristic among Walloon respondents: multilevel statistical estimates. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. *= $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

It bears repeating that regardless of whether the priming effect is confirmed in this analysis or not, *stability* is still the strongest factor; prior politician heuristic use (Specific politician W1) at the start of the campaign is the strongest predictor in all models. Campaign effects do not occur on a blank slate. Whatever effects occur, prior attitudes are still the best predictor. This is well established in campaign effects literature, but as subsequent models will indicate, minimal effects does not mean *no* effects (Ansolabehere, 2006). Note that using the politician heuristic in wave 1 now gets an insignificant estimate, which is due to the fact that, as one would expect, the more precise predictor of mentioning a *specific* candidate is now included in the model. Nevertheless, this variable is included because in subsequent models we interact it with exposure and visibility measures to assess whether it mediates the priming effect, or not.

Model 1 presents visibility and exposure measures. Compared to the somewhat mixed results of Table 7-5, in Flanders a clear picture emerges when we use the full breath of information we have at our disposal: both visibility indicators for specific politicians increase the probability of deciding based on that politician at the end of the campaign. In Flanders, the priming of specific politicians gets empirical support. Keeping all other independents constant, both absolute and relative politician visibility increase the probability that the politician will be mentioned by voters. Conversely, in Wallonia we find no evidence of a direct or indirect priming effect. The coefficients for absolute and relative visibility are both insignificant, as are the interaction terms with exposure. In Flanders the interaction term between absolute visibility and newspaper exposure is significant, and positive: people who are more exposed to newspapers are more likely to become primed as absolute visibility of the specific politician increases. This provides evidence substantiating *H1politician_m*. Furthermore, in model 2 one interaction term between the wave 1 politician heuristic and the visibility measures is significant. Thus, model 2 provides us with some support for H2. However, model 3 shows clearer results, with one very significant interaction (Politician heuristic W1 * Television * Absolute Visibility).

Since it is of such importance to one of our central hypotheses (H2), we plotted this three way interaction, with 95 per cent confidence intervals to get an idea of the actual importance of this interaction. To keep things clear, we plotted the interaction using two graphs, always keeping the exposure level constant within the graph (resulting in a graph with very low

exposure, and very high exposure), then comparing between an individual *not* using the politician heuristic in w1 and an individual that was using the politician heuristic. The x-axis provides a range of 0 to 655 mentions, which is the maximum amount of individual mentions in the Flemish newspaper dataset.

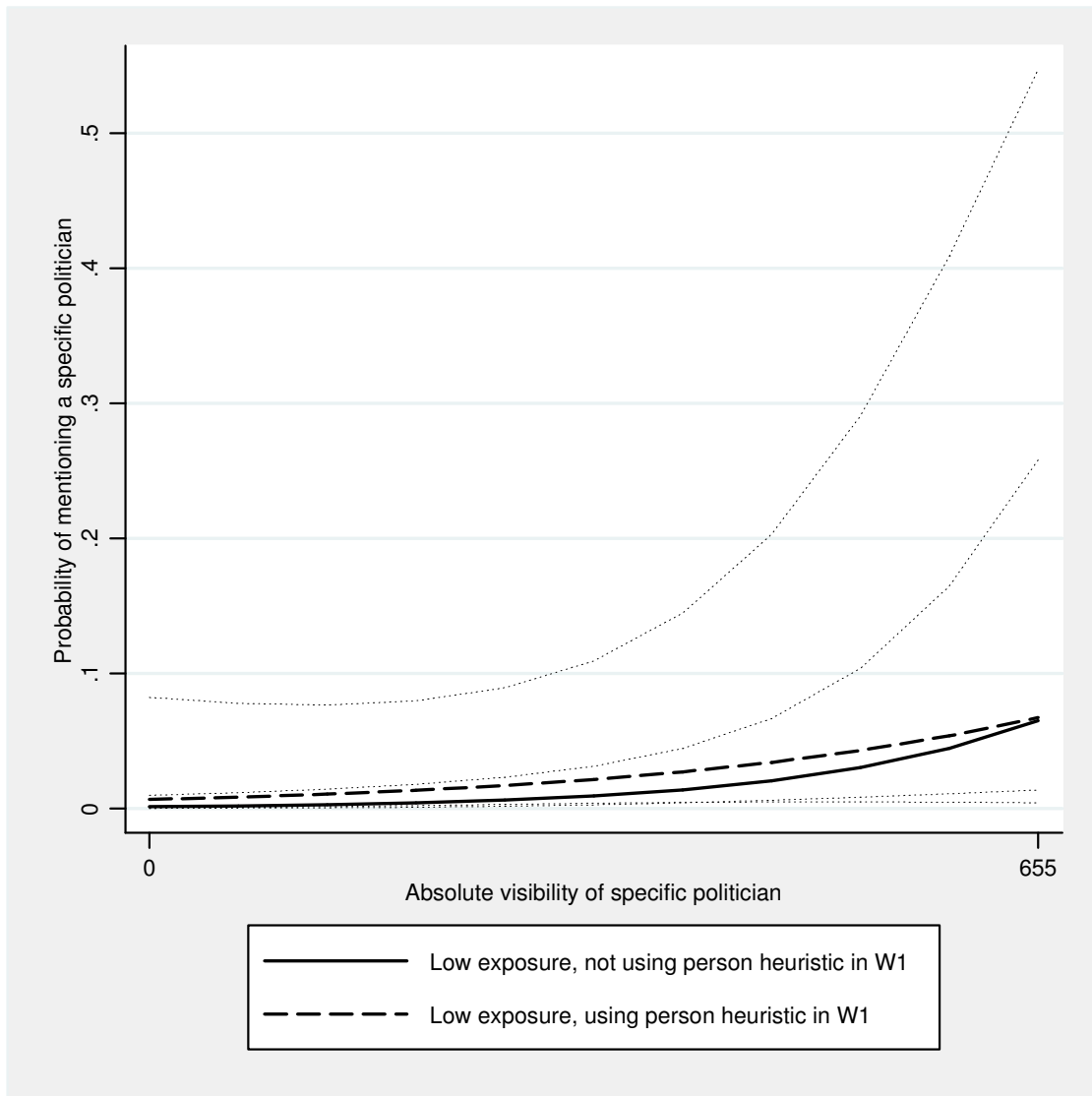


Figure 7-1: Predicted probability of mentioning a specific Politician among Flemish voters, for low degree of exposure / use of politician heuristic at the start of the campaign. Fine dotted lines indicate boundaries of the 95 per cent confidence interval.

Figure 7-1 shows that for low degrees of exposure, the mediating effect of prior heuristic use is non-existent. Both lines run follow the same path, and the confidence intervals overlap

across the entire range. What happens if someone is highly exposed to information? Figure 7-2 does the same exercise, but for a high degree of exposure to newspapers.

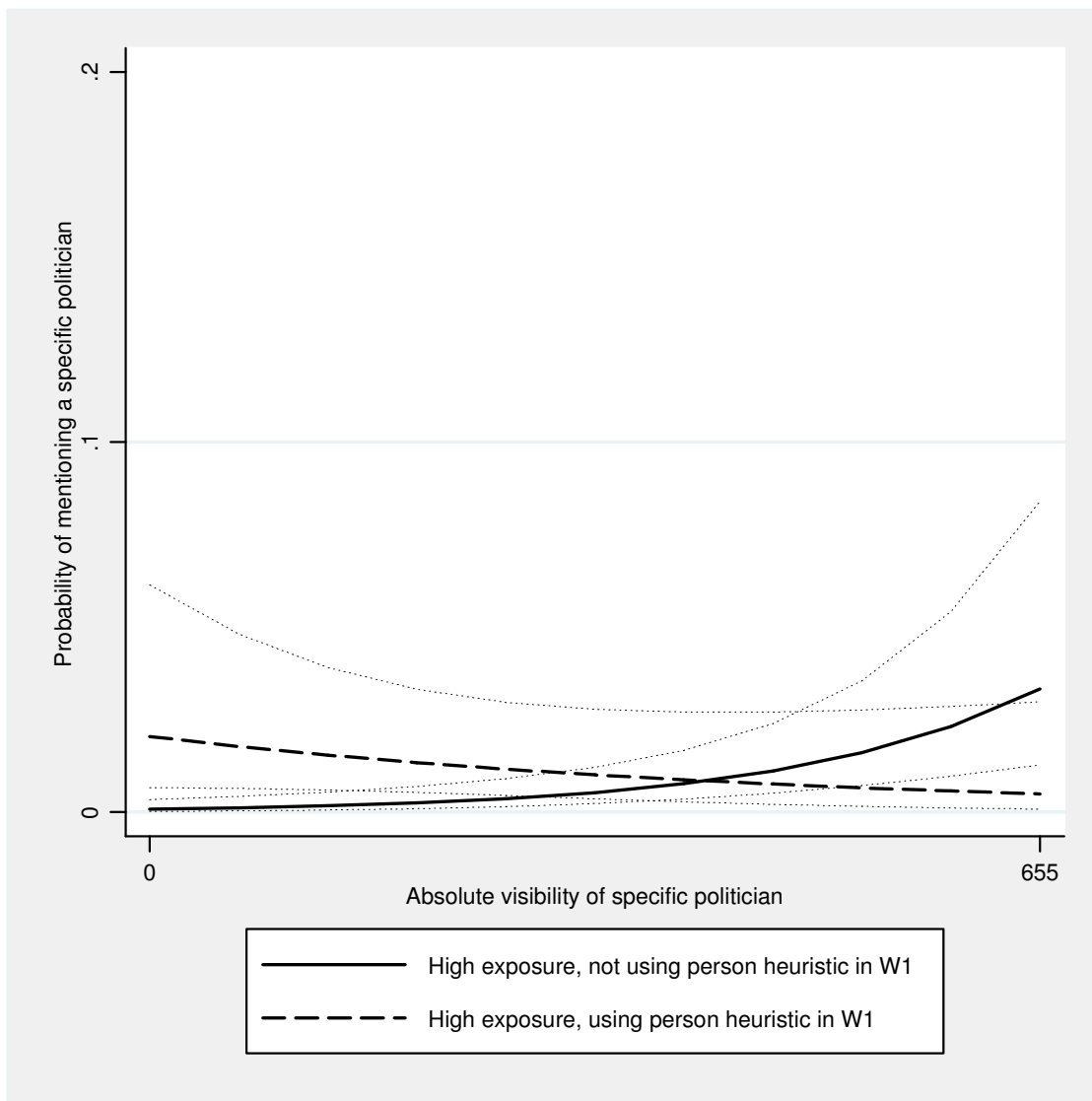


Figure 7-2: Predicted probability of mentioning a specific Politician among Flemish voters, for high degree of exposure / use of politician heuristic at the start of the campaign. Fine dotted lines indicate boundaries of the 95 per cent confidence interval.

At higher degrees of exposure, the mediating effect of prior heuristic use becomes clear. If a voter is already focused on candidates at the start of the campaign, the odds of mentioning a specific politician *decrease* as visibility increases. The two confidence intervals overlap, but the changes between low visibility and high visibility for respondents not using the politician heuristic are significant. Though the absolute changes in probability are small, the conclusion

is clear. What this graph shows is that contrary to what we expected, the priming effect is not so much determined by the pre-existing decision making structure as it is by what politicians are promoted by the mass media. If pre-existing heuristic use mattered, the lines in Figure 7-2 should run a completely different course: prior politician voters react more to visibility compared to non-politician voters. The opposite is true, which suggests that those voters, who were not basing their decision making on politicians at the start of the campaign, are likely to start deciding based on highly visible politicians.

The results in Wallonia, as we said earlier, suggest that there is almost no priming effect of the mass media whatsoever. The absolute visibility coefficient in model 1 is almost significant ($p = .068$), but none of the interaction terms is. Looking closer at the data one politician stands out: Didier Reynders. Not only is he the most often mentioned politician in the mass media, he is also relatively often mentioned by respondents in wave 1 (11 mentions). In wave 2 he is *never* mentioned again. Presumably, the negative tone surrounding him may have caused voters to not mention him when asked why they would vote for the party because he had become a reason *not* to vote for the party. In models where we exclude him, we find strong evidence for a direct priming effect of absolute visibility ($p = .004$), and slight support for identical conclusions regarding H2. We pick up this point again when we address the impact of tone on politician priming. A final explanation is that at the start of the 2009 campaign, only 9 per cent of the Walloon electorate used the politician heuristic, whereas this was 18 per cent in Flanders. Statistically speaking, in Wallonia we have to predict a dependent that is far more skewed than in Flanders, which may also partially explain the difference in results. The fact that given this we find very strong evidence in Flanders, some support in Wallonia in general ($p = .068$), and strong support if we discount Didier Reynders, leads us to the conclusion that $H1_{politician_i}$ receives overall support. At the end of the campaign, highly visible politicians are more likely to be used within the politician heuristic compared to less visible politicians. This conclusion is further strengthened by the results with STI measures, which are reported in appendix (Table E-7 and Table E-8). Using these measures, the results for Flanders with regards to $H1_{politician_i}$ remain unaltered: we find strong support for a direct priming effect. In Wallonia, relative visibility in the short term has a significant ($p < .05$) priming effect on the use of the politician heuristic. Thus, visibility in the short campaign primes politicians among voters. Using the STI indicators yields no support for H2 in Wallonia or Flanders. Given these results, it seems that support for the

mediating effect of prior heuristic use is weak for two separate elections, and two visibility measures (LTI and STI). As such, the evidence rejects H2. However, while our models do show that priming happens, and sometimes overrides prior heuristic use, they also show a remarkable resilience to priming: stability. Prior mentioning of a politician is still by far the strongest predictor in the model. Keeping all other predictors constant, the difference between mentioning a specific politician in wave 1 or not translates to a difference in predicted probability of 0.1. One needs only to compare this to the realistic probability changes caused by priming to understand that priming effects matter, but only to a certain extent. Furthermore, it should be noted that ‘becoming primed’ does not imply that the public is simply at the media’s whim. Rather, the fact that the public becomes primed to use considerations put forward by the mass media is a signal that electoral campaigns do matter for the public: people learn about who matters, and consequently use this information in their decision making.

7.3.2 - Mediating factors of politician priming

So far, our first hypothesis (*H1politician*) received support: yes, the politician heuristic does become primed in voters’ minds as the campaign progresses, and mass media visibility matters in this regard. Mere visibility alone may be enough to find support for our hypothesis, but it would serve our conclusions to look at what *other* factors may be impacting the priming effect. In Chapter 3 we developed four additional hypotheses regarding factors that we expect to in- or decrease the priming effect: *linking to elections* (H3), *tone* (H4) and *undecidedness* of voters (H5) all increase the priming effect, and exposure to *interpersonal communication* (H6) decreases the priming effect.

7.3.2.1 *Linking politicians to the elections*

Being visible in the media increases the probability of becoming more important in the voters’ mind. So far we have treated visibility as the raw amount of articles in which a politician is mentioned. However, the Content2009 dataset contains dummy variables that indicate, for each article, whether the regional and / or European elections were mentioned in the article. Mentioning elections could increase *applicability* of the information within the article: if a politician is mentioned often, but never in articles related to the upcoming elections, we

would expect that voters would evaluate that politician as inapplicable to the elections. As a result, they would not be primed to take that politician into consideration.

On the other hand, when articles in which a given politician is mentioned also mention the upcoming elections, this can increase the perceived applicability of the politician to the decision at hand. The underlying message given in such coverage is that the information given in the article (in this case, information regarding the politician) is relevant, or applicable, for the upcoming elections. Because we focus on the regional elections, we add a measure indicating the relative amount of references to the regional election (e.g. a score of 15 per cent means that in 15 per cent of the articles in which a given politician was mentioned, the regional elections were also mentioned). In Chapter 6 we already discussed the fact that at the same time the regional elections were held, European elections were held as well. Though EP elections are considered less important and visible, it is possible that voters do not discern between the two elections⁸⁶. Therefore, we also include a relative measure to control for the amount of references to the EP elections. The results (for a full report on the obtained estimates, see Table E-9 and Table E-10 in appendix) indicate that there is no direct priming effect of the relative amount of references to the regional, nor the European elections on the politician heuristic. These results are identical in Flanders and Wallonia. With regards to *HIpolitician*, it is interesting that inclusion of these variables causes the absolute visibility indicator to become significant ($p < .05$) in Wallonia. This gives further confidence that though the priming effect is somewhat less outspoken in Wallonia, it is certainly present.

There may not be a direct effect of election references, but two-way interactions with the visibility measures indicate that the interaction between absolute visibility and references to the regional elections is significant, and positive – in both Flanders and Wallonia. Figure 7-3 plots the interaction effect for politicians with low absolute visibility, average visibility and high visibility⁸⁷ in Flanders. The X-axis indicates the range of relative election mentions in per cent, ranging from 0 to 1.

⁸⁶ If only because of the fact that the two elections (regional and EP) were held on the same day.

⁸⁷ Absolute visibility was set to 5 (low visibility), 327 (average visibility), and high visibility (655).

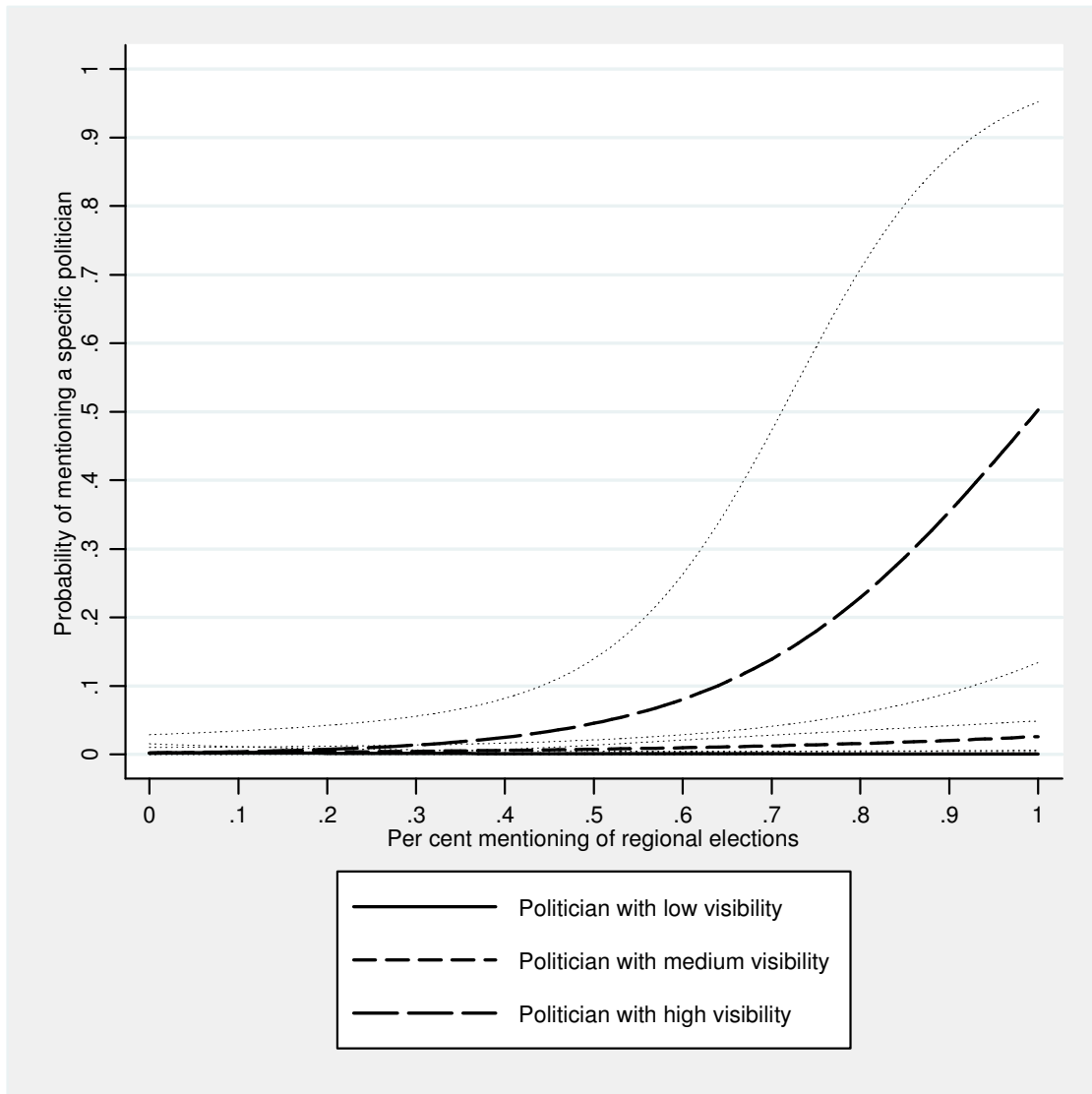


Figure 7-3: Predicted probability of mentioning a specific Politician for Flemish respondents, for various degrees of absolute visibility and regional election references. Fine dotted lines indicate boundaries of the 95 per cent confidence interval.

Though the graph presents substantial probability increases, suggesting a very large effect, it should not be overstated. The line representing politicians with high visibility shows what happens if the visibility of the politician reaches the maximum amount of visibility in the dataset, which occurs only rarely. Nevertheless, the graph does show that applicability embedded in media content matters, and potentially matters a great deal for politician priming. Also, the 50 per cent mark seems to be where the effect of electoral references becomes exponentially greater as the number increases. In other words, if a politician is often

referenced, but only sporadically with regards to electoral campaigns, the applicability effect is lost. Campaign priming of politicians is just that: if a politician is not connected to a campaign at all, the link (applicability) is absent, and the reinforcing effect is non-existent. Note that absolute visibility as such still matters; but the applicability effect only starts to become a crucial factor when a substantial amount of visibility is present. These results clearly support *H3*.

7.3.2.2 *Increasing accessibility through Tone*

H4 formulates the expectation that factors that increase the accessibility of information to voters will increase the priming effect. With regards to politician visibility, tone is a key factor that can in- or decrease accessibility of information. The amount of tone (whether positive or negative) can increase the attention paid to a politician. If tone is present it may attract readers' attention to the politician. To test whether tone matters, we added the overall tone measures to the model. These are the same measures we used in Chapter 6 when we discussed the tone for various politicians. For each mention, coders had to indicate whether the overall tone of the mention was positive (+1), neutral (0) or negative (-1). By cumulating these scores, we get idea for the overall evaluative tone in the mass media. We only discuss the key results here; readers interested in the full model estimates should consult Table E-11 and Table E-12 in appendix.

In Flanders, overall tone does not seem to matter (0.00 (.00), $p = .158$). The effect of absolute and relative visibility remains, but overall tone does not have a direct or an indirect effect on the probability of using the politician heuristic later on in the campaign. In Wallonia, the situation is radically different. Tone turns out to be the missing factor to understand politician priming in the Walloon campaign. If we add overall tone to the model, not only is it highly significant (0.04 (.01), $p < .000$), controlling for it also brings about the expected priming effect of absolute visibility. The estimate for absolute visibility is now positive, and highly significant (0.01 (.00), $p < .000$). Our suspicion that negative tone was causing the earlier results to be insignificant is confirmed here. When we control for the evaluative tone in the mass media with regards to politicians, the evidence substantiates *H1politician_i*. The fact that tone matters in Wallonia, whereas it does not in Flanders, may be explained by the fact that a variety of highly visible politicians (especially Reynders, but Van Cauwenberghe and Donfut as well) had strong negative evaluative tone. However, as we saw in Chapter 6, the

same can be said about the Flemish campaign. Nevertheless, politicians with extreme negative tone such as Bart Somers and Dirk Vijnck were generally less visible. Didier Reynders, on the other hand, was by far the most visible politician in the Walloon campaign. The interaction effects between overall tone and absolute and relative visibility are both positive and highly significant. Thus, tone mattered a lot for Walloon voters to become primed; given that the Walloon campaign essentially centered around scandals and a heated mudslinging campaign between the two largest parties of the region (PS and MR), the fact that tone matters to such an extent is important. Voters do not simply take the most visible politician into account: they also keep track of the way these politicians are evaluated. More positively evaluated politicians are more likely to become primed, whereas negatively evaluated politicians are pushed to the background. The way the original open-ended question was formulated enhances this effect. We asked respondents to state the reasons why they would choose a party. We did not ask why they would *not* choose the party. As such, the fact that more negatively evaluated politicians cease to be mentioned is only natural: if anything, these politicians became a liability rather than an asset.

7.3.2.3 *Voter (un)decidedness and politician priming*

The potential for media content to prime voters is limited by the extent to which voters 1) are *exposed* to media content 2) willing to *accept* that content 3) think of the content as *applicable* to the voting decision. The later a voter decides, the more open (s)he is to information. We therefore included (un)decidedness at the start of the campaign in the models, and interacted it with visibility (LTI) and exposure measures. However, we found no evidence of a direct⁸⁸ or indirect⁸⁹ effect of (un)decidedness on the probability of being primed. As such, politician priming during the 2009 electoral campaign was not altered by the level of decidedness at the start of the campaign. H5 does not get empirical support.

⁸⁸ In Flanders: 0.15 (.10), $p = .115$. In Wallonia: -0.10 (.17), $p = .570$

⁸⁹ In Flanders: (un)decidedness * absolute visibility: -0.00 (.00), $p = .564$ / (un)decidedness * relative visibility: .53 (.48), $p = .270$. In Wallonia: (un)decidedness * absolute visibility: -0.00 (.00), $p = .267$ / (un)decidedness * relative visibility: 0.13 (1.01), $p = .898$.

7.3.2.4 *Exposure to interpersonal communication*

Based on findings by Mendelsohn (1996) we expect that exposure to interpersonal communication decreases the priming effect. Mass media information can be counterbalanced by arguments from the social circle of the voter. To test whether interpersonal communication indeed lowers the effect of politician visibility on use of the politician heuristic, we added three separate exposure measures to the model: friends, family and colleagues. Question wording can be found in appendix on page 293. The measures did not have a direct effect in a model using the LTI visibility measures, which is to be expected. However, none of the two-way interactions with either relative or absolute visibility turned out to be significant either⁹⁰. Based on our evidence we cannot substantiate H6: interpersonal communication does not decrease the priming effect.

7.3.3 - Politician Priming - Conclusion

Overall, the conclusions to draw from these results are straightforward. During the 2009 electoral Flemish and Walloon campaigns, politicians that received more media attention were more likely to become primed among voters. Our hypotheses regarding politician priming are confirmed. We found support for the hypothesis both on the aggregate party level (*H1politician*), and on the level of specific politicians (*H1politician_i*). Interestingly, the role of actual exposure to media was less outspoken, especially in the LTI measures. Arguably, exposure matters less when politicians are visible over longer periods of time: the information seeps through to even the less exposed parts of the electorate. That said, the introduction of tone into the model proved critical in Wallonia. Without including the measure for overall evaluative tone, we would have wrongly concluded that the politician heuristic did not become primed among Walloon voters. Instead, we discovered that the politician heuristic did

⁹⁰ In Flanders: talking with friends * absolute visibility: 0.00 (.00), $p = .541$. Talking with friends * relative visibility: 0.47 (.73), $p = .519$. Talking with family * absolute visibility: 0.00 (.00), $p = .731$. Talking with family * relative visibility: -0.63 (.69), $p = .360$. Talking with colleagues * absolute visibility: 0.00 (.00), $p = .786$. Talking with colleagues * relative visibility: -0.12 (.60), $p = .846$. In Wallonia: talking with friends * absolute visibility: 0.00 (.00), $p = .741$. Talking with friends * relative visibility: 2.48 (1.56), $p = .113$. Talking with family * absolute visibility: 0.00 (.00), $p = .596$. Talking with family * relative visibility: -0.96 (1.52), $p = .525$. Talking with colleagues * absolute visibility: -0.00 (.00), $p = .786$. Talking with colleagues * relative visibility: -0.72 (1.05), $p = .494$.

become primed in both regions, but due to the very negative tone towards some politicians we needed to control for this to unveil the effect.

Regarding H2, the results run counter to what we expected. Price and Tewksbury (1997) considered the evaluation of relevance to be crucial in determining what information would be retained and recalled from memory. In other words, voters that were already focused on political personalities should evaluate media information accordingly, and be more likely to remember, recall and ultimately use politician-related information in their decision making. Our results indicate the contrary. As visibility of a politician increases, the probability of becoming primed is unchanged for voters that were using the politician heuristic at the start of the campaign. For voters *not* using the politician heuristic, increased visibility strengthens the priming effect. For the politician heuristic, H2 gets no empirical support whatsoever. Politician priming during the 2009 electoral campaign occurred as an overall priming effect, effectively overriding prior heuristic use. As the interaction plots show, it really is a *big* message effect: among lower degrees of visibility (both relative and absolute), the differences are non-significant. It is at the highest degrees of visibility that the overriding effect of visibility matters.

The fact that we do not find support for H2 should not be interpreted as evidence that voters simply decide based on what the media prescribes them. The key explaining factor in all models is still prior use of the politician heuristic. Furthermore, we discovered that various mediating factors in- or decrease the priming effect. Of special importance is the extent to which politicians are linked to the elections in mass media coverage. Consistent with what Althaus and Kim (2006) suggested, the more politicians are linked to electoral coverage in the media, the more the priming effect manifests itself. This is evidence that media do not simply prime voters; voters do take into account whether certain politicians are linked to the elections, or not. The fact that voters are (becoming primed to) take such information regarding running politicians into consideration should be read as an indication that voters do learn from campaigns.

7.4 Issue priming

Campaigns are, or should be, about issues. Critiques on electoral campaigns being too much about the horse race or candidates are often rooted in the assumption that issue positions should be the driving force behind campaigns and electoral choice. It does not come as a surprise that most of the existing research on priming has studied the priming of issues (Althaus & Kim, 2006; Druckman, 2004; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990; Mendelsohn, 1994, 1996; Scheufele, 2000; Sheafer, 2007). Thus, we would expect to find similar priming effects with regards to the issue heuristic as well (*Hlissue* and *Hlissue_i*). Furthermore, though H2 did not get support for the politician heuristic, it remains to be seen whether prior use of the issue heuristic mediates the priming effect.

In contrast to the politician heuristic, testing the priming of the issue heuristic is somewhat difficult (*Hlissue*). Whereas we can calculate how visible a parties' politicians were, or how many mentions of all politicians were present in the mass media for a certain period, we cannot do the same for issues. In our coding scheme, all articles received an issue code; we did not, as other studies have done, assign issue / politician frames. Thus, we are unable to calculate 'issue exposure' for various respondents. *Hlissue* was already simplified: for general heuristic priming, we can only predict that over the course of the campaign, voters are more likely to use the issue heuristic. Bivariate analyses also suggest this: in both Flanders and Wallonia, overall use of the issue heuristic increased⁹¹. This gives some timid support for general issue heuristic priming (*Hlissue*). We are also somewhat hampered by the data when it comes to testing *Hlissue_m*. We can only look at how exposed respondents were to the mass media and test whether this affects their probability of using the issue heuristic over the course of the campaign. In Table 7-9 we present logit estimates predicting whether the issue heuristic was used (1) or not (0), for Flemish and Walloon voters. We only present estimates that are of substantive interest. For a full report see appendix, Table E-13. In model 1 we add exposure measures and prior heuristic use, in model 2 we add cumulative interaction terms for exposure * prior heuristic use.

⁹¹ In Flanders it went from 26 to 29 per cent of voters, and in Wallonia from 28 to 32 per cent. Most other heuristics dropped over the same time period, which makes this increase all the more noteworthy.

<i>Flemish respondents (N=863)</i>	Model 1 (Pseudo R²: .08)	Model 2 (Pseudo R²: .08)
Issue Heuristic W1	1.02 (.20) ***	1.17 (.62) +
Newspapers	0.06 (.05)	-0.01 (.15)
Television	0.01 (.06)	0.11 (.18)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Newspapers		0.05 (.10)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Television		-0.07 (.12)
<i>Walloon respondents (N=692)</i>	Model 1 (Pseudo R²: .12)	Model 2 (Pseudo R²: .13)
Issue Heuristic W1	1.66 (.21) ***	2.44 (.77) **
Newspapers	-0.08 (.05)	0.32 (.16) *
Television	0.09 (.07)	0.04 (.20)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Newspapers		-0.30 (.11) **
Issue Heuristic W1 * Television		0.04 (.14)

Table 7-9: Priming of Issue Heuristic between W1 and W2 of the PVPS survey. Statistical estimates obtained from logistic regression analysis. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. += $p \leq .10$ *= $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

In model 1, none of the exposure measure estimates reach significance – higher exposure does not automatically equal a higher probability of using the issue heuristic. These first results indicate that we should reject *H_{1issue_m}*. In all fairness, mere exposure measures are very rough indicators, so the odds of finding anything are slim. Among the control variables, prior heuristic use is again the strongest predictor in the model. To test whether we can substantiate the mediating effect of prior heuristic use, we interact exposure with the wave 1 issue heuristic dummy in model 2. In Flanders none of the interaction effects reach significance, but in Wallonia the interaction between newspaper exposure and wave 1 issue heuristic is negative, and very significant. This means that for respondents that were using the issue heuristic at the start of the campaign, increasing exposure *lowers* the probability of using the issue heuristic later on in the campaign. For respondents that did not use the issue heuristic, the probabilities remain stable. This evidence suggests that H2 will have to be rejected for the issue heuristic as well.

One critique is that the above analyses look at exposure, without taking the specific issues into account. To remedy this, we construct a stacked dataset to assess the priming effect for specific issues. The expectation is that as issue salience in the media increases, so do the odds of the specific issue becoming primed in voters' minds (*H_{1issue_i}*). Our second hypothesis is that this priming effect is mediated by prior use of the issue heuristic. We include two salience measures in our models; one is the mean amount of domestic / mixed articles in which a certain issue is mentioned (e.g. if respondent A gets a score of .20 on the issue of environment, this means that in 20 per cent of the articles during the selected period, the environment issue was mentioned). This variable does *not* look at issues linked to the

electoral campaign as such, but rather maps which issues are salient at that time. For example, the financial crisis may have been a very salient issue in the months preceding the elections, thereby priming voters to weigh the economy more heavily in their vote choice. However, if the media content does connect the issue to politics this can reduce the priming effect: if voters do not think of the issue as *relevant*, or applicable to voting, the issue will not become primed. To this end, we include a second salience measure: again the mean amount of articles mentioning an issue, but this time only those articles *dealing with politics* are taken into account⁹². The assumption is that as media content talks about an issue at the same time it discusses politics, applicability is increased, and so is the priming effect.

We only retain issues that were mentioned by at least one respondent in the PVPS survey. In total, this yields 18 distinct issues⁹³ among respondents, for which we then calculate the issue salience measures in the Content2009 dataset. For some issues, such as family policy, a separate issue code was unavailable in the Content2009 dataset. For these issues, we assigned the salience score of the most appropriate proxy issue⁹⁴. In total, this operationalization results in 18 cases per respondent. We again calculated measures for LTI and STI. Table 7-10 and Table 7-11 present results for the LTI measures, for Flemish and Walloon voters. For full model estimates, see Table E-14 and Table E-15 in appendix.

⁹² This distinction is made by means of a dummy variable: when an article dealt with politics, it was coded 1, otherwise it was coded 0.

⁹³ Asylum Seekers and Immigrants, Communitarian Relations, Crime, Culture, Economic Policy, Education, Employment, Environment & Energy, Europe, Health Care, Mobility, Political Culture, Social Policy, Taxes.

⁹⁴ For family policy: social policy. For drugs we used the ‘other’ issue code – which entailed drug policy mentions, and a few other very small issues. Because we had no separate issue salience score for drug policy, we had to take this decision if we wanted to include the issue; note that running the model without the drug issue did not change any of the substantive results, since it was a very low salience issue among both voters and media anyway.

Parameter	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Issue Heuristic W1	0.33 (.20)	0.29 (.36)	1.06 (1.20)
Specific Issue W1	3.82 (.26) ***	3.86 (.26) ***	3.85 (.26) ***
Saliency (LTI)	-6.09 (2.77) *	-6.00 (9.42)	17.10 (10.66)
Political Saliency (LTI)	4.82 (1.55) **	3.30 (5.85)	0.46 (6.54)
Newspapers	0.01 (.05)	0.04 (.09)	0.05 (.12)
Television	0.06 (.06)	0.05 (.11)	0.22 (.16)
Saliency (LTI) * Newspapers		-0.96 (1.47)	-2.56 (2.43)
Saliency (LTI) * Television		-0.75 (1.66)	-4.99 (2.58) +
Political Saliency (LTI) * Newspapers		0.30 (.80)	0.54 (.98)
Political Saliency (LTI) * Television		0.78 (1.09)	1.36 (1.33)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Saliency (LTI)		12.75 (5.90) *	-8.79 (17.91)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Political Saliency (LTI)		-8.99 (3.63) *	3.38 (15.54)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Newspapers * Saliency (LTI)			2.21 (3.11)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Television * Saliency (LTI)			6.71 (3.43) +
Issue Heuristic W1 * Newspapers * Political Saliency (LTI)			0.79 (2.13)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Television * Political Saliency (LTI)			-0.59 (2.57)
<i>Random effects</i>			
Level 2 (respondent) variance	0.36 (.23)	0.36 (.23)	0.32 (.24)
Log likelihood	-792.523	-787.094	-781.633
Ni / Nj	15534/ 863	15534/ 863	15534/ 863

Table 7-10: Campaign priming of Issue Heuristic among Flemish respondents: multilevel statistical estimates. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. * = $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

Parameter	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Issue Heuristic W1	0.61 (.20) **	0.52 (.33)	-0.03 (1.15)
Specific Issue W1	3.57 (.24) ***	3.54 (.24) ***	3.48 (.25) ***
Saliency (LTI)	-7.16 (3.94) +	-0.61 (13.09)	-2.78 (16.39)
Political Saliency (LTI)	6.04 (1.64) ***	0.43 (5.95)	2.79 (7.32)
Newspapers	-0.07 (.05)	0.00 (.09)	-0.03 (.12)
Television	0.05 (.06)	0.00 (.11)	0.00 (.14)
Saliency (LTI) * Newspapers		-0.84 (2.26)	0.53 (2.91)
Saliency (LTI) * Television		-0.92 (2.55)	-1.37 (3.30)
Political Saliency (LTI) * Newspapers		-0.13 (.94)	-0.13 (1.25)
Political Saliency (LTI) * Television		1.14 (1.14)	0.69 (1.45)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Saliency (LTI)		0.31 (7.87)	8.77 (25.67)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Political Saliency (LTI)		0.79 (3.30)	4.71 (12.62)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Newspapers * Saliency (LTI)			-4.02 (4.74)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Television * Saliency (LTI)			1.49 (5.22)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Newspapers * Political Saliency (LTI)			0.09 (1.94)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Television * Political Saliency (LTI)			1.14 (2.33)
<i>Random effects</i>			
Level 2 (respondent) variance	0.00 (.09)	0.00 (.10)	0.00 (.13)
Log likelihood	-682.130	-680.929	-676.415
Ni / Nj	12654/ 703	12654/ 703	12654/ 703

Table 7-11: Campaign priming of Issue Heuristic among Walloon respondents: multilevel statistical estimates. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. * = $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

Model 1 incorporates media content and exposure measures. Both salience measures yield interesting results. The coefficient for general salience is *negative*, and significant in Flanders and slightly so in Wallonia. The explanation is to be found in the controlling effect of salience in political articles: political salience is highly significant in both Flanders and Wallonia, and positive. The more an issue is salient, *and connected to the political sphere*, the more it primes voters. As a result, the remaining issues lose importance, which is indicated by the negative coefficient for general salience. *H1issues_i* get support as being a direct effect, but exposure to mass media might further increase the effect. Model 2 adds two way interactions between the exposure and salience measures, but none of these reach an acceptable level of significance. In other words, exposure to mass media is not a necessary condition for priming effects; rather, the information available in the mass media primes voters even if they are not regularly exposed to mass media. The fact that we use LTI measures might be lessening the role of exposure, but using the STI indicators yields similar results. *H1issues_m* is not confirmed by our data. Priming of the issue heuristic occurred across the board. One explanation is that the economy was a very important issue in both regions (see Chapter 6), and its importance also increased among voters. Whether people were watching the news or reading newspapers or not, they probably picked up (through significant others, for example) that the state of the economy was troublesome. Consequently, they might start to give the issue more importance, regardless of media exposure.

In model 2 the interactions between prior issue heuristic use and both salience indicators are significant in Flanders, which suggests that prior heuristic use mediates the priming effect, but the sign for political salience * w1 issue heuristic is negative. This means that for voters using the issue heuristic at the start of the campaign, the probability of using the issue heuristic at the end of the campaign drop as issue salience increases. Adding three-way interaction gives mostly insignificant estimates. *H2* gets no support for the issue heuristic as well. Estimating the same models with STI measures (Table E-16 and Table E-17 in appendix) yields results that are highly similar to the LTI measures. Political salience of an issue has a direct and positive priming effect on the use of that issue within the issue heuristic. General salience has a negative effect, but its significance is low. Regarding *H2*, we draw identical conclusions: *H2* must be rejected.

7.4.1 - Mediating factors

With regards to issues, the Content2009 dataset does not provide many additional mediating variables; tone is notably absent, so for example we cannot assess whether economic policy was evaluated in a negative or positive way by the media (Sheafer, 2007 has amply shown that such tone matters with regards to priming). Thus, we cannot test the accessibility hypothesis, which predicted that increased tone would increase the priming effect (H4). We already looked at the effects of linking issues to politics by means of the political salience measure. However, we have not looked at the link between issues and the upcoming regional elections.

7.4.1.1 *Linking issues to the elections*

In our analysis of the politician heuristic, we found that the more a politician is mentioned in articles in which the regional elections are mentioned, the more these mentions start to prime respondents to use the politician heuristic. We now do a similar analysis to assess whether the extent to which information is linked to the elections increases the priming effect (H3). We already built up a similar argument as to why this would matter. An issue can be salient, but the extent to which it becomes a political issue may well determine the extent to which voters take it into account when they cast their vote. We calculated issue salience levels (LTI and STI) for two sets of articles: articles that mentioned the regional elections (Regional election salience) and articles that mention the EP elections (EU election salience). We had to exclude our prior ‘political salience’ variable because correlation between this variable and the regional election salience was extremely high in both regions⁹⁵. Full tables are reported in appendix (Table E-18 and Table E-19); we only discuss the most important results here.

Regional election salience matters in both regions. In both Flanders and Wallonia, the more an issue becomes linked to the regional elections, the more it becomes primed among voters. Regarding European election linking, the results are radically different for Flanders and Wallonia. In Wallonia linking an issue to the European elections does not have any effect, direct or indirect. In Flanders, European election salience has a slight ($p < .10$) positive priming effect of the issue. The indirect effect with newspaper exposure is significant as well

⁹⁵ Correlation of the two measures was higher than .9 in both regions.

($p < .05$). Given the electoral context of the 2009 campaigns, this is to be expected. In Wallonia, the EP campaign was notably absent. The two big parties, MR and PS, focused on becoming or staying the biggest party in the region (see paragraph 6.2 for a more expansive discussion). This pushed the EP elections further to the background. In Flanders, two former prime ministers were running in the EP elections: Jean-Luc Dehaene (CD&V) and Guy Verhofstadt (Open VLD). The Flemish newspapers did pay more attention to Europe in the coded months: 15 per cent of the Flemish newspaper articles mentioned Europe, compared to 9 per cent in Walloon newspapers. This may have caused the issues mentioned in those articles to become primed more easily.

7.4.1.2 Voter (un)decidedness

As with the politician heuristic, we expected that voters, who are still uncertain about who to vote for, would be more likely to become primed. We therefore estimated the models testing for both a direct and indirect effect of voter decidedness on the probability of using the politician heuristic. As with the politician heuristic, we found no evidence of either a direct⁹⁶ or indirect⁹⁷ effect of voter decidedness on the odds of being primed. It should be noted that in Flanders, the direct effect was marginally significant and positive, but all things considered the effect of (un)decidedness is very weak. Based on the evidence, H5 gets no support.

7.4.1.3 Exposure to interpersonal communication

We also formulated the expectation that talking about politics with friends, family and colleagues would affect the priming effect. More precisely, we expected that such communication would decrease the priming effect. In contrast to the politician heuristic, results were not entirely insignificant, at least in Wallonia. In Flanders none of the direct⁹⁸ or

⁹⁶ In Flanders: 0.11 (.07), $p = .124$. In Wallonia: -0.02 (.07), $p = .722$.

⁹⁷ In Flanders: (un)decidedness * general salience: 3.63 (2.27), $p = .109$ / (un)decidedness * political salience: -0.79 (1.26), $p = .529$. In Wallonia: (un)decidedness * general salience: 2.12 (3.04), $p = .486$ / (un)decidedness * political salience: -1.77 (1.32), $p = .182$.

⁹⁸ Talking with Family: 0.04 (.11), $p = .683$. Talking with Friends: 0.17 (.10), $p = .086$. Talking with Colleagues: -0.13 (.09), $p = .173$.

indirect⁹⁹ effects were significant. In Wallonia we did find that talking with family (0.18 (.10), $p = .074$) and especially colleagues (0.25 (.09), $p = .009$) had a direct effect on using the issue heuristic. Thus, contrary to what we expected interpersonal communication did not lower the effect. That said the effect of interpersonal communication remains mixed at best – in Wallonia none of the two-way interactions with (political) salience were significant¹⁰⁰. The results lead us to reject H6: the effects of interpersonal communication are often insignificant, and if they are significant they *increase* the probability of issue priming. It should be noted that we only have relatively crude measures of interpersonal communication at our disposal. For example, we do not know to what extent the opinions within the social circle of the respondents vary. A voter, who is confronted with a more diverse pallet of opinions, is more likely to re-evaluate his own attitudes. In such a situation interpersonal communication is far more likely to block mass media priming.

7.4.2 - Issue Priming - Conclusion

The results for the issue heuristic are highly similar to those of the politician heuristic. Issues that get more coverage in the media, get primed. However, the data do support our expectations regarding the role of applicability. Mere ‘coverage’ (general salience) is not enough for an issue to become primed. For example, crime rated as a high salience issue in both Flanders and Wallonia. However, almost no voters used it in their decision making. This can be explained by applicability: it is when that issue becomes linked to politics that voters start to weigh it more heavily in their decision making. Crime, among other issues, was notably absent in electoral and political coverage. Other issues, such as the communitarian issue, were not that salient in the general coverage, but were very visible in the electoral coverage. Voters discount information that is irrelevant to the decision at hand.

⁹⁹ Talking with Family * General Salience: -1.91 (3.22), $p = .554$. Talking with Family * Political Salience: -0.43 (1.77), $p = .807$. Talking with Friends * General Salience: -3.44 (3.37), $p = .308$. Talking with Friends * Political Salience: 1.02 (1.95), $p = .600$. Talking with Colleagues * General Salience: -2.44 (3.09), $p = .430$. Talking with Colleagues * Political Salience: 0.78 (1.68), $p = .641$.

¹⁰⁰ Talking with Family * General Salience: -3.33 (4.54), $p = .464$. Talking with Family * Political Salience: 1.40 (1.88), $p = .456$. Talking with Friends * General Salience: -2.84 (4.93), $p = .564$. Talking with Friends * Political Salience: 0.547 (2.05), $p = .790$. Talking with Colleagues * General Salience: 0.44 (4.27), $p = .918$. Talking with Colleagues * Political Salience: 0.85 (1.76), $p = .629$.

Counterbalancing this finding is the fact that again, prior heuristic does little to mediate the priming effect. We read this as mostly a sign that policy positioning of parties does reach voters to a certain extent: those issues that are salient in electoral coverage do become primed among voters, regardless of whether they were deciding based on the issue heuristic or not. If anything this is good news: campaigns do manage to increase issue-awareness among the electorate.

7.5 Priming of the Party Heuristic

Earlier in the chapter we discovered that the party heuristic was used by large parts of the electorate, both in Flanders (28 per cent in wave 1) and Wallonia (32 per cent in wave 1). As such, the party heuristic is the most often used heuristic used. Due to the question wording (why did you vote for this *party*) it is likely that people were more likely to answer in terms of party-related reasons. This may cause the party heuristic to be slightly overrepresented in our measure. Nevertheless, in Belgium, voters essentially have to choose between parties. It is no wonder that we find the party heuristic to be of such importance. That said, given that the party heuristic had the lowest inter rater reliability (α of .6), and is plagued by a variety of measurement issues, limits our expectation of finding much priming effects.

In addition to this, the party heuristic itself encompasses various types of considerations that all focus on party-related information: the image of the party, being a member of the party, and so on. However, while the party as such is still the key deciding factor, we should not expect all sub heuristics to be as likely to become primed as others. For example, becoming a party member usually is not brought about by an electoral campaign. Or, constituency service is unlikely to become primed by mass media exposure: voters who use this sub heuristic have often been directly aided by the party. Conversely, party image is more likely to become primed as party visibility increases during the campaign. In the same manner, being against another party could become primed among voters. In the Flemish and Walloon campaigns several parties were clearly campaigning against each other. The best example is the fight between PS and MR, who explicitly refused to form a coalition with one another after the elections. These clues could be picked up by voters, and prime them to use that sub heuristic.

In our first analysis, we simply look at the party heuristic as one single dependent. In other words, we try to assess whether party visibility in the mass media increases the odds of using the party as a shortcut to decide who to vote for. Similarly to the issue and politician heuristic, we calculated both STI and LTI measures. The Content2009 dataset contains a 'party-specific' measure. For each article coders had to indicate whether a party was mentioned, or not. These measures were separate from the mentioning of politicians. For example, if an article mentioned Kris Peeters, followed by CD&V (his party) in parentheses, this does *not* count as a mentioning of CD&V. Only mentions of the CD&V as such, without mentioning

specific politicians of the party, was counted as a ‘party mention’. From these measures, we first constructed basic visibility measures according the LTI / STI calculation methods: absolute party visibility is the absolute weighted amount of mentions in the period under consideration. Relative party visibility is the relative amount of mentions, which was obtained by dividing the absolute measure by the cumulative amount of mentions for all parties that also ran in the same elections¹⁰¹. Table 7-12 presents results for three logit regressions, for Flemish and Walloon respondents. The first model tests for the direct priming effect of absolute and relative party visibility (*H1party*). The second adds two-way interactions between visibility measures and exposure, and use of the party heuristic in wave 1. Finally, model 3 adds three way interactions to test for the mediating effect of prior heuristic use (*H2*). We only present estimates that are of substantive interest, for the full model see Table E-20 and Table E-21 in appendix.

¹⁰¹ This means that for Flemish parties, we only divide by the amount of mentions of Flemish parties, and vice versa for Walloon parties.

<i>Flemish respondents (N=863)</i>	Model 1 (Pseudo R²: .06)	Model 2 (Pseudo R²: .07)	Model 3 (Pseudo R²: .08)
Party Heuristic W1	1.04 (.18) ***	0.84 (.61)	5.71 (2.20) *
Absolute visibility (LTI)	0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)	-0.01 (.00)
Relative visibility (LTI)	2.10 (2.87)	13.19 (10.43)	39.98 (12.63) **
Newspapers	0.08 (.05)	0.23 (.14)	0.44 (.18) *
Television	0.03 (.06)	-0.11 (.17)	0.09 (.21)
Absolute visibility (LTI) * Newspapers		0.00 (.00) *	0.00 (.00) *
Absolute visibility (LTI) * Television		0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
Relative visibility (LTI) * Newspapers		-3.30 (1.45) *	-5.67 (1.74) **
Relative visibility (LTI) * Television		0.00 (1.78)	-3.10 (2.10)
Party Heuristic W1 * Absolute visibility (LTI)		0.00 (.00)	0.01 (.00)
Party Heuristic W1 * Relative visibility (LTI)		4.61 (6.28)	-57.85 (22.36) *
Party Heuristic W1 * Absolute visibility (LTI) * Newspapers			0.00 (.00)
Party Heuristic W1 * Absolute visibility (LTI) * Television			0.00 (.00)
Party Heuristic W1 * Relative visibility (LTI) * Newspapers			5.54 (3.23)
Party Heuristic W1 * Relative visibility (LTI) * Television			8.85 (4.55)
<i>Walloon respondents (N=692)</i>	Model 1 (Pseudo R²: .05)	Model 2 (Pseudo R²: .05)	Model 3 (Pseudo R²: .07)
Party Heuristic W1	0.79 (.19) ***	1.10 (.64)	5.00 (2.34) *
Absolute visibility (LTI)	0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
Relative visibility (LTI)	-4.52 (1.69) **	-5.30 (5.52)	-5.88 (7.84)
Newspapers	-0.01 (.05)	-0.18 (.17)	-0.09 (.22)
Television	0.17 (.07) *	0.15 (.20)	0.28 (.29)
Absolute visibility (LTI) * Newspapers		0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
Absolute visibility (LTI) * Television		0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
Relative visibility (LTI) * Newspapers		0.50 (.89)	0.02 (1.10)
Relative visibility (LTI) * Television		-0.17 (1.06)	0.77 (1.53)
Party Heuristic W1 * Absolute visibility (LTI)		0.00 (.00)	-0.01 (.00) *
Party Heuristic W1 * Relative visibility (LTI)		0.60 (3.36)	-1.34 (12.37)
Party Heuristic W1 * Absolute visibility (LTI) * Newspapers			0.00 (.00)
Party Heuristic W1 * Absolute visibility (LTI) * Television			0.00 (.00) *
Party Heuristic W1 * Relative visibility (LTI) * Newspapers			1.18 (1.84)
Party Heuristic W1 * Relative visibility (LTI) * Television			-0.33 (2.28)

Table 7-12: Priming of Party Heuristic between W1 and W2 of the PVPS survey. Statistical estimates obtained from logistic regression analysis. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. * = $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

In Flanders, model 1 finds no direct priming effect of party visibility; in Wallonia, it finds a *reverse* relationship. The coefficient for relative visibility is negative, which suggests that the less visible a party is compared to the other parties running in the elections, the more likely it is that voters voting for that party will start to use the party heuristic. This runs completely counter to what we would expect, and we do not have an explanation for this result. The fact that the party heuristic does cover several types of considerations that are unlikely to become primed by the campaign might explain this result. In Flanders, the indirect priming effect estimates have opposing signs: relative visibility is negative, absolute visibility is positive. In Wallonia, none of the two way interactions are significant. The model 3 interactions are mostly insignificant, with only 1 out of 4 being significant ($p < .05$) in Wallonia. We ran the same models using the STI indicators, which yielded identical results (Table E-22 and Table E-23 in appendix). Given these results, $H1_{party}$, $H1_{party_m}$ and $H2$ are rejected.

However, as we already indicated the party heuristic consists of several considerations that are quite divergent: deciding based on the extent to which you identify with a given party is different from deciding based on the parties' image. We expected that especially party identification, constituency service and being a party member were unlikely to become primed: these types of considerations are based on a condition (party membership and constituency) or attitude (party identification) that is relatively stable over time, and as such unlikely to become primed by the mass media. Therefore, we ran the LTI models again, this time excluding these considerations from the party heuristic. Even when we excluded these considerations, the conclusions remained unchanged: in Flanders neither absolute nor relative party visibility had a significant direct¹⁰² or indirect¹⁰³ priming effect. In Wallonia the direct effect of relative visibility remained significant and *negative*¹⁰⁴; none of the two-way

¹⁰² Absolute visibility: -0.00 (.00), $p = .689$. Relative visibility: -0.17 (2.79), $p = .952$.

¹⁰³ Absolute visibility * Newspapers: 0.00 (.00), $p = .632$. Absolute visibility * Television: 0.00 (.00), $p = .368$. Relative visibility * Newspapers: -1.79 (1.44), $p = .212$. Relative visibility * Television: 0.02 (1.74), $p = .993$.

¹⁰⁴ Relative visibility: -6.13 (1.65), $p = .000$. Absolute visibility: 0.00 (.00), $p = .233$.

interactions were significant here either¹⁰⁵. Our conclusions remain unchanged. The party heuristic did not become primed during the 2009 campaign.

In our opinion, several explanations can help us understand these results. First, we already showed that other heuristics did become primed by the mass media: politicians and issues. Only so much information can be taken into account: by focusing on issues and especially specific politicians, campaigns may be drawing attention away from the parties themselves. The idea that politics has become more ‘personalized’ has been criticized (Karvonen, 2010), but our findings indicate that more visible politicians do become primed in voters’ minds. If campaigns draw attention to politicians, this might be occurring at the expense of the party heuristic. A second possible explanation is that we use a somewhat convoluted measure for party visibility. We only take ‘pure’ party mentions into account. However, parties are often represented in the media by their politicians. For example, if an article mentions the Christian Democratic leader, this is a politician mention; but he is representing the Christian Democratic party as well. With our data we cannot know how respondents process this information. We did test whether a combined party / politician measure made any difference in our assessment of *H1party*, but the results remained identical. A third reason is that at the beginning of the campaign, when attention to politics was still low, the effect of question wording (*why did you vote for this party?*) may have induced a lot of party-related answers. When the political campaign got under way, and more information became known to the respondents, the party heuristic was replaced by other heuristics.

Unfortunately, we can only depend on indirect evidence to really test whether increased interest in the campaign actually brought about a shift away from the party heuristic. To test this, we examined the bivariate results for those respondents that used the party heuristic in wave 1, and ceased using it in wave 2 (N = 126 for Flanders, and 134 for Wallonia). 32 per cent of those Flemish respondents and 43 per cent of the Walloon respondents used the issue heuristic in wave 2. The issue heuristic was by far the most often used. Among Flemish respondents, the politician heuristic also scored quite well (23 per cent), but in Wallonia it seemed weak by comparison (8 per cent). Furthermore, when we compared the respondents

¹⁰⁵ Absolute visibility * Newspapers: 0.00 (.00), $p = .523$. Absolute visibility * Television: -0.00 (.00), $p = .742$. Relative visibility * Newspapers: 0.96 (.81), $p = .231$. Relative visibility * Television: -0.22 (1.01), $p = .829$.

that ceased using the party heuristic to the other voters, we found that they were using the issue heuristic more often, especially in Wallonia¹⁰⁶. These results do seem to suggest that at least some respondents replaced their ‘default’ party-related motivations to other heuristics once the campaign got under way.

7.5.1 - Linking of party mentions to the elections

H3 stated the expectation that the more information is linked to the elections, the greater the odds of that information priming respondents. With regards to the party heuristic, at first sight this might seem meaningless: contrary to politicians (who may not be a candidate) or issues (which may not be linked to politics), parties are almost naturally linked to the elections. They are the entities that compete. Nevertheless, government parties are mentioned more often, but their ‘electoral link’ is less established compared to a smaller party that only makes the news when it campaigns. Therefore, we ran our models again, this time including two ‘election’ measures: linking with regional elections contains the per cent of mentions of the party that occurred in articles in which the regional elections were also mentioned. Linking with EP elections does the same with EP elections. We only discuss the key results here; full models are presented in appendix, Table E-24 and Table E-25. Though we did not expect to find much, we did find a significant ($p < .05$) and positive effect of regional election linking among Flemish respondents. The more a party is mentioned in articles that mention the regional elections, the more respondents become primed to use the party heuristic. However, in Wallonia we did not find any significant results. H3 receives some support with regards to the party heuristic. We also tested for two-way interactions with use of the party heuristic at the start of the campaign, and television / newspaper exposure, but none of the estimates reached an acceptable level of significance.

7.5.2 - Increasing accessibility through tone

We formulated the expectation that increasing amounts of tone would increase the attention voters would give to mass media information. A story about a party being in trouble, or being

¹⁰⁶ Issue heuristic in Flanders: 32% for respondents ceasing to use party heuristic versus 30% for other respondents. Issue heuristic in Wallonia: 43% for respondents ceasing to use party heuristic versus 32% for other respondents.

in a winning mood, would presumably be more interesting to voters than a neutral story about that same party. In addition to tone measures for politicians, the Content2009 dataset also contains an identical tone measure for party mentions. We added this tone measure to the LTI model to test for a direct priming effect of the evaluative tone towards parties. In a second model, we added two-way interactions with relative and absolute visibility. In both Flanders and Wallonia we found no evidence of a direct priming effect of tone¹⁰⁷. The two-way interactions were insignificant in Wallonia, but in Flanders they did reach significance¹⁰⁸. However, the signs of the two interactions were opposing, so if anything the conclusion should be that the mediating effect of tone is unclear. Again, we suspect that the aforementioned biases (due to question formulation / party visibility measure) are affecting these results to a certain extent.

7.5.3 - Voter (un)decidedness

With the politician and issue heuristics, we found no evidence of voter (un)decidedness mediating the priming effect. Indeed, we must also reject H5 with regards to the party heuristic. In both Flanders and Wallonia, all of the two-way interactions with absolute and relative visibility are insignificant¹⁰⁹. However, one finding regarding voter (un)decidedness provides further evidence regarding the reasons we stated earlier on why party priming did not occur: in Flanders, voter (un)decidedness has a significant direct and negative effect on the odds of using the party heuristic (-0.17 (.08), $p = .034$). This means that the more undecided a voter was at the start of the campaign, the less likely (s)he is to keep using the party heuristic. This could point to the fact that campaigns indeed do not prime the party heuristic: they prime other heuristics. Undecided voters are – presumably – more receptive to new information. This finding could indicate that indeed the party heuristic becomes replaced

¹⁰⁷ In Flanders: -0.00 (.00), $p = .512$. In Wallonia: -0.00 (.00), $p = .183$.

¹⁰⁸ In Flanders: absolute visibility * tone: -0.00 (.00), $p = .034$. relative visibility * tone: 0.11 (.04), $p = .008$. In Wallonia: absolute visibility * tone: -0.00 (.00), $p = .825$. relative visibility * tone: 0.01 (.02), $p = .638$.

¹⁰⁹ In Flanders: (un)decidedness * absolute visibility: 0.00 (.00), $p = .322$. (un)decidedness * relative visibility: -1.52 (2.58), $p = .556$. In Wallonia: (un)decidedness * absolute visibility: -0.00 (.00), $p = .380$. (un)decidedness * relative visibility: 0.47 (1.25), $p = .708$.

by other, campaign primed, heuristics. In Wallonia the coefficient was negative as well, but insignificant (-0.07 (.08), $p = .349$).

7.5.4 - Interpersonal communication

In neither Flanders nor Wallonia we found evidence of a direct¹¹⁰ or indirect¹¹¹ effect of interpersonal communication. In Wallonia, the interaction between colleagues and absolute visibility is significant and positive ($p = .004$), but given that the other 5 interactions are insignificant, and all six Flemish interactions are insignificant, we still conclude that H6 is rejected regarding the party heuristic.

7.6 Bringing the other heuristics back in

Thus far, we have taken a blindsided look at three heuristics: issues, politicians and party. Our analysis has been blindsided because we did not take the other heuristics into account. We only tested whether prior use of the politician / party / issue heuristic mediated the media priming effect of that heuristic. But it is likely that other heuristics, for example endorsements, also determine to what extent media information primes voters.

To test how other heuristic usage alters the priming effect, we ran the regression models again, this time including the dummy variables indicating whether the other heuristics (endorsements, habit, and so on) were used at the start of the campaign. H2 stated that we expect that prior heuristic use mediates the priming effect; thus, we should not only look at

¹¹⁰ In Flanders: Talking with Friends: -0.04 (.11), $p = .696$. Talking with Family: -0.05 (.09), $p = .597$. Talking with Colleagues: 0.17 (.10), $p = .094$. In Wallonia: Talking with Friends: 0.07 (.12), $p = .579$. Talking with Family: -0.14 (.10), $p = .162$. Talking with Colleagues: -0.04 (.11), $p = .744$.

¹¹¹ In Flanders: Talking with Friends * Absolute visibility: 0.00 (.00), $p = .689$. Talking with Friends * Relative visibility: -3.12 (3.27), $p = .376$. Talking with Family * Absolute visibility: -0.00 (.00), $p = .297$. Talking with Family * Relative visibility: 3.43 (3.27), $p = .294$. Talking with Colleagues * Absolute visibility: 0.00 (.00), $p = .451$. Talking with Colleagues * Relative visibility: -0.88 (3.10), $p = .778$.

In Wallonia: Talking with Friends * Absolute visibility: 0.00 (.00), $p = .815$. Talking with Friends * Relative visibility: 0.06 (2.08), $p = .976$. Talking with Family * Absolute visibility: -0.00 (.00), $p = .198$. Talking with Family * Relative visibility: 0.98 (2.06), $p = .633$. Talking with Colleagues * Absolute visibility: 0.00 (.00), $p = .004$. Talking with Colleagues * Relative visibility: -3.33 (1.76), $p = .058$.

the mediating effect of the politician heuristic on politician priming, but also how the endorsement, habit or any other heuristic affects the politician priming effect. We only discuss the results here, but full reports on the regression models are available in appendix: Table E-26 and Table E-27 provide estimates for politician priming, Table E-28 and Table E-29 for issue priming, and Table E-30 and Table E-31 for party priming.

7.6.1 - The role of other heuristics in politician priming

We estimated two models; in the first we only added the dummies as such, to look at whether politician priming adversely affected the use of the other heuristics. In a second model we added interaction effects between the various other heuristics and absolute / relative politician visibility. The reason for this is that the use of another heuristic in wave 1 might affect the priming effect of politician visibility in the news: voters *not* using the politician heuristic might be less likely to become primed, regardless of absolute or relative visibility of the politician. This is why the second model is added. The coefficients for the direct effect of other heuristics are almost all insignificant but 11 of the 16 coefficients are negative. We should be careful about interpreting these insignificant results, but in our opinion they do point at something we should expect. Priming of the politician heuristic among voters does not occur without cost: a voter can only take so much information into account, so the fact that specific politicians become (more) important has an overall adverse effect on the use of other heuristics. The signs of the coefficients for most of the other heuristics do vary between the regions – among the Flemish voters different heuristics lost importance than was the case in Wallonia. Nevertheless, this evidence on the information trade-off is tentative at best. The interaction effects of the other heuristics are all insignificant: we do not find evidence that using other heuristics at the start of the campaign altered the priming effect in any way. For the politician heuristic, H2 is again rejected.

7.6.2 - The role of other heuristics in issue priming

For issue priming, we also find that the direct effects of other heuristics are often insignificant. However, in Flanders and Wallonia use of the endorsement heuristic at the start of the campaign has a negative effect on use of the issue heuristic. We already found this inverse relationship in our descriptive analysis of the (correlations between) heuristics.

Overall, the negative signs dominate here as well, again offering some evidence on the information trade-offs that are going on.

The interaction effects are of more substantive interest. In Flanders, using the group heuristic has a very strong *positive* interaction with *general* salience ($p < .001$), whereas this is completely absent in Wallonia. We read this as a specific match between a specific heuristic and a specific issue. In paragraph 7.1 we already said that most of the references to groups consist of economic group references: blue- and white collar workers and the self employed. In other words, respondents using the group heuristic were predominantly thinking about economic groups. Table 6-6 on page 152 provided details on which issues were highly salient in the general coverage. One issue dominated the 2009 general and campaign-specific coverage: the economy. What, in our opinion, this highly significant interaction is showing is that group voters were predominantly focused on economical groups when the campaign began; when the economy became highly salient in the general coverage, these voters continued to use that group heuristic (indicated by the positive sign for the direct effect of the group heuristic in both regions), but also started to take the economic issue as such (more) into account in their decision making. Interestingly, this effect is only found in Flanders, and not in Wallonia. Our argument would be that the campaigns simply ran a different course; from our experience coding the responses it appeared that in Wallonia the rise of the green party focused attention on the environment. They did not stress the economy as much as, for example, the Flemish greens did with their campaign strategy of ‘the green economy’. In Flanders the issue of the economy was highly present in the campaign strategies of all parties. In Wallonia the fight for dominance between PS and MR may have obscured the issue somewhat more.

The remaining interactions between the other heuristics and (political) salience of issues are non-significant. Though we do find one very significant interaction, the overall tendency is that H2, again, does not get support. Media information primes voters’ heuristics, but pre-existing heuristics do not significantly moderate this process.

7.6.3 - The role of other heuristics in party priming

Finally, we also looked at the direct and indirect effect of other heuristics regarding party heuristic priming. Before we look at the results, it is important to note that earlier on we found very little evidence supporting H1 for party priming. We discussed a variety of reasons as to why this might be occurring.

Most of the direct effects of other heuristics upon the party heuristic are insignificant; more importantly, they are predominantly positive. This runs counter to our earlier findings on the effect that they had on issue / politician priming; given that earlier on we found that the party heuristic as such did not become primed at all – presumably because issues and politicians did – these results give further support to this notion. In each region, one other heuristic has a significant and positive effect on use of the party heuristic further on in the campaign: the G&O heuristic in Flanders (0.64 (.28), $p < .05$) and the politician heuristic in Wallonia (1.01 (.30), $p < .01$). Thus, voters using the G&O heuristic at the outset of the campaign were more likely to start using the party heuristic during the campaign; politician voters were likely to do the same in Wallonia. Given the confusing results on the party heuristic, combined with our earlier voiced comments on it, we cannot meaningfully explain these results – one possible explanation being that in Flanders, the future government was not really an issue in the campaign (causing the switch to other, party-related motives). However, in Wallonia the finding that the politician heuristic increases the odds of using the party heuristic at the end of the campaign is puzzling to say the least. One explanation for this is, again, Didier Reynders. At the start of the campaign, MR voters mentioned him, but ceased to do so after negative coverage of him in the media. The positive coefficient for the politician heuristic in this analysis indicates that these voters switched towards the party heuristic.

Turning to the interaction effects, the findings are puzzling. We continue to find mixed results for the politician heuristic in Wallonia: a negative coefficient for relative visibility, and a positive one for absolute visibility. Given our earlier reservations regarding the party heuristic in general, we do not attach much meaning to these coefficients. None of the other interactions are significant. The overall gist of these results is that H2 is also rejected for the party heuristic.

7.7 Conclusion

With this analysis, we conclude the empirical part of the dissertation; overall, the conclusions are straightforward. First, we find evidence that media information primes the heuristics that voters use over the course of the 2009 election campaign. Second, we also find evidence that the bits and pieces used within those heuristics are primed by media coverage. Third, we find persistent evidence that, contrary to what we expected, prior heuristics did not moderate this priming effect. Finally, though we did not have a hypothesis regarding the finding, we found tentative evidence that priming is never without cost. Other heuristics are adversely affected when a heuristic becomes (more) important.

Regarding the overall conclusion that the priming effect is substantiated our results are in line with prior research. We may have used a different concept (heuristics) than most of the existing research¹¹², but the basic conclusions are identical. Media information primes voters' decision making processes. In this regard media, and the campaign they cover, matter. We may be kicking in an open door here, but these findings are important: media information alters the information set that is taken into consideration, which may in turn affect the outcome of the decision making process. Our evidence substantiates the claim that voters voting for parties with highly visible politicians are more likely to start using the politician heuristic; furthermore, we found that the information used within the politician heuristic, namely the specific politicians that voters mention, are those that consistently get more visibility in the media. As such, our evidence regarding the politician heuristic is pretty much clear-cut: media information primes the politician heuristic, as well as the information used within that heuristic. Probability estimates suggest that the effect is modest, but significant nonetheless.

Similar results emerged regarding the issue heuristic, though our evidence on the priming of the issue heuristic 'as such' (*H1issues*) was crippled by the way the content analysis was coded. Issue codes were assigned to all articles, which prohibited us from calculating 'issue visibility' in general for each respondent. Nevertheless, we do argue that issue priming as such is substantiated based on circumstantial evidence. First, the issue heuristic was the only heuristic that increased in importance in both Flanders and Wallonia (see Table 7-2 on page

¹¹² Which usually talks about 'considerations'.

164). Second, mass media did prime the information within the issue heuristic, as evidenced by our analyses regarding the specific information used within the issue heuristic. Here, our evidence has ample proof of a media priming effect. Mass media coverage primed voters to use those issues that were salient within the political coverage. We already discussed the weak evidence for the party heuristic; most likely measurement issues, both reliability wise and validity wise, have crippled the analysis. We return to this point in the overall conclusion, because it is related to the larger debate on the use of open-ended causal reports.

Our basic conclusions add to the body of research on the magnitude of campaign effects. In this regard, the strong effect of applicability, which we operationalized as ‘linking to the elections’, is noteworthy. Prior research often focused on the accessibility mechanism: more recent information is in the top shelves of the voters’ minds, and is thus more likely to matter in the decision. However, our data suggest that the extent to which information is made applicable to the upcoming elections, the more it primes voters. H3 suspected that the more media content was linked to the elections, the more likely it would be that such content would prime voters. H3 received strong empirical support for both issues and politicians; regarding issues, the general salience mattered little. The issues that primed voters were those issues that were highly salient in the political or electoral coverage. Likewise, the more visible politicians were in electoral coverage, the more they stuck in voters’ minds. We found evidence for this among both the Walloon and Flemish electorates, so the importance of applicability holds in two separate elections, with different campaign contexts and party landscapes. In our opinion, the importance of applicability shows that priming effects never occur on a blank slate either; the evidence on the effect of the pre-existing group heuristic among Flemish voters on the issue priming effect is a good example. Voters who judged economic groups to be important for their vote subsequently started to incorporate the economic issue into their decision making when that issue started to gain salience. This shift towards another heuristic (issues) was most probably driven by applicability – a prior heuristic determining the shift towards new heuristics.

Furthermore, our data allowed us to include evaluative tone of politicians in the models: controlling for tone was a necessary condition to uncover the priming effect in the Walloon campaign. Thus, the campaign coverage in the mass media has important effects on the electorate. Voters notice and pick up cues from (media coverage of) the campaign: these

effects are modest but they exist nonetheless. The divergent findings in Flanders and Wallonia did not suggest that priming did not occur; instead they are a convincing example of the fact that the context of the campaign determines not only which issues and persons are primed, but also the role of mediating factors such as tone and applicability on this effect.

Chapter 8: Conclusion and Discussion

Our empirical findings provide two clear answers to the research questions we posited in our opening chapter. To the first research question “*does mass media coverage of the campaign prime heuristic use among voters?*” the answer is yes. For both the issue and politician heuristics we found evidence that media coverage primes them. In neither Flanders nor Wallonia we found evidence of priming effects on the party heuristic. In our opinion various reasons explain this finding. First, we were somewhat crippled by our measurement of the party heuristic (see further). Second, mass media coverage often reports on parties through their politicians. We ran into this issue with our assessment of ‘party visibility’; political coverage rarely deals with parties without quoting, citing or displaying photographs of politicians. The distinction between parties and politicians blurs in media coverage. This might also be occurring among the electorate. The fact that we find effects for the politician heuristic provides some evidence towards understanding how media information is processed. Because the mass media must resort to specific politicians to report on parties, the voters’ decision making starts to focus on these politicians as well. That we find only slight drops in the use of the party heuristic implies that even though mass media information is not increasing its use, it is certainly not decreasing it much either. The overall conclusion is that mass media coverage primes the heuristic use of voters.

For our second research question, “*do pre-existing heuristics moderate the priming effect?*” the evidence shows that prior heuristics do not moderate the priming effect as we expected. When results pointed out that prior heuristics mattered, they did so counter to what we had expected. For example, our findings regarding the politician heuristic suggest that voters who were not using the politician heuristic were more subject to politician priming by the mass media. Prior heuristics are the foundation upon which priming effects occur. Voters that were deciding based on ‘primable’ heuristics at the start of the campaign were already giving these heuristics priority. Subsequently, priming effects change little if anything in the decision making of those voters. In contrast, voters that were not using these heuristics do get primed by media coverage. Probably the best explanation is that cognitive filters only do so much. If the economy gets more attention, we theorized that habitual voters would ignore this, and issue voters would be likely to pick this up. One could make the equally valid argument that if the economy is in recession, all voters think this is relevant, whether they were habitual voters

or not. If an issue or a politician becomes the object of mediatized debate this gets picked up by the electorate as a whole. Pre-existing cognitive filters do little to dampen the priming effect of something that is all over the news.

The filtering effect was rejected by our evidence, but we did find significant inverse effects. If the issue or politician heuristics were absent at the start of the campaign, the priming effect occurred. If they were present, the priming effect did not occur. Thus, pre-existing heuristics do matter in that they are the foundation for priming effects. Campaign coverage can alter heuristic use, but this effect occurs on a pre-existing configuration of heuristics. Issue priming occurs among voters that do not think of issues at the outset of the campaign, and politician priming mainly occurs among voters that were not using the politician heuristic. Observers making inferences about ‘the campaign’ immediately after the elections should take note of this: in the debate on the evening of Election Day, the Flemish Nationalist leader Bart De Wever stated that the Flemish voters had given a clear signal for more autonomy. Our evidence shows that the campaign did indeed prime the state reform issue among voters, but also that the issue was still relatively small compared to other issues such as the economy or the environment. What is salient in the mass media does become *more* salient among voters, but this does not necessarily mean that these considerations were important for the *majority* of the electorate.

Normatively, we feel that these findings are good news. If campaigns manage to communicate information on issues and politicians to the electorate as a whole, they at least partially fulfill their goal of bringing politics to the people. The effects that we found are relatively small, but issues and politicians that are visible in the media do ‘stick’ in people’s minds. Pre-existing heuristics do not block or facilitate this process much: campaigns apparently can and do reach the larger public.

Our theoretical framework used concepts from political communication and psychology. In the past, interdisciplinary efforts have been fruitful avenues of research. However, such crosspollinations are often short-term: after concepts have been transferred from one scientific area to another, they start to diverge as they evolve independently in each discipline (Druckman et al., 2009). The meaning of ‘heuristics’ in political science and psychology has already diverged substantially. Our typology was rooted in the approach taken by political scientists. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the hypotheses regarding the role of

applicability (linking to elections) and accessibility (tone) received overall empirical support¹¹³. These concepts were obtained by looking at developments in psychology and applying them to an electoral setting. This should serve as proof that linking two different bodies of literature is enriching: our understanding of media priming during electoral campaigns was enhanced because our evidence suggests that not only accessibility, but also applicability matters. And the evidence shows that causal mechanisms which are rooted in psychology, also work in an electoral setting. In our opinion, the role of applicability has not been given enough consideration in prior studies. According to our data, this causal process explains part of the priming effect: linking information to the elections increased the probability of priming, presumably because it increased its applicability to the decision at hand. Various other factors could also increase applicability. For example, issue ownership of parties links certain parties to certain issues (Petrocik, 1996). Thus, some issues are more relevant (or applicable) for some parties than for others. By increasing applicability or relevance, these issue-party ties may affect not only priming, but other media effects as well. Future research efforts should focus on increasing our understanding of the role of applicability.

The fact that the evidence did not support RQ2 does not diminish the value of interdisciplinary work. Though our evidence does not support the hypothesis that prior heuristics act as cognitive filters, interdisciplinary work allowed us to develop such novel hypotheses in the first place. Perhaps most voters are less interested in their political decisions, and are not willing to engage in deep processing of information. This might explain why heuristics do not act as filters, but because of the survey design we cannot make inferences about the depth of information processing: we could not ‘track’ voters’ throughout the entire campaign. In this regard, future research efforts could use experimental settings to add to our understanding of the role of pre-existing heuristics, because among voters that do engage in deep processing of information their filtering role may be present.

¹¹³ These two mechanisms both partially cause the priming effect (see Chapter 3). Priming through *applicability* occurs because mass media coverage links considerations (issues, or politicians) to the upcoming election. As a result, the relevance of these considerations to the elections is increased, and the considerations are primed. Conversely, priming through *accessibility* occurs because media coverage raises the chance that considerations will be remembered, subsequently increasing the chance that they will matter in the voting decision. According to our evidence both mechanisms are at work.

We have answered our two key research questions, but thus far have not addressed the broader implications of our findings. We address the peculiar features of the two elections and the period we studied, and we try to assess to what extent our findings regarding issue and person priming would be altered in a different setting. We conclude with a commentary on the use of open-ended causal reports.

8.1 Media priming of politicians and issues

Our evidence brings additional support for a growing body of literature stating that the mass media prime voters. The more mass media's electoral coverage focuses on specific issues and politicians, the more voters start to use these heuristics; furthermore, the specific bits of information they use within those heuristics (specific issues and politicians) can also be predicted by mass media visibility. We draw these conclusions based on evidence for the 2009 regional elections in Flanders and Wallonia. Both elections have a largely identical institutional framework and indeed we found similar results in both elections. However, some important differences emerged between Flanders and Wallonia. These cannot be attributed to institutional differences, but are caused by differences in the campaign context and party systems in both regions.

In Wallonia, the politician heuristic was used less often at the outset of the campaign (10%) compared to Flanders (18%). In both regions media coverage primed voters, but in Wallonia we only unveiled the effect after controlling for evaluative tone of politicians; most likely tone mattered in *both* elections, but the fact that the campaign had greater hostility in Wallonia¹¹⁴ increased its influence in the Walloon setting. The way the campaign is waged matters. Conversely, the difference in the absolute amount of politician heuristic use can be attributed to differences in the party landscapes. The Flemish party landscape includes several parties that depend heavily on their leader¹¹⁵, but such parties are not present in the Walloon

¹¹⁴ See our discussion on this in Chapter 6: PS and MR fought intensely for the market leadership in Wallonia, and a series of provocations finally resulted in both party leaders vetoing each other from any future government coalition.

¹¹⁵ Lijst Dedecker (Jean-Marie Dedecker) and N-VA (Bart De Wever).

context. Though the absolute amount of ‘politician’ voters differs, both campaigns increased the importance of individual politicians among the electorates.

The differences between the Flemish and Walloon campaign and party landscape also affected issue priming. The evidence suggests that the link with the EP elections mattered somewhat in Flanders, but not in Wallonia. Again, the explanation is that in Wallonia, the focus of the parties’ campaigns was on the regional campaigns because the market leadership was up for grabs. In Flanders the regional elections also got most of the attention, but the fact that both Verhofstadt and Dehaene ran in the EP elections increased the attention to Europe¹¹⁶. As such, the issues put forward in those articles got primed among Flemish voters more so than they did in Wallonia. The differences in the party landscape also determined issue priming. As noted earlier mass media attention to the state reform issue primed the Walloon and Flemish electorates. However, Flanders has various parties with clear Flemish-Nationalistic tendencies (N-VA, LDD and VB), which increased its starting salience among the Flemish electorate¹¹⁷. Though the campaign contexts both *increased* the issues’ salience¹¹⁸, the difference in the absolute salience of the issue is explained by the party landscapes.

Because we already found some differences in two cases with largely similar institutional layouts, we should expect substantially different results in other, less similar settings. Therefore we first discuss three factors that might affect politician priming, and how this alters the role of applicability and accessibility. Then, we do a similar exercise for issue priming. Next, we address the impact of compulsory voting: in both elections voters had to make their way to the voting booth, but this is not the case in a number of countries. Finally, our data studied media effects during a period of only a few months. Media cover politics over longer periods of time, so we end the paragraph by discussing the priming effect of the mass media over longer periods of time.

¹¹⁶ 15% of the Flemish newspaper articles mentioned Europe, compared to 9% in Wallonia.

¹¹⁷ 26 Flemish voters mentioned the issue, compared to only 3 in Wallonia.

¹¹⁸ At the end of the campaign, 40 Flemish voters and 5 Walloon voters mentioned the issue.

A first factor affecting politician priming in different settings is the fact that in the Flemish and Walloon regional elections, voters have to choose between parties. Once a list is chosen, voters can give specific candidates preference votes, but the key choice that has to be made is between parties. This fact alone has important consequences for the decision making process and the use of heuristics among both the Flemish and Walloon electorates. For one, the party heuristic is the most used heuristic in both electorates – some of these considerations were undoubtedly cued by the question wording, but in our opinion the statement that parties are the key objects of electoral choice still stands. In the Netherlands, a country where voters are faced with a similar choice between parties' lists, Van Holsteyn and Andeweg (2010, p. 6) find that “*just over half of the voters are pure party voters ...*”. Their analysis focuses on politicians versus parties as object of choice, but their findings underpin our argument nonetheless. In the 2009 regional elections, parties were the most important choice mechanism.

In countries where candidates rather than parties are the objects of choice, the decision to be made is different. Thus is it hard to extrapolate our results to such settings. Nevertheless, in such settings prior research found that visibility of politicians primes *characteristics* of politicians (Mendelsohn, 1996). Instead of priming certain candidates or politicians media prime certain aspects of these actors among the electorate. One reason for this is probably that in such settings the visibility of all candidates is relatively high, but also the fact that the candidates are the options between which voters must choose.

The current study does offer some insights regarding the role of applicability and accessibility in politician priming, which may also matter in candidate-centered settings. We expected that tone would increase the priming effect for politician priming because it increased *accessibility*, and it did. In Wallonia, it proved to be a crucial factor in explaining voters' heuristic use. Negatively covered politicians (in this case, Didier Reynders) fade away, whereas positively covered politicians come to the forefront. Critics might argue that just because they cease to be mentioned does not mean they become less important. However, ceasing to be mentioned at least implies that voters did not consider them a reason to vote *for* the party anymore – but rather considered them a liability. Given that voters still vote for the party, it would be illogical to give much consideration to such a liability. It is more likely that the voter, as a result of negative coverage on the politician, shifted attention away from the

politician towards other heuristics, which then gained importance. In this regard, it should be noted that most of the voters that ceased mentioning Didier Reynders stayed loyal to MR throughout the campaign. Studies on negative campaigning warned for the (presumed) detrimental effects on the electorate (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995). However, other scholars suggest that voters are remarkably resilient to these detrimental effects (Brooks, 2006). Our findings suggest a possible explanation for this resilience. Voters deal with negativity by shifting attention: they start to lower the importance of the adversely affected politicians in their decision making, and start to focus on different politicians or even other heuristics instead¹¹⁹. Instead of focusing on the negative attention for the preferred candidate, voters might avoid the negativity by focusing on the fact that the candidate is still backed by various groups in society. Our findings for the 2009 Walloon elections suggest that negatively covered politicians do cease to be mentioned by most voters, presumably because attention among voters shifted away from them. Something similar might occur in candidate-centered elections: in such settings certain features of candidates become primed (e.g. leadership, trustworthiness, and so on). If a candidate gets negative attention in the news regarding their lack of leadership voters may be turning away from the leadership aspect and focus on other (more positive) aspects of the candidate instead.

A second factor affecting politician priming is the thinly spread media visibility of politicians in the elections under study: the data on media coverage of the campaign suggest that for the two regional campaigns, media attention for the various politicians was thinly spread – some politicians managed to attract a lot of attention, but a lot of politicians had to deal with small amounts of visibility. In candidate-centered elections a select group of politicians gets most of the attention¹²⁰ whereas in the 2009 regional elections it was spread over a large amount of

¹¹⁹ Compulsory turnout in Belgium might be a confounding factor: theoretically voters cannot choose to abstain from voting due to negativity. However, the odds that a voter will be sanctioned for not turning out are low (Deschouwer, 2009, pp. 110-111). Also, various studies have shown that turnout is not affected by campaign tone, so compulsory voting should not impact our findings to a great extent.

¹²⁰ In U.S. elections the final battle is usually between two candidates: elections for the House of Representatives, Presidential elections (discounting the primaries). Identically, U.K. general elections focus on the candidate prime-ministers (e.g. in 2010 all televised debates were between Clegg, Cameron and Brown). In the Netherlands parties are also the objects of choice, but due to the fact that there is only one electoral constituency the focus is more on one politician per party.

politicians. As such, we would expect priming effects to be at least equal, if not greater, than those we found in the 2009 regional elections.

A final factor that affects politician priming is the fact that in the Flemish and Walloon media coverage ‘electoral linking’ varied greatly between politicians. We found strong evidence that this mattered for politician priming: the more a politician was visible in articles in which the upcoming elections were mentioned, the more this visibility primed voters. The theoretical explanation is that increasing the link between the politician and the elections in the media coverage increases the applicability of the politician to those elections. However, these findings are probably of less importance in presidential elections. In Belgian campaigns politicians get attention, but the extent to which that attention is linked to the elections varies wildly. Various politicians of the federal government such as Herman Van Rompuy and Laurette Onckelinx were highly visible in the media during the investigated period, but were less visible in coverage on the campaign. In candidate-centered elections, we would assume that most of the candidates running would indeed take office; furthermore, the link to the elections would be less variable, since all of the candidates are campaigning. The absolute visibility of the candidates fluctuates but the degree to which they are linked to the elections remains constant. There is one noteworthy exception here; based on our findings, we would assume that if for example Barack Obama actively campaigns for the midterm elections in 2010, this would prime voters to give their evaluation of him more weight in their decision making for those elections. The reason is that Obama’s visibility becomes more and more linked to the midterm elections, thereby increasing his applicability. As such, our findings would suggest that such interventions do matter, for better or worse.

Regarding issue priming, we expect fewer differences in other settings because the issue priming effect has been established in other settings (Druckman, 2004; Mendelsohn, 1996; Sheaffer, 2007). Instead, we address the role of applicability, which turned out to be crucial for issue priming as well. Our initial analysis revealed that general media coverage did not prime issues among voters. In both Flanders and Wallonia we found strong evidence that salient issues in the political or electoral¹²¹ coverage did prime voters. In 2009, the economy was in

¹²¹ The content analysis dataset contained two variables: one dummy for ‘political coverage’, which was marked if the article dealt with politics in general, and another for ‘election coverage’ which was only marked if specific

general recession, and the issue received high visibility both generally and politically. Issues prime when they become salient in the *political* coverage. Crime was highly visible in the mass media, but only marginally in the political coverage; as a result, media did not prime the crime issue among the electorate. The economy, on the other hand, was a dominant issue in the campaign – especially so in Flanders. All parties incorporated the economic troubles in their campaign, and voters picked this up.

That said, pre-existing decision making of voters mattered. The amount of economic references increased during the campaign, but part of this rise was due to the fact that it was a relatively unimportant issue among voters at the start of the campaign¹²². This does not diminish the finding that priming caused a big shift: over the course of the 2009 campaigns, the amount of references to the economic issue nearly doubled. And according to our evidence, the economy was primed because it had become a political topic over the course of the campaign. These effects occur ‘on top’ of what was present at the start of the campaign. Pre-existing heuristics do not act as a filter, but matter nonetheless because the priming effects are greater if the heuristics are absent or unimportant at the start of the campaign. The specific features of the Belgian polity give little reason to assume that this effect would be radically different in other countries. When issues are high on the media’s agenda, it may or may not prime voters. The key determinant is whether the media cover the issue as being a political issue, or not.

Contrary to other countries voting is compulsory in the Belgian polity (Deschouwer, 2009). It is hard to predict how different priming effects would be among the electorates of countries in which voting is voluntary: most of the other priming studies focus on the part of the electorate that does show up. We expect that in countries where voting is voluntary, media will be less successful in priming the part of the electorate that does not intend to vote. The reason for this is, again, applicability. If a voter does not plan on casting a vote, electoral coverage on issues

references to the upcoming elections were made; Regarding issue priming, both turned out to significantly increase the priming effect.

¹²² Across the two electorates, the amount of economic issue references almost doubled between W1 and W2, from 19 to 38 (unweighted). The environment issue, for example, already had 117 references at the start of the campaign, but dropped in importance to 106 references.

and politicians is not linked to a decision that the voter has to make. Consequently, such coverage would be dismissed by the voter as irrelevant. This is a very crude prediction, but the general gist of the argument (irrelevant information is dismissed) builds on our findings on that part of the electorate that did go out to vote.

Finally, we only measured media visibility during campaign times. As the elections approach, journalists make sure that their coverage adheres to the best journalistic practices by giving each party and candidate their 'fair' share of attention. We found that priming effects occur over longer periods of time: our LTI indicators of media visibility were almost invariably the best predictors. We delineated a three-month period based on the timing of the PVPS waves, but priming effects probably occur over longer periods. We found strong results for the priming of specific politicians within the politician heuristic in a more 'balanced' period of news coverage. In periods of 'regular' coverage the skew in media reporting on politics is greater, especially the visibility of individual politicians (Van Aelst & De Swert, 2009). Presumably this also occurs in other countries, but evidence is lacking. If priming effects do occur based on cumulative attention over a longer time period, the differentiating effect between politicians should be even greater in regular periods: as political coverage in general lessens, and the focus shifts towards a more select group of politicians, it is this small group of politicians that is remembered among the electorate. Our findings for the first wave of the PVPS data confirm that a few politicians account for the bulk of specific politician mentions. But when the campaign gets under way and coverage becomes more balanced, other lesser known politicians start to become more important in voters' minds.

Similarly, issues that have become the topic of political debate become primed among the electorate. As we showed earlier, the link with 'politics' is crucial. As such, political issues should become primed over a longer period, and not just within the campaign period we delineated. We have no evidence to support this, but our findings show that the priming of issues depends on political salience as much as electoral salience. Future research efforts could assess the fluctuation of political issue priming between election campaigns. During the campaign the increased attention to politics may intensify the priming effect, but this effect has to occur in a short period of time. Conversely, over the entire legislature sustained political attention to an issue may establish a firm link between an issue and politics, so that it remains primed among the electorate even if it is absent in the campaign. The 2009 campaign

occurred after a period of substantial conflict over the state reform issue, and especially in Flanders the issue was heavily debated. The presence of the Flemish-Nationalistic party N-VA further spurred this debate. We think this explains its high salience among the Flemish electorate at the outset of the campaign (compared to the Walloon electorate). In both regions it was the third most salient issue in campaign coverage, behind the economy and political culture. Voter references to the communitarian issue increased albeit somewhat less than the increase in economical references. Arguably, the fact that it was already politically salient before the campaign affected the priming effect: priming has the most effect if an issue is less salient at the start of the campaign. We do not have any data to confirm these inferences, but we found highly similar findings in an experimental study on Flemish respondents in the run up to the 2007 federal elections across a large range of issues (Walgrave, Van Aelst, & Lefevere, 2010). Future research should address these long-term priming effects and their consequences for short-term priming.

8.2 Causal reports and Introspection

The findings regarding the priming hypotheses on issues and politicians lead us to believe that open ended causal reports should not be ignored. Whether we are truly measuring the entire decision making process accurately or not, the validity tests and the empirical findings prove that such reports contain information that is of interest to many scholars. People may not give us all the information, but the information that they provide makes a lot of sense. This finding is further proof that interdisciplinary research is necessary. Causal reports are seldom used in electoral research, whereas psychology is still debating their use. This debate is notably absent in political science, so consulting another disciplines' take on the matter benefits our understanding of the technique.

In our opinion only one heuristic gave cause for alarm: the party heuristic. The fact that we find unexpected results regarding the party heuristic can partially be attributed to the way we measured heuristics. More specifically, question wording may have increased the amount of party mentions because it cued people to use them: why did you vote for this *party*? Especially at the start of the long campaign, when the elections are still a few months away, these cued answers may have had an important impact. As the campaign got under way, and electoral coverage in the media started to increase, respondents started to switch to other, non-

cued heuristics. We did instruct the interviewers to use follow-up questions: if the respondent answered “because it is the best party”, interviewers had to probe for more specific reasons. We believe that such preemptive measures decrease the amount of ‘cued’ responses, but it probably does not completely solve the problem. In our web-based electoral panel for the 2010 elections we included an experimental design with alternative question wording¹²³, and the findings suggest that this does lower the amount of party references. Nevertheless, the issue remains difficult to circumvent because the preceding question is always: for which *party* would you vote if the elections were to be held today?

We cannot know for certain the extent to which such measurement issues are also present for the other heuristics; the results that our measurement yielded confirm the priming effect found by previous research, which is encouraging. Our measurement is crude: we can only assess whether a heuristic is present, or not. We cannot know whether the heuristic dropped in importance or whether the campaign ‘lifted’ some heuristics that were already present into the answer. From listening to the CATI interviews and coding the responses it appeared that these open ended reports do indeed yield the most top-of-mind information. Arguably, this was less the case in the first wave, where CAPI was employed: interviewers sat down with the respondent, and did not have to hurry as much; the CATI interviews were often done ‘on the spot’: for example, some respondents were probably called while they were shopping, driving home, and so on. As a result some respondents may have just wanted to get it over with, and rushed through the interview. This results in shorter, quicker, but especially more top of mind answers. If anything, such responses should result in *less* priming effects – in the CAPI interview respondents had more time to voice their reasons, which resulted in a slightly higher average amount of heuristic mentions in the first wave¹²⁴. Simply put: the less reasons were given at the end of the campaign, the less likely it was that our priming hypotheses would get confirmed. And yet, for the most part our hypotheses were confirmed nonetheless.

¹²³ For example “Why did you vote this way?” or “Why did you make this choice?”

¹²⁴ In Flanders: 1.65 heuristics on average in W1, compared to 1.55 in W2 (N = 864).

In Wallonia: 1.64 heuristics on average in W1, compared to 1.55 in W2 (N = 694).

Perhaps the most important advantage of open-ended causal reports is that they yield *different* data than other questions. We already referenced Shapiro in our opening chapter, but it seems befitting to reiterate the citation prior to our closing remarks.

"... perhaps some other game should be played ... we might learn more about why people vote in the ways that they do by asking them."

(Shapiro, 2002, p. 611)

The question ‘why do people vote the way they do?’ can be answered by talking about what caused the behavior, but also by looking at the reasons for the behavior. The importance of reasons may seem trivial, but what caused the behavior may not always fully explain the reasons underlying it. Vice versa, reasons that voters use to explain their behavior may not have caused the behavior. Instead, reasons may explain the intentions of the voter. The lack of focus on reasons to explain behavior is because “*mainstream methodology is causalist and one of the assumptions that makes it work ... has been that reasons are causes.*” (Meadwell, 2008, p. 13). But reasons are not causes: reasons refer to the intentions or motivations of the actor (Davidson, 1963). Reasons can be causes, but a variety of other things can also be seen as causing something (Jacobitti, 1979).

The search for the causes of behavior was the implicit focus of this manuscript: we used the open-ended measure as an indicator of the bits and pieces of information that caused the vote choice. Doing so was successful. We confirmed previous findings of research that used more traditional indicators. This proves that causal reports are useful to understand the causes of behavior. It furthermore shows that the current lack of debate regarding their use in electoral studies is troublesome: scholars are currently too quick in dismissing the technique. However, the reports could also be read as another explanation of the behavior, or an indicator of the voters’ intentions rather than a report on the exact causes of the behavior. Interpreted in this way, these reports give *different* information that can help correctly explain the behavior. As such, they should not be ignored. Scholars that use more traditional (causal) models to study voting behavior should consider consulting these reports to understand what is going on. Some authors already implicitly do this (for example Marsh, 2007; Pauwels, 2011), but it is far from widespread. In our experience, a variety of results could only be correctly interpreted

when we went back to the causal reports to understand what was really going on¹²⁵. There really is nothing to be lost in considering them: at worst, the evidence they yield offers no additional insight. At best, they help scholars answer one of the key questions in political science.

¹²⁵ Examples include the 'weird' interaction between the group heuristic and issue priming, the extent to which various scandals were known and visible among the electorate, and so on.

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Appendix A: PVPS Survey

A.1 - PVPS Sample design and contact procedures for all waves

Wave 1 - Initial sample and research design

The initial sample consisted of 4363 addresses, distributed over 240 sampling points, which were extracted from the Rijksregister. Put shortly, the Rijksregister, which is the official list of all residents in Belgium, is the best source of addresses available. It can only be used by the authorities or academic institutions, and even then an application must be approved by the privacy commission which scrutinizes every application for its guaranties for personal privacy. A privacy regulation, specific introduction letters, and a vow to destroy the addresses 6 months after completion of the fieldwork were only some of the measures that were taken to assure respondents rights to privacy. The sampling points were used to keep the traveling costs, which are substantial in face-to-face interviewing, under control. For each sampling point 17, 20 or 25 addresses were randomly selected depending on the district. Urban districts received more addresses to anticipate higher non response compared to more rural districts. The aim of this sample was to achieve a sample of at least 1200 Flemish and 1200 Walloon voters for the first wave. These respondents would then be contacted for two follow-up telephone interviews: waves 2 and 3.

The field work itself was coordinated by TNS media. Before initiating the contact procedure, a letter of introduction was sent to the respondents. Due to the restrictions set by the Privacy Commission, it clearly indicated that participation was voluntary, which had repercussions for the response rate as will be discussed later. Following the introduction letter, an interviewer then attempted to contact the respondent. A total of 136 interviewers cooperated for the PVPS, 86 in Flanders and 50 in Flanders. All interviewers were extensively trained in the general goals and methods of scientific survey research. Furthermore, in several briefing sessions the Partirep team instructed the interviewers on the goals of the project, the questionnaire, and the contact procedure. The interviewers had to try to contact the respondent at least four times, spread out over at least two weeks. At least one of these attempts had to occur during the weekend, and one on a weekday after 6PM. After the third failed attempt, a contact card was left in the mailbox with the credentials of the interviewer. If no reaction by

the respondent ensued, the interviewer had to contact the respondent at least one additional time.

The project also provided a so called 'green line': a free number the respondents could call with questions about the project, who funded it, and so on. Respondents could also contact this green line to indicate that they did not wish to participate in the survey. This turned out to be an easy way out for many respondents, as a telephone refusal resulted in an abrupt abortion of all further contacts. Again, this green line was implemented mainly to appease the Privacy Commission, but turned out to have an adverse effect on response rates.

The interview itself was aimed at a length of roughly 40 minutes. Before commencing the interview, the interviewer was obliged to read the full introduction out loud; in this introduction, the goal of the project, guidelines, and an explicit assertion that participation was voluntary were mentioned. After this, the actual questions followed. After the interview, the interviewer asked the respondent if s(he) could be contacted for two follow-up interviews (waves 2 and 3). Whether the respondent agreed to participate or not, s(he) received an incentive¹²⁶ at the end of the interview. Some respondents were later contacted to check whether they actually participated or not.

Wave 1 – a short field work overview

The key issue that was encountered during the data collection was low response. Though low response does not necessarily lead to a biased sample, it usually is the case. Therefore, high response rates are quite desirable. Because of two reasons, the green line and the introduction letter, non response was higher than initially anticipated. Because of this an additional sample of 500 addresses was extracted from the Rijksregister on the 14th of April, 2009. These addresses were then immediately contacted in the manner described above. When the field work was complete, 2331 interviews had been realized on a sample of 4831 addresses – a response rate of 48,3 per cent. The fact that an additional sample was added caused the fieldwork period to extend as well – some respondents that were interviewed near the end of wave 1 were interviewed for the second wave only a week later. This will naturally have to be taken into account when we assess changes in attitudes and behavior. Another effect of the

¹²⁶ A shopping voucher of 5 euro.

additional sample is the fact that two subsamples of respondents exist: those who were interviewed in the early stages of the campaign (February / March) and those that were interviewed when the campaign was already well underway (April / May). Figure A-1 shows the per cent of interviews for both the Flemish and Walloon sample per day, for the entire fieldwork period.

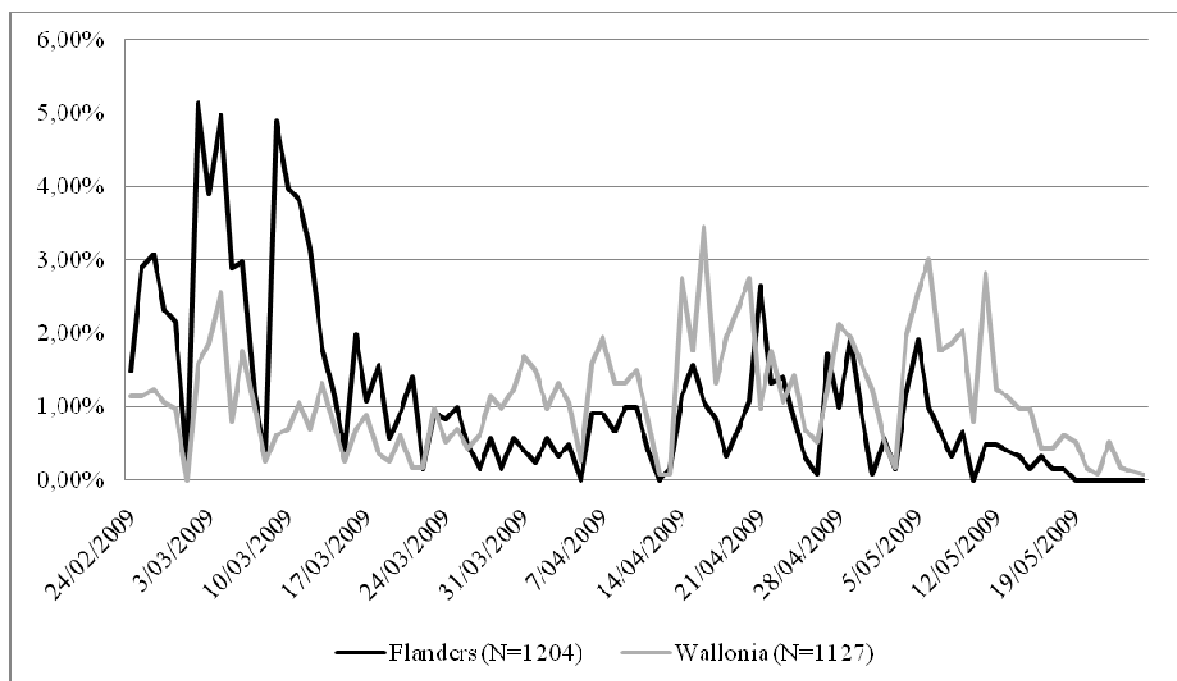


Figure A-1: Per cent of interviews conducted for the first wave in Flanders and Wallonia, per day.

As the graph shows, the field work for wave 1 took place over a relatively long period. For some respondents the time gap between wave 1 and wave 2 was larger than for other respondents. As we show later on in the actual analysis, we account for this by calculating individual exposure measures for each respondent. The data we have at our disposal offers the advantage that we have respondents who were exposed to certain campaign events at the time of their wave 1 interview, and respondents who were only exposed to the same events between their wave 1 and 2 interviews. As such, the resulting data actually fits the purposes of the study well.

During the field work, the interviewers received feedback after the first three successful interviews. Both the Partirep team and TNS supervisors reviewed these interviews. The key issue was the fact that the introduction was read too fast, which compromised the privacy

assertions we gave to the commission. All in all, most of the interviews were almost void of substantial errors, especially so after the feedback. Interview duration was longer than expected (50 minutes on average). Most importantly, 88 per cent of the sample agreed to the follow up interviews, which was crucial for the panel design.

Waves 2 and 3 - Initial sample and research design

Since both waves 2 and 3 operated largely on the same principles, they will be discussed in tandem. Both surveys had as the initial sample those respondents that participated in the first wave and agreed to participate in the follow-up telephone surveys. Respondents that refused upon contacting, or who contacted the green line and refused, were not contacted further. The initial sample for waves 2 and 3 was N=2057. The contact procedure was identical for both waves. Each respondent is contacted at least three times, most often contacts are attempted after 6PM or in weekends. Furthermore, each interviewer had been trained with adequate arguments as to maximize cooperation. In total, the CATI centre of TNS consists of both a call centre in the company headquarters (40 interviewer posts) and a CATI@home system (up to 140 interviewers can be interviewing at the same time). The CATI system allowed monitoring by the Partirep team from any landline¹²⁷; furthermore, TNS supervisors continually monitored the fieldwork.

The CATI method allowed for a short field work period: wave 2 started two weeks prior to the elections and ended the day before the elections. Wave 3 fieldwork was also planned to last only a few weeks.

Waves 2 and 3: a short field work overview

The field work for wave 2 went, all things considered, relatively smoothly. This was mainly due to the fact that all respondents that were contacted had already agreed to the interview; most of the non response was caused by being unable to contact the person in the relatively short field work period (2 weeks). Nevertheless, out of 2057 respondents 1845 were interviewed: a response rate of 90 per cent. The field work for wave 3 met more non response, mainly due to the fact that summer vacation begun right in the middle of data collection. Because of this, the field work period was extended and the amount of contact attempts per

¹²⁷ The author monitored the CATI interviews for both wave 2 and 3.

respondent was increased. Field work on wave 3 was ceased on August 24th, 2009. At this time, out of 2057 respondents 1698 had been successfully interviewed, which is a response rate of 83 per cent.

Sample representativeness and weighting

The aim of the PVPS survey was to study the attitudes and behavior of those inhabitants of Flanders and Wallonia that were entitled to vote in the 2009 regional elections. Random samples offer a way to make statistical inferences about the population through a sample. A key prerequisite for this is that the sample is representative for the population. Non response endangers representativeness, because earlier research has shown that some people are more likely than others to refuse. If the sample is biased because it over-represents or under-represents certain parts of the population, inferences are biased as well. The sample of the first PVPS wave had a response rate of 48 per cent, so non-response was substantial. If the sample is not that different from the population the implications for statistical inference are not a great deal of concern. However, the sample did differ from the population on several key demographics, especially when we take the distribution across the territory in account. More importantly, voting preference was off if we look at the third and final wave, in which the actual voting behavior of respondents was polled (some tables on this are provided the next paragraph). Naturally, these biases are problematic if we wish to make inferences about the general population. To this end, for almost all analyses based on the PVPS dataset we utilized proportional weights, which shift the distribution of the sample towards that of the population on several variables. Weighting does not erase the problem of bias introduced by non-response: if certain groups of respondents are missing from the sample altogether, weighting will never introduce them into the analysis (ISPO/PIOP, 2006). Still, given that the sample at hand is what it is, weighting is the best option available to achieve a sample that is as representative as can be.

The weights that will be used in the analysis were computed by TNS, under supervision of the Partirep team. Since we are dealing with panel data, several sets of weights were calculated: for analyses utilizing variables from waves 1 and 2, the sample consists of respondents that participated in both waves. If we only use wave 1, the composition of the sample is different, and so on. For each sample three weights were calculated: first, a basic weight that only adjusts the distribution of province, age and sex. Second, a weight that adds profession and

level of education to this. Finally, the most complex weight also included voting preference (weights for wave 1 and wave 2 samples) or voting behavior in 2009 (wave 3 sample). Weights were calculated using reiterative rim weighting¹²⁸. The weights are proportional for the regions; what this means is that the N of the Flemish / Walloon sample are kept constant, only the distributions within each of these samples are adjusted. The reason for not creating a ‘Belgian’ weight is simple: the Brussels region is absent from the sample, so a Belgian sample was impossible to begin with. Unless otherwise noted, the analyses in the dissertation use the weight that adjusts for socio-demographic variables and voting behavior / preference.

A.2 - Comparison between PVPS sample and Flemish / Walloon populations

Flanders				
Age category	Population		PVPS wave 1 sample	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
18-24	5%	5%	5%	5%
25-39	13%	12%	12%	12%
40-64	22%	21%	22%	21%
65-79	8%	9%	10%	9%
80+	2%	4%	2%	2%
N	2.379.074	2.489.911	598	584
Wallonia				
Age category	Population		PVPS wave 1 sample	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
18-24	6%	5%	6%	6%
25-39	13%	13%	11%	13%
40-64	21%	21%	22%	23%
65-79	7%	9%	7%	8%
80+	2%	4%	1%	2%
N	1.274.083	1.391.632	526	573

Table A-1: Comparison of PVPS sample with Flemish / Walloon Population on Age and Sex.

Differences at the aggregate level are relatively small; the greatest difference is 2 per cent. Nevertheless, the aggregate picture disguises larger, more outspoken differences at the educational level. Furthermore, party preference was notably biased in the sample. Table A-1 shows the actual election result of 2007 and the reported voting behavior for 2007 (surveyed in the first wave) in the PVPS sample.

¹²⁸ Because no population data exists that offer cross tabulations of socio-demographic variables and voting behavior, rim weighting is the only option. Rim weighting tries to adjust the ‘rims’ of the crosstab, which are known, by altering the distributions of the individual cells within the table. Another reason to use rim weighting is that it allows for smaller weights – if the proportion of one cell is highly off, a large weight would need to be applied to adjust for this, whereas if only the rims have to be adjusted, the adjustments are smaller in general.

Party	% vote in 2007	% reported vote in PVPS sample
<i>Flemish parties (N=1171)</i>		
CD&V – N-VA	29.6	34.6
Groen!	6.3	4.6
Sp.A – Spirit	16.3	17.5
VB	19.0	9.7
Open VLD	18.8	20.1
LDD	6.5	2.1
<i>Walloon parties (N=1080)</i>		
PS	29.5	33.6
MR	31.2	24.8
CDH	15.8	13.4
Ecolo	12.8	10.8
FN	5.6	1.4

Table A-1: Comparison of Voting Distribution for 2007 elections (Chamber) among the Population and PVPS sample.

Especially for VB, the Flemish sample is clearly biased; for Wallonia the distribution is also biased: MR and PS market leadership is inversed.

Appendix B: Codebook Causal reports

B.1 - General guidelines

The general purpose of the coding scheme is to indicate which heuristics were mentioned in the causal report. To this end, two hierarchical levels of coding are used.

- The first level indicates which heuristics are mentioned (e.g. issue heuristic, politician heuristic, government and opposition, and so on).
- The second level indicates the specific type of information that is mentioned (e.g. environment issue, Guy Verhofstadt, and so on).

To ease the coding job, the second level is sometimes further split up into two hierarchical levels.

B.2 - Unit of analysis and amount of heuristics coded

A maximum of **three heuristics** will be coded per answer; this is in line with the ISPO/PIOP codebook on the same type of causal report (Beerten et al., 1997; ISPO & PIOP, 2003; ISPO/PIOP, 2006). As earlier results from the UAWEP panel indicated, 96.9 per cent of the reports contained two heuristics or less (3,1 per cent gave 3 or more). We feel confident that the loss in coded strategies is only very slight, and we would not gain much by coding an additional heuristic.

The unit of analysis is **the entire answer given by the respondent**. This means that we apply a maximum of three codes to describe the content of the entire answer. The alternatives (using a (semi)sentence) would lead to unnecessary fragmentation, as some reports are by necessity split out over multiple sentences. Furthermore, as we do not aim to assess the relative importance of the heuristics in such detail we opted to use the entire answer as a single unit.

B.3 - Coding tool overview

The actual coding was done by means of an Access form. This offers several advantages compared to manual input into Excel or an SPSS data sheet. Firstly, the coding scheme is quite complex, with almost 400 unique codes at the lowest level. Remembering all the codes

during coding would be impossible, which might cause coders to forget about less-often used codes. The form displays the different (sub)codes dynamically, so coders always have an overview of all possible codes within each level. Secondly, typing errors are eliminated. The form is fully mouse-operated, so coders simply have to point-and-click. This also speeds up the actual input of data. The form was constructed and programmed by the author. Figure B-1 shows an example of what the coding form looks like.

Figure B-1: Example of the Coding Form used in Causal Report coding.

In the coding form, field 1 indicates the party preference of the respondent. This aids in interpreting the causal report, since the party is often not referred to by its name. Field 2 contains the actual causal report to be coded. Under these two fields, the fields to code heuristic use are located.

First, in field 4 the coder indicates the first level code for the first heuristic. In this case, ‘issues’ has been selected. As soon as a selection in field 4 is made, field 5 updates with the relevant subcategories. In turn, as soon as a selection has been made in field 5 (in this case, ‘environment and energy’), field 6 updates with the final level of subcategories (if applicable). The checkboxes (indicated by the number 3) are three additional indicators that were added to the coding scheme: two time indicators (references to the past / future) and one indicator for

mentions of Europe in the heuristic. The same principle applies for the coding of heuristics 2 and 3.

B.4 - Coding scheme

The coding scheme is hierarchical in nature. At the first level, 13 categories are used:

- 9 to indicate specific heuristics (politicians [1], endorsements [2], government and opposition [3], groups [4], habit [5], magnitude [6], ideology and values [7], issues [8], and party [9]).
- 4 to indicate either missing answers [-1], no reasons being given [12], incomprehensible answers [13], or an answer that did not fit the heuristic coding scheme [11].

Each category and its subcategories will be discussed in turn below. In addition to this hierarchical scheme, three additional indicators are also used:

- For each heuristic, indicators for mentions of the past / the future can be checked if they are applicable for that strategy. For example, *“because Guy Verhofstadt has helped me in the past”* is a politician heuristic reference which also mentions the past. *“I’ve been raised like that”* (general past), *“the current parties in power are not doing a good job”* (past performance of current government), *“they’ve accomplished a lot already”*, *“they did a good job”*, and so on.
- An indicator for mentioning anything relating to Europe is provided for each strategy. This allows us to go back to the original reports and quickly find those reports that are related to Europe.

[1] Politicians

If the respondent mentions either a specific politician or the party’s politicians in general the report is coded as mentioning the politician heuristic. The coding scheme provides a list of well known politicians for each party. If the politician is not listed, use the ‘specific politician’ category. General references to the political personnel of a party (e.g. they’ve got good people / competent people), use the ‘general politicians’ subcategory.

If the report mentions politicians of another party (e.g. a CD&V voter criticizing Guy Verhofstadt), code this as the politician heuristic as well.

IMPORTANT: IF THE RESPONDENT INDICATES S(HE) KNOWS THE POLITICIAN (EITHER AS A FRIEND, AN ACQUAINTANCE OR AS FAMILY) THIS IS AN ENDORSEMENT!

[2] Endorsements

If the respondent mentions friends, family, acquaintances or an organisation that s(he) is a member of, it is coded as the endorsement rule. The idea behind the endorsement rule is that something in the direct social environment of the respondent was used in the decision.

E.g. *“my parents vote this way”, “my father told me they are doing well”, “most of my friends also vote for them”, “I volunteer in an organization and most people there like the party”, and so on.*

For each subcategory of endorsements, it has to be defined whether the report makes a general mention about the endorsement, or whether it specifically mentions the fact that the endorsement was a shortcut or an influence; an easy but crude distinction can be made by using the following rule. Using endorsements as a *shortcut* means you are lazy (you literally delegate the decision to someone else), being *influenced* by endorsements means you are a coward (because you simply adopt the opinion of someone else).

[201] Acquaintances

Mentions of acquaintances of the respondent are coded under this subcategory. E.g. *“I know some people that think they’re doing a good job”, “some people we know spoke highly of them”.*

IMPORTANT: IF RESPONDENTS INDICATE THAT THEY KNOW A POLITICIAN PERSONALLY (EITHER DIRECTLY OR THROUGH SOMEONE ELSE), IT IS CODED UNDER THIS CATEGORY.

[202] Association

If the respondent mentions membership of an association, use this category. This can be broad: from a sport association through which s(he) got to know party activists, through simply being a member of a health insurance linked to a certain party (e.g. CM, ...).

IMPORTANT: TRADE UNIONS, BEING A CLEAR ECONOMIC GROUP, MUST BE CODED UNDER THE GROUP RULE!

[203] Family

References to the influence of parents, uncles, grandfathers. References to youth, being raised up in a certain way, and so on.

References to tradition. This is important, because even when family as such is not mentioned, tradition is treated as both an indicator of habit (since it refers to past behavior) and family. Therefore, the general rule is to code tradition as both habit and endorsements – family.

[204] Friends

Any and all references to friends that vote for the party as well, or that convinced the respondent to vote a certain way. Also simply mentioning that ‘all my friends vote this way’ is counted as an endorsement.

[3] Government and Opposition (G&O)

In general, if any future or past government or the opposition is specifically mentioned, use this category over most of the others if you have to make a choice.

For example, suppose two out of three heuristics have been used to code the first part of the report. The final sentence is “The party seems to be doing a pretty good job in the Flemish government”. Two options would be feasible: party preference rule or G&O. In this case, G&O should always be the preferred option. Obviously, if two slots were available both party preference and G&O should be used.

[301] Government

If government is mentioned, use this category. Use the final level of subcategories to further specify whether it is a reference to the current government (doing a good [30101] or bad [30102] job) or to the future government. Future government references are split up into three types: the respondent makes a general reference to the composition of the future government

coalition [30103], wants to keep another party out of the future coalition [30104] or stresses that he votes for the party because he wants them to be in government [30105].

IMPORTANT: DO NOT FORGET TO USE THE TIME INDICATORS! GOVERNMENT REFERENCES OFTEN REFER TO EITHER THE PAST OR THE FUTURE!

[302] Opposition

If the respondent refers to the opposition doing a good job [30202], a bad job [30201], or if the respondent describes the party as an opposition party [30203], use this subcategory. The description of [30203] refers to a general disposition to get the party into the opposition. For example, Vlaams Belang voters often describe them as a pressure party, to keep the others in line. This type of description would also serve as an indication of the party as an opposition party.

[303] Change

This subcategory is meant to capture all references to (resistance to) a change in power: “*I want to have these guys give it a go*”, “*to stir things up a bit and change things*”, “*I want change*”, and so on [30301]. A general change in policy is also coded under this category, as it implies a power shift.

Continuity in government [30302], references to keeping things as they are: “*I do not want anything to change*”, “*to keep things as they are*”.

Specific references to bringing about a more rightist [30304] or more leftist [30303] policy.

[4] Groups

If the causal report mentions groups in society, this is an indicator of the group rule. Groups can fall into either economic [401], ethnic [402], geographic [403], religious [404], or social [406] groups.

A special category in this respect is self-interest [405]. Respondents mentioning the fact that it serves their own interest are coded as a sub-group of the group rule. The reason for this is that when these types of references are made, it is often linked to the own group, e.g. ‘this type of government would be beneficial for *people like me*’.

[401] Economic groups

Most economic groups are specific: blue-collar workers [40102], white-collar workers [40103], the self-employed [40104], the poor [40105], or the trade unions [40106].

A special economic group is the general population [40101]. If people refer to “*for the interests of the people*”, it is coded as 40101¹²⁹.

[402] Ethnic groups

An important distinction to be made up front is that between the *issue* of Asylum seekers and Immigrants, and mentioning an ethnic group. Ethnic group mentions are almost always positive (e.g. “*the socialist party is the most sensitive to the Moroccan way of life*”). As soon as the problem of immigration streams or the multicultural society comes into play, the issue code should be used (e.g. “*Moroccan people have been pouring into the country*”, “*these strangers are taking over*”, and so on).

Use the second level of subcategories to indicate the type of ethnic group mentioned: Afro-American (Black people) [40201], Asian [40202], North-African (Moroccan) [40203], White people [40204], or Other [40205].

[403] Geographic groups

Geographic group mentions are those group mentions that have clear geographical boundaries: Europe [40316], Belgium [40301], Flanders [40302], Wallonia [40303], Brussels [40304], a province [40305-40314], one’s own municipality or one’s own neighborhood [40315]. E.g. “*he is from Antwerp, so he knows what we care about*”, “*defending the interests of the Flemish people*”, “*for the people of my community*”.

[404] Religious groups

Any mention of the Church, Islam, being a member of the Christian society, and so on is coded under this category.

¹²⁹ The reason the general population is not coded as a geographic group is that it is often unclear what ‘the people’ refers to. Furthermore, we interpret ‘the interests’ here as economic interests.

Important, note that Christian-*Democratic* references are an ideology! As far as Christianity is concerned, the reference must clearly reference the Catholic Church. E.g. “*their links to the Church*”, “*I am a nun*”.

[405] *Self-Interest*

Examples of references to be coded under this category are ‘*This serves me well*’, ‘*The party does good things for people like me*’, ‘*People like me have a lot to gain from them*’.

[406] *Social groups*

Note that poor people fall under economic groups [40105], as being poor is considered an economic condition for the purposes of this study.

The coding scheme provides several social groups as subcategories: the young [40604], the elderly [40602], gay or bisexual people [40601], and women [40603]. If none of these groups capture the reference, use the other category [40605].

[5] **Habit**

Mentions of prior voting behavior, in general, are coded as being habit (e.g. “*I’ve always voted this way*”, “*voted for them the last time, and they still seem alright*”, “*out of habit*”).
Mentions of tradition.

[6] **Magnitude**

All references to the (expected) size of parties fall under this category, e.g. “*Because they’re winning*”, “*I want to vote for the winner*”, “*I want to vote for a big party*”, “*Small parties have clearer stances*”, “*they are losing, so I want to support them*”.

References to the voting threshold [603] are coded here as well, since the threshold is based upon the size of parties. E.g. “*because I want them to make the threshold*”.

[7] **Ideology and values**

Ideology splits up onto three subcategories: either the general ideology of the party or a specific one is mentioned [701], the left-right dimension is mentioned [702], or values [703] are mentioned.

[701] Ideology

If it is unclear which ideology is referred, or if the report simply mentions ‘ideology’, use the general ideology subcategory [70101]. The coding scheme provides seven specific ideologies: Christian-democratic ideology [70102], conservatism [70103], ecologism [70104], liberalism [70105], nationalism [70106], progressivism [70107], and socialism [70108].

[702] Left-Right

Mentions of the left right dimension can either be positive (supporting the left [70205], right [70206] or centre [70204]) or negative (being against the centre [70201], the left [70202] or right [70203]).

Being against extreme ideologies, or against the left *and* right, is coded as a reference in favor of the centre [70201].

[703] Values

Values [70301] are mentions of general beliefs and value systems. E.g. “*Because they are democratic*”, “*They are social*”.

[8] Issues

Issue mentions split up into three categories: references to the general programme [801], mentioning a specific issue [802-823], or mentioning a VAA [824].

For specific issues [802-823], the second level of subcategories are used to indicate whether the respondent feels that the own party has a good point of view on the issue [8xx02], or that the other parties have a bad point of view on the issue [8xx01]. If it is unclear, use the [8xx02] code (own party has a good point of view on the issue).

[801] General programme

The programme of a party is an overview of its policy stances on a wide range of issues. Therefore, mentions to the programme fall under the issue rule. A distinction is made to the general programme [80101] or the EU programme [80102]. If no clear indication of the type of programme is made, the general programme [80101] is the default category.

[802] Asylum seekers and immigrants

Asylum, asylum procedures, (illegal) immigrants, housing for immigrants, legislation on asylum seekers, asylum procedure.

[803] Communitarian relations

The splitting of Brussel-Halle-Vilvoorde, the failed attempts to do so, or any future endeavors on this issue. Conflicts between the French-speaking and Flemish-speaking. State reforms, the transfer of political competences to the regions, and so on.

[804] Crime

Any type of illegal activity: corruption, fraud, arson, vandalism, theft, murder, stalking, robbery, *prison escape*. HOWEVER: if the topic of the article is on the way police and justice handle these things, it must be coded as ‘Operation of Justice & Police’.

[805] Culture

Cultural policy, funding for the opera / theatre, protests by the cultural sector, movie premieres, movie reviews, Tom Lanoie who attacked the new minister of culture.

[806] Drug policy

Narcotics, legalization of marihuana, drug tourists, drug addiction.

[807] Economic policy

(Financial) crisis, economic policy, deregulation, protectionism, economical planning.

E.g. “*we need stability in this time of crisis*”, “*they’ve got good ideas to keep the economy going strong*”, and so on.

[808] Education

Diploma’s, education, courses, school regulation, savings in education in general (basic / high schools / universities / ...). Extraordinary education, technical / professional education. Post-university education. Public versus private schools, Steiner schools, the exams at universities.

[809] Employment

Dismissions, pensions, collective dismissions, employment policy, creating employment, unemployment, hidden unemployment, long-term unemployment, VDAB, labor market, interim agencies, social dialogue, unions, strikes,

[810] Environment

Waist control, soil, mineral reserves, acid rain, toxics, ozone layer, climate change, deforestation, protected animals, environmental disasters. Energy policy, nuclear power plants, windmill parks, oil, electricity,

[811] Ethic issues

Abortion, death penalty, euthanasia,

[812] Europe

European policy, European institutions, expansion of Europe, European legislation / regulation, ...

[813] Family policy

Family policy, support for people having children,

[814] Health care policy

Food regulations, hormones, health care, mental health care, food poisoning, hospital policy, homeopathic medicine,

[815] Housing policy

Housing, social housing, assignment of social housing, renting, costs of the *notaries*, *leegstand*.

[816] International relations

VN, UNAIDS, OESO, NATO (non European). Diplomatic relations of Belgium with another country, scientific exchanges, Interpol. Economic Relations, free trade,

Wars, war in Iraq / Afghanistan,

[817] Mobility

Traffic jams, speed regulations, cars, technical checkup, car registration. Transport of dangerous substances, airlines, ports, NMBS, De Lijn, Traffic accidents.

[818] Operation of Justice and Police

Judicial reform, cost of being represented in court, lawyers, reform of police, Octopus agreement, malfunctioning of police / justice, firefighters and civil protection.

[819] Political culture

Political morality, depolitisation, political responsibility, political scandals, political deflections (LDD – Open VLD), political renewal, accumulation of political mandates, the wages of ministers and MPs.

[820] Social policy

Social security, social inequality, aging of the population, mortality / birth rate, facilities for disabled or older people, protection of children, well being, social services, social burdens, social security benefits, maternity leave,

[821] Spatial structuring

Rural / urban regions, project development, prices of housing / apartments / land, *uitdieping Westerschelde*,

[822] Taxes

Fraud is coded under crime. Increasing / decreasing taxes. Tax reduction, harmonization of taxes,

[823] Traffic safety

Amount of people killed in traffic. Danger of SUV's on the driveway. Children having to wear fluorescent vests,

[824] VAAs

Mentioning a VAA (Voting Advice Application) in any way. Examples include: *'I simply filled out the Stemtest and got this result'*, *'Kieskompas'*,

[9] Party (preference)

The party rule has several subcategories: being against another party [901], constituency service of the party [902], identifying with the party [903], the general feeling of image of the party [904], being a member of the party [905], the parties' performance [906], or another parties' performance [907].

[901] Against another party

References to blocking the rise of another party (e.g. Vlaams Belang), or just being against another party in general. References to the fact that the other parties are no good are coded using the General [90101] subcategory.

If specific parties are mentioned (up to two), code them using separate heuristics. E.g. in "MR and PS are corrupt, CDH is the only good one" both PS [90115] and MR [90114] would get a code, using up 2 out of the three heuristics. If three or more parties are mentioned, use the General subcategory.

References to the 'cordon sanitaire' should be coded under the General category [90101].

[902] Constituency service

If the party provided a service to the respondent, or someone he knows, it is coded as constituency service. Examples are *'they fixed us up with a house'*, *'we had problems with the taxes but they sorted it out'*, *'my uncle was helped by them when he needed to move to a retirement home'*.

[903] Party identification

Mention of identification with a specific party (e.g. 'I am an Open VLD'er' / 'CD&V'er' and so on). General expressions of affiliation with the party (e.g. 'I think I belong here', 'I feel connected to them', and so on) are coded under party identification as well. References to ideologies (socialism, liberalism, ...) are coded under Ideology [701].

[904] Party image

Mentioning of thrust, general ‘feel’ of a party (e.g. ‘Because I trust this party will do what’s right for the people’, ‘Because this feels like the right party for me’), without mention of specific policies, candidates, values, ideology, or the program in general. Other indicators: sympathy for the party, they appeal to me, I trust this party, they have contact with the people, they are different from the others, ... (vague reasons).

[905] Party membership

If respondent indicates s(he) is affiliated with a party in some way (e.g. volunteer, member, representative, and so on).

Note that working for a group that is affiliated with a party (e.g. CM, ...) is not coded under this category, but rather under endorsements – association [202].

[906] Parties’ own performance

If the report mentions the fact that the party ‘is doing a good job’, without mentioning G&O or the parties programme / specific issues, use this category.

[907] Other parties’ performance

If the report mentions the fact that another party ‘is doing a bad job’, without mentioning G&O or the parties programme / specific issues, use this category. It is often better to use [901], as this allows you to be more specific about which party the respondent is talking.

[10] Other

The other category captures the content of reports that does not fit under any heuristic as such.

[1001] A-political

A-political reasons are those reasons that express a lack of interest in politics or in voting. Examples include: ‘I only chose a party because I had to’ [100102], ‘If I did not have to go out and vote, I could not care less’ [100101], ‘No idea, I just picked one from the list’ [100103], ‘I do not really care about politics, I do not know anything about it’ [100104].

[1002] Anti-political

Anti-political reasons express distrust, discontent or dissatisfaction with politics. Examples include: *'As a protest vote'* [100202], *'You really cannot trust any of them'* [100201], *'Those folks in Brussels decide what they want anyway, my vote will not change anything'* [100201].

[1003] Based on a different policy level

If respondents mention that they simply picked this party because they also chose it for a different election (most notably the Regional [100303] or European [100302] ones, as these two elections coincided) use this category.

If the report mentions the performance of the party in the local municipality, the major of the party doing a good job, and so on, use the *'Based on local policy'* category [100301].

[11] Incomprehensible

Use this category if nothing understandable can be made of the report. Common causes are misplacement of the interviewers' fingers on the keyboard, or blabbering from respondents. If part of the report is understandable, code it as such, and use the code [1101] to code the incomprehensible part.

[12] No reason

If the report simply states 'no reason', use this code.

[-1] Missing

If the report is empty, use this code.

B.5 - Specific issues & corresponding solutions in the coding scheme

[1] Communitarian references

An important distinction must be made when we regard the communitarian issue in Belgium. A lot of references are made to Flanders, Flemish people, and so on. Globally, three possible codes for these types of references exist:

- Geographic groups [403]
- Nationalist ideology [70106]

- Communitarian issue [803]

When to use each one of these?

If the people of Flanders, Wallonia, Belgium or Brussels are mentioned: Geographic groups.

If a reference is made to specific conflicts (BHV, expansion of Brussels, conflicts in government formation, linguistic issues): Communitarian issue [803].

If a reference is made to being ideologically aligned (Vlaamsgezind, Vlaams-nationalistisch, ..): Nationalist ideology [70106].

Appendix C: Codebook Content analysis

The coding, as with the coding of the causal reports, was performed through an Access form. Again, the key reason for this decision was the lower amount of errors made, and speeding up the coding process. Figure C-1 shows the coding form that was used. The numbers indicate the sequence that had to be run through for each article that was to be coded. Prior to that, however, coders had to decide whether the article had to be coded, or not.

C.1 - Selecting which articles must be coded.

All articles except those listed below must be coded, as well as any political advertisements.

Articles that must not be coded are:

- Articles in the Sports, Celebrity, Weather, Local, and Weekend sections.
- Articles that only deal with celebrity news.
- Non-political advertising.
- Letters from readers (note: opinion pieces in *De Standaard* are *not* letters from readers, and must be coded!).
- Cartoons with no accompanying text.

Large articles consisting of several sub-articles should be split up, and each sub-article has to be coded separately.

C.2 - Step 1: Article characteristics.

First, the date of the newspaper must be added, as well as the newspaper title and the number of the page the article appears on.

The 'Reference on front page' checkbox is used to indicate whether articles further in the newspaper were referred to on the front page. If the front page contains a reference to an article further in the newspaper (e.g. '*Exclusive interview with Dewever on p5*'), you code that article before moving on to the following page. In the example, the page number of the article will be 5, but you mark the 'reference on front page' checkbox. If the reference contained a picture, mark the 'picture?' checkbox as well.

Codering Kranten campagne 2009 Codenummer:

Datum krant: Krant: Pagina: Ref op Voorpagina Met Foto?

Titel: Grootte: Klein Middel Groot

Type artikel

Type Artikel: Binnenlands nieuws
 Mixed nieuws
 Internationals nieuws

Politieke advertentie
 Opiniestuk
 Opiniestuk door redactie

Artikel Kenmerk - Europa

Europa vermeld

EU verkiezingen IN België vermeld
 EU verkiezingen BUITEN België vermeld

Europese Conservatieven vermeld
 Europese Liberalen vermeld
 Europese Socialisten vermeld
 Europese Groenen vermeld

Artikel Kenmerk - Verkiezingen

Partijpolitiek
 Regionale campagne

VLAAMSE regionale verkiezingen vermeld
 WAALSE regionale verkiezingen vermeld
 BRUSSELSE regionale verkiezingen vermeld
 DUITSTALIGE regionale verkiezingen vermeld

Kiesdrempel vermeld
 Peiling vermeld

Issues

- Asielzoekers en Migranten
- Begroting
- Belastingen
- BHV
- Criminaliteit
- Cultuur
- Economisch
- Europa
- Ethische thema's
- Financiële Crisis
- Gezondheidszorg
- Huisvesting
- Internationale relaties
- Interne organisatie partijen
- Lange Wapper
- Leger
- Milieu en Energie
- Mobiliteit
- Onderwijs
- Peilingen
- Politieke cultuur
- Rampen
- Religie
- Ruimtelijke ordening
- Schandalen
- Sociaal beleid
- Staatshervorming
- Taalconflicten
- Werkgelegenheid
- Werking Justitie en Politie
- Werking regering en parlement
- Ander thema

Centraal:

Politici

Naam politicus	Neg / Pos	Algemeen Neg / Pos	Foto?
<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> - <input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/> - <input checked="" type="radio"/> +/- <input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> - <input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/> - <input checked="" type="radio"/> +/- <input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> - <input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/> - <input checked="" type="radio"/> +/- <input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> - <input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/> - <input checked="" type="radio"/> +/- <input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> - <input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/> - <input checked="" type="radio"/> +/- <input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> - <input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/> - <input checked="" type="radio"/> +/- <input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> - <input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/> - <input checked="" type="radio"/> +/- <input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> - <input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/> - <input checked="" type="radio"/> +/- <input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> - <input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/> - <input checked="" type="radio"/> +/- <input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/>
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<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> - <input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/> - <input checked="" type="radio"/> +/- <input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> - <input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/> - <input checked="" type="radio"/> +/- <input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> - <input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/> - <input checked="" type="radio"/> +/- <input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> - <input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/> - <input checked="" type="radio"/> +/- <input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> - <input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/> - <input checked="" type="radio"/> +/- <input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/>

Partijen

Vlaamse partijen				Waalse partijen			
<input type="checkbox"/> CDV	<input type="checkbox"/> -	<input type="checkbox"/> +	<input checked="" type="radio"/> +/-	<input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/> -	<input checked="" type="radio"/> +/-	<input type="checkbox"/> +
<input type="checkbox"/> Groen	<input type="checkbox"/> -	<input type="checkbox"/> +	<input checked="" type="radio"/> +/-	<input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/> -	<input checked="" type="radio"/> +/-	<input type="checkbox"/> +
<input type="checkbox"/> LDD	<input type="checkbox"/> -	<input type="checkbox"/> +	<input checked="" type="radio"/> +/-	<input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/> -	<input checked="" type="radio"/> +/-	<input type="checkbox"/> +
<input type="checkbox"/> N-VA	<input type="checkbox"/> -	<input type="checkbox"/> +	<input checked="" type="radio"/> +/-	<input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/> -	<input checked="" type="radio"/> +/-	<input type="checkbox"/> +
<input type="checkbox"/> Open VLD	<input type="checkbox"/> -	<input type="checkbox"/> +	<input checked="" type="radio"/> +/-	<input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/> -	<input checked="" type="radio"/> +/-	<input type="checkbox"/> +
<input type="checkbox"/> PvdA	<input type="checkbox"/> -	<input type="checkbox"/> +	<input checked="" type="radio"/> +/-	<input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/> -	<input checked="" type="radio"/> +/-	<input type="checkbox"/> +
<input type="checkbox"/> SLP	<input type="checkbox"/> -	<input type="checkbox"/> +	<input checked="" type="radio"/> +/-	<input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/> -	<input checked="" type="radio"/> +/-	<input type="checkbox"/> +
<input type="checkbox"/> Spa	<input type="checkbox"/> -	<input type="checkbox"/> +	<input checked="" type="radio"/> +/-	<input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/> -	<input checked="" type="radio"/> +/-	<input type="checkbox"/> +
<input type="checkbox"/> VB	<input type="checkbox"/> -	<input type="checkbox"/> +	<input checked="" type="radio"/> +/-	<input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/> -	<input checked="" type="radio"/> +/-	<input type="checkbox"/> +
<input type="checkbox"/> Andere	<input type="checkbox"/> -	<input type="checkbox"/> +	<input checked="" type="radio"/> +/-	<input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/> -	<input checked="" type="radio"/> +/-	<input type="checkbox"/> +
<input type="text"/>							
<input type="checkbox"/> Vla partijen	<input type="checkbox"/> -	<input type="checkbox"/> +	<input checked="" type="radio"/> +/-	<input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/> -	<input checked="" type="radio"/> +/-	<input type="checkbox"/> +
<input type="checkbox"/> Wal partijen	<input type="checkbox"/> -	<input type="checkbox"/> +	<input checked="" type="radio"/> +/-	<input type="checkbox"/> +	<input type="checkbox"/> -	<input checked="" type="radio"/> +/-	<input type="checkbox"/> +

Toekomstige coalities

- Toekomstige VLAAMSE coalitie
- Toekomstige FFWD coalitie
- Toekomstige Vlaamse coalitie
- Toekomstige BRUSSELSE coalitie
- Toekomstige coalitie FRANSTALIGE GEMEENSCHAP
- Toekomstige DUITSTALIGE coalitie

Gemeenschappen

- Belgen
- Brusselaars
- Duitstaligen
- Europeanen
- Franstaligen
- Vlamingen
- Walen

Figure C-1: Coding form for Newspaper Content Analysis.

For the article size, use a sheet of A4 paper to determine whether the article is large, medium, or small in size (take pictures into account when determining article size):

Newspaper	Instructions
Laatste Nieuws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Article larger than an A4 paper folded in TWO: LARGE - Article smaller than an A4 paper folded in TWO, but larger than an A4 folded in FOUR: MEDIUM - Article smaller than an A4 paper folded in FOUR: SMALL
Standaard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Article larger than an A4 paper folded in FOUR: LARGE - Article smaller than an A4 paper folded in FOUR, but larger than an A4 folded in EIGHT: MEDIUM - Article smaller than an A4 paper folded in EIGHT: SMALL
Le Soir	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Article larger than an A4 paper folded in FOUR: LARGE - Article smaller than an A4 paper folded in FOUR, but larger than an A4 folded in EIGHT: MEDIUM - Article smaller than an A4 paper folded in EIGHT: SMALL
La Dernière Heure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Article larger than an A4 paper folded in TWO: LARGE - Article smaller than an A4 paper folded in TWO, but larger than an A4 folded in FOUR: MEDIUM - Article smaller than an A4 paper folded in FOUR: SMALL

Table C-1: Instructions for coding Article Size.

C.3 - Step 2: Determining type of article

Next, you assess the type of article through several variables:

[1] Foreign news – Mixed news - Domestic news

- *Domestic news*: article that is almost exclusively about Belgium. For example, an article about a crime in a Belgian community; or an article about Opel Antwerp, in which a German factory is mentioned only in three sentences.
- *Foreign news*: article in which Belgium or any Belgian actors (companies or people) are almost never mentioned. E.g. An article about the American invasion in Iraq.
- *Mixed news*: article about foreign news in which Belgian actors (companies or people) are prominently featured. E.g. an article about the visit of Charles Michel to Congo, or an article about a Belgian company in the United States).

Depending on whether the article is foreign news or not, the coding procedure is slightly different.

Domestic news	Mixed News	Foreign news
Follow the entire procedure described below.	Fill out the 'country' field.	Fill out the 'country' field.
	Follow the entire procedure described below.	Code EU references.
		Indicate which ISSUES are mentioned.

Table C-2: Procedural differences for Domestic / Mixed / Foreign News Articles.

[2] Opinion pieces and political ads

If the article is an Opinion piece, indicate this using the dummy. If the opinion piece was written by someone of the newspaper, indicate this using the dummy as well.

If the article is a political ad, indicate this using the dummy. Political ads are ads by political parties. Ads for VAA's, or by the newspapers themselves, are *not* to be coded.

C.4 - Step 3: coding EU references

Using the checkboxes, indicate whether Europe is mentioned, and if so whether the EP elections or European party families are mentioned.

- **Europe:** indicate whether Europe or the EU is mentioned or not.
- **European elections:** if the article mentions European elections within Belgium / in another country, indicate this using the checkboxes.
- **European party families:** indicate whether any of the European party families (Conservatives, Socialists, Liberals, Greens) are mentioned.

C.5 - Step 4: coding references to Politics or the Regional elections

- **Political news:** if the topic of the article is on party politics in general.
- **Regional Campaign news:** if the topic of the article is on the regional electoral campaign (e.g. referring to 7th of June, the elections, and so on). If possible, indicate the specific election (Flemish / Walloon / Brussels / Germanophone / European).
- **Poll:** if the article refers to, or mentions a poll, indicate this using the dummy.
- **Vote Threshold:** if the article refers to, or mentions the 5 per cent voting threshold, indicate this using the dummy.

C.6 - Step 5: coding Issues

Coding issues is a crucial, but difficult step in the coding of the article. For each issue type, we have come up with a list of possible indicators, but you will often have to rely on your own judgment as it is impossible to devise a comprehensive list.

In order for an issue to be marked, a mere ‘mention’ is not enough: if, for example, there is a brief reference to education in one sentence, this in itself is not enough for education to be marked. Only if the issue is mentioned several times in the article, it is coded as such.

[1] Asylum seekers and immigrants

Asylum, asylum procedures, (illegal) immigrants, housing for immigrants, legislation on asylum seekers, asylum procedure.

Racism is often coded under this category, but if the article deals with a conviction, it must be coded as crime as well.

[2] Budget

The federal / regional budget, budget negotiations, negative budget,

[Note: fiscal policy is coded under both budget *and* taxes]

[3] Taxes

Fraud is coded under crime. Increasing / decreasing taxes. Tax reduction, harmonization of taxes,

[Note: fiscal policy is coded under both budget *and* taxes]

[4] BHV

The splitting of Brussel-Halle-Vilvoorde, the failed attempts to do so, or any future endeavors on this issue.

[5] Crime

Any type of illegal activity: corruption, fraud, arson, vandalism, theft, murder, stalking, robbery, *prison escape*. HOWEVER: if the topic of the article is on the way police and justice handle these things, it must be coded as 'Justice & Police'.

[Note: international terrorism must be coded under Crime *and* International Relations]

[6] Culture

Cultural policy, funding for the opera / theatre, protests by the cultural sector, movie premieres, movie reviews, Tom Lanoie who attacked the new minister of culture,

[7] Economic Policy

Deregulation, protectionism, economical planning, regional development, KMO, self-employed policy, night shops.

[8] Europe

European policy, European institutions, expansion of Europe, European legislation / regulation, ...

[9] Ethical issues

Abortion, death penalty, euthanasia,

[10] Financial crisis

The financial crisis, aids for the banks, fortis, dexia, fortis commission,

[11] Health policy

Food regulations, hormones, health care, mental health care, food poisoning, hospital policy, homeopathic medicine,

[12] Housing

Housing, social housing, assignment of social housing, renting, costs of the *notaries*, *leegstand*.

[13] International relations / policy

VN, UNAIDS, OESO, NATO (non European). Diplomatic relations of Belgium with another country, scientific exchanges, Interpol. Economic Relations, free trade,

Wars, war in Iraq / Afghanistan,

[Note: leaders visiting the Pope are coded as IR *and* Religion]

[Note: international terrorism must be coded under Crime *and* International Relations]

[14] Internal organization of parties

List formation, power struggles within parties, election of chairman, party congresses, Most of the electoral news should be coded using this category, since it often deals with parties that are campaigning in a way – be it by giving interviews,

[15] Lange wapper

BAM, construction plans on the viaduct, protests in Deurne / Merksem, Ademloos or any other action groups,

[16] Army

Army recruiting, army policy, detachment of soldiers to Irak, closing of *kazernes*,

Note that the ‘war in Irak’ in general is coded under ‘international relations’. This category only pertains to the Belgian army policy.

[17] Environmental policy and energy

Waist control, soil, mineral reserves, acid rain, toxics, ozone layer, climate change, deforestation, protected animals, environmental disasters. Energy policy, nuclear power plants, windmill parks, oil, electricity,

[18] Mobility

Traffic jams, speed regulations, cars, technical checkup, car registration. Transport of dangerous substances, airlines, ports, NMBS, De Lijn, traffic accidents.

[19] Education

Diploma's, education, courses, school regulation, savings in education in general (basic / high schools / universities / ...). Extraordinary education, technical / professional education. Post-university education. Public versus private schools, Steiner schools, the exams at universities.

[20] Political culture

Political morality, depolitisation, political responsibility, new public management, political renewal, cumulation of political mandates, the wages of ministers and MPs, constituency service, political deflections (LDD – Open VLD),

[21] Disasters

Tsunami, earthquakes, hurricanes, airplane crashes,

[22] Religion

Islam, *hoofddoeken-debat*, influence of the church on the state, ...

[Note: leaders visiting the Pope are coded as IR *and* Religion]

[23] Spatial structuring (Town & Country planning)

Rural / urban regions, project development, prices of housing / apartments / land, *uitdieping Westerschelde*,

[24] Political Scandals

Agusta / Dassault, Public markets, bribe, conflict of interests between public mandate and private business, etc. examples: Donfut, Charleri, Lizin, Fournaux, etc.

[25] Social policy

Social security, social inequality, aging of the population, mortality / birth rate, facilities for disabled or older people, protection of children, well being, social services, social burdens, social security benefits, maternity leave, Family policy

[26] State reform

Reform of the state, transfer of competences to the regional / federal level, special majorities required for a state reform, ...

[27] Linguistic Issues

Conflicts between the French-speaking and Flemish-speaking.

[28] Employment policy

Dismissions, pensions, collective dismissions, employment policy, creating employment, unemployment, hidden unemployment, long-term unemployment, VDAB, labor market, interim agencies, social dialogue, unions, strikes,

[29] Justice and police

Judicial reform, cost of being represented in court, lawyers, reform of police, Octopus agreement, malfunctioning of police / justice, firefighters and civil protection.

[30] Government and parliament

Question hour in parliament, announcements by the prime minister, acts of government,

[31] Other

If (and only if) you cannot code the article on any of the previous codes, use this. Provide a good description of the issue in the textbox provided.

- Fait Divers: a mountainbiker that is climbing all stairs in the Cathedral of Antwerp, ... small and random news items.
- Royals: purely about the royal family
- Accidents: an accident while working, a fire in a house, a water leak,
- Electoral news: news that is about the elections, but cannot be attributed to any party. For example, the voting preference of a famous person,

Special cases

- Religious Terrorism: to be coded as both religion and crime.

Central topic

As a final step, the central topic of the article must be coded.

C.7 - Step 6: coding Politicians

Up to 12 politicians can be coded. A list with the most famous politicians is provided, but if the politician is not in the list, write down the name of the candidate as follows:

Last Name First name (Party)

For example: De Gucht Jean-Jacques (Open VLD) / Janssens Rudy (Sp.a) / ...

Furthermore, for each politician you indicate whether he is mentioned in a positive, neutral, or negative way:

- The first two dummies are used to indicate whether ANY negative / positive mentions are made.
- The final scale is used to measure the *overall* tone. When the tone is unclear, simply use the neutral category.

Though difficult, the easiest way of coding tone is asking the question: **is this article good or bad news for the politician?**

Examples of negative mentions:

An article that is clearly critical of a politician ('Marianne Thyssen looks and acts like a tired teacher' (Laatste Nieuws 2nd of June).

An article in which the electoral score of a politician is said to be diminishing ('Anciaux's happy days are over', 'Voters do not believe in Van Mechelen as a minister-president', ...).

Articles that blame politicians, associate them in a negative way with scandals ('Dedecker: driven by resentment', 'Turtelboom does not have what it takes').

Examples of positive mentions:

Generally speaking, any political add will mention the politician in a positive tone (note

that other politicians / parties may be attacked in the add, resulting in a negative mention).

Articles in which the electoral score of a politician is said to be on the rise ('Majority of voters wants Kris Peeters for another term', 'Dewever's on the rise').

Generally positive articles towards politicians: 'Gennez burst out in tears on the SP.A meeting, and her tears seemed to be genuine', 'Jean-Jacques De Gucht has the looks and appeal of a politician on the rise. Perhaps this is the white rabbit the liberals have been waiting for?'.
waiting for?'

If a politician is depicted in a photograph, mark the 'photo' checkbox.

C.8 - Step 7: coding Parties

The following variables are indicators of whether or not a *party* is mentioned. E.g. 'CD&V is looking to gain a large percentage of votes in the upcoming election'. If the party name is mentioned following a politicians' name, it does *not* count.

If you use the 'other party', fill out the party name in the provided textbox.

Tone: use the same criteria as you did for the politician tone coding. Again, when the tone is unclear, use the middle category.

C.9 - Step 8: coding mentions of future coalitions

This is broad: from mentions of 'being in the middle of the bed' to 'Olive coalition in the making'.

C.10 - Step 9: coding mentions of communities

Appendix D: Question wording for PVPS2009 variables

D.1 - Age

Age was constructed based on year of birth (2009 – year of birth).

Wave 1, question 3: What is your year of birth?

D.2 - Gender

Gender was assessed by the interviewer.

D.3 - Education

Wave 1, question 5: What is your highest obtained educational degree?

- None
- Lower education
- General high school, not fully finished
- Technical high school, not fully finished
- Professional high school, not fully finished
- General high school, fully finished
- Technical high school, fully finished
- Professional high school, fully finished
- Higher non-universitary education
- university education

The four-point scale used in all analyses is obtained by grouping several responses together (1 and 2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-10).

D.4 - Political interest

Wave 1, question 32: to what extent are you interested in politics in general? Give a score from 0 to 10, zero indicating that you have no interest in politics at all, and 10 indicating that you are very interested in politics. With the scores in between you can nuance your answer.

(Respondent could indicate response using a card)

D.5 - Exposure to Mass Media

Wave 1, question 64: for each of the following types of media, can you indicate how much you have used them in the last 2 weeks?

- “Read a newspaper”
- “Watched the news on television”
- “visited a news website”
- “listened to the radio”

Respondents could indicate their answer on a 6-point scale:

- 1 (Never)
- 2 (Seldom, meaning less than 1 day per week)
- 3 (Now and then, meaning 1 or 2 days per week)
- 4 (Often, meaning 3 or 4 days per week)
- 5 (Almost every day of the week, meaning 5 days per week)
- 6 (Systematically every day of the week, meaning 6 or 7 days per week)

The same question was asked in wave 2 (question 1).

D.6 - Decidedness at the start of the campaign

Wave 1, question 20: on June 7th there will be elections for the Flemish / Walloon parliament. Are you already sure for which party you will vote then?

- 1 (I am entirely sure)
- 2 (I have a slight preference for a certain preference)
- 3 (I am still undecided between two or several parties)
- 4 (I am entirely undecided)

D.7 - Party preference

Wave 1, question 21: If the elections for the Flemish / Walloon parliament were to be held today, and you would therefore HAVE to make a choice, for which of the following parties would you vote?

Flemish respondents

1: CD&V
2: Groen!
3: N-VA
4: SP.A
5: SLP (previously VlaamsProgressieven or Spirit)
6: Vlaams Belang
7: Open VLD
8: Lijst Dedecker
9: PvdA
98: Other party
10: Blanc vote
11: Invalid vote
12: Will not go out and vote
13: Refuses to answer

Walloon respondents

21: PS
22: MR
23: CDH
24: Ecolo
98: Other party
10: Blanc vote
11: Invalid vote
12: Will not go out and vote
13: Refuses to answer

Question wording for wave 2 was identical.

D.8 - Open ended causal report

Wave 1, question 22: You indicated that you would vote for [name of party] for the Flemish / Walloon Parliament. People often have a variety of reasons to vote for a certain party. Can you explain to me, in your own words, why you would vote for this party?

[If respondent answers with: “the best party” ask “why is it the best party?”]

[If respondent refers to “government” ask “which government do you mean exactly?”]

[If respondent refers to “policy” ask “which policy do you mean exactly?”]

Question wording for Wave 2 was identical, but the question was asked earlier in the survey (question 6).

D.9 - Exposure to Interpersonal communication

Wave 2, question 17: in the month preceding this interview, how often did you speak with friends / Family / Colleagues about politics?

- Never
- Seldom
- Sometimes
- Often

D.10 - Trust in media

Wave 1 – Question 44: for each of the following institutions, can you indicate to what extent you trust them? Zero means you do not trust the institution at all, and 10 means you completely trust them.

- The justice system
- Police
- Media

- Political parties
- Flemish / Walloon government
- Flemish / Walloon parliament
- Federal parliament
- Federal government
- Social movements
- Politicians

Respondents could indicate their answer using a showcard.

Appendix E: Model estimates

E.1 - Priming of politician heuristic between waves 1 and 2

<i>Flemish respondents (N=863)</i>	Model 1 (Pseudo R²: .10)	Model 2 (Pseudo R²: .11)	Model 3 (Pseudo R²: .13)
Politician heuristic W1	1.62 (.25) ***	1.72 (.47) ***	5.70 (2.14) **
LTI - Relative visibility	-3.71 (2.40)	-6.20 (9.97)	-7.96 (13.31)
LTI - Absolute visibility	0.00 (.00) *	0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
Newspapers	0.02 (.06)	0.14 (.11)	0.19 (.14)
Television	-0.05 (.08)	0.04 (.15)	0.24 (.20)
LTI – Absolute visibility * Newspapers		0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
LTI – Absolute visibility * Television		-0.00 (.00)	-0.00 (.00)
LTI – Relative visibility * Newspapers		-1.44 (1.15)	-1.21 (1.45)
LTI – Relative visibility * Television		1.74 (1.97)	1.79 (2.35)
Politician heuristic W1 * LTI – Absolute visibility		0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
Politician heuristic W1 * LTI – Relative visibility		-0.47 (4.75)	-12.32 (25.40)
Politician heuristic W1 * LTI – Absolute visibility * Newspapers			0.00 (.00)
Politician heuristic W1 * LTI – Absolute visibility * Television			-0.00 (.00)
Politician heuristic W1 * LTI – Relative visibility * Newspapers			-0.43 (2.23)
Politician heuristic W1 * LTI – Relative visibility * Television			2.56 (4.52)
Politician heuristic W1 * Newspapers			-0.10 (.22)
Politician heuristic W1 * Television			-0.70 (.39) +
LTI – Relative visibility * LTI – Absolute visibility			0.00 (.00)
Sex	-0.22 (.23)	-0.28 (.23)	-0.29 (.23)
Age	0.01 (.01)	0.01 (.01)	0.01 (.01)
Education	0.04 (.16)	0.02 (.16)	-0.00 (.16)
Intercept	-2.31 (.89) **	-3.15 (1.03) **	-4.11 (1.20) **
Log Likelihood	-342.740	-338.858	-331.008

Table E-1: Politician Priming among Flemish voters. Statistical estimates obtained from logistic regression analysis. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. += p ≤ .10 * = p ≤ .05 ** = p ≤ .01 * = p ≤ .001.**

<i>Walloon respondents (N=692)</i>	Model 1 (Pseudo R²: .04)	Model 2 (Pseudo R²: .09)	Model 3 (Pseudo R²: .12)
Politician heuristic W1	1.12 (.41) **	0.72 (.78)	2.96 (2.71)
LTI - Relative visibility	-0.32 (1.70)	-6.25 (5.46)	1.23 (6.48)
LTI - Absolute visibility	0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
Newspapers	-0.04 (.08)	0.19 (.16)	0.18 (.19)
Television	0.08 (.12)	0.00 (.20)	-0.06 (.24)
LTI – Absolute visibility * Newspapers		-0.00 (.00) **	-0.00 (.00) *
LTI – Absolute visibility * Television		0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
LTI – Relative visibility * Newspapers		1.46 (.84) +	0.94 (.83)
LTI – Relative visibility * Television		0.32 (1.01)	-0.05 (1.10)
Politician heuristic W1 * LTI – Absolute visibility		-0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00) *
Politician heuristic W1 * LTI – Relative visibility		4.47 (5.38)	-16.18 (16.64) *
Politician heuristic W1 * LTI – Absolute visibility * Newspapers			-0.00 (.00) *
Politician heuristic W1 * LTI – Absolute visibility * Television			-0.00 (.00)
Politician heuristic W1 * LTI – Relative visibility * Newspapers			2.30 (4.50)
Politician heuristic W1 * LTI – Relative visibility * Television			3.91 (3.54)
Politician heuristic W1 * Newspapers			0.63 (.65)
Politician heuristic W1 * Television			-0.69 (.59)
LTI – Relative visibility * LTI – Absolute visibility			-0.00 (.00) *
Sex	0.03 (.33)	-0.02 (.34)	0.09 (.35)
Age	0.02 (.01) +	0.02 (.01)	0.02 (.01) +
Education	0.00 (.17)	-0.02 (.17)	-0.02 (.18)
Intercept	-3.59 (.86) ***	-3.71 (.96) ***	-4.50 (1.20) ***
Log Likelihood	-189.869	-182.111	-173.862

Table E-2: Politician Priming among Walloon voters. Statistical estimates obtained from logistic regression analysis. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. += $p \leq .10$ *= $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

<i>Flemish respondents (N=863)</i>	Model 1 (Pseudo R²: .09)	Model 2 (Pseudo R²: .09)	Model 3 (Pseudo R²: .12)
Politician heuristic W1	1.58 (.24) ***	1.51 (.44) **	5.16 (1.71) **
STI - Relative visibility	-2.22 (2.32)	7.46 (7.57)	14.08 (10.45)
STI - Absolute visibility	0.00 (.01)	-0.01 (.02)	-0.03 (.02)
Newspapers	0.01 (.06)	0.11 (.10)	0.16 (.12)
Television	-0.05 (.08)	0.03 (.14)	0.20 (.18)
STI – Absolute visibility * Newspapers		0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
STI – Absolute visibility * Television		-0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
STI – Relative visibility * Newspapers		-2.03 (1.24)	-1.57 (1.51)
STI – Relative visibility * Television		-0.43 (1.44)	-2.74 (1.64) +
Politician heuristic W1 * STI – Absolute visibility		0.00 (.01)	0.11 (.05) *
Politician heuristic W1 * STI – Relative visibility		-0.22 (4.97)	-46.79 (19.23) *
Politician heuristic W1 * STI – Absolute visibility * Newspapers			-0.00 (.01)
Politician heuristic W1 * STI – Absolute visibility * Television			-0.02 (.01) *
Politician heuristic W1 * STI – Relative visibility * Newspapers			-0.29 (2.81)
Politician heuristic W1 * STI – Relative visibility * Television			9.29 (3.87) *
Politician heuristic W1 * Newspapers			-0.10 (.20)
Politician heuristic W1 * Television			-0.64 (.32) *
STI – Relative visibility * STI – Absolute visibility			8.72 (13.78)
Sex	-0.25 (.22)	-0.27 (.22)	-0.30 (.22)
Age	0.01 (.01)	0.01 (.01)	0.01 (.01)
Education	0.02 (.16)	0.02 (.16)	0.02 (.16)
Intercept	-2.04 (.88) *	-2.77 (.95) **	-3.66 (1.10) **
Log Likelihood	-346.219	-343.435	-333.815

Table E-3: Politician Priming among Flemish voters. Statistical estimates obtained from logistic regression analysis. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. += p ≤ .10 *= p ≤ .05 ** = p ≤ .01 * = p ≤ .001.**

<i>Walloon respondents (N=692)</i>	Model 1 (Pseudo R²: .04)	Model 2 (Pseudo R²: .061)	Model 3 (Pseudo R²: .10)
Politician heuristic W1	1.12 (.41) **	0.17 (.94)	-0.94 (4.19)
STI - Relative visibility	0.33 (1.43)	-5.07 (7.96)	2.21 (11.57)
STI - Absolute visibility	-0.00 (.01)	0.01 (.02)	0.02 (.02)
Newspapers	-0.04 (.08)	0.21 (.18)	0.28 (.21)
Television	0.07 (.11)	-0.06 (.20)	-0.38 (.23) +
STI – Absolute visibility * Newspapers		0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
STI – Absolute visibility * Television		-0.00 (.00)	-0.01 (.00)
STI – Relative visibility * Newspapers		-1.88 (.73) *	-2.49 (1.04) *
STI – Relative visibility * Television		2.00 (1.52)	5.53 (2.22) *
Politician heuristic W1 * STI – Absolute visibility		0.01 (.01)	-0.03 (.05)
Politician heuristic W1 * STI – Relative visibility		1.30 (4.93)	34.71 (24.16)
Politician heuristic W1 * STI – Absolute visibility * Newspapers			0.01 (.01)
Politician heuristic W1 * STI – Absolute visibility * Television			0.01 (.01)
Politician heuristic W1 * STI – Relative visibility * Newspapers			-6.53 (5.16)
Politician heuristic W1 * STI – Relative visibility * Television			-3.93 (4.44)
Politician heuristic W1 * Newspapers			0.60 (.60)
Politician heuristic W1 * Television			-0.06 (.78)
STI – Relative visibility * STI – Absolute visibility			-48.80 (20.81) *
Sex	0.03 (.33)	0.09 (.34)	0.11 (.33)
Age	0.02 (.01)	0.02 (.01)	0.02 (.01)
Education	-0.01 (.17)	-0.03 (.17)	-0.06 (.18)
Intercept	-3.53 (.88) ***	-3.47 (.99) ***	-3.91 (1.20) **
Log Likelihood	-190.035	-185.606	-177.234

Table E-4: Politician Priming among Walloon voters. Statistical estimates obtained from logistic regression analysis. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. += p ≤ .10 *= p ≤ .05 ** = p ≤ .01 * = p ≤ .001.**

E.2 - Priming of politician heuristic: multilevel statistical estimates

Parameter	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Politician heuristic W1	0.37 (.33)	1.71 (.53) **	-2.43 (2.07)
Specific Politician W1	1.80 (.49) ***	2.23 (.51) ***	2.35 (.46) ***
Absolute visibility (LTI)	0.00 (.00) **	0.00 (.00)	-0.00 (.00)
Relative visibility (LTI)	7.79 (1.40) ***	4.86 (2.26) *	1.53 (2.68)
Relative visibility of party (LTI)	3.30 (2.98)	2.97 (2.97)	2.56 (3.23)
Newspapers	-0.04 (.06)	-0.30 (.13) *	-0.55 (.20) **
Television	-0.00 (.08)	-0.11 (.16)	-0.18 (.20)
Relative Visibility (LTI) * Newspapers		0.18 (.29)	0.51 (.37)
Relative Visibility (LTI) * Television		0.59 (.39)	1.04 (.47) *
Absolute Visibility (LTI) * Newspapers		0.00 (.00) *	0.00 (.00) **
Absolute Visibility (LTI) * Television		-0.00 (.00)	-0.00 (.00)
Politician heuristic W1 * Absolute Visibility (LTI)		-0.00 (.00) *	0.01 (.00) *
Politician heuristic W1 * Relative Visibility (LTI)		-2.61 (1.33)	6.21 (4.93)
Politician heuristic W1 * Newspapers * Relative Visibility (LTI)			-1.46 (.89)
Politician heuristic W1 * Television * Relative Visibility (LTI)			-0.53 (.63)
Politician heuristic W1 * Newspapers * Absolute Visibility (LTI)			-0.00 (.00)
Politician heuristic W1 * Television * Absolute Visibility (LTI)			-0.00 (.00) **
Politician heuristic W1 * Newspapers			0.58 (.27) *
Politician heuristic W1 * Television			0.45 (.38)
Absolute Visibility (LTI) * Relative Visibility (LTI)			-0.00 (.00)
Age	0.00 (.01)	0.00 (.01)	0.00 (.01)
Sex	-0.25 (.23)	-0.28 (.23)	-0.25 (.22)
Education	-0.21 (.12)	-0.20 (.12)	-0.22 (.12)
Intercept	-5.45 (1.03) ***	-4.30 (1.16) ***	-3.06 (1.18) *
<i>Random effects</i>			
Level 2 (respondent) variance	0.56 (1.18)	1.18 (2.02)	0.00 (.34)
Log likelihood	-383.665	-375.561	-362.017
N	4367/843	4367/843	4367/843

Table E-5: Campaign priming of Politician heuristic among Flemish respondents: multilevel statistical estimates. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. * = $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

Parameter	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Politician heuristic W1	-0.63 (.98)	0.46 (1.08)	4.06 (5.81)
Specific Politician W1	3.68 (1.19) **	4.76 (1.34) ***	5.76 (1.73) **
Absolute visibility (LTI)	0.00 (.00)	-0.00 (.01)	0.01 (.01)
Relative visibility (LTI)	-1.01 (1.32)	0.98 (3.29)	3.26 (3.03)
Relative visibility of party (LTI)	-3.96 (2.16)	-3.23 (2.22)	-7.00 (2.86) *
Newspapers	-0.24 (.12) *	-0.10 (.18)	-0.13 (.23)
Television	0.10 (.14)	-0.09 (.20)	-0.03 (.27)
Relative Visibility (LTI) * Newspapers		0.08 (.68)	-0.21 (.51)
Relative Visibility (LTI) * Television		-0.38 (.64)	0.48 (.65)
Absolute Visibility (LTI) * Newspapers		-0.00 (.00)	-0.00 (.00)
Absolute Visibility (LTI) * Television		0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
Politician heuristic W1 * Absolute Visibility (LTI)		-0.01 (.01)	-0.05 (.04)
Politician heuristic W1 * Relative Visibility (LTI)		-1.79 (4.32)	36.19 (34.68)
Politician heuristic W1 * Newspapers * Relative Visibility (LTI)			-5.60 (5.55)
Politician heuristic W1 * Television * Relative Visibility (LTI)			-4.30 (8.18)
Politician heuristic W1 * Newspapers * Absolute Visibility (LTI)			0.01 (.01)
Politician heuristic W1 * Television * Absolute Visibility (LTI)			-0.01 (.01)
Politician heuristic W1 * Newspapers			1.19 (.89)
Politician heuristic W1 * Television			-1.29 (.97)
Absolute Visibility (LTI) * Relative Visibility (LTI)			-0.03 (.01) **
Age	0.02 (.01)	0.02 (.01)	0.03 (.01) *
Sex	0.41 (.45)	0.55 (.47)	0.67 (.49)
Education	-0.03 (.21)	-0.11 (.22)	-0.08 (.23)
Intercept	-4.61 (1.56) **	-4.44 (1.70) **	-5.38 (1.80) **
<i>Random effects</i>			
Level 2 (respondent) variance	0.23 (1.61)	0.44 (1.01)	0.00 (.18)
Log likelihood	-128.454	-124.337	-110.116
N	2258/760	2258/760	2258/760

Table E-6: Campaign priming of Politician heuristic among Walloon respondents: multilevel statistical estimates. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. * = $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

Parameter	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Politician heuristic W1	0.23 (.33)	0.78 (.41) +	0.52 (1.54)
Specific Politician W1	2.42 (.48) ***	2.69 (.49) ***	2.77 (.50) ***
Absolute visibility (STI)	0.04 (.01) **	0.02 (.04)	0.06 (.04)
Relative visibility (STI)	1.91 (.60) **	1.49 (1.33)	0.16 (1.71)
Relative visibility of party (STI)	-6.53 (1.78) ***	-6.47 (1.78) ***	-6.92 (1.82) ***
Newspapers	-0.04 (.06)	-0.09 (.09)	-0.08 (.11)
Television	-0.01 (.08)	-0.07 (.12)	-0.07 (.14)
Relative Visibility (STI) * Newspapers		0.11 (.19)	0.14 (.24)
Relative Visibility (STI) * Television		0.12 (.25)	0.46 (.33)
Absolute Visibility (STI) * Newspapers		0.00 (.01)	0.00 (.01)
Absolute Visibility (STI) * Television		0.00 (.01)	-0.00 (.01)
Politician heuristic W1 * Absolute Visibility (STI)		-0.01 (.03)	0.02 (.11)
Politician heuristic W1 * Relative Visibility (STI)		-1.87 (.80) *	5.27 (3.22)
Politician heuristic W1 * Newspapers * Relative Visibility (STI)			-1.31 (.62) *
Politician heuristic W1 * Television * Relative Visibility (STI)			-0.13 (.41)
Politician heuristic W1 * Newspapers * Absolute Visibility (STI)			0.01 (.02)
Politician heuristic W1 * Television * Absolute Visibility (STI)			-0.02 (.01)
Politician heuristic W1 * Newspapers			0.03 (.19)
Politician heuristic W1 * Television			0.03 (.27)
Absolute Visibility (STI) * Relative Visibility (STI)			-0.08 (.05)
Age	-0.00 (.01)	-0.00 (.01)	-0.00 (.01)
Sex	-0.32 (.23)	-0.33 (.23)	-0.33 (.23)
Education	-0.30 (.12) *	-0.29 (.12) *	-0.27 (.12) *
Intercept	-2.08 (.78) **	-1.72 (.88) +	-1.84 (.95) +
<i>Random effects</i>			
Level 2 (respondent) variance	0.78 (.39)	0.61 (.45)	0.48 (.51)
Log likelihood	-407.371	-403.690	-395.535
N	4367/843	4367/843	4367/843

Table E-7: Campaign priming of Politician heuristic among Flemish respondents: multilevel statistical estimates. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. * = $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

Parameter	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Politician heuristic W1	-0.50 (1.02)	0.55 (1.11)	1.09 (4.26)
Specific Politician W1	3.68 (1.30) **	4.43 (1.30) **	5.88 (1.71) **
Absolute visibility (STI)	0.03 (.02)	-0.00 (.07)	0.06 (.08)
Relative visibility (STI)	1.80 (.77) *	0.68 (2.95)	1.92 (3.37)
Relative visibility of party (STI)	-0.19 (2.40)	0.11 (2.46)	-1.05 (2.51)
Newspapers	-0.24 (.13)	-0.04 (.19)	-0.23 (.23)
Television	0.10 (.15)	-0.21 (.21)	-0.03 (.25)
Relative Visibility (STI) * Newspapers		-0.70 (.50)	-0.22 (.45)
Relative Visibility (STI) * Television		0.62 (.52)	0.50 (.52)
Absolute Visibility (STI) * Newspapers		0.00 (.01)	0.00 (.01)
Absolute Visibility (STI) * Television		0.01 (.01)	0.00 (.01)
Politician heuristic W1 * Absolute Visibility (STI)		-0.14 (.08)	-0.30 (.36)
Politician heuristic W1 * Relative Visibility (STI)		-0.21 (2.50)	3.86 (11.48)
Politician heuristic W1 * Newspapers * Relative Visibility (STI)			1.42 (2.65)
Politician heuristic W1 * Television * Relative Visibility (STI)			-7.07 (3.97)
Politician heuristic W1 * Newspapers * Absolute Visibility (STI)			0.02 (.07)
Politician heuristic W1 * Television * Absolute Visibility (STI)			0.04 (.06)
Politician heuristic W1 * Newspapers			0.93 (.55)
Politician heuristic W1 * Television			-0.82 (.67)
Absolute Visibility (STI) * Relative Visibility (STI)			-0.17 (.13)
Age	0.03 (.01) *	0.03 (.01) *	0.03 (.01) *
Sex	0.48 (.47)	0.53 (.48)	0.76 (.49)
Education	0.03 (.22)	-0.05 (.23)	-0.10 (.22)
Intercept	-6.43 (1.77) ***	-5.54 (1.87) **	-5.87 (1.79) **
<i>Random effects</i>			
Level 2 (respondent) variance	1.02 (.86)	0.85 (.89)	0.00 (.22)
Log likelihood	-125.171	-119.855	-113.019
N	2258/760	2258/760	2258/760

Table E-8: Campaign priming of Politician heuristic among Walloon respondents: multilevel statistical estimates. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. * = $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

Parameter	Model 1		Model 2	
<i>Fixed effects</i>				
Politician heuristic W1	0.37 (.33)		1.69 (.52)	**
Specific Politician W1	1.75 (.48)	***	2.20 (.51)	***
Absolute visibility (LTI)	0.00 (.00)	**	0.00 (.00)	
Relative visibility (LTI)	6.58 (1.52)	***	-2.25 (4.40)	
Relative visibility of party (LTI)	2.28 (2.95)		-0.12 (3.34)	
Regional elections	1.68 (1.15)		-1.68 (1.78)	
European elections	1.11 (1.30)		-2.64 (2.69)	
Newspapers	-0.04 (.06)		-0.29 (.13)	*
Television	-0.00 (.08)		-0.11 (.16)	
Relative Visibility (LTI) * Newspapers			0.16 (.28)	
Relative Visibility (LTI) * Television			0.51 (.38)	
Absolute Visibility (LTI) * Newspapers			0.00 (.00)	*
Absolute Visibility (LTI) * Television			-0.00 (.00)	
Politician heuristic W1 * Absolute Visibility (LTI)			-0.00 (.00)	*
Politician heuristic W1 * Relative Visibility (LTI)			-2.65 (1.31)	*
Regional elections * Relative Visibility (LTI)			5.91 (5.51)	
European elections * Relative Visibility (LTI)			12.55 (13.11)	
Regional elections * Absolute Visibility (LTI)			0.01 (.01)	*
European elections * Absolute Visibility (LTI)			0.00 (.01)	
Age	0.00 (.01)		0.00 (.01)	
Sex	-0.26 (.23)		-0.29 (.23)	
Education	-0.21 (.12)		-0.21 (.12)	+
Intercept	-6.16 (1.11)	***	-2.50 (1.52)	
<i>Random effects</i>				
Level 2 (respondent) variance	0.47 (.48)		0.20 (.77)	
Log likelihood	-369.930		-381.757	
N	4367/843		4367/843	

Table E-9: Effect of mentions of Regional / European elections on Politician priming among Flemish respondents. Multilevel statistical estimates. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. * = $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

Parameter	Model 1	Model 2
<i>Fixed effects</i>		
Politician heuristic W1	-0.50 (1.00)	0.79 (1.10)
Specific Politician W1	3.52 (1.25) **	4.32 (1.37) **
Absolute visibility (LTI)	0.00 (.00) *	-0.01 (.01)
Relative visibility (LTI)	-1.04 (1.44)	-3.15 (10.33)
Relative visibility of party (LTI)	-3.36 (2.33)	-6.22 (3.03) *
Regional elections	2.19 (1.25)	-0.87 (1.91)
European elections	0.42 (2.20)	0.52 (5.47)
Newspapers	-0.25 (.13)	-0.02 (.20)
Television	0.11 (.14)	-0.18 (.22)
Relative Visibility (LTI) * Newspapers		-0.07 (.82)
Relative Visibility (LTI) * Television		-0.24 (.80)
Absolute Visibility (LTI) * Newspapers		-0.00 (.00)
Absolute Visibility (LTI) * Television		0.00 (.00)
Politician heuristic W1 * Absolute Visibility (LTI)		-0.01 (.01)
Politician heuristic W1 * Relative Visibility (LTI)		-2.61 (4.69)
Regional elections * Relative Visibility (LTI)		1.68 (11.85)
European elections * Relative Visibility (LTI)		28.50 (41.44)
Regional elections * Absolute Visibility (LTI)		0.02 (.01) *
European elections * Absolute Visibility (LTI)		-0.04 (.03)
Age	0.03 (.01) *	0.02 (.01)
Sex	0.50 (.47)	0.49 (.48)
Education	-0.03 (.22)	-0.14 (.22)
Intercept	-6.53 (2.06) **	-3.34 (2.15)
<i>Random effects</i>		
Level 2 (respondent) variance	0.71 (1.19)	0.27 (1.51)
Log likelihood	126.26	-118.26
N	2251/758	2251/758

Table E-10: Effect of mentions of Regional / European elections on Politician priming among Walloon respondents. Multilevel statistical estimates. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. * = $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

Parameter	Model 1		Model 2	
<i>Fixed effects</i>				
Politician heuristic W1	0.37 (.33)		1.70 (.53)	**
Specific Politician W1	1.86 (.49)	***	2.29 (.52)	***
Absolute visibility (LTI)	0.00 (.00)	**	0.00 (.00)	
Relative visibility (LTI)	7.55 (1.39)	***	4.59 (2.30)	*
Relative visibility of party (LTI)	2.13 (3.05)		2.36 (3.15)	
Newspapers	-0.04 (.06)		-0.30 (.13)	*
Television	-0.01 (.08)		-0.12 (.17)	
Overall tone	0.00 (.00)		0.01 (.01)	
Relative Visibility (LTI) * Newspapers			0.18 (.29)	
Relative Visibility (LTI) * Television			0.63 (.40)	
Absolute Visibility (LTI) * Newspapers			0.00 (.00)	*
Absolute Visibility (LTI) * Television			-0.00 (.00)	
Politician heuristic W1 * Absolute Visibility (LTI)			-0.00 (.00)	*
Politician heuristic W1 * Relative Visibility (LTI)			-2.66 (1.36)	+
Overall tone * Relative Visibility (LTI)			-0.00 (.00)	
Overall tone * Absolute Visibility (LTI)			-0.02 (.01)	
Age	0.00 (.01)		0.00 (.01)	
Sex	-0.26 (.23)		-0.30 (.23)	
Education	-0.24 (.12)	+	-0.21 (.12)	+
Intercept	-5.17 (1.03)	***	-4.12 (1.19)	**
<i>Random effects</i>				
Level 2 (respondent) variance	0.56 (.46)		0.44 (.54)	
Log likelihood	-382.67		-372.83	
N	4367/843		4367/843	

Table E-11: Effect of tone on Politician priming among Flemish respondents. Multilevel statistical estimates. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. * = $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

Parameter	Model 1	Model 2
<i>Fixed effects</i>		
Politician heuristic W1	-0.61 (1.00)	2.49 (1.27)
Specific Politician W1	3.78 (1.22) **	4.95 (1.20) ***
Absolute visibility (LTI)	0.01 (.00) ***	0.02 (.01) *
Relative visibility (LTI)	-0.02 (1.43)	9.51 (4.48) *
Relative visibility of party (LTI)	-5.06 (2.27) *	-4.15 (3.52)
Newspapers	-0.23 (.13)	0.35 (.28)
Television	0.08 (.15)	-0.52 (.30)
Overall tone	0.04 (.01) ***	-0.13 (.05) **
Relative Visibility (LTI) * Newspapers		-0.49 (1.24)
Relative Visibility (LTI) * Television		0.82 (.96)
Absolute Visibility (LTI) * Newspapers		-0.00 (.00) *
Absolute Visibility (LTI) * Television		0.00 (.00)
Politician heuristic W1 * Absolute Visibility (LTI)		-0.01 (.01) *
Politician heuristic W1 * Relative Visibility (LTI)		-7.48 (6.34)
Overall tone * Relative Visibility (LTI)		0.00 (.00) *
Overall tone * Absolute Visibility (LTI)		0.69 (.22) **
Age	0.02 (.01)	0.02 (.01)
Sex	0.43 (.46)	0.46 (.49)
Education	-0.07 (.22)	-0.10 (.25)
Intercept	-5.26 (1.55) **	-6.75 (2.10) **
<i>Random effects</i>		
Level 2 (respondent) variance	0.52 (.94)	0.00 (.09)
Log likelihood	-121.152	-95.293
N	2252/758	2252/758

Table E-12: Effect of tone on Politician priming among Walloon respondents. Multilevel statistical estimates. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. * = $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

E.3 - Priming of Issue Heuristic. Logistic regression estimates.

<i>Flemish respondents (N=863)</i>	Model 1 (Pseudo R²: .08)	Model 2 (Pseudo R²: .08)
Issue Heuristic W1	1.02 (.20) ***	1.17 (.62) +
Newspapers	0.06 (.05)	-0.01 (.15)
Television	0.01 (.06)	0.11 (.18)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Newspapers		0.05 (.10)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Television		-0.07 (.12)
Sex	-0.24 (.19)	-0.23 (.19)
Age	-0.02 (.01) **	-0.02 (.01) **
Education	0.16 (.11)	0.16 (.11)
Intercept	-1.58 (.64) *	-1.83 (1.05) +
Log Likelihood	-475.163	-474.846
<i>Walloon respondents (N=692)</i>	Model 1 (Pseudo R²: .12)	Model 2 (Pseudo R²: .13)
Issue Heuristic W1	1.66 (.21) ***	2.44 (.77) **
Newspapers	-0.08 (.05)	0.32 (.16) *
Television	0.09 (.07)	0.04 (.20)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Newspapers		-0.30 (.11) **
Issue Heuristic W1 * Television		0.04 (.14)
Sex	-0.05 (.20)	-0.02 (.20)
Age	-0.01 (.01) *	-0.01 (.01) *
Education	0.14 (.11)	0.16 (.11)
Intercept	-2.77 (.66) ***	-3.99 (1.29) **
Log Likelihood	-369.748	-365.644

Table E-13: Priming of issue heuristic between W1 and W2 of the PVPS survey. Statistical estimates obtained from logistic regression analysis. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. += $p \leq .10$ *= $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

E.4 - Priming of Issue heuristic. Multilevel statistical estimates.

Parameter	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Issue Heuristic W1	0.33 (.20)	0.29 (.36)	1.06 (1.20)
Specific Issue W1	3.82 (.26) ***	3.86 (.26) ***	3.85 (.26) ***
Saliency (LTI)	-6.09 (2.77) *	-6.00 (9.42)	17.10 (10.66)
Political Saliency (LTI)	4.82 (1.55) **	3.30 (5.85)	0.46 (6.54)
Newspapers	0.01 (.05)	0.04 (.09)	0.05 (.12)
Television	0.06 (.06)	0.05 (.11)	0.22 (.16)
Saliency (LTI) * Newspapers		-0.96 (1.47)	-2.56 (2.43)
Saliency (LTI) * Television		-0.75 (1.66)	-4.99 (2.58) +
Political Saliency (LTI) * Newspapers		0.30 (.80)	0.54 (.98)
Political Saliency (LTI) * Television		0.78 (1.09)	1.36 (1.33)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Saliency (LTI)		12.75 (5.90) *	-8.79 (17.91)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Political Saliency (LTI)		-8.99 (3.63) *	3.38 (15.54)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Newspapers * Saliency (LTI)			2.21 (3.11)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Television * Saliency (LTI)			6.71 (3.43) +
Issue Heuristic W1 * Newspapers * Political Saliency (LTI)			0.79 (2.13)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Television * Political Saliency (LTI)			-0.59 (2.57)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Newspapers			-0.06 (.19)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Television			-0.30 (.23)
Political Saliency (LTI) * Saliency (LTI)			-221.72 (133.47) +
Age	-0.01 (.01) *	-0.01 (.01) *	-0.01 (.01) *
Sex	-0.09 (.17)	-0.10 (.17)	-0.08 (.17)
Education	0.02 (.09)	0.03 (.09)	0.01 (.09)
Intercept	-5.35 (.52) ***	-5.31 (.71) ***	-6.10 (.90) ***
<i>Random effects</i>			
Level 2 (respondent) variance	0.36 (.23)	0.36 (.23)	0.32 (.24)
Log likelihood	-792.523	-787.094	-781.633
Ni / Nj	15534/ 863	15534/ 863	15534/ 863

Table E-14: Campaign priming of issue heuristic among Flemish respondents: multilevel statistical estimates. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. * = $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

Parameter	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
<i>Fixed effects</i>						
Issue Heuristic W1	0.61 (.20)	**	0.52 (.33)		-0.03 (1.15)	
Specific Issue W1	3.57 (.24)	***	3.54 (.24)	***	3.48 (.25)	***
Saliency (LTI)	-7.16 (3.94)	+	-0.61 (13.09)		-2.78 (16.39)	
Political Saliency (LTI)	6.04 (1.64)	***	0.43 (5.95)		2.79 (7.32)	
Newspapers	-0.07 (.05)		-0.00 (.09)		-0.03 (.12)	
Television	0.05 (.06)		-0.00 (.11)		0.00 (.14)	
Saliency (LTI) * Newspapers			-0.84 (2.26)		0.53 (2.91)	
Saliency (LTI) * Television			-0.92 (2.55)		-1.37 (3.30)	
Political Saliency (LTI) * Newspapers			-0.13 (.94)		-0.13 (1.25)	
Political Saliency (LTI) * Television			1.14 (1.14)		0.69 (1.45)	
Issue Heuristic W1 * Saliency (LTI)			0.31 (7.87)		8.77 (25.67)	
Issue Heuristic W1 * Political Saliency (LTI)			0.79 (3.30)		4.71 (12.62)	
Issue Heuristic W1 * Newspapers * Saliency (LTI)					-4.02 (4.74)	
Issue Heuristic W1 * Television * Saliency (LTI)					1.49 (5.22)	
Issue Heuristic W1 * Newspapers * Political Saliency (LTI)					0.09 (1.94)	
Issue Heuristic W1 * Television * Political Saliency (LTI)					1.14 (2.33)	
Issue Heuristic W1 * Newspapers					0.11 (.19)	
Issue Heuristic W1 * Television					-0.07 (.22)	
Political Saliency (LTI) * Saliency (LTI)					-75.75 (36.36)	*
Age	-0.01 (.01)		-0.01 (.01)		-0.01 (.01)	
Sex	0.01 (.18)		0.02 (.18)		0.03 (.18)	
Education	-0.10 (.09)		-0.10 (.09)		-0.10 (.09)	
Intercept	-4.81 (.50)	***	-4.68 (.67)	***	-4.64 (.82)	***
<i>Random effects</i>						
Level 2 (respondent) variance	0.00 (.09)		0.00 (.10)		0.00 (.13)	
Log likelihood	-682.130		-680.929		-676.415	
Ni / Nj	12654/ 703		12654/ 703		12654/ 703	

Table E-15: Campaign priming of issue heuristic among Walloon respondents: multilevel statistical estimates. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. * = $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

Parameter	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Fixed effects</i>			
Issue Heuristic W1	0.33 (.21)	0.38 (.32)	0.74 (1.03)
Specific Issue W1	3.86 (.26) ***	3.91 (.26) ***	3.91 (.26) ***
Saliency (STI)	-3.36 (2.52)	-1.10 (8.41)	13.77 (11.06)
Political Saliency (STI)	5.85 (1.62) ***	8.10 (5.13)	0.97 (6.79)
Newspapers	0.02 (.05)	0.03 (.08)	0.04 (.11)
Television	0.06 (.06)	0.13 (.10)	0.17 (.15)
Saliency (STI) * Newspapers		-0.44 (1.33)	-2.11 (2.07)
Saliency (STI) * Television		-1.34 (1.54)	-3.45 (2.44)
Political Saliency (STI) * Newspapers		0.13 (.83)	0.74 (1.16)
Political Saliency (STI) * Television		0.31 (.96)	1.45 (1.42)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Saliency (STI)		11.22 (5.22) *	-14.05 (15.69)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Political Saliency (STI)		-9.35 (3.34) **	1.97 (10.74)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Newspapers * Saliency (STI)			2.86 (2.77)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Television * Saliency (STI)			3.47 (3.16)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Newspapers * Political Saliency (STI)			-0.65 (1.80)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Television * Political Saliency (STI)			-2.10 (2.01)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Newspapers			-0.02 (.16)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Television			-0.06 (.19)
Political Saliency (STI) * Saliency (STI)			-0.59 (39.12)
Age	-0.01 (.01) *	-0.01 (.01) *	-0.01 (.01) *
Sex	-0.09 (.18)	-0.09 (.18)	-0.08 (.18)
Education	0.01 (.09)	0.01 (.09)	0.01 (.09)
Intercept	-5.61 (.52) ***	-6.00 (.67) ***	-6.19 (.86) ***
<i>Random effects</i>			
Level 2 (respondent) variance	0.41 (.22)	0.41 (.22)	0.41 (.22)
Log likelihood	-790.536	-785.571	-783.224
Ni / Nj	15534/ 863	15534/ 863	15534/ 863

Table E-16: Campaign priming of issue heuristic among Flemish respondents: multilevel statistical estimates. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. * = $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

Parameter	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
<i>Fixed effects</i>						
Issue Heuristic W1	0.62 (.20)	**	0.31 (.30)		0.08 (.94)	
Specific Issue W1	3.44 (.24)	***	3.45 (.25)	***	3.45 (.25)	***
Saliency (STI)	-10.00 (3.39)	**	-26.31 (13.58)	+	-29.47 (18.21)	
Political Saliency (STI)	7.50 (1.56)	***	10.83 (6.69)		12.04 (8.95)	
Newspapers	-0.07 (.05)		-0.02 (.08)		-0.03 (.11)	
Television	0.04 (.06)		-0.08 (.09)		-0.10 (.13)	
Saliency (STI) * Newspapers			1.14 (1.86)		4.25 (2.65)	
Saliency (STI) * Television			1.99 (2.51)		0.29 (3.42)	
Political Saliency (STI) * Newspapers			-1.02 (.88)		-2.21 (1.28)	+
Political Saliency (STI) * Television			0.01 (1.22)		0.70 (1.67)	
Issue Heuristic W1 * Saliency (STI)			6.48 (6.77)		9.14 (26.26)	
Issue Heuristic W1 * Political Saliency (STI)			-1.22 (3.16)		-2.06 (13.11)	
Issue Heuristic W1 * Newspapers * Saliency (STI)					-5.96 (3.80)	
Issue Heuristic W1 * Television * Saliency (STI)					3.42 (4.95)	
Issue Heuristic W1 * Newspapers * Political Saliency (STI)					2.37 (1.79)	
Issue Heuristic W1 * Television * Political Saliency (STI)					-1.42 (2.45)	
Issue Heuristic W1 * Newspapers					0.02 (.16)	
Issue Heuristic W1 * Television					0.04 (.19)	
Political Saliency (STI) * Saliency (STI)					-0.51 (12.13)	
Age	-0.01 (.01)	+	-0.01 (.01)	+	-0.01 (.01)	+
Sex	0.03 (.18)		0.05 (.18)		0.06 (.18)	
Education	-0.11 (.09)		-0.11 (.09)		-0.12 (.09)	
Intercept	-4.75 (.49)	***	-4.13 (.61)	***	-4.03 (.74)	***
<i>Random effects</i>						
Level 2 (respondent) variance	0.00 (.09)		0.00 (.60)		0.00 (.09)	
Log likelihood	-675.905		-672.437		-670.324	
Ni / Nj	12654/ 703		12654/ 703		12654/ 703	

Table E-17: Campaign priming of Issue heuristic among Walloon respondents: multilevel statistical estimates. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. * = $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

Parameter	Model 1	Model 2
<i>Fixed effects</i>		
Issue Heuristic W1	0.34 (.20)	0.85 (.31) **
Specific Issue W1	3.75 (.26) ***	3.79 (.26) ***
Saliency (LTI)	-5.44 (2.89) +	-5.08 (2.87) +
Regional Election Saliency (LTI)	4.34 (1.36) **	3.68 (4.86)
European Election Saliency (LTI)	2.45 (1.29) +	-1.39 (4.65)
Newspapers	0.01 (.05)	-0.10 (.08)
Television	0.06 (.06)	0.02 (.09)
Regional Election Saliency (LTI) * Newspapers		-0.31 (.67)
Regional Election Saliency (LTI) * Television		0.79 (.87)
European Election Saliency (LTI) * Newspapers		1.42 (.70) *
European Election Saliency (LTI) * Television		-0.26 (.82)
Issue Heuristic W1 * Regional Election Saliency (LTI)		-5.36 (2.77) +
Issue Heuristic W1 * European Election Saliency (LTI)		-0.56 (2.58)
Age	-0.01 (.01) *	-0.01 (.01) *
Sex	-0.08 (.17)	-0.09 (.17)
Education	0.00 (.09)	0.02 (.09)
Intercept	-5.58 (.54) ***	-5.23 (.64) ***
<i>Random effects</i>		
Level 2 (respondent) variance	0.40 (.22)	0.37 (.23)
Log likelihood	-782.453	-775.700
N _i / N _j	15534/ 863	15534/ 863

Table E-18: Effect of linking to elections on campaign priming of issue heuristic among Flemish respondents: multilevel statistical estimates. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. * = $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

Parameter	Model 1		Model 2	
<i>Fixed effects</i>				
Issue Heuristic W1	0.61 (.20)	**	0.53 (.26)	*
Specific Issue W1	3.59 (.24)	***	3.57 (.25)	***
Saliency (LTI)	-3.60 (3.21)		-3.60 (3.20)	
Regional Election Saliency (LTI)	3.83 (1.31)	**	-2.21 (4.11)	
European Election Saliency (LTI)	-0.42 (1.25)		4.30 (3.98)	
Newspapers	-0.07 (.05)		-0.02 (.07)	
Television	0.05 (.06)		0.01 (.09)	
Regional Election Saliency (LTI) * Newspapers			0.02 (.58)	
Regional Election Saliency (LTI) * Television			1.18 (.76)	
European Election Saliency (LTI) * Newspapers			-0.51 (.74)	
European Election Saliency (LTI) * Television			-0.76 (.79)	
Issue Heuristic W1 * Regional Election Saliency (LTI)			0.51 (2.04)	
Issue Heuristic W1 * European Election Saliency (LTI)			0.39 (2.49)	
Age	-0.01 (.01)	+	-0.01 (.01)	
Sex	0.00 (.18)		0.01 (.18)	
Education	-0.10 (.09)		-0.10 (.09)	
Intercept	-4.79 (.50)	***	-4.67 (.59)	***
<i>Random effects</i>				
Level 2 (respondent) variance	0.00 (.09)		0.00 (.60)	
Log likelihood	-684.143		-682.217	
N _i / N _j	12654/ 703		12654/ 703	

Table E-19: Effect of linking to elections on campaign priming of issue heuristic among Walloon respondents: multilevel statistical estimates. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. * = $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

E.5 - Priming of Party Heuristic. Logistic Regression estimates.

<i>Flemish respondents (N=863)</i>	Model 1 (Pseudo R²: .06)	Model 2 (Pseudo R²: .07)	Model 3 (Pseudo R²: .08)
Party Heuristic W1	1.04 (.18) ***	0.84 (.61)	5.71 (2.20) *
Absolute visibility (LTI)	0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00) +	-0.01 (.00) +
Relative visibility (LTI)	2.10 (2.87)	13.19 (10.43)	39.98 (12.63) **
Newspapers	0.08 (.05) +	0.23 (.14)	0.44 (.18) *
Television	0.03 (.06)	-0.11 (.17)	0.09 (.21)
Absolute visibility (LTI) * Newspapers		0.00 (.00) *	0.00 (.00) *
Absolute visibility (LTI) * Television		0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
Relative visibility (LTI) * Newspapers		-3.30 (1.45) *	-5.67 (1.74) **
Relative visibility (LTI) * Television		0.00 (1.78)	-3.10 (2.10)
Party Heuristic W1 * Absolute visibility (LTI)		-0.00 (.00)	0.01 (.00)
Party Heuristic W1 * Relative visibility (LTI)		4.61 (6.28)	-57.85 (22.36) *
Party Heuristic W1 * Absolute visibility (LTI) * Newspapers			0.00 (.00)
Party Heuristic W1 * Absolute visibility (LTI) * Television			-0.00 (.00)
Party Heuristic W1 * Relative visibility (LTI) * Newspapers			5.54 (3.23) +
Party Heuristic W1 * Relative visibility (LTI) * Television			8.85 (4.55) +
Party Heuristic W1 * Newspapers			-0.46 (.31)
Party Heuristic W1 * Television			-0.66 (.42)
Relative visibility (LTI) * Absolute visibility (LTI)			-0.01 (.01)
Sex	-0.29 (.17) +	-0.27 (.18)	-0.29 (.18) +
Age	0.01 (.01) *	0.01 (.01) *	0.01 (.01) *
Education	0.02 (.09)	0.02 (.09)	-0.00 (.09)
Intercept	-1.88 (.60) **	-1.77 (1.02) +	-3.93 (1.35) **
Log Likelihood	-493.155	-488.634	-482.783

Table E-20: Priming of Party Heuristic between W1 and W2 of the PVPS survey. Statistical estimates obtained from logistic regression analysis. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. += $p \leq .10$ *= $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

<i>Walloon respondents (N=692)</i>	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	(Pseudo R²: .05)			(Pseudo R²: .05)			(Pseudo R²: .07)		
Party Heuristic W1	0.79 (.19)	***		1.10 (.64)	+		5.00 (2.34)	*	
Absolute visibility (LTI)	0.00 (.00)			-0.00 (.00)			0.00 (.00)		+
Relative visibility (LTI)	-4.52 (1.69)	**		-5.30 (5.52)			-5.88 (7.84)		
Newspapers	-0.01 (.05)			-0.18 (.17)			-0.09 (.22)		
Television	0.17 (.07)	*		0.15 (.20)			0.28 (.29)		
Absolute visibility (LTI) * Newspapers				0.00 (.00)			0.00 (.00)		
Absolute visibility (LTI) * Television				0.00 (.00)			-0.00 (.00)		
Relative visibility (LTI) * Newspapers				0.50 (.89)			0.02 (1.10)		
Relative visibility (LTI) * Television				-0.17 (1.06)			0.77 (1.53)		
Party Heuristic W1 * Absolute visibility (LTI)				-0.00 (.00)			-0.01 (.00)		*
Party Heuristic W1 * Relative visibility (LTI)				0.60 (3.36)			-1.34 (12.37)		
Party Heuristic W1 * Absolute visibility (LTI) * Newspapers							-0.00 (.00)		
Party Heuristic W1 * Absolute visibility (LTI) * Television							0.00 (.00)		*
Party Heuristic W1 * Relative visibility (LTI) * Newspapers							1.18 (1.84)		
Party Heuristic W1 * Relative visibility (LTI) * Television							-0.33 (2.28)		
Party Heuristic W1 * Newspapers							-0.22 (.36)		
Party Heuristic W1 * Television							-0.66 (.48)		
Relative visibility (LTI) * Absolute visibility (LTI)							-0.01 (.00)		+
Sex	0.30 (.19)			0.30 (.20)			0.26 (.20)		
Age	0.00 (.01)			0.00 (.01)			0.00 (.01)		
Education	-0.15 (.10)			-0.15 (.11)			-0.17 (.11)		
Intercept	-1.09 (.65)		+	-0.63 (1.01)			-2.02 (1.46)		
Log Likelihood	-396.552			-394.955			-388.729		

Table E-21: Priming of Party Heuristic between W1 and W2 of the PVPS survey. Statistical estimates obtained from logistic regression analysis. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. += $p \leq .10$ *= $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

<i>Flemish respondents (N=863)</i>	Model 1 (Pseudo R²: .06)	Model 2 (Pseudo R²: .07)	Model 3 (Pseudo R²: .08)
Party Heuristic W1	1.05 (.18) ***	0.70 (.50)	3.73 (1.68) *
Absolute visibility (STI)	-0.01 (.01)	-0.10 (.04) *	-0.08 (.05)
Relative visibility (STI)	-0.32 (2.60)	11.80 (8.23)	18.13 (10.41) +
Newspapers	0.08 (.05) +	0.11 (.12)	0.17 (.15)
Television	0.03 (.06)	-0.10 (.14)	0.09 (.17)
Absolute visibility (STI) * Newspapers		0.02 (.01) **	0.02 (.01) *
Absolute visibility (STI) * Television		0.01 (.01)	0.00 (.01)
Relative visibility (STI) * Newspapers		-3.30 (1.31) *	-4.21 (1.62) **
Relative visibility (STI) * Television		-0.02 (1.50)	-0.41 (1.90)
Party Heuristic W1 * Absolute visibility (STI)		-0.00 (.03)	-0.04 (.09)
Party Heuristic W1 * Relative visibility (STI)		2.92 (5.63)	-9.41 (18.75)
Party Heuristic W1 * Absolute visibility (STI) * Newspapers			-0.01 (.01)
Party Heuristic W1 * Absolute visibility (STI) * Television			0.02 (.02)
Party Heuristic W1 * Relative visibility (STI) * Newspapers			2.80 (2.85)
Party Heuristic W1 * Relative visibility (STI) * Television			0.47 (3.72)
Party Heuristic W1 * Newspapers			-0.12 (.25)
Party Heuristic W1 * Television			-0.55 (.32) +
Relative visibility (STI) * Absolute visibility (STI)			-0.04 (.14)
Sex	-0.29 (.17) +	-0.28 (.18)	-0.26 (.18)
Age	0.01 (.01) *	0.01 (.01) *	0.01 (.01) *
Education	0.02 (.09)	0.03 (.10)	0.01 (.10)
Intercept	-1.88 (.60) **	-1.06 (.89)	-2.23 (1.12) *
Log Likelihood	-492.827	-487.114	-483.837

Table E-22: Priming of Party Heuristic between W1 and W2 of the PVPS survey. Statistical estimates obtained from logistic regression analysis. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. += $p \leq .10$ *= $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

<i>Walloon respondents (N=692)</i>	Model 1 (Pseudo R²: .05)	Model 2 (Pseudo R²: .05)	Model 3 (Pseudo R²: .06)
Party Heuristic W1	0.82 (.19) ***	1.71 (.94) +	3.93 (3.22)
Absolute visibility (STI)	0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.01)	0.02 (.02)
Relative visibility (STI)	-3.89 (2.06) +	-0.16 (6.84)	-0.07 (10.98)
Newspapers	-0.01 (.05)	-0.11 (.29)	0.03 (.36)
Television	0.17 (.07) *	0.31 (.33)	0.42 (.48)
Absolute visibility (STI) * Newspapers		-0.00 (.00)	-0.01 (.00) *
Absolute visibility (STI) * Television		0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
Relative visibility (STI) * Newspapers		0.59 (1.29)	1.09 (1.59)
Relative visibility (STI) * Television		-0.92 (1.44)	-1.20 (2.11)
Party Heuristic W1 * Absolute visibility (STI)		-0.00 (.01)	-0.04 (.03)
Party Heuristic W1 * Relative visibility (STI)		-3.22 (4.20)	-2.75 (14.33)
Party Heuristic W1 * Absolute visibility (STI) * Newspapers			0.01 (.00) **
Party Heuristic W1 * Absolute visibility (STI) * Television			0.00 (.01)
Party Heuristic W1 * Relative visibility (STI) * Newspapers			-0.41 (2.52)
Party Heuristic W1 * Relative visibility (STI) * Television			0.24 (3.14)
Party Heuristic W1 * Newspapers			-0.50 (.58)
Party Heuristic W1 * Television			-0.14 (.75)
Relative visibility (STI) * Absolute visibility (STI)			-0.02 (.07)
Sex	0.29 (.19)	0.28 (.19)	0.27 (.19)
Age	0.00 (.01)	-0.00 (.01)	-0.00 (.01)
Education	-0.11 (.10)	-0.11 (.10)	-0.13 (.11)
Intercept	-1.26 (.72) +	-1.90 (1.46)	-2.78 (2.30)
Log Likelihood	-398.330	-397.255	-391.584

Table E-23: Priming of Party Heuristic between W1 and W2 of the PVPS survey. Statistical estimates obtained from logistic regression analysis. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. += $p \leq .10$ *= $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

<i>Flemish respondents (N=863)</i>	Model 1 (Pseudo R²: .07)	Model 2 (Pseudo R²: .07)
Party Heuristic W1	1.03 (.18) ***	0.18 (1.60)
Absolute visibility (LTI)	0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)
Relative visibility (LTI)	1.34 (3.09)	1.08 (3.13)
Regional election link (LTI)	3.78 (1.64) *	7.21 (4.03) +
European election link (LTI)	-3.20 (3.27)	-12.24 (10.48)
Newspapers	0.08 (.04) +	-0.01 (.37)
Television	0.04 (.06)	0.36 (.48)
Regional election link (LTI) * Newspapers		0.05 (.52)
European election link (LTI) * Newspapers		0.37 (1.50)
Regional election link (LTI) * Television		-0.76 (.74)
European election link (LTI) * Television		1.35 (1.96)
Party Heuristic W1 * Regional election link (LTI)		0.60 (2.27)
Party Heuristic W1 * European election link (LTI)		3.56 (6.27)
Sex	-0.27 (.18)	-0.24 (.18)
Age	0.02 (.01) **	0.01 (.01) **
Education	0.01 (.10)	0.02 (.10)
Intercept	-4.51 (1.35) **	-5.64 (2.77) *
Log Likelihood	489.819	488.538

Table E-24: Effect of election linking to priming of Party Heuristic between W1 and W2 of the PVPS survey. Statistical estimates obtained from logistic regression analysis. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. += $p \leq .10$ *= $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

<i>Walloon respondents (N=692)</i>	Model 1 (Pseudo R²: .05)	Model 2 (Pseudo R²: .06)	
Party Heuristic W1	0.77 (.19) ***	-0.33 (1.65)	
Absolute visibility (LTI)	0.00 (.00)	0.00 (.00)	
Relative visibility (LTI)	-6.97 (2.42) **	-8.61 (2.74)	**
Regional election link (LTI)	-0.49 (1.96)	3.57 (4.30)	
European election link (LTI)	-3.77 (2.51)	-0.10 (4.16)	
Newspapers	-0.02 (.05)	0.84 (.54)	
Television	0.17 (.07) *	0.53 (.59)	
Regional election link (LTI) * Newspapers		-1.01 (.70)	
European election link (LTI) * Newspapers		-2.36 (1.64)	
Regional election link (LTI) * Television		-0.42 (.86)	
European election link (LTI) * Television		-0.69 (1.01)	
Party Heuristic W1 * Regional election link (LTI)		0.85 (2.31)	
Party Heuristic W1 * European election link (LTI)		6.47 (3.41)	+
Sex	0.29 (.19)	0.31 (.20)	
Age	0.00 (.01)	0.00 (.01)	
Education	-0.17 (.11)	-0.19 (.11)	+
Intercept	0.17 (1.93)	-2.53 (3.27)	
Log Likelihood	-394.363	-390.527	

Table E-25: Effect of election linking to priming of Party Heuristic between W1 and W2 of the PVPS survey. Statistical estimates obtained from logistic regression analysis. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. += $p \leq .10$ *= $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

E.6 - Impact of other pre-existing heuristics on Politician priming

Parameter	Model 1		Model 2	
<i>Fixed effects</i>				
Specific Politician W1	2.02 (.55)	***	2.40 (.55)	***
Newspapers	-0.04 (.07)		-0.05 (.06)	
Television	-0.03 (.09)		-0.03 (.09)	
Relative politician visibility (LTI)	7.68 (.82)	***	9.44 (1.69)	***
Absolute politician visibility (LTI)	0.00 (.00)	***	0.00 (.00)	*
Overall tone towards politician (LTI)	0.00 (.00)		0.00 (.00)	
Politician W1	0.47 (.38)		1.82 (.64)	**
Endorsements W1	0.03 (.36)		0.12 (.80)	
G&O W1	-1.13 (.58)	+	0.04 (1.59)	
Groups W1	-0.73 (.48)		-0.11 (.97)	
Habit W1	-0.11 (.52)		1.36 (.81)	+
Magnitude W1	-16.78 (4696.75)		-15.40 (15711.27)	
Ideology W1	-0.08 (.38)		-0.26 (.87)	
Issues W1	0.38 (.34)		-0.44 (.89)	
Party W1	0.14 (.31)		0.42 (.66)	
Endorsements W1 * Relative politician visibility (LTI)			-1.30 (2.02)	
G&O W1 * Relative politician visibility (LTI)			-1.33 (3.00)	
Groups W1 * Relative politician visibility (LTI)			-1.29 (2.45)	
Habit W1 * Relative politician visibility (LTI)			-1.39 (5.42)	
Magnitude W1 * Relative politician visibility (LTI)			-9.69 (172190.30)	
Ideology W1 * Relative politician visibility (LTI)			-2.05 (2.10)	
Issues W1 * Relative politician visibility (LTI)			0.88 (1.71)	
Party W1 * Relative politician visibility (LTI)			-0.72 (1.53)	
Politician W1 * Relative politician visibility (LTI)			-3.78 (1.58)	*
Endorsements W1 * Absolute politician visibility (LTI)			0.00 (.00)	
G&O W1 * Absolute politician visibility (LTI)			0.00 (.00)	
Groups W1 * Absolute politician visibility (LTI)			0.00 (.00)	
Habit W1 * Absolute politician visibility (LTI)			0.00 (.00)	
Magnitude W1 * Absolute politician visibility (LTI)			0.00 (80.60)	
Ideology W1 * Absolute politician visibility (LTI)			0.00 (.00)	
Issues W1 * Absolute politician visibility (LTI)			0.00 (.00)	
Party W1 * Absolute politician visibility (LTI)			0.00 (.00)	
Politician W1 * Absolute politician visibility (LTI)			0.00 (.00)	
Sex	-0.37 (.27)		-0.37 (.26)	
Age	0.01 (.01)		0.01 (.01)	
Education	-0.26 (.14)	+	-0.23 (.13)	+
Intercept	-5.36 (.99)	***	-5.95 (1.16)	***
<i>Random effects</i>				
Level 2 (respondent) variance	0.86 (.45)		0.32 (.74)	
Log likelihood	-328.298		-318.841	
N _i / N _j	5017/ 863		5017/ 863	

Table E-26: Impact of other pre-existing heuristics on politician priming among Flemish respondents. Multilevel statistical estimates. += p ≤ .10 *= p ≤ .05 ** = p ≤ .01 * = p ≤ .001.**

Parameter	Model 1		Model 2	
<i>Fixed effects</i>				
Specific Politician W1	3.77 (1.08)	**	4.85 (1.19)	***
Newspapers	-0.23 (.12)	+	-0.25 (.13)	+
Television	0.02 (.15)		-0.04 (.15)	
Relative politician visibility (LTI)	1.39 (1.03)		2.89 (2.72)	
Absolute politician visibility (LTI)	0.01 (.00)	***	0.01 (.00)	+
Overall tone towards politician (LTI)	0.03 (.01)	***	0.04 (.01)	***
Politician W1	-0.74 (1.01)		0.55 (1.22)	
Endorsements W1	-0.46 (.68)		-0.80 (1.22)	
G&O W1	-0.55 (1.31)		-0.73 (2.43)	
Groups W1	-0.46 (.65)		-0.66 (1.21)	
Habit W1	0.09 (.68)		0.05 (1.24)	
Magnitude W1	-23.60 (217597.80)		-24.21 (615616.70)	
Ideology W1	0.92 (.55)	+	-0.31 (1.07)	
Issues W1	-0.05 (.54)		0.09 (.92)	
Party W1	-0.04 (.49)		-0.08 (.86)	
Endorsements W1 * Relative politician visibility (LTI)			-11.47 (10.31)	
G&O W1 * Relative politician visibility (LTI)			-1.64 (4.12)	
Groups W1 * Relative politician visibility (LTI)			-4.44 (6.12)	
Habit W1 * Relative politician visibility (LTI)			6.29 (6.38)	
Magnitude W1 * Relative politician visibility (LTI)			0.34 (2139250.00)	
Ideology W1 * Relative politician visibility (LTI)			-0.07 (2.59)	
Issues W1 * Relative politician visibility (LTI)			-1.49 (2.67)	
Party W1 * Relative politician visibility (LTI)			-0.24 (2.02)	
Politician W1 * Relative politician visibility (LTI)			-1.16 (4.49)	
Endorsements W1 * Absolute politician visibility (LTI)			0.01 (.01)	
G&O W1 * Absolute politician visibility (LTI)			0.00 (.01)	
Groups W1 * Absolute politician visibility (LTI)			0.00 (.00)	
Habit W1 * Absolute politician visibility (LTI)			0.00 (.01)	
Magnitude W1 * Absolute politician visibility (LTI)			0.00 (3720.79)	
Ideology W1 * Absolute politician visibility (LTI)			0.01 (.00)	
Issues W1 * Absolute politician visibility (LTI)			0.00 (.00)	
Party W1 * Absolute politician visibility (LTI)			0.00 (.00)	
Politician W1 * Absolute politician visibility (LTI)			-0.01 (.01)	
Sex	0.48 (.45)		0.63 (.48)	
Age	0.03 (.01)	*	0.03 (.01)	+
Education	0.00 (.22)		-0.06 (.23)	
Intercept	-7.16 (1.48)	***	-7.04 (1.67)	***
<i>Random effects</i>				
Level 2 (respondent) variance	0.00 (.14)		0.00 (.14)	
Log likelihood	-110.748		-119.276	
Ni / Nj	2157/688		2157/688	

Table E-27: Impact of other pre-existing heuristics on politician priming among Walloon respondents. Multilevel statistical estimates. += $p \leq .10$ * = $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

E.7 - Impact of other pre-existing heuristics on Issue priming

Parameter	Model 1		Model 2	
<i>Fixed effects</i>				
Specific Issue W1	3.77 (.26)	***	3.87 (.27)	***
Newspapers	0.03 (.05)		0.03 (.05)	
Television	0.06 (.06)		0.06 (.06)	
General salience (LTI)	-6.23 (2.75)	*	-19.55 (6.80)	**
Political Salience (LTI)	4.96 (1.54)	**	10.50 (3.71)	**
Politician W1	0.07 (.26)		-0.05 (.48)	
Endorsements W1	-0.56 (.30)	+	-0.33 (.55)	
G&O W1	0.38 (.30)		0.78 (.56)	
Groups W1	0.38 (.24)		-0.71 (.48)	
Habit W1	-0.17 (.43)		0.35 (.79)	
Magnitude W1	0.49 (.55)		0.26 (1.06)	
Ideology W1	0.07 (.25)		-0.07 (.47)	
Issues W1	0.32 (.23)		0.28 (.41)	
Party W1	-0.02 (.22)		0.36 (.43)	
Endorsements W1 * General Salience (LTI)			-0.18 (8.72)	
G&O W1 * General Salience (LTI)			-13.78 (13.47)	
Groups W1 * General Salience (LTI)			26.01 (5.61)	***
Habit W1 * General Salience (LTI)			-10.80 (18.95)	
Magnitude W1 * General Salience (LTI)			13.12 (14.55)	
Ideology W1 * General Salience (LTI)			8.70 (6.53)	
Issues W1 * General Salience (LTI)			13.50 (5.87)	*
Party W1 * General Salience (LTI)			-12.50 (9.50)	
Politician W1 * General Salience (LTI)			-0.95 (8.39)	
Endorsements W1 * Political Salience (LTI)			-2.65 (5.28)	
G&O W1 * Political Salience (LTI)			2.96 (5.24)	
Groups W1 * Political Salience (LTI)			-5.52 (4.52)	
Habit W1 * Political Salience (LTI)			-0.23 (8.77)	
Magnitude W1 * Political Salience (LTI)			-6.41 (10.98)	
Ideology W1 * Political Salience (LTI)			-4.40 (4.48)	
Issues W1 * Political Salience (LTI)			-9.44 (3.95)	*
Party W1 * Political Salience (LTI)			2.53 (4.05)	
Politician W1 * Political Salience (LTI)			2.04 (4.03)	
Sex	-0.03 (.18)		-0.04 (.18)	
Age	-0.02 (.01)	**	-0.02 (.01)	**
Education	0.00 (.09)		0.01 (.09)	
Intercept	-4.76 (.58)	***	-4.58 (.66)	***
<i>Random effects</i>				
Level 2 (respondent) variance	0.33 (.24)		0.32 (.22)	
Log likelihood	-795.169		-775.326	
Ni / Nj	16164/898		16164/898	

Table E-28: Impact of other pre-existing heuristics on Issue Priming among Flemish respondents.
Multilevel statistical estimates. + = $p \leq .10$ * = $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ *** = $p \leq .001$.

Parameter	Model 1		Model 2	
<i>Fixed effects</i>				
Specific Issue W1	3.54 (.24)	***	3.55 (.25)	***
Newspapers	-0.06 (.05)		-0.06 (.05)	
Television	0.07 (.06)		0.07 (.06)	
General salience (LTI)	-7.22 (3.96)	+	-5.55 (8.56)	
Political Salience (LTI)	6.22 (1.64)	***	6.42 (3.60)	+
Politician W1	-0.60 (.38)		-1.27 (.81)	
Endorsements W1	-1.11 (.42)	**	-0.18 (.73)	
G&O W1	-0.08 (.42)		0.07 (.77)	
Groups W1	0.31 (.25)		0.66 (.43)	
Habit W1	-0.34 (.44)		-0.11 (.73)	
Magnitude W1	-1.06 (1.33)		-3066.28 (16800000.00)	
Ideology W1	-0.30 (.28)		-0.08 (.48)	
Issues W1	0.42 (.22)	+	0.42 (.36)	
Party W1	-0.21 (.20)		-0.13 (.36)	
Endorsements W1 * General Salience (LTI)			-48.18 (38.34)	
G&O W1 * General Salience (LTI)			-1.62 (18.28)	
Groups W1 * General Salience (LTI)			-0.53 (10.65)	
Habit W1 * General Salience (LTI)			2.43 (17.24)	
Magnitude W1 * General Salience (LTI)			-24706.91 (136000000.00)	
Ideology W1 * General Salience (LTI)			-2.20 (12.17)	
Issues W1 * General Salience (LTI)			-1.73 (8.59)	
Party W1 * General Salience (LTI)			2.49 (8.71)	
Politician W1 * General Salience (LTI)			-3.74 (20.86)	
Endorsements W1 * Political Salience (LTI)			15.42 (15.09)	
G&O W1 * Political Salience (LTI)			-1.22 (8.28)	
Groups W1 * Political Salience (LTI)			-3.62 (5.02)	
Habit W1 * Political Salience (LTI)			-4.07 (7.59)	
Magnitude W1 * Political Salience (LTI)			18598.07 (102000000.00)	
Ideology W1 * Political Salience (LTI)			-0.71 (5.26)	
Issues W1 * Political Salience (LTI)			0.98 (3.57)	
Party W1 * Political Salience (LTI)			-2.32 (3.63)	
Politician W1 * Political Salience (LTI)			6.41 (7.90)	
Sex	0.06 (.18)		0.08 (.18)	
Age	-0.01 (.01)		-0.01 (.01)	
Education	-0.07 (.09)		-0.07 (.09)	
Intercept	-4.39 (.50)	***	-4.52 (.57)	***
<i>Random effects</i>				
Level 2 (respondent) variance	0.00 (.06)		0.00 (.06)	
Log likelihood	-677.360		-671.304	
Ni / Nj	12978/712		12978/712	

Table E-29: Impact of other pre-existing heuristics on Issue Priming among Flemish respondents.
Multilevel statistical estimates. += $p \leq .10$ * = $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ * = $p \leq .001$.**

E.8 - Impact of other heuristics on party priming

Parameter	Model 1 (Pseudo R ² : .07)			Model 2 (Pseudo R ² : .10)	
Party W1	1.11	(.19)	***	0.53	(.66)
Newspapers	0.08	(.04)	+	0.09	(.04) *
Television	0.03	(.06)		0.02	(.06)
Absolute party visibility (LTI)	0.00	(.00)		0.00	(.00)
Relative party visibility (LTI)	1.92	(2.76)		0.07	(7.01)
Politician W1	-0.08	(.22)		0.12	(.80)
Endorsements W1	0.24	(.22)		0.26	(.77)
G&O W1	0.64	(.28)	*	-1.60	(1.06)
Groups W1	-0.07	(.24)		0.10	(.77)
Habit W1	0.27	(.30)		1.12	(1.40)
Magnitude W1	0.30	(.62)		-0.95	(2.03)
Ideology W1	0.32	(.21)		0.19	(.76)
Issues W1	-0.21	(.21)		-0.67	(.69)
Endorsements W1 * Absolute party visibility (LTI)				0.00	(.00)
G&O W1 * Absolute party visibility (LTI)				0.00	(.00)
Groups W1 * Absolute party visibility (LTI)				0.00	(.00)
Habit W1 * Absolute party visibility (LTI)				0.00	(.00)
Magnitude W1 * Absolute party visibility (LTI)				0.00	(.00)
Ideology W1 * Absolute party visibility (LTI)				0.00	(.00)
Issues W1 * Absolute party visibility (LTI)				0.00	(.00)
Party W1 * Absolute party visibility (LTI)				0.00	(.00)
Politician W1 * Absolute party visibility (LTI)				0.00	(.00) **
Endorsements W1 * Relative party visibility (LTI)				2.97	(7.50)
G&O W1 * Relative party visibility (LTI)				18.72	(13.90)
Groups W1 * Relative party visibility (LTI)				3.27	(7.93)
Habit W1 * Relative party visibility (LTI)				-13.56	(12.92)
Magnitude W1 * Relative party visibility (LTI)				9.18	(29.36)
Ideology W1 * Relative party visibility (LTI)				3.12	(7.16)
Issues W1 * Relative party visibility (LTI)				5.01	(7.23)
Party W1 * Relative party visibility (LTI)				6.69	(6.87)
Politician W1 * Relative party visibility (LTI)				-18.77	(8.20) *
Sex	-0.29	(.16)	+	-0.30	(.16) +
Age	0.01	(.01)	*	0.01	(.01) **
Education	0.02	(.08)		0.03	(.09)
Intercept	-1.88	(.57)	**	-1.52	(.84) +
Log likelihood	-486.873			-475.101	
N	863			863	

Table E-30: Impact of other pre-existing heuristics on Party Priming among Flemish respondents.
Statistical estimates obtained from logistic regression analysis. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. += p ≤ .10 * = p ≤ .05 ** = p ≤ .01 *** = p ≤ .001.

Parameter	Model 1		Model 2	
	(Pseudo R ² : .07)		(Pseudo R ² :.09)	
Party W1	0.96 (.20)	***	1.33 (.72)	+
Newspapers	-0.01 (.05)		-0.02 (.05)	
Television	0.17 (.06)	**	0.18 (.06)	**
Absolute party visibility (LTI)	0.00 (.00)		0.00 (.00)	
Relative party visibility (LTI)	-4.87 (1.70)	**	-2.39 (3.74)	
Politician W1	1.01 (.30)	**	0.90 (1.34)	
Endorsements W1	0.04 (.27)		1.06 (1.10)	
G&O W1	0.08 (.37)		6.73 (3.03)	*
Groups W1	-0.34 (.29)		-0.32 (1.11)	
Habit W1	0.59 (.32)	+	3.18 (1.54)	*
Magnitude W1	0.31 (.81)		2.34 (3.29)	
Ideology W1	0.42 (.26)		1.68 (1.01)	+
Issues W1	0.14 (.21)		0.81 (.79)	
Endorsements W1 * Absolute party visibility (LTI)			0.00 (.00)	
G&O W1 * Absolute party visibility (LTI)			0.00 (.00)	
Groups W1 * Absolute party visibility (LTI)			0.00 (.00)	
Habit W1 * Absolute party visibility (LTI)			0.00 (.00)	
Magnitude W1 * Absolute party visibility (LTI)			0.00 (.00)	
Ideology W1 * Absolute party visibility (LTI)			0.00 (.00)	
Issues W1 * Absolute party visibility (LTI)			0.00 (.00)	
Party W1 * Absolute party visibility (LTI)			0.00 (.00)	
Politician W1 * Absolute party visibility (LTI)			0.00 (.00)	
Endorsements W1 * Relative party visibility (LTI)			-2.37 (4.92)	
G&O W1 * Relative party visibility (LTI)			-39.08 (20.03)	+
Groups W1 * Relative party visibility (LTI)			0.45 (5.19)	
Habit W1 * Relative party visibility (LTI)			-9.95 (6.55)	
Magnitude W1 * Relative party visibility (LTI)			-5.25 (17.13)	
Ideology W1 * Relative party visibility (LTI)			-4.64 (5.29)	
Issues W1 * Relative party visibility (LTI)			-2.35 (4.15)	
Party W1 * Relative party visibility (LTI)			0.74 (3.79)	
Politician W1 * Relative party visibility (LTI)			2.35 (6.83)	
Sex	0.30 (.18)	+	0.24 (.18)	
Age	0.00 (.01)		0.00 (.01)	
Education	-0.16 (.10)	+	-0.16 (.10)	
Intercept	-1.20 (.62)	+	-2.10 (.86)	*
Log likelihood	-387.448		-379.995	
N	692		692	

Table E-31: Impact of other pre-existing heuristics on party priming among Flemish respondents.
Statistical estimates obtained from logistic regression analysis. Table entries are coefficient estimates with standard errors in parentheses. += $p \leq .10$ *= $p \leq .05$ ** = $p \leq .01$ *** = $p \leq .001$.