

**Appendix A – list of interviewees**

Interview No.	Format	Interviewee
1	In person	Local official, Vooruit
2	In person	National official, Vooruit
3	In person	National official, Groen
4	In person	National official, Groen
5	Online	National official, environmental umbrella organisation of CSO's
6	Online	National official, environmental CSO
7	Online	Country expert
8	Online	Director, environmental think tank
9	Online	Former national official, Groen
10	Online	National official (migration policy), umbrella organisation of CSO's
11	Online	Former national official, Groen
12	Online	National official, umbrella organisation of CSO's
13	Online	National official (climate policy), umbrella organisation of CSO's
14	Online	National official, umbrella organisation of CSO's
15	Online	National official, socialist trade union
16	Online	Senior Ministerial Advisor, Vooruit
17	In person	National official, Vooruit
18	In person	National official, Vooruit
19	Online	Local official, Vooruit
20	Online	Country expert
21	Online	Nationally prominent Vooruit figure
22	Online	Country expert
23	Online	Former senior regional official and candidate, Vooruit
24	Online	Former senior trade unionist and Vooruit candidate
25	Online	Former senior national and municipal officer, Vooruit
26	Online	Director, think tank
27	Online	Country expert
28	Online	National official, socialist trade union

## Appendix B – Thematic Coding

To structure my case analysis, I conducted initial and secondary thematic coding of my interview transcripts. Table B.1 shows list the secondary thematic codes, the description of those codes, and illustrates each secondary code with examples from the interview transcripts.

**Table B.1 – Initial and secondary coding of interview transcripts**

Secondary thematic coding	Description	Examples from the transcripts
New vs. older social movements	New social movements from 1980's were in part a reaction to unresponsiveness of institutionalised CSO's – particularly trade unions – to social change and the emergence of new issues. Their emergence and ways of working placed traditional connections under strain and prompted some change in the direction of more collaboration amongst CSO's and open channels of connection.	<p>'Older and more established environmental organisations know that Groen represents most of their demands. Youth led groups and extinction rebellion introduce a new relationship that is sometimes difficult for the Greens in government' (In. 8)'</p> <p>'New social movements were a reaction to older social movements especially the labour unions and mutualities that did not take up issues such as biodiversity, nuclear power, and women's rights...New social movements were absolutely independent of any political party.' (In. 11)</p>
Policy structures and competences	The framework of government policymaking is central to the structuring and substance of connections. CSO's focus their advocacy efforts on this structure rather than on links to MP's and there are many allies of CSO's within policy structures. The government status of parties and the competences of their ministers influence the frequency and closeness of links. Split government competences present a challenge to CSO's.	<p>'The form of interaction depends on the files or dossiers and the competences which in Belgium are many. We [a coalition of CSO's] have a lot of personal meetings and will tour around the different <i>cabinet</i> to present reports and finding' (In. 10)</p> <p>'We [a CSO] mainly start with a report or policy letter with our positioning that is directed to cabinets, responsible ministers and their vice-Chairs. There is a big role for inter-cabinet working groups that try to influence policy through the responsible minister'. (In.13)</p>
Pragmatism and independence	CSO's adopt a strongly independent and pragmatic approach to connecting with parties. Connections are non-exclusive and guided by goal of making an impact. Smaller wins are valued and celebrated. This is sometimes frustrating for parties.	<p>'There is no joint campaigning work, it is important for us [an environmental CSO] to be politically neutral and to take a prudent approach...So we have to be independent and not too close to any specific political party'. (In. 5)</p>

		<p>‘We [a coalition of CSO’s] want our campaign against the extreme right to be apolitical at the outset, so we plan not to get parties on board so as not to be hijacked by them’. (In.12)</p>
Party strategies	<p>Party strategies towards connections reflect trends in the personalisation of party leadership and professionalisation of party staffs. Strategies are sometimes ambiguous with leadership behaviour, rhetoric and coalition seeking priorities at odds with behaviour within policy making structures, which exhibits engagement and continuity, and the positioning of individual elected representatives.</p>	<p>‘We [a party] saw that lots of people no longer like to engage with traditional institutions and so the party tries to engage them into issue based actions. The party is leaving traditional groups more and more’. (In.17)</p> <p>‘The approach now is like a marketing campaign centred around the personality first and then the content. The <i>Big Shift</i> claims to be about content but no one from the bottom was consulted, we are just presented with topics. It is make believe democracy’. (In.19)</p>
Coalitions of representation	<p>There is an increasing trend for the representation of a diverse civil society to parties and government to be channelled through coalitions or umbrella organisations. These seek more collaboration between, and unity of, old and new civil actors around shared goals, and aim to build capacity of their members to represent interests and connect to parties. These coalitions retain the independent approach and pragmatism of individual CSO’s but are also potential targets for infiltration by radical political actors..</p>	<p>‘We put together unusual coalitions involving unions, consumers, family organisations and even sometimes farmers who we are normally up against’ (In. 5)</p> <p>‘The origin of [umbrella coalitions] is to be explained in the recent tendency to have more right-wing governments with a negative impact on civil society. The umbrellas give individual organisations greater anonymity so that they can force the critique’. (In. 28)</p>

## Appendix C – Organisational and Connective Density

### Organisational Density

The concept of organisational density was originated by Bartolini and Mair (1990) in their study of ‘electoral availability’ in Western Europe between 1885 and 1985. Bartolini and Mair measure organisational density at the country level as an additive index of two measures. First, *trade union density* – the proportion of a country’s labour force in membership of a trade union. Second, as the membership of left-wing parties as a percentage of those parties electorates - the *party-membership ratio*. Controlling for a range of other influences on electoral volatility Bartolini and Mair found that higher levels of organisational density were strongly associated with lower levels of electoral volatility at the country level.

I operationalise organisational density at the party level with an additive measure also of two variables. First, *party-trade union support* - the percentage of a party’s voters at each election who are in membership of a trade union taken from the European Social Survey (ESS, 2020). And second the *party-membership ratio*, expressing party membership as a percentage of each party’s electorate at each election taken. Data on party membership was sourced from the MAPP dataset (Van Haute et al., 2018) and other secondary sources. In my dataset I have observations on 152 parties at 30 elections in Western Europe between 2005 and 2017. Measures for each of the variables were standardised to take a mean value of zero and a standard deviation of one, and then added to form a composite score for organisational density. The mean value of organisational density for all parties in the dataset is 0.06 with a minimum of -2.08 and a maximum of 6.04<sup>1</sup>. Data for the five Flemish parties serving in either regional or federal governments is summarised in Table C.1.

Table C.1 – Organisational Density of Flemish Government Parties

	Pillar party	2007	2010	2014
Vooruit	Yes	1.16	1.10	1.20
Open-VLD	Yes	0.46	0.76	0.29
CD&V <sup>1</sup>	Yes	0.42	1.10	-0.04
Groen	No	0.60	0.10	-0.58
Nieuw Vlaams Alliantie <sup>1</sup>	No	-	-0.43	0.05

<sup>1</sup>At the 2007 general election CD&V and Nieuw Vlaams Alliantie presented a joint list of election candidates.

<sup>1</sup> An individual could in fact be counted as part of both the constituent elements of organizational density, i.e. they could be a party member who votes for that party and thus part of the party membership ratio for the party, **and** they could be a member of a trade union and thus counted as part of the measure of trade union support. My operationalization is consistent with that deployed by other scholars (Bartolini and Mair; 1990; Emanuele, 2023).

The Table shows that of the five parties *Vooruit* had the highest and most stable level of organisational density over the period covered by my dataset. Apart from *Vooruit* only one other party, the *Open VLD*, the party associated with the liberal pillar in Flanders, had a level of organisational density consistently higher than the mean level of organisational density for all the parties in my dataset. The organisational density of Groen fell from above the mean value for all parties in my dataset in 2007 to a value substantially below that mean value by 2014.

The high and stable figure of organisational density for *Vooruit* reflects its continued reliance on electoral support from individual members of trade unions. In 2014 for example, 46.8% of the party's voters were members of trade unions, marginally up from 45.3% four years earlier. The data indicates that while *Vooruit*'s overall support fell at both the 2010 and 2014 elections its support amongst trade union members rose slightly, by around 5,000 votes, in 2014. In contrast Groen's organisational density fell over the period studied despite the party experiencing a small increase in its party membership ratio – from 1.7 in 2007 to 2.2 in 2014. The fall in Groen's organisational density is explained by a large fall in its party-trade-union support. Trade unionists made up 53.3% of the party's electorate in 2007 but just 29.5% of its electorate in 2014, so that while Groen increased their overall support at the same elections a declining number of individual trade unionists gave their support to the party.

### Connective Density

Connective density is measured using Waves I and II of the Comparative Candidates Survey (CCS). Wave I covered elections between 2005 and 2013 and Wave II covered elections between 2013 and 2018. Of the 30 elections covered in my dataset, 21 took place during Wave I and 9 took place during Wave II. My dataset does not include all elections that took place in the countries under study for the period, for example in the Netherlands in 2010 and 2012, nor do I have observations for connective density for France. The CSS has not yet produced data for France. I also exclude four elections in Iceland, which are covered by the CSS. I make this decision because of Icelandic exceptionalism as explained in the literature and because of lack of data availability for key variables for several elections.

### *Categories of organisation in Connective Density*

In each wave of the survey candidates of each party were asked whether they were members of a number of organisation types. Table C.2 summarises which categories of membership organisation were selected to operationalise connective density. The selection was made on the basis of an assessment of whether a type of membership was pertinent from the perspective of electoral mobilisation. On this criterion, for example, membership of sports or cultural associations was not included while membership of religious associations were. In order not to bias my measure of connections towards parties with specific ideological leanings, I balance memberships of organisations like trade unions, which are traditionally associated with left-wing parties, with memberships of business and religious associations that are traditionally associated with right-wing parties.

The Table shows that there was some inconsistency between the two waves in the categories of association surveyed. While candidates in both waves were asked about their membership of Trade Unions and Religious Organisations there were slightly different survey categories in other important respects. The principal source of potential inconsistency was the higher number

of relevant categories of membership in wave II opening the potential for a candidate to report higher connections as a product of a greater number of possible membership categories, thereby destabilising recorded values across waves of the CCS. To correct for this, memberships of two categories of organisation in wave II – Human and Civil Rights groups and environmental organisations - were treated as equivalent to interest group memberships in wave I and a new variable was computed that could only take on a maximum value of 1 in cases of candidates' membership of both categories of organisation in wave II of the survey. The resulting values for mean country connective density are stable across waves for the seven countries with elections in both waves – falling, or remaining essentially flat across waves in three countries each, and rising significantly in just one country.

**Table C.2 - Connective Density**

Wave (no. elections)	Categories selected	Treatment
I (21)	Trade Unions Professional Associations Interest Groups Religious Groups	Not adjusted
II (9)	Trade Unions  Business Associations  Human and Civil rights organisations Environmental organisations  Religious Groups	Not adjusted  Business treated as equivalent to Professional Associations in Wave I  Human and civil rights and environmental organisations treated as equivalent to the single category of interest groups (in wave 1) and coded so that a maximum value of 1 was possible in cases of membership of both groups.  Not adjusted

*Vooruit and Groen – Trends in Connective Density by Type of Connection*

Table C.3 summarises trends in connective density for *Vooruit* and *Groen* by type of connection, i.e. between the parties and respectively socio-economic or socio-cultural CSO's. It shows that the decline in both parties connective density took place largely after 2010. In the case of *Vooruit* all of the decline in connective density was in the party's connections to socio-economic CSO's. In the case of *Groen* the loss of connectivity was with both sub-types of CSO. By 2014 *Vooruit* had stronger connections than *Groen* with socio-cultural CSO's, a reversal of the position in previous years.

Table C.3 – Connective Density: Vooruit and Groen 2007-14

Party	2007	2010	2014
Vooruit			
- All CSO's	1.04	0.98	0.65
- <i>Socio-economic CSO's</i>	0.70	0.67	0.33
- <i>Socio-cultural CSO's</i>	0.34	0.31	0.32
Groen			
- All CSO's	1.05	1.07	0.47
- <i>Socio-economic CSO's</i>	0.44	0.43	0.18
- <i>Socio-cultural CSO's</i>	0.61	0.64	0.29

*Connective density of government parties in Flanders*

A total of five Flemish parties currently (2022) hold government office at either the federal or regional level. Table C.4 summarises data on connective density for each of these parties between 2007 and 2014. With the exception of the liberal *Open-VLD* all Flemish governing parties experienced declining levels of connective density over this period. In 2014 all three parties with origins in the countries pillars had higher levels of connective density than those governing parties that had emerged from outside the structure of pillarisation.

Table C.4 – Connective Density of Flemish Government Parties

	Pillar party	2007	2010	2014
Vooruit	Yes	1.04	0.98	0.65
Open-VLD	Yes	0.40	0.53	0.53
CD&V <sup>1</sup>	Yes	1.12	0.93	0.53
Groen	No	1.05	1.07	0.47
Nieuw Vlaamse Alliantie <sup>1</sup>	No	-	0.72	0.36

<sup>1</sup> At the 2007 general election CD&V and Nieuw Vlaamse Alliantie presented a joint list of election candidates.

### Additional References

Van Haute, E., Paulis, E., and Sierens, V. (2018) 'Assessing party membership figures: the MAPP dataset', *European Political Science*, 17, 366-377.

## **Appendix D – Sampling, Response Rate and Template Interview Schedules**

### Sampling and response rate

Interviewees were contacted by means of an email communication, describing the aims of the study, indicating the likely length of an interview, and confirming anonymity and confidentiality of data collected in the interview. I contacted a total of 41 possible respondents by this means and completed 28 interviews, a response rate of 68%. Of the respondents interviewed, 9 were current or former officials of *Vooruit*, 5 were current or former officials of *Groen*, 9 were senior officials of a wide range of CSO's, and 5 were country experts or commentators.

### Template Interview Schedules

Semi-structured interviews were given on a guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity. To protect this undertaking I have removed details from these examples of template interview schedules that might reveal the identity of any specific interviewee. Interviewees were asked either to identify both formal and informal types of connections between parties and civil society, or open questions about the form of connections and their evolution in recent decades.

#### *Interview schedule – party officials*

Introduction to me and background on my research.

1. Can you tell me a little about your current role within [party] and how long you have held the position?
2. How does the party view its relationships and connections to civil society organisations? What influence do important CSO's have on the development of party programmes and party organization?
3. Has the party's relationships with CSO's in the [specified] field developed over the last couple of decades?
4. Are there any formal links between [specified field] organisations and the party? Please specify.
5. Does the party have informal contacts with these organisations for example regular meetings with these organizations to discuss the development of policy or shared positions?
6. Does the party encourage its candidates and members to be active within civil society organizations and in what way? Please specify.
7. Does the party organise joint actions (e.g. protests, petitions, campaigns, etc.) with groups of CSO in the [specified] field.
8. Do leading members of the party also hold leadership roles or senior positions in important civil society organisations? Please illustrate.

9. Is the party involved with any joint initiatives with civil society in the legislative arena, either at the Federal or Regional level? If so, what does this cooperation entail and what are the objectives of the cooperation?
10. Who does the party regard as its main competitors in the electoral field? For its target voters?
11. What role, if any, does the party's digital activity play in maintaining closeness to actors within civil society?
12. Can you suggest any other contacts that it would be good for me to talk to in a) [the party], and b) civil society organisations?

### *Interview schedule – civil society organisation officials*

Introduction to me and background on my research.

1. Can you tell me a little about your role and that of your team? What is your own background?
2. Can you tell me a little about some of the current initiatives of [CSO] in Flanders?
3. Can you give me a couple of examples of recent campaigns that you regard as successful? What do you think was key to their success?
4. When [CSO] interacts with political parties and politicians what are its goals? What makes specific parties most valuable for [CSO] to interact with?
5. What are the main ways in which [CSO] and its staff interact with parties and politicians? What types of contacts are most usual and who tends to take the lead in initiating contact?
6. Does [CSO] regard connecting with political parties as an important area of its work?
7. How important are personal relationships to maintaining closeness to parties and important politicians?
8. Has the form and frequency of contacts with parties and politicians changed over recent decades?
9. What is your perspective on the aims that parties have in sustaining relationships with [CSO] and your members [individuals and organizations]?
10. How does [CSO] help its members [individuals and organisations] to maintain contacts with parties and/or politicians?

11. Do any senior officers of [CSO] have leading roles with Vooruit or Groen or indeed any other parties?
12. Can you suggest any other contacts that it would be good for me to talk to in a) [CSO], b) other civil society organisations, and c) political parties?

## Appendix E - Secondary Documentation Used to Triangulate Interviews

To triangulate the data collected from semi-structured interviews I consulted a wide range of secondary documentation.

### Political parties

#### *Party websites*

Vooruit (formerly SP.a) - <https://www.vooruit.org/>

Groen - <https://www.groen.be/>

PVDA-PTB - <https://www.pvda.be/>

#### *Party documentation*

### Political commentary

Articles, manuscripts, and commentary pieces:

- In Samenleving and Politiek (SAMPOL) including:
  - Bart Meulman, Koen Abts, Chris Gaasendam, and Marc Swyngedouw (2016) - Differences and complementarities between green and red voters
  - Marc Swyngedouw (2012) - Over het verdriet van Janssens
  - Marc Le Bruyn (2022) – Does Conner Rousseau want a coalition with the N-VA?
  - Marc Swyngedouw (2010) – Social Democratic Challenges for the Future
  - Wim Vermeersch (2018) – Why is migration such a difficult subject for socialists
  - Chris Gaasendam (2019) – The electoral paradoxes of SP.a
  - Marc Swyngedouw and Dirk Jacobs (2003) – Agalev’s failure at the elections of May 18, 2003
- Published by the Centre de Recherche d’information socio-politique (CRISP) for example:
  - Associations in crisis and in times of crisis - Interview with Jean Faniel and Christophe de Mos
  - The Climate Affair (Klimaatzaak). A Social mobilisation between law, science and politics – V. Lefebve
  - Trade Unions and Trade Unionism: Perceptions and Opinions – Mark Swyngedouw, Koen Abts, and Bart Meuleman

- Published by the Flemish cultural foundation, *Masreel Fonds*
- Published by the Flemish think tank *Oikos*
- Published by the network of Flemish environmental organisations – *Reset Vlaanderen*
- Published by New Left Review for example:
  - Rebel Regions – Anton Jäger (NLR 128, March-April 2021)
  - Belgian Sorrows - Anton Jäger (NLR Sidecar Blog, 10 November 2021)

### **Newspaper articles and interviews**

A wide range of articles on, and interviews about, the two parties accessed via Lexis Nexis and published in:

- Green European Journal
- De Krant van West-Vlaanderen
- De Morgen
- De Tijd
- DiggIt Magazine
- Knack
- Trends magazine