

All about the economy? Issue emphasis in Belgian parties' communication on X before and during the 2024 election campaign

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INTRODUCTION

Social media play a crucial role in the communication strategies of political parties which have becoming increasingly digital. Political actors consider these platforms as essential tools for reaching out to voters, shaping the political agenda, disseminating their ideas, as well as criticising opponents as arenas of party competition. Perhaps more importantly, social media allow political actors to engage directly with the public without being constrained by journalists' traditional gatekeeping role.

This research note analyses the communication of Belgian political parties and their leaders before and during the June 2024 electoral campaign, focusing on X (formerly Twitter). We rely on the full population of posts on X that were disseminated by political parties and presidents from February 9 2023 until June 8 2024 (n = 16,084). We examine the issues that political parties emphasised the most during the campaign (n= 4,979), and whether these priorities shifted compared to the pre-campaign period (n=11,105). We analyse whether these political actors have emphasised similar or different issues, and the extent to which they aligned or changed their communication during the campaign to fit with the agenda-setting of a dominant party or to salient issues in general.

Main findings:

1. Political parties and their leaders (i.e., party presidents) posted more frequently on X during the peak of the electoral campaign, in May 2024, than during the pre-campaign period. This trend is observed for the majority of political parties.
2. Despite some discrepancies between Flanders and Francophone Belgium, parties from both language groups highlighted similar issues (the economy, finance/budget, labour, and social affairs) while neglecting rights and liberties or environmental issues. We note that migration was more often emphasised in Flanders (16%) than in Francophone Belgium (2%), mainly due to Vlaams Belang's strong focus on this topic.
3. Overall, issue emphasis showed little change from before to during the election campaign. The main shift was in energy and environmental issues, reflecting a decreased attention to energy topics between 2023 and 2024 and confirming that climate issues were less prioritised in 2024 than during the 2019 elections.
4. Both language groups increased their focus on economic issues during the campaign and this holds in particular for some parties (e.g., N-VA in Flanders and MR in Francophone Belgium), while attention to energy and environmental topics declined.
5. While most actors placed a specific focus on economic issues during the campaign, some prioritised specific issues. In Francophone Belgium, Ecolo emphasised environmental topics more than other parties, right-of-centre parties (MR, Les Engagés, DéFI) focused more on security than others; MR, PTB, and PS highlighted work-related topics more than other parties. In Flanders, Vlaams Belang stressed migration and security more often, while Groen concentrated on the environment, discrimination, racism, and diversity.
6. What about shifts in emphasis by party, after the start of the campaign? While most political actors in Francophone Belgium reduced their focus on environment and migration during the campaign, some strategies varied. The PS was the only one to increase attention to foreign affairs, particularly on the situation in Palestine and Ukraine. Left-wing parties increased their attention to education and culture. In Flanders, all parties and their leaders reduced their focus on the environment and energy while increasing attention to foreign affairs. Still,

variation exists: the N-VA made a significant shift compared to others, being the only party to drastically increase its emphasis on economic and work-related issues.

DATA AND METHOD

This research note analyses the frequency and content of posts disseminated by all main political parties and their presidents on X (formerly Twitter) in Belgium before and during the June 2024 electoral campaign. We first analyse the issues that these political actors prioritised during the campaign and whether any shifts occurred compared to the pre-campaign period. As the pre-campaign period, we consider all posts published between February 9 2023 and February 9 2024, which marks the start of the legally defined period with rules and limits on campaign spending, i.e. ‘sperperiode’ (in Dutch) or “période de prudence” (in French).

X has developed into a key campaign tool for political actors. Most political parties and presidents are active on it, although there are some differences in the frequency with which the platform is used. Since the acquisition of the platform by Musk, some party presidents (e.g., Sammy Mahdi) have withdrawn from it, which is why –where possible— we report relative analyses, which still allow us to compare across parties and within parties over time. X is still heavily used, as it is a means that political actors use to set the political agenda, reach journalists, enter in interaction with each other.

We analyse data from all Belgian political parties with parliamentary representation at the federal level (6 Francophone and 7 Flemish parties)¹. Unfortunately, Vooruit and CD&V had to be excluded from the party-level analyses, as they did not post regularly enough. A total of 16,084 posts were collected, archived, and manually coded across various dimensions², including policy issues. The analysis is quantitative in nature, allowing for a systematic examination.

The first part of this note examines issue emphasis before and during the 2024 electoral campaign. Hence, we look at the issues that attracted the most attention from parties and their presidents on X (which we will refer to as “political actors”). Table 1 lists the various issues and topics that were included in our coding process, which are inspired by the Manifesto Project Database, adapted to the specific Belgian context. Since a post could refer to more than one issue, these numbers do not amount to 100% (e.g., 31% of posts contain 1 issue, 32% contain 2 issues, 14% 3 issues).

¹ Hence, new parties (e.g., Voor U, Team Fouad Ahidar) were out of scope for the current research note. This is because we mainly want to compare across time for a longitudinal period starting already in 2023, which was not feasible for newly founded parties. See Appendix 1 for the list of accounts included.

² We conducted inter-coder reliability tests to ensure consistent coding among different coders and these results show that they are indeed sufficiently reliable and meet requirements of the thresholds that are commonly applied.

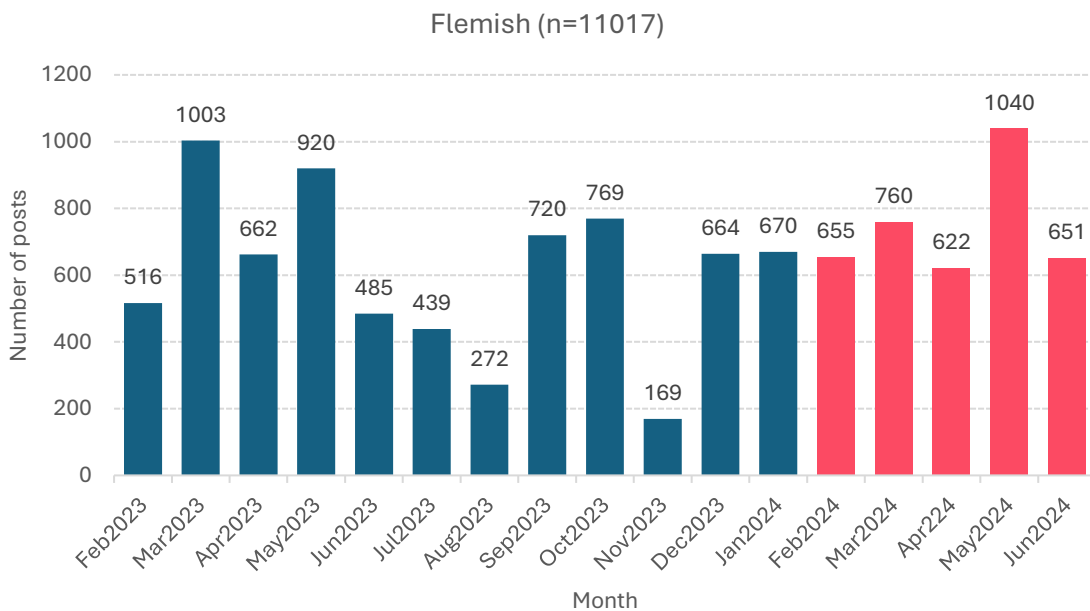
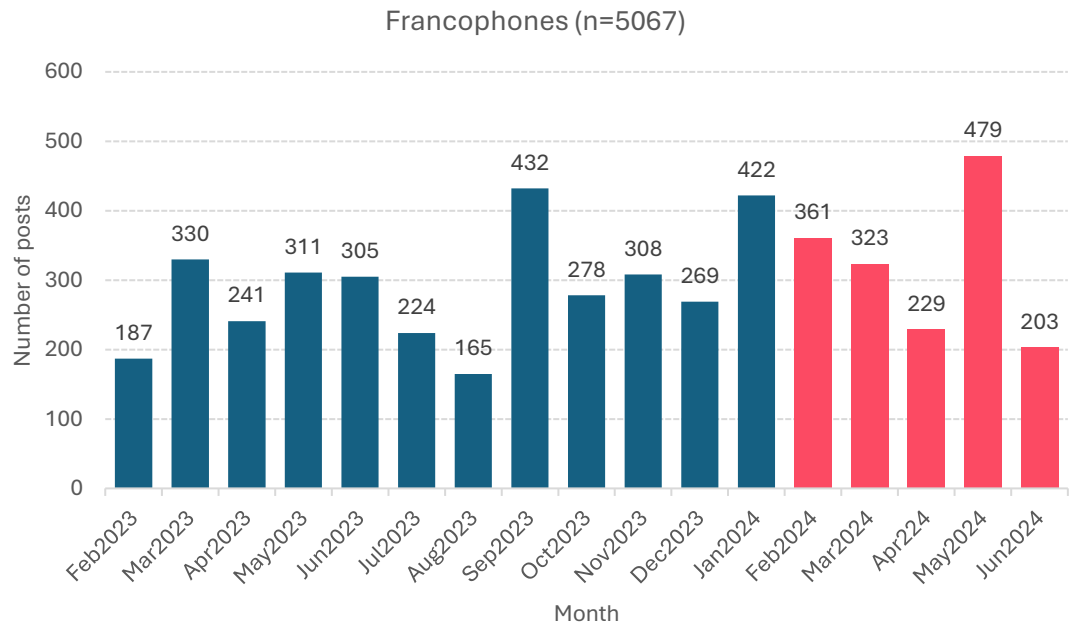
Table 1. List of issues.

Issues	Number* of posts	Percentage
Economy & Finance Finance, budget, economic policy, free market, investment, debt, etc.	5,476	34%
Social Affairs Pensions, poverty, health, housing, youth, well-being, etc.	2,918	18%
Environment & Energy Climate, energy, agriculture, animals, disasters, mobility, etc.	2,673	17%
Education & Culture Education, science, regional autonomy, media and technology, sports, etc.	2,571	16%
Labour Labor market, unemployment, strikes, etc.	2,363	15%
Right & Liberties Human and minority rights, governance, democracy, etc.	2,305	14%
Migration Immigration, asylum policies, integration, border control, etc.	1,721	11%
Security Crime, terrorism, etc.	1,766	11%
Foreign Affairs Defense, war and conflicts, development aid, foreign relations, etc.	1,562	10%
European Union	1,239	8%
Total	16,084	

POLITICAL ACTORS' ACTIVITY ON X ACROSS THE CAMPAIGN CYCLE

Political actors are expected to use more social media and send out more X posts during electoral campaigns considering their importance for reaching out to voters, setting up issues on the political agenda, and attacking opponents. This trend was observed during the 2024 campaign (Figure 1). During this period, political parties and their leaders slightly increased their activity on X. **In May 2024, when the campaign was at its peak**, Francophone party actors sent out on average 80 posts, compared to a monthly average of only 48 posts in the preceding months. In Flanders, the average rose to 149 posts in May 2024, compared to only 97 in other months. While the starting point is distinct –with Flemish party actors being more active on X in general– **in both language groups there is a notable increase**. Efforts were deployed in the very last weeks of the campaign, and could have had an effect on (undecided) voters (see [note on vote switching](#) published by the inter-university consortium NotLikeUs).

Figure 1. Evolution of the number of posts on X by parties and party leaders*.



*The lower number of posts in June 2024 is due to not all posts for that month being counted.

We observe this increase in activity for nearly all parties. In Francophone Belgium, the Parti Socialiste (PS), MR, and Les Engagés saw the largest increases in posting frequency. For example, the left-wing PS posted 75 times in May 2024, up from a monthly average of 32 posts. In Flanders, Vlaams Belang shows the most notable increase in activity, followed by N-VA and PvdA. The radical right Vlaams Belang (VB), which made on average 252 posts per month before the campaign, posted 589 times in May 2024. The Flemish green party (Groen) was the only party to post slightly less during the campaign’s peak, with 105 posts in May 2024 compared to a pre-campaign average of 110.

ISSUE EMPHASIS ACROSS THE CAMPAIGN CYCLE

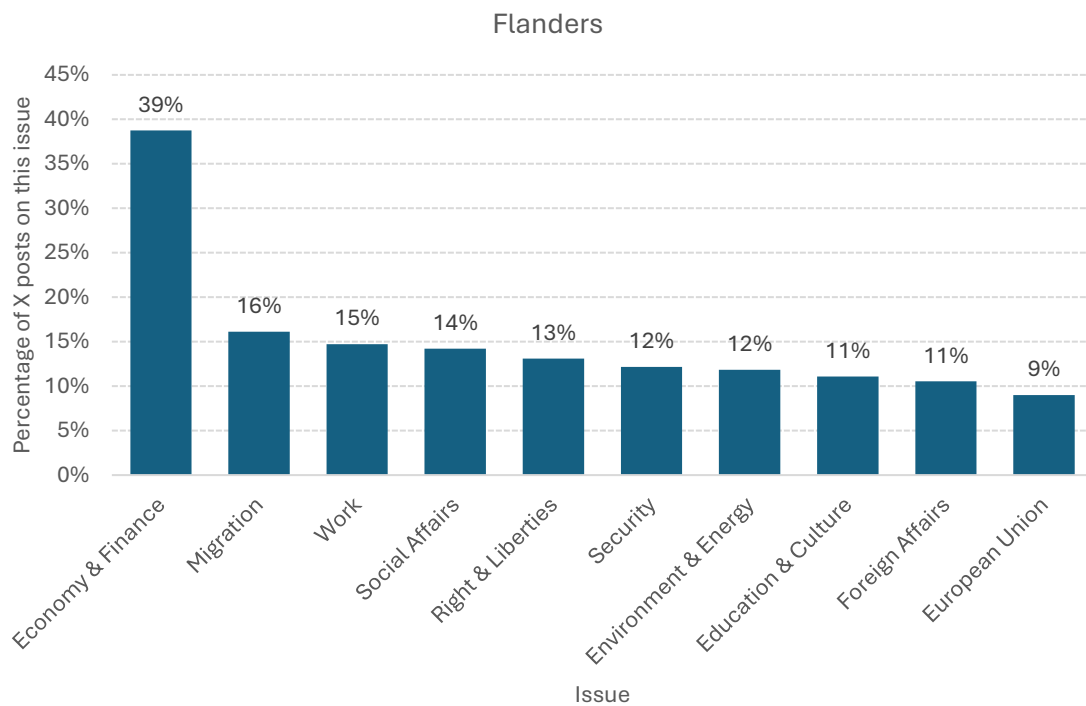
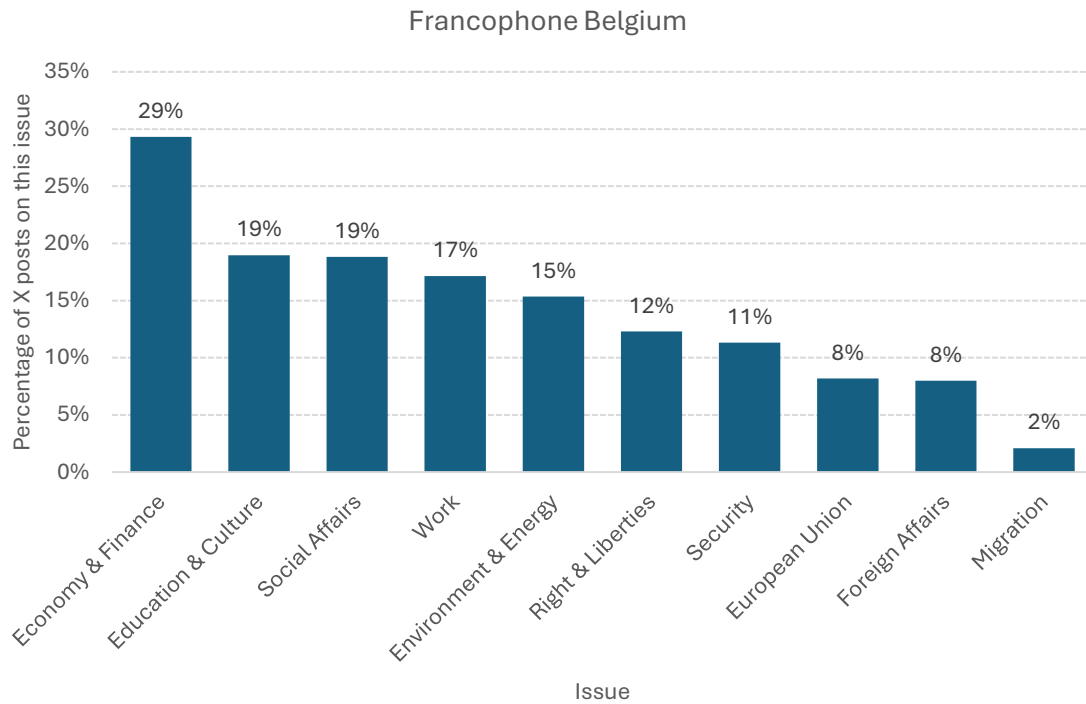
Main issues emphasised during the campaign

What issues were most frequently highlighted by parties and their leaders during the 2024 electoral campaign? During this electoral (campaign) period, **Belgian political actors put substantial emphasis on economic and financial topics, with 36% of their posts on X focusing on these issues. Social affairs and labour were also salient themes during the campaign**, accounting respectively for 16% and 15% of posts published on X. By contrast, **topics like migration, security, and foreign affairs received a relatively low attention**. For example, despite a challenging context involving both the war in Ukraine and tensions in the Middle East, only 10% of posts on X addressed foreign affairs during the campaign. A closer look at foreign affairs posts in Francophone Belgium shows that most of them focused on the Israel-Palestine situation (Gaza), followed by the conflict in Ukraine.

The issue that received the **least emphasis from Belgian political actors was EU politics**, accounting for only 9% of posts on X during the campaign. This result is rather surprising, given that European elections were held concurrently with the federal elections on June 9, 2024. This finding suggests that political actors did not consider the EU elections as particularly critical, at least in comparison to the federal elections. Furthermore, this limited focus on EU politics during a time of European elections raises further questions about the relevance of scheduling these three major elections (federal, regional and European) simultaneously. This is even more pertinent, given that a specific part of the electorate –16- to 18-year-olds— were obligated to vote for the EU for the first time, following a court decision in March 2024.

Considering the distinct party and media systems in Francophone Belgium and Flanders, it is important to differentiate between Francophone and Flemish political actors (Figure 2) shows the frequency of various policy issues emphasised by political actors on X during the electoral campaign, broken down by language community.

Figure 2. Policy issues emphasised on X in both language communities (campaign period).



In both language groups, parties and their leaders placed a strong emphasis on economic and financial issues. Similarly, issues such as social affairs and work were simultaneously highly emphasised by political actors in both communities. In contrast, foreign affairs and EU politics

were among the least frequently mentioned issues by political actors in both Francophone Belgium and Flanders.

On the other hand, there were also key differences between the two language communities. Specifically, **Francophone political actors discussed education and culture (+8 points), social affairs (+5 points) and environment and energy (+3 points) more frequently during the electoral campaign** than their Flemish counterparts. In contrast, **political actors in Flanders were more active than those in Francophone Belgium in addressing migration (+14 points), economy and finance (+10 points), and foreign affairs (+3 points)**. The most important distinction between the two language communities was on the issue of **migration** and asylum policies. In Flanders, 16% of posts on X focused on migration during the electoral campaign, while only 2% of posts in Francophone Belgium addressed this same topic. This is explained by the presence and activity of the VB in the Flemish sphere.

Evolution of issue priorities across the election campaign

How did political parties adjust their communication strategy during the electoral campaign? In what follows, we study changes in political actors' social media communication in Belgium comparing the campaign to the pre-campaign period. During campaigns, political actors often have strong incentives to adapt their strategies, priorities, and focus to better align with voter preferences, respond to media coverage and public debate, and differentiate themselves from their opponents. This holds in particular in our media environment in relationship to polling data, and studies pinpointing that large numbers of voters were still undecided at the start of the campaign, (see [note on vote switching](#) published by the inter-university consortium NotLikeUs).

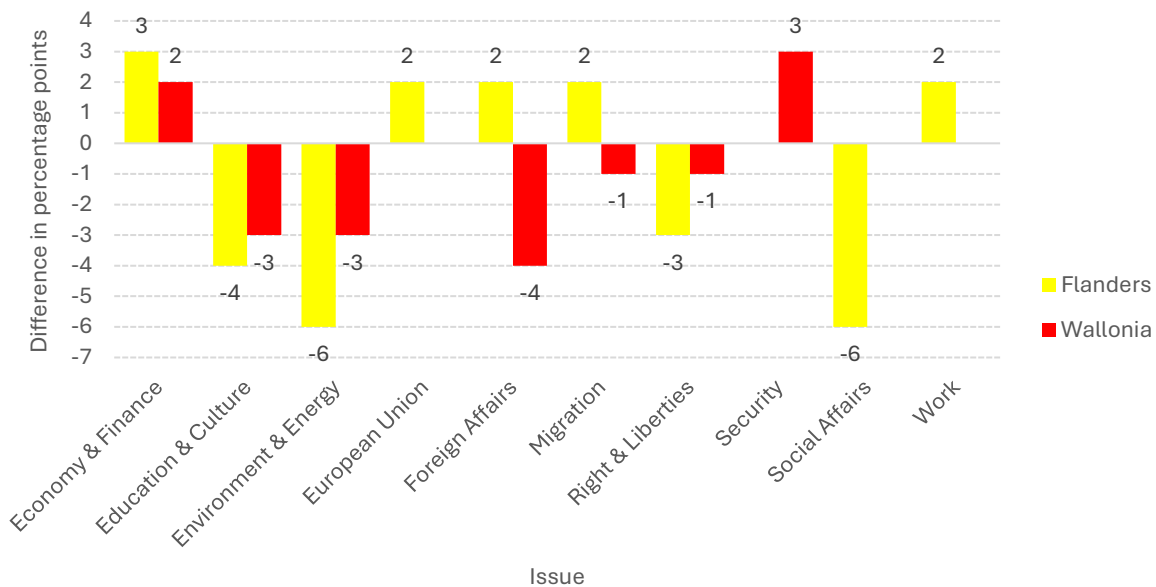
For most policy issues, the communication on X of political actors did not change significantly between the pre-campaign and campaign periods. For example, both before and during the electoral campaign, political parties and their leaders frequently discussed economic and financial topics on X. Specifically, 33% of posts addressed these issues before the start of the campaign and 36% during the campaign. The few issues that saw **a statistically significant shift in Belgian parties' communication on X is between the pre-campaign and campaign periods were energy and environmental issues and education (received significantly less attention), and the Economy and EU politics (received significantly more attention)**³. Before the campaign, 16% of posts on X addressed environment and energy, but this share dropped to 10% during the campaign, a decrease of six percentage points. This low salience of environmental issues in 2024 contrasts with the 2019 elections, when climate issues were more central to the campaign following large-scale climate protest marches of youngsters.

Do we observe similar or different trends between the pre-campaign and campaign periods across the two language communities? Figure 3 shows the change in emphasis (measured as the difference in percentage points, hence a relative measurement) across various policy areas. Positive values indicate that a policy issue was discussed by political parties more frequently during the campaign compared to the pre-campaign period, while negative values indicate less frequent emphasis during the campaign. When there is no data (e.g., for EU politics in Francophone Belgium), it simply means that nothing changed between the two periods for that language community and policy issue. In other

³ Significant differences, when mentioned, are based on the outcome of multivariate logit regression models one general model, and one for each language community.

words, positive values mean that the issue was more emphasised during the electoral campaign than before it.

Figure 3. Change in issue emphasis: pre-campaign vs campaign period.



On one hand, there is convergence between the two language communities on several policy issues. Indeed, **political actors in both Francophone Belgium and Flanders increased their focus on the economy and finance after the electoral campaign started.** Additionally, **political parties and leaders in both communities reduced their emphasis on energy and environmental issues, right and liberties, and education and culture.**

On the other hand, some differences emerge between political actors from both language groups in their communication on the issues of migration and foreign affairs. Specifically, **Flemish parties appear to have increased their emphasis on migration during the electoral campaign, while Francophone political actors slightly reduced their focus on that issue.** A similar trend appears with foreign affairs: political parties and leaders in Flanders increased their focus on this topic after the campaign started, whereas the contrary happened for Francophone parties.

Did political parties' issue emphasis change during the election campaign?

In the preceding section, we have analysed which policy issues were most frequently emphasised by all political parties during the electoral campaign and examined changes between the pre-campaign and campaign periods. However, political parties and their leaders may choose to focus on specific policy issues, for instance on those which align more closely with their platform and core messages in terms of “issue ownership”. Indeed, we would expect parties to mostly communicate during the campaign on salient issues and on issues that they consider to be the ‘main owner’ of. This section assesses whether all political parties emphasised the same policy issues during the electoral campaign or if notable differences can be observed between them. We first report results for Francophone Belgium and then for Flanders.

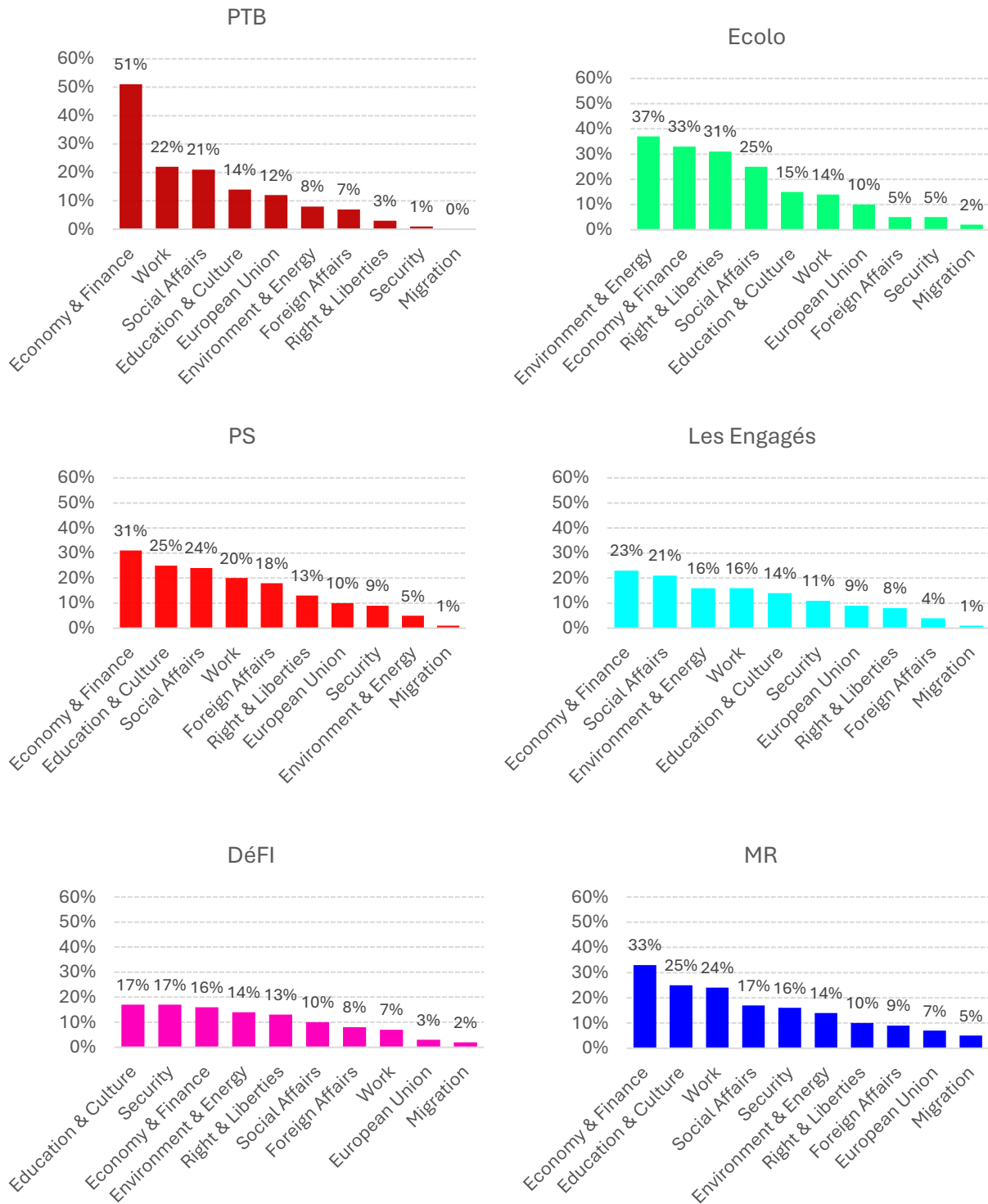
Francophone Belgium

Figure 4 ranks the issues that were emphasised by each Francophone party and their president⁴, based on their frequency in the overall number of posts they published during the course of the campaign. Hence, the percentage indicates how frequently each issue came up in the total number of posts published by a political actor during this period.

There is a consistent pattern in the emphasis on certain policy issues across political parties. Specifically, **economic and financial issues received most attention during the electoral campaign for all Francophone parties**. This category ranked among the most emphasised topics on social media by all parties and their leaders. **There was also a shared lack of focus on migration issues**, which was the least emphasised topic by all political actors during the electoral campaign, including the MR. This might be due to the fact that in Francophone Belgium, in contrast to Flanders, no strong radical right party is present that is mainly mobilising on this issue. Note also that education and culture received more attention than in Flanders (see infra) – between 14% (PTB, Ecolo, Les Engagés) and 25% (PS, MR).

⁴ It should be noted that that during the electoral campaign, there does not appear to be significant differences in the types of issues emphasised by official party accounts compared to those of party leaders, except for a couple of issues (i.e., EU politics and Migration). The picture is somewhat more different when it comes to the pre-campaign period however, although this is not the focus of this research note.

Figure 4. Issues emphasised by each political party in Francophone Belgium during the campaign.



At the same time, there is also important variation across parties. **The topic with the largest variation in emphasis on X was environment and energy.** Notably, the green party Ecolo dedicated 37% of its posts on X to these issues, making it a very central them in their campaign as their ‘owned issue’. LesEngagés emphasised environment and energy, dedicating 16% of its posts to the topic on

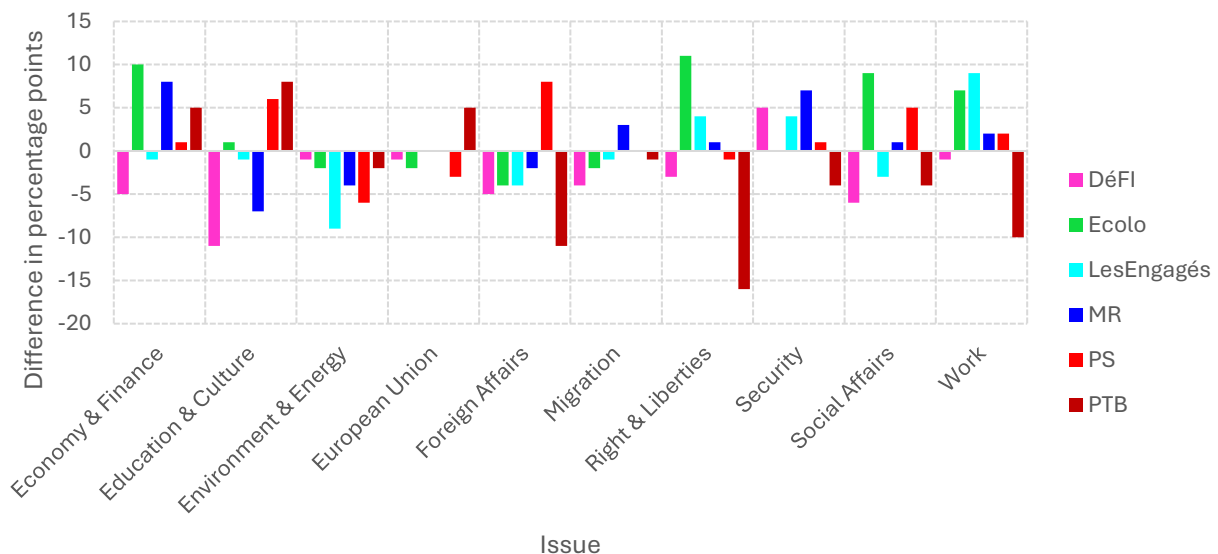
X. By contrast, other parties, including DéFI, MR, and PTB showed limited to moderate engagement with these issues. At the other end of the spectrum, **PS largely disregarded environmental and energy topics**, making it one of the least emphasised issues, with only 5% of their posts on X addressing these areas.

Security was another issue with much variation among Francophone political parties. The political party which emphasised security the most during the electoral campaign was **DéFI**, with 17% of its posts on X about this issue. It was **followed by the MR and Les Engagés**, each dedicating 16% of their posts on X to this issue. If security was a prominent theme for right-wing (or centre-right) parties in Francophone Belgium, (radical) left parties (PS, Ecolo, PTB) placed much less emphasis on this issue in their social media communication. Specifically, only 9% of the PS’s posts on X were about security during the campaign, 5% for Ecolo and only 1% for the PTB.

Finally, **political parties in Francophone Belgium were also divided regarding how much emphasis they placed during the campaign on labour-related issues** – such as jobs, careers, unemployment, and the labour market. **This issue was a major focus for the MR, the PTB, and the PS.** More precisely, 24% of the MR’s posts on X addressed this issue during the campaign, followed by 22% for the PTB and 20% for the PS. In contrast, work and unemployment received less attention in the social media communications of Les Engagés (16% of posts), Ecolo (14%), and DéFI (only 7%).

Did Francophone parties adapt their social media communication strategies after the start of the campaign? In what follows, we examine whether all parties followed a similar pattern –increasing or decreasing their emphasis on the same issues during the campaign– or whether they adopted different strategies. Figure 6 presents data for Francophone parties and their leaders, showing the percentage point differences in issue emphasis between the pre-campaign and campaign periods. Positive values mean that a party placed greater emphasis on a policy issue during the electoral campaign compared to the pre-campaign period.

Figure 5. Issue emphasis evolution from pre-campaign to campaign in Francophone Belgium.



First, it should be noted that, for some issues, there is a common trend among all parties, with either increased or decreased emphasis during the campaign compared to the pre-campaign period. **On environment and energy, all political parties in Francophone Belgium discussed this issue less**

frequently during the campaign than before, likely due to a decrease in urgency regarding energy prices in 2024 compared to 2023. Similarly, **foreign affairs received less attention from all parties during the campaign, except for the PS**. This evolution likely reflects the intense focus on the situation in Ukraine in 2023, followed by a strategic pivot in 2024, with parties prioritising domestic issues such as the economy, finance, work, and security over international concerns. We can notice an increasing attention towards education and culture for the PS and PTB, partly due to the debate over the « décret paysage » (hence, a community issue), and issues pertaining to the financing of education and the salary of school teachers.

Finally, on **migration, nearly all political parties reduced their focus on it during the campaign, with the MR being the only party in Francophone Belgium to slightly increase its emphasis on migration compared to the pre-campaign period**.

Second, there are also important differences. PS and Ecolo increased their focus on social affairs during the campaign, while DéFI, Les Engagés, and PTB chose to discuss this issue less frequently than before the campaign. A similar pattern is observed for education and culture, where PS and PTB increased their focus on these topics, while DéFI and the MR reduced theirs. For the two left-wing parties, this is partly explained by their warning of the risk of a ‘State reform’ and the ‘splitting of Belgium’ in the case of a victory of the N-VA MR front. Interestingly

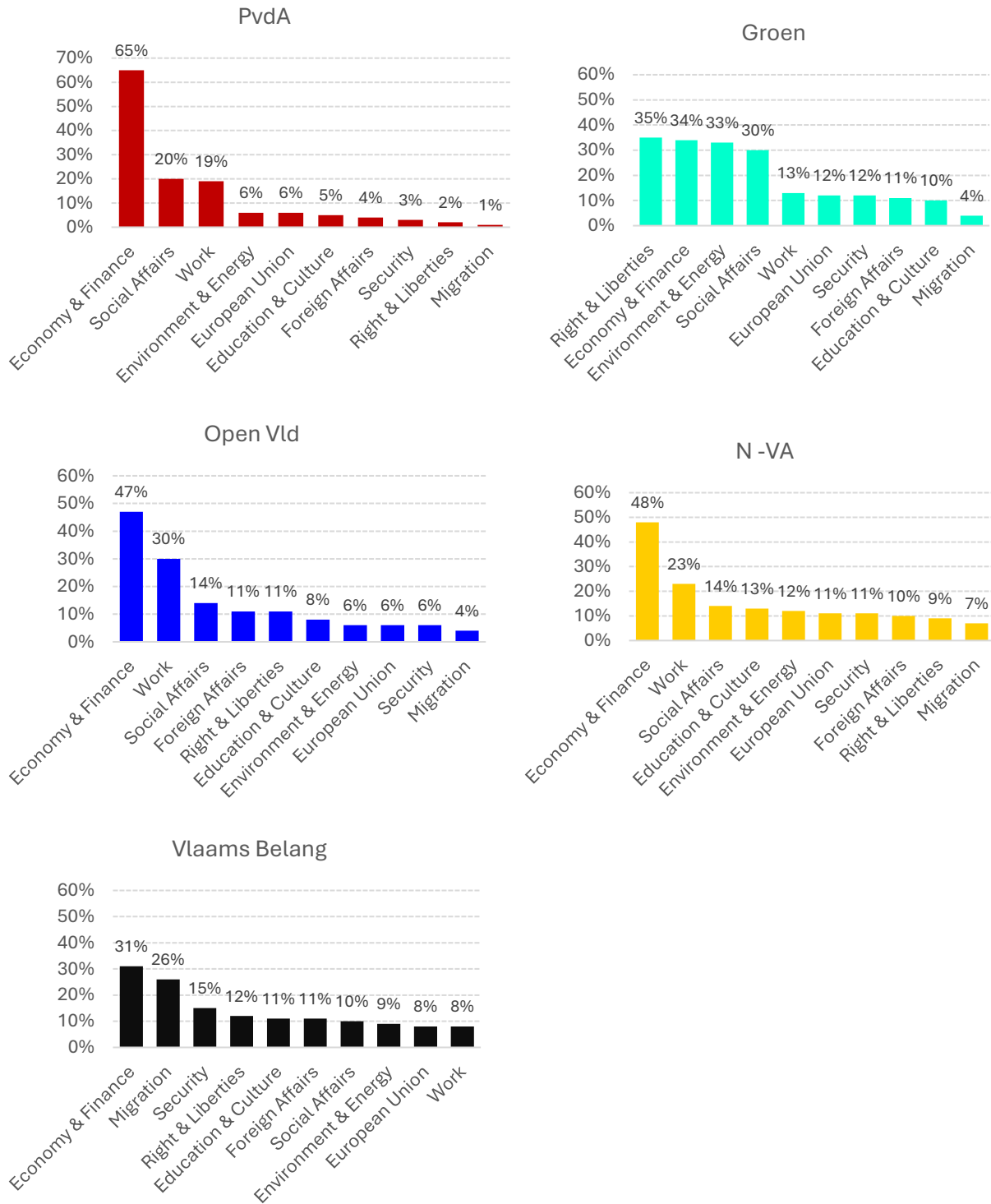
In summary, our analysis reveals distinct patterns of change across all political parties in Francophone Belgium. This suggests that while parties may all be influenced by the general mood of the campaign and the agenda-setting of other parties and the media, they also follow their own strategy. Ecolo, like many other parties, increased its focus on economic and financial issues during the campaign, but also placed a greater emphasis on social affairs and work – rather than emphasizing environmental issues that the party owns. PS placed a greater emphasis on education and culture and foreign affairs, while PTB increased its attention to the economy, as well as education and culture.

These findings can be read in light of the vote switching note (see *infra*), with parties’ decision as to what issues to prioritise having a potential impact on who voters eventually choose to vote for on election day (i.e., for instance, the stream of voters that left PS for Les Engagés during the campaign, whereas the PS strategy had especially focused on the PTB). In fact, Les Engagés notably raised its focus on work-related issues during the campaign. In addition to its heightened focus on economic issues, MR emphasised migration more during the campaign compared to before – attracting maybe voters who opted for small radical right parties in 2019. Finally, DéFI and its leader did not significantly change their strategy between the pre-election period and the campaign, maintaining the same focus on the same issues.

Flanders

The data from Flanders reveal similar trends to those in Francophone Belgium, with a strong emphasis by political actors on economy and finance. Indeed, **all parties placed a significant focus on economic and financial topics** during the electoral campaign. For example and reflecting the strong emphasis placed by the **PTB** in Francophone Belgium on these issues, the **PvdA** dedicated 65% of its posts on X during the campaign to economic and financial matters, meaning their **dominant mobilisation is socioeconomically inspired** (as clearly evidenced by the top 3 issues for PvdA, followed by social affairs and social issues).

Figure 6. Issues emphasised by each political party in Flanders during the campaign.



At the same time, there are notable differences between parties on certain policy issues. The most variation concerns migration. **The only party to emphasise this issue during the campaign was the Vlaams Belang**, with posts related to migration accounting for more than 25% of their content on X.

In contrast, other parties gave relatively little attention to this issue in their social media strategies. **The N-VA, the second most prominent party on this issue in Flanders, placed far less emphasis than the Vlaams Belang, with only 7% of posts on X related to migration.** This is an interesting strategy, as in the 2018-2019 campaigns also N-VA still communicated a lot about migration in the wake of the so-called Migration pact that led to the end of the federal government Michel-I. This highlights a **deliberate strategy by N-VA to run a mostly socioeconomic campaign**, against government De Croo I, and with the aim to win over voters in the centre-right, rather than aiming on VB voters via stressing the migration issue. A similar trend can be observed for security, an issue more prominently focused on by the radical right than by other parties.

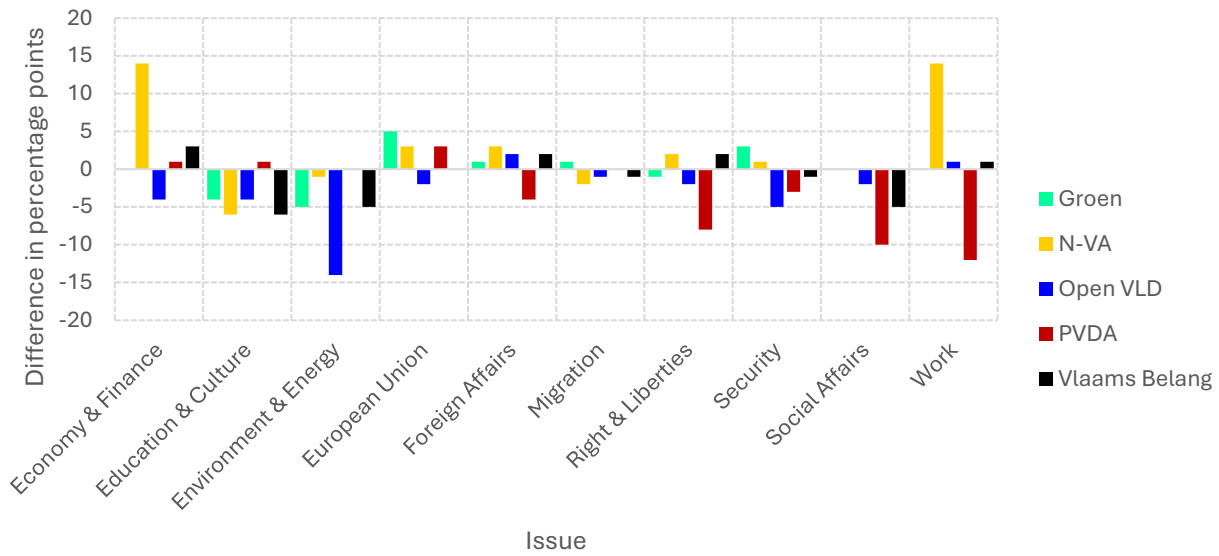
This finding on migration highlights two points. First, **the strong emphasis on migration by Vlaams Belang is the main factor explaining the observed difference in emphasis on this policy issue between Flanders and Francophone Belgium.** Second, this finding shows that despite the Vlaams Belang's efforts to prioritise this issue on the political agenda in Flanders, other parties appeared to disregard it, choosing instead to ignore this topic in their communication on X.

Another issue that saw variation in emphasis during the campaign was rights and liberties, which encompass topics such as **discrimination, diversity, racism, and LGBTQIA+ rights.** The only party to focus on these issues during the campaign was **Groen.** That was the most emphasised issue for that party, accounting for **35% of its posts on X during the campaign.** In contrast, other parties dedicated less attention to these issues. Open-VLD, N-VA, and Vlaams Belang each dedicated around 10% of their posts on X to right and liberties. The difference is even more pronounced for the PvdA, which mentioned these issues in only 2% of its posts on X during the campaign, again highlighting its primary focus is socioeconomic.

Like in Francophone Belgium, there was also important variation among Flemish parties regarding the issues of labour, as well as environment and energy. First, concerning the **topic of work, it was prominently emphasised during the campaign by the Open Vld, the N-VA, and the PvdA, while the green party (Groen) and the radical right party (Vlaams Belang) dedicated less attention to this issue.** In fact, work-related topics were among the least addressed by Vlaams Belang, representing only 8% of their posts on X. Second, there was also important differences in how parties focused on environment and energy issues during the campaign. Groen was the only one to specifically focus on these topics, with 33% of their posts dedicated to them during the campaign. In contrast, all other parties largely ignored these issues, with PvdA and Open Vld dedicating it the least attention (6% of their posts on X).

Did political parties in Flanders change their communication strategy on X after the start of the electoral campaign? Figure 7 shows the percentage point differences in issue emphasis between the pre-campaign and campaign periods. Positive values mean that a party placed greater emphasis on a policy issue during the electoral campaign than before.

Figure 7. Issue emphasis evolution from pre-campaign to campaign in Flanders.



Some policy areas exhibit consistent patterns of evolution across all political parties. **Most parties discussed education and culture, social affairs, as well as environment and energy less during the campaign than in the pre-campaign period**, despite regional elections taking place, with social affairs or well-being and education being the most important regional competence. The data suggests that **the campaign was dominated by federal issues**, which may have granted federal opposition parties (such as N-VA or LesEngagés) or parties that criticised the federal government from within (MR) an advantage in terms of the election results. Note that a higher focus on the EU is also observed across all political parties, with the exception of the Open Vld – this was not observed for Francophone actors.

At the same time, there is notable diversity in the focus on certain policy issues. First, regarding **economy and finance, N-VA was the only party to increase its emphasis on this issue to such an extent during the campaign**. Before the campaign, N-VA dedicated 34% of its posts on X to this topic, rising to 48% during the campaign (a 14-percentage point increase). **A similar trend can be observed for the labour issue**. N-VA also increased its focus on these issues during the campaign, from 9% to 23% of its posts on X (a 14-percentage point increase). In contrast, the radical left party (PvdA) talked less about this issue, with posts dropping from 31% before to 19% during the campaign. Other parties did not notably shift their focus on work-related issues after the campaign started.

Finally, an intriguing pattern emerges regarding **migration, for which there is not much change in the extent to which parties addressed this issue before and during the campaign**. This suggests that, despite potential pressure from the radical right party (Vlaams Belang) on this topic, **no political party adopted a strategy to respond by increasing its emphasis on migration during the campaign**. This probably was, as suggested, a deliberate strategy of all parties –in particular N-VA— as they might have learned from prior campaigns and elections (e.g., following also the Dutch elections).

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the analysis of Belgian political parties' communication on X before and during the June 2024 electoral campaign provides key insights into their online communication tactics. We found that **political parties and their leaders increased their publication activity during the peak of the campaign**, with a notable **focus on issues related to the economy and finances** (e.g., budget and fiscal policy). Despite regional differences, parties from both Flanders and Francophone Belgium highlighted similar issues, mainly the economy, work, and social affairs, while talking much less about foreign affairs and EU matters. Migration emerged as an exception, receiving more emphasis in Flanders, primarily due to the strong focus of the radical-right party Vlaams Belang on this topic, while other Flemish parties remained silent on the issue.

Our findings also indicate that **both language groups increased their focus on economic issues during the campaign, while attention to energy and environmental topics declined**. In Francophone Belgium, Ecolo emphasised environmental topics more than other parties (probably given its 'ownership' of the issue), but to a lower extent during the campaign than before – the party rather aligned its communication to issues put forward by other parties (economy and finance, work). Right-of-centre parties (MR, Les Engagés, DéFI) focused on security more than other parties, and more during the campaign than before. In Flanders, Vlaams Belang stressed migration and security, while Groen concentrated on the environment, discrimination, racism, and diversity. In fact, green parties and the Vlaams Belang are often considered “niche” parties, focusing on a limited number of socio-cultural issues but less on economic ones.

All in all, our analysis gives us a comprehensive overview of the issue competition strategies adopted by Belgian political parties and their leaders during the 2024 electoral campaign, and sheds new light on the election results. For instance, our analysis brings **additional evidence that the N-VA deliberately ran its campaign predominantly on socioeconomic issues, against the record of the Vivaldi coalition**. This strategy focused on winning over centre-right voters, steering away from prioritising Vlaams Belang supporters through a focus on migration issues. In Francophone Belgium, we see that although some parties opted to emphasise similar issues, they did not necessarily meet the same electoral fate: for instance, **Ecolo, PS and MR emphasised economy and finances –but only MR managed to appear as the 'owner' of these issues and paid off from this strategy**. Ecolo's strategy to adapt to socioeconomic issues instead of imposing a “green” agenda did not pay electorally.

Appendix

Appendix 1. Overview of accounts included in the study.

Parties and their presidents	Creation date	Handle
<hr/>		
Flanders		
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PVDA	Oct 2009	@pvdabelgie
Raoul Hedebouw	May 2009	@RaoulHedebouw
Groen	Aug 2007	@groen
Jérémie Vaneeckhout	Apr 2012	@JeremieVaneekh
Nadia Naji	Dec 2011	@_nadianaji
Vooruit	Mar 2009	@vooruit_nu
Conner Rousseau	Mar 2015	@conner_rousseau
Melissa Depraetere	Nov 2017	@MelissaDepr
CD&V	Aug 2008	@cdenv
Sammy Mahdi	Aug 2011	@SammyMahdi
Open Vld	Feb 2009	@openvld
Egbert Lachaert	Jun 2009	@egbertlachaert
Tom Ongena	Feb 2010	@tomongena
N-VA	Mar 2009	@de_NVA
Bart De Wever	May 2010	@Bart_DeWever
VB	Mar 2009	@vlbelang
Tom Van Grieken	May 2010	@tomvangrieken
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Wallonia		
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PTB	Oct 2009	@ptbbelgique
Raoul Hedebouw	May 2009	@RaoulHedebouw
Ecolo	Apr 2008	@Ecolo
Jean-Marc Nollet	Oct 2012	@jmnollet
Rajae Maouane	Jun 2012	@RajaeMaouane
PS	Feb 2011	@Psofficiel
Paul Magnette	Feb 2009	@PaulMagnette
Les Engagés	Jan 2011	@LesEngages_be
Maxime Prévot	Apr 2013	@prevotmaxime
MR	Jan 2010	@MR_officiel
George-Louis Bouchez	Sep 2010	@GLBouchez
DéFI	Mar 2010	@defi_eu
François De Smet	Oct 2010	@francoisdesmet
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