

Politics and Basking-in-Reflected-Glory: A Field Study in Flanders

Filip Boen

Fund for Scientific Research–Flanders and K. U. Leuven

Norbert Vanbeselaere

Fund for Scientific Research–Flanders and K. U. Leuven

Mario Pandelaere

K. U. Leuven

Siegfried Dewitte

Fund for Scientific Research–Flanders and K. U. Leuven

Bart Duriez

K. U. Leuven

Boris Snauwaert

Fund for Scientific Research–Flanders and K. U. Leuven

Jos Feys

K. U. Leuven

Vicky Dierckx

Ghent University

Eddy Van Avermaet

K. U. Leuven

This field study tested whether the basking-in-reflected-glory phenomenon would emerge in a political context. Two days before the general elections in Flanders (Belgium), 3 urban regions were systematically surveyed by 10 observers. These observers unobtrusively registered the addresses of private houses that displayed at least 1 poster ($N = 482$) or 1 removable lawn sign ($N = 180$) supporting a political party. The day after the elections, the observers checked whether the registered houses still displayed their poster(s) or lawn sign(s). A strongly positive linear relation was found between the proportional win–loss of the various political parties (compared with the previous elections) and the percentage of houses that continued to exhibit the poster(s) or lawn sign(s) in favor of that party: The better the election result, the more houses that still displayed their poster(s) or lawn sign(s). Two complementary processes seem to account for the observations: a tendency to flaunt one's association with a triumphant party (i.e., basking-in-reflected-glory) and a tendency to conceal one's association with a defeated party (i.e., cutting-off-reflected-failure). A follow-up indicated that basking-in-reflected-glory lasted for at least 1 week after the elections.

strated by Cialdini et al. (1976) in a series of famous field studies. Observations at seven universities in the United States revealed that on the Mondays following a victory of the local football team, students wore more apparel displaying the logo or name of their university than on the Mondays following a defeat or a draw. Moreover, when students were asked to describe a victory of the university team, they used the pronoun “we” significantly more to designate their team than when they were asked to describe a defeat or a draw. This tendency was more pronounced when the students’ public self was threatened. For example, when they had personally failed a knowledge test, when they had been told to describe a defeat before describing a victory, or when they were more closely connected to the team than was the interviewer.

To explain the BIRG effect, Cialdini et al. (1976) used Heider’s (1958) balance concept. According to Heider (1958), people strive for consistency in the perception of relations. They try to avoid ambiguity and discrepancy between cognitive “unit” relations and affective “sentiment” relations. A positive unit relation (i.e., *A* perceptually resembles *B*) should be accompanied by a positive sentiment relation (i.e., *A* has the same evaluative meaning as *B*). Therefore, when an affectively neutral stimulus is perceptually associated with a positively evaluated source, this neutral stimulus will acquire a positive evaluation. Framing the BIRG-effect as a self-presentation device, Cialdini et al. (1976) argued that people are aware that this generalization comes into play when they are perceived by others. Others will confer a positive sentiment on them if they can display their unit relation with a positively evaluated stimulus (event, person, or group). Cialdini et al. (1976) therefore reasoned that university students wanted to underscore their association with the winning football team because they believed that the positive evaluation of the team after a victory would be transferred to themselves, even though they had no personal merit in the performance of the team.

The previous analysis implies that BIRG should be very prominent and widespread in society. However, Sigelman (1986) noticed that the behavioral evidence is rather limited. He even wondered whether “the BIRG phenomenon operates in realms of human behavior other than sports” (p. 90), for example in a political context. Therefore, on the day before county-wide elections in Lexington (Kentucky), Sigelman (1986) registered lawn signs supporting one of two candidates for two legal offices. He predicted that signs that supported the victorious candidates would remain longer than signs supporting the defeated candidates. However, when the signs were checked on the day after the elections, no significant effect was found. In fact, there was even a nonsignificant tendency that signs in favor of the defeated candidates remained longer than signs of the victorious candidates.

As one possible explanation, Sigelman (1986) suggested that local politics are less salient than university football. Another explanation put forward by Sigelman is the “cli-

mate of expectations.” Before the elections in Lexington, no clear predictions could be made with respect to the winning chances of the political candidates. By contrast, the football teams in Cialdini et al. (1976) all enjoyed a very good reputation. For these teams, winning was the norm, and losing the exception. According to Sigelman (1986), losing is only traumatic when you had expected to win. It is only in such situations that people would dissociate themselves from the negatively evaluated source. Therefore, Sigelman (1986) argued that the effect found by Cialdini et al. (1976) was mainly caused by the attempts of the students to conceal their association with the team on the Mondays after an unexpected defeat. In Lexington however, the pre-election expectations had been too ambiguous to elicit attempts at hiding one’s political affiliation after a traumatic defeat.

Sigelman’s (1986) explanation is partially supported by a study of Snyder, Lassegard, and Ford (1986). These authors randomly divided participants into isolated groups to solve an intellectual task. Thereafter, participants received negative, positive, or no feedback about the performance of their group. They were then told that the groups would be brought together to give a public presentation on an unrelated task. Participants had to indicate how much they would like to be present at this presentation, and were offered the possibility to wear badges that clearly identified them as a member of the group with which they had solved the intellectual task. Both the rating scales and the behavioral measure revealed that participants in the negative-feedback condition were more reluctant to exhibit their group membership than participants in the positive-feedback and no-feedback conditions. By contrast, no significant differences were found between participants in the positive-feedback and no-feedback conditions. Snyder et al. (1986) therefore concluded that the tendency to dissociate oneself from unsuccessful others, which had been labeled cutting-off-reflected-failure (CORF) by Snyder, Higgins, and Stucky (1983), is more dominant than the tendency to associate with successful others (BIRG). This conclusion is in line with Sigelman’s (1986) second explanation.

On the other hand, Sigelman (1986) also argued that thwarted expectations were a necessary condition to elicit CORF. However, in the study of Snyder et al. (1986) no expectations were aroused, yet CORF was nevertheless observed. Moreover, Sigelman’s (1986) emphasis on the climate of expectations contradicts the processes proposed by Cialdini et al. (1976), which are assumed to be of a very general nature. Although we do not dispute that expectations can increase or decrease the amount of CORF or BIRG, we see no theoretical reason why the ambiguous expectations in Lexington would have cancelled out all CORF- or BIRG-tendencies.

We propose another, quite pragmatic, reason to explain the lack of BIRG and CORF in Sigelman’s (1986) study. In Flanders, lawn signs are usually first provided and later col-

lected again by the political parties in collective drop-offs and pick-ups. Moreover, they are often too large and too heavy to be removed by an individual person. Sigelman (1986) did not provide any information about the size and characteristics of the lawn signs in his study. Therefore, it cannot be excluded that practical considerations masked CORF and BIRG in his study, considerations that did not apply for the apparel observed by Cialdini et al. (1976), nor for the badges used by Snyder et al. (1986).

In addition to lawn signs, Flanders has a tradition of placing political posters behind the windows of private houses. This practice is more prevalent in urban than in rural areas, because houses in urban regions often do not have a front garden where lawn signs can be placed. For posters, the practical considerations mentioned earlier do not apply. Posters can be removed easily, and only by the residents of the house themselves (and not by the political parties). Therefore, we decided to replicate Sigelman's (1986) study in Flanders with a focus on posters instead of on lawn signs. Nevertheless, we also registered addresses of houses displaying relatively small lawn signs that could easily be removed by one occupant. Although these lawn signs are usually collected by the parties, individuals do have the option to remove them themselves if they really want to dissociate themselves from their party.

The general elections of June 13th, 1999 constituted an ideal context for replicating Sigelman's (1986) study. For the first—and probably last—time, the elections for the Flemish, Belgian, and European parliament were combined in one important and salient election, coined by the media as “the mother of all elections.” Moreover, the expectations of the six biggest political parties in Flanders were quite divergent. Based on polls conducted 1 month before the elections, the governing Christian–Democratic party (CVP) would remain stable. By contrast, its coalition partner, the governing socialist party (SP), was expected to suffer heavy losses due to the fact that some of the former SP leaders had been convicted for their involvement in a bribery scandal. The liberal opposition (VLD) would win enough to break the existing coalition. Of the smaller opposition parties, both the ecologist party (AGALEV) and the extreme–right party (Vlaams Blok) would win considerably, whereas the left–nationalist party (VU) would remain status quo.

However, 2 weeks before the elections, it became known that Belgian chickens had been contaminated with dioxin since January. The two ministers in charge of Agriculture and of Public Health, a Christian–Democrat and a socialist, had been informed of this contamination since the end of April, but they had tried to conceal this information from the general public. As a result of this so-called “dioxin crisis,” the CVP anticipated a limited loss, whereas AGALEV anticipated even bigger gains.

Based on Cialdini et al.'s (1976) analysis, we hypothesized that posters at addresses supporting a victorious party

would remain longer after the election than posters at addresses supporting a defeated party. In other words, we expected a main effect of the election outcome (win vs. loss) on the post-election display of posters. On account of pragmatic considerations, we expected a similar, but weaker effect for the addresses with removable lawn signs. One could also formulate an alternative hypothesis based on Sigelman (1986): Posters or lawn signs supporting a party that was confronted with an unexpected defeat would be removed more quickly than posters or lawn signs supporting the other parties. This would imply an interaction effect of election outcome and frustrated expectations on post-election display.

METHOD

On Friday, June 11th, 1999, 2 days before the elections, three urban regions in Flanders were systematically surveyed by 10 observers. The three regions were the city of Leuven and its surroundings, the city of Lier and its surroundings, and the region north of the city of Antwerpen. As a result, our observations covered a university town (Leuven), a provincial town (Lier), and a section of a large industrial city (Antwerpen). We decided to focus on urban regions to increase the likelihood of detecting a sufficient number of posters.

Five teams of two observers drove through a designated area, and registered all the addresses of private, inhabited houses where one or more political posters were placed behind the window. They also recorded how many posters were visible at each house. In addition, the addresses of private houses with one or more removable lawn signs, but without poster, were also registered. A removable lawn sign was defined as “a lawn sign that can easily be removed by a single occupant.”

On Monday, June 14th, the day after the elections, all registered addresses were visited again between 9:30 am and 1:30 pm. The observers then checked whether the poster(s) and lawn sign(s) were still present.

RESULTS

Pre-Election Display of Posters

In total, 462 addresses of private houses with one or more political posters were registered. Of these 462 addresses, 182 supported the SP (39%), 95 supported the CVP (21%), 86 supported the VLD (19%), 63 supported AGALEV (14%), and 36 supported the VU (8%).

Addresses with posters supporting the Vlaams Blok were initially registered, but later dropped, because the small sample size ($n = 3$) would not permit reliable analyses. This lack of posters for the Vlaams Blok should be at-

tributed to the very negative public image of this extreme-right party. Because of its views on immigrants, the Vlaams Blok is stigmatized as “antidemocratic” and “fascist.” The other parties have even agreed to exclude the Vlaams Blok from all negotiations (i.e., the so-called “cordon sanitaire”). This general disapproval might explain why only a few supporters of the Vlaams Blok were willing to show their association with this party.

At 69 of the 462 addresses (15%), the poster(s) were accompanied by a removable lawn sign, but these addresses were only included in the analyses as poster-addresses. On average, 1.77 posters were displayed at each address. At 276 houses (60%), exactly one poster was displayed, whereas at 186 houses (40%) two or more posters were displayed, with a maximum of 15.

Pre-Election Display of Lawn Signs

In total, 177 addresses of private houses with one or more removable lawn signs (but without a poster) were registered. Of these 177 addresses, 65 supported the CVP (37%), 48 supported the VLD (27%), 34 supported the SP (19%), and 30 supported the VU (17%). Only three houses with lawn signs supporting AGALEV were observed, and only two houses with a lawn sign supporting the Vlaams Blok. Because the small sample sizes of AGALEV and the Vlaams Blok would not permit reliable analyses, these addresses were excluded from the registration. On average, 2.42 lawn signs were placed at each registered address. At 77 houses (44%), exactly one removable lawn sign was displayed, whereas at 100 houses (57%) two or more removable lawn signs were displayed, with a maximum of 8.

Election Outcomes

We will only focus on the results for the Flemish parliament because these results were given most attention in the Flem-

ish media. Moreover, the results for the Belgian and the European parliament were very similar.

As can be seen in the second and third column of Table 1, the two governing parties, the CVP and the SP, both suffered heavy losses. Compared with the results for the Flemish parliament in 1995, the CVP lost 4.7% of the total votes falling back to 22.1%, whereas the SP lost 4.4%, receiving only 15.0% of all Flemish votes. By contrast, all the major opposition parties received more votes than in 1995: The VU won 0.3% receiving 9.3% in total, the VLD gained 1.8% reaching 22.0%, and AGALEV won 4.5% obtaining 11.6% in total. The extreme-right Vlaams Blok won 3.2% receiving 15.5% in total, but the results for this party are not displayed in Table 1 because not enough supporting posters and lawn signs had been registered.

As an index of the relative importance of these wins and losses for each party, the win or loss of each party was divided by its previous election result (see the fourth column of Table 1). By this index, the SP lost 23% of the votes it had received in 1995, whereas the CVP lost 18% of its voters. On the other hand, the VU increased its votes by 3%, the VLD by 9%, and AGALEV by 63%. The Vlaams Blok increased its votes by 26%.

In terms of pre-election expectations, these results imply that the loss of the CVP was much heavier than expected, whereas the progress of AGALEV was surprisingly great. The results of the other parties were more or less as predicted.

Post-election display of posters. The day after the elections, 13 of the 462 registered poster-addresses could not be checked because rolling shutters concealed the window where the poster(s) had been visible. Consequently, only 449 addresses were included in the analysis. The fifth column of Table 1 shows the percentage of the houses that still displayed their poster(s) on the day after the elections: For the SP only 27 out of 176 supporting houses continued to show their posters (15%). For the CVP this proportion was 21 out of 84 (25%), for the VU 15 out of 36 (42%), for the VLD 45 out of 93 (48%), and for AGALEV 51 out of 60 (85%).

TABLE 1
Election Results and the Percentage of Post-Election Display for Supporting Posters and for Removable Lawn Signs

<i>Political Party</i>	<i>Percentage of Total Votes Obtained for the Flemish Parliament June 13th 1999</i>	<i>Compared to 1995</i>	<i>Percentage of Relative Win-Loss</i>	<i>Percentage of Post-Election Display for Posters</i>	<i>Percentage of Post-Election Display for Lawn Signs</i>
SP	15.0%	-4.4%	-23%	15% (27/176)	38% (13/34)
CVP	22.1%	-4.7%	-18%	25% (21/84)	66% (43/65)
VU	9.3%	+0.3%	+3%	42% (15/36)	87% (26/30)
VLD	22.0%	+1.8%	+9%	48% (45/93)	90% (43/48)
AGALEV	11.6%	+4.5%	+63%	85% (51/60)	not enough

Note. AGALEV = Ecologist party; CVP = Christian-democratic party; SP = Socialist party; VLD = Liberal opposition; VU = Left-nationalist party.

To test our hypothesis derived from Cialdini et al. (1976), the data for the parties that had won (i.e., AGALEV, VLD, & VU) and the data for the parties that had lost (i.e., SP & CVP) were summed and compared. As predicted, the proportion of houses that still displayed their posters after the elections was significantly higher for winning parties (i.e., 111/189, or 59%) than for losing parties (i.e., 48/260, or 19%), $\chi^2(1, N = 449) = 77.59, p < .001$.

Paired post-hoc comparisons revealed that the proportion of AGALEV houses that still displayed their poster(s) after the elections was significantly higher than the proportion of each of the other parties: Compared with the VLD (85% vs. 48%), $\chi^2(1, N = 153) = 20.91, p < .001$; with the VU (85% vs. 42%), $\chi^2(1, N = 96) = 19.67, p < .001$; with the CVP (85% vs. 25%), $\chi^2(1, N = 144) = 50.40, p < .001$; and with the SP (85% vs. 15%), $\chi^2(1, N = 236) = 98.13, p < .001$. The proportion of VLD houses that still displayed a poster after the elections was significantly higher than the proportion of the CVP (48% vs. 25%), $\chi^2(1, N = 177) = 10.32, p < .01$, and of the SP (48% vs. 15%), $\chi^2(1, N = 269) = 33.90, p < .001$, but did not differ significantly from the proportion of the VU (48% vs. 42%), $\chi^2(1, N = 129) = 0.47, p = .49$. The proportion of VU houses that still displayed a poster was significantly higher than the proportion of the SP (42% vs. 15%), $\chi^2(1, N = 212) = 13.04, p < .001$, and it was marginally significantly higher than the proportion of the CVP (42% vs. 25%), $\chi^2(1, N = 120) = 3.33, p = .07$. The difference between the proportion of CVP and SP houses was also marginally significant (25% vs. 15%), $\chi^2(1, N = 260) = 3.52, p = .06$.

In summary, the proportion of each of the winning parties differed significantly from the proportion of each of the losing parties, indicating that the overall effect was not due to one or a few specific parties. Moreover, the relationship between the proportion of houses that still displayed their poster(s) supporting the party, and the relative win-loss-score for that party approached perfect linearity, $r = .99, p = .01, N = 5$. As Figure 1 shows, the percentage of houses that still displayed their poster(s) on the day after the elections increased as the proportional difference between the election results of 1999 and 1995 became more positive.¹ This overall picture remained unaffected after ex-

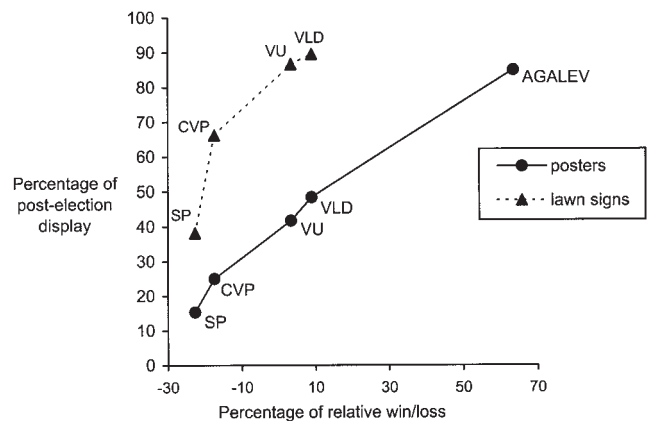


FIGURE 1 The relation between the relative win-loss for each party and the post-election display of supporting posters and lawn signs.

cluding the 69 addresses where the poster(s) was accompanied by one or more lawn signs.

The election results did not permit a definitive test of the alternative hypothesis derived from Sigelman (1986) because there was no party that lost, whereas it had expected to win. On the other hand, the pre-election expectations of the two losing parties had been quite divergent: The SP had anticipated a heavy loss, whereas the CVP had hoped to remain relatively stable. When confronted by reporters, many CVP officials were not really able to hide their disappointment. Therefore, if frustrated expectations would play a major role as suggested by Sigelman (1986), one would predict that the post-election display of the CVP would be lower than the post-election display of the SP. As mentioned previously, this was clearly not the case. On the contrary, the proportion of houses that still displayed SP-posters after the elections was marginally significantly smaller than the proportion of houses that still displayed CVP-posters. In conclusion, these results suggest that the post-election display of posters was a direct linear function of the relative election results, and was not influenced by pre-election expectations.

Post-election display of removable lawn signs.

The rightmost column of Table 1 shows the percentage of houses that still displayed their removable lawn sign(s) on the day after the elections. Only 13 out of 34 houses supporting the SP still displayed their lawn signs (i.e., 38%). For the CVP this figure was 43 out of 65 (i.e., 66%), for the VU 26 out of 30 (i.e., 87%), and for the VLD 43 out of 48 (i.e., 90%).

To test our hypothesis based on Cialdini et al. (1976), the data for the parties that had won (i.e., VLD & VU) and the data for the parties that had lost (i.e., SP & CVP) were summed and compared. As predicted, the proportion of

¹We checked for possible regional differences by computing separate correlations for the regions Leuven, Lier, and Antwerpen. The correlation based on the Leuven data, $r = .968, p < .01, N = 5$, and the correlation based on the Antwerpen data, $r = .918, p < .05, N = 5$, did not differ significantly, $Z = 0.503, p = .70$. The correlation based on the Lier data was lower, $r = .457, N = 3$. However, because of the small sample at Lier—only 66 of the 462 posters where found there—this correlation was based on only three reliable data points. Therefore, we could not test whether the correlation for Lier differed significantly from the correlations obtained for Leuven and Antwerpen. Nevertheless, the strikingly similar correlations for the latter two cities assured us that the overall linear relation between the relative election result and the percentage of houses still displaying a poster after the elections, was not due to only one region.

houses that still displayed their lawn signs after the elections was significantly higher for winning parties (i.e., 69/78, or 89%) than for losing parties (i.e., 56/99, or 57%), $\chi^2(1, N = 177) = 21.39, p < .001$.

Paired post-hoc comparisons revealed that the proportion of houses that still displayed a VLD sign was significantly higher than the proportion of the SP (90% vs. 38%), $\chi^2(1, N = 82) = 24.23, p < .001$, and of the CVP (90% vs. 66%), $\chi^2(1, N = 113) = 8.33, p < .01$. The proportion of the VLD did not differ significantly from the proportion of the VU (90% vs. 87%), $\chi^2(1, N = 78) = 0.15, p = .69$. The proportion of the VU was significantly higher than the proportion of the CVP (87% vs. 66%), $\chi^2(1, N = 95) = 4.34, p < .05$, and of the SP (87% vs. 38%), $\chi^2(1, N = 64) = 15.70, p < .001$. The proportion of the CVP was significantly higher than the proportion of the SP (66% vs. 38%), $\chi^2(1, N = 99) = 7.08, p < .01$.

In summary, the proportion of each of the winning parties differed significantly from the proportion of each of the losing parties, indicating that the overall effect was not due to one specific party. Moreover, the relation between the proportion of houses that still displayed their lawn sign(s) supporting a political party and the relative win-loss-score of that party was clearly linear, $r = 0.93, p = .07, N = 4$. As Figure 1 shows, the percentage of houses that still displayed their lawn sign(s) on the day after the elections increased as the proportional difference between the election results of 1999 and 1995 became more positive.²

Again, we found no support for the alternative hypothesis of frustrated expectations based on Sigelman (1986). As mentioned previously, the proportion of SP houses that still displayed their lawn sign(s) on the day after the elections was much lower than the proportion of CVP houses, even though the SP had anticipated its heavy loss whereas the CVP had not.

Relation Between Postelectoral Display of Posters and of Lawn Signs

A positively linear relation was found between the post-election display of posters for a specific party and the post-election display of lawn signs for that party, $r = .96, p < .05, N = 4$. The higher the proportion of houses that still displayed their posters after the elections, the higher the proportion of houses that still displayed their lawn signs.

On the other hand, the overall proportion of houses that still displayed their lawns-signs after the election (i.e., 125/177, or 71%) was significantly higher than the proportion of houses that still displayed their posters (i.e., 159/449, or 35%), $\chi^2(1, N = 626) = 63.50, p < .001$. This difference between the post-election display of lawn signs and of posters was also significant when calculated for each political party separately: for the SP (38% vs. 15%), $\chi^2(1, N = 210) = 9.69, p < .01$; for the CVP (66% vs. 25%), $\chi^2(1, N = 149) = 25.33, p < .001$; for the VU (87% vs. 42%), $\chi^2(1, N = 66) = 14.08, p < .001$; and for the VLD (90% vs. 48%), $\chi^2(1, N = 141) = 63.50, p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

The data of this field study yielded clear support for our hypothesis based on Cialdini et al. (1976): Houses supporting victorious parties displayed their poster(s) and removable lawn sign(s) for a longer time after the elections than did houses supporting defeated parties. More specifically, the relation between the election outcome and the proportional display for each party turned out to be strongly linear: The better the election result compared to the previous election, the higher the proportion of houses that still displayed their poster(s) or lawn sign(s) on the day after the elections.

An important theoretical question that needs to be addressed pertains to Sigelman's (1986) suggestion that the BIRG effect proposed by Cialdini et al. (1976) should perhaps be relabeled as CORF. This suggestion was supported by the results of an experimental study by Snyder et al. (1986). These authors only observed a tendency to dissociate from a failing group, but no tendency to associate with a successful group. We therefore tried to determine whether the observed linear relation between the election result and the post-election display should be attributed to a tendency to associate with winning parties (BIRG), or rather to a tendency to dissociate from losing parties (CORF). Although we do not have an empirical baseline to identify BIRG or CORF like Snyder et al. (1986), it is possible to construct a statistical baseline derived from the correlation between the election result and the post-election display. The linear regression derived from this correlation predicts that if a party would have remained status quo (i.e., a proportional loss-win of 0%), 38% of the houses supporting this party would still have displayed their poster(s) on the day after the election. We then took the average number of pre-election addresses that supported each party (i.e., 90) to calculate the corresponding proportion of houses that would have continued to support the hypothetical status quo-party after the elections (i.e., $34/90 = 38\%$). Paired post-hoc comparisons were performed then to see whether the proportions of the other parties did or did not differ significantly from this statistical baseline. It turned out that the propor-

²We checked for possible regional differences by computing separate correlations for the regions of Leuven and Antwerpen. Because only a very limited number of lawn signs had been found in the region of Lier, no reliable correlation could be computed. However, the correlation for Leuven, $r = .996, p < .01, N = 4$, and the correlation for Antwerpen, $r = .962, p < .05, N = 4$, did not differ significantly, $Z = 0.74, p = .77$.

tion of SP-houses that still displayed their poster(s) after the elections was significantly lower than this baseline (15% vs. 38%), $\chi^2(1, N = 266) = 16.96, p < .001$. The proportion of CVP houses was marginally significantly lower than the baseline (25% vs. 38%), $\chi^2(1, N = 174) = 3.28, p = .07$. By contrast, the proportion of AGALEV houses was significantly higher than the statistical baseline (85% vs. 38%), $\chi^2(1, N = 150) = 32.69, p < .001$. The proportion of VU houses did not differ significantly from the baseline (42% vs. 38%), $\chi^2(1, N = 126) = 0.164, p = .69$, nor did the proportion of VLD houses (48% vs. 38%), $\chi^2(1, N = 183) = 2.10, p = .15$. These additional analyses suggest that SP and (to a lesser extent) CVP supporters tried to conceal the bond with their party, whereas AGALEV supporters tried to show off their party-affiliation.³ It therefore seems that the linear relation between election outcome and post-election display is due to the presence of two complementary processes, namely CORF and BIRG. Although Snyder et al. (1986) only found evidence for CORF, this study clearly indicates that the linear relation observed in our study cannot be reduced to CORF, but that both BIRG tendencies were simultaneously at work.

Anecdotal evidence supports our interpretation that AGALEV supporters basked in the glory of their triumphant party. For example, the day after the elections we observed six new AGALEV posters that had not been present before the elections, whereas no new posters were observed for the other parties. Moreover, in one particular street in Leuven, where prior to the elections one SP and one VLD address had been separated by two houses without a poster, both the SP and VLD poster had disappeared on the day after the elections, but the houses in between now proudly showed off their AGALEV connection. At another address, an AGALEV poster, hardly visible before the elections because of the yellowish color of the window, was now conspicuously moved outside, in front of the window. Finally, one house now displayed a cartoon of the Christian-Democratic prime-minister, the face completely green (i.e., the color of the ecologist party) and saying: "I must have eaten something wrong!", referring to the contaminated chickens.

To have an idea of the duration of this BIRG, we again checked the houses within the inner city of Leuven exactly one week after the elections. To our surprise, 9 out of 25 AGALEV houses (36%) still displayed their poster(s), which was significantly higher than the proportion of the SP (i.e., 0/23 or 0%), $\chi^2(1, N = 48) = 10.19, p < .001$, of the CVP (i.e., 1/14 or 7%), $\chi^2(1, N = 39) = 3.92, p < .05$, and of the VLD (i.e., 1/10 or 10%), $\chi^2(1, N = 34) = 4.41, p < .05$.

³An alternative way to identify BIRG and CORF would be to take the data of the VU as a baseline, because this party remained virtually stable. As can be derived from the Results section, this alternative baseline would lead to the same conclusion as the statistical baseline, namely CORF by SP and CVP supporters, and BIRG by AGALEV supporters.

The proportion of the VU (i.e., 1/9 or 11%) was also smaller, but not significantly, $\chi^2(1, N = 35) = 2.37, p = .12$. Moreover, 2 weeks after the elections, 8 of the AGALEV houses still displayed their poster(s), whereas all the posters supporting other parties had been removed. Three weeks after the elections—it was then becoming clear that for the first time in its history the green party would become part of the government together with the VLD and the SP—6 AGALEV houses continued to display their posters. Even 1 month after the elections, the posters of 4 AGALEV houses were still in full view. Because such post-election display is no longer functional to persuade potential voters, these additional data illustrate that the BIRG observed for AGALEV supporters in this study was a long-lasting and substantial behavioral manifestation.

In contrast with the BIRG exhibited by AGALEV supporters, the relatively low percentages of houses that still displayed posters and lawn signs for the SP and the CVP indicate that supporters of these parties tried to cut off the reflected failure experienced by their group. There is no question that supporters of the SP and the CVP interpreted the election results as a defeat. As soon as the negative trend became clear, prominent members of the SP and the CVP admitted the loss of their parties before national radio and television. Consequently, a continued public association with these parties involved risks for the public image of their supporters. For example, the day after the elections we observed a lawn sign in favor of the socialist SP that had been completely sprayed over with derogatory slogans like "Asocials."

It should be noted that the proportion of houses that still displayed posters or lawn signs supporting the SP was lower than the proportion for the CVP. This finding clearly contradicts Sigelman's (1986) explanation of CORF as being based on frustrated expectations. Whereas the downfall of the SP confirmed the predictions of the pre-election polls, the losses of the CVP were much heavier than expected. If Sigelman (1986) was correct, such a climate of expectations should have resulted in a stronger tendency to CORF for CVP supporters than for SP supporters, yet the opposite pattern emerged. In other words, our data demonstrate not only the existence of both BIRG and CORF in this political context, but also that the strength of these processes is a direct linear function of the relative win-loss incurred during the elections.

The findings of this study are clearly at odds with Sigelman's (1986) failure to observe any effect of the election outcome on the post-election display of lawn signs. As outlined in the introduction, this discrepancy might be attributed to the fact that this study explicitly focused on posters and on lawn signs that were easily removable by one occupant. By excluding large lawn signs, we may have ruled out pragmatic considerations that could have masked CORF and BIRG-tendencies in the Lexington elections. Evidence that such practical motivations do come into play

can be derived from the observation that in this study the post-election display of removable lawn signs was much higher than the post-election display of posters. Supporters knew that their lawn signs would soon be removed by a pick-up sent by the party, whereas posters could be taken away only by the occupants themselves. Moreover, even a small lawn sign requires more effort to be removed than a poster. It is therefore not surprising that supporters were less inclined to remove lawn signs than posters immediately after the elections. Despite these pragmatic considerations, the linear relationship between the relative win-loss of the party and the post-election display also emerged for the removable lawn signs, hinting at the robustness of the phenomenon. With respect to Sigelman's (1986) nonfinding, this could imply that pragmatic considerations were of more importance in his study. For example, he might have registered larger lawn signs that were more difficult to remove than the lawn signs that we have registered. However, because we have no information on the size of the lawn signs observed in Lexington, alternative explanations should also be taken into consideration to account for the discrepant results obtained by Sigelman (1986) and by ourselves. These alternative explanations could be related to the different settings in which the two field studies were conducted.

First of all, one could point to the exceptional size of the victories and defeats that occurred in the Flemish elections. In contrast with previous elections, it was very clear who were the losers and who were the winners. The losses of the SP and the CVP were unusually large, whereas the progress of AGALEV was very impressive. On the day after the elections, one newspaper even headlined "Landslide!" to refer to the election outcome. Unfortunately, Sigelman (1986) did not report the exact election results in Lexington. He only distinguished between winning and losing candidates, but provided no information about the magnitude of the difference. Therefore, we cannot exclude the possibility that the difference between the post-election display of winning and losing parties in the Flemish elections was contingent on the remarkable size of the victories and defeats. Richardson and Cialdini (1981) already noted that the amount of BIRG in Cialdini et al.'s (1976) football study was positively correlated with the size of the score-difference between the own team and the opponent. On the basis of this finding, Richardson and Cialdini (1981) concluded that "close, hard-fought games are not as useful to BIRGers as one-sided ones because they communicate less clearly that the home team is the superior one" (p.43). This might also explain the difference in post-election display between AGALEV and the VLD. Although the election result of AGALEV was quite spectacular, the modest progression of the VLD probably did not produce enough glory for their supporters to bask in.

Second, the nationwide elections in Flanders were probably much more salient to the general public than the re-

gional elections in Lexington. These Flemish elections were indeed of extreme political importance because they were the first elections held since the so-called "Dutroux affair"⁴ in 1996, which shocked the whole nation and resulted in the "White March" (i.e., the biggest protest march ever organized in Belgium). As a consequence, the political campaigns for these first post-Dutroux elections received unparalleled attention by the Flemish media. This already strong media coverage was even intensified when the "dioxin crisis" emerged 1 month before the elections.

Third, whereas the elections in Lexington focused on individual candidates, the elections in Flanders focused on political parties and their programs. Although many posters and lawn signs in the Flanders study also showed names and faces of individual candidates, the election outcomes of these candidates could not influence the post-election display because individual results were announced only 3 days after the elections (i.e., after the post-election display had been registered). Moreover, every individual candidate had to campaign on the basis of the party program. It is, therefore, not surprising that many Flemish voters voted for a party as a whole rather than for individual candidates (although this possibility does exist).⁵ Consequently, the linear relation between the election result and the post-election display observed in this study should mainly be attributed to the group affiliation expressed by supporters of the various political parties. By contrast, the post-election display in Lexington would have mainly reflected the supporter's commitment to the individual person running for the office.

Both social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and self-categorization theory (SCT; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherel, 1987) have made a sharp distinction between intergroup attraction and interpersonal attraction. It has been repeatedly shown (see Ellemers, 1993) that belonging to a low-status group (e.g., a party that has lost the elections) leads to a lowered identification with this group, which in turn results in attempts at distancing from the ingroup (e.g., hiding one's party affiliation by removing supporting posters or lawn signs). Conversely, belonging to a high-status group (e.g., a party that has won the elections) heightens ingroup identification, and leads to more

⁴In 1996, Marc Dutroux was caught as the main perpetrator of the abduction, abuse, and murder of several young girls. The Belgian public was stunned not only by the horrible nature of these crimes, but also by the fact that the malfunctioning of the judicial and police systems was party responsible for the belated arrest of this criminal. The reform of these institutions was one of the main themes during the 1999 election campaign in Flanders.

⁵Readers should also realize that the political parties decide in which order their individual candidates will appear on the ballots. Moreover, a vote for the party as a whole is interpreted as consenting with the order in which the candidates of that party are presented. Therefore, the chance of an individual candidate to be elected is determined to a great extent by his or her position on the party list and by the result of his party as a whole.

group-oriented behavior (e.g., leaving the posters or lawn signs for a while longer). These social identification processes could account for the differential post-election display of losing and winning parties in the Flemish elections. By contrast, the post-election display in Lexington could be less susceptible to the election outcome because it reflected supporters' personal commitment with the candidates instead of their identification with a more abstract group.

The potential relevance of this theoretical framework becomes even more apparent when recent developments are taken into account. Whereas SIT and SCT have initially neglected that strategic considerations can influence the expression of one's social affiliations, these developments have paid more attention to these reputational aspects (Emler, 1990; Emler & Hopkins, 1990; Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995). For example, Emler and Hopkins (1990) stated that social identities "are also and perhaps fundamentally, public claims and commitments. They result in performances before an audience, self-presentations aimed at persuading others to award or concede the social identity claimed" (p. 123). Therefore, an analysis based on SIT and SCT seems not only compatible with the processes proposed by Cialdini et al. (1976), but it could also account for the strength of the BIRG and CORF observed in our study. Considering that social identity in terms of party affiliation was made very salient (by the media, by the election procedure, & by the clear-cut election outcomes), SIT and SCT would indeed assume that party membership became very central for the supporters' self-image. It is not surprising then that the supporters of the losing parties would attempt to conceal their connection with these parties, especially because the commentaries after the elections stated that the CVP and SP had lost because many voters would have held these parties responsible for the preceding period of political scandals. Lutwak, Ferrari, and Cheek (1998) have indeed shown that feelings of shame are specifically related to one's social identity. By contrast, supporters of the winning parties could be expected to accentuate their party affiliation (i.e., leaving the posters & lawn signs), especially because these parties (AGALEV, VLD, & VU) stated that they would change the face of the Flemish political world.

Assuming that social identification processes were indeed at work, the number of posters or lawn signs displayed at one particular address prior to the elections could be considered as a raw indication of the amount of identification with the party. Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje (1997) have demonstrated that members who identify strongly with their group remain faithful even in the most disadvantageous circumstances, whereas low-identifiers are ready to flee at the first set-back. Moreover, Wann and Branscombe (1990) observed that high-identifying sports fans were more likely to BIRG, whereas low-identifiers were more likely to CORF. These findings would imply that the relation between election outcome and post-election display would differ for high- and low-identifying supporters. To check this possibility, we divided both the addresses with post-

ers and those with lawn signs in low-identifiers (i.e., only 1 poster or lawn sign present) and high-identifiers (i.e., 2 or more posters or lawn signs present). We then calculated separate correlations between election outcome and post-election display for high- and low-identifiers, both for posters and lawn signs. The observed correlations were all very positive (r 's between 0.90 & 0.99) and did not differ significantly between low- and high-identifiers, neither for posters nor for lawn signs. This could mean that the number of pre-election posters or lawn signs was not an accurate measure of ingroup identification, or that the BIRG and CORF processes were so powerful that they overrode the impact of identification processes. A third possibility is that all people displaying their party affiliation were very strongly identified (e.g., because of the high salience of the Flemish 1999 elections), and that this resulted in a ceiling effect.

Although the strength of the linear relation was not affected by the number of pre-election posters and lawn signs, we noticed that the level of post-election display was higher for addresses with two or more lawn signs than for addresses with only one lawn sign (85% vs. 56%, $\chi^2[1, N = 177] = 22.91, p < .001$). By contrast, the post-election display of addresses with two or more posters did not differ from that of addresses with only one poster (35% vs. 36%, $\chi^2[1, N = 449] = 0.05, p = .83$). These divergent results for posters and lawn signs could again be explained by pragmatic reasons. Removing two or more lawn signs takes more effort than removing one, whereas removing two or more posters is not much harder than removing one. Therefore, supporters who displayed two or more lawn signs could be more inclined to avoid the costs of hiding their party-affiliation, especially because they knew that these lawn signs would soon be collected by the party itself. Despite these pragmatic considerations, the linear relation between election result and post-election display also emerged for addresses with two or more lawn signs, which hints at the reliability of the phenomenon.

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated the occurrence of BIRG as well as CORF in the context of political elections. People like to flaunt their association with victorious parties, and they try to conceal their association with defeated parties. The strength of these behavioral tendencies seems to be a direct linear function of the relative election result, and is not dependent on pre-election expectations. These findings thus support Cialdini's et al. (1976) claim that the scope of the processes underlying BIRG (and consequently CORF) is very broad: These behavioral tendencies are not limited to sports competitions in the United States, but also occur in European election contexts.

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