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Political Parties and Policy Change: Explaining the Impact of French and German Greens on Energy Policy

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ABSTRACT *This article assesses the conditions of partisan influence on public policy change, by comparing the action of the German and French Greens with regard to energy during their participation in the “Red–Green” (1998–2005) and “Plural Left” (1997–2002) coalitions, respectively. First, it highlights the importance of the institutional context in which political parties operate. In Germany, both political and sector-specific institutions made it possible for Die Grünen to have a stronger and deeper impact on energy policy than Les Verts. Second, it emphasizes the strategic and relational dimensions of partisan influence. The ability of the German Green party to foster contacts with the renewable energy industry and experts also explains its policy impact and the success of its strategy focusing on specific issues during its participation in government.*

Introduction

Green parties' participation in government is characterized by ebbs and flows. In the 1990s several of them joined centre-left coalitions, before returning to the ranks of the opposition a few years later. Recently, the context seems to have become more favourable again, especially in France and Germany.¹ This institutionalization of Green parties in electoral competition and the eventuality of their participation in executive functions once again raises the question of their influence on public policy.

Until recently, most studies on Green parties have focused on other issues: the conditions of their institutionalization in the sphere of political competition (Kitschelt 1986; Sainteny 2000; Blühdorn and Szarka 2004); their organizational

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structures and the content of their programmes (Richardson and Rootes 1995; Burchell 2002); and the consequences of their participation in government, not only on their electoral results but also on their relations with the movements from which they stem (Müller-Rommel 2002; Rüdig 2006).

The question of the policy impact of political parties has rather been studied in more general terms of left–right alternation. Based on quantitative analyses, the aim has been essentially to assess the consequences of this alternation on macro-economic policies, military budgets, or the level of public spending and social welfare (Hibbs 1977; Castles 1982; Blais et al. 1993, 1996; Boix 1997). These analyses have produced mixed results that neither confirm nor invalidate the relevance of the partisan variable in explaining policy change (Imbeau et al. 2001). The same observation can be made for more in-depth case studies regarding economic reforms in France under the Jospin government (Levy 2001), or the Swiss and German pension policies (Häusermann 2010). One should therefore not (only) ask whether parties do (or do not) matter, but also determine the specific conditions under which they are able to influence public policy when they gain access to executive functions.

This article tackles this issue by comparing two different Green parties' actions regarding energy policy when they were part of government coalitions.² In particular, I focus on the “Red–Green coalition” in Germany (1998–2005) and the “Plural Left” in France (1997–2002). A comparison of these two case studies is interesting for two reasons. First, energy is a strong identity issue for parties stemming largely from antinuclear movements. These parties could therefore be expected to consider this issue as a priority when they gain access to government functions. Second, the fact that both of the Green parties under consideration entered a left-wing government coalition during the same period allows for comparison in a similar international context.

Yet the trajectories of French and German energy policy appear to differ considerably from the early 2000s. The German “Red–Green” coalition initiated a phase-out of nuclear power and a proactive policy regarding energy efficiency and renewable energies, and thus became the European leader in this domain (Lauber and Mez 2006). In contrast, the energy policy of the “Plural Left” in France was largely a continuation of the status quo, with only minor concessions to the ecologists and marginal changes in the energy industry (Evrard 2010).³ Finally, the institutional differences between France and Germany, in both the political system and the energy subsystem, also afford insight into the influence of the institutional framework on partisan action.

The article demonstrates that two sets of variables impact on Green parties' ability to influence energy policies in France and Germany: (1) political and sector-specific institutions and (2) parties' strategic choices before entering the government and then during their action within the governmental coalition. The discussion is divided into three sections. The first section considers the main aspects of the theoretical debate on the partisan variable in the explanation of policy change. The second section then shows that Green parties' influence over public policy depends on the institutional frameworks in place. It discusses the political institutions concerned, which explain the different trajectories of Green parties during their emergence as political actors. It also includes the institutions of the energy sector which formed a constraining framework in which these parties had to operate when they came to power. The third section analyses the strategic and interactive dimension of partisan

influence. By looking at how Green parties joined renewable energy networks, negotiated coalition agreements and took action within government, we are able to see how *Die Grünen* significantly contributed to steering German energy policy, whereas *Les Verts* seemed unable to trigger meaningful change.

Explaining Partisan Influence on Policy Change

Apart from being unable to settle the debate on the relevance or not of this “partisan theory” (Hibbs 1992: 316), the quantitative literature has been called into question many times on other grounds. Two main criticisms were initially expressed by von Beyme (1984). First, quantitative analyses cannot account for many non-quantifiable elements of public policy. Second, the wish to measure partisan influence is necessarily an incentive to minimize other crucial variables such as the weight of institutional power structures or the influence of interest groups. From a similar perspective, Schmidt (1996) showed that while partisan influence is a legitimate hypothesis, it is relevant mainly in majoritarian democracies and highly centralized political systems. Finally, apart from these inherent limits of partisan theory, it has also known a time in the wilderness with the growth of neo-institutionalist approaches that challenge the capacity of political actors to influence public policies. Within this literature, studies devoted to agenda setting have continued to grant the political actors an explanatory role, yet without being able to explain the actual mechanisms of their influence or the role of parties themselves (Kingdon 1984; Keeler 1993; Baumgartner and Jones 1991, 2002).

The entry of the ecologists into government poses an even more specific problem regarding the impact of the partisan variable on public policy (Rihoux and Rüdiger 2006). Until now, Green parties have participated in government action only within coalitions in which they were the junior partner. This implies particular theoretical issues. First, one has to analyse the way in which these coalitions are formed and how much leeway they leave to “small parties”. The study of coalition negotiations therefore appears to be a crucial step in determining these parties’ capacity to influence policy-making (Strøm 1990; Müller and Strøm 2000; Lees 2001) and more particularly that pertaining to the distribution of ministerial portfolios (Browne and Franklin 1973).

Therefore, taking into account the context in which these negotiations are set is crucial. For instance, the fact that a small party occupies a “pivotal” position within the coalition will afford it more powerful levers to obtain important portfolios and effectively defend its preferences (Keman 1994). Apart from a minority party’s ability to impose itself within the coalition, the question of its impact on the policy content (goals and instruments that are finally adopted) constitutes another key issue in this analysis. Studies devoted to “small parties” assume that their power rests primarily on their agenda-setting role and their influence on policy discourses (Fischer 1980; Rihoux and Rüdiger 2006).

Two conclusions can be drawn from this brief literature review on the partisan dimension of public policy. First, qualitative studies are a necessary complement to quantitative research, in so far as they provide deeper insight into the micro-politics of government coalitions and are better able to explain policy results. Second, the literature suggests the need to analyse political parties in interaction. Two dimensions appear to be crucial: the institutional context in which the parties operate, and the strategies that they implement.

The Institutional Drivers of Partisan Influence

National Political Institutions and their Practices

The fact that institutional dynamics tend to be overlooked is one of the main arguments against partisan theory. Schmidt (1996) considers that majoritarian democracies afford parties more room to manoeuvre than do non-majoritarian systems, such as the German system. I consider that this is only relevant in the case of a right/left analysis, and in respect of major parties. If we look at the action of younger and minor parties, such as the Greens, the conclusion seems to be quite the opposite, as the majority system is conducive to large partisan formations. In practice, the German political institutions have effectively put the Greens in a better position to influence public policies than have the French institutions.

As Kitschelt (1986) said with regard to social movements, it is necessary to study the extent to which political institutions function as “political opportunity structures” for the emergence of Green parties. This enables us to explain the following apparent paradox: while the process of construction of environmentalism as an actor of the electoral competition developed earlier in France (1973) than in Germany (1980), *Die Grünen* were more rapidly successful in this respect and entered the *Bundestag* as early as 1983 (Sainteny 2000: 452).

One of the main institutional factors explaining differences in the weight of the French and German Green parties is their electoral and public funding systems. Maurice Duverger’s seminal work showed that party systems are shaped by electoral laws (Duverger 1954), a fact which has since been confirmed by many empirical studies (Rae 1967; Lijphart 1994). One of Duverger’s laws assumes that systems of proportional representation are associated with multi-party systems. Thus, by enabling voters to elect half of the MPs on the basis of a simple majority vote and the other by means of proportional representation (lists system), the German system favours the representation of small parties, including the Greens. In contrast, the French two-round system has been shown to penalize the minor parties and consequently the Greens. Table 1 shows not only the better electoral results of *Die Grünen*, but also the fact that when the results of the two parties are similar, the difference in the number of seats obtained becomes obvious.

Until 1988 the absence of regulations on the funding of parties in France also facilitated the development of powerful, well-entrenched parties, to the detriment of *Les Verts*. Conversely, in Germany the implementation in the late 1960s of a system of public subsidies, both nationally and locally, enabled *Die Grünen* to receive relatively large sums for funding their electoral campaigns and consolidating the party. For example, following European elections in 1984, whereas the German Greens obtained 3.4 per cent, which was only one point less than the French Greens’ list, they had 18.2 million German Marks (€9.3 million) compared to 1.5 million francs (€0.3 million) in debts run up by their French counterpart.

Apart from electoral rules, it was the political system as a whole that influenced the Green parties’ capacities for action. This is a point on which the analogy with Kitschelt’s notion of structure of political opportunity seems the most interesting. For a long time the unitary and centralized French political system impeded the Greens’ access to representative institutions. In Germany, on the other hand, the federal structure and the existence of the *Länder* afforded the ecologists more

Table 1. Electoral results of French and German Greens since 1979

Elections ¹	France		Germany	
	%	Seats	%	Seats
European 1979	4.4	0	3.4	0
Legislative 1981/1983	1.1	0	5.6	28
European 1984	6.7	0	8.2	7
Legislative 1986/1987	1.2	0	8.3	44
European 1989	10.6	9	8.4	8
Legislative 1989/1990	11.1	0	3.9	8
European 1994	4.9	0	10.1	12
Legislative 1997/1998	6.4	7	6.7	47
European 1999	11.2	9	6.4	7
Legislative 2002	5.6	3	8.6	55
European 2004	7.4	6	11.9	13
Legislative 2005/2007	3.25	4	8.3	51
Legislative 2009 (Ger)	–	–	10.9	68

¹When elections did not take place the same year. The first date refers to French elections and the second to German elections.

frequent opportunities and elections with less crucial implications, to gain access to political institutions. By standing for election and winning seats in local parliaments, *Die Grünen* initiated a phase of consolidation and legitimization that is significant if we are to understand the subsequent stages of their trajectory. Finally, apart from formal aspects, the practices of institutions are also crucial, as the example of multiple office-holding illustrates (Foucault 2006; Navarro 2009). Far more frequent in France than in Germany, this phenomenon has tended to penalize the candidates of new parties such as the ecologists.

These few examples highlight the way in which political institutions have impacted on the construction of ecologist parties as political actors. Alone, they do not enable us to directly explain the parties' ability to influence public policy, but they do allow us to understand the differences in the weight of the two Green parties when they entered the government in the late 1990s. Müller-Rommel (2002) argues that *Die Grünen* can be analysed as a "professional party" that is, having a long pre-parliamentary phase, followed by opposition in parliament and regular participation in local government. *Les Verts*, on the other hand, settled for a "pre-parliamentary" experience, that is, a long extra-parliamentary experience and very little participation at local level. This difference, which is partly the consequence of the political institutions in the two countries, is of considerable importance in analysing the two parties' policy impact. We can expect a "professional" party such as *Die Grünen* to have more influence than *Les Verts* on the global policy of the government in which they are participating (Müller-Rommel 2002: 9). But to analyse their influence on a particular policy, in our case energy, we also have to take into consideration the specific institutional dynamics in the industry.

The Institutions of the Energy Sector

It is not only the overarching political institutions that frame the Green parties' abilities to change policies, but also the institutions of the subsystem in question.

In this respect the energy sector is symptomatic because it seems conducive to institutional inertia, in both Germany and France alike.

First, due to the strategic nature of the “energy independence” goal, states have always equated it to the idea of national independence. This became even stronger after the Second World War, especially in countries that already had nuclear power (Hecht 1998). It led to highly centralized state management of energy policy and to cognitive and normative frameworks more hostile to change and relatively permeable to supranational rules and norms. Moreover, the very high level of technicality of exploiting energy resources led to the emergence of expert groups close to or even within government institutions. This worsened the asymmetry in the balance of power and the opacity of decision-making. As a result of this phenomenon of centralization and technicization, energy remained of little interest to citizens for a long time. Apart from a minority of activists, no one really sought change or had the possibility of demanding it. The inertia of this technical-institutional complex was an incentive to analyse policy-making through the notions of path dependence (Pierson 2000) or institutional lock-in (Unruh 2000).

The institutions of the energy industry in France and in Germany were strongly affected by the country’s opting for nuclear energy. Until the 1980s, both countries were characterized by corporatist arrangements (Hatch 1991), a situation relatively well-known in the French case. The legitimacy of public corporations, strong institutional centralization and weak control by parliament generally characterize the French energy industry. The result is policy decided mainly within a core group of actors (*Electricité de France* – EDF, the *Commissariat à l’énergie atomique* – CEA and the DGEMP⁴) and enjoying wide consensus among the political-administrative actors and in public opinion. These structures of political opportunity considerably limit the parties’ influence. Political actors (especially the Parliament) are largely excluded from the decision-making process, which is monopolized by the engineers of the *Corps des Mines*.⁵ Additionally, the policy driven by these experts enjoys the support of almost all political parties, Gaullists, socialists and communists alike.

The situation is less intuitive in the German case but several studies have shown that the energy industry was initially also characterized by the emergence of relatively closed institutions (Kitschelt 1986; Rüdig 2000). We first witnessed a process of recentralization of the decision process, notably with the aim of maintaining the stability of energy policy in the face of anti-nuclear movements (Joppke 1992). Moreover, even though Germany had not entirely adopted the same planning system as France, the term *Planung* took on considerable importance as part of the “active industrial policy” approach adopted by the Social Democrat governments in the 1970s. Germany jettisoned the *laissez-faire* doctrine to a large extent and gave the state more weight in the economy, especially with regard to energy policy.

This closure of German policy-making in respect of energy policy can be balanced in two respects. First, as Joppke (1992) has shown, from the end of the 1980s we witnessed the overlap between competing models of statehood in German energy policy. Apart from a certain “autocratic state” concerning choices, especially with regard to nuclear power, Joppke has identified a form of “federal-constitutional state” characterized by several other venues to influence energy policy. He has also identified a form of “party state”, for example by noticing that internal divisions within the SPD (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*) over nuclear issues had

repercussions on decisions taken by the state. Second, subsequent to the Chernobyl accident there was a gradual opening of German policy-making and a calling into question of a consensual form of decision-making (Rüdig 2000: 482). Thus, even if the federal state has maintained a dominant role in the definition of this policy, there are several policy venues that the other actors, including political parties, can use.

So we see that, as in the case of the political system, from the late 1990s the institutions in the energy sector seem to have placed the German Green party in a more favourable position than its French counterpart, with regard to encouraging change in energy policy. Yet, far from concluding on the exclusivity of this institutional variable, which remains too static, it seems necessary to point out the strategies put in place, both prior to their access to executive functions and during their participation in government. We need to understand, through observation of the strategies implemented by the ecologists, how partisan formations can (or not) free themselves from institutional constraints or, on the contrary, benefit (or not) from opportunities afforded by the institutions.

The Strategic Drivers of Partisan Influence

Green Parties prior to their Participation in Government: Insertion in Non-profit and Professional Networks

Several studies have shown how social movements' relationship with political parties is one of the variables explaining their capacity to influence energy policy (Kitschelt 1986; Giugni 2004). As political parties themselves have only very limited expertise when it comes to energy policy, we believe that their relations with economic actors and experts networks partially explain their ability to influence this policy. A comparison of the French and German Green parties' relations with the renewable energy actors clearly shows marked differences between the two.

In France, at the end of the 1990s, *Les Verts* was the party most strongly opposed to the country's energy policy orientations. In particular, they opposed the choice of nuclear power as a solution to climate change, and based their programme on energy efficiency, on the phasing out of nuclear energy, and on the development of renewable energy. Yet interviews with actors in the renewable energy network (e.g. the *Comité de Liaison des énergies renouvelables* and the *Syndicat des énergies renouvelables*) revealed that *Les Verts* were not really considered a significant partner.⁶ A member of the previous Environment Ministry's cabinet explained that, at the time, *Les Verts* were not considered to be dealing adequately with the issue:

They're not present in renewable energies. It's mainly the NGOs that are active, like for example on feed-in tariffs. Another example: the debate that took place about amendments on wind power. Many people complained about the absence of a reaction by *Les Verts*, especially in the Senate.

In the framework of local projects, *Les Verts* were not either really present in the field: "The [non-governmental] organizations have to survive by turning themselves into consulting firms looking for contracts. If the contract comes from the CEA, they take it too. But we received no particular support from *Les Verts*".⁷

The difficulty of acquiring the loyalty of real expertise can partially explain this relative absence of *Les Verts* in the renewable energy sector:

It's not only their fault, it's also related to the difficulty of becoming professional. There were fewer than 20 permanent staff at the party. No comparison with their German counterparts, who already have a sound structure. At *Les Verts* there's probably only one expert specialized in energy. That's not enough and so they're not a credible partner when it comes to renewable energies; they offer no coherent protest.⁸

The situation was very different in Germany, where *Die Grünen* and even a part of the SPD overlapped more with the renewable energy sector. Several members of the Bundestag had organized into an "energy policy 'red-green' network" (*Netzwerk rot-grüner Energiepolitiker*). These MPs were also very often members of non-governmental organizations promoting renewable energy and maintained close ties between the two levels. A noteworthy example of this difference between the involvement of French and German staff (especially *Les Verts*) within renewable energy networks could be found with the NGO Eurosolar. In 2005, the strong German and Austrian representation contrasted with the absence of French representation on the executive committee. Moreover, the German members were two SPD MPs in charge of this issue (Hermann Scheer and Mechtilde Rothe), while the head of the German section of Eurosolar was Hans-Josef Fell, a Green MP. In contrast, the French committee member, Paul Coste, was from an NGO (Hespul).

Such a statement is very important in terms of support for the measures subsequently adopted by the coalition. For instance, on 5 November 2003, a major action day was organized by environmental organizations such as Greenpeace and the German Renewable Energy federation (BEE) to mark their attachment to an amendment of the law on renewable energies that was far more favourable to these organizations.⁹ The 10,000 people and all the organizations that came together that day served as a lever for Green MPs and the Ministry of the Environment in negotiations with the other MPs and the Ministry of the Economy, as we will see in the following section.

Thus, even before their participation in government, we witness more permeability in Germany in the boundary between the NGOs promoting renewable energy, and the Green MPs and councillors. This constitutes an additional resource, in terms of both expertise and support for the preparation of participation in government.

Entry into Government: Negotiating Coalition Agreements and Portfolio Allocation

The place granted to energy issues in negotiations between partners of the two coalitions confirms the finding that *Les Verts* and *Die Grünen* have not adopted the same strategy, even though contextual factors also explain differences.

Coalition Agreements and Government Programmes. The signing of coalition agreements and government programmes constituted the first step in this preparation for government. The French case is fairly atypical because, due to the organization of

legislative elections, the complete text was not drawn up. The *Assemblée Nationale* was dissolved on 21 April 1997 and the first round of elections was held one month later. The two parties nevertheless relied on an existing agreement concluded in January 1997, in which it was specified that it was the result of over six months of negotiation. The only allusion to the energy issue and renewable energies was very general: “To steer energy policy in a new direction by establishing a moratorium on the manufacturing of MOX until 2010, while strongly increasing the financing of energy savings and renewable energies.”¹⁰

The participation of the French Communist Party (PCF) in the “Plural Left” coalition made it even more difficult to produce common proposals with regard to energy. As noted above, historically the PCF had strong ties with the nuclear industry, while the Socialist Party found it difficult to take a stand on environmental issues, especially when it came to energy policy. After first trying to deny the new environmental challenge, it essentially implemented a strategy of harnessing ideas, voters and ecologist leaders, with varying degrees of success (Sainteny 2000). When it came to power in 1981, the Socialist Party implemented an energy policy that followed on seamlessly from the previous one. A Socialist MP commented that if the Greens had made the phasing out of nuclear power a non-negotiable condition, the coalition would have imploded.¹¹ The energy issue was therefore addressed during negotiations but revolved around symbolic measures and notably the closure of the Superphénix breeder reactor. The issue of renewable energy was not addressed during these negotiations.¹²

Unlike their French counterparts, the German Greens made the energy issue one of their main concerns during negotiations with the Social Democratic Party (SPD). Significantly, while *Die Grünen* appeared to be more professional and powerful than *Les Verts*, they were declining and had weakened considerably by 1998, at the beginning of negotiations with the SPD, in which they were simply one coalition partner among others. Moreover, although the SPD’s official position since 1986 in favour of a programme to phase out nuclear power may have put *Die Grünen* in a more favourable position to negotiate the content of energy policy, this was not so straightforward. Dissension existed within the Social Democratic Party itself on this point, and reappeared very quickly during negotiations with the Greens, then within the government, as we will see below. The future Ministers of the Economy, W. Müller and W. Clement, clearly and repeatedly emphasized their scepticism with regard to programmes for phasing out nuclear power and developing renewable energies. In this respect they were opposed to those of the Greens and the Social Democrats who supported a phasing out (Lees 2001: 116).

The result of these negotiations, the coalition agreement signed on 20 October 1998, was a long document set out in 12 sections. The energy issue occupied a fair amount of space (three out of 18 pages), particularly the phase-out of nuclear power and the development of renewable energies. Entire programmes were discussed, such as the “100,000 solar roofs programme”, the necessity to develop cogeneration, and the amendment of energy legislation in order to enable access by renewable energies to the energy market (SPD–Bündnis90/Die Grünen 1998). This first phase illustrates the different concerns and capabilities of the German and French Greens to ensure that energy issues were put on the government agenda.

Portfolios Allocation and Ministries' Perimeters of Action. After negotiating the programme, the ministerial portfolios allocation, the definition of their range of action, was one of the most important strategic decisions at the time of entering government (Browne and Franklin 1973; Poguntke 2002). The choice of a Minister of the Environment could seem self-evident for Green parties. In the French case, this "choice" was actually restricted and attested to an unfavourable balance of power in relation to the Socialist Party. One of the participants in the negotiations explained: "When Lionel Jospin contacted us, he proposed a single ministry: environment. We'd have preferred another one but we had no choice. Then it was Dominique Voynet or nothing. There again, we tried to refuse but we were like the freshers at school."¹³

During the definition of the ministry's perimeter of action, *Les Verts* did not grant energy prime importance. After hesitating, they asked for spatial planning to be attached to it. This choice – strategic in so far as it meant expanding the competence of the Ministry of the Environment and encroaching on that of the Ministry of Infrastructure – was very costly (in time and in terms of weight in subsequent negotiations) and had little effect. According to a former cabinet minister, this may have been a mistake as the issue mobilized Dominique Voynet's team for a long time.¹⁴

The Greens' lack of experience in government and their absence of loyal experts was also felt when the ministers appointed the members of their cabinets and heads of departments, incorporating several members of the Socialist Party and of the *Corps des Mines*.¹⁵ Voynet's team therefore called on a renowned energy expert formerly with the French agency for energy management AFME (*Agence française pour la maîtrise de l'énergie*) and whose views were close to those of the ecologists on this subject. This decision was however taken at a late stage (end of 1999) and did not really help to set right the balance of power.

In Germany *Die Grünen* obtained three ministerial portfolios: foreign affairs, environment and health. Although obtaining a post as important as foreign affairs could be seen as a sign their power, it was set in a tradition in which, since 1969, the Free Democratic Party (FDP) had always been given this portfolio as a junior partner. When it came to the environment, as in the French case, the Greens first tried to obtain another ministry but the SPD wanted to keep control over economic and social issues and therefore refused. It was Jürgen Trittin, spokesperson and representative of the left wing of *Die Grünen*, who obtained the Ministry of the Environment. In Germany this ministry has broader competence than its French counterpart, notably on nuclear matters. As a result, negotiations initially did not concern the extension of its scope of action. This became an issue only after the 2002 legislative elections, as we will see below.

To sum up: when they entered the government in 1998, *Die Grünen*, like *Les Verts*, despite more favourable institutional conditions, were in a weak position compared to their Social Democratic partner and were forced to accept the only ministerial portfolios that the SPD was willing to grant them.¹⁶ That is why we consider that the strategies within the government were of crucial importance as regards their influence on energy policy.

Action within the Government

Les Verts in Government (1997–2002): Lack of Experience and Dispersion. *Les Verts* did not have (or grasp) the opportunity to use their presence in government to

introduce significant change in energy policy. Although institutional constraints do partially explain this result, their choice of strategies was also responsible. These strategies did not enable them to remedy an unfavourable balance of power faced with the Ministry of Industry and the energy interest groups, whose vast powers of obstruction they seem to have discovered only once they were there.

Thus, by choosing to enlarge its scope of competence, the Green party also chose dispersion – a strategy that did not pay off. In the above we have considered their weak involvement in renewable energy networks, despite the fact that “it was they who, in France, were the first, many years ago, to militate, almost in a vacuum, for renewable energies” (*Le Monde*, 14 November 2000). But they did not see this as a priority for their action. After negotiating the broadening of the Ministry of the Environment’s competencies to include spatial planning, *Les Verts*, through Minister D. Voynet and her cabinet, spent a huge amount of time negotiating and then drafting the bill on spatial, as well as the dossier on hunting regulation. The time and energy invested in these projects was time that could have been spent moving forward on other issues like energy policy.¹⁷ Furthermore, and more generally, during these negotiations *Les Verts* were hampered by their lack of experience in government. As Boy (2002: 67) pointed out, “the ecologist elite simply had not been educated in the *Grandes Ecoles* (*Ecole Nationale d’Administration, Ecole Normale Supérieure, Ecole Polytechnique*) ... Thus, in inter-ministerial arbitration, ignorance of the customs familiarity, the techniques and even the language to the state management class was a severe handicap to those representing the Ministry of the Environment”.

More precisely, *Les Verts* seemed to push to the extreme the tendency to expand their ambit – a tendency that many ecologist parties in Europe share (Burchel 2002: 153) – and tried to intervene in many other policy fields. For instance, they called for the creation of minimum income support for the youth (“*RMI-jeunes*”), criticized measures on savings plans for employees, and demanded the right to vote for foreigners, with D. Voynet involving herself personally in the battle to give undocumented migrants residence permits. In the end, the Prime Minister gave in on very few points. The main consequences of *Les Verts*’ presence in government were budgetary. The Environment Ministry’s budget was increased by 30 per cent, while that of ADEME (*Agence de l’environnement et de la maîtrise de l’énergie*) rose from €251 million in 1997 to €360 million in 2000. Apart from that, the trade-offs favourable to the Ministry of the Environment were made mainly on symbolic issues such as the scrapping of the project to revamp the Rhine–Rhône canal, and closure of the Superphénix breeder reactor.¹⁸

One of the most concrete changes in the energy sector took place at the end of the mandate, when Dominique Voynet was replaced by Yves Cochet, an expert on energy issues. The change consisted in adopting the “German system” of promoting renewable energies: the feed-in-tariffs mechanism. This decision was based on a report submitted by Yves Cochet to the Prime Minister in 2000 but was implemented only when he took up his functions in July 2001. Two significant conclusions can be drawn from this: first, the personality and competencies of the minister, as well as his or her party, are significant variables to consider; and second, when the Green minister focused primarily on the energy issue, he was able to achieve more significant change than during the “phase of dispersion”. Comparison with the German situation confirms these conclusions.

Die Grünen in Government (1998–2004): Deconstruction of the Network and Institutional Conversion. Unlike the French situation, energy was at the heart of the Green party's preferences during negotiations on the coalition agreement in Germany. The subject also mobilized the party during its governmental action. The two main axes of this action were the implementation of nuclear power phase-out and the promotion of renewable energies. In the context of stalemate discussed above, the first step of *Die Grünen's* government action was to destabilize these policy networks and to reconstruct another one, through a process of "institutional conversion" (Thelen 2003) via the Ministry of the Environment. Smith (1993) has shown that change is facilitated by excluding players who do not share the same values as the policy community in a given subsystem.

In 1998 the nomination of J. Trittin (*Die Grünen*), to the Federal Ministry of the Environment (BMU), and of W. Müller (SPD), to the Ministry of the Economy (BMW), afforded an opportunity for internal confrontation within the government between the two conceptions of energy policy. As noted above, the coalition agreement provided for a programme to phase out nuclear power and to promote renewable energies. Yet many competencies pertaining to energy were still in the hands of the BMW. Müller had already clarified his position with regard to these issues: he was sceptical about the potential of renewable energies and in favour of the nuclear option.¹⁹ His scepticism with regard to a change in energy policy was also shared by his successor, W. Clement, and G. Schröder himself had no intention of supporting Trittin in this conflict with his colleagues in the BMW (Lees 2001: 117). To circumvent this opposition, the Green minister replaced certain senior government officials, especially in the field of nuclear safety, with individuals opposed to nuclear energy, and was thus able very effectively to break up existing networks (Evrard and Saurugger 2007). It was in this way that the partisans of the new paradigm were able gradually to establish themselves in positions where they had decision-making powers with regard to energy policy, and thus to implement the phase-out from nuclear power.

On this point, the Greens were however compelled to accept a far slower process than their base would have liked (the gradual closure of nuclear plants over a 30-year period). The programmes to promote renewable energy were thus partially intended to satisfy this base and the NGO movement, but there too they encountered resistance, as the process of drafting the bill on renewable energies, enacted in 2000 (the EEG Act), shows. Considered as a success, for it boosted the development of renewable energies and especially wind power, it also triggered conflict between the supporters of the two paradigms. Until 2002 the BMW was competent when it came to renewable energies and therefore supervised the drafting of the four-page EEG bill. It incorporated the following clause in Article 9: "in case of conflict or disagreement between the manager of the network and that of the facility, the representative of the Land concerned will arbitrate". This single clause was fundamental because it made the participation of the *Bundesrat*²⁰ mandatory, and the "Red-Green" coalition did not have a majority in the *Bundesrat*. According to an actor involved in this process, too few people were mobilized and the advocates of renewable energies "let through" this article, which was to be a serious impediment.²¹

Based on the same conclusion, *Die Grünen* took advantage of the 2002 elections to implement decisive institutional changes. Their score, which had improved since

1998, indicated that the party would probably demand a fourth ministry, especially since the SPD's results were poorer than in the previous elections. But the Greens' strategy was instead to call for the transfer to the Ministry of the Environment of competencies concerning energy. In the end, the transfer concerned only renewable energies but it was nevertheless to have a major impact on German policy in this domain. Before this institutional change, only one unit of five or six people was in charge of renewable energies and attached to the BMWi, itself more sympathetic to the cause of the coal and nuclear interest groups. After the reorganization of competencies, six units (with a total of over 40 persons) were in charge of these issues, and all were attached to the BMU.

New policy networks were consequently set up with the renewable energy industry or environmental organizations. From the status of "a negotiating partner among others" of the BMWi, groups such as the BEE came to have a direct relationship with the BMU.²² On the other hand, the German electricity association (VDEW), which benefits from a very close relationship with the Ministry of the Economy, claimed that it was not consulted at all during the drafting of the amendment to the EEG Act, passed in 2004, which created even more favourable conditions for certain renewable energies and notably solar energy.²³ Thus, while the adoption of the first version of the EEG Act in 2000 afforded an opportunity for the "Green-Red coalition" to meet its commitments taken in the pre-electoral agreement, and was saluted by the Green deputies (Fell 2000), these MPs took advantage of their second term in office to stabilize the turn in energy policy, and the amendment of the law was an element of this strategy. To offset their status as a junior partner within the coalition with the SPD, *Die Grünen* chose to focus their intransigence on specific themes – of which energy was perhaps the main one – by making concessions on other issues.²⁴

Reorientation of German energy policy was consequently controversial, and the ecologist party clearly played an essential part in the process. The support of the renewable energy industry and experts, and then the Greens' strategy of concentration, enabled them to propose significant reforms and to ensure their implementation. Rather than focusing on nuclear power, *Die Grünen* centred their communication on their policy of promoting renewable energies. On both issues, the policies that they launched have not been challenged since, even though they were severely criticized at the time by the Christian Democrats and some of the Social Democrats.

Conclusion

The comparison of Green parties' influence on energy policies in Germany and France confirms that the partisan variable may constitute a relevant factor of policy change. I have endeavoured to show that a qualitative approach based on the in-depth study of a "small *n*" comparison can complete quantitative studies on this subject. It enables us to better define the conditions under which this variable may contribute to policy change, as well as the way in which that takes place.

The article shows that an analysis of political parties should take into account constant interactions with other actors and with institutions. In this respect, it empirically confirms the relevance of the institutionalist assumptions regarding the

“partisan theory” (Schmidt 1996; Mulé 1997). The influence of political parties on public policy is set in an institutional framework which subjects them to constraints but also provides resources for their action. First, political institutions and especially the electoral systems not only offered a stronger parliamentary representation to *Die Grünen* than *Les Verts*, they also facilitated the emergence of a more professionalized Green party in Germany than in France. Second, even if institutions of the energy policy sector can withstand parties’ influence in both countries, the German case indicates that these institutions are not set in stone and can progressively open up to change. This has been the case for the German Ministry for the Environment that has been characterized by a process of institutional conversion when the Greens came to power.

Besides the importance of institutions, the article stressed the need for a dynamic and rational analysis of parties’ influence on public policy. The proliferation of policy actors, and the growing complexity of their interaction, calls for an analysis of the strategies that political parties can use to promote their insertion (or not) in these networks. We have seen that for a minor party like the Greens, whose legitimacy in the eyes of its partners and public opinion is acquired above all on issues pertaining to the environment and lifestyle, a strategy of concentrating on these issues enables them to more deeply influence public policy. By joining renewable energy networks, and by prioritizing energy issues in negotiations within the coalition (even when it meant sacrificing other issues), *Die Grünen* reinforced their capacity to wield more influence than did *Les Verts*. They were thus able to free themselves from institutional constraints and to steer energy policy in a new direction. In the French case, the strategy of focusing on a number of issues contributed to *Les Verts* being unable to meaningfully influence policy in the energy sector. More generally, this case study shows that, although they behave in a restrictive institutional framework, actors remain capable of taking strategic actions to meet their goals. It is therefore essential to study these strategic actions in detail, and so to assess political parties’ ability to change public policy.

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Notes

1. In France, *Europe Ecologie – Les Verts* achieved scores of 16.28 per cent (14 candidates elected) in the 2009 European elections, then 12.18 per cent in the first round of the 2010 regional elections. Despite a low score in the 2012 presidential election, Green ministers recently entered the new government. In Germany, *Die Grünen* also attained historically high scores in the 2011 municipal and regional elections. For the first time in history, a Green politician, Winfried Kretschmann, is now at the head of a regional executive, in Baden-Württemberg.
2. This article is part of broader comparative research on renewable energy policies in Europe, undertaken between 2005 and 2010 with the financial support of the ADEME (French Agency for the Environment and Energy Management). Eighty-four semi-structured interviews were conducted with actors in the renewable energy field (experts, economic and political actors, officials), not only in France and Germany but also in Denmark and Brussels. Based on the triangulation method (Peters 1999), information from interviews was cross-compared with results from data analysis (party manifestos, official reports, press articles).
3. The accident in Fukushima hardly changed these diverging paths. The Christian Democrat government led by Angela Merkel decided to accelerate the phase-out of nuclear energy and both the development of renewable energy and energy efficiency, whereas French authorities confirmed their intention to further develop the nuclear industry.
4. *Direction Générale de l’Energie et des Matières Premières* = the Department of Energy and Raw Materials within the Ministry of Industry.
5. The *Corps des Mines* consists of the state engineers educated at the *Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Mines*. As a technical elite of the French state, they wield considerable influence over the whole energy sector.
6. Interviews: CLER, Paris, 7 July 2005; Hespul, Paris, 13 July 2005; SER, Paris, 19 July 2005. The SER (*Syndicat des énergies renouvelables*) is a confederation of renewable energy firms whose main activity is to lobby government authorities. The CLER (*Comité de liaison des énergies renouvelables*) is an organization whose mission is to coordinate the actions of local authorities, small firms and non-profit organizations, and to pool experiences and exchange “good practices”.
7. Interview: *Institut national de l’énergie solaire*, Paris, 13 July 2005.
8. Interview: Cabinet of the former Minister of the Environment, Paris, 13 July 2005.
9. “Zangengeburt”, *Neue Energie*, December 2003, p. 20.
10. Greens–Socialists common policy document, 28 January 1997.
11. Interview: Socialist MP, Paris, 29 June 2005.
12. Interview: Cabinet of the former Minister of the Environment, Paris, 13 July 2005.
13. Interview: former Minister for the Environment, Paris, 13 July 2005.
14. Interview: Cabinet of the former Minister of the Environment, Paris, 13 July 2005.
15. “1997–2002: les Verts au gouvernement, bilan et perspectives”, *Ecovev*, June 2002, p. 2.
16. In Germany, the *Ressortprinzip* gives more autonomy to German ministries. This specificity both offer crucial resources for a small party and makes the portfolio allocation even more crucial and controversial.
17. Interview: Cabinet of the former Minister of the Environment, Paris, 13 July 2005.
18. On this point, even though Lionel Jospin announced the closure of this nuclear power plant, it took the minister and her cabinet over a year of struggling with the players in the nuclear industry for the decrees to be issued and the decision to be effectively implemented.
19. *Der Spiegel*, no. 45, 1998: “No one knows how we’re going to meet our energy needs in fifty or a hundred years’ time, if fossil fuels such as oil and gas are depleted. Perhaps it will then be the Greens who’ll be the first to demand the construction of new nuclear power plants. No one can dispute the fact that the production of nuclear energy does not pollute the air, unlike gas, coal and oil” (author’s translation).
20. The *Bundesrat* is the upper house of the German parliament, in which the *Länder* are represented.
21. Interview: scientific assistant of a SPD MP, Berlin, 20 June 2005.
22. Interview: BEE, Berlin, 21 June 2005.
23. Interview, VDEW, Berlin, 16 June 2005.
24. For example, they agreed to the intervention of German soldiers in Kosovo, as well as a more restrictive reform than they would have liked to the nationality code.

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