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Political parties and marine pollution policy: Exploring the case of Germany

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A B S T R A C T

Effective marine pollution policy strongly depends on actions coordinated at the international level. As a result, scholars tend to more closely examine the formulation and implementation of international agreements, while paying scant attention to policy making at the domestic level. How important is the protection of seas to domestic key actors? This study gives an overview of German parties' policy agendas with respect to marine pollution. In doing this, it analyzes manifestos for nine federal elections taking place between 1980 and 2009. The findings of the qualitative content analysis show that the combat of marine pollution has persistently formed an integrative part of German parties' policy agendas, although there is notable cross-party variation regarding the scope of attention paid to this issue. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that German parties do not limit themselves to only recognizing sea pollution as a general problem and making some vague statements about the need to enhance protection levels. On the contrary, they present concrete proposals for improving the status of German and international marine ecosystems.

Keywords:
Marine pollution policy
German parties
Election manifestos
Qualitative content analysis

1. Introduction: domestic actors and marine pollution policy

The pollution of marine ecosystems represents one of the most serious forms of environmental degradation warranting regulatory efforts by policy makers. Yet, one of the main characteristics of marine pollution is the global spreading of contaminants [1], which has stimulated the negotiation of numerous international agreements and conventions such as the Baltic Sea Action Plan [2]. In light of the transboundary character of sea pollution it comes as no surprise that most studies tend to focus on the international dimension of marine pollution policy. However, contamination problems principally arise due to domestic activities since most sources are land-based. Consequently, empirical studies could increase analytical leverage by equally addressing marine policy making at the domestic level [3]. It is thus the objective of this article to shed light on whether and how domestic actors react to the transboundary problem of sea pollution.

In so doing, the focus is on how political parties incorporate the issue of marine pollution into their election manifestos. To be sure, parties are key actors in the domestic policy-making process [4]. They are actively involved in preference formation, implying that they fulfill an important function in producing and spreading new policy 'images', which, in turn, can lead to an alteration of the regulatory status quo in favor of a more effective policy [5,6].

How much attention do parties pay to the issue of marine pollution? Has the level of attention changed over time? Are policy proposals limited to national marine ecosystems or rather of a global scope? To address these principal research questions, this study analyzes the contents of German parties' manifestos for federal elections published within a period of thirty years (1980–2009). These strategic documents provide an ideal source for learning about the importance the individual parties attach to marine pollution. The German party system represents an instructive case for at least two reasons. Firstly, located at the North Sea and the Baltic Sea, the country has an extensive marine environment that contributes significantly to its economic power [7, p. 6]. German parties are hence provided with an incentive to develop strategies that help to improve the quality of seas. Secondly, Germany has a pluralist party system with up to five principal parties, which allows for analyzing the overall variation across the individual parties concerning the priority they accord to marine pollution. Among these principal parties, there is the Alliance 90/The Greens (henceforth only: the Greens); the party has been represented in the German *Bundestag* since 1983. The existence of a successful green party turns Germany into an even more interesting case as this signals that there is public demand for environmental policy. Accordingly, it can be expected that German parties are more active in elaborating policy proposals tackling sea pollution than their counterparts in countries with a lower public awareness of environmental degradation. From this it follows that the case at hand is appropriate for gaining a first impression of the range of possible policy proposals.

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While acknowledging that the study's empirical focus is restricted, it is still useful for receiving some ideas about how much political attention parties pay to the transboundary problem of marine pollution and what kind of proposals they elaborate for getting a grip on it. There are hardly any studies that have provided a focused analysis of how parties address marine pollution. Instead, existing work describes the general importance of environmental issues to parties of a given party system [8–10]. While it is indeed reasonable to expect that parties attaching importance to environmental issues in general are also in favor of reducing marine pollution, this relationship cannot be taken for granted since empirical information impedes a systemic testing of it. Consequently, hitherto studies provide a very rough idea only about parties' perception of marine pollution. It is this research gap that the current article aims to reduce.

The next section considers some theoretical arguments on why parties should have different stances on marine pollution. Based on these considerations, theoretical expectations are formulated with respect to the degree to which the individual German parties incorporate this topic into their policy agendas. Subsequently, Section 3 outlines the methodological considerations related to the use of qualitative content analysis. Results are presented and discussed in Section 4, whereas Section 5 concludes the article and points to possible future research directions.

2. Parties' policy agendas: some theoretical considerations

Germany has a pluralist party system with two major parties, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), with her sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU), which, however, only operates in the state of Bavaria. Moreover, there are three minor parties: the Free Democratic Party (FDP), the Greens, and the Left. The parties differ regarding their positioning on a left–right scale and therewith with respect to their policy preferences. To be sure, all German parties have a complex structure and thus their positioning on an ideological scale represents a simplification. Keeping this in mind, the CDU and the FDP are considered to be located at the center-right since in comparison to the other German parties they have a more pro-market position. This implies that both generally support the market economy, limited forms of government regulation, and private property rights.

The SPD acknowledges the need for interventionist policies in order to achieve social equality and high levels of welfare state provisions, which characterizes it as a center-left party. In a similar vein, the Greens are a center-left party as they favor ecologically oriented post-materialist policies. The Left represents a specific case. It was founded as the merger of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) – the successor of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (the ruling party of the German Democratic Republic) – and the Electoral Alternative for Labor and Social Justice. The party is a post-communist leftist party with some anti-system elements in its policy profile [11, p. 65–68].

The different policy positions of parties are a result of their competition for electoral votes [12,13]. What does this imply for parties' stances on marine pollution? In fact, answering this question is rather difficult since neither theoretical nor empirical work has addressed this issue yet. Instead, empirical studies tend to concentrate on parties' general environmental policy agendas. This research perspective has shown that the environmental policy agendas differ from one party to another [8–10]. In this sense, the Greens are generally associated with the most pro-environment position. As concerns the other German parties, their environmental policy stances are more volatile, making it difficult to formulate clear-cut theoretical expectations. To start with the more straightforward cases, the center-right CDU and FDP are mostly thought to pay minor attention to environmental issues [14, p. 129–130]. Parties located at the (center) right, thus the argument, are less willing to intervene into economic activities, making them likely to accord environmental concerns a notably lower priority over economic ones [15]. Of these two, however, the FDP should have a more restricted environmental agenda since it displays the most economic liberal ideas of the parties represented in the *Bundestag* [9, p. 223]. Likewise, the Left is anticipated to have a meager environmental policy agenda. Yet, this position does not stem for its lacking acceptance of government intervention, which the Left actually strongly advocates. Instead, it results from the party's relatively narrow focus on criticizing capitalism and improving the economic well-being of the working class, even if this comes at the prize of ongoing environmental degradation [16].

The SPD represents the most challenging case for making a theoretical prediction. The party's ideological characteristics suggest that it could be both in favor and against a high environmental protection level. To be sure, the SPD is primarily interested in increasing the material wealth of the working class through ensuring employment opportunities. On balance, however, the party' openness to new topics as well as its overall acceptance of interventionist policies to correct market failures should entail an environmental policy agenda that is better developed than the ones of CDU, FDP and the Left [17]. Furthermore, in electoral systems in which new small parties such as the Greens can easily emerge, left-wing parties have been forced to absorb environmental issues to circumvent losses in their electoral outcomes [18]. As a result, the SPD's environmental policy agenda should largely correspond to the one of the Greens, although perhaps a bit more restricted in its coverage of topics.

Since this article perceives of marine pollution policy as a subfield of environmental policy, the starting point for theorizing is the expectation that there exists a link between parties' environmental policy stances and the importance they attach to the protection of seas. Accordingly, the Greens should pay the most attention to marine pollution, followed by the SPD, the CDU, and the FDP. Further, due to its relatively extreme positioning, the Left is anticipated to trail behind the other parties. Nevertheless, it must be underscored that these expectations are only indirectly informed by existing research. Principally, it is conceivable that the observations for party stances on marine pollution deviate from how parties are judged with respect to their general environmental policy positions. Hitherto research thus allows for anticipating the extent of attention German parties pay to environmental issues at the aggregate level, but the question how they incorporate strategies for combating marine pollution into their policy agendas awaits to be explored empirically.

3. Methodological clarifications

To assess the extent to which parties address marine pollution, this study employs 42 party manifestos for nine federal elections taking place between 1980 and 2009. Access to the electronic versions of the documents was provided by the political documents archive 'polidoc.net' [19]. The assumption underlying the use of election manifestos is that parties do not use words randomly but intend to send 'ideological signals' to their electorate by mentioning some words more frequently than others [20]. This also implies that there is a connection between the issues raised in an election manifesto and the actual policy actions taken once the party becomes elected into government [21]. If one is willing to accept these assumptions, election manifestos indeed offer an appropriate means for evaluating whether concerns about marine pollution are part of German parties' policy agendas.

Since this study pursues the objective of conducting a nuanced analysis of statements on sea pollution, qualitative content analysis represents the most suitable technique. With this method, the first step consists of developing coding categories through an inductive approach [22]. Here the overarching coding categories are formed by the words 'ocean', 'sea' and 'waters'. The latter signal word was chosen to minimize the risk of missing any relevant policy statement that also refers to marine resources. Statements on 'waters' were, however, only taken into consideration, if they discernibly encased seas. About 95% of all relevant statements in the manifestos containing the three signal words were coded; about 5% alluded to infrastructure projects located nearby German shores or were statements about marine energy. Since these issues are not directly related to the protection of seas, they were excluded from the analysis.

The next step was to manually scan the documents in accordance with the selection criteria while gradually deducing more precise coding categories. Subsequently, the categories were revised and reduced multiple times to give way to a scheme that is both complete and concise. This procedure was completed by a final scan of the documents in order to check the completeness of the coded data and to ensure that the requirements of reliability are fulfilled. The data derived from the manifestos were assigned to four principal categories:

- general recognition of contamination and the need to take action,
- mentioning of the requirement to combat pollution through international cooperation,
- proposition of concrete measures limited to German marine resources,
- proposition of concrete measures of a more global scope.

The resulting data allow for assessing the relevance of marine issues to the individual parties, but they do not represent interval-scale measures. This means that the distance between any two adjacent units of measurement cannot be considered to be same, which hampers a systematic comparison of the marine policy agendas in terms of relative degrees of differences between parties. Nevertheless, the data are appropriate for observing changes in the parties' stances on marine pollution over time. Moreover, by perceiving each coding category as equal in value, the data can be used to roughly rank order the parties with regard to the frequency of relevant policy statements.

4. Three decades of marine policy: the main findings

This section presents the data derived from the qualitative analysis of the contents of German parties' election manifestos. The parties' statements on marine pollution are summarized for each of the decades under scrutiny. In this way, the data are presented in a concise manner, yet without eliminating the possibility of observing changes in the frequency and nature of policy statements in the course of the observation period. Likewise, the presentation of the empirical findings is organized along the three decades.

4.1. The 1980s: calls for international cooperation

Table 1 gives an overview of how important marine issues were to the then four principal German parties, namely the FDP, the CDU, the SPD, and the Greens. In the table heading only the CDU is mentioned, but the indicated policy statements also refer to her Bavarian sister party CSU as both parties started to emit joint election manifestos in 1972. Only in 1990, the parties presented individual election manifestos [23, p. 6]. Yet, even in this exceptional case, the contents were very similar. The findings refer to the manifestos published for the elections of 1980, 1983, and 1987.

Table 1
Marine policy statements 1980s.

Categories of statements	FDP	CDU	SPD	Greens
Pollution prevention/reduction				
Water bodies	×	×	×	×
Oceans/seas	×			×
North Sea	×		×	×
Baltic Sea	×		×	×
Wadden Sea	×		×	
International action				
Unspecific remarks	×		×	×
Specific remarks (e.g. MARPOL)	×			
EC/EU action	×			
Measures of unlimited scope				
Sustainable use of seas				
Protection of marine flora and fauna				×
Creation of marine national parks and sanctuaries				
Protection of ecosystems of the deep sea				×
Ban of ocean dumping	×			×
Combat of increasing sea level	×			
Ban of fuel burning and tank washing on sea				
Combat of over-fishing/eco-certification				×
Safety standards for vessels	×			
Complete vessel disposal in harbors				
Tax for sea use				
Measures of limited scope				
Removal chemical weapons				
Ban of emissions into North Sea				×
Ban of emissions into Baltic Sea				
Ban of emissions into Wadden Sea			×	
Ban of oil drilling in Wadden Sea				
Rehabilitation North Sea ecosystem				
Rehabilitation Baltic Sea ecosystem				
Rehabilitation Wadden Sea ecosystem	×			
Total (=29)	12	1	6	10

The general expectation for all parties is that they indeed incorporate the issue of marine pollution to a certain degree into their election manifestos since in 1980 the German Advisory Council on the Environment – a consultative committee of the federal government founded in 1971 – had clearly outlined the critical state of the North Sea [24,25, p. 301]. Consequently, a responsive party would somehow tackle the issue of North Sea pollution. In spite of the scientific evidence that would suggest a relatively homogenous reaction to this problem, Table 1 shows that some parties were more willing to incorporate this issue into their manifestos than others.

The party with the most limited agenda is the CDU. In fact, the manifesto only recognizes the need to maintain and improve the quality of surface waters, without making any specific reference to marine ecosystems. Clearly more ample is the SPD's recognition of marine pollution as a policy problem. The party states its general commitment to reduce the pollution of the German seas, underlines the need for concerted action and, more specifically, proposes to ban discharges of emissions into the Wadden Sea, an ecosystem that is particularly rich in biological diversity [26]. Unsurprisingly, the Greens address sea pollution more extensively. Besides recognizing the need to reduce marine pollution and to strengthen international cooperation, the party formulates several clear-cut demands of unlimited geographic scope, i.e. the adoption of measures for protecting marine flora and fauna as well as ecosystems of the deep sea, a ban of ocean dumping, and measures for fighting the over-fishing of seas. Moreover, the party calls for a complete ban of emission discharges into the North Sea.

Although the importance the Greens attach to marine pollution is beyond doubt, they do not represent the party with the most comprehensive policy agenda. In fact, it is the economic liberal FDP that intensively underscores the need to reduce marine pollution. To this end, the party makes several detailed suggestions about international action. In its 1983 manifesto, for instance, it calls for a joint action program in order to reduce the degradation of the North Sea and the Baltic Sea as well as to prevent accidents leading to oil pollution. In addition, it proposes a conference for all countries sharing borders with the North Sea to limit contamination through land-based sources. In this context, it is important to note that the German government – in which the FDP participated – took the initiative to convene a conference on the protection of the North Sea. The First Ministerial International Conference on the Protection of the North Sea, which then took place in Bremen, Germany, in 1984, marked an important step in accelerating international cooperation to protect the North Sea [27, p. 623], [28, p. 8]. Further, the Liberals are the only party that explicitly mentions the possibility of attaining more ambitious marine policy goals through harmonization at the level of the European Community (EC) (since 1993: European Union; EU). Furthermore, the party makes statements about combating the increase of sea level, adoption of obligatory safety standards for vessels and the goods they transport, measures for re-establishing the sensitive ecosystem of the Wadden Sea, and proposes a ban of ocean dumping.

4.2. The 1990s: shifting attention to the German marine ecosystems

The marine policy statements made by the parties on the occasion of the elections in 1990, 1994, and 1998 are displayed by Table 2. In contrast to the previous decade, the party system now comprises a fifth party, i.e. the PDS, which will later become renamed into the Left. Akin to the 1980s, there are predominantly two parties (i.e. FDP and Greens) that make several proposals to limit marine degradation, whereas to the other parties this issue seems to be of lesser importance. However, the parties all have in common that their proposals now increasingly target the German marine ecosystems.

With the emergence of the PDS, it is not the CDU anymore that brings up the rear in terms of addressing marine protection. The PDS only states that the quality of surface waters must be improved, but it does not propose any precise measures. Further, there is one explicit use of the word 'oceans' in the 1990 election manifesto, but it refers to a military context and signals the party's disapproval of Germany possessing war vessels. The CDU, by contrast, now explicitly recognizes the problem of marine pollution and demands more effective international action. As concerns the SPD, the party mostly consolidates the moderate level of attention it attaches to this topic. Nevertheless, it makes two rather far-reaching statements by conveying that the ecosystems of the North Sea and the Baltic Sea should be rehabilitated.

Again, the Greens make clear that they are well aware of marine pollution. Thus, the party continues to demand a ban of ocean dumping and highlights the need to combat increasing sea level. Additionally, it calls for a better prevention of accidents through stricter safety standards for vessels. The Greens also advocate a number of measures in order to re-establish the ecosystem of the Wadden Sea. While the policy agenda of the Greens is already extensive vis-à-vis the PDS, the CDU, and the SPD, it is clearly exceeded by the importance the FDP attaches to sea protection. In addition to the general recognition of the problem and a plea for international cooperation, the party presents a considerable number of policy options of both a limited and unlimited geographic scope. The most far-reaching one must be seen in the demand for cleaning-up chemicals weapons lying at the bottom of the Baltic Sea. In fact, thousands of tons of chemical weapons were dumped into the sea following World War II, posing a serious contamination risk for more than 50 years [29]. Since the Baltic Sea mostly belonged to Eastern German territory, for a long time it was politically unfeasible to tackle the problem of chemical weapons. On the occasion of German reunification, however, the removal of toxic chemicals could be placed on the policy agenda. The location and disposal of such weapons clearly represents a very costly undertaking, which further substantiates the impression that marine pollution represents a salient issue to the FDP.

Table 2
Marine policy statements 1990s.

Categories of statements	FDP	CDU	SPD	Greens	PDS
Pollution prevention/reduction					
Water bodies	×	×	×	×	×
Oceans/seas	×	×		×	
North Sea	×	×	×	×	
Baltic Sea	×		×	×	
Wadden Sea	×			×	
International action					
Unspecific remarks	×	×			
Specific remarks (e.g. MARPOL)	×				
EC/EU action	×				
Measures of unlimited scope					
Sustainable use of seas					
Protection of marine flora and fauna					
Creation of marine national parks and sanctuaries					
Protection of ecosystems of the deep sea					
Ban of ocean dumping	×			×	
Combat of increasing sea level	×			×	
Ban of fuel burning and tank washing on sea	×				
Combat of over-fishing / eco-certification	×				
Safety standards for vessels				×	
Complete vessel disposal in harbors	×				
Tax for sea use					
Measures of limited scope					
Removal chemical weapons	×				
Ban of emissions into North Sea					
Ban of emissions into Baltic Sea					
Ban of emissions into Wadden Sea					
Ban of oil drilling in Wadden Sea	×				
Rehabilitation North Sea ecosystem	×		×		
Rehabilitation Baltic Sea ecosystem	×		×		
Rehabilitation Wadden Sea ecosystem	×			×	
Total (=37)	18	4	5	9	1

4.3. The 2000s: towards more global policy proposals

The parties' statements made on the occasion of the elections that took place in 2002, 2005, and 2009, are exhibited in Table 3. Yet, there is one important observation, which is not reflected by the table. The manifestos for 2002 and 2005 hardly incorporated the topic of marine pollution. Instead, the parties' predominant concerns were about climate change [30]. It was only with the 2009 elections that marine pollution regained momentum. This observation represents a strong contrast to the prior decades, in which no such clear temporal concentration of marine policy proposals was observed.

The findings show that the FDP and the Greens continue to make the highest number of referrals to actions for improving the state of seas. The main difference is that now the Greens are slightly more specific about the proposed measures than the FDP. Another persistent element is the lacking attention the Left

Table 3
Marine policy statements 2000s.

Categories of statements	FDP	CDU	SPD	Greens	Left
Pollution prevention/reduction					
Water bodies	×	×	×	×	
Oceans/seas	×	×		×	×
North Sea	×			×	
Baltic Sea	×			×	
Wadden Sea		×			
International action					
Unspecific remarks	×			×	
Specific remarks (e.g. MARPOL)					
EC/EU action	×	×		×	
Measures of unlimited scope					
Sustainable use of seas	×	×			
Protection of marine flora and fauna	×	×			
Creation of marine national parks and sanctuaries	×		×	×	×
Protection of ecosystems of the deep sea					
Ban of ocean dumping				×	
Combat of increasing sea level				×	
Ban of fuel burning and tank washing on sea					
Combat of over-fishing / eco-certification	×			×	
Safety standards for vessels				×	
Complete vessel disposal in harbors					
Tax for sea use				×	
Measures of limited scope					
Removal chemical weapons					
Ban of emissions into North Sea				×	
Ban of emissions into Baltic Sea				×	
Ban of emissions into Wadden Sea					
Ban of oil drilling in Wadden Sea					
Rehabilitation North Sea ecosystem	×				
Rehabilitation Baltic Sea ecosystem	×				
Rehabilitation Wadden Sea ecosystem		×			
Total (=37)	12	7	2	14	2

dedicates to marine pollution. However, this time the party does not only acknowledge marine pollution as a political problem but also suggests the creation of marine national parks. To be sure, there is an astonishing degree of convergence amongst the parties with regard to this particular demand. Only the CDU refrains from proposing marine sanctuaries. Another important observation is that the parties make a broader referral to the EU, asking for supranational marine policy coordination and the development of effective regulation and management strategies.

Another major change refers to the CDU and its now more extensive marine policy agenda. The party demands the application of the sustainability principle with respect to the use of seas, which also implies support of activities for protecting marine flora and fauna. In this context, the 2009 election manifesto advocates a complete ban of whaling. That said, on 9 June 2010 the *Bundestag* factions of CDU and CSU took the lead in a cross-factional petition to renew the government's repudiation of commercial whaling [31], which shows that statements made in manifestos can indeed be policy-consequential. By contrast, the marine policy agenda of the SPD became more modest, making merely reference to the problem of water pollution and demanding the creation of marine sanctuaries.

4.4. Discussion

All in all, the empirical findings point to four elucidating observations. Firstly, the precision of the parties' statements on marine pollution is remarkable. Given the transboundary character of this topic, the initial expectation was to find some general remarks about the need to reduce marine pollution and to stimulate international action for achieving this goal. Instead, the parties elaborated several specific proposals of a varying geographic reach, which address multiple aspects of marine pollution.

This leads straight to the second observation that, on balance, the policy suggestions are of a rather global scope. This becomes particularly apparent in the documents for the 1980s, which only include three proposals of a national scope. Then in the 1990s, proposals of a global reach and those targeting regional pollution were about the same in terms of their number. The strengthened regional focus can be explained by the German reunification and the need to take remedial action for removing the environmental degradation caused by the socialist government of the German Democratic Republic. This is epitomized by suggestions to clean-up chemical weapons present in German seas and statements on rehabilitating the Baltic Sea's ecosystem. Then in the 2000s, the scope of the proposed measures became notably more global again. Additionally, the parties more often expressed the need to harmonize marine pollution policy at the EU level.

Thirdly, the findings show that German parties vary concerning the extent of their marine policy agendas. In this regard, the low priority of marine issues for the CDU and the Left is in line with the theoretical expectations. Likewise, the numerous policy proposals put forward by the Greens was anticipated. However, the dense marine policy agenda of the FDP and the relatively low priority the SPD accords to sea pollution are surprising. To be sure, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s the FDP had the most comprehensive marine policy agenda. Only in the 2000s, the Greens seem to pay slightly more attention to the protection of marine ecosystems. One tentative explanation relates to the party's policy portfolio [32]. In fact, from 1969 until 1998 the FDP controlled the foreign ministry in German coalition governments, so that the Liberals possibly paid enhanced attention to marine pollution as they perceived of it as a crucial dimension of foreign policy. Put in this way, the high degree of precision regarding the party proposals for concerted action would become entirely plausible. As regards the SPD, the ambiguities encountered in theorizing how traditional left-wing parties perceive of environmental issues have also materialized with respect to marine pollution policy. On the whole, the party could not come up with a consistent approach toward improving the state of seas.

The final observation refers to the variety of measures proposed over time. The tables show that parties modified the importance they attached to individual pollution problems and policy proposals. In addition to this cross-temporal variation within the parties, there is also variation across them, which only becomes a bit reduced in the 2000s as four of the five parties support the creation of marine national parks. Furthermore, there are some overlaps in the measures proposed by the FDP and the Greens concerning prohibition of ocean dumping, combat of increasing sea level, re-establishment of the ecosystems of the Wadden Sea through the creation of protection areas, and introduction of an eco-certificate for the fishing industry. By and large, however, the number of coding categories displayed by the tables indicates that there are differences in the ways German parties' seek to reduce marine pollution.

5. Concluding observations

This article aimed to learn more about whether German political parties recognize the need to limit marine pollution and what measures they propose to attain this goal. To this end, it examined 42 election manifestos of the major political parties and summarized the main characteristics of their statements on marine pollution for a period of thirty years (1980–2009). The empirical findings suggest that German parties have constantly acknowledged that marine ecosystems need to be protected. Regarding the degree of

attention paid to marine issues there is considerable variation across the individual parties. Generally, the lowest degree of attention has been demonstrated by the Left, followed by the CDU and the SPD. By contrast, the FDP and the Greens turned out to possess the most comprehensive marine policy agendas. While the FDP addressed marine pollution more often during the 1980s and 1990s, the Greens got ahead of the Liberals in the 2000s. The overall salience of marine issues increased in the 1990s and then stagnated at a relatively high level. As concerns the geographic reach of policy proposals, the findings show that measures of a specific regional scope were mostly present during the 1990s, which coincides with the process of German reunification and the need to clean-up contaminated marine sites located in the territory that previously belonged to the German Democratic Republic. Apart from that, the parties largely presented policy proposals of a more global scope.

Despite of its descriptive character, this study contributes to the state of research in two important ways. Firstly, it showed that domestic political actors indeed elaborate policy options for reducing marine pollution, even though it is a predominantly transboundary problem. Accordingly, future work should more explicitly address the rationale of domestic actors and help to develop a theoretical explanation for the observations outlined here. Secondly, the study produced a more fine-grained account of German parties' policy preferences. To present, empirical analyses have mostly calculated the overall salience of environmental issues for the individual parties of a given party system without taking into consideration that environmental policy covers a wide range of issues. While such a high degree of aggregation might indeed facilitate cross-country comparison, it is of limited use for assessing whether parties' attention varies from one environmental subfield to another. Therefore, a seminal avenue for further research might be to disaggregate parties' environmental policy positions in order to learn about the salience of marine pollution vis-à-vis other issues.

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Glossary

Election manifesto: This is a party publication promoting the party in question and its policies in order to secure votes in an election;
Left–right scale: The left–right scale is a common way of classifying parties along a one-dimensional political spectrum. Generally, left-wing parties are associated with a preference for regulatory policies, while right-wing parties prefer deregulatory policies;
Marine national park or sanctuary: This is a protected water surface with the objective of sheltering marine flora and fauna;
Policy agenda: A policy agenda is a set of issues laid out by political actors with the aim to addressing them through the promulgation of legislation;
Preference: A preference is a value that defines an individual choice for someone or something.