



The Winter of Democracy

Partitocracy in Belgium



*Edited by Pierre Baudewyns, Marleen Brans,
Min Reuchamps, Benoît Rihoux, Virginie Van Ingelgom*

PUL PRESSES
UNIVERSITAIRES
DE LOUVAIN

The Winter of Democracy

The Winter of Democracy

Partitocracy in Belgium

Edited by
Pierre Baudewyns
Marleen Brans
Min Reuchamps
Benoît Rihoux
Virginie Van Ingelgom

PUL PRESSES
UNIVERSITAIRES
■ DE LOUVAIN



© Presses universitaires de Louvain, 2022
Registration of copyright: D/2022/9964/24
ISBN: 978-2-39061-246-9
ISBN PDF version: 978-2-39061-247-6
Printed in Belgium by CIACO scl – printer number 103810

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, adapted or translated, in any form or by any means, in any country, without the prior permission of Presses universitaires de Louvain
Graphic design: Marie-Hélène Grégoire

Distribution: www.i6doc.com, on-line university publishers
Available on order from bookshops or at
Diffusion universitaire CIACO (University Distributors)
Grand-Rue, 2/14
1348 Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium
Tel: +32 10 47 33 78
Fax: +32 10 45 73 50
duc@ciaco.com

Distributor in France:
Librairie Wallonie-Bruxelles
46 rue Quincampoix
75004 Paris, France
Tel: +33 1 42 71 58 03
Fax: +33 1 42 71 58 09
librairie.wb@orange.fr

Preface

After 35 years of dedicated service at the Université catholique de Louvain (that has meanwhile become UCLouvain), and after almost five decades of a rich research career that was initiated at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (now KU Leuven) and that also spanned across numerous projects and networks all around Europe, Lieven De Winter has now achieved the well deserved *emeritus professor* status. We could not let him go without a special treat. Because our dear colleague is always looking at things in detail with a high level of expectation, we dared to ask him what he would most like.

He said: a book. But not a typical *liber amicorum*, he wanted a *real* book. He knew exactly what he wanted: a scientific book in English on the concept of *particratie/partitocracy* that truly fascinates him, probably because it characterizes two countries that marked his life, professionally and personally: Belgium and Italy.

Not only did Lieven De Winter have a strong idea of the format but also and above all he had a clear idea of its content. All the chapters should contain some profiling of Belgium in comparative perspective, or typologies and measurements. He drafted himself the line-up of chapters and picked the names of the contributors for each of them.

Here we are. The book that you have in your hands is a gift to Lieven De Winter and a gift of Lieven De Winter to the political science community. We would like to thank very much all the contributors, those who explicitly appear in the book as well as those who all through Lieven De Winter's career contributed and collaborated with him.

This book has also become reality thanks to the editing work of Emilie Hamoir, Anna Maria Gkopi and Luis Pereira Cardoso, with the support of the Presses universitaires de Louvain. It has received funding from the Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique – FNRS, the Institute of Political Science Louvain-Europe (ISPOLE), the Centre de Science Politique et de Politique Comparée (CESPOL), as well as the School of Political and Social Sciences (PSAD) at the Université catholique de Louvain (UCLouvain), all places that have long lastingly been marked by the works and the personality of Lieven De Winter.

Pierre Baudewyns
Marleen Brans
Min Reuchamps
Benoît Rihoux
Virginie Van Ingelgom

Short biography of Lieven De Winter

Lieven De Winter enjoyed his primary and secondary education at the Sint-Michielscollege at Brasschaat (1960-1972) and became exchange student of Youth For Understanding in Warren, Michigan the following year. He studied Political Science and Economics at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (1973-1978), and wrote his master thesis on ‘De partijpolitiserings als instrument van de participatie. Een overzicht van de ontwikkeling sinds de Tweede Wereldoorlog’. He was ‘aspirant’ of the NFWO (1980-1984) and researcher at the European University Institute, San Domenico di Fiesole (1984-1987), where he defended his PhD on ‘The Belgian Legislator’ (promotor Ian Budge). In december 1987, André-Paul Frogner repatriated him to start a career at the Faculty of Economic, Social and Political Sciences (ESPO) of the Université catholique de Louvain, where he became a senior professor in 2007. He jointly initiated and then directed the Centre de Politique Comparée (CPC) that has become the Centre de Science Politique et de Politique Comparée (CESPOL). He was co-director of the Belgian Election Studies 2003 to 2014, and directed the Belgian Candidate Studies from 2007 until 2019.

His research interests include coalition formation, party and cabinet government, parliament, political parties and elites, multi-level governance, territorial identities, patronage and electoral behaviour. In many of these fields, he has also been participating in comparative projects that triggered a large number of chapters in comparative volumes. In total, he published more than 200 articles and chapters, still counting... They led to more than 5300 citations. His most cited work was written with Huri Türsan, his spouse (*Regionalist parties in Western Europe*, Routledge, 1998).

Lieven participated in numerous comparative research projects, amongst others Jean Blondel’s projects on “Cabinet Government” (1988-1996); “Peace-Com: Peace Processes in Community Conflicts” (2004-2007), co-directed with Elise Féron; “CIVGOV: Organised Civil Society and European Governance”, directed by Carlo Ruzza; “INTUNE: Integrated and United? A Quest for Citizenship in an ‘Ever Closer Europe’” (2005-2009), directed by Maurizio Cotta; “Representative democracy in Europe’s regions” (2003-2006), under his direction; “Government formation process in Belgium” (1994-2020), directed by Wolfgang C. Müller, Kaare Strøm and Torbjorn Bergman; “Regionalist Parties in Europe”, co-directed with Huri Türsan, Peter Lynch and Marga Gomez-Reino; “Government Formation: a theoretically informed inductive approach” co-directed with Rudy Andeweg; “European Elections and the Political Representation in Europe”, directed by Hermann Schmitt and Jacques Thomassen;

“European Parliaments and Public Choice” (1991-1995), directed by Prof. H. Döring; “Comparative Candidate Study” (2007-2019), directed by Hermann Schmitt; financial auditor of the *COST Action* “The True European Voter: A Strategy For Analysing the Prospects of European Electoral Democracy” (2009-2013), directed by Hermann Schmitt.

He (co-)edited more than a dozen books, often the product of intense international cooperation: *Parliamentary candidates between voters and parties* (with R. Karlsen & H. Schmitt, Routledge, 2021); *Candidates, Parties and Voters in the Belgian Partitocracy* (with A. Vandeleene & P. Baudewyns, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); *Puzzles of Government Formation. Coalition theory and deviant cases* (with R. Andeweg and P. Dumont, Routledge, 2011); *The Politics of Belgium* (with M. Brans & W. Swenden, Routledge, 2009); *Elections: le reflux? Comportements et attitudes lors des élections en Belgique* (with A-P. Frogner & P. Baudewyns, De Boeck, 2007); *Autonomist parties in Europe: identity politics and the revival of the territorial cleavage (Vol. I & Vol. II, with M. Gomez & P. Lynch, Institut de Ciènces Politiques i Socials, ICPS, 2006)*; *Mise à l’agenda politique en Belgique (1991-2000). Le dialogue difficile entre l’opinion publique, les médias et le système politique* (with S. Walgrave, Academia Press, 2005); *Liberalism and Liberal Parties in the European Union* (with J. Marcet, ICPS, 2000); *Regionalist parties in Western Europe* (with H. Türsan, Routledge, 1998); *Non-state-wide parties in Europe* (ICPS, 1994); *Los Partidos Socialistas en Europa* (with E. Maravall, et al., ICPS, 1994); *Christian Democracy in Europe* (with M. Caciagli, A. Mintzel, J. Culla & A. De Brouwer, ICPS, 1992); *Socialist Parties in Europe* (with E. Maravall, et al., ICPS, 1992).

His contributions to comparative books were published by a.o. Oxford University Press, Routledge, Palgrave Macmillan, Sage, St. Martin’s Press, Manchester University Press, University of Michigan Press, Frank Cass, Pinter, Presses de Sciences Po, L’Harmattan, Armand Colin, Economica, Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, Braumueller, Leske + Budrich, Academia Bruylant, VUBPress, Editions de l’Université de Bruxelles, Universitaire Pers Leuven, Acco, De Boeck, Standaard Uitgeverij, Presses universitaires de Louvain.

In terms of journal articles, he published in *American Behavioral Scientist*, *Electoral Studies*, *Revue Internationale de Politique Comparée*, *European Journal of Political Research*, *European Journal of Political Research Political Data Yearbook*, *ECPR-News*, *Regional and Federal Studies*, *Journal of Legislative Studies*, *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, *Party Politics*, *European Political Science Review*, *Evaluation*, *Cuadernos Manuel Giménez Abad*, *Les Cahiers du CRAPS*, *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, *Res Publica*, *Tijdschrift voor Federalisme en Democratie*, *Namens: Tijdschrift over Vertegenwoordiging en Democratisch Bestuur*, *West European Politics*, *Politique et Sociétés*, *Government and Opposition*. For many of these he regularly served as referee.

He was in charge of the Erasmus programme of his department for several years. He (co-)directed a Socrates Intensive Programme on the ‘Territorial Political Identities and Citizenship in Europe’ (2003-2010). In 1994 he became also part-time lecturer at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven Campus Brussel. He was visiting professor at the Università di Trento, Science Po at Lille, Bergen University, Maastricht University and Universiteit Antwerpen. He taught (mainly in French and English, but also in Dutch and Italian) a panoply of courses (often as co-titulaire): Political and Administrative System of Belgium, Political Culture, Comparative Politics, Comparative Methodology, Contemporary Political Regimes, Comparative Public Policy Analysis, Comparative Regionalism and Federalism, Political and Electoral Engineering, Policy Analysis and Development, Analysis of Public Organisations, Research strategies in Political Science, Democratic Innovations and Transformations, Institutions and Policies of West-European Countries, International Organisations, History of Post-war International Relations, Crises and Mutations of the State, Applied Sociology, Research Proposal, Lobbying and Regulatory Affairs Management in the EU.

Lieven De Winter served as external evaluator of various EU research projects. Above all, Prof. De Winter was promoter or committee member of about two dozen of doctorates in both French-speaking and Dutch-speaking Belgian universities but also abroad. The language of these doctoral dissertations was as diverse as Castilian, Catalan, Dutch, English, French and Italian. Lieven De Winter’s – former – PhD students have collaborated with him in writing many research papers and several of them have contributed to the present volume: *The Winter of Democracy: Partitocracy in Belgium*.

List of contributors

Alban Versailles is a post-doctoral researcher at the Institut de sciences politiques Louvain-Europe (ISPOLE) of UCLouvain. His main research interests are political communication, public opinion and European integration. He is a former student of Lieven De Winter, who was the president of his PhD jury in August 2021.

André-Paul Frogner is emeritus professor at the Université catholique de Louvain (UCLouvain) where he was the director of the Unit of political science and public affairs, the predecessor of the School of Political and Social Sciences (PSAD). He actively organized the recruitment of Lieven De Winter and for several decades they have been very active research partners publishing many papers based notably on data collected via the PIOP, le *Point d'appui Interuniversitaire sur l'Opinion publique et la Politique*.

Arthur Meert is a PhD researcher at the KU Leuven Public Governance Institute. His research interests are ministerial cabinets and ministerial advisers in the Napoleonic administrative tradition. Arthur specifically studies ministerial cabinet reforms attempts, as well as career patterns of advisers. Arthur met Lieven De Winter through his PhD supervisor, Marleen Brans.

Audrey Vandeleene is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of political sciences of Ghent University and lecturer at the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB). Her research interests cover party politics, intra-party democracy, political representation and political metaphors. Lieven De Winter supervised her PhD dissertation on candidate selection and since then they enthusiastically share an interest in electoral candidates. They coordinated the Belgian Candidate Survey and co-authored numerous publications. But what they most like to do together is sharing a good meal with a glass (or two) of wine, and then an espresso for Lieven and a cappuccino for Audrey.

Benjamin Biard holds a PhD in political science and is a researcher at the Center for Socio-Political Research and Information (CRISP) as well as a guest lecturer at UCLouvain and UNamur. His main research interests focus on populism, right-ring extremism, Belgian political parties and democracy. For several years, Benjamin has been a colleague of Lieven De Winter at ISPOLE where he earned his PhD.

Benôit Rihoux is full professor in political science at UCLouvain and former director of the Centre de Science Politique et de Politique Comparée (CESPOL). He plays a lead role in the development and diffusion of comparative methods, in particular Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA). He is engaged in diverse disciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research projects involving mixed- and multimethod designs. He coordinates COMPASSS, the global network around

QCA-related methods (<https://compasss.org/>), and is joint Academic Coordinator of the Methods Excellence Network (<https://www.methodsnet.org/>), a global and pluralist network of social science methods experts. He was persuaded by Lieven De Winter to join the PIOP team back in 1991, under the leadership of André-Paul Frogner, their common mentor and accomplice. He took over Lieven's teaching assistant position back in 1993 and has collaborated with him on multiple projects and publications over more than 30 years.

Bram Wauters is professor of political science at Ghent University, where he leads the research group GASPAR. His research interest are elections, political parties, party members, leadership selection, and political representation. Lieven De Winter's work has been a source of inspiration for many years, and it was an honor and a pleasure to collaborate with him for a chapter on candidate selection processes on the occasion of the 2012 local elections.

Britt Vande Walle is PhD researcher at the KU Leuven Public Governance Institute, funded by a FWO fellowship 'Fundamental Research'. Her research focuses on comparative politics, political parties, and political party think tanks.

Christian de Visscher is emeritus professor in political science at UCLouvain. His research interests are in public sector management in Belgium and in Western Europe. For more than 15 years, he has taught the course "Political and Administrative System of Belgium" together with Lieven De Winter, André-Paul Frogner and Benoît Rihoux.

Christoph Niessen is post-doctoral researcher in political science at UCLouvain and the European University Institute. His research interests cover multi-level governance and deliberative citizen participation. Christoph met Lieven De Winter for the first time in 2013 as his student. Later, Lieven supervised his traineeship on the Belgian Candidate Survey – sharing both the burdens of manual survey assembling and the pleasure of Italian wine to forget about it. Lieven and Christoph have collaborated on different occasions, notably on the comparative assessment of different measurements of (sub-)national identity.

Dave Sinardet is a professor of political science at the Free University of Brussels (VUB), as well as at the Université Saint-Louis Bruxelles. His research interests are federalism, nationalism and ethno-territorial identities, subjects on which he has collaborated and confabulated regularly with Lieven De Winter. It all started with Lieven's membership of his PhD committee and was later pursued in the form of papers, articles and chapters. Dave and Lieven also share what can be characterised as a fluid linguistic identity, as well as an interest in exquisite fluids made from fermented grapes, especially if they come from Italy.

David Aubin holds a PhD in political science and has been a colleague of Lieven De Winter at UCLouvain since 2006. He teaches policy analysis and leads a policy evaluation training programme for civil servants. David is also a former student of Lieven who taught him the basics of comparison which he still uses today in his

collaborative research projects on policy advice, sustainability policies, and collaborative networks. As Lieven does, David maintains strong ties with KU Leuven and is very proud of Lieven's contribution on the Parliament in the edited book *Policy Analysis in Belgium* (Policy Press, 2017).

Ellen Fobé holds degrees from the KU Leuven in Political Science, and in Public Management and Policy. She holds a postdoctoral position at the KU Leuven Public Governance Institute. Her research deals with evidence-informed policy-making and policy advice by actors within and outside government. She also has expertise on policy instruments and behavioural public policy. Her PhD (KU Leuven 2020) dealt with the policy analytical capacity of in-house policy workers in Belgium. For the book *Policy Analysis in Belgium*, in which Ellen co-authored several chapters, as well as for her PhD, she co-designed and implemented a large N-survey on the policy work of civil servants. It is on her statistical analysis of the survey results that part of the chapter on the politicization of public administration in the book celebrating Lieven De Winter's career is based.

Frédéric Varone is full professor in political science at the University of Geneva. His research interests include comparative public policy, public sector reforms, interest groups and political elites. For seven years (1999-2005), Frédéric has been a colleague of Lieven De Winter at the Université catholique de Louvain and he has shared with him an interest in Belgian and comparative politics. Beyond purely scientific exchanges, Lieven and Frédéric had repeated opportunities to "experiment" Belgian beers and Swiss cheeses and wines, and to discuss for hours who are the best chocolates' producers.

Giulia Sandri is an Associate Professor at the European School of Political and Social Sciences (ESPOL) of the Université catholique de Lille. Her main research interests are digital politics, territorial politics and political behaviour. For two years, Giulia had been a colleague of Lieven De Winter at the Université catholique de Louvain and shares with him an interest in territorial and Italian politics, especially in front of a Duvel in a sunny terrasse. Giulia was Lieven's PhD student on regional democracy and thanks to this collaboration, they wrote a chapter on Patterns of Regional Democracy together with Régis Dandoy in 2018. She still hopes one day they will manage to publish their paper on "Lijphart goes regional" that languishes in a drawer since 2010.

Jean-Benoit Pilet is professor of political science at Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB). His research interest are elections, political parties, electoral systems (and especially preferential voting systems), leadership selection, democratic innovations and technocracy. During his master degree at UCLouvain, Lieven De Winter was the supervisor of his final dissertation (on Tony Blair's New Labour). This MA dissertation was clearly his first step into academic research, and was what gave him the desire to start a PhD in political science.

Jérémy Dodeigne is an associate professor in political science at the University of Namur (UNamur), at the Research institute Transitions. He holds a PhD in social and political science from the Université catholique de Louvain (UCLouvain) and the Université de Liège (ULiège). He has been visiting researcher at the University of Oxford, University of Edinburgh, the Universitat Pompeu Fabra and the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. His research areas cover the study of political representation in multilevel systems, political elites' recruitment and behaviour, comparative politics and mixed methods research designs. Jérémy met Lieven De Winter in 2012 as a member of his thesis committee and have been active members of CESPOL. He has learnt from him that curiosity and ethical integrity are requirements that extend beyond the realm of academia: they are as important for good food and great wine.

Karolin Soontjens is a post-doctoral researcher at the Department of political science of the University of Antwerp. Her research interests cover political communication, public opinion, and in particular political representation. During her PhD, she studied how politicians perceive public opinion and to what extent electoral incentives instigate elite responsiveness to the public. Most of her work relies on surveys and interviews with political elites in Belgium, an interest that she shares with Lieven De Winter.

Marleen Brans (educated at KU Leuven, Hull University, European University Institute), is Professor at the KU Leuven Public Governance Institute, and guest lecturer at UCLouvain. She is the co-founding Vice-President and current Treasurer of the International Public Policy Association (IPPA). Her research interests are the production and consumption of policy advice by various actors in policy advisory systems. She met Lieven De Winter 30 years ago, when she sought his advice on her first ever conference paper. He subsequently coached her on her PhD journey to the European University Institute in Firenze. She quickly became friends with *Livio l'Inverno* and his lovely wife Huri, and shares with them a passion for politics and Mediterranean food. Lieven and herself have co-authored several publications, and with Wilfried Swenden they co-edited the special issue of *West European Politics* and subsequent Routledge book *The politics of Belgium: Institutions and policy under bipolar and centrifugal federalism*.

Maximilien Cogels was Lieven De Winter's last PhD candidate before retiring and, thanks to his excellent mentorship, he holds a PhD in political sciences from UCLouvain. At CESPOL, his research focussed on political parties, candidates, and the theory of representation.

Mihail Chiru is a Lecturer in Politics at the University of Oxford. His main research interests are legislative behavior and party politics. For two years, Mihail has been a colleague of Lieven De Winter at UCLouvain and shares with him an interest in candidate surveys, parliamentary tools of cabinet oversight and Mediterranean food. Lieven was Mihail's promotor for his postdoctoral research project at UCLouvain and thanks to this collaboration they have published together an article on the oversight

of cabinet coalitions in Belgium in *Government and Opposition* as well as two book chapters on candidate selection (together with Audrey Vandeleene) and representation foci (together with Chloé Janssen).

Min Reuchamps is professor of political science at UCLouvain where he leads a research team around democratic innovations and multi-level politics. While Lieven De Winter has never hidden – some – skepticism towards democratic innovations, they share a passion to explore old and new political dynamics through the eyes of the actors, more specifically in Belgian politics, always in inter-university and bi-community collective endeavors. In this wake, Min is currently the co-editor-in-chief of the journal *Politics of the Low Countries* which is the successor of *Res Publica* where Lieven published his *benjamin* – first – article back in 1978 and many more since then. Lieven and Min have also taught several courses together, generally to the good and happy memory of the students. Above all, they have not only been sparring partners in researching and teaching political science but also in tennis.

Patrick Dumont is professor at the School of Politics and International Relations of The Australian National University in Canberra. He is also guest professor at the University of Luxembourg, chair of IPSA's Research Committee on Elites (RC02), and co-editor of the Routledge Research on Social and Political Elites book series. His relationship with Lieven De Winter dates back to the early to mid-1990s, when the latter was successively his lecturer, Erasmus coordinator and 'licence' thesis supervisor. Lieven would then become highly influential in his career, recruiting him for a comparative project on coalition governments which led Patrick to study Luxembourg's political system in addition to Belgium. After eight years at Lieven's office, *Doge* and *Cambridge* table neighbour in Louvain-la-Neuve, securing a fruitful, close and entertaining working relationship, Patrick took a position in... Luxembourg and a decade later his current one further away. Distance did not put an end to their coauthorship/editorship of articles, books and chapters: with (currently) 50 pieces in 25 years, they are most probably each other's most frequent collaborator. From the midnight sun in Umea to Lieven's visit to Patrick at the University of California, Irvine (where the Brasschaat Hells Angels member rented a rare 2-wheeled Ford Mustang), through countless epic travels to meetings and conferences around Europe, or from a Rainbow to a Vivaldi coalition, there was never a dull moment in a friendship of over a quarter of century.

Peter Van Aelst is professor in political communication at the University of Antwerp. He works on the role of old and new media in politics. He is a big fan of Lieven De Winter's work on Belgian parties and candidates, and has enjoyed his company at conferences, workshops and less formal events.

Pierre Baudewyns is professor in political science at UCLouvain. His research and teaching focus on the political behaviour of mass and elites as well as on the methodology of opinion surveys. He is particularly interested in the determinants of voting and abstention as well as in the determinants explaining the conduct of

electoral campaigns by candidates. He has published in various French and English language journals as well as general works on his different research topics. Pierre was hired in the PIOP team back in 1997, under the leadership of André-Paul Frogner and Lieven De Winter. Since then, he has extensively worked with Lieven De Winter on numerous research projects and teaching activities.

Pierre Squevin is a postdoctoral fellow at the Department of Political Science (Institutt for Statsvitenskap), University of Oslo (UiO). He holds a PhD from UCLouvain. His research interests include policy advice, ministerial advisers and ministerial offices, policy learning, and the career patterns of bureaucratic elites and ministerial advisers. For a little more than four years, he has been a colleague of Lieven de Winter in Louvain-la-Neuve and shares with him an interest in characterizing the extent of the party politicization phenomenon pervading through (Belgian) public administration and in the dysfunctions it may engender.

Pierre-Étienne Vandamme is an F.R.S.-FNRS postdoctoral researcher in political theory at Cevipol of the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB). His current research project questions the desirability and viability of a democracy without political parties. Although he did his PhD at UCLouvain and shares Lieven De Winter's interest in parties and Italian cuisine, he very much regrets having had no opportunity to collaborate with him directly.

Sophie Devillers has been a researcher in political science for a couple of years at UNamur and UCLouvain. Former student of Lieven De Winter, they have written together papers on ethno-territorial identities and in particular comparing voters and candidates, two of Lieven's *marottes*.

Stefaan Walgrave is professor of political science at the University of Antwerp. His research focuses on media, movements and representation. Still being a PhD student, he met Lieven De Winter in 1991 at his first conference in Spa. He shares with Lieven an interest in political elites. In fact, Stefaan's main research program consists of surveying and interviewing politicians, something Lieven already pioneered in his PhD.

Stefano Camatarri is FSR Incoming Postdoctoral Fellow at ISPOLE of UCLouvain. He received his PhD from the Network for the Advancement of Social and Political Studies, University of Milan, in 2017. His research interests broadly concern the study of electoral behaviour, migrant political participation and party competition. He has been a colleague of Lieven De Winter since 2018 and shares with him a special interest in the study of political candidates, especially as part of book projects developed within the framework of the Belgian Candidates Survey (BCS) and Comparative Candidates Survey (CCS) research groups.

Vincent Jacquet is a postdoctoral researcher in political science at the University of Namur. His research interests are participatory and deliberative procedures, political engagement, public policy and local politics. Vincent has been a colleague of Lieven

De Winter at CESPOL of UCLouvain for eight years and is still inspired by his usual question in seminars: “AND SO WHAT?”.

Virginie Van Ingelgom is an F.R.S.-FNRS Research Associate at ISPOLE of UCLouvain and current director of CESPOL. Her main research interests are multi-level legitimacy, citizens’ attitudes and reactions to European integration and policy feedbacks. For now more than 10 years, Virginie has been a colleague of Lieven De Winter after being his student. She shares with him an interest in multilevel legitimacy, her friendship with André-Paul Frogner and her strong commitment to meet at the ‘Cantine’ regularly.

Wouter Wolfs is lecturer at the KU Leuven Public Governance Institute and post-doctoral researcher with the Research Foundation Flanders. He has intensively collaborated with Lieven De Winter on partitocracy and the institutional position of the Belgian parliaments.

List of contributions

Introduction

A short journey into Lieven De Winter's long bibliography
Audrey Vandeleene, Min Reuchamps 21

Chapter 1. Partitocracy

Anatomy and pathologies
Lieven De Winter 37

Chapter 2. The decline of the Belgian Parliament

Wouter Wolfs, Britt Vande Walle 77

Chapter 3. Candidate selection and leadership selection in Belgium

Despite intraparty reforms, still prisoners of partitocracy?
Jean-Benoit Pilet, Audrey Vandeleene, Bram Wauters 97

Chapter 4. Coalition formation in Belgium

From exceptional complexity to regime breakdown?
Lieven De Winter, Patrick Dumont 121

Chapter 5. The end of the party politicisation of public administration

A fata morgana?
Marleen Brans, David Aubin, Christian de Visscher,
Ellen Fobé, Arthur Meert, Pierre Squevin 137

Chapter 6. Partitocracy and intra-party ideological agreement

Belgium compared internationally
Stefaan Walgrave, Karolin Soontjens, Frédéric Varone 165

Chapter 7. Partitocracy and the future of Belgium

Revisiting Does Belgium (still) exist?

Christoph Niessen, Pierre Baudewyns, Stefano Camatarri,
Jérémy Dodeigne, André-Paul Frogner, Min Reuchamps,
Dave Sinardet

183

Chapter 8. Mediatization and partitocracy

Opposite poles or partners in crime?

Peter Van Aelst, Maximilien Cogels

201

Chapter 9. The Awakening of the Sleeping Beauty?

Belgian Partitocracy and European Integration

Mihail Chiru, Giulia Sandri, Virginie Van Ingelgom,
Alban Versailles

223

Chapter 10. Direct and deliberative democracy as potential remedies for partitocracy in Belgium

Sophie Devillers, Benjamin Biard, Pierre-Étienne Vandamme,
Vincent Jacquet, Min Reuchamps

251

Conclusion

Lessons learned about partitocracy, from Antwerpen to Zakynthos

Benoît Rihoux

273

Introduction

A short journey into Lieven De Winter's long bibliography

Audrey Vandeleene
Min Reuchamps

Lieven De Winter's bibliography is long, very long. It is in fact the mere illustration of the tremendous bulk of his academic works, throughout a rich scientific career. In order to grasp the diversity of his intellectual contribution to the field of political science and beyond, we have organized this short journey into Lieven De Winter's long bibliography around four levels that lay the foundations for the chapters of this book. We first look at his contribution to the understanding of *citizens*, that is public opinion, and in particular their ethno-territorial identities, a sub-field where we can find at least one quarter of Lieven De Winter's publications. His interest was not only on what he often, albeit never pejoratively, refers to the masses but also on the elites, and in particular the *candidates*, those who aspire and sometimes become the political elites. They act and interact within political *parties*, and this is our third level. One type of parties has specifically attracted the attention of Lieven De Winter: regionalist parties. This attention turned into a definition that remains the seminal definition of regionalist parties in the literature. Our fourth and last level, *parliaments* and *governments*, is overarching; it is where all first three levels end up and meet up: citizens elect candidates selected by political parties, that are also in charge of cabinet ministers' nomination. No surprise that Lieven De Winter's doctoral thesis, some 40 years ago, was on the Members of Parliament in Belgium.

It is in (t)his country that partitocracy has perhaps reached its highest level of elaboration, with complex interactions between citizens, candidates and elected representatives, parties as well as parliaments and governments. Lieven De Winter has significantly contributed to the study of these four levels that are the cornerstones of the object at the core of this book: partitocracy. In itself, partitocracy can be simply defined as a political regime (a course that Lieven De Winter has taught for several decades) where power is – by far and large – in the hands of parties. But the first chapter of this book shows the multifaceted complexity and originality of this concept. This first chapter had to be authored by Lieven De Winter himself.

1. Citizens: Their ethno-territorial identities and institutional preferences

For a scholar who grew up in Flanders, studied in Italy, worked most of his life in Wallonia and resided in Brussels, studying citizens and in particular their identities should come as no surprise. For decades, Lieven De Winter with his mentor, André-Paul Frogner, have sought to measure ethno-territorial identities via the surveys conducted by the PIOP, *Pôle Interuniversitaire Opinion publique et Politique*, in collaboration with the ISPO, *Instituut voor Sociaal en Politiek Opinieonderzoek*. In fact, the first attempt to measure ethno-territorial identities dates back to 1975 via the survey carried out by the interuniversity consortium AGLOP-GLOPO, followed by the Régioscope surveys in the 1980s and then the ISPO-PIOP from 1991 until 2014, and more recently PartiRep and RepRepresent. In all these surveys, the most frequent and consistently used method to measure identities in Belgium has been through the so-called *hierarchical question*, asking respondents to which of a list of given identities they feel most closely related in the first and in the second place. The most recent writing is: “To which cultural or geographical entity do you feel you belong to in the first and the second place?” with as possible answer categories Europe, Belgium, The French Community of Belgium, The Flemish Region or Community, The German-speaking Community, The Walloon Region, The Region of Brussels-Capital, Your province, Your town or commune.

Survey after survey, Lieven De Winter has probably become, at the turn of the century, the most knowledgeable scholar in Belgium of ethno-territorial identities, their measurement and their evolution (De Winter, 1998b, 2002; De Winter & Frogner, 1999, 2001). In 2007, he wrote an assessment of the first 25 years of research on ethno-territorial identities (De Winter, 2007a, 2007b). His conclusion was quite clear and still remains true today: Walloons feel more Belgian than Flemings, but many Flemings have a stronger Belgian identity than a Flemish one. This question of complementarity of identities (in contrast to the exclusive nature of the hierarchical question) led him and the ISPO-PIOP team to introduce the so-called Linz-Moreno question in the voter survey of 1995 and onwards. It offers five possible responses: only X, more X than Y, as X as Y, more Y than X, only Y, to the question “Which of the following propositions match the most your vision of yourself?”. For Flemish and Walloon respondents, the propositions are the following:

- I feel only Flemish/Walloon;
- I feel more Flemish/Walloon than Belgian;
- I feel as Flemish/Walloon as Belgian;
- I feel more Belgian than Flemish/Walloon;
- I feel only Belgian.

Lieven De Winter was the first researcher to explore the dynamics behind this question in Belgium (De Winter, 1998b). This survey question has the main advantage that it allows respondents to put their regional and national identity at the same level (whereas the hierarchical question forces to choose between different identities). But its main disadvantage is that it reduces the ethno-territorial identification to those two levels, while these may not necessarily be the most important ones for all respondents. Yet, Lieven De Winter's analysis showed that on average about 4 respondents to the hierarchical question in 5 do choose either the regional or the national identification as their first choice in Belgium. The comparability and consistency of identity questions continued to spark his attention, leading to a peak in the 2014 PartiRep voter survey in which no fewer than three identity questions were asked to the same respondents: the hierarchical question, the Linz-Moreno question and a metric scale where respondents were asked to score their degree of identification with Belgium, with Flanders, with Brussels, with Wallonia and with the French Community on a unidimensional scale running from 0 (no identification at all) to (10 complete identification).

With this rich set of empirical data, Lieven De Winter has led a team investigation revealing that a (large) majority of respondents gives answers on the three identity questions that are consistent with the presumed internal hierarchy thesis of national vs regional identities. The answers from respondents seem to be somewhat "structured" by an underlying internal hierarchy of identities, and do not seem to be just the result of random choices or coding mistakes (Deschouwer, De Winter, Dodeigne, Reuchamps, & Sinardet, 2015; Sinardet, De Winter, Niessen, Dodeigne, & Reuchamps, 2020). Thus, Lieven De Winter's intuition about some form of internal hierarchy has been confirmed. What's more, he has always refused to essentialize identities and hence has looked at them as dependent variables but also as independent variables. In this perspective, his quest to understand ethno-territorialities was also a quest to understand their relationship with citizens's institutional preferences.

In a country that has experienced six state reforms during his academic life, such dynamics are obviously food for thought for an empirical political scientist such as Lieven De Winter. Relying again on the voter surveys, he has closely followed citizens' opinions on institutional preferences and their relationship with their ethno-territorial identities. With André-Paul Frogner, looking at data between 1970 and 2007, they show that the evolution in four decades is surprising in that the gradual establishment of the new substate institutions does not lead people to become less Belgian and more Flemish or Walloon/Bruxellois. In all three regions, the "Belgian" position comes out on top and in proportions that do not differ much per region (Frogner & De Winter, 2013). Lieven De Winter has continued to follow the relationship between institutional preferences and identities of citizens, bringing into the picture their vote choice (Deschouwer, De Winter, Reuchamps, Sinardet, & Dodeigne, 2015a, 2015b), their inter-regional contacts (Reuchamps, De Winter, Dodeigne, Sinardet, & Thijssen, 2020; Thijssen, Reuchamps, De Winter, Dodeigne, & Sinardet, 2021) as well as a

comparison between voters and candidates (Devillers, Baudewyns, De Winter, & Reuchamps, 2019). The general conclusion is that overall vote choice is not strongly related to identities and institutional preferences, except when they are more salient – which is not often the case.

This interest to understand what is behind voting behaviour in an institutional perspective dates back to Lieven De Winter's very first article: "Officiële en reële omvang van het absenteïsme bij de na-oorlogse parlementsverkiezingen" (that can be translated into something like: "Official and real contours of absenteeism in post-war parliamentary elections") published in what could be considered the Belgian political science review, *Res Publica* (De Winter, 1978). From the very beginning of his scientific enterprise, one can observe his clairvoyance to look at both the demand and the supply side of politics.

2. Candidates: Parties' agents and their secret garden

As parangons of the supply side of politics, electoral candidates have caught Lieven De Winter's interest in his early – scholar – years. In the 1980s already he studied how candidates are selected by their party, going as back in time as in 1958 thanks to media and party statutes data (De Winter, 1980). He also scrutinized in-depth the selection processes for the 1985 parliamentary elections (De Winter & Ceuleers, 1986). After about a two decades-break, he got a revived interest in the topic and investigated candidates chiefly based on survey data among candidates or party selectors, for the 2007 federal elections (De Winter & Baudewyns, 2015), but also the 2012 local elections (De Winter et al., 2013) and from different angles the 2007, 2010 and 2014 elections (De Winter et al., 2019; Devillers et al., 2019; Vandeleene et al., 2019, 2017). But Lieven De Winter's curiosity for candidates extended beyond Belgium's borders as he initiated for instance a joint publication on a comparative study of candidates at general elections held between 2005 and 2013 in 13 countries, entitled *Parliamentary Candidates Between Voters and Parties. A Comparative Perspective* (De Winter et al., 2021).

Why studying candidates in the first place? Candidates are the human face of their party and investigating them allows disentangling political parties beyond their unitary actor image (De Winter et al., 2021). These political figures are central in the representation process, acting as direct intermediary between citizens-voters, parties, parliaments and governments – hereby creating multiple intricate relationships worth researching, adding nuances and complexity to the study of representation as a mere party-voter affair. In that, candidates might be considered as the central piece of the four-layered journey we are doing into Lieven De Winter's bibliography.

A central research question on Lieven De Winter's agenda is the extent of the party grip on candidates, in particular in campaign times. How much do candidates stand out vis-à-vis their party? District magnitude, party magnitude, electoral safety,

seniority in terms of party offices but also chiefly party type influence how much Belgian candidates run personalized campaigns (De Winter & Baudewyns, 2015). The kinds of campaign instruments candidates use or if they can rely on a personal campaign team is likely to depend on their insider, resp. outsider, status in their party (De Winter et al., 2019). But next to the campaign focus, how much do candidates actually resemble their party's voters? As already mentioned, Lieven De Winter investigated candidates and voters' divergent ethno-territorial identities and institutional preferences over time (Devillers et al., 2019). His research also tackled whether the profile and institutional preferences of candidates differed depending on the list they were running on (regional or federal) (Vandeleene et al., 2016).

But what has formed the core of Lieven De Winter's interest for candidates is how they are selected: the evolutions of candidate selection processes, their determinants and consequences. Candidate selection is a critical *ex ante* mechanism that can potentially help parties as principals hold control on their agents – the candidates. Despite the direct impact of candidate selection on the composition of legislative assemblies – especially in the Belgian electoral system, it has remained one of political parties' best kept secret that Lieven has during decades tried to uncover (starting from De Winter, 1980).

Given the secrecy of this core party activity, a first challenge is simply to find out how parties make this selection. Who makes the choices? How is the power distributed within the party (which organs and which party levels)? To what extent do parties rely on formal procedures and how do they deviate from their (own) rules? He has numerously outlined that one best explores candidate selection taking informal practices into account, out of risk of missing out an important part of this realm (De Winter & Ceuleers, 1986; De Winter et al., 2013).

The importance of informal practices is best exemplified through the analysis of the democratisation processes of candidate selection. Political parties' headquarters in the Belgian context have at all times hold a considerable grip on candidate selection, what lead Lieven De Winter to describe their decision-making systems oligarchic rather than democratic (De Winter, 1988), and this despite varying levels of grassroots' involvement throughout the years. Members' involvement in candidate selection decisions follows roughly a U-curve, with inclusiveness in candidate selection processes in the late 1950s, much less in the late 1970s and again democratisation by the turn of the millennium (De Winter, 1980; Put, 2015). Yet this was not the case in all parties and most often rather described as window-dressing given the enduring influence of party elites on these critical choices (Vandeleene et al., 2017). The rise of new parties next to the mainstream parties could have impacted candidate selection methods but Audrey Vandeleene and Lieven De Winter show that “changes were more likely to occur among newer parties than among older parties” (2018, p. 61), following the former's growth towards stable professional structures. Yet at the local level, post-pillarization parties tend to rely on other kinds of selection methods than

the mainstream party families, letting a greater room for manoeuvre to the candidates themselves (De Winter et al., 2013).

Selection methods differ across parties, time and contexts (but not so much within parties when we compare regional and federal selection procedures (Vandeleene et al., 2016)), and Lieven De Winter has wondered what causes these differences, and which effects these have. Party ideology and party membership size influence how candidate selection is organized: we find more exclusiveness in rightist and in larger parties (Chiru et al., 2020). His research also pointed to differences following the candidate's likelihood of being elected: decisions are more centrally taken for would-be MPs (Chiru et al., 2020). In terms of consequences, exclusive selectorates tend to select candidates ideologically closer to the party voters (Vandeleene et al., 2017). The perceived selection method also influences whose interests candidates claim to represent and how they represent them (Janssen et al., 2019).

Digging in various places of the so-called secret garden of politics (Gallagher & Marsh, 1988) has let Lieven De Winter reveal several of the electoral candidates' secrets, but he has still left many for the generations after him to discover.

3. Parties: From traditional to regionalist party families

Candidates do not stand alone. In fact, their candidacy is fully grounded in a given political party. Lieven De Winter's original scientific interest in candidates and parliamentarians has logically spanned up in studying political parties. In the 1990s, he co-edited several books investigating political parties and their families with the support of the *Institut de Ciències Politiques i Socials* in Barcelona created in 1988 by *Diputació de Barcelona* and the *Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona*. This agenda of research and publications on political parties started with a book on *Christian Democracy in Europe* (Caciagli, De Winter, Mintzel, Culla, & De Brouwer, 1992). The same year, with José María Maravall, Gabriel Colomé, Antonio Missiroli, Patrick Seyd, Einar Berntzen, Michalis Spourdakalis and Wolfgang Merkel, they edited the book *Socialist Parties in Europe* (Maravall et al., 1992) and then in Castillan *Los Partidos Socialistas in Europe* two years later. The liberal parties also got their book, *Liberalism and Liberal Parties in the European Union* (De Winter & Marcet, 2000).

But the focus of Lieven De Winter was not only on traditional parties but also and above all on non-state wide parties and more specifically on regionalist parties. Lieven De Winter has had a decisive role in this research agenda. With the political parties' specialist, Daniel-Louis Seiler, they edited the book *Non-state wide parties in Europe* (De Winter & Seiler, 1994) again in the series on political parties of the Institut de Ciències Politiques i Socials. It was followed by two volumes on *Autonomist parties in Europe: identity politics and the revival of the territorial cleavage* (De Winter, Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro, & Lynch, 2006). These were the stepping stone to what will soon become the reference book, published with his spouse, Huri Türsan, *Regionalist*

parties in Western Europe (De Winter & Türsan, 1998). Today, it is the most cited work of his bibliography (500+ times) and a must-read book for any scholar interested in this field.

In the concluding chapter of this book (cited on its own over 250 times), Lieven De Winter reminds us that he prefers the label of “ethno-regionalist parties” as it puts the emphasis on the intersection between ethnicity and regionalism. Indeed, “the defining characteristic of ethno-regionalist parties’ programmes is undoubtedly their demand for political reorganisation of the existing national power structure, for some kind of ‘self-government’” (De Winter, 1998a, p. 204). Because of this distinguishing feature, these parties form a family on their own, allowing both comparative work and case studies, which is a twofold research method praised by Lieven De Winter.

In this perspective, his country, Belgium, has always provided him a fertile and almost infinite ground of investigation. This is perhaps best exemplified in a workshop held in Brussels in December 2005, followed in a special issue in *West European Politics* in 2006 and then published in a book by Routledge (Swenden, Brans, & De Winter, 2009), under the straightforward title *The Politics of Belgium*, with a more explicit sub-title *Institutions and policy under bipolar and centrifugal federalism*. In this work, one can find Lieven De Winter’s touch in the attention given on the intricate interplay between the institutional components and the multiple actors of the Belgian political system. His paper with Marc Swyngedouw and Patrick Dumont, *Party system(s) and electoral behaviour in Belgium: From stability to balkanisation*, digs into the complex intertwining between all actors of the multilayered Belgian polity (De Winter, Swyngedouw, & Dumont, 2006).

His research led him to even dare to ask the question of the survival of Belgium. With Pierre Baudewyns, they wrote *Towards the Breakdown of a Nation-State in the Heart of Europe?* (De Winter & Baudewyns, 2009). They predicted a “lighter but fitter Belgium” which was confirmed by the sixth state reform that is likely not to be the last reform. Because of his tremendous knowledge of Belgian politics – which he year after year shares in the Political Data yearbook of the *European Journal of Political Research* for which he has for long been particularly in charge of recounting the main (communautaire) issues in Belgian politics of the past year (e.g. Rihoux et al., 2015) –, Lieven De Winter cannot do wrong. It also related to how smartly he articulates the analysis of the (inter)actions of citizens, candidates and parties. But on top of these actors, he has always kept a look at the institutions, be them the parliament or the government, because he is so much interested in the interplay between all these units of analysis.

4. Parliaments and governments: On the uneven power distribution between MPs, ministers and their parties

The study of Members of Parliaments (MPs) is at the core of the early scholarly interest of Lieven De Winter. In his doctoral dissertation – *The Belgian legislator*, defended at the *European University Institute* in Florence in 1992, he highlighted that the general dissatisfaction with democracy in our societies likely translates into a disaffection with the parliamentary elite in particular, despite the fact that MPs have in the Belgian context, and beyond, very little influence on the political decision-making process. Surprisingly maybe, legislators have long since carried this bad reputation of absenteeism and lack of initiative on the one hand and well paid mandates accumulation and large benefits on the other. Lieven De Winter has scrutinised the quality and behaviour of those politicians and has come to the conclusion that MPs do not operate in a vacuum. Their acts are deeply constrained by the institutions in which they operate (De Winter, 1992). He blames in the first place the extreme partitocratic practices which he points to have undermined the political legitimacy of the (Belgian) system (De Winter & Dumont, 2006). Yet he also recognizes that the concentration of power in the hands of party leaders originates in the necessity to guarantee a minimal level of cohesion in the multilevel structure of the country. Decision-making processes' centralisation in parties ensures some kind of stability but comes with the side-effect of disempowering various other political actors, among which MPs, but also ministers. Lieven De Winter's interest for the (dis)functioning of both the legislative and the executive branch goes hand in hand with a concerned interest for partitocratic regimes.

Most of Lieven De Winter's publications on parliaments and governments examine the Belgian case, but his comparativist nature translates in some insightful comparative works, mostly on Western cases (e.g. Andeweg et al., 2008; Wolfs & De Winter, 2017). His first major study within the framework of his PhD allowed him to interview face-to-face no fewer than 155 Members of the Belgian Parliament, back in the 1980s, and to rely on answers to a written questionnaire of almost all of them (De Winter, 1992). Much more recently, he also benefitted from insights from in-depth interviews on policy analysis in the parliamentary setting (De Winter & Wolfs, 2017). While some publications rely on his deep case knowledge, some others are informed by survey data among political elites (Ackaert et al., 2013, 2008; De Winter, 1993), nicely completing the multimethod picture of his bibliography.

The behaviour of MPs is best analysed not only within the parliamentary arena, but also outside the parliaments where MPs could actually enjoy much more freedom than in their initial role as backbencher (De Winter, 1992). De Winter repeatedly emphasized that individual legislators do not have ample influence possibilities (De Winter & Dumont, 2006; Wolfs & De Winter, 2017), and mostly have to rely on their extra parliamentary party organisation to provide them resources to carry out their

duties such as government control, law-making or debates in plenary and committee meetings (De Winter & Wolfs, 2017). But once out of parliament, MPs appear to be busy, for instance back in their constituency, and are able to strengthen their power by combining other roles next to their parliamentary office (e.g. local office but also leadership positions within their party organisation). Yet Lieven De Winter warns for generalisations as the average MP does obviously not exist, as one will give more or less priority to the intra or the extra parliamentary work, chiefly depending on her own career pattern and the associated resources she could benefit from thanks to the positions held (De Winter, 1997).

Lieven De Winter subscribes to the thesis that parliaments are in decline, and points to the overwhelming role of political parties (De Winter & Dumont, 2003) that succeed in disciplining their representatives who can as a consequence hardly perform one of their key tasks, that has attracted also most of Lieven De Winter's attention, that is government control. Parliaments are not given the tools to properly scrutinize the policy process, dominated by the executive branch. The relation between the government and the parliament has given rise to several studies, for instance on the role of the parliamentary opposition (Andeweg et al., 2008) and on variations in MPs' behaviour depending on the government status of their party (De Winter, 1992).

The executive power as such has also kept Lieven De Winter intrigued. He has researched, most often with Patrick Dumont or Johan Ackaert, many aspects of the study of governments, from coalition bargaining and government formation (also at the local level (Ackaert et al., 2013, 2008)), to government or individual cabinet minister resignation (Dumont et al., 2001), with of course a focus on the maintaining of coalition governments (Dumont & De Winter, 1999). The Belgian scene proves fascinating to examine governments, with one of the most complex government formation processes due to a deeply fragmented and multidimensional party system on top of formal constraints. Who will share the power, what are the different coalition options, and why parties decide to govern together are questions Lieven De Winter tackled on many occasions (Ackaert et al., 2013; De Winter & Dumont, 2005). The stage of coalition bargaining is also crucial given the importance during the term of the coalition agreement, the bible of the government determining the boundaries of what ministers will be entitled to do, and actually negotiated mainly by party leaders at the time of government formation (De Winter & Dumont, 2021).

Through his works on parliaments and governments, and on the individuals behind these institutions, Lieven De Winter has once again been able to spotlight how powerful political parties are in partitocratic regimes. From MPs who exercise their influence rather outside than inside the parliamentary arena to cabinet ministers having to remain within what their party presidents have agreed upon before the executive has been installed, it becomes clear that the real locus of power in a regime like the Belgian one situates within the party arena.

5. The book: A multifaceted exploration of partitocracy in Belgium

All this scholarly work of Lieven De Winter feeds the chapters of this book. It opens, as we already announced, with a dense Lieven-like chapter (de)constructing the concept of partitocracy by Lieven De Winter himself. The second chapter, by Wouter Wolfs and Britt Vande Walle, raises the question of the decline of the Belgian Parliament, the topic of Lieven De Winter's PhD. Jean-Benoit Pilet, Audrey Vandeleene and Bram Wauters continue the journey by looking at candidate selection and leadership selection in a context of sometimes schizophrenic moves between intraparty democracy and partitocracy. The fourth chapter is a reproduction of a chapter Lieven De Winter and Patrick Dumont have written on coalition formation in Belgium and published in a book whose title has appealed to Lieven De Winter from the start: *Belgian Exceptionalism: Belgian Politics between Realism and Surrealism*.

A KU Leuven-UCLouvain team had to reflect upon the end of the party politicisation of public administration. It is done in chapter 5 by Marleen Brans, David Aubin, Christian de Visscher, Ellen Fobé, Arthur Meert and Pierre Squevin. Another team made of comparativists, Stefaan Walgrave, Karolin Soontjens and Frédéric Varone, tackles the issue of partitocracy and intra-party ideological agreement in the sixth chapter. In the wake of Lieven De Winter's work, the seventh chapter raises the question of the future of Belgium. His old and new partners have joined for this chapter: Christoph Niessen, Pierre Baudewyns, Stefano Camatarri, Jérémy Dodeigne, André-Paul Frogner, Min Reuchamps and Dave Sinardet.

The last three chapters cover questions that have always fascinated Lieven De Winter, sometimes with some prudent distance. Peter Van Aelst and Maximilien Cogels join forces to study mediatization and partitocracy, asking whether they are opposite poles or partners in crime. The Europeanist team made of Mihail Chiru, Giulia Sandri, Virginie Van Ingelgom and Alban Versailles dare to awake a sleeping beauty by putting Belgian partitocracy in the perspective of European integration. So-called democratic innovations have not – yet – convinced Lieven De Winter, but he requested a chapter on direct and deliberative democracy. Sophie Devillers, Benjamin Biard, Pierre-Étienne Vandamme, Vincent Jacquet and Min Reuchamps explore if such democratic innovations can be potential remedies for partitocracy in Belgium.

Benoît Rihoux wraps up the book in a Lieven-style approach of opening many doors and windows. One never gets bored when reading a piece by Lieven De Winter and the conclusion of this book had to be written in such a spirit that brings the reader from Antwerpen to Zakynthos. More specifically, *11 lessons learned* are drawn from the contributions of this book and these lessons will for sure have a lasting impact on the political science, just like Lieven De Winter himself.

Regular or sporadic co-authors, old students, teaching partners, colleagues, many political scientists played their parts to co-create this edited volume, relying on the

thematics they best master among those that have formed most of the scholarly interests of Lieven De Winter in the course of his long career. Obviously, this book has not been able to cover all – political science – subjects of interest of Lieven De Winter who is tirelessly curious about partitocratic practices, and much more.

References

- Ackaert, J., De Winter, L., Dumont, P., & Hennau, S. (2013). Met man en macht. Over mensen, macht en beleid bij lokale coalitievorming. In K. Deschouwer, T. Verthé, & B. Rihoux (Eds.), *Op zoek naar de kiezers. Lokale Partijafdelingen en de gemeenteraadsverkiezingen van oktober 2012* (pp. 147-164). Brussels: ASP.
- Ackaert, J., Dumont, P., & De Winter, L. (2008). Hoe oude vormen en gedachten overleven: lokale coalitievorming. In J. Buelens, B. Rihoux, & K. Deschouwer (Eds.), *Tussen kiezer en hoofdkwartier. De lokale partijafdelingen en de gemeenteraadsverkiezingen van 2006* (pp. 111-138). Brussels: VUB Press.
- Andeweg, R. B., De Winter, L., & Müller, W. C. (2008). Parliamentary opposition in post-consociational democracies: Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands. *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 14(1-2), 77–112. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13572330801921034>
- Caciagli, M., De Winter, L., Mintzel, A., Culla, J., & De Brouwer, A. (Eds.). (1992). *Christian Democracy in Europe*. Barcelona: Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials.
- Chiru, M., De Winter, L., & Vandeleene, A. (2020). Candidate selection. Still a secret garden? In L. De Winter, R. Karlsen, & H. Schmitt (Eds.), *Parliamentary Candidates Between Voters and Parties. A Comparative Perspective* (pp. 54-77). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429284700>
- De Winter, L. (1978). Officiële en reële omvang van het absentisme bij de naoorlogse parlementsverkiezingen. *Res Publica*, 20(4), 685-692.
- De Winter, L. (1980). Twintig jaar polls, of de teloorgang van een vorm van interne partijdemocratie. *Res Publica*, 32, 563-585.
- De Winter, L. (1988). Belgium: democracy or oligarchy. In M. Gallagher & M. Marsh (Eds.), *Candidate Selection in Comparative Perspective* (pp. 20-46). London: Sage.
- De Winter, L. (1992). *The Belgian Legislator*. European University Institute.
- De Winter, L. (1993). The Links between Cabinets and Parties and Cabinet Decision-Making. In J. Blondel & F. Müller-Rommel (Eds.), *Governing Together* (pp. 153-176). London: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-22936-9_7
- De Winter, L. (1997). Intra- and Extra-Parliamentary Role Attitudes and Behaviour of Belgian MPs. *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 3(1), 128-154. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13572339708420503>

- De Winter, L. (1998a). Conclusion. A comparative analysis of the electoral, office and policy success of ethnoregionalist parties. In L. De Winter & H. Türsan (Eds.), *Regionalist parties in Western Europe* (pp. 204-247). London and New York: Routledge.
- De Winter, L. (1998b). Etno-territoriale identiteiten in Vlaanderen: verkenningen in een politiek en methodologisch mijneveld. In M. Swyngedouw, J. Billiet, A. Carton, & R. Beerten (Eds.), *De (on)redelijke kiezer. Onderzoek naar de politieke opvattingen van Vlamingen. Verkiezingen van 21 mei 1995* (pp. 159-180). Leuven & Amersfoort: Acco.
- De Winter, L. (2002). De ondraaglijke lichtheid van het Belg- of Vlaming-zijn: het enigma van etno-territoriale identiteiten in Vlaanderen'. In M. Swyngedouw & J. Billiet (Eds.), *De kiezer heeft zijn redenen. 13 juni 1999 en de politieke opvattingen van Vlamingen* (pp. 215-232). Leuven: Acco.
- De Winter, L. (2007a). La recherche sur les identités ethno-territoriales en Belgique. *Revue Internationale de Politique Comparée*, 144(4), 575-595.
- De Winter, L. (2007b). Les identités territoriales : 25 ans d'évolution. In A.-P. Frogner, L. De Winter, & P. Baudewyns (Eds.), *Élections : le reflux ? Comportements et attitudes lors des élections en Belgique* (pp. 141-156). Bruxelles: De Boeck.
- De Winter, L., & Baudewyns, P. (2009). Belgium: Towards the Breakdown of a Nation-State in the Heart of Europe? *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 15(3), 280-304.
- De Winter, L., & Baudewyns, P. (2015). Candidate centred campaigning in a party centred context: The case of Belgium. *Electoral Studies*, 39, 295-305. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2014.04.006>
- De Winter, L., Baudewyns, P., & Cogels, M. (2019). The Puzzle of Personalisation of Politics: Evidence from Candidate Campaigns in Belgium 2007–2014. In A. Vandeleene, L. De Winter, & P. Baudewyns (Eds.), *Candidates, Parties and Voters in the Belgian Partitocracy* (pp. 131-160). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96460-7_5
- De Winter, L., & Ceuleers, J. (1986). De samenstelling van de kandidaten-lijsten in de Vlaamse partijen. *Res Publica*, 28(2), 197-212.
- De Winter, L., & Dumont, P. (2003). Belgium: Delegation and Accountability under partitocratic rule. In K. Strøm, W. Müller, & T. Bergman (Eds.), *Delegation and Accountability in Parliamentary Democracies* (pp. 253-281). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- De Winter, L., & Dumont, P. (2005). Coalition Formation. In R. S. Katz & W. J. Crotty (Eds.), *Handbook of Party Politics* (pp. 175-188). Sage.

- De Winter, L., & Dumont, P. (2006). Do Belgian parties undermine the democratic chain of delegation? *West European Politics*, 29(5), 957-976. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402380600968844>
- De Winter, L., & Dumont, P. (2021). Coalition formation in Belgium: From exceptional complexity to regime breakdown? In D. Caluwaerts & M. Reuchamps (Eds.), *Belgian Exceptionalism. Belgian politics between realism and surrealism*. London: Routledge.
- De Winter, L., Erzeel, S., Vandeleene, A., & Wauters, B. (2013). Nationale bemoeienis of lokale autonomie? Het lijstvormingsproces bij gemeenteraadsverkiezingen. In K. Deschouwer, T. Verthé, & B. Rihoux (Eds.), *Op zoek naar de kiezers: lokale partijafdelingen en de gemeenteraadsverkiezingen van Oktober 2012* (pp. 93-122). Brussels: ASP.
- De Winter, L., & Frogner, A.-P. (1999). Les identités ethno-territoriales des Wallons: explorations dans un champ de mines politique et méthodologique. In A.-P. Frogner & A.-M. Aish (Eds.), *Des élections en trompe-l'oeil. Enquête sur le comportement électoral des Wallons et des Francophones* (pp. 67-96). Bruxelles: De Boeck Université.
- De Winter, L., & Frogner, A.-P. (2001). Réalités et paradoxes des identités en Belgique. In A. Leton (Ed.), *La Belgique : un état fédéral en évolution* (pp. 251-278). Bruxelles & Paris: Bruylant & L.G.D.J.
- De Winter, L., Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro, M., & Lynch, P. (Eds.). (2006). *Autonomist Parties in Europe: Identity politics and the revival of the territorial cleavage*. Barcelona: Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials.
- De Winter, L., Karlsen, R., & Schmitt, H. (2021). *Parliamentary Candidates Between Voters and Parties. A Comparative Perspective*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429284700>
- De Winter, L., & Marcet, J. (Eds.). (2000). *Liberalism and liberal parties in the European Union*. Barcelona: Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials.
- De Winter, L., & Seiler, D.-L. (Eds.). (1994). *Non-state wide parties in Europe*. Barcelona: Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials.
- De Winter, L., Swyngedouw, M., & Dumont, P. (2006). Party system(s) and electoral behaviour in Belgium: From stability to balkanisation. *West European Politics*, 29(5), 933-956.
- De Winter, L., & Türsan, H. (Eds.). (1998). *Regionalist Parties in Western Europe*. London: Routledge.
- De Winter, L., & Wolfs, W. (2017). Policy analysis in the Belgian legislatures: The marginal role of a structurally weak parliament in a partitocracy with no scientific and political tradition of policy analysis. In M. Brans & D. Aubin (Eds.), *Policy analysis in Belgium*. Bristol: Policy Press.

- Deschouwer, K., De Winter, L., Dodeigne, J., Reuchamps, M., & Sinardet, D. (2015). *Measuring (sub)national identities in surveys: Some lessons from Belgium*. Paper presented at the conference BELGIUM: THE STATE OF THE FEDERATION, Liège.
- Deschouwer, K., De Winter, L., Reuchamps, M., Sinardet, D., & Dodeigne, J. (2015a). Communautaire overtuigingen en stemgedrag. In K. Deschouwer, P. Delwit, M. Hooghe, P. Baudewyns, & S. Walgrave (Eds.), *De kiezer ontcijferd: Over stemgedrag en stemmotivaties* (pp. 151-167). Leuven: Lannoo Campus.
- Deschouwer, K., De Winter, L., Reuchamps, M., Sinardet, D., & Dodeigne, J. (2015b). Les attitudes communautaires et le vote. In K. Deschouwer, P. Delwit, M. Hooghe, P. Baudewyns, & S. Walgrave (Eds.), *Décrypter l'électeur : Le comportement électoral et les motivations de vote* (pp. 156-173). Louvain: Lannoo Campus.
- Devillers, S., Baudewyns, P., De Winter, L., & Reuchamps, M. (2019). Who Do You Feel and What Future Do You Want for Belgium? A Comparison of Candidates and Voters' Identities and Institutional Preferences. In A. Vandeleene, L. De Winter, & P. Baudewyns (Eds.), *Candidates, Parties and Voters in the Belgian Partitocracy* (pp. 245-272). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dumont, P., & De Winter, L. (1999). La formation et le maintien des gouvernements (1946-1999). *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, 39(1664), 1-59. <https://doi.org/10.3917/cris.1664.0001>
- Dumont, P., De Winter, L., & Dandoy, R. (2001). Démissions gouvernementales et performances électorales des majorités sortantes (1946-1999). *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, 17(1722), 5-51. <https://doi.org/10.3917/cris.1722.0005>
- Frogner, A.-P., & De Winter, L. (2013). Les Belges et le fédéralisme. Les leçons des enquêtes de 1970 à 2007. In R. Dandoy, G. Matagne, & C. Van Wynsberghe (Eds.), *Le fédéralisme belge. Enjeux institutionnels, acteurs socio-politiques et opinions publiques* (pp. 205-226). Bruxelles: Academia Bruylant.
- Gallagher, M., & Marsh, M. (1988). *Candidate selection in comparative perspective: The secret garden of politics*. London: Sage.
- Janssen, C., Chiru, M., & De Winter, L. (2019). Between Parties and Voters: Candidates' Role Conception in the Belgian Partitocracy. In A. Vandeleene, L. De Winter, & P. Baudewyns (Eds.), *Candidates, Parties and Voters in the Belgian Partitocracy* (pp. 313-339). Cham: Routledge.
- Maravall, J. M., Colomé, G., Missiroli, A., Seyd, P., Berntzen, E., De Winter, L.,... Merkel, W. (Eds.). (1992). *Socialist Parties in Europe*. Barcelona: Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials.
- Put, G.-J. (2015). *All politics is local: The geographical dimension of candidate selection. The case of Belgium (1987-2010)*. KULeuven.

- Reuchamps, M., De Winter, L., Dodeigne, J., Sinardet, D., & Thijssen, P. (2020). Comportement électoral, identité, autonomie, solidarité et contact interrégional. In J.-B. Pilet, P. Baudewyns, K. Deschouwer, A. Kern, & J. Lefevere (Eds.), *Les Belges haussent leur voix : Une analyse des comportements électoraux du 26 mai 2019* (pp. 197-213). Louvain-la-Neuve: Presses universitaires de Louvain.
- Rihoux, B., Vandeleene, A., De Winter, L., Baudewyns, P., & Deruette, S. (2015). Belgium. *European Journal of Political Research Political Data Yearbook*, 54, 33-43.
- Sinardet, D., De Winter, L., Niessen, C., Dodeigne, J., & Reuchamps, M. (2020). *Measuring (sub)national identities in surveys: Some - new - lessons from Belgium*. Paper presented at the virtual conference BELGIUM: THE STATE OF THE FEDERATION.
- Swenden, W., Brans, M., & De Winter, L. (Eds.). (2009). *The politics of Belgium: Institutions and policy under bipolar and centrifugal federalism*. London: Routledge.
- Thijssen, P., Reuchamps, M., De Winter, L., Dodeigne, J., & Sinardet, D. (2021). Inter-regional contacts and voting behaviour in Belgium: What can we learn from the 2019 elections? *Regional & Federal Studies*, 1-22. doi:10.1080/13597566.2021.1919096
- Vandeleene, A., & De Winter, L. (2018). The curious stability of candidate selection methods in Belgium in times of crisis. In X. Coller, G. Cordero, & A. Jaime-Castillo (Eds.), *The Selection of Politicians in Times of Crisis* (pp. 49-65). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Vandeleene, A., De Winter, L., & Baudewyns, P. (2019). *Candidates, Parties and Voters in the Belgian Partitocracy*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96460-7>
- Vandeleene, A., Dodeigne, J., & De Winter, L. (2016). What do selectorates seek? A comparative analysis of Belgian federal and regional candidate selection processes in 2014. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 60(7), 889-908. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764216632825>
- Vandeleene, A., Meulewaeter, C., De Winter, L., & Baudewyns, P. (2017). La relation entre le mode de sélection des candidats et la congruence idéologique entre masses et élites : analyse du cas belge. *Politique et Sociétés*, 36(2), 91-118. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1040414ar>
- Wolfs, W., & De Winter, L. (2017). Policy analysis in the legislative branch. In M. Brans, I. Geva-May, & M. Howlett (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Comparative Policy Analysis* (pp. 199-212). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt22h6q1x.12>

Chapter 1. Partitocracy

*Anatomy and pathologies*¹

Lieven De Winter

Introduction

The concept of *particratie* has entered the Belgian political vocabulary since the 1960s. Over time, it has become one of the most common labels to qualify the Belgian political system. In recent years we witness an inflation of the use of the concept of partitocracy (*particratie*) in Belgium (*infra*). Not only in the media (see Figure 1.1), but it is also commonly used by politicians and academics. In this chapter we identify the components of partitocracy and their applicability to the Belgian political system over time. For reasons of space, we do not address explicitly the question of the dysfunctions of partitocracy and how to remedy them.

1. Variations of spelling

In political science, the concept of *partitocrazia* was first used – as expected – in Italy (Calise, 1994). There was some debate amongst Italian political scientists about the optimal spelling of the term². But in the end, *partitocrazia* became used most often, although Pasquino (2019) sometimes uses partyocracy. Some authors use another variation: partyarchy (Coppedge, 1994; Mirza et al., 2013).

The term travelled into other latin languages (French: *particratie*; Spanish: *partidocracia*) but also on Dutch (*partikratie* / *particratie*). In German the most used term translation is *Parteiherrschaft* (von Arnim, 2017) but some authors also use *Parteienstaat* and *Parteiendemokratie* (Lembruch 1967; Wiesendahl, 2013). These two concepts are however sometimes also used as conceptual equivalents of “party government”.

Note that the concept of partitocracy is used by some authors (e.g. Guo, 2020) for one-party dictatorships, régimes which fall beyond the scope of this chapter.

¹ We would like to thank Johan Ackaert, Marleen Brans and André-Paul Frogner for their comments on earlier versions of this chapter.

² The natural translation for the Italian neologism, *partitocrazia*, would be partitocracy. Calise (1994) uses “particraty” while Pasquino (2019) opts for “partyocracy”.

2. Variations of use over time (in Belgium)

In Belgium “*particratie*” was first mentioned in the media and political science in the 1960s, but by only a few authors (e.g. the four newspaper articles of Marcel Grégoire, 1965; Meynaud et al., 1965). Only Grégoire (a former minister turned journalist) published a short, but balanced view on the topic.

In the 1970s the term became a buzz word for many politicians and journalists, given the predominant role that party presidents played in the real world, especially since the elaboration of a grand community pact between Flemish, Walloons and Bruxellois (1977-1978), the so-called Egmont pact. The *de facto* government was often labelled as the “junta of party presidents”, supposedly marginalizing the Prime Minister (PM) and his ministers (Platel, 1979; De Ridder, 1982). Since then, it is still used commonly, but varying in time.

The archives of the two main quality papers, *De Standaard* and *Le Soir*, indicate a varying use of the concept in the most recent three decades (Figure 1.1). Apart from the boom/peak of its use during the last 5 years (2016-2021), with a record of 53 mentions in *Le Soir* in 2020, we only find a second but minor peak in that newspaper lasting for a few years (2008-2011) when *particratie* was mentioned more than ten times. Most probably, the mid-1970s early 1980s – before the existence of electronic newspaper archives – were also a fertile period for the media use of the concept.



Figure 1.1: Mentions of *particratie* in De Standaard & Le Soir *per annum* 1990-2021

3. Geographical spread

In this chapter we will only look at the use of the concept of partitocracy as label applied to democratic states. We do not look at quasi-authoritarian illiberal regimes in which a single party is omnipotent or predominant, like the Communist Party of the

Soviet Union (CPSU) in the defunct USSR, the Communist Party of China (CPC), the Partito Nazionale Fascista (PNF) in Italy and Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NSDAP) in nazi-Germany.

As there exist a plenitude of definitions of democracy (Held, 2006), for simple reasons of parsimony we use as unique, sufficient and necessary criterion for being a fully democratic state, a country's ranking as "Free" by Freedom House (2022). It applies to 82 countries out of 195 in 2020, but the concept may also had been used correctly for "non-free" countries, when the country was "partly free" or "free" for the period for which a researcher labeled the country as a partitocracy (e.g. Venezuela until 1999).

Beyond Belgium, the concept of partitocracy is still used regularly for referring to the Italian "First Republic" (1948-1994), "the golden age of partitocracy" (Pasquino, 2019). The concept of partitocrazia was generated early after World War II by the constitutionalist Maranini (1949). Since 1993, Italy underwent major changes that makes it difficult to still qualify it as a genuine partitocracy (Pasquino, 2019)³. It has been used in order to qualify the political system of The Netherlands (Maat, 2016), France (Bouissou & Pombeni, 2001), Austria (Fallend, 2012); Spain (Colomer, 2020; Matuschek, 2003); Cyprus (Kitromilides, 2015); Venezuela (Coppedge, 1994; Buxton, 1999); Uruguay (Demasi, 2012; Chasqueti & Buquet, 2004); Chili (Siavelis, 2009); El Salvador (Baloyra, 1998); Mexico (Márquez, 2014; Chaouch, 2012); Ecuador (Galarza Izquierdo, 1992); Columbia (Velásquez Pinilla, 2018); Greece (Pappas, 1999; Di Mascio et al., 2010); Hungary (Bozóki, 2015); Macedonia (Kuçi, 2015); Serbia (Spasojević, 2020); Bangladesh (BIGD, 2014); Japan (Bouissou & Pombeni, 2001) and even the European Union (Poguntke, 2013).

As in the past, the increased use of the label of partitocracy was associated with a crisis of democracy, expressing a reaction again the increasing role of mass parties in the Burkean vision on parliamentary democracy during the interbellum (Balthazar, 1981; Pasquino, 1987; Ragazzoni, 2019).

In Belgium, the varying frequency of the use of the concept seems to be linked to institutional crises, more in particular regarding difficulties in coalition formation (Leterme I, Di Rupo, De Croo), which were triggered by increased coalition bargaining complexity (De Winter & Dumont, 2022) and subsequent government instability, but also the frequent interference of party leaders/presidents in regular cabinet decisions as well as the widespread party patronage in the civil service and semi-public spheres (De Winter, 2006).

³ Pasquino (1997, p. 34) observed that: "There is no doubt that the Italian political system has been undergoing a transition for some time... It is a peculiar transition from a democratic regime, correctly identified as partitocrazia (one dominated by political parties), to another regime, more or less equally democratic".

4. The quest of definition

Many authors do not offer a clear-cut definition of partitocracy. Some even use the concept in the title of their publication/chapter, but without mentioning it at all in the text body of their chapter (e.g. De Vadder, 2007; Cotta, 2015). Other use many pages or even a chapter to define the concept (Katz, 1986; Calise, 1994; Maat, 2016; Pasquino, 2004, 2019).

As with many political science “regime” concepts, there is a wide variety of definitions of partitocracy, going from simple inclusive extentional single-criteria catch-all definitions like “party rule”, to complex intentional multicriteria conjunctive definitions.

In spite of the relatively frequent use of the term partitocracy in its simple etymological meaning (i.e. party rule), most scientific publications do not offer a clear nor more extensive definition. Hence, in the single-criteria inclusive definition of “party rule”, the concept remains very high on Sartori’s “ladder of generality”, valid for labeling a quite extensive number of cases of modern states (Pennings et al., 2005). In this form, it covers a wide range of political systems that are governed by one or several parties, including a wide number of one-party dictatorships (sometimes called partocracy).

5. “Party rule”: How much too much?

Parties exist in almost all contemporary democracies⁴, and participate to a varying degree in ruling a political system. Often, they co-govern with other institutions and political actors (executive, legislature, the judiciary, the media, the organised civil society, the army, the economic elite, the clergy, etc. Sartori (1987, p. 76) argued that parties have become “such an essential element in the political process that in many instances we might legitimately call democracy not simply a party system but a ‘partitocracy’”⁵.

However, the rule of one or more parties does not convert every political regime into a genuine partitocracy. Partitocracy implies the excessive rule by parties, that exercise disproportionate power at the expense of other political actors that are considered as more legitimate rulers, depending on the democratic theory or institutional model one embraces⁶.

⁴ Apart from countries that legally ban political parties, currently non-partisan democracies, also called “no-party democracies”, i.e. systems of representative government where universal and periodic elections take place without reference to political parties. On the national level, de facto nonpartisan systems are found only in a few island states with small populations, such as Tavalu, Nauru, Micronesia and Palau (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-partisan_democracy).

⁵ Earlier, Sartori (1976, p. 77) conceived Italian partitocracy as “a party tyranny in which the actual locus of power is shifted and concentrated from government and parliament to party directorates”.

⁶ Partitocracy can operate within different constitutional regime types, such as parliamentary democracy, presidentialism, semi-presidentialism, directorial régimes, etc., and exist in different forms of government (unitary state, federal states, regional and decentralized states).

This raises the crucial questions of what these excesses are, where they are situated in the “body politic”, where they originate from, and how they operate and perpetuate themselves. Like democracy cannot be reduced to only having “free and fair elections” (Boix et al., 2013), but can include dozens of criteria that have to be met (e.g. Freedom House uses 25 indicators), partitocracy is not a simple undifferentiated monolithic concept of (“All Power To The Party/Parties”). As any political system, a partitocracy has to be disaggregated into various institutions, procedures, functions, values, outcomes, etc., and for each component of a specific political system we should look whether formal rules and “real world” practices are excessive vis-à-vis general accepted norms and standards of democracy and good governance (such as Worldwide Governance Indicators used by Lijphart, 2012, p. 264).

In parliamentary monarchies that emerge out of authoritarian monarchies, nascent parties were rapidly criticised for weakening, or even de facto usurping the constitutional power of the monarch and/or the parliament. The notion of excessive party influence in European systems was already present in the early theoretical writings on the organisation of parties in emerging democracies by European scholars (Ostrogorski, 1902; Michels, 1915; Pareto, 1893; Weber, 1919). Critique on partitocracy was voiced mostly by (far) right and populist voices (Balthazar, 1981; Pasquino, 1987; Ragazzoni, 2019). Hence, often, these critiques were voiced already before parties had (yet) fully replaced other political actors from dominance in decision-making. Therefore, most of these early critiques were “reactionary” (Bardi et al., 2014, p. 240), downgrading party rule vis-à-vis the idealised vision on the previous regimes, that maintained their old, outdated label like the “Kingdom” of Belgium (while most monarchs had no real power anymore in parliamentary monarchies, nor did many presidents in republics). In fact, the instruments of party rule are usually not formally embedded in constitutions, laws and parliamentary rules. Comparative research indicates the scarcity of legal arrangements on the role, function and power (and their limits) of parties in western democracies (Müller & Sieberer, 2005).

A more “constructive” boost for the theoretical reflections on the merits and dysfunctions of party rule in industrial democracies came from the publication of Schattschneider’s *Party Government* (1942, p. 1): “The parties created democracy and modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of parties”. While the US presidential system, with its weak, stratarchical parties, does not seem to represent an obvious and fruitful ground for developing and testing theories about “the nature of party government”, West European theorists and empirical researchers started to embrace the concept of “party government”, that led to an avalanche of theoretical debates and empirical studies of the predominant role of parties in modern democracies. More recently, the theory of party government has become contested given its “real world” dysfunctionalities. Katz and Mair (1995) that argue that the model of party government is no longer working given the fact that some basic premises on which the theory

of responsive party government is build, have been eroded since the late 1970s-1980s (*infra*).

In Belgian political science, the concept *particratie* became a standard label for the qualifying the Belgian political system. A few monographs and edited volumes were produced specifically on the Belgian *particratie* (Dewachter & De Winter, 1981; Res Publica special issues on *partitocracy* of 1981 and 2018, Eraly, Destexhe & Gillet, 2003; Dewachter, 2014; Vuye & Wouters, 2016; Verleden, 2019), while also many journal articles and case study contributions to comparative books helped to disseminated this regime type beyond the Belgian and Italian case.

Most Belgian media actors, politicians and academics use the concept in a derogatory way, implying that in a *partitocracy*, a party or several parties have “excessive power”, parties are “bad” governmental actors (Calise 1994), often pointing to a variety of democratic pathologies of the Belgian *particratie*⁷. The use of the word “excessive” is inherently normative and the excesses thus depend on an author’s vision on democracy.

Unfortunately, rarely these “anti-partitocrats” define the “normal”, democratically legitimate, role of parties in plural democracies. Where exactly these *partitocratic* excesses of party power in the functioning of the political system are situated is often not specified: *partitocracy* is presented as a glaringly obvious deviation from “representative democracy” or “the principles of democratic government”. Rarely authors specify where, in which decision-making sub-institution(s) or decision-making procedure(s) (and even *régime* values) these deviations are located. Are parties failing in their function of recruiting of political personnel, of structuring of public opinion and of competitive elections, in defining of public policies, in creating of social cohesion and nationhood, etc.? In the following sections we will examine how in a *partitocracy* parties violate the legitimate role of parties in modern democracy, in particular in the Belgian case.

6. Failing party government as an anchor for defining *partitocracy*

In many representative democracies, the constitutional design of parliaments is rooted in Burkean pre-war conceptions of the role of the member of parliament as

⁷ Cfr. the stigmatising titles of some books “The bag of tricks of the Belgian *partitocratie*. A European Schame” – *De trukendoos van de Belgische particratie. Een Europese schande* (Dewachter, 2014); “Democracy or *partitocratie*” – *Démocratie ou particratie* (Destexhe et al., 2007); “Keeping up Appearances: *Partitocracy* strangles democracy” – *Schone Schijn: Particratie wurgt democratie* (Vuye & Wouters, 2019).

an independent representative (or trustee) of his/her electorate, rather, than as a party delegate (Catterral, 2021)⁸.

However, since the end of WWII, many scholars started to consider “party government” as the most common and predominant institutional form of contemporary parliamentary government (Castles & Wildenmann, 1986; Katz, 2020). Therefore, in this conceptual chapter, we will use “party government” as a normative, ideal-type-like analytical as well as practical yardstick, for studying the partitocratic “deviant” form” of party government in which parties play an ultra-predominant role. For instance, Pasquino (2019) defined the particularities of partitocrazia in the Italian First Republic during, its “golden years” (1950-1990), as deviations from normal “party government”. He describes these deviations from “party government” in the following terms:

Partitocracy: an excessive amount of power held by the parties that control too many economic and social resources... (p. 47).

Throughout the forty years of its golden age, slowly but inexorably party government degenerated into partyocracy, which I would define as a situation in which all parties collude in sharing available state resources (“spoils”) and take hold of them for the benefit of their organizations, leaders, followers and voters. In such situations, parties create, promote, infiltrate, fund, control and steer civil associations, extract resources from them, and recruit and demote members, making life difficult, if not impossible, for those associations that strive to maintain their autonomy (p. 49).

Note that Pasquino (2019) (like other scholars) defines these deviations from a particular model of democracy (Held, 2006), and stresses that partitocrazia (“partitocracy”), should be kept clearly distinct from the concept of “party government”. He argues that in political science, we cannot use partitocracy and party government as equivalent terms. “The doctrine of party government is a mere evolutionary step within the parliamentary tradition. If partitocracy has to be conceived of as a form of government in its own right, we cannot just rely on a conceptual framework where party government is little more than perfected parliamentary government”.

In fact, since Schattschneider coined already in 1942 the concept of “Party Government”, specific definitions of party government multiplied with the seminal contributions of Ranney (1962), Rose (1967, 1974) and especially the EUI-research project on *The Future of Party Government*, directed by Rudolf Wildenmann (producing a series of edited volumes⁹). The most authoritative theoretical work on party

⁸ The Burkean critique on the loss of power of parliament, where trustee MPs are replaced by party delegates (and the loss of power of the monarchy) to political parties can be easily integrated in the “visions on party government”. In fact, party government is increasingly formulated in the popular terms of a “principal-agent” model of party politics (Müller, 2000; Strøm et al., 2003).

⁹ By Castles and Wildenmann (1986) and by Katz (1987).

government is formulated by Katz (1987, 2020), although also Rose (1969, 1974), Thomassen (1994) and Mair (2008) have also identified important components (sometimes called “conditions”, “requirements” or “facilitators” of party government).

As a starting point, we take the synthesis made by Andeweg (2020) of the various definitions of party government:

1. More than one party offers voters distinct and realistic policy programs¹⁰.
2. Voters vote for the party with the policy program they prefer most.
3. The party that wins the elections recruits partisans to occupy sufficient key positions in the political executive to control policy-making.
4. The party is cohesive, so that all partisans in policy-making positions give priority to implementing the party’s policy program.
5. Partisans in policy-making positions are accountable to the party.
6. The party is held accountable to the voters for the performance of its partisans in policy-making positions.

So, on the one hand, partitocracy’s excesses, viewed as a set of deviations from party government, should be sought first and foremost in the excesses in one or more of these six components of ideal-type party government. For instance, Katz and Mair (1995, 2018) have formulated their “cartel party” model of party democracy starting from their critique on the party government model. However, partitocracy has excesses that do not deviate from the party government model, but from other principles of democracy and good governance such as wide and deep patronage, invasion of civil society, intraparty oligarchisation, separation of powers, etc. (see below).

In the overview below of partitocratic excesses, I will, on the one hand, summarise comparative debates and empirical findings and, on the other hand, address shortly the evolution and current state of affairs in the Belgian partitocracy, of which most will be addressed more in detail in other chapters in this book.

7. Partitocratic deviations from the party government ideal type

7.1. More than one party offers voters distinct and realistic policy programs

Lipset and Rokkan (1967) claimed that party systems in Western Europe were frozen until the mid-1960s. However, Katz and Mair (1995, 2018) argue that since the 1980s parties, conceived as “actors of public policy”, refrain from the testing of these views and their popularity to the citizens in general elections. Parties become more and more simple vehicles for pure office-seeking politicians, no matter at what policy price. This

¹⁰ Preferably constrained by a single ideological dimension (Thomassen, 1994).

evolution is due to the fact that “the conflicts that divide political parties in the older democracies of Western Europe have attenuated substantially in the past 30 years” (Mair, 2008). Hence, mainstream governing parties’ programs and policies tend to converge (Spoon & Klüver, 2019). Old cleavages weaken (Dalton, 2018) while there has been a reduction in ideological polarisation as the old anti-system parties (i.e. communists and fascists) lost electoral appeal. However, new cleavages and conflict dimensions have emerged and led to new parties on the far-right (Mudde, 2007) and far-left (Delwit, 2016), creating a new ideological cleavage (the so-called GAL-TAN divide, Green-Alternative-Libertarian vs Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist).

While all electoral research confirms the waning of the three traditional cleavages in the Belgian polity, reducing consequently the electoral importance of the three mainstream governing parties (Christian Democrats, Socialists and Liberals) from more than 90% in 1950 to less than 40% in 2019, these parties have not vanished. Like in the pre-1980s period (Hearl, 1992), they remain key players in coalition government formation, and very rarely another party (family) entered government (De Winter & Dumont, 2021). For instance, five of the seven current governing parties are “old mainstream” with only the two ecologists parties that are surfing on the GAL-TAN divide.

Regarding the distinctiveness of party policy programs, when electoral manifestos are converging, the rational voter will have difficulties to vote for the party that is closest to his policy preferences. However, Dandoy (2012) found that “Overall, the content of the manifesto seems to fluctuate over the years, oscillating between convergence (Flemish parties in 1985, 1995 and 2007; French-speaking parties in 1985 and 1995) and divergence (broadly the other election years)” (p. 246).

7.2. Voters vote for the party with the policy program they prefer most

Many arguments have been formulated regarding the decline of policy voting of citizens: the convergence of party manifestos, the growing voter ignorance or disinterest in politics, the declining partisanship within the electorate, declining voter turnout, the manipulation of the election campaigns and wider party communication by political marketeers, the personalization of politics, leader and celebrity voting, etc. (Thomassen, 1994; Mair, 2008).

Similar arguments are made regarding the voting motivations of Belgian citizens. A classic indicator of voter alienation is absenteeism and blank/invalid voting, but due to compulsory voting these two indicators have remained low and stable (10% and 5.3% respectively in 2019). Others point to the increase of the “personal vote”, a vote for one or more candidates instead of casting a party list vote. Here we see a long-term upwards trend, with the percentage of preference votes steadily growing from 22% in 1961 to a peak of 66% in 2003, but declined gradually (53.7% at the

2019 elections) (Wauters et al., 2020). Also, one can question the validity of preference voters as indicator of “anti-party establishment” feelings. In fact, survey research reveals that preference voters mainly want to express with their vote for a candidate support for her policy realisations and position-taking. Other motivations include her local embeddedness, personal relations, personality traits, etc. None mention the fact that they wanted to support unfortunate candidates that had been relegated by the list selectors to a non-eligible place of the list (André et al., 2014). Also, in 2014 four out of five preference voters first decided on the party to vote for, rather than first on the candidate they like most (André, Depauw & Pilet, 2017).

Regarding voter/party coherence, at the 2014 elections, a very large majority of voters seem to have the same positions on a large variety of issues as the party they voted for (Lesschaeve, 2017; André & Depauw, 2017). Thus, even when interest in politics is comparatively low and so is political knowledge, “incorrect voting” for a party that does not share the voters’ policy preferences is limited.

7.3. The new government is formed by the party that wins the elections or by the leaders of political parties that agree on forming a parliamentary viable coalition

Parties are vote-, office- and policy-seeking (Strøm & Müller, 1999). Vote-seeking is instrumental to gaining office. Yet winning parties may be excluded from government if other parties manage to negotiate an alternative coalition. The leaders of parties that have won seats in parliament are the key players in these negotiations about which parties will join the new government, with which policy platform and which portfolio distribution.

Coalition negotiations take several weeks, sometimes several months (De Winter & Dumont, 2008). Belgium holds the absolute world champion in this regard (De Winter & Dumont, 2022), with often governments formed by four or more parties (7 in 2020) and a record formation duration of 541 days for the Di Rupo government (2010-2014). As key players in the negotiations, party leaders also nominate the individuals for running the ministerial portfolios they managed to obtain in the bargaining. The composition of coalitions is relatively congruent with parties’ strength, as only twice, a coalition excluded the largest party in parliament (i.e. the Flemish independentist N-VA in (2011 and 2020).

7.4. The party/parties that enter the government recruit(s) partisans to occupy sufficient key positions in the political executive to control policy-making

While the nomination of the large majority of ministers with party background is a requisite for party government, this aspect has even during the golden years of party

government been criticised for the potential lack of input of professional policy expertise (in comparison with non-partisans recruited by parties from the economy, higher civil service, academia, etc.).

However, in spite of the utility of “technocratic” ministers, in party governments the number of such “non-partisans” ministers should remain limited and their impact is to be out-trumped by partisan ministers. And in practice often even technocrats become accountable to the party leadership and become “regular partisans”, as they often tend to run as candidate at the next elections.

While in many European countries the number of technocrats is growing (Cotta, 2018), in Belgium technocratic ministers have always been an exception (De Winter, 1990; Dumont, Fiers & Dandoy, 2008). And in his comparative longitudinal research, Cotta (2018) finds only a clear increase of non-partisan ministers in Italy (between the “First” and “Second” Republic), which was to be expected given the collapse of partitocracy of the First Republic. For the other countries he found no clear trend of “departisisation” of the recruitment of ministers.

The key selectors of ministers are usually the presidents of the coalition parties (or the new PM¹¹, Goddard, 2021). Since WWII, the party presidents of the three mainstream governing parties have always been the main ministerial selectors. Except for the Green parties, where a special membership assembly confirms or rejects a leadership proposal, (e.g. Groen in 2020). The concentration of the ministerial selection power in the hands of one individual leader may seem quite monocratic. But this power concentration is tolerated by fellow partisans because in practice expanding the selectorate to a few more top leaders or even a wider set of party members would most often lead to large internal party disputes, as each selector tends to believe he is “min-istrable”. This does not mean that the party president may not seek advice of many secondary party leaders and uneligible “wise men”, factions’ chiefs as well as regional party strongholders (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2013; Ceron, 2014). Factional support was important especially in the Flemish Christian-Democrats (Wauters & Schamp, 2014).

With four to seven coalition parties bargaining over ministerial portfolios with overlapping appetites, the final distribution between parties is complicated. Usually Gamson’s law of proportionality seems to be applied and most distributions attain a Pareto equilibrium (De Winter & Dumont, 2021). Luckily for the party presidents, their selection does not require the prior approval the party congress, or the executive bureau or parliamentary party, as these bodies only debate and approve the coalition agreement, not the final portfolio distribution.

¹¹ In most party governments, the leaders of the party (often one individual or a core group) selected the party’s ministers. In most countries the upcoming PM has a say in this selection at least for ministers from his own party. But in Belgium, the PM has very little freedom of choice even regarding his own party’s ministers (De Winter & Dumont, 2021).

Parties serve as selector for many other positions in the public sector, not only in the higher administrations, where in many countries formal spoil system¹² is at work (as in the USA). Also in European countries, ministers can nominate a varying number of higher civil servants in their ministry (see below in the section on wider forms of patronage, and the chapter of Brans et al., in this volume).

7.5. The party is cohesive, so that all partisans in policy-making positions give priority to implementing the party's policy program

Government as a whole nor individual ministers are no more accountable to parliament as whole, but only to groups of majority MPs, that vote in a cohesive party-disciplined way. They verify whether the ministers' policy proposals are in accordance with the party manifesto, or, in coalition government, in agreement with the coalition's policy program. Hence, contrary to the model of Laver and Shepsle (1996), regarding the party-ness of ministers' decisions in coalition government, ministers are rarely "policy dictators" (Moury, 2013). Their policies are supposed to translate the stipulations of the coalition agreement into policy. In fact, in practice, a majority of party pledges – sometimes a large majority – are acted upon in most countries, most of the time (Naurin et al., 2019).

Pledges research indicates various degrees of minister's policy respect to the government policy program. Many parties that enter government executives are highly likely to fulfil their pledges. First, coalition agreements pledges seem to emerge in a proportional way from the coalition parties' electoral manifestos (Thomson et al., 2017). In general, parties in coalition deliver least on their electoral pledges, which explains the comparatively low success score for Belgium, with its coalitions counting a large number of parties. Hence, Belgian parties have a low degree of "policy pledge delivery".

In the case of inter-party conflict, parties almost always fall back on the initial policy deals enshrined in the coalition agreement (Moury & Timmermans, 2013; Naurin et al., 2019). Thus, the policies of the Belgian governments are strongly inspired by the wishes of the coalition parties as stipulated in the coalition agreement. But the very high number of parties in a government and the long and comprehensive coalition agreements create unavoidably some "policy drift".

In party government, not only ministers are "agents" of the leadership of the government party, that act as their main "principal". Also MPs belonging to the governing party/parties are "delegates" of their party "principal". The role of majority MPs is to discuss, improve, facilitate, etc. the law-making initiatives of ministers, exercise executive oversight over the ministers' management of their department, voice citizens

¹² In the USA, every president can nominate thousands of top federal officials at the beginning of his "administration" rewarding them for their electoral support (Horton, 2011).

concerns to the government and media, etc. In most systems of party government, the very large majority of legislative bills voted and passed by parliament are initiated by the government. Comparative research indicates that on average, three-quarters of the executive's initiatives are approved (Saiegh, 2014).

Not surprisingly, this is certainly also the case for the Belgian partitocracy. The disempowerment of parliament is one of the core outcries about *particratie*. The major role of (majority) MPs is to scrutinize legislation proposed by ministers (even when they tend to be less critical on legislation originating from ministers of their own party), especially in committee meetings, but also by exercising their oversight role on ministers' policy decisions. There is abundant (comparative) research on the submissive role of parliament vis à vis the government (Van Nieuwenhuise et al., 2018; De Pauw & Martin, 2008; Kam, 2014; Wolfs & Vande Walle, in this book). In terms of voting, Belgian MPs were about the most disciplined (99.06% in the 1991-1995 term) amongst 16 countries. This comes close to the theoretical ceiling of *Kadaverdisziplin* (100%, only attained in Ireland). Nor did Wauters et al. (2021) find for the 1995–2014 period any trace of “parliamentary personalization” (e.g. a rise in the use of individual parliamentary instruments, an increase in single-authored initiatives for activities that could also be conducted collectively, a larger concentration of visible parliamentary activities and an increase in party switching). The need for smoothing out coalition conflicts requires regular (often more than weekly), “majority concertations” between the parliamentary group leaders of the majority parties (De Winter & Dumont, 2000; De Winter & Wolfs, 2014). However, Belgian MPs are increasingly active in the production of legislative proposals (to no or little avail), as well as parliamentary control tools such as oral and written questions (see chapter by Wolfs & Vande Walle in this book). Yet, MPs' resources in terms of policy advice are comparatively scarce and often mutualised or skimmed off by the party research centre or party leadership (De Winter & Wolfs, 2017).

Finally, not only are MPs – especially from the majority parties in multiparty coalitions – obliged to operate “en bloc” in parliament to make large coalitions work. It seems that also “in thought” they are very homogeneous (see chapter Walgrave et al., in this volume) as they closely agree with the party line on most policy issues.

7.6. Partisans in policy-making positions are accountable to the party leadership bodies

The literature on delegation and accountability identifies four control mechanisms through which coalition parties can hold their ministers accountable (Müller & Meyer, 2010): screening, contract design, monitoring, and institutional checks. First, party leaders select candidates they believe to act loyally to the party, and are capable to function in a competitive yet compromise-driven cabinet environment. Second, most coalitions underwrite coalition agreements. Although these coalition agreements are

difficult to enforce legally (Müller & Strøm, 2008), they establish what the coalition requires the ministers to do within the remit of their portfolio and as constructive cabinet colleagues, co-participants in collective cabinet decision-making. Third, parliamentary democracies allow for the direct monitoring of the executive through parliamentary committees. These can scrutinise legislative proposals and also other executive behaviour (ministerial decrees, budgeting, etc.).

Fourth, coalition governments often establish intra-coalition conflict management mechanisms. Typically, these are more or less permanent bodies with representatives from all coalition parties, including cabinet members, party leaders, and parliamentary leaders in various combinations (Andeweg & Timmermans, 2008). While “watchdog junior ministers”, belonging to different coalition parties than the minister under whom they serve, may serve as a tool mainly to control their minister’s departmental activities and reporting violations of the coalition agreement to their own party, they can also be attached to a senior minister of their own party, and equally perform the watchdog role.

Belgian governing party leadership bodies hold their ministers accountable in an even wider variety of ways (De Winter & Dumont, 2021). First, large by international standards, ministers’ personal staffs (“ministerial cabinets”) consist of political advisers often recruited on a partisan basis. The chef de cabinet and many core cabinet members are recruited from the party research centre (Brans et al., 2017; see Brans et al. chapter in this book). This allows for a firm hold of parties on the administration (Walgrave et al., 2004, p. 8; Göransson & Eraly, 2015). They are tools for party control over ministers and for supporting party organisations, with political parties imposing senior personnel and at times even forcing less well qualified personnel on the minister (De Winter, 1981; Walgrave et al., 2004; Göransson & Eraly, 2015). In some parties, the chefs de cabinets are chosen upon proposal of the party president.

Second, ministers hold weekly a meeting with their party leader and party top (Thursday evening prior to Council of Ministers held on Friday morning). Direct one-to-one contacts between a minister and her party president in case a minister is asked during a government meeting to support a cabinet decision that may be delicate for the party (cf. the frequent interruptions of Council of Ministers and the Kernkabinet allowing ministers to feedback with their party president and his entourage).

Third, the Kernkabinet (“restricted cabinet for general policy”), comprising the vice-PM of each party plus the PM, is the core decision-making body, not the Council of Ministers. Each vice-PM plays an oversight role for his party over other ministers, of all parties (including her own).

Fourth, there are the weekly meetings of the Party Executive (Monday morning) and of the parliamentary party group (Thursday morning) which ministers attend regularly. Finally, there is the yearly party’s General Congress of delegates of lower party bodies and activists that can voice criticism on government actions.

Of course, the strongest, ultimate sanction a party can exercise against a rebellious minister is deselection: either urging the minister to resign, or to not reselect her as minister.

7.7. The party is held accountable to the voters for the performance of its partisans in policy-making positions

Mair (2008) argued that in the more traditional ‘continental’ European systems, in which fragmented party groupings compete against one another in shifting multi-party coalitions, a clear boundary between government and opposition was often difficult to draw. Wholesale government change was also a relatively rare occurrence, since one coalition usually overlapped with another, with the overall lines of responsibility and accountability being thereby often blurred.” Bergman and Strøm (2011) as well as Pellegata and Quaranta (2018) confirm that in countries with wholesale government alternation, voters are better able to hold governments accountable because in essence voters have the choice to keep their current government or ‘throw the rascals out’.

As the party government model stipulates that citizens vote for the party with the policy program they prefer most, they may also define their programmatic vote choice retrospectively, on the basis of the former policy performance of the parties (and not on their policies promises for the future).

Partitocracies do not flourish in volatile party systems. The Belgian party system is not frozen, but it is not highly volatile either. It is a bit less volatile than the European post-war average, but party system volatility has been growing since 1992 (Chiaromonte & Emanuele, 2017). And the main source of this volatility is the voters sanctioning the incumbent government parties. Dassonneville (et al., 2017) showed that in spite of the low-clarity setting of the Belgian polity for its voters, due to the complexity of coalition governments and federalism, retrospective economic voting in Belgium is nevertheless fairly general.

8. Additional dysfunctionalities of partitocracy

The core features of party government listed above, with their intrinsic merits and dysfunctionalities, constitute only a partial and non-exhaustive inventory of the dysfunctionalities of the partitocratic model in the Belgian case and beyond. To this already long list of deviations from the party government ideal-type one should add several additional dysfunctionalities not intrinsically linked to excessive party government.

8.1. In a partitocracy, patronage resources are wide and deep and controlled mainly by parties

To several authors, party patronage is one, if not the, core feature of a partitocracy. According to Calise (1994, p. 448), “partitocracy is strongly associated with an unrestricted spoils system... this is indeed unanimously regarded as a distinguishing – if not distinguished – trait of partitocratic regime... The difference with the partitocratic spoils system is that it is no minor spillover, but one of the major pillars of the whole governmental system. In fact, the spoils system can be considered the true rationale of a partitocratic form of government, as it brings together the electorate, the party organization, and the executive branch in the name of democratic theory”. Chanda (2004, p. 6) and Pappas (2012, p. 144) even define partitocracy as “party patronage democracy,” i.e. “democracies in which parties in office have a relative monopoly on jobs and services, and in which elected officials enjoy significant discretion in the implementation of laws allocating the jobs and services at the disposal of the state”.

In a partitocracy, party patronage, i.e. the power of political parties to appoint people to positions in state institutions (Kopecki & Mair, 2012) is more extensive, in breadth, depth and span, in the (semi-)public sector, and often as well in some sectors of civil society.

In fact, to the selection of ministers and MPs addressed above can be added the recruitment of higher and medium civil servants, senior parliamentary actors (Speaker, committee chairs), leading and lesser personnel of different types of (semi-) public bodies (e.g. public enterprises and banks, public service institutions in health, transport, public education sectors, the public media, etc.), in the judiciary, army and police, etc. (De Winter et al., 1996; Kopecky & Mair, 2012, p. 4).

Party leaders may use party patronage for several reasons (Kopecky & Mair, 2012, p. 9-10):

Party patronage can be intra-party organizational resource in the hands of the leadership, which is used to reward (or punish) elected officials or to promote intra-party cohesion and organizational loyalty.

Another key reason for parties to seek to secure access to non-elective offices within the state might also be the control of policy design and implementation, or what is referred to in the German literature as *Politikpatronage*... (Müller, 2006) ... as a means of governing rather than just a means of generating favours. By staffing the state with trusted individuals, political parties can make their policies flow more effectively, can be better informed, and can thereby enhance their policy-making capacity and reputation.

And of course, patronage as clientelism can serve as an important electoral resource (Piattoni, 2001).

In comparative perspective, Belgium, together with Italy, were the champions of party patronage, with in the 1970s to 1990s similar degrees of patronage by national governments (Müller, 2000, Figure 7.1¹³). Contrary to Italy, in Belgium patronage goods were mainly reserved to majority parties (following the “majority style” of government patronage).

While the old Italian *partitocrazia* collapsed under the Mani Puliti anti-corruption campaigns (Di Mascio, 2012), party patronage in Belgium declined since the late 1990s, but did not entirely disappear (for the party patronage in the executive sphere, see chapter by Brans et al., in this book). While recruitment to the courts was heavily subject to party patronage until the 1990s, (De Winter, 2006), the nomination of judges has become nearly entirely depoliticized. In 1991, recruitment to the judiciary was made conditional upon success in entrance examinations. In 1998, the “Octopus reforms” decided to depoliticise the promotion of judges by transferring the justice minister’s powers of nomination to the more neutral and “pluralist” Higher Justice Council.

Regarding collective party patronage, the so-called “pork barrel” politics, Belgian MPs managed to serve in a considerable way the collective needs of their constituency, and pork barrel activities represented an important task of Belgian MPs (De Winter, 2002). The prominence of pork barrel activities was also related to the ‘non-rational’ way in which public expenditures were allocated in Belgium. Given the ongoing conflicts between the different regions and cultural communities, departmental spending is carefully distributed over the regions and communities, so that each unit receives public investments according to its size. Hence, many projects are allocated to constituencies which normally, in terms of socio-economic cost/benefit calculations, would not be able to attract such investments. Hence the decisions on the allocation of public investments are largely based on political criteria, rather than on socio-economic cost/benefit calculations (De Winter, 2006). For instance, Jennes and Persyn (2015, p. 1) found that for the 1995-2010 period, “that transfers to inhabitants of a particular electoral district increase significantly with every extra federal minister originating from that electoral district”.

Note that when parties “invade” the executive power, the legislative power and even the judiciary, the core democratic value of “separation of powers” is systematically undermined... “Party is, therefore, the place where the fusion of legislative and executive power” (Calise, 1994, p. 446).

¹³ Currently Spain would also score high on a comparative patronage scale. According to Colomer (2020) the “Spanish parties are small oligarchies of public officers with very few affiliates, are overprotected and subsidized by the government, and tend to control not only the parliaments and governments but the judiciary, the diplomacy, the independent regulatory bodies, the state-owned enterprises, the media, the culture, some universities, and as many institutions as their reach can expand”.

8.2. In a partitocracy, the interests of civil society organisations are mainly represented through their linkage with political parties

The literature on consociationalism does not only point to the power of ideologically organised segments of civil society (“pillars”) (Lijphart, 1968; Huyse, 1970, 2003; Van den Brande, 1973; Billiet, 2006; Bruyère et al., 2019; Hellemans, 2020), but also underlines the representation of these pillars by specific parties, that are organically linked with these civil society organisations (e.g. church, trade unions, cultural associations, educational networks, etc.). Some authors even suggest that the leaders of these pillar umbrella organisations were more powerful than their respective party leaders (Luther, 2004), especially in the socialist pillar (Deschouwer, 2004). In any case, in the ideal type of partitocracy (i.e. “excessive party rule”), the parties are not only the political representatives of their pillars, but also act as their captains, as Pasquino (2019, p. 49) suggests: “parties create, promote, infiltrate, fund, control and steer civil associations, extract resources from them, and recruit and demote members, making life difficult, if not impossible, for those associations that strive to maintain their autonomy”.

In Belgium, both “faces” of the pillars have lost power, especially in the strong “catholic world” (Deschouwer, 2004). While most specialists on consociationalism agree that *verzuiling* underwent major changes since its golden age (until end of the 1950s), the organisational structure of the two main pillars (christian-democratic and socialist) remained relatively intact. In terms of organisational logic, Huyse (2003) emphasized the importance of political parties and their mediating role in providing pillar-friendly legislation and governmental subsidy policies, and their changing into service organisations and political holdings, as causes of the continuing presence of pillar-like networks of organizations.

At the individual level, currently the members of the old pillar parties generally still reflect these old societal segments (van Haute & Wauters, 2019). In terms of voting, Hooghe (1999) showed that the links between citizens’ integration into a pillar – with membership of Christian, Socialist, or Liberal trade unions and health insurance funds as indicators – and electoral behaviour and ideological attitudes, had by no means vanished. Also, Abts et al. (2014) concluded that in the 1990-2010 period, pillar adhesion remains the strongest determinant of voting.

8.3. In a partitocracy, parties have large material resources at their disposal, mainly drawn from public funding

In a partitocracy, most party funding is usually drawn from public resources. But the parties themselves define the rules of the public party finance system, as well as the control over its implementation (Simral, 2014). As such, they also control the access

of minor or oppositional parties to public resources, and thus can act as an oligopolistic cartel (Katz & Mair, 1995). Resources can be drawn legally through institutionalised state subventions (party finance laws), and through donations of private sponsors. But in addition, parties can illegally skim-off contracts between government bodies (“kickbacks”) and private enterprises in exchange for public contracts, i.e. through corruption of public officials and of private and semi-public actors (e.g. state enterprises) (Della Porta, 2000, 2004). These financial resources can be used for classical party expenditures (campaigns, professionalisation of the party bureaucracy (e.g. research & communication units), salary and staff of leaders, and other party office perks. It can also lead to self-enrichment of the parties and its leading individuals (Kühner, 2016).

Finally, often public funding passes through the hands of the party leading bodies (leadership of national party, of the parliamentary party, regional party bosses), thus not directly to lower party echelons, candidates, activists, etc. This enhances the centralisation of power within parties.

In the Belgian partitocracy, party elites were driven to public funding after a series of scandals of corrupt financing of government parties (De Winter, 2000). After a timid start in 1989, public funding expanded rapidly, not only at the federal level, but also at the regional and provincial level. At the same time, party expenditures were constrained in size and kind (e.g. prohibition of TV commercials). Public funding has eliminated nearly completely the corrupt exchanges between politicians and economic actors (De Winter, 2002). However, by now, the system is criticised for its excesses: parties are perceived to receive excessive amounts that they do not really need nor manage to spend), opaque control of party accounts by peers (i.e. by a parliamentary control committee), the centralisation of incoming resources in the hand of national party leadership, the campaign advantages for larger (governmental) parties and for prominent electoral candidates, etc. (Weekers et al., 2009).

8.4. In a partitocracy, national parties manage to duplicate partitocracy at lower levels of government (e.g. regions and communes)

Party government and partitocracy may emerge at the regional level in a “home-grown” way, especially when regionalist parties are dominant since the creation of the regional institutions (e.g. during the CDC-led governments in Catalonia, Barberà & Barrio, 2006). However, often partitocratic features can spill over from the national level to regional and local levels of government (Katz & Mair, 2018), as a part of the broader process labelled by Caramani (2004) as the “nationalisation of politics” of local party systems in Europe.

Regarding partitocracy at the level of the Belgian regions and communities, one can expect it to be high, as these levels of governance were created by the parties

controlling the federal partitocracy, that de facto were already “regional parties”. In fact, since 1978 there are no more national parties, only regional ones (with the exception of the far-left PTB-PVDA). Hence, partitocracy easily spilled over to these levels. For instance, when the first regional administrations were created in 1980, the devolution law stipulated that during the first term, the Flemish and Walloon executive should include all Flemish and Francophone mainstream parties respectively, in order to allow these parties to participate fully in the nomination of the new regional civil services to be created from scratch.

Thus, at the regional elections the same parties compete as at the federal level, often along ideological divides and issues and manifestoes similar to their federal ones. Since the first direct regional elections of 1995, most regional elections coincided with federal elections (except in 2004 and 2009). Candidates could run simultaneously for both elections, whereby parties often presented their most visible candidates at both levels (e.g. their regional and federal ministers) until this was prohibited in 2013. Level-hopping between parliaments was frequent (Dodeigne & Vandeleene, 2013). All regional executives are coalition governments, and until 2004 tended to include the same party families as in the national coalition, given that at both levels the same party leaders were the core formation negotiators. Negotiations were concluded when a comprehensive policy agreement was agreed upon, and party leaders nominated the regional ministers to execute this policy blue print, assisted by well-staffed regional “ministerial cabinets”. Hence, like federal ministers, regional ones also act as delegates of the party (president).

At the parliamentary level, the dominance of regional executives over the regional assemblies is also strong. For instance, in the Flemish parliament, operates since 1999 an informal “hush up agreement” (“*zwijgakkkoord*”), stipulating that majority MPs cannot introduce private member bills nor motions without preliminary agreement of all majority partners. Party discipline is equally strong as in the federal parliament (Van Vonno et al., 2014).

The degree of nationalisation of local party systems in Belgium is relatively low according to comparative standards (1976-2018, Dodeigne et al., 2021). Regarding campaigning, national parties provide their local sections in terms of campaign material and themes (Van Aelst, 2008). Still, many parties competing at the local level are genuinely local, with no links to national parties. Nor does one find an incremental process towards fully nationalised local party systems (Dodeigne et al., 2021). Local elections are mostly a competition between individual politicians, rather than between their parties and programs (De Winter et al., 2013). Voters also use about twice as much preference voting than at federal elections (Thyssen et al., 2018). However, four out of ten local parties participate in pre-electoral coalition agreement negotiations (Ackaert et al., 2013), therefore ignoring the ultimate voters’ coalition preferences. However, while the electoral system (PR with Imperiali seat allocation) disfavors more small parties than the D’Hondt formula used for federal elections, recent reforms

have enhanced the impact of voters. First, candidates on a list are elected purely in function of the number of preferences votes they receive. Second, the most voted candidate of the majority party or coalition parties becomes automatically mayor. Finally, administrative reforms have reduced the opportunities of local party leaders and their representatives in the local boards to nominate officials in public and semi-public (inter-)local service administrations and enterprises.

Regarding the relations between levels, within and between mainstream parties, the priorities of parties of the federal level are still predominant over those of the regional level, although this predominance is waning (Deschouwer, 2003). Since 1999, regional coalitions are formed before a coalition party composition formula is found at the federal level, often leading to asymmetric compositions. Also, national interferences with the formation of local coalitions are quite a few, especially in larger cities (Wille & Deschouwer, 2012).

9. Intraparty democracy: In a partitocracy, mainstream parties tend to be oligarchic

In a partitocracy, parties are reluctant to operate internally in a democratic way, as this may undermine the freedom of maneuver of party elites. This freedom is especially needed for those elites participating in coalition governments, where each party needs to act as a disciplined unitary actor in order to permit the coordination of cabinet decisions with other coalition partners. Factionalism and interferences from lower party bodies, can only constrain the necessary room for maneuver for party actors in the cabinet¹⁴, and in any case may undermine the party's electoral attractiveness (voters do not vote for a "party of bickerers", Barrett, 2018).

Also, with the increasing power of parties within the political system, the internal organization of power within parties becomes vital (Carty, 2013). And thus Michels' (1911) "iron law of oligarchy" within parties becomes ever more relevant. And the more parties participate in government, the more oligarchisation will become institutionalized. In coalitions, not only ministers of one's own party have to be kept in line acting as party delegates. But they also serve as indirect coalition delegates that have to be in line with the coalition agreement, a mega compromise designed and underwritten by all coalition parties (Müller & Meyer, 2010). Hence ministers from different coalition parties serve as delegates of multiple party-principals, that are bound by a common principal/agent contract.

While the party government model does not necessarily require intra-party democracy, the seminal cartel party thesis of Mair and Katz (1995) discerned a decline in

¹⁴ Michels (1911, p. 365): formulated the fundamental sociological law of political parties which asserts that "it is organization which gives birth to the dominion of the elected over the electors, of the mandatories over the mandators, of the delegates over the delegators. Who says organization says oligarchy".

party membership (Mair & van Biezen, 2001) and within the (waning) mass parties, a centralization of power (in terms of recruitment, party finance, policy decision-making, campaigning, etc.) in the hands of national executive bodies. But at the same time, they discern some empowerment of the lowest party echelons, i.e. the local party members, that often become more directly involved in the (s)election of party leaders and parliamentary candidates. The “losers” in these intraparty restructuring processes are the intermediary party bodies, e.g. local party sections, their activists and their delegates to higher party bodies (e.g. the party’s general conference).

In the Belgian case, one can indeed find in most parties on the one hand, a decline in party membership, but also an empowerment of members in the selection of national party leaders, with competitive elections (see chapter of Pilet et al., in this volume). Also, the selection of candidates for parliamentary elections is now more open to party members (in half of the parties, at least formally), but in practice selection remains quite centralized (Vandeleene, 2016). Apart from these activities, most party members do not participate much in the internal workings of their party (Wauters, 2017).

10. Discussion: The future of parties, party government and partitocracy

The overview above indicates that most academic authors, many journalists as well as party politicians, perceive partitocracy as a pathological form, a degeneration, a “distortion and perversion of party government” (Pasquino & Valbruzzi, 2015, p. 161) and of representative democracy.

In addition, since the 1980s the “benign” vision of party government – unblemished by the excesses of partitocracy – itself has become more and more criticised. Mair (2008, p. 211) notices that while parties continue to dominate democratic politics, the conditions that support party government have generally been weakening, suggesting that the long-term security of party democracy cannot be taken for granted. Hence “it is now almost impossible to imagine party government in contemporary Europe either functioning effectively or sustaining complete legitimacy”.

These changing conditions are multiple. First, the old cleavages that divided political parties in the older West European democracies have attenuated substantially in the past 40 years. Mainstream governing parties’ programs and policies tend to converge, especially with the predominance of neoliberal economic paradigms. Therefore, “governments are now finding it increasingly difficult to be responsive to voters and to electoral opinion simply in the sense that they are finding it increasingly difficult to read and aggregate preferences and to persuade voters to align behind their policies” (Mair, 2009, p. 13). The personalization thesis of party politics stipulates that gradually voters do not vote for a party and a policy program anymore, but for individuals that parties propose as their electoral leaders, whose personality traits voters may

appreciate (Karvonen, 2010; Rahat & Kenig, 2018), even when these candidates are just non-political media celebrities (Marsh et al., 2010; Street, 2012; Wheeler, 2012).

Parties that enter government recruit increasingly apolitical technocrats, that give less priority to implementing the party's policy program, and are less accountable to their party leadership and the voters (Pinto et al., 2018, Bertou & Caramani, 2020).

Regarding the direct impact of parties on policies, Katz and Mair (2018) discerned a trend in party governments to transfer responsibility for a variety of activities onto non-partisan or non-governmental agencies, including neocorporatist bodies, independent central banks, the WTO or the EU. In addition, parties have had to compete increasingly with interest groups or lobbies (i.e. lobbyocracy, increasingly relevant at the EU level: Karr, 2017).

Others authors have observed a trend of transferring of decision-making power from the political to the judiciary, i.e. "*le gouvernement des juges*" (Davis, 1987), labeled recently juristocratie by Elchardus (2021).

Finally, also the media conditions of partitocracy have changed. Van Aelst and Cogels argue in this volume that partitocracy and mediocracy are compatible, and even mutually reinforcing. Their comparative research indicates that the leaders of political parties became the central actors featuring in the media. This "media-presidentialisation" also resonates with the thesis of "leader democracy", i.e. "a type of political, democratic regime and an elite configuration in which political leaders play a central role in providing a 'democratic linkage' between the rulers and the citizenry" (Pakulski & Körösenyi, 2012).

Likewise, Manin (1997) suggested that we witness a move from party democracy to an "audience" democracy": from traditional parties' democracy – where the political party was the dominant actor in the field of politics, the party program the leading principle and competence the virtue for which politicians strived and with which they legitimized their politics – to audience democracy in which personalities are favored over the party, performance over the program and authenticity over competence (De Beus, 2011).

Apart from these shifts in the older media, the "new social media" with their tremendous growth, have become an indispensable part of modern political campaigning. Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram have changed how political campaigns are run; how politicians and the public access and share political information; and the way citizens learn about politics, form opinions and attitudes, and ultimately engage in or disengage from the political process (van Aelst et al., 2017). Their use has increased the manipulation of publics through the spread of doubtful, discriminating, sometimes hate-based information (Lindner & Aichholzer, 2020). They lead to a declining supply of political information, of the quality and diversity of news, and growing inequality in political knowledge, increasing media concentration, fragmentation and polarization.

The emergence of so-called “digital parties” or “platform parties” (e.g. Cinque Stelle & Podemos), intend to transform intra-party democracy through the adoption of online ‘participatory platforms’, i.e. sections of their official websites where registered members can debate and discuss proposals, elect party officials and candidates, and decide on various issues. However, in practice they tend to be little inclusive and highly centralised. In this top-down model of “plebiscitarian reactive democracy”, party members have little say over decision-making process and are mostly left with ratifying decisions taken elsewhere by the party leadership (Gerbaudo, 2021).

The long list of dysfunctions of partitocracy, but also of current alternative models to democratic party government (audience democracy, mediocracy, personalized and celebrity politics, leadership democracy, lobbyocracy, juristocratie, populist democracy¹⁵, ...) echoes the recurrent worries about the “crisis of democracy”. Only the literature on (semi-)direct democracy and participatory democratic reforms (e.g. referendums, deliberative democracy, participatory budgeting, etc. (see chapter Devillers et al., in this book) brightens up somewhat the prospects for democracy in the future¹⁶.

While our comparative and longitudinal overview of the partitocratic nature of the Belgian political system undoubtedly confirms that Belgium is currently still a partitocracy – albeit less than in the 1970-1990s –, we can wonder whether these partitocratic excesses undermine the legitimacy of democracy, in the eye of Belgian citizens, the “ultimate principal” of their main delegates (i.e. the governing parties) in the decision making of our system of democratic delegation and accountability.

Using the longest comparative and longitudinal public opinion data set available (Eurobarometers (EB1976-2022)), the degree of satisfaction of Belgium citizens with the way democracy works in their country is for most years situated around the EU average (see Figure 1.2). However, there are three periods where satisfaction is lower: the 1979-1981 period (with 7 governments in 3 years!), the 1997-1999 period (with the Dutoix & dioxine crises) and finally in 2019-2020. After the fall of the Michel government, it took no less than 662 days to form the De Croo government, despite the urgency of the covid crisis. There is only one period in which Belgians were more satisfied than the European average: 2012 and 2013, i.e. the only full years of the Di Rupo cabinet.

¹⁵ Mair (2002) pitches “populist democracy,” a regime in which parties do not exist and the leaders are in direct, unmediated relationship with the voters, as the model opposite to “party democracy.”

¹⁶ However, some authors question whether a general demand to increase citizen participation in decision-making really exists. In their model of “stealth democracy” of Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002), most (US) citizens do not care about most policies and therefore are content to turn over decision-making authority to selfless experts and independent bodies. Also, the hopes about “E-democracy” or “Democracy 2.0” through the application of online tools for political participation and public discourse, have vanished. After two decades of e-democracy, e-participation was largely confined to the initial and the final stages of the policy cycle and rarely allows for entries into the core stages of decision-making and policy execution (UN, 2016).

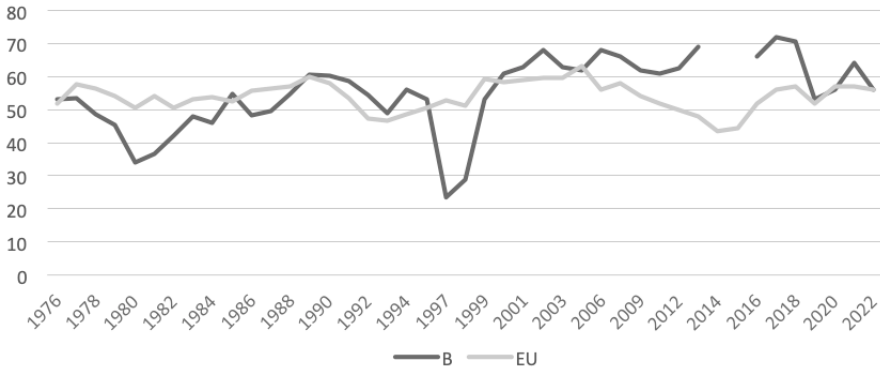


Figure 1.2: Satisfaction with democracy in Belgium and the EU 1976-2022

The trend above suggests that low satisfaction with democracy is affected mainly by deplorable government performance. This is confirmed when we look at the more short-term data EES regarding citizens satisfaction with their national government (2002-2018), where we notice a sudden fall after 2018 (as in 2010 after the global financial crisis), while before Belgians were more satisfied than the European average (for a more detailed snapshot picture, see the chapter of Devillers et al., in this book).

Finally, these trends are dramatically reflected in the trust citizens have in political parties, the core decision-makers in a partitocracy¹⁷. While in the 2002-2018 period trust in Belgian parties is slightly above average (but behind all Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands and Switzerland), trust in parties plummets in 2020 to a low of 17% (Eurobarometer Spring 2020 vs. 27% in EB Fall 2018)¹⁸. One may presume that this is due to the government resignation in December 2018 (when the N-VA-pulls out of the Michel government). It remains low due to the absence of a new government on October 1 2020, the longest period the country without a genuine government, with the highest number (13!) of failed formation attempts (De Winter & Dumont, 2022). This most complex formation was not only due to the complex electoral results and the high number of parties needed to attain a parliamentary majority, but also due to unnecessary delays caused by several mainstream parties that were paralyzed by

¹⁷ Note however that it is possible that one trusts a particular party very much, but detests all other parties given that, they are all enemies/competitors of the party one adores. In the 1999 PIOP/ISPO post electoral survey, we found that hardly one out of ten Belgians trusted political parties (in plural), but more than half trusted the party they voted for. Given the current record high number of parties, there are more parties to dislike in Belgium than in a compact two- or three-party system.

¹⁸ This is way below the West-European average (31%), but still more than Italians, French, Spanish and Portuguese, the usual laggards in institutional trust.

competitive internal leadership elections (CD&V, VLD, MR), crippling these parties' capacity to fully engage into coalition formation¹⁹.

The latest Eurobarometer (Winter 2021/Spring 2022) indicates a recovery towards the EU average of trust in government and parties. However, the 2024 (fourth!) "Mother of all elections" is likely to produce a party system even more complex than the one produced by the 2019 mother of all elections, making the formation of a viable coalition a "mission impossible" for the mainstream parties. This may start a new period of prolonged multilevel and intralevel ungovernability, feeding citizens' revulsion and, steering the Belgian partitocracy towards an irrevocable meltdown of its federal core.

References

- Abts, K., Swyngedouw, M., Billiet, J., & Meuleman, B. (2014). *Vlaanderen kiest: trends in stemgedrag en opvattingen over politiek, staatsvorming en kerk*. Leuven: LannooCampus.
- Ackaert, J., De Winter, L. Dumont, P., & Hennau, S. (2013). Met man en macht. Over mensen, macht en beleid bij lokale coalitievorming. In K. Deschouwer, T. Verthé & B. Rihoux (Eds.), *Op zoek naar de kiezers. Lokale partijafdelingen en de gemeenteraadsverkiezingen van oktober 2012* (pp. 147-164). Brussel: Academic and Scientific Publishers.
- Andeweg, R. B., & Timmermans, A. (2008). Conflict Management in Coalition Government. In K. Strøm, W. C. Müller, & T. Bergman (Eds.), *Cabinets and Coalition Bargaining: The Democratic Life Cycle in Western Europe* (pp. 269-300). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Andeweg, R. B. (2000). Consociational democracy. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 3(1), 509-536.
- Andeweg, R. B. (2020). Parties and Executives in Parliamentary Systems. In R. B. Andeweg, R., Elgie, L. Helms, J. Kaarbo, & F. Müller-Rommel (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Executives* (pp. 460-480). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- André, A., Baudewyns, P., Depauw, S., & De Winter, L. (2014). Het waarom van de voorkeurstem. In K. Deschouwer, P. Delwit, M. Hooghe, P. Baudewyns, & S. Walgrave (Eds.), *De kiezer ontcijferd* (pp. 57-75). Leuven: LannooCampus.
- André, A., & Depauw, S. (2017). The quality of representation and satisfaction with democracy: The consequences of citizen-elite policy and process congruence. *Political Behavior*, 39(2), 377-397.

¹⁹ In addition, for a long time the CD&V preferred a government including the N-VA instead of the final Vivaldi formula.

- André, A., Depauw, S., & Pilet, J. B. (2014). The nature of preference voting: Disentangling the party and personal components of candidate choice. In K. Deschouwer (Ed.), *Mind the Gap. Political Participation and Representation in Belgium* (pp. 251-274). London: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Baloyra, E. A. (1998). El Salvador: From Reactionary Despotism to Partidocracia. In K. Kumar (Ed.), *Postconflict elections, democratization, and international assistance* (pp. 15-37). Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Balthazar, H. (1981). La participatie entre les deux guerres. *Res Publica*, 23(1), 5-8.
- Barberà, Ò., & Barrio, A. (2006). Convergència i Unió: From Stability to Decline? In L. De Winter, M. Gómez-Reino & P. Lynch (Eds.), *Autonomist Parties in Europe* (pp. 101-142). Barcelona: ICPS.
- Bardi, L., Stefano, S., & H. Trechsel, A. (2014). Responsive and responsible? The role of parties in twenty-first century politics. *West European Politics*, 37(2), 235-252.
- Barrett, D. J. (2018). *The effect of observable party cohesion on voter choice in liberal democracies* [PhD Dissertation]. Dublin: Trinity College Available at: <http://www.tara.tcd.ie/bitstream/handle/2262/82676/Complete%20PhD%20thesis.pdf?sequence=1>.
- Bergman, T., & Strøm, K. (2011). Nordic Europe in comparative perspective. In T. Bergman & K., Strøm (Eds.), *The Madisonian Turn. Political Parties and Parliamentary Democracy in Nordic Europe* (pp. 35-65). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Bertsou, E., & Caramani, D. (Eds.). (2020). *The technocratic challenge to democracy*. London: Routledge.
- BIGD (2014). *The State of Governance Bangladesh 2013: Democracy, party, politics*. Dhaka: BRAC Institute of Governance and Development.
- Billiet, J. (2006). Verzuiling en ontzuiling in België. In E. Witte & A. Meynen (Eds.), *De geschiedenis van België na 1945* (pp. 331-364). Antwerpen: Standaard Uitgeverij.
- Boix, C., Miller, M., & Rosato, S. (2013). A complete data set of political regimes, 1800–2007. *Comparative political studies*, 46(12), 1523-1554.
- Borz, G., & Janda, K. (2020). Contemporary trends in party organization: revisiting intra-party democracy. *Party Politics*, 26(1), 3-8.
- Bouissou, M., & Pombeni, P. (2001). The Rise and Fall of “Regulated Redistributive Partitocracy”. *Revue française de science politique*, 51(4): 545-567.
- Bozóki, A. (2015). Broken democracy, predatory state, and nationalist populism. Athenaeum. *Polish Political Science Studies*, 48, 247-262.

- Brans, M., de Visscher, C., Gouglas, A., & Jaspers, S. (2017). Political control and bureaucratic expertise: Policy analysis by ministerial cabinet members. In M. Brans & D. Aubin (Eds.), *Policy analysis in Belgium* (pp. 57-77). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Bruyère, L., Crosetti, A. S., Faniel, J., & Sägerser, C. (Eds.). (2019). *Piliers, dépilariation et clivage philosophique en Belgique*. Bruxelles: CRISP.
- Buxton, J. (1999). Venezuela: degenerative democracy. *Democratization*, 6(1), 246-270.
- Calise, M. (1994). The Italian particracy: beyond president and parliament. *Political Science Quarterly*, 109(3), 441-460.
- Caramani, D. (2004). *The nationalization of politics: The formation of national electorates and party systems in Western Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Catterall, P. (2021). Edmund Burke, Delegates, Trustees and Parliament: From Constituency Instructions to Delegatory Government. In A. Antoine, G. Gadbin-George, E. Gibson-Morgan, & A. Blick (Eds.), *Constitutions under pressure: France and the United Kingdom in an age of populism and Brexit* (pp. 83-108). Paris: Société de Législation Comparée.
- Ceron, A., (2014). Gamson Rule Not for All: Patterns of Portfolio Allocation among Italian Party Factions. *European Journal of Political Research*, 53(1), 180-199.
- Chasquetti, D., & Buquet, D. (2004). La democracia en Uruguay: una partidocracia de consenso. *Política*, 42, 221-247.
- Chaouch, M., T. (2012). Crisis of political representation and democratization in Mexico: the generality and specificity of the case. *Desafios*, 24(1), 15.
- Chiaromonte, A., & Emanuele, V. (2017). Party system volatility, regeneration and de-institutionalization in Western Europe (1945–2015). *Party Politics*, 23(4), 376-388.
- Colomer, J., M. (2020). Political institutions in a comparative perspective. In D. Muro, & I. Lago. (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Spanish Politics* (pp. 153-170). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Coppedge, M. (1994). *Strong parties and lame ducks. Presidential partyarchy and factionalism in Venezuela*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Cotta, M. (2018). Technocratic Government Versus Party Government? Non-partisan Ministers and the Changing Parameters of Political Leadership in European Democracies. In A. Costa Pinto, M. Cotta, & P. Tavares de Almeida (Eds.), *Technocratic Ministers and Political Leadership in European Democracies* (pp. 267-288). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cross, W.P., & Katz, R.S. (Eds.). (2013). *The challenges of intra-party democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Dalton, R. J. (2018). *Political realignment: economics, culture, and electoral change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dassonneville, R., Hooghe, M., & Debus, M. (2017). Economic voting in a federal country: Overcoming the limited clarity of responsibility. In K. Deschouwer (Ed.) *Mind the gap. Participation and representation in Belgium* (pp. 161-182). London: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Davis, M. H. (1987). A government of judges: an historical review. *The American Journal of Comparative Law*, 35(3), 559-580.
- De Beus, J. (2011). Audience democracy: An emerging pattern in postmodern political communication. In K. Brants & K. Voltmer (Eds.), *Political communication in postmodern democracy* (pp. 19-38). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Della Porta, D. (2000). *Political parties and corruption: 17 hypotheses on the interactions between parties and corruption*. EUI paper, San Domenico: European University Institute.
- Della Porta, D. (2004). Political parties and corruption: Ten hypotheses on five vicious circles. *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 42(1), 35-60.
- Delwit, P. (2016). *Les gauches radicales en Europe, XIXe-XXIe siècles*. Bruxelles: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles.
- Demasi, C. (2012). La partidocracia uruguaya: aportes para la discusión de una hipótesis. *Historia y problemas del siglo XX*, 3(3), 267-282.
- Depauw, S., & Martin, S. (2008). Legislative party discipline and cohesion in comparative perspective. In D. Giannetti & K. Benoit (Eds.), *Intra-party politics and coalition governments* (pp. 119-136). London: Routledge.
- De Ridder, H. (1982). *De keien van de Wetstraat*. Leuven: Davidsfonds.
- Deschouwer, K., & Luther, K. R. (2004). From consociation to federation. In K. Deschouwer & K. R. Luther (Eds.), *Party Elites in Divided Societies* (pp. 93-127). London: Routledge.
- Deschouwer K. (2003). Political Parties in Multi-Layered Systems. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 10(3), 213-226.
- Destexhe, A., Eraly, A., & Gillet, E. (2007). *Démocratie ou partitocratie*. Bruxelles: Labor.
- De Vadder, I. (2007). *Het DNA van de macht*. Leuven: Van Halewyck.
- Dewachter, W., & De Winter, L. (1981). *Over Partitocratie*. KU Leuven. Afdeling politologie.
- De Winter, L. (1981). Partitocratie als blokkade. *De Nieuwe Maand*, 10(5), 334-346.
- De Winter, L. (1981). De partijpolitiserings als instrument van de partitocratie. Een overzicht van de ontwikkeling sinds de Tweede Wereldoorlog. *Res Publica*, 23(1), 53-107.

- De Winter, L. (1990). Parlement et parti politique comme trajectoire de la carrière ministérielle en Belgique. *Les Cahiers du CRAPS*, 12, 40-54.
- De Winter, L. (2000). *Political Corruption in the Belgian Partitocracy: (Still) an Endemic Disease?* San Domenico: European University Institute, Working paper no. 2000/31.
- De Winter, L. (2002). Belgian MPs: between omnipotent parties and disenchanting citizen-clients. In P. Norton (Ed.), *Parliaments and Citizens in Western Europe* (pp. 89-110). London: Frank Cass.
- De Winter, L. (2002). Political corruption in Belgium. In M. Bull & J. Newell (Eds.), *Corruption in Contemporary Politics* (pp. 93-105). London: Macmillan.
- De Winter, L. (2006). *Sixty years of party patronage in the Belgian partitocracy: quantitative and qualitative transformations*. Paper prepared for the Workshop on Party Patronage, Joint Sessions of the ECPR, University of Nicosia, 25-30 April.
- De Winter, L., Della Porta, D., & Deschouwer, K. (1996). Comparing similar countries: Italy and Belgium. *Res Publica*, 43(2), 215-236.
- De Winter, L., & Dumont, P., (2000). PPGs in Belgium: Subjects of Partitocratic Dominion. In K. Heidar & R. Koole (Eds.), *Behind Closed Doors: Parliamentary Party Groups in European Democracies* (pp. 106-129). London: Routledge.
- De Winter, L., Erzeel, S., Vandeleene A., & Wauters, B. (2013). Nationale bemoeienis of lokale autonomie? Het lijstvormingsproces bij gemeenteraadsverkiezingen. In K. Deschouwer, T. Verthé & B. Rihoux (Eds.), *Op zoek naar de kiezers. Lokale partijafdelingen en de gemeenteraadsverkiezingen van oktober 2012* (pp. 93-122). Brussel: Academic and Scientific Publishers.
- De Winter, L., & Dumont P. (2021). Belgium: From in highly constrained and complex bargaining setting to paralysis. In T. Bergman, H. Back & J. Hellström (Eds.), *Coalition Governance in Western Europe* (pp. 81-123). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- De Winter, L., & Dumont, P. (2022). Coalition formation in Belgium: from exceptional complexity to régime breakdown. In D. Caluwaerts & M. Reuchamps (Eds.), *Belgian Exceptionalism: Belgian Politics between Realism and Surrealism* (pp. 108-124). Abingdon: Routledge.
- De Winter, L., & Wolfs, W. (2014) *The decline of the Belgian Parliament: Myth or reality? A preliminary longitudinal analysis*. Paper presented at the Parliaments and Parliamentarians – Evolution and Change in Challenging Times, Second General Conference of the ECPR Standing Group on Parliaments, Vienna, 26-28 June.

- De Winter, L., & Wolfs, W. (2017). Policy analysis in the Belgian legislatures: the marginal role of a structurally weak parliament in a partitocracy with no scientific and political tradition of policy analysis. In M. Brans & D. Aubin (Eds.), *Policy analysis in Belgium* (pp. 129-147). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Di Mascio, F., & Natalini, A. (2015). Fiscal retrenchment in southern Europe: Changing patterns of public management in Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain. *Public Management Review*, 17(1), 129-148.
- Di Mascio, F., Jalali, C., Pappas, T., Verge, T., & Gómez, R. (2010). *Southern European party patronage in comparative perspective*. Paper prepared for the PSA 60th Anniversary Conference, Edinburgh 29 March-1 April.
- Dodeigne, J., Close, C., & Teuber, F. (2021). Nationalisation of local party systems in Belgium (1976-2018): the combined effects of municipality size and parliamentary parties' dominance. *Local Government Studies*, 47(1), 100-125.
- Dodeigne, J., & Vandeleene, A. (2013). *New rules, new political class? Analysis of the impact of the electoral reforms in Belgium on the 2014 elections and aftermath*. Paper presented at the Second edition of the Conference 'Belgium: The State of the Federation', Louvain-la-Neuve, 18 October.
- Dumont, P., Fiers, S., & Dandoy, R. (2008). Belgium: ups and downs of ministerial careers in a partitocratic federal state. In K. Dowding & P. Dumont (Eds.), *The Selection of Ministers in Europe: Hiring and Firing* (pp. 125-146). London: Routledge.
- Elchardus, M., (2021). *Reset. Over identiteit, gemeenschap en democratie*. Aalter: Ertsberg.
- Esser, F., & Strömbäck, J. (Eds.). (2014). *Mediatization of politics: Understanding the transformation of Western democracies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ennsner-Jedenastik, L., & Müller, W. C. (2015). Intra-Party Democracy, Political Performance, and the Survival of Party Leaders: Austria, 1945-2011. *Party Politics*, 21(6), 930-943.
- Ennsner-Jedenastik, L., & Schumacher, G. (2021). What parties want from their leaders: How office achievement trumps electoral performance as a driver of party leader survival. *European Journal of Political Research*, 60(1), 114-130.
- Fallend, F. (2012). Populism in government: the case. In C. Mudde & R. Kaltwasser (Eds.), *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or corrective for democracy?* (pp. 113-135). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ferrín, M., & Kriesi, H. (Eds.). (2016). *How Europeans view and evaluate democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Freedom House (2022). *Freedom in the World 2021: democracy-under-siege*, available at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2021/democracy-under-siege>.

- Galarza Izquierdo, L. (1992). *Partidocracia y descomposición de la clase política ecuatoriana*. Quito: FEPP.
- Gerbaudo, P. (2021). Are digital parties more democratic than traditional parties? Evaluating Podemos and Movimento 5 Stelle's online decision-making platforms. *Party Politics*, 27(4), 730-742.
- Giebler, H., Lacewell, O. P., Regel, S., & Werner, A. (2018). Decline or change? Party types and the crisis of representative democracy. In W. Merkel & S. Kneip (Eds.), *Democracy and crisis. Challenges in Turbulent Times* (pp. 145-175). Cham: Springer.
- Goddard, D. (2021). Examining the Appointment of Women to Ministerial Positions across Europe: 1970–2015. *Party Politics*, 27(4), 631-643.
- Göransson, M., & Eraly, A. (2015). Les cabinets ministériels en Belgique: entre coalition et participatie. In J. M. Eymeri-Douzans, X. Bioy & S. Mouton (Eds.), *Le règne des entourages. Cabinets et conseillers de l'exécutif* (pp. 703-719). Paris: Presses de Science Po.
- Grégoire, M. (1965) *Particratie*. Liège: Editions du Grand Liège.
- Guo, B. (2020). A Partocracy with Chinese Characteristics: Governance System Reform under Xi Jinping. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 29(126), 809-823.
- Jennes, G., & Persyn, D. (2015). The effect of political representation on the geographic distribution of income: Evidence using Belgian data. *European Journal of Political Economy*, 37(C), 178-194.
- Hearl, D. J. (1992). Policy and coalition in Belgium. In M. Laver & I. Budge (Eds.), *Party Policy and Government Coalitions* (pp. 244-276). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Held, D. (2006). *Models of democracy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hellemans, S. (2020) Pillarization ('Verzuiling'). On Organized 'Self-Contained Worlds' in the Modern World. *The American Sociologist*, 51(2), 124-147.
- Hibbing, J. R., & Theiss-Morse, E. (2002). *Stealth democracy: Americans' beliefs about how government should work*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hooghe, M. (1999). De persistentie van verzuiling op microniveau in Vlaanderen. Een analyse van surveydata over lidmaatschap, zuilintegratie, stemgedrag en maatschappelijke houdingen. *Res Publica*, 41(4), 391-420.
- Horton, S. (2011). Contrasting Anglo-American and continental European civil service systems. In A. Massey (Ed.), *International handbook on civil service systems* (pp. 31-54). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Huyse, L. (1970). *Pacifcatie en verzuiling in de Belgische politiek. Een sociologische studie*. Antwerpen: Standaard Wetenschappelijke Uitgeverij.
- Huyse, L. (1984). Pillarization reconsidered. *Acta Politica*, 19(1), 145-158.

- Huyse, L. (2003). *Over Politiek*. Leuven: Van Halewyck.
- Kam, C. (2014). Party discipline. In S. Martin, T. Saalfeld, & K. Strøm (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of legislative studies* (pp. 399-417). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Karr, K. (2007). *Democracy and lobbying in the European Union*. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag.
- Karvonen, L. (2010). *The personalisation of politics: A study of parliamentary democracies*. London: ECPR.
- Katz, R. S. (1987). *Party Governments: European and American Experiences*. Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter.
- Katz, R. S., & Mair, P. (1995). Changing models of party organization and party democracy: the emergence of the cartel party. *Party politics*, 1(1), 5-28.
- Katz, R. S., & Mair, P. (2018). *Democracy and the cartelization of political parties*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kitromilides, P. M. (2015). Partitocracy and democracy in Cyprus. In G. Charalambous & C. Christophorou (Eds.), *Party-Society Relations in the Republic of Cyprus: Political and societal strategies* (pp. 203-211). London: Routledge.
- Kitschelt, H. (1997). *The radical right in Western Europe: A comparative analysis*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Kopecký, P., Mair, P., & Spirova, M. (Eds.). (2012). *Party patronage and party government in European democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kostadinova, T., & Levitt, B. (2014). Toward a theory of personalist parties: Concept formation and theory building. *Politics & Policy*, 42(4), 490-512.
- Kuçi, D. (2015). Contemporary Models of Organization of Power and the Macedonian Model of Organization of Power. *European Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 1(3), 9-15.
- Lesschaeve, C. (2017). Inequality in Party-voter Opinion Congruence: A Matter of Choices Made or Choices Given? *Representation*, 53(2), 153-166.
- Lindner, R., & Aichholzer, G. (2020). E-democracy: conceptual foundations and recent trends. In L. Hennen, I. Van Keulen, I. Korthagen, G. Aichholzer, R. Lindner & R. Ø. Nielsen (Eds.), *European e-democracy in practice* (pp. 11-45). Cham: Springer Nature.
- Lijphart, A. (2012). *Patterns of democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Lipset, S. M., & Rokkan, S. (Eds.). (1967). *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives*. New York: Free Press.
- Luther, K. R. (2004). A framework for the comparative analysis of political parties and party systems in consociational democracy. In K. Deschouwer & K. R. Luther (Eds.), *Party Elites in Divided Societies* (pp. 22-38). London: Routledge.

- Maat, A. (2016). *De partitocratie. Over de verstrekkende macht van onze politieke partijen*. Soesterberg: Aspekt B.V. Uitgeverij.
- Mair, P. (2002). Populist Democracy vs. Party Democracy. In Y. Mény & Y. Surel (Eds.), *Democracies and the Populist Challenge* (pp. 81-98). Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Mair, P., & van Biezen, I. (2001). Party membership in twenty European democracies, 1980-2000. *Party politics*, 7(1), 5-21.
- Mair, P. (2008). The challenge to party government. *West European Politics*, 31(1-2), 211-234.
- Mair, P. (2005). *Democracy beyond parties*. Paper presented at the Center for the Study of Democracy, University of California, Irvine.
- Maranini, G. (1949). *Governo parlamentare e partitocrazia*. Discorso all'inaugurazione dell'Anno accademico 1949/50 dell'Ateneo fiorentino, Editrice Universitaria.
- Matuschek, P. (2003). Spain: A Textbook Case of Partitocracy. In J. Borchert & J. Zeiss (Eds.), *The Political Class in Advanced Democracies* (pp. 336-351). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Marsh, D., Hart, P., & Tindall, K. (2010). Celebrity Politics: The Politics of the Late Modernity? *Political Studies Review*, 8(3), 322-340.
- Márquez, D. (2014). Democracia y partidocracia en México: la decepción democrática. *Revista de Derecho Estasiológico Ideología y Militancia*, 2(3), 37-64.
- Martin, S., & Depauw, S. (2009). Legislative party discipline and cohesion in comparative perspective. In D. Giannetti & K. Benoit (Eds.), *Intra-Party Politics and Coalition Governments in Parliamentary Democracies* (pp. 103-120). London: Routledge.
- Mershon, C. (2001). Contending Models of Portfolio Allocation and Office Payoffs to Party Factions: Italy, 1963-79. *American Journal of Political Science*, 45(2), 277-293.
- Michels, R. (1915). *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*, Hearst's International Library Company.
- Hassan, M., Islam, S., & Zakaria, S. M. (2013). Partyarchy and Political Underdevelopment in Bangladesh. In *The State of Governance in Bangladesh 2013: Democracy, Party, Politics* (pp. 24). Dhaka: BRAC University.
- Moury, C., & Timmermans, A. (2013). Inter-party conflict management in coalition governments: analyzing the role of coalition agreements in Belgium, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands. *Politics and Governance*, 1(2), 117-131.
- Moury, C. (2013). *Coalition Government and Party Mandate: How coalition agreements constrain ministerial action*. London: Routledge.

- Mudde, C. (2007). *Populist radical right parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Müller, W. C. (2000). Patronage by national governments. In J. Blondel & M. Cotta (Eds.), *The nature of party government: a comparative European perspective* (pp. 141-160). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan Springer.
- Müller, W. C. (2006). Party patronage and party colonization of the state. In R. Katz & W. Crotty (Eds.), *Handbook of party politics* (pp. 189-195). London: Sage.
- Müller W. C., & Sieberer U. (2005). Party Law, In R. Katz & W. Crotty (Eds.), *Handbook of party politics* (pp. 435-445). London: Sage.
- Müller, W. C., & Meyer, T. M. (2010). Meeting the challenges of representation and accountability in multi-party governments. *West European Politics*, 33(5), 1065-1092.
- Müller, W. C., & Strøm, K. (2008). Coalition Agreements and Cabinet Governance. In K. Strøm, W. C. Müller, & T. Bergman (Eds.), *Cabinets and Coalition Bargaining: The Democratic Life Cycle in Western Europe* (pp. 159-199). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Naurin, E., Royed, T.J., & Thomson, R. (Eds.). (2019). *Party mandates and democracy: Making, breaking, and keeping election pledges in twelve countries*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Ostrogorski, M. (2002). Democracy and the organization of political parties, 1902. In *Perspectives on political parties* (pp. 251-261). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Pakulski, J., & Körösenyi, A. (2012). *Toward Leader Democracy*. London: Anthem Press.
- Pappas, T. S., & Assimakopoulou, Z. (2012). Party patronage in Greece: Political entrepreneurship in a party patronage democracy. In P. Kopecký, P. Mair, & M. Spirova (Eds.), *Party patronage and party government in European democracies* (pp. 144-162). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pareto, V. (1893). The Parliamentary Régime in Italy. *Political Science Quarterly*, 8, 677-721.
- Pasquino, G. (1987). Party Government in Italy: Achievements and Prospects. In R. S. Katz (Ed.), *Party Governments: European and American Experiences* (pp. 202-242). Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Pasquino, G. (2004). Partitocrazia. In N. Bobbio, N. Matteucci, & G. Pasquino (Eds.), *Il dizionario di politica*. Torino: Utet.
- Pasquino, G. (2019). *Italian Democracy: How It Works*. London: Routledge.
- Pellegata, A., & Quaranta, M. (2018). Accountability through government alternation: economic performance and the conditional role of political institutions in fifty countries, 1990–2015. *International Political Science Review*, 40(3), 419-436.

- Pennings, P., Keman, H., & Kleinnijenhuis, J. (2005). *Doing research in political science: An introduction to comparative methods and statistics*. London: Sage.
- Perin, F. (1960). *La démocratie enrayée, Essai sur le régime parlementaire belge de 1918-1958*. Bruxelles: Institut belge de science politique.
- Piattoni, S. (Ed.). (2001). *Clientelism, interests, and democratic representation: the European experience in historical and comparative perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pinto, A. C., Cotta, M., & Tavares de Almeida, P. (Eds.). (2018). *Technocratic ministers and political leadership in European democracies*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Poguntke, T. (2013). *Politics in the European Union: Party rule without party government. On the way to a European party democracy*. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft.
- Ragazzoni, D. (2019). "Particracy": The pre-populist critique of parties and its implications. In P. Blokker & M. Anselmi (Eds.), *Multiple Populisms. Italy as Democracy's Mirror* (pp. 86-105). London: Routledge.
- Rahat, G., & Kenig, O. (2018). *From party politics to personalized politics? Party change and political personalization in democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rose, R. (1969). The variability of party government: A theoretical and empirical critique. *Political Studies*, 17(4), 413-445.
- Rose, R. (1974). *The problem of party government*. London: Palgrave Macmillan Springer.
- Saiegh, S. M. (2014). Lawmaking. In S. Martin, T. Saalfeld, & K. Strøm (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of legislative studies* (pp. 481-513). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sartori, G. (1987). *The Theory of Democracy Revisited*. Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publishers.
- Siavelis, P. M. (2009). Elite-mass congruence, partidocracia and the quality of Chilean democracy. *Journal of Politics in Latin America*, 1(3), 3-31.
- Simral, V. (2014). *The cost of partisocracy: party funding in East Central Europe* [PhD Dissertation]. Lucca: Scuola IMT Alti Studi.
- Spasojević, D. (2020). Rising Expectations and Centralizing Power: Party Leaders in Serbia. In S. Gherghina (Ed.), *Party Leaders in Eastern Europe* (pp. 219-240). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Spoon, J.-J., & Klüver, H. (2019). Party convergence and vote switching: Explaining mainstream party decline across Europe. *European Journal of Political Research*, 58(4), 1021-1042.

- Street, J. (2012). Do Celebrity Politics and Celebrity Politicians Matter?, *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 14(3), 346-356.
- Strøm, K., & Müller, W. C. (1999). Political parties and hard choices. In W. C. Müller & K. Strøm (Eds.), *Policy, office, or votes* (pp. 1-35). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Takis S. (1999). *Making Party Democracy in Greece*. London: Macmillan.
- Thomassen, J. (1994). Empirical research into political representation: Failing democracy or failing models. In M.K. Jennings & T.E. Mann (Eds.) *Elections at home and abroad: Essays in honor of Warren Miller* (pp. 237-65). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- Thomson, R., Royed, T., Naurin, E., Artés, J., Costello, R., Ennser-Jedenastik, L., Ferguson, M. et al. (2017). The fulfillment of parties' election pledges: A comparative study on the impact of power sharing. *American Journal of Political Science*, 61(3), 527-542.
- UN. (2016). *United Nations e-government survey 2016*. <http://workspace.unpan.org/sites/Internet/Documents/UNPAN97453.pdf>.
- Van Aelst, P., Strömbäck, J., Esser, F., de Vreese, C., Matthes, J., Hopmann, D. N., & Stanyer, J. (2017). Political communication in a high-choice media environment: A challenge for democracy? *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 41, 3-27.
- Vandeleene, A. (2016). *Does candidate selection matter? A comparative analysis of Belgian political parties' selection procedures and their relation to the candidates' profile*. Doctoral dissertation, UCL-Université catholique de Louvain.
- Van Den Brande, A. (1973). Voluntary associations in the Belgian political system 1954-1968. *Res Publica*, 15(2), 329-356.
- van Haute, E., & Wauters, B. (2019). Do Characteristics of Consociational Democracies Still Apply to Belgian Parties? *Politics of the Low Countries*, 1(1), 6-26.
- Van Nieuwenhuysse, K., Fiers, S., & Verleden, F. (2018). De macht van partijen in België sinds 1981 - partitocratie revisited. *Res Publica*, 60(4), 302-317.
- Van Vonno, C. M., Malka, R. I., Depauw, S., Hazan, R., & Andeweg, R. (2014). Agreement, loyalty, and discipline: A sequential approach to party unity. In K. Deschouwer & S. Depauw (Eds.), *Representing the People: a Survey among Members of Statewide and Substate Parliaments* (pp. 110-136). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Velásquez Pinilla, B. (2018) El interés particular en el sistema de partidos políticos en Colombia. *Novum Jus: Revista Especializada en Sociología Jurídica y Política*, 12(2), 131-146.

- Venturino, F. (2010). Italy: From Partitocracy to Personal Parties. In J. Blondel & J.-L. Thiébaud (Eds.), *Political Leadership, Parties, and Citizens: The Personalization of Leadership* (pp. 172-189). London and New York: Routledge.
- Von Arnim, H. (2017). *Die Hebel der Macht: und wer sie bedient-Parteiherrschaft statt Volkssouveränität*. München: Heyne Verlag.
- Vos, D., & Van Aelst, P. (2018). Does the political system determine media visibility of politicians? A comparative analysis of political functions in the news in sixteen countries. *Political Communication*, 35(3), 371-392.
- Vuye H., & Wouters, V. (2019). *Schone Schijn: Particratie wurgt democratie*. Hofstade: Doorbraak Boeken.
- Walgrave, S., Caals, T., Suetens, M., & De Swert, K. (2004). *Ministerial cabinets and partitocracy. A career pattern study of ministerial cabinet members in Belgium*, PSW Paper 2004/7, Antwerp: University of Antwerp, Faculty of political and social sciences.
- Wauters, B. (2017). *Wie is nog van de partij? Crisis en toekomst van partijleden in Vlaanderen*. Leuven: Acco.
- Wauters, B., & Schamp, T. (2014). *Standen binnen CD&V: een analyse op niveau van de partijleden*. Onderzoeksnota Universiteit Gent.
- Wauters, B., Bouteca, N., & De Vet, B. (2021). Personalization of parliamentary behaviour: Conceptualization and empirical evidence from Belgium (1995–2014). *Party Politics*, 27(2), 246-257.
- Wauters, B., Van Aelst, P., Thijssen, P., Rodenbach, J., Smulders, J., & Pilet, J-B. (2015). Presidentialisering versus personalisering? De daling van het gebruik van de voorkeurstem verklaard. In K. Deschouwer, P. Delwit, M. Hooghe, P. Baudewyns, & S. Walgrave (Eds.), *De kiezer ontcijferd: het stemgedrag en de stemmotivaties op 25 mei 2014* (pp. 76-95). Leuven: LannooCampus.
- Wauters, B., Thijssen, P., & Erkel, P. (2020). Preference Voting in the Low Countries. *Politics of the Low Countries*, 3(1), 77-106.
- Weber, M. (1919). *Politik als Beruf*. In: *Geistige Arbeit als Beruf. Vier Vorträge vor dem Freistudentischen Bund*. München: Zweiter Vortrag. München.
- Weekers, K., Maddens, B., & Noppe, J. (2009). Explaining the evolution of the party finance regime in Belgium. *Journal of elections, public opinion and parties*, 19(1), 25-48.
- Wheeler, M. (2013). *Celebrity politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Wheeler, M. (2012). The democratic worth of celebrity politics in an era of late modernity. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 14(3), 407-422.

- Wiesendahl, E. (2013). Restlaufzeiten der Parteiendemokratie. In O. Niedermayer, B. Höhne & U. Jun (Eds.), *Abkehr von den Parteien?* (pp. 9-42). Wiesbaden: Springer.
- Wikipedia, *Non-partisan democracy* at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-partisan_democracy.
- Wille, F., & Deschouwer, K. (2012). *Over mensen en macht. Coalitievorming in de Belgische gemeenten*. Brussel: ASP Editions.

Chapter 2. The decline of the Belgian Parliament¹

Wouter Wolfs
Britt Vande Walle

Introduction

In the field of legislative studies, the decline of parliaments has traditionally been one of the most dominant paradigms for consolidated democratic systems, both for Westminster type of parliamentary systems (e.g. Bryce, 1921; Wheare, 1963) and in continental European systems such as France or Italy (Cotta & Verzichelli, 2007). Later, authors have questioned the decline thesis, among others because of a lack of empirical data (Elgie & Stapleton, 2006; Flinders & Kelso, 2011; Khmelko et al., 2020; Norton, 1999).

Conceptually, the decline of a parliament can be analysed in two main perspectives: in relative or in absolute terms. The first approach considers political power as a zero sum game – i.e. the increase of power of one actor means by definition the decrease power of one (or more) other actor(s) – and examines the power of a parliament compared to other political actors, such as political parties (Deschouwer, De Winter & Della Porta, 1996; Cotta & Verzichelli, 2007), interest groups (Norton, 1999), new public management actors (Rieder & Lehmann, 2002), deregulation and privatization (Megginson & Netter, 2001), ‘mediacracy’ (Norris, 2011), the judiciary (Vallinder, 1995:14), judicial activism (Lijphart 2012: 214), EU actors (Council, EP, Commission, etc.) but also other international public actors (i.e. IMF, WB, etc.), or other agents of globalization such as multinational enterprises, banks or rating bureaus (Beck, 2005). The most common approach has been an analysis of the declining position of the legislative branch vis-à-vis the executive. This process of “deparliamentarisation” – parliaments losing influence over governments – has been described by many authors (Wessels, 1989; Birkinshaw & Ashiagbor, 1996; Raunio & Hix, 2000; O’ Brennan & Raunio, 2007).

A second approach is to consider the decline of parliaments in an absolute way through a long-term analysis of the main parliamentary instruments (such as private

¹ This chapter partly draws from ideas and data collected in collaboration with Lieven De Winter. More specifically, the paper ‘The decline of the Belgian Parliament: a preliminary longitudinal analysis’ presented at the ISPOLE workshop in Louvain-la-Neuve, 15-16 May 2014, and the paper ‘The decline of the Belgian Parliament: Myth or reality?’, presented at the ECPR Standing Group on Parliaments Conference in Vienna on 26-28 June 2014.

member bills (PMB), decree laws, committee and plenary meetings), constitutional or statutory rules regarding parliament's role in legislation, legislative support structures or the profile and seniority of Members of Parliament (MPs) (See for example Cotta & Best, 2000, 2007; Kreppel, 2009).

In this chapter, we will look mostly at the change in parliamentary power of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives, by focusing on the empirical components of parliamentary outputs, how this influences the parliament's relation to the executive, and which role political parties play in this respect. The first part of this chapter goes into the general context of Belgian politics in which the Chamber is situated. The second part gives an overview of the main parliamentary indicators, and the third part describes how the mechanisms of partitocracy work in practice and have a negative effect on the position of the parliament vis-à-vis the executive. To study this change in components of parliamentary powers and how this influences the parliament's relation to the executive and the political parties, we collected data from the annual reports of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives on the one hand and from semi-structured in-depth interviews that we conducted with the secretaries and policy advisors of the parliamentary groups on the other hand.

1. A context of party system fragmentation and difficult coalition formation

The Belgian party system is one of the most fragmented in Western Europe. Until the end of the 1950s, it could be characterized as a two-and-a-half party system. Since then, the number of effective parties has gradually increased, with a (provisional) peak in 2019 of 9,7 parties (Figure 2.1). In terms of fragmentation, Belgium has consistently scored higher compared to traditionally fragmented party systems like the Netherlands since the 1970s. This extreme fragmentation expresses a multitude of cleavages and policy dimensions: left-right, clerical-anticlerical, regional-linguistic, materialist-postmaterialist and system-antisystem. An important reason for this fragmentation is that (most) political parties in Belgium are not nation-wide. Instead, they are homogeneously Flemish or Francophone, and contest only Flemish or Francophone constituencies (except for the bilingual Brussels constituency). The only exception is the radical left Belgian Workers' Party PVDA/PTB, the only nation-wide party in Belgium. The Francophone PTB and Flemish PVDA form a single parliamentary group – the Flemish and Walloon Greens also unite themselves in one group in the Chamber – and have a single party headquarters and party leader (Pilet, 2020, p. 10).

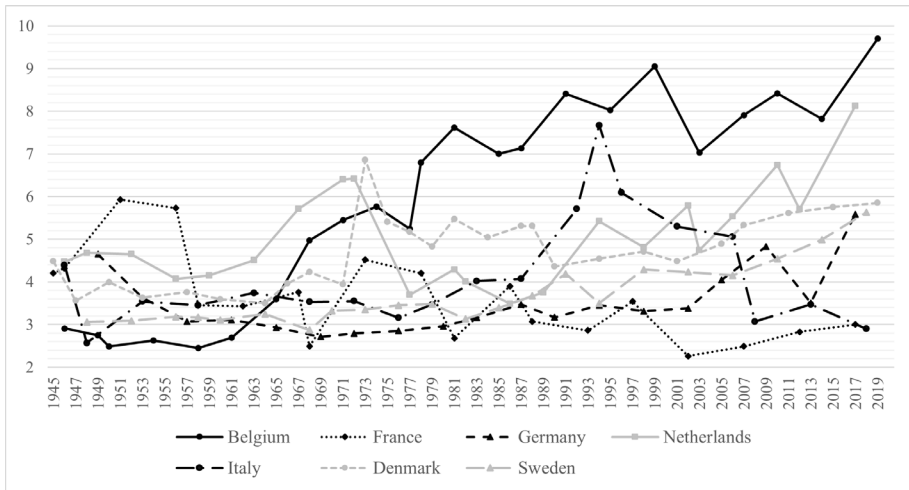


Figure 2.1: Effective number of parties (Gallagher index)

Due to this fragmentation, cabinets have since the 1970s been rather unstable coalitions of between four to six parties. The pivotal Christian-Democrats (the largest party family until 1987) usually chose either the Socialists or the Liberals as coalition partners. As a consequence, Belgium has had one of the most complex coalition bargaining systems in Western Europe, and government formation has become its most crucial policy decision-making stage (De Winter & Dumont, 2008). The duration of government formation is on the rise (with the “world record” of 541 days after the 2010 elections, and again a period of 494 days after the 2019 elections). The increasing number of coalition parties – the government led by Alexander De Croo formed after the 2019 elections even counted seven parties – feeds uncertainty and shirking potential, thus undermining cabinet cohesion. From a principal-agent perspective, parties have developed an elaborate set of *ex ante* and *ex post* delegation control mechanisms. These mechanisms make governmental decision-making extremely collective, and tend to reduce cabinet ministers but also majority MPs to mere party agents, in order to reduce agency loss and cabinet instability (Dumont & De Winter, 1999; De Winter & Dumont 2000, 2009).

The most central *ex ante* control mechanism is the government agreement or coalition policy programme. Its length has grown over time, with latest agreements counting 180 pages (2011), 115 pages (2014) and 97 pages (2020). While they are essentially packaging of policy proposals, these agreements sometimes also contain statements about competencies and behavioural rules that the coalition members are expected to follow in the governmental as well as parliamentary arena².

² Several agreements concluded with a statement that also for all matters not included in the coalition agreement the majority parties have agreed to observe the classic rule of consensus within the cabinet and in parliament.

In addition, to guarantee a minimal degree of cohesion and stability, governmental parties minimise the interference of other actors as much as possible: voters, party rank-and-file, individual ministers, civil servants and even the judiciary. Hence, it comes as no surprise that the decision-making role of parliament as a whole and of individual MPs has been perceived to be in decline, vis-à-vis the “new principal” in the democratic chain of delegation: the coalition parties (Strøm, 2003; De Winter & Dumont, 2003).

In fact, in comparison with the powerful inter- and intra-party tools that parties use to monitor the government, the traditional tools for parliamentary monitoring of the executive as well as its role as co-legislator seem quite ineffective. Parliamentary government in Belgium can only function properly if the MPs of the majority parties are able to guarantee permanent support for the government. Until the introduction of the constructive motion of censure in 1995, the cabinet had to mobilise a majority of votes from the majority parties on every single governmental initiative introduced in parliament. ‘Alternative majorities’ (that include the votes of some opposition parties and exclude some of the majority parties) might have existed on specific issues, but have never been used extensively in the post-war period (at least on government-initiated proposals) because doing so would trigger the downfall of the government. Hence, members of the governmental majority are permanently faced with the dilemma of having to approve governmental actions unconditionally, or forcing the cabinet to resign. Consequently, parliamentary groups were (and still are in spite of the constructive motion of censure) very disciplined in voting (Depauw, 2005; Depauw & Shane, 2008).

Exceptions are the periods with caretaker governments, such as the minority caretaker government of Sophie Wilmès in 2019-2020. When Covid-19 hit Belgium in March 2020, the unprecedented situation was created in which opposition parties in parliament supported the government and its plenary powers. Because there was no unconditional majority in parliament, the parliamentary debate and were more powerful and influential than in “ordinary” times (Vande Walle et al., 2021). In any case, before the introduction of the “disempowering” constructive motion of censure in 1995 (Rasch, Martin, & Cheibub, 2015), only two of the post-war governments fell due to a parliamentary vote (Dumont et al., 2001).

Formal and informal party constraints further enhance voting discipline. First, the statutes of all parties give supreme authority to the party's national congress, and between congresses, to the party executive. Most party statutes define the role of their public office holders in agency terms: office holders are agents of the party, and they are obliged to carry out the party programme. The composition of the new governing coalition and the government agreement is also submitted for approval to the party congresses. Since congress decisions bind the entire party – including its Members of Parliament – to the coalition contract, any criticism can be condemned as a breach of party discipline. In almost all parties, MPs must ask permission from their group

(leader) to introduce a private bill or amendment, hold interpellations, or support a bill sponsored by another party. The parliamentary group can explicitly sanction voting rebellions in a variety of ways—from a simple warning to exclusion from committees, from the parliamentary party group and even from the party³. Additionally, the composition of the electoral lists is also determined by the party executive. The quasi-closed list system in Belgium means that the position on the list is decisive for a MP's chance of getting re-elected, which magnifies the dependence of the MP on the party executive (De Winter, 1988; Vandeleene et al., 2013).

Increasing electoral volatility also enhances turnover. High turnover weakens social cohesion, acquaintance and political trust amongst MPs, which especially may undermine the efficacy of committee work and MPs' capacity to specialise in particular policy fields. The number of the incumbents replaced after elections has increased gradually from 10 per cent in 1950 to 53 per cent in 2014 (Fiers, Gerard & Van Uytven, 2004; own calculations). In addition, in order to reduce the high conflict potential between parliamentary groups of the majority, their leaders – with an important role for the group secretaries – are in quasi-permanent negotiation with their peers (they usually meet several times a week multi- or bilaterally).

Finally, the Belgian Parliament is characterised by meagre collective resources in terms of staff. The modest staffs allotted to parliamentary groups is in most parties transferred to the party research centres, which add to the MP's dependency on the party organisation. MPs often rely on information provided by their research centre in drafting bills, amendments, and interpellations. For most policy sectors, a group of paid experts, cabinetards (*infra*) and volunteer specialists associated with the party research centres prepare the party's proposals in collaboration with the MPs who specialise in these areas. Consequently, MPs are to a large extent dependent on their party's brain-trust (Pattyn et al., 2017).

2. The limited power of the Chamber of Representatives

2.1. Limited influence despite increased activity

An important indicator for the activity of a parliament are the number of plenary and committee meetings (Döring, 1992). There is a general agreement that in 'working' (vs. 'talking') parliaments (cfr. Costa, Schnatterer & Spuarcioni, 2013), most relevant parliamentary work is done in parliamentary committees, in terms of legislation. The House's standing committee structure largely corresponds to the division of labour

³ The fact that most ministers (until 1995) and party presidents have been Members of Parliament and therefore usually attended the meetings of their parliamentary party groups, has been an additional source of party control over the group's decision-making (De Winter & Dumont, 2000).

between ministries. There are currently 11 standing committees with a membership of 17 MPs⁴.

The agendas of the standing committees are often overcharged. In addition to the discussion on bills referred to the committees, dozens of oral questions to the minister are tabled (sometimes up to a hundred). When time runs out, the questions are referred to a future meeting, and hence often lose their topical (“news”) value. Committee chairs and members are allotted in a proportional way amongst all parliamentary groups (using D’Hondt system of allocation) but even committees chaired by an opposition chair have to abide to the “majority rule”, imposed by committee members belonging to the majority parties (Andeweg, De Winter & Müller, 2008). Most government control takes place in the committees, but some government control activities are exerted also by the plenary assembly, and more in particular the highly mediatized “question hour” in the plenary on Thursday.

Regarding the number of plenary meetings, the longitudinal data in Figure 2.2 show a rising trend from the 1980s to the second half of the 1990s, but a downward trend since. The number of committee meetings follow a similar pattern: an increase between 1985 and 1996, and a stabilization since then. This stabilization at a high level may be due to the natural law that “a week only counts seven days” and “a day counts only 24 hours”, even for MPs (De Winter, & Brans, 2003). In general, the numbers don’t provide substantial support for the decline thesis.

However, while we can consider the job of a Belgian MP as “full time”, the genuine parliamentary involvement in the capital is on average only “part time”. In fact, the regular weekly agenda of an average MP looks like this: Monday morning: attendance of party executive (if one is member); Tuesday and Wednesday (usually only morning): committee meetings, Thursday morning: meeting of parliamentary group; Thursday afternoon: question time and voting in the plenary. As far as possible, no plenary nor committee meetings are held on Friday, which is reserved for constituency work, as well as most parts of Saturday and Sunday. So, there is ample of time available to increase in-House activities. No wonder that of the average 60 hours working week of MPs, half is spent in the constituency (and not in the capital) on “home style” activities (Fenno, 1978), such as local office holding, constituency surgeries and participation in constituency party and associational activities (De Winter, 1997; De Winter & Brans, 2003; PARTIREP 2009 survey data).

⁴ In addition, there are temporary committees in charge of specific legislation (for instance on modernising the entire penal code law; fiscal reform), some other permanent advisory committees relevant for legislation (equal opportunities, science & technology, climate change and durability) and oversight (over intelligence services, police, nuclear safety, public financing of parties, etc.).

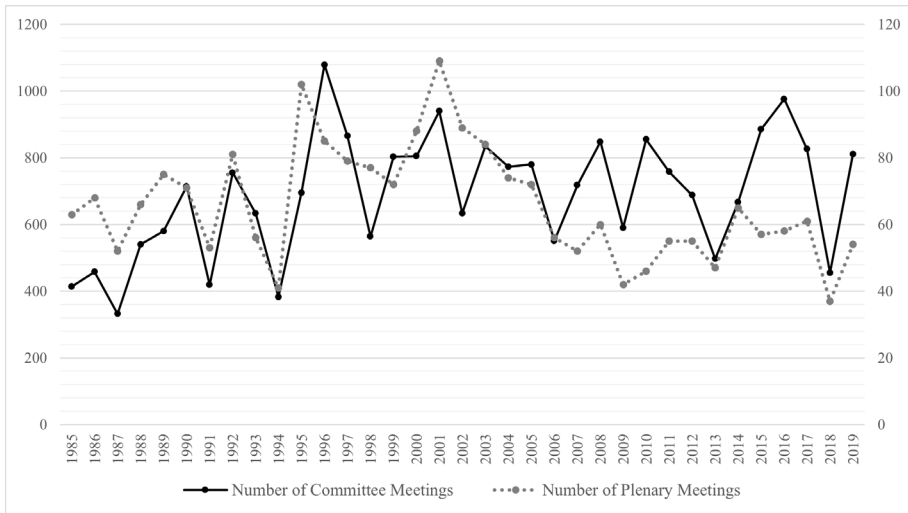


Figure 2.2: Number of committee and plenary meetings (Chamber of Representatives)

The role of parliament in the legislative process is often considered as a key element of the decline of parliament. Often this role is operationalized by the number of private member bills vs. government-initiated bills, and especially by the success rate of the initiated PMBs and government initiated bills of making it into actual laws (Andeweg & Nijzink, 1995). A more refined indicator could be the amendment power of parliament vis-à-vis government bills, the use of amendments and their success. Unfortunately, no recent empirical data on Belgian Parliament's amendment activities on government bills and the success on this amending activity is available, neither on the government taking over PMB proposals as embraced government project.

When considering the number and the success rate, a stark difference between government-initiated and member bills can be recognized (Figure 2.3). While the number of member bills has substantially increased over time (with more than 1500 in 2010), the number of member bills that has been adopted has remained relatively stable (on average between 40 and 70 bills a year). The number of government-initiated bills on the other hand is much lower, but they are almost all adopted. A number of institutional constraints limit the success of PMBs in the legislative process within the Belgian Parliament. First, parliamentary statutes stipulate that on the committee and plenary agenda, government bills have priority over private member bills. While most Member bills are discussed, many die in the committee phase, especially those introduced by opposition MPs. In addition, successful Members bills are usually of little importance in terms of policy content and are often introduced for pure publicity reasons.

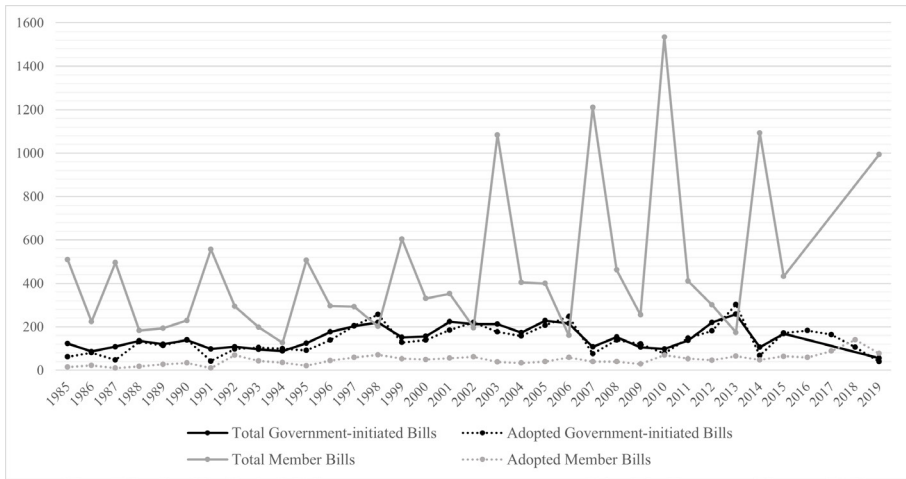


Figure 2.3: Member- and government- initiated bills (Chamber of Representatives)

Several scholars have put forward that parliaments can compensate their weak role in legislation by focusing more on their function of executive oversight by controlling governmental policy. Members of the Belgian Parliament can use several instruments for the ex post control of the government: interpellations, oral questions in the plenary (so-called “topicality questions”), oral questions in the committees, written questions, and various forms of investigative committees. In the House, oral questions are increasingly posed in (public) committee meetings, rather than in the plenary assembly. However, after an MP has read the oral committee or plenary question and the minister has answered, no debate is held, and no motions can be tabled. In terms of impact, the oral questions posed in the plenary have the largest control impact, as the media cover this question hour relatively well.

Written questions must be answered within twenty working days and are published within thirty working days in the Bulletin of Questions and Answers (Kamer van volksvertegenwoordigers, 2020). In terms of content, all parliamentary questions concern demands for clarification or confirmation. They aim at exposing a neglect, abuse or ill application of the law, and sometimes suggest improvements and reform. They can force a minister to voice an opinion on delicate matters. Figure 2.4 clearly shows that the number of written questions has substantially increased over time. However, in spite of their substantial control potential, most questions only concern demands for information and are often inspired by mere electoral and publicity-seeking motives, giving MPs a written proof that they have taken to heart a matter raised by their constituents or client pressure groups. Although written questions are mainly a signaling device of MPs to their constituents (Baumann, 2014), of the thousands of written questions posed annually, only a couple of dozens attract attention of the national media. Many questions are even based on newspaper articles. Note that many

ministers fail to give a prompt answer to written questions. In addition, as ministers' answers to oral and urgent questions are not followed by a plenary debate, their oversight utility is limited.

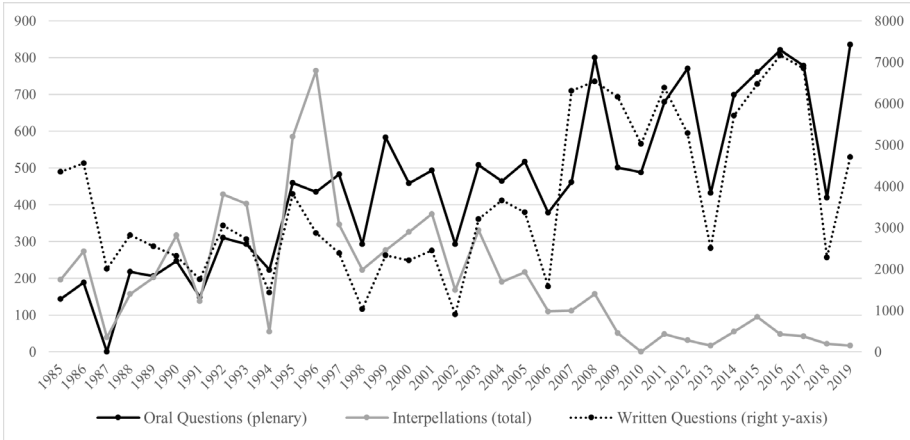


Figure 2.4: Oral questions, written questions, interpellations (Chamber of Representatives)

Regarding oral questions posed in the plenary, Figure 2.4 indicates a general rising trend. This evolution is rather puzzling as the number of questions that can be asked during the 1-2 hour question time is necessarily limited, and the number of questions asked at question hours is strictly determined by the decisions of the Conference of Group Presidents⁵.

Interpellations of ministers represent the most powerful tool of parliamentary control in Belgium. Interpellations can aim at obtaining information from the government, question the policy of a particular minister but sometimes also criticize general governmental action. In principal matters of local or special interest are excluded, although in practice these tend to become more numerous. The House increasingly relegates such interpellations to committee meetings (that are public since 1985), and only those of genuine general importance are still held in the plenary. Interpellations can be followed by a motion. Members of the opposition usually introduce a motion of censure, while majority members traditionally counter this demand with a motion demanding the “returning to the order of the day”. The latter type of motion has voting precedence on motions of censure and annuls all other motions. Thus, by voting the “simple motion”, majority MPs are not obliged to express themselves on the political problem raised during the interpellation, a face-saving device in case the government

⁵ On Wednesday, the Conference of Presidents decides on the oral questions that will be tabled for the next day’s question hour (and the general House agenda of the upcoming week). Usually, each group is allotted time for two oral questions.

or a minister's reply has failed to satisfy the House. The changes of the House rules, due to the reform of the Belgian bicameral system of 1993, allowed for the increase in relegation of interpellations to committee meetings, reserving only those of general importance for the plenary. Figure 2.4 shows a clear increase by the middle of the 1990s, but a gradual and dramatic decline since then. For example, in 2012-2013 only four interpellations were held in the plenary, and only 28 in committee meetings.

In 1987 the House formally introduced the use of hearings. However, in the beginning, the number of committee meetings hearing experts and stakeholders was extremely low, but since the second half of the 1990s, committee hearings have become more frequent. For instance, in the most recent full parliamentary year (2020-2021), the eleven standing committees (and its subcommittees) organized in total over 140 hearings. The organization of hearings is often used by the majority or opposition, as a tool to delay the passage of legislation initiated by the government or opposition respectively. Therefore, calls for hearings made by the opposition are often overruled by majority MPs (Art. 28 stipulates that the organization of hearings requires an absolute majority). Yet, once the decision to hold a hearing is taken, all groups can more or less freely decide which experts they want to invite.

2.2. Limited support structures

Parliamentary activism does not only depend on its institutional legislative and control rights, but also on the resources that are allotted to parliamentary actors: individual MPs, parliamentary parties, committees, and to Parliament as a whole, as well as MPs capacities to specialize in executive policy fields. The Belgian House is traditionally poorly staffed in comparative terms. Currently, there are about 600 permanent employees, of which over a quarter are university trained. Of the latter, over a quarter works for the Legislative Services and ten for the Library. They can provide some policy advice to individual MPs. These include the single secretary allotted to each standing committee, but these are mostly occupied with running the secretariat of the committee and its chairperson, and of drafting the committee reports on bills discussed in the committee.

As one can expect in a party-centred polity, parliamentary groups are better endowed with staff resources. Since 1988, the House pays for each group the costs of one full-time employee (academic degree) per four members, and the cost of one secretary per four MPs. Since then the system has been gradually expanded to one university assistant per MP (in 1995). Currently, the House grants to every parliamentary group (note one needs five MPs to be recognized as a group) 1.15 university trained assistants per MP. They are on the official payroll of the Chamber and are allotted to the group collectively. In addition, each MP gets means to engage an “administrative” collaborator paid at the sub-university “clerk” level (Kamer van volksvertegenwoordigers, 2015; Maddens et al., 2015). This personal assistant mainly conducts administrative

and practical work, and does not engage in substantial policy analysis or support (De Winter & Wolfs, 2017; Wolfs & De Winter, 2017).

In practice, there is a wide variety between parties in terms of patterns of usage of these two types of assistants. In most parties, some of the collective group assistants are delegated to the party research center or to the party central office. The degree of “mutualisation” or “pooling” of these collaborators varies very strongly: in one party all university trained as well as “personal” administrative assistants are pooled in the party research centre, in others the party skims off only a few collaborators allotted to the group. For instance, in the Flemish-independentist extreme right Vlaams Belang, until 2013, about all university trained as well as administrative personal assistants were delegated to the central party office, but mostly transferred to the constituency parties in order to enhance the local implantation and electoral expansion of the party. On the other hand, in the Flemish liberal party Open Vld, all university collaborators work for the party research centre, whose main task is to support the parliamentary group.

2.3. Loss of influence due to European integration

In terms of scrutiny of the executive, the process of European integration has had a negative effect on the position of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives. Since the Treaty of Maastricht in the beginning of the 1990s, governments in the EU member states have progressively reinforced their own position at the expense of the role and place of their legislatures. National parliaments are commonly described as “victims” left behind on the road to a closer Europe in the academic literature (e.g. O’Brennan & Raunio, 2007; Weiler, Haltern, & Mayer, 1995; Winzen, 2010) as their traditional legislative prerogatives have been progressively eroded following the shift of competences to the European level. During the years, more and more legislation is coming from the European level, limiting the policy room for manoeuvre at national level.

As stressed by some authors (Holzhacker, 2002; Winzen, 2012) the deepening of European integration – while reducing the number of policy fields under exclusive national legislative control – has also determined a transfer of decision-making powers from parliaments to the executives. The governments are indeed directly involved in EU decision-making, since they have a crucial legislative role in the EU Council of Ministers. This also causes a serious information asymmetry between the executive and the legislative branch, which makes it much harder for the parliaments to control their governments’ positions in Brussels.

This is particularly true for the Belgian Chamber of Representatives, which is not only one of the EU parliaments with the least formal instruments to scrutinize the position of the Belgian government’s position, but also has barely made use of those instruments that it has at its disposal (e.g. De Winter & Laurent, 1996; Delreux & Randour, 2014; Auel, Rosenberg, & Tacea, 2015). However, we have not found a

non-ambiguous longitudinal indicator of the components of direct policy making decline.

3. Mechanisms of partitocracy in parliament

The most important reason for the weak position of the Belgian Parliament is the partitocratic culture that dominates the functioning of the institution. Formally, the individual Members of Parliament have substantial competences to make their mark on the parliamentary legislative and scrutiny work.

The formal threshold for submitting legislative proposals, amendments, or parliamentary questions are relatively low. However, these formal instruments are subordinate to the partitocratic mechanisms and culture that dominate intra- and inter-group dynamics, with regard to legislative work as well as scrutiny initiatives or external communication.

With regard to voting on legislative proposals and bills, political groups almost always vote as a bloc; dissenting votes are close to non-existent. In all political groups it is expected that Members of Parliament follow the group line in their voting behaviour. This, however, seems more the result of conditioned behaviour as a result of social norms within the group than rational behaviour anticipating sanctions from the group or party leadership. In the political groups of the liberal parties it is expected that Members follow the group line during voting (Interviews 1 & 2). The respondent from the PS acknowledged that it would be considered highly problematic if a Member would vote against the party's political programme, since it is expected that people that become a candidate for the party also entirely agree with the party's ideological platform (Interview 3). The respondent from Vooruit admitted that although internal discussions on votes are possible, these rarely happen in practice because of trust and collegiality among the Members of Parliament. There is a distribution of labour regarding the policy fields and topics, and Members trust the judgement and position of their colleagues (Interview 4). While internal voting coherence could be partly explained by ideological congruity, voting discipline in the Chamber goes even further: the political groups that form the governing coalition also coordinate their actions in parliament. The respondents confirmed that loyalty is expected among the political parties that form the majority in parliament (Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 7 & 8).

However, also among the opposition parties, voting cohesion is deemed to be highly important. In the PVDA/PTB, it is considered essential to vote in line with the party programme and decisions of the party congress. In case of dissenting opinions, the issue is discussed internally to ensure that the MPs can speak with a common voice, especially because dissenting opinions attract the attention of the media and are exploited by the other political parties (Interview 5). In the political group of Vlaams Belang, there can be internal discussions on topical issues, but public disagreements are not appreciated. Although there is no strict determination of voting behaviour

before the votes at committee level, MPs must make sure not to diverge too far from the party platform. In case a party position is not entirely clear, MPs often abstain in committee votes to enable ex post coordination. The votes on plenary level are always prepared in group meetings, which often involves consulting the party headquarters on topical issues. Members are expected to follow the party line. In case of serious disagreements, the respective Member usually does not vote instead of voting against the group line (Interview 6 & 7).

Votes on ethical issues, such as abortion and euthanasia, are an important exception. The liberal parties grant their Members of Parliament a free vote on ethical issues (Interviews 1 & 2). Similarly, the Members of Parliament from the PS are free to vote on any ethical issue that is not part of the party's political programme (Interview 3).

Also, with regard to legislative initiatives, a strong discipline among the MPs in the political groups exists. The MPs from the majority parties are in frequent contact with the ministerial cabinets to coordinate their actions. The respondent from Vooruit confirmed that the MPs are aimed at streamlined and uniform messages, both in terms of style as well as content (Interview 4). The government ministers frequently attend the group meetings in parliament and comment on possible parliamentary initiatives. They for example discourage putting forward certain (critical) parliamentary questions (Interview 1 & 7). These informal contacts are also seen as an important tool for MPs to influence government policy: possible legislative initiatives or parliamentary questions can be discussed directly with the responsible minister (Interview 1 & 8). In addition, some parliamentary initiatives are informally transferred from the ministerial cabinet to an MP of the same party. This is mainly done to avoid an assessment by the Council of State, which is compulsory for government-initiated legislative proposals but not for MP proposals. Such an assessment not only delays the entire procedure, but also potentially exposes the government for (legal) criticism from the Council of State.

Majority parties constantly coordinate to discuss possible initiatives and to determine their common approach. No legislative proposals or amendments are submitted without prior coordination. Such discipline is considered essential to foster trust among the government parties and ensure that all initiatives are in line with the coalition agreement (Interview 3). In other words, the room for manoeuvre for MP initiatives is strictly limited to those issues that were agreed during the negotiations to form a government or that are not part of the coalition agreement but have been approved by the other majority parties beforehand. This also includes their response towards initiatives from the opposition parties: the majority parties first discuss such initiatives internally and only support legislative proposals or amendments from the opposition if they all agree. Such coordination is considered essential to avoid that the majority parties are pitted against each other and the governmental majority is put in jeopardy (Interview 1 & 7).

However, the government parties do not hold a monopoly over internal coordination. Also, among the opposition parties discussing initiatives internally is considered the norm. Within the PVDA/PTB all legislative initiatives are internally discussed and submitted by the secretary of the political group (Interview 5). The same culture exists in Vlaams Belang, where the group chair(wo)man and secretary collects all possible legislative initiatives and amendments and approval of the group is required before a proposal is formally submitted (Interview 6).

Members of Parliament seem to have a bit more leeway with regard to (written) parliamentary questions. Within Open VLD it is customary that parliamentary questions are first assessed by the secretary of the political group before they are formally submitted (Interview 1). Within the MR, there also exists a form of coordination, but not all questions are examined before submission. MPs of the PS are expected to keep the other Members and group secretary informed about possible parliamentary questions. Regularly, the decision and content of parliamentary questions are determined centrally (by the secretary or one of the advisors of the political group) and only in a second step it is determined which MP could formally submit the question (Interview 3). Such a coordination with the policy advisors is also customary within the PVDA/PTB (Interview 5). Vooruit grants more discretion to its MPs and only coordinates centrally and in case of difficulties (Interview 4). While Vlaams Belang approves interpellations and coordinates oral questions within the group, MPs were free to ask written questions.

Party discipline goes beyond mere parliamentary initiatives. Even external communication is heavily coordinated. Within the socialist parties an intense coordination exists between the political groups, ministerial cabinets and party headquarters. Members are expected to verify their messages within the party before communicating (Interview 4). Also, among the liberal parties, MPs are expected to discuss their external communication with the group spokesman, who also coordinates with the party headquarters in case of a sensitive topic (Interviews 1 & 2). The PVDA/PTB also aims to streamline the external communication: all messages are sent out by the group chair in collaboration with the director of communications at the party headquarters (Interview 5). Except for communication on written parliamentary questions, the external communication is also centralized in the political group of Vlaams Belang: press releases are coordinated by the group leader and secretary in consultation with the party leadership at the extra-parliamentary headquarters.

In sum, it is clear that the actions of Members are heavily restricted by a culture of strong party discipline and coordination. This is partly because of internal reasons: a high degree of loyalty to the party's ideological platform is expected. In other words, MPs are considered to be representatives of the party – instead of representatives of the people – and should respect the manifesto as it was internally decided within the party. Although no party makes use of (the threat of) formal sanctions, there is a normative culture that induces compliant behaviour. There are also important external

reasons: MPs avoid demonstrating internal disagreements to be taken seriously by the other political groups and foster loyalty with the coalition partners. In addition, internal dissent is often picked up and magnified by the media, and subsequently exploited by other political parties to point to internal weaknesses. Therefore, Members predominantly refrain from revealing disagreements outside the realm of the political group.

Conclusion and discussion

At first glance, the Belgian Chamber of Representatives does not seem in decline, since it is characterized by an increasing parliamentary activity and output. Considering the empirical data, the evidence is mixed, but generally points to increasing ‘parliamentary activism’. Most indicators indeed show an important rise over time: the number of committee meetings, introduced Member bills, hearings, and oral and written questions. Yet, further analysis indicates that this increased output merely serves as attempts to increase the Member’s visibility and media exposure, while it does not contribute to the overall legislative and scrutiny activity. More research is needed, however, to dig deeper into this relation. This can be done in a quantitative way by digging up new indicators such as amendment activity and effectiveness in the committee stage, and in a qualitative way for instance by analyzing the policy relevance of PMBs, questions and interpellations.

The interview material does show that Members function in a general partitocratic context that substantially limits their room for maneuver. Both formal and informal procedures have been put in place to control the activities of individual Members. There is a constant exchange and coordination between the leadership of the political groups to discuss the content and introduction of parliamentary instruments, and almost unconditional support is expected from the Members of the majority coalition for initiatives put forward by the government. This strong loyalty follows from the fact that most Members of Parliament do not want to expose their political group to criticism from their competitors by voting against or voicing concerns about their parliamentary initiatives. This aspect could be examined more in further research, in particular by focusing on the role of the media in highlighting internal party dissent and discussions between coalition parties. In addition, and probably most problematic, they are also expected to act (and to a large extent also consider themselves) as representatives of the party and not, as enshrined in the Constitution, the entire nation.

References

- Auel, K., Rozenberg, O., & Tacea, A. (2015). To Scrutinise or Not to Scrutinise? Explaining Variation in EU-Related Activities in National Parliaments. *West European Politics*, 38(2), 282-304.

- Andeweg, R., & Nijzink, L. (1995). Beyond the Two-Body Image: Relations Between Ministers and MPs. In H. Döring (Ed.), *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe* (pp. 152-178). New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Andeweg, R., De Winter, L., & Müller, W. C. (2008). Parliamentary Opposition in Post-Consociational Democracies: Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands. *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 14(1-2), 77-111.
- Baumann, M. (2014). Tabling Priorities: Individualized MP Behavior and Electoral Incentives in Parliamentary Questions. *Paper presented at the 2nd General Conference of the ECPR Standing Group on Parliaments, Vienna, 26-28 June 2014*.
- Beck, U. (2005). *Power in the Global Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Birkinshaw, P., & Ashiagbor, D. (1996). National Participation in Community Affairs: Democracy, the UK Parliament and the EU. *Common Market Law Review*, 33(3), 499-529.
- Bryce, J. (1921). *Modern Democracies*. New York: Macmillan.
- Cheibub, J. A., Shane, M., & Rasch, B. E. (2014). Why Investiture? Explaining Modes of Government Selection in Parliamentary Democracies. *Paper presented at the 2nd General Conference of the ECPR Standing Group on Parliaments, Vienna, 26-28 June 2014*.
- Costa, O., Schnatterer, T., & Spuarcioni, L. (2013). The French Constitutional Law of 23 July 2008 as seen by MPs: Working or Talking Parliament? *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 19(2), 261-277.
- Cotta, M., & Best, H. (2000). *Parliamentary Representatives in Europe 1848-2000. Legislative Recruitment and careers in Eleven European Countries*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cotta, M., & Best, H. (2007). *Democratic Representation in Europe. Diversity, Change, and Convergence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cotta, M., & Verzichelli, L. (2007). *Political institutions in Italy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Delreux T., & Randour F. (2015), Belgium: Institutional and Administrative Adaptation but Limited Political Interest. In C. Heffler, C. Neuhold, O. Rozenberg, & J. Smith (Eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of National Parliaments and the European Union* (pp. 153-169). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Depauw, S. (2005). Hoe controleert het partijbureau de fracties? In W. Dewachter & S. Depauw (Eds.), *Een halve eeuw partijbureau in België* (pp. 177-94). Leuven: Acco.
- Depauw, S., & Fiers, S. (2008). Komen onze Kamerleden ervaring tekort? *Res Publica*, 50(2), 89-108.

- Depauw, S., & Shane, M. (2008). Legislative party discipline and cohesion in comparative perspective. In D. Giannetti & K. Benoit (Eds.), *Intra-party politics and coalition governments* (pp. 103-120). London: Routledge.
- Deschouwer, K., De Winter, L. & Della Porta, D. (1996). Partitocracies between crises and reforms: the cases of Italy and Belgium, *Res Publica*, 38(2), 216-494.
- De Winter, L. (1988). Belgium: Democracy or Oligarchy? In M. Gallagher & M. Marsh (Eds.), *Candidate Selection in Comparative Perspective* (pp. 20-46). London: SAGE.
- De Winter, L. (1997). Intra- and Extra-Parliamentary Role Attitudes and Behaviour of Belgian MPs. *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 3(1), 128-154.
- De Winter, L., & Brans, M. (2003). Belgium: Political Professionals and the Crisis of the Party State. In J. Borchert & J. Zeiss (Eds.), *The Political Class in Advanced Democracies* (pp. 45-66). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- De Winter, L., & Dumont, P. (2003). Belgium: Delegation and Accountability under partitocratic rule. In K. Strøm, W. Müller, & T. Bergman (Eds.), *Delegation and Accountability in Western Europe* (pp. 253-281). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- De Winter, L., & Dumont, P. (2008). Uncertainty and Complexity in Cabinet Formation. In K. Strøm, W. Müller, & B. Torbjörn (Eds.), *Cabinets and Coalition Bargaining. The Democratic Life Cycle in Western Europe* (pp. 123-158). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- De Winter, L., & Dumont, P. (2009). Do Belgian Parties Undermine the Democratic Chain of Delegation? In M. Brans, L. De Winter, & W. Swenden (Eds.), *The Politics of Belgium* (pp. 95-114). London: Routledge.
- De Winter, L., & Dumont, P. (2000). PPGs in Belgium: Subjects of Partitocratic Dominion. In K. Heidar & R. Koole (Eds.), *Behind Closed Doors: Parliamentary Party Groups in European Democracies* (pp. 106-129). London: Routledge.
- De Winter, L., & Wolfs, W. (2017). Policy analysis in the Belgian legislatures: The marginal role of a structurally weak parliament in a partitocracy with no scientific and political tradition of policy analysis. In M. Brans & D. Aubin (Eds.), *Policy Analysis in Belgium* (pp. 129-150). Bristol: Policy Press/University of Bristol Press.
- Döring, H. (1992). Parlament und Regierung. In O. W. Gabriel (Ed.), *Die EG-Staaten im Vergleich. Strukturen, Prozesse, Politikinhalt*. Opladen: Westdt Verlag.
- Dumont, P., & De Winter, L. (1999). La formation et le maintien des gouvernements belges (1946-1999). *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, 39(1664), 1-59.
- Dumont, P., De Winter, L., & Dandoy, R. (2001). Démissions gouvernementales et performances électorales des majorités sortantes (1946-1999). *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, 17(1722), 5-51.

- Elgie, R. & Stapleton, J. (2006). Testing the Decline of Parliament Thesis: Ireland, 1923–2002. *Political Studies*, 54(3), 465-485.
- Fenno, R. (1978), *Home style: House members in their districts*. London: Harper Collins.
- Fiers, S., Gerard, E., & Van Uytven, A. (2004). De federale en Vlaamse parlementsleden (1946-2004). In S. Fiers & H. Reynaert (Eds.), *Wie zetelt? De gekozen elite in Vlaanderen doorgelicht* (pp. 87-111). Leuven: LannooCampus.
- Flinders, M., & Kelso, A. (2011). Mind the Gap: Political Analysis, Public Expectations and the Parliamentary Decline Thesis. *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, 13(2), 249-268.
- Holzhaecker, R. (2002). National Parliamentary Scrutiny Over EU Issues: Comparing the Goals and Methods of Governing and Opposition Parties. *European Union Politics*, 3(4), 459-479.
- Kamer van volksvertegenwoordigers. (2015, juli 1 en 15). Statuut van de medewerkers van de erkende politieke fracties van de Kamer van volksvertegenwoordigers.
- Kamer van volksvertegenwoordigers. (2020, december). Reglement van de Kamer van volksvertegenwoordigers.
- Khmelko, I., Staphenurst, R., & Mezey, M. (2020) *Legislative Decline in the 21st Century: A Comparative Perspective*. London: Routledge.
- Kreppel, A. (2009). Executive-Legislative Relations and Legislative Agenda Setting in Italy: From Leggine to Decreti and Deleghe. *Bulletin of Italian Politics*, 1(2), 183-209.
- Lijphart, A. (2012). *Patterns of democracy: Government forms and performance in thirty-six countries*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.
- Maddens, B., Smulders, J., Wolfs, W., & Weekers, K. (2015). *Partij- en campagnefinanciering in België en de Europese Unie*. Leuven: Acco.
- Megginson, W. L., & Netter, J. M. (2001). From state to market: A survey of empirical studies on privatization. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 39(2), 321-89.
- Norris, P. (2011). *Critical Citizens Revisited*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Norton, P. (1999). *Parliaments and Pressure Groups in Western Europe*. London: Frank Cass.
- O'Brennan, J., & Raunio, T. (2007). *National Parliaments within the Enlarged European Union: From 'victims' of integration to competitive actors?* Abingdon: Routledge.
- Pattyn, V., Van Hecke, S., Pirlot, P., Rihoux, B., & Brans, M. (2017). Ideas as close as possible to power: Belgian political parties and their study centres. In M. Brans & D. Aubin (Eds.), *Policy Analysis in Belgium* (pp. 173-192). Bristol: Policy Press/University of Bristol Press.

- Pilet, J.-B. (2020). Hard Times for Governing Parties: The 2019 Federal Elections in Belgium. *West European Politics*, 44(2), 439-449.
- Raunio, T. & Hix, S. (2000). Backbenchers Learn to Fight Back: European Integration and Parliamentary Government. *West European Politics*, 23(4), 142-168.
- Rieder, S., & Lehmann, L. (2002) Evaluation of New Public Management Reforms in Switzerland. *International Public Management Review*, 3(2), 25-43.
- Strøm, K. (2003). Parliamentary Democracy and Delegation. In K. Strøm, W. Müller, & T. Bergman (Eds.), *Delegation and Accountability in Western Europe* (pp. 55-106). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Vandeleene, A., De Winter L., Meulewaeter C., & Baudewyns P. (2013). The Impact of Candidate Selection on Mass-Elite Ideological Congruence: The Case of Belgium. Paper presented at the 7th ECPR General Conference, Bordeaux, 4-7 September 2013.
- Vande Walle, B., Wolfs, W., & Van Hecke, S. (2021). Opposition in Times of COVID-19 – To Support or Not to Support? *Politics of the Low Countries*, 3(2), 138-159.
- Weiler, J. H. H., Haltern, U., & Mayer, F. (1995). European Democracy and its Critique. *West European Politics*, 18(3), 4-39.
- Wessels, W. (1989). *The Community at the Crossroads*. Bruges: College of Europe.
- Wheare, K. C. (1963). *Legislatures*. London: Oxford.
- Winzen, T. (2010). Political integration and National parliaments in Europe. *Living reviews in democracy*, 2.
- Winzen, T. (2012). European integration and national parliamentary oversight institutions. *European Union Politics*, 14(2), 297-323.
- Wolfs, W., & De Winter, L. (2017). Policy Analysis in the Legislative Branch. In M. Brans, I. Geva-May, & M. Howlett (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Comparative Policy Analysis* (pp. 199-212). London: Routledge.

Annex: List of interviews

Interview 1 with the Secretary of the political group of Open VLD, 29 January 2021, online interview.

Interview 2 with the Secretary of the political group of MR, 17 February 2021, online interview.

Interview 3 with the Secretary of the political group of PS, 15 January 2021, online interview.

Interview 4 with the Secretary of the political group of Vooruit, 22 January 2021, online interview.

Interview 5 with the Secretary of the political group of PVDA/PTB, 20 January 2021, online interview.

Interview 6 with a former Secretary of the political group of Vlaams Belang, 15 January 2021, online interview.

Interview 7 with a policy advisor of the political group of CD&V, 28 January 2021, online interview.

Interview 8 with a policy advisor of the political group of N-VA, 3 September 2021, in person interview in Leuven.

Chapter 3. Candidate selection and leadership selection in Belgium

*Despite intraparty reforms,
still prisoners of partitocracy?*

Jean-Benoit Pilet
Audrey Vandeleene
Bram Wauters

Introduction

One recurrent claim that Lieven De Winter has proposed to test throughout his career is the strength and resilience of partitocracy in Belgium. Partitocracy has always been for him, and other scholars, a core feature of Belgian politics, with strong parties maintaining control over elections, parliament, government and even the judiciary or civil society (de Visscher, 2004; De Winter, 2002; De Winter & Dumont, 2000, 2006). He has examined the evolution of this political system quite systematically, wondering whether some emerging trends were actually eroding the strength of partitocracy. Repeatedly, he demonstrated that parties had been able to adapt and to keep control, confirming the strength of partitocracy.

In this chapter, we propose to re-examine this argument by focusing on how Belgian parties organize internally, and more specifically on two core processes in their internal life: the selection of party leaders and the selection of candidates. Belgian parties have passed a series of reforms claimed to be democratizing both processes. We analyze these changes, and question whether and how these developments have affected the partitocratic nature of Belgian politics. Then, as Lieven De Winter is first and foremost a comparativist, we connect what we observe in Belgium to developments in other, mostly European, democracies.

The chapter is structured in four sections. In the first, we report on how Lieven De Winter has characterized Belgian partitocracy over the course of his career. The second section examines the partitocratic nature and evolution of the selection of party leaders in Belgium over recent decades. We move along with a similar approach to the process of candidate selection in the third section, and we conclude by situating Belgium in a comparative perspective.

1. The strength of Belgian partitocracy

Already in the 1980s, Lieven De Winter described partitocracy as one of the core features of the Belgian political system. He described it as the control of political parties, and even more of the established parties of the three main traditional families (Christian-democrats, Socialists and Liberals) over a variety of facets of the political systems (De Winter, 1988). Belgian political parties, first, exert a strong control over the business of government. Coalitions are formed through negotiations among party leaders who later closely monitor government's work. Parties also exert a strong control over the business of parliament, leaving very limited freedom for individual MPs. Party cohesion is very strong (Depauw, 2003; van Vonno et al., 2014). The human and financial resources of parliamentary groups are also fairly limited, especially compared to the significant financial resources that parties receive from the Belgian system of public party funding (Weekers, Maddens, & Noppe, 2009). Finally, Belgian parties are central in the electoral process. The party headquarters are coordinating the campaign on the ground. They dominate the media. We also observe that there is little room of maneuvers for individual candidates to deviate from the party line. This is best explained by candidates' reliance on their party's support to get elected, as only a very small proportion manages to break the list order determined by the party.

The observations made by Lieven De Winter in the 1980s have been systematically confirmed in his later work, be it on policy-making (Dumont & De Winter, 2006; De Winter & Van Wynsberghe, 2015), legislative activity (De Winter, 1998; De Winter & Dumont, 2000) or elections and the electoral system (De Winter, 2005; De Winter & Baudewyns, 2015; Vandeleene et al., 2018). Belgian parties seem to have been able to adapt to societal transformations but also to political evolutions such as the presidentialization of politics (Fiers & Krouwel, 2004), or the growing volatility of the electorate. Even the multiplication of parties over recent years does not seem to have weakened partitocracy.

Yet, there is also another facet of partitocracy that Lieven De Winter has extensively studied, that is the control of an oligarchy, of the party elite, over the internal life of the party. The core idea is that a limited number of high-profile politicians keep strict control over how the party is run and especially over who is recruited to be the public face of the party. This strong control of an oligarchy is visible when it comes to the selection of a new party leader as well as for the selection of candidates. He argues that the control of this oligarchy over these two processes has even been reinforced despite their apparent democratization – and especially of leadership selection – with a more formal direct role of party members (De Winter, 1988, 1993). For candidates, it also appears that the inclusiveness of selectorates at the last stages of the process is heavily counterbalanced by the control of exclusive selectorates on the so-called model lists. Even the green parties introduced a draft lists' system after episodes of highly aggressive debates at members' polls (Vandeleene & De Winter, 2018).

This observation has actually also been made by other prominent scholars. It is central in Katz and Mair's cartel party model (Katz & Mair, 1995, 2009), and described accurately by Hazan and Rahat (2010) when it comes to candidate selection and by Pilet and Cross (2014, 2016) for the selection of party leaders. What these studies show is that the control of a small oligarchy within the party is observable by their capacity to limit the competitiveness and openness of candidates' and leaders' recruitment processes. Contests for party leadership are rarely competitive and tend to be most often coronations rather than true competitions. For candidate selection, party members rarely have the real possibility to select among a large pool of potential candidates. Most often, they simply approve a list pre-established in party headquarters. Moreover, these processes tend to be only moderately open to newcomers. Incumbents are most of the time reselected.

In the next section, we propose to verify these claims. We start by describing the Trends in formal rules organizing leadership selection within Belgian political parties and by investigating whether the formal democratization holds consequences on competitiveness and openness. By doing so, we test whether Lieven De Winter's theory on partitocracy remains alive and kicking in the contemporary Belgian political system.

2. Trends in the selection of party leaders

Party leaders are central in the Belgian political system. They have always been very strong and have become even stronger over the last decades (Fiers & Krouwel, 2004). They are the public image of the party during elections. They lead negotiations to form coalition governments. They coordinate the work of ministers and MPs during the course of the legislative term. They shape party communication. Given this central role, we could expect that this position is highly controlled by the party elite. The stakes are too high for letting someone out of control become leader of the party. Yet, as Lieven De Winter already underlined in 1993, there is a paradox. Belgian parties have been among the first to introduce the direct election of party leaders by party members. Nevertheless, he also argued that this formal change was compensated by the capacity of the ruling party elite to steer the process in pre-selecting one or a few candidates among them. We propose to test this assertion by examining how party leaders selection occurs among Belgian parties. We first look at formal rules, and especially at the selectorate formally in charge of electing the party leader. We then move to the dynamics of leadership selection by examining how competitive and open leadership races are.

2.1. Formal rules of leadership selection

Belgian parties have been among the first ones in the world to introduce direct party leader elections by party members, what the literature refers to as "closed primaries" (Kenig, 2009). Already in 1970, the Francophone Christian-democrats – PSC/CDH/

Les Engagés – opted for this method immediately after the split of the nationwide PSC-CVP. At the time, the dominant method to select party leaders in consolidated democracies was through the parliamentary party group, or a small party council composed of the most prominent party figures, or party delegates at a party convention (Maes, 1990, p. 43). This last method was actually how all other Belgian parties selected their leaders until the 1980s-1990s (see Figure 3.1). Then, from the end of the 1980s, most Belgian parties shifted to an election by party members on the principle of one member, one vote (Pilet & Wauters, 2014). It started with the Francophone Greens – Ecolo – at the time of their creation in 1981. They were then followed by the Francophone Liberals – PRL/MR – in 1989, the Liberals – Open VLD – and Flemish Christian-Democrats – CVP/CD&V – in 1993, the Flemish socialists – SP.a / Vooruit – and Greens – Agalev/Groen – in 1995, the Francophone socialists – PS – in 1997, and the Flemish nationalists – N-VA – in 1999. In 2020, only two parties, the radical right Vlaams Belang and radical left PTB-PVDA resist the trend and still select their leader via the party council composed of a few top party members (Wauters & Pittoors, 2019). The predominance of inclusive selections is a unique characteristic of the Belgian system. Even if closed primaries have become usual, very few countries have most parties applying this method (Pilet & Cross, 2014). Nonetheless, unlike in Italy or France (Seddone et al., 2020), no Belgian party has so far moved to open primaries allowing also non-party members to take part to the leadership selection.

Yet, the argument developed by De Winter (1993), but also by Katz and Mair (1995), states that the generalization of closed primaries does not necessarily mean that the party oligarchy has lost control over the process. It could be a “*réforme de façade*” passed to prompt the renewal of the party and to strengthen the influence of the party elite (Pilet & Wauters, 2014). Interviews with party elites responsible for the introduction of inclusive leadership selection procedures have indeed revealed that cutting back the influence of intra-party groups [be it of socio-economic (“*standen*”) or geographical (provincial or *arrondissemental*) party sections] was among the main motivations for this introduction (Wauters, 2014).

Voters	Party members		Delegates to a party convention		PPG		Party council		Single leader
							PTB-PVDA		
	Ecolo 1981								
	Groen 1995 ←						Groen 1981		
	PS 1997 ←		PS 1965						
	SP.A 1995 ←		SP.A 1965						
	CDH 1970 ←		CDH 1965						
	CD&V 1993 ←		CD&V 1965						
	DÉFI ←								
	MR 1989 ←		MR 1965						
	Open VLD 1993 ←		Open VLD 1965						
	N-VA 1999 ←						VU 1965		
							Vlaams Belang 2010	←	Vlaams Belang 1978

Figure 3.1: Inclusiveness of the selectorate for leadership elections Belgium 1965-2020¹

In order to verify this argument, we look at the actual dynamics of leadership selection in Belgian parties, by examining two indicators: the degree of competition – the number of candidates running and the margin of victory of the winning candidate – and the degree of openness – leaders' seniority as MP and/or minister, their gender and age, and the duration of their term in office. The underlying assumption is that the party oligarchy would have maintained its control over leadership selection if races are not very competitive and lead very rarely to the selection of inexperienced party leaders or leaders with a short tenure in office.

¹ We label the parties according to their current name to avoid any confusion, although most Belgian parties have had different appellations through time.

2.2. Competitiveness of leadership selection

The general observation is that leadership contests are not very open and that often grassroots members can only approve or disapprove the candidate put forward by the party elite, reinforcing the party oligarchy. In 60% of all party leadership “contests” in Belgian parties since 1965 until 2020, there was only one candidate. For full member votes, this percentage is a bit lower, but still in almost half of all full-member votes (49,5%), the rank and file can only coronate a candidate. The average number of candidates is also higher in contests when party members are entitled to vote: on average, there are 3,96 candidates in full member votes (excluding coronations) versus 2,25 candidates in contests using other selectorates. This reflects the results of international-comparative research revealing that less inclusive selectorates also produce less competitive contests (Kenig et al., 2015).

Table 3.1: Indicators of competitiveness of party leadership contests

	All contests (N=155)	Full member votes (N=99)	Non-full member votes (N=56)
Share of coronations	60,0%	49,5%	78,6%***
Mean number of candidates (excl. coronations)	3,63	3,96	2,25***
Mean margin of victory	31,4	33,1	25,7

Note: own calculations based on Cross, Pilet and Pruysers, 2019.

*** < 0,001; ** < 0,01; * < 0,1.

When there are more candidates, most of the time there is a candidate preferred by the party elite who only has to struggle with a minor, not well-known contender who obtains only a limited share of votes. The frontrunner is often the incumbent leader, or a new candidate that had the chance to be president *ad interim* for a few months giving him more notoriety and legitimacy (Pilet & Wauters, 2014). Bart De Wever (N-VA) who was re-elected as party leader in 2017 with 98,5% of the votes and Paul Magnette (PS) who obtained in 2019 95,1% of the votes are cases in point here. The margin of victory in full member votes is slightly higher than (but not statistically significantly different from) contests with other selectorates: 33,1% versus 25,7%. But the overall size of this margin indicates that leadership contests in general are not very competitive.

There are a number of exceptions, however. There have been a handful of contests in which the anticipated winner did not obtain the victory (Pilet & Wauters, 2014). The most competitive election was the election of Charles-Ferdinand Nothomb for the presidency of the PSC in 1996 when he won with 47,9% versus 47,8% for Joëlle Milquet. Geert Bourgeois defeated the incumbent VU party leader Patrik Vankrunkelsven in 2000, and in 2010 Alexander De Croo (Open VLD) won in the second round of the preferred candidate of the party elite, Marino Keulen.

A recent phenomenon in some parties is that the party elite expresses no clear preference for a candidate and/or is divided about which candidate should prevail. This was the case in recent leadership contests in CD&V (2019), MR (2019) and Open VLD (2020). For the first two contests, even a second round was needed to come to a decision, in which respectively Joachim Coens and Georges-Louis Bouchez obtained the victory with a small margin (with scores of 53,1% and 62,0% respectively).

All these rather competitive elections took place under a system of direct membership votes, which proves that this kind of leadership selection has the potential to break the power of the party oligarchy and that occasionally, this potential is also realized. Grassroots members are then entirely free to pick the candidate of their choice. Recent research reveals that members use a broad range of motives for their vote: policy positions of a candidate, his/her personality characteristics, his/her competencies and his/her socio-demographic backgrounds (most notably whether the candidate lives in the same region), to name only the most recurrent ones (Wauters et al., 2020). This underlines that grassroots members do not blindly follow the advice of senior party figures, but have their own reasons to pick one candidate when the election is competitive.

2.3. Openness of leadership selection

In terms of openness, we obtain a mixed picture when it comes to the effect of the introduction of full member votes. It appears to have had an effect on the duration of a mandate as party leader: this duration is now on average lower than before (3,7 versus 5,9 years). This means more rotation of the office of party leader and smaller chance of power accumulation over a longer period of time. This does not mean that long-serving party leaders do not occur under full member votes: indeed, both Bart De Wever (N-VA, 17 years in office and still counting), Elio Di Rupo (PS, about 12 years) and Joëlle Milquet (CDH, also about 12 years) were all elected by party members. Karel Dillen (VB), Frank van Hecke (VB) and Gérard Deprez (PSC), on the contrary, are examples of long-serving party leaders that were not selected through full member votes.

Table 3.2: Indicators of openness of party leadership contests

	All contests (N=102)	Full member votes (N=61)	Non-full member votes (N=41)
Pct women	7,8%	11,5%	2,4%*
Mean age	45,7	45,9	45,6
Pct without political seniority	13,7%	6,6%	24,4%**
Average durability of leaders	4,5	3,7	5,9**

Note: own calculations based on Cross, Pilet and Pruyssers, 2019.

*** < 0,001; ** < 0,01; * < 0,1.

The increased rotation of party leaders is, however, not to the benefit of politicians without an elected mandate at the national, regional or European level. Whereas under other selection procedures about 24% of the selected leaders did not hold such a mandate, this only amounts to 6% under a system of full member votes. When rank-and-file members are allowed to vote, candidates need to have already some name recognition (which is more easily reached with a political mandate) to obtain the victory. Alexander De Croo (Open VLD), Patrick Janssens (sp.a) and Wouter Van Besien (Groen) are rare examples of party leaders selected by party members without having an elected political mandate. All of them were backed by either the party elite or senior party figures at the moment of the internal elections. In contests without full member votes, such examples are more prevalent and include amongst others Guy Verhofstadt (PVV), Wilfried Martens (CVP), Gérard Deprez (PSC) and Karel Dillen (VB).

For age, we do see no differences between contests with and without full member votes: in each kind of selection system, party leaders are about 45 years old. For sex, a remarkable difference appears between full member contests and other contests (11,5% versus 2,4%). Earlier analyses, however, revealed that this is due to an effect over time (in which women's representation in general has improved) rather than to an effect of the kind of selectorate (Wauters & Pilet, 2015).

In sum, as rightly claimed by Lieven De Winter, party leadership elections are often directed and even dominated by the party elite. They are not very competitive nor very open to newcomers. The introduction of full member votes has not reversed this general picture, but has nevertheless improved some aspects of competitiveness and openness, as there are now fewer coronations (with one single candidate), on average more candidates taking part in contests, and shorter duration of party leaders in office. Full member votes have, however, increased the margins between the winner and runner-up, and have made access for non-mandate holders more difficult. We will now conduct a similar analysis for candidate selection.

3. Trends in candidate selection

Candidate selection is a defining function of political parties. By recruiting candidates, parties shape both their own image and that of representative assemblies (Katz, 2001). Especially in the Belgian context, candidate selection is crucial. As Lieven De Winter repeatedly argued: "the Belgian voters decide only on the number of seats a party gets; the parties themselves decide who will receive them" (De Winter, 1988, p. 21). Even following the increase in preference votes over the 20th century (from a sixth to more than half) and after the list votes to be distributed to the candidates according to the list order were halved in 2003, candidates elected "out of order" remain a very small exception. Lieven De Winter (1980) computed the figure of 0,66%

of the Chamber's deputies for the period 1919-1978, and one of his PhD students did so for 1995-2014 and reached 0,46% (Cogels, 2020).

Scholarly interest in candidate selection has been increasing over time, and more remarkably over the last two decades (following a.o. the lead of Rahat & Hazan, 2001). Lieven De Winter was quick on the ball since he published on the matter in the 1980s already (De Winter, 1980, 1988; De Winter & Ceuleers, 1986). Recently, he analyzed the interactions between candidate selection and ideological congruence (Vandeleene, Meulewaeter, De Winter, & Baudewyns, 2017) and the contextual factors impacting candidate selection modes (Vandeleene & De Winter, 2018; Vandeleene, Dodeigne, & De Winter, 2016).

Similarly to leadership selection, Lieven De Winter's primary claim is that, despite their democratic disguises, parties are oligarchies regarding candidate selection. He argues, first, that parties have reduced over time the prerogatives of large selectorates, what undermines the democratic legitimacy, as involving party members guarantees a healthy balance of power within the party (De Winter, 1980). On top of these falling rights, the ratio voters/effective decision makers is declining because of weak participation rates. Second and more importantly, he contends that even if selectorates are formally inclusive, we cannot trust that the rules are respected (De Winter, 1980, p. 566) given a recurrent gap between theory and practice, especially in cases of early elections. He explains this by the relative unpredictability of inclusive selection processes who would not per se favor voters' preferred candidates, but rather those favored by party members – at the expense of balances in terms of representation, quality of the parliamentary work and party cohesion (De Winter, 1988, pp. 31-32). Yet, he is convinced that, in spite of the shortcomings of polls, these are the best means to ensure a wide involvement within the party and to protect rebel MPs against national sanctioning party organs (De Winter, 1980).

Lieven De Winter is not the only one doubting about the democratic character of candidate selection. Obler (1974) concluded that the primaries in Belgian parties had not more than a democratic appearance and were in practice controlled by party leaders who otherwise could not be able “to speak for [their] voters and to compete successfully with [their] rivals” (Obler, 1974, p. 185). It is also interesting to note that at that time, voters were fine with the partitocracy and considered candidate selection as an internal party matter. Hazan and Rahat (2010) developed the thesis that nor inclusive nor exclusive selectorates, and nor central nor decentralized processes, are satisfactory, because all involve drawbacks. Their preferred option is to combine several selectorates in a single selection process so as to foresee check-and-balances for the pathologies of every type of selectorate. Their call for more power diffusion interestingly complements Lieven De Winter's warnings against parties' oligarchic trend.

In this section, we first map out the evolution of the processes of candidate selection in terms of formal rules and actual functioning (which may not always overlap), and second we assess the competitiveness of these processes and their openness to newcomers.

3.1. Formal rules of candidate selection, and actual functioning

A political party holds various means to ensure a certain degree of control on candidate selection. In line with Hazan and Rahat (2010)'s framework, we distinguish the size of the selectorate and the degree of centralization.

Playing with the size of the selectorate is a means for parties to strengthen their domination over candidate selection processes. The larger the selectorate, the more inclusive the process, but the weaker the control from the party elites because a crowd can arguably less easily be driven than a small group of selectors. Yet some scholars argue that middle-level elites are the least powerful when the selectorate is inclusive because party elites are still able to influence the large selectorate's decision, by pre-cooking the decision, like drafting a proposal to be rubber-stamped by an inclusive selectorate.

Belgian parties were known as the champions of members' polls in the post-war period. The poll system, "an intraparty primary in which dues-paying members could vote and select their parliamentary candidates" (De Winter, 1988, p. 20), has been organized in the country almost since its birth (i.e. from the 1840s in the liberal party which has inspired the other major parties at that time). The usage of this very inclusive method declined from the 1960s onwards, due to the frequent occurrence of early elections and the birth of new rightist parties with much more exclusive modes of organization (Put, 2015). The selectorates re-opened again a few decades later, and by now a great deal of Belgian parties call on either their members or their members' delegates to ratify the candidates' lists, as displayed in Figure 3.2. Both green parties, Ecolo and Groen, have organized inclusive selection procedures since the 1980s. The socialist parties, PS and sp.a, now select their candidates via a conference of delegates; although the francophone counterpart PS had a more inclusive process until the end of the 1990s. Party members also vote in the Christian-democratic parties, cdH and CD&V, who both had more exclusive procedures in the past. The Flemish liberal party Open VLD is peculiar since it shifted from an exclusive selection procedure to the most inclusive one in the beginning of the 1990s. It is to date the only Belgian party to have organized a proper primary where registered voters could cast a vote. Yet after one election, the selectorate was restricted to party members only – and it is still the case nowadays.

Still a small half of Belgian parties do not foresee the formal intervention of an inclusive selectorate. The far-left PTB-PVDA as well as the francophone liberal MR select candidates through an exclusive selectorate made of top party figures. The regionalists N-VA and DÉFI, and the far-right VB, approve their lists in their national party council, a party organ larger than the party board but smaller than a delegates' conference. It has to be noted that DÉFI slightly enlarged its selectorate after the end of the long electoral alliance with the PRL/MR.

Our longitudinal analysis shows first that there have been a number of changes over time, and second that the trend is clearly going towards democratization. Nowadays, more than half of Belgian parties select their candidates in an inclusive

way. Nonetheless, it would be misleading to assume that, because rank and file or delegates have a say in the process, the real decision maker is inclusive. A study of the formal rules only does not fully disclose the reality of candidate selection. All Belgian parties use multistage processes to draft their lists, and research has made clear that not all stages are mentioned in the formal rules (Vandeleene et al., 2016). Most often the processes are assorted – that is, not all candidates are selected according to similar rules. Parties tend to hold more control, formally or informally, on the selection of candidates on eligible positions. A say for party members does also not presume that these were not guided in their decision by more exclusive selectorates. There is in Belgium no direct membership vote on individual candidates as all parties foresee some kind of preparation for the members’ decision, through means of a list committee for instance (Vandeleene, 2016). The apparent inclusiveness of Belgian parties’ selectorates thus has to be nuanced in light of both formal and even more informal tenets.

Next to selectorates’ size, scholars distinguish the degree of centralization in the process. The more decentralized, the weaker the control of the party elites. A decentralized process in the Belgian context refers to a decision made at the arrondissemental or provincial level, as opposed to a national-level decision.

Voters		Party members		Delegates to a party convention		PPG		Party council		Single leader
								PTB-PVDA 2014		
		Ecolo 1988								
		Groen 1988								
		PS 1988	→	PS 1999						
				sp.a 1988						
		cdH 1991	←					cdH 1988		
		CD&V 1999	←	CD&V 1988						
						DÉFI 2014	←	DÉFI 1988		
								MR 1988		
Open VLD 1995	→	Open VLD 1999	←					Open VLD 1988		
						N-VA 2001				
						VB 1988				

Figure 3.2: Inclusiveness of the selectorate for candidate selection Belgium 1988-2020²

² Based on Put (2015) and Vandeleene (2016).

3.2. Competitiveness of candidate selection

We demonstrated that Belgian parties hold a strong control on candidate selection, in particular by centralizing the decisions. So, although inclusive selectorates are involved in the processes, the party at the central level is still able to steer the making up of the electoral lists. We now aim to test whether the presumed grip of parties on candidate selection translates in a weak competitiveness. As detailed in Vandeleene and Sandri (2018), a high degree of intraparty competition holds both benefits and downsides. A competitive selection is more democratic because of the selectorates' larger panel of possibilities which may boost the quality of the chosen ones. But a tough competition with candidates turning on each other may be detrimental to the party image just before the crucial Election Day.

Data from the Belgian Candidate Survey, a large-scale project coordinated a.o. by Lieven De Winter, allow us to assess the degree of competitiveness of the selection processes, as seen through the eyes of the candidates. Two thirds of them did not experience any competition to obtain their place on the list. Yet, less than 30% of the candidates on realistic positions (Vandeleene, De Winter, & Baudewyns, 2018) report no competition, highlighting that the real competition is taking place at this level.

Table 3.3: Perceived degree of competitiveness of the selection process, by kind of candidate selection process

	All candidates (N=635)	Inclusive candidate selection (N=383)		Exclusive candidate selection (N=252)
No competition	64,9%	61,4%		70,2%*
	All candidates (N=635)	Decentralized candidate selection (N=53)	Both levels (N=391)	Centralized candidate selection (N=191)
No competition	64,9%	50,9%	60,9%	77%***

*Note: the survey question reads as "To what extent have you had to 'fight' in order to obtain the specific position you occupy on the list?"; No competition ("Not at all") versus some competition ("A lot", "To a moderate extent", "To a weak extent"); Data for candidates for the Belgian federal elections of 2014; *** < 0,001; ** < 0,01; * < 0,1.*

If we investigate differences depending on the type of candidate selection process (Table 3.3), we observe that the least competitive are processes with exclusive selectorates and centralized at the party level. More than 70% of the candidates selected by exclusive selectorates reported no competition at all, against just above 60% of the candidates from inclusive procedures. A trend is also visible along the decentralization line: the more centralized, the less the process was perceived as competitive. This confirms Lieven De Winter's claim that the oligarchisation of candidate selection leads to lower levels of democracy in terms of competitiveness.

3.3. Openness of candidate selection

The democratic character of candidate selection can also be assessed based on the renewal rate on the electoral lists. If incumbents are automatically reselected (and on eligible positions), the chances for a newcomer to enter parliament are obviously weak. Parties' control on their political personnel can thus translate in a quasi-automatic reselection of incumbents. Yet most candidates on a list are never elected. One may thus consider openness differently. An open process would be a process whose outcome is lists with a certain degree of candidate turnover. In other words, the candidates would not be identical from one election to the other. Data from the Belgian Candidate Survey show that about half the candidates running for office did so for the first time. Table 3.4 demonstrates that the democratization of candidate selection processes leads to more openness. When selectorates are exclusive, the percentage of candidates who never stood before as candidate is much lower than when selectorates are inclusive. Similarly, when the processes involve the central level of the party only, the degree of turnover is much lower (from a third to more than half!). The oligarchisation of candidate selection thus reduces the access of newcomers to the candidacy.

Table 3.4: Reported level of experience as a candidate, by kind of candidate selection process

	All candidates (N=980)	Inclusive candidate selection (N=727)		Exclusive candidate selection (N=253)
No experience	50,6%	53,0%		43,9%*
	All candidates (N=980)	Decentralized candidate selection (N=112)	Both levels (N=705)	Centralized candidate selection (N=163)
No experience	50,6%	54,5%	54,0%	33,1%***

*Note: the survey question reads as "In which years have you stood as a candidate for the federal elections?"; No experience ("Never stood before") versus experience ("Stood at least once in the past"); Data for candidates for the Belgian federal elections of 2007 and 2010; *** < 0,001; ** < 0,01; * < 0,1.*

4. Belgium's partitocracy in comparative perspective

All over his career, Lieven De Winter has been a strong comparativist. Studying Belgian politics was making sense when this case could be situated in a broader perspective, and compared to other countries. His work on partitocracy fell directly within this logic. It is therefore the next logical step for this chapter. In the first section, we explained that the capacity of parties to maintain a strong dominance of the elite despite apparent reforms towards more openness in leadership or candidate selection was found in several countries, especially across Western democracies. Katz and Mair (1995) even included it as one feature of their "cartel party" model.

It is therefore important to verify whether Belgian parties can be defined as typical or deviant cases in that respect. We start with formal rules organizing both processes. Concerning leadership selection, Belgian parties appear to have both set and followed the dominant trend towards more inclusiveness. In their study, Pilet and Cross (2014) have shown a trend towards more inclusive selectorates, and the dominance of one member one vote model, for which Belgium is a typical case. Over the last decades, all parties except PTB-PVDA have passed reforms making this process more inclusive. The most common model is the full member vote. Yet, we can also stress that no Belgian party so far has moved towards open primaries, and it does not appear that any party is really considering it for the near future.

Regarding candidate selection, things are a bit less clear. A major empirical finding in comparative literature is that there are important intra-country and intra-party variation in the candidate selection modes (Chiru, De Winter, & Vandeleene, 2020). Across Western democracies, there have been trends towards more inclusive selectorates, but less strongly than for a leadership election. Another major evolution has been a growing role for the central party headquarters (Rahat & Hazan, 2010). Belgian parties appear to fit quite well into this framework. Regarding the size of the selectorate, there have been changes but they are not unidirectional. Some parties moved to more inclusive selection procedures (like CDH or DÉFI) while others moved in the opposite direction (PS, Open VLD). By contrast, there seems to be a more structural evolution towards a greater centralization, i.e. an increased intervention of national party headquarters.

Further than formal rules, we have also looked at whether the dynamics and outcomes of leadership and candidate selection have evolved within Belgian parties. Here again, some comparative perspective might prove useful. For leadership selection, data has been systematically gathered within the COSPAL project covering 14 countries over more than 50 years (Cross, Pilet, & Pruyssers, 2019).

What we observe in terms of competitiveness, is that Belgium performs on average in comparison to other countries. First, Belgian parties take with about 60% middle position when it comes to the percentage of leadership contests that could be labeled as “coronations” or uncontested leadership selections (Kenig et al., 2015). There are countries with much more coronation, including Hungary, Norway and Germany, but also countries which have fewer coronations, most notably the UK, Israel and Canada.

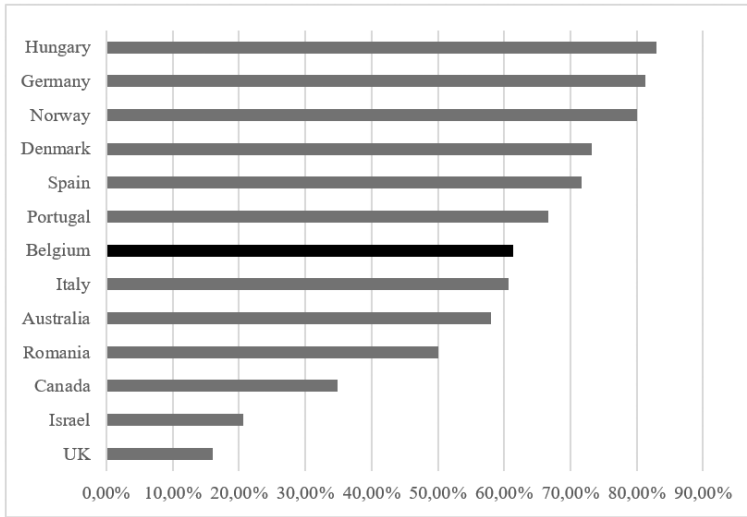


Figure 3.4: Percentage of coronations in leadership contests in a number of Western countries

Note: own calculations based on Cross, Pilet and Pruyssers, 2019.

The same applies more or less to the number of candidates in case of a contested leadership selection. Parties in Canada, Spain and Germany have on average more contenders than Belgian parties, but these have, on their turn, much more candidates than parties in countries such as Austria, Hungary and Denmark. Also, when it comes to the margin of victory, i.e. the difference between the winner and the runner-up, in leadership contests, Belgian parties perform on average in comparison to parties in other countries.

These various figures confirm that the dynamics of leadership contests in Belgium are very comparable to what could be observed in several other Western democracies. Despite opening up leadership selection to all party members, it seems that the dominant party elite has been able to keep control. In most countries, including Belgium, a majority of leadership races are actually coronations with a single candidate – approved by the party oligarchy. When several candidates run, they are often not many of them, between 2 and 3. There is very often a frontrunner, who eventually wins by a large margin of victory (superior to 30 pc points). This pattern of constrained openness and competition is found in Belgium and in most other countries covered. Yet, there are exceptions, like in Australia, the United Kingdom, Israel and Canada where coronations are rarer. There are often many candidates running – there were for example 17 candidates for the 2017 leadership race of the Conservative Party of Canada. Tight elections are also more common. Interestingly, it appears that these more open dynamics might be explained by the difficulties within several parties to

construct a unified party oligarchy not deeply divided in factions. In countries where the party oligarchy is more cohesive, we observe like in Belgium a great ability to control the leadership selection.

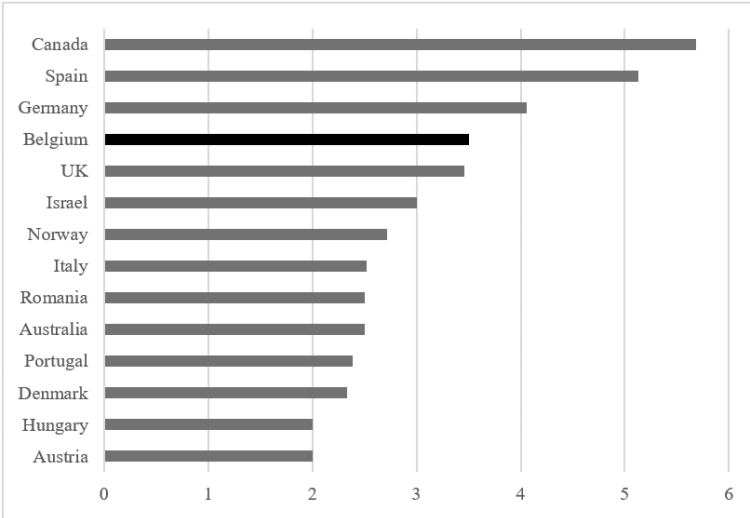


Figure 3.5: Average number of candidates in leadership contests in a number of Western countries, excluding coronations
 Note: own calculations based on Cross, Pilet and Pruyssers, 2019.

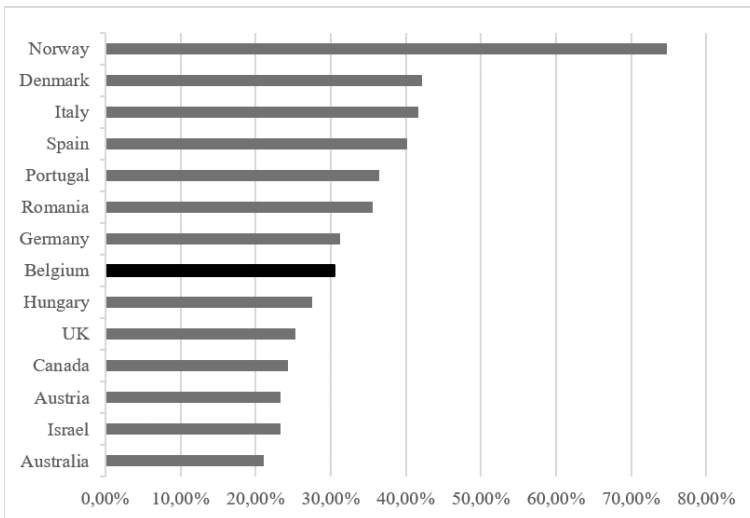


Figure 3.6: Average margin of victory in leadership contests in a number of Western countries, excluding coronations
 Note: own calculations based on Cross, Pilet and Pruyssers, 2019.

The Comparative Candidate Survey (CCS) project allows us to compare candidate selection processes in various Western countries. The data is survey-based on answers from the candidates themselves, gathered just after the elections. Our database covers 21 countries with most of them several legislative elections over the period 2005-2016⁴. We compiled the average value for candidates running in the different elections when several entries per country were available. When we examine the level of competitiveness of candidate selection in these countries, we observe foremost large variations, from Montenegro and Switzerland where a great majority of the candidates report no competition during their selection process to Swedish, Italian and Albanian candidates who mostly declare that there was at least one other contender for their position as candidate. We showed already that 64,9% of the Belgian candidates in 2014 reported having experienced no competition during their selection process to become a candidate. Belgium is clearly above average. Put in an international perspective, we can assess that the level of competitiveness of Belgian candidate selection processes seems to be rather low, what confirms the hypothesis that Belgian parties' grip on candidate selection dampens intraparty competition.

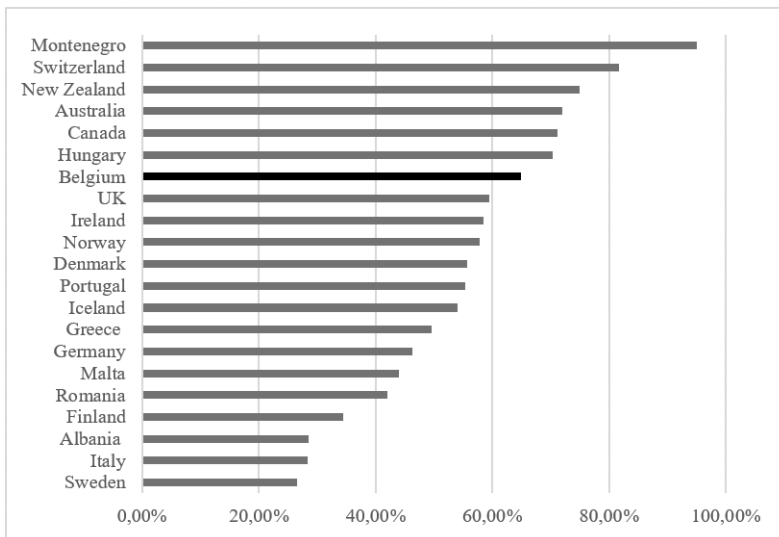


Figure 3.7: Percentage of selection of candidates without any competition, as reported by the candidates in a number of Western countries

Note: own calculations based on data from the Comparative Candidate Survey, modules 1 and 2.

⁴ Reference: CCS 2016. *Comparative Candidates Survey Module I – 2005-2013* and CCS 2018. *Comparative Candidates Survey Module II – 2013-2018* (Dataset – cumulative file). Distributed by FORS, Lausanne.

Investigating the openness of candidate selection processes, again based on CCS data, we assess that most candidates running for office report to have never done so before. Taking into account that the candidates answering the candidate surveys tend to have more chances of winning a seat⁵, these figures are remarkable. The levels of candidate turnover are high, meaning that selectorates seem to recruit many new candidates before each election. Belgium stands out in this comparative perspective as a country where the degree of openness of the candidacies is low. With just more than half of the candidates for the legislative elections of 2007 and 2010 reporting that they were already candidate at least once before, Belgian parties appear as conservative entities not letting the doors open to many newcomers.

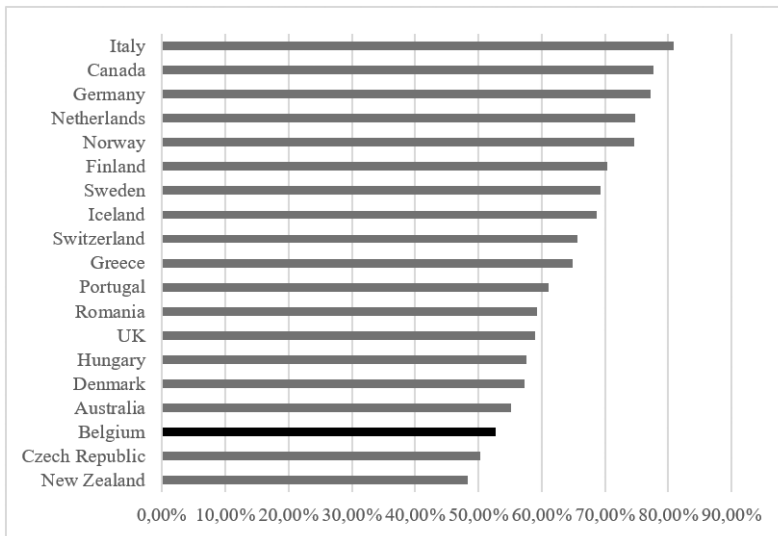


Figure 3.8: percentage of candidates reporting no candidate experience in a number of Western countries

Note: own calculations based on data from the Comparative Candidate Survey, modules 1 and 2.

Conclusion

Are Belgian political parties democracies or oligarchies? One of Lieven De Winter's most recurring claim is that Belgium is partitocratic in nature, hence we should pay attention to how Belgian parties organize. We attempted to test in this chapter whether two core processes of the internal life of parties, the selection of the party leader and of the electoral candidates, reflect an oligarchic or rather a democratizing trend. Based

⁵ Some countries even do not contact the candidates with absolutely no chance of winning, e.g. selected on the last list positions or in hopeless districts.

on longitudinal data going back to the 1960s for leadership elections and to the 1980s for candidate selection, we establish that Belgian parties have implemented over time some reforms, mostly towards democratization. Although half a century ago most parties selected their leaders via a conference of delegates, the rank-and-file members hold nowadays the power to elect the party's head. Similarly, most parties select their candidates relying on members' approval, but not all: delegates' conferences and party councils have the upper hand in some parties. A parallel trend over time has been the relative centralization of the candidate selection procedures for which in all but one party the national level has a say.

We sketched out some developments in leadership and candidate selection, and this triggered the question of whether despite these intraparty reforms, these processes are still prisoners of *partitocracy*, alluding to Lieven De Winter's (1998) words. Have these reforms effected the *partitocratic* nature of Belgian politics, or, in other words, to what extent is parties' supremacy still translated in key features of these intraparty processes? We looked at the degree of competitiveness and openness of the selection processes. First, the democratization has led to more competition during these intraparty events. Both when parties choose their new leader and select their candidates, we observed that inclusive selectorates boost the levels of competition, i.e. with more candidates competing. Yet the figures show that in general, most contests remain not very competitive. The oligarchic trends persist, but may be dampened by the more open (and more decentralized) procedures. Also, in comparative terms, Belgium is on par with many Western counterparts, namely, the competition is most often not tough. Second, the democratization has opened up access to the leadership or candidate position. We witness that the duration in office is shorter for party leaders, but that the more inclusive selectorate's setting requires party leaders to be more experienced as politicians than when exclusive party bodies decide. We also demonstrated that for candidate selection larger and more decentralized selectorates let the doors more open to newcomers without any experience as candidate.

To wrap up, our results are nuanced. We take stock of the increasing democratization in both leadership and candidate selection, but as well of the grip that party headquarters still manage to maintain on these important decisions. Democratization has rendered the selection processes more competitive than before, but still the level of competitiveness remains rather low. At the same time, the openness of the processes is limited. We cannot attest that there is true democracy within Belgian parties, as oligarchic tendencies keep on.

But is it a democratic problem if parties' internal processes are prisoners of *partitocracy*? Scholars contend that democratic principles and political parties do not automatically have to go hand in hand. Some argue that democracy is not to be found in the parties (Schattschneider, 1942), while many defend that intraparty democracy is thinkable (Pettitt, 2011). Internally democratic parties would be critical because they reflect and/or affect a political system's democratic quality (Sandri, 2012). Political

parties are “intermediary institutions” in political systems, linking voters to the state (von dem Berge et al., 2013), and their democratic functioning would thanks to a virtuous circle contribute to “the stability and legitimacy of the democracies in which [they] compete for power” (Scarrow, 2005, p. 3). Recent trends in Belgian parties with fairly competitive and open processes may give the hope that the internal reforms were not hopeless, and that they may in the future set themselves free from the partitocratic prison.

References

- Chiru, M., De Winter, L., & Vandeleene, A. (2020). Candidate Selection. Still a Secret Garden? In L. De Winter, R. Karlsen, & H. Schmitt (Eds.), *Parliamentary Candidates Between Voters and Parties. A Comparative Perspective* (pp. 54-77). London: Routledge.
- Close, C., Kelbel, C., & van Haute, E. (2017). What Citizens Want in Terms of Intra-Party Democracy: Popular Attitudes towards Alternative Candidate Selection Procedures. *Political Studies*, 65(3), 646-664.
- Cogels, M. (2020). *Representation Amidst Candidates: the Balance of Electoral Lists A Longitudinal Analysis of the Belgian Political Parties*. UCLouvain.
- Cross, W. P., & Pilet, J.-B. (2015). *The Politics of Party Leadership: A Cross-National Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cross, W. P., Pilet, J.-B., & Pruyssers, S. (2019). *Dataset Comparative Study of Party Leaders V.2 (COSPAL)*.
- Depauw, S. (2003). Government Party Discipline in Parliamentary Democracies: The Cases of Belgium, France and the United Kingdom in the 1990s. *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 9(4), 130-146.
- de Visscher, C. (2004). *La relation entre l'autorité politique et la haute administration*. Gand: Academia Press.
- De Winter, L. (1980). Twintig jaar polls, of de teloorgang van een vorm van interne partijdemocratie. *Res Publica*, 22(4), 563-585.
- De Winter, L. (1988). Belgium: democracy or oligarchy. In M. Gallagher & M. Marsh (Eds.), *Candidate Selection in Comparative Perspective* (pp. 20-46). London: Sage.
- De Winter, L. (1998). Parliament and Government in Belgium: Prisoners of partitocracy. In P. Norton (Ed.), *Parliaments and Governments in Western Europe* (pp. 97-122). London & Portland: Frank Cass.
- De Winter, L. (2002). Political Corruption in Belgium. In M. Bull & J. Newell (Eds.), *Corruption in Contemporary Politics* (pp. 93-105). London: Macmillan.

- De Winter, L. (2005). Belgium: Empowering Voters or Party Elites? In M. Gallagher & P. Mitchell (Eds.), *The Politics of Electoral Systems* (pp. 417-432). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- De Winter, L., & Ceuleers, J. (1986). De samenstelling van de kandidaten-lijsten in de Vlaamse partijen. *Res Publica*, 28(2), 197-212.
- De Winter, L., & Dumont, P. (2000). PPGs in Belgium: Subjects of Partitocratic Dominion. In K. Heider & R. Koole (Eds.), *Parliamentary Party Groups in European Democracies. Political Parties Behind Closed Doors* (pp. 106-129). London: Routledge.
- De Winter, L., & Dumont, P. (2006). Do Belgian Parties Undermine the Democratic Chain of Delegation? *West European Politics*, 29(5), 957-976.
- De Winter, L., & Van Wynsberghe, C. (2015). Kingdom of Belgium: Partitocracy, Corporatist Society, and Dissociative Federalism. In K. Detterbeck, W. Renzsch, & J. Kincaid (Eds.), *Political Parties and Civil Society in Federal Countries* (pp. 40-69). Don Mills: Oxford University Press.
- De Winter, L., & Baudewyns, P. (2015). Candidate Centred Campaigning in a Party Centred Context: The case of Belgium. *Electoral Studies*, 39, 295-305.
- Dodeigne, J., & Vandeleene, A. (2013). New Rules, New Political Class? Analysis of the Impact of the Electoral Reforms in Belgium on the 2014 Elections and Aftermath. Paper presented at the *Second edition of the Conference Belgium: The State of the Federation*, Louvain-la-Neuve.
- Fiers, S., & Krouwel, A. (2004). The Low Countries: From Prime Minister to Minister-President? In P. Webb & T. Poguntke (Eds.), *The Presidentialisation of Politics in Democratic Societies* (pp. 126-156). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hazan, R. Y., & Rahat, G. (2010). *Democracy within Parties: Candidate Selection Methods and Their Political Consequences*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Katz, R. S. (2001). The Problem of Candidate Selection and Models of Party Democracy. *Party Politics*, 7(3), 277-296.
- Katz R. S., & Mair, P. (1995). Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy: The Emergence of the Cartel Party. *Party Politics*, 1(1), 5-28.
- Katz, R. S., & Mair, P. (2009). The Cartel Party Thesis: A Restatement. *Perspectives on Politics*, 7(4), 753-766.
- Kenig, O. (2009). Classifying Party Leadership Selection Methods in Parliamentary Democracies. *JEPOP*, 19(4), 433-47.
- Kenig, O., Rahat, G., & Tuttnauer, O. (2015). Competitiveness of Party Leadership Selection Processes. In W. Cross & J.-B. Pilet (Eds.), *The Politics of Party Leadership: A Cross-National Perspective* (pp. 50-72). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Maes, M. (1990). De formele aanstelling van de partijvoorzitters in België. *Res Publica*, 32(1), 56-62.
- Michels, R. (1915). *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*. New York: Dover.
- Obler, J. (1974). Intraparty Democracy and the Selection of Parliamentary Candidates: the Belgian Case. *British Journal of Political Science*, 4(2), 163-185.
- Pettitt, R. T. (2012). Exploring Variations in Intra-party Democracy: A Comparative Study of the British Labour Party and the Danish Centre-Left. *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, 14(4), 630-650.
- Pilet, J.-B., & Cross, W. P. (2014). *The Selection of Political Party Leaders in Contemporary Parliamentary Democracies*. London: Routledge.
- Pilet, J.-B., & Wauters, B. (2014). The Selection of Party Leaders in Belgium. In J.-B. Pilet & W. P. Cross (Eds.), *The Selection of Political Party Leaders in Contemporary Parliamentary Democracies. A Comparative Study* (pp. 30-46). London: Routledge.
- Put, G.-J. (2015). *All Politics Is Local: The geographical Dimension of Candidate Selection. The Case of Belgium (1987-2010)*. KULeuven.
- Put, G.-J., & Maddens, B. (2019). *De evolutie van het profiel van de Vlaamse kandidaten voor de Kamerverkiezingen van 1987 tot en met 2019 (VIVES Beleidspaper)*. Leuven.
- Rahat, G., & Hazan, R. Y. (2001). Candidate Selection Methods: An Analytical Framework. *Party Politics*, 7(3), 297-322.
- Sandri, G. (2012). *Intra-party Democracy and Political Activism: a Comparative Analysis of Attitudes and Behaviors of Grass-roots Party Members*. Université libre de Bruxelles.
- Scarrow, S. (2005). *Political Parties and Democracy in Theoretical and Practical Perspectives: Implementing Intra-Party Democracy*. Washington: National Democratic Institute for International Affairs.
- Schattschneider, E. E. (1942). *Party government*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Seddone, A., Sandri, G., & Sozzi, F. (2020). Primary Elections for Party Leadership in Italy. In A. Alexandre-Collier, A. Goujon & G. Gourgues (Eds.), *Innovations, Reinvented Politics and Representative Democracy*. Abingdon, Routledge.
- Vandeleene, A. (2016). *Does Candidate Selection Matter? A Comparative Analysis of Belgian Political Parties' Selection Procedures and Their Relation to the Candidates' Profile*. Université catholique de Louvain.

- Vandeleene, A., & De Winter, L. (2018). The Curious Stability of Candidate Selection Methods in Belgium in Times of Crisis. In X. Coller, G. Cordero, & A. Jaime-Castillo (Eds.), *The Selection of Politicians in Times of Crisis* (pp. 49-65). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Vandeleene, A., De Winter, L., & Baudewyns, P. (Eds.). (2019). *Candidates, Parties and Voters in the Belgian Partitocracy*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Vandeleene, A., Dodeigne, J., & De Winter, L. (2016). What Do Selectorates Seek? A Comparative Analysis of Belgian Federal and Regional Candidate Selection Processes in 2014. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 60(7), 889-908.
- Vandeleene, A., Meulewaeter, C., De Winter, L., & Baudewyns, P. (2017). La relation entre le mode de sélection des candidats et la congruence idéologique entre masses et élites : analyse du cas belge. *Politique et Sociétés*, 36(2), 91-118.
- Vandeleene, A., & Sandri, G. (2019). The More, the Smoother? Candidate Selection and Intraparty Competition. In A. Vandeleene A., L. De Winter, & P. Baudewyns (Eds.), *Candidates, Parties and Voters in the Belgian Partitocracy* (pp. 77-103). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- van Vonno, C., Malka, R. I., Depauw, S., Hazan, R. Y., & Andeweg, R. B. (2014). Agreement, Loyalty and Discipline: A Sequential Approach to Party Unity. In S. Depauw & K. Deschouwer (Eds.), *Representing the people. A survey Among Members of Statewide and Substate Parliaments* (pp. 110-136). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- von dem Berge, B., Poguntke, T., Obert, P., & Tipei, D. (2013). *Measuring Intra-Party Democracy: A Guide for the Content Analysis of Party Statutes with Examples from Hungary, Slovakia and Romania*. New York: Springer.
- Wauters, B. (2014). Democratizing Party Leadership Selection in Belgium: Motivations and Decision Makers. *Political Studies*, 62(S1), 61-80.
- Wauters, B., & Pilet, J.-B. (2015). The Selection of Female Party Leaders. Does the Selectorate Make a Difference? In W. Cross & J.-B. Pilet (Eds.), *The Politics of Party Leadership: A Cross-National Perspective* (pp. 73-89). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wauters, B., & Pittoors, G. (2019). Populist Party Leaders in Belgium: an Analysis of VB and PVDA-PTB. *Polish Political Science Review*, 7(1), 1-23.
- Wauters, B., Bouteca, N., Kern, A., & Vandeleene, A. (2020). What's in a Party Member's Mind? Voting Motives in Direct Member Votes to Select the Party Leader", paper presented at the *ECPR Virtual General Conference*, 25-28 August 2020.
- Weekers, K., Maddens, B., & Noppe, J. (2009). Explaining the Evolution of the Party Finance Regime in Belgium. *JEPOP*, 19(1), 5-48.

Chapter 4. Coalition formation in Belgium

*From exceptional complexity to regime breakdown?*¹

Lieven De Winter
Patrick Dumont

Introduction

The New York Times reported that on Sunday January 23, 2011, 34.000 Belgians marched the streets of Brussels under the banner “Shame. No government, great country” (Castle, 2011). Defying the normal conventions of protest politics to try to get rid of a government, this was a public outcry to the political class to finally form a government, 255 days after the May 13, 2010 general elections. Belgium was well on the way to break the world record of government formation duration, with 354 days record hitherto held by Cambodia. Eventually, with 541 days, that record was pulverized by the installation of the Di Rupo government on December 5, 2011.

In West European comparative perspective, Belgium is indeed an exceptional case in terms of coalition formation: high or even record values are reached regarding the classic determinants of government formation complexity (such as number of players, uncertainty and information scarcity), the structure and features of the cabinet formation process (e.g. institutional constraints, long formation duration) and its outcomes (“irrational” coalition composition, extensive coalition agreements). These core features of the bargaining process affect the life of coalitions, in terms of government duration, intra-cabinet conflictuality, policy inertia and ineffectiveness.

This chapter presents the Belgian case on all these coalition formation and functioning core variables in comparative West European perspective. We find that on most of these independent and dependent variables of the chain of coalition formation (see Figure 4.1), Belgium scores record-breaking values, or at least is one of the top three “performers”.

Our theoretical framework draws on the comparative projects of Strøm, Müller & Bergman that by now empirically embrace the 1945-2019 period in Western as well as Eastern and Central Europe (hereafter C1, C2, C3, and C4)² and updates and extends

¹ This chapter is a reproduction of the chapter by the same authors from: *Belgian Exceptionalism Belgian Politics between Realism and Surrealism* (pp. 108-122), edited by Didier Caluwaerts and Min Reuchamps, Copyright (2022) by Routledge. Reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis Group.

² C1 = Müller, W. C., & Strøm, K. (Eds.). (2000). *Coalition Governments in Western Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; C2 = Strøm, K., Müller, W. C., & Bergman, T. (Eds.). (2008). *Cabinets and*

our previous work on the Belgian case. We also investigate whether these exceptional government formation features impact citizens' trust in politics and satisfaction with democracy, eroding the legitimacy of the wider political system and fostering its disintegration.

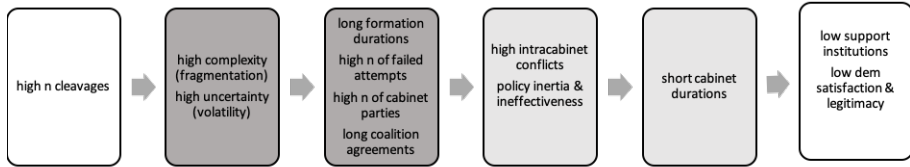


Figure 4.1: Cabinet formations, determinants and effects

1. Bargaining complexity and information uncertainty causes and consequences

We define *bargaining complexity* as the difficulty of finding a coalition of parties that would make a viable coalition government. Complexity increases when actors involved in the formation of a government face a high number of viable coalition outcome “resolutions”. These outcomes comprise (1) the partisan composition of the coalition; (2) the results of policy negotiations, usually contained in a coalition policy agreement and (3) the distribution of ministerial portfolios and other key positions (e.g. chairpersons for the assemblies, EU Commissioner). Obviously, *ceteris paribus*, the fragmentation of the parliamentary party system boosts bargaining complexity, in an exponential manner³.

After the 1999 elections, which led to a new peak in the fragmentation of seats among parties in parliament, no less than nine different coalitions were at the same time clearing the following formal and informal constraints: (1) winning more than 50% of seats in the federal parliament; (2) based on a majority of MPs in each language group and (3) symmetrically composed, i.e. each linguistic component of a “party family” was part of the potential coalition (Dumont, 2011). However, some of these informal composition constraints have been relaxed in most of the governments formed since 1999. Thus, in 2019, with 4,095 coalitions numerically possible given the parliamentary seat distribution (2,021 of which are winning), bargaining complexity has probably never been higher.

coalition bargaining: The democratic life cycle in Western Europe. Oxford: Oxford University Press; C3 = Bergman, T., Ilonszki, G., & Müller, W. C. (Eds.). (2020). *Coalition Governance in Central Eastern Europe.* Oxford: Oxford University Press; C4 = Bergman, T., Bäck, H., & Hellström, J. (Eds.). (2021). *Coalition Governance in Western Europe.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³ The number of solutions equals $2n - 1$, where n stands for the number of parties represented in parliament.

Research on coalition bargaining has highlighted a second factor which is likely to delay cabinet formation duration: *information uncertainty*. Rather than being involved in a bargaining game where all players have complete information over the preferences and strategies of the others, in practice, party leaders face a much messier reality. These actors are often not transparent in their preferences, and change their preferences during the formation. Elections are being particularly disruptive in terms of vital information (Diermeier & van Roozendaal, 1998); whereas party leaders gradually learn about preferences and strategies of government partners and opposition parties in day-to-day legislative work, parties come to elections with new platforms and demands; furthermore, they undergo changes in size in accordance to their electoral performance; in addition, the heat of the campaign may have polarized positions and (internal) rivalries and disappointing results may also provoke a change of leader to represent the party in government formation talks.

Especially after high-volatility elections, uncertainty would plausibly be high. In periods of high electoral stability, a party can more easily be persuaded to enter a coalition (Strøm, 1990): all else equal, the less party leaders have to worry about possible repercussions in future elections, the more willing they will be to reach an (coalition) agreement, which under other circumstances would have appeared too risky. In periods of high electoral competitiveness, the bargaining situation is made more complex by the fact that the ratio of instant office rewards to deferred electoral costs may be lower or more uncertain, given the long-term trend that governing parties increasingly tend to lose more votes than opposition parties (Narud & Valen, 2008). Thus, when parties tend to focus on vote-seeking rather than office-seeking strategies (Strøm & Müller, 1999), one would expect more bargaining rounds and longer periods of negotiation. Finally, Strøm (1994) also argues that party preferences and strategies may also not be stable throughout the formation process. Thus, although a longer formation process may be needed to gather new information, its very length may also bring new uncertainty by causing preference changes within and across parties at the bargaining table.

Information uncertainty is thus conceptualized separately from bargaining complexity. In a three-party system where any two-party coalition is a winning formula, it will be more difficult, *ceteris paribus*, to form a government right after an election than midway in the legislative term.

The interaction of *high* bargaining complexity and *high* information uncertainty leads to the most difficult circumstances in which coalition governments are to be formed. In this chapter, we analyze whether this core relationship is true, concentrating on the Belgian case in comparative perspective. Figure 4.1 depicts how we extend our analysis from this initial link between complexity and uncertainty with coalition formation (in dark grey) to the study of coalition governance and stability (in light grey), and to the likely societal causes and consequences (in white) of the

often assumed exceptionally difficult job of forming and maintaining governments in Belgium.

Our expectations are, in line with the existing literature, that high party fragmentation results from a high number of societal cleavages. Combined with the uncertainty of (especially disruptive) elections, this bargaining complexity would lead to more failed attempts to reach the final coalition solution and thus require longer formation durations (De Winter & Dumont, 2008). In turn, we expect that high complexity due to party system fragmentation will also be associated with a high number of coalition parties that end up governing. The more parties in government, the more likely these will have different policy preferences and incentives to deviate from what was discussed at the time of government formation or even to leave the coalition once their preferred legislation has been passed. To avoid such “opportunistic” behavior, formateurs will seek to build credible commitments among parties in the form of comprehensive coalition agreements. The comprehensiveness of these documents, and therefore also their size, is likely to increase with the level of distrust among actors involved. Since distrust is linked to information uncertainty, we thus expect that in terms of the functioning of coalition, both high bargaining complexity and uncertainty will also lead to, *ceteris paribus*, longer coalition agreements (see Müller & Strøm, 2008). We document these links in the following section of the chapter.

Moving to the right hand side of Figure 4.1, and to the third section of this chapter, we argue that, because even comprehensive coalition agreements are “incomplete contracts” and because exogenous events may force coalition partners to take decisions on issues that were not anticipated at the time of government formation, the large number of coalition parties – and its related greater array of policy preferences – will lead to higher intra-cabinet conflictuality and/or policy inertia and ineffectiveness, eventually making for shorter cabinet duration. Finally, in the conclusion, we investigate whether these latter three dysfunctions in particular could spill over into the political culture, producing low trust in political institutions, dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy, erosion of the legitimacy of the entire political system, fostering its instability, and even potentially triggering its breakdown.

2. Cleavages, party fragmentation, multilevel politics and electoral volatility

Our empirical analysis puts the Belgian case in comparative perspective, focusing on Western Europe⁴. Given that party system fragmentation is a crucial determinant of

⁴ We exclude East and Central European democracies given their still unconsolidated party system. Also, we exclude Malta (for its lack of coalition cabinets), France (semi-presidential system), Cyprus (presidential system) and European microstates. We further exclude Switzerland, a country where the four main parties agreed in 1959 on a more or less proportional “magic formula” that would include them all in subsequent governments.

bargaining complexity, the period under study starts in 1978, with the split of the last traditional unitary party, the Belgian socialists (PSB-BSP). It ends with the formation of the (exceptional) De Croo seven-party coalition on October 1, 2020. Throughout the chapter, our empirical analyses mostly draw on the data that was collected with the framework of not only C1, C2 and C4 (2021), but also other comparative datasets, some of which may refer to a longer time period or, on the contrary, not cover the full 1978-2020 time span.

As seen earlier, the distribution of seats between parties has a direct effect on the total number and the number of potential coalitions that would reach more than 50 % of seats in parliament and thus make for a viable, majority-supported government. Laakso and Taagepera's (1979) Effective Number of Parliamentary Parties (ENPP) is the operationalization most often used in comparative politics to measure party system fragmentation. It considers the number and the size of parliamentary parties, and thus reflects the bargaining complexity concept introduced earlier. In the period under consideration, Belgium is the record holder of the average party system fragmentation measured by Laakso-Taagepera's ENPP (in the Chamber of Representatives). It also holds the highest level of fragmentation ever recorded in Western Europe: after the 2019 elections its ENPP peaked at 9.7⁵.

Another way of looking at the difficulty of forming a coalition is to look at the relative size of the largest party in parliament. Across Western Europe, that party is indeed expected to play a prime role in coalition formation. Sometimes the constitution recognizes the leader of that party the right to "make the first move" (Bäck & Dumont, 2008), that is, to invite other parties to negotiate a coalition together. The smaller the largest party, the more contested its status as first formateur, and the more partners it will need to coalesce with to reach a majority, thereby making coalition formation more difficult. Throughout the period 1978-2014, Belgium was the Western European country with the lowest average number of parties that received more than 15% of the vote in an election and thus had the smallest number of "major parties" (Siaroff, 2019, Table 2.1), and that in 1999, even its largest party had not reached that 15% threshold⁶.

What brings about this high level of party system fragmentation? Aside from the effect of electoral systems (Duverger, 1950), the most pertinent determinant of the format of party systems is the number of cleavages in society, as defined by Lipset and Rokkan (1967). Unfortunately, to our knowledge, there is no authoritative comparative research on the number of relevant cleavages in West European democracies. According to Lijphart's (1999) subjective and unsystematic attempt, Belgium is

⁵ See: https://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/people/michael_gallagher/ElSystems/Docts/ElectionIndices.pdf.

⁶ Putting those two indicators together, Siaroff (2019) developed an Index of Coalition Difficulty (ICD) that combines the ENPP with the size in seats of the largest party. The higher this value, the assumed greater the challenge of forming a government. Again, Belgium has the highest average for Western Europe in the period under study.

one of the very few plural, in the sense of deeply divided, West European countries. However, Taagepera and Grofman (1985) claim that there does exist a direct and simple mathematical link between the number of cleavages and the ENPP. The formula would be $ENPP = n \text{ cleavages} + 1$. If they are right, with an ENPP fluctuating between 6.8 (1978) and 9.7 (2019), no less than six to eight cleavages would have been relevant in Belgium in the last 40 years.

This seems hard to reconcile with common ways of counting cleavages in the Belgian polity (De Coorebyter, 2008), which records three traditional cleavages: the first being religious (Church/State), the second socioeconomic (left-right) and the third linguistic (Flemish vs francophones). The different components of what makes for a more recent cleavage in Western Europe, summarized as the Green-Alternative-Libertarian vs Traditionalist-Authoritarian-Nationalist divide by Hooghe et al. (2002), do also need to be considered. And, rather than counting the linguistic cleavage as one of those present in the Belgian party system as a whole, one could consider the latter as made of two different party systems (one Flemish and one Francophone one), each with its own cleavage constellations. In the Francophone party system, we would find the Church/State (or liberal vs traditional values opposition of the GAL-TAN cleavage), the economic left-right, and the environment vs productivism cleavages. The cosmopolitan vs nativism cleavage is not politicized given the absence of a successful far right francophone party, nor the Flemish vs francophone divide as all francophone parties endorse the institutional status quo regarding devolution. In the Flemish party system, we find the same cleavages as in the South, but we need to add the Flemish vs francophones cleavage (ranging from moderates to separatists, which can also be seen as a “super cleavage” over the “Belgian system”, see below), and the cosmopolitan vs nativism divide politicized mostly by the Vlaams Belang. Altogether then we would arrive at eight cleavages politicized in the Belgian party systems: five in Flanders and three in Wallonia.

In addition to its effect on the number of cleavages that are pertinent for the representation of parties in the federal parliament, Belgium’s linguistic community divide has also led to the construction of a multilevel political system. The latter has not only increased complexity of reaching an agreement at the bargaining table through the higher number of parties that is necessary to build a federal government (at least four), but has also increased information uncertainty. Through constitutional reforms since the 1970s, leading to the regionalization of most federal competences and the transfer of most public resources, the lack of hierarchy of norms, and the holding of direct elections to regional parliaments, the regional and community level is now considered at least as important as the federal level (Reuchamps et al., 2017).

The addition of elections at the regional level, the territorial unit where parties are organized, with the formation of regional and community executives at stake, has triggered more information uncertainty for cabinet formation and maintenance at the federal level. First, in those regional elections, the main parties in each linguistic

community have from 1995 onwards waged a fierce competition to become the largest party in seats in their regional parliament. Contrary to the federal level, the King plays no constitutional role in regional government formation; hence, the largest party is the natural formateur at that level. This battle for regional leadership has enhanced volatility, especially in Flanders where no less than four parties have become the leader in seats in one decade. Second, party leaders who negotiate for their party at both the regional and federal level have by now been socialized in this new, regionalized context where a political career in one's own region is equally prestigious as one at the federal level. The gradual emergence of this new generation caused misunderstandings and mistrust among long-standing coalition negotiators in the 2007 government formation. Third, the empowerment of regional institutions and actors have contributed to the drifting apart of the Flemish and Francophone civil societies allowing the Flemish- nationalists to transform the nebulous thesis of segmented pluralism (Lorwin, 1971) into the deception of "two democracies", two nations growing apart but held prisoner in an artificial state⁷. Fourth, regional elections have not only contributed to building regional identities, but have also tended to radicalize party positions on the linguistic/community divide as leaders only appeal to voters from their community. The 2007 government formation was again a case in point but, by the 2019 elections nearly half of the Flemish voters opted for the two parties (N-VA and VB) that strive for Flemish independence, and thus the demise of the Belgian political system/state. When anti-Belgium-system parties become relevant in coalition bargaining at the federal level, uncertainty is bound to rise as mainstream parties are unlikely to know their true objectives and strategies. For instance, the N-VA, considered by about all other Flemish parties as "coalitionable"⁸, could in principle profit from at least two diverging strategies: either joining a federal coalition in exchange for major institutional concessions towards more Flemish autonomy, or, sabotaging for months the formation of a coalition without them, thus showing that the Belgian (federal) system is ungovernable, and thus should be abandoned all together.

In addition to increased uncertainty at the federal bargaining table when regional elections have been organized on the same day as the federal elections (1995, 1999 and 2019) and government formation at different levels were interrelated, regional elections also made federal coalition maintenance (and following federal coalition formation) more difficult when the elections were not synchronized: heated campaigns among parties at one level affected the internal cohesion and work of coalition governments at another level, and the formation of coalitions with different partners across levels both accentuated coordination problems between inter-regional and federal decision-making (Deschouwer, 2012), eventually also blurring responsibility

⁷ Most intra-Belgian comparisons actually do not reveal sharp differences in social and political attitudes between Flemish and Walloons (Billiet, Maddens & Frogner, 2006).

⁸ And the latter increasingly considers the Vlaams Belang as a potential government partner: in 2019, the formateur party N-VA invited first the Vlaams Belang for coalition talks that lasted two months in the regional government formation process before turning to the mainstream parties.

given that often all parties were in power at least at one level, a point we come back to later when exploring the consequences of Belgium's complex governance system on public opinion.

In terms of information uncertainty then, even though overall electoral volatility in Belgium was lower in the period than where the old party regime was blown away by newcomers, it has been higher than the West European average (Caramani, 2015; Siaroff, 2019) with peaks in 1981, 1991, 1999, 2003, 2010 (and 2019) followed by elections with greater stability. Also, even if it was not as abrupt as in some other countries, the electoral decline of mainstream parties (Christian-democrats, socialists and liberals) was dramatic, from a combined share of votes of 78% in 1978 to 45% in 2019. This means that especially for those parties, which were still the core actors of all coalition governments in the period, government participation has increasingly become a serious electoral risk, often paid cash in votes at the next elections. As a result, mainstream parties have become ever more cautious when underwriting compromises in the bargaining process.

Finally, in addition to party leaders becoming increasingly socialized and politicized in separate arenas, information certainty increased due to changes of party leaders during periods of government negotiations. Comparative research shows that short experience as a party leader results in lengthier and more failure-ridden bargaining periods (Ecker & Meyer, 2020). For instance, at the time of formation of the De Croo government in 2020, only two of the eight party leaders who signed the coalition agreement had led their party in the 2019 electoral campaign⁹.

3. Formation process and outcomes features

The previous section has shown that Belgium was exceptional in terms of complexity bargaining in the period under study, and that information uncertainty had also been high because of the relevance of the linguistic/community divide and the need to form federal coalitions with parties that compete (mostly) within their own community. A first consequence of the combined effect of those characteristics is its record-long government formation duration: for post-election cabinets in Western Europe 1945-2016, it took on average 104 days, a record held together with the Netherlands. However, the 2019-2020 government formation lasted 493 days, so Belgium would hold the European record of average duration of formation, as the Rutte III cabinet of 2017 took "only" 225 days to form. In any case, the European record of the longest single formation is also Belgian, with the infamous 541 days to form the Di Rupo government (2010-2011).

Simply put, this exceptionally long formation process is due to the large number of failed bargaining attempts. Often a set of parties start bargaining, but after some weeks or months, they realize that no coalition policy compromise is possible. Belgium holds

⁹ The coalition is made of seven parties but Ecolo has two co-presidents.

the West European record in this regard as well, with close to three failed attempts before succeeding in forming a government in the 12 post-electoral formations since 1978. It took for instance no less than eight attempts to arrive at a viable coalition formula and coalition agreement for the Di Rupo coalition (2011-2014), and even 13 attempts for the 2019-2020 formation (Sägesser, 2020).

Belgium is the record holder on those two features reflecting the difficulty of the formation process because the combined effect of the bargaining complexity and information uncertainty factors described earlier largely determine the types of formation outcomes those processes would lead to. One of those outcomes is the size of the cabinet in terms of the number of coalition partners, for which again Belgium scores highest in Western Europe: considering coalition cabinets only, the average number of cabinet parties in Belgium since 1970 sits at 4.54, the highest, with Italy and Finland coming second and third, with respectively, 4.32 and 4.07 cabinet parties.

Another outcome, and additional cause for long formation duration, is the level of care that partners give to the policy agreement that seals their deal. Coalition agreements are the result of negotiations where each partner comes with its own policy demands and are likely to require several sessions to arrive at compromises, especially when a large number of sometimes quite ideologically distant parties are at the bargaining table. In the 1945-1998 period, Belgium had the longest government agreement (Martens VII in 1988 – known as Martens VIII in Belgium’s usual counting – 43,600 words), and also the highest average in Western Europe (14,180 words). Even though the Di Rupo and Michel agreement surpassed that earlier record (53,000 and 57,100 words, respectively), in the following period some countries started drawing even longer agreements, and Belgium had some surprising short ones. Taking this period as a whole, Belgium would now rank third in Western Europe with over 20,000 words for 24,000 words for Germany, the new record holder¹⁰.

4. Government formation, outputs, outcovers and their effectiveness

Coalitions that contain many parties are delicate constructions, that take a long time to form, but can be easily be destroyed. Despite comprehensive agreements, programmatic disputes between parties are usually at the heart of intra-cabinet conflicts during the life of government (Damgaard, 2008). Also, in Belgium the main reason for cabinet termination is conflicts between coalition parties (19 out of 43 governments in the 1946-2019 period). In terms of actual government duration, Siaroff’s (2019) data

¹⁰ The Prodi II agreement in 2006 in Italy and the Bettel II in 2018 in Luxembourg counted more than 80,000 words. Regarding the average size of the coalition agreements, Germany is now the record holder (the latest two Merkel governments had much longer agreements than earlier ones, topping each at more than 60,000 words), followed by Austria (the 2017 Kurtz agreement also had close to 60,000 words).

put Belgium second after Italy (with 13 months and 17 months, respectively), while C4-data rank Finland second and Belgium third.

Long formation durations and short-lived governments do not give much time for the government to prepare, pass and implement effective policies. Dandoy and Terrière, in this book, investigate the growing occurrence and length of caretaker cabinets in Belgium, which are (or at least are expected to be) relatively impotent governments given their restricted decision-making capacity (Ecker & Meyer, 2020). But even for fully empowered and thus viable governments, the need to contain coalition conflicts and the difficulty to change the policy status quo have had consequences for effective decision-making and policy innovation.

The high number of coalition partners has led to the adoption of a wide variety of conflict solving mechanisms, some of which are time consuming (Kerncabinet, confessionals, party summits, cabinet committees and inter-cabinet working groups, etc., see De Winter, Timmermans, & Dumont, 2000; De Winter & Dumont, 2021) and slow down decision-making. Sometimes compromises are only found by paying off the conflicting demands of all coalition parties, by awarding extra expenditures to each party “clientele” (cfr. the mega deals, “pacts” concluded on the denominational, economic, and institutional divide). This method became burdensome for public finances since the economic recession of the late 1970s.

Coalitions counting usually four to six parties tend to write coalition policy agreements in which, for each and every policy issue, a coalition compromise position is formulated that is situated somewhere close to the average positions of coalition parties. In Belgium, this has often resulted in a position that is close to the one of the median position of parties represented in parliament, that of the (Flemish) Christian-democrats (Dumont & De Winter, 1999). An exception was the Verhofstadt I six-party coalition, that adopted a different, generalized exchange (uitruil) strategy, due to the large programmatic heterogeneity of the liberal, socialist and Green party families (Dumont, 2011). The parties followed a logic of “policy territories”, where liberal views were mostly reflected in the tax reform plans, Socialists influenced mostly the social policy areas, and Greens could make their imprint on transportation and energy, and each party family received ministerial remits accordingly. Overall, the much more usual logic was to find a median compromise for an overall centrist coalition, which led to policies that were not only close to the Christian-democrats’ habitual positions, but also to those of the previous governments, thus barely moving from a status quo position. On the one hand, this logic assured policy stability, but on the other hand, it led to policy inertia, and thus suboptimal effectiveness.

In fact, the difficulties of forming and maintaining Belgian coalition governments have affected the effectiveness of their policy outputs and outcomes. A general longitudinal and comprehensive indicator of good governance is a state of healthy public finance, in terms of the size of the national public debt (Tarek & Ahmed, 2017). In 1993, in the run up to the Maastricht Treaty conversion norms, Belgium public debt

reached an unedited Eurozone record of nearly 140 % of GDP, beating even Italy. Its public debt to the 1989-2019 period stands at 110%, behind Italy (113%) and Greece (121%)¹¹. Regarding the size of the shadow economy (undeclared economy in percentage of GDP), Belgium was bypassed in 2000 and 2016 by only three West European countries: Portugal, Italy, and Greece¹². Finally, rankings provided by Transparency International on the perception of (political) corruption show that until 2000, Belgium was perceived to be among the most corrupt country in the EU, and clearly the most corrupt amongst countries that do not belong to the Southern Europe (De Winter, 2002). However, since 2001 the country's position gradually improved. In 2011 and 2019, Belgium was surpassed by not only Portugal, Italy, Spain and Greece but also by Ireland and France.

A contemporary sectorial snapshot indicator of good governance is the success of a country fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. There is some discussion about the validity of the figures published by national governments in terms of cases detected, successfully treated and mortal casualties. One of the most comprehensive measure is the “excess deaths” or “excess mortality rates”¹³, i.e. the number of deaths per 1,000 inhabitants from all causes during a crisis above and beyond what we would have expected to see under “normal” conditions (Checchi & Roberts, 2005). Regarding the peak months (March and April) of the first wave of the pandemic, Belgium had the highest excess rates after Spain and Italy, compared to the 2016-2019 averages¹⁴. Thus, it does not come as a surprise that Belgians were little satisfied (57%) with the measures the government had taken so far (end of April 2020): only Italians, Frenchmen and Spaniards were less satisfied¹⁵.

Regarding citizens classic political support attitudes (van Ham & Thomassen, 2017), however, generally Belgium scores around West- European averages. The nine European Social Surveys (2002-2018) indicate that Belgians have comparatively (EU) a bit more than average trust in politicians and in political parties, but a bit less trust in parliament, the legal system, the police, and the national government. Also, satisfaction with the way democracy works in one's country is below average. Thus, we do not find really “exceptional” averages in the longitudinal comparative perspective. However, this does not exclude extreme low values for some indicators at a particular moment. For instance, in the aftermath of the Dutroux and dioxin

¹¹ See: <https://tradingeconomics.com/portugal/government-debt-to-gdp>.

¹² See: <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WP/Issues/2019/12/13/Explaining-the-Shadow-Economy-in-Europe-Size-Causes-and-Policy-Options-48821>.

¹³ Each demise in pensioners homes (the largest sector of casualties) is usually counted as a COVID-19 victim, which is certainly an overestimation and more inclusive than the way casualties are counted in most other West European countries.

¹⁴ See: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/images/5/5c/Table_1_Excess_mortality_indicator_Jan21_update2.png.

¹⁵ See: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/en/be-heard/eurobarometer/public-opinion-in-the-eu-in-time-of-coronavirus-crisis>.

affairs, satisfaction with democracy had dived under the traditionally pathologically low score of 20% of Italy. But it fully and swiftly recuperated towards a more average position in Western Europe¹⁶.

Finally, support for political actors, institutions, processes, policies, principles, ideas and values, etc., are all components of the overarching but fuzzy concept of “political legitimacy”, the degree of how power is used in ways that citizens consciously accept. There is a general presumption that a legitimacy crisis may trigger the replacement of a dysfunctional regime by an unaccepting society (van Ham & Thomassen, 2017). The concept is, however, hard to measure (Wheatford, 1992). To our knowledge, only Gilley (2006) made an empirical, multidimensional study of state legitimacy in the late 1990s and early 2000s for 72 states. Gilley (2006, p. 501) defines legitimacy as a degree: “a state is more legitimate the more that it is treated by its citizens as rightfully holding and exercising political power”. Amongst West-European democracies, Belgium enjoys the lowest degree of state legitimacy except for Italy and Greece (Gilley, 2006, p. 514).

Thus, overall, we do not find much of a link between the levels of institutional performance and popular political support in Belgium (Magalhães, 2017). Conjecturing that this lack of an expected relationship is part and parcel of Belgian exceptionalism would probably go a bridge too far however.

5. Discussion and conclusion: A truly exceptional and explosive case

Despite truly exceptional and potentially explosive societal characteristics (number of cleavages and the linguistic/community divide in particular) that lead to extremely difficult cabinet formations and maintenance of governing coalitions, the degree of the Belgian “malgoverno” (Heylen & Van Hecke, 2008) as reflected by political instability or policy outputs and outcomes needs to be relativized when compared with other West European countries. Some Belgian political personnel “geni” might be credited for that better-than-expected performance given preexisting conditions. But the state of domestic politics and the economic performance of other European countries obviously also affect the relative ranking of Belgium on corresponding indicators. In addition, Belgium also had some “luck” episodes where policy inertia turned out to be preferable to actual choices due to international economy circumstances (Albalade & Bel, 2020)¹⁷. But those rare episodes could only be seen as positive in retrospect.

Whether because the Belgian “political genie” is also efficient in terms of communication, because of low clarity of responsibility triggered by the lack of transparency

¹⁶ See: <https://www.gesis.org/en/eurobarometer-data-service/search-data-access/eb-trends-trend-files/list-of-trends/democracy-satisf>.

¹⁷ Albalade and Bel (2020) show that the long 2010–2011 formation period led to better GDP per capita growth than what would otherwise have been expected.

of a complex, or out of mass public resignation and apathy, we do not find much of a relationship between the less than optimal governance indicators, trust in institutions, satisfaction with democracy and legitimacy.

Up until now, the blatant legitimacy deficit has not spilled over into citizen behavioral revolt, by a vote empowering anti-establishment parties or mass demonstrations. However, it may just become impossible to form a federal government in the near future. At the time of writing this chapter, most Flemish parties call for further devolution after the 2024 elections, while most francophone parties prefer the status quo. In addition to this institutional agenda already anchored on the 2024 political agenda, formulating a coalition compromise on the unavoidable austerity policies for restoring the economy costs of the anti-Covid emergency measures, may be an unsurmountable hurdle for any coalition formula. In addition, it is not unlikely that at the 2024 federal and regional elections, the separatist's parties (VB, N-VA) win a majority of the seats in the Flemish parliament, forming an independence-seeking Flemish government, while at the same time being able to sabotage the formation of a federal government. A new prolonged formation impasse may show that the centrifugal Belgian federal system does not function anymore as a régime capable of legitimately governing “two separate democracies”, and should be dumped all together.

References

- Albalade, D., & Bel, G. (2020). Do Government Formation Deadlocks Really Damage Economic Growth? Evidence from History's Longest Period of Government Formation Impasse. *Governance*, 33(1), 155-171.
- Bäck, H. & Dumont, P. (2008). Making the First Move. A Two-Stage Analysis of the Role of Formateurs in Parliamentary Government Formation. *Public Choice*, 135(3-4), 353-373.
- Bergman, T., Bäck, H. & Hellström, J. (Eds.). (2021). *Coalition Governance in Western Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bergman, T., Ilonszki, G., & Müller, W. C. (Eds.). (2020). *Coalition Governance in Central Eastern Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Billiet, J., Maddens, B., & Frogner, A. P. (2006). Does Belgium (Still) Exist? Differences in Political Culture Between Flemings and Walloons. *West European Politics*, 29(5), 912-932.
- Caramani, D. (2015). *The Europeanization of Politics. The Formation of a European Electorate and Party System in Historical Perspective*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Castle, S. (2011). Belgians Press Politicians to Form Government (a Lack of One, That Is). *New York Times*, January 31.

- Checchi, F., & Roberts, L. (2005). Interpreting and Using Mortality Data in Humanitarian Emergencies. Humanitarian Practice Network Paper Nr. 52.
- Damgaard, E. (2008). Coalition Termination. In K. Strøm, W. C. Müller, & T. Bergman (Eds.), *Cabinets and Coalition Bargaining: The Democratic Life Cycle in Western Europe* (pp. 301-326). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- De Coorebyter, V. (2008). Clivages et partis en Belgique. *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, 2000(15), 7-95.
- Deschouwer, K. (2012). *The Politics of Belgium*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- De Winter, L. (2002). Political Corruption in Belgium. In M. Bull & J. Newell (Eds.), *Corruption in Contemporary Politics* (pp. 93-105). London: Macmillan.
- De Winter, L., Timmermans, A., & Dumont, P. (2000). Belgium: On Government Agreements, Evangelists, Followers and Heretics. In W. C. Müller & K. Strøm (Eds.), *Coalition Governments in Western Europe* (pp. 300-355). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- De Winter, L., & Dumont, P. (2003). Belgium: Delegation and Accountability under Partitocratic Rule. In K. Strøm, W. C. Müller, & Bergman, T. (Eds.), *Delegation and Accountability in Western Europe* (pp. 253-281). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- De Winter, L., & Dumont, P. (2008). Uncertainty and Complexity in Cabinet Formation. In K. Strøm, W.C. Müller, & T. Bergman (Eds.), *Cabinets and Coalition Bargaining: The Democratic Life Cycle in Western Europe* (pp. 123-158). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- De Winter, L., & Dumont, P. (1999). Belgium: party system(s) on the eve of disintegration? In D. Broughton & M. Donovan (Eds.), *Changing Party Systems in Western Europe* (pp. 183-206). London & New York: Pinter.
- De Winter, L., & Dumont, P. (2021). Belgium: From Highly Constrained and Complex Bargaining Settings to Paralysis? In T. Bergman, H. Back, & J. Hellström (Eds.), *Coalition Governance in Western Europe* (pp. 81-123). Oxford University Press.
- De Winter, L., Timmermans, A., & Dumont, P. (2000). Belgium: On Government Agreements, Evangelists, Followers and Heretics. In W. C. Müller & K. Strøm (Eds.), *Coalition Governments in Western Europe* (pp. 300-355). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Diermeier, D., & van Roozendaal, P. (1998). The Duration of Cabinet Formation Processes in Western Multi-Party Democracies. *British Journal of Political Science*, 28(4), 609-626.
- Dumont, P. (2011). The Belgian Rainbow Coalition: Optical Illusion or Mechanical Phenomenon? In R. B. Andreweg, L. De Winter, & P. Dumont (Eds.), *Puzzles of Coalition Formation. Coalition Theory and Deviant Cases* (pp. 165-189). London: Routledge.

- Dumont, P., Timmermans, A., & Moury, C. (2015). Coping with Domestic and European Complexity: How Consensus Politics is Maintained in the Low Countries' Governments. In H. Vollaard, J. Beyers, & P. Dumont (Eds.), *European Integration and Consensus Politics in the Low Countries* (pp. 24-47). London: Routledge.
- Duverger, M. (1950). *L'influence des systèmes électoraux sur la vie politique*. Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques.
- Ecker, A., & Meyer, T. M. (2020). Coalition Bargaining Duration in Multiparty Democracies. *British Journal of Political Science*, 50(1), 1-20.
- Gilley, B. (2006). The Meaning and Measure of State Legitimacy: Results for 72 Countries. *European Journal of Political Research*, 45(3), 499-525.
- Heylen, W., & Van Hecke, S. (2008). *Regeringen die niet regeren. Het malgoverno van de Belgische politiek*. Leuven: Lannoo Campus.
- Hooghe, L., Marks, G., & Wilson, C. J. (2002). Does Left/Right Structure Party Positions on European Integration? *Comparative Political Studies*, 35(8), 965-989.
- Laakso, M., & Taagepera, R. (1979). "Effective" number of parties: a measure with application to West Europe. *Comparative political studies*, 12(1), 3-27.
- Lijphart, A. (1999). *Patterns of Democracy*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Lorwin, V. R. (1971). Segmented Pluralism: Ideological Cleavages and Political Cohesion in the Smaller European Democracies. *Comparative Politics*, 3(2), 141-175.
- Lipset, S. M., & Rokkan, S. (Eds.). (1967). *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Magalhães, P. (2017). Economic Outcomes, Quality of Governance, and Satisfaction with Democracy. In C. van Ham, J. J. Thomassen, K. Aarts, & R. B. Andeweg (Eds.), *Myth and Reality of the Legitimacy Crisis: Explaining Trends and Cross-National Differences in Established Democracies* (pp. 156-171). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Müller W. C., & K. Strøm (Eds.). (2000). *Coalition Governments in Western Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Müller, W. C., & Strøm, K. (2008). Coalition Agreements and Cabinet Governance. In K. Strøm, W. C. Müller, & T. Bergman (Eds.), *Cabinets and Coalition Bargaining: The Democratic Life Cycle in Western Europe* (pp. 159-199). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Narud, H.-M., & Valen, H. (2008). Membership and Electoral Performance. In K. Strøm, W. C. Müller & T. Bergman (Eds.), *Cabinets and Coalition Bargaining: The Democratic Life Cycle in Western Europe* (pp. 369-402). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Reuchamps, M., Sinardet, D., Dodeigne, J., & Caluwaerts, D. (2017). Reforming Belgium's Federalism: Comparing the Views of MPs and Voters. *Government and Opposition*, 52(3), 460-482.
- Sägesser, C. (2020). La formation du gouvernement De Croo (mai 2019-octobre 2020). *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, 2471-2472(26-27), 5-86.
- Siaroff, A. (2019). *Comparative European Party Systems: An Analysis of Parliamentary Elections Since 1945*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Strøm, K. (1990). *Minority Government and Majority Rule*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Strøm, K. (1994). The Presthus debacle: Intraparty politics and bargaining failure in Norway. *The American Political Science Review*, 88(1), 112-127.
- Strøm, K., & Müller, W. C. (1999). The Keys to Togetherness: Coalition Agreements in Parliamentary Democracies. *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 5(3-4), 255-282.
- Strøm, K., Müller, W. C., & Bergman, T. (Eds.). (2008). *Cabinets and Coalition Bargaining: The Democratic Life Cycle in Western Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Taagepera, R., & Grofman, B. (1985). Rethinking Duverger's Law: Predicting the Effective Number of Parties in Plurality and PR Systems – Parties Minus Issues Equals One European. *Journal of Political Research*, 13(4), 341-352.
- Tarek, B. A., & Ahmed, Z. (2017). Institutional Quality and Public Debt Accumulation: An Empirical Analysis. *International Economic Journal*, 31(3), 415-435.
- van Ham, C., & Thomassen, J. J. (2017). The Myth of Legitimacy Decline: An Empirical Evaluation of Trends in Political Support in Established Democracies. In C. van Ham, J. J. Thomassen, J. J., K. Aarts, & R. B. Andeweg (Eds.), *Myth and Reality of the Legitimacy Crisis: Explaining Trends and Cross-National Differences in Established Democracies* (pp. 3-16). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Weatherford, M. S. (1992). Measuring Political Legitimacy. *The American Political Science Review*, 86(1), 149-166.

Chapter 5. The end of the party politicisation of public administration

A fata morgana?

Marleen Brans
David Aubin
Christian de Visscher
Ellen Fobé
Arthur Meert
Pierre Squevin

Introduction

The party politicization of the executive branch is certainly no new phenomenon, nor is it a neglected subject in the study of public services. Yet, it is reported to have become more pervasive across time and space, as the demands and strains on executive politicians have grown. At the same time, the politicization of public services has attracted more refined taxonomies of different mechanisms of politicization (Peters & Pierre, 2004; Peters, 2013; Hustedt & Salomonsen, 2014; Halligan, 2021). As a scholar of Belgian partitocracy, Lieven De Winter was quick to document the main mechanisms of appointment-based politicization of public services. Fourty years after his seminal contribution in *Res Publica* (1981), it is time to take stock of the “breadth and depth” (Halligan, 2021) of the phenomenon. In this contribution to the celebratory book on the occasion of Lieven De Winter’s career celebration, we focus on two types of mechanisms that typically concur in the Belgian executive branch, and that have been subjects of normative concerns and reform proposals. The first one is direct politicization, or appointments- based politicization. The second one is structural politicization: the strongly institutionalised practice of surrounding ministers with trusted advisers in ministerial offices, in the Napoleonic administrative tradition known as ministerial cabinets. While there are positive sides to politicization in terms of representative bureaucracy and democratic control, the international literature much articulates the negative ones, in terms of administrative politicization: procedurally, civil servants would be prevented from providing frank and free advice; substantively, policy advice by the bureaucratic experts would be politically coloured (Shaw & Eichbaum, 2018), at the expense of its expert content. In Belgium, these concerns are mirrored in the for long accepted view that ministerial cabinets colonize the policy process, thus ostracizing professional civil servants’ input in policy-making. In

the last section of this contribution we draw on recent empirical material on policy work of civil servants to show that such sweeping claims need qualification. While the politicization of Belgian public administration persists, despite reform attempts and recurrent criticisms, its penetration into one of the classic functions of civil servants – the provision of policy advice – is not as dramatic as earlier accounts would have it.

1. Appointments based politicization

Direct politicization of the public service occurs through political executives' discretion in appointing and promoting civil servants on partisan grounds. While in principle, Belgian civil servants are appointed based on merit and expected to be neutral to whatever executive they serve, there is a long tradition of using various mechanisms of appointments based politicization. These have persisted and been re-invented over time. It does appear, however, that merit-based selection and assessment procedures have gained importance, while some historically prevalent routes to appointing partisans are now closed. The following two sections discuss historical and revised practices.

1.1. Instruments and practices of appointments based politicization

The Belgian model of public administration was in its origins significantly influenced by both the Weberian bureaucratic system and the French Napoleonic tradition. Political power is concentrated at the top and all the structures of the State administration have to report to the minister and his/her personal advisers (Dierickx, 2003; Stenmans, 1999). Civil servants are appointed based on merit and are expected to be loyal to the government of the day. At the same time, however, the Belgian administrative system is a typical example of a consociational bargain (Hood & Lodge, 2006) where the principle of representativeness serves as a means to overcome divisions in Belgian society (language, religion, ideology) and to obtain stability (Hondeghem et al., 2015). For example, since the adoption of the law on the use of language in the administration (1966), posts within the federal administration are assigned according to linguistic quotas. Language parity for top jobs can be seen as an instrument for ensuring a balance of power and thus for preserving the Belgian State.

Until the “Camu” reform of 1937, there was no uniform statute covering all state employees. Quite a variety of regulations and situations existed between ministries. Neither was there much protection against the arbitrary intervention of political power in recruiting and promoting civil servants (Molitor, 1982).

Louis Camu was appointed Royal Commissioner for Administrative Reform in 1936. The turbulent times between the two wars were characterized by the rise of Nazism, the consequences of the economic crisis of 1929 and the sudden appearance

of a populist party called “Rex”. The new Royal Commissioner was expected to restore the authority of the State by increasing the quality of service to the public and by putting an end to the direct politicisation of civil service appointments.

Camu succeeded in installing a uniform statute for the agents of all the ministerial departments. The ‘Camu Statute’ of 1937 became the reference for the entire public sector, including government corporations and local public services. It brought about a degree of equity and stability for civil servants who now saw their career guaranteed by the State under the rule of law. Recruitment and promotions of agents were formally governed by the merit principle. Competitive recruitment examinations were organised under the authority of the central recruitment agency. Promotions were to be dependent on seniority and merit, both evaluated by the administration itself. The democratic character of the career was safeguarded by equal access of all Belgians to jobs in government (de Visscher et al., 2011).

However, according to Molitor (1974; 1982), Camu probably overestimated the strength of the statute in the face of enduring political and administrative practices. Although it attempted to “professionalize” the management of the Belgian civil service, political appointments and promotions persisted as a widespread phenomenon.

In what ways did practices of direct politicization perpetuate in the post-war political regime of Belgium? As part of a contribution to a colloquium organized by the *Politologisch Instituut* on 17 October 1980, Lieven De Winter (1981) described how direct politicization as an instrument of partitocracy was maintained and even strengthened. He identified the following procedural routes to political appointments (see also Molitor, 1974; Stenmans, 1999; Thijs, 2005):

1. Article 18 of the Statute allowed for the recruitment of persons of high value in exceptional circumstances. It enabled the executive to integrate such individuals into the administrative career by exempting them from all or part of the normal selection procedures. Since Article 18 assigned quite generous discretionary power to the Council of Ministers, abuses came as no surprise. A statutory facade was (ab)used for making political appointments
2. The extension of the State’s tasks in the post-war period led to the creation of multiple public interest bodies (e.g. social security agencies). When installing these new public institutions ministers were allowed to make all the appointments because applying the default rules would be taking too much time. The ruling parties indulged in what were called “primo-nominations” and shared the top civil service positions between them.
3. Another route to politicization was the recruitment of temporary staff to meet ‘exceptional needs’. Temporary agents joined administrations without passing through competitive recruitment examinations for admission and often thanks to the intervention of ministers and/or political parties. While in principle temporary agents were excluded from the permanent civil service, a few years into their careers a great number of them claimed and effectively obtained tenure.

This practice led to genuine parallel recruitment channels, much more open to politicization, even patronage.

4. Regarding career advancement of civil servants, evaluation processes did not deliver value on selecting the best candidates for promotions. Evaluators shirked extreme ratings to maintain a healthy atmosphere within the service and to avoid reputation damage. This half-hearted career evaluation culture broadened the room of manoeuvre for ministers to pick the “right” candidate for promotion.

Has the situation evolved since then? As De Winter (1981) stated, the degree of politicization and its development are notoriously difficult to measure, not so much because of methodological pitfalls, but because of the reluctance of officials and politicians to co-operate in such research. Mere document analysis cannot reveal actual practices of politicizing appointments since these decisions and agreements between ministers or between parties are rarely laid down in official documents. And even when such documents exist, they usually remain confidential (Molitor, 1974).

By the turn of the century, before the outbreak of the “dioxine crisis” that triggered a far-reaching reform of the federal administration, politicization in the recruitment and advancement of agents remained important but in more limited proportions than in the post-war years:

1. The use of article 18 of the Statute had by then received such bad press that governments first decided to use it only for appointing the very top (rank 17) and in genuinely exceptional circumstances, to next repeal altogether the article in the year 2000 (Stenmans, 2001).
2. The law of 22 July 1993 laid down strict rules on “primo-nominations”. In case of newly created public services, this law gives absolute priority to appointing civil servants on mobility schemes and to appointment through promotion to all agents who meet the conditions of the vacant degrees. Any remaining positions are subjected to the rules of the staff regulations of the new service (Stenmans, 2001).
3. The aforementioned law of 1993 also defined the conditions under which temporary agents might be recruited: exceptional and temporary needs, replacement of staff on leave, and implementation of ancillary or specific tasks.
4. Regarding advancement in the career, until the Copernicus Reform, public servants entered at the bottom of the hierarchy, and after a long career, they reached top positions in the administration. Promotions at the top level depended formally on three criteria: a minimum of seniority in the lower grades, a good evaluation, and a positive advice of the Board of Directors, consisting of the top civil servants in a department. In practice, political support came on top of these formal criteria, as jobs were divided among the political parties belonging to the ruling coalition (de Visscher et al., 2011). While political discretion

in promotions thus continued, and suggested far-reaching politicization of the civil service, some qualification is in order. Even if every top civil servant has a political tag this does not mean that he or she is functionally politicized (Eichbaum & Shaw, 2010). Research in the nineties indeed showed that top civil servants, once in office, displayed a high degree of political decision-making distrust known as “political alienation” (Dierickx & Majersdorf, 1993). They demonstrated a technocratic attitude and identified themselves first and foremost as ‘servants of the State’ or as ‘experts’, and only in the last place as ‘servants of a political program’.

1.2. Redefining relations between ministers and their civil servants

Since the so-called Copernicus Reform (Hondeghem & Depré, 2005; de Visscher et al., 2012) the relationship between the minister and top civil servants has been redefined at the federal level as follows:

1. While in the past, top positions were not open to outsiders, nowadays, the positions of chair (rank N) and director-general (rank N-1) in the federal public administrations are open to candidates coming either from the public or from the private sector.
2. Candidates for top civil service positions from rank N to N-2 have to pass an objective selection procedure headed by Selor (Recruitment Agency for the Federal Administration). The recruitment process for each open position happens as follows: first, a screening is carried out by a selection board established at the initiative of SELOR; then the Minister may select his or her candidate but only among those considered as “highly qualified” by the selection board.
3. In addition, top civil servants are no longer appointed for life, but for a fixed period of six years (see Table 5.1 for numbers of mandates). During and after this period, the top civil servant is evaluated. Only when the evaluation is positive can the mandate be extended. The working relations between the minister and his/her top civil servants holding a management function is organized on the basis of “management plans”. These plans are used as reference documents in the evaluation of top civil servants and in the possible renewal of their mandate.
4. Finally, in return for greater accountability of top management, the reform was to change the rules on administrative and budgetary control. The intention of the authors of the reform was to move towards an ex-post focus on outcomes and risks, based on methods of internal control and audit, and in return reduce the ex-ante controls too focused on inputs.

Table 5.1: Number of mandate holders at the federal level

	Total positions	Total positions held	Difference	M	F
Federal Public Services	167	110	65,9	86	24
Public interest bodies	90	59	65,5	42	17
TOTAL	257	169	65,8	128	41

Source: *Federal Public Service BOSA – 30 June 2016.*

It is far from clear how this reform has affected the politicization of appointments inside the higher civil service. Even though ministers now have less room for political manoeuvre, party-political criteria still carry weight when it comes to picking candidates in the final stage of the recruitment process. The first wave of appointments after the adoption of the Copernicus Reform (2001-2004) revealed that of the fourteen positions of new chairs of the federal public services, only one went to a candidate from the private sector and two to candidates closely affiliated to opposition parties. The remaining positions were assigned to ex-members of ministerial offices or former secretaries-general who were politically close to one of the parties of the ruling coalition (Molitor & de Visscher, 2010). In 2019, only two of the eleven chairs of the federal public services were politically colourless¹.

Hondeghem et al. (2004) observed that people with several years of service in a ministerial office indeed perform better both in the assessment and in the confrontation with the selection committee. Most probably, the accumulation of advanced management skills and technical expertise has prepared such candidates very well for the selection tests. And when they perform well at the preselection stage, it is not surprising that, at the final stage of the procedure, ministers opt for candidates who have both a long experience of management in a politicized environment and an affiliation with their political ideology. However, despite the interest of the ministerial advisers for top civil service jobs, the tests by SELOR proved to be more solid as a stumbling block than before. Several senior civil servants have started pointing at an emerging trend of depoliticization at the federal level thanks to the introduction of professional assessments that exclude candidates who are not competent for the job (De Standaard, 23/03/2019).

The mandate system has been replicated by the governments of the regions and of the communities, with some differences though. In the federal and Flemish administrations top civil servants are appointed for a period of 6 years. In the Walloon Region and the French Community, in turn, the term of office aligns with that of

¹ 2 CD&V, 2 MR, 2 SPA, 1 Open VLD, 1 CDH, 1 PS, 2 non-party. Of the eleven posts, five were occupied by an acting president pending the appointment of a new chair. Source: <https://www.standaard.be> (23/03/2019).

the Parliament's term (5 years). There, new cabinets have the opportunity to renew top jobs after taking office. Any candidate for a mandate must belong to a pool. This also differs from the conditions in the federal and Flemish administrations. One way to become part of this pool is to hold a certificate of public management issued by the Regional School of Public Administration after the successful completion of an interuniversity executive master programme in public management organised by the universities of the French Community (Petit Jean, 2013).

At the federated level, experience in a ministerial office seems to be even more important than at the federal level: for the Walloon Region, out of seven director generals, five had ministerial adviser experience (two as chief of staff, three as advisers); for the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles, out of six administrators-general, three had ministerial experience (one as chief of staff, one as deputy chief of staff, one as adviser); for Flanders, out of eleven secretary generals, six had ministerial adviser experience (five as chief of staff, one as deputy chief of staff)².

In Belgium, the political affiliations of senior officials are public secrets. Gerfa³, a French-speaking independent study group on public administration, regularly quantifies the phenomenon by mapping the distribution of posts in the public services of the Walloon Region and of the French Community. This political label is often relatively easy to detect: most of these senior officials have transited through ministerial offices or are engaged in local politics. In case of doubt, people are qualified as unlabelled. For example, in 2018, 47.05% of the sixty-eight top positions at the SPW (Service public de Wallonie) were held by agents labelled as socialists. CDH (christian-democrats) occupied an enviable position of 29,41%, especially when considering that party's performance at the ballot box. MR (liberals) and Ecolo followed respectively with 11,76% and 2,94%. Non-partisan officials amounted to 8,82% (La Libre, 23/04/2018).

Overall, political appointments still exist but less extensively than before. As Van Dooren (2018) summarized it: "For most entry-level appointments, no political support or intervention is required. Also, middle management positions are increasingly freed from political interventions. For promotion to the senior management, a political decision is still made by the government, but only after a professional assessment of the candidates. Candidates that are not capable should be excluded at this step" (p. 54).

The mandate system, implemented at all levels of government, has impacted politico-administrative relations. Mobility at the top of the administration has been enhanced, including the possibility to dismiss a mandate holder in case of disagreement with their political masters. It is unclear whether the system has changed power relations. On the one hand, top civil servants have gained autonomy (even if

² Figures for 2020. Sources used: LinkedIn, Cumuleo, and own dataset.

³ See www.gerfa.be.

constrained by the budgetary crisis). On the other hand, they have lost some independence because they are no longer appointed for life.

2. Structural politicization in the executive triangle:

Ministerial cabinets

Next to appointing partisans in the civil service, Belgian politicization has proceeded by a strong structural embedding of ministerial cabinets, making the relations between the civil service and ministers a ‘ménage à trois’ (de Visscher & Salomonsen, 2013). Peters (2013) calls this type of politicization ‘redundant’. A kind of rather resilient redundancy, it seems, in Belgium. Abolishing ministerial cabinets simply led to re-inventing them. The following subsections first describe what these ministerial cabinets are, and how they have survived attempts to do away with them. They next explain what ‘currency’ these ministerial offices have, and the mix they present between partisan agents and policy professionals, making them an irresistible partner to executive ministers.

2.1. A particular type of executive support and advisory office

In comparative terms, a ministerial cabinet (MC for short) is a highly institutionalized type of executive support and advisory office (EASO) (Meert et al., 2022a), populated by a mix of temporary administrative and advisory staffers appointed on partisan grounds. They are defined by their organizational, functional, and individual level features.

Organizationally, MCs are sizeable structural interfaces between the minister and the career civil service. In the study of politicization of public services, this is called redundant politicization (Halligan, 2021; Peters, 2013). Functionally, there is a distinction between individual administrative and logistical support to the minister and advisory support to the formulation, management, co-ordination, and negotiation of the minister’s policy. The first set of roles raise the comfort of the ministers in terms of agenda-keeping, secretarial office work, chauffeuring and catering. The second set contributes to minister’s control of the formulation, decision-making and implementation of policies. These roles are performed across the internal vertical and horizontal arenas of the executive on the one hand, and external political and societal arenas on the other. In the vertical and horizontal executive arena, MCs control and steer the administration, as well as co-ordinate and negotiate government policy across ministries, and in Belgium across levels of governance. External to the executive, they maintain relations with the parliamentary party and central party of their minister, consult external societal actors and are pivotal in media communication. Individually, MCs are composed of administrative and advisory staff, presenting a mix of seconded civil servants appointed as temporary partisans, and agents externally recruited from other sectors of employment. After their secondment to MCs, civil servants are not

hindered to return to the administration, this signifying the cultural acceptance of the MCs in the executive triangle (Meert et al., 2022a).

In a partitocracy, redundant politicization is accompanied by other types of politicizing public services: policy politicization, administrative politicization, and direct politicization. To the extent MCs' policy roles combine balancing political control with expert advice, they are a good rather than an evil for democratic politics, since they provide overall policy capacity with political acumen, direction and co-ordination. This policy politicization helps keeping policy in line with the democratic chain of delegation, aligning ministerial policies with the preferences of parties and voters. MCs are well placed to marry different sources of evidence (scientific/technical/value-interest), thus combining considerations of scientific evidence, feasibility and political support. Less laudable is when MCs directly interfere in administrative processes, even in the nuts and bolts of policy implementation – the traditional fief of neutral civil servants – and engender a process through which professional judgement is bypassed on partisan grounds (Halligan, 2021). To the extent that this administrative politicization (Eichbaum & Shaw, 2018) sidelines professional civil service judgement, objective evaluations, and due implementation process, it may lead to incompetency, unequal treatment, even policy failure. MCs also fuel direct politicization, that is the appointment and promotion of partisans in civil service positions and in the wider public sector as a whole (Walgrave et al., 2004, p. 8; Göransson & Eraly, 2015). Direct political intervention in the selection and promotion of civil servants, and with it rewarding MC members with top civil service positions, was facilitated by MCs negotiating the allocation of personnel, and taking human resource management and organizational design out of the hands of the civil service. At any rate, whatever the extent of this politicization through HR and organizational design, a series of studies since the 1970s revealed that the passage of civil servants through MCs positively affected their future careers (Depré, 1973; Hondégheem, 1990; Walgrave et al., 2004). Comparing a ministerial advisers' database with the top federal civil servants in 2020 confirms what we and other colleagues found earlier. The extent to which MCs still negotiate political appointments further down the hierarchy, as described by De Winter in 1981 is an open question, however, requiring further research. And so is the under-researched allegation that ruling parties have used public sector reform such as agentification to create more positions with which to both reward partisans for loyal service as well as to increase parties' control over different sections of the public sector that find themselves at arms-length of classic government departments.

With redundant and other types of politicization fueled by MCs, parties certainly have the power to permit ministerial departments and other public sector agencies to maintain control over the policy cycle. But control over recruitment and employment opportunities also provide direct retainers to the central political parties' classic role in selecting political personnel. Walgrave included these party retainers under partitocratic functions of MCs (called latent functions in Van Hassel's (1974) and De

Winter's (1981) works). With their access to HR resources, MCs are key in selecting and grooming candidates for future political office, in cushioning defeated candidates in wait for a try at the next elections, or in simply employing ghosts who are formally staffers on the payroll of MCs of the party in office, but who actually work for the central party office.

Of these 'partitocratic functions', the maintenance of partisan personnel has received most attention in the academic and public debate. Having gotten less attention, but equally important is the access to information and policy advice. MCs and the networks of partisan loyalists throughout the public sector provide party organisations with privileged access to policy relevant information and secrets of the bureaucracy. The broader their network, and the vaster their access to information, the more parties arrive with currency at the negotiation tables of government formations. The ensuing information asymmetries experienced by newcomer parties can be speculated to have them invest in similar politicization strategies as deployed by their more experienced mainstream counterparties, thus perpetuating direct politicization despite proclaimed intentions of good governance.

2.2. Cabinetisation, decabinetisation and re-cabinetisation

To be sure, MCs in Belgium long preceded the advent of the Belgian party system, and of partitocracy for that matter (Molitor, 1973; De Winter, 1981; Van Hassel, 1988). Incepted in the 1840s, they were initially conceived as institutions to counterbalance monarchical influence, particularly in the areas of policy and personnel allocation. Since then, they progressively evolved as the central locus of politics and policy in the Belgian national and later federal policy advisory systems. Before the Great War, MCs were typically composed of about four advisers, of which 90 % would be civil servants. After the Great War, their size increased for accommodating the reconstruction needs of the country, but also correlated with the growth of political party organizations. The politicization of the administration was a hot issue in the 1930s, with the Camu reform formally reaffirming the principle of a neutral public service, but incapable of curbing direct politicization. The impact of party politics on the administration backfired into an expansion of ministerial cabinets. The politicisation of appointments and promotions had a negative effect on the relationship of trust between executive politicians and civil servants. The perception by politicians that civil servants who were previously promoted by political competitors lacked loyalty as a result, led to ever rising numbers of ministerial advisers (Brans, Pelgrims, & Hoet, 2005). Curtailing MCs became a recurrent theme in the public debate. Particularly during the so-called heyday of Belgian partitocracy (1970-1999), both the size of MCs and their dysfunctions featured prominently in media and in research. As evidenced by De Winter (1981), in 1960 the number of MC members was estimated at about 800 of which about one fifth (175) were advisers. In 1973, these figures would have risen to over 1800 with slightly less than one fifth of advisers (330). According to Walgrave et al. (2004, p. 10-11), the numbers of advisers in MCs

increased significantly in the 1980s showing an increase to 900. This surge would have been explained by the process of federalization and the ensuing government overload. So, by the year 2000, the size of MCs had continuously expanded. Most strikingly their very number had as well. By 2000, the number of MCs in the federal government even superseded the number of ministers, as there were 25 MCs for 17 ministers. But the number of portfolios is not the only explication. Multiple cabinets also represented the institutionalization of shadowing practices, with MCs functioning to keep other cabinets and their ministers in check.

It was not until the late 1990s, that the abolition of MCs found a firm place on the agenda of the Verhofstadt government, and it did so in a classic Kingdonian fashion (Kingdon, 1994). In late 1990s, a series of political scandals and cases of maladministration (Brans & Steen, 2007, p. 68) in the problem stream, a vibrant discourse on ‘New Political Culture’ together with an internationally disseminated public management reform agenda in the policy stream, and a major change of coalition in the political stream combined to push open a window for what came to be known as the Copernicus public sector reform. Surfing on the rhetorical strength of New Public Management, the federal government launched a comprehensive reform programme, of which the dismantling of MCs was one of the key targets. At least, that is what it appeared to be.

Belgium was not unique in its effort of ‘decabinetisation’. In a systematic literature review, Meert and colleagues (2022b) found 22 cases of decabinetisation efforts: six in Belgium, two in the European Commission, one in Italy, and thirteen in France. Most decabinetisation measures were little ambitious and were implemented with varying success. In some cases, measures sought to reduce numbers or were meant to curb the cabinets’ control of the policy process or their meddling with the administration. In others, the recruitment of advisers was subjected to restrictive conditions. Most measures were not or only halfheartedly implemented. Only the Kinnock and Barroso reform of the cabinets or European Commissioners are an exception to the rule. In Belgium, ministerial cabinets were abolished for re-inventing them.

The Copernicus reform would replace MCs by strategic and policy cells whilst at the same time improving the policy capacity of the administration. The Prime Minister, as well as Vice-Prime Ministers each also have a general policy cell to shadow general government policy and ministers’ devotion to the coalition agreement. The role of the administration was to be strengthened by the installment of direction committees and strategy boards. By the mid 2000s, however, the strategy boards were abolished and the MCs firmly re-instated, albeit not in name. In this sense, the Belgian federal decabinetisation attempt is similar to the Italian one (Di Mascio & Natalini, 2013, 2016). Despite its ambition, the reform failed and the old MC system returned under a different guise. This is shown by data covering 20 years after the launch of the Copernicus reform.

Revisiting the definitional features of MCs presented earlier in this chapter, budgetary data (Figure 5.1) and numbers (Figure 5.2) confirm the persistence and stability of MCs as sizable institutions in the executive triangle.

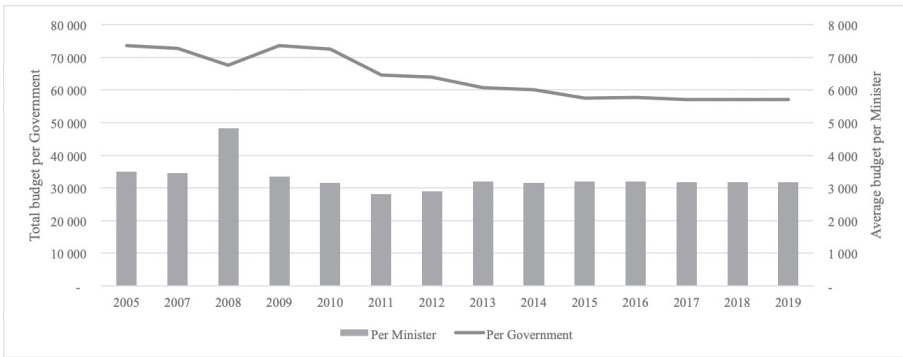


Figure 5.1: Federal ministerial cabinet budget 2005-2019

Source: Based on yearly “Projet de budget general des dépenses”.
 Real values based on Index of November 2018 (1,7069).

As Figure 5.1 illustrates, the overall budget devoted to MCs slightly decreased in the last 20 years. The annual budget decreased from approximately 70 million € (from 2005 to 2010) to +/- 60 million € since 2015. Such budget reduction might have been part of an overall government spending reduction. Yet, in relative terms, cross checking the share of MC spending with the overall government budget the MC budget clearly decreased. While it accounted for 0,00068% to 0,00084% between 2005 and 2010, its share dropped to 0,00050 and 0,00057% between 2012 and 2019. This reduction is in fact explained by a size reduction of government. Indeed, between 2005 and 2012, all governments (but one) had a minimum of 21 members. Between 2013 and 2019, all governments included 18 or 19 members. Consequently, as the orange columns show, per Minister, the average budget remained rather stable between 2005 and 2019. The increased average of 2008 (a bit less than 5 million €/ minister) is explained by the sheer size of the Verhofstadt III government (14 government members).

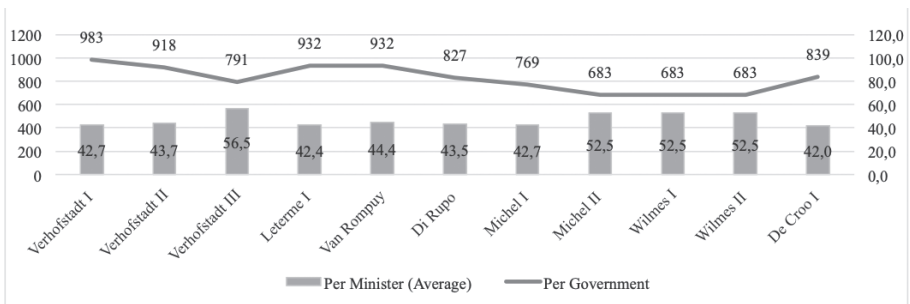


Figure 5.2: Federal ministerial cabinet size between 1999 and 2021

Source: Authors' calculation based on Vademecum provided by the SPF Chancellery of the Prime Minister.

Figure 5.2 (MC members per government) displays MC size of the whole government (blue line) and per Minister (orange column). Those size quotas are agreed on at the beginning of each government in the Council of Ministers and published in a Vademecum.

MC size per government has varied between 983 and 683. The lowest values are found for the Michel II, Wilmes I and Wilmes II government which were also the smallest (13 ministers). We also find that the average size of a MC is inversely correlated with government size. The Verhofstadt III government (14 ministers), as well Michel II, Wilmes I and Wilmes II government (13 ministers) have had, on average, the biggest MC size (above 50 MC members per minister).

Also, in other levels of government MCs persist as sizeable organisations. This is the case for all regional and community governments, as Figure 5.3 portrays.

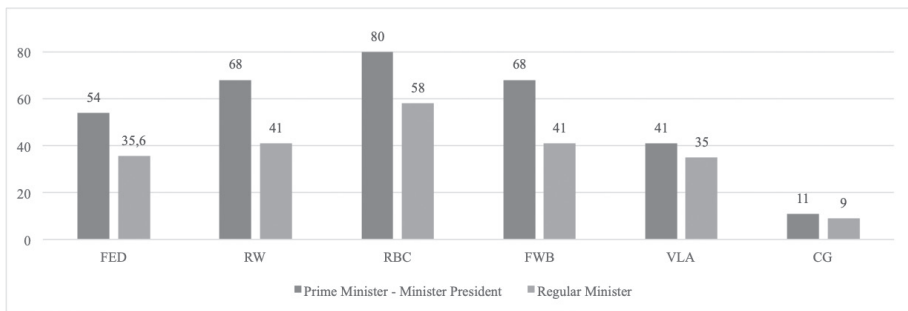


Figure 5.3: Average ministerial cabinet size in 2020

Sources:

(FED) Federal Government: « Directives pour les secrétariats, la Cellule de coordination générale de la politique, les cellules de politique générale et les cellules stratégiques », Vademecum, 23 octobre 2020;

(WAL) Walloon Region: Arrêté du Gouvernement wallon du 14 septembre 2019 relatif aux cabinets des ministres du Gouvernement Wallon, au secrétariat du Gouvernement Wallon et au SEPAC;

(RBC) Brussels-Capital Region: Arrêté du Gouvernement de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale déterminant la composition et le fonctionnement des cabinets des membres du Gouvernement de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale et des Secrétaires d'Etat régionaux, 20 juillet 2014;

(FWB) Wallonia-Brussels Federation: Arrêté du Gouvernement de la Communauté française relatif aux cabinets des Ministres du Gouvernement de la Communauté française, au Secrétariat du Gouvernement de la Communauté française et au SePAC, 20 septembre 2019;

(VLA) Flanders: Arrêté du Gouvernement flamand portant organisation des cabinets des membres du Gouvernement flamand, 24 juillet 2009;

(CG) German-speaking Community: Arrêté du Gouvernement modifiant l'arrêté du Gouvernement du 20 juin 2019 portant sur la composition et le fonctionnement des cabinets des membres du Gouvernement ainsi que sur les membres du personnel des services du Gouvernement appelés à collaborer dans le cabinet d'un membre du Gouvernement fédéral et abrogeant l'arrêté du Gouvernement du 20 juin 2019 relatif à la chancellerie du Gouvernement auprès du Ministre-Président, 17 septembre 2020.

Figure 5.3 presents the average MC size of a regular Minister, and the one of the Prime Minister (or Minister-President) based on the regulation in application in 2020. If we consider average values across the offices, the French-speaking Community has the biggest MCs with an average of more than 50 members per cabinet while Flanders and the German-speaking Community have the smallest MCs. Yet in absolute numbers, the federal government has the most advisers: more than twenty per minister. At the regional or community level, governments are much smaller (between four and nine government members), making the overall number of advisers much smaller.

To explain these variations, more in-depth research is needed on the impact of portfolio features and of other policy specific or administrative culture variables. Our most important take-home message here is that as a Belgian unitary invention, MCs have not only survived attempts to do away with them, they have also embedded themselves in the Belgian sub-national governments. Even at the local level, in medium sized and big cities, cabinets are on the rise, as mayors and aldermen increasingly surround themselves with advisers, this being revealed by the investigative journalism of Apache and Le Vif/L'express in 2018.

2.3. The policy and political currency of ministerial cabinets

The accumulation of research from 1970 to 2000 culminated in the specification of partitocratic/political and policy functions. The comparative wave of ministerial advisers' research in the anglo-Westminster world combined with a policy turn in the study of advisory work led to a greater sophistication of advisers' roles on the one hand and of their interactions with different arenas on the other.

Table 5.2: Types of ministerial advisers (Connaughton 2010a, 2010b, 2015)

Types	
The expert	'A highly qualified political outsider', working as a specialist on a specific departmental portfolio. The expert's currency is knowledge
The partisan	Predominantly appointed on grounds of partisan affiliation, a highly political agent, attentive to the minister's mission, aiming to achieve electoral gains and political dominance, a party apparatchik
The co-ordinator	A generalist, understanding and responding to strategic and political context, primarily providing oversight of the government programme, engaged in political and policy steering and management.
The minder	The minister's body guard, looking out for him/her and keeping him/her out of harm's way, their relationship being based on trust, affinity and mutuality, a personal loyalist

Source: Connaughton 2010a, 2010b.

Past research portrayed ministerial advisers mostly as partisan, as party soldiers or loyal executors of the minister's partisan will (Walgrave et al., 2004, pp. 20-1). More recent work, classifying Belgian advisors along Connaughton's types (2010a, 2010b) challenged the partisan thesis (Gouglas et al., 2015; Jaspers, 2015). The majority of Belgian advisers, about 40%, appear to fit the pure co-ordinator type. The rest are classified as hybrids, revolving around the co-ordinator and minder types. Interestingly, the dominant type of adviser differs according to whether advisers work in general policy or in strategic cells (Jaspers, 2015). In strategic cells, advisers are mostly fixers, managing and co-ordinating policy. They are not shying away from getting their hands dirty with the nuts and bolts of policy at the technical level. They also indulge in political and policy steering by managing agendas and time, by mobilizing and directing the department, by final processing of policy documents, and by co-ordinating stakeholders. They are jacks of all trades in policy support. But the average strategic cell advisers are at the same time a political bodyguard of the minister, protecting him or her from harm.

By contrast, advisers in general policy cells are tasked with maintaining a political line in inter-cabinet negotiations on different policy areas (Jaspers, 2015). Despite having a managerial role too, this role is of less importance for general policy cell advisers than for strategic cell advisers. Advisers in general policy cells are "political animals" whose main impact in the cabinet and outside is political dominance (Brans et al., 2017).

Differences between strategic and policy cells are also confirmed by the highly active interactions ministerial advisers have in vertical, horizontal, and external arenas. Strategic cell advisers' core responsibilities lie in working with the department, across the executive (with other advisers) and with stakeholders. By contrast, general policy cell advisers engage less with vertically supervising, steering and mobilizing departmental work. They are mainly active in political co-ordination across the coalition government, with the legislature and relevant stakeholders. Belgian coalition government requires extensive co-ordination to facilitate decision-making and resolve policy conflicts (see Maley, 2015, pp. 51-52) across coalition government parties. This is a stage dominated by the partisan type of adviser. Teams of advisers of various ministries across the coalition present, discuss and pre-negotiate policies (Göransson & Eraly, 2015). They control and contest policy proposals on both political and policy grounds, always keeping in mind the coalition agreement. This also means that advisers spend a lot of time monitoring the policy portfolios of other ministers. Finally, in the external arena, advisers of all types bargain and negotiate the linkage of ideas with interests (Maley, 2015). The moderately strong corporatist nature of interest intermediation in Belgium has traditionally involved advisers in engaging with stakeholders as their core work (see Suetens & Walgrave, 1999; Vancoppenolle & Brans, 2010), as a responsibility they cannot shirk. To what extent this tradition is challenged by

some parties' aversion to neo-corporatist interests, is a question calling for a research update.

2.4. Individual ministerial adviser careers: Partisan agents or policy professionals?

Internationally, there is a revival of academic attention to the individual level characteristics of members of ministerial offices (Askim, Karlsen, & Kolltveit, 2020; Blach-Ørsten, Mayerhöffer, & Willig, 2019; Taflaga & Kerby, 2019). Also, in Belgium, much is there to learn still from the careers of this sub-echelon of politico-administrative elites (Meert & Brans, 2022). Who are these ministerial advisers (MAs for short), and with what features do they move in, through, and out of the centre of executive power? Are they still party soldiers mainly, displaying partitocratic careers, or have they developed into policy professionals with careers moving in and out of politics following opportunities that value their professional expertise? Echoing Thuillier's compelling metaphors, are MAs cats, loyal to the party house, dogs loyal to their minister/master, or monkeys loyal to whoever values their expertise most (Thuillier, 1982)? The answer is, we don't now, or at least what we know is incomplete and dated.

There is data on the extent to which MAs' career patterns project partitocratic, trustee, or policy professional profiles, but it is shattered in time and place. In 2004, Walgrave and his team tested the partitocracy hypothesis. They showed how Flemish and federal advisers' mobility in various MCs was based on partisan loyalty (always serving a Minister of the same political party) rather than on personal loyalty (following one Minister irrespectively of the Ministry) or on expertise (always serving the same Ministry irrespectively of the Minister). This is what was to be expected in a partitocracy, where party affiliation is a shortcut for ensuring that ministerial advisers keep to the party line, and the ministers with them. The most recent comprehensive research of MAs dates back to Pelgrims (2001, 2005), who conducted two career pattern analyses of inflow, through-flow, and outflow of Flemish advisers. The 2005 study challenged the idea that "advisers come and go with their Minister" by showing how they serve multiple ministers and develop as a professional class and constitute continuity.

Survey research by Moens (2020) compares staffers of the central party, the parliamentary party, and the parties in office. He found party activism to be lower for what he calls ministerial staffers than for parliamentary or central part office staffers, which is in line with what we expect for expertise as an increasingly important basis for recruitment. Yet still, party activism remains rather high as advisers with extra-political expertise (Panebianco, 1988) will most often become active after recruitment to demonstrate loyalty.

There are good reasons to believe that expertise as a basis for recruitment has gained importance, and that there has been a shift to a greater reliance on policy professionals. Due to the ever-growing complexity of policy-making ministers need relying on advisers with technical expertise from within or outside the government. But to what extent exactly advisers careers develop under the partitocratic or policy advice professionalization paradigm requires longitudinal prosopographic research on advisers' inflow, through-flow, and outflow of the executive. And with such an agenda will also come a thorough update on how advisers career patterns replicate patterns of direct politicization as rewards for past service, or reflect other partitocratic retainers of politicization.

3. Administrative politicization: Ostracizing the civil service?

One of the normative concerns over the size and reach of ministerial cabinets concerns the ostracization of the civil service in policy work. Policy work consists of providing analytical support to government for making intelligent choices for solving societal problems (Colebatch et al., 2010). It encompasses a variety of activities around the garnering of information, the demarcation of problem definitions, the design and comparison of policy instruments, and the evaluation of policies. In Belgium, the ministerial cabinets have been found to take the lead in policy work. That puts to question the role of middle-range civil servants in policy work and the degree to which they are ostracized by ministerial cabinets. There is little evidence in the literature on the role and position of middle-range civil servants in policy work. Several reasons explain that lack of information. Firstly, until recently there was no empirical view on what exactly policy advisory work consisted of (Fobé, 2020), let alone on how the civil service was excluded from it. Second, past research on the impact of politicization has focused mainly on the troubled relationship between ministers and the very top of the administration, not on the entire civil service. Research has largely ignored the 'casts of thousands' (Page & Jenkins, 2005) lower down in the hierarchy who perform policy work. Recent empirical evidence on the nature of policy work by the civil service permits a more balanced view on policy work and on the role of the civil service therein.

Whether politicization interferes in civil servants' policy work is here approached by first, analyzing the organizational capacity for policy work, including how the latter is affected by ministerial cabinets; and second, by assessing the nature and content of the contributions of civil servants in policy work. The analysis relies on different surveys conducted across four governments in Belgium between 2013 and 2015 about the conditions in which civil servants participate to policy work. The large-N electronic survey was conducted in Dutch or French and generated an overall response rate of about 40% (for more details, see Brans & Aubin, 2020; Fobé 2021). The population

studied in the different governments was slightly different, which does not allow strict comparisons. In francophone Belgium, all civil servants with a university degree were selected while in Flanders, only limited lists of policy analysts or policy advisers were provided. In the Federal government, the population differed from one ministry to the other. Despite these differences, our analysis leads to the conclusion that politicization does not impede professional policy work of civil servants in the Belgian administrations.

3.1. Organisational capacity for policy work

Organisational policy capacity refers to the organizational resources that contribute to the quality of policy work, such as the support of management, the training opportunities and access to information. In general, Belgian civil servants signal shortages in the policy capacity of their departments, but they are not disillusioned either (see Table 5.3). The main criticism is that long-term issues are somewhat neglected in their work, but this is not typical for Belgian governments alone (Carson & Wellstead, 2015). Civil servants in Belgian public services also consider that their unit lacks personnel to carry out policy work and that the follow-up of scientific information related to policy work is often left aside.

Table 5.3: Policy capacity of the Belgian government organisations

	(Somewhat or fully) agreed		
	Federal (n=370)	Flanders (n=397)	Wallonia and FWB (n=589)
There is too little concern for long-term issues in policy work	71%	77%	68%
I can quickly make use of relevant information and knowledge to my work	62%	83%	46%
The ministerial cabinet plays a dominant role in policy formulation	57%		44%
The work I do has an impact on the decisions that are finally taken	47%	73%	32%
I receive strong support from my superiors to carry out policy work	47%	69%	38%
I know where to go if I need to coordinate on cross-sectoral policy issues	45%	69%	41%
The ministerial cabinet's role in policy formulation is too dominant	31%	73%	44%
The training offer related to the policy work I carry out is sufficient	28%	58%	23%

My unit has enough personnel to carry out policy work	22%	46%	17%
I have enough time to follow up on scientific work related to my policy work	12%	28%	15%

Source: Aubin & Brans 2020; Fobé 2021.

Notes: The answers to these questions ranged on a scale from 1 to 5 where a score of 1 and 2 indicates that respondents 'rather' or 'fully' disagreed' and a score of 4 and 5 indicates that they 'somewhat' or 'fully' agreed with the statement. In Flanders, there was no 'neutral' answer option (score 3). The percentages represent respondents who somewhat or fully agree with the statement against the total of respondents.

The results indicate that interference by ministerial cabinets persists. In turn, that interference can potentially impede policy capacity in the administration because the more ministerial cabinets are in charge of policy work, the less civil servants are in capacity to contribute to that policy work. The survey shows that ministerial cabinets indeed do continue to play a dominant role in policy formulation: 57% in the Federal government, and 44% in Wallonia and Federation Wallonia-Brussels (FWB). This dominant position of ministerial cabinets is even considered excessive by a fair share of respondents in each government: 31% at the federal level, 44% in Wallonia and FWB, and 73% among policy advisers in Flanders. This last figure appears paradoxical considering that the administrative reforms in Flanders were aimed at empowering civil servants in the policy formulation process. Based on the results, however, we cannot fully support the policy ostracization hypothesis of the civil service. If the hypothesis were to be true, then our results would have shown a far greater proportion of civil servants denoting an excessive role of the ministerial cabinets.

3.2. Civil servants' contribution to policy work

A significant number of Belgian civil servants are frequently involved in the production of policy documents and in other policy-related tasks (see Table 5.4). Civil servants supply politicians with information most frequently. They also answer questions from ministerial cabinets and members of Parliament, and are engaged in the writing of strategic notes both to the administrative top and to the minister. In the four Belgian governments, despite differences in the surveyed population, the ranking of the different tasks is somewhat identical. The civil servants spend a fair share of their time answering questions from ministerial cabinets and preparing the ministers' answers to parliamentary questions. In proportion, francophone civil servants are less involved in preparing briefings, presentations or reports to the minister, but more in budgetary documents. The regional civil servants also seem to work more on internal strategic notes for the administration than their federal counterparts. Overall, Belgian civil servants clearly show to be involved in policy work, even if not always full time but rather incidentally.

Table 5.4: Belgian civil servants' involvement in the preparation of policy documents

	Often or always		
	Federal (N=408)	Flanders (N=492)	Wallonia and FWB (N=933)
Questions from ministerial cabinets	49%	56%	35%
Parliamentary questions	42%	55%	24%
Briefings, presentations or reports to the minister	39%	45%	16%
Internal strategic notes to the administration	34%	41%	26%
New regulation	34%	43%	21%
Strategic policy notes to the minister	26%	51%	25%
Research reports	13%	22%	7%
Budgetary documents	13%	15%	22%
(Cross-sector) policy plans	10%	32%	12%
Government coalition agreement	10%	38%	5%
Foresight	9%	15%	10%
Regulatory impact assessment (RIA)	9%	11%	4%
Program evaluations	6%	16%	6%
Green or white papers	5%	10%	1%

Source: Aubin & Brans, 2020; Fobé, 2021.

Note: The population is not identical in the different surveys. In Flanders, only policy analysts were included, while all civil servants with a university degree in the francophone governments. Despite these differences, the data show a nearly similar ranking in policy work activities.

The kind of documents civil servants are associated with does not bring a lot of detail about the contribution they make in writing these documents. Overall, the respondents focus mostly on matters of implementation (see Table 5.5), and they also conduct technical analyses such as assessing the legal acceptability and budgetary impacts. Beyond this, civil servants are also involved in policy related tasks with high political salience, such as testing the timing and feasibility of policy options, assessing cross-sector effects, investigating political risks for the minister or assisting the MC in inter-cabinet meetings. The share of civil servants involved in the most politically sensitive activities evolves around 10%. These civil servants decide on policy options and test societal support for policies.

Table 5.5: Involvement of Belgian civil servants in policy related tasks

	Often (or always)		
	Federal (N=406)	Flanders (N=491)	Wallonia and FWB (N=916)
Implementing policies	49%	50%	41%
Assessing legal acceptability	29%	26%	13%
Testing timing and feasibility of policy options	16%	26%	7%
Determining budgetary impacts	16%	19%	12%
Assessing (cross-sector) effects	15%	26%	6%
Investigating political risks for the minister	15%	18%	5%
Assist the ministerial cabinet in inter-cabinet meetings	13%	12%	5%
Deciding on policy options	10%	16%	3%
Testing societal support for policies	10%	28%	4%
Follow-up on commissioned research or evaluation	9%	30%	13%
Assist the minister at Parliament	6%	4%	1%

Source: Aubin & Brans, 2020; Fobé, 2021.

Notes: the respective populations were sampled differently. Despite these differences, politically salient issues are reported to be taken up in civil service work.

In all, these results nuance the commonly accepted view that policy formulation is an exclusive competence of ministerial cabinets in Belgium. In fact, the data show that civil servants are not excluded from policy formulation. Ministerial cabinets may certainly take the lead in the process but civil servants contribute through tasks which require high skills, political acumen, and a good sense of responsibility. Considering these results, we can support the findings on policy work in other jurisdictions that civil servants must often anticipate the preferences and position of the minister in their policy work (Page & Jenkins, 2005).

Conclusion

In a partitocracy one can expect politicization of the administration to be extensive, in 'breadth, depth, and span' (Halligan, 2021). In this contribution, we have evidenced breadth by the force of several instruments of politicization: direct, appointment based politicization of the top of the administration, the structural entrenchment of ministerial offices in the executive apparatus, and vertical and horizontal mechanisms

of policy control. Evidence on the depth or the level of penetration of politicization throughout the administration, from top to bottom, is less straightforward. While politicization was particularly deep in the 1980s and 1990s, there are, however incomplete, signs that the modernization of HR management in various administrations has depoliticized recruitment and advancement of middle ranking civil servants. Survey data from the 2010s, has moreover shown that these civil servants are not ostracized in the policy formulation process and that policy work is shared with rather than completely colonized by ministerial cabinets. As to the span of politicization, our analysis has not included evidence on how politicization has affected appointments in semi-public and semi-autonomous organisations at arms length of government. Neither have we answered how far-reaching 'reform politicization' is, that is the reshaping of administrations' governance structures and internal organization, and with it creating positions open to partisan appointments. There are indeed many pending questions still, and the research agenda on politicizing the administration is huge.

Some instruments of politicization have been repeatedly criticized, and this has most vociferously occurred in the wake of major crises. This was the case in the tumultuous 1930s with the Camu reform. Also, the intentions to end politicization at the turn of the new millennium came after a decade of scandals, and were given wind by a number of international movements such as the New Public Management and the concern to raise standards in public life, the latter of which in Belgium was embodied by the New Political Culture movement. For a brief moment in history, it looked as if the reform would do away with the most visible and institutionalized instrument of politicization: the ministerial cabinets. Clearly, this was a *fata morgana*, an optical illusion. Ministerial cabinets were abolished to be re-invented.

Meanwhile the entrenchment of ministerial offices in the executive triangle is no longer an institutional feature of countries in the Napoleonic tradition alone. Even in fundamentally different politico-administrative traditions, institutions in the executive triangle begin to resemble each other, as several Westminster countries have witnessed rising numbers of ministerial advisers as a third actor between politicians and the civil service. How can we explain this? Institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) would have us investigate similarities in the social and political conditions in the environment of executive ministers, such as the growing complexity of policies, the mediatization and personalization of politics, perceptions of declining policy capacity, and the 24/7 campaign mode of present executive politics. An equally important question from an institutionalist point of view, is the question under which social and political conditions, ministerial offices, once called to life, survive attempts to do away with them and to replace them by functional equivalents? The trend to cabinetisation in Westminster systems certainly confirms the survival skills of ministerial offices, and so does the endurance of the Italian MC elite, despite the turbulent political and institutional changes of the past 20 years (Di Mascio & Natalini, 2016). In Belgium, given the endurance of *partitocracy*, we might have to consider the force

of there being a strong institutional conflict of interest that we have also seen at play in such areas as parliamentary/congressional ethics: mainstream parties are not going to be the ones to regulate reform against their interest, unless they might benefit electorally in the long run. Challenger parties in turn may at the front stage display criticism against different types of politicization, but as soon as they and their executives have in the backstage experienced the currency of MCs in terms of policy and political capacity, as well as the derived party retainers, they will not press for reform either.

References

- Askim, J., Karlsen, R., & Kolltveit, K. (2020). Public Office as a Stepping-Stone? Investigating the Careers of Ministerial Advisors. *Political Studies Review*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478929920906991>.
- Aubin, D., & Brans, M. (2020). Policy advisory styles in the francophone Belgian civil service. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, *86*(3), 463-478.
- Blach-Ørsten, M., Mayerhöffer, E., & Willig, I. (2019). From Government Office to Private PR: Career Patterns of Special Ministerial Advisors and the Privatization of Politics. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 1-19, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161219887963>.
- Brans, M., Meert, A., Moens, P., & Squevin, P. (2022 forthcoming). Studying ministerial advisers' career and profile: the prosopographic method. In R. Shaw & C. Eichbaum (Eds.), *Handbook on Ministerial Advisors*. London: Edward Elgar.
- Brans, M., & D. Aubin (Eds.). (2017). *Policy Analysis in Belgium*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Brans, M., & Steen, T. (2007). From incremental to Copernican reform? Changes to the position and role of senior civil servants in the Belgian federal administration. In E.C. Page & V. Wrigth (Eds.), *From the active to the enabling state* (pp. 63-80). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Brans, M., de Visscher, C., Gouglas, A., & Jaspers, S. (2017). Political control and bureaucratic expertise: policy analysis by ministerial cabinets. In M. Brans & D. Aubin (Eds.), *Policy Analysis in Belgium* (pp. 57-77). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Brans, M., Hoet, D., & Pelgrims, C. (2006). Comparative observations on tensions between professional policy advice and political control in the Low Countries. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, *72*(1), 57-71.
- Carson, D., & Wellstead, A. (2015). Government with a cast of dozens: Policy capacity risks and policy work in the Northern Territory. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, *74*(2), 162-175.
- Colebatch, H. K., Hoppe, R., & Noordegraaf, M. (Eds.). (2010). *Working for Policy*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

- Connaughton, B. (2010a). Minding the minister: Conceptualizing the role of the special adviser. *Ireland Administration*, 58(1), 55-75.
- Connaughton, B. (2010b). Glorified gofers, policy experts or good generalists: A classification of the roles of the Irish ministerial adviser. *Irish Political Studies*, 25(3), 347-369.
- Connaughton, B. (2015). Navigating the borderlines of politics and administration: reflections on the role of ministerial advisers. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 38(1), 37-45.
- Depré, R. (1973) De topambtenaren van de ministeries in België: een bestuurs-sociologisch explorerend onderzoek. Leuven: KU Leuven.
- De Standaard (2019). NVA Grote winnaar benoemingscarrousel. 23 March 2019.
- de Visscher, C., Hondeghem, A., Montuelle, C., & Van Dorpe, K. (2011). The changing Public Service Bargain in the federal administration in Belgium. *Public Policy and Administration*, 26(2), 167-188.
- de Visscher, C., Hondeghem, A., Van Dorpe, K., Randour, F., & Montuelle, C. (2012). *Les mandats dans la fonction publique fédérale : une (r)évolution depuis Copernic? / Mandaten in de federale overheid: (r)evoluties sedert Copernicus?* Gent: Academia Press.
- de Visscher, C., & Salomonsen, H. H. (2013). Explaining differences in ministerial “ménages à trois”: multiple bargains in Belgium and Denmark. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 79(1), 71-90.
- De Winter, L. (1981). De partijpolitisering als instrument van de participatie. Een overzicht van de ontwikkeling sinds de Tweede Wereldoorlog. *Res Publica*, 23(1), 53-107.
- Dierickx, G., & Majersdorf, P. (1993). *De politieke cultuur van ambtenaren en politici in België*. Brugge: Vanden Broele.
- Dierickx, G. (2003). Senior civil servants and bureaucratic change in Belgium. *Governance*, 16, 321-348.
- Dimaggio, P., & Powell, W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review*, 48(2), 147-160.
- Di Mascio, F., & Natalini, A. (2013). Analysing the role of ministerial cabinets in Italy: Legacy and temporality in the study of administrative reforms. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 79(2), 328-346.
- Di Mascio, F., & Natalini, A. (2016). Ministerial advisers between political change and institutional legacy: The case of Italy. *Acta Politica*, 51(4), 517-538.

- Eichbaum, C., & Shaw, R. (2010). Introduction. In C. Eichbaum & R. Shaw (Eds.), *Partisan Appointees and Public Servants. An International Analysis of the Role of the Political Adviser*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Fobé, E. (2021). *The policy analytical capacity of in-house policy workers in Belgium* [PhD Thesis]. Leuven: KU Leuven, Faculty of Social Sciences.
- Göransson, M., & Eraly, A. (2015). Les cabinets ministériels en Belgique. Entre coalition et participatie. In J.-M. Eymeri-Douzans, X. Bioy & S. Mouton (Eds.), *Le règne des entourages. Cabinets et conseillers de l'exécutif* (pp. 703-720).
- Gouglas, A., Brans, M., & Jaspers, S. (2015). *Political advisers and policymaking in ministerial cabinets systems: the cases of Belgium, Greece and the European Commission*. Paper presented at the International Conference on Public Policy, Milan, 1-4 July.
- Halligan, J. (2021). Politicization of Public Services in Comparative Perspective. In B. G. Peters & I. Thynne (Eds.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Public Administration*, <https://oxfordre.com/politics/page/public-administration/>.
- Hondeghem, A. (1990). *De loopbaan van de ambtenaar. Tussen droom en werkelijkheid* [PhD Thesis]. Leuven: KU Leuven, Faculty of Social Sciences.
- Hondeghem, A., & Depré, R. (Eds.) (2005). *De Copernicushervorming in Perspectief. Veranderingsmanagement in de Federale Overheid*. Brugge: Vandendroele.
- Hondeghem, A., Schepers, S., Decat, A., & Facon, P. (2004). *Studie naar de gelijkheid van mannen en vrouwen in het federaal openbaar ambt*. Leuven: KU Leuven Instituut voor de Overheid.
- Hondeghem A., de Visscher C., Petit Jean, M., & Ruebens, S. (2015). Belgium. In M. Van Wart, A. Hondeghem, & E. Schwella (Eds.), *Leadership and Culture. Comparative Models of Top Civil Servant Training* (pp. 137-152). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hood, C., & Lodge, M. (2006). *The politics of public service bargains. Reward, Competency, Loyalty and Blame*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jaspers, S. (2015). *Political advisors in Belgian federal ministerial cabinets and their policy-making role* [M.A. Dissertation]. Leuven: KU Leuven.
- Kingdon, J. (1984). *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- La Libre (2018). Politisation de l'administration: PS et CDH vampirisent les postes clés. 20 April 2018.
- Maley, M. (2015). The policy work of Australian political staff. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 38(1), 46-55.
- Meert, A., & Brans, M. (2022). Les membres des cabinets ministériels en Communauté germanophone (1999-2019). *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, 2521, 5-56.

- Meert, A., Brans, M., Di Mascio, F., Gouglas, A., Natalini, A., & Silva, P. (2022a forthcoming). Ministerial advisers in political systems of Napoleonic administrative tradition: the ministerial cabinet. In R. Shaw & C. Eichbaum (Eds.), *Handbook on Ministerial Advisers*. London: Edward Elgar.
- Meert, A., Pickering, H., Brans, M., & Gouglas, A. (2022b forthcoming). Systematic Literature Reviews: Opportunities and Limits in Ministerial Adviser Research. In R. Shaw & C. Eichbaum (Eds.), *Handbook on Ministerial Advisers*. London: Edward Elgar.
- Moens, P. (2021). *Serving or undermining democracy? How political parties hold staffers accountable in Belgium and the Netherlands*. Ghent: Ghent University.
- Molitor, A. (1973). *Les superstructures des administrations centrales*. Paris: Cujas.
- Molitor, A. (1974). *L'administration de la Belgique*. Bruxelles: CRISP.
- Molitor, A. (1982). *Servir l'Etat*. Louvain-la-Neuve: Institut des Sciences politiques et sociales.
- Molitor, C., & de Visscher, C. (2010). Du concours à la sélection comparative : le développement d'une nouvelle vision de la GRH dans les administrations publiques du pouvoir fédéral en Belgique. Les concours administratifs : de la plasticité d'une forme institutionnelle. Association française de sciences politique, Groupe de travail « Science politique comparée des administrations ». 6-7 May 2010, Toulouse.
- Page, E. C., & B. Jenkins (2005). *Policy bureaucracy: Government with a cast of thousands*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Panbianco, A. (1988). *Political Parties: Organisation and Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Peters, B. G. (2013). Politicization: What is it and why should we care? In C. Neuhold, S. Vanhoonacker, & L. Verhey (Eds.), *Civil Servants and Politics: A Delicate Balance* (pp. 12-24). Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Petit Jean, M. (2013). Le régime des mandats dans l'administration wallonne. *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, 2166-2167, 5-67.
- Pelgrims, C. (2001). *Ministeriële kabinetleden en hun loopbaan. Tussen mythe en realiteit*. Brugge: die Keure.
- Pelgrims, C. (2005). Personal advisors of ministers: more than personal loyal agents. Paper NISPAcee Annual Conference, Moscow.
- Pickering, H., Brans, M., & Gouglas, A. (2019). Institutionalisation of ministerial advisers in Westminster governments (1970-2019): a systematic review and thematic synthesis. Paper presented for the 4th International Conference on Public Policy, Montréal.

- Suetens, M., & Walgrave, S. (1999). Leven en werk van de kabinetsleden. Wie zijn de mannen achter de minister en wat doen ze? *Res Publica*, 41(4), 499-528.
- Taflaga, M., & Kerby, M. (2019). Who Does What Work in a Ministerial Office: Politically Appointed Staff and the Descriptive Representation of Women in Australian Political Offices, 1979–2010. *Political Studies*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321719853459>.
- Thuillier, G. (1982). *Que sais-je ? Les cabinets ministériels*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France.
- Shaw, R., & Eichbaum, C. (Eds.). (2018). *Ministers, minds and mandarins: An international study of relationships at the executive summit of parliamentary democracies*. London: Edward Elgar.
- Stenmans, A. (1999). *La transformation de la fonction administrative en Belgique*. Bruxelles: CRISP.
- Stenmans, A. (2001). Pratiques de politisation dans les administrations publiques. *Pyramides*, 3, 31-54.
- Thijs, N. (2005). Geschiedenis van de administratieve hervormingen in België. In A. Hondeghem & R. Depré (Eds.), *De Copernicushervorming in Perspectief. Veranderingsmanagement in de Federale Overheid* (pp. 3-33). Brugge: Vandenbroele.
- Vancoppenolle, D., & Brans, M. (2010). Kabinetten als spil en het begijnhof voor de ambtenaren? Een vergelijkende analyse van de beleidsinteracties van kabinetsmedewerkers en ambtenaren in de Vlaamse beleidsvorming. *Res Publica*, 52(4), 483-510.
- Van Dooren, S. (2018). *Public administration characteristics and performance in EU28: Belgium*. Brussels: European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.
- Van Hassel, H. (1988). Le syndrome du cabinet dans une perspective historique. *Bulletin trimestriel du Crédit communal de Belgique*, 166, 11-35.
- Van Hassel, H. (1973). Belgian ministerial cabinets: spoils in a spoiled merit-system. *Res Publica*, 15(2), 357-369.
- Van Hassel, H. (1974). *Het ministerieel kabinet. Peiling naar een sociologische duiding* [PhD Dissertation]. Leuven: KU Leuven.
- Walgrave, S., Caals, T., Suetens, M., & De Swert, K. (2004). Ministerial cabinets and partitocracy. A career pattern study of ministerial cabinet members in Belgium. PSW Paper 2004/7.

Chapter 6. Partitocracy and intra-party ideological agreement

Belgium compared internationally

Stefaan Walgrave
Karolin Soontjens
Frédéric Varone

Introduction

Partitocracy can be considered as an extreme version of “normal” party government. In many parliamentary systems, party governments need continuous support from parliament. This support can only be realized when government parties, first, form stable and homogenous blocs that toe the party line and, second, vote consistently in line with the government (and with the other government parties) (Bowler et al., 1999). In a partitocracy, though, parties not only hold a firm grasp on government policies – this is the case in any party government – they also “occupy” the state and its apparatus by nominating partisans on key administrative and judicial positions and they, to some extent, control befriended interest groups (De Winter, 1981; De Winter, della Porta, & Deschouwer, 1996). It can be debated whether party control of government policy is, compared to other party government regimes, even stronger developed in partitocracies (some say that it is the centralization of policy power within parties that rather characterizes a partitocracy, see De Winter, 1981). But it is obvious that strong party unity is a typical feature of partitocracies. Parties can only rule (and dominate the state) when they act in unison. United party behavior is a necessary condition for partitocracies to exist. So, it can be expected that, all other things being equal, parties under partitocratic rule are more united than parties under non-partitocratic rule (see De Winter (1981) who talks about strong party discipline as a feature of partitocratic regimes). Translated to the country we study in this volume: Belgium has been defined as a textbook example of a partitocracy (Dewachter, 1981; De Winter, della Porta, & Deschouwer, 1996); hence, Belgian parties are expected to be very united.

There is an empirical literature on party unity that finds that Belgian MPs do indeed confirm to the united behavior expectation. In an older, comparative study covering the 1990s, Depauw (2003) found that in more than 95% of the cases, with some small variations across parties, Belgian parties act as if they had one single vote; in the handful of cases whereby there was dissent it was only a single MP who defected. In

comparison with the UK and France, the share of public dissident voting in parliament appeared to be extremely limited in Belgium.

The problem with the empirical party unity literature is that underlying the observable outcome, namely that parties publicly act in unison in parliament, there are different causes that are analytically distinct (see also: Hazan 2003; van Vonno et al., 2014). In fact, parties can be united because of three reasons (Özbudun, 1970). Their representatives agree with the ideological and policy positions of their party (or the majority of their colleagues), their representatives are (for intrinsic reasons) loyal to the party, or their representatives are disciplined by carrots and/or sticks strategies (e.g., assignments to committees, reselection on favorable positions, etc.) (see e.g. Cox & MacCubbins, 1993). Cohesion can be assured by ideological agreement, party loyalty, or party discipline. All three can be true at the same time, of course. And low levels in one of the three factors may be compensated by a stronger presence of the other but only to some extent (Bowler et al., 1999). Most studies about party unity only look at the end product – the voting of party representatives in parliament – without scrutinizing its underlying causes. These causes are harder to observe, in fact, as most of the sticks and carrots party representatives are disciplined with, for instance, are not out in the open for the researcher to be observed. In this chapter, we focus on the ideological agreement (or homogeneity) of parties under partitocratic and non-partitocratic rule. Relatively few studies have looked into the ideological homogeneity of party representatives, probably because access to politicians is not always easy to acquire (but see: Kam, 2001; Andeweg & Thomassen, 2011). The question we attempt to answer in this chapter is whether parties in partitocratic systems are more ideologically homogenous than parties in non-partitocratic systems.

We do not per definition expect this to be the case. In fact, partitocracies demand party unity – parties must behave as blocs in parliament – but they do not require that parties are ideologically homogeneous. As long as the ideological heterogeneity of a party is compensated by party loyalty or party discipline¹ the result may still be that the party acts in a united fashion. Yet, there are limits to the loyalty of disagreeing party members and the power of party discipline is not endless either. The least expensive and most natural way to assure party unity is to have ideologically proximate party representatives to start with (see: van Vonno et al., 2014). Hence, it can be expected that parties in partitocratic systems are more ideologically homogenous compared to other systems. Applied to the country at stake here: Belgian parties are anticipated to be relatively more ideologically homogeneous.

In this chapter we analyze the internal ideological homogeneity of Belgian parties and we compare it with that of parties in three other countries: Germany, Switzerland and Canada. None of these other countries is considered to be a partitocracy; the

¹ Note that partitocracy also implies that party loyalty can be more easily “bought” by the many perks that are commanded by parties who occupy and can allocate large numbers of positions and functions of the state. In other words, in partitocracies parties have more resources to ensure loyalty.

Swiss case is sometimes even described as the exact opposite, namely a system that does not entail party government and with relatively weak parties (see: Lanfranchi & Lüthi, 1999). We employ novel data drawn from a survey of 851 politicians – MPs, ministers and party leaders – in these four countries. Our questionnaire included eight (or nine in Switzerland) policy proposals that politicians were asked their personal opinion about. This allows calculating ideological agreement on the country, party and individual level. Apart from using objective opinion ‘distance’ between a partisan and his/her party as a measure of ideological agreement, we also use questions in which politicians were asked to make a subjective estimation of how often they disagree with their party compared to their colleagues.

We find that parties in all four countries are rather ideologically homogeneous. On average, individual politicians agree with their party’s stance (i.e., with the majority of MPs in their party) on four out of five policy proposals. There are only small differences between individual representatives but much larger differences across parties. In the four countries under study, government parties, left-wing parties and populist parties are more internally homogenous (they have fewer members who diverge from the party line on several policy proposals) than opposition, right-wing and non-populist parties. Further, we find that politicians diverge from their party especially with regard to issues on which they perceive their electorate to be at odds with what the party wants. Most importantly, the country in our sample with the weakest parties, Switzerland, also appears to have the least ideologically homogenous parties; many party representatives in Switzerland disagree with the majority of their partisan colleagues. Our partitocratic case of Belgium differs significantly from the Swiss by having more homogenous parties but Belgian parties are not more ideologically united than their German and Canadian counterparts.

1. Measuring ideological homogeneity within parties

In order to assess ideological agreement within parties, we surveyed politicians face-to-face; they completed the questionnaire themselves on a computer brought by the interviewer present in the room. As a consequence, we are sure that the politicians themselves answered the questions and not their staffers. Data were gathered in the framework of the POLPOP project². All interviews were conducted between March 2018 and September 2019. We include politicians from Belgium, Canada, Germany, and Switzerland (we also had Dutch politicians but excluded them since

² Data have been gathered in the framework of the POLPOP-project. POLPOP is a transnational collaboration examining the perceptual accuracy of politicians in five countries. It was initiated by Stefaan Walgrave from the University of Antwerp (Flanders, Belgium). Flemish funding comes from the national science foundation (FWO) with grant number G012517N. In Francophone Belgium, it is led by Jean-Benoit Pilet and Nathalie Brack (Université libre de Bruxelles), in Switzerland by Frédéric Varone and Luzia Helfer (Université de Genève) funded by the SNSF (100017_172559), in the Netherlands by Rens Vliegthart (University of Amsterdam), and in Germany by Christian Breunig (University of Konstanz) and Stefanie Bailer (University of Basel).

we did not have enough observations per party in The Netherlands). Of the four countries under study, only Belgium can be considered as being a prime example of a partitocratic system. Germany and Canada are strong party systems while parties in Switzerland are considered to be weak. Hence, we expect to find most differences between Belgium and Switzerland, with Germany and Canada in between. As all countries in our sample are federal countries with decentralized polities and substantial regional competences, we target both members of the national parliaments and of (some) regional parliaments. Additionally, we also aim for party leaders (in so far that they do not sit in parliament, we count them among the national politicians) and, in Belgium, we also target ministers (who were all initially elected in parliament but have to resign from parliament when they become a minister). In total, we conducted 851 successful survey interviews which represents a response rate of 43%; most studies aiming for politicians reach lower response rates (see for example: Deschouwer & Depauw, 2014; Bailer, 2014). Response rates vary considerably with very high response rates in Belgium and Switzerland and lower response rates in the two other countries. Table 6.1 shows the evidence per country.

Table 6.1: Response rates per country

	Population	Sample	Response rate
Belgium			
National MPs	150	112	
Regional MPs	271	212	
Total	421	324	77%
Switzerland			
National Council MPs	192	124	
Council of States MPs	44	29	
Regional MPs Bern	159	140	
Regional MPs Geneva	100	77	
Total	495	368	74%
Germany			
National MPs	511	79	15%
Canada			
National MPs	338	50	
Regional MPs Ontario	124	30	
Total	462	80	17%

Central to our research design is the selection of the policy proposals for which politicians are asked to provide their own opinion. We followed a systematic procedure uniformly implemented in each country to arrive at a set of eight (or nine) carefully selected policy proposals³. Since the political context and the current debates in each country vary, we did not seek to query the exact same policy issues in every

³ In Germany and Switzerland two different sets of issues were used and in Switzerland the sets contained *nine* and not eight policy proposals.

country. Instead, we selected a set of policy proposals in each country designed to be equivalent. Our first criterion was that proposals should not be overly technical. Even without much prior knowledge, politicians should be able to understand what the proposals entail. Second, all proposals are topical or relevant in the sense that, at the time of the survey, they were present in the public realm in the country at stake; we did not invent new proposals but drew on existing debates. Third, the salience of the proposals and of the underlying issues varies. Some of the proposals were highly salient at the time of the survey, others were less salient. Fourth, in each country, the eight policy proposals represent a good deal of issue variation. They include policy proposals situated on the traditional socio-economic left-right axis (e.g., retirement age, the right to strike, taxes) as well as proposals that belong to the cultural left-right divide (e.g., immigration, environment, moral issues, defense) while some proposals do not belong to any of the two main cleavages (e.g. democracy). Concretely, for each policy proposal, politicians were asked for their own opinion: *Do you personally disagree or agree with the policy proposal?* Politicians could tick whether *they totally disagreed, disagreed, were undecided, agreed or totally agreed*. We merged both the disagree and the agree categories to have a more straightforward positioning of party members.

To be able to calculate intra-party consent and dissent, we need to have an idea of the party position. We assume here that the official party position is the position that is adopted by the majority of the party's representatives (see Kam, 2001 who follows a similar logic). Yet, calculating a sensible majority position only makes sense if there are sufficient members per party in our sample. We decided to put the cut-off point at a minimum of five party representatives. This choice implies that twenty-four (smaller) parties are dropped from our analyses, twenty-six parties remain. Also, the number of individual representatives for which we can calculate agreement and disagreement dropped to 786. One could argue that intra-party majorities should be outspoken in order for considering them as the formal party position. Therefore, we examined for how many of the party proposal combinations (N=294) the internal majorities are small, a situation that challenges our assumption that the majority represents the formal party position. In most cases, intra-party majorities are large – the mean majority size is eighty-one percent; majorities hovering between fifty and sixty percent only constitute fourteen percent of the cases.

The dependent variable in most analyses below is the share of policy proposals on which politicians hold the same opinion as the majority of their party colleagues. Note that our procedure leads to a loss of information as, for example, being congruent with eighty percent of one's co-partisans implies more consent than agreeing with sixty percent; our crude measure ignores this difference in the size of the majority within parties. Our dependent variable is a rough measure (0/1) and simply measures being congruent with the majority or not (averaged over all policy proposals).

We experimented with more nuanced measures⁴ but results were basically the same. Therefore, we decided to stick to the more intuitive measure. To cover policy issues that were salient on the political agenda (at survey time), we used eight policy proposals in Belgium, Canada and Germany and nine in Switzerland. Our dependent variable is the share of policy proposals (in %) on which party representatives agree with the majority of their co-partisans.

The main part of the analyses reported below consists of regression models predicting percentage agreement of a party member with the majority of his or her party. We run multilevel models because politicians are nested within parties, and include both individual and party-level predictors in our models. We control for country differences (including country fixed effects) in the models and basically expect that Belgian parties would be more ideologically homogeneous compared to parties in Canada, Germany and, definitely, Switzerland. The key question is whether country effects remain even when controlling for a host of alternative explanations for the individual and the party level.

2. Results

2.1. Perceived relative agreement

Before we examine the “actual” agreement of politicians with their party as spelled out in the data section above, we first assess whether parties are ideologically homogeneous relying on a subjective self-perception measure. We asked politicians to what extent their own ideas are congruent with those of their party. Here is the question: *Political parties as a whole take a stance on various policy issues, but positions of individual politicians can differ from the official party line. When you think about your own political positions, where would you place yourself on the following scale?* Respondents were then asked to place themselves on a scale going from *Compared to my colleagues within the party, I more often disagree with my party’s position (0)* to *Compared to my colleagues within the party, I more often agree with my party’s position (10)*. Note that this self-perception measure explicitly asks to compare oneself with co-partisans. This means that politicians situate themselves vis-à-vis their perception of the average dissent in their party. As a consequence, the measure may not be very fit to compare across parties and countries as the benchmark politicians compare themselves with is subjective and, most importantly, varies across parties and countries. Still, we think it is a useful way to start exploring how politicians

⁴ An alternative individual measure of dissent or consent is, for instance, the percentage of co-partisans that are positioned on the same side as a given politician. This measure does not use the somewhat arbitrary decision rule that the majority position equates the formal party position. We calculated this alternative measure for all politicians but, at the individual level, it correlated strongly (Pearson’s $r = 0.85$) with the measure we use in this chapter. At the party level, the correlation between both measures was even larger ($r = 0.95$).

think about the ideological agreement within their party. Figure 6.1 below shows the distribution of answers with the answer scale inverted (a higher score refers to more agreement).

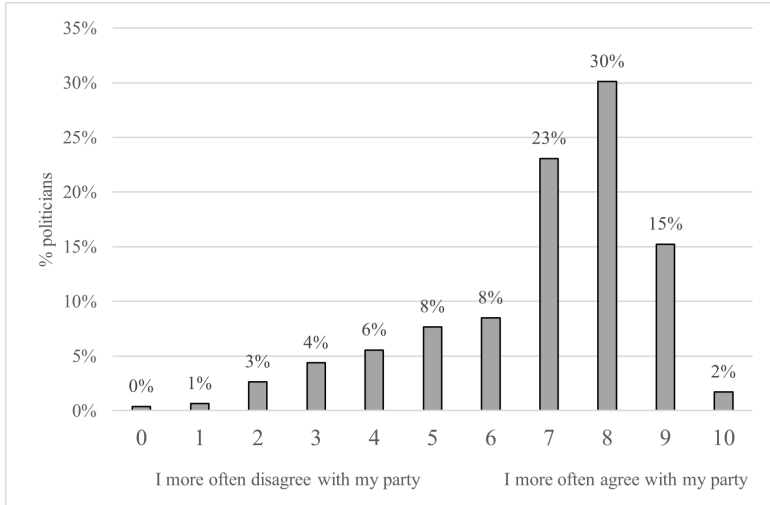


Figure 6.1: Frequency distribution of politicians perceived relative agreement with their party (N=754)

The data demonstrate that politicians tend to place themselves on the positive side of the agreement scale: they consider themselves to be, on average, closer to what the party wants than their fellow politicians are. The average politician places her/himself at 6.9 on the perceived agreement scale, which is rather high. If politicians' perception of dissent were exact, of course, the average should be situated in the middle, but it is not. In other words, politicians perceive more dissent with the party among their colleagues than they perceive dissent from themselves. It is the others who more frequently disagree with the party line, they say, while they themselves more often agree with the party.

Differences between countries are small. Canadian politicians are standing relatively closer to their party (mean score of 7.2; SD 1.92) than Swiss (7.0; SD 1.90), Belgian (6.7; SD 1.93) and German (6.5; SD 1.98) politicians. Hence, in terms of their perceived internal agreement, Belgians operating in a partitocratic system do not differ much from party representatives in other countries. Thus, it is not the case that the partitocratic case of Belgium differs systematically from the non-partitocratic countries. Further multivariate analyses exploring the predictors of perceived relative congruence find that, compared to their backbencher colleagues, elite politicians – party leaders, ministers, caucus leaders and speakers – do think of themselves as even more agreeing with the formal party line (full results not reported). This makes sense. Those

who call the shots and determine the party line also agree more with it than those who have less impact on what the party line is.

2.2. Percent agreement with the party

Figure 6.2 shows the distribution of politicians and their actual percent agreement with their party across the eight (Switzerland: nine) proposals. We grouped the data in eight categories going from low (21-30%) to high (91-100%) agreement with the majority position of their party.

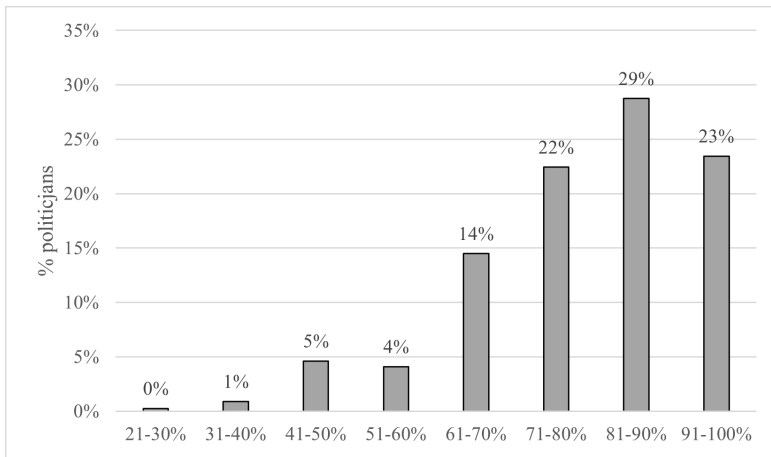


Figure 6.2: Frequency distribution of politicians' percent agreement with their party (N=786)

The data show that, overall, most politicians' opinions concur with those of their fellow partisans. A large majority agrees with the position of their party. This is, of course, mathematically by definition the case since we calculated the party position drawing on partisans' majority position on each of the policy proposals. Overall, the parties in the four countries under study do seem to be ideologically quite homogeneous. More than half of the surveyed politicians (52%) agree for more than eighty percent of the positions with their party. Those who often disagree with the majority position within their party form only a small group. The average politician agrees with eighty-one percent of the positions his or her party holds. In other words, of the eight proposals, the average politician only diverges from the party on one-and-a-half proposal. Still, Figure 6.2 shows there is individual variation. There also is a sizeable group of politicians who diverge from the party line on quite a few policy proposals.

Figure 6.3 presents the same data but this time showing the variation on the party level. Each party is represented by a single bar (hence 26 bars) and parties are rank ordered from low to high average internal agreement. Belgian parties are marked in

black. Again, the main message is one of variation on the party level. While most parties display a fairly high level of internal agreement, some parties display an almost total internal consensus (with average agreement scores topping 90%) while others come across as Mexican armies with enormous levels of internal disagreement. Note that the four most homogeneous parties are all Belgian parties (see black bars on the right)⁵.

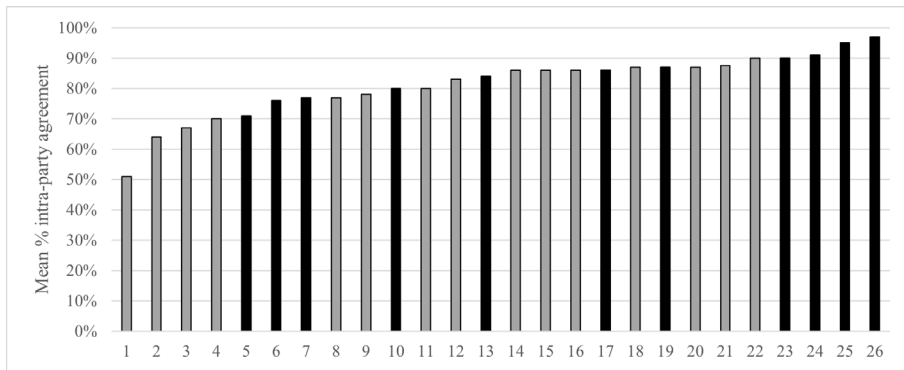


Figure 6.3: Mean percent agreement for each party (N=26)

2.3. Explaining ideological homogeneity

Now that we found variation, in the next step we attempt to explain percent agreement with the party by bringing in individual variables, party variables, and country dummies. Who are the politicians who diverge most of their party, and which are the parties who display most internal disagreement? Table 6.2 presents the answers to those questions.

Table 6.2: Multilevel regression model explaining percent agreement with the party

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coef. (S.E.)	P	Coef. (S.E.)	P
Politician variables				
Female	2.5 (1.1)	.027	2.4 (1.1)	.035
Experience	-.11 (.07)	.103	-.09 (.07)	.183
Elite position	.41 (1.9)	.831	.57 (1.9)	.769

⁵ We refrain from providing the actual names of the parties. When asking for their participation, we promised our respondents that we would never expose individual parties' names (nor individual politicians' names, of course). We believe this increases response rates and honest answers since it takes out the competition between parties.

Style of representation (trustee)	.34 (.28)	.221	.30 (.28)	.283
Focus of representation (party)	-.29 (.71)	.681	-.20 (.71)	.776
Specialization (generalist)	-.03 (.24)	.899	-.03 (.24)	.896
Party variables				
Size			-.04 (.08)	.649
Government			5.3 (2.0)	.009
Right-wing			-3.6 (.72)	.000
Populist			19.5 (5.4)	.000
Country (Ref. = Belgium)				
Germany	-.13 (5.5)	.981	-1.5 (4.2)	.719
Canada	-6.03 (5.4)	.266	-2.27 (4.65)	.953
Switzerland	-8.4 (4.3)	.052	-12 (3.2)	.000
Constant				
Constant	83 (3.9)	.000	96.96 (4.9)	.000
N	689 politicians 26 parties		689 politicians 26 parties	

First, with regard to individual predictors, not much is going on. Only one variable has a significant effect: female politicians are significantly more in accord with their party compared to their male colleagues. We tested a range of other classic structural and attitudinal variables but none gave any result. More experienced politicians who have been in politics for a longer time have not profited from this longer time span to develop a closer ideological affinity with their party than their less experienced counterparts. Politicians occupying top positions (party leaders, ministers, caucus leaders, speakers) who had the chance to influence their party's position more than backbenchers are not closer to their party than these other politicians are. Various attitudes are not related to party agreement either. Those who define themselves as trustees and declare to follow their own convictions do not diverge more from the party line than self-declared delegates who say to follow the public (style of representation⁶). Those who declare that their aim is to primarily represent their party voters instead of other groups of voters are not ideologically closer to the party either (focus

⁶ Exact question wording: *Some people believe that elected officials should exactly follow the preferences of citizens. Others argue that MPs should follow their own convictions while pursuing the interests of citizens. What do you think is the right balance a politician should have? 0 = Follow citizens' preferences exactly to 10 = Follow their own convictions while pursuing the interests of citizens.*

of representation⁷). And, being a generalist dealing with a large variety of issues compared to being a narrower specialist is not associated with party agreement either⁸. Note that there is a significant correlation between the perceived relative agreement with one's party (see above) and one's actual party agreement (Pearson's $r = 0.08$; $p = .02$) – those who say to be ideologically close are in reality also closer to their party. Yet, the correlation is very weak and perceptions cannot be considered as a cause of actual agreement so we left this variable out of the regression in Table 6.2.

Although the analytical power of our analyses is limited due to the fact that we only have twenty-six parties, the results with regard to party differences are more promising. In fact, we record three significant and robust effects on the party level. First, representatives of government parties are more in accord with their party than politicians of opposition parties. The effect is quite substantial. While the average party agreement for opposition members is 76%, it is 82% for government party politicians (predicted probabilities calculated based on models presented in Table 6.2). Note that we get this result while controlling for party size; government parties are on average larger than opposition parties. That government parties are more ideologically homogenous might be contra-intuitive. In fact, there is work claiming that government parties are less ideologically homogeneous, due to the fact that they are often forced to vote, out of coalition loyalty, for policy proposals they do not fully agree with, and which internally divides the party (as some do adopt these new positions as their own while others do keep their private dissenting opinion) (Rahat, 2007; van Vonno et al., 2014). What we do find here is the opposite pattern: there is more ideological homogeneity among the government parties in our sample. It could be that there is more social desirability in answers of government MPs in the sense that they feel forced to toe the party line in their responses but since the survey was fully anonymous that is not very likely.

Second, right-wing parties⁹ are much less homogenous than left-wing parties are. The effect is stark. Figure 6.4 shows the predicted probabilities. The most left-wing¹⁰ party scores a mean percent agreement of 96%, the most right-wing party has a mean percent agreement of 63% only (controlling for all other variables). The difference

⁷ Exact question wording: *Politicians can represent various groups of voters. Sometimes these groups have different or even conflicting preferences. Which groups are most important for you to represent? Please rank them from 1 (least important) to 5 (most important) by dragging and dropping each item in your order of preference. Rank of "All people who voted for my party".*

⁸ Exact question wording: *Some politicians specialize in one or two policy issues, while others prefer to act upon a wide range of policy issues. Where would you place yourself on the following scale? 0 = Small number of policy issues to 10 = Large number of policy issues.*

⁹ We verified the robustness of this finding by running separate country analyses. In Canada, Switzerland and Belgium we see that parties with a right-wing orientation are indeed much less homogeneous. In Germany, however, where we only have four parties in our sample, the right-wing populist party AfD shows to be quite homogeneous, hence we do not find a significant relation between ideological orientation and ideological homogeneity in that country.

¹⁰ Party ideological placement based on Chapel Hill expert data.

is remarkable. We have no ready explanation for this finding but can only speculate. Note that the effect of right-wingness cannot be explained by the fact that right-wing parties are bigger parties as party size is accounted for in the models. Maybe the fact that right-wing parties are often also liberal parties forms part of the explanation. Liberal parties may let their representatives – in line with their liberal ideology – more free to develop their own points of view and this may lead to more heterogeneity. Also, it could be that left-wing parties are, generally, organized in a more centralized and hierarchical way, or that their candidates are more screened on ideological proximity than the potential candidates of right-wing parties are. If what we found is the effect of the party extremity – more extreme parties have outspoken positions that their representatives know and comply with – the effect of ideological leaning would have been U-shaped, but it is not as Figure 6.4 shows.

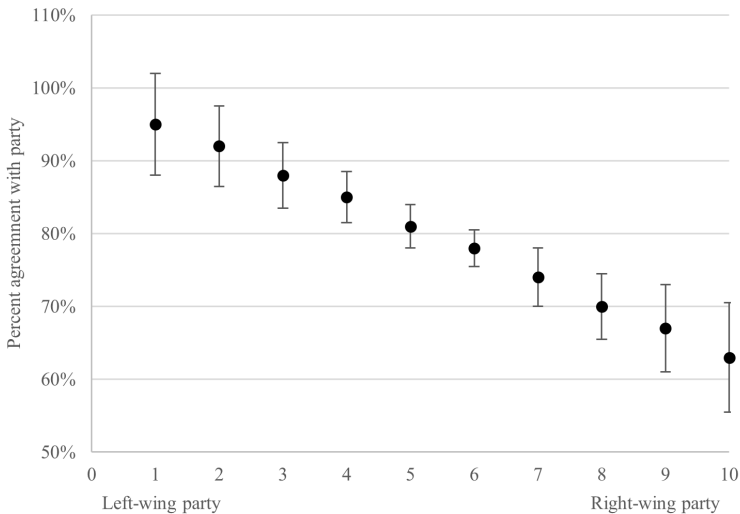


Figure 6.4: Predicted probabilities of the effect of party ideology on percent agreement with the party

Third, populist parties¹¹ are characterized by significantly higher party agreement of their representatives compared to non-populist parties. Again, the difference is outspoken with populists displaying extremely high mean party agreement scores of 97% and non-populists reaching only 78%. Note that populism and right-wingness are correlated (but not to the extent that it violates multicollinearity assumptions; Pearson's $r = 0.53$) so that the populism variable grasps the pure effect of populism controlling for the ideological position of these parties. The populist parties in our sample are

¹¹ Among the parties in our sample, we consider the parties *Vlaams Belang* (Belgium), *Alternative für Deutschland* (Germany) and the *Schweizerische Volkspartei* (Switzerland) to be populist parties.

all right-wing, anti-immigration parties. Our results suggest that they are not only internally homogeneous with regard to their stances about immigration but that they are also quite united when it comes to other stances; they display an almost perfect ideological unity across the board.

Finally, and related to our quest of assessing whether parties in partitocratic systems are more ideologically homogenous, we look at the country effects. By controlling for a host of individual and party-level variables, we present a tough test for finding possible country differences. Comparing Germany, Canada and Switzerland with the reference category of Belgium – our partitocratic case – we see that all other three countries have, as expected, a (slightly) lower ideological homogeneity than Belgium (predicted value: 86%). Only the Swiss case (74%) diverges significantly from Belgium. Germany (84%) and Canada (85%) have average agreement scores that are statistically indistinguishable from Belgium. This finding comes as no surprise as Switzerland, of all four countries, is the country with the weakest parties (see Ladner, 2004; Sciarini, 2015). Our results are suggestive of the fact that in partitocratic countries parties may be more ideologically homogenous, but our proof is fragile only. It is obvious that we need more country cases to further explore the matter.

So far, by creating a congruence score for each politician, we looked at the extent to which individual, party and country characteristics explain ideological homogeneity at the individual level. Yet, our data also allow us to move the level of analysis downwards and to look at variation on the level of the policy proposals that politicians were confronted with. Indeed, it may be the case that the explanation for homogeneity or heterogeneity lies at a lower level. More specifically, we look at politicians' perception of their party electorate's opinion¹². We suspect that politicians might let their own opinion, and therefore their possible divergence from their party, be steered by their voters' preferences or, rather, by their perception of their voters' preferences. If these perceptions divert from the party line, they might cause politicians to drift away from the party line. Contrary to the previous analyses we presented, we here look at politicians' congruent positioning on each of the policy proposals separately. Specifically, we stack our dataset so that each politician is represented eight times (or nine in the case of Swiss politicians), once for each policy proposal on which they expressed their opinion. Including country-level fixed effects as in the models presented above, and controlling for the fact that politicians are nested in the party policy proposal combinations, we run a multilevel logistic model with politicians' statement-level agreement with the party position (again, the majority position of party politicians) as the dependent variable. The independent variable we are now interested in is the difference between politicians' perceptions of their voters' opinions and their party's position (a dummy variable that gets the value of 1 if both do not coincide).

¹² Exact question wording: *What percentage of the current voters of your party who do have an opinion about this, rather agrees or totally agrees with this policy proposal? (slider – %).*

We find that there is a strong effect of the mismatch between electorate opinion and party position on ideological “defection”. The effect is strong: when politicians’ views of their voters’ preferences differ from the party line, the odds of being incongruent with the party on that specific policy proposal increase by a factor of no less than 4.6. In other words, politicians do not agree with their party when they perceive their voters not to agree with the party either. When having to choose between their party and their voters, many decide to trail the voters. Note that the causality could also run the other way around but our data do not allow us to tease this out. Indeed, it could be that politicians tend to “project” their opinion more on their electorate when they disagree with their party. Yet, theoretically speaking, we do not see why there would be more projection of one’s own opinion when this own opinion is less in line with that of the party. If anything, rather the opposite should be the case: the more politicians feel bolstered by the opinion of their party the more they should project, not less. So, we contend that the opposite causal effect is more likely and that politicians diverge from their party because they perceive their electorate to disagree with the party line.

2.4. Zooming in on Belgium

In the remainder of this section, we focus on internal party agreement in Belgium only. The reason is that we have more data on Belgian politicians that may help explain differences in party agreement between politicians and that Belgium is the partyocratic case that is of interest in this book.

First, we have not looked at variation at the policy proposal level so far but it is likely that the precise policy matters and that parties are more divided on some issues compared to others. In Figure 6.5 below, we show the eight policy proposals we confronted the Belgian politicians with and present the average party agreement per statement across all parties.

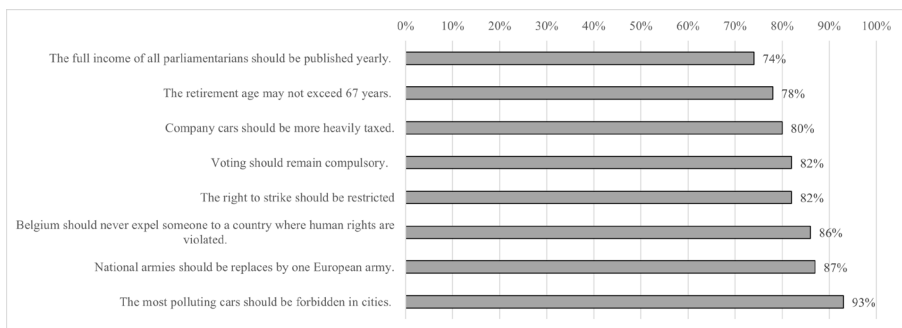


Figure 6.5: Mean percent party agreement per policy proposal in Belgium (N=327)

The figure clearly shows variation across proposals. On some proposals, Belgian parties are more divided than on others. But there is not a strong pattern. The only thing the data suggest is that Belgian parties may be more ideologically homogeneous with regard to sociocultural policies than with regard to socio-economic and other policies. Indeed, the three policy proposals revealing most homogeneity – expelling immigrants, European armies, and polluting cars – all relate to the sociocultural cleavage. This suggests that the newer, socio-cultural divide may be more important as a structuring force in Belgian party politics compared to the traditional socio-economic cleavage classically pitching socialist against liberal parties. The number of policy proposals we have at our disposal is too small to draw very confident conclusions, though.

Next, we ran the regression presented above in Table 6.2 again, but now only including Belgian politicians and adding extra variables at the individual level (results not shown in a table). Note that the models covering all countries did not reveal significant individual-level patterns (except for the fact that female politicians were closer to their parties). Do we find systematic variation among Belgian politicians? We do, to some extent. First, the twenty-five Belgian politicians in our sample who switched parties in the past¹³ hold opinions that are less in line with that of the party they joined. This makes sense. It shows that party switchers probably hold on to some of the opinions they shared with the previous party they were a member of. The effect of party switching is pretty strong (coeff.=-9.9; SE=3.9; p=.01): non-switchers have a mean party agreement score of 83%, switchers only have 66% (predicted probabilities keeping all other variables at their means). This evidence suggests that party switching in Belgium is not very likely to be mainly driven by a greater ideological affinity with the new party.

Second, we asked Belgian politicians to what extent they follow their own convictions even if that comes at the price of lowering their electoral success¹⁴. The question is an alternative measure of the style of representation politicians adhere to; politicians who say to follow their own views can be considered as trustees. The more politicians state to behave as trustees, the more their opinions were in line with that of their party (coeff.=1.11; SE=.49; p=.025). The causality is uncertain here. It could be that politicians who have the (correct) feeling that they are close to their party are also those who have sufficient self-confidence to state that they most of the time follow their own ideas (that are close to those of the party).

Third, there is no significant difference between Dutch-speaking and Francophone Belgian politicians. Both groups are similarly close to their party's position (mean party agreement in Flanders is 82%, in Francophone Belgium it is 85%, no significant

¹³ It regards mostly politicians (13) who switched towards the nationalist party N-VA.

¹⁴ Exact question wording: *in my parliamentary work I always follow my own point of view, even when this reduces my chances of electoral success. Answers going from 0= totally disagree to 10= totally agree.*

difference). This comes as no surprise since both main regions of the country are similarly affected by partitocratic arrangements.

Conclusion

Our study presented modest evidence that partitocracy breeds ideological homogeneity of parties. Compared to politicians in Switzerland, a weak-party system, Belgian politicians demonstrate more affinity with their party; but we recorded no difference with the “normal” strong-party systems Germany and Canada. In the end, it is unclear whether partitocracy in itself, on top of being a strong-party system, further boosts party homogeneity. A significant contribution of the study is that we established that party features matter importantly for their internal ideological homogeneity, and that they matter on top of a range of characteristics of the politicians representing the parties; the party effects do not seem to be composition effects but true party effects. Government, left-wing and populist parties are more ideologically united than their counterparts. Further, our finding that heterogeneity is also strongly affected by electorate opinion perceptions is another contribution to the study. We do believe that these results contribute to the small literature that examines ideological unity of parties and that directly surveys politicians about their own opinions.

The study is not without flaws, of course. Mostly methodologically, there is room for improvement. The small number of policy proposals we confronted each individual politician with limited leverage we had on policy differences and made our assessment of party agreement per individual more tenuous than we had liked. This noise may have been the reason for our null results on the individual level. We think our strategy to work with concrete policy proposals and not with a general left-right scale and a self-placement on it is a good way to go, but the downside is that one needs more policy questions. Also, we would have liked to have measures of politicians’ perception of where their party stands on policy proposals. Finally, although we do better than many other studies by including four countries, assessing the effects of political systems requires more analytical leverage at the country level. Moreover, it is unclear at this stage whether our results can be generalized to other polities.

In closing, we believe that examining party unity going beyond simply looking at the public behavior of MPs in parliament is a worthy endeavor. Ideological homogeneity is a crucial aspect of it; party representatives are not just loyal to their party nor are they constantly disciplined by their party. They toe the party line primarily because they share their party’s positions and agree with its policy stances.

References

- Andeweg, R. B., & Thomassen, J. (2011). Pathways to Party Unity: Sanctions, Loyalty, Homogeneity and Division of Labor in the Dutch Parliament. *Party Politics*, 17(5), 655-672.
- Bailer, S. (2014). Interviews and surveys in Legislative Research. In S. Martin, T. Saalfeld, & K. W. Ström (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Legislative Studies* (pp. 167-193). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bowler, S., Farrell, D. M., & Katz, R. S. (Eds.). (1999). *Party Discipline and Parliamentary Government*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
- Cox, G. W., & McCubbins, M. D. (2007). *Legislative Leviathan: Party Government in the House*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- De Winter, L. (1981). De partijpolitiserings als instrument van de participatie. Een overzicht van de ontwikkeling sinds de Tweede Wereldoorlog. *Res Publica: Belgian Journal of Political Science*, 23(1), 53-107.
- De Winter, L., della Porta, D., & Deschouwer, K. (1996). Comparing Similar Countries: Italy and Belgium. *Res Publica: Belgian Journal of Political Science*, 38(2), 215-235.
- Depauw, S. (2003). Part 2: Discipline: Government Party Discipline in Parliamentary Democracies: the Cases of Belgium, France and the United Kingdom in the 1990s. *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 9(4), 130-146.
- Deschouwer, K., & Depauw, S. (Eds.). (2014). *Representing the People: a Survey Among Members of Statewide and Substate Parliaments*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dewachter, W. (1981). De partijenstaat in de Westeuropese polyarchie: een proeve tot meting. *Res Publica: Belgian Journal of Political Science*, 23(1), 115-123.
- Hazan, R. Y. (2003). Introduction: Does Cohesion Equal Discipline? Towards a Conceptual Delineation. *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 9(4), 1-11.
- Kam, C. (2001). Do Ideological Preferences Explain Parliamentary Behavior? Evidence from Great Britain and Canada. *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 7(4), 89-126.
- Ladner, A. (2004). The Political Parties and the Party System. In U. Klöti, P. Knoepfel, H. Kriesi, W. Linder, & Y. Papadopoulos (Eds.), *Handbook of Swiss Politics* (pp. 197-242). Zürich: NZZ Publishing.
- Lanfranchi, P., & Lüthi, R. (1999). Cohesion of Party Groups and Interparty Conflict in the Swiss Parliament: Roll Call Voting in the National Council. In S. Bowler, D. M. Farrell, & R. S. Katz (Eds.), *Party Discipline and Parliamentary Government* (pp. 99-120). Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

- Özbudun, E. (1970). *Party Cohesion in Western Democracies: A Causal Analysis*. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Rahat, G. (2007). Determinants of Party Cohesion: Evidence from the Case of the Israeli Parliament. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 60(2), 279-296.
- Sciarini, P. (2015). *More Power Balance, Less Consensus: Changes in Decision-Making Structures Over Time*. In *Political Decision-Making in Switzerland* (pp. 51-77). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Van Vonno, C. M., Malka, R. I., Depauw, S., Hazan, R., & Andeweg, R. (2014). Agreement, loyalty, and discipline: A sequential approach to party unity. In K. Deschouwer & S. Depauw (Eds.), *Representing the People: a Survey among Members of Statewide and Substate Parliaments* (pp. 110-136). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chapter 7. Partitocracy and the future of Belgium

Revisiting Does Belgium (still) exist?

Christoph Niessen
Pierre Baudewyns
Stefano Camatarri
Jérémy Dodeigne
André-Paul Frogner
Min Reuchamps
Dave Sinardet

Introduction

In 2006, Jaak Billiet, Bart Maddens and André-Paul Frogner raised the question: Does Belgium (still) exist? And they explored the differences in political culture between Flemings and Walloons (Billiet, Maddens, & Frogner, 2006). 15 years later, we continue their journey and seek to uncover whether these differences have increased or by contrast declined. Because the general endeavour of the volume is to disentangle partitocracy in Belgium, we focus on political differences or similarities between the two main language groups and add to the perspective of voters, the perspective of candidates. This allows us to grasp possible differences not only between Dutch-speakers and French-speakers but also between political elites and masses. Billiet and colleagues started their exploration from the gradual cultural and social divergence between Flanders and Wallonia that led to two separate political systems in Belgium. They came to the conclusion that “quite a few differences in public opinion still exist between Flemings and francophone Belgians” (Billiet et al., 2006, p. 929). In particular, the former have a stronger regional – i.e. Flemish – identity whereas the latter a stronger national – i.e. Belgian – identity, which goes hand in hand with preferences for further regionalization in Flanders but less in Wallonia, even though emotional ties to Belgium do still exist in each region, albeit more widespread in Wallonia than in Flanders.

In order to explain these differences, the researchers concluded that “contextual characteristics are more important than national character” (Billiet et al., 2006, p. 929). In 15 years, the political and social context in Belgium has quite dramatically changed and centrifugal but also centripetal dynamics can be observed (De Winter & Baudewyns, 2009; Caluwaerts & Reuchamps, 2015; 2020; 2022). Such dynamics can be seen both between language groups and between so-called ‘elite’ and ‘mass’ (De

Winter & Van Wynsberghe, 2015). The objective of this chapter is therefore to look at the evolution of political attitudes and opinions over the last 15 years regarding the future of Belgium. Beside voter surveys, we can rely on candidate surveys that offer insightful data to grasp the evolution of this question in both language groups and between masses and elites. In this chapter, we first look at the left-right dimension, before focusing on ethno-territorial identities and finally turn to state reform preferences. In so doing, we seek to revisit the underlying twofold question: does Belgium (still) exist and will it continue to do so?

1. Left-right dimension

A first political cleavage for which we investigate the potential differences between Flemings and Walloons is the political left-right dimension. Drawing on the Belgian Candidate Surveys (2007-2019), the Belgian National Election Study (2007-2019) as well as at the PartiRep (2014) and RepResent (2019) studies¹, we look at how voters and candidates in both Flanders and Wallonia position themselves on the following question:

“In politics, people often speak of ‘left’ and ‘right’. This can be represented on a scale where 0 indicates ‘fully left’ and 10 indicates ‘fully right’ – with intermediate steps depending on whether one is more or less inclined to the left or right. If you think about your own position, where would you position yourself on such a scale?”

In the last years, we have witnessed an increasing share of votes for parties on the political left in Wallonia, and for parties on the political right in Flanders (Dodeigne & Renard, 2018). Combined with the consociational features of the Belgian federation, this has substantially complicated the formation of federal governments when majorities in both language groups were sought – either to reform the Constitution during a state reform or to contribute to the symbolic legitimacy of the government (Caluwaerts & Reuchamps, 2015; Deschouwer, 2009). Despite lengthy negotiations, the three last regular governments did not have a majority on either the Flemish (Di Rupo, De Croo) or the Francophone side (Michel I) – in addition to three minority cabinets (Michel II, Wilmes I & II). This led the Flemish nationalist N-VA to describe Belgium as being composed of “two democracies” – one on the left in Wallonia, and one on the right in Flanders – each of which should have the right to govern itself according to its own wishes (Sinardet, 2021).

¹ Throughout the chapter, the voter data are weighted by age, gender, education and vote. The data for 2007 come from the Belgian National Election Study as well as the data for 2010 in Wallonia. For Flanders, the data for 2007 and 2010 were published by Abts et al. (2011) and Swyngedouw et al. (2014). In particular, we would like to thank Marc Swyngedouw for sharing the mean on the left-right scale for Flemish voters by party in 2010. The data for 2014 come from the PartiRep Election Study – European, Federal and Regional 2014: <http://www.partirep.eu/> and for 2019 from the RepResent Electoral Surveys. The candidate data are weighted by age, gender and party. The data come from the Belgian Candidate Survey 2007, 2010, 2014, 2019.

Based on these evolutions and electoral results (Reuchamps et al., 2020a), one would thus expect to find an increasing share of both voters and candidates in Flanders to position themselves on the political right, as well an increasing share of both voters and candidates in Wallonia to position themselves on the political left. When we look at the results of the aforementioned surveys in Table 7.1, however, we see that the picture is not that clear-cut.

Table 7.1: A comparison of the left-right self-placement of voters (V) and candidates (C) in Flanders and in Wallonia from 2007 to 2019 (0-10 scale)

Parties	2007			2010			2014			2019		
	V	C	Δ	V	C	Δ	V	C	Δ	V	C	Δ
CD&V	5,4*	5,4	0,0	5,8	5,5	0,3	5,4	4,8	0,7	5,3	4,9	0,4
N-VA	5,4*	6,1	-0,7	5,9	6,7	-0,8	5,9	6,8	-0,9	7,2	7,1	0,1
Groen	4,0	1,8	2,1	3,8	2,2	1,6	3,6	2,0	1,7	3,7***	2,1	1,6
Lijst Dedecker	5,5	7,3	-1,8	5,9	7,4	-1,5	-	-	-	-	-	-
Open VLD	5,5	6,1	-0,6	5,4	6,7	-1,3	5,6	6,5	-0,9	5,6	6,4	-0,8
PVDA	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0,5	-	2,7***	0,4	2,3
sp.a	4,1**	2,5	1,6	3,9	2,4	1,5	4,0	1,9	2,1	4,1	2,0	2,1
VB	6,8	8,2	-1,4	6,4	8,4	-2,0	7,1	8,6	-1,5	7,3	8,0	-0,7
Flanders												
Mean	5,39	5,59	-0,20	5,41	5,74	-0,33	5,34	5,30	0,04	5,76	5,39	0,37
Std. dev.	0,89	2,04	1,19	0,88	2,01	1,22	0,93	2,12	1,27	1,52	2,46	1,22
CDH	5,3	5,2	0,1	4,9	5,1	-0,2	5,4	5,2	0,2	5,3	5,1	0,2
Ecolo	4,6	2,8	1,7	3,8	2,3	1,5	3,9	2,3	1,6	4,5***	2,6	2,0
FN	5,8	8,9	-3,1	5,5	-	-	8,2	-	-	-	-	-
FDF/DéFI	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5,9	4,7	1,2
MR	6,1	7,1	-1,1	5,2	6,9	-1,7	6,5	7,1	-0,7	6,9	7,3	-0,4
PP	-	-	-	-	8,0	-	-	8,6	-	7,6	-	-
PS	3,6	2,8	0,8	4,2	2,1	2,1	3,5	0,9	2,6	3,7	1,2	2,5
PTB	3,0	-	-	3,0	-	-	3,6	0,4	3,2	3,6***	0,3	3,3
Wallonia												
Mean	4,97	4,97	0,00	4,57	4,17	0,40	4,73	3,52	1,21	4,96	3,33	1,63
Std. dev.	1,04	2,12	1,44	0,54	2,09	1,57	1,30	2,74	1,12	1,37	2,60	1,35
Δ Mean Fla./Wall.	0,42	0,62	-0,2	0,84	1,57	-0,73	0,61	1,78	-1,17	0,80	2,06	-1,26

Sources: Belgian Candidate Survey (2007-2019); Belgian National Election Study (2007-2010); PartiRep (2014); RepResent (2019).

Note: Regional means and standard deviations were weighted based on parties' electoral vote share. For the candidates of Francophone parties, left-right positions were not available in 2010's electoral data. We used positions on a more specific economic issue question (public vs.

private ownership of enterprises) instead. * Estimates merged because of electoral cartel. ** In an electoral cartel with Spirit. *** These estimates do not consider voters in the Brussels region, where support for each corresponding party was not measured separately (i.e. PTB-PVDA and Groen-ECOLO merged together).

A look at the average (mean) position of candidates and voters grouped by region, visualized in Figure 7.1, shows us that that during the period of observation, the average Flemish candidate and voter have positioned themselves a little more towards the political right, while the average Walloon candidate and voter have positioned themselves more towards the political left. This confirms the initial expectations. However, the difference between Flemish and Walloon voters is very limited without a real tendency to drift apart – the difference always remains under one point difference on the ten point-scale – who can both rather be considered to be close to the political center.

The latter is less the case for candidates who are also less stable in their positioning. Among candidates we do see a tendency for Flemings and Walloons to move further apart. This tendency seems to come above all with the average Walloon candidate positioning itself increasingly towards the left. In Flanders, against many common expectations, the average candidate remains stable in the (moderate) right.

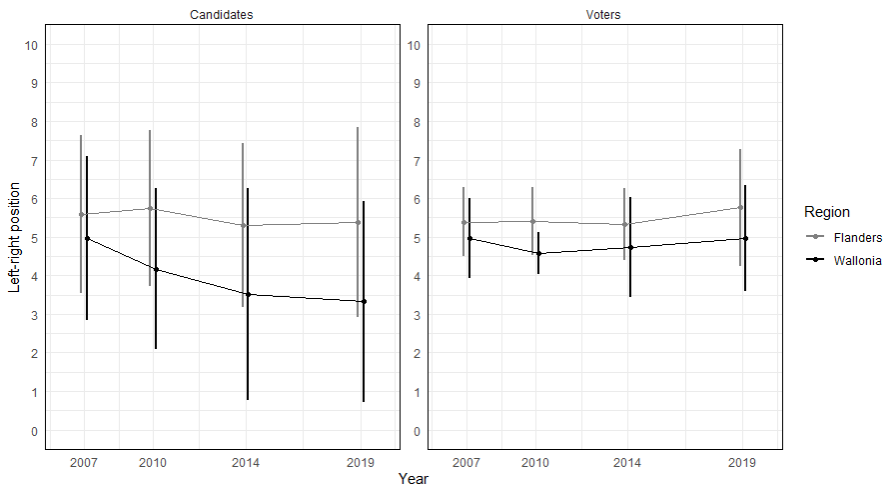


Figure 7.1: A comparison of the left-right self-placement of voters and candidates in Flanders and in Wallonia from 2007 to 2019 (0-10 scale)

Note: Mid-point = mean, bars = standard deviation (only based on aggregated data by party here). Regional scores were weighted based on parties' electoral vote share.

These observations call for a more detailed look into the distribution of positions by political party, visualized in Figure 7.1. Such a look shows us first that the leftist turn in Wallonia stems not only from the radical left PTB who has gained increasing votes in recent years. The candidates of the traditional socialist PS also position themselves

increasingly towards the political left. Beside stability among most other parties, we see that overall, the difference between parties within each region are larger than the differences between regions displayed above – which is not to cover the fact that the electoral strongholds remain on the right in Flanders and on the left in Wallonia. At the same time, the tendency already spotted above across regions for voters to be more centered than their candidates is also confirmed across parties – both on the left and on the right.

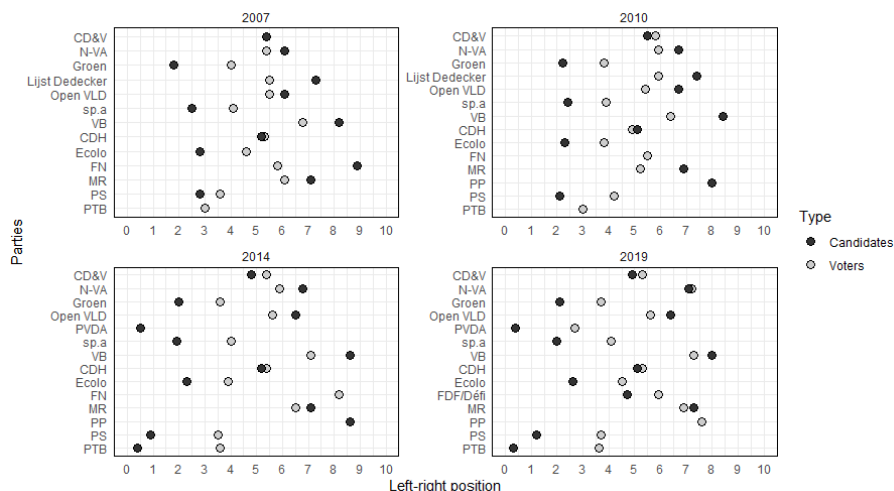


Figure 7.2: A comparison of the left-right self-placement of voters and candidates in Flanders and in Wallonia from 2007 to 2019, by political party (0-10 scale)

Now, what does this glance at the evolution of left-right self-placements among Flemish and Walloon voters and candidates between 2007 and 2019 tell us for the future of the Belgium? Well, at first, we do see a growing discrepancy of the political left-right positioning of candidates in Flanders and Wallonia, indicating that there is a growing apart of the elites of the two regions. Among voters, however, this tendency is not reflected. Voters in Flanders and Wallonia are on average more centered than the candidates they vote for and there is no real growing apart observed at this stage.

In addition to this conclusion, two caveats deserve mentioning – both related to the left-right scale as a measurement tool for voters’ and candidates’ political position. First, one should keep in mind that voters may be less familiar with and have a different perception of the left-right scale than elites. They may indeed see themselves as belonging to the political center although their opinions are effectively more leftist or rightist. Secondly, while candidates can be expected to be more aware of their effective position on the scale, their responses may be influenced by the way in which they want to see themselves rather than by the effective policies of their party. One may

wonder indeed whether the PS really became more leftist in recent years, or whether its candidates wished to position themselves as such in reaction to the increasing electoral pressure from the radical left PTB.

2. Ethno-territorial identities

Existing studies of identity in Belgium do not find empirical evidence of regional identities gaining importance (De Winter & Frogner, 1999; De Winter, 2007; Deschouwer et al., 2015a; 2015b)², in spite of the increasingly strong community tensions in recent years (Sinardet et al., 2018; Devillers et al., 2019; Reuchamps et al., 2020b; Thijssen et al., 2021). There have been discussions on the linguistic border and perimeters of Brussels, the competencies and funding of Communities and Regions and the splitting of the electoral constituency of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde where Flemish and French-speaking political arenas used to overlap (Deschouwer & Reuchamps, 2013; Bouhon & Reuchamps, 2018). In 2010, the N-VA, a Flemish nationalist political party, became the country's largest party, a position further reinforced in 2014 (Baudewyns et al., 2015; Dandoy et al., 2015). Given the post-2010 electoral long government formation (541 days) generated by the demand of different Flemish parties for more autonomy and francophone parties' desire for the federal system to remain unchanged, one could have expected that Flemish identity in Flanders and Belgian identity in Wallonia would have been reinforced (Reuchamps, 2013b).

In Table 7.2, we show the evolution of Flemish or Walloon, and Belgian identities among voters and candidates from 2007 to 2014, using the so-called Linz-Moreno question (Linz, 1975; Moreno, 1986; Moreno, 2006; Frogner & Baudewyns, 2007) that offers five possible responses: only X, more X than Y, as X as Y, more Y than X, only Y, to the question "Which of the following propositions match the most your vision of yourself?". In Belgium, the propositions were the following (with a variation between the two main language groups):

- I feel only Flemish/Walloon;
- I feel more Flemish/Walloon than Belgian;
- I feel as Flemish/Walloon as Belgian;
- I feel more Belgian than Flemish/Walloon;
- I feel only Belgian.

² Lieven De Winter has played a major role in these existing studies, as it is reminded in the introduction of this volume. This section and the following one are largely drawn from a chapter co-authored by Lieven De Winter and published in the book *Candidates, Parties and Voters in the Belgian Partitocracy*, edited by Audrey Vandeleene, Lieven De Winter and Pierre Baudewyns.

Table 7.2. A comparison of the sense of political identity among voters and candidates in Flanders and in Wallonia from 2007 to 2014 (%)

	2007			2010			2014		
	<i>Voters</i>	<i>Candidates</i>	Δ	<i>Voters</i>	<i>Candidates</i>	Δ	<i>Voters</i>	<i>Candidates</i>	Δ
<i>Flanders</i>									
Only Flemish	7,3	22,1	-14,8	8,0	32,1	-24,1	8,7	14,9	-6,2
More Flemish than Belgian	27,4	29,3	-1,9	27,4	23,8	3,6	18,4	16,2	-2,2
As Flemish as Belgian	35,5	30,4	5,1	41,3	28,5	12,8	41,7	28,5	13,2
More Belgian than Flemish	17,0	9,2	7,8	12,4	12,5	-0,1	8,0	27,5	-19,5
Only Belgian	12,7	7,7	5,0	10,9	3,1	7,8	23,2	12,9	10,3
<i>Wallonia</i>									
Only Walloon	1,6	1,4	0,2	4,4	2,7	1,7	2,1	1,6	0,5
More Walloon than Belgian	6,1	7,0	-0,9	5,0	6,9	-1,9	6,9	5,4	1,5
As Walloon as Belgian	38,0	45,1	-7,1	21,1	54,9	-33,8	42,7	39,1	3,6
More Belgian than Walloon	19,9	35,9	-16,0	22,8	29,8	-7,0	11,7	32,2	-20,5
Only Belgian	34,4	8,9	25,5	46,7	5,7	41,0	36,6	20,7	15,9

Among voters, all data yielded by the Linz-Moreno question does not display any increase of regional identities. In Flanders, the “only Flemish” category, which expresses the strongest the exclusive Flemish identity, hovered around 7 to 9%. This answer category is the least chosen during the entire period (except 2014). The third category “as Flemish as Belgian” is the most frequently selected by Flemish respondents, on average. During the period under study, between 35% and 42% chose this answer category. This situation has remained unchanged in spite of the increasing inter-community tensions in 2007 and in 2010-2011. Rather, we observe an opposite, pro-Belgium trend: in 2014, many more Flemish voters felt “only Belgian” (23%, the double of 2010) while we find clearly fewer respondents in the category “more Flemish than Belgian” (which decreased from 27% to 18%).

On the Walloon side, Belgian identity is even more strongly prominent compared to the regional identity, although the trends are less linear. In 2014, 37% of the Walloon respondents felt “only Belgian”, and 12% felt “more Walloon than Belgian”. The middle category had always been (except in 2010) the most favored option (43% in 2014), whereas those who feel “more Walloon than Belgian” or “only Walloon” constituted a very small minority (7% and 2% respectively).

However, when comparing the answers of the Walloon and Flemish candidates, the picture appears to be more contrasted. The Flemish candidates, i.e. the candidates running in the federal and regional elections, opt more markedly than the voters do for the “only Flemish” political identity (22.1% in 2007, 32.1% in 2010 and 15.6% in 2014). The difference in percentages between the candidates and the voters indicates a gap that has widened between 2007 and 2010, and narrowed between 2010 and 2014. This difference is easily explained by the 2007 and 2010 political context, in which the N-VA gained predominance in electoral and political terms within the Flemish party system. The identity of N-VA candidates is very clear, as the party advocates a very strong Flemish identity. Many candidates also choose the “as Flemish as Belgian” answer category, but to a lesser extent than voters. This is also the case for the “only Belgian” answer category. The two categories that reflect the strongest Flemish identity (“only Flemish” and “more Flemish than Belgian”) are systematically more popular among candidates than voters. Despite the focus on Flemish identity in public discourse of Flemish parties and media (Sinardet, 2013), this phenomenon is mainly observed on the candidates’ side, rather than amongst voters.

On the Walloon side there is less difference between candidates and voters, concerning the strength of the regional identity. Only about 5% of them declared themselves as “only Walloon” in 2007 and 2010, with a slightly lower score in 2014. The majority of candidates and voters fall under the “Belgian” pole, declaring themselves as either “as Walloon as Belgian”, “more Belgian than Walloon”, or even as “only Belgian”. However the ‘only Belgian’ category is systematically stronger among voters than candidates, although this gap diminishes in 2014 because of a rise of this category among candidates, suggesting a ‘Belgicisation’ trend.

Generally, these results suggest a genuine stability of the relative weight of different entities amongst the public’s feelings about identity. Changes over time, if any, do not seem to boost regional identities. This confirms all previous research results, regardless of how the question is asked (Frogner & De Winter, 2013). Attitudes thus do not vary according to intensive outburst of community conflicts. When parties that strongly mobilize on the identity issue, lose votes (as was the case of the Flemish Volksunie until 2001, or earlier in the case of the Rassemblement Wallon) or, on the contrary, win votes (such as the Vlaams Belang after 1991, or the N-VA after 2007), this cannot be considered as the result of “identities adrift”. These are visibly more stable than what high electoral volatility levels would suggest (Baudewyns et al., 2015; Dandoy et al., 2015). The stability of identities does not mean that voters’ opinions are not varying on other matters indirectly related to identity, such as the future of Belgium’s institutional configuration, as we will discuss in the next section.

Before turning to this question, Tables 7.3a and 7.3b look at the most recent data, those collected from the voters after the 2019 elections. Then, the identity question that was asked to respondents was not the Linz-Moreno question but the so-called hierarchical question. The question asked was: “To which cultural or geographical

entity do you feel you belong to in the first and the second place?” with as possible answer categories Europe, Belgium, The French Community of Belgium, The Flemish Region or Community, The German-speaking Community; The Walloon Region; The Region of Brussels-Capital, Your province, Your town or commune. In the following table, we show the results for the voters, grouped by their vote choice (political party), first for Flanders (Table 7.3a) and then for Wallonia (Table 7.3b).

Table 7.3a. Sense of political identity in Flanders among voters in 2019, by political party (%)

Flanders	Europe	Belgium	The Flemish Region or Community	Your province	Your town or commune
CD&V	8,0	57,6	21,5	6,6	5,5
Groen	19,9	53,2	11,3	2,2	11,9
N-VA	5,1	35,0	49,7	2,9	7,4
Open VLD	13,4	61,3	13,0	1,1	9,7
PVDA	16,0	55,4	16,1	7,2	5,3
sp.a	13,7	53,7	20,9	5,5	6,3
Vlaams Belang	3,3	34,1	46,1	5,8	10,1

Table 7.3a shows, on the one hand, that a majority of the voters for Flemish traditional parties (CD&V, Open VLD, sp. a) and for Groen choose Belgium as their first choice. This is also the case for the voters for the countrywide PVDA. On the other hand, almost one N-VA and Vlaams Belang voter out of two opt for The Flemish Region or Community as their first choice. This said, one voter out of three for these two same parties choose Belgium as first choice.

Table 7.3b. Sense of political identity in Wallonia among voters in 2019, by political party (%)

Wallonia	Europe	Belgium	The French-speaking Community	The Walloon Region	Your province	Your town or commune
cdH	2,7	71,1	3,1	8,8	4,8	8,2
DéFI	6,8	67,5	4,2	0,0	8,5	13,1
Ecolo	15,6	49,1	7,1	11,5	3,8	11,2
MR	12,3	65,8	5,2	4,8	2,4	6,9
PP	0,0	63,1	8,8	5,7	0,0	16,7
PS	6,6	61,7	4,5	14,8	2,6	7,2
PTB	6,7	50,5	7,3	16,6	5,3	12,4

In Wallonia, a majority of voters, regardless of their vote choice, choose Belgium as first choice. There are however some differences between the electorates. cdH voters are those who identified the most with Belgium (71,1%), whereas ecole voters are ‘only’ 49,1% who choose Belgium as a first choice. The identification to Europe comes second for these voters (15,6%). It is interesting to note that among PS and PTB voters, we find a group of around 15% of voters in each party who identify first with the Walloon Region. As the responses to the Linz-Moreno questions showed: there is a significant group of voters in Wallonia who identify first and foremost with Belgium.

What can we conclude from this longitudinal overview of the feelings of identities among both candidates and voters? Three findings are striking. First, the differences between the two main language groups are very far from being as deep as expected from the repeated political tensions between elites. Second, there is no evolution towards stronger regional identities over the period under scrutiny, rather to the contrary, given the strengthening of the Belgian identity election after election. Third, the question whether candidates are more radical than their voters finds a nuanced answer: in some instances, such as for the VB and the N-VA, candidates have a stronger Flemish identity than their voters, but in others, especially in Wallonia, voters feel more exclusively Belgian than their candidates. The following step in our inquiry is to explore whether these identities find an echo in the institutional preferences for the future of Belgium.

3. Institutional preferences

In the previous section, we sought to assess, over a 15-years period, the evolution and more specifically the (in)congruence between the identities of candidates and of voters in the two main Belgian regions. In countries where different identities coexist, the structure of the state has usually been – more or less – adapted to accommodate these diverging identities (Reuchamps, 2015). Billiet and colleagues observed in 2006 that “the stronger subnational feelings in Flanders are also translated into more outspoken support for the further federalisation of Belgium” (Billiet, Maddens, & Frogner, 2006, p. 917). The question that remains is whether, since then, this trend has evolved in both Flanders and Wallonia, and whether there are differences between candidates and voters.

In Belgium, institutional preferences regarding the potential reform of the Belgian state towards more or less devolution has been tapped by a question asking respondents to position themselves on a so-called devolution scale (Reuchamps et al., 2017; Sinardet et al., 2018; Reuchamps et al., 2021). Generally, the question reads as follows: “The form that state should have in our country is still discussed. On this regard, some think that “regions and communities (Walloon region, Brussels region, French-speaking community and German-speaking community) should make all decisions”,

while others on the contrary think that “Belgium should make all the decisions”. Where would you position yourself?”. On this basis, respondents are asked to situate their preferences for Belgian federalism on a Likert scale where “0” means a preference for an exclusive regional self-rule situation (“Regions and Communities should make all the decisions”) while “10” implies that “Belgium should make all the decisions”. The point “5” means that respondents are satisfied with the status quo.

For the sake of clarity and parsimony, we summarize the answers on this scale into three categories: “pro region” (0-4), “status quo” (5) and “pro Belgium” (6-10). In Table 7.4, we present data collected from both voters and candidates around three elections: 2007, 2010, 2014.

Table 7.4. A comparison of the institutional preferences among voters and candidates in Flanders and in Wallonia from 2007 to 2014 (%)

	2007			2010			2014		
<i>Flanders</i>	<i>Voters</i>	<i>Candidates</i>	Δ	<i>Voters</i>	<i>Candidates</i>	Δ	<i>Voters</i>	<i>Candidates</i>	Δ
Pro region	42,3	56,5	-14,2	38,3	68,8	-30,5	43,4	54,9	-11,5
Status quo	17,1	20,6	-3,5	27,2	14,7	12,5	34,9	29,4	5,5
Pro Belgium	40,6	22,9	17,7	34,5	16,5	18,0	21,7	15,7	6,0
<i>Wallonia</i>	<i>Voters</i>	<i>Candidates</i>	Δ	<i>Voters</i>	<i>Candidates</i>	Δ	<i>Voters</i>	<i>Candidates</i>	Δ
Pro region	13,3	13,9	-0,6	15,7	20,3	-4,6	26,1	27,3	-1,2
Status quo	26,6	27,9	-1,3	32,0	41,6	-9,6	30,2	26,3	3,9
Pro Belgium	60,2	58,1	2,1	52,3	38,1	14,2	43,7	46,5	-2,8

In Flanders, a first striking observation is the large difference between the institutional preferences of the voters and of the candidates. The comparison indeed shows noteworthy differences, of which the biggest is observed in 2010 (and in 2007, to a lesser extent but following the same pattern) regarding the positions on the regionalization of competencies, that is more power for the Regions and Communities, with two-thirds of the candidates demanding more autonomy versus “only” a bit more than one-third of the voters. For that year, we also find a large difference between the positioning of voters and candidates concerning the position “Belgium should make all the decisions” with twice as many voters (34,5%) as candidates (16,5%) supporting this claim. It is also interesting to note that the middle category, that prefers the institutional status quo, also increases over time for voters (from 17,1% to 34,9%). Taking a step back, it is quite clear that the large differences between candidates and voters in 2007 and 2010 should be understood in light of the ongoing political tensions between the elites of the two main language groups in the period 2007-2011. In this period,

Flemish candidates were demanding regional autonomy more than their voters, who seemed to remain somewhat distant from these political tensions and negotiations.

In Wallonia, differences between the opinions of candidates and voters are less important. On the 0-4 positions (“pro region”), the proportions of candidates and voters are relatively identical and increase in the same direction. The proportions of the “status quo” category (position 5) are also similar, with the exception of 2010 where the difference is larger. That year, it is interesting to compare Flemish and Walloon candidates because their respective position reveals where the political negotiations were at an impasse: Flemish candidates wanted more autonomy and Walloon candidates were defending the status quo. No wonder then why it took a year and a half to reach an agreement between both language groups (Deschouwer & Reuchamps, 2013).

In order to go deeper into the analysis, we can look at the 2019 voter survey and compare voter’s institutional preferences in light of their party choice. We first do it for Flanders (Table 7.5a) and then for Wallonia (Table 7.5b).

Table 7.5a. Institutional preferences in Flanders among voters in 2019, by political party (%)

Flanders	Pro region	Status quo	Pro Belgium
CD&V	32,1	32,7	35,2
Groen	33,2	24,9	42,0
N-VA	61,7	16,0	22,3
Open VLD	31,4	30,0	38,6
PVDA	28,3	26,4	45,3
sp.a	24,1	31,9	44,0
Vlaams Belang	47,9	25,2	27,0
Total	41,5	25,5	33,0

Table 7.5a. allows to dig further into these institutional preferences by looking at voters according to their vote choice. The data resonates with the N-VA discourse relating strong Flemish identity with further regionalization of competencies. Indeed, over 60% of N-VA voters are pro region, which is many more than for all other parties, including Vlaams Belang voters who are less than 50% to be pro region. On the other side of the institutional spectrum, PVDA, sp.a and Groen (as well as Open VLD and CD&V in a lesser extent) voters are more inclined towards Belgium.

Table 7.5b. Institutional preferences in Wallonia among voters in 2019, by political party (%)

Wallonia	Pro region	Status quo	Pro Belgium
cdH	19,2	39,7	41,1
DéFI	19,5	22,2	58,3
Ecolo	30,9	27,6	41,5
MR	14,1	24,3	61,6
PP	24,5	27,4	48,1
PS	40,7	24,0	35,3
PTB	33,3	25,7	41,0
Total	28,5	26,7	44,8

Table 7.5b presents the institutional preferences of the voters by political party. The preferences of Walloon voters reflect the classic picture of the Walloon landscape on this dimension (Dodeigne et al., 2013; 2015; 2016; 2021). 40% of Socialist Party's voters shows a "regionalist" inclination, which is a marked difference with other parties (even if among PS voters there is also a 'Belgicist' group). Indeed, the largest group of voters for all other parties is the "pro Belgium" one. This said, for the voters of the cdH one finds almost as many of them in the "status quo" category (position 5).

Previous works by Lieven De Winter have shown that the longitudinal analyses of institutional preferences indicate a certain degree of congruence between candidates and voters throughout the years despite the country's divided nature. However, during the period 2007-2011, infested by severe inter-community tensions, incongruence reached a peak, both between Flemings and Walloons as well as between candidates and voters. In the years before and after, congruence was rather business as usual.

Conclusion

To the question "Does Belgium (still) exist?", Jaak Billiet, Bart Maddens and André-Paul Frogner answered in 2006 that "emotional ties to Belgium remain, in both regions, an important counterbalance to the centrifugal forces, both institutional and social" and added "these forces are also contained by the fact that an over-arching Belgian political and economic elite still exists, which uses its not inconsiderable, albeit significantly reduced power to maintain the unity of the country" (Billiet, Maddens, & Frogner, 2006, p. 930). In this chapter, following the works of Lieven De Winter, we have sought to update this research by looking at left-right self-placement, ethno-territorial identities and institutional preferences in the two main regions of Belgium: Flanders and Wallonia. In addition to public opinion (i.e. voters), we have also looked

at elite opinion (i.e. candidates), so that we can not only offer a comparison between the two language groups but also within each of these language groups.

Looking at the evolution of left-right self-placement among Flemish and Walloon voters and candidates in the last 15 years, we observed a growing discrepancy between candidates in Flanders and Wallonia but not between voters. In fact, the latter are on average more centered than the former. This trend can also be seen when looking at ethno-territorial identities. Indeed, somewhat counterintuitively to the usual presentation of Belgium as a country divided by the language groups, the findings show that the divide is actually larger between voters and candidates than between language groups. This is not so much the case for institutional preferences. Lieven De Winter's works have shown some congruence between candidates and voters throughout the years despite the country's divided nature. Yet, as it can be clearly seen in the data presented in this chapter, the political tensions in 2007-2011 sparked incongruence both between Flemings and Walloons and between candidates and voters.

Does Belgium still exist? And what role do political parties play in this dynamic? In this chapter, we try to give a nuanced answer to an otherwise heatedly debated question. The tendencies indicate that there is still quite some common ground between voters, while elites tend to drift apart. This drift has in the past been attributed to various features of the consociational federal architecture of the Belgian state. Whether a reform of the latter can and should address the former issue lies beyond the scope of this chapter. Yet, a seventh state reform is in preparation. But, however, this time with a citizen component, via an online platform and mixed deliberative committees made of parliamentarians and randomly selected citizens (Reuchamps, 2020; Vrydagh et al., 2021). Next to the typical political (i.e. partitocratic) dialogue, there is – some form of – a citizen dialogue in motion to shape the future of Belgium. Will this mean the end of partitocracy in Belgium, only the future will tell.

References

- Billiet, J., Maddens, B., & Frogner, A.-P. (2006). Does Belgium (still) exist? Differences in political culture between Flemings and Walloons. *West European Politics*, 29(5), 912-932.
- Abts, K., Swyngedouw, M. & Billiet, J. (2011). Belgian National Election Study 2010. Codebook: Questions and frequency tables. Leuven: Institute for Social and Political Opinion research, ISPO - KU Leuven.
- Baudewyns, P., Dandoy, R., & Reuchamps, M. (2015). The Success of the Regionalist Parties in the 2014 Elections in Belgium. *Regional & Federal Studies*, 25(1), 91-102.
- Bouhon, F., & Reuchamps, M. (Eds.). (2018). *Les systèmes électoraux de la Belgique* (2e ed.). Bruxelles: Larcier.

- Caluwaerts, D., & Reuchamps, M. (2015). Combining Federalism with Consociationalism: Is Belgian Consociational Federalism Digging its Own Grave? *Ethnopolitics*, 14(3), 277-295.
- Caluwaerts, D., & Reuchamps, M. (2020). Still Consociational? Belgian Democracy, 50 Years After 'The Politics of Accommodation'. *Politics of the Low Countries*, 2(1), 28-50.
- Caluwaerts, D., & Reuchamps, M. (Eds.). (2022). *Belgian Exceptionalism: Belgian Politics between Realism and Surrealism*. Abingdon & New York: Routledge.
- Dandoy, R., Reuchamps, M., & Baudewyns, P. (2015). The 2014 Federal and European Elections in Belgium. *Electoral Studies*, 39, 164-168.
- De Winter, L. (2007). Les identités territoriales : 25 ans d'évolution. In A.-P. Frogner, L. De Winter, & P. Baudewyns (Eds.), *Élections : le reflux ? Comportements et attitudes lors des élections en Belgique* (pp. 141-156). Bruxelles: De Boeck.
- De Winter, L., & Baudewyns, P. (2009). Belgium: Towards the Breakdown of a Nation-State in the Heart of Europe? *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 15(3), 280-304.
- De Winter, L., & Frogner, A.-P. (1999). Les identités ethno-territoriales des Wallons: explorations dans un champ de mines politique et méthodologique. In A.-P. Frogner & A.-M. Aish (Eds.), *Des élections en trompe-l'oeil. Enquête sur le comportement électoral des Wallons et des Francophones* (pp. 67-96). Bruxelles: De Boeck Université.
- De Winter, L., & Van Wynsberghe, C. (2015). Kingdom of Belgium: Partitocracy, Corporatist Society, and Dissociative Federalism. In K. Detterbeck, W. Renzsch, & J. Kincaid (Eds.), *Political Parties and Civil Society in Federal Countries* (pp. 40-69). Don Mills: Oxford University Press.
- Deschouwer, K. (2009). Coalition Formation and Congruence in a Multi-layered Setting: Belgium 1995-2008. *Regional & Federal Studies*, 19(1), 13-35.
- Deschouwer, K., De Winter, L., Reuchamps, M., Sinardet, D., & Dodeigne, J. (2015). Les attitudes communautaires et le vote. In K. Deschouwer, P. Delwit, M. Hooghe, P. Baudewyns, & S. Walgrave (Eds.), *Décrypter l'électeur : Le comportement électoral et les motivations de vote* (pp. 156-173). Louvain: LannooCampus.
- Deschouwer, K., De Winter, L., Reuchamps, M., Sinardet, D., & Dodeigne, J. (2015). Communautaire overtuigingen en stemgedrag. In K. Deschouwer, P. Delwit, M. Hooghe, P. Baudewyns, & S. Walgrave (Eds.), *De kiezer ontcijferd: Over stemgedrag en stemmotivaties* (pp. 151-167). Leuven: LannooCampus.
- Deschouwer, K., & Reuchamps, M. (2013). The Belgian Federation at a Crossroad. *Regional & Federal Studies*, 23(3), 261-270.

- Devilleers, S., Baudewyns, P., De Winter, L., & Reuchamps, M. (2019). Who do you feel and what future do you want for Belgium? A comparison of candidates and voters' identities and institutional preferences. In A. Vandeleene, P. Baudewyns, & L. De Winter (Eds.), *Candidates, Parties and Voters in the Belgian Partitocracy* (pp. 245-272). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dodeigne, J., Gramme, P., Reuchamps, M., & Sinardet, D. (2016). Beyond linguistic and party homogeneity: Determinants of Belgian MPs' preferences on federalism and state reform. *Party Politics*, 22(4), 427-439.
- Dodeigne, J., Niessen, C., Reuchamps, M., & Sinardet, D. (2021). The Effect of Institutional Affiliation and Career Patterns on (De)centralization Preferences in Advanced Multi-Level States: Parliamentarians' Support for (De)Centralization in Belgium. *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 51(2), 262-282.
- Dodeigne, J., & Renard, H. (2018). Annexe n°3. Les résultats électoraux depuis 1847. In F. Bouhon & M. Reuchamps (Eds.), *Les systèmes électoraux de la Belgique* (pp. 675-700). Bruxelles: Larcier.
- Dodeigne, J., Reuchamps, M., & Sinardet, D. (2013). L'avenir du fédéralisme en Belgique. Visions des parlementaires fédéraux et régionaux avant l'accord sur la sixième réforme de l'État. *Revue nouvelle*, (6), 40-55.
- Dodeigne, J., Reuchamps, M., & Sinardet, D. (2015). Identités, préférences et attitudes des parlementaires envers le fédéralisme belge après la sixième réforme de l'État. *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, (2278), 5-51.
- Frogner, A.-P., & Baudewyns, P. (2007). Introduction. Pourquoi la Question Moreno ? *Revue Internationale de Politique Comparée*, 144(4), 489-495.
- Frogner, A.-P., & De Winter, L. (2013). Les Belges et le fédéralisme. Les leçons des enquêtes de 1970 à 2007. In R. Dandoy, G. Matagne, & C. Van Wynsberghe (Eds.), *Le fédéralisme belge. Enjeux institutionnels, acteurs socio-politiques et opinions publiques* (pp. 205-226). Bruxelles: Academia Bruylant.
- Linz, J. J. (1975). Politics in a Multi-Lingual Society with a Dominant World Language: The Case of Spain. In J.-G. Savard & R. Vigneault (Eds.), *Les États multilingues, problèmes et solutions* (pp. 367-444). Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval.
- Moreno, L. (1986). *Decentralization in Britain and Spain: The Cases of Scotland and Catalonia*. Doctoral thesis, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh.
- Moreno, L. (2006). Scotland, Catalonia, Europeanization and the 'Moreno Question'. *Scottish Affairs*, 45(1), 1-21.
- Reuchamps, M. (Ed.) (2015). *Minority Nations in Multinational Federations: A comparative study of Quebec and Wallonia*. Abingdon & New York: Routledge.
- Reuchamps, M. (2020). Belgium's experiment in permanent forms of deliberative democracy. *ConstitutionNet*, 1-9. Retrieved from <http://constitutionnet.org/news/belgiums-experiment-permanent-forms-deliberative-democracy>.

- Reuchamps, M., Baudewyns, P., Dandoy, R., Gallina, M., & Niessen, C. (2020a). From a green high tide to government participation: the successes of ECOLO and GROEN in the 2019 Belgian elections. *Environmental Politics*, 29(2), 344-348.
- Reuchamps, M., Boerjan, H., Niessen, C., & Randour, F. (2021). More or less regional autonomy? A qualitative analysis of citizen arguments towards (de)centralization in Belgium. *Comparative European Politics*, 19(2), 225-247.
- Reuchamps, M., De Winter, L., Dodeigne, J., Sinardet, D., & Thijssen, P. (2020b). Comportement électoral, identité, autonomie, solidarité et contact interrégional. In J.-B. Pilet, P. Baudewyns, K. Deschouwer, A. Kern, & J. Lefevre (Eds.), *Les Belges haussent leur voix : Une analyse des comportements électoraux du 26 mai 2019* (pp. 197-213). Louvain-la-Neuve: Presses universitaires de Louvain.
- Reuchamps, M., Sinardet, D., Dodeigne, J., & Caluwaerts, D. (2017). Reforming Belgium's Federalism: Comparing the Views of MPs and Voters. *Government and Opposition*, 52(3), 460-482.
- Sinardet, D., De Winter, L., Dodeigne, J., & Reuchamps, M. (2018). Language, identity and voting. In K. Deschouwer (Ed.), *Mind the Gap: Political Participation and Representation in Belgium* (pp. 113-132). Colchester: Rowman & Littlefield International / ECPR Press.
- Sinardet, D. (2021). Flemish Nationalism and the Left-Right Divide. Consequences for Constitutional Politics in Belgium. In A. Lecours, N. Brassard-Dion, & G. Laforest (Eds.), *Constitutional Politics in Multinational Democracies* (pp. 132-157). Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Swyngedouw, M., Abts, K., & Billiet, J. (2014). Verschuivingen in het stemgedrag (2007-2010). In K. Abts, M. Swyngedouw, J. Billiet, & B. Meuleman (Eds.), *Vlaanderen kiest: Trends in stemgedrag en opvattingen over politiek, staatshervorming en kerk* (pp. 131-146). Leuven: LannooCampus.
- Thijssen, P., Reuchamps, M., De Winter, L., Dodeigne, J., & Sinardet, D. (2021). Inter-regional contacts and voting behaviour in Belgium: What can we learn from the 2019 elections? *Regional & Federal Studies*, 1-22.
- Vrydagh, J., Bottin, J., Reuchamps, M., Bouhon, F., & Devillers, S. (2021). Les commissions délibératives entre parlementaires et citoyens tirés au sort au sein des assemblées bruxelloises. *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, (2492), 5-68.

Chapter 8. Mediatization and partitocracy

Opposite poles or partners in crime?

Peter Van Aelst
Maximilien Cogels

Introduction

There is a growing consensus that the media have an increasing influence on politics. The idea that news media are all-powerful is not a far-fetched idea. People extensively consume news and learn almost everything they know about politics through (old and new) media. Politicians, on the other hand, walk into parliament with a newspaper, leaving no doubt where they find their inspiration. A survey has shown that the vast majority of (Flemish) parliamentarians strongly believe in the all-powerful paradigm of the media. In 2006, for instance, 91% of the members of parliament agreed with the statement that the media can make or break politicians, and more than 70% agreed with the proposition that the media determine the political agenda, while politicians have little control over it. This view among politicians is by no means a national phenomenon; Norwegian and Swedish members of parliament also strongly believe in all the powerfulness of the media (van Dalen & Van Aelst, 2014).

The central thesis of this chapter is not that the media have become all-powerful, as there is no question of a mediocracy, but rather that politics have become highly mediated and that this has important consequences for how politics are practiced. The mediatization means that the importance of the media has steadily increased over time and that politics gradually and structurally adapted to the media and its logic. However, the mediatization of politics does not imply, contrary to the idea of a mediocracy, that the power of politics has been eroded. The central thesis of this contribution is that the mediatization of politics has not led to the demise of the partitocracy. Parties have certainly maintained their central position, as well as their dominant impact on the political decision-making in the Belgian context. De Winter and Dumont (2006) argue that parties have been able to adapt to political challenges over time, and that as a consequence, Belgium has become even more partitocratic than in the 1970 and 1980s. In this chapter we will focus specifically on why mediatization and partitocracy go so well together. We see two important explanations for this. Firstly, media logic does not always appear to be at odds with the conventional political party logic. Especially in their daily political reporting, the media often strengthen the existing power relations within and between parties, rather than changing them. As a result,

“ordinary” politicians such as members of parliament receive hardly any attention and have hardly seen their influence increase within and outside the party. Moreover, in the Belgian context, the personalization of politics does not appear to mean that politicians oppose their party, but rather that they show themselves to be loyal defenders of the party. Secondly, it seems that parties have managed to adapt to the media logic in such a way that they have been able to maintain their central position of power. Parties and ministries have brought a bit of “media knowledge” into their organization, partly through the incorporation of journalists. Political actors are becoming more and more familiar with the workings and logic of the news media and are also increasingly focusing on new media channels, which enables them to bypass the most critical journalists.

In this chapter we elaborate on these two statements. First, we will elaborate on the relationship between media and politics in Belgium and explore how this relationship has changed over the last decades. We briefly explain the historical evolution of a pillarized press and a censored broadcasting company towards an autonomous journalism, almost free of political interference, but under increasing commercial pressure. Yet we will see that the world of journalism and politics still remains closely connected today. Next, we will take a closer look at how politicians and parties have adapted to this evolution. To do so, we will draw on the work of Strömbäck and Esser (2014) on the mediatization of politics as an overarching framework. We will briefly explain this model in the next section. In the conclusion, we speculate on the extent to which mediatization and partitocracy remain reconcilable in the digital age.

1. The framework: The mediatization of politics

Mediatization refers to a broad change in society pressured by the increased use and importance of the media as a channel of communication and information. It is a structural change that is often put on an equal footing with other broad evolution such as individualization and globalization. Thus not only politics, but also all kinds of other domains of society (ranging from religion to fashion) would undergo changes because of an increased role of the media. The concept has been increasingly used over the last decade to outline the increasing presence of the media into the political world (Kriesi et al., 2013; Lundby, 2009). Because of the importance of the media as a bridge between voter and politics in a representative democracy, it seems unthinkable that politicians should not take the media into account. The mediatization of politics is therefore used as an overarching concept to identify this increased influence of the media, as well as the responses of the political actors and institutions. Central is the idea that the media are increasingly bringing political news according to their own working methods and commercial motives. Over time politicians have adapted to this media logic, and by doing so have further strengthened the importance of the media.

Although mediatization is a broad concept, great progress has been made in recent years to better define the latter and make it “measurable”. Among the scholars who contributed, Strömbäck and Esser (2014) have the merit to have taken a first step from the theoretical concept to an empirical model. Mediatization is understood as a model that consists of four dimensions or phases. In a first phase, the media are the most important source of political information for citizens. This means that the media are by far the best way for politicians to reach a broad audience. In a second phase, the media are politically independent and do not (yet) suffer much from political pressure and interference. In a third phase, the media autonomously determine their reporting on politics and politicians have to adapt their communication to the latter. In a fourth phase, political actors and institutions adapt their political behavior to the news media and their logic. This last phase therefore also implies an influence on political policy, but also on the functioning of political institutions such as parliament or political parties.

Each phase can be understood as a continuum in which at one end the media are seen as a marginal actor, and where politics works autonomously, and at the other end the media are seen as the one in charge, forcing politicians to follow. Speaking in terms of phases implies a certain, but not straightforward, chronology in the model. Indeed, there is little chance that the news media can steer politics strongly when voters hardly use them or when journalists are still controlled by politics. In other words, the first two phases are a precondition for the third and fourth phases (see also Van Aelst, 2014, pp. 14-15). It is important to note that this is an ideal type model and that reality is more complex and differs in place and time. In other words, the degree of mediatization of politics is a research question rather than a given.

The concept of mediatization also offers a new perspective on an old power issue. Political communication scientists agree that journalists and politicians influence each other mutually, but there is no consensus on who is the leading who. Several authors point to the power of politicians in the creation of news reports, while others rather emphasize the influence of media reports on political actors. Mediatization is not so much about who has the upper hand in the power struggle, but rather about the adjustments politics has undergone as a reaction to the increased importance of the media. Indeed, this is not necessarily the same and can even lead to very different interpretations. This is apparent, for example, from a study on the role of the media in the period preceding the Gulf War in Iraq. Bennett and colleagues (2007) have shown how the Bush administration, supported by a small army of media experts and spin doctors, set the reporting to their will. The American news media are labeled as submissive and complacent towards the government. From a mediatization perspective, however, an entirely different conclusion follows: the Bush administration’s vast communication structures and sophisticated press strategy are proof of an advanced and structural form of mediatization. The media strategy has become part of the political policy. Mediatization is thus much more about the structural response of politicians to

the media than about who wins the daily battle for the news. Moreover, the concept of mediatization also takes into account so-called indirect effects and anticipatory behavior from politicians.

2. From party or partisan logic to media logic:

The media as a politically autonomous actor?

Strömbäck and Esser (2014) argue that the media become politically independent in the second phase of their mediatization model. This means that journalists and editors still have little to do with external political pressure and still are free from political interference. It does not mean, however, that the media can control politics. Rather, it is a precondition for it. The political independence of the media has certainly not been a given in the past. For a long time, Belgian journalists were in a subordinate position in which they were either asked to express a certain vision (newspapers) or, on the contrary, had to report on politics in an extremely cautious manner (television). In a first part, we sketch how the media systematically broke free from the political grip and evolved into a quasi-autonomous player with regard to politics. Although a number of evolutions are similar, the (in)dependence of newspapers and television on politics has taken on different forms. In the case of the press, we rather speak of de-pillarization; in the case of public broadcasting, it is more about depoliticization with regard to government and political parties' interests. That is why we discuss the evolution of both types of mass media separately. A third part focuses on the current situation. We examine what remains of this pillarization and politicization and how the relationship between politicians and journalists look today.

2.1. The de-pillarization of the written press

At its origin at the end of the 19th century, both the Flemish and francophone press could be considered as opinion journalism. The political message was often the *raison d'être* of a newspaper and leading politicians were often closely involved in the creation of a newspaper. The layout of newspapers was invariably according to the three major political currents: Catholic, Socialist and Liberal. As a way of example, the newspaper *La Cité*, had the objective to express the point of view of the Catholic working class, while the newspaper *Vers l'Avenir* was created with the objective to serve the church and the Catholic cause (van Peel, 2006; Lits, 2010). Neutral newspapers were non-existent in Flanders, and with the exception of *Le Soir* also on the francophone side (Hereng, 2003). Although most newspapers were counted as belonging to a certain pillar, their relationship to the central pillar organizations differed somewhat. Newspapers such as *Het Volk*, *de Vooruit*, *Courrier Wallon*, or the *Cité Nouvelle* were real party or trade union newspapers, while newspapers such as *De Standaard*, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, or *La Libre Belgique* had an outspoken party political preference, but with less obvious structural ties to the party or trade union. De Winter

(1981) showed in his longitudinal study on partitocracy (1945-1975) that until the mid-1970s, about one third of the leading figures in the newspaper world also had a top mandate in a pillar organization or party.

The relationship between politician and journalist was very close in that period. The socialist newspapers were still subject to political censorship in the post-war years. The socialist movement and especially the party injected a lot of money into their newspapers. In the more “independent” newspapers as well, the dependence with politics was particularly strong. In the 1950s, *De Standaard* and its main journalists established very close and personal ties with various leading persons from the Christian Party. Van Nieuwenhuysse (2005) shows that this relationship was rather based on reciprocity. The newspaper underwent political pressure, but also tried to influence politics itself, first and foremost the PSC-CVP, in the desired direction. During political lunches information was exchanged and journalists and politicians tried to influence each other mutually. In this way, during the formation of the government, the newspaper tried to steer the layout and the composition of the program. However, the initiative came not only from the newspaper, but also from leading politicians, such as Paul van den Boeynants, who as formateur in 1966 invited several journalists to have their insights on the government program. According to former editor-in-chief of *De Standaard* Manu Ruys (1996, p. 63), journalists of the written press were in that period in awe of the political class, and a select group of leading journalists was also consulted when important political decisions were made.

In recent decades, the structural links between the press and politics have declined sharply. Newspapers have gone their own way and overt references to political roots have disappeared. At the same time, it is striking that this has been a very slow process that only seems to have been completed at the beginning of the millennium. The Flemish socialist party only withdrew as a financier of *de Morgen* in 1986 and the cooperation between the Christian labor movement (ACW) and the newspaper *Het Volk* was only stopped in 1994. It took until 1999 before *De Standaard* had the logo AVV/VVK (“Alles voor Vlaanderen, Vlaanderen voor Kristus”) removed from its front page. The newspaper *Vers l’Avenir* (now known as *L’avenir*), was detained quasi-exclusively by the Catholic Church (bishopric of Namur) until the end of the nineties. This seems to have brought the de-pillarization of the press, just like the de-pillarization of other sectors. The journalists also distanced themselves from party politics. In 1973, 40% of the daily paper journalists were still members of a political party, by 1983 this number had dropped to 27%, and ten years later only 6% of them had a party membership card (de Bens, 2001). Today, it is unthinkable that a journalist would have a party membership card.

The very gradual de-pillarization of the press is also evident from a longitudinal study of election reporting in Flanders (Van Aelst, 2014). In the run-up to the elections of 1958 and 1968 newspapers like *De Standaard* and *Het Laatste Nieuws* openly showed their support for respectively the then CVP and the liberal party, first PVV

later VLD. Between 1970 and 1980 the partisan tone in newspaper reporting is still visible, albeit in a more subtle manner. In francophone newspapers of the period, there was still a visible preference for candidates “sharing” the political color or ideological orientation of the newspaper. In the elections of 78 and 79, *La Dernière Heure* only interviewed or portrayed liberal candidates, the Catholic newspapers, such as *La Libre Belgique* or *Vers l’Avenir* focused on Catholic candidates. The same was seen for newspapers having a socialist and communist background (Thoveron et al., 1978). At the end of the 1990s this was hardly ever the case and political disengagement seemed almost complete. Newspapers only show a certain bias because of their open disapproval of the right-wing extremist party *Vlaams Blok/Belang*. We can conclude that the newspapers have evolved from a partisan approach to a more open and at the same time detached critical approach. In 1958 *De Standaard* considered it its mission to persuade the reader to vote for the CVP; in 1999 CD&V was openly criticized for its failing government policy. In forty years, one has almost silently evolved from one position to another. Although the de-pillarization of the written press has been rather slow, compared to our neighbouring countries, it seems to have continued in a certain sense. In Belgium, no newspaper pronounces itself in favor of any particular party before the elections, which is still common in the British press, for instance.

2.2. The struggle for the political independence of the audiovisual media

The relationship between politics and public broadcasting has also changed considerably over the years, but the evolution is clearly different from that of the written press. Public broadcasting in Belgium was originally highly politicized (Burgelman, 1990). The impact of the government was particularly important before 1960. Indeed, the Board of Directors was appointed by the Council of Ministers and chaired by the competent minister. The minister could and did intervene directly in news broadcasts (De Winter, 1981). Gradually, political influence on the government’s “state broadcasting” shifted to the three classic parties. This was also translated in the political equilibrium inside the Board of Directors. As it was the case with the written press, the media and politics seemed to considerably overlap during this period. The journalistic base may or may not have been forced to identify with the party and its representatives in the Board of Directors (Boone, 1998). To note that around the same time with the State reform of 1970, the RTB-BRT split into the RTB (who will later add the F to reference to the francophone part), and the BRT (who would later change to VRT, to reference the Flemish part).

Despite the great similarity to the situation found in the written press, the manner of reporting was substantially different. While the newspaper journalist was almost encouraged to express his or her political opinion, the journalists of the audiovisual media were expected to be extremely neutral and cautious. The journalists’ own

contribution to the news was minimal. Broadcasting journalism functioned as a passive conduit, mainly for events with an official character. In addition, the news consisted of manifestations of all kinds of civil society organizations, primarily the classical political parties and the major recognized pillar organizations. This so-called “news on demand” was not initiated by the journalist, but was ordered in advance by those involved. The Board of Directors did assess the objectivity of programs from the news sector as a permanent item on the agenda. It came down to the traditional parties each having their say. According to the Council, quoting non-pillarized actors as a news source led to ambiguity and social unrest, and was therefore best avoided as much as possible.

At the end of the 1970s the broadcasting journalists began to resist the very passive and law-abiding interpretation of their function. This increasingly led to conflicts with politicians. For the first time within the television campaign, a group of “colorless” people arose who could not immediately be labeled. Especially under this new generation of journalists a more active and critical journalistic view was adopted. In the course of the 1980s, the journalists gradually gained autonomy. The recruitment of journalists was also based less on a political criterion and more and more on a competence criterion. Political interference in reporting was reduced, but the pressure remained to show the necessary restraint, especially in times of high tension. In 1985, for example, two activists had spoken out against the deployment of missiles on Belgian ground. Former PVV chairman Guy Verhofstadt protested fiercely against this and was proven right by the Board of Directors of the BRT. Politicians did not intend to relinquish their grip on the broadcaster just like that.

Persistent criticism and political dissatisfaction among the Flemish Liberals and Christian Democrats would open the way to breaking the BRT monopoly, and the introduction of commercial television. According to critics, the politicians hoped for a “more willing” coverage by a commercial broadcaster. In francophone Belgium, the monopoly on information is broken around the same time with the introduction of RTL-TVI (other channels were already broadcasting, such as the competitive French television, or Télé-Luxembourg). The commercial success is undisputable, after three years, RTL-TVI becomes the most watched channel. Similarly, In Flanders, VTM became a commercial success in the early 1990s with a market share of almost 40% of viewers. The public broadcaster proved neither prepared nor able to respond. Politicians hesitated to give the BRTN more (financial) clout. It was only in 1995, under the tutelage of Media Minister Eric van Rompuy, when politics took a clear step back, that the broadcaster set a more result-oriented and independent course. In 1997 the reform was completed with a name change to VRT and a new statutory relationship with the government. The influence of the Board of Directors, which is still composed politically, has further diminished since then, but never completely disappeared. The same happened in the RTBF, with a new decree making the RTBF an autonomous company, with a management contract setting out its missions and

objectives (RTBF, 2016). However, the RTBF remained more – in line with the situation in most South European countries – under political influence compared to the VRT (Sinardet et al., 2004).

The politicization and later depoliticization are also evident in election reporting over time (Van Aelst, 2014). Certainly, until the 1980s, the attitude of public broadcasters towards the elections was characterized by absence and prudence. A short report on a politician or an overly critical question was quickly translated into terms of political bias. In 1961 both broadcasters combined devoted only nine minutes to election campaign coverage (Clausee et al., 1961). Being cautious was therefore also aimed at rigorously respecting the existing power relations during election times. Today, little remains of the policy of caution. Television journalists play a free and critical role in the various debates and current affairs programs.

The autonomy of political journalism is based on the growing importance of economic logic in both the audiovisual media as well as in the written press. Newspapers and broadcasters are seen less as a means of spreading a message, but rather as products to be consumed. Commercialization and depoliticization of the media go hand in hand (McQuail, 1988, p. 108). A commercial strategy takes into account the wishes of advertisers and consumers, and therefore not or barely those of political parties. Moreover, parties and pressure groups had already proven in the past not to be the best managers. Their political convictions and interests appear on several occasions to be at odds with reaching as large an audience as possible. According to Witte (2002), the commercialization of the media has led to a middle-of-the-road approach to politics, in which the media do not take clear political positions, but rather search for the safe, greatest common denominator. The news media have evolved from a supply market to a demand market: in the past the media offered a product independently of the existing demand, whereas now the demand from the public is rather the starting point (van Cuilenburg, 1999).

It is clear that the public is no longer served by militant partisan reporting. This change is linked to the loss of the link between the political parties and their traditional supporters. The public does not want an unconditional loyalty to a party, but rather the freedom to “shop” between different politicians and parties. Hence the increasing dealignment. Through less colored or one-sided reporting, newspapers were able to expand their target group. Today, the support base of newspapers has become extremely heterogeneous (Van Aelst, 2014, pp. 48-49).

2.3. The relation between media and politics today:

Between distrust and informality

The historical overview shows that the processes of de-pillarization and depoliticization have profoundly changed the (power) relationship between politicians and journalists. However, the consequences of these changes remain unclear. Do journalists

and politicians live in separate worlds? The time when only like-minded journalists and politicians came into contact with each other is far behind us. However, the close ties between politicians and journalists seem to have survived the de-pillarization effortlessly. The “lunch culture” has barely lost its importance and informal contacts are still frequent. The fact that these contacts no longer respect the original ideological boundaries do make their consequences less predictable. For example, the sources on which journalists rely are less well known and not necessarily stable. Politicians also use journalists as listening ears and even ask them for advice on aspects of their job. The informality of the relationship also seems to be slightly higher in Belgium than in countries such as Sweden and Norway (Van Aelst & Aalberg, 2011).

The contacts between politicians and journalists rely less than before on ideological like-mindedness but rather on a kind of a give-give relationship. Journalists need information about what happens in front of and especially behind the scenes, with a strong preference for receiving this information first. As for the politicians, they have an interest in sending their message around at the right time, and in the right way. It is striking that these frequent and sometimes informal contacts go hand in hand with a high level of mutual distrust. A survey of journalists and politicians shows that more close contacts do not necessarily lead to more trust. To put it in negative terms, both groups are quite cynical about each other, but from a more positive point of view, journalists and politicians maintain a healthy distance. It is not because they have lunch together that they are assured of preferential treatment.

The last twenty years many journalists have made the transition from media to politics. In the past this was logical and often a confirmation of the almost perfect osmosis between press and politics. Today, these moves are primarily a way for parties and ministers to inject some media expertise into the party (see below). Journalists seem to be opting for a new challenge, often offered by parties on the rise. The opposite path, from politics to journalism, is rather exceptional. In the de-pillarized Belgium, journalists should be above party boundaries and certainly not publicly express their personal political preferences. The news media are increasingly based on their own way of working and are less guided by what politicians and parties consider important. However, this does not mean that journalism is completely free of political pressure and negotiation. Rather, the tension between press and politics seems to be at a constant in the outlined evolution. The media often feel like the objects of political games, whereas the politicians in turn are hunted by inquisitive reporters.

If we place this evolution of the political “liberation” of journalism in the mediatization model of Strömbäck and Esser (2014), we arrive at a fairly unambiguous conclusion. The second phase of the mediatization that presupposes a shift on the continuum from full political dependence to full independence seems to have been completed. The Belgian news media, which originated as part of the political world, has today evolved into a single quasi-independent institution that operates according to its own rules and laws (Cook, 2005). The mediatization model of Strömbäck and Esser (2014)

does require an important nuance. The authors suggest that political independence from the media is a precondition for the media's autonomous influence on politics. The historical sketch clearly shows that the Belgian media also played a political role in the past. In particular, a select group of political journalists from the written press had an influence on their readers at the time of the pillarization that politicians could not fully control. Moreover, they were regarded as experts by politicians and asked for feedback to test their policy. In a sense, politics has always been a bit mediatized. The big difference with today is that their role took place within a clear framework of party politics and was therefore much more predictable. In short, the increased media attention for politics, combined with the almost complete political autonomy of the Belgian journalist, has made a far-reaching mediatization of politics possible. In the next part, we will examine what the consequences of this can be for the position of political parties in Belgium.

3. Why mediatization does not affect partitocracy?

However, the increased autonomy and more central position of the Belgian news media have not led to a decline in the power of the political parties. During recent election campaigns and during the long government formation period of 2019-2020 political parties, and their chairpersons, remain the most visible, and most influential players. The complex and fragmented Belgian federal system has warranted a sort of "oligarchic coordination" of party leadership in the hands of a small number of people. Both intra- en inter-party conflicts are mostly dealt with by a handful of party executives (De Winter & Van Wynsberghe, 2015). Although the public trust in political parties is at an all-time low, there are few indications that the media have changed much about the central position of parties in our political system. We put forward two explanations for this, which we will elaborate separately.

3.1. Explanation 1: The media logic and the political logic are not (always) opposite

The historical sketch shows that the time of pillarization and outspoken political patronage is far behind us. This means that news editors are much freer than before to determine who they invite into the studio or whom they place prominently on the front page (phase 3). From the perspective of media logic, it seems evident that politicians who respond best to the main news values enjoy the most media attention. More concretely, this would mean an over-representation of politicians who communicate well and smoothly, who are charismatic, and who cause conflict and turmoil.

Yet, it is striking that the news media primarily and predominantly respect the existing political hierarchy of power. This is evident from research into political reporting both during and outside the election period. In election time, most attention is paid to the parties and politicians who have governed and/or are at the forefront of the polls.

Outside election time, it is government members and party chairmen who divide the media attention.

Research on the presence of politicians in the main evening news in Flanders (VRT-VTM) over a period of more than fifteen years shows a clear and consistent picture: the higher the political function, the more attention in the news (Van Aelst, 2018). Government leaders and ministers are at the top of the charts. This focus on the executive power is quite logical, as they make policy that impacts the life of ordinary citizens. Unsurprisingly, the prime minister is on top of the list, but compared with other Western democracies the attention of the Belgian prime minister is rather modest (Vos & Van Aelst, 2018). This is because a lot of media attention goes to individual ministers (at both federal and regional level), but also the party chairs. Bart de Wever, chairperson of the biggest Flemish party N-VA and mayor of Antwerp, could even compete in media attention with the government leaders of the federal and Flemish government.

These figures are not immediately encouraging, especially for members of parliament in the House of Representatives or the Flemish Parliament. The average attention given to a member of parliament is indeed negligible. Of course, members of parliament can gain some additional media attention by working hard or using the right media strategy, but overall it changes little to their structural low level of media exposure (Vos, 2005; Ketelaars & Van Aelst, 2020). The predominant importance of the political function indicates that it is still political parties (and the voter) who determine who the leading politicians are. Or to put it another way: political power always leads to media attention, but conversely, media attention rarely leads to political power. Even in election times, the party and the order of the electoral candidate lists primarily determine the media attention a candidate receives.

It should, of course, be noted that parties include “media potential” in the selection of their political actors. In the early 2000s, young politicians such as Freya van den Bossche (sp.a) and Inge Vervotte (CD&V) had rapidly proven their talent for politics, but also their ability to deal well with the media and quickly gained a certain familiarity and popularity with the wider public. After some time, however, they became ordinary politicians who were judged according to the same power hierarchy.

Indeed, journalists scrupulously respect the internal power hierarchy of parties, mainly because politicians with power have more influence on people’s lives and are therefore more newsworthy. Referring to “the power elite” is even seen in literature as a classic newsworthiness (O’Neill & Harcup, 2009). At the same time, however, the focus on politicians with more influence is consistent with a traditional political power logic. The logic of the media and politics are on the same page here. The media not only reflect the status of politicians, they also legitimize and strengthen it. The focus on a select group of top politicians makes it particularly difficult for ordinary members of parliament and political outsiders to slip through the gates of news selection. Because of this extremely skewed distribution, the media strengthen the existing

power relations in politics rather than contesting them. This means that, on the one hand, there is a small group of top politicians who can sometimes control the media. On the other side of the spectrum, there is a large group of politicians who barely come into the picture and who often frenetically try to stand out in order to gain the much-needed media attention.

It is therefore not surprising that a majority of them see the media as the culprit for not getting their political careers off the ground (see above). But in doing so, they forget that it is not the media, but still parties, that decide on political careers in the first place. This is also apparent when a politician gets controversial. At that moment, a dynamic often arises in which all journalists simultaneously start questioning the survival of the politician. The strength then lies not so much in that one opinion piece or news item, but in the accumulation of messages that are sent out through all sorts of channels. Whether a politician survives such a media storm and associated pressure depends on many things, such as the eagerness of the journalists, the personality of the politician, but also the position of the party. Politicians who “breaks” often lack (sufficient) support from their party. In January 2012, Flemish Minister Philippe Muyters (N-VA) became controversial as a result of a number of leaked e-mails from his cabinet employees. The opposition filed a motion of no-confidence and the press got hooked on the case. Muyters was faced with difficult times, but remained standing because his party leader and other party colleagues continued to support him fully. When the party decides not to back a minister anymore, it becomes very difficult to “survive”, as for instance happened with the Walloon Minister of local powers Paul Furlan (PS), who had to quit due to the turmoil of the financial scandal Publifin.

3.2. Explanation 2: Politicians and parties adapt

The fourth phase of the mediatization model concerns the workings of politics itself and concerns politicians, but also political institutions and processes, who are adapting to the media logic. To a certain extent, this is related to the previous statement: the media determine how they represent politics and that means that politicians, when they want to be in the news, have to comply with the rules established by the media. Political communication should be concise, comprehensible and fast. In other words, it is a professional communication strategy in which the mass media are given a central place. This adapted communication style can be seen as the first step in the adaptation of politics. However, the fourth phase goes further than that and also assumes that politicians are influenced by the media in their work.

The extent to which politicians allow themselves to be guided in their work by media coverage and media attention is not easy to determine. The politician starts thinking in advance about “how something will play in the media” and, if necessary, adjust the form or content of the message. In this context Davis speaks of an “anticipatory media effect” (2007, p. 188), while Strömbäck and Esser speak of a form of “self-mediation”. A great deal of research has been carried out in recent years in

order to find out more empirically to what extent members of parliament are guided in their work by the themes in the media. A recent study has shown that the media are certainly not the only source, but an important one, on which parliamentarians develop initiatives. This applies in particular to members of the opposition, younger politicians and politicians who focus more on the political game of the parties rather than on political policy as such (Sevenans, Walgrave, & Vos, 2015).

The importance of the media for MPs is not the same in all countries. This is shown in a previous international comparative study that asked MPs in 15 countries the same question about their sources of inspiration (Midtbø, Walgrave, Van Aelst, & Christensen, 2014). Figure 8.1 shows that Belgian MPs, after the Dutch and Norwegian MPs, rely most on the media to develop parliamentary initiatives. The same study also asked how often these initiatives were reported in the media. In this respect, the assessment of the Belgian members of parliament is the most pessimistic. Only one of the four cases is attention paid to their parliamentary question, interpellation or legislative proposal. This means that our members of parliament rely more than in other countries in the media, but also succeed less than in other countries in getting their work in the news. It confirms the previously demonstrated weak position of ordinary members of parliament when it comes to generating media attention.

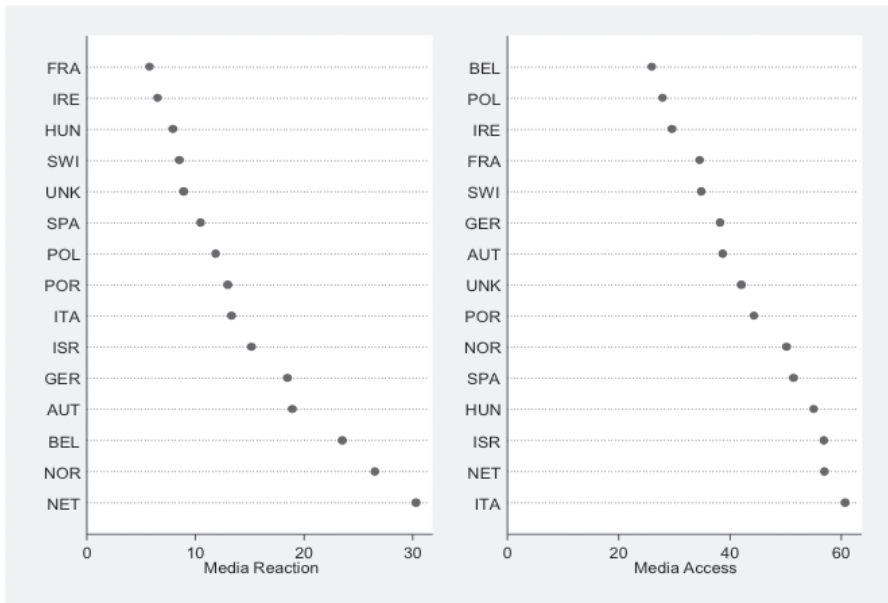


Figure 8.1: Media as a source of inspiration, and media success for parliamentary initiatives

Source: Midbo et al., 2015 (using the PARTIREP MP Survey).

If “ordinary” politicians, with all their initiatives, seldom make it into the media, the question arises as to why they continue to put so much effort into it? Of course, it remains important for voters to notice politicians in the news, even if only occasionally. Research shows that media attention contributes to the personal electoral success of candidates in elections (Van Aelst et al., 2008; van Erkel, Van Aelst, & Thijssen, 2020). More important than media attention, however, is the place on the list of elections. But paradoxically, politicians themselves argue that media attention contributes to the place on the list. A survey in 2018 among Flemish members of parliament showed that 73% of them agree with the following statement: “getting in the media helps me to get a good position on the ballot list of my party” Only 11% disagreed, and 16% did not agree or disagree with this statement (Ketelaars & Van Aelst, 2020). This also indicates that politicians want to profile themselves in the media, but certainly do not want to do so at the expense of their party. On the contrary, appearing and doing well in the media can strengthen the position of the politician in the party, probably on the condition that this media attention is not used to stand up to the party leadership, or to antagonize the party as such. This is also evident from a survey of candidates for the 2014 elections. The majority of the candidates indicated in this survey that they promote the party in the first place, and only in a second order their person (van Erkel, Thijssen, & Van Aelst, 2017). We will come back to this in the conclusion.

Perhaps even more than individual politicians, parties have adapted to the mediatisation of politics. As a result of the increasing importance of the media, political parties have adapted not only their communication strategy, but also their organization. The literature distinguishes three steps or ways in this respect. First of all, parties have brought in more specialized personnel and freed up more resources to take care of their communication. Following the example of American and British parties, almost all European parties have implemented these changes to a greater or lesser extent. A second, more far-reaching way is to include the communication officer in the party’s higher decision-making bodies. In this way, the media strategy becomes part of everything that parties do and decide. A third ultimate step is taken when parties change their selection of political personnel. Election candidates and party leaders are then selected based on their media knowledge and skills (Davis, 2010; Strömbäck & Van Aelst, 2013).

In Belgium, these adjustments are often assumed by the parties, but have hardly been researched. The thesis of communication strategist Noel Slangen that parties have shifted people and resources from their study department to their communication department is probably correct. It is ironic, however, that Slangen makes this observation, since he is often regarded as an example of the second step: a communication expert who climbs high in the party hierarchy. Indeed, Noel Slangen started out as a campaign advisor, but became (among other things) the political director of Open VLD. Yet, he seems to be the exception rather than the rule. Parties often have

external specialists assist them, but they usually rely on market researchers and less on communication advisors. Moreover, most of these advisors rarely acquire a strong internal position. So how did parties acquire media expertise? It seems that parties (and ministers) have simply obtained the expertise from those who master the media logic best, the political journalists themselves.

For instance, in 2014 the MR hired former journalist Olivier Alsteens, considered as the “Rolls-Royce of spin doctors” who had worked as a spokesperson for several ministers, working as its party director of communications (La Libre Belgique, 1/12/2014). More structurally, between 1990 and 2014, 40 Flemish political journalists exchanged the media for a job at a political party (Van Aelst, 2014, pp. 85-86). The concerned journalists go to all types of parties and there is no immediate distinction to make between a privileged political party or an ideology. Rather, most switching points to a choice for a party that is growing electorally and is allowed to take part in the board of directors. This explains why about one third of the political journalists who made the switch take up the job of spokesperson for a minister. In those cases, the transfer of knowledge and skills is fairly obvious. The spokesperson knows how the journalist works and thinks and can therefore better steer the politician’s media actions. Moreover, contacts from the previous working environment are more than welcome. In addition to the spokesperson’s job, he or she becomes an employee or (communication) advisor. It is striking that not all journalists end up in the same place. Indeed, TV journalists end up on a list more often than their colleagues in the written press and then also in parliament. In addition to their media knowledge, television familiarity is also played out among the wider public. In this way, they are an outspoken example of the fact that media influence the selection of the political staff of parties.

Conclusion and discussion

We started this analysis from the observation that the mass media have taken an increasingly central position in the political world. An important condition for this is that the news media in Belgium have become almost completely independent politically. The post-war newspaper landscape, characterized by a multitude of newspapers each working according to a partisan logic, has evolved into a landscape in which all newspapers work according to a shared media logic. The radio and television journalists had to free themselves from the pressure of partisan logic and the interference of the executive power as well. But as with their colleagues of the written press, they have started to operate more autonomously according to a media logic that relies on journalistic routines and a shared commercial goal that aims at reaching as many people as possible. It is precisely because this logic is so strongly shared by all the news media that political actors and institutions have begun to adapt to this media logic. At first sight, one would therefore expect that this evolution from a partisan

or party logic to a media logic would go hand in hand with a decline in the power of parties. This chapter argued this is not the case.

In the first place, it appears that the media, in their attention given to politicians, follow the existing power hierarchy more often than one might think. Former Prime Minister Jean-Luc Dehaene (2012, p. 912), among others, suggested in his memoirs that the media autonomously determines, “who gets in the picture and who doesn’t”. While this is true, practice shows that the outcome of all those free choices is almost perfectly predictable. The news media predominantly follow a political power logic and focus on politicians with influence such as government leaders, ministers, and party chairmen. These leading politicians incorporate media logic and owe their position in part to the fact that they have previously proven to be “media proof”. Although a glance at recent top politicians reveals that communication skills are seldom decisive, as long as their party puts them in the foreground, the media attention follows automatically. Not so much because journalists are docile, but rather because media logic and political logic reinforce each other in this respect. Politicians in higher positions simply have greater electoral popularity and also have a higher influence on people’s daily lives.

The victims of this convergence of the two logics are ordinary members of parliament. That brings us to our second statement. Members of parliament often remain out of the picture despite the fact that they are constantly trying to access the media. They are influenced by the topics in the news in order to increase their chances of being picked up by the same media. It is a source of frustration, which explains why members of parliament often think negatively about the media, but which has its deeper roots in party discipline and the weak position of parliament as such. Politicians in higher positions appear at first sight to be less dependent on the media in their work. Moreover, the higher policy agendas (such as the council of ministers) are less influenced by media coverage (Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2016). Contrary to “ordinary” politicians, political parties, as institutions, have been able to adapt better to mediatization. Parties have professionalized themselves by adapting their structures and incorporating journalists as media experts in their organizations. Parties are increasingly proactive in communicating and use the media more and more often to settle a decision in their favor. The classic political logic of party competition is being shifted to the media arena. As a result of this shift, it sometimes seems that journalists have become the key players in the political game. Politicians are already firmly convinced of this. A survey (Medpol, 2006) shows that almost two thirds of the members of parliament in Flanders believe that a political journalist has more power than a member of parliament. Without making a definitive judgment on the power of the journalist, two things seem important. Firstly, it is safe to say that the media do not exercise power, but do have influence. Power means that you can impose something (against someone’s will), influence is more indirect and subtle. A journalist cannot force a politician to resign, or can’t even force the MP to ask a simple parliamentary

question. Secondly, that influence is not so much in the pen of one journalist, but rather in the joint action of all the journalists together.

Is the weak position of parliament and its members also to blame for the mediatization of politics? It is true that the growing importance of the media has not done any good to the idea of parliament as being the central place for the political debate. But the weak position of MPs has deeper causes. The dominance of the executive is a classic fact, but parliaments in Belgium have lost even more influence in recent decades. According to Deschouwer (2009), this can mainly be explained by the far-reaching federalization of our country. As a result, the number of Belgian elected members of parliament has risen sharply to over 500. The competition is therefore high. In addition, the Belgian context, with a fragmented party landscape and several governments, demands a high degree of party discipline. As a result, power lies with the party leader and a few top politicians, not with the members of parliament. The powerlessness of the parliament or legislative power is most painfully demonstrated by the fact that more than eight out of ten approved laws have been initiated by the government. More and more parliamentarians are submitting legislative proposals in order to raise their profile, but less and less of them lead to real laws (Van Aelst & Louwerse, 2014). Perhaps members of parliament should also reflect on how far they still go into the media logic. Their political influence is modest, their media value negligible. Why not opt for a smaller number of parliamentarians who are better surrounded? Members of parliament who can be assisted by several highly competent people and communication experts. In this way, they will be able to weigh more heavily on the decision-making process, control a minister better and perhaps distance themselves from the party's position a little more often.

Finally, the question arises as to how and to what extent participation will also digest the digital revolution and the rise of social media. Politicians and parties no longer need to adapt to traditional media logic, but also to a so-called "new media logic" or "network logic", in which direct interaction with the public is gaining in importance (Klinger & Svensson, 2015). This can have different consequences for the different phases of the mediatization model. If more people start to inform themselves via social media, this may be at the expense of the media as the dominant information channel (phase 1). Moreover, politicians can strengthen their position with respect to the traditional media again by bypassing the traditional media or discrediting them through accusations of partiality, as President Trump is currently frequently doing (phase 4). At first sight, there are also many reasons to assume that the personalization of politics will increase now that social media offer more opportunities for individual politicians to profile themselves. Still, these new possibilities seem to change little in the position of the parties for the time being. First, it appears that the popular politicians on social media such as Twitter are predominantly the same as in traditional media (Van Aelst, van Erkel, D'heer, & Harder, 2017). In this respect, social media also seem to confirm rather than negate the existing power relations. Secondly, it appears that most

politicians use social media to promote themselves, but seldom do so at the expense of their party. In this respect, the performances of politicians on social media differ little from those in traditional media. It seems that political parties have not relinquished their grip on individual politicians in this digital age. Parties do not tolerate individual members deviating too far from their central message. However, this does not alter the fact that parties and leading politicians are increasingly using both old and new media simultaneously for their campaigns.

References

- Bennett, L., Lawrence, R., & Livingston, S. (2007). *When the Press Fails. Political power and the news media from Iraq to Katrina*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Boone, L. (1998). Het objectiviteitsbegrip. Wettelijke voorschriften, oorsprong en definitie. In A. Hendriks, J. Huypens & J. Servaes (Eds.), *Media en Politiek. Liber Memorialis Luk Boone* (pp. 23-44), Leuven, Acco.
- Brants, K., & van Praag, P. (2006). Signs of media logic. Half a century of political communication in the Netherlands. *Javnost/The Public*, 13(1), 27-41.
- Burgelman, J. C. (1990). *Omroep en politiek in België*. Brussel: BRT uitgave.
- Cook, T. E. (2005). *Governing with the news: The news media as a political institution* (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Davis, A. (2007). Investigating Journalist Influences on Political Issue Agendas at Westminster. *Political Communication*, 24(2), 181-199.
- Davis, A. (2010). *Political Communication and social theory*. London: Routledge.
- de Bens, E. (2001). *De Pers in België. Het verhaal van de Belgische dagbladpers gisteren, vandaag en morgen*. Tielt: Lannoo.
- De Winter, L. (1981). De partij-politisering als instrument van participatie. *Res Publica*, 23(1), 53-107.
- De Winter, L., & Dumont, P. (2006). Do Belgian parties undermine the democratic chain of delegation? *West European Politics*, 29(5), 957-976.
- De Winter, L., & Van Wynsberghe, C. (2015). Kingdom of Belgium: partitocracy, corporatist society, and dissociative federalism.
- Hereng, J. (2003). *Le Soir dans l'histoire*. Bruxelles: L. Pire.
- Huyse, L. (1994). *De politiek voorbij. Een blik op de jaren '90* (1ste ed.). Leuven: Kritak.
- Ketelaars, P., & Van Aelst, P. (2020). An Actor Approach to Mediatization Linking Politicians' Media Perceptions, Communication Behaviour and Appearances in the News. *Politics of the Low Countries*, 3(1), 5-31.

- Klinger, U., & Svensson, J. (2015). The emergence of network media logic in political communication: A theoretical approach. *New Media & Society*, 17(8), 1241-1257.
- Kriesi, H., Bochsler, D., Matthes, J., Lavenex, S., Bühlmann, M., & Esser, F. (2013). *Democracy in the Age of Globalization and Mediatization*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lits, M. (2010). L'impossible clôture des récits multimédiatiques. *A contrario*, (1), 113-124.
- Lundby, K. (2009). *Mediatization: concept, changes, consequences*. New York: Peter Lang.
- McQuail, D. (1988). Commercialization and Beyond. In D. McQuail & K. Siune (Eds.), *The Media Policy. Convergence, Concentration and Commerce* (pp. 107-107). London: Sage.
- Midtbø, T., Walgrave, S., Van Aelst, P., & Christensen, D. A. (2014). Do the Media Set the Agenda of Parliament or is It the Other Way Around? Agenda Interactions between MPs and Mass Media. In K. Deschouwer & S. Depauw (Eds.), *Representing the People. A Survey among Members of Statewide and Sub-state Parliaments* (pp. 188-208). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- O'Neill, D., & Harcup, T. (2009). News values and selectivity. In K. Wahl-Jorgensen & T. Hanitzsch (Eds.), *The handbook of journalism studies* (pp. 161-174), London: Routledge.
- Ruys, M. (1996). *Achter de maskerade: over macht, schijnmacht en onmacht*. Kapellen: Pelckmans.
- Sevenans, J., Walgrave, S., & Vos, D. (2015). Political elites' media responsiveness and their individual political goals: A study of national politicians in Belgium. *Research & Politics*, 2(3), 1-7.
- Sheafer, T. (2001). Charismatic Skill and Media Legitimacy: An Actor-Centered Approach to Understanding the Political Communication Competition. *Communication Research*, 28(6), 711-736.
- Strömbäck, J., & Esser, F. (Eds.). (2014). *Mediatization of Politics: Understanding the Transformation of Western Democracies*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Strömbäck, J., & Van Aelst, P. (2013). Why Political Parties Adapt to the Media: Exploring the Fourth Dimension of Mediatization. *International Communication Gazette*, 75(4), 341-358.
- Van Aelst, P. (2014). *De mediatisering van de Vlaamse politiek*. Leuven: Acco.
- Van Aelst, P. (2018). Twee handen op één buik? Hoe en waarom de mediatisering van de Vlaamse politiek en partitocratie hand in hand gaan. *Res Publica*, 60(4), 347-371.

- Van Aelst, P., & Aalberg, T. (2011). Between trust and suspicion. A comparative study of the relationship between politicians and political journalists in Belgium, Norway and Sweden. *Javnost/The Public*, 18(4), 73-88.
- Van Aelst, P., & Louwerse, T. (2014). Parliament without Government: The Belgian Parliament and the Government Formation Processes of 2007-2011. *West European Politics*, 37(3), 475-496.
- Van Aelst, P., Maddens, B., Noppe, J., & Fiers, S. (2008). Politicians in the news: media or party logic? Media attention and electoral success in the Belgian election campaign of 2003. *European Journal of Communication*, 23(2), 193-210.
- Van Aelst, P., van Erkel, P., D'heer, E., & Harder, R. A. (2017). Who is leading the campaign charts? Comparing individual popularity on old and new media. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(5), 715-732.
- Van Aelst, P., & Walgrave, S. (2016). Political agenda setting by the mass media: ten years of research, 2005-2015. In N. Zahariadis (Ed.), *Handbook of Public Policy Agenda Setting* (pp. 157-179). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- van Cuilenburg, J. (1999). Het Nederlandse mediabestel: verscheidenheid tussen kartel en concurrentie. In J. van Cuilenburg, P. Neijens, & O. Scholten (Eds.), *Media in Overvloed* (pp. 10-24). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- van Dalen, A., & Van Aelst, P. (2014). The Media as Political Agenda-Setters: Journalists' Perceptions of Media Power in Eight West European Countries. *West European Politics*, 37(1), 42-64.
- van Erkel, P. F., Van Aelst, P., & Thijssen, P. (2020). Does media attention lead to personal electoral success? Differences in long and short campaign media effects for top and ordinary political candidates. *Acta Politica*, 55(2), 156-174.
- van Erkel, P. F. A., Thijssen, P., & Van Aelst, P. (2017). One for all or all for one: The electoral effects of personalized campaign strategies. *Acta Politica*, 52(3), 384-405.
- van Nieuwenhuysse, K. (2005). *De Klauw van een papieren leeuw. De politieke geschiedenis van de krant De Standaard (1947-1976)*. Leuven: Acco.
- van Peel, H. (2006). Vers l'Avenir: histoire d'un groupe de presse francophone, *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, 1924-1925, 5-55.
- Vos, D. (2005). *Beyond Political Power: Which Politicians Pass the News Gates and Why?*, Antwerpen, Proefschrift Universiteit Antwerpen.
- Vos, D., & Van Aelst, P. (2018). Does the Political System Determine Media Visibility of Politicians? A Comparative Analysis of Political Functions in the News in Sixteen Countries, *Political Communication*, 35(3), 371-392.

- Walgrave, S., & de Swert, K. (2005). De 'kanseliersbonus' revisited. Over de dominante aanwezigheid van de regering en de premier op het nieuws. In M. Hooghe, K. Deswert, & S. Walgrave (Eds.), *Nieuws op televisie. Televisiejournals als venster op de wereld* (pp. 79-98). Leuven: Acco.
- Witte, E. (2002). *Media en Politiek. Een inleiding tot de literatuur*. Brussel: VUB Press.
- Wolfsfeld, G., & Sheaffer, T. (2006). Competing Actors and the Construction of Political News: The Contest over Waves in Israel. *Political Communication*, 23(3), 333-354.

Chapter 9. The Awakening of the Sleeping Beauty?

Belgian Partitocracy and European Integration

Mihail Chiru
Giulia Sandri
Virginie Van Ingelgom
Alban Versailles

Introduction

One of the major puzzles for contemporary European political science is how and to what extent the process of European integration has affected national politics, not only in terms of Europeanization of national policies and institutions, but also in terms of effects on electoral campaigns, mass voting behaviour, political attitudes and changes in the political supply (Goetz & Hix, 2012). From the supply side, national elites can see European integration as a challenge or an opportunity. In particular, the ways in which elites, and specifically political parties either in government or in opposition, position themselves on the issue of European integration has been broadly explored by the literature (Marks et al., 2002; Hutter et al., 2016).

However, the literature is not conclusive on the main determinants of party positions on European integration, nor on the explanations of voters' attitudes towards the EU. The response of a political party to an issue emerging on the national agenda or acquiring new salience can be determined by a large set of predictors, ranging from party leaders' rationalities, to the format and competition structure of the national party system, to the constraints posed by prior policy positions or the territorial structure of the state (Steenbergen & Scott, 2004).

This chapter therefore tries to disentangle the interplay between meso- and macro-level variables affecting the attitudes towards the EU of national elites and citizens in a case study, namely Belgium.

The Belgian case is particularly interesting in this regard because it offers significant variation in a set of variables often considered to be relevant in the analysis of party and voters' issue positioning. The evolutions of Belgian federalism, the relative stability of its party system format and structure (e.g. the effective number of parties has only slightly changed since the 1990s, oscillating between 7.0 in 2003 and 9.7 in

2019, see ParlGov dataset¹) and the partitocracy features of its political system can all play a role in explaining how both elites and citizens perceive European integration (De Winter & Laurent, 1995; Brack & Crespy, 2019).

In one of the rare analyses on the Belgian case, Deschouwer and Van Assche demonstrated that Belgium is a country in which the European issue has an extremely low salience (2005). Indeed, searching for evidence of some impact of Europe on Belgian party life and analysing party manifesto between 1985 and 2004, Deschouwer and Van Assche concluded that parties have not been deeply influenced by Belgium being part of the EU (2005). According to them, the main reason behind this observation is the fact that membership has never become an issue for public debate in Belgium. A decade later, analysing the impact of European integration on Belgian political parties between 1995 and 2009, Van Hecke, Bursens, Wolfs and Jadot conclude again to its very limited impact due to what seemed to be a vicious circle of low salience (2012). To them, the combination of low salience among the public with the consensus among political parties explain the observed limited impact of European integration on Belgian politics.

In a nutshell, what both studies point to is the limited politicization of the European integration process in the Belgian electoral arena; thus, following the ‘sleeping giant’ metaphor introduced by Van der Eijk and Franklin (2007; see also De Vries, 2007), the Belgian partitocracy could be perceived as the Sleeping Beauty as both the extent of partisan conflict over European integration and the degree of EU issue salience remained very low.

When considering the ongoing political context, these results should or could probably be revised for the last decade. First, the EU has gained important powers since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. Studies have shown that the economic crisis has brought about an empowerment of the EU in the economic field (Schimmelfennig, 2018). Ten years after the start of the economic crisis, the EU could largely appear to be responsible for economic issues and in particular for the inability of states to produce an economic recovery. Second, we can assume that 2014 and 2019 European elections were held in a context of an increased politicization of European issues. Indeed, recent economic and migration “crises” have brought the EU to the centre of media attention (Hooghe & Marks, 2018). The 2014 and 2019 elections are also the first elections to have taken place since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty which had instituted the so-called Spitzenkandidaten system, which aims to make the European elections more important in citizens’ eyes by linking European elections to the choice of the Presidency of the European Commission (Wolfs et al., 2021).

Last but not least, the episode of Brexit has also increased the visibility of the EU since 2016 (de Vries, 2018). The discussions surrounding Brexit put European disintegration at the centre of attention, thus probably reinforcing the perception of

¹ See http://www.parl.gov.org/data/table/viewcalc_election_parameter/ (accessed on September 6, 2021).

the importance of the European elections. All of these elements therefore invite to reconsider the impact of European integration on Belgian political parties or, in other words, if the diagnosis of the limited politicization of European integration process in the Belgian electoral arena remains.

Has European integration process actually been politicized in the Belgian electoral arena in the last decade? When did this politicization process start and what is its typical pattern? And, what are the driving forces of this process in the Belgian case? In particular, what is the role of Belgian partitocracy in this process of (non)politicization? We take an innovative stance in answering these questions in three ways. First, we propose to follow an operationalization of politicization that considers its multi-dimensional character – salience, polarization and the expansion of political actors involved (de Wilde, 2011; Kriesi et al., 2016) – operationalization that has not yet been applied to the Belgian case.

Second, we analyse the scope of politicization and the positioning of political parties across regions over the last decade by using CHES dataset as well as original communication data gathering more than 195.000 tweets from Belgian political parties and their leaders (Versailles, 2021). Thus, we present new and original data on the politicization of Europe in Belgium from 2009 to 2019. Moreover, in order to measure EU salience in Belgian parties' national election manifestos, we relied on the Manifesto Project Dataset (Volkens et al., 2020), and to assess the politicization of EU integration in legislative agendas, we relied on data from the Belgian Comparative Agendas Project (Walgrave et al., 2019).

Third, our analysis focuses on particular areas where European integration intersects with Belgian partitocracy in order to explain the specificity of the Belgian case – and in particular, the enduring non-politicization of the EU in the Belgian electoral arena and what seems to be a changing evolution in 2019. First, we consider that the cause for the lack of politicization should be found in the incentives the EU issue offers mainstream political parties, in other words to the Belgian partitocracy². Mainstream parties find European integration an unattractive issue for two reasons. Thus, mainstream political parties' positions on the EU issue are characterized by a strong pro-European consensus but also by a very low level of dissent inside those parties. Moreover, until the last European elections, there were very little electoral incentives to develop a stance on the EU issue as the Eurosceptical extreme parties collected few votes at European elections or were simply inexistent at this level of election – in the case of the French-speaking party system. We also address the question of how the 'frozen' party systems in Belgium – so to say the partitocracy – importantly also limits the emergence of new political parties and of new political cleavages. Recent research suggests that, particularly for the United Kingdom, European integration has altered

² The Belgian party system has often been described as a partitocracy, based not only on a frozen party system but also on the strong grip that parties exert on all aspects of social and political life (administration, judiciary, media; see: De Winter, 1996).

party competition in national and European elections as EU issues may engender a new electoral cleavage. However, this seems not to be the case – yet – in Belgium.

Fourth, the chapter examines the argument that the co-occurrence of different elections could also explain the lack of politicization of European integration in the Belgian electoral arena. Here, more than the co-occurrence with national elections, it is perhaps the fact that regional, federal and European elections were taking place at the very same day in 2014 and 2019 that could explain the limited impact of European integration on party competition in Belgium, as political parties are already very busy with other very salient issues such as the future of institutionalized Belgium.

As the effects of Europe on a national polity depend very much on the specific nature of that national polity (Deschouwer & Van Assche, 2005), Belgium is an interesting empirical case to study as political parties are key players in the political system of Belgium, which is sometimes called a *partitocracy* (De Winter & Dumont, 2006; Deschouwer, 2009). Moreover, although parties are the only institutions that link the different Belgian government levels with each other, Belgian political parties operate in two separate party systems. These characteristics of the Belgian political system make Belgium a crucial case (Lijphart, 1971; Gerring, 2007). Crucial cases display variables of interest that are present in a special manner (Lijphart, 1971).

This chapter uses the cases of Flemish and French-speaking party systems to study the role of meso and macro level variables, and in particular of the *partitocracy* in explaining variation in the effects of European integration on political parties. Both systems experienced the same level of European integration, yet possible variation in the salience of and polarisation of political parties on European integration might have developed in the last decade.

This chapter is organized as follows. Following this brief introduction, a second section presents the literature on politicization and European integration in order to develop a multidimensional operationalization. The third section explore empirically how well the expectations from the existing literature fit the Belgian case. The fourth section explores the politicization of EU integration further by focusing on the salience of EU issues in Belgian national election manifestos and legislative agendas. The fifth section focuses on the two Belgian party systems – seen as two crucial cases – to understand the factors that could lead to non-politicization of European integration in Belgian political arena to explain why it does not – yet – come about. The last section provides some conclusions.

1. Politicization and European integration

In the field of EU studies, there is a wide consensus among scholars that ‘something like politicization has occurred’ regarding the European integration issue (Schmitter, 2009, pp. 211-212). The soaring salience of European governing has been documented, as well as the expanding scope of actors that take an interest in EU affairs

and scrutinise them, like national political parties and national media across member states (de Wilde, 2011; de Wilde et al., 2016; de Wilde & Zürn, 2012; Statham & Trenz, 2013a, 2013b).

In terms of party competition, Kriesi and colleagues (2016) have emphasised that EU politicization is not only time-dependent but also varies according to national contexts. Indeed, political parties, societal actors, and media can at one point decide to politicize certain issues and at another point develop strategies of de-politicization, depending on the context. This is what we would like to assess in this chapter for Belgium in the last decade. Has European integration process actually been politicized in the Belgian electoral arena in the last decade? In this section, we define what politicization is and how it could be operationalized.

Following Schattschneider (1959), the concept of politicization emphasizes the importance of political conflict. By identifying the ‘intensity, visibility, direction and scope’ of conflict as the key dimensions of politics, Schattschneider conceptualizes – already 50 years ago – politicization as a multifaceted process. The most recent literature underlines that European integration is understood as politicized if EU issues become a relevant topic in political discourse (salience), trigger controversies (polarisation), and are debated by a broad range of societal actors (resonance/actor expansion) (de Wilde, 2011; Hutter et al., 2016). Current literature on politicization mostly revolves around de Wilde’s influential definition as “an increase in polarisation of opinions, interests or values and the extent to which they are publicly advanced towards the process of policy formulation within the EU” (2011, p. 560).

Accordingly, in order to politicize an issue, one has to assume that only topics that are frequently raised by political actors in public debates can be considered politicized. As underlined by Hutter and Grande, if an issue is not debated in public, it can be politicized only to a very limited extent, if at all (2014). Thus, the salience can be understood as the relative importance actors – here political parties – attribute to a specific political matter (Beyers, 2018).

However, as underlined by Kauppi and Trenz, one does not talk of politicization if there is agreement that an issue should be raised on the public agenda (Palonen et al., 2019). Thus, politicizing an issue consists “in turning something a priori not contested, politically unmarked, devoid of struggle and disagreement, into something disputable or at least discussable, involving different perspectives and interests (Kauppi et al., 2016)” (Palonen et al., 2019). Politicization combines the visible and the contested dynamics of the political (Kauppi & Trenz, 2019). Thus, one also assumes that the expansion of the actors involved in a public debate is another key dimension of politicization. In the electoral arena, where political parties compete for votes, expansion of the scope of actors means that not only parties in government address European integration, but also party actors that are not represented in government – for example, actors from opposition parties or challengers’ parties (Hutter & Grande, 2014, p. 1004). A third dimension of politicization is polarization of conflict among political

parties. Building on De Wilde's definition (2011), political actors need to put forward differing positions, and one must find opposing camps. More precisely, polarization is defined as the intensity of conflict related to an issue among the different political parties.

Based on this multidimensional conceptualization of politicization, the next section analyses – in the Belgian case and for the last decade – the politicization of European integration by Belgian political parties by focusing respectively on issue salience, polarization and expansion of actors. In Section 4 we focus more specifically on the dimension of salience of EU issues, by exploring Belgian parties' electoral manifestos and legislative agendas.

2. The politicization of European integration:

Issue salience, polarisation and actor expansion

The first step of our analysis is to focus on the dependent variable: the politicization of European integration. This section presents empirical evidences of the enduring non-politicization of European integration in the Belgian electoral arena by focusing on the issue salience, the polarisation and the actor expansion. Our analysis leads us to reaffirm the very limited impact of European integration on Belgian party systems. However, the last 2019 elections seem to pave the way to what could be the awakening of the Belgian Sleeping Beauty.

2.1. Issue salience

In order to assess the degree of salience of European integration for Belgian political parties, we first relied on the Chapel Hill expert survey (CHES) (Bakker et al., 2015) that includes a question asking expert to evaluate the 'relative salience of European integration in the party's public stance' on a scale from 0 to 10. Several works studying the salience of European integration for national political parties have used this measurement (Netjes & Binnema, 2007; Steenbergen & Scott, 2004).

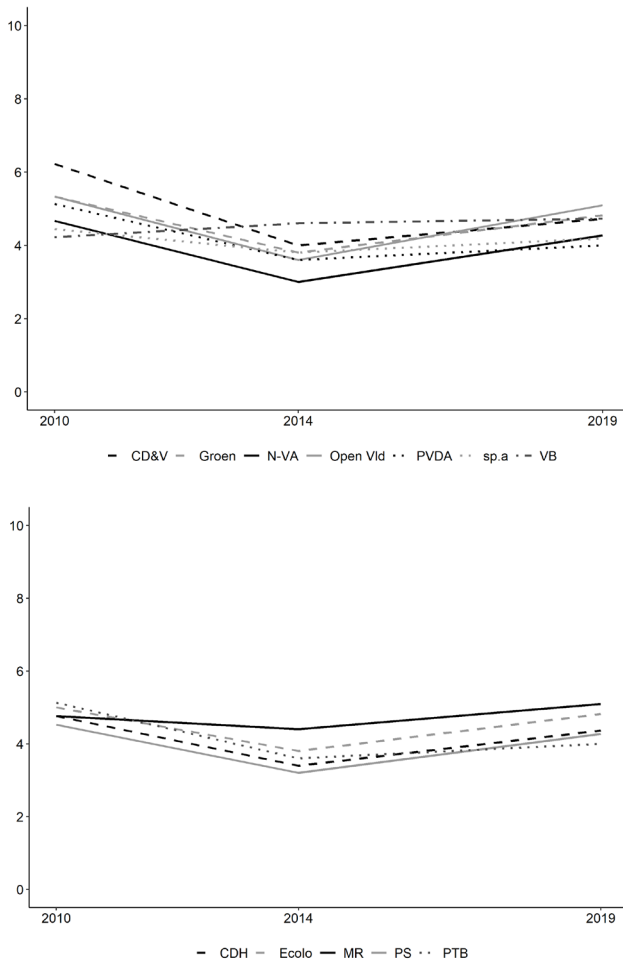


Figure 9.1: Salience of European integration by political parties (2009-2019)

Note: Salience scores with regard to European integration are derived from CHES: see Bakker et al., 2015. CHES uses a scale ranging from 0 (low salience of European integration) to 10 (high salience of European integration).

As underlined by previous studies, overall, a convergence is observed in the Belgian party system towards a moderately low salience of the European issue in the last decade. All the party families, and in both regional party systems, consider the European issue to be only moderately important. Remarkably, the salience's levels reported by expert are stable over time despite the growing importance of European integration witnessed in the 2010s. The 2014 elections even record a convergent decline in both regional political systems – slightly stronger however in Flanders where the European issue was in fact also slightly more salient in 2009. Finally, and as

it was already the case in 2006 (Van Hecke et al., 2012), the last survey (2019) reports hardly any differences between the parties: left or right, Flemish or French-speaking, all parties seem to attribute only moderate importance to European integration.

In order to offer a more comprehensive assessment of how salient European integration really is for Belgian political parties, we propose to turn to parties' communication activities. Tweets from both the official party accounts and the accounts of the party leaders (plus head of government when applicable) have been collected from January 1, 2009 until December 31, 2019. In this period, 195.929 tweets were published by political parties and their leaders in Belgium; 140.680 tweets by Flemish parties and 55.249 tweets by French-speaking parties. Figures 9.2 and 9.3 display parties' emphasis on European affairs in a longitudinal perspective, showing the average weekly percentage of tweets mentioning Europe or the European Union³.

The same picture emerges. By comparing Belgium to neighbouring countries, Figure 9.2 confirms the low salience of European integration in the Belgian electoral arena as Belgian parties' communication activities are characterized by a very low level of salience. This is true for the last decade and the context of growing salience surrounding European elections is not present in the Belgian case whereas it is patent in other national political arenas. As for Brexit as well, one could perceive a growing trend in parties' communication activities in particular in the UK, this is not the case for Belgium.

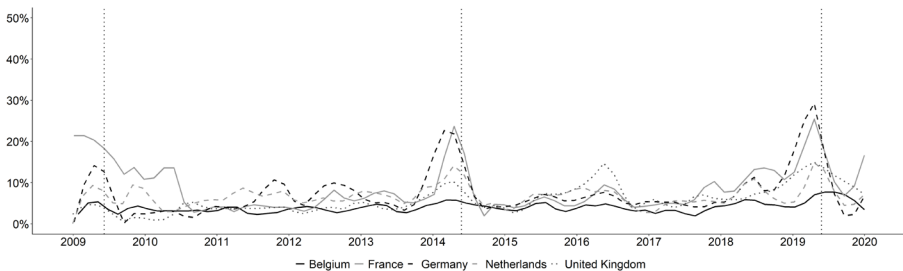


Figure 9.2: Average national weekly emphasis on Europe and the EU in parties' tweets

Figure 9.3 distinguishes between the two Belgian party systems. Even when disaggregating social media and political communication data by parties and by party system, the overall trend of low salience of the European issue in the last decade is confirmed. The differences between the Flemish and the French-speaking parties are quite limited. The only two points of relative deviation from the overall convergence

³ Tweets with at least one occurrence of “EU”, “Europe” or “European(s)”. The results from this straightforward dictionary correlates (0.664) with a more detailed dictionary designed to measure salience of European affairs in plenary speeches (Rauh, 2015).

trend are represented by the slightly higher salience attributed to the EU issues by the Vlaams Belang during the 2014 elections and by the MR between 2019 and 2020.

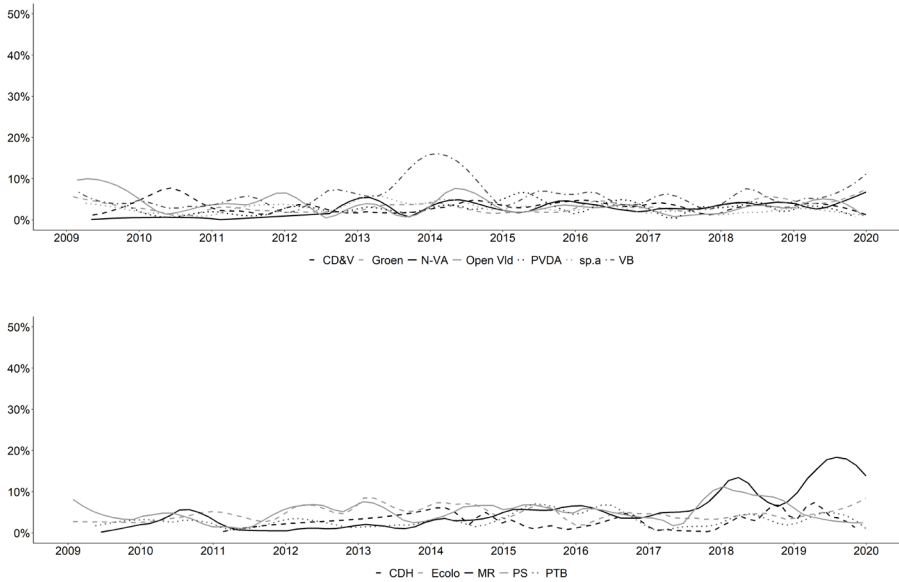


Figure 9.3: Average weekly emphasis on Europe and the EU in Belgian parties' tweets

2.2. Issue polarization and extension of actors

In order to assess the degree of polarisation on European integration by Belgian political parties, we also relied on the Chapel Hill expert survey (CHES) (Bakker et al., 2015) that includes a question asking expert to evaluate the 'overall orientation of the party leadership towards European integration' on a scale from 1 (Strongly opposed) to 7 (Strongly in favour).

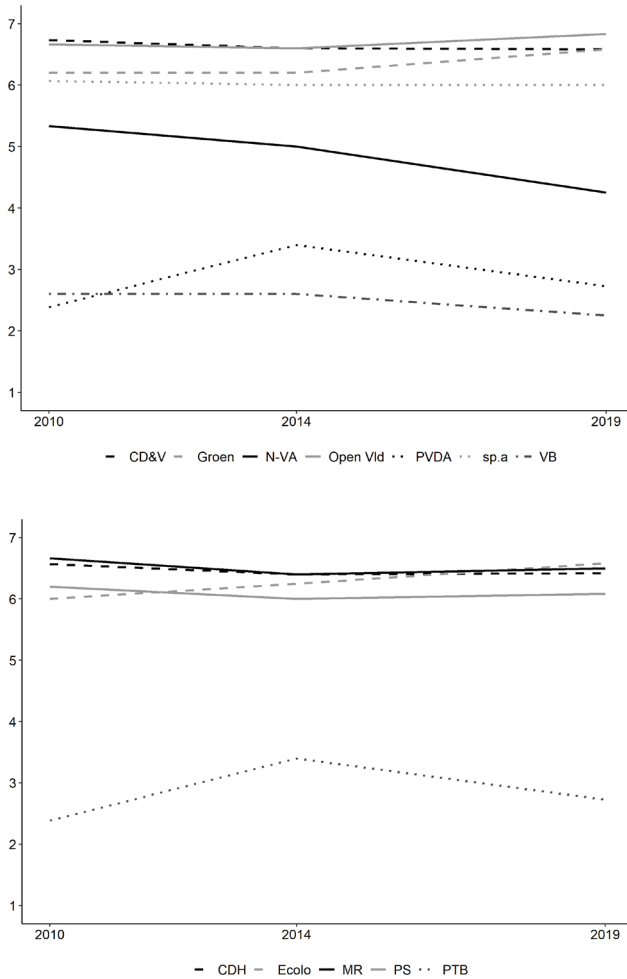


Figure 9.4: Position on European integration by political parties (2009-2019)

Note: Position scores on European integration are derived from CHES: see Bakker et al., 2015. CHES uses a scale ranging from 1 (strongly opposed) to 7 (strongly in favour).

As Figure 9.4 shows, among the Christian democrats, the Liberal parties, the Social democrats and the Green parties, a strong and stable pro-European consensus can be recognized. In the case of the N-VA, a slight decrease in support for the European project is observable, maintaining a tendency that has been observed in the previous decade (Van Hecke et al., 2012) and leading the N-VA to be closer to the neutral position in expert evaluation (position 4). The diverging voices are coming from the radical populist extreme right and extreme left sides of the political spectrum. According to the experts, the Vlaams Belang and the PVDA-PTB are the only parties that take a

clear anti-European position. Overall, one can conclude that the Belgian party landscape is still characterized by a strong pro-European consensus. However, both in the Flemish and the French-speaking party systems, Eurosceptic voices are present.

In the next section, we analyse further the cross-time dynamics and main determinants of the EU issue salience in Belgian national politics by looking at party manifestos and legislative agendas. A specific focus on salience is needed to understand better the patterns of politicization of EU integration in Belgium, since a topic's relevance in the political discourse is one of the main dimensions of the concept. Measuring the relative importance that actors such as political parties and elected representatives attribute to a specific political matter is crucial for better understanding how, why and to what extent the topic is politicized.

3. The politicization of EU integration in Belgium: A focus on issue salience

3.1. The salience of EU integration in national election manifestos

To measure EU salience in Belgian parties' national election manifestos, we also relied on the Manifesto Project Dataset (Volkens et al., 2020), adding up the percentage of quasi-sentences coded as "European Community/Union: Positive" (per108) and "European Community/Union: Negative" (per110). We cover 113 party manifestos prepared ahead of the national parliamentary elections held between 1981 and 2019. The mean EU salience in the sample is 2.67 (s.d. 2.88), while the values of this variable range from 0 to 25.75. Figure 9.5 below presents a longer time span to put into perspective the period covered. It confirms that the politicization of EU in Belgian parties' manifestos has been constantly low and if anything, it has decreased slightly over time.

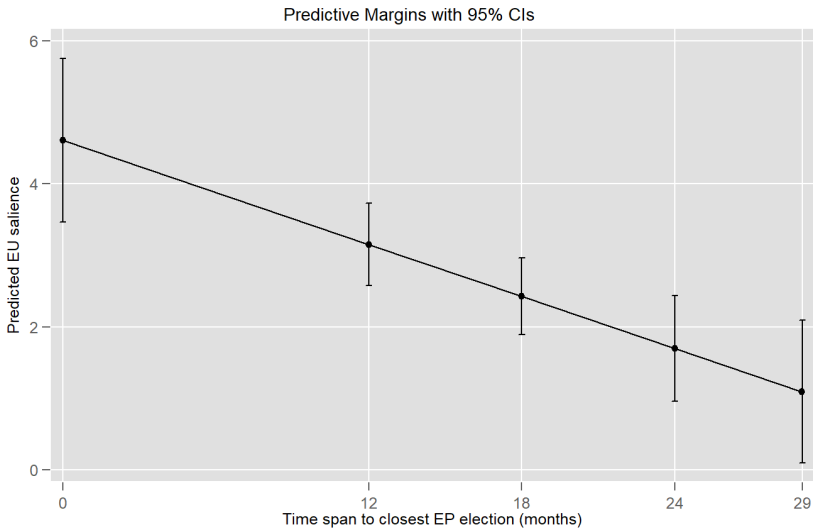


Figure 9.5: Salience of EU integration in Belgian parties' national manifestos

We also try to identify the main explanatory factors of such low levels of salience. Among the independent variables in the model, we test for the effects of the electoral cycle, the ideological positioning concerning European integration, left-right positions, time passed since first EP elections, party age and government/opposition status. Time span to EP elections indicates the number of months between the date of the national parliament elections and the closest European Parliament election⁴. Eurosceptic party is a dummy variable, based on Rooduijn et al. (2019)⁵. We use the 'RILE' measure from CMP for the left-right position of the parties. Party age draws on data from two sources (Chiru et al., 2015; Döring & Regel, 2019) and we use the log of this variable since it is likely that the marginal effect of each additional year is not constant. The underlying assumption is that older parties would become more efficient and also develop specialized EU expertise over time and this will be reflected in the greater emphasis given to European issues in their manifestos (Gross & Chiru, 2021). Government party is a dummy based on the ParlGov database (Döring & Manow, 2020). As not all parties are equally programmatic, they produce manifestos of different lengths and might use manifesto space also for other purposes than emphasizing policy issues or making pledges. To control for these aspects, we use the Share of uncoded sentences, based on the percent of uncoded quasi-sentences from CMP.

⁴ To compute this variable and identify the closest EP election the 5-year intervals between the previous and forthcoming EP elections were split in half.

⁵ VB and PTB/PVDA are the only Eurosceptic parties in our sample. LDD is considered only borderline Eurosceptic in this classification, hence we coded it as 0.

The OLS regressions reported in Table 9.1 below were run first on the pooled sample (Model 1) and then separately for the Flemish and Walloon parties⁶. The main findings are robust to excluding the outlier manifesto of PRL-FDF-MCC from 1999, which devoted more than a quarter of the text to EU issues. We first discuss the findings of the regression using the pooled sample. When national elections take place at the same time or very close to EP elections, Belgian parties assign a higher salience to EU issues in their manifestos. The magnitude of this effect is illustrated in Figure 9.6 below.

Surprisingly, Eurosceptic parties do not seem to put more emphasis on EU issues in their national manifestos compared to the rest. We also find no difference between Flemish and Walloon parties, and the left-right ideological position also does not play any role. The passage of time since the first EP elections has not increased the politicization of the EU in national manifestos. On the contrary, we find a small negative effect for this variable. Of the remaining variables, only the share of uncoded sentences makes a difference: as expected, parties which are less programmatic or use their manifestos for other purposes than making pledges also devote less space to EU integration.

Table 9.1: Explaining EU salience in Belgian parties' national manifestos (OLS regressions)

	Model 1	Model 2 Flemish parties	Model 3 Walloon parties
Time span to EP elections	-0.121*** (0.033)	-0.104*** (0.026)	-0.164** (0.078)
Eurosceptic party	-0.708 (0.952)	-0.570 (0.570)	-4.021 (3.477)
Flemish party	-0.894 (0.621)		
Left-right position	0.019 (0.021)	0.022 (0.014)	0.057 (0.074)
Years since 1 st EP election	-0.087** (0.034)	-0.097*** (0.027)	-0.015 (0.099)
Party age (log.)	0.303 (0.348)	0.278 (0.270)	0.197 (0.940)
Government party	-0.312 (0.569)	0.086 (0.482)	-1.189 (1.295)
Share of uncoded sentences	-0.167** (0.076)	0.156** (0.065)	-0.191 (0.173)

⁶ The sum of the observations in Models 2 and 3 is larger than the number of cases in Model 1 because both regressions include also PTB/PVDA, the only party not split along linguistic lines (and which could not be coded as Flemish or Walloon for the corresponding variable in Model 1).

Constant	6.700*** (1.488)	5.671*** (1.113)	7.573** (3.698)
Observations	111	72	43
R ²	0.171	0.260	0.190

Notes: Dependent variable is a party's EU salience in its national election manifesto.
Significance level: * $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

The margins plot below, based on Model 1 shows that, on average Belgian parties devote 4.6% of their manifestos to EU issues when the national and the EP elections take place at the same time, whereas the corresponding share is only 1.1% when the span to the closest EP election is 29 months.

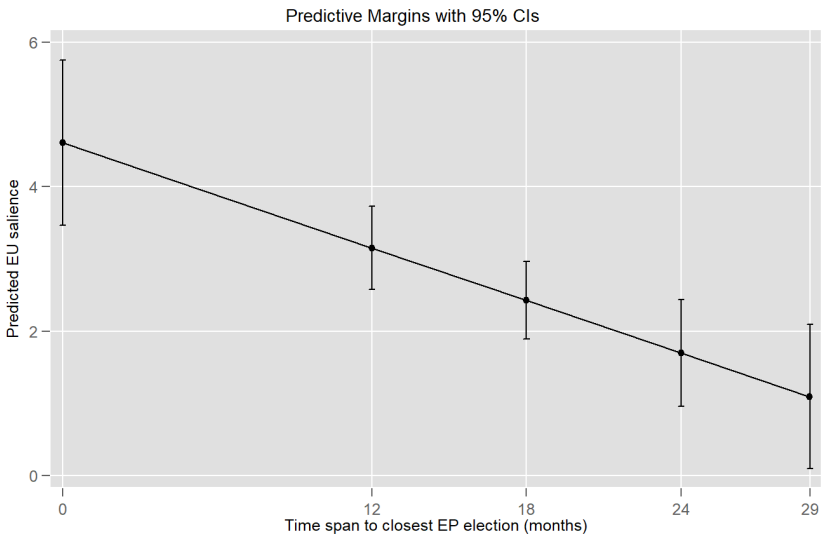


Figure 9.6: Closeness between national and EP election and EU salience in manifestos

The findings of the pooled model are corroborated fully by the regression ran on the sample of Flemish parties. With respect to the model for Walloon parties, two of the effects discussed previously (time passed since first EP election and the share of uncoded sentences) do not reach conventional levels of statistical significance, but this is most likely due to the small number of cases.

3.2. The salience of EU integration in legislative agendas

Drawing on data from the Belgian Comparative Agendas Project (Walgrave et al., 2019) we also investigate how often do Belgian MPs raise parliamentary questions

on EU matters. It seems that in the period covered by this dataset (1988 to 2010) only around 1.3% of all questions and interpellations dealt with the EU: 639 questions out of 48,381.

Figure 9.7 below plots the shares of oral questions and interpellations⁷ addressed to cabinet ministers on EU matters from 1988 to 2010 out of the total number of questions and interpellations submitted yearly. As for the party manifestos and Tweets measures of salience of the EU issue, we do not observe an increased over-time politicization of EU integration.

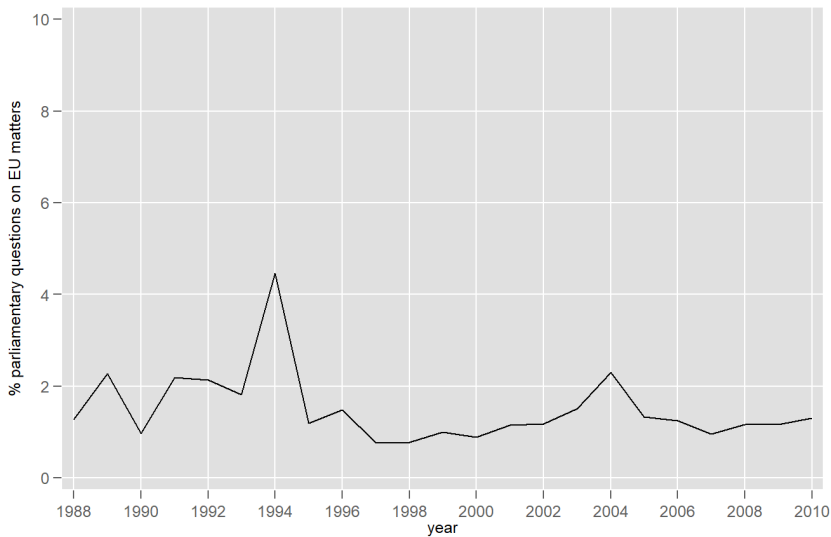


Figure 9.7: Salience of EU integration in Belgian MPs' questions

Table 9.2 below reports the results of a binary logistic regression which has as unit of analysis the individual questions or interpellations. We test here for the main determinants of the variation in the share of MPs' questions and interpellations dealing with the EU. The dependent variable is coded 1 if the question or interpellation addressed EU matters and 0 otherwise. Once again, we observe a proximity effect to EP elections. Thus, Belgian MPs tend to ask slightly more questions on EU matters closer to the time of EP elections.

Another finding that corroborates the results of the analyses of party manifestos is that the passage of time since the first EP elections has not increased the politicization of the EU in legislative agendas in Belgium. Once again, we find a small negative

⁷ In Belgium, as in other Western European democracies, these are more visible compared to written parliamentary questions.

effect for this variable. Eurosceptic⁸ MPs seem to have a higher likelihood of asking EU-related questions, but this effect does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. MPs representing Flemish parties have a smaller probability of asking questions or interpellations on EU issues compared to MPs from Walloon parties⁹.

Table 9.2: Determinants of questions on EU issues in the Belgian Federal Parliament (Binary logit regressions)

Time span to EP elections	0.983*** 0.007
Eurosceptic party	1.369 0.359
Flemish party	0.688*** 0.098
Groen!/ Ecolo	0.982 0.213
Years since 1 st EP election	0.979** 0.010
Government party	0.952 0.121
Observations	48381
Log Likelihood	-3381.035
AIC	6776.070
BIC	6837.578

Notes: Cell entries are odds ratios, robust std. errors clustered on MP
*Significance level: *p < 0.10; **p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01.*

In the next section, we explore further the factors that contribute in explaining the variation in our dependent variable. In particular, we discuss the determinants of low politicization related to partitocracy and the nature of the Belgian party systems.

⁸ We once again relied on the classification of Rooduijn et al. (2019). The two Eurosceptic parties present in this sample are VB and FN.

⁹ Because of the joint parliamentary group of the green parties, Ecolo and Agalev/ Groen! we coded their MPs as a separate category to the variable distinguishing Flemish and Walloon parties.

4. Understanding the so-far non-politicization of European Integration in the Belgian electoral arena and the Awakening of the Sleeping Beauty

We started this analysis from the observation that the mass media have taken an increasingly central position in the political world. An important condition for this is that the news media in Belgium have become almost completely independent politically. The post-war newspaper landscape, characterized by a multitude of newspapers each working according to a partisan logic, has evolved into a landscape in which all newspapers work according to a shared media logic. The radio and television journalists had to free themselves from the pressure of partisan logic and the interference of the executive power as well. But as with their colleagues of the written press, they have started to operate more autonomously according to a media logic that relies on journalistic routines and a shared commercial goal that aims at reaching as many people as possible. It is precisely because this logic is so strongly shared by all the news media that political actors and institutions have begun to adapt to this media logic. At first sight, one would therefore expect that this evolution from a partisan or party logic to a media logic would go hand in hand with a decline in the power of parties. This chapter argued this is not the case.

4.1. The Belgian electoral arena and the lack of electoral incentives?

Hooghe and Marks point to the key role of radical right or left-wing parties. They opposed European integration in order to take advantage of the electoral incentives resulting from a Eurosceptic mass public (2009, p. 21). However, the Belgian public has always been Europhile in its very great majority (Van Ingelgom, 2014), as Figure 9.8 illustrates, and this gives almost no electoral incentives to mainstream and challengers' parties to adopt a Eurosceptic stance on this issue.

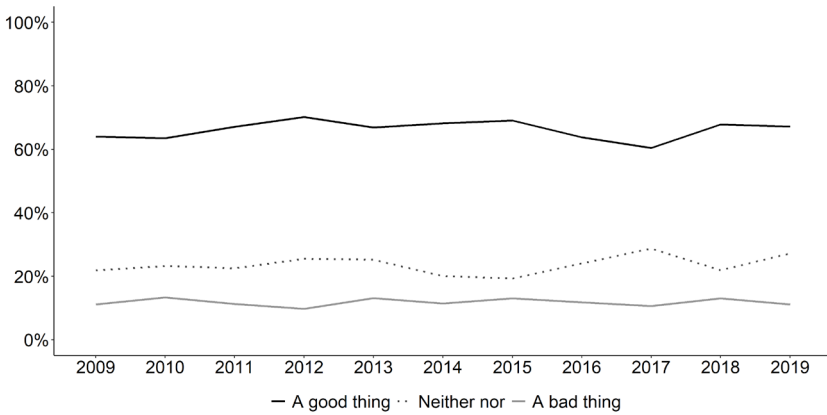


Figure 9.8: Support for EU membership, Belgium (2009-2019)

While public opinion is mostly Europhile, it is important to note that a varying number of Belgian voters choose Eurosceptic parties in recent European elections, as illustrated by Table 9.3. As studies seeking to explain the politicization of the EU issue at the electoral level point to the role of Eurosceptic extreme parties (De Vries, 2007), this is key to understand the extent of the politicization of the EU issue in the Belgian electoral arena. On the French-speaking side, the vote share of Eurosceptic parties was limited until the recent breakthrough of the extreme-left PTB. On the Flemish side, the vote share of Eurosceptic parties varied but has reached a peak in 2019 with the combined results of the extreme-right VB and extreme-left PVDA. These recent developments could mean there is a possibility for a politicization of Europe in the Belgian political arena in the future. However, our previous analyses have shown that even these Eurosceptic parties do not emphasize European matters in their tweets, manifestos and parliamentary questions. They do not seem that much interested in awaking the sleeping beauty.

Table 9.3: Support for parties in recent European elections, by position on European integration (2004-2019)

	2004	2009	2014	2019
Flemish parties				
CD&V	28,15	23,26	19,96	14,53
Groen	7,99	7,9	10,62	12,37
OpenVLD	21,91	20,56	20,4	15,95
Spa	17,83	13,23	13,18	10,21
N-VA		9,88	26,67	22,44
PVDA-PTB	0,62	0,98	2,4	4,95

VB	23,16	15,88	6,76	19,08
Total Europhile parties	75,88	64,95	64,16	53,06
Total Eurosceptic parties	23,78	16,86	9,16	24,03
French-speaking parties				
CDH	15,15	13,34	11,36	8,94
Ecolo	9,84	22,88	11,69	19,91
MR	27,58	26,05	27,1	19,29
PS	36,09	29,1	29,29	26,69
PTB-PVDA	0,81	1,16	5,48	14,59
Total Europhile parties	88,66	91,37	79,44	74,83
Total Eurosceptic parties	0,81	1,16	5,48	14,59

Note: Party positions with regard to European integration are derived from the positions identified in CHES, see above. Among the Flemish parties, CD&V, Groen, OpenVLD and Spa are classified as Europhile, while PVDA and VB are classified as Eurosceptic. Among the French-speaking parties, CDH, Ecolo, MR and PS are classified as Europhile, while PTB is classified as Eurosceptic.

4.2. The ‘frozen’ Belgian party systems

Parties are recognized as central actors in the Belgian political system, up to the point that it has been described as a pillarized partyocracy (Deschouwer, 2002; De Winter et al., 2006) Through the years, the fragmentation of the party system and the effective number of parties have increased due to the multiplication of cleavage politics (Delwit, 2011) and the split of the three traditional party families along the linguistic divide (Deschouwer, 2009). Each party family (Christian Democrats, Socialists, Liberals, Greens, and Extreme Right) has its sister party on the other side of the linguistic border, but the patterns of electoral competition are completely separate between the two-party systems.

However, in recent years the format of the two-party systems have “frozen” in the sense that new cleavages struggle to emerge and even new populist radical right parties, which are ascending all around Europe, have difficulties in mobilizing voters on new issues and thus in surviving (De Winter & Dumont, 2021; de Jonge, 2020). The strength of mainstream parties (notably in the French-speaking party system) and the ongoing salience of traditional cleavage structures has so far ‘frozen’ the existing party systems.

Moreover, in Belgium parties are crucial social and political actors linked to the civil society via their membership and various satellite organizations (pillarization), and they have developed strong links with public administration, which corresponds to an ideal-typical model of partyocracy (Deschouwer 2009). The Belgian party system

may have evolved but is still based on the control by parties on most aspects of social and political life (administration, judiciary, media, etc., see De Winter, 1996). Scholars have tried to measure the level of partitocracy in Belgium using different indicators: the power of the different political actors (legislative and executive branches, party leaders, etc. – De Winter, 1996), the parties' control over administration, judiciary and public media (De Winter & Brans, 2005), the use of ministerial cabinets (Walgrave et al., 2005), or the level of clientelism, corruption and patronage (De Winter, 2000). All have concluded that Belgium scores higher on these indicators than most Western European democracies.

The partitocratic nature of the Belgian political system, combined with the format and the “frozen” nature of the two-party systems, contribute in explaining why the emergence of new Eurosceptic or Euro-centred parties is almost impossible. Therefore, the level of politicization of the European integration issue remains weak because no new political actors specifically positioned on the issue can emerge and strengthen the salience of the new pro- or anti- EU cleavage.

4.3. The co-occurrence of elections

Despite the fact that European elections still remain, to a certain extent, second-order national elections with voters favouring challenger parties and opposition parties, they have also become an occasion for parties to politicize EU issues (Braun, Hutter, & Kersch, 2016; Braun & Schmitt, 2018; Eugster et al., 2020). Belgium could be an exception here, as European elections were held simultaneously with the Belgian federal legislative elections in 2014 and 2019, and simultaneously with regional elections since 1999. In this context, the co-occurrence of national or subnational elections with European elections might decrease the effect of the latter on EU politicization. We find mixed evidences in our analyses. First, in manifestos and parliamentary questions, salience on Europe increases with the proximity of European elections. This confirms that this is an opportunity to raise European issues and debate about Europe. However, compared to other countries, emphasis on Europe in tweets is clearly lower during European elections. This tends to confirm that the co-occurrence of elections limits the possibility of European elections to become an occasion for politicization. Belgian political parties are busy with national and regional campaigns and no longer have time and resources for European issues.

4.4. The absence of internal party divide

In order to analyse further the dimension of polarization of Belgian parties over the European integration issue, and to go beyond the simple measure of the pro- or anti-European attitudes discussed in Figure 9.4, we also briefly explored the degree of internal conflict within parties on this topic. As Figure 9.9 shows, based on Chapel Hill expert survey data, the degree of internal dissent on European integration within

Belgian political parties is relatively weak and remains stable over the whole period analysed (2009-2019). Not only the main mainstream parties show strong and stable pro-European attitudes, but they are also internally united on the issue. The only French-speaking party featuring a slightly higher level of internal dissent on EU issues is the PS during 2014 EP elections. In the Flemish party system, the only party marginally more internally divided on the EU issue is the N-VA.

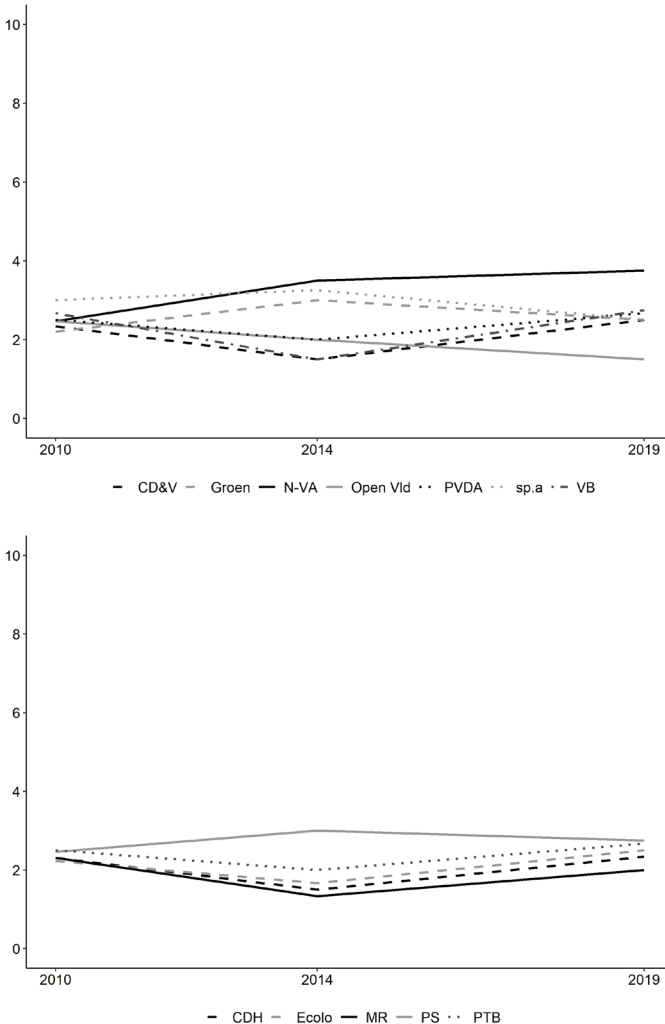


Figure 9.9: Party dissent on European integration by political parties (2009-2019)

Note: Dissent scores with regard to European integration are derived from CHES: see Bakker et al., 2015. CHES uses a scale ranging from 0 (Party was completely united) to 10 (Party was extremely divided).

Conclusion

The salience of the issue of European integration has increased in the last decade, as the dynamics of the 2019 EP campaigns in the Member States have shown (Maier et al., 2021). A decade of economic crisis, of transformation of EU leadership towards greater visibility (e.g. via the Spitzenkandidaten process), of rising Euroscepticism, of increasing need by the MS to find common solutions for common problems - from managing the migration crises to managing the response to the global pandemic – and in which one of the MS exited the union after 47 years of membership, has certainly put European integration back on the centre stage in national politics. Recent studies have shown that in the 2019 campaign, for instance, the average EU salience in national parties' campaign communication has increased on average in the 27 MS (Meier et al., 2021).

However, while all the above-mentioned elements may have increased the visibility of the EU in most Member States, Belgium seems to remain the main exception to this trend. In this chapter, we tried to assess the impact of European integration on Belgian political arena in light of all the changes that have occurred in the last decade. The aim was to verify whether the degree of politicization of European integration process in the Belgian electoral arena remains limited. We also tried to identify the main driving forces of this politicization process in the Belgian case. To do so, we explored the issue salience of the EU topic, but also the degree of polarization of the topic and of its resonance across different political actors.

We measured issue salience through four different measures: expert surveys, tweets by party official accounts and party leaders, parties' electoral manifestos and MPs' parliamentary questions. All these measures confirm the same finding: an overall convergence is observed in the Belgian party systems towards a moderately low salience of the European issue in the last decade until 2019, and according to some of the measures, even in 2020. The salience levels are stable over time despite the growing importance of European integration in the last decade. Also, the multidimensional conceptualization of politicization based on salience, polarization and extension of political actors has confirmed this finding. Our study shows that Belgian parties' show a lasting, strong pro-European consensus. Both in the Flemish and the French-speaking party systems, Eurosceptic voices are present. However, they do not seem to put more emphasis on EU issues in their national manifestos compared to the rest.

In terms of the explanatory factors, our results show that the differences between Flemish and Walloon parties are marginal, and the left-right ideological position also does not play any role. The time lag since the first EP elections has not increased the politicization of the EU in national manifestos. The electoral cycle (and the co-occurrence of other elections than the EP) seems though to bear some explanatory potential for the lack of politicization of European integration in the Belgian electoral arena. All these elements seem to be correlated to a crucial underlying variable: the role of

Belgian partitocracy in this process of (non)politicization. The level of support for the EU is high and relatively stable between and within Belgian parties, which have little interest in mobilizing new cleavages related to the European integration given the stability of the format and nature of the party systems and the broad access they enjoy to state resources.

Even so, small changes seem to have emerged since 2019, with some parties, such as the French-speaking liberals, that start to attribute higher salience to the issue in the last year. Does this mean that we will be soon witnessing an awakening of the Belgian Sleeping Beauty? It may be too soon to say in a conclusive way. Belgian partitocracy and its 'frozen' party systems best explain the specificity of the Belgian case and these two features of the system are clearly rooted in the Belgian political system.

References

- Bakker, R., et al. (2015). Measuring Party Positions on Europe: The Chapel Hill Expert Survey Trend File, 1999-2010. *Party Politics*, 21(1), 143-52.
- Beyers, J., Dür, A., & Wonka, A. (2018). The Political Salience of EU Policies. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 25(11), 1726-37.
- Brack, N., & Crespy, A. (2019). Belgium in Search of a Stance on Today's EU Integration Dilemmas. In *The Future of Europe* (pp. 5-8). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Braun, D., Hutter, S., & Kersch, A. (2016). What Type of Europe? The Salience of Polity and Policy Issues in European Parliament Elections. *European Union Politics*, 17(4), 570-92.
- Braun, D., & Schmitt, H., (2018). Different Emphases, Same Positions? The Election Manifestos of Political Parties in the EU Multilevel Electoral System Compared. *Party Politics*, 26(5), 640-50.
- Chiru, M., Gauja, A., Gherghina, S., & Rodriguez-Teruel, J. (2015). Explaining change in party leadership selection rules. In W. P. Cross & J.-B. Pilet (Eds.), *The politics of party leadership: A cross national perspective* (pp. 31-49). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Delwit, P. (2011). *Les Partis politiques en Belgique*. Brussels: Edition de l'Université de Bruxelles.
- De Jonge, L. (2020). The curious case of Belgium: Why is there no right-wing populism in Wallonia? *Government and Opposition*, 1-17.
- De Vries, C. (2007). Sleeping Giant: Fact or Fairytale? How European Integration Affects National Elections. *European Union Politics*, 8(3), 363-85.
- De Vries, C. (2018). *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- De Wilde, P. (2011). No Polity for Old Politics? A Framework for Analyzing the Politicization of European Integration. *Journal of European Integration*, 33(5), 559-75.
- De Wilde, P., & Trenz, H.-J. (2012). Denouncing European integration: Euroscepticism as polity contestation. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 15(4), 537-554.
- De Wilde, P., & Zürn, M. (2012). Can the politicization of European integration be reversed? *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 50(1), 137-153.
- De Wilde, P., Leupold, A., & Schmidtke, H. (2016). Introduction: the differentiated politicization of European governance. *West European Politics*, 39(1), 3-22.
- De Winter, L. (1996). Party encroachment on the executive and legislative branch in the Belgian polity. *Res Publica*, 38(2), 325-352.
- De Winter L., & Dumont, P. (2021). Belgium: From Highly Constrained and Complex Bargaining Settings to Paralysis? In T. Bergman, H. Back, & J. Hellström (Eds.), *Coalition Governance in Western Europe* (pp. 81-123), Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- De Winter, L., Swyngedouw, M., & Dumont, P. (2006). Party system(s) and electoral behaviour in Belgium: From stability to balkanisation. *West European Politics*, 29(5), 933-956.
- De Winter, L., & Laurent, T. (1995). The Belgian parliament and European integration. *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 1(3), 75-91.
- Deschouwer, K. (2009). Coalition formation and congruence in a multi-layered setting: Belgium 1995-2008. *Regional & Federal Studies*, 19(1), 13-35.
- Deschouwer, K., & Van Assche, M. (2005). It Goes (Almost) without Saying: Europe in the Belgian Parties. Paper prepared for presentation at the European Union Studies Association Ninth Biennial International Conference Austin, Texas, March 31-April 2.
- Döring, H., & Manow, P. (2020). Parliaments and governments database (ParlGov): Information on parties, elections and cabinets in modern democracies. Development version.
- Döring, H., & Regel, S. (2019). Party Facts: A database of political parties worldwide. *Party Politics*, 25(2), 97-109.
- Eugster, B., Jalali, C., Maier, M., Bathelt, S., Leidecker-Sandmann, M., Adam, S., Negrine, R. & Demertzis, N. (2021). When do European election campaigns become about Europe? *West European Politics*, 44(7), 1425-1454
- Gerring, J. (2007). Is There a Viable Crucial Case Method? *Comparative Political Studies*, 40(3), 231-53.
- Goetz, K. H., & Hix, S. (2012). *Europeanised politics? European integration and national political systems*. London: Routledge.

- Grande, E., & Hutter, S. (2016). Beyond Authority Transfer: Explaining the Politicization of Europe. *West European Politics*, 39(1), 23-43.
- Green-Pedersen, C. (2012). A Giant Fast Asleep? Party Incentives and the Politicization of European Integration. *Political Studies*, 60, 115-130.
- Gross, M., & Chiru, M. (2021). Time is on my side: temporal proximity and parties' salience strategies, unpublished manuscript.
- Hix, S., & Høyland, B. (2013). Empowerment of the European parliament. *Annual review of political science*, 16, 171-189.
- Hoeglinger, D. (2016). *Politicizing European Integration: Struggling with the Awakening Giant*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hooghe, L., & Marks, G. (2009). A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus. *British Journal of Political Science*, 39(1), 1-23.
- Hooghe, L., & Marks, G. (2018). Cleavage theory meets Europe's crises: Lipset, Rokkan, and the transnational cleavage. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 25(1), 109-35.
- Hutter, S., & Grande, E. (2014). Politicizing Europe in National Election Arena: A Comparative Analysis of Five West European Countries, 1970-2010. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 52(4), 1002-18.
- Hutter, S., & Kriesi, H. (2019). Politicizing Europe in times of crisis. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 26(7), 996-1017.
- Hutter, S., Grande, E., & Kriesi, H. (Eds.). (2016). *Politicizing Europe: Integration and Mass Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kauppi, N., & Trenz, H. J. (2021). (De) politicisation: Shifting Dynamics in an Emerging European Political Field and Public Sphere. In *Rethinking Politicisation in Politics, Sociology and International Relations* (pp. 153-174). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kriesi, H. (2016). The politicization of European integration. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 54(S1), 32-47.
- Lijphart, A. (1971). Comparative politics and the comparative method. *The American Political Science Review*, 65 (3), 682-693.
- Maier, M., Jalali, C., Maier, J., Nai, A., & Stier, S. (2021). When do parties put Europe in the centre? Evidence from the 2019 European Parliament election campaign. *Politics*, 02633957211008348.
- Marks, G., Wilson, C. J., & Ray, L. (2002). National political parties and European integration. *American Journal of Political Science*, 585-594.
- Netjes, C. E., & Binnema, H. A. (2007). The Salience of the European Integration Issue: Three Data Sources Compared. *Electoral Studies*, 26 (1), 39-49.

- Palonen, K., Wiesner, C., Selk, V., Kauppi, N., Trenz, H.-J., Dupuy, C., Van Ingelgom, V., & Liste, P. (2019). Rethinking Politicization. *Contemporary Political Theory*, 18(2), 248-281.
- Rauh, Christian. (2015). Communicating Supranational Governance? The Salience of EU Affairs in the German Bundestag, 1991-2013. *European Union Politics*, 16(1), 116-38.
- Rooduijn, M., van Kessel, S., Froio, C., Pirro, A. L. P., de Lange, S. L., Halikiopoulou, D., Lewis, P., Mudde, C., & Taggart, P. (2019). The PopuList: An Overview of Populist, Far Right, Far Left and Eurosceptic Parties in Europe.
- Schattschneider, E. E. (1957). Intensity, visibility, direction and scope. *American Political Science Review*, 51(4), 933-942.
- Schimmelfennig, F. (2018). European integration (theory) in times of crisis. A comparison of the euro and Schengen crises. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 25(7), 969-89.
- Schmitter, P. (2009); On the way to a post-functionalist theory of European integration. *British Journal of Political Science*, 39(1), 211-215.
- Satham, P., & Trenz, H.-J. (2013a). How European union politicization can emerge through contestation: The constitution case. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 51(5), 965-980.
- Satham, P., & Trenz, H.-J. (2013b). *The Politicization of Europe: Contesting the Constitution in the Mass Media*. New York: Routledge.
- Steenbergen, M. R., & Scott, D. J. (2004). Contesting Europe? The salience of European integration as a party issue. *European integration and political conflict*, 30(2), 165-192.
- Van der Eijk, C., & Franklin, M. (2009). *Elections and voters*. London: Macmillan International Higher Education.
- Van Hecke, S., Bursens, P., Wolfs, W., & Jadot, C. (2012). A Tale of Two Cities? The Limited Impact of Europe on Belgian Political Parties, Paper presented at the Sixth Pan-European Conference on EU Politics University of Tampere, Finland, 13-15 September 2012.
- Van Ingelgom, V. (2014). *Integrating Indifference: A Comparative, Qualitative and Quantitative Approach to the Legitimacy of European Integration*. Colchester: ECPR Press.
- Versailles, A. (2021). *Parties communicating Europe: investigating why parties communicate on European affairs and how citizens react to these messages*. Louvain-la-Neuve: Université catholique de Louvain.

- Volkens, A., Burst, T., Krause, W., Lehmann, P., Matthieß, T., Merz, N., Regel, S., Weßels, B., & Zehnter, L. (2020). The Manifesto Data Collection. Manifesto Project (MRG/ CMP/ MARPOR). Version 2020b. Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB).
- Walgrave, S., Joly, J., & Sevenans, J. (2019). The Belgian Agendas Project. In F. R. Baumgartner, C. Breunig, & E. Grossman (Eds.), *Comparative Policy Agendas: Theory, Tools, Data* (pp. 57-66). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wolfs, W., Put, G. J., & Van Hecke, S. (2021). Explaining the reform of the Europarties' selection procedures for Spitzenkandidaten. *Journal of European Integration*, 1-24.

Chapter 10. Direct and deliberative democracy as potential remedies for partitocracy in Belgium

Sophie Devillers
Benjamin Biard
Pierre-Étienne Vandamme
Vincent Jacquet
Min Reuchamps

Introduction

The golden age of party democracy may have passed (Mair, 2013), but political parties are still the central actors organizing governments and opposition in most democracies. Belgium is no exception in this respect. The country has actually historically scored quite high on the scale of partitocracy (De Winter, della Porta, & Deschouwer, 1996) or, less pejoratively, “partyiness” (Katz, 1986), understood as the degree of control exercised by parties over policy-making and the selection of (major) public officials.

The persisting dominance of parties goes accompanied with quite some popular and theoretical discontent. Many citizens consider that parties lock democratic procedures and thereby reduce the opportunities for citizens who are not party members¹ to weigh on collective decisions. According to scholars, the logic of partisan antagonism is often perceived as making public debates predictable and non- or weakly deliberative (Leydet, 2015). To overcome these problems, democratic innovations such as popular initiatives, referendums or citizen assemblies are often put forward with the aim of bypassing traditional partisan procedures and enriching representative institutions (Smith, 2009).

The aim of this chapter is to take stock of the support for such direct and deliberative democratic procedures among the population and to relate this support with citizens’ perception of political parties. We want to analyze to what extent these innovations can be a remedy for the ills of partitocracy. To this end, we start with a brief overview of the challenges raised by the centrality of parties in the Belgian political system. Then, we analyze the demand for non-partisan politics by Belgian citizens and link it with their perception of parties. Finally, in the third section, we compare the demand

¹ This does not mean that party members enjoy sufficient opportunities for influence (most parties are organized in a very hierarchical way), but that they usually enjoy more opportunities for influence than non-members.

side with the supply side, i.e. what kind of democratic innovations are supported by Belgian parties. We conclude with a discussion of the prospects of partitocracy and democratic innovation in Belgium.

1. Partitocracy under question

1.1. Why is partitocracy criticized?

A diversity of undesirable consequences had been associated with partitocracy, ranging from government instability to public indebtedness, political patronage and corruption (see De Winter, della Porta, & Deschouwer, 1996). We will focus here on two problems related to partitocracy for which direct and deliberative democratic procedures could be potential remedies.

The first problem is that a political system excessively controlled by parties reduces the opportunities of political involvement available to citizens. These opportunities are virtually reduced to party membership, which does not guarantee that all voices are considered. If you are neither a party member nor an influential public figure, your chances to weigh on public decisions are very low. And if you are a party member, your opportunities to influence policy-making will depend on the degree of intra-party democracy, which is usually not very high in traditional political parties (Vandeleene, 2018)². This can create public frustration, resulting either in citizens disconnecting from politics, or requesting more direct participation in the decision making.

The limitation to political involvement to party membership and its potential negative consequences can be judged undesirable from a normative viewpoint for at least two reasons. On the one hand, the growing frustration and disconnection between citizens and traditional political parties may affect the stability of representative institutions and lead voters to anti-democratic parties or attitudes. On the other hand, as citizens increasingly disconnect from political parties, thereby decreasing their membership and connection to civil society, the quality of the democratic system might be weakened. Indeed, as people move away from parties, the representative gap risks widening: what citizens aspire to may no longer match with what their representatives do.

The second problem is the lack of deliberativeness of a political system saturated by parties. In the partisan adversary process, two types of discourses dominate. The first one is public statements, which are targeted at citizens and not meant to convince opponents, even when these statements are expressed in parliamentary “debates” (Leydet, 2015). The other one is negotiation, which usually takes place behind closed doors, with the aim of building a coalition or reaching a peaceful agreement with social partners.

² Interestingly, Kelbel, Sandri and van Haute (2018, pp. 43-44) show that party activists are also strongly critical towards the weight of parties in Belgium.

None of these types of discourses is genuinely deliberative, because participants do not substantively engage with each other's reasons and arguments. This is regrettable because the political process then loses the potential for correcting mistaken views and recognizing legitimate claims that deliberation can offer when it is successful.

Two qualifications to this analysis must be mentioned before moving further. First, deliberation does sometimes occur in parliamentary committees, because these discussions are not public, and the issues may not have been highly politicized yet (Leydet, 2015, pp. 243-244). Second, even when cross-party deliberation is absent, political parties can be held to play a valuable deliberative role. By situating their actions in a coherent societal project, they can contribute to making the decision process visible and understandable for the wider public³. This would facilitate accountability, and parties would bring visibility and hope to the outvoted points of view (Rummens, 2012). What is more, the public confrontation of competing societal projects may help citizens build their political judgments through internal deliberation⁴.

Nevertheless, despite these two qualifications, a political system highly dominated by parties leaves little room for genuine deliberative exchanges. From this viewpoint, one can consider that representative institutions would be improved if more space could be made for non-partisan deliberations who's input would then feed the decision-making process.

1.2. Politics beyond parties

We thus have diagnosed two main democratic problems associated with partitocracy: the lack of opportunities for citizen involvement, and the lack of space for non-partisan deliberation. Their solutions point in two different directions. When the aim is to increase the opportunities for citizen involvement or inclusive participation, direct democracy mechanisms complementing representative institutions seem the way to go. These mechanisms include the right of initiative, public consultations, referendums⁵ or participatory budgeting. When, in turn, the aim is to have spaces of non-partisan deliberation, randomly selected citizen assemblies look more promising (Caluwaerts, 2011).

In light of this theoretical analysis, we will unravel to what extent citizens perceive these pitfalls of partitocracy, and to what extent they support alternative models to counter these problems. We will see that more than supporting participatory and/or deliberative processes per se, they seem to have lost faith in the current conduct of the system, and many of them might consequently support all alternative solutions they

³ Which is usually not the case for decisions resulting from other potential political fora such as deliberations in mini-publics (Rummens, 2016).

⁴ This argument, however, has less strength if parties merely display their positions and never engage with each other's reasons and arguments (Leydet, 2015).

⁵ On public consultations and referendums in Belgium, see Gaudin, Jacquet, Pilet and Reuchamps (2018).

are offered, be it expert governments, referendums or citizen assemblies, at all levels of power and with all levels of empowerment.

2. The demand for non-partisan politics in Belgium

2.1. How do citizens view parties?

As we have seen, the Belgian political system is structured around elections, in which parties compete for power. These parties are the main drivers of coalition formation and law making and structure the whole political debate (Deschouwer, 2012). In this section, we analyze how citizens perceive this highly partitocratic system on several criteria, from a very general perspective, to somewhat more specific aspects of this system. The idea is to understand to what extent Belgian citizens trust this system centered on elections and parties, agree on the way it functions and identify with political parties. Then, in the next section, we show to what extent their position on these elements generates support – or lack of it – for alternative political institutions. The results presented in this section and the next one come from the EOS RepResent 2019 survey⁶.

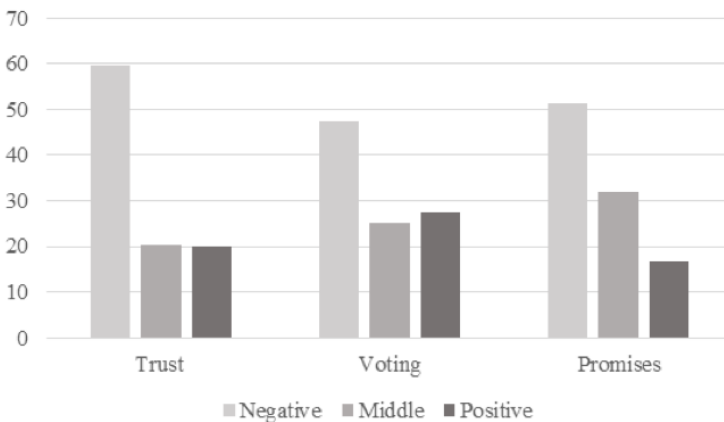


Figure 10.1: Level of trust in political parties⁷

⁶ RepResent is a Belgian academic consortium gathering researchers from 5 different universities. The 2019 study aimed at analyzing the 2019 Belgian elections.

⁷ “Trust” = On a scale of 0 to 10, what is your level of confidence in political parties? [0 – 4= negative; 5= middle; 6 – 10= positive]. “Voting” & “Promis-es”= Please indicate to what extent you disagree or agree with the following statements: Voting is pointless because parties do what they want anyway [to-tally disagree & somewhat disagree= positive ; neither agree nor disagree= mid-dle; somewhat agree & totally agree= negative] & Politicians try to keep their promises [totally disagree & somewhat disagree= negative; neither agree nor disagree= middle; somewhat agree & totally agree= positive].

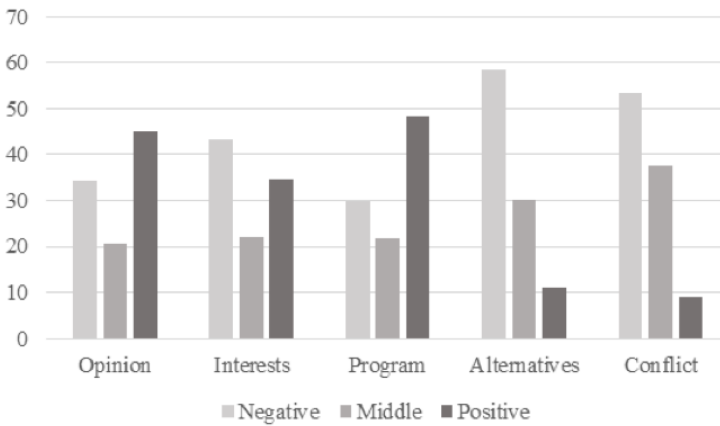


Figure 10.2: Level of perceived congruence between citizens and parties⁸

However, even though they do not trust parties, citizens still seem to feel somehow represented by them. They mainly recognize themselves in a specific party's program and feel that their opinion matches the one of a specific party. However, they are not convinced that this match in terms of opinion is accompanied by a match in terms of interests: citizens might agree with a party line and still feel that this same party does not fairly represent their interests. In other words, people seem to believe in the party's ideological stances, but not in their willingness to implement them once in power. What's more, more than half of the respondents believe that the ideas, opinions voiced by parties are more radical than theirs: there would be more differences between the parties' positions and their electorate than among the whole electorate. In addition, a large majority of respondents, even though they tend to identify with a specific party, think that these parties do not offer real alternatives to voters. These responses indicate that Belgian citizens hold ambivalent views on their political parties.

⁸ "Opinion", "Interests" & "Program" = Could you indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: I believe that there is a political party and/or politician that shares my opinions [0 – 4= negative; 5= middle; 6 – 10= positive], There is not one political party and/or politician that properly represents my interests in general [0 – 4= positive; 5= middle; 6 – 10= negative], I find that some of my main concerns are addressed in the program of a political party [0 – 4= negative; 5= middle; 6 – 10= positive]. "Alternatives" & "Conflict" = To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements: Political parties do not offer real political alternatives to the people [0 – 4= positive; 5= middle; 6 – 10= negative], Political opposition is more present between citizens and the elite than between citizens themselves [0 – 4= positive; 5= middle; 6 – 10= negative].

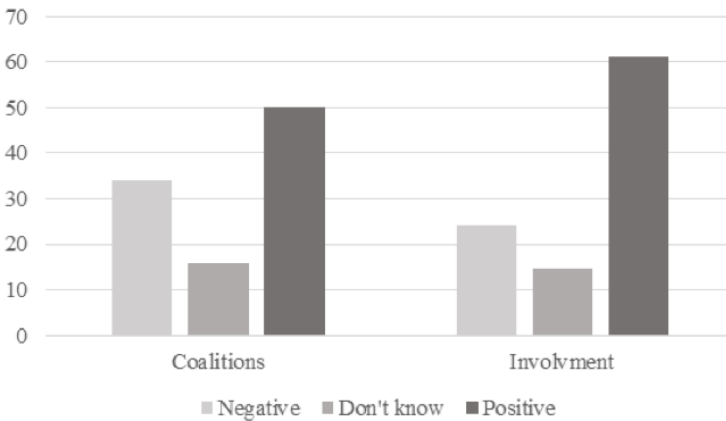


Figure 10.3: Level of support for the current functioning of the system⁹

Regardless of these rather negative perceptions of parties, our respondents still seem to believe that they are useful to form governments. More than half of them agree with the idea that parties are the actors who must be in charge of negotiating coalition formations, possibly because it is hard to imagine an alternative. However, they also believe that parties should not remain the only actors in power, as they are mainly in favor of involving citizens to a larger extent in decision making, at least more often than merely at the ballot box. Previous findings also indicated that a majority of voters considered that parties had too much weight on policy-making in Belgium, but it did not result in an overwhelming support for increased citizen participation (Kelbel, Sandri, & van Haute, 2018, pp. 41-45).

2.2. How do citizens view democratic innovations?

Our data show that, in general, respondents tend to support a greater involvement of citizens in the political decision-making system. Figure 10.4 shows that citizens are more likely to trust citizens than parties to make decisions in their name. Also, they believe that this greater involvement of citizens should happen at all levels.

⁹“Coalitions” & “Involvement” = In Belgium, democracy is organized according to a number of legal rules and informal practices. We will introduce you to a few. For each of these rules that organize democracy in Belgium, can you tell us what you think? The governments are composed of coalitions between several parties. These parties must negotiate after the elections to find an agreement in order to form a government together [very negative & somewhat negative= negative; somewhat positive & very positive= positive] & Apart from voting during elections, citizens are currently not involved in the political decision-making processes [very negative & somewhat negative= negative; somewhat positive & very positive= positive].

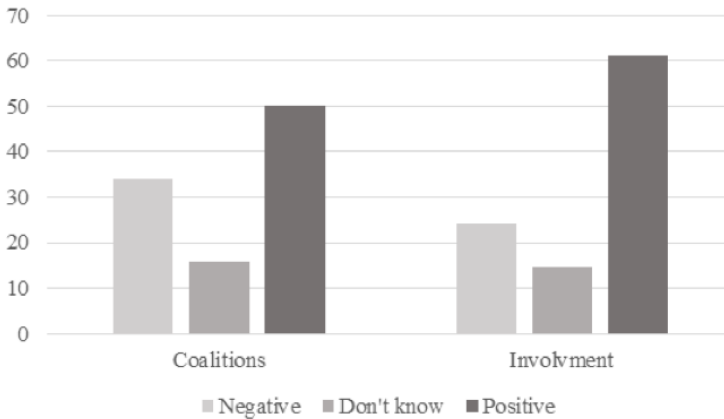


Figure 10.4: Level of trust in citizens compared to parties¹⁰

However, the closer the level of government, the greater the support for citizen involvement. This can be explained by several elements. First, local issues affect citizens quite directly compared to national or European issues, and respondents might therefore privilege these closer issues to more distant ones. Second, they might feel more comfortable discussing local issues, as they can be perceived as less technical and more easily discussable than more global issues. Third, the local level might be considered a first step in the spread of citizen participation: respondents might want to first experience participation at the local level before fully empowering citizens at higher levels; it would sound less radical, more reasonable or careful to start at the local level.

¹⁰ “Parties” = On a scale of 0 to 10, what is your level of confidence in political parties? [0 – 4= negative; 5= middle; 6 – 10= positive] & “Citizens” = To what extent are you in favor or against the following statement: I prefer being represented by an ordinary citizen rather than a professional politician. [totally disagree & somewhat disagree= negative; neither agree nor disagree= middle; somewhat agree & totally agree= positive].

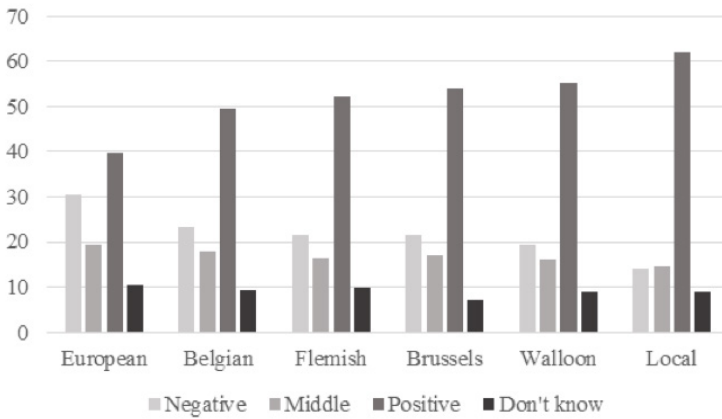


Figure 10.5: Support for citizen involvement at different levels of power¹¹

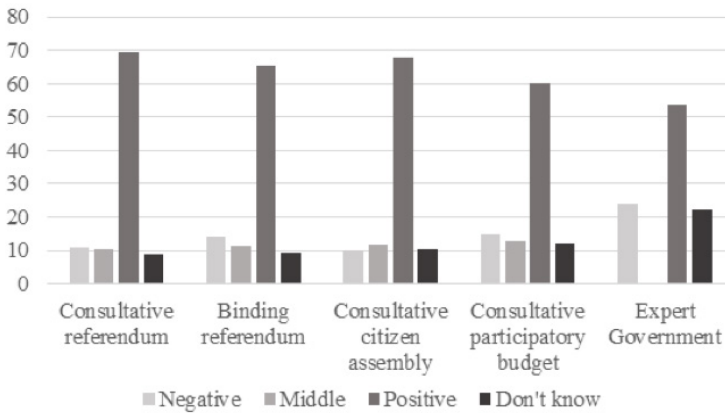


Figure 10.6: Level of support for different democratic innovations¹²

¹¹ “European”, “Belgian”, “Flemish”, “Brussels”, “Walloon” & “Local” = To what extent are you in favor or against the following statement: Important political decisions should more often be taken by ordinary citizens rather than by elected politicians: at the European level, at the Belgian level, at the Flemish level, at the Brussels level, at the Walloon level, at the local level [0 – 4= negative; 5= middle; 6 – 10= positive].

¹² “Consultative referendum” = In general, are you for or against consultative referendums about important national issues? Citizens have the right to vote for or against a specific proposition. The parliament receives the voters’ opinion but is not obliged to follow it [0 – 4= negative; 5= middle; 6 – 10= positive]; “Binding referendum” = In general, are you for or against binding referendums about important national issues? Citizens have the right to vote for or against a specific proposition. The parliament receives the voters’ opinion and is obliged to follow it [0 – 4= negative; 5= middle; 6 – 10= positive]; “Consultative citizen assembly” = In general, are you for or against the organization of consultative citizen forums on important national issues? A citizen forum is an assembly composed

When it comes to the shape and power their involvement should have, citizens tend to support different specific tools. First, they tend to be in favor of participatory mechanisms such as referendums, either with a non-binding power, or, to a lesser extent, with a binding power. Second, they also tend to value more deliberative bodies, such as non-binding citizen assemblies or participatory budgets. Hence, there does not seem to be a clear citizen preference for one of these models. We cannot say that citizens want to directly participate. What remains unclear is whether citizens would be happy in a configuration with only forms of citizen involvement restricted to the happy few who are randomly selected. Third, they would also be in favor of experts making important decisions instead of elected representatives, although support is a bit lower here¹³. This suggests that some citizens would be happy with anything other than parties, and that democratic innovations are not the only possible way to address the limitations of partitocracy.

Table 10.1: Pearson correlations between democratic innovations

	Consultative referendum	Binding referendum	Consultative citizen assembly	Consultative participatory budget	Experts
Consultative referendum	1	0.46***	0.53***	0.40***	0.13***
Binding referendum	0.46***	1	0.53***	0.58***	0.21***
Consultative citizen assembly	0.53***	0.53***	1	0.61***	0.23***
Consultative participatory budget	0.40***	0.58***	0.61***	1	0.25***
Experts	0.13***	0.21***	0.23***	0.25***	1

Level of significance: *** = < 0.001, ** = < 0.01, * = < 0.05

As shown on the table above, the support for each of these tools is significantly correlated with the support for all other tools. While the literature sometimes suggests

of around 30 to 50 citizens, selected at random, who meet and discuss a certain topic in order to formulate a recommendation that is then transmitted to the parliament [0 – 4= negative; 5= middle; 6 – 10= positive]; “Consultative participatory budget” = In general, are you for or against participative budgeting on a national level? Participative budgeting consists of citizens deciding on a portion of the Belgian state’s budget. The citizens involved meet and discuss the way in which they wish to spend that amount in order to support different specific projects [0 – 4= negative; 5= middle; 6 – 10= positive], “Expert Government” = Currently, several propositions for reform of the Belgian democracy are being debated. We will introduce you to a few. For each of these reforms, could you indicate if you are completely against, somewhat against, somewhat in favor, or totally in favor: Experts should take the major political decisions instead of politicians [1 & 2= negative; 3 & 4= positive].

¹³ The data dates back to May 2019. As a result of the 2020 health crisis and the important role of experts in the decision-making process to contain the pandemic, citizens’ opinions may differ as to the place to be given to experts.

that there is a substantive difference between participatory and deliberative logics (Cohen & Fung, 2004; Mutz, 2006), citizens tend not to evaluate these as separate mechanisms: when they support one kind of tool, they also tend to support the others, regardless of their participatory or deliberative nature. However, when the correlations between the different participatory and deliberative tools are quite strong, their bilateral correlations with the support for a technocratic government is less strong. Therefore, they will be considered as two different “preferences” (or factors) in the following analyses.

Table 10.2: Results of the principal component analysis

	Preference for deliberative and participatory tools	Preference for an expert government
Consultative referendum	0.72	-0.29
Binding referendum	0.80	-0.11
Consultative citizen assembly	0.83	-0.09
Consultative participatory budget	0.81	0.00
Experts	0.40	0.90

Indeed, when computing a principal component analysis (results displayed in Table 10.2) with all 5 questions, we clearly see how the deliberative and participatory tools all explain one “preference” for such democratic innovations, and how the support for an expert government can be considered as a separate “preference”.

Table 10.3: Linear regression explaining the support for participatory and deliberative tools

	B	E.S.	Sig.
(Constant)	5.77	0.33	
Age	-0.01	0.00	**
Gender	0.22	0.07	**
Highest level of education	-0.09	0.04	*
Region	0.21	0.05	***
Interest in politics	0.03	0.02	
External efficacy	-0.21	0.05	***
Internal efficacy	-0.06	0.04	
Confidence in citizens	0.33	0.02	***
Confidence in experts	0.14	0.02	***

Confidence in political parties	-0.05	0.02	**
Absence of citizen participation	-0.42	0.04	***
Coalition and parties	-0.11	0.04	*
Feeling of representation by parties	0.06	0.02	**

$R = 0.48$

$R^2 = 0.23$

Level of significance: *** = < 0.001, ** = < 0.01, * = < 0.05

Several characteristics of the respondents contribute to explaining why they are in favor of the integration of participatory and deliberative tools in the political system.

On the one hand, sociodemographic variables are at play. Women seem more supportive of such mechanisms than men, and younger respondents are more positive about such tools than older respondents, which is in line with other studies' results (Schuck & de Vreese, 2011; Vandamme et al., 2018). Moreover, the level of education of respondents seems to be negatively correlated with the preference for participatory and deliberative mechanisms, which means that people holding a higher degree are less likely to be in favor of such innovations (Schuck & de Vreese, 2015; Vandamme et al., 2018). Also, Flemish respondents seem significantly more reluctant to support such innovations, compared to Walloon respondents. This result is to be read in light of previous studies examining cultural differences between the two regions (Abts et al., 2012) and a lower dissatisfaction with partitocracy in Flanders (Kelbel, Sandri, & van Haute, 2018, p. 45).

On the other hand, political attitudes matter to explain the preference for more participatory and deliberative mechanisms. The negative correlation displayed between "external efficacy" and the preference we are aiming to explain indicates that the less respondents feel that the government cares for their needs and responds to the demands of the population, the more they are likely to advocate for more participatory and deliberative tools. Also, the level of confidence of the respondents in several actors is significant: the more they trust citizens and experts to be knowledgeable and honest enough to take care of important decisions, and the more they lack confidence in political parties, the more they tend to be in favor of such democratic innovations.

When it comes to the link with more precise attitudes towards the functioning of the partitocratic system, results are clear. Unsurprisingly, respondents who agree with the statement that parties should negotiate coalitions and form governments, with citizens only participating at elections, are less likely to support participatory and deliberative innovations.

All in all, it seems that it is the people who are distrustful and disappointed by the current partitocratic system that are the most likely to support the democratic innovations we presented to them in the survey. Again, this confirms previous findings, in

Belgium (Bedock & Pilet, 2020) and elsewhere (Webb, 2013). This provides support to the hypothesis that democratic innovations can be a promising remedy for the ills of partitocracy, at least in terms of their perceived legitimacy among the citizenry.

Table 10.4: Linear regression explaining the support for a delegation of important decisions to experts

	B	E.S.	Sig.
(Constant)	2.71	0.13	
Age	0.00	0.00	**
Gender (man=1)	0.03	0.03	
Highest level of education	-0.07	0.02	***
Region	-0.02	0.02	
Interest in politics	-0.03	0.01	***
External efficacy	-0.06	0.02	**
Internal efficacy	-0.02	0.02	
Confidence in citizens	-0.01	0.01	
Confidence in experts	0.22	0.01	***
Confidence in political parties	-0.07	0.01	***
Coalition and parties	-0.06	0.02	**
Absence of citizen participation	0.06	0.02	**
Feeling of representation by parties	0.00	0.01	**

$R = 0.48$

$R^2 = 0.23$

Level of significance: *** = < 0.001, ** = < 0.01, * = < 0.05

As to the support for an expert government, the model seems quite different. Contrary to what we found for participatory and deliberative mechanisms, being Walloon or Flemish does not matter, and men are more likely than women to support a technocratic government. Also, young people are less likely to support such a reform, while they were the most supportive of more participatory tools, which is in line with Inglehart's (1997) theory about the aversion of young people for power delegation. However, the effect of the level of education is the same for both preferences: the more highly educated citizens seem to reject these two reforms.

While being interested in politics did not matter to explain the support for participatory and deliberative tools, it does seem to be negatively correlated with the support for a technocratic government. Indeed, the less respondents are interested in politics,

the more they seem to approve of the delegation of important decisions to experts (see also Bertsoy & Caramani, 2022). When it comes to the level of confidence in some political actors, the more the respondents trust experts, and the less they trust political parties, the more they are likely to be in favor of such a reform.

Finally, when considering more specific attitudes towards the current political system, it seems that the people who support a delegation of power to experts are also disagreeing with the way coalitions and governments are built only by political parties. Moreover, citizens supporting a more technocratic government not only defend a lower importance of parties, but also endorse a minimalist understanding of citizen participation (only through elections). This is the opposite of citizens supporting deliberative and participatory processes, who favor less power for political actors and more participation by citizens (not exclusively through elections).

3. Parties and democratic innovations

3.1. How do parties view democratic innovations?

In Belgium, political parties are calling for democratic innovations at the local, regional and federal levels. This is the case since different civic organisations as the G1000¹⁴ or the foundation for future generations called for developing democratic innovations. Whereas in the 2010 elections, there were very few mentions of democratic innovations in party manifestos, the 2014 manifestos contained many more propositions about participatory and deliberative democracy (Jacquet, Moskovic, Caluwaerts, & Reuchamps, 2016). Similarly, during the 2019 multiple voting campaign, almost all parties developed proposals aimed at increasing citizens' participation in decision-making. Yet, the extent to which such measures are proposed and the nature of those proposals vary depending on the party (and depending on the party family). Through a thematic analysis, the following paragraphs shed light on how parties view democratic innovations in Belgium, based on the manifestos published for the 26 May 2019 elections.

On the French-speaking side, all parties agree that it is important to involve citizens to a greater extent into the decision-making process. One of the first parties to address the issue is unquestionably Écolo. While Écolo – and, more broadly, the ecologist party family – has owned the issue for several decades (Biard et al., 2020), it still devotes an important place to democratic innovations in its electoral program. According to Écolo, recent scandals lead to a double necessity: “On the one hand, that of rebuilding democracy around citizens' participation. On the other hand, that of a profound overhaul of the practices of representative democracy”¹⁵. Therefore, the ecologist party

¹⁴ The G1000 was a grassroots initiative organized in 2011. It aimed to bring together 1000 citizens, randomly selected, to deliberate about the future of Belgium (Reuchamps et al., 2017).

¹⁵ Écolo, Manifesto (2019), p. 38.

notably proposes to create a right of legislative initiative for citizens and to allow referendums. The green party also suggests setting up joint or mixed committees in parliamentary assemblies made up of elected representatives and randomly selected citizens (a reform recently implemented in the Brussels Parliament and accepted by the Walloon Parliament). Then, it strives for the suppression of the Senate and for the creation of an inter-federal assembly of the future focused on long-term issues (such as climate or the ageing of the population) and composed of randomly selected citizens. Yet, as previously underlined, Écolo also advocates measures to improve the functioning of representative democracy, such as through the establishment of a parity democracy in terms of gender in parliaments, governments and administrations or through the lowering of the voting age to 16 years old.

The Centre démocrate humaniste (CDH) also defends the need to reform the functioning of democracy in its program. Most of its proposals are inspired by what already exists in Wallonia, as the systematization of citizen panels in parliaments, made up of randomly selected citizens, in order to provide advice to representatives, the generalization of the co-writing and co-editing of decrees and laws in all Parliaments, the extension of the possibility for citizens to provide written advices on law proposals in all parliaments, and the introduction of regional popular consultation in Brussels and the German-speaking Community. In addition, CDH also wants to generalize existing mechanisms at the local level. Therefore, CDH encourages participatory and cooperative budgets through the entire country and wants to make advisory councils for children, the youth and elderly people mandatory at the local level.

The measures proposed by the Parti socialiste (PS) in order to improve the quality of democracy are numerous. PS firstly considers it crucial to enhance representative democracy, for instance by extending the right to vote in European, federal, regional and provincial elections to foreigners who have been living legally in Belgium for at least five years, or by allowing all voters, including those who cannot move, to vote by setting up polling stations in rest homes, hospitals and prisons. Yet, the socialist party also defends a more participatory decision-making system. Among others, PS proposes to create a popular constituent assembly made up of randomly selected citizens responsible for thinking about provisions to be included in a preamble to the Constitution. In addition, the party wants to establish the citizens' initiative referendum at the federal, regional and local levels and to create citizens' committees in parliamentary assemblies, based on voluntary citizens, randomly selected citizens and representatives in order to debate about a wide variety of issues and to provide advice. PS also aims to organize deliberative polls for taking the pulse of the population as to the directions to be given to future reforms, to systematize popular consultation and to create and integrate users' committees composed of "experience experts" into administrations and public companies. As CDH, PS also encourages municipalities and provinces to implement procedures for participatory budgeting and to make it compulsory to set up thematic advisory bodies within municipal and provincial councils.

Also, the Mouvement réformateur (MR) proposes to make democracy more participatory. The liberal party indeed suggests to systematize popular consultation beyond Wallonia, to strengthen participatory mechanisms at the local level, for instance by generalizing participatory budgeting, and to systematize citizens' panels in parliaments, made up of randomly selected citizens, who could therefore give opinions, formulate proposals and make recommendations to representatives. MR further advocates improving representative democracy, notably by removing the devolving headbox effect on electoral lists and by abolishing lists of substitutes on electoral lists.

Beyond sharing some proposals with other parties – such as the creation of a right of legislative initiative for citizens and the establishment of citizens' initiative referendum –, the regionalist party DéFI develops a specific plan – called Nova Carta – in order to reform the State and to redraw the Constitution. Based on a precise schedule, that plan suggests the creation of a citizen convention where representatives, experts and – mostly – citizens would work together in order to reform the Constitution.

The Parti du travail de Belgique – Partij van de Arbeid van België (PTB-PVDA) also takes democratic renewal seriously. The radical left populist party indeed proposes to introduce the binding citizens' initiative referendum (submitted to the population if the text is supported by at least 1% of the concerned electorate) and intends to ensure that civil society actors are systematically consulted on any significant change in the law.

The importance given to democratic innovations by the Flemish parties is much lower. The party that approaches this issue most head-on is the ecologist party Groen. According to Groen, it is important to involve citizens beyond campaign periods, for instance through deliberative processes. Therefore, Groen suggests enabling citizens to request the organization of a citizens' panel, making popular consultations possible at all levels, creating the right of legislative initiative for citizens or generalizing participatory budgets. But the ecologist party also calls for greater transparency in representative democracy, for instance by banning the accumulation of mandates, abolishing lists of substitutes on electoral lists or lowering the voting age to 16 years old.

Despite the relatively weak number of proposals related to democratic innovations made by the Socialistische Partij Anders (SP.A), the Flemish socialist party also considers that citizens' participation into the decision-making process is crucial. Yet, the party sets conditions for a greater citizens' participation: citizens must have a real impact on public policies and enough time must be allocated to the process, for instance. In its program, therefore, SP.A suggests reforming the Senate and to turn it into a citizens' assembly, composed of eligible voters (except professional politicians) and to make popular consultations possible at all levels for socially controversial cases.

The Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams (CD&V) pays less attention to participatory processes, even though it argues that it wants to increase the role of citizens and civil society in decision-making processes, notably at the local level. In their

respective programs, neither the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (N-VA) nor the Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten (Open VLD) address democratic innovations in any important way.

Finally, while the Vlaams Belang (VB) does not defend many proposals in order to make democracy more participatory, that radical right populist party strongly strives for a “more democratic Flanders”¹⁶. On one hand, the VB proposes to introduce binding citizens’ initiative referendums (on the Swiss example). On the other hand, the VB defends a renewed representative democracy. Hence, it suggests abolishing compulsory voting, reserving the right to vote to nationals, introducing a single Flemish electoral district, reducing the number of members of Parliament, prohibiting the accumulation of executive mandates at local level and a parliamentary mandate, etc.

The analysis of parties’ most recent manifestos reveals three important trends. First, the importance of democratic innovations seems greater in the manifestos of French-speaking parties than in those of Dutch-speaking parties. This does not mean that Flemish parties do not defend reforms aiming to better associate citizens to decision-making processes, but they do so to a lesser extent. This observation can be linked to our observation, above, that the citizen demand for democratic innovations is also lower in Flanders.

Then, confirming a frequent finding in the literature (Sintomer et al., 2008; Font et al., 2014; Jacquet et al., 2015; Schifano et al., 2019), left-wing parties are usually more favorable to the introduction of participatory mechanisms than right-wing parties, for example through the willingness to transform the Senate into an assembly of randomly selected citizens. For instance, while the MR manifesto contains proposals aiming to generalize or systematize existing participatory mechanisms, the liberal party does not favour such a reform.

Finally, while many measures are proposed to extend or introduce participatory and deliberative democracy mechanisms, a significant number of measures also aim to improve representative democracy itself, for example by lowering the voting age to 16 years old. These reforms are not necessarily in opposition, but the fact that some parties lay the emphasis more on reforming representation than increasing citizen involvement may suggest a lower confidence in democratic innovations.

3.2. Why would parties promote non-partisan politics?

If partitocracy offers parties a quasi-monopoly over the decision-making process, why would they accept to give up power? And how can this monopoly be breached to leave room for democratic innovations?

Despite the fact that manifestos indicate political parties’ willingness to develop democratic innovations – through the generalization of existing processes but also through new participatory mechanisms –, the literature has shown that political elites

¹⁶ Vlaams Belang, Manifesto (2019), p. 11.

may be more reluctant to adopt and implement such innovations than they have citizens believe (Schiffino et al., 2019). For instance, Vandamme et al. (2018) have shown that most Belgian politicians opposed the idea of a citizen Senate, or (to a lesser extent) a mixed one, combining randomly selected and elected representatives. Political elites also consider participatory mechanisms are more a means to regain popular support than a way to share power with citizens. While some indeed believe that politics “is a specific task that requires special skills and abilities” (Jacquet et al., 2015, p. 184), others consider that “true democracy comes through intermediary groups” (*Ibidem*, p. 195).

Yet, this does not mean that political elites are necessarily striving against democratic innovations. Political elites always consider participatory tools as complementary to representative democracy. It is doubtless why most of the reforms proposed in parties’ manifestos are usually accompanied by reforms of representative democracy (cf. *supra*). This can be understood in the light of the thesis developed by Webb (2013), according to whom citizens who are supporting democratic innovations are more expressing a rejection of the current situation than really desiring another political model. Therefore, the proposed reforms aim to improve the quality of democracy more generally, either by reforming representative democracy or by proposing new alternatives.

Nevertheless, especially in Belgium, parties are willing to propose democratic innovations in their manifestos for at least two reasons. Firstly, there is a demand from citizens to be more integrated into decision-making. Based on a survey conducted in 2014, Caluwaerts et al. (2018) indeed indicate that there is a strong support for more direct and deliberative forms of democracy in Belgium. While only a slight majority of respondents supports representative democracy (52,7%), a large majority of them supports either direct democracy (84,4%) or deliberative democracy (77,3%). These findings are corroborated by the analysis above. Moreover, van Dijk et al. (2020) indicate that citizens who vote for a populist party are even more enthusiastic about such democratic reforms. Therefore, parties moved by electoral incentives may be willing to respond to such a demand. What is more, the results above reveal the existence of regional differences in democratic preferences in Belgium. While deliberative democracy is strongly supported in Wallonia, elitist types of democracy find stronger support in Flanders. That difference may explain why Flemish parties are less inclined than others to dedicate large parts of their programs to democratic innovations (cf. *supra*). It reinforces the idea that parties adjust their electoral supply to what they perceive as an electoral demand.

Then, political parties may defend democratic innovations in order to position themselves in the partisan game. While the issue has been owned by the ecologist party family for decades (Frankland et al., 2008), competing parties may strategically take ownership of such a priority (Sulkin, 2005). Thus, although the devolution of power from parties to citizens may not be in the long-term interest of the political class taken

as a whole, it can certainly be in the electoral interest of some parties. And given the fact that the political class does not act as a unified political agent determined to protect its long-term interests, there is room for ambitious democratic innovations in Belgium.

Conclusion

In the first section, we identified two problems associated with partitocracy. First, it reduces the opportunities of political involvement available to citizens. This may affect the stability of representative institutions and weaken the quality of the democratic system. Indeed, the lack of political involvement of the population and the disconnection it creates between citizens and political parties might increase the representative gap, or the distance between what citizens aspire to and what their representatives do. Second, a political system saturated by parties can be considered as lacking deliberativeness.

The empirical data explored in this chapter do not allow us to know whether citizens perceive the second problem. It seems clear, however, that many of them are frustrated by the lack of opportunities for citizen involvement. And they seem to value inclusive participatory mechanisms such as referendums and participatory budgeting as much as more deliberative devices such as citizen assemblies. This suggests that democratic innovations have the potential to reconcile many Belgian citizens with their political system – and even more clearly so in francophone Belgium than in Flanders.

Based on that assumption, we then considered the plausibility of a transformation of our political system towards less partitocracy and more citizen involvement. Since about 2011, such transformation has become more plausible, as suggested by the growing number of propositions of the sort in party manifestos, and as apparent in our analysis of the 2019 manifestos. Citizen panels or assemblies are supported by many citizens and many parties. There seems to be growing support for a democratic renewal of the Belgian Senate. And even the referendum is garnering support for some parties, including mainstream ones. It is likely that parties will be reluctant to relinquish too much power, however. They might be tempted by reforms that seem to open our representative system to citizens' input yet without fully empowering citizens. It thus remains to be seen whether that will be enough to quench citizens' thirst for participation.

Some of the other questions that should be considered in future research are the following. Do citizens perceive the lack of deliberativeness of their political system and the value of deliberation? Would they be happy in a configuration with only forms of citizen involvement restricted to the happy few who are randomly selected? (In other words, are they more participatory than deliberative democrats?) Do they genuinely support citizen-involvement or anything different from parties, technocracy included?

These are fascinating questions that will have to be addressed if we want to improve our collective understanding of citizens' implicit conceptions of democracy.

References

- Abts, K., Swyngedouw, M., & Jacobs, D. (2012). Intérêt pour la politique et méfiance envers les institutions. La spirale de la méfiance enrayée. In L. Voyé, K. Dobbelaere & K. Abts (Eds.), *Autres temps, autres mœurs : Travail, famille, éthique, religion et politique* (pp. 173-214). Bruxelles: Racine Campus.
- Bedock, C., & Pilet, J. B. (2020). Enraged, engaged, or both? A study of the determinants of support for consultative vs. binding mini-publics. *Representation*, 1-21.
- Bertsou, E., & Caramani, D. (2022). People Haven't Had Enough of Experts: Technocratic Attitudes among Citizens in Nine European Democracies. *American Journal of Political Science*, 66(1), 5-23.
- Biard, B., Bottin, J., Cogels, M., & Sabbe, M. (2020). Ecologists and Democracy in Belgium: An Analysis of Party Manifestos. Constitution-making & Deliberative democracy, Working Paper 6.
- Caluwaerts, D. (2012). *Confrontation and Communication: Deliberative Democracy in Divided Belgium*. Brussels: Peter Lang.
- Caluwaerts, D., Biard, B., Jacquet, V., & Reuchamps, M. (2018). What is a good democracy? Citizens' support for new modes of governing. In K. Deschouwer (Ed.), *Mind the Gap: Political Participation and Representation in Belgium* (pp. 75-89). Colchester: Rowman & Littlefield International / ECPR Press.
- Deschouwer, K. (2012). *The politics of Belgium*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Deschouwer, K., De Winter, L., & della Porta, D. (1996). Partitocracies between crises and reforms: The cases of Belgium and Italy. *Res Publica*, 38(2), 215-494.
- Font, J., della Porta, D., & Sintomer, Y. (Eds.). (2014). *Participatory democracy in Southern Europe: causes, characteristics and consequences*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Frankland, E. G., Lucardie, P., & Rihoux, B. (Eds.). (2008). *Green parties in transition: the end of grass-roots democracy?* Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd.
- Fung, A., & Cohen, J. (2004). The Radical-Democratic Project. *Swiss Journal of Political Science*, 10(4), 23-34.
- Gaudin, T., Jacquet, V., Pilet, J.-B., & Reuchamps, M. (2018). Consultation populaire et référendum en Belgique. *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, 2390-2391, 5-62.
- Inglehart, R. (2020). *Modernization and postmodernization: Cultural, economic, and political change in 43 societies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Jacquet, V., Schiffino, N., Reuchamps, M., & Latinis, D. (2015). Union sacrée ou union forcée ? Les parlementaires belges face à l'impératif délibératif. *Participations*, (3), 171-203.
- Katz, R. S. (1986). Party government: a rationalistic conception. In F. G. Castles & R. Wildenmann (Eds.), *Visions and realities of party government* (pp. 31-71). Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Kelbel, C., Sandri, G., & van Haute, E. (2018). Who framed the party? Gap in the perception of political organizations in Belgium. In K. Deschouwer (Ed.), *Mind the Gap: Political Participation and Representation in Belgium* (pp. 35-50). Colchester: Rowman & Littlefield International / ECPR Press.
- Leydet, D. (2015). Partisan legislatures and democratic deliberation. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 23(3), 235-260.
- Mair, P. (2013). *Ruling the void: The hollowing of Western democracy*. New York: Verso Trade.
- Mutz, D. C. (2006). *Hearing the other side: Deliberative versus participatory democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Reuchamps, M., Caluwaerts, D., Dodeigne, J., Jacquet, V., Moskovic, J., & Devillers, S. (2017). Le G1000 : une expérience citoyenne de démocratie délibérative. *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, 2344-2345, 5-104.
- Rummens, S. (2012). Staging deliberation: the role of representative institutions in the deliberative democratic process. *Journal of political philosophy*, 20(1), 23-44.
- Rummens, S. (2016). Legitimacy without visibility? On the role of minipublics in the democratic system. In M. Reuchamps & J. Suiter (Eds.), *Constitutional deliberative democracy in Europe* (pp. 129-146). Colchester: ECPR Press.
- Schiffino, N., Jacquet, V., Cogels, M., & Reuchamps, M. (2019). Les gouvernants face aux transformations de la démocratie. *Gouvernement et action publique*, 8(2), 57-80.
- Schuck, A. R., & De Vreese, C. H. (2011). Public support for referendums: The role of the media. *West European Politics*, 34(2), 181-207.
- Schuck, A. R., & De Vreese, C. H. (2015). Public support for referendums in Europe: A cross-national comparison in 21 countries. *Electoral Studies*, 38, 149-158.
- Sintomer, Y., Herberg, C., & Röcke, A. (Eds.). (2020). *Les budgets participatifs en Europe : des services publics au service du public*. Paris: La Découverte.
- Sulkin, T. (2005). *Issue politics in Congress*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Vandamme, P.-É., Jacquet, V., Niessen, C., Pitseys, J., & Reuchamps, M. (2018). Intercameral relations in a bicameral elected and sortition legislature. *Politics & Society*, 46(3), 381-400.

- Vandeleene, A. (2018). La sélection des candidats aux élections par les partis politiques. L'exemple du scrutin du 25 mai 2014. *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, 2398, 5-40.
- Van Dijk L., Legein T., Pilet J.-B., & Marien S. (2020). Voters of Populist Parties and Support for Reforms of Representative Democracy in Belgium. *Politics of the Low Countries*, 2(3), 289-318.
- Webb, P. (2013). Who is willing to participate? Dissatisfied democrats, stealth democrats and populists in the United Kingdom. *European Journal of Political Research*, 52(6), 747-772.

Conclusion

Lessons learned about partitocracy, from Antwerpen to Zakynthos

Benoît Rihoux

How to wrap up such a dense set of contributions? It is as challenging as if I were to attempt to encompass Lieven De Winter's multifaceted scholarly contribution. In this concluding chapter, in an essayistic manner, I will tease out some core findings from this volume's chapters, and prolong each one of these findings with some further reflections, also building upon Lieven De Winter's vast contribution. I will follow the flow of the introductory chapter, also distinguishing four different levels – or rather analytical entry points, I would argue – via which the evolution of liberal democracies and of partitocracies in particular may be apprehended: citizens, political elites, political parties and political institutions.

But first things first: why Antwerpen and why Zakynthos, besides the fact that I needed two locations starting with an “A” and a “Z” for the purpose of producing a catchy title? Antwerpen, obviously, because Lieven De Winter originates from this city's suburbs (Brasschaat more precisely), and also because this city exemplifies, in many ways, the political dynamics of the Belgian ‘laboratory’ – in particular the ever-evolving Flemish party system. His homonym from the former *Vlaams Blok* (now *Vlaams Belang*) would certainly agree – and this is where any further agreement between the two De Winter's would stop. Then Zakynthos because I would have loved to find a Southern Italian municipality starting with a “Z” but failed to do so – hence I went for the now Greek island of Zakynthos which, culturally and even in terms of political culture, is in fact still quite Italian as it was under Venitian rule for more than three centuries. Here we have it: the link with Italy, dear to Lieven De Winter in many ways, not least because Italy also constitutes, alongside Belgium, a particularly striking and dynamic instance of a *partitocrazia*.

1. Citizens: Contrasted and ambivalent

Lesson learned #1: Walloon and Flemish citizens do display some enduring differences in terms of left-right placement, ethno-territorial identities and institutional preferences, but these differences are not increasing over time (Niessen, Baudewyns, Camatarri, Dodeigne, Frogner, Reuchamps & Sinardet, Chapter 7). Further reflection: considering the different historical legacies and collective memories between Flemings and Francophones, also not least considering the still different

socio-economic situations in Flanders and Wallonia, it should come as no surprise that such enduring differences prevail. Nonetheless, one of the striking findings is that there is nothing like a trend that would lead a clear majority of Flemish citizens to go for a ‘Flanders only’ identity and would buy an outright independent Flemish nation-state. And yet, as Belgian politics is quite clearly elite-driven (see also *Lesson learned #3* below), this might not preclude some Flemish politicians to continue pushing in that direction. All this said: when examining the ‘Belgian identity syndroms’ for more up close, one should also consider at least two elements of complexity beyond the Flemings/Walloons contrast: the obviously complex and hybrid (well – multicultural, multi-identity and multilingual, in fact) Brussels Region as well as the quite distinct *OstBelgien*, corresponding to a very small proportion of the population but whose political authorities have become significant political players in the institutional debate.

Lesson learned #2: Belgian citizens hold ambivalent views on their political parties: they express low trust but yet feel represented by them; and they are in favour of more active forms of citizen participation, especially at the local level (Devillers, Biard, Vandamme, Jacquet & Reuchamps, Chapter 10). Further reflection: here we identify one major paradox in the Belgian democracy: citizens appear to have lost their trust in political parties, and still they continue to cast their votes *en masse* at the successive elections, and they do not completely disavow the ‘traditional’ parties (Socialists, Liberals and Christian Democrats). Rather: a proportion of voters may shift their vote to other, challenger parties, e.g. the N-VA, the Vlaams Belang, the PTB-PVDA, the Greens or diverse smaller and most frequently short-lived protoparties. But it’s still about parties. It is also not surprising that a large proportion of citizens still feel represented by parties, given the broad and diverse party offer, and also given the still existing patronage practices at the local level especially (see also Chapter 1). In a way, Belgian citizens emit two contradictory signals: they would still like to benefit from diverse services (patronage) from their local politicians, which, *de facto*, would maintain a sort of hierarchy between the politician and the ‘client citizen’; conversely, they are also in favour of more participatory or deliberative forms of democracy. But these are perhaps two distinct categories of citizens?

2. Political elites and candidates: Under party control

Lesson learned #3: in spite of diverse reforms enabling some decentralized participation by the rank and file, the selection of party leaders and candidates remains overall relatively centralized and controlled by the party top (Pilet, Vandeleene & Wauters, Chapter 3). Further reflection: all in all, this leads me to concur with Lieven De Winter when he diagnoses that these selection processes remain quite oligarchical in nature (see also Chapter 1). Such a diagnosis is in line with Panebianco’s more general observation – and theoretical expectation – that party organizations are bound to follow a rather ‘conservative’ logic, in the sense that they tend to reproduce their

historically entrenched practices. In the Belgian context, one could then expect that most mainstream political parties would stick to their historically quite hierarchical logics. Further, it seems to me that this logic of control by the party apparatus is quite pervasive in the Belgian party system. Indeed, consider the main more recent or emerging challenger parties such as the N-VA, the Vlaams Belang, the PTB-PVDA and also the Greens who, in this respect, have also become less ‘alternative’ in their internal workings: all of these parties are ensuring, each one in its own way, a significant level of control – or at least coordination – by the party top while composing the electoral lists. Finally, my reading of Pilet, Vandeleene and Wauters’ conclusion is that enduring control by the party top is, in a way, *structurally* functional (read: useful) in that it ensures some level of stability of the Belgian party-political system. In particular: it enables a certain level of elite reproduction/cooptation, so that some typically Belgian practices of cross-party elite accommodation may be reproduced as well – thereby also reproducing a clearly elite-driven political system.

Lesson learned #4: in terms of ethnoterritorial identity and institutional preferences, Flemish candidates are persistently more Flemish than Flemish citizens, while the congruence is higher between Walloon candidates and citizens (Niessen, Baudewyns, Camatarri, Dodeigne, Frogner, Reuchamps & Sinardet, Chapter 7). Further reflection: over the last decennia, it has become clear, in the Belgian context, that the more *vlaamsvoelend* portion of Flemish politicians has played a lead agenda-setting role, pushing towards a stronger Flemish identity *and* institutional construction framed as contributing to Flemish *nation*-building. The survey results are well in line with this. They also corroborate a classical sociological observation following May’s law of curvilinear disparity: those individuals who are ideologically more committed (“activists”) typically hold more polarized views than the regular voter/citizen. Over the last decades, the typical N-VA or Vlaams Belang politician would picture him/herself as ‘a politician, but still an activist’ in the pursuit of a more affirmative Flanders. What’s also blatant here is the contrast with Walloon candidates and citizens alike: the overarching majority of both feel either more Belgian than Walloon, or as Walloon as Belgian – and there is nothing like a strong “Walloon national project” or identity they would adhere to. Here we find one of the most striking asymmetry in the current Belgian political system.

3. Political parties: Still standing strong

Lesson learned #5: Belgian politicians of respective parties are ideologically quite homogenous, but not more so that in ‘normal’ strong-party systems such as Germany and Canada (Walgrave, Soontjens & Varone, Chapter 6). Further reflection: here I could propose two further explanations (or, more cautiously, interpretations) of this Belgian relative non-exceptionalism. On the one hand, we have to consider the sheer fact that the Belgian party system is so highly multipartisan – adding up the Flemish and Francophone party systems, we are talking about up to twelve nationally ‘relevant’

parties (in the Sartorian sense). This then enables each party to potentially occupy a specific ideological space or “niche”. On the other hand, in the Belgian context, the existence and persistence of ‘cleavage politics’ (in the Rokkanian sense) may, at least for some Belgian parties, lead to more ideological diversity within some parties. One case in point is that of the ‘ethical issues’ (e.g. abortion, euthanasia) about which some parties – the Liberals, but also the Greens – are internally split alongside a religious/secular cleavage. Anyhow, Belgian politicians may be a bit heterogeneous in their respective party spheres, but when it comes to actual behaviour of those who have become MPs: they do walk in line and follow party discipline, as demonstrated in Chapter 2.

Lesson learned #6: the development of non-partisan (i.e. non-party controlled) mass media has reinforced the power position of top party politicians and in particular of ministers and party presidents (Van Aelst & Cogels, Chapter 8). Further reflection: this deep, longer-term transformation of the media landscape has in fact contributed to the reinforcement of structural within-party imbalances of power: delivering further ‘image capital’ to the party-in-office (in particular the most prominent ministers) and to the party president, at the expense of regular MPs. Here again we see a disadvantageous logic at work with regards to MPs (see also lesson learned #8). This is reinforced by the fact that the party head offices (at the service of the party presidents) as well as the ministerial cabinets (see also lessons learned #10) can actually afford, in terms of financial resources, to hire full-time media and communication experts, as is also explicated in Chapter 8. Bottom line: discrepancies in terms of access to ‘hard’ resources (budget, staff) also translates to discrepancies in terms of acquiring symbolic resources (notoriety, visibility). In the Belgian context, such a discrepancy cannot be counterbalanced by media campaigns from the part of strong individual ‘entrepreneur’ candidates, as the list PR system necessitates that the latter be streamlined via the whole party-controlled candidate selection process (see also lesson learned #3), and as campaign expenses for individual candidates are very strictly monitored and controlled. This all goes in the direction of *structurally* maintaining the power of the party apparatus while also *structurally* not enabling the emergence of more candidate-centered politics.

Lesson learned #7: The degree of politicization of the European integration process via (and within) political parties remains limited in Belgium; this also holds for less mainstream parties (Chiru, Sandri, Van Ingelgom & Versailles, Chapter 9). Further reflection: what is most striking here is that, in contrast to quite a number of other Western European democracies (Germany, France and The Netherlands, for instance), the less traditional parties do not challenge a *de facto* ‘unspoken consensus’ on European integration and on the sheer existence of the EU. In a way, in spite of the diverse ideological positions held by the respective parties in the respective subnational (Flemish and Francophone) party systems, this is a further illustration of the fact that most parties – traditional and less traditional – would still more or

less converge on at least two major sets of issues: the importance of the EU (and of Belgium's position within it) and a support to a certain form of social dialogue, i.e. the current Belgian neocorporatist arrangement that was installed via the 'Social Pact' right after World War II. Bottom line: the respective Belgian party systems are, after all, not-so-extremely polarized, which also enables diverse sorts of coalitions both at the national and subnational levels.

4. Political institutions: Party bosses still in the driver's seat

Lesson learned #8: in spite of increasing 'parliamentary activism', parliamentary activity by Belgian MPs is still very much constrained by party-driven hierarchical logics; hence, MPs largely follow a logic of loyalty and compliance to party discipline (Wolfs & Vande Walle, Chapter 2). Further reflection: this analysis, which was conducted at the federal level, also holds for political assemblies at other levels – certainly at the regional/community, provincial and municipal levels, and perhaps to the exception of the European Parliament level that partly follows another logic. It is also in line with a deep structural (dare I add: 'and cultural'?) feature of the Belgian political system and electoral system in particular: Belgium is still clearly a case of party-driven elections, still far away from a move towards candidate-centered politics – thus: the party-controlled activity of the MPs is just a logical prolongation of a logic of control by the party hierarchy, starting from the handpicking of candidates (see also Chapter 3). Further, this analysis is very much congruent with another core feature of the Belgian political system: a strong structuring of the parliamentary assembly along a majority/opposition distinction, which actually requires discipline from the individual MPs. This is especially the case for those of the majority, in a context of broad and ideologically diverse coalitions in which the party leaders cannot afford to have 'their' MPs walk out of line and become veto players.

Lesson learned (#9): Belgium constitutes an extreme case in terms of (very) difficult coalition formation, (very) broad and ideologically diverse coalitions, (highly) frequent intra-coalition disputes and (high) number and diversity of within-cabinet conflict solving mechanisms (De Winter & Dumont, Chapter 4). Further reflection: putting aside the admittedly important issue of the policy efficiency and cost-effectiveness of such a complex coalition governance system, the question I would raise here is that of the viability of this system. My own conclusion, put a bit provocatively, would be that this system has thus far proven to be very viable. Indeed: thus far: eventually, federal cabinets have always been formed, in spite of the painful and lengthy processes; oversized and very diverse coalitions have managed to 'muddle through' and to prolong or initiate diverse policies, and not least to somehow coordinate with the subnational (regional and community) cabinets; in the two last decennia at least, the coalitions have, on the whole, remained relatively stable and have been able to

survive the four years of the legislature; some parties (and individual ministers) have managed to remain on board of successive coalitions; and thus far the popular vote has not (yet) given a clear mandate that would empower anti-establishment parties. The biggest threat to this system's viability, however, consists in the sheer existence of the N-VA, the country's largest party by now, which in a way constitutes an 'anti-system party within the system'.

Lesson learned #10: in spite of successive reform attempts and actually passed and implemented reforms, the politicization of Belgian public administration persists via direct (or strong influence on) appointments of top administrators, structural entrenchment of ministerial cabinets, and mechanisms of party-driven policy control (Brans, Aubin, de Visscher, Fobé, Meert & Squevin, Chapter 5). Further reflection: besides the fact that some elements of the 'deep party politicization' have begun to weaken over the last two decades (e.g. some depoliticization of recruitment and career advancement at least of middle ranking civil servants; see details in Chapter 5), one quite major virtuous transformation away from partitocracy should be stressed: the actual de-politicization of the main positions in the judiciary sector (judges, etc.). Nonetheless: perhaps the most blatant sign of the resilience of partitocracy with regards to policymaking is the persistence of overstuffed ministerial cabinets – along with the persistence of these cabinets' core role in the whole policymaking cycle. Indeed ministerial cabinets remain a *structurally* central element of the Belgian political system and hence constitute a core resource for the (governmental) parties' far-reaching influence. Note that no challenger party having joined federal coalitions (e.g. the N-VA and the Greens) has actually challenged this; one interpretation is that these parties have also come to realize that, at least under the current (unwritten) rules of the game, just as the other ruling parties, they need access to such resources to be among the 'main players'.

5. Beyond the Winter of Democracy: Springtime in Firenze

Let me now conclude this set of reflections with an overarching lesson learned from *il Maestro* himself.

Lesson learned #11: partitocracy implies the excessive rule by parties, i.e. disproportionate power exercised by the latter at the expense of other political actors – which necessarily entails a form of normative assessment (De Winter, Chapter 1). Further reflection: such a framing, which enables one to distinguish partitocracy from the 'party government' ideal type (see Chapter 1), entails that the concept of partitocracy is, by definition, negatively connotated, i.e. framed as a sort of 'deviation' from supposedly more virtuous democratic forms. In order to move beyond such a normatively negatively connotated approach, one must engage in a close and well-documented *empirical* scrutiny – which is exactly what Lieven De Winter has done in his

framing Chapter 1, and what the respective authors of Chapters 2 to 10 have done in their respective more focused analyses.

All things considered, it appears that the move towards a partitocratic system is definitively a long-term process. So is the consolidation of such a system. In this respect, Belgium indeed remains, up to this day at least, a very strong case of such a thus far *structurally* consolidated partitocracy. How to account for such an endurance of the ‘*excessive rule*’ of political parties in Belgium? To conclude this volume, I would like to formulate three sets of explanations, respectively at the micro-, meso- and macrosociological levels.

First, parties may continue to thrive as long as they are able to maintain some form of relatively routinized contact with a sufficiently broad pool of individual citizens/voters, which then ables them to ‘survive the next election’ *and* to thus also keep a critical mass of MPs as well as a sufficient level of public funding to sustain their party apparatus. One may observe that, in fact, many Belgian parties – traditional and less traditional – are successful in doing so. Further, the more traditional parties are still able, thus far, to count on a certain proportion of loyal voters as well as some ‘client voters’ still benefiting from patronage practices. In other words: quite a proportion of individual Belgian citizens are still relatively well attached to a given political party.

Second, the organizational resilience of Belgian political parties is quite remarkable. Indeed, for instance, the decline in the number of party members is much less steep in Belgium than in other similar West European democracies (e.g. The Netherlands). In diverse ways, also via some rebranding, and in spite of an overall electoral decline over the last decennia, most traditional parties (Liberals, Christian-Democrats and Socialists) have found ways to survive as still quite strong and resourceful organizations. On the other hand, the emerging or ‘less traditional’ parties (N-VA, Vlaams Belang, PTB-PVDA, Greens) have, in many ways, adapted to the practices of mainstream institutional politics, which has also enabled them to benefit from a significant level of public funding.

Third, at the level of the political system as a whole, Belgium is a striking instance of the persistence and parthenogenesis of an elite accommodation system that *structurally* requires strong political parties. Indeed: via the transformation of the country from a unitary system to a complex federal system, we now have *de facto* five party-political systems and corresponding arenas: a Flemish one, a Walloon one, a Brussels-capital Region one, an *Ostbelgien* one and an overarching federal one. In each one of these systems, we still observe typically Belgian ‘traditional’ political practices: quite broad coalitions, compromise seeking, log rolling and package deals, politicization of public administration, etc. Besides party politics within these institutional settings, we also observe the persistence of the ‘social dialogue’ and of the neocorporatist logic giving such a weight to trade unions and employers’ associations in socio-economic policymaking. Beyond this, we also witness the persistence of strong organizations still attached, at least to some extent, to the old ‘pillars’ (e.g. educational institutions,

hospitals, health services organizations, cultural organizations, etc.). Belgian society at large is definitively not (yet) strongly de-pillarized, which again provides leverage, power ('societal relays') and resources for the traditional political parties especially.

We would probably need a few more decades to examine the next steps in the evolution of partitocracies, and of the Belgian ideal-typical case in particular. Anyhow, whenever looking for clues on this or that puzzling further evolution or political event, we would all be well advised to continue searching for Lieven De Winter's ever sharp analyses and insights. The only issue would then be how to find his trace, somewhere in between Brasschaat and Zakynthos. I would bet for Firenze. Don't ask me why, just trust my instinct: it's based on 30+ years of empirical observation of *Livio l'Inverno*.

Table of contents

Preface	5
Short biography of Lieven De Winter	7
List of contributors	11
List of contributions	19
Introduction	
<i>A short journey into Lieven De Winter's long bibliography</i>	
Audrey Vandeleene, Min Reuchamps	21
1. Citizens: Their ethno-territorial identities and institutional preferences	22
2. Candidates: Parties' agents and their secret garden	24
3. Parties: From traditional to regionalist party families	26
4. Parliaments and governments: On the uneven power distribution between MPs, ministers and their parties	28
5. The book: A multifaceted exploration of partitocracy in Belgium	30
References	31
Chapter 1. Partitocracy	
<i>Anatomy and pathologies</i>	
Lieven De Winter	37
Introduction	37
1. Variations of spelling	37
2. Variations of use over time (in Belgium)	38
3. Geographical spread	38
4. The quest of definition	40
5. "Party rule": How much too much?	40
6. Failing party government as an anchor for defining partitocracy	42
7. Partitocratic deviations from the party government ideal type	44

7.1. <i>More than one party offers voters distinct and realistic policy programs</i>	44
7.2. <i>Voters vote for the party with the policy program they prefer most</i>	45
7.3. <i>The new government is formed by the party that wins the elections or by the leaders of political parties that agree on forming a parliamentary viable coalition</i>	46
7.4. <i>The party/parties that enter the government recruit(s) partisans to occupy sufficient key positions in the political executive to control policy-making</i>	46
7.5. <i>The party is cohesive, so that all partisans in policy-making positions give priority to implementing the party's policy program</i>	48
7.6. <i>Partisans in policy-making positions are accountable to the party leadership bodies</i>	49
7.7. <i>The party is held accountable to the voters for the performance of its partisans in policy-making positions</i>	51
8. Additional dysfunctionalities of partitocracy	51
8.1. <i>In a partitocracy, patronage resources are wide and deep and controlled mainly by parties</i>	52
8.2. <i>In a partitocracy, the interests of civil society organisations are mainly represented through their linkage with political parties</i>	54
8.3. <i>In a partitocracy, parties have large material resources at their disposal, mainly drawn from public funding</i>	54
8.4. <i>In a partitocracy, national parties manage to duplicate partitocracy at lower levels of government (e.g. regions and communes)</i>	55
9. Intraparty democracy: In a partitocracy, mainstream parties tend to be oligarchic	57
10. Discussion: The future of parties, party government and partitocracy	58
References	62

Chapter 2. The decline of the Belgian Parliament

Wouter Wolfs, Britt Vande Walle	77
Introduction	77
1. A context of party system fragmentation and difficult coalition formation	78
2. The limited power of the Chamber of Representatives	81
2.1. <i>Limited influence despite increased activity</i>	81

2.2. <i>Limited support structures</i>	86
2.3. <i>Loss of influence due to European integration</i>	87
3. Mechanisms of partitocracy in parliament	88
Conclusion and discussion	91
References	91
Annex: List of interviews	96
Chapter 3. Candidate selection and leadership selection in Belgium	
<i>Despite intraparty reforms, still prisoners of partitocracy?</i>	
Jean-Benoit Pilet, Audrey Vandeleene, Bram Wauters	97
Introduction	97
1. The strength of Belgian partitocracy	98
2. Trends in the selection of party leaders	99
2.1. <i>Formal rules of leadership selection</i>	99
2.2. <i>Competitiveness of leadership selection</i>	102
2.3. <i>Openness of leadership selection</i>	103
3. Trends in candidate selection	104
3.1. <i>Formal rules of candidate selection, and actual functioning</i>	106
3.2. <i>Competitiveness of candidate selection</i>	109
3.3. <i>Openness of candidate selection</i>	110
4. Belgium's partitocracy in comparative perspective	110
Conclusion	115
References	117
Chapter 4. Coalition formation in Belgium	
<i>From exceptional complexity to regime breakdown?</i>	
Lieven De Winter, Patrick Dumont	121
Introduction	121
1. Bargaining complexity and information uncertainty causes and consequences	122
2. Cleavages, party fragmentation, multilevel politics and electoral volatility	124
3. Formation process and outcomes features	128
4. Government formation, outputs, outcovers and their effectiveness	129

5. Discussion and conclusion: A truly exceptional and explosive case	132
References	133

Chapter 5. The end of the party politicisation of public administration

A fata morgana?

Marleen Brans, David Aubin, Christian de Visscher, Ellen Fobé, Arthur Meert, Pierre Squevin	137
---	-----

Introduction	137
1. Appointments based politicization	138
1.1. <i>Instruments and practices of appointments based politicization</i>	138
1.2. <i>Redefining relations between ministers and their civil servants</i>	141
2. Structural politicization in the executive triangle:	
Ministerial cabinets	144
2.1. <i>A particular type of executive support and advisory office</i>	144
2.2. <i>Cabinetisation, decabinetisation and re-cabinetisation</i>	146
2.3. <i>The policy and political currency of ministerial cabinets</i>	150
2.4. <i>Individual ministerial adviser careers: Partisan agents or policy professionals?</i>	152
3. Administrative politicization: Ostracizing the civil service?	153
3.1. <i>Organisational capacity for policy work</i>	154
3.2. <i>Civil servants' contribution to policy work</i>	155
Conclusion	157
References	159

Chapter 6. Partitocracy and intra-party ideological agreement

Belgium compared internationally

Stefaan Walgrave, Karolin Soontjens, Frédéric Varone	165
--	-----

Introduction	165
1. Measuring ideological homogeneity within parties	167
2. Results	170
2.1. <i>Perceived relative agreement</i>	170
2.2. <i>Percent agreement with the party</i>	172
2.3. <i>Explaining ideological homogeneity</i>	173
2.4. <i>Zooming in on Belgium</i>	178

Conclusion	180
References	181

Chapter 7. Partitocracy and the future of Belgium

Revisiting Does Belgium (still) exist?

Christoph Niessen, Pierre Baudewyns, Stefano Camatarri,
Jérémy Dodeigne, André-Paul Frogner, Min Reuchamps,
Dave Sinardet

183

Introduction	183
1. Left-right dimension	184
2. Ethno-territorial identities	188
3. Institutional preferences	192
Conclusion	195
References	196

Chapter 8. Mediatization and partitocracy

Opposite poles or partners in crime?

Peter Van Aelst, Maximilien Cogels

201

Introduction	201
1. The framework: The mediatization of politics	202
2. From party or partisan logic to media logic: The media as a politically autonomous actor?	204
2.1. <i>The de-pillarization of the written press</i>	204
2.2. <i>The struggle for the political independence of the audiovisual media</i>	206
2.3. <i>The relation between media and politics today: Between distrust and informality</i>	208
3. Why mediatization does not affect partitocracy?	210
3.1. <i>Explanation 1: The media logic and the political logic are not (always) opposite</i>	210
3.2. <i>Explanation 2: Politicians and parties adapt</i>	212
Conclusion and discussion	215
References	218

Chapter 9. The Awakening of the Sleeping Beauty?

Belgian Partitocracy and European Integration

Mihail Chiru, Giulia Sandri, Virginie Van Ingelgom,

Alban Versailles

223

Introduction

223

1. Politicization and European integration

226

2. The politicization of European integration:

Issue salience, polarisation and actor expansion

228

2.1. *Issue salience*

228

2.2. *Issue polarization and extension of actors*

231

3. The politicization of EU integration in Belgium:

A focus on issue salience

233

3.1. *The salience of EU integration in national election manifestos*

233

3.2. *The salience of EU integration in legislative agendas*

236

4. Understanding the so-far non-politicization of European Integration in the Belgian electoral arena and the Awakening of the Sleeping Beauty

239

4.1. *The Belgian electoral arena and the lack of electoral incentives?*

239

4.2. *The 'frozen' Belgian party systems*

241

4.3. *The co-occurrence of elections*

242

4.4. *The absence of internal party divide*

242

Conclusion

244

References

245

Chapter 10. Direct and deliberative democracy as potential remedies for partitocracy in Belgium

Sophie Devillers, Benjamin Biard, Pierre-Étienne Vandamme,

Vincent Jacquet, Min Reuchamps

251

Introduction

251

1. Partitocracy under question

252

1.1. *Why is partitocracy criticized?*

252

1.2. *Politics beyond parties*

253

2. The demand for non-partisan politics in Belgium

254

2.1. *How do citizens view parties?*

254

2.2. <i>How do citizens view democratic innovations?</i>	256
3. Parties and democratic innovations	263
3.1. <i>How do parties view democratic innovations?</i>	263
3.2. <i>Why would parties promote non-partisan politics?</i>	266
Conclusion	268
References	269

Conclusion

Lessons learned about partitocracy, from Antwerpen to Zakynthos

Benoît Rihoux	273
1. Citizens: Contrasted and ambivalent	273
2. Political elites and candidates: Under party control	274
3. Political parties: Still standing strong	275
4. Political institutions: Party bosses still in the driver's seat	277
5. Beyond the Winter of Democracy: Springtime in Firenze	278

In itself, *partitocracy* can be simply defined as a political regime where power is – in an excessive degree – in the hands of political parties. In Belgium, partitocracy has perhaps reached its highest level of elaboration, with complex interactions between citizens, candidates and elected representatives, parties as well as parliaments and governments.

The Winter of Democracy: Partitocracy in Belgium aligns a dozen of scientific contributions that tackle the multifaceted concept of partitocracy from multiple perspectives. The book also celebrates the academic career of Lieven De Winter, almost five decades of a rich research commitment that spanned both at Université catholique de Louvain and at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, as well as across numerous institutions, projects and networks all around Europe. Lieven De Winter has significantly contributed to the study of all dimensions that constitute the core object of this book: *Partitocracy in Belgium*.



With contributions from 33 political scientists: David Aubin, Pierre Baudewyns, Benjamin Biard, Marleen Brans, Stefano Camatarri, Mihail Chiru, Maximilien Cogels, Sophie Devillers, Christian de Visscher, Lieven De Winter, Jérémy Dodeigne, Patrick Dumont, Ellen Fobé, André-Paul Frogner, Vincent Jacquet, Arthur Meert, Christoph Niessen, Jean-Benoit Pilet, Min Reuchamps, Benoît Rihoux, Giulia Sandri, Dave Sinardet, Karolin Soontjens, Pierre Squevin, Peter Van Aelst, Pierre-Étienne Vandamme, Audrey Vandeleene, Britt Vande Walle, Virginie Van Ingelgom, Alban Versailles, Stefaan Walgrave, Bram Wauters, Wouter Wolfs

