

The electoral equilibrium hypothesis tested
A statistical historiography of the Belgian national electoral and party system

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0. Introduction

Origin, rise and fall of political parties, the nature and complexity of electoral and party systems and democracy in itself are among the most central topics that political scientists study. Electoral systems are at the core of the principle of democratic representation and therefore at the heart of the parliamentary game. (Bogdanor & Butler (1983) in: Pilet 2012:419) There are many reason to study elections, electoral systems and the election results of political parties. “Elections and parties are the key mechanisms of democracy, without stable parties, elections are weak reeds [...]” (Lipset 2011:111) The reason for this study, that is on the crossing of these three domain and studies the evolution of the Belgian electoral system from the realistic Schumpeterian point of view², however is of a more particular nature. This study aims to meet three different challenges.

Firstly, notwithstanding the fact that scientific initiatives were launched to bring together long-term datasets of detailed election results, the available data are still dispersed, incomplete, often variable in quality. (Renard & Dodeigne 2012:545) Where publicly available and considered trustworthy, data for certain periods in time (cf. 1831-1847, 1900-1919 and the inter-bellum) nevertheless often show dissimilarities. Pre-1948 election results are simply largely missing. Bringing all the available data together in one dataset is on itself an important effort on itself.³ By analyzing the dataset in straightforward theory-led way we intend to add to the research-ability of this topic.

Secondly, the statistical analysis of the election results in a long-term perspective is largely missing from the election studies of Belgium and where available the nature is largely descriptive. To give one example: just recently a comprehensive study of the electoral systems in Belgium (1831-2010) was co-edited and published by two Belgian professors of the University of Liège, Frédéric Bouhon and Min Reuchamps. This voluminous book helped us tremendously in understanding the genesis and further development or decline and eventually the complete disappearance of political parties as well as the relation between the evolution of the Belgian party system and the electoral system... by and large from a diachronic historic point of view. (cf. Van Haute 2012:212) In order to present an comprehensible version of the historic evolution of the electoral system(s), political and electoral changes are mostly studied either on an aggregated party family level (comparing catholic with liberal, socialist and other parties) or at a regional level (comparing Flanders with Brussels and Wallonia), or both. This foremost history-based analytical and anecdotal or descriptive approach contextualizing election outcomes (cf. Lipset 2001:111) in our view leaves a gap for more thorough empirical evidence and for more elaborated statistical research. We try to fill this gap by analyzing the election results of all political initiatives (thus non-elected parties included) based on time series (from 1876 onwards), and by detecting and contextualizing trends in the Belgian political life, on both the aggregate party family as well as on the sub-group or factional level or on an individual or party-level.

Thirdly, as stated in the paragraphs below, Belgium is often cited as an exception to many rules that explain development and form of the current electoral system⁴ as well as the size and complexity of the party system. Many such rules are based on comparative multi-country (explanatory) analysis of election data, but very often it is not clear what the outcomes of such studies in fact teach us about each single country? Just like social science-based theory does not necessarily say everything about any particular research object, and because none of the individual objects will fit all imperatives or rules deduced from the theory, we control for the fit of the Belgian case with the theory-based assumptions. Looking at one country's electoral history is important and fundamental to the study and understanding of the electoral policies of that country. Because most election studies traditionally discuss one election or a rather a short period of elections, detailed broad scale historic insight in what really molded the Belgian political and party system over a longer period of time is lacking. We thus perceive a clear added value in complementing the already existing comparative research with the broad-scale statistical single case historiography that we present here, examining the origins, the early years until the contemporary development of the Belgian electoral system and the national electoral politics.

² “[Democracy is] a system in which voters, the mass of the population, are able to choose between contending elites, that is, alternative candidates.” (Lipset 2011:111)

³ The election data (period 1847-2010) are collected in the online elections database of the FOD Binnenlandse Zaken (<http://www.ibzdgif.fgov.be/result/nl/main.html>) and completed with the data collected in the annexes 1 to 3 of Bouhon & Reuchamps' *Les systems électoraux de la Belgique* (2012:535-587).

⁴ I.e. the *electoral institution* including electoral laws defining the size of the parliament, the electorate and the electoral district(s), the ballot structure and seat distribution mechanism, as well as those regulating the entire organization of elections, including the frequency and the number of re-electable seats.

Belgium is a representative democracy, based on bicameralism. Nevertheless, the scope of this paper is limited to the national (later federal) elections of the Chamber of Representatives (or '*Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers*'), hence not the Senate. The reason for this is that since 1995 the Senate has lost many powers and its number of direct elected members reduced drastically. In 2012 again the Senate was reformed by the cabinet Di Rupo I to become a reflection chamber, convening ten times per year. The result is that over the past two decades Belgium has lost its strong bicameralism.

In line with the comparative approach election **the level of analysis** is the state and not the arrondissement or the electoral district. In order to allow any comparison with here referred (mostly comparative) research, party representation is studied largely based on the election results of party families (i.e. the catholic, liberal, socialist, green, nationalist or extreme left, extreme right and even ultra catholic ideologies) and thus at an aggregate level. Unless otherwise stipulated **the unit of analysis** therefore is the party family.

The choice of the electoral rules is crucial for the perception of the level of democracy in a country, a region, or a commune. According to authors like Ross (1955) and Hermans (1941) (in: Quintal, D. 1970:752) proportional systems are the only "civilized" electoral systems because they answer the highest possible preferences of the people. Democratic electoral systems are to be separated from undemocratic systems because the latter are segregational or exclusive, aimed at keeping out as many political groups as possible and democratic systems do not. Quite on the contrary: P.R. systems more often lead to more electoral and parliamentary parties and increase the chance for multi-party coalition forms. According to Arend Lijphart (1999:32) political systems that embrace multiple cleavages under a plurality system could turn out undemocratic and dangerous. Implicitly P.R. system produce governments that have a larger representativeness and legitimacy. (Schamp, Devos 2011:536) The risk however is existent that highly proportional systems lead to unbridled multiparty systems producing chronic instability (Ross (1955) en Hermans (1941), o.c. in: Quintal 1970:752). As we will see further on, since the mid-1960s the political situation in Belgium has glided towards uncontrolled and unpredictable levels of volatility and precariousness.

In his *Handbook of electoral system choice* Josep Colomer (2004) argues that larger parties in general prefer smaller electoral institutions because these seat distribution or votes-to-seat translation mechanisms, hence closed electoral systems (i.e. based on majority or plurality-based electoral formula), exclude smaller parties more easily. The lack of apparentment or the presence of an electoral threshold also reduces the openness of the electoral institution. (Muyllé 2012:307) Such electoral systems produce plurality democracies of the Westminster type⁵. (Lijphart 1999:10) Smaller parties, on the other hand, prefer larger electoral institutions that offer the capacity to be included, hence more open systems based on proportional representation (P.R.). The more seats per electoral, the higher the proportionality of the seat distribution and the more inclusive the electoral system will become. Examples of the latter are the Belgian system where since 1995 all 150 seats of the federal parliament are elected in multiple districts⁶ and the Dutch system where all 150 seats of the *Tweede Kamer* are elected in one go and in one country-wide electoral district. These P.R. systems typically produce consociational democracies (Lijphart 1969:211) of which Belgium is the most complete example (Lijphart 1981:1)⁷. The kind of electoral system also influences the inter-party strategies. In the case of open systems with three or more candidates (or parties) electoral strategies diverge from the more traditional ideology-rooted strategies where parties divide the public emphasizing foremost differences in their policy preferences to less polarizing strategies (allowing association and the formation of political *kartels*, cf. *infra*).

The inter-party electoral strategies, the complexity of the party system and the understanding of the operational side of the electoral system (e.g. the mechanical effect), on their turn influence the voter. A growing body of research gives "(...) evidence that people vary in their proclivity to vote strategically, as determined by various motivational factors as well as their capability to comprehend the strategic implications that are offered by particular electoral rules." (Gschwend 2003:4) Pure technical features of the electoral

⁵ Characterized by: a two-party system, a concentration of the executive power with one party, a flexible constitution, a dominant position of the government over the parliament, and a centralized and unitary civil service.

⁶ In the years 1995 and 1999 Belgium was divided in 20 electoral districts (arrondissements). Before the 2003 election that number was reduced to 11 (larger provincial districts).

⁷ Characterized by: a multiparty system, a division of executive power between broad governmental coalitions, a equilibrium between government and parliament, a federal decentralized civil service, and a strong bicameralism, [however, strongly weakened since the 1995 state reform and the reduction of the size of both the Chamber of Representatives and the Senate, cf. *supra*].

system thus can affect (strategic) motives of political parties (to participate, to collaborate... or not) as well as the electorate (to cast a vote, the vote strategically... or wrongly or not at all (i.e. blanco)). In sum, party representation is the end result influenced by many factors: e.g. district magnitude, voting behavior, the vote procedure, the seat distribution system (electoral formula, the existence of a electoral threshold, and so on. Changes in the electoral institution that have an impact on either one of these factors are expected to influence the election outcome, hence on the representation of political groups, are therefore considered to be major system reforms.

We start this study referring to the French sociologist Maurice Duverger's triple sociological law on the basis of which one can predict the size and complexity of the party system based on the type of electoral system. Firstly, plurality systems (with only one winning candidate or party) would significantly more often lead to one- or two-party systems. Secondly, electoral systems that partition the available seats in a proportional way significantly more often result into multiparty systems. Thirdly, in multiparty systems electoral systems with low coherence (a.o. two-round system) can be separated from systems with high coherence (e.g. list proportional representation). (Goguel 1950 [1946]:81) In his seminal paper on *L'Influence des systèmes électoraux sur la vie politique* Duverger characterizes the case Belgium as the classical exemption to the rule with no significant increase of the number of (legislative or ruling) parties since the introduction of the list proportional electoral system in 1899 (first application of the system-D'Hondt in 1900)⁸, and therefore with a party system that was only slightly modified, in casu by a (weak) communist party. Opposite to Duverger's and Grumm's initial understanding of the effect of the introduction of an electoral system that represents political parties proportionally (P.R.), it was clear that "under the visible surface however the *party system change* is real." (Duverger 1950:17)

Some years later John G. Grumm studied the validity of Duverger's law and the effects of a changing electoral institution in a handful of European countries, again including Belgium.⁹ Grumm confirmed that there is no convincing empirical evidence for the link between the presence of a plurality system and a two-party system nor for the hypothesis that the introduction of a more proportional electoral system leads to a multi-party system, especially not in the case of Belgium: "(...) there are too many exceptions to the proposition that small parties are under-represented and that large parties are over-represented to permit us to adopt this as a general rule, and that the examination of the voting statistics of these countries supplies almost no evidence of the existence of the hypothetical "psychological" factor." (Grumm, J., 1958: 374) Instead, Grumm suggested that most democratic political systems would grow to a stabilization point, i.e. "a situation in which all parties have an equal chance to survive". If that were the case than it would seem that in countries where a proportional electoral system was introduced smaller parties will experience "an increase in their shares of the popular vote, or at least would experience a leveling-off in the event that they were in a state of decline at the time." (ibid.:360) More specifically Grumm's indicates that "it may be more accurate to conclude that P.R. is a result rather than a cause of the party system in a given country. (...) And so it is that P.R. has been established in almost all countries that have a multi-party system." (ibid.: 375)

From these assumption **three propositions or research questions** follow. First, do (aggregated) election data give sufficient evidence of the fact that in the case of Belgium changes in the electoral laws were made to accommodate the party system? For example was the P.R.-system introduced at a time where a multi-party system was already a fact, as Grumm understood it? Second, if so, when and how was the electoral institution changed and to what purpose? Was the supposed stabilization point for instance reached, i.e. the *equilibrium* producing a relatively higher level of parliamentary representation of smaller political parties? Third, connected to the supposed stabilization of the party system, when and how did the ruling parties undertook or approve legislative initiatives to reverse the supposed post-P.R. trend of party system fractionalization, and in how far were such legislative initiatives beneficial to their own electoral strength (as one would expect)?

⁸ "[Seats] being attributed in relatively small districts according to the system designed by the Belgian legal scholar Victor D'Hondt. [...] A second-tier division of remaining seats operated at the provincial level, the so called 'apparentement' system, with a relatively low threshold: while in the past, parties had to obtain 2/3 of the Hare quota in at least one district to be allowed to take part in the second-tier division, in 1995 this threshold was lowered to the equivalent of 1/3 of the Hare quota (Hooghe, 2003; Hooghe et al., 2003). The mean number of seats per district was 7.5 (150 seats in the Chamber for 20 districts)." (Hooghe et al. 2006:354)

⁹ Because the systematic causal link between the kind of electoral system and the party system was lacking at the time, Grumm looked at the impact of electoral system change in five European countries where in the course of the first quarter of the 20th Century the plurality system was replaced by P.R. (Germany, Denmark, Switzerland, Norway and Belgium). He compared the aggregated election results of the traditional party factions (ideologies) in these countries with those of the U.K. where continuously the First past the post-system had been in place. The period studied by Grumm for Belgium runs from 1876 to 1919.

Central to our quest are elements supportive of the assumption that the introduction of the proportional system offers a solution to the issue of systematic overrepresentation of the larger political factions and of underrepresentation or even non-representation of the smaller factions. Implicitly, the understood mechanical and psychological effects that, according to Duverger, form the basis of the elevated levels of polarization that are typical for plurality systems. (Grumm, J. 1958: 358) In order to reach this objective a number of values, indexes, ratios and standardized measures for size, fractionalization, representativeness, permissiveness etc. of the electoral and party system are used.

For this study, firstly, we will look into the concepts of proportionality and representation. Secondly, we focus on fractionalization of the party landscape and party system size. Thirdly, we examine the so-called 'strategic logic' (of the ruling parties) behind changing the electoral system or keeping it intact. These elements together give a more nuanced picture of the national and federal electoral history of Belgium. Having put these boundaries around our study, with this paper the authors explicitly state that they don't have the intention of being comprehensive in their review of the party systems or electoral systems literature and research.

1. Proportionality and representativeness of the electoral system

In his study of *Les partis politiques* (1951) Duverger described the origin and nature of a party system based on its structure, magnitude and functioning on behalf of (political and societal) forces and segments and its organization, i.e. the interaction between its parts and the political regimes that characterize a party system. In representative democracies, like Belgium, political organizations and parties determine to a large extent the nature of local, regional, national and European politics. At the one hand political parties mediate between the people and the parliament. At the other hand parties mobilize the body of voters for their own profit and legitimacy. (Schamp, Devos in: Devos (Ed.) 2011:517)

Origin and development of party systems is partly explained by the heterogeneity of ethnic cleavages, these are socio-economic differences based on (professional or income) class, religion, language group, education or region. Each one of them can be represented by a political party. Ideological cleavages can also be materialized by subgroups, interest groups, pressure groups or political initiatives or positions vis-à-vis the government.¹⁰ However, apart from these cleavages, a country's party system size is also determined by the electoral system, including all the rules that allow groups in society to become political parties (or not), rules that prescribe how parties can participate in legislative elections, and rules that define how seats are distributed among the electoral parties and how candidates are selected. Such rules are fit together in what is called the electoral institution of a country. Referring to Clark, Golder & Golder's *Party systems: social cleavages and the modifying effect of electoral institutions* (2009:584) we agree that there is a constant interplay between the electoral institution and society aiming precisely at bridging as many tensions and frictions as possible. (Schamp, Devos in: Devos (Ed.) 2011:518) This part will reveal some of the historic evidence.

1.1 Where have the (large) political parties gone?

This paper starts with a historical overview of the national (and federal) electoral history and of the development of the electoral and party system in Belgium since 1876, from a bird's eye view. At that time and as a consequence of the absolute majoritarian and single an multimember district-based system that had been in place since from 1831¹¹ until 1899, Belgium was a solid bipolar political system with two competing parties (the oldest, the notables' Liberal party versus the younger clerical Catholic party). We divide this synopsis into distinct periods that are marked by successive essentially big electoral reforms –or as Lijphart (1994) defined them *major* changes in the electoral system- for the national and later federal elections of the Chamber of Representatives.¹² They are changes "(...) that substantially affect the electoral formula, the district magnitude

¹⁰ Cf. the anti-system or anti-establishment parties like Vlaams Belang (formerly Vlaams Blok) or the party of Jean-Pierre Van Rossem, R.O.S.S.E.M., in Flanders, or the List Pim Fortuyn (LPF) in The Netherlands. (Devos, C., 2006: 294-295)

¹¹ "[N]ul n'est élu au premier tour de scrutin s'il ne réunit plus de la moitié des voix." (Art. 35 of the electoral law of 3 March 1981 in: Muylle 2012:309).

¹² A different approach, proposed by the Brussels professor Emilie Van Haute (2012:212), would be to analyze emergence, development and disappearance of political parties and their election results, parliamentary representation and participation in the governmental power depending the emergence and development of grounding cleavages ('*clivages fondateurs*'), five in total and situated in the following periods 1830-1893 (church versus state), 1894-1945 (haves (owners) versus have nots (workers)), 1949-'65 (philosophical cleavage in the two-and-a-half polar system of Catholics versus laic socialists and liberals around the King's Question

[and the assembly size], and the electoral threshold [both effective and legal].” (Jacobs & Leyenaar 2011:495; 496) Next to that major electoral reform also include changes of electorate (for example the suffrage right for women (1948) and the inclusiveness of 18-20 year olds (1981)) or the introduction of the suffrage for Belgians living abroad despite the fact that their participation rate did not exceed 25% and was less than eight percent for the 2010 federal elections). The ballot structure is less considered since the changes (the number of votes and the impact of these votes on the actual election of candidates) are to be considered minor or technical. (ibid.:502)¹³ Whether or not an electoral reform has a direct impact on political parties, individual candidates, the electorate or not is of no importance to the definition of what a change of the electoral system is. Throughout the entire paper the focus remains on the national level. Consequently the periods studied by Duverger (1890-1950) and Grumm (1876-1919) are included in our analysis.

In the political history of Belgium we find ample examples of changes in the electoral laws for social, democratic or other more opportunistic reasons. In the 1870s and 1880s, when Belgian politics was still largely based on one central philosophical cleavage between the church and the state is a bipolar catholic-liberal opposition (Van Haute 2012:212-213), the electoral institution and laws were reformed in many ways. The pre-printed alphabetical ballot paper and the joined candidate list as well as the list vote system and the secret voting were introduced in 1877 (applied for the first time in the 1878 national elections). The electorate was allowed to vote for more than one candidate on more than one candidate list (= *panache voting*). Individual candidates won parliamentary seats based on the winner takes all principle. These institutional changes encouraged new political initiatives to climb on the national political platform and lead to the formation of a national Liberal Progressist party and a Flemish Socialist party. In 1879 the Belgian Socialist party was formed, replacing the Flemish Socialist party. *Capacitor suffrage* was introduced in 1883 enlarging the censitary suffrage. In 1884 the Belgian Catholic party and Socialist party, both typically partisan parties, were officially founded. Electoral results were mixed and largely depending the region: in the period 1857-1894 people in Flanders voted primarily catholic (at least 61%), whereas at least 51% of the Walloons and 54% of the people from Brussels voted liberal. (Matagne & Verjans 2012:89) eradicate

From the time when the labor movement organized itself throughout the first half of the 19th Century and the formation of the Socialist party in 1885, the Catholic party experienced a rising pressure to replace the tax-based suffrage dating from the Ancien Régime by a system of universal suffrage. After taking part in the 1890 elections for the first time, the Socialist party (‘Belgische Werkliedenpartij’ or BWP) demanded the introduction of the general single voting for all adult men but in 1893. The proposal to introduce the universal suffrage was declined before the parliament for the first time in 1893 and followed by a national strike. By introducing the general *multiple* suffrage together with the compulsory voting later on in the same year the ruling Catholic party adapted the election system in a way that it produced an even larger disproportional distribution of seats.¹⁴ Since both Walloons and Brussels the electorate in the year 1894 turned away massively from the liberal party towards the Socialist party or the Catholic party (and in Wallonia to the cartel party of liberals and socialists), a glorious victory of the Catholic party in the 1894¹⁵ and the 1896 and 1898 elections was the result. On the other hand, the underrepresentation of the Liberal faction reached unseen levels in those years, as shown in the below graph.

Having studied the evolution of the Belgian electoral systems from 1830 to 2006¹⁶ Jean-Benoit Pilet observed that in the case of electoral realignment, a true electoral rupture crystallizing the new electoral groups and forces is needed to demonstrate the urge for an immediate alignment of the electoral rule with the new partisan system. (2012:425) The turn of the 19th-20th Century has produced exactly a rupture of this kind. Notwithstanding the importance of this pivotal moment in the Belgian electoral and political history, the focus

and the School Question), 1965-’80 (centre versus periphery, ethno-regionalism) and 1980-2010 (left ecologist versus extreme right). But the latter cleavage is largely debated because of the volatility of the electoral support of the green or nationalist parties, in casu the francophone FN and the Flemish Agalev that was electorally eradicated in the 2003 federal elections (cf. infra).

¹³ Belgium has introduced in 1877 a system of semi-closed alphabetically ordered party list allowing the voter to choose one candidate per party list. That system was changed in 1899 when the *panache voting* was banned. In 1995 the voter was given the freedom to choose as many candidates of one party list in combination with the list vote (or not). (Schamp & Devos 2011: 494-495; 506)

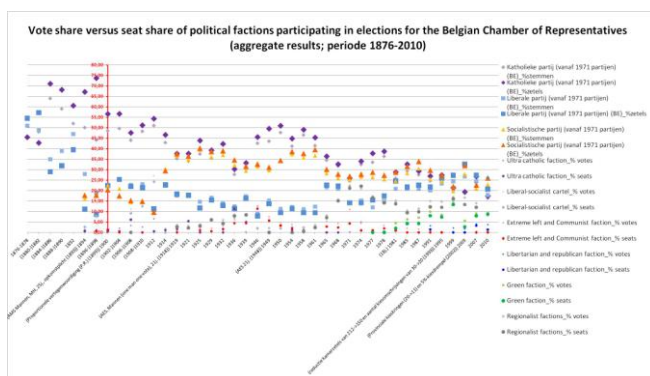
¹⁴ The new system functioned like a regular plurality system where all of the available seats in a district went to the candidate (or party) who won the absolute majority of the votes, if needed after ballotage.

¹⁵ This political reality convinced the catholic rulers to introduce ‘as an experiment’ a system of limited proportional representation for the 1895 communal elections but only for those seats that were not taken by candidates that obtained 50%+1 of the votes and therefore were directly elected to the communal council, and proportionally based on the number of votes obtained by all party lists. (Muyllé 2012:310)

¹⁶ Cf. Pilet, J.-B. (2007). *Changer pour gagner? Les réformes des lois électorales en Belgique*. Bruxelles: ULB.

of this paper is on the 1900-2010 period, hence from the first application of the proportional representation (P.R.-system) for the national legislative election, thus after the introduction of the proportional seat distribution system-D'Hondt in 1899.¹⁷ The abandonment of the majority system was motivated by the growth of the Socialist party, that threatened the Liberal party in its survival. The introduction of the P.R.-system is considered of strategic importance because the Catholic party did not like the prospect to face the Socialist party on its own, and therefore risking a drawback of its own electoral success the Catholics decided to leave the plurality system. (Muylle 2012:310) This is an example of self-interest driving electoral reform. These changes of the electoral system triggered the unification of the Progressist party and the Liberal party into a national Liberal party. The 1900 election outcome mainly favored Liberal party, hence, mission accomplished, at the expense of the ruling Catholic party, as expected... “To accept the party means to accept pluralism.” (Ignazi 1996:561) And, to accept pluralism means to accept proportional representation.

But the new 1899 election law were meaningful for other reasons as well: party lists contained both candidates and followers and both were listed alphabetically (this meant the end of the interim or partial elections in districts where an elected candidate died or stepped down), the list vote was devaluated, panache voting was abolished, and smaller administrative arrondissements were merged into larger arrondissements increasing the size electoral districts and bringing their number down from 41 (since 1840) to 30. All in all, “[t]o the extent that parties and fractionalization were unavoidable, the re-establishment of broad electoral representation required the invention and introduction of new electoral rules different from the traditional, now obsolete system based on multi-member districts and majoritarian rules.” (Colomer 2007:270) Hence, Duverger’s laws upside down: it’s the party system that shapes the electoral system. (Colomer 2005)



Cf. Schamp, T., Devos, C. 2011:495-503. Before 1876 the political landscape was divided between two ideological (parliamentary) groups: the liberals and the clericals. Since the 1892 elections the overrepresentation of the main party (Catholics) grew to astronomic proportions (from 10% in 1892 over 15% in 1894 to 30% in 1896-1898).

According to Grumm the use of the P.R.-system had two key effects. At the one hand the electoral institution distributed the available seats¹⁸ more (but far from perfectly equally and being favorable to large parties¹⁹) equally among the parties participating in the election. At the other hand both the increase of the number of seats after since 1902 and the proportional seat distribution have had a positive impact on the surplus votes of all electoral parties. (Grumm 1958:364) The immediate result for the Catholic party –the largest political party- was a decline of its seat share with 15%. Nevertheless the impact on the party’s overrepresentation in the years 1900, 1902 and 1904 has been rather mild. Since the 1906 national elections the overrepresentation of the largest ideological family (until 1978 this has been the Catholics) decreased to less than five percent – to remain at that level. (cf. *infra*) When comparing the situation during which the majority system with second round plurality was in place (1847-1898) with the post-1899 period of P.R., on average the total disproportionality rate which characterized the 19th Century so dramatically because of the plurality system (cf. *infra*) dropped with more than 70%.

In 1912 only 5,38% of the Walloon vote went to the Liberal party compared to 42,33% for the cartel party of liberals and socialists. In 1914 the Catholic Union was founded.

At the end of the First World War two important electoral changes were made by the unionist grand coalition of all three main ideological party families (cf. the Pact of Loppem, 1918). (Schamp, Devos 2011:499) At the one hand the universal single suffrage for all 21 year old men was put in place (and applied for the first time in

¹⁷ Law of 29 December 1899 concerning the application of the proportional representation in legislative elections (BS 30/12/1899).

¹⁸ According to Grumm the number of parliamentary Seats had increased which is not entirely correct because the number of Seats in the Belgian Chamber of Representatives in the years 1894 to 1898 remained 152. The number increased to 166 seats but only at the time of the 1902 elections.

¹⁹ Benoit, K. (2000b:384, 387).

1919, even though the constitution was adapted only in 1921) in an attempt to re-unite the country. At the other hand a complex system of list connection and apparentment was introduced to allow as small many parties to be represented in parliament (quite successfully!). The universal simple suffrage is still in place today, though broadened several times (*cf. infra*). In the same period the Flemish-nationalist Front Party was established. After the 1921 the Socialist party was removed from the former unionist government coalition.

In 1924 the Communist Party was established, followed one year later by the foundation of the (anti-communist) Catholic Flemish National Association (Katholiek Vlaams Nationaal Verbond). In 1925 the German East kantons Eupen, Malmédy and Sankt-Vith were added to the arrondissement of Verviers.

In the early 1930s some ultra-radical parties are born. In 1930 the Walloon Leon Degrelle starts the ultra-conservative and corporatist party REX. In 1931 the ultra-nationalistic and authoritarian Verdinaso (Verbond van Dietsche Nationaal Solidaristen) was established by Joris Van Severen. In 1932 the Dutch and French languages were acknowledged as officially 'equal' administrative languages in Belgium; Brussels capital is now officially bilingual.

In 1933 the right-radical Flemish National Association (Vlaams Nationaal Verbond, VNV) is established by Staf de Clercq. The party obtained 16 of the 202 seats in the 1936 elections. In those same elections REX even wins 21 seats. The traditional national Catholic party starts the process towards regionalization.

After the 1939 elections, the BWP reforms into the Belgian Socialist party. REX and VNV marginalize to disappear after the 1946 elections. The Catholic party now officially has a Flemish (Christelijke Volkspartij, CVP) and a Walloon (Parti Social Chrétien, PSC) branch. After the launch of the anti-Soviet and anti-communist Truman doctrine the Belgian CP leaves the government in 1947. Political life in the 1950s was painted by the (absolute) predominance of the Catholic party and her attempts to control and solve the Royal Question (1950, decided with the abduction of King Leopold III after a national referendum in 1951 on the King's return to the Belgian throne) and the School Question (decided with the School Pact in 1958) and the *de facto* partition of the Belgian public and political opinion in three camps, a Flemish, Walloon and Brussels one. But the dominant position of one party forced the majority to take consociational steps; perceived by Daalder as an act of self-denial of the majority (Lijphart 1968 in: Daalder 1974:611-612).

In 1954 the Flemish People's Union (Volksunie) is established, its main political objective being the regionalization of Belgium and the equal treatment of Flemings and Walloons. As a result of the language laws of 1962, experienced by the francophone as a political defeat, the francophone FDF (Fédéralistes Démocrates Francophones) was established. Nonetheless in 1965 the language border was *officially drawn* affecting two electoral districts²⁰.

According to Matagne and Verjans the most important political phenomenon was the passage from a two-and-a-half party system to a multiparty system in those pivotal legislature years of 1961 to 1965, leading to significant electoral losses for all three traditional political party families. (2012:90) But the linguistic decomposition of Belgium also had a direct effect on the national party system. In 1968 the Catholic party officially split in two single regional parties: the Flemish CVP (Christian People's Party of Christelijke Volkspartij) and the Walloon PSC (Social-Christian Party). In the same year the regionalist and francophone Rassemblement Wallon was founded. In 1969 a first pure and true consociation initiative to prepare the first state reform was taken by prime minister Gaston Eyskens and his minister of Community Affairs, Leo Tindemans, and supported by all parties, including the regionalist parties: the Working Group of the 28 ('Werkgroep der 28' of de Werkgroep-Eyskens). (Eyskens 1993:809-810)

After the first Belgian state reform (1970) Belgium officially falls apart into three communities (the Flemish, French and German community) and three regions (Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels). On the national level Belgium became a multi-level governed state (Velaers 2012:111) with linguistic parity in the council of ministers and with an institutionalized *alarm bell procedure* to protect linguistic groups in the case of a potentially discriminatory constitutional or institutional reform. Also all members of parliament need to

²⁰ The district *Komen-Moesroen* is shifted from the arrondissement Ieper-Kortrijk to the arrondissement Tournai (Doornik) and the district *Voeren* is shifted from the arrondissement Liège (Luik) to the arrondissement Tongeren-Maaseik.

confirm their belonging to either the Flemish or French langue group.²¹ These elements –fruits of a consociation approach *pure sang* or as Sinardet calls it, “the [constitutionalized] consequence of [institutionalized] negotiations conducted in the most consociational of traditions”²²– have made Belgium to a rather unique case in federalism. The end result of the process of regionalization of parties and party elites that are scattered over two linguistic groups and the presence of the *Bolt constitution* (‘Grendelgrondwet’), as the Flemish nationalists called it, has proven to be more difficult and as it has increased rather than decreased inter-party (elite) and inter-regional tensions. (Sinardet 2010:352)

In the 1960s and 1970s the Belgian political system progressively moved further towards a political system with a relative open character. A moderate effective threshold (3% in some districts) had allowed for the election of new political formations (regionalists, ecologist and extreme right). (Pilet 2012:431) But also at the other side of the political spectrum things moved. In 1970 the post-communist ultra-left wing AMADA (*All powers to the workers*) was founded. In 1971 the Liberal party splits into a Flemish party (Partij voor Vrijheid en Vooruitgang, PVV) and a Walloon party (Parti Réformateur Libéral, PRL). A record number of 16 different parties got represented in the Belgian federal parliament in 1971. It is still the all-time high.

The first oil crisis of the early 1970s on the one hand, the increasing (academic and political) attention to the negative impact of the inflated industrialization and production on the other hand, disasters like the one with the oil tanker Amoco Cadiz (1978) and the disappearance of the Communist Party has lead to new left-wing political initiatives such as the green parties AGALEV (‘Anders gaan leven’ in Flanders) and Ecolo (in Wallonia). The second oil crisis underlined their raison d’être and broadened their electoral resonance in so far that both effectively adopted a political party structure in the early 1980s. Since their first representation after the 1977 elections, the ecologist parties form one solid faction in the Belgian parliament.

In 1977 the Flemish regionalist Volksunie falls apart in two wings, a moderate Flemish People’s Party and a radical Flemish Nationalistic Party, both stressing factors of cultural, linguistic and national identity more than other parties. Out of the latter fraction sprung the extreme right, separatist, anti-immigrant Flemish Blok (Vlaams Blok) in 1979-1980, mainly as a reaction to the way the former Volksunie was trying to become *incontournable* and staying involved in the production of typical Belgian political compromises between Flemings and Walloons that were *de facto* considered by hardliner nationalists as suboptimal for Flemings. Both initiatives however symbolize the urgent search for more Flemish autonomy. In 1978 the Belgian Socialist party splits into a Flemish part (Socialistische partij, SP) and a Walloon part (Parti Socialiste, PS). Around that same period the national post-communist AMADA reforms into the Party of the Labour (PvdA/PTB). With thirteen different elected parties the Belgian parliament became increasingly scattered.

In 1981, with the second Belgian state reform, Belgium becomes a true federal state with equal constitutional rights between the communities, the regions and the federal level. The new federal structure requires conciliation between the regional and the federal bodies. Ever since 1919 Belgium has been politically divided: Flanders being relatively more catholic than the other two regions, Wallonia being more socialist, and (except for the years 1971-1981) Brussels being more liberal. (Matagne & Verjans 2012:93, 95) This political divide has been reinstituted since the 1985 national elections.²³ However, nationalist sentiments also grow in French-speaking part of Belgium and in 1984-’85 this lead to a new kid on the party bloc: the (francophone) Front National (FN), largely inspired by the French FN, under the leadership of Jean-Marie Le Pen. (Van Haute 2012:219)

The third Belgian state reform lead to the Law on party finance and the control of electoral expense (1989). With thirteen parties elected in parliament after the federal elections of 1991 the political diversity reaches unprecedented levels. Vlaams Belang wins ten seats and Volksunie loses six. Because more than 10% of the Flemings and 6% of the voters in Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde (BHV) expressed their consent with the extremist,

²¹ “All ‘national’ representatives have to be either Dutch-speaking or French speaking representatives: ‘the end result is a parliament in which the representatives are supposed to represent their own language group’ (Deschouwer, 2006, p. 902).” (in: Sinardet 2010:352)

²² [Additions] by the authors.

²³ The Catholic party (CVP, later CD&V) receiving 15,2% to 30,7% of the total vote in Flanders (representing *on average* 3,67% more vote share than compared to the total nation-wide votes share (min-max: 1,4%-7,6%)), the Socialist party (PS) receiving 23,8% to 37,9% of the total vote in Wallonia (representing *on average* 8,76% more vote share than compared to the total nation-wide votes share (min-max: 6,2%-11,3%)), and the Liberal party (MR and Open VLD) receiving 21,1% to 27,8% of the total vote in Brussels (representing *on average* 5,57% more vote share than compared to the total nation-wide votes share (min-max: 3,7%-8,3%)). (based on data provided by Matagne & Verjans 2012: 91,95)

anti-democratic and anti-semitic programme of the Vlaams Belang, and because more than 5% of the Flemish voters and 2,3% of the voters in BHV voted for the ultra-libertarian and republican party R.O.S.S.E.M, the 1991 elections are regarded a traumatizing *Black Sunday* for all other parties. The Flemish liberals are the first to reconsider their political project. As a result the Flemish PVV changes its name into VLD (Flemish Liberal Democrats – party of the Citizen). Notwithstanding the political earthquake a government of catholic and socialist ministers stays in power. The first proposals to transform the electoral system to limit the multiplication of parties saw the light in the aftermath of the 1991 elections.

The fourth Belgian state reform in 1993 results in the regionalization of the governmental structure including the conception of a Flemish parliament, a Walloon parliament and a parliament of the Brussels Capital region elected in 1995 for the first time. The reformation also leads to a reduction of the number of seats in the federal parliament (from 212 to 150) and the enlargement of the electoral districts decreasing the number from 30 (since 1900) to 20 (until 2002). The (federal-regional) double mandate is eliminated. Since 1995 the plural voting for candidates and followers on one and the same list is allowed. In 1999 the green parties book a success and participate in the first ever purple-green federal government under the leadership of a liberal premier.

Recent changes of the electoral institutions and laws include the reduction by half of the weight of the list vote (2001) and the introduction of the provincial electoral districts and the five percent electoral threshold in 2002 (first application in 2003)²⁴ as a part of the fifth Belgian state reform regionalizing the federal competences and powers.

Recent changes at the level of the political and party system are the split in 2001 of the Volksunie in three parts with the right-wing New Flemish Alliance (Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie, N-VA) and left-wing Spirit the electorally speaking more relevant and politically the most viable successors. In the same year the CVP renamed itself into Christian-Democratic & Flemish (CD&V). One year later the Flemish SP renamed itself Social Progressive Alternative (SP.anders, SP.a) and the Walloon PSC became Centre démocrate HUMANISTE (CdH). After the 2003 federal elections, in 2004 the liberal VLD changed its name into Open-VLD, the French MR consolidated, SP.a and Spirit formed a (temporary) *kartel*, N-VA and CD&V formed a (temporary) *kartel*, Agalev changed its name into Groen! (after losing all its parliamentary seats in the 2003 elections), and Vlaams Blok became Vlaams Belang after a juridical decree that the party could no longer use the original name due to anti-semitic and anti-democratic connotations to the former party. The Flemish populist party Lijst Dedecker that was founded around its front man who was banned from the liberal party VLD, participated in the 2007 elections for the first time and received 6,5% of the total vote (five of the 150 seats). After the 2010 defeat (only one seat at the moment), the party was renamed in 2011 (Liberaal, Direct & Democratisch, LDD).

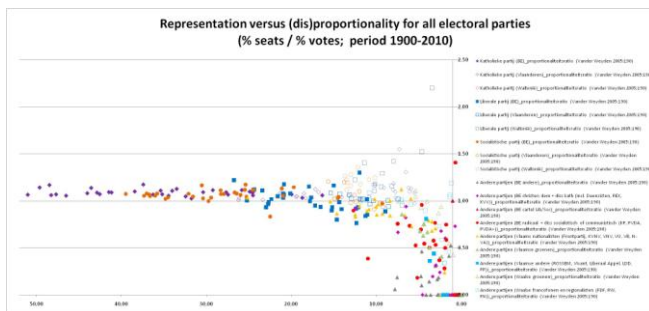
After the 2010 federal elections the N-VA is the largest political faction of the parliament (18% seat share). The Christian-democratic, liberal and socialist party factions are equally represented (10-15%) and the green faction has about 10% of the seats.

As stated by Matagne and Verjans (2012:87) looking at the election results allows to identify the more general trends, as well as the more detailed analysis of the evolution of the three traditional political families and of all other political factions (regionalists, green parties,...) and ruling coalition(s). With respect to the development of the Belgian national party system and the democratic representation since 1900 the above graph adds in many ways to the evidence supporting Grumm's proclaimed progression towards a relative electoral equilibrium between the three classic or traditional ideologies or *party families* (the Catholics, the liberals and the socialists)... but only from the mid-1960s onwards. The source of the shake-up of the political system in the mid-1960s is threefold. Firstly, since 1963 the political system and the re-organization of the country in two language areas divided by an invisible 'language border' drawn across the territory. Secondly, the result of this was the split of the state-based or nationwide parties into a Flemish and a Walloon party, the "communautarization" of political agendas, a revival of the nationalistic and regional sentiments, and a new phase in the fractionalization of the Belgian political and party system. (cf. infra) Also, thirdly, the competition with upcoming post-modern ideologies and factions like the leftist green or Marxist faction in the 1970s and the rightist libertarian factions in the 1980s and 1990s resulted in lower adherence to the 'old-fashioned'

²⁴ Law of 13 December 2002 changing the electoral Code and its annex and law and the law of 13 December 2002 changing the electoral legislation in several ways (BS 10/01/2003).

ideologies of the three classic party families and therefore higher degrees of de-alignment, partisan detachment and volatile voter behavior.

The result of this development has been an inflation of the number of (regional) electoral and parliamentary parties, as shown in the graph below. Because of the built-in time dimension this graph reads from left to right and depicts the absolute increase number of parties and their relative under- and overrepresentation of each individual party faction at the federal level. It is all too clear that at an aggregate level the representation of the Flemish and Walloon parties is different from each other.



Note: Both in absolute and relative terms Walloon parties that address the French-speaking community (in Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde (BHV) and Wallonia) are being more frequently overrepresented than Flemish parties that address the Dutch-speaking community (in Flanders and BHV).²⁵

In sum, Belgium has experienced a severe church-state conflict (from 1830 to 1958), a sharp class conflict (from 1880 to 1920) and the linguistic-territorial conflict between Flemings and Walloons (from the 1950s to the present). (Nordlinger in Guelke 2012:19) Yet in the aftermath of such fundamental changes, according to Lijphart, multiparty systems like the Belgian one, have nevertheless proven to be stable democracies. (1968:14) But Lijphart's conclusion is based on the situation before 1969. Since then Belgium has suffered at least three important political changes of a rather revolutionary type. Firstly, the country has traded its largely ideology-based, polarized and pillarized state-based three-party party system for a multitude of smaller regionalized parties with different political agendas, different (elite) styles, different organizations, different networks or societal embedding (multipartism). Secondly, the parties themselves have traded their stable national electoral bases for a number of regionalized volatile electoral subgroups. In fact, the absence of one federal electoral district has made Belgium the sum of *two singular regionalized representative democracies*, barely united at the federal level. And thirdly, as in most other European countries, because of the drop in memberships, because of the dealignment of the electorate and the reduced partisanship, because of the personalization and the mediatization of politics shown not only in the ways parties select candidates but also in the reduction of the weight of the list vote (in 2002), and because of the increasing unpredictability of elections, the (traditional) political parties themselves are said to be in decline. As a consequence many authors place big question marks behind the representative function of parties.... Still it is generally accepted that democracy is unthinkable without political parties. (Devos et al 2008:15) More to it, in the case of Belgium at least (but in many more countries as well) this party system that is supposedly in crisis has produced several new political parties (cf. *New Politics* parties) –both at the left and at the right end of the ideological spectrum and with mixed success. Hence, “[the] crisis concerns more a type of party rather than the party per se.” (Ignazi 1996:549) Parties are still brokers of political power, yet the function of representation has been shrunk. (ibid.:561)

In the next part we will look at the institutional or mechanical side of representation: the proportional representation and the representativeness of the Belgian electoral system.

1.2 Vote share versus seat share

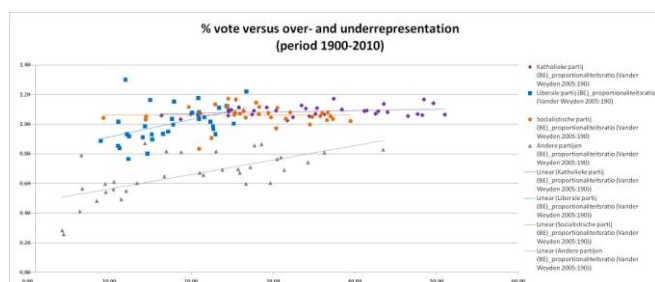
At least four methods can be applied to study the mechanical characteristics of disproportionality. (Vander Weyden 2006:70) Measures studied here are: the simple deviation from proportionality (%), the reduction effect (the difference between the effective number of electoral parties and the effective number of parliamentary parties, and, the large party benefit or the electoral bonus (the extra vote versus seat gain of the largest parties versus the loss of smaller parties). The calculation of the electoral thresholds (the minimum vote share that any party must obtain in order to win a parliamentary seat), the fourth measure, is not studied here because it does not match with our analysis which is largely based on aggregated data on the national

²⁵ Hence, parties present themselves to the voter only in their own region, Flanders and Wallonia and in the bilingual region of Brussels Capital.

level (and not on the district level).

In his doctoral dissertation Patrick Vander Weyden observed that it has never been proved that large, middle-sized or small parties profit from the disproportional character of an electoral system.²⁶ In our opinion the correctness of such assumption depends to a large extent on the definition of a large, middle-sized and small party. In order to test the assumption, we use the definition of a large party as Vander Weyden has used it –i.e. a party with at least 40% vote share; a small party has less than ten percent of the vote. (Vander Weyden 2005:196)²⁷

At an aggregate party family level the first more general observation is that higher vote shares go hand in hand with higher levels of overrepresentation. The more votes an party receives, the more it will be overrepresented compared to smaller parties. On a more detailed account, political groups that receive 23% or more of the vote will be overrepresented.²⁸ For the non-classical party factions underrepresentation seems to be the rule. Fourth, parties that have a vote share of less than 10%, are generally speaking, underrepresented. Factions or parties that receive 10-23% of the vote show a mixed pattern.



Note: This graph shows the levels of under- and overrepresentation for the larger party factions (Catholics, liberals, socialists and a rest faction of 'other parties'). Perfect proportional representation equals 1. Ratio's below 1 signal levels of underrepresentation, and vice versa for ratios' exceeding 1.

On a party family level our conclusion is that there is a strong relation between the vote share and the relative over- and underrepresentation of respectively large and small factions. Also, the relative underrepresentation of the smaller factions is more frequent and generally larger than the overrepresentation of the larger parties. Therefore, based on the levels of over- and underrepresentation of party factions, there is no reason to believe that small factions are equally represented than larger factions.

Looking at the averaged periodic over- and underrepresentation of the three traditional political families we can clearly see a shift from extreme disproportional representation in the period between 1883 and 1899 to above-average proportional representation of the three traditional party factions in the period 1981-1999. The 1894-1898 national parliamentary elections resulted in significantly higher (averaged) levels of total party family related *disproportionality*, being the total disproportionality rate averaged among all parliamentary parties.²⁹ There are many reasons for this peak in the disproportional representation, such as the presence of some newcomers in the political arena: the Socialist party, a cartel party of liberals and socialists and some other minor parties including the ultra-catholic party. All of these parties were able to get elected into parliament but except for the cartel party these smaller parties were largely underrepresented due to the plurality system which was still in place until the 1898 elections.

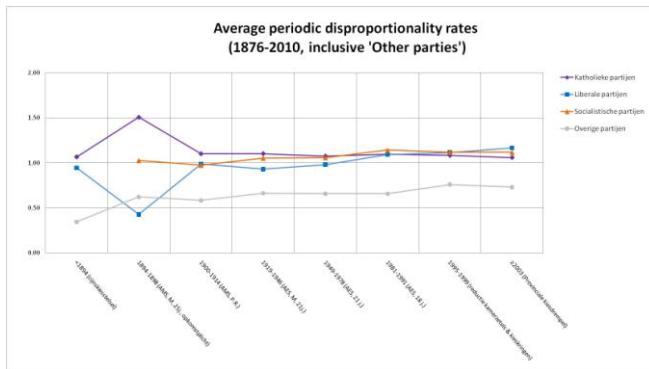
²⁶ "Nooit is empirisch aangetoond of het grote, middelgrote of kleine partijen zijn die voordeel halen uit het disproportionele karakter van het kiessysteem." (Vander Weyden 2005:192)

²⁷ Please note that at the time of the larger party families or so-called traditional parties, there were virtually no political initiatives that belong to this category. Hence, according to Vander Weyden's definition there were no small parties before 1908, the election in which the cartel of liberals and socialist won 11,14 % of the vote.

²⁸ There is one exception only, namely the Socialist party being underrepresented after the 1914 elections. But that is merely the result of the *two-yearly partial elections* where only half of the members of the assembly were replaced. Because of this practice the substantial increase of vote share (from 9,28% in 1912 to 30,39% in 1914) did not (entirely) reflect in an increase of the number of seats taken by the socialists (from 18 in 1912 to 26 in 1914). Moreover, the period 1902-1912 is also very specific because of the changing number of available seats. This is a direct outcome of the number of parliamentary seats, which changes with each two-year election: from 152 seats in 1900 to 168 in 1902 to 166 in 1906, 1908 and 1910 and to 186 in 1912.

²⁹ Conversely the party specific disproportionality is calculated as follows: $\frac{s_i}{v_i} = \frac{S}{V}$. "Let $v_i = \frac{V_i}{V}$, $s_i = \frac{S_i}{S}$ be the vote and seat shares that party i receives. We call $y_i = \frac{s_i}{v_i}$ the representation of party i. Party i is overrepresented when $\frac{s_i}{v_i} > \frac{S}{V}$, and party i is underrepresented when the opposite inequality holds. Using representations, it is possible to compare various parties with each other.

In the ideal case, each vote has equal force and each party obtains a share of seats equal to the share of votes, $v_i = s_i$, $i = 1, n$." (Karpov 2008:1422)



Note: The recent climbed of the faction of 'Other parties' is the result of the rapid rise of the N-VA (former cartel partner of the Flemish Christian-democratic party) that is today the biggest party in the federal Chamber of Representatives combined with the relative less significant return of the Green faction since 2003.

As stated above, with the introduction of the P.R.-system the Belgian political system became a virtual three-party system.³⁰ Later changes of the electoral system too have systematically improved the level of proportional representation, especially the reduction in 1995 of the number seats at the federal level (from 212 to 150) and the reduction of the number of electoral districts (from 30 to 20). The effect is obvious, the overrepresentation of the three traditional party families was well reduced and at the same time more smaller parties were elected (decreasing the aggregated level of disproportionality for the group of 'Other parties').

The following graph summarizes the *total disproportionality* produced by the electoral system at all elections in the period from 1876-2010. The scores are based on five different measures: the Gallagher Least Square LSq index³¹, the Rae RID index³², the Sainte-Laguë SLI index³³, the Loosemore-Hanby D disproportionality index³⁴ and the Lijphart IL index³⁵ (cf. Karpov, A. (2008)). All five indexes follow the same (curvi)linear path, from an all time high at the time of the (1896-)1898 elections with extreme excesses of the plurality system to rather moderate levels towards the end of World War I and late 1960s-early 1970s, both periods during which the main or traditional political families (and later on parties) were (on average) represented in a quasi perfect proportional way.

In-between index correlations are highly significant at a $p < .01$ level, which means that they all measure more or less the same levels of growing and declining disproportionality.³⁶ The Pearson R correlation coefficients

³⁰ Cf. graph infra: this corresponds with the theoretic number of effective parliamentary parties (Neffs) in 1919 (3,14).

³¹ $LSq = \sqrt{\frac{\sum (v_i - s_i)^2}{2}}$ "The lower the index value [ranging from 0 to 100] the lower the disproportionality and vice versa. Michael Gallagher, who created the index, included 'other' parties as a whole category, and Arend Lijphart modified it, excluding those parties. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gallagher_Index) "[The index] has a different sensitivity to large and small deviations between vote and seat shares. Small differences have less influence on the index than big ones, which increase the index significantly. Small deviations are generally not eliminated. Big deviations imply that the distribution is less proportional." (Karpov 2008:1424)

³² $IRae = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^n |s_i - v_i|$ Because this index is based on the number of parties elected, the higher the number of parties, the lower the index. Since lower Rae-index rates indicate a higher proportionality, "The lower values of the index do not correspond to a more accurate representation. Only those parties that have more than 0.5% of votes should be considered in order to avoid misinterpretation of the low values of the index. Nevertheless, this measure does not resolve the problem of potential misinterpretation." (Karpov 2008:1422) Because of this data in the here-presented graph will not take into account the parties that received <0,5% of the votes.

³³ $SLI = \sum \frac{(S - V)^2}{V}$ "(...) is a weighted sum of squares of relative deviation. (...) and has) no upper limit, making their interpretation more difficult. The Sainte-Lague index is significantly different from the others [11]. It has the same form as the χ^2 statistic of some tests.

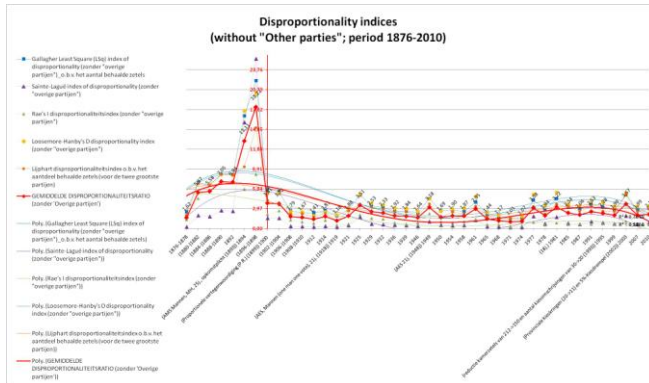
³⁴ $D = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^n |v_i - s_i|$ "The value of the Loosemore-Hanby index gives the total excess of seat shares of overrepresented parties over the exact quota and the total shortage accruing to other parties." (Karpov 2008:1423) The index is more sensitive to small discrepancies than for instance the Gallagher index.

³⁵ $IL = \frac{|s_i - v_i| + |s_j - v_j|}{2}$ "... is calculated in the same way as the Rae index, but only the two largest parties are considered. (...)

Since the largest parties usually have the most significant deviations from their exact quota, this measure can be used to evaluate the disproportionality of the whole system." (Karpov 2008:1423)

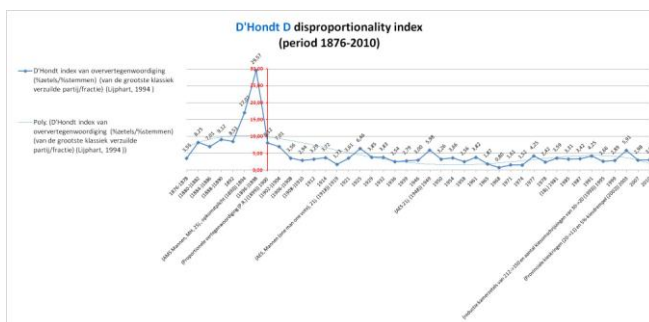
³⁶ The relatively higher correlation of the Gallagher's LSq and Loosemore-Hanby's D with most other indexes would indicate that the LSI and D successfully capture best the nuances included in those other indexes and therefore one could argue that these indexes are more robust. In order to limit the scope of the more detailed analysis we base our selection of one disproportionality index on the averaged correlation scores. Because Gallagher's LSq (average $R = .916$) is the highest, hence forward the LSq-index will be used further more in depth analyses, amongst other of (the effect of) (dis)proportionality.

vary between ,628** for the Rae's I on Sainte-Laguë's index and ,990** for the Gallagher's LSq on Loosemore-Hanby's D index.³⁷ Because of the strong correlations between all five indexes and though each one of them has its own specific distinctive focus (and therefore limitation), we chose to calculate a *mean disproportionality index* presenting the average disproportionality score for all points in time (= simple mathematical mean), hoping that this would allow for a more robust interpretation of the data. After all disproportionality levels of all five indexes use in the analysis follow the same curvilinear trend around the downward linear averaged total disproportionality trendline.



Note: because of the fluctuation of the data we use a polynomial regression line. The order of the polynomial is four ($y = ax^4 + bx^3 - cx^2 + dx + e$) and was determined by the cyclical nature (number of bends) hence the number of fluctuations in the data (in casu four post-1899 election years with a disproportionality score close to or higher than the mean value (2,19) plus one standard deviation ($\sigma=0,78$) –so considerably higher than the average- are considered years with above-average total disproportionality. When the total disproportionality of ‘Other parties’ is included in the analysis the average total disproportionality rate is 4,85 ($\sigma=3,44$), thus indicating a high underrepresentation of these parties (cf. *infra*)

Based on the mean disproportionality trend line, the situation under the plurality system is very obvious. With the introduction in 1893 of the AMS for 25-year men and the compulsory voting at the same time, the average level of disproportionality climbed to 12% and to an unprecedented 21% at the 1894 national elections. Such levels of total over- and underrepresentation surely did not go unnoticed by either the political elite or the public.... And it was decided to undertake measures swiftly to cope with the problem before the next national election of 1900, only two years after the previous one. Since the first application of the P.R.-system in 1900 basically three cycles emerge: a first cycle of decreasing total part system disproportionality from 1900 to the mid-1950's; a second cycle of increasing total disproportionality from the late 1950s to the early 1990's, and a third cycle of decreasing disproportionality from 1991 on.



Cf. comparable to Benoit's “bonus ratio of seats to votes awarded to the party winning the largest number of votes, calculated as the percentage of seats won by the largest party divided by the percentage of votes cast for the largest party. This measure is identical to the “advantage ratio” of Taagepera and Laasko (1980) applied to the largest party.” (2000b:383)

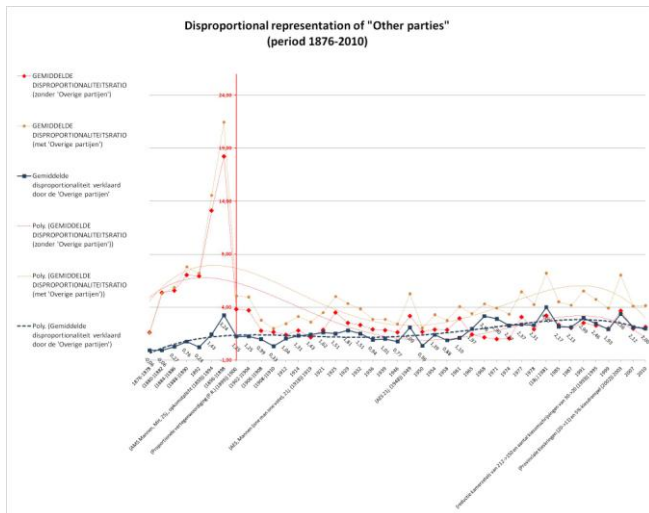
So far for the general trend. But, what about the disproportional representation of the smallest and largest parties? Lijphart's D'Hondt disproportionality index (D) gives a good indication of the overrepresentation of the largest parliamentary party. The overrepresentation had reached exceptional levels in the two election years following the introduction of the general multiple vote system for 25 year old males. The expansion of the electorate was combined with the obligation to vote and under the plurality system this favored the largest (and ruling) party exceptionally. Compulsory voting –still in force today- supported the democratic participation³⁸ but the broadened access to the elections did not show in the parliamentary representation of the

³⁷ The high correlation between the LSq and Loosemore-Hanby's D is no surprise since “Gallagher's least-squares disproportionality index, ranging from 0 to 100, [is] similar to the well-known Loosemore-Hanby (1971) index but registering small discrepancies less than large ones (Gallagher 1991).” (Benoit 2000b:383)

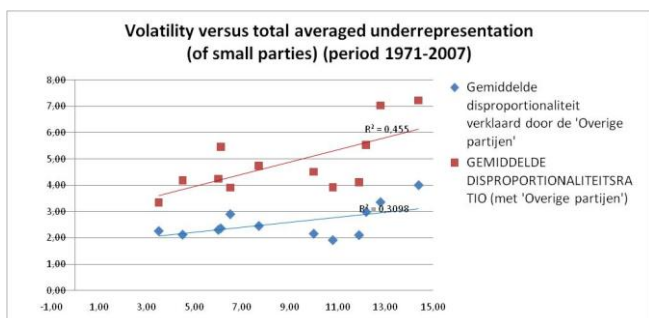
³⁸ The compulsory voting was applied for the first time in the national legislative elections of 1894 resulted in a participation rate of 88,81%. Since then the participation varies between 88 and 95% with an average over all post-1900 elections of more than 92,5%. In sum, national electoral participation –in the sense that people cast a vote- is very high in Belgium, making these elections very democratic and giving the outcome of the elections a broad legitimacy. Since the late 1970s we notice a slight drop of the voter participation with a 80-year low at the latest 2010 federal elections (89,28% participation rate) because people were ‘fed up’ with two governments that fell due to broken promises in-between coalition partners.

competing parties. Under the plurality system the disproportional overrepresentation of the catholic party and the underrepresentation of the socialist and liberal party reached extreme levels. At the end of the day, even the Catholic party could no longer ignore the facts and supported the introduction of the P.R.-system in 1899.

Assuming that the overrepresentation of the largest party (measured by D'Hondt's D) affects the total disproportionality of a legislative party system, and that the disproportional representation merely gives the largest party a bonus (= disproportionality bonus), we controlled for positive correlations between all five specific disproportionality indexes used above and the D'Hondt D disproportionality bonus of the largest party. The correlation is very high for all indexes.³⁹



Let us turn away from the overrepresentation of the largest political faction to the underrepresentation of the smaller factions (or 'Other parties'). The graph above plots both the total disproportionality for each election year as well as the disproportionality rates for the 'Other parties' separately. The substantially and systematically observable higher levels of disproportionality of these (smaller) parties compared to the disproportionality of the representation of the larger parties is eye-opening. Moreover, when looking at the difference between both total and small party disproportionality representation, we notice that it has been increasing in the period from 1900 until 1991, the point at which the upward slope bends⁴⁰. Also, it is clear from the span of both trend lines that the underrepresentation of small parties vis-à-vis the total disproportionality of the system has been rather stable in the period 1900-1921 but that it has widened ever since until the 1991 federal elections. The election result of parties like Vlaams Belang (12 seats of 212) and R.O.S.S.E.M (three seats) were explained by a profound anti-politics sentiment and a widening gap between politics and the people.



Note: data on the electoral volatility are based on: Devos et al 2008:17-18.

When comparing the electoral volatility in the period 1971-2007 with the total averaged disproportionality the

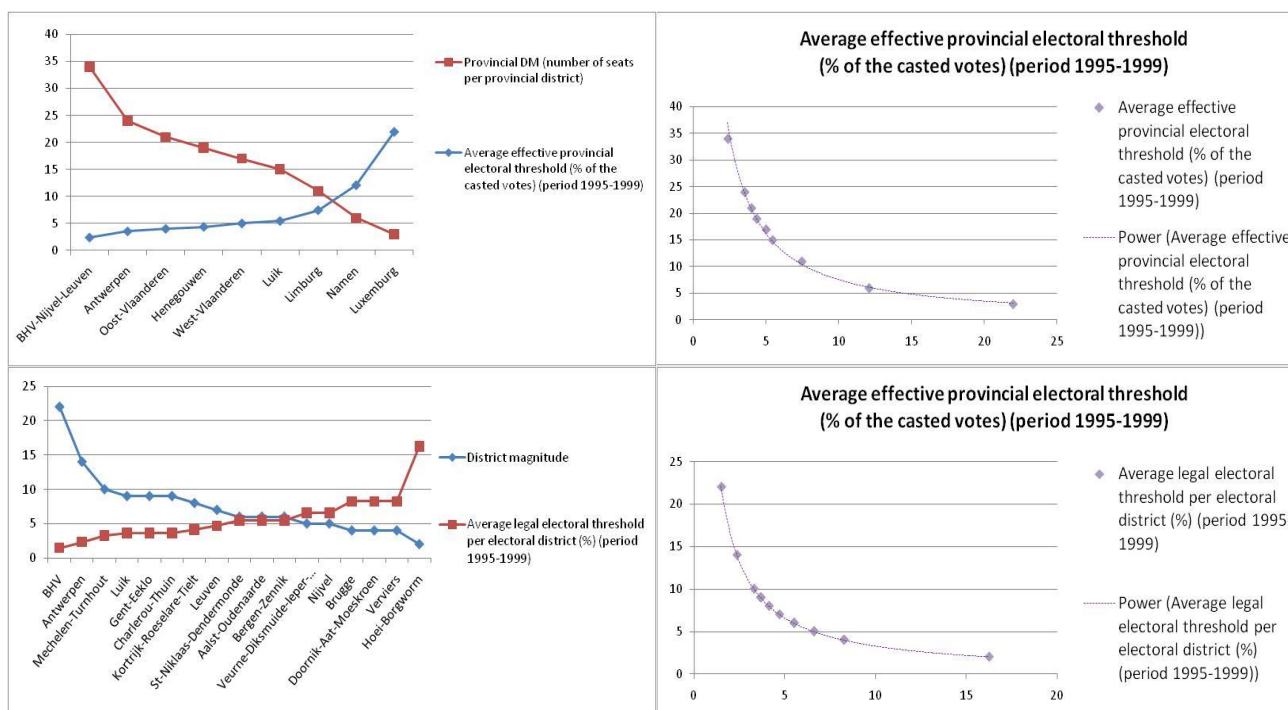
³⁹ For the predictive value of the disproportionality indexes: if LSq-index resp. Lijphart's IL increases with one then D'Hondt's D disproportionality bonus of the largest faction/party increases with 2,46 resp. 1,07 ($p < .0001$). If Loosemore-Hanby's D or Rae's I increase with one then D'Hondt D decreases with 2,07 ($p < .0001$) resp. ,431 ($p < .001$). There's no significant explanatory power for Sainte-Laguë's LSI. Notwithstanding the strong positive correlations, LSq and L-H's D indexes for instance predict D'Hondt's D in a complete different way.

⁴⁰ The general post-1900 linear trend is upward: from a level of 1,25 in 1900 over 1,49 in 1919 to 2,09 in 1949 and even 4,00 in 1981. With the introduction of the 5% electoral threshold the disproportionality of smaller parties lowered to 3,39.

correlation is strong (Pearson $R=.84$). The link with the underrepresentation of the smaller parties is also apparent (Pearson $R=.56$) Thus higher levels of electoral volatility relate to higher levels of underrepresentation of the smaller parties and significant high levels of total disproportional representation.

1.3 The size of the parliament, the district magnitude and the representativeness of the electoral system

In this section we look at the impact of the size of the parliament and the district magnitude. Like Vander Weyden –who studied the electoral impact of the electoral reform in the period from 1981 to 1999 (2006)- we assume that the larger the parliament and the larger the district magnitude, the smaller the real electoral threshold will be to gain a seat, and thus the lower the vote share may be in order to pass that threshold. (Vander Weyden 2001:37) On the aggregated level these assumptions were confirmed. (cf. below graph) Also, following Duverger's laws situation with higher district magnitude would lead to more proportional representation and thus to less strategic effects. Larger average numbers of parliamentary seats (per district) are thus favorable for the number of newcomers and the number of elected parties overall. (Clark, Golder, Golder 2009: 596) As a consequence it is more interesting for 'new' political parties to present themselves to the voter in electoral districts with an above average DM (in Belgium these are a.o. BHV-Nijvel-Leuven, Antwerp, East Flanders, Henegouwen and West Flanders). The higher the DM, the higher the chances of being elected.



Source: Vander Weyden 2001:40. In the period 1995-1999 the *effective* provincial electoral threshold for BHV-Nijvel-Leuven is 2,374% (DM=34) versus 22% for Luxemburg (DM=3). In the same period the *legal* provincial electoral threshold varied from 1,5% in BHV (DM=22) to 16,25% in Hoei-Borgworm (DM=2). Because since the introduction of the P.R.-system and the reduction of electoral districts from 42 to 30 in 1990, the smallest DM has been 'two seats' (a situation that lasted until 2002). As of the 2003 federal elections the smallest electoral district is Luxemburg (DM=4) and the largest is Antwerp (DM=24). (Cf. Schamp & Devos 2011: 544)

Most markedly the gap between the total disproportionality rate and the disproportional representation of small parties more specifically began to narrow not as a result of the introduction of the P.R. system like one would expect knowing that the distribution of the seats is done in an essentially proportional way, but rather as a result of a reduction of the number of seats in the federal parliament (from 212 to 150), first applied in the federal elections of 1995⁴¹. The impact of size of the parliament or the district magnitude cannot be ignored.

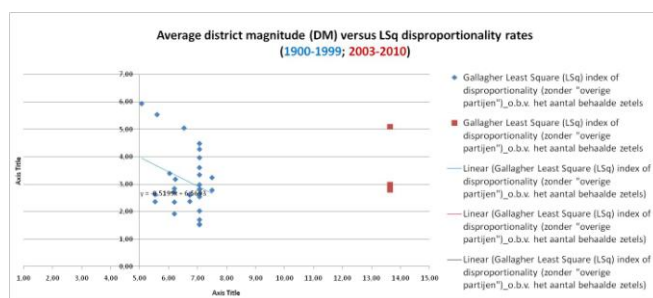
⁴¹ The fourth transformation of the Belgian state in 1993 made Belgium officially a "federal" state with three communities (a Flemish, Walloon- and German-speaking community) and three regions (Flanders, Wallonia and the Brussels Capital Region), each represented in regional parliaments or assemblies. Because of the installation of the new parliamentary assemblies at the regional level the size of the federal parliament was reduced from 212 to 150 for the Chamber of Representatives and from 70 to 40 for the Senate. There is not overlap possible between mandates in these parliaments. As a result the composition of the federal as well as each regional parliament is unique.

As expected—all other variables kept the same- the higher the average district magnitude (DM)⁴², the higher the proportionality and therefore the more democratic the representation of relatively more parliamentary parties (Neffs).

In how far does changing the number of seats from each district allows politician to strike a balance between the often conflicting goals of minority representation and defractionalization? (Rae 1995) “The strongest relationship found by Rae is that between district magnitude and proportionality: as magnitude increases, disproportionality goes down.” (Rae 1971 in: Lijphart 1990:486)⁴³ This thesis is also supported by Clark, Golder and Golder’s research of the participation and representation of x parties in 17 countries in parliamentary elections in the period 1946-2000. In sum the relation found between DM and both the participation and the representation is as follows: chances of representation is highest when DM equals 150 (comparable to the size of the Dutch national parliament) in which case “[...] increasing the number of ethnic groups by one [...] yields about one and a half electoral parties and one and a quarter legislative parties.” (Clark, Golder, Golder 2009: 596) A DM smaller than 20 decreases the chance of representation profoundly and a DM equal to one lowers the theoretical chance for any (new) political candidate (faction) to run for office to 11% and to get elected to only 7% (p<.07).

Since the driver of the representativeness of an electoral system is clearly the DM (cf. Rae 1971:20; Lijphart 1994:11 and Dodeigne & Binard in: Bouhon & Reuchamps 2012:571-587) a non-periodic analysis of the association between the (average) district magnitude (DM) and the disproportionality levels for the period 1900-2010, however, shows a strong negative correlation between the average DM and the level of disproportionality, measured by the LSq-index (R= -.386*, sign. the p<.05). In the period before 2003 an increase of the DM with one unit would lead to a decrease of the total disproportionality measured by the LSq-index of 0,52. Referring to the empirical data collected and analyzed by Vander Weyden (2005:172, 175, & 176): the lower/higher the average DM, the lower/higher the observed disproportionality rate.

Outlying values at the right end of the graph (election years 2003, 2007 and 2010) are the result of the change of the electoral institution in 2002, including the replacement of the smaller arrondissemental electoral districts by larger “provincial” districts (the effect of which theoretically ought to be the increase of the proportionality of the electoral system) as well as the introduction of a 5% electoral threshold (which in theory should increase the disproportionality). As a result of the introduction of the 5% electoral threshold applied for the first time in the 2003 federal elections, the disproportionality levels again peaked but normalized back to under-average LSq-levels in 2007 (LSq=2,80) and 2010 (2,99).⁴⁴



Higher district magnitudes are linked with lower overrepresentation of the largest parliamentary party (Vander Weyden 2005:160-161; 163; 168). We tested this hypothesis using Lijphart’s D index.⁴⁵ The graph above clearly shows that the association between DM and D is negative: each increase of DM with one unit results in a 1,25 unit cut of D. Outliers at the right of the graph again are the result of the 5% electoral threshold, which raise D. However, even though the overrepresentation of the largest party has diminished over time, it is clear that it has not disappeared. Having said this, based on the evolution of the national outcomes on or after 1900

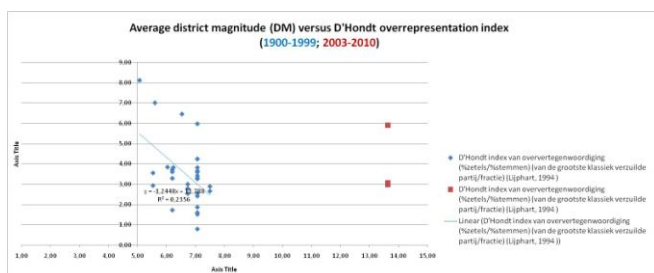
⁴² Cf. Rae (1971:20) and Lijphart (1994:11).

⁴³ “[Rae] compares the effects of electoral systems classified according to five categories of average district magnitude, m: (1) singlemember districts where m = 1, (2) m between 2 and 6, (3) m between 6 and 10, (4) m between 10 and 20, and (5) m between 100 and 150, which occurs in the two countries with a single nationwide district, Israel and the Netherlands.” (Lijphart 1990:ibid.)

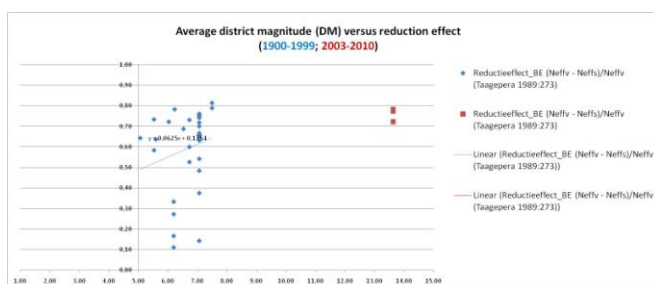
⁴⁴ The average LSq-score for the period 1900-2010 is 3,15. For the pre-1900 period the LSq-index is 10,18.

⁴⁵ Party i is relatively overrepresented when $si/S > vi/V$ and party i is underrepresented when $si/S < vi/V$. In the case of perfect proportional representation $si/S = vi/V$. Lijphart’s D only takes into account the representation of the largest party. In all cases this party is also most overrepresented.

it is hard to see clear signs –if any signs at all- of a significant increase of the ‘equal’ chances for representation for *all* electoral parties in the way that Grumm assumed it would occur.



Does the increased proportionality signify that (all) parties (hence newcomers too) have higher chances to gain a seat and be represented in parliament? Vander Weyden (2005:185) formulates and tests the following hypothesis: the higher the DM, the lower the *relative reduction effect* of the seat distribution system (i.e. the system D'Hondt)⁴⁶. Based on all election years from 1900-2010 the linear trend line in the below scatter plot would basically support this supposition. However, in the period before 2003 the relation was clearly inverse: with every extra unit of DM, the reduction effect increases with 6,25%.⁴⁷ The explanation for this unexpected result is not be that for this sort of analysis the median DM is preferred above the average DM (cf. Rae 1971:20 en Lijphart 1994:11)⁴⁸ rather the reduction effect has most likely more important ‘causes’, i.e. the sheer increase of the number of electoral parties due to large numbers of newcomers that did not succeed in entering the parliament as well as the introduction of the electoral threshold, which clearly had an impact (cf. outliers on the right of the graph).



In sum, whereas the drop of the electoral support of the three traditional party families at the level of the national elections has been significant during the course of the past fifty years, in none of the periods studied here a general significant rise of the smaller parties could be noted. The smaller parties on average remained significantly underrepresented over time, while the traditional parties were largely overrepresented (both in terms of number of observations and in terms of the degree). One of the results being that in spite of the proportional representation already in force many of the smaller parties (the Communist Party (CP), the Front party (Frontpartij), the People Union (Volksunie) and others) did not survive the competitive nature of the Belgian national or federal party system.

2. Size, fractionalization and inclusiveness of the party system

There's plenty empirical findings showing that higher levels of proportionality in the seat distribution system lead to higher numbers of parliamentary parties. In this part we look at the evolution of the size and the complexity of the Belgian national and federal party system. Many observers and politicians agree that since the 1990s Belgium has drifted towards a situation in which simply too many political initiatives and parties have become electorally viable. In this part we aim to answer the question whether or not this means that the Belgian political and party system has become more *inclusive*? Has Belgium become a pluralistic parliamentary democracy *par excellence* or does the country suffer from a democratic deficit? What is the nature of the Belgian representative democracy?

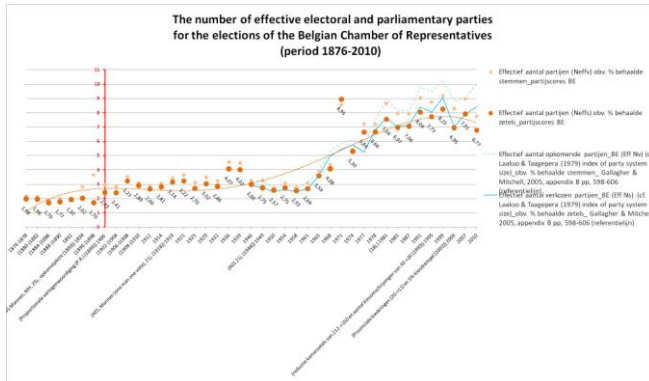
⁴⁶ The relative reduction effect $r = (N_v - N_s)/N_v$ (Taagepera & Shugart 1989:273)

⁴⁷ Not really equivalent to the reduction effect of some non-permissive electoral systems signaled by Clark et al. (2006, 2009) where the proportionality of the seat distribution is reduced to one-fifth (or 20%). (Clark, Golder, Golder 2009:592 en 594)

⁴⁸ The correlations based on the median DM are somewhat stronger but largely comparable to that of the average DM (reduction effect $Y = 0,1012x + 0,1476$).

2.1 The number of electoral and parliamentary parties

The below graph summarizes the overall evolution. Based on the Laakso & Taagepera index it becomes clear that the late 1960s and early 1970s induced a growth spurt of the number of effective electoral parties (Neffv) and parliamentary parties (Neffs). De regionalization of the before national parties had increased the effective number of parties dramatically. But the year 1971 is really a mark in all-time Belgian electoral history. Never have there been more electoral and parliamentary parties than with the 1971 national elections. What happened?



Note: referring to the election year 1971, because all parties that received more than 0,5% of the votes were elected into parliament and because the square of vote proportion for the seats taken for those parties is on average higher than the square of vote proportion of the votes for these parties, the total party system Neffs exceeds the Neffv. In all other case the opposite is the case, basically because less parties succeed in winning at least one seat and therefore, underrepresentation is on average much higher.

As seen in the first part of this paper, the late 1960s and 1970s changed the party landscape dramatically. In 1968 the national catholic party split into a Flemish (CVP) and a Walloon (PSC) part and both participated in the national elections. The extreme left AMADA was created in 1970 out of the remainders of the Belgian CP. And, in 1971 the national liberal party split into a Flemish faction (PVV) and a Walloon part (PRL). Later on the Socialist party followed and split in a Flemish part (SP) and a Walloon part (PS). In 1977 the Flemish and Walloon green parties Agalev and Ecolo were created. That same year the Flemish People party (Vlaamse Volkspartij) and the Flemish-National Party (Vlaams-Nationale Partij) were formed. In 1979 the leftist AMADA became PVDA/PTB (1979), the only political party that currently is national party. In the same year the Flemish nationalistic Vlaams Belang was created out of the ashes of the Flemish nationalist factions. In that same period (since 1971), however, we can clearly see that the gap between the Neffv and Neffs widens. Meaning, less parties are successfully winning at least one seat and more parties are being underrepresented on average. Hence in the 1970s through the 1990s the mathematical chance for (new) political groups to get elected shrunk.

Nevertheless the relatively lowered chances to win a parliamentary seat, the late 1990s and the early 2000s are characterized an outbreak of new –mostly Flemish- political initiatives such as R.O.S.S.E.M, Liberaal Appel, Spirit (since 2008 SLP), ID-21, Vivant, VLOTT... As said already the Flemish regionalist Volksunie split in 2001 in three parts; the liberal part joined the liberal VLD. The public and political opinion –definitely with the liberals that were highly fractioned among themselves- got more and more directed towards legal initiatives to put a halt to the fragmentation of the party system. The introduction of an electoral threshold was one of them.

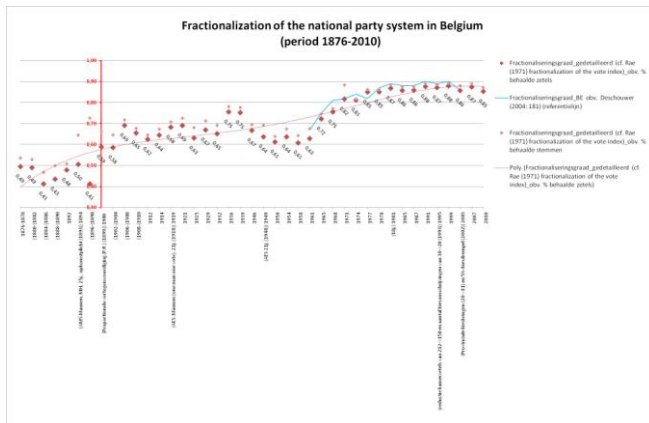
For the 2003 election some of the new parties engaged in a collaboration with either the Christian-Democrats (CD&V-N-VA), or the liberals (VLD-Vivant) or the socialist (SP.a-Spirit). These so-called *kartels* served two main causes. They underpinned the ideological resourcing of the three main-stream parties. At the same they safeguarded the chances for survival of societal valuable political initiatives that would not stand a chance of survival when the electoral threshold of 5% were in place. The first application of the electoral threshold in 2003, introduced by the purple-green federal government lead by the Flemish liberal Guy Verhofstadt (1999-2003) has had the expected effect on the effective number of parties: the upward trend of the number of electoral and parliamentary parties was bent and based on the Laakso & Taagepera's indexes fewer Flemish and Walloon parties seem to participate in or get elected after federal elections.

As we will see, the effective number of parliamentary parties (Neffs) is important, because the higher the Neffs, the higher de fractionalization in the federal parliament and the more difficult a majority can be formed, because there are more alternatives. Neffs therefore determines the number of parties that could be asked to

form a parliamentary majority as well as the government. The break-up of the former kartels in 2009-2010 did not simplify things, though most of the smaller factions were ‘eaten’ by the other parties (e.g. VLOTT associated with Vlaams Belang, Spirit (SLP) fused with Groen!, ID-21 with N-VA and VLD, Liberaal Appel associated with VLD).

2.2 The fractionalization of the national party system

Theory-based calculations of the level of fractionalization of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives over the period 1900-2010 show that fractionalization based on the number of seats (F_s) climbs from .59 (cf. Rae’s fractionalization index⁴⁹) which approximates three effective parties (cf. Laakso & Taagepera’s 1979 effective number of parties index⁵⁰) in 1900 to an F_s fractionalization level of .71 or close to four effective parties after the 1965 elections to become .85 in 2010.



Note: the fractionalization levels are those based on the vote share (small dots) and seat share (large dots) for all individual parties. Defractionalization shift is the difference between both ($F_v - F_s$). Weak levels of defractionalization means stable party systems and vice versa for high defractionalization levels. (Rae 1995:71)

The above graph shows first of all that –in line with theoretic assumptions- the general level of fractionalization has steadily increased after the introduction of the P.R. system. The biggest shift happened in the pre-WO II years and in the 1960s. Elements that explain these shifts are a.o. the rise of the ultra-catholic party REX that wins the 1936 elections (21 seats) and the regionalization of the Catholic party. In 1936 and 1939 both the communist and the nationalist parties gain seats (resp. 9 and 17 seats) and therefore political influence. In 1968 the catholic party presents itself to the voter as two separate parties (CVP and PSC). In 1971 the Liberal party splits into a Flemish part (PVV) and a Walloon part (PRL). In those years the ultra-catholics become politically insignificant, the extreme left faction survives, and the regionalist Flemish (Volkunie, °1954) and Walloon factions (FDF, °1962-1963 and Rassemblement Wallon, °1968)) turn bigger and bigger (resp. 21 and 23 seats in 1971). Also, looking at the relative change of the degree of fractionalization from one election to the other (= delta), we notice that the fractionalization levels have stabilized since the 1968 elections (between -10 and +10%) and that defractionalization shifts are virtually absent since the 1978 elections. Thus, the Belgian party landscape is fractionalized but pretty stable over the last three to four recent decades.

As said fractionalization is a measure of the size of the party system. Logically, with the fractionalization also the effective number of elective and parliamentary parties stabilized. Both follow the same pattern and correlation for N_{effv} and N_{effs} is significant (Pearson $R=.988^{**}$ at a $p<.01$ level). Correlation between N_{effv} and fractionalization rate based on vote share (vote-vote: $.922^{**}$) and between N_{effs} and fractionalization rate based on seat share (seat-seat: $.917^{**}$) are very strong as well and relatively higher than the opposite correlations vote-seat ($.891^{**}$) or seat-vote ($.907^{**}$). Analyzing the defractionalization shifts (Rae 1995) we

⁴⁹ $F = 1 - \sum_{i=1}^N p_i^2$, “where p_i is the proportion of parliamentary seats of party i , and \sum stands for summation (in this case, the sum of all parties’ squared proportions of seats is taken and subtracted from 1 to provide the fractionalization of parliamentary parties).” (Dumont & Caulier 2003:4) The higher the F , the higher the degree of fractionalization of the national party system. F gives an indication of the likelihood or chance that two random voters will choose for the same party and varies between 0 (very strong likelihood; one party takes all seats) and 1 (no chance at all or the limiting case of an infinite number of small parties). (Rae 1995:71; Devos & Steyvers, 2011: 289)

⁵⁰ $N = \frac{1}{\sum_{i=1}^n p_i^2}$ where n is the number of parties with at least one vote/seat and p_i^2 the square of each party’s proportion of all votes or seats. This index gives an indication of the number of relevant parties in a party system. (Devos & Steyvers, 2011: 289)

conclude that high levels of fractionalization go together with low levels of defractionalization shift. (Pears $R=-.537$ for F_v and $-.648$ for F_s) In other words, highly fractionalized party systems do not tend to defractionalize as much as less fractionalized party systems.

In fact after a significant drop from 1939-1950 and rise again from 1958-1977 the level of fractionalization has stabilized to more or less .85 since the early 1980s. Is this the stabilization point that Grumm had in mind, i.e. a situation where all political initiatives (parties) have equal chances to get elected? In theory there are arguments that support the equilibrium claim, amongst others because the correlation between the number of effective parliamentary parties (Neffs) and the level of fractionalization is statistically significantly high. Also true, this is the case only in the post-1900 era where the P.R.-system is in place. But that is theory.

The table down shows that *in reality* the number of electoral and parliamentary parties at each point in time was far higher than the theoretic Neff_v and Neff_s. Measuring the size of the Belgian party system, in 1900 there were 14 electoral parties (P_v) in total and 5 parliamentary parties (P_s) (hence the P_s/P_v-ratio = .36), in 1965 33 electoral and 8 parliamentary parties (ratio=.24), and in 2010 53 (!) electoral and 12 (!) parliamentary parties (ratio=.23). A first observation is that on average the deviation between both measures of the reduction is big, i.e. 45%. The years scoring relatively high compared to the mean $(.45 + 1\sigma)^{51}$ are the following.

Election year	Theoretic reduction rate based on the theoretic Neff _s and Neff _v *	Real reduction rate based on the real P _v and P _s **
1900 (largest party = 56% seat share)	.18	.57
1914 (largest party = 46% seat share)	.08	1.00
1965 (largest party = 36% seat share)	.09	.73
1995 (largest party = 27% seat share)	.12	.80
1999 (largest party = 26% seat share)	.10	.75
2010 (largest party = 18% seat share)	.13	.70

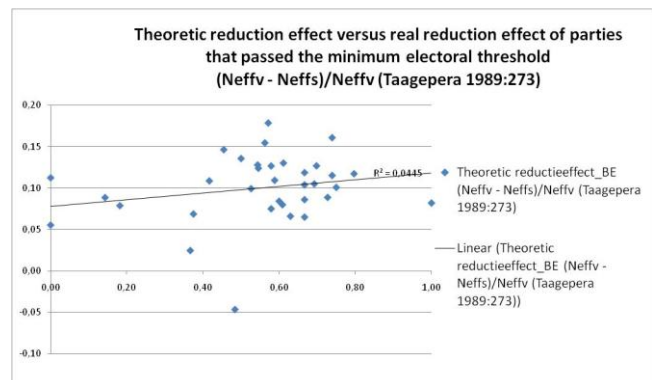
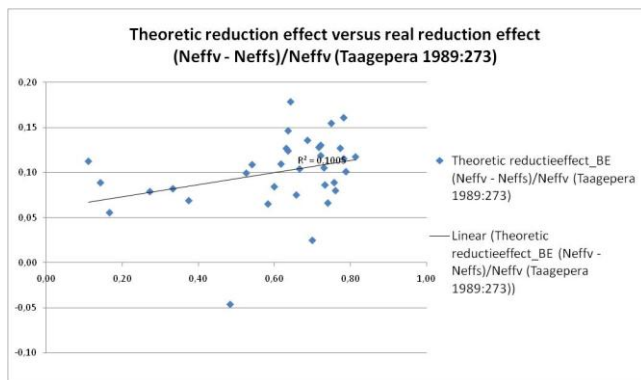
*Based on the calculation used by Taagepera & Sugart 1989:273. **The number of real P_v includes all electoral parties that participated in the national or federal elections and received at least the factual threshold for those elections, being the lowest vote share on seat share noted. On average since the 1900 elections this threshold is 0,50%.

Secondly, if theory (or measures built on it) represent reality correctly then at best the theoretic and real ratio's should overlap largely. Regarding the above the comparison if fractionalization says something about the real representation of the electoral parties then there should be a clear linkage between the theoretic and the real reduction effect.

Notwithstanding the overall strong positive correlations between the theoretic and genuine number of electoral and parliamentary parties, the correlation between the theoretic and actual parliamentary/electoral parties ratio is weak and statistically insignificant, whereas one would expect the correlation to be positive and strong. (cf. graphs below) The graphs below show that this is not the case, R^2 being only 0,10 in the case of the total number of electoral parties and R^2 being only 0,04 in the case of the total number of electoral parties that have passed the minimal electoral threshold needed to obtain one seat. This distortion is rather counter intuitive and entirely due to the systematically lower levels of the Neff_v compared to the real number of electoral parties (P_v).⁵² Theory clearly does not tell the whole story... This calls for further attention when interpreting the theoretic measure proposed by Taagepera and Shugart (1989), at least when studying the fractionalization based on aggregated data. The same argument applies concerning the relation between the theoretic Neff_s/Neff_v-ratios and the seat share of the largest parliamentary party. On the other hand there is sufficient reason to believe that the P_s/P_v-ratio correlates well with the size of the largest party.

⁵¹ $\sigma=.21$

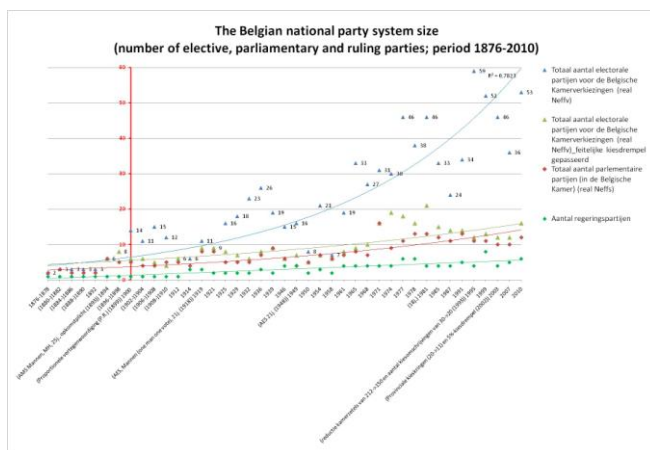
⁵² In brief, the theoretical Laakso & Taagepera Neff_v and Neff_s ratios are to a large extent based on the sum of the vote or seat proportion for n parties. Because n is in the denominator of the equation, the higher the number of individual p^2i , the lower the effective number of parties. The smaller the vote/seat proportion of a party, the lower the respective impact of that party on the total Neff_v or Neff_s.



Note: the left graph shows the (weak) correlation between the theoretic reduction effect (based on the theoretic Neffv and Neffs) and the real reduction effect based on the total number of electoral parties. The second graph shows the relation with the number of electoral parties that passed the real electoral threshold (different for each election).

Comparing the pre-1900 period (plurality voting) with the post-1900 period (P.R.), the impact of the P.R.-system on the multiplication of new political initiatives and parties has been massive. Undoubtedly more massive than the theoretic measures of the fragmentation of the national party system (are able to) indicate. Since the introduction of the P.R.-system in 1899 the general trends concerning the Belgian national party system size and complexity are clearly those of more electoral parties, more elected parties and not to forget broader coalition governments. The below graph show that over time the growth of the number of electoral parties has been disproportionally higher than that of the parliamentary parties or the ruling parties.

Assumptions on the relations between the variables studied in the above graph can be summarized as follows: first, association between the real number of electoral parties and parliamentary parties and between the number of parliamentary parties and governmental parties is not existing in the period before 1893. During the election years 1893-1898, the relations is 100% negative for the first aspect. An increase of the number of electoral parties with one, leads to a decrease of the ruling parties with one. Newly launched political initiatives in that period stood no chance because of the working of the plurality system in those years, favoring foremost the Catholic party. (cf. supra)



Note: Since 1848 the Belgian political system size was invariably bipolar (Matagne & Verjans 2012:85), basically of the same kind as in the years 1876-1892. The reason for this is that there were only two parties (the Liberal and the Catholic party) and the plurality system allowed single-party majority governments. Since 1919 the Belgian political system qualified as a two-and-a-half party system and –quite visible on the above graph- evolved further into a multiparty system.

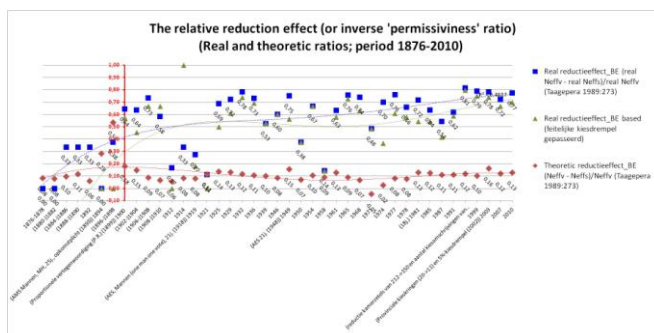
After the introduction of the P.R.-system, correlation between the number of electoral, parliamentary and ruling parties has become significantly positive compared to the negative correlation under the plurality system.

2.3 The inclusiveness of the Belgian party system

Referring to the below graph, the introduction of the P.R. system did not result in an instant increase of the permissiveness of the system. Quite on the contrary, since the 1912 elections the trend is cyclical towards lower levels of permissiveness and sometimes with levels comparable to those under the plurality system. The general trend is that since the introduction of the P.R.-system the relative reduction effect has grown.

Despite the significantly increased level fractionalization of the party landscape since the late 1960s, there is

no wide-ranging evidence of the supposed rise of the smaller parties up to the point that they become equivalent to the traditional parties. One explanation for this is that the smaller parties on average remained significantly underrepresented to the benefit of the larger electoral parties.⁵³ More to it, the election data show that since the late 1960s the (steadily increasing) proportionality rate⁵⁴ (measured by the *reduction effect* of the electoral formula (D'Hondt)) and the (steadily lowering) permissiveness rate⁵⁵ follow an opposite trend, where one would expect both to run in parallel. Whereas based on the theoretic measures one would conclude that the Belgian national/federal electoral system is rather inclusive (cf. a post-1900 average reduction rate of 10%), the reality is that it is not since the average reduction rate since the introduction of the P.R.-system is 55% (only those parties that passed the minimum electoral threshold) to 61% (all electoral parties).



Note: as stated above in the text the number of real electoral parties (blue) is the actual total number of political parties that have participated in each of the mentioned parliamentary elections (numbers reported by the federal election authority); the green triangles –largely overlapping the blue squares– represent the number of parties that have passed the minimum electoral threshold calculated for each specific election. (cf. supra: under the P.R. system this on average 1,50%)

In view of the increasing disproportionality rates and an increasing number of (new) political parties, it is no surprise that in 2002 the ruling parties chose to change the electoral system in an attempt to bring down the number of electoral and parliamentary parties and at the same time trying to correct the high levels of overrepresentation of foremost the bigger parties and the far larger underrepresentation of the smaller fractions. The latter being to the benefit of the smaller governing green parties. The question that remains is whether or not this recent attempt to establish a balance between increased democratic representation and defragmentation of the party landscape has been fruitful?

As stated before the introduction of the electoral threshold was a clear attempt to instigate the effort to reduce the number of electoral and parliamentary parties. Many political leaders have asked themselves the question whether or not it is worthwhile starting a new party in an already scattered electoral arena that election after election becomes more competitive and difficult to master politically? As a consequence of such strategic considerations, the permissiveness rate of the Belgian electoral system at the level of the national/federal parliament would automatically improve, it was believed.

On the short-term the data tend to underscore the effect and to justify this logic: from 1999 to 2003 the total number of electoral parties went from 52 to 46, and further down to 36 in 2007. However, on the longer term the effect of a strong measure like the introduction of the electoral threshold in terms of the expected (increased) reduction effect was rather feeble: the number of electoral parties in 2010 (53) was higher than before the introduction of the electoral threshold. (cf. above graph)

The downside of step-by-step increasing democratic participation and political representation of a multitude of political groups leading to so-called *highly permissive* electoral systems (Clark et al. 2006, 2009)⁵⁶ is obvious. The increasing fragmentation of the Belgian national political scenery has led to fewer larger parties (as defined above) and to broader and therefore less-stable governmental coalitions.

⁵³ The latter can be explained by the characteristic of the D'Hondt-system which distributes seats more or less proportional, but not 100% proportional (like the Hare-quot). (Schamp, Devos in: Devos (Ed.) 2011:530)

⁵⁴ *Proportionality*: share of seats / share of votes. Proportionality equals one if both shares are the same. Proportionality is weak if the share of seats is either far higher (= overrepresentation) or far lower (underrepresentation) than the share vote share.

⁵⁵ *Permissiveness*: share of the parties that participate in elections (= electoral parties (Pv)) that actually gains a seat in parliament (= parliamentary parties (Ps)), thus Ps / Pv.

⁵⁶ In highly permissive systems the relatively larger numbers of electoral parties also result in larger numbers of parliamentary parties. Because of this positive relation, (new) parties will be inclined to participate in elections and present themselves to the public. In low-permissive systems the relation between the number of electoral and parliamentary parties is negative, discouraging newcomers from participating in elections.

3. Electoral reform and the cost of ruling

Since the Belgian Revolution in 1830 until today (June 2012) Belgium has had 86 governments and 53 parliamentary legislatures (Matagne & Verjans 2012:105), that 3,43 years on average per legislature which in theory should be four years. On the other hand the 85 governments before the current one have lasted on average 25,8 months, barely more than half of the intended 48 months legislature. In line with Duverger's prognosis governments under the majority system in the pre-1900 period, including a long period from 1830 to 1845 with mostly Liberal-Catholic unionist governments are more stable (on average 39,4 months) than those in the era where the P.R.-system has been applied (on average 21,6 months) (ibid.:106) Also the second half of the 19th Century, with strong bipolar confrontation between the Liberal party and the Catholic party produced the most stable and successive governments ever in the Belgian political history (sometimes with a duration exceeding 52 months). And, the introduction of the P.R.-system did not immediately induce a governmental precariousness: (Catholic) governments lasted on average 55,6 months in the period 1900-1914. (ibid.) According to Matagne and Verjans the definite rupture with the past stable governments came at the end of World War I, when the general suffrage for men was introduced and were due to the social and societal tensions Belgium and in the Belgian politics (cf. the increase of extreme right politics during the inter-bellum, and of extreme left wing politics after the World War II and the politization of the question of the retour of the Belgian King, the *Royal Question* in 1950 and later on the rising of regionalism at both sides of the language border (since 1962-'63)). Since de mid-1960s government power became more inclusive.⁵⁷ From 1981-2007 governmental stability largely returned to national politics (lasting on average 44,4 months), era of the first attempts to federalize Belgium. (ibid.: 107) Therefore, referring to the 1918-1919 electoral system change and all other changes of the electoral institutions why change an electoral system that offers the benefit of ruling? Who decides on such change? Are the political parties the only actors?

The question why the electoral system changes is equally important to the question what the impact of the change has been, i.e. on the political and party system. In theory three forces making or breaking electoral system change work hand in hand. At the one hand there is the force that determines the *strategic logic of political parties*. This logic can be ideology-driven (for policy-seeking parties), power-driven (for office-seeking parties) or purely electoral (for vote-seeking parties). (Pilet 2007:67-71) At the other hand there are the forces of ideas and contextual factors like the social, economic, political, legal and constitutional organization of a country (Ibid 2007.:71-76) that determine the *perception and the beliefs of democracy by the citizen-voter*, who's role in the electoral process is vital and who's indirect or direct share in the process of changing electoral systems has been shown in many research pieces. (Pilet 2012:423) And next to that there is the impact of the non-partisan actors such as expert opinions (academia, legal experts), the influence of external actors (international organizations, foundations supporting democratic processes), and the edicts of the constitutional court before which the democratic nature of electoral laws can be contested. However, unlike the tendency observed in numerous other democratic nations, in the case of Belgium the interaction between political parties and third parties is extremely limited if at all perceivable. (Ibid. 2012:422) Exceptions to this rule are the experts and counselors close to the party leadership and political decision-makers, the academic and other reporters on the effect of changes in the electoral system or organized experts in non-partisan initiatives like the Pavia group (°2007)⁵⁸ or the Gravensteen group (°2008)⁵⁹.

Therefore in this paper we grounded our historic analysis in major societal, socio-economic and political developments that colored the political history of Belgium since 1876. Next to that there is the real politics that persuade the ruling parties that feel that the end of an era of political hegemony is nearing to proactively accommodate to the reality of politics (hence introduce change in the electoral institution) hoping that this

⁵⁷ In the period before 1900 on average *one party* formed the government (typical for plurality systems) at a overall selection rate among all parliamentary parties of on average 41%; in the period 1990-1961 the average number of ruling parties doubled (*two parties*) at an invariable average selection rate; since 1965 the average size of the government at the federal level increased to *five parties*, the selection rate being 0,45%.

⁵⁸ A group of independent opinion makers that recommend the introduction of one national electoral district for 10% of the parliamentary seats at the federal level, to be distributed proportionally according to the system D'Hondt. (Pilet:428-429; Schamp, Devos 2011:570-571)

⁵⁹ A group of opinion makers, journalists, academics etc. calling for the remediation of the growing democratic deficit in Belgium, which has been constitutionalized since the first state reform in 1970 (cf. supra the *Bolt constitution*), i.e. resulting in the overprotection of the Walloon minority and the amplification of the financial stake of Brussels at the expense of the aspirations of the Flemish majority for the regionalization of more responsibilities (social security, employment, asylum and migration, and (fiscal) powers (taxation)).

modus operandi will be appreciated and rewarded by the voter.⁶⁰ (Quintal, D., 1970:758-759) According to Grumm it would therefore be plausible that a certain kind of political system looks for and implements a certain kind of electoral system because the latter answers the broader societal and party's own political needs better. (Grumm, J. (1958) in Quintal, D., 1970: 752) Colomer too concluded that political parties in essence choose the electoral system, or Duverger's laws upside down. (Colomer, J., 2005)

In his often cited article *A theory of electoral systems* the Irish researcher Kenneth Benoit (2000) focuses on the relation between electoral systems and political systems. More specifically he targets the relation between the relative (in)stability of party systems and the (in)stability of electoral systems in a country (i.e. changes of the electoral institution, the introduction of a threshold, changes in the size of the assemble or the DM, and so on and so forth). Benoit concludes that the likelihood for an instable party system to induce instability of the electoral system is inversely proportional to the chance that a stable party system will produce changes in the electoral system. Therefore, the more instable the party system, the more likely changes in the electoral system will be. How did the electoral institution in Belgium evolve and can it be convincingly linked to the changing political or party system? And, who benefitted (most) from the changes in the national electoral system change?

Regarding the development of the electoral system, we agree with Grumm that electoral system change –like the introduction of a proportional system or the electoral threshold- is likely to materialize when the (entire) political system has "prepared itself" for that change. Answering the catalyzing effect of societal imbalances or strong desires for any change that aiming to correct the underrepresentation of the Socialist party was clearly the prominent concern of the ruling Catholic faction allowing the introduction of the P.R.-system in 1899. (cf. supra) The same can be said about the introduction of the right to vote for all adult women in 1948. The cry to restore a clear democratic deficit was even the case, though less visible out on the streets, when the vote age was brought down to 21 and with the introduction of the *one man one vote* system when WO I ended, or when the vote age was lowered once more to 18 years in 1981.

In the absence of democratic imbalances, or important elite-mass interactions supporting electoral system change, we might expect that such electoral system change will simply not happen, because of several reasons. Firstly because the distribution of the vote after such change remains a big question mark. Secondly, because the only thing the parliamentary or ruling party/-ies know for sure is that the electoral system 'in place' has lead to the participation in the parliamentary or legislative power. Thirdly, because since the outcome is unpredictable every change of the electoral system holds a risk. So, "[why] risk this by trying to change the rules of a game one is already winning?" (Katz 2005 in: Jacobs and Leyenaar 2011:504)

From the key explanation that a party will never support a change that risks to turn out counterproductive for its own political or electoral position (Pilet 2012:432), the assumption follows that a party –in parliament or government- wants to change the electoral system or institution only when the party is convinced that this change will bring more prosperity to the party. Doing so parties that support a change of the electoral rules aim at a long-term impact on the political system and at the same time at short-term effect, namely their own electoral profit. How can both be reconciled? How can the electoral gain/loss be properly tested for parties that hold different agendas (cf. votes, office or policy)?

4. Conclusion

Analysis of long-term time series of representation and fractionalization data, i.e. analyzing trends of the election results –vote share and seat share- and the number of all electoral and parliamentary parties for all the Belgian state and federal elections since 1876 shows that the Belgian case does in general support the "equal opportunity to survive" thesis in more than one respect. In sum, even though no (immediate) equilibrium between the main traditional political families occurred after the introduction of the P.R.-system in 1900 can be noted, the Belgian political life since the mid-1960s until today does substantiate Grumm's *electoral equilibrium hypothesis*. However, it is all too clear that the cause for the fragmentation of the party politics and

⁶⁰ Changing the electoral institution because there is no alternative is better known as the Rokkan hypothesis. "The "Rokkan hypothesis" attributes the introduction of [P.R.] in continental Europe to the extension of the franchise and the desire by established groups to protect their position while simultaneously granting a measure of representation to previously excluded groups. Lipson (1964) likewise reexamined many of the cases studied by Duverger (1951) and concluded that party politics or political traditions drove the electoral arrangements and not vice-versa (see also Grumm 1958:375). More recent evidence also challenges the conventional Duverger model [...]. " (Benoit 2000:2)

the initiation for the electoral reform since the mid-1960s is merely the result of a combination of different long-term trends, amongst other the mediatization and digitalization of politics and the individualization and personalization of politics and of elections, the growing distrust in politicians and the widening gap between politics and the citizen and between the citizen and the intermediary structures as well as of the erosion of the traditional parties, the call for new politics, and the increasing electoral volatility that has sustained the multiplication of new political initiatives and parties. (Pilet 2012:430-431) Because parties nowadays are evaluated by the electorate in a more insightful or intuitive way than half a century ago, and the perception of party strength is no longer related to the membership, party activists, number of controlled media and so on but on the voters' personal beliefs and preferences, media coverage (of party members and political personnel), strong leadership in the party's policy formation and on accountability, inter- and intraparty competition has grown ensuing in a fierce fragmentation or balkanization of the Belgian (regionalized) party landscape (*cf. supra*).

Of course John Grumm could not have foreseen back in 1958... a time at which the Belgian political opinion and social life was still by and large polarized and organized around three pillars (catholic, liberal and socialist). That is not the point but what is interesting is that Grumm based his forecast on the Belgian election data until 1919 elections. It is a mystery why he did not look at the results for the entire period 1876-1954. With the exception of the two pre-WWII election years 1936 and 1939, it appears that the post-WWI period until the early 1960s was a period of electoral consolidation, with relative low levels of party system fractionalization. Because the density of the party system in 1919 and 1954 actually look quite similar based on the vote share and the representation of all three main parties (two large and one medium-sized party) and of the smaller non-traditional factions, we suppose Grumm actually did look at the most recent election data available and based his analysis and his electoral equilibrium hypothesis on this observed consolidation of the respective party shares. The big shake-up of the Belgian party system clearly came later, i.e. with the 1965 national elections the outcome of which was in fact the prologue of the institutional and constitutional problems that the first state reform in 1970 would bring. (*cf. supra*) Over the past four decades the Belgian national and subsequent federalized party system has become more and more multifarious characterized by an inter-party and intra-party competition that increased exponentially with just about each next election.

The consequence of this 'situation' is as sore as notorious (!). In 2010 the largest party (N-VA) obtained only 18% of the 150 parliamentary seats of in total twelve parties that were successful in getting represented. That is 20% up compared to the previous federal election of 2007. Large doses of political craftsmanship were needed to produce a government accord (eight parties involved) to establish a federal government (six parties involved) after 541 days of *formation talks*. At that time: a world record. But more importantly, it looks like the effect of the electoral threshold of 5% (2002) is already gone. Because we have seen that highly fractionalized party systems do not tend to defractionalize easily, we wonder what the next electoral reform to cope with this situation will be.

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