

A statistical historiography of Belgium's national electoral and party system

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Background paper

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1. Introduction

In their overview of the Belgian national electoral results and party systems since 1830, Matagne and Verjans (2012:85) concluded that Belgium advanced from a bipolar political system since 1848, via what Giovanni Sartori (1976) called a two-and-a-half party system in the 1920s to the fractionalized and highly volatile multiparty system that present-day Belgium is worldwide known for. In this paper we study the linkages between the changing political system, the process of electoral reforms and the development of the party system. We intend to do so focusing on an old democracy: Belgium. We analyze origin, rise and fall of Belgian political parties participating in the national legislative elections, of the nature and complexity and change of the national electoral system, of the persistence, consolidation and change of the national party system, and last but not least of the perception of democracy in itself.² These issues are among the most central issues studied by political scientists.

There are plenty of explanations for today's party system fragmentation. Ever since the 1960s political parties in Belgium, in The Netherlands and in many other Western European representative democracies were principally uprooting from social cleavages. In fact, both party fractionalization and electoral volatility have flared up together with the institutionalization of the pluralistic and multi-level Belgian political system back in the 1970s and 1980s. Throughout the 1990s a combination of political *scandalitis*, corruption and general perceived failure in the field of policing or food quality control (Swenden et al. 2009:9) has left the bulk of Belgian voters as well as the international media aghast. Party ideologies have unmistakably converged (Andeweg 2012:366) therefore traditional parties compete more and more for the center of the political spectrum symbolized by 'Joe average' the flanks at the far right and left are unlocked for new political initiatives. That process of the depillarization of the traditional Belgian polity was reinforced in the 1980s by very different processes, both sociological (i.e. secularization, individualization) and institutional (i.e. the state reforms which resulted in the regionalization of the national party system and the fact that political parties had become more dependent (for its funding) of the state³ and not of private support or contributions). As a consequence partisanship in the mid-1990s had dropped massively in most European democracy, including Belgium⁴ (ibid. 2012:361) and total electoral and party system volatility as well as political system instability had risen (Drummond 2006) to unseen levels. And despite the fact that the role and function of political parties are largely questioned, because this debate largely confuses the voter and the public opinion on the efficacy of the democratic institutions, it is still widely accepted that "[e]lections and parties are the key mechanisms of democracy, without stable parties, elections are weak reeds [...]" (Lipset 2001:111)

There are many reasons to study electoral systems, the electoral process and the electoral weight and strength of political parties. And the relative stability of political systems is certainly a good reason. However, in a healthy democracy "[p]olitical leadership needs to be renewed and elections provide a peaceful ritual by which this may be accomplished." (Katz, Mair 1995:22) Because "(...)electoral systems "determine the means by which votes are translated into seats in the process of electing politicians into office" (Farrell 2001:4), electoral systems are at the core of the principle of democratic representation and therefore at the heart of the parliamentary game. (Bogdanor & Butler (1983:1) in: Pilet 2007:10 and Pilet 2012:419) One way for parties to adapt to the new societal conditions that for some observers like Peter Mair (2006) could lead to the *failure of parties* and the end of the party-based democratic representation as we currently know it, is therefore to change the electoral institution.

In this article we give an overview of the electoral reforms that shaped Belgium's political system and we make an evaluation of how successful those reforms have been in terms of finding durable electoral equilibria, which are said to be the cornerstones of a sometimes more and sometimes less well-functioning democracy.

² According to Schumpeter "[Representative democracy is] a system in which voters, the mass of the population, are able to choose between contending elites, that is, alternative candidates." (Lipset 2001:111) What matters for the development of a party system is when a democracy was born, not how old it is (Mainwaring, Zoco 2007:155)., should we say a democracy that was born after World War I, hence with the introduction of the *one man one vote* electoral system in 1919, extended to all Belgians in 1948 (introduction of voting right for all 21-year old women)?

³ According to Katz and Mair it is the state that "(...)provides contested elections. And since democratically contested elections, at least as currently understood, require political parties, the state also provides (...) political parties." (1995:22)

⁴ According to van Biezen, Mair & Poguntke only Spain seems to be the one new democracy where party membership (both in absolute and relative numbers) has grown almost uninterruptedly since the introduction of democracy. But the general conclusion is that political parties are no longer mass organizations that connect society to the political authorities. (2012:389-390)

2. Why the statistical historiographic approach?

The reason for this study of the Belgian national electoral and party system however is of a more particular nature too. Apart from the above more general issue definitions this study also aims to meet three different more particular challenges. First of all, there have been several scientific attempts to bring together longitudinal datasets of detailed time series of election results, though the available data remain dispersed, sometimes incomplete, and often variable in quality. (Renard & Dodeigne 2012:545) Where publicly available and considered trustworthy, election data for certain periods in time (cf. 1831-1847, 1900-1919 and the interbellum) nevertheless often show dissimilarities. Pre-1848 election results for the Belgian legislative are simply largely missing which explains why this period is relatively under-studied. Post-1945 election data in most of the Western democracies are widely available, making the modern age very interesting for (comparative) research. Bringing all the available data together in one dataset spanning the entire 1848-2010 period is an important effort on itself.⁵ By analyzing the dataset in a politicological, socio-historical and statistical way, we intend to add to the research-ability of Belgium's national electoral and party system.

Secondly, the longitudinal statistical analysis of election data is largely missing and where available the nature is largely descriptive. For the reasons already mentioned, most studies are based on periodic analysis (pre-WWI, post-WWII, post-1995). Most election studies discuss the outcome of one election or a rather a short period of elections. Lipset referred to the foremost developmental analytical and anecdotal approach as a (required) technique allowing primarily the contextualizing election outcomes (2001:111), using sociological and institutional determinants and looking at the consequences of change. In-depth or integrated historic studies of the institutional context (e.g. De Winter et al. 2009) that have molded the Belgian political and party system over a longer period of time combined with statistics that transcend the level of pure narrative and add to the analysis and interpretation of long-term evolutions or trends, are, however, very scarce. In 2012 a comprehensive study of the electoral systems in Belgium (1831-2010) was published by Frédéric Bouhon and Min Reuchamps, two Belgian professors of the University of Liège. This voluminous book titled *Les systèmes électoraux de la Belgique* is a tremendous help for understanding the starting conditions and the further development of the electoral systems as well as for the comprehension of the relation between the evolution of the Belgian political, electoral and party system..., however, studied by and large from a diachronic historic point of view. (cf. van Haute 2012:212) And the study is far from 100 percent exact in its data.⁶ In 2007 the Brussels professor Jean-Benoit Pilet did exactly the opposite and studied *Les réformes des lois électoraux en Belgique* from a contemporary perspective. Attention is given in particular to three 'ongoing' discussions (i.e. the return to the majoritarian system, the direct election of the mayor, and the devolution of the list vote). Pilet spends two chapters on the historic evolution of the electoral system(s) in Belgium –chapters that are well-needed to understand the particularities of the present discussions. But the book does not present a statistical historiography of the national electoral and party system.

More to it, in order to present a consistent historic evolution of the electoral system(s), political and electoral changes are mostly studied on an nationally aggregated party family level (i.e. comparing the electoral strength of the main ideologies, e.g. Catholicism, liberalism, socialism and other (nationalism, ultra-leftism, environmentalism)) or at a regional level (comparing Flanders with Brussels and Wallonia), or both (cf. Bouhon & Reuchamps). This approach too offers an opportunity for more thorough empirical evidencing and for more elaborated statistical research of the electoral history. With this article we seek to fill this gap by analyzing the electoral system changes and the election results of all politically relevant initiatives (thus electoral and parliamentary parties included) and based on a time series starting in 1876 (in total: 48 national elections). This includes both the study of the electoral strength of the *party family or ideological group or faction* at an aggregated country level as well as on the sub-group or fractional level (*party fraction*) and for instance in the case of the de-nationalized or regionalized parties at the individual party level at a regional level. The unit of analysis therefore is varying between the party family (e.g. the Catholic or Christian-democratic, socialist, liberal, ecologist and the Flemish-nationalist parties⁷) and the party (including all

⁵ The election data (period 1847-2010) are collected in the online elections database of the FOD Binnenlandse Zaken (<http://www.ibzdgip.fgov.be/result/nl/main.html>) and checked against the data collected by Bouhon and Reuchamps' *Les systèmes électoraux de la Belgique* (2012:535-587).

⁶ To give an example, when over viewing the number of directly eligible seats in the Chamber of Representatives the authors overlook the changes of the size of the parliament in the years 1919, 1925, 1936 and 1949.

⁷ We draw the same line as drawn by Deschouwer and Van Parijs (2009:10): the recent election results discussed are presented by *party family*, and not per party, because there are no country-wide parties any more. And though very different in the style, story and language the Flemish-nationalist party family includes the rather exclusive-nationalist *Vlaams Belang* (extreme right) and the

mainstream, traditional, modern or post-modern parties as well as the ultra-catholic parties, the libertarian or republican, or extreme left fractions).

A third motive for the statistical historiographic approach relates to the fact that Belgium is often cited as *the exception to the laws* that explain the nature and causes of electoral institutions⁸ and of their reform as well as of the advancement of a national party system under a specific electoral system. Many such laws are based on cross-sectional multi-country (explanatory) or comparative analysis of election data. On the basis of such large datasets, it seemingly makes sense to classify democracies and party systems and categorize parties for instance in terms of their social cohesion, their ideology, their organization, party activity and many other useful variables. But, that way party (system) characteristics are aggregated to a higher (universal) level and “(...)testing systematically through a specified and substantial universe”; “[inevitably], the data used for these tests will vary in precision from hypothesis to hypothesis.” (Rose 1969:20) Therefore, tough conclusions drawn on tests based on large datasets of election data for several countries or regions may open a perspective on further generalizations to other comparable universes, it seldom becomes clear what the –generalized– outcomes in fact teach us about each single country... at each point of time (election or electoral reform). To cite the same author on one example: “Implicit in much sociological discussion of parties is the hypothesis that social groups give birth to political parties.” That conclusion –based on the central thesis that more diverse societies install an electoral system that allows for more democratic participation– could be derived quite easily from large multi-country databases with information on electoral participation and electoral results, however, –so the author continues– “[the] statement is as implausible empirically as it is metaphorically unnatural” for “(...)the decision to found a party is always taken at the initiative of a small group of politicians, and not by mechanical market mechanisms.” (ibid.) In sum, the stronger the social cohesion of a political or party system, the stronger the *demand-push* dynamics for political representation of new societal groups. At the same time not all of the religion-based, class-based or community-related politicized initiatives have been successful or long lasting. Many societal groups have proven infertile, like the extreme fascist parties before the Second World War (WWII) or the new parties sprouting from wartime resistance activities after WWII was ended, or even the more recent libertarian parties⁹ that emerged in Flanders at the turn of the 21st Century. Whereas one would expect that electoral strength of parties as well as elasticity of the party vote vary inversely with the party system’s degree of cohesiveness, in some contexts (for instance at times of deep institutional, societal or economic crises) only the thematically and organizationally more *flexible* party lead by the especially skillful *broker politicians*¹⁰ may prove to be the more workable (cf. the resurrection of the People’s Union (*Volksunie*) in the late 1960s and the first half of the 1970s and of its successor, the New-Flemish Alliance (N-VA) in the period 2001-2012). Looking at a country’s electoral history is fundamental for the study of the electoral policies of that country. Hence election research cannot do without looking at the broader context, at the legacies and the paths electoral reforms, party system dynamics and political choices were depending on.

Thus, in our opinion the comparative multiple-country highly quantitative approach is highly problematic when it comes to single out ideas or findings that are relevant for one or the other particular country, not to mention that the relevance of the largely generalized conclusions lacks the widely accepted anticipated applicability at the level of the individual party. We here purposely take a strong stand in putting in perspective the fact that social science-based theory does not state or explain everything about any particular case and that none of the individually observed objects or cases will possess all averaged characteristics or traits nor will it fit all imperatives or rules deduced from the theory. Nevertheless some (all) cases observed do to some extent. We therefore control for the fit of the Belgian case with the theory-based assumptions concerning democratic representation of parties, political inclusiveness of electoral systems, party system dynamism, and so on and so forth. But the task of testing a series of hypotheses concerning the variations in party support cannot be successfully completed when leaving the *social context* or the properties of the *electoral institution and party system* aside. (Rose, Urwin 1970:296) We thus perceive a clear added value in not only validating but also complementing the already existing comparative models of electoral and party

inclusive-nationalist N-VA (right of the centre). Cf. Maddens, B. (15/10/2012). Kroniek van een aangekondigde nederlaag?, *Opinestuk*, Deredactie.be.

⁸ 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. The *electoral system* focuses on those aspects that help the translation of the public vote into seats (i.e. the *electoral formula*) as well as the attribution of representative mandates to (elected) candidates. (Pilet 2007:10)

⁹ For instance R.O.S.S.E.M., *Liberaal Appél* or VLOTT.

¹⁰ Cf. Rose framing this problem as the classic trade-off between party management efficiency (of parties built upon class, religion...) and electoral success (of “heterogeneous parties capable of building coalitions of specific instrumental appeals”) (1969:22-23; 25).

system change with the in-depth statistical single case-based statistical historiography that we present here. To quote Pilet, the combination of detailed historically descriptive of election outcomes, the particular contextualization of the balance of power between the traditional ideologies and between individual parties and on top of that the systematic statistical verification of the theory of the effects of electoral system reforms at the national level is *missing* and is therefore *strongly needed* in the study of elections and electoral systems. (Pilet 2007:58)

In order to allow any comparison with here referred mostly comparative research, parliamentary representation is studied based on the election results of party families (i.e. catholic, liberal, socialist, green, regionalist, extreme left, extreme right and even ultra liberal or catholic or libertarian ideologies) and thus at an aggregate level (i.e. the national party score is the sum of the regional party scores), the data used here include all publicly available election results at the national (federal) level. Comparable to Rose and Urwin's study "[the] chief measure is the aggregate vote for each party in each election for the major national legislative assembly". A party's strength therefore is the percentage of votes, hence a continuous variable, and not its executive strength referring its participation in government or opposition. (1970:289-290) The analyses are not based on the election results at level of the region, the province, the arrondissement or the smallest constituency.

Last but certainly not least, another important driver of this statistical historiography of Belgium's national electoral and party system, is that interest might drop in this line of research when the Belgian state is fully dismantled (read: *de-federated*), in casu as soon as the federal level is completely eroded. In view of the mother of elections of 2014 (when federal, regional and European elections are organized together) and the unpredictable outcome in terms of the perceived risk of a breakup of the Belgian state (a scenario that is considered at both sides of the language border), the timing of this study might prove strategic too.

3. The evolution of Belgium's national electoral and party system

In *How party systems form* Marcus Keuzer states that "(...)a founding election of a democracy does not take place in a historical vacuum. It is shaped by longterm historical legacies and short-term starting conditions. Such as prior factors affecting the effective number of electoral contestants." (2009:676) "A founding election is the starting point in a process that may or may not lead to a country becoming an established democracy. It introduces an electoral system, encourages political elites to organize parties to compete for votes, and reveals what could previously only be guessed at: how much support different elites have among those eligible to vote." (Rose 2000:104)

In the case of Belgium, political life in the half century following the election of the first National Congress in November 1830 –thus even before the independence of Belgium was officially accepted by France and Great Britain–, was largely organized around and dominated by two opposing ideological groups: the oldest, the notables' Liberal party versus the younger clerical Catholic party. (van Haute 2012:212-213) Though the Liberal party was in itself heavily divided between doctrinaires and radicals right from the start, until the 1880s Belgium *de facto* was a bipolar political system.¹¹ In this system both liberal and catholic groups shared two concerns: firstly, the concern of protecting the wealth of *primi inter pares*¹² and, secondly, the joint concern in opposing the Dutch sovereign Willem I. Both concerns had strongly allied both opposing ideological blocs into a monster alliance.

The newborn empowered political elite (estimated to less than thousand men) of less than one thousand men was considered to be the only one being capable enough and eager enough to protect the state and its wealth and therefore entitled to exercise political rights and therefore stand for elections (= passive suffrage). At the time the National Congress counted 200 seats and included representatives of the nobility and the higher

¹¹ In those early days it was already clear that the country was divided along a ideological line. The Congress represented four blocs: 103 liberals, 94 Catholics, 33 *Orangists* (= annexation of the Flemish province to The Netherlands) and 20 *Reunionists* (= annexation of the Walloon province to France). The Northern part of the country (East-Flanders and West Flanders) was largely clerical and harbored the majority of *Orangists*. The Southern part of Belgium (Liège and Henegouwen) was largely anti-clerical. The south was foremost inspired by *Reunionists* Those factions were also represented in the National Congress. To give an example, when the House of Orange-Nassau was excluded from the Belgian throne 'forever and ever', 189 out of 200 votes were counted of which 28 congressmen voted against and eleven abstained (Decree dd. 24 November 1830). The voting of a second Decree on the same issue clearly showed that the interest or the support to exclude the House of Orange-Nassau was diminishing (only 131 votes of which 98 against and 2 abstentions) (Decree dd. 24 February 1831). Source: [http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nationaal_Congres_\(Belgi%C3%AB\)](http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nationaal_Congres_(Belgi%C3%AB))

¹² That thin layer of wealthy and rich people represented the *one percent*.

bourgeoisie from all nine provinces (the average district magnitude was hence $200/9 = 22,22$)¹³. The main task of the National Congress was to prepare a Constitution. After the adoption of the first Constitution in February 1831, many of the congressmen were convinced that their role was outplayed, others were disappointed or frustrated, bored or not longer interested in being part of political life. Eventually, around one in five representatives were replaced.

At the time the political elite spoke French throughout the country and French was therefore also the obvious choice as the language of government and public administration. (Deschouwer, Van Parijs 2009:8) We will demonstrate in the next paragraphs that Belgium's democracy has changed in many ways: the right to vote was generalized, parties formalized, the electoral institution became more inclusive and the parliament more representative, voters became more self-aware as society increasingly turned more individualistic and politicians were gradually held more accountable¹⁴. Hence, Belgian's electoral history is characterized by change. However, there is one constancy, ever since the very first election of the national parliament, Belgian politics have incessantly been dominated by tensions stemming from the community- and identity related divide (call it *nationalism*).

3.1 A tax-based electoral franchise and the polarization of a nation

In 1831 somewhat like 46 thousand citizens owed the right to vote (= active suffrage). Overall franchise was around 1,13% of the total Belgian population.¹⁵ At the time of the introduction of the tax based electoral system or *tax suffrage* the parliament counted 108 seats being spread over 41 constituencies. There were 27 multiple member districts (MMDs) in which members of parliament were indirectly elected via the party lists. In those MMDs the election was based on a two-round system based on absolute majority. In the remaining fourteen single member districts (SMDs) candidates were elected directly, by simple majority (plurality).¹⁶ However the heavy plurality character of the electoral system which in general leads to the overrepresentation and political supremacy of one party, until the formal organization of parties, until the acceptance of Belgium's independence by the Dutch King Willem I (1839: *Treaty of the 24 articles*), the liberals and Catholics systematically maintained their unionist strategy which lead to conjoint governing. Moreover, due to a conflict concerning the interpretation of the constitutionally anchored freedom of education, aka the first *School Question*, the 15 years old inter-party unionism eventually came to an end in 1846. The liberal radical and doctrinaire parliamentary groups –merely tied by a genuine anti-clericalism– were the first to get formally organized. The Belgian Liberal party, officially the oldest party in Belgium, was born in 1846, lead by the Walloon Eugène Defacqz.¹⁷ Being confronted with a general economic crisis, mounting unemployment, and a life threatening food shortage the liberal prime minister Charles Rogier had to undertake swift measures.

In order to calm the situation that followed the *Spring of People* of 1848, Karl Marx was expelled, the School Question was solved and the electoral system was reformed. Since that time the Belgian educational system would accommodate a network of public schools and a network of free schools run by the catholic church. Secondly, the parliament agrees to extend the tax-based electoral access or *censitary system* to a broader class of more or less four thousand aged men (25 years old), paying taxes (on houses and grounds), or having obtained a certain level of education. With 79 thousand voters the level of franchise reached 1,81% of the total Belgian population. The electoral reform however favored the (liberal) bourgeoisie and preluded the era of the *Liberal hegemony*. It is self-evident that the political elite of the 19th century was largely united by descent, capital and language. That political elite formed a class on its own and in its own right. Nevertheless, the large majority of Belgians spoke no French (like the majority of the anti-clerical bourgeoisie) but Dutch (Flemish)

¹³ The National Congress held 98 representatives from Flanders, 75 from Wallonia and 27 from Brabant. East-Flanders was the largest province (35 seats) and the smallest was Namur (10 seats).

¹⁴ Elections have always been a form of 'electoral accountability', except when the National Congress was established, where accountability was not determined by the broader set of issues and tasks that the congressmen had to deal with, yet foremost concerned the writing of the Constitution at the shortest possible term. Since a great deal of Congressmen quitted their mandate when this task was accomplished, they couldn't be held accountable in the subsequent election of 1831, because they were not re-electable. Besides, as long as *unionisme* between the liberals and the Catholics ruled the Belgian polity and by virtue of a lack of control mechanisms the 19th century politics in Belgium were largely characterized weak personal accountability. (Rose 2000:2)

¹⁵ Cf. Stefano Bartolini's definition of franchise, i.e. the concept refers to "the right of suffrage, that is, to the legal definition of who is eligible to cast a ballot in a state." (in Rose 2000:117)

¹⁶ As a consequence of the absolute majoritarian system in all multimember districts "[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 1831 in: Muylle 2012:309).

¹⁷ <http://www.liberaalarchief.be/Bots3.html>

(like most Catholics). History would prove that Flemings would seek an own future for their own language community.¹⁸ Resisting the French-speaking suppression in more than one layer of society was part of that ambition. However, one of the main stumbling blocks turned out to be the French-speaking Flemings that was a part of the Belgian local and national political elite. It would take another 50 years to solve that internal language divide (*cf. infra*: the Equality Law). Anyhow, from the 1848 elections onwards the Liberal party would aim to break into the catholic sphere of influence. And vice versa.

In the years 1831-1848 the number of parliamentary seats followed the growth of the population (102 in 1831 versus 108 in 1848) and the biggest electoral districts were further enlarged.

3.2 Party formalization and the birth of the two-and-a-half party system

The formal organization of the Catholic factions into one united conservative and unitaristic-Belgian Catholic party under the leadership of Charles Woeste (1869) deepened the already existing societal and political divisions.¹⁹ In the 1870s and 1880s the Belgian polity was heavily dominated by tensions caused by the central philosophical church-state cleavage (clericalism versus anti-clericalism) and tensions caused by the economic class-based cleavage (either workers versus employers or workforce versus capital). (Lauwers 2012:40-41) Such societal tensions raised the attractiveness of the political alternative offered by the socialists. In 1870 this disturbance of the electorate caused the downfall of the liberal rule and the rise of the catholic party. Still under Catholic ruling a *party list system* was introduced in Belgium (1877), giving voters the possibility to vote for one or more alphabetically arranged pre-printed candidate lists. In this *multiple list vote system*, voters thus had to chose between party lists (Fiers 2009:170-171 in: Schamp, Devos 2012:504) but the voter was also allowed to choose for more than one list (called *panache voting*). Candidates of the more successful party lists won all available parliamentary seats based on the *winner takes all* principle. In order to assign the seats to the candidates, the list votes were divided equally among all candidates on the corresponding list, following the list order (i.e. closed list system). David Farrell's remarks correctly that "[The] origin of list systems coincided with the development of representative democracy, and particularly with suffrage extension and the development of mass parties." (2001:70). In the years 1876-1882 the electoral reform also moved incumbent political players like a splinter group that was instigated to form of a national Liberal Progressist party (*Liberale progressistische Partij* or LPP 1877) or the faction of Flemish socialists launching their own party (named *Vlaamse Socialistische Arbeiderspartij* (VSAP)), in the same year. The catholic supremacy was hence threatened by splinter groups and the Liberal party took advantage of the situation. Though the Catholic party returned at full strength after the 1884 national elections, another new threat arose: that of rising socialism.

However, equally important, the linguistic divide, which had colored Belgian politics since the publication of Hendrik Conscience's historic epos titled *De Leeuw van Vlaanderen* (1839), flared up heavily once more, concentrating on the bilingualism of the public administration and the civil servants working for it as well as on the bilingual status of the alleged *ville mixte*, e.g. Brussels. Though the *freedom of language* was a constitutional right, in practice French had remained the official language. In fact, both the political elite and the administrative elite continued to speak French. (Deschouwer, Van Parijs 2009:8) Though in Flanders the use of language was based on the personality principle, in Brussels –considered to be the capital of Flanders– the dominating language was French. After all, in that epoch French was considered “the language of modernity and liberalism, the *lingua franca* of royal courts and diplomatic circles.” (ibid.) Unilingual Flemings on the other hand benefitted some privileges (so-called language facilities). The expansion of the Brussels' agglomeration turned the Flemish communes around Brussels more and more francophone, and

¹⁸ We refer to Léon Vanderkindere, the liberal member of parliament and mayor of Ukkel, who mentioned as one of the very first politicians a possible split of the country in 1868, at the same time considering a reunion with the newly reunited Germany as a possibility. Vanderkindere based his suggestion on studies that had ‘proven’ that Flemings and Walloons were two different races; Flemings had German roots and Walloons had Celtic roots. (Van Cauwelaert, *Knack*, 1 augustus 2012:27)

¹⁹ Very similar to the voters' behavior in the Victorian polity described by Gary Cox (1983) in his doctoral thesis: “We argue that voters became more party-oriented in the 1860s and 1870s, voting more on the basis of their preferences between the two great parties –the Liberals and Conservatives– and less on the basis of their attitudes toward the individual candidates. This shift in the basis of electoral choice, we argue, with electors becoming less responsive to the issue positions adopted by MPs, meant that the electoral benefits to an MP of dissent were smaller relative to the sanctions available to party leaders. Hence, we expect a decline in the influence of constituents over the voting behavior of their MPs (and a concomitant increase in party voting.) A number of approaches to the measurement of the influence of constituents over their MPs' voting behavior are taken, and the findings, on the whole, support the hypothesis.” (<http://thesis.library.caltech.edu/3181/>)

flamingantism was very much neglected²⁰. (van Velthoven 1981:247-250) Though unilingual Flemish residents of the capital agglomeration felt discriminated, since the early 1880s bilingualism increased in and around the capital and by the end of the 1880s Dutch passed on from one generation to the next, albeit only in a marginal way. As we will explain the crosscutting and overlapping ethnical, linguistic and religious divisions of the country will make it very difficult to territorialize the different communities. People in different regions (Flanders, Brussels and Wallonia) voted largely different from each other: two-thirds of the Flemings voted catholic, whereas a majority of the Walloons and inhabitants of Brussels voted liberal. (cf. Matagne, Verjans 2012:89 in: Schamp, Devos 2012b:6) Hence, electoral outcomes in the second half of the 19th century were mixed and largely depending the region.²¹ That mixture of sentiments, ideological frames and public opinions has never stopped to influence the Belgian polity. When discussing the several stages in of the Belgian state reform further on we will note that the linguistic and community-based division of the nation motivated politicians in the first place to come up with (constitutional) mechanisms to secure the equal inclusion of both language groups in the political decision-making process and to protect the stakes of the French and the Flemish language communities²², with the ambition to preserve the sovereignty and autonomy of the unitary state. In their view compelling one community to take into account the other and to find political compromises largely invalidated and countered the demands of competitive ideologies (community-based nationalism or regionalism).

Societal, electoral, and institutional changes and the resulting lack of democratic representation encouraged new political initiatives –like the socialist movement- to organize themselves and to climb on the national political forefront. Against the background of Nietzsche's post-theistic critique *Gott ist tot*²³, the second largest mass party was formally founded: the Socialist Workforce party (*Belgische Werkliedenpartij* or BWP) (1885). Both Catholic and Socialist parties were typically partisan parties. Their common goal was to dethrone the Liberal party.²⁴ By that time, however, a new elite deserving political rights was born: the intellectuals and the liberals were determined to win that new elite. In 1883, hence under liberal ruling and instigated by the ultra-progressist liberal Paul Janson²⁵, the *Loi des capacitaires* was passed, opening up the censitary suffrage for the local and provincial elections to other classes than the owners, land lords and notables. Because of the *capacitor suffrage* the electorate was enlarged to 2,48% of the population (little under 137 thousand voters). Throughout the 1850s-1950s suffrage was manipulated strategically by one party to reduce the support of the competing parties and to increase its own adherence. However, in the case of the introduction of the capacitor suffrage the electoral reform turned out to a real debacle for the Liberal party. The Catholic party won the 1884 elections and would dominate the Belgian politics for the next thirty years.

The ostensible stability of Belgian national politics was hence heavily distorted. First of all, the political customs were distorted by the entrance in the parliamentary arena of the Socialist party BWP under the joint leadership of Gabriel Brodtkom, Romain Van Loo, Joseph Maheu, Antoine Delporte, Joseph Milot, Edward Anseele and Alphonse Wormhout. Secondly, the political scenery was surprised by the election of more radical parties like the Liberal Progressist party under the leadership of Paul Jansson (1887) and by the Christian-democratic Flemish Christian party (or *Vlaamsche Christene Volkspartij* (1893)) under the

²⁰ Swenden and Jans (2009:17) refer to the practice of language census determining whether or not the language status of a city or village should be changed and whether or not a municipality should remain in the unilingual Dutch or French language zone (at least 50% speakers required) or bilingual language zone (at least 30% speakers of at least two languages required)) –a practice that existed until 1948.

²¹ 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)

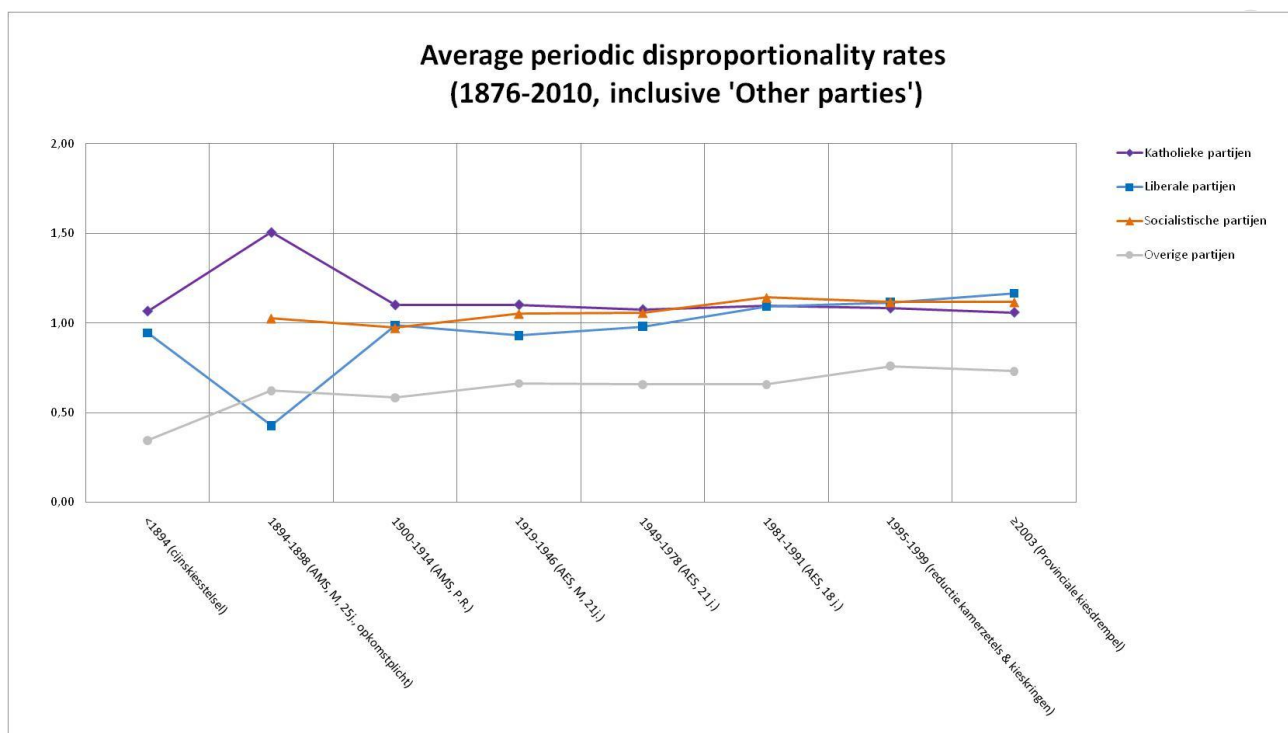
²² For instance, the federal cabinet includes as many Dutch- as French-speaking ministers and the federal government decides with unanimity. (Deschouwer, Van Parijs 2009:11)

²³ Cf. Nietzsche's analysis of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* (1882).

²⁴ Apart from the purchase of power, socio-economic or ideological factors leading to the first School War ('*Schooloorlog*') between the liberal side fighting for a state-subsidized public school net and the confessional camp trying to keep full control of education as it has always been before or the *class fight* between the white and blue collar workers have explained the creation, have also lead to the rise (and in a later stage the fall) of national political parties in Belgium since the late 1860s. But ideologies mean nothing without supporters. The Catholic party and its overpowering electoral position since the 1880s was –just like the Socialist party- built on massive extra-parliamentary recruitment in a particular segment of church-goers, sick and poor care houses and workers' movements and electoral support was largely fed by social support organizations (like the catholic co-operative networks, union or mutuality that had been endorsed by pope Leo XIII's Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891)). (Lauwers 2012:37) Moreover, this attempt to bridge the minor ideological differences between the Catholic and the socialist party was in the first place a strategy to prevent the concentration of political power and economic wealth in the hands of one elite and the liberal cadre party.

²⁵ http://www.thesis.net/doctrinairen/doctrinairen_hfst_2.htm

charismatic and populist control of priest Adolf Daens (a electoral group aka *Daensists*) who aimed to implement the base line ideas of the papal encyclic *Rerum Novarum* (1891), in casu aid the horrible situation of the factory laborers and manual workers. Where election results and seat distribution are not at all representative for the diversity of opinions among the electorate, both mechanical and psychological effects lead to elevated levels of polarization between the central ideologies (Catholicism, liberalism and socialism) and between the traditional ideologies (Catholics and liberals) and new more radical ideologies (progressists, socialists etc.). That is exactly what happened in the course of the 1880s.²⁶ In order to restore the balance between ideological and political groups the BWP, the party that presented itself as the alternative for the 19th century capitalism, demanded the replacement of the highly plurality based electoral system by a more representative system based on universal single voting for all adult men in parliament, e.g. ‘one man one vote’.



Ever since the formal political organization of the labor movement the Catholic party had experienced this pressure to replace the tax-based suffrage dating from the *Ancien Régime* by a system of universal suffrage. In 1893 the first proposal to introduce a one man one vote system was, however, declined before the parliament where the Catholic party had an absolute majority of 102 out of 152 seats. The socialist protest workers called for a national strike, a significantly enough threat to convince the Catholic party to work out an electoral reform on its own. In an attempt to satisfy democratic powers they proposed a system of general multiple suffrage²⁷. The system was introduced in 1893 together with the compulsory voting and a two-round majority electoral rule for the legislative.²⁸ The new (majoritarian) 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 (50% + one vote), if needed after a second round (called *ballotage*). In the second round a simple majority (or plurality) was sufficient to win the seat(t). (Schamp, T. & Devos, C. 2012:506)²⁹ Understanding the possible effects of the replacement of the censitary system the Catholic party was not entirely free of any fear for repudiation but greedy enough for the marginal gains that the new system might bring.³⁰ Nonetheless,

²⁶ High polarization is quite typically for plurality systems (Grumm 1958:358).

²⁷ All 25-year old men received suffrage and could gain two extra votes when proving specific capacity, when being the family head older than 35 years paying no less than five BEF house tax, or proving at least 2000 BEF in bank savings or the entitlement of annuities for a minimum amount of 100 BEF.

²⁸ Cf. Electoral Law of 7 September 1893.

²⁹ The absurdity of the preferential (block (majority) system is easy to see as “the multiple votes of electors are separated into distinct repeat elections using a majority rule.” (Sanders 2012:16) This two-round multiple vote majority system is also known as a preferential block (majority) vote system.

³⁰ Referring to Rose and Urwin (1970) it is more generally believed that political parties will more likely try to accommodate cross-social cleavages for what they call ‘temporary electoral advantage’ rather than risking electoral repudiation. More to it, “(...)even where elections threaten survival of the regime [as was the case in Belgium in the late 1890s], governing parties usually do not engage in systematically altering the electoral system to strengthen themselves and to disadvantage opponents of the regime.” Not so in

the electoral reform of 1893 served a clear anti-revolutionary purpose.

After the new electoral system was passed, Belgium counted 1,370,000 voters (21,6% of the population). In 1892 the growth of the population had already caused the increase in the number of parliamentary seats to 152 (from 138 seats).

Andrew McLaren Carstairs demonstrated in his *Short History of Electoral Systems in Western Europe* (1980) that also in the case of Belgium the shift from plurality to list proportionality was via a two-round majoritarian system (Farrell 2001:177). This system was considered a compromise between those willing to improve the negative effects of the SMD and MMD plurality and therefore to make the electoral system more proportional and those not at all willing to adopt the full proportional representation. Due to the combination of a series of other institutional factors total disproportionality of the representation in parliament after the 1894 elections, however, was inflated to historic levels –rather than lowered. First of all, one out of four districts after the 1893 electoral reform still was a single member districts, the election in such districts was based on plurality. Secondly, the size of the national parliament (152 seats) and therefore the change of the average size of a constituency was changed, Ghent and Antwerp –two Flemish cities- here-included, however, the overall change for the bulk of constituencies was very limited. Hence the effect on the total disproportionality of the seat distribution in those districts was small. Thirdly, a mixture of other elements also reinforced the disproportional outcome indirectly. Both voters and party leaders changed their voting or electoral strategies. Opening up the elections to all aged man combined with the introduction of compulsory voting and the multiple voting rights for certain categories of voters (educated men, tax-paying men, house-owners, and family owners) after all worried a great number of conservative voters. Because the outcome of the new multiple vote majoritarian system was more unpredictable than before (cf. Farrell 2001:52) and afraid of the election of socialist candidates many radical *liberal* voters in Flanders, especially in the large cities where the BWP was primarily present (campaigning on issues that also concerned the radical liberals³¹) and therefore polarizing the political debate, voted for a *catholic* candidate.³² For the same reason in Brussels the mainly liberal electorate had turned away massively from the Liberal party to the Catholic party and towards the Socialist party or towards the cartel party of liberals and socialists. Finally, the Catholic party left the 1894 election arena triumphantly in a record number of districts.³³ In sum, the electoral reform of 1893 included the ingredients necessary to put an end to the *Liberal hegemony*. The Liberal party, though largely underrepresented, had become nothing more than a small opposition party... Imagine, even the most radical opponent of the great catholic front man Charles Woeste, the Christian-democrat Daens, managed to get elected.

As the below graph shows, the partial elections of 1896 and 1898 reaffirmed the division of power between the three main parties and ideologies, more in particular those elections reaffirmed the supremacy of the Catholic party. The electoral success of the Catholic party in the May 1898 parliamentary elections can be explained partly by the internal dissention of the socialists regarding the Equality Law. One of the effects of the strong opposition of the Walloon socialist against that law, was that a large part of the Flemish socialist electorate turned towards the Catholic party. As a consequence the overrepresentation of the Catholics in parliament had grown to rather astronomic proportions. In the year 1898 total overrepresentation of the largest party (the Catholic party) was 29,57% (from 17% in 1894). (cf. graph below: the level of overrepresentation of the largest party is expressed by the *D'Hondt D disproportionality index*³⁴) The underrepresentation of the smaller parties was on average 3,24% (per party) (from 1,34% in 1894).

Belgium at the end of the 19th Century... but, because of the increasing success of the Socialistst BWP, exactly the reason why the last cabinet Beernaert (1884-1894) has coupled to the one man one vote to the 'compulsory vote'.

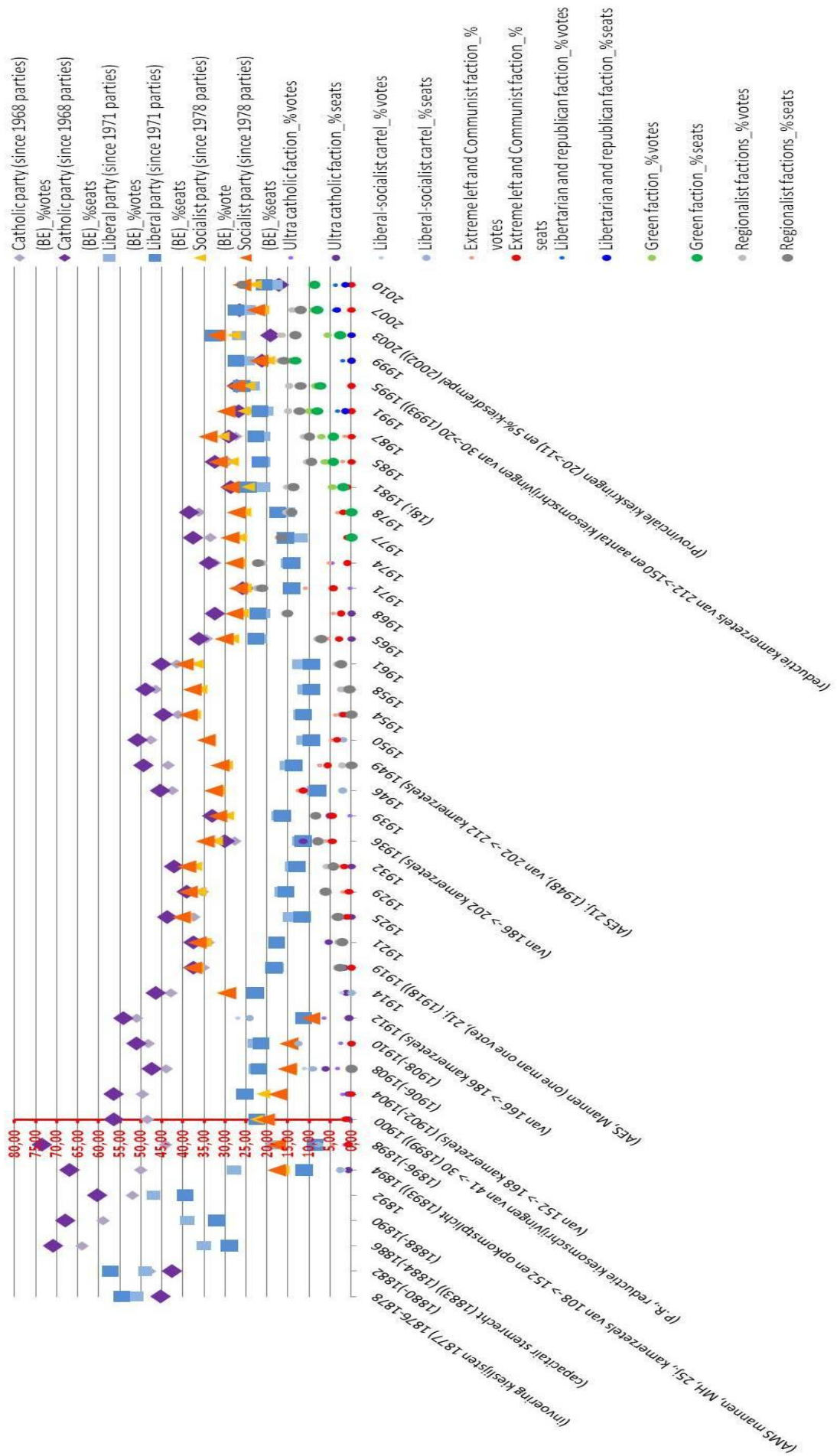
³¹ According to Lauwers (2012:38-39) what remained of the Liberal party after the 1898 elections were mainly *doctrinaire* anti-clericals, employers, bourgeois or middle class. They purposely neglected issues like human rights, child labor, general suffrage and so on –issues that were not at all neglected by the Socialist or the Catholic party. The radical wing of the Liberal party, on the other hand, supported the idea of more democratic participation or the abolishment of child labor under 12 years.

³² When the liberal candidate did not stand a chance in the first round. In the second round an even larger share of the traditionally liberal electorate (especially in Ghent or Antwerp) voted for the candidate of the Catholic party.

³³ 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. (Muylle 2012:310)

³⁴ Cf. Lijphart 1994.

Vote share versus seat share of political factions participating in elections for the Belgian Chamber of Representatives (aggregate results; period 1876-2010)



Never before (or later) the parliamentary seats have been divided in a more disproportional way than in the period 1894-‘98. Likewise, the underrepresentation of the Liberal party on the other hand reached similar levels in those years.

At the turn of the 19th-20th Century democracy and the party system in Belgium were in a deep crisis. When assessing both the systemic and strategic consequences of the electoral reform of the 1880s-1890s, a complete imbalanced outcome, totally unacceptable to the smaller parties, was the result. As a consequence, those parties joined the Socialist party in its claim to introduce the universal suffrage. The skewed outcome of the 1894 to 1898 parliamentary elections in Belgium under the general multiple voting system is a clear example of what Will Sanders (2012) more specifically categorizes as *undemocratic*.³⁵

With the expansion of the suffrage just before the 1894 national elections, the position of the Catholic party was reinforced (Devos 2006:260). Liberalism was more or less crushed between both socialism and Catholicism, both mass ideologies. (Lauwers 2012:37) As a matter of fact, because of the strategic voting the liberal had almost crushed themselves. The Catholics took advantage of the situation and in 1898 the Equality Law (*Gelijkheidswet*) was voted on. The law was proposed by the Flemish catholic Juliaan Devriendt and placed Dutch (i.e. Flemish) at the same level for all legal and lawmaking matters and for state-related official communication, except in the context of diplomacy. Wallonia remained unilingual (French), Flanders became officially bilingual (Dutch-French).³⁶

At the end of the 19th Century the liberal family was more divided than ever before. At the one hand the party included a bloc of so-called ‘evolutionary’ liberals promoting positive freedom (based on the power of individual self-realization), being less anti-clerical and more socially engaged... compared to the bloc of pure ‘utilitarian’ liberals³⁷ promoting ideas of negative freedom (based on limiting intervention in society of the authorities). Such schisms between doctrinaire and radical liberals appeared in nearly all liberal families in Europe at the turn of the 19th-20th Century. Those intra-party divisions added to the inter-party polarization and the repositioning of the traditional parties along new beliefs and ideologies. Rooted in a reformist socialistic dream³⁸, the democratization process of society in general and of the democratization of the electoral institution more in particular seem to be an important explanatory factor for the evolution of the parties and the party system as a whole. In that system the Liberal and Catholic party actually switched places on the socio-economic left-right continuum³⁹.

3.3 To accept ‘the party’ means to accept pluralism⁴⁰

In his doctoral thesis titled *Changer pour gagner? Les réformes des lois électorales en Belgique* (2007) Jean-Benoit Pilet observed that in the case of ideological realignment of the electorate, a true electoral rupture crystallizing the new electoral groups is needed to demonstrate the urge for an alignment of the electoral rule with the new partisan system. (2012:425) As shown above, the turn of the 19th-20th Century had produced

³⁵ “(...)multiple-vote adaptations of the plurality and majority electoral formulae to multi-member districts, (...) should be judged *unacceptable* as *democratic* electoral systems” because “(...)these systems concentrate representation among large voting groups as district magnitude increases, perversely increasing the disproportionality of the vote/seat outcome rather than lessening it.” (Sanders 2012:16) Concerning the effects of the majority system, Farrell a.o. looked into the outcome of the French and Australian majoritarian systems in the post-WWII period (1949-1998) and he concluded that in fact, “(...) the evidence from both countries’ majoritarian systems suggests electoral trends which are strikingly similar to those for single-member plurality (SMP). Smaller parties are disadvantaged by the highly disproportional results; larger parties are advantaged; parties with a good geographical concentration in support tend to do better.” (Farrell 2001:63) The outcome being highly disproportional or even non-proportional (ibid.:50) and because the electoral dynamics outbid small parties not to field candidates in the second round (Sartori 1997:65-7 in: Farrell 2001:64) the Belgian election anno 1898 clearly encouraged what Farrell calls ‘a politics of centrism’. Other mechanical effects of the electoral system are dealing with the additional burden (and cost) for all voters being entitled to vote twice or even more times, which in itself risks higher levels of no-show or a larger orphaned electorate and of higher levels of electoral volatility that feed a general mood of ‘electoral uncertainty’ (ibid.:64, 65) –effects that are largely comparable to those of other multiple voting MMD-based majority systems.

³⁶ Cf. Van Cauwelaert, R., *Knack*, 1 augustus 2012, p. 26, 27.

³⁷ The term comes from A. Kinniging et al. (1988), who was quoted in Lauwers (2012:38).

³⁸ Cf. Eduard Bernstein’s and Frederik Engels’ writings on ‘the participation of workers in parliamentary democracy’ (in: Lauwers 2012:36).

³⁹ The Liberal party shifted from a socially progressive to a conservative position whereas the Catholic party shifted from a mainly conservative to a socially progressive position.

⁴⁰ Cf. Ignazi 1996:561.

exactly a rupture of that scale. A change of the electoral institution was therefore urgently needed. The abandonment of the majority electoral system and the introduction of the proportional seat distribution system D'Hondt (called P.R.-system)⁴¹ for the national legislative election was motivated partly by a *theoretic* fear of a situation where members of parliament could be elected without an overall majority of support in their constituencies (Farrell 2001:70) and partly by a not so theoretic fear of a situation where the growth of the Socialist party and the intra-party division of the liberals would actually lead to the disappearance of the Liberal party. Because the Catholic party did not want to compete with the Socialist party one on one, the Catholic party risked a drawback of its own electoral success the Catholics decided to leave the plurality system and to introduce the P.R.-system. (Muylle 2012:310) Whereas the positive message is that the Belgian political elite had the desire to adopt an electoral system that optimized the representation of different subgroups⁴², the introduction of the P.R.-system in 1899 (first application in 1900) is a good example of institutional reformism driven by self-interest, *in casu* a strategic electoral change orchestrated by the Catholic party. In other words, "[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 forms the electoral system... (Colomer 2005)

The result of the introduction of the P.R.-system was positive for the Liberal party because the downward electoral trend imbedded since the mid-1880s was reversed, at the expense of the ruling Catholic party. The electoral score and parliamentary representation of Socialist party stagnated. Hence mission accomplished. Yet the electoral reform of 1899 was meaningful for other than strict representative reasons as well. First of all, ever since 1899 party lists contained both effective candidates and *candidate-followers* and both were *listed alphabetically*. Voters could mark either the list vote or more or more candidates on the same list of one or more followers of that list, or all three together (list, candidate and follower), but within the same party list. The election of candidate-followers made partial elections every two years largely preventable and thus this change meant to end of the interim or partial elections in districts where an elected candidate for instance died or stepped down. Secondly, as indicated already above, the practice of panache voting was forbidden. Votes for more than one or more candidates on more than one list were invalidated. Thirdly, the distribution of list vote was changed: only *full* list votes were transferrable, limiting the total number of transferrable list votes to those bulletins that only contained the list vote (hence not in combination with one or more name votes). Like before the transfer of list votes was largely benefitting the highest ranked candidates. Fourthly, smaller districts were merged into larger MMDs districts increasing significantly the average size of electoral districts (from 3,7 in 1893 to 5,1 in 1900), at the same time bringing their total number down from 41 to 30 constituencies.⁴³

About 1,47 million Belgian male voters participated in the parliamentary election of May 27th 1900 (plus minus 22% of the total population).

The introduction of the P.R.-system has had several effects (e.g. an increased voter turnout) that made the outcome more legitimate. But the main effect concern the proportional representation of competing parties and therefore the number of parliamentary parties. At the one hand the P.R.-system minimized the distortion between the number of votes a party wins and the number of seats it ends up with in parliament (Farrell 2001:153-154), and therefore distributed the available seats⁴⁴ far more equally among the parties participating in the election (but far from perfectly equally and being favorable to large parties (Benoit, K. 2000:384, 387). At the other hand, this effect was often reinforced by an increase of the number of available parliamentary

⁴¹ The system-D'Hondt was introduced with the Law of 29 December 1899 concerning the application of the proportional representation in legislative elections (BS 30/12/1899). The system D'Hondt is based on a highest averages with divisor series 1, 2, 3, 4,...).

⁴² Farrell refers to the *Association Réformiste pour l'Adoption de la Représentation Proportionnelle* in 1881 of which Victor D'Hondt was a founding member, and the conference at Antwerp in 1885 where the D'Hondt proposal for a list system of election was chosen as the most appropriate seat distribution method over the Hare quote (single transferrable vote system). (2001:70-71) These initiatives were typically demonstrating such "(...)proclivities of the political elite" to make choices in favor of one or the other electoral system or to *design* the electoral system. (ibid.:175, 176)

⁴³ The number of seats (or mandates) varied between two (Neufchateau-Virton) to 18 (Brussels). In total the Belgian Chamber or Representatives then counted 152 seats. It is obvious that P.R. could not be obtained in a similar way everywhere.

⁴⁴ According to John Grumm (1958) 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.

seats which lead to surplus votes for all electoral parties (Grumm 1958:364), to be effectuated for the Belgian parliament in 1902 (85 seats were elected) and 1904 (81 seats elected), hence 168 seats in total (instead of 152 seats in 1900)⁴⁵.

Compared to the pre-1900 period in which the majority/plurality system was in place with the P.R.-proportional representation, the average total disproportionality rate since the 1900 elections dropped with more than 70%. Disproportionality however clearly did not disappear entirely. That raises the important question of '*How (dis)proportional and democratic is the D'Hondt P.R.-system?*'

The immediate result for the Catholic party –the largest political party- of the combination of both above mentioned dynamics was a decline of its seat share with 15% (to 86 of the 152 seats (or 56,6%)). This correction may seem significant, however, due to the time effect of the partial elections, the negative impact of the electoral reform on the Catholic party's parliamentary overrepresentation in the years 1900 to 1904 was more or less sustained. After the 1906 national elections the overrepresentation of the largest ideological family (until 1978 this was the Catholics) dived below five percent for the first time in Belgium's electoral history –a level that is rather typical for parliamentary democracies using the D'Hondt-system.⁴⁶ Because of the PR-system the Liberal party was saved from extinction. The party won 31 seats in 1900 (20,4%) and 42 in 1904 (25%). Nonetheless, the Catholic party was able to prolong its absolute majority in the House of Representatives and the Catholics' position was consolidated until the introduction of the *general suffrage* for all aged male Belgians in 1919. (cf. *infra*)

The number of parliamentary seats grew to 186 (and 187) seats in the years 1912 to 1932. At the 1912 elections the Liberal party a second downfall since only 5,38% of the Walloon vote went to the Liberal party compared to 42,33% for the cartel party of liberals and socialists, gaining 45 of the 186 seats. Surprisingly the Catholic party left the electoral battle field stronger than it had entered it. In Wallonia a large protest rose against the election result. In Liège an uprising of blue collar workers broke out. Four demonstrators, among whom a child, were killed by police forces, and 20 wounded.⁴⁷ The proponents of a partition of Belgium in two autonomous administrative regions gained support, also in socialist circles.

It took the Liberal party until the 1914 election to fully regain its strength. In that year the seat share of the Liberal family almost doubled, and that of the socialists almost tripled – both to the expense of the Catholic faction. Dissatisfied with the declining vote share of the Catholic party, a splinter group named the Catholic Union (*Katholieke Unie*), was founded the same year. In 1914 Belgium had the highest population rate (7,6 million inhabitants) and it was the fifth economic power worldwide. (de Schaepdrijver 1997:11)

The organization of the command of the Belgian army, which existed more often than not out of French-speaking officers, re-emphasized the already widespread traditional socio-linguistic and political divide of Belgium's society. That divide had been mapped since the late 1800s but was reinforced in the late 1910s: Flanders was (still) relatively more catholic than the other two regions, Wallonia was more socialistic, and Brussels was more liberal. (Matagne & Verjans 2012:93, 95) This pairing of issues dealing with language, ideology and culture at one side and religious and ideological conviction at the other was the cradle of the so-called *communautarian* cleavage between the Flemish and the Walloon community. As the development of the Belgian national party system will demonstrate: this community-based division would eventually lead to the federalization of the country in the 1970s.⁴⁸ (cf. *infra*) In the deeply communautarian divide lied the seed of what is often referred to as the incumbency of peripheral parties that are *de facto* posing an electoral threat to the concentration of centralization of power with the traditional state parties (Alonso 2012:50-54; 93-108). But the divide also had immediate political effects.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ www.verkiezingsdatabase.be (<http://www.ibzdgip.fgov.be>)

⁴⁶ This level is comparable to the theoretic level of disproportionality of 4,96% of the 15 countries having an electoral formula based on the D'Hondt divisor mentioned in Farrell 2001:161.

⁴⁷ Cf. Van Cauwelaert, R., *Knack*, 8 augustus 2012, p. 25.

⁴⁸ A *federalization by disaggregation* as Swenden et al. call it, characterized by the transfer of considerable political, legal, fiscal and spending autonomy to constitutionalised units of a *federated state*, hence very different from the kind of federalization that emerges when (independent) regions or states are merged together or aggregated to a larger federal entity. (2009:2)

⁴⁹ For instance confession-ideological differences delayed the voting of the law that installed obligatory education and the corresponding law that inhibited child labor under the age of fourteen. (van Velthoven 1981b:261)

Hence, the foremost important political issue that King-soldier Albert I had to deal with after WWI was how to reunite the country. The King called openly for a government of 'national unity'. In that respect the 1920s would be the stepping stone towards the change of rules governing the use of language by public authorities and of the creation of three linguistic territories: one for the Dutch speaking part of the country, one for the French speaking part and one where both languages could be used (Brussels). (Deschouwer, Van Parijs 2009:8) Secondly, the King did not hesitate to echo the long lasting demand by the democratic forces in society for a radical reform of the electoral system that would allow for a more democratic representation of all classes and groups in society. By the end of the year 1921 two important electoral reforms were prepared by the unionist government including all three main ideological party families laid down in the Pact of Loppem (1918)). (Schamp, Devos 2011:499) First of all the coalition agreement included the introduction of the *universal single suffrage* for all 21 year old men (cf. het *algemeen enkelvoudig stemrecht* (AES)). Secondly, a complex system of *list connection* and *apparenting* –also named after its inventor, the system-Van de Walle- was introduced to optimize small party representation (and quite successfully!).⁵⁰ Apparenting was expected to correct the disproportionality produced by the D'Hondt highest average seat distribution system (Lijphart 1994) and to compensate for the many wasted votes for smaller parties not being able to win a seat (Farrell 2001:78).

Driven by anti-Belgian sentiments at the time the rumors of an imminent electoral reform started to circulate and in view of the better chances of becoming electorally livable and stable the Flemish-nationalist Front Party (*Frontpartij*) was founded. The universal single suffrage for men was applied for the first time in the 1919 legislative elections (even though the constitution was adapted only in 1921). In 1919 the Catholic party lost 26 seats (-14%), the Liberal party lost 11 seats, and the Socialist party won 30 (+16%). The catholic and socialist party had become equally big (70 seats or 37,63% seat share). The liberal representation in the parliamentary half round was half the size. Nine seats in total went to split parties, of which the Front Party obtained five (or 2,68% of the available seats). The electoral reform of 1919-1921 hence sharply marked the end of the Catholic hegemonic rule. Ever since coalition negotiation talks have been the basis of government formation... The *coalition government* was a fact in Belgian politics.

The constitutional reform of 7 February 1921 and the national elections later that year put an end to the government of national unity. At the same time 1921 was the start of an era of general passive political involvement of Belgian women. Though all aged women were granted the right to vote at the local level, the general female suffrage for the national elections was postponed (until 1948, cf. *infra*)⁵¹. The result of the 1921 national election, in which 91% of the 1,762 million Belgian man participated, largely confirmed the electoral weight of the three largest parties: a status quo for the Catholic party, minus two seats for the Socialist party and minus one seat for the Liberal party and the Front Party. The Christian People's Party (*Christene Volkspartij*) won six seats.

3.4 Political orthodoxy and the rising of radicalization and political extremism

The *roaring twenties* did produce industrial growth and a boost in cultural and artistic as well as political life. But a *great depression* and the worldwide economic shake-up provoked several extreme political ideologies.⁵² Many of them stepped up onto the political forum, for example the Communist Party (KP/PC), established in Belgium in 1924. This caused a chain reaction in many old democracies. For instance the foundation of the anti-communist and anti-corporatist ultra-Catholic Flemish National Association (*Katholiek Vlaams Nationaal Verbond* (1925)) was clearly a reaction to the 'godless' KP/CP. To compensate for the Belgian losses of the

⁵⁰ Cf. Farrell (2001:78) for a definition: "Apparentement is used most commonly in D'Hondt systems to compensate for the relatively low disproportionality of the result (compared with other list systems)." In the remainder transfer system (like in Belgium) the proportions of higher-tier seats are not fixed in advance. (ibid.:81) The number of higher-tier seats (or left-over seats) is the total number of seats available in the district minus the number of seats distributed directly in the first- or lower tier distribution. The latter is the sum for all individual parties of the number of votes of the respective party divided by the electoral quotient. (Schamp, Devos 2012: 558-560)

⁵¹ By the end of the 1920s in most West-European voting right were given to women. (Schamp, Devos 2012:512-513)

⁵² No less than eleven new parties participated in the 1925 elections, among which the Christian Workers (*Christelijke Werklieden*), the Farmers party (*Agriculteurs*), the Middle Class party (*Classe moy/Middenklasse*), the Christian democrats, the *Légionnaires*, the Farmers Unions, the Radical Socialists, the National Legion (*Légion Nationale*), the Neutrals, the *Parti National Wallon*, and the Independants. None of these parties managed to obtain more than 1% of the total vote. In 1929 more split lists entered the electoral campaign (*Lijst De Lille*, *Vlaamse Liberale Demokraten*, *Lijst Lambreghe*, etc.).

WWI, the German East cantons Eupen, Malmédy and Sankt-Vith were 'added' to the arrondissement of Verviers. Because of the annexation of the German East cantons in 1925 a new electoral district (representing one seat) was created and the total number of seats in the Chamber of Representatives increased with one unit to 187.

In the early 1930s numerous ultra-radical parties were born.⁵³ National politics became the playing field of many dissatisfied and frustrated groups and persons, often radicalizing and ridiculing the *sérieux* of the national and international political customs. The ultra-nationalistic and authoritarian Verdinaso (*Verbond van Dietsche Nationaal Solidaristen* (1931)) was founded by Joris Van Severen. In the 1932 national elections the ultra-nationalists won eight seats. In an attempt to respond and dam such radicalization, in 1932 the Dutch and French languages were acknowledged as officially 'equal' administrative languages in Belgium. Brussels capital became officially bilingual. Two years before the University of Ghent (*Universiteit Gent*) had been Flemishified (1930), but that had only nourished the nationalistic sentiments and the hope for more cultural autonomy of Flanders.

Mirroring the nationalistic dream of Hitler's NSDAP, in 1933 the right-radical Flemish National Association (*Vlaams Nationaal Verbond* (VNV)) was founded by Staf de Clercq. In an attempt to safeguard the national unity a tripartite of Catholics, liberals and socialists (1935) replaced the Catholic-liberal coalition cabinets that had governed since the 1927 elections. The cabinet Van Zeeland I however was heavily attacked by the non-traditional parties (nationalists, radicals and communists) and fell after 14 months. At the 1936 elections the VNV, incorporating Verdinaso, obtained 16 of the 202 seats. Fascism had undoubtedly found its way inside the Belgian political system. The ultra-conservative, militant Catholic and corporatist party REX (1936), lead by a Walloon named Leon Degrelle, was a newcomer to and won 21 seats (or 10,4%). The infiltration of anti-democratic forces put the traditionally liberal parliamentary democracy to the test.⁵⁴ With 18% of the seats in the hands of a handful of anti-democratic and anti-elitist organizations at both sides of the language border the more *ultra-conservative* wing of the Catholic party, that had experienced the greatest electoral loss (-18 seats), had become very sensitive to the nationalistic and corporatist discourse of VNV and REX. Nonetheless in the years 1936 to 1939 the subsequent cabinets (Paul Van Zeeland II, Paul-Emile Janson and Paul-Henri Spaak I) were lead by Catholics who managed to keep the nationwide tripartite of Catholics, liberals and socialists on the rails.

Differences in popularity of national socialism versus collectivism between the Flemish and the Walloon divided the Catholic party along the line of the language border. In the years 1937-1938 the Catholic party was the first traditional party to start the process towards the regionalization of the party organization. In an effort of satisfying the regionalist fractions, the Catholic party was the first traditional party to reorganize around a Flemish branch (*Christelijke Volkspartij* or CVP) and a Walloon branch (*Parti Socialiste Chrétien* or PSC), with the main goal to win back the ultra-conservative and nationalist voter. Though both branches were still operating within one national party organization in a way this regionalization of the central party was *accentuating* rather than camouflaging or settling regional differences and tensions in regional approaches.

After losing the 1939 elections, the socialist BWP transformed into the Belgian Socialist party with a Flemish and a Walloon part (BSP/PSB, 64 seats in total), however still operating under one single party structure. The Catholic party won six seats. Once more it became the largest party with 67 seats. The Liberal party won ten seats and obtained 33 in total. The two winning parties formed the cabinet under the premiership of the Catholic Hubert Pierlot⁵⁵. With 17 seats the Flemish Nationalists were the fourth largest faction in the national parliament. The number of split list parties had decreased to ten; most of them pulled by one or the other notorious politician⁵⁶. Just like the graph above shows, the interbellum is a remarkably period because of its

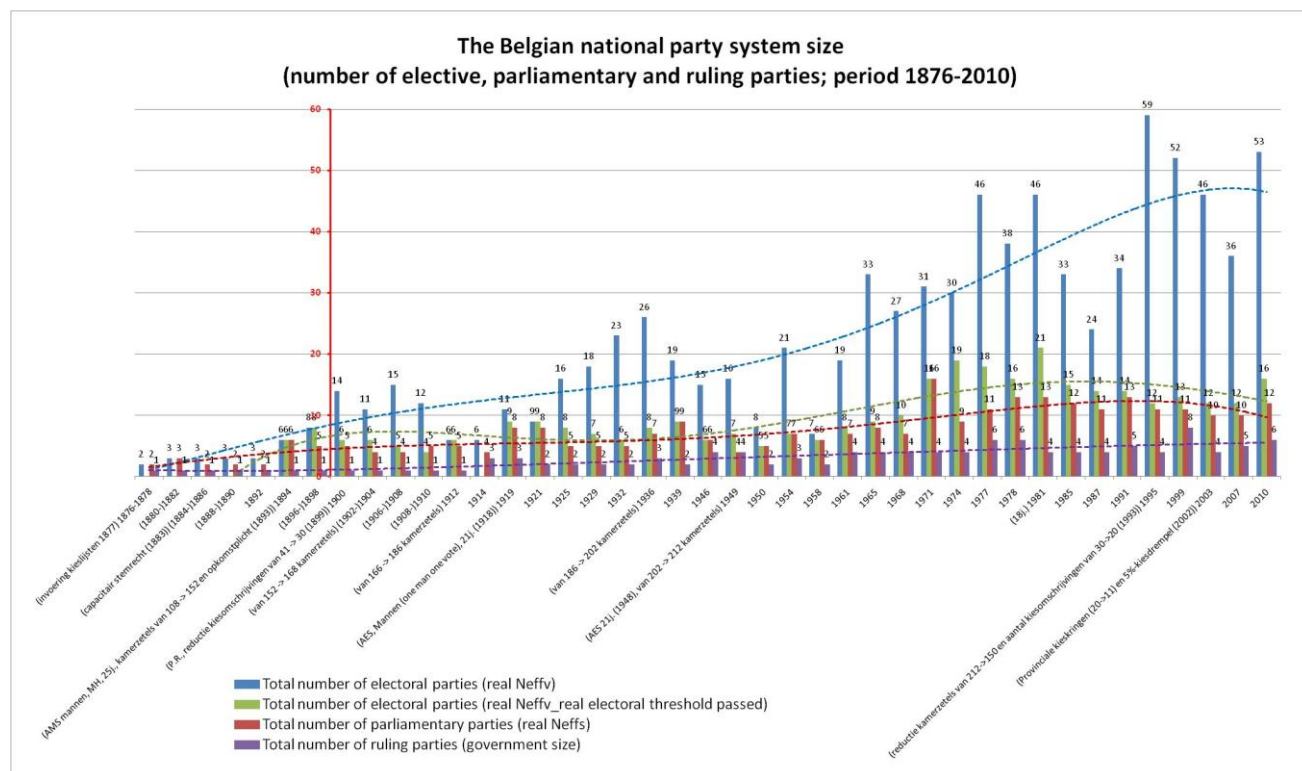
⁵³ By the elections of 1932 and 1936 the number of not-represented dissident, split and other lists had reached the number of 18 resp. 19! Many of them had ridiculous names and ambitions like Watch (*Klok*), Isolated (*Isolé*), Tax payers (*Lastenbetalers*) or Pigeon Lovers (*Duivenliefhebbers*).

⁵⁴ Cf. Bruno De Wever in *Knack*, 13 Febr. 2013, pp. 41-42.

⁵⁵ The cabinet Pierlot I (February 1939) fell in its first week and was continued as the cabinet Pierlot II (18 April to 3 September 1939).

⁵⁶ Cf. *Liste Lahaut*, *Liste Dekeyser*, *Liste Verbist*, *Liste Frenssen* (won one seat in 1939) and many other. The bulk of these newcomer parties however did not manage to pass the real electoral threshold, as indicated by the above graph.

temporary amplified political instability⁵⁷, the quest for an answer against the rise of extremism and its relatively large numbers of electoral parties. From the introduction of the P.R.-system and prior to the first state reform of 1970, 1936 and 1939 were also the years in which the national party system arrived at historically low levels of party system concentration (less than 25%, meaning moderate concentration).



Under Nazi German occupation party politics in Belgium had *de facto* come to a standstill. That however did not mean the end of political turmoil. After the war, a sense of reunification permeated the Belgian society. The Belgian voter was fed up with extremism and fascism, as well as with the *Lilliput* lists drawn by anti-politicians that lead basically nowhere. The general resentment translated into the marginalization and virtually disappearance of REX and VNV at the 1946 elections. The CVP/PSC won 92 of the 202 seats. The Socialist party won 66, and the Communist party won 23. The liberals lost half of their representation (16 seats). Two other parties –the Union of Belgians (*Union des Belges* (UDB)) and a cartel of liberals and socialists- won respectively one and four seats. The one seat of the UDB helped the socialist Achille Van Acker (BSP) to form a cabinet with the Liberal party and the communist party and to drop the Catholic party.

Despite the electoral success of the Communist party and its part-taking in the cabinets Van Acker I and II, the Belgian adherence of the anti-Soviet and anti-communist Truman doctrine in the years 1945 and 1946 forced the Belgian KP/CP to leave the Belgian government in 1947. One election later, the presence of the Communists was halved (12 seats in 1949). The Catholics and the liberals won 13 seats each. One explanation of this remarkable electoral shift is the impact of the Truman doctrine. Another concerns the introduction of the enlargement of the general suffrage to all aged women.

In fact, in the year 1948, the universal suffrage for all aged man and women was *finally* introduced by the Law of 27 March⁵⁸. From one election to the other the electorate grew from 23,25% of the total Belgian population to 59% (being 5,031 million persons). In 1949 the size of the parliament increased with ten seats to 212 seats.⁵⁹ Even though the female suffrage in Belgium was observed not “to have significantly affected party strength” (Rose, Urwin 1970:291), the position of the Catholic and liberal party nonetheless was strengthened

⁵⁷ In the 1930s until the invasion of the Germans on 10 May 1940 no less than ten cabinets were formed. Not only was the average length of a legislature being less than 11 months, the period counts five governments of national unity (tripartites), including the cabinet Pierlot III (1939-1940) that lasted less than eight months.

⁵⁸ ‘Finally’ because it came 30 to 40 years later than many other Western democracies like Finland (1906), Norway, Iceland, Denmark, Austria (1920). (cf. Schamp, Devos 2012:512-513)

⁵⁹ Except for the enlargement of the parliament in 1949 which was following the enlargement of the electorate resulting from the introduction of the general suffrage (Law of 27 March 1948), the number of seats followed the growth of the Belgian population.

in the 1949 elections (+10% to almost 50%)⁶⁰. Rudi Van Doorslaer⁶¹ suggests that the Catholic party was rewarded for their moral leadership, despite the fact that the 'pragmatic' treatment of the Jewish problem by the King (Leopold III) and the Belgian political and judicial elite as well as by the leadership of the Catholic church was largely debatable. The position of the Socialist party was consolidated and that of the Communist and nationalistic parties further weakened. Belgians were clearly fed up with extremist ideologies and redirected towards the traditional ideologies. Hence Belgium confirms the general trend spotted in most Western European countries, namely that Christian Democratic parties were favored and Communist and Socialist parties disadvantaged by female suffrage, just like it had been the case with early introductions of female suffrage (for instance in Finland (1906) or Austria (1920)). (Dogan 1967:161) As a matter of fact women were said to vote for the old parties, and hence not to vote for parties promoting extreme opinions.

3.5 In search of unification strategies for a multi-faced society

According to Matagne and Verjans the most important political phenomenon of the 1950s and 1960s was the passage from a two-and-a-half party system to a multiparty system. The legislature years of 1961 to 1965 were pivotal since they lead to significant electoral losses for all three traditional party families. (2012:90) More to it, the linguistic decomposition of Belgium also had a direct effect on the traditional 'pillar' parties...

Political life in the 1950s was characterized by the (absolute) predominance of the Catholic party. The CVP/PSC attempted to control and solve the Royal Question (1950), which was decided with the abdication of King Leopold III in favor of his oldest son Boudewijn after a national referendum on the King's return to the Belgian throne was held in 1951. Though the outcome of the referendum had been in favor of the King's return (57,68% nationwide), the result once more showed the old signs of a divided country: in general (catholic) Flemings voted significantly more than the (socialist) Walloons in favor of the King's return. But the divide depended largely on the rural versus industrial character within each region. (Buelens 2009 in: Schamp, Devos 2012:589) In those days Belgian society and politics was axed on at least three central dimensions: class, religion, and communal or territorial divisions. (Rose 1969:35) Belgium was still heavily religiously divided anti-positioning the electorally successful Catholic bloc and the not so successful anti-clerical liberal bloc. Yet, the regionalist bloc was regaining political strength in the 1950s in a very forceful way. In its wake all three traditional parties were preparing for the split in a Flemish and Walloon wing. (*cf. infra*) Its main political objective being the regionalization of Belgium and the equal treatment of Flemings and Walloons in 1954, the Flemish People's Union (*Volksunie* (VU))⁶² was established right after the WWII⁶³ as a reaction to what was perceived as an act of self-denial of the (Catholic) majority. The VU won its first seats for the Chamber of Representatives in Antwerp (one in 1954 and one in 1958). As Richard Rose points out correctly the Flemish nationalists of the VU aimed primarily at the 'deconstitution' of the Belgian state, in order to form an autonomous Flemish nation-state consistent with its ethnic loyalty. (1969:32) But the VU was also the first party in Belgium to put post-modern issues more prominent on the political agenda such as the demilitarization of Belgium, the promotion of world peace, environmental care and so on. It is therefore said that within Flanders the VU was the first indigenous *cath-all party* in the across-cleavage and across-class meaning of the word.⁶⁴

In 1958 the (second) School Question demonstrated again the *de facto* divide of the Belgian public and political opinion into three camps: a Flemish, a Walloon and a Brussels camp. While trying to keep the country together and to stay into power the dominant CVP/PSC –chased and whipped by the regionalists– was forced to take consensual measures and set its own priority list largely aside. In spite of the ongoing polarization around the central ideas of the *modern* Flemish movement, the Catholic party family managed to resolve the School Question by the School Pact of 1958.

After the 1961 census it appeared that the population of the Flemish provinces was growing faster than that of the Walloon provinces. That conclusion lead to two important changes: first of all, an adaptation of the number of seats per electoral district in the Chamber and the Senate and, secondly, a shift of the division of

⁶⁰ In Flanders the CVP would win one absolute majority after another until the 1961 elections.

⁶¹ Cf. *Knack*, 13 Febr. 2013, p. 44.

⁶² The credo of the VU: "*Alles voor Vlaanderen, Vlaanderen voor Christus!*" (Everything for Flanders, Flanders for Christ!)

⁶³ The VU was created out of the ashes of the Flemish Concentration (*Vlaamse Concentratie*, 1949-1954) that was not been successful in winning a parliamentary seat in the 1949 national elections.

⁶⁴ Cf. Rose and Urwin, "i.e. (...) appealing to voters across class, confessional and other traditional lines of division." (1970:299)

seats between the two language groups.

After the formal division of the Catholic party in two regional parties (CVP in Flanders and PSC in Wallonia) in 1961, the Catholic family lost its absolute representative majority in the 1965 elections (less than 45% of the total vote).⁶⁵ Around the same time as the formal split of the Catholic party family along the language barrier, the country itself was split on paper in a Dutch-speaking and a French-speaking part (Brussels capital being officially bilingual). That country-split was the result of the voting of the language laws of 1962 and 1963. The language laws make Belgium a school example of a country in which religious differences between groups were reinforced by the communal differences (Rose 1969:41), resulting in the societal, political and institutional break-up of the nation, for at least two reasons. Firstly, party politically relevant cleavages reinforced the tensions between the (mainly Catholic) Flemish part and the (mainly socialist) Walloon part of the country (as said before the region of Brussels was foremost liberal in kind). Secondly, the increasing communautarism of the 1950s and 1960s undeniably has produced increasing strains in the regimes like Belgium and has increased disruptive tendencies in the major parties, and also, in the streets of Belgian cities. (cf. Rose 1969:42) But more importantly, the regionalist (like the FDF, cf. *infra*), extreme right (like Vlaams Blok), ecologist (like AGALEV/Ecolo), and extreme left (like PVDA) ideologies underlying those disruptions were capable of getting organized and managed to participate in elections at the legislative level and get represented. (Pilet 2012:431)

In the 1960s and 1970s the Belgian political system progressively had advanced towards a political system with a relative open character. A moderate effective threshold as low as 3% and in some districts even as low as 0,5% had allowed for the election of new political formations (regionalists, ecologist and extreme right). (Pilet 2012:431) Because many francophone citizens (in Brussels) felt that the installation of the language border was a political defeat and an injustice done to the French speaking part of Belgium⁶⁶, an ethno-regionalist francophone party called *Fédéralistes Démocrates Francophones* (FDF) was created to defend the political standpoints of the unitary francophone voter.⁶⁷ Despite the francophone protest, in 1965 the language border was *officially drawn*.⁶⁸ From 1965 onwards the Flemish members of parliament would outnumber the Walloon and Brussels MPs. (Sinardet 2009:76-77) The arrangement reconfirmed the regime of permanent facilities given to French-speaking people living in six communes of the Brussels periphery. This kind of solution Lijphart (1968) names *politics of accommodation*. (in: Daalder 1974:611-612); precisely the sort of solution that Belgians need to get rid of if the politicians are aiming to solve the issues related to the linguistic territoriality problem. (Van Parijs 2009:99-100)⁶⁹ In 1965 total inter-party electoral volatility rose to historically high levels; a total of 16,42% of the voters switched parties. The biggest losers were the Catholic party and the Socialist party (both minus +/-10% seat share), the greatest winners were the Liberal party (+14% seat share) and the regionalist bloc (+6%).

1968 was a year marked by the *May 1968* emancipation movement, the freedom movement and anti-war and

⁶⁵ A level that the Catholic parties would not be able to regain, cf. graph below, not even in the late 1970s when the Catholic bloc experienced somewhat 'a revival' (cf. Swyngedouw, Vander Weyden 2006:217).

⁶⁶ As Deschouwer and Van Parijs noted "French speakers, (...), tend to invoke the principle that official boundaries should track real-life trends, including the spread of the stronger language." (2009:9)

⁶⁷ FDF is also named *Front Démocratique des Francophones*. (cf. Swenden & Jans 2009:17)

⁶⁸ The language border affected two electoral districts: the district *Komen-Moescroen* was shifted from the arrondissement Ieper-Kortrijk to the arrondissement Tournai (Doornik) and the district *Voeren* was shifted from the arrondissement Liège (Luik) to the arrondissement Tongeren-Maaseik.

⁶⁹ The Flemish political philosopher Philippe Van Parijs (2009) makes a profound exercise on the future of Belgium, the position and relationships of the communities. From the conclusion that neither generalized unilingualism, neither generalized bilingualism, nor that non-territorial separation bring the solution, the author derives a package of four possible reforms that in his opinion would help to solve the communities- and Brussels-related problems. One of them being "to strengthen the linguistic significance of borders, while weakening their socio-economic importance" (ibid.:96) The here-mentioned principle of linguistic territorialism refers to John Stuart Mill's conception of multilingual democracies and his perception that in a country made up of different nationalities it is simply impossible to create one common public opinion which is necessary to produce a coherent government. (Mill 1861:196-197 in Van Parijs 2009:86-87) According to Van Parijs to makes things easy on all three language groups the public opinion and the entire preceding debate and common forum ideally ought to be generated in 'the emerging first universal lingua franca' – hence English, overarching yet not replacing the principle of linguistic territoriality, an element that needs to be substantiated, shaped and formalized institutionally, among others by the electoral reforms at the regional level (make the Flemish community and the Walloon region two separate electoral districts; also make the region of Brussels a clear linguistically mixed electoral district allowing only linguistically mixed lists with securing a guaranteed representation for each language group (Flemish, French and German) as well as at the federal level (i.e. the creation of a federal election district for at least a certain number of the MPs (10% in the proposal of the Pavia group, cf. Deschouwer, Van Parijs 2007,2009).

peace movement. Those were the answers to the rising *New Right*. The Catholic party officially fell apart in two separate regional parties: the Flemish CVP and the Walloon PSC. In the same year the ethno-regionalist and francophone *Rassemblement Wallon* (RW) was founded, campaigning for more socio-economic autonomy for Wallonia. (Swenden, Jans 2009:17) With the 1968 elections the Liberal party (still being the umbrella of the Flemish *Partij voor de Vrijheid* or PVV (Party for the Freedom) and Walloon *Parti réformateur Liberal* or PRL (Liberal reform Party)) managed to consolidate their electoral representation. The nationalist parties (cf. VU and FDF) however were once more significantly strengthened (+8% of the seat share). However, an unusual high level of 5,95% of the voters had wasted its vote to parties that did not manage to win a seat.

3.6 The first and the second Belgian state reform: the second generation of extreme left and right party ideologies

In 1969 a first pure and true consociational initiative to prepare the first state reform was taken by the catholic prime minister Gaston Eyskens and his minister of Community Affairs, Leo Tindemans, and supported by all other parties, including the regionalist parties. The context was that of the Working Group of the 28 (*Werkgroep der 28* aka the *working group-Eyskens*), a platform of consultation installed to prepare the first Belgian state reform. (Eyskens 1993:809-810) The first Belgian state reform under the catholic-socialist cabinet Eyskens V dates from 1970 and made Belgium officially the sum of three separate *culture communities* (the Flemish, French and German community), with relatively limited competencies in cultural matters (only). Because the foundations were also placed for the later Flemish, Walloon and Brussels capital regional, on the national level Belgium was about to become a multi-level governed state (Velaers 2012:111). In this new constellation linguistic minority protection was key. Four protection mechanisms that are still applied today, were then installed. First of all, there is the linguistic parity in the council of ministers. Secondly, there is the institutionalized *alarm bell procedure* to protect the minority (language) group in the case of a potentially discriminatory constitutional or institutional reform.⁷⁰ Thirdly, based on the special majority rules it requires three quarters of that group to launch the alarm bell procedure, suspending the parliamentary procedure with 30 days, a period in which the government needs to find a solution.⁷¹ And fourthly, since 1970 all members of the newly elected parliament need to confirm their membership of either the Flemish or French langue group.⁷² (Sinardet 2009:77)

The strict separation of the political personnel into language groups and the obligation to govern together or the Belgian logic of separation and inclusion (cf. Deschouwer, Van Parijs 10-11) are considered by Dave Sinardet (2010:352) “the [constitutionalized] consequence of [institutionalized] negotiations conducted in the most consociational of traditions”.⁷³ They have made Belgium a rather unique case in *federalism*. These evolutions have spurred the fragmentation of the national party landscape and have complicated federal political decision-making⁷⁴ for at least two reasons. Firstly, because the outcome of the regionalization process of parties was that party elites were spread over two linguistic group, it has increased rather than decreased both the inter-party (elite) competition within one region as well as the inter-regional tensions. Secondly, the presence of the so-called Bolt constitution (*Grendelgrondwet*) limited the powers of the majority of Flemings in a dramatic way (Deschouwer 2009:44), adding to the perceived democratic deficit at the national level.

As seen the rise of the regionalist parties put the traditional state-wide Belgian parties under such a pressure that all of them broke up along the Flemish-Walloon linguistic line; and vice versa, “(...)the regional split of the Belgian party system increased the salience of the ethno-regionalist cleavage and thus created the conditions for federalism.” (Swenden, Jans 2009:17-18)

As seen, the electoral support of the diametrically opposing Flemish VU and Brussels-based FDF had grown

⁷⁰ The minority thus has a veto power. (Deschouwer, Van Parijs 2009:11)

⁷¹ Deschouwer and Van Parijs (2009:11) indicate that the solution can either be one that is acceptable by both language groups or no solution at all, the case in which the government has to resign.

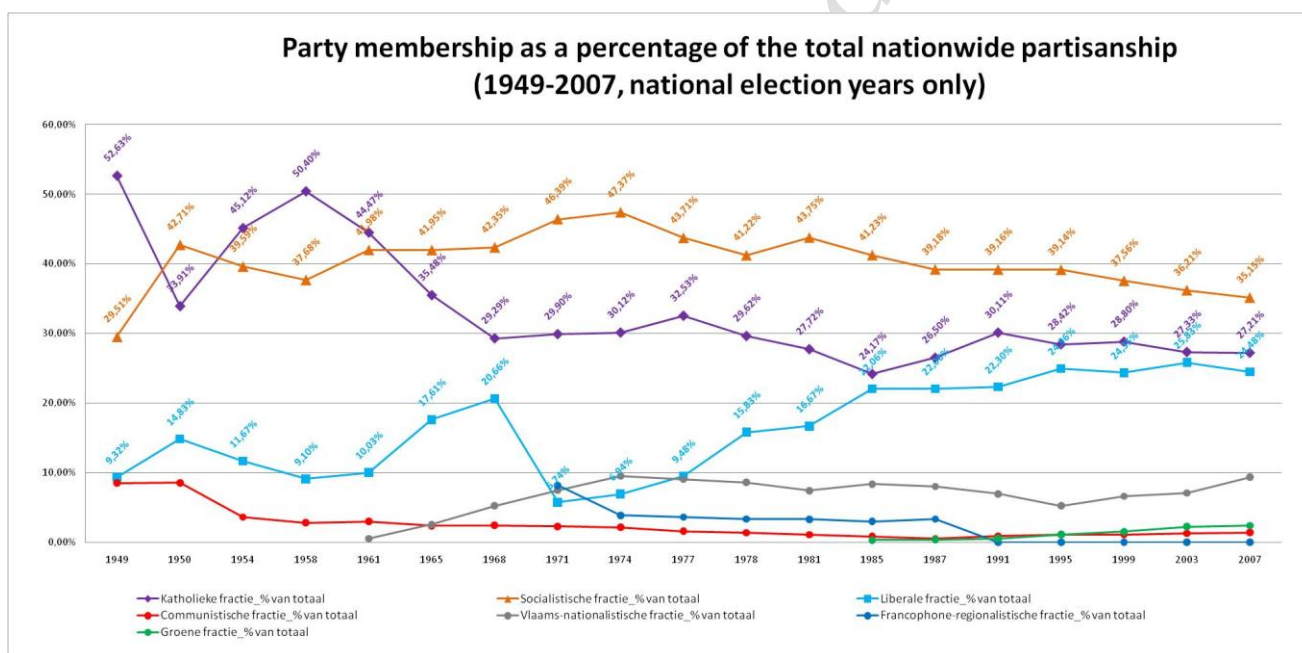
⁷² “All ‘national’ representatives have to be either Dutch-speaking or French speaking representatives: ‘the end result is a parliament in which the representatives are supposed to represent their own language group’ (Deschouwer, 2006, p. 902).” (in: Sinardet 2010:352)

⁷³ [Additions] by the authors. This refers to the claim made by Arend Lijphart calling Belgium “(...)the most thorough example of consociational democracy, the type of democracy that is most suitable for deeply divided societies.” (1981:1)

⁷⁴ “[For]most articles that define the political institutions of regions and communities, and for so-called Special Laws that implement these basic principles, a majority is needed in each language group, i.e. a concurrent majority, as well as an overall two thirds majority.” (Deschouwer, Van Parijs 2009:11)

since 1965 until their electoral peak in 1974.⁷⁵ But things were moving at the other side of the ideological spectrum as well. The increasing (academic and political) attention to the negative impact of the inflated capitalism, industrialization and production (cf. the first oil crisis of 1973-1974), the social and psychological pressures of economic development and the disappearance of the Communist Party have unlocked the door for new political initiatives such as the post-communist ultra-left wing AMADA ('All powers to the workers' (*Alle macht aan de arbeiders*) (1970)) or the later *left-ecologist* political organizations such as AGALEV (*Anders gaan leven*) in Flanders (°1971, formally organized in 1973, first election in 1977) and Ecolo (*Ecologistes Confédérés pour l'Organisation de Luttes Originales*) in Wallonia (founded in 1978, first election in 1979 (European Parliament, zero candidates elected)). They were denominated as the *New Left*. Three years after the regionalization of the CVP/PSC, in 1971 the Liberal party also formally broke up into the Flemish PVV and the Walloon party PRL. However, unlike the VU and FDF that won the elections of 1971 and 1974 the Liberal party was downgraded after the regionalization of the party in 1971. Both the Catholics and the liberals lost 8% of their national parliamentary representation. The new left won 11% of the total vote but that vote share did not translate in seat share (less than five percent!). Compared to the seven parliamentary parties in 1968, in 1971 a record number of sixteen different parties –still an all-time high– were represented in the national parliament. (Schamp, Devos 2012b:9, 12) An previously unseen 19,22% of the voters had switched from one party to another.

As shown on the below graphs, at the beginning of the 1970s a growing share of the total party membership was owned by the nationalist parties, the socialist parties and to a lesser extent by the catholic parties. From the 1968 to the 1971 elections the liberal fraction experienced an extreme membership loss –both in absolute and in relative numbers. It would take the liberal parties a full decade to recover from that dip in partisanship and almost two decades to return to its electoral power it had known at the end of the 1960s.

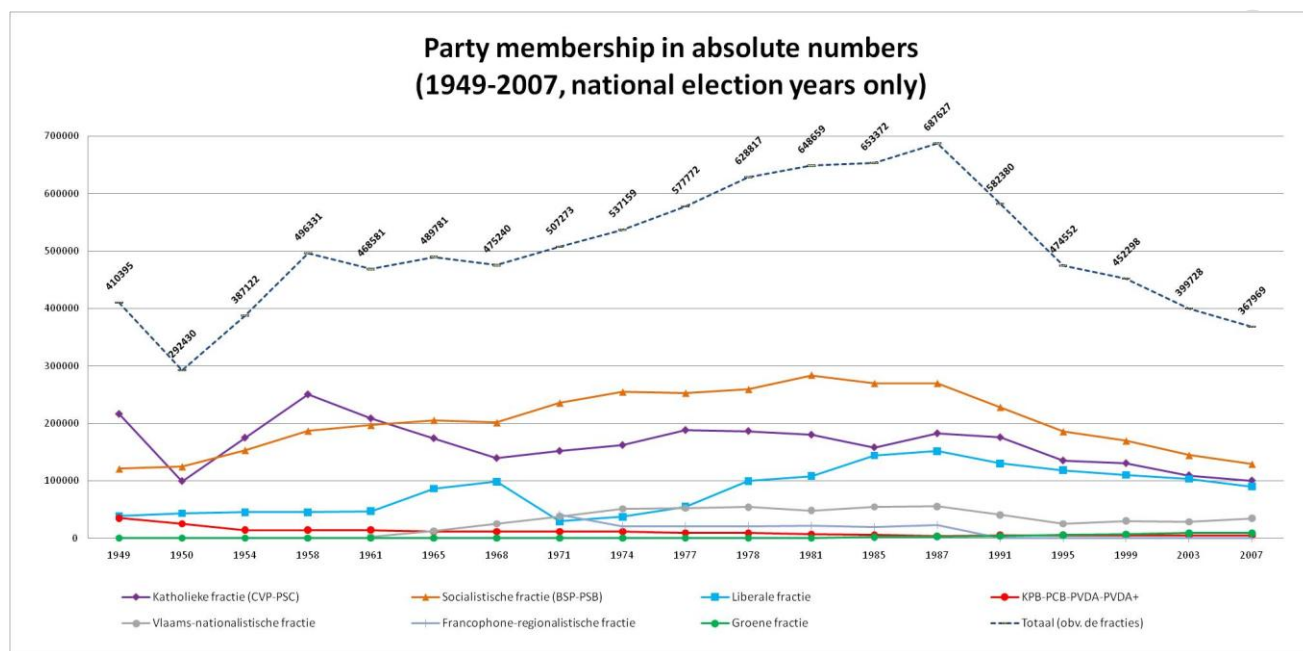


Share of the total number of party members (party membership share) per political family or ideology (own calculations based on Maes 1988:169 and Quitenlier & Hooghe 2010:8).

In theory heterogeneous parties like the VU are in general believed to “(...)be more committed to power as an end or an ideology, and therefore, readier to accept office in coalition.” (Rose 1969:29) On the other hand, quite typical for the so-called heterogeneous or *across cleavages cutting* based parties like the VU “(...)their cath-all nature makes them specially subject to fluctuations in strength, as coalitions can build up or collapse more quickly than with *verzuijing* or class-based parties.” (Rose, Urwin 1970:299) The combination of both was exactly what became a huge problem for the VU in the course of the second half of the 1970s. In 1977 the Flemish nationalist VU, FDF and the socialist party were part of the minority cabinet Tindemans II. While the catholic Tindemans was preparing the second state reform (cf. the *Egmont pact* of 1977-1978) some of the more radical VU partisans and their followers got frustrated. In their eyes their partaking in the government

⁷⁵ About 20% of the Flemish vote went to the *Volksumie* (VU: 21 seats in 1971, 22 seats in 1974 and 20 seats in 1977), close to 40% of the vote in and around Brussels went to FDF, and close to 15% of the Walloon vote for MR. (Swenden, Jans 2009:17)

symbolized the rationalization for more Flemish autonomy, which was largely supported among Flemings. Yet a balance needed to be struck with the unitary francophone FDF. In Brussels the lingua franca more and more became the French, not only because of the growing sphere of influence of the capital in the surrounding Flemish communes but also because the occurrence of large groups of guest working immigrants and their families coming from Mediterranean countries like Morocco or Turkey, the large presence of EU officials and other foreigners. (Witte & Meynen 2006:180) No party was blind for the underdog position the Flemings were stuck in in the Brussels capital region and for the increased *flamingantism*, not even the Socialist party. Because of the inter-regionalist tensions the BSP split in 1978 into a Flemish part (*Socialistische partij* (SP)) and a Walloon part (*Parti Socialiste* (PS)). Around that same period the national post-communist AMADA turns into the Party of the Labour (PvdA/PTB).



In the period between 1974 and 1978 the Catholic party regained electoral weight. The imbalance in electoral weight between the traditional party families (the Catholic party family held $\pm 35\%$ of the seats, socialists held $\pm 25\%$ of the mandates, liberals and regionalists held $\pm 15\%$) –which was not at all in line with the membership (base) of these parties– lead to the polarization and radicalization of party standpoints, especially those of the liberal fraction that since the early 1970s had been attracting new members more rapidly. The growth spurts of partisanship of the liberal parties PVV and PLP can be matched very easily with their involvement in the national cabinets Leburton I and II (1973-1974), Tindemans I (1974-1977) and Martens III (1980)⁷⁶. Serious levels of political tension and instability resulted from that radicalization process which had started to culminate at the end of the 1970s.⁷⁷

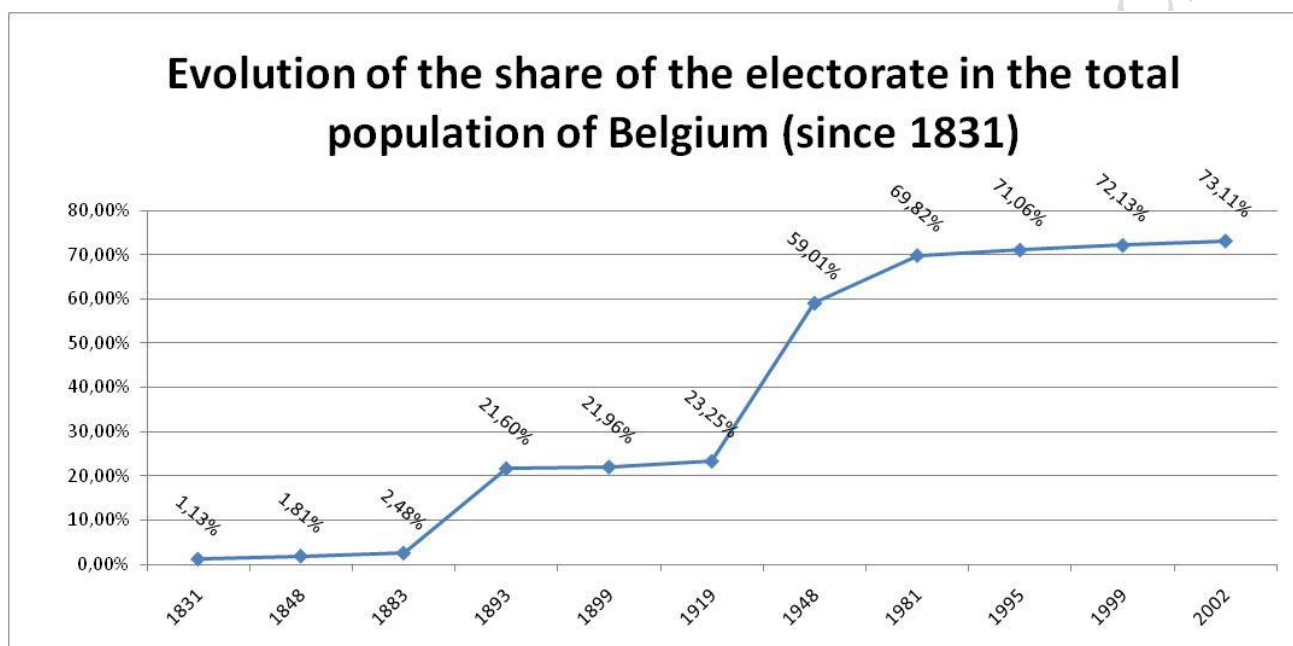
The divergence of political positions was sharpened by the rather mild electoral loss of the VU in 1978 the Flemish nationalist party fell apart in a radical and a moderate wing. The radical wing had connected to the Flemish People's Party (*Vlaamse Volkspartij* (VVP)) that was formed in 1977 out of dissatisfaction with the Egmont pact. The VVP supported a conflict model rather than the consensus model which was typical for consociational democracies. The VVP, which was largely based in Brussels, was founded only some weeks later than the radical Flemish Nationalistic Party (*Vlaams Nationale Partij* (VNP)), based in Antwerp. Both initiatives were stressing factors of cultural, linguistic and national identity more than any other Flemish party. Eventually they joined forces and since the 1978 elections the VVP-VNP alliance presented joint candidate lists under the new name of the radical Flemish Blok (*Vlaams Blok* (VB)) (first parliamentary seat in 1978 for

⁷⁶ The same trend was spotted even the case in the period 1981-1987 (Martens V, VI and VII), at the end of which the total membership of the liberal fraction reached its all time peak.

⁷⁷ "Between 1977 and 1981 there were no less than seven cabinets, all falling apart because they were not able to find an acceptable compromise about the institutional hardware of a new Belgium." (Deschouwer, Van Parijs 2009:7) In 1979 the young catholic Wilfried Martens becomes prime minister of the Belian government. In two years time his coalitions fell three times (cf. Martens I, II, III and IV).

Karel Dillen, co-founder of VB). Since 1980 VB holds the credo “Own people first” (*Eigen volk eerst!*)⁷⁸. According to Cas Mudde (2012) this attempt of becoming undeniably present is quite typical for populist radical extreme right parties⁷⁹. With thirteen different parties elected into parliament in 1978 the Belgian party system experienced a reinforcement of its relative high levels of fractionalization. As a result the period was politically exceptionally turbulent and marked by heavy community-related tensions.⁸⁰ The late 1970s were also marked by above average levels of electoral volatility and extreme low levels of wasted votes (hence, committed voting).

The second oil crisis of 1979 justified the cause and the political relevance of the ecologist faction and increased the electoral and political resonance in so far that since their first representation after the 1977 elections both Flemish AGALEV and Walloon Ecolo effectively adopted a state-wide political party structure in the late 1970s-early 1980s. Hence, contrary to all other parties at the national level the ecologist parties are particular because they have formed one solid faction in the national parliament (independent of the individual election results).



In 1981 the minimum voting age for the legislative elections was lowered from 21 to 18 years. This way the electorate grew with 10% to 6,87 million Belgians. At that point +-70% of the total population were electorally franchised. Swyngedouw and Vander Weyden connect the definitive downturn of the Flemish CVP of the same year to the reduction of the voting age. (2006:216) Nonetheless, until the 1999 elections –won by the liberal Guy Verhofstadt- the catholic party family succeeded in delivering the prime minister without interruption. Subsequent growth of the electorate for the national parliamentary elections has been due to the so-called social population growth, i.e. a net migration saldo (Schamp, Devos 2012:515), hence not to specific electoral reforms. (cf. graph above)

With the second Belgian state reform of 1980-1981 under the leadership of the Catholic prime minister Wilfried Martens (the catholic-socialist government Martens II, III and IV) Belgium became a true *federal state* with equal constitutional rights between the Flemish, the Walloon and the German communities (just communities, not longer ‘culture communities’), the Flemish and the Walloon regions and the federal level. Each community installed a parliament (or council) and a government. The organization of the third region of Brussels capital –though recognized in 1970- had to wait until the next state reform in 1988. The new federal structure required conciliation between the regional and the federal bodies. But that conciliation was largely

⁷⁸ The VB was basically 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.

⁷⁹ Mudde (2012:223) investigated three decennia of populist radical-right politics in West-Europe, a.o. *Vlaams Belang* (VB) and *Front National* (FN) in Belgium.

⁸⁰ “(...)between 1977 and 1981 there were no less than seven cabinets, all falling apart because they were not able to find an acceptable compromise about the institutional hardware of a new Belgium.” (Deschouwer, Van Parijs 2009:7)

based on the *waffle iron politics* “(...)whereby alleged benefits for one language group had to be matched by commensurate benefits for the other group.” (Swenden, Jans 2009:26) The consequence of this financing practice however was that one of the two regions always risked to receive more money than necessary, hence increasing the total state debt to 100% of the BBP.

When looking at the evolution of the relative membership base of the largest party families or ideologies than the rise in the 1980s of the Catholic and nationalist and regionalist parties is very clear. The political divide between Flanders (mostly catholic and nationalistic), Wallonia (more than average socialist) and Brussels (more than elsewhere liberal)⁸¹ was still ideology-centered. The divide goes back until the end of WWI (cf. *supra*) and had been reinstituted in full force since the early preparations of the first state reform in the late 1960s. The tensions however culminated after the second state reform. The political divide sharpened the regionalist sentiments (cf. increase in activism and partisanship of VU, VB and FDF) – sentiments that also grew among the radicals among the French-speaking part of Belgium. In 1984-’85 this led to a new political initiative: the (francophone) National Front party (*Front National* (FN)), largely inspired by the French extreme right *Front National* led by Jean-Marie Le Pen. (van Haute 2012:219) Also, because of the economic crisis that loomed over the European mainland and the endless row of (political) scandals putting Belgium on the international front news for several years⁸², anti-system or anti-establishment parties like the Flemish Block and Jean-Pierre Van Rossem’s libertarian party R.O.S.S.E.M. in Flanders received a lot of media attention. (Devos, C., 2006: 294-295)

3.7 The ‘new politics culture’ politics and the denial of voter

There’s a general trend in the late 1980s and 1990s of relative increasing total electoral volatility (Blomme et al. 2009) and more national voter mobility and total vote transfers (Swyngedouw 2009) Together with the increased electoral volatility, the total share of *wasted votes* –i.e. votes casted for parties that were not successful in entering the parliament after all- grew significantly since the 1980s. But more importantly, since the late 1980s the character of the wasted vote changed significantly. Wasted votes more often became ‘protest’ votes, aimed against the political practices rather than for.

The growing distrust in politicians added to the polarization between traditional power-addicted parties and the more radical and populist ‘anti-’parties against whom the traditional parties swiftly built a *cordon sanitaire* to keep them from power and policy-making (cf. against the Flemish Blok in 1989). On its turn the rising number of *protest voters*, who were extra motivated by what they perceived to be largely undemocratic practices of segregation and exclusion of winning parties, had triggered many other parties in the 1990s to ‘give it a try’. And, hence, the working of the political system in itself has sustained the unwanted and detrimental multiplication of new political parties (Pilet 2012:430-431). Such parties are often labeled in very different ways⁸³ but they all share one feature: they added to the intra-party system hostility and to the total inter-party competition. The perceived widening gap between politics and the citizen and between the citizen and the intermediary structures as well as the perceived erosion of the traditional parties required and justified a culture of *new politics* (NPC). As we will see, the NPC would lead to the rejuvenation of all traditional parties in the 1990s and 2000s. But instead of realigning politics and citizens that process again confused rather than reassured the (overall aging) electorate. But the institutional reform of the Belgian state too added to the political instability of the country.

The third Belgian state reform of 1988 and 1989 marked the official end of the *waffle iron politics*. The regions became largely responsible for their own expenses. Ever since then Belgian politics were framed in territorial terms, the conception of a ‘confederal Belgium’ was on virtually every politician’s mind, especially

⁸¹ 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)

⁸² These scandals include a.o. the series of unsolved robberies by the *Bende van Nijvel* (1982-’85), the Agusta helicopter kickback scandal (1988-’89), the kidnapping of Vanden Boeynants (1989), the murder of André Cools (1991) –most of them involving directly or indirectly highly ranked functionaries of the socialist party family-.

⁸³ Single issue parties, theme parties, business firm parties, modern cadre parties or electoral professional parties.

on the mind of the Flemish nationalists of VB.⁸⁴ Also a *Law on party finance and the control of electoral expense* (1989) was voted entitling all political parties or fractions that are represented in the legislative to receive state funding based on the size of their representation (i.e. number of seats taken). Because of a difference of meaning on a wrongly issued export license to Belgium's gun-making company *Fabrique Nationale de Herstal* (FN), by the end of September 1991 the pacifist wing of the VU forced the Flemish nationalists out of the government Martens VIII (1988-1991), lead by the catholic Wilfried Martens. With still thirteen parties elected in national parliament the party diversity after the federal elections of 24 November 1991 reached once again above average levels.

In those 1991 federal elections the radical-right and Flemish nationalistic VB won ten seats whereas the more moderate VU lost six, indicating a broader acceptance of the hardened anti-foreigners discourse spread by the VB. Because more than ten percent of the Flemings and six percent of the voters in constituency of Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde (BHV) voted for the right-radical, anti-Belgian and anti-immigrant viewpoints of the populist VB and because more than five percent of the Flemish electorate and 2,3% of the voters in BHV voted for the ultra-libertarian and republican party R.O.S.S.E.M, the 1991 national elections 'traumatized' the traditional parties, not to mention the left parties Agalev and PVDA. The sudden electoral success of VB clearly signaled a significant disapproval by a substantial part of the *Flamingant* and the Flemish voters of the position taken by the VU and of the way politics were run by the traditional parties. Election day lives on in the public memory as *Black Sunday* ('Zwarte Zondag') for more than one reason. Obviously the most important reason is the triumph of the radical right VB. Secondly, the election outcome meant the official end of the cabinet of Martens VIII and of the reign of the traditional parties' politics. The change caused the traditional parties to undertake two concrete actions. The *cordon sanitaire* ('cordon') that the traditional Flemish parties CVP, SP, PVV, VU and the green party had erected against the so-called fascist and undemocratic VB in 1989 was renewed and reinforced. (Schamp 2013) In this way the traditional parties and the ecologists were hoping to save their own strayed 'electoral souls'.⁸⁵ Thirdly, the mainstream parties understood that the time of thorough party-introspection had arrived. In that context, Swenden and Jans argued that at the time the consociational and anti-majoritarian devices that operated at the national (and sub-national) level might have functioned as significant institutional shock-absorbers. (2009:28)

After the 1991 elections the Flemish liberals were kept out of the government formation talks and were the first to reconsider their political project. As a result of that introspection the party's name was changed into Flemish Liberals and Democrats (*Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten* (VLD) – *Party of the Citizen*). Putting 'Flemish' in the party's name was in a way strategic. The CVP-led mirror cabinet led by Jean-Luc Dehaene of catholic and socialist ministers stayed in power. The first proposals of the government Dehaene I was to evaluate and transform the electoral system in such a way that reform would put an end to the seemingly unbridled multiplication of parties. Despite those intentions to recalibrate the national party system, more new political initiatives saw the light at the beginning of the 1990s. At the same time the VU disappeared further and further at the rear end of the national political scenery.⁸⁶

The fourth Belgian state reform of 1993 resulted in the regionalization of the legislative and governmental structure including the conception of a Flemish parliament, a Walloon parliament and a parliament of the Brussels Capital region. The regional parliaments were elected in 1995 for the first time. The institutional reform lead to a reduction of the number of seats in the federal the Chamber of Representatives from 212 to 150 seats and to a decrease of the number of electoral districts from 30 (since 1900) to 20 – but the operation resulted in a doubling of the total number of (regional and federal) parliamentary mandates in Belgium (from 212 to 438!)⁸⁷. The redistricting lead to a relatively modest expansion of the average district magnitude from 7,1 (since 1973) to 7,5. At the federal level Dehaene I was followed up by Dehaene II and all seemed well for the red-Roman cabinet of CVP/PSC and SP/PS.

⁸⁴ Cf. Van Houten (2004) in: Swenden, Jans 2009:27-28.

⁸⁵ VB officials like Filip Dewinter and Jurgen Ceder were at the time most renown for their anti-Belgian convictions and for the solution of the problem that foreigners in their eyes posed. The solution included a list of 70 *proposals* to send back –forcefully if needed- non-Flemings in order to protect the Flemish culture and identity. The plan was refined in 1996 but renounced by the party top because it had become irrelevant. (source: http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/70_puntenplan)

⁸⁶ Part of the explanation is in the great electoral losses (five seat in 1995, eight seats in 1999). The VU was not able to restore the successes of the first half of the 1970s.

⁸⁷ Including the 150 seats in the federal parliament, 124 seats in the Flemish regional parliament, 89 seats in the parliament of the Brussels' region, and 75 seats in the Walloon regional parliament.

However, the outbreak of the dioxin crisis in 1999 caused the fall of Dehaene II. After the elections later on the same year both the CVP and the PS booked a dramatic electoral loss. Not surprisingly the green parties booked an electoral success in the following federal elections. After all, environmental care, food safety, animal rights etcetera are among the issues and concerns that Flemish and Walloon ecologists stand for. As a result of their substantial electoral support both AGALEV (nine seats or 6,99% of the vote) and Ecolo (11 seats or 7,36% of the total vote) were invited to be part of the first ever purple-green federal government under the leadership of the already mentioned flamboyant Guy Verhofstadt. It was the first liberal lead cabinet since the government lead by Paul-Emile Janson (1937-1938) in between the two wars.

3.8 The fifth and the sixth Belgian state reform: electoral reform, the cartelization of party politics and the fight for the median voter

As a part of the fifth Belgian state reform the federal competences and powers were further regionalized. Recent changes of the electoral institutions and laws were included, like the reduction of the list vote by half of the weight (2001-2002)⁸⁸. This devolution of the list vote makes it easier for lower ranked candidates of a list to leapfrog a higher placed candidate. Secondly, the 20 arrondissement electoral districts were replaced by eleven (larger) *provincial districts*. This resulted in a significant increase of the average DM to 13,6.⁸⁹ And, thirdly, a five percent electoral threshold at the provincial level was installed for the election of the federal Chamber of Representatives (first application in 2003) and the regional parliaments.⁹⁰

Since the 2003 national elections parties present one candidate list per province. Hence, the score of that party list only will determine the outcome of the seat distribution (application of the system-D'Hondt) and the appointment of candidates. This way the system of list connection and subsequent apparenting at the provincial level (*cf. supra*) became obsolete and disappeared (though there was one exception⁹¹). Though the occurrence of larger districts would in fact trigger new political groups to attempt to win a seat in the parliamentary elections, the effect of the electoral threshold at the provincial level aimed to dissuade these new parties from participating in the electoral battle. The end result of the electoral reform in terms of the effect on the inter-party strategies and competition or on the overall fragmentation of the federal party landscape has therefore been *mixed*. Yet the electoral reform –including the new rules for (limiting) the funding of electoral campaigning⁹²– has brought about a new phenomenon to Belgian national politics: the phenomenon of making inter-party alliances and *cartelization*, i.e. political parties joining forces and presenting candidates of more than one party on one candidate list.

Other changes of the electoral rules for the federal parliamentary election were: firstly, the introduction of a 50/50 parity of female and male candidates (and followers) on each party list (thus also on incomplete lists⁹³), secondly, the elimination of the (federal-regional) double mandate⁹⁴ and, thirdly, the possibility to cast more than one vote for candidates and followers within one and the same list (= *multiple vote*). (Swyngedouw &

⁸⁸ Federale Voorlichtingsdienst, 'Nieuwe wetsinitiatieven inzake de verkiezingen (Kamer – Senaat) op zondag 18 mei 2003', versie 16 april 2003, p. 2. These electoral reforms were published in the *Belgisch Staatsblad* (BS) on January, 10th 2003.

⁸⁹ The distribution of seats over all provinces was based on the population number of each province (*cf.* the census of October, 1st 2001) (Royal Decree of 22 January 2003 (BS 1/02/2003)). The only two exceptions to the status quo of the number of seats are the absolute decrease from 7 to 6 seats in the province of Namur and the increase from 18 to 19 seats in the province of Henegouwen (Hainaut). The electoral district B-H-V was split in 2012.

⁹⁰ Law of 13 December 2002 changing the electoral Code and its annex and the law of 13 December 2002 changing the electoral legislation in several ways (BS 10/01/2003).

⁹¹ Until the 2010 national elections apparenting was possible in the constituency of Brussels-Halle – Vilvoorde (BHV) for party lists that were connected with lists of the constituency of Louvain (*kieskring Leuven*) in the province of Flemish Brabant or the constituency of Nivelles (*kieskring Nijvel*) in the province of Walloon Brabant. Since the split of the constituency of BHV (13 July 2012) and the creation of two new provincial electoral districts –Flemish Brabant and Walloon Brabant– list connection is no longer possible.

⁹² Law of 2 April 2003 introducing a new table with allowed maximum expenses per district per party and candidate. (Federale Voorlichtingsdienst, 'Nieuwe wetsinitiatieven inzake de verkiezingen (Kamer – Senaat) op zondag 18 mei 2003', versie 16 april 2003, p. 5) (BS 16/04/2003)

⁹³ Law of 18 July 2002 guaranteeing the equal representation of men and women on candidate lists (BD 28/08/2002). Complete lists of effective candidates contain maximally the number of seats to be filled in the provincial district (for instance 24 in Antwerp and four in Luxembourg). The maximum number of followers on each list is half of the number of effective candidates plus one, with a minimum of six (for instance 13 in Antwerp and six in Luxembourg). For a practical example of the 2010 elections: http://www.verkiezingen2010.belgium.be/nl/cha/preferred/preferred_top.html

⁹⁴ Since the 2003 elections candidates that are elected for both the Chamber and the Senate need to make a choice within three days after the election. The seat not-taken was filled by the first follower on the list.

Recent changes at the level of the national *party system* include the split in 2001 of the Volksunie (VU) in three separate groups of which the conservative right-wing New-Flemish Alliance (*Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie* (N-VA)) under the leadership of Geert Bourgeois and the social-progressive left-wing party Spirit⁹⁵ under the leadership of Geert Lambert were electorally speaking the most relevant and politically speaking also most viable successors of the VU. A third group of old-VU-members wanted to continue (*Doe voort!*) but eventually they were scattered all over the Flemish political landscape. In the same year the CVP was given another name, Christian-Democratic & Flemish (CD&V). Here too, the suffix 'Flemish' had a strategic meaning, aiming at winning back the Flemish-nationalist voter. One year later the Flemish socialist party renamed itself Social Progressive Alternative (*SP.anders* (SP.a)) and the Walloon PSC converted into *Centre démocrate Humaniste* (CdH).

After the 2003 federal elections, AGALEV changed its name into Groen! after losing all its parliamentary seats in the elections –a direct result of the electoral threshold that the green parties had voted for. The following year the liberal VLD changed its name into Open-VLD⁹⁶, SP.a and Spirit formed a (temporary) *kartel*, and N-VA and CD&V formed a (temporary) *kartel*. VB became *Vlaams Belang* after a juridical decree that the party could no longer use the original name *Vlaams Blok* due to anti-semitic and anti-democratic statements linked to the 'old VB'. The frequent name changes in the years 2001 to 2004⁹⁷ underlined another important trend in Belgian national politics, namely the *rejuvenation of politics*. A new generation of party leaders (for instance Guy Verhofstadt (Open VLD), Steve Stevaert (Sp.a), Joëlle Millequet (CdH), and Stefaan De Clercq (CD&V)) broke with the old-fashioned style of the so-called 'old crocodiles'.

In 2006 a new Flemish right-wing, liberal party *Lijst Dedecker* (LDD) was founded around its populist leader and former coach of the national judo team, Jean-Marie Dedecker. Dedecker was first banned out of the liberal party VLD in November 2004 after a neck-on-neck race for the presidential elections of the VLD and the many internal tensions the strongly polarized elections had caused, and later disavowed by the CD&V that was in *kartel* with N-VA, who's fresh elected president, Bart De Wever, decided to take Dedecker on board of the party. The Christian-democrat leader, Yves Leterme, however saw no space for Dedecker in the *kartel* and he broke up the alliance with N-VA. After Dedecker had been dumped for the second time in one year CD&V and N-VA reestablished their Flemish center-right alliance. Strengthened by the surprisingly large support received for the VLD's president's elections, Dedecker decided to participate in the June 2007 elections with his own party, LDD. At the 2007 federal elections the newcomer received an remarkable 6,5% of the total vote (i.e. five of the 150 seats)⁹⁸. Though capable of stealing in parts of the VB electorate, LDD –a party showing characteristics of the business firm party, the *kartel* party, and the 'old' cadre party (cf. Put 2012:20)- has not been capable to consolidate its organization and its electoral score. After the 2010 defeat (only one seat at the moment), LDD was renamed in 2011 (*Liberaal, Direct & Democratisch*). Contrary to N-VA, the 2012 local elections did not render the party the required local network of communal representatives in an attempt to consolidate the party.⁹⁹

Not to mention the many leadership changes, the intra-party fights, the party splits of the past two decades, how does theory explain this long list of party system dynamics and party changes taking place in less than one decade? Regarding the collaboration between parties and the kartellization process, Peter Mair, who studied *cross-party friendliness* (1990:140) based on prior positive inter-party collaborations for instance at the local or the European level, attempted to explain the reasons why initially competitive parties at specific points in time would actually bundle their forces and present themselves to the electorate as one *kartel*-list, for instance for elections at the regional or the federal level. In Flanders such *kartels* –not mergers- were quite successful at the short term and proved positive for most of the parties involved (e.g. CD&V-N-VA, Sp.a-Spirit, Open-VLD-Vivant). However, when programmatic issues popped-up it became all too clear that *kartels*

⁹⁵ Meaning 'Sociaal Progressief Internationaal Regionalistisch Integraal-democratisch en Toekomstgericht' or else the Future Group (*Toekomstgroep*). In 2008 Spirit changed its name to *Vlaams-Progressieven* (Vl.Pro) and in 2009 once more to SLP (*Sociaal-Liberale Partij*). By the end of 2009 the left-liberals of SLP joined up with the Flemish ecologist party Groen!.

⁹⁶ This name change was linked to the incorporation of the *Liberaal Appél* into the VLD. For the 2006 regional elections Open VLD formed a *kartel* with the right-libertarian party Vivant (that received 2,1% of the vote in the 1999 federal elections, and 1,3% of the vote at the 2003 federal elections).

⁹⁷ Blomme et al. 2008:20.

⁹⁸ LDD also won one seat in the Senate.

⁹⁹ Cf. De Vadder, I. (2013). Wie maakte de N-VA groot?, Opiniestuk, www.deredactie.be, 21/03/2013.

were built on quick sand and it became all too clear too soon that these virtual partnerships could not stand the intra-*kartel* frictions for a long time.

Since the 2003 elections, the *kartels* had split one after the other after one or two elections. N-VA being the exception to the rule¹⁰⁰, the broad outcome of the kartellization has been the significant electoral loss of the traditional parties (CD&V, Sp.a and Open-VLD) and the acquisition of other parties (like Spirit or Vivant) by parties like Groen! and Open-VLD, because the acquired parties were not capable of jumping the electoral threshold in none of the electoral districts on their own strength. The recent *kartel* experiment in Belgian politics seems to confirm Mair's empirical findings about the electoral gain and loss following either a merger or a diffusion of parties (1990:135)¹⁰¹: the *kartel* formula appeared useful at the short term but proved disastrous in most cases when the intended collaboration breaks down.

3.9 A democratic equilibrium and the optimal representation of party ideologies

According to Matagne and Verjans (2012:87) looking at the election results in a longitudinal way enables one to spot more general trends as well as the more detailed 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 the last quarter of the 19th century the graph plotting the electoral positions of the respective parties in the Belgium party system adds in many ways to the evidence supporting Grumm's proclaimed progression towards a relative electoral equilibrium. At the one hand the three classic or traditional ideologies or *party families* (the Catholics, the liberals and the socialists) have grown to rather similar levels of representation... but only from the mid-1960s onwards. On the other hand, apart from one exception (N-VA after the 2010 elections), the non-traditional regionalist, green, extreme-right and left parties have not grown much over time and are in general still considerably smaller than the traditional parties, both in terms of electoral support as in terms of parliamentary representation. More to it, the traditional parties have a strong local base which is certainly reflecting a share of the electoral support experienced by those parties at other electoral levels as well, in casu the federal level. At the eve of the October 2012 local and provincial elections N-VA was largely missing such a local stronghold but the party lived up to the general expectation and anchored itself successfully. Since N-VA successfully established a dominant politically relevant representation at the local and provincial level, in theory a second growth spurt of N-VA with the 2014 national elections is to be expected.

To summarize Belgium's political and electoral history in one paragraph: Belgium has experienced several cleavage-based conflicts such as 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) Still, since the late 1960s Belgium has suffered at least two important political changes of a rather revolutionary type. Firstly, the parties themselves have traded their stable national electoral bases for a number of regionalized volatile electoral subgroups. In fact, the absence of one national or federal electoral district allowing the election of a certain number of seats in a higher tier (cf. *two-tier districting*), has made Belgium the sum of *two singular regionalized representative democracies*, barely united at the federal level.¹⁰² As a result the country has traded its largely uncomplicated ideology-based, polarized and *pillarized* party system for a complex multitude of medium-sized and smaller regionalized parties with different political agendas, different (elite) styles, different organizations, different networks or societal embedding (multi-partism) and so on. 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' ideologies of the three traditional party families, called partisan de-alignment or

¹⁰⁰ Having left the *kartel* with CD&V in the autumn of 2008, the Flemish N-VA since 2004 lead by Bart De Wever came out as the winner of the 2010 federal elections, with 17,4% of the popular vote. More to it, N-VA became the largest political faction in the federal parliament with 27 of the 150 seats (18% of the seat share). Together with VB (12 seats) the Flemish family of regionalists hold 26% of the seats and has become as big as the socialist family (SP.a holds 13 seats and the PS 26 seats). The Christian-democratic and liberal blocs are somewhat equally represented (17-20% of the seats) and the ecologist or green faction has about 10% of the seats. (cf. Annex 3: overview of the factional representation in the Belgian federal parliament)

¹⁰¹ "More precisely, even though the numbers of gainers and losers in each group more or less balances out, it is clear that when merged parties lose they tend to lose more than when splintered parties lose, (...) And when merged parties gain they tend to gain less than when splintered parties gain (...). It is in this sense that fission tends to prove more profitable than fusion." (Mair 1990:135)

¹⁰² In fact next to the Flemish and Walloon regional parliamentary democracies there is the bilingual democracy of the Brussels capital region where the electorate can vote for Flemish or Walloon lists and candidates.

detachment. Both factors have led to the electoral devolution of the traditional state-parties and the incumbency of several peripheral parties that are 'by definition' geographically concentrated. (Alonso 2012:52) Secondly, as in most other European countries, because of the progressive depillarization and partisan de-alignment, because of the personalization of individual politicians by more independent media and the personification of politics shown not only in the ways in which parties select their candidates but also in the reduction of the weight of the list vote (in 2002), and because of the increasing unpredictability of elections, *all* political parties are said to be in decline.

Since the introduction of the PC forty years ago and of the internet twenty years ago technological innovations and the media have changed the ways in which people communicate in general and of the way people do politics in particular. Media have become more open and therefore less docile to one or the other ideology or party. Live streaming from inside the parliament, instant messaging via Twitter, Facebook and through other social network sites has increased the political understanding and insight. However, the downside of the informatization of politics is that (personal) visibility (who gets air play?) and accountability (who done it?) of the political personnel have replaced tradition as the main driver to vote for a party (or its central ideology) or to decide to become a member of that party. In a way voters have become potential stakeholders of each and every party. The process of mediatization –again reinforcing the personification of politics- has supported higher degrees of de-alignment, partisan detachment and volatile voter behavior. (Devos et al. 2009:15-20) The end result of this evolution has been a clear diversification in political and voter preferences, symbolized by *the volatile voter* or the party-less voter.¹⁰³ In many cases electoral volatility and party de-alignment leads to radicalization and the re-politicization of initially loosely connected opinions. In the case of Belgium, next to the societal and technological evolution there is the specific historical and institutional evolution: 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. The result of this was the regionalization of the state-based or nationwide parties into a Flemish and a Walloon party (1968-1978), the communautarization of political agendas, and the strong revival of the nationalistic and regional sentiments. These factors combined have spurred a new phase in the complicating of the already highly fractionalized Belgian political and party system, i.e. an inflation of the number of (regional) electoral and parliamentary parties each one of them aiming to answer one or the other timely desire or fancy want (ibid.:20-21). Since the democratization of the parliamentary elections in the late 1800s, "[the] North and South of the country returned quite different results" and "(...)the two parts of the country still display significantly different electoral behavior." (Deschouwer, Van Parijs 2009:9)

Even though the question arises what the representative function of parties anno 2012 exactly is and though the critique on the value of P.R.-based representative democracy, it is generally accepted that "democracy is unthinkable without political parties"¹⁰⁴ or that "popular democracy fails when parties fail". (Mair 2006:10; Devos et al. 2009:15) More to it, in the case of Belgium at least (but in many other countries as well) the party system that is supposedly in crisis has produced several new political parties (the so-called *New Politics* parties) both at the left and at the right end of the ideological spectrum and with mixed success. Therefore, we tend to agree that "[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 shriveled. (ibid.:561)

4 Conclusion

In this article we presented a historic account of the election results for the national legislative in Belgium. A descriptive statistical analysis of long-term time series of representation and proportionality, i.e. analyzing trends of the vote share versus seat share data, the number of electoral and parliamentary parties, and the representativeness of the parliamentary democracy. In this paper the relationship between the Belgian electoral system and the party system was studied based on the nationally aggregated election outcomes of parties and party families and factions in the Chamber of Representatives (1900-2010). We studied the historic development of the size of the national parliament, the number and size of the electoral districts, the number

¹⁰³ Cf. Russell Dalton in 'Wie wil er nu nog een partijkaart?', Knack, 15 augustus 2012, p. 47.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Elmer Eric Schattschneider's view on the position and relevance of parties dating from the early 1940s, namely that: "[political] parties created democracy and that modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of parties." (1942:1) However, Schattschneider had American parties in mind, not European and as Andeweg clarifies it is perfectly arguable that political parties on the European mainland are a different breed, because they share a different origin (cf. social cleavages and the dominance of the mass party as central organizing principle) than American parties.

of electoral and electoral strength of the parliamentary parties (i.e. the complexity of the party system and the inter-party competition). In this part we have done so in a historically descriptive way describing the context of electoral reforms such as the democratization of the suffrage, measures affecting the proportional representation and so on. The contextualization allowed for insight in the nature of the inter-party competition in certain time periods, the electoral party strategies, or time effects. In the next part we will look at the association of the drivers of the subsequent electoral reforms and the changes of the national party system.

Summarizing Belgium's party system evolution, the above graphs show that apart from the exceptional pre-WWII election years 1936 and 1939, the period between the introduction of the general male suffrage and the early 1960s was a period of *electoral consolidation*, with relative low levels of party system fractionalization in terms of electoral and parliamentary parties. The big shake-up of the Belgian party system clearly came with the 1965 national elections, the outcome of which was in fact the prologue of the institutional and constitutional problems surrounding the first state reform (1970). Since then the Belgian national and subsequently *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. Parties nowadays are evaluated by the electorate in a more insightful and intuitive way than half a century ago. The perception of party strength is no longer related to the number of party members, party activists, controlled media but on the falling in line of the voters' personal beliefs or preferences, media coverage (of party members and political personnel), strong leadership in the party's policy formation and on personal accountability of politicians. Because of the changing structure, nature and face of Belgian politics inter- and intraparty competition have risen – certainly at the federal level where basically two different communities delegate representatives in one (national) parliament, based on the choice to belong to the Dutch-speaking or French-speaking language group which each representative has to make when sworn in¹⁰⁵. It is this choice between the Dutch or the French language groups to be made by any candidate of a Flemish or a Walloon party before the elections as well as after the elections in the case of a representative elected in the electoral district B-H-V that since 1970 determined the actual number of representatives of each region (Flanders, Wallonia or Brussels capital region)¹⁰⁶. This way the neat separation between the language groups is guaranteed and as a consequence not a single politician formally represents voters outside of his or her language group. (Deschouwer, Van Parijs 2009:11)

In 2010 the largest party in the Belgian federal parliament (N-VA) obtained 18% of the 150 seats. Today there are twelve parties represented at that level. That is 20% more parties compared to the previous federal election of 2007. Huge doses of so-called political craftsmanship, willingness and courage were needed to bring about a government accord (with eight parties involved) and to establish a federal government (with six parties involved) after 541 days of 'formation talks' –a world record at that time.¹⁰⁷ In neither bringing about the government accord nor the federal government itself N-VA had been involved. Because N-VA is a coalition partner of the socialist and Christian-democratic parties at the regional Flemish level, the both governments are politically incongruent. At the other side of the language border the Walloon government is a coalition of socialist, Christian democrat and ecologists and incongruent too with the federal government. The government of the region of Brussels (i.e. a coalition between the Walloon socialist party, the Flemish liberal party, the Christian-democratic parties and the ecologist parties) too is largely incongruent with the composition of the federal government (i.e. what is called a classic tri-partite of both Flemish and Walloon catholic, socialist and liberal parties). Such federal-regional coalition incongruence sharpens political asymmetries caused by a bipolar Flanders-Walloon constellation. (Swenden, Jans 2009:20-22) More to it, the federal government today is not backed by a majority of the Flemish voters and the prime minister is Walloon –notwithstanding the fact that the party leader of N-VA received 600 thousand preference votes in the 2010 elections. Because of the perception of a certain degree of denial of the Flemish majority at the federal level, the problem of Belgium seems to be foremost its democratic institution. In relation to the representation of the political factions, it looks like the effect of the electoral threshold of 5% (2002) has already gone. Highly fractionalized party systems do not tend to defractionalize easily (cf. '*it is difficult to send the rascals packing*' (Pinto-Duschinsky

¹⁰⁵ In fact for Flemish and Walloon representatives that language group membership "(...)is defined by the territory in which the members of parliament have been elected. (...) For MPs elected in the central B-H-V district the language in which they take their oath defines the group to which they belong." (Deschouwer, Van Parijs 2009:10)

¹⁰⁶ For an overview of the number of representatives per region in the national parliament in the period 1946-2003 see Alonso 2012:125. Since 1995 there are 53% Flemish speakers, 32% French-speakers and +-15% representatives from the bilingual Brussels capital region.

¹⁰⁷ <http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/Search.aspx?q=Longest+time+without+a+government+in+peacetime#>

(1999) in Farrell 2001:197). Together with Richard Katz we wonder whether or not the next electoral reform will cope with the question of “who we are [as a nation], where we are [as a democracy] and where we want to go [as a state]”. (1997:308, [...] added by the author)¹⁰⁸

Like all five previous reforms the ongoing sixth state reform (2011-2012) has not been successful in decommunautarizing Belgian politics and could mean the bridge too far for consociation-based politics. Most likely politicians will continue to do what they have done since the first state reform in 1970: finding short-term solutions for long-term problems. In order to further adjust the political system to the reality of the two-democracies based federal party system it seems logic to make more small incremental changes in the electoral system. Whether this means the introduction of more hurdles (like the increase of the five percent electoral threshold (to ten percent?), the further devolution of the list vote (to one third of the total number of valid casted list votes?), the complete abolishment of the apparentement system (in all provinces), or the introduction of a federal electoral district (for at least 10% of the parliamentary seats?) and so on), however, is yet to be seen. The alternative route towards the de-federation of Belgium is more certain as the support for the idea has gained wide support in Flanders since 2007 and actually sustain the hypothesis of a country comprising two democracies. (Pilet, J.-B. 2012b:44)

In the next parts of this article series, we will discuss a handful of aspects of the historical study of the Belgian electoral and party system change more in detail. First of all, in the next part, we will concentrate on the relevance of the statistical and historiographic approach of this line of research. Also a set of intuitive but central assumptions regarding electoral reform, social movement and party system dynamics will be developed. These theoretic statements will be used to further analyze the association between the process of democratization of the electoral system and the development of the party system in Belgium. In another part we will look at the impact of the discerned electoral reforms, proportionality of the representation, electoral volatility on the party system organization. In the last part we look at the issue whether or not this approach helps us to understand the current political instability. At the end of the last part of this article series the authors make suggestions to take this research further.

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¹⁰⁸ Though there is a constitutional vacuum regarding a split or a *dismembratio* of the country, this does not mean that parties don't have a post-Belgium strategy. Some actually do, like the Flemish Vlaams Belang and N-VA or the francophone Wallonie d'abord. Others, like the minister-president of the German Community, Karl-Heinz Lambertz, dream of a separate German region having the same autonomy and executing similar powers as the Flemish and the Walloon regions. (Knack 15/09/2011:11)

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APPENDIX : Aggregated electoral strength of the traditional, modern and mainstream post-modern party ideologies and their representation in the national legislative elections (seat share, in percentage)

<i>Election year</i>	<i>Catholic faction</i>	<i>Liberal faction</i>	<i>Socialist faction</i>	<i>Regionalist (nationalist) faction*</i>	<i>Green faction</i>	<i>Extreme left faction</i>
1847	50,00	50,00				
1848	23,15	76,85				
1850	36,11	63,89				
1852	47,22	52,78				
1854	50,00	50,00				
1856	53,85	46,15				
1857	35,19	64,81				
1859	40,52	59,48				
1861	43,10	56,90				
1863	49,14	50,86				
1864	44,83	55,17				
1866	42,62	57,38				
1868	40,98	59,02				
1870 I	50,00	50,00				
1870 II	58,06	41,94				
1872	57,26	42,74				
1874	54,84	45,16				
1878	45,45	54,55				
1882	42,75	57,25				
1886	71,01	28,99				
1890	68,12	31,88				
1892	60,53	39,47				
1894	67,11	11,18	17,76			
1898	73,68	8,55	17,76			0,66
1900	56,58	22,37	20,39			1,32
1904	56,63	25,30	17,47			0,00
1908	47,56	21,95	15,24	0,00		0,00
1910	51,19	21,43	14,88			0,00
1912	54,30	11,29	9,68			
1914	46,59	22,73	29,55			
1919	37,63	18,28	37,63	2,69		0,00
1921	37,63	17,74	36,56	2,15		
1925	43,88	11,73	40,31	3,06		1,02
1929	39,23	15,47	38,67	6,08		0,55
1932	42,25	12,83	39,04	4,28		1,60
1936	30,20	11,39	34,65	7,92		4,46
1939	33,17	16,34	31,68	8,42		4,46
1946	45,54	7,92	32,67			11,39
1949	49,53	13,68	31,13	0,00		5,66
1950	50,94	9,43	34,43			3,30
1954	44,81	11,32	38,68	0,00		1,89
1958	49,06	9,43	37,74	0,47		0,94
1961	45,28	9,43	39,62	2,36		2,36
1965	36,32	22,64	30,19	7,08		2,83
1968	32,55	22,17	27,83	15,09		2,36
1971	25,94	14,15	26,89	21,23		4,25
1974	33,96	14,15	27,83	22,17		0,94
1977	37,74	15,57	28,77	16,51	0,00	0,94
1978	38,68	17,45	27,36	14,15	0,00	1,89
1981	28,77	24,53	28,77	13,68	1,89	0,94
1985	32,55	21,70	31,60	9,43	4,25	0,00
1987	29,25	22,64	33,96	9,91	4,25	0,00
1991	26,89	21,70	29,72	12,26	8,02	0,00
1995	27,33	26,00	27,33	12,00	7,33	0,00
1999	21,33	27,33	22,00	16,00	13,33	0,00
2003	19,33	32,67	32,00	13,33	2,67	0,00
2007	26,67	27,33	22,67	12,00	8,00	0,00
2010	17,33	20,67	26,00	26,00	8,67	0,00

Note: missing values indicate that the party/-ies did not participate in the election. Zero (0,00) percentages indicate the party has a relevant electoral based but did not win a seat in the respective election. Green shades indicate the largest of the five traditional and modern party families.

*Except for the thirty years in between 1965 and 1995 the parliamentary representation of the regionalist faction was prior to 1965 for 100% and after 1995 for at least 90% determined by the Flemish nationalist parties (*Frontpartij*, KVVN, VNV, VU, VB, N-VA) and for the remainder by the francophone regionalist parties (FDF, RW and FN). Cursive numbers: The golden age of the Walloon regionalism is the era between 1968 and 1981 when seat shares varied between 3,77% (1981, eight seats) and 11,79% (1971, 25 seats).