

Parliamentary party group leaders (PPG leaders) are crucial actors in parliament. As managers of parties' legislative branches, they contribute to systems' political stability, parliaments' decisional efficiency and parties' collective accountability to the electorate. Still, research on PPG leaders is scarce and narrowly focuses on their part in enforcing discipline. Drawing on neo-institutional parliamentary role theory and using data from 68 in-depth elite interviews, this doctoral dissertation examines (1) how PPG leaders in Belgium conceive of their roles in parliament and (2) which factors explain role variance. It carefully maps out the wide array of tasks PPG leaders in the Chamber of Representatives and Flemish parliament fulfil and shows that, due to diverging party-level expectations and personal incentives, PPG leaders fill in their positions differently, which could have repercussions on the internal functioning of PPGs and on the behaviour of its members. Besides making both theoretical and methodological contributions, this study provides important empirical insights into an underexposed aspect of legislative organisation and enables the reader to take a unique glance behind the closed doors of PPGs and their daily political management.

## Between Party and Parliament



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### The Roles of Parliamentary Party Group Leaders in Partitocratic Belgium

Benjamin de Vet



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# **BETWEEN PARTY AND PARLIAMENT**

THE ROLES OF PARLIAMENTARY PARTY GROUP LEADERS  
IN 'PARTITOCRATIC' BELGIUM

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## **Between Party And Parliament**

The Roles of Parliamentary Party Group  
Leaders in Partitocratic Belgium

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I promise that I will finally get my driver's license now.





# Abstract

Parliamentary party group leaders (PPG leaders) are pivotal players in parliament. They manage parties' legislative branches, coordinate backbenchers' specialized activities and ensure group unity. Likewise, they promote political stability, decisional efficiency and parties' collective accountability to the electorate. Still, research on PPG leaders is scarce and tends to narrowly focus on their part in enforcing discipline. Drawing on parliamentary role theory and using data from 68 in-depth elite interviews, this dissertation takes a broader, in-depth approach. It examines (1) how PPG leaders personally conceive of their roles in parliament and (2) which factors explain role variance. While neo-institutionalist approaches stress that MPs' role orientations are shaped by both institutional norms and individual preferences, they deterministically treat the roles of frontbenchers as institutionally-prescribed 'position roles' that leave limited room for role choice. This thesis advances a more actor-centered approach by arguing that, due to diverging party-level pressures and personal goals, PPG leaders might adopt different roles, which could have repercussions on the internal functioning of PPGs and on the behaviour of its members.

After showing that a deductive, international-comparative approach produces unsatisfactory results (*Chapter 4*), the roles of PPG leaders are explored using an inductive, single-country research design. We focus on Belgium, where the expected autonomy of PPG leaders in defining their role is low due to the 'partitocratic' nature of policy-making and because of PPG leaders' comparatively weak intra-party position as intermediates between the PPG and the central party elite. Where quantitative analyses of population data already reveal party-level differences in terms of PPG leaders' political profile (*Chapter 5*), the qualitative findings show that, even in a country where their autonomy is limited, considerable role variance can be discerned (*Chapter 6*). We discuss how differences between PPG leaders are structured along two dimensions (i.e. an internal vs. an external focus, and top-down vs. bottom-up intra-party liaison) and inductively reconstruct five PPG leader role types. While informal role expectations (of MPs, party leaders) indeed appear central drivers of PPG leaders' roles (*Chapter 7*), they cannot explain the full array of role variance. The explanatory analysis using multi-value Qualitative Comparative Analysis (mvQCA) confirms that besides contextual factors such as parties' government status, size and electoral performance also individual factors such as experience and career ambitions matter (*Chapter 8*).

As such, this study provides important empirical insights into an underexposed aspect of legislative organisation and contributes methodologically by innovatively demonstrating how QCA can be used to study the complex interactions of institutional and individual factors that explain legislators' roles. It moreover makes a strong theoretical case that also among frontbenchers preference-driven role variance is possible, which should inspire more research on the roles of these influential actors and their impact on parliamentary activity.



## Samenvatting (Dutch)

Fractieleden zijn cruciale actoren in hedendaagse parlementen. Ze besturen de politieke fracties, coördineren de activiteiten van backbenchers en bewaren fractie-eenheid. Ze zorgen zo voor politieke stabiliteit, efficiëntere besluitvorming en duidelijkheid bij de kiezer. Desondanks is onderzoek naar fractieleden schaars en focust het doorgaans uitsluitend op hun aandeel in het afdwingen van discipline. Deze bredere studie onderzoekt (1) hoe fractieleden hun rol percipiëren in het parlement en (2) welke factoren rolvariatie kunnen verklaren. Het baseert zich op 68 elite-interviews en gebruikt de literatuur rond parlementaire rollen als theoretisch kader. Hoewel nieuw-institutionele perspectieven benadrukken dat de parlementaire rollen worden beïnvloed door institutionele normen en individuele motivaties, conceptualiseren ze de rollen van frontbenchers als institutioneel-gekrystaliseerde ‘positierollen’ die nauwelijks ruimte laten voor persoonlijke invulling. Deze thesis argumenteert echter dat, omwille van uiteenlopende factoren op zowel partij- als op individueel niveau, ook fractieleden verschillende rollen kunnen opnemen, wat een impact kan hebben op de interne organisatie van fracties en op het gedrag van haar leden.

Nadat blijkt dat een deductieve, internationaal-vergelijkende aanpak minder geschikt is (*Hoofdstuk 4*), worden de roloriëntaties van fractieleden onderzocht aan de hand van een inductieve, landen-specifieke casestudie. De focus ligt op België, waar de verwachte autonomie van fractieleden in het definiëren van hun eigen rol klein is door de ‘particratische’ aard van besluitvorming en de zwakke interne partijpositie van fractieleden in internationaal opzicht. Waar kwantitatieve analyses van populatiegegevens al verschillen op partijniveau blootleggen in het politiek profiel van fractieleden (*Hoofdstuk 5*), bevestigen de kwalitatieve analyses dat, zelfs in een land waar hun autonomie beperkt is, aanzienlijke rolvariatie plaatsvindt. We bespreken hoe verschillen tussen fractieleden langs twee bredere dimensies verlopen (i.e. een interne vs. een externe focus, en top-down vs. bottom-up intrapartijliaison) en reconstrueren vijf roltypen (*Hoofdstuk 6*). Hoewel informele rolverwachtingen (van parlementsleden, partijleiders) inderdaad cruciale drijfveren blijken (*Hoofdstuk 7*), verklaren ze niet het volledige spectrum aan roloriëntaties. De verklarende analyses met *multi-value Qualitative Comparative Analysis* (mvQCA) bevestigen dat naast contextuele factoren zoals regeringsdeelname, fractiegrootte en recente verkiezingsuitslagen ook individuele factoren zoals ervaring en carrièreambities cruciaal zijn (*Hoofdstuk 8*).

Deze studie biedt belangrijke inzichten in een onderbelicht aspect van parlementaire organisatie en maakt een innovatieve, methodologische bijdrage door aan te tonen hoe QCA uiterst geschikt is om de interactie tussen institutionele en individuele factoren als determinanten van roloriëntaties te analyseren. De thesis draagt ook theoretisch bij door te bewijzen dat ook onder frontbenchers rolvariatie mogelijk is, wat moet leiden tot meer onderzoek naar de rol van deze actoren en hun impact op parlementaire werkzaamheden.



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## **PART I**

### **GENERAL INTRODUCTION**

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# Introduction

## 1. The parliamentary party group leader

In 1980, Herman De Croo, a long-serving Belgian legislator and political statesman, observed that the leaders of the parliamentary party groups (PPGs) were progressively gaining importance in the daily organization of the Belgian Chamber of Representatives. Some years before, in 1962, the Chamber had thoroughly revised its standing orders, with the primary purpose of enhancing procedural efficiency on the floor. Most prominently, the reform officially recognized the existence of the PPGs and placed them at the heart of parliamentary business. It formally shifted the procedural focus away from the personal prerogatives of individual members of parliament (MPs), towards the partisan collectivity to which they belong. As legislators' work became increasingly channelled and streamlined through PPGs in the years after, De Croo (1980) remarked that also their formally-appointed chairpersons steadily became parliamentary protagonists. They not only played an increasingly important role in internally coordinating PPG members' activities (e.g. dividing speaking time, allocating committee seats) but also in externally representing the PPG in parliament's leading bodies, in plenary debates and towards extra-parliamentary party branches. Almost four decades later, not much appears to have changed. Political parties, rather than the individual legislator, remain the pivots of parliamentary work. Illustrative of this are the very few dissonant sounds arising from within party groups and the frequently appearing testimonies of (former) MPs underscoring the limited autonomy of individual representatives and stressing the predominance of party elites in parliamentary policy-making.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For recent examples, see: Knockaert, D. & Plets, G. (2019). 'Eerst word je op het matje geroepen, later word je genegeerd'. *De Standaard*, 2 February, p. 10. Or: Vuye, H. & Wouters, V. (2019, 19 March). We hebben de mond vol van de scheiding der machten, maar ons politiek systeem beantwoordt niet aan die logica. *Knack*, 19 March, retrieved from <https://www.knack.be>.



What has been sketched above is of course not unique to the Belgian case. Across the globe, parliamentary democracy and party politics have become intimately intertwined (Deschouwer & Depauw, 2014; Katz, 1987; Mair, 2008; Müller & Narud, 2013). The party groups in parliament, consisting of MPs that were elected under the same party label, are now central building blocks of legislative organization. Simultaneously their leaders have become crucial political players (Heidar & Koole, 2000c; Saalfeld & Strøm, 2014).

PPG leaders bear a number of basic responsibilities that are essential for the day-to-day organization of contemporary parliaments. Although cross-national differences in terms of their formal intra-party authority can be observed (de Vet & Wauters, 2018; Pilet & Cross, 2014), they typically ensure PPGs' smooth internal functioning by outlining the division of labour among group members, overseeing their specialized activities and defusing personal frictions between MPs. They coordinate intra-party deliberation and lead internal discussions on policy proposals, salient matters and party strategies (Heidar & Koole, 2000b). Beyond the closed doors of the PPG meeting, PPG leaders take the floor on behalf of the party when crucial bills or topical debates are tabled, and they bargain with other parliamentary (party) leaders over the agenda, procedural matters or specific policies, both during formal board meetings or during the many informal talks in the corridors of parliament.

Perhaps most importantly, PPG leaders' reputations hinge upon their capacity to foster political unity among group members (Bailer, Schulz, & Selb, 2009, p. 356; Laver, 1999, p. 12). Party unity, i.e. when PPG members act in perfect concert (Sieberer, 2006; Van Vonn et al., 2014), is often seen as an important precondition for effective government performance and stability, especially in fragmented, parliamentary systems with complex, multiparty coalitions (De Winter & Dumont, 2006; Laver, 1999; Laver & Shepsle, 1999). Legislators, however, are goal-seeking individuals that might have diverging policy preferences or might be rationally driven by the interests of multiple and potentially competing principals<sup>2</sup> (Carey, 2007). Parties subsequently appoint leaders who are given the critical task of monitoring the behaviour of individual group members' and ensuring that they contribute to the party's collective interest (Cox & McCubbins, 1993; Kam, 2009). Doing so, PPG leaders reduce transaction costs in legislative bargaining and resolve the so-called 'collective action problems' that arise when

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<sup>2</sup> Such as their constituency, personal voters, party elites...

the individualistic goal-seeking behaviour of legislators leads to outcomes that are collectively undesirable.<sup>3</sup> Although it could be argued that their hierarchically-imposed instructions undermine the representative relationship between voters (as the ultimate democratic *principals*) and legislators (as their *agents*), others would contend that the interference of PPG leaders is functional from a representative-democratic perspective (Heidar, 2013; Heidar & Koole, 2000a, pp. 4-5). By ensuring that elected representatives loyally execute the party policies and electoral pledges for which they were mandated by the electorate, PPG leaders enable 'responsible party government' (Mair, 2008; Thomassen, 1994). Through unified action in the legislature, they bring the transparency and clarity needed to hold political parties electorally accountable for their collective deeds and realizations (Aldrich, 1995; Heidar, 2013; Saalfeld & Strøm, 2014; Strøm & Müller, 2009).

Despite PPG leaders' sheer ubiquity and their general importance, empirical knowledge on these influential actors remains surprisingly limited. Whereas legislative party leadership has received some scholarly attention in the context of the United States' Congress (see: Strahan, 2011), research is especially scarce in Europe, where the ascendancy of parties in the legislature is paradoxically much greater (Katz & Kolodny, 1994). The few studies that do exist furthermore tend to focus exclusively on PPG leaders' use of disciplinary instruments (e.g. the deprivation of speaking time, favourable prospects for re-(s)election or interesting committee seats) as a means to sanction uncooperative MPs and invoke party unity when preference homogeneity or voluntary loyalty are inconclusive (Bailer, 2017; Bailer et al., 2009; Kam, 2009; Van Vonn et al., 2014). Not only do these studies thus focus on a very small segment of PPG leaders' overall duties responsibilities in parliament, whilst neglecting many others (e.g. managing the PPG's daily organization, liaising with the extra-parliamentary party or other parties). By mostly drawing on economic, rational choice-based conceptualisations of legislative behaviour<sup>4</sup>, they also use simplifying assumptions of political reality which might generate too parsimonious accounts of how PPG leaders manage their PPG in the wake of preference heterogeneity (Saalfeld & Strøm, 2014).

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, when all group members would exclusively allocate parliamentary resources (speaking time, initiative rights) to defend the parochial interests of their specific personal constituency (out of vote-seeking incentives), common policy-making would become difficult.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. with the risk of disciplinary sanctions as a 'cost' (rational-thinking) MPs should consider when breaching group unity.

As such, many unanswered questions still remain. How do PPG leaders organize their daily activities as internal managers and external PPG representatives? What do PPG leaders personally see as their central responsibilities? How do they influence the activities of legislators? Do some PPG leaders fill in their position differently than others? What skills or characteristics do party selectorates look for and explain why some legislators are appointed as PPG leader, whilst others are not?

All these questions, which will be addressed in this doctoral thesis, call for a broader, in-depth study of PPG leaders' daily functioning in parliament. Using a qualitative, single-country research design, and drawing on parliamentary role literature, which concerns itself precisely with how parliamentary actors fill in their position and why they do so in a specific manner, this empirical study aims to tackle two central research questions. First of all, *how do PPG leaders (in Belgium) personally conceive of their roles in the legislature (RQ1)?* We will explore how PPG leaders fill in their institutional position and examine what they themselves see as their most important responsibilities and duties. We will describe which role expectations other political actors (MPs, central party leaders) hold towards PPG leaders' functioning and try to identify whether and in what specific ways differences in terms of PPG leaders' personal priorities and roles can be discerned. Whereas the first broad research question relates to the purely descriptive-explorative aim of the thesis to gain insights into PPG leadership as an understudied political position, the second one is more explanatory in nature: *how can we explain the (potentially diverging) role expectations of PPG leaders? (RQ2).* Congruent with contemporary views of MPs' roles' determinants (see below), here we examine the influence of *contextual (party-level) factors* and informal expectations. Are PPG leaders that belong to majority parties expected to take up different roles than opposition PPG leaders, for instance (and do they do so)? What is the impact of PPG size? In addition, we look at the impact of *individual-level preferences* and goals: how and to what extent do individual progressive career ambitions, for instance, affect PPG leaders' roles?

## **2. Research approach**

### **2.1. PPG leaders' roles in parliament**

This thesis uses the literature on parliamentary roles as its central theoretical and analytical framework. Grounded in sociology, roles connect individuals to a

particular position within a specific social context (in this case legislatures) and to the norms of conduct that are associated with them (Andeweg, 2014; Biddle, 1986). They are the ‘comprehensive patterns of attitudes and/or behaviour shared by MPs’ (Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012, p. 8) that reflect ‘an individual’s perception of what is generally expected of her as a holder of her current institutional position’ (Andeweg, 2012, p. 66). Ever since their emergence in the mid-1990s, widely-acclaimed neo-institutionalist perspectives such as Donald Searing’s *motivational approach* (1994) and Kaare Strøm’s *strategic approach* (1997) have become dominant in the field. Notwithstanding distinct differences between them, these neo-institutionalist approaches commonly stress that the roles of legislators are shaped by a complex interplay of institutional constraints (i.e. formal and informal norms that prescribe how a role player should act) and personal preferences and goals. Simultaneously, however, they differentiate between ‘preference roles’ on the one hand, and ‘position roles’ on the other (Searing, 1994, pp. 12-13; Strøm, 1997, p. 156). The former are associated to backbench positions and are said to leave a lot of leeway for individual role choice as they are associated with few institutionally-specified responsibilities. The latter, by contrast, are associated to leadership positions in the legislature that require the performance of many specified tasks and are accordingly considered to be almost completely constrained by institutional norms. As such, the insights of these neo-institutionalist framework appear primordially directed at backbenchers: they adopt rather rigid views of frontbench roles and potentially overlook role variation among these influential legislators. This thesis challenges this deterministic view on parliamentary leadership roles and aims to assess its empirical validity. We centrally argue that diverging informal institutional expectations at the party-level as well as individual-level goals and preferences could lead PPG leaders to adopting different roles. PPG leaders who belong to a large, government party, for instance, are indeed rather likely to perceive of their tasks differently than a PPG leader who leads a small, opposition party. Moreover, highly experienced and esteemed PPG leaders who are at the end of a rich career in national politics could rather plausibly fill in their position differently than a PPG leader who is new to the job and still wants to climb the political career ladder.

## **2.2. The Belgian case**

In order to examine whether, how, to what extent and why PPG leaders showcase role variation within the same institutional context, this research is designed as a

single-country case-study. This simultaneously allows us to study PPG leaders' roles in-depth, departing from these actors' own standpoints and taking into account the characteristic institutional incentives and constraints provided by the specific political setting (Searing, 1994). The focus is on Belgium, which provides an interesting case in itself but also when regarding it from an international-comparative perspective.

After all, unlike in other countries, the position of PPG leader in Belgium does not coincide with that of the general party leader (e.g. Westminster democracies, the Netherlands) nor with that presidency of the extra-parliamentary party organization (EPO) (e.g. Spain, Germany). Instead, Belgian parties' indisputable political leaders are the EPO presidents (Fiers, 1998). These powerful actors have an important say in the selection of PPG leaders (in the federal and national parliament), who thereafter function as a crucial, intermediate 'linking pin' between the central party leadership and the party's backbenchers (De Winter, 1992; Pilet & Wauters, 2014). Because of the general dominance of EPO leaders over PPGs and their members (De Winter & Dumont, 2000, 2006) and due to PPG leaders' limited intra-party authority, the leeway PPG leaders experience in defining their own role is expected to be comparatively low. If individually-driven role variance is found here, it is rather likely that it can also be observed in other parliamentary systems, where the autonomy and authority of PPG leaders tends to be larger. This makes Belgium, first of all, a theoretically interesting case for a wider, international academic audience.

The Belgian case is, however, also empirically interesting in itself. Because of their specific intra-party position as intermediates between the PPG and the EPO elite, Belgian PPG leaders are likely to be confronted with a 'competing principal problem' (e.g. Carey, 2007). On the one hand, they can act as a representative of the central party elite in the PPG, communicating the decisions and instructions of the latter to MPs and ensuring their implementation in parliament. On the other hand, PPG leaders are also well-placed to inform the party elite about issues at stake at the level of the PPG and defend backbenchers' wishes and preferences at higher party echelons. As such, exploring the role of PPG leaders allows us to tap into the underexposed relationship between the 'party in central office' and the 'party in public office' as two party branches with potentially adversarial interests (Katz & Mair, 1993). How and to what extent do PPG leaders contribute to the general predominance of the party elite over PPG members? Or can they provide MPs, who are generally seen as weak political actors in the Belgian 'partitocracy'

(De Winter & Dumont, 2006), an alternative, indirect route towards policy influence, outside of the parliamentary arena?

### **2.3.A (predominantly) inductive-qualitative research design**

Searing argues that ‘the best way to understand the roles of politicians is to understand them as they do’ (1994, p. 10). We adhere to the fundamentals of his motivational framework and use a broad, inductive-qualitative research strategy based predominantly on in-depth elite interviews (N=68) to identify, reconstruct and explain the roles of PPG leaders. Unlike Searing (1994), however, who views roles as interrelated patterns of goals, attitudes and behaviours, or Strøm (1997) who sees them as behavioural strategies, we more distinctly try to disentangle the key components (i.e. role attitudes or orientations), causes (i.e. formal rules, informal norms, individual preferences and goals) and the consequences (i.e. role behaviour) of parliamentary roles (e.g. Andeweg, 2014).

Central to this thesis are the in-depth interviews with 29 current and former PPG leaders in the Belgian federal Chamber of Representatives and the Flemish regional parliament. We selected PPG leaders from all six Flemish parties that are represented in the Chamber and the Flemish Parliament and pursued a maximum of heterogeneity within each party based the PPG’s government status, size and respondents’ personal political experience. In order to achieve this intra-party variance, we not only interviewed current PPG leaders but also respondents who occupied this position in the past (*see Chapter 3*). The semi-structured interview questionnaires, that contained both open- and closed-ended questions, gauged respondents’ self-perceived priorities in parliament, the intrinsic aspects of their jobs they found most satisfactory, their time allocations and how they evaluate their functioning compared to other PPG leaders. Besides providing rich data on the role orientations of PPG leaders, their self-reported behaviour, on how they internally manage the PPG and how they deal with intra-party preference heterogeneity, these interviews also allowed us to tap into the personal motivations (both intrinsic preferences and rational goals) that (might) lie at the basis of PPG leaders’ roles.

Politicians do not operate in an institutional vacuum. Therefore, besides looking at individual motivations as determinants of parliamentary roles, it is crucial to also take into close account the institutional framework, especially when it comes to leadership positions (e.g. Searing, 1994). Formal institutional rules on PPG leadership are examined through a document analysis of the standing orders of

the Chamber and the Flemish Parliament and the statutes of the investigated political parties. As these formal rules appear limited in number and scope, we mostly have to turn towards informal institutional norms and expectations as created and maintained by the actors interacting with the role players. We conducted an additional 39 elite interviews with both PPG actors (MPs, senior PPG staff) and EPO elites (party leaders, senior EPO staff) in the direct professional proximity of the selected PPG leaders.<sup>5</sup> These semi-structured interviews allowed us to triangulate the findings from the interviews with PPG leaders. More importantly, they provided substantial insights into what in the view of these actors constitutes a good PPG leader, what his/her top priorities should be, why and how a specific PPG leader was initially selected and how they evaluate the functioning of the diverse PPG leaders they experienced.

Methodologically innovative to the field, moreover, is that this thesis uses (multi-value) Qualitative Comparative Analysis (mvQCA) to supplement the in-depth, qualitative description of legislative roles (and their key components) with an explanatory analysis of their determinants. QCA enables systematic cross-case comparison by converting cases (i.e. PPG leaders) into ‘configurations’ or combinations of explanatory ‘conditions’ (e.g. institutional or individual factors) and their subsequent ‘outcomes’ (i.e. role types). It is an analytical as well as an epistemological approach that wields a conception of causality that acknowledges real-world complexity by stating that outcomes are generally provoked by a conjunction of conditions rather than by a single cause and that different combinations of conditions may well lead to the same outcome (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). Although not often applied to cases at the micro-level, and entirely novel to legislative (role) studies, we argue that QCA is highly appropriate for examining the roles of legislators as the result of complex interactions between individual calculations and institutional incentives. QCA, moreover, might provide a helpful middle-road for scholars who wish to combine in-depth insights into MPs roles with a systematic analysis of their determinants, bridging the current gap between small-N and large-N analytical approaches on roles in parliament (see: Rozenberg & Blomgren, 2012; Chapters 2 and 4). By incorporating both institutional (party-level) and individual-level conditions in the analysis, QCA furthermore provides us the needed analytical tools to assess the validity of current deterministic views on PPG leadership roles. Can different

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<sup>5</sup> Per interviewed PPG leader, at least one EPO actor and one PPG actor was interviewed (see Chapter 3).

institutional constellations alone lead to different roles? What is the explanatory relevance of individual-level factors?

Although qualitative (comparative) methods form the methodological backbone of this research project, this thesis also uses quantitative research methods on multiple occasions. This is the case in Chapter 4, in which an alternative, deductive approach is tested to study the roles of PPG leaders based on secondary (Partirep) data and in Chapter 5, in which we examine and explain the personal and political characteristics of PPG leaders on an original dataset containing population data of over 300 PPG leaders in the federal and Flemish Parliament (*see further below*). This mix of research methods is further discussed in the methodological part of this thesis (*Chapter 3*) and in the individual empirical chapters.

In sum, by focusing on the role orientations of PPG leaders (in Belgium), this dissertation aims to provide unique and in-depth insights into an underexposed but inherent aspect of contemporary legislative organisation. In this endeavour, this study contributes to the parliamentary role literature theoretically, by examining and explaining role variation among these actors, but also methodologically, by innovatively doing so using mvQCA.

### **3. Outline of the book**

This dissertation consists of nine chapters, which are subdivided into three main parts. The first part is dedicated to introducing the research topic, the theoretical foundations and the data and methods of the study. After this first general introduction, **Chapter 2** sketches the ‘state of the art’ of the established literature. First, we delve into existing research on PPGs and, insofar possible, their leaders. Second, we proceed to the literature on parliamentary roles. We discuss what parliamentary roles are, how they are central concepts to legislative politics and studies alike, and which theoretical perspectives on the concept have been proposed. We expound popular neo-institutionalist approaches on roles and further develop our main theoretical critique that they adopt too deterministic views of leadership functions in the legislature.

In **Chapter 3**, more details on the data and methodology of the research project are given. After discussing why Belgium serves as an interesting case for analysing the roles of PPG leaders and exploring the boundaries of rigid views on leadership roles in parliament, we discuss how we gathered the in-depth elite interview data. We explain how respondents (PPG leaders, other party actors) were selected and



contacted, how the interviews were prepared and how the tape recordings were transcribed, coded and inductively analysed aimed at retrieving common patterns or 'roles' as perceived by the role players themselves. Here, we furthermore discuss how QCA provides an innovative and highly appropriate method to analyse the interplay of institutional constraints and personal motives that explain roles and disseminate how several additional quantitative analyses are used to paint a global picture of PPG leadership (roles).

Part two consists of five empirical chapters. In **Chapter 4**, we take one step back before proceeding to the Belgian case study, and look at PPG leaders' roles from an international-comparative perspective. Drawing on an alternative, deductive approach on MPs' roles and using Partirep Comparative MP Survey data (Deschouwer & Depauw, 2014), this chapter examines the representative roles (e.g. style, focus) of PPG leaders. Despite strong theoretical expectations that PPG leaders across European national and regional parliaments would adopt distinct party-oriented role orientations, multivariate regression analyses reveal no common, distinguishable patterns that make them stand out from other legislators. Together with other analytical difficulties, this points us to the need to study PPG leaders' roles more in-depth with country case studies. This chapter is a revised version of an article that earlier appeared in *The Journal of Legislative studies* (de Vet & Wauters, 2018).

**Chapter 5** shifts the focus to PPG leaders in Belgium. Prior to examining their actual roles, this chapter examines the socio-demographic and political career characteristics of every PPG leader who has ever seated in the federal Chamber of Representatives, the Senate and the Flemish Parliament. This original set of population data, which proved highly helpful when sampling potential interview respondents, allows us to get a proper picture of the political actors we are studying. Furthermore, the multivariate regression models reveal distinct differences in terms of PPG leaders' profile (e.g. their age, parliamentary tenure or former experience as government ministers) through time and based on party-level characteristics such as PPG size, government status or recent electoral shifts. These differences between subpopulations of PPG leaders seem to indicate that party selectorates look for a different type of PPG leader under specific political circumstances, which could already reflect diverging role expectations and thus herald role variation. This chapter is a thoroughly revised version of an article that earlier appeared in *Res Publica* (de Vet & Wauters, 2015).

**Chapter 6** is entirely dedicated to the inductive reconstruction of PPG leaders' roles. Drawing on open-ended question data from the elite interviews with PPG leaders, we first paint the global picture of PPG leaders' general self-perceived responsibilities in parliament and expose distinct differences in the role orientations of PPG leaders. We find that differences between PPG leaders appear to run along two broader dimensions or continuums (an internal focus versus an external focus, and a focus on top-down versus bottom-up intra-party liaison). Based on these dimensions, we develop a typology of five distinct PPG leader roles, discuss them in detail and test both their robustness and consequences by linking them to concrete forms of attitudes and behaviours respectively, measured with closed-ended interview questions. Substantial parts of this chapter (i.e. the reconstruction of PPG leaders' roles) have also been published as a single-authored article in *Parliamentary Affairs* (de Vet, 2019).

After the development of PPG leaders' roles, we turn towards their explanation. The literature dictates that the institutional framework weighs heavily on the roles of frontbenchers. **Chapter 7** therefore examines the existence, transmission and to some extent also the consequences of (in)formal institutional norms. We show how formal institutional rules on PPG leadership are limited in number in scope and how informal norms and expectations, as developed and maintained by parliamentary and extra-parliamentary party actors, prove to be more important. Rather than uniform, however, these informal expectations are contingent upon the political context a party is in (e.g. government participation, electoral mood). We furthermore show how role expectations are translated in the selection criteria used by PPG actors and central party elites to select a specific PPG leader at a certain point in time. While PPG leaders' identified roles do largely match with the expectations of their environments, we show how a mismatch between role expectations and PPG leaders' actual roles may lead to internal discontent among PPG members.

Empirical **Chapter 8**, lastly, aims to provide an integrative explanation of PPG leaders' roles by bringing together the contextual party-level pressures and individual-level factors that might influence them. First, a qualitative analysis of the PPG leader interviews allow us to detect the potentially relevant explanatory factors. These are subsequently integrated in a more structural analysis using mvQCA. Besides demonstrating how QCA can be fruitfully employed to study parliamentary roles, this chapter provides interesting insights in the factors that underpin roles, by showing how contextual-party level factors only partially

explain role variance as also individual characteristics and goals appear to have explanatory value. While some of the identified roles can indeed be classified as institutionally-driven position roles, we show how also among frontbenchers preference roles are possible. Large parts of this chapter (i.e. the mvQCA of PPG leaders' roles) have been published as a single-authored article in *Parliamentary Affairs* (de Vet, 2019).

Part three, with its concluding **Chapter 9**, lastly, summarizes the main findings of the empirical research. We highlight the relevance and contributions of the study, as well as its shortcomings, and discuss where future research could further lead to a better understanding of the role and relevance of the group leaders in parliament.

# Literature Review

## 1. Party groups in parliament

### 1.1. Definition and organizational features

Before proceeding to the actual protagonists of this study, we first discuss the entities they chair and manage: i.e. parties' legislative branches, which in the literature are commonly referred to as 'parliamentary party groups' (PPGs). These groups, which also go under country-specific labels such as *Fraktionen/fracties* (Germany, the Netherlands) or *Klubs* (Austria), comprise of members of parliament (MPs) that were elected under the same party label. They can, however, also consist of legislators that belong to different parties but who wish to collaborate in the parliamentary arena (e.g. Heidar & Koole, 2000c, p. 249; Malová & Krause, 2000; Saalfeld, 2000). Heidar and Koole (2000c) add to this that at least some form of political cohesion and coordination among group members is a necessary precondition to be able to speak of a 'PPG'. This excludes so-called 'technical groups' from the definition, which lack a common ideological denominator and are formed by legislators for the sole reason to be able to enjoy a number of rights and material benefits (e.g. financial support, additional speaking time) that would otherwise be unavailable to them.<sup>6</sup>

PPGs are more than a loose gathering of like-minded legislators: they are organised (Heidar & Koole, 2000c, p. 253). Although they vary in terms of size, preference homogeneity, voting unity, staffing, financial resources, the formalisation of internal procedures and other organisational properties, they typically rely both on *horizontal* (i.e. a division of labour) and on *vertical internal*

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<sup>6</sup> See for instance the 'Technical Group of Independents' (1999-2001) in the European Parliament (Settembri, 2004). Although not explicitly prohibited in its standing orders, the *Bureau* of the Belgian federal Chamber of Representatives has the historical tradition not to formally recognize the existence of such politically-heterogeneous, technical groups (Van der Hulst & Muylle, 2017).

*differentiation* (i.e. a division of power) (Brady & Bullock, 1985; Heidar, 2000; Heidar & Koole, 2000c; Saalfeld & Strøm, 2014). The former is reflected in the fact that PPGs are generally characterised by varying degrees of internal policy specialisation. They ensure an efficient division of labour by assigning group members to parliamentary committees and - particularly in large PPGs - to internal policy-related working groups that shadow the legislatures' committee system (Damgaard, 1995; Mickler, 2018; Saalfeld, 2000; Schüttemeyer, 2001). Although the collective PPG meeting typically remains in charge of formulating broad party positions, PPGs do generally delegate the task of developing detailed policy proposals to its policy experts. This can give committee members some policy discretion, especially in policy domains which are less salient or divisive for the party (Andeweg & Thomassen, 2011; Schüttemeyer, 2001).

PPGs are typically also structured along hierarchical lines (Brady & Bullock, 1985; Heidar & Koole, 2000c; Saalfeld & Strøm, 2014). At the top of the pecking order, they are commonly presided by a single leader, chairman or president. Although considerable variation exists in terms of their authority and specific rights granted to them (*see below*), PPG leaders typically serve as the PPG's most important spokesperson on the floor, coordinate the PPGs' parliamentary activities and are given the task of safeguarding party unity. Particularly in larger PPGs they might be assisted by a more or less developed middle-management tier, consisting of vice-chairmen, 'whips' (Bailer, 2008; Cowley & Stuart, 2012; Norton, 2003) or policy-specific 'working group chairs' (Patzelt, 2003; Schüttemeyer, 2001). They assist the PPG leader in transmitting relevant information from and to backbenchers and further facilitate internal coordination and control (Heidar & Koole, 2000c; Saalfeld & Strøm, 2014).<sup>7</sup>

As a third basic organizational feature we might add that PPGs are not free-floating structures but are part of a larger, more complex party organisation. Although parties are often conceptualised as monolithic actors and it is generally easier to treat intra-party processes as if they occurred inside a 'black box' (Laver & Shepsle, 1999), parties are organisations with their own internal life and politics (Katz, 2005). They consist of multiple segments or 'faces' that interact with each

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<sup>7</sup> These middle-management positions are generally taken up by elected representatives, who subsequently generate a recruitment pool for future senior parliamentary, party and governmental positions. In some countries, however, these positions are more depoliticized and are taken up by a full time (senior) party staff member (e.g. a PPG secretary or a secretary-general) under the direct supervision of the PPG leader, as typically is the case in Belgium (De Winter & Dumont, 2000) and France (Messerschmidt, 2005; Saalfeld & Strøm, 2014).

other and do not necessarily pursue the same goals and interests. While ‘the party on the ground’ refers to parties’ societal ties (i.e. their memberships) and ‘the party in central office’ to its extra-parliamentary headquarters, PPGs make up ‘the party in public office’, together with the parties’ executive members when in government (Katz & Mair, 1993). Particularly relevant here is that PPGs differ with regards their autonomy and power relationships vis-à-vis the other party branches (Heidar & Koole, 2000c; Helms, 2000). Although PPGs in modern parliamentary democracies have rather strong ties with the EPO and the executive branch in general, in some cases they have more influence over policies, the allocation of political offices and the formation of governments, than in others where they are often seen as ‘voting machines’ or as instruments of extra-parliamentary party branches (*see further below*) (Heidar & Koole, 2000c, pp. 262-265).

## **1.2. Functional importance**

Ever since the extension of mass electoral suffrage in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, PPGs became central to the day-to-day functioning of parliaments in Western European democracies (Scarrow, 2006). Elected representatives formed alliances within the legislature to maintain their policy influence and organised extra-parliamentary parties to mobilize voters at elections (i.e. the elite or cadre parties). New parties arose and organised outside of the legislature to acquire power and achieve parliamentary representation (i.e. the mass parties) (Duverger, 1954). The emergence of political parties in the legislature has, however, historically been approached with scepticism. Early 20<sup>th</sup> century political observers and scholars criticized them for restricting individual representatives’ independent mandates, subjecting them to centralized control and impinging free deliberation among peers, which would even lead to a ‘decline of legislatures’ (Bryce, 1929; Michels, 1915; Ostrogorski, 1902). Others would adopt distinctly more optimistic views of parties, seeing them as useful vehicles of political competition in liberal democracies (Dahl, 1956; Schattschneider, 1942; Schumpeter, 1929).

Contemporary scholars particularly stress the importance of parties as stabilising forces in parliament. PPGs provide the crucial linkages between the electorate, parties and parliament and are widely acknowledged as ‘necessary instruments of parliamentary business’ (Heidar & Koole, 2000c, p. 1) or, together with committees, as the most important component of legislative organisation (Saalfeld & Strøm, 2014, p. 372). To fully understand why exactly PPGs have become crucial to the functioning of parliaments, it is important to understand (1) their

relevance to the functioning of political systems in general, (2) the benefits they bring to individual representatives and (3) their usefulness to individual voters.

### *1.2.1. For political systems*

First, from a system-functionalistic view, political parties – and their legislative branches – perform a number of linkage functions that are essential for the practical operation of democracy (Dalton, 2011; Diamond & Gunther, 2001; Katz, 1990; Lawson, 2005). Amongst others, parties engage in interest articulation and preference aggregation. They distil from a wide range of public interests, policy inputs and societal demands a number of manageable policy alternatives that can be compared, implemented and enforced through legislation. Besides recruiting, training and selecting the political office-holders that execute and decide over these policies, they educate, socialise and mobilize the electorate around these policy proposals. Through these democratic linkage functions, i.e. by channelling societal demands (mostly done by the party in central office) and translating them into appropriate political decisions and legal norms (done by the party in public office), parties and their members in public office provide regimes their legitimacy (Heidar & Koole, 2000c, p. 5) and their stability on the long-term (Field, 2013; Saalfeld & Strøm, 2014, p. 381).

Also more on the short-term, PPGs contribute to political stability. By acting as cohesive, durable coalitions on the floor, they obviate the need to constantly seek fragile ad-hoc alliances amongst individual representatives and provide executive governments the stable majority they need to effectively implement their policies (Laver, 1999; Laver & Shepsle, 1999; Strøm & Müller, 2009). Through their internal coordination and division of labour, moreover, PPGs enable that initiatives and decision-making can be processed more efficiently through parliament. As we further discuss below, through their preference aggregation and cohesive legislative action, PPGs also bring clarity to voters and allow them to more easily hold office-holders electorally accountable for their collective deeds (Strøm & Müller, 2009).

### *1.2.2. For individual representatives*

Looking into their systemic importance does not answer the question of why nominally equal elected politicians would find it useful to create and join PPGs, and give up on some of their personal autonomy and discretion (Loewenberg, 2015; Saalfeld & Strøm, 2014). Rational-choice theorists on legislative behaviour

contend that, although they obviously also brings costs (e.g. submitting themselves to hierarchical discipline), PPGs are beneficial vehicles for individual representatives as they allow them to satisfy their policy- and office-related goals (Strom, Müller, & Bergman, 2003; Strøm & Müller, 2009). Related to their systemic role of contributing to procedural efficiency, moreover, PPGs resolve a number of problems and costs that are typically associated with collective decision-making among MPs as individual goal-seeking actors (Aldrich, 1995; Cox & McCubbins, 1993).

First of all, PPGs allow politicians to pursue their political goals. Policy-wise, PPGs allow backbenchers to ‘win more of what they seek to win, and more often’ (Aldrich, 1995, p. 28) than would otherwise have been the case as independent backbenchers, through preference aggregation and the effective alignment and coordination of MPs’ activities. In addition, PPGs are useful vehicles for legislators who have office-related ambitions. Besides controlling the policy-making process, political parties typically function as important gate-keepers that co-decide over legislators static and progressive career prospects. They thus can not only enhance MPs’ chances for re-election but also their potential nomination for attractive and influential higher intra-party, parliamentary and executive office (Hazan & Rahat, 2010; Schlesinger, 1966; Strøm, 1997; Strøm & Müller, 2009).

Furthermore, by reducing transaction costs in legislative bargaining and inferring from the many heterogeneous preferences of legislators, a number of joint policy positions that have the potential of being backed by a legislative majority, PPGs prevent legislators from being ‘trapped in endless voting cycles’ (Strøm & Müller, 2009, p. 31). Even when stable collective positions can be naturally agreed-upon, game-theoretical applications of legislative behaviour contend that PPGs – and particularly their leaders – are important because they resolve so-called ‘collective action problems’ in the legislature (Aldrich, 1995; Cox & McCubbins, 1993). These problems are inherent to the tension between government by majority rule and legislators’ aim to get re-elected (Mayhew, 1974) and arise when group members, who typically serve diverging and potentially competing principals (Carey, 2007; Tavits, 2009), have rational incentives to behave in ways that are collectively inefficient or detrimental to the group as a whole (Cox & McCubbins, 1993). For instance, while it might be electorally interesting for individual legislators to squander scarce speaking time to address parochial constituency interests, this would eventually refrain the legislature from adopting important collective decisions, even if they would also be in the mutual interest of legislators



and their personal constituents (Cox, 2005; Saalfeld & Strøm, 2014; Strøm & Müller, 2009).

### 1.2.3. *For voters*

Third, scholars have emphasized the relevance of PPGs for voters. Modern democracy is representative democracy. This means that voters, i.e. the ultimate democratic sovereigns or ‘principals’, are not directly involved in political decision-making, but delegate this authority to an elected class of politicians as their ‘agents’ (Pitkin, 1967). In parliamentary systems, this delegation of power is not a singular step but should be modelled as an indirect chain of multiple representative relations, where voters delegate to legislators; legislators to the prime minister; the prime minister to individual cabinet members; and cabinet members to civil servants (Strøm et al., 2003). Delegation, however, can be risky (Lupia, 2003). Agents and principals might have diverging preferences and the latter might lack the information to choose the right agent in the beginning (*i.e. adverse selection*) or to keep him or her loyal afterwards (*i.e. moral hazard*). Here political parties come into play. Although PPGs can be criticized for being ‘awkward’ in democratic linkages as MPs must balance their dual position as a representative of their electors and the party (Heidar, 2013, p. 118), the ‘responsible party model’ would argue that the coordinating actions of legislative parties are also useful for voters (Mair, 2008; Thomassen, 1994). Political parties present voters a number of candidates who have been thoroughly screened and socialized, and whose policy preferences are clear: they are written down in the party program. Voters compare these ‘policy menus’ and choose for the party that best suits their personal policy preferences. Once given an electoral mandate, legislative parties make sure their office-holders loyally execute these policies. Likewise, they reduce the risk of moral hazard. They ensure the collective accountability of legislators towards the electorate and allow voters to transparently judge parties upon their merits and the fulfilment of electoral pledges (Heidar & Koole, 2000c; Saalfeld & Strøm, 2014). By attaching a ‘party label’ to individual electoral candidates, moreover, parties allow voters, who often lack the time, knowledge and interest to screen candidates and monitor politicians, to make informed prior judgments of how an agent will act once elected. Without party cohesion in the legislature, when parliamentary decision-making would be anarchic, these party labels – which are indeed the central drivers of electoral choice, even in open and flexible-list systems (André, Depauw, & Pilet, 2018) – would lose their heuristic value as information economizing devices. This would

make agency loss through adverse selection more likely (Heidar, 2013; Lupia, 2003; Saalfeld & Strøm, 2014; Strom et al., 2003; Strøm & Müller, 2009).

### **1.3. Empirical research on PPGs**

In light of their importance to the practical functioning of parliamentary democracy, empirical research on PPGs is comparatively scarce. In part, this is because PPGs internally operate as exclusive, secret arenas or as ‘political parties behind closed doors’ (Heidar & Koole, 2000c). Access to outsiders is generally restricted, leaving the systematic study of PPGs as pivotal democratic structures at a disadvantage. According to Heidar (2013, pp. 118-120), studies that do focus on PPGs tend to concentrate around four subdomains.

A first topic, which was also touched upon in the sections above, addresses normative questions on the role and purposes of political parties in modern democracies and their legislatures (Saalfeld & Strøm, 2014, pp. 381-382). Scholars have addressed the advantageous functions parties fulfil as bridges between voters and government (Daalder, 2001; Diamond & Gunther, 2001; Katz, 2008; Müller & Narud, 2013) as well as their shortcomings in light of notions of ‘party decline’ (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2002; Mair, 2008) and the potential alternatives to party government (Katz, 1987; Lucardie, 2015; Strøm, 2002). Scholars here often conclude that alternatives such as direct democratic forms of citizen engagement or more direct ties between legislators and their constituencies<sup>8</sup> are inconclusive on their own (Kölln, 2014, p. 50) or that one would still expect partisan groups to emerge in the legislature after all (Strøm, 2002, p. 203). Even in light of their flaws such as their increasing detachment from civil society (Katz & Mair, 1995), political parties are thus seen as a ‘necessary evil’ (Lucardie, 2015, p. 2)

The second and probably the most popular research line looks into the political cohesion or unity of PPGs as a central feature of parliamentary politics, mostly by examining roll call behaviour. Early, descriptive work on PPG unity already concluded that ‘cohesive voting has increased so close to 100 % that there is no longer any point in measuring it’ (Beer, 1982, p. 350). More contemporary studies, however, looked into the driving forces and components of PPG unity (e.g. Andeweg & Thomassen, 2011; Van Vonna et al., 2014), the factors that explain cross-country and inter-party differences (Depauw & Martin, 2009; Sieberer,

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<sup>8</sup> This is what Katz (1987) calls ‘pluralist democracy’ and leans towards politics as conducted in the United States.

2006) and the consequences of unity, for instance, for cabinet entrance and survival (Laver, 1999; Laver & Shepsle, 1999). These studies have provided important insights in how PPG unity is a function of legislators' ideological agreement, their voluntary loyalty and possibly top-down enforced discipline (Andeweg & Thomassen, 2011; Hazan, 2011; Van Vonn et al., 2014). They moreover demonstrated how, for instance, the electoral system or disciplinary measures available to the PPG leadership (*see further below*) affect MPs' likelihood that they will breach unity (Bowler, Farrell, & Katz, 1999; Carey, 2007; Coman, 2015; Kam, 2009; Sieberer, 2006).

A third research domain, which generally requires more intensive efforts to gain access to relevant information and data, relates to PPGs' internal organization and functioning. Studies here examine PPGs' resources in terms of their staffing and finances, their internal rules and decision-making structures, and the position of individual group members (Bowler et al., 1999; Heidar, 2000; Messerschmidt, 2005; Schüttemeyer, 2001). As such, they answer important questions on the autonomy of individual representatives, on how inclusively collective positions are deliberated upon and on how these collective positions are later enforced in legislative activities. A central contribution in this subdomain is the edited volume of Heidar and Koole (2000c). Based on several country-specific accounts of PPGs in European democracies, they find a tendency towards what they call 'parliamentary party complexes'. Whereas parliamentary politics became professionalised in recent decades and parties increasingly tap into state funding (e.g. Katz & Mair, 1995), the extra resources are allotted to PPGs rather than to individual legislators. Combined with high degrees of PPG unity in West European parliaments, this makes the authors argue that MPs become ever more dependent from the PPG, for instance when it comes to getting staff support or acquiring (campaign) funding.

A fourth and probably the least developed research domain seeks to examine the reciprocal relationships between PPGs and other party branches (i.e. the EPO and the party in government). Heidar and Koole (2000c) distinguish a historical evolution towards ever more 'integrated PPGs' with closer ties to the EPO and the party in government (when in majority). The power position of the PPG within this increasingly closer intra-party trinity, however, differs across countries and parties. In Belgium and Austria, for instance, PPGs are labelled as 'dominated' or as mere implementers of the decisions of extra-parliamentary party branches. In other countries, like the Netherlands or the United Kingdom, PPGs have more

influence and autonomy from the EPO, although when in government, they are typically overruled by the executive party branch. In a similar vein Helms (2000), identifies four basic patterns of EPO-PPG relationships. In some countries, the centre of power is unmistakably situated at the level of the EPO (*party organisation dominance*; e.g. Belgium, Italy). In others, it is rather situated at the PPG (*parliamentary party dominance*; e.g. Great Britain). Moreover, while in some countries the leadership of the EPO and PPG largely overlap (*integrative party leadership*; e.g. Germany) in others - mostly non-parliamentary democracies - the PPG and the EPO function largely independently from each other (*functional autonomy*, e.g. the US). The former are key agents in the legislative process, while the latter concentrate their activities on mobilising voters at elections. A last category is dedicated to systems with a high degree of factionalism, in which neither the PPG nor the EPO challenge the dominance of intra-party faction leaders (*factiocracy*, e.g. Japan). Although one would expect from the rise of the modern cartel party an 'ascendency of the party in public office' as the main recipient of state funding (Bardi, Calossi, & Pizzimenti, 2017; Katz & Mair, 2002), in-depth country case studies show that this is not necessarily always the case. In some countries, political parties remain EPO strongholds (see: De Winter & Dumont, 2006 on Belgium).

In any case, research made clear that PPGs are central to the operation of parliamentary democracy. As the inherent mechanisms of any democratic process should be transparent and open for public scrutiny (Heidar & Koole, 2000c, p. 5), further studies and insights into the daily (internal) functioning of PPGs remain highly important.

## **2. The leaders of the pack**

### **2.1. General duties and responsibilities**

What remains particularly underdeveloped, however, are empirical studies on PPGs' leadership. This is rather surprising in light of the growing body of comparative literature on political leadership in general (Helms, 2012; Rhodes & 't Hart, 2014) and the intensifying focus on leadership in political parties (Cross & Pilet, 2015; Cross & Blais, 2012), governments (Poguntke & Webb, 2007) and in elections (Balmas et al., 2014). Although PPG leaders are sometimes briefly reported in the PPG research domains addressed above, studies focused exclusively on these influential actors are almost non-existent. Such studies would

be highly relevant, though, exactly because it would reach out to multiple of the relevant questions outlined above. Not only do PPG leaders embody an important, if not the most important, aspect of internal PPG organisation, the part PPG leaders play in maintaining political unity and in liaising with extra-parliamentary party branches is anything but negligible. PPG leaders, as such, affect the individual leeway and behaviour of legislators, the PPG's operation in parliament and the position of the PPG (and its members) vis-à-vis other party branches (the EPO and party-in-government).

PPG leaders are effectively pivotal parliamentary players that bear a number of basic responsibilities that are critical to the day-to-day organization of PPGs and of parliament as a whole. Together with their personal staff and a potential second leadership tier, PPG leaders first of all ensure the PPGs' smooth functioning as its primary organizational and political managers. They outline the division of labour among legislators and coordinate their specialised activities. They streamline intra-party deliberation in the PPG meeting or *legislative caucus*, which convenes regularly, consists of all its members and typically acts as the PPGs' ultimate decision-making body (Heidar & Koole, 2000c; Saalfeld & Strøm, 2014). Here, they lead discussions on concrete policy proposals and party strategies, and they cut the 'Gordian knot' in case of internal disagreement. Beyond the internal organisation of the party group, PPG leaders make up one of the main connections with other party branches (in multiple possible forms, *see below*). They, moreover, generally maintain close contacts with other parliamentary leaders (the Speaker, committee chairs, other PPG leaders) and co-decide on the legislative agenda and procedural matters within the assemblies' governing bodies. When topical and mediatized debates or important bills are eventually tabled, PPG leaders are expected to take the floor on behalf of their group to elucidate and defend the party's positions.

Importantly, PPG leaders' personal reputations hinge upon their capacity to secure party group unity (Bailer et al., 2009, p. 356; Laver, 1999, p. 12). As parties might be faced with collective action problems in the legislature and group members might have rational electoral incentives to defect (Carey, 2007; Carey & Shugart, 1995), parties select leaders that are expected to internalize the parties' collective interest and keep tabs on group members' behaviour (Kiewiet & McCubbins, 1991; Strøm & Müller, 2009). By virtue of their institutional position, PPG leaders allegedly control a number of selective incentives (both positive and

negative) that allow them to reward cooperative MPs and discourage shirking behaviour (Bowler et al., 1999; Cox & McCubbins, 1993; Kam, 2009).

## 2.2.PPG leadership in comparative perspective

Notwithstanding these basic responsibilities, parties but also political systems in general vary with regards to the autonomy and authority vested in their PPG leaders. In some cases, PPG leaders are true *political leaders* that have ‘considerable opportunities to convert their position in the hierarchy into policy, office or electoral gains’ (Saalfeld & Strøm, 2014, p. 375). In others they rather are *organizational managers* with mostly coordinating functions. Not surprisingly, the intra-party status of PPG leaders seems connected to the PPGs’ general position in the overall party organisation and particularly to its relation to the EPO (*see Table 2.1*) (e.g. Heidar & Koole, 2000c; Helms, 2000).

**Table 2.1. PPG, EPO and party leadership in parliamentary democracies**

		Also party leader?	
		Yes	No
Also EPO chairman?	Yes	Spain <sup>(a)</sup> , Germany <sup>(a)</sup> , Austria <sup>(a)</sup> ( <i>integrative party leadership</i> )	– <sup>9</sup>
	No	Westminster countries, the Netherlands <sup>(a)</sup> , ( <i>parliamentary party dominance</i> )	Belgium, Portugal ( <i>party organisation dominance</i> )

<sup>(a)</sup> Generally unless the party leader is appointed as cabinet member and resigns from parliament.<sup>10</sup>

In countries that would be classified under Helms’ (2000) category of ‘*parliamentary party dominance*’, the PPG leader rather than the chairperson of the EPO is generally seen as the party’s main political and electoral spearhead. Exemplary of this category are Westminster democracies like the United Kingdom (Bale & Webb, 2014), Canada (Cross & Blais, 2012) or Australia (Gauja, 2014). As probably suits a model rooted on the idea of parliamentary sovereignty, he or she who leads the party in parliament (in the House of Commons) is commonly understood to be

<sup>9</sup> To our knowledge, no examples exist of PPG leaders who chair the EPO but are not simultaneously the party leader.

<sup>10</sup> Own summary based predominantly on Cross & Pilet (2014).

the party's top candidate for Prime Minister and is therefore indisputably recognised as the true leader and electoral frontrunner of his or her party (Bale & Webb, 2014, p. 13). The presidency of the EPO, by contrast, is a mere organisational function and is filled in by someone else, who even is not necessarily an elected MP.<sup>11</sup> A similar situation can be found in the Netherlands, where the PPG leader in the Second Chamber (and not the EPO chairman) typically is the party leader, unless he/she becomes a member of cabinet and is obliged to resign from parliament (Andeweg, 2000).

In other countries, which are characterised by what Helms (2000) calls '*integrative party leadership*', the position of PPG leader and EPO president are typically held by the same politician who thereby constitutes the true centre of party authority. This accumulation of party mandates is, for instance, the reason why Spanish (parliamentary) party leaders are considered to be the most powerful players in Spanish politics (Barberà et al., 2014, p. 109).<sup>12</sup> Also in Austria (Ennsner-Jedenastik & Müller, 2014; Müller & Steiniger, 2000) and Germany (Detterbeck & Rohlfing, 2014) the EPO presidents are conceived as the general party leaders. On that account, the most important public office available to the party (i.e. PPG leader when in opposition, (vice-)chancellor when in government) is usually reserved for him or her.<sup>13</sup> In other countries, like Hungary or Norway, the disentanglement of leadership positions is less straightforward. Here the positions of PPG leader and EPO chairman are generally held by two separate individuals (e.g. the Westminster model) but while in some parties the former is the party leader, in other parties it is the latter and in some particular cases party leadership is 'shared' (Pilet & Cross, 2014)

In a few cases, which are characterized by '*party organization dominance*' (Helms, 2000), PPG leaders neither are EPO president nor party leaders. In Belgium, the indisputable party leaders are the EPO presidents (Fiers, 1998). These powerful

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<sup>11</sup> In the UK, the EPO chairmen of the Liberal Democrats Party are usually prominent MPs (but not the PPG leaders). In Labour Party, the so-called 'General Secretary' has not been an elected MP since 1945 (Bale & Webb, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> In Spain we also point out the position of the '*portavoz*'. These actors, whose office can be roughly compared to that of the Chief Whip in Westminster (Holliday, 2002) play an important role in the organization of PPGs and generally replace the PPG leader when the latter moves to an executive position (Sánchez de Dios, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Exceptions are often made by newer parties. The German Greens for instance has an internal policy of incompatibility between such public offices and membership of the party executive committee (Detterbeck & Rohlfing, 2014).

actors have important, in some cases predominant say in the selection of a PPG leader, who thereafter functions as a central ‘linking pin’ between the PPG and the EPO elite (Pilet & Wauters, 2014). He or she can transfer decisions of the latter to backbenchers and inform party leaders about issues at stake at the level of parliamentary decision-making (De Winter, 1992, p. 18). A similar intermediate intra-party position of PPG leaders can be found in Portugal (Lisi & Freire, 2014). Also comparable, but not quite the same as it refers to PPGs’ intermediate or secondary hierarchical tier, is the position of the ‘whips’ in Westminster systems. The Chief Whip, assisted by a team of ‘Junior Whips’ is generally in charge of coordinating parliamentary activities. He/she informs legislators about forthcoming debates, assures their attendance and safeguards cohesion (Leach, Coxall, & Robins, 2011). Consequently, whips act as mediating actors between the party’s front- and backbenchers. Although the office is quite prestigious and whips generally have considerable moral authority, they are not the actual leaders of the PPG, which is an important difference with for instance Belgian PPG leaders. Whips mostly work behind the scenes, do not get much media attention and are appointed by and accountable to the real PPG leaders: the overall party leaders (Searing, 1994; Searing & Game, 1977; Westmacott, 1983).

### **2.3. US-centrism and a focus on disciplinary sanctions**

Scholarly research on legislative party leadership has thus far concentrated mostly on non-parliamentary systems with a distinct focus on the United States’ presidential system. Mostly drawing on rational choice theory and spatial models of legislative bargaining, American scholars focused on (1) whether congressional party leaders even influence legislative outcomes at all, (2) if so, how and (3) which mediating conditions affect their ability to do so (Strahan, 2011). Krehbiel (1993, 1998) for instance posits that party leaders are of little significance as legislative outcomes in the US Congress are primarily determined by the exogenous preferences of pivotal legislators (e.g. the median legislator). Partisan unity, in other words, is caused by preference homogeneity rather than by external pressures. These assertions are challenged amongst others by Cox and McCubbins (2005) who argue that (majority) legislative party leaders do influence legislative decisions by means of (particularly) negative agenda-setting powers. They can block bills on which the majority party is internally divided from a final vote on the floor even if a proposal would be favoured by a majority of members (or the median legislator) of the House. In their conditional party government model, Aldrich and Rohde (2000) concur with the idea that congressional party leaders



matter but add that their ability to influence legislation is strengthened in the case of strong internal preference homogeneity and/or interparty polarization in Congress (see also: Cooper & Brady, 1981; Sinclair, 1999).

Paradoxically, in Western Europe's parliamentary democracies, where parties' influence on decision-making is practically uncontested, research on PPG leaders is surprisingly less accumulative and often solely concentrates on their access to and their employment of disciplinary instruments. Preference homogeneity among group members (*'party agreement'*) or MPs' voluntary and willingness to contribute to the party's collective goal, even if one personally disagrees with a particular policy position (*'party loyalty'*), might not always suffice in order to induce the near perfect accounts of party group unity recorded in European legislatures (Depauw & Martin, 2009; Sieberer, 2006; Van Vonnö et al., 2014; Willumsen, 2017). When such organic *'party cohesion'* is lacking, external pressures like positive rewards or negative sanctions might still incentivize MPs to toe the party line (i.e. *'party discipline'*) (Hāzan, 2011; Van Vonnö et al., 2014).<sup>14</sup> PPGs leaders control and allocate a number of parliamentary resources, such as speaking time on the floor, committee memberships or offices and travel benefits. In some cases, they moreover have a considerable impact over MPs' chances for re-election or on their prospects for attaining higher legislative, party or executive office (e.g. committee chair, minister) which are attractive to parliamentarians as they generally are associated with higher status, policy influence and better remuneration. Control over such benefits – which could be both granted to cooperative group members and deprived or stripped from those who dissent – is generally considered to strengthen PPG leaders' ability to establish group unity (Bowler et al., 1999; Hāzan, 2011; Kam, 2009).

While some authors plead that PPG leaders rarely resort to the actual employment of disciplinary measures, as the perceived threat sheer existence might already do the trick (e.g. Andeweg & Thomassen, 2011), others describe how PPG leaders do occasionally use their 'carrots and sticks' (e.g. Bailer, 2017; Cowley, 2005; Field,

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<sup>14</sup> The distinction between *'party loyalty'* and *'party discipline'* is nuanced and often leads to conceptual confusion, even the more because disciplinary measures are not always actually employed (Andeweg & Thomassen, 2011). Important is that *'party loyalty'* follows a *'logic of appropriateness'* (March & Olsen, 1989) or the internalised and socialized norm that party unity in the legislature is important, both for the general functioning of parliamentary democracy and for reaching party's collective goals. *'Party discipline'*, by contrast, is more involuntarily in nature and follows a *'logic of consequentiality'*: legislators' anticipate that dissent could be followed by potential sanctions (Andeweg & Thomassen, 2011; Van Vonnö et al., 2014).

2013; Kam, 2009). Kam (2009) codes occurrences of party discipline in newspapers in Australia, Canada and New Zealand, and distinguishes between two types of party discipline. Formal discipline occurs when sanctions are formally imposed on MPs (e.g. by expelling them from the party group). Informal discipline refers to leaders reprimanding legislators or threatening them with the future use of sanctions. In a recent study based on elite interviews with PPG leaders in five European legislatures<sup>15</sup>, Bailer (2017) finds that PPG leaders do admit to sometimes using disciplinary tools such as depriving or granting additional speaking time, opportunities for self-promotion (e.g. media access or plenary questions), interesting committee assignments or office space and business trips. These measures are used more frequently when PPG leaders lack control over ex-ante candidate selection procedures and in large and ideologically heterogeneous groups. Many studies, moreover, do not actually investigate the interference of PPG leaders but take the existence of disciplinary measures as a given and concentrate directly on the moderating effects of institutional incentives (e.g. party-centred electoral rules such as closed-party electoral lists) (e.g. Carey, 2007; Coman, 2015; Sieberer, 2006) or leaders' personal characteristics (e.g. age, prior experience) on parties' voting unity (Bailer et al., 2009).

The predominant focus on PPG leaders' use of sanctions and their role in maintaining discipline, however, caused scholars to neglect the many other duties PPG leaders fulfil (and their potentially diverging priorities) that are still crucial for the functioning of legislatures (e.g. overseeing the division of labour among legislators, acting as central spokespersons, liaising with other parties and party branches; see above). Moreover, rational choice theory, on which many of these (and US congressional) studies are based - with sanctions as a potential 'cost' for dissenting legislators - generally uses simplifying assumptions of political reality, which generate too parsimonious accounts of how PPG leaders maintain unity in the wake of preference heterogeneity (Saalfeld & Strøm, 2014). In reality, for instance, PPG leaders might be reluctant to impose sanctions because it might damage their reputation within the party group or because it could lead to negative publicity (Laver, 1999). In addition, backbenchers' preferences are not necessarily fixed or exogenous to the policy-making process but could well be shaped by persuasion, deliberation and new substantial insights (Strahan, 2011). Lastly, PPGs are not free-floating structures but are part of a larger, more complex party

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<sup>15</sup> Being the national parliaments of Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom as well as the European Parliament (Bailer, 2017).

organization (Katz & Mair, 1993). As such, backbenchers, but also PPG leaders, might be subjected to the pressures and wishes from extra-parliamentary party organizations (*see above*), which should definitely be taken into account.

The above-mentioned reasons call for broader, in-depth studies on PPG leaders' general functioning in parliament. For decades, how legislators (both in the front and backbenches) fill in their mandates, and why they do so in a specific way, has been the focal point of the literature on parliamentary roles.

### **3. Parliamentary (leadership) roles**

#### **3.1. The study of roles in parliament**

Grounded in sociology, 'roles' connect individuals to a particular position within a specific social context - in this case: legislatures - and to the norms of conduct that are associated with them (Andeweg, 2014; Biddle, 1986; Müller & Saalfeld, 1997). Roles constitute, in other words, 'the application of a particular institution's 'logic of appropriateness' (March and Olsen 1989) to the level of individual inmates of that institution' (Andeweg 2014: 66). The internalisation of collective norms as a key feature is the 'unique selling proposition' that makes 'roles' stand out from other concepts such as 'styles', 'positions' or 'offices'

The concept of roles has first been introduced in legislative studies in the 1960s (Wahlke, Elau, et al., 1962). Since then, it has been used widely and proved a successful means to move the field beyond a narrow institutional perspective and open the black box of legislatures (Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012, p. 9). They provide a way to get behind formal procedures and place individual politicians and their conceptions of their tasks as representatives (i.e. 'representative roles') or their jobs overall (i.e. 'legislative roles')<sup>16</sup> at the centre of attention, for instance, through the use of large N-surveys or in-depth elite interviews (Rozenberg & Blomgren, 2012).

A 'role' as an analytical concept is, however, multidimensional and complex. This is reflected by the abundance of definitions given to it by role theorists (see: Biddle, 1986). In its simplest form and in the specific context of the legislature, roles can be defined as 'comprehensive patterns of attitudes and/or behaviour

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<sup>16</sup> For the analytical (and methodological) distinction between 'representative' and 'legislative roles', see Chapter 4.

shared by MPs' (Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012, p. 8). They enable MPs to be distinguished or identified as a group, and enable us to distinguish between them.<sup>17</sup> Other often used definitions are that of (Searing, 1994, p. 369), who approaches roles as 'composite patterns of goals, attitudes and behaviours that are characteristic of people in particular positions' or that of Strøm (1997, p. 157) who defines them as 'behavioural strategies conditioned by the institutional framework'. From these definitions already becomes apparent that some authors see roles as attitudinal constructs, others as behaviours and even others as a combination of the two. We follow Andeweg (2012, 2014) in this analytical discussion, who strongly argues in favour of disentangling the concept by making a clear distinction between (1) roles as attitudes and (2) their translation into (potentially) congruent behaviours. Roles are then purely seen as 'an individual's perception of what is generally expected of her as a holder of her current institutional position' (Andeweg, 2012, p. 66). The primary purpose of studying roles as attitudinal constructs is indeed to make sense of the uniformity and regularity of individual behaviour that results from a position in society and/or from the incorporation of collective norms' (Blomgren and Rozenberg, 2012, p. 8).

Today, there does appear to be a quite broad academic consensus that parliamentary roles are created, shaped and maintained by an interplay of MPs' individual preferences and goals on the one hand, and (in)formal institutional incentives on the other (Andeweg, 2014; Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012). These insights, underpinning roles' basic determinants, find their origins in popular neo-institutional frameworks that were developed in the 1990s (Searing, 1991, 1994; Strøm, 1997, 2012).

### **3.2. Early approaches and the neo-institutionalist turn**

Multiple scholars already extensively documented how role analysis has long been dominated by the research traditions of *structural-functionalism* (e.g. Wahlke, Elau, et al., 1962) and *symbolic-interactionism* (e.g. Cain, Ferejohn, & Fiorina, 1987; Fenno, 1978) (see: Andeweg, 2014, pp. 272-281; Müller & Saalfeld, 1997, pp. 2-13; Searing, 1994, pp. 6-12). Building on the work of Parsons (1951), structural-functionalists particularly 'take structure seriously' (Searing, 1994, p. 9). Roles are

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<sup>17</sup> Central to role analysis is the identification, classification and explanation of 'role types' among legislators – for instance, such as Searing's (1994) ministerial aspirants, policy advocates, constituency members and parliamentary men.

seen as institutionally-prescribed norms of conduct that are internalized by legislators and are constitutive to the institution as such and to the successful performance of its basic functions (Wahlke, Elau, et al., 1962). According to symbolic-interactionists (e.g. Mead, 1934), on the other hand, roles are rather created and recreated through processes of social learning and interaction between individuals and their associates. Roles are thus formed predominantly by the transmittance of informal, social expectations to role players (Searing, 1994, p. 10).

These historical traditions have been subject to a number of criticisms, however. Besides proliferating a large amount of neologisms associated to roles, which led to conceptual confusion (Searing, 1994, pp. 6-9), the main empirical critique holds that early approaches do not adequately credit people with their own independent standpoints and choices, and overemphasize the role of institutional norms and social expectations (Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012; Searing, 1994). Moreover, many studies – often building on the seminal work of Wahlke et al. (1962) and their conception of the ‘representational role’ – produced inconclusive results and were unsuccessful in linking legislators’ roles to concrete and characteristic behaviour in the legislature (*see also Chapter 4*) (e.g. Andeweg, 2012; De Winter, 1997; Gross, 1978; Hedlund & Friesema, 1972; Jewell, 1983; Kuklinski & Elling, 1977). Together with the emergence of rational-choice perspectives on political behaviour, which shifted the focus away from group norms and socialization process towards individuals’ goal-seeking calculations, this caused parliamentary role analysis to gradually fall out of favour in the 1980s (Searing, 1994).

More recently, however, the study of parliamentary roles is experiencing an apparent uprise (Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012). More and more researchers now acknowledge that the ‘roles of politicians are much too important to be overlooked’ (Searing, 1994, p. 2). They are ‘the means through which politicians ‘educate, govern, reform and represent citizens in contemporary liberal democracies’ and through which they ‘play their parts in looking after the political systems essential tasks or responsibilities’ (Searing, 2012, pp. xii-xiii). One of the main reasons for this ‘*role revival*’ can be found in the emergence of neo-institutional approaches, which form a synthesis of political-institutional and sociological perspectives on the one hand (i.e. focusing on formal and informal rules, norms and values) and economical perspectives on political behaviour on the other (i.e. focusing on politicians as rational actors with a free will) (March & Olsen, 1989; Peters, 2000). By combining ‘*Homo Sociologicus*’ and ‘*Homo Economicus*’,

neo-institutionalists emphasise the influence of both institutional incentives and individual motivations on the way politicians perceive of their roles. Two contributions in particular have been notably successful in joining the ‘new institutionalism’ and the concept of parliamentary roles: Donald Searing’s (1994) ‘*motivational approach*’ and Kaare Strøm’s (1997) ‘*strategic approach*’.

### 3.2.1. Searing’s ‘*motivational approach*’

In his ground-breaking work ‘*Westminster’s world. Understanding political roles*’, Donald Searing (1994) presents a ‘*motivational approach*’ for studying legislative roles, which he later applies to parliamentary life in the British House of Commons. In his framework, Searing mixes ‘rules, roles and reasons’ (March & Olsen, 1989) by recognising that roles are embedded in institutional contexts, while simultaneously treating role players as purposive actors with a free will: politicians are not locked up in social cages of conformity, nor do they operate within an institutional vacuum. Accordingly, Searing suggests that parliamentary roles are created by (in)formal rules, norms and values, and by the individual motivations and goals of legislators. Rather than using predefined role constructs like ‘trustee or delegate’ (Wahlke, Elau, et al., 1962), he strongly emphasises that researchers that try to reconstruct roles satisfactorily should try to understand them as they are understood by their players: ‘as dynamic interactions between rules and reasons, between institutional constraints and individual preferences’ (Searing, 1994, p. 12). By directing our concepts and measures towards roles as politicians themselves conceive them, he believes, we are in the best possible position to explain the observable behaviour that originates from these role orientations. This is exactly what earlier contributors often failed to do.

Well-known is Searing’s distinction between ‘position roles’ and ‘preference roles’. Position roles refer to leadership functions in parliament (e.g. Whips, Speaker, Ministers,...) that require the performance of many specific duties and responsibilities and are therefore, at least according to Searing, almost completely determined by formal and informal rules. Preference roles, on the contrary, are associated with parliamentary positions linked with fewer responsibilities (e.g. backbenchers) and are consequently less constrained by institutions, leaving more freedom for individual choice. In fact, preference roles lend themselves better to applying the motivational approach on roles, since they allow more interplay between individual motivations and the institutional context.

Formal rules are relatively easy to analyse, as they are described in an organisation's constitutional code, 'which defines lines of authority and division of work by specifying the organisation's principal offices and their principle duties and responsibilities' (Searing, 1994, p. 4). More challenging to measure are informal rules, which refer 'to the relationships, attitudes and behaviours that are not fully specified in the formal scheme' (Searing, 1994, p. 4). These informal rules are largely created by expectations and attitudes towards certain institutional positions. The relationship between formal rules and informal rules is 'reciprocal and complex', but most importantly formal rules determine the boundaries in which informal rules can be formed, 'thereby guiding informal relationships along lines that are appropriate for pursuing the organisations goals' (Searing, 1994, p. 4). Regarding the individual preferences as determinants of role conceptions, Searing distinguishes between (1) career goals and (2) psychological incentives. The former are the rational calculations that are inevitably present in the thinking of politicians, while the latter are constituted by the inherent preferences, desires and beliefs which are rooted in the personality of role players. Career goals are defined quite broad and refer, for instance, to MPs' desire to climb the political ladder (e.g. 'Ministerial Aspirants'), to promote and influence policies (e.g. 'Policy Advocates'), to enhance and maintain one's status' (e.g. 'Parliament Men') or to redress 'local grievances' (e.g. Constituency Members). Psychological preferences on the other hand, for instance refer to a desire for achievement, feelings of rectitude, self-importance or a sense of duty and competence. Although Searing acknowledges the importance of rational career goals, he asserts that psychological incentives are the principle energising forces in all parliamentary roles: they 'provide the 'passion'; they intensify the striving that is inherent in the career goals' (Searing, 1994, pp. 19-20).

### 3.2.2. *Strøm's 'strategic approach'*

Kaare Strøm (1997, 2012) sees merit in Searing's attempt at marrying neo-institutional insights and role theory and agrees that (in)formal rules as well as individual choices are important when analysing parliamentary roles. He too, believes that institutions are key determinants of roles as they are the 'rules' that constrain 'reason' and they do so in a greater or lesser extent. He disagrees, however, with the limited role Searing attributes to 'reason' as a motivational drive and contends that 'besides all charming idiosyncrasies, legislators are goal-seeking men or women' (Strøm, 1997, p. 158).

In an attempt to shift closer to rational-choice neo-institutionalism (e.g. Shepsle, 1989; Tsebelis, 2002), Strøm presents a '*strategic approach*' in which roles are seen as 'behavioural strategies conditioned by the institutional framework in which parliamentarians operate' (Strøm, 1997, p. 157). Roles are 'game plans' or 'endogenous prescriptions as to how actors may most successfully and efficiently act to maximize the likelihood of whatever outcomes they favour' (Strøm, 1997, p. 158). Which role - or strategy – seems fit, is determined by cultural expectations and personal traits, but above all by the rational and purposive goals legislators pursue. The exogenous 'tastes' or preferences legislators have concerning their political fortunes are crucial factors that shape roles but do not constitute them in itself.<sup>18</sup> Strøm identifies four hierarchically-ordered, rational goals: reselection, re-election, party office and legislative office.

As role players repeat their strategies day after day, they become 'routines, regular patterns of behaviour' (1997, p. 158). A key aspect of these strategies is the purposeful allocation of the scarce resources MPs possess (e.g. their time, media access, money and voting power). Conditioned by the institutional framework which constrains and enables, different goals lead to different strategies and to a different allocation of parliamentary resources. For instance, MPs whose sole ambition is to get re-nominated and re-elected for parliamentary office will, guided by the electoral system and existing intra-party rules on candidate selection processes, adapt their behaviour to please party leaders if selection processes are centralised, or to satisfy local party branches and/or their own constituencies if selection processes are decentralised. Correspondingly, MPs who seek a higher party office will devote more time and effort to the desires of the party leaders and his peers, even if this would include fulfilling unrewarding tasks with low electoral payoff.

### **3.3. Theoretical determinism and the rigidity of 'position roles'**

Both scholars provide valuable analytical frameworks. While Searing advocates thick description and sees (rational and psychological) preferences as endogenous to the role-taking process, Strøm promotes parsimony by conceptualising roles as strategic behaviour shaped by exogenous, rational goals. Moreover, as Strøm's roles are instrumental to reaching one's strategic goal, gratification is delayed (upon reaching that goal), while in Searing's psychological preference-driven roles

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<sup>18</sup> In Searing's view, preferences are an intrinsic part – the motivational core - of the role itself (Searing, 1994, p. 19).



gratification is immediate (Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012, p. 22). Still, differences between the two approaches should not be exaggerated. Both authors agree that legislators tend to focus predominantly on playing one singular role<sup>19</sup>, which is shaped by both institutional and individual factors and which has repercussions on concrete, observable and characteristic parliamentary behaviour.

By both distinguishing between ‘preference roles’ and ‘position roles’, however, and by linking frontbenchers to the latter, the neo-institutionalist insights of these influential frameworks seem primarily directed to backbenchers. This appears to have led towards the underexposure of (potential variation in) frontbench roles in parliament as also other scholars have remarked how preference roles are most illustrative of these frameworks (Blomgren and Rozenberg, 2012: 22).

Still, Strøm acknowledges that position roles (institutionally-constrained strategies) and preference roles (institutionally-unconstrained strategies) should be seen as the ‘polar points on a continuum of institutional constraint’: most real-life political roles lie somewhere in between. Also Searing admits that ‘even when institutional rules trump individual goals, they cannot fully drive them out of the picture’ (Searing, 1994, p. 200). This theoretical nuance, however, comes less to the forefront in subsequent empirical analyses in which the roles of frontbenchers are reconstructed. Searing, for instance, subcategorizes multiple backbench roles (e.g. ‘Ministerial Aspirants’, ‘Policy Advocates’, ‘Constituency Members’, ‘Parliament Men’) and subsequent subroles (e.g. the role of Policy Advocate is further subdivided into ‘Ideologues’, ‘Generalists’ and ‘Specialists’) in his monumental study on the British House of Commons. His frontbench roles, by contrast, all coincide with their institutionalized position (e.g. Chief Whip, Junior Whips, Ministers) and preference-driven differences among his interviewees are only sparsely discussed. As a consequence, the often-heard critique that role theorists in the 1960 viewed roles too much as ‘group facts’ and neglected the individual variety in roles across similar institutional context (Searing, 1994, p. 25) might well also hold here. By adopting rigid – in fact structural-functionalist – views of parliamentary frontbench roles as institutionally-prescribed ‘position roles’, we might overlook individual role variation across these actors. As frontbenchers, such as PPG leaders, have an important impact on the organisation

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<sup>19</sup> See, however, for instance Andeweg (1997) or Van Vonn (2012) in this regard. In Chapter 6, we further elaborate on the theoretical discussion of whether politicians specialize in a particular role or if they switch roles depending on the circumstances or political arena.

of parliament and the daily activities of other legislators (*see above*), (potential) role variation is definitely something worth examining.

The main theoretical argument that drives the conceptual distinction between preference and position roles (and between back- and frontbenchers respectively) relates to task differentiation and the importance of one's responsibilities for an organizations smooth functioning. Frontbench roles are more constrained and better crystalized because actors care far more about them. They are linked to well-defined positions to which many responsibilities are assigned and whose proper performance is critical for winning power and exercising it effectively (Searing, 1994: 199). We find a similar logic in situational or contingency approaches on leadership in organizational psychology and management studies, which analogously stress the importance of contextual factors on leadership performance and discretion (e.g. Osborn, Hunt, & Jauch, 2002; Osborn, Uhl-Bien, & Milosevic, 2014; Yukl, 2013, pp. 162-184). Also here it is stressed that organizational leaders face many (in)formal demands and constraints because of their major responsibilities and many duties. Simultaneously, however, it is argued that even for people who occupy the highest position within an organizational hierarchy, some scope for role choice remains, exactly because their differentiated responsibilities allow them to emphasize specific dimensions of their jobs and de-emphasize others (James & White, 1983; Stewart, 1982; Yukl, 2013). Within the boundaries imposed by relevant stakeholders or higher management tiers, some leaders might for instance emphasize staff supervision, whereas others delegate much of the internal management to the assistant manager and concentrate on actively broaching new export markets. The trade-offs inherent among having multiple performance dimensions and the lack of time to do everything well, in other words, 'make it inevitable that different people will define the same job in different ways' (Yukl, 2013, p. 34). How they do so, at least partly reflect managers' personal interests, skills and values as well as the (changing and divergent) role expectations of individuals whose destinies are intertwined with the manager's.

This rationale can also be transposed to parliament. Even if their positions come with great responsibility and extensive task differentiation, those higher in parliaments' organizational hierarchy – i.e. frontbenchers – might prioritise

specific aspects of their jobs over others<sup>20</sup>, which could result in distinctly different roles. This could moreover not only be influenced by informal norms but also by their own preferences and goals. As they generally have a wide array of functions next to their most stressed tasks in maintaining party unity (e.g. dividing labour, communicating party policies, liaising with other party branches), this could definitely also be the case for PPG leaders in particular.

#### 4. Why expect role variance?

This study aims to bring agency back in and advances a less deterministic, more actor-centred approach of frontbench roles in the legislature. We concur that the roles of legislators and their underlying determinants are most effectively and satisfactorily studied inductively - e.g. as 'they are understood by their players' (Searing, 1994). This does not mean, however, that no broader expectations with regards to the explanatory factors that potentially drive role variation may be inferred from earlier studies on parliamentary (backbench) roles as well as from the party discipline literature, where PPG leaders have been most distinctly studied. Even when examining PPG leaders within the same political-institutional system (i.e. *the macro-level*), we argue that role variation among PPG leaders is possible due to diverging contextual pressures at the level of the political party (i.e. *the meso-level*) and PPG leaders' diverging individual preferences and goals (i.e. *the micro-level*).

First of all, role variance might occur because of *diverging informal role expectations that stem from contextual (party-level) pressures*. For one, a party's *government status* might matter. When in government, PPG leaders are not only responsible for safeguarding the coherence of legislative work with the party program and additional party decisions, but also for ensuring its compliance with the coalition agreement and additional government compromises (Depauw & Martin, 2009). As these compromises generally imply concessions for all participating parties, this might cause internal frictions among the PPGs' ideological hardliners and

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<sup>20</sup> Prioritizing specific aspects of their jobs over others is in essence also what backbenchers do. Whilst all MPs are generally tasked somehow with lawmaking, checking the executive, representation and deliberation (Norton, 1993), some focus distinctly more on their policy-making tasks through the initiation of bills or by means of government scrutiny (e.g. Policy Advocates), others focus more on representing local entities and specific grievances in the legislature (e.g. Constituency Members) and some are mostly engaged in public deliberation and plenary activities as a means gain attention and pursue career ambitions (e.g. Ministerial Aspirants) or highlight their status (e.g. Parliament Men) (Searing, 1994).

could potentially lead to their publicly observable discontent (e.g. Sieberer, 2006). Because of this, and as they bear important responsibilities in securing cabinet stability through the assertion of party unity (De Winter & Dumont, 2006; Laver, 1999), majority PPG leaders might (have to) focus more on the PPG's internal management (e.g. coordinating intra-party deliberation, monitoring group members), whilst opposition leaders could be expected to be able to act more independently.

In a similar vein, also the size of the PPG might matter. Larger PPGs logically tend to be characterised by more internal preference heterogeneity and need more elaborate hierarchical structures and efforts from PPG leaders to coordinate and streamline MPs' activities (Heidar & Koole, 2000c; Sieberer, 2006). This might again cause leaders of large PPGs to adopt a role that is distinctly more focused on the internal management of the PPG compared to leaders of small PPG groups. Relatedly, not only the size but also the *composition of the PPG* might play a role. PPGs with a lot of politically-unexperienced newcomers are expected to need leaders who pay considerable attention to coaching MPs and showing newly elected the parliamentary ropes. In PPGs with a lot of senior members this might be redundant, although here more attention towards the maintenance of party unity might be required as experienced MPs are generally more detached and less dependent on the party for their future political fortunes (e.g. Depauw, 2005).

Furthermore, central in politicians' thinking is their desire to be re-selected in a later phase of their career (Strøm, 1997). This could make them particularly responsive to the expectations of their *selectorate* (Hazan & Rahat, 2010). As PPG leaders are often tasked with liaising with other party branches, the relevant question here is to what extent PPG leaders are selected by the PPG or by extra-parliamentary actors such as the central party leadership (Lisi & Freire, 2014) or grassroots members (Bale & Webb, 2014). In the specific case of Belgium, PPG leaders are formally selected by PPG members (*see Chapter 7*) but often central party leaders decide practically sovereignly (De Winter & Dumont, 2000; Pilet & Wauters, 2014). PPG leaders who were chosen by their PPG rather than by an exclusive central party selectorate might conceive of their role differently and, for instance, feel more mandated to defend PPG members' interests. Beyond that, the selection of candidates for top political offices like - PPG leader - is typically a pure and often unformalized intra-party matter. The in- or exclusiveness of the party selectorate might then provide indications of political parties' organizational culture (or their openness to the input of backbenchers). This is a less tangible but

important aspect of parties' internal organization for which generally less ideal proxies, such as party ideology, age or origin are used (Heidar & Koole, 2000c).

Diverging informal institutional expectations (at the party-level) might, however, not always suffice in order to explain role variance. Much like among backbenchers, we expect that *individual-level factors, motivations and goals drive role variation*, and thus that also among PPG leaders 'preference roles' are possible. Particularly *progressive career ambitions* might be decisive (Best & Vogel, 2012; Searing, 1994; Strøm, 1997). Research has shown how PPG leadership can be a stepping stone for higher political office such as party leader, Speaker or cabinet minister (de Vet & Wauters, 2015). PPG leaders typically control a number of interesting parliamentary resources that, besides enforcing discipline (Bailer, 2017), can be used for self-promotion (e.g. media access, speaking time). Consequently, PPG leaders who aspire such higher office might fill in their position differently than those who do not. They might try to put themselves more in the limelight, while less ambitious PPG leaders are more likely to be satisfied with a back office position, aimed at supporting and coordinating other MPs. Relatedly, also PPG leaders' prior *experience (or age)* might matter. Relevant political experience (e.g. as an MP or an executive cabinet member) is generally associated to the accumulation of policy and procedural expertise and with longer socialisation processes within the legislature and the political party. PPG leaders with a long political track record are bound to be more inclined to focus on coaching MPs and transferring political knowledge compared to PPG leaders who are relatively inexperienced 'rookies'. Moreover, it might be logically assumed that those who become PPG leaders at the end of a rich political career or at an advanced age, are less likely to be motivated by career aspects or that they are at least less dependent from the (central) party leadership for their remaining career plans (see: Bailer et al., 2009). This could, for instance, both mean that they function more detached from the party leadership in their liaising tasks (see above) and that they do not feel the personal need to engage in personal vote-seeking activities (e.g. by frequently taking the (plenary) floor or trying to get personal media attention) all the time.

Lastly, it should be noted that, besides looking at the impact of party-level contextual factors and individual-level goals and preferences, it is also important to take into account the temporality of parliamentary roles. Although roles are fairly stable, collective changes in MPs' roles may come forth from modifications of the 'rules of the game' or from changes in the political or societal context that

affect (in)formal institutional expectations and redefines the boundary conditions in which politicians act (Best & Vogel, 2012, p. 38). Similar to Searing's (1994, pp. 370-372) finding that British MPs' roles evolved due to processes of professionalisation, also the roles of Belgian PPG leaders might have undergone changes over time. This might be relevant in our case, as our interviewees (see Chapter 3) comprise both current and former PPG leaders.

For one, because of their central position within the party, party organizational transformations which affect the internal balance of power, might be relevant. Although the international literature speaks about an 'ascendency of the party in public office' due to the emergency of the societally-detached cartel party (see amongst others: Bardi et al., 2017; Katz & Mair, 2002), PPGs in Belgium are still seen as rather weak political actors compared to the powerful central party organizations. In order to guarantee some degree of political stability in a context of unstable multiparty governments, intra-party decision-making is concentrated in the hands of a small EPO elite whilst the interference of other actors is minimized (De Winter & Dumont, 2006). It can be argued, moreover, that the dominance of central party elites further amplified due to consecutive constitutional reforms that turned Belgium into a federal state and caused a proliferation of separate PPGs since the first direct elections of regional parliaments in 1995.<sup>21</sup> As also policy competences further devolved in the years after, this poses new challenges for intra-party coordination, causing the role of central party elites in harmonizing policy-making at the diverse levels to become even more vital, and more complex due to the emergence of asymmetrical governments at the federal and regional level (De Winter & Dumont, 2006; Steyvers, 2014). This could, for instance, decrease the autonomy of PPG leaders and make them more responsive to the expectations of central party elites. Also other evolutions, such as the increasing mediatisation of politics and the growing focus on high-placed individual politicians (Rahat & Sheaffer, 2007; Van Aelst, 2018) or the electoral reform of 2002 that enlarged the electoral districts might affect the role conceptions of PPG leaders (e.g. by potentially focusing more on their spokespersonship tasks, amongst others due to a growing need of reaching a wider electorate). Hence, while the distinct focus of the explanatory analysis will still be on the influence of party-level factors and individual goals and preferences

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<sup>21</sup> Before 1995, the regional parliaments were composed of federal representatives, making coordination between federal and subnational levels no issue.

on PPG leaders' roles, potential, more systemic evolutions over time will also be taken into account.

## **5. The road ahead**

In the seven chapters that follow, we thus delve more into the details and idiosyncrasies of an underexposed but crucial aspect of daily parliamentary organisation. This endeavour, moreover, puts us in the right place to assess the validity of a number of (deterministic) premises of influential neo-institutional approaches on roles which are often applied but never really put to the test (Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012). Is there indeed very limited variation in how frontbenchers – PPG leaders in our case – fill in their leadership position. To what extent, if any, do individual preferences or goals shape PPG leaders' roles? What is the role of diverging informal role expectations at the meso- or party-level?

Chapter 3 is dedicated to the methodological sections of this thesis. We amongst others, expound how we aim to measure the roles of PPG leaders, why the Belgium provides a fruitful case for examining rigid propositions on leadership roles, and which strategies we use to explain PPG leaders' roles and pinpoint the relevance of both institutional and individual-level explanatory factors. Chapters 4 through 8 subsequently present the empirical findings that come forth out of these methodological choices.

# Data and methodology

## 1. Introduction

Any empirical study of parliamentary roles inevitably needs to consider MPs' views of what being an MP entails in some way or another (Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012, p. 215). These data be obtained from large-scale surveys (e.g. Andeweg, 2012; Brack, Costa, & Teixeira, 2012; Dudzinska et al., 2014), elite interviews (e.g. Gauja, 2012; Navarro, 2012; Searing, 1994), participant observation (Fenno, 1978) or they can be deduced more indirectly from behavioural data (e.g. Jenny & Müller, 2012).<sup>22</sup> Searing, in any case, strongly urges to refrain oneself from deductively imposing abstract concepts that 'exist in the minds of social scientists rather than in the minds of the people we are studying' (1994, p. 13).<sup>23</sup> Although costly in terms of time and labour, he defends an inductive, qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews. By directing our concepts and measures directly to roles as conceived by their actual players, he argues, we obtain more veracious and valuable accounts of political reality as perceived by those who construct it. An inductive approach on roles, moreover, puts us in the best possible position to understand the political behaviour that follows from these roles, something which early contributors often failed to do (Searing, 1994, p. 14).

Still, to operationalise the concept of roles and to go beyond a mere description of how politicians believe individuals in their position should act, remains challenging. The twofold aims of this project are (*RQ1*) to examine and describe the self-perceived roles of (Belgian) PPG leaders and (*RQ2*) to explain role

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<sup>22</sup> Distilling roles from behavioral data, however, puts restrictions on the analytical use of the concept as any further use of role typologies to explain and understand subsequent political behaviour would evidently be highly tautological (Andeweg, 2014, p. 269).

<sup>23</sup> Searing (1994, p. 12) here hints at predefined role types such as 'trustee' or 'delegate', referring to the representational styles as developed by Wahlke, Elau, et al. (1962).



variance based on both individual preferences and diverging institutional-contextual expectations. Consequently, also the analysis will consist of two main components.

The first, *descriptive component* uses a broad, qualitative interpretivist research strategy to explore the roles of PPG leaders. This descriptive part will also allow us to already identify to a certain degree the potential individual considerations and contextual pressures that underpin them. Following Searing's (1994) *motivational approach*, in-depth interviews with PPG leaders are used to inductively reconstruct these actors' roles and gauge their personal motivations, goals and preferences. Additional elite interviews with PPG actors (e.g. MPs) and EPO actors (e.g. party leaders) in their direct professional environment moreover enable us – together with a document analysis of formal rules – to provide a detailed reconstruction of the (in)formal institutional environment in which PPG leaders operate and assess the impact of contextual role expectations on PPG leaders functioning.

Second, the *explanatory component* introduces Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) (Ragin, 1987; Rihoux & Ragin, 2009) to further examine the (institutional and individual) factors that shape PPG leaders' roles. QCA is helpful here as it enables cross-case comparison whilst simultaneously respecting the intricate causal complexity of each case (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009, p. xviii). Although – to our knowledge – entirely novel to legislative role research, we argue (and demonstrate) that QCA is a highly useful and appropriate method to supplement the in-depth reconstruction of the roles of legislators, with a transparent and structural analysis of their determinants. As we discuss in more detail below, QCA provides us with the necessary tools to assess the interrelated explanatory power of institutional incentives on the one hand, and personal motivations and goals on the other. The latter effectively allows us to test the deterministic premises on frontbench roles in influential neo-institutionalist frameworks (*see Chapter 2*).

In addition, and although secondary to the qualitative (comparative) character of this study, on several locations we make use of quantitative data and statistical techniques. Chapter 4 for instance uses comparative survey data collected by the PARTIREP MP Survey team (Deschouwer & Depauw, 2014) to test an alternative, deductive approach for studying PPG leaders' representative role orientations (Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012; Wahlke, Elau, et al., 1962). This alternative does not provide clear results, which further strengthens our claim that the inductive approach is most suited for role analyses. Chapter 5 explores the

socio-demographic and political characteristics of Belgian PPG leaders using on an original dataset on PPG leaders in the Federal and Flemish parliament (N=311) (1962-2019). Multivariate regression models are used to examine whether differences in terms of PPG leaders' profile can be discerned based, for instance, on parties' government status, size or recent electoral performances.

In this methodological chapter, we focus mostly on (1) the qualitative reconstruction of PPG leadership roles and (2) the QCA of their determinants, which constitute the core of this thesis. We explain in more detail which methodological choices were made, how the data were collected and which techniques were used to analyse them. The supporting quantitative analyses of both secondary (*Chapter 4*) and original data (*Chapter 5*) are less essential here and will be discussed in more detail in the methodological sections of the corresponding empirical chapters.

## **2. In-depth, qualitative reconstruction of PPG leaders' roles**

Qualitative methods and elite interview data form the backbone of this thesis. Legislative roles are most accurately reconstructed not only by trying to understand them as they are understood by their players (Searing, 1994), but also by taking into account the characteristic institutional incentives provided by the parochial features of a given legislature (Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012; de Vet & Wauters, 2018). As also we find that a deductive, international-comparative approach produces unsatisfactory results (*see Chapter 4*), this research is designed as a single-case study. By examining the occurrence of role variance within the same institutional setting, moreover, we are moreover well-placed to test (and challenge) the deterministic neo-institutionalist assumptions on frontbench roles. The main focus is on Belgium, which provides an highly interesting case, also for a wider international audience. Below, we first briefly summarize the main and most relevant political features of Belgium and then discuss why this institutional setting provides fertile ground for an in-depth study on PPG leadership roles.

### **2.1. The Belgian case**

The Belgian constitution of 1831 designed the country as a bicameral parliamentary system with the 'Chamber of Representatives' as its lower house and the 'Senate' as the upper house. Belgium is often described as a 'divided country' where sharp societal demarcations are historically centred along religious, socio-economic and linguistic cleavages and gave rise to a multitude of

political parties (Deschouwer, 2009, 2018). Since 1978, there is a distinct Flemish and francophone party system between which there is no electoral competition (except in Brussels). Each party family (i.e. traditional liberal, socialist and Christian democratic parties, and newer regionalist, ecologist, and extreme-right parties) have their ideological counterpart at the other side of the linguistic border, albeit with varying degrees of electoral success (De Winter, Swyngedouw, & Dumont, 2006).

Next to this *extreme party fragmentation*, which is partly driven by the country's proportional electoral system, another important characteristic is that Belgium can rightfully claim its title as a textbook example of a *consociational democracy* (Lijphart, 1981, p. 1). Political conflicts between socio-cultural communities have been historically pacified through consensual decision-making at the elite-level. Particularly exemplary of this are the six consecutive 'state reforms' since 1970 that mitigated centrifugal territorial tendencies between the north and the south and transformed the country into a federal state. This regionalisation process gave considerable competences and autonomy to the federation's linguistic communities (Flemish, French and German-speaking) and territorial regions (Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels) (Deschouwer, 2009; Hooghe, 2004) and proliferated the number of directly-elected (regional) parliaments and PPGs alike (De Winter & Dumont, 2006).

A third feature of the Belgian case, which is highly related to the characteristics addressed above, is the general power of *extra-parliamentary parties*. In order to assure a minimal degree of cohesion and stability in this context of extreme party fragmentation, complex multi-party coalitions and multi-level decision-making, party elites keep tight control over policy-making at the federal and regional tiers of government. As elaborately discussed by De Winter and Dumont (2006), central party organisations developed a number of *ex-ante* and *ex-post* control mechanisms (see: Lupia, 2003) that severely hamper the room for manoeuvre of executive and parliamentary agents. For one, the hands of cabinet ministers, who are selected and deselected by party leaders, are tied by voluminous coalition agreements (negotiated by party leaders), the collective nature of cabinet decision-making (with a central role for deputy-prime ministers as their parties' 'chef de file') and reporting requirements in the party's central executive and during informal meetings with the party president. Also parliamentary representatives are strongly dependent from the party leadership, not in the least through the country's flexible-list PR system, which has been described by some as a 'closed-

list system in disguise' (Crisp et al., 2013; De Winter, 2005). Elected representatives are 'reduced to party agents' (De Winter & Dumont, 2006), have comparatively limited access to institutional resources such as funding or personal staff (De Winter & Dumont, 2000; De Winter & Wolfs, 2017) and showcase high levels party discipline (Depauw, 2005).

Multiple reasons related to these political-institutional features make Belgium an interesting case for studying the roles of PPG leaders, that should also be (theoretically) relevant for a wider, international audience. First of all, unlike in some other countries (*see Chapter 2*), PPG leadership in Belgium does not coincide with the overall political leadership of parties (e.g. Westminster democracies, the Netherlands) nor with the presidency of the extra-parliamentary party organization (EPO) (e.g. Spain, Germany) (Helms, 2000; Pilet & Cross, 2014).<sup>24</sup> Instead, Belgian parties' indisputable leaders are the EPO presidents (Fiers, 1998). These powerful actors have an important (in some cases, predominant) say in the selection of PPG leaders in the federal and regional parliamentary assemblies, who thereafter function as a central 'linking pin' between the PPG and the EPO (Pilet & Wauters, 2014). Due to this comparatively weak intra-party position, and because of the general dominance of EPO elites over (legislative) policy-making (De Winter & Dumont, 2006), PPG leaders' leeway in defining their own role is expected to be limited, providing a good theoretical case for testing neo-institutional approaches and their deterministic views on frontbench roles in parliament.

Their intermediate intra-party position, moreover, quite likely confronts PPG leaders with a potential 'competing principal problem' (e.g. Carey, 2007). On the one hand, they can choose to act as a representative of the central party elite, communicating their decisions to MPs and ensuring their correct implementation in parliament. On the other, they can also inform party leaders about issues at stake at the level of parliamentary decision-making, warn the party elite about discontent among backbenchers, and defend the latter's preferences at higher (central) party echelons (De Winter, 1992, p. 18; Pilet & Wauters, 2014). This in itself is a topic worth investigating as it might provide MPs, who are generally seen as weak actors in the Belgian 'partitocracy' (De Winter & Dumont, 2006; Deschouwer, De Winter, & Della Porta, 1996; Van Nieuwenhuyse, Fiers, &

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<sup>24</sup> In the mentioned countries that go by the rules of dualism, PPG leaders often are the party spearheads, unless the party leader is in the executive and is obliged to resign from parliament.

Verleden, 2018), an alternative route towards policy influence, outside of the parliamentary arena. It should be noted, moreover, that although PPG leaders' intermediate intra-party position is rather typical of the Belgian case, it also occurs in other countries where PPG leaders normally have a more prominent role (e.g. the Netherlands, Germany) but when (s)he moves to government and is replaced by someone who in turn is tasked with liaising between the party-in-government and the party-in-parliament. This again, should, make the findings of this Belgian case-study relevant to wider readership.

## **2.2.Elite interview data**

The data this thesis centrally draws on, stem from a total of 68 in-depth elite interviews. As we saw in the previous chapter, roles are an 'individual's perception of what is expected of her as a holder of a specific institutional position (Andeweg, 2012, p. 66). Following an epistemology that is indeed essentially constructivist or interpretivist (Halperin & Heath, 2017; Morris, 2009; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2015), elite interviews allow us look at political reality through the lenses of its central protagonists and, in our case, reconstruct the roles of PPG leaders as PPG leaders themselves conceive of them (e.g. Searing, 1994). Elite interviews provide a great opportunity to get into the mind-sets of politicians (Aberbach & Rockman, 2002; Lilliker, 2003; Rathbun, 2008), gather the detailed, in-depth data needed for '*thick description*' (Geertz, 1973) and gain insights about actions or events that take place in secret meetings, such as party group sessions (Bailer, 2014, p. 167). For this research project two types of elite interviews were conducted. First of all, (current and former) PPG leaders were interviewed in order to gather data on their overall role orientations, self-reported behaviours and personal motivations. Second, we additionally interviewed parliamentary (MPs, senior staff) and extra-parliamentary party agents (party leaders, senior staff) in the direct environments of each of the selected PPG leaders. These interviews provide useful information on the informal role expectations of PPG and EPO actors towards PPG leaders and allow us to triangulate the information issued by PPG leaders (e.g. their self-reported behaviour) and check the overall data validity (e.g. Bailer, 2014; Lilliker, 2003).

### *2.2.1. Case-selection and access*

Respondents were chosen following a two-stage case-selection process. In the first phase, we selected (current and former) PPG leaders. Conducting interviews, particularly with busily-engaged political elites, is a time-consuming process. Even

if one succeeds in ‘getting in the door’, interviews have to be scheduled (and often re-scheduled) and need attentive preparation (Bailer, 2014; Berry, 2002; Goldstein, 2002; Hermanowicz, 2002). Once conducted, a labour-intensive period starts of transcribing, coding and analysing the interview transcripts. For this reason, and as cases in QCA (i.e. PPG leaders) should have a maximum of heterogeneity on a limited number of characteristics (or conditions) (Berg-Schlosser & De Meur, 2009; Schneider & Wagemann, 2010), further choices had to be made to further narrow down the pool of potential interview respondents.

First, we decided to only select PPG leaders of Flemish parties. By restricting the number of political parties in the analysis, it remains feasible to interview a sufficient number of PPG leaders per party. The latter allows us to cross-reference and make more reliable assessments of differences *between* parties (e.g. due to informal habits or formal internal rules). By at the same time making the research period long enough, we are moreover in a good position to pursue a maximal degree of variance *within* political parties, for instance by interviewing opposition and majority PPG leaders or experienced and inexperienced PPG leaders from each party, to the extent possible (*see below*). By interviewing PPG leaders of all six major Flemish parties with acknowledged party groups in the elected assemblies, moreover, we still acquire data on an entire party system (De Winter et al., 2006) and obtain sufficient variation based on parties’ ideology, age or experience in office.

Second, although we opted to make the research period long enough, we decided to only select PPG leaders from 1995 onwards. In this year, the regional parliaments were directly elected for the first time, forcing MPs and PPG leaders alike to focus exclusively on one parliament rather than accumulating federal and regional mandates. Moreover, the constitutional reform of 1993, which was fully employed in 1995, accelerated the regionalisation of policy domains and institutional reorganisation, which amplified the role of the extra-parliamentary party headquarters in coordinating between its multiple federal and regional PPGs (De Winter & Dumont, 2006). Exploratory research also indicates that 1995 would be a good cut-off point since important elements of the political profiles of PPG leaders (e.g. their average political experience and duration of the mandate) have significantly changed in that period (de Vet & Wauters, 2015). A more pragmatic reason for narrowing the time period is that interview respondents of course still have to be alive and able to provide enough valuable insights. Nevertheless, not only interviewing current PPG leaders but also going

back in time is interesting (1) to assess potential evolutions in the roles of PPG leaders over time and (2) obtain more intra-party heterogeneity, for instance based on parties' government status.<sup>25</sup>

Third, we decided to only focus on PPG leadership in the federal Chamber of Representatives and the Flemish regional parliament: the two politically most important assemblies for Flemish political parties. This means, amongst others, that we do not look at PPG leaders in the Senate, which lost considerable competences and (party-political) relevance due to consecutive constitutional reforms (particularly that of 2014) (Laureys, Van den Wijngaert, & Velaers, 2016).

From this narrower group of Flemish PPG leaders in the Chamber and the Flemish parliament since 1995, concrete interview respondents were selected using a purposive rather than a random sampling strategy, aimed at obtaining an internally heterogeneous sample. A heterogeneous sample is interesting for the qualitative, descriptive analyses as it (1) increases the likelihood that we find meaningful *differences* between PPG leaders and capture the full array of potential PPG leadership roles and (2) because *commonalities* found across a diverse group of cases are more likely to reflect widely generalizable phenomena than commonalities found in a homogenous group of cases (Miles et al., 1994; Robinson, 2014). Also when using QCA, the purposive selection of cases is a general requirement (Berg-Schlosser & De Meur, 2009). A basic rule is that the research population (i.e. Flemish PPG leaders) should be sufficiently homogeneous and share a number basic characteristics that remain constant and make comparison possible, whereas the sampling strategy should aim for a maximum of heterogeneity over a minimal number of cases based on a number of subcharacteristics (Berg-Schlosser & De Meur, 2009; Schneider & Wagemann, 2010, 2012). The case-selection, in other words, should address as much possible (combinations of) 'conditions' (i.e. the explanatory variables) that are expected to be 'sufficient' or 'necessary' (*see below*) for a certain outcome. Although the roles of PPG leaders (as the 'outcomes') are still to be inductively reconstructed, in Chapter 2, we already identified a number of institutional-contextual (e.g. PPG size, government status, party selectorates, time) and personal characteristics (e.g.

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<sup>25</sup> As such, we succeeded in interviewing opposition and majority PPG leaders for each major political party; except for the radical-right Vlaams Belang/Blok which has been excluded from coalition participation through a 'cordon sanitaire'. In practice, we had to go back to the 1999-2003/4 period of the purple-green coalition for this. This was the only legislative term when the Ecologists were in government, and the Christian democrats in opposition. A single selected interviewee was PPG leader in the period before that.

political experience, career ambitions) from the literature that potentially influence PPG leaders' roles and thus provide a starting ground for the case-selection.

The interview respondents were selected from an original dataset containing biographical information of every PPG leader (N=311)<sup>26</sup> to have ever held office in the Belgian Chamber, the Senate and the Flemish regional Parliament since 1962.<sup>27</sup> More details about this population dataset can be found in Chapter 5, in which we examine the socio-demographic and political career characteristics of PPG leaders. In practice, our case-selection method resembles a *stratified purposive sampling strategy*, which is most appropriate when the aim is to select groups that display variation on a particular phenomenon but are still fairly homogeneous, so that subgroups can be compared (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2014, p. 114). Most relevant party characteristics (e.g. size, intra-party procedures for the selection of PPG leaders) are covered by analysing all six main Flemish parties represented in the Flemish parliament from 1995 to 2019. As a starting point, from each party four PPG leaders were selected: two PPG leaders with above-average political experience when they started (i.e. having federal/regional ministerial experience and/or more than 7,9 years of experience as a regional/federal MP, which is the population mean) and two PPG leaders with below-average political experience (i.e. no federal/regional ministerial experience and less than 7,9 years of experience as a regional/federal MP). Within each of these categories we selected one PPG leader that was appointed in an early phase of the delineated research period (e.g. in the 1995-1999 and 1999-2003/4 legislative terms) and one PPG leader that was selected more recently (e.g. in the 2009/10-2014 and 2014-2019 legislative term). As mentioned above, the latter allows us to pursue enough (intra-party) dispersion based on respondents' government status at the time they were selected.

As such, 24 PPG leaders (i.e. 6x2x2) were selected as a start. However, as potential respondents did not always showcase the desired variance on all of these characteristics, further cases have been selected until data saturation was reached (Ritchie et al., 2014; Robinson, 2014). Respondents unwilling to participate were replaced by respondents with similar background characteristics.

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<sup>26</sup> N=101 for the subpopulation of Flemish PPG leaders in the Chamber and Flemish Parliament since June 1995.

<sup>27</sup> At the time when respondents selected, the dataset contained information on PPG leaders up until 1 January 2017).



Table 3.1 shows the definitive sample of PPG leaders that were actually interviewed (N=29) and their basic characteristics (i.e. aggregates per party in order to ensure respondents' anonymity). It moreover shows that the sample is indeed internally heterogeneous and nicely reflects the degree of empirically-possible variation of PPG leaders (based on their central characteristics) in the overall population. On several occasions, however, due to the fact that respondents were PPG leader multiple times or over a long period of time, PPG leaders in fact fit into multiple columns of this table (e.g. having chaired both a small and a larger or a majority and an opposition PPG). In that case, the values attributed in the table reflect on which period the interviews primarily focused.

**Table 3.1. Overview of interviewed PPG leaders**

Party	N	Government status		Political experience		PPG size (seats)		Time period	
		<i>Majority</i>	<i>Opposition</i>	<i>Inexperienced</i>	<i>Experienced</i>	<i>Small (&lt;15)</i>	<i>Large (≥15)</i>	<i>Early ('95-'07)</i>	<i>Late ('07-'19)</i>
Liberal dem. (VLD)	5	4	1	2	3	1	4	2	3
Social dem. (SPA)	5	3	2	2	3	1	4	3	2
Ecologists (Groen)	5	2	3	3	2	4	1	2	3
Christian dem. (CD&V)	5	2	3	2	3	0	5	2	3
Regionalists (NVA)	5	4	1	3	2	3	2	2	3
Radical-right (VB)	4	0	4	2	2	3	1	2	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	15	14	14	15	12	17	13	16

In a second phase, other parliamentary and extra-parliamentary actors were selected for the interviews on role expectations towards PPG leaders' functioning. The case-selection here was based on the initial selection of PPG leaders: for each interviewed PPG leader we contacted one PPG actor and one EPO actor who were active in the direct professional environment of the interviewed PPG leaders at the time when they were appointed. Selected PPG actors include elected PPG members but also PPG secretaries. The latter, important actors, who generally are the most senior staff members of the PPG, assist the PPG leader in coordinating the PPGs' activities and typically attend political-decision making in the weekly PPG meetings. The advantage of interviewing PPG secretaries is that they

typically worked closely with the PPG leaders of interest and served as a PPG staff member for many years. Similarly, as for the EPO actors, we not only interviewed central party leaders (or vice-party leaders) but also the central parties' most senior political staff member: the 'party secretary' or the 'political director'. These actors assist the party leader in coordinating between party branches, and typically attend the meetings of the powerful party executive or informal top meetings (e.g. between the party leader and PPG leaders).

In order to maintain a manageable sample size, we used a pragmatic sampling strategy: parliamentary and extra-parliamentary actors were selected in such a way so that they could be interviewed about multiple PPG leaders in our sample<sup>28</sup>. In other words, not only did we interview two actors per PPG leader (i.e. one PPG actor and one EPO actor) but also interviewed PPG and EPO actors about two PPG leaders in the sample (*see further below*). Table 3.2. gives an overview of the respondents. Again, those unwilling to participate were replaced by respondents with similar characteristics.

**Table 3.2. Overview of interviewed EPO and PPG actors**

	Total	PPG actors (MPs, PPG secretaries)	EPO actors (party leaders, senior staff)
CD&V	6	4	2
sp.a	5	3	2
VLD	5	3	2
Groen	6	3	3
N-VA	5	3	2
VB	5	3	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>13</b>

The selected respondents all received personalized access letters in which the research topic was addressed and where we explained why the recipient was contacted and why his/her insights would make an important contribution to the study (Aberbach & Rockman, 2002; Bailer, 2014; Goldstein, 2002; Lilliker, 2003). Respondents received a reminder mail exactly one week after the first mail in case of non-response. If we still did not receive an answer exactly one week later, we

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<sup>28</sup> In practice, we did this simply by making a summary of the composition of the PPG and party leadership at the time a specific PPG leader was selected. We then looked if some names of PPG actors or EPO actors occurred multiple times.

tried to get in contact over the phone. This approach led to a rather high response, especially when considering the political status of the contacted respondents. Among the (former) PPG leaders, only 4 selected respondents did not respond or declined. Among the other EPO and PPG actors this number is 5. These persons are spread quite evenly over the several political parties (with a slight overrepresentation of the liberals) and a general lack of time constituted the most important reason - if we received an answer.

Prior to conducting the actual interviews, we conducted pilot interviews (N=7) with three types of respondents: (1) personal *staff members* of PPG leaders (N=2) with insights in the daily agenda of PPG leaders, (2) elder *political statesman* (N=3) who occupied multiple political positions during their careers – including PPG leadership – and were therefore able to place PPG leaders' importance in a broader perspective, and (3) senior *political journalists* who were additionally able to independently reflect and talk about relevant events that occurred during the terms of the specific PPG leaders. Although these interviews primarily served to test the interview questionnaires (see below), they also provided relevant background information and general insights in the research topic. Together with the interviews with PPG leaders (N=29) and other party actors (N=32), this brings the total number of interviews to N=68.

### 2.2.2. *Semi-structured questionnaires*

Two separate questionnaires were developed for the interviews with (1) PPG leaders and with (2) other party actors (PPG and EPO actors). These questionnaires have a semi-structured character as they contain both open- and closed-ended questions. Open-ended questions are most suited to capture roles (Searing, 1994), to make full use of the respondents' expertise (Bailer, 2014) and to explore domains where research is comparatively scarce (Aberbach & Rockman, 2002). Closed-ended questions were integrated to sustain a fluent cadence, help keep respondents in line and gather supplementary, more comparable data with a more quantitative character, e.g. on PPG leaders' (self-reported behaviour) (Bailer, 2014; Leech, 2002). They moreover allow us to use precise values in the operationalisation of the QCA truth tables (see below). Throughout the interviews, respondents had ample opportunities to address topics that the questionnaires not directly tapped into.

Appendix 1 shows the semi-structured questionnaire for the interviews with PPG leaders. The interviews were divided in topical stages and started with broad, non-

threatening questions (e.g. on general responsibilities, time allocation), after which they moved to more sensitive questions (e.g. on personal ambitions or intra-party disagreement) (Hermanowicz, 2002; Leech, 2002; Morris, 2009). Often following similar question wordings as Searing (1994), the questions were designed to capture and compare (1) role attitudes, (2) role behaviours, (3) personal preferences, (4) career goals and (5) provide relevant background information, e.g. on the relation between the PPG and the EPO and PPGs' internal organization (*see Appendix 1*).

Appendix 2 shows the semi-structured questionnaire for the interviews with PPG and EPO members. These questions were predominantly designed to grasp broad informal role expectations towards PPG leaders' general functioning (e.g. *What constitutes a good PPG leader in your view*) but also more specific expectations towards the functioning of particular PPG leaders, amongst others, by including questions on why (and how) a certain MP was selected as PPG leader at a certain point in time. Further questions probed into how specific PPG leaders actually filled in their positions and if they lived up to role expectations. They additionally provide relevant information on PPG's internal organisation and the relation with the central party organisation under a specific PPG leader (*see Appendix 2*).

As delineated above, we did not only interview current PPG leaders (and other PPG actors and EPO leaders) but also conducted retrospective interviews with respondents who held these positions in the past. This makes that one should be prudent for potential recall problems. For many respondents PPG leadership, however, represents an important and substantial part of their political career on which they were able and happy to vividly elaborate. Also the interviewed MPs, party leaders and senior staff members, who generally worked closely with them for extended periods of time, could typically provide rather detailed accounts of their experiences with particular PPG leaders. It should also be noted, moreover, that political elites are generally less reluctant to openly talk about politically-sensitive topics from the past (e.g. intra-party disagreements) compared to very recent or still unravelling events. Still, several measures were taken in order to increase the validity and reliability of the interview data (e.g. Berry, 2002). Next to the fact that topical overlap in the questionnaires allows us to cross-reference the findings (between PPG leaders and other actors), the interviews were well-prepared: basic background information on PPG leaders' careers, the composition of the PPG and the political context was gathered and discussed during the interviews' *drop-off* (*see Appendix 1 and 2*). The semi-structured questionnaires

were furthermore ‘personalised’ to some extent by systematically screening media outlets and incorporating questions and examples on actual events during one’s term as a PPG leader (e.g. intra-party disagreements, discussions between coalition partners, group members who rebelled or switched parties,...).

### *2.2.3. Transcription and coding*

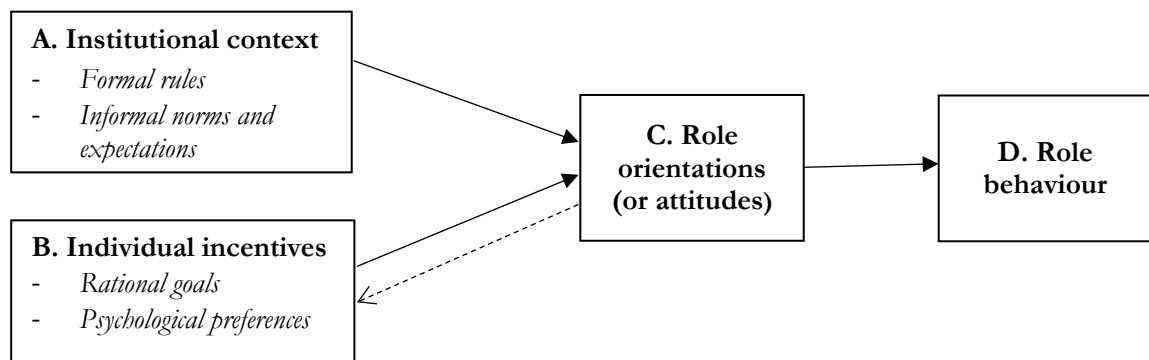
Except for the pilot interviews, which took place in February-March 2017, all interviews were conducted between May 2017 and May 2018. On average, they lasted 72 minutes: the shortest interview took 35 minutes, the longest over 3 hours. All interviews were tape-recorded, with the consent and permission of respondents (*see Appendix 1 and 2*). In a next step, the more than 4700 minutes of tape-recording were manually converted into over 1300 pages of interview transcript. Although the large majority of interviews were transcribed without any assistance, a total of 21 transcriptions were outsourced to a (Dutch) professional firm acquainted with transcribing academic interviews, in order to reduce the immense workload. Prior to sending out the tape recordings, the data files were anonymised and a non-disclosure agreement was signed, guaranteeing the full confidentiality and the automatic deletion of the transcripts and audio files after two weeks. The quality and uniformity of the transcripts were furthermore safeguarded by overseeing the entire process and cross-checking every final document against the original tape recording.

In order to structure this extensive set of textual data, the transcripts were subsequently coded in *NVivo12*, following a coding strategy similar to that as proposed by ‘grounded theory’ (Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Starting with a very rudimentary, a priori coding scheme based on the central topics the interviews aimed to address, we went through an inductive process of ‘open’, ‘axial’ and ‘selective coding’ in which the transcripts are respectively broken down into sentences or quasi-sentences, linked to codes (or ‘nodes’) which summarize their central meaning, after which these nodes are further organised by delineating relationships and subrelationships. The PPG leader interviews (N=29) and interviews with other party actors (N=32) were coded in two separate data files which provided a more comprehensible starting ground for the further analyses and delineation of role patterns, as we discuss below.

## 2.3. Reconstructing roles and identifying their determinants

For the reconstruction of PPG leadership roles and the identification of their causes, we adhere to the basic neo-institutionalist insights of Searing's *motivational approach* (1994). We, do concur, however, with Andeweg (2012) who strongly suggests to make a clear distinction between roles (as attitudes) and the behaviours that follow from them. The former are a politician's personal interpretation of how one should appropriately act in a given situation or institutional context, which might – or not- subsequently be translated into observable actions. As such, unlike Searing, who sees roles as 'interrelated goals, attitudes and behaviours' (1994, p. 369) or Strøm who defines them as 'behavioural strategies' conditioned by institutional rules (1997, p. 157), we more distinctly disentangle the key components (i.e. role attitudes), causes (i.e. (in)formal norms, individual preferences) and consequences (i.e. role behaviour) of roles (see Figure 3.1). The focus will be mainly on PPG leaders' role attitudes and their causes (i.e. formal rules, informal norms, personal motivations); less on their behavioural consequences (see, however, Chapter 6).

**Figure 3.1. Analytical framework**



### 2.3.1. Formal rules: parliamentary norms and party rules

*Formal institutional rules* are one of the shaping factors of roles and are relatively easy to identify: 'they are written down in an organisation's constitutional code which defines lines of authority and division of work by specifying the organisation's principal offices and their principle duties and responsibilities' (Searing, 1994, p. 4). Hence, while the interviews might provide hints of the degree to which they are respected, formal rules should be examined through document

analysis. PPG leaders function at the intersect of two political arenas: parliament and the party organisation. Formal rules on PPG leaders are therefore identified, collected and coded in two types of documents.

The first are *parliamentary standing orders*.<sup>29</sup> These documents contain general rules on parliaments' organisation, procedures and the right and duties of individual MPs. Specific articles on PPG leadership reveal formal expectations regarding PPG leaders' duties and their general functioning at the *parliament-level*. We have analysed the most recent versions of the standing orders of the federal Chamber of Representatives and the Flemish regional parliament.<sup>30</sup> However, given that we also interviewed former PPG leaders (and other EPO and PPG actors) and as formal rules can be changed throughout time, we also analysed the standing orders of 1995 and interim regulatory amendments to take changes throughout the research period into account.<sup>31</sup>

The second type of formal documents are *party statutes*. Statutes are popular instruments among party scholars (e.g. Scarrow, Webb, & Poguntke, 2017) because they contain rich information on parties' organisation, decision-making procedures and on the rights and duties of mandate-holders and members. Interesting for our purposes is that they contain formal rules on PPG leadership at the *party-level*. We analysed all statutes of the six parties under study from 1995 onwards (see Table 3.3). The party statutes were mostly obtained directly from the party headquarters. Where needed, they were completed with the help of party-political historical archives.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Unlike for instance in Germany, parties and party groups are not mentioned in the Belgian constitution. The parliamentary standing orders do explicitly recognize their existence.

<sup>30</sup> For the Chamber this is 'Reglement van de Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers (1/2019). Available at [https://www.dekamer.be/kvvcr/pdf\\_sections/publications/reglement/reglementNL.pdf](https://www.dekamer.be/kvvcr/pdf_sections/publications/reglement/reglementNL.pdf). For the Flemish Parliament this is 'Reglement' (2/2018). Available at <http://docs.vlaamsparlement.be/pfile?id=1369307>.

<sup>31</sup> The 1995 standing orders of the Flemish Parliament are freely available online. We obtained the 1995 Federal Parliaments' standing orders with help from the Library of the Chamber of Representatives. Parliamentary acts making amendments to the standing orders are freely accessible on the respective parliaments' websites. It should be noted that very few substantial changes in formal rules on PPG leadership since 1995 were identified.

<sup>32</sup> These are the "AMSAB-Institute of Social History", "Archief, Documentatie en Onderzoekscentrum voor het Vlaams-nationalisme" (ADVN) and "KADOC-documentatiecentrum voor Documentatie- en Onderzoekscentrum voor Religie, Cultuur en Samenleving". I am grateful to the helpful staff of these institutions.

**Table 3.3. Overview of coded party statutes**

Party	Statutes	Party	Statutes
<b>CD&amp;V/CVP</b>	February 1994	<b>sp.a/SP</b>	June 1992
	May 2005		December 1995
	April 2009		November 2002
	November 2013		June 2016
<b>Groen/Agalev</b>	October 1996	<b>(Open)VLD</b>	April 1993
	May 2001		December 1996
	February 2005		February 2000
	June 2005		December 2002
	April 2008		October 2004
	October 2010		June 2008
	March 2011		March 2011
	November 2014		February 2013
<b>N-VA/VU</b>	June 1998	<b>VB</b>	February 1995
	December 2010		November 2004
	October 2015		November 2005
	June 2016		January 2008
	June 2018		October 2008
			April 2011

A third potential document could logically have been found where parties and the parliamentary sphere meet: in formal codes of conduct as outlined in potential internal PPG rules. Although the existence of such rules was gauged among respondents of all studied parties (i.e. mostly among PPG actors), only one respondent of CD&V mentioned that these rules used to exist for the federal PPG in the past, but that they were ‘hardly known or followed’. We therefore focus on party statutes and parliamentary rules.

### *2.3.2. Informal norms and role expectations*

*Informal institutional norms* are less straightforward to identify. Despite a general reluctance to study them due to an aversion of returning to the early sociological perspectives that were set aside to pursue new economic models (*see Chapter 2*) informal norms and role expectations should not be overlooked (Searing, 1994, pp. 4-5). Especially in the absence of clear-cut formal rules, the common norms and values of an organisation (e.g. parliaments) are critical for it to run smoothly: to a great extent they determine its ‘modus operandi’ by delineating the logic of appropriateness (March & Olsen, 1989) according to which office-holders think,



act and thus define their roles (Andeweg, 2014; Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012; Searing, 1994).

Informal norms are essentially created by the role expectations of those institutional actors who interact with the central role players. Therefore, we turn towards the interviews with party actors in the direct environment of PPG leaders. These allow us, first of all, to extend the scope from only considering formal rules (which are not numerous and have a limited range, see Chapter 7) to also taking informal institutional norms into account, which are extremely effective in shaping individual behaviour (Searing, 2012, p. 5). What do MPs, party leaders and senior staff members generally see as ‘appropriate behaviour’? What, in the eyes of interviewees, constitutes a ‘good PPG leader’? What should be his or her top priorities?

Second, these interviews not only allow us to paint ‘the global picture’ and detect dominant, parliament-wide or party-specific role expectations towards PPG leaders’ general functioning: they also provide us data on *individual-level* role expectations. Both EPO leaders and PPG actors are typically involved in the selection of PPG leaders, albeit with varying degrees of (informal) influence (*see Chapter 7*). As they were either directly involved as part of the selectorate (party leaders, MPs) or more indirectly as ‘privileged witnesses’ or advisors (PPG or party secretaries), the interviewees are well-placed to comment on why certain candidates were chosen over others as PPG leader. By incorporating questions on why a specific PPG leader was selected at a specific point in time, which criteria were used to make the final call and whether or not explicit instructions were expressed at the beginning of one’s mandate, we obtain data on the considerations made by party actors when deciding who would become PPG leader, and thus on the informal role expectations towards those who were eventually selected. By linking this to PPG leaders’ actual, self-conceived role orientations, moreover, we can assess whether or not the interviewed PPG leader lived up to these expectations. The latter would already provide us indications on the relevance of institutional expectations as factors shaping PPG leader roles (rather than independent, personal motivations).

### *2.3.3. PPG leaders’ personal motivations, roles and behaviours*

Next to formal and informal institutional rules, parliamentary roles (and according to us, also those of frontbenchers) are shaped by role players’ *individual preferences and goals*. In order to identify these personal incentives, we evidently turn towards

the interviews with the actual protagonists of this study. Although they often already were touched upon when respondents told which job aspects they prioritised and why (*see below*), several interview questions were designed with the precise purpose of gauging both intrinsic psychological preferences (e.g. Searing, 1994) and rational goals (e.g. Strøm, 1997). Amongst others, we asked respondents why they wanted to become PPG leader in the first place and which intrinsic aspects of being a PPG leader gave them most job satisfaction once they held the position. By incorporating both questions, we can to some extent assess whether individual preferences are exogenous (e.g. Strøm, 1994) or endogenous to the role-taking process (e.g. Searing, 1997) and if they are stable or change as role players adapt to their institutional environments (Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012). A third question specifically gauged career ambitions by asking whether respondents aspired higher political office after their term as PPG leader ended. Although respondents might be reluctant to answer such direct questions, it should be noted that by the time this question was asked (near the middle of the interview) respondents were quite open about their ambitions (and, in the case of former PPG leaders, the extent to which they succeeded). Whereas the qualitative interview data allow us to identify personal motivations, the extent to which the latter rather than institutional expectations shape PPG leaders' roles will be examined in the explanatory parts using QCA.

Besides mapping personal preferences and goals, the interviews with PPG leaders of course served to identify and reconstruct their roles (i.e. the central dependent variable in this thesis). Departing from PPG leaders own accounts of their daily functioning, we aimed to inductively extract role types from the interviews that make 'diversity intelligible by squeezing out the idiosyncratic' but are simultaneously not too abstract in order not to lose explanatory grounding (Searing, 1994, p. 411). For this purpose, we followed a stepwise procedure similar to that used in other studies (Navarro, 2009, 2012; Rozenberg, 2009; Searing, 1994). First, the interview transcripts were coded and analysed with a particular focus on a number of central open-ended questions at the beginning of the interviews that gauged PPG leaders' priorities and invited them to evaluate and reflect on how they filled in their mandates. The very first question, for instance, invited respondents to describe 'what they personally saw as their three most important responsibilities as a PPG leader', followed by further probes in to the duties they found (un)important and the tasks they typically delegate to other group members or staff. These question proved highly helpful for our purposes, as respondents typically answer them by telling *what* they do and *why* they do it. As

such, they immediately tap into what Searing calls ‘motivational roles’ and bring clear differences between PPG leaders to the surface (Searing, 1994, p. 412). Subsequent questions requested PPG leaders to further evaluate their functioning by asking what, in their personal view, constitutes a good PPG leader, whether they think other PPG leaders fill in their position any differently, why they believe this is the case, and why they think that they were initially selected as a PPG leader. Based on respondents’ extensive and enlightening answers to these questions, differences and similarities between PPG leader were discerned, central patterns and tendencies were delineated and a typology of recurrent roles was constructed.

In a second step we went back to the individual transcripts and linked respondents to the inductively-derived role types. Although there is a debate on whether roles are ‘mutually-exclusive’ or if politicians play different roles, we follow the basic reasoning that ‘role primacy’ (Best & Vogel, 2012) among MPs occurs because of their limited energy and resources, and as role specialisation maximizes politicians’ chances of achieving their desired goals (Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012; Searing, 1994). We do acknowledge, however, that the roles we identify and describe are ideal types and indicate where further diversifications can be observed throughout the reports of the main findings.

The third step consisted of further testing and demonstrating the validity of the identified role types. Besides providing numerous verbatim quotations that support the analytical interpretations and statements in respondents’ own terms, the purely qualitative analyses of PPG leaders’ roles are supplemented, to the extent possible, with quantitative assessments of their link to concrete attitudes derived from several closed-ended questions integrated in the questionnaires. Also the link between the role orientations (or attitudes) and specific forms of behaviour (e.g. self-reported time allocation) is addressed in a similar way (see Chapter 6).

### **3. Explanatory analysis using mvQCA**

#### **3.1. QCA’s basics and epistemology**

Methodologically novel is that this thesis complements the in-depth (qualitative) reconstruction of roles with a Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) of their primary determinants. First elaborated by Charles Ragin (1987), QCA is exceedingly gaining popularity among social scientists as a way to study complex causal relationships between conditions ( $\approx$  independent variables) and outcomes

( $\approx$  dependent variables). The main strength of QCA, which both incorporates an epistemological approach as well as a set of analytical techniques (Rihoux, 2006), is that it allows ‘systemic cross-case comparison, while at the same time giving justice to within-case complexity’ (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009, p. xviii). Choosing QCA as a research strategy often reflects researchers’ intention to marry two contradictory goals: one, to gather in-depth insights in cases and to capture their complexity (for which small-N research designs are most suited) and two, to adopt a variable-oriented approach that produces some level of generalization (for which large-N research designs are best suited) (Rihoux, 2006).

QCA incorporates key strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods. It is a holistic, case-sensitive approach that considers each case under study as a complex entity throughout the analysis. In addition, it wields a conception of causality that acknowledges real-world complexity built on the notion of ‘*multiple conjunctural causation*’. This implies that (1) a certain outcome is often provoked by a combination of conditions, rather than by one single cause, (2) several different combinations of conditions may well produce the same outcome, and (3) depending on the context, a given condition may have a different impact on the outcome. Causality is thus context-sensitive, moving QCA away from simplistic causal reasoning (Berg-Schlosser et al., 2009; Ragin, 1987; Rihoux, 2006) and nicely fitting theoretical views on parliamentary roles as being contingent upon the institutional context in which they are played (Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012; Saalfeld & Strøm, 2014; Searing, 1994). A key-asset of QCA that leans more towards quantitative approaches is that it allows to analyse more than just a handful of cases, which opens up the possibility to produce modest<sup>33</sup> generalizations for a given (sub-)population. Relying on Boolean algebra and minimization, QCA is an analytical tool that allows scholars to reduce complex real-world cases to a series of variables (in terms of conditions and outcomes) and makes scientific replication possible: it is a transparent technique in which analytical choices must be backed by theoretical and/or empirical arguments (Berg-Schlosser et al., 2009).

QCA indeed combines both deductive and inductive aspects. A clear deductive aspect is that the initial cases should be selected purposefully, aimed at obtaining maximal internal heterogeneity based on their characteristics that are expected to

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<sup>33</sup> Trough systemic comparison of comparable cases, it is possible to formulate propositions, with proper caution, to other similar cases that share a reasonable number of characteristics with those that were the subject of the QCA (e.g. PPG leaders) (Berg-Schlosser et al., 2009, p. 12).

be theoretically relevant (see above). A clear inductive aspect, which is indispensable in parliamentary role analysis, is that new cases and conditions (see below) can be added at any stage of the analytical process. QCA is subsequently suited both for testing and falsifying existing hypotheses and theories, as well as for elaborating new theoretical arguments (see however: Hug, 2013). It can also be used in a more descriptive manner, e.g. in order to structure and summarize the data (Berg-Schlosser et al., 2009; Rihoux, 2006). We use QCA as a means to transparently structure the qualitative interview data and test current, deterministic hypotheses on the institutional underpinnings of leadership roles in parliament (*see below*).

### 3.2. Operationalization and analysis

QCA enables systemic comparison of complex cases by breaking these cases down into ‘*configurations*’, which are specific combinations of explanatory variables or ‘*conditions*’ that produce a certain ‘*outcome*’. The main question QCA attempts to address, is which conditions are ‘*sufficient*’ or ‘*necessary*’ for a certain outcome. A condition is necessary when it is always present when a certain outcome occurs: the outcome cannot occur without this condition (or a combination thereof). A condition is sufficient for an outcome if the outcome always occurs when the condition (or a combination thereof) is present (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). Multiple (combinations of) conditions can be sufficient for the same outcome.

For this specific research project, the individual (interviewed) PPG leaders are our cases, their respective role orientations – which are first to be examined – are the outcomes. As we further clarify in Chapter 8, the outcomes will be operationalized into several<sup>34</sup> mutually-exclusive multinomial categories that group PPG leaders according to their role types as identified in Chapter 6. We consequently use multi-value QCA (mvQCA) rather than the crisp-set (i.e. based only on dichotomous variables) or fuzzy-set variant (i.e. based on continuous variables) (Duşa & Thiem, 2015). Several possibly relevant conditions – the explanatory variables – have been revealed in the literature review (see Chapter 2). These are both institutional-contextual factors (e.g. parties’ government status, size, PPG leaders’ selectorates, potential evolutions throughout time) and individual-level characteristics (e.g. PPG leaders’ prior political experience) and guided the purposive selection of a

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<sup>34</sup> Five categories in practice, as we identified five PPG leader role types (see Chapter 8).

heterogeneous set of interview respondents. Congruent to the inductive character of this study, however, the exact selection of conditions in QCA can be adjusted throughout any stage of the data analysis – for instance when during the interviews becomes clear that a primarily envisioned condition has no relevant impact on the outcome or when a new condition seems more appropriate (Rihoux & De Meur, 2009, pp. 48-49). In any case, the number of conditions should be kept moderately low: between 4 to 8 conditions for intermediate N-analysis (i.e. 10 to 40 cases). A large number of conditions tends to ‘individualize’ each case, making it difficult to find any regularities (Berg-Schlosser & De Meur, 2009).<sup>35</sup> Based on the interview data and the analyses in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, we withhold five conditions, which are all operationalized in binary terms. Four are institutional-contextual conditions at *the party level* that indicate: if a PPG leader leads a *government PPG* (GOV; 1= majority, 0= opposition), a *large PPG* (LP; 1= large, 0= small), belongs to a party that made relative *electoral gains* in the recent elections (EG; 1= relative gains, 0= losses) and if he/she is a ‘*central party appointee*’ or was elected among group members (CPA; 1=appointed by leadership, 0=elected by PPG). The last condition is a condition at the *individual-level* that indicates if a PPG leader has a lot of parliamentary/ministerial *experience* or not (EXP; 1= experienced, 0=inexperienced). The operationalization of these conditions is either very straightforward (e.g. a PPG leader either belongs to majority party or not), based on strict population (not sample) parameters (e.g. PPG size, parliamentary experience) or based on cross-referenced interview data (e.g. PPG’s selectorates). For the full description, discussion and operationalization of the conditions, we refer directly to Chapter 8.

Once the variables (i.e. outcome, conditions) are operationalized, the first step of QCA’s analytical procedure consists of constructing the ‘truth tables’. A truth table essentially is a ‘table of configurations’ which summarizes the data by describing which conditions are associated to which specific outcome and then linking specific empirical cases (one, more or none) to these configurations (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). In the first phase, we will only integrate party-level conditions in the truth table to examine to what degree contextual pressures alone explain PPG leaders’ roles. A fictional example: the first row of the truth table might contain one PPG leader who was appointed by the central party elite

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<sup>35</sup> In addition, adding one extra condition exponentially increases the number of theoretically possible configurations and thus increases the risk of obtaining many ‘logical remainders’ (Berg-Schlosser & De Meur, 2009; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012).

to lead a large, majority PPG that suffered relative losses in recent elections and adopts role A (i.e. the outcome). The second row might contain another PPG leader who shares the same attributes but leads an opposition PPG and adopts role B (and so on, until all theoretically-possible configurations are dealt with). This segmentation into variables, however, does not affect the holistic perception of the case as a whole: the aim is to compare cases as whole units, each being defined as a configuration of conditions and outcomes (Berg-Schlosser et al., 2009).

Truth tables already contain a lot of relevant information. For one, they might reveal ‘contradictory configurations’: rows where the same combinations of conditions lead to different outcomes.<sup>36</sup> Addressing contradictory rows is an inherent part of the iterative character of QCA and provides a good opportunity to gain a more thorough understanding of the cases (Rihoux & De Meur, 2009). Several strategies may be applied to resolve contradictory rows (Rihoux & De Meur, 2009, pp. 48-49). Researchers might add or replace a condition, re-examine the way the variables were operationalized, reconsider whether all cases are indeed part of the same sufficiently homogenous population or examine in what way the cases involved differentiate from each other. Our strategy for resolving contradictory rows (in the truth table containing only contextual, party-level conditions) is returning to the interview evidence and adding an individual-level condition that indicates if a PPG leader was highly politically experienced (as an MP or government minister) or not. The interview data suggests that this might be a relevant determinant of PPG leaders’ roles as it is not only related to prior party and legislative socialisation but also to (the pursuit or fulfilment of) career ambitions. We discuss this in more detail in Chapter 8.

Once the truth tables have been constructed, the analysis of necessity and sufficiency can take place. Necessary conditions are first identified by screening for conditions that are always present when a certain outcome is present (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009). In our specific set-up, the analysis of necessity shows which roles are clearly linked to the presence or specific (institutional or individual-level) explanatory factors (e.g. are some roles only adopted by PPG leaders of majority or large parties?). Even when an outcome does not occur without the presence of

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<sup>36</sup> For instance, when two PPG leaders are in opposition, lead a small PPG, suffered losses in recent elections and were appointed by the central party leadership but when one PPG leader adopts role A and the other role B.

a necessary condition, this condition might still be observed among cases with a different outcome. Therefore, besides reporting the coverage measures that indicate the relevance or trivialness of necessary conditions (e.g. Schneider & Wagemann, 2012, pp. 144-147), we have to turn to the analysis of sufficiency to fully explain roles' occurrence.

The analysis of sufficiency aims to uncover the 'multiple conjunctural causations' that are 'sufficient' for an outcome (or role) to occur. It is conducted based on the 'truth table algorithm' (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012, pp. 178-193). Without going in too much detail into the conventions of Boolean algebra and set-theoretic operations here (see: Rihoux & De Meur, 2009, pp. 34-36; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012, pp. 42-54), this algorithm first translates truth table rows into Boolean expressions<sup>37</sup> and subsequently minimizes them into more parsimonious formulas by removing logically redundant conditions: 'when two expressions differ in only one causal condition yet produce the same outcome, then the causal condition that distinguishes the two expressions can be considered irrelevant and can be removed to create a simpler, combined expression' (Ragin, 1987, p. 93).<sup>38</sup> As our main aim is to structure the qualitative data and further examine the extent to which the interviewed PPG leaders' roles are shaped by contextual expectations or individual factors, we do not incorporate 'logical remainders' in the minimization process and thus only report the conservative solution formula (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012, p. 162).<sup>39</sup> Boolean minimization is a key operation that lies at the heart of QCA (Rihoux & De Meur, 2009, p. 35). Its end product is a comprehensive overview of the solution formulas (or sufficient combinations of conditions) that can be interpreted as the 'explanatory paths' that lead to a specific outcome: the empirically observed roles. Further parameters of fit, such as the coverage measures, are reported to indicate how much of the outcome

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<sup>37</sup> For instance: if a PPG leader, who adopts 'Role A', leads a majority PPG (GOV=1), a large PPG (LP=1), was appointed by the central party leadership (CPA=1), belongs to a party that made electoral gains in recent selection (EG=1) but is not very politically experienced (EXP=0) then this could be noted as the Boolean expression: GOV\*LP\*CPA\*EG\*exp → ROLE A. Uppercases denote the presence of a condition, lower cases the absence. The asterisks indicate the 'conjunction' or co-occurrence of conditions.

<sup>38</sup> E.g. in the fictional expressions GOV\*LP\*EXP → ROLE A + GOV\*LP\*exp → ROLE A, the condition indicating if cases are experienced or not is causally irrelevant. The two expressions can thus be minimized into one combined, more parsimonious formula: GOV\*LP → ROLE A.

<sup>39</sup> Logical remainders are theoretically-possible but empirically-unobserved configurations of conditions and outcomes that can be used to further minimize the expressions and obtain more parsimonious solution formula (i.e. the intermediate and parsimonious formula) and make causal statements about unobserved cases (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012).



(based on the number of cases it applies to) is explained by a single path or formula (see Chapter 8). All analyses, from the construction of the truth tables to the analysis of necessity, will be performed using the QCA-package (version 3.3) for R (Duşa, 2018).

### **3.3.QCA and parliamentary roles**

Explaining parliamentary roles using QCA yields multiple benefits and is innovative for a number of reasons. First of all, it is quite novel for QCA-research as the method has often been applied by social scientists who aim to analyse cases and outcomes that are situated at the macro- or meso-level, such as states, economies, policy fields or organizations. Only few scholars have applied QCA to micro-level data, like small groups or individuals, despite its potential to do so (Berg-Schlosser & De Meur, 2009; Rihoux et al., 2009). Indeed, we will demonstrate that QCA is highly useful as a means to study individual legislators, and the determinants of their role orientations. Second, QCA is especially novel to legislative role research, where – to our knowledge – it has not been used before. We, however, argue that because of its intrinsic causal logic, QCA is highly appropriate for empirically examining the complex interplay of individual calculations and institutional incentives that underpin MPs' roles (which makes more sense than focusing on isolable causes). It also provides us with a transparent and comprehensible way to systematically compare role players based on a number of key attributes without neglecting the idiosyncrasies of each individual case. QCA thus gives us the tools to get to the bottom of the individual cases, whilst simultaneously making some generalizations on the determinants of legislators' (in our case PPG leaders') roles. As such, QCA provides a promising middle-road between small-N, case-oriented studies (focused on an in-depth, qualitative reconstruction of roles) and large-N, variable-oriented studies (often measuring MPs' 'representative roles' based on survey data) on parliamentary roles (Rozenberg & Blomgren, 2012).

Applying QCA will not only allow us to identify and measure the importance of causal conditions influencing roles: it will also allow us to test the underlying assumptions of neo-institutional approaches, and particularly their rigid conception of parliamentary leadership roles (seen exclusively as institutionally-determined 'position roles'). Scholars referring to neo-institutional frameworks often only use fragmented parts (e.g. the distinction between position and preference roles) or specific empirical findings (e.g. Searing's findings on ministerial aspirants, constituency members,...) rather than scrutinizing their

main analytical components and assumptions (Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012, p. 217). By using QCA, we will be able to distinguish between ‘institutional conditions’ (e.g. party characteristics) and ‘individual conditions’ (e.g. personal political experience) and examine the relevance of these groups of conditions on PPG leaders’ role orientations as an outcome. Are parliamentary leadership roles truly predominantly determined by the institutional framework in which role players act? What is the importance of personal considerations? Are they indeed logically redundant for role variation to occur or are they relevant parts of the solution formulas?

Before actually proceeding to the empirical chapters that report the exploratory-descriptive and explanatory findings of this qualitative (comparative) study on PPG leaders in Belgium, we first conduct several supporting, quantitative analyses. As mentioned above, we start by looking at PPG leadership from a broader-international perspective and testing a deductive approach on PPG leaders’ ‘representative roles’. Chapter 4 starts with a discussion of this alternative approach and argues why PPG leaders are expected to adopt distinctly different representative role orientations compared to other MPs. After discussing the Partirep MP survey data and methodology, we present the (at times peculiar) findings of this approach, which highlight the greater suitability of the in-depth, inductive approach when studying parliamentary roles.



## **PART II**

# EMPIRICAL CHAPTERS

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# The alternative approach: Representative role orientations of PPG leaders in comparative perspective

## 1. Introduction<sup>40</sup>

The study of parliamentary roles knows a long-standing research tradition. Ever since the publication of ‘The Legislative System’, the pioneering study by Wahlke and his associates (1962) on four US state legislatures, scholars have been interested in how legislators see their roles as representatives, how they fill in their mandates more broadly and which factors explain differences. The historical road of legislative role research has, however, been ‘somewhat bumpy’ (Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012, p. 31). Through the years, several theoretical approaches on the concept have been proposed<sup>41</sup>, aimed at overcoming normative, conceptual but mostly empirical issues, as role analysis has been taunted predominantly by difficulties in linking roles as attitudinal constructs to concrete emanations of characteristic and observable political behaviour (Andeweg, 2012; De Winter, 1997; Erikson, Luttbeg, & Holloway, 1975; Gross, 1978; Hedlund & Friesema, 1972; Jewell, 1983; Katz, 1997; Kuklinski & Elling, 1977).

Rozenberg and Blomgren (2012) summarize and group the diverse theoretical perspectives on parliamentary roles by distinguishing between two broader analytical approaches. The first are labelled ‘*representative roles*’. Studies in this line of research centre around whom MPs represent, focusing on legislators as ‘agents’ with multiple and potentially competing ‘principals’ (e.g. Carey, 2007; Pitkin, 1967). Often building on the distinction originally made by Eulau et al. (1959)

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<sup>40</sup> This chapter is based on B. de Vet & B. Wauters (2018). Follow the leader. Testing a deductive approach for studying parliamentary party group leaders’ roles. In *Journal of Legislative Studies*

<sup>41</sup> For detailed historical overviews see, among others: Andeweg (2014, pp. 272-281); Müller and Saalfeld (1997, pp. 2-13) and Searing (1994, pp. 6-12).

between the representational focus (i.e. whom is represented?) and style (i.e. how should representatives come to their decisions?), the roles of legislators are typically reconstructed deductively, using predefined role sets which can quite easily be compared over space and time (*see below*).

Studies in the second approach focus on what are labelled '*legislative roles*', which are broader and more generally capture how MPs organize their activity in parliament (Rozenberg & Blomgren, 2012, p. 212). Rather than deductively examining the roles of legislators, researchers in this category avoid predefined role sets and take a more inductive stance. They believe that 'the best way to understand the roles of politicians is to understand them as they do' (Searing, 1994, p. 10) and focus on how MPs give meaning to their functioning in parliament, as influenced by both individual preferences and institutional constraints. This often results in repertoires of identified roles that are highly specific to the parochial features of a particular legislature. Exemplary is Searing (1994) categorising British backbenchers as 'policy advocates', 'ministerial aspirants', 'constituency members' and 'parliament men', Costa and Kerrouche (2009) who classify French deputies as 'leading voices', 'future ministers', 'technocrats', 'provincials', 'idealists', 'group advocates' and 'ideologists', Jenny and Müller (2012) who in Austria identify 'workhorses', 'showhorses', 'rapporteurs' and 'spectators' or Navarro (2009) who finds 'specialists', 'animators' 'intermediaries' and 'outsiders' in the European Parliament.

Both approaches have their merits and limitations (Rozenberg & Blomgren, 2012, p. 213). Representative roles, for one, connect the study of legislators with normative debates on political representation. The predefined concepts and questions used to measure them tap into rather universal and classical discussions on how elected agents (should) fulfil their positions in representative democracies. They can be used in large-N studies to compare the roles of MPs across countries and over time and, for instance, examine the impact of electoral or intra-party rules on legislators' attitudes towards representation (André & Depauw, 2018). Legislative roles, on the other hand, are costly to research in terms of time and labour, which makes replication and cross-country comparison challenging. However, while the standardized measures used to capture MPs representative roles are sometimes criticized for standing too far from parliament's real world (Andeweg & Thomassen, 2005; Searing, 1994), legislative roles 'say something accurate about legislatures' (Rozenberg & Blomgren, 2012, p. 213). Departing from MPs' own conceptions, the rich data studies on legislative roles provide are

interesting because they help us make sense of what actually happens in parliament. For instance, while ‘policy advocates’ make up 41 % of all British backbenchers in Searing’s study (1994) and are believed to have become increasingly numeral over time (Norton, 1997), their intrinsic motivations (i.e. influencing policy) are not necessarily captured by any form of representative style or focus (*see below*) (Rozenberg & Blomgren, 2012).

The central aim of this broader dissertation is to provide an in-depth examination and explanation of role variance among PPG leaders in a similar institutional setting. Departing from PPG leaders’ own perspectives with the specific aim to provide ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 2008) and probe into every aspect of their functioning in parliament, our main approach leans towards analysing what Rozenberg and Blomgren (2012) call ‘legislative roles’ (*see Chapter 3*). However, before directly proceeding to the country-specific analysis on PPG leadership roles in Belgium, this chapter takes one step back and uses the alternative, deductive approach to study the representative roles of PPG leaders in Europe. Drawing on data from the Partirep Comparative MP Survey (Deschouwer & Depauw, 2014), this chapter examines (1) whether holding a PPG leadership position influences the representative role orientations of legislators and (2) if a discernible common ground can be identified among PPG leaders in European legislatures in terms of a similar pattern of representative role attitudes and behaviours. We hypothesize that, despite cross-country differences in terms of their formal intra-party authority, PPG leaders are typically commonly responsible for, among others, coordinating the collective action of MPs in the legislature and ensuring party unity (Cox & McCubbins, 1993; Kam, 2009) which is likely to result in distinctly more party-oriented representative role attitudes and behaviours.

Before proceeding to the analysis of PPG leaders’ representative roles, below, we take a closer look at the representative role approach and build the argumentation on why PPG leaders are likely to commonly and more distinctly than other MPs adopt representative roles that display their loyalty to the party. We then discuss the data and methodology and report the main findings.

## **2. Representative roles and PPG leaders**

Right after his election to the British House of Commons in 1774, Edmund Burke, later recognized as the philosophical founder of modern conservatism, proclaimed the following in his ‘speech to the electors of Bristol’.



“Parliament is not a congress of ambassadors from different and hostile interests; which interests each must maintain, as an agent and advocate, against other agents and advocates; but parliament is a deliberative assembly of one nation, with one interest, that of the whole; where, not local purposes, not local prejudices, ought to guide, but the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole. You choose a member indeed; but when you have chosen him, he is not member of Bristol, but he is a member of parliament” (Burke, 1774).

Inspired by this classical speech, which illustrates Burke’s view on the representative mandate, Eulau and his colleagues (1959) would years later famously distinguish between legislators’ ‘focus’ and ‘style’ of representation (see also: Eulau & Karps, 1977; Prewitt, Eulau, & Zisk, 1966; Wahlke, Eulau, et al., 1962). The representational focus concentrates on *whom* MPs (should) represent: the entire electorate (or ‘one nation’ as Burke put it) or rather a particular geographically or functionally defined part of it (e.g. the constituency, party voters, certain social groups in society) (e.g. Caramani, Celis, & Wauters, 2013; Thomassen & Esaiasson, 2006). The representational style focuses on *how* MPs (should) come to their decisions: by relying on their own conscience (as Burkean ‘trustees’) or by following the instructions of a specific principal, most notably their constituents (as ‘delegates’).<sup>42</sup> Notwithstanding more contemporary approaches on political representation (Mansbridge, 2003; Saward, 2006; Severs, Celis, & Meier, 2014) and despite direct normative (Pitkin, 1967; Rehfeld, 2009) and empirical critiques on their conceptualisation (Andeweg & Thomassen, 2005; Gauja, 2012; Searing, 1994), the work of Eulau et al. (1959) continues to inspire and influence empirical studies and MP survey questionnaires to this very day (Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012; Deschouwer & Depauw, 2014).

One of the most pertinent empirical critiques on the trustee-delegate dichotomy is that it was designed in the context of the United States, with no reference to strong and disciplined political parties (Andeweg, 2014). In their attempt to adapt and apply the trustee-delegate to representative government in France, Converse and Pierce (1979) split up the delegate style of representation into two categories: instructed by the party caucus (i.e. party delegates) and instructed by local constituents (i.e. voter delegates). By doing so, they make it possible to apply this typology to European politics and, for instance, make comparisons between systems with strong or weak party organizations. Their model, however, does not account for the way in which parties structure the relations *between* MPs and voters

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<sup>42</sup> A third category, that of ‘politicos’, concerns MPs for ‘whom it depends’.

(Andeweg & Thomassen, 2005). In this respect, the responsible party model would argue that parties, and not individual MPs, are the key actors in political representation (Katz, 1987; Mair, 2008). Political parties, which are sufficiently cohesive and disciplined, present several crystallized policy packages to voters, who choose the party that best represents their policy preferences. Based on the outcomes of the elections, parties receive a mandate for implementing their program within a given legislative term (Thomassen, 1994). Consequently; with strong parties, representation will not run from below (*bottom-up representation*) but from above (*top-down representation*) with a focus on authorisation instead of voter responsiveness (Esaiasson & Holmberg, 1996; Mansbridge, 2003). Combined with the ex-ante (e.g. screening, contracts) and ex-post (e.g. monitoring, reporting requirements) control mechanisms voters as principals have to ensure that their representative agents will not act in a way that harms their interests (e.g. Lupia, 2003), Andeweg and Thomassen (2005) propose four modes of representation: *delegation* (representation from below and ex-ante control), *responsiveness* (representation from below and ex-post control), *authorisation* (representation from above and ex-ante control) and *accountability* (representation from above and ex-post control).<sup>43</sup>

Since the seminal study of Eulau et al. (1959), many empirical studies on legislators' representative roles have been conducted. Most of these studies focus on a single country or political system (e.g. Andeweg, 2012; De Winter, 1997; Ilonszki, 2012; Katz, 1997; Miller & Stokes, 1963; Patzelt, 1997) but some also provide comparative insights. Converse and Pierce (1979, 1986) already found that party delegate style is far more salient in France and the Netherlands than in the US, where most legislators see themselves as trustees. Their findings are supported by Dudzinska et al. (2014) who conclude that among MPs in Europe, the party delegate style (48% of surveyed MPs) prevails over that of the trustee (31%) and the voter delegate (16%). Based on research in France, Belgium and Portugal, Brack et al. (2012) conclude that representational foci are not mutually-exclusive: MPs may adopt multiple foci and serve several entities. Analysing how these foci are influenced by individual-level characteristics (e.g. seniority, local and

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<sup>43</sup> Empirically, MPs' attitudes towards these forms of representation are measured by asking them (1) whether politicians should translate the political views of citizens into policy as accurately as possible (*bottom-up representation*) or if they should seek support from the voters for the political views of their own (*top-down representation*). The preferred control mechanisms are gauged by asking (2) whether politicians, in elections, should account to the voters for their actions in the past (ex-post control); or if they should put their plans for the future to the voters (ex-ante control).

party responsibilities) is not straightforward, however, as the same factor might have different effects based on the institutional and cultural features of a particular political system. In a similar vein, also other studies attribute differences in representative focus and style to institutional variables at the level of the level of the political system (e.g. multilevel organisation, electoral rules) and party (e.g. candidate selection rules) rather than by personal factors such as social background or political career characteristics (Dudzinska et al., 2014; Önnudóttir, 2016; Weßels, 1999).

Although scholarly interest in MPs' representative roles endures, those of PPG leaders in specific have yet to be studied. In contemporary European parliaments, PPG leaders are pivotal political actors that influence the behaviour of legislators and mediate the relationship between voters and individual representatives. As noted in the theoretical chapters, considerable cross-country variety exists in terms of PPG leaders' formal intra-party position and authority (Heidar & Koole, 2000b; Helms, 2000; Pilet & Cross, 2014). In some countries, including the typical Westminster democracies (e.g. United Kingdom, Canada, Australia) (Bale & Webb, 2014; Cross & Blais, 2012; Gauja, 2014) and the Netherlands (Andeweg & Irwin, 2009), PPG leaders are typically understood to be the party's main electoral figurehead and political leader. In other countries, such as Spain (Barberà et al., 2014), Austria (Ennser-Jedenastik & Müller, 2014) and in some traditional German parties (Detterbeck & Rohlfing, 2014), political power is often even more concentrated in the hands of PPG leaders as they additionally preside the extra-parliamentary party organization (EPO).<sup>44</sup> In countries like Belgium (Pilet & Wauters, 2014) and Portugal (Lisi & Freire, 2014), however, PPG leaders neither are chairman of the EPO nor the party's political leader but act as mere communication channels between the party's parliamentary branch and the powerful central party elite (*see also Chapter 2*).

Notwithstanding differences in terms of their formal intra-party position, PPG leaders typically share a number of elementary responsibilities. These common duties make them stand out as a particular class of parliamentarians and are highly likely to affect their representative role orientations. Drawing on the responsible party model (Mair, 2008; Thomassen, 1994) and principal-agent based conceptualisations of representative delegation in parliamentary democracies

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<sup>44</sup> Generally unless the country's parliamentary system is based on constitutional dualism and the party is in government. Often, these party leaders then move into the executive, resign from parliament and are replaced as PPG leaders.

(Strom et al., 2003), political parties are presupposed to be sufficiently cohesive in order to implement the policies for which they were mandated by the electorate (*see above*). Unity is moreover needed for parties to satisfyingly function as ‘informational economizing devices’ (Strøm & Müller, 2009) that help voters - who often lack the time and resources to screen all individual candidates – make informed judgements about whom to select as representatives (*e.g. Chapter 2*). By carefully selecting and listing candidates whose preferences are clear (they are delineated in the party program), parties attach an informative ‘party label’ to candidates that help voters assess how these candidates would act once elected. If legislative politics would be anarchic, however, this informative label would be useless, increasing the risk of adverse selection (i.e. principals would have been better off selecting another agent) and making it more difficult for voters to hold officials accountable (Aldrich, 1995; Saalfeld & Strøm, 2014; Strøm & Müller, 2009). By safeguarding unity, PPG leaders ensure parties’ collective accountability to the electorate, reduce transaction costs in parliamentary decision-making (there is no need for constant ad-hoc alliances) and avoid ‘collective action problems’. The latter are inherent to the rather universal tension between legislators’ aim to get re-elected and the practice of policy-making by majority rule, and arise when the rational behaviour of individuals might lead to outcomes undesirable for the group as a whole (Cox & McCubbins, 1993; Strøm & Müller, 2009).<sup>45</sup> Hence, parties need leaders that overcome preference heterogeneity among group members, monitor their behaviour and possess incentives (both positive and negative) in order to keep group members loyal (Bailer, 2017; Kam, 2009; Kiewiet & McCubbins, 1991). As PPG leaders, regardless of their formal intra-party status, are commonly and explicitly expected to internalise the parties’ collective interest and maintain unity at all cost, we expect quite straightforwardly that their sheer institutional position drives PPG leaders in European national and regional parliaments towards patterns of representative role attitudes and behaviours that are (H1) more homogeneous and (H2) more distinctly party-oriented compared to those of (the large and heterogeneous group of) other MPs.

*Hypothesis 1: PPG leaders adopt more homogeneous representative role attitudes and behaviours compared to the large and heterogeneous group of other MPs*

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<sup>45</sup> Each legislators of a party group might, for instance, be electorally incentivized to only represent the parochial interest of his or her constituency.

*Hypothesis 2: PPG leaders adopt more distinctly party-centred representative role attitudes and behaviours compared to other MPs*

### **3. Partirep MP Survey data<sup>46</sup>**

For the empirical analyses of the representative roles of PPG leaders in European parliaments, we use data from the Partirep Comparative MP Survey<sup>47</sup>, which was conducted between 2009 and 2012 among 2,325 members of national and regional parliaments in fifteen European states<sup>48</sup> (i.e. a response rate of about one in four MPs). The cross-country survey with a closed-ended question format gauged legislators' attitudes and self-reported behaviours through questions on the democratic system, personal role orientations and constituency definitions. The dataset was further complemented with macro- and meso-level variables, among others on countries' electoral rules and party-level characteristics (Deschouwer, Depauw, & André, 2014). Among the sample, a total of 113 members of parliament declared being the leader of a parliamentary party. This is used as the central independent variable in the analysis (PPG leader=1, other MPs=0). Table 4.1 shows the composition of the sample. Two countries in which no PPG leader was surveyed (Poland and Ireland) were excluded from the analysis. Because of the overrepresentation of Swiss (cantonal) MPs, the data are correctively weighted by country, and, due to varying return rates, by parliamentary party in each parliament, for the bivariate analyses.

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<sup>46</sup> The data used in this chapter were collected by the PARTIREP MP Survey research team ([www.partirep.eu](http://www.partirep.eu)). The PARTIREP project was funded by the Belgian Federal Science Policy (BELSPO – grant n° P6/37). Neither the contributors to the data collection nor the sponsors of the project bear any responsibility for the analyses conducted or the interpretation of the results published here.

<sup>47</sup> [www.partirep.eu](http://www.partirep.eu)

<sup>48</sup> Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

**Table 4.1. Partirep MP Survey sample composition**

	PPG leaders	Other MPs	Total
Austria	17	210	227
Belgium	15	148	163
France	3	87	90
Germany	5	274	279
Hungary	1	98	99
Israel	4	35	39
Italy	14	114	128
The Netherlands	2	63	65
Norway	1	45	46
Portugal	8	109	117
Spain	5	267	272
Switzerland	36	568	604
United Kingdom	2	105	107
Total	113	2123	2236

As for the dependent variables, the representative role attitudes of PPG leaders are determined in two alternative ways. First, we analyse legislators' *representative focus* (i.e. should MPs represent the entire population or a geographical or functionally-defined part of it?) and *style* (i.e. should MPs act as a Burkean 'trustee', a 'voter delegate' or as a 'party delegate'?) following the often-used approach of Eulau et al. (1959). In accordance with empirical critiques of responsible party model-based operationalisations of representative roles, we secondly examine whether PPG leaders and other MPs favour *bottom-up or top-down representation* (i.e. should MPs seek authorization for implementing their own program or show responsiveness to voters' wishes) (e.g. Andeweg & Thomassen, 2005; Esaiasson & Holmberg, 1996). Concretising our hypotheses, we expect PPG leaders to commonly and more distinctly adopt a party focus and party delegate style, and to be more in favour of top-down representation compared to other MPs, due to their general preoccupation and responsibility of internalising the party interest and coordinating collective action among individual goal-seeking MPs (Cox & McCubbins, 1993; Saalfeld & Strøm, 2014).

Investigating how PPG leaders conceive of their roles as representatives is one thing. It is, however, equally important to examine how they behave and if their role orientations are translated in concrete parliamentary actions and initiatives.

An often-heard critique on deductive approaches on roles is their difficulty in linking role attitudes to characteristic political behaviour (Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012; Müller & Saalfeld, 1997; Searing, 1994). Yet, often studies focus on roll-call voting as an indicator of representative role behaviour, which is probably too ambitious, especially in the context of West European democracies where legislative parties are disciplined and leave little leeway for personal considerations of how to vote in parliament (Andeweg, 2012, p. 70). We too will examine whether PPG leaders' role attitudes are translated into concrete role behaviour by looking at legislators' (self-reported) main source of inspiration for their parliamentary work as the main behavioural dependent variable. MPs' indications of the proportions of their parliamentary work that is derived from the party, personal experience, the media and contacts with citizens or interest groups tap into a fundamental aspect of legislators' everyday work in parliament and can be expected to be functionally equivalent and comparable across cases. Here, we again would expect that PPG leaders are commonly and more distinctly than other legislators inspired by the party as a source of inspiration for parliamentary initiatives.

The attitudinal and behavioural differences *between* PPG leaders and MPs (*RQ2*) are assessed by means of multilevel fixed effects models that measure the effect of holding a PPG leadership position on legislators' representative attitudes and behaviours, while also taking into account a moderate number of potentially relevant contextual factors that might explain or conceal superficial differences. On the country-level, particularly the electoral system is important: the more it encourages MPs to cultivate a personal vote, the less party-oriented MPs will be (André & Depauw, 2018; Carey & Shugart, 1995; Mayhew, 1974; Pilet, Freire, & Costa, 2012). Smaller electoral districts, which are linked with less proportional and more candidate-centred system, have indeed been shown to lead to more voter-oriented representative foci and styles among legislators (Dudzinska et al., 2014; Weßels, 1999). On the party-level, factors such as party size, ideology or government participation have been known to affect group cohesion (Heidar & Koole, 2000c; Sieberer, 2006) but research on their impact on role orientations has not always lead to unequivocal results (e.g. Dudzinska et al., 2014; Gauja, 2012). All our models (both for the operationalisations of representative role attitudes and behaviours) will therefore include party size (i.e. the relative size of respondents' party in parliament), government status (government party = 1) and party family dummies as control variables at the party-level, and district magnitude

(i.e. the average district magnitude of all surveyed legislators within a particular legislature) as a control variable at the parliament-level.

In order to assess the homogeneity *among* PPG leaders and examine whether a common pattern can be discerned in terms of role attitudes and behaviours (RQ1), we turn towards bivariate analyses of PPG leaders' and other MPs' responses. As we mostly rely on ordinal rating scales, the homogeneity among PPG leaders is calculated using Van der Eijk's coefficient of agreement (A-score) which, when using rating scales, is a more appropriate indicator for dispersion than standard deviations (Van der Eijk, 2001). The A-score is easily interpretable: it ranges from 1 (perfect agreement) over 0 (respondents are spread equally) to -1 (perfect polarization). For non-ordinal survey items we rely on distribution percentages.

## 4. Research results

### 4.1. Representative role attitudes

#### 4.1.1. PPG leaders' focus of representation

We start with PPG leaders' *focus of representation*. Respondents cooperating with the Partirep MP Survey were asked to indicate on a 7-point scale how important it was for them to promote the interests of a number of geographically and functionally-defined groups in society (one's own voters, party voters, the constituency, the party or the entire nation or region). A score of 1 indicates 'no importance'; 7 indicates 'great importance'.

The findings in Table 4.2 suggest that leading a parliamentary party has no statistically significant effect on legislators' focus of representation. Both PPG leaders and other MPs seem to attach equal importance to representing the interests of their constituency, personal and party voters, the entire population and the party. Several party-level and parliament-level control variables, by contrast, do stand out as influencing factors on MPs' representative roles. Belonging to a government party has a negative impact on legislators' voter-oriented focus while the size of the PPG has a slight positive effect on both a constituency and a more Burkean nation-wide focus. On several occasions also party ideology (e.g. compared to other party families, the greens are less likely to have a constituency-oriented focus and more likely to adopt a party-oriented



focus) and the average district magnitude have an effect (the larger the average electoral district, the less likely that MPs adopt a constituency-oriented focus).

When we turn towards the bivariate agreement-scores (A-scores) (Van der Eijk, 2001) at the bottom of Table 4.2, we see that also a common ground among PPG leader is lacking. Although the A-scores approach the theoretical maximum (1; perfect agreement) closest in case of the party and party voters representative foci, they do remain moderately low and the A-scores of PPG leaders' foci are generally even (slightly) than those of the rather large and very heterogeneous group of other, regular MPs

**Table 4.2. PPG leaders' representative foci (fixed effects model, multiple regression)**

	<b>Own voters</b>	<b>Party voters</b>	<b>Constituency</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>All people</b>
PPG leader	-0.052 (0.151)	-0.024 (0.123)	0.050 (0.135)	0.099 (0.127)	0.179 (0.176)
Government party	-0.277 (0.097)***	-0.079 (0.082)	-0.137(0.104)	0.061 (0.081)	-0.022 (0.115)
PPG size	0.002 (0.003)	0.001 (0.002)	0.011(0.003)***	0.003 (0.002)	0.009 (0.003)***
Party family (ref: greens)					
Socialist	-0.027 (0.148)	-0.197 (0.121)	0.139 (0.152)	-0.313 (0.122)**	0.190 (0.173)
Chr. Dem.	0.126 (0.165)	-0.269 (0.140)*	0.502 (0.176)***	-0.558 (0.141)***	0.362 (0.209)*
Liberal	0.121 (0.162)	-0.352 (0.138)**	0.378 (0.173)**	-0.427 (0.140)***	0.593 (0.191)***
Extreme right	0.320 (0.219)	0.256 (0.174)	0.502 (0.216)**	0.235 (0.177)	0.078 (0.282)
Regionalist	0.208 (0.211)	-0.183 (0.181)	0.424 (0.220)*	-0.290 (0.181)	0.198 (0.245)
Conservative	0.287(0.178)	-0.181 (0.141)	0.349 (0.175)**	-0.116 (0.141)	0.487 (0.196)**
District size	-0.004 (0.003)	0.002 (0.002)	-0.012 (0.002)***	0.001 (0.002)	0.004 (0.003)
Constant	5.707(0.159)***	5.894 (0.126)***	5.399 (0.135)***	5.692 (0.117)***	4.723 (0.172)***
$\Sigma_{\text{party}}$	0.064	0.077	0.223	0.072	0.175
$\Sigma_{\text{parliament}}$	0.300	0.171	0.064	0.081	0.199
N	1923	2162	2080	2143	1987
Bivariate A-scores					
PPG leaders	0.47	0.58	0.56	0.58	0.39
Other MPs	0.57	0.60	0.60	0.54	0.41

Note: \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01; standard errors in parentheses

#### 4.1.2. PPG leaders' representative style

Second, we examine the representative styles of PPG leaders. We distinguish between three styles of representation (Converse & Pierce, 1986; Dudzinska et al., 2014). Respondents are categorised either as 'trustee' (MPs should follow their own conscience), 'voter delegates' (MPs should follow their voters' instructions) or 'party delegates' (MPs should follow party instructions) based on their answers to three standardized dilemma questions on how MPs should vote in case of a conflict between (a) their own opinion and the party' position, (b) their own opinion and the voters' position and (c) the voters' opinion and the party' position. Respondents that did not show a clear pattern on how to act in such situations are categorised as 'inconsistent'.

**Table 4.3. PPG leaders' representative styles (fixed effects model, logistic regression)**

	Trustee	Voter delegate	Party delegate	Inconsistent
PPG leader	-0.360 (0.316)	-0.529 (0.380)	0.294 (0.276)	1.060 (0.414)**
Government	-0.092 (0.169)	-0.114 (0.194)	0.292 (0.160)*	-0.305 (0.284)
party				
PPG size	-0.006 (0.005)	-0.017 (0.006)***	0.016 (0.005)***	-0.011 (0.010)
Party family (ref: greens)				
Socialist	-0.517 (0.262)**	-0.005 (0.308)	0.307 (0.263)	1.058 (0.589)*
Chr. Dem.	-0.508 (0.303)*	0.020 (0.357)	0.113 (0.301)	1.412 (0.630)**
Liberal	-0.021 (0.300)	-0.386 (0.386)	-0.005 (0.305)	1.011 (0.657)
Extreme right	-1.186 (0.406)***	0.174 (0.407)	0.658 (0.358)*	1.314 (0.702)*
Regionalist	-0.699 (0.414)*	-0.045 (0.435)	0.528 (0.373)	0.707 (0.811)
Conservative	-0.475 (0.304)	0.296 (0.337)	0.093 (0.300)	1.114 (0.630)*
District size	-0.008 (0.004)*	-0.003 (0.004)	0.009 (0.004)**	-0.003 (0.006)
Constant	-0.067 (0.265)	-1.080 (0.298)***	-1.247 (0.263)***	-3.612 (0.599)***
$\Sigma$ party	0.073	0.060	0.126	0.008
$\Sigma$ parliament	0.385	0.400	0.275	0.320
N	2070	2070	2070	2070
Bivariate distribution %				
PPG leader	29.4	10.3	47.1	13.2
Other MPs	31.8	15.8	47.4	4.9

Note: \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01; Standard errors in parentheses

The multivariate analyses in Table 4.3 show that ‘being a PPG leader’ has no statistically significant effect on the probability of respondents to be categorised either as a ‘trustee’, ‘voter or party delegate’. A similar share of respondents in both groups value acting as ‘party delegates’ even if this implies setting aside voter interests or one’s own ‘mature judgement’ and ‘unbiased opinion’ (Burke, 1774). Once again, the party- and parliament-level control variables have more effect on MPs’ chances to fall into one of the three representative style-categories. Although the coefficient sizes are small, the larger the PPG, the smaller the chance that MPs adopt a voter delegate style and the greater that he or she falls into the party delegate style. Also when legislators belong to a government party or when the average district magnitudes becomes larger, the chance that legislators adopt a party delegate style becomes slightly larger.

Quite remarkably, however, we do find an effect for the ‘inconsistent’ category. The chance that PPG leaders do not suggest a clear-cut solution when confronted with divergent standpoints are higher than those of other MPs. The bivariate distribution percentages below in Table 4.3 indeed show that 13.2 per cent of PPG leaders (i.e. more than one out of eight) fall in the inconsistent category, versus 4.9 (i.e. one out of 20) of other MPs. Further analysis (not in table) reveals that every single PPG leader in this group responded that (a) the party’s position should prevail over one’s own convictions, (b) one’s own convictions over the voters’ opinion, and (c) the voters’ opinion over the party’s position.<sup>49</sup>

Why so many PPG leaders fall into the ‘inconsistent category’ is puzzling. One possible explanation might be that PPG leaders do not experience many conflicts between diverging standpoints as they (partially) shape the party’s position themselves or because they more intensively internalised the party’s point of view. Another explanation might be that, as other authors also argued (e.g. Searing, 1994), the trustee-delegate model might be too crude to analyse complex multidimensional concepts like representation and roles, especially when studying variation at the individual-level and examining the effect of holding leadership positions in parliament.

The bivariate distribution percentages at the bottom of Table 4.3 furthermore tell us that the ‘agreement’ among PPG leaders is lower than among other MPs as

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<sup>49</sup> 76.7 percent of the ‘regular’ MPs in this category follow the same logic. Among 23.3 percent of them, this sequence is reversed.

they are spread more over the several categories, mainly due to the larger inconsistent category.

#### *4.1.3. Bottom-up versus top-down representation*

As noted above, some authors argue that the Eulau and Wahlke typology, even with the adaptations made by Converse and Pierce (1986), does not properly capture how political parties in Western Europe *mediate* the relationship *between* voters and elected representatives (Andeweg, 2014). In this respect, Esaiasson and Holmberg (1996) and later also Andeweg and Thomassen (2005) suggest measuring whether MPs favour ‘bottom-up’ (i.e. responsivity towards the wishes and grievances of voters) or ‘top down representation’ (i.e. seeking authorisation for implementing the party program). Respondents of the Partirep MP survey were asked to indicate their views on a 5-point dilemma scale (1= ‘politicians should aim to translate the political views of citizens into policy as accurately as possible’; 5 = ‘politicians should stand clearly on their party’s platform and aim to win citizen support for those views’). In line with the above, we would expect PPG leaders to be more party-oriented, which would be reflected in a more distinct preference for top-down representation.

While particularly party ideology seems to have an effect in this model (i.e. MPs that belong to green parties more distinctly favour top-down representative views compared to MPs that belong to other party families), the other independent and control variables do not have a statistically significant effect. Again, Table 4.4 shows that the views of PPG leaders and other MPs are highly congruent. Being a PPG leader has no clear effect on the type of representational view valued most. Moreover, the A-scores are rather low for both groups of legislators but are still somewhat closer to 1 for normal MPs compared to PPG leaders, demonstrating that there is no clear agreement or common pattern among PPG leaders.

**Table 4.4. PPG leaders' bottom-up versus top-down views of representation (fixed effects model, multiple regression)**

	Bottom-up versus top-down representation
PPG leader	-0.017(1.120)
Government party	0.096(0.077)
PPG size	0.002(0.002)
Party family (ref: greens)	
Socialist	-0.330(0.116)***
Chr. Dem.	-0.498(0.134)***
Liberal	-0.270(0.133)**
Extreme right	-0.644(0.165)***
Regionalist	-0.163(0.178)
Conservative	-0.407(0.134)***
District size	0.002(0.002)
Constant	3.118(0.127)***
$\Sigma_{\text{party}}$	0.051
$\Sigma_{\text{parliament}}$	0.208
N	2006
Bivariate A-scores	
PPG leader	0.23
Other MPs	0.28

Note: \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01; standard errors in parentheses

## 4.2. Representative role behaviour

Roles as attitudinal constructs become particularly valuable if they can be linked to characteristic political actions (e.g. Searing, 1994). Therefore, we also look at respondents' role behaviour. Respondents were asked to indicate which proportion of their parliamentary initiatives is derived from: the media, interest/action groups, the party, contacts with citizens and personal experiences. Very much in line with what was hypothesized above again, we would expect that PPG leaders more frequently than other MPs rely on the party as a source of inspiration for their legislative activities and less on other potential sources.

Although the bivariate analyses below in Table 4.5 show modest differences in the average proportions, we do not find significant effects for holding a PPG leadership position on the sources of inspiration in the multivariate regression models. PPG leaders and other MPs thus appear equally inspired by the party for their legislative initiatives. Again particularly the party- and parliament-level

control variables have an effect: MPs that belong to majority and (to a lesser degree) larger PPGs are more likely to derive their parliamentary initiatives from the party, while district magnitude has a minor negative impact on the estimated proportion of initiatives derived from the party. For the other potential sources, we see that particularly party ideology has an impact. Particularly belonging to extreme-right and conservative parties (and for contacts with citizens as a source of inspiration also the liberal, Christian-democrats and social-democrats) increases the average proportion of initiatives derived from the media and from direct contacts with citizens.

**Table 4.5. PPG leaders' inspiration for parliamentary initiatives (fixed effects model, multiple regression)**

	Media	Interest groups	Party	Citizens	Personal experience
PPG leader	1.914(1.689)	-3.222(1.963)	2.819(2.153)	-1.263(1.807)	-3.394(2.278)
Government party	-1.015(1.010)	-0.473(1.081)	2.959(1.256)**	-0.859(1.071)	0.679(1.394)
PPG size	-0.109(0.031)***	-0.050(0.034)	0.076(0.038)**	-0.028(0.033)	0.020(0.043)
Party family (ref: greens)					
Socialist	1.069(1.556)	-1.225(1.743)	0.204(1.974)	4.443(1.655)***	2.430(2.150)
Chr. Dem.	2.922(1.809)	-1.685(2.013)	-2.206(2.288)	6.454(1.925)***	3.791(2.495)
Liberal	1.890(1.783)	-1.343(2.005)	0.357(2.268)	5.702(1.902)***	4.488(2.464)*
Extreme right	7.290(2.202)***	-9.697(2.466)***	0.355(2.793)	8.479(2.336)***	5.827(3.020)*
Regionalist	3.112(2.386)	-2.258(2.635)	1.153(2.971)	2.410(2.536)	1.132(3.245)
Conservative	3.722(1.775)**	-3.399(1.969)*	-1.287(2.247)	5.675(1.885)***	2.963(2.453)
District size	0.060(0.028)**	-0.046(0.023)**	-0.077(0.028)***	0.009(0.032)	0.025(0.034)
Constant	15.782(1.605)** *	25.902(1.686)***	20.210(1.911)***	17.368(1.772)** *	21.326(2.135)***
$\Sigma_{\text{party}}$	6.931	5.091	10.960	6.757	15.980
$\Sigma_{\text{parliament}}$	23.283	12.863	18.830	33.798	32.590
N	1817	1831	1824	1835	1830
Bivariate distribution %					
PPG leaders	18.27	18.07	24.84	20.43	21.06
Other MPs	15.51	20.43	21.90	20.49	24.25

Note: \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01; standard errors in parentheses



In addition, the bivariate distribution percentages do not demonstrate more internal homogeneity among PPG leaders than among the diverse group of other MPs. Respondents, of both groups, appear rather equally distributed among the several categories.

All the results above, on PPG leaders' role attitudes and role behaviours, force us to reject both hypothesis 1 and 2. Despite the basic, common responsibility of maintaining party unity and coordinating collective action in parliament, PPG leaders do not adopt similar representative roles nor can they be distinguished from other legislators based on distinctly more party-oriented representative attitudes and behaviours.

## **5. Discussion**

The central goal of this chapter was, before proceeding to the in-depth analysis of PPG in Belgium, to take one step back and test a deductive approach on legislators' roles using Partirep MP survey data on multiple national and regional parliaments in Europe. We explored the representative roles (Rozenberg & Blomgren, 2012) of PPG leaders by analysing whether these pivotal actors, who share a number of basic responsibilities, adopt (1) similar (party-centred) representative role attitudes and behaviours, that (2) make them stand out from other legislators.

The results suggest that differences between PPG leaders and regular MPs are limited. No effects of occupying a position as party group leader on MPs' role attitudes (the 'inconsistent' category of representative style being the exception) or behaviours were uncovered. Furthermore, and contrary to the theorized expectations, also the internal agreement among PPG leaders appeared limited and often even smaller than among the large and diverse group of regular MPs. We provide two explanations for these (remarkable) findings and the overall lack of straightforward differences. These simultaneously contain suggestions for future research.

First, the results suggest that PPG leaders have been, and still are, members of parliament. Before climbing the hierarchical ladder, they were 'ordinary' MPs who underwent socialisation processes and adopted particular attitudes and behaviours. These do not suddenly change when undergoing a secondary socialisation process into a leadership position. Perhaps this alters when remaining

in office for several terms but the number of observations in the dataset is too low to test this.

Second, several other studies also concluded that the impact of individual-level social background and political career factors on MPs' focus and style of representation is limited (e.g. Brack et al., 2012; Dudzinska et al., 2014; Weßels, 1999). Complemented with our findings, this suggests that predefined, representative role sets, tailored to capture practices in different contexts, only scratch the surface of MPs' - and especially PPG leaders' - actual roles. They might not be fine-grained enough to study how *individuals* holding a certain position perceive their tasks. Together with other difficulties, including many PPG leaders falling in the 'inconsistent' category of representative styles, this corresponds with the idea that rigid categories like 'trustee' or 'delegate' are not the best way to conceptualise political roles. This was already brought up by Searing (1994, p. 13) who argued that these constructs exist in the minds of social scientists rather than in the minds of the people we are studying. A shift away from representative roles (studied deductively) towards legislative roles (studied inductively) seems to yield a more fruitful approach. Although specific elements of PPG leaders' set of duties can indeed be studied using standardized measures suited for comparative analysis (see for instance Bailer (2017) on PPG leaders' use of disciplinary instruments), when studying their broader roles in parliament, a more qualitative approach, using in-depth case studies, might be advisable. Investigating PPG leaders' own conceptions of their mandate and taking into account their personal preferences, goals and their ways of coping with the incentives and constraints provided by the institutional features of a given legislature (Searing, 1994) is essential for understanding PPG leaders' behaviour. In addition, because of their pivotal and often influential position in parliament, it would allow us to further open up 'the black box of legislatures' (Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012), extending our knowledge on the internal organization of legislatures and the functioning of parliamentary democracy more broadly.

In the next chapter, we shift our focus towards our single-country study and begin looking more in-depth at PPG leadership in Belgium. Before probing into their legislative role orientations and examining role variance across these frontbenchers in a similar institutional context, we take a look at the political and socio-demographic profile of PPG leaders. Who exactly are these PPG leaders? What are their main socio-demographic and political career characteristics. To

what extent do we already observe differences between subgroups of PPG leaders, which could herald potentially diverging role orientations?

# Socio-demographic and political career characteristics of PPG leaders in Belgium, 1962-2019

## **1. Introduction<sup>50</sup>**

From this point on, the research focus is narrowed down to PPG leadership in Belgium. Before proceeding to the analyses of how PPG leaders conceive of their roles and why they do so in a specific way, this chapter takes a closer look at the socio-demographic profile and political career characteristics of PPG leaders in the Belgian federal Chamber of Representatives, the Senate and the Flemish Parliament.

This is interesting for multiple reasons. The first is rather pragmatic and relates to the case-selection and data analysis for the more in-depth, qualitative (comparative) part of this thesis. The dataset used in this chapter contains population data (see below) and provides us with a good starting ground for the selection of interview respondents using the stratified purposive sampling strategy as disseminated in the methodological chapter. Apart from this, there are also more substantive reasons. To begin with, this chapter provides us a general image of the political actors we are studying. Who are these PPG leaders? What are their basic socio-demographic characteristics? What does the political career of these actors look like before and after they were selected as PPG leader? Second, going beyond a description of PPG leaders profile, this chapter incorporates a number of independent variables in the analysis that could bring up and explain objective party-level differences between subpopulations of PPG leaders. These differences could indicate that party selectorates are looking for a specific profile or type of PPG leader when the party is in certain political circumstances (opposition or

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<sup>50</sup> This chapter is a thoroughly revised version of B.de Vet & B. Wauters. 'Tussen partij en parlement. Het profiel van de fractievoorzitter in België. *Res Publica*, 57 (2), 185-215.

government, to give one example), which could reflect diverging role expectations and consequently herald role variation (e.g. Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012; Searing, 1994).

By focusing on the profile of PPG leaders, this chapter places itself in a wider research tradition on the social backgrounds and career paths of political elites (Cotta et al., 2017; Gaxie, 2018; Putnam, 1976) such as local politicians (Kjær, 2006; Steyvers & Reynaert, 2006), legislative agents (Best & Cotta, 2000; Best & Vogel, 2018), executive elites (Dowding & Dumont, 2008, 2014; Kerby, 2009) and party leaders (Cross & Pilet, 2015; Cross & Blais, 2012). Many studies in this field have highlighted the importance of examining political elites' social attributes and mapped how, among others, recruitment patterns led to the numeric underrepresentation of women (Bjarnegård & Kenny, 2015; Sawyer, Tremblay, & Trimble, 2006; Studlar & McAllister, 2002; Wauters & Pilet, 2015) and ethnic minorities (Bird, Saalfeld, & Wüst, 2010; Norris & Lovenduski, 1995), and to the overrepresentation of the middle-aged and higher educated (Best & Cotta, 2000; Bovens & Wille, 2017). Scrutinizing politicians' career trajectories prior to their selection for a legislative, executive or party mandate, scholars have moreover described the importance of political tenure and party socialisation (Cowley, 2012; Dowding & Dumont, 2014; Edinger & Jahr, 2016; Matthews, 1984; Norris, 1999; Ohmura et al., 2018; Pilet & Cross, 2014; Scarrow, 1997), while studies on the duration and ending of political mandates provided insights in why politicians' leave their position (Cross & Blais, 2012; Dowding & Dumont, 2008; Quinn, 2012) and how there is increasingly more turnover among (legislative) elites (Fiers, 2000; Gouglass, Maddens, & Brans, 2018; Matland & Studlar, 2004).

Besides providing rich data on the characteristics of political elites in representative democracies, many studies have sought to explain differences in social and political attributes between countries and parties. Often focussing on the demand-side of recruitment processes (e.g. Best & Cotta, 2000; Norris, 1997), scholars have for instance analysed the effect of electoral rules (Krook & Schwindt-Bayer, 2013; McAllister & Studlar, 2002) and party-level factors (Caul, 1999; Celis & Erzeel, 2013; Eelbode et al., 2013; Wauters & Pilet, 2015) on the sociodemographic profile of elites. Other studies have shown how also the career attributes of politicians (mainly their political experience, duration of the mandate and incumbency) differ across political systems (e.g. due to country level-variables such as the proportionality of the electoral system, electoral volatility, the presence of quotas) and political parties (e.g. due to party-level factors such as size, age,

government participation, ideology and electoral scores) (Aldrich, 2018; Cross & Blais, 2012; Gouglas et al., 2018; Matland & Studlar, 2004).

In a similar vein, this chapter will not only describe the sociodemographic attributes and political career characteristics of PPG leaders in Belgium but also try to explain potential differences between PPG leaders (mostly in terms of their political career backgrounds).

We focus on three main sociodemographic attributes (i.e. PPG leaders' sex, educational level and age) and four political career traits (i.e. their (sub)national parliamentary experience, their experience as government ministers, the duration of one's term as PPG leader, and the follow-up position attained immediately after one is deselected or resigns as PPG leader). Particularly the explanatory analysis of PPG leaders' political career characteristics is relevant for the remainder of this thesis, when we focus more on PPG leaders substantial functioning in parliament. When do parties, for instance, appoint highly experienced PPG leaders? When do they select inexperienced politicians? What might this already tell us about the functioning of PPG leaders under these political circumstances?

As we have single-country data, the explanatory analysis focuses not on political system-level factors but on party-level differences and potential evolutions throughout time. We examine the influence of three central party-level independent variables on which party groups (and potentially their leaders) distinctly differ.

The first is their *government status*: it might be expected, for instance, that majority parties are more inclined to select highly experienced PPG leaders as government participation increases the need for safeguarding party unity in order to secure cabinet stability (De Winter & Dumont, 2006; Laver, 1999; Laver & Shepsle, 1999). Opposition parties, by contrast, might be more inclined to select more inexperienced politicians. Second, we look at *parties' size* in parliament. Large party groups tend to have more internal preference heterogeneity (Sieberer, 2006) and complex organisational structures (Heidar & Koole, 2000b), requiring more efforts, attention and skills of leaders to manage. We therefore expect that larger parties select more experienced PPG leaders than small parties. Furthermore, larger parties can make bigger claims on attractive political positions such as government minister or parliamentary speaker, which could be reflected in higher numbers of PPG leaders making political promotion after their terms have ended. Third, we focus on parties' *electoral result* in the most recent elections before the

selection of a PPG leader. PPG leadership is a rather visible position that codetermines the general image of a party to the wider public. As is often the case with party leaders (Cross & Blais, 2012; Fiers, 1998; Pilet & Cross, 2014; Quinn, 2012), parties who suffered electoral defeats might be incentivized to replace their PPG leaders and allow someone less experienced to take over. On the other hand, parties that won in the recent elections will have more newcomers (with limited experience) in the PPG, while parties that suffered severe losses are more likely to fall back on its most experienced group members. This changes the composition of the pool of MPs from which PPG leaders can be selected, enabling or simply making it impossible for PPGs to select less experienced PPG leaders. Furthermore, for majority parties electoral defeats imply a loss in coalition bargaining power or potentially even falling out of government.<sup>51</sup> Parties could then opt to provide members with impressive track records (e.g. former ministers) with a political safety net and appoint them as (highly experienced) PPG leaders.

As the dataset moreover contains longitudinal data on every PPG leader in the federal Chamber, the Senate and the Flemish parliament in the past six decades, we can also assess potential evolutions over time. Studies have shown how the population of legislators, i.e. the recruitment pool from which PPG leaders are selected, has undergone a number of evolutions in the past decades: MPs become increasingly younger (Fiers, Gerard, & Van Uytven, 2006; Verleden, 2013), have less political experience to resort to (Depauw & Fiers, 2008) and do not remain in office as long as before (Fiers, 2000; Gouglaas et al., 2018). Does this also have consequences for PPG leaders' attributes? If effectively identified, how could such evolutions affect the daily functioning of PPG leaders in parliament?

## 2. Data and methods

The analyses below are based on an original dataset containing biographical information of every legislator that ever lead a formally recognized PPG in the Belgian Federal Chamber of Representatives, the Senate and the Flemish Parliament.<sup>52</sup> The data start from the very year that the existence of party groups

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<sup>51</sup> Although not necessarily, see: De Winter and Dumont (2006); De Winter, Timmermans, and Dumont (2000).

<sup>52</sup> For the Belgian Federal Chamber of Representatives and Flemish Parliament this requires having at least 5 members. In the Senate the minimum number of legislators to get recognized as a PPG is 3. A formal recognition as a PPG is materially beneficial in terms of financial resources and staffing,

in each parliament was officially acknowledged in its respective standing orders. For the Federal Chamber this is since 1962 (Verleden, 2014), in the Senate since 1971 (Laureys et al., 2016) and in the Flemish Parliament, PPGs were already formally recognized since the installation of the *Cultuurraad* in 1970, *i.e.* the predecessor of what in 1995 became the Flemish Parliament (Goossens, 2002, p. 33). The dataset was last updated in January 2019, which marks the end of the research period that is analysed in this chapter. PPG leaders that were appointed afterwards are not included in the analysis.

The full list of names of all PPG leaders, and the exact starting and ending date of their terms as PPG leaders were obtained from the Documentation and Archival Offices of the Federal Chamber, Senate and the Flemish Parliament.<sup>53</sup> These data were complemented with information on the party (group) of the PPG leaders (party affiliation, size, government status, electoral scores) and with individual-level data on PPG leaders' personal attributes. Most information could easily be retrieved from legislators' biographical notes on the websites of the parliamentary assemblies or from their personal websites.

Although PPG leaders in theory remain in office for the remainder of the legislative term, they can of course also prematurely resign from their mandate, for instance when they are appointed as a member of government or when they are elected as party leader. It might, however, also be the case that legislators are re(s)elected as PPG leaders during two or more consecutive legislative terms. We only take PPG leaders' uninterrupted mandates into account (no matter if it lasted 1 or 10 years) and do not break PPG leaders' terms further down into separate legislative terms. Still, several politicians reoccur multiple times in the dataset. This might be the case, for instance, when legislators resign as PPG leaders at one point in time (e.g. to become minister, speaker or party leader) but return to the office of PPG leader at a later phase or in a different parliament.

Table 5.1. summarizes the research population. The second column shows how many unique individuals per parliament are in the dataset (N=272), the third column indicates how many uninterrupted PPG leadership mandates are effectively covered (N=311).

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but also politically, as recognized PPGs get more speaking time and are represented in parliaments' governing bodies (De Winter & Dumont, 2000; Van der Hulst & Muylle, 2017).

<sup>53</sup> I am very grateful to the staff members for their help in the data collection phase.



**Table 5.1. Research population**

	Unique PPG leaders	Uninterrupted mandates
Chamber (1962-2019)	115	136
Senate (1971-2019)	93	102
Flemish Parliament (1970-2019)	64	73
Total	272	311

Below we report and plot the descriptive statistics of the socio-demographic traits and political career characteristics of PPG leaders since 1962. We, however, also run multivariate, binomial logistic and linear regression models that explain differences in terms of PPG leaders' (political) attributes (as dependent variables) based on the independent variables that were addressed above.<sup>54</sup> Potential (1) evolutions throughout time are accounted for by integrating the year in which PPG leaders were selected in the model. On the party-level, PPG leaders' (2) government status is determined at the moment of their formal nomination (1=majority, 0= opposition), (3) the relative size of the PPG is coded as the PPGs' percentage share of the total number of seats in parliament and (4) parties' short term electoral results are operationalised by calculating the electoral gains/losses (in percent) of the PPG leader's party in the most recent elections prior to his/her selection (*election t*) compared to the preceding election (*election t-1*).<sup>55</sup> We furthermore include eight party family dummies<sup>56</sup> and parties' linguistic group (in the federal parliament) to control for further differences between parties. As the descriptive analyses point to disparities between the analysed parliaments (mostly

<sup>54</sup> Even though this chapter deals with population data, we do report statistical significance levels as these are still appropriate to identify non-trivial differences between sub-populations of the data (Blalock, 1979; Rubin, 1985). At a higher level of abstraction, another argument in favour of performing significance tests is that populations are always evolving; any population at a specific point in time could be seen as a sample of that population at any future point in time (Rubin, 1985, p. 519).

<sup>55</sup> The values on this variable vary from -8,5 to 9,3 (mean= -0,124; SD=2,367). For PPG leaders in the Senate, the Chamber and those who were PPG leader in the predecessors of the Flemish Parliament, before it held its first direct elections, parties' electoral gains or losses are inferred from their nation-wide vote shares in the federal elections. For PPG leaders in the Flemish Parliament after 1995, we look at parties' vote shares in the Flemish region but multiply the electoral shifts by a factor 0,6 for reasons of comparability (0,6 as this is the ratio of seats for Dutch-speaking MPs to the total number of seats in the Chamber between 1995 and 2019).

<sup>56</sup> Being the liberals (PRL/MR, PVV/VLD), Christian democrats (PSC/CdH, CVP/CD&V), socialists (PS, SP/sp.a), ecologists (Ecolo, Agalev/Groen), regionalists (VU/N-VA, FDF, RW), radical right (VB, FN), communists (KPB) and a rest category of small parties (LDD, ROSSEM).

between the Senate and the other two parliaments) we also include dummies for each parliament (with the Senate as reference category).

Particularly the influence of these independent variables on the political career characteristics of PPG leaders (experience, duration of the mandate, follow-up job) is useful for our purposes. We will, however, also report differences in the socio-demographic attributes of PPG leaders, when relevant (*see also Appendix 3*).

### **3. Research results**

#### **3.1. Sociodemographic attributes**

##### *3.1.1. Sex*

We start with PPG leaders' sex. Whereas women are underrepresented in politics in general (Caul, 1999; Krook, 2010; Matland, 2005), this is typically even more so the case higher up the political hierarchy, when looking at top positions in political parties or executive bodies (Krook & O'Brien, 2012; O'Brien, 2015; Wauters & Pilet, 2015). The underrepresentation of women also becomes very clear in our analysis as, in total, men constitute 88,1% of all PPG leaders that ever took office in the three analysed legislative bodies. The percentage of women is distinctly the lowest in the Flemish Parliament with a mere 5,5 % versus 11,0 % in the Federal Chamber of Representatives and 17,6 % in the Senate.<sup>57</sup> Although the historical underrepresentation of women in parliament logically also reduces the recruitment pool from which (female) PPG leaders could be selected, these figures are obviously that disproportional that they seem to point towards an additional funnel hampering the progression of women to leadership positions.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> This is surprising given that women are generally (slightly) better represented in subnational than in national legislatures (Vengroff, Nyiri, & Fugiero, 2003).

<sup>58</sup> By means of illustration: 30,2% of all members of the federal Chamber between 1995 and 2019 were women, versus 21,9% of the PPG leaders. 30,6% of all Flemish MPs between 1995 and 2019 were female, versus 10,5 of the PPG leaders in that period (IGMV-IEFH, 2019; RoSa, 2019).

**Figure 5.1. Percentage of female PPG leaders per legislative term (1962-2019)**

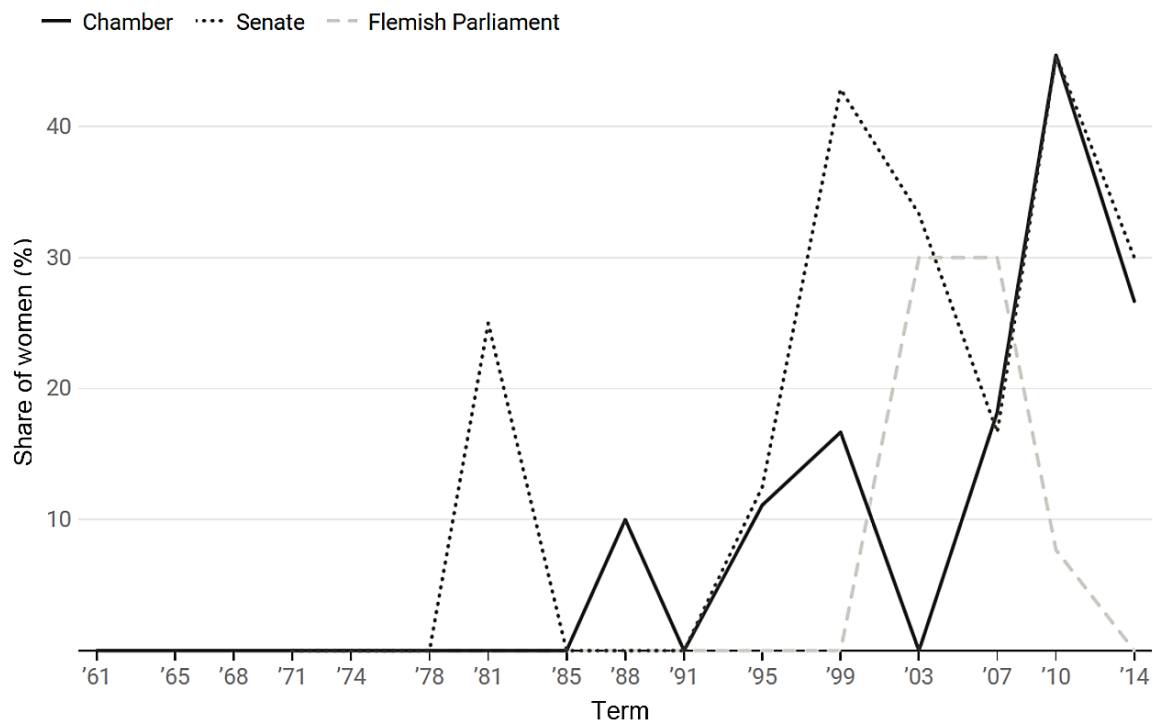


Figure 5.1 shows that the share of female PPG leaders per legislative term did increase of the past decades. However, while the first directly elected female MP entered the Chamber in 1929 and the first woman was sworn in as a minister in 1965, it takes until 1983 for Lucienne Herman Michielsens (PVV) to become selected as the first female PPG leader in the Senate. Six years later, also the Chamber follows (Mieke Vogels, Agalev) and in the Flemish Parliament the first female PPG leaders are only appointed after the elections of 2004 (Caroline Gennez, sp.a and Patricia Ceysens, VLD). It is mainly since the end of the 1990s that we see an increase in the total share of women, with distinct peaks in the 1999-2003 and 2010-2014 legislative term in the Senate and the Chamber respectively. Despite this increase, however, the percentage of female PPG leaders never reaches the 50% threshold and keeps showing distinct trends downwards.

The multivariate regression analysis (logistic regression<sup>59</sup>, see Appendix 3) confirms what the graph above already shows: there is a positive trend throughout time (odds ratio (OR)= 1,096) and compared to the Senate in particular, the

<sup>59</sup> The same independent variables as below were incorporated in these models.

Flemish parliament performs poorly with regards to the selection of female PPG leaders. Of all the party-level variables, only belonging to the Christian democratic party family has a significant and negative impact. While ecologist parties score highest with a total share of 30,6% female PPG leaders during the entire research period, only a mere 5,9% of all PPG leaders that were ever selected by the Christian democratic parties were women (for CVP/CD&V this comes down to only one female PPG leader).<sup>60</sup>

### 3.1.2. Educational level

Next, we take a look at PPG leaders' educational background. Studies show how politics became increasingly professionalised during the past decades and how the formerly aristocratic political elite has been replaced by an educational elite. Legislative and executive political office is increasingly being dominated by the highly-educated, while the lower or medium-educated citizens have close to disappeared from parliament (Best & Cotta, 2000; Bovens & Wille, 2017). This also shows in the profile of PPG leaders (*see Figure 5.2*).

In total, around 86% of all PPG leaders in the dataset went to university and obtained a Master's degree. A part of this group, or 36,1 % of the total population, also obtained a PhD. For a smaller percentage of around 10 %, their highest diploma is a Bachelor title, and the share of PPG leaders that did not follow any higher education is 4,3 %. When looking at differences between legislative assemblies, we see that the share of PPG leaders that holds a university degree is highest for the federal Chamber (around 90 %) and the smallest for the Flemish Parliament (but still around 83 %). Remarkable, moreover, is that practically half of all PPG leaders that ever seated in the Senate obtained a PhD (most often in Law).

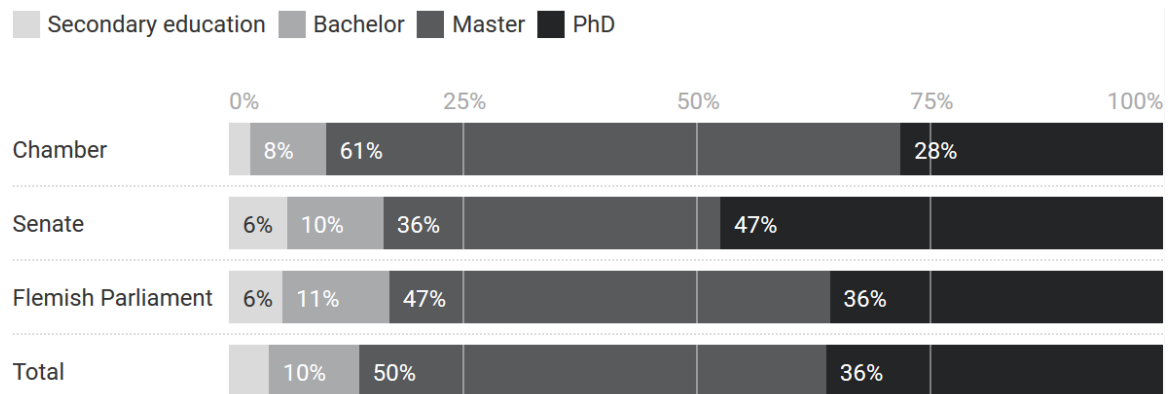
As there is very little variance in the population of PPG leaders based on their educational level, it comes as no big surprise that no relevant differences between subpopulations can be discerned (*see Appendix 3*). We mainly find that, compared to ecologist parties, the odds of having a university degree is particularly lower for PPG leaders of the radical right and communist parties in the dataset (although still respectively 70 % and 60 % of these parties' PPG leaders are university graduates). The models also provide hints that larger PPGs are slightly more likely

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<sup>60</sup> Being Sabine de Bethune, who was selected as PPG leader in the Senate in 2003.

to select higher educated PPG leaders but the effect is very small. Clear evolutionary patterns throughout time could not be observed: it is rather probable that the research period does not go back in time far enough to notice any trends (e.g. Bovens & Wille, 2017)

**Figure 5.2. PPG leaders' education level (1962-2019)**



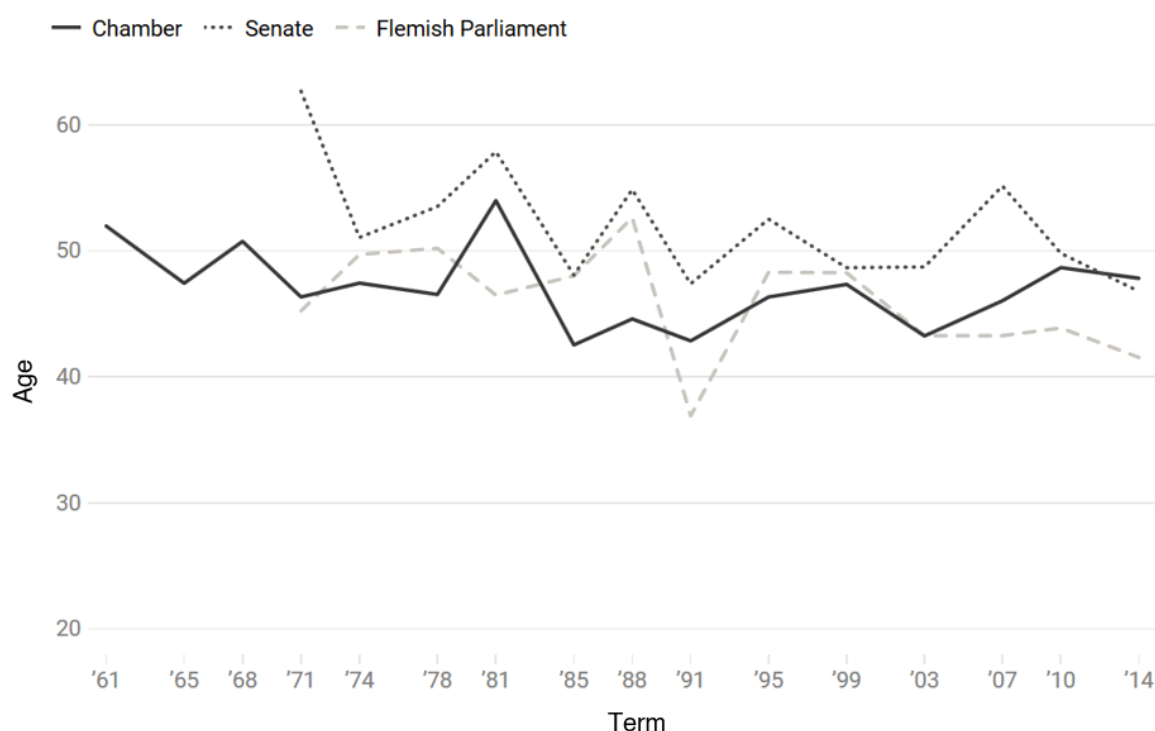
### 3.1.3. Age

The third socio-demographic trait we discuss is PPG leaders' age. On average, PPG leaders are 48,2 years old when they commence their political mandate. We can infer from the standard deviation of 8,4, however, that there is quite some dispersion. The youngest PPG to appear in the dataset is Melchior Wathelet (jr.), who was close to 27 years old when he became PPG leader of the CdH party group in the Chamber in 2004. Herman De Croo (Open VLD) became the oldest with almost 73 years when he was appointed as a PPG leader in the Chamber during the 2010-2011 government formation period. PPG leaders are on average the youngest in the Flemish Parliament (45,8) and the oldest in the Senate (51,9). A potential reason for the latter might be that until 1995 there was a higher age restriction to become a member of the Senate (i.e. 40 year), reflecting the conservative character of the assembly (Laureys et al., 2016). This could logically also have an impact on the profile of PPG leaders.

Unlike with educational level, at first sight, Figure 5.3 does seem to show (minor) evolutions when it comes to PPG leaders' age. This is particularly the case for the Senate, where the average age of PPG leaders decreases (with ups and downs) from between 50 and 60 years to below 50 years in the latest legislative term. Also in the Flemish regional parliament we observe that the average age of PPG leaders

declined slightly from around 50 years in the 1970s and 1980s to close to 40 years in the later legislative terms. A noticeable dip downwards is seen in the 1991-1995 term, which is predominantly caused by the appointment of Filip Dewinter (VB) as PPG leader at 29 years old.

**Figure 5.3 Evolution of Belgian PPG leaders' age, 1962-2019 (average per legislative term)**



A number of further remarks should be made with regards to PPG leaders' age. First, research points out that also the age of Belgian MPs in general has decreased over time. For the federal Chamber in specific, the average age of MPs has decreased from 52,4 year in 1960 to 46,8 in the 2010-2014 term (Verleden, 2013). Due to this 'rejuvenation' in parliament, logically also the recruitment pool from which PPG leaders can be selected gets younger. Still, PPGs can still opt to allocate responsibilities and prestigious offices to the more senior MPs. We, however, surprisingly find the contrary when comparing our data with data on legislators in the Chamber, Senate and Flemish Parliament between 1981 and 2004, collected by Fiers et al. (2006). In all three parliaments, the PPG leaders that served in this period are on average younger than the other MPs. In the Chamber, PPG leaders were on average 45,6 years old, while the mean age for all MPs is 47,3. In the Senate this difference is smaller with 51,3 versus 52,1 years

respectively, and in the Flemish Parliament PPG leaders (45,6 year) are most outspokenly younger than other MPs (49,0 years old).

Although a bivariate analysis confirms that the starting year and age of PPG leaders are indeed negatively correlated (Pearson  $r = -0,177$ ,  $p = 0,002$ ), this effect fails to reach statistical significance in the multivariate regression model (*see Appendix 3*). Instead, we find that liberal and regionalist parties tend to select older PPG leaders, that Dutch-speaking PPG leaders are on average younger than their French-speaking colleagues and that PPG leaders - as also Figure 5.4 indicates - are on average older in the Senate. Differences between large and smaller PPGs, majority and opposition parties, and parties that gained or lost electorally could not be discerned.

## **3.2. Political career characteristics**

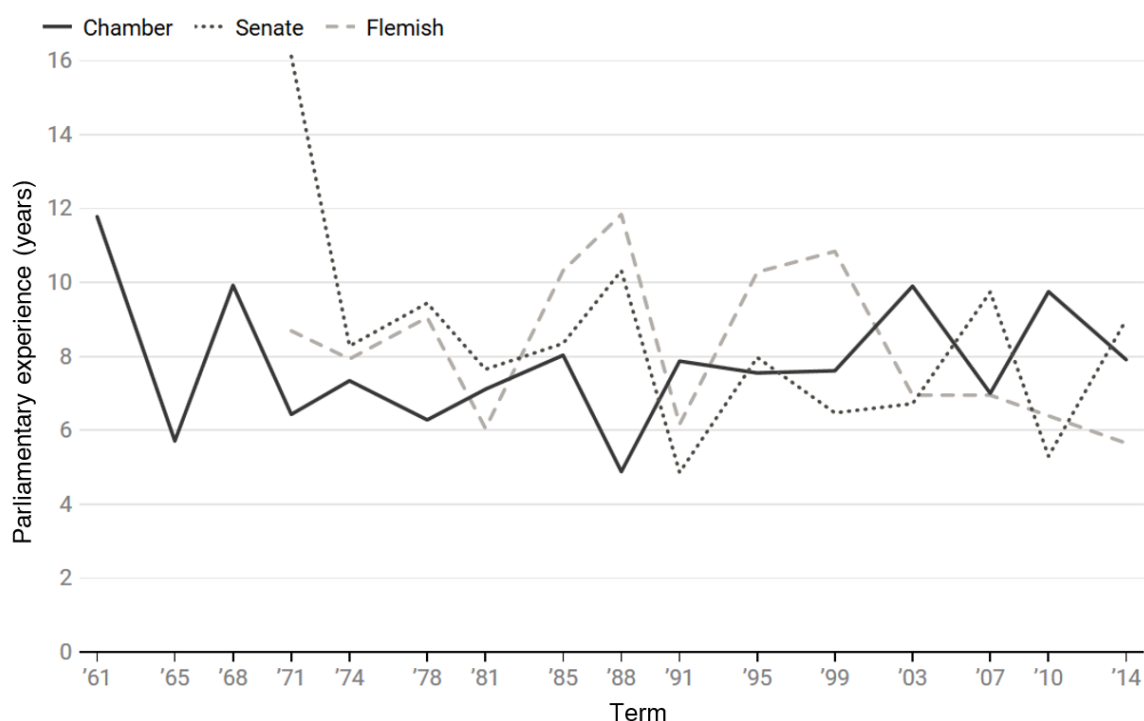
### *3.2.1. Parliamentary experience*

Next, we shift the focus from PPG leaders' sociodemographic traits to their political career characteristics. By looking into legislators' prior political experience, the duration of their mandates as well as mapping the 'follow-up' jobs they occupy immediately after their mandate as PPG leaders ends, we gain a better understanding of the place PPG leadership generally takes in the career trajectories of politicians. Do legislators' become PPG leader at the end of a long and rich parliamentary career? Or is it a function that is often used as a launching platform for inexperienced politicians? Here we also look at the explanatory regression models in closer detail. To what extent can factors such as government status, PPG size, electoral results and evolutions through time explain objective differences in the political profile of PPG leaders?

We start with PPG leaders' prior experience as regional or national MPs. Experience is often seen as 'hard cash' in legislative politics. Although individual MPs have limited political power, compared to for instance the executive branch that is better equipped with staff and takes the lead in the initiation of legislation (Dewachter, 2002; Norton, 1993), legislators can still exert informal influence on those political actors who do have decision-making power. Essential here is their political experience. Legislators who remain in office for many years can build up a lot of expertise and political authority on specific policy domains mainly through their specialized committee work (Depauw & Fiers, 2008). This could give them

a competitive advantage over the executive, as ministerial careers are often short due to high levels of circulation between elections and because ministers are not necessarily selected (only) for their policy expertise (Dumont, Fiers, & Dandoy, 2008). As parliamentary careers get shorter and MPs less experienced, this advantage diminishes (Depauw & Fiers, 2008).<sup>61</sup> Also for frontbenchers, parliamentary experience is important: it provides them with the political authority, procedural knowledge and skills to manage a party group and steer parliamentary proceedings in the preferred direction (Searing & Game, 1977).

**Figure 5.4. PPG leaders' parliamentary experience, 1962-2019 (mean per term)**



The average parliamentary experience of PPG leaders, in any regional, national or European parliament, at the start of their terms is 7,9 years. This comes down to approximately two (four-year) legislative terms.<sup>62</sup> Again the standard deviation (5,4) points to quite some variation. A few PPG leaders, like Hendrik Vuye (N-

<sup>61</sup> Verleden and Heyneman (2008) find that the average experience of MPs in the Chamber dropped from around 10 years in the 1960s to around 5,5 years in 2007. Note that here only experience in the Chamber is taken into account, not the parliamentary experience of MPs in general (in the federal/, regional and European parliament).

<sup>62</sup> This was the length of a full legislative term in the federal parliament up until 2014, when the length of a term was increased to 5 years (as in the Flemish regional parliament).



VA, Chamber) or Filip Watteeuw (Groen, Flemish Parliament), were selected immediately upon their election in parliament. Others, like Herman De Croo (Open VLD, Chamber, 35,2 years) or Georges Housiaux (BSP, Senate, 25,8 years) had decades of parliamentary experience lying behind them when they were appointed. Differences between parliaments are less outspoken: PPG leaders have on average most experience in the Senate (8,2 years) compared to the Flemish Parliament (7,9 years) and the Chamber (7,7 years). In Figure 5.4, the average parliamentary experience of newly-selected PPG leaders per term is plotted over time. In the Chamber, the parliamentary tenure of PPG leaders is roughly the same as 50 years ago. In the Senate, we see a distinct decrease between 1971 and 1995, while in the Flemish Parliament, there appears to be a dip in experience since the 1999-2004 term.

**Table 5.2. Parliamentary experience of PPG leaders (linear regression)**

	Parliamentary experience (years)	
	<i>Standardized betas</i>	<i>SE</i>
Time	-0,007	0,022
Majority party	0,092	0,712
Party group size	0,270***	0,047
Electoral result	-0,150**	0,134
Party type (ref: ecologists)		
<i>Liberal</i>	0,210**	1,145
<i>Chr democrat</i>	-0,019	1,290
<i>Socialist</i>	0,059	1,247
<i>Regionalist</i>	0,082	1,178
<i>Radical right</i>	0,108*	1,792
<i>Communist</i>	0,003	2,586
<i>Other</i>	0,009	2,771
Linguistic group (Dutch=1)	-0,011	0,705
Parliament (ref: Senate)		
<i>Chamber</i>	-0,038	0,687
<i>Flemish Parliament</i>	-0,134*	0,936
Constant	9,878	44,916
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.098	
N	311	

\*,p<0.1, \*\*,p<0.05, \*\*\*,p<0.01

The linear regression model with PPG leaders' years of parliamentary experience as the dependent variable reveal some interesting insights (see Table 5.2). As PPGs increase in size, they tend to select more experienced PPG leaders. This is immediately is the largest effect in the model. As mentioned above, a potential explanation might be that larger PPGs are characterized by more preference heterogeneity among its members and require an authoritative and experienced PPG leader who knows the parliamentary ropes and is able to keep the troops in line (Heidar & Koole, 2000b; Sieberer, 2006). We moreover find that electoral gains in the most recent election relative to the election before have a small negative impact on PPG leaders' parliamentary experience. This appears to be in line with the reasoning that, the more parties grow electorally, the more newcomers they welcome in the PPG from which (inexperienced) PPG leaders can be selected (potentially out of necessity, e.g. when a new party enters parliament for the first time). The higher parties' electoral loss, on the contrary, the more likely they are to fall back on their incumbents, and the higher the chance that they select an experienced PPG leader (again potentially out of necessity). We further see that liberal and radical right PPG leaders are slightly more experienced and that, particularly compared to the Senate, PPG leaders at the Flemish level have less parliamentary tenure.

### *3.2.2. Ministerial experience*

Besides attaining parliamentary experience, politicians can of course also build up experience as members of a (regional or national/federal) executive government. In fact, PPG leadership is sometimes conceived as a position that serves as kind of a 'consolation prize' for politicians who fail to become (re)selected as a minister (Devos & Dehullu, 2017, p. 355).

In total, one fourth (25,1 %) of all the PPG leaders in the dataset were ministers (in a regional or the federal executive) prior to their appointment as PPG leaders. This percentage is distinctly lowest in the Flemish parliament (16,4 %) compared to the Senate (26,5 %) and Chamber (28,7 %). Of this subpopulation of PPG leaders, the average period served as PPG leader is 4,4 years (SD=3,9). Distinct outliers are Laurette Onkelinx (PS) and Patrick Dewael (Open VLD) who respectively had 22,59 years and 15,6 years of ministerial experience when they both became PPG leader in the federal Chamber in 2014.

Despite these outliers near the end of the research period, Figure 5.5, in which the shares of former ministers per legislative are plotted, shows a decrease in the

number of former ministers over time. While more than 60% of the PPG leaders that were selected in the 1968-1971 term in the Chamber had ministerial experience, this proportion had dropped (with distinct ups and downs) to less than 30 % in the nineties. Since then, there seems to be a slight recovery. A similar, but less outspoken trend can be discerned in the Senate. In the Flemish Parliament, the number of former ministers as PPG leaders has historically been low (with the 1985-1988 term as a clear exception) but seems to be increasing along with the political relevance of the assembly since its first direct elections in 1995.

**Figure 5.5. Proportion of PPG leaders with ministerial experience, 1962-2019 (mean per term)**

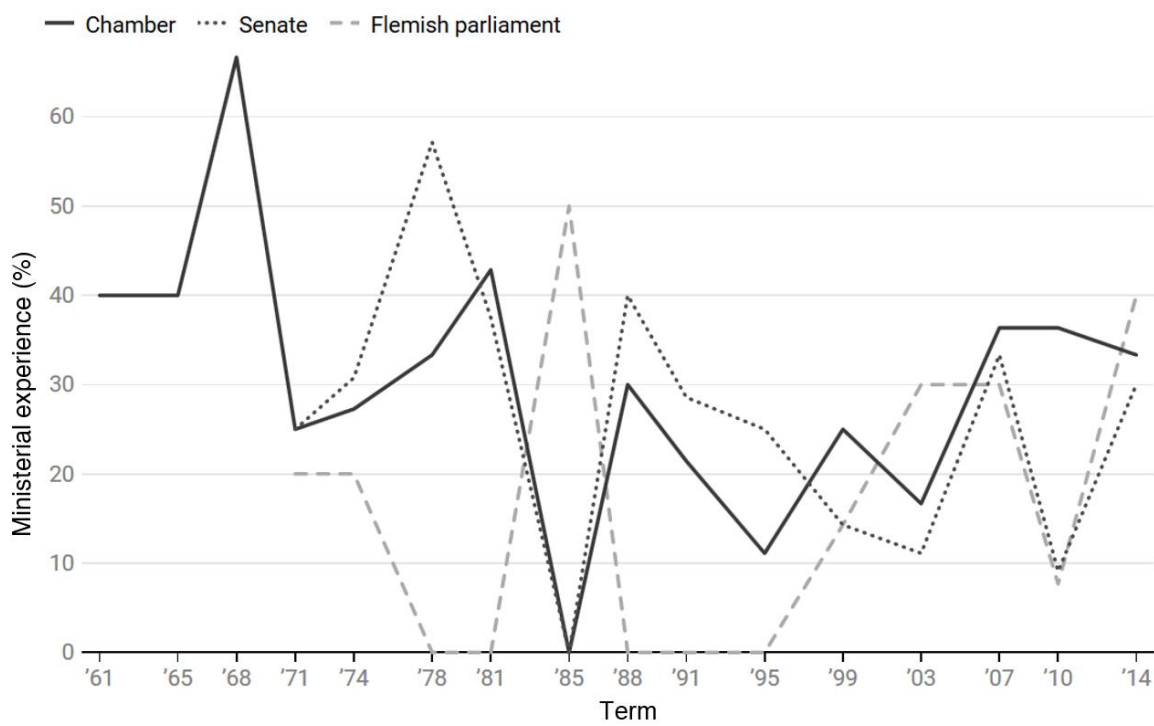


Table 5.3 shows the binomial logistic regression models with PPG leaders’ experience as ministers (1) or not (0) as dependent variable. Controlling for the other variables, also the multivariate analysis provides indications of a negative (but small) trend in the number of former ministers in the dataset. A more substantial but still a moderate effect is found when looking at parties’ short term electoral result. Parties that made relative gains in the most recent elections, are less likely to select former ministers. Again, the same explanation for this effect as above might apply: parties that make short-term wins, might simply have more

inexperienced MPs to recruit a PPG leader from (or no former minister to recruit from at all, in the case of new parties). While parties that suffered losses (and where (some) ministers potentially fell out of government) are more inclined to provide a former minister with a political safety net. We furthermore see that particularly the liberal and social-democratic parties select former ministers as PPG leaders.

**Table 5.3. Ministerial experience of PPG leaders (binomial logistic regression)**

	Ministerial experience	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Time	-0,020*	0,011
Majority party	-0,430	0,336
Party group size	-0,026	0,026
Electoral result	-0,214***	0,075
Party type (ref: ecologists)		
<i>Liberal</i>	1,278**	0,575
<i>Chr democrat</i>	0,477	0,635
<i>Socialist</i>	1,299**	0,615
<i>Regionalist</i>	-0,779	0,704
<i>Radical right</i>	-19,488	11657,612
<i>Communist</i>	-20,824	17874,773
<i>Other</i>	-18,644	19731,336
Linguistic group (Dutch=1)	-0,541	0,332
Parliament (ref: Senate)		
<i>Chamber</i>	0,230	0,324
<i>Flemish Parliament</i>	-0,163	0,498
Constant	38,220*	22,386
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0,232	
N	311	

\*,p<0.1, \*\*,p<0.05, \*\*\*,p<0.01

### 3.2.3. Duration of the mandate

Besides gaining experience as a cabinet minister or a (regular) parliamentarian, PPG leaders can of course also gain experience as PPG leaders. Shifting away from PPG leaders' careers before they were selected for PPG leaders, we therefore

look at the duration of PPG leaders' (uninterrupted) mandates. Is there, like among MPs, a lot of circulation and turnover (Fiers, 2000; Gouglas et al., 2018; Matland & Studlar, 2004)? Or are there, on the contrary, quite some PPG leaders who remain in office for several years?

The answer leans more towards the former. The average duration of a PPG leadership mandate in the three parliaments together is 3,4 years (SD=3,4) or less than a full legislative term. Some PPG leaders only stay for a few months or weeks (e.g. Stefaan De Clerck (CVP) became PPG leader in the Chamber in June 1999 and resigned in October to become party president). Others remain in office for many years (e.g. Claude Eerdekens (PS) in the Chamber (15,4 years) or Filip Dewinter and Gerolf Annemans (VB) who were both PPG leaders for more than 20 years in the Flemish parliament and Chamber respectively). On average, PPG leaders remain in office slightly longer in the Senate (3,6 years), compared to the Chamber (3,4 years) and the Flemish parliament (3,2 years).

**Figure 5.6. Duration of an uninterrupted mandate as PPG leader, 1962-2019 (mean per term)**

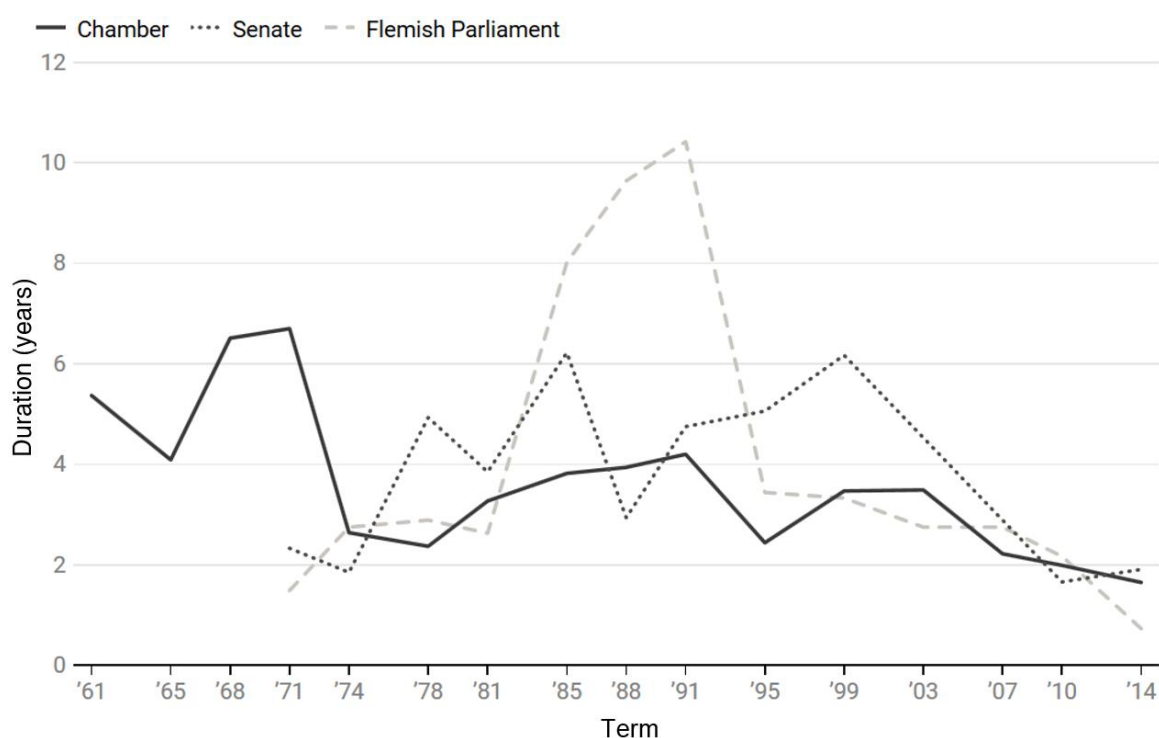


Figure 5.6 shows that the average duration of PPG leaders' mandate has decreased over time. This evolution is most outspoken in the federal Chamber. Whereas PPG leaders that were selected at the end of the 1960 and the beginning of the

1970s remained in office for over 6 years, this gradually declined to under 2 years in the 2010-2014 and 2014-2019 terms (not taking into account PPG leaders that are still in office at the moment of the analysis). In the Senate, this downward trend seems to have only taken place since the end of the 1990s. In the Flemish parliament, we see that particularly the PPG leaders that were selected between 1985 and 1995 remained in office for a comparatively long period of time (e.g. André Denys (PVV), Paul Van Grembergen (VU), Filip Dewinter (VB)). Since the 1995-1999 term, we again observe a declining trend.

**Table 5.4. Duration of PPG leaders' mandates (linear regression)**

	Duration (years)	
	<i>Standardized beta</i>	<i>SE</i>
Time	-0,143**	0,016
Majority party	-0,003	0,488
Party group size	-0,119	0,033
Electoral result	0,151**	0,091
Party type (ref: ecologists)		
<i>Liberal</i>	0,034	0,791
<i>Chr democrat</i>	0,110	0,899
<i>Socialist</i>	0,186*	0,869
<i>Regionalist</i>	0,025	0,813
<i>Radical right</i>	0,210***	1,243
<i>Communist</i>	-0,009	1,724
<i>Other</i>	-0,038	1,835
Linguistic group (Dutch=1)	-0,066	0,482
Parliament (ref: Senate)		
<i>Chamber</i>	-0,007	0,468
<i>Flemish Parliament</i>	0,056	0,647
Constant	70,879**	32,977
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.038	
N	311	

\*,p<0.1, \*\*,p<0.05, \*\*\*,p<0.01

The regression analysis (see Table 5.4) confirms the declining evolutionary trend. As also is the case with MPs in general (Gouglass et al., 2018; Matland & Studlar, 2004), the mandates of PPG leaders get shorter, meaning that there is more circulation or turnover among these actors as before. This is of course not very

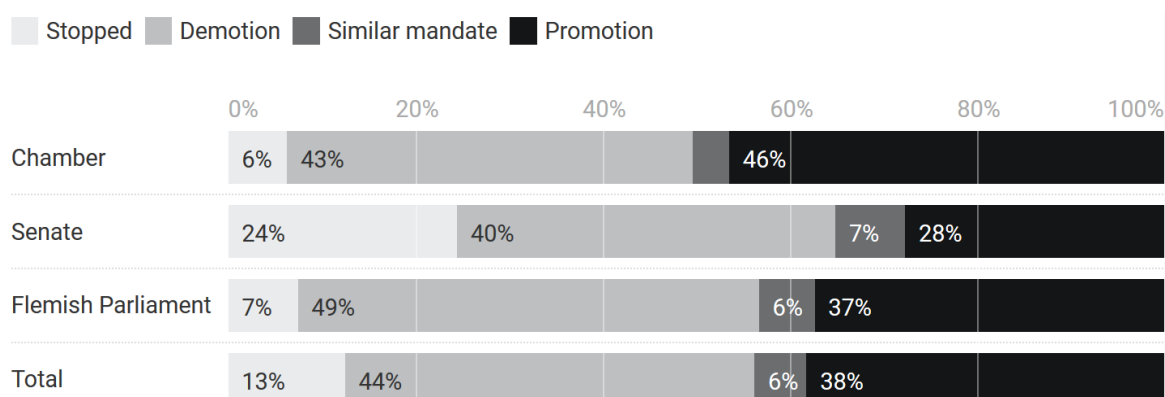
conducive for the continuity within party groups and parliament, and might refrain PPG leaders from gaining political influence and authority (vis-à-vis group members, central party elites, other parties or the executive) through their personal reputations as long-serving PPG leaders. We also see that PPG leaders that were selected after relative electoral gains of the party are more likely to remain in office for a longer period of time. Hence, while parties that suffered electoral defeats are more inclined to select politically experienced PPG leaders, they are also more inclined to replace them quicker. A possible reason might be that these PPG leaders more rapidly seek other horizons or, as we also see when it comes to the (de)selection of party leaders, that parties that lose electorally feel more urge to replace their key political personnel (Fiers, 2000; Pilet & Cross, 2014). Lastly, we see that PPG leaders who belong to a socialist or radical right party (mainly due to the two outliers mentioned above) tend to stay in office the longest.

#### *3.2.4. What happens after PPG leadership?*

Finally, after looking at the duration of PPG leaders' mandate and their political careers prior to becoming PPG leaders, we examine what happens after they are deselected or resign as PPG leader. The analyses above revealed that the average duration of an uninterrupted mandate as PPG leader is less than one legislative term and even declined. This implies that a relevant share of PPG leaders leaves their office prematurely. Where do they go? To what extent is PPG leadership in Belgium a stepping stone to higher political office? Or should it be seen as the terminus station at the end of a rich career in national politics?

When looking at the population of PPG leaders, the considerable diversity in follow-up jobs strikes the eye. While some make it to parliamentary speaker, minister, party president or even prime minister, others return to being a regular MP or quit national politics entirely. Remarkable moreover is that more recently several PPG leaders are identified as 'level-hoppers' (e.g. Fiers & Noppe, 2016) that leave their position to become PPG leader in another parliamentary assembly.

**Figure 5.7. Position attained after PPG leadership (1962-2019)**



We recoded the political positions attained by PPG leaders after their term ended in four categories and show the distribution percentages in Figure 5.7. For around 13 % in total, PPG leadership indeed constitutes a *'fin the carrière'*. They quit (sub)national politics, either voluntarily or after failing to get re-elected.<sup>63</sup> This especially the case in the Senate (24 %) which is not surprising given that PPG leaders here are also older and served longer as MPs prior to their selection as PPG leader. Around 44% of the PPG leaders are 'demoted' to being an regular MP in a regional, federal or European parliament and 38 % are 'promoted' to a position such as party leader, member of an executive body or speaker, a percentage that is highest in the Chamber (46%). Lastly, 6 % can be classified as 'level-hoppers', i.e. PPG leader that leave one parliament to be re-selected as PPG leader in another.<sup>64</sup>

Which PPG leaders have more chance of political promotion? The logistic regression analysis in Table 5.5 reveals that the odds of climbing the political hierarchy after one's term is higher when PPG leaders are members of the Flemish parliament or Chamber, but also that these odds have (very slightly) decreased over time in general. Moreover, a rather large negative effect is found for PPG leaders that were selected when the party was in government. This seems logical: as opposition parties do not have any ministerial portfolios to allocate, PPG leadership (together with party leadership) is the highest achievable position. In majority parties, however, PPG leaders are also surpassed by the party's ministers in the hierarchy, which is not only likely to affect their political weight in the party

<sup>63</sup> In a few cases, PPG leaders decease during their term.

<sup>64</sup> Further classifications can be made based on PPG leaders prior political experience and the position attained after PPG leadership (see: de Vet & Wauters, 2015).



but also increases intra-party competition for attractive political positions in a next legislative term. A similar reasoning might also explain the negative effect we find for PPG size: in larger parties, there is more competition, while in small parties, a (former) PPG leader might be an evident choice for other important positions due to a lack of many alternatives. Lastly, we find limited remaining differences based on party family: only in socialist parties the odds of political promotion seem higher (although this effect is only significant at the  $p < 0.1$  level).

**Table 5.5. Political promotion after term as PPG leaders (binomial logistic regression)**

	Political promotion	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Time	-0,024**	0,011
Majority party	-0,625**	0,317
Party group size	-0,052**	0,022
Electoral result	-0,030	0,060
Party type (ref: ecologists)		
<i>Liberal</i>	0,626	0,511
<i>Chr democrat</i>	0,926	0,576
<i>Socialist</i>	0,954*	0,558
<i>Regionalist</i>	-0,533	0,542
<i>Radical right</i>	-0,002	0,824
<i>Communist</i>	-1,285	1,077
<i>Other</i>	-21,010	19993,488
Linguistic group (Dutch=1)	-0,095	0,312
Parliament (ref: Senate)		
<i>Chamber</i>	0,910***	0,310
<i>Flemish Parliament</i>	1,091**	0,436
Constant	47,179**	22,386
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0,133	
N	311	

\*, $p < 0.1$ , \*\*, $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*, $p < 0.01$

## 4. Discussion

By looking into a number of socio-demographic and political career attributes, this chapter provided an extensive view of the profiles of PPG leaders in Belgium. We showed how PPG leaders are predominantly high-educated, middle-aged

men, how much political experience is typically required to become selected, how long PPG leaders typically remain in office and which positions they take up when their mandates as PPG leader ends.

The explanatory analyses of PPG leaders' career traits moreover revealed some interesting findings. We mapped differences between parliaments and showed how several evolutions throughout time can be discerned. As also has been documented among legislators in general, PPG leaders can resort less and less to their (ministerial) experience and the turnover among PPG leaders has increased, considerably shortening the average duration of their mandates. The decrease in experience and also the lower chances of political promotion for PPG leaders compared to the past could potentially indicate a weakening of the political authority of PPG leaders throughout time.

We moreover identified a number of interesting factors that explain differences at the party-level. Even when controlling for party affiliation, we found that larger PPGs are more likely to select a leader with a lot of experience as MP, potentially because it requires more managerial skills and authority to steer a larger group of MPs. An opposite effect of PPG size is found for PPG leaders' chances of promotion: the odds of getting selected for more important political positions after one's term ends is higher in smaller PPGs than in larger ones. Also short-term electoral results have an impact on the profile of PPG leaders. As parties make relative electoral gains compared to the elections before, they are more inclined to select inexperienced PPG leaders, whereas parties that lose are more likely to appoint experienced PPG leaders. A potential reason might be that parties that grow are more likely to have newcomers in the PPG to select from, while parties that lose more rapidly have to resort to its incumbents. Simultaneously we find, however, that the better the short-term electoral results of parties, the longer PPG leaders remain in office. Parties that lose thus tend to replace their PPG leaders sooner. Contrary to our expectations, we find limited effects of parties' government status on the profile of PPG leaders. Bivariate analyses and hierarchical regression models, however, do indicate that majority PPG leaders are politically more experienced than opposition PPG leaders, but these significant effects disappear when adding variables such as PPG size and party family dummies. The (full) multivariate regression models do indicate, however, that PPG leaders that were selected when the party was in opposition have better prospects of promotion afterwards, which might illustrate their more prominent intra-party position compared to majority parties.

Although these findings might indicate that parties look for a specific profile of PPG leaders under certain political circumstances, they do not tell us anything about how PPG leaders actually fill in their positions. For this, we proceed to the next three empirical chapters where we describe the roles of PPG leaders in Belgium (*Chapter 6*), examine the role expectations of other party elites (*Chapter 7*) and explain differences between PPG leaders based on contextual (party-level) differences and personal incentives (*Chapter 8*).

# In command but nowhere to go? The parliamentary role orientations and behaviours of PPG leaders in Belgium

## 1. Introduction<sup>65</sup>

Now that we analysed the sociodemographic and political characteristics of PPG leaders, it is time to examine their actual roles and functioning in parliament. Evidently, ‘we can pretend to talk about parliamentary roles only if MPs’ views about being an MP are considered one way or another. In empirical terms, it means studies of legislative role require data about MPs’ opinions’ (Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012, p. 215). In our case, it requires taking into account PPG leaders’ view of what being a PPG leader entails for them personally. Moreover, as we have seen in the introductory chapters, there are several lessons to be learnt from parliamentary role theory falling out of favour in the 1980s, and its replacement by more economical perspectives on political behaviour. First of all, early structural-functionalist (Converse & Pierce, 1979; Eulau & Karps, 1977; Wahlke, Elau, et al., 1962) and symbolic-interactionalist approaches on parliamentary roles (Cain, Ferejohn, & Fiorina, 1979; Fenno, 1978) put too much emphasis on the weight of external factors on legislator’s role orientations, whilst largely neglecting that MPs have independent standpoints and preferences. They did so respectively by stressing either that roles are prescribed by the norms of conduct linked to an institution’s basic functions or that they are shaped and adapted through social interactions (Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012; Müller & Saalfeld, 1997; Searing, 1994). Secondly, by using concepts like ‘trustees’, ‘delegates’ or ‘politico’, early studies were preoccupied with applying abstract, theoretical constructs that ‘exist

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<sup>65</sup> Substantial parts of this chapter are published in: B.de Vet (2019). Position or preference? Explaining parliamentary party group leaders roles in Belgium. *Parliamentary Affairs*, doi:10.1093/pa/gsz023

in the minds of social scientists rather than in the minds of the people we are studying' (Searing, 1994, p. 13). As a result, the field suffered from conceptual confusion (Searing, 1994) and, more problematically, encountered difficulties in linking roles as attitudinal constructs to observable behaviour (e.g. Andeweg, 2012, 2014; De Winter, 1997; Gross, 1978; Hedlund & Friesema, 1972; Katz, 1997; Kuklinski & Elling, 1977). In Chapter 4, also we showed that deductively-derived role sets, grouped under the label 'representative roles' by Rozenberg and Blomgren (2012) and mostly building on the 'style' and 'focus' of representation as introduced by Eulau et al. (1959), only scratch the surface of legislators' roles and PPG leaders in particular.<sup>66</sup> Although useful to compare through time and space and, for instance, to examine the impact of electoral or internal party rules on legislators' attitudes towards representation (André & Depauw, 2018; Dudzinska et al., 2014), they appear not fine-grained enough to examine role variance on the individual-level, as the impact of social background and political career factors on MPs' representative focus and style is generally limited (Brack et al., 2012; Dudzinska et al., 2014; Weßels, 1999).

The solution offered by neo-institutionalist approaches is straightforward. By directing our measures to the role players themselves and taking their personal views as a point of departure, we keep close to the 'world in which to seek to reconstruct roles' (Searing, 1994, p. 26) and are 'in the best possible position to explain the behaviour resulting from them' (Searing, 1994, p. 14). Indeed, the main difference between neo-institutionalist notions of roles and their structuralist or interactionalist predecessors is that the former distinctly shift their focus towards the independent standpoints, goals and preferences of politicians, which conditioned rather than determined by institutional norms, give shape to parliamentary roles (Searing, 1994; Strøm, 1997). Nonetheless, as we have criticized earlier (*see Chapter 2*) these theoretical contributions differentiate between back- and frontbenchers and adopt deterministic - in fact structural-functionalist - views on the roles of the latter. They link leadership positions in the legislature to 'position roles' that are heavily constrained by (in)formal norms and leave little room for individual interpretation or role variance (Searing, 1994; Strøm, 1997).

As a first but nonetheless crucial step in falsifying these rigid theoretical expectations on parliamentary leadership roles, this chapter aims to identify the

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<sup>66</sup> See also de Vet and Wauters (2018) and Chapter 4 in this dissertation.

role orientations of PPG leaders, and map out to what extent there is role variance. This will serve as a basis for the next two chapters, in which we proceed to the explanatory analysis and examine the underlying determinants of PPG leaders roles.

## **2. Reconstructing the roles of PPG leaders**

This chapter primarily draws on the data from the 29 semi-structured elite interviews conducted with (current and former) PPG leaders in the Belgian federal Chamber of Representatives and the Flemish Parliament. As extensively discussed in Chapter 3, within this sample, a maximum of heterogeneity was achieved based on party affiliation, government status, PPG size and experience<sup>67</sup>. We adhere to Searing's 'motivational approach' (1994) and use an interpretive research design aimed at extracting empirical role types from the interviews, that make 'diversity intelligible by squeezing out the idiosyncratic' but are simultaneously not too abstract in order not to 'lose explanatory grounding' (Searing, 1994, p. 411).

For this purpose, we use a stepwise procedure similar to that followed in other studies (Navarro, 2009, 2012; Rozenberg, 2009; Searing, 1994) in which roles are inductively reconstructed roles based on respondents' answers to the open-ended interview questions. The supporting closed-ended questions, of which the analyses should be treated with precaution (*see below*), are not used for this purpose (i.e. inductively reconstructing role types). Still, some data from these closed-ended questions – and their relation to the qualitatively reconstructed role types – are reported below (*see part 3.3*) by means of illustration and additional information.

In a first step, the interviews with PPG leaders (over 2100 minutes of tape recordings) were fully transcribed in almost 600 pages of transcript and subsequently coded in *NVivo12* using a strategy similar to that proposed by 'grounded theory' (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 2017).<sup>68</sup> Often using similar wordings as Searing (1994), the reconstruction of PPG leaders' roles is predominantly based on a number of (open-ended) questions that gauged

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<sup>67</sup> To achieve this variance we also went back to previous legislative terms. See Chapter 3 for a more thorough discussion.

<sup>68</sup> We did, however, start from a rough *a priori* coding scheme compiled based on the central topics addressed in the questionnaires and aimed at disentangling key attitudes, behaviours, motivations and contextual pressures.

respondents' own, broad conceptions of their priorities as a PPG leader and the motivations that underpin them. A first and important question asked respondents to *describe* "what, for them personally, were their most important responsibilities as a PPG leader", followed by further probes into the duties they find (un)important, the tasks they generally delegate and more specific questions on how they cope with intra-party disagreement. Respondents typically answer these questions by telling *what* they do and *why* they do it. As such, they immediately tap into how respondents see their roles and brings differences between PPG leaders to the surface (Searing, 1994, p. 412). Second, respondents were invited to further *evaluate* their functioning by asking: what, in their view, constitutes a good PPG leader, whether they think other PPG leaders fill in their position any differently than how they did, and why they believed they were initially selected as PPG leader. Thirdly, the focus of the interviews was shifted explicitly towards respondents' *motivations*, by asking: why they wanted to become PPG leader in the first place, what intrinsic aspects of being a PPG leader gave them most job satisfaction and whether they aspired higher political office afterwards. Besides descriptively mapping the general responsibilities of PPG leaders, the open and axial coding of respondents' answers to these questions (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 2017) allowed us to identify central tendencies and patterns in the data and integrate them in a typology of recurrent roles. As we further disseminate in the result sections below, respondents showed distinct differences in how they talked about their roles and which responsibilities they prioritised. In all cases, these differences appeared to relate to two broader dimensions that are also acknowledged by the respondents themselves. The first is an *internal focus* (i.e. PPG leaders as coaches and team players) versus an *external focus* (i.e. PPG leaders as spearheads) and the second is a focus on top-down intraparty liaison (i.e. EPO to PPG) versus a focus on bottom-up intraparty liaison (PPG to EPO). Combined, these dimensions produce four distinct quadrants (see Figure 6.2).

The second step consisted of going back to the interview transcripts and linking respondents to specific quadrants, based on the duties (or poles of the distinguished dimensions) they predominantly prioritised or emphasized during the interviews. Respondents' motivations and own explanations of why this was the case were used to further develop, refine and substantiate the inductively-derived role types. There is a debate on whether roles are 'mutually exclusive' or if politicians, at one point or another, play multiple roles. The interactionist approach, for instance, focuses on how role-taking is time- and context-specific

(Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012, pp. 16-18; Fenno, 1978). Also Andeweg (1997) argues that MPs may act differently in different settings (e.g. in plenary debates, committees, their constituencies) by stating that: 'it would seem to be an oversimplification to classify MPs on the basis of a single role orientation, just as odd as classifying great actors as either 'Hamlets', 'Uncle Vanyas' or 'Algy Moncrieffs' (Andeweg, 1997, p. 122). We, however, follow Searing's reasoning that MPs focus on a singular role because of their limited energy and resources, and because role specialization maximizes politicians' chances of achieving their desired goals (Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012, pp. 26-27; Searing, 1994, p. 81; 416). This, however, does not mean that legislators only perform a handful of tasks while cold-shouldering others. Role-taking rather is a matter of prioritising some aspects of one's job over others: many MPs do at some point engage in addressing local grievances in parliament, but only a minority ('constituency members') makes it their principal preoccupation (Searing, 1994, p. 416). Or in our case, all PPG leaders at some point defend party elites' wishes in the PPG, but only some see it as their main duty (*see below*).

Although a disadvantage of inductively reconstructing parliamentary roles based on open-ended interview data is that replication becomes more difficult (amongst others because of its time- and labour-consuming character), a crucial advantage is that its ecological validity is high, as it uses the real-life stories and experience of the examined stakeholders as its departure point (Searing, 1994; Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012). Nonetheless, the third step consisted of further demonstrating the validity of the identified role types, in the first place by providing plenty of verbatim quotations that support and illustrate the analytical interpretations in respondents' own terms. To the extent possible the purely qualitative-interpretive analyses of PPG leaders' roles are supplemented with more quantitative assessments of their link to concrete attitudes and behaviours as derived from several closed-ended questions (*see part 3.3*). Still, the latter analyses are supplementary information that should be treated with prudence, due to the rather low N and high standard deviations (particularly when further subdividing between role types; which is why only non-parametric tests are used). Moreover, although respondents appeared quite open to reflect on their functioning and talk about sensitive topics such as intra-party conflicts when confronted with open-ended questions where they could elaborate and add nuance, they seemed more susceptible to socially-desirable answers (that sometimes contradicted the open-ended parts) when confronted with 'the straightjackets of closed-ended questions'



(Aberbach & Rockman, 2002, p. 674).<sup>69</sup> Therefore, the qualitative analyses of the open-ended interview sections remain central in the pages below as well as in the subsequent empirical chapters.

### 3. Research Results

#### 3.1. The global picture: PPG leaders' responsibilities in parliament

Before looking at differences between PPG leaders and examining role variance, we take a closer look at the overall tasks they fulfil in Belgium. When asked about their priorities as a PPG leader, respondents recite a wide array of responsibilities that go far beyond '*ensuring that everyone pushes the right button during votes*' (PPG leader 16). These duties can be appropriated to five broad categories, each with its own subtasks and subdivisions (see Figure 6.1). We additionally asked respondents to indicate on a scale from 1 to 10 how important a number of tasks were for them personally (1= not important, 10=really important) and how much time they allocated to them (1= almost no time, 10 = a lot of time). This allows us to make a global assessment of their overall priorities and most important responsibilities (see Table 6.1).

##### 3.1.1. Internal PPG management

PPG leaders are, first of all, in charge of the internal management of the PPG organization, which can easily take the proportion of '*a small or medium-sized enterprise*' (PPG leader 16, 21). While this includes administrative tasks<sup>70</sup> (HR-management, controlling the PPG budget), most PPG leaders (26 of 29 respondents) refer to its political management as one of their top priorities. First of all, PPG leaders stress their tasks as '*playmakers*'. They outline a division of labour at the beginning of the legislative term, by allocating committee seats and dividing policy portfolio's among MPs, and assure that everyone complies with these initial agreements. As such, they make sure that all policy domains are covered, that everyone gets enough airplay and that internal tensions among MPs

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<sup>69</sup> I.e. when they realised they would be pinpointed on a specific score that would be compared to that of colleagues.

<sup>70</sup> Many delegate administrative matters to their 'PPG secretary'. These actors should be seen as PPG leaders' right-hand assistants who, often through their many years of experience, are also assigned more political tasks, like supervising PPG staff, making sure commitments made in PPG meetings are executed, coordinating with other PPGs (e.g. when bills have to be co-signed) and acting as political advisors to PPG leaders.

are resolved or - preferably - avoided. One third of the interviewed PPG leaders spontaneously mention that they regularly need to resolve what one respondent called 'border conflicts': i.e. situations that arise when MPs try to 'expand their territory' by intervening on someone else's field of specialisation or when it's unclear within whose 'competence' a newly-arisen issue falls:

"Sometimes, three to four MPs are already waiting at my office door by the time I get back from the PPG meeting. Most of the times their question is: 'a new policy issue arose within our committee, which one of us gets to work on it?' Of course I understand them, they all want a place in the limelight, but it requires a lot of people management and, to be honest, I underestimated how much of my time it would cost" (PPG leader 17).

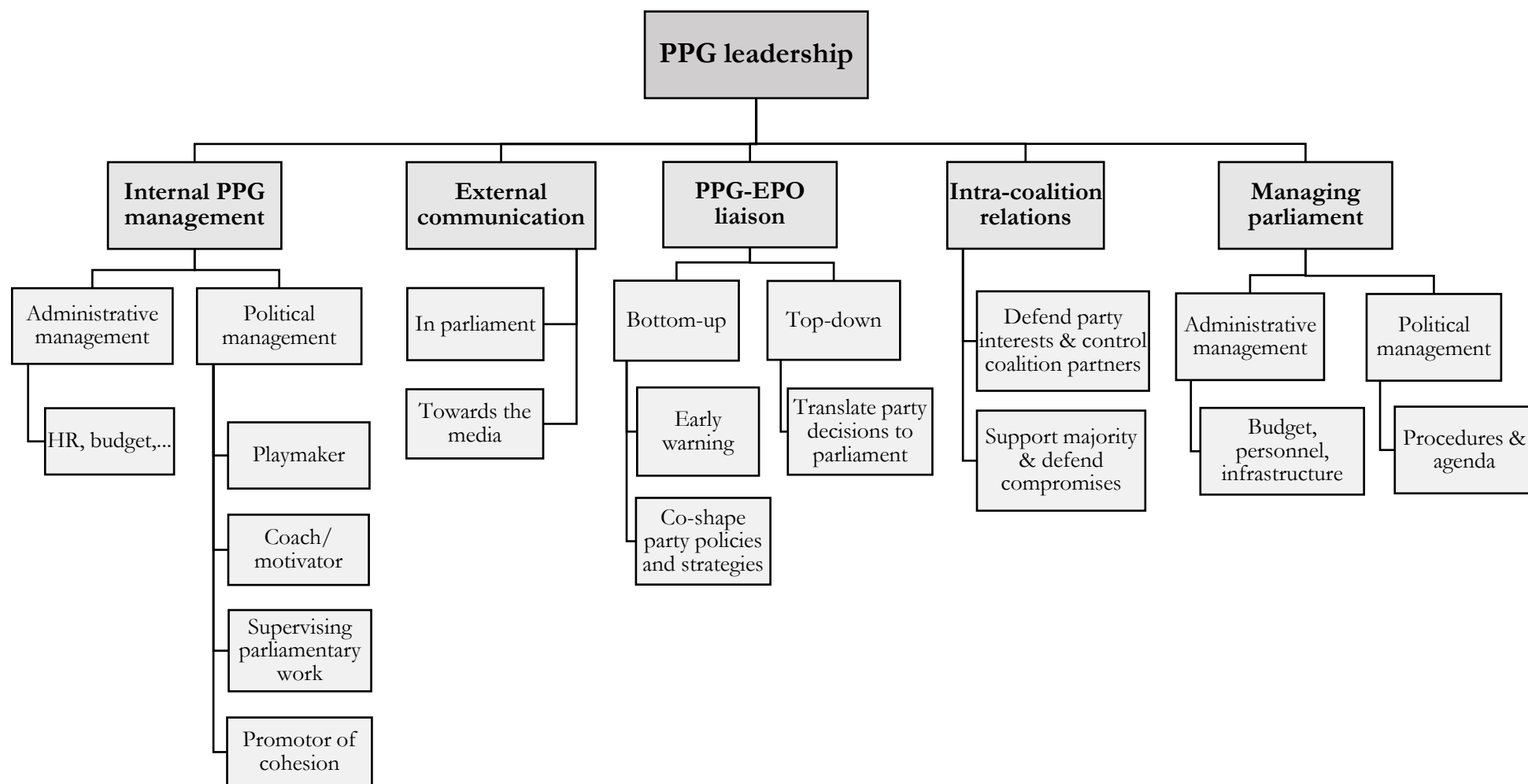
Also the complex task of fairly distributing speaking time and opportunities for self-promotion (particularly oral questions in the weekly plenary 'question time' are popular) needs considerable attention in order to keep everyone satisfied and let everyone 'score' once in a while. Relatedly, PPG leaders try to assure that the PPG comes across as a strong collective entity, by using every MPs' capacities in the best possible way.

"MP X is not someone who I will send to an emotional debate with a minister in order to loudly and wildly gesticulating make a point... No, she is someone who has the talent to, almost academically, make a concise and critical assessment of integration policies. MP Y on the other hand comes up with great one-liners at the right time. He is someone who I take to general plenary debates on governmental policies in order to generate media attention" (PPG leader 3).

Particularly elder PPG leaders stress their tasks as *coaches*. They feel it is their duty to mentor MPs and encourage them to take new initiatives, providing them with (staff) support and advice where needed. This is deemed important especially when the PPG has a lot of newcomers, who still need to be taught the ins and outs of parliamentary procedure (PPG leader 11, 15).

"I always found coaching extremely important. I did that together with my PPG secretary. And I think I could say we were quite innovative in this regard, at least for our party. We had a lot of attention for persons in the PPG, for the topics they were working on. Counselling them, helping them network with the academic world, the administration or interest groups to consult or exert influence. We also had a lot of attention for communication. How do you debate, how do you intervene in parliament and stuff like that" (PPG leader 2).

**Figure 6.1. Overview of PPG leaders' overall tasks and responsibilities in Belgium**



PPG leaders *coordinate and supervise* the PPGs' parliamentary activities: they determine the PPG's strategies, lead discussions on policy positions in the weekly PPG meeting and try to maintain 'the helicopter view' over everyone's specialized work. Particularly in majority parties, this often implies '*tempering the diligence and ambitions of MPs*' (PPG leader 1) in order not to bring ministers into difficulties. But also in other parties, the autonomy of MPs is restricted. Practically all PPG leaders<sup>71</sup> stated a clear expectation that MPs do not submit or co-sign any legislative proposal (resolutions, private member bills) without first bringing it to the PPG meeting. Although proposals are often prepared by the party's study-centre or discussed in internal working-groups, this allows group members to suggest changes, make technical improvements, become included as a co-author and build internal support for their legislation.<sup>72</sup> Most importantly, however, it gives PPG leaders an opportunity to assess the expediency of new initiatives, ensure their compliance with party decisions or coalition agreements, and retain potential intra-party divisions from reaching the public. Unanimity is pursued, and sometimes a final decision is postponed until MPs get around the table and resolve potential issues first. PPG leaders might also escalate the discussion to the party executive in case of politically-sensitive proposals where the party does not yet have a fully crystallized standpoint.

"They have to present their legislative proposals to the PPG meeting. As an MP, you are not an atom, right. You are part of a PPG, which is part of a larger party organization. If every MP would just do whatever they want, there wouldn't be coherent policy anymore" (PPG leader 27).

Also with regards to government scrutiny activities, MPs room for manoeuvre is not unlimited. Interpellations, calling to account ministers for a specific deed or situation, are expected to be discussed with the PPG leader first (not in the PPG meeting as interpellations often follow topical events and are more urgent). This is (1) because they can be followed by a motion on which PPG members have to cast a (unified) vote and (2) because PPG leaders have to approve their scheduling in the Conference of Group Chairmen (*see below*) where they do not wish to be confronted with an interpellation on which they did not have prior knowledge (PPG leaders 3, 12, 21, 23 & 28). Written and oral (committee) questions leave

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<sup>71</sup> Only one PPG leader stated that his consent sufficed.

<sup>72</sup> In the Flemish Parliament, it has another important reason as an informal agreement ('*zwijgakekoord*') stipulates that majority MPs do not initiate any legislative proposal, without it being co-signed all coalition parties.

more leeway, often because of their sheer amount and limited relevance (see also: Bailer, 2011; Martin, 2011). PPG secretaries or other staff members sometimes screen them, in order to check if they meet all formal requirements and if legislators respect the agreements on the division of policy portfolios. PPG leaders generally do monitor MPs' external communication. Press releases, and particularly those that do not solely refer to constituency-specific interests, are generally asked to be drafted together with the PPG's communication officer. He or she checks their content, framing and timing and, in case of doubt, informs the PPG leader in order to streamline all outgoing messages and assure that their content complies with the PPG's or party's policy position. This of course does not retain MPs from having personal contacts with journalists or posting directly on social media, where PPG leaders have to resort more to ex-post control (e.g. by reprimanding group members).

Lastly, PPG leaders stress their role in safeguarding both *political and interpersonal cohesion*. Table 6.1 indicates that this is one of their core tasks - even though it generally does not require that much of their time. They do so predominantly proactively by ensuring that everybody feels comfortable, relevant and knows their role within the PPG (e.g. avoiding 'border conflicts', and by organizing (one-one) meetings where policies are discussed, and potential issues are talked over. Parliamentary sanctions or rewards are rarely used.<sup>73</sup> Respondents either claim that *'there is not much they can do besides escalating the matter to the party president who decides over MP's renomination'* (PPG leader 26) or argue that sanctioning would cause them to *'lose their authority and position as a coach within the group'* (PPG leader 28). As such, unlike what for instance a sequential approach on party unity implicitly assumes (Andeweg & Thomassen, 2011; Van Vonnio et al., 2014), PPG leaders do not only come into play in what would be labelled 'party discipline', e.g. by providing the 'carrots' and 'sticks' that cause MPs to toe the party line involuntarily. Instead, their role in reaching 'party agreement' (i.e. by convincing MPs using substantive arguments or offering a listening ear and taking their specific concerns into account, potentially by making symbolic adaptations to legislative speeches) and party loyalty (i.e. by convincing MPs not to 'let their colleagues down') seems much larger.

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<sup>73</sup> Still several PPG leaders did admit having withheld staff support (PPG leader 14), speaking time and opportunities for self-promotion (PPG leader 1, 3, 6, 13, 29) or redistributing committee seats (PPG leader 13, 14) mainly when MPs made bold public statements.

“In case of disagreement, my advice is always: follow the group. And I will always try to convince defecting MPs by providing them reasons why that is also beneficial for them. And then I don’t mean: ‘watch out for your job’ and stuff like that. No, I am talking about substantial and political-strategic arguments, like: how their voting behaviour might be misused by political adversaries. Or: ‘you are putting your colleagues under pressure. Because you are voting against, and they’re not. You are the good guy while they come out badly’” (PPG leader 9).

One populist right-wing PPG leader even admitted exploiting a feeling of ‘it is us against everyone else’ in order to cultivate within-group loyalty.

“Our party group has always been quite cohesive. And that was not so much my merit, but was due to external pressures. When the whole world is always against you, and we’ve always cultivated that feeling, well yes, then you obtain strong internal cohesion [...]. Group pressure was decisive: you are either with us, or you’re not” (PPG leader 13).

Respondents however stress that preference homogeneity within the PPG is often generally high and discontent mostly relates to details, style or strategy rather than content, or refers to specific concessions in coalition compromises. In case of persistent disagreements on a political issue, PPG leaders generally escalate the discussion the central party executive which will then cut the Gordian knot. In any case, group disunity is to be avoided. Voting dissidence on the floor is rare and often takes the form of an abstention (see also: Depauw, 2005), which MPs are strongly urged to discuss with their PPG leader first.<sup>74</sup> Still, taking a strategic ‘toilet break’ (PPG leader 6, 15, 16) or ‘forgetting’ to push the button (PPG leader 7, 14) provide more elegant ways out, as they are less visible to the public eye.

### *3.1.2. External communication*

PPG leaders also mentioned tasks that go beyond the internal management of the PPG. They are the party group’s most important spokesperson in parliament and towards the media. They take the floor on behalf of the PPG during debates that concern general government policies (e.g. the budget, the annual ‘state of the union’ or debates preceding a vote of confidence) and when procedural matters are disputed. When specific dossiers become topical, PPG leaders indicate that they might also decide to replace backbenchers in order to give more weight to

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<sup>74</sup> Moreover, although individual abstentions might indeed indicate an MP’s discontent (e.g. because of constituency interests), they are more often used after a collective decision in the PPG meeting to make a statement, e.g. to express some remaining concerns during as the brief explanation of vote that follows abstentions.

the party message. As PPG leaders are furthermore an important contact person for the media, they should be able to elucidate the PPGs' standpoints in a comprehensible way and are regularly required to engage in crisis communication, as 'the media tend to zoom in on intra-party divisions' (PPG leader 21) or in order to take the heat off the party's ministers during a government crisis.

"When it is positive news, the ministers are all queuing up to get in the media. But when your party is in a defensive position... They cannot just send anybody, so they send the PPG leader to take the punches. It is an extremely ungrateful job" (PPG leader 26).

**Table 6.1. Respondents priorities and time allocation, ranked high to low (N=29).**

	Importance (1-10) <i>Mean (SD)</i>	Time allocation (1-10) <i>Mean (SD)</i>
<i>Act as the PPG's political frontrunner (external communication)</i>	8,86 (0,85)	7,46 (1,55)
<i>Promote unity</i>	8,32 (1,16)	4,93 (2,32)
<i>Maintain frequent contacts with party's ministers (if in majority)</i>	8,07 (1,03)	5,47 (1,55)
<i>Lead discussions on PPG positions</i>	7,76 (1,24)	5,61 (1,47)
<i>Ensure a good division of labour (playmaking)</i>	7,72 (1,69)	5,62 (2,04)
<i>Co-decide on parliamentary agenda in Conference of Group Chairmen</i>	7,25 (1,78)	4,57 (1,73)
<i>Top down liaison (EPO to PPG)</i>	6,38 (2,47)	3,93 (1,84)
<i>Bottom-up liaison (PPG to EPO)</i>	6,32 (2,13)	3,79 (1,75)
<i>Coach PPG members</i>	6,07 (2,23)	4,50 (2,24)
<i>Maintain frequent contacts with MPs from other parties</i>	6,07 (2,23)	4,54 (2,10)
<i>Coach PPG Staff</i>	5,90 (2,37)	3,68 (1,70)
<i>Supervise committee work</i>	5,66 (1,82)	4,57 (2,13)
<i>Maintain frequent contacts with ministers from other parties</i>	4,25 (2,46)	2,75 (1,73)

Table 6.1 shows that external communication, i.e. acting as the PPG's political frontrunner, is the task that PPG leaders on average prioritise most. It is important

for their party (group), but also for themselves as PPG leadership gives them a lot of personal public exposure. Table 6.1 additionally indicates that PPG leaders claim to spend a lot of time on external communication. The interviews reveal that this is mostly because they constantly have to remain informed about the latest political developments and permanent consultations with other party actors are required before making public statements. Moreover, PPG leaders are expected to be policy generalists and several respondents claimed that a large share of their time goes to preparing debates and studying the technical aspects of policy proposals.

“The stupid thing is: people only see what happens during the plenary meeting [...]. But as a PPG leader, you have to know each dossier. I never know them in full detail, but I have to know what is happening with the new road tax, something I normally wouldn't follow. Or how many is invested in public transport. Or education. And it is always that technical.... It takes a lot of time to simply study all those things. And I always have to do that at night” (PPG leader 17).

### 3.1.3. PPG-EPO Liaison

Most respondents (20 out of 29) somehow also spontaneously bring up their liaising tasks between the PPG and EPO as one of their top priorities. Once selected as PPG leader, legislators are incorporated in the higher party echelons, both formally (e.g. they become a statutory member of the central party executive committee) and informally (e.g. they maintain frequent contacts with the party president and the party's ministers). Although their intra-party influence seems to vary (e.g. experienced and opposition PPG leaders more distinctly refer to their role in co-shaping party policies), this puts PPG leaders in central and important position, in-between the party's backbenchers and the extra-parliamentary party elite. PPG leaders should consequently be conceived of as 'agents' with multiple intra-party 'principals' (e.g. Carey, 2007; Pitkin, 1967; Strom et al., 2003) who can act in the specific interest of either side.

First, many PPG leaders stress their *top-down liaising* tasks. They transfer policy positions, and party strategies as outlined the central party executive (or in the more exclusive meetings among parliamentary and extra-parliamentary elites) to the backbenchers. This is deemed important particularly in larger parties where many MPs are not member of the central executive committee, and in government parties where coalition compromises have to be guided through parliament.

“You should not forget, in a party like ours: we have a lot of MPs, but being an MP does not automatically mean that you are at the top of the party hierarchy. In the



meantime, however, a lot of things are discussed and decided there, above your head. As an MP you need to know about that (PPG leader 16).

By being transparent, setting out the party decisions on PPG and staff meetings and explaining the main motivations and arguments that lie at the basis of these decisions, they ensure that MPs are informed and at least *feel* involved. Most importantly, however, this way PPG leaders contribute to the party's programmatic coherence towards the broader public, ensure the translation of party decisions in the legislature, and prevent that individual actors or instances take initiatives or communicate policy stances that in fact go against the party line.

“In Belgian political hierarchy, the real political power isn't with the PPG leader, right. The PPG leader is in part the go-between between the 'foot soldiers' and the real centres of power. You stand with one leg on either side. As a PPG leader you do not really have the argument of power. That comes from above. And you pass it through” (PPG leader 1).

“Our party now has a couple of dozens of MPs, several ministers and hundreds of staff members. That is: the party HQ, several ministerial offices, two large PPGs - federal and Flemish - and two smaller ones: Brussels and Europe. More and more, they are becoming separate 'islands'. As a party, you have to watch out for that” (PPG leader 17).

PPG leaders, however, also stress their tasks as bottom-up liaising actors. During their formal and informal meetings with party elites, many feel it is their duty to inform them about the preferences of backbenchers. In a first place, this can be intended as an 'early warning' to party leaders and potential ministers, that they need to take into account the (possible) objections of certain MPs when taking a specific decision. Moreover, this is the place where PPG leaders are in the position to co-shape party standpoints and shift them closer to the preferred policies of the PPG, or to those of individual MPs - including themselves. Doing this, as well as trying to win '*room for PPG members' own initiatives, which is not always easy when in majority*' (PPG leader 5), they ensure that MPs feel acknowledged and valued, which is regarded as an essential precondition for avoiding dissidence and ensuring MPs goodwill and continuing diligence.

“Every Thursday, we have a meeting with the party president and the party's federal and Flemish ministers. There, I will regularly say: '*OK, good, but this is what currently lives in my PPG*'. You won't catch me saying: '*MP A said something or B said this*'. That is not my habit. [...]. And if someone said something to me in person, I will often give him the opportunity to express his concerns in the PPG meeting by providing the 'assist', so that they only have to 'tap it in'. Or I bring it depersonalized myself by saying: '*I*

*hear in my PPG that...*' Then MPs sometimes open up and intervene after all. So I don't really have a clear method for it. But when your MPs are under the constant impression that they are there for decoration only, you get in trouble" (PPG leader 9).

Although respondents generally are rather down-to-earth with regards to the perceived impact the PPG has on party decisions and policies, many argued that the PPG, also when in majority, can make a difference. Key to this is specialization: opinions of MPs who have built significant knowledge on a specific topic are taken seriously and are being listened to (PPG leaders 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 25). But also proactive involvement is essential: decisions or deals are hard to alter once finalized (PPG leader 3, 16, 17, 19). For this all to succeed, however, it is essential that PPG leaders have good personal relationships with the party elite and their PPG members, as intra-party liaison often follows informal channels. This appears one of the main reasons why both sides are generally involved in the selection process preceding the appointment of a PPG leader (see also Chapter 6). A lack of support on either of both sides makes it hard for PPG leaders to function properly, as illustrated by the quote below.

"My assignment was a compromise: *Person X* and *Y* both wanted someone else. But that gave me the handicap of not having a good understanding with *Person X*, the most powerful person of our party. I had insufficient lines of communication with him. [...] I was an atypical PPG leader. Under normal circumstances I would have never become PPG leader and, looking back, it is not abnormal that my period as PPG leader did not last too long" (PPG leader 26).

#### 3.1.4. *Intra-coalition contacts*

For respondents that belong to a government party, a similar dual dynamic is found in PPG leaders' intra-coalition contacts. These contacts occur during formal (e.g. the coalition meeting preceding the Conference of Group Chairmen) and informal meetings (e.g. lunch meetings) among majority PPG leaders, with whom they try to maintain a collegial or even 'amical bond' (PPG leader 25). Although 'it is not unimportant to remain on good terms with everybody' (PPG leader 2), it is rather uncustomary as a PPG leader to have direct political contacts (e.g. asking support for a specific legislative proposal) with backbenchers from other parties. Table 6.1 shows that direct political contacts with ministers from other parties do not occur often as well. In opposition, informal contacts take place only occasionally due to the 'harsh majority-opposition divide' (PPG leader 21) and majority PPG leaders stress that direct contacts with coalition partners' ministers are not always appreciated by their own minister or the so-called '*vice-*

*kabinet*: i.e. the deputy-prime ministers' personal staff that follow all governmental policy areas, including the competences of coalition partners (PPG leader 7, 29).

During their contacts with colleagues, majority PPG leaders not only discuss strategies of how to cope with the opposition's manoeuvres in the legislature (PPG leader 5, 17, 19, 29) but also defend the interests of their party (group) among coalition partners. This can take the shape of trying to find support for party groups' own initiatives, by obstructing or amending the proposals submitted by coalition partners or by strengthening the party's ministers' bargaining position during political disputes among government parties.

"I often played that card. I would go to meetings with coalition partners and say: 'I'm sorry but I cannot convince *PPG member X* of that. You know him too, right? You will have to figure out a solution'" (PPG leader 29).

Moreover, majority PPG leaders act as parties' eyes and ears in parliament and reassure that the preferred policies incorporated in the coalition agreement at the start of the legislative term are loyally executed by the coalition partners during the rest of the term. As such, similar to what has been argued by Martin and Vanberg (2004, 2005, 2011) related to majority legislators' use of formal parliamentary instruments (e.g. government bill amendments), PPG leaders use their informal contacts to 'police the bargain' and help avoid agency loss by monitoring coalition partners initiated bills, placing the execution of preferred policies on the agenda and assuring that ministers stick to the agreed-upon coalition compromise.

"When in government, I think you have one clear assignment. That is, ensuring that the coalition compromise is being executed and that the most important elements for your party or party group are being concretised in a correct way. To oversee the activities of all committees and particularly when the yearly budget is submitted, to check whether it is all just and if all the aspects we negotiated in the coalition agreement are carried out correctly" (PPG leader 27).

"The PPG should not try to weigh on your own ministers policies. Our ministers should do it themselves with their personal staff. But I did always have the feeling that we were able to influence the policies of other ministers by putting the brakes on when they were heading the wrong directing. Or by altering their course a little bit" (PPG leader 22).

Simultaneously, majority PPG leaders are expected to defuse potential incidents in committees or plenary sessions among coalition partners, to sustain the

parliamentary majority and to loyally defend government compromises - which imply concessions for each party - within their party group.

“Take for instance the recent government agreement on the budget. A lot of our party’s demands are incorporated in it, but then of course there are also those 1 or 2 aspects on which we had to concede. If you don’t watch out, your PPG members will only keep fixate on those two aspects, and feel as if we aren’t weighing on policies enough. That is something that you always have to counter, and it requires a lot of energy” (PPG leader 27).

Many respondents moreover stress that majority PPG leaders have to walk on eggshells in their public interventions, as they are in a difficult, constant balancing act. On the one hand, it is expected from them that they adopt a loyal and cooperative attitude in parliamentary debates and towards the media, as members of the majority. On the other, however, they have to give profile to their own political party, accentuating its specific standpoints and proactively setting boundaries for coalition partners. To some this is a ‘fun challenge’ (PPG leader 18), to others it constitutes the very core of being a PPG leader in government (PPG leader 6). In either way, ‘biting’ a coalition partner means ‘getting bitten back’ (PPG leader 5) and the same applies to backbench activities. Several accounts have been raised of majority PPG leaders appealing to each other when backbenchers of another PPG went too far in criticizing a minister (PPG leader 17, 23) and an abstention in a vote on a bill that is important for another government party, might be followed by an abstention on one of your bills as a symbolic repercussion (PPG leader 23, 26).

### *3.1.5. Managing parliament*

Lastly, PPG leaders formally represent the PPG in parliament’s governing bodies (e.g. the Bureau, the Conference of Group Chairmen). Here, they co-decide over administrative and organizational matters (parliaments’ budget, infrastructures, personnel) and over the legislative agenda (i.e. the agenda of plenary sessions, the holding of interpellations, and the coordination of committees). The latter is important for opposition PPG leaders, who try to employ the full array of parliamentary scrutiny instruments, get interpellations or topical debates on the agenda and simply get information on upcoming parliamentary procedures and majority PPGs’ positions. It is also important for majority PPG leaders, who try to block potentially detrimental debates within the borders delineated by the standing orders, and try to get preferred legislation through the parliament in time). The Conference (or ‘*Uitgebreid Bureau*’ in the Flemish Parliament) in

principle takes its decisions in consensus. Many respondents – also opposition PPG leaders – stress that its closed meetings are indeed characterised by a sense of collegiality, where opposition and majority parties often do reach across the aisle, in part because the latter want to prevent procedural disputes in the plenary meeting that are visible to the general public, as some form of protest might arise when opposition parties feel as if they are treated unfairly (PPG leader 11).

### **3.2. Uniformity or variation? A typology of PPG leader roles**

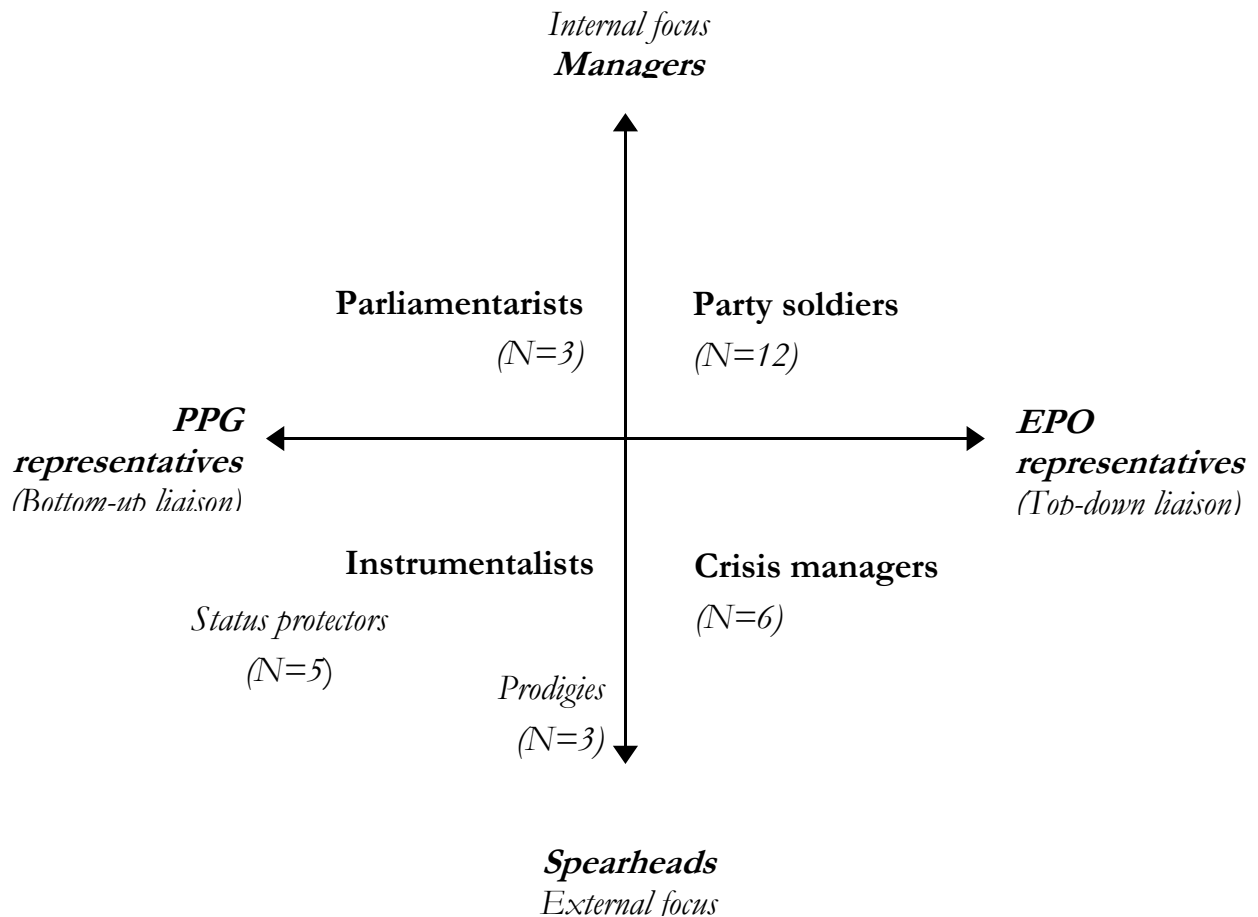
#### *3.2.1. Two dimensions, five (sub)roles*

Above we sketched the overall tasks PPG leaders fulfil in Belgium. During the interviews, however, it became highly clear that there is considerable variation among PPG leaders' priorities and the underlying goals and motivations that underpin them. Although some formal responsibilities allow for limited individual interpretation (e.g. representing the PPG in the Conference of Group chairman), practically all respondents themselves (27 out of 29) acknowledged that the way they fill in their mandate probably differs from the way others did. Whereas some attribute this to individuals' competence and skills (e.g. eloquence, being a policy generalist, commitment), it most of the time reflects a different 'logic of appropriateness' (March & Olsen, 1989) in the heads of the respondents, either due to varying party-level pressures (e.g. different expectations due to a parties' size, government status, organizational culture, electoral prospects) or diverging personal goals and characteristics (e.g. political weight, progressive career ambitions,...).

In all cases, these differences somehow relate to two broader dimensions or continuums that refer to inbuilt dilemma's in the daily functioning of PPG leaders. The first is PPG leaders primarily adopting an *external focus* (i.e. respondents who see themselves mainly as the PPG's political figureheads) versus those with a distinct *internal focus* (PPG leaders as team players, coaches and managers). The second dimension refers to the intra-party position of PPG leaders: while some mainly see themselves as representatives of the PPG in the EPO's decision-making bodies and focus mostly on *bottom-up liaison*, others focus more on *top-down-liaison* aimed at transferring central party leaders' directives to the backbenchers. When clustering interviewees based on their own reports of their daily functioning (e.g. by gauging their priorities and underlying motivations), we find five PPG leader role types that run along these two dimensions (see Figure

6.2).<sup>75</sup> It should be noted, however, that these are ideal-types and that within each category further diversifications can be observed, as will be described below.

**Figure 6.2. PPG leader role types**



### 3.2.2. Party Soldiers

'Party soldiers' adopt a clear internal focus and stress their loyalty to the central party leadership. They make up the largest category among the interview respondents (12 out of 29). Party soldiers tend to prioritize their work behind the scenes. They feel it is their duty to ensure that the PPG is a strong, well-organized collective entity where a collegial atmosphere between PPG members – who all want a place in the limelight – is prevalent. They therefore prioritize their duties as playmakers (fairly dividing PPG resources and opportunities for self-

<sup>75</sup> One for each quadrant, and a further distinction is made for the instrumentalist role type based on the exact dimension that is stressed and the specific motivations that role players have (see further on).

promotion), coaches to backbenchers and motivators. They stress the importance of transferring their political insights and knowledge on parliamentary procedures to backbenchers, of helping them with the policy-related issues they encounter, finding the right communicative strategy, building and extending their networks, and seeking new opportunities for parliamentary initiatives. In terms of behaviour, this implies spending a lot of time in parliament and sustaining direct and accessible contacts with group members:

“It first and foremost means: being approachable. When they [PPG members] call, you pick up your phone. Never close your office door. When they have concerns or questions and email you, make sure to reply within a couple of hours. So that they feel important. Organize meetings in order to work things out. Just offer a ‘listening ear’ and never make them feel as if the things they struggle with are unimportant. Because they all have egos, you see” (PPG leader 2).

Good PPG leaders, in their view, are empathic, altruistic, know the capacities and desires of backbenchers, spend a lot of their time on ‘people management’ and are able to proactively detect and resolve problems within the PPG. Importantly, he or she is not someone who absorbs all public attention but is happy with a more supportive role, even if it implies having to fulfil personally unrewarding tasks with low electoral pay-off. As opposed to others (*see below*), they value internal legitimacy over external legitimacy. They do not solely seek personal exposure, but find most job satisfaction in seeing fellow PPG members grow, having a good trust relationship with all MPs and developing a PPG with a strong collective reputation, i.e. not being dependent only on the interventions and work of a handful of protagonists.

“Last week, *MP X* got a lot of good press on *topic Y*. Not that I am that vain or anything but it was mainly because of a communicative strategy I developed for him. Of course, that is also my job, I am a team player and I am glad for him, but what’s in it for me? Afterwards I sometimes think: damn, maybe I should try to be in the newspapers a bit more. I would like to get re-elected too, you know” (PPG leader 17).

Party soldiers tend to accept their place in the ‘back office’, partly because they can reside to the formal moments on which they are expected to take the floor (e.g. during budgetary debates) but mostly because they do not need the exposure as much as backbenchers do, as they tend to be experienced, well-known politicians. Intensively socialized within the diverse party echelons, party soldiers particularly value top-down liaison by transferring policy decisions or party strategies as determined by the party leadership or central executive committee to

backbenchers.<sup>76</sup> It is in fact often why they believe they were selected: not only because of the support of fellow PPG members for their candidacy but also because of their loyalty to the party leadership: one respondent described himself as a ‘safe choice’ for the party elite as they believed that he would not cause any trouble. Still, most respondents argue that official party policy positions are deliberated upon quite openly in the central party executive, where also PPG delegates are present, and that it afterwards comes down to transparently briefing these decisions in the PPG meeting by setting out all arguments and providing the ‘pros and cons’ of alternatives. Party soldiers’ apprehension that top-down liaison is important seems to stem more from the fact that all respondents in this category belong to majority parties, and that they see themselves as important go-betweens between the executive and parliament, who play an important role in maintaining cabinet stability. Delicate government compromises and package deals implying concessions for all coalition parties have to be guided through the legislative process and ideological hardliners in the party group have to be convinced. Moreover, they often have to put the brakes on backbenchers’ policy-related ambitions because coalition partners are divided on the topic.

“That is difficult, because the PPG is of course not directly involved in the making of government compromises nor with its initial formation. All MPs – including me – went door to door with our programme during the election campaign. Once elected we at least wish to discuss those policies in parliament, gaining support and implement them. But once that coalition agreement, that ‘bible’, has been drafted, there is that constant inhibition: you cannot simply put anything on the political agenda anymore and have to defend compromises with all their intrinsic concessions. That is not easy and is often frustrating for MPs” (PPG leader 5).

“You should consider our party’s structure: the party group is subordinate to the party’s executive committee and council, in which also party volunteers are represented. Now, if I would say: “mobility, standpoint A”, and I get a signal from the party: “no, we disagree, standpoint B”, then I would have to defend standpoint B. [...]. *Case X*, where several municipal interests were at stake, was a clear situation where several PPG members had issues with the party position but had to be convinced in the end. On a regular basis, however, the government makes compromises, which our party as a totality simply has to accept (PPG leader 17).

Still, it is not all a one-way street. As they are highly preoccupied with supporting backbenchers and understand that proactive involvement is key in governmental

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<sup>76</sup> Although, when present at the PPG meeting, they also expect the party president to do this.



policy-making through their years of political experience, they try to make sure that backbenchers can at least express their concerns by inviting central party elites or ministers to PPG meetings, or by providing other opportunities where MPs and party elites interact and co-develop concrete policies.

“A sensible minister understands that, ultimately, the PPG members have to pass their legislation through parliament. They should not show up when the final compromise has already been made because, of course, then they will encounter critiques. As a PPG leader, you have to ensure that ministers involve PPG members already at an early stage, so they can give their input and see for themselves how an initial proposal evolves towards a final compromise. We therefore organized a lot of meetings with ministers and their staff for which backbenchers were invited. Half of them [MPs] never showed up, but when they had critiques afterwards at least I could say: I am very sorry, but then you should have raised your concerns earlier, during the meeting” (PPG leader 29).

As already mentioned, interviewees identified as party soldiers often appear experienced politicians that belong to larger government parties. They are found among respondents of all parties under study except in the green and extreme-right party.

### *3.2.3. Parliamentarists*

‘Parliamentarists’ constitute the second and smallest category among the interviewed PPG leaders (3 out of 29). Very similar to the category above, parliamentarists are foremost preoccupied with the internal management of the PPG, and state that they spend a lot of time in guiding backbenchers, supporting them in their parliamentary work and coordinating the PPGs’ substantial parliamentary activities. They too see themselves as team players, who do not necessarily feel the need to absorb all public attention but are happy with a more supportive role, aimed at furthering the PPG as a collective entity with a strong reputation in parliament.

“A good PPG leader is someone who can coach a group and puts a strong team out there on the pitch. He should be able to translate the party message to a broader public, although he should not be the one who always takes centre stage. Instead, he should let others ‘score’ as well. Without it being obvious that he is the one who always gives the ‘assists’. A certain degree of discretion. The team above all else” (PPG leader 28).

The primary difference between ‘party soldiers’ and ‘parliamentarists’ is that the latter more distinctly than the former feel that it is their duty to articulate and

defend the policy positions of the PPG or individual PPG members in intra-party meetings and when addressing the broader public.<sup>77</sup> Two of the three respondents in this category admit that the fact that their party was in opposition gave them some more leeway and opportunities to expound the PPG's positions and support MPs own initiatives. The third respondent, belonging to a government party, stated he favoured expressing the PPGs' view because of sense that a degree of 'dualism' between the executive and the legislative branch would be desirable, and would yield benefits both for the party group and for the party as a whole:

"As a PPG leader, it is your tasks to point out to the party's minister: 'Look, we also have a PPG, consisting of people who have opinions and visions. You have to communicate with them'. Providing that link is extremely important. [...]. Afterwards, in parliament, you are of course expected to defend government decisions. But simultaneously, you are also the one that can take it a step further. As a PPG leader, you are not actually in government, you don't have to identify entirely with them. You should dare to distance yourself a bit from their decisions and give a sharper profile to the PPG by stressing your own demands and accents, of course without taking it too far. Doing so, is not only in the interest of the PPG but in the interest of the entire party, as governmental policies are coalition compromises" (PPG leader 22).

Designated as PPG leaders because of a strong reputation as competent MPs and because of very strong support among the PPG members for their candidature (they were all elected after a practically unanimous vote in the PPG), 'parliamentarists' are mostly aimed at influencing policy and delivering sound parliamentary work together with their group members. They enjoy a 'firm political discussion once in a while' (PPG leader 21) and besides being able to weigh on party policies and legislative outcomes, they find a lot of job satisfaction in the appreciation and support they get from their group members (PPG leader 28).

As mentioned, the few 'parliamentarists' can be found both in opposition and government parties. Two cases are older politicians while one respondent was a younger PPG leader with less than a legislative term of experience (but with a remarkable parliamentary track record, during those few years). Two of them belong to the green party, one to the liberal party.

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<sup>77</sup> Although legislators also do this themselves, particularly as the three respondents belong to smaller parties where a lot of MPs (if not all of them) have closer ties with the party leadership and are member of the party executive committee.

### 3.2.4. *Instrumentalists: Prodigies and Status Protectors*

The third role type that can be identified are the ‘instrumentalists’. Respondents that fall in this category (8 out of 29 respondents) tend to see their position as leader of the PPG as something that is ‘instrumental’ to achieving their personal goals and ambitions. Within this group, a further distinction can be made based on PPG leaders’ exact goals and objectives, and the specific aspects of their jobs they prioritise. While some instrumentalists are mostly aimed at retaining their status and influence in the party, other more distinctly use their position to build a personal reputation and gain visibility towards the wider public (*see below*).

PPG leaders in first subgroup are labelled ‘status protectors’ (5 respondents). These respondents are generally seasoned politicians that do not necessarily have progressive career ambitions but do tend to use their PPG leadership as a personal power base, or a means that allows them to stay at the forefront and (still) exert influence in intra-party decision-making. ‘Status protectors’ often actively lobbied (or ‘pushed through’ as one respondent puts it) in order to become PPG leader as they ‘did not want to be demoted directly to a normal MP’ (PPG leader 10) after being a minister or party president or because they ‘felt like they were wasting away in the backbenches’ (Respondent 23). PPG leadership confirms their status within the party, provides them a public forum and puts them (back) in the party’s decision-making cockpit.

A second subgroup, labelled ‘prodigies’ (3 respondents), refers to younger, less experienced but talented politicians that were selected as a PPG leader by the party leadership with the explicit intention of providing them with a ‘launching platform’. Holding the office of PPG leader allows them to gain public visibility and learn how to cope with political responsibility. While ‘status protectors’ focus more on the PPG-EPO liaising dimension (and ‘bottom-up’ liaison in particular) as their primary aim is to influence (party) policies, ‘prodigies’ focus more on the other dimension, as they are mostly preoccupied with building ones’ external fame and reputation, and eventually further climbing the political career ladder, for which they are more dependent from the central party leadership.

“A basic expectation, for a young PPG leader like me, was: ‘Go forth and multiply.’ Become well-know, if possible also popular, ensure that you get votes at the next general elections, and – I don’t know – maybe become a minister afterwards” (Respondent 1).

Unlike the previous two role types, instrumentalists – and particularly prodigies – have a more distinct external focus. In their view, a good PPG leader is foremost a frontrunner and a good debater. Someone who eloquently transfers the party message in parliament and towards the media. They tend to find the internal management of the PPG (coaching MPs, providing a fair division of labour, resolving internal conflicts) of secondary importance or even state that it ‘requires a lot of your time, but distracts you from the essence: being a spokesperson, preparing debates, going to television appearances, doing parliamentary interventions’ (PPG leader 13).

They enjoy ‘being in the picture’ (PPG leader 23) and like that – as opposed to backbenchers, who (need to) specialize in a specific policy field – they can intervene in a broad spectrum of topics in parliament. While also instrumental for their personal fame and status, they believe that the PPG leader (instead of other PPG members) should take the floor when an issue becomes a hot topic in order to give more political weight to the PPG message. Convinced that the media increasingly focus on key figures within the PPG, they argue that this is electorally interesting for the party as well. This opposes the idea of PPG leaders as playmakers and during the interviews, several accounts have been raised of intra-PPG tensions and frustrations among backbenchers, who prepare their cases and build up expertise on highly specialized policy issues, but do not get the opportunity to take the floor and generate personal media attention as soon as the issue becomes topical.

Instrumentalists – and particularly ‘status protectors’ – tend to use their position as PPG leaders to influence overall party policies and strategies. They contend that they mostly see it as their task to promote the views and interest of the PPG in the central party decision-making bodies, although also their own policy views matter (one PPG leader in this category stated that he was not ‘a mail carrier’ and that backbenchers with personal wishes or grievances should not hide behind the PPG leader but contact the party elite themselves). While ‘prodigies’ seem more inclined to practice top-down liaison and act as a central party representative in the PPG because of their dependence of the party elite for their future careers, several (elder) respondents in the ‘status protector’ category state that the party president should come to the PPG meeting personally in order to defend difficult party decisions as it would cause them to lose their authority within the group.

“When the party president wants to bring a difficult message to the PPG members, he should do it himself. I don’t do that, because then I lose my authority within the

group. The PPG should be behind me at all times. They should feel as if I am defending their interests in the central party executive committee. And not have the impression that I am only a puppet of the party executive that pushes through all the party decisions that they don't want to defend themselves in the PPG. That really wouldn't be a good idea" (PPG leader 13).

Instrumentalists can be found in all parties under study. While they most often belong to opposition parties, two respondents in this category belonged to government parties.

### 3.2.5. *Crisis Managers*

'Crisis managers' make up a last distinct category among PPG leaders (6 out of 29 respondents). We find them in the quadrant of PPG leaders with a predominantly externally-oriented focus, who simultaneously put a lot of value on top-down liaison (from EPO to PPG). The main common ground among respondents in this category appears to be that they belong to parties that suffered large electoral losses in the foregoing elections (and often ended up in opposition). In all cases, these electoral defeats have been the harbinger for internal party renewal. New party presidents with renewed policy agendas and political strategies were appointed in order to turn the electoral tide. On their turn, these party presidents appointed relatively unknown politicians as new PPG leaders who, together with him or her, are expected to embody the new political course of the party. As a result, the PPG leaders that fall into this category all stress their loyalty to the new party presidents and mainly prioritize top-down liaison: they feel that is their duty to convince the other MPs of the new programmatic or political-strategic course the party is heading and try to support the party leader in his endeavours. Practically all of them state that this is not always easy as those renewed party policies and strategies might invoke opposition among the party's longer-serving MPs.

"A clear expectation was for me to make the clear change of course as outlined by the party leader. Both in terms of style and policies. Not always the hard bickering, not focusing solely on socio-economic topics. Working on a new image, one that people wouldn't directly ascribe to our party. And embodying that image. Actively challenge people to address new topics. And remain loyal to the renewed party strategies as set out by the new party leader and the people that supported them" (PPG leader 3).

"While our party president is trying to set out a new programmatic course, there is always *PPG member X* of whom you're never sure what he will say during plenary meetings [...]. That is why... where it often used to be the PPG meeting that decided

on which position to take in parliament, I will now escalate the discussion more quickly to the central party executive committee. It is easier to push things through when you're backed by the entire central party leadership. I do not always use that as leverage, but sometimes I do" (PPG leader 11).

In order to 'embody the new party message', PPG leaders that fall in the category of 'crisis managers' adopt a clear external focus. A good PPG leader is a good communicator, who does not act primarily out of self-interest but convincingly tries to translate the renewed party policies to a broader audience in a comprehensible way. More than instrumentalists, however, crisis managers are also preoccupied with the internal management of the party as a priority. They face greater disunity (see above) and state that they put a lot of effort in convincing fellow PPG members and avoiding that dissidence reaches the outside world, given the already precarious situation the party finds itself in. Crisis managers are driven by a strong sense of duty to help the party (president) get back on top. Although they do not function in the most euphoric political circumstances, they find job satisfaction when they get the party message across in the media (PPG leader 3, 4), when the PPG still manages to function properly despite the worrisome political context (PPG leader 8, 11, 14) or when the efforts eventually pay off and the party's electoral scores start to improve (PPG leader 24).

As mentioned, crisis managers appear to belong to opposition parties that suffered electoral losses. We find them in four out of six parties under study, albeit at different points in time: the greens, the extreme-right party, the Christian democrats and the social democrats.

**Table 6.2. Summary of PPG leaders' roles**

	Party Soldier	Parliamentarist	Instrumentalist		Crisis manager
			Status Protector	Prodigy	
<b>Internal vs external</b>	Internal	Internal	External	External	External
<b>EPO vs PPG</b>	EPO	PPG	PPG	PPG/EPO	EPO
<b>Goals</b>	Support party elite/cabinet	Promote and influence policies	Maintain ones' personal status in the party	Climb the political ladder	Turn the electoral tide /support (new) party elite
<b>Psychological incentives</b>	Sense of duty, loyalty	Sense of achievement, competence, influence	Status, influence	Ambition, status	Sense of duty, loyalty, ambition

### 3.3.Role players' attitudes and behaviours

The qualitative data already provide strong evidence for role variance among PPG leaders. However, in order to further validate the detected role types, we additionally report some quantitative data based on PPG leaders responses to a number of closed-ended questions incorporated in the questionnaires. By looking at the connection between inductively-derived role orientations (based on open-ended questions gauging PPG leaders' general priorities and motivations) and specific attitudes and behaviours (based on respondents' answers to closed-ended questions), we basically do two things: One, we verify the qualitatively-derived role types with more quantitative measures of role attitudes. And two, we also look at the consequences of PPG leaders' roles in terms of self-reported and quantitative measure of political behaviour (e.g. Andeweg, 2012; Jenny & Müller, 2012; Searing, 1994).

The dependent variables in the analyses below are constructed based on the same closed-ended questions reported in Table 6.1, gauging the importance respondents attach to specific aspects of their jobs (on a scale from 1 to 10) and the time they allocate to these tasks (1=almost no time, 10= a lot of time). As independent variables we take respondents positions on the two dimensions along

which role variance occurs (internal vs. external; top-down vs. bottom-up).<sup>78</sup> Given the rather small N and general left-skewedness of the data, we use non-parametrical, independent sample Mann-Whitney U tests to make estimations of the statistical significance of the results.<sup>79</sup> We start with differences between PPG leaders with an internal role focus (party soldiers, parliamentarists) and those with a more external focus (prodigies, status protectors and crisis managers).

**Table 6.3. Attitudinal and behavioral differences between PPG leaders with an external (N=14) versus those with an internal role (N=15) (mean values)**

	Attitudes (Importance 1-10)		Behaviour (Time allocation 1-10)	
	<i>External</i>	<i>Internal</i>	<i>External</i>	<i>Internal</i>
Ensure a good division of labour	7,14	8,27	5,07	6,13
Lead discussions on PPG positions	7,57	7,93	5,29	5,93
Coach PPG members	5,43	6,67	3,86	5,14
Coach PPG staff	6,50	5,33	4,21	3,14
Monitor committee work	5,14	6,13	3,50	5,64***
Ensure group unity	8,36	8,29	5,36	4,46
Top-down liaison (EPO to PPG)	5,43	7,27*	3,93	3,93
Bottom-up liaison (PPG to EPO)	6,07	6,57	3,93	3,64
Co-decide on parliamentary agenda in Conference of Group Chairmen	7,07	7,43	4,50	4,64
Maintain frequent contacts with MPs from other parties	5,07	7,07**	3,86	5,21**
Maintain frequent contacts with own party's ministers	8,00	8,08	4,67	5,67
Maintain frequent contacts with ministers from other parties	3,29	5,21**	2,36	3,14
Act as PPG's political frontrunner	8,86	8,86	8,00	6,93*

*Note: Independent samples Mann Whitney U-tests: \*=  $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* =  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* =  $p < 0.01$*

<sup>78</sup> We do not analyse differences between each role type separately as it would further reduce the N of each group. For all respondents the coding of these dimensions is binary and corresponds to the specific role type in which they were allocated.

<sup>79</sup> Although we report these statistical significance tests, their importance should of course be place in perspective (given the small N) as we are mostly interested in the size of the differences.



Table 6.3 shows that there are indeed important attitudinal and behavioral differences between PPG leaders with an internal role, versus those with an external role. In practically all cases, these differences lie in the expected direction and in several instances they reach statistical significance, even when considering the low N of each group. Internally-oriented PPG leaders attach considerably more importance to maintaining frequent contacts with MPs from other parties as well as maintaining a good trust relationship with ministers from other parties. There also appear to be rather large differences in terms of attaching importance to a outlining a proper division of labour and coaching MPs, but these results are not significant, which is to be nuanced in light of the lower number of observations. Although PPG leaders with an externally-oriented and a internally-oriented role equally see the importance of acting as the PPGs' main spokesperson when needed, the latter claim to spend considerably less time on it (i.e. preparing debates etc.) which is in line with the general expectations. Internally-oriented PPG leaders do allocate more time to their contacts with other parties' MPs (mostly PPG leaders) and on keeping oversight over backbenchers' committee work. Also differences in terms of time spent on coaching MPs and 'playmaking' are substantial and in the expected direction. Only one result is somewhat puzzling and out of line with our expectations: although not statistically significant, externally-oriented PPG leaders attach more importance and time to coaching PPG staff (while spending less time on coaching MPs). A potential reason could be that they do this to let staff execute a lot of the coordinating and internal management tasks in the PPG. Further analysis shows that is mostly crisis managers who stress their role in coaching staff, while internally-oriented PPG leaders appear to delegate this task more often to others (e.g. the PPG secretary or a staff coordinator), perhaps because they are more preoccupied with the other internal management duties.

It is furthermore important to note that Table 6.3 additionally shows that PPG leaders with an internal role focus seem to attach more importance to top-down liaison (transmitting decisions from the EPO elite to the PPG). They also find bottom-up liaison more important, but the results are not significant. As such, the two identified dimensions that structure role variance among PPG leaders appear not to be entirely independent from each other. Instead, the internal vs. external dimension seems to have a reinforcing effect on the other dimension: internally-oriented respondents pay more attention to intra-party liaison. This is, however, to some extent logical, as EPO-PPG liaison occurs behind the scenes, away from the public eye. Moreover, while it appears to affect the importance attached to

intra-party liaison in general, it does not dictate its specific direction (top-down vs. bottom-up). This is also shown in the analyses below. The dichotomy remains therefore useful for our purposes and for distinguishing between PPG leaders.

**Table 6.4. Attitudinal and behavioral differences between PPG leaders with a top-down (N=18) versus those with a bottom-up oriented role (N=11) (mean values)**

	Attitudes (Importance 1-10)		Behaviour (Time allocation 1-10)	
	<i>Top-down</i>	<i>Bottom-up</i>	<i>Top-down</i>	<i>Bottom-up</i>
Ensure a good division of labour	7,94	7,36	5,67	5,55
Lead discussions on PPG positions	8,00	7,36	6,00	5,00*
Coach PPG members	6,56	5,27	4,76	4,09
Coach PPG staff	6,33	5,18	3,82	3,45
Monitor committee work	6,33	4,55**	5,12	3,73*
Ensure group unity	8,59	7,91	4,38	5,73
Top-down liaison (EPO to PPG)	7,33	4,82**	4,06	3,73
Bottom-up liaison (PPG to EPO)	7,00	5,27**	4,00	3,45
Co-decide on parliamentary agenda in Conference of Group Chairmen	7,76	6,45*	4,82	4,18
Maintain frequent contacts with MPs from other parties	6,53	5,36	5,06	3,73
Maintain frequent contacts with own party's ministers	8,08	8,00	5,50	5,33
Maintain frequent contacts with ministers from other parties	4,53	3,82	2,88	2,55
Act as PPG's political frontrunner	9,00	8,64	7,29	7,73

*Note: Independent samples Mann Whitney U-tests: \*:  $p < 0.1$ ; \*\*:  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\*:  $p < 0.01$*

Table 6.4 indicates that PPG leaders with a top-down oriented role attach more importance and spend more time on monitoring backbenchers' committee work. They furthermore prioritize their task of co-deciding on the parliamentary agenda in the Conference of Group chairman more and they claim to allocate more time to leading internal discussions on the PPGs' political positions. Several other differences also strike the eye (e.g. top-down oriented PPG leaders (party soldiers and crisis managers) spend more time on coaching PPG members and staff) but are not significant. Counter-intuitively at first glance, while PPG leaders with a

top-down oriented role logically find transmitting decisions from the party elite to the PPG more important than respondents with a bottom-up role, the same applies to the opposite: furthering backbenchers' wishes and preferences to central party elites. This, however, seems to cohere with the rather large group of 'party soldiers' and our remark above that an internal role focus seems to reinforce respondents' conviction that intra-party liaison in general is important. Nonetheless, Table 6.4 also shows that while top-down oriented PPG leaders' (party soldiers, crisis managers) scores for top-down liaising tasks is on average slightly higher than that for bottom-up liaison, the opposite applies to bottom-up oriented PPG leaders (status protectors, prodigies, parliamentarists). Moreover, as a PPG leader can both translate PPG wishes in the central party executive committee, whilst afterwards simply briefing the decisions made by the latter in the PPG meeting, the question is more what a PPG leader should do in case of intra-party disagreement between the EPO and PPG. Table 6.5 below indeed shows that party soldiers and crisis managers (top-down oriented roles) state to be more inclined to defend the EPO's position towards PPG members, while status protectors, parliamentarists and to a lesser extent prodigies (bottom-up oriented roles) stress their role in standing with their PPG members and defending their positions.

**Table 6.5. Intra-party disagreement dilemma scale: PPG leaders with top-down (N=18) versus those with a bottom-up oriented role (N=11)**

	Top-down	Bottom-up
'Should a PPG leader, in case of disagreement, defend the EPO's position (=1) or that of the PPG (=10)?'	4.44	5.73*

*Note: Independent samples Mann Whitney U-tests: \*:  $p < 0.1$ ; \*\*:  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\*:  $p < 0.01$*

## 4. Discussion

Using data from 29 semi-structured interviews with PPG leaders in the Belgian federal and Flemish regional parliament, this chapter turned towards PPG leaders' own accounts of their functioning in parliament. We (1) painted the global picture by describing PPG leaders' general responsibilities in parliament, (2) exposed differences between PPG leaders and developed a typology of PPG leader roles, (3) verified them by linking the role types with quantitative measures of concrete

attitudes and (4) examined to some extent the consequences of these role in terms of a translation into subsequent and characteristic behaviour.

Besides providing general insights into the daily activities of understudied but important parliamentary actors, thereby going beyond the typical and narrow focus on their use of disciplinary measures, we importantly found rather fundamental differences in terms of PPG leaders' priorities and underlying motivations, which result in five distinctly different role orientations. While some PPG leaders (i.e. prodigies, status protectors and crisis managers) adopt a clear external focus aimed at translating party policies to a broader audience, others (i.e. parliamentarists and party soldiers) are satisfied with a place behind the scenes and focus more distinctly on their tasks as internal managers, coaches and playmakers. Additionally, while some (party soldiers and crisis managers) primarily see it as their duty to convince fellow PPG members of central party elite decisions, others (i.e. parliamentarists, status protectors and to a lesser extent prodigies) see it as their duty to more actively try to co-shape central party policies by defending the interests and policy positions of PPG members.

As such, this chapter's – still rather descriptive – findings already have important theoretical implications for parliamentary role research. Even in Belgium, where PPG leaders have comparatively limited formal intra-party authority and are expected to have limited leeway in defining their own role, we clearly identified and delineated clear patterns of role variation. This in itself contradicts the usual assumptions in the literature that frontbenchers play 'position roles' that are heavily constrained by (parliament-wide) institutional expectations and norms, thereby leaving little to no room for divergent roles. The very fact that PPG leaders are indeed found to define their roles in distinctly different ways should encourage scholars to extend their scope from only focusing on the roles of backbenchers, to also studying those of frontbenchers, particularly given the latter's general influence of parliamentary decision-making and the activities of regular MPs.

To a large degree, however, the question remains under what specific circumstances or political constellations PPG leaders adopt a specific role, and to what extent these roles are driven by personal goals and motivations. Are the identified roles effectively preference-driven or are they shaped by informal expectations and contextual pressures at the party-level? Do some roles allow for more individual interpretation? What happens when role expectations conflict with a PPG leader's personal goals? Those are all questions we tackle in the next

two empirical chapters, in which we examine and disentangle the determinants of PPG leaders' roles in closer detail.

# Right place, right time?

## Institutional norms, expectations and PPG leaders' role orientations

### 1. Introduction

Roles are inherently attached to the institutional context in which they are played. Before the behaviouralist turn in political science, early structural-functionalist and symbolic-interactionist approaches on legislative roles conceived the impact of 'structure' over 'agency' highly in the benefit of the former (Fenno, 1978; Prewitt et al., 1966; Searing, 1994; Wahlke, Eulau, et al., 1962). The renewed scholarly interest in parliamentary roles, however, should be seen in the light of the growing interest in how institutions and legislators' independent preferences are *intertwined* (Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012, p. 31). Rational choice neo-institutionalists stress that institutions create conditions that constrain or enable the strategic behaviour of politicians (Shepsle, 1989; Strøm, 1997; Tsebelis, 2002; Zittel, 2012). Normative neo-institutionalists focus on how and to what degree individuals internalize the explicit or implicit expectations of them as holders of a certain position (Andeweg, 2014; March & Olsen, 1989; Searing, 1994). In any case, institutions shape MPs' roles and deserve our full attention. But what exactly are institutions?

Institutions constitute the 'rules of the game' (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013, p. 46). Neo-institutionalism builds on the 'old' institutionalism in political science, which mostly focused on how *formal rules* constrain individuals' conduct (Peters, 1999, pp. 3-11). Formal institutions are relatively straightforward to identify and can be studied through document analysis. They are the rules and procedures that are created, communicated and enforced through channels widely accepted as official (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004, p. 727). They are written down in constitutions, laws or in organizations' internal 'constitutional code', 'which defines lines of authority

and divisions of work by specifying the organizations' principal offices and their principal duties and responsibilities' (Searing, 1994, p. 4).

The 'new' institutionalism stresses that besides formal rules also informal norms, expectations and practices are at least as – if not more – effective in shaping the behaviour of individuals (March & Olsen, 1989; Peters, 1999). Informal institutions are 'socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated and enforced outside of the officially sanctioned channels' (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004, p. 727). They are the common norms, values and expectations that members of an institution have towards the holders of a particular institutional position. They reveal 'how things are done around here' and non-compliance can be followed by displays of social disapproval (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013, pp. 52-53). Informal institutions are critical for an organization to run smoothly: they supplement formal rules where they are incomplete, ineffective or not specific enough, or might even bring common practices that circumvent formal regulations to the surface (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004, 2006; Searing, 1994). While there is, to give one simple example, no formal rule that obliges legislators to toe the party line in parliament - sometimes to the contrary<sup>80</sup> - the informal norm of party loyalty is rather widely-accepted in Western Europe, even when disregarding party unity as a result of MPs' anticipation of sanctions, following a logic of consequentiality (e.g. Van Vonn et al., 2014).

It is argued that formal and informal institutional rules indeed have an important impact on individual behaviour, in a normative rather than a cognitive way (Peters, 1999, p. 29). Although individuals are also rationally concerned about the consequences of certain actions (and the pay-offs for them personally), institutions impose a 'logic of appropriateness' to its members (March & Olsen, 1989). Before acting, members will think about whether an action conforms to the norms of the organization (March & Olsen, 1989; Peters, 1999, p. 29). Do their actions qualify as institutionally 'appropriate' behaviour?

As we have seen in the introductory chapters, the roles of leaders in parliament are said to be particularly determined by institutions. This chapter therefore focuses on that institutional framework. In a first place, it aims to identify relevant

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<sup>80</sup> In Belgium, art. 42 of the constitution (i.e. 'parliamentary representatives represent the entire nation and not solely their constituencies) furthers a Burkean conception of representation, which has long been considered as a legalistic base for a prohibition of an imperative mandate by the party (De Prins, 2011; Verleden, 2014, 2015).

formal rules and dominant informal norms and expectations (of PPG and EPO actors) towards PPG leaders' general, everyday functioning. We show that formal rules on PPG leadership are scarce and discuss how informal norms and expectations, which appear highly dependent on the parties' political context, are more relevant. Besides looking at their existence, we also examine the transmission and to some extent the consequences of (informal) institutional norms to PPG leaders. How are context-dependent role expectations made clear to role players? To what extent do these expectations match with the interviewees' actual role orientations?

We argue that the initial selection process preceding the appointment of a PPG leader is key in understanding how informal expectations (of PPG and EPO members) are shaped and communicated to role players. Candidate selection is one of the oldest and more opaque functions of political parties (Gallagher & Marsh, 1988; Gunther & Diamond, 2001; Hazan & Rahat, 2010; Katz, 2001; Norris, 1997). The process in which is decided who will take up a specific political position is a largely unregulated, intra-party matter, which takes place far from the public eye but has important consequences for the power balance within parties, the composition and functioning of political institutions and the behaviour of selected actors (Hazan & Rahat, 2010; Rahat, Hazan, & Katz, 2008; Vandeleene, 2016).<sup>81</sup> Empirical research on the consequences of candidate selection on legislative behaviour has mostly focused on the impact of *formal aspects* of selection procedures (most notably the composition of the selectorate) on legislators' responsiveness in terms of representative focus or party loyalty (see amongst others: Cordero et al., 2018; Dudzinska et al., 2014; Faas, 2003; Hazan & Rahat, 2006; Hix, 2002; Indriðason & Kristinsson, 2015; Rombi & Seddone, 2017; Shomer, 2009; Sieberer, 2006). The more *substantial* dimension of candidate selection, i.e. *why* certain candidates are chosen over others, which selection criteria are used by the selectorate, how they reflect role expectations and how this impacts the selected politician's behaviour, gets less scholarly attention (see,

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<sup>81</sup> Note that many of these studies refer to 'candidate selection' as the selection of electoral candidates (e.g. future MPs). We use the term to denote the selection of PPG leaders, a position further up the party hierarchy. Still, the selection of PPG leaders, like that of party leaders (Cross & Blais, 2012; Lisi, Freire, & Barberà, 2015; Pilet & Cross, 2014; Wauters, 2014) or ministers (Dowding & Dumont, 2008) shares a number of formal characteristics highly similar to the selection of other candidates. Referring to Hazan and Rahat (2010), it might feature varying degrees of exclusive or inclusive candidacies (e.g. all MPs or a selective group), selectorates (e.g. all MPs, the party executive or a single leader) and voting vs. appointment procedures. Moreover, research has shown that also the allocation of 'mega seats' by parties (e.g. leadership positions such as committee chair, whip) impact the behavior of legislators (Louwerse & Otjes, 2016; Martin, 2014).



however: De Winter, 1988, pp. 39-42). We argue that this is nonetheless essential. Hazan and Rahat (2006, p. 116) stress that a central motivation of politicians is their wish to be reselected for their position in a later phase of their career (e.g. Strøm, 1997). They will therefore pay special attention to the grievances of their electorate. As such, not only *who* selects, but particularly *why* they select someone is essential. By asking PPG and EPO actors why specific PPG leaders were selected in the first place, we gauge into their initial role expectations, are able to translate general informal norms (dependent on the political context) to the level of individual PPG leaders, and can examine to what degree PPG leaders' roles are congruent with the expectations of MPs, party leaders and other relevant actors (i.e. the agents that are somehow involved in the selection of PPG leaders; *see below*).

## 2. Data

As discussed in detail in the methodological parts of this thesis, this chapter draws on data from two main sources. *Formal rules* on PPG leadership are identified, collected and coded in two types of documents. The first are *parliamentary standing orders*. These documents contain general rules on parliaments' organisation, procedures and the right and duties of individual MPs. Specific articles on PPG leadership reveal formal expectations regarding PPG leaders' duties and general functioning at the *parliament-level*. We have analysed the most recent versions of the standing orders of the federal Chamber of Representatives and the Flemish regional parliament. However, given that we also interviewed former PPG leaders (and other EPO and PPG actors) and as formal rules can be changed throughout time, we also analysed the standing orders of 1995 and interim regulatory amendments to take changes throughout the research period into account.

The second type of formal documents are *party statutes*. Statutes contain rich information on political parties' organisation, decision-making procedures and on the rights and duties of mandate-holders and members (e.g. Scarrow et al., 2017). Interesting for our purposes is that they contain formal rules regarding PPG leadership at the *party-level*. We analysed all statutes of the six parties under study from 1995 onwards (see Table 3.3 in Chapter 3). The party statutes were mostly obtained directly from the central party headquarters and – if necessary – completed with the help of several historical archives. The tables in the empirical parts below report current formal regulations. Amendments throughout time are mentioned in-text.

A third potential document where formal rules on PPG leadership could have been found are internal PPG rules. Only one respondent of CD&V, however, mentioned that these rules used to exist for the federal PPG, but they were moreover ‘hardly known or followed’ (PPG actor 35).

Informal institutional norms and expectations are analysed using data from the semi-structured elite interviews conducted with EPO (party leaders, senior staff) and PPG actors (MPs, PPG secretaries). As explained more in detail in Chapter 3, the selection of these respondents are the result of a two-phase selection process. In a first step, we selected a heterogeneous sample of PPG leaders based on party affiliation, experience and government status. In a second step, we selected one PPG (MP, PPG secretary) and one EPO actor (party leader, party secretary or director) in the direct professional environment of selected PPG leaders (at that time). In order to maintain a manageable sample size, the respondents in the second phase were selected in such a way so that they could be interviewed about multiple PPG leaders in the sample (see Chapter 3).

The interviews with PPG and EPO actors (N= 31) are interesting for two reasons. One, they allow us to extend the scope from only studying formal rules to also taking informal norms into account, which have an important impact on individuals’ behaviour as discussed above. We rely mostly on the questions that gauged what, in the eyes of the interviewees, constitutes ‘a good PPG leader’ and ‘what should be his/her top priorities’. Second, the interviews again do not only allow us to paint the global picture and detect dominant, parliament-wide or party-specific role expectations towards PPG leaders’ general functioning: they also provide us data on *individual-level* role expectations. Both EPO leaders and PPG actors are typically involved in the selection of PPG leaders, albeit with varying degrees of informal influence (*see below*). As they were either directly involved as part of the selectorate (party leaders, MPs) or more indirectly as ‘privileged witnesses’ or advisors (PPG secretaries, EPO directors), the interviewees are rather well-placed to comment on why certain candidates were chosen over other as PPG leader.<sup>82</sup> By incorporating questions on the selection criteria that were used and whether or not explicit instructions were expressed at the beginning of

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<sup>82</sup> In order to reduce the risk of hindsight bias, moreover, these sections were well-prepared by bringing to the interviews the names of alternative candidates that circulated in the media (allowing respondents to reflect on why other candidates were not chosen at that time). Moreover, as we interviewed one PPG and one EPO actor per PPG leader, we are able to triangulate the data from these interviews.

one's mandate, we obtain data on the considerations made by party actors when deciding who would become PPG leader, and thus on the informal role expectations towards those who were eventually selected. By linking this to PPG leaders' self-conceived role orientations (*see Chapter 6*), we can assess whether or not the interviewed PPG leader lived up to these expectations. The latter would already provide us indications on the relevance of institutional expectations as factors shaping PPG leader roles (rather than independent, personal motivations).

### 3. Research results

#### 3.1. Formal institutional rules

##### 3.1.1. *Parliamentary standing orders (1995-2019)*

We start with formal rules on PPG leadership in parliamentary standing orders. Here we can be brief: there are not many. The few formal parliamentary stipulations that explicitly refer to PPG leaders can be distilled to four categories (*see Table 7.1*). These formal rules are quite stable over time. Where relevant, amendments made to these rules are mentioned.

A first category deals with the formal selection of PPG leaders. Both the standing orders of the Chamber (art. 11) and Flemish parliament (art. 7) stipulate that PPG leaders are formally selected among and by the PPG members. At the beginning of the legislative term (or whenever a PPG leader is replaced), PPG members formally inform the Speaker which members are part of the PPG and who is elected PPG leader.<sup>83</sup> Each MP can only be member of one PPG. Since 1995, PPGs in the federal Chamber and Flemish parliament need to consist of five MPs to be formally recognised as a party group.<sup>84</sup> This formal recognition is important as it has consequences in terms of PPGs' speaking time, staffing and representation in parliaments' governing bodies (*see below*).

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<sup>83</sup> In practice, we often see that this is just a formality. Although there are exceptions, most often the central party leadership decides who becomes PPG leader, generally after consulting (prominent) PPG members (*see below*).

<sup>84</sup> Before, only three MPs were needed, even though the federal Chamber consisted of 212 instead of 150 members (De Winter & Dumont, 2000; Van der Hulst & Muylle, 2017).

**Table 7.1. Formal regulations in parliamentary standing orders**

	<b>Chamber of Representatives</b>	<b>Flemish Parliament</b>
<b>Selection</b>	By and among PPG members (art. 11)	By and among PPG members (art. 7)
<b>Memberships</b>	Conference of Group Chairmen (art. 14) Bureau (art. 3).	‘Uitgebreid’ Bureau (art. 15)
<b>Rights</b>	Voting right in Bureau if PPG has at least 12 MPs (art. 3)	Be informed on Bureau decisions (art. 129)  Postpone vote on motions (art. 79)
<b>Duties</b>	Inform Speaker of changes in PPG composition (art. 11)  Inform Speaker of (changes in) committee membership (art. 157- 158)  Inform Speaker of PPGs’ plenary questions (art. 124)  Advice Speaker on holding of topical debates (art. 125)  Divide speaking time among PPG members (art. 44 & 48)	Inform Speaker of changes in PPG composition (art. 7)  Inform Speaker of (changes in) committee membership (art. 21)  Propose candidate for Speakership (art. 11)

*Note: article numbers denote locations in the standing orders’ editions of resp. 2019 and 2018 (see above)*

The second category sums up the parliamentary governing bodies in which the leaders of recognized PPGs are officially seated. In the Chamber, PPG leaders are formal members of the ‘Conference of Group Chairman’, together with the Speaker, former Speakers who are still member of the Chamber (since 2009) and one extra MP per PPG. The Conference generally convenes on Wednesday, and decides over the parliamentary agenda, speaking time, the convocation of committees and the holding of interpellations. PPG leaders are also formal members of the ‘Bureau’, together with – amongst others – the Speaker and Vice-

Speakers of the Chamber.<sup>85</sup> This body has a more administrative role and decides over parliament's patrimony, the appointment and dismissal of staff and the budget. In the Flemish Parliament, PPG leaders are not formal members of the administrative 'Bureau' (art. 12) but since 1998, all PPG leaders (also those of unrecognized PPGs) are formally informed about every Bureau decision. When it comes to the political functioning of the Flemish parliament, the leaders of the recognized PPGs join the members of the Bureau (i.e. the speaker, vice-speakers and secretaries) in the '*Uitgebreid*' (i.e. 'expanded') Bureau. This governing body convenes every Monday and functions similarly to the federal 'Conference of Group Chairman'.

A third category concerns PPG leaders' formal rights. The Chamber's standing orders mention that, if a PPG has at least 12 members, their PPG leader has a right to vote during Bureau meetings.<sup>86</sup> Since 2004, the internal rules of the Flemish Parliament furthermore mention that PPG leaders have the right to postpone a plenary vote on a motion following a topical debate with one hour, if requested.

The fourth category is most relevant for our purposes and deals with explicit formal duties appropriated to PPG leaders. These formal duties are, however, limited in number and scope and mostly relate to parliamentary organization in general. In both parliaments, all PPG leaders ought to formally inform the Speaker of changes in the composition of the PPG (i.e. members leaving or joining) or replacements in committees by letter. Since 1998, PPG leaders in the Flemish Parliament have the additional task to deliberate and propose a candidate as Speaker, striving to a maximum of support in the hemicycle (art. 11). The internal regulations of the Chamber furthermore literally stipulate that PPG leaders inform the Speaker on which question will be asked by which MP to a specific minister during the weekly plenary 'question time' (art. 124). They can additionally advise the Speaker to bundle several questions on the same topic in a 'topical debate' (art. 125).<sup>87</sup> Article 44 and 48 indicate PPG leaders' role in dividing the PPGs' speaking time among its members.

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<sup>85</sup> Only leaders of PPGs with more than 12 MPs have a right to vote in Bureau meetings. Before 2001, only leaders of PPGs with more than 12 MPs were member of the Bureau.

<sup>86</sup> The political relevance of this voting right is, however, limited as the Bureau mostly deals with organizational and materialistic matters.

<sup>87</sup> In practice, a similar procedure is followed in the Flemish Parliament.

The above illustrates that the number of *explicit* references in the standing orders made to PPG leaders' formal duties is limited. Nonetheless, ever since the Chamber's standing orders mentioned PPGs' for the first time in 1962<sup>88</sup>, consecutive amendments have further placed PPGs rather than the individual MP in the center of parliamentary decision-making (De Croo, 1980; Verleden, 2014, 2015). These amendments have granted important *implicit* rights to PPG leaders as coordinators and intermediaries between MPs and the parliamentary leading bodies and administration. These implicit rights include coordinating (or deciding over) the internal division of speaking time and allocating the committee seats or (remunerated) leadership positions in parliament (e.g. committee chair, vice-speaker) that are appointed to the PPG (Van der Hulst & Muylle, 2017).

### 3.1.2. *Party statutes (1995-2019)*

When examining party statutes, particularly the considerable variation between parties, both in terms of the amount and nature of formal rules on PPG leadership, stand out. While some parties only marginally mention PPG leaders, other parties spend quite some passages on their 1) selection, 2) statutory memberships, 3) incompatibilities and 4) duties.

The only party whose (current) statutes tell us something on PPG leaders' selection is Groen. Here we literally read that 'for each party group, a PPG leader is appointed by the entire PPG' (art. 10.1, Groen-statutes 2014). A similar but more detailed clause was integrated in the Flemish liberal's statutes up until 2008. Their PPG leaders were to be 'directly elected by the members of the PPG by secret ballot', if needed in multiple rounds until one candidate would reach an absolute majority (art. 17, VLD-statutes 2004). The interviews, however, reveal that political practice long surpassed this formal clause, as already in 1999 the role of the party president in selecting PPG leaders became decisive. Similarly, the statutes of the Volksunie (VU), the predecessor of N-VA, mentioned that party groups should draft their own internal regulations, which should be approved by the party council and should, among others, outline a procedure for the selection

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<sup>88</sup> This formal institutionalization of party groups occurred surprisingly late given that political parties already played a coordinating role in parliament before WWII. The reason for this late formal recognition lies in the fact that a significant part of the legislators holds on the normative ideal-type of the free, Burkean representative and opposes the idea of an 'imperative mandate' (Verleden, 2014, 2015).

of a PPG leader (art. 3.0.1.11, VU-statutes 1998). This clause was not taken over by the N-VA in its statutes after 2001.

In all six parties, PPG leaders are statutory members of the central party executive (i.e. '*partijbureau*' or '*partijbestuur*'). This powerful intra-party decision-making body convenes every Monday, is typically made up of around 20 key party actors (party leaders, ministers, MPs, directly elected members) and makes important collective decisions on the party's policies and communication strategies (see: Dewachter & Depauw, 2005). In the executives of Open Vld and sp.a, PPG leaders only play an advisory role as they do not have a right to vote unless they were directly elected as party executive members. As these bodies, however, mostly try to make decision by consensus, the relevance of this clause is limited.

Without exception, PPG leaders (like all other MPs) are also members of the 'party council' (or '*partijraad*') which is much larger (around 150 people, including local delegates) and on paper acts as the most important intra-party decision-making body in-between party congresses. In practice, however, the political role of party councils is limited, due to their sheer size and infrequent meetings (max. on a monthly basis) (Dewachter, 2005).

In the CD&V<sup>89</sup> and sp.a, PPG leaders are furthermore part of the small team, together with the party leader and his/her personal staff, which is in charge of the party's daily management. In N-VA this accumulation is formally prohibited. In sp.a, only the functions of PPG leader and party president are statutorily incompatible.

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<sup>89</sup> In CD&V, PPG leaders are also formal members of the committee '*Christendemocratie*', which reflects on the parties' basic principles and ideology.

**Table 7.2. Formal rules on PPG leaders in party statutes (1995-2019).**

	<b>VLD</b>	<b>CD&amp;V</b>	<b>sp.a</b>	<b>Groen</b>	<b>N-VA</b>	<b>VB</b>
<b>Selection</b>	-	-	-	By PPG members	-	-
<b>Memberships</b>	Party executive* Party council	Party executive Party council Daily management Ideological committee	Party executive* Party council Daily management	Party executive Party council	Party executive Party council	Party executive Party council
<b>Incompatibilities</b>	-	-	Party president		Daily management	-
<b>Duties</b>	Preside the PPG, which determines policies together with the party executive and congruent with party program  Can be held accountable by party congress	Organize weekly PPG meetings to prepare party executive and council and discuss how to implement party policies.  Attends party meetings  Responsible for: Proper functioning of PPG Internal labour division. Evaluation of PPG members Contacts with party Contacts with civil society Furthering party policies Safeguarding congruence between legislative work and party program  Further clauses on PPG-EPO relationship (art. 65-68)**	Report on PPG's activities in party executive and congress  Party executive should be represented at PPG meetings	The party executive can interpellate and evaluate PPG leaders  Initiate proposals and implement policies as determined by party council and congress	-	-

(\*) Only advisory (no voting right), unless directly elected as a member of the party executive.

(\*\*) Article numbers in CD&V statutes of 2013



Differences between parties mostly become apparent in the description of PPG leaders' formal tasks. N-VA and VB do not mention them at all. The sp.a only refers to PPG leaders' liaising functions. He or she needs to report on the party group's activities in the party executive and party congress and, vice-versa, the party executive should be represented in PPG meetings (art. 46, sp.a-statutes 2016).<sup>90</sup> Also in Open VLD and Groen formal rules on PPG leaders' tasks are minimal. The Flemish liberals' statutes mention that PPG leaders preside the PPG, which is responsible for developing policies, together with the party executive and congruent with the party program (art. 21, Open VLD-statutes 2011). PPG leaders can moreover be held accountable for their actions by the party congress (art. 12, Open VLD-statutes 2011). Similarly, Groen's PPG leaders can be evaluated and questioned by the party executive<sup>91</sup> (art. 8.3, Groen-statutes 2014). PPG leaders should furthermore oversee that 'fully-fledged proposals are initiated by MPs in each policy domain, which implement the policies as determined by the party council and congress and follow political strategies as outlined by the party executive, in close collaboration with the party president' (art. 10.5, *ibid*). Before 2005, the party's statutes also stipulated that PPG leaders should each year evaluate all PPG member, together with the party leader. His or her written reports should be transmitted to the party executive, council, the MP and their constituency (art. 9.4, Agalev-statutes 1996).

The party statutes of the Christian democrats hold the most elaborate and comprehensive description of PPG leaders' tasks. First, PPG leaders should organize weekly PPG meetings (except during holidays) where the party executive and council meetings are prepared. Here, PPG members deliberate how they can implement party policies and coordinate their individual activities (art. 37, CD&V-statutes 2013). The party president attends these meetings. Reversely, PPG leaders punctually attend meetings of the party executive and the daily management team (art. 64, *ibid*). The statutes furthermore explicitly stipulate that PPG leaders are formally responsible for a proper functioning of the PPG and the internal division of labour among its members. This includes having individuals talks with each MP once a year to evaluate his or her functioning in the PPG. PPG leaders are furthermore responsible for the congruence between legislative work and party

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<sup>90</sup> Here we also read that PPGs are responsible for their own internal functioning and should draft internal PPG rules. None of the interviewees, however, confirmed the existence of these internal rules.

<sup>91</sup> The 1996 statutes of Agalev are more detailed: this evaluation should be done on a yearly basis. PPG leaders should not be present during their own evaluation (art. 7.3).

decisions and the party program and contacts with the party and civil society (interest groups, etc.) (art. 65, CD&V-statutes 2013). Article 65-68 contain additional instructions that are applicable to all MPs. Among others, MPs should adopt an assertive but loyal attitude towards coalition partners, should subscribe to the collective nature of PPG-decision-making by discussing policy proposals with in the PPG before initiating them in parliament, and should remain in constant contact with the extra-parliamentary party.

Globally speaking, however, formal rules on PPG leaders' functioning remain quite limited, both in number and in scope. This leaves a lot of room for informal norms which, together with formal rules, make up the institutional framework (see above).

### **3.2. Informal institutional norms**

Informal institutional rules are unwritten, socially shared norms and expectations that members of an institution have on how institutional position-holders should adequately act (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013; March & Olsen, 1989; Searing, 1994). PPG leaders function at the intersects of parliaments and parties. In order to fully grasp informal institutional norms of how PPG leaders should fill in their mandates, we turn towards the informal expectations as formulated both by PPG actors (MPs, PPG secretaries) and EPO actors (party leaders, vice-leaders and senior staff members)<sup>92</sup>. When analysing these informal expectations, two central observations strike the eye: one, to some extent PPG and EPO actors stress norms related to different aspects of PPG leaders' duties and, two, informal role expectations towards PPG leaders' functioning are highly context-dependent.

#### *3.2.1. PPG and EPO actors' dominant role expectations*

First of all, to some degree the interviews reveal notable differences in the emphasized role expectations of PPG actors on the one hand, and EPO actors on the other. Although there are exceptions, PPG actors often refer to PPG leaders' role *in* the legislature. Most PPG members stress that PPG leaders should be good PPG managers. Some particularly emphasize their roles as experienced 'coaches', that *take the younger MPs under their wings*' (PPG actor 51). Most, however,

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<sup>92</sup> These generally are the party's 'political director' or 'general secretary', i.e. the party's highest ranked non-elected staff member.

stress the expectation that PPG leaders should foremost be empathic - rather than politically egocentric - team players. He or she should ensure that each and every MP gets credit for the work they have been undertaking, and are able to generate public attention for it on a regular basis. This implies that, in the view of many MPs, PPG leaders should not use their position to absorb all of the PPG's resources (i.e. media attention, speaking time) to raise a personal profile (PPG actor 32, 35, 37, 38, 42). Neither should he or she give special treatments to specific PPG members, favoring some MPs over others (PPG actor 63). The latter is one of the main reasons several respondents gave as to why one PPG leader was deselected before the end of the legislative term. MPs were dissatisfied with how the PPG was led, and once the party leadership realized the gravity of the situation, they decided to replace this person as a PPG leader (PPG actors 47, 48; EPO actor 50). Indeed, not paying attention to a fair division of parliamentary instruments is seen as truly detrimental for the collegial atmosphere and cohesion among PPG members (PPG actor 42, 63). Furthermore, a good division of labour is often considered more durable than relying on the capacities of a single leader:

“The real good PPG leaders are experienced, reconciling people, who are politically smart, can see through political strategies, are communicatively strong, but who are simultaneously, I will say, ‘courteous’ towards other people. They function very empathically. Because of that ‘cocktail’ they are internally respected and able to bang their fists on the table when needed. They are the independent minds who can train a group, who are supported by that group, who can move a group, who make sure that every member of that group can score and who, because of that, gain internal legitimacy” (PPG actor 31).

“You’ve got a good PPG leader when outsiders say: ‘darn, that is a strong PPG’. If all PPG members are able to ‘score’, then that is partly the merit of the PPG leader. He can also try to do it all by himself. But of course, if he then drops out during the middle of the term, it all falls apart. That, in my eyes, is the problem of *party x* right now” (PPG actor 42).

Some PPG actors stress that PPG leaders should mainly be eloquent, able to think strategically and be politically knowledgeable: they should be policy generalists that can intervene on each topic and should not fixate on a preferred policy domain. This is instrumental to what many see as a their top priority: to speak convincingly in the hemicycle as the PPGs’ primary spokesperson that defends party positions during the debates that matter.

“What lingers most is the external mage: he should be good in debates. For me that is honestly the main prerequisite. A PPG leader who slacks in the internal PPG

management, but knows how to stand his ground during debates that matter, is still a good PPG leader in my eyes. The PPG secretary would maybe have to step in a bit more but that is the most important criterion (PPG actor 37).

EPO actors' informal expectations are typically defined more broadly, referring to PPG leaders' role in the broader (party) picture. A majority of EPO actors emphasizes that a good PPG leader is someone who succeeds in maintaining unity, which is believed to contribute to the coherence and clarity of the party's standpoints as conceived by the general public, and to the parties' bargaining position towards political competitors. When in government, this is moreover considered crucial for the political stability of the cabinet (*see below*). Therefore, PPG leaders should not be agitators but have a reconciling nature, possess good 'people skills' and place high value on deliberation and consultation: or as one respondent put it: *it all starts with listening* (EPO actor 55). Simultaneously, he or she should have a strong character, be able to speak with authority, and have the knowledge, skills and sometimes political 'slyness' to craftily settle a discussion in a certain way when crucial for the party (leadership).

"A good PPG leader roughly knows how his people think. And who will criticize certain policies. It sometimes simply comes down to the slyness of PPG leaders in what order to let MPs intervene during PPG meetings to steer a discussion in a certain way. You can first give the floor to an experienced, respected MP who are in favour of the proposed policy or says: 'it isn't all that bad, is it?'. Criticasters will then often soften their tempers. You can also let them speak first and then let someone authoritative with an opposing opinion gloss things over. The group dynamics of a PPG require you to be present a lot, talk to people and try to figure out how they feel about certain topics" (EPO actor 55).

Whereas the quote above implicitly refers to PPG leaders tasks in ensuring top-down liaison, other EPO actors more explicitly emphasize the importance of PPG leaders as intra-party go-betweens. One party leader stated that for him, PPG leaders should express the concerns of the PPG and transmit to him '*what currently lives among group members*' and '*assess what would be their reaction if a certain decision at the party or governmental level was to be made*' [...]. Afterwards, they, however, also '*bear the responsibility of collectively defending these agreements internally and externally*' (EPO actor 39). Although acknowledging that this is difficult, another party leader stressed that a good PPG leader is someone who tries to make sure that '*legislation is not bluntly railroaded through parliament*' (EPO actor 34) but gets scrutinized, amended and brought to vote in considerate way.

### 3.2.2. *Context-dependency*

A second central observation with regards to informal institutional norms and expectations is that of their context-dependency. When asked: ‘what, in your view, constitutes a good PPG leader?’ many PPG and EPO actors typically start their answer by saying: ‘well, that depends’. Unlike what for instance Searing seems to imply in his discussion of the role of ‘whips’ in the British House of Commons, there appears not to be a ‘one-size-fits-all’ version of PPG leadership in Belgium. Informal norms of PPG leaders’ functioning is strongly affected by the political context. Although many respondents acknowledge individualistic differences between PPG leaders, three common, party-level contextual factors stand out as particularly crucial in shaping general informal role expectations: (1) the party’s government status, (2) party size, and (3) the party’s electoral mood.

#### *Government-opposition*

Central in close to all interviews is the government-opposition divide. Whether or not a party is part of the parliamentary majority strongly shapes the informal norms of what the job of PPG leader entails. Respondents stress that when in government, you need ‘*a specific profile as a PPG leader*’ (e.g. EPO actor 51). Someone who is internally-oriented. According to many, they generally should be particularly concerned with the internal management of the PPG and with liaising between the PPG, the EPO and the party-in-government.

Indeed, it is argued that government participation amplifies the need for a PPG leader who places high value on intra-party coordination and consultation. Majority PPG leaders should have good and frequent contacts with the EPO leadership and the party’s government ministers. This is not only during the formal, weekly party executive or PPG meeting (*see above*) but, more importantly, during the weekly, more informal and closed meeting with the party leader and ministers (often on Wednesday evening) in preparation of the council of ministers (on Friday). Although not mentioned in the party statutes, this is a crucial decision-making body. Here, the political agenda is talked over and upcoming policy-making at the level of government is prepared and discussed. Also the preparation and chairing of the weekly PPG meeting requires more attention for majority PPG leaders. They are expected to inform (and sometimes convince) PPG members of important governmental decisions or coalition compromises. Relatedly, a crucial informal role expectations towards majority PPG leaders is that they should keep their PPG members together and let them toe the line, as

set out by the party elite and government ministers. They should oversee and streamline PPG leaders' intentions and activities with governmental decision-making, '*slow things down*' (PPG actor 36) when PPG members want to initiate potentially politically sensitive proposals, and ensure that MPs do not embarrass coalition partners too much in their public interventions or breach informal agreements made between government parties prior to parliamentary sessions.

"Sometimes that can be quite 'a cold shower' for PPG members. When you want to take a number of initiatives or asks parliamentary questions and then a PPG leader says: 'this and this and this has been decided in government, so that and that, we cannot do anymore. We agreed not to intervene on this subject'. So then that's done" (EPO actor 44).

"The moment you enter government, the role of the PPG leader for 90% is to make sure that the party group toes the line - how regrettable it may sound. And that is crucial. There are constant meetings where PPG leaders and ministers discuss the political agenda and deliberate on party positions. Parties which are often in government tend to select the dreariest figures to the outside world, of whom you thought: how is it possible that they make him PPG leader? But of course, that is smart. Their main task is to make sure that everyone... calm... And solve potential problems between the PPG and government, the PPG and the party, and sometimes, the party and government" (EPO actor 45).

The informal institutional norm that majority PPG leaders should contribute to cabinet stability by coordinating PPG, EPO and government decision-making is that stringent and well-understood, that many respondents acknowledge that majority PPG leaders have considerably less autonomy and intra-party authority than opposition PPG leaders. Although expected to take the floor and get in front of 'their' minister when he or she is in political difficulties, they play a more supporting role, which to a large extent is behind the scenes and away from the public eye.

"You obviously have less autonomy as a PPG leader when in government. In a majority party, you are government's 'errand boy'. It may sound belittling but, yes, an errand boy" (EPO actor 40).

The above does not paint a very bright picture of an ideal-typical dualistic relationship between the legislative and the executive branch. Several respondents, however, do mention that good PPG leaders are also capable of influencing policy-making, creating room for the initiatives of backbenchers and scrutinize government decisions (PPG actors 63, 65, EPO actors 34,51). Rather than doing

this through the use of formal and publicly visible parliamentary instruments and activities, however, this is said to occur during internal meetings by trying to co-shape governmental policy-making, and by controlling the actions of coalition partners, providing ‘constructive criticism’ and overseeing the execution of the party’s preferred policies as formally agreed-upon in the coalition agreement (PPG actor 56, 63)(see also Chapter 6).

Whereas the role of majority PPG leader is very much restricted by informal expectations, this is less the case with opposition PPG leaders. First of all, they enjoy a higher intra-party status. In the absence of ministers, they are the most important and most visible politicians of the party next to the party president.<sup>93</sup> More than majority PPG leaders, they can thus adopt an external role and act as an important party spokesperson. Indeed, respondents generally stress that opposition PPG leaders should foremost be able to eloquently put forward the party’s positions, and to challenge those of others. Evidently, they are expected to criticize governmental policies but a critical attitude towards other opposition parties is also necessary to become acknowledged by the broader public as the officious ‘*leader of the opposition*’ (EPO actor 44).

“When in government, PPG leaders should pay a lot of attention towards the functioning of the group. And if there are sensitivities in the PPG, he should somehow try to canalize them internally, in order to avoid political incidents. In the opposition, your focus should of course be more external” (PPG actor 35).

The duty of the opposition is to oppose. Although MPs often stress that being in opposition is quite satisfying given the relative freedom they enjoy compared to MPs from governing parties, it can also be ‘*greatly unsatisfying*’ (PPG leader 9) as it requires a lot of hard work but often generates little directly observable results in terms of policy influence. Respondents therefore stress that a good PPG leader in the opposition should be a good motivator. A captain of the team who is able to encourage people to undertake parliamentary activities, intervene in debates, criticize government members and propose new policy alternatives:

“If you’re in the parliamentary majority, and you remain silent – you’re even expected to remain silent – all is ok. But if you’re in opposition, and you remain silent, then the entire machine comes to a halt. They expect you to undertake initiatives. The more

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<sup>93</sup> Often, party leaders and PPG leaders organize informal and closed meetings similar to the ‘Wednesday-evening’ meetings in majority parties.

the better. You need a PPG leader who encourages and incites MPs: ‘fire away, boys!’” (PPG actor 36).

In sum, while majority PPG leaders seem rather restricted in their functioning due to clear management and liaison-related expectations that are crucial for maintaining government stability, opposition PPG leaders seem to have more leeway and can also focus more on their tasks as spearheads and spokesperson.

### *Party group size*

A second contextual factor that strongly shapes informal institutional expectations of PPG leaders’ functioning, is the size of the PPG they lead. PPGs in the Chamber and Flemish parliament can comprise just a handful of MPs (5 as the bare minimum to get recognized) or, to the contrary, they can consist of around 30 to 40 legislators. As noted in the introductory chapters, PPGs are typically characterized by horizontal differentiation (i.e. specialization). This means that policy domains (and committees seats) are divided among MPs who then become the PPG’s policy specialist on that topic. A major difference between PPGs based on their size, is that in smaller or medium-sized PPGs each MP is generally appointed to one or more committees and its subsequent competences in their entirety (e.g. mobility, education). Very large PPGs, however, are entitled to multiple seats in each committee. As a result, each MP logically gets a smaller piece of the pie and is expected to ‘hyperspecialize’ into a narrow, highly segmented topic<sup>94</sup> (PPG actor 49, EPO actor 47).

Consequently, many respondents stress that in large PPGs what you need is a PPG leader with good managerial skills. PPG leaders should primarily be playmakers, who ensure that every MPs’ tasks and responsibilities are clearly outlined and that internal conflicts between MPs (often within the same committee) are avoided or resolved.

“That is an important assignment for a PPG leader. We had five MPs in each committee. And each individual MP of course wants to show to his voters, to his constituency that he is doing his job. So that is not always easy and sometimes there are frictions of ‘who gets to what’, who gets to ask which question and stuff like that. So resolving those conflicts is an important task for the PPG leader, taking into

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<sup>94</sup> The policy domain ‘education’, for instance, might be ‘chopped up’ into preschool, primary, secondary, higher and adult education.



account all possible sensitivities and everyone's personal character. Even the more so with a group of 32" (PPG actor 60).

Moreover, although they can generally delegate more tasks, as larger PPGs are also better equipped with staff, it is argued several times that large PPGs require a leader who takes his or her role as a coach for the newer MPs seriously: growing as a PPG generally implies welcoming a lot of newcomers in the legislature. Overall, leaders of smaller PPGs are not required to coach MPs that much (it depends on the seniority of PPG members) and are less often faced with internal conflicts relating to the division of labour. Leaders of small PPGs are, however, typically expected to ensure that each committee meeting is attended by at least one PPG member, and they are also required to do more of their own. Often, they have to step in themselves and actively follow one or more committees or policy domains (PPG actors 59, 60).

A benefit for smaller PPGs is that there is more room and time for internal deliberation. Whereas PPG leaders of large parties are required to tightly chair and steer the weekly PPG meeting (which, according to one leader of a large group, can take the size of '*a small parliament in itself*' (PPG leader 23)), leaders of smaller PPGs tend to have more room to thoroughly discuss positions and strategies among their members.

"You should imagine, at that time, a PPG meeting was basically the eight of us around one table. We had the culture of really debating things through. But the end goal always was: 'Ok, guys, we have to find a common position'. It was always like: 'What are we going to do?', 'Do we propose amendments?', 'Who intervenes?', 'What will we say?', 'Come on, guys, go get them'. That was a totally different dynamic than later. When we were bigger, and more of a machine. The PPG meeting was mainly a forum for the party leadership to tell their troops what was going on, and what we could, or couldn't do. You can't really compare that" (EPO actor 51).

### *Electoral mood and prospects*

Lastly, in times where political parties increasingly face electoral uncertainty due to high levels of voter volatility (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2002; Dassonneville, 2011; Drummond, 2006), it should come as no surprise that the electoral mood or prospects of parties influence their internal functioning and shape informal expectations towards their office-holders. During several interviews it was stressed that when a party suffered severe electoral losses, or even when it is doing

bad in the polls, this has drawbacks on PPG leaders' perceived duties, in two main ways.

First of all, when faced with electoral defeats, parties tend to perceive this as an important message from the voter and will try to turn the electoral tide by renewing their organization, image and policies (see also Chapter 6). For PPG leadership in particular, this generally means that relatively young politicians who are new faces to the general public, are preferred over more well-known, experienced party politicians, who carry the 'burden of the past'. This inclination to select 'new faces' connects to the expectation that PPG leaders should try to embody the new party message, adopt an external role and convince the voter of the party's policies and general added value.

"Of course, PPG leader to some extent represent the party's image to the public, and even more so in opposition. If you say 'our party is renewing' but then select *person X* [a highly experienced, well-known party politician], then that is not really a sign to the outside world that you're renewing of course. So that's difficult. You have a bunch of politicians who could make good PPG leaders. But you can't select them and simultaneously say: we are renewing. It does not work that way. You're obliged to look at the upcoming talents. And try to manage things from within the party headquarter as much as possible" (EPO actor 33).

Secondly, when the party is 'electorally in the defensive', respondents furthermore stress that it is even more crucial for PPG leaders to be in constant contact with the EPO leadership as they are generally expected to be closely involved in shaping renewed policies and strategies and in preparing the next electoral campaign. Moreover, particular attention is required to liaising between the central party and the PPG. Gloomy electoral prospects might bring out an individualistic 'urge to survive' among MPs (PPG actor 41), making not only their liaising tasks but also their duties in maintaining PPG unity more important and more challenging. Party renewal (both in terms of policy and personnel) might invoke resistance from the more seasoned party office-holders and the risk of what is labeled in the literature as 'collective action problems' (e.g. Kiewiet & McCubbins, 1991; Strøm, 2000) increases as MPs become less confident in the electoral strength of the party brand and are incentivized to emerge in personal vote-seeking behaviour. PPG leaders are therefore expected to pay particular attention to keeping the PPG together as a collective entity.

"Things don't get easier. When you are in a winning mood, the party leader can walk in this room and say to you: this 'table is round'. You would probably look at him and

think: ‘did he get crazy’, but you would not discuss with him. He is the one who gets the votes, so when he says this square table is round, he probably has good reasons to do so. End of story. When the party gets in troubled waters, however, then you get a situation in which each individual wants to place him- or herself in the picture, at the expense of the collectivity. And then, as a PPG leader, you are in a pickle. Where every MP wants to go his own way. Away from the collective idea, towards the individual. That’s just how the system works. It is a deflationary spiral, really” (EPO actor 33).

### **3.3. Institutional expectations meet role players: selection criteria**

At this point, we identified formal and informal institutional rules, norms and expectations towards PPG leaders’ functioning in Belgium. While the number and scope of formal rules are limited, informal norms are more extensive and salient. The latter refer to PPG leaders’ general roles as managers, spokespersons and intra-party go-betweens and, as demonstrated, appear highly contingent upon contextual factors such as the party’s government status, size and electoral prospects. The question, however, still remains how and to what extent context-dependent role expectations are transmitted and made clear to position-holders as role players.

The interviews reveal that informal role expectations are only seldom literally expressed or communicated to PPG leaders. ‘*You don’t get rule book for PPG leadership*’, as one respondent put it (PPG leader 1) or ‘*there is no formal contract between PPG and PPG leader*’, as another formulated it (PPG leader 20). Nevertheless, PPG leaders are well aware of what is expected of them, because they themselves - as generally seasoned politicians - know what is needed in a specific political constellation (PPG leader 17) but also because they know *why* they were selected as PPG leaders in the first place, and why others were not. As mentioned above, the role expectations of the selectorate become apparent in the selection criteria they use and are highly likely to invoke a degree of responsivity of PPG leaders to their selectorate (Hazan & Rahat, 2010). Several PPG leaders, moreover, stressed that MPs and party leaders ‘*knew what they were up for when they chose me*’ (PPG leader 18) or state that the selectorate ‘*knew how I would fill in a position like this*’ (PPG leader 17). As such, the relationship between selection processes (in which role expectations come to the surface) and actual role orientations might be more reciprocal and complex than often theorized.

Below we discuss the selection criteria that are used by selectorates when deciding whom will be selected as a PPG leaders. But who exactly are these selectorates?

As briefly touched upon above, PPG leaders are generally selected by a combination of EPO actors and PPG members. Still the influence of these respective actors in this (mostly informal) process varies. In some parties (e.g. sp.a, N-VA, VB and VLD), the party leader typically plays a predominant part by proposing a candidate PPG leader in the PPG meeting, after consulting (prominent) PPG members.<sup>95</sup> On paper, the PPG can reject this proposal as it is formally responsible for selecting its own leader (*see above*) but it typically follows the proposition made by the party leader without further ado.<sup>96</sup> In other parties (mostly in Groen and to some extent also CD&V), the party leader plays a more reserved, advising role and the PPG is granted more autonomy to select its own leader, often casting a vote by secret ballot in the PPG meeting in case of multiple candidates.<sup>97</sup> Although it logically might influence the responsivity of PPG leaders to the PPG or EPO, especially as these actors to some extent emphasize different informal role expectations, we do not focus on these varying degrees of influence in the selectorate here (see, however, *Chapter 8*). Instead, we focus on the substantial selection criteria that were mentioned both by PPG and EPO actors during the interviews as in one way or another (either as advisory or decisive actors) they were involved in this selection. As explained above, the criteria that were used to select PPG leaders reflect MPs' and party leaders' (individual-level) informal role expectations. Moreover, by discussing them per PPG leader role type (see Chapter 6), we to some degree examine the relationship between context-driven, informal role expectations and the actual role orientations of PPG leaders.

Gallagher and Marsh (1988, pp. 6-8, 247-256) distinguish between objective and subjective selection criteria (see also: Seligman, 1971, p. 12). Objective selection criteria refer to ascriptive or sociodemographic factors that might determine a choice for a certain candidate. Indeed, achieving a gender balance, territorial dispersion or a balance between intra-party factions are selection criteria that were mentioned during the interviews. Examples of subjective criteria are organizing capacities, communication or bargaining skills, experience or track record in the

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<sup>95</sup> Although also here examples have been raised where the PPG enjoyed more autonomy to select its PPG leader via secret ballot.

<sup>96</sup> Several examples have been raised where discontent among other aspiring candidates was appeased by allocating them other legislative positions like committee chair, Bureau member (PPG actor 37) or vice-PPG chairman (PPG actor 47).

<sup>97</sup> However, also in these parties there are examples where PPG leaders were appointed by the party leader.

party (Gallagher & Marsh, 1988, p. 6). The latter are most relevant here, as they indicate what EPO and PPG actors find important characteristics and capacities of PPG leaders, in the specific context the party is in.

### 3.3.1. *Party soldiers*

The interviews with EPO and PPG actors reveal a number of prevalent subjective criteria that led to the selection of the PPG leaders that were qualified as ‘party soldiers’ (N=12) in the previous chapter. Their party loyalty or good personal trust relationship with the party leadership are the criteria that are mentioned most often as an important, if not the most decisive factor when selecting PPG leaders that fall in this subcategory. Ahead of their start, they are already believed to be ‘compromise-minded’ (EPO actor 56) and are seen as a ‘safe choice’ (PPG actor 38) for party leaders due to their general unwillingness to foster internal divisions or rebellions within the party.

Also candidates’ parliamentary experience and political track records in the diverse echelons of the party are often – but not always – important motives for selecting PPG leaders that later adopt this role orientation. On the one hand, experience is important for understanding parliamentary procedures and ‘*debunking opponents’ political games*’ (PPG actor 36). On the other, it is also functional for earning one’s stripes within the party, building support within the PPG, and developing the leadership skills and natural authority required for the job. Because they are generally experienced, well-known politicians, candidate-PPG leaders are believed to prioritise the collective functioning of the PPG over building their personal fame and status. When running candidates for PPG leadership are relatively inexperienced, their self-expressed intentions to act as team players appear decisive. By way of defending one’s candidacy in the PPG meeting, one interviewed PPG leader (PPG leader 6) listed all of his colleagues’ capacities and domains of expertise, rather than focusing on his own competencies, in order to convince PPG members to choose him as PPG leader. The fact that he did eventually monopolise several PPG resources (it was, amongst others, mentioned that he used the PPG spokesperson more as a personal assistant) was given as one of the reasons why he was not re-selected in the next legislative term (PPG actor 38). Similarly, another PPG leader was said to fill in his position too egocentrically, was confronted with internal discontent within the PPG, and was de-selected and replaced by a PPG leader that does fit the qualifications of a ‘party soldier’ before the end of the legislative term (EPO actor 47, 50; PPG actor 48).

Lastly, it should be noted that the ‘party soldiers’ in our sample always belong to government parties. These parties have multiple desirable executive offices to allocate at the start of the term and, although the interviewed PPG leaders generally qualify as ‘someone fit to become government minister’ (EPO actor 46) they often failed to obtain a ministerial office by a hair’s breadth. This too is often mentioned as a decisive factor: party leaders might offer him/her the position of PPG leader by ways of ‘consolation’ (PPG actors 30, 32; EPO actor 33). The following citation of an MP quite neatly sums up all that has been discussed above:

“The criteria that mattered most, because I remember it well, was that *person X* had built an extensive track record as a parliamentarian and was appreciated for his loyalty to the party. And in fact never got the chance to enter government even though he was always considered *ministeriable*, to say it with an ugly word. Also because he was and still is a charming man [...]. It was a very easy discussion at the level of the PPG. Personally, I don’t know anyone who lives in conflict with *person X*. He always seeks consensus. And he was a quite comfortable choice for the party elite. They could make him do anything” (PPG actor 31).

### 3.3.2. *Crisis managers*

PPG leaders that fall into the ‘crisis managers’-category (N=6) are chosen for entirely different reasons. The used selection criteria are moreover quite coherent and recurrent. First of all, for the reasons mentioned above, selectorates looked for ‘new faces’ rather than seasoned and experienced politicians. This is in fact the central criterion mentioned by EPO and PPG actors for all PPG leaders identified as crisis managers. When appointing PPG leaders of whom is expected to help with the party’s renewal operation and get it out of electorally troubled waters, it would be ‘*insensible*’ (EPO actor 33) for party selectorates to choose someone whom the voter associates with the party’s ‘*ancien regime*’.

Although rather unknown to the general public, the selected candidates have generally been noticed within the PPG and party for their decent parliamentary work and political talent. They ‘*proved themselves*’ (PPG actor 30) on relative short notice and are believed to be able to manage despite their limited experience.

Thirdly, although their loyalty and organizational skills are also mentioned, it is mostly the communicative skills of candidate-PPG leaders in this category that mattered. PPG leaders that are identified as crisis managers were, also prior to their selection, expected to become an important spokesperson that expound and defend (new) party policies and embody the party’s renewal strategy. Although

also their managerial skills are deemed important as a negative mood increases the need and difficulty of maintaining group cohesion and liaising with the EPO (*see above*), being eloquent is seen as the capability that truly matters. In fact, one respondent in this category was replaced prematurely as a PPG leader by someone who was believed to be stronger in debates and could further build the party's external profile, after the main internal problems the party was facing were sorted out.

“He is one of the most underestimated and least appreciated politicians of our party. Because he had one problem. He is not a good public speaker. That's it. For the rest I give him all the credit he deserves. He is loyal, a good manager, a warm person, a policy generalist, one of the people that saved our party. But he had difficulties with ad-hoc debates” (EPO actor 46).

### 3.3.3. *Parliamentarists*

The criteria that are used by the selectorate to appoint the PPG leaders identified as '*parliamentarists*' in Chapter 6 (N=3) are less consistent. One clear exception is candidates' prior parliamentary work. Much like in the category above, the aspiring-PPG leaders that are effectively chosen are especially respected by other PPG and EPO members because of their reputation in parliament, which was sometimes acquired in relative short notice.

“In his first months in parliament, *candidate X* really got his teeth into a number of dossiers. Also got in the media frequently. In a very short period of time he built a good reputation as a decent parliamentarian. He also clearly had a different style than *candidate Y*. More sec, very knowledgeable, much stronger in analyzing the budget and stuff like that” (EPO actor 60).

As also implied in the last sentence of this quote, being seen as a policy generalist who can lead internal discussion on all topics and can keep her or his ground during debates on general governmental policies is another factor that is mentioned in the interviews with politicians involved in the selection of parliamentarists.

At least equally important as a criterion are candidates' support in the PPG, as PPG members were typically very closely involved in the selection of the selection of the '*parliamentarists*' in the sample. Although in two of the three cases multiple MPs in the PPG openly expressed their candidacy for the position, there was relatively little discussion (and almost unanimity) among PPG members of whom to select as a leader. In one case, an opposing candidate whom had an explicitly

sharper and more ambitious profile than the eventual PPG leader was deliberately not chosen, as the latter was more moderate, compromise-minded and well-liked person within the PPG.

“He is a true gentlemen. Intrinsically, he also was the best candidate. A beloved, kind man. I think that the personal contacts with the other PPG members were much more important at that time than political-strategical considerations” (PPG actor 52).

#### 3.3.4. *Instrumentalists: Prodigies and Status Protectors*

Finally, we turn towards the selection of the PPG leaders that fall into the instrumentalist-category (N=8). We start with the first subgroup of ‘*prodigies*’. Much like the ‘crisis managers’ discussed above, the desire of party selectorates to launch ‘new faces’ was a decisive selection criterion in the appointment of PPG leaders in this group. Party group leadership is seen as a good platform for young, talented politicians to learn the ins and outs of political decision-making and build their personal reputations in the electorate. Because of the latter, particular value is attached to candidates’ eloquence. In order to fully enjoy and employ the benefits of the launching platform they have been offered, they should be able to clearly and convincingly explain and defend party positions during plenary meetings and during contacts with the media.

Selectorates’ decision to experiment with a young, inexperienced PPG leader seems reasoned or justified as it is often made while the party is in opposition. Rather than focusing on the internal PPG management or liaising tasks, they reflect the selectorates wish to invest in the party’s external image to the outside world. One PPG leader of the prodigy-subgroup was, however, selected while the party was in government. An EPO actor that was closely involved in his selection process admits that this might have been an atypical choice (see the citation below) and several rather critical accounts have been raised during other interviews that this persons’ main interest was not managing the group as one would expect from a majority PPG leader, but rather to ‘increase his own personal fame’ (PPG actor 30).

“Government or opposition matters a great deal. You need entirely different profiles [...]. You need someone who is less sharp, more consensual in nature, and brings messages more subtle or in a veiled way. Why then choose *person X* as a PPG leader, is indeed an apt question [...]. Even at that time, in majority, we saw: well, that guy has a lot to offer. Very talented, but too young to become minister. And then you also have to protect them against themselves. Because those youngsters all believe that



they can become prime minister at 18. But PPG leadership was perfect for him. Perfect. There he could learn the *métier*” (EPO actor 33).

The selection of PPG leaders in the ‘*status protector*’-group is rather peculiar, in the sense that candidates here often themselves lobbied actively, intensively and successfully in order to become selected as a PPG leader. Their considerable political weight in the party often allowed them to do so. They are generally renowned for their political insights, knowledge, eloquence and (political and electoral) successes, have a long history of serving in the higher echelons of the party and often also occupied executive office in their fruitful careers. The choice for them as PPG leaders by PPG and EPO actors is often seen as an ‘evident one’ (PPG actor 59) or even an ‘automatism’ (EPO actor 58), as it invokes little discussion in the PPG meeting.

“That was an automatism. There was practically no discussion about it. No-one ever questioned his appointment. No-one proposed another candidate. Everyone always thought that it would be rather normal that *person X* was PPG leader” (PPG actor 60).

It should be furthermore noted that, the selection of seasoned and authoritative politicians as PPG leaders in this group sometimes *immediately* follows a top position within the party (e.g. party president) or the executive branch (e.g. minister). In some cases indeed, parties look for an elegant ‘way out’ in order not to demote him or her immediately to a backbench position. This selection of a PPG leader can be seen as temporary, allowing the selected candidate to look for new opportunities – for instance outside of national politics, as the political context in which the party finds itself might require a different profile, in the heads of party selectorates. The quotation below illustrates how one PPG leader that falls in the status protector-category was selected right after a major electoral loss for the party, but was replaced two years later by someone with the characteristics of a crisis manager.

“We had no reason whatsoever to liquidate *person X* after the elections. That was not our style. It was all sad and messy enough. [...] The selection of *person Y*, two years later should be seen in terms of a relay race, which I gave my full support: a new face, younger, same region” (EPO actor 40).

In sum, the above illustrates that the PPG leaders in our sample were appointed after running through considerate selection processes where party selectorates (PPG and EPO actors) make thoughtful judgments of what the PPG – and by extension the party – needs from a PPG leader in light of the political context it

is in. The criteria they use reflect their (context-dependent) informal expectations of how a PPG leader should fill appropriately act. The citation below by one of the interviewed PPG leaders quite clearly summarize the point we make here:

“In politics, it often depends on having ‘the right person on the right place on the right moment’. The context is crucial. Someone can be ‘the right person on the right place in the wrong moment’. And then he will fail. The context has to match up. And most of the time, the group... You can have contingencies but my experience is that selection processes in political parties are not carried out unwisely. And when you are the subject of this process, you only tend to realize that afterwards...” (PPG leader 9).

These expectations and used selection criteria indeed seem to match with the description of PPG leaders role orientations in Chapter 6. However, we also pointed out instances where they did not match, which can lead to dissatisfaction within the PPG or even to PPG leaders’ eventual deselection.

## **4. Discussion**

In line with dominant theoretical views of institutionally-constrained frontbench roles in parliament (see Chapter 2), a study of the roles of PPG leaders cannot overlook the institutional framework. In this chapter, we examined the existence, transmission and to some extent also the consequences of formal and informal institutional rules, norms and expectations.

As formal institutional rules in parliamentary standing orders and party statutes are limited in number and scope, we discussed how particularly informal institutional norms, developed and maintained by parliamentary and extra-parliamentary party actors, appear more relevant. While informal institutional norms are indeed more encompassing and relate to PPG leaders’ tasks as managers, intra-party go-betweens and political spearheads, they are also context-dependent. Particularly the party’s government status, size in parliament and electoral prospects are important contextual factors that shape informal role expectations. As such, role variance among PPG leaders appears at least partially driven by important informal role expectations of how to act under certain political conditions.

In addition, we argued how PPG leaders’ selection process is crucial for the transmittance of (context-specific) informal norms and expectations to role players (e.g. Hazan & Rahat, 2010; Strøm, 1997). Indeed, while role expectations

are generally not explicitly expressed, and there is no ‘rule book on PPG leadership’ (PPG leader 1), the interviewed PPG leaders do tend to understand why they were selected. We showed how the selection criteria used by PPG and EPO actors to decide whom to select as a PPG leader to a large extent match with their role orientations identified in Chapter 6. We moreover showed on several occasions how a ‘mismatch’ between informal role expectations (reflected in selection criteria) might be followed by discontent among PPG members, or even to PPG leaders’ eventual deselection after - or even during - the legislative term.

As such, the institutional framework, and particularly informal institutional norms and expectations do appear to matter as crucial factors shaping the general functioning of PPG leaders. Of course, the institutional framework provides only one part of the global picture. Since the emergence of neo-institutionalist approaches it is stressed that parliamentary roles – or at least those of backbenchers – are also shaped by legislators’ intrinsic preferences (Searing, 1994) or rational career goals (Strøm, 1997). The next chapter therefore provides an integrative explanation of PPG leader roles, that takes into account both contextual-institutional factors, and role players’ personal motivations.

# Position or preference?

## Explaining parliamentary party group leaders' roles with mvQCA

### 1. Introduction<sup>98</sup>

In Chapter 6, we provided an in-depth description of the roles of PPG leaders in Belgium. We discussed what being a PPG leader entails in general, demonstrated how differences among PPG leaders are structured along two dimensions and developed a typology of five PPG leader roles that run along them. We described the intricacies of each role type and examined their links with specific forms of behaviour related to the job. In Chapter 7, we then turned towards the (partial) explanation of these roles by focusing on formal and informal role expectations. We discussed how mainly informal institutional norms as developed and maintained by institutional agents (e.g. MPs, party leaders, senior staff) are important, and how these norms are context-contingent and how they are reflected in the selection criteria used to appoint a candidate considered suited for the job.

This chapter shifts the focus back towards the interviewed PPG leaders. We further analyse how diverging contextual, party-level pressures partially lie at the basis of PPG leadership roles by examining how these pressures are perceived by the role players themselves. However, as we discussed in the theoretical chapters of this dissertation, it is also essential to take into account the personal goals and preferences of these actors. After all, the central contribution of neo-institutionalist approaches on roles is that they release legislators from their strict

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<sup>98</sup> Substantial parts of this chapter are published in: B. de Vet (2019). Position or preference? Explaining parliamentary party group leaders roles in Belgium. *Parliamentary Affairs*, doi:10.1093/pa/gsz023.

utilitarian or sociological cocoons by blending ‘roles, rules and reason’ (March & Olsen, 1989; Searing, 1994, p. 3). They form the synthesis between sociological and economic perspectives on political behaviour, arguing that both institutional pressures (i.e. the norms that constrain and enable) and individual factors (i.e. strategic goals and intrinsic preferences) are driving forces behind legislators’ roles (Andeweg, 2014; Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012; Müller & Saalfeld, 1997; Searing, 1994; Strøm, 1997), thereby placing individual legislators and their motivations back at the centre of analysis (Searing, 1994, p. 25). Nonetheless, in Chapter 2 we criticized that by differentiating between the roles of front- and backbenchers, and applying their theoretical insights mostly on the latter, dominant neo-institutionalist approach still adopt very deterministic – in fact, structural-functionalist - interpretations of leadership roles in parliament. Searing (1994) originally categorized the roles of leaders in parliament as ‘position roles’ which, unlike backbenchers’ ‘preference roles’, are highly crystallized and defined by institutional norms. Later, Strøm (1997, 2012) would take over this distinction, contending that institutions are the rules that constrain reason, whereby position roles (i.e. fully institutionally determined strategies) and preference roles (i.e. institutionally unconstrained strategies) are the polar points on a continuum of constraint.

As argued, we disagree with this rigid categorization that led to an underexposure of role variance among frontbenchers, and advance a more actor-centred approach of leadership roles in parliament. After elaborately demonstrating that PPG leaders within the same parliament can conceive of their roles differently, something that already is a relevant contribution in itself, this chapter focuses more in detail on the explanatory factors that underpin the varying role orientations of PPG leaders. Building on the broad theoretical expectations we formulated in Chapter 2, and drawing on the findings in the previous chapter, we first of all argue that the meso-level should not be overlooked: different PPG leader role orientations might result from *diverging informal institutional pressures at the party-level*. For one, parties’ *government status* might play a role. When in government, PPG leaders are not only responsible for ensuring the legislative works’ congruence with party positions but also for ensuring its compliance with coalition compromises (Depauw & Martin, 2009). While majority PPG leaders bear crucial responsibilities in securing cabinet stability (De Winter & Dumont, 2006; Laver, 1999), opposition PPG leaders might act more independently. Also the *size of the PPG* might matter: larger PPGs generally face more internally

preference heterogeneity and require more elaborate structures and efforts to streamline MPs' activities (Heidar & Koole, 2000c; Sieberer, 2006).

Different informal expectations might, however, not always suffice in order to explain the full array of role variance. A second expectations is that *also individual preferences and goals matter*. Like backbenchers, PPG leaders could indeed play 'preference roles'. Particularly progressive *career ambitions* and *experience* might be decisive (Best & Vogel, 2012; Strøm, 1997). PPG leadership is often a stepping stone for higher office (party leader, minister, speaker) (de Vet & Wauters, 2015). As they control parliamentary resources that can be used for self-promotion (media access, speaking time), PPG leaders who aspire higher office might fill in their position differently than those who do not. Experienced PPG leaders have moreover undergone longer socialisation processes which could make them particularly loyal to the desires of the central party elite. Alternatively, it could be argued that elder, more experienced PPG leaders are less dependent from the (central) party elite for their future careers, either because they have built a strong personal electoral base or because they do not seek re-election anymore. This could make them more 'detached' from the party elite. Moreover, the analysis might show signs of 'deviant cases' that, according to the contextual constellation, could be expected to adopt a certain role (following the logic of 'position roles') but, due to particular reasons, in practice adopt another role. Also these deviant cases could support the idea that also among legislative leaders, preference roles are possible.

This chapter thus contributes empirically and theoretically by providing an integrative explanation of variance in the roles of PPG leaders as often neglected parliamentary actors, and bringing together the contextual pressures but also the individual-level incentives that underpin them. This chapter, however, also makes a methodological contribution by showing how (multi-value) qualitative comparative analysis (mvQCA) can appropriately supplement the in-depth examination of MPs' roles with a systematic and variable-oriented cross-case analysis of their primary determinants. In the following paragraphs, we discuss the data and methodology used in this chapter more in detail.

## 2. Data and methods

### 2.1. Qualitative analysis of PPG leader interviews

Data-wise, this chapter builds on the findings of Chapter 6 and predominantly draws on the information acquired with the semi-structured interviews with (former) PPG leaders. The central ‘dependent variable’<sup>99</sup> in this chapter are PPG leaders’ role orientations as identified and described in Chapter 6. There, we found that there are indeed distinct differences between PPG leaders, which roughly centre around two dimensions. First, while some respondents adopt a clear *external focus*, mainly aimed at acting as the PPG’s central spokesperson, others adopt a clear *internal focus*, aimed at acting as managers, coaches and playmakers. Secondly, while some attach a lot of importance on *top-down liaison*, making sure PPG members support party elite decisions, others believe it is rather their duty to mostly conduct *bottom-up liaison*, by furthering the wishes of PPG members in central party decision-making bodies. Building on this dual classification, which reflect inherent dilemmas in the day-to-day functioning of PPG leaders, we developed a typology of five distinct PPG leader roles: e.g. party soldiers, parliamentarists, status protectors, prodigies and crisis managers (*see Table 8.1*).

**Table 8.1. PPG leader role types as ‘dependent variables’ (N=29)**

	Party soldiers	Parliamentarists	Instrumentalists		Crisis managers
			<i>Status protectors</i>	<i>Prodigies</i>	
Focus	Internal	Internal	External	External	External
Liaison	EPO	PPG	PPG	PPG/EPO	EPO
N	12	3	5	3	6

The first part of the empirical sections below, in which we explain the identified role types, is dedicated to the qualitative analysis of the explanatory factors that arose during the interviews with PPG leaders. The raw interview data are interesting for this purpose, first, because respondents tend to tell about their roles in terms of how they believe they should act and *why* (Searing, 1994). Second, besides reflecting on one’s own functioning, we additionally asked respondents to reflect on the functioning of their colleagues, by asking 1) if they believed other

<sup>99</sup> Between quotation marks as the terms ‘dependent’ and ‘independent’ are generally not used when following QCA’s epistemology (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009; Schneider & Wagemann, 2010).

PPG leaders fill in their positions differently than how they did and 2) why they believed this was the case. PPG leaders' responses to these questions provide meaningful insights into the explanatory factors that lie at the basis of leadership roles in parliament, as perceived by the office-holders themselves. The relevant party-level and individual-level factors that emerge from this qualitative analysis, moreover, provide a useful starting ground for the second part of the empirical analysis below, in which we examine the relevance of potential explanatory factors more structurally and in conjugation with each other, with the use of multi-value qualitative comparative analysis (mvQCA) (Duşa & Thiem, 2015; Haesebrouck, 2016; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012, pp. 255-263)

## **2.2. Multi-value Qualitative Comparative Analysis (mvQCA)**

Methodologically novel is that this chapter additionally uses (multi-value) QCA to systematically structure and examine the determinants of (PPG leaders') parliamentary roles (see also the methodological chapter of this dissertation). First elaborated by Charles Ragin (1987), QCA allows systematic cross-case comparison by converting cases (e.g. PPG leaders) into 'configurations': combinations of explanatory 'conditions' and subsequent 'outcomes' (e.g. role types). QCA wields a conception of causality (*'multiple conjunctural causation'*) that acknowledges real-world complexity by stating that (1) outcomes are often provoked by a conjunction of conditions rather than a single cause, (2) different combinations of conditions may produce the same outcome and (3) depending on the context, conditions may have a different impact on the outcome. Using its analytical tools based on Boolean algebra, QCA aims to find necessary conditions (which are always present when the outcome occurs) and sufficient conditions (which always lead to certain outcomes) (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). As, we do not solely integrate dichotomous (*crisp-set QCA*) or continuous variables (*fuzzy-set QCA*) but operationalise the roles of PPG leaders – i.e. the outcomes – as mutually-exclusive multinomial categories, the QCA variant we use is *multi-value qualitative comparative analysis* (mvQCA) (Cronqvist & Berg-Schlosser, 2009; Duşa & Thiem, 2015; Haesebrouck, 2016).

We have argued that QCA is highly appropriate for grasping the complex interplay of individual calculations and institutional incentives that underpin legislative roles, which makes more sense epistemologically than focusing on isolated causes. Moreover, QCA – which despite its growing popularity has not fully found its way to legislative studies, let only to legislative role research – might provide a helpful



middle-road for studies on roles that wish to combine in-depth insights into MPs' roles with a systematic cross-case analysis of the variables that explain them. Choosing QCA as a research strategy often reflects the intention of researchers to marry two contradictory goals: one, to gather in-depth insights in cases and gain intimacy with their complexity (for which qualitative, small-N research designs are most suited) and, two, to adopt a variable-oriented approach that produces some level of generalization (for which quantitative, large-N research designs are best suited) (Berg-Schlosser et al., 2009; Rihoux, 2006).

In addition, while theoretical assumptions on legislative roles are often applied, they are not often tested (Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012; Saalfeld & Müller, 1997). By including both contextual and individual-level conditions, we can effectively test neo-institutional approaches' assumptions on leadership roles. Can different institutional constellations alone lead to different role types? Under what circumstances, if any, do individual-level factors play a role? All analyses below are performed using *QCA version 3.3* for R (Duşa, 2018). For the specific selection and operationalisation of the variables, we refer to the result sections below.

### **3. Determinants of PPG leaders' roles**

We first return to the semi-structured interviews with PPG leaders (N=29) in order to qualitatively identify the relevant explanatory variables that shape roles as experienced by the role players themselves. As mentioned earlier, practically all respondents themselves (27 out 29) acknowledged that the way they fill in their mandate probably differed from the way others did (*see Chapter 6*). When further probing into the underlying factors that explain such differences, respondents emphasized the importance of both exogenous, contextual pressures and more endogenous, individual-level incentives, which is very much in line with basic theoretical insights on the determinants of legislative roles. Note that several of the determinants of context-driven role expectations identified among PPG and EPO actors (*e.g. Chapter 7*) re-emerge here, which seems to highlight the importance of institutional pressures on PPG leaders' roles. We first discuss institutional or contextual explanatory factors and then proceed to individual-level incentives.

### 3.1. Institutional-contextual factors

#### 3.1.1. Government-opposition

The majority of PPG leaders argue that differences between PPG leaders can be explained by their party's government status. '*It is the alpha and omega of PPG leadership, really*', one respondent (PPG leader 13) summarized.

When the party is a member of the governing coalition, PPG leaders' main task is to assure that the executive is backed by a majority in parliament. In the first place, this requires PPG leaders to focus predominantly on the internal PPG management. They make sure within the PPG, everyone knows his or her place, role and remains satisfied to the extent that they feel 'more of a psychologist than someone who deals with substantive policies' (PPG leader 9). They ensure that backbenchers remain informed of governmental decision-making or political strategies and policies as outlined by the party leadership. Together with the leaders of other majority PPGs, they prepare parliamentary activities and make sure that potential incidents (e.g. disagreements between coalition partners) are defused before they reach the surface. Simultaneously, however, respondents state that they remain important agents of the party during these contacts. They try to ensure that coalition partners execute and concretise the agreed-upon policies in a correct way (PPG leader 27), thereby avoiding the 'agency loss' that might occur as policy domains are delegated to specific ministers (e.g. Martin & Vanberg, 2011). Due to the importance of internal PPG management and (mostly top-down) liaison with party elites and coalition partners, the bulk of majority PPG leaders' work is situated behind the scenes.

"On the one hand, you have these *sturm-und-drang* PPG leaders like *PPG leader X* and me back in the days. The rising talents who bring firework in parliament, making bold statements, the grandstanders. On the other hand, you have someone like *PPG leader Y*, who almost endearingly defends government decisions in parliament, to the point where you think: come on, you don't believe this yourself, do you? Or *PPG leader Z*, who was clearly there to keep the bunch together and make sure that no-one rocks the boat. That's the difference between opposition and majority. Opposition is much more fun. *PPG leader Z* probably was a better majority PPG leader than me. Majority PPG leaders are the janitors of politics (*laughs*). You try to clean up the mess before anyone notices it" (PPG leader 1).

Opposition PPG leaders, on the other hand, have to be less concerned with their liaising and managerial duties. One, because there evidently are no coalition

partners with whom they have to coordinate in order to maintain cabinet stability and, two, because they are not bound by concessions made by the party when negotiating coalition agreements, which are an important source for internal PPG discontent in majority PPGs (PPG leaders 9, 14, 19, 26). Instead, opposition PPG leaders are expected to focus more on the external aspects of being a PPG leader, giving government (parties) a hard time during parliamentary activities, debates and media performances, as also illuminated in the outlets above.

Due to the absence of a party-in-government, PPG leaders of opposition parties are considered to be higher placed in parties' internal pecking order, which would allow them to more successfully shape party policies and direct party's internal decision-making closer to PPG members' preferred outcomes (PPG leader 3, 7, 21), increasing the likelihood of bottom-up oriented roles. One PPG leader stressed that this may be 'fun at first', because you can really 'give it a go as you are not restricted by the wishes of coalition partners' (PPG leader 10). It can also get frustrating, however, as a direct impact on policy-making is generally not immediately observable. Thus, while majority PPG leaders are perceived to enjoy less autonomy due to rather crystallized role expectations (i.e. they ought to support the cabinet), they are better informed and remain closer to the center of (governmental) decision-making. One majority leader noted as follows:

"It is perhaps a witticism but my position is interesting rather than amusing. Because you constantly have to put the brakes on. Of course, yeah, you are more closely involved in political decision-making. That's true. But the fun thing you have in opposition: "let's go for this...". With us that generally turns into: "be careful, because..." (PPG leader 16).

### *3.1.2. Party group size*

Second, PPG leaders argue that the size of the PPG is another contextual factor that influences one's role in parliament. Similar as outlined by MPs, party leaders and other actors, large PPGs are faced with many backbenchers but limited opportunities and resources to build one's profile and work around concrete policies in parliament. PPGs are typically internally characterised by a division of labour (Brady & Bullock, 1985; Saalfeld & Strøm, 2014) and the more MPs a PPG has, the more committees and policy domains are broken down into smaller packages, in which legislators are able to specialize, gain expertise and act as the party's spokesperson. Due to this '*hyperspecialisation*', respondents that lead a large PPG tend to focus a lot on the PPG management and thus often appear to adopt

an internally-oriented role. Even more than others, they stress their roles as playmakers, who (1) design a well-considered division of committee seats and policy domains at the beginning of the legislative term and (2) pay particular attention to preventing and resolving ‘border conflicts’ that arise when multiple MPs claim responsibility for dealing with specific (often newly arisen) political issues.

“We have four MPs in each committee. That means that colleagues quite easily enter each other’s territory. That demarcation of policy domains took quite some time in the beginning. I think it all crystallized now, but OK, every week you still end up in situations where the one or the other thinks it is up to him. So then you have to soothe people and make decisions that are not pleasant for everyone. If you are a member of [very small] PPG  $x$ , you can follow External Affairs, Pensions and Railways, sort of speak. With us, that demarcation is much stricter. Colleagues very finely have to feel: when is it up to me? And that can lead to clashes” (PPG leader 16).

While leaders of large PPGs are managers who can delegate a lot of substantive parliamentary work to backbenchers or staff as large PPGs are also better equipped with personnel (De Winter & Dumont, 2000), leaders of small PPGs do not have this luxury and are required to do more of their own (e.g. intervening in committees). Although smaller PPG (especially the non-recognized ones) experience a number of direct disadvantages (e.g. not being able to influence agenda-setting in parliaments’ governing bodies), they also bring a number of practical advantages, as the citation below demonstrates. Internal policy deliberation is much easier and the distance between PPG leaders and MPs is smaller, which could encourage PPG leaders to practice bottom-up liaison.

“It is much harder to keep track of everything. But in the past I could always rely on one member in each committee. Now we have to do a lot by ourselves. Also practically. We used to organize a PPG meeting each week where we discussed which plenary questions we would ask. Now, I already submitted mine for tomorrow. Rather than organizing those obligatory meetings, we discuss a lot by phone right now. As a recognized PPG, you are in the Conference of Chairmen and you get first-hand information. Right now, I often have to ask the Speaker: ‘let me know at least, what you decided in the Conference’. In order for us to prepare debates decently” (PPG leader 11).

Lastly, it should be noted that several interviewed PPG leaders indicated that also presiding the *largest* governing party makes a difference<sup>100</sup>. This contributes to the idea that the explanatory factors that shape roles should be examined in conjugation with each other (*see below*). PPG leaders of the largest majority party stress their roles as consensus-seekers, that bring fellow majority PPG leaders around the table and resolve intra-coalition conflicts before they reach the surface. Like the prime minister presides the cabinet', they facilitate meetings with majority PPG leaders', try to find common denominators in the preparation of parliamentary activities and exercise particular restraint in their external communication in order not to tread on coalition partners' toes (PPG leader 9, 7).

### 3.1.3. *Party selectorates*

The candidate selection literature expects office-holders to pay particular attention to the grievances of their selectorates as a central motivation of politicians is their wish to be at least reselected for their position in a later phase of their careers (Hazan & Rahat, 2010). This could be relevant as PPG and EPO actors who - with varying degrees of influence (see below) - make up the selectorate of PPG leaders, to some extent accentuate different expectations with regards PPG leaders' roles (see Chapter 7). It might, moreover, also impact PPG leaders' tendency to defend the wishes of backbenchers in central party decision-making bodies (bottom-up liaison) or to act as a representative of the central party leadership in the PPG (top-down liaison).

We find hints in of PPG leaders' responsiveness to their selectorate in the empirical data as many respondents know why they were appointed in the first place and to whom they owe their position (e.g. PPG leader 3,7,16,17,20,23). The inclusiveness of the selectorate and particularly the leeway given to PPGs to select their own chairperson, moreover, seems connected to political parties' organizational cultures and the general autonomy granted to PPGs by EPO leaders.

As mentioned earlier, both the PPG and the EPO leadership are typically involved in the selection of PPG leaders. In some cases, however, the party leader typically cuts the knot, generally after consulting (prominent) PPG members to check how a choice for certain candidate would be received in the PPG and if he or she would

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<sup>100</sup> As it generally delivers the prime minister (although the Michel I government is a clear and recent exception).

get support. Although there are exceptions, parties that are described by respondents as quite hierarchical, well-structured and disciplined, like sp.a and N-VA (PPG leaders 2, 16, 22), generally tend to follow this procedure, which at first glance results in more top-down oriented role orientations of PPG leaders. Also in the liberal VLD, party leaders generally have an important say in the selection of PPG leaders, although several occasions were reported where party leaders give more weight to the wishes of the PPG (PPG leader 27, 28) or where their preferential candidate was challenged by others (PPG leader 28). These could be emanations of what some liberals call a more individualistic, less structured culture (PPG leader 28, PPG actor 49) and seems to lead to quite some role variance between PPG leaders.

In other parties, the PPG generally plays a more decisive role in selecting its leader. Groen appears to have adopted quite an open selection procedure where candidatures (sometimes backed by the party leader, however) are openly discussed in the PPG meeting, which can be followed by a secret ballot vote (PPG leader 20, 21; PPG actor 41, 42). Here, we more often find more bottom-oriented PPG leaders who tend to see themselves as representative of the PPG in EPO bodies. An exception can be seen during party's period in government, when PPG leaders were selected more exclusively by the party leader and also respondents' roles focus more on top-down liaison. The radical right-wing VB is a special case as the power centre here seemed centred for a long time in the PPGs – albeit still centralized in the hands of the influential and charismatic group leaders, whose position was long-time uncontested (PPG actor 59). As the parties' electoral results started waning, these powerful group leaders resigned which provided the EPO the opportunity to appoint younger PPG leaders (EPO actors 58, 61) with a more distinct willingness to conduct top-down liaison (from EPO to PPG).

One party appears an exception with regards to an apparent link between PPG leaders' selectorates and their role orientations. In CD&V, PPG leaders are often elected by secret ballot in the PPG meeting (although there are also exceptions). Still many respondents fall into role categories with a rather distinct focus on top-down liaison from the EPO to party members. One explanation is that this party has a long tradition as a governing party. It therefore seems necessary to further look into effect of the selectorate on PPG leaders' roles in conjugation with other explanatory variables.

#### *3.1.4. Electoral mood*

Already during the description of the role of ‘crisis managers’ in Chapter 6, the relevance and impact of the parties’ electoral mood became clear. When a party is packing electoral punches, this has a major impact on PPG leaders’ functioning as clarified vividly by the respondents. In several instances, it was reported during the interviews that bad results in the elections (or polls) made parties slip down into an ‘existential crisis’ (PPG leader 8, 24), where they had to re-evaluate their position in the party landscape and convince voters of their political relevance. Several interviewed PPG leaders claimed that they were selected precisely to help turn the party’s electoral tide. Often supplementing renewed party policies and a new communicative strategy, new political personnel is selected (i.e. party leaders and PPG leaders) to break with the past and embody the parties’ renewal. PPG leaders subsequently define their role as externally-oriented in the first place, trying to gain as much visibility as possible and reclaim the party’s position on the political and electoral map.

“I think I was chosen as a PPG leader, one, because I already built some political experience both in front and behind the screens. Two, I was quite young. Three, my communicative talent. I think I am a better communicator than a lot of my fellow PPG members. That is just how it is. Those three factors made me someone with whom you ‘can go to war’, on the one hand, but also young, new and fresh enough to embody a clear-cut break with the past” (PPG leader 3).

Still, for reasons already touched upon earlier, the internal PPG management is not to be neglected when a negative electoral mood is prevalent in the diverse party ranks. One, in the wake of potential further electoral losses it is stated that some PPG members tend to leave the sinking ship (PPG leader 24) or become more individualistic as chances for re-election are dwindling (PPG leader 26). Due to a larger risk of political disunity, PPG leaders often have to pay particular attention to people management, trying to detect discontent before it is too late and convince PPG members not to further harm the party by letting disunity reach the surface. Second, more practically, bad electoral results come with a direct decrease in political staff (funded by parliament) and public funds (used to employ party staff) (Moens & Smulders, 2017). This means that in the aftermath of the elections several PPG members had to allocate a lot of time on the re-organization of the PPG (and sometimes the party), in preparation of the next elections (PPG leader 24). Lastly, several PPG leaders said to devote particular attention to their roles as coaches, in order to turn the subjective electoral mood of the party’s

backbenchers and keep the moral of the troops high (PPG leader 8, 10). This implies “*undertaking actions en masse, make sure that people scored again on their domains. To make them feel comfortable again in their parliamentary activities, which is rather labour-intensive*” (PPG leader 10).

### 3.1.5. Time

Lastly, we look at evolutions throughout time. During the interviews, several societal and political evolutions were addressed that influenced the perceived functioning of PPG leaders on a more systemic level during the last two decades. About half of the interviewed PPG leaders (14 out of 29) mentioned *mediatisation* as an influencing factor (or rather, media personalization (e.g. Rahat & Sheaffer, 2007; Wattenberg, 2009). MPs are thought to be increasingly dependent on ‘getting good press’, among others as the electoral reform of 2002 enlarged electoral constitutions to the provincial level, which reduced the importance of having a good local reputation as candidates have to reach out to a wider electorate (PPG leader 23) (see also the work of Bräuninger, Brunner, and Däubler (2012) on personalised parliamentary behaviour in Belgium). PPGs put more and more focus and staff on political communication (PPG leader 5), there is a growing desire to rapidly jump on the bandwagon when issues become highly salient (PPG leader 15) and, according to some, an increasing focus on coming up with original soundbites has led to an erosion of the parliamentary debate (PPG leader, PPG leader 25). Moreover, while many report that the coverage of parliamentary debates has increased (e.g. due to live coverage on television, internet, social media), it is the general impression that the media increasingly focus on a handful of mediagenic individuals while the interest in substantial policies or committee work has waned (PPG leaders 8, 19, 23) (see also: Van Aelst, 2018). As a result, several respondents report a perceived shift in the roles of PPG leaders towards a more external focus as communicators and spearheads, restraining their ability to play a more internally-oriented role.

“There used to be much more room for the collectivity. The way the media cover politics has changed. They increasingly narrow the spokespersonship on issues. Somehow that’s more interesting. Due to that, also the role of the PPG leader has evolved. For example, take a dossier about economy or education, of which you have an absolute but unknown expert in your PPG. Even when sending out a press release, it will be co-signed by the PPG leader. To attract media attention. Or the media expect you as a PPG leader to expound the PPG’s position. Almost pushing away other PPG members. Unless they start roaring or take up radical standpoints. That they will pick



up [...]. That makes it hard for a PPG leader who wants to be a coach. You are almost obliged to act as a spearhead, otherwise they will not pick up your issues” (PPG leader 22).

Relatedly, some respondents argue that the media increasingly focus in individual dissidence within party groups, which is regarded as a factor that plays into the hands of party elites, strengthening their claim to strictly streamline policies, communication and avoid that dissidence reaches the outside world (PPG leader 18). Also the growing complexity of decision-making due to several state reforms and non-homogeneous competences in the multi-level environment (PPG leader 18, 20) and the increased fragmentation of the party system, leading to smaller parties and less stable coalitions (PPG leader 9, 26) are said to increase the need for tight control and top-down liaison by PPG leader.

While multiple respondents point to perceived evolutions others argue that the roles of PPG leaders, essentially have not changed over time. Strikingly, PPG leaders in the latter group are typically respondents that were either PPG leader during the entire research period (PPG leaders 12, 13) or in the beginning and the end (PPG leader 1, 27). Moreover, although our sample size and purposive sampling strategy does not allow us to really make statements on systematic shifts in PPG leaders’ roles, we find both PPG leaders with an external and internal focus in the beginning and the end of the research period in our sample. The same applies to PPG leaders with a bottom-up and a top-down oriented role. For these reasons, we will not further consider ‘time’ as an explanatory ‘condition’ in the analyses below.

### **3.2. Individual-level factors**

#### *3.2.1. Political experience and ambition*

During the interviews not only contextual (party- and systemic-level) explanatory variables came to the surface. Also individual-level factors and incentives were mentioned as having an important influence on the role orientations of PPG leaders. Some respondents primarily stress colleagues’ capacities, skills and engagement that coloured their terms as PPG leader (e.g. eloquence, being a policy generalist, not accumulating with a local executive mandate). More relevant here are the - often interrelated - factors of PPG leaders’ prior political experience and potential future career ambitions as they more directly affect the preferences

(Searing, 1994; Strøm, 1997) and 'logic of appropriateness' (March & Olsen, 1989) in the heads of respondents. PPGs possess a lot of resources (i.e. speaking time, opportunities for self-promotion such as plenary questions and media access) that are allocated by PPG leaders (as playmakers) to specific group members, and that can be used to build one's reputation. Highly ambitious PPG leaders, i.e. often young politicians who were made PPG leader with the explicit intention of providing them a launching platform (see Chapter 6 and 7), tend to use these resource to adopt a distinct external profile as a PPG leader, aimed at raising one's own profile. This might lead to PPG members' 'expressing their discontent in the corridors of parliament' (PPG leader 24), as these PPG leaders tend to neglect their tasks as playmakers and coaches.

"If you're younger you still have to build your own name and fame. So you try to attract as much attention as possible to yourself, without looking: are others scoring as well? While I, I was older [and a former minister] and did not feel the need to constantly say: "Did you see me?". [...]. Young, talented politicians tend to use the PPG leadership for themselves out of the ambition: "I want to climb the ladder". But the problem is then that they are not paying attention for the group they are responsible for. That's why I say: being a coach is incredibly important. There are PPG leaders who want to intervene on everything. Even though they never attend committee meetings. Even though there is someone in the PPG with a lot more expertise. Yeah, that's a difference you can easily see" (PPG leader 22).

More experienced PPG leaders, on the other hand, are already well-known by the public, often already fulfilled many of their career ambitions (e.g. as former ministers or party leaders) or at least have less to prove to the party and the electorate. As a result, they are often more internally-minded. Rather than constantly taking the floor themselves, they are more easily satisfied with a back-office position, in which they try to transfer the experiences and skills they acquired throughout their careers to younger backbenchers, advising them and providing them ample opportunities to grow in parliament.

"There are PPG leaders who depart from the philosophy: 'it doesn't always have to be me'. Whose goal is to ensure a good coaching and guidance of PPG members and who's fine with the PPG's vision being defended by other PPG members. And then there are colleagues who are more selfish. Who belief they can and should always do it themselves. That is the major typology I see. The PPG leader who prioritizes the group, and the PPG leader who thinks he is that important that he should take the floor as much as possible" (PPG leader 2).

## 4. Integrative model using mvQCA

### 4.1. Operationalisation and truth tables

After identifying the relevant explanatory variables from the elite interview data, it is time to analyse them in combination with each other and provide a more integrative picture of the factors that shape the roles of group leaders in parliament. After all, roles are the products of complex *interactions* between a legislator's personal preferences and his or her judgements of what is considered as institutionally-appropriate behaviour. Suited to study these role-based interactions between institutional constraints and personal goals because of its underlying causal logic, we use Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA). Although the (conservative) solution formulas below are not the most parsimonious (i.e. using also logical remainders), they indeed tell something important about these interactions between institutional pressures and individual incentives. What room for manoeuvre is there for a young and highly ambitious PPG leader who chairs a large, majority PPG? Under what circumstances – if any – are individual preferences the decisive shaping factors of group leaders' roles?

The first step in QCA's analytical procedure consists of selecting and operationalising the variables and constructing the so-called '*truth tables*' which link cases (i.e. PPG leaders) to configurations of *conditions* (i.e. explanatory variables) and *outcomes* (e.g. role types) (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012, pp. 91-93). The QCA variant used here is multi-value QCA (mvQCA) (Cronqvist & Berg-Schlosser, 2009; Duşa & Thiem, 2015; Haesebrouck, 2016). The outcomes are operationalised into five mutually-exclusive categories that indicate the role orientation of PPG leaders as determined in Chapter 6. This is either 'party soldier' (PS), 'crisis manager' (CM), 'parliamentarist' (PA), 'status protector' (SP) or 'prodigy' (PR).<sup>101</sup>

The conditions are all operationalised in binary terms: variables are given a score of 1 if they are present or 0 when they are absent in a case. They are selected based on the theoretical expectations expressed above and because of their empirical relevance as pointed out during the interviews. The dichotomization of the

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<sup>101</sup> As only the outcomes are multivalent and the five multinomial categories are mutually-exclusive (i.e. membership in an outcome set directly implies non-membership in another) the analyses largely corresponds with five crisp-set analyses for each outcome separately, integrated in the same summarizing tables.

condition values cautiously rests on rather robust quantitative thresholds based on objective data, statistical population data (i.e. the dataset used in Chapter 5) or – in a single case - quantitative scores derived directly from closed-ended questions in the semi-structured interviews, in order to reduce the risk of measurement bias (Rihoux & De Meur, 2009; Schneider & Wagemann, 2010).

In a first step, only party-level conditions are integrated in the analysis in order to examine to what degree contextual pressures alone define and explain roles. We operationalise four contextual (party-level) conditions. Cases' *government status* (GOV) is dichotomised quite straightforwardly into either '1' (majority) or '0' (opposition). *Large PPGs (LP)* (1) are distinguished from small PPGs (0) using 15 seats – i.e. the population mean PPG size for Flemish parties in the federal Chamber since 1995 - as a quantitative threshold.<sup>102</sup> For the third condition, indicating if PPG leaders are '*central party appointees*' (CPA), we rely on closed-ended questions that asked PPG and EPO actors to indicate on 10-point scales how much in their view, a number actors (e.g. the party leader, the PPG, the party executive) weighed on the choice to select *person X* as a PPG leader. When EPO actors score highest, PPG leaders are labelled '1'; if the PPG was decisive, '0'.<sup>103</sup> A fourth and last party-level condition is aimed at detecting the impact of the electoral mood on PPG leaders' roles. It indicates whether parties, compared to the elections before, made relative *electoral gains* (EG) in the federal or regional elections prior to the selection of their PPG leader (1) or if they suffered losses (0).

The first truth table below shows what configurations of (institutional-contextual) conditions lead to which role types as outcomes and indicates which cases (i.e. the interviewed PPG leaders) correspond to these configurations. Logical remainders, i.e. the rows or configurations of conditions that are theoretically possible but for which there is no empirical evidence (i.e. a case) available (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012) are not incorporated in the truth table (see Table 8.2).<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> PPGs are on average slightly larger in the Flemish parliament. Taking the mean size of Flemish parties in both the federal and Flemish parliament (17 seats) since 1995 does not alter the results in any way since the dataset contains no respondents that lead a PPG of exactly 15 or 16 MPs.

<sup>103</sup> As such, we obtained the judgement of two respondents (one PPG and one EPO actor) per PPG leader. In case of contradictory judgements (i.e. in 1 case), we turned towards PPG leaders' own assessments.

<sup>104</sup> A truth table with  $N$  conditions contains a maximum of  $2^N$  rows. Our truth table thus consists of 12 rows out of a theoretical maximum of 16, which showcases the considerable diversity in our sample.

**Table 8.2. QCA Truth table with only institutional (party-level) conditions**

Row	Conditions				Outcome	Cases
	GOV	LP	EG	CPA		
1	1	1	1	1	PS	16,17,25,26,29
2	0	0	0	1	CM/SP	4,11,14,23,24
3	1	1	0	1	PS/PR	1,2,5
4	0	0	1	0	SP/PR/PA	12,20,21
5	0	1	0	1	CM/SP	3,8,10
6	1	0	1	0	PS/SP	19,27
7	1	0	1	1	PS/PA	18,22
8	1	1	0	0	PS	6,7
9	1	1	1	0	PS	9
10	0	0	1	1	PR	15
11	0	1	0	0	PA	28
12	0	1	1	0	SP	13

*Note:* GOV = government party; LP = large PPG; EG = electoral gain; CPA = central party appointee; PS = party soldier; CM = crisis manager; SP = status protector; PR = prodigy; PA = parliamentarist.

As one might expect from theoretical perspectives on institutionally-constrained leadership or ‘position roles’ in parliament, the first truth table indeed certainly has some explanatory power. This is for instance demonstrated by the first row where the presence of the same conditions (i.e. being selected by the central party elite and belonging to a large, majority party that won in the most recent elections) drive 5 cases to the ‘party soldier’ role.

However, 6 out of 12 rows of this truth table are so-called ‘*contradictory configurations*’: i.e. rows where the same combination of conditions lead to different outcomes. Row 3, for one, applies to 3 PPG leaders with the same contextual background factors. While PPG leader 2 and 5 are clear examples of loyal, internally-oriented ‘party soldiers’, PPG leader 1 is a young and ambitious ‘prodigy’ with a clear external focus. One of the strategies for resolving contradictory rows, which we will use here, is adding an extra condition to the analysis (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012, pp. 120-123). We include the individual-level condition ‘experience’ (EXP) as it is generally related to political socialization and the fulfilment of career ambitions, which has been identified as an important explanatory factor by respondents (*see above*). Cases’ political experience is, however, more straightforward to quantify than a more subjective measure of, for

instance, respondents' political ambitions. Population data reveals that PPG leaders' prior experience is on average 2 legislative terms (de Vet & Wauters, 2015) which will be used as the quantitative threshold. Respondents who became PPG leader in their first or second term in (regional or federal) parliament are thus labelled as inexperienced (0); the others (or those with regional or federal ministerial experience prior to their selection as PPG leader) as experienced (1).

**Table 8.3. QCA Truth table including party- and individual-level conditions**

Row	Conditions					Outcome	Cases
	GOV	LP	EG	CPA	EXP		
1	1	1	1	1	0	PS	16,17,29
2	0	0	0	1	1	CM/SP	4,23,24
3	1	0	1	0	1	PS/SP	19,27
4	1	1	0	1	1	PS	2,5
5	1	1	1	1	1	PS	25,26
6	0	0	0	1	0	CM	11,14
7	0	0	1	0	0	PA/PR	20,21
8	0	1	0	1	0	CM	3,8
9	1	0	1	1	1	PS	18
10	1	1	0	0	0	PS	6
11	1	1	0	0	1	PS	7
12	1	1	1	0	1	PS	9
13	0	0	1	0	1	SP	12
14	0	0	1	1	0	PR	15
15	0	1	0	0	0	PA	28
16	0	1	0	1	1	SP	10
17	0	1	1	0	1	SP	13
18	1	0	1	1	0	PA	22
19	1	1	0	1	0	PR	1

*Note: GOV= government party; LP= large PPG; EG= electoral gain; CPA= central party appointee; PS= Party Soldier; CM= Crisis Manager; SP= Status Protector; PR= Prodigy; PA= Parliamentarist.*

In the second truth table (see Table 8.3), the number of contradictory rows immediately drops considerably from 6 to 3 (containing 7 instead of 16 cases). Remaining inconsistencies are explained by returning to the interview data. Row 2 contains two 'crisis managers' (case 4 and 24) who were both appointed to help steer the party away from the electoral storm it was in. PPG leader 23, a 'status

protector’, in fact actively lobbied to replace PPG leader 24 by the end of that same legislative term, when the party’s electoral prospects started to look brighter, and did so mainly in order to get back in the picture: *‘my entire career, I was in the parties forefront and all of a sudden I sat there in the back of parliament. Once I got the opportunity to return, I didn’t hesitate too long’* (PPG leader 24). Also in the other two contradictory rows it is a matter of character, preferences and distinct political aspirations. PPG leader 21 (a ‘parliamentarist’) too sees differences between himself and PPG leader 20 (a ‘prodigy’): *“he is more temperamental: politics runs through his veins. When something starts to smoke, he tends to jump straight on it himself”. That’s not how I would personally act”*. Differences between PPG leader 19 (a ‘parliamentarist’) and 27 (a ‘status protector’) stem from the fact that the former more actively tried to give a platform to the PPGs’ youngsters as he knew that he would retire before the next election, while the latter did see his mandate as a way to generate personal public attention. Nevertheless, we can conclude that experience as a condition does play an important role: it reduces many contradictory configurations and the few remaining contradictory rows are quite easily explained by the fact that experience is indeed generally linked to, but cannot be entirely equated with the fulfilment of (saturated) career ambitions. We therefore proceed with this truth table.

## 4.2. Analysis of necessity

After operationalising the variables and constructing the truth table, we delve more into the conditions’ causal importance. As proposed by (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012, p. 278), we start with the analysis of necessary conditions. Necessary conditions are conditions that always present when the outcome is present (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009, pp. 10-11). Without this condition, the outcome is not empirically observed.

Table 8.4 shows that necessary conditions are found for each role type. The descriptive measure of consistency demonstrates to what degree the empirical data supports the statement of necessity and should be ‘1’ for a necessary condition to be fully ‘consistent’.<sup>105</sup> The descriptive measure of coverage provide an indication of the relevance of necessary conditions: high values approaching 1 indicate high

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<sup>105</sup> The formula for the consistency of X as a necessary condition for outcome Y is:  

$$\frac{N \text{ cases where } X=1 \text{ and } Y=1}{N \text{ cases where } Y=1}$$

relevance, low values indicate trivialness (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012, pp. 144-147).<sup>106</sup>

**Table 8.4. Analysis of necessity**

Outcome	Conditions	Consistency	Coverage	N
Party Soldiers (PS)	GOV	1.000	0.800	12
Crisis Managers (CM)	gov	1.000	0.750	6
	eg	1.000	0.750	
	CPA	1.000	0.750	
Parliamentarist (PA)	exp	1.000	0.214	3
Status Protector (SP)	EXP	1.000	0.333	5
Prodigy (PR)	exp	1.000	0.214	3

*Note: Uppercases denote the presence of a condition, lowercases the absence. “\*” indicates the conjunction of conditions. GOV=government party; LP=large PPG; EG=electoral gain; CPA=central party appointee; EXP= experienced.*

Party soldiers are always in government. The coverage value is quite high (0.8) and indicates that 80 % of all majority PPG leaders in the dataset belong to this role type. Exceptions are PPG leader 1, an ambitious ‘prodigy’, and a somewhat surprising choice as PPG leader for a large majority party as also he acknowledged, PPG leader 22, a ‘parliamentarist’, convinced that a degree of dualism between the executive and parliament is highly desirable, and PPG leader 27, a ‘status protector’ with a lot of political weight in the party.

Interestingly, for the second role type three conditions (and thus also their conjunction) are necessary: ‘crisis managers’ always belong to opposition parties that suffered electoral losses and were always appointed by the central party elite. Again the coverage value of these necessary conditions is quite high (0.75). This indicates that in three out of four incidences in the dataset where PPG leaders have a value of 1 on these three conditions (separately and combined), they are classified as crisis manager. The two cases where the presence of these conditions does not lead to the outcome are two ‘status protectors’ that in fact succeeded (PPG leader 24) or briefly preceded (PPG leader 10) a ‘crisis manager’ in the same legislative term. For the other three role types experience (‘status protector’) or the absence thereof (‘prodigy’ and ‘parliamentarist’) is a necessary condition.

<sup>106</sup> The formula for the coverage of X as a necessary condition for outcome Y is:  

$$\frac{N \text{ cases where } X=1 \text{ and } Y=1}{N \text{ cases where } X=1}$$



Although these statements of necessity are fully consistent, the coverage values are quite low (0.33; 0.21 and 0.21 respectively) and indicate that many respondents with the same condition values fall into different role categories.

To some degree, these results already seem to indicate that the roles of ‘party soldier’ and particularly ‘crisis manager’ are two – albeit intrinsically different – ‘position roles’: institutional or party-level contextual factors are crucial for the presence of these roles as outcomes. The other three role types (‘status protector’, ‘prodigy’ and ‘parliamentarist’) could be seen as ‘preference roles’ since they are always linked to individual-level conditions: i.e. cases’ political experience or the absence of this experience. Still, the lower coverage values indicate that, although necessary conditions, also here the context must allow for the expressions of these roles. In order to identify all causal paths, we therefore turn towards the analysis of sufficiency.

### 4.3. Analysis of sufficiency

A condition is sufficient for an outcome, if the outcome always occurs when the condition – or a combination thereof – is present. In line with the concept of *multiple* conjunctural causations, multiple (combinations) of conditions can be sufficient for the same outcome (Rihoux & Ragin, 2009, p. xix). The analysis of sufficiency is based on the ‘truth table algorithm’ (see: Schneider & Wagemann, 2012, pp. 178-193). Truth table rows are first translated into Boolean expressions, which are then ‘minimized’ or combined into shorter, more parsimonious formulas by removing logically redundant conditions<sup>107</sup>. We do not incorporate logical remainders and thus only report the conservative solution formula (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012, p. 162).<sup>108</sup> The consistency parameter<sup>109</sup> indicates to what degree the statement of sufficiency is backed by empirical evidence (in

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<sup>107</sup> When expressions only differ on one condition, that condition has no effect on the outcome. It is logically redundant and can be removed from the solution formula.

<sup>108</sup> We are not interested in obtaining the most parsimonious formula, as we mostly aim to describe the diverse paths that lead to certain role and test rigid theoretical assumptions on leadership roles. We also do not report the ‘intermediate solution formula’ by integrating ‘easy counterfactuals’ based on theoretical expectations (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012, pp. 167-175) as we deal with micro-level data and people can act irrationally.

We do incorporate the contradictory rows in the minimization process as they at least make the outcome possible (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012, p. 12). The downside is that some solution formula will also cover cases with a different outcome, which is reflected in its lower consistency values.

<sup>109</sup> The formula for the consistency of X as a sufficient condition for outcome Y is:  

$$\frac{N \text{ cases where } X=1 \text{ and } Y=1}{N \text{ cases where } X=1}$$

essence it shows whether formulas also apply to contradictory cases). Raw coverage indicates how much of the outcome is explained by a single path; unique coverage how much it *uniquely* covers<sup>110</sup> (Schneider & Wagemann, 2012, pp. 129-139).

Table 8.5 provides an overview of all conservative solution formulas. It shows that several formulas provide rather clear paths specific roles.

Constant in the four expressions for the role of ‘party soldier’ as an outcome is the prevalence of belonging to a government party (which is logical as it is a necessary condition) but also leading a large PPG and having a lot of political experience (although not necessarily) are important factors that lead to this role. The directional impact of being a central party appointee (or not) or parties’ result in the previous elections are less unequivocal. In the fourth expression being appointed by the extra-parliamentary party and a positive electoral mood lead (together with leading a large government party) to the ‘party soldier’ role as an outcome. In the third expression the reverse is true (although the values for the conditions of leading a large party and being in government remain stable).

‘Crisis managers’ probably constitute the best-explained role type in our analysis. Crisis managers are central party appointees that belong to opposition parties that suffered relative losses in the previous elections, and they either lead a relatively small PPG or have little political experience. The latter is congruent with the idea of ‘launching new faces’ as stressed by several respondents during the elite interviews. Either way, the raw coverage values for the two conservative solution formulas are rather high (0.667), particularly in light of the fact that 6 cases were identified with this role type as an outcome.

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<sup>110</sup> The formula for the coverage of X as a sufficient condition for outcome Y is:  

$$\frac{N \text{ cases where } X=1 \text{ and } Y=1}{N \text{ cases where } Y=1}$$

**Table 8.5. Analysis of sufficiency: Conservative solution formulas**

Outcome	Solution	Consistency	Coverage		Cases
			<i>Raw</i>	<i>Unique</i>	
Party Soldier (PS)	GOV*LP*EXP	1.000	0.500	0.167	7; 2, 5; 9; 25, 26
	GOV*EG*EXP	0.833	0.417	0.167	19, 27; 18; 9; 25, 26
	GOV*LP*eg*cpa	1.000	0.167	0.083	6; 7
	GOV*LP*EG*CPA	1.000	0.417	0.250	16, 17, 29; 25, 26
	Total	0.923	1.000		
Crisis Manager (CM)	gov*lp*eg*CPA	0.800	0.667	0.333	11,14; 4, 23, 24
	gov*eg*CPA*exp	1.000	0.667	0.333	11, 14; 3, 8
	Total	0.857	1.000		
Parliamentarist (PA)	gov*lp*EG*cpa*exp	0.500	0.333	0.333	20, 21
	GOV*lp*EG*CPA*exp	1.000	0.333	0.333	22
	gov*LP*eg*cpa*exp	1.000	0.333	0.333	28
	Total	0.750	1.000		
Prodigy (PR)	gov*lp*EG*exp	0.667	0.667	0.667	20, 21; 15
	GOV*LP*eg*CPA*exp	1.000	0.333	0.333	1
	Total	0.750	0.100		
Status Protector (SP)	gov*EG*cpa*EXP	1.000	0.400	0.200	12;13
	gov*eg*CPA*EXP	0.500	0.400	0.400	4,23,24; 10
	lp*EG*cpa*EXP	0.667	0.400	0.200	12; 19,27
	Total	0.625	1.000		

*Note: Uppercases denote the presence of a condition, lowercases the absence. \* indicates the conjunction of conditions. GOV= government party; LP= large PPG; EG= electoral gain; CPA= central party appointee; EXP= experienced.*

The three other role types portray more diverse paths, with seemingly more influence of individual-level factors. In the ‘parliamentarist’ role, only not having too much experience is a constant (although it is not hard to imagine a ‘parliamentarist’ that does have a lot of experience). All other conditions have varying causal effects: the conditions that indicate whether or not a PPG leader belongs to a majority party, leads a large PPG, was selected by the extra-parliamentary party elite and if the party is in a negative electoral mood have highly diverging values in all three solution formulas.

Largely the same applies to prodigies. Only having little political experience remains a constant. The solution formula with the highest (raw and unique) coverage scores indicates that prodigies often belong to small, opposition parties that suffered electoral losses, although the other expression indicates that they can also belong to larger, governing parties in a more positive electoral mood.

Lastly, for status protectors, only having a lot of experience is constant; whether you lead a large party, were selected by the EPO or if the party won in the recent elections has a less unequivocal impact. It should be noted that the unique coverage formulas indicate that most (but not all) PPG leaders in the last three role types can be found in opposition parties.

As such, we can confirm the two broader theoretical expectations as expressed above. The analyses show that there are multiple paths that lead to different PPG leader roles, and that both diverging party-level contextual (government status, PPG size, the party selectorate and electoral mood) and individual-level factors (experience and ambition) play a role. In some cases, roles appear ‘position roles’ as their explanatory paths seem quite coherent and determined by the presence of (different) institutional pressures (i.e. party soldiers and crisis managers). In others they by contrast appear ‘preference roles’ as the (institutional) solutions are less conclusive and individual-level factors appear to play a more important role (i.e. parliamentarists, status protectors and prodigies).

## **5. Discussion**

This chapter examined the underlying determinants that shape the roles of PPG leaders. After having reconstructed and described in detail the roles of PPG leaders in the Belgian federal and Flemish parliament (*Chapter 6*) and examining the institutional environment in which these actors function (*Chapter 7*), we

returned towards the perspectives of PPG leaders themselves and examined the contextual pressures and personal motivations that explain their role orientations.

Already based on a purely qualitative analysis of the elite interview data with PPG leaders, we identified multiple relevant party-level (i.e. government participation, group size, electoral mood, party selectorates, time) and individual-level determinants (i.e. experience, ambitions, preferences). Based on PPG leaders' personal accounts, we amongst others explained how the need for an internally- and top-down oriented role increases with a PPG's size or its participation in government, and how a party's opposition role or bad electoral results increase the need for a PPG leader with an externally-oriented role. While inexperienced and highly ambitious PPG leaders are more inclined to absorb a lot of the PPG's resources and adopt an externally-oriented role aimed at building one's own fame and status, highly experienced PPG leaders often already fulfilled many career ambitions are happier with a internally-oriented role away from the limelight.

After discussing all contextual and individual-level determinants in detail, we integrated them in a Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) that provides a more integrative account of why PPG leaders adopt certain roles in parliament, and examined the variables more systematically and in conjugation with each other. Although it might not explain the full array of variance in the outcome as we only reported the conservative solution formulas, the QCA did importantly reveal that (party-level) contextual-institutional conditions can only partially explain role variance among PPG leaders as also individual factors have explanatory value. While some PPG leader roles (i.e. party soldiers; crisis managers) are clearly associated with institutional expectations (related to party's participation in government, size, electoral results), others (i.e. parliamentarists, status protectors and prodigies) are so less conclusively and are more satisfactorily explained by taking individual characteristics and motivations in account (e.g. prior experience and future career ambitions). As such, besides providing substantial insights in why some PPG leaders' prioritise different aspects of their jobs over others, which rather likely has direct consequences for PPGs' internal organisation and the behaviour of its members, these findings make a strong theoretical case that frontbenchers do not by default play institutionally-predetermined 'position roles'. Even in Belgium, where their (intra-party) authority is limited, 'preference roles' or unexpected outcomes based on the contextual constellation are possible. Moreover, by proposing and showing how mvQCA may fruitfully be used to empirically analyse the complex interactions

between institutional pressures and individual goals that underpin legislators' role orientations, we add a new methodological tool to the array of research strategies that can be used to study legislators' roles. This new methodological strategy effectively provides researchers a useful middle-road between (small-N) qualitative, case-oriented and (large-N) quantitative, variable-oriented approaches on parliamentary role analysis (Rozenberg & Blomgren, 2012, pp. 211-214). In the concluding chapter, we further address our contributions to the literature, as well as this study's shortcomings, and potential avenues for future research.



## PART III

# GENERAL CONCLUSION

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# Conclusions

## 1. Main findings

This dissertation sought to provide deeper insights into the functioning of PPG leaders as central actors to the practical operation of parliamentary democracy. Through their coordinative work in the legislature, PPG leaders crucially contribute to political systems' stability, parliaments' decisional efficiency and parties' collective accountability to the electorate (Heidar & Koole, 2000c; Laver & Shepsle, 1999; Saalfeld & Strøm, 2014; Strøm & Müller, 2009). Nonetheless, we discussed how empirical research on these pivotal players remains limited and either concentrates on non-parliamentary systems (i.e. the US) where the influence of legislative party leaders is paradoxically rather confined (e.g. Aldrich & Rohde, 2000; Krehbiel, 1998; Strahan, 2011) or focuses narrowly on PPG leaders' use of disciplinary instruments to enforce party unity (Bailer, 2017; Bowler et al., 1999; Kam, 2009). Drawing on parliamentary role theory (Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012; Müller & Saalfeld, 1997; Searing, 1994) and predominantly using data from semi-structured elite interviews, this study took a broader approach and focused on PPG leaders' overall conceptions of their jobs, with a distinct focus on the Belgian case. Five consecutive empirical chapters yielded rich insights into how PPG leaders (*RQ1*) personally conceive of their roles in the legislature and (*RQ2*) tried to explain role variance by looking both at diverging institutional-contextual factors and at PPG leaders' personal preferences and goals.

We first tested an international-comparative, deductive approach (**Chapter 4**). Using Partirep Comparative MP Survey data (Deschouwer & Depauw, 2014), we explored the 'representative roles' of PPG leaders in national and regional parliaments across Europe (e.g. Rozenberg & Blomgren, 2012; Wahlke, Eulau, et al., 1962). Even though cross-national differences in terms of PPG leaders' intra-party status exist, we argued that PPG leaders typically share a number of elementary responsibilities (e.g. promoting party unity, resolving collective action

problems) that are critical to the functioning of West European parliaments (Mair, 2008; Saalfeld & Strøm, 2014). We hypothesized how these shared responsibilities are likely to make PPG leaders adopt common, more party-centred representative role attitudes and behaviours compared to other legislators. Our analyses, however, revealed no relevant effects for holding a PPG leadership position on MPs' role orientations or behaviours, with the only - remarkable - exception that significantly more PPG leaders answered inconsistently to the dilemma questions gauging their representative style (i.e. trustees, voter delegates, party delegates). Also the internal agreement among PPG leaders appeared limited and often even smaller than among the large, heterogeneous group of regular MPs. Besides the fact that PPG leaders are still legislators and that a secondary socialization process into a leadership position appears not to suddenly alter their representative attitudes and behaviours, a potential explanation might be that rigid categories such as 'trustee' or 'delegate' are indeed not the best way to conceptualize MPs' roles (e.g. Searing, 1994, p. 13). Our analysis adds to a series of other studies that similarly conclude that the impact of individual-level background and career factors on MPs' focus and style of representation is limited (e.g. Brack et al., 2012; Dudzinska et al., 2014; Weßels, 1999). This suggests that, although tailored to capture practices in different contexts (e.g. André & Depauw, 2018), deductively-constructed role sets are not fine-grained enough to study how *individuals* holding a specific institutional position perceive of their roles. A shift away from representative roles (studied deductively) towards legislative roles (studied inductively and in-depth) seems to yield a more fruitful approach (e.g. Rozenberg & Blomgren, 2012, p. 212).

From then on, we therefore proceeded to the in-depth, single-country case-study. We concentrated on Belgium, where PPG leaders are not parties' overall political leaders but act as 'mere' go-betweens between the PPG and the powerful EPO (de Vet & Wauters, 2018; Pilet & Wauters, 2014). Because of their international-comparatively weak intra-party authority, we argued how PPG leaders are expected to have limited autonomy in defining their roles, making Belgium a good case for testing deterministic assumptions on institutionally-predefined frontbench roles in the literature (*see below*). We furthermore discussed how a better understanding of PPG leaders' functioning would yield crucial insights into the partisan dynamics of parliamentary decision-making, in a country that is often described as 'partitocratic', where EPO elites undermine the ideal-type chain of delegation from voters to elected representatives (e.g. De Winter & Dumont, 2006).

Prior to actually examining role variation, we first examined the socio-demographic and political career attributes of PPG leaders in the Belgian federal and Flemish regional parliament (1962-2019) (**Chapter 5**). Already from a purely descriptive level this was interesting as it allowed us to sketch a general image of the political actors we are studying. We, amongst others, showed how PPG leaders are predominantly high-educated, middle-aged men and discussed the average parliamentary and ministerial experience of PPG leaders, the average duration of their mandates and the political positions they take up when their term as PPG leader ends. We furthermore uncovered several longitudinal trends. Similar to MPs in general, we observed a decrease in terms of PPG leaders' average (ministerial) political experience over time. Simultaneously, there is an increase in turnover, which considerably shortens the average duration of a term as PPG leader. Together with the fact that also their chances for political promotion have decreased, this could potentially indicate a weakening of the political authority of PPG leaders throughout time. Probably most relevant for the broader purposes of this study, several additional regression analyses revealed a number of party-level factors that explain differences between subpopulations of PPG leaders. These differences might indicate that party selectorates look for a specific type of PPG leader under certain circumstances and could thus reflect diverging role expectations. Even when controlling for party affiliation, for instance, we found that larger PPGs are inclined to select more experienced leaders, potentially because it requires more skills and authority to steer a larger group of MPs. Also short-term electoral results have an impact on the profile of PPG leaders. Parties that made relative electoral gains are more inclined to select inexperienced PPG leaders, whereas parties that lost are more likely to appoint experienced PPG leaders. Potentially this is because PPGs that grow logically have more newcomers to select from, while parties that lose more rapidly have to resort to incumbents. Simultaneously we find, however, that the better the recent electoral results of parties, the longer PPG leaders remain in office. Parties that lose thus tend to replace their PPG leaders sooner. Although we found limited effects of parties' government status (mainly due to the fact that we control for party affiliation and PPG size), we found that opposition PPG leaders have better prospects for political promotion, which might illustrate their more prominent intra-party position compared to majority PPG leaders.

In order to examine whether objective differences in PPG leaders' profile are also mirrored by diverging role orientations, we turned towards the inductive reconstruction and description of PPG leaders' roles (**Chapter 6**). Using data

from the semi-structured interview with PPG leaders in the Belgian federal and Flemish parliament, we first painted the ‘global picture’ by describing PPG leaders’ self-perceived responsibilities in the legislature. We discussed how the overall duties of PPG leaders in Belgium can be classified into five broader categories (internal PPG management, external communication, PPG-EPO liaison, intra-coalition relations and the managing of parliament) and discussed the diverse subtasks and general considerations associated with them. Second, we explained how the interviewed PPG leaders effectively prioritized different aspects of their jobs and discussed how differences between PPG leaders – which were acknowledged by practically every respondent – relate to two broader dimensions that refer to inbuilt dilemmas in the daily functioning of PPG leaders. While some PPG leaders have a distinct *external focus* (i.e. aimed at acting as the PPG’s figureheads), other adopt a clear *internal focus* (i.e. acting as team players, coaches). Moreover, while some truly see themselves as representatives of the PPG in EPO decision-making bodies (i.e. *bottom-up* intra-party liaison), others focus more on top-down liaison and transferring party leaders’ directives to backbenchers. Based on these two dimensions, we developed a typology of five PPG leadership roles. ‘*Party soldiers*’ distinctly stress their roles as internal managers, and particularly value top-down liaison (often to inform MPs about governmental coalition bargaining). Many PPG leaders in this group believe that they were selected exactly because of their party loyalty, making them a safe choice of EPO leaders. Whereas ‘*parliamentarists*’ equally emphasize their tasks in the back-office, they more distinctly feel it is their duty to act as representatives of the PPG in central party decision-making bodies. For some being in opposition simply appeared to give them more room to defend PPG members’ wishes (i.e. without jeopardizing the cabinet stability). One respondent, belonging to a majority party, however, was driven by a strong personal belief that a degree of ‘dualism’ between the executive and parliament is desirable. ‘*Prodigies*’ and ‘*status protectors*’ find internally-oriented, managerial tasks of secondary importance and commonly see their institutional position as something ‘instrumental’ to achieving their personal goals. ‘*Prodigies*’ are talented but relatively unknown politicians that use PPG leadership as a ‘launching platform’. They are mainly characterized by a distinct external focus, aimed at gaining publicity, getting well-known and eventually further climbing the political ladder. ‘*Status protectors*’, by contrast, are already well-known and seasoned politicians that do not necessarily have progressive career ambitions but tend to see PPG leadership as a personal power base. They particularly use their position as mandated PPG representatives to

weigh on central party policy-making and remain politically relevant within the party. ‘*Crisis managers*’, lastly, have a clear external focus and particularly stress their role in conducting top-down liaison. The interview data already made clear that the main reason for this is that their party is in electorally troubled waters, and is undergoing a renewal process. PPG leaders in this category feel it is their duty to defend the (new) party presidents’ renewed standpoints and strategies in the PPG, and simultaneously embody the new party image to the outer world. Besides using ample illustrations and evidence from the interviews to provide detailed descriptions of each role type, we further assessed the validity of these role types by linking them to quantitative measures of specific job-related attitudes (using PPG leaders’ answers to a number of closed-ended questions). We also examined to some extent the consequences of these role in terms of a translation into characteristic behaviour (e.g. time allocation).

After the identification and reconstruction of PPG leaders’ roles, we proceeded to their explanation. Parliamentary roles are inherently attached to the institutional context in which they are played (Andeweg, 2014; Müller & Saalfeld, 1997). The literature suggests that this is particularly the case for frontbench roles (i.e. position roles) which are strongly determined and constrained by formal and informal rules, norms and expectations (Searing, 1994; Strøm, 1997). **Chapter 7** was therefore dedicated to this institutional framework and examined the existence, transmission and to some extent the consequences of such institutional norms. Formal institutional rules were first identified and examined through a document analysis of parliamentary standing orders and party statutes (1995-2019). These appeared limited in number and scope, while the informal institutional norms as developed and maintained by parliamentary and extra-parliamentary actors in the direct political environment of PPG leaders appeared more relevant. While informal norms are indeed more encompassing, we also showed how they are contingent upon the specific political context a party is in. Particularly parties’ government status, size and electoral performance are factors that shape informal role expectations and at least partially drive role variance. We argued that the selection process preceding the appointment of a PPG leader is crucial for the transmittance of (context-dependent) informal norms. As a central motivation of politicians is their wish to be reselected for their position in a later phase of their career, they will pay particular attention to the grievances and expectations of their selectorate (Hazan & Rahat, 2006, p. 116; Strøm, 1997, 2012). Indeed, while role expectations are generally not explicitly expressed, and there is no ‘rule book on PPG leadership’, the interviewed PPG leaders very well

understand why exactly they were selected. We showed how the selection criteria used by PPG and EPO actors to select a specific PPG leader to a large extent match with the latter's role orientations identified in Chapter 6. We moreover demonstrated on several occasions how a 'mismatch' between role expectations (reflected in selection criteria) and PPG leaders' actual functioning, might later lead discontent among PPG members and EPO actors.

Although important, the institutional framework provides only one part of the global picture. Neo-institutionalists stress that parliamentary roles – or at least those of backbenchers – are also shaped by legislators' intrinsic preferences (Searing, 1994) and their rational career goals (Strøm, 1997). Therefore, the last empirical chapter (**Chapter 8**) provides an integrative explanation of PPG leadership roles, taking into account both contextual-institutional explanatory factors and PPG leaders' personal motivations. In the first part, a qualitative analysis was used to describe the explanatory factors as they arose from the interview data. The interviews with PPG leaders themselves provided highly interesting information for this purpose as respondents tend to tell about their roles in terms of which job dimensions they prioritize and *why* (Searing, 1994). During the interviews, respondents were furthermore additionally invited to reflect on the functioning of their colleagues, by asking if they believed other PPG leaders filled in their positions differently than how they did, and why they believed this was the case. Based on the personal accounts of PPG leaders themselves, we identified several party-level (i.e. government participation, group size, electoral mood, party selectorates) and individual-level factors (i.e. experience, progressive ambitions) that proved to be relevant. We discussed each of these factors in detail and illuminated how they are likely to affect PPG leaders' positions on the two dimensions identified in Chapter 6. Importantly, in the second part, we examined the relevance of these potential explanatory factors more structurally and in conjugation with each other. In order to provide a more systematic account of why (and under which conditions) specific PPG leaders adopt a particular role in parliament, we used multi-value qualitative comparative analysis (mvQCA). In the first place, the QCA revealed that some roles are indeed quite clearly linked to (diverging) contextual-institutional factors, but at the party-level which is generally overlooked when talking about 'position roles'. The role of (internally- and top-down oriented) 'party soldiers' is clearly linked to parties' government status (but – to a lesser extent – also leading a large PPG is an important factor). The role of (externally- and top-down oriented) 'crisis managers' is clearly linked to parties' bad electoral performance, their opposition

status and PPG leaders' selection by an exclusive EPO selectorate. In both cases, these party-level contextual factors even proved to be 'necessary conditions' that are always present when a certain role as an outcome is observed. Even when indeed serving as important constraints influencing PPG leaders' role choice, we found that institutional-contextual factors alone can only partially explain the full array of role variance. This became particularly clear by the fact that the QCA truth table that only contained party-level conditions brought forward many contradictory configurations: identical combinations of (contextual) conditions that nonetheless led to PPG leaders holding different roles. By integrating a condition at the individual-level (i.e. political prior experience) and going back to the raw interview data, we resolved most of these contradictory rows. Crucially, the subsequent analysis of sufficiency showed how also personal motivations matter. While some roles are indeed quite well explained by mostly taking into account diverging contextual pressures (e.g. 'party soldiers' and 'crisis managers'), others are so less conclusively and are more satisfactorily explained by individual-level factors such as PPG leaders' prior experience and – relatedly – their progressive career ambitions.

## **2. Contributions and implications**

Through these findings, this study not only provides substantive insights into an often neglected but crucial aspect of legislative organisation, it also makes a number of theoretical and methodological contributions to parliamentary role research, which we further discuss below.

### **2.1. Substantial: PPG leadership beyond discipline**

Due to its explorative and inductive character, this study first of all provides a unique glance behind 'the closed doors of PPGs' and their daily political management (e.g. Heidar & Koole, 2000c). This immediately is where the societal relevance of this study lies. In the introduction we sketched how, simultaneous to the emergence of PPGs, their formally-appointed chairpersons have become key actors in Western European parliaments (Heidar, 2013; Saalfeld & Strøm, 2014). Besides representing the PPG towards the electorate, the media, other party branches and competing parties, they importantly coordinate internal deliberation, monitor PPG members' parliamentary work and ensure that everyone contributes to the party's collective interest (Strøm & Müller, 2009). While PPG leaders consequently have an unmistakable impact on legislative decision-making and on



the individual behaviour of elected representatives, much of their work is behind the scenes, as PPGs are typically secretive arenas. As any inherent mechanism of the democratic process should be transparent and open for public scrutiny (Heidar & Koole, 2000c, p. 5), this makes research into PPG leadership highly relevant as it opens up the black box of the interactions between PPG members and their leaders (Bailer, 2017, p. 13).

This in-depth study does so, by going far beyond the usual focus on PPG leaders' role as enforcers of party discipline (e.g. Bailer, 2017; Bailer et al., 2009; Bowler et al., 1999; Kam, 2009). In fact, we nuancedly showed how PPG leaders are indeed reluctant to impose sanctions (or rewards) in case of internal disagreement. They believe that there is not much they can do as their position is based on natural authority rather than on formal political power, fear that such measures might reach the media, or argue that it would severely damage their trust relationship with group members. Instead, their role in reaching 'party agreement' (e.g. by convincing MPs, taking their considerations into account) and inducing 'group loyalty' (e.g. by encouraging them to be collegial, explaining how opponents might misuse their defecting behaviour, or just offering a listening ear) is much larger. In addition, even when only looking at their responsibilities related to the internal PPG management, which is only one of the five broad categories of tasks PPG leaders fulfil, we discussed several subtasks that are less well documented in the literature but appear equally important for the PPG's smooth functioning and the cohesion and atmosphere among its members. For one, PPG leaders need to spend considerable time and effort in acting as playmakers. They must carefully outline the internal division of labour in the PPG and fairly distributing its scarce resources in order to grant every member a spot in the limelight and prevent interpersonal frictions. They acknowledge their role as party gatekeepers and coordinators of MPs' specialized work, which often implies tempering the diligence of backbenchers in order not to bring intra-party or coalition disagreements to the surface. Simultaneously, however, they stress that it is their duty to mentor, coach and encourage MPs to take initiatives on policies where they can make a difference and increase their overall job satisfaction. Beyond the internal PPG management, we discussed how PPG leaders must balance their acts as playmakers with their tasks as the PPGs' primary spokesperson in parliamentary debates and towards the media, and how PPG leaders interact with their peers in parliament's governing bodies and during informal intra-coalition contacts. By mapping PPG leaders' intra-party liaising tasks, furthermore, this study provides important insights into the everyday contacts and relations between the party-in-

parliament, the party-in-government and the party-in-central office as central components of party organisation.

Importantly, by going deeper into PPG leaders' day-to-day activities, we uncovered that PPG leaders strongly differ with regards to how they fill in their position and how they perceive of their priorities, thereby contradicting the usual assumptions in the literature (*see below*). In some cases and under certain circumstances, PPG leaders distinctly focus on the internal management of the PPG. Much of these PPG leaders' work is behind the scenes, aimed at coordinating and monitoring backbenchers' work, coaching and motivating MPs and timely defusing political or interpersonal frictions or conflicts in the PPG. Others, however, see these internal tasks of secondary importance or even that they distract them from the essence: acting as the PPGs' political spearhead and externally representing it during debates, in the media and towards the electorate. Of course, this has a direct impact on the internal dynamics of the PPG. MPs tend to get more support, coaching and opportunities for self-promotion under internally-oriented PPG leaders, which is particularly beneficial for newly-elected representatives that still need to learn the ropes. While under certain circumstances it might be desirable or even expected to have a strongly externally-oriented PPG leader (e.g. when in opposition or when the party needs to regain its electoral appeal), we described how discontent might arise among PPG members when PPG leaders focus too much on raising his or her own profile. Furthermore, we uncovered how some PPG leaders see it as their clear duty to communicate elite decisions such as coalition compromises or renewed party policies to backbenchers and ensure their practical implementation in parliament. Others, however, feel more mandated by the PPG and more distinctly see themselves as representatives of the party-in-parliament during formal and informal top EPO meetings. Again, this has an impact on the degree to which elected representatives can weigh on policy-making, either through the formal parliamentary channels or more informally through intra-party contacts.

Indeed, this study tell us something more broadly about parliamentary politics in Belgium, which has often been described by political scientists and observers alike as oligarchic or 'partitocratic' in nature, due to the overwhelming role played by extra-parliamentary party elites (De Winter & Dumont, 2006; Van Nieuwenhuyse et al., 2018). In Chapter 2, we argued how centralized coordination in the legislature is system-functional to a certain degree (*see Chapter 2*). It enhances cabinet stability and makes legislative policy-making more efficient, which is

particularly crucial in Belgium's extremely fragmented and multilevel political environment (De Winter & Dumont, 2006). More on the micro-level, moreover, it enables backbenchers to weigh on specialized policies through preference aggregation and it provides clarity to voters who strongly rely on party labels as heuristic tools to select representatives and hold them accountable (Aldrich, 1995; Heidar, 2013; Strøm & Müller, 2009). Belgian PPG leaders indeed are coordinators in the true sense of the word. Much of their work in the legislature is driven by multilateral deliberation and their institutional position is based on natural authority rather than on formal and coercive, political power. This explains why, even when deciding rather autonomously, extra-parliamentary party elites generally seek candidates that are widely supported and respected by PPG members prior to actually appointing a PPG leader (*see Chapter 8*). As also documented elsewhere, the true centres of party authority in Belgium are situated outside of parliament (De Winter & Dumont, 2000, 2006; Fiers, 1998; Pilet & Wauters, 2014). The EPO presidents are powerful players that decide over politician's (re)nomination prospects and their career advancements and strongly influence policy-making. As also PPG leaders are dependent on these actors for their future political fortunes, it is rather unsurprising that many PPG leaders predominantly engage in top-down liaison from central party decision-making bodies to backbenchers. This dynamic seems further strengthened by the perceived 'logic of appropriateness' that follows from a party's participation in government (and the need for cabinet stability) or its disappointing electoral performance (and the need to unitedly support the party renewal process). In some cases, however, strong PPG leaders might temper extra-parliamentary party dominance by more distinctly engaging in bottom-up liaison and defending the PPG's position in central party decision-making bodies. In those cases, it nonetheless remains the question whether PPG leaders indeed act out of a sense of duty to further the policy preferences of the party's elected representatives (e.g. 'parliamentarists') or whether they mostly act out of self-interested and a personal desire to remain politically relevant (e.g. 'status protectors').

## **2.2.Theoretical: frontbench roles and individual agency**

In addition, this dissertation makes an important theoretical contribution by engaging in the 'structure vs. agency debate' that is historically rooted in parliamentary role research. In Chapter 2, we discussed how early structural-functionalist (e.g. Wahlke, Eulau, et al., 1962) and symbolic-interactionalist approaches on MPs' roles (e.g. Fenno, 1978) have been criticized for not

accrediting politicians enough with their own independent standpoints (Andeweg, 2014; Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012; Müller & Saalfeld, 1997; Searing, 1994). They overemphasized the importance of institutional norms and social expectations on legislators' functioning, thereby viewing roles too much as 'group facts' and overlooking the considerable variety among individual MPs across similar institutional contexts (Searing, 1994, p. 25). Neo-institutionalists overcome this issue by combining sociological (i.e. focusing on the internalization of group norms) with economic perspectives on political behaviour (i.e. focusing on MPs as goal-seeking actors with a free will) (e.g. March & Olsen, 1989). Both Searing's *motivational approach* (1994) and Strøm's *strategic approach* (1997) mix 'rules and reason' and reinvigorated roles as helpful tools for understanding how MPs act congruent with their personal goals and preferences but constrained by institutional norms and expectations.

We criticized, however, that by differentiating between 'preference' and 'position roles', these acclaimed approaches direct their insights primarily to backbenchers but still adopt rather deterministic (in fact structural-functionalist - views of leadership roles. Unlike backbenchers' 'preference roles' which are indeed very illustrative of the neo-institutional blend of structure and agency, frontbenchers (e.g. .PPG leaders) are said to play institutionally-determined 'position roles' that leave little to no room for individual interpretation (Searing, 1994). Even when theoretically nuancing the clear-cut dichotomy between 'position' and 'preference roles' (Strøm, 2012), subsequent empirical studies identified a rich variety of backbench roles (e.g. Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012; Müller & Saalfeld, 1997) but typically disregards role variation among frontbenchers.

In this dissertation, we advocated a more actor-centred approach of leadership roles in the legislature. Even in Belgium, where the authority of PPG leaders is limited due to their comparatively weak intra-position (de Vet & Wauters, 2018) and the large impact of extra-parliamentary party elites on legislative decision-making (De Winter & Dumont, 2006), we demonstrated that role variance does occur within the same institutional context. Whereas differences can already be distilled from PPG leaders' mere political profile (e.g. *Chapter 5*), we also clearly saw that different PPG leaders strongly emphasize and prioritise different dimensions of their jobs. In part, this is because the meso-level should not be overlooked. Indeed, we showed how role variance among PPG leaders is partly driven by diverging contextual pressures at the party-level. We demonstrated how factors such as a PPG's size but particularly parties' participation in government

and recent electoral losses strongly shape PPG and EPO actors' role expectations towards PPG leaders' functioning and how they consequently serve as crucial (party-level) constraints influencing PPG leaders' role choice.

We, however, also discussed how these party-level role expectations only partially explain role variance: also PPG leaders' individual preferences matter. While some of the identified roles (i.e. party soldiers; crisis managers) are indeed clearly associated with institutional pressures, others (e.g. status protectors, prodigies) are driven more distinctly by PPG leaders' individual characteristics and career goals. Although the political context should still allow for such preference-driven roles (i.e. PPG leaders seem to experience more leeway in opposition or when the party is not undergoing internal renewal after electoral defeats), we also illustrate clear cases of discontent among MPs and party elites as PPG leaders functioned contradictory to their wishes and expectations.

As such, the findings presented in this thesis make a strong theoretical case that even when parliamentary frontbench roles in parliament are indeed more institutionally-constrained than the roles of backbenchers, they are not 'position roles' by default: also among these actors preference roles are possible. This should encourage scholars to extend their focus from only studying the roles of backbenchers to also examining those of frontbenchers, particularly given the latter's impact on legislative decision-making.

### **2.3. Methodological: QCA and explaining legislators' roles**

Lastly, also from a methodological point of view, this research makes an important contribution. Besides pointing out a number of issues related to the deductive, representative role approach (e.g. *Chapter 4*), we innovatively demonstrated how multi-value Qualitative Comparative Analysis (mvQCA) can supplement the in-depth reconstruction of MPs' roles with a systemic examination of their determinants. Although the increasing use of QCA in social sciences has thus far not trickled down to legislative role research and although micro-level applications of the method remain scarce (Berg-Schlosser & De Meur, 2009), we argued – and showed – that its underlying epistemology make QCA particularly useful for this field of inquiry.

First of all, because of its intrinsic causal logic as a set-theoretic method, QCA is highly appropriate for examining the complex interplay of individual calculations and institutional incentives that underpin MPs' roles (e.g. Andeweg, 2014; Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012; Müller & Saalfeld, 1997). Using the notion of

multiple conjunctural causation, QCA is designed for grasping real-world causal complexity. By examining how explanatory variables conjugate rather than focusing on isolable causes, QCA moves away from simplistic causal reasoning and approaches causality as context-specific (Rihoux, 2006; Rihoux & Ragin, 2009; Schneider & Wagemann, 2012). This makes that also legislators' roles - and in particular the impact of their personal goals and motivations on their own functioning - are approached as contingent upon the institutional context, in line with basic theoretical views on the concept (e.g. Searing, 1994; Strøm, 1997)

As second reason why QCA is highly useful for studying roles is because it is a holistic, case-sensitive research method (Berg-Schlosser et al., 2009; Ragin, 1987; Rihoux & Ragin, 2009). Even when breaking cases (e.g. role players) down into configurations of conditions (i.e. explanatory variables) and outcomes (e.g. their roles), QCA treats each case under study as a complex entity throughout the entire analysis. This means that QCA provides scholars the tools to make intelligible cross-case comparisons between role players based on a number of key attributes, without losing touch of the idiosyncrasies of each individual case. This is indispensable when studying legislators' roles (Searing, 1994).

By combining key strengths of both approaches (Berg-Schlosser et al., 2009; Ragin, 1987), QCA might bridge the current qualitative-quantitative divide in parliamentary role analysis. It is a particularly useful method for scholars who wish to combine in-depth insights into legislators' roles (for which small-N, case-oriented studies are appropriate) with a systematic and variable-oriented analysis of their cross-case determinants (for which large-N, quantitative data are generally used) (Rozenberg & Blomgren, 2012).

Lastly, whereas many scholars that refer to seminal neo-institutionalist frameworks only use fragmented parts (e.g. the distinction between position and preference roles) or specific empirical findings (e.g. Searing's findings on constituency members, ministerial aspirants,...) (Blomgren & Rozenberg, 2012, p. 217), QCA allowed us to also scrutinize their analytical components and theoretical assumptions. By differentiating between institutional-contextual and individual-level conditions, and assessing the impact of both groups of conditions, we were able to empirically falsify predominant deterministic views of leadership roles (as position roles) in the legislature (*see above*).

### **3. Limitations and avenues for future research**

This study also raises a number of new questions. The potential avenues for future research it opens, would simultaneously address a number of our research design's main limitations that inevitably followed from some of the central methodological choices that were made.

First of all, this study was designed as single-country case study (and even focused only on Flemish parties). While this allowed us to feasibly examine PPG leaders' roles in-depth, identify role variance within the same institutional setting and assess the impact of party- and individual-level factors, it does not allow us to boldly transpose the PPG leader role types we identified to other parliamentary systems. Future research could therefore examine the roles of PPG leaders in different political settings and further disentangle the causes of diverging role orientations. Interesting would be, for instance, to focus on countries where PPG leaders have more intra-party authority (and potentially more autonomy) or on parliaments where PPGs are generally much larger, obliging PPG leaders to make clear prioritising choices and delegate specific duties to other MPs or staff. Even though roles are strongly shaped by an institutional settings' parochial features, the two broader dimensions that structure PPG role variance in Belgium are rather likely to recur in other countries. Differences on the internal-external dimension appear related to rather universal parliamentary incentives like political ambition and can, for instance, be linked to the upcoming literature on personalised parliamentary behaviour (e.g. Bräuninger et al., 2012; Louwerse & Otjes, 2016), investigating whether legislators (progressively) adopt individualistic goal-seeking behaviour. Additionally, the liaising dimension – which taps into conceptualizations of legislators as agents with multiple and potentially adversarial principals (e.g. Carey, 2007) - might also matter in countries where PPG leaders normally have a more prominent intra-party position (e.g. The Netherlands, Germany) but when the true party leader moves to government and is replaced as by someone who plays an important part as a go-between between the PPG and the party-in-government.

Second, this study was predominantly concerned with PPG leaders' role orientations as dependent variables (or 'outcomes' in QCA terms). Future research should also approach them as independent variables and more distinctly examine the consequences of PPG leaders' roles. How and to what extent are different role orientations translated into characteristic behaviour (e.g. do bottom-up oriented PPG leaders indeed more often criticize or go against party elites'

policy positions)? What are the implications of PPG leaders' role orientations for PPGs' internal organisation and the activities (and attitudes) of its members? For instance: Do MPs who belong to PPGs with a bottom-up oriented PPG leader indeed feel as if they weigh on party policies more than in PPGs with top-down oriented leaders? Do internally-oriented PPG leaders drive MPs to more legislative activity? A thorough examination of these questions would have to rely on observational, interview or survey data aimed not only at grasping PPG leaders' role attitudes but also at gaining insights into PPG leaders' (and other MPs) activities that often take place behind closed doors. Nonetheless, we believe that many of the results and insights reported in this explorative study may also lead to new and more straightforwardly testable hypotheses on the link between PPG leaders' personal characteristics and formal, observable parliamentary activity. For instance: Do young and less experienced PPG leaders – who are more likely to engage in externally-oriented and individual goal-seeking activities – personally take up more of the PPG's scarce speaking time? Do more experienced PPG leaders, or those who lead a large or majority PPG provide more opportunities for self-promotion to other MPs? All these questions would significantly further deepen our knowledge on partisan dynamics in the legislature.

Third, this dissertation focused on only one – but nonetheless crucial - leadership position in the legislature. It, however, extrapolates the findings to say something in general about so-called parliamentary 'position roles'. Of course, there are many more leadership positions (or assumed 'position roles') in the legislature, such as speaker or committee chair, that might equally deserve scholarly attention. To what extent can role variance also be observed among actors holding these institutional positions? What is the impact of diverging party-level factors or individual preferences and motivations here? What are the consequences of these office-holders' potentially different role orientations on parliamentary decision-making?





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# Appendices

## 1. Questionnaires PPG leader interviews

*(Translated from Dutch)*

### Introduction

- Personal introduction
- Explain research aims
  - o Research on PPG leadership in Belgium
  - o Important position – limited knowledge (importance, role, expectations, selection...)
  - o Interviews with PPG leaders but also with MPs, party leaders...
- Several types of questions
  - o Some questions on general aspects of PPG leadership
  - o Most questions about personal experiences when you were PPG leader (+ *specify reference period*)
  - o Focus is on open-ended questions; some are closed-ended.
- Duration interview ( $\pm$  45 - 60min).
- Tape recording: ask permission
- Confidentiality: non-attribution basis: literal quotes + references to third persons or recognizable events will be anonymized.

**Drop-off** (Based on self-collected information sheets).

- **Political context**
  - o Legislative term, government
  - o Opposition/majority
  - o Composition PPG (size, ...)
- **PPG leadership**
  - o Start + end of mandate
  - o Career before and (if applicable) after PPG leadership

### A. Tasks (attitudes and behaviours)



Q1. The first question directly relates to the period between [from x to y] when you were a PPG leader. PPG leaders perform a multitude of tasks and duties, both within and outside of the legislature. What did you personally see as your three most important responsibilities when you were a PPG leader?

- Probes: why were these tasks so important? Where there tasks which you were expected to fulfil but which you found less important?

Q2. Now I would like to go through a list of duties that are often ascribed to PPG leaders. I would like to ask you two things. One, could you give to each of these tasks a score between 1 and 10 according to how important this task was for you personally when you were a PPG leader (1= not important, 10= very important). Second, differences might sometimes occur between the general importance of a task and the time it requires to conduct it. Can you therefore, give a second score between 1 and 10 to each tasks indicating how much time you had to spend to it (1= little time, 10= a lot of time).

	<i>Not important</i>	<i>Very important</i>	<i>Little time</i>	<i>A lot of time</i>
Ensure a proper division of labour among PPG members	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Lead discussions on policy positions within the PPG	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Coach PPG members	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Coach PPG staff members	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Monitor committee work	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Ensure party unity	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Communicate party elite decisions to PPG members	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Communicate PPG members' wishes to the party elite	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Co-decide on parliamentary agenda in Conference of Group Chairmen	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Maintain close contacts with MPs from other parties	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Maintain close contacts with own party's ministers ( <i>if applicable</i> )	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Maintain close contacts with other parties' ministers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Expounding party positions as the PPGs' main spokesperson	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

- Probes: are there any duties we did not go over? In case of discrepancy between attitudes and behavior: why? In case of extremes: why? Which tasks did you typically delegate to the PPG secretary? If you would be able to fully choose your own priorities and time allocation, not considering any external pressures, would it look any different than what you have described up until now?

## **B. Evaluation (general and personal)**

Q3. A more general question: what, in your personal view, constitutes a good PPG leader?

- Probes: Do you see differences in terms of how PPG leaders, both from your own and other parties, fill in their position? In what ways? Why do you believe this is the case? Do you think the role of PPG leaders has changed throughout time? In what ways?

Q4. Why do you think you were initially selected as a PPG leader [*on moment T*]?

- Probes: Were there any other candidates? Why do you think they weren't selected? Who made the final call? Did they specify concrete expectations towards your future functioning?

## **C. Motivations (preferences and ambitions)**

Q5. Why did you want to become PPG leader yourself?

Q6. Which intrinsic aspect of your job as a PPG leader do/did you find most satisfying?

- Probes: Why is that? Which aspects do/did you find least satisfying? Why?

Q7. PPG leaders sometimes proceed to other political positions like party leader, minister or Speaker after their terms. Did/do you personally have the ambition to

take up such an ambition afterwards? [+ own collected information on respondents' careers].

- Probes: Which position? Why? Do you think other PPG leaders have/had such ambitions? How do you see?

Q8. You personally had a lot of/relatively little political experience prior to becoming PPG leader. Did you consider this useful/a handicap in the execution of your duties? In what ways?

#### **D. Relationship PPG-party, internal PPG organization**

Q9. Within political parties, differences of opinions occasionally arise. On which concrete policies or occasions were the party elite and (specific) PPG members not on the same wavelength?

- Probes: do you have concrete examples [+ *own examples from media outlets*]. How did you cope with such situations? Did you ever defend PPG's preferences towards the party elite (Often? Examples? How? Formal or informal?) Did you ever defend the position of the party elite in the PPG? (Often? Examples? How? Formal or informal?). Which of the two did you have to do most often during your term as a PPG leader (*give score on dilemma scale*)?

Defend EPO position in PPG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Defend PPG position in EPO
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Q10. [If applicable]. Majority PPG leaders often find themselves in a position in which they both have to guarantee the PPG's loyalty to the cabinet, whilst also making sure that the PPG can sufficiently raise its own profile. How did you personally try to cope with this 'field of tension'?

- Probes: Did you find this difficult? Do you think other PPG leaders cope with this field of tension differently? Were there specific instances where you had to temper the diligence or wishes of backbenchers? Were there instances where you gave more leeway to PPG members? To what degree do you feel that your PPG, under your leadership, was able to weight on coalition policies (if applicable). To what degree do you feel that the PPG, under your leadership, was able to weigh on party positions?

Q11. The next question relates to the internal management of the PPG. I want to address several of its concrete aspects and want to ask you to indicate on a scale of 1 to 10 to what degree the PPG could take these decisions autonomously (10) or whether they were taken in close consultation with the central party leadership (1).

	<i>Close consultation with EPO</i>										<i>Autonomous</i>									
Appointing spokespersons and allocating speaking time for plenary meetings	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
	<i>Probes: How was this done in practice? Which considerations were typically made here?</i>																			
Appointing spokespersons for media debates	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
	<i>Probes: How was this done in practice? Which considerations were typically made here?</i>																			
Allocating committee seats	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
	<i>Probes: How was this done in practice? Which considerations were typically made here?</i>																			
Allocating other inter- and intra-parliamentary mandates (committee presidency, Bureau,...)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
	<i>Probes: How was this done in practice? Which considerations were typically made here?</i>																			
Determining the PPG's position with regards to specific policy proposals or initiatives	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
	<i>Probes: How was this done in practice? Which considerations were typically made here?</i>																			

Q12. On a scale of 1 (no autonomy) to 10 (full autonomy), to what degree did group members, under your leadership, enjoy individual autonomy when it comes to:

	<i>No autonomy</i>										<i>Full autonomy</i>									
Submitting bill proposals and amendments	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10										
	<i>Probes: Discuss with whom? Why?</i>																			

Submitting written and oral questions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	<i>Probes: Discuss with whom? Why?</i>									
Submitting interpellations	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	<i>Probes: Discuss with whom? Why?</i>									
Sending out press releases	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	<i>Probes: Discuss with whom? Why?</i>									

Q13. In Belgium, but also abroad, parliamentary votes (in committees and plenary sessions) are typically subjected to party discipline. Have there been, however, during your period as a PPG leader, occasions where group members enjoyed more freedom to determine how they would personally vote?

- Probes: which ones? How would you assess the overall political cohesion among PPG members during your term? In what percentage of all discussions in the PPG meeting would you assess that there was in fact no disagreement: all MPs were on the same wavelength? In what percentage of all discussions do you believe your interference was crucial to obtain unity on the floor?

Q14. Did you ever personally had to intervene when a group member was bound to breach group unity?

- Probes: how did you cope with this situation? Did you ever use or threatened to use sanctions if an MP would breach or breached unity? Did you ever reward loyal group members? Did you ever use any of the following sanctions/reward (allocate or deny speaking time, seats in attractive committees, media access,...).

### Closing questions

- Are there any aspects of PPG leadership we did not discuss but where you still would like to say something about?
- Briefly summarize main take-away points from the interview + check if accurate (respondent validation).
- Thank for time and insights
- Give contact details

## 2. Questionnaires EPO and PPG actor interviews

(Translated from Dutch)

### Introduction

- Personal introduction
- Explain research aims
  - o Research on PPG leadership in Belgium
  - o Important position – limited knowledge (importance, role, expectations, selection...)
  - o Interviews with PPG leaders but also with MPs, party leaders...
- Several types of questions
  - o Some questions on general aspects of PPG leadership
  - o Most questions about personal experiences with specific PPG leaders you worked with (+ *specify reference period*)
  - o Focus is on open-ended questions; some are closed-ended.
- Duration interview ( $\pm$  45 - 60min).
- Tape recording: ask permission
- Confidentiality: non-attribution basis: literal quotes + references to third persons or recognizable events will be anonymized.

**Drop-off** (Based on self-collected information sheets).

- **Political functions, period**
- **Specific PPG leaders during this period (+ political context)**
  - o Legislative term, government
  - o Opposition/majority
  - o Composition PPG (size, ...)

### A. General expectations

Q1. We start with a number of general questions. What are, in your view, the most important tasks of PPG leaders?

Q2. Do you see differences in terms of how PPG leaders, both from your own and other parties, fill in their position?

- Probes: In what ways? Why do you believe this is the case? Do you think the role of the PPG leader has changed throughout time?

Q3. What, in your personal view, constitutes a good PPG leader?

### B. Selection (+ specific role expectations)

Q4. Let's proceed to PPG leaders [x] and [y] as concrete cases. We start at the beginning: the selection process preceding their appointments as PPG leaders. We start with the selection of [x] and then proceed to that of [y].

- At [moment t] your party needed a new PPG leader in [parliament z]. Was there, at that time, a formal procedure for the selection of PPG leaders? Which one? Was it followed?
- Could PPG members put forward their personal candidacies for this position? How? Who eventually did so?
- Who, to your assessment, weighed to what degree on the eventual decision for person [x] as the PPG leader? Please give each actor I sum up a score between 1 (no influence) and 10 (a lot of influence).

	<i>No influence</i>					<i>A lot of influence</i>				
Party president	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Other party elite members*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
The entire PPG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Specific PPG members*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
The party executive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Others?*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

\*Please specify.

- Who finally made the decisive call?
- Has there been a vote (or more than one) on the candidacies for this position? Which procedure was followed?
- 

Q5. Why was person X eventually chosen as a PPG leader?

- Which criteria have been decisive according to you?
- Were there any a priori expectations regarding how PPG leader [x] or [y] would fill in his/her position? Which ones? Were they explicitly communicated? Did he/she live up to these expectations?

- What do you think was the main motivation of PPG leader [x] and [y] to become PPG leader?

### C. Role performance

Q6. In the beginning we talked – very generally – about the tasks PPG leaders fulfill. Thinking back about PPG leader [x] and [y] specifically, which tasks do you think these actors prioritized? Were there distinct differences?

- Probes: Are these also the tasks to which they devoted most of their time? Which tasks did they delegate to other PPG actors (MPs, PPG secretary)? Is this different than under other circumstances?

### D. Relationship PPG-party, internal PPG organization

Q.7. Within political parties, differences of opinions occasionally arise. Did it occur, under the PPG leadership of [x] and [y], that the party elite and (specific) PPG members were not on the same wavelength?

- Probes: On which concrete policies or occasions? [+ *own examples from media outlets*]. How did PPG leader [x] and [y] cope with such situations? Did they ever defend PPG's preferences towards the party elite (Often? Examples? How? Formal or informal?) Did they ever defend the position of the party elite in the PPG? (Often? Examples? How? Formal or informal?). Which of the two did PPG leader [x] and [y] do most often during their term as a PPG leader (+ *give score on dilemma scale*)?

Defend EPO position in PPG	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Defend PPG position in EPO
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Q8. [If applicable]. Majority PPG leaders often find themselves in a position in which they both have to guarantee the PPG's loyalty to the cabinet, whilst also making sure that the PPG can sufficiently raise its own profile. How did PPG leader X cope with this 'field of tension'?

- Probes: Was this any different than PPG leader Y? To what degree do you feel that the PPG, under the leadership of X and Y, was able to weight on coalition policies (if applicable). To what degree do you feel



that the PPG, under the leadership of [x] and [y], was able to weigh on party positions?

-

Q9. The next question relates to the internal management of the PPG. I want to address several of its concrete aspects and want to ask you to indicate on a scale of 1 to 10 to what degree the PPG, under the leadership of PPG leader [x] and [y], took these decisions autonomously (10) or whether they took them in close consultation with the central party leadership (1).

	<i><b>Close consultation with EPO</b></i>					<i><b>Autonomous</b></i>				
Appointing spokespersons and allocating speaking time for plenary meetings	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	<i>Probes: How was this done in practice? Which considerations were typically made here?</i>									
Appointing spokespersons for media debates	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	<i>Probes: How was this done in practice? Which considerations were typically made here?</i>									
Allocating committee seats	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	<i>Probes: How was this done in practice? Which considerations were typically made here?</i>									
Allocating other inter- and intra-parliamentary mandates (committee presidency, Bureau,...)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	<i>Probes: How was this done in practice? Which considerations were typically made here?</i>									
Determining the PPG's position with regards to specific policy proposals or initiatives	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	<i>Probes: How was this done in practice? Which considerations were typically made here?</i>									

Q10. On a scale of 1 (no autonomy) to 10 (full autonomy), to what degree would you say that group members, under the leadership of PPG leader [x] and [y], enjoyed individual autonomy when it comes to:

	<i><b>No autonomy</b></i>					<i><b>Full autonomy</b></i>				
Submitting bill proposals and amendments	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	<i>Probes: Discuss with whom? Why?</i>									

Submitting written and oral questions	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	<i>Probes: Discuss with whom? Why?</i>									
Submitting interpellations	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	<i>Probes: Discuss with whom? Why?</i>									
Sending out press releases	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	<i>Probes: Discuss with whom? Why?</i>									

Q11. In Belgium but also abroad, parliamentary votes (in committees and plenary sessions) are typically subjected to party discipline. Do you remember, however, under the PPG leadership of [x] or [y] votes where group members enjoyed more freedom to determine how they would personally vote?

- Probes: which ones? How would you assess the overall political cohesion among PPG members during their term? In what percentage of all discussions in the PPG meeting would you assess that there was in fact no disagreement: all MPs were on the same wavelength? In what percentage of all discussions do you believe their interference was crucial to obtain unity on the floor?

Q12. Did PPG leader [x] or [y] ever personally had to intervene when a group member was about to breach group unity?

- Probes: how did they cope with this situation? Did they ever use or threatened to use sanctions if an MP would breach or breached unity? Did they ever reward loyal group members? Did they ever use any of the following sanctions/reward (allocate or deny speaking time, seats in attractive committees, media access,...).

## E. Political ambitions

Q13. Quite some PPG leaders proceed after their mandates have ended to more important political positions such as minister or party president. Do you think PPG leader [x] and [y] had such ambitions?

- Probes: Do you think that the way in which PPG leader [x] and [y] filled in their position contributed to the fact that they later became [position z]. In what way?

**Closing questions**

- Are there any aspects of PPG leadership or PPG's organization, we did not discuss but where you still would like to say something about?
- Briefly summarize main take-away points from the interview + check if accurate (respondent validation).
- Thank for time and insights
- Give contact details

### 3. Sociodemographic characteristics of PPG leaders (multivariate regression analyses)

#### A. Sex of PPG leaders (binomial logistic regression, 1=female)

	Sex (1 = female)	
	B	SE
Time	0,092***	0,020
Majority party	0,205	0,483
Party group size	-0,073	0,056
Electoral result	0,066	0,095
Party type (ref: ecologists)		
<i>Liberal</i>	-0,440	0,719
<i>Chr democrat</i>	-1,346*	0,764
<i>Socialist</i>	-0,686	0,774
<i>Regionalist</i>	-0,863	0,745
<i>Radical right</i>	-0,990	0,938
<i>Communist</i>	-17,273	17815,743
<i>Other</i>	-20,734	19840,305
Linguistic group (Dutch=1)	0,311	0,455
Parliament (ref: Senate)		
<i>Chamber</i>	-0,656	0,428
<i>Flemish Parliament</i>	-1,503**	0,679
Constant	-184,219***	39,816
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0,309	
N	311	

\*,p<0.1, \*\*,p<0.05, \*\*\*,p<0.01

**B. Education of PPG leaders (binomial logistic regression, 1= university degree)**

	Education ( <i>1= university</i> )	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Time	0,011	0,014
Majority party	-0,434	0,439
Party group size	0,056*	0,031
Electoral result	-0,055	0,084
Party type (ref: ecologists)		
<i>Liberal</i>	-1,727	1,126
<i>Chr democrat</i>	-2,292*	1,175
<i>Socialist</i>	-2,068*	1,165
<i>Regionalist</i>	-1,797	1,112
<i>Radical right</i>	-2,895**	1,259
<i>Communist</i>	-3,197**	1,475
<i>Other</i>	-2,819*	1,663
Linguistic group (Dutch=1)	0,071	0,444
Parliament (ref: Senate)		
<i>Chamber</i>	0,691	0,427
<i>Flemish Parliament</i>	-0,484	0,524
Constant	-19,707	27,975
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0,106	
N	311	

\*,p<0.1, \*\*,p<0.05, \*\*\*,p<0.01

### C. Age of PPG leaders (linear regression)

	Age (linear)	
	Standardized betas	SE
Time	-0,078	0,034
Majority party	0,042	1,066
Party group size	0,122	0,071
Electoral result	-0,065	0,202
Party type (ref: ecologists)		
<i>Liberal</i>	0,233***	1,722
<i>Chr democrat</i>	0,150	1,939
<i>Socialist</i>	0,108	1,869
<i>Regionalist</i>	0,192**	1,767
<i>Radical right</i>	-0,049	2,695
<i>Communist</i>	0,064	3,889
<i>Other</i>	0,093*	4,168
Linguistic group (Dutch=1)	-0,156**	1,055
Parliament (ref: Senate)		
<i>Chamber</i>	-0,301***	1,028
<i>Flemish Parliament</i>	-0,298***	1,403
Constant	135,205**	67,421
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0,171	
N	311	

\*,p<0.1, \*\*,p<0.05, \*\*\*,p<0.01



