



**Partecipazione e Conflitto**  
 \* *The Open Journal of Sociopolitical Studies*  
<http://siba-ese.unisalento.it/index.php/paco>  
 ISSN: 1972-7623 (print version)  
 ISSN: 2035-6609 (electronic version)  
**PACO, Issue 8(1) 2015: 190-214**  
 DOI: 10.1285/i20356609v8i1p190

Published in March 15, 2015

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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### PARTY MEMBERSHIP AND INTRA-PARTY DEMOCRACY

#### *How do members react to organizational change within political parties? The case of Belgium*

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**ABSTRACT:** Facing a crucial legitimacy crisis, many Western European political parties have recently undergone various forms of organizational changes by adopting procedures for increasing intra-democracy: internal ballots, internal referenda, primary elections and so on. Direct democracy is now used in a wide range of decision-making procedures such as candidate and leadership selection (Cross and Katz, 2013). These reforms have provided new opportunities for participation to party members. What happens to more traditional elements of party internal structures when such instruments of intra-party democracy are adopted? And more specifically, how are such changes perceived by the party base? This paper explores the attitudes and behaviors of members with regard to intra-party democracy procedures. On the basis of a case study (Belgium) and of an original dataset, the paper explores the political consequences of intra-party democracy. We show that members' satisfaction with the party and their degree of previous internal activism affect the level of involvement in intra-party democracy activities. However, the dissatisfaction of the party base vis-à-vis of the membership role is growing. Intra-party democratization seems to limit the organizational function of the grass-roots membership to a 'cheerleading' role.

**KEYWORDS:** Intra-party Democracy, Leadership Selection, Party Membership, Party Politics, , Primary Elections

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## 1. Introduction

Facing a legitimacy crisis, many political parties have changed their organizational structures by integrating new and more direct procedures of intra-democracy. For instance, several West European parties recently adopted reforms in candidate and leadership selections methods, which provided new opportunities for participation to party members (Cross and Katz 2013; Cross and Pilet 2014). At the same time, the overall degree of involvement of party grass-roots within the political organizations' structures appears to be declining too (Scarrow 2013). Are these two phenomena linked in some way? Or rather, how these two aspect of intra-party life interact (if they do, indeed, are associated to some extent)? The nature and determinants of participation within party by enrolled members has been widely explored in the last three decades by scholarly studies (van Haute 2009). Several scholars have developed different theories for explaining the antecedents of intra-party activism and to explain the varying degree participation within parties (Seyd and Whiteley 1996, 2002; Granik 2005; van Haute 2011).

The literature on party membership has rapidly evolved during the last twenty years (Heidar 2006; Scarrow and Gezgor 2010) and more recently is becoming a fully-fledged, autonomous field of research in political science (Pedersen 2005; Heidar 2007; Morales 2009; van Haute 2009). Moreover, party membership as an organizational composing element is generally studied either at meso-level as an internal structural unit of party structures or at individual level as sociologically distinctive group, either in terms of political attitudes, socio-demographic features or political behaviours (Heidar 1994). Thus, party membership is rarely studied in relation to the overall organizational functioning of the party. There are very few studies that combine the meso- and the individual level analyses on party membership, attempting to assess the interactions between the internal organizational rules and functional dynamics of parties and the behaviour of their members (Rüdiger 2005; Ignazi and Bardi 2006; Van Holsteyn and Koole 2009; Lyons and Lynek 2009; Sandri 2011). Party internal organizational diversity and the differences in the rationales, attitudes and behaviour of party internal faces are often discussed at the theoretical level but have rarely been tested empirically (van Haute 2009). However, several aspects of internal party life still need to be researched more in-depth. In particular, studies on party membership have focused mainly on the profiles of members and on the reasons for joining (Seyd and Whiteley 1992, 2002; Scarrow 1996; Heidar 2006; van Haute 2009). Other aspects of party membership, such as rank-and-file members' perception of the internal power dynamics, the satisfaction with party rules and with the overall functioning of the party remain rather understud-

ied (Heidar 2007; Van Holsteyn and Koole 2009). Even less studied are the impact of party organizational features and rules on membership attitudes and behaviour (Granik 2005; Sandri 2011).

Therefore, in this paper we look at the relationship at individual level between intra-party democracy and membership participation. When party adopt, for various reasons, new internal democratization measures such as direct internal elections of the party leader, one-member-one vote procedures for selecting delegates to national congress and for nominating candidates for elections, how grass-roots members perceive these measures? Do they participate in these procedures? Does this impact their overall mobilization within the party? Who are the members that take part in internal democracy procedures?

In this paper, we explore the above mentioned research questions. We try and contribute to the debate on the consequences of intra-party democracy at individual level by looking at the extent to which ordinary members take part in internal democratic procedures and by assessing how they perceive intra-party democracy. We develop and exploratory analysis of the actual use by party grass-roots of the new instruments that give members more say over party decisions. Then, we look at the profiles of those members that take part in intra-party democracy procedures. Is it possible to delineate a categorization of more active members? In general, most studies have shown that party members are more likely to be inactive within their parties. There is only a small minority of them that are engaged in intra-party activities, especially outside the period of high mobilization such as election campaigns. Within the broad supply of activities, the specific nature of direct democracy procedures remains to be explored more in-depth. Many theoretical implications have been elaborated on their consequences on the power sharing within political parties (Rüdig 2005; Koole 2009; Linek and Lyons 2009; Wauters 2009; Baras *et al.* 2010).

However, we still don't know how party members differentiate themselves with regard to these new opportunities of participation. This paper will explore which kinds of members take part in direct selection procedures within parties. Are they new or old party members? Are they instant-members, joining only for a brief period of time and with little or no linkage with the party, or members more loyal to the party? Do they participate in all kinds of activities or are they only attracted by these new rights they've been granted? To what extent intra-party democratization measures could contribute in explaining the new features of party internal mobilization by grass-roots affiliates? These questions will provide us with a clear overview of the organizational changes and cleavages that these procedures have promoted.

Taking the Belgian Socialist Party as a case-study, the paper analyses the individual attitudes towards intra-party democracy and the participation of members in internal selection procedures (for nominating the leader, the candidates for elections and the delegates to congress). The PS provides an appropriate case study because it has integrated different forms of internal democratization during the last two decades and therefore ordinary members have had the time to get familiar with them and strategically and ideologically evaluate their consequences. As a traditional left-wing mass party, characterized by decentralized structures and highly mobilizable membership, the PS also provides an interesting environment for assessing the consequences of the adoption of intra-party democracy measures. Analyses will be developed on the basis of a PS membership survey (n=809) realized in 2010. In particular, the focus of our analysis will be at individual level. In order to explain the antecedents of the new features of party internal mobilization by grass-roots affiliates, a link between the degree of satisfaction with intra-party democracy, membership duration and loyalty and participation in intra-party democracy procedures will be drawn. We argue that members' perception of intra-party democracy and their degree of previous internal activism are related to their respective level of involvement in intra-party democracy activities. We also argue that membership duration also contribute in predicting the extent to which members take part in internal democracy procedures.

In the next section of the paper (Section 1), we briefly discuss the theoretical grounds of our study and of our main hypotheses. We then lay out the hypotheses that we aim at assessing (Section 2). In the following section we provide a descriptive account of the data used in this paper and of our methodology (Section 3). Finally, in Section 4 we present the analyses we developed and our main findings.

## **2. Theoretical framework and research questions**

Political parties in established democracies have recently faced three significant trends that have altered their relationships with the grassroots: declining voter loyalty, declining party membership, and the declining importance of cleavage politics (Dalton, Farrell and McAllister 2011; Scarrow and Gezgor 2010). The three constitutive organizational elements of party politics, namely the 'party in central office'; the 'party in public office' and 'the party on the ground' (Katz and Mair, 1994) are developing in different directions and coping with general declining political trust and participation and growing political discontent in different ways. Several authors pointed out that it is the 'party on the ground' dimension is facing a real crisis (Scarrow 2014). The most signifi-

cant aspect of 'party decline' could be interpreted as a crisis of participation within parties.

The two main organizational responses that parties have recently elaborated to cope with such new challenges (anti-party attitudes, eroding electorates, etc.) are the expansion of intra-party democracy and the introduction of new forms of party membership. On the one hand, parties have been prompted to develop new strategies to broaden their boundaries and reach out to non-member supporters (or "sympathizers"). In the last decade, Western European parties (but also Canadian, Australian, Israeli, Latin American, etc.) have adopted several organizational reforms that prompt the recognition of different forms of partisan affiliation. These reforms often entail the creation of 'friends' and 'supporters' networks that allow the participation of non-members in intra-party activities and decision-making (Scarrow 2014). For example the PS in France offers three different types of party affiliation in addition to full membership.

On the other hand, parties have adopted a wide range of internal organizational reforms that, at least formally, give members more say over outcomes. Direct democracy is now used in a wide range of intra-party decision-making procedures such as candidate selection, leadership selection and policy positions formulation. For instance, in March 2014 the UK Labour has changed the method for selecting its leader and has adopted a procedure that entails the use of full membership ballot for the next leadership elections, with a selectorate composed by full members, affiliated members, and registered supporters. These two responses - and party organizational change in general - triggers significant modifications in the role and behaviour of grassroots activists, namely party members.

These evolutions have triggered a first literature on the evolutions of party strategies. In this perspective, the model of parties as instruments of social integration has been reformulated within a new mobilizing strategy that goes beyond the traditional ideological boundaries (Kirchheimer, 1966). Trying to attract the median voter (Downs 1956), political parties target their political message for all the electorate, adopting thus a catch-all approach. The old organizational structures, rooted in the grassroots membership and ideologically distinctive, have been replaced by this new logic in the mobilization of party supporters. This new tools for mobilizing voters may allow to attract new quotas of the electoral market, but do not guarantee a loyal and faithful electoral support (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000), thus affecting negatively the transformation of voters into activists (Raniolo 2004, 2006). Looking at declining membership data and election turnout, it seems that this new approach to electoral and party mobilization has entailed some problems in the effectiveness of these mobilizing strat-

egies (van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke 2011). Furthermore, the increasing diffusion of anti-party and anti-politics feelings among citizens and voters strengthen the idea of an emerging deep gap between parties and their supporters (Poguntke 1996; Poguntke and Scarrow 1996; Dalton, Farrell and McAllister 2011).

From an organizational point of view, a part of the literature has been devoted to the description of the new rules of intra-party democracy (Scarrow, 1999; Scarrow and Kittilson 2003; Cross and Katz 2013). Rahat and Hazan (2007) underlined that the most used instrument for implementing this 'democratization' process is the enhancement of the inclusiveness of the methods for candidate and party leadership selection. At the moment, the most inclusive method identified by the literature for selecting candidates for elections or the party leader is represented by party open or closed primaries, i.e. internal direct elections by party members and, in the case of open primaries, supporters and voters (Cross and Blais 2012).

For instance, the Italian Democratic Party (PD, Partito Democratico), has been reaching out to supporters and has integrated them in crucial internal decisions such as selecting the party leader or candidates for elections or chief executive candidate for more than ten years now (Pasquino 2009; Pasquino and Venturino 2010, 2014; Sandri, Seddone and Venturino 2015). French Socialists used an open primary to select their presidential candidate in 2011. All Icelandic parties use open primaries for selecting legislative candidates, and the Greek Socialist Party (Pasok) uses open primaries to select its leader.

A large part of the literature is dedicated to the possible consequences of the adoption of internal elections both for the organisational boundaries of parties and for the relation between party headquarters and grass-root members. On the one hand, these measures contribute in stimulating the internal mobilization of members already enrolled in the party. On the other hand, the open and inclusive character of this instrument encourage new typologies of political participation, which in some cases do not require any formal affiliation to the party, but instead develop an intermittent participative behaviour that concern in particular voters interested by cognitive mobilization (Dalton 2008; Scarrow, 2013). In this perspective, the direct selection of party leader and candidates for elections seem to strongly affect the role of grass-roots members within party organizations. Scholars have pointed out that party central bodies and elites are often strengthened by these measures rather than weakened (Baras *et al.* 2010, Scarrow 1999a; Cross and Katz 2013). In particular, what needs to be explored is the extent to which the adoption of a direct relationship between members and leadership through the electoral link is actually translated in stronger accountability of leaders towards rank-and-file members within the organization.

Broadly speaking, few studies have explored to what extent the internal direct selection procedures (either for choosing the leader, candidates for election or delegates to congress or to party executive bodies) have affected the role of grass-roots members (Kittilson and Scarrow 2003, 65; Allern and Pedersen 2007; Faucher-King 2007; Van Holsteyn and Koole 2009; Lyons 2009; Sandri 2011). Beside an evaluation of the role of members in objective terms, some studies have however examined individual data on party grass-roots members' perceptions of intra-party democracy. This literature aims at studying how party members evaluate party's internal democracy and whether they actually support these organizational changes (Seyd 1999, van Schuur and Voerman 2009; Baras *et al.* 2010; Bardi and Ignazi 2006; Wauters 2009; van Holsteyn and Koole 2009; Sandri 2011). These individual measures are a mean to evaluate the procedural democratization and its impact relying on the point of view of the concerned actors.

Seyd (1999) analyzed the attitudes of British Labour members toward internal democracy and in particular their support for party leadership. He found little empirical evidence to confirm the assertion of the positive association between rank-and-file inactivity (Katz and Mair 1995) and the likelihood to support the party leadership and thus to be more docile (Seyd 1999, 395). Moreover, van Haute (2008) studied members' political discontent and their voice attitudes concerning their dissatisfaction with party functioning. Along the same lines, Lynek and Lyons (2008) have explored the preferences of party members concerning leadership selection rules and practical implementation. More recently, Baras *et al.* (2010) presented an exploration of the evaluation and support for intra-party democracy among Spanish party delegates.

A first exploration of the frustration with the lack of internal democracy of Italian far-right party members has been performed through survey data by Bardi and Ignazi in 2006. Concerning the Dutch case, van Holsteyn and Koole (2009) have developed a first attempt to study the opinions of party members on internal party democracy. Wauters (2009) has analyzed members' opinions on intra-party democracy (in particular concerning the attitudes and behaviors with regard to the direct election of the party leader) in the case of Belgium and compared them with the formal rules and actual practices of power sharing within Belgian parties. Authors have mainly considered how procedures of intra-party democracy could change the role of parties, members and supporters and their interrelations (Sandri 2011).

These studies have extensively examined how often these measures are actually used by party members but they have often tackled grass-roots members as a unique and monolithic group. Instead of opposing party members to sympathizers/supporters or to party elites, it seems relevant to examine whether the opportunity of new forms of participation has been seized by different kinds of members. The idea is to catego-

rize and differentiate grass-root members on the basis of the intensity with which they take part in internal democracy events such as direct selection procedures for party and elective mandates.

We consider important to know how rank-and-file members have adapted their behavior and attitudes to the new role the elites gave them within the party structures. Is the participation to these selection procedures randomly distributed among party members? Or is on the contrary possible to draw a profile of those members that take more often part in these events? Does this contribute in explaining patterns of internal mobilization? Regarding the literature review provided in this section, a question that also arises is: to what extent new or recently enrolled members have been attracted by these forms of “democratic” participation and therefore participate more than older members? Are these activities used more by already highly active members, and thus the overall degree of internal activism is not affected? Does nothing change in intra-party mobilization? The main aim of this study is therefore to identify the determinants of the participation of party members in internal democratic procedures, which constitutes thus the dependent variable explored in the paper.

### **3. Main hypotheses**

This paper will explore how party members use and take advantage of the new opportunities of participation offered by the intra-party democratization processes. The main aim of this study is to apprehend party members in their diversity, considering that all members will not seize these new opportunities in the same way or with the same intensity. Taking into account the fact that participation will probably not be randomly distributed among party members will provide us with useful information on the consequences of these new measures on party grass-roots. We therefore explore the actual impact of the adoption of measures for democratizing candidate and leadership selection methods on individual political participation in terms of patterns of behavior. Here, we thus define and identify the different groups we want to explore on the basis of their participation on intra-party democracy activities. In this paper, we develop 3 main hypotheses.

First, party activism has often been considered as an overall behavior involving all kinds of activities (Heidar and Saglie 2003). However, each activity differs in terms of costs and benefits and therefore in terms of its attractiveness. Some members can participate in some kind of activities and not in others. This paper considers intra-democracy instruments as one specific kind of activism, among other internal activities



(canvassing, participating in party rallies, in local section meetings, etc). Therefore, it is relevant to know which types of members take part in these activities and which do not. From this idea we draw our first hypothesis. We can hypothesize that the introduction of new instruments of intra-party democracy could strengthen the degree of participation of members that are already highly mobilized. Therefore, these new opportunities consolidate the participation of already active members and do not change the overall level of participation within parties.

*HP1A: More generally active members will be more interested in intra-party democracy procedures and will be more involved in them.*

Moreover, it has been argued that most active members are more disposed to be dissatisfied with intra-party democracy and to support less strongly the party, because they care more about how the party organization works or about their own role in the party machine than passive members (Ignazi and Bardi 2006). We will therefore investigate whether intra-party democracy will also be considered more or less positively by active members.

*HP1B: Members more satisfied with intra-party democracy will participate more in internal selection procedures.*

The second hypothesis investigates the difference in the degree of internal participation on the basis of membership duration. The assumption is that intra-party democracy has a stronger effect on members that have tighter links with the party and whose membership duration is the longest.

*HP2: Older members will participate more in intra-party democracy procedures.*

After a brief presentation of the methodology adopted in the paper, we will therefore assess the two hypotheses formulated in this section on the basis of the data concerning our case study.

## **4. Methodology**

### *4.1 The case study: the Belgian French-speaking Socialist Party*

The Belgian French-speaking Socialist Party provides an excellent case study for exploring our research questions. In fact, it has adopted inclusive procedures for selecting the leader and candidates since the 90s and as a traditional mass party organization is characterized by high rates of internal mobilization and by formally defined rights and obligations for enrolled members (Sandri and Pauwels 2010). Moreover, in the PS, since the 1997 party statutes' reform, the party leader (or "party president") is directly

elected by all the enrolled, due-paying members (for at least two years) every four years.

Even though most recent studies on intra-party democratization have put particular emphasis on the role of non-member supporters or “sympathizers” (Scarrow 2014), since they may broaden the party boundaries, this paper focuses on internal organizational reforms giving formally affiliated members more say over outcomes. The Belgian PS case is characterized by closed primaries (as most Belgian parties are) and thus we decided to concentrate on this case study because our aim is to investigate the internal organization reforms rather than to extensively explore all the intra-party democracy's features. Internal reforms such as the adoption of direct membership ballots, besides improving the active role of the grassroots activists, are the most consolidated strategies to improve the degree of intra-party democracy in a comparative perspective (Sandri *et al.* 2015). Indeed, closed primaries characterize the party leaders' selection in many European parties: such as the UK Labour party, the French Socialist party, all Finnish parties, most of Danish parties, etc.

All the relevant Belgian mass (or membership-based) parties (PS, SP.a, CDH, CD&V, MR, Open VLD and NVA<sup>1</sup>) have adopted full member vote to select their president since the 90s (the precursor has been the CDH in 1970) and some of them use direct ballots at local (sections) level to select their candidates for elections (Cross and Pilet, 2014). However, in a political system in which parties play a dominant role such as the Belgian one (often considered a textbook example of a so-called ‘partitocracy’, see Deschouwer *et al.* 1996), the PS represents the political organization with the strongest societal roots and the broadest and significantly mobilized membership base (van Haute *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, the Belgian French-speaking PS is an appropriate case study for testing grassroots' attitudes and opinions on internal democracy.

The French-speaking Socialist Party was created in 1978 from a split of the former Belgian Socialist Party (founded in 1885) into two separate linguistic fringes. It represents one of the three pillars of Belgian consociationalism (Catholic, Liberal and Socialist), the historical socialist one, committed to defending the secular and working class community. The party is integrated in a socialist ‘sphere’ including socialist trade union, mutuality and several ancillary organizations and associations. This party, although with varying electoral performances both at federal and regional level during the last thirty years, remains a major actor of the Belgian political life and maintains the fea-

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<sup>1</sup>In 2014, Belgian parties relied on a membership base that overall represented a M/E ratio of 4%. Their respective membership size is the following: Ecolo : 6,233; Groen: 5,075; PS: 91,164 ; SP.a: 50,737; CDH: 26,027; CD&V: 71,287; MR: 25,739; Open VLD: 66,232; NVA: 36,439.

tures of a mass organization with a large membership body representing around 80 000 affiliates in 2013 (91,164 the year before). The socialists' 'party on the ground' thus represents around 10% of the party's voters (encapsulation ratio) and more or less 1% of overall national electorate (membership ratio).

With regard to the formulation of the party's political platform and electoral programme, it is worth to note here that the PS defines its policy positions within its national executive body which is composed by both representatives of the party central offices but also by delegates from the local and provincial branches. The latter, also called 'federations', represent the party units responsible for the political and organizational management of the respective local branches. The federations are also mutually autonomous from party central bodies in terms of internal decision-making, at least concerning the issues related and limited to their respective territorial tier.

The socialist party members mainly attend the local branches activities, the basic structure of the party. Their place is consultative and their role passive. The privileges and obligations of PS grass-roots members are described in detail in the party statutes (whose last version has been adopted in May 2010) and in the "Members' Regulations" (*Charte du Militant*, adopted by the party congress on May 10, 1997). According to party internal rules, PS members are endowed with extensive rights and privileges but also with a few obligations. Firstly, in terms of membership rights the party statutes entail that members can participate in party assemblies at all different levels, in particular branch and municipal assemblies, and to party activities. They have the right to stand as candidates for party internal mandates and for elective mandates. Moreover, members directly elect the executive body of their local branch as well as its president. Members also elect their delegates to the provincial federation's assembly (art. 22 of the statutes) and to the national congress (art. 32). All members can participate to a provincial federation's assembly but only with consultative role and without voting rights (art. 22, § 2). They also can participate in the selection of candidates for the elections that is held at the level of the local branches. PS members cannot choose directly the composition of the main executive body, the bureau, which is selected indirectly via the delegates to the provincial federations.

Since the reform of the party statutes adopted in 1999, the party leader (or "party president") is directly elected by all the members every four years. All enrolled members that have regularly paid their inscription fees for the last two years, namely year preceding the election and the year in which the election is held, can vote in the direct election of the leader. The term in office is four years and the presidential mandate could be renewed indefinitely. The function is incompatible with any ministerial position, a top position in the socialist press and, since 1973, an age limit of 65 years is ap-

plied. The rules for organizing the direct election of the party leader are rather simple and are presented in the PS statutes. It is possible to stand as candidates in the PS leadership elections only if one has been affiliated for at least five years and is member with voting rights of a provincial federation's executive body (committee). The nomination procedure is highly centralized and is managed directly by the national bureau and the party Secretary-general (who is elected by the congress and is in charge of the day-to-day administration of the party and its organizational structures). They are in fact in charge of selecting the candidates that could run in the leadership election. This nomination procedure entails a high degree of centralization and even hierarchy. It contributes in explaining the non-competitive character of these elections.

The first election has been organized in October 1999 (Table 1). Four contenders stood for this election: Elio Di Rupo, who won with 28.208 votes over 40.258 votes cast (around 71%), Anne-Marie Lizin (who obtained 6.673 votes, i.e. 16,6%), Jean-Maurice Dehousse (2.923 votes, 7,3%) and Michel Villain (1.706 votes, 4,2%). Although only half of the enrolled members actually voted, PS first internal elections were comparatively more competitive than the second ones organized in 2003. In the latter, the incumbent leader Di Rupo stood as the only contender in what has been substantially a coronation, obtaining 27.174 preferences (94%) over a total of 28.950 votes cast (Delwit 2011). After the electoral defeat at federal level of June 2007, a third direct election of the leader has been organized in July 2007: Di Rupo has then be re-elected for a third mandate by obtaining 20.654 preferences (89,5% of the votes), standing against only one contender, Jean-Pierre De Clercq, who gained 2.425 votes (Delwit 2011). Finally, on May 29, 2011 Di Rupo has been elected for a fourth time, again in a coronation - given that he was the only candidate - and obtained 17.436 (96,7%) of the 18032 votes cast by PS grass-roots members and activists. The last internal ballot, organized in November 2014, also resulted in a coronation for Di Rupo, who was re-elected with a landslide of members' votes (93.6%).

The first table presented above already shows –quite surprisingly – that the opportunities provided by new measures of intra-party democracy are actually used only by a small share of socialist party members. The turnout remains steadily below 50% of enrolled members. We also observe that the turnout is constantly decreasing over time, probably due to the non-competitive nature of the direct election of the socialist party leader. Therefore, having assessed that grass-roots members do not enthusiastically take part in the new inclusive procedure for choosing the leader, for the moment we leave this variable aside and we move to the exploration of other measures of intra-party democracy, namely the direct internal selection by members of candidates and of party mandates at local and national level.

**Table 1. PS internal elections for selecting the leader**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Candidate scores</i>	<i>Turnout</i>
1999	Elio Di Rupo (71,4 %) Anne-Marie Lizin (16.6%) Jean-Maurice Dehousse (7.3%) Michel Villan (4.2%)	38.7 %
2003	Elio Di Rupo (93.86%)	32.1%
2007	Elio Di Rupo (89.5%) Jean-Pierre De Clercq (10.5%)	30.7%
2011	Elio Di Rupo (96.7%)	22.3%
2014	Elio Di Rupo (93.6%)	28.2%

#### *4.2 Data description and exploration*

The present study is developed on the basis of an original dataset on party members. The data on party membership stems from a survey on PS (French-Speaking Belgian Socialist Party) party members conducted in Belgium in 2010 in order to measure members' political attitudes, socio-political profiles and degree of internal activism. This survey aimed at collecting data at individual level among party members on how they perceive, evaluate and experience structural democracy and provide a reliable and valid instrument for assessing the effects of organizational changes on membership role at individual level.

A mail-back survey of randomly selected grass-roots members was conducted between July and November 2010. The survey is based on a two-steps simple random sample drawn from the membership lists of the political party. A first mail-out of questionnaires to 2500 randomly selected addresses was completed on July 15, 2010: 388 questionnaires were returned, generating a response rate of 15,5 %. A second-wave mail-out of questionnaires to other 2500 randomly selected addresses was completed on November 4, 2010 with a response rate of 16,8 % (421 surveys returned). A total of 5.000 questionnaires were thus mailed in two waves to the sampled individuals, with a total 809 surveys returned, generating a response rate of 16,2%. Although not entirely satisfactory, this result in terms of response rate is consistent with the timing and response rates of other mail surveys made on Belgian party members (van Haute, 2009).

## **5. Results and discussion**

### *5.1 Participation to selection procedures*

Our questionnaire includes various questions on members' participation to selection procedures. As we have already outlined, socialist party members have the right to select the president of their local branch, their delegates to the federation and national congress and they can participate in the selection of candidates for elections. In the survey, we asked how often the members participated to these kinds of activities during their membership. The possible answers were "never", "rarely", "occasionally" and "very often".

Party members most often participate to the selection of the local president (Table 2). This is not surprising regarding the proximity of the local contest with the environment the members live in. The majority (52.1%) of the socialist party members very often took part in the procedures for selecting the president of their local section. Only a small minority (19.4%) has never done it in the past. The second most popular selection procedure is the selection of candidates for elections which also concerns the local branches because it is carried out at that level, even for national elections. On the contrary, those who participate very often or occasionally to the selection of delegates to congresses are a minority of the party members we have surveyed.

In Table 2, we can see that few members really participate to the selection of their representatives in party assemblies. Therefore, we built a cumulative scale of participation in internal selection procedures. Before doing that, we assessed that the different items used for measured the participation of the respondents in internal democratic procedures were actually lined to an underlying variable dealing with intra-party democracy. The common features of the 4 items used for measuring the involvement in intra-party democracy activities were assessed by a principal component analysis of the different selection procedures presented in Table 2. A one factor solution emerged from this analysis. This component explains 67.21% of the total variance from the above mentioned variable.

This analysis allowed us to calculate an overall scale of participation to internal selection procedures. This cumulative scale is elaborated by adding up the scores of each individual respondent on the different items presented in Table 2 and to the assessing the participation to the various rounds of leadership elections. The calculation provides a scale ranging from 5 to 20. The minimum score of 5 corresponds to a party member who never participates to any of these activities. The maximum score of 20 corresponds to the case of a party member who participates very often to all selection pro-

cedures made available. Party members' distribution on this scale reveals a cluster around the minimum value of the scale (Figure 1). Except for this specific aspect, the scale has a normal distribution shape.

**Table 2. Distribution of party members on their participation to internal selection procedures**

Type of internal selection	Frequency of participation	%
Selection of the president of the local branches	Never	19.4
	Rarely	7.8
	Occasionally	20.7
	Very Often	52.1
	Total (N)	701
Selection of delegates for provincial bodies	Never	49.4
	Rarely	17.7
	Occasionally	19.1
	Very Often	13.8
	Total (N)	708
Selection of delegates for national congress	Never	58.2
	Rarely	18.5
	Occasionally	13.8
	Very Often	9.4
	Total (N)	701
Selection of candidates for elections	Never	38.9
	Rarely	12.5
	Occasionally	21.8
	Very Often	26.7
	Total	719

Moreover, in this section we examine the specific nature of intra-party democracy activities and of the profiles of the members that take part in them. Here we explore whether the opportunities offered by these new forms of participation have been seized by different kinds of members. The idea is to differentiate members on the basis of the intensity with which they take part in internal democracy events. We consider important to know how rank-and-file members have adapted their behavior and attitudes to the new role the elites gave them within party structures. In this perspective, our first research question investigates whether the participation to these selection procedures is randomly distributed among party members or whether these activities

are mainly carried out by already active members. We therefore hypothesized that overall highly active members participate more in intra-party democracy procedures (HP1A).

Figure 1. Party members' distribution on the scale of participation to selection procedures

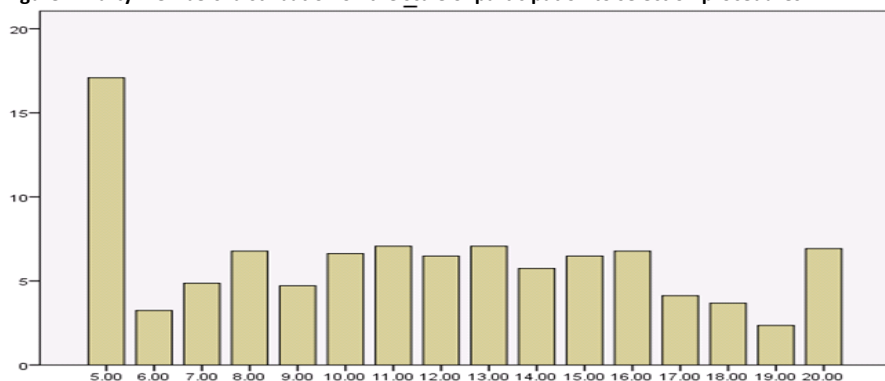
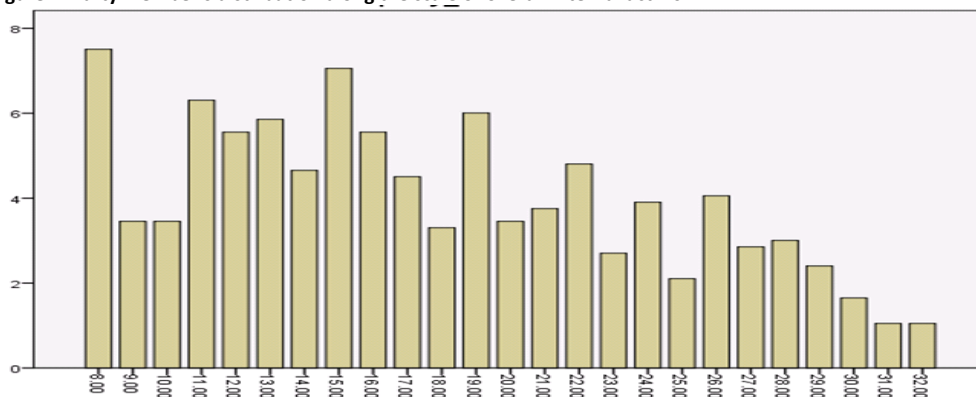


Figure 2. Party member's distribution along the scale of overall internal activism



In order to assess our first hypothesis, we built a scale of traditional party activities (Figure 2). The cumulative scale combines several items presented in the survey, all measuring the frequency of participation to different party activities. The 8 items included in the scale are the following: 'participate to party demonstrations and public events', 'doing administrative work for local branch', 'participate in social events organized by the party', 'participate in electoral campaign activities', 'stand for an internal office or for an elected office', 'participate in local branch meetings', 'organize internal



meetings or party events’, ‘speak in party debates or events’. Considering eight activities carried out by party members, a principal component analysis was run and provided a one-dimension solution. The main component extracted explains 55.5% of the total variance included in the original variables. All activities loaded highly on the underlying component, meaning that one overall scale can summarize them appropriately. Consequently, we calculated a party activism scale by adding the individual scores of each member on these 8 activities. The scale of party activism ranges from 8 to 32. The minimum score concerns members who never participate in any activities and vice versa for the maximum score (Figure 2).

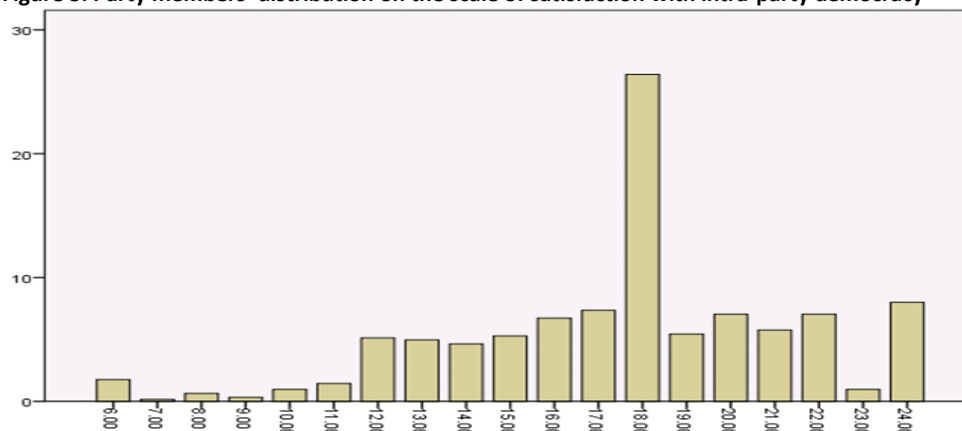
In order to explore our first hypothesis, we have run a correlation analysis between the two quantitative scales we created. The Pearson correlation is significant and highly positive. Its value means that the two scales are closely related (Table 3). This positive correlation suggests that when the level of overall activism increases, the level of participation to selection procedures will also increase. The data seem to support our first hypothesis stating that intra-party democracy procedures are mainly used by those members that were already active in the party.

**Table 3. Pearson correlation between scale of participation to selection procedures and scale of overall activism**

	Scale of overall activism
Scale of participation to selection procedures	0.640*** N=628

The new opportunities are therefore seized by those who already participate within the party. But does this mean that the members involved in internal selection procedures are also satisfied by intra-party democracy? In order to test the second hypothesis (HP1B) we created a simple cumulative scale of satisfaction with intra-party democracy (Figure 3). The scale is the result of the sum of individual scores on 6 questions dealing with members’ satisfaction with the functioning of different selection procedures: ‘measures for selecting the leader of the local branch’; ‘measures for selecting the leader of the provincial branch’; ‘measures for selecting the delegates to national or provincial congress’; ‘measures for selecting members of national executive body (bureau)’; ‘measures for selecting candidates’; ‘measures for selecting the party leader’. Respondents could declare themselves ‘very satisfied’, ‘satisfied’, ‘unsatisfied’, ‘very unsatisfied’ with the 5 propositions. The cumulative scale of satisfaction with intra-party democracy ranges from 6 to 24: 6 corresponds to the lowest level of satisfaction with intra-party democracy and 24 being the highest level of satisfaction (Figure 3).

**Figure 3. Party members' distribution on the scale of satisfaction with intra-party democracy**



Then, we briefly explored the relationship between this scale and the scale of participation to internal selection procedures. The correlation between the scale of participation in selection procedures and the scale of satisfaction with intra-party democracy shows a Pearson correlation score of 0.148 (Table 4). Although this coefficient is significant, it is not very high. The level of satisfaction with intra-party democracy is positively associated with the participation in intra-party democracy activities but the relationship is not very strong. At any rate, this seems to suggest that the data support our second hypothesis (HP1B).

**Table 4. Pearson correlation between the scale of satisfaction with intra-party democracy and the scale of participation to internal selection procedures**

	Scale of satisfaction with intra-party democracy
Scale of participation to selection procedures	0.148***
	N=625

### 5.2 Participation to intra-party democracy and membership-party linkage

In this section, we investigate our third hypothesis (HP2). We argue that the degree of internal participation in intra-party democracy activities varies in the basis of membership duration. The assumption is that intra-party democracy has a stronger effect on members that have tighter links with the party and whose membership duration is the longest. First we assess the relationship between the degree of involvement in internal selection procedures and membership duration while in the second part of this

section we will examine the impact of the loyalty to the party on our dependent variable.

In order to investigate the link between participation in selection procedures and membership duration, we examine the correlation between the quantitative variable measuring for how many years the respondent has been enrolled in the party and the scale of participation to selection procedures. The coefficient is significant and positive. Its value means that the two measures increase in the same direction: when the membership duration increase, the level of participation to selection procedures does too.

We investigate more in-depth this association by analyzing membership duration as a categorical variable. We recoded the variable by creating several cohorts or classes of membership duration years. As this variable is a categorical one, we compared the mean values on the scale of participation to internal selection procedures per each class of membership duration. Then, we ran a t-test of independence to compare the means among groups, given that they appeared to be quite different. The following table (Table 6) clearly shows a linear evolution of the level of participation in intra-party democracy activities on the basis on membership duration. The last class or “generation” of member has the lowest mean and the first generation the highest. This suggests a similar conclusion than the one drawn from the correlation between the two variables. However, here we can clearly distinguish two important points where members’ participation significantly increases: when the duration of membership corresponds to more than 10 years and when it reaches more than 40 years. Surprisingly, the level of participation does not decrease or stagnate when the variables reaches the level of the highest class in terms of membership duration. On the contrary, it still increases

**Table 5. Pearson correlation between membership duration and the scale of participation to internal selection procedures**

	Membership duration
Scale of participation to selection procedures	0.289***
	N=650

These findings seem to support our third hypothesis stating that older members participate more in intra-party democracy procedures. Moreover, this also suggests that the members who are attracted by this type of intra-party activity and who joined more recently - and that can be considered as ‘younger’ members- may be different from those who join and remain over the long haul.

**Table 6. Participation to selection procedures mean scores per classes of membership duration**

Class of membership duration	Mean
Less than 10 years	8.3300
10 to 19 years	11.4906
20 to 29 years	11.9206
30 to 39 years	11.7810
40 to 49 years	13.0882
More than 50 years	13.2405
Total	11.6123

Finally, we looked at the degree of loyalty that the surveyed members show towards their party. The “loyalty” variable measures the extent to which members feel loyal to their party. In the questionnaire, a question was presented to the respondents simply asking whether they felt, or not, loyal towards the party<sup>2</sup>. For this categorical variable, we also calculated the mean values on the scale of participation to internal selection procedures for the loyal members and for the disloyal members (Table 7). The t-test revealed that the difference in the degree of participation between the two groups is significant. The most loyal member score 12 on the scale of participation while disloyal members score 10 on the same scale. The first tend to participate more. If those who participate in intra-party democracy activities are those who feel more loyal to the party, we can question the change and internal renovation potential of internal democratization measures.

**Table 7. Participation to selection procedures mean scores per loyal and non-loyal members**

Scale of participation to selection procedures		N	Mean
Loyalty to the party	No loyalty	38	8.9474
	Loyalty	615	11.8455

### 5.3 Explaining participation to intra-party democracy procedures: regression analysis

We also have run a final regression in order to assess the causal relation between the previously explored independent variables and the participation to selection procedures and to investigate the intensity of these relationships. The dependent variable of this regression analysis is the scale of participation to selection procedures. The independent variables are age, gender, education (classical control variables), the scale

<sup>2</sup> The respondents had the possibility to fully agree, partly agree, partly disagree or fully disagree with the following proposition ‘I have strong feelings of loyalty towards the party’.

of overall activism, the scale of intra-party democracy satisfaction, loyalty to the party and membership duration. The results of the analysis are reported in Table 8.

**Table 8. Linear regression analysis on the scale of participation to selection procedures**

Model	Standardized coefficients (Beta)	t	Sig.
Constant		.653	.514
Gender	.035	1.035	.301
Age	-.037	-.772	.441
Education level	-.037	-1.028	.305
Scale of overall party activism	.572	16.121	.000
Scale of intra-party democracy satisfaction	.109	3.067	.002
Loyalty to party	-.044	-1.220	.223
Membership duration	.256	5.485	.000

$R^2 = 0.431$

The first finding concerns the explained variance. The  $R^2$  of this analysis equals 0.431 meaning that the variables we included in the model explain 43.1% of the variance of the scale of selection procedures.

The regression analysis supports previous findings. Except for loyalty that does not seem to significantly predict the level of participation in selection procedures, all the previously tested variables are significant. The level of overall party activism impacts significantly and positively (.572) on the intensity of participation to selection procedures. Having controlled for other variables, the more a member participates to usual party activities, the more he/she will participate to intra-party democracy procedures. The level of intra-party democracy satisfaction also exerts a positive and significant effect on the dependent variable. All things being equals, a one unit increase in the level of intra-party democracy satisfaction will increase the level of participation to selection procedures of 0.109, which is not a huge increase, but still interesting. Membership duration exerts also positive and significant effect as the participation to selection procedures increases when the membership duration increases.

Surprisingly, the demographic control variables we included in the regression analysis are not significant, while they often are when we examine the overall scale of party activism (see for instance, van Haute *et al.* 2012; van Holsteyn and Koole 2009; Wauweters 2009). Except for age (which was significant before including the other variables), all the demographic variables do not have an impact on the participation to selection procedures.

## 5. Conclusions

In this paper we explored the determinants of the degree of participation in intra-party democracy activities by grass-roots affiliates. We looked at the impact of the satisfaction with intra-party democracy, membership duration and loyalty on the dependent variable. We argue that members' perception of intra-party democracy and their degree of previous internal activism are related to their respective level of involvement in intra-party democracy activities. We also argue that membership duration contribute in predicting the extent to which members take part in internal democracy procedures. The survey data on the Belgian Socialist party seem to fully support our three hypotheses. More generally active members are more interested in intra-party democracy procedures and thus are more involved in them and the members who are more satisfied with intra-party democracy will participate more in internal selection procedures. Moreover, older members will also participate more in intra-party democracy procedures.

These findings raise the question of the real change that can be brought by adopting internal democratization measures. In the French-speaking Socialist party, when elites give members a say over important internal decisions, the members that actually seize the opportunity to participate are those more loyal and already highly implicated within the party. So, intra-party democratization seems to strengthen the involvement of the core activists instead of attracting new members or instead of mobilizing previously passive members. The impetus for internal organizational and political change that should be associated with the adoption of such measures appears to be less significant than expected.

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