

# **Democratization versus representation? Women party leaders and party primaries in Belgium.**

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## 1. Introduction

An increasing number of political parties have recently been changing their internal organization, more in particular by giving grassroots members a greater formal say in the selection of the party leader (Leduc, 2001; Denham, 2009 ; Kenig, 2009a ; Wauters, 2010 ; Cross and Blais, 2012). These developments vary across countries and across parties, but seem to constitute nevertheless a clear trend in Western political parties.

The most inclusive way to select a party leader is organizing party primaries in which all party members can participate. This phenomenon can be studied from different angles: by either focusing on the features, the causes or the consequences of it. In this paper, we will evaluate these direct member votes by looking at one type of consequences, i.e. their impact on representation. As for representation, a distinction can be made between descriptive representation (or 'representation as presence') and substantive representation (or 'representation of ideas') (Pitkin, 1967 ; Rahat & Hazan, 2006). Our focus will be on the former, and more in particular on the representation of women. The continued lack of gender equality in political leadership is named by Inglehart, Norris and Welzel (2002) as one of the fundamental problems of contemporary democracies. The presence of women at the head of a party matters for several reasons: they are thought to be a support for women politicians in the candidate selection process, they could be a stronger guarantee for the consideration of women's interests in policy-making processes and they could function as role models for future politicians.

The focus will on Belgian parties, which have been in international perspective frontrunners as concerns organizing direct member votes to select the party leader (Pilet, Cross & Blais, 2011). We will analyze whether the level of inclusiveness of leadership selection procedures impact on the presence of women as party leaders. But our analysis will be broader than that: other variables, such as party strength, candidate characteristics and the ideological position of the party (O'Neill & Stewart, 2009) will also be included in our analysis.

In addition, we will analyze whether women candidates manage to obtain an equal number of votes compared to men in contests in which all members are enfranchised. In parliamentary elections women tend to obtain fewer votes than men, but this is often due to

party elite bias (Murray et al, 2009 ; Wauters et al, 2010), it remains to be seen whether this also applies to intra-party elections.

This paper is structured as follows. First, we will sketch the development of direct member votes in contemporary Western political parties, and we will indicate how these developments can be studied. Next, we will highlight the importance of the presence of women in the higher ranks of the party. In the third section, we will deal with what we already know from previous studies about the relationship between leadership selection and the presence of women. On the basis of this overview, we will formulate some hypotheses. The next step is an empirical analysis based on Belgian data. We end with conclusions.

## **2. Direct member votes and how to study them?**

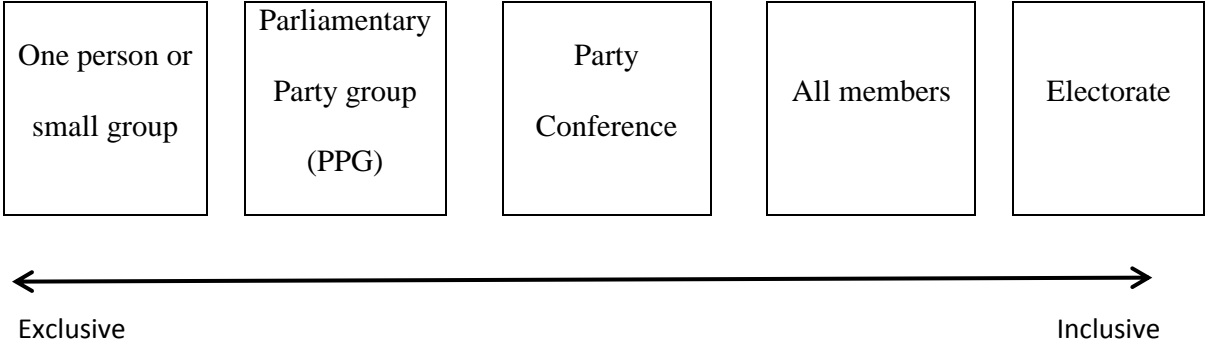
The main focus in this article will be on leadership elections in which all party members have one vote ('direct member vote', 'party primaries', 'one member one vote elections' often abbreviated as 'OMOV', are all synonyms). Like candidate selection procedures, these can be studied from three different angles: either by focusing on the process leading to their introduction, or by directing the attention to particular features of these internal electoral procedures, or by concentrating on their effects (Rahat & Hazan, 2001).

Rahat & Hazan (2001) have pointed out that candidate selection methods can be classified according to four **features**: selectorate, candidacy, decentralization and voting system. Since the latter two dimensions are not relevant for leadership selection, i.e. the selection of one single person at the national level, we will only discuss selectorate and candidacy here.

The selectorate is the body that selects the party leader. More in particular, the degree of inclusiveness of the selectorate is important. Inclusiveness can be measured by looking at the relative size of the party agency responsible for the selection of the party leader. In order to grasp this variety, a continuum on which leadership selection methods are classified according to their degree of inclusiveness is developed (Kenig, 2009a). On the one end point of the continuum, a small elite group decides who will become party leader, while at the other end all members, or even all (party) voters, are allowed to make this decision. The last few years, many parties have clearly moved in the direction of this latter point on the

continuum, i.e. towards more inclusive methods of leadership selection (Leduc, 2001; Denham, 2009 ; Kenig, 2009a ; Wauters, 2010 ; Cross and Blais, 2012)

Figure 1: Inclusiveness of leadership selection rules (Kenig, 2009a)



The second feature of leadership selection methods, i.e. candidacy, defines who is eligible for the post of party leader. Again an inclusiveness-exclusiveness continuum can be used. At the inclusive end of the continuum, all members without any further requirements could be candidate for the party leadership. At the more exclusive end, requirements such as membership seniority (in order to ensure party loyalty), internal support from a minimum number of members and/or from local or regional sections, or membership of a particular party committee, are imposed as conditions upon potential candidates. The higher the barriers imposed by these requirements, the more exclusive the leadership selection process will be.

A second way of analyzing leadership selection methods is studying the **introduction** of changes in selectorate and/or candidacy. More in particular, the adoption of grassroots involvement in the selection of the party leader appears to be interesting. Studies on this topic are scarce, but recently growing in number. Most studies provide (anecdotal) evidence about the introduction of party primaries in one particular party or country (e.g. Denham, 2009 ; Lisi, 2010) Exceptions are formed by the cross-country analysis of Cross & Blais (2012) who detect decision-makers and stimuli for the adoption of direct member votes in a large number of parties in Westminster countries (the UK, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and Canada) and by the analysis of Wauters (forthcoming) who tries to infer a general pattern for consensus democracies from the analysis of Belgian parties.

A common finding of these studies is that party elites grant more involvement to party members when finding themselves in a weak position (electoral defeat, etc.). In order to reinforce the party's (electoral) performance (or their own position in the party), party leaders adopt more inclusive leadership methods.

A final area of research on leadership selection processes is constituted by the analysis of their **effects** (Rahat & Hazan, 2001). Broadly speaking, five types of effects can be distinguished: participation, competitiveness, responsiveness, performance and representation.

A first element on which particular leadership methods can have an impact is participation. This can be interpreted in a quantitative and a qualitative manner (Rahat & Hazan, 2006). The former approach focuses on the sheer number of participants, which will automatically be higher in procedures with more inclusive selectorates. The latter approach takes the quality of participation into consideration: the type of members that are participating (Scarrow, 1999 ; Wauters, 2010) or turnout rates (the number of actual participants divided by the number of potential participants) are analysed.

A second consequence of the choice for a particular leadership selection method refers to the competitiveness of the process. Several indicators for competitiveness have been used: the number of candidates competing for the leadership, the difference in vote shares between the winner and the runner up, incumbents' success rate, and the distribution of votes index (Kenig, 2009b ; Wauters, 2009).

Thirdly, responsiveness is another aspect used to assess the consequences of leadership selection methods. Responsiveness refers to the agreement between members' opinions and these of the party leader. For instance, are the policy positions of party leaders that are elected directly by the members more in line with these of the members, compared to party leaders that are elected more indirectly?

Fourthly, performance can be used as a criterion for assessing the effects. More inclusive selection procedures are supposed to strengthen the legitimation of the party leader, both for internal and external purposes (Wauters, 2009). This increase in legitimation can be evaluated by looking at the length of time party leaders retain their position (Andrews & Jackman, 2008). Then the emphasis lies on the internal aspect. When focusing more on the external aspect, the relationship between leadership selection method and electoral

performance can be scrutinized: do party leaders that are selected by party members obtain more votes for the party in the next elections?

Finally, leadership selection procedures can be evaluated by looking at representation. As for this aspect, a distinction can be made between descriptive representation (or 'representation as presence') and substantive representation (or 'representation of ideas') (Pitkin, 1967 ; Rahat & Hazan, 2006). Our focus will be here on the former, and more in particular on the presence of women as party leaders. We make the choice for this particular group because of pragmatic and substantive reasons. In pragmatic terms, focusing on women is attractive since gender is an aspect of representation that is potentially relevant for all parties and since it provides accessible and reliable data as, contrary to for instance ethnic minorities, it is quite easy to identify women (Rahat, Hazan & Katz, 2008). In the next section, we will indicate why women's presence at the top of the party also matters from a substantive point of view.

### **3. The relevance of descriptive representatives as party leader**

Political parties are crucial actors in Western political systems and party leaders play a predominant role in the functioning of these parties. Therefore, it is difficult to underestimate the role and impact of party leaders. Their role for the political representation of women is no exception to that rule.

Party leaders are, first of all, responsible for the selection of the political personnel. They coordinate the composition of candidate lists (including determining crucial list positions and/or districts in which candidates run for office) and they appoint quite autonomously ministers and other cabinet members. Women occupying party leadership positions offer a better and more sustainable guarantee of commitment to the inclusion of women than relying on a homogeneous male selectorate, it has been found (Caul 1999 ; Darcy, Welsh and Clark 1987; Norris and Lovenduski 1995). Niven (1998) calls this the outgroup effect. To male party elites women are an outgroup, who are assessed by using stereotypes of women as a group, resulting in a judgment of these candidates as less political capable. Male candidates, on the contrary, are identified as belonging to the 'ingroup' (because of the similarity to the party elite), and consequently they are more easily judged as capable. A male selectorate

might more easily move away from women representation when, for instance, public opinion attaches less importance to this issue.

Over and above this direct effect on the recruitment and selection of women politicians, party leaders also have an indirect impact. Party structures and internal party cultures are reported to be key determinants for the descriptive representation of women in parliament. Several party characteristics – including the presence of women’s organisation in the party, the existence of target figures or certain (internal) quota – are said to influence the political representation (Caul 1999). A party leader has an enormous impact on these structural and cultural aspects. It is likely that women as a party leader will take elements which affect women’s political representation more into consideration than male party leaders.

Another relevant element of recruitment and selection is the fact that party leaders themselves often become prime minister or senior minister in government. The selection of a party leader (and whether or not this is a woman) must, therefore, not only be considered as an intra-party matter, but also as a procedure that may decide on future top government positions (Kenig, 2009b). Party leadership for women can therefore be seen a route towards (prime) ministerial office.

In sum, the presence of a woman at the top of the party helps the influx of women in parliament and government.

Supplying political personnel is, however, only one of the functions of political parties, and of party leaders in particular (Lawson 1980). Political parties fulfil more functions than just recruiting and selecting electoral candidates (Key 1964; Gunther & Diamond 2001). Parties perform functions vis-à-vis society (informing, socialising and mobilising people), they aggregate and articulate interests as part of their political agenda setting role and representational role, and also have important duties towards the government (providing and securing legislative majorities for instance).

The presence of women in the top of the party structure might, first of all, facilitate and enhance the societal functions of parties towards women, most particularly informing, socialising and mobilising women. Women’s presence in top party positions affects beliefs about politics as a ‘male’ domain (Franceschet et al., 2009). By disconnecting the exclusive link between politics and men, women can become convinced that politics is also something for them and this can encourage them to inform them about politics and to get involved in

it. Women who are better informed and more ready to undertake action, will in turn be more likely to engage in politics and to be heard by political elites. Eventually, they could aspire a political career and become part of the political elite themselves. At the same time, changes in gendered ideas about political participation can also improve the views on women held by a wide number of actors inside and outside parliament, which paves the way towards more women in public office.

Secondly, party leaders are important for political agenda setting and representation. A major reason why the inclusion of women in top party positions matters is that it is a more solid basis for substantive representation of women's issues and interests. Research reveals that women MPs in general have personal preferences to represent their particular group, are convinced that their presence can make a difference, and are encouraged to behave as a group representative by their parties, by civil society organisations and by the general public. But when this behaviour is not compatible with their personal career goals and interests – i.e. being a mainstream MP securing re-election – they hesitate and even refrain from taking up the role of group representative (Celis and Wauters 2010). The inclusion of women in top decision-making processes within parties therefore needs to complement the presence of descriptive representatives, in order to support them to substantively represent women's interests. As a consequence of the presence of a women party leader, women MPs will feel more support from their party leader to tackle these issues in parliament (and consequently will be more likely to actually behave as a group representative).

The presence of a woman at the top of the party is not only important as support for other women politicians, though. Party leaders can to a large extent influence the content of policy documents, both within and outside the party. As women in general tend to have both more expertise and more political will for representing women's issues and interests (Phillips, 1995), women party leaders can be a guarantee for the inclusion of women's issues in party and electoral programmes and/or in government agreements.

We have demonstrated that the presence of women party leaders can be important for the recruitment and selection of women MPs and women ministers, for the political mobilisation of women and for the substantive representation of women's interests.

We will now discuss the relationship between leadership selection and the presence of women.



#### **4. Leadership selection and women**

The 'law of increasing disproportion' (Putnam, 1976) states that the higher one climbs in the party hierarchy, the fewer women one will encounter. In general, we expect to find only a handful of women that have been party leader. What is of interest here, is whether there is a relationship between a woman as party leader and the selection process. In other words, are women selected as party leader by different selection methods and/or does the selection process runs different when they are selected.

We will first review what is already known about the relationship between leadership selection and women.

In the few studies on gender and party leadership, O'Neill & Stewart (2009) and Bashevkin (2010) try to detect some explanatory factors for the presence of women as party leaders in Canada. Their focus is not exclusively on the effect of leadership selection methods, but their insights are nevertheless interesting as they elaborate a framework with variables which should be taken along in our analysis. Apart from that, they also touch upon some aspects related to leadership methods.

Broadly speaking, O'Neill and Stewart put forward two general explanations for the presence or absence of women party leaders: gender role socialization and party ideology.

First of all, gender role socialization refers to the dominant culture in society seeing women in subordinate roles (care-taker, nurturer, etc) while it is seen as normal that men are holding powerful positions, for instance in politics. This implies that women aspiring a political career are in a weaker position in comparison with men: they have to overcome more barriers than men, they are less often asked than men, they are only allowed to take low-profile positions which can do not much harm, etc. (Niven, 1998 ; Lawless & Fox, 2005).

This weaker position stemming from views held in society has four possible consequences for obtaining and holding the leadership position. These lead us to four hypotheses. First of all, because of their weaker position in society and in politics, it can be expected that women will obtain the leadership position only when they are supported by senior party figures and/or high-ranked party organs. It is difficult to analyze the extent of internal party support prior to the selection process, especially when one wants to conduct an over-time analysis.

We use here the number of contenders as a proxy. It can be expected that when the party elite have a preferred candidate, they will try to limit possible resistance against this person, typically by trying to prevent other candidates to run against their candidate. Our first hypothesis is that when women are selected as party leader the number of candidates will be lower (H1).

Secondly, women are more likely to take prominent positions when the stakes are low (Bashevkin, 2010). We find this phenomenon also in parliamentary elections when women are granted candidate positions in non-competitive districts or on inferior positions of a list (Dahelrup, 2007 ; Murray et al, 2009). For men, it is easier to give up a rather unimportant position than a position that really matters. Similarly, we expect to find more women party leaders in smaller, less competitive parties (H2). The chance that party leadership in such parties results in senior government positions is rather small, and therefore men are more ready to abandon their privileged position.

A third element related to the cultural views on women is the observation that they have to do extra efforts to prove that they are up to the job. If these cultural drawbacks can be overridden by exceptional qualifications or experience of women, only then they have a chance to become party leader. Therefore, we expect that women party leaders will have more than male leaders prior parliamentary experience (H3) and are in general older (H4) meaning that they had more time to prove themselves. This latter hypothesis is also supported by the expectation that women (who are supposed to take care of their family) can only really start a political career once their children have grown up.

A second broad explanation put forward both by O'Neill & Stewart (2009) and Bashevkin (2010) is party ideology. Parties with a high commitment towards women will be more likely to have women at the higher ranks of the party. From the literature it appears that in general leftist parties are more open to disadvantaged groups in society (including women) and therefore also tend to have a better representation of these groups, both inside and outside the party (Caul 1999). This brings us to H5: there will be more women party leaders in leftist parties.

Up to now, we have formulated some interesting hypotheses, but the leadership method was not the main focus of these hypotheses. In order to formulate expectations about this,

we have to rely on literature from other research fields (instead of the one on leadership selection), i.e. candidate selection and voting behavior.

In a study on candidate selection, Rahat, Hazan & Katz (2008) posit a trade-off between inclusion and representation. The more inclusive a selectorate, the worse the presence of underrepresented groups, they state. They refer to two motivations for this thesis.

First, they mention the possibility of communication and deliberation between members of a selectorate as key element for the outcome. In direct member votes, this is not possible as the vote is individual and anonymous, and voters do not receive intermediate cues about who is likely to win. Therefore, consensus-building, including 'horse-trading' and package deals, are not likely to emerge in direct member votes (in contrary to more exclusive selectorates). This is detrimental for women, as equal representation tend to be realized better and more often when compromises can be built. Although in leadership contests only one position is allotted, package deals can be relevant as the designation of other positions (deputy party leader, leader of the parliamentary party, etc.) can be combined with the selection of the party leader. Exclusive selectorates are more suited to realize such balanced overall agreements.

A second motivation mentioned in Rahat, Hazan & Katz' (2008) analysis of candidate selection methods is less pertinent for our purposes. They state that members' choices are mainly driven by their preference for an individual candidate, while more exclusive selectorates tend to take the party interest into account. Since only one party leader is selected who is going to defend the party interest anyway, this motivation does not make much sense here.

Nevertheless, this results in the following hypothesis: exclusive selectorates are more beneficial for women party leaders (H6a). Bashevkin's (2010) analyses suggests indeed that one member-one vote selection methods are not beneficial for women.

At first glance, studies about voting behavior in parliamentary elections seem to confirm that voters (which could be considered as an inclusive selectorate) tend to vote more for men candidates than for women (Fréchette et al, 2008). A closer look at the results and the intervening variables influencing these results, however, reveals that bias held by the party elite towards women can be held accountable for this difference (Murray et al, 2009 ; Wauters et al, 2010 ; Verge & Troupel, 2011). Party elites are nominating women in less

attractive districts, they are granting smaller campaign budgets to women and they put women less forward in the media. Consequently, women obtain fewer votes, not because of the preferences of the voters (inclusive group), but due to choices made by the party elite (exclusive group). If we apply this to the selection of the party leader, we can formulate an opposite hypothesis, i.e. that inclusive selectorates are more beneficial for the selection of women party leaders (H6b).

Before introducing the situation in Belgium and starting the empirical analysis, a final control variable should be introduced. As the political presence of disadvantaged groups, and of women in particular, has risen the last few decades, it can be expected that their presence at the top of the party, has automatically increased over time.

## **5. Leadership selection in Belgian political parties**

Before starting the discussion of the empirical analysis, we first give some facts about the position of the party leader and his selection process in Belgium.

The party leader is a crucial and powerful actor in Belgian politics that is characterised as a 'partitocracy', a democratic system dominated by political parties (Fiers, 1998 ; Deschouwer, 2009). The party leader is as leader of the organisation responsible for both the internal organisation of the party and the external relations and activities of the party, such as acting as spokesperson in negotiations and appointing ministers. He almost always coincides with the electoral leader, but not with the leader of the parliamentary party which is a separate function. When in opposition, the party leader of a major party is the candidate to become prime minister or for smaller parties to play a key role in a future government. For government parties, the incumbent prime minister, a function that is in practice never combined with a mandate as party leader, is in general the candidate for a new term, but the party leader also plays a prominent role in the electoral campaign. All in all, party leaders are powerful actors in Belgian politics, only overtrumped in power by the prime minister and deputy prime ministers (Dewachter, 2003).

In the 1970s and 1980s almost all Belgian parties designated their party leader at a party conference where delegates could vote. Only the Christian-democratic PSC (the predecessor of the CDH) organised at that time already elections with participation of all members.

Nowadays, almost all parties give their members (and only them) the right to vote in party leadership elections. In the beginning of the 1990s, the radically transformed liberal party VLD introduced as first party in Flanders internal elections to designate the party leader (De Winter, 2000). This radical transformation including the introduction of far-reaching participatory procedures was an answer to the crisis of the political system, the loss of party members and the breakthrough of the extreme-right ('black Sunday' in 1991), but also a strategy to bypass the powerful middle-level elites in the party (including 'pillarized' organisations) (Wauters, forthcoming). Soon, most other parties followed and by now, almost all Belgian parties use internal elections with member suffrage to assign their party leader. By the early 2000s, all democratic parties in Belgium had introduced the full members' vote in their party statutes. This method has become the norm. When a new party is created, the system is automatically adopted, as in the case of the new party Lijst Dedecker (LDD) which was created a few months before the 2007 federal elections.

We will conduct two analyses: one on a dataset with all leadership contests and one on a dataset with all contests decided by a direct member vote.

First, a dataset<sup>1</sup> with data on the formal selection procedures and on all actual leadership contests in Belgian parties from 1965 until 2010 was set up as part of a broader comparative project lead by William Cross and Jean-Benoit Pilet. We limited ourselves to the six major parties in Flanders (Christian-democrats, social-democrats, liberal-democrats, regionalists, extreme right, greens) and the four major parties in French-speaking Belgium (Christian-democrats, social-democrats, liberal-democrats and greens). For the analysis here, we selected only these leadership contests in which a party leader was selected for the first time. Contests which simply prolonged one's stay in leadership office (re-election as incumbent) are not included. A party leader entering party leadership for a second time, but with an interruption in between, is, however, included. This was for instance the case with Charles-Ferdinand Nothomb which became party leader in 1972 and in 1996. We also excluded the French-speaking green party Ecolo from our analysis, since they have a collective leadership, ranging from 2 to 7 party leaders. It is not easy to compare the representational quality of these collective leaders with only one leader.

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Jean-Benoit Pilet together with whom I gathered the data for the Belgian part of the comparative project.

A second dataset containing data on all direct member votes is analysed in a second phase. We gathered data about all candidates that managed to obtain at least one percent of the votes in party primaries in Belgian parties.<sup>2</sup> Here all contests are included, also those that re-elected the incumbent party leader.

## 6. Empirical analysis: all leadership contests

We start with a general overview of the gender of all party leaders. As becomes apparent from Table 1, party leadership has been dominated by men. Up to now, only 6 Belgian party leaders have been women. This clearly confirms the law of increasing disproportion: the higher one climbs in the party hierarchy, the fewer women there are.

Table 1: Gender of party leaders

	Frequency	Percent
Women	6	7,3
Men	76	92,7
Total	82	100,0

Next, we test our hypotheses.

The first hypothesis stated that women need support from the party elite (in eliminating candidates for instance) to attain party leadership's office. Therefore we expected that when women are selected as party leader, the number of candidates will be lower.

At first glance, table 2 seems to confirm this hypothesis. We note an average number of candidates of 2,03 when a man is selected as party leader, which clearly differs from 1,60 candidates on average in leadership contests when a woman obtains the victory.

Table 2: Number of candidates in leadership contests, by gender of the party leader<sup>3</sup>

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Women	5	1,60	,894
Men	66	2,03	2,418
Total	71	2,00	2,342

<sup>2</sup> Especially the Flemish liberal-democratic party (VLD) used to have a tradition of a large number of minor candidates. After candidacy rules had been tightened, this phenomenon has disappeared.

<sup>3</sup> Given the low number of observations, it is difficult to run reliable statistical analyses.

We should be cautious, however, as the standard deviation is clearly higher in contests won by men. In one such a contest, no less than 15 candidates aspired to become party leader. Evidently, this outlier pushes the mean number of candidates in contests won by men to a higher level and could introduce bias in our interpretation of the results.

Therefore, it seems to be better to create a new variable with two categories: only one candidate, and more than one candidate. This has theoretical relevance as well: the question is not so much how many candidates party elites allow, but whether they are able to put forward only one candidate or not.

Table 3: More than 1 candidate in leadership contests, by gender of the party leader

		Gender of the new leader		Total
		Women	Men	
Only 1 candidate	N	3	42	45
	Row percentage	6,7%	93,3%	100,0%
More than 1 candidate	N	2	24	26
	Row percentage	7,7%	92,3%	100,0%
Total	N	5	66	71
	Row percentage	7,0%	93,0%	100,0%

Table 3 shows that there is a slight difference between men and women party leaders, but in the opposite direction as expected. 6,7% of the contests with only one candidate are won by women, while they prevail in 7,7 % of the contests with several candidates.<sup>4</sup>

Since the difference is not outspoken and in the opposite direction as expected, we reject hypothesis 1. Women do not win more in contests which are directed by the party elite.

We will now deal simultaneously with H2 and H5, as they both refer to the party of the woman party leader. H2 expects to find more women party leaders in smaller, less competitive parties, while H5 expects more women as party leader in parties from the left. First, we analyse the percentage of votes obtained at the previous national elections, and its relationship with the gender of the next party leader.

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<sup>4</sup> If we add contests on which data are missing (mainly due to closed and secret character of these contests, which took often place in 1960s or 1970s) to the category of ‘only 1 candidate’ then the difference becomes slightly smaller.

Table 4: Number of party votes obtained in the last national elections and gender of the party leader

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Women	6	8,666667	6,1210021
Men	76	13,020263	7,9618745
Total	82	12,701707	7,8936553

Table 4 clearly confirms H2: women party leaders are more prevalent in smaller parties. The average percentage of party votes in the last national elections is 8,66 % for parties in which women won the party leadership contest, while this is 13,02 % when men prevail in leadership contests. Note that given the split up of the Belgian party system in regional parties, the vote shares are in general rather small. The findings are in line with our expectation that women are allowed easier access in smaller, 'less important' parties.

Also the hypothesis concerning the ideology of the party is confirmed. Table 5 demonstrates that women party leaders are more numerous in left parties than in centrist parties, while they are also more numerous in centrist parties than in parties from the right.

In total, 12,5 % of the leadership contests in left parties are won by women, while this amounts only to 6,7 % for centrist parties and 3,6 % for right parties.

Table 5: Party's ideological orientation and gender of the party leader

		Gender of the new leader		Total
		Women	Men	
Left <sup>5</sup>	N	3	21	24
	Row percentage	12,5%	87,5%	100,0%
Centre <sup>6</sup>	N	2	28	30
	Row percentage	6,7%	93,3%	100,0%
Right <sup>7</sup>	N	1	27	28
	Row percentage	3,6%	96,4%	100,0%
Total	N	6	76	82
	Row percentage	7,3%	92,7%	100,0%

<sup>5</sup> Including Flemish and French-speaking social-democratic parties and the Flemish green party

<sup>6</sup> Including Flemish and French-speaking christian-democratic parties and the former Flemish regionalist party (Volkunie)

<sup>7</sup> Including Flemish and French-speaking liberal-democratic parties, the Flemish extreme-right party and the current Flemish regionalist party (N-VA).



Let us now turn to H3 and H4, which states that women need more skills and experience than men to reach the position of party leader. We measure experience by analyzing both the age and the parliamentary experience of the new party leaders.

H4 about age is not confirmed, as appears from Table 6. Women party leaders are on average not older than their male counterparts, even on the contrary, they are slightly younger: 44,67 years versus 46,97 years old. The marked difference in the maximum values (53 for women versus 68 for men) indicates that it is not evident for old women to obtain the position of the party leader, while it has happened at least once for a man who was already above pensionable age. On the other side of the age scale (young age), there seems to be no problems for women, as the difference between the minimum values is small (32 versus 29).

Table 6: Age and gender of the party leader

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Women	6	44,67	8,892	32	53
Men	74	46,91	9,065	29	68
Total	80	46,74	9,016	29	68

As for parliamentary experience, there appears to be a gender effect. All women party leaders had prior experience in parliament before becoming party leader. Also most male party leaders had, but still 14 of them (or more than 18 %) had not. This indicates that it is easier for men to become party leader without parliamentary experience than for women. So, hypothesis 3 stating that women party leaders are more likely than men to have prior parliamentary experience, is confirmed.

Table 7: Parliamentary experience and gender of the party leader

		gender of the new leader		Total
		Women	Men	
No prior experience in parliament <sup>8</sup>	N	0	14	14
	Row percentage	0,0%	100,0%	100,0%
Prior experience in parliament	N	6	62	68
	Row percentage	8,8%	91,2%	100,0%
Total	N	6	76	82
	Row percentage	7,3%	92,7%	100,0%

This brings us to hypotheses 6A and 6b about whether inclusive or exclusive selectorates are better for the selection of women as party leaders.

Table 8: Selectorate and gender of the party leader

		Gender of the new leader		Total
		Women	Men	
All party members	N	5	35	40
	Row percentage	12,5%	87,5%	100,0%
Delegates at a party convention	N	1	29	30
	Row percentage	3,3%	96,7%	100,0%
Party council	N	0	12	12
	Row percentage	0,0%	100,0%	100,0%
Total	N	6	76	82
	Row percentage	7,3%	92,7%	100,0%

From Table 8 it appears that women profit more from inclusive selectorates. 12,5 % of the leadership contests decided by party members have resulted in a woman as party leader, while only one woman was designated by party delegates at a conference and no women by a party council. This finding contradicts the conclusions about the effect of candidate selection methods on representation (Rahat, Hazan & Katz, 2008), but is in line with the finding that party elites rather than voters are an impeding factor to women's political

<sup>8</sup> Either in the national, the regional or the European parliament.

presence. Note that, unlike in parties in Westminster countries for instance, parliamentary parties never have been in charge of selecting the party leader.

We have to interpret this findings cautious, however, as intervening factors, such as time, might have an influence. The awareness in society for the political presence of women and the opportunities for them to build up a political career have increased over time. The first woman party leader in Belgium was only selected in 1985, the second in 1999. This means that the selection of women party leaders is concentrated in the last few decades. Complementary to the rising awareness of women’s presence in politics, there have been other evolutions over time, such as the introduction of direct member votes finally resulting in the omnipresence of this selection method in Belgian parties. Perhaps, the relationship between gender of the party leader and leadership selectorate is not so much due to the inclusive character of the selectorate, but rather to a time factor which reflects the growing attention in society for women and politics. Women only managed to reach the top position in the party in an era when almost all Belgian parties were using inclusive selection methods.

**7. Empirical analysis: direct member votes**

In order to keep this time factor under control, we look more into detail to those leadership contests that have been decided by a direct member vote. This is our second dataset that we are going to analyse now. We will investigate whether women have an equal chance to win in this kind of contests, and whether they manage to obtain an equal number of votes, as compared to men.

Table 9: Winning a direct member vote and gender of the candidate

		Winner	Loser	Total
Men	N	46	30	76
	Row %	60,5%	39,5%	
	Col %	88,5%	88,2%	88,4%
Women	N	6	4	10
	Row %	60,0%	40,0%	
	Col %	11,5%	11,8%	11,6%
Total	N	52	34	86
	Row %	60,5%	39,5%	

From Table 9, it appears that women are not very frequently candidate for party leadership contests when all members can vote. In total, only 11,6 % of all candidates in direct member votes are women. We do not have data on candidates in leadership contests with more exclusive selectorates, but when we compare with the overall percentage of women party leaders (7,3 %), it seems that this percentage is not extremely high nor extremely low.

But when women are candidate in direct member votes, they have an almost equal chance to become party leader: 60,5% of the men who are candidate becomes party leader, while 60,0 % of the women candidates obtains the victory in leadership contests decided by the rank and file. Or, expressed in column percentages: 11,5 % of all winners of leadership contests are women while 11,8 % of all losing candidates are women.

We will now turn to an analysis of the percentage of votes obtained by candidates in party primaries.

Table 10: Percentage of votes in a direct member vote and gender of the candidate, for all direct member votes and for competitive direct member votes only

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
All direct member votes	Men	73	53,53	33,170	2	99
	Women	10	53,50	34,082	6	97
	Total	83	53,53	33,070	2	99
Only competitive direct member votes (> 1 candidate)	Men	50	36,44	25,609	2	90
	Women	8	43,00	29,374	6	87
	Total	58	37,34	25,980	2	90

If we take all direct member votes into account, the average percentage of votes a candidate obtains is almost equal between men and women: 53,53% for men versus 53,50 % for women. In a large number of direct member votes, however, there is only one candidate which means that these direct member votes are no real contests. Most of the time, the only candidate is elected with percentages above 90 %. In order to control for this, we have also calculated the average percentage of votes obtained only in direct member votes with more than one candidate. These results show that women obtain on average more votes than men: 36,44 % for men versus 43,00 % for women.

This clearly confirms our earlier observation that inclusive selectorates in leadership contests are not detrimental for women. The fact that more women are elected via direct member votes could not simply be attributed to the effect of a rising awareness for women's presence over time.

## 7. Conclusion

The inclusion of party members in the selection of the party leader is a recent trend in contemporary party politics. This phenomenon can be studied from different angles. We have focused in this paper on one kind of consequence, i.e. representation of women. The presence of women party leaders can be important for the recruitment and selection of women MPs and women ministers, for the political mobilisation of women and for the substantive representation of women's interests.

Table 11: Summary of hypotheses

	<b>Rationale</b>	<b>Actor</b>	<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Confirmed?</b>
H1	Role socialization	Women	The number of candidates will be lower when women win	-
H2	Role socialization	Party	There will be more women party leaders in smaller, less competitive parties	+
H3	Role socialization	Women	Woman party leaders will more often have parliamentary experience	+
H4	Role socialization	Women	Woman party leaders are in general older	-
H5	Party ideology	Party	There will be more women party leaders in leftist parties	+
H6a	Selectorate	Selectorate	Exclusive selectorates are more beneficial for women party leaders	-
H6b	Selectorate	Selectorate	Inclusive selectorates are more beneficial for women party leaders	+

We have put forward hypotheses stemming from three kind of rationales: the role socialization which creates societal barriers that women politicians have to overcome, the ideology of the party and the composition of the electorate. These effects can be evaluated by looking at three kinds of actors: women themselves, party and electorate (see table 11).

Based on evidence from Belgian parties, we have found confirmation for the thesis that women are more likely to become party leader in smaller, 'less important' parties and that they are more likely to have parliamentary experience, which gives them the skills and experience needed to overcome criticism about the general capacity of women to function as party leader. This confirms the role socialization thesis. The hypotheses about the number of candidates and the age of the party leader are, however, rejected.

The role of a party ideology that supports women's presence in politics is also confirmed: there are more women party leaders in parties from the left.

Contrary to findings on candidate selection (Rahat, Hazan & Katz, 2008) and on party leadership (Bashevkin, 2010), inclusive selectorates appear to be more beneficial for women than exclusive ones. Women party leaders are most often selected by the rank and file in Belgian parties, women have an equal proportion of winning candidates compared to men in this kind of elections and women candidates obtain an equal or a higher number of votes than men in party primaries.

These findings are based on data on Belgian parties. It is our aim to elaborate this analysis further by including data on parties from other countries.

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