Why did they do it?

Motives for introducing party leadership elections in Belgium.

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1. Introduction

Party change is a remarkable phenomenon. On the one hand, parties are thought to be conservative organisations that resist change (Harmel & Janda, 1994). On the other hand, an increasing number of parties are recently changing its internal organisation, more in particular by giving their grassroots members a greater formal say in the selection of the party leader (Leduc, 2001 ; Denham, 2009 ; Kenig, 2009 ; Wauters, 2010 ; Cross & Blais, 2011) These developments vary across countries and across parties, but seem nevertheless to constitute a trend in recent party organizations, also in Belgium. This trend is even more remarkable when taking into account that it seems to involve a decision of the party elite to reduce (at least on paper) its own power within the party.

This change towards greater member involvement does not just happen, but is, as any other party change, produced by a combination of exogenous factors (external stimuli that provide a reason to change) and endogenous factors (a coalition of support within the party that makes change possible or inevitable) (Panebianco, 1988 ; Harmel & Janda, 1994). The presence of an external stimulus does not generate automatically a change in the formal rules of party. Critical actors within the party must be aware of these environmental stimuli, they must be supportive of the proposed change in party rules and they must be convinced that this formal change will be able to respond the external challenge.

Studies on the introduction of grassroots involvement in the selection of the party leader are scarce. Recently, however, there is a growing literature on this topic. Most of them are studies providing anecdotal evidence about the introduction of leadership elections in one particular party and studies inferring general patterns from the context in which change took place in several parties (e.g. Alderman, 1999 ; Denham, 2009 ; Lisi, 2010 ; Cross & Blais, 2011). This paper adopts a different approach: by interviewing key decision-makers at the time of the introduction of leadership elections, we hope to obtain a (more) realistic and in-depth picture of the motives and the decision-making process. More in particular, we conducted elite-interviews with party leaders and party secretaries from five Belgian parties that changed their rules to designate the party leader in the course of the 1990s. This approach is suited to gain insights in attitudes, opinions and experiences of the decision-makers in the parties under scrutiny, and in the decision-making process in these parties. As such, we are able to establish in-depth insights into the mechanisms of this introduction and generate feedback concerning findings from the literature.

Almost all Belgian parties have introduced internal elections of the type 'one member, one vote'[1] for selecting their party leader. Belgium also differs from the countries using a Westminster system investigated by Cross & Blais (2011). One difference might be the fact that the parliamentary caucus never had a privileged role in the selection of the party leader in Belgium. In this respect, this paper could be a test of the Cross & Blais findings in a different institutional and party context.

This paper has three objectives: first of all, documenting and explaining changes in party leadership selection procedures in Belgium. Secondly, by using elite-interviews, this paper will add an original methodological approach to the existing literature. And finally, it is our goal to extend the premature literature on factors influencing leadership elections. More in particular it is the aim of this paper to shed more light on the two intertwined aspects of the introduction of leadership elections in Belgium: the motives that were mentioned to launch them and the context in which they were introduced (why? and when?) and the decision-makers putting internal elections into force (who?).

2. Motives and decision-makers

As indicated above, the introduction of leadership elections can be explained by a combination of external stimuli (a context providing reasons to change) and proponents of these reforms within the party (the decision-makers). In this section, we will present patterns on these two aspects that come forward in the rather scarce literature on party reforms granting members a greater say in the selection of the party leader.

2.1 Decision-makers

There are many factors and events that could stimulate the adoption of leadership elections, but at the end of the day, leadership elections can only be implemented by a decision taken in the party. Reform is not an automatic response to an external stimulus, but it always involves intra-party decision-making with possible struggles between actors and groups in the party. Since changes in leadership selection rules do clearly alter the internal distribution of power, the interests at stake are high. It is therefore important to take a look inside the party because it is clear that changes in the internal power distribution are the result of an internal power struggle.

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[1] In order not to complicate readability, we will further refer to this type of selection procedure as 'leadership elections'

It is generally assumed in the literature that party elites are not enthusiastic to grant much decision-power to grassroots members in assigning the position of party leader (Scarrow, Webb and Farrell, 2001) and that even when power is granted, they try to keep control of the process a.o. by imposing eviction rules (Quinn, 2005). This could be explained by the fact that modern 'electoral-professional parties' (in Panebianco's (1988) terms) prefer to keep their hands free in order to respond quickly to voter demands. Therefore, Cross & Blais (2011) suggest that party elites only reluctantly approve more involvement of members in the leadership selection process. Only when they are put under pressure from the basis and when finding oneself in an awkward situation (electoral defeat, opposition, etc.: see motives below), they bow to the members' wishes and eventually introduce leadership elections in which all members could participate. Scarrow et al (2001) state that party elites prefer in that case to hand over influence to party members, rather than to party congresses for instance in which sub-leaders and middle-level part elites tend to have most influence. The general idea, following May's law of curvilinear disparity (1973), is that grassroots members are easier to control and take less radical positions than party activists or middle-level elites (Katz, 2001). Therefore, party elites prefer to empower grassroots members instead of middle-level party elites.

Apart from this pattern in which party elites are forced by the rank and file to adapt, change in the party rules could also be a result of leadership change and/or a (intended) change in the dominant faction within the party. Factions could simply be defined as groups within parties whose members share a common identity and a common purpose and they are organised to achieve particular goals (Zariski, 1960 ; Boucek, 2009). If the necessary safeguards are built in, factions have the potential to play a positive role in a political party, for instance by feeding the internal debate or by empowering the rank and file in the internal decision-making process. Leadership elections in particular could serve the goals of a faction as they could possibly strengthen their position or even allow them to take over the party leadership (Panebianco, 1988). Therefore, party factions could be strong advocates of leadership elections, putting pressure on the current party elite to introduce them. Another possible scenario is that when an oppositional faction manages to seize power in a party, it introduces itself these leadership elections because it is in their advantage or to provide a clear break with the past.

It seems to be clear from the literature that the driving force of the change in leadership electorate is to be found among the grassroots of the party or in a party faction, but certainly not in the incumbent party leadership.

2.3 Motives

Barnea & Rahat (2007) distinguishes in their study of the introduction of more inclusive candidate selection methods between three levels of analysis: the political system, the party system and the intra-party arena.

Motives at the level of the *political system* refer to general political, cultural or social trends that influence the environment in which parties have to operate. When this environment changes, parties tend to adapt. The increasing personalisation of politics is an example of a trend at the level of the political system that could affect the adoption of internal leadership elections. At the *party system* level, the competition between parties plays a central role. Parties carry out reforms in order to enhance their competitiveness in the electoral arena. For example, parties that have suffered a heavy defeat at the elections can use this as a reason to introduce leadership elections. Motives at the *intra-party level* refer to internal tensions and struggles between party actors. Unlike Barnea & Rahat (2007) who interpret this level mainly as relevant for identifying the decision-makers, we are convinced that elements from the internal power contest could also be motives to change the rules to select the party leader.

We have selected seven motives that could be relevant for the analysis. These motives can be situated at one or more of these levels of analysis (see Table 1). We will now describe these motives and indicate how they could affect the adoption of leadership elections.

Table 1: Motives to introduce leadership elections, classified according to the levels of analysis of Barnea & Rahat

	Political system	Party system	Intra-party arena
Electoral defeat		X	X
Contagion effect		X	
Membership decline	X	X	
To facilitate upward communication	X		X
Breaking the power of middle-level elites			X
Personalisation and strengthening the position of the party leader	X		X
Democratisation of society	X		

2.3.1 Electoral defeat

Parties that have suffered a disappointing electoral result[2] are more likely to introduce leadership elections than other parties. A bad electoral showing incites parties to revitalize themselves in order to become again attractive among voters. Parties feel pressure to show that they have understood the signal of the voters by giving more attention to the desires of the basis. Electoral defeats have to a very large extent been interpreted by the party elite as a request to change in the internal functioning of the parties (Deschouwer, 2004, 189). Parties have perceived that voters tend to pay increasingly attention to participation and involvement, and have consequently become convinced that being an open and democratic party can be an electoral trump in elections (Scarrow, 1999). A leadership contest can indeed be a spectacular opportunity to advertise itself to the electorate as an open and democratic party (Punnett, 1992). Therefore, parties have not only introduced leadership elections, but party elites also pay lip service to such reforms and make efforts to publicize them for a wide audience (Scarrow, 1994). Especially after an electoral setback, internal reforms are implemented in order to attract again the electorate. In that sense, democratising the leadership selection procedures is part of a broader strategic plan aimed at improving the electoral performance of a party.

There is yet another element to electoral defeat. An electoral defeat changes the internal power balance and as a consequence, change in the leadership rules could becomes possible. Cross & Blais (2011) have found in a cross-country study in Westminster political systems that in almost all parties leadership selectorates were opened up after an electoral setback. In parties in these countries, these reforms transferred the formal power to select the party leader from the parliamentary party to the party membership at large. By performing badly in the elections, the parliamentary party looses both of its size and its authority. As a consequence, this parliamentary party is weakened and becomes a target when reforming the party. The introduction of leadership elections is in Cross & Blais' (2011) view a zero-sum game: more power to one (group of) party actor(s) means less power for another (group of) party actor(s). When the parliamentary party looses authority, it becomes possible for other party actors to grab more power in the party.

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[2] It should be noted that an electoral defeat is subject to interpretation: expectations also play a role in determining whether elections are lost or not. If the score of a party is lower than in previous elections but much higher than expected, then it is not necessarily interpreted by the party elite as a defeat.

2.3.2 Contagion effect

Within the same party system, a contagion effect can often be identified: if major parties have introduced leadership elections, other parties of that political system tend to follow (Harmel & Janda, 1994 ; Scarrow et al, 2001). Parties look at each other and tend to copy features of party organization that prove to be successful. This effect fails, however, to materialize if only smaller parties adopt leadership elections. It appears that leadership elections are an element of political competition between parties (Cross & Blais, 2011) but that only the example of major competitors providing a real threat to one's electoral share tend to be followed.

2.3.3 Membership decline

It is often assumed in the literature that adopting leadership elections is one of the remedies undertaken by political parties confronted with declining membership figures (Scarrow, 1999). The aim of this introduction is making party membership less conventional and more attractive because it matches with the rise of postmaterialist values in modern societies. In many Western societies during the last decades, an increase in mobilization and participation has taken place outside political parties, in less conventional political outlets. By copying the modus operandi of these successful alternative groups and movements, parties believe that party membership will become again more attractive. Directly electing the party leader and the party's democratic functioning in general are used on the websites of Belgian parties as arguments to convince people to join the party (Wauters, 2009). Attracting new members could be a goal of introducing leadership elections, but also keeping existing members on board or activating them by increasing the value of party membership for them could be such a goal.

2.3.4 To facilitate upward communication

Parties are increasingly losing their link with society (Mair, 1994). Consequently, one of the central functions of political parties, i.e. linking citizens and government (Lawson, 1980), comes under pressure. In order to keep abreast of the problems and needs of their followers and of society as a whole, parties rely increasingly on intra-democratic procedures. The opinion of the grassroots could be used to test whether the party's policy is in line with the public opinion.

In addition, since the emergence of the cartel party, a process of stratarchisation has taken place in many parties: different faces of the party that are operating increasingly more autonomous from each other

(Katz & Mair, 1995). As the grassroots members (the so-called party on the ground) and the party in central and public office operate separately from each other, a new gap risks to appear. Leadership elections could in this respect also be seen as an instrument to bring party members and party elites (and their concerns and interests) (again) closer to each other.

2.3.5 Breaking the power of the middle-level elites

This relates to the point discussed earlier when treating the decision-makers in the party. Mair (1994), Scarrow, Webb & Farrell (2001) and Katz (2001) stress the fact that more formal power is granted to individual grassroots members, often at the expense of middle-level elites or party activists. In Mair's view, these ordinary members tend to be more docile and more likely to endorse proposals and candidates proposed by the party elite. This element could not only be part of the decision-making process, but it could also be one of the motives to initiate these reforms.

2.3.6 Personalisation and strengthening the position of the party leader

Legitimation of the party leader by the rank and file is useful, both for internal and external reasons.
Party leaders have increasingly become more crucial players in the political decision-making process, especially given the process of the presidentialisation of politics (Poguntke & Webb, 2005). Party leaders personify to a great extent their political party. As such, they determine to a large extent the political line of the party and have a great impact on the electoral performance of their party. With such a large concentration of power in the hands of one person, it is estimated to be healthy for the party to have the possibility to hold him or her to account via leadership elections (internal reason). At the same time, it is also necessary to have a legitimized and strong party leader who knows that he can take tough decisions quite autonomously because he is backed by the rank and file (external reason).

2.3.7 Democratization of society

The rise of postmaterialistic values in most Western societies has had as a consequence that participation and involvement have become important issues. Inglehart (1990) has found a clear shift in the culture and attitudes of Western societies from materialistic to postmaterialistic values, focusing on the quality of life and self-expression. This shift coincided with an improvement in education and the extension of communication means and mass media. Thus, people have not only the desire to participate, but also the

knowledge and skills to become involved. More and more, it is believed that not only citizens should be granted involvement in the policy-making process, but that grass roots participation and involvement should also be applied to the internal functioning of political parties.

Before setting out the methodology and discussing the empirical results, it is necessary to give some background information about leadership elections in Belgium.

3. Party leadership elections in Belgium

The party leader is a crucial and powerful actor in Belgian politics (Fiers, 1998 ; Poguntke & Webb, 2005) who is responsible for both the internal organisation of the party and the external relations and activities, such as acting as spokesperson in negotiations and appointing ministers. In general, he is also the electoral leader, but not the leader of the parliamentary party group which is a separate function. Party leaders are powerful actors in Belgian politics, only overtrumped in power by the prime minister and deputy prime ministers (Dewachter, 2003). This points us to the importance of party leaders and the process to select them. Given this importance, it is likely that several actors will aspire to become involved in this selection process and will exert pressure to achieve this.

Scarrow et al (2001) distinguish between three types of leadership selection procedures according to the actors involved (apart from leadership elections): party congress or convention (examples given by these authors include Austria, Germany, Finland and Sweden), parliamentary elites (Australia, Ireland, Denmark and the Netherlands) and an extra-parliamentary national committee (France, Italy). Most Belgian parties have for a long time belonged to the first category using congresses with party delegates to designate the party leader. In practice, much power rested in the hands of the arrondissemental[3] federations who gave instructions to their delegates to the congress. It is important to note that unlike in Westminster systems, parliamentary caucuses have never been in charge of selecting the party leader in Belgium (Cross & Blais, 2011). In all the countries Cross & Blais (2011) analysed, party leaders used to be selected by the parliamentary party. This implies that parliamentary party groups will be worse off

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[3] Formerly, electoral districts coincided in Belgium with 'arrondissements', administrative entities which typically grouped several local municipalities. Parties were organized accordingly. The party structure was composed of quite powerful arrondissemental sections or federations. In 2003 the electoral districts for the House of Representatives were enlarged to the level of the provinces, typically grouping a handful of arrondissements. Most party structures were soon adapted accordingly.

when introducing leadership elections granting grassroots members a vote. Given that references to the parliamentary party are numerous in the rationale behind factors influencing the adoption of leadership elections, it might be that the decision-making process in Belgium will have passed off differently. More broadly, it seems that who was initially in charge for selecting the party leader could play a role in the development of the decision-making process.

Table 2: Leadership selection procedures in Begium in the 1970s and now

PARTY	1970s	2000s
CVP/ CD&V	Party Congress with delegates voting on a list of candidates nominated by the Executive National Committee	All members
PSC / CDH	All members	
SP / SP.A	Party congress with delegates: acclamation	All members
PS	Party congress with delegates: acclamation	All members
OpenVLD	Party congress with delegates	All members
PRL / MR	Party congress with delegates	All members
Groen!	Party congress with participation of all Members	
Ecolo	Party congress with participation of all members (no party leader but a team of party secretaries)	
VU / N-VA	Party council	All members
Vlaams Belang	No elections, president appointed for life	Party council

In the 1970s only the French-speaking christian-democratic party PSC elected their party leader in internal elections of the type 'one member, one vote', here called leadership elections. The members of the francophone nationalist party FDF elected their leader in that decade on a party conference where all members could participate in. At the end of the 1980s, the French-speaking liberal party PRL followed the example of the PSC by organising 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). Soon, most other parties followed and by now, almost all Belgian parties use internal elections with member suffrage to assign their party leader.

There are three different means to collect members' votes in leadership elections (Maes,1990 ; Fiers, 1998 ; Biondi et al., 2000) :

    - by asking a member to vote by post or via electronic way (internet, …)

    - by arranging polling booths in every local party section

- by inviting all members to attend a party conference where they can vote

We include only elections using the first two means in our overview, since attending a conference clearly involves much more effort for the rank and file than casting a vote in internal elections (Rahat & Hazan, 2001). In this way, internal elections in a.o. FDF and the green parties are excluded from the analysis. While in the 1970s only 8 % of the party leadership appointments were decided by internal elections, this figure had risen to 38 % in the 1990s and it has further increased in the first decade of the new millennium to 63 %.

Table 3: Number of party leader appointments and number of party leadership elections in Belgian political parties (1944-2009) (Maes, 1990 ; Biondi et al., 2000 ; Wauters, 2009 ; own calculations)

Decades	Number of party leader appointments	Number of party leadership elections	Percentage party leadership elections
1944-1949	12	0	0
1950-1959	21	0	0
1960-1969	28	0	0
1970-1979	50	4	8.00
1980-1989	38	2	5.26
1990-1999	47	18	38.30
2000-2009	38	24	63.16

All parties represented in Parliament give their members nowadays a direct say in the appointment of the party leader, be it on a party conference or via internal elections. The exception is formed by the Flemish extreme right party *Vlaams Belang* where the party council holds a vote and the preferred candidate is subsequently accepted by acclamation on a party conference.

In order to gain more insight in the adoption of leadership elections, we have conducted elite-interviews with former party leaders and party secretaries from five Belgian parties that have changed their rules to designate the party leader in the course of the 1990s.[4] In the interviews, which lasted for about one hour,

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[4] Parties that adopted leadership elections earlier were difficult to study because of practical reasons. From the PRL for instance, the party secretary and both co-leaders of that time have already died. Parties that adopted them later were less relevant since they all were successors or split offs of existing parties that already used leadership elections.

issues about the reasons to introduce internal elections as well as questions about internal support for this change were tackled (For an overview of Belgian parties and the details of the interviews: see Appendix).

Table 4: Introduction of party leadership elections in Belgian political parties

Party	Year in which leadership elections were introduced	Included in the analysis
PSC	1970	
PRL	1989	
VLD	1993	*
CVP	1993	*
SP	1995	*
PS	1997	*
VU	1999	*
Spirit	2004	
N-VA	2004	
LDD	2009	

5. Results

We will start with discussing the results about the decision-makers. Next, we will move over to a discussion of their motives.

5.1 Decision-makers

Formally, all decisions to introduce leadership elections were taken on a party conference. But in all parties, this was only the final step in a decision-making process that started much earlier. In all parties but one, the initiative originated from the party leader, who first tried to seek support from other members of the party elite (typically in the party executive) and once this support was acquired, support was sought from the grassroots and middle-level elites. And only then the decision was submitted for approval to a party conference.

In the SP, the idea of leadership elections was talked over by party leader Louis Tobback with the rest of the party elite, before he defended the idea in meetings with all members which were held in every Flemish province long before the party conference that formally decided was held. In this way, possible resistance could be revealed and set off in an early phase. Consequently, opposition at the conference that decided on the adoption of leadership elections was limited.

In the PS, party leader Busquin took the initiative and gathered a meeting to discuss the statutory rules as a response to the scandals the party was involved in. Participants to this meeting included "members of the party executive, both those with decisive vote and those with advisory vote, the secretaries of the arrondissemental federations, the members of parliament, … in short everyone that was of importance within the party" (Jean-Pol Baras, PS). At this meeting, the principle of leadership elections was approved and two months later an extra-ordinary statutory conference was held to endorse this decision.

In the CVP, an unexpected replacement brought Johan Van Hecke to the position of party leader. Van Hecke was designated as party leader according to the old rules. But "at his appointment in the party executive, he immediately launched the idea of direct elections by the members. (…) We have then designated rapidly some ad hoc rules at the party executive in order to endorse this and meanwhile we started the formal process of changing our statutory rules." (Luc Willems, CVP). Van Hecke himself confirms that he has taken the initiative, but adds that the demand for more internal democracy has already been present in the party for a while: "This process had started already some time before (…) The youth section of the CVP for instance had demonstrated during a party conference for a drastic reform of the party and for more internal democracy."

In the VLD, party leader Guy Verhofstadt was the great champion of these reforms, which were only a small part of the radical transformation of the party, which was also initiated by him. He wanted to bring change and renewal in the party and in Belgian politics in general. The introduction of leadership elections were "only an practical externalization of the principles described in his so-called citizen manifestos." (Clair Ysebaert, VLD). He has presented this idea first in the political executive committee of the old liberal party PVV, and then on all other levels in the party. He visited several arrondissemental federations in order to explain how the whole process would function. He has systematically prepared the decision so that it would easily pass on a party conference.

Owing to the informal contacts beforehand, proposals to adopt leadership elections passed relatively easy on party conferences. On top of that, there are other explanations for this smooth adoption process. First of all, it is not only the party elite that is in favour of these reforms: there is support from other party actors too, as Linda Blomme (SP) illustrated: "The decision to introduce leadership elections was also supported by the younger generation who suffered from a lack of opportunities within the party and who were fully aware of the limited attractiveness of the party towards young people." A second supporting factor is the lack of alternatives for a party in crisis, as Jean-Pol Baras (PS) said: "You have to keep one thing in mind: the party was in crisis: we had to save the party which was in a very bad position. (…) It was not the right moment to set up internal conflicts. It was important that the reforms passed as smoothly as possible." A third factor that explains why the initiatives of the party leader are easily adopted, is his powerful position. It is always risky for

those aspiring a political career to oppose a party leader: Luc Willems (CVP) testifies: "At that time, European elections and parliamentary elections were coming closer: candidate lists had to be composed and afterwards government positions were assigned. In both these processes, the party leader played a crucial role. This had as an effect that you thought twice before stepping on his toes."
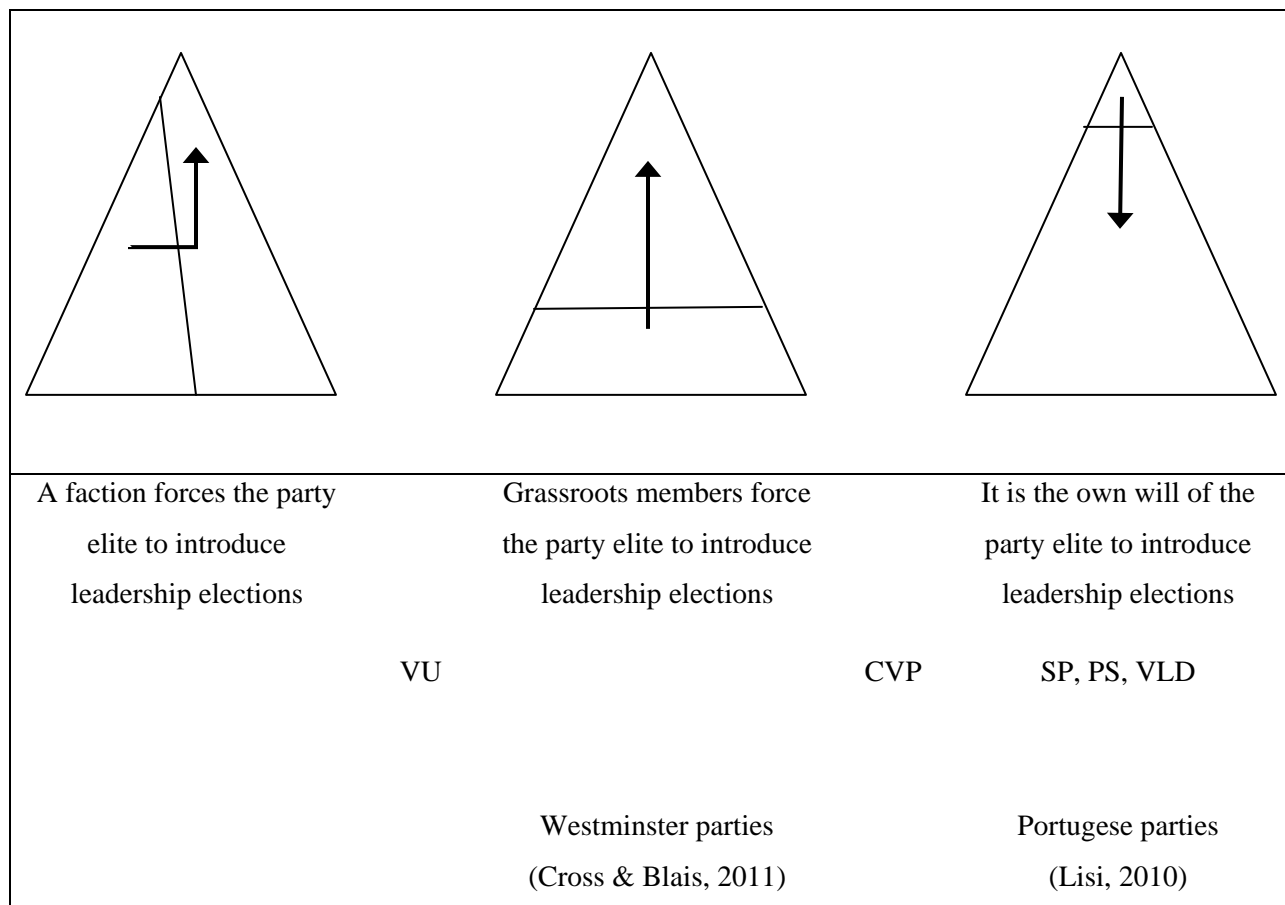
The exception to this pattern is the VU where it was not the party leader, but the party secretary who took the initiative to propose the introduction of leadership elections. His main objective was bridging the gap between grassroots members and the party elite. At that time, the party was split into two factions (Wauters, 2005), which were both surprised by his proposal, but supported it albeit for different reasons. The incumbent party elite including the party leader was in favour of this introduction because of the general democratic principles that matched with the attention of citizen participation in the party program and because of the positive publicity that such elections could yield to the party. They were also confident that they would obtain the victory in these elections. The oppositional faction that had developed some sort of organisation without the party elite's knowledge, was a proponent because they could reveal the divergence between members' views and the behaviour of the party elite. They were confident that elections by the members were advantageous to them because they could provide them with alternative power instruments in contrast with the indirectly composed party organs dominated by the incumbent party elite. As Eric Defoort (VU) states: "It came unexpected, but for us, it was a gift op God. (…) It was an instrument to render our faction visible in the party, and to make it, in the long run, the major force within the party". The ruling party elite was insufficiently aware of the threat of the oppositional faction. Otherwise they would have been more critical about the approval of leadership elections. In sum, a remarkable coalition of support has been established within the party consisting of a semi-hidden oppositional faction attempting to seize power and a party elite adopting leadership elections because of the match with the party program, unknowing about potential internal threats.

5.2 Decision-makers in broader perspective

This general pattern of decision-making with the party leader as driving force clearly differs from patterns sketched in Westminister parties which have another starting position, i.e. with parliamentary party groups initially in charge of the leadership selection (Cross & Blais, 2011). In these latter parties, the party leader is eventually forced by bottom-up opposition within the party to adopt leadership elections. This is not the case for the Belgian parties under investigation here: it is the party leader himself who takes voluntarily the initiative to introduce leadership elections.

In Figure 1, we develop three types of decision-making processes for the introduction of leadership elections. The first one sees a change in the method of leadership selection originating in an oppositional faction within the party that finally manages to force the ruling elite to adopt internal elections or that adopts them themselves after taking over power. This new method of selection could strengthen the position of that faction within the party. In the second model, party elites are also forced to adopt changes in the selection process, but this time by several groups and actors at the bottom of the party, who aspire to increase their power. This bottom-up process often takes time, but when supported by the right context (electoral defeat, etc, see below), this claim could become irresistible for the party elite. The third model adopts a top-down approach. It is the party elite that introduces consciously and autonomously leadership elections.

Figure 1: Three types of decision-making processes to adopt internal leadership elections

A faction forces the party elite to introduce leadership elections	Grassroots members force the party elite to introduce leadership elections	It is the own will of the party elite to introduce leadership elections
VU	CVP	SP, PS, VLD
	Westminster parties (Cross & Blais, 2011)	Portugese parties (Lisi, 2010)

We have tried to classify the Belgian parties in this diagram. Most of them belong to the third model: the party leadership itself takes the initiative to introduce leadership elections. The CVP is in between model

3 and model 2 since party leader Van Hecke mentioned also the pressure of (mainly young) party members that were frustrated about their limited involvement. The VU clearly differs from the other Belgian parties, as outlined above. The adoption process could be situated between model 1 (with a crucial role of party factions) and model 2 (with pressure from the grassroots). While the former argument played a role in the endorsement of this decision, the latter was an argument put forward by the party secretary who took the initiative to propose leadership elections.

Parties studied by other researchers could also positioned in this figure. The Westminster parties (in the UK, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand and Canada) studied by Cross & Blais (2011) can all be situated in the second model. Party elites only reluctantly introduce leadership elections, after increasing pressure from the grassroots. The decision-making process in Portugese parties, however, rather resembles Belgian parties: it is the party leader who, convinced of the benefits involved in leadership elections, takes the initiative to reform the selection procedure and brings it into force.

5.3 Motives

We now move over to the discussion of the motives underlying the decisions to introduce leadership elections.

5.3.1 Electoral defeat

It appears that in the Belgian context leadership elections are in general introduced when a party is in crisis, but not necessarily a crisis in electoral terms. Other features of a party crisis that are relevant for the adoption of leadership elections include scandals in which the party is involved, negative press articles and bad opinion polls.

The involvement in scandals was very relevant for the two social-democratic parties PS and PS. PS party secretary Baras testifies: "After the Agusta and Dassault scandals broke out, a tornado has gone through the party, the party was completely perturbed. (…) I believe that these scandals have clearly put into action the plans to reform the party." In the SP, something comparable happened. Party secretary Linda Blomme (SP): "Another aspect was the Agusta scandal. The bombshell has been dropped and then the party was completely put upside down. There were fears that, like in Italy, the social-democratic party would disappear completely. (…) There was a broad feeling that our party structures needed a thorough renovation then." Reforming the party, including introducing leadership elections, was seen as a remedy to overcome a party crisis caused by scandals.

For the VU, who had recorded an increase in votes at the previous elections and who had entered the Flemish regional government before introducing leadership elections, one of the motives for the adoption was a bad showing of the party in the press: "At that time, the VU suffered heavily from negative press articles: all kinds of things: senior party figures contradicting themselves and so on. It was my opinion that we should create something positive, with which we could go public. (…) There were no objections against leadership elections in the party since it would produce a positive appearance for the party in the media." (party secretary Laurens Appeltans).

The CVP was looking anxiously to the opinion polls, as Luc Willems explains: "The party was on the brink of disaster (…) The VLD was leading in the opinion polls, the economy was underperforming, our prime minister had to take unpopular decisions. Our only ray of hope was (party leader) Johan Van Hecke."

This does not mean that electoral defeat does not play a role at all. It appears that electoral defeat plays a role in the long run. After the 1991 elections ('Black Sunday'), many parties started to think about party renewal, but in some parties, change became only possible much later when other factors reinforced this trend towards more internal democracy. In the PS, for instance, a combination of electoral defeat and party scandals made change possible. Party leader Philippe Busquin said: "After the 1991 elections with the great break-through of the extreme right, I would already modernise the party and lighten the heavy party structures. (…) The scandals the party was involved in some years later gave me an additional reason to carry through the reforms." In the SP, electoral victory at the next elections functioned as an asset to eventually introduce more internal democracy. Party secretary Linda Blomme indicates that party renewal in the SP started after 'Black Sunday' in 1991, when all established parties suffered a heavy electoral defeat. Strong opposition from the middle-level elites, in this case the arrondissemental federations, prevented, however, that leadership elections were adopted more quickly. Blomme tells: "Frank Vandenbroucke (the party leader before Louis Tobback) wanted to reform the party by reducing the power of the arrondissemental federations in order to direct the party from Brussels (i.e. the national headquarters). That was not so easy: reforming customs and traditions that have existed for several decades produced immediate reaction. He has paid cash for that. In 1993 there was a leadership election, still at the party conference with delegates of the federations. He was the only candidate, but obtained only 66 % of the votes. A third of the party was against him (they did not abstain, but voted against him). The federations felt that they would lose a great part of their power if further reforms would be implemented. Vandenbroucke was very disappointed and embittered about that. This bad experience has certainly delayed the adoption of leadership elections with two years or so." It was only after an unexpected electoral victory that the new party leader (and electoral leader) Louis Tobback found himself in a such a comfortable position that he could carry through the introduction of leadership elections. Tobback himself declares: "It was shortly after the 1995 election campaign which was built around my person. Against all odds, we

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won these elections and I managed immediately to continue our participation in government. So, at that time, I could presume a great deal. Two years later, it would have been much more difficult." Blomme confirms: "He had acquired a powerful position vis-à-vis the federations. Owing to his electoral victory, he was unassailable within the party"

In the CVP something comparable appeared: "There was some resistance against the reforms, but Johan Van Hecke had the wind behind him: he was successful leader of the parliamentarty party, he had been very successful in electoral terms in his district Ghent, he was a successful mayor and he was backed by one of the three social organisations in the party." (Luc Willems, CVP) Good electoral performances were one of the trumps the party leader could use to carry through the introduction of leadership elections.

In sum, a crisis in the party provides a context in which party reforms including introducing leadership elections are deemed necessary and even inevitable, also in Belgium. A crisis is not necessarily equal to an electoral defeat, however. Even on the contrary, an electoral victory can be a powerful instrument enabling the party elite to eventually introduce leadership elections. This contrasts with Anglo-Saxon parties where parliamentary party groups are forced to hand over authority in the leadership selection process after an electoral defeat because they have put up a poor show. This points us also to the fact that analysts of party reform should keep an eye on the long term: often party reforms are conceived after an electoral defeat or following an electoral downward trend for several elections. But these reforms fail to be implemented by a lack of strong figures in the party elite. An electoral good result could empower this party elite in order to enable them to eventually implement leadership elections.

The general idea is that leadership elections contribute to an open and modern image of the party, and as such, it could lead to an increase in vote percentages. Some critical remarks about electoral motives could be heard in the interviews, however: SP party leader Louis Tobback states: "I don't believe that there has ever been a voter who has casted a vote for our party or for whatever other party because they held leadership elections. That's something only party members are interested in."

But most interviewees were convinced of the existence of an indirect link between adopting leadership elections and electoral victory. Leadership elections are stressing the open character of a party and this open character could yield more votes, most people from the party elites estimated. Philippe Busquin (PS) explains: "Because of the party scandals and because of the local potentates of the federations, we had no grip on the younger voters. In order to become attractive again, we had to give the party the image of an open party." Also in the VLD, a link between renewal, openness and electoral success was supposed: "The aim of party leader Verhofstadt was to bring change, something new. (…) Why? Because he wanted to become the largest party." (Clair Ysebaert, VLD).

The mere organization of leadership elections is not sufficient to transform all of sudden into a modern and open party. It appears to be very important to inform and convince the electorate that your party is organizing internal elections and that it is operating as an open party. As such, these internal elections become part of the marketing strategy of a party. Jean-Pol Baras (PS) provides a case in point: "We wanted to show everyone that our party was opening up itself and that we were granting involvement to our members. Therefore, we have prohibited proxy and postal voting and we have decided to organize polling booths in every local section. Since we were a party of 100,000 members and more than 300 local sections, we expected that one could see our members in the streets going to the polling booth, rendering our elections strongly visible. (…) It has produced the desired effect: on the 9th and the 10th of October 1999, when Elio Di Rupo for the first time was elected by the members as party leader, there were queues of people waiting to cast their vote. Everyone could see that social-democratic party activists could elect their leader. These queues were also shown on the television news." The VLD was the first party to organize leadership elections in Flanders, which attracted automatically some media attention: "In addition, Verhofstadt has conducted an intensive and continuous campaign in the media. The leadership elections were dinned into the people by the newspapers. The trend of democratization was every time mentioned in a positive way by them. (…) Remember: leadership elections were something new, both for the people and for journalists."

Also in the CVP, leadership elections were used to bring the party into the limelight: "The entire operation around Van Hecke was a media operation. Our campaign manager counseled us with this operation. (…) The election of Van Hecke was in the first place a communication event. It was very important to make a good appearance in the media. Everybody knew: it is important to score, it is important to show them that we are again alive and kicking. I think we succeeded, because the titles in the press were 'le nouveau CVP est arrivé' (The new CVP has arrived)." (Luc Willems, CVP).

In the VU, the same applies: "Leadership elections create a positive atmosphere, your party is talked about, it is a sort of product placement in the media, but it can also be painful." (Eric Defoort, VU) Another voice within the VU, however, is more critical: "I do not have the impression that it generates more or less media attention. If we had before a leadership selection by the party council, we always had much media-attention, perhaps even more than today." (Patrik Vankrunkelsven, VU)

In general, we could conclude that leadership elections constitute an element of the political marketing of a party. Often, the aim is to generate more media attention than before and to propagate via the media that the party has transformed itself into an open and modern party.

5.3.2 Contagion effect

Almost all interviewees recognize that the example of VLD, who as first party in Flanders introduced leadership elections and made a lot of publicity about it, has been inspiring, especially in Flanders.[5] People who were responsible to introduce leadership elections in the CVP do not hesitate to admit that they were inspired by the VLD: "The VLD was setting the political agenda with their leadership elections. Then, you can do two things: either explaining why the CVP refuses to do the same, but that is difficult, very difficult, or reconciling yourself with that situation and trying to maximize the advantages linked to leadership elections." (Johan Van Hecke, CVP). Also in the VU, it is recognized that practices in other parties have stimulated the introduction in their party: " (…) our adoption of leadership elections is related to a trend in politics in which other parties started to do that, in Belgium and abroad. (…) Parties keep an eye on each other. Apart from that, it of course also matched with the focus in our party program." (Patrik Vankrunkelsven, VU)

5.3.3 Attracting members

A third possible motivation, often put forward in the literature, is bending the declining membership figures. Most interviewees admit that attracting new members and keeping old members was a goal when adopting leadership elections, but only a subordinate goal. They see it as a welcome bonus, but not as the central driving force behind the introduction of leadership elections.

One of the reasons for this limited role is the declining importance of a large membership file. It has lost relevance due to the increase in public funding of political parties and to the mediatisation of politics which allows parties to be electorally successful without having a well-developed party structure. "If I see how much money per vote a party receives, then a membership fee of 12 euro counts for little (…) Voters are far more important than members for a party." (Linda Blomme, SP) Moreover, not all people of the party elite seem to be convinced that internal elections could produce an effect on members. Luc Willems (CVP) is one of them: "It is always disappointing to see how few members take the effort to turn up for party leadership elections: sometimes half of them, sometimes only 25 or 30 %. One can question why the others are joining the party. Just for a sense of belonging, and that's all. Apparently, many members do not demand nor wish to have internal elections."

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[5] Belgium is a federal country composed of three regions and three communities. In fact, there are two party systems: a Flemish one and a French-speaking one, who operate quite autonomously from each other. Except for the bilingual electoral district Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde, parties from different party systems do not enter into competition with each other. Therefore, when a Flemish party adopts leadership elections, the contagion effect is expected to materialize in Flanders, and not so much in the French-speaking part of Belgium.

In other parties, most notably in the VU, leadership elections are not so much initiated to attract new members, but to re-activate existing members: "It was NOT my opinion that by introducing leadership elections we would gain members, but it was my aim to give members more value for their money. Activating the party apparatus and closing the gap between rank and file and party elite, that was my concern and indirectly this could have perhaps led to an increase in membership figures." (Laurens Appeltans, VU) Also in the CVP, it was the implicit aim to render the rank and file more active: "Many people joined our party because of clientelistic reasons, to prosper their career as lawyer or notary. It was Van Heckes goal to change this and to transform the CVP into a vibrant and active party." (Luc Willems, CVP)

Adopting leadership elections is seen as a strategy to revitalize the party, and in that sense it can contribute to increased membership figures or to a more active membership. It should be noted, however, that these concerns were not the driving forces of the reforms, but at most a subordinate goal.

5.3.4 To facilitate upward communication

Apart from the VU, this motive appears to have played only a minor role in the decision-making process leading to the adoption of leadership elections. In the VU, closing the gap between members and party elite was an important motive for party secretary Laurens Appeltans: "In his last years as party leader, Bert Anciaux has taken some drastic decisions (such as presenting joint candidate lists with the social-liberal movement ID21) without consulting the rank and file. That stuck in my throat (…) I believed that ideas from the top that are not supported by the basis would be no longer possible with leadership elections. (…) It was my goal to bring grassroots members again in contact with the party elite because there was a yawning gap between them. As party leader, you would be compelled to explain your views to the rank and file, and no longer solely to the party executive."

Other interviewees from other parties stress the fact that the type of communication switches: from indirect communication mediated by the federations towards direct communication between members and party elite for instance. Philippe Busquin (PS) acknowledges that in federations where this channeling of communication did not work well, the introduction of leadership elections has been an improvement. But he has some doubts whether this also prevails in federations that were efficiently channeling communication from the members to the top. It is to some proponents unclear what the effects are of this switch and consequently, it is unlikely that this motive has been decisive when introducing leadership elections.

This motive could not only refer to the communication between party elites and grass roots members, but also about communication between party elites and society at large. But SP party leader Tobback is sceptical: "We have 25 national representatives and more than 100 local councillors: why would you then organise leadership elections in order to get to know what people think? If you don't know it that way, you will never know it. Moreover, they cannot write anything on their voting ballot for the leadership elections, they can only cast a vote for a person." Jean-Pol Baras (PS), however, has another opinion on this subject: "Members who are not very active in the party have the potential to bring into the debate interesting topics that are not classic political topics. Before, the two or three MPs that represented their arrondissemental federation on the party congress introduced topics related to what they had encountered in the House. This is not a reproach, it was just their duty. (…) It is now for instance written in our statutory rules that every federation is obliged to organise an open debate with all candidates to become party leader. (…) It is not the party apparatus (parliamentarians, secretaries of federations, mayors, etc) that intervenes there, but ordinary members." Grassroots members have in this view more potential to bring citizens' concerns into the debate in their party than was the case in an indirect system with delegates.

5.3.5 Breaking the power of the middle-level elites

Both in the SP, PS, CVP and VLD, this was one of the major motivations to introduce leadership elections.

Louis Tobback (SP) declared: "I admit it openly, the main goal of this introduction was breaking the power of the arrondissemental federations." This introduction was part of a broader reform: at the same SP party conference in 1995 when party leadership elections were approved, it was also decided to transfer the right to vote on party conferences from the arrondissemental federations to the local sections. The same is true for the PS, where it was also estimated that the arrondissemental federations had too much power.

In the CVP, it were not such much the arrondissemental federations that were the main target, but the collateral social organizations who had acquired a powerful position in the party. It was the aim of the new party leader Johan Van Hecke to revive the initial goals of the CVP, i.e. becoming a non-denominational member party. Especially the latter element is relevant here. "We were a mass party, but the decision-making process in the party was dominated by the three social organisations in the party. People from the *Boerenbond* (farmers organization), NCMV (organization of self-employed) and ACW (workers organization) set out the political lines in the party. They had their own troops at almost any level in the party. It was Van Heckes aim to break through this. And how could you become a member party instead of party dominated by social organisations? By reinforcing the party leader and by giving him a mandate directly by the members, and no longer by the middle-level elites." (Luc Willems). Party leader Johan Van Hecke confirms: "Leadership elections

functioned as a driving force, not so much to bring down the role and influence of social organizations, but to make them clear that it is the party that decides. Before, many others in the party have tried this, but failed."

In the VLD, party leader Verhofstadt propagated in a series of so-called 'citizen manifestos' a system of political decision-making in which the power of the social organisations was reduced to the benefit of the individual citizens. It was his aim to apply this new system also to his own party. Clair Ysebaert (VLD) explains: "He wanted his ideology to be proved right, he wanted to show that his ideology was not only theory, but could also be applied in practice."

The VU is the outlier here, since in the eyes of the party leader there was absolutely no need to circumvent middle-level party elites: "Before, the party council decided on the party leader. This was a party body that was evenly composed, with presidents, secretaries and representatives of the arrondissemental levels, together about 200 people en that functioned very well. Nobody has ever formulated objections against it. (…). Introducing leadership elections was definitely not a machination from the party elite to checkmate the party council and the way we have been selecting party leaders for years." (Patrik Vankrunkelsven, VU)

Broadly speaking, there were three kinds of objections against the middle-level party elites (be it arrondissemental federations or social organizations): the system in which they played a major role was undemocratic, they had too much autonomy which impeded party renewal and they limited the power of the party leadership.

A first complaint about the arrondissemental federations is that they functioned in an undemocratic and even medieval system. Louis Tobback (SP) explains: "In the past, a coalition formed by a handful powerful arrondissemental federations, typically Antwerp, Ghent and Bruges, decided who would become party leader. But also on numerous other important questions, they had a decisive impact. (…) In practice, much power rested in the hands of the president of the arrondissemental federation, who told as a feudal lord his vassals how to vote on the party conference. (…) This had absolutely nothing more to do with democracy (…) It was called a democratic decision, but in fact the presidents of the arrondissemental federations decided amongst themselves." Also PS party leader Philippe Busquin calls it an "almost medieval system with 'dukes' and 'counts'." A related point is that in such a system members of federations with a low number of members counted for almost nothing. In a system with direct member elections, all members are equal.

A second grievance is that middle-level party elites had too much autonomy. Jean-Paul Baras (PS) explains: "Before, the federations had probably too much power: they could not be controlled by the central party headquarters. But if federations did things that were illegal, the reputation of the whole party was blackened. (…) Introducing leadership elections was a way to better control the party". Arrondissemental federations were

doing things that were not applauded by the party leadership: involving the party in illegal cases, but also blocking party renewal, as evidenced by Louis Tobback (SP): "There was no room for renewal in that system. There was, for instance, not any possibility, besides some exceptions, to present new candidates. The local ruling politician grabbed everything for himself (…) Look at the presence of women on candidate lists: they were most numerous (also in other parties) when the national party executive took care of the list composition." Linda Blomme (SP) adds: "there were several abuses in the federations: candidates on safe positions on the lists that actually did not match with the party's profile, representatives who lead a vegetative life in the House or in the Senate and representatives who did too much clientelism while at time it was no longer fashionable." The same applies for the social organisations in the CVP: "the influx of new talent, the decision-making in the party: all these things were blocked in the party by the negotiations between the social organisations." (Luc Willems, CVP)

A third problem with the influence of middle-level party elites was that they were limiting the power of the party elite rendering the decision-making process in the party more complex. PS party leader Philippe Busquin gives a good example: "We were in government at that time, and we had to cut drastically in the budget in order to attain the Maastricht norms. That was not easy. As a party leader, I had to handle very carefully vis-à-vis the 'barons', i.e. the presidents of the federations. Every other time, it was again a bit negotiating with them. As party leader, you always had to achieve the right balance. (…) I estimated that it would be better if the party leader was more strongly legitimized." He estimates that this situation has changed due to introduction of leadership elections: "The most important position in the party is that of party leader, but he always had to take the federations into account. Now, you still have to keep an eye on the federations, but you are no longer bound by them. The party leader now has power directly coming from the rank and file. He is no longer accountable to the federations, and can even bypass them if necessary." Luc Willems (CVP) indicates that given the entrance of new topics on the political agenda, the decisive role of social organisations in the decision-making process in the CVP was no longer appropriate: "Our party was dominated by socio-economic groups, the social organisations. (…) Normally when there was a problem, the party leader invited the prime minister and the leaders of the three social groups to see how things could be solved. But when you are talking about gay marriage or euthanasia, those people do not have much to say. (…) At that time, there was a recovery of the economy, and such items came increasingly to the fore. (…) In order to bring up new topics, one needed a new type of decision-making in the party."

5.3.6 Personalisation and strengthening the position of the party leader

The reduction of power of the federations to the advantage of the central party elite brings us to a next motivation to adopt leadership elections, i.e. strengthening the legitimacy and position of the party leader. This is also clearly a motive that played a role in several parties.

Both the position inside and outside the party is reinforced by leadership elections. To illustrate the former point: "Party leaders play a very important role in our country. They negotiate, they are consulted by the king, they appoint ministers, and so on. It is evident that they need a legitimization then. They receive this legitimization now from the members in leadership elections. This need is also related to the evolution of the media. Before, to promote the party, one needed party activists to distribute leaflets, to mount posters, to canvass, etc. Nowadays, the party leader appears on TV to promote the party. Consequently, you need a party leader who can respond immediately to topical events and then it is important that he knows that he is backed by the whole party." (Louis Tobback, SP). Also in the CVP, it was thought that leadership elections would enable the party leader to communicate more clearly to the electorate: "In order to break through the system in which the social organisations were powerful, Van Hecke wanted a strong party leader who would be capable to defend the party line strongly. CVP has always been an accountable party taking up its responsibilities in government and delivering the prime minister. As a consequence, the party was always a sort of appendix to the government, lacking a clear profile." (Luc Willems, CVP)

The introduction of leadership elections could also serve the need to give the party leader more power internally in the party. Philippe Busquin (PS) admits: "The leadership elections have given a legitimacy to my successor (Di Rupo) that permitted him to change things in the party that I would never have been able to." Johan Van Hecke (CVP) also contends: "A party leader assigned by a small group does not possess the same authority than a party leader supported by all members, especially when his election happened on the basis of a clear and straightforward manifesto. Then, he has much leeway. After my election, I used it several times in internam discussions: '... yes, but that is what the rank and file want. It was written in my manifesto and I am only executing it now. I am the guardian of what the members have asked.'" This is illustrated by Luc Willems (CVP): "In discussions, the party leader could say: 'well, I am legitimized by the grassroots members. Who do you think you are, secretary of the ACW without a mandate?'"

Two final remarks about this point should be made.

This reinforcement of the party leader as goal does not mean, however, that the party elite was confident that they can easily manipulate the election process in order to legitimize their preferred leader. Even on the contrary, some interviewees indicated that the introduction of elections by the members renders the outcome more unpredictable. They also estimate that it is not necessarily a drawback for a party when there are several competitive candidates in the leadership contest. Linda Blomme (SP) for instance told: "The party elite was apprehensive. On the party conferences, there were 1,000, maybe 1,200 people attending, but we had 60,000 or 70,000 party members. Masses of people were not present on party congresses and it was difficult to estimate how they would react. Before, on the congresses with delegates of the federations, you knew the result beforehand, only the decimal places were still unknown."

A reinforced position of the party leader could produce also harmful effects for the party. An imbalance between the party leader and other party organs could cause conflicts within the party, as evidenced by the VU: "The directly elected party leader (Geert Bourgeois) was stuck with a party executive that was composed in the traditional way and in which consequently the former party leader (Bert Anciaux) had more power than himself. He had only three political allies in this party executive. One day, he even organized a press conference with his three allies to state openly that they disagreed with the decision of the party executive. (…) The fear for this kind of abuse was already present in the discussions on the introduction of leadership elections. The different ways of composition of the party organs was one of the contradictions in this operation." (Laurens Appeltans, VU)

5.3.7 Democratisation of society

A final motive, prescribing that the democratisation of society should be responded by a democratization in the internal life of parties, has not played a major role in most parties, except in the VU. In the VU, this even was the most prominent reason for the ruling party elite to adopt these internal elections: "We were pre-eminently a party that was putting forward values of citizen government, next to our focus on Flemish autonomy. We gave quite some support to the ideas of participation and citizen government, especially after (the social-liberal movement) ID21 joined us. Then our party secretary brought his proposal forward: you cannot on the one hand plead for more citizen participation and on the other hand put grassroots members offside in such an important process as the selection of the party leader. (…) It seemed logic from the perspective of our party ideology to introduce leadership elections." (Patrik Vankrunkelsven, VU)

6. Conclusion and discussion

Political parties in modern democracies are increasingly adopting more inclusive procedures to select their party leader. More in particular, grassroots members are increasingly involved in this process, most notably by having one vote in internal leadership elections.

This change could be explained by a combination of exogenous (context, motivation) and endogenous factors (internal coalitions of support). This paper has focused on both these aspects in Belgian political parties. We used an innovative qualitative approach using interviews with key decision-makers instead of inferring general patterns as is usually done in research of this type.

Our results undermine to a certain extent three elements that are often commonly assumed in research on the introduction of intra-party elections. As such, it amends the existing literature and provides avenues for alternative explanations.

First of all, it is often stated that the incumbent party leadership is very reluctant to adopt leadership elections and that it does so only when forced by circumstances and/or other powerful actors in the party (Scarrow et al, 2001 ; Cross & Blais, 2011). In all Belgian parties of this study but one, the current party elite was very keen on introducing leadership elections and took itself the initiative to carry them through. The mechanism at work is the same as in for instance Westminster parties, but the starting position differs and consequently the decision-making process looks completely different. In both Belgian and Westminster parties, the party elite tries to avoid too much power for the middle-level elites (party congresses, regional and local sections, collateral social organizations, etc.). In Westminster parties, the parliamentary party was initially in charge of selecting the party leader. Taking away power from them involves weakening the party elite and possibly strengthening the middle-level elites. As a consequence, party elites are reluctant to introduce leadership elections. In Belgian parties, on the contrary, the starting position was different: party congresses using a system of delegates, which empowers organized middle-level elites, were in charge to designate the party leader. Introducing leadership elections means taking away power from the middle-level elites, which is applauded by the party elite, and therefore, they are proponents of reforms granting members more involvement.

Secondly, it is often assumed in the literature that the adoption of more inclusive selection procedures follows an electoral defeat (Cross & Blais, 2011). Because the decision-making process of this reform is different in Belgium, the role of the electoral context is also different. Whereas in Westminster countries, electoral defeat implies a weakening of the parliamentary party, which gives proponents of a reform an argument to take away (some of) their power, this is not the case in Belgium. Even on the contrary, a good (personal) result at the elections could empower the party leader in order to eventually overcome resistance of the middle-level elites and grant grassroots members involvement in the selection of the party leader. Westminster parties and Belgian parties share the fact that electoral defeat could induce parties to consider reforming and renewing the party, but whereas in Westminster parties, the weakening of parliamentary parties support these tendencies, in Belgian parties, a strengthening of the party elite following an electoral victory at the next elections is helpful, and sometimes even necessary, to finally implement changes. Moreover, it seems to be better to use party crisis as context rather than electoral defeat which is more limited, since bad opinion polls, involvement in party scandals and negative press articles could have the same effect on the need of party reform.

Thirdly, the decline in membership figures is often cited as one of the major driving forces behind the introduction of internal elections (Scarrow, 1999). From our interviews, it appears, however, that this is at

most a subordinate goal of the reforms, but definitely not the driving force. The reason for this is that party elites are often not sufficiently aware of this decline and that they estimate, for various reasons, that voters are far more important than party members.

We have indicated in this paper that other patterns (than those sketched in the literature up to now) of adopting leadership elections could occur and we have tried to sketch these patterns in detail based on the Belgian situation. The question arises what factors determine the kind of pattern, both in terms of decision-makers and motives, that is followed. We have tried to give in this paper some initial explanations (by referring to difference in party organs initially in charge of selecting the party leader for instance), but some puzzling elements remain (why for instance does the VU exhibits another pattern than other Belgian parties?). Further research should elaborate further on the causal mechanisms that make that the adoption process in some parties in some countries runs differently from that in other parties in other countries.

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Appendix 1: List of Belgian political parties

CD&V (previously CVP): Flemish Christian democrats

CDH (previously PSC): French-speaking Christian democrats

SP.A (previously SP): Flemish Social democrats

PS: French-speaking Social democrats

VLD (previously PVV): Flemish Liberals

MR (previously PRL): French-speaking Liberals

Groen! (previously Agalev): Flemish Greens

Ecolo: French-speaking Greens

FDF (merged with MR): French-speaking Regionalist party in Brussels

LDD (founded in 2006): Populist Flemish Liberals around charismatic J-M Dedecker

VU (split up in 2001): Flemish Regionalist party

N-VA (former members of VU): Flemish Regionalist party

SLP (previously Vl.Pro., previously Spirit, former members of VU): Flemish Regionalist party with a social-liberal profile, now disappeared

Vlaams Belang (previously Vlaams Blok): Extreme right Flemish Regionalist party

FN: French-speaking Extreme right party

Appendix 2: List of interviews

Party	Year	Name	Function in year X	Date	Location
VLD	1993	Clair Ysebaert	Party secretary	31 January 2011	Brussels
CVP	1993	Johan Van Hecke	Party leader	16 March 2011	By telephone
CVP	1993	Luc Willems	Party secretary	11 February 2011	Brussels
SP	1995	Louis Tobback	Party leader	8 February 2011	Leuven
SP	1995	Linda Blomme	Party secretary	10 February 2011	Antwerp
PS	1997	Philippe Busquin	Party leader	15 February 2011	Seneffe
PS	1997	Jean-Pol Baras	Party secretary	1 February 2011	Brussels
VU	1999	Patrik Vankrunkelsven	Party leader	18 January 2011	Laakdal
VU	1999	Laurens Appeltans	Party secretary	14 January 2011	Leuven
VU	1999	Eric Defoort	Deputy party leader	9 March 2011	Ghent