

The Floating Voter in a Multiparty Systems Democracy: Does the Number of Electoral Parties Actually Matter?

TOM SCHAMP*

Abstract

This paper deals with the relationship between institutional, electoral and party system dynamics on the one hand, and the evolution of total electoral volatility in Belgium, on the other. Based on aggregated election data from the 1876–2010 period the paper describes how and why party system size and electoral volatility in a fragmented parliamentary democracy interrelate and how they affect the equal parliamentary representation of parties. There are three important conclusions: first of all, the national party system has become more permeable to new parties over time and, concurrently, has become more competitive. This process has impacted negatively on the supremacy of the three traditional ideologies and the distinctive electoral market leadership of the Flemish Catholic party. But more importantly, it is not the absolute number but rather the relative change in electoral competition from one election to the next that has been a prime factor in explaining the linkage between party system fragmentation and electoral volatility. Lastly, the increasingly permeable Belgian national party system seems to have impacted adversely on the equal representation of smaller parties and – somewhat counterintuitively – even after the year 2000 has primarily rewarded larger parties, the very parties that represent the main pillar-based ideologies. Added to this is that one of the main factors precluding equal representation of (new) parties is total electoral volatility.

Keywords: Belgium; party system change; proportional representation; electoral volatility

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1. Introduction

Following the cross-national analysis of societal cleavage structures and their impact on the party system and voter alignment (cf. Lipset and Rokkan 1967a; 1967b), the question of whether a changing party system is still a sign of a changing society¹ has received plenty of attention. Connected to this question is the issue of whether or not parties and politicians resolved tensions in society by changing democratic, electoral and state institutions (Daalder

* Ghent University, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Department of Political Science (GASPaR.be), Universiteitstraat 8, 9000 Gent, Belgium, e-mail: tom.schamp@ugent.be.

1974; 2011). Another related issue is how such changes affect voting behaviour. What does the history of elections teach us about the success of changes to the electoral and political systems for the representation of political parties that guided those changes? In the case of Belgium, we wonder whether consociation strategies resulted in a more equilibrated party system and what the effect has been on the political system. Those are the central questions I wish to address in this article.

Though these linkages have been studied in a comparative and cross-sectional manner for several different selections of democracies, very few single country studies have been conducted. Nevertheless there are a couple of arguments in favour of a single case study design. First of all, analyses using a multiple-country design focused on the interrelation between societal change, institutional change and party system dynamics tell us a lot about the general trends and relationships concerning groups of countries, particular kinds of democracies, party systems and political systems. But the results of these studies do not often explain the evolution along each dimension outside a given context or country setting. The latter is in fact very specific and never overlaps with that of another country on several dimensions simultaneously. Provided that we assume the system characteristics to be alike, there is in most cases very little to compare. Secondly, if the aim is to draw conclusions about the success of institutional changes in terms of democratic participation, political system stability or change in the party system, not to mention in the party itself, there must first and foremost be an examination of the combined particularities of each specific country or, if applicable, region. Because ever since the appearance of the initial studies of the electoral versus party system linkage, Belgium has been considered an exception for the most part to the many rules that explain the link between the electoral party systems (cf. Duverger 1950; Grumm 1958; Nohlen 1984, Reeve and Ware 1992),² it is our feeling that only a single-country case study approach can facilitate the understanding of the theoretical puzzle presented by party system change and electoral politics.

Belgium has clearly developed toward a two-party system democracy in the postwar era. But to increase our ability to make valid claims about the way the political system in Belgium changed, we look at two particular drivers of the Belgian parliamentary democracy: the *state institution* (state reforms) and the *electoral system* (electoral system changes). The main assumption is that this connection between either of these elements causes friction at the societal and political levels and confronts politicians with the task of resolving the tensions. We examine the relationship from a statistical historiographic standpoint (Schamp and Devos 2013a; 2013b), which means that the institutional history of Belgium is used here as the overarching contextual variable.

The data include the election results for all parties in all national elections for the period from 1876 to 2014, encompassing 49 different national elections.³ Based on the electoral strength of the individual parties a handful of party system characteristics or indicators are applied, like those describing the evolution of the size and complexity of the party system (the fragmentation of the total (electoral) party landscape and the fractionalization of the parliament), the (dis)proportionality of the total representation, and total electoral volatility. In some cases, the impact of institutional or electoral changes is only felt several elections later. A long-term historic approach therefore enables us to detect and interpret potential time affects more adequately.

Special attention is devoted to the central question of the link between a party's electoral strength and party de-alignment as measured by voter mobility. The first of these factors increases the prospects for a stable party system, while electoral volatility is understood to diminish those prospects. We also assume that changing voter preferences and change in electoral competition (in terms of more new parties, or more parties overall) tell us something about broader societal and political choices and any underlying shift in societal values. Changing electoral preferences, including changes in the turnout rate and the number of void and invalid votes, as well as changes to political initiatives and the number of electoral parties, may therefore be considered the signature of a changing society. Because both a growing supply of parties and shifting voter demand make the outcome of elections more unpredictable, we would anticipate the combination of both to impact inter- and intra-party competitiveness and contribute to overall political tension levels. But to what extent are supply and demand two sides of the same coin? Does the demand hypothesis actually hold water? Can we state confidently that the presence of a greater number of political parties leads to higher electoral volatility? The institutional setting in Belgium has clearly seen an expanded number of political parties over time. That makes Belgium an interesting case for exploring in greater depth the extent to which the number of electoral parties really matters in explaining voter mobility.

This paper will adhere to the following structure: The first part of the paper contains a brief discussion of the development of the Belgian national party system since the introduction of the P.R. system in 1899. We offer a nutshell presentation of institutional and electoral changes in the system. More specifically, we explore the issue of whether changes to the electoral system have produced a party system in which a greater number of political parties have had to undergo change in order to survive. The second part of the paper tests the central hypothesis that higher levels of party system competition are expected to induce higher levels of total electoral volatility and hence lead to a more unstable political climate. An initial observation here is that the key factors leading to fragmentation of the national party landscape lie not in the democratization of electoral institutions per se, but rather in institutional change to Belgium – making it a true federal state in the 1970s – combined with a fundamentally changed value system. Secondly, a broader selection of (new and old) electoral parties in a more open democratic setting has led to a more diverse, variable choice when it comes to changing voter preferences. But there is no clear link between the evolution of the absolute size of the national party system as the sum of two strongly regionalized party systems and the aggregate level of total electoral volatility (measured here by the Pedersen-Index, see below). More specifically, the relationship between party system complexity and voter mobility is based above all on relative changes in the number of electoral parties between two consecutive elections. But this relationship loses strength as electoral competition, as measured by the number of electoral parties, increases. Finally, the empirical evidence points to an interesting (novel) finding concerning the significance of the consistent (under)representation of new parties. It seems to be a historical constant that higher levels of factionalization lead to higher levels of underrepresentation of the smallest actions and significant electoral bonuses for the largest parties. But the Belgian case also shows that new parties seem to stand a better chance of surviving if the party system is in the early stages of expansion, as it was in the period from 1970 until the mid-1980s, but not yet heavily fragmented as in the 1990–2000s. Hence we conclude that

the number of electoral parties does indeed matter in explaining total electoral volatility, but a lot depends upon the context, in particular, upon changes in the level of fragmentation of the (electoral) party system and the way in which newcomers manage to overcome the barrier of systematic underrepresentation.

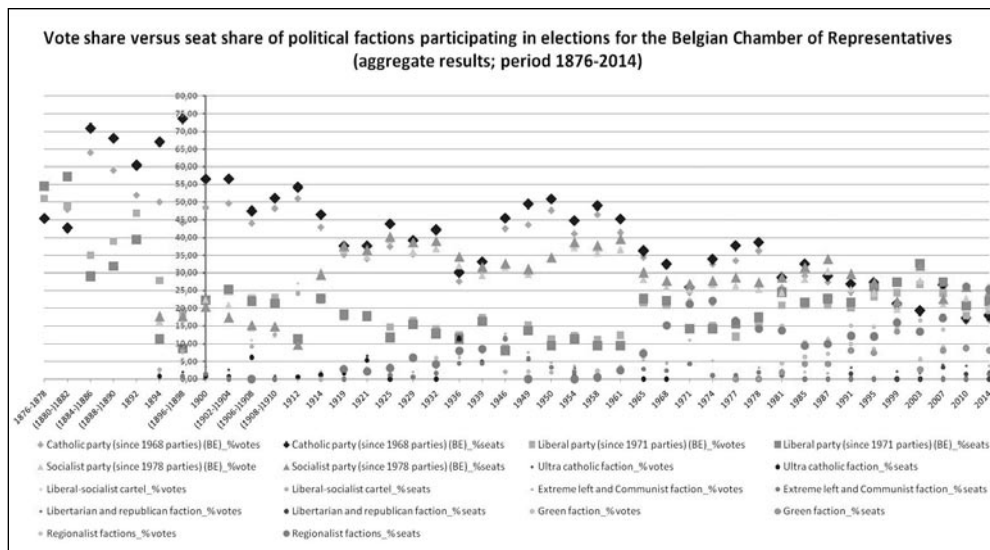
2. The Regionalization of the National Party System

Schamp and Devos (2013b) explore the thesis as to whether the political elite in Belgium has managed to strike a balance between competing (political) ideologies in order to avoid winding up embroiled in a revolutionary scenario. Given the particular history of Belgian representative democracy and typical nature of the Belgian party system⁴, the question as to whether the set of electoral rules introduced in 1899 (basically a PR system) was adapted later in the effort to preserve democracy, political stability, law and order and create the best fit with a changing societal and (national) political context could be answered largely in the affirmative. But the assumption that the electoral system had produced conditions in which parties must change more often to survive, along with the assumption that the party system would reach an equilibrium or stabilization point, i.e., “a situation in which all parties have equal chances to survive” (Grumm 1958), was largely invalidated. The evolution of the post-WWII party system proved clearly otherwise. As we will show in the text to follow, a chief cause has been the disappearance of traditional political ideologies (see Figure 1) allied to the fact that the Belgian national party system, at both the electoral and parliamentary levels, has not developed in linear fashion but rather fragmented and factionalized in a more or less cyclical manner (see Figure 2) largely dependent upon critical historical junctures of the country’s social, sociological and institutional evolution.

2.1. The Disappearance of the Grand Ideologies

To accept ideological and political pluralism means to accept an electoral formula that supports the proportional representation of different ideological or political groups or parties (Schamp and Devos 2013a). Major institutional and electoral changes – as summarized in the table in Annex 1 – optimized such a democratic representation, either through the introduction of a proportionality-based seat distribution system, or via redistricting (increasing the size of the parliament) or via the broadening of the right to vote (suffrage). Over time the party system shifted from a two-party system (until the 1890s) to a three-party system (before the First World War) and to a multiparty system in the post-war era. Other measures (such as the introduction of the 5% electoral threshold and the abolishment of the list connection and apartment system) aimed to put a hold on the increasing fragmentation of the electoral party landscape and the factionalization of the national parliament – with questionable success. Though perfect proportional representation has never been attained under the PR-system D’Hondt⁵, the party system and the parties themselves have become more pluralistic.

Figure 1: Representation of the main political ideologies (party families) at the national level.

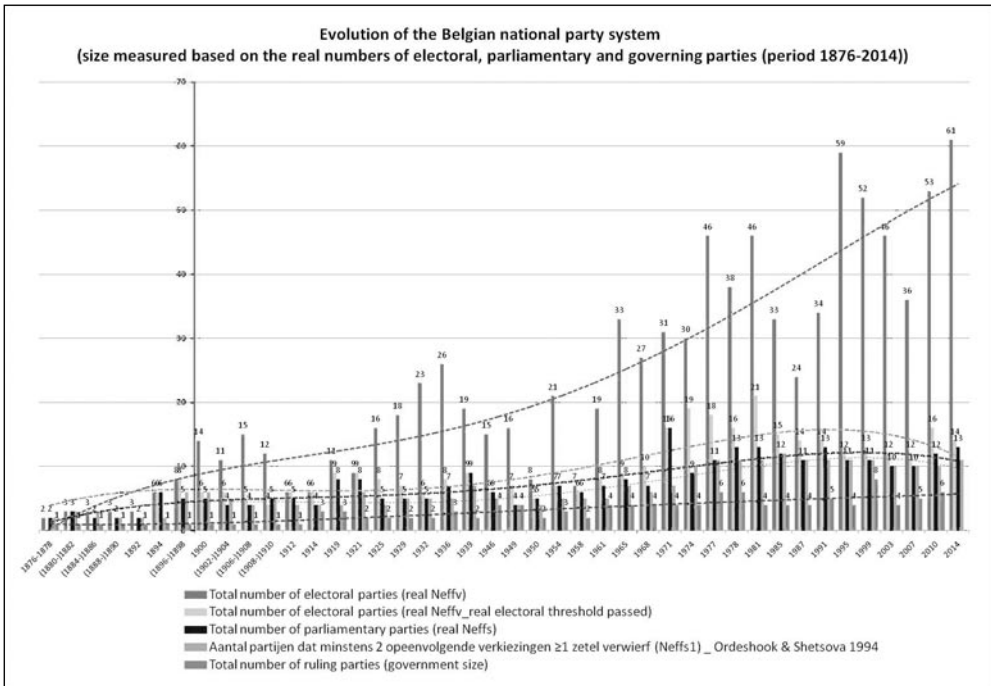


Source: Author's calculations.

As for the past couple of decades, the party landscape has been shaken up by the outcome of a series of earthquake elections at several electoral levels (local, provincial, regional, national). Foremost among them were the breakthrough election of the radical extreme-right Flemish Blok (*Vlaams Blok*) in 1991, the rise of the Green parties (Agalev/Ecolo) in 1999 and more recently the landslide electoral victories of the moderate Flemish-nationalist New Flemish Alliance (*Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie*, N-VA) in 2009 (regional elections) 2010 (federal elections) (cf. Annex 2 for the 2010 election results). These recent changes, however, are neither unique to Belgium nor a novel phenomenon in Belgian political history and are seldom lasting (cf. the electoral evaporation of the Flemish Greens in 2003, or the electoral defeat of the radical Flemish-nationalists *Vlaams Belang* in 2014). The success of the non-traditional or so-called new parties has its roots in the post-WWII social movements which gained momentum during the 1960s and the 1970s. More precisely, for instance, the cradle of political success for the regionalist ideologies (first and foremost, the Flemish nationalists) may be traced back to the interwar period and the fairly fascist Flemish patriotic Verdinaso, Rex, VNV and the like, or later on, the more moderate Flemish-Nationalism, which was reabsorbed into the Flemish People's Union (*Volksunie*, 1954). At the same time, new ideologies rose to the surface, including the ecology movement (see Figure 1). These new parties, including other regionalist parties like the Francophone FDF or the *Rassemblement Wallon*, represented ideologies defending values that were other than purely materialistic, aimed more at personal freedom, equal opportunities and the well-being of individual citizens in a less strict or structured community or *Gesellschaft*. Undeniably the process of depillarization and ideological alienation and subsequent party de-alignment that started in the late 1960s has fundamentally changed the face of the political system in Belgium.

Throughout the 1970s and the 1980s the national party landscape was coloured by the following phenomena. First of all, in view of the regionalization (federalization) of Belgium (the first state reform, 1970) all three traditional national parties regionalized into a Flemish and a francophone branch and organization: the Catholic party (CVP/PSC, 1968), Liberal party (PVV/PRL, 1970) and the Belgian Socialist Party (BSP/SPB, 1978). Secondly, in 1978 the Flemish-nationalist *Volksumie* split into one moderate bloc and one radical faction – the later *Vlaams Blok* (1979) – which strove for an independent Flemish republic and hence the dissolution of the Belgian parliamentary monarchy. Thirdly, in 1979–1980 the green parties AGALEV and Ecolo were founded, and the post-communist AMADA renamed itself PVDA/PTB, *Party of the Workers*. These three changes, which increased the level of factionalization both at the ideological centre and at the fringes, have dominated Belgium’s electoral history since that time.

Figure 2: The size of the Belgian national party system (i.e., the number of electoral parties, the number of parliamentary parties and the number of governing parties).



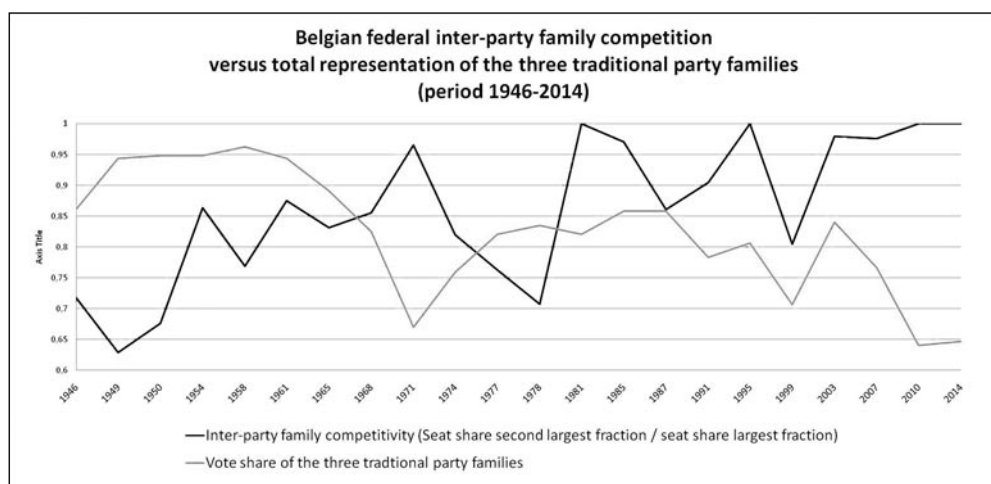
Note: see Annex 3 for the effective numbers of parties (national party system size).

Source: Author's calculations.

In parallel with the denationalization of the traditional parties, the federalization of the country has had a serious impact on the development of the national (and regional) party system. First of all, the overarching ‘national election’ level had disintegrated completely (cf. Schamp 2014a: 96–98). Election programs more and more often contain regional accents and

parties created two kinds of election programs: a national program and a regional program, dealing with other, sometimes conflicting, issues. As a consequence, the federal level found itself competing more often with regional parliaments and governments, especially when the regional majority was not mirroring the federal parliamentary majority (and the government coalition) at the federal level (called asymmetric government). Throughout the subsequent state reforms (1980-'81, 1988-'89 and 1993), political power shifted further from the federal to the regional level. This process divided communities and increased intraregional and interparty electoral competition (cf. Figure 3). A two-party system democracy became a political reality.

Figure 3: Belgian federal inter-party family competition versus total representation of the three traditional party families (period 1946–2014).



Source: Author's calculations.

The duplication of election levels in fact increased total interparty system competition and drove up levels of political tension. The “schizophrenic” 1990s became renowned for growing voter discontent because of a broad perception that political institutions were malfunctioning.⁶ New political initiatives attempting to profit from the “new political culture” were offered a platform in the 1995 elections for launching attacks against the old political system and traditional values from within. Equally important was the fact that the 1995 elections were held in keeping with new election rules. One of the major new features was the multiple preferential voting system. As a result, many voters shifted from voting for the party list to casting votes by name. This evolution introduced a personalization trend in national elections, rerouting attention from the program or the core ideologies to the individual candidates, especially those candidates ranked at the top of each candidate list. Even though elections were held on the basis of competing party lists under a (list) P.R. regime – D’Hondt and – they took on a more or less presidential character. Elections increased intra-list competition and saw more party switching before, during and after the elections. The duplication of political avenues in which parties were able to compete with each other, however, was the chief reason that the small increase in the average size of districts in 1995 at the federal level (from 7.07 to 7.50

seats) coincided with a strong boost in the number of electoral parties, to 59, the second highest figure in Belgian history to this point, surpassed only by the number of electoral parties in the most recent (2014) federal elections (see Figure 2). On the other hand, it must be said that the success rate of the large majority of participating parties was (and still is) relatively low and largely comparable to preceding and subsequent electoral outcomes.

Nevertheless, even though the parties aimed to bridge the perceived gap between politicians and society in the 1990s, trust in the political system in general and individual politicians in particular has never been fully restored. What is more, if one looks at the turnout in the most recent elections, the number of *blanco* and invalid votes and the outcome of the Eurobarometer studies of trust in politics, political parties and individual politicians, one finds ample reason to believe the distance between voters and political parties has actually increased rather than decreased (Schamp 2014b). As Figure 3 shows, electoral support for the three traditional political ideologies is at a historical low.

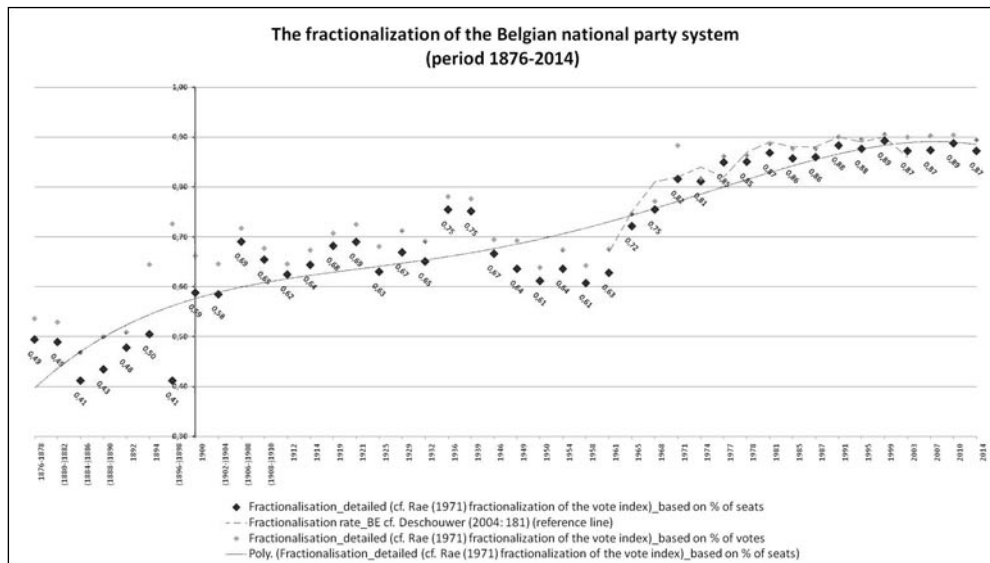
2.2. The Perverse Effect of a Strong Multiparty System Democracy

The past half-century has shown a continuous decline in the traditional parties in the Belgian political arena. In general, where the three traditional parties had 95% of the seats in the Chamber Representatives in the early 1960s (see Figure 4, which shows a factionalization level of 0.63), 20 years later that level of representation had dropped to 81% ($F = 0.87$) and, after another 10 years, stood at 78% ($F = 0.88$). After the 2010 elections the three old ideologies represented only 64% of all parliamentary seats (the lowest collective share ever!).

Though the decline of traditional party adherence is more or less a European phenomenon, the trend is more pronounced in Flanders and has hit Christian-Democracy the hardest. Notwithstanding the fact that some of the new political initiatives of the 1960s–80' in Flanders and Wallonia have been successful in winning at least one seat in parliament, this trend is thus not at all typically 'Belgian' or nationwide. Voters clearly exhibit different behaviour along either side of the linguistic border (cf. Schamp 2014a).

On the Walloon side, the two largest parties, the Socialist Party (PS) and Liberal Party (MR)⁷, successfully consolidated their electoral and political positions at the expense of the Christian Democratic, Humanist CdH and Francophone Regionalist Party FDF (which until 2011 had been a strategic cartel partner of MR) and, until 2010, the extreme right National Front (FN), as well. In contradistinction to the Flemish speaking section of the country, where the Flemish nationalist ideology has once again gained more success over the past two decades, not a single new party has been consistently successful at the national level in the French-speaking section of the country. Subsequently, politics in the French-speaking portion of Belgium and increasingly stabilized, with fewer coalition partners and more stable majorities in parliament. But at the federal level, the formation of a coalition between two largest party families along each side of the linguistic border (the Flemish nationalists of the N-VA and the Walloon socialists) has turned into a real challenge (see Annex 2). At the federal level, the classic "tripartite" governments including Catholics, socialists and liberals along both sides of the linguistic border, as well as other combinations such as the Purple-Green coalition government of Verhofstadt I (1999–2003), including six or even more parties, have become more probable or conceivable than ever before.⁸

Figure 4: Aggregated fractionalization levels (Belgium, 1876–2014).



Note: Rae's index of fractionalization can be computed using this formula: $F = 1 - \sum p_i^2$ (cf. Rae 1968 in: Dumont and Caulier 2003: 4, Rae 1971). The total aggregated fractionalization at the national level was 0.85 after the 2010 elections – and hence at the same level as in the late 1970s – we have shown that the electoral and parliamentary party landscape has changed drastically.

Source: Author's calculations.

In sum, after the introduction of the P.R. system D'Hondt in 1899, we observe a cyclical evolution involving increasing and decreasing numbers of electoral parties (or lists) and of parliamentary parties. The higher (or lower) the number of electoral parties, the higher (or lower) the number of elected parties, and thus the higher the likelihood of a fragmented and divided party system. With the fragmentation of the national party system, electoral competition has increased at both the national and regional level, but so has the fractionalization of the federal parliament (and of the regional parliaments) (see Figure 3). In what follows we will look at the impact of these high levels of party system fragmentation on voter behaviour as measured by the total net electoral volatility.

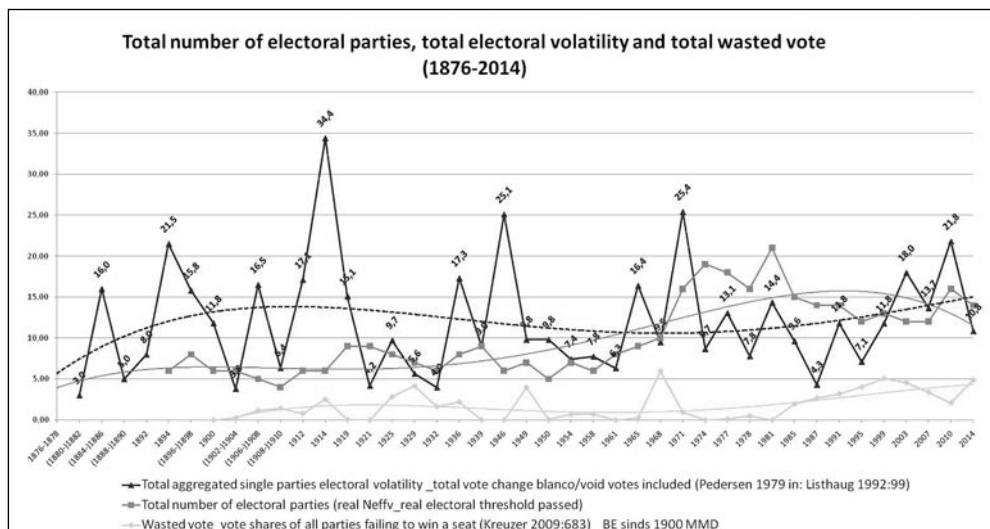
3. Party System Dynamics and Electoral Volatility: Do They Relate at All?

Party system change implies a change in the number of parties and thus the electoral strength of the competitive parties in the same system. When party strength is changeable and party loyalty is gradually eroding or unstable, any increase in the number of electoral parties may cause an increase in the number of parties gaining representation, thus impacting voter mobility measurements. In Belgium at the national level, both new party birth (newcomers) and electoral volatility got a serious boost in the mid-1980s and 1990s (see Figure 5). Until the

mid 1980s, however, many scholars believed in the so-called ‘stabilization of the European electorates’ mapped in great detail by Bartolini and Mair (2007). Party system stability in fact implies the opposite: strong, consistent party adherence leading to relatively stable party representation, which according to Bartolini and Mair had been the case over the 100-year period starting in 1885 in Europe. Using a wide range of various measures of aggregate volatility they describe “a trend of less, not more, volatility and hence increasing political stability.” (Listhaug 1992: 98) This evolution does not seem to match the data presented in Figure 5, which shows a clear increase in average electoral volatility since the mid-1980s.

One of the broadest studies is that by Mainwaring and Zoco (2007) who looked at electoral volatility in 47 old and new democracies. Measuring electoral volatility is important according to the authors because volatile party systems are more likely to produce less stable political systems, since volatile systems make politicians uncertain. In some cases this increases strategizing by the elite and/or strategic voting, or else results in electoral changes that put extra entry barriers in place for new parties (Mainwaring and Zoco 2007: 157–158). On the basis of their assumptions, electoral volatility has potential political relevance. The measure most commonly used is *the total net electoral volatility*, conceptualized by Pedersen (1979) known since that time as the *Pedersen-Index*.⁹ Briefly put, the Pedersen-Index is used to get a rough idea of the total vote change (from one party to another) between two subsequent elections, based on the electoral strength of each (electoral) party in the system.

The causes behind changes in the distribution may be varied (see above): e.g. public discontent with the traditional polity and the institutional arrangements made by the (mainly) traditional parties, growing distrust in the political elite or growing disbelief in politics, or a crisis of democracy in general, as well as a lack of party identification or party loyalty. Under such circumstances citizens grow increasingly disaffected or hostile (Converse in: Mainwaring et al. 2006). “They reject parties and turn to political independents and outsiders” (Mainwaring and Zoco 2007: 169). If that is what happens, then this would imply that this ‘other option’ is available. In terms of the number of electoral parties, it is clear that there was a gradual inflation in party competition during the 1960s and 1970s in Belgium: from seven electoral parties (that passed the electoral threshold in at least one electoral district) in 1961 to more than 15 ten years later. During that same period, electoral volatility was above average (see Figure 5). If, however, one believes that the number of competing parties per se plays a major role in explaining the change in voting, then the assumption to be tested is that by offering the electorate a broader choice in terms of moral electoral parties, voters will in fact be more inclined to change party preference and differentiate their choices – both from one election to another as well as during the same election at different election levels (regional, federal, European). Hence total electoral volatility would ‘reflect’ both changes in the demand side (individual electorate preferences) as well as changes on the supply side (party switching of candidates, party mergers or alliances, newcomers, etc.). There is a widespread belief that in the current electoral-professional era, party-political demand can be (successfully or unsuccessfully) created by the parties themselves – either by the normal development of existing parties or by the creation of genuinely new parties, so-called “flash” parties, making splits from existing parties, or doing the opposite by forming electoral alliances or executing mergers between two or more factions.

Figure 5: Total electoral volatility (Pedersen's aggregated electoral volatility).

Note: The trend line plotted here for the evolution of (aggregate) electoral volatility in Belgium (at the national level) is very similar to the trend lines for the Pedersen Index in parliamentary elections in Western Europe, 1945–2011 plotted by Dassonneville and Hooghe (cf. 2011: 18, figure 1), with most observations within a 3% to 20% range.¹⁰

Source: Author's calculations.

If the above assumptions are correct, then the more complex and competitive the electoral market gets, the more likely this will show in a measure like the Pedersen-index. According to the UK researchers Richard Rose and Derek Urwin, however, there is a difference between a party's electoral strength and the 'total' float of eligible voters (1970: 292). The latter would basically include the participation or turnout for elections, the wasted vote (votes cast for parties or candidates that failed to win a seat) and the invalid or blanco (or empty) vote. These changes are not captured by the total net electoral volatility index. What is more, movement among individual voters – i.e., only those who actually cast a vote – may cancel each other out, making it difficult to interpret the total electoral volatility. As Listhaug (1992) advises, we look at electoral volatility at the micro-level¹¹, i.e. the party level and we include in our analysis the share of invalid and void votes (Schamp 2014a).

3.1. The Relevance of Party System Size: There Seems to Be No Clear Association

First of all, Figure 5 shows that total electoral volatility in Belgium is in itself very volatile. It was notably very high at specific points in time: e.g. when generalized suffrage for all 25-year old men was introduced along with compulsory voting (first implemented in 1894), before WWI, in the years before and after the Second World War, in the mid-1960s and early 1970s, and even today. In fact, the past twenty years show a trend of increasing electoral volatility (Devos et al. 2009: 17–20¹²), though the pattern itself is undulating. More moderate levels of electoral volatility are found in the years 1981 (the breakthrough of AGALEV/Ecolo), in 1991

(with the breakthrough of *Vlaams Blok*) and in 2007 (with the success of LDD, the revival of the Flemish Green Party and the success of Ecolo and N-VA, which was in a cartel with CD&V). In all other postwar election years, total electoral volatility has been relatively low, despite fundamental changes in the national party system (see above).

However, though the degree of electoral competition further increased throughout the late 1970s and the early 1980s, total electoral volatility dropped in that same period. Electoral volatility reached a historic low in 1987 (4.31%). Still, in 1987 the Electoral party system was very much scattered. During the 1990s and the 2000s electoral volatility levels rose again by an average of just under 3% per election to reach a level of 21.82% in 2010. Schamp (2014) gives the percentage for interparty bloc electoral volatility (15.83%). In the 2010 national elections, one in six voters switched party ideology, about four times more than in 1987. If we compare 1987 and 2010 in terms of the size of the electoral and parliamentary party system, however, the situation is more or less the same. In other words, in the 1987–2010 period, voting patterns became increasingly volatile. As previously noted, a growing interest in a new kind of politics (*a new political culture or NPC*) less preoccupied with economic issues (cf. Bartolini and Mair 1990 in Listhaug 1992: 98) and guided by post-materialist values and a new sense of belonging has shifted the political playing field since the mid-60s. The consequences of party-voter de-alignment played out over decades but were most visible during the 1990s, when electoral volatility took on real momentum (Devos et al. 2009: 31): most parties changed their image (party presidency, party leadership, party name, party logo, the organization of ideological congresses, etc.), more and more politicians and candidates from traditional and nontraditional parties switched sides (so-called “*party swingers*”), parties risked disintegration because of internal conflicts and there were plenty of openings for new political initiatives and more popular or heavily promoted personalities and their incumbent parties to get elected. In turn, this climate of change increased both incentives and opportunities for the electorate to change its vote. On the other hand, by the end of the 20th Century there was a broad consensus among all parliamentary parties that the electoral system needed to be changed to stop any further fragmentation of the political landscape (think, for example, of the 2002 electoral threshold). In fact, the electoral party system more or less shifted into defragmentation mode – “consolidation mode” – mainly due to the clustering of parties around the three old ideologies (Devos 2009 in Schamp. Examples include the regrouping of the Flemish CD&V, Open VLD and Sp.a (and the francophone PRL) and non-traditional parties, respectively N-VA, Vivant/Liberaal Appel and Spirit (and FDF) in the so-called *cartel parties*.

Though the changes are very much country specific, periods of low volatility seem to alternate with periods of high volatility in a rather uncoordinated or unpredictable way (Schamp 2014a). In 2014, total electoral volatility dropped to 10.85%, below the average of 12.30% for the postwar period. What is more, when one examines the evolution of the number of real electoral parties, the link to total electoral volatility is, perhaps surprisingly, not present. Two periods show a remarkably inverse relationship. First, there were times when the total party system clearly became more complex and competitive, for example the 1949–1961 period¹³ and the period from 1965–1981. While fragmentation of the party system increased in terms of both party numbers and electoral parliamentary party numbers, the total measured electoral volatility gradually declined. The opposite is true for the second period, from 1978 to 2003,

during which there was a gradual decrease in the total number of electoral parties matched by increasing total electoral volatility. What is behind the fact that the best fitting curvilinear trend line shows these two measures have chiefly evolved in opposing directions since the 1960s (see Figure 5), even though the literature assumes the main driving force behind electoral volatility is the number of electoral parties?

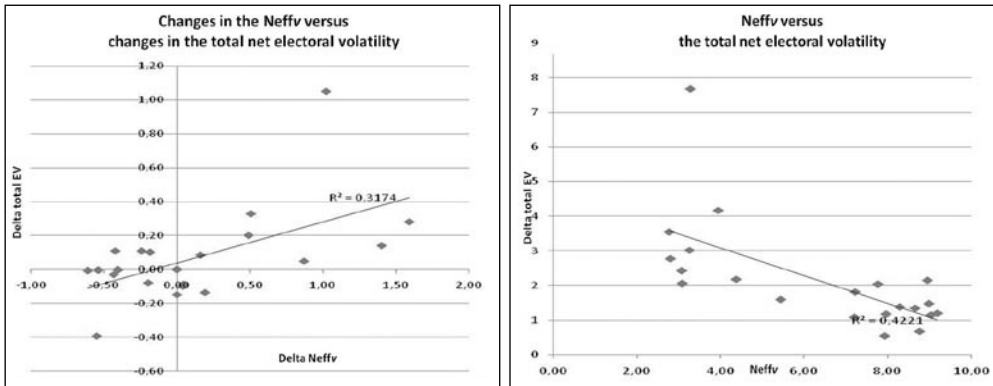
3.2. And Yet There Is a Good Explanation!

Why do the empirical data fail to match the theoretical assumption that the presence of a broader choice and greater competition will increase voter mobility? Dassonneville and Hooghe, for instance, concluding their research on the relationship between electoral systems, party systems and electoral volatility: “With regard to differences in party systems, electoral volatility is significantly higher in systems with more political parties. The more parties participate in elections and the more options voters have in the polling booth, the higher levels of volatility. (...) The length of democracy is significantly related to the Pedersen Index.” (2011: 25). Despite the many cases cited by many researchers showing that there is a positive correlation between electoral volatility and party system complexity or size, and though not infrequently some of them even suggest that the number of emerging parties or the size of a party system is ‘the main factor’ to explain electoral volatility (cf. e.g. Walgrave et al. 2010: 3), it looks like the underlying logic that supports the assumption of a consistent relationship between both phenomena in the case of Belgium does not entirely hold. Based on the data presented in the above paragraph, a straightforward relationship between the levels of electoral volatility and the fragmentation of the national or federal party system is largely missing.

Research based on the assumption that voters change their party preferences when more parties enter the electoral arena and the choice becomes more complex assumes greater mobility from one election to the next. Therefore if changes in the supply side (the number of electoral parties) are to correspond to fluctuations in demand (electoral volatility); what must be studied is the impact of the degree of fragmentation of the party system from one election to the next. Hence it is not the absolute level of electoral volatility but rather the (relative) change in electoral volatility between two consecutive elections that is the pertinent element for better understanding any potential relationship between party system size and electoral volatility. (We have already ascertained that the Pedersen-index is not very useful for general trend analysis.) Referring to Figures 6a and 6b, we may conclude that, at least for the postwar period and utilizing the average total electoral volatility for the 1950s as our reference point, there is a positive correlation between the relative increase/decrease in the number of electoral parties (‘delta’ electoral parties (Neff v) and the relative increase/decrease in total electoral volatility (‘delta’ EV). So if more parties stand for election than did in the previous election, it becomes more likely that voters will begin to float (see Figure 6a). This insight based on relative changes in total electoral volatility scores hence largely corrects the missing evidence from analyses based upon the absolute numbers of electoral parties. The answer to the question of whether every increase in the number of electoral parties will result in increased total electoral volatility is clearly “no”. Figure 6b shows that in the post-war period there is a significant negative correlation between the relative volatility per (additional) electoral party from one election to the next and total measured additional electoral volatility. In other

words, the more parties participating in the electoral competition, the lower the impact of an additional new party on total electoral volatility.

Figure 6a and 6b: The relationship between the number of electoral parties and electoral volatility (1960s–2014).

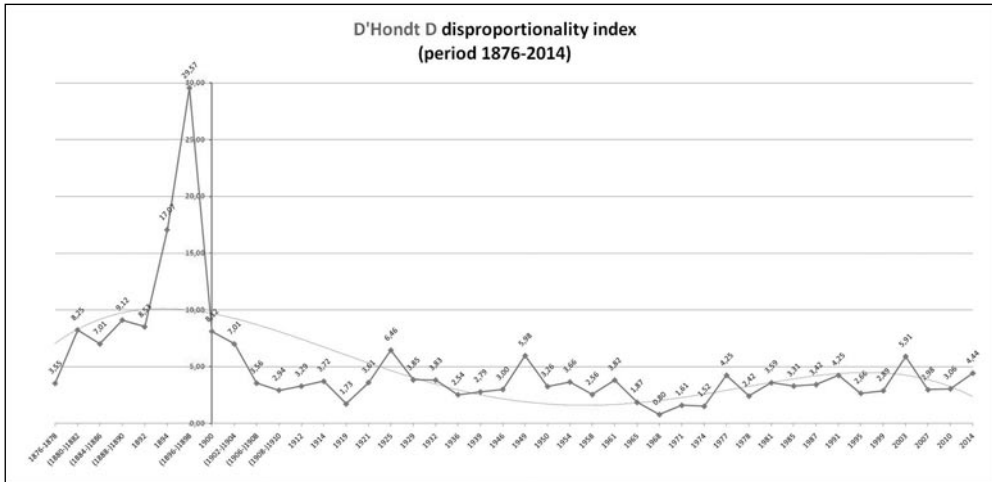


Source: Author's calculations.

To summarize: the expansion of electoral party system from three to four parties (+ one party) has a greater impact on total electoral volatility (change) than does enlarging a party system from six electoral parties to seven (also + one party). These findings may seem trivial or largely intuitive but the issue that we want to underline is that the absolute number of electoral parties – commonly used in this line of research – is far less relevant in explaining the evolution of total electoral volatility than relative changes in the number of electoral parties (or the size of the competition) between two consecutive elections. Hence we have provided evidence that an approach based upon the change between two consecutive elections is indeed a more proper way of finding meaningful correlations.

3.3. The Political Relevance of Electoral Volatility: Who Wins, Who Loses?

Apart from the linkages between the electoral system changes, party system changes and the changes in the voter mobility, we also want to look at what the impact is on the representation of parties. Does electoral volatility drive up the chances for newcomers to be represented? Or are lower levels of voter mobility beneficial for the established parties? These and other questions are actually covered by the *electoral equilibrium hypothesis* (cf. Duverger 1950; Grumm 1958).¹⁴ In the 1950s, thus half a century after the introduction of the P.R. system, it was strongly held that because “[most] democratic political systems would eventually grow to a stabilization point, i.e., a situation in which all parties have equal chances to survive” (Grumm 1958: 375) any P.R. system reaching that equilibrium phase would for instance deal with problems of the systematic overrepresentation of the larger political parties and the unjust underrepresentation or even non-representation of the smaller parties. If the supposed party system fragmentation were evidenced in practice, the logical conclusion would be that the phenomenon should lead to more equally sized ideological families and parties.

Figure 7: Total disproportional representation of the largest parties (1876–2014).

Source: Author's calculations.

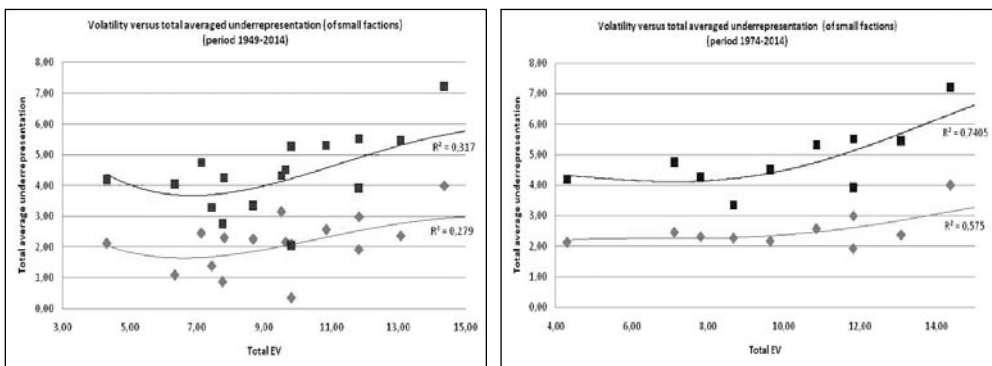
In the postwar period, the introduction of a P.R.-based seat distribution system (D'Hondt, Imperiali, Hare-quota based and alike) has led, in Belgium as in most Western (European) countries that have introduced a more democratic electoral institution, to an increase in fragmentation of the party system and increased factionalization of the parliament. In the case of Belgium, the electoral strength of the three traditional political families has systematically declined in favour of new parties (see above). Considering this evolution, the electoral equilibrium hypothesis can at least partially be confirmed. However that portion of the hypothesis that supposes a situation will occur in which “all parties have an equal chance to survive” does not necessarily relate simply to the size of the party system, but also to other dynamics such as changing voter preferences. Though in the case of Belgium the relation to the level of volatility of the electorate is not at all clear, in general total electoral volatility tends to reach relatively higher levels in more complex political systems. In order to find out whether all parties benefit ‘equally’ from the system dynamics, we take another indicator into account: total disproportional representation of parties. This parameter is the sum of the relative overrepresentation of the larger parties (measured by Lijphart's *D'Hondt D Index*) and underrepresentation of the smaller. (cf. Figure 7) Under the pre-1900 plurality system we noticed typically extreme electoral bonuses for the larger political faction. As of 1900, under the P.R.-based system D'Hondt, total disproportionality levels dropped, mainly due to the devaluation of the (mostly) huge electoral bonus of the largest party under the plurality system. Overall there is a substantial association between the disproportional over/underrepresentation of the largest/smaller parties (Pearson $R = .26$) and the number of parliamentary parties as a whole (Pearson $R = .73$).¹⁵

3.4. When the Number of Electoral Parties, Total (Dis)proportionality and Total Electoral Volatility Come Together

Now who suffers most from the fragmentation of the electoral party system? Based on the simple correlation for the postwar period between D'Hondt's D and the number of electoral parties that have passed the real electoral threshold (Pearson $R = -.122$), we would argue that the more electoral parties become politically relevant, the more the largest parties are over-represented. In the 1971–2014 period, the negative correlation between both variables is even more pronounced ($R = -.283$). Because of the interplay of several electoral mechanisms (the legal threshold, redistricting in the form of increases of the DMA, the increased Neff ν value after the denationalization process, etc.), until the 5% electoral threshold at the provincial level was introduced in 2002, not only did more parties enter the electoral competition, but a relatively smaller number of parties got represented. (See above.) In the 2014 federal elections, disproportionality rates increased, though there were relatively fewer electoral parties surmounting the electoral threshold.

The scatter plots presented in Figures 8a and 8b (one for the entire postwar period, one for the post-1971 era) point to the following pattern: the higher the total electoral volatility, the higher the averaged underrepresentation of the small parties (and thus the higher the electoral bonus of the largest parties). Foremost, then, it seems that the large(r) incumbent parties benefit from higher levels of electoral volatility, not smaller parties or newcomers. This positive correlation has gotten even more pronounced since the 1970s, the period in which the Belgian national party system became increasingly fragmented and total system competition increased. This trend is supported by the data in Figure 7, showing that the electoral bonus gained by the largest parties has actually grown in that same period. We therefore conclude that new parties have a better chance of (lasting) representation and electoral survival in less competitive or less fragmented party systems. Vice versa for the incumbent (or traditional)

Figure 8a and 8b: Total electoral volatility versus the averaged underrepresentation of the smaller parties (until 2014).



Note: these findings are more or less comparable to those represented in Annex 4, including numbers collected by De Winter et al. (2009) for the 1949–2009 period and by Devos et al. (2008) for the period 1971–2007.

Source: Author's calculations.

parties. The higher the complexity of the total party system, the smaller the electoral bonus of the largest party (cf. D'Hondt's D).

The partial correlation between the changes in the number of electoral parties and total electoral volatility is summarized in the Table 9a (1971–2010). As against the simple correlation, however, here the interaction effect of the D'Hondt disproportionality measure (Table 9b) is higher – i.e. indicating that the disproportionality bonus of the largest party/-ies in fact strengthens the observed correlation. The opposite holds true for the total averaged underrepresentation of the smaller parties.

Hence the higher the electoral bonus gained by the largest parties and thus the higher the total averaged underrepresentation of the smaller parties, the stronger the association is between *relative change* in electoral party system size and total electoral volatility. During the time period under observation, more proportionate representation of parties leads to a stronger relationship between changes in the size of the party system and electoral volatility. This evidence taken from a multiparty system democracy like Belgium (and measured at the aggregate level) underscores the more general assumption that in more proportionate systems an increase of electoral parties does in fact lead to voter mobility, whereas in less proportionate systems it does not.

Table 1a: Correlations.

		RealNeffv_KDdelta	TSPEV
RealNeffv_KDdelta	Pearson Correlation	1	.645*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.017
	N	13	13
TSPEV	Pearson Correlation	.645*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.017	
	N	13	13

*. The correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Author's calculations.

Table 9b and 9c: Partial correlations.

Control Variables			RealNeffv_KDdelta	TSPEV	Control Variables			RealNeffv_KDdelta	TSPEV
D'Hondt_D	RealNeffv_KDdelta	Pearson Correlation	1	.664	D'Hondt_D	RealNeffv_KDdelta	Pearson Correlation	1	.630
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.019			Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.028
		N	0	10			N	0	10
TSPEV	TSPEV	Pearson Correlation	.664	1	TSPEV	TSPEV	Pearson Correlation	.630	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.019	.			Sig. (2-tailed)	.028	.
		N	10	0			N	10	0

Source: Author's calculations.

4. General Conclusion

This paper has explored the interplay between institutional, electoral and party system dynamics on the one hand, and the evolution of total electoral volatility in Belgium, on the other. The aggregate election data utilized included all party families and individual parties from 1876–2010. A central question to be examined was how party system size and electoral volatility in a fragmented parliamentary democracy interrelate and how they affect the *equal* parliamentary representation of parties. The study of institutional and electoral reform (i.e., the denationalization of a former national parliamentary democracy into several regionalized democracies, as well as changes to electoral laws and rules) served as the main argument for using this single case study approach. The combination of history (facts) and statistics (figures) is in no way novel but the statistical historiographic approach tends to get bypassed in multi- and cross-national comparative studies, which in our opinion is an unfavourable development.

Firstly we investigated the long-term relationship between the fragmentation of the party system and electoral volatility. Our main observations are that, over time, the party system has become more open and accessible to new parties. On the one hand, the representation of new political groups in the national (federal) parliament has helped topple the supremacy of the three traditional ideologies and has resulted in the loss of distinct electoral market leadership. At the same time, overall electoral competition has increased (i.e., there are now more equally strong, electorally successful or durable parties) and additional electoral thresholds have been put in place to decrease the level of competition and high factionalization. But most importantly, we have found that it is not the absolute number but rather the relative change in the number of electoral parties that is a key factor for exploration when studying the linkage between party system fragmentation and electoral volatility.

Secondly, and somewhat counterintuitively, based upon the election data, we found that an increasingly permeable party system runs counter to the interests of equal representation for smaller parties and instead rewards larger parties (i.e., medium-sized parties). This finding nuances the electoral equilibrium hypothesis put forward by Grumm in the late 1950s, which suggested that more permeable electoral systems would lead to more complex party systems in which all parties would attain a more or less 'equal chance to survive'. This research adds value to the broader study of electoral systems and party systems, because it serves to understand better the conditions that prevent the system from attaining electoral equilibrium. Quite surprisingly, what came out of the analysis is that one of the main factors precluding equal representation of parties is total electoral volatility. In other words, the more fragmented the Belgian total electoral party system has become from one election to the next, the greater the impact on voter preference and the less likely it is that full proportionality is reached. Under evenly proportional conditions, the more fragmented the party system, the less likely the total electoral volatility will (further) increase – in this, consolidating the situation and keeping new parties out.

The analysis and conclusions for this paper are based on the election outcomes for the national elections and only at the level of the national or federal parliament. We did not continue the research to the regional level (e.g. the Flemish parliament, the Walloon parliament and the parliament of the Brussels Capital region). Also, the election data utilized are aggregated at

the national (federal) level, whereas suggestions have been made to control for party system versus electoral volatility relations at the lowest level possible, i.e., the level at which the voter casts his or her vote. Though it is far from certain that additional research in either direction would contradict the findings that are presented above, we believe that the research area in itself would benefit from a more diversified approach – taking steps to move even further away from the more mainstream multi-country or cross-national large-dataset-based research designs.

Annexes:

Annex 1: Institutional changes and their impact on the political market place.

<i>Summary of institutional changes</i>	(Election) year	What changed at the national level? (institutional level)	What impact on the political market space? (party system level)
<i>State reform</i>	1970	First state reform: Belgium is divided into three communities (Flanders, the French speaking and German speaking communities) and three regions (Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels)	The introduction of the so-called “bolt” institution meaning that a qualified majority of the vote is needed to change the constitution (2/3 rd majority in the parliament and 50 %+1 majority in each language group in the parliament)
	1980–1981	Second state reform: constitutional equality between the communities, regions and the federal level	Proportionate representation of both language groups at the parliamentary and the executive level
	1988–1989	Third state reform: Brussels becomes an autonomous region (Brussels Capital region)	—
	1993	Fourth state reform: election of regional parliaments + redistricting (cf. below)	Number of seats in the federal parliament drops from 212 to 150. The total number of MPs in Belgium rises from 212 to 534 (= 150 in the federal Chamber of Representatives + 71 in the Senate + 124 in the Flemish parliament + 75 in the Walloon parliament + 89 in the parliament of the Brussels Capital Region (72 French-speaking community and 17 Dutch speaking community members) + 25 in the German Community parliament.
	2001–2002	Fifth state reform: the devolution of the list vote (by half), redistricting (cf. below)	More power for voters to select individual candidates. Placement on the candidate list becomes more important.
	2011	Sixth state reform: abolition of the direct election of the Senate + the split of the BHV electoral district for federal and European elections + term of office for the federal legislature extended to five years (instead of four) as of the 2014 elections + end of cumulating political mandates	Candidates may no longer present themselves on more than one list and must take the seat at the level in which they are elected (= the end of the double mandate and the sham candidacy). Voter control over MP selection increases. ¹⁶

<i>Democratic participation</i>	<1876	Tax-based suffrage	Two-party system: the Liberal Party (1847, ending unionist politics) and the Catholic Party (1869). Voters represent less than 2% of the population.
	1884	Tax-based + capacity-based suffrage	Opening up suffrage to the educated, gifted and family heads paying real estate taxes etc. Rewarded the Catholic party. Total electorate accounts for 2.48% of Belgians.
	1894	Generalized multiple voting for all 25-year old men + compulsory voting	Three-party system. Where the second round was a race between a socialist and a catholic candidate, liberal voters mostly voted for the catholic candidate. Decay of the Liberal party. Rise of the Socialist party (1885). First strategic alliances of moderate liberals and socialists. Total electorate represents for 21.6% of the total population.
	1919	One man, one vote system + general suffrage for all 21-year old men	Post-WWI breakthrough of Flemish nationalist ideology. (Radicalization during the interwar period and under the German occupation in 1940–1945)
	1948	General suffrage for all 21-year old Belgians (men and women)	Strengthening of the Catholic party. 59% of the Belgians can vote.
	1981	Suffrage for all 18 year old men and women (Belgians)	A little less than 70% of all Belgians can vote (in 2014 the size of the electorate is more or less the same (71%) and follows the demographic evolution of the country).
<i>Electoral formula</i>	1878	First past the post single member combined and two-round majoritarian winner takes all voting system (+ panache voting) ¹⁷	Electoral supremacy of the Catholic Party – extremely overrepresented in parliament by the end of the 19 th Century.
	1900	End of panache voting + first application of the system D'Hondt (P.R. list vote system)	End of the absolute majorities of the Catholic Party. Revival of the Liberal Party.
	1995	Multiple preferential list voting system	Increase of the preferential or name vote (and fewer list votes).
<i>District magnitude (total number of seats / total number of districts)</i>	1894	152 (seats) / 40 (districts)	Despite the increase in average DM(a) at the national level, small parties (newcomers) remain largely underrepresented under the system-D'Hondt.
	1900	152 / 30, average DM = 5.07	
	1902	168 / 30 (DMa = 5.6)	
	1912	186 / 30 (DMa = 6.2)	
	1936	202 / 30 (DMa = 6.73)	
	1948	212 / 30 (DMa = 7.07)	
	1995	150 / 20 (DMa = 7.5), cf. 4 th state reform	
	2003	150 / 11, average DM = 13.63, cf. 5 th state reform	The effect of the 2003 enlargement of electoral districts was largely neutralized by the 5% electoral threshold set at the provincial level for gaining a seat.
<i>Electoral thresholds</i>	1919	System of list connection at the provincial level (and apparentment)	Implemented in order to allow (smaller) parties to win an extra seat.
	2003	5% (at the provincial level) + end of apparentment system	Relative momentary impact on the number of electoral parties and no effect on the number of parliamentary parties but an important immediate effect on the relative overrepresentation of the larger parties (at the expense of the smaller parties).

<i>Other</i>	1989	Law on the public funding of political parties in return for openness of their books	Parties get increasingly large sponsorship and subsidies from the state (since the early 1990s on average 75 % to 85 % of their total budgets). ¹⁸ Parties need not rely as much on membership payments, overlapping organizational, infrastructural and financial support by parallel organizations (like unions and health insurance organisations) or private donations as before.
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Note: Since 1831, the point of departure has been a single member and multimember plurality system. (Years noted = first implementation of new rules.)

Source: Author's calculations.

Annex 2: Electoral strength at the national level (seat and vote share in the federal Chamber of Representatives, 2010 and 2014).

Federal elections 2010	Liberal family	Christian-democratic family	Socialist family	Flemish nationalist faction	Green faction	Other factions
Number of seats (total = 150)	MR (incl FDF19): ¹⁹ Open Vld: 13	CD&V: 17 CdH: 9	PS: 26 Sp.a: 13	N-VA: 27 VB: 12	Groen!: 5 Ecolo: 8	LDD: 1 MLD: 1
Share of the available seats	20.67%	18.67%	26%	26%	8.67%	1.33%
Share of the total vote	17.92%	16.37%	22.94%	25.16%	9.18%	3.60%
Disproportionality	2.75%	0.96%	3.06%	0.84%	-0.51%	-2.27%

Note: A handful of other parties did not obtain a seat (*Front National, Rassemblement Wallonnie-France, PVDA+, Wallonie d'abord...*). Regarding MLD (*Mouvement Libéral Démocrate*), the party's only representative is Laurent Louis, who founded his own party in 2011 after being elected from the Persons Party (PP) founded by the businessman Mischaël Modrikamen in 2010.

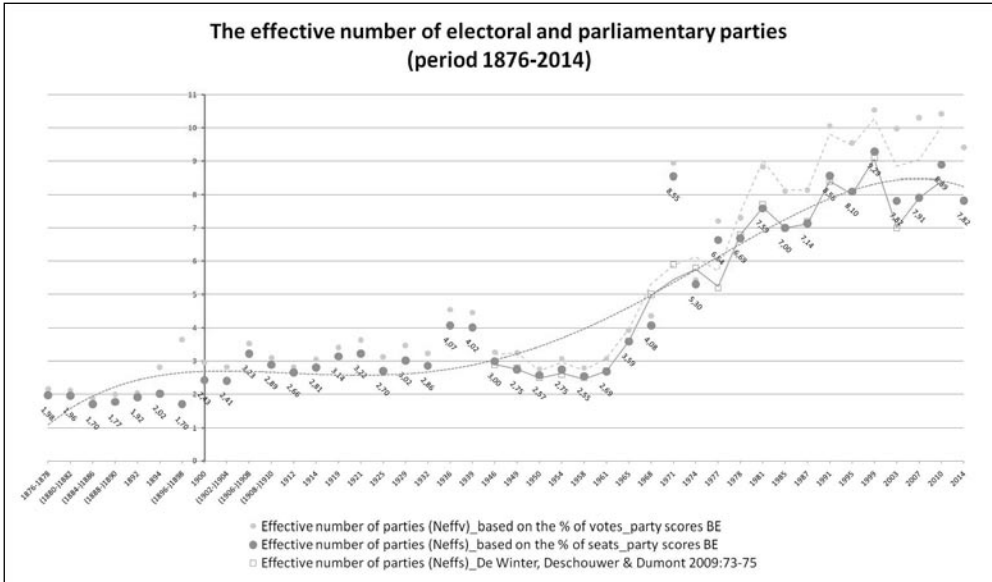
Source: Author's calculations.

Federal elections 2010	Liberal family	Christian-democratic family	Socialist family	Flemish nationalist faction	Green faction	Other factions
Number of seats (total = 150)	MR: 20 Open Vld: 14	CD&V: 18 CdH: 9	PS: 23 Sp.a: 13	N-VA: 33 VB: 3	Groen: 6 Ecolo: 6	FDF: 2 PTB-Go!: 2
Share of the available seats	22.67%	18%	24%	24%	8%	2.66%
Share of the total vote	19.42%	16.59%	20.50%	23.93%	8.62%	3.77%
Disproportionality	3.25%	1.41%	3.5%	0.07%	-0.38%	-1.11%

Note: A handful of other parties did not obtain a seat (Piratenpartij, LDD, FN,...).

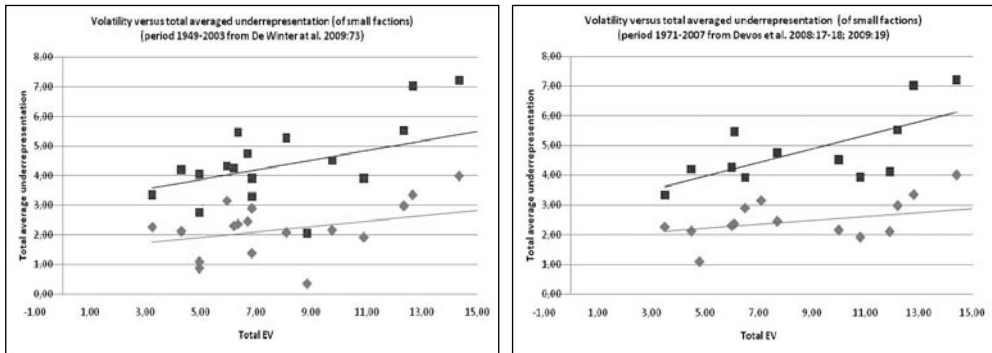
Source: Author's calculations.

Annex 3: (Theoretical) effective number of parties at the aggregate national level, 1876–2014.



Source: Author's calculations.

Annex 4:



Note: the total net volatility measure used is Pedersen's Index (= total electoral volatility). When comparing the electoral volatility in the period 1971–2007 (figure above right) with total average disproportionality (red dots) the correlation is very strong (Pearson R=.84). The association between voter volatility and the underrepresentation of the smaller parties (blue dots) is positive and statistically significant (Pearson R=.56).

Source: Author's calculations.

Notes:

1. The basic ingredients of the changing society in Belgium and the majority of the Western-European countries since the mid-1960s and 1970s have been: processes of deconfessionalization and secularization, depillarization, party dealignment and ideological detachment, individualization, electoral-professionalization of parties, particratisation of the political system, etc.
2. For instance, it has been said that compared to the neighboring countries under the same electoral system there has been *no* significant increase in the number of electoral or parliamentary parties since the introduction of the seat distribution system D'Hondt in 1900 in Belgium (Duverger 1950), and that this P.R. system is a result rather than a cause of the party system (Grumm 1958), or that electoral reform in Belgium is the exception rather than the rule (cf. Nohlen 1984; Reeve and Ware 1992).
3. The pre-1948 period is known as the period of 'unionism' when the two political groups (the liberals and the Catholics) actually shared governmental power. Therefore the years between 1848 and 1876 were invariably 'bipolar' with the *Belgian Liberal party* (∞1846) and *Belgian Catholic party* (∞1869) interchanging governmental powers. This equilibrium was disturbed by the organization of the Belgian worker associations and the birth of the (socialist) *Belgian Workforce Party* (1885), elected to parliament for the first time in 1894, hence after the introduction of the generalized vote for all 25-year-old males and the introduction of the compulsory voting system (majority system). (cf. Annex 1).
4. In fact, at the level of legislative elections, there is not just one nationwide party system in Belgium but a multitude of largely independent party systems, depending upon the unit of analysis (electoral or parliamentary parties). Since the fourth Belgian state reform (1993, cf. Annex 1) we can clearly discern at least four party system geographies, depending upon the level of analysis: the federal party system, the Flemish regional party system, the Walloon regional party system, and the Brussels regional party system. This paper, however, studies the development of the party system at the aggregate national (federal) level only.
5. Under the system-D'Hondt the largest parties are relatively favored over the smaller parties. This relative advantage increases when more voters vote blanco or vote incorrectly (Schamp 2014b).
6. One issue has been the anti-establishment feeling that grew as a result of the upheaval and commotion over the *cordon sanitaire* of the so-called democratic parties against the so-called undemocratic radical and extreme right-wing Flemish nationalist *Vlaams Blok*. Another clear issue was what was perceived to be a widening gap between citizens and politicians, broad-scale civilian protests against the failing government and judiciary, party political scandals that hit Francophone socialists hard (Agusta, Dassault, Uniop), and the overall systemic crisis in which Belgium appeared to have become engulfed (Devos et. al. 2004: 81).
7. After the introduction of the electoral threshold and the enlargement of the electoral districts to the provincial level (2002), the francophone liberal side merged into one cartel called the *Mouvement Réformateur* (MR), including the PRL, FDF, RW and two other small political groups.
8. In this context, the main issue addressed at the 25 May 2014 regional, federal (and European) elections was whether smaller parties like LDD (the Flemish Libertarian Party), PVDA+/PTB-Go!, and the PP (Persons Party) would break through the 5% provincial electoral threshold in at least one district and manage to win one or more seats. LDD and PP failed in the attempt (Cf. Annex 2, Table 2).
9. Total net electoral volatility is the sum of the absolute value of change in percentage of votes gained or lost by all parties in the system from one election to the next, divided by two. (≠/= total number of floating voters) As a result, the index varies between 0 and 100 and is more easily interpreted (Pedersen 1979). (Dassonneville and Hooghe 2011: 5).
10. "Although the number of elections with a volatility index of over 20% has clearly increased, the 1950s were equally marked by some high volatility elections. More telling than this amount of exceptional and groundbreaking elections across western Europe is the very limited number of low volatility elections since the nineties. While in the beginning of the period of observation [1945], the

- Pedersen Index in parliamentary elections was frequently under 5%, there are hardly any low volatility elections anymore in the last two decades observed.” (Dassonneville and Hooghe 2011: 17).
11. While there are convincing reasons to assume that [bloc-cleavage] aggregate volatility is an appropriate indicator of individual vote shifts, the analysis of aggregate data is clearly less satisfying than an investigation of micro-level data, since individual data permit the investigator to measure the theoretically relevant variables more directly. (Listhaug 1992).
 12. Considering a volatility score $\geq 10\%$ as “high”.
 13. From this finding, researchers concluded that the (old) Western European democracies were ideologically ‘frozen’ or experienced an ideological standstill (Lipset and Rokkan 1967).
 14. Cf. Duverger (1950): “there has been no significant increase of the number of electoral or parliamentary parties in Belgium since the introduction of the D’Hondt system in 1900” and Grumm (1958): “the P.R. is a result rather than a cause of the party system, P.R. in itself has had little impact on the development of the Belgian party system” and that “There’s no convincing empirical evidence for the link between the presence of the plurality system and a two-party system or for the hypothesis that a more proportional electoral system leads to a multi-party system, especially not in the case of Belgium” (Grumm 1958: 374).
 15. Based on the Neffs value, based on the share of the seats won by each faction (or party) at each point in time.
 16. However, the role of the party elite is still decisive. It is still the party leadership that decides the placement of candidates on the list, and the electoral level or the district (candidates may run in electoral districts other than the one in which they live) – hence the three elements mainly responsible for deciding whether a candidate gets elected or not.
 17. Where no party wins the election in the first round (based on an absolute majority 50%+1 vote) the second round election between the best two candidates decides (simple majority).
 18. I.e., an allowance to support their organization and operations (based on fractional representation in the regional and federal parliament) and a subsidy per vote won in each election.
 19. FDF: 3 seats.

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