## Candidates, Parties and Voters in the Belgian Partitocracy

## Audrey Vandeleene · Lieven De Winter Pierre Baudewyns Editors

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It all started on 25 May 2014 when regional, federal and European elections took place. Actually, we launched the work even earlier by preparing the survey questionnaire, within the framework of the Comparative Candidate Survey (www.comparativecandidates.org) and together with colleagues from the PartiRep network (www.partirep.eu). We had the chance to meet in person several former candidates to legislative elections who devoted some of their precious time to entirely fill in the pilot questionnaire with us and point out the shortcomings of the draft version. The preparation of fieldwork also included an intense collection of personal email addresses for more than 5000 candidates and the preparation of personalised letters to be sent to candidates' home address. Right after Election Day, the rush time started and the first filled in questionnaires were soon returned, what of course triggered our curiosity. How would candidates answer our sometimes very academic-oriented questions? Some candidates wanted to let us know in person and emailed us or even called us on the special number bought for this project, with more or less kind intentions...

After three months in the field, and a meagre answer rate around 10%, we transformed the Centre of Political Science and Comparative Politics (CESPOL) into a mail sorting office. We prepared paper questionnaires for the thousands of candidates who did not answer yet, together with personalised letters. Who could imagine a better team building activity than spending days at the copy shop printing countless sheets of paper

(we are so sorry for the forests that were destroyed because of us), and back at the office, folding and stapling paper questionnaires? But this effort paid off since, just after the Christmas break when our mailbox was more days empty than full with returned questionnaires, we decided to stop the collection of data at a response rate of about 35%, which places Belgium in 2014 on the average of other CCS countries, especially taking into account that we contacted all candidates on the list, and even of parties that gained only a handful of seats.

We were not alone in this endeavour. First of all, the Belgian Research Fund F.R.S.-FNRS kindly funded our project over the years with two 'research credits' (CDR 1.5314.08F and CDR J.0141.14F). Our colleagues from PartiRep helped us to improve the content of the questionnaire by adding questions central to their own research. The CESPOL<sup>1</sup> team was also very efficient during summer 2014 and we warmly thank all of them to have accepted to leave their computers to do some manual work. In particular, in alphabetical order, we express our gratitude to Jérémy Dodeigne, Silvia Erzeel, Vincent Jacquet, Conrad Meulewaeter, Min Reuchamps, Benoît Rihoux, Ferdinand Teuber and Virginie Van Ingelgom. Christoph Niessen deserves a special thank as he devoted his entire summer to assist us in the data collection when he was not yet a master student, and he even translated the questionnaire for our small German-speaking Community (together with Ferdinand Teuber)! We also thank Mathieu Coton and Marine Radelet who should now know a lot about candidates' experiences and stances since they encoded all French-speaking candidates' answers from the questionnaires returned on paper into the online survey. An army of Flemish students kindly coordinated by Tom Verthé (thank you!) at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel did the same job for the Flemish questionnaires. The BCS 2014 questionnaire is detailed in the online appendix of this book, available on the online platform SpringerLink (see copyright page for details about how to access it).

The book project as such really started in April 2015 with a first book outline that does not look that different from the current book. When the data was (almost) cleaned, we organised the first seminar in November 2015 where colleagues from CESPOL but also from the entire PartiRep network could suggest ideas for chapters and present very preliminary findings based on basic analyses. In May 2016, a second seminar gathered teams of authors and we could discuss chapters'

research designs and theoretical frameworks. Comprehensive versions of the chapters were then submitted to some international experts in order to receive high-quality comparative feedback and ensure that this was not a Belgian story only. In December 2016 and January 2017, we spent three nice and productive days (and pleasant dinners) with Eva Heiða Önnudóttir (University of Iceland), Paolo Segatti (University of Milan) and Thomas Zittel (Goethe University Frankfurt). We are deeply grateful to the three of them for their relevant and constructive comments on the theory and further empirical analyses suggested for the book. Several rounds of reviews later, the final book chapters were, finally, ready to be submitted in Spring 2018, almost four years after Election Day but still one year before the next general, regional and European elections of May 2019, which is certainly a great relief! A warm thank you to all authors of the eleven chapters of this book, who kindly satisfied all our (sometimes very specific) queries and made our survey live by using candidates' answers in their original research designs and approaches.

It was not an easy journey. We experienced unforeseen developments as well as almost vegetative periods. We hope that the final version of this book will bring some added-value to our field of study. We are convinced that candidates are a relevant category of the political elites to be studied as for themselves. Hereby we want to thank all our respondents for answering a 24 pages long questionnaire, framed in Political Science jargon unfamiliar or irrelevant to them, and excuse us for harassing them with our numerous reminders, and hope that they will be as willing in 2019 as 2014 to respond to our query at our next 'mother of all elections'.

We also thank profoundly Annick Bacq for the editing work at the final stages of the book production, Dr. Huri Türsan for her continuous contribution to the English and Political Science terminology of this book, and Mihail Chiru—on which we could always test our ideas—for his methodological support and careful reading of many draft chapters. The editorial team at Palgrave (Imogen, Katelyn, Ambra and Kayalvizhi) also deserves a thank you for their patience and reactivity to respond to all our detailed questions.

This book provides, hopefully, some evidence that candidates can arouse curiosity and interest for scholars working on questions of representation, democracy, participation and beyond. On top of that, maybe this book will also be read outside the Political Science academic arena, first by our family members and relatives who had to tolerate us talking

about the 'BCS book' for ages before they could hold it in their hands. We want to end these acknowledgments by thanking them for their support throughout the years. We promise that our next book will take a shorter time to come out.

Lund, Sweden Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium May 2018

Audrey Vandeleene Lieven De Winter Pierre Baudewyns

#### Note

1. https://uclouvain.be/en/research-institutes/ispole/cespol/about-cespol. html.

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## **Abbreviations**

BCS Belgian Candidate Survey

BHV Bruxelles-Hal-Vilvorde/Brussel-Halle-Vilvoorde

CCS Comparative Candidate Survey
CD&V Christen-Democratisch & Vlaams
cdH centre démocrate Humaniste
CSP Christlich Soziale Partei
D&A Delegation and accountability

Ecolo Écologistes Confédérés pour l'Organisation de Luttes Originales

ENP Effective number of parties

EU European Union

FDF Fédéralistes démocrates francophones

ICT Information and communication technologies LDD Lijst Dedecker/Libertair, Direct, Democratisch

MEP Member of the European Parliament

MP Member of Parliament MR Mouvement Réformateur N-VA Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie

OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OLS Ordinary Least Squares

Open VLD Vlaamse Liberalen & Democraten

PAT Principal-Agent theory

PFF Partei für Freiheit und Fortschritt

PM Prime Minister PP Parti Populaire

PR Proportional representation

ProDG Pro Deutschsprachigen Gemeinschaft

#### XX ABBREVIATIONS

PS Parti socialiste

PTB-GO Parti du Travail de Belgique-Gauche d'Ouverture

PvdA Partij van de Arbeid

PVEA Personal Vote-Earning Attributes

Voting Advice Application

SD Standard deviation
SMD Single-member district
SP Socialistische Partei
sp.a Socialistische partij anders
STV Single Transferable Vote
USA United States of America

VB Vlaams Belang WW World War

VAA

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