

Party Membership and Discontent

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Abstract

This paper focuses on discontent among party members. Taking Belgium as a case-study, the paper investigates two dimensions of discontent: the sense of external political efficacy and the level of specific support. The analysis emphasizes the positive impact of both extra- and intra-party socialization on the sense of external efficacy, but also to a lesser extent on the level of specific support. Moreover, the results confirm that discontent is an interesting alternative to the existing explanatory models of intra-party activism. The level of intra-party activism is determined by the members' perception of external political efficacy, whereas the nature of intra-party participation (allegiant vs. challenging) is associated with the level of specific support. The combination of external political efficacy and specific support thereby generates different types of participation in the party. More generally, the paper shows that by distancing themselves from civil society, parties might decrease the sense of external efficacy of their members, but also their level of specific support, and thereby reinforce apathetic alienation among party members.

Key words: party allegiance, discontent, Belgium, political participation, membership composition, membership activities

1 Introduction

The literature on party membership often focuses on the question of who joins political parties, and why. Explanatory models have been developed, mainly inspired by the existing literature on political participation. Whereas scholars questioned the motivations for joining a party, few researches have been performed on the reasons for remaining a member (Granik, 2003), not to say for leaving a party (Fillieule, 2005). Besides, the literature on party membership often takes for granted that members are happy, loyal, and love and support their party. This might be linked to the dominant rational choice approach of political participation: in a pure rational perspective, why should someone remain a party member if he/she is not happy about it, about the way the party is functioning, or the direction the party is heading to? The strict rational choice approach of political participation leaves little room for doubts, criticism and discontent.

However, when coding party membership surveys in Belgium, it appeared that a substantial part of the respondents were very critical about their own party. It was revealed through several questions in the surveys. The purpose of this paper is to focus on discontent among party membership. The main goal is to try to understand who the discontented members are and what if anything makes them different from satisfied members, using literature on political efficacy, political trust and participation. The paper is divided into four sections. First, we review the literature on discontent and participation. This is followed by a section dedicated to the presentation of the data and the operationalization of the theoretical models. A third section examines the results and the estimates of the models. Finally, the conclusion looks deeper at the implications of these results and their contribution to a better understanding of discontent in political parties.

2 What do we know about discontent and participation?

When studying intra-party criticisms, the literature mostly focuses on one specific form of discontent: voice. The classical approach of voice is linked to May's law of curvilinear disparity (1973). Based on rational choice theories, the law postulates that sub-leaders would adopt more radical policy positions than top-leaders (for a discussion, see Kitschelt, 1989; Norris, 1995). May's law implicitly states that sub-leaders would be more radical and more prompt to voice their criticisms, whereas grass-root members and party elite would be more moderate. This has led scholars to evaluate middle-level elite and activists as potential costs for the party given their tendency to go against party leadership and vote-maximizing goals (Scarrow, 1996). Regarded as a form of protest behaviour inside the party, voice could be approached as a mode of political participation. Therefore, in order to explain who voices in the party, one could use the traditional models of political participation at the individual level (Barnes & Kaase, 1979: 43; Norris, 2002): the resource model (Verba & Nie, 1972; Verba, et al, 1978; Verba, et al, 1995; Widfelt, 1995; Heidar, 1994), the social psychological model (Muller, 1979; Finkel, et al., 1989; Finkel & Opp, 1991; Finkel and Muller, 1998), or the rational choice model (Clark & Wilson, 1961; Olson, 1965), all summarized by Seyd and Whiteley in their General Incentive Model applied to party membership and party activism (Whiteley, et al, 1994; Whiteley, 1995; Whiteley & Seyd, 1996). However, if voice refers to actual behaviour or the active formulation and expression of criticisms, discontent is a broader concept as it captures an attitude referring to the level of satisfaction among party membership. It might be tempting to automatically relate the two

concepts and postulate that an attitude of discontent will lead to actual expression of dissent, and therefore to voice. But this has to be nuanced: “the validity of this argument depends, first of all, upon the existence of a relationship between the attitudes and actions of individual citizens” (Craig, 1980: 190). In that sense, voice and discontent do not necessarily overlap. Voice is one of the multiple potential expressions of discontent.

If voice has been paid some attention in the literature on party membership, discontent understood as an attitude has been left aside. This paper is an attempt to filling the gap. Besides, studying discontent might be one way to approach the process of decline of organizations. The literature emphasizes a general trend of decline in party membership figures in Western democracies (Katz & Mair, 1992; Mair & Van Biezen, 2001; Scarrow, 2000; Van Biezen, Mair & Poguntke, 2009). If a lot of research has been done at the macro level to explain the declining trend, little has been done at the individual level, especially given that there is little information available on the exitters. Therefore, studying discontent among party membership might be a way to indirectly tackle the question.

The theoretical framework linked to the concept of discontent differs from the literature on voice. If voice as behaviour can be linked to the literature on political participation, discontent as an attitude might just as well be linked to political alienation (Olsen, 1969). Miller defines discontent as a feeling of powerlessness and normlessness (two components of alienation – Finifter, 1970) that is captured by attitudes of lack of trust in government, hostility toward leaders, institutions and government, or feelings that the government does not function for the citizens (Miller, 1974: 951). In this area of research, discontent is traditionally split in two dimensions and measured by political efficacy (powerlessness) and political (dis)trust or cynism (normlessness) (Seeman, 1959; Almond & Verba, 1965; Gamson, 1968; Finifter, 1970).

The literature puts forward explanations of discontent. On the one hand, some studies emphasize the link between background characteristics like age, income, education, group identification, and the level of political (in)efficacy, with a higher level of resources linked to a higher level of political efficacy. Koch (1993: 311) postulates that group identification not only helps the individuals forming preferences, but it also contribute in making inferences about abilities and thereby increase the sense of political efficacy. This argument was also developed by Opp (1986) in his works on collective action (see also Chong, 1991; Moe, 1980; Rothenberg, 1988). On the other hand, other studies focus on policy position as an explanation of the level of (dis)trust (Key, 1965). The supporters of unpopular policy alternatives would fall in the cynical, distrustful category. For Miller (1974: 964), “it may be hypothesized, therefore, that discontent is related to dissatisfaction with the perceived policies of the party in power on issues that are relevant to the values of a substantial part of the population”. He operationalizes policy dissatisfaction in terms of the distance between the individual’s own policy preferences and the policy position of a party.

But most of the literature focuses on the consequences of discontent on participation. It is based on Gamson’s assumption that participation is best explained by the combination of trust and efficacy. The author states that, among those who have a high sense of political efficacy, the mistrustful are more likely to participate than the trusting: “more specifically, a combination of high sense of political efficacy and low political trust is the optimum combination for mobilization – a belief that influence is both possible and necessary” (Gamson, 1968: 48). The

underlying idea is that citizens with a low sense of political efficacy will not get involved whatever their level of trust is because they think their participation will have no effect whatsoever. For those who have a high sense of political efficacy, the most trustful will participate less because they are already satisfied with the system without participating. Therefore, participation should be higher among those combining a low level of trust with a high level of sense of political efficacy. Trust alone would not be a good predictor of participation (Muller, 1977); the emphasis is on political efficacy (Aberbach, 1969; Craig, 1980: 191). However, this appealing hypothesis was not confirmed by empirical evidence (Fraser, 1970; Hawkins, et al, 1971; Craig, 1979; Seligson, 1980). According to Craig, this is due to the misinterpretation of the concepts of political efficacy and political trust, and their expected relationship with political behaviour.

For Miller (1974: 952), political trust is “a basic evaluative or affective orientation toward the government”. According to Craig, the broad concept of political trust has to be refined. In Gamson’s work, trust is understood as a diffuse support of the system. Diffuse support refers to the support toward the institutions, as opposed to specific support (Easton, 1975: 437), which corresponds to the support toward individuals. Specific support implies a utilitarian relationship between citizens and government, whereas diffuse support would be more stable over time. Craig et al (1990: 291-92) also refer to regime-based trust for diffuse support and incumbent-based trust for specific support.

In the same way, the concept of political efficacy generated a lot of discussion in the literature. It was first developed by Campbell et al in *The Voter Decides* (1954) and was used to explain wide variety of modes of political participation. Four items were mainly used to measure political efficacy, developed by the Survey Research Centre (Campbell, et al, 1964; Almond & Verba, 1965). However, the reliability of the measure was discussed (McPherson, 1977). After several tests and empirical verifications, the concept was refined into two separate dimensions: subjective competence and governmental responsiveness (Converse, 1972), or internal and external efficacy (Balch, 1974). Internal efficacy “indicates individual’s self-perception that they are capable of understanding politics and competent enough to participate in political acts” (Miller, et al, 1980: 253); whereas external efficacy refers to “beliefs about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizen demands (Craig, et al, 1990: 290; Converse, 1972; Balch, 1974; Coleman & Davis, 1976). The concept was operationalized in different studies (Miller, et al, 1980; Acock, et al, 1985; Clarke & Acock, 1989; Acock & Clarke, 1990; McPherson, et al, 1977), but they proved to be not very satisfactory, especially regarding the internal aspect (Craig & Magiotto, 1982). Therefore, Craig and Niemi (Craig, et al, 1990; Niemi, et al, 1991) attempted to disentangle the different dimensions of efficacy and trust, and developed and successfully tested items that could be used to measure internal and external efficacy, as well as diffuse and specific support. They found a clear distinction between internal and external efficacy, but also between external efficacy (powerlessness) and specific support (expression of dissatisfaction with governmental performances) (see also Craig, 1979; Pollock, 1983).

Finally, given the multiple dimensions of both political efficacy and political trust, their relation to participation might be more complex than what Gamson postulated. Craig (1980: 202) puts forward that the various combinations between efficacy and trust lead to different modes of participation. Overall, in the literature, low levels of political efficacy and trust are associated with unconventional participation, but the relationship is not systematic and weak (Aberbach,

1977: 1558; Craig, 1979: 232; Pollock, 1983). According to Pollock, “efficacy affects the level of initiative required by the act, and trust structures its allegiant or nonallegiant nature” (1983: 400). Craig suggests distinguishing between regime-challenging mobilization and elite-challenging mobilization (Inglehart, 1977) or protest. Regime-challenging mobilization would be linked to low diffuse support and high internal efficacy, whereas elite-challenging mobilization would be linked to low specific support and high external efficacy (Craig, 1980: 203).

If one considers the intra-life of parties as comparable to a system on its own, as Eldersveld does (1964: 1), this theoretical framework of political discontent could be applied to the study of party membership. This is the argument developed in the paper. Parties are still too often studied as uniform political actors, and when considered as internally diverse, this diversity is discussed at the theoretical level but has rarely been systematically empirically tested. Researches on party membership constitute an attempt to investigate this diversity at the intra-party level (Seyd & Whiteley, 1992; Heidar, 1994; Scarrow, 1996; Carty & Blake, 1999; Pedersen, 2003; Gallagher, 2004). But intra-party life is one aspect of political parties that still has to be researched more in-depth. If the literature on discontent is applied to party membership, several hypotheses can be inferred. One could expect the sense of (internal and external) political efficacy of party members to vary, as well as their level of diffuse support (support toward the party as an institution) and specific support (support toward the behaviour of individuals), affecting the members’ level and nature of intra-party participation.

Therefore, this papers aims at investigating discontent among party members, in its two dimensions: (external) political efficacy and (specific) political trust. On the one hand, the paper attempts to emphasize explanations of variations in the level of political efficacy and political trust. On the other hand, the paper intends to investigate the consequences of these variations in political efficacy and trust on the level and nature of intra-party participation.

More precisely, two explanations of the variations of the levels of political efficacy and trust are tested. First, the paper focuses on the impact of background variables (age, gender, education, group influence) on the level of efficacy, expecting a positive association between the variables and political efficacy. Second, the paper intends to verify the effect of policy position on the level of trust. We expect that the lower the policy satisfaction, the lower the specific support.

Furthermore, the paper aims at verifying the hypothesis that political efficacy affects the level of participation whereas political trust influence the nature of participation. We expect to find different patterns of participation linked to the combination of political efficacy and political trust (Table 1).

Table 1. Relationship between political efficacy, trust and participation

		Political Trust (specific support)	
		High	Low
(External) Political Efficacy	High	Allegiant participation	Elite-challenging participation
	Low	Allegiant apathy	Alienated apathy

This is where voice and discontent might meet. Discontent can be translated into an actual expression of grievances and criticism if a low level of political trust is combined with a high

sense of external political efficacy (elite-challenging participation). The table clearly shows that discontent can be translated into other forms of political participation depending on the combination of political efficacy and political trust. Interestingly, the literature argues that among the mistrustful, it is the level of political efficacy that determines whether one will opt for the elite-challenging or the apathy.

3 Data and operationalization of the variables

The data on party membership stems from surveys conducted in Belgium in 2006. Two parties are included in the analysis: the CD&V (Dutch-speaking Christian Democrats), the OpenVLD (Dutch-speaking Liberals). The analysis is based on mail-back surveys of randomly selected members conducted between January and June 2006¹. A total of 5.000 questionnaires were mailed to a random sample drawn from the membership lists of each political party, with 1.069 surveys returned, generating a response rate of 21,4%². Data was weighted by gender, geographical origins, and relative weight of the party in terms of membership.

Specific support is understood as the support toward individuals, i.e. a statement of the belief that the government is (not) functioning and producing outputs in accord with individual expectations (Miller, 1974: 952); it is the evaluation of “the perceived decisions, policies, actions, utterances or the general style” of the incumbent authorities (Easton, 1975: 437). Our questionnaire contains several items or proposals submitted to the opinion of the members that could be used to measure specific support for incumbent authorities of the party among party members. These items are related to how members perceive their party in government, and the party leadership. The respondents had the possibility to fully agree, partly agree, partly disagree or fully disagree with the proposals. These items measure whether the party produces the expected outputs (evaluation of the perceived actions) and the general style of incumbent authorities in the party. The items were recoded so as to range from 1 (lowest level of specific support) to 4 (highest level of specific support) and summarized in one scale (Table 2)³.

Table 2 shows that specific support is fairly high among party members, with about one member out of seven displaying low or no support (12,6%). However, the level of support varies greatly between the two parties, with the Liberal party gathering a much lower level of support than the Christian Democrats.

Table 2. Level of specific support by party (%)

	CD&V	VLD	All*
No support	0,2	2,3	1,1
Low support	6,0	18,7	11,5
Average support	67,9	61,3	65,4
High support	25,9	17,7	22,0
Total (N)	521	385	100,0

* In order to be representative, these figures are weighted by party, gender and geographical origin of the members

External efficacy is measured by the perception of the member’s influence in the party, captured by the perceived influence on the designation of the party leader, and presented in one scale (Table 3). Here again, the average level of external efficacy is higher among the members of the CD&V, but the difference is less obvious than in the case of specific support.

Table 3. Level of external efficacy by party (%)

	CD&V	VLD	All*
No efficacy	2,1	3,5	2,9
Low efficacy	6,4	8,8	7,6
Average efficacy	60,0	52,0	56,9
High efficacy	31,4	35,8	32,6
Total (N)	512	400	100,0

* Data weighted

Craig et al (1990: 305) find a positive correlation between external efficacy and specific support or incumbent-based trust (IBT): “external efficacy and IBT also are positively correlated, reflecting the tendency in democratic settings for incumbent authorities to be judged in part by whether the political process is seen as open to citizen involvement”. Our dataset confirms the link between the two measures ($r=0.241$; $p<0.001$).

Next to the traditional background variables (age, gender, and education), other variables are mobilized to explain variations of political efficacy and trust: policy position and group identification. Policy (dis)satisfaction is measured by the distance between the respondent’s own position on a 0-7 left-right scale and the position of the party on the same scale. Two indicators are used to measure group identification: extra-party socialization and intra-party socialization. The intra-party socialization index evaluates the depth of the socialization in the party (length, constancy and fidelity of party membership). The extra-party socialization index evaluates the level of embeddedness of the member in the network of satellite organizations around the party (pillar organizations). Pillarization is referred to as the vertical encapsulation of a subculture through overlapping memberships in pillar organizations. In the Belgian case, the literature traditionally identifies two main pillars (Socialist and Christian Democrat), and a smaller one, the Liberal (Seiler, 1997). These pillars emerged from the organization of the two first cleavages that structured the Belgian society since the independence of the country: the church-state and the left-right socio-economic cleavages (Lorwin, 1974). These pillars were supposed to organize the lives of individuals ‘from the cradle to the grave’, allowing the citizens to be associated throughout their life with youth movements, schools, universities, trade unions, mutual societies, associations and party belonging to the same sociological world. Parties incarnating the pillars (Socialists, Christian Democrats and Liberals) are characterized by an organizational penetration and incorporation of the subculture, especially via mass party membership and extensive auxiliary network (Luther, 1999)⁴. In that sense, the extra-party socialization in the auxiliary network is a measure of encapsulation of party members in the pillar their party belong to.

Finally, the level of political participation is measured by a scale of intra-party activity, including time devoted to party activities, contact with the local section of the party and participation to meetings. As regard the nature of intra-party participation, the survey does not allow to measure actual behaviours. Therefore, we opted for a proxy measure using an open question in the survey. The open question asked the respondents to define their party with three adjectives. This leaves space for an actual expression of elite-challenging attitudes. The open question was recoded as a binary variable, opposing members expressing at least one negative adjective as “challengers”, the others as “allegiant”.

4 Testing models of intra-party discontent

4.1 Explaining discontent

In order to test the impact of background characteristics on the level of external efficacy, a discriminant analysis was run so as to introduce a hierarchy among the variables and allow identifying the variables that best predict the belonging to one of the two groups (low sense of external efficacy vs. high sense of external efficacy).

Table 4 shows the results of the analysis. All explanatory variables have been introduced step by step in the model in order to evaluate their predictive value for belonging to the high efficacy category. The results emphasize the impact of group identification on external efficacy. A high level of intra- and extra-party socialization best predicts a high level of external efficacy. The three other background variables are not included in the function. Age is related to efficacy (younger members showing a lower level of efficacy), but the effect disappears when included in the model, probably being captured by the intra-party socialization index, which includes the length of party membership (partly related to age).

These results tend to confirm Koch's hypothesis that group identification not only helps the individuals forming preferences, but they also contribute in making inferences about their ability to have an influence. The analysis validates that the deeper the socialization in the party and the embeddedness in auxiliary organizations, the higher the sense of external efficacy.

Table 4. Discriminant – background characteristics and external efficacy

Variables	Function
Gender	-0,055
Age	0,444
Education	0,014
Intra-party socialization (1)	0,794***
Extra-party socialization (2)	0,762***
Wilk's lambda	0,98***
% good class	71,6
% included	71,7

Data weighted; *** p < 0.001

The literature also postulates that discontent is associated with policy dissatisfaction, through political (dis)trust. A low level of policy satisfaction would be associated with a low level of specific support. Our results confirm this association (Table 5).

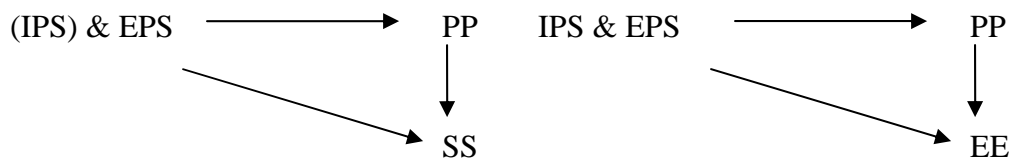
Table 5. Policy position and specific support (%)

		Specific support	
		Low	High
Policy position***	Incongruence (difference of 2 points or more)	45,0	13,3
	Semi-congruence (1 point difference)	35,0	35,8
	Perfect congruence (same position)	20,0	50,9

Data weighted; r : 0.189; *** p < 0.001

A perfect congruence between the members' policy position and the position of the party is related to a high level of specific support. Conversely, the members displaying a difference of two points or more between their self-placement and the placement of the party on the 0-7 left-right scale tend to present a lower level of specific support.

However, the exact relation between the two variables is not very clear. When controlling for background variables, the discriminant analysis reveals that the level of specific support is best predicted by policy position, but also by extra-party socialization, revealing a direct effect of one background variable on specific support as well⁵. Besides, policy position is a function of intra-party and extra-party socialization. The same pattern holds for external efficacy. Only in that case, the direct effect of background variables is stronger (both IPS and EPS are significant). Therefore, one might hypothesize the following relation between background variables (IPS & EPS), policy position (PP), specific support (SS) and external efficacy (EE):



In the end, our expectations are generally confirmed: external efficacy is predicted by group identification, and specific support is predicted by policy position. However, the results nuanced our expectations in two directions. First, external efficacy is also a function of policy position. Second, one background characteristic (EPS) has a direct effect on specific support, not mediated by policy position, but intra-party socialization does not affect the level of specific support. These relationships confirm that specific support and external efficacy are correlated but do not overlap.

4.2 Discontent and intra-party participation

In order to measure the impact of these two dimensions of discontent (political efficacy and political support) on political participation, we first have to verify the hypothesis that external efficacy predicts the level of activism whereas political trust influences the nature of participation (Pollock, 1983).

A linear logistic regression was run in order to identify the determinants of the level of activism (scale ranging from 0 to 10). External efficacy and specific support were included, as well as the background characteristics as control variables. The results shown in Table 6 confirm that the level of activism is a function of external efficacy, whereas it is not predicted by specific support. As expected, the feeling of having a say in the decisions within the party is a strong predictor of intra-party participation.

Table 6. Linear Regression – Level of activism (standardized regression coefficients, *t* ratios in parenthesis)

Variables	B (t)
Gender	-0.01 (-0.21)
Age	0.06 (1.41)
Education	0.01 (0.18)
Intra-party socialization	0.16 (3.13)**
Extra-party socialization	0.04 (0.90)
External efficacy	0.11 (2.71)**
Specific support	0.08 (1.89)
Policy position	0.08 (1.99)
Constant	0.00 (-0.50)
R ²	0.055

* Data weighted; $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

As regard the nature of participation (challenging vs. allegiant), its link with specific support is also confirmed (Table 7). The allegiant members almost exclusively display high levels of specific support, whereas the challenging members display more often low levels of specific support. Unfortunately, the indicator for the nature of participation is based on an open question, generating a lot of missing values. Therefore, no regression could be run including a satisfactory percentage of valid observation.

Table 7. Specific support and nature of participation (%)

		Nature of participation	
		Challenging	Allegiant
Specific support	Low	24,6	1,1
	High	75,4	98,9

Data weighted; $r = 0.294$; $p < 0.01$

Therefore, the basic assumption that the sense of external efficacy affects the level of participation whereas the level of specific support affects the nature of participation is confirmed by our data on party membership.

Finally, the idea that different patterns of participation are linked to the combination of political efficacy and political trust can be tested (Table 8). A high level of specific support is supposed to favour allegiant types of participation; a high level of external efficacy is supposed to favour participation. Therefore, four different types of participation are expected according to the combination of the two attitudes.

The results clearly show that a combination of low level of specific support and external efficacy is associated with alienated apathy, whereas a combination of a high level of specific support and a low level of external efficacy is associated with allegiant apathy. The association is less obvious for the members displaying a high level of external efficacy. Within this group, the type of participation is linked to the level of specific support (high support favouring allegiant forms of participation), but high efficacy does not always lead to participation.

Table 8. Types of participation as a function of external efficacy and specific support

			Specific Support	
			Low	High
External efficacy	Low	Alienated apathy	76,9	38,0
		Elite-challenging participation	7,7	12,0
		Allegiant apathy	7,7	38,0
		Allegiant participation	7,7	12,0
		Total (N)	100,0 (13)	100,0 (50)
	High	Alienated apathy	53,3	7,1
		Elite-challenging participation	20,0	3,3
		Allegiant apathy	26,7	48,6
		Allegiant participation	0,0	41,0
		Total (N)	100,0 (15)	100,0 (490)

These results only partly confirm our expectations. This mixed fit of the model could be explained by different factors. First, the use of a proxy measure of the nature of participation might cause two major problems. On the one hand, it might be a shaky assumption to consider the adjectives chosen by the members to define their party as a proxy measure of the nature of participation. On the other hand, using this measure leaves us with low levels of challengers. No satisfactory analysis can be performed on such low N. Second, we used a measure of external efficacy that Craig et al consider to be too close from the measure of specific support. They plead in favour of using internal efficacy instead. The use of internal efficacy rather than external efficacy might produce a better fit of the model.

5 Conclusion

This paper aimed at focusing on the intriguing phenomenon of discontent among party members. Although the existing literature gives some insight on the incentives to join a party, few researches study how party members feel about their membership. It is as if it was taken for granted that, for they have decided to join, party members must by definition be satisfied with their membership. However, evidence supports that it is not always the case. Understanding discontentment as a form of political alienation and taking Belgium as a case-study, this paper investigated two dimensions of discontent: external political efficacy and specific support.

On the one hand, the paper emphasized that political efficacy is a function of intra- and extra-party socialization, the more socialized feeling more efficient. It also showed that specific support is a function of policy satisfaction, but also of extra-party socialization. In that sense, the socialization process of the members clearly affects their level of discontent.

On the other hand, the paper showed that discontent is an interesting alternative to the existing models to explain the level and the nature of intra-party activism. The existing literature mainly focuses on theories of political participation to explain intra-party activism. This paper showed that literature on alienation provides interesting alternatives. The level of activism is clearly determined by the perception of external efficacy. As regard the nature of activism, our data did not allow to test the hypothesis in a very satisfying way. However, our proxy measure of the nature of participation showed that there is a link between the level of support and the nature of

participation within the party. Finally, the paper showed that among those displaying a low level of support for their party, a low level of external efficacy tend to favour apathetic alienation.

More generally, the results point out that socialization, and especially extra-party socialization, do matter to create a sense of political efficacy, and thereby to activate participation. But extra-party socialization, combined with policy satisfaction, also affects the level of support toward the party, and thereby the nature of participation. This link with external-party socialization might explain why we find higher levels of external efficacy and specific support among the Christian Democrats than among the Liberals. The CD&V represent the archetype of a pillar party (Luther, 1999) or social integration party (Neumann, 1956; Seiler, 1986), whereas the VLD could better be described as an electoral-professional party (Panebianco, 1988), evolving toward cartellization. The greater emphasis of the CD&V on socialization might explain its higher levels of external efficacy, but also specific support among its members.

So, if political efficacy determines participation, and participation is considered as a desirable trait, the factors that affects political efficacy – in this case, extra-party socialization - are of special importance. Therefore, one way to attract and keep active and allegiant members would be for a party to develop its ties with civil society. However, recent literature on party organizations emphasizes the opposite trend, parties distancing themselves from civil society to get closer to the state (Katz and Mair, 1995). While disconnecting from civil society, parties might face an increase in intra-party discontent, with lower levels of efficacy and lower levels of support. This might enlighten why party cartellization is linked to membership decline. According to Katz & Mair (1995), cartellization implies distancing from civil society. This paper shows that the increasing distance (level of extra-party socialization) impacts on the level of external efficacy, and to a lesser extent of specific support of party members. It increases the level of discontent at the grass-roots level. If not resolved, discontent might lead to exit and thereby explain the declining figures of party membership.

6 Appendix

Specific Support (SS): This measure derives from two propositions submitted to the respondents: (1) ‘The contributions of my party in government are visible’; (2) ‘The party president is doing a good job’. Highest scores went to the respondents who strongly disagreed. The items were converted to a specific support scale ranging from 1 (lowest support) to 4 (highest support), and merged in a single scale (1 to 4).

External Efficacy (EE): This is measured using one item submitted to the respondents: ‘I have a say in the designation of the party president’’. Highest scores went to the respondents who strongly disagreed. The items were converted to an external efficacy scale ranging from 1 (lowest efficacy) to 4 (highest efficacy)

Gender (G): coded 1 = male; 2 = female

Age (A): this is measured in a 6 points scale: 1 = <25; 2 = 25-34; 3 = 35-44; 4 = 45-54; 5 = 55-64; 6 = >64

Education (E): this is measured using the Belgian educational levels: (1) none/primary education; (2) vocational education; (3) secondary education; (4) higher education; (5) university degree.

Policy position (PP): this measure derives from two questions about left-right placement. Respondents were asked to self-assign score on a 0-7 left-right scale, the most right-wing

respondents scoring the highest. They were also asked to assign a score to their party on the same scale. The policy position scale measures the distance between the self-placement and the placement of the party: 1 = incongruence (difference of 2 points or more); 2 = semi-congruence (difference of 1 point); 3 = perfect congruence (same position).

Extra-party Socialization (EPS): This is a measure of the degree of socialization in the pillar. Three indicators of pillarization were used to build the scale: (1) belief (belief of the pillar, rival belief or neutral); (2) mutual health insurance company (MHIC of the pillar, rival, or neutral); (3) educational network (network of the pillar, neutral or rival). The indicators were used to build a 5 points scale. Lowest scores on the scale (0) go to the respondents who are totally depillarized; highest scores go to the respondents who are totally embedded in their pillar (4).

Intra-party socialization (IPS): This is a measure of degree of the intra-party socialization. Three indicators of internal socialization were used to build the scale: (1) constancy of membership over time (yes or no); (2) membership to another party (yes or no); (3) membership length. The questions were used to build an intra-party socialization scale ranging from 1 (lowest level of socialization) to 8 (highest level of socialization).

Activism (A): This measure is based on an index of activism combining different sets of questions in the survey: (1) time devoted to the party; (2) contacts with the local section; (3) attendance of local party meetings. The scale of the index ranges from 0 (no activity) to 10 (maximum level of activity).

Nature participation (NP): This measure is based on an open question. Respondents were asked to define their party with three adjectives. The question was recoded so as the members expressing at least one negative adjective were coded (1) Challengers, and the members expressing positive or neutral adjectives were coded (2) allegiant.

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¹ VLD in January 2006 and CD&V in June 2006.

² The response rate by party is: CD&V 24,2% and VLD 18,6%. The variations in response rates could be explained by the origin the survey (French-speaking university) having a negative impact on the response rate for Dutch-speaking parties, but also by the method (no reminder could be sent to the members), and the poor state of the party registers (a lot of questionnaires were returned with the mention 'deceased', 'removed', etc).

³ A factor analysis (PCA) was run and showed that the items can be summarized in one dimension, with 50,76% of the variance explained.

⁴ The main areas covered by pillar organizations are the belief system, the educational network and the mutual health insurance companies (MHIC), for every citizen has a compulsory or automatic link to them. The belief system opposes the Catholics (Christian Democrats) to the lay non-believers (Socialists, and historically the Liberals, although the party opened up to the Catholics in 1961). The Belgian educational network opposes the official network (socialist and liberal pillars) and the free denominational network (catholic pillar). Besides, the Belgian State transfers the money received from taxes to semi-public health insurance companies. Citizens are obliged to register to one of these MHIC. Again, each pillar developed its own MHIC (socialist, liberal and catholic). Today, new neutral or independent companies challenge the traditional companies linked to the pillar system. The parties

that emerged after the development of the pillars, among which the Greens, are very critical about this structured and closed organization of the society and declared themselves trans-pillar organizations.

⁵ Wilk's Lambda : 0,951 ; $p < 0.001$; Function = extra-party socialization (0,720) and policy position (0,649) ; % of good placements = 70,1.