

Who voices? Socialisation process and ideological profile of discontented party members

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Introduction

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. One may distinguish three major models at the individual level: the resource, attitude and motivation models¹. The resource model hypothesises that affiliation is determined by individual resources². The socio-psychological model emphasises specific psychological traits that facilitate membership and activism³. Finally, the motivation model is developed with the contribution of rational choice theories⁴.

¹ E. VAN HAUTE, *Adhérer à un parti. Aux sources de la participation politique*, Brussels, Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2009.

² S. VERBA, K.L. SCHLOZMAN, and H.E. BRADY, *Voice and Equality. Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*, New York, Harper & Row, 1995.

³ S.E. FINKEL and E.N. MULLER, 'Rational Choice and the Dynamics of Collective Political Action: Evaluating Alternative Models with Panel Data', *American Political Science Review*, 92/1, 1998, p. 37-49; S.E. FINKEL, E.N. MULLER, and K.D. OPP, 'Personal Influence, Collective Rationality, and Mass Political Action', *American Political Science Review*, 83/3, 1989, p. 885-902.

⁴ M. OLSON, *The Logic of Collective Action*, Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press, 1965; P. SEYD and P. WHITELEY, *Labour's Grassroots. The Politics of Party Membership*, Palgrave, Macmillan, 1992; P. WHITELEY and P. SEYD, *High Intensity Participation. The Dynamics of Party Activism in Britain*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2002; P. WHITELEY and P. SEYD, 'Rationality and Party Activism: Encompassing Tests of Alternative Models of Political Participation', *European Journal of Political Research*, 29/2, 1996, p. 215-234; P. WHITELEY

Scholars have questioned the motivations for joining a party, although little research has been conducted on the reasons for remaining a member⁵, and not to mention for leaving a party⁶. Furthermore, 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 purely rational perspective, why should someone remain a party member if he/she is not happy about it, or about the way the party is functioning, or where it is headed? The strict rational choice approach of political participation leaves little room for doubts, criticism, and discontentment.

The starting point of this contribution is related to the great surprise encountered when coding party membership surveys in Belgium. When coding, one could be struck directly by the substantial proportion of respondents who were very critical about their own party. This was evident in several questions in the surveys. This contribution is aimed at focusing on what one could call the ‘malcontent’ among party members. The purpose is to try to understand who voices in the party and what, if anything, makes them different from loyal members.

This contribution is structured in three main sections. After an initial overview of the theoretical background, this paper presents the research question, hypotheses, data, and method used in the analysis. The third part consists of the analysis itself. It focuses on the sociological profile, socialisation process and ideological profile of the discontented members, in comparison with the loyal members.

Party membership, voicing, and discontentment

The literature on political participation and party membership is not totally silent regarding the phenomenon of discontentment among participants. One may distinguish two main approaches to the phenomenon: the symbolic approach mainly based on Hirschman’s works, and the rational choice theories.

The symbolic approach is often seen as a rival of the rational choice approach. However, the two approaches could be considered as complementary rather than contradictory⁷. Indeed, one of the main criticisms of Olson’s pure rational choice model of political participation is that it focuses only on selective material benefit from participation, and not enough on other potential (rational) incentives for participation. Other non-material or symbolic incentives have been added to the model⁸. This may be considered as an attempt to integrate elements from the symbolic approach developed in Hirschman’s works.

and P. SEYD, ‘The Dynamics of Party Activism in Britain: A Spiral of Demobilization?’, *British Journal of Political Science*, 28, 1998, p. 113-137.

⁵ S. GRANIK, ‘Part of the Party: continuity and discontinuity amongst political party membership’, Paper presented at the *Annual Conference of the Political Studies Association*, University of Leicester, 2003.

⁶ O. FILLIEULE, *Le désengagement militant*, Paris, Belin, 2005.

⁷ G. SAINTENY, ‘Les rétributions du militantisme écologiste’, *Revue française de sociologie*, 36/3, 1995, p. 479.

⁸ See Seyd and Whiteley’s general incentive model. P. SEYD and P. WHITELEY, *op. cit.*, 1992.

The three concepts in Hirschman's work (exit, voice, and loyalty) help to understand the link between party members and party organisation⁹. Although it is poorly developed in his own works, the concept of loyalty might help to understand the incentives for joining and the retributions from being a party member¹⁰.

When members are discontented or perceive a decrease in their benefits to belonging to the party, they have two main options: exit the party (withdraw from the relationship) or voice their criticisms (attempt to repair or improve the relationship through communication of the complaint, grievance or proposal for change)¹¹. Exit and voice help to understand the process of decline of organisations. Exit only takes place when members see another opportunity that could replace their former involvement. Exit simply gives an indication of organisational decline, whereas voice is particularly interesting in the sense that it provides information on the potential reasons for exit. The voicing capacity of members also helps to understand how they can still benefit from their participation even though it would be considered as a failure in a strict rational choice perspective. Therefore, the concept of voice is particularly interesting when studying discontented party members.

From the parties' perspective (demand side), exit and voice interact. By providing more opportunities for criticism, parties can reduce the exit option. On the other hand, if the party tries to stifle the discontented, it might lead members to choose the only other option, which is exit. However, loyalty also enters the picture and affects how the discontented members consider the two options. Loyal members would be less likely to exit when discontented; they would rather voice or wait for the situation to evolve in a more positive way. Being loyal to an organisation means that one believes that, over a period of time, the right turns will more than balance the wrong ones.

Parties may also develop incentives to reduce the voice and exit options. Alan Ware postulates that solidarity incentives are more likely to develop loyalty, whereas ideological and material incentives are more likely to develop voice and exit among party members¹². Indeed, material and ideological incentives require the party to remain in office. Patronage requires the party to be in power. In the same way, the guarantee of fulfilling policy promises is low when not in government. For Ware, solidarity incentives lack these disadvantages. If the initial cost of building an extensive organisation and solidarity incentives is high, 'once a party has set up an extensive organization to attract stamp collectors, snooker players, drinkers and the

⁹ A. HIRSCHMAN, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1970.

¹⁰ The concept of loyalty can be considered as the unsold item of the trilogy. It even disappears in the first edition of the French translation of his work. A. HIRSCHMAN, *Défection et prise de parole : théorie et applications*, Paris, Fayard, 1995 (reed. *Exit, voice, loyalty. Défection et prise de parole*, Brussels, Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2011).

¹¹ D. SAUNDERS, 'Introduction to research on Hirschman's Exit, Voice and Loyalty Model', *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, 5/3, 1992, p. 187-190.

¹² A. WARE, 'Activist-Leader Relations and the Structure of Political Parties: 'Exchange' Models and Vote-Seeking Behaviour in Parties', *British Journal of Political Science*, 22/1, 1992, p. 71-92.

rest, the running costs of keeping them in the club are relatively low¹³. For Ware, the risk of this strategy is to develop an apolitical involvement. But if the party can appeal to the loyalty of these solidarity members, they can be mobilised with low costs.

Next to the symbolic approach, the rational choice approach is also based implicitly on the link between party membership, ideology, and voice. Scholars studying political participation soon discovered the multiple forms of participation in a party organisation. Typologies of party affiliation have been developed, based on the function in the organisation structure or the level of activity in the party¹⁴. The question soon arose regarding the link between the different party strata. May proposes a law governing the link between party strata, known as the law of curvilinear disparity¹⁵.

There is a lot of debate in the literature on this law¹⁶. It is not the purpose here to examine the debate, but rather to emphasise how the discontented members are conceived in this approach. The law postulates that policy positioning varies according to the party strata. More precisely, May claims that the sub-leaders (activists and/or regional representatives, which is the first point of disagreement in the literature) would pursue policy-seeking goals to realise their ideological incentives, whereas top leaders would pursue office-seeking goals in order to maintain their material retributions. Top leaders would therefore adopt less radical policy positions in order to attract voters and preserve their material benefits, whereas sub-leaders would adopt more radical positions to reach ideological goals. This law relies on Downs' model of the median voter based on rational choice theories¹⁷. Therefore, in May's terms, radicalism is understood as distance from the centre. Other scholars have interpreted radicalism as greater attachment or intransigence towards the party doctrine.

May's law states implicitly that sub-leaders would be more radical and more prompt to voice their disagreement, whereas grassroots 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 support vote-losing policies¹⁸. In that sense, May's law is another approach to the voicing members.

Hypotheses, data, and operationalisation

To test what differentiates those who voice from those who are loyal, one could use this theoretical background and build hypotheses.

¹³ A. WARE, *loc. cit.*, 1992, p. 82.

¹⁴ R.P. ORMROD, 'Categorising Political Party Members for Empirical Research', paper presented at the *Annual Conference of the Political Studies Association*, University of Lincoln, 5-8 April 2004, p. 4.

¹⁵ J. MAY, 'Opinion Structure of Political Parties: The Special Law of Curvilinear Disparity', *Political Studies*, 21, 1973, p. 135-151.

¹⁶ H. KITSCHOLT, 'The Internal Politics of Parties: The Law of Curvilinear Disparity Revisited', *Political Studies*, 37, 1989, p. 403-406; P. NORRIS, 'May's Law of Curvilinear Disparity Revisited: Leaders, Officers, Members and Voters in British Political Parties', *Party Politics*, 1/1, 1995, p. 29-47.

¹⁷ A. DOWNS, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, New York, Harper and Row, 1957.

¹⁸ S. SCARROW, *Parties and their members*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 40-41.

Based on Ware's work, one could say that those who voice are more likely to be those who joined for ideological or material incentives (because of a greater likelihood to be discontented) than those who joined for solidarity incentives. This is hypothesis 1.

Two other hypotheses are derived from May's law. The first relates to party strata: those who voice are more likely to be the activists and intermediate strata (less necessity to be close to the median voter) than the passive members and the leaders. The second relates to the idea of radicalism: those who are more likely to voice are the party members situated further from the centre.

In order to test these hypotheses, our paper focuses on one specific party in Belgium: the Flemish Liberals (OpenVLD). When coding the responses for this specific party, the phenomenon of 'voicing' clearly emerged.

The survey was conducted in January 2006. 2,500 questionnaires were sent to a random sample of party members selected by the party headquarters. 465 questionnaires were returned, which represents a response rate of 18.6%. This response rate is very low. This could be explained by the origin of the survey (French-speaking university), as well as by the method (no reminder could be sent to the members), and the poor state of the party registers (many questionnaires were returned with the mention 'deceased', 'removed', etc.). Data was weighted by age and geographical origins.

The questionnaire contains several questions that could be used to measure the level of discontentment inside the party. More precisely, two sets of questions are particularly interesting. The first consists of an open question. The respondents were asked to define their party with three adjectives. This leaves space to voice criticism and discontentment. The second set of questions consists of items submitted to the opinion of the members. Nine items were related to how members perceive their party in government and the functioning from within (e.g. participation to government was a good decision, members do weight in the election of the party leader, etc.). The respondents had the possibility to fully agree, partly agree, partly disagree, or fully disagree with the proposal. This was another opportunity for the respondents to express discontentment with the party decisions or the way the party functions internally.

The adjectives used to define the party were recoded into two categories: voice or loyalty. The 'voice' category includes adjectives defining the party as weak, too conciliating, divided, not reliable, eager for power, not democratic, with a gap between elite and party on the ground, or not on the same wavelength as the respondent on specific issues. We coded the respondents as 'discontented' when they chose at least one negative adjective to define their party, and loyal when they chose no negative adjectives to define their party.

The nine items were also recoded and summarised in a scale ranging from 1 (voice) to 4 (loyalty).

In order to verify whether these two methods measure the same phenomenon, a factor analysis (principal component analysis) was conducted. Two factors emerged, explaining 50.35% of the total variance. The first factor summarises seven items and the adjectives. The second factor summarises only two items. The factor analysis reveals that the two measures are quite similar. However, combining the two methods into one single measure of discontentment/loyalty would lead to a huge loss of

respondents. Therefore, in order not to lose too many cases for the analysis, the paper specifically focuses on the first measure, i.e. the adjectives used by the respondents to define their party.

The choice of measuring discontentment/loyalty in these terms could be questioned. First, it is an open question. One could criticise the coding, for it is sometimes subjective and hard to tell whether an adjective is negative or not. It was coded in a very restrictive manner. Furthermore, as the open question is closely related to the second closed measure (items), it could be considered as a sign of the validity of the coding. One could also question the choice of defining voice with at least one negative adjective, independently of the hierarchy of the adjectives. A respondent who gives a negative adjective as a first adjective could be considered as more discontented than another who gives a negative adjective in the third place. However, the negative adjectives are equally distributed among the three possibilities: 22 to 23% discontented for each adjective. Furthermore, one could argue – and this is the position defended in this paper – that defining the party you belong to with a negative adjective is a strong sign of discontentment. It reveals a distance between the member and the party, a problem at the very core of the commitment. This is the reason why this specific definition of voice or discontentment was chosen.

The number of respondents who use at least one negative adjective to define the party is fairly high (34.3%). This means that one third of the respondents expressed their discontentment by using at least one negative adjective to define their party.

This paper focuses on how these discontented members differ from the loyal members in terms of socialisation process and ideological position.

The Flemish Liberals at the turn of the century

The Liberal family is the oldest party family in Belgium. The Liberal Party emerged a few years after the independence of the country, defending the lay side of the church-state cleavage¹⁹. The party dominated in the 19th century, but it almost disappeared with the emergence of the socioeconomic cleavage and the Socialist Party at the end of the century. At that time, the Christian Democrats dominated Flanders and the Socialists controlled Wallonia. The Liberal family owes its survival to the adoption of proportional representation in 1899²⁰, although this also meant a loss of its leadership for the next century. From then on, it had a secondary role in the formation of governments, with the Christian Democrats having the leadership and the pivotal role. In 1961, the party operated realignment on the church-state cleavage and opened to the Catholics, while opting for a clear anchorage on the right side of the socioeconomic cleavage. At the same time, the party faced difficulties in taking into account the centre-periphery cleavage. The Liberal Party incarnates the (French-speaking) industrial interests and bourgeoisie, and therefore tends to incarnate the centre. The tensions on the cleavage nevertheless led to the split of the party on the

¹⁹ K. DESCHOUWER, 'Le VLD ou l'impasse structurelle du libéralisme en Flandre', in P. DELWIT and J.-M. DE WAELE (eds), *Les partis politiques en Belgique*, Brussels, Université de Bruxelles, 1996, p. 125-135.

²⁰ J.-B. PILET, *Changer pour gagner? Les réformes des lois électorales en Belgique*, Brussels, Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2007.

linguistic divide in 1972, giving birth to separate liberal parties²¹. The 'new' Flemish PVV incarnates the Flemish Liberals. The party faced a radicalisation to the right on socioeconomic issues in the 1980s at the instigation of a new generation of leaders (Guy Verhofstadt). The first goal of the party is to oust the Flemish Christian Democrats from power and to regain leadership in Flanders. In this perspective, the party operated a deep reform in 1992 and relabelled itself VLD. In the meantime, it regained third and then second place in Flanders. However, despite the bad situation of the Christian Democrats, the Flemish Liberals are kept out of power and seem to be condemned to second place, waiting for the Christian Democrats to ask them to enter a coalition under their conditions. In 1999, when the Flemish Liberals had almost given up, the scandals compromising the Christian Democrat-Socialist coalition opened the way to the reconquest of the leadership in Flanders. The VLD obtained 22.6% of the votes, compared with 22.2% for the Christian Democrats. Deeply defeated, the Christian Democrats opted for a cure on the opposition benches. For the first time since 1884, the Liberals had the leadership in the negotiations on the formation of the next coalition government²².

The main goal of the Flemish Liberals was soon to keep and strengthen this reconquered leadership. For that purpose, they developed a strategy of opening. They integrated a split of the Christian Democrats in 2002 (NCD), but also renegades from a Flemish regionalist party (Spirit) claiming a left-liberal anchorage. Thus, in a short period of time the party welcomed right-wing conservatives on moral issues and left-libertarians, demonstrating that their main goal was vote-seeking rather than policy consistency. Furthermore, the arrival of regionalists in the party frightened the old 'Belgican' guard. This strategy blurred the image of the party. Not a single issue generated cohesion, given the motley composition of the party: moral issues, immigration and the problem of how to deal with the extreme right. The heterogeneity created tensions with the traditional right wing. A first right-wing split occurred in 2003, without success. The party managed to maintain its leadership in the federal elections of 2003 (24.2%). The coalition with the socialists was renewed. However, the defeat was heavy in the regional elections of 2004 (19.8%). The party was overtaken by the Christian Democrats and the extreme right (VB), and was hounded by the Socialists of the SP.a (0.08% difference, i.e. 3,341 votes)²³.

The party membership survey was conducted in January 2006. This is an important note to keep in mind given the particular situation of the party at that time. On the one hand, the party won the 2003 federal elections and leads the federal government. On

²¹ K. DESCHOUWER, 'From Consociation to Federation. How the Belgian Parties Won', in K.R. LUTHER and K. DESCHOUWER (eds), *Party Elites in Divided Societies. Political Parties in Consociational Democracy*, London, Routledge, 1999, p. 74-107.

²² J. BILLIET, « Les transformations du libéralisme en Flandre. Les Vlaams Liberalen en Democraten (VLD) », in P. DELWIT (ed.), *Libéralismes et partis libéraux en Europe*, Brussels, Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2002, p. 199-225.

²³ E. VAN HAUTE, *Le rapport des adhérents à l'idéologie : un facteur discriminant entre partis? Le cas du CD&V et du VLD en Belgique néerlandophone*, thèse de doctorat, Brussels, Université libre de Bruxelles, 2008.

the other hand, the party faced defeat in the 2004 regional elections and has fear and doubts about the next elections in 2007.

Data analysis

Sociological background and socialisation process of the discontented

In terms of gender, men are slightly more inclined to voice than women, but the difference is not statistically significant (Table 1). There is no significant difference among the two groups in terms of age structure. The malcontents do not present a specific age structure compared to the loyal members. As regards the level of education, the discontented members present a slightly higher level of education (higher proportion of higher educated members), but again, the difference is not statistically significant. Finally, the socio-professional status structure does not differ among the two groups, although the self-employed are more numerous among the discontented group of members.

Table 1. Sociological background of the discontented and loyal members (%)

	<i>Voice</i>	<i>Loyalty</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Gender</i>			
Male	77.5	69.1	72.0
Female	22.5	30.9	28.0
<i>Age</i>			
< 25 years	4.3	5.4	5.0
25-34 years	11.8	9.7	10.4
35-44 years	19.4	14.0	15.8
45-54 years	17.2	21.0	19.7
55-64 years	22.6	26.3	25.1
65 years >	24.7	23.7	24.0
<i>Education</i>			
None & Primary	3.9	6.6	5.7
Secondary	39.8	45.4	43.5
Higher	56.3	48.0	50.8
<i>Status</i>			
Worker	2.0	4.3	3.5
Employee	13.0	12.0	12.3
Civil servant	15.0	14.1	14.4
Self-employed	17.0	10.9	13.0
Profession	3.0	7.1	5.6
Manager	8.0	6.0	6.7
Non-active	40.0	44.6	43.0

The analysis of the sociological background of the two groups of members does not highlight significant differences. This is a particularly interesting and important point. This means that those who voice are not characterised by a higher level of resources than the loyal members. The resource model is important in understanding

who joins and who participates actively in the life of the party, yet the model does not apply when differentiating between who voices and who is loyal²⁴.

In terms of the socialisation process, the profile of the discontented members presents more specificity in comparison with the loyal members. First, they are less socialised in the liberal/anticlerical pillar.

A pillar is the vertical encapsulation of a subculture through overlapping memberships in pillar organisations. In the Belgian case, the literature traditionally identifies two main pillars (Socialist and Christian Democrat), and a smaller one, i.e. the Liberal pillar²⁵. These pillars emerged from the organisation of the first two cleavages that structured the Belgian society since the independence of the country: the philosophical cleavage and the socioeconomic cleavage²⁶.

These pillars organise the lives of individuals 'from the cradle to the grave', allowing citizens to be associated throughout their lives with youth movements, schools, universities, trade unions, mutual societies, associations, and parties belonging to the same sociological world. Parties incarnating the pillars are characterised by an organisational penetration and incorporation of the subculture, especially via mass party membership and extensive auxiliary networks²⁷. Party membership can be considered as a global sociological phenomenon; for a large number of citizens it is a natural, traditional move, if not actually automatic, arising from an encapsulation to a particular pillar.

Pillars are sociological worlds structuring the lives of citizens. The main areas covered by pillar organisations are the education system and the mutual health insurance system, for every citizen has a compulsory and automatic link to these associations. The Belgian education network is divided across the state/church cleavage. Each network historically belongs to a side of the cleavage and to a pillar, and is thus associated with the pillar party. The official network is related to the Socialist and Liberal pillars, whereas the free denominational network is related to the Catholic pillar. Nowadays, the education network is also divided across the communitarian cleavage, between Flemish- and French-speaking networks. Furthermore, in Belgium, the state does not manage health insurance itself. It transfers the money received from taxes to semi-public health insurance companies. Citizens are obliged to register with one of these semi-public health insurance companies. Again, each pillar developed its own health insurance company (Socialist, Liberal, and Catholic). Today, new neutral or independent insurance companies challenge the traditional companies linked to the pillar system.

²⁴ S. VERBA, K.L. SCHLOZMAN, and H.E. BRADY, *op. cit.*

²⁵ D.-L. SEILER, 'Un système consociatif exemplaire : La Belgique', *Revue internationale de politique comparée*, 4/3, 1997, p. 601-623.

²⁶ V. LORWIN, 'Belgium: Conflict and Compromise', in K.D. MCRÆ (ed.), *Consociational Democracy. Political Accommodation in Segmented Societies*, Toronto, Mc Clelland and Stewart, 1974, p. 179-206.

²⁷ K.R. LUTHER, 'A Framework for the Comparative Analysis of Political Parties and Party Systems in Consociational Democracies', in K.R. LUTHER and K. DESCHOUWER (eds), *Party Elites in Divided Societies. Political Parties in Consociational Democracy*, London, Routledge, 1999, p. 3-19.

One may observe in Table 2 that the discontented members were less socialised in the liberal/antierical pillar.

First, the discontented members are less likely to have received their education in the public school network, which is traditionally linked to the liberal/antierical pillar. The majority (52.1%) of loyal members were educated in the public network, whereas this proportion only reaches 38.8% for the discontented members. The malcontents attended free denominational schools more often, or combined the networks.

Second, the proportion of non-believers among the malcontents is lower. Only a quarter of the discontented respondents declare themselves to be non-believers, compared with 35.8% of loyal members. This lower proportion of non-believers is mainly due to the higher proportion of Catholics among the discontented members.

Finally, the affiliation with a mutual health insurance company (MHIC) also reveals weaker embeddings of the malcontents in the liberal pillar. The discontented members are affiliated with the liberal mutual health insurance company less often than their loyal counterparts. On the contrary, loyal members present a profile that is more anchored in the liberal pillar. The differences are statistically significant, meaning that the two groups differ in terms of socialisation process. The loyal members are characterised by a stronger socialisation process within the pillar. This stronger socialisation process may enhance their loyalty and prevent the party members from voicing their criticisms.

Table 2. Socialisation process of the discontented and loyal members (%) – part I

	<i>Voice</i>	<i>Loyalty</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Network*</i>			
Free denominational	28.8	20.0	23.2
Public	38.8	52.1	47.3
Other/Multiple	32.5	27.9	29.5
<i>Belief*</i>			
Catholic/Christian	67.0	56.5	60.1
Non believer	27.2	35.8	32.8
Other/None	5.8	7.8	7.1
<i>MHIC*</i>			
Christian	34.0	25.1	28.2
Socialist	25.2	24.6	24.8
Liberal	40.8	50.3	47.0
<i>Mean length of membership (years)</i>	19.6	18.1	18.6
<i>Mean age at membership (years)</i>	32.8	34.6	33.9
<i>Constancy party membership*</i>			
Yes	89.3	95.4	93.3
No	10.7	4.6	6.7
<i>Membership other party*</i>			
Yes	19.4	11.2	14.0
No	80.6	88.8	86.0

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

In addition to the socialisation process within the pillar, socialisation within the party might also influence the probability of the member to voice criticism. Four indicators can be mobilised to measure the strength of socialisation within the party: the length of membership, the age at membership, the constancy of affiliation, and former membership in another party.

In terms of length of membership and mean age at membership, the two groups do not differ significantly. Discontented and loyal members are both long-term members (average number of years of membership close to 19). In addition, they all joined the Flemish Liberal Party at an average age of about 33 to 34.

On the contrary, the two groups of members differ in terms of their link to the party. The loyal members could be considered as more faithful or regular members, whereas discontented members are less exclusive and regular members. The discontented members have experienced an intermittent membership more than the others (10.7% compared with 4.6%), and affiliation with another party (19.4% compared with 11.2%). Again, the strong socialisation of the loyal members in the party may favour their loyalty, whereas the less exclusive link of the discontented to their party may facilitate detachment and criticism.

Furthermore, some other aspects of the socialisation process allow the hypotheses formulated earlier to be tested.

The respondents were asked to express their main reason for joining the party, both in an open and a closed question. These reasons have been grouped in three categories: material incentives, process or solidarity incentives, and ideological incentives, following Clark and Wilson's typology²⁸. According to the first hypothesis based on Ware's work, those who voice would tend to have joined for ideological or material incentives in a greater proportion than their loyal counterparts, who would tend more to have joined for solidarity incentives. Our results show that the hypothesis is only partly verified (Table 3). The discontented members have joined for material reasons twice as much as the loyal members (6.2% compared with 2.6%). But the hypothesis is not verified for ideological incentives. A large majority of loyal members declare to have joined for ideological incentives (61.0% compared with 50.5% for the discontented members). Furthermore, solidarity or process incentives are expressed more often by the discontented members than by the loyal members (43.3% compared with 36.4% for the loyal members). The differences among the two groups are statistically significant, meaning that the incentives for joining do indeed differ between discontented and loyal members, but not always in the expected direction.

The second hypothesis, based on May's law of curvilinear disparity, postulates that those who voice are more likely to be active members than passive members or leaders, who are more likely to be loyal to their party. An index of activism was built on several questions regarding the respondents' activities (time devoted to the party, participation in meetings, etc.). The scale of the index ranges from 0 to 12. This index clearly shows that the discontented members are on average less active in the

²⁸ P.B. CLARK and J.Q. WILSON, 'Incentive Systems: A Theory of Organizations', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 6/2, 1961, p. 129-166.

party than the loyal members (mean score of 1.95 on the scale, compared with 2.38 for the loyal members). Therefore, the second hypothesis is not verified, and is even contradicted (Table 3).

Table 3. Socialisation process of the discontented and loyal members (%) – part II

	Voice	Loyalty	Total
<i>Incentives to join*</i>			
Material	6.2	2.6	3.8
Process	43.3	36.4	38.7
Ideological	50.5	61.0	57.5
<i>Mean activism (0-12 scale)**</i>	1.95	2.38	2.19
<i>Party strata**</i>			
Passive members	67.7	49.2	55.6
Activists	9.4	26.2	20.4
Party representatives and officials	22.9	24.6	24.0

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

The survey also integrated questions on the position of the respondents in the party organisation. Combined with the index of activism, it helped to divide the respondents into three party strata: passive members, activists (active members without any official function in the organisation), and (sub-)leaders (party representatives and officials). It was decided that passive members situated themselves up to 4, and activist from 5 to 12 on the index of activism. The party representatives and officials correspond to the respondents exercising an elective mandate or a function in the party organisation. The results shown in Table 3 clearly emphasise that the proportion of passive members is much greater among the discontented members (67.7% compared with 49.2% of the loyal members). And on the other hand, the proportion of activists is greater among loyal members (26.2% compared with 9.4% of the discontented members). This confirms that the second hypothesis has to be rejected.

Ideological profile of the discontents

In terms of ideology and political positioning, the respondents were asked to place themselves on a left-right scale (0-7), and to place their party on the same scale.

It turns out that the discontented members place themselves on average slightly more on the right of the left-right scale in comparison with the loyal members (Table 4). These results confirm the third hypothesis: those who voice are more radical (further from the centre) than the loyal members. Furthermore, they place their own party slightly more to the left than the loyal members²⁹. Consequently, the congruence between the self-placement and the placement of the party is much greater among loyal members and accounts for the majority of them (55.7%), whereas this is the case for less than one third of the discontented members (30.6%). This confirms the idea that the discontented members perceive a distance or a gap between their party and themselves. This could be used as another measure of discontentment.

²⁹ E. VAN HAUTE, 'Ideological misfits: A distinctive class of party members', *Party Politics*, 2011 (published Online First).

It is also interesting to analyse how the respondents perceive the rest of the political landscape in Flanders, and whether it can help differentiate our two groups. The respondents were asked to give a sympathy score to the other parties, ranging from 0 to 7 (0 being the lowest sympathy score, and 7 the highest). The two groups differ significantly in their perception of their rivals. On average, the discontented give a lower sympathy score to the Flemish Socialists, and a higher score to the Christian Democrats, the Flemish Nationalists, and above all to the extreme right (Table 4). Their average sympathy score for the extreme right is 1.78 point higher than the average score for the loyal members. This may be considered as a huge difference in an 8-point scale. The extreme right is the second preferred party among discontented members, whereas it is the last among loyal members. On average, discontented members tend to give higher sympathy scores to the other parties on the right. This finding is congruent with the results of self-placement on the left-right scale. Generally speaking, they also tend to give higher scores to the other political parties than their loyal counterparts, which indicates a greater opening towards other political parties. This is also congruent with the findings regarding the past experience of the members (affiliation with another party).

Table 4. Ideological profile of the discontented and loyal members (scales)

	<i>Voice</i>	<i>Loyalty</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Self-placement left-right scale (0-7)*</i>	4.41	4.11	4.20
<i>Placement of the party left-right scale (0-7)*</i>	3.87	4.12	4.07
<i>Congruence self-placement / party placement***</i>			
Same placement	30.6	55.7	47.0
Different placement	69.4	44.3	53.0
<i>Sympathy towards other parties (0-7)</i>			
Flemish Socialists (SP.a)***	2.32	3.24	2.87
Flemish Christian Democrats (CD&V)**	3.15	2.54	2.70
Flemish Extreme Right (VB)***	2.79	1.01	1.68
Flemish Nationalists (N-VA)**	2.05	1.47	1.65
Flemish Nationalists (Spirit)	1.37	1.49	1.44
Flemish Greens (Groen!)	1.57	1.52	1.54

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

These results point out that the two groups have a very different perception of themselves, their party and the whole political landscape. But the left-right scale is a very global measure, and it hides the nuances of the cleavages structuring the political scene. This is especially true for Belgium, where the cleavage structure is complex, and where cleavages interlace.

In order to get a better picture of the nuances in the policy positioning, the respondents were also asked to position themselves on several items and issues. The answers were recoded, and a factor analysis was conducted to reduce the number of items to a narrower number of dimensions. The factor analysis resulted in the emergence of six dimensions (converted into scales ranging from 1 to 4, 1 being the left side of the scale, 4 the right side). These factors correspond broadly to the

main cleavages dividing the Belgian political landscape: the old church/state cleavage (converted into a progressive-conservative opposition on moral and ethical issues), the centre-periphery cleavage, the left-right cleavage on socioeconomic issues, and three new oppositions related to post-materialism, namely a first opposition on immigration issues (opening vs. closing), and the two traditional scales linked to post-materialistic issues, already distinguished by Swyngedouw in the case of Flanders, i.e. new left vs. new right (libertarianism vs. authoritarianism) and environmentalism vs. materialism³⁰.

The two groups of members differ on three of these scales: the progressive-conservative scale (with the discontented members positioned slightly more on the conservative side), the centre-periphery scale (with the discontented members slightly more on the periphery side), and the libertarian-authoritarian scale (with the discontented members slightly more on the authoritarian side).

These elements confirm the anchorage of the discontented members on the right side of the spectrum, but not in socioeconomic terms. The rightist anchorage of the discontented members differs from the loyal members regarding other societal issues. What is striking is that the two groups do not differ on the opening-closing scale (immigration issues). This is not very congruent with the analysis of the sympathy score for the extreme right. Therefore, one might interpret the higher sympathy score of the discontented members for the extreme right as sympathy towards the assumed separatist, conservative and authoritarian positions of the VB, but not as a higher sharing of the anti-immigrant positions of the VB.

Table 5. Ideological profile of the discontented and loyal members: position on cleavages

	<i>Voice</i>	<i>Loyalty</i>	<i>Total</i>
Progressive – Conservative Index (1-4)**	2.22	1.98	2.12
Centre – Periphery Index (1-4)**	2.54	2.33	2.48
Opening – Closing Index (1-4)	2.88	2.74	2.86
Socioeconomic Left-Right Index (1-4)	2.87	2.91	2.88
Libertarianism – Authoritarianism Index (1-4)*	3.04	2.88	3.03
Environmentalism – Materialism Index (1-4)	2.76	2.67	2.66

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Compared to the loyal members, the bivariate analysis showed that the discontented tended to be less socialised in the liberal pillar, less regular members, less driven by ideological incentives, and less active members. The bivariate analysis also emphasised that those who voice present a less congruent self-placement/party placement on the left-right scale and a general tendency to favour parties from the right. The rightist anchorage is mainly due to more conservative, authoritarian, and peripheral stances.

³⁰ R. INGLEHART and S. FLANAGAN, 'Value Change in Industrial Societies', *American Political Science Review*, 81/4, 1987, p. 1289-1319; M. SWYNGEDOUW, 'Les nouveaux clivages dans la politique belgo-flamande. Etude empirique', *Revue française de science politique*, 45/5, 1995, p. 775-790.

Towards a general model of the discontented

The bivariate analysis tells little about the hierarchy of the variables and the structure of the differences among the two groups. A discriminant analysis can introduce such a hierarchy among the variables and allow an identification of the variables with the best predictive value for belonging to one of the two groups (voice or loyalty).

Table 6 shows the results of the discriminant analysis. All explanatory variables have been introduced step by step in the model in order to evaluate their predictive value for belonging to the voice category (0), in opposition to the group of loyal members (1).

The results of the discriminant analysis emphasise a mix of socialisation and ideological variables as the best predictors of belonging to the group of discontented members. In terms of socialisation, three variables emerge and help predict which members belong to the group of discontented members: the MHIC (less affiliation with the liberal MHIC), previous affiliation with another party (more often), and the level of activism (lower). The level of socialisation in the pillar and in the party helps predict the probability to voice. A poorer socialisation clearly favours the expression of discontentment.

Table 6. Discriminant analysis

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Function</i>
MHIC (2*)	0.416
Belief	0.150
Education network	0.202
Constancy membership	0.093
Membership other party (5*)	-0.222
Incentives to join	-0.054
Index activism (4*)	-0.315
Self-placement left-right	0.129
Party placement left-right (3*)	-0.335
Average sympathy score VB (1*)	0.679
Average sympathy score SP.a	-0.191
Average sympathy score N-VA	-0.047
Average sympathy score CD&V	0.132
Prog – cons Index	-0.067
Centre – periphery Index	0.158
Lib – autho Index (6*)	0.446
Wilk's lambda	0.689
% of good placements	79.3

Three variables linked to the political positioning of the members also enter the function and help predict who belongs to the 'voice' group: how members place their party on the left-right scale (more to the left); their average sympathy score for the far right (higher); and the score on the libertarian-authoritarian scale (more on the authoritarian side).

Conclusion

This contribution was aimed at questioning the phenomenon of discontented party members. Although the existing literature gives some insight into the incentives to join a party, very little research has been conducted on how party members feel about their membership. It is as though it were taken for granted that, if they have decided to join a party, members must by definition be happy about their membership. However, there is evidence to support the fact that this is not always the case, and that discontented party members may sometimes want to voice their criticism about how the party functions or about its policy orientations.

Based on two different approaches in the literature, namely the symbolic approach and rational choice theories, this paper investigated how the discontented members differ from their loyal counterparts. Only two of the three hypotheses deduced from the literature were partly confirmed. The party members who provided a negative definition of their party and voiced their discontentment are less active (tend to be more passive members than party activists), less driven by ideological incentives and are more radical (rightists).

The analysis of who voices is particularly interesting in the sense that it provides information on the potential reasons for exit and the profile of the potential defections.

The context of the survey was a context of challenges for the Flemish Liberal Party. Having conquered the leadership in Flanders for the first time since the 19th century, the party's first goal was to maintain this leadership. The party developed strategies in order to achieve this priority. They opted to move their strategy from dealing with discontentment at the grassroots towards a strategy in the perspective of building a large popular party at the centre-right of the political spectrum. This led the party to welcome new and sometimes antagonistic currents.

The survey results show that many party members were dissatisfied and felt a distance between their own policy positioning and the positioning of the party. As said above, an examination of who voices tells us something about who might exit. Furthermore, the literature stresses that the exit option is only considered if members have a substitute for their engagement.

Since the survey was conducted, the Flemish political landscape faced the emergence of a new political party: the *Lijst Dedecker*. The party emerged in January 2007, a few months before the June federal elections. The party is named after its leader, Jean-Marie Dedecker, who happens to be a former figurehead of the VLD. Dedecker is a former and very popular professional judo star, and was approached by the VLD for the 1999 federal elections. This integration brought the party many votes, although Dedecker soon appeared to be managed with difficulty. He defied the party establishment in the presidential elections in 2004, where he gathered a significant number of the grassroots votes (38.3% compared with 50.5% for the establishment candidate Bart Somers). A dispute at the time of the local elections in 2006 was the occasion for the party leadership to ban Dedecker from the VLD. After a short transition in the N-VA (Flemish right-wing regionalist party), which also expelled

him³¹, Dedecker founded his own party in January 2007. The party performed beyond all expectations in the federal elections, exceeding the 5% threshold, and obtaining five seats in the Chamber and one in the Senate.

It is striking how close the profile of the discontented members of the VLD is to the discourse of the new *Lijst Dedecker*. Therefore, the situation of the VLD might have worsened since the survey of 2006. With a new party on the political marketplace, the discontented members might consider the exit option as less problematic. The Flemish Liberals might face a huge drop in their membership if they do not manage to respond to the growing discontentment of the grassroots.

The other main conclusion of the paper is that those who voice are not always those you hear the most. This is particularly interesting. Most of the literature considers activists as the main source of contestation within the party. It may be true that activists indeed play that role when one looks at the internal life of the parties, and express their opinions during meetings and activities. But this role might stop once they speak to the outside world, as the loyalty they developed through early socialisation within the party and related associations prevents them from criticising what they would consider as ‘the family’. Passive members, however, might make their voice heard less at party activities, and as they are less socialised within the party and its satellite world, they might perceive it less as a family which should not be criticised. Therefore, once they are discontented, their voice is more likely to be heard outside the party.

³¹ The N-VA had at that time negotiated with the Christian Democrats in order to form a cartel in the 2007 federal elections. The Christian Democrats threatened to break the cartel if the N-VA accepted Dedecker as a party member.

