

Women as party members: how active are they?

Bram Wauters

GASPAR (www.gaspar.ugent.be)

Ghent University

Bram.wauters@ugent.be

<< Work in progress >>

Abstract:

Parties have granted grassroots party members more opportunities to participate within the party. These participation activities provide a unique opportunity for members (and especially also for female party members) to influence a party's decision-making. By being very active in party activities, women could compensate for their limited presence among party members, in the party elite and in parliament and government.

Based on the analysis that we ran on a dataset from a broad-scale survey among party members in four Flemish/Belgian parties, we found that women are less likely than men to participate in activities that select party leaders and candidates, and in activities aimed at influencing the party's policy and strategy. Only for party activities that serve to mobilize and inform voters, women are on equal footing as men.

These gender differences could not be explained by a difference in resources (level of education), but rather by occupying fewer formal positions in the (local) party (demand factor) and especially by lower levels of political interest (motivation as a supply factor).

These findings point us to a participation paradox : by organizing more participation opportunities, parties broaden further the inequalities between men and women.

Paper to be presented at the 4th European Conference on Politics and Gender

Uppsala (Sweden), 11-13 June 2015

1. Introduction

Worldwide, politicians and scientists alike devote much attention to the socio-demographic representativeness of political institutions. The underrepresentation of specific groups in political institutions is clearly considered as a democratic problem the last few decades (Phillips, 1995). It comes then as no surprise that the presence of women in parliaments has also been high on the research agenda (e.g. Darcy, Welch & Clark, 1987; Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; Caul, 2001; Franceschet et al., 2012).

Although progress has been made the last decades, women continue to be underrepresented in parliaments and governments (e.g. Paxton, Kunovich & Hughes, 2007 ; Krook & O'Brien, 2012). Also in political parties, women are underrepresented, not only among party members (e.g. Scarrow & Gezgor, 2010 ; van Haute et al, 2013), but even more so when moving up in the party hierarchy (e.g. Wauters & Pilet, 2015 ; O'Brien, 2015). Given the fact the parties fulfil a number of crucial functions such as recruiting and selecting electoral candidates, informing, socialising and mobilising voters, and aggregating and articulating interests (Key 1964; Gunther & Diamond 2001), the underrepresentation of women in parties could have far-reaching consequences for the general position of women (and their interests) in politics.

We will focus in this paper on activities of grassroots party members. In recent years, the formal role of this kind of members has increased: in many countries, parties introduced leadership primaries, opened up party conferences, and granted members a greater say in the composition of candidate lists (e.g. Leduc, 2001; Cross & Blais, 2012; Pilet & Cross, 2014; Wauters, 2014). This participation activities inside parties provide, on the one hand, a unique opportunity for members (and especially also for female party members) to influence a party's decision-making. By being very active in party activities, women could compensate for their limited presence among party members and in the party elite. On the other hand, these activities could reproduce inequalities also found in other participation activities and lead to the so-called participation paradox (Hartman, 1998 ; Bovens & Wille, 2010): the more opportunities for participation, the higher inequalities will weigh in political decision-making.

In this paper, we will evaluate whether the gender of party members affects their propensity to participate in this kind of activities. We test two conflicting hypotheses: 1) women are

more likely to participate since by overcoming participation hurdles to become party member, female members are a selected elite very motivated to participate ; 2) women are less likely to participate since the same barriers for becoming party member hinder them in participating in these party activities. Next, we also test which variables can be held accountable for gender differences. We focus on supply-side explanations (differences in resources and motivation in particular) and on demand-side explanations (local party executives being automatically more active). We will run our analyses on a dataset from a broad-scale survey among party members in four Belgian parties (N > 3,000).

We start this paper by sketching the functions that parties perform, why these are relevant for women's position in politics, and what the role of party members is in these functions. Next, we describe the barriers women are confronted with when becoming active in party politics. This description will lead to the two conflicting hypotheses outlined above, which will be tested in the empirical part. In the second part of the empirical section, we will test explanations for participation patterns of female party members.

The main findings are that female party members participate less in selecting party leaders and candidates and also less in activities aimed to influence a party's policy and strategy. For activities informing and mobilizing people, no significant effects could be noted. All this allows us to conclude that granting more powers to rank and file members is in general not helpful for the position of women in politics. The main explanations for the lower activity rate of female party members point to their lower levels of political interest and their underrepresentation in local party executives.

2. Party functions

Political parties are crucial actors in Western political systems: it is difficult to underestimate their role and impact in contemporary political systems (Luther & Müller-Rommel, 2005 ; Depauw & Martin, 2008). Their role for the political representation of women is no exception to that rule (Caul Kittilson 2013). Notwithstanding the wide-spread idea that electoral-professional parties have become increasingly more dependent on (social) media

and less on large membership bases (Panebianco, 1988 ; Van Biezen et al, 2012), party members continue to be highly relevant for the functioning of parties. In recent years, they are even increasingly given a greater role in selecting political office-holders and in determining a party's policy priorities (Scarrow, 1994 ; Pilet & Cross, 2014).

The description of the party functions will always contain three parts: we first sketch the functions that parties perform, then indicate why these are relevant for women's position in politics, and we end by discussing the role of party members in these functions.

Parties are, first of all, responsible for the **selection of political personnel**. They play a crucial role in the composition of candidate lists (including determining crucial list positions and/or districts in which candidates run for office) and in the appointment of ministers and other cabinet members. Some party characteristics have been found to impact on this process, most in particular the composition of the selectorate in gender terms (Caul 1999; Darcy, Welsh and Clark 1987; Norris and Lovenduski 1995). Niven (1998) calls this the outgroup effect. To male party elites women are an outgroup, who are assessed by using stereotypes of women in general, which results in a judgment of these candidates as less political capable. Male candidates, on the contrary, are identified as belonging to the 'ingroup' (because of the similarity to the party elite), and consequently they are more easily judged as capable. Even in quota systems, the composition of the selectorate is important: male party elites are often reluctant to lose their power position and while they agree to introduce quota regulations, they are often mitigating these regulations in practice (Dahlerup, 2007 ; Murray et al, 2009).

As a reaction to profound changes in the internal and external environment (such as personalization tendencies, electoral defeat or change of leader), parties have increasingly opened up their selection processes to rank and file members in recent decades (Barnea & Rahat, 2007). Consequently, the selectorate is more inclusive than before and involves more people than before. As we have indicated above that the composition of the selectorate is highly relevant for the outcome of the selection process in gender terms, it is highly important to investigate to what extent female party members make use of the opportunity to become involved in this selection process. All party members are invited to participate, but not all of them make use of this possibility to the same extent (Wauters, 2010).

Supplying political personnel is, however, only one of the functions of political parties (Lawson 1980). Political parties fulfil more functions than just recruiting and selecting electoral candidates (Key 1964; Gunther & Diamond 2001). They perform functions vis-à-vis society (informing, socialising and mobilising people), they aggregate and articulate interests as part of their political agenda setting role and representational role, and they also have important duties towards the government (providing and securing legislative majorities for instance).

We start to discuss **informing, socialising and mobilising** as party functions. Parties provide citizens and voters with information shortcuts in order to comprehend the often complex political discussions (e.g. Merolla, Stephenson & Zechmeister, 2008). By relying on the opinions of parties on a number of complex topics, people save time and effort to form their own opinion. As such, parties ease citizens' processing of information on policy topics. Parties also transmit general democratic values and more specific ideology-based values to their followers. This is called the socialization function (Gimpel, Lay & Schuknecht 2003). And finally, parties could act as mobilizing actors by inciting people to cast a vote at elections or to participate in demonstrations or other policy-oriented activities. Although not always realized to the full extent (e.g. for voter turnout, see: Blais, 2006), parties could be helpful to put into action the participation potential of many people.

The presence of women in the party might facilitate and enhance these three societal functions towards women, i.e. informing, socialising and mobilising female citizens. Women's presence and activities in parties affects beliefs about politics as a 'male' domain (Franceschet et al., 2012). By disconnecting the exclusive link between politics and men, women can become convinced that politics is also something for them and this can encourage them to inform them about politics and to get involved in it. Women who are better informed and more ready to undertake action, will in turn be more likely to engage in politics and to be heard by political elites. Eventually, they could aspire a political career. At the same time, changes in gendered ideas about political participation can also improve the views on women held by a wide number of actors inside and outside parliament, which paves the way towards more women in public office.

Thirdly, parties are important for **political agenda setting and interest representation**. A small but significant part of party members do indeed see their membership as an

instrument to influence the policy options of their party (e.g. Cross and Young, 2004). By actively participating in party meetings, they try to influence a party's policy. Miller and Schofield (2003:259) attach great importance to members for the ideological choices of their party. Members could, for instance, apply opposite lock when the party elite tries to change the ideological course of the party. As such, the policy-motivated activists are a force of stability by discouraging ideological change.

A major reason why the presence and activity rate of women in a party matters is that it provides a solid basis for the substantive representation of women's issues and interests. Research reveals that women MPs in general have personal preferences to represent their particular group, are convinced that their presence can make a difference, and are encouraged to behave as a group representative by their parties, by civil society organisations and by the general public. But this effect does not always materialize, due to party discipline or the wish to be a mainstream MP, which would give a better chance on re-election (Celis and Wauters 2010). The support of women within parties therefore complements the presence of descriptive representatives by supporting them to substantively represent women's interests. The presence of women in a party is not only important as support for other women politicians, though. Party members can also to a certain extent influence the content of policy documents, both within and outside the party. As women in general tend to have both more expertise and more political will for representing women's issues and interests (Phillips, 1995), women party members can be a guarantee for the inclusion of women's issues in party and electoral programmes and/or in government agreements.

A common thread in all these functions is that they matter for women's position in politics and that the input of active female party members could make a difference in that respect. We have demonstrated that the presence of active women in parties is important for the recruitment and selection of women MPs and ministers, but also for other democratic functions such as the political mobilisation of women and the substantive representation of women's interests. By being active in this kind of activities, party members can have an impact in how they function.

Apart from these direct effects, party member activity can also influence cultural aspects in the party (contributing to a general women-friendly atmosphere within the party, which

creates opportunities on other aspects of party life) and it provides a unique opportunity to get noticed for those aspiring a political career.

In the next section, we will give theoretical reasons why women party members might be more active than their male counterparts, but at the same time, there are also reasons why this might not be the case. In the empirical part, we will determine which of both options is confirmed in practice.

3. Barriers for women's participation to party activities

Gender role socialization refers to the dominant culture in society in which women were expected to take up subordinate roles (care-taker, nurturer, etc), while it is seen as normal that men are holding powerful positions, for instance in politics. This implies that women aspiring a political career are in a weaker position in comparison with men: they have to overcome more barriers than men, they are less often solicited than men, they are only allowed to take low-profile positions which can do not much harm, etc. (Niven, 1998 ; Lawless & Fox, 2005). We will discuss these barriers now more into detail.

In general, two kind of factors can be put forward to explain lower levels of political participation among women: supply and demand factors (e.g. Norris & Lovenduski, 1995 ; Krook & Norris, 2014).

Supply-side explanations focus on women themselves and refer to two broad factors, i.e. motivation and resources. **Motivation** denotes in this context political interest and ambition. It has been found that, in general, women in politics are less ambitious than men and are less convinced that they have the capabilities required to run for political office (Lawless and Fox, 2005 ; Frederick, 2007). It seems likely that less ambitious women and women who fear they might not be up to the job will be less inclined to become active in a party.

Resources include time, money, education and experience. Also here, due to a general subordinate position in different spheres of society (especially in the past), women encounter problems: they are on average lower educated, have on average a lower qualified

job than men, and tend to take a larger portion of the work in the household (Paxton, Kunovich & Hughes, 2007). As such, they are in a disadvantaged position to participate in politics, and in party activities in particular.

Demand-side explanations, in contrast, concentrate on the gatekeepers that allow or hinder the political participation of women. Above, we already referred to the opinions of the party elite in the process of candidate selection for elections. The power of this party elite has been far-reaching: by selecting (or not) and by allotting (or not) high positions on the list or in safe districts, they can make or break political careers. Similarly, party elites play also a crucial role in determining positions in the local party executive (local party chairmen, treasurer, etc.). People occupying such organizational functions are often asked to do so, and in addition, regional (and even national) party leaders usually have a hold over this process.

Whereas for election candidates and elected representatives, both supply-side factors and demand-side factors provide a disadvantage for women, it seems that mainly supply-side factors are at stake for party membership activity. Participating to party activities is most of the time freely accessible, no election or delegation (in which party elites could play a role) is needed.

In addition, it could also be expected that supply-side factors will not have an effect, since female party members have already overcome several barriers in order to join a party. Only very motivated and ambitious women become party member, it could be argued, and therefore differences on the supply-side will be erased. It could even be argued that these motivated women will do extra efforts and will be very eager to compensate for their limited presence at the top levels of the party.

We end up with two rival hypotheses:

H1a Female party members will be less active in party activities than male members

H1b Female party members will be more active in party activities than male members

4. Methodology

In order to test these hypotheses, we rely on a survey conducted in four parties in Flanders (Belgium). This survey among party members allows us to investigate the involvement in a wide range of specific party activities. This is in contrast with general cross-country surveys, who are conducted among the population at large (instead of only among party members) and who contain (if any) only questions about involvement in party activities in general. Lacking cross-country surveys among party members, our approach is the best option to grasp the effect of gender on party member activity. Our focus lies on Flanders/Belgium, which has a political system in which parties play a dominant role (Deschouwer, 2009 ; Van Haute et al, 2013). Parties have strong roots in society by large membership bases, which tend to decline more slowly than in other countries. In addition, Flemish parties have been frontrunners in granting members greater involvement, especially for leadership selection (Pilet & Wauters, 2014). This renders parties and party members crucial to analyse in order to understand political influence of women.

In the course of 2012, we conducted a postal survey among party members of the Flemish-regionalist party N-VA and the liberal-democratic OpenVLD in Belgium, using the Total Design-method (TDM) of Dilman (1978). The same method was used one year later to survey party members of the Christian-democratic party CD&V and the ecologist party Groen.¹ Despite following the same method, response rates varied from one party to another (see Table 1). N-VA members recorded the highest response rate with 65,5 %, for OpenVLD (whose membership file suffered from several inaccuracies) we obtained a response rate of only 28,9 %. In order to control for underrepresentation, the data were weighted according to sex and age category.

¹ Apart from these four parties, there are two other major Flemish parties represented in parliament. A survey among members of the social-democratic sp.a will be conducted in the course of 2015, the extreme right Vlaams Belang refused to cooperate.

Table 1. Details about the surveys conducted among party members of 4 Flemish parties

Party	N	Total response rate	% of online responses	Period: start	Period: end
N-VA	990	65.5 %	10.9 %	3 April 2012	14 September 2012
OpenVLD	430	28.9 %	11.1 %	9 May 2012	9 September 2012
CD&V	666	44.3 %	10.2 %	21 March 2013	12 June 2013
Groen	931	62.0 %	23.0 %	23 April 2013	16 June 2013

We will start with a descriptive analysis, in which we will present cross tabulations between participation in party activities and gender. For those activities that exhibit gender differences, we will subsequently run binary logistic regressions in order to analyse which factors can be held accountable for these gender differences.

The **dependent variables** of these logistic regressions are constituted by participation to the different activities party members can fulfil (as indicated in the second section). Rather than only looking at the frequency of party activities in general (e.g. Van Haute et al, 2013), we will take into account the diversity in activities. For the activities aimed at selecting political personnel, the analysis will centre around two activities: voting in party leadership elections and voting for the composition of candidate lists.² These are activities in which rank and file members can directly participate (no system of delegation is used anymore in the four parties at stake here). The informative and mobilising functions will be measured by looking at the frequency of undertaking each of these campaign activities: distributing door-to-door flyers during election campaign, convincing others to vote for the party and showing election posters at one's home.³ A final group of functions refers to activities aiming to actively influence the party's policy and strategy. Activities that are catalogued under this heading include participating in a debate at a local party meeting, being a candidate for an internal function or position, and preparing and organizing internal party meetings.⁴

² A exploratory factor analysis on the original coding of the questions show that they indeed measure the same concept. Factor loadings (after a varimax rotation) are 0,772 and 0,903. Cronbach's alpha = 0,743.

³ A exploratory factor analysis on the original coding of the questions show that they indeed measure the same concept. Factor loadings (after a varimax rotation) range from 0,521 to 0,892. Cronbach's alpha = 0,732.

⁴ A exploratory factor analysis on the original coding of the questions show that they indeed measure the same concept. Factor loadings (after a varimax rotation) range from 0,767 to 0,857. Cronbach's alpha = 0,862.

There was a question in our survey which asked for each of these activities⁵ how often party members have conducted this activity for their current party (4 answer categories: never, only once, a number of times, often/always). In order to have enough observations in each category, we recoded these variables into dummy variables indicating whether or not the respondent has participated more than once. Because we work with a dummy variable, we will run logistic regressions.

A first **independent variable** is evidently the sex of the respondents (1 = male, 2 = female).

Other independent variables that will be added to the model, include variables that could explain why gender differences in party activities occur. As indicated above, these can be related either to supply-side factors and demand-side factors.

First, supply-side factors could be catalogued into two broad categories: motivation and resources. As for resources, we include two socio-demographic variables: age (divided in age categories: younger than 35 years old, from 35 years to 65 years old, and older than 65 years old) and level of education (primary education, lower secondary education, higher secondary education, higher non-university education, and university education).

Motivation is captured by a question about political interest. Respondents had to indicate on a scale from 0 to 10 how much they were interested in politics.

Secondly, we will consider demand-side variables. For this analysis, we will take into account whether or not someone occupies a formal position in the local party executive (chairman, deputy chairmen, treasurer, etc). The party elite (either at the regional or the national level) often has a say in the designation of crucial organizational functions in the local party and/or takes up an active role by recruiting these local party executive members themselves.

In order to control for intervening effects, we also add the kind of party as a **control variable** to the analysis. Parties with a high commitment towards women will be more likely to have active female party members. From the literature it appears that in general leftist parties are more open to disadvantaged groups in society (including women) and therefore also tend to

⁵ There was also a question on attending a national party conference, but the factor loadings of this variable were not high enough for any of the three factors we identified. This also seems logical from a substantive point of view: at party conferences, topics about both selection of personnel and a party's policy and strategy are discussed. Therefore, we opted to leave this variable out of our analysis.

have a better representation of these groups, both inside the party and in parliament and government (Caul 1999 ; O'Neill & Stewart, 2009 ; Bashevkin, 2010). This would mean that in this case Groen and CD&V would have more female members than OpenVLD and N-VA. This is confirmed when we look at Table 2, in which the percentage of female party members per party is presented.

Table 2. Percentage of female member by party in our sample (after using weights)

Party	N	% female members
N-VA	977	36,0 %
OpenVLD	419	36,5 %
CD&V	654	40,8 %
Groen	920	43,6 %

It could be logically argued that the more women already in a party, the more active female members will be. Having many women for instance would show that the presence of women in politics is widely accepted. These women can act as role models and show to women and to the whole population that women are capable of playing a role in politics. By doing this, they have the potential to advance the views about women politicians in society and in the party. In sum, we expect female party members to be more active in (centre-)left parties, in this case Groen and CD&V. Therefore, it is necessary to control for the effect of the kind of party someone belongs to.

5. Results

In this empirical section, we will first present a descriptive analysis showing cross-tabulations between party activities and gender. Next, we will move over to explanatory analyses for those activities that exhibit gender differences.

Table 3. Cross-tabulations of party activities and gender (chi² analysis)

Party activity	N	% male members participation	% female members participating
Leadership elections	2834	33,1%	26,0%***
Composition candidate lists	2829	25,3%	21,4%*
Distributing flyers	2852	44,0%	44,9%
Convincing others	2863	60,0%	56,4%
Showing posters	2881	51,5%	58,7%***

Debate local meeting	2835	31,3%	23,5%***
Candidate internal function	2835	15,0%	10,2%***
Preparing meetings	2826	20,2%	13,0%***

*** p < 0.001 ; ** p < 0.01 ; * p < 0.05

Table 3 clearly shows that women participate less than men in activities for **selecting personnel** in a party. The percentages of male party members that participate to leadership elections and procedures to determine the list of candidates at elections are significantly higher than percentages of female members undertaking these activities. For instance, 33 % of male party members have more than once participated to leadership elections, while only 26 % of female members have done so.

An even more outspoken gender effect can be found in activities aimed to influence the **party's policy and strategy**: the share of frequently participating male party members is clearly higher than that of female party members when it concerns debates in local party meeting, being a candidate for an internal function and preparing party meetings. All these differences are statistically significant. The difference is most prominent for participating in a debate at a local party meeting: 31 % of male members have done this more than once, while only 23 % of female members did so.

The exception to this gendered participation pattern is formed by **informing and mobilising** activities. Here, none of the activities shows a significant negative effect for the participation of women. Even on the contrary, for showing party posters at election time in one's home, women undertake this kind of activity more than men (58,7 % versus 51,5 %). Here we can conclude that women participate equally (if not more) than men. It might come as a disappointment to women that participation behaviour is on an equal footing with men only in these activities whose direct impact on gender relations is limited and tend to materialize only in the long run. As indicated above, informing and mobilizing activities in which women participate have the potential to reverse the idea as an exclusively male domain.

All this allows us to reject the hypothesis that women are more active in party activities (except for some informing and mobilizing activities). Consequently, it can be stated that the larger role granted to party members does not act as a compensation for the lower presence of women at other levels in the party and in parliament.

In the rest of this paper, we will search for explanations for women's underrepresentation in these party activities. Therefore, we will conduct logistic regressions for the two kinds of party activities that showed significant gender differences (in Table 3), i.e. selecting political personnel and influencing a party's policy and strategy.

The presentation of the results of the logistic regressions will take place into three steps. We will first present the results of a model containing gender, resources variables (as part of supply-side factors) and the kind of party as independent variables. A next model adds the function in the local party executive as a demand-side variable. Political interest (as a proxy for motivation, a supply-side variable) will be added to the final model. We will follow this three-step approach for all the activities that showed a significant difference at the expense of women (in Table 3). Due to a lack of space, we will only report the odds ratios in the table.

Table 4. Odds ratios of logistic regressions with activity rate in selecting political personnel as dependent variable (participation in leadership elections and in the composition of candidate lists)

	Selecting party leader			Candidate selection		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Party (ref = CD&V)	***	***	***	***	***	***
Groen	,280***	,227***	,190***	,454***	,372***	,329***
N-VA	,681**	,638***	,485***	,226***	,188**	,145***
OpenVLD	1,980***	2,042***	2,016***	1,312*	1,333*	1,333
Age (ref = above 65)	***	***	***	***	***	***
Below 35 years	,361***	,336***	,365***	,395***	,369***	,392***
35-65 years	,679***	,633***	,674***	,757*	,718**	,757*
Education (ref = univ)	*	(ns)		(ns)	(ns)	(ns)
Primary	,693	,807	1,180	,832	1,018	1,416
Lower secondary	,729*	,892	1,195	,733	,940	1,185
Higher secondary	,646***	,731*	,899	,901	1,033	1,229
Higher non-university	,831	,879	1,003	1,094	1,162	1,276
Sex	,787**	,904	1,098	,811*	,934	1,113
Function local party		5,234***	4,409***		6,081***	4,973***
Political interest			1,277***			1,276***
Constant	1,557	,996	,119	1,044	,629	,078
R ²	0,15	0,23	0,27	0,14	0,23	0,27

*** p < 0.001 ; ** p < 0.01 ; * p < 0.05

Both Models 1 in Table 4 show that women participate less than men in selecting personnel (both party leaders and candidates), even when taking into account gender differences in resources (education and age). The odds for women to participate in this kind of activities are only 0,787 and 0,811 times the odds for men. Both effects are statistically significant.

The significance of sex disappears when we enter the variable 'function local party' (see Models 2). Whether or not a party member occupies a formal position in his local party section (such as chairman or treasurer) has a large impact on the odds to participate in leadership and candidate selection. It appears that the gender effect found in model 1 can be attributed to the fact that fewer women take up a function in the local party, since the significance of sex disappears when entering this latter variable.

In Model 3, we also include political interest as an explanatory variable. This variable significantly affects the chance to participate in the activities at stake here. The effect of sex remains neutralised in this model.

In sum, female party members participate less than male members to political selection activities in the party. This difference is not due to gender differences in resources, but could be explained by differences in motivation (political interest) and differences on the demand side (fewer women occupying a formal function in the party).

To end, we point at some other effect that come forward from Table 4. Party and age exhibit straightforward and significant effects. Members of Christian-democratic CD&V are more active in this kind of activities than Groen and N-VA members, but liberal-democratic OpenVLD members are even more active than CD&V members. This could be explained by the fact that OpenVLD has been a frontrunner in introducing this kind of party member involvement in Flanders (Wauters, 2014). Older people are more likely to participate to this kind of activities than younger people (below 35 years old).

Next, we look at activities that aim to influence the party's policy and strategy.

Table 5. Odds ratios of logistic regressions with activity rate in influencing the party's policy and strategy as dependent variable (participating in a debate at a local party meeting, being a candidate for an internal function or position, and preparing and organizing internal party meetings)

Candidate internal function				Debate local meeting		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Party (ref = CD&V)	**	**	***	***	***	***
Groen	1,174	1,021	,934	1,606***	1,542**	1,443*
N-VA	,730	,598**	,466***	,755*	,612**	,447***
OpenVLD	1,139	1,131	1,105	,499***	,385***	,354***
Age (ref = above 65)	(ns)	(ns)	(ns)	***	***	***
Below 35 years	1,036	1,087	1,131	1,602**	1,907***	2,301***
35-65 years	1,269	1,203	1,288	1,804***	1,910***	2,233***
Education (ref = univ)	***	**	*	***	***	(ns)
Primary	,433*	,700	,817	,417**	,577	,812
Lower secondary	,386***	,576*	,730	,335***	,426***	,580*
Higher secondary	,445***	,514***	,593**	,565***	,616***	,755
Higher non-university	,900	,977	1,080	,825	,865	,974
Sex	,622***	,791	1,048	,608***	,698**	,922
Function local party		14,420***	11,917***		19,905***	16,945***
Political interest			1,460***			1,476***
Constant	,349	,118	,004	,692	,321	,010
R ²	0,05	0,31	0,35	0,12	0,38	0,43
Preparing meetings						
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3			
Party (ref = CD&V)	**	**	***			
Groen	1,301	1,131	1,048			
N-VA	,829	,666*	,541**			
OpenVLD	1,328	1,436	1,428			
Age (ref = above 65)	**	**	**			
Below 35 years	1,399	1,669*	1,804*			
35-65 years	1,684***	1,799**	1,943***			
Education (ref = univ)	***	***	***			
Primary	,277***	,330*	,368*			
Lower secondary	,239***	,285***	,352***			
Higher secondary	,349***	,321***	,380***			
Higher non-university	,760*	,751	,849			
Sex	,571***	,713*	,902			
Function local party		22,729***	18,997***			
Political interest			1,428***			
Constant	,463	,151	,007			
R ²	0,10	0,42	0,44			

*** p < 0.001 ; ** p < 0.01 ; * p < 0.05

All Models 1 in Table 5 again show that female party members are less active than men, and this effect comes forward consistently for all three kinds of activities related to influencing a

party's policy. Moreover, the effect is very outspoken: the odds for women to participate to this kind of activities is with 0.622, 0.608 and 0.571 much lower than the odds for men, but also lower than the odds for participating to activities related to selecting personnel (0.787 and 0.811, as has been shown in Models 1 in Table 4).

Contrary to the analyses for activities about selection of personnel, the significant effect of sex does not disappear when the function in the local party is entered to the model (except for being a candidate where sex is only marginally non-significant, see Models 2 in Table 5). This means that the effect of gender cannot simply be explained by the fact that women occupy fewer formal positions in the (local) party. Only when political interest is introduced, sex is no longer a significant predictor for activity rate to policy-oriented activities. This means that differences between male and female party members in activity rate cannot be attributed to the fact that fewer formal party functions are taken up by women. These demand-side explanations need to be complemented by differences in motivation in order to explain more fully the variance in participation rates between men and women.

It is further striking that education has a large impact for the activities at stake here. Table 5 shows that people with a degree of higher education are more likely to participate in all three activities of policy influencing compared to party members with a degree of secondary education or lower. Finally, younger people are more active in this kind of activities, compared to older party members. This constitutes also a difference compared with leadership and candidate selection activities.

6. Conclusions

The political participation and representation of women has been high on the agenda of researchers and politicians for several decades now. Earlier studies have demonstrated that despite having made some progress, women continue to be underrepresented in parliaments, governments and in parties, especially in the higher ranks of these institutions, but also among the rank and file. Given the fact the parties fulfil a number of crucial functions, the underrepresentation of party members could have far-reaching consequences.

Parties have taken the initiative to grant grassroots party members more opportunities to participate. The formal role of this kind of members has increased in a.o. leadership selection, participation to party conferences, and in the composition of candidate lists. These participation activities inside parties provide a unique opportunity for members (and especially also for female party members) to influence a party's decision-making. Since no conditions are set for participation, demand-side factors causing participation bias seem less relevant at first sight. And female party members have already overcome a number of participation barriers by becoming member rendering the effect of these barriers less pertinent for activities in parties. As such, it could be expected that by being very active in party activities, women could compensate for their limited presence among party members and in the party elite. The alternative hypothesis was that women are less likely to participate since the same barriers for becoming party member hinder them in participating in these party activities.

Based on the analysis that we ran on a dataset from a broad-scale survey among party members in four Flemish parties, we can confirm to a large extent the second hypothesis. Women are clearly less likely than men to participate in activities that select party leaders and candidates, and in activities aimed at influencing a party's policy and strategy. Only for party activities that serve to mobilize and inform voters, women are on equal footing as men. It might be disappointing to see that women's participation is high in the kind of activities that have only an impact in the long run.

Apparently, participation barriers are not completely removed when becoming party member, but continue to have an impact even on the participation within parties, especially in activities aimed to select political personnel and to influence a party's policy and strategy. From our explanatory analyses, it came forward that gender differences could not be attributed to a difference in resources (level of education for instance). But the fact that fewer women occupy a formal position in the local party (demand factor) and especially the lower levels of political interest of female party members (motivation as a supply factor) could be held accountable for the lower activity rate of female members.

As such, participation procedures in political parties reproduce gender inequalities also found in other participation activities, rather than providing an alternative outlet with fewer

barriers for women. These findings could be related to the so-called participation paradox : by organizing additional participation opportunities, parties broaden further the inequalities between men and women, as demonstrated by our results. These new opportunities are to a larger extent used by men, and therefore confirm and even deepen participation inequalities.

List of references

- Barnea, S. and Rahat, G. (2007) Reforming candidate selection methods. A three-level approach. *Party Politics* 13(3): 375-395.
- Bashevkin, S. (2010). When do outsiders break in? Institutional circumstances of party leadership victories by women in Canada, *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 48, 72-90.
- Blais, A. (2006). What affects voter turnout? *Annual Review of Political Science*, 9(1), 111-125
- Bovens, M., & Wille, A. (2010). The education gap in participation and its political consequences. *Acta Politica*, 45(4), 393-422.
- Celis, K., & Wauters, B. (2010). Pinning the Butterfly: Women, Blue-Collar and Ethnic Minority MPs vis-à-vis Parliamentary Norms and the Parliamentary Role of the Group Representative. *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 16(3), 380-393
- Cross, W., & Blais, A. (2012). Who selects the party leader? *Party Politics*, 18(2), 127-150
- Depauw, S. & S. Martin (2008). Legislative party discipline and cohesion in comparative perspective. In Benoit, K. & D. Gianetti (ed). *Intra-party politics and coalition governments*. London: Routledge.
- Dilman, D. (1978). *Mail and Telephone Surveys: the Total Design Method*. New York: Wiley.
- Gimpel, J.G., Lay, J.C. & Schuknecht, J.E. (2003). *Cultivating Democracy: Civic Environments and Political Socialization in America*. Washington DC: The Brookings Institution.
- Hartman, I. (1998) De andere kant van politieke participatie: Kanttekeningen bij de huidige democratisering van bovenaf. *Vorming* 14(1): 7-18
- Krook, M. L., & O'Brien, D. Z. (2012). All the President's Men? The Appointment of Female Cabinet Ministers Worldwide. *The Journal of Politics*, 74(03), 840-855.
- Krook, M. L., & Norris, P. (2014). Beyond Quotas: Strategies to Promote Gender Equality in Elected Office. *Political Studies*, 62(1), 2-20
- Luther, K. & Müller-Rommel, F. (eds.) (2005). *Political parties in the New Europe. Political and analytical challenges*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Merolla, J. L., Stephenson, L. B., & Zechmeister, E. J. (2008). Can Canadians Take a Hint? The (In)Effectiveness of Party Labels as Information Shortcuts in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique*, 41(03), 673-696
- Norris, P. and Lovenduski, J. (1995) *Political Recruitment: Gender, Race and Class in the British Parliament*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Paxton, P., Kunovich, S., & Hughes, M. M. (2007). Gender in Politics. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 33(1), 263-284
- O'Brien, D. Z. (2015). Rising to the Top: Gender, Political Performance, and Party Leadership in Parliamentary Democracies. *American Journal of Political Science*, doi: 10.1111/ajps.12173

O'Neill, Brenda K. & Stewart, David K. 2009. "Gender and political party leadership in Canada," *Party Politics* 15, pp. 737-757.

Scarrow, S. E., & Gezgor, B. (2010). Declining memberships, changing members? European political party members in a new era. *Party Politics*, 16(6), 823-843

Van Biezen, I., Mair, P., & Poguntke, T. (2012). Going, going, . . . gone? The decline of party membership in contemporary Europe. *European Journal of Political Research*, 51(1), 24-56

Wauters, B. (2010). Explaining participation in intra-party elections. Evidence from Belgian Political Parties. *Party Politics*, 16(2), 237-259.

Wauters, B. (2014). Democratising Party Leadership Selection in Belgium: Motivations and Decision Makers. *Political Studies*, 62(S1), 61-80.

Wauters, B., & Pilet, J.-B. (2015). The selection of female party leaders. Does the selectorate make a difference? In W. Cross & J.-B. Pilet (Eds.), *The Politics of Party Leadership: A Cross-National Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.