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The impact of the personalization by gender on the electoral volatility

The Belgian elections of 2014

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La mémorante,  
Larissa Hendrickx



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Through the 20th century and the period of industrialization, the social organization shifted into a formerly unseen neo-liberal structure of State in all western countries<sup>1</sup> tied to a new way of behaviours for both voters and candidates. Formerly, in Western societies, socio-economic cleavages structured the content of political and electoral discourses, and thereby partisan voting choice<sup>2</sup> while the differences between competing social groups provided the framework for political competition. As underlined by Lipset and Rokkan in their theoretical model, at the roots of European party systems, parties embodied every social strata's articulated around four types of cleavages<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, these were expected to remain *frozen*<sup>4</sup>, it provided a high partisanship and thus a stable voting behaviour. The religious strength provided the other basis for social division in Western societies. For instance, in Belgium, the process of pillarization offered a strong basement for the whole cultural, political and economic organisation. Undeniably, political parties often took position according to specific religious interests, which influenced the electoral choice of citizens in regard of their own beliefs. Yet, regarding the present electoral setting, a strong evolution can be noticed in comparison to the previous elections. The model established by Lipset and Rokkan has been challenged since the position of the voters on the socio-economic scale is increasingly less important as a determinant of the voting behavior. These two traditional forms of social cleavages were disrupted by the modernization<sup>5</sup> which encouraged the development of a new way of behave for both candidates and voters. On one side, citizens witnessed a decline of traditional partisanship, and started to pay increasingly attention to candidates' personal criteria's they used as short-term cues. To take profit of the disrupted new hectic and unstable frame, and to answer to this new political demand, parties began to develop new strategies to push personal dimension of candidates forward at the expense of the party's outlines in order to keep a strong

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<sup>1</sup> Hammer, R., and Kellner, D., Third-Wave Feminism, Sexualities, and the Adventures of the Posts in *Women, feminism, and femininity in the 21st century: American and French perspectives*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2009, pp. 219-234.

<sup>2</sup> Lijphart A., *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration.*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977, 268 pages

<sup>3</sup> National/regional, church/secularism, workers/owners and primary vs secondary economy

<sup>4</sup> Lipset S., Rokkan S., *Party systems and voter alignments: cross-national perspectives*, New York: Free Press, 1967, 554 pages

<sup>5</sup> Dalton R., Political cleavages, issues, and electoral change. *Comparing Democracies: Elections and voting in global perspective*, Vol. 2, 1996, pp. 319-422.

support from their electorate. Thus, the unseen volatile feature, far from the long-term loyalty of previous generation, entailed the personalization of politics as a new cue in electoral analysis.

Current literature about the changing features of politics in advanced industrial democracies emphasizes that so-called personalization as one of the key developments<sup>6</sup> in this new era. This evolution of frozen cleavages was first explained by the convergence of parties about socio-economic issues as well as the general trend to promote the *Welfare State* after the Second World War. With smaller class-related differences due to new social policies, it's quite logical that class would become a less important factor to determine the vote. However, it cannot be the sole explanation because social and political splits have not ended anymore, and there are still topics to fuel traditional cleavages and influence the way of voting. Subsequently, one other dimension of the new voting behavior concerns the mediatic expansion that hit the Western Societies at the end of the 20th century and its consequence on parties' strategies. Many of the changes that have been observed in the role of political leaders in western democracies have been driven by the growing place of media, and especially the television, during the 1950s and 1960s<sup>7</sup>. It allowed the *mass* and lower social groups of the society to be exposed on direct contact with the officials during over-mediated campaigns. In this period, the media became – and still is – the dominant channel of political propaganda, and fueled the willingness of voters to be influenced by personal factors, such as an individual or an issue. According to Swanson and Mancini, the key consequence of the technological change is known as the individualization of politics<sup>8</sup>; politicians have, since many years, gained in visibility and are currently most the central protagonists during the electoral period<sup>9</sup>. A third structural change entailed the alleged transformation. With the modern liberal settlement arose new debates about the equality between men and women. Indeed, the new global labour market involved a social construction, free from the traditional and patriarchal ties, toward one in which

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<sup>6</sup> Franklin M., Mackie T., Valen H., *Electoral change: Responses to evolving social and attitudinal structures in western countries*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 489 pages.

<sup>7</sup> McAllister I., *The personalization of politics*, in *The Oxford handbook of political behavior*, 2007, pp. 571-588.

<sup>8</sup> Swanson D., Mancini P., *Politics, Media, and Modern Democracy: An International Study of Innovations in Electoral Campaigning and Their Consequences*, Greenwood: Preager Publishers, 1996, 288 pages.

<sup>9</sup> Dalton R., Wattenberg W., *Parties without partisans: Political change in advanced industrial democracies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 330 pages.

women were strongly expected to play a pivotal role<sup>10</sup>. Accordingly, women obtained the opportunity to emancipate, to prove their capacities and to fight for their political and social rights. This evolution which took place in the social and economic spheres after the two World Wars was paired to an unseen progress in terms of women's representation in the political sphere. Indeed, the gendered bivalence was previously totally inexistent and with the participation of women in politics, a whole new gender-dimension outstretched and disrupted the electoral frame.

In other words, from the invisible intervention of women in politics to the new social and mediatic setting as well as the declining influence of political parties at the expense of other key-actors and individuals, the prior persistent electoral frame is now totally disrupted. The decline of trustworthiness to the parties fueled – and to this day – the personalization based on personal criterions provided by candidates and used by voters. Thereupon, academics assume that the political activity of people, as all other activities, take place in a certain “*mood*” linked to specific values and patterns, but always dyed by decreasing stability<sup>11</sup>. The voting takes place shaped by a set of beliefs linked to a specific context; by being exposed to the fluctuation in time, it could rationally make the choice of voters change from one election to another<sup>12</sup>. As summarized by Bernard Manin, the increasing trend to vote for a person and no longer for a party makes voting looking differently from one election to another, depending on the persons competing for their candidature and the dominant issue highlighted during the electoral period<sup>13</sup>. Initially, this paper aims to investigate the connection between the personalization and the electoral volatility in Belgium. Nevertheless, and here is the real interest of this paper, the personalization of politics isn't a one-dimension pattern, but can be constructed on a variety of personal determinants, from different nature. Keeping in mind the huge improvement in the sector of gender equality, the one on which this study would focus concerns the gendered dimension, and investigate if the gender can, in any way, influence the way of behave and the propensity of being volatile in the electoral choice. Indeed, as already underlined, the revolutionary evolution of women's capacities in politics has raised a range of new questions and

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<sup>10</sup> Ringrose, J., and Walkerdine, V., Regulating the abject: The TV make-over as site of neo-liberal reinvention toward bourgeois femininity. *Feminist media studies*, Vol. 8, No.3, 2008, pp. 227-246

<sup>11</sup> Singh Negi M. M., Theoric aspects of electoral behaviour *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 66, No. 1, 2005, pp. 95-104

<sup>12</sup> Manin B., *Principes du gouvernement représentatif*, Paris : Calmann-Lévy, 1995, 319 pages.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

thanks to these progresses; politics isn't currently male-dominated anymore. In the contrary, the electorate has now a choice between men and women since the gender has become be a criterion of choice. The analysis would thus tarry the motivations of a personalized vote, by focusing on the gender dimension, and study its impact on volatility for the elections of 2014 in Belgium. The research will be organized after the following structure: First, a research statement would be settled in order to give a general outlook of the advancement of the topic in the international literature – what has already been done and what needs to be achieved. Next, a short glance to the concepts of personalization, volatility and gender would take place before a methodological point about both mixed-method and case study. Finally, the research Project *PartiRep* paired to a set of semi- structured interviews would be explored to bring to light the gender dimension in the triangular relation with the personalization and the electoral volatility.

## 2. RESEARCH'S STATEMENT

### 2.1 PETER SÖDERLUND

At the origin of this research stands the relation between the personalization and the electoral volatility, which doesn't need to be proven anymore. Existing international literature focusing on the new electoral behavior are quite clear: It does exist a bound between volatility and personalization. One of these researches has been handled by Peter Söderlund between 2007 and 2011. Using Finland as his case of study, Söderlund classifies all measures which can potentially determine the candidate-centered reasoning and the impact of the so-called personalized behavior on electoral volatility<sup>14</sup>. Basically, the idea of the personal vote is defined as “*when candidate choice is independent of party affiliation (including the performance of the party and party leader) or any other external factor*”<sup>15</sup>. Thus, the personal vote take solely roots on a candidate's personal reputation and characteristics instead of the party's collective reputation while none legal compulsory context urges voters to support a candidate or a party. On the contrary, the behavioral model is built freely by both candidate and voters. Elections are truly candidate-centered if the political supply is constructed on individual reputations during campaign periods to attract personal votes from the electorate. If runners invest in personal campaigns to promote themselves at the district level, voters are likely to respond by focusing on the candidates' personal qualities. From the electorate's side, the propensity to follow such a reasoning depends on different standards' – one of the most important being the level of *political sophistication*<sup>16</sup>. The notion of sophistication encompasses individual political analysis, rate of interest, and how people behave toward politics: Do they have a deep understanding and broaden knowledge's of the electoral setting? Do they take into consideration solely short-term cues and preconceived ideas? Are they expected to remain stable and loyal to a party – or not? As seen in the *Figure 1*, Söderlund constructs four profiles and connects this alleged sophistication with the inclination to be volatile. Highly informed voters,

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<sup>14</sup> Söderlund P., *Candidate-centered evaluations and party switching: Evidence from the Finnish preferential voting system*, Åbo Akademi University

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Neuman (1986) suggests a definition of political sophistication resting on three factors: “political salience” (based on individual interest, attentiveness, and involvement), “political knowledge” (based on factual knowledge items) and “political conceptualization” (largely based on the ability to integrate political concepts).

labelled as *politically sophisticated*, have stable attitudes and party preferences; these have interest in politics, and accept persuasive messages which come from politicians but refuse messages that are conflicting with their beliefs and predispositions<sup>17</sup>. Inversely, *moderately informed voters* are expected to be more aware of short-term stimulus such as persuasion in political campaigns or personal characteristics of representatives and are consequently potentially more volatile in terms of voting behavior<sup>18</sup>. The very least sophisticated voters for whom the party is more important are likely to be stable because they are not exposed to new information and persuasive messages. In contrary, low-sophisticated voters supporting a candidate are high volatile because of the changing political offer through times.

		Object of electoral support	
		Party very important	Candidate very important
Information level of candidate traits and evaluation	High	Very certain/stable	Moderately certain/important
	Moderate/Low	Moderately certain/stable	Uncertain and volatile

Figure 1, The information level of voters and the object of electoral support  
Söderlund P., 2007

To continue, the *Figure 2* draws attention to the relation between personalization and volatility and displays that in 2007 and 2011 voters who voted after a candidate-centered analysis were more volatile than party-centered voters. Findings from the *Figure 2* clearly indicate the positive correlation between the inclination to vote for a party and a stable conduct. Participants for whom the candidate is more important are nearly the double of party-switcher in 2007 and 2011 with respectively the scores of 30 and 39 surveyed while the ratio of voters who were volatile but in favor of a party is merely about 17 and 25. In addition, this table confirms the strong evolution of the

<sup>17</sup> Söderlund P., *Candidate-centered evaluations and party switching: Evidence from the Finnish preferential voting system*, Åbo Akademi University

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

volatility with the drop of stable electors from 72 in 2007 to 57 in 2011. Similarly, the ratio of party-switcher has known a rise of 10%.

		2007			2011		
		More important for vote choice			More important for vote choice		
		Party	Candidate	Total	Party	Candidate	Total
Volatile voting behaviour	Loyal to a party	79	64	72%	63	48	57%
	Party-switcher	17	30	21%	25	39	31%
	Mobilized voter	4	7	5%	13	12	12%
	<b>Total (N)</b>	100% (542)	100% (447)	100% (989)	101% 564	99% (394)	100% (958)

Figure 2, Personalization and volatility relation: Finland (2007 and 2011)  
Söderlund P., 2007

In his conclusions, Söderlund supports two assumptions. First, voters who regard candidates as the key-competitor are more volatile and uncertain, and secondly, the link between personalization and volatility is now clearly defined as well as the rising in time of the electoral volatility phenomenon. According to Söderlund, with the declining importance of party, and increasing personalization of electoral choice, voters have become increasingly likely to emphasize personal attributes of individual candidates. Without surprise, Finland knows the same trend than other advanced industrial western democracies. Due to the weakening in cleavages and party identification, voters were – and still are – open to more alternatives and are likely to switch parties simply because they are less restrained by a sense of partisanship<sup>19</sup>. In summarize, findings confirms that the ties between voters and parties have weakened over the recent decades, while more and more Finnish voters support an individual and pay attention to the party list as second choice.

## 2.2 PARTIREP RESEARCH PROJECT

A second research participated to the statement of knowledge relative to the electoral behavior and the impact of the personalization on the volatility. *Décrypter*

<sup>19</sup> Söderlund P., *Candidate-centered evaluations and party switching: Evidence from the Finnish preferential voting system*, Åbo Akademi University

*l'électeur Le comportement électoral et les motivations de vote* (2015) have been launched by several Belgian academics in the frame of the *PartiRep Project*, in order to deliver a general statement of the electoral behavior and motivations of vote in Belgium. Contrary to manifold researches about the voting choice and the volatility between political parties, the dimension of the candidate-centered choice has been more deeply treated. According to researchers, during the latest elections of 2014 more than the half of the Belgian population casted a candidate-focused vote instead of respecting the electoral order imposed by the political party<sup>20</sup>. Starting from this empirical finding, researchers support the assumption that voters are submitted to different sources of candidate-centered motivation which influence them to cast a prudential vote. Data have been grouped in the 10-dimensions table below. This survey presents some methodological strengths: open questions have been asked to voters about their motivation to vote. Through this spontaneous collection of data which isn't established according to a list determined by academics, people have provided answers in a predetermined order.

The table below embodies what sub-ideas lay behind the personalization and establish the range of motivations which induce a candidate-centered vote. One elector out of four has justified the personalized strategy by standings taken by candidates on specific issues. This latter is also the most mentioned reason to cast a personalized choice with 16.5% of the cumulated answer. With 11.4%, one elector out of 9 has voted for a candidate because of the social identity. For voters who share a same social identity with the candidate, the latter is expected to represent the social group once elected. Definitely, the item includes individual's characteristics like a specific ethnicity, socio-economic group, religious beliefs, ... The question of gender can also be found in the item *identité de groupe*. Gender as a group and a root for identity, some would vote for a candidate because she is a woman, and *vice versa*<sup>21</sup>. Moreover, one elector out of five has supported a candidate with a "*local anchor*". Generally, the candidate is from the same geographical area than the voter and has already been in political assemblies. The candidate is thus expected to have strong understanding of local concerns and the key to solve them. 24.8% of participant expressed the "*direct contact*" with the candidate as a

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<sup>20</sup> Deschouwer K., Delwit P., Hooghe M., Baudewyns P., Walgrave S., *Décrypter l'électeur, Le comportement électoral et les motivations de vote*, Louvain : LannooCampus, 2015, 336 pages.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

motivation to ballot a personal vote. The candidate may be a neighbor, a friend, a family member, etc, but the direct contact stays at the second position of the most mentioned motivations with 15.9%. Nevertheless it exists an amount of other motivations: the indirect contact, the integrity, the personality or the competencies and the leadership. The 5% left haven't been saved, because of categories.

	Given motivations*	Respondants
Standing on position	16.5 %	25.7 %
Group identity	7.3 %	11.4 %
Local anchor	12.3 %	19.1 %
Direct contact with the candidate	15.9 %	24.8 %
Indirect contact with the candidate	9.2 %	14.3 %
Integrity	6.3 %	9.8 %
Personality	6.6 %	10.3 %
Capability	9.2 %	14.3 %
Leadership	5.8 %	9.0 %
Others	3.5 %	5.5 %
Don't know	7.2 %	11.3 %
Total (N)	967	622
<b>* all answers cumulated</b>		

Figure 3, Motivations of personalized vote in Belgium (2014)  
Deschouwer K., Delwit P., Hooghe M., Baudewyns P. , Walgrave S. , 2015

The initial gain from such a project is to define and classify the large scope of potential motivations of personalization. Firstly, the research scheme confirms that the personalization fit with the Belgian model case Further, the *PartiRep Project's* biggest benefit is to include the gender dimension in the personalization – even if it's in an indirect way. Thanks to its analysis, gender is, for the first time, labelled as a source of motivation to cast a personal vote despite isn't clearly studied as a separate category. Then the gendered aspect of the personalization stays no clearly unidentified.

### 2.3 WEAKNESSES OF THE EXISTING LITERATURE ABOUT VOLATILITY, PERSONALIZATION AND GENDER IN BELGIUM

Thanks to the strong empirical findings of the international literature, the assumption that it exists a growing propensity of the personalization in the voting behavior, correlated to a higher volatility is now confirmed. Moreover, the Belgian research has made emerged that the gender takes part in the process of the personalization. However, even if these two researches enlarge knowledge's, they also remain incompletes on some points and need to be completed to really tackle the investigated matter.

In the paper of Peter Söderlund, findings are reported in the case of Finland, different from Belgium in several points. Finland has a presidential system, constituted of 2-tours majoritarian for presidential elections and a proportional system for legislative ones<sup>22</sup>. Theoretically, the organizational dimension could have an impact on the way people behave towards elections<sup>23</sup>. Finland being definitely far from the Belgian proportional system coupled to a federal structure, such a difference acts as a limit in the frame of this precise study but raise question about the Belgian case. *Is the impact of the personalization on volatility equal in Belgium?* Finland also differs from Belgium in term of representation. The Nordic neighbour witnesses almost an equality between women and men in assemblies, while the Belgian assembly experience difficulties to overtake a representation of 40% of women. One last variance concerns the Belgian quotas policies implemented to tackle the imbalance of female representation, which doesn't exist in Finland. Finally, and here's the biggest gap in the current international literature, Söderlund doesn't deal with the gender dimension of the personalization and leaves blurred the significance of the gender in the candidate-centered motivations.

Whereas *Partirep "Décrypter l'électeur"* research has the advantage to fit with the temporal and geographical frames of the present investigation, results about the different motivations of voters stay limited. Indeed, the political psychology emphasizes that the electorate vote because of multiple motivations which are supposed to be ranked. In other words, between all criteria's that influences the way of voting, one is expected to be more predominant and take the advantage over others. Yet, *PartiRep* encompasses all motivations of a preferential vote at the aggregate level, without giving

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<sup>22</sup> Website of the European Union. Elections in Finland. Available online: <http://elections-en-europe.net/institutions/elections-en-finlande/> [accessed 23 of May 2017]

<sup>23</sup> Shugart, M., Wattenberg, M. P., *Mixed-member electoral systems: The best of both worlds?*, Oxford: Comparative Politics, OUP Oxford, 2001, 661 pages

the exact hierarchical weight of each motivation and their rank. This subtlety lacks in the Belgian research: the effective amount of the particular gender dimension, and its impact on the volatility stay too vague. Finally, the dimension “*identité de groupe*” stressed in the *Figure 3* supposes that voters and candidates share the same social groups. However, given that the notion of social group may be enlarged to different dimensions such as the gender, the ethnicity or the religious commitment and to a greater extent, the socio-economic scale, the label “*identité de groupe*” lack an accuracy and cannot be useful to analyse the detailed gender dimension of personalization. As a result, the impact of the personalization by gender on the electoral volatility is currently an unexplored academic field. The paper is consequently groundbreaking and original by its subject but also by its methodology process.

With regard to the existing gap in the literature, this research seeks to discuss findings from previous quantitative research’s thanks first-hand testimonies from semi-directed interviews with selected witnesses. In addition to the reconsideration of previous exploration, the study is also original by its method: the quantitative descriptive analysis, paired to the qualitative explanative analysis allows to catch the roots of the phenomenon, its potential evolution and to provide new gain to the international literature. Finally, these new evidences might be used to deal with the Belgian issue regarding the rate of female politicians elected. Since the elaboration of the first policy *the “zip law”*, in 1994 until its enforcement in 2012 the issue of female representation in politics stay touchy and in spite of some progress, Belgium records a low results of elected women. Therefore, this research can rise prospects of a new solution and may be used to discuss the real effectiveness of Belgian quotas. Taking into account the advances in prior academic literature, it occurs that the impact of the personalization with the voting volatility is strongly confirmed, although the gender factor is still a missing dimension. As a new approach of this common issue, this research aspires to bring light to the question: *What is the impact of the personalization by the gender on the volatile voting behavior in Belgium?*



### 3. THEORETICAL STATEMENT

Before responding to the research question, a short theoretical statement is necessary to raise understanding about the three main concepts upon which this paper is based: the personalization of politics, the electoral volatility and the gender representation in politics.

#### 3.1 ELECTORAL VOLATILITY

##### 3.1.1 SOURCE: THE DECLINE OF PARTIES' MONOPOLY AND PARTISANSHIP

The electoral volatility *is* defined as “*the net change within the electoral party system resulting from the transfer of individual votes*”<sup>24</sup>. According to academics, the volatile electoral demands of citizens takes its source in the decreasing level of party identification subsequent to the rising of both new actors as of the non-effectiveness of parties. Fundamentally, strong bonds with the population ensure a party stable electorate bases<sup>25</sup>. To analyze the sharply rise of the electoral volatility in western societies, let's first define the expected role of political parties.

##### *a) Expected prerogatives of political parties...*

First of all, a political party simplifies the choice of voters<sup>26</sup>. If politics can often be perceived as complex by citizens, parties may be useful for those who have it hard to make a sense of all the issues they have to face. Hence, a high level of party identification can be an economizing device for voters facing obscured political decisions<sup>27</sup>. Secondly, a party's role is to educate citizens by delivering important political information and thereby highlighting their specific position on issues<sup>28</sup>. Thirdly, parties ought to fit the need of voters to have *a political anchor*. By generating symbols of identification, they create benchmark and offer citizens a guidance among

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<sup>24</sup> Pedersen M., The Dynamics of European Party Systems: Changing Patterns of Electoral Volatility, *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 7, No 1, 1979, pp. 1-26

<sup>25</sup> Dalton R., Wattenberg W., *Parties without partisans: Political change in advanced industrial democracies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 330 pages.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

all issues<sup>29</sup>. In conclusion, parties are expected to mobilize people to participate. Indeed, high party identification urged people to be enrolled into the electoral process and to get involved in the campaign<sup>30</sup>.

b) ... *weakened by numerous sources*

Consequently, the better a party fulfills its obligations, the higher is the party's identification and the fewer its electoral volatility. However, according to Peter Söderlund, in the past few decades, many countries in Western Europe have witnessed a decline in *conventional political participation*<sup>31</sup> and party identification. This questioning of the monopoly of parties is considered as the trigger point of electoral volatility<sup>32</sup> and knows manifold sources.

To begin with, the development of new types of relay between citizens and the political world has deflated the key role of parties. Mass Medias assume now many of former function that parties controlled<sup>33</sup> by becoming – among other – the principal source of information through over-mediatised campaigns. Consequently, media are now detaining the role in providing evidences and cues to guide voting decisions of citizens.

Moreover, the formation of groups of interests has challenged the expecting domination of parties in representation of interests and decision making-power<sup>34</sup>. This current and increasing trend of “*movement*” gives the floor to a wave of non-political groups and lobbies, which stand on interests and defend their profits without relying on partisan's channels. At this time, these are more and more independents and equal to political actors into voter's representation<sup>35</sup>; *de facto*, instead of being a help for parties, they are seen as opponent. To summarize, as media have stolen the role of parties in delivering political information's, interest groups and lobbies have replaced political parties in representing public interests.

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<sup>29</sup> Converse, P-E., Information Flow and the Stability of Partisan Attitudes, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No 4, 1962, pp. 578–599.

<sup>30</sup> Rosenstone, S., Hansen, J. M., *Mobilization, participation and democracy in America*, Londres: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1993, 333 pages

<sup>31</sup> Söderlund P., Retrospective Voting and Electoral Volatility: A Nordic Perspective, *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2008, pp. 217–240

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Dalton R., Political cleavages, issues, and electoral change, *Comparing Democracies: Elections and voting in global perspective*, Vol. 2, 1996, pp. 319-42.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*

Additionally, the increasing volatility also results from the growing educational level of citizens who have, thanks to technologies and available source of information's', developed deeper political and cognitive resources<sup>36</sup>. Once again, the media coverage hold a key role: it has driven – and still help – the citizens to develop a more critical way of thinking<sup>37</sup>. Naturally, with more information available and a higher educated electorate than in the past, people are less likely to count on parties to cast a vote, or, more simply, to express loyalty to a party<sup>38</sup>. To Dalton “*with cognitive mobilization, voters possess now the skills and resources necessary to become politically engaged, are able to deal with the complexities of politics*”<sup>39</sup>; political parties have lost their key role of “political facilitators” to complex issues, instead, people prefer questioning elites or resorting to non-partisan forms of political expression<sup>40</sup>.

Furthermore, the changing of social structure of advanced industrial societies was also depicted as a source further weakening the party. According to Inglehart, “*advanced industrialism has been linked to the emergence of a new middle class of salaried white-collar employees and government workers, which differs from the old middle class of business owners and self-employed*”<sup>41</sup>. In comparison to previous time, the new middle-class embraces a highly-educated and technological elite whose background make them well suited to a higher political sophistication. In this way, cognitive mobilization may be seen as a stable characteristic, rivaling the stability of party attachments and translate into the emergence of increasingly uncertain electorates<sup>42</sup>. As an effect, the higher levels of cognitive mobilization lead incidentally to more direct actions - citizen action

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<sup>36</sup> Inglehart, R., *Culture shift in advanced industrial society*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990, 504 pages.

<sup>37</sup> Bennett L., The Personalization of Politics: Political Identity, Social Media, and Changing Patterns of Participation, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 644, No. 1, 2012, pp. 20-39.

<sup>38</sup> Bennett L., The Personalization of Politics: Political Identity, Social Media, and Changing Patterns of Participation, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 644, No. 1, 2012, pp. 20-39.

<sup>39</sup> Dalton R., Wattenberg W., *Parties without partisans: Political change in advanced industrial democracies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 330 pages.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Inglehart, R., *The silent revolution: Changing values and political styles among Western publics*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977

<sup>42</sup> Dalton R., Wattenberg W., *Parties without partisans: Political change in advanced industrial democracies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 330 pages.

movements, neighborhood associations, single issue groups, and finally protest behavior<sup>43</sup>.

The final foundation of the new cognitive mobilization of citizen concerns the changing values which occurred during last decades<sup>44</sup>. Socioeconomic trends of industrialism have given way to post-material values and a rising awareness to post-material issues<sup>45</sup> as well as a political independence from elite-controlled hierarchical organizations<sup>46</sup>. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, frozen socio-economic cleavages were producing a stable system of party competition<sup>47</sup>, but by the end of the 1970s, mobility that characterizes the current post-industrial society weakened the bond between citizens and community and led to the erosion of group-based politics. However, in addition to the development of new post-industrial areas of concerns, this new reality has observed the inability of traditional parties to deal with issues and problems of contemporary society. These post-material issues cut across standing partisan positions while they were too slowly integrated into party's recommendations: "*confronting the issues of environmental quality, resource shortages, and the economic crises of the welfare state have caused severe restrictions on industrial democracies and parties.*"<sup>48</sup>.

Nevertheless, this idea of a growing volatility doesn't reach a mutual understanding among academics. The social environment can potentially weaken the inclination of people of being volatile<sup>49</sup> through, for example, "*an organizational encapsulation, group solidarity and the relative political homogeneity (in terms of party preferences) of the social environment*"<sup>50</sup>. But despite arguing about its intensity, the international literature converges into the conclusion that crisis in party identification and

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<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Inglehart, R., *The silent revolution: Changing values and political styles among Western publics*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977

<sup>45</sup> Inglehart, R., *The silent revolution: Changing values and political styles among Western publics*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977

<sup>46</sup> Dalton R., Wattenberg W., *Parties without partisans: Political change in advanced industrial democracies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 330 pages.

<sup>47</sup> Lipset S., Rokkan S., *Party systems and voter alignments: cross-national perspectives*, New York: Free Press, 1967, 554 p.

<sup>48</sup> Dalton R., Wattenberg W., *Parties without partisans: Political change in advanced industrial democracies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 330 pages.

<sup>49</sup> Lipset S., Rokkan S., *Party systems and voter alignments: cross-national perspectives*, New York: Free Press, 1967, 554 p.

<sup>50</sup> Knutsen O., Scarbrough E., 'Cleavage Politics', in J. van Deth and E. Scarbrough (eds), *The Impact of Values*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 492-523.

partisanship is a general trend in Western democracies<sup>51</sup>. The volatile political demand rooted in these mutations blurred the stable party support, while in the same time causing one key consequence in the electoral behavioural change of citizens namely the personalization of voting.

### 3.2 PERSONALIZATION OF POLITICS

The personalization of politics is an actual way of reasoning, resulting from the volatility. While the latter exceed the ability of parties to perform<sup>52</sup>, these adapt their political supply and the set-up of personalized strategies to make citizens less volatile<sup>53</sup>. The personalization doesn't know a consensus in its definition although the general idea emphasizes a psychological behavior related to a cognitive distortion in the voting behavior where the voter considers individual political actors as more prominent at the expense of the parties and collective identities. The so-called psychological distortion is also depicted as the source of the personal vote, "*that portion of a candidate's electoral support which originates in his or her personal qualities, qualifications, activities, and record*"<sup>54</sup>. The concept of personalization has already been dealt with by sociologists focusing on the primitive societies. Researchers examined the need of the Human Being to have the authority translated in one and unique person<sup>55</sup>. Undeniably, the trend of political personalization has known an expansion since the First World War, whose symptoms hit its higher stage with the fall of the democracy and the rising of authoritarian regimes. In current times, this comportment has fallen to a less extreme level but still fits perfectly with, for example, the habits for governments to be named after their leader rather than after its parties. Although personalization seems to be a consensus, it remains multi-dimensional.

#### 3.2.1 ELEMENTS OF THE PERSONALIZATION

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<sup>51</sup> Söderlund P., Retrospective Voting and Electoral Volatility: A Nordic Perspective , *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2008, pp. 217–240

<sup>52</sup> Crozier M., Huntington S., Watanuki, J., *The crisis of democracy*, New York: New York university press, 1975, 227 pages.

<sup>53</sup> Deschouwer K., Delwit P., Hooghe M., Baudewyns P. , Walgrave S. , *Décrypter l'électeur, Le comportement électoral et les motivations de vote*, Louvain : LannooCampus, 2015, 336 pages.

<sup>54</sup> Söderlund P., Retrospective Voting and Electoral Volatility: A Nordic Perspective , *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2008, pp. 217–240

<sup>55</sup> Mabileau A., La personnalisation du Pouvoir dans les gouvernements démocratiques, *Revue française de science politique*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1960. pp. 39-65.

In the social-psychological model of voting, the three main information categories on what voters evaluate running candidates are the party affiliation, the issue positions and the personal traits<sup>56</sup>. Those are based on several characteristics to influence a centered-candidate strategy. The first dimension is an electoral campaign and media coverage increasingly attentive to individual candidates, as well as the perception of a competition between individuals rather than between political parties. Secondly, the voting calculation should be founded more on candidate evaluations than on party evaluations. Finally, the personalization of politics emphasizes the candidate traits and image as a decisive motivation for the election outcomes<sup>57</sup>.

### 3.2.2 INDIVIDUALIZATION AND PRIVATIZATION

Established literature makes the basic distinction between personalization at the expense of the parties and personalization as the shifting boundaries between public and private parts of the politician's life. In its first form – named individualization – individual politicians are more dominant in media coverage, while parties and government institutions become less relevant. In this setting, the political system is presented just as the battlefield of individual actors. The second form of personalization, termed privatization, refers to the growing importance of the politician as ordinary person “*no longer presented solely as a policy maker or as a spokesperson but rather as a dedicated parent or a passionate music lover*”<sup>58</sup>.

### 3.2.3 FROM VOTER'S SIDE

As a result of the falling partisanship and the volatility, the personalization of politics implies diverse modifications in electorate's inquiry; individual features are now favored. Casting a personalized vote is then linked to the ways an individual collects political as well as personal information's about candidates and judges them suitable. According to Cattelani, due to these cognitive shortcuts, people produces their political preferences based on their insight of politicians, divided into several

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<sup>56</sup> Shugart, M., Wattenberg, M. P., *Mixed-member electoral systems: The best of both worlds?*, Oxford: Comparative Politics, OUP Oxford, 2001, 661 pages.

<sup>57</sup> Karvonen L., *The Personalization of Politics: A Study of Parliamentary Democracies*, Colchester: ECPR Press, 2010. 124 pages

<sup>58</sup> Van Aelst, P., Sheafer, T., & Stanyer, J., The personalization of mediated political communication: A review of concepts, operationalizations and key findings. *Journalism*, Vol. 13, No.2, 2012, pp. 203-220.

categories<sup>59</sup>, and used at different rates of intensity<sup>60</sup>. Voters' choice is thus built on certain traits outside of any political dimension, which give them the impression of being capable to make a summary of the contenders and the policies they'll implement once elected<sup>61</sup>.

#### 3.2.4 FROM CANDIDATE'S SIDE

Yet, personalization isn't considered as a single-way relation but is fueled by several sources; its essential source is identified as the expansion of the media and the growing rank of mediatized campaigns during electoral period<sup>62</sup>. By obscuring the borders between public and private sides of candidates' life although emphasizing direct contact between voters and the politician, media obliges the latter to present himself as multidimensional person with both personal and private sides. Then candidates ought to share their life, like a product, to raise electoral support<sup>63</sup>. In a competition where electoral program isn't enough anymore, politicians aim to compete for attention during campaigns by creating a more intimism relation with the citizen who would consider the runner after his or her personal qualities. Accordingly, from candidate's side, personalization is handled as *"the change in the presentation of politics in the media, expressed in a heightened focus on individual politicians and a diminished focus on parties, organizations and institutions"*<sup>64</sup>. Hence, those strategies stress the role of individual qualities instead of the political party. Such a perception is furnished during high mediatized campaign, by every candidate whose traits and image can be decisive for election outcomes<sup>65</sup>. Thus, both voters and candidates construct and fuel the personalization. Beside its roots, the interest is then really about: *on which aspect the personalization is constructed? What are the personal traits that are taking into account?* Indeed, in the range of individual characters on which the personalization is

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<sup>59</sup> Competence, integrity, reliability, charisma, and image

<sup>60</sup> Catellani, P., Political Psychology, *Encyclopaedia of Applied Psychology*, 2004, Elsevier, pp. 51–65.

<sup>61</sup> McAllister I., The personalization of politics, *The Oxford handbook of political behavior*, 2007, pp. 571-588.

<sup>62</sup> Lilleker D., Jackson N., Towards a More Participatory Style of Election Campaigning: The Impact of Web 2.0 on the UK 2010 General Election, *Policy and Internet*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 2010, 69-98 pp.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Rahat, G., Sheaffer, T., The personalization (s) of politics: Israel, 1949–2003. *Political Communication*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2007, pp. 65-80.

<sup>65</sup> Söderlund P., Retrospective Voting and Electoral Volatility: A Nordic Perspective, *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2008, pp. 217–240

founded, the present research is going to consider exclusively the gendered component and its impact on volatility.

### 3.3 GENDER

#### 3.3.1 EVOLUTION OF FEMINISM AND IMPROVEMENT OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL RIGHTS

The question of women's condition has always been a touchy issue. In the patriarchal society, women were limited to house-keeping while their husband were permitted to work and have activities to raise money and satisfy the household. However, the 20th century, has comprehended a new settlement within which women were strongly expected to play a pivotal role<sup>66</sup>. The promotion of women's status and egalitarian rights were embodied in three complementary types of feminism: the liberal feminism focused on equal rights between gender, radical one which supported private sphere and finally, Marxist feminism, in favor of better condition of work for women<sup>67</sup>. This evolution taking place after the two World Wars evolved through the all European area, while most of the western democracies were stricken by the full-right to vote and to be elected for women. Belgium allocated this right in 1948, the Netherlands and Luxembourg in 1919, the United Kingdom in 1928 and France in 1944, while Portugal and Spain respectively evolved in 1974 and 1975.

#### 3.3.2 INSTITUTIONAL AND ELECTORAL EFFECT ON GENDER REPRESENTATION

With regard to this progress in Europe during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it seems that the general improvement knows different paces and realities in each country, and for a good reason: gender (im)balance takes its source in the country-specific design<sup>68</sup>. Undeniably, features of political systems shape the rules of the game and therefore whether women

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<sup>66</sup> Ringrose, J., and Walkerdine, V., Regulating the subject: The TV make-over as site of neo-liberal reinvention toward bourgeois femininity, *Feminist media studies*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 2008, pp. 227-246.

<sup>67</sup> Kulhing, C, "Postfeminism" in: Theoretical approaches to gender, culture and society 1, 2017, University of Limerick. Available: <https://sulis.ul.ie/portal/site/abfead16-1184-4e07-acfc-70ce03e8b90f> [accessed 15 Oct 2017].

<sup>68</sup> Kunovich, S., Paxton, P, Pathways to Power: The Role of Political Parties in Women's National Political Representation 1, *American Journal of Sociology*, 2005, Vol. 111, No. 2, pp. 505-552.

can attain political power<sup>69</sup>. The electoral system as already be correlated to a specific percentage of women in national legislatures. For instance, proportional system (PR) with party lists have been proven to be more comprehensive towards women than other electoral system, but depending on closed or open lists. Open, or semi-open structures are more conducive to women's political representation because female candidates may count on public support instead of solely on parties' strategies<sup>70</sup>. For its own, the legal context may influence favorably women's place in politics.<sup>71</sup> To correct persisting gender inequalities in politics, Governments and parties may settle a legal structure to expand the conditions for women's electoral success<sup>72</sup>. When efforts are put into this area, the measures implemented take most frequently the form of gender quota policy, defined as "a party or legislative rule requiring that women make up a certain percentage of a candidate list, a parliamentary assembly, a committee, or a government."<sup>73</sup> This precise form of quota aims to remove structural barriers for female politicians, by binding parties by law to respect them to avoid penalties and fines. Other measures, not compulsory, include gender awareness campaigns to encourage voters to cast votes for women<sup>74</sup>. Indeed, the need for such a measure is directly linked to the will to apply a fair and democratic regime.

### 3.3.3 FROM VOTER'S SIDE: GENDER CUES AND STEREOTYPES

Regarding the human backgrounds of the issue, progress occurring in political side seems having been left behind by the electorate. Currently, men are composing most elected politicians, while women remain under-represented, this highlight the incapacity of voters to follow the path and to vote for women. In other words, the question of gender inequality finds its source in the gendered-perceptions built by citizens, and exploited to make a superficial summary of the contenders running for an

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<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Kunovich, S., Paxton, P., Pathways to Power: The Role of Political Parties in Women's National Political Representation 1, *American Journal of Sociology*, 2005, Vol. 111, No. 2, pp. 505-552.

<sup>71</sup> Marques-Pereira B., Gigante C., La représentation politique des femmes, des quotas à la parité?, *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP*, 2001, Vol. 1723, No. 18, pp. 5-40.

<sup>72</sup> Meier, P., Rihoux, B., Deschouwer, C., Lloren, A., Erzeel, S., & Van Ingelgom, V., *Partis belges et égalité de sexe: changements et résistances. Analyse de l'intégration de la dimension de genre au sein des partis politiques belges*, Louvain-La-Neuve : Université Catholique de Louvain, 2006

<sup>73</sup> Paxton P., Hughes M. M., Painter M. A., Growth in women's political representation: A longitudinal exploration of democracy, electoral system and gender quotas, *European Journal of Political Research*, 2010, Vol. 49, No 1, pp. 25-52.

<sup>74</sup> Meier, P., Rihoux, B., Deschouwer, C., Lloren, A., Erzeel, S., & Van Ingelgom, V., *Partis belges et égalité de sexe: changements et résistances. Analyse de l'intégration de la dimension de genre au sein des partis politiques belges*, Louvain-La-Neuve : Université Catholique de Louvain, 2006

election<sup>75</sup>. For instance, the gendered disparity in politics highlights voters' reflex to cast a vote based on prejudice and stereotypes, structured by the idea of prior male-dominated standards<sup>76</sup>. As Huddy and Terkildsen examine in their researches, one central stereotypes settle that women are more empathic and kind and solely able to carry social welfare issues and implement compassionate policies.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, Shapiro and Mahakan confirm the shared-prejudice which label female politicians as competent to handle just issues such as poverty, education, child-related policies<sup>78</sup>, but not sufficiently aggressive and competent to deal with the military, business or economic issues<sup>79</sup>. In addition to stereotypes linked to gender, the vote can also be influenced by the gendered dimension of candidates itself. Recently, several studies have portrayed voters as to have a *baseline gender preference*, defined as “a basic inclination to prefer and to cast one preferential vote for candidates of one gender instead of the other”<sup>80</sup>. In case of electoral system in which preferential vote are allowed, this idea encompasses different realities: first, the same-gender-voting; secondly, the cross-gender voting if the voters support exclusively candidate of the opposite gender; finally, the mixed voting where voters vote for both male and female candidate. Hence, the gender-based vote is measured through the attitude of voters, and their propensity to vote for a candidate due to his or her specific social group.

### 3.3.4 FROM CANDIDATE'S SIDE: ELECTORAL STRATEGIES

The gender inequality in politics couldn't be handled like the electorate's responsibility solely. Indeed, this reality knows a second pole: parties themselves set up strategies to raise more support, but which are often based on gender discrimination<sup>81</sup>. Thereby, the women is limited because of “*parties' way of acting (...) also impact place*

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<sup>75</sup> McAllister I., The personalization of politics in: *The Oxford handbook of political behavior*, 2007, pp. 571-588.

<sup>76</sup> Lovenduski, J, Gender and Politics in *Encyclopedia of Government and Politics*, Routledge London, 1992, pp. 603-615.

<sup>77</sup> Huddy L., Terkildsen N., Gender Stereotypes and the Perception of Male and Female Candidates, *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 1993, pp. 119-147

<sup>78</sup> Shapiro R., Mahajan H., Gender Differences in Policy Preferences: A Summary of Trends from the 1960s to the 1980s, *Public Opin Q*, Vol.50, No. 1, 1986, pp 42-61.

<sup>79</sup> Huddy L., Terkildse Nayda, The Consequences of Gender Stereotypes for Women Candidates at Different Levels and Types of Office, *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 3, 1993, pp. 503-525

<sup>80</sup> Meier, P., Rihoux, B., Deschouwer, C., Lloren, A., Erzeel, S., & Van Ingelgom, V., *Partis belges et égalité de sexe: changements et résistances. Analyse de l'intégration de la dimension de genre au sein des partis politiques belges*, Louvain-La-Neuve : Université Catholique de Louvain, 2006

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*

of women's position in election's outcome"<sup>82</sup>. According to Vandeleene, women couldn't be willing to express full support for a female candidate because women are often located at less-attractive place on electoral list<sup>83</sup>. In their research, Rihoux, Erzeel and al. confirm the evidence that "an overwhelming majority of voters cast their vote for a male top candidate, which isn't surprising, according to the fact that the majority of top position are occupied by man"<sup>84</sup>. Women's bad position on electoral lists are settled by political parties in regard to the supposed stereotypes on candidates and to the level of competence they run for<sup>85</sup>. This meets the idea that electoral strategies, based on a cost-benefit analysis, support the prejudices for gender inequality. However, it's important to not jump to conclusion too quickly: parties diverge in terms of how many women they nominate, the place of women on electoral lists and the proportion of women representing them in elected bodies. Parties also fluctuate with regard to their internal rules for the selection of female candidates, oscillating from none to voluntary quotas<sup>86</sup>. In summary, each party knows a different experience of equality. Finally, biding laws may restrain their selection process freedom in order to meet equality<sup>87</sup>.

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<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Vandeleene, A., Does Candidates Selection Matter? A Comparative « Analysis of Belgian Political Parties' Selection Procedures and their Relation to the Candidate's Profile, Louvain-La-Neuve: Université Catholique de Louvain, PhD dissertation, 2016.

<sup>84</sup> Meier, P., Rihoux, B., Deschouwer, C., Lloren, A., Erzeel, S., & Van Ingelgom, V., *Partis belges et égalité de sexe: changements et résistances. Analyse de l'intégration de la dimension de genre au sein des partis politiques belges*, Louvain-La-Neuve : Université Catholique de Louvain, 2006

<sup>85</sup> Dahlerup, D., & Freidenvall, L., Electoral gender quota systems and their implementation in Europe, 2011, European Parliament.

<sup>86</sup> Lovenduski, J., C. Baudino, M. Guadagnini, P. Meier et D. Sainsbury, *State Feminism and Political Representation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005

<sup>87</sup> Meier, P., Rihoux, B., Deschouwer, C., Lloren, A., Erzeel, S., & Van Ingelgom, V., *Partis belges et égalité de sexe: changements et résistances. Analyse de l'intégration de la dimension de genre au sein des partis politiques belges*, Louvain-La-Neuve : Université Catholique de Louvain, 2006



#### 4. HYPOTHESES

Thanks to the large study of the international literature, the link between the personalization and the volatility cannot be ignored. Voters who cast preferential vote based on candidate's personal settings are more likely to change their mind during the campaign or between two election times<sup>88</sup>. Indeed, the moving structure of western societies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the rising of new non-political-actors or the increasing non-effectiveness of parties are the main sources which powered the volatility. Besides, such a phenomenon is still existing and remains an actual electoral feature<sup>89</sup>. For its own, the personalization is be constructed on a variety of personal determinants, from different types and with different rate of intensity<sup>90</sup>. These personal determinants include – among others – the whole gender dimension, and its related-interrogations namely “*is gender able, in any way, to influence the way of behave and the propensity of being volatile in the electoral choice?*”.

The gender-motivation for the elector entails different realities: it can be based on the sharing membership to the same gender group, but also on candidate's positions on gendered concerns. Indeed, gender being one of the dimensions of the personalization, voters whom motivation are based principally on gender dimensions of candidates may thus be expected to be more volatiles. However, the idea of a gender-based voting positively correlated to higher volatility is currently still left behind by the present literature. Whereas the general impact of the personalization on the volatility is identified, the impact of the different realities laying behind the idea of *Gender* is still ignored. Based on this premise, two hypotheses are submitted:

*Hypothesis a: Voters who follow a candidate-centered strategy because of a shared gender group are more volatiles.*

*Hypothesis b: Voters who cast a candidate-centered vote because of candidate's explicit position on gender-related issues are more volatiles.*

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<sup>88</sup> Söderlund P., Retrospective Voting and Electoral Volatility: A Nordic Perspective , *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2008, pp. 217–240

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Deschouwer K., Delwit P., Hooghe M., Baudewyns P. , Walgrave S. , *Décrypter l'électeur, Le comportement électoral et les motivations de vote*, Louvain : LannooCampus, 2015, 336 pages.



## 5. METHODOLOGY

### 5.1 MIXED-METHOD

The methodology applied to carry the triangular relation between volatility, personalization and gender consists on a mixing of quantitative and qualitative exploration. The quantitative method handles a descriptive analysis of the phenomenon in Belgium, and brings to light the frame and the structure in which it takes place. The completing qualitative part provides an explicative analysis in order to understand, comprehend and explain the current existing situation. While the first step answers the *How*, the second one allows to tackle the *Why*. The complementarity of approaches acknowledges a deep understanding of the whole subject, from its source to its features. In addition, mixing both methods help to surpass the potential limits, explained above.

#### 5.1.1 QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

The quantitative part of the investigation is based on data about the electoral behaviour in Belgium launched by *The PartiRep Project*. This Interuniversity Attraction Pole (IAP) funded by the Belgian Science Policy has been launched in 2014 to focus on motivations of vote, including “*the personalization dimension*”<sup>91</sup>. This project takes its roots with the assumption that “*one of the frames that is often cited as offering a possible alternative to the partisan and ideological linkage is the personalization of politics (...) the individualization of society has weakened traditional ties and cleavages, accompanied by a growing distrust of political parties among citizens. Another major change has been the growing importance of the media in politics*”<sup>92</sup>. Indeed, *PartiRep* clarify the perception of volatility, make the distinction between inter-election and inter-listing volatility, and deliver its evolution and current amount in Belgium. Moreover, the effect of the personalization on the volatility is tackled to determine if people for whom personal motivations are central are more willing to change their mind during electoral times. In addition, the research group investigate all motivations of preferential voting; more than the half of the Belgian population voted for a single-specific candidate in 2014, justified through a range of motivations, from

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<sup>91</sup> Website of The PartiRep Project. Personalization. Available online: <http://partirep.eu/project/work-package/wp-2-personalization>, [accessed 2 of May 2017]

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*

candidates' stance on issues to their personal characteristic and personality. However, and as previously underscored, *PartiRep* project is limited to a general view of the personalization, without considering the specific gender-dimension. Data may be used to highlight the potential motivations of voters, but all motivations cannot be considered as being into the same range by the voters. Despite that *PartiRep Project* remains a relevant source to exploit, the gendered-blank should be fixed to tackle the purpose of the study.

### 5.1.2 QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

#### a) *Semi-structured interviews and non-random sample*

It exists a range of different way to complete the blank left by quantitative data's; a study method through a quantitative document-based research may leave other forms of data collection largely underexplored. Semi-interviews are proposed as the best qualitative process to compensate for both the lack and limitations of quantitative approach<sup>93</sup>. Mainly, interviews can be used to deepen data and “*establish what people involved in a specific process think—what their attitudes, values, and beliefs are*”<sup>94</sup>. Missing information may of course be acquired differently, but the interview arrangement allows analysts to investigate directly participants' patterns on key issues relevant to the research project. Furthermore, and by taking in comparison the survey format such as *PartiRep Project*, interviewing has the advantage to be settled on open-ended questions and to let surveyed people answer freely, without the constraint of fixed categories. Researchers can thus gather rich detail about key people's opinions on specifics issues. Another advantages of interviews is the first-hand participants' dimension of the processes. While document and other sources of second-hand information are exposed to the risk to be distorted, interviews investigate accounts at its source, by talking directly to witnesses involved in the events. Then, the use of interviews gives the opportunity to figure out the whole decisions and actions process that lay behind an event, here the electoral behavior. By asking direct and focused questions, researchers can construct explicative analysis based on the interviewees' testimonies. Interviewing citizens remains the best method to gather relevant

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<sup>93</sup> Davies, Philip H. J. Spies as Informants: Triangulation and the Interpretation of Elite Interview Data in the Study of the Intelligence and Security Services, *Politics*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 2001, pp. 73–80

<sup>94</sup> Aberbach, J-D., Rockman, B-A., Conducting and Coding Elite Interviews, *Political Science and Politics*, Vol 35, No. December, 2002, pp. 673–6.

information's about one specific issue, although one disadvantage may weaken the process: in some cases, interviews occurs years after the events and in such can limit the trustworthiness of the testimonies, “a simple memory lapse can limit the usefulness of one-on-one meetings”<sup>95</sup>. However, the short time-frame of this research doesn't seem to jeopardize the findings collected from interactions with the interviewees. Consequently, in this way, adding this qualitative approach to the *PartiRep project* contributes toward the process of triangulation of sources, in which collected data may be cross-checked and deepened through multiple. The Data of this paper are not collected from one source only, but in the contrary are reinforced across multiples sources. In conclusion, the triangulation through the data-base pairing and interviewing is the best strategy to increase the credibility of this paper as well as its robustness. Nevertheless, the process of selection of citizens contents a particularity: candidates have been chosen after precise criteria's. The aim of such a method is to obtain information about specific patterns and events; consequently, it justifies the selection of the most appropriate sampling, composed by well-defined and key political actors— those who have had the most involvement with the processes of interest<sup>96</sup>. In our research, candidates should have respected the following criterions to fit with one specific sample. Three age group were selected, 18-30, 30-50 and 50+, within each gender. Moreover, the research necessitated participants to live in Belgium and to have voted in 2014. Based on these conditions', participants were labelled in the following manner:

	Gender	Age
P1	F	50+
P2	F	30-50
P3	F	18-30
P4	M	50+
P5	M	30-50
P6	M	18-30

Figure 4: Age and gender of each participant to the semi-structured interviews

<sup>95</sup> Kramer, M., Remembering the Cuban Missile Crisis: Should We Swallow Oral History?, *International Security*, Vol 15, No. Summer, 1990, pp. 212–8

<sup>96</sup> Tansey, O., Process tracing and elite interviewing: a case for non-probability sampling. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, Vol. 40, No. 4, 2007, pp.765-772.

Critics about this sampling process aren't denied; the lack of a larger sample has the risk to jeopardize all attempts to make causal inferences about the population. However, the limited time and resources can prevent the possibility to conduct detailed interviews with all the subjects of interest<sup>97</sup>. Accordingly, the aim of the paper wasn't to draw a representative sample of all Belgian people in order to raise general theories about voting behavior, but instead, to choose the best appropriate direct witness involved in the process to deliver results despite limitation of available capital<sup>98</sup>. Moreover, without providing a real inference with the Belgian population, the selection of one man and one woman for each age group favored an outlook as general as possible. To conclude, while the corroborative function of the non-random selection is not minimized, its additive role should be underscored. To the contrary of random sampling, such interviews can allow the researcher to collect first-hand testimonies from direct participants without taking the risk to exclude important respondents who are highly pertinent to the research objectives<sup>99</sup>.

## 5.2 CHOICE OF CASE STUDY: BELGIUM

The choice of Belgium isn't harmless. Through to its system Belgium doesn't appears to be featured by a high exposure to personalization and volatility, while this statement is weakened by the electoral system and the implemented policies.

### 5.2.1 INSTITUTIONAL FRAME AND PARTY-SYSTEM

First, the Belgian electoral system owns features such as proportionality, theoretically in favor of gender equality, but which is also counter-balanced by multi-member districts and multiparty. Indeed, those features are expected to increase incentives for candidates to cultivate a personalized vote<sup>100</sup>. Whereas a party label may push candidates and ensure them a space of visibility against candidates from competing parties, self-promotion based on personal traits and exposition can make the

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<sup>97</sup> Tansey, O., Process tracing and elite interviewing: a case for non-probability sampling. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, Vol. 40, No. 4, 2007, pp.765-772.

<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> Grumm, JG., Theories of Electoral Systems, *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 1958, pp. 357–376

distinction between fellow party candidates<sup>101</sup>; then the strategy of fostering personal and private dimensions of politics, enhance the process of personalization and an instable electorate<sup>102</sup>. In addition, semi-open list systems with optional nominal votes encourage a candidate-centered system, despite that voting for the predetermined list order makes it also highly party-centered<sup>103</sup>. However, taking as a comparison proportional closed system, voters don't have the possibility to cast a preferential ballot for an individual candidate but must choose exclusively for a list of candidates, already ranked by the party. The particularity of a strict rank increases gap in opportunities for some groups. The Belgian electoral system is based on semi-open lists and follow the path: voters have choice to either vote for a party list or cast a preferential vote for a specific or different candidate. Voters can cast as many preferences votes as they want but voting for candidates from different party lists is forbidden. While the order in which candidates appear on the list does not totally determine who is going to past the post, the candidate's position on the list does influence the chance of getting elected<sup>104</sup>. The allocation of seats is determined by the amount of votes a candidate obtains; candidates who receive enough preferences vote to pass the pre-decided threshold are automatically elected. If they fail to reach the threshold, the list order defines their electoral chances in the allocation of left seats. Hence, the higher the position of candidates on the electoral list, the higher the chance of being elected<sup>105</sup>.

### 5.2.2 FEDERAL SYSTEM

Belgium has also been chosen because of its interesting federal organization and allocation of competences between levels. Indeed, the federal organization is characterized by the distribution of competences as established in the Belgian Constitution<sup>106</sup>. This organization urges each level to deal with issues and competences in specific areas, without the involvement of other levels. Consequently, voters' stereotypes on policy areas in which men and women can be efficient and suitable may

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<sup>101</sup> Söderlund P., *Candidate-centered evaluations and party switching: Evidence from the Finnish preferential voting system*, Åbo Akademi University.

<sup>102</sup> Carey J-M., Shugar K., Incentives to cultivate a personal vote: A rank ordering of electoral formulas, *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 4, 1995, pp 417-436.

<sup>103</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> Grumm, JG., Theories of Electoral Systems, *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 1958, pp. 357-376

<sup>105</sup> Grumm, JG., Theories of Electoral Systems, *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 2, No. 4, 1958, pp. 357-376

<sup>106</sup> Belgian Constitution, Article 35

also penalize women. In the Belgian distribution of competences, areas such as the Economy or the Army are delegated to the Federal level but, existing stereotypes linked to the capability of women on these precise topics may influence citizens for whom women aren't able to deal with such topics.<sup>107</sup> Consequently, the area of competence given to each entity can have an impact on the way people behave at every level of power and limit the opportunities primarily offered to women in an open-PR system. Furthermore, it takes place differentiating features across different levels of elections, some of which are important for the promotion of a gender disparity in political decision making. A key variance in the Belgian federal system is the district magnitude<sup>108109</sup>. District magnitude also varies because of existing large disparities in term of population density between levels because each assemblies use different types of districts. While the representatives of the Flemish Parliament are elected in provincial electoral districts, candidates in Wallonia are elected in electoral districts that follow the boundaries of much smaller administrative districts. Through the biggest features of its system, Belgium may be qualified of complex, fragmented but unique case of study.

### 5.2.3 BINDING QUOTA LAWS

The last reason Belgium is a relevant case of study may be found in its compulsory legislative frame of gender quotas. For a very long time the Nordic countries and the Netherlands were the only European countries to be located at the top of women's political representation world rank<sup>110</sup>. More recently, Belgium, France, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, and most lately Poland – have introduced compulsory quotas which became binding for all political parties; in these countries at least one of the political parties represented in Parliament has written electoral gender quotas into its legal statutes<sup>111</sup>.

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<sup>107</sup> Miller C., Categorization and stereotypes about men and women, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 12, No. 4, 1986, pp. 502-512.

<sup>108</sup> Dahlerup, D., & Freidenvall, L., *Electoral gender quota systems and their implementation in Europe*, 2011, European Parliament.

<sup>109</sup> The number of representatives elected to the legislature for an electoral district.

<sup>110</sup> Dahlerup, D., & Freidenvall, L., *Electoral gender quota systems and their implementation in Europe*, 2011, European Parliament.

<sup>111</sup> *ibid.*

Defining more precisely the case of Belgium, the development and the establishment of new structures such as quota laws or an *Institute for the equality of women and men*<sup>112</sup> have increasingly ensured the place of women in electoral lists. All those progresses permitted the rise of women's place in politics, by giving them the chance to achieve political goals, even in the political area previously dominated by men. From the 1970s, different women's' movements pleaded for "more women in politics"<sup>113</sup>, putting forward legislated gender quotas as a way of overcoming structural glass ceiling<sup>114</sup>. From active consultations with civil society organizations resulted a first gender quotas act in 1994. The *Smet-Tobback law* forbid electoral lists to be composed with more than two-third of candidates of the same sex<sup>115</sup>. Yet, from the beginning of its implementation, the *Smet-Tobback law* was criticized because of lack of full equality between women and men as well as the absence of guarantee that women were given eligible positions on the parties' electoral lists<sup>116</sup>. Disapprovals led to the 2002 *Gender Quota Acts*, compelling parties to include as many women as men on electoral lists<sup>117</sup> and to share the two top positions on a list<sup>118</sup>. To end with, Belgium has the particularity to be one of the only European country to have enforced binding quota laws in Constitution. With such a strict legal frame, parties can be exposed to fines or, taken one step further, can be excluded from participating at the elections in case of non-compliance.

#### 5.2.4 ACTUAL STATEMENT IN BELGIUM

In term of results, the reality is quite different than the total equality. After the adoption of the first Quotas act in 1994, the number of women standing or elected sharply improved at all levels of elections. In the federal elections of 2007, the percentage of women reaching a seat augmented marginally while remaining less than in the previous elections of 2003 to almost 37% for the House of Representatives, and

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<sup>112</sup> Website of the *Institute for the equality of women and men*. Available online: <http://igvm-iefh.belgium.be/en> [accessed 23 May 2017]

<sup>113</sup> Dahlerup, D., & Freidenvall, L., *Electoral gender quota systems and their implementation in Europe*, 2011, European Parliament.

<sup>114</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> Moniteur belge, 1er juillet 1994

<sup>116</sup> Dahlerup, D., & Freidenvall, L., *Electoral gender quota systems and their implementation in Europe*, 2011, European Parliament.

<sup>117</sup> Moniteur belge, 28th of Augustus 2002

<sup>118</sup> The last disposition entered into force in 2007 for the elections of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

to 30% for the Senate<sup>119</sup>. In 2010, the proportion of women elected to the Senate grew to 41%, while the number in the House of Representatives was about 38%<sup>120</sup>. But what about the latest elections of 2014? Despite the general trend of expansion in gendered equality, the current situation is still far from the expected fair representation; the gap between men and women remains actual<sup>121</sup>. In terms of figures, the rate of 50% women sitting on electoral lists in 2014 were higher than the effective ratio of elected women<sup>122</sup>. Concerning the Chamber of Representatives and the Senate, the ratio of elected women was respectively about 40% and 50% for Senate in 2014. Results of other levels are quite similar, with a standard of more or less 40% solely for the Walloon Parliament and the Parliament of Brussels-Capital. In comparison, the Flemish Parliament knows a small upgrading with 44% of women elected. The cross-analysis of each Belgian legislative group stresses the weak average of 39.3% and 41.5% of women elected in Federal and Federated Assemblies in 2014<sup>123</sup>. Although the Belgian system is assumed to be in favour – and a foreseeable supporter – of the gender equality, the gap between expectations and reality undeniably makes Belgium an interesting and relevant case to investigate. To conclude, the originality of the question of gender in Belgium is found in its binary dimension: even if the percentage of women elected is “*relatively good*” in Belgium in comparison to many other European countries, on the other side the introduction of gender parity law has not yet urged citizens to change into considering equality in their calculation.

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<sup>119</sup> Dahlerup, D., & Freidenvall, L., *Electoral gender quota systems and their implementation in Europe*, 2011, European Parliament.

<sup>120</sup> Meier, P., Verlet D., La position des femmes en politique locale belge et l'impact des quotas, *Swiss Political Science Review*, 2008, Vol. 14, No 4, pp. 715-740.

<sup>121</sup> Website of the *Institute for the equality of women and men*: Political representation of women after the election of May 2014. Available online : [http://igvm-iefh.belgium.be/fr/publications/de\\_politieke\\_vertegenwoordiging\\_van\\_vrouwen\\_na\\_de\\_verkiezingen\\_van\\_25\\_mei\\_2014](http://igvm-iefh.belgium.be/fr/publications/de_politieke_vertegenwoordiging_van_vrouwen_na_de_verkiezingen_van_25_mei_2014). [accessed 23th of May 2017.]

<sup>122</sup> Meier, P., Verlet D., La position des femmes en politique locale belge et l'impact des quotas, *Swiss Political Science Review*, Vol. 14, No 4, 2008, pp. 715-740.

<sup>123</sup> Website of the *Institute for the equality of women and men*: Rate of women elected. Available online: [igvm-iefh.belgium.be](http://igvm-iefh.belgium.be) [accessed 2 of May 2017]

	Women elected/Seats (2010)	Women elected/Seats (2014)
Dutch-speaking	36/88 (41%)	40/87 (46%)
French-speaking	21/62 (33.9%)	19/63 (30.2%)
Total (N)	38% (57/150)	39.3% (59/150)

*Figure 5, Women elected in the Chamber of Representatives (2010 and 2014)*  
Institut pour l'égalité des hommes et des femmes, 2014

	Women/Seats (2010)	Women/Seats (2014)
Dutch-speaking	16/41 (39%)	17/35 (48.6%)
French-speaking	13/30 (43.3%)	13/25 (52%)
Total (N)	40.8% (29/71)	50%(30/60)

*Figure 6, Women elected in the Senate (2010 and 2014)*  
Institut pour l'égalité des hommes et des femmes, 2014

	Women/Seats (2009)	Women/Seats (2014)
Total (N)	41,1% (51/124)	44.4% (55/124)

*Figure 7, Women elected in the Flemish Parliament (2009 and 2014)*  
Institut pour l'égalité des hommes et des femmes, 2014

	Women/Seats (2009)	Women/Seats (2014)
Total (N)	34.7% (26/75)	40% (30/75)

*Figure 8, Women elected in the Walloon Parliament (2009 and 2014)*  
Institut pour l'égalité des hommes et des femmes, 2014

	Women/Seats (2009)	Women/Seats (2014)
French-speaking parties	37/72 (44.4%)	29/72 (40.3%)
Dutch-speaking parties	7/17 (41.2%)	7/17(41.2%)
Total (N)	43.8% (38/89)	40.4% (36/89)

*Figure 9, Women elected in the Parliament of Brussel-Capital in 2009 and 2014*  
Institut pour l'égalité des hommes et des femmes, 2014

*Summary: Belgium as a strong and relevant case for gender-based voting*

1. The Belgian electoral system applies proportional system, multipartism and multiple preferential voting: give voters the opportunity to express their support for one or more candidate, and provide bigger opportunities for every runners.
2. Semi-open lists: optional nominal vote encourages a candidate centered-system but increase opportunities for representatives of social group.
3. The federal organization: the allocation of power which might be associated to gendered stereotypes and encourage voter to adapt its choice in function of each level of competence.
4. Strict quotas and electoral rules implemented in the past, binding parties to select an equal number of male and female candidate in their lists and share the two-top positions of the list between both. In case of non-compliance, the possibility to apply penalties.
5. The gap between Belgian policies, expecting to ensure women's representation and reality.

## 6. DATA ANALYSIS

*PartiRep* project on which the book “*Décrypter l’électeur: comportement électoral et les motivations de vote*” is founded aims to handle every aspect of the voting behavior in Belgium in 2014<sup>124</sup>. The research takes its roots in one questioning: *What’s an election is really about?* Considering its first and deepest meaning, an election can be defined as “*the sum of votes*”<sup>125</sup>.. Nevertheless, because Belgian voters have space to support a political party or a single specific candidate, the electoral outcome and the reasoning process that comes before need to be interpreted. What voters are doing when they make a choice and cast their vote is much more subtle and complex than what the electoral result shows; whereas some of them are sure since a long time, other are hesitating between runners, or while some are voting for a party because the political agenda fits with their beliefs and values, other are voting for several other reasons. Indeed, it exists plenty of differences between voters, from their motivations and reasoning to their interpretations, and which cannot be evaluated on the basis of raw results. For this reason, *PartiRep* has directly surveyed voters to distinguish subtleties about the whole process; the outcome of all surveys handle almost every aspect of the electoral conduct. However, in the interest of this paper only the question of the personalization, its impact on the electoral volatility, and the gendered-motivations of choice are considered as relevant.

### 6.1 THE ELECTORAL VOLATILITY

To tackle the gendered dimension of personalization in the electoral volatility, the clarification of the volatility after the elections of 2014 needs first to be done. *PartiRep* provides a distinction between two different types of volatility in the analysis: on one hand, the inter-listing volatility, defined as “*track transfers occurring as two consecutive polls*”<sup>126</sup> and on the other hand, the volatility during electoral campaign (changes in voting intentions during the campaign). Despite their fundamental distinction, international researchers postulate that these two types of volatility are quite

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<sup>124</sup> Deschouwer K., Delwit P., Hooghe M., Baudewyns P. , Walgrave S. , *Décrypter l’électeur, Le comportement électoral et les motivations de vote*, Louvain : LannooCampus , 2015, 336 pages.

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> *ibid.*

similar and underlie the same dynamics at source<sup>127</sup>. Whether the change runs between two elections or during the campaign, voters share the same incentives<sup>128</sup>. On this base, *PartiRep* researchers have paid attention to make a distinction between these two forms of electoral mobility. From a methodological point, the amount of electoral volatility in the elections of 2014 has been studied with the help of a panel survey. The volatility rate during the electoral campaign is investigated through a two-time survey, by examining changes in intentions of voting between the pre-election and the post-election times. To define the level of inter-election volatility, the election of 2010 was labeled as a starting point for participants who remembered their vote and compared to their responses of 2014.

As stated by the *Figure 10*, the volatility between 2010 and 2014 and the volatility during the 2014 campaign and shows their dissimilarities: the volatility between the two former elections shows 40.2% of citizens surveyed declared they changed their electoral strategy between 2010 and 2014 (despite they voted for a party or a specific candidate), while only 35.50% of voters changed their vote during the election campaign of 2014<sup>129</sup>. Thus, the level of intra-campaign volatility is identified as being less important than inter-election mobility in Belgium. Similarly, the evolution of both volatility demonstrates different results. Although the relatively high inter-election rate of 40.2%, does not stand out from preceding periods in Belgium, focusing on the individual scale, the last three decades shows a progressive growth from 15% in the 1980s to 30% in 1990 and 40% in the 2000s<sup>130</sup>. Nonetheless, this so-called widening of inter-election volatility is not confirmed by the *PartiRep* project. Instead, results indicate a stabilization of the mobility level with 40.2% in 2014, with only two of five Belgian voters having changed their preferences regarding to 2010. In comparison, the proportion of participants who changed their vote during the campaign is a bit inferior

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<sup>127</sup> Berelson, B., Lazarsfeld, P., McPhee W., *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963

<sup>128</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Deschouwer K., Delwit P., Hooghe M., Baudewyns P., Walgrave S., *Décrypter l'électeur, Le comportement électoral et les motivations de vote*, Louvain : LannooCampus, 2015, 336 pages.

<sup>130</sup> Dassonneville, R. Electoral volatility, political sophistication, trust and efficacy: a study on changes in voter preferences during the Belgian regional elections of 2009, *Acta Politica*, Vol. 47, 2012 pp. 18-41. ; Walgrave, S., Lefevre, J., Hooghe, M., Volatils ou capricieux ? La modification des préférences électorales au cours de la campagne, in : Deschouwer, K., Delwit, P., Hooghe, M., Walgrave, S., *Les voix du peuple*, Bruxelles : Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2010, pp. 25-42.

to the past with 35.50% while the election of 2009 witnessed 37% of mobility<sup>131</sup>. These findings are then confirmed thanks to the interviews<sup>132</sup>. Indeed, 3 of the 5 participants are labeled as constant during two different periods of election. This result confirm the value of 59% found by *PartiRep* for the inter-election. Specially, the rate of 64.5% of stable electors within the campaign is almost the same as the 66% established with the interviews for 2014. In short, the inter-election volatility known a higher frequency than the intra-campaign one in 2014 and even these are both existing in Belgium, the general trend is on the decline.

<b>Inter-élection</b>	N	%
Stable	722	59.81
Switcher	485	40.19
Total (N)	1207	100
<b>Intra-campaign</b>	N	%
Stable	903	64.50
Switcher	498	35.50
Total (N)	1403	100

Figure 10, Proportion of inter-election and intra-campaign volatility in Belgium (2014)  
*Deschouwer K., Delwit P., Hooghe M., Baudewyns P., Walgrave S., 2015*

	<b>Inter-elections</b>	<b>Intra-campaign</b>
P1	Stable	Stable
P2	Volatile	Volatile
P3	-	Stable
P4	Stable	Stable
P5	Volatile	Volatile
P6	Stable	Stable
Total (N)	60% (3/5)	66% (4/6)

Figure 11, proportion of inter-election and intra-campaign volatility of the non-random panel (2014)  
 Semi-structured interviews, 2018

<sup>131</sup> The examination of the intra-campaign volatility is more difficult to carry out due to the scarcity of findings. Answers from the 2014 survey have been compared with other previous surveys conducted in 2009 during the regional elections.

<sup>132</sup> Semi-structured interviews, [April-May 2018]

## 6.2 PERSONALIZATION AND VOLATILITY

During the elections of 2014, 57% of Belgian citizens emitted a preferential vote to one or several candidate(s) and such a pattern was emphasized at each level of election<sup>133</sup>. To cross-check data from the interviews, a column personalization has been added to the *Figure 12* about the rate of volatility in 2014. Accordingly, the level of personalized vote – in at least one level of election of 2014 – is about 83% or 5 voters out of 6<sup>134</sup>. Solely one participant has voted after the head of the list strategy. Such a behavior is easily identified; the voter has a particular high interest and acknowledgements in Belgian politics, and refuse to cast a personal vote, “*ce ne sont pas des bons critères de choix, je préfère voter pour des idées que plutôt pour des personnes*”<sup>135</sup>. Taking into consideration the 5 other electors, all have behaved after a personalized strategy of voting in 2014 – the most frequent being for all the communal level. In comparison, the rate of personalization in the sample is strongly higher than in the Belgian population. Therefore, the chosen sample of voters seems to be specifically concerned with the personalization.

	Inter-elections	Intra-campaign	<b>Personalization</b> (at least at one level of election in 2014)
P1	Stable	Stable	Yes
P2	Volatile	Volatile	Yes
P3	-	Stable	Yes
P4	Stable	Stable	Yes
P5	Volatile	Volatile	No
P6	Stable	Stable	Yes
Total (N)	60% (3/5)	66% (4/6)	83.3% (5/6)

*Figure 12, Rate of personalization of the non-random panel (2014)*  
Semi-structured interviews, 2018

<sup>133</sup> Deschouwer K., Delwit P., Hooghe M., Baudewyns P., Walgrave S., *Décrypter l'électeur, Le comportement électoral et les motivations de vote*, Louvain : LannooCampus, 2015, 336 pages.

<sup>134</sup> Semi-structured interviews, [April 2018]

<sup>135</sup> Participant 5, Semi-structured interview, Brussel, 10 April 2018

The *PartiRep* research highlights the extent of personalization in Belgium and its relationship with both types of volatility. In order to emphasize the relation between personalization and volatility, and to determine which type of voters fit with the personalized strategy, 13 categories have been chosen to classify voter's personal characteristics underlying different degrees of personalization. In addition, two sets of control variables were applied to avoid potential bias: the socio-cultural dimension and political attitudes. The latter includes the level of political sophistication as well as political dissatisfaction divided respectively into political knowledge, political interest and political trust, satisfaction with the functioning of democracy and external political effectiveness. As for the socio-cultural dimension, age, gender, religious practice and level of education are included and justified on the basis of international literature. Young people are more willing to show less faith and loyalty to a party compared to older individuals.<sup>136</sup> Women also tend to be more volatile than men<sup>137</sup>, while lower-educated citizens are expected to use their partisan identification to compensate for their lack of knowledge and thus be less volatile<sup>138</sup>. These findings will be discussed below. Finally, researchers have added the last variable *attention paid by the person during the electoral campaign*, but for the study of the intra-campaign volatility solely. *Figures 13 and 14* presented below both express the correlation between personalization and volatility<sup>139</sup>.

For each sort of volatility, four models are given: the first model examines the effect of all socio-demographic variables and political patterns on personalized behavior while the three following models deal with the effect of the underpinning indicators of the personalization on volatility. The first indicator determine whether the elector has made his choice primarily due to the candidates, the second indicator states if the voter has

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<sup>136</sup> Campbell, A., Converse, P., Miller, W. and Stokes, D., *The American Voter*, New York :Wiley, 1960 and Van Der Meer, T., Van Elsas, E., Lubbe, R., Van der Brug, W. Are volatile voters erratic, whimsical or seriously picky? A panel of study of 58 waves into the nature of electoral volatility (The Netherlands 2006-2010), *Party Politics*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 2015, pp. 100-114.

<sup>137</sup> Kuhn, U. (Stability and change in party preference, *Swiss Political Sciences Review*; Vol. 15, No. 3, 2009, pp. 463-494

<sup>138</sup> Dalton, R., Cognitive mobilization and partisan dealignment in advanced industrial democracies, *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 46, No. 2, 1984, pp. 264-284

<sup>139</sup> Deschouwer K., Delwit P., Hooghe M., Baudewyns P. , Walgrave S. , *Décrypter l'électeur, Le comportement électoral et les motivations de vote*, Louvain : LannooCampus , 2015, 336 pages.

cast a preference vote or prefer supporting the list as established by the party and the third and last indicator specifies the rate of preference votes distributed by the voter<sup>140</sup>. To recapitulate, these figures highlight both the link between voters' characteristics and their willingness to generate a personalized vote as well as the effect of each of the dimension of the personalization on volatility for 2014. In its model 1, *Figure 13* shows that the age attribute has a strong negative effect on inter-election volatility. With a ratio of 0.968, young people appears to be deeply less constant in their voting behavior than older generations. Additionally, as exposed by *Figure 14*, the positive gender effect of 1.210 clarifies the greater likelihood of women to change party between two elections<sup>141</sup>. In terms of volatility within the campaign, the effect of age and gender remain unchanged. For its part, the gender dimension underlines that men are more stable than women within the campaign. By cross-checking findings found through the interviews, these assumptions are mitigated. Regarding the sample, voter's profile and their propensity to be volatile, it appears that younger (18-31) and older (50+) citizens remains more stable in their electoral behavior during both two elections and in the campaign: *"j'ai chaque fois voté pour le côté écolo ; (...) je suis assez stable, disons que, dans mon opinion générale, j'affine des choses, mais je ne passe pas de l'un à l'autre. (...) Aussi mon vote est souvent défini avant d'aller aux urnes"*<sup>142</sup> or one other testimony *j'ai toujours voté libéral et voilà. Maintenant je vote en général (...) je sais toujours pour quel parti je vais voter en y allant"*<sup>143</sup>. The young generation is also labelled as stable because of their lack of interest in politics; between 2010 and 2014, P6 (young electors which voted during the two elections) hasn't change his state of mind because of familial traditions: *"à cause de Mon père et des idées de ma famille, je ne voyais pas de raisons de changer."*<sup>144</sup> Concerning young voters, they both followed the same path and conduct stable during the campaign of 2014: at the beginning, asking to their parents, long-time or short-time before the Election Day, and despite a superficial interest during the electoral period, they decided to pursue their parents' state of mind. In comparison, voters from the middle-age range (30-50) were highly more unstable in both their behavior within the campaign and between 2010 and 2014. Their

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<sup>140</sup> Results are translated as "odd ratios", indicate a positive effect of the indicator on personalization when it's upwards 1 while a ratio under 1 translates a negative effect.

<sup>141</sup> Deschouwer K., Delwit P., Hooghe M., Baudewyns P. , Walgrave S. , *Décrypter l'électeur, Le comportement électoral et les motivations de vote*, Louvain : LannooCampus , 2015, 336 pages.

<sup>142</sup> Participant 1, Semi-structured interview, Louvain-La-Neuve, 18 April 2018

<sup>143</sup> Participant 4, Semi-structured interview, Brussel, 10 April 2018

<sup>144</sup> Participant 6, Semi-structured interview, Louvain-La-Neuve, 13 April 2018

volatility during the electoral campaign takes its roots in the lack of political offer, “(...) *jusqu’à présent je n’avais pas l’impression qu’il avait une offre politique qui correspondait à un vrai choix et où je trouvais ce vers quoi je voulais tendre*”<sup>145</sup>. Accordingly, both interviewed have been seduced by the blank vote; P2 casted a blank vote in 2014 while P5 just envisaged to. Despite their variation of comportment, both made a choice by eliminating candidates on the base of standards’, but without expressing a strong support to chosen outcome. P5 casted a vote for a candidate without being rally convinced while this work of elimination has led to a blank vote for P2. At the light of their interviews, the instability and uncertainty of choice comes from one specific source, the poor political offer which doesn’t fit with their values.

Regarding their volatility during two different election, the high volatility comes also from the lack of political offer and partisanship coupled to the evolution of political matters: “*si c’était à refaire, le choix serait différent, il évolue pas mal. J’ai déjà voté pour pas mal de partis politiques différents* »<sup>146</sup>. However, one like the other intend to be increasingly stable in the future elections. By aging, this group knows progressively what they expect from a candidate and refine their criteria of selection<sup>147</sup>.

But what about the impact of the personalization on volatility in Belgium in 2014? Firstly, with the scores of 1.491 and 1.506 for the item *choice because of the presence of a candidate*, the model 2 of *Figures 13 and 14* articulates that voters whom motivation to support a party is the presence of an individual on the electoral list are more likely to modify their choice during both the campaign or during two election periods. Similarly, the ratio of 0.717 expressed by the model 3 of *Figure 13* emphasizes that those who cast a preferential vote have more chance of being volatile, but between two elections solely. The ratio of 0.846 shown by *Figure 14* in its model 3 doesn’t stress the same pattern during the campaign. Finally, the cross-analysis of the model 4 of each model underscores that the amount of preferential vote delivered by a voter has no connection with the willingness of being volatile, neither in the campaign, nor between two election times. Thanks to both *Figure 13 and 14*, it is now confirmed that personalization and volatility are well-linked.

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<sup>145</sup> Participant 5, Semi-structured interview, Brussel, 10 April 2018

<sup>146</sup> Participant 5, Semi-structured interview, Brussel, 10 April 2018

<sup>147</sup> “*Je sais maintenant vers quoi je veux aller*”

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	Odd-ratios	Odd-ratios	Odd-ratios	Odd-ratios
Age	0.968	0.967	0.969	0.969
Gender	1.210	1.217	1.262	1.194
Education	0.904	0.896	0.949	0.906
Religious beliefs and practices	1.038	1.033	1.033	1.044
Political Knowledges	1.077	1.072	1.093	1.069
Political Interest	0.945	0.944	0.997	0.951
Political Trust	0.732	0.720	0.766	0.737
Political Efficiency	1.195	1.188	1.210	1.186
Satisfaction with the democracy	1.117	1.130	1.138	1.114
Choice because of the presence of a candidate	-	1.491	-	-
Preferential vote	-	-	0.717	-
Rate of preferential vote distributed	-	-	-	0.967

Figure 13, Effect of the personalization on volatility and influence of socio-demographic attributes (inter-elections)

*Deschouwer K., Delwit P., Hooghe M., Baudewyns P., Walgrave S., 2015*

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	Odd-ratios	Odd-ratios	Odd-ratios	Odd-ratios
Age	0.982	0.982	0.980	0.983
Gender	1.038	1.043	1.149	1.030
Education	1.153	1.143	1.248	1.155
Religious beliefs and practices	0.951	0.946	0.953	0.956
Attention paid to the campaign	0.813	0.807	0.949	0.820
Political Knowledges	1.030	1.024	1.017	1.023
Political Interest	0.879	0.876	0.894	0.883
Political Trust	0.792	0.799	0.783	0.797
Political Efficiency	1.250	1.244	1.225	1.244
Satisfaction with the democracy	0.996	1.010	1.046	0.944
Choice because of the presence of a candidate	-	1.506	-	-
Preferential vote	-	-	0.846	-
Rate of preferential vote distributed	-	-	-	0.897

Figure 14, Effect of the personalization on volatility and influence of socio-demographic attributes inter-elections (intra-campaign)  
*Deschouwer K., Delwit P., Hooghe M., Baudewyns P., Walgrave S., 2015*

### 6.3 MOTIVATIONS OF PERSONALIZATION

This first part of this analysis offers a wide outlook about the electoral volatility in Belgium and its strong relation with personalization, but no words have been said about the real motivations to follow a candidate-centered strategy. Indeed, the personalization is based on plenty of different short-term motivations, including the gender. Thereupon, the significance of gender dimension in voters' motivations, and broadly in the triangular relation with personalization and volatility, is still blurred. *Figure* below underlines 10 categories of motivations surveyed by *PartiRep*; these are based on the position and ideas of candidates, the way candidates represent their community, their social group, and their geographical area but also include the interaction the voter has with the candidate and the personal qualities of the latter<sup>148</sup>. However, considering the scope of this paper, only the first-two motivations of *Figure 15* would be investigated in order to keep a concise and relevant analysis. Leaving all non-relevant categories outside, *Figure* below<sup>149</sup> provides an overview of preferential voting motivations related to gender for the election of 2014<sup>150</sup>.

To begin with, *Figure 15* points out 15 25.7% of citizens who stressed candidate's stance on political matters, or the accomplishment of policy related to definite issues as one of their incentive. The item *Standing on issue* is also the most preferred motivation used to justify preferential voting, with 16.5% of the cumulated answers. The electorate defend this choice because of the values they can share with the candidate or similar perception of issues. Generally, fellow party candidates converge in term of ideologies due to their shared beliefs, though they can also potentially stand for different opinions. For that reason, giving preference to one or more candidate(s) reflects the desire to favor a position, including related to gender matters, at the expense of another one<sup>151</sup>.

At least one of nine electors have mentioned the *group identity* as a source of preferential voting motivation. In this frame, candidate gain support because of a shared

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<sup>148</sup> Deschouwer K., Delwit P., Hooghe M., Baudewyns P., Walgrave S., *Décrypter l'électeur, Le comportement électoral et les motivations de vote*, Louvain : LannooCampus, 2015, 336 pages.

<sup>149</sup> Table 4.1 covers two dimensions: one reflects the cumulated motivations, which explains why the final number is greater than the number of 622 participants and the second refers to the number of respondents per category of motivations.

<sup>150</sup> 1 out of 10 voters answered "do not know" despite the free and open structure of the questions; 9 out of 10 have chosen between 1 and 3 specific motivations.

<sup>151</sup> Deschouwer K., Delwit P., Hooghe M., Baudewyns P., Walgrave S., *Décrypter l'électeur, Le comportement électoral et les motivations de vote*, Louvain : LannooCampus, 2015, 336 pages.

membership to a socio-demographic group, based on the gender, an ethnicity, or a common religious minority. The frequency of 11.4% confirms that candidates can also be selected on account of personal characteristics, and not exclusively due to political opinions. Runner and voter are linked by a same identity. Hence, within a cost-benefit analysis, the voting group expect that, once elected, candidates would pay more attention to the needs and demands of the social group they belong with<sup>152</sup>.

	Given motivations*	Respondants
Standing on issue	16.5 %	25.7 %
Group identity	7.3 %	11.4 %
Local anchor	12.3 %	19.1 %
Direct contact with the candidate	15.9 %	24.8 %
Indirect contact with the candidate	9.2 %	14.3 %
Integrity	6.3 %	9.8 %
Personality	6.6 %	10.3 %
Capability	9.2 %	14.3 %
Leadership	5.8 %	9.0 %
Others	3.5 %	5.5 %
Don't know	7.2 %	11.3 %
Total (N)	967	622
<b>* all answers cumulated</b>		

Figure 15, Motivation of personalized vote in Belgium (2014)  
Deschouwer K., Delwit P., Hooghe M., Baudewyns P. , Walgrave S. , 2015

As a comparison, in the non-random panel, the item *standing on issues* isn't the favored motivation of personalization, but, is the most enounced with a rate of 100%. Technically, it means that the electorate coming from the sample doesn't motivate

<sup>152</sup> Deschouwer K., Delwit P., Hooghe M., Baudewyns P. , Walgrave S. , *Décrypter l'électeur, Le comportement électoral et les motivations de vote*, Louvain : LannooCampus , 2015, 336 pages.

originally their vote for one or several candidate(s) because of their standing on issues, but they all take the dimension into consideration. The item *Direct contact with the candidate* is the most preferred motivation with a proportion of 4 out of 5. In other words, these voters are willing to vote for an individual candidate because the latter belong in a direct – or indirect way – with a close-familiar circle: “*c’est exceptionnel que j’ai voté pour un candidat bien précis. Je l’ai fait une seule fois. C’était dans un parti que j’aimais bien, je savais qu’il y avait cette personne-là, c’était la sœur d’un ami (...)*”<sup>153</sup>, “*j’ai un ami que j’estime beaucoup et que je crois au niveau local peut faire des choses intéressantes. Il n’est pas écolo, mais ce ne n’est pas grave pour moi, je différencie la partie pays de la partie plus locale*”<sup>154</sup>, “*j’ai voté pour ma cheffe de troupe scout au niveau communal*”<sup>155</sup>. With 2 participants out of 5, the other preferred motivations are *Family tradition*, *Integrity* and *Acquis in the past*. Personal qualities such as being a good-speaker has also been stressed by one voters: “*quelqu’un quand je l’entends qui sache aussi s’exprimer ; pour moi c’est hyper important. (...) qui arrive à mettre des mots clairs, précis, qui arrive à s’adresser au peuple*”<sup>156</sup>. Finally, one voter has expressed the necessity of candidates which introduce *fresh-air* in the competition: “*moi je trouve que ce soit quelqu’un d’assez frais, d’assez nouveau. Pas...pas quelqu’un qui débarque, mais quelqu’un qui va renouveler un peu les choses d’où quelqu’un de jeune*”<sup>157</sup>. One last surprising point concerns the absence of category *Group identity* which hasn’t been left behind in *PartiRep* results.

The analysis of one’s propensity to favorite a specific personalized motivation depending on characteristics gave interesting evidences. On one hand, voters from the 50+ range have greater regards to the acquired experience of the candidate. On the other hand, young people pay more attention to their family tradition, and are more willing to follow the family path and adopt the same comporment as their parents; “*On en avait parlé avant avec ma famille (...) et je pense qu’elle aussi elle avait dû nous dire “ok telle ou telle personne (...) elles sont chouettes. J’ai peut-être été influencée (...) ma maman avait fait de la politique, elle était dans un parti et donc là c’est vrai que pour notre ville je connaissais bien le parti (...) et le futur bourgmestre qui est un ami à ma*

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<sup>153</sup> Participant 2, Semi-structured interview, Brussel, 16 April 2018

<sup>154</sup> Participant 1, Semi-structured interview, Louvain-La-Neuve, 18 April 2018

<sup>155</sup> Participant 6, Semi-structured interview, Louvain-La-Neuve, 13 April 2018

<sup>156</sup> Participant 3; Semi-structured interview, Louvain-La-Neuve, 22 May 2018

<sup>157</sup> Participant 1, Semi-structured interview, Louvain-La-Neuve, 18 April 2018

*maman (...) et je savais que c'était entre guillemets quelqu'un de bien (...)''<sup>158</sup>, "j'ai demandé "Papa je vote pour qui" ? ''<sup>159</sup>.*

	Motivations*	Respondants (First motivation)
Standing on issue	5/5	0/5
Group identity	-	-
Direct contact with the candidate	4/5	3/5
Acquis	2/5	1/5
Novelty	1/5	0/5
Integrity, Honesty	2/5	0/5
Family tradition	2/5	0/5
Personality	1/5	-
<b>*all answers cumulated</b>		

Figure 16, Motivations of personalized vote of the non-random panel (2014)  
Semi-structured interviews, 2018

#### 6.4 THE IMPACT OF THE PERSONALIZATION BY GENDER ON THE VOLATILITY

Thanks to the cross-checking of the evidences from the *Partirep* project and interviews, the attendance of the volatility and the personalization, as well as the extent of their bond in Belgium in 2014 is now obvious. The next part of the empirical analysis is aimed to solve the question of the impact of the personalization on the volatility. But by focusing specifically on gendered motivations. As already underlined, only the interviews would be exploited in this part of the analysis due to the *PartiRep*'s imprecisions about gender-related aspects. Interviews were constructed around the two following questions: "*vous est-il arrivé de voter pour un candidat car vous vous sentiez appartenir à un même groupe social lié au genre?*", "*vous est-il arrivé de voter pour un candidat pour ses positions sur des enjeux liés au genre ?*"<sup>160</sup>. Thanks to the semi-

<sup>158</sup> Participant 3; Semi-structured interview, Louvain-La-Neuve, 22 May 2018

<sup>159</sup> Participant 6, Semi-structured interview, Louvain-La-Neuve, 13 April 2018

<sup>160</sup> Semi-structured Interviews, April-May 2018

structured design, participants spontaneously explained to which degree gendered motivation would have potentially influenced a changing of vote in the same time of answering to questions.

	H1: Group identity	H2: Standing on gendered issues
P1	No	Yes
P2	No	Yes
P3	No	Yes
P4	No	No
P5	No	No
P6	No	No

Figure 17, Impact of the personalization based on gender dimension on the volatility (2014)  
Semi-structured interviews, 2018

#### 6.4.1 HYPOTHESIS 1: *VOTERS WHO FOLLOW A CANDIDATE-CENTERED STRATEGY BECAUSE OF A SHARED GENDER GROUP ARE MORE VOLATILES.*

Results emanating from the first hypothesis are quite clear: in 2014, the same-gender voting had no direct effect on the volatility. On the first base, none of the participants, neither men, nor women stressed the *gender identity* as a key motivation to cast a personal vote. Definitely, in case of candidate-centered vote the so-called component was considered as unreasoned and counterproductive, and by consequence, was totally neglected by voters. All the panel agree that they wouldn't have voted – and will never – for a female or male candidate because of their shared gender, but prefer keeping attention at the capability of the candidate. In general, as explained by P2, they would never support a woman solely because she's a woman: “*c'est ennuyant de voter parce que c'est une femme en fait. Je ne vote pas parce que c'est une femme en fait. Je vote parce que c'est mon idée et parce qu'on pense qu'elle est capable de faire, de réaliser les projets qu'elle propose. Maintenant est-ce que j'irais plus vers une femme parce que c'est une femme ? Je ne crois pas non.*”<sup>161</sup>, while P3 confirms: “*Non, ça dépend vraiment de leurs idées, mais je ne voterais pas pour une femme parce que c'est une femme. Je voterais pour un candidat qu'il soit homme ou femme pour les idées qu'il*

<sup>161</sup> Participant 2, Semi-structured interview, Brussel, 16 April 2018

*représente. (...) Mais je ne vais jamais voter pour une femme en me disant “ oh elle c’est une femme, je vais la prendre au pif dans une liste”<sup>162</sup> and finally “ (...) non parce que ça, ça dépend des connaissances qu’on a dans la matière et ça que ce soit une femme ou un homme on n’est pas moins bon. Si on est impliqué, on est intéressé, et qu’on a des connaissances (...) ça ne dépend pas du genre qu’on a”<sup>163</sup>. Through testimonies, it appears that the variables *commitment* and *competence* strongly prevail, but conceivable matters of representation stayed, and more generally, stays less important for both men and women: “ si tu fais ton choix en fonction du sexe du candidat, tu risques de perdre de vue tous les autres critères de compétence, de programme”<sup>164</sup>.*

Thenceforth, the first hypothesis tends to be rejected simply because the same-gender voting isn’t bringing into consideration by the panel at all and so, doesn’t influence their volatility. Nevertheless, in term of facts, this statement must be moderated while one case of variance exists and counterbalances the strong rejection of the first hypothesis. If a female elector has to choose between a man and a woman, and both candidate have equal concerns, the acceptance of the same-gender voting is intensified. At the contrary, in these circumstances, the same-gender is a criterion of volatility which influence the voter in one direction. When such a situation occurs, women are less reluctant to cast a same-gender voting but prefer supporting a woman instead of a man; such an inclination is justified by the women’s awareness to achieve a gender equality and in politics, and to support it when they have opportunities to : “ si c’est une femme et un homme qui représente tous les deux des idées qui me correspondent (...) du coup je voterais peut-être plus pour la femme si les deux présentent les mêmes idées parce qu’en général il y a quand même moins de femmes dans les politiques, que souvent ça reste un peu, il y a plus d’hommes”<sup>165</sup>, “ (...) si j’ai une balance entre un homme et une femme, je vais prendre une femme si je trouve qu’elles sont valables (...) dans l’idée de renouveau parce que je crois que ça apporte une autre dimension (...) il n’y a pas une tonne de temps qu’elles font de la politique et je crois qu’elles peuvent aborder les problèmes

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<sup>162</sup> Participant 3, Semi-structured interviews, Louvain-La-Neuve, 22 May 2018

<sup>163</sup> Participant 1, Semi-structured interviews, Louvain-La-Neuve, 18 April 2018

<sup>164</sup> Participant 4, Semi-structured interviews, Brussel, 10 April 2018

<sup>165</sup> Participant 3, Semi-structured interviews, Louvain-La-Neuve, 22 May 2018

*autrement*”<sup>166</sup>. Inversely, the impact of the gender identity on volatility doesn’t know variance for men.

To conclude, the scrutiny of the gendered identity’s effect on volatility rejects the first hypothesis for 2014; none of the participants have casted a same-gender vote. In general, men and women joined to prefer the representation of ideas or competencies in lieu of the representation of their gendered social group. Therefore, belonging to the same gender group than a candidate isn’t strong enough to make them modify their vote or to help them to support one candidate. However, the assumption cannot be simply denied. Indeed, according to the female part of the panel, it exists one hypothetical situation within the gender-based voting matters. While women are hesitating between one male and one female candidate with the same ideas, they would have a preference to cast their vote for the female candidate; hence, in this precise case, the personalization applied by the gender identity impacts the volatility.

#### 6.4.2 HYPOTHESIS 2: *VOTERS WHO CAST A CANDIDATE-CENTERED VOTE BECAUSE OF CANDIDATE’S EXPLICIT POSITION ON GENDER-RELATED ISSUES ARE MORE VOLATILES.*

The second hypothesis is applied to understand if voters are likely to be changeable in their vote if they pay attention to candidate’s standing on gender issues, and in spite of the candidate’s gender. As shown by *Figure 17*, a trend is quickly detected which creates a gap between opposite sub-groups in the panel. At one side, the female part of the sample shows a united front: candidate’s positions on issues, related to their gender-group has been an incentive to support one or several specific(s) candidate(s) in 2014, without being their first motivation. More precisely, concerns such as equal pay, maternity leave or sexual harassment have been named as central by the female panel and were expected to influence their general evaluation of the runners “*ça oui, parce que je trouve que, que, oui parce que ce sont des questions qui m’importent. Quelqu’un qui a dit “je vais me battre pour que le congé maternité soit plus long, ou que le congé d’allaitement soit plus long, ou que pareil, les femmes soient plus... aussi bien payées que les hommes”, ça oui parce que je suis une femme et donc*

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<sup>166</sup> Participant 1, Semi-structured interviews, Louvain-La-Neuve, 18 April 2018

*fatalement... ”<sup>167</sup>, “oui. Égalité des genres et position de la femme sont des enjeux qui pourraient me faire voter pour un candidat plutôt qu’un autre ”<sup>168</sup>.*

Further, the female panel has confirmed that candidate’s understanding can generally influence female voters to prefer one candidate in place of the other or change their ballot for a candidate who wasn’t primary foreseen: *“si les enjeux qu’il représente voilà c’est des enjeux actuels de mon groupe social, je pense que oui (...) je ne suis pas le genre de personne qui a une idée fixe un mois à l’avance, et me dire je vais voter pour telle personne. J’aime bien regarder les débats et évoluer avec ça (...) si c’est un parti auquel je ne m’étais pas intéressée, mais pour lequel je pourrais voter également, et qu’il y a un candidat qui se démarque en disant telle ou telle chose, ça pourrait changer. ”<sup>169</sup>, “oui je pourrais voter pour cette personne spécifiquement dans un autre parti que celui que je m’étais fixé au début ”<sup>170</sup>. In addition, this part of the panel support that the shared-gender have had no significance in case of an issue-voting. For them, candidates weren’t required to belong to the gender group they fight for: *“mais le projet ne doit pas d’office être porté par une femme. Mais par quelqu’un qui peut défendre les femmes (...) quelqu’un qui a une sensibilité à ce sujet ”<sup>171</sup>. Allowing merely and exclusively women to handle those areas of matters, without any intervention of men can lead to undesirable situations: *“ce n’est pas parce qu’on fait partie d’un groupe qu’on va mieux le défendre, je ne pense pas. Peut-être qu’on est facilités par certains trucs, mais je ne suis pas sûre que c’est toujours quelque chose qui peut être bénéfique, ça peut avoir ses travers ”<sup>172</sup>. On the opposite, some doubts have been expressed by the male part of the panel vis-à-vis the total objectivity and combativity of candidates with different gender than issues they stand for. According to P6, the deep understanding of gendered matters is the necessary prerequisite, taking source into a specific background that solely men and women respectively can understand thanks to their experience. Despite a meaningful knowledge and awareness about one topic, if a candidate doesn’t belong to the specific gender group, there would always be something***

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<sup>167</sup> Participant 2, Semi-structured interview, Brussel, 16 April 2018

<sup>168</sup> Participant 1, Semi-structured interviews, Louvain-La-Neuve, 18 April 2018

<sup>169</sup> Participant 3, Semi-structured interviews, Louvain-La-Neuve, 22 May 2018

<sup>170</sup> Participant 2, Semi-structured interview, Brussel, 16 April 2018

<sup>171</sup> Participant 1, Semi-structured interviews, Louvain-La-Neuve, 18 April 2018

<sup>172</sup> Participant 3, Semi-structured interviews, Louvain-La-Neuve, 22 May 2018

missing to be combative and keeping strong positions<sup>173</sup>. Likewise, a candidate would certainly be more inclined to reach compromise due to a weak sense of realities.

However, even if all women involved in the interviews supported candidates partly because of specific positions on gender concerns, the second hypothesis cannot be confirmed for 2014. For the three men interviewed, a gendered-issue hasn't had any impact on their calculation but have been instead refuted in the name of the nation-wide interest. Thereby, for men who support a, or several, specific candidate(s) in 2014, gendered issues haven't had any impact on their choice. According to them, despite the existence of different small groups of identity, fostering their specific concerns encompass the risk to lead to a worse situation for all. Correspondingly, even if the outcome can be better for some specific social groups, the global situation would be worse. In these circumstances the gender-issue voting haven't influenced their electoral behaviour or their tendency to be volatile : *“alors si on regarde de façon collective la façon dont a été traitée la problématique on n'a pas gagné grand-chose et que du coup ça n'a pas de sens”*<sup>174</sup>. Men are generally less likely to be uncertain because of gender-issue topics simply because they don't have consciousness of specific men-related issues. In other words, being a man doesn't make them belonging to a specific gendered-social group. Instead, men identify primarily their socio-economic group<sup>175</sup>, or their linguistic group<sup>176</sup> as matter of concerns which can justify an issue-voting; the variable gender is non-existing. The conclusion about the influence of gender-related issues on volatility is clear: women generally understand the necessity to take position on women's issues and thereby adjust their vote depending on candidate's positions, while men are strongly less exposed to gender-issue's influence. Instead, men are more inclined to cast a personal vote based on the general interest, because they are less aware about area of concerns which could be labelled as *“men issues”*. These general assumptions can be applied to the elections of 2014.

In view of results, the second hypothesis can be confirmed but for women uniquely. The propensity that the gendered-issue personalization increases one's volatile behavior is directly linked to the gender of the elector. In 2014, all voters focus on candidate's

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<sup>173</sup> Participant 6, Semi-structured interview, Louvain-La-Neuve, 13 April 2018

<sup>174</sup> Participant 5, Semi-structured interview, Brussel, 10 April 2018

<sup>175</sup> Participant 6, Semi-structured interview, Louvain-La-Neuve, 13 April 2018

<sup>176</sup> Participant 4, Semi-structured interviews, Brussel, 10 April 2018

standing on issues in case of candidate-centered strategy, but solely women paid attention to the gender issues. Accordingly, this dimension of the personalization has less impact on the volatility of male electors.



## 7. CONCLUSION

This paper aimed to investigate the connection between the personalization by gender and the electoral volatility in Belgium. More precisely, the analysis tarried on the different characteristics that motivate a personalized vote, in which the gender dimension occupy a key place. Whereas the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the emergence of a neo-liberal, industrial and mediatized structure of State in all western countries, the former stable electorate evolved and became highly unsteady. In the past, electoral discourses took place in a structure of frozen socio-economic cleavages, in the sens of Lipset and Rokkan, in which parties embodied every socio-economic strata's. Accordingly, the fixed setting launched a frame for stable electoral behaviour. But, it hadn't been reckoned that the modernization would have disrupted traditional forms of social cleavages, involving the decrease of the socio-economic group of voters as the only determinant of voting conduct. The alleged transformation urged a deep makeover of voting cues used before by the electorate as well as the way of considering political parties. Indeed, the sharply development of media since the 1950s, especially through high-mediatized campaign at the television, permitted to the *mass* to be exposed to political matters. Media as a source of knowledge's, then emerged educated and flexible voters, but also uncertain and instable, and less involved in conventional political participation. Therefore, the media expansion has driven citizens to develop more critical way of thinking, which joined to a higher education, made the electorate capable to challenge the politics instead of supporting it. Parties were also challenged by the rise of non-political actors: as media stole the role of parties in delivering political information, interest groups and lobbies replaced political actors in representing public interests. The inability of traditional parties to deal with the post-material values and a rising awareness was also pointed out as a source of unstable voting behavior. Definitely, this reconsideration of the role of parties by the electorate has been a trigger point of electoral volatility as evidenced by its evolution from 15% in the 1980s to 30% in 1990 and 40% in the 2000s.

The declining weight of party made voters more disposed to emphasize personal attributes of single candidates and then, the individual gained authority at the expense of the whole political party. In addition, and because every political demand ought to be answered, parties revised their political supply by enlarging the attention on personal

criteria's during electoral campaign. As a consequence, this process fueled by both politicians and citizens entailed the personalization of politics. For its own, the relation between the volatility and the personalization has already been proven by the international literature: the higher the intensity of personalization, the higher the propensity to be volatile between two elections or during the electoral campaign. However, the personalization of politics isn't built on a one-dimension design, but involves a variety of motivations, all constructed on candidate's personal criteria's. Thus, while the impact of the personalization on volatility is well-defined, the detailed influence of each dimension of the personalization on the volatility has been totally ignored by the literature.

In all these sources of personalized preferences, the gender is currently constituting a newcomer. In regard to the History, the evolution of women's civil and political rights has also driven the modern electoral pattern of both voters and candidates. While the gendered bivalence was non-existing in past political settings, the electorate has now the choice between men and women. Consequently, the innovative participation of women in politics makes the gender-dimension of candidate a potential criterion of influence.

Despite the improvement in women's' representation, the gendered disparity in politics is still a touchy concern. On one hand, women are often stereotyped by citizens as too kind, too soft and not sufficiently aggressive and competent to deal with serious topic. On the other hand, electoral strategies, settled by parties to meet the political demand, support these prejudices. Henceforth, in reason of the currentness of this point but the lack of awareness about the gender-dimension effect on volatility, this research aspired to bring light on *the impact of the personalization by the gender on the volatile voting behavior in Belgium*. To answer this question, two hypotheses were submitted to encompasses different realities laying behind the general concept "Gender": "*Voters who follow a candidate-centered strategy because of a shared gender group are more volatiles*" while the second one was "*Voters who cast a candidate-centered vote because of candidate's explicit position on gender-related issues are more volatiles*".

The data analysis has been steered through a methodology mixing results from the Belgian survey *PartiRep: Decrypter l'électeur* (2015), and six semi-structured interviews of citizens selected after a non-random sample. On the first step of the study, the volatility and the personalization were handled separately and applied to the Belgian

elections of 2014. As underlined by *PartiRep*, 40.2% of citizens surveyed declared they changed their electoral strategy between 2010 and 2014, while 35.50% of voters changed their vote during the election campaign of 2014. For its own, results from the panel were quite similar and translated 34 % of switcher electors within the campaign of 2014 and 40% during the campaign. Concerning the personalization during the elections of 2014, 57% of Belgian citizens emitted a preferential vote to one or several candidate(s). Comparatively, 5 out of the 6 participants of the interviews cast – at least - one personal vote in 2014; solely one participant has voted for a party. After having been depicted separately, the research handled if their presumed bond could be applied to the Belgian elections of 2014. The second part of the inquiry helped to confirm that personalization and volatility were effectively well-linked. *PartiRep* project assumes that voters who motivated their vote for a party by the presence of individual candidates were more likely to modify their choice during the campaign or between the two election periods of 2010 and 2014. In addition, those who casted a preferential vote had more chance of being volatile, but between the two elections solely. The third and last stage of the study took one step further by stressing the different motivation of personalization. The matter was to focus on gendered features in order to tackle the impact of the personalization by the gender on the volatile voting behavior in Belgium. After having cross-checked *PartiRep* and interviews, the first hypothesis is neither confirmed, nor rejected. In most of times, and similarly in 2014, the same-gender voting based on shared identity has no direct effect on the volatility. As shown by the interviews, none of the participants, neither men, nor women stressed the gender identity as a key motivation to cast a personal vote. Instead, individuals' commitment and competence strongly prevailed on matters for representation. However, the assumption couldn't be totally refused whereas one hypothetical situation of variance exists. In case of a female elector dawdles between two individuals, a man and a woman with both equals ideas, then the rejection of the same-gender motivation may be weakened. In these circumstances, the female panel would prefer to support the female candidate in order to encourage the need to achieve gender equality. Hence, in this precise case, the personalization constructed after the gender identity may impact the volatility. The second hypothesis tends to be partially confirmed; the willingness to pay attention to candidates' position on gender-issue depending on electorate's gender.

Despite runner's positions on issues wasn't the first favorite motivation to follow a candidate-centered calculation, women who voted in 2014 payed attention to positions related to their gender-group. In view of that, such a cue was used as an incentive to support one or several specific(s) candidate(s). The best-ranked subjects to get their support were equal pay, maternity leave or sexual harassment. In addition, according to them, candidates who stood on women-related issues weren't obliged to come from the group they fought for. Women all agree that female politicians are definitely not the most capable to defend female interests, but it's more than preferred to have men involved in debates to have a wider view of a specific issue. In contrast, for the male part of the sample, the gendered-issue basement hadn't any impact on their ballot in 2014. Instead, they refuted it in the name of the nation-wide interest. According to them, consequences of this electoral calculation would have been – and still is – worse for the whole community. The preference of the nation-wide interest may be justified by their lack of self-awareness about taking part of a gender group. As collected in the interviews, being a man doesn't make them belong with a specific gendered-social group they have to fight for. If men cast an issue-voting, they would consider first take into consideration their socio-economic group, or their linguistic group. Subsequently, the breach into the panel makes the second hypothesis not completely verified; while women understood the necessity to take position on women's issues and truly adjust their vote depending on candidate's positions, men are strongly less exposed to gender-issue's influence. To conclude, the propensity that the gendered-issue personalization increases one's volatile behavior is directly linked to the gender of the elector.

However, readers should keep in mind that the present study is the first step of a blank area of concerns, and requests obviously to be reproduced in time and in a broader geographical zone to contribute to the literature. Undeniably, the current state of research knows one major key-limit due to the lack of available resources: six semi-structured interviews only highlight a narrow view of the reality and therefore, may weaken the robustness of the conclusions. Logically, testimonies from six individuals cannot be totally illustrative of the whole Belgian population, and a wider selection of citizen would be more appropriate. Thenceforth, results should be interpreted with caution. The ambition of future examinations, would be to enlarge the sample, and select it randomly, to progress and strengthen current conclusions. On a second time, it would be relevant to apply such a research to different areas in order to cross-check

analysis, and why not launch a comparative study in all western democracies. Moreover, these conclusions are solely concerned with the election of 2014. As already said, the electoral behavior takes foundations in a mood contingent to a specific conjecture. Results are deeply dependent of specific context and are thus expected to evolve in the next elections. The replication of the study through different times would certainly stress evolution of the gender status in electoral behavior. As an example, with the light bring on concerns about sexual harassment and the sharply booming of movement such as *Time'sUp*, #MeToo and #Balancetonporc, the matter of “gendered-related issues” and more largely, status of women would undoubtedly disrupt the future voter’s priorities in electoral calculation as well as the next political outcome.

The primarily purpose of the investigation was to strike the gendered branch of the electoral volatility, but one things led to another, the conclusions has raised an interesting discussion which overcome the simple question of electoral behavior. At the base of the reasoning stands the postulation that men are more incline to favor the nation-wide interest instead of their specific gender-group. As emphasized in the conclusions, men never build their vote on a hypothetical connection to the male gender-group. But what could be said about this notion of “general interest”? Basically, the idea of a common and shared interest may be defined as “the goods of the community”. In this setting, the so-called idea of community is logically opposed to smallest social-groups. However, is the reality really matching with this theoretical statement? In regard to the past – and the current – time, which impact have had the male overrepresentation in politics on the notion of general interest? Like, there are plenty of debates about women’s issues, or ethnic groups’ issues but less often about the social group “men” and their specific interests of men. In regard to the running of the society, a situation is commonly applied to the whole community, until she doesn’t fit to everyone anymore and is then adapted to specific realities. Those sub-groups are mostly socio-economic, ethnic, religious, but the label “specific gendered concern” is frequently linked to women’s demands. Then where are the men’s interests as a group? Accordingly, what if the notion of general interest would have been distorted and blurred by the male interests? What if all policies implemented in the name of the common good were instead an indirect – and hidden – pretext to defend male positions? Thereby, the initial study about the electoral behavior raised a question of ethic, and one step further of the fairness of the democracy.



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In the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the media-revolution, the rising of many non-political actors and the non-effectiveness and the hardness of traditional parties powered a new electoral behavior named the volatility. The new volatile elector is characterized by a decline in classic partisanship paired to a new electoral personalized calculation, constructed on preferential vote and candidate's personal dimension. The link between volatility and personalization is clear: electorates who vote after candidate's personal settings are more likely to be volatile. However, personalization may encompass a variety of personal determinants and until now, the weight of gender have always been neglected by the literature. Thereby, the study investigates how the personalization, focusing on its gender branch, can affect the volatile voting behavior during the Belgian elections of 2014. On one side, the personalization by gender encompass a shared-membership to a gender group between an elector and a candidate. However, results show that belonging to the same gender group isn't an enough pertinent motivation to make voters be more volatile. Yet, in situation where women balance between candidates with the same ideas, they would prefer to support the female candidate instead of a man. In this precise circumstance solely, the personalization through the gender-identity rises the volatility. On the other side, personalization by gender concerns voters influenced by candidate's positions on gendered concerns. With regard to the results, this assumption is partially refused. The propensity that the gendered-issue personalization increases one's volatile behavior is directly linked to the gender of the elector. Indeed, while women adjust their vote due to candidates' standings on women's issues, men are strongly less exposed to gender-issue's influence.

*Key-words:* political psychology, electoral behavior, volatility, personalization, gender.

