

CALL FOR PAPERS

Call for Papers

Special issue

Parties at the grassroots: local party sections in the Low Countries

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Parties are generally considered to be in decline in Western democracies, including Belgium and the Netherlands (a.o. van Biezen, Mair & Poguntke, 2012; Whiteley, 2011; Wauters, 2017). Features of this decline include amongst others a reduced trust in parties and a decrease in the number of party members.

This decline forces parties and governments to reconsider their own functioning. Other ways (than party membership) to connect citizens and governments have recently been developed and tested in the form of interactive decision-making and citizen initiatives (Li & Marsh, 2008; Bakker et al., 2012; Vanleene et al., 2017). This raises the question of the (future) relevance of grassroots political parties. Rather than focusing on party members, we put the spot here on local party sections. What is the role and function of local party sections, apart from selecting candidates and acquiring votes for the party (André & Depauw, 2016)? How do they relate to the national party: are they still considered as ambassadors of the national party and as upwards transmitters of signals among the population, or are they increasingly acting independently?

In order to contribute to this debate, we invite articles dealing with one or more of the following topics:

- **Party organization:** the number of members and/or activities of local party sections (including causes and consequences), relationship with other levels in the party (vertical integration in the national party, multi-level strategies, hierarchy vs stratarchy, etc.)
- **Party strategies:** policy choices, party positions and attitudes, etc. (between parties, and between local parties and the national party)
- **Communication:** which communication strategies do local party sections use, do they use social media, etc. (causes, consequences, variance): to what extent does this facilitate (or replace) communication with national party and with the population?
- **Opinions and background of local chairs:** ideological positions of local parties (in line with the national party or not, variance between parties), attitude towards democratic renewal (citizen initiatives surpassing political parties, etc.)

The articles preferably rely on analyses of the Belgian Local Chairs Survey-data (conducted all over Belgium) and on a survey among Dutch local party leaders conducted by Voerman & Boogers. The advantage of these surveys is that they have been conducted recently (both in 2018), but also several times before. This allows for both up-to-date analyses as well as for cross-temporal analyses. Perhaps, even articles comparing Belgium and the Netherlands are a possibility.