The Power or the People?

Direct Democratic and Electoral Reforms in Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands

Een wetenschappelijke proeve op het gebied van de Managementwetenschappen

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Some people already know by the age of six that they are passionate about politics. I am definitively not that person. In fact, I studied Communication Sciences and worked briefly as a communications consultant. But there was always a hint of enthusiasm for Political Science. When I was young we did not talk politics at the dinner table. In fact both my mother and brother routinely turned silent when I brought it up. However, it was them who first spotted my embryonic love of politics when they gave me a book on ‘Het Vlaams Blok’ (now Vlaams Belang) for my eighteenth birthday. The fact that I still remember says it all, though it took me a further three years to discover that Political Science was my true passion. I joined the Political Science group at the University of Antwerp in 2002 – and left in 2004 when my temporary contract ended. But I soon returned to academia and started the project that led to this thesis.

During the years I worked on this project I have benefited greatly from the discussions and comments of many people. The field work was truly exciting – it was the most rewarding work experience I have ever had – and I thoroughly enjoyed my regular visits to Austria from February 2009 till August 2010. My Belgian and Dutch interviews and archival visits were also very rewarding. I would like to thank in particular the people at the IWM (Vienna) for granting me the opportunity to stay with them. It was an enriching experience. Not only was the library (and lunch) excellent but the whole academic atmosphere was highly inspiring. I have never been as creative and productive as I was in Vienna. I would explicitly like to thank Krzysztof Michalski, the rector of the institute, and Mary Nicklas for their support. I met some great people in Vienna. At the risk of forgetting someone, I would like to thank Andreea Raluca Maierean, Margherita Angelini, Patryk Babiracki, Sara Zorandy, Leila Hadj-Abdou and Lisa Wewerka for their time, help and friendship in Vienna.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 A second wave of democratic reform?

In 1975 three leading scholars, Crozier, Huntington and Watanuki, edited an influential book called *The Crisis of Democracy*. This book was, as the title suggests, a warning cry. The authors believed that at that time liberal democracy itself was in danger, as it was faced by threats from fascism, communism and ‘excessive demands of citizens’. In 2000 a group of contemporary leading scholars re-examined this alleged crisis of democracy in the book *Disaffected Democracies. What’s Troubling the Trilateral Countries?* (Pharr and Putnam, 2000). The authors found that *The Crisis of Democracy* should be considered a historical document rather than an accurate prediction of the future. One cannot speak of a ‘crisis of democracy’ any longer: the support for democracy *as such* is greater than ever in trilateral countries, fascist and communist threats have diminished and although citizens’ demands have risen, this did not lead to the collapse of national political systems. In short, liberal democracy proved to be more resilient than was expected by the authors of *The Crisis of Democracy*. Nowadays the question is no longer ‘will democracies survive?’ Instead a new question has emerged, namely: how, why and when will established democracies evolve? The ‘survival question era’ was normatively inextricably linked to (the need for) stability and with the survival question answered, the focus shifted from stability to evolution. This was also reflected in the field of democratic reform. Until the beginning of the 1990s, the academic consensus seemed to be that electoral laws and referendum legislation (when available) were stable. At most some piecemeal and/or isolated changes took place.

However, in 2003 this perspective changed radically. A group of leading scholars in the field of comparative politics and public administration examined all the existing research and carried out a comprehensive survey of 18 established democracies (Cain, Dalton and Scarrow, 2003). The study looked at legislation in the field of representative democracy (electoral reforms), direct democracy (changes in referendum legislation) and participatory democracy. Overall the authors found that from the beginning of the 1990s the 18 democracies started to experience a so-called ‘second wave of democratic reform’, as the institutionalized relationship between the citizen and the political elites suddenly began to change (Dalton, Scarrow and Cain, 2003:7-9). Regarding participatory democracy the changes were often limited to (isolated) experiments (e.g. with participatory budgeting or citizen juries) rather than being full-fledged changes in the legislation, but especially as regards representative democracy and direct democracy substantial changes seemed to have taken place. Electoral reforms occurred more often and referendum legislation was introduced or changed in a large number of established democracies (Dalton and Gray, 2003; Scarrow, 2003). As will become

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1 The term ‘trilateral countries’ refers to Canada and the USA, Western Europe and Japan.
3 Strictly speaking, Cain, Dalton and Scarrow (2003:18) use the term ‘advocacy democracy’, which is slightly broader than participatory democracy as it also includes e.g. the relationship between citizens and the judiciary and transparency laws. However, since I am interested only in the relationship between citizens and the political elites, the subset of participatory democracy is more suited. When I discuss ‘participatory democracy’ I will use only the evidence the authors provide on the topic of participatory democracy and thus exclude elements that are part of advocacy democracy but not of participatory democracy (for more on the elements specific to participatory democracy, see Zittel and Fuchs, 2007).
clear in the remainder of this introduction, a great deal still has to be done in this relatively new field of democratic reform.

1.2 Lacunae in the field of democratic reform.

There are at least four general gaps in the field of democratic reform: 1) only a few explanatory studies exist that include both electoral and direct democratic reform; 2) little is known about any but major reforms; 3) reform studies do not consider the specific nature of consensus democracies; and 4) not much is known about how electoral and direct democratic reform relate to each other in reform discussions.

1. A LACK OF COMPARATIVE CAUSAL ANALYSES WHICH INCLUDE BOTH DIRECT DEMOCRATIC AND ELECTORAL REFORM. Dalton, Scarrow and Cain (2003:13) have observed that reformers’ ‘[c]alls for democratic reform generally favour changes to strengthen both the system of representative and direct democracy. (...) These processes are often intertwined as part of the democratic passions of reformers’ (emphasis in the original). Yet it is striking that studies examining individual democratic reforms generally examine electoral reforms and direct democratic reforms independently. In fact, direct democratic reforms are hardly ever studied, while the direct democratic elements in reform ‘packages’ are routinely ignored. The study of electoral reform, for instance, has mostly focused on four countries: Italy, Japan, New Zealand and France (Norris, 1995; Shugart and Wattenberg, 2001; Benoit, 2004; Katz, 2005; Renwick, 2010). In two of these countries direct democratic reform was part of at least one electoral reform discussion. In New Zealand the government introduced a major reform of the electoral system, but at the same time brought in far-reaching citizen-initiated referendum provisions as well (the Citizen Initiated Referendum Act of 1993, see: Qvortrup, 2005:96). In France in 2007-08 citizen-initiated referendum provisions replaced the original electoral reform proposals during the democratic reform discussions (Renwick, 2010:109). Lastly, no direct democratic reforms occurred in Italy, but the country already had one of the most far-reaching referendum provisions, which was also key in passing the 1992-94 electoral reforms (cf. Qvortrup, 2005:126-131; Renwick, 2010:172-176). Only in Japan was the referendum issue entirely absent. To sum up, despite the fact that the direct democratic and electoral reforms are often ‘intertwined’, they are hardly ever studied together.

2. A LIMITED KNOWLEDGE OF ANY BUT MAJOR DEMOCRATIC REFORMS. A second lacuna in the field of democratic reform relates to the ‘size’ of the reforms studied. Mainly major national-level electoral or direct democratic reforms are examined. Indeed, major electoral reform especially is studied intensively by political scientists (cf. Leyenaar and Hazan, 2011). Changes such as a shift from a purely majoritarian to a more proportional electoral system receive a great deal of scholarly attention (cf. the volume edited by Shugart and Wattenberg, 2001). Major direct democratic reforms, such as the introduction of national referendum legislation, also have received (some) attention (cf. Scarrow, 2001; 2003; Qvortrup, 2005). Overall numbers of actual referendums or individual (mostly European Union-related) referendums are studied more often, but analyses of changes in referendum legislation remain rare (cf. Scarrow, 2001).

In fact, to my knowledge virtually no comparative causal analyses of democratic reforms exist. The only exception is the volume edited by Cain, Dalton and Scarrow (2003), which is, however, mostly descriptive and offers no systematic causal analysis.

For now I interpret ‘major’ and ‘any but’ or ‘non-major’ in an intuitive way as large-scale or small-scale. Later on, in Chapter 3, I will delineate major and non-major reforms in a systematic way.
However, non-major reforms are routinely ignored in the academic literature. Indeed, reforms such as changes in the impact of preference votes, the introduction of suffrage for 18- or 16-year-olds or changes in the requirements to initiate referendums are rarely studied. Only very recently have scholars begun to examine non-major democratic reforms. In 2005 Katz wrote the first explanatory study of non-major electoral reform, while in particular Susan Scarrow’s (often cited but rarely followed up) 1997 exploratory study of the expansion of direct democracy in Germany at the level of the Länder was the first to analyse non-major direct democratic reforms.

Nevertheless, studying non-major democratic reforms has significant advantages. First of all, major democratic reforms often seem more an ‘accident’ than ‘politics as usual’ where patterns can be observed and studied (Blais and Shugart, 2008:198; Jacobs and Leyenaar, 2011:503). Non-major reforms may well be less determined by idiosyncratic (and mostly unpredictable) factors and can probably be explained more accurately through existing theories (cf. Katz, 2005:74). Furthermore, non-major democratic reforms also can have major consequences. Farrell (2001) for instance observed that in the United Kingdom nothing had changed at the national level, while at the sub-national level significant (but non-major) electoral reforms were taking place (for a similar argument on the USA, see Bowler and Donovan, 2008). These sub-national electoral reforms were reshaping citizens’ ideas about smaller parties and making them more aware of the existence and functioning of different electoral systems. Another example relates to redistricting. It is well established among those studying redistricting that such reforms can heavily influence who is elected (Handley and Grofman, 2008:3). As far as direct democracy is concerned non-major reforms can also have significant consequences. For instance, lowering the number of signatures required to initiate a referendum can substantially increase the number of referendums held in a country. In short, by excluding non-major reforms (a) idiosyncratic factors and extraordinary circumstances gain more importance, while (b) reforms that may well have significant consequences are left out of the picture.

3. NO INSIGHT INTO THE SPECIFIC NATURE OF DEMOCRATIC REFORM IN CONSENSUS DEMOCRACIES. Another lacuna concerns what methodologists call ‘causal homogeneity’, or the scope conditions for the explanatory theories of democratic reform. Indeed, the main factors used to explain democratic reform may well have different effects in different types of democracies. In a recent innovative study in the edited volume To Keep or to Change First Past the Post? several leading scholars examined major electoral reform in majoritarian democracies (Blais, 2008). In such democracies the explanatory factors may well have different effects than they do in consensus democracies. On at least three crucial points majoritarian democracies seem to be dissimilar to their consensus counterparts (cf. Lijphart, 1999). First, majoritarian democracies are less vulnerable to modest surges of public dissatisfaction, as these are less likely to be translated into seat losses. They are also less vulnerable to threats from third parties, given the mechanical and psychological effects of the electoral system which benefit the two largest parties. Second, in majoritarian democracies

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7 Conversely, there is debate over the sometimes limited impact of major reforms (e.g. Horiuchi and Saito, 2003 versus Krauss and Pekkanen, 2004; see also Gallagher and Mitchell, 2005).
8 Lijphart uses ten dimensions to distinguish between majoritarian and consensus democracies. Later work by Vatter (2009) even added two extra dimensions. For the sake of clarity I here gather the most relevant dimensions in three groups.
there are fewer veto players. In most cases governing parties are not ‘hindered’ by coalition partners or an all too critical Lower House. Nor do they face strong non-partisan veto players or written constitutions that are difficult to amend. Third, the governing parties in majoritarian democracies often benefit hugely from the existing electoral system, making them less keen to change it. This can also affect the prospects for direct democracy, as governing parties in majoritarian democracies may be more inclined to implement direct democratic reforms (rather than electoral reforms) when for instance they are confronted with an upsurge in political dissatisfaction, as such reforms damage them less. Conversely, in consensus democracies parties are more vulnerable to public dissatisfaction and smaller parties, there are (far) more veto players and larger parties benefit less from the overall electoral system. All of this is likely to influence the effect of the factors traditionally used to explain democratic reform. Hence, there are reasons to expect that democratic reform works in a different way in consensus democracies. Yet with the exception of one recent case study of three Belgian reforms by Hooghe and Deschouwer (2011), no study has examined democratic reforms as embedded within consensus democracies. So far, no study has attempted to bring findings from different consensus democracies together and generate an explanation or model that specifically applies to and integrates the specific nature of consensus democracies.

4. No insight into why and which types of democratic reform occur together.

Given that direct democratic reforms and electoral reforms are routinely studied separately, there is no insight into whether patterns exist in the composition of reforms. Reforms often occur in the form of ‘multi-faceted’ package deals (Rahat, 2008:271). In this way a consensus can be reached between divergent interests. Indeed, in coalition governments in particular such divergent interests are likely to exist. Currently, however, there is little or no insight into why and when particular elements appear together in one package deal. Specifically the relationship between different electoral and direct democratic reform elements and between major and non-major reform elements is unclear. To my knowledge no study has systematically discussed the nature of democratic reform package deals.

1.3 Research question and theoretical puzzles

This study intends to provide a link to fill these four lacunae. I will examine what can explain democratic reform by analysing both electoral and direct democratic reforms and both major and non-major reforms in three consensus democracies, namely Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands. Nested within these three countries I will select a diverse set of a total of seven government periods, covering eleven reform discussions. Some of these debates led to actual reforms, while others did not and simply collapsed. The central research question guiding the intensive study of these cases is the following: What best explains the fate of democratic reform attempts in consensus democracies?

In general two theories dominate the field. A first theoretical approach to democratic reform is rational choice. It is mostly used in the study of electoral reform and focuses on the self-
interest of political elites. In its purest form the rational choice approach maintains that parties will change the electoral system when (a) they have the majority to do so and (b) such an operation is expected to ‘maximize’ their seat share (Benoit, 2004:363). As is apparent at first glance, this interpretation is only suited for explaining electoral reform that affects seat distribution. However, with minimal modifications the theory can be made applicable to democratic reform in general. Indeed, one needs only reformulate the second element of Benoit’s explanation. I propose the following: (a coalition of) parties will implement democratic reform when (a) they have a majority to do so and (b) they expect that the outcome of these reforms maximally benefits them.

The second theoretical approach to democratic reform, sociological institutionalism, is mainly applied in the field of direct democratic reform. Here authors state that reforms occur as ‘an elite response to popular demands for new forms of participation’ (Donovan and Karp, 2006:672). In its simplest form this approach maintains that direct democratic reforms occur when a significant section of citizens is dissatisfied with the existing democratic procedures. Under such circumstances, political elites have substantial electoral incentives to implement direct democratic reform (cf Scarrow, 2001:653). Although the sociological institutional approach is principally used in the field of direct democratic reform (cf Dalton, Burklin and Drummond, 2001; LeDuc, 2003, Donovan and Karp, 2006), some scholars have also applied it to electoral reform (cf. Lijphart, 1987; Renwick, 2010). Indeed, this approach can easily be adapted to be relevant to democratic reform more in general. Here I suggest the following: (a coalition of) parties will implement democratic reform when a significant section of the citizenry is dissatisfied with the democratic procedures.

Broadly speaking, the main difference between the two theories is the central actor: rational choice emphasizes the role of political elites, while sociological institutionalism stresses that of public opinion. Translated into a metaphor, one could say that according to rational choice theory political elites are behind the steering wheel as independent drivers. To sociological institutionalists political elites are merely taxi drivers and it is the wider society that determines where to go. Certainly the political elites can determine which route to take, but in essence they are bound by public opinion. This study examines which applies best to democratic reform in general, the rational choice elite approach or the sociological institutionalist mass approach.

Apart from this broad elite versus mass puzzle, three other theoretical puzzles are addressed in this study. Both the elite and the mass strand in the literature are challenged. After a survey of the most important recent literature in the field, three particular puzzles stand out (Cain, Dalton and Scarrow, 2003; Katz, 2005; Qvortrup, 2005; Bowler, Donovan and Karp, 2006; Pilet, 2007a; Blais, 2008; Rahat, 2008; Farrel, 2011; Renwick, 2010; Leyenaar and Hazan, 2011). The first involves the impact of principles in the field of democratic reform. The second relates to the impact of a rise in the effective number of parties. The third and final puzzle focuses on the impact of veto players in the democratic reform process.

1. Principle versus self-interest. First, rational choice is challenged by claims that political elites are not driven only by outcome-related self-interest. In the electoral reform literature the general feeling is that ‘[i]n politics, when principle collides with self-interest, principle tends to retreat with a bloody nose’ (Kellner, 1995:23). However, other scholars disagree and feel that ‘democratic values matter’ (Katz, 2005:74). Moreover, even if only a
minority of politicians is driven by principle, it might be that these are the crucial actors who decide the fate of a reform proposal. Lastly, the principle versus self-interest puzzle has the character of ‘a received wisdom that is not often put to the direct test’ (Bowler, Donovan and Karp, 2006:443). As a consequence, whether principle or self-interest prevails is mostly unknown.

2. **The impact of a significant rise in the effective number of parties.** Within the rational choice school there is also disagreement on when politicians implement reform. As mentioned earlier, the purest version of the theory states that parties will implement reforms that suits them whenever they have the power to do so. If this were the case one should witness a very high number of reforms (cf. Benoit, 2004). The existing empirical evidence seems to refute this expectation. Although there is no dataset of ‘all democratic reforms’, partial datasets do suggest that, while more reforms occur than expected, it is unlikely that parties are constantly implementing democratic reform (cf. Scarrow, 2003; Colomer, 2004; Renwick, 2011). Other scholars have advanced an alternative explanation. Most importantly, Colomer (2004) contends that parties implement reform when the effective number of parties rises significantly. Under such circumstances traditional parties implement reform to protect themselves. This explanation is supported by some - but not all - empirical evidence (cf. Colomer 2004, who only finds a broad trend with many exceptions). In his study of electoral reform in France, Italy, Japan and New Zealand, Renwick (2010) finds that this explanation is only valid for majoritarian democracies. Therefore, the impact of a rise in the effective number of parties is still unclear. The second puzzle this study wishes to address thus relates to when democratic reforms occur: is a significant rise in the effective number of parties a trigger for democratic reform or not?

3. **Veto players or players without a veto?** Sociological institutionalism has been challenged by both new and veto player institutionalism. Essentially the critique of sociological institutionalism is that institutions are stickier than it seems. Procedures and veto players constitute barriers to reform attempts. The role of veto players in particular is a matter for debate. Indeed, some have contended that – especially in consensus democracies - veto players are considerable barriers to reform (cf. Blau, 2008; Hooghe and Deschouwer, 2011). Because of their proportional electoral system consensus democracies are almost by definition ruled by coalition governments, which means that a democratic reform can only be implemented when all coalition partners agree to it. Additionally, consensus democracies often have other non-partisan actors that can block reforms, such as constitutional courts. As a result, one would expect that democratic reform is especially rare in consensus democracies. However, others maintain that veto players are easily nullified (Rahat, 2008; Renwick, 2010).

1.4 **Plan of the book: democratic reform in three consensus democracies**

The four lacunae and the four puzzles outlined above will gradually be addressed throughout this study. In Chapter 2 I will elaborate on the theoretical puzzles that were mentioned earlier. I will sketch and discuss the assumptions, causal mechanisms and empirical expectations of the rational choice and the sociological institutionalist approaches to

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10 Only a few single-country direct tests of principle versus self-interest exist (see most notably Pilet, 2007a).
11 The impact is mostly examined in the field of electoral reform. For a rare study of the effective number of parties and direct democratic reform, see Scarrow, 1997.
democratic reform. I will then examine the challenges to these theoretical approaches and offer solutions in the form of the breakdown of party cartels (cf. Katz and Mair, 1995, 2009), populism and postmaterialism (Mudde, 2007; Inglehart, 1977) and public dissatisfaction (cf. Dalton, 2004) as explanatory factors of democratic reform. I will also provide an answer for the empirical puzzle that many reforms occurred in countries with a high number of veto players. I will suggest that a high number of veto players may actually be a catalyst for rather than a barrier to implementing reforms.

In Chapter 3 I will discuss my research design, which is an embedded multiple-case study-design. Students of democratic reform are generally handicapped by an incomplete overview of the reforms that occurred. Given the lack of studies examining non-major reform, we simply do not know how many of them took place. I will contend that this is partly due to the absence of a suitable conceptual framework that can also detect non-major reform. Some scholars, most notably Katz (2005:70), feel that it is 'unproductive' to construct a full listing of all (types of) non-major reforms. However, not having such a list is actually even worse. After all, when one wants to offer causal explanations, as I do, a good sample has to be 'representative but also insightful' (Gerring, 2008:9). Both criteria can however only be applied when one knows the distribution of the cases on the dependent variable (Gerring, 2007:80). When this is not known it can lead to substantial bias in the analysis, as scholars do not know what type of case they are actually analysing – something that is crucial when assessing the theoretical impact of one's findings. Yet regarding democratic reform no complete list of reforms exists. To tackle this problem, I use the following strategy: I first outline a conceptual framework that allows the gathering of a complete dataset of democratic reforms. I then select a subset of three typical consensus democracies. I follow this by collecting data to make a full list of democratic reforms for these three countries. To keep this project manageable I limit myself to the period 1987-2008, which includes one government period before the supposed start of the second wave of democratic reform (cf. Cain, Dalton and Scarrow, 2003). At that point another contentious problem arises: what constitutes the ‘cases’? In practice, scholars have mostly studied individual reforms or countries (cf. Norris, 1995; Scarrow, 2001; Shugart and Wattenberg, 2001; Katz, 2005; Rahat, 2008; Renwick, 2010). However, as I will show, it is better to analyse reform (attempts) embedded in government periods, as the government composition is a crucial explanatory variable. Based on the dataset I then select a diverse set of seven government periods. While the principles of this research design will be outlined in Chapter 3, a description and first analysis of the dataset will take place in Chapter 4, where I will also carry out the selection of the cases (here: government periods) that will be examined more elaborately in the country chapters.

Each of chapters 5, 6 and 7 will then look in depth at the government periods within one country. In Chapter 5 I discuss the Vranitzky III, Schüssel I and Gusenbauer reform processes. In Chapter 6 I examine the Dehaene II government period as well as the
Verhofstadt I reforms. Finally, in Chapter 7 I look into the Kok II and Balkenende II reform attempts. Each analysis will be a qualitative in-depth analysis aiming to unravel the causal mechanisms that lead to democratic reform or its failure. To do so I will employ the general principle of process tracing. For each government I will first reconstruct the reform process, focusing on four key areas: the historical traces of the debate, the initiation of the reforms, the reform processing phase and, when applicable, the final votes on the reform proposals. Afterwards, I will carry out a causal analysis, consisting of a constant and a flexible part. The constant part is an assessment of the self-interest of the parties involved, which is an excellent 'hoop test' (cf. Van Evera, 1997:31). After all, when a reform is not in line with a party’s self-interest, this is strong evidence that self-interest was not a dominant motivation in implementing reform. Yet, conversely, merely establishing that a reform was in a party’s self-interest is by itself relatively weak evidence for self-interest being the dominant motivation in carrying out reform. The second part of the causal analysis is flexible and builds on the assessment of the self-interest of the parties. It examines the questions that arise from this assessment and focuses mainly on other, rival, explanations.

Chapter 8 binds the preceding six chapters together. This chapter presents the main findings on the four puzzles outlined above. In doing so it will offer a theoretical model to explain democratic reform in consensus democracies. I will also reflect on the question of why particular types of democratic reform occur at a given moment in time. I will present what I call an ‘onion model’, which is a simple model that starts with the contention that political elites rank democratic reforms according to the levels of threat or opportunity that they present to them. When confronted with public dissatisfaction or reformist politicians, non-reformist politicians are most likely to give up the ‘outer layers’ (the lowest-ranked elements) and allow, for instance, an increase in the impact of preference votes or the introduction of minor direct democratic reform. On the other hand, when politicians expect to maximize their self-interest they will reason ‘inside out’ and focus on the ‘inner’ layers - the democratic reforms that political elites deem to have the greatest impact - and implement reforms affecting the proportionality of the electoral system. When they fear that this may be beyond the pale and risks enraging voters, they will either move to more outer layers or add an element from such a layer to appease the media and the public. In conclusion I will sketch why this model specifically applies to democratic reform in consensus democracies and outline its advantages and implications.

\[14\] In such instances self-interest can only have played a role if parties had a misperception of their self-interest. This happened in the Austrian Gusenbauer case.

\[15\] Unfortunately this point is mostly ignored in studies of democratic reform. Merely showing that a reform was in the self-interest of a party is routinely taken to prove that self-interest was the dominant motivation.
CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO DEMOCRATIC REFORM

2.1 Introduction

The two subtypes of democratic reform examined in this study, electoral and direct democratic reform, differ significantly with regard to the theoretical state of the art. Ever more elaborate theories on electoral reform have been produced during the last ten years (cf. Shugart and Wattenberg, 2001; Katz, 2005; Blais and Shugart, 2008; Rahat, 2008; Renwick 2010; Leyenaar and Hazan, 2011), while direct democratic reform still remains quite elusive (but see Scarrow, 1997 and 2001; LeDuc, 2003; Qvortrup, 2005). If we add the distinction between major and minor reform, the situation becomes even more unbalanced. It is not electoral reform per se, but rather major electoral reform that has attracted much of the attention. Of the authors mentioned, only Katz (2005:69-73) devotes some attention to minor electoral reform. Lastly, the call from Cain, Dalton and Scarrow (2003:13) to study electoral and direct democratic reforms together has remained unanswered so far. Nevertheless, the situation looks worse than it actually is. Broadly speaking the subtypes of democratic reform are studied using the same two theoretical approaches, namely rational choice and sociological institutionalism. The difference is more a matter of emphasis and specific interpretation than of different theoretical approaches.

The field of electoral reform (be it minor or major) is clearly dominated by rational choice. It is assumed that changes in electoral law are first and foremost dominated by seat-maximizing political parties (cf. Benoit, 2004). Or in the words of one prominent scholar, ‘It’s parties that choose electoral systems (or Duverger’s law upside down)’ (Colomer, 2005). The field of direct democratic reform, on the other hand, especially emphasizes the role of public dissatisfaction and is mostly inspired by sociological institutionalism (cf. Scarrow, 1997; Dalton, Bürklin and Drummond, 2001, Dalton, 2004:202-204).

In the first part of this chapter each of the two theoretical approaches will be outlined by sketching their general principles and main empirical findings. This will be done by looking at the subtype of democratic reform for which the most extensive body of literature exists. The two dominant approaches to democratic reform are both challenged from within and/or by other less dominant theoretical avenues. These challenges will be discussed immediately after each overview.

In the second part of this theoretical chapter I will integrate and expand the theoretical approaches to democratic reform. I will specifically focus on veto players, the role of party cartels, the role of political ideology, the impact of public dissatisfaction and the distinction between self-interest and principles. Each of these elements will be translated into theoretical expectations, which will guide the empirical chapters of this study.

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16 It should be noted that these two approaches are not mutually exclusive and are often combined (Rahat, 2008:5; see also Katz, 2005:68-69).

17 For the distinction between rational choice and institutionalist approaches to democratic reform, see Rahat, 2008; Renwick, 2010; Farrell, 2011.
Part I. Theoretical overview

2.2. The rational choice approach to democratic reform

2.2.1 General principles

It should come as no surprise that the rational choice approach is especially used in the realm of electoral reform. Direct democratic devices are not normally considered to be tools that increase the power of those who are to implement reforms, the political elites.\(^{18}\) I will thus start with the rational choice approach to (major) electoral reform and highlight its four main elements. The initial problem with the rational choice approach was that it had severe difficulties with explaining electoral reform *tout court*. After all: why would politicians change the rules of a game they are winning? (Katz, 2005:60) Hence, as Nohlen (1984:217) noted, it was originally expected that ‘fundamental changes [to electoral systems] are rare and arise only in extraordinary historical situations’. Confronted with the empirical phenomenon that electoral reform actually occurred rational choice inspired scholars looked for a way to explain this. Such an explanation was offered by Benoit (2004). He presents a clear and parsimonious explanation of why politicians would take ‘the risk’ of introducing a major electoral reform. Benoit (2004:374-375) offers the following prediction:

A change in electoral institutions will occur when a political party or coalition of political parties supports an alternative which will bring it more seats than the status quo electoral system, and also has the power to effect through fiat that institutional alternative. Electoral systems will not change when no party or coalition of parties with the power to adopt an alternative electoral system can gain more seats by doing so.

In short, political parties will implement an electoral reform when (a) they have the required majority to do so and (b) such a reform would increase their seat share. The rational choice approach to electoral reform is based on four general principles: the dominance of outcome-contingent motivations; optimization; information seeking and rationality.

1. Political elites are primarily interested in the outcome of a reform. According to Benoit (2004:375), political parties are predominantly interested in expanding their seat share. Hence it is the benefits attached to the outcome of a reform that matter, not whether a reform is in line with a party’s principles or whether a reform makes a party look good in the eyes of the voters (see also Colomer, 2004:6-7).

2. Political elites optimize. One could take the first principle one step further. Political elites not only want to increase their seat share, they want to optimize the gains. Political elites will implement the reform that benefits them most (Benoit, 2004:373, see also Hindmoor, 2006:190-192).\(^{19}\)

3. Political parties actively seek information about the consequences of reforms. In order to know which reform would benefit them most, political elites need to gather as much information as possible about the range of reform options and the consequences of each of them. Hence, Benoit expects political elites actively to seek information and when new data become available the elites are expected to update their existing information (Benoit, 2004:379).

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\(^{18}\) Although, as empirical research has shown, parties can and do use direct democracy devices to their advantage (cf. Scarrow, 1999 and LeDuc, 2003).

\(^{19}\) Benoit (2004:373) labels such optimization ‘seat-maximizing’.
4. Political elites act rationally. Benoit based his explanation on the assumption that political elites act rationally. They will implement the reform that serves them best in light of the available information and given the time constraints that apply (Benoit, 2004:367, 379, 385-386; see also Sutherland, 1992:7). Therefore the absence of irrationality is an important basis for the rational choice explanation.  

Benoit only intended to provide an explanation for electoral reform. Yet using the principles underlying his explanation one can extend it to democratic reform in general. In general Benoit’s model claims that parties are mainly interested in the consequences of a given reform proposal. When a reform (maximally) benefits them, they are likely to support it. From a rational choice perspective one can expect that parties support a direct democratic reform when they consider the outcome to be advantageous to them. Thus, one could reformulate Benoit’s explanation as follows: political parties will implement a democratic reform when (a) they have the required majority to do so and (b) such a reform would maximally benefit them.

Though the aforementioned line of reasoning is widely accepted in the field of electoral reform, it is less common in the field of direct democratic reform. Conventional wisdom holds that referendums, and especially citizen-initiated referendums, undermine the power of parties by giving citizens a say on a specific decision or by allowing them to put an issue on the political agenda. In short, referendums are often considered to be ‘anti-party tools’ (for an overview of the relationship between parties and referendum legislation see: Scarrow, 1999; Müller, 1999; Qvortrup, 2005). The idea that direct democracy threatens the role of political parties is rooted in more than a century of political debates. Specifically, there is a long tradition of asserting that where direct democracy is strongest (in Switzerland and the USA) parties are at their weakest (Scarrow, 1999:276, 279). By allowing referendums, parties are said to undermine their own position. If this is true the rational choice expectation should be interpreted as follows: parties will only implement direct democratic reforms that limit the possibilities to organize referendums.

However, as more recent research has shown, this need not always be the case. Referendums can also benefit parties and can be used ‘to seal the legitimacy of a controversial policy change or change of regime’ (Qvortrup, 2005:156). Whether referendum legislation is advantageous to parties or not depends first and foremost on who is allowed to initiate the referendum. If a referendum can only be initiated by the government parties, it can be controlled and is generally no threat to them. Conversely, if a referendum can be forced upon the ruling parties by citizens or opposition parties, it generally is a threat to them. I will elaborate the argument on when exactly a direct democratic reform is (dis)advantageous to parties in Chapter 3. What is most important here is that the rational choice expectation is that government parties can favour the expansion of a particular type of referendums, namely government-sponsored, controlled referendums (see Smith, 1976).

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20 Irrationality is defined here as the opposite of rationality, or any decision ‘that is not the best that could have been reached in the light of the evidence, given the time constraints that apply’ (Sutherland, 1992:7). It should be stressed that this definition differs from the common pejorative interpretation of the term. In Sutherland’s definition, irrationality need not be bad. For instance ‘better safe than sorry’ can be very sensible advice to adhere to. Sutherland distinguishes between 14 forms of irrationality, namely the availability error (judging by the first thing that comes to mind); obedience; conformity; behaving according to group membership; misplaced consistency; the misuse of rewards and punishments; emotion (in particular ambition and vanity); ignoring the evidence; distorting the evidence; making the wrong connections; mistaking the cause; misinterpreting the evidence; making misplaced bets or overconfidence.
Though Benoit’s model is fairly abstract, it has been used quite often in empirical studies of democratic reforms (cf. Colomer, 2004 and 2005, Shugart, 2008, Blais, 2008). Most recently, Alan Renwick (2010:11: 87-88) provided a more user-friendly framework to apply the rational choice approach to actual empirical cases. His framework goes well beyond simple seat-maximization and provides a comprehensive schema of building blocks to examine the different causes and processes of electoral reform (Renwick, 2010: 24-85; see also Farrell, 2011:1989-190). Most importantly, Renwick distinguishes between the exogenous motivations of the actors in the reform process, such as principled motivations and the estimated consequences of a reform proposal, and endogenous factors, such as path dependency and leadership. Not surprisingly, the rational choice part of his study focuses mainly (but not only) on the estimated consequences of the outcomes of reform proposals. Renwick summarized the rational choice explanation as reform through elite majority imposition. The label ‘elite majority imposition’ refers to the fact that in such cases a majority of the political elites implements reforms at the expense of remaining elites. In what follows, I will use this label to refer to the rational choice explanation. Apart from reforms through elite majority imposition, one can also think of reforms based on a broad agreement among political elites, so-called reforms through elite settlement. In practice Renwick (2010) found that such reforms are very rare.21

2.2.2 Challenges to the rational choice approach

The rational choice approach has been challenged from both the inside and the outside. Remaining within the realm of rational choice, scholars disagree on the impact of the effective number of parties (cf. Colomer, 2004, 2005; Rahat, 2008; Renwick, 2010). Furthermore, scholars using behaviouralist approaches to democratic reform point to the possibility that political elites are driven by motivations other than maximizing the benefits of a system. Most importantly, they point to the role of principles such as values and ideology and to so-called act-contingent motivations, meaning the motivation to support a reform because it is popular and may attract voters (cf. Reed and Thiess, 2001; Bowler, Donovan and Karp, 2006; Pilet, 2007a; Shugart, 2008).

1. The impact of the effective number of parties. The first challenge to the dominant rational choice approach is that Benoit’s formalized model does not explain when exactly parties may deem that a new system would benefit them. Colomer (2004:6) was the first to fill this void, by claiming that parties have motivations to change the electoral system when a substantial change in the effective number of parties occurs. Specifically, he expected the electoral system to change towards being more proportional when the number of parties increases, an expectation arising from the premise that parties have a preference for seat maximization and tend to be risk averse. Other scholars disagreed. Most notably Renwick (2010:249) opposed Colomer’s claims and stated that ‘the effective number of parties in terms of votes (ENPV) has been higher prior to reforms away from proportionality than towards it’. Renwick (2010:250) subsequently concludes, referring to his own empirical findings, that ‘these figures clearly contradict Colomer’s expectations. Indeed, they are even more striking than I

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21 This should not come as a surprise, as it is rarely possible to improve the prospects of all or even most parties. Nevertheless, one can for instance think of electoral reforms that implement an electoral threshold. If the parties are fairly large and the threshold is fairly low, it protects all the parties against newcomers or splits.
expected myself'. Renwick observed a far more complex link between the party system and the electoral system. The existing electoral system seems to matter most. In majoritarian electoral systems Colomer's hypothesis is probably valid. However, in consensus democracies with proportional electoral systems - the topic of this study - a rise in the effective number of parties is likely to lead to a move away from proportionality because at such moments the 'perverse effects' of the proportional electoral system are exposed (Renwick, 2010:248). Therefore with regard to consensus democracies an alternative to Colomer's claim is still needed. Moreover, all of the above was heavily based on the study of electoral reform. In the second part of this chapter an alternative to Colomer's claims that is valid for democratic reform in general is put forward.

2. Principles and the act of supporting a reform. A second challenge to the rational choice approach comes from scholars using a behaviouralist angle. In contrast to the rational choice approach, behaviouralists are focused explicitly on individuals rather than parties. They attempt to explain reforms by concentrating on empirically observable individual behaviour (cf. Rahat, 2008:6). These scholars makes use of surveys of both the wider public and the individual MPs. Behaviouralists challenge the rational choice approach on two fronts. They claim that rational choice-inspired analyses omit the impact of principles in the form of values and ideology. Furthermore, they draw attention to the impact of vote-seeking motivations (rather than seat-maximizing motivations).

First and most importantly, Bowler, Donovan and Karp (2006) found that ideology (operationalized as (a) the traditional left-right scale and (b) postmaterialism) has a significant effect on whether or not a politician favours certain democratic reforms.23 Regarding values, Renwick (2010:39) lists no fewer than 23 different values ranging from the avoidance of anomalous results and fairness to efficient decision making and simplicity. Second, behaviouralist analyses suggest that voters' preferences matter significantly to politicians, because they not only want to optimize their seat share, but also their vote share (Bowler, Donovan and Karp, 2006). In essence this finding echoes the distinction between act- and outcome-contingent motivations, as originally formulated by Reed and Thies (2001:153) (see also: Shugart, 2008). The rational choice approach focuses primarily on outcome-contingent motivations. In such instances, the main motivation for political elites to implement reform is the belief that they will do better under the new rules. However, political elites can also have act-contingent motivations to support a reform. In such instances the mere act of supporting a reform is more important than the expected consequences the reform has. Political elites may feel that they might lose a forthcoming election (or pay higher costs to win) if they were seen to oppose a reform. Conversely, political elites may initiate reform if they feel this could give them an advantage in forthcoming elections. In both cases politicians 'determine that there is strategic value in positioning themselves as reformers, whether or not they sincerely favour the reform in question' (Shugart, 2008:16).

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22 The only exception to this rule is New Zealand, but as scholars have argued this seems to be more of a deviant than a typical case (cf. Blais and Shugart, 2008:199).
2.3 The sociological institutionalist approach

2.3.1 General principles
The sociological institutionalist approach to democratic reform focuses on the interrelationship of institutions and their societal roots (Lijphart, 1984, 1999). Unlike the rational choice approach, no single author has formalized it explicitly, therefore the sociological institutionalist approach has multiple variations. In this section, I will describe the core principles of the sociological institutionalist approach to democratic reform. Like most institutionalists, sociological institutionalists consider the institutional setting to be stable. Only large exogenous shocks can upset the institutional equilibrium. One of the basic principles of the sociological institutionalist approach to democratic reform is that institutions should ‘fit’ the society in which they are rooted. Following Lijphart (1984), they claim that when the link between institutions and their societal foundations is lost because of a significant societal change, political elites will either adapt to or counter these changes through democratic reform (Rahat, 2008:22). Sociological institutionalist especially point to a postmaterialist value change as the single most important trigger for democratic reform (cf. Dalton, 2004; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005; see also Renwick, 2010).

During the second half of the twentieth century advanced industrial societies experienced a time of profound socio-economic change. A so-called post-Industrial Revolution reshaped the nature of work, the lifestyles of citizens and the basic economic conditions. Most importantly, educational levels have risen substantially since the 1960s. In contemporary established democracies a considerable number of citizens have had at least some college education. As Inglehart and Welzel (2005) have shown, a rise in educational levels has significant consequences for the way citizens think about their democratic institutions. Whereas most notably Almond and Verba (1965) once argued that the better educated and more affluent provide the core support for democratic systems, nowadays the correlation seems to have inverted: higher educational levels are eroding support for traditional representative institutions (Dalton, 2004:95). This rather counter-intuitive statement can be explained as follows. One can see the gradual rising of educational levels as a cognitive mobilization process, by which citizens acquire ‘the skills and resources necessary to become politically engaged with little dependence on external cues’ (Dalton, 1984:267). Citizens with high educational levels think for themselves, question authority and have the capabilities to engage in non-partisan political activities. Hence citizens with a high educational level are also ‘critical citizens’ (Norris, 1999). Inglehart (1977) argues that those better educated also have a different set of values and strongly endorse the principles of democracy. Cognitive mobilization combined with this postmaterialist value change may have created ‘dissatisfied democrats’ (cf. Dalton, 2004:45-48). Such dissatisfied democrats clearly approve of democracy in general, but they are not content with the way their own system is currently...
operating (Klingemann, 1999:32). Thus, critical citizens can be viewed not so much as a threat to democracy itself but rather as a force for democratic reform and improvement of democratic processes. This pool of dissatisfied democrats is said to be fertile soil for democratic reform as ‘crises’ can take root there and cause public outrage. Such a crisis then leads to a critical juncture where major democratic reforms occur (cf. Rahat, 2008:23).

The sociological institutionalist approach is mainly used in the direct democratic reform literature (cf. Dalton, Bürklin and Drummond, 2001; Scarrow, 2001 and 2003; LeDuc, 2003, Donovan and Karp, 2006). It is not widely applied to electoral reform. Nevertheless, two notable exceptions exist. First, Lijphart (1987, 1993) used the sociological institutionalist approach to predict the reforms in New Zealand and to explain these in Israel. Second, Renwick (2010:167) used insights from the sociological institutionalist approach to craft his notion of reform through *elite-mass interaction* as an alternative to reform through elite majority imposition (cf. rational choice approach).

Renwick offered the most systematic outline of just exactly how societal changes influence the reform process. When the fertile soil of public dissatisfaction exists, the following process in three stages can lead to reform (Renwick, 2010:167): First, a minority of politicians espouse reform. They initiate the reform process, but they have insufficient strength in themselves to impose reform through normal legislative channels. They therefore go above the heads of other politicians and take the issue to the people, and this popular mobilization around reform constitutes the second stage of the process. But public opinion on its own cannot generate a new electoral system. Rather, at the third stage, public pressure forces politicians to acquiesce in reforms that, on the whole, they still do not want.

Based on the above, one can distil the following four general principles of the sociological institutionalist approach.

1. A fit between society and its institutions. The starting point of sociological institutionalist analyses is that institutions must ‘fit’ the society in which they are rooted. When the society changes, the institutions must change as well. If they do not change they are no longer deemed legitimate and risk disintegrating.

2. Democratic reform is mainly driven by public opinion. Directly deriving from the first principle, the conundrum of the sociological institutionalist approach is that reform is mainly driven by masses, not by elites. Certainly, the army of public opinion needs generals in the form of political elites, but without such an army the generals are powerless (cf. Renwick, 2010:224).

25 One could observe that changing the wording does not mean the description fits a real-world direct democratic reform process. There are however few theoretical reasons to expect that the elite-mass interaction path to reform is inapplicable to direct democratic reform or minor electoral reform. For instance, one could think of reformist political elites that want to implement referendum legislation but are blocked by a majority of conservative elites (as referendum legislation could mean a loss of power for them). In the second phase the reformist elites could use a ‘crisis’ based on public dissatisfaction to put pressure on the conservative political elites. In the last phase a compromise is then made. As will become clear in the empirical analyses in this study, such reform processes did indeed occur.
3. No claims are made regarding the direction of reform. Unlike the rational choice approach, the sociological institutionalist approach makes no claims regarding the direction of democratic reform. Political elites can either adapt to or counter the societal changes (Rahat, 2008:22). No claims are made about when political elites will adapt to societal changes and when they will counter them.

4. Major societal changes are followed by major reforms. Under normal circumstances, sociological institutionalist deem the system to be stable and any reforms that take place are only incremental and minor. However, when significant societal change occurs the ‘equilibrium’ is disturbed and major reforms occur to counter or adapt to these changes. Hence, although the sociological institutionalist approach says nothing about the direction of reform, it does make claims as far as the scale of reforms is concerned.

Based on the sociological institutionalist approach, one can expect that (a coalition of) parties will implement democratic reform when a crisis associated with significant public dissatisfaction with the democratic procedures occurs.

2.3.2 Challenges to sociological institutionalism
Sociological institutionalism is challenged on two grounds (cf. Rahat, 2008:23-24). First, it is criticized over the vague notion of ‘crisis’ that is central to the sociological institutionalist explanation. Second, the scale of the impact of societal change is disputed.

1. The vague notion of crisis. Rahat (2008:22) points to the ambiguity of the notion of ‘crisis’ that is considered to be the trigger for democratic reform. Because sociological institutionalists have no clear definition of ‘crisis’, its applicability is limited. In a more functionalist version of institutionalism Shugart (2001, 2008) has argued that the ‘crisis’ that triggers reform is not based on societal changes but on inefficiencies in the existing system. While sociological institutionalism focuses on the congruence between a society and its institutions, Shugart focuses on system-level rationality. He expects reforms to happen when the existing institutions produce ‘perverse effects’. The most ‘extreme’ institutions are expected to be the most prone to perverse effects and hence the most prone to reform (cf. Shugart and Wattenberg, 2001). Reforms are thus expected in highly proportional democracies, such as Israel and the Netherlands, or in highly majoritarian democracies such as New Zealand (before 1993) and the United Kingdom. This new institutionalist approach is most established with regard to electoral reform. The first major comparative contribution on electoral reform written from an institutionalist point of view was the volume Mixed-Member Electoral Systems: The Best of Both Worlds? edited by Shugart and Wattenberg (2001). Electoral systems that balance representation with stability and personal accountability with party programme are expected to remain stable, as these are ‘electorally efficient’ (Shugart and Wattenberg, 2001:42). The more ‘extreme’ systems, be they majoritarian or proportional, on the other hand, would be more prone to reform. The predicted shift would then be towards more mixed systems (the middle position). Especially at times when electoral system perversions are abundant, one can expect reform pressures to counterbalance such perversions. Specifically, one can expect these pressures when a proportional electoral system produces such a fragmented party system that coalition building and governing are

26 For a general overview of functional institutionalism, see Thelen, 2003:214-216.
extremely difficult. In more recent work Shugart (2008) acknowledges that perversities or anomalies alone are probably not enough to lead to electoral reforms. He therefore distinguishes between inherent and contingent factors, the former institutional (is a system prone to perversities or anomalies?) and the latter inspired by the rational choice approach (most importantly outcome-contingent motivations). The inherent factors are likely to trigger debates, but by themselves are insufficient to lead to reform. The later version of the new institutionalist theory is thus more modest in its causal claims than the earlier one. Shugart’s approach is hardly ever used for direct democratic reform. Nevertheless, Shugart’s logic need not necessarily be limited to electoral reform. After all, not only electoral systems can be extreme; referendum legislation also can be very extreme (such as the Californian referendum legislation) or balanced (such as the Swiss referendum legislation) (LeDuc, 2003:32). Extreme direct democratic legislation can thus also produce perversities, which may then lead to adjustments of the legislation. To the best of my knowledge, no such new institutionalist analysis of direct democratic reform exists.

2. The importance of societal change: crises versus barriers obstructing reform. The second challenge to the sociological institutionalist approach concerns the ‘weight’ or importance of its explanation. This critique also echoes findings in other strands of institutionalism. In the field of democratic reform the barriers approach outlined by Rahat and Hazan (2011) and veto player theory (Tsebelis, 2002; Blau, 2008; Hooghe and Deschouwer, 2011) in particular challenge the weight of the sociological institutionalist approach. The barriers approach of Rahat and Hazan (2011) points to the numerous high barriers reform proposals have to overcome. According to these authors (2011:480), ‘the institutional status quo is the default’. Rahat and Hazan point to no fewer than seven barriers to reform, of which the required majority to pass a reform bill is the most specific and tangible one. As a result of these numerous barriers, societal change is unlikely to be sufficient to trigger democratic reform. The societal developments and crises that sociological institutionalists point to ‘must be considered as part of the analysis (...) because they supply reformers with the opportunity to rest their case’ (Rahat, 2008:24). However, Rahat (2008:24) doubts whether crises are sufficient to trigger reform ‘even for the analysis of its penetration into the agenda’.

A similar focus on barriers to reform can be found in studies using veto player theory. Veto player theory assumes that the crucial variable is the number of veto players in the political system (Tsebelis, 2002). The preferences of the veto players are assumed to be fixed and each proposal that runs contrary to the preference of a veto player is expected to be vetoed (Ganghof, 2003:3). In consensus democracies the number of veto players is very high. Only when the preferences of all these veto players coincide can reform happen. From a veto player point of view, reform is unlikely (cf. Blau, 2008, Hooghe and Deschouwer, 2011). Hence, even major crises can have merely a limited impact, since they are mediated by veto players.

27 For majoritarian electoral systems the perversities are obviously different. In such systems they are: lopsided majorities, where the opposition is decimated, and reversed pluralities, where the party with the most votes does not win the most seats (cf. Blais, 2008).

28 I have to note though that some American authors have debated the perversities of referendum legislation and assessed alternatives to ‘cure’ the problems (most notably see: Gerber, 2001).
2.4 A comparison between the rational choice and the sociological institutionalist approach

To finish this overview of the two main theoretical approaches to democratic reform, I will compare them regarding their view on (1) who the crucial actors in the reform process are and (2) how reform happens.

1. Central actor. The first important difference between the two approaches relates to the central actor. The rational choice approach first and foremost focuses on political elites and in particular political parties. Certainly, citizens, judges and experts for instance might play a role, but these are at best a constraint. They never determine the broad lines of a reform. The sociological institutionalist approach, on the other hand, focuses principally on the impact of public opinion. It is public pressure that determines the broad lines of reform. Political elites may try to resist these reform pressures, but they definitively face an uphill fight (cf. Dalton, 2004:185).

2. Triggers and causal mechanisms. The two approaches also differ on the triggers for reform debates and the reason why actual reforms are implemented. The rational choice approach is clear about what set off reform debates, which is shifts in the strength of the main political parties. These can be based on national elections, mid-term elections at non-national level or even opinion polls just before an election (cf. Benoit, 2004:376). The rational choice approach also provides a causal mechanism to explain why parties implement reform, namely the outcome-contingent motivation seat maximization. The sociological institutionalist approach, on the other hand, was until recently mainly focused on what triggers reform debates (cf. Rahat, 2008:24). In particular, sociological institutionalists pointed to crises based on public dissatisfaction driven by societal change. They were however, relatively silent about the causal mechanism driving the implementation of reform. Since Renwick’s analysis of reform through elite-mass interaction, this is no longer the case. The causal mechanism used by Renwick (2010) is mainly based on act-contingent motivations, where conservative elites concede on reform because they fear electoral losses.

Both the rational choice approach and the sociological institutionalist approach are likely to apply to some (but not all) cases (cf. Scarrow, 1997; Renwick, 2010; Farrell, 2011). Hence, to study democratic reform one needs an analytical framework integrating all the elements mentioned earlier, to enable the assessment of each of the two approaches. In second part of this chapter I will build such a framework. I will also distil the main variables from the two theoretical approaches and their critiques. Furthermore I will suggest solutions to the challenges to the two main approaches to democratic reform and integrate them into the

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29 After a discussion of some examples of democratic reform, Dalton (2004:185) for example notes that dissatisfaction was ‘a driving force behind these [democratic] reforms’, but does not specify how this worked. He merely concludes that dissatisfaction increases the ‘pressure’ to implement reforms (Dalton, 2004:184).
30 Regarding the motivations of the reformist political elites, Renwick (2010:38-39 versus 50-52) provides some theoretical starting points, in the form of values, but he offers little explanation of which political elites may be driven by values and which are not.
31 Even Benoit (2004:373) explicitly states that his model is just ‘a model (...) rather than being presented as the model’.
analytical framework. This framework and the main variables included in it will later serve as the foundation for the analyses in the empirical part of this study.

Part II. Towards an analytical framework for studying democratic reform

The theoretical overview pointed to an interesting amalgam of factors that one should keep in mind when studying democratic reform. Specific elements such as the content of a reform package (and whether or not it serves the interest of a given party) and the values of political elites were mentioned alongside such broad factors as veto players and public dissatisfaction. Generally speaking some elements were found in a predominantly macro-level setting, while others were seen more in a more meso- or micro-level context. However, given that this terminology is often intuitively linked to the state-level versus the individual level, a more applicable version of this distinction is preferable. I propose the labels country level, government level and reform level. The country level is where slowly evolving or persistent factors can be found. One can think of historical tradition, (interpretations of) past experiences with reform, or most importantly for this study, veto players. Based on the country-level factors, one can determine whether or not a given country is prone to reform. At government level, the intermediate level, factors that primarily change when a new government is formed are seen. Firstly, factors related to government composition, such as the types of parties included in the government, are placed at this level. More specifically, I will focus on whether traditionally excluded party (so-called cartel status) and populist or postmaterialist parties (political ideology) are part of the government. Secondly, one can attribute public dissatisfaction and ‘crises’ to this level. Given that significant fluctuations in dissatisfaction with democratic procedures occur annually, but generally not on a day-to-day basis, these factors are best not placed at the country level. Moreover, as dissatisfaction is not contingent upon the content of a reform it is not at reform level either. However, as it does push a government to react - and as I will show later, the composition of a government to a large extent determines whether or not a government acts upon a crisis - it is best situated at government level. All three factors determine whether or not a government is likely to implement democratic reforms. Lastly, some factors are found at reform level. Specifically, elements that depend upon the content of a reform (package) are at this level. In the first place, I include self-interested (act- and outcome-contingent) motivations to support a reform. Indeed, whether reform is in the self-interest of a party depends on that reform’s content. Some reforms may be thought advantageous, while others clearly are not. Somewhat less intuitively, values are also best placed at this level. Although political ideology should be traced to the government level, it is better to locate values at reform level. Whether a given value is relevant depends on the content of a reform. For instance, the value ‘a fair distribution of seats’ is irrelevant in

32 It is important to note here that the analytical framework presented in this section is to be understood as heuristic, not as a straitjacket. It mainly serves as a stepping stone to which variables can be attached.

33 One can say a country has a lot or a few veto players. The number of non-partisan veto players is generally very stable. Certainly, within countries some governments have slightly fewer partisan veto players than others. Yet the differences within a given country are generally very limited (cf. Tsebelis, 2010, http://sitemaker.umich.edu/tsebelis/data). In the empirical chapters, I will reconstruct the number of veto players for each of the relevant countries and government periods. As will become clear, the differences between government periods within a country were limited enough to place this factor at country level.
discussions on ballot structure reforms or the introduction of referendum provisions. The reform-level factors determine whether or not a given reform is likely to be implemented.

Table 2.1 Overview of the three levels and the corresponding determinants of reform

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The factors at the three different levels do not always operate independently. In fact, it is often the interaction between elements at different levels that determines the fate of a reform. In the empirical analyses I will thus examine all three levels. In the remainder of this chapter I will expand on each of the factors mentioned (see Table 2.1).

2.5. Country-level factors: veto players in consensus democracies

Reformist political elites always have to deal with actors who have the power to block their proposals. George Tsebelis (2002) labelled such actors veto players. He maintains that veto players are crucial in trying to understand the amount of significant policy reform (and non-reform) a country experiences. The veto player approach has increasingly been used in the field of electoral reform. I will first outline the general concepts and principles of Tsebelis’ veto player thesis and then I will discuss how it is applied to electoral reform research. Lastly, I will develop my argument concerning veto players and the study of democratic reform in consensus democracies.

1. Concepts of veto player thesis

A. Veto points and veto players. A first distinction made by Tsebelis is between veto points and veto players. Veto points can be understood as arenas in which there are a number of veto players. For instance the Lower House and the Upper House are both veto points, which contain a number of veto players. The number of parties that support (in the case of a minority government) or are included in (in the case of a ‘normal’ majority) the government determines the number of veto players at each of the veto points. Regarding the Upper House, it is important to note that it can be ‘absorbed’ (Tsebelis, 2002:12). When elections for the Upper and the Lower House are held at the same time and the majorities are the same, the Upper House merely mirrors the Lower House and is thus de facto absorbed. In the empirical chapters it will become clear that this distinction matters significantly.

B. The ‘veto power’ of veto players. As suggested by the term, ‘veto power’ was originally considered to be a dichotomous variable (Tsebelis, 2002:2-6). A veto player either has veto power or not. If this ontology of veto power corresponds to reality, than one would expect

34 For a similar argument (although based on different factors), see Rahat, 2008:269-271; Rahat and Hazan, 2011.
fewer reforms in countries with more veto players. After all, larger numbers of veto players are more difficult to control. If on the other hand, they only have a certain degree of veto power, some veto players are more easily neutralized than others. If this is the case, it is important to distinguish between types of veto players, those that have more veto power and those that have less.

C. Types: partisan and non-partisan veto players. A focus on the degree of veto power allows us to assess the importance of different veto players. Not all are equally powerful – especially not when it comes to democratic reform. Partisan veto players are potentially the more powerful (Tsebelis, 2002). After all, reformers can draft reform bills in such a way that particular non-partisan veto players (for instance the constitutional court or the head of state) have less veto power (e.g. only a temporary veto, or only advisory power). However, when the necessary partisan majority is not reached, a reform proposal simply fails. Hence, generally, the veto power of partisan veto players is absolute. They have genuine ‘veto’ power.

2. TYPES OF VETO PLAYERS AND TYPES OF DEMOCRACY.

As mentioned earlier, the veto player insights are increasingly used in the field of electoral reform. Most importantly Blau (2008) and Hooghe and Deschouwer (2011) apply elements of veto player theory to electoral reform in respectively majoritarian and consensus democracies. Blau (2008) only focuses on veto players in a majoritarian setting. His general expectation is that major electoral reforms are unlikely even though there are only a few veto players. His explanation for this is that the few veto players in such settings (a) have a high degree of veto power but most importantly (b) have intense preferences for maintaining the status quo (as they have a vested interest in the system). In consensus democracies the expectation as regards veto players is both similar and different. Hooghe and Deschouwer (2011:627) contend that the veto player barrier ‘will even be steeper in a political system where veto players are abundantly present and where the use of veto power is endemic in the political decision-making process’. Their case study of electoral reform in Belgium illustrates that in consensus democracies it is not so much the preferences of the veto players, but rather their sheer number that makes reform very unlikely. Unlike majoritarian democracies, consensus democracies by their very nature also have a high number of non-partisan veto players. Indeed, when it comes to implementing significant policy reform, the number of veto players matters (Blau, 2008:78; see also Katz, 2005:61). Hence, where many non-partisan veto players exist, electoral reform will be more difficult than if there are only a few. To sum up, in majoritarian democracies the most important difficulty to overcome is the vested interests of parties. This makes the reform game clear and simple: the reformers only have to overcome the barrier of vested interests for one or a few of the veto players. In consensus

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35 This distinction is highly relevant, as it substantially influences the expectations that are derived from the veto player thesis. If veto players are not really ‘veto’ players (if their veto is not absolute and they only have a certain degree of veto power), the argument that large numbers equate to fewer reforms is not necessarily correct.

36 Tsebelis (2002) originally seems to prefer the dichotomous interpretation. However, even he distinguishes between certain types of veto players, thereby implicitly conceding that some have more veto power than others, which in turn implies the existence of different degrees of veto power.

37 The term ‘partisan veto players’ refers to political parties that have veto power. Not all political parties have veto power, while at the same time not all veto players are political parties. Examples of non-partisan veto players are for instance constitutional courts or (when a referendum is to be held on the topic) public opinion.
democracies the reform game is first and foremost a complex multilayered game. Routinely a high number of partisan veto players (often in the form of fairly small parties) have to be dealt with. Apart from these numerous partisan veto players, multiple non-partisan veto players also need to be accommodated. Therefore one can expect that electoral reform is even more difficult in consensus democracies than it is in majoritarian democracies (see also Blais and Shugart, 2008:186).

So far I have only focused on electoral reform, but one needs to ask whether the reasoning outlined in this section is also valid for direct democratic reform. This seems to be the case. Traditionally referendums – and especially referendums that can be triggered by a given number of citizens (so-called citizen-initiated referendums) are considered to undermine the power of political parties. Indeed, referendums are often considered to be ‘anti-party’ tools (for an overview, see Scarrow, 1999; Müller, 1999; and Qvortrup, 2005). Hence, by allowing referendums parties are said to undermine their own position (Scarrow, 1999:276, 279). As a consequence one can expect that the preference of a significant part of the partisan veto players will be for not allowing referendum legislation. Given that in consensus democracies there are more partisan veto players, the chances that at least one partisan veto player will use his/her vote to veto direct democratic reform are higher.38 Regarding non-partisan veto players, there are no theoretical reasons to expect that they function in a different way for electoral and for direct democratic reform. There are no a priori reasons to expect that their preferences on direct democratic reform are different to their preferences on electoral reform. Additionally, the number of non-partisan veto players can be considered to be roughly the same for both electoral and direct democratic reform.

In general, the veto player logic leads to similar expectations for electoral and for direct democratic reform in consensus democracies. Based on the veto player logic, I have the following expectation.

Expectation 1. One can expect that the more veto players there are, the less likely it is that democratic reforms will occur.

2.6 Government-level factors

2.6.1 The role of the effective number of parties: cartel dynamics

Earlier in this chapter, I noted that the rational choice approach as outlined by Benoit (2004) remained relatively silent on the circumstances under which parties are likely to prefer reform. Colomer (2004) complemented Benoit by stating that major electoral reform is likely when the effective number of parties (in terms of votes) increases significantly. Empirically this should be observable in that some election results (those that significantly increase the effective number of parties) should lead to reform while others should not (cf. Colomer, 2004; Renwick, 2011). However, research by Renwick (2010:249-250) showed that this was not true in the case of consensus democracies. Moreover it is unclear to those studying democratic reform whether Colomer’s thesis should also apply to direct democratic reform and minor electoral reform. The task ahead is thus (a) to explain the failure of Colomer’s thesis with respect to consensus democracies and (b) to examine whether the thesis also is applicable to democratic reform in general.

38 One could argue that parties might allow reforms that make it more difficult to hold a referendum or that they will expand government-sponsored referendums. I will consider these possibilities in the empirical chapters.
I suggest that the most suitable way to tackle these two tasks can be found in the cartel party literature, as this makes explicit predictions about parties changing their institutional environment to their advantage. Interestingly, none of the major democratic reform studies refers to cartel party theory (Shugart and Wattenberg, 2001; Scarrow, 2001; LeDuc, 2003; Qvortrup, 2005; Katz, 2005; Bowler, Donovan and Karp, 2006; Pilet, 2007a; Blais, 2008; Rahat, 2008; Renwick, 2010). Similarly, the cartel party literature barely discusses democratic reform. There is however one, oft-cited but never replicated, study of German direct democratic reform at the Land level that successfully applies the cartel party logic (Scarrow, 1997). Scarrow finds that cartel dynamics along with act-contingent and principled motivations can be useful in explaining the occurrence of direct democratic reform. I will show that elaborating Scarrow’s analysis makes it possible to kill two birds with one stone. First, it presents an opportunity to extend the rational choice explanation from electoral reform to democratic reform in general. Second, given that the cartel party logic has different expectations for majoritarian and consensus democracies, it can also explain the peculiar finding that Colomer’s thesis only fails to explain electoral reforms in proportional settings (cf. Renwick, 2010:248).

In their seminal 1995 article, Katz and Mair discuss the rise of the so-called cartel party. A cartel party was said to be a party that was virtually identical to the state. It was no longer the intermediary between public opinion, civil society and the state. Cartel parties controlled the public good for their own benefit. Later reactions and additions to the original cartel party thesis stated that it is probably better to speak of a cartel of parties rather than of individual cartel parties (Koole, 1996). Parties that are part of a so-called ‘cartel’, or a group of parties that has ‘a reasonable expectation that they might be included in a national governing coalition,’ have an incentive to work together and to change the system to their advantage (Katz and Mair, 2009:757; original emphasis). After all, parties ‘have the ability to devise their own legal (...) environment and, effectively, to write their own salary checks’ (Katz and Mair, 2009:756). A cartel of parties thus uses the state’s (financial and legislative) resources to advance its own prospects. The introduction of and changes to state subvention legislation are the most cited example of ways in which a cartel of parties adapts its environment (cf. Van Biezen, 2008; Katz and Mair, 2009), but the electoral system and the direct democratic legislation are also tools that can be used/manipulated.

However, a cartel of parties is not a fixed entity. Just as with economic cartels, sometimes newcomers are able to break the power of the existing cartel. Whenever such a new party enters the government, de facto a new cartel is born. Given that each cartel can be expected to change the institutional legislation for its own benefit, it is likely that the ‘new’ cartel will embark on democratic reform to adapt the system to its advantage (for a similar reasoning see:

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39 The only exception is Cain, Dalton and Scarrow, 2003. However, in this edited volume the cartel party literature is not used as a means to explain democratic reform, but to highlight the tension between the rhetoric and the actions of parties (Kittilson and Scarrow, 2003:64-65).

40 Scarrow (1997:456-457) distinguishes between three scenarios: direct democratic reform occurs due to the impact of (1) parties that do not belong to the cartel, (2) vote-seeking (or act-contingent) motivations and (3) a diminished legitimacy of the party as such (which relates to principled motivations). Especially the first scenario is important as it brings in an element that sheds new light on the puzzle of the impact of the effective number of parties (cf. infra). The other two scenarios have a significant overlap with other explanations discussed in this chapter and will thus not be discussed separately.
Katz, 2005:61). Yet in most cases the previous cartel is not replaced by a completely new cartel. Especially in consensus democracies, where coalition government is the rule and single-party governments are the exception, one can expect only partial cartel replacements. This leads me to distinguish between four kinds of 'cartel status': cartel stability (the cartel remains in place), cartel break-in (a small party is added to the cartel), partial cartel breakdown (a significant part of the cartel is replaced) and wholesale cartel breakdown (a completely new cartel is formed).

1. **Cartel Stability.** In a situation of cartel stability, the ruling cartel of parties need not adapt, because they need not change ‘the rules of a game they are winning’ (Katz, 2005:61). Therefore from the cartel party theory point of view, one can expect politicians to prefer stability under such circumstances.

2. **Cartel Break-In.** Sometimes smaller newcomer parties are included in a coalition before they have grown ‘too large’. If this is the case their impact is likely to be very limited and one can thus expect stability or at best minor reforms.

3. **Partial Cartel Breakdown.** In other instances the cartel cannot stand its ground. If a cartel of parties breaks down partially and only weakened remnants of the old cartel are included in the government as junior partners, one can expect democratic reforms to occur. Katz suggests that ‘particularly a first-time government may understand its victory to have been the product of a fortuitous combination of circumstances that is unlikely to persist – in effect to believe itself to have won in spite of, rather than because of, the electoral system in place’ (2005:61). However, in the case of a partial cartel breakdown the remnants of the old cartel still have the power to dilute the reform proposals, which would make it more difficult to implement reform.

4. **Wholesale Cartel Breakdown.** Related to this, if the existing cartel breaks down completely and is replaced entirely, one can expect all types of democratic reform to occur. These are the situations where I expect the highest number of successful democratic reforms.

*Expectation 2.* One can expect that the more a government cartel is replaced by a new cartel, the more likely it is that democratic reforms will occur.

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41 For instance, if the old cartel included only parties that were strong in rural areas, it can be expected to have changed the electoral system in such a way that voters in the cities carry less weight. Once a new cartel that only consists of parties that are strong in cities is formed, one can expect that the electoral system will be adapted to give more weight to the cities. This happened for instance in Austria in 1970 (Müller, 2006b:286).

42 Multiple theoretical perspectives can be valid at the same time (cf. Renwick’s equifinality). For instance, a postmaterialist or populist party that is part of a stable cartel of parties can still keep the subject on the agenda and try to press for reforms for ideological reasons.

43 There is one exception though. If a newcomer is heavily disadvantaged by the electoral system, e.g. in a mixed member majoritarian or pure majoritarian electoral system, it may want to change this situation at all costs. In this case one would expect electoral reforms to occur. I expect these to be mainly minor ones. After all, in such a case the cartel parties have a strong incentive not to change anything, as it would only increase the threat and make them more vulnerable. The focus of this study is on consensus democracies (with a proportional electoral system), so I did not find examples of this in Austria, Belgium or the Netherlands.

44 This is of course a fairly formalized logic. I expect it to be mainly valid when the newcomers came to power fortuitously (cf. Katz, 2005:61). After all, if the cartel breakdown is based on a structural electoral shift, the newcomer can expect to score electoral victories for a longer period of time, which again raises the question of ‘why would they change the game they are winning’?
2.6.2 The role of political ideologies: populism and postmaterialism

A second challenge to the rational choice approach concerned the role of ideology. Behaviouralist studies pointed to the fact that political elites are not always driven by outcome-contingent motivations. Their ideological affiliation in particular seems to influence them as well. Such ideological motivations can be propelled by act-contingent reasons, such as the need to appear consistent or to keep one’s promises, but they can also be genuinely principled. In these cases, the idea that democratic reform is the right thing to do derives from political elites’ ideological convictions. Scholars studying democratic reform have been struggling with the notion of ideology for a long time (Katz, 1997; Pilet, 2007a; Blais and Shugart, 2008:200). This should not come as a surprise, as ‘ideology’ is a broad, complex and abstract concept. Moreover, not all parts of it are relevant to the study of democratic reform. To start with it may thus be useful to have a clear definition of the concept. One particularly suitable definition of (party) ideology can be found in the oft-cited work of Hinich and Munger (1994:11), who define ideology as follows:

An ideology is an internally coherent set of propositions that makes both prescriptive and proscriptive demands on human behavior. All ideologies have implications for (a) what is ethically good, and (therefore) what is bad; (b) how society’s resources should be distributed, and (c) where power appropriately resides.45

Therefore a political ideology tells us what is good, who should get what and who should rule. The ethical and economic dimensions of political ideology are often used in empirical research on electoral behaviour, but the third dimension, which highlights the role of the citizen in the political process, is less prominent in the empirical literature. Traditional ideologies such as socialism, liberalism and conservatism mainly include this dimension implicitly, which makes its salience debatable. Additionally these ideologies may not be convincing explanatory factors, since they have existed for a long time and it will be hard to find a positive correlation with instances of reform. An exclusive focus on such traditional ideologies is thus unlikely to be fruitful when one tries to study democratic reform. Unfortunately, this is principally what has been done in the literature (see for instance Katz, 1997; Pilet, 2007a; Bowler, Donovan and Karp, 2006). Hence, the literature’s difficult grappling with party ideology may well stem from the wrong focus.

How to refocus? Hinich and Munger are fairly strict in their definition of party ideology: all three dimensions have to be present for something to be called an ideology. This may be too rigid and it limits the number of ‘useful suspects’ to traditional ideologies. More recent additions to the party ideology literature make a distinction between thick- and thin-centred ideologies. A thin-centred ideology is ‘one that arbitrarily severs itself from wider ideational contexts, by the deliberate removal and replacement of concepts’ (Freeden, 1998:750). In the terminology of Hinich and Munger, a thin-centred ideology is one that only has a clear-cut and coherent position on at least one (but not on all three) dimension of ideology. The most promising thin-centred ideologies with regard to democratic reform are clearly those that focus on the third dimension. Two of those kinds of thin-centred ideologies can be thought

45 Certainly other definitions can be used as well. Yet these definitions are mainly fairly abstract and non-empirical. The added value of Hinich and Munger’s definition is that it explicitly aims to combine empirical and theoretical definitions, which makes it all the more useful for this study.

I. POPULISM AND ITS IDEAL-TYPE DEMOCRACY

Populism is a hotly debated concept (see among others Canovan, 1999; Taggart, 2000, Mudde, 2004; Jagers and Walgrabe, 2007) but recently a fairly broad consensus on its conceptualization has emerged. It was Cas Mudde who set the stage with his influential 2004 definition. Mudde (2004:543) defines populism as:

> [A]n ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will).

Populism thus focuses on opposition to *elitism* (the citizens themselves know what is best for them, and need not to be educated), *pluralism* (the citizenry is a homogenous group), *establishment* (political parties, and by extension the whole intellectual establishment, is/are corrupt) and *intermediary structures* (since intermediary structures artificially subdivide the citizens). In practice one seldom sees pure populist parties. As Freedon (1998:759) notes, a thin-centred ideology only rarely exists by itself and it has a far longer life when it is combined with a host ideology. Such host ideologies can be fairly diverse. Mudde distinguishes three types of populists, namely social populists (such as the German *Linkspartei*), neoliberal populists (such as the Italian *Forza Italia*) and radical right populists (such as the Austrian *FPO*) (Mudde, 2007:29-30).

In his recent work, Mudde (2007:150-155) outlines the archetypical populist democracy. This overview provides an excellent starting point for making hypotheses regarding the impact of populism on democratic reform. Mudde stresses three elements in the ideal-type populist democracy: plebiscitary politics, the personalization of power and the primacy of the political. The first two in particular are important for this study.

(1) One of the crucial claims of populists is that they want to return power to the people (and take it away from the corrupt elites). This can be done by increasing the use of plebiscitary tools such as recalls, public initiatives and referendums (Barney and Laycock, 1999: 318). The first is not pertinent to this study, but the other two are especially relevant to democratic reform in consensus democracies.

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46 Among the studies of democratic reform only Bowler and Donovan (2006) and Barney and Laycock (1999) have used populism to explain the introduction of referendum provisions, respectively at American state level and in Canada. Some other studies have pointed to the fact that populist parties support direct democracy, but have never used it in the analysis of actual reforms (Canovan, 2000; Taggart, 2000; Laycock, 2002; Bowler, Denemark and Donovan, 2003; Mudde, 2007).

47 Sometimes an exclusionist view is added to this element: some people, such as migrants for instance, are said not to be part of ‘the people’ (cf. Jagers and Walgrabe, 2007).

48 Mudde labels this type of populists ‘populist radical right parties’ in order to stress the importance of the radical right elements (Mudde, 2007:42).

49 The primacy of the political should be understood as the primacy of politics over the rule of law, since this weakens rule by the people (Mudde, 2007:154). However, since the relationship between the judiciary and politicians is not part of the topic of this study, this third element of the ideal-type populist democracy is omitted in the discussion.

50 Recall provisions are typically confined to majoritarian electoral systems.
Populists have an aversion to all intermediary bodies, since they maintain these only dilute the relationship between the people and the leadership. This is particularly visible in populists’ calls for a more personalized political system (Mudde, 2007:153). One can thus expect that they want a direct link between the leader and the people. Such a desire can be translated into many specific electoral reforms, such as increasing the weight of the preference vote (which decreases the role of parties), or the direct election of executives such as mayors, provincial governors or even the head of state (which all establish a direct link between politicians and the people).

Hence, when populists achieve office one can expect democratic reforms to occur. Obviously, when the populist party is just a small junior partner the impact will be more limited. Based on these elements the following two general expectations can be outlined.

The first expectation deals with the impact of populist parties on the overall number of reforms.

**Expectation 3.** One can expect that the greater the impact of a populist party within a government, the more likely it is that democratic reforms will occur.

The second (set of) expectation(s) deals with the direction of reform.

**Expectation 4.** One can expect that the greater the impact of a populist party within a government, the more likely it is that direct democratic reforms as well as reforms towards a more personalized electoral system will occur.

2. POSTMATERIALISM AND ITS IDEAL-TYPE DEMOCRACY

Unlike populism, Inglehart’s well-known concept of ‘postmaterialism’ has already been used in some democratic reform studies (cf. Dalton, 2004; Bowler, Donovan and Karp, 2006; Renwick, 2010). It has been principally applied to public opinion. For instance, Dalton (2004) and Renwick (2010) have a postmaterialism-based mass-approach to values. The same is true for Lijphart, who includes a materialist/postmaterialist cleavage in his standard work *Patterns of Democracy* (1999). However, postmaterialism need not be limited to public opinion. Upon Lijphart’s cleavage parties can ‘root’ themselves and the best labels for such parties are probably ‘materialist’ and ‘postmaterialist’. Indeed, Inglehart himself originally expected that this cleavage would be accommodated within the political spectrum of countries with proportional electoral systems such as Italy and the Netherlands (1977:250). A second application of postmaterialism is seen in the study of the elites in the work of Bowler, Donovan and Karp (2006), who include it in their analysis of politicians’ institutional preferences. Each politician gets a party score for ideology and postmaterialism. As it turns out, the variable has a sizable impact on preferences for institutional changes (Bowler, Donovan and Karp, 2006:443). In short, although it has mainly been applied to public opinion, postmaterialism can also fruitfully be used as a party ideology in research.

What then is at the heart of this postmaterialist thin-centred ideology? Unlike with populism, there is no ready-made definition for postmaterialism as a party ideology. In fact in his early work Inglehart was quite vague about the concept as such. He only dubbed it ‘a greater

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51 To my knowledge, this is the only study of democratic reform in which postmaterialism is considered to be a party characteristic. Strangely enough the authors call postmaterialism a value, not an ideology, although clearly it is a characteristic of a party not of individual politicians (Bowler, Donovan and Karp, 2006:438).
emphasis on the quality of life’ (1977: 3) and operationalized it in his famous four-point postmaterialism scale. The concept has continued to be more operationalization-driven than definition-driven. However, although some additions and changes have occurred in the work on postmaterialism, the core elements of the concept still stand: the postmaterialism scale grew to include more items, but these essentially tapped into the same underlying dimensions (cf. Inglehart, 1997; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). Two components of the concept have been discerned, namely a liberty and an idealist component (Welzel and Inglehart, 2005: 90). The first stresses the importance of political and civil liberties, while the second emphasizes the importance of the quality of life and living in a more humane society.

Again, in practice pure postmaterialist parties hardly ever exist. Sometimes postmaterialism has been equated to ecologism, but not all green parties are postmaterialist – as Inglehart himself acknowledged (Inglehart and Welzel 2005:39). There is no reason why environmental parties should be postmaterialist by definition. In fact, many green parties, especially those in Eastern Europe are quite conservative and anything but postmaterialist. Conversely, one of the prototypical postmaterialist parties, the Dutch D66, is clearly not a traditional green party (Inglehart, 1977:250; see also Lijphart, 1999; Andeweg and Irwin, 2005:54-55). Therefore there is no reason to limit green parties to postmaterialist parties, nor is there any reason to limit postmaterialist parties to green parties. Nevertheless, ecologism is one of the host ideologies postmaterialism can be attached to. Similarly, libertarianism can be such a host ideology - as is the case with D66. Hence, two kinds of postmaterialist party can be discerned, green postmaterialist and libertarian postmaterialist. What then will an ideal-type postmaterialist democracy look like? Postmaterialists agree with populists in their desire to limit the power of the authorities, but their views on the nature of 'the people' are different. Unlike populists, postmaterialists clearly do not see the people as a homogenous group. On the contrary, postmaterialism stresses self-expression and individuality. Essentially postmaterialists thus have a pluralistic view of society. Therefore a postmaterialist democracy is first and foremost a pluralist democracy, with significant anti-authoritarian checks and balances. Plebiscitary politics are congruent with postmaterialism, with referendums seen as a way to participate in politics which can also act as a safeguard for minorities and pluralism (cf. Qvortrup, 2005: Chapter 5). Lastly, although intermediary bodies are not necessarily disliked per se, they can sometimes hinder the impact of individual voters on politics. Majoritarian systems are at odds with the notions of pluralism and individualism, since they eliminate party pluralism and limit the impact of individual voters. Two general expectations can be derived from the theoretical discussion about postmaterialism. The first expectation deals with the impact of postmaterialist parties on the overall number of reforms.

Expectation 5. One can expect that the greater the impact of a postmaterialist party within a government, the more likely it is that democratic reforms will occur.

52 For instance, in more recent work Inglehart and Welzel relate postmaterialist values to 'self-expression values', and consider postmaterialist values to be a part of self-expression values, although it is unclear what the other items add to postmaterialism so as to form self-expression values (2005:25-26, 33 and 51 for an overview of the items of the self-expression value).

53 In an early version Inglehart (1977) also included a preference for participatory democracy as a feature of postmaterialism. In a later version he opted for the more general 'increasing individual liberties' (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005:27-33).

54 One could also label libertarian postmaterialist parties 'left-libertarian' or 'progressive liberalist'.
A second (set of) expectation deals with the direction of reform.

Expectation 6. One can expect that the greater the impact of a postmaterialist party within a government, the more likely it is that direct democratic reforms as well as reforms towards a more proportional electoral system will occur.

2.6.3 Public dissatisfaction
In the discussion on the general principles of sociological institutionalism I noted that scholars such as Norris (1999), Pharr and Putnam (2000) and Dalton (2004) claimed that a postmaterialist value change created 'dissatisfied democrats' (Dalton, 2004:45). Such dissatisfied democrats support democracy as a general principle, but think that an improvement in the existing democratic procedures is needed. Given this, one might expect that there is fertile soil for popular demands for democratic reform. Recent studies have confirmed that dissatisfaction with democratic procedures is indeed partially driven by value change. However, such dissatisfaction is also found among lower educated materialist groups that have not experienced a value change (Bowler, Donovan and Karp, 2007:360). Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002) have labelled these citizens 'stealth democrats' 55. If one only looks at the postmaterialist value change, this group of citizens is ignored (see also Mudge, 2004). Moreover, the 'crisis' that is invoked by sociological institutionalists as a trigger for reform debates builds on public dissatisfaction in general (cf. Dalton, 2004:203). When it comes to dissatisfaction and a demand for 'change', the higher educated, postmaterialist, dissatisfied democrats and the less educated, materialist, stealth democrats are unlikely allies, but they are allies nonetheless. The dissatisfaction of dissatisfied democrats plus the dissatisfaction of stealth democrats forms the fertile soil for crises and democratic reform. Therefore, when seeking explanations for democratic reform, it is best to examine public dissatisfaction rather than just looking at value change. A focus on dissatisfaction also has another advantage. Rahat (2008:24) rightly directs attention to the fact that 'societal change' is often too gradual to serve as a useful explanation for democratic reform. Societal change is a long-term development or trend, while democratic reform happens at a specific moment. Public dissatisfaction is however more suitable as it fluctuates often enough to serve as an explanation for a particular democratic reform. Lastly, public dissatisfaction can serve to explain both electoral and direct democratic reform (cf. Rahat, 2008; Dalton, 2004:203; see also Scarrow, 2001; Bowler, Donovan and Karp, 2006; Dalton, 2004:178).

Consensus democracies tend to be more susceptible to public dissatisfaction than majoritarian democracies, because of the respective electoral systems. Consensus democracies by definition have proportional electoral systems, which makes parties more vulnerable to even minor vote swings. Hence, one can expect that public dissatisfaction plays a more important role in the democratic reform process in consensus democracies than in majoritarian democracies. More dissatisfaction also means that even minor crises can have considerable consequences.

55 Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002) use the analogy of a stealth fighter planes the inspiration for the label 'stealth democrats'. Citizens want democracy to be stealthy: present, yet invisible. Only when it really matters should democratic processes be both present and visible. 'Just as stealth bombers can be made to show up on radar when desired, the people want to know that their government will become visible, accountable and representative should they decide such traits are warranted. Yet until that time most people prefer not to be involved and therefore desire unobtrusive accountability.'
2.7 Reform-level factors

At the reform level, act-contingent and outcome-contingent motivations play a role alongside values. Scholars often treat these three factors as direct rivals and therefore it is useful to outline a general expectation regarding which plays the most important role in actual reform discussions. After this I will discuss each of the three factors separately.

2.7.1 Dominant motivations

According to rational choice-inspired scholars, the answer to the question of which motivations are dominant in the democratic reform process is quite simple: the outcome-contingent motivations (cf. Boix, 1999; Benoit, 2004; Colomer, 2004). Scholars inspired by the sociological institutionalist approach stress that act-contingent motivations also play a role. However, even they feel that in the end outcome-contingent motivations outweigh act-contingent motivations in most cases (cf. Bowler, Donovan and Karp, 2006). When act-contingent motivations push a party into supporting a reform it would be harmed by, most politicians tend to ‘dodge the issue’ or try to stall by setting up expert commissions rather than supporting the reform (cf. Blais and Shugart, 2008:197; see also Renwick, 2010:214). Similarly, principled motivations can put a reform on the agenda, but many principle-driven reforms have floundered. In other cases principles coincided with outcome-contingent motivations (cf. Pilet, 2007a:229). In such cases one tends to suspect that principles were merely ‘window-dressing’, to cover up the true (outcome-contingent) motivations of reformers (Katz, 2005:69).

Expectation 8. One can expect that outcome-contingent motivations are more dominant in reform debates than act-contingent and principled motivations.

2.7.2. Outcome-contingent motivations.

Some reforms benefit parties more than others. Each specific reform benefits or disadvantages each party in a different way, which prevents scholars from formulating too specific expectations of the impact of outcome-contingent motivations on democratic reform in general. Nevertheless, one general expectation can be advanced. If most political elites are driven by outcome-contingent motivations to implement a reform, one can expect they will try to build a majority to implement reforms which will improve the prospects of all the parties included in that majority. Certainly such a reform is likely to be a ‘lowest common denominator’, as all parties in this majority will want to maximally improve their prospects, but nevertheless one can expect democratic reforms to happen quite often. It is impossible a priori to determine what the level of the lowest common denominator will be, as all sorts of democratic reforms (major, minor or merely technical) are likely to occur.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{56} Regarding the specific content of these reforms, one can for instance think of electoral reforms that decrease proportionality. In consensus democracies, which by definition have a proportional electoral system, the bigger parties would benefit most from a less proportional electoral system. Furthermore, reforms that expand the legislation on one specific subtype of referendum, namely government-sponsored referendums are also likely to be implemented. Such government-sponsored referendums (sometimes called ‘plebiscites’) are initiated by
2.7.3. Act-contingent motivations.
As mentioned earlier, act-contingent motivations refer to the motivation to support a reform not because it would be advantageous, but because the mere act of supporting the reform can have electoral benefits, or conversely because not supporting a reform proposal may result in electoral punishment (Reed and Thies, 2001:153). In general scholars tend to be rather sceptical about the degree of impact of act-contingent motivations. Specifically with respect to electoral reform, they stress that ‘it can hardly be overstated how unimportant it is to voters most of the time’ (Blais and Shugart, 2008:196). Nevertheless it is not unthinkable that voters are interested in such issues as the electoral system some of the time - or at least that political elites think that voters are interested in an issue. In consensus democracies such occasions may have a greater impact than in majoritarian democracies. Indeed, in such a setting political elites are more vulnerable if voters switch from one party to another, as even small electoral swings lead to seat losses, which in turn can have large consequences. After all, parties’ seat shares are generally nearer to each other in proportional settings than in majoritarian systems. Hence there are reasons to expect that if act-contingent motivations play a role, then this is most likely to be visible in consensus democracies. Based on a rational choice interpretation of the interests of the citizens, one can expect that citizens will prefer reforms that empower them. However, in a significant number of cases empowering the citizen is done the expense of the power of the political elites themselves. Therefore one can expect them to try to get the best of both worlds: cash in on act-contingent motivations, while at the same time not lose too much power. This can be done by implementing (the often less harmful) minor democratic reforms.

Expectation 9. One can expect that the more outcome-contingent motivations dominate the reform debate, the more likely it is that democratic reforms will occur.

2.7.4 Values
Democratic reform can be driven by principled motivations. Such motivations can come in the form of party ideology – mostly populism and postmaterialism – and of values. In this section I will focus on the values. Principled motivations, and values in particular, are often considered to be less important than self-interested motivations (cf. Chapter 1). With regard to electoral reform it is traditionally considered that values may play a role in getting a topic on the agenda, but in the end interests usually trump values (Blais and Shugart, 2008:200). These interests are mainly seen as outcome-contingent motivations. In the field of direct democratic reform the interests are interpreted as act-contingent motivations: if act-contingent motivations are absent, there is not much of a role for values (cf. Bowler, Donovan and Karp, 2006). However, some scholars point to the fact that in some of the most influential reform discussions a number of politicians were at least partially driven by values (cf. Katz, governments and are mostly used to ‘seal the legitimacy of a controversial policy change or change in regime’ (Qvortrup, 2005:156).

Expectation 10. One can expect that the more act-contingent motivations dominate the reform debate, the more likely it is that minor democratic reforms will occur.

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Certainly, this is a rather modest statement, but it suggests that one should not abandon values too quickly. In his comprehensive study of major electoral reforms in France, Italy, Japan and New Zealand, Renwick outlined a list of no fewer than 23 values that can matter in reform discussions. With such a shopping list of values, basically every position a party or politician takes can be backed up by one value or another. This is indeed the most pressing problem concerning this variable: the values explanation risks becoming a catch-all that can be invoked in each and every reform analysis but adds little or nothing. Nevertheless, as Renwick (2010:38-41) makes clear, the list of 23 values can be reduced to three broad categories, namely representation, accountability and simplicity. Often the three are incompatible. Reforms making the system simpler can also make it less representative or accountable. More importantly, reforms that make a system more representative virtually always make it less accountable (and vice versa). Of the three categories, representation and accountability are the most important. In his assessment of the importance of representation and accountability in electoral reform discussions, Katz (2005:74-75) concludes that representation is more important than accountability. Additionally, he states that representation should be interpreted as the ‘direct popular choice of representatives’, not representation as mediated by parties. There is no reason to expect that the dominance of representation over accountability does not apply to consensus democracies. Indeed, in such systems the dominant conception of democracy has a heavy emphasis on equality and representation (Blais and Shugart, 2008:204-205).

Expectation 11. One can expect that in democratic reform debates, the values associated with representativeness play a greater role than the values associated with accountability.

Regarding the impact of values on the general occurrence of democratic reform, most scholars feel that values can play a part in some individual cases, but by themselves have only a

58 Renwick (2010:39) lists the following values: a fair distribution of votes; avoidance of anomalous results; a fair distribution of power; representation of society; voter choice; accountability of governments; accountability of individual politicians; checks and balances; encouraging effective political parties; simplicity; avoidance of inter-group conflict; avoidance of conflict over choice of system; democratic process of system choice; constitutional process of system choice; efficient decision making; effective scrutiny of decisions; avoidance of corruption; avoidance of money politics; economic policy objectives; quality of constituency service; affirmation of links with national tradition; affirmation of links with favoured states; administrative simplicity.

59 By their nature, values are thus an excellent tool for politicians to cover up socially less acceptable self-interested motivations.

60 Representation includes a fair distribution of seats, a fair distribution of power, avoidance of anomalous results, representation of society and voter choice. Accountability includes accountability of governments; accountability of individual politicians and checks and balances. Simplicity includes simplicity and administrative simplicity. Overall, the three categories do not include all values, but they do cover the most common and important ones (cf. Renwick, 2010).

61 In practice representation translates into such electoral reforms as increasing the proportionality of the electoral system or giving citizens more say in who wins the seats (e.g. by lowering the preference threshold). Regarding direct democratic reform, representation is less straightforward. Katz (2005) only discussed the impact of values in electoral reform debates. The consequence for direct democratic reform of an emphasis on representation can be understood in two different ways. First, one can conceive of referendums as the ‘most extreme majoritarian method of decision making’ (Lijphart, 1999:230). However, in the case of citizen-initiated referendums ‘even very small minorities [have] a chance to challenge any laws passed by the majority of the elected representatives’ (Lijphart, 1999:231, see also Vatter, 2009:128-130). Hence, the most important difference seems to be the type of referendum: government-sponsored referendums focus more on accountability, while citizen-initiated referendums focus more on representation.
Renwick (2010:243-245) only found that the values of public opinion mattered. Most scholars agree that values can play a role, but this is at best auxiliary (see also Pilet, 2007a; Blais and Shugart, 2008). If a reform discussion is primarily driven by values, it is therefore unlikely to persuade other, non-reformist, politicians.

Expectation 12. One can expect that the more values dominate the reform debate, the less likely it is that democratic reforms will occur.

2.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the two dominant approaches to democratic reform, rational choice and sociological institutionalism. The rational choice approach mainly focuses on the estimated consequences of reform as an explanation of why it was implemented (so-called outcome-contingent motivations), while the sociological institutionalist approach focuses on the impact of citizens (in the form of societal change and public dissatisfaction). Neither of the approaches is uncontested. Scholars using the rational choice approach claim that a higher effective number of parties leads to reform, but this does not seem to be valid for consensus democracies. I have suggested that the cartel party logic of Katz and Mair (1995, 2009) may well account for this phenomenon. The rational choice approach was also challenged by behaviouralists, who drew attention to vote-seeking (or act-contingent) and principled motivations. Principled motivations in particular are difficult to examine. Such difficulties may well stem from the wrong focus. Traditional studies using political ideology to explain democratic reform focused principally on traditional ideologies, while looking at newer ideologies such as populism and postmaterialism may be more fruitful. The sociological institutionalist approach, on the other hand, is often criticized for overestimating the impact of public dissatisfaction. Many barriers that are often difficult to bring down by ‘public pressure’ exist. Based on the veto player logic as outlined by Tsebelis (2002) one can indeed expect that democratic reform is very hard to achieve in consensus democracies. After all, in consensus democracies coalition governments are the norm, which means that multiple partisan veto players exist. Moreover, the barriers to reform are heightened even more by the often substantial number of non-partisan veto players, such as constitutional courts or independent Upper Houses.

This chapter highlighted seven very different variables in total. To structure this myriad of explanatory variables included in the study of democratic reform, I suggested the use of a framework based on three levels, the country level, the government level and the reform level. Variables are placed at each of the three levels (cf. Table 2.2). In the next chapter I will discuss, among other things, how these variables are operationalized. In the empirical chapters that follow I will examine the expectations regarding the impact of each of the seven variables.

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Even Bowler, Donovan and Karp (2006:444) state that while values may have a ‘substantively large’ impact on the attitudes regarding democratic reform, when it comes to actual reform discussions self-interest outweighs values.
### Table 2.2 Summary of the seven variables and their corresponding expectations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Variable relates to...</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Veto players</td>
<td>Challenge to soc. inst.: barriers</td>
<td>E1. The more veto players there are, the less likely it is that democratic reforms will occur.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>Cartel status</td>
<td>Challenge to rat. choice: eff. number of parties</td>
<td>E2. The more a government cartel is replaced by a new cartel, the more likely it is that democratic reforms will occur.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political ideology</td>
<td>• Populism</td>
<td>Challenge to rat. choice: principles</td>
<td>E3. The greater the impact of a populist party within a government, the more likely it is that democratic reforms will occur.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Postmaterialism</td>
<td></td>
<td>E4. The greater the impact of a populist party within a government, the more likely it is that direct democratic reforms as well as reforms towards a more personalized electoral system will occur.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public dissatisfaction</td>
<td>Soc. inst.</td>
<td>E5. The greater the impact of a postmaterialist party within a government, the more likely it is that democratic reforms will occur.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>E6. The greater the impact of a postmaterialist party within a government, the more likely it is that direct democratic reforms as well as reforms towards a more proportional electoral system will occur.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform</td>
<td>General expectation</td>
<td>Rat. choice</td>
<td>E7. The higher the public dissatisfaction, the more likely it is that democratic reforms will occur.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outcome-contingent motivations</td>
<td>Rat. choice</td>
<td>E8. Outcome-contingent motivations are more dominant in reform debates than act-contingent and principled motivations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Act-contingent motivations</td>
<td>Challenge to rat. choice: vote-seeking + soc inst.</td>
<td>E9. The more outcome-contingent motivations dominate the reform debate, the more likely it is that democratic reforms will occur.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Values</td>
<td>Challenge to rat. choice: principles</td>
<td>E10. The more act-contingent motivations dominate the reform debate, the more likely it is that minor democratic reforms will occur.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>E11. Values associated with representativeness play a greater role than the values associated with accountability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>E12. The more values dominate the reform debate, the less likely it is that democratic reforms will occur.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

Scholars studying democratic reform have used large-N statistical techniques to examine the pressures for democratic reform (cf. Shugart, 2008), politicians and parties' preferences for reform (cf. Bowler, Donovan and Karp, 2006; Pilet and Bol, 2011) and the preferences of public opinion (cf. Dalton, 2004; Norris, 2011). However, when it comes to studying actual democratic reforms most scholars revert to small-N qualitative techniques. This is no surprise. If one takes only major electoral reform into consideration, the number of actual reforms is extremely small. In the main only the reforms in France, Italy, Israel, Japan and New Zealand are examined.\(^{63}\) Even if one takes a broader view of major electoral reform, a limited number of cases are identified.\(^{64}\) The study of major electoral reform is thus restricted by its small-N nature. However, if one studies democratic reform in general (including minor electoral reforms and minor and major direct democratic reforms) more cases can be found. Will this change the main methodological approach to democratic reform from qualitative to quantitative? This question is best answered on the basis of the nature of the phenomenon 'democratic reform' (cf. Schneider, 2008). Hence, the first section below deals with ontological matters. As is shown, the ontology of democratic reform is particularly suited to small-N techniques. Thus, even if we had a database of 1,200 minor and/or major democratic reforms, statistical techniques are probably not the best techniques to use (see also Katz, 2005:74).\(^{65}\) After the ontological discussion the research design is detailed, paying specific attention to the type of case study and the case selection procedure. Based on the analytical framework presented in Chapter 2, I will make use of the distinction between the country, government and reform levels. The selection of three countries, namely Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands, between 1987 and 2008 will be substantiated. During this period fifteen governments took (and left) office. In Chapter 4 I will compile a list of all democratic reforms in the three countries during this time. Based on this list I will be able to select the most insightful government periods. In this chapter I will outline which criteria I will use to determine what these most insightful government periods are. I will also set out the principles for selecting the most important reform discussions during a given government period. Before doing the actual case study research it is obviously important to know what to look for. Often the conceptualization and operationalization are overlooked in traditional studies, which may produce biased results (but see: Shugart, 2008; Rahat, 2008a; Renwick, 2010).\(^{66}\) Therefore, I devote a separate section to the conceptualization and operationalization of the central variables in this study. Lastly I will discuss which sources I use, how the findings for each of the central variables in this study are gathered and how the qualitative in-depth case studies are carried out in practice.

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63 For an overview of these studies, see: Renwick, 2010.
64 Fourteen according to Katz (2005:58).
65 The 'small-N problem' as Rahat (2008b: 30) calls it, may thus be overstated. The lack of quantitative studies is not (only) due to a limited number of cases, but also to the nature of the phenomenon.
66 For an overview of the potential biases due to the omission of conceptualization see Jacobs and Leyenaar, 2011.
3.2. Research design and strategy

3.2.1 The nature of democratic reform

Some social phenomena are best studied using statistical techniques, while for others qualitative techniques are more suitable. The choice of methods depends not only on the status or position in the life cycle of the field (cf. Gerring, 2007:12-13). The choice of a research design also depends heavily on the (theoretical and empirical) nature of the phenomenon one wishes to study (cf. Ragin, 2000; Braumoeller, 2003; Schneider and Grofman, 2006). So what kind of phenomenon is democratic reform? To this more systematically I will assess whether the nature of democratic reform involves asymmetric causation, multifinality, conjunctural causation and equifinality (cf. Schneider and Grofman, 2006). The more of these elements are present, the more a social phenomenon is best analysed using small-N or configurational techniques, such as QCA (cf. Rihoux, 2008).

(1) **Asymmetric causation** applies to phenomena for which the causal explanations for an outcome are irrelevant for the explanations for the opposite. Theories and empirical findings on the opposite of democratic reform, namely non-reform or stability, point out that it is indeed explained by factors other than democratic reform. For instance, catalysing events are necessary to trigger electoral reform debates, but the absence of such events is irrelevant for stability (Rahat, 2008:30-32). Similarly, leadership is often necessary for an electoral reform proposal to be approved (Renwick, 2009: 296), but the absence of leadership is irrelevant in explaining stability. The same holds true as regards direct democratic reform. Public dissatisfaction may be important in explaining such reforms (cf. Scarrow, 1997:463), but its opposite public satisfaction is not necessarily important in the explanation of stability (cf. Scarrow, 2001).

(2) **Multifinality** applies to phenomena for which the same causal factor contributes both to an outcome and to its opposite. In the field of electoral reform this is exemplified by the finding that the absence of public dissatisfaction can lead to electoral reform (because this allows political elites to push through reforms that are blatantly advantageous to them without being punished by the voters) and to non-reform (because political elites feel no pressure to reform the electoral system) (cf. Renwick, 2010). It can also be applied to direct democratic reform where cooperation between government parties can lead to both reform and non-reform (Scarrow, 1997:464).

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67 Obviously many social phenomena can be studied using both qualitative and quantitative techniques.
68 Braumoeller (2003:210) somewhat confusingly calls these elements indicators of causal complexity. Because this label implies that other phenomena cannot be complex or that phenomena driven by asymmetric causation, conjunctural causation, multifinality and equifinality are by definition complex, I will not use this term further.
69 A high score on the four criteria is closely related to small-N analysis (cf. Collier and Brady, 2004; Gerring, 2007). Such phenomena are difficult to analyse with quantitative techniques (and most specifically regression analysis), because statistical analysis is based on the exact opposite foundations. Regression analysts assume symmetric causation (versus asymmetric causation), net effects (instead of conjunctural effects) and causal unifinality (rather than multifinality). Traditional large-N analyses are thus ill-equipped for the study of democracy reform: statistical analyses will most likely produce invalid test results. Invalid because equifinality will not be visible in the results, which is especially problematic regarding the rarer paths, while multifinality will reduce the significance of the effects of some of the variables. Causal complexity and asymmetric causation are less threatening but do require careful modelling and interpretation.
(3) **Conjunctural causation** applies when two or more factors have to be present at the same time for an outcome to be achieved. Again, both electoral reform and direct democratic reform are best explained by conjunctions of explanatory variables rather than by single variables (see most importantly Renwick, 2010). For example, public pressures may lead to reform only when there are reformist politicians who embrace and further the reform in the political arena.

(4) **Equifinality** applies when multiple paths can lead to the same outcome. Of all four elements, equifinality is probably the easiest to assess, as it has been explicitly recognized in the case of both electoral and direct democratic reform. The statement by Alan Renwick (2010:10) that ‘we should acknowledge that there are different types of electoral reform process’ specifically refers to equifinality. Similarly, Susan Scarrow’s distinction of different ‘scenarios’ to achieve reform highlights equifinality in the explanation of direct democracy reform (1997:456).

To sum up, both electoral reform and direct democratic reform score very highly for each of the four criteria. As a result statistical analysis of democratic reform is of limited use. Certainly, one can always ‘push the buttons’ and carry out a statistical analysis, but the results will be either quite meaningless or at least severely biased (see also Katz, 2005:74). Therefore I will employ qualitative and configurational research methods in this study.

3.2.2. Research design: type of case study and case selection principles

1. Type of case study: the embedded multiple case study design

To get an in-depth view of democratic reform processes, the case study design is the most suitable. Furthermore, since the aim of this study is both to test the theoretical expectations advanced in Chapter 2 and generate new theoretical insights regarding democratic reform as such, it is best to examine multiple cases (cf. Gerring, 2007). Therefore, I will use a comparative case study design. Selecting multiple cases provides me with the opportunity of constructing a medium-N dataset. This in turn makes both a meaningful in-depth within-case analysis and a broader cross-case comparison possible (cf. Ragin, 1987, 2000). The multiple case study research design permits me to examine why democratic reforms occurred when they did, while at the same time it allows me to assess their occurrence or non-occurrence in a more general way (Gerring, 2007:49). A third important matter is the cases themselves. Indeed what are the cases in this study? In Chapter 2, I constructed an analytical framework in which three levels, the country, the government and the reform level, were combined. Each of the three levels is a locus where cases are founded. Hence, the specific type of case study design that is applied in this thesis is the embedded, multiple-case design (Yin, 2003: 52), ‘embedded’ pointing to the fact that the reforms (the primary cases) are considered to be subunits rooted in governments (the secondary cases) and countries (the tertiary cases).71 In

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70 Given the status of the field – and especially the lack of democratic reform studies – there is still a lot of room for ‘theory-generating’, or, in the words of Gerring (2007:39), democratic reform is still at its ‘lightbulb moment’ rather than its ‘skeptical moment’.

71 The additional added value of this case study design is that it allows more variation in both the independent and the dependent variables. Such a research design makes possible a refinement of conceptualization and measurement, as well as the suggesting explanations and hypotheses testing. Or, to put it differently, this design suits the aim of making both descriptive and causal inferences and of both testing and generating new insights (Collier, Mahony and Seawright, 2004:100). Furthermore, the subunits increase the number of observations, a means to increase the leverage of a study (King, Keohane and Verba, 1994:29-31).
practice this means that I will study democratic reforms by country (Chapter 4), by
government period (Chapter 4) and by reform (the three country chapters, Chapters 5, 6 and
7). Each of these analyses will be increasingly specific and detailed.

However, as Collier, Brady and Seawright (2004:225) correctly note, adding subunits (for
instance by using an embedded case study design) generally comes at a cost. First of all, one
should be aware of the implications of increasing the number of observations as far as
conceptual stretching, measurement validity and causal homogeneity are concerned.
Especially when one adds new countries (which may have significantly different contexts
from those of the original cases) this may be a major danger for the overall validity of the
study. However, conceptual stretching and measurement validity are not a risk when multiple
subunits of the same case (here understood as 'a country') are analysed. Causal homogeneity
on the other hand may still be a problem, for instance if one analyses subunits from an
entirely different time period. For example, the same (combination of) causal factors may
have different effects in the 1850s and the 1950s. As already mentioned in the introduction of
this chapter, I use the timeframe 1987 to 2008. Because of this the effects can be expected to
be the same throughout the whole period. Furthermore, the in-depth within-case analyses in
the three country chapters should allow me to detect any breach of the causal homogeneity
assumption (Munck, 2004:110).

Secondly, adding subunits can mean a trade-off as regards the independence of observations.
Among other things, observations that are not independent of each other may lead the
researcher to make incorrect estimates of 'statistical significance' or, more generally, over- or
underestimate the impact of certain independent variables (Collier, Brady and Seawright,
2004:226). For instance, the quantity of direct democratic reform in a given government
period may be in direct correlation with previous direct democratic reform. These caveats
should be kept in mind. Yet two comments should be made. First of all, I do not aim to
assess statistical significance and, since the breach of the assumption of independence of
observations does not bias causal inference as such, the risk of this to my (medium-N)
research is fairly limited (see also Seawright and Collier, 2004:290). Furthermore, the within-
country analyses in the country chapters should let me assess the impact of prior reforms,
thereby giving me a view on the impact of any breach of the assumption of independence of
observations.

2. CASE SELECTION: PRINCIPLES AND CAVEATS
Below I outline the general principles that I will use to select the reforms, governments and
countries included in this study. The aim of this thesis is to generate both descriptive
inferences about the occurrence of democratic reform and causal inferences about what best
explains why reform happens. I will begin with the selection of countries and government
periods and then discuss how I will select the reform discussions.

Given the fact that research into democratic reform is still in an early phase, the types of cases
that are used to test the theoretical approaches outlined earlier is of vital importance. After

72 For instance when referendum legislation has been introduced at all levels of the political system it is
impossible to introduce more referendum legislation.
73 Indeed, as I will show in the empirical analyses, in practice prior reforms often carried the seeds of new
reforms within them.
all, selecting the wrong type of case can lead to biased results, which in turn has greater consequences for an emerging field of research than for an established one (Gerring, 2007; see also George and Bennett, 2005:111-115). As Gerring (2007:145) notes, "in order to be a case of something broader than itself, the chosen case must be representative of a larger population. Otherwise (...) it is uninformative about anything but itself". But what if one cannot tell which cases are representative? In order to make a judgment on this it is necessary to have insight into this population. Specifically, one needs an overview of all reforms (dependent variable) and their scores on the independent variables outlined earlier for a given set of countries or governments during a given time period. What to do though when even the mere distribution of the dependent variable is unknown, as in the case of democratic reform?

One strategy might be to focus on the most visible cases: the extreme cases. This research strategy was often applied in the field of electoral reform. Extreme cases of instances where reform occurred, such as Italy, New Zealand, Israel and Japan, were extensively studied (cf. Donovan, 1995; Vowles, 1995; Diskin and Diskin, 1995; Shiratori, 1995; Sakamoto, 1999; Hazan and Rahat, 2000). The advantage of extreme cases is that they are often excellent for examining causal mechanisms. However, it is also very likely that at least some of these extreme cases highlight the impact of idiosyncratic factors. To put it more formally: extreme cases more often than not reflect a selection bias resulting from truncation (Collier, Mahony and Seawright, 2004:90-92). Within-case analyses should be able to filter out the impact of such idiosyncratic factors, but without a broad view of the general relationship these extreme cases present unreliable and invalid tests of (a set of) theoretical approaches. In short, focusing only on extreme cases of democratic reform is likely to produce biased results. The second problem here was that scholars concentrated too much on successful reform attempts and ignored unsuccessful ones. Or, as Sakamoto (1999:435) noted, 'in order to gain more valid and generalizable inferences, we need to study cases in which the dependent variable takes different values'. Hence, solely studying extreme cases is unlikely to be fruitful. It is better to select a diverse set of cases which includes some, but does not consist only of, extreme cases (cf. Gerring, 2007:104)

A second strategy for tackling the issue of representativeness is simply trying to make rough estimates of the dependent variable. However, given that even a rough estimate of democratic reform requires an extensive knowledge of legislation, this is a demanding task. In particular the fact that democratic reform is a two-level concept consisting of two subtypes - electoral and direct democratic reform - makes the task of establishing rough estimates for the dependent variable challenging and labour-intensive, as the two subtypes are only very occasionally studied together. Some estimates can be used though. Direct democratic reform is best documented. Susan Scarrow (2003:48) developed an index to score direct democratic reforms and gathered data on 18 established democracies. Although a number of countries

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74 The most telling example is probably the Italian legal provision to hold national citizen-initiated referendums, a provision that only exists in Switzerland, New Zealand and Italy (LeDuc, 2003:39). As a result of the analysis of the Italian reform, scholars contended that referendums were vital for the approval of reform. However, a significant number of referendums on electoral reform held elsewhere resulted in the demise of that particular reform discussion. It thus seems that the successful Italian reform may well be more of an exception rather than the rule (cf. Renwick, 2010).

75 Within-case analyses allow a researcher to assess which factors played a role, but without knowing of other cases it is impossible to make generalizations that are valid across multiple cases. Given that the field of democratic reform is still in its early days, knowledge about other cases is still lacking.
are excluded and her analyses are limited to the local and the national arenas, these data at least provide some assessment of the overall quantity of direct democratic reform. It is more difficult to find data on electoral reform. In the aftermath of the electoral system overhauls of the 1990s, scholars began to pay more attention to the topic of electoral reform. Moreover, since the beginning of the 21st century the focus has shifted from major electoral reforms to ‘major and minor electoral reforms’ (cf. Chapter 2). However, no framework for selecting non-major reforms has been outlined yet. As Katz (2005:69) notes, ‘there is no clear dividing line between major and minor reforms; even more, there is no clear dividing line between reforms that might be considered minor, and those that might instead be called trivial, technical or no reform at all’. Hence, with regard to electoral reform only scattered bits and pieces can be found. The volume *The Politics of Electoral Systems* edited by Gallagher and Mitchell (2005) comes probably closest to providing an electoral reform database. It includes chapters on 22 countries, most of which are established democracies. In each chapter a section on electoral reform can be found. However, as has been shown, each author has his/her own set of criteria for deciding what should be considered an electoral reform and what not (Jacobs and Leyenaar, 2011:497). Therefore, combining the findings of these 22 chapters is likely to produce an invalid and hence hardly useful dataset. Especially with regard to electoral reform, therefore one first needs to develop a conceptual framework that makes it possible to gather data on the number of electoral reforms.

A third strategy for countering the representativeness problem is to increase the number of observations in order to maximize the variation on the dependent variable. Selecting more cases at least makes it possible to attain more variation on the variables. Increasing the number of observations can be done by stretching the timeframe. The more observations there are, the easier it is to create a full-variance design. As discussed earlier, such a full-variance design has significant methodological benefits. Dalton, Scarrow and Cain (2003:7, 20) find that since the 1990s established Western democracies have been experiencing a second wave of democratic reform roughly. To guarantee that governments which implemented no reforms as well as those that did implement democratic reforms are included, it is thus best to stretch the timeframe so as to include a government period before this second wave of democratic reform.

2. CASE SELECTION STRATEGY
Regarding the selection of countries, the most important aim of the case selection is to prevent substantial bias due to idiosyncratic background variables. Hence, I will study countries that showed similarity in key background variables (*most similar system design*) and can be said to be typical or representative of a given population (in this case consensus democracies). Additionally it is also best to select a group of countries that have a typical or ‘normal’ number of democratic reforms. In a second phase I will develop a conceptual framework that allows me to compile a full dataset of all reforms that occurred. In the subsequent third phase I will gather data on all governments during a given period in each of the countries. These data include both the independent variables at country and government level (veto players, cartel breakdown, political ideology and public dissatisfaction) and the dependent variable (all democratic reforms that occurred during a given government period). As I am most interested in the second wave of democratic reform, but want to maximize the chances of including some governments that did not implement democratic reform, I will also cover one government period that started before the 1990s per country. Based on this dataset I will
make a selection from the ‘population’ of government periods. Because at this point I do have insight into whether democratic reform occurred at a time when one or more of the independent variables (e.g. public dissatisfaction) was present, I can make a ‘purposeful’ case selection. In other words, I will be able to select those government periods that are most insightful theoretically. The case selection criterion used in this phase is that I want to have a diverse set of typical, deviant and extreme cases. The reason for this strategy is that it yields the most opportunities to test (and when necessary revise) the theoretical expectations outlined in Chapter 2 (cf. Gerring, 2007, 89-90). In a fourth and last phase I will select certain reform discussions that took place during these selected government periods. Non-reform comes in many shapes. Sometimes democratic reform is not discussed at all, while at other times reforms are mentioned, but not discussed seriously. A final kind of non-reforms are those that were considered seriously but failed nonetheless. It is especially this last group of non-reforms that is most theoretically insightful (cf. Sakamoto, 1999; Pilet, 2007a; Rahat and Hazan, 2011). Thus, when studying democratic reform, one should study non-reforms that were seriously considered as well as implemented reforms. In the literature there is significant debate about what is to be considered a seriously debated but failed reform discussion. To a certain extent this is always an artificial choice. I choose to include all reform discussions (1) where the reform proposal was translated into a bill by (among others) one or more government parties and (2) where this bill was actually debated in parliament. By using this selection criterion I impose a fairly moderate threshold. It is high enough to exclude a fair number of reforms that were only briefly mentioned in the media or stood no chance of being adopted because they were only supported by the opposition. This will keep the project manageable. On the other hand, the threshold is also low enough to still include reform proposals that had the support of at least part of the government and which were (literally) discussed. Next to the intensity of the reform debate and the author of the reform proposal I also apply a third criterion, namely the level of the political system that the reform deals with. To keep the project feasible, I will focus only on national and local reforms. For instance, debates on the direct election of mayors will be included, but those on the direct election of provincial governors will not. Additionally, I will only focus on national reform debates.76 This means that Belgian and Austrian reform discussions held at the regional level will not be included. Table 3.1 summarizes the four selection phases and their most important attributes.

In the remaining sections of this chapter I will select my countries, devise the conceptual framework and discuss the research techniques that I will use in the empirical chapters of this study.

76 Obviously, if for instance local and provincial reforms are closely related I will briefly discuss the provincial reforms as well.

77 This criterion is in line with most direct democratic reform studies (cf. Scarro 2001 and 2003), while it is broader than most electoral reform studies. An overwhelming majority of those studies focuses only on the national level whereby a lot of the reforms fly below the radar (for a similar argument, see Farrell, 2001 and Bowler and Donovan, 2008).
Table 3.1 Summary of case selection strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Aim</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First (Chapter 3)</td>
<td>Selection of countries</td>
<td>Most similar system design, typical cases</td>
<td>Set of countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second (Chapter 3)</td>
<td>Devising a conceptual framework to gather data on the number of democratic reforms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third (Chapter 4)</td>
<td>Gathering of data, Selection of governments</td>
<td>Diverse set of cases (typical, deviant and extreme cases)</td>
<td>Full list of reforms for set of countries, Selection of most insightful government periods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth phase (Chapters 5, 6, 7)</td>
<td>Selection of reform (discussions)</td>
<td>Only reforms that were translated into bills by government (parties) and that were debated in parliament, Only local and national reforms discussed at the national level</td>
<td>Set of reform discussions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. COUNTRY SELECTION AND TIME PERIOD IN PRACTICE

Based on the information on direct democratic and major electoral reform available in the literature, I selected Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands. These three countries are not extreme, atypical cases such as Italy (high numbers of electoral and direct democratic reform, cf. Donovan, 1995; Sakamoto, 1999; Scarrow, 2003; Katz, 2005) and New Zealand (again high quantity of electoral and direct democratic reform, cf. Vowles, 1995; Denemark, 2001; Katz, 2005), but cases that present a direct democratic and electoral reform rate similar to other countries and can be labelled ‘typical cases’ as far as the occurrence of democratic reform is concerned. The analysis will include government periods that started and ended in the 1987-2008 era. In practice this means that for Austria the timeframe ranges from 1987 to 2008, for Belgium from 1987 to 2007 and for the Netherlands from 1989 to 2006. With regard to the most similar system design aspiration, three key background variables were taken into account, namely being an established democracy, having a similar party system and having a similar degree of consensus democracy.

1. Established democracies. The first (obvious) criterion is that the countries to be analysed should be established democracies. It is convincingly argued by scholars that democracy reforms are far easier to introduce in newly established democracies and the reform process is clearly different in those types of democracies. Scholars have noted that it is easier to bring in democratic in the early stages of political development, because at that time governments are more open to new ideas and interests are not yet fixed (cf. Hoskin, 1997; Barczak, 2001). Thus, I decided to select countries that were part of what Huntington (1991) called ‘the first and second wave of democratization’.

2. Degree of consensus democracy. As Lijphart (1999:XII) shows in his influential work *Patterns of Democracy*, the degree of consensus democracy is important. Not only does it have an impact on indicators of the quality of democracy, such as voter participation, equality
and the representation of women, it is also related to how successful governments are in addressing macroeconomic issues such as unemployment and economic growth. Furthermore, institutional rules and practices influence the responsiveness of governments (cf. Gallagher and Mitchell, 2005; Farrell, 2011). This, in turn, may influence the incentives political elites have for introducing democratic reforms. Indeed, as Blais and Shugart (2008) and Renwick (2010) show, the original electoral system matters significantly in the democratic reform process (cf. Chapter 1). Therefore I select countries that have a similar type of democracy. In assessing this I use the detailed categorization developed by Lijphart (1999). When looking at the mean position of countries during the period 1971-1996 on Lijphart’s conceptual map, Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands are indeed located close to each other (1999:248; see also Vatter, 2009:145).

3. Comparable party families. Although Lijphart’s categorization already includes the effective number of parties, this does not mean that the nature of the party families is necessarily comparable. For example, Italy and Japan are located close to Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands on Lijphart’s conceptual map, but their party families are significantly different. The party families represented in the Austrian, Belgian and Dutch parliaments, on the other hand, are very similar: all three have fragmented party systems which include comparable social democrat, liberal, green and populist parties (Gallagher, Laver and Mair, 2005; Andeweg and Irwin, 2005; Müller, 2006b; Deschouwer, 2009).

With regard to these three criteria Belgium, Austria and the Netherlands are similar. However, the contexts in different countries are always likely to vary to some extent. One could argue that the countries also have distinctive characteristics, which to a certain extent make them unique and thus ‘dissimilar’. In particular the Belgian political system and the tensions between the linguistic communities can (and do) have an impact on democratic reform. Hence, in the empirical analyses I will pay attention to such tensions.

3.3. Conceptualization and operationalization

After having outlined my research design and case selection criteria, I will in this section present the conceptualizations of the dependent variable, democratic reform, and the operationalization of both the dependent and the independent variables. Regarding the latter, I will outline the general principles of the operationalization. The actual detailed operationalization will be shown in the appendices.

3.3.1 The dependent variable: the many faces of democratic reform

Democratic reform in general can be understood as a reform of the legislation that deals with the role of the citizen in the decision-making process (cf. Cain, Dalton and Scarrow, 2003:1-2). Democratic reform is thus about changing the existing legislation that defines the relationship between citizens and the state (cf. Klingemann and Fuchs, 1995). It can move some degree of influence over the decision-making process from political elites towards citizens, or the other way around.\(^{78}\) Probably the two best known examples are legislation that deals with the electoral process and referendum legislation. Focusing on formal legislation means excluding political action devices such as protesting and participating in a

\(^{78}\) I explicitly want to stress that the label ‘democratic’ should be understood as being neutral. It does not imply only changes that ‘empower the people’.
boycott. Also, reforms by political parties to enhance their internal party democracy are not included in the definition of democratic reform used in this study, as this generally does not happen through formal legislation but is an individual decision by a party. Secondly, internal party democracy does not deal with the relationship between citizens and the state, but merely between citizens and parties.

Although democratic reform in theory can take many forms in the areas of representative, direct and participatory democracy, in practice it is mainly limited to the first two. Therefore I will limit myself to electoral and direct democratic reforms in this study. Each of these types of democratic reform refers to a specific model of democracy and provides a different answer to the question 'what kind of participation is envisaged for the people?' (cf. Held, 2006:2). One can thus view democratic reform as a two-level concept (Goertz and Mahony, 2006; Goertz, 2006). The basic level ('democratic reform') taps into a factor which is common across all 'cases of democratic reform', namely a change in the legislation that deals with the role of the citizen in the decision-making process. The secondary level, on the other hand, permits one to differentiate within this group of democratic reforms. Hence, it makes it possible to distinguish between different forms, or subtypes, of democratic reform, such as electoral and direct democratic reforms. These subtypes often occur at the same time, but this need not necessarily be the case. Conceptually democratic reform is different to for instance ‘liberal democracy’, which consists of necessary components that together constitute a certain type of political system (Goertz, 2006:8-9). It is best treated as a two-level concept based on the so-called ‘family resemblance approach’ (Collier and Mahon, 1993:846-848; Goertz, 2006:237-268). Its subtypes neither ‘define’ nor cause democratic reform, but can be seen as specific paths to democratic reform (Goertz and Mahony, 2004:5-6, 11).

1. ELECTORAL REFORM: DIMENSIONS AND DEGREES

(1) The concept electoral reform. The term ‘electoral reform’ in this study refers to reforms of the electoral legislation. Electoral reform itself also can be seen as a two-level concept. It

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79 Participatory democracy is rarely enshrined in legislation. In practice it is mainly ad hoc experiments with such participatory devices as citizen juries, participatory budgeting and citizen assemblies that are carried out (see for instance Delwit, Pilet, Reynaert and Steyvers, 2007; Zittel and Fuchs, 2007). The only participatory device that is legally enshrined on a widespread basis is the right to hand in petitions to the Lower House. However, reducing it to the right to petition would severely distort the notion of participatory democracy. Therefore I decided to limit myself to direct democratic and electoral reform.

80 Family resemblance refers to a family where none of the members share all traits of the others. Nevertheless all members have some traits in common with some others. The commonalities may be quite evident, even though there may be no family trait that all family members have in common (Collier and Mahon, 1993:847).

81 In most other studies on electoral reform a distinction is made between major (or substantial) and other reforms (cf. Lijphart, 1994; Norris, 1995; Dunleavy and Margetts, 1995; Rahat, 2004). Major electoral reforms are understood by these authors as reforms that alter 'the fundamental dimensions of the electoral system', namely the district size, the electoral formula, the electoral threshold and the assembly size (Lijphart, 1994:7). However, a plethora of different aspects of the electoral legislation can be changed. Whether or not these changes have significant consequences is a matter of empirical assessment and can often not be determined a priori. To name just a few reforms that do not fit the ‘fundamental dimensions’ but can have large-scale consequences: changes in district borders, the abolition of compulsory voting, the extension of suffrage from the ‘happy few’ to the whole electorate and a shift from a fully closed list PR system to a completely open list PR system.

82 In total I thus consider democratic reform to be a three-level concept. Democratic reform (first level) consists of electoral and direct democratic reform (second level), which both consist of multiple sub-dimensions (third level).
also includes changes to a plethora of different aspects of the electoral legislation. The introduction of the direct election of mayors, a change in the electoral system, or the decision to vote by computer instead of by paper ballot, although they have little in common, can all be considered electoral reforms. Again, unlike the concept ‘liberal democracy’, there is no given set of necessary components that jointly constitute an electoral reform. Therefore electoral reform is also best treated as a two-level concept based on the so-called family resemblance approach. The basic level refers to the most general description of electoral reform, namely a change in the legislation regarding the electoral process. The secondary level, on the other hand, specifies which dimensions are considered to be part of this electoral process. Consistent with the family resemblance logic, a bill that changes at least one element of at least one of these dimensions is then called an electoral reform (cf. Jacobs and Leyenaar, 2011).

(2) Dimensions of electoral reform. The term ‘electoral’ provides a good starting point for specifying the dimensions of the electoral process. Electoral reform is defined here as a change in the legislation (versus practice) that regulates the process of voting in elections, which includes who can vote, what voters are allowed to vote for (e.g. a party or a person), what type of election it is (e.g. national, provincial, local, executive, recall) and how the votes are then translated into seats (Farell, 2011; Dalton and Gray, 2003:27). Based on this description, one can extract four substantial dimensions of electoral reform: (reforms of) the proportionality of the electoral system, the ballot structure, the inclusiveness of the electoral legislation and the election level. I add (changes to) the practical organisation of an election as a fifth dimension, covering the election procedures (see also Massicotte, Blais and Yoshinaka, 2004:10).

(3) Foundations of the operationalization. After establishing the dimensions of electoral reform, I will now tackle the tricky subject of the operationalization of electoral reform. The main reason this is tricky is because there are few guidelines on establishing the degree of reform. My option is to construct an ordinal variable with three categories (major, minor and technical), rather than aiming for a quantitative measurement. This is because although some (sub)dimensions can be quantified (e.g. the expansion of the district size), this is clearly not the case with all (sub)dimensions (e.g. the category of electoral formula, type of list system, electoral level, or changes in the procedures). To develop a useful ordinal operationalization I apply an *ex ante criterion* rather than the traditional implicit *ex post* consequential approach. Both the subject for which the reform is meant and the actual content of the reform are taken into account. I will apply five general principles when assessing the degree of reform. First, reforms can have a direct impact on political parties, individual candidates, the electorate or none of these. Reforms that do not directly affect them are considered to be at best minor (and cannot be major). Second, reforms that affect

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83 Note that the term ‘legislation’ refers to the entirety of all electoral legislation in a country. Often the electoral legislation on different electoral levels (e.g. local, provincial, regional and/or national) is laid down in different documents. Therefore, by using the term ‘the legislation’ it is not my intention to limit electoral reform to changes in the national-level legislation.

84 Some, most notably Katz (2005:68), feel such an operation is likely to be ‘unproductive’, as it is virtually impossible to have insight into the full range of electoral reform. I disagree, because it is possible to distinguish between dimensions of electoral reform – as I did in the previous section – which in turn can be operationalized (see also Jacobs and Leyenaar, 2011). Certainly, this is a demanding task, but not an impossible or unproductive one.
the national level are rated higher. Third, the ‘coverage’ of the reform is taken into account. Reforms that only affect a small part of the country or population are rated lower. Similarly, I rate changes that cause a shift from one established category to another (such as from one of the three categories of electoral formulas to another) higher than changes within these categories (e.g. a shift from one PR formula to another). Fourth, the introduction of new legislation receives a higher score than a change in the existing legislation. Fifth, when it is possible to calculate the change numerically, such as a change in district size, I elaborate on the ‘more than 20%’ criterion as outlined by Lijphart (1994:13). A change of more than 20% is regarded as a major change, one from 1 to 20% is labelled a minor reform, while any change below 1% is viewed as technical.\textsuperscript{85,86} The actual operationalization can be found in Appendix 1.

2. DIRECT DEMOCRATIC REFORM

(I) The concept direct democratic reform. The second subtype of democratic reform refers to direct democracy. Although direct democracy was used in Switzerland as early as 1294, only a few other countries followed the Swiss example before the start of the twentieth century (LeDuc, 2003:13-15). A wide variety of types of direct democracy can be discerned. Lijphart (1984:198) distinguishes between four direct democracy devices: referendums, primaries, recalls and the direct election of executives. However, primaries are often part of the internal democracy of parties. Even when national electoral legislation deals with primaries, they are actually related to representative democracy (not direct democracy), as they do not allow citizens to be involved in the decision-making process, but only give them a say in who is elected as their representative. Similarly, recall provisions and the direct election of executives are also in the realm of representative democracy and deal with the election of representatives. Therefore out of these four devices I only include changes in referendum provisions in my analysis. This interpretation is consistent with what Scarrow (2001:660) calls ‘the strict definition of direct democracy’ and is also shared by most contemporary scholars in the field of direct democracy (cf. LeDuc, 2003; Qvortrup, 2005; Vatter, 2009). In this study direct democratic reform thus refers to reforms of the referendum legislation. Referendum legislation encompasses many different aspects of the referendum process, therefore direct democratic reform is also best analysed as a two-level concept. At the basic level direct democratic reform can be described as a change in the legislation that deals with the referendum process.

\textsuperscript{85} As an example: a shift in the effective electoral threshold from 2.5 to 3% would be a minor electoral reform, while a change from 2.5 to 5% would be a major electoral reform. Given that the criterion is based on the previous level of the electoral threshold, I suggest some latitude in the categorization.

\textsuperscript{86} One implication of the conceptualization based on family resemblance is that if a reform package includes multiple reform elements and affects more than one dimension, the highest score (technical, minor or major) is the one that counts. After all, each dimension is substitutable and the correct way to calculate the degree of reform is to use the ‘maximum’ mathematical operator (Goertz, 2006:137). However, I suggest that if a reform package includes several changes in the same (sub)dimension these can be added together. Hence, if a reform package that concerns redistricting includes 25 district changes each affecting 1% of the population, this would count as a major reform, since the overall result of the package affects 25% of the population. Lastly, I want to stress that the consequences of a reform package can of course be greater than that of its highest component. However, these ex post consequences are not included in my definition: major electoral reform \textit{can} have insignificant consequences, while technical reform \textit{can} have substantial consequences.
(2) Dimensions of direct democratic reform. The next question is, which dimensions can be discerned? Direct democratic reform is defined as a change in the general legislation that regulates the process of holding referendums. This includes who can initiate a referendum, on which subjects a referendum can be held, who is allowed to vote in the referendum and which ‘majority’ is required for a referendum to be valid. Based on this description one can extract the following four substantial dimensions: (reforms of) the initiation requirements, the majority requirements, the inclusiveness of the referendum process and subject requirements. Additionally, the mere existence of referendum legislation can be seen as an important aspect of the referendum process. Indeed, by definition all established democracies have electoral legislation, but a significant number of them had no referendum legislation. Hence, I add the introduction of referendum legislation as the fifth dimension. Lastly, changes to the legislation on the practical organization of a referendum constitute a sixth and final dimension (cf. Sabato, Ernst and Larson, 2001).

(3) Foundations of the operationalization. Earlier I formulated five guidelines on which my operationalization of electoral reform is based. I will use the same guidelines to operationalize direct democratic reform. I will also use the distinction between technical, minor and major reforms and apply ex ante criteria rather than ex post criteria. A detailed discussion of the operationalization of direct democratic reform can be found in Appendix 2.

Table 3.2 Summary of the basic conceptualization of democratic reform

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First level</th>
<th>Second level</th>
<th>Third level</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democratic reform</td>
<td>Electoral reform</td>
<td>(Prop. of the) electoral system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct democratic reform</td>
<td>1. Ballot structure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Introduction of referendum legislation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Inclusiveness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Initiation requirements</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Majority requirements</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Subject requirements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Election levels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Electoral procedures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Referendum procedures</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

87 Sometimes scholars study the occurrence of specific types of referendum (e.g. referendums on European affairs). Unlike these scholars, I will study referendum legislation, not specific instances of referendums. This approach to direct democratic reform mirrors my approach to electoral reform: I do not study elections, but changes in the electoral legislation. This also means that I exclude ad hoc legislation that regulates one specific referendum (e.g. the legislation for the 2005 Dutch referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty).

3.3.2 Independent variables

1. COUNTRY LEVEL: VETO PLAYERS

As Ganghof (2003:3) notes, veto player theory often suffers from a 'problem of identification': scholars have difficulty distinguishing between veto players and influential actors. In practice this problem comes in two variations, one specific to quantitative and one specific to qualitative studies. Regarding qualitative studies, such as this thesis, the crucial aspect is how scholars justify who the relevant actors are (Ganghof, 2003:4). As far as democratic reform is concerned, the identification of the relevant veto players is fairly easy. Rahat (2008:28) lists nine actors that can matter in the reform process, namely parliament, the government, the head of state, the judiciary, political parties, interest groups, experts, the media and public opinion. However, some of these are clearly merely influential actors who have no veto power. Most notably experts, interest groups and the mass media can only have influence, but have no veto power. Additionally, public opinion only has veto power where a (politically or legally) binding referendum is or can be held. Lastly, the political parties mainly correspond to parliament and the government (cf. Blau, 2008:78). Hence the number of government parties can serve here as the number of veto players, as is also suggested by Tsebelis (2002). However, parliament may well consist of two veto points (the Lower and the Upper House). If the Upper House is independent of the Lower House I will count the former separately. In practice this means I will count as veto players: the number of government parties, the number of government parties in the Upper House (when the Upper House is independent), the head of state and the judiciary (in practice mostly constitutional courts) (see also Nikolenyi, 2011:631-632). 89

2. GOVERNMENT LEVEL

As outlined earlier in Chapter 2, I place three variables at government level: cartel breakdown, political ideology and public dissatisfaction. In this section I will operationalize each of them.

1) Cartel breakdown. Cartel breakdowns are instances when an existing cartel of ruling parties is broken and traditionally excluded or new parties enter the government. It is important to note that the parties that form a cartel are not necessarily only those included in a given government (cf. Katz and Mair, 2009:757). If there is frequent government turnover, a cartel will include parties that are not part of the government all the time, but which are in government at least some of the time. Especially in consensus democracies, cartel breakdowns are often in fact partial breakdowns. Coalition governments rather than single party governments are the norm in consensus democracies and the replacement of just one or more coalition partners by a traditionally excluded or new party can be seen as a partial cartel breakdown or even simply a cartel break-in, depending on the size of the party involved. To measure the cartel status in a country I devised an index that ranges from 0 to 1 (cf. Appendix 3.3.2 Independent variables

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89 Tsebelis (2002) notes that in practice the preferences of the veto players matter. Scholars mainly refer to two general foundations on which these preferences are based: principles (values and ideology) and/or self-interest (act- and outcome-contingent motivations). When it comes to the political parties and the head of state, these preferences cannot be assumed a priori and must be assessed empirically. Regarding the courts the main preferences are probably easier to identify. Normally the judiciary's main aim is to check whether the proposed legislation is legal in itself (Rahat, 2008:34). In the case of a constitutional court this means examining whether the reform proposal is in line with the constitution. I will check these preferences empirically where needed, but one can expect the preferences of the judiciary to be fairly straightforward: to uphold the law.
3. This index is based on the strength of the traditionally excluded parties, the time they spent in opposition and the power balance within the government. By relying on this index it is possible to determine the status of the cartel during a given government period.

2. **Party ideology (populism and postmaterialism).** Generally two techniques to assess party ideology are discerned: expert assessment and study of party literature – mainly party manifestoes (cf. Benoit and Laver, 2007). Given that the focus of this study is a relatively long-term analysis of (changes in) party ideology, the latter approach seems most suitable, as it allows for variation in time and enables me to estimate the precise ideological positions of a given party for each government period (and even within each government period). I use a quantified qualitative content analysis to assess whether or not a party is populist or postmaterialist (see Appendix 4). As regards populism, based on the work of Canovan (1999), Taggart (2000) and Mudde (2004, 2007) I focus on opposition to elitism (the citizens themselves know what is best for them, and need not be educated), pluralism (the citizenry is a homogenous group, sometimes an exclusionist view is added); the establishment (political parties, and by extension the whole establishment, are/is corrupt) and intermediary structures (since because these artificially subdivide the populace). These four elements are assessed for each relevant party in parliament. As far as postmaterialism is concerned, based on the works of Ronald Inglehart (1977, 1997; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005) and Lijphart (1999, Chapter 5), I focus on pacifism, opposition to authoritarianism (e.g. prevention versus repression), limits to economic growth (economic goals may not be pursued at all costs, the focus is on the quality of life), increasing individual liberties and pluralism. Again, these features are assessed for each relevant party in parliament. Based on the coding of the party manifestoes, I will determine whether a party is not, moderately or strongly populist or postmaterialist. Appendix 4 discusses the operationalization in more detail and gives a list of the populist and postmaterialist parties in this study.

3. **Public dissatisfaction.** Citizens living in established democracies can be dissatisfied with many different objects (e.g. the government, a particular minister or the political system as such) and not all dissatisfaction has an impact on democratic reform. Scholars have long been troubled over the objects of public dissatisfaction (cf. Easton, 1965; Crozier, Huntington and Watanuki, 1975; Fuchs and Klingemann, 1995; Pharr and Putnam, 2000). In 2004 Dalton outlined five objects of public dissatisfaction in his oft-cited book *Democratic Challenges, Democratic Choices.* Since then this has become the standard framework for understanding public dissatisfaction. Specifically, Dalton (2004:6-7, 24) distinguished between (dissatisfaction with) the political community (the nation), the democratic principles (support for democracy as such), the democratic norms and procedures (the specific rules governing political action), the democratic institutions and, lastly, the political authorities (the individuals who hold positions of political authority). With regard to democratic reform the third object in particular, dissatisfaction with the democratic norms and procedures, is of

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90 I use the following terminology: party/electoral manifestoes refer to the electoral platforms a party uses to fight an election campaign. Party programmes, on the other hand, refer to the documents that outline the more abstract ideological foundations of a party and are relatively unrelated to elections.  
91 Indeed, some parties were populist for a relatively short time (e.g. the Dutch SP, which was populist from 1992 to 2000). Expert surveys have difficulties in picking up such longitudinal differences. As Benoit and Laver (2007:103) point out, ‘[f]or expert survey estimates, for instance, we remain unable to compare positions over time, since a time series of expert placements does not exist for most countries’.  
92 A relevant party is one that has won at least five seats in two consecutive elections.
importance, as this refers to dissatisfaction with the functioning of the democratic process and the role of the citizen in the decision making process (Dalton, 2004:39, 177-187). The operationalization of this is difficult, especially if one wishes to carry out longitudinal analyses, as I do (Dalton, 2004:41). Dalton (2004:39) himself suggests using the responses to the survey question about a respondent’s (dis)satisfaction with the way democracy works. This is not the best variable, but it is the best variable available if one wants to carry out longitudinal analyses. The Eurobarometer Series (EB) includes this variable almost annually, therefore I will compute average dissatisfaction scores for each government period on the basis of the Eurobarometer dataset.

3. Reform level

Act- and outcome-contingent motivations as well as values were placed at reform level. These are less straightforward than the four variables previously mentioned, as they are inextricably linked to individual reform proposals. Hence in the following sections I will only outline the broad principles of the operationalization. Later in the country chapters, these broad principles will be translated into an actual evaluation of the motivations of the different parties.

1. Outcome-contingent motivations. Political elites have outcome-contingent motivations to support a reform proposal when the outcome is to their advantage. I operationalize outcome-contingent motivations as an ordinal variable with five categories (strongly negative, moderately negative, neutral, moderately positive and strongly positive). In practice, I will consider parties as my units of analysis. What benefits a party differs across the eleven subdimensions of democratic reform. Hence it is very difficult to outline a priori for all possible reforms what would be advantageous to a party. Nevertheless, some general guidelines can be advanced. Regarding electoral reform, the outcome-contingent motivation that is most often cited is increasing a party’s seat share (cf. Benoit, 2004; Colomer, 2005; Blais and Shugart, 2008). However, some dimensions (e.g. the ballot structure dimension) have no impact on seat shares. In such cases I consider reforms that increase the power of the central party leadership (which generally determines the position of a party) as a positive outcome-contingent motivation. Certainly this is not always the case, but it is a good starting point nonetheless. In practice, each electoral reform will be assessed individually, but on the basis of these two guidelines.

With direct democratic reform a similar problems arises, as again the dimensions are heterogeneous. I will apply the following general guidelines. In the case of direct democratic reform, what matters most is whether a referendum is ‘controlled’ or ‘uncontrolled’ (cf. Smith, 1976). Mandatory, minority-sponsored and citizen-initiated referendums are threats to (potential) government parties, as they are not controlled by the government and thus can be used against it. Therefore direct democratic reforms which make such referendums more difficult, benefit (potential) government parties, but do not benefit parties that stand little chance of being included in the government (cf. Qvortrup, 2005:85, 156). Conversely, direct

93 Traditionally the question is: ‘on the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not satisfied at all with the way democracy works in (respondent’s country)?’.

94 Most studies of democratic reform take parties as their unit of analysis. There are, however, problems with this choice. Especially the intra-party dimension tends to become obscured. Therefore I will also examine intra-party dynamics in the within-case analyses.
democratic reforms that make such referendums easier are advantageous to parties that stand little chance of getting into the government, while they give no advantage to (potential) government parties. Similarly, direct democratic reforms that make government-sponsored referendums easier benefit (potential) government parties, but not parties that stand little chance of getting into the government. The reverse, direct democratic reforms that make government-sponsored referendums more difficult, are advantageous to parties that stand little chance of getting into the government, but not to (potential) government parties. Obviously, this is just a broad guideline. In practice many more elements can play a role. Therefore, and as with electoral reform, each actual direct democratic reform will be assessed individually on the basis of the general guideline given here and the characteristics of the reform itself.

2. Act-contingent motivations. Political elites have act-contingent motivations to support a democratic reform when the mere act of supporting it is advantageous to them. As in the case of outcome-contingent motivations, I operationalize act-contingent motivations as an ordinal variable with five categories (strongly negative, moderately negative, neutral, moderately positive and strongly positive). In practice I will consider parties as my units of analysis. How to assess whether or not the act of supporting a reform is advantageous? I will combine five elements that determine whether and how support for a reform can benefit a party, namely: (1) the nature of the reform, (2) the number of citizens who support the reform, (3) the degree of public dissatisfaction at the time, (4) the degree to which the media support the reform and (5) whether or not the parties would be acting in agreement with their party manifesto at the last election combined with whether or not they lost seats in that election.95

3. Values. A last variable at reform level is values. In the theoretical chapter I highlighted that no fewer than 23 values can be discerned. As a result politicians can always allude to one value or another to cover their position. Even if we reduce the 23 values to just two (representativeness and accountability), this statement generally is valid. Hence the operationalization of values is not a matter of assessing whether or not values were present. What is most important is which values were present and whether they were genuine or merely a façade. Based on Renwick’s list and his general distinction between representativeness and accountability, tracing which values were present is possible. The question of whether those values were genuine or merely a façade is trickier. Often values, and principles more in general, are seen as the opposite of self-interested motivations. The main task of a researcher is thus to try to find out which of the two predominated. This is not an easy task. Nevertheless, three complementary tools to distinguish between ‘principle’ and ‘self-interest’ are available. First of all, one can examine whether the (invoked) principle is against the self-interest of a party. If this is the case it is inconsistent with the self-interest explanation, but consistent with the principle explanation (Bennett and Elman, 2006:460).96 Second, one can look at whether politicians acted consistently with their own prior positions and voting behaviour. If a party consistently argues on the basis of one or more value(s) and acts accordingly, this suggests (but nothing more than that) that it is principled. If a party, however, switches from one value to its opposite, this is evidence that it is not principled. Third, one can check whether the principles invoked are in line with the ideology of a party.

95 It was not always possible to trace all five elements (e.g. because there were no surveys or polls that revealed the number of citizens who supported a reform). However, this is not necessarily a problem. After all, if they were non-existent or unavailable, politicians could not consult them either.

96 Stephen van Evera (1997:31) calls this the ‘uniqueness’ of a given prediction.
Again, if the value(s) are in agreement with the party ideology, this suggests (but no more) that it is principled. If a party, however, argues against its own ideology, this is evidence that it is not principled.  

3.4. Methods of analysis

In this study two methods, a cross-case analysis mainly based on QCA (logic) and a within-case analysis based on process tracing, will be combined. This is done by following the logic of a mixed-method design (cf. Lieberman, 2005; see also Gerring, 2007). I will start with the cross-case analyses (Chapter 4) and then move on to the within-case analyses (Chapter 5, 6 and 7). In this section I will briefly discuss the principles of the cross-case analyses, followed by the methods used in the within-case analyses.

3.4.1 The cross-case analysis

For each of the 15 government periods that begin and end during the period 1987-2008, I gather data on democratic reform and the four country- and government-level independent variables. After this, the scores are compiled, translated into set-scores and presented in a data matrix (cf. Ragin, 2008; Schneider, 2008). This cross-case analysis allows me to examine whether the independent variables are present at times when democratic reform occur. However, to use statistical received wisdom here, ‘correlation is not causation’. In the within-case analyses in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, I will assess the most ‘theoretically insightful’ government periods to examine whether these variables contributed to the occurrence of democratic reform. The cross-case analysis enables the selection of these theoretically insightful government periods and thus also serves the methodological aim of constituting the basis for case selection.

3.4.2 General principles of the within-case analysis

In Chapter 2, seven variables were highlighted, based on a discussion of the rational choice and sociological institutionalist approaches to democratic reform. I also outlined expectations for each of the variables and discussed their respective causal mechanisms. The seven variables are the focus of the within-case analyses. In these analyses I will look for ‘traces’ of the impact of the independent variables. This section deals with the question of how to design the within-case analyses in such a way that one maximizes the quality of the empirical

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97 The first of the three tools refers to what Van Evera (1997:32) calls a ‘double-decisive’ test, while the other two refer to so-called ‘hoop tests’. In the next section I will elaborate on both.

98 There are many conceptions of process tracing (to name just a few, George and Bennett, 2005; Bennett and Elman, 2006; Hall, 2006; Gerring, 2007). Sometimes process-tracing is simply equated to historical reconstruction, but this is merely one type (cf. George and Bennett, 2005). In this study I use process tracing as a method to test my theoretical expectations. In this understanding of the concept, it is a method that highlights how to design the within-case analyses so as to maximize the causal leverage of the findings.

99 ‘Case’ should be interpreted here as ‘government’.

100 Set scores have the advantage of making it easier to select the government periods to be examined in the within-case analyses (phase three of the case selection, cf. section 3.2.2).

101 The practical translation from raw data to fuzzy set scores comes close to dichotomization. The only difference is that I not only have scores of 0 or 1 but also use the score 0.75. I differentiate between 0.75 and 1 to be able to include differences in the presence of a certain phenomenon. This is for instance the case when a cartel break-in occurs. Clearly there is some form of cartel breakdown (hence the neutral category 0.5 cannot be used), but cartel break-in is also distinct from cartel breakdown. To make this difference visible I use 0.75.
evidence - and thereby the quality of the empirical assessment of the expected relationships between the independent and the dependent variables.

Two metaphors have been advanced by methodologists to describe the process of conducting within-case analyses: the detective and the domino metaphors. The detective metaphor considers within-case analyses to be like detective work. Like Sherlock Holmes, a scholar tries to find equivalents to a ‘smoking gun’, checks alibis, delves into the motives and cleverly takes ‘dogs that did not bark’ into account (George and Bennett, 2005:90). All these bits and pieces of evidence are then put together to form a causal narrative. The stronger the pieces of evidence are, the more convincing the overall within-case analysis will be. Indeed, some pieces of evidence are stronger than others. Van Evera (1997:30-32) systematized the strength of the evidence by distinguishing between four types of test: (1) straw-in-the-wind tests (2) hoop tests (3) smoking gun tests and (4) doubly-decisive tests. Each type results in a different degree of evidence. What is important is to remember that the tests are asymmetric: the implications of passing a test are not always the opposite of the implications of not passing the test.

1. **DOUBLY-DECISIVE TESTS** yield the strongest kind of evidence: if this test is passed it strongly corroborates an explanation, while failing it destroys the explanation. Van Evera gives the example of a bank security camera. If the camera records the face of a suspect while s/he carries out a robbery, it proves both that this suspect is guilty and that other suspects are not. Such tests are extremely useful, but are unfortunately very rare in practice.

2. **SMOKING GUN TESTS** strongly corroborate an explanation if the test is passed. Yet not passing this test says little about whether an explanation is valid. Indeed, if an investigator finds no ‘smoking gun’, this does not mean that the suspect is innocent, since after all the gun may still be hidden or have been destroyed. Again, in practice smoking gun tests are fairly rare.

3. **HOOP TESTS**, on the other hand, are more common. They are the opposite of smoking gun tests. Failing this test leads to the rejection of a given explanation. For instance, ‘the suspect was not in the country at the time of the murder’ means that this suspect can be released. However, passing the hoop test does not strongly corroborate an explanation (e.g. being in the country does not mean that the suspect is automatically the killer).

4. **STRAW-IN-THE-WIND tests** are a final kind of test. Such tests only provide ‘circumstantial’ evidence: passing the test proves little, but failing it is by itself not sufficient to reject an explanation. For instance having or not having visited a victim prior to a murder is by itself not enough evidence to convict or release a suspect. Straw-in-the-wind tests yield the weakest evidence, while doubly-decisive tests provide the strongest type of evidence. Scholars using the detective metaphor stress that one needs to look for doubly-decisive evidence or at least focus on hoop and smoking gun tests. They thus mostly stress the importance of the quality of the evidence.

The domino metaphor on the other hand highlights how to write a good causal narrative. Each causal narrative is considered to be like a line of dominoes: the task of the researcher is to trace what happened to the dominoes and connect them to each other. The domino metaphor focuses on the process that leads to a specific outcome (visualized as a line of
It is a means of looking for evidence or traces that the independent variable had an impact on the dependent variable during the process. Each domino is a point where the impact of a causal mechanism can be examined. By studying the positions of the dominoes (did they fall or not and if they did, how and why did they fall?), rival causal mechanisms are then eliminated (George and Bennett, 2005:207). To be sure the process tracing is done properly, Bennett and Elman (2006:459-460) outline a checklist of four vital elements that have to be present to produce a convincing within-case analysis. First, a domino line must start at the beginning - a researcher must not artificially start in the middle. For instance, a reform analysis must start with the reform initiation. Second, one should limit the number of breaks in the causal story as much as possible. After all, breaks leave room for alternative explanations. Third, a process tracing account is stronger if the impact of the causal mechanism can be seen at the ‘key non-substitutable links’ in the domino line (Bennett and Elman, 2006:460). These key links are the heart of the explanation and need to be supported by strong pieces of evidence. Fourth, evidence that is incompatible with alternative explanations must be found. For instance, one cannot conclude that principles prevail during the reform process when the self-interest explanation has not been empirically rejected. A within-case analysis is thus more convincing if all the relevant intervening steps are as predicted and other explanations can be rejected. Based on the theoretical state of the art in a given field one can discern what the starting point is, which key non-substitutable links should be considered and which alternative hypotheses should be examined. If all four criteria are met, the within-case analysis is more convincing. To sum up, scholars using the domino metaphor first and foremost stress the quality of the causal narrative as such.

In the empirical part of this study I will make use of insights from both the detective and the domino metaphor. In the next section I highlight how the domino and detective metaphors will be used in practice.

3.4.3. Within-case analyses in this study

All within-case analyses are structured in the same way. I will analyse reform debates within the selected government periods in two parts, a descriptive and an explanatory one. The first section focuses on the ‘key non-substitutable links’, makes sure that I start ‘at the beginning and aims to minimize the number of unexamined dominoes. The last two are fairly straightforward, but identifying the key non-substitutable links is less obvious. However, the contemporary state of the art regarding the study of major electoral reform provides an excellent source for doing this. Most importantly, Rahat (2008:38-40) points to three ‘reform stages’: (1) the reform initiation, (2) the actual treatment of the reform proposal, including the reform coalition building and a possible reformulation of the initial proposal, (3) the final vote on the proposal. Each of these three stages can be seen as a key non-substitutable link. Therefore in the descriptive section I will reconstruct what happened during each of the three stages. I will also add the preliminary stage, namely the historical roots of the debates on a specific reform (e.g. when did the direct election of mayors first appear on the political agenda and who supported it). Such earlier discussions sometimes have a big impact on
subsequent debates and should thus not be omitted (cf. Renwick, 2010). Often, they are the *real* start of a reform process.

In practice, the descriptive section thus always follows the same format and aims to allow me to assess what happened at each of these four stages. I will begin with briefly sketching the historical origins of the debate, after which a timeline including the important dates and reform events will be presented. I then proceed with the reconstruction of the actual reform process. First of all the reform initiation will be described. This part mainly involves the coalition negotiations and the coalition agreement. I then outline the reform processing phase, which starts with the introduction of the bill into parliament. The behind-the-scenes negotiations and parliamentary treatment of the bill are also included in this part. Lastly, when applicable, the final vote on the bill will be discussed and any last-minute behaviour of parties and politicians will be described.

The second section of each within-case analysis is more focused on explaining the reform(s). Here, my design aims to maximize the quality of the evidence and concentrates on directly confronting alternative hypotheses. This part of the section is relatively flexible, since each case has its own peculiarities. Moreover, not all independent variables are present in all cases. For instance, populist or postmaterialist parties were only included in six of the 15 governments. However, one element is always discussed in this section, namely the self-interest (in the form of act- and outcome-contingent motivations) of the parties involved in the reform process. I do so to provide a hoop test for these variables. Smoking gun or doubly-decisive evidence is sometimes hard to find and in some cases even may be absent altogether, yet hoop tests can be included by design. For all reforms I will assess whether or not actors had act- or outcome-contingent motivations to support a certain reform, based on the information that was available to them at the time. When a reform was not in the self-interest of a party this cannot have played a role. However, when a reform was in the self-interest of a party it does not necessarily mean that self-interest was the predominant motivation to implement a reform. Based on the assessment of the self-interested motivations of the parties, I will then delve deeper into the reform process. Here I look for smoking gun and doubly-decisive evidence and where applicable I confront self-interested explanations with principled ones. Given that it sometimes is impossible to find smoking gun or doubly-decisive evidence, it will not always be possible to find strong evidence to reject one or the other. Nevertheless, by systematically conducting hoop tests, the evidence is always at least at this level.

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104 For instance, Bennett (2008:707) gives the example of a private letter in which one of the central actors explicitly admits something. However, such evidence is not available in all cases. For instance, there are many cases of all actors refusing to admit - even in private - to something (let alone write it down), simply because it is socially unacceptable.

105 Hoop tests follow the logic of correlation: causation is impossible without correlation, but correlation is not causation.
3.5 Sources

In this section I shortly discuss the sources that I use for the within-case analyses. I use four types of sources in these analyses: yearbooks, official documents, interviews and media articles. Below I discuss the general principles I apply in selecting and using the sources, after which I talk about when each of the four sources is employed.

3.5.1 General principles

In this study I keep three general principles in the back of my mind: (1) relevance is more important than representativeness, (2) quality is more important than quantity and (3) triangulation rather than single sources. As most of these general principles are fairly straightforward and non-controversial, I will discuss them only briefly.

1. Relevance is more important than representativeness. Regarding qualitative research it is well-established that small random samples have a high risk of being non-informative. Therefore none of the sources is used with the aim to present a representative sample of all such sources. Rather they are used because they were/represented the most relevant or insightful sources (cf. Tansey, 2007:765). For instance (and most obviously), I do not interview a random sample of politicians, but I purposefully select those politicians that are most important in the debates.

2. Quality is more important than quantity. Consistent with the earlier discussion of the detective metaphor, the quality of the evidence included in the sources is more important than its quantity: one piece of doubly-decisive evidence is considered far more important than 20 pieces of straw-in-the-wind evidence (see Van Evera, 1997).

3. Triangulation rather than single sources. Another well-established rule in qualitative research is to use different types of sources to cross-check the evidence. The more evidence is corroborated by other sources of evidence, the stronger it is. In practice, the four types of sources will thus explicitly be used for triangulation as well.

3.5.2 The actual usage of the sources

Some sources are more suitable to one specific part of the within-case analyses and less to others. The first part of each within-case analysis, the historical reconstruction, is mainly based on yearbooks. For Austria I use the EJPR yearbooks, as the Austrian yearbooks are all politically biased towards one of two largest political parties. As far as Belgium is concerned, I employ the Res Publica yearbooks. Lastly, with regard to the Netherlands I use the yearbooks published by the Documentatiecentrum Nederlandse Politieke Partijen (DNPP). I also examine media articles and some official documents, such as bills and coalition agreements, as supplementary sources to check or elaborate information of the yearbooks.

The second part of the within-case analyses, the explanation of the (non-)reform, always starts with a fixed part: an assessment of the self-interest of the parties (cf. supra). This assessment is based on official documents, such as parliamentary minutes, bills and party manifestoes. Additionally I use media articles to assess how the media anticipate or react to a given reform proposal. Based on the assessment of the self-interest of the parties, some puzzles emerge

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106 The sources used in the cross-case analyses will be elaborately discussed in Chapter 4.
107 An overview of the specific sources I have used can be found in Appendix 5.
(e.g. the position of a given party or politician). The flexible part of the explanation of the (non-) reform focuses on these puzzles. It mainly makes use of interviews, bills and parliamentary minutes. Some scholars use interviews as their primary source (e.g. Pilet, 2007a), while other employ interviews as an auxiliary one (e.g. Renwick, 2010) or do not use interviews at all (e.g. Rahat, 2008; Scarrow, 1997). I choose to use interviews as auxiliary sources. Abstaining from interviews would reduce the causal leverage of the thesis significantly as often behind-the-scenes events are decisive in the reform process. Additionally, interviews are often the only means to carry out ‘smoking gun’ or doubly-decisive tests. Often they are even the only means to obtain these particular kinds of information (see also Rathbun, 2008:690). Certainly there are risks attached to the use of interviews. For instance, one can expect respondents to give socially desirable answers or provide a biased version of the events. Nevertheless it is possible that contrary to these expectations they do offer a view on their real motives and describe events as they happened. In essence, this is thus not a reason to abstain from interviewing, but rather a reason to make sure as much evidence from other sources is examined as possible both to check and complement the interview information.\footnote{In practice, many of the respondents I interviewed were surprisingly open, even if the information they revealed made them look bad. As a result the interviews often provided the strongest pieces of evidence.} This is also the reason why I decided against the use of interviews as the main source of information. Not only would this be an extremely time-consuming effort,\footnote{Pilet, for instance, studied one country, while I study three. Additionally, Pilet focused more on the preferences and expectations of parties regarding (the consequences of) electoral reform, while I first and foremost want to explain the (non-)occurrence of democratic reform. When one wants to examine party preferences and expectations obviously it makes more sense to use interviews as primary sources.} it would also risk leaving gaps in the reconstruction of cases where one is either unable to get interviews with the main actors or when these main actors were unable or unwilling to provide the information needed to explain a (non-)reform.\footnote{Given that some of the cases I study are fairly ‘old’, this problem would be all the more pressing.} Therefore I decided to use interviews as an auxiliary source. In practice the interviews serve three aims: (1) to corroborate other sources, (2) to establish what the politician/actor thought and (3) to reconstruct certain behind-the-scenes events. The interview guide can be found in Appendix 6.

As a last note, I wish to address the usage of media articles in this study. The media are often not only a source of information in reform discussions (e.g. because they publish simulations). They can be an actor as well. In many cases the media publicly condemn or endorse a reform proposal, which in turn influences the act-contingent motivations parties have to support or oppose the proposal. The media articles are therefore not only used as a source of information, but also as a source to check how the media responded to reforms or reform proposals.

\section*{3.6 Conclusion}

In this methodological chapter I presented an overview of my general research design, outlined my case selection strategy, discussed the conceptualization and operationalization of the main variables and described which methods I will be using in the empirical chapters of this study. The thesis will be an embedded multiple case study. The cases are selected through a four-phased strategy. Two of these phases have been carried out in this chapter, namely the country selection and the conceptualization of the dependent variable. In the next chapter, the cross-case analysis, I will present an overview of democratic reform in 15
government periods in Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands (1987-2008). There I will embark on the third phase of the case selection, the selection of governments.
CHAPTER 4. CROSS-CASE COMPARISON

4.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 2, democratic reform is a phenomenon that is determined by the interplay of factors on three different levels: the country (or political system) level, the government level and the reform level itself. On the country level, the number of veto players can be pinpointed as important in determining both the incidence and the degree of democratic reform (cf. Tsebelis, 2002; Blau, 2008; Hooghe and Deschouwer, 2011). On the government level, cartel breakdown, the presence of postmaterialists and populists in a government and public dissatisfaction play a role (Katz and Mair, 1995; 2009; Mudde, 2007; Dalton, 2004; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). Lastly, on the reform level itself factors such as leadership, path dependency, politicians’ self-interest and values matter (cf. Renwick 2010:69-85).

In this chapter I will gradually zoom in on the country and government levels. The reform level will be discussed later in the country chapters. I will first present a general overview of democratic reform in the three selected countries. To be able to do so I assembled a database of all national-level changes in electoral and direct democratic reforms.111 The majority of these reforms are technical, but a small minority are clearly major reforms. Interestingly, and contrary to the gut feeling of many country experts, all countries experienced at least one major democratic reform. Belgium had the highest number of these. A first major reform concerns gender quota laws, which were introduced on 2 May 1994 and make Belgium one of the very few Western countries to have such a provision (Celis, Krook and Meier, 2011). Second, as part of the federalization of the country, Belgian politicians introduced a regional electoral layer on 11 May 1993, which was accompanied by a significant reduction in the number of national MPs (from 212 to 150). Third, on 13 December 2002 a law was passed that introduced a legal electoral threshold of 5%, increased the size of the electoral districts and changed elements of the ballot structure. Austria on the other hand experienced one major electoral reform, on 8 April 1992, when an electoral threshold of 4% was introduced alongside a three-tier seat allocation and an increase of the number of electoral districts from 9 to 43. Lastly, on 7 October 2001, the Netherlands introduced a (temporary) law that allowed the holding of national referendums.

In addition to describing the data I will also examine the relationship between the number of veto players in each of the three countries and the number and degree of democratic reforms. As outlined in Chapter 2, theoretically one can expect that the number of veto players limits the amount of significant democratic reform a country experiences. Interestingly, it will become clear that the relationship as observed in Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands is different: the country with the highest number of veto players, Belgium, underwent by far the most significant democratic reforms. Some of these unexpected reforms are so-called state reforms, connected to the federalization of Belgium. Indeed, between 1988 and 1993 the Belgian political system was changed from a unitary to a federalized state with three regions (Flanders, Brussels and Wallonia) and three linguistic communities (Dutch-speaking, Francophone and German-speaking). These state reforms may well bias the findings.

111 I want to thank Gregor Wenda, Etienne van Verdeghem and Ron de Jong for their much-appreciated help in providing me with the official documents on which the database is based.
However, as I will show, controlling for state reform cannot explain away the overall positive relationship between the number of veto players and democratic reform.

After describing the reforms and discussing their relationship to a country's veto players, I will examine whether the presence of the three catalysts of democratic reform at government level, namely cartel breakdown, party ideology and public dissatisfaction, coincides with the occurrence of democratic reform. As discussed in the methodological chapter, the research tool used to carry out this cross-case analysis is the simple data matrix QCA works with (Ragin, 2000). In such a data matrix the presence of the government-level factors is simply 'matched' to that of democratic reform to see whether a relationship exists between them. This part of the study not only serves an exploratory purpose, but it is also essential for a well-informed selection of cases (from that moment on: government periods).

Regarding the case selection based on the data matrix, I will select a diverse set of cases, given that the aim of this study is to refine and check the existing theories on democratic reform. I include positive (where reform occurred) as well as negative (where reform did not occur) outcomes and select a group of cases that includes both expected and unexpected results. The selected government periods will be analysed elaborately in the second part of the empirical section of this study, the so-called within-case analyses (cf. George and Bennett, 2005: 251).

4.2 Descriptives, veto players and trends

Within the literature on electoral reform it is considered common sense to say that reforms of the electoral system are rare (see most notably: Taagepera and Shugart, 1989; Blais and Shugart, 2008). In those exceptional instances where they do occur, most of the major electoral reforms are towards more proportionality (Colomer, 2004; Renwick, 2011). Based on a set of 18 countries Scarrow shows that on the other hand direct democratic reform occurs fairly widely (Scarrow, 2003; see also Leduc, 2003). Regarding country level explanations for the quantity of democratic reform, the number of veto players is frequently mentioned in electoral reform literature (most recently by Blau, 2008 and Hooghe and Deschouwer, 2011), while being largely ignored in the field of direct democratic reform. In this section I will examine the overall amount and degree in each of the three countries and present an overview of all major and minor democratic reforms. I will also present a systematic assessment of the veto players in each country and see whether there is a relationship between them and the quantity of reform in the three countries.

4.2.1 The amount and degree of democratic reform.

Changes to the electoral system are expected to be rare in consensus democracies (Hooghe and Deschouwer, 2011). After all, in such political systems numerous actors, some of them with veto power, have to find a consensus before a reform can be implemented. The most important actors in this process are the political parties. When it comes to electoral reform, one can expect the need for consensus among parties to be a high barrier to pass, since electoral law has a huge impact on determining who the winners and losers of an election are (and more importantly: it determines the size of their victory or loss). An electoral reform thus has redistributive consequences and can be seen as a zero-sum game. Seats won by one party, are lost by other parties. Therefore one can expect it to be difficult to reconcile the interests of all partisan veto players. As well as these partisan veto players, other veto players
can also block a reform. Constitutional courts can block or revoke legislation that they deem unconstitutional. Given that the most important parts of electoral law often are constitutionally enshrined, constitutional courts may prove a significant hurdle as well. When there is an elected head of state, he or she may veto reforms that are deemed illegitimate (Nikolenyi, 2011). Lastly, Upper Houses can also veto reforms, especially when they operate relatively independently from the Lower House. To summarize, *the more veto players there are, the less likely it is that major and minor electoral reforms will occur* (cf. Hooghe and Deschouwer, 2011).

Regarding direct democratic reform, veto players can be even more detrimental. Conventional wisdom holds that referendums, and especially citizen-initiated referendums, are ‘anti-party tools’ (cf. Chapter 2). By allowing referendums, parties are said to undermine their own position. Certainly, one can expect that government parties will try to implement significant direct democratic reforms that introduce or expand government-sponsored referendums. However, such reforms often have to be passed by a two-thirds majority. In fragmented party systems governments that have the support of a two-thirds majority in parliament are quite rare and unstable. Moreover, the higher such fragmentation is, the less likely it is that the government is supported by such a majority. Hence, one can expect that the more partisan veto players there are, the more difficult it will be to persuade enough of them to pass significant direct democratic reform. The same reasoning holds true for the partisan veto players in the Upper House. The mere presence of an Upper House would thus constitute another barrier to direct democratic reform. *Constitutional courts* also can present an additional barrier. Furthermore, the constitution often includes articles that stipulate who governs the country. In most cases this means binding referendums are prohibited by the constitution, since they grant citizens the right of self-government. When a government tries to implement referendum legislation without changing the constitution, constitutional courts can de facto veto it by repealing the relevant law. Hence the presence of constitutional courts often raises the barrier for direct democratic reform as they may demand a constitutional change before the legislation can be implemented. Lastly, the situation regarding elected *heads of state* is less clear. There are no explicit expectations of the impact of an elected head of state. In theory they are often allowed to veto a reform. On the other hand, elected heads of state are expected to be above political bickering and can act as facilitators of reforms ‘for the sake of the country’ (Nikolenyi, 2011). It remains to be established which one of these expectations is most valid. To summarize, excluding the elected heads of state, one can expect *the more veto players there are, the less likely it is that major and minor direct democratic reforms will occur*. This is true in particular for reforms which introduce referendum legislation and legislation empowering citizens.

But which of the three countries has most veto players? According to Tsebelis’ data Belgium has four veto players, while the Netherlands and Austria each have two (Tsebelis, 2010, http://sitemaker.umich.edu/tsebelis/data). However, the data are somewhat out of date as they only run up to 2000 and they merely seem to count the partisan veto players. Therefore I recalculated the veto players myself. By doing so I also wish to avoid the common fallacy of veto player research using qualitative research methods, which is that it is unclear which veto players are taken into account (Ganghoff, 2003:4-5).

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112 Obviously this reasoning is fairly abstract and is built on multiple assumptions. In the within-case analyses in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 the expectations will be examined more in detail.
Four veto points matter in democratic reform: the Lower House, the Upper House, an elected head of state and the constitutional court (Blau, 2008; Katz, 2011; Nikolenyi, 2011). At these veto points specific veto players can operate. In the Lower House every party that can tip the balance between having a majority or not having one can be considered a veto player. In a two-party coalition one party can block the proposal of the other. Depending on the number of parties in the coalition the number of veto players thus increases or decreases. Regarding the Upper House, this institution is only considered to be a veto player when (a) it formally has the power to veto and (b) its composition is not the same as that of the Lower House. If its composition is the same, the Upper House is ‘absorbed’ and is not considered to be a separate veto player (Tsebelis, 2002:12). Table 4.1 presents an overview of the number of veto players from 1986 to 2007.

Table 4.1 Overview of veto players from 1986 to 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Veto points</th>
<th>Austria*</th>
<th>Belgium</th>
<th>The Netherlands**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lower House</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3 to 5</td>
<td>1 to 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+ 1 (linguistic group)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper House</td>
<td>0 (No veto power)</td>
<td>0 (absorbed)</td>
<td>1 to 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of State</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constitutional Court</td>
<td>1 (since 1920)</td>
<td>1 (since 1988)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 to 7</td>
<td>2 to 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The Austrian president cannot veto a bill based on its content. He can, however, refuse to sign a bill when he deems its genesis to be in violation of basic law (Müller, 2006a:197). Yet in practice the Austrian president resembles a ‘constitutional monarch’ (Müller, 2006a:199). ** Only during Lubbers III was there just one veto player in each of the Dutch Lower and Upper Houses.

If our theoretical predictions hold true, we should see fewer minor and major reforms in Belgium, since that country has a high number of veto players. Conversely we should see more minor and major reforms in the Netherlands and Austria, which have far fewer veto players.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, one can expect that minor and major electoral reform is quite rare, but if we move beyond such minor and major electoral reforms we can expect that technical electoral reform happens quite often. It seems safe to assume that veto players have little impact on such technical reforms as the opening hours of the polling booths, given the relative political insignificance of these measures. The expectations regarding the relationship between veto players and democratic reform should thus only apply to major and minor democratic reform.

Table 4.2 shows the number and the degree of democratic reforms in the three countries. To avoid the risk of artificially inflating the number of reforms, I counted similar laws and reform packages as one single reform. For instance, the state reform of 1993 in which regional parliaments were introduced and the district size of the national parliament was reduced are considered one reform. The same holds true for all legislation introducing the directly elected Brussels regional council. If one were to count all these laws separately, the totals for each country would be:

- **Austria:** 12 electoral reforms and 8 direct democratic reforms (+3 direct democratic reforms).
- **Belgium:** 58 electoral reforms; 4 direct democratic reforms (+21 electoral reforms and 2 direct democratic reforms).
- **The Netherlands:** 29 electoral reforms; 5 direct democratic reforms (+3 direct democratic reforms).
Interestingly, there are significant differences between the countries. In the Netherlands electoral law constantly changes but basically stays the same, while in Belgium, and to a lesser extent Austria, electoral law has changed significantly.

Table 4.2 Amount and degree of democratic reform by country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Electoral reform*</th>
<th>Direct democratic reform*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>11 (1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>36 (3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>29 (0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The total number of reforms is first, with the category of reform in brackets. The first number refers to the major reforms, the second to the minor reforms, and the third to technical reforms.

Direct democratic reforms are rarer than electoral reforms. This should come as no surprise, since they are linked to the existence or absence of original referendum legislation. Democracies by definition have electoral law, which can be changed. But they do not necessarily have referendum legislation. In fact, at the end of the 1980s only Austria had such legislation. Once referendum legislation is introduced it changes more often. It is thus not surprising that Austria has experienced the most direct democratic reforms.

Considering our expectations about veto players, the results in Table 4.1 are striking: contrary to the theoretical expectations in the literature, it is precisely Belgium that experienced most electoral reforms. Some might object that Tsebelis’ theory only seeks to explain significant policy reforms, but even if we just look at major reforms, Belgium still stands out. Regarding the number of major electoral reforms the relationship is exactly the opposite of what was expected: the Netherlands has fewest reforms and Belgium has most. If we take minor reforms into account the position of the Netherlands and Austria is balanced, but Belgium stands out even more. A second point worth noting is that in all three countries some major and/or minor direct democratic reforms took place. However, interestingly, there seems to be no relationship between the number of veto players and the amount of direct democratic reform. How to explain these odd findings?

To begin with, four explanations can be advanced to account for the positive relationship between the number of a country’s veto players and democratic reform. What first comes to mind are the state reforms that established the Belgian federalized state. These may well account for the high number of electoral reforms. In the next section we will discuss the impact of this uniquely Belgian factor. If the state reform explanation does not account for the difference, three other (potentially complementary) explanations can be thought of. First, Rahat (2008) points to what he calls power dispersion - the more partisan veto players there are, the less veto power each individual player has – to explain the fact that electoral reform occurred in Israel despite the high number of veto players. Indeed, government parties have more opportunities for building alternative majorities to implement electoral reform when there are more opposition parties to talk to. However, this explanation stretches the notion of veto players. After all, it contends that sometimes veto players have hardly any or even no veto power at all. The explanation is thus at odds with Tsebelis’ conceptualization of veto players. In Tsebelis’ work a veto player either has veto power or he has not. If it has no veto power, it simply is not a veto player. If Rahat is right, than Tsebelis’ is wrong in automatically labelling all government parties as veto players. A second alternative explanation may be that it is precisely a high and increasing number of partisan veto players...
that fuels the reform process. It may well be that partisan veto players want to limit the total number of veto players as much as possible. If it is the players themselves who are frustrated with the overall number of veto players, this may also make these frustrated players more determined to defeat the vetoes issued by other veto players. After all, as Renwick (2010:242) has shown: lengthy bargaining, skilful leadership and strategic action aimed at sidelining hostile veto players can overcome a high number of veto players. Vetoes can thus be overcome if one is prepared to invest enough time and energy to do so. Why then would electoral reform be different from any other policy reform or, put differently, why would politicians prefer investing their scarce time and energy in electoral reform rather than in other policy reforms? One reason could simply be that, given that electoral reform is about the nature of the rules of the game, this topic is likely to be given more time and energy than other policy reforms. Investing in electoral reform pays off in other policy areas as well, since it reduces the overall number of veto players. If the ‘frustration’ explanation holds true, than a high number of partisan veto players does not lead to fewer but rather to more electoral reforms. A third related explanation is that it is possible that public opinion gets frustrated with the amount of veto players. If important policy reforms are blocked due to a high number of veto players, this may well arouse hostile public opinion. There is some empirical support for this explanation in the field of major electoral reform. In his study of major electoral reforms, Renwick (2010:242) shows that public dissatisfaction can indeed nullify a high number of veto players. Whether this explanation is also valid beyond major electoral reform, still needs to be examined.

The last two explanations would also be able to account for both the positive relationship between veto players and electoral reform and the overall negative relationship between veto players and significant reform in other policy areas. Which of these explanations is most relevant empirically cannot be answered based on the numerical descriptives in this section. Some starting points can be found in an analysis of the content of the reforms, which will be presented in the following section. Later, the explanations and their follow-up questions will be assessed more elaborately, based on the evidence of the within-case analyses presented in the next three chapters.

Regarding the finding that the number of veto players does not seem to be related to the amount of direct democratic reform, two explanations can be thought of. First, it may well be that the assumption that referendums undermine the power of political parties is not correct. If the theoretical expectation is based on the wrong assumption, the expectation itself may not be valid. If this is the case, we should see politicians using referendums, or we should see elements in the legislation that grant parties control over referendums, so that they can be used only when parties decide to do so.

Second, even if referendums are seen as ‘anti-party tools’ and are believed to undermine the power of parties, this does not necessarily mean that this is the only or even the most important motivation in a political debate on the introduction of direct democratic reform. Indeed, when the government loses control over the political agenda other factors may well come into play. One could for instance think of public pressure, the actions of courts or the values of a reformist minority of the political elite. Briefly, Renwick’s alternative explanations for major electoral reform discussed in chapter two, namely elite-mass interaction and elite settlement, may also apply to direct democratic reform (cf. Renwick,
If this is the case, it should be clearly visible in the processes that led to the implementation of the direct democratic reform. Again, both explanations will be examined more thoroughly in the following chapters.

4.2.2 The content of democratic reform

In the first part of this chapter I did not differentiate between the five dimensions of electoral reform, nor between the six dimensions of direct democratic reform. Table 4.3 lists these eleven dimensions and what they cover (for a more elaborate overview of the eleven dimensions, see Chapter 3). In this section I will examine the number of democratic reforms by dimension. Specifically, I will present an overview of the number of reforms for each of the eleven dimensions. Afterwards I will provide an overview of all specific minor and major democratic reforms by country.

To guide the analysis of both overviews I will first reiterate my expectations regarding how often reforms affecting each of the eleven dimensions will happen. To start with, the small amount of electoral reform research which includes the procedural dimension suggests that one can expect most electoral reforms to be procedural, changing such things as the opening hours of polling booths and the way candidate names are shown on the ballot paper (cf. Massicotte, Blais and Yoshinaka, 2004). There is no theoretical reason to expect something different for direct democratic reform, where one also would expect most reforms to be procedural. As far as the remaining nine dimensions are concerned, I will first discuss the state of the art with respect to the incidence of the four remaining dimensions of electoral reform and then proceed to the five remaining dimensions of direct democratic reform.

A third explanation may be that the majority of direct democratic reforms shown in Table 4.1 defuse the threat of referendums by actually reducing the role of citizens. This can be done for instance by raising the number of signatures needed to call a referendum, or by increasing the threshold for a referendum to be valid. In practice this explanation does not apply: all direct democratic reforms at least included some elements that expanded the influence of citizens.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ELECTORAL REFORM</strong></td>
<td>All reforms affecting the electoral formula, district magnitude, electoral threshold and the election cycle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The (proportionality of the) electoral system</td>
<td>All reforms affecting candidate selection (who is on the ballot paper and what determines who gets a seat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Ballot structure</td>
<td>Reforms affecting who is allowed to vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Inclusiveness</td>
<td>Reforms affecting which political positions are elected (e.g. reforms regarding the direct election of regional MPs, mayors and judges)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Election levels</td>
<td>Reforms of the way the election is organized in practice (e.g. the opening hours of the polling booths, where the elections are held etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Electoral procedures</td>
<td>Introduction of a (new type of) referendum in a country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DIRECT DEMOCRATIC REFORM</strong></td>
<td>Reforms affecting who is allowed to call a referendum and what requirements have to be met to call a referendum (e.g. 100,000 signatures; the support of 8 MPs etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Introduction of referendum legislation</td>
<td>Reforms affecting the requirements that have to be met for a referendum result to be valid and to achieve a majority (e.g. turnout requirements, special majority requirements etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Initiation requirements</td>
<td>Reforms increasing or decreasing the number of subjects on which a referendum can be held</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Majority requirements</td>
<td>Reforms affecting who is allowed to vote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Subject requirements</td>
<td>Reforms of the way a referendum is organized in practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Regarding electoral reform, most attention has been focused on the proportionality of the electoral system. The two most elaborate analyses available, Colomer’s analysis of major electoral reform in 289 electoral systems of countries having some democratic experience and more than a million inhabitants and Renwick’s analysis of 84 major electoral reforms in post-1945 Europe, find that the proportionality of an electoral system in fact changes quite often, mostly in the direction of more proportionality.\textsuperscript{115} In respect of ballot structure, the only systematic study which includes this topic finds that ballot structure reforms are somewhat rarer (Renwick, 2011:464-466).\textsuperscript{116} Inclusiveness has not been examined in a systematic way but, based on the observation that in Europe the voting age has been lowered on various occasions since 1945, one can cautiously expect that reforms on inclusiveness happen fairly regularly. As far as the election levels are concerned, the little research that has been done on the direct election of mayors suggests that some reforms have happened, but they are rare (Scarrow, 2003:48). All in all, the last three dimensions have clearly been neglected compared to research on the proportionality of the electoral system. A similar picture applies to direct democratic reform: mostly studies have examined the introduction or the initiation requirements of referendum legislation (Scarrow, 2001; 2003; Vatter, 2009). The remaining three dimensions, the inclusiveness and the subject and the majority requirements, have been examined far less often and then mainly based on a single or a few cases (Leduc, 2003; Qvortrup, 2005). Based on the little research available, one can expect the following: referendum legislation has been introduced in most countries, while changes in the initiation requirements happen sometimes, but not very often. Furthermore, ad hoc referendum legislation introduced for a single issue also appears to occur more often.

Table 4.4 presents an overview of the electoral and direct democratic reforms by topic. After this, Table 4.5 zooms in on the minor and major reforms for each government period.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{115} The study by Colomer (2004:57), which examines a huge number of countries, yields a ratio of 3 to 1, while Renwick’s more limited sample yields a ratio of 1.54 to 1 (Renwick, 2011:464-466).

\textsuperscript{116} Major proportionality reforms happen 1.44 times as often as major ballot structure reforms (Renwick, 2011:464-466).

\textsuperscript{117} What matters most for our analysis is the partisan composition of a government and the relative strength of its component parties. Hence, a government period is delineated by a change in the partisan composition of the government or by an election. A change in political personnel is not considered a change of government. Based on these rules I identified 19 governments.
Table 4.4a. Subject of electoral reform (grouped by dimension)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Proportionality**</th>
<th>Ballot structure</th>
<th>Inclusiveness</th>
<th>Election levels</th>
<th>Electoral procedures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>2 (1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3 (0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>4 (2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1)</td>
<td>4 (1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>5 (0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5)</td>
<td>2 (0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* When a law affected multiple dimensions, we categorized it in the dimension which covered the most important part of the law.
** The total number of reforms is mentioned first, the number of major, minor and technical reforms is added in brackets.
The first figure refers to major reforms, the second to minor reforms and the third to technical reforms.

Table 4.4b. Subject of direct democratic reform (grouped by dimension)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Introduction legislation**</th>
<th>Initiation requirements</th>
<th>Subject requirements</th>
<th>Majority requirements</th>
<th>Inclusiveness</th>
<th>Referendum Procedures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>1 (0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0)</td>
<td>1 (0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>1 (0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0)</td>
<td>1 (0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>1 (1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* When a law affected multiple dimensions, we categorized it in the dimension which covered the most important part of the law.
** The total number of reforms is mentioned first, the number of major, minor and technical reforms is added in brackets.
The first figure refers to major reforms, the second to minor reforms and the third to technical reforms.
### Table 4.5. Major and minor democratic reform

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government period</th>
<th>Subject of the democratic reform</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Vranitzky II      | 27.7.1989. Introduction of the so-called Volksbefragung (direct democracy, introduction, minor)  
28.2.1990. Enfranchisement of Austrians residing abroad (inclusiveness, minor) |
| Vranitzky III     | 4.8.1992. Change to electoral system, number of electoral districts and impact of preferential vote (proportionality + ballot structure, major) |
| Vranitzky V/      | 20.10.1998. Abolition of the possibility of 8 MPs or 12 Länder MPs initiating a Volksbegehren (direct democracy, initiation, minor) |
| Klima*            |                                  |
| Schüssel I        | [none]                          |
| Schüssel II       | [none]                          |
| Gusenbauer        | 21.6.2007. Introduction of postal voting, lowering of voting age to 16 and increase of election cycle from four to five years (proportionality + inclusiveness + procedures, minor) |

* Vranitzky IV is not included in the analysis as it lasted merely one year.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government period</th>
<th>Subject of the reform bill (State reform related in italics)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dehaene I</td>
<td>11.5.1993. State reform: reduction in MPs; decrease in number of electoral districts (and accompanying laws) (proportionality, major)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24.5.1994. Introduction of gender quota (maximum 1/3 of candidate list of same gender) (ballot structure, major)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.4.1995. Introduction of multiple preferential vote (ballot structure, minor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10.4.1995. Introduction of top-down local referendums (direct democracy, introduction, minor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dehaene II</td>
<td>12.3.1998. Introduction of direct election of county councils (election level, minor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27.1.1999. Introduction of local suffrage for Europeans residing in Belgium (inclusiveness, minor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.5.1999. Extension local top-down referendums to citizen-initiated referendums (direct democracy, initiation, minor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verhofstadt I</td>
<td>26.6.2000. Reduction of the impact of list vote by half; abolition of list of reserves (and accompanying laws) (ballot structure, minor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22.1.2002. State reform. Increasing the number of Brussels MPs from 75 to 89 (proportionality, minor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28.1.2002. Gender quota, changes in existing legislation to maximum 50% of the list +/- 1 candidate of one gender (and accompanying laws) (ballot structure, minor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.12.2002. Creation of provincial electoral districts, introduction of electoral threshold of 5% and reintroduces the list of reserves (proportionality + ballot structure, major)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verhofstadt II</td>
<td>19.3.2004 Grant of suffrage to non-EU citizens residing in Belgium for at least five years (inclusiveness, minor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26.3.2005 State reform. Regions are from now on responsible for the regulation of local elections and local and provincial referendums (procedures, minor)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.5. Major and minor democratic reform (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government period</th>
<th>Subject of the reform bill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lubbers III</td>
<td>[none]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Kok I             | • 6.6.1996. Introduction of local suffrage for European citizens (inclusiveness, minor)  
|                   | • 29.5.1997. Change in impact of preferences votes from 50% to 25% (ballot structure, minor) |
| Kok II            | • 10.7.2001. Introduction of optional direct election of mayor ('burgemeestersreferendum') (election levels, minor)  
|                   | • 10.7.2001. (Temporary) introduction of binding abrogative referendum (direct democracy, introduction, major) |
| Balkenende II     | • 25.1.2005. Law on holding a consultative referendum on the European constitution (direct democracy, issues, minor) |
Some patterns can be discerned. Regarding electoral reform, a first look at Table 4.4 reveals that most of the changes in the three countries are technical reforms of the electoral procedures. But some more substantive trends can also be seen. First of all, in all three countries reforms affecting the proportionality of the electoral system have occurred. If we dig a little deeper and look at the specific content of each of these minor and major electoral reforms in Table 4.5, we see that there is a trend towards a slight decrease in proportionality of the electoral system, be it as a side effect of municipal mergers or deliberately, as in the 1992 Austrian electoral reform, which introduced an electoral threshold of 4% and the Belgian 2002 reforms which introduced an electoral threshold of 5%. Admittedly, my data set only includes three countries selected from a subset of all democracies (the subset covering consensus democracies) and spans just twenty years. Even so, this is a puzzling finding, which contradicts the general agreement in the literature.

The ballot structure reforms are marginally rarer. As is shown in Table 4.5, all ballot structure reforms point in the same direction: they increase the impact of the preference vote. In Austria this happened in 1992, in Belgium in 1995 and 2000 and in the Netherlands in 1998. Additionally, Table 4.5 reveals that electoral reform often comes in the form of a package deal. The Austrian 1992 reform introduced the electoral threshold and changed the size of the districts, but at the same time increased the impact of the preference vote. The Austrian 2007 reform package consisted of the extension of the election cycle from four to five years, but also introduced the postal vote and lowered the voting age to 16. The Belgian Verhofstadt I reforms introduced an electoral threshold and changed the electoral district borders, but also expanded the impact of the preference vote.

Finally, it is worth noting that all three countries introduced multiple laws that extend the inclusiveness of electoral law. Some of this has been a side effect of what can be labelled ‘the Europeanization of electoral law’. Following Directive 94/80/EC, countries implemented legislation allowing EU citizens to vote in local and European elections in the member state they happen to be living in (even if they are not a national). In Austria this legislation was introduced starting from 1995, in Belgium in 1999 and in the Netherlands it was implemented in 1996. But many other previously excluded citizens have gained voting rights. In all three countries legislation was introduced to grant suffrage to citizens residing abroad. The Netherlands was the first to do so, in 1985, the Austrians followed in 1990 and the Belgians in 1998. Additionally, in the Netherlands and Belgium non-EU foreigners were granted local suffrage in 1986 and 2004 respectively, while in Austria 16- and 17-year-olds were allowed to vote from 2007 onwards.

To sum up, there is more than meets the eye. Only focusing on proportionality would seem to indicate that the impact of citizens in the electoral process has slightly decreased, which by itself is a puzzling finding. However, it is just one part of the picture. Looking at the ballot structure and inclusiveness dimensions reveals that not only have citizens gained impact in deciding who gets a seat, but also more citizens than ever are allowed to vote.

118 Given the scope of these reforms, all five mergers which occurred were coded as technical reforms. As a result they are not included in Table 4.5.
119 The only exception being the reintroduction of the Belgian list of reserves in 2002. I will return to this law in the within-case analysis.
120 Each province had to implement the directive separately.
121 Given the time frame of this study, this law is not included in the Tables.
Lastly, Table 4.5 allows me to reflect on the high number of Belgian reforms. Indeed, the topics of the Belgian reforms focus attention on one factor to explain the high number of Belgian electoral reforms: the federalization of the Belgian political system. We highlighted the Belgian electoral reforms that are a side effect of state reform in italics. Indeed, some reforms are clearly a result of Belgian state reform (or are even part of it). Yet only four state reforms occurred. Even if we remove these reforms from the list, Belgium still stands out with 11 minor or major reforms as opposed to five Austrian and five Dutch democratic reforms. Therefore, the high number of Belgian reforms cannot be explained away by controlling for state reform.

If we turn to direct democratic reform, Tables 4.4 and 4.5 show that, as expected, all three countries introduced (extra) referendum devices, be they at the local level (Belgium) or national level (Austria and the Netherlands). Sometimes this legislation was temporary (the Netherlands), while at other times it was permanent (Belgium and Austria). Additionally, one ad hoc referendum law was introduced, namely the 2005 Dutch referendum law on the European constitution. Interestingly, the timing of the legislation shows that referendum legislation often appears shortly after or before electoral reform packages (see Table 4.5). For instance, the 1995 Belgian referendum law was approved on 10 April 1995, while the multiple preferential vote was introduced on 5 April 1995. This is even more clear in the case of the Dutch direct election of mayors and the temporary referendum law, which were both even officially part of the so-called ‘Healing agreement’ (Steur, 2005:60-61). Thus, this constitutes a first indication that direct democratic measures are or can be included in the electoral reform debates and can serve as ‘trading currency’ to persuade opponents or appease reformers. In the theoretical chapter we already mentioned that reformers may well balance electoral system elements in a complex package deal as a way to overcome differences between the governing parties (cf. Rahat, 2008: 40-41). Based on our data it seems that political elites in consensus democracies have a much more extended menu of options they can and do choose from. Most notably, ballot structure elements, but elements of inclusiveness and direct democracy as well, can be included in a complex package deal. Focusing only on major electoral system features risks obscuring these elements of package deals and may well lead to incomplete or even invalid causal analyses.

4.3 Concurrence of government factors and democratic reform

In the previous section I already discussed the general relationship between veto players and the number of reforms. In this section we will focus on three catalysts of reform that operate at government level, namely public opinion, cartel status and the presence of populist and postmaterialist parties in the government.

As outlined in the methodological chapter, a standard statistical analysis makes little sense given the low number of cases in this study (see also Katz, 2005). However, based on the logic of data matrices configurational methods work with (cf. Ragin, 2000; Rihoux, 2008),

122 Somewhat confusingly, this law was labelled the law on the referendum on mayoral candidates (‘wet burgemeestersreferendum’).  
123 Prior to this agreement the government had been brought down over the referendum issue in the so-called ‘Night of Wiegel’, named after the senator who singlehandedly killed the referendum bill. The agreement functioned as an update of the coalition agreement in order to bridge the differences between the three parties of the Kok II government (cf. Chapter 7).
one can perform an analysis to check whether cartel breakdown, ideology and public dissatisfaction are present during government periods in which democratic reforms occur. Later, I will use the data matrix to select the most suitable set of cases for more elaborate analysis in the within-case analyses in the country chapters. In this section I will first narrow down the dependent variable and describe the operationalization of the independent variables. After that, I will carry out the cross-case analysis itself.

4.3.1 Delineating the dependent variable
In this section I will focus my dependent variable and narrow it down. Indeed, if I were to examine all the democratic reforms together, I would risk lumping together a plethora of causal explanations as well. For instance, the separate introduction of a gender quota is likely to be explained by other factors than an isolated reform of the electoral formula. Sometimes these factors are similar, yet at other times they are clearly not. To elaborate on the example of gender quotas, Celis, Krook and Meier (2011) point to the impact of agency and discursive struggles—factors that are also important in the explanation of major reforms of the electoral system (Rahat, 2008; Renwick, 2010). Yet Celis, Krook and Meier (2011:521) also point to the importance of group interests and international diffusion, two factors that are unrelated to major reform of electoral systems. Conversely, the dominant explanation for major reforms of the electoral system, namely that the reforms are implemented because parties want to maximize their seat shares, seems to be of little relevance in the field of gender quota. In short, by lumping together the eleven dimensions of democratic reform, one also groups together explanations that only hold for one or a few (sub-)dimensions, thereby inducing causal heterogeneity. Such causal heterogeneity should explicitly be accounted for. If this is not done, one risks biasing the results of the research. It is an important research agenda in itself to assess which explanations are similar across all dimensions and which are not (cf. Jacobs and Leyenaar, 2011). However, with the exception of the proportionality of the electoral system and the introduction of referendum legislation, little research has been done on the eleven dimensions. Due to a lack of such research, it is too early to implement a research agenda that compares the explanations for all dimensions in this study.

A second consideration to bear in mind when delineating the dependent variable is that an a priori focus on one dimension only risks obscuring important elements of the explanation. After all, as Table 4.4 showed, democratic reform often occurs in the form of a package deal (see also Rahat, 2008). Hence by ignoring some of the dimensions one might miss important elements of such a deal. Yet in most contemporary research this is precisely what happens. Indeed, most empirical research focuses on either the proportionality of the electoral system or the introduction of referendum legislation, with elements of the other nine dimensions routinely ignored. Just to give two examples, in his analysis of the 1992 Austrian reform Muller (2005) does not mention the increased impact of the preference vote; while Hooghe and Deschouwer (2011) do not include the reintroduction of the list of reserves in their analysis of the 2002 Belgian electoral reform. To be fair, the authors would probably say that these elements were not important or had no important consequences. This may well be true,

124 Given that veto player theory is a theory that claims to work regardless of the type of policy reform (Tsebelis, 2002:161-163), I did not need to delineate the dependent variable to carry out my country level analysis.

125 Though these factors can and sometimes do play a role in the original choice of an electoral system (Colomer, 2004).
yet excluding them in advance risks disregarding important factors of the compromise. Additionally, some of the elements that were included in these analyses also had no or few consequences, such as the electoral threshold in the 1992 Austrian reform, which had effects in only one election afterwards (in 1999, when the Liberal Forum polled 3.7%). On the other hand, the Belgian reintroduction of the list of reserves for instance did have major consequences and a significant portion of the MPs have the list of reserves to thank for their job (Deschouwer, 2009:117).

To summarize, until we have a good grasp on the determinants of the ten dimensions of democratic reform it is best to start with a broad overview, only afterwards narrowing the democratic reform variable down to one or a few (sub-)dimensions. By doing so one is able to spot elements of package deals across all dimensions. After all, it is important to exclude isolated reforms that affect dimensions that lie outside the focus of a study, while at the same time it is important to include reforms that affect dimensions that lie outside the focus of a study when they are a part of the package deal.

This brings me to the question of which (sub-)dimensions to include in this study. Regarding electoral reform, I will include all minor and major reforms that affect the (proportionality of the) electoral system. Additionally, I include the sub-dimension of ballot structure that covers the impact of the preference vote and the type of vote a voter is allowed to cast. As recent research has shown, such changes can be explained by factors similar to those of the reforms of the electoral system (Jacobs and Leyenaar, 2011; Renwick, 2011). Lastly, reforms affecting other dimensions that are part of the package deal will be included as well. Conversely, this means I exclude technical reforms, due to the fact that the current knowledge of technical reforms is too limited to include isolated technical reforms into the research (cf. Jacobs and Leyenaar, 2011). For the same reason isolated reforms affecting inclusiveness, the election levels and the electoral procedures are left out. Lastly, the idiosyncratic Belgian state reforms are excluded, since they would bias our analysis and introduce non-random error. In practice eight minor or major electoral reforms were included.

Regarding direct democratic reform, I include minor and major reforms affecting the introduction of referendum legislation and the initiation requirements for referendums to be held. This means only the three Austrian technical requirements and the Dutch ad hoc referendum on the European constitution were excluded (for an analysis of the origin of the Dutch ad hoc referendum, see Van Holsteyn, 2005). Five minor or major direct democratic reforms were selected. Finally, given that in this part of the study the units of analysis are government periods, I grouped the electoral and direct democratic reforms together by government.

4.3.2 Operationalizing the independent variables

In this section I will present a short overview of how I operationalized the three independent variables. In the appendices I present a more elaborate discussion of the operationalization where needed.

126 To check whether laws are part of a package deal, I examined all the parliamentary debates on the minor and major electoral reforms affecting the proportionality and ballot structure dimensions. Since some parts of the negotiations are not traceable in the parliamentary debates I also examined all political yearbooks for the three years surrounding the reforms. For Belgium, I used the Res Publica yearbooks; for the Netherlands, I used the DNPP yearbooks; for Austria I used the EJPR yearbooks and supplemented them with interview information.
**Cartel breakdown.** Regarding cartel breakdown, one cannot simply use an existing dataset on cartelization, because there are no datasets on this topic. This probably stems from the fact that although Katz and Mair (1995, 2009) in their work present some starting points as to what a cartel of parties is and what traditionally excluded parties are, they do not present any quantification or qualitative measure of cartelization. Based on these starting points and the key notions that (a) a cartel breakdown measure should present the degree to which a government consists of traditionally excluded parties, while (b) weighting for the degree of exclusion of these parties, I devised a cartel breakdown index (cf. Chapter 3 and Appendix 3). Simply put, this index calculates the proportion of ministries and secretaries of state which is in the hands of traditionally excluded parties. It adds a basic weighting for the importance of these mandates and corrects the overall result for the time a party spent in opposition before joining the coalition. The advantage of this index is that it is intuitive and fairly easy to calculate. Additionally, it merely requires knowledge of the partisan distribution of the government mandates. As a consequence, data availability is assured.

**Political ideology.** To assess whether there are populist or postmaterialist parties included in the government, I analysed the manifestoes that the parties issued for the election prior to the formation of the government.\(^{127}\) I devised a coding scheme for these sources and assigned a score from -8 to 8 to each party at a given moment (cf. Chapter 3 and Appendix 4). In theory it is thus possible that a party at one point in time is strongly populist and at another is not populist. I coded for populism and postmaterialism separately. However, though there is some important overlap between populism and postmaterialism, most notably in their anti-elitism, a party cannot be populist as well as postmaterialist, since populism and postmaterialism have opposing views on the nature of society. While the former essentially believes the ‘populus’ is homogenous, the latter disagrees and believes in a pluralist society. In my coding and interpretation of the scores I included provisions to ensure a party cannot be populist and postmaterialist at the same time. Given that the unit of analysis in this section is the government, I aggregate the scores and examine whether at least one populist or postmaterialist party is included. Additionally, I also include an assessment of the degree of populism or postmaterialism of the parties involved.\(^{128}\)

**Public dissatisfaction.** This is probably the most difficult concept to operationalize. In the field of electoral reform, most research does not look directly at public opinion. Media accounts are mostly used. Though these seem important in shaping both the politicians’ views of public opinion and public opinions’ views of the politicians, the causal mechanism outlined in the theoretical section focuses more on public opinion than on the impact of the media on politics. Hence, it seems more valid to operationalize public dissatisfaction by using survey data (Dalton, Bürklin, Drummond, 2001; Norris, 2011). The next question is: which data to use? Given that in the end I aim to explain changes in the democratic

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\(^{127}\) I was unable to obtain the 1999 FPO election manifesto and thus based the scoring on the 1997 Linzer Programm, on which the manifesto itself was based (cf. Appendix 5).

\(^{128}\) Some might object that by doing so I group populism and postmaterialism together. Indeed, the score only reflects whether one or more populist or postmaterialist parties is/are included in the government and does not differentiate between the two ideologies. However, for now this should not be a problem. After all, the difference between the two types of ideology lies not in the incidence of democratic reform: both can be expected to push for reform. It is the content of the reform that is expected to be different. In the country chapters I will examine whether this is also the case empirically. From that moment on I will make a distinction between the impact of populism and that of postmaterialism.
procedures, it seems most suitable to use a measure on dissatisfaction with present procedures. As Dalton (2004:24) shows, the often-used satisfaction with democracy survey question is a good operationalization of such dissatisfaction (cf. Chapter 3). An extra advantage of the satisfaction question is the data availability: the Eurobarometer Series provides both a longitudinal and a fairly dense dataset. After all, the satisfaction question is included in the survey annually, which provides us with a great amount of data points. Again, given the unit of analysis, I aggregated the numbers by taking the average of the scores during a government period. I used the period during which the field work was done as the point of reference and checked which government was in charge at that time.\(^{129}\)

Two issues need to be dealt with: a country’s ‘normal’ level of dissatisfaction (the so-called country baseline) and the Austrian data problem. First, if I look at long-term trends, some countries show consistently more dissatisfaction than others, so their baseline of dissatisfaction seems to be higher (cf. Bovens and Wille, 2008). Hence a given level of dissatisfaction may be seen as problematic in one country, but simply regarded as business-as-usual in another. This particularly applies to Belgium, which seems to have a higher dissatisfaction baseline. Even after dissatisfaction fell by a huge margin of 20 points between 1998 and 1999 (from 66% to 46%) and further declined by eight points six months later (46% to 38%), it was still higher than all but one of the Dutch results. Given that reform is only likely when dissatisfaction is perceived as problematic, I use two different thresholds to consider a government as being confronted with high public dissatisfaction: a 40% threshold for Belgium and a 30% threshold for Austria and the Netherlands. The second problem with the dissatisfaction database relates to what the data cover. Given that Austria only joined the EU in 1995, the Eurobarometer series starts from then on. The Austrian marketing institute Fessel GfK did carry out satisfaction surveys before 1995, but these surveys included a different worded satisfaction question.\(^{130}\) The parallel survey sessions available show that the Austrian surveys underestimated the number of dissatisfied (32 versus 34% in 1995, Ulram, 2006:516; 29 versus 39% in 1997 and 25 versus 35% in 1998; Plasser and Ulram, 2002:113 versus EB 48 and EB 49). Additionally, the Austrian surveys were held far less regularly, which undermines the reliability of the scores. Between 1986 and 1995 they only were done in 1988, 1989 and 1993. Therefore, I can only use the trends in these surveys, not their actual numbers. In an interview Peter Ulram, the head of the Fessel GfK political research department, described the situation as follows, ‘you had an increase in unrest starting in the late 1980s, first peak in the late 1990s, slow decrease from that moment’ (Ulram, 17.02.2009). Indeed, this is also what indicators regarding dissatisfaction reveal. Dissatisfaction jumps from the very low 13% in 1984 to 17% in 1989, 23% in 1993 and even to 32% in 1995. To counter the weaknesses of the dataset, I decided to complement the satisfaction data with related data. Unfortunately virtually no other data on the system’s norms are available. Luckily, the data on the political priorities of the Austrians do grant us another view of the way Austrians look at the political process. These data come closest to data on the evaluation of the system’s norms.

\(^{129}\) I used the following Eurobarmeter studies: 33, 34.0, 35.0, 36, 37.0, 38.0, 39.0, 40, 41.0, 41.1, 42, 43.1, 48.0, 49, 51.0, 52.0, 53, 54.1, 56.2, 58, 59, 60.1, 61, 63, 65 and 68 (see European Commission, 2010, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb_arch_en.htm).

\(^{130}\) 'Sind Sie Zufrieden mit der Demokratie, den politischen Parteien und dem ganzen politischen System?' versus 'Sind Sie Zufrieden mit der Funktionieren der Demokratie?' In 1995 the formulation was adjusted to the Eurobarometer version (Ulram, 2006: 516).
## Table 4.6 Overview of the operationalization of the independent variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operationalization</th>
<th>Range and interpretation</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cartel breakdown</td>
<td>Cartel breakdown index by government</td>
<td>Official documents (own calculations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range from 0 to 1 whereby:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 0 to 0.25 signifies cartel break-in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 0.25 to 0.5 signifies partial cartel breakdown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 0.5 to 1 signifies complete cartel breakdown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political ideology</td>
<td>Ideology score by party (grouped by government)</td>
<td>Party manifestoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government includes:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• no postmaterialist/populist party</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• at least one mildly postmaterialist/populist party</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• at least one strongly postmaterialist/populist party</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public dissatisfaction</td>
<td>Dissatisfaction with democracy (average for government period)</td>
<td>Eurobarometer series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range from 0 to 100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• For Austria and the Netherlands 30% or more can be seen as public dissatisfaction</td>
<td>For Austria before 1995; Plasser and Ulram, 2002; Ulram 2006; 2009.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• For Belgium 40% or more can be seen as public dissatisfaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From 1990 until the second half the 1990s ‘corruption and the privileges of the political class’ is the fourth most important political priority for the Austrian citizen. Only in 1998 does it disappear from the top six list of priorities (Plasser and Ulram, 2002:152). Combined, the Eurobarometer data and the data on the political priorities of the Austrians paint a picture of a rapidly deteriorating situation beginning in the late 1980s, followed by an improvement from 2000 onwards.

Table 4.6 summarizes all three operationalizations, their range and interpretation and the sources I used to calculate the scores for the cross-case analysis in the following section.

4.3.3 The cross-case analysis
In what follows I will analyse the relationship between cartel status, party ideology and public dissatisfaction and our dependent variable democratic reform. But first I will reiterate the theoretical expectations regarding our three variables. To begin with, I can expect that in a stable cartel situation no reforms will take place. After all, why would the ‘winners’ in the political system reshape the rules that apparently serve them well, since the cartel is comfortably in place? On the other hand, partial and complete cartel breakdowns are likely to lead to electoral reforms. The expectation in respect of cartel break-ins is somewhat mixed. Surely the ‘intruding party’ (or parties) could benefit from changing the rules of the game, but it or they may very well be too weak to succeed. Attempts to push through electoral reforms will probably be made, but success is not guaranteed. As regards political ideology, one can expect democratic reforms to occur when populist or postmaterialist parties are included in the government, given that these parties focus on giving citizens more say in the political process. Furthermore, one can expect that public dissatisfaction provides fertile soil for reformers to legitimize their claims – a process that Alan Renwick (2010) labeled elite-mass interaction. This brings us to a second topic: how do the three variables interrelate and in which combinations are they most likely to coincide with democratic reform. The interactions between political elites (and other actors) that Renwick (2010) describes in his analysis of major electoral reform in France, Italy, Japan and New Zealand can serve as a useful starting point (cf. Chapter 2). Although I am still examining democratic reform at government level, one should nevertheless see some hints of the processes that lead to the occurrence of democratic reform at this level. I already mentioned elite-mass interaction, which should be visible in the presence of public dissatisfaction. Without this, it makes little sense to say democratic reform occurred as a result of elite-mass interaction. The elite side of this interaction is also likely to be noticeable at government level. After all, it is precisely the traditionally excluded parties, the populist and the postmaterialist parties that are expected to be reform-minded. Hence if democratic reform occurs through elite-mass interaction, one would expect to see public dissatisfaction combined with either cartel breakdown or ideology and the presence of democratic reform. Renwick’s second important route to reform, elite majorities imposition, can also be visible at government level. This time public dissatisfaction is not needed – in fact its absence is an important prerequisite for this route to democratic reform. The legitimacy constraints on the governing parties are low, because public opinion is unwilling to punish or uninterested in punishing political parties for pushing through

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131 One exception to this rule may be a lagged effect of dissatisfaction. It is not unthinkable that politicians initiate a reform process at a time of great public unrest, but that the democratic reform is implemented at a time when this unrest has already faded. In the within-case analyses I will examine whether such lagged effects occurred or not.
blatantly self-interested reforms. When legitimacy constraints are low, the governing parties can pretty much do as they like and adapt the system to suit them better. But why would politicians want to change a system that benefits them? After all, they got into government and can be said to be the winners of the system. Yet this is not necessarily the case. Traditionally excluded parties may well have got into the government despite a given political system rather than because of that system (cf. Katz, 2005:61). Therefore, the second way reform can take place is through a combination of the absence of public dissatisfaction and the presence of cartel breakdown. To sum up both paths to democratic reform, I would expect to see the presence of democratic reform together with either (a) a combination of public dissatisfaction and at least one of the two other variables, or (b) cartel breakdown combined with the absence of public dissatisfaction.

Renwick (2010:6) found that elite-majority imposition occurred more frequently than elite-mass interaction. However, he analysed major reforms of the (proportionality of the) electoral system. In this study I use a far broader dependent variable. Direct democratic reforms and minor electoral reforms may well happen more often as a result of elite-mass interaction because they lend themselves more to being ‘symbolic measures’. For instance, the introduction of referendum legislation is an act with a highly symbolic value as it gives the citizen a say in some matters. However, when the majority requirements are very high the actual threat of such a referendum to politicians is limited. The same applies to, for instance, ballot structure reform. An increase in the impact of the preference vote gives the citizens more power, but if the impact of the preference vote increases from virtually nil to very little, the actual effect of the reform is likely to be limited. Hence such ‘harmless’ reforms can be an excellent way for reluctant political elites to agree to some of the demands of reformers and to claim to have listened to public opinion, while at the same limiting the ‘harm’ done by the democratic reforms. As a consequence I would expect there to be more minor electoral and direct democratic reforms through elite-mass interaction.

Before I move to the data matrix, one last technical transformation is required. To select the government periods that will be analysed more thoroughly in the within-case analyses, I first have to standardise the scores of each of the three government level variables. Therefore, I calibrated my original scores and thereby translated them to fuzzy-set scores, using the calibration rules provided by Ragin (2008:185) as a guide. Ragin suggests that when transforming values to fuzzy-set scores one first needs to assess how the value relates to the maximum value of the variable. The question to ask is: does the value signify that the variable is more present than absent or not? To make the Table as insightful as possible, yet preserve some room for differentiation, I opted for three scores:

- 0 = the variable is absent or only present to a very low degree (e.g. there are no populist parties in the government)
- 0.75 = the variable is present, but in a moderate form (e.g. the populist parties in the government are only mildly populist)

The actual recoding of each of the three variables is described in the notes to Table 4.7.

One cannot use 0.5 in these cases since the fuzzy-set score 0.5 means neither in nor out − similar to a ‘don’t know’ survey answer. I opted for 0.75 as it is the average of the ‘mostly in’ (0.881) and ‘more in than out’ (0.662) options (Ragin, 2008:185), since both ‘mostly in’ and ‘more in than out’ cannot properly describe the moderate presence of the factors I use in this study.
• 1 = the variable is present (e.g. the populist parties in government are strongly populist)

Table 4.7 shows the results in data matrix form. The Table highlights the cells with a score of 0.75 or 1 that go together with a positive outcome (the occurrence of democratic reform) in green, and the cells with a score of 0.75 or 1 that are linked to a negative outcome (no reform) in red. The cells where the variables were absent (the ‘0’ scores) and no reform occurred were left white. I also highlighted in green or red whether a positive outcome went together with the presence of at least one government variable. Table 4.7 includes 15 government periods - four short-lived and/or caretaker governments are not included. Lastly, I want to stress that the table does not imply causality. I will examine causality later on in the country chapters.

Table 4.7 shows that in eight of the nine cases of reform the presence of democratic reform coincides with at least one explanatory factor. There is only one case, the Austrian Gusenbauer government, where democratic reform occurs in the absence of the explanatory factors. Conversely, when excluding the four short-lived governments, in four cases the presence of the explanatory factors does not coincide with the occurrence of democratic reform.

If one examines Table 4.7 more closely, one finds that the results are counter-intuitive. The elite-mass interaction I expected occurred at best only once, but the most striking observation is that public dissatisfaction alone seems to go hand in hand with democratic reform. The only exception is the Balkenende II government, which makes this a very good case to examine more closely later. One could wonder that, if the pattern is so clear, why have other scholars not found it? An explanation can be found in our operationalization of democratic reform. Most scholars excluded minor and/or direct democratic reform and it is precisely these two types of reform that occur most often in conjunction with public dissatisfaction. In fact, there is only one exception and that is the 1992 Vranitzky III reform. Hence it seems to be the case that by excluding minor electoral and direct democratic reforms, the potential impact of public dissatisfaction is completely obscured. The question remains how to explain these findings. Obviously, for now I can only speculate on why this is the case. Nevertheless it seems likely that politicians, when faced with public dissatisfaction, turn to less far-reaching or more symbolic democratic reforms to appease the public mood. Whether this is also the case empirically, will be examined in the within-case analyses.

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134 I considered each government that did not last until one third into its official term as short-lived. Both the Austrian Vranitzky IV (383 days) and the Dutch Balkenende I (87 days) fall in this category. Additionally the two short-lived caretaker governments, the Belgian Martens IX government (57 days) and the Dutch Balkenende III (138 days) were excluded (Müller, 2006a:170; Andeweg, 2008:270; Deschouwer, 2009:144).
Table 4.7 Concurrence of government factors and democratic reform

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Cartel breakdown</th>
<th>Political ideology</th>
<th>Public dissatisfaction</th>
<th>Democratic reform</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Austria</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vranitzky II</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vranitzky III</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.75</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Martens VIII</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verhofstadt II</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0.75</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kok II</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Balkenende II</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cartel status: I coded all cartel break-ins (a score between 0 and 0.25) as 0.75; while (partial and complete) cartel breakdowns were coded as 1. Party ideology: I coded the presence of mildly populist or postmaterialist parties as 0.75. I coded the presence of a strongly populist or a strongly postmaterialist party as 1. I also coded the presence of a moderately populist and a moderately postmaterialist party as 1. Public dissatisfaction: 30% or more for the Netherlands and Austria from 1995 onwards is coded 1. 40% or more for Belgium is coded 1. For Austria before 1995: based on the discussion presented above I coded Vranitzky III and IV as 1; I was cautious on the coding of Vranitzky II and coded it merely as 0.75. Democratic reform: I coded no reform as 0; minor reform, be it direct democratic or electoral, is coded as 0.75, while major reform or a minor electoral and a minor direct democratic reform are coded 1.
Regarding cartel breakdown, Table 4.7 paints a mixed picture. Sometimes cartel breakdowns and break-ins coincide with reforms, sometimes they do not. At least two explanations can be thought of. First, Table 4.7 only shows successful reform attempts. It may well be that the traditionally excluded parties attempted to reform, but were simply unsuccessful. If this is the case this should be visible in the within-case analyses, where I analyse processes during government periods and not only the actual outcome. Second, democratic reform is not the only way to adjust the rules of the game in favour of the traditionally excluded parties. Other, for instance socio-economic strongholds of the old cartel can be the focus of an attack of the formerly excluded parties. If such other cartel dynamics are at work, this should be clear when I examine such cases more closely.

Lastly, the results on political ideology echo the findings on cartel breakdown: no clear pattern appears. In the Netherlands and Belgium some democratic reforms were implemented when populists and/or postmaterialist were in government. Conversely, the Schüssel and Balkenende governments also included such parties, but delivered no democratic reforms. Many explanations can be thought of, but the procedural barrier is probably the first that comes in mind. Indeed, the Schüssel governments did not have the required two-thirds majority to implement far-reaching changes. Without a doubt such reasons played a role. However, this should not rule out all democratic reform. Especially minor reforms should still be possible, but these did not occur either. Additionally, at other times the opposition parties did support democratic reforms (as happened in for instance 1998 and 2007). After all, these parties have act-contingent motivations not to vote against democratic reforms that empower the people, because this looks bad to the public. Therefore something else also plays a role. It may well be that some parties give higher priority to democratic reform than others. The difference is not accounted for by populism versus postmaterialism: democratic reforms occurred both when populist and when postmaterialist parties were in office. The difference is more likely to lie in what is a hot debate in populism literature, namely the question of whether populism is an ideology or merely a strategy to attract voters (Mudde, 2004; Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2009 versus Jagers and Walgrave, 2007). Government participation is an excellent litmus test for answering this question. After all, once in office many of the populist ideals clash with the self-interest of the party as part of the government. Therefore in the within-case analyses I will return to this question of populism as an ideology as against populism as a strategy.

4.4 Case selection within the three countries

Analysing all 15 government periods in a qualitative in-depth way clearly goes beyond the scope of this study. Additionally, not all cases give equal insight. Indeed some are even what Goertz calls ‘irrelevant’ (2006:178): the cases where no independent variable is present and nothing happened. But which cases give the clearest insight? In the previous section I already highlighted some of them. In this section I will carry out the case selection in a more systematic way. I intend to select a wide variety of cases to enable me to have enough diversity within countries as well as between the three countries. I first aim to select extreme yet typical cases – those where a positive outcome was most likely and indeed happened. In these it should be easiest to detect the causal mechanism. I then complement these with deviant cases, because they potentially undermine my theoretical claims. Given that I have
three independent variables, I will select both typical and deviant cases for all three independent variables.  

One of the most important findings of Table 4.7 was the impact of public dissatisfaction. However, the mere co-existence of public demand and reform proves little. After all, very little is known about how public dissatisfaction works and it may even be that the relationship is merely the result of something else. Additionally, it may well be that public dissatisfaction is simply used as an excuse by elites to achieve partisan gains. Public dissatisfaction is strongest during Dehaene II, when on average no fewer than 54% of the Belgians were dissatisfied with the way democracy worked. If I find that the causal mechanism is not in play in this case, than that is strong evidence that something else explains democratic reform better. If, on the other hand, the causal mechanism is in play, then this case will allow us to trace precisely how it works in practice. Another extreme yet typical case is Vranitzky III. Public dissatisfaction is high, but in particular the degree of reform (the value of the dependent variable) is extremely high. Vranitzky III is the case where degree of electoral reform was the highest (cf. Table 4.5). This has the advantage that this case probably has the most elaborate reform process. Given this, public dissatisfaction should be easy to trace because of the great number of opportunities to influence the reform process. There is one deviant case where the presence of public dissatisfaction did not lead to democratic reform: Balkenende II. As that is the only such case, it is extremely useful to examine why the causal mechanism was absent or why it did not lead to reform.

Regarding the other explanatory factors, again I first aim to select extreme yet typical cases. The value of cartel breakdown is the highest in the Verhofstadt I government. Therefore this case is most suitable to check the cartel mechanism. It is also a good case for examining the impact of ideology, given the presence of both one populist and two postmaterialist parties. Because the cartel breakdown value is higher, I prefer Verhofstadt I over Kok I. The opposite of Verhofstadt I - an extreme yet deviant case - is Schüssel I. This government also shows a cartel breakdown combined with a populist party in office, but no reform occurred.

Regarding the impact of ideology, there is only one case where a populist or postmaterialist party is included in the government (but without cartel breakdown or public dissatisfaction) and democratic reform occurs, namely the Kok II case. It is thus the best case for examining the impact of political ideology in its purest form. What makes this case all the more interesting is the fact that it is the case in which the largest direct democratic reform occurs, namely the 2001 (temporary) introduction of binding national referendum legislation. Therefore this case probably again has a very elaborate reform process. Both elements, the

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135 In what follows the selection process will not always be as clear-cut as stated here, since many variables overlap.
136 Verhofstadt I also experienced a major electoral reform, but the content of this reform was less far-reaching than the content of the Vranitzky III reform.
137 I analysed this case elsewhere in an article co-authored with Monique Leyenaar (see Jacobs and Leyenaar, 2011). Indeed the 1997 reform was initiated by the postmaterialist D66, which broke into the cartel. However its more substantial reform attempts to establish a new electoral system were frustrated by its two coalition partners, both of which were part of the traditional cartel. This should come as no surprise, since this is merely a case of cartel break-in and not cartel breakdown. The traditional cartel remnants were too strong. Additionally, the reform that did happen, a lowering of the preference threshold, was no threat to the cartel and sprung from the postmaterialist ideology of D66 - not from the cartel status. Hence in this case ideology was more important than cartel status.
sole presence of political ideology together with an elaborate reform process, provide an excellent opportunity to check for traces of the impact of political ideology. If I find no impact of political ideology in this case, than this finding is an important indication that the inclusion of postmaterialist and populist parties in the government by itself may not be enough to trigger democratic reform.

Lastly, one case seems to defy all my theoretical expectations: the Gusenbauer government and its 2007 reform. There is no public dissatisfaction, no cartel breakdown or even a cartel break-in and the governing parties are neither populist nor postmaterialist. This is a deviant case on all fronts and thus extremely useful for our analyses. After all, it can highlight alternative explanations for democratic reform.

The overall case selection has some other advantages beyond the individual case level I outlined above. First, given that at least two cases from each country are selected, I can also check the impact of veto players in the three countries (the government level). Additionally, the Belgian and Dutch selected government periods largely are consecutive, meaning the government periods immediately before those where major reforms occur are included. This has the advantage that I can check lagged effects, which are especially relevant when one analyses such major reforms. After all, in most cases these reforms involve constitutional change, which in turn often needing a double two-thirds majority: a first reading concluded by a first vote requiring a normal or a two-thirds majority is followed by an election after which a second vote is held on the constitutional change. This second vote requires a two-thirds majority. This system is in place in the Netherlands and Belgium. In Austria the procedure is somewhat easier and does not require the approval of two consecutive governments.

Lastly the case selection also allows us to examine the lagged effect of public dissatisfaction, given that two of the selected governments follow periods of public dissatisfaction: Balkenende II and Verhofstadt I. In the following three chapters I will now analyse these eight cases by country. I will start with Austria and then move on to Belgium and the Netherlands.

4.5 Summary and conclusion

In this chapter I examined the amount and the degree of democratic reform in Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands. Although at country level I expected to see fewer reforms in Belgium than in the Netherlands and Austria due to the former’s high number of veto players, this was not the case. Regarding electoral reform, Belgium stood out and clearly saw more reforms than the other two countries. The amount of direct democratic reform on the other hand seemed to be unrelated to the veto players in a country. After that I moved from the country level to the government level and examined whether cartel breakdown, political ideology and public dissatisfaction are related to the occurrence of democratic reform. Based on a simple data matrix, I carried out a cross-case analysis. Here too did I mostly encounter

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138 Between Kok II and Balkenende II, the short-lived Balkenende I government was in charge. It collapsed after merely 87 days. Therefore it is safe to say that any lagged effects were likely to materialize under Balkenende II. As I will show, this was indeed the case.

139 Article 44 of the Austrian constitution stipulates that ‘Constitutional laws or constitutional provisions contained in simple laws can be passed by the House of Representatives only in the presence of at least half the members and by a two-thirds majority of the votes cast, they shall be explicitly specified as such.’ (Tschentscher, 2010, [http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/au00000.html](http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/au00000.html)).
counter-intuitive findings: (a) the impact of public dissatisfaction seems to be higher than expected; while (b) cartel breakdown and political ideology yielded mixed results. Sometimes democratic reform occurred when traditionally excluded, populist or postmaterialist parties were included in the government, but equally democratic reform did not always happen during such government periods. To sum up, it seems that if we move beyond the realm of major reforms of the electoral system or the introduction of referendum legislation the theories do not work as well and need to be adjusted. Which adaptations need to be made is the main topic of the following three chapters. In these chapters I analyse seven government periods by country. To select the most theoretically relevant government periods I used the cross-case analysis to find extreme typical cases as well as extreme deviant cases.
CHAPTER 5. AUSTRIA

5.1 Introduction

The cross-case analysis in Chapter 4 has highlighted three Austrian government periods, Vranitzky III (1990-1994), Schüssel I (2000-2002) and Gusenbauer (2007-2008). Vranitzky III is an extreme yet typical case, during which particularly the degree of reform (the value of the dependent variable) is very high. Schüssel I, on the other hand is an extreme yet deviant case. It shows cartel breakdown combined with a populist party in office, but no reform occurs. Lastly, the Gusenbauer government is theoretically relevant, because its 2007 reform occurred in the absence of public dissatisfaction or formal cartel breakdown (or even a cartel break-in), while the governing parties were neither populist nor postmaterialist. This case is deviant in all aspects and thus extremely useful for my analyses.

The timeframe of this study encompasses an era of profound political changes in Austria. The three government periods selected are all at important political turning points, be it directly as in the case of Schüssel I and Gusenbauer governments, or somewhat further along the road as with the Vranitzky III government, which builds on reform talks that began in 1986. Until 1986 Austria had de facto between two and two-and-a-half effective parties (Müller, 2006b:290). The two major parties, the social democratic SPÖ and the Christian democratic ÖVP, received the bulk of the votes and seats, while the far smaller conservative liberal FPÖ trailed them by some 30 to 40%.140 In 1983 the FPÖ for the first time briefly entered government with the SPÖ, but this led to infighting in the party (Luther, 2006:365). When Jörg Haider ousted then party chairman Norbert Stegers in September 1986, the Vranitzky I government of which it was part collapsed and the party began to change dramatically. Haider slowly but steadily transformed the FPÖ into a populist radical right party (Luther, 2006:365). From the first election under Haider’s leadership onwards the party began to gain electoral strength, culminating in its participation in government in 2000 (see Figure 5.1).

1986 was also an important date because the Greens were able to enter parliament for the first time (Sully, 1991). Their electoral rise throughout the research period is a second important background element in the reform debates analysed in this chapter. The two traditional parties on the other hand lost votes heavily from 1986 onwards, albeit at different rates and at different times. After Haider took over the FPÖ in 1986 the two established parties formed a grand coalition, another milestone in the recent political history of Austria. In the 1990 election that resulted in the Vranitzky III government, the ÖVP especially lost a great many votes to the FPÖ. The traditional parties continued the grand coalition started in 1987, which was vehemently attacked by the FPÖ. A second important event occurred in 1999, when the SPÖ suffered significant losses and was forced into opposition for the first time since 1970. The first Schüssel government, which included the ÖVP and the FPÖ, was formed. Schüssel I and the subsequent Schüssel II government, which also included the ÖVP and the FPÖ, in turn dramatically changed the FPÖ. After its first governmental participation the FPÖ recorded notable losses in the 2002 election. The ÖVP and the FPÖ nevertheless renewed their government coalition. In April 2005 the FPÖ split, after Haider and most of the FPÖ MPs left the party (Luther, 2006:365). Haider founded the BZÖ, which ‘remained’ in office

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140 For an elaborate study of the ideology of the main Austrian parties see Jenny, 2006.
in the Schüssel II government, while the remnants of the FPÖ went into opposition. Ideologically the BZÖ barely differed from the FPÖ. The difference was more in the tone of the campaigns than in substance (Luther, 2006:380). In the 2006 election the BZÖ just managed to pass the 4% electoral threshold (cf. Müller, 2008). After that election the right was divided, while at the same time the two traditional parties were weakened. This fragmented party system forced the two major parties into another grand coalition, the Gusenbauer government.

Figure 5.1 The long-term evolution of the five major Austrian parties

![Graph showing the long-term evolution of the five major Austrian parties](image)

Source: Sully, 1991; Müller, 2000; 2004; 2008

Against the background of these changes a high number of reform debates took place. In this chapter I will analyse these reform debates within each of the three selected government periods in two sections, one descriptive and one explanatory.

5.2 Vranitzky III: 'Strong democracy'

Vranitzky III is a typical case, as it shows the presence of (two of) the independent variables as well as the dependent variable. On 15 July 1992 a major electoral reform was voted upon, which changed the electoral system and the ballot structure.

5.2.1 Reconstruction of the debate

A. Historical roots of the debate. Although the Austrian electoral system throughout the postwar era has always been a list-proportional one, it twice changed substantially, in 1970 and 1992. Before 1970 the electoral system was actually very 'majoritarian', due to the small constituencies and the requirement of having to gain at least one seat in at least one electoral district to be allowed into the second-tier seat distribution (where the smaller parties stand a better chance of winning seats) (Müller, 1996:236-237). The combination of these two elements makes it very hard for smaller parties to enter parliament. In 1970, as part of a compromise between the governing SPÖ and its minority supporting party the FPÖ, the

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141 For a more elaborate discussion of the main characteristics of the Austrian electoral system, see Müller, 2005.
142 Even in the largest electoral district, where 12 seats were distributed, a party had to win 7.7% of the votes to gain one seat (Müller, 1996:238).
electoral system was changed substantially (Müller, 2006b:288). Most importantly, the number of electoral districts was reduced (in the first tier from 25 to 9 and in the second tier from 4 to 2) and the number of MPs was raised from 165 to 183. As a result of these measures the effective electoral threshold decreased from 8.1 to 3.3%, which in turn significantly lowered the hurdle for the smaller parties (Müller, 2006b:287). The position of smaller parties was also improved by another important element of the new law, namely the fact that the electoral formula to calculate the seats in the first tier was changed from the Droop quota to the De Hare quota, which benefited smaller parties (Gallagher and Mitchell, 2005: 589).

The 1970 reform, however, contained the seeds for new reform debates. Indeed, the 1970 electoral reform was said to disconnect the voters from their representatives, because the electoral districts were ‘too’ large. Moreover, there was a general feeling that these large constituencies were not sufficiently compensated for by the preference vote system (Poier, 2001:184; Müller, 2006b:284). This fear was strengthened by the rise of the Greens and the FPÖ. The Greens entered parliament in 1986 and the FPÖ made spectacular gains in the same elections, both of which gave extra credibility to the general feeling that the 1970 electoral system was ‘flawed’ (Müller, 2005:399). What made these developments all the more significant was that, because no party wanted to collaborate with the FPÖ, the two established parties were forced in 1987 to join in a grand coalition. It was the first time since 1966 that the two major parties were united in a grand coalition. The return of such a grand coalition was met with suspicion, given that during the first period of grand coalitions, from 1947 until 1966, the role of parliament had been reduced significantly and the opposition had been restricted (Schefbeck, 2006:142). During the coalition negotiations both the media and intellectuals were concerned that the new grand coalition would lead to another such concentration of power in the hands of the government (Müller, 2005:400).

The Vranitzky II government, consisting of the SPÖ and the ÖVP, prominently included democratic reform in its coalition agreement (Vranitzky, 1987:3; Müller, 2005:400). The first chapter of the agreement was simply called ‘Democracy’ and outlined the government’s democracy agenda. According to the document, the goal of the democratic reforms was (a) to increase the contact between the electorate and the MPs and (b) to increase the influence of the voter on who would represent him/her (Vranitzky, 1987:3). The reform agenda consisted of electoral reform, specifically the shift to a mixed electoral system with 100 single-member districts and the introduction of a 3% electoral threshold; and direct democratic reforms, namely making the introduction of a Volksbegehren easier, allowing the initiators of a

143 Candidates had to get 100% of the De Hare quota to be elected 'out of the order of the list' (cf. Müller, 1996 and 2005).

144 For the sake of clarity, the original sources that I used in this thesis are listed in a separate appendix (Appendix 5). It includes in particular all coalition agreements, laws, bills, parliamentary minutes, party platforms, yearbook entries, interviews and media articles cited in this study.

145 The Volksbegehren is a specific type of direct democratic instrument. Like a referendum, a Volksbegehren is held on a specific policy issue. In the first instance 10,000 (from 1998 onwards, 8,032) signatures have to be gathered to start the official procedure. Once this threshold has been met, an official timeline is outlined. The second phase of the Volksbegehren is scheduled. This consists of eight days on which citizens can sign the Volksbegehren text. They can do so in offices specifically set up for the issue all over the country. When a threshold of 100,000 signatures is met, the Volksbegehren topic moves to the parliamentary agenda, where it has
Volksbegehren to participate in the parliamentary debate when the Volksbegehren achieves more than 100,000 signatures, and the introduction of a Volksbefragung, a binding government-sponsored referendum (Vranitzky, 1987:3).

The introduction of the Volksbefragung was quickly achieved on 27 July 1989. However, especially the electoral reform part of the coalition agreement proved far more difficult. In April 1987 the government reached an agreement on the general principles of the reform, but the 'devil was in the detail', namely the number, size and boundaries of the electoral districts. In August 1987 it became clear no agreement could be achieved. A reform commission was set up to sort the problems out (Ucakar, 1994:140). In December 1987 the commission delivered its report, advising among other things that 80 single-member districts should be established. The Greens and the FPÖ opposed the report, but they were not alone, as some factions within the ÖVP also disapproved of the report. In particular the selection of candidates for the single-member districts was seen as difficult. After all, single-member districts would risk more competition between the factions within the ÖVP regarding in which electoral districts each faction was obliged/allowed to field candidates. Indeed, some districts would be 'safe seats', while others would be more difficult to capture or keep (Ucakar, 1994:141). Apart from this, Erhard Busek (ÖVP), the Vice-Chancellor at that time, pointed to another source of opposition to the reform, one within the parties themselves: the individual MPs. '[T]he parliamentarians were thinking “will I be re-elected?”' (Busek, 4.8.2009). Many of them also believed that the MPs elected in the single-member districts would be ‘first-class MPs’ and MPs elected in the second and third tiers would have a lower status (Müller, 2005:400). In January 1988, a completely new reform proposal was put on the table by the Ministry of the Interior, but again the two major parties were internally divided on the ideas. To make matters worse, they even started to question the main principles of the reform proposal. The ÖVP now wanted 25 multimember electoral districts and a 5% electoral threshold, while the SPO called for a far less majoritarian electoral system. It wished to see an electoral system consisting of nine electoral districts, together with an electoral threshold of 3% (Ucakar, 1994:141). In July 1988, two new reform proposals were introduced by the Ministry of the Interior, each reflecting one party's views (Ucakar, 1994:142). The two main parties again started to negotiate and on 24 October 1989 a new proposal was outlined which resembled the original reform programme included in the coalition agreement, but the two parties once again could not agree. In the end the only reform that took place was the introduction of suffrage for Austrians living abroad (BGBI. nr. 148/1990).147

B. Initiation of the reform. The issue stayed on the agenda during the political campaign and featured prominently in the coalition negotiations of Vranitzky III (Ucakar, 1994:143). The government parties reached a compromise, whereby 46 electoral districts would be created, grouped in nine second-tier districts and one third-tier national district. An electoral threshold of 4% was to be established and the impact of the preference vote would be strengthened by lowering the threshold for a candidate to be elected based on preference votes from 100% to 50% (Vranitzky, 1990:2).

to be discussed (for an elaborate discussion of the Volksbegehren, see Müller, 1999). De facto, a Volksbegehren acts as a referendum in which one can only vote ‘yes’.

146 All interviews in this chapter were held in English and all quotes are unchanged, unless explicitly indicated.

147 The government was forced to introduce this legislation because the constitutional court obliged them to in its ruling of 7 October 1987 (BGBI. nr. 19/1988).
C. Reform processing stage. Behind the closed doors of the Ministry of the Interior, the civil servants at the Directorate of Elections calculated the impact of multiple proposals. The civil servants were supplemented by about three experts per party and one officer of each of the two governing parties. Robert Stein (SPO), who worked at the Directorate at that time and is now its head, describes the Department's role as follows: ‘[t]he role of [the] Directorate [of Elections] was, before 1990 and afterwards, that drafts were sent by fax or mail and we and several people in the department had to calculate, to figure out with old election results what the influence would be’ (Stein, 24.2.2009). The negotiations themselves were not along the lines of the coalition agreement:

And in the coalition agreement you could read “change of the election law for more democracy”. In practice it works differently. They had ten drafts, maybe virtual drafts, thirty ideas and three proposals and then they would say “we will ask what our party says”, but what the parties do is not to look at whether the draft would achieve more democracy, but whether the draft would lead to more seats than the other party or fewer seats. And if the draft would gain us seats, it was a good draft. But of course, the other party already knew it was a good draft for us and in that case they would oppose it. (Stein, 24.2.2009)

Just before the Summer of 1991 the government parties reached agreement and on 9 July 1991 a government proposal for a new electoral law was introduced. The proposal followed the lines of the coalition agreement. This did not mean however, that there was agreement on all details. Behind the scenes the parties kept on bargaining. In particular the nature of the electoral districts remained a matter of debate. As Stein puts it: ‘at five to 12 we thought it would be 46 districts and suddenly the number of districts changed to 43’ (Stein, 24.2.2009).

During the parliamentary debates the opposition parties opposed the reform bill. The bill was discussed by the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, since it required a constitutional change. Although the committee held its sessions behind closed doors, it was clear that at least the Greens opposed the measure during those sessions. Johannes Voggenhuber, the Green MP on the committee, introduced an alternative electoral reform proposal (cf. Nationalrat, 10.7.1992c). In comparison to the original proposal, the Greens were against the electoral threshold, as this would disadvantage the smaller parties. Voggenhuber even thought that this introduction of the threshold was the primary aim of the government (Nationalrat, 10.7.1992c:50).

148 Indeed, an amendment to the electoral reform bill on 10 July 1992, when the bill was finally voted upon, revealed in points 5 and 6 that the boundaries and number of electoral districts were changed at the very last minute (Nationalrat, 10.7.1992b).
Table 5.1: Reform timetable

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Stage</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-reform phase</td>
<td>Late 1970s-1986</td>
<td>• Calls by predominantly ÖVP and to a lesser extent SPÖ to increase the link between citizens and their MPs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21.1.1987</td>
<td>• Democratic reform featured prominently in the coalition agreement of Vranitzky II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>December 1987</td>
<td>• A first attempt at electoral reform failed due to opposition from and largely within the ÖVP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27.7.1989</td>
<td>• A direct democratic reform was implemented (introduction Volksbefragung)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>December 1989</td>
<td>• Electoral reform failed again: ÖVP wanted a more majoritarian system than the SPÖ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform initiation</td>
<td>17.12.1990</td>
<td>• Vranitzky III was formed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Coalition agreement included new electoral system proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform process</td>
<td>9.7.1991</td>
<td>• Bill number 180 was introduced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stage</td>
<td>July 1991 → July 1992</td>
<td>• Behind the scenes the government parties kept discussing the details of the electoral reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final vote</td>
<td>10.7.1992</td>
<td>• The reform proposal was voted on in the Lower House. The government parties voted in favour, the opposition against. Last-minute adjustments were made regarding the number of electoral districts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15.7.1992</td>
<td>• The Upper House raised no objection to the reform proposal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Greens also wanted a lower threshold for a candidate to be elected through preference votes (15% of the electoral quota, compared to the 50% of the government proposal) and the introduction of panachage whereby one could vote for a party and a candidate (even one from a different party) at the same time (Nationalrat, 10.7.1992c:49-50). FPÖ-speaker Frischenschlager was also against the reform proposal and preferred the status quo over the current plans (cf. Nationalrat, 10.7.1992a:8639).

D. Final Vote. The reform proposal was voted upon in the Lower House on 10 July 1992. The final version differed slightly from the original. However, this did not mean that complaints and suggestions from the opposition had been taken into account. The last-minute adjustments were mainly related to the number of electoral districts (cf. footnote 147; Nationalrat, 10.7.1992b). The reform proposal was accepted by the government parties with the opposition voting against it. Subsequently, it was sent to the Upper House, where shortly afterwards, on 15 July 1991, it was briefly discussed. No objections were raised by the Upper House, which de facto meant it was approved (Bundesrat, 15.7.1992:26600).

5.2.2 Explaining the 1992 electoral reform
At first sight the Vranitzky III reforms seem fairly straightforward. They comply with
Renwick's reform through elite-majority imposition. The most substantial elements, specifically the three-tier system, benefited the government parties and the overall reform was accepted by the government against the wishes of the opposition. However, the reform was brought in at a moment when public dissatisfaction was growing, and traditionally this is seen as a factor that prohibits reform through elite-majority imposition. After all, under such circumstances politicians risk being severely punished by the voters. Secondly, as Müller (2005:399) notes: 'the SPO and the ÖVP had the ability to squeeze the opposition parties. Yet, this was not the case.' It seems plausible that growing public dissatisfaction and the relatively moderate 'manipulation' of the electoral system were connected. As I will show, this was indeed the case, yet in a more subtle way than might be expected: the government parties did try to implement far more self-interested measures and probably used the lowering of the preference threshold as a distraction.

A. Assessing the self-interest of the parties. The 1992 electoral reform consisted of three important changes to the prior electoral law:

1. It introduced an electoral threshold of 4%.

2. A ‘three-tier’-system (43 ‘regional’ and nine provincial districts and one national district) was established. In the national district the seats are distributed according to the D'Hondt system. However, as opposed to the previous electoral system, not only remainder votes but all votes for all seats are included in the calculation;

3. The preference threshold was lowered to 50% or one sixth of the party vote (at the regional level); at the provincial level the preference threshold is 100%.

As Renwick (2010:16) notes, the public is rarely passionate about the small details or the complexities of an electoral system. Indeed, the second aspect of the new electoral system (the ‘three-tier’ system) is very likely to be too complex to outrage or charm public opinion. It is a reform about which one could say that it 'looks neither good nor bad' because ordinary citizens simply 'do not look'. The act of supporting or initiating such an element is thus very unlikely to have electoral consequences. Supporting the first and the third elements is however, more likely to attract attention from the public (and the media). Introducing an electoral threshold means that the choice of the voters is diluted, because smaller parties risk being excluded from parliament. The third element, the reduction in the preference threshold, on the other hand granted citizens more influence over the selection of parliamentarians. As Stein puts it: '[i]t looks nice' (Stein, 24.2.2009), because, as his deputy Gregor Wenda, added: 'it is in line with “more democracy”' (Wenda, 24.2.2009).

Regarding the consequences of the electoral reform, the motivations to support or oppose it are quite different. The ‘three-tier’ system is not neutral. Particularly the third-level distribution based on the D'Hondt electoral formula benefits parties that enter the calculations

149 To be exact, a second alternative threshold is that a party is allowed into the second- and third-tier seat distribution when it gets at least one first-tir ‘regional seat’ (Müller, 2005:402). However, the effective threshold in these regional districts is extremely high because the electoral quota used to calculate the seat distribution in the ‘regional’ districts is actually calculated at the second-tier, provincial level - not at the far smaller ‘regional’ level. This means that the number of votes needed to get a seat is very high. In practice, smaller parties never even come close to winning a seat at the regional level. Hence, the nationwide electoral threshold is de facto the most important threshold.

150 Before the 1992 reform there was an effective threshold in the period 1970-1990 of 2.7% (Müller, 2006b:287).
with a large number of votes. When only remainder votes are taken into account, as was the case in the past, there is no great difference between the parties (Müller, 2005:407-408), but when all votes are included it benefits the larger parties (Gallagher and Mitchell, 2005:589). Certainly, the number of seats distributed in the third tier is fairly low – on average only 13.1% of the seats (Müller, 2005:405) – but nevertheless this measure benefits the larger parties. A second element in the three-tier system that the larger parties thought would be to their benefit is the greater number of districts. The larger parties thought smaller parties would be unable to field well-known candidates in all 43 districts, while they, on the other hand, had enough such candidates (Müller, 2005:400; see also Nationalrat, 10.07.1992:8648).

The electoral threshold obviously has advantages for the larger parties, since it protects them both from new parties entering parliament and from splinter parties defecting from their own ranks. The FPO, which at that time had already exceeded the threshold convincingly, could expect the same benefits. It was however particularly for the Greens that the threshold could be a mixed blessing. In 1992 they had polled 4.78%, which was above the threshold. Moreover, if the party were to grow and new or splinter parties failed to reach the threshold, this could also benefit the Greens. Lastly, at the time a Green splinter party, the VGÖ, was seeking alliances to survive (Müller, 2005:406) and as the threshold would make it even more unlikely it would gain a parliamentary seat this would be a further incentive for it to join forces with its most likely partner, the Greens. On the other hand, the Greens were still in the danger zone and actually had lost some votes in the 1990 election (Sully, 1991:78). Hence, it would not take very much for the party to fall below the threshold.

The last element of the electoral reform, the decrease in the preference threshold, has somewhat more subtle consequences. By itself it does not damage the seat shares of parties. However, for both larger parties – and especially the factionalized ÖVP – preferences votes can disturb the delicate balance between the candidates on the list. As Stein puts it, the measure disadvantaged ‘especially parties who are divided into wings, because they don’t want voters to break the balance between these wings’ (Stein, 24.2.2009). The two opposition parties, the Greens and the FPO, also had factions, but these were far less institutionalized and overall there were also simply fewer (Dachs, 2006:395-399; Luther, 2006:374-376). Therefore the measure would first and foremost threaten the two government parties. Interestingly, the package deal thus included an element that was difficult to sell to the electorate but that had favourable consequences for the government parties (the electoral threshold), while at the same time it also included an element that was easy to sell to the electorate but that had negative consequences for the government parties (the decrease in the

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151 In practice this meant the following: on average the Greens are overrepresented by 0.1%, but the largest party, the SPÖ, is overrepresented by 1.2% (Müller, 2005:408).
152 In fact, the Greens always proved too small to gain from the measure (Müller, 2005:406), but that was unknown at the time.
153 In practice this did indeed partially work out this way, as part of the VGÖ deserted to the Greens (Müller, 2005:407).
154 One can also consider the introduction of the regional districts as a reform affecting the system of preference voting, as citizens were now allowed to cast a preference vote at both the regional and the provincial level, a point that also could be sold as ‘more democracy’.
155 Both parties are factionalized, but the ÖVP is more so than the SPÖ. For an overview of the internal structure of parties, see Müller, 2006c:349-353 and Ucakar, 2006:328-329 respectively.
156 The Greens had a progressive and a conservative faction and the FPÖ had a conservative liberal and a nativist faction (Dachs, 2006:397-399, Luther, 2006:374-376).
preference threshold). Table 5.2 summarizes the act- and outcome-contingent motivations for each of the three elements of the electoral reform.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Threshold</th>
<th>Act</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Three tiers</th>
<th>Act</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Pref. threshold</th>
<th>Act</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gvt.</td>
<td>SPÖ</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ÖVP</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opp.</td>
<td>FPÖ</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greens</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After having established the self-interest of the parties, I now turn to the actual explanation of the reform. I will first explain the introduction of the reform proposal, after which I will discuss its approval. Lastly, I will consider whether and to what extent this was a reform predominantly driven by self-interest.

B. Explaining the introduction of the reform proposals. The original reform proposal of 1987 seems to have been a question of ‘agenda management’, an answer to calls from the media and intellectuals for a clear sign that the return of the grand coalition would not mean squeezing the opposition (Müller, 2005:400). The government parties recognized the electoral damage that this could do and therefore initiated a reform proposal (Müller, 2005:399-400). Indeed, while Austrians ‘are not revolutionary’, as Klaus Poier describes it (12.8.2010), public dissatisfaction can still substantially hurt the political parties indirectly. What happened especially from 1986 onwards was that turnout began to decline (thereby undermining the legitimacy of the elections), party membership halved and votes for new parties were rising (cf. Müller, 2006c; Ucakar, 2006 and Luther, 2006). However, these trends were only starting to occur in 1986. Public dissatisfaction manifested itself even more strongly in the 1990 elections. The turnout decreased from 88% to 83% - in Vienna it even dropped even 13% to 69% - and the FPÖ once again grew substantially (Sully, 1991:77). Additionally, the elections were a disaster for the ÖVP, whose share of the votes declined by 9.23% (a fourth of its previous votes) (Sully, 1991:78). As a result, the catalysts of the 1987 reform agenda were even more present in 1990. Also electoral reform, once on the

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157 An analysis of the media coverage also confirms this. For instance the largest Austrian newspaper, the Kronen Zeitung, only mentioned the lowering of the preference threshold (Kindermann, 11.7.1992), while Der Standard mentioned the electoral threshold, the lowering of the preference threshold and the number of 43 districts, but not the three-tiers (Vecs/APA, 11/12.7.1992). It disproved the threshold, but was positive of the lowering of the preference threshold (Vecsei, 11/12.7.1992).

158 Media articles of that period indeed indicate that this was the case. For instance, during the coalition negotiations the newspaper Kronen Zeitung said: ‘the SPÖ and the ÖVP have to be aware that there will be no praise for this coalition and the shadow of patronage and particularity will always be present’ (Kindermann, 1.1.1987). The government also anticipated on this and told the press that ‘the new red-black coalition has nothing to do with the old grand coalitions’ (Vranitzky cited in Kindermann, 29.1.1987).

159 Studies of Austrian political participation label Austrians ‘restless citizens, but stoical Austrians’, since their actions are limited to protest voting (Ulram, 2006:517).

160 It should thus not come as a surprise that especially the ÖVP wanted a higher electoral threshold. The party suffered from infighting in the 1990s, during which ‘the Business League’ wanted to split from the ÖVP. However, they decided it was too risky because of the electoral threshold (Müller, 2005:407).
political agenda, gives parties an opportunity to optimize the electoral system to their advantage. Clearly, as the reconstruction of the debate has shown, such motivations played a role in the Vranitzky II and III reform debates. By once again scheduling electoral reform in 1990 the government parties were able to kill two birds with one stone: they could claim to be addressing public dissatisfaction and at the same time could try to optimize the electoral system for their benefit.

C. Explaining the approval of the proposal. In practice, however, the issue was trickier than it seems. As long as electoral reform was on the agenda, each party could try to mould the electoral system to its advantage, but it also risked losing seats if it did not pay attention to the other government party. After all, both government parties were trying to optimize the electoral system for their own benefit, mostly at the expense of the other party. Hence agenda management, in this case getting the topic off the government agenda, was also an impetus for finishing the reform process. In 1991, at a point when there was a proposal that benefited both government parties slightly, they decided to put the reform to a vote, even though their benefits had not been optimized. At least in this way they did not risk being damaged by the reform. As Erhard Busek (OVP) recalls: 'there was the idea that if the reform discussion kept going on, nobody knows the result and so I thought let's do something because some things were moving out of order or in the wrong direction' (Busek, 4.8.2009).

D. Strong democracy? Explaining the mixed nature of the reform. Increasing public dissatisfaction triggered the reform and contributed to keeping it on the agenda. It also delineated the borders by imposing legitimacy constraints: the reform had to strengthen the relationship between the voter and the MPs one way or another. Unlike the 1960s and 1970s, especially from 1990 onwards the government parties were not free to introduce a tailor-made electoral system, because this could entail voter retaliation. It should thus not come as a surprise that the package deal includes a ‘pro-democracy’ measure, namely the lowering of the preference threshold. However, the government parties did try to reduce its impact in significant ways. First, the preference threshold is still very high. Second, and more importantly, as Stein puts it, ‘the parties prohibit the individual candidates from campaigning for themselves’ (Stein, 24.2.2009). Therefore, this means that the government parties did not want the measure to have a significant impact. Both aspects explain how the government parties dealt with the trade-off between act-contingent and outcome-contingent motivations. The lowering of the preference threshold was thus first and foremost a symbolic measure. It did not strengthen ‘democracy’, to use the Vranitzky III coalition agreement wording, in a significant way, but did respond to demands from the media and intellectuals who were worried about the lack of a direct relationship between MPs and the(ir) voters. It was harmless, but useful. Additionally, the measure could also function as a distraction. After all, especially the subtle rise in the electoral threshold, which was harder to sell to the electorate, was less the centre of attention due to the lowering of the preference threshold.

161 For instance, between 1994 and 2002 only two MPs were elected through preference votes (Müller, 2005:409).
162 The 1989 Volksbefragung law and other changes to direct democratic instruments included in the original reform package of Vranitzky II can also be seen as such measures. Additionally, the reform whereby the threshold for introducing a bill in parliament is reduced from eight to five MPs is also a symbolic measure (Müller, 1999). After all, a bill introduced by the opposition is typically ignored or voted down by the government parties, so this reform is ‘harmless’.
To sum up, the Vranitzky III reform was a mixture of subtle self-interested reform elements and a symbolic measure to appease the general public mood. The public and media dissatisfaction opened a window of opportunity for the government parties to tinker with the electoral system, but it at the same time limited their options because the reform had to include some strengthening of the contact between MPs and voters.163

5.3 Schüssel I: ‘An important democratic reform’?

After the Vranitzky III reform, democratic reform was never really off the political agenda. From 1993 onwards the FPÖ kept calling for reform. In 2000 the party finally came into office and a reform proposal including postal voting (for both those living abroad and residents) and the citizen-initiated referendum was introduced.

5.3.1 Reconstruction of the debate

A. Historical roots of the debate. The Schüssel I reform bill included two important elements, the introduction of postal voting and the transformation of public initiative into a genuine citizen-initiated referendum. Postal voting had been on the political agenda since 1989 - the year when suffrage for Austrians living abroad was introduced, but the legislation was very restrictive. Slightly more Austrians abroad who do vote, vote for the ÖVP (Sully, 1991:79). Hence, it should come as no surprise that the ÖVP was in favour of a more open procedure in the form of postal voting. However, the SPÖ opposed the measure, which prevented it having a chance of being implemented. The second element, a genuine citizen-initiated referendum, also came to prominence during the late 1980s. It was first demanded by the Greens, who already favoured it in the 1980s. However, from 1993 onwards it also became an important demand of the FPÖ. In his vision of a Third Republic, Haider outlined an important role for a strong executive, such as a strong president and directly-elected regional governors, combined with a genuine citizen-initiated referendum (cf. FPÖ, 1994:23-25 and 33-34). Both elements also became official FPÖ policy demands in 1997, when they were enshrined in the Linzer Programm (see FPÖ, 1997:16-17). The SPÖ had always been against such measures and although the ÖVP had in the past called for more democracy, from the 1990s on it became far more hesitant and dropped the issue (cf. ÖVP, 1990:27 versus ÖVP, 1994).

B. Initiation of the reform debate. In the elections of October 1999 the FPÖ achieved a resounding electoral victory. It finished second and outpolled the ÖVP (although by a mere 415 votes). This was an important psychological landmark for both parties (Müller, 2000:191). After deadlocked coalition talks with the SPÖ, which was the largest party in 1999, the ÖVP decided to opt for the FPÖ in order to form a government. Although the FPÖ had received more votes than the ÖVP, it was the latter that captured the Chancellorship (Müller, 2000:197). The government included six ÖVP and six FPÖ ministers. This seemed to indicate that the parties were equal, but de facto the FPÖ was the junior party. Not only did the ÖVP attain the Chancellorship, they also bargained more successfully and were able to

163 It is difficult to say whether the leeway for the parties to introduce a majoritarian element in the electoral system was more limited under Vranitzky III than under Vranitzky II. After all, by 1990 it was clear that introducing such a majoritarian element was opposed by the MPs of the two major parties, because they feared that they would not be re-elected in single-member districts (cf. Müller, 2005:400). Given the 1990 elections, it seems likely that the room for manoeuvre had shrunk - and the recourse to complex subtle manipulations also points to less leeway - but nevertheless I cannot be sure whether it was public dissatisfaction that made the politicians more cautious and restrained.
have more impact on the coalition agreement (De Lange, 2008:180). Nevertheless, the coalition agreement of Schüssel I included some elements of Haider’s vision of a Third Republic. Most importantly, it included a chapter on ‘strong democracy’ (Schüssel, 2000:12-18). One of the measures in that chapter was the introduction of the citizen-initiated referendum. This was to be done by amending the law on the Volksbegehren. Other elements of the chapter reflected the interests of the ÖVP (most notably postal voting provision). However, both measures required a two-thirds majority, which the government by itself did not have. The government thus needed the support of the SPÖ.

C. The processing phase. On 1 March 2000, just one month after the government was formed, it initiated a bill [bill 98/A (XXI. GP)] which aimed to introduce postal voting and the citizen-initiated referendum. The bill was referred to the Committee of Constitutional Affairs. Unfortunately, this committee holds its meetings behind closed doors, but the press release afterwards nevertheless gives some insight into what was discussed during the meeting and what the positions of the parties were. The press release, quoting Peter Kostelka, the leader of the SPÖ’s parliamentary group (and the chairman of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs), stated that the bills discussed in the committee ‘include some interesting parts’, but found the electoral reform parts ‘very selective’ and not sufficient and therefore Kostelka believed that the SPÖ would bring in additions and amendments (Nationalrat, 13.4.2000).

A second piece of information about the processing phase that is available is the timeline of the bill. This shows that the bill was only discussed once before its first expiry deadline. Apparently the issue dropped off the agenda quickly after the first meeting as it was clear that no compromise would be reached. Nevertheless, the bill was kept alive and the deadline to discuss it kept being extended. There were two deadline extensions and three ‘pre-meetings’ were held on the subject (which are legally required every six months), but it was never again scheduled for a real meeting.

The press releases issued after the extensions of the deadline reveal a last bit of information. The first was the most elaborate. It clearly shows that the tensions between the opposition and the government had risen significantly. The ÖVP co-author of the bill, Andreas Khol, ‘accuses the chairman of the Committee of Constitutional Affairs Kostelka (SPÖ) of having failed to answer requests from the government parties to put the issue on the agenda’. He also accused Kostelka of linking the issue to other unrelated issues. The SPÖ replied by saying that the government had not been willing to set up a subcommittee on animal rights or discuss minority rights for the opposition parties in parliament. The Green MP included on the committee added that he doubted the sincerity of the government parties regarding direct democracy. He pointed to three public initiatives which all met the requirements of the proposed reform bill and drew attention to the fact that the government refused to turn these into referendums (Nationalrat, 31.1.2001). In contrast to the press release after the first extension of the expiry date, those after the second show that no discussions were held on the topic (Nationalrat, 6.6.2001). To sum up, the bill became a zombie bill, since it was clear that (a) no compromise could be found but (b) nevertheless the bill would not be voted on or allowed to expire.

164 Interestingly, the FPÖ dropped its pledge to increase the personalization of the electoral system and, more importantly, its pledge to create a strong executive after it had bad experiences with President Klestil (Fallend, 2002:909).

165 The Greens were too small to provide the seats needed to reach the two-thirds majority.
Table 5.3: Reform timetable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-reform phase</td>
<td>1986-1999</td>
<td>• The Greens favour a citizen-initiated referendum, but SPO and ÖVP opposed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1989-1999</td>
<td>• Public calls for the introduction of postal voting by the ÖVP in the media, but SPÖ opposed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>• Haider (FPÖ) call for a ‘Third Republic’ with a strong executive and far-reaching direct democratic provisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>• Approval of the so-called ‘Linzner Programm’ as the ideological foundation of the FPÖ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Programme included: ‘the chance to start the referendum process by the electorate’ (FPÖ, 1997:16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform initiation</td>
<td>3.2.2000</td>
<td>• The Schüssel I government formed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Coalition agreement including postal voting and citizen-initiated referendum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform process stage</td>
<td>1.3.2000</td>
<td>Bill number 98/A introduced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.4.2000</td>
<td>• Bill discussed in the Committee of Constitutional Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• After first session, some behind-the-scenes talks on the bill took place, but no compromise could be reached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31.1.2001</td>
<td>• Bill becomes a ‘zombie bill’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.5.2001</td>
<td>Deadline for the bill to become invalid extended (+ press release)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.6.2001</td>
<td>First pre-meeting of the Committee of Constitutional Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.12.2001</td>
<td>The deadline once again extended (until 30 June 2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.5.2002</td>
<td>Second pre-meeting of the Committee of Constitutional Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30.6.2002</td>
<td>Third pre-meeting of the Committee of Constitutional Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bill expires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final vote</td>
<td>[None]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.2 Explaining the Schüssel I non-reform

A. Establishing the self-interest of the parties. Of the two elements in the coalition agreement, postal voting and the citizen-initiated referendum, postal voting is the easiest to assess in terms of self-interest. The mere act of supporting postal voting is unlikely to have a major influence on a party’s electoral support. The media were divided on the issue but, as Klaus Poier (ÖVP) highlights, ‘[t]he media would discuss it as a principle thing, but they would always say that the parties are only focused on their self-interest’ (Poier, 12.8.2010). Regarding the consequences of the reform, at that time the idea was that especially better educated voters would make use of it and these tended to vote for the Greens and the ÖVP, a reasoning that was also supported by the available analyses of actual votes from abroad (Sully, 1991:79). Not surprisingly, these two parties supported the measure, while the SPO

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166 This is also confirmed when analysing the news coverage when postal voting was eventually implemented in 2007. For instance some media, while applauding the measure, still labelled it a result of ‘horse trading between government parties’ (Prüller, 5.6.2007).
As far as the citizen-initiated referendum was concerned, the act of supporting the measure could be more beneficial. The largest newspaper, the *Kronen Zeitung*, especially, often vehemently campaigned for or against a Volksbegehren. Thus the newspaper had a big influence over the success of public initiatives. As Stein puts it: ‘If they get the *Kronen Zeitung* to support the Volksbegehren, it will have one million or more signatures, because they advertise it’ (Stein, 24.2.2009). Hence, not only could a citizen-initiated referendum empower citizens, it could also give the media more influence. Therefore it was unlikely that the *Kronen Zeitung*, at least, would oppose a citizen-initiated referendum. Citizens themselves also supported more direct democracy. The percentage of Austrians favouring a democracy with more substantial direct democratic provisions was fairly stable and hovered around 66% (Ulram, 2006:518). The citizen-initiated referendum itself could, however, be a threat to the government parties. After all, it could also be used by the opposition. Particularly in Austria, where party membership was and is unusually high, it would be fairly easy for a party to mobilize enough support to trigger a referendum (cf. Müller, 1999).

To sum up, the government parties had an incentive to support the citizen-initiated referendum because it looked good and was supported by the media and a clear majority of Austrians, but at the same time they had an incentive to block it because it could work against them.

B. Explaining the introduction of the bill. There is some evidence that points in the direction of the two government parties, the FPÖ and the ÖVP, being able to carry out this balancing act between act-contingent (to initiate and support the bill) and outcome-contingent motivations (to prevent it from becoming a law). Indeed, the government parties only commanded 104 of the 183 seats in the Nationalrat, while they needed 123 votes to reach the required two-thirds majority. The Greens, who were openly in favour of the citizen-initiated referendum, only had 14 seats, so SPÖ votes were necessary to pass the bill. The SPÖ had always been vehemently opposed to more direct democracy and, as Klaus Poier (ÖVP) puts it, it was clear that ‘the SPÖ was openly against’ (Poier, 12.8.2010). It was thus highly unlikely that the SPÖ would agree unless significant concessions were made. In practice, this was indeed the case. As Gusenbauer (SPÖ, 28.2.2011) explains: ‘the citizen-initiated referendum at that time did not find the support of the SPÖ for three reasons. The majority of the SPÖ politicians thought that it would increase the role of the media even further. The second reason was that a few issues would dominate the entire political agenda and the third was that it further reduced the role of the parliament’.

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167 Alfred Gusenbauer (28.2.2011), who was the SPÖ- and opposition-leader at the time, also explicitly acknowledges that this played an important role: ‘the reasoning was a very traditional one, namely that it favoured the ÖVP.’

168 This is also confirmed by Stein (24.2.2009): ‘And there has been an important change in the Volksbegehren. It was possible to introduce the Volksbegehren by 8 MPs and this possibility has been dropped. But for a political party in parliament in 2 or 3 days they have these signatures. A peculiarity of Austria is the high percentage of members of parties. (...) They make a circular e-mail and within a few days they have them. Which means that cancelling the possibility of introducing a Volksbegehren by getting signatures of 8 MPs, it is not a big deal for the parties’.

169 Gusenbauer (28.2.2011) himself did support the citizen-initiated referendum because ‘first of all the role of parliament and government would still be huge in formulating the questions and pivoting the issue in a proper direction. And what I liked about the idea is that it would have lead to a remobilization of the political class, which in my opinion was quite lazy’. The position of the SPO (as a party) was, however, that it was against the
But why did the ÖVP agree to the measure during the coalition negotiations in the first place? As Martin Graf (FPÖ) believes, the reform package ‘was in the coalition agreement to show our political will’ (Graf, 17.8.2010). He also adds that ‘I myself presume that the ÖVP agreed easily on this issue during the coalition negotiations, KJ, knowing that for the bill they will need a two-thirds majority which at this stage is not yet feasible’. Indeed, the ÖVP - which was against the citizen-initiated referendum during the 1999 election campaign - could easily agree on the issue during the coalition negotiations because it would never be approved anyway (cf. ÖVP, 1999). Poier also acknowledges this: the reform bill ‘was certainly symbolic because it was clear that they would be unable to implement that’ (Poier, 12.8.2010). This ‘concession’ to the FPÖ also had other advantages. The party could appear in favour of more democracy and market its own project, postal voting, by linking it to the citizen-initiated referendum. Furthermore, the failure of the bill could be blamed on the SPÖ, thereby exposing that party to negative publicity.

C. Explaining the failure of the reform bill. The available evidence indeed hints at such a ‘blame game’. The SPÖ did not openly oppose the reform bill – Kostelka (SPÖ) just said that the bill included ‘some interesting parts’, but found the electoral reform ‘very selective’ (Nationalrat, 13.4.2000). In saying so Kostelka did not openly discard the citizen-initiated referendum. He also hinted that he wanted to construct a package deal by saying that he expected the SPÖ members of the committee to introduce amendments to the bill (Nationalrat, 13.4.2000). After the debate on the extension of the deadline for the bill, it became clear that the opposition demanded two things in return for discussing the bill: the setting-up of a subcommittee for animal rights within the Committee of Constitutional Affairs and the opening of discussions on minority rights for the opposition. The government parties refused both. Nevertheless, the government parties accused the SPÖ of obstructing ‘such an important bill’ by linking it to other ‘unimportant matters’ (Nationalrat, 13.4.2000). Yet if the concessions were that unimportant and if the government was serious about its reform package, why then refuse them? It could have at least set up the requested subcommittee or started discussions on minority rights. It did neither. All this seems to indicate that the government was not really willing to fight for its reform bill, just eager to blame the opposition for its failure.

Actions by the government in other domains also support the presumption that the government did nothing to show its willingness to negotiate with the opposition. On the contrary, it alienated the SPÖ from the beginning. The government devoted a lot of attention to socio-economic and administrative reforms (Minkenberg, 2001:15). In its first two years in office it hurried through a so-called ‘depoliticization’ or ‘democratization’ of the Austrian corporatist bodies. Traditionally these were politically appointed and included members of the two biggest parties, the SPÖ and the ÖVP. In practice, however, the reforms meant ‘repoliticization’ rather than ‘depoliticization’, as several corporatist bodies were simply ‘cleansed’ and SPÖ members were replaced by FPÖ members (Fallend, 2003:906-908). This move was seen by the SPÖ as a very hostile act and raised tensions between the government and the opposition (Müller and Fallend, 2004).

There are three other pieces of circumstantial evidence that hint at the lack of determination of the two government parties regarding the reform bill: the actual usage of the existing initiative proposal: ‘So I was sympathetic for this proposal, but the vast majority of the party was not. The official position was against’.
provisions and the blocking of other referendum proposals. Regarding the use of existing public initiative provisions, from the moment it came into government the FPÖ changed its use of the Volksbegehren instrument. Indeed, between 1987 and 1999 the FPO initiated no fewer than six public initiatives, but during the Schüssel era from 1999 to 2006 it only initiated one Volksbegehren, the Temelin initiative, on an issue on which it disagreed with the ÖVP (Fallend, 2003:912). Additionally, one of the first things the FPÖ did when Haider left and the party returned to opposition was to initiate a Volksbegehren (‘Österreich bleib frei!’) against the EU and against Turkey joining the EU (BMI, 2010, http://www.bmi.gv.at/cms/BMI_wahlen/volksbegehren/Alle_Volksbegehren.aspx ). Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the government parties blocked all referendum requests that conformed to the criteria of the reform bill (Nationalrat, 31.1.2001). Lastly, the ÖVP later ‘did not raise the topic anymore when [the SPO and the OVP] negotiated over the 2007 democracy package’ (Gusenbauer, 28.2.2011).

D. Conclusion: self-interest versus principled motivations. Virtually all the available evidence contradicts the theory that the government parties genuinely wanted to implement the reform bill. Indeed, if the government really wished to do this, it is striking that the issue was so easily abandoned after its introduction and that the government parties were unwilling to grant even small concessions to the opposition. The ÖVP-FPÖ coalition seemed more keen to attack the corporatist bulwarks of the social democrats while using a discourse of democratization, than on implementing ‘genuine’ democratization (cf. Fallend, 2003:907). Additionally, there are no signs that the ÖVP leadership ever abandoned its original opposition and really wanted to implement the direct democracy part of the bill. Regarding the FPO, most evidence also points in the direction of the party at that time in fact being against the extension of the direct democratic legislation and that it only supported direct democracy for strategic rather than principled reasons. The only evidence supporting the hypothesis that the parties were serious about the reform bill would be the Temelin initiative, but this was not supported by the ÖVP. It was actually done against the will of the party and is more likely to show the growing tensions between the government parties than being a sign of the government genuinely wanting to implement more direct democracy. All in all, even the Temelin initiative indicates that populism was more a strategic tool for the FPO than an ideology. In short, the government parties seem to have been driven by act-contingent, self-interested motivations, in which the high procedural barrier (i.e. the two-thirds majority needed), can explain both the initiation and the failure of the reform bill.

170 The initiative dealt with taking a stand on the building of a nuclear power plant in the Czech Republic in a location near the Austrian border.
171 Klaus Poier gives another clear example of the behind-the-scenes opposition of the ÖVP to direct democracy during the Schüssel era. He describes the following event, that took place during the ‘closed doors’ negotiations on direct democracy at the Österreich Konvent, a large-scale convention on constitutional reform established by the Schüssel II government: ‘It was crazy because I was the representative of the ÖVP and I had to be against direct democracy because it was the party line - although I am personally in favour of it. So we sat there and said “personally we are in favour of more direct democracy but the ÖVP will not agree”’ (Poier, 12.8.2010). This depiction fundamentally disagrees with the Schüssel II coalition agreement, where once again the government pledges to introduce more direct democracy (Schüssel, 2003:2)
5.4 Gusenbauer: An unexpected ‘democracy package’

New reform discussions already started during the Schüssel II government. Particularly during the large-scale constitutional conference (the so-called Österreich Konvent) the topic was discussed, albeit not prominently (Poier, 2005:182-183). Some two years later, on 21 June 2007, the Bundesrat, the Austrian Upper House, voted on and passed a minor electoral reform, ‘democracy package’, which echoed elements discussed at the Österreich Konvent. The reform bill included three major elements (Khol and Westenthaler, 2007:1):

- The lowering of the voting age from 18 to 16
- The introduction of postal voting
- The extension of the electoral cycle from four to five years

The reform bill was passed at a time when public dissatisfaction was low and the government did not include either any traditionally excluded or populist or postmaterialist parties (cf. Chapter 4). So the question is, why did it pass?

5.4.1 Reconstruction of the debate

A. Historical roots of the debate. As I already noted in the previous section, the ÖVP favoured postal voting from 1990 onwards, while the SPÖ opposed it. The lowering of the voting age was less visible on the agenda, although at the end of the 1990s the FPÖ presented some bills aimed at introducing a lower voting age (cf. Nationalrat, 5.6.2007). The ÖVP, which (rightly, as it turned out) believed it would suffer from this measure, opposed it. Neither subject was ever prominently on the political agenda, since in both cases one of the big parties opposed the measure. Postal voting was included in the coalition agreement of Schüssel I, but the government lacked the necessary two-thirds majority to push it through (see above). The topic resurfaced in 2003, when the Schüssel II government decided to create a broad conference on constitutional reform, the Österreich Konvent. Democratic reform was one of the topics discussed. The deliberations on the lowering of the voting age and postal voting revealed that if the Konvent were to result in actual bills, these topics would certainly be part of it, as a package deal was within reach (Poier, 2005:183). After all, it seemed a straightforward compromise: the SPÖ wanted the lowering of the voting age, the ÖVP wanted postal voting, both reforms would affect a small number of people, so why not combine them? However, the SPÖ was in opposition at the time and in autumn 2004 it decided not to support bills resulting from the Österreich Konvent (Poier, 2005:181). Hence, a compromise was readily available, but did not materialize. The extension of the election cycle was also on the agenda of the Österreich Konvent, but the parties disagreed on the topic and it seemed less likely a compromise on this could be reached (Poier, 2006:165).

B. Initiation of the reform debate. Austrian general elections were held 1 October 2006. Surprisingly, both major parties lost votes. Yet the SPÖ was psychologically speaking the winner. It suffered from the fallout of a scandal, but performed far more strongly than expected: it only lost 1.2% and received 35.3% of the votes. The ÖVP by contrast did far worse than expected and finished with 34.3%, losing no less than 8% (Müller, 2008:177).

172 It also included two minor elements, which were seldom discussed in the media and the parliamentary debate, namely the lowering of passive suffrage for the Lower House from 19 to 18 and the simplification of the technical requirements for Austrians living abroad.
However, given that the seats were split between five parties, the only feasible coalition was another grand coalition of the two big parties, the SPO and the ÖVP. The government coalition talks were long and difficult and the new government was not sworn in until 102 days after the election. The reform agenda of the Schüssel governments was continued – a clear sign that the ÖVP had most influence over the coalition agreement (Fallend, 2008:906, see also ÖVP, 2006). This agreement already sketched the broad outlines of the 'democracy package', which indicated that a deal seemed to be within reach (Gusenbauer, 2007:27-28).

Table 5.4. Reform timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-reform phase</td>
<td>1989-1999</td>
<td>• Some calls for the introduction of the postal vote by the ÖVP, but SPO opposed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.2.2000</td>
<td>• Some calls for the lowering of the voting age by the Greens, the FPÖ and the SPO, but ÖVP opposed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28.2.2003</td>
<td>• Schüssel I government sworn in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30.6.2003</td>
<td>• Coalition agreement included introduction of the postal vote, but the government lacked the required two-thirds majority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31.1.2005</td>
<td>• Schüssel II government sworn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Coalition agreement included the founding of a constitutional conference (‘Österreich Konvent’) and the introduction of postal voting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform initiation</td>
<td>11.1.2007</td>
<td>• Gusenbauer government sworn in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Coalition agreement included a package deal with all three elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform process stage</td>
<td>12.1.2007</td>
<td>Government discussed the reform behind closed doors and reached an agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.5.2007</td>
<td>Government introduced a bill (bill 94/A) in the Lower House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.5.2007</td>
<td>Bill discussed in the Lower House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24.5.2007</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote</td>
<td>5.6.2007</td>
<td>Bill voted on and passed in the Lower House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing</td>
<td>8.6.2007</td>
<td>Bill sent to the Upper House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21.6.2007</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final vote</td>
<td>21.6.2007</td>
<td>Bill discussed and passed in the Upper House</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C. Processing phase. The government parties had already reached a compromise at the beginning of April, but tensions between the two parties briefly delayed the reform (Pink, 13.4.2007). One media account highlighted the contradiction between the government’s

173 The SPO toyed with the idea of a minority government, while the ÖVP wanted new elections or a renewed coalition with the populist radical right parties. However, none of these options proved a viable alternative to the grand coalition (Müller, 2008:178).
claims – namely that they wanted to have a wide discussion about the reform – and their intention to swiftly implement it ‘before the summer’ (Traxler, 27.4.2007). Indeed, in less than two months the reform bill was discussed and voted on in both the Lower and the Upper House (see table 5.4). The parliamentary debates were short and despite the claims made by the chairman of the SPÖ’s parliamentary group Josef Cap, who stated that he wanted to look for a broad parliamentary consensus, it was clear from the beginning that the room for manoeuvre for the opposition parties was extremely limited (Rauscher, 7.5.2007). Table 5.5 shows the positions of the five parties in parliament.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5.5. Main parties’ positions on the elements of the democracy package</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grünen</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowering voting age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postal voting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extending election cycle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ✓ = in favour; X = oppose; Source: parliamentary minutes (Nationalrat, 5.6.2007:73-87); following speakers in particular: Dr. Eva Glawischnig-Piesczek (Die Grünen) (Nationalrat, 5.6.2007:73-76); Dr. Peter Wittmann (SPÖ), (Nationalrat, 2007:76-79); Heinz-Christian Strache (FPÖ), (Nationalrat, 5.6.2007:80-82); Dr. Wolfgang Schüssel (ÖVP), (Nationalrat, 2007:82-84); Herbert Scheibner (BZÖ); (Nationalrat, 5.6.2007:84-87).

During the parliamentary debate, Chancellor Gusenbauer presented the following arguments in favour of the democracy package (Nationalrat, 5.6.2007:88-89):

> I believe that this package to reform the electoral law and Austrian democracy is a successful package, because more people will have better access to voting – in Austria itself and abroad – and moreover that in general more people will have the right to vote. This is an improvement of our democracy.

Regarding the extension of the election cycle Gusenbauer was more on the defensive.

> People say this is a weakening of democracy. But tell me, are the Austrian municipalities, which are elected every five years, less democratic than the Lower House?

At that moment FPÖ leader Strache shouted: ‘you should have shortened their election cycle!’ Gusenbauer continued and argued that governments in Austria have a mere three years to govern, given the lengthy coalition negotiations and the equally lengthy election campaigns. Furthermore, Gusenbauer also maintained that the aim of the government was to equalize the election cycles at all levels (Nationalrat, 5.6.2007:88-89). Afterwards the Minister of the Interior, Günther Platter (ÖVP), took the floor, but he did not mention extending the election cycle (Nationalrat, 5.6.2007:90-91).

D. Vote and final vote in the Upper House. One week later, on 5 June 2007, the bill was passed in the Lower House. The government parties and the BZÖ voted in favour of the whole bill, while the Greens, although they were against the extension of the election cycle, in

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174 The other two elements that were discussed during the debate were the lowering of passive suffrage from 19 to 18 and simplification or the requirements for residents abroad. All parties agreed on these proposals.
the end also voted in favour of the bill.\textsuperscript{175} Given the nature of the bill, it also had to be approved by the Upper House, which however was only allowed to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the whole package. Its power was thus limited. The debates in the Upper House were held on 21 June 2007. The discussions themselves were brief. The most important event was that the Greens changed their stance: they decided to cast a split vote (two votes for, two votes against) (Bundesrat, 21.6.2007:69). On the same day it was discussed, the bill was approved in the Upper House by half of the Greens, the BZÖ and the government parties.

After this no further democratic reforms took place, but in the aftermath of the reform discussions the Gusenbauer government did in December 2007 decide to constitutionally enshrine the composition of the corporatist bodies. This protected the SPÖ (but also the ÖVP) from ‘cleansing’ efforts like those that occurred under the Schüssel I government (Fallend, 2008:908).

5.4.2 Explaining the occurrence of the ‘democracy package’

The traditional explanation for the democracy package is that it is just a package deal, in which the SPÖ and the ÖVP traded the lowering of the voting age and the postal vote (Fallend, 2008:907-908; but the opposition parties also claimed this during the parliamentary debates).\textsuperscript{176} However, as I will show, one may wonder whether the SPÖ itself really was expecting to benefit from the lowering of the voting age. Additionally, the traditional explanation omits the extension of the election cycle.

A. A self-interested package deal? In this section I will assess what was in the self-interest of the parties based on the information that was available to them at that time. There was indeed some useful information available. Lowering the voting age to 16 had already been introduced in Vienna (from 2003 onwards) and Salzburg (in 2005) for the regional elections (Aigner, 2006:960) and the voting age for local elections had also been lowered in Vienna, Salzburg, Carinthia, Steiermark and Burgenland (Steininger, 2006:995). The Viennese case especially is crucial here, since in 2005 local elections had been held under the new rule that 16- and 17-year-olds were allowed to vote. SORA, a research institute, conducted exit poll studies of the political participation of the 16- to 18-year-olds during these elections. Its findings were widely available and were echoed by one of the SPÖ electoral reform specialists, Kurt Stürzenbecher, which means that at least some people in the SPÖ were conscious of the potential impact of the lowering of the voting age (cf. infra). The results of the SORA research were important in two ways. First, the institute discovered that voter turnout among the 16- to 18-year-olds was only marginally lower than that of the whole electorate (59\% versus 61\%), thereby invalidating claims that the young were less interested in politics and would not vote in great numbers. Second, the institute showed the party preferences of the young (see Figure 5.2). The overall picture is basically that the three main parties receive fewer votes and their losses accrue to the Greens.

\textsuperscript{175} They voted ‘against’ after the second reading, but changed their vote after the last reading (Bundesrat, 21.6.2007:37).

\textsuperscript{176} For instance, the Green MP Glawischnig-Piesczek maintained that the ÖVP had obstructed the lowering of the voting age for years and had now traded it for postal voting (Nationalrat, 5.6.2007:74).
A second, contradictory, source of information were the surveys done by the research institute Fessel GfK. As Peter Ulram, the head of the department for political research, explains about his surveys of Austrian 16- to 18-year-olds:

‘What we could predict was that it was a rich field for the opposition, but the Greens did not understand that opposition was not necessarily Green opposition. Also we knew that when the FPÖ was still a strong party, it had three real electorates: the blue-collar workers, the young people and the private sector. (...) So of course they did vote for the FPÖ.’ (Ulram, 17.2.2009)

The question is: did the SPÖ know of the (at least for them) disturbing Fessel GfK data? The answer is clearly yes: Ulram stresses that ‘[t]here is a long-standing quarrel between me and one of the social-democrat ministers about electoral behaviour of youngsters’. The empirical research showing that the young would vote anti-politically ‘was an empirical result that was simply not accepted by them’ (Ulram, 17.2.2009).

Hence, it seems that a section of the party refused to accept that the young were more likely to vote for the FPÖ. Additionally, there are reasons to believe that at least some people within the party thought that the SORA analysis was more credible than the Fessel analysis. Ulram himself indirectly states that during his discussions with the SPÖ they raised the SORA report: ‘There were some discussions on what happened in the last Viennese city elections’ (Ulram, 17.2.2009), and indeed it seems that the SPÖ put more faith in the SORA report. According to Stürzenbecher: ‘We thought that the Greens would benefit more [as predicted in the SORA report, KJ] and we were astonished that the Freedom Party had more benefit from it [in line with the Fessel data, KJ]’ (Stürzenbecher, 21.8.2009). If this is true, it means two

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177 I would like to thank Christoph Hofinger from SORA for providing me with these data.
178 Ulram also had calculations on the overall political preferences of the 16- to 18-year-olds: ‘I know from all the studies I have that the biggest party by far, either alone or together with the BZÖ, is the FPÖ. This was in the 40% category; the second party was the ÖVP (25%) and the SPÖ and Greens were in the 20% range’ (Ulram, 17.2.2009).
179 As an interesting side note: Stürzenbecher himself is a Viennese politician who was (re-)elected in the 2005 elections the SORA report deals with
things. Firstly that the party had a misperception of the consequences of lowering the voting age and secondly (and more importantly) that it did not expect to gain itself.

As regards postal voting the considerations are less clear, since less information about its impact was available. However, given that postal voting was expected to be used mostly by voters living abroad, it was expected that 'it would give a little benefit to the ÖVP and the Green party because more of their voters reside in foreign countries' (Stürzenbecher, 21.8.2009). Indeed, after the first election in which Austrians abroad were allowed to vote, the 1990 election, it became clear that 'the balance of the expatriot vote was found to be in favour of the ÖVP' (Sully, 1991:79).

Neither the lowering of the voting age nor postal voting was expected to have a big impact. In the parliamentary minutes, Schüssel (ÖVP) estimated that around 60,000 Austrians who were registered abroad could make use of the procedure (Nationalrat, 5.6.2007:83), while Chancellor Gusenbauer (SPO) estimated that between 160,000 and 180,000 youngsters would be allowed to vote (Nationalrat, 5.6.2007:88). All in all, that would constitute a maximum increase in the electorate of some 4.5%, but more likely about 3.4% given that turnout among these groups is unlikely to be 100%. To sum up, the position of the ÖVP was in agreement with their self-interest, the position of the SPÖ was not. It seems that some sections of the party simply had a misperception of the consequences or supported the measure because they had always supported it. Another section of the party, however, clearly thought that the Greens would benefit. But why would the SPÖ want to support the Greens at the expense of the other parties - including themselves? There is also a second paradox: if the reform measures were so unlikely to have major consequences, while they could also easily be sold as 'improving Austrian democracy', why then rush the reform through parliament? As I will show, this apparent inconsistency cannot be explained without discussing the third element of the package deal, the extension of the election cycle.

B. The third element in the package deal. For a long time both main parties had been frustrated by the increasing fragmentation of the party system and the suggestion of having a more majoritarian electoral system surfaced time and again (for an overview see Poier, 2009:12). Nevertheless, especially from the 1990s onwards when there were significant competitors, the senior politicians in each party seemed unwilling or afraid to implement such a major electoral reform. The most important Austrian newspaper, the Kronen Zeitung, 'is against a more majoritarian electoral system' (Poier, 12.8.2010), which constituted a significant legitimacy constraint. However, as Stürzenbecher (21.8.2009) points out, the party leadership of the big parties also liked the existing proportional system because it granted them a great deal of power over candidate selection:

Now it is easier to say 'this seat is for the farmers and this one for the trade unions and that one for a woman' and so on. The current system gives more influence to party

180 Austrians living in Austria could also use postal voting.
181 Calculations based on 230,000 extra voters - some 10,000 Austrians abroad already voted before the introduction of postal voting. The overall number of voters is derived from the 2006 election and the more realistic estimate is based on a 77% turnout - the turnout in the 2006 election (Müller, 2008:177).
182 Most of the other print media were more in favour.
headquarters. More personal elements means more impact of the voters. The leading persons in the party did not like that.183

When a more majoritarian electoral system is impossible, there are few other electoral reform options that can ease frustration with the fragmented party system. Two possibilities had been discussed in the past: raising the electoral threshold and extending the election cycle. An electoral threshold would simply eliminate the smallest parties, prevent splits and block the rise of small parties. Extending the election cycle would work in a more subtle way. After all, party fragmentation makes forming a coalition more difficult. Hence, the extension of the election cycle would reduce the number of times such government negotiations had to be held. In short, it would not address party fragmentation directly, but would soften one of its negative consequences.184 The first option was to raise the electoral threshold, as the government had done in 1992. However, this strategy was less appealing, since it would most likely only centralize the radical right voters, now split between the BZÖ and the FPÖ, in one party instead of two, with the more radical of the two, the FPÖ, as the dominant party group. Therefore, only the extension of the election cycle remained a viable option. However, it is clear that this measure only benefits the parties in government and makes the overall political system ‘less democratic’ – something that would be more difficult to sell to the opposition, the media and the public.185

C. A stand-alone extension of the election cycle versus a package deal. If we examine the arguments presented by the government parties a little closer, it becomes clear that from the beginning they were unlikely to convince the media. The arguments given by the coalition, (1) the ‘ever-extending coalition negotiations’ combined with the ‘ever-longer electoral campaign’, and (2) the harmonization of the election cycles at all levels, were vulnerable to attack. Regarding the first argument, the time needed to form a government indeed increased from on average about 60 days to about 100 days from Vranitzky V onwards, but after all that is only just over a month longer. Additionally, there is little evidence that electoral campaigns lasted so much longer than in the past (Müller, 2000; Müller, 2004; Müller, 2008). Thus, the statement by the government politicians that recently the election cycle in practice only was three years, exaggerated the situation. The second argument could also be countered on several grounds: (a) there was little reason why the election cycles should be harmonized, since all these elections were held on separate dates anyway,186 (b) some local and regional election cycles were six rather than five years – these were not changed - and (c) one could

183 This reasoning is also echoed by the former Vice-Chancellor Erhard Busek (ÖVP) when he describes his motivations regarding the 1992 electoral reform: ‘I think if the [electoral] system is dividing (...) all the candidates at the lower tiers, than the [national] party headquarters have no chance to bring someone in’ (Busek, 4.8.2009).

184 Extending the election cycle would not reduce the number of parties included in a government or in parliament. It would also not reduce the number of governments falling early. However, it would increase the ‘spoils of office’ for parties in government, as they could be in office for a longer period. Hence, although the gains were modest, they were clear and unambiguous.

185 After all, there would be fewer elections.

186 Gusenbauer (28.2.2011) raised the objection that: ‘The reason why we agreed on this extension was basically that in Austria normally you are permanently campaigning because of the non-concurrent regional elections all the time. These types of elections are blocking the decision making process. Therefore I said that the time you can govern is so limited that in order to facilitate a more solid type of government it is good to have one extra year of government.’ Nevertheless, this does not explain why one necessarily needs to extend the election cycle rather than harmonizing the regional elections.
also harmonize the election cycles by making them all four years instead of five. As a stand-alone reform, these arguments would thus probably have been difficult to sell to the opposition, the media and the wider public.'

As part of a broader democracy package, extending the election cycle was somewhat more difficult to oppose. First of all, the opposition parties were confused and did not know what to focus on, as was most clearly seen in the volatile voting record of the Greens: in the Nationalrat they twice voted in favour of the bill and once opposed it, while in the Bundesrat they had a split vote. A stand-alone reform of extending the election cycle would probably be opposed, as is acknowledged by the general secretary of the Greens, Michaela Sburny: 'They knew we would agree with it [the electoral reform package, KJ]. It’s a classic political thing. Normally if they do that [extending the election cycle, KJ], we vote against it. In this case we thought, well this is so important to us that younger people can vote, so we approved’ (Sburny, 26.8.2009). But the Greens were also caught by surprise. The whole reform ‘was really fast and there was not really a discussion about it. The Greens did not discuss it extensively at that time. We had a big discussion afterwards, after it had been in parliament and we got hostile comments that we had agreed with the Khol thing [the alleged ÖVP-architect of the democracy package, KJ] without a big discussion’ (Sburny, 26.8.2009). The FPÖ was less supportive but also held back, because it had been demanding the lowering of the voting age since 1999 (Nationalrat, 5.6.2007:80). Lastly, the BZÖ supported the bill. Their position can be explained by at least two reasons. First, they had supported the extension of the election cycle and postal voting earlier during Schüssel II - when they themselves were in government - and probably wanted to appear consistent. Second, it is likely that they wanted to appear ‘government-worthy’, because after all at that time they had been out of office for only four months and during the negotiations after the 2006 election the ÖVP had made clear that it wanted to govern with them rather than with the SPÖ (Müller, 2008:178).

The media were equally confused and taken by surprise. The Kronen Zeitung mainly highlighted the lowering of the voting age. It suggested that the lengthening of the election cycle might lead to a ‘democratic deficit’, but did not push the issue (Kindermann, 8.5.2007). On the other hand, the two largest quality newspapers, Die Presse and Der Standard, were clearly against the extension of the election cycle (Prüller, 5.6.2007; Rauscher, 8.5.2007). They somewhat welcomed the lowering of the voting age and postal voting, but found the arguments for extending the election cycle ‘quatsch’ (ridiculous) (Rauscher, 8.5.2007). Hence, a separate extension of the election cycle would most likely have been met with far more hostility from the opposition parties and the media than the whole reform package.

D. The speed of the reform. What is also striking is the speed of the reform. It was rushed through parliament and it was clear from the beginning that there was virtually no possibility
for input from the opposition. Moreover, it was also done at the very beginning of the government period. If this electoral reform was so harmless and would improve democracy as Gusenbauer claimed, then why rush it through? It could have been an excellent PR opportunity for showing how much the government valued democracy. If the government parties were really sure that this package would be seen as an ‘improvement of democracy’, then it is difficult to understand why the government did not allow lengthy debates on it. However, given that extending the election cycle was also included in the package – which, as one newspaper calculated, would deprive the average Austrian of three election opportunities during his or her lifetime (Prüller, 5.6.2007) – the ‘improvement of democracy’ narrative would be difficult to maintain.\footnote{In fact, as media accounts show, it was already difficult to maintain during the short period that it was discussed (Traxler, 27.4.2007; Prüller, 5.6.2007; Rausscher, 8.5.2007).} It is very likely that the two government parties estimated that the speed of the reform process and the composition of the reform package would confuse the opposition parties and the media, while the timing of the reform at the very beginning of the government period minimized the risk of electoral fallout if the media and public should find the reform ‘one step too far’.

This is also one answer to the question of why a section of the SPÖ wanted to lower the voting age while thinking it would cost the SPÖ votes and would benefit the Greens: it was a way of getting them on board and making sure the Greens would support the measure. Another reason can be thought of as well. The grand coalition that was formed in 2007 was not the favourite option for the two parties. An SPÖ-Green government, which was preferred by the SPÖ, was at that time not unthinkable – in the 2006 election they were only three seats short of a majority (Müller, 2008:177). In the words of Gusenbauer (28.2.2011): ‘In the 2005 opinion polls, there was a clear red-green majority for quite some time. If we had not been plagued by the BAWAG scandal, I think we would have gotten a majority. In practice this is all a question of who gets a majority, but our 2006 result could have been higher. So yes, at that time it was a real possibility and I always favoured a red-green coalition’. Pushing through the lowering of the voting age could help bring this coalition closer. The ÖVP, on the other hand, also looked beyond the grand coalition. First of all, it considered the 2006 election outcome ‘an error on the part of the voters’, because a significant number of ÖVP-leaning voters had abstained (Müller, 2008:178). It judged that the next election would correct this error and channel vote share back from the BZÖ and the FPÖ to the ÖVP (Müller, 2008:179). The split between Haider and his former party, the FPÖ, deeply divided the radical right. The animosity between the FPÖ and the BZÖ was also the main reason why the coalition preferred by Schüssel, a right-wing coalition including the BZÖ, the FPÖ and the ÖVP, was impossible (Müller, 2008:178). However, if the ‘error on the part of the voters’ were to be corrected, a ÖVP-BZÖ or maybe even an ÖVP-FPÖ coalition was not improbable.

Regarding the extension of the election cycle, this meant that there was actually a high degree of uncertainty over what the future would bring. There was no cartel breakdown as defined in Chapter 2, but there was a considerable chance that it would be the end of an era (cf. Müller and Fallend, 2004). Under such uncertain circumstances one would expect that parties would act either as if they were under ‘a Rawlesian veil of ignorance’ (Renwick, 2010:56) or conservatively (Pilet, 2007b). In both cases extending the election cycle makes little sense, but this only applies if politicians realize the uncertainty. If they do not they may well have misconceptions as regards their interest. This seems to have been the case here. You could
even say that ‘one gets the impression that when a party is in the government it thinks it will never be in the opposition again, (...) while the parties in the opposition assume that they will be there until the end of time’ (Poier, 2005:181). This misconception mostly played a role in the case of the ÖVP, which blamed the non-voters for its electoral losses in 2006.\footnote{The ÖVP misinterpreted the SORA data in two ways. First, it overestimated the impact of the non-voters. The ÖVP voters who stayed at home contributed to less than half of its losses. Even if all these non-voters had voted ÖVP, the party would still have lost 4.17% (own calculations based on Müller, 2008:177-178). Second, it did not consider the possibility that these non-voters were discontented and could migrate to other parties. In both ways it overestimated its popularity. Just to complete the picture: in the 2008 election the party did not regain its strength but lost another 8.3% (Müller, 2009:516).} The SPÖ, on the other hand, could reasonably expect that a red-green majority was within reach — after all such a majority was only three seats away. Lastly, with the experience of lengthy and difficult coalition negotiations in the back of their minds (Müller, 2008:178), both parties probably genuinely judged that the election cycle needed to be extended to balance these costs of getting into government - a government of which both parties, it seems, thought they would be a part.

5.5 Conclusion

Democratic reform scholars often ignore Austria. There are many reasons why this may be unwise. After all, as the cross-case analysis in Chapter 4 has shown, Austria provides excellent examples of ‘onliers’ or typical cases. In this chapter I have examined one such onlier case, the Vranitzky III government period. Austria also has many intriguing deviant cases. I analysed two of these, one where the presence of a populist party that came into government after thirteen years of opposition did not lead to reform and one in which reform occurred despite the absence of all three variables. In this section I will discuss the consequences for the study of democratic reform of my analyses of the three Austrian cases. I will start with the country-level variables, then move on to the government level and, lastly, discuss the reform level.

5.5.1 Country-level factors: the impact of veto players

De facto, Austria has a very small and largely overlapping number of veto players. The Austrian constitutional court is the only non-partisan veto player, while the number of parties in the government is limited compared to Belgium and the Netherlands. All governments in the period examined consisted of just two parties. Lastly, the Upper House has a very restricted role. It only has real veto power (as against delaying power) when it comes to the federal structure and competences or when a bill is introduced to change the way the Upper House is composed (Fallend, 2006:1032). Formally, the Upper House is not ‘absorbed’ by the Lower House as it is indirectly elected through the Länder, but since the political parties underpin all Austrian political bodies, the Upper House does in fact not play an independent role. Indeed, this explains why the role of the Upper House was very limited in the Vranitzky III and Gusenbauer cases.

The analyses presented in this chapter point to two explanations for non-reform. First, in Austria, virtually all reforms need a two-thirds majority and therefore require a high degree of consensus. In the late 1980s this was rarely a problem, given that the two government parties mostly had such a two-thirds majority between them. Indeed, the grand coalition had a two-
thirds majority most of the time, the only exception being the short-lived Vranitzky IV government. At the start of the 21st century the Schüssel government, however, did not have this majority. All governments that had a two-thirds majority pushed through at least one minor reform, while those that did not did not implement any minor or major democratic reforms. Yet this is only a partial explanation. As I have highlighted discussing the Schüssel I government, it was not just the lack of a two-thirds majority that explains the absence of reform in the Schüssel era. One must seriously question the determination of the government parties. After all, there is evidence that both government parties at the time blocked opportunities to pass the reform.

5.5.2 Government-level factors

A. The unexpected impact of cartelization. The Schüssel government parties wanted to mould the system to their advantage. However, they did not do this through democratic reform, but through socio-economic reforms such as ‘cleansing’ corporatist bodies by replacing the SPÖ politicians with FPÖ people (Fallend, 2003:906-908). Clearly, recartelization comes in many forms, of which democratic reform is just one (cf. Katz, 2005:62). The Vranitzky III reforms, on the other hand, point to the direct impact of cartel breakdown. The introduction of the electoral threshold and the requirement to include all votes in the 'third-tier' seat distribution are two subtle ways in which the two government parties slightly enhanced their own position (cf. Müller, 1996:261). The final government examined, Gusenbauer, serves as an example of recartelization playing a role even if no partner has been long excluded. The SPÖ had only been out of office for some seven years. Nevertheless, the Schüssel governments did have such a significant impact on reshaping the way politics was conducted in Austria that one may safely say that the return to power of the SPÖ signalled the end of a distinct cartel era (cf. Müller and Fallend, 2004). Moreover, the Schüssel governments clearly attacked the SPÖ position in the corporatist bodies. The Gusenbauer government countered the Schüssel I 'cleansings' and in December 2007 the composition of the corporatist bodies was constitutionally enshrined in order to protect the SPÖ’s position in them (Fallend, 2008:908). Additionally, the Gusenbauer democratic reform package adapted the political system in a way that benefited the two government parties. Hence, despite the fact that the SPÖ had been in opposition for only seven years, the Gusenbauer reform to some degree was influenced by ‘recartelization’ efforts, which cautions against a too rigorous usage of numerical measurements of partial or wholesale cartel breakdown. It is no coincidence that the three governments examined were all at the beginning of 'government eras': Vranitzky III was the follow-up government of the start of the second grand coalition era (SPÖ-ÖVP). Schüssel I began the Schüssel era (ÖVP-FPÖ/BZÖ) and Gusenbauer was the beginning of the third grand coalition era (SPÖ-ÖVP). It thus seems that with the advent of a new government constellation, reforms inspired by recartelization efforts took place.

192 After all, in 1970 the SPÖ and the FPÖ were able implement the greatest electoral system change in post-war Austria without a two-thirds majority (cf. Müller, 2006b:286). Hence a government does not need a two-thirds majority to implement democratic reform.

193 The statement by Poier (2005:181) mentioned earlier, that in 2004 the parties acted as if 'when the party is in government it thinks it will never be in opposition again, (...) while the parties in opposition assume that they will be there until the end of time', also points in this direction.

194 Indeed, the Vranitzky III reforms were the 'delayed' product of discussions started during the Vranitzky II government.
Recartelization is, however, not the only important factor. Public dissatisfaction is also crucial: several things in each of the three reform packages examined here point to the role of public dissatisfaction. As mentioned before, the Austrian citizens never directly intervened in the reform process. No demonstrations were held, nor were large citizen groups actively lobbying for reform. Mostly, the impact of public dissatisfaction was felt through the media and through legitimacy constraints, although the indirect role of dissatisfaction through voting behaviour should not be dismissed either.

The Vranitzky III reform was originally initiated during Vranitzky II in order to get dissatisfaction off the public/media agenda. The final product, the 1992 electoral reform, also included a purely symbolic lowering of the preference threshold, a measure that was clearly intended to appease the media. Not including such a 'personalization element' was by that time also virtually impossible for other reasons. The FPÖ's rise in the polls made the threat of electoral retaliation very real. The second Austrian case, the Schüssel I reform package, was even more influenced by the media. In fact the reform proposal's sole reason for existence was 'to look good' in the eyes of the media and the public. Lastly, the Gusenbauer reform package was implemented so swiftly that it suggests that the parties were afraid of the media exposure it might attract. Additionally, by linking the lowering of the voting age with extending the election cycle they brought aboard the Greens and diverted media attention away from the extension of the election cycle. Anticipation of the reactions of the media seems to have played a role in all three cases.

Yet all of this does not mean that politicians significantly empowered the citizens. On the contrary, they did all they could to limit the negative consequences of the measures they took, as is strikingly obvious in the fact that the parties wanted to limit the impact of lowering the preference threshold by prohibiting the candidates from campaigning for themselves. The government parties also used the calls in the media to change the electoral system to their advantage. Hence, the major impact of public opinion probably lies in its preventive character: it increased the legitimacy constraints on politicians – as witnessed during the Vranitzky III government, when the SPÖ and ÖVP believed that they could no longer blatantly change the electoral system for their own benefit (cf. Müller, 1996:263). Nevertheless, this case also shows that elite-majority imposition, one of Renwick's two routes to electoral reform, can occur not because there is an absence of public dissatisfaction, but precisely because there is public dissatisfaction.

C. Political ideology: ideology or just a strategy? Although no postmaterialist party entered the government, the Schüssel governments do present a good opportunity to examine the impact of populism on democratic reform. Clearly this is the least important of the three factors examined at government level. Populism had no significant direct influence. This was not easily visible to the 'outside world'. After all, the Schüssel I government did initiate a democratic reform package. Nevertheless, one can seriously question whether the parties were determined to implement the reform proposal. As the press release after the behind-closed-doors meeting of the Committee of Constitutional Affairs on 31 January 2001 shows, the government parties were not even prepared to offer minor concessions in order to find a compromise (Nationalrat, 31.1.2001). All in all, it seems that to the FPÖ populism was more of a strategy than a genuine ideology, a presumption that is also strengthened by the FPÖ's
sudden loss of interest in the existing direct democracy devices once they were in government (cf. Jacobs, 2010).

Even if it is merely a strategy, populism can still have an indirect impact when government parties introduce populist reform elements to counter the threat of populist opposition parties. Based on the three cases discussed in this chapter it is impossible to judge whether such an indirect impact of the FPÖ on democratic reform existed. As mentioned above in the section on public dissatisfaction, it seems that the FPÖ’s electoral performance did constrain the Vranitzky reform. However, the FPÖ’s populist agenda was only fully established in 1993, after this reform. Therefore this impact is not so much the result of populism, but more of the FPÖ purely as an electoral competitor. If the FPÖ’s populism did have an indirect impact, this should be visible in the 1993-99 period, but during that time only one minor direct democracy reform occurred. Briefly, even if the FPÖ’s populism had an indirect impact, it would have been fairly limited.

5.5.3 Reform-level factors: in the name of democracy, but to the advantage of the parties?
In this chapter I have devoted a great deal of attention to reconstructing self-interested motivations in the reform process. Interestingly, all three reform packages were linked to democracy itself: the 1992 reform was part of efforts to create a ‘strong democracy’ (Vranitzky, 1990:2) and both the Schüssel I and the Gusenbauer bills were called ‘democracy package’. Of all three it was claimed that they improved democracy. Whether this is genuinely the case is difficult to say, but the most important elements of the two successful reforms certainly improved the position of the government parties. Ironically, the only reform that certainly would have given the citizens more influence, the Schüssel I reform, failed. As I have shown above this is no coincidence. The government parties were well aware that they lacked the necessary two-thirds majority and were careful not to enhance the bill’s viability. To sum up, outcome-contingent motivations always played a major role. In the Vranitzky III and Gusenbauer cases they were the most important motivations for voting on and passing the bill, while in the Schüssel I case they were the most important reason for obstructing the bill as much as possible. However, act-contingent motivations also played a role. All reform packages included elements that ‘looked good’ coupled with elements that ‘looked bad’. Not surprisingly, in the initiation phase especially act-contingent motivations dominated, while as soon as the reform debate became more serious outcome-contingent motivations were more important.

5.5.4 The persistence of the Austrian reform debate
As a final note I wish to address the question of why democratic reform remained on the political agenda. The same discussions and complaints kept returning. In particular the ‘lack of governability’ or effectiveness of the grand coalition was a breeding ground for dissatisfaction within the major parties (Poier, 2009:11). The grand coalition that ruled the country throughout most of the period examined was unloved by both government parties. It was merely a marriage of reason. In essence, this boils down to party system fragmentation and a ‘problem’ in the electoral system. However, citizens and the media judge the situation differently: they see it as a problem with the politicians within the government parties. Hence it should not come as a surprise that intellectual and political pleas for a more majoritarian system never had much impact on public opinion (cf. Müller, 2005:399). In a context where especially the media tend to be hostile to self-interested electoral reforms and government parties are electorally under threat from flourishing opposition parties, politicians
are very much constrained in what electoral reforms they can enact (Renwick, 2010: 61-64). Raising the electoral threshold moderately and extending the election cycle proved two measures that were both subtle and achievable, but their impact is very modest. Moreover, even these subtle reform elements needed to be linked to symbolic reforms such as direct democratic reforms or ballot structure reforms. Therefore, precisely because a significant portion of the electorate votes for the opposition, the government parties not only find it difficult to govern, but they are also very much constrained in the electoral reforms they can enact to tackle the governability problem.


6.1 Introduction

The cross-case analysis in Chapter 4 highlighted two Belgian governments as particularly promising: Dehaene II and Verhofstadt I. Dehaene II was selected because of the presence of both public dissatisfaction and democratic reform. Indeed, the Dehaene II government faced unusually high levels of public dissatisfaction, as during this government period an average of 54% of Belgians indicated in the Eurobarometer surveys that they were not satisfied with the way democracy worked in Belgium. During Dehaene I the local (and provincial) government-sponsored referendum legislation was upgraded to full-blown citizen-initiated referendum legislation. The Dehaene II case is thus an excellent one for examining the impact of public dissatisfaction on (direct) democratic reform. The second case discussed in this chapter is the Verhofstadt I government period, during which two electoral reform packages were passed. Verhofstadt I was a government composed of two social democratic parties and four traditionally excluded parties, the two green parties (who participated in government for the first time) and the two liberal parties (who had spent more than eleven years in opposition). At the same time, there was a low level of public dissatisfaction during Verhofstadt I (28.6% on average). Therefore, all factors needed for reform through elite majority imposition were present. The Verhofstadt I case is thus excellently suited to examining the impact of cartel breakdown.

Before I move on to the rest of this chapter I would like to make one preliminary observation. The Austrian reform discussions were fairly straightforward. There were only a limited number of parties (four) and a limited number of reform discussions (one per government period). Additionally good primary sources are available to those who look for them, such as press releases concerning behind-closed-doors meetings. All of this makes the Austrian cases easy to study. The Belgian cases, however, are significantly ‘messier’. Generally, reconstructing Belgian reform discussions is like reconstructing a three-dimensional multiplayer chess game. Not only are there more ‘moves’ to explain (while the motivations of the players are more difficult to retrieve), there is also a greater chance that the players themselves miscalculated.195

195 Compared to the four main Austrian parties, Belgium had (at least) ten parties, of which four to six were in the government. In Belgium multiple reform discussions were held during each government period and a very wide range of reforms was discussed. More negotiations occurred behind closed doors, making the ‘moves’ of the parties more difficult to retrieve (cf. Hooghe and Deschouwer, 2011). Given all these factors, studying Belgium is more prone to the so-called ‘narrative fallacy’, whereby things that seem logical appear truthful even though there is no ‘smoking gun’ evidence for them (cf. Taleb, 2007; Derksen, 2010). Just one example of a move that seems too obvious to be a coincidence: around November 1996 the Flemish opposition joined forces to prepare bills on democratic reform. On 2 December 1996 the government also launched a (less far-reaching) democratic reform initiative. At first I was tempted to see the latter move as a reaction to the former. However, as Luc Willems (19.10.2010), who was a member of the government party CD&V, explained to me: ‘we did not know [of] this [initiative]. (...) There was no connection between the two initiatives’. This explanation is corroborated by the absence of media coverage of the opposition initiative, which was only made public in 1997 (cf. Deweerdt, 1997 versus Deweerdt, 1998).

Another element that makes the Belgian case more difficult is the lack of so-called discriminatory evidence (Derksen, 2010). Specifically, act-contingent self-interest and principle often pointed in the same direction, making it virtually impossible to assess which of the two prevailed. In those instances, the only useful evidence was in the form of very weak circumstantial ‘straw in the wind’ evidence (cf. Bennett, 2008). I am not the first
6.1.1 Belgian political parties

During the 1987-2007 period several new parties entered parliament. Some of these remained on the fringe (the Francophone radical right Front National) or disappeared after one government period (the Flemish libertarian ROSSEM), but others were ‘there to stay’. In particular this is true for the populist radical right Flemish party Vlaams Belang and both the Flemish and the Francophone green parties. The traditional parties suffered very volatile voting records, but overall lost out to these newcomers. Even before the rise of the greens and Vlaams Belang, the Belgian party system was extremely fragmented. From 1965 onwards, when regionalist parties entered government, party fragmentation increased. A second element leading to more fragmentation was the splitting of the (national) Belgian traditional parties into Francophone and Flemish parties between 1968 and 1978. However, even when one takes party families as units of analysis and combines the scores of the Francophone and Flemish parties that belong to the same family, party fragmentation remains extensive. Overall, ‘the Belgian electorate has increasingly cast its vote on a wider variety of parties’ (Deschouwer, 2009:124). Below I will discuss the most important Francophone and Flemish parties separately, starting with the Francophone parties as they are fewer in number.

6.1.1.1 Francophone parties

1. Parties on the left. Traditionally, the left has dominated the Francophone party system. It was the Francophone social democratic party, the Parti Socialiste (PS), in particular that dominated the ‘South’ of Belgium. Ideologically speaking the PS is a traditional socio-economic left-wing party, which denounced ‘Third Way socialism’ (Deschouwer, 2009:79). During the 1987-2007 period the dominance of the PS was, however, somewhat eroded. This was in part due to the rise of the Francophone green party ECOLO, which achieved a breakthrough in 1991. ECOLO has a postmaterialist green ideology (Deschouwer, 2009:91). Electorally speaking, the party was able to capture nearly 20% of the vote share in 1999, but lost a significant percentage of this after its first participation in government.

2. Liberal parties. The second most important party is the Mouvement Réformateur (MR). This party, originally called the Parti Réformateur Libéral (PRL), can be seen as fairly traditional liberal. During the research period the PRL in 1995 joined forces with the Brussels regionalist party Front des Francophones (FDH), which in essence also endorsed a liberal ideology and in 1998 also allied with a splinter from the Christian-democratic party, the Mouvement des Citoyens pour le Changement (MCC) (Deschouwer, 2009:83).

3. Christian democratic parties. A final Francophone party is the Centre Démocrate Humaniste (CDH). Although it adheres to Christian democratic values, it dropped ‘Christian’

to encounter this problem. Pilet observed that the Belgian parties adopted positions that were aligned with both their principles and their self-interest ‘in most of the cases’ (Pilet, 2007a:229). My theoretical framework to analyse principle is more detailed than his, but this cannot fully overcome the lack of discriminatory evidence. To sum up, in Belgium reform discussions took the form of ‘shadow play’, often forcing the researcher to deduce the position of the parties based on their shadows. This does not mean that the Belgian reforms cannot be explained. On the contrary, strong evidence often is available. Yet some aspects will remain uncertain.

I will use the term ‘Francophone’ to label parties and politicians operating in the French-speaking part of the country, while ‘Flemish’ is used for parties and politicians that operate in the Dutch-speaking part.

The last national or all-Belgian party, the Belgian social democratic party, split in 1978 (Deschouwer, 2009:78).
from its name in 2002. Before 2002 this was a centre party, representing both more left-wing and conservative factions. From 2002 onwards the party moved to the left on both ethical and socio-economic issues (Deschouwer, 2009:76-77).

Figure 6.1. Election results (Francophone part of the country)

Source electoral results: Deschouwer, 2009:129.

6.1.2 Flemish parties

1. Christian democratic parties. In the North of Belgium, the dominant force throughout the research period was the Christian democratic party Christendemocratisch & Vlaams (CD&V). Ideologically speaking this is a centre party, including both more left-wing and conservative factions. Electorally, the party suffered substantial losses, as can be seen in Figure 6.2. In fact the party ‘won’ only one federal election up to 2007, that of 1995, when it achieved an additional 0.5% of the vote.

2. Parties on the left. Two parties take positions to the left of the CD&V. The first is Socialisten en Progressieve Anders (sp.a), a social democratic party which during the 1990s embraced Tony Blair’s ‘Third Way’ (Deschouwer, 2009:79). Electorally the party suffered substantial swings in voting, losing heavily in 1991 and 1999, but winning substantially in 2003. The second left-wing party is the green party GROEN! Ideologically speaking this resembles ECOLO, as it is also a green postmaterialist party. Electorally, it hovered around 7% of the Flemish vote share during most of the 1990s, but it achieved considerably more in 1999. After joining the government in 1999 it was severely punished by the voters and fell back to a mere 4% of the vote.

3. Liberal parties. The Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten (Open VLD) is a liberal party representing both conservative and progressive liberals. During the 1980s and 1990s it combined a neo-liberal with a fiercely populist stance (cf. Verhofstadt, 1991 and Verhofstadt, 1992). The Open VLD was forced into opposition after the 1987 election, but it gradually won more and more electoral support until in 1999 it overtook the CD&V as the largest Flemish party and once again entered the government. From then it also moderated its ideological stance (Deschouwer, 2009:82).

4. Regionalist parties. During the research period the mainstream regionalist party Volksunie (VU) gradually crumbled electorally and eventually it split into a left-liberal (SPIRIT) and a more conservative regionalist party, the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (N-VA), in
2001. This split reflected the ideological struggles within the VU. The party was indeed regionalist, but it combined this with varying other ideologies throughout its existence. At the end of the 1980s it adopted a more liberal stance, while during the 1990s under the influence of Bert Anciaux it took a more progressive stance. Such identity struggles did not occur in the second regionalist party, the populist radical right Vlaams Belang. Ideologically speaking that party combines radical right positions with a blend of populism (Mudde, 2000:87-116). Vlaams Belang is the only party that significantly increased its vote share in each election during the 1987-2007 era. Its electoral breakthrough came on 24 November 1991, but even thereafter the party increased its share of the seats election after election.

Figure 6.2 Election results (Flemish part of the country)

![Graph showing election results](image)

Source electoral results: Deschouwer, 2009:129.

6.1.2 Shocks, landmarks and coalitions (1987-2007)
Both the Dehaene II and the Verhofstadt I governments are located at an important turning point in recent Belgian political history. The Dehaene II government can be considered 'the end of politics as usual', while Verhofstadt I can be seen as 'a new beginning'. From 1987 until 1999 Belgium was ruled by a coalition of the Christian democrats and the social democrats, a fairly normal government composition. However, the Christian/social democrat coalition, and politicians of the established parties more in general, were shocked by three major events, spread over five years. The first was the election of 24 November 1991, when the anti-establishment parties Vlaams Belang, Front National and ROSSEM won seats. The second event consisted of corruption scandals that gradually spread to affect the government parties in the first half of the 1990s. Finally, the third shock was a huge

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198 One that however, only lasted until 2007 when yet another new era, one of constant gridlock, began.
199 From 1987 until 1991 they were also joined by the regionalist VU.
200 These major shocks were accompanied by many smaller shocks, which will be examined in the context of the Dehaene I case. The three shocks, however, constitute the most important part of the background against which the reform discussions took place.
201 The two major scandals are the Agusta and the Dassault scandals. One relatively minor scandal that also occurred at the beginning of the 1990s was the Uniop scandal (Deweerdt, 1995:281).
citizens’ demonstration on 20 October 1996 in the aftermath of the capture of Marc Dutroux. Between these shocks the government regained lost ground somewhat, but it never fully recovered. Each of the three shocks gave more momentum to reform discussions and created more of a ‘fin de régime’ atmosphere. It was this atmosphere that formed the background against which the reform processes during the Dehaene I government took place. The occurrence of yet another scandal immediately before the 1999 elections allowed the liberals and the greens to enter government and form a new type of coalition, from which the Christian democrats were excluded for the first time in some 40 years (Swyngedouw, 2002:124). The new Verhofstadt I government promised to implement a broad reform agenda, of which democratic reform was a prominent part.

Table 6.1 Belgian coalitions and their composition

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composition</th>
<th>Party families</th>
<th>Two-thirds majority?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Martens VIII</td>
<td>Christian democrats, social democrats &amp; regionalists</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dehaene I</td>
<td>Christian democrats &amp; social democrats</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dehaene II</td>
<td>Christian democrats &amp; social democrats</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verhofstadt I</td>
<td>Liberals, social democrats &amp; greens</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verhofstadt II</td>
<td>Liberats &amp; social democrats</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Fl = Flemish parties; Fr = Francophone parties.

6.2 Dehaene II: Towards a ‘new political culture’? 202

Between 1997 and 1999 three direct democratic reforms were implemented. First provincial government-sponsored referendums were introduced (bill 49K935), after which provincial citizen-initiated referendums were approved (bill 49K1175). On 13 May 1999 a third

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202 I first want to address three technical issues regarding terminology and focus. First, as far as party names in the text are concerned, many of the Belgian parties changed names, merged or split during the period examined. For the sake of clarity I will use the name of the party as on 1 January 2010, if the party has remained more or less the same. This applies to Open VLD (until 1992 PVV, afterwards VLD and from March 2008 Open VLD), the CD&V (before 1999 CVP), the sp.a (before 2001 SP), Vlaams Belang (before 2004 Vlaams Blok) and GROEN! (before 2003 Agalev). Regarding the VolksUnie (VU), I will use VU until the party split in 2001 into a left-libertarian party (SPIRIT) and a separatist party (N-VA). Furthermore, although the party used the label VU-ID from the late 1990s, I choose to use the term VU for the sake of clarity. Regarding the ‘Francophone liberals’ I mostly use this term, as the party went into electoral alliance with other parties at virtually every election until it was finally labelled MR in 2002. Obviously, in the references I will use the original names. Second, when I speak of ‘regional’ I mean Flanders, Brussels and Wallonia, not the local, sub-local or non-urban territories. Third, regarding the focus of this chapter, in line with the broader focus of this study I will discuss the democratic reforms that affect the national (Lower House) and the local level. When necessary other levels will be mentioned and discussed briefly, but the spotlight will be on the national (Lower House) and local levels.
referendum bill, introducing local citizen-initiated referendums, was passed in parliament (bill 49K1174). I will first reconstruct the debates leading up to these reforms and then examine whether or not public dissatisfaction played a crucial role in the reform process.

6.2.1 Reconstruction of the debate

A. Historical roots of the debate. Until that time, only one ad hoc national consultative referendum had been held in Belgium, the 1950 referendum on the return of King Leopold III. His return was controversial, because in 1940 he had decided to surrender to Germany of his own accord, without consulting the government. The result of the referendum seriously increased the tensions between Wallonia and Flanders and resulted in a near break-up of the country.\(^{203}\) The effects were so devastating that referendum discussions stayed off the agenda for many years (Rihoux, 1996:258).

The first traces of the resurfacing of the referendum topic, and the broader democratic reform debate, can be seen in the 1960s.\(^{204}\) During the 1960s the smaller regionalist parties wanted democratic reforms, to allow citizens to participate more in the political system (Pilet, 2007a:37). However, the established parties were able to block most reform proposals. Later, in the 1980s, the reform agenda was taken over by the green parties and somewhat later still from 1991 onwards by the liberal parties. In January 1991 Guy Verhofstadt, then leader of the Flemish liberal party Open VLD, wrote his first citizens' manifesto, calling among other things, for radical democratic reforms such as the abolition of compulsory voting and the Upper House and the introduction of primaries and referendums (Verhofstadt, 1991: Ch. 4). The Francophone liberals swiftly followed and promoted two bills to introduce national referendums in August and September 1991 (bills 47K1746 and 47K1754).

As mentioned in the introduction, the elections of 24 November 1991 were an important landmark and a catalyst for the democratic reform debate.\(^{205}\) The elections were labelled ‘Black Sunday’ and caused ‘a shockwave throughout the country’ (Swyngedouw, Billiet, Carton and Beerten, 1993:8). The results showed the unexpected rise of the radical right parties in Brussels and Flanders.\(^{206}\) The government that was formed after the elections, Dehaene I, did not pursue a broad democratic reform agenda. It wanted to address ‘society’s problems’ by tackling crime and immigration, simplifying the judiciary and addressing social security and environmental problems (Dehaene, 1992:7-13). It did mention that it intended to change the traditional ‘political culture’ – the catch phrase used by Verhofstadt and the other opposition parties to describe the way in which Belgian political parties overly dominated the political process (Dehaene, 1992:13). However, the government did not wish to do this by

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\(^{203}\) Overall 57.6% of Belgians voted in favour of the return of Leopold III, but this result hid a huge disparity between the two regions: only 42% of the Walloons vote 'yes', while 72% of the Flemings favoured the return of the king (Rihoux, 1996:258). The Christian democratic government nevertheless decided to allow him to return, but strikes, protests and even bomb explosions, mainly supported by the Walloon left, forced the government into asking him to abdicate in favour of his son Baudouin (Gerard & Van Nieuwenhuyse, 2005:236).

\(^{204}\) For an elaborate overview of the electoral reform debate in Belgium, see: Pilet, 2007a: 17-40.

\(^{205}\) From 1987 to 1991, 17 democratic reform bills were introduced. Between 1992 and 1995 this number increased to 60 (own calculations based on the information available on www.dekamer.be).

\(^{206}\) Both Francophone and Flemish parties compete and win seats in Brussels, while traditionally Wallonia is reserved for Francophone parties and Flanders for Flemish parties. In 1991 the Flemish Vlaams Belang polled 6% of the vote in Brussels and the Francophone Front National (FN) added another 4.2% of radical right voters. In Flanders Vlaams Belang received 10.4% of the vote and the anti-establishment party ROSSEM 5.2%. 

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implementing democratic reforms, as the opposition demanded, but by limiting the number of staff allocated to ministers. The only explicit statement about democratic reform was that the government wanted 'to support local democracy', a phrase that was rather open to interpretation (Dehaene, 1992:13). In practice the government did not hasten to translate this one sentence into bills. However, as mentioned in the introduction, in the early 1990s a second shock hit Belgian politics, namely the disclosure of serious corruption scandals. On 21 January 1994, three PS politicians were forced to resign over the scandals, while a year later, on 22 March 1995, another minister, Frank Vandenbroucke (sp.a), also had to resign (Deweerdt, 1995:285-286; Platel, 1996:507-509). Amidst the political turmoil, Prime Minister Dehaene (CD&V) on 17 February 1995 called early elections (Platel, 1996:505). Only after the election was called did the government introduce its democratic reforms. On 6 March 1995, a bill was presented to provide a legal framework for government-sponsored referendums at local level (bill 48K1784). This was accompanied by a bill introducing the multiple preferential vote (bill 48K1758). Both bills were passed in the Lower House on 3 April 1995 and they were approved by the Upper House on 30 and 16 April 1995 respectively.

On 24 May 1995 early elections took place. The outcome defied most predictions and gave the ruling coalition of Christian democrats and social democrats a majority of 82 seats in the 150-seat Lower House (Downs, 1995:336). As a consequence, Guy Verhofstadt resigned as Open VLD leader. Democratic reform disappeared almost completely from the government agenda. The coalition agreement only mentioned that the government would try 'to increase the citizen participation based on already implemented legislation' (Dehaene, 1995:50). Again, this statement was vague and open to interpretation. On 25 January 1996, a bill was introduced to implement government-sponsored referendums on the (relatively powerless) provincial level (bill 49K0935). As was envisaged in the coalition agreement, the rules mirrored the existing local-level legislation. The bill was approved in the Lower House on 29 May 1997 and in the Upper House on 25 June 1997. However, a second, unexpected, round of reform debates had already started while this bill was still in progress.

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207 Specifically, the Agusta and the Dassault scandals were disclosed, in the aftermath of the investigation into the murder of the PS politician André Cools on 18 July 1991. The Agusta scandal involved a bribe in exchange for a contract for 46 army helicopters (Deweerdt, 1995:281). The Dassault scandal also concerned bribery over an army contract (Platel, 1996:507).

208 From that moment on, voters were allowed to cast a preference vote for multiple candidates on one list. For instance, they could tick the boxes of all women on the PS list.

209 On pages 25 to 29 of the bill one can find the rules governing the introduction of government-sponsored provincial referendums.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-reform phase</td>
<td>12.3.1950</td>
<td>First (and only) national referendum resulting in serious tensions between the two linguistic communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960s</td>
<td></td>
<td>New regional parties support democratic reform, the traditional parties opposed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td></td>
<td>Walloon and Flemish green parties support national referendums, the traditional parties still opposed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1991</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Guy Verhofstadt (Open VLD) writes his first citizens’ manifesto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- The Open VLD now embraces referendums, the Francophone liberals swiftly follow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.7.1991</td>
<td></td>
<td>André Cools (PS) murdered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.11.1991</td>
<td></td>
<td>Elections, soon labelled the first ‘Black Sunday’ due to the rise of the anti-establishment parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.1.1994 → 22.3.1995</td>
<td></td>
<td>The corruption scandals lead to the resignation of four ministers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.2.1995</td>
<td></td>
<td>Early elections called</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.1995 → 6.4.1995</td>
<td></td>
<td>A bill on local government-sponsored referendums and the multiple preferential vote introduced and swiftly voted through</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May-June 1995</td>
<td></td>
<td>Early elections held, the government parties ‘win’. Verhofstadt resigns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform initiation</td>
<td>18.6.1995</td>
<td>The new coalition agreement wants to increase citizen participation based on existing legislation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform process stage</td>
<td>25.1.1996</td>
<td>A bill on government-sponsored provincial referendums introduced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.8.1996</td>
<td></td>
<td>Two kidnapped children found in the house of Marc Dutroux</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.9.1996</td>
<td></td>
<td>- In the Dassault corruption scandal, Taxquet (PS) is arrested and confesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- It is revealed that Jean-Marc Connerotte, the previous prosecutor in the corruption scandal, has been removed from the case, although he rightly accused Taxquet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.10.1996</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spaghetti verdict leads to dismissal of Jean-Marc Connerotte in Dutroux case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.10.1996</td>
<td></td>
<td>The ‘Commission Dutroux’ in the Dutroux investigation set up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.10.1996</td>
<td></td>
<td>250,000 to 300,000 people join the White March protest against the spaghetti incident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 1996</td>
<td></td>
<td>Guy Verhofstadt leads informal talks on democratic reform in Room F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.11.1996</td>
<td></td>
<td>Elio Di Rupo accused of being a paedophile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.12.1996</td>
<td></td>
<td>The government parties call for a ‘State General on Democracy’; the so-called Group Langendries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.2.1997</td>
<td></td>
<td>Guy Spitaels (PS) resigns over the Dassault scandal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March → April 1997</td>
<td></td>
<td>The coalition agreement is updated and includes creating ‘a new political culture’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- The CD&amp;V leadership allows individual CD&amp;V politicians to endorse bills coming out of the ‘room F’-talks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Three bills on the abolition of compulsory voting and referendums are introduced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.4.1997</td>
<td>The Commission Dutroux presents its findings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1997</td>
<td>Verhofstadt becomes party chairman, CD&amp;V withdraws support from the three Room F bills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.6.1997</td>
<td>The Consultative Group Langendries reaches agreement on the introduction of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>local, provincial and regional citizen-initiated referendums</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.9.1997</td>
<td>Bills on local and provincial citizen-initiated referendums are introduced</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.10.1997</td>
<td>New White March attracts only 5,000 people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1998 → 15.2.1998</td>
<td>Leaks from second report of the Commission Dutroux cause upheaval</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Final) vote</td>
<td>- Both bills are voted on in the Lower House</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Government parties and the Francophone liberals support the bill;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.3.1999 The bill on local referendums is amended in the Upper House, the bill on the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>provincial referendum is approved</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.4.1999</td>
<td>The amended bill on local referendums passes in the Lower House</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: events playing at the societal level or not directly related to democratic reform are highlighted in light grey.

**B. Initiation of the debate.**

Huge political turmoil following the discovery of two kidnapped girls in the house of Marc Dutroux on 13 August 1996, which combined with new evidence in the investigation of the corruption scandals, triggered new reform debates. The corruption scandals and the Dutroux case were seen as part of a ‘Belgian disease’ pervading all levels of the political and judicial systems (Deweerdt, 1997:497). This widely shared impression of ‘a Belgian disease’ was aggravated by particular events that connected both cases in the form of one prosecutor, Jean-Marc Connerotte, who was generally seen as having been decisive in the discovery of the two kidnapped girls. On 6 September 1996 a PS politician, Richard Taxquet, was arrested in connection with the corruption case and confessed to having ordered the murder of André Cools. In fact Taxquet had been arrested earlier, but the Court of Cassation had then ordered his release. Most importantly, the Court had at the same time taken the case out of the hands of its then prosecutor Jean-Marc Connerotte (Deweerdt, 1997:499). This revelation severely damaged public confidence in the police, the judiciary and politics. It was widely believed that a cover-up operation had taken place. To make things worse, on 14 October 1996 Jean-Marc Connerotte was also removed from the Dutroux case after the so-called spaghetti incident, named after a spaghetti dinner organized by the parents of the two released children, during which he was given a pen, which

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210 It is difficult to pinpoint the exact initiation of the reform debates – provincial government-sponsored referendums are implied in the coalition agreement. Regarding this reform, the coalition agreement would be the initiation point. However, since the focus of this study is on national and local reforms, I will devote my attention to the second, and far more far-reaching direct democratic reform package, in which the existing government-sponsored legislation is complemented by legislation to introduce citizen-initiated referendums at both levels. It must be noted that many other administrative and judiciary reforms were discussed at the same time. 211 Indeed, in August 1996 it was discovered that Dutroux also was involved in stolen car swindles. One of his accomplices was the head of the Judicial Police of Charleroi and the son of the Procurator-General of Mons (Deweerdt, 1997:498). For a detailed account of the events from August 1996 onwards, see Deweerdt, 1997:497-508 and Deweerdt, 1998: 311-334.
the Court saw as showing bias (Deweerdt, 1997:498). The media, the political elites and public opinion alike reacted furiously and believed another cover-up was happening. On 15 October 1996 demonstrations and strikes occurred all over the country, and on 20 October 1996 the largest demonstration in the Belgian postwar era took place, the so-called ‘White March’ (Deweerdt, 1997:498-499).

Until then the government had been only indirectly involved in the Dutroux case. It became clear that a system of political appointments was detrimental to an independent and well functioning judiciary, but the politicians themselves were not involved (Deweerdt, 1997:502). However, this changed on 16 November when yet another (rumoured) scandal was revealed. On that day it was leaked that a judicial investigation being held into supposed paedophile activities by two ministers. The media claimed that one of these was Elio Di Rupo (PS), then deputy prime minister. Nevertheless, as it soon became known that the case was based on only one witness, who was labelled ‘a storyteller’ by his friends and family, Prime Minister Dehaene was unconvinced by the allegations and publicly defended Di Rupo (Deweerdt, 1997:505-506). Under normal circumstances such allegations were not likely to cause a fuss, but in the Autumn of 1996 they were yet another straw on the camel’s back.

Shortly after the White March and the beginning of the Di Rupo crisis new democratic reform debates were initiated. On 2 December 1996, the chairman of the Lower House, Raymond Langendries (CDH), invited the chairmen of all parties (apart from Vlaams Belang) to participate in a ‘State General on Democracy’ (or the so-called Group Langendries) (Deweerdt, 1997:508). GROEN!, Ecolo and the VU were sceptical and the green parties even decided not to become involved. At that time the Di Rupo crisis was still at the top of the public and political agenda. On 11 December 1996 the crisis deepened, as Di Rupo’s party, the PS, asked for an official declaration from the government stating that Di Rupo was innocent. After intense discussions between the government parties the government complied on 12 December 1996 and backed Di Rupo. The opposition and the media interpreted this as another cover-up and as a result Open VLD and the VU decided to leave the Group Langendries, because they feared it was just a means by means the government tried to keep the crisis under control (Deweerdt, 1998:353-354; see also Standaert, 14.12.1996 and Donckier, 13.12.1996). Simultaneously secret talks on democratic reform were taking place within the opposition. Indeed, from the Autumn of 1996 onwards, Guy Verhofstadt, then a senator, held informal and secret meetings on democratic reform with politicians of the green parties and the VU. These meetings were later labelled the Room F talks, after the room in which they were held (Deweerdt, 1998:354).

C. The processing phase. From that moment, democratic reform proceeded on two tracks, an opposition track in Room F and a government one in the Group Langendries. During the negotiations the Dutroux and corruption scandals only slowly disappeared from the public agenda. I will first sketch the developments in the Dutroux and corruption cases, as they formed the background against which the reform talks took place. Subsequently I will

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213 The reality is somewhat more complicated than presented here. By calling the first track ‘opposition’ I oversimplify, since the Room F talks also included some government politicians. Moreover, it was only composed of Flemish politicians. Conversely, it should be noted that the Consultative Group Langendries also included the Francophone liberals. However, calling them an opposition and a government track is justified by the fact that the initiative in the former came from the opposition (Verhofstadt), while in the latter it came from the government. This had substantial consequences for the viability of the proposals emanating from the two tracks.
proceed to the (failed) Room F talks and the negotiations in the Group Langendries. Lastly, I will consider the parliamentary discussions and the bills that emerged from the Group Langendries.

1. **Dutroux case, 1997 to April 1998.** During the period that the Room F and Group Langendries negotiations took place, the Dutroux and corruption scandals were still prominent. A parliamentary inquiry into the Dutroux case, the so-called Commission Dutroux, was set up and examined how the judiciary and the police conducted the investigation. The matter was still very sensitive, as illustrated by the impact of the outcomes of this parliamentary inquiry. The report of the Commission Dutroux was presented to parliament on 15 April 1997. It only mentioned one politician, the prominent former CDH politician Melchior Wathelet, who had signed the release papers for Dutroux in 1992. Even this one name gave rise to a new government crisis (Deweerdt, 1998:316-317). After this, the Commission Dutroux was given a second mandate, on 18 April 1997. This second inquiry aimed to investigate any corruption that might have occurred and protection that Dutroux might have enjoyed (Deweerdt, 1998:322). During the period of investigation things calmed down. However in the beginning of January 1998, when the second investigation was drawing to a close, preliminary drafts from the final report were leaked. This once again boosted public debate and a new demonstration took place on 15 February 1998. This time some 25,000 to 30,000 people participated, a sign that public confidence was very fragile. The final report of the second Commission Dutroux stated that there had been no direct protection of Dutroux (Deweerdt, 1999:163-165). The public debate then died out somewhat, only to resurface once more on 23 April 1998, when Marc Dutroux escaped. The Minister of the Interior Johan Vande Lanotte (sp.a) and the Minister of Justice Stefaan de Clerck (CD&V) resigned immediately. Yet this should not be seen as a sign that the government was still as fragile as it had been from October 1996 until June 1997. Indeed, Vande Lanotte was replaced by Louis Tobback (sp.a), a heavyweight figure within the Flemish social democrats, which was widely interpreted to signal that the government would not bow to calls from the opposition to resign (Deweerdt, 1999:168-169).

2. **Corruption scandals, January to March 1997.** At the beginning of 1997 corruption scandals also haunted the government. In January 1997 it was revealed that Guy Spitaels (PS), the president of the Walloon regional parliament, was involved. This revelation in particular led to tensions between Prime Minister Dehaene (CD&V), who wanted the government simply to carry on, and the CD&V chairman Marc van Peel, who wished to see a strong signal from the PS in the form of the resignation of Guy Spitaels (Deweerdt, 1998:526-527). The government once again went through turbulent times, until Spitaels resigned on 27 February 1997 (Deweerdt, 1998:529). As a direct consequence of the Spitaels affair the coalition agreement was ‘brought up to date’, to adjust it to the events that had taken place from the second half of 1996 onwards. On 25 March 1997 Dehaene announced which topics

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214 The crisis concerned the question of whether Wathelet should be nominated for a new term as a judge at the European Court of Justice. After intense debates between 20 April and 7 May 1997, the government decided to nominate Wathelet nonetheless – which the opposition was as another sign that a cover-up was taking place (cf. Deweerdt, 1998).

215 For instance, on 19 October 1997 a new White March to remember the first White March and to complain about the lack of sanctions against the judiciary and politicians involved in the Dutroux case only attracted 5,000 people (Deweerdt, 1998:319).
would get the full attention of the government. One of these was the creation of a ‘new political culture’ and included direct democratic reform (Deweerdt, 1998:331). 216

To sum up, both the Dutroux and the corruption cases severely threatened the government between October 1996 and approximately May 1997. The government was able to move on, but had to make concessions: one politician resigned and the topic of democratic reform resurfaced.

3. **Room F, Autumn 1996 to June 1997.** As mentioned before, precisely during this period from October 1996 until June 1997 democratic reform talks took place on two tracks. The first was the Room F track. The talks in Room F originally included Verhofstadt and representatives from the green parties and the VU (most notably Bert Anciaux). From March onwards some CD&V politicians (specifically Johan van Hecke, Luc Willems and Pieter de Crem) also participated (Deweerdt, 1998:354). Among the subjects discussed in Room F were the abolition of compulsory voting, the introduction of referendums, lowering the preference threshold and the direct election of mayors. In March 1997 the CD&V party leadership allowed CD&V politicians to support bills emanating from Room F. 217 However, in early June Verhofstadt returned as Open VLD chairman, which led the CD&V leadership to withdraw its quiet consent and CD&V politicians were no longer allowed to participate in the Room F talks (Deweerdt, 1998:354-355). As a result all bills that had emanated from the Room F talks were no longer discussed and expired.

4. **Group Langendries, December 1996 to June 1997.** The Group Langendries was more successful. After some four months of negotiations the participating parties, the Christian democrats, the social democrats and the Francophone liberals, reached an agreement on 17 June 1997. Three elements were included: (1) the number of paid mandates one politician was allowed to combine, (2) rules on campaign spending, and (3) the introduction of local, provincial and regional citizen-initiated referendums. Interestingly, however, the actual referendum bills only covered local and provincial referendums (cf. bills 49K1174 and 49K1175). I will return to this point when explaining the reforms. The bill on local referendums aimed to introduce non-binding citizen-initiated referendums that could be triggered when 10% (or 20% for smaller municipalities) of the population signed a petition (instead of 10% of the voters as used to be the case). The voting age was set at 16 and foreigners were also allowed to vote. Lastly, the result requirement for a referendum was lowered from 40% to 10%. Under the new rules a referendum would be valid when 10% of the population of a municipality turned out to vote. 218

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216 After this, the corruption scandal remained on the agenda, but far less prominently and it never threatened the existence of the government (cf. Deweerdt, 1998:333). In 1998 it dropped off the political agenda as the investigation came to a close and judicial procedures began (cf. Deweerdt, 1999:221).

217 Indeed, on 25 April 1997 three Open VLD politicians, Geert Bourgeois (VU) and Pieter de Crem and Johan van Hecke (CD&V) initiated a bill aimed at abolishing compulsory voting (bill 49K1009). Soon afterwards on 7 and 12 May 1997 similar bills were introduced to abolish compulsory voting in local and regional elections (bills 49K1036 and 49K1043). Regarding the referendum topic, the Room F negotiations resulted in a bill to change constitutional article 195, which would allow national referendums to take place (bill 49K1026). This time the Flemish greens also supported the bill. The Open VLD also wished to see the introduction of a majoritarian electoral system, but the other parties opposed this (for an overview of the debates on a majoritarian electoral system in Belgium see: Pilet, 2007a:90-93).

218 Voting in referendums was not compulsory.
In short, by the end of June 1997 the prospects for the Room F talks had disappeared, while those for the Group Langendries resulted in viable bills. Democratic reform now moved to the parliamentary stage.

5. The Parliamentary Debate, 1998-1999. The bills that emanated from the Group Langendries provoked fierce debates. The green parties and the Flemish liberals demanded binding referendums and pointed out that the then current local government-sponsored referendums had a lower threshold than that mentioned in the new bill (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 1998:4). Although the greens and the Flemish liberals tried to push for lower result requirements and kept the issue on the agenda, the government parties and the Walloon liberals ignored them (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 21.4.1999:11853). Vlaams Belang was largely absent from the discussion. It was isolated, as it had not been included in the Room F talks or in the Group Langendries. It did not take any initiative itself: in the committee debate it only briefly sketched its position, while in the plenary sessions it barely participated and did not introduce amendments (cf. Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 1998, see also Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 21.10.1998, 29.10.1998).

D. The Final Vote. The bill on local referendums was voted on initially on 29 October 1998. However, the Upper House corrected some judicial mistakes in the text and the bill had to be voted on a second time on 22 April 1999. The government parties and the Walloon liberals supported the bill. The green parties and Vlaams Belang voted against it. The green parties voted against because of de facto the number of signatures needed to trigger a local referendum was raised by replacing the requirement of representing ‘10% of the electorate’ with ‘10% of the population’. This change effectively meant a 25% increase in the threshold (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 21.10.1998:9709). Vlaams Belang opposed the bill because it allowed foreigners to participate (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 29.10.1998:9989). The Flemish liberals, led by Verhofstadt, abstained since they believed the bill should have been more far-reaching. Nevertheless they welcomed it as a first step (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 21.10.1998:9708).

6.2.2 Explaining the 1998 and 1999 Direct Democratic Reforms
As the reconstruction of the debate revealed, two consecutive waves of democratic reform occurred. First, local and provincial government-sponsored referendums were introduced and after this both were transformed into citizen-initiated referendums. In Chapter 4 I signalled that most of these reforms occurred at times of significant public dissatisfaction, but are the two related? Or to put it differently, how likely was it that citizen-initiated referendums would have been introduced without public dissatisfaction? Would the government parties

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219 Given that I focus on local and national reforms, I will only analyse the local reform bill. However, the two bills were discussed at the same time, and the discussions were similar.
220 Even to the point that when GROEN! signalled judicial flaws in the law during the Lower House debate, the party was ignored. Only in the Upper House were these mistakes rectified (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 21.4.1999:11853).
221 The 1995 law on local government-sponsored referendums already allowed signatures to be collected. Under the 1995 law, 10% of the electorate would have to sign a petition, after which the local council would consider holding a referendum. It could easily reject such a request. The new law would oblige local councils to hold a referendum.
have introduced them anyway or were the events from October 1996 onwards a necessary condition for the reforms? To examine this question, I will first assess the self-interested motivations of politicians in implementing the reform. Subsequently I will examine the initiation and failure of the Room F talks, followed by an analysis of the Group Langendries process. Lastly, I will tie all these pieces together and examine whether the reform occurred as result of elite-mass interaction.

6.2.2.1. Assessing the self-interest of the parties.
As far as citizen-initiated referendums are concerned, parties often have contradictory act-contingent and outcome-contingent motivations. Indeed, unlike government-sponsored referendums, citizen-initiated referendums are more difficult to control, as the government has to follow 'the will of the people' and is obliged to organize a referendum once a certain number of signatures has been gathered. On the other hand, precisely because the introduction of citizen-initiated referendums gives citizens more influence, it also 'looks good' and the act of supporting it can have strategic value to politicians who want to position themselves as reformers (cf. Shugart, 2008:16). Hence, regarding citizen-initiated referendums there is a trade-off between act-contingent and outcome-contingent motivations. Additionally, the more citizens are dissatisfied, the more act-contingent motivations may play a role, as the benefits of appearing reformist are greater. To assess citizen dissatisfaction and related act-contingent motivations, I will first use the Eurobarometer data and link these to data from the demonstration database assembled by the research group M2P (University of Antwerp).222, 223

1. EUROBAROMETER DATA: SWINGS IN DISSATISFACTION. As mentioned in the introduction, three important shocks to the political system occurred during the 1990s: Black Sunday (1991), the revelation of corruption scandals (mostly 1994) and the Dutroux case and White March (1996). Figure 6.1 shows how dissatisfaction with democracy as recorded in the Eurobarometer surveys evolved. It also shows when the three shocks took place.224

222 I would like to thank Joris Verhulst, Knut de Swert and Stefaan Walgrave for their kind assistance and willingness to provide me with the dataset.
223 Unfortunately, there are no longitudinal data on the attitude of Belgians during the 1990s regarding the usage of referendums.
224 One can wonder how the three relate to each other. Most likely Black Sunday was a consequence of dissatisfaction, while the corruption cases and the Dutroux case were causes of dissatisfaction.
Unfortunately no Eurobarometer data exist for 1996, but the nearest data point, the standard Eurobarometer 49 for which the field work was done in October-November 1997, shows that still 66% of the Belgians were still dissatisfied with the way democracy worked (EB48), no less than 18% higher than the previous peak in 1993 (EB40). At the beginning of 1998 it was still 66%, but by early 1999 it had gone down to 46% (EB51). As these data show, dissatisfaction was unusually high in 1997 and 1998 but decreased sharply thereafter.

2. DEMONSTRATIONS AS OUTBURSTS OF DISSATISFACTION. But did politicians notice this dissatisfaction? Indeed, given that reform is carried out by politicians, their perceptions of public dissatisfaction often matter more than actual dissatisfaction. Such perceptions can be influenced by many different things, such as election results like that of Black Sunday, but probably the most visible outbursts of public dissatisfaction are large-scale demonstrations near or in front of important political buildings. The White March of 20 October 1996 was certainly an example of this. It was impossible to ignore it. But the White March was no isolated event. Many other related demonstrations took place. During 1996 no fewer than 138 similar demonstrations were held, of which 11 attracted more than 5,000 protestors and three more than 10,000. Overall, more than 530,000 demonstrators were counted in

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225 Without a doubt this is lower than the actual number in 1996. One can only imagine how high it must have been in 1996. After all, by the time the field work was being done for the Eurobarometer 49 report, only 5000 people participated in the (second) White March, as opposed to 250,000 to 300,000 in 1996.

226 Some politicians, such as Jos Geysels (GROEN!) participated in the march, which made the following impression on him: ‘I remember walking there. The atmosphere was truly hostile. It was the ultimate sign of a gap between the citizens and the elite’ (Geysels, 16.3.2010).

227 I only counted demonstrations that had a minimum of 500 participants.

228 All three ‘big’ demonstrations were held shortly before or immediately after the ‘first’ White March. A demonstration on 18 October attracted some 20,000 demonstrators; one on 17 October some 13,000 participants and a third on 24 October more than 10,000.
Not only were these numbers exceptionally high compared to other demonstrations, they also made dissatisfaction very tangible to politicians (cf. Van Aelst and Walgrave, 1998:47). Even after 1996, politicians seemed to be sitting on a volcano. As shown in the Eurobarometer data mentioned before, public dissatisfaction was still present. Occasionally outbursts continued to occur, as for instance on the march on 15 February 1998, which again attracted between 25,000 and 30,000 people.

3. ASSESSING THE ACT-CONTINGENT MOTIVATIONS. Looking at the Eurobarometer data and the demonstration data, it seems that until October 1996, the act-contingent motivations to support direct democratic reform were present, but only moderately. One could even say that for the government parties act-contingent motivations were close to non-existent, since they were elected on platforms that either saw local government sponsored referendums as the endpoint of democratic reform discussions (CVP, 1995; PS, 1995) or did not mention referendums at all (SP, 1995; PSC, 1995). But even for them, it might look good to give citizens more power. Yet, the issue was clearly not important enough for their voters in the 1995 election to vote for a different, more reformist, party. If it had been, they would have done so. All of this changed in October 1996, when the build-up to and the actual White March took place. During the last three months of 1996 and the beginning of 1997, politicians had significant act-contingent motivations to support reforms, such as the citizen-initiated referendums. However, once the impact of the Dutroux case and the corruption scandals slowly began to fade away during 1998, the act-contingent motivations also became less important, although still more so than in 1995 since dissatisfaction remained high.

4. ASSESSING THE OUTCOME-CONTINGENT MOTIVATIONS. The outcome-contingent motivations to support local and provincial citizen-initiated referendums were more stable. A citizen-initiated referendum can be used by citizens to correct (envisaged) government policy. It can also be used by the opposition as an agenda-setting instrument (cf. Scarrow, 1999; Muller, 1999). Hence, the more a party was involved in a coalition at local (and provincial) level, the more a citizen-initiated referendum could backfire. As Pilet (2007a:137-145) shows, this was especially the case for the CD&V, the PS and the CDH and to a lesser extent for the liberals and the sp.a. One party for which the instrument could be very helpful was Vlaams

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229 Obviously some of them were counted more than once when they participated in more than one demonstration. Only demonstrations similar to the White March were included in the numbers.
230 This demonstration was triggered by leaks from the second report of the Commission Dutroux. After this no large-scale demonstrations were held. All in all only some 35,000 people – including the participants of 15 February 1998 – protested in similar demonstrations in 1998. To be complete, the numbers for 1997 were the following: 30 similar demonstrations (each attracting more than 500 participants) took place with 55,000 participants counted.
231 Citizen-initiated referendums were explicitly called for by the green parties (cf. Agalev, 1995; Ecolo, 1995) and the OpenVLD (cf. VLD, 1995), while the Francophone liberals only mentioned that they wanted a referendum at all government levels (cf. PRL-FDF, 1995). The VU and Vlaams Belang did not mention the topic (Volksunie, 1995; Vlaams Blok, 1995).
232 The elections of 1995 had shown that socio-economic issues were still more important than reform issues for a large part of the electorate as the government parties (which ran a campaign mostly based on socio-economic issues) saw a slight increase in vote share, while parties with a reform agenda either lost votes or stagnated (cf. Downs, 1995).
233 Pilet’s data are calculated from the 2000 local elections and hence do not reflect the situation in 1998. However, given that the CD&V (-3.6%), the sp.a (-1.4%), the PS (-0.4%) and the CDH (-3.9%) lost votes at the 2000 local elections, this statement is most likely an underestimation of the importance of the local level for
Belang. Due to the cordon sanitaire, the party was excluded from all local coalitions and it could thus use citizen-initiated referendums to have more impact on decision-making processes; a strategy other radical right parties such as the FPÖ had already successfully applied (cf. Müller, 1998). There was also a second, more abstract, outcome-contingent motivation that applied to the Open VLD, as Guy Verhofstadt wanted to break the power of the pillarized (and mostly Christian or social democratic) civil society. He saw referendums as one of the tools to break the power of these pillarized structures (Verhofstadt, 1994). As Table 6.2 shows, act-contingent and outcome-contingent motivations pointed in the same direction for the greens and, to a lesser extent, Vlaams Belang, the VU and the Open VLD. The four government parties in 1995 had few act-contingent and no outcome-contingent motivations to support citizen-initiated referendums. However, from October 1996 onwards, they had act-contingent motivations to support referendums. As mentioned in the reconstruction of the debate, democratic reform debates advanced along two parallel tracks: the Room F talks and the Group Langendries. The Room F talks bridged the gap between government and opposition to a certain extent, since some CD&V politicians were allowed to participate. Nevertheless, in the end they failed, because the CD&V withdrew its support. This last is in line with the negative outcome-contingent motivations of the CD&V, but its original participation is puzzling. Furthermore, the position of the Francophone liberals is also striking, as they pushed for citizen-initiated local referendums even though a risk this would ‘hurt’ them. In both cases the momentum generated by the White March may have been decisive. I will first examine the Room F talks and the role of the Francophone liberals in the Group Langendries and then the impact of the White March.

234 The Belgian referendum practice between 1995 and 1997 also showed that the instrument benefited Vlaams Belang most (Buelens, 2009:127).
235 In practice citizen-initiated referendums often actually depend on the strength of civil society, because individuals have huge difficulties in gathering the necessary number of signatures to trigger a citizen-initiated referendum (cf. Donovan, Bowler and McCuan, 2001).
Table 6.3. Summary of the act- and outcome-contingent motivations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Act-contingent</th>
<th>Outcome-contingent</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Government:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>CD&amp;V</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>++</td>
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<tr>
<td>PS</td>
<td>+/-</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDH</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sp.a</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>++</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Opposition:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open VLD</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francophone liberals</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vlaams Belang</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECOLO</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volksunie</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GROEN!</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
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</table>

**Note:** The order of the parties is as follows: first I distinguish between government and opposition, second I start with the largest party in the Lower House in the Dehaene II era in terms of seats, ending with the smallest party. Coding: -- = strongly negative (or: strong motivations not to support reform); - = moderately negative; +/- = neutral; + = moderately positive; ++ = strongly positive (or: strong motivations to support reform).

6.2.2.2. The Room F negotiations

The Room F talks were a personal initiative of Guy Verhofstadt, who was then a senator. He was the agenda setter. As Filip Rogiers (journalist, sp.a, 22.6.2010) recalls, 'the talks were surrounded by a complete mist'. As a result little is known about what really happened, especially during the first months of the talks. What is known is that at one point during the Autumn of 1996, Verhofstadt started talks with Bert Anciaux and politicians from GROEN! At that time the government parties 'did not know of the existence of the Room F talks' (Willems, CD&V, 25.10.2010). However, at the beginning of 1997 Guy Verhofstadt approached the reformist Johan van Hecke (CD&V). Van Hecke was a former party leader. In 1994, he had tried to reform the CD&V by opening it up to non-traditional civil organizations such as the peace movement and development organizations. He also brought in new people and tried to reduce the emphasis on the Christian identity of the party (Deweerdt, 1995:309-310). However, these reforms met with fierce resistance within the CD&V and he resigned as party leader on 6 June 1996, officially because he was in an extramarital relationship (Deweerdt, 1997:517).
1997 the three spoke to the CD&V faction in the Lower House (Deweerdt, 1998:354). Against the background of the developments in the Dutroux case and the White March, the three CD&V politicians in March 1997 were allowed to sponsor bills emanating from Room F. The party leadership 'disapproved of the initiative, but sensed that something had to be done' (Willems, 25.10.2010). Such cooperation would have been unthinkable under normal circumstances, but as Willems (25.10.2010) states: 'because of the Dutroux disorder, we had a strong position'. The CD&V leadership remained very sceptical about Verhofstadt's motives. According to Filip Rogiers, the CD&V leadership thought that the talks were initiated by Verhofstadt as a means to break the power of the government. 'Whenever I talked to Jean-Luc Dehaene or Herman van Rompuy they said that it was something Verhofstadt just did to break the power of the CD&V' (Rogiers, 22.06.2010). This suspicion about Verhofstadt's underlying motives was also illustrated by the instant removal of all CD&V politicians from the Room F talks as soon as Verhofstadt once again appeared on the political main stage when he became party leader in June 1997.

How to explain the initiation of the Room F talks by Verhofstadt? In the democratic reform literature little has been written on the role of individual politicians. The few existing explanations for the individual voting behaviour of politicians mostly focus on their chances of being re-elected (cf. Bowler, Donovan and Karp, 2006; Blais and Shugart, 2009:195; Renwick, 2010: 35-36). However, Renwick (2010:30) adds two more factors that might play a role. First, it may well be that politicians want more individual power, either within their party or by building alliances across parties. Second, individual values and principles can also have an influence (see also Katz, 2005; Bowler, Donovan and Karp, 2006).

1. RE-ELECTION. The mere act of initiating the Room F talks was unlikely to have an impact on Verhofstadt's re-election chances. He already had a strong personal following that made it possible for him to be elected from virtually any position on a list.

2. INDIVIDUAL POWER. This motivation seems to have played an important part. Verhofstadt wanted a political realignment, to form a broad movement revolving around the Open VLD (cf. Verhofstadt, 1992: Ch. 12). The Room F talks were an excellent way to convince politicians from other parties to join forces.237 They were also a good way to prepare Verhofstadt for a return to the centre stage in the Open VLD.238

3. PRINCIPLE. According to Willems, democratic reform was very important to Verhofstadt.239 His judgment is that Verhofstadt was convinced that democratic reform was necessary, to increase the accountability of the government by reducing the impact of the pillarized organizations and to improve the quality of governance. As Willems explains: 'it

237 In the end Willems and Van Hecke joined the Open VLD, as did some of the followers of Bert Anciaux (Deweerdt, 2002:248).
238 The Room F talks were a good way to show that he was no longer as polarizing a tone as before 1995. In the 1995 election campaign, the sp.a and the CD&V had stated that they did not want to govern with 'this kind of Verhofstadt' (Platel, 1996:509). When Verhofstadt campaigned to become party leader in 1997 he used his 'reformist ideas' and claimed he 'was no longer such a radical' as was clearly illustrated by the Room F talks (Deweerdt, 1998:370).
239 When I asked him how important it was to Verhofstadt, he answered: 'ad infinitum' (Willems, 25.10.2010).
was a way to bypass the established structures. How to break the power of the traditional organizations? By turning directly to the citizen’ (Willems, 25.10.2010).

4. OTHER. A final necessary condition seems to have been the fact that Verhofstadt was at the time sidetracked. He merely had a seat in the Upper House—not in the Lower House where all the action was taking place. ‘If he had not been in the Upper House, he would probably have played at the level of the Group Langendries’ (Willems, 25.10.2010).

To sum up, it seems that Verhofstadt was partly driven by his wish to increase his own (and his party’s) power. The fact that he focused on democratic reform rather than any other subject can be explained by his personal conviction that a change in political structures was needed to change the way politics was conducted.

As mentioned earlier, the Room F talks crumbled as soon as Verhofstadt returned as party leader on 7 June 1997. From that moment on the yawning gap between government and opposition parties reappeared. The opposition parties were suspicious of the government, as they feared a cover-up was taking place (Deweerdt, 1998:353-354). Additionally, they did not want to participate in the Group Langendries because this would lend credibility to the government. They suspected that the government would merely try to take over the (democratic) reform theme and reduce the ‘radicalness’ of the proposals. There is, however, one exception to this overall picture of a yawning gap between government and opposition parties, in the shape of the Francophone liberals, who stayed in the Group Langendries and collaborated with the government parties.

6.2.2.3. The Francophone liberals and the Group Langendries
The peculiar position of the Francophone liberals gives rise to at least three questions:

1. Why did the Francophone liberals join (and remain in) the Group Langendries?
2. Did their presence make a difference?
3. Did their act-contingent motivations outweigh their negative outcome-contingent motivations?

1. EXPLAINING THE PARTICIPATION OF THE FRANCOPHONE LIBERALS IN THE GROUP LANGENDRIES. At least two explanations can be thought of. First, may be the Francophone liberals wanted to appear ready for government. Indeed, according to Filip Rogiers, among journalists there was a general feeling that ‘they wanted to distance

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240 This reasoning is also echoed in Verhofstadt’s citizens’ manifestoes. As Verhofstadt stated: ‘the most important aspect (...) is without a doubt to take the political power (...) away from special interests and return it to the citizen’. (Verhofstadt, 1992, Ch. 4). Verhofstadt’s focus on the pillarized structures was probably inspired by his own bad experiences with them in 1987, when the Christian democratic labour union vetoed a centre-right coalition (cf. Verhofstadt, 1992: Ch. 3).

241 There is evidence that this suspicion was justified, as the government parties refused to merge the Room F and Group Langendries proposals by arguing that the former were ‘too extreme’ (Rogiers, 3.2.1998).

242 Open VLD, the VU and GROEN! suspected that, as one newspaper put it, the government wanted ‘to block the path of the Room F talks’ (Rogiers, 3.2.1998).

243 Unfortunately, this question cannot be answered easily. For instance, media accounts only focused on why the other opposition parties left the negotiations, but not on the one party that stayed. Theoretically this lack of information could be solved by conducting interviews. However, even after repeated efforts I was unable to get an interview with any of the politicians who were important in the party during the 1990s.
themselves from the Open VLD, which they felt was far too radical and diminished their chances of getting in the government. They wanted to appear ‘salonfähig’ and profile themselves as a government-worthy party’ (Rogiers, 22.6.2010). This can also be seen in the campaign of 1995. On the Flemish side, this campaign was fought by the social democrats under the slogan ‘no government with Verhofstadt’ (cf. SP, 1995). Given that the composition of the Belgian government tends to be based on party families (which combine similar parties on both sides of the linguistic divide) rather than individual parties, the Francophone liberals were to a large extent bound to their Flemish counterparts. By 1997 the liberals had already been in opposition for ten years. In the aftermath of the Dutroux case, they clearly diverged from Verhofstadt and adopted a more cooperative strategy (Deweerdt, 1999:171-173). Secondly, by staying in the Group Langendries, the Francophone liberals also had a greater chance of affecting policy outcomes. If they genuinely wanted to implement democratic reforms, staying in the Group Langendries was the best strategy.

2. The impact of the Francophone liberals. Certainly, the government parties themselves were convinced that something needed to change. As Van der Maelen (28.6.2010) recalls ‘there was clearly a realization within the government parties in parliament that we would have to budge at least on some issues’. But on which issues to budge? The corruption scandals were closely related to party financing (one of the elements in the agreement of the Group Langendries), but the Dutroux crisis was not so easily linked to a solution. Most of the opposition parties had put forward bills on a(national) citizen-initiated referendum and clearly favoured it (cf. bill 49K124, 49K219, 49K276). Yet on several occasions it became clear that the government parties were very reluctant to support these bills. First of all, from the very beginning it was evident that the government parties themselves were not in favour of citizen-initiated referendums. After all, none of them had included this in their election manifesto for the 1995 elections and the coalition agreement did not mention a citizen-initiated referendum. The fact that the government parties introduced local and provincial government-sponsored referendums in 1995 and 1997, but refrained from introducing a citizen-initiated referendum, also pointed in this direction. Only after the agreement within the Group Langendries did they support the idea. Lastly, the report from the Committee on the Interior, in which local citizen-initiated referendums were discussed in 1998, also suggests that the government parties were very reluctant (cf. Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 1998). Peter Vanvelthoven (sp.a) for instance noted that in principle it is local councils which have to govern the local community and ‘referendums should not systematically undermine this principle’ (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 1998:7). The same is true for the PS, which was afraid ‘referendums will replace (...) directly elected politicians’ (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 1998:6). The CDH had a more nuanced view and thought that ‘given the current context it is certainly justified that some decisions will in the future be taken by citizens through direct democracy’ (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 1998:6-7). The CD&V did not reveal its position in the report, but in his 1999 book Sporen naar 2000, Prime Minister Dehaene explicitly stated that the referendum instrument is simply ‘unfit’ and that he ‘remains a huge proponent of representative democracy’ (Dehaene, 1999:146-147). Furthermore, he believed that ‘there is no public demand for such changes and such instant democracy will only make decision

244 This is also seen in other policy domains, such as reform of the police and the judicial system (Deweerdt, 1999:171-173).
making more difficult' (Dehaene, 1999: 139). Hence, in line with their outcome-contingent motivations, three of the four government parties remained hostile to the referendum idea. Only the CDH was more favourably disposed, but explicitly referred to the ‘current context’. The Francophone liberals on the other hand were enthusiastic. They even wanted to go further and make the referendum results binding, but the other four parties were unwilling to go that far (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 1998:3). The precise impact of the Francophone liberals can be gauged by comparing the debate on provincial government-sponsored referendums on 20 May 1997, which was held shortly before the Langendries agreement was reached, with the debates on citizen-initiated referendums in the Committee of the Interior on 13 July 1998. In addition to the discussion on whether the outcome should be binding, a second contentious element was elaborately discussed: from what moment is an outcome valid - or in a uniquely Belgian translation of this problem, when do we begin to count the votes? During the debates on 20 May 1997 the government rejected an amendment from the Francophone liberals to abolish the threshold, which at that time was set at 40% of the electorate (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 1997). Yet later through the legislation on provincial citizen-initiated referendums, this threshold was lowered, to 10%, which was probably a compromise between the government parties and the Francophone liberals. Lastly, transforming government-sponsored into citizen-initiated referendums was also advocated by the Francophone liberals (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 1997, see also Gol, Duquesne and Michel, 1992:2). Hence, the impact of the Francophone liberals is visible in the transformation of a government-sponsored referendum and in the lowering of the threshold from 40% to 10%.

Table 6.4 Summary of the differences between the two debates

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<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outcome binding?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Result requirement?</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen-initiated?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. THE SUPPORT OF THE FRANCOPHONE LIBERALS FOR CITIZEN-INITIATED REFERENDUMS. Strangely enough the Francophone liberals were the only ones who acted against their outcome-contingent motivations. After all, the party was included in a substantial number of local coalitions. In all of these local communities a citizen-initiated referendum might backfire. In all likelihood a combination of three factors played a role in their support: principles, act-contingent motivations and the relatively lower weight given to outcome-contingent motivations by the Francophone liberals. First, it may well have been the case that principled motivations were instrumental here. The party had included referendums in its 1995 manifesto and citizen-initiated referendums fit in with the Francophone liberals’ vision of a liberal society consisting of individuals taking matters into their own hands (PRL-FDF, 1995). Second, as mentioned before, the Dutroux crisis enhanced the already existing act-contingent motivations for the party to maintain its support for citizen-initiated referendums. Third, although the Francophone liberals were part of a number of local coalitions, this was even more the case with their main competitors, the CDH and the PS. Therefore, their

245 When the threshold was not reached, the votes were simply not counted. This happened several times (Buelens, 2009:19).
competitors risked losing more than the Francophone liberals themselves. Perhaps the instrument could even help the Francophone liberals in breaking the dominance of the PS at local level. Furthermore, given that the party was more centralized than its two competitors (cf. Pilet, 2007b: 217), it did not suffer from internal conflicts between the local and the centralized party branches. Hence, by pushing for local and provincial citizen-initiated referendums, it exposed its competitors to internal disagreements, while being far less vulnerable to such disagreements itself. Lastly, the outcome-contingent motivations for not supporting citizen-initiated referendums mentioned in Table 6.2, were at local level and it is always easier for national politicians to give citizens more say in local (and provincial) matters given that they themselves are not affected by it. 246

6.2.2.4 Direct democratic reform through elite-mass interaction?
To conclude this analysis, I now return to the question of the importance of public dissatisfaction. If public dissatisfaction did play a role one can expect to see a democratic reform process through elite-mass interaction. 247 Were the Dehaene II reforms accomplished through elite-mass interaction? As mentioned in Chapter 2, reform through elite-mass interaction takes place in three phases. First, reformers put a reform topic on the agenda. Second a public outcry occurs and third, reformers use this in political arenas to push reform through. Regarding the first phase, referendums were put on the agenda by reformers within the green parties and later by the liberal parties. From 1991 to 1994 a myriad of referendum proposals was introduced, but only a moderate kind of referendums, a non-binding local government-sponsored referendum, was implemented. In 1995 the Dehaene II government did not include far-reaching direct democratic reform in its coalition agreement. Therefore, the government parties were indeed reluctant to do so. Regarding the second phase, clearly the Dutroux crisis and the White March built on the erosion of public confidence witnessed by Black Sunday and aggravated by the corruption scandals. They represented the moment when ‘democratic reform gained momentum’ (Van der Maelen, 28.6.2010). Yet these events by themselves were, as Jos Geysels calls them, ‘merely a cri de coeur’ (Geysels, 16.3.2010): they were simply a heartfelt appeal for ‘something’ to be changed. There was no specific explanation of this ‘something’. It was the opposition parties, and most notably the liberals and the green parties, who interpreted the White March as a call for democratic reform. Given that the reformist politicians were mainly in opposition, they had few options in pushing for democratic reform. 248 However, Verhofstadt successfully made use of this limited set of options by initiating wide ranging informal talks in Room F. Certainly, during the Room F talks there was substantial disagreement on which reforms to implement. 249 Yet on one thing all participants agreed: the need for more elaborate referendum provisions. 250

246 With regard to this matter, it is telling that unlike local and provincial citizen-initiated referendums, regional referendums, which were originally part of the June 1997 agreement, failed to materialize.
247 A discussion of the reasons why mass imposition, or instances where the people force political elites to implement reforms is virtually impossible when no citizen-initiated referendums pre-exist, can be found in Renwick, 2010: 15-16. Hence in reality public dissatisfaction mostly has at best an indirect impact.
248 The reform-minded politicians within the government parties, the young CD&V politicians, were few and not close to the centre of power of their party. The only politician with some influence was Johan van Hecke, the former CD&V party chairman. However, as mentioned earlier, by 1997 his power was waning and he was not represented in the circles of the party that were close to Prime Minister Dehaene and Van Rompuy.
249 This is also acknowledged by Jos Geysels (26.3.2010).
250 This is also shown by the fact that the referendum bill ensuing from the Room F talks was the only democratic reform bill that all participants in Room F signed (cf. bill 49K1026).
Hence the greatest pressure on the Group Langendries was over finding a compromise on referendums. Indeed, again it was probably no coincidence that only a few days after the Room F talks collapsed because of the withdrawal of the CD&V politicians, the Group Langendries reached a compromise which included only one democratic reform topic: referendums (cf. Delfosse, 18.6.1997). By agreeing on this issue the government parties could claim to have listened to the public. In this third phase of the elite-mass interaction process, only the Francophone liberals were able to influence the government parties. In the end the Francophone liberals had to make concessions, but nevertheless they had a tangible impact on the local and provincial citizen-initiated referendums.

6.3 Verhofstadt I: A ‘citizens’ democracy’?

The election of 1999 saw the reformist parties come in office. It was the first time the green parties had participated in government, while the liberals had been out of office for 12 years. From that moment, democratic reform was explicitly on the government agenda. The Verhofstadt I debates covered three broad democratic reform topics: the preference threshold, the proportionality of the electoral system and (national and regional) referendums. Two electoral reform packages were approved. The first consisted of the abolition of so-called list of reserves and the lessening of the impact of the list vote, both of which lowered the preference threshold, as well as an increase of the gender quota. The second reform package reintroduced the list of reserves, enlarged the electoral districts and introduced a provincial electoral threshold of 5%. The attempts to introduce regional and national referendums largely failed.

6.3.1 Reconstructing the debates

A. Context and historical roots of the debate

In 1987, the Belgian electoral system was a list PR system. The seats were allocated according to the D'Hondt formula in two tiers, one

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251 In an interview with Jean-Benoit Pilet, Delaene (21.9.2005) explains how the CD&V dealt with (electoral) reform at that time: ‘Verhofstadt’s citizens’ manifesto started the discussion. (...) The liberals were the driving force of the reform debates because of the citizens’ manifesto and most notably because it was in line with the logic of the liberal ideology. And I always fundamentally opposed it’. Earlier on in that interview Delaene summarizes the CD&V’s position towards reform as follows: ‘[I]t is not one of our ‘dada’s’. We were mainly reactive, not proactive’.

252 As I mentioned before, the government parties ignored all amendments and comments from the other opposition parties.

253 Even though regional referendums were included in the agreement of 17 June 1997, it never materialized. A bill introducing a constitutional change to allow this was presented and approved in the Lower House on 16 July 1998, but was simply not discussed in the Upper House (cf. bill 49K1176). One can only speculate about the reasons why regional referendums did not materialize, since there was no vote or discussion on it in the Upper House. But the fact that compared to local and provincial referendums, they were ‘more threatening’ to the parties, combined with less positive act-contingent motivations to support the bill because the sense of urgency had decreased significantly by late 1998, can probably explain the failure of the bill to a large extent.

254 The wider political reform debates during Verhofstadt I included among other things a deontological code for parliamentarians, rules to limit clientelism, campaign funding legislation, decreasing the number of a minister’s personal staff and political advisers, legislation on the judicial responsibility of aldermen, mayors and ministers, a strengthened petition right, the introduction of national and regional referendums, the direct election of mayors, the change to a majoritarian electoral system, and the abolition of compulsory voting (Hondeghem, Maesschalck and Pelgrims (2002:3-4).

255 The historical traces of the referendum debate have already been outlined in the previous section, therefore I will now focus on the debates about the proportionality of the system and the preference threshold.
subprovincial and one provincial. The two tiers were connected through so-called ‘apparentement’ provisions, which basically pool the votes at provincial level. The criterion to be allowed to enter the second-tier seat allocation was to gain two-thirds of the subprovincial electoral quota. Apart from for parties excluded due to this electoral threshold, the system de facto operated as an electoral system with provincial electoral districts. In 1993 the threshold was reduced to one-third of the electoral quota, to counterbalance the impact in the reduction of the number of MPs from 212 to 150 (which was simultaneously enacted as part of the 1993 state reform) (Van der Weyden, 2001:5).

Before the 1991 elections the proportionality of the electoral system was barely discussed. Only the green parties wanted the introduction of a ‘pure’ proportional system, but they were simply ignored (Rihoux, 1996:259). However, the elections of 24 November 1991 put the issue prominently on the agenda. These elections increased the number of parties in the Lower House from 11 to 13. The two new parties, the Front National and ROSSEM, were both anti-establishment. Moreover, the election outcome meant that the smallest parties grew quite substantially: the Vlaams Belang went from 2 to 12 seats and ECOLO jumped from 3 seats to 10. In short, party system fragmentation increased, while the anti-establishment parties grew stronger. Shortly afterwards Verhofstadt (1992) advocated the introduction of a more majoritarian electoral system in his second citizens’ manifesto. He was soon followed by the Francophone liberals, who introduced a bill to change the constitution in order to implement a majoritarian electoral system (bill 48K1582). Prime Minister Dehaene also let it be known that he personally favoured a less proportionate electoral system, through the introduction of an electoral threshold (Rihoux, 1996: 259-260). However, none of the majoritarian proposals passed or was seriously discussed (Pilet, 2007a:91) and the electoral threshold proposal was not even translated into a bill. The issue briefly resurfaced in the second half of the 1990s, when the liberals shifted their position and advocated a mixed electoral system. The PS showed its support, but the other parties rejected the idea (Pilet, 2007a:91-92).

Regarding the preference threshold, again the debates were marginal before the 1990s, but this changed after the 1991 elections (Pilet, 2007a:177). As early as 14 February 1992 the Francophone liberals introduced a bill to abolish the list vote at local level, which would lower the preference threshold. Open VLD followed in May 1992, when Verhofstadt

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256 The effective number of parties rose from approximately seven to approximately eight and a half (De Winter and Dumont, 1999:184-186).

257 In an interview with Jean-Benoit Pilet, Antoine Duquesne (Francophone liberals, 13.9.2005), explains why his party supported reforms towards a more majoritarian electoral system as follows: ‘Belgium is a difficult country. It is an exploded country. And the more there is party fragmentation, the more difficult the debate is. Taking decisions is even more difficult. That is an enormous problem, and that is why we politicians always think of electoral reforms to reduce the party fragmentation’.

258 He admitted to supporting the threshold to counter the rise of the extreme right (Rihoux, 1996:259-260).

259 The original Belgian ballot structure in 1987 was as follows (cf. Pilet, 2007a:176; De Winter, 2005:421):
- Voters are given a ballot paper with two lists, one of effective candidates and one of reserve candidates. There is also a box to vote for the party
- The voters are allowed to either cast a vote for the party (the list vote) or a vote for both a candidate on the effective list and one on the list of reserves.
- Each candidate who receives a number of preference votes that is equal to or higher than the electoral quota gets a seat. After this the distribution of the seats is calculated by looking at the place on the list (starting with the first candidate, then the second and so on). Initially, each candidate needs to reach the
stated in his second citizens’ manifesto that the list vote should be discontinued (Verhofstadt, 1992). On 9 July and 1 December 1992 the anti-establishment party ROSSEM followed in the liberals’ footsteps and introduced bills to abolish the list of reserves and the list vote in both cases resulting in a lower preference threshold (bills 48K585 and 48K761). Lastly, the green parties also submitted a bill to eliminate the list of reserves.\(^{260}\) As far as the government parties were concerned, the Christian democrats were not unsympathetic to a lower preference threshold. Then CD&V party chairman Johan van Hecke endorsed the abolition of the list vote, while from 1993 onwards the CDH also favoured this (Pilet, 2007a:177). The social democrats, on the other hand, were against a lower preference threshold. As a compromise the multiple preferential vote was introduced on 3 April 1995 which gave voters the right to cast multiple preference votes. In practice this law also lowered the preference threshold to some degree. During the second half of the 1990s the debates on this topic were less prominent.\(^{261}\)

B. Initiation of the debates. Helped by yet another scandal immediately before the elections, the green parties and Verhofstadt’s Open VLD won the election of 1999. The social democrats and the CD&V lost a significant share of the votes (Swyngedouw, 2002:125). As a result the liberal and green parties were able to form a new kind of coalition, from which the Christian democrats were excluded for the first time in the post-World War II era. Conversely, the greens entered government for the first time and the liberals returned after 12 years in opposition (Deschouwer, 2009:13). The only remnants of the old order in this new coalition were the social democrats, who had lost heavily in the elections.\(^{262}\)

During the coalition negotiations democratic reform was discussed substantively. Indeed, Open VLD and its Francophone sister party tried to have a more majoritarian electoral system included in the coalition agreement (Pilet, 2007a:92). However, this met with fierce resistance from the green parties and the social democrats. Several other democratic reforms did feature prominently in the coalition agreement. Most importantly it included:

- The creation of a commission on political reform, which was to examine the modernization of the electoral system, the size of the electoral districts and how to strengthen the political participation of the citizenry
- A lowering of the preference threshold by reducing the impact of the list vote to 50% together with the abolition of the list of reserves
- The introduction of national and regional government-sponsored referendums (Verhofstadt, 1999:5-6)

### Electoral Quota

Electoral quota. The list votes are used when a candidate does not have sufficient preference votes. Each list vote can only be used once. When the reservoir of list votes is depleted but there are still seats to allocate, the remaining candidates are ranked in order of the number of their preference votes. The leftover seats are distributed based on this order.

- Regarding the list of reserves, the same procedure is used, the only difference being that ballots on which only a preference vote for an effective candidate is cast are also counted as list votes. The list of reserves is used when a candidate leaves parliament prematurely (e.g. to become a minister in the new government).

\(^{260}\) They only supported the abolition of the list vote after a party congress on 24 April 1998 (Pilet, 2007a:198)

\(^{261}\) Three bills were introduced: a PRL-FDF bill (bill 48K1048); a CDH bill (bill 48K1105) and an Open VLD bill (bill 48K1734). None of which were discussed. Although the issue featured in the Room F talks, no bills ensued.

\(^{262}\) The sp.a lost more than 24% of its votes, while the PS lost 14% (Swyngedouw, 2002:125).
Table 6.5 Reform timetable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-reform phase</td>
<td>Before 1991</td>
<td>Marginal debates on more proportionality and lowering the preference threshold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24.11.1991</td>
<td>Black Sunday, effective number of parties jumps from about seven to eight and a half; anti-establishment parties gain substantially</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.2.1992</td>
<td>PRL introduces a bill to lower the preference threshold</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.5.1992</td>
<td>In his second citizens’ manifesto Verhofstadt (Open VLD) calls for a more majoritarian electoral system and a lower preference threshold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1992—1995</td>
<td>• The Christian democrats, ROSSEM and the green parties also want a lower preference threshold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Prime Minister Dehaene (CD&amp;V) wants an electoral threshold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• The social democrats are against a lower preferential threshold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• The green parties, VU, the anti-establishment parties, sp.a and CDH are against a more majoritarian electoral system</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.5.1995</td>
<td>The preference threshold lowered through the introduction of the multiple preferential vote</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1995—1999</td>
<td>Both the preference threshold and the proportionality issues fade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform initiation</td>
<td>7.7.1999</td>
<td>The coalition agreement includes the setting up of a commission on political reform, the lowering of the preference threshold and the introduction of referendums.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st reform process</td>
<td>17.1.2000</td>
<td>The commission on political reform convenes for the first time</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19.5.2000</td>
<td>The government reaches a first agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.7.2000</td>
<td>The commission presents its report and expert advice on direct democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote reform</td>
<td>15.6.2000—</td>
<td>The impact of the list vote reduced to 50% and the list of reserves abolished</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27.12.2000</td>
<td>Vote on raising the gender quota from 33% to 50%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30.5.2002*</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2nd reform process</td>
<td>25.4.2001</td>
<td>Verhofstadt acknowledges that the government is preparing a bill on electoral reform</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25.9.2001</td>
<td>The commission presents its expert report on representative democracy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26.4.2002</td>
<td>An agreement on a second electoral reform package is reached.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.5.2002</td>
<td>The actual electoral reform bill introduced in parliament</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vote second reform</td>
<td>25.9.2002—</td>
<td>Bill approved in respectively the Lower House and the Upper House</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.11.2002</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

* Although this is not in chronological order, I include this reform vote here for the sake of clarity as it was part of the first reform package. (cf. footnote 270).

C. The process of the first reform package. The commission on political reform was set up on 17 January 2000. The commission included MPs of all parties in both the Lower and the Upper House. It was presided over by a Flemish social democrat, Dirk van der Maelen, and a Francophone liberal, Armand de Decker. The task of the commission was limited to listing options and presenting well-founded advice. The actual decisions and initiatives were then to
be taken by the government (Hondeghem, Maesschalck and Pelgrims, 2002:18; see also Verhofstadt, 1999:5).

The commission outlined no fewer than 21 topics for discussion, many of which had subtopics (cf. Belgische Senaat en Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2000:24-27). In the end it chose to discuss seven general themes (Deweerdt, 2001:247). The meetings began on 27 March 2000. Dirk van der Maelen, the co-chairman of the commission, described the actual proceedings of the commission as follows:

'...The commission only advanced very slowly. I tried to increase the pace of the process by making sure that everybody's themes got a chance. I scheduled three or four themes per session to make sure all parties were interested. Also I wanted to involve academics. I hoped to make the issues more neutral this way' (Van der Maelen, 28.6.2010).

The commission delivered its first report and expert advice on direct democracy on 6 July 2000. The report unanimously stated that binding (national or regional) referendums would require constitutional change. The authors were more divided on the need for constitutional change to implement non-binding (national or regional) referendums (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers en Senaat, 2000a:16-35). After the first report the commission suffered from a high degree of non-attendance and progress was slow. On 25 September 2001 it delivered its expert advice on representative democracy, listing the options as regards the abolition of compulsory voting, gender quotas and the administrative control of elections. Following the reports on direct democracy and representative democracy the commission only delivered one interim report, on the deontology of the political mandate, while there were no reports whatsoever on the four remaining topics (cf. Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers en Senaat, 2002).

As was stated in the coalition agreement, the actual decision making took place at government level. The government parties remained divided on national referendums. The liberal parties and greens were in favour, whereas (especially the Francophone) social democrats were against. With the largest Francophone party resisting, reaching an agreement at national level therefore proved totally impossible.

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263 For instance, on 5 March 2001, the session on the punishment for non-attendance by MPs had to be cancelled due to... significant non-attendance (Hondeghem, Maesschalck and Pelgrims, 2002:19).

264 The report was most elaborate on compulsory voting and a switch to a more majoritarian electoral system. The report advised against abolishing compulsory voting (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers en Senaat, 2001:81-82). Regarding the introduction of a more majoritarian electoral system, the report warned that party fragmentation could not be defined be solved through electoral reform, even when the government adopted a majoritarian electoral system (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers en Senaat, 2001:161). The other five topics were: politics and society, citizenship and politics, the efficiency of democracy, the protection of democracy, and the role of parliament (Deweerdt, 2001:247).

265 During the debate on the report on political reform in the Lower House, Claude Eerdekens (PS) explicitly stated: 'the introduction of referendums (...) is not desirable' (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers en Senaat, 2000b:13).

266 The only step taken was to approve the first reading of a constitutional change to article 41 of the constitution, which would allow the introduction of legislation on binding regional referendums (cf. bill 50K2389). Given that the next government, Verhofstadt II, included the same parties and hence the same deadlock, in the end the article was not changed.
The government was more successful on the topic of electoral reform. The first electoral reform package was agreed on 19 May 2000. It combined five issues: the increased impact of the preference vote, the direct election of mayors (both favoured by the liberals and to a lesser extent the green parties), the introduction of an electoral threshold of 5% (favoured by the social democrats and the liberals), the enlargement of the electoral districts (favoured especially by the Flemish social democrats and liberals, but also by the greens) and an increase in gender quotas from 33% to 50% of a candidate list (favoured by the social democrats and the greens) (Deweerdt, 2001:247-248).

D. Vote on the first reform package. The first (minor reform) package was passed in parliament on 26 June 2000 (bill 50K666). It included a reduction in the impact of the list vote and the abolition of the list of reserves, both of which lowered the preference threshold for local, provincial and European elections. Six months later, on 27 December 2000, the bill affecting national elections was passed in the Upper House (bill 50K667). The government parties, the VU and CD&V supported the legislation, while the CDH and the Front National abstained because they thought the list vote should be abolished completely (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2000:3). Vlaams Belang voted against because it thought the legislation was premature (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2000:5).

E. The second reform package. When the legislation in the first reform package was voted on, some elements of the agreement of 19 May 2000 were still under debate. On 25 April 2001 Prime Minister Verhofstadt announced that the government was working on an agreement to group subprovince electoral districts at provincial level (Deweerdt, 2003:343). Yet the negotiations proceeded very slowly, because the PS was opposed to enlarging the electoral districts in the provinces of Liège and Hainaut.

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268 The enlargement of the electoral districts was not only favoured by the Flemish social democrats and the Flemish liberals. As Geyels (GROEN!) states: "It benefits the smaller parties. (...) We traded the electoral threshold for the larger electoral districts. We had calculated it: de facto the threshold was already higher". (Geyels, 16.3.2010)

269 In practice, the direct election of mayors was, however, opposed by the greens and the social democrats. As a result no agreement could be reached within the government. To find a way out it was first sent to the commission on political reform. Soon afterwards the government parties changed their strategy and the topic regionalized in 2001 as part of the Lambermont agreement on state reform (Pilet, 2007a:126, 179).

270 The bill had already been approved in the Lower House on 7 July 2000. The time gap was due to the parliamentary recess.

271 The legislation on gender quota took even longer: the bill was only introduced on 28 January 2002, only three months before the second democratic reform agreement was reached on 26 April 2002. There are, however, reasons to count it as part of the first reform package. Indeed, the bill was introduced four months before the agreement of 26 April 2002 was reached and the parliamentary debates and votes on the gender quota bill were held before the debates on the bills stemming from the second agreement. The votes on the gender quota bill also resembled the votes on the other bills included in the first reform package. The only difference was the vote of the Vlaams Belang, who now abstained instead of voting against the bill (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 30.5.2002:51). This reasoning is also supported by an interview Jean-Benoit Pilet did with the Minister responsible for the bills, Antoine Duquesne (Francophone liberals, 13.9.2005). Duquesne points out that "it [the lowering of the preference threshold, KJ] was coupled to the problem of gender equality on the candidate lists".

272 Especially the local branches of the PS were opposed, while party chairman Elio Di Rupo was afraid that 'his' province Hainaut would lose a seat due to the merger of the sub-provincial districts (Deweerdt, 2003:243).
districts because it feared competition from the Francophone liberals (Deweerdt, 2003:243-244). A third important element of the debate was whether the electoral threshold should be imposed at regional or at provincial level. Verhofstadt himself actually wanted a combination of the two. However, SPIRIT, one of the descendants of the VU, which split in October 2001 into the N-VA and SPIRIT, was at that time part of the Flemish regional government. It was negotiating on the (then regionalized) issue of the direct election of mayors and opposed a national threshold. On 17 April 2002 it threatened to block the direct election of mayors if the Verhofstadt I government implemented a regional electoral threshold. The liberal parties backed down and the regional electoral threshold was no longer on the agenda.

On 26 April 2002 a broad agreement on political reform was reached, which also included democratic reform. To start with, the government agreed to approve the first reading of a constitutional change needed to implement regional referendums after the 2003 election. It was also agreed that the Lower House would be expanded from 150 to 200 MPs, 50 of whom would be elected on regional lists. Politicians would be allowed to stand as candidates on both types of list. The agreement also included creating provincial electoral districts and introducing provincial electoral thresholds (Deweerdt, 2003:245). The expansion of the assembly from 150 to 200 MPs was not part of the actual bill of 14 May 2002. However, out of the blue a new element was included in the bill: the reintroduction of the list of reserves, which had been abolished only eighteen months earlier (cf. bill 50K1806).

F. The vote on the second reform package. On 25 September 2002 the bill was approved in the Lower House. Pierre Lano (Open VLD), Jan Peeter (sp.a) and Francois Dufour (PS) were given permission to vote against the bill to show their opposition to the provincial electoral districts. For similar reasons Karel Pinxten (Open VLD) was allowed to abstain. The bill was approved by the remaining government MPs, while the opposition parties voted against it. The bill was accepted in the Upper House, by a similar majority on 7 November 2002 (Deweerdt, 2003:249).274

G. Epilogue. Shortly after its approval the Belgian constitutional court deemed the law unconstitutional, because of the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde district (cf. Sinardet, 2010; Hooghe and Deschouwer, 2011). However, although this ruling did spark new reform debates, since then at least three elections have been held under the new electoral rules.

6.3.2 Explaining the Verhofstadt (non-)reforms
The Verhofstadt I government introduced the highest number of democratic reforms that were not a by-product of state reform in the recent political history of Belgium. Nevertheless, many bolder democratic reforms, such as the introduction of national referendums, failed. Why did referendums fail, when the electoral reform packages succeeded? In this section I will examine the three most substantial reform discussions, namely those on national and regional referendums the first reform package (resulting in the lowering of the preference threshold and an increase in gender quotas), and the second reform package (most importantly

273 Another complex piece of the puzzle was the electoral district Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde (B-H-V), which received an exceptional status: its constituency borders were not extended to the provincial level (for more on B-H-V see: Deschouwer, 2009: 107-108, 172; Sinardet, 2010; Hooghe and Deschouwer, 2011).
274 This time Jacques Timmermans (sp.a) was allowed to vote against the bill (Deweerdt, 2003:249).
resulting in the creation of provincial electoral districts and the introduction of electoral thresholds of 5% at provincial level).

6.3.2.1 Assessing the self-interest of the parties
By 2000 Belgian dissatisfaction with democracy had abated significantly (cf. Figure 6.4). In the first months after the Verhofstadt I government took office, dissatisfaction declined from 46% to 38%. After a short steep decline to 19%, the level remained at between 26% and 34%. Hence, unlike its predecessor, Verhofstadt I did not face huge citizen dissatisfaction. There were also no large scale corruption scandals or demonstrations. Briefly: the Verhofstadt I period was relatively calm and peaceful. It is this low public dissatisfaction that forms the background to the self-interested motivations regarding national referendums and the first and second reform packages.

Figure 6.4 Dissatisfaction with the way democracy works nowadays (1999-2003)

1. NATIONAL AND REGIONAL REFERENDUMS. Even though there was no large-scale public dissatisfaction, there were some act-contingent motivations to support national referendums. Indeed, given that referendums gives citizens more power, it may be beneficial to a politician to support them. In addition to this rather abstract incentive, the election manifestoes of the different parties provide a more specific incentive. Two groups of parties can be distinguished. The first group, consisting of the Christian and the social democrats, had few incentives to support referendums, which they did not include referendums in their

275 To my knowledge, no survey results exist for 1999-2003 on whether Belgians support referendums. Similarly, I found no surveys by polling agencies in my searches of the media databases Mediargus and Press Banking.
manifestoes (cf. SP, 1999; CVP, 1999) or only endorsed in a very moderate form (PS, 1999; PSC, 1999). The second group consisted of the other parties, which all favoured binding (citizen-initiated) national referendums (cf. VLD, 1999; PRL-FDF-MCC, 1999; Vlaams Blok, 1999; ECOLO, 1999; Agalev, 1999; VU-ID, 1999). National and regional referendums were much more problematic as far as outcome-contingent motivations were concerned, since the government could actually be affected by a national referendum. As a result, the parties' outcome-contingent motivations were relatively negative. However, the aspiration of the Open VLD and the francophone liberals to break the pillarized society and the domination of respectively the CD&V and the PS was still an outcome-contingent motivation for supporting referendums, albeit a very indirect and abstract one. On the other hand, an outcome-contingent motivation not to support national referendums related to the Belgian linguistic divide. As witnessed in the 1950 referendum, an asymmetric outcome could result in tensions between the two linguistic groups. Therefore even a referendum might cause tension within the national government if the outcome differed between the linguistic communities. A second negative outcome-contingent motivation was the more general consequence that referendums entail handing over (at least some) power to the people. The only party that could really benefit from the measure was once again Vlaams Belang, as it was permanently excluded from the government due to the cordon sanitaire and could use referendums to influence the political agenda.

2. THE FIRST REFORM PACKAGE. The first electoral reform package consisted of lowering the preference threshold and increasing gender quotas. The act-contingent motivations to support these two elements of the package were both positive. The lowering of the preference threshold gave voters more say. Moreover, all parties thought that this issue mattered to the voters (Pilet, 2007a: 180-181). The increase of gender quotas, similarly, ‘portray[ed] the party as open to women and their concerns’ (Celis, Krook and Meier, 2011:519). Both elements of the package deal thus ‘looked good’. The only party that had somewhat more neutral act-contingent motivations was Vlaams Belang. It had not supported gender equality in the past and it deemed the lowering of the preference threshold unimportant, as it thought its voters would not care (Pilet, 2007a: 181). As far as the outcome-contingent motivations were concerned the picture was more mixed, as both measures could potentially disturb the intra-party balance. Parties with powerful factions especially, in this case the social and the Christian democrats, had outcome-contingent motivations for not supporting the lowering of the preference threshold, since it could destabilize the balance between their factions. The green parties had other outcome-contingent reasons for not supporting the legislation, because their party members decided the composition of (and positions on) the candidate lists. 278

276 Interestingly, both Francophone parties included referendums in their manifesto - even the PS, which previously had not supported them. However, both parties advocated only a very moderate form of referendum that was non-binding and to be held in the earliest phases of the decision-making process. They saw it more as an opinion poll than a decision-making tool (PS, 1999; PSC, 1999).

277 Although they differed on the specific details, all parties agreed on the need to introduce national binding referendums. Vlaams Belang and OpenVLD did not explicitly mention whether or not they wanted citizen-initiated referendums (cf. VLD, 1999; Vlaams Blok, 1999). Hence in what follows, I will refer to national or regional referendums instead of national or regional citizen-initiated referendums.

278 This was true to a lesser extent for regional referendums, but it could still handicap the relations between the regional and the national government.

279 Given their federalist or separatist ideology, this might be less of a disadvantage to the VU and Vlaams Belang.
Through the lowering of the preference threshold the decisions of the party members could more easily be overruled (Pilet, 2007a:187). Increasing the gender quotas, on the other hand, was more neutral, but this too could disturb the list order. Male incumbents in particular faced the risk of being ranked lower on candidate lists.

3. THE SECOND REFORM PACKAGE. The second reform package consisted of the reintroduction of the list of reserves, the enlargement of the electoral districts and the introduction of a provincial electoral threshold of 5%. The act-contingent motivations for this reform package were generally negative. The reintroduction of the list of reserves by itself ‘looked bad’, given that it had only been abolished eighteen months earlier. Additionally, the measure gave the parties (rather than the voters) more power over who was elected. The enlargement of the electoral districts was more neutral. Although it clearly benefited the government parties, since they had most well-known politicians, it also gave more voters the chance to vote for popular politicians and made the system more transparent by abolishing the complex apparentement system. Lastly, the introduction of a 5% electoral threshold also ‘looked bad’, as it limited the ability of citizens successfully to vote for new parties.

However, for the government parties the expected outcomes of the reform package had substantial benefits. The reintroduction of the list of reserves was even advantageous to all parties – and specifically to the party leadership. As Van der Maelen (28.6.2010) explained: ‘the reintroduction of the list of reserves allowed the national party leadership to make sure that the desired candidates got into parliament’. Enlarging of the electoral districts to the provincial borders had more subtle advantages. It had little or no consequences for seat distribution, since prior to the reform the apparentement already ensured that the de facto seat distribution was the same as seat distribution at provincial level (cf. Hooghe, Noppe and Maddens, 2003). However, this reasoning is only valid when one does not take into account the legal threshold of one third of the electoral quota at subprovincial level. Indeed, the smaller parties simply reasoned that the larger the constituency the better, if that also meant that this threshold was abolished (Pilet, 2007b:211). To the smaller parties the larger electoral districts concept thus seemed appealing. The enlargement also had two other benign

280 Indeed, the parties soon struggled with this issue when drafting their lists for the 2003 elections. The obligation to have 50% female candidates on the list caused a lot of ‘teeth grinding’ among the male candidates (Otte, 18.10.2002).
281 One newspaper even labelled the abolition and then reintroduction of the list of reserves ‘madness’ (De Standaard, 14.9.2002).
282 The media suspected that the measure was mainly intended to obstruct the N-VA, one of the heirs to the VU, which in 2001 had difficulties getting 5% of the vote in the polls (De Standaard, 14.9.2002).
283 Indeed, as Jos Geysels (16.3.2010) stated: ‘for a seat in the first-tier division in West Flanders and Limburg there sometimes was a threshold of 6 to 8%, which is incredibly high. It also means that a lot of votes were wasted. In fact, the Greens partly miscalculated, as the decrease in the threshold in 1993 lowered the threshold for the largest subprovince electoral district significantly. In West Flanders for instance, the lowest threshold was 4.125% (Vander Weyden, 2001:23). Given that the parties only had to pass the threshold in one of the subprovince electoral districts in order to be allowed into the second-tier division, this was what needed to be achieved. Certainly it meant that a party had to be strong enough to cross the threshold in that particular subprovincial district, but typically the greens indeed polled at their best in those (urban) districts. In Limburg, the threshold was higher (7.46%), but there were no sub-provincial districts there, so the enlargement of the districts had no impact. Given that the de facto electoral threshold was 7.46%, the legal threshold of 5% was superfluous (Vander Weyden, 2001:21). On the other hand, because of the enlargement of the electoral districts, the smaller parties were able to secure seats for candidates in the smaller subprovinces with higher thresholds.
effects for both the smaller and the larger parties in the government. It simplified who got
seats and it allowed the parties to use their best-known candidates in a whole province rather
than just in a smaller subprovince. The allocation of the remainder seats at subprovincial
level was often unpredictable. Remainder seats were distributed to the subprovincial districts
where the party was closest to winning a seat. The problem was that a remainder seat could
only go to a district that had not yet reached its maximum number of seats. If all seats in that
district had already been allocated, the seat went to another subprovincial district (Pilet,
2007b:213-214). This could lead to a highly unpredictable seat allocation for the last
remainder seats, when most subprovincial districts already had their maximum number of
seats. The second effect was that the enlarged electoral districts allowed the parties with a
high number of nationally well-known politicians to cashing on their fame. This benefited
especially the government parties (with the partial exception of the PS) and Vlaams Belang.
Moreover, it handicapped the parties with mostly locally well-known politicians (the
Christian democrats and to a lesser extent the PS) (Pilet, 2007b:215-216). The third
element of the reform package, the introduction of a provincial electoral threshold protected
all parties from newcomers entering the political arena. It was generally seen as a means to
safeguard the party system against further fragmentation (cf. Hooghe and Deschouwer, 2011,
Coveliers, et. al., 2002:7).

Table 6.5 summarizes the act- and outcome-motivations regarding the three reform debates.
The table raises at least three questions. First, did negative outcome-contingent motivations
outweigh positive act-contingent motivations in the referendum debate? Second, and
conversely, did the act-contingent motivations overrule the outcome-contingent motivations
in the decision on the first reform package? Third, why were the government parties able to
push through the blatantly partisan second reform package? To answer these questions, I will
first discuss the role of the commission on political reform, which set the stage for answering
the first question on the failure of national referendums. Subsequently, I will examine the role
of principled motivations, which will allow me to appraise both the first question and the
second. Lastly, I will look at public (dis)satisfaction, media reactions and the composition of
the second reform package to answer the last question.

Hence, the green parties miscalculated when it came to the impact on their total number of seats, but rightly
estimated that it would increase the chances of candidates in smaller subprovincial districts to be elected.
284 The PS also had a substantial number of nationally well-known politicians, which neutralized this
disadvantage.
285 Having a threshold could also backfire. The Flemish greens lost all their MPs in the election of 2003, partly
due to the electoral threshold. This however, does not mean that they were forced to agree with legislation they
strongly disapproved of. As Gysels (16.3.2010) stated, '[i]n reality the threshold was already higher than 5%
in some provinces, so I thought I could easily concede on something that was already mostly the case. Obviously I had never foresen that we would only get 3.9% of the votes in 2003'. In practice, the electoral
threshold reversed the benefits from the enlargement of the electoral districts, which was a second miscalculation
on the part of the smaller parties.
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<th>Referendum</th>
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<th>Second package</th>
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<td>GROEN!</td>
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<td>CD&amp;V</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vlaams Belang</td>
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<td>(ex-)VU</td>
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6.3.2.2 The role of the commission on political reform

As mentioned before, the government agreement included the setting up of a commission on political reform. It was intended originally that the commission would provide the input for the debates. However, two months before the commission presented its first advice the government already bypassed the commission by reaching a preliminary reform agreement which included two of the elements that were to be discussed by the commission: enlargement of the electoral districts and the introduction of a legal electoral threshold of 5%. This shows that the role of the commission was very limited. Verhofstadt himself claimed that he did not want ‘the discussion on political reform to end nowhere, as was the case in the past’ (cited by Falter, 8.6.2000). Indeed, the commission proceeded very slowly and suffered obstruction. However, there was one topic that was discussed swiftly: referendums. The commission present its advice and expert report as early as 6 July 2000.

The referendum topic thus seemed different to the other topics discussed by the commission. Indeed, there were more positive act-contingent motivations to support the issue and a less cynical observer could also suggest that the referendum topic was propelled by more principled motivations.

6.3.2.3 Principle versus self-interest

If principles prevailed, one should see (1) an increase in voter influence over who is elected and (2) the introduction of referendum provisions. Referendums and a lower preference threshold were also in line with the liberal view of a society consisting of ‘atomized’ individuals as embraced by the Francophone liberals. Therefore if principles prevailed, one also should see traces of the green and the liberal parties promoting referendums and a lower preference threshold (cf. Chapter 2).

1. REFERENDUMS. As outlined before, the national referendum proposal failed. At first sight one is tempted to conclude that the government wanted the benefits of supporting referendums without actually running the risk of having them implemented. However, the actual outcome (no reform) obscures the fact that some Belgian government parties made substantial efforts to push the proposal through. In particular the greens and the liberals consistently advocated referendums and brought in bills to advance the issue. As Geysels (GROEN!) acknowledged, ‘the referendum debate was mainly driven by the greens and Verhofstadt, albeit for different ideological reasons’. Originally the coalition agreement stated that the government wanted to implement non-binding referendum legislation without a constitutional change (Verhofstadt, 1999:6), since was assumed that it did not require this. Hence, when the coalition agreement was concluded, there was no certainty that the legislation would not pass. As mentioned in the reconstruction of the debate, the topic was referred to the commission on political reform, to examine whether non-binding government-

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286 In reaction to the agreement, the commission was ‘displeased’ and summoned Verhofstadt before it on 7 June 2000. Afterwards, the commission resumed its work, but it was clear that its impact would be limited (Falter, 29.5.2000; Falter, 8.6.2000).

287 To give one example: as Van der Maelen (28.6.2010) recalled, ‘the CD&V waited outside the room to check whether the quorum would be reached. If this was the case, they entered the room, otherwise they just stayed outside. Many meetings had to be cancelled due to high non-attendance’.

288 Although the PS made it clear from the beginning that it opposed any national or regional referendum legislation, one vote from the opposition (for instance the VU, which also advocated referendums), would be enough to pass the law.
sponsored referendums could be implemented without changing the constitution. A majority of the experts considered that referendums would require a constitutional change even if they were non-binding (Belgische Senaat en Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2000:14-15). The parliamentary debate on the expert report on direct democracy revealed that the PS was still opposed to referendums. As Claude Eerdekens stressed, ‘the introduction of referendums in the legislative toolbox is not desirable’ (Belgische Senaat en Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2000:13). At the same time, the Francophone liberals, and later the green parties, introduced their own bills to implement referendums (bill 50K852 and 50K1636). However, no bill on national referendums was submitted and the government only (officially) decided to approve the first reading of a constitutional change which would allow regional referendums. However, by doing so the government also obstructed other bills being presented at the regional level with the intention of introducing (non-binding) regional referendums. Therefore the first vote on a constitutional change was also an effective means of killing off other bills.

Based on these traces the following conclusions can be drawn. Firstly and most clearly, for the PS outcome-contingent motivations prevailed. The sp.a only showed lukewarm support for referendums (cf. Belgische Senaat en Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2000), had opposed them in the past and introduced no bills on the matter. Thus there are no signs that the sp.a changed its mind. Outcome-contingent motivations most likely prevailed for them too. ECOLO and GROEN!, on the other hand, did try to keep the topic on the agenda, by submitting a bill on 12 February 2002 (bill 50K1636). The Francophone liberals did the same. The position of these three parties is in line with their principles. However, it is also in line with their positive act-contingent motivations, making it virtually impossible to assess which of the two prevailed. Lastly, Verhofstadt and his Open VLD are the most difficult to judge. At first sight they seemed to focus more on electoral reforms, since they introduced no bills on referendums. Yet during the long negotiations leading to the agreement of 26 April 2002, Verhofstadt did keep referendums on the agenda. This points towards the fact that he genuinely wanted to implement referendums - be it for act-contingent or for principled reasons. Again, there are not enough traces to decide which of the two motivations, the principled or the act-contingent one, prevailed. It may well be that Verhofstadt acted in a principled way, but it is equally likely that he only sought to cash in on the benefit of supporting the issue (or even simply reaching an agreement on the topic).

289 Legislation to introduce binding referendums required a constitutional change, while there was no agreement on whether non-binding referendums needed this. The proponents of referendums thus wanted ‘have a go’ and introduced bills at regional level.
290 Not entirely unexpectedly, the second reading of the constitutional change failed, on 10 March 2005 (cf. bill 51K1531).
291 As mentioned before, the PS had included referendums (albeit in a lightweight version) in its party manifesto (PS, 1999). Hence it had moderate act-contingent motivations to support them, yet in government it opposed referendum legislation.
292 One could also point out the Open VLD’s outcome-contingent motivations to support referendums (i.e. breaking the power base of the CD&V). Yet such consequences were so indirect and uncertain that they were unlikely to have dominated the Open VLD’s thinking during the debate.
293 Indeed, the media credited Verhofstadt personally with the successful negotiations of 26 April 2002. As one newspaper headline said: ‘The marathon agreement is a personal triumph for Verhofstadt’ (Brinkman, 27.4.2002)
2. THE FIRST REFORM PACKAGE. A similar picture emerges as regards the first reform package. The government parties acted in line with both their principles and their act-contingent motivations. The lowering of the preference threshold was in line with the principles of the liberals and the greens, while the increase in gender quotas was in line with the principles of the social democrats and the greens. Additionally, all parties had act-contingent motivations for supporting the two measures. Regarding the outcome-contingent motivations, the consequences of lowering the preference threshold and increasing gender quotas were slightly negative, most notably for the PS. Yet overall the impact would not be very strong (for the practical consequences of increasing gender quotas see: Otte, 18.10.2002). Therefore outcome-contingent motivations played a role only in the sense that the negative fallout of the electoral reforms was likely to be limited.

It is difficult to say whether act-contingent or principled motivations prevailed. The fact that the preference threshold was so easily raised merely eighteen months later by reintroducing the list of reserves at the very least gives rise to suspicion about how attached the parties were in principle to the lowering of the preference threshold. On the other hand, as the outcome-contingent motivations to support lowering the preference threshold and increasing gender quotas were negative for most parties and the act of supporting these measures was unlikely to hand the government parties an electoral victory, at least an element of principle seems to have played a part in the decision to implement the first reform package. Once again no verdict can be pronounced, as no ‘smoking gun’ evidence is available.

3. THE SECOND REFORM PACKAGE. Lastly I will discuss the motivations regarding the second reform package, which included the reintroduction of the list of reserves, the enlargement of the electoral districts and the introduction of a provincial electoral threshold of 5%. As mentioned above, the expected outcome of this package was congruent with the self-interest of the government parties. It is difficult to see how this reform could have been inspired by principled motivations. The reform was not in line with Verhofstadt’s citizens’ democracy, as the citizen would have less impact on the actual composition of parliament through the reintroduction of the list of reserves and the introduction of an electoral threshold. Indeed, none of the proposals in his second citizens’ manifesto was included in the second reform package (cf. Verhofstadt, 1992).

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294 Geysels (16.3.2010) remembered that ‘[t]he PS was lenient. The reform had little impact on them. Di Rupo was more concerned with the reform of the Senate’.

295 Additionally, it may well have been that some politicians initiated the discussion out of principled reasons, while the others deemed it too risky not to support the bill once it was on the table. This is also supported by an interview Jean-Benoit Pilet held with Charles Michel (Francophone liberals, 31.8.2005). Michel indicates that regarding the gender quota topic ‘there is a difference between what the MPs think and what they support in public. This is definitely the case among the male MPs, but also some female ones told me off the record that it was a foolish plan. … But they did not say this in public. I think it was a debate where there was kind of an intellectual terrorism. It was extremely difficult to express an opinion that ran against the bill in this atmosphere of bidding up’.

296 This was also one of the biggest critiques in the media. As one newspaper noted: ‘[the reintroduction of the list of reserves] strengthens the conviction that the tinkering with the electoral system has very little to do with the voter and is mostly inspired by the career planning of politicians and partisan motivations’ (De Standaard, 14.9.2002).
Jos Geysels (16.3.2010) was even very blunt about it: ‘obviously, we wanted to use the electoral reform to consolidate our position’.

Given that the act-contingent motivations to support the package were also unanimously negative, these cannot have had an influence – they would only have been a reason not to implement the reform package. Table 6.5 summarizes the motivations that can explain the initiation and the failure of referendums and the success of the two reform packages. When a party or party family is shown in two or more cells in one column, there is no decisive evidence about which motivations prevailed.

Table 6.7: Summary of the dominant motivations for the government parties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Referendum Initiation</th>
<th>Failure</th>
<th>First reform package</th>
<th>Second reform package</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* greens</td>
<td>* liberals</td>
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<td>* greens</td>
<td>* liberals</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>* greens</td>
<td>* sp.a; PS (+/-)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td></td>
<td>* social democrats</td>
<td>* greens</td>
<td>* liberals</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>* social democrats</td>
<td>* social democrats</td>
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The second reform package was blatantly a moulding of the electoral system for the benefit of the government parties. All electoral reforms that ‘looked good’ were included in the first reform package. One would expect at least one element that ‘looked good’ in the second package, one that could ‘sell’ the whole proposal. At first sight this was not the case. However, as I will show, a mixture of public satisfaction, media support and the fact that democratic reform was a part of wider reform can explain why the government most likely judged that it would ‘get away’ with the second reform package.

6.3.2.3. Public opinion, media support and the wider agreement of 26 April 2002

The political atmosphere at the beginning of 2002 was very positive: public dissatisfaction was low for Belgian standards (26%, EB58), there were no widespread protests and economically the country was still doing fairly well. The government was also supported by many of the biggest papers. The government itself was also very optimistic. As Jos Geysels (16.3.2010) remembered: ‘during those days we were close to sheer euphoria. There was an enormous drive to succeed’. The government was very popular and the legitimacy constraints for the Verhofstadt government were lower than these on its predecessors. Additionally, there were elements in the agreement of 26 April 2002 that do not fall into the category of democratic reforms, but that to some degree may have functioned as a lightning rod. First, the government announced changes in the composition and the competences of the Upper House, something that had been on the agenda for a very long time. Jean-Luc Dehaene (CD&V) had already tried to reform the composition and the competences of the Senate in 1992, but ‘in the

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297 As far as the sp.a was concerned this probably also played a part. As Van der Maelen (28.6.2010) explained: ‘in the back of the mind of the sp.a leadership (...) driving back the CD&V most likely played a role, since they [the CD&V, KJ] have more local figureheads’.
end the result was a strange mixture that appealed to no one but the Senators themselves' and the mere fact that Verhofstadt succeeded where Dehaene had failed was seen as 'spectacular' (Brinckman, 27.4.2002). The agreement also included a reform obliging politicians to declare their assets and a proposal for more professional control over campaign expenditure of the parties, as well as the already mentioned agreement to hold a first vote on a constitutional change which would allow for regional referendums. All three measures 'looked good' as they introduced or strengthened control over political parties. In practice the reform of the Upper House especially attracted a lot of media attention - far more than the electoral reform proposals (cf. Dubbeleare and Brinckman, 27.4.2002).

The actual bill introduced on 14 May 2002 included the reform of the Upper House, the electoral reforms and control over campaign expenditure.²⁹⁸ By then the opposition had organized itself sufficiently to attack the bill and the media were less focused on the mere fact that a comprehensive agreement had been reached. The opposition, and especially the CD&V, tried to draw attention to the partisan bias of the electoral reforms.²⁹⁹ It even submitted a bill titled: ‘Bill to remove the presumption of partisan bias through reforms of important elements of the election of the Lower and the Upper House’ on 11 June 2002 (bill 50K1859; Verherstraeten and De Crem, 2002).³⁰⁰ The CD&V also claimed that reforms such as the second reform package would increase the ‘already widespread image of a political class that is alienated from public opinion and is mostly concerned with itself’ (Verherstraeten and De Crem, 2002:7). The opposition joined forces - the CD&V and Vlaams Belang even introduced joint amendments to stall the process, in the hope that the government would back down (amendment 50K1806/13).³⁰¹ However, the opposition amendments were ignored.³⁰² Two mutually complementary elements can probably explain the failure of the opposition. First, the government parties ‘managed’ opposition to the reform package by allowing some of their MPs to vote against it (Deweerdt: 2003:249). Second, the opposition was unable to exert real pressure on the government given that its discourse was not taken up by the media, which was most likely related to the popularity of the government.³⁰³ The media were more

²⁹⁸ The declaration of MPs assets was not included in the bill, since it was not related to electoral reform.
²⁹⁹ For instance it specifically targeted the self-interested nature of the electoral reforms by calling them ‘electoral self-service’ (Brinckman, 8.5.2002).
³⁰⁰ The bill called the electoral reforms ‘gerrymandering’ and ‘manipulation’ of the electoral law (Verherstraeten and De Crem, 2002:5).
³⁰¹ The opposition was able to move the vote on the reform from the 20 July to 25 September 2002 (Deweerdt, 2003:248-249), but it was not successful in forcing the government to withdraw the bill.
³⁰² Just a few quotes from the parliamentary debates in the Commission of the Interior to illustrate the critique of the opposition. Geert Bourgeois (N-VA) thought that the arguments to support the reform package were 'incredibly dishonest' and felt that he had never heard 'such provocative and politicized argumentation' in his parliamentary career (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2002:16). Pieter De Crem (CD&V) stated that 'the decision-making process clearly shows that [the government] wants to get as much electoral advantage from the reform as possible, while at the same time the government parties are humouring each other' (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2002:20). Lastly, Richard Fournaux (CDH) claimed that the enlargement of the electoral districts was a 'decline in democracy' (Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2002:76). An overview in the media of the official reactions of the opposition parties can be found in HT, 25.9.2002.
³⁰³ In fact most journalists deemed the opposition to be as self-interested as the government, so their principled critiques sounded cynical to the media. Moreover, they could gain from the reforms as well and the argument that the reforms were intended to hurt the opposition was not shared by the media (De Standaard, 14.9.2002). In that respect it is also telling that the CD&V, when it returned in office, did not repeal the legislation (Hoogehe and Deschouwer, 2011:635).
sceptical about the reforms during the parliamentary debates than they had been on the night of the agreement. They echoed the argument that the electoral reforms were clearly intended to benefit the government parties. One newspaper even called the reforms the institutionalization of a ‘premier league for government politicians’ (De Standaard, 14.9.2002; see also MD, 29.5.2000). Yet this did not mean that the media were on the side of the opposition and thought the bills were detrimental to democracy. 304

6.4 Conclusion

6.4.1 Country-level factors: (frustration about) veto players

As in the Austrian cases, non-partisan veto players had little impact on the reform process. 305 The role of partisan veto players on the other hand was substantial. During the Dehaene II government this was most visible in the Group Langendries, where the Francophone liberals were diametrically opposed to the other parties on how to strengthen local and provincial referendums. In the end the government parties vetoed binding local and provincial citizen-initiated referendums. During the Verhofstadt I government the impact of veto players was much greater, as could be witnessed for instance when Spirit blocked the regional electoral threshold, the PS blocked national referendums and all parties apart from the liberals jointly blocked the introduction of a majoritarian element in the electoral system during the coalition negotiations. Lastly, the constant changing of the content of the package deals also pointed to extensive usage of vetoes within the government.

But why then did so many reforms pass? As suggested in Chapter 2, a high number of veto players may well have triggered frustration with the electoral system. The Belgian PR electoral system combined with the linguistic division of the country, did indeed produce a very high effective number of parties and a large number of parties included in the government (De Winter and Dumont, 1999:184-186). After the Black Sunday election of 1991 in particular, there was a great deal of dissatisfaction among politicians over the ‘openness of the system’, as was for instance demonstrated by Prime Minister Dehaene when he called for an electoral threshold. Clearly, party fragmentation was also in the back of Verhofstadt’s mind first when he wanted a majoritarian electoral system, and later when he called for regional and provincial electoral thresholds. 306 However, as the example of electoral thresholds also shows, precisely because of the fragmentation it was difficult to implement far-reaching measures: the smaller green parties and the sp.a opposed a majoritarian system during the Verhofstadt I coalition negotiations and it was one of the descendants of the VU, SPIRIT, a small party, that blocked a regional electoral threshold and allowed only a provincial one. This paradox explains why, despite all the frustration, only small steps to reduce party fragmentation were taken.

304 For instance, the same newspaper added that ‘the voter would not care about it [the reforms, KJ]’ (De Standaard, 14.9.2002).
305 Only after the reform was approved was the enlargement of the electoral districts deemed unconstitutional by the constitutional court (Sinardet, 2010:358).
306 This motivation was explicitly acknowledged in the parliamentary debate on the second reform package: ‘to counter the further fragmentation of the political landscape, an electoral threshold of 5% will be implemented’ (Coveliers, et. al., 2002:7).
6.4.2 Government-level factors

A. Cartelization as a source of electoral reform. The Verhofstaden I government replaced the old cartel of Christian democrats and social democrats. The social democrats were still part of the new government, but had been severely weakened. The government parties used the new momentum to rearrange the electoral system for their benefit. This was done specifically through the second reform package, which created greater possibilities for the government parties to use their well-known politicians. The second reform package was directly opposed to most of the reform agenda principles of the liberals and the green parties. It did not increase the impact of the citizen in any way, but rather it strengthened the electoral starting position of the government parties at the expense of the (Christian democratic) opposition. As far as the Flemish greens were concerned, Jos Geysels (16.3.2010), then party chairman, even openly acknowledged that his party wanted to consolidate its position through the reform package.

B. The impalpable impact of political ideology? The inclusion of moderately populist and postmaterialist parties in the government also put topics such as national referendums and the lowering of the preference threshold on the government agenda. But did it lead to the implementation of these reforms as well? It is difficult to disentangle the impact of ideology from self-interested act-contingent motivations. In some cases it is easy to pinpoint act-contingent motivations. Both during the Dehaene II and the Verhofstaden I government periods some parties (the social democrats and the Christian democrats) supported legislation that 'looked good', while it was against their party ideology as well as their outcome-contingent motivations. For these parties act-contingent and principled motivations diverged and their behaviour showed that act-contingent motivations prevailed. However, principled and act-contingent motivations coincided for the Francophone liberals in the Dehaene II negotiations on referendums and for the green parties and the liberals during the referendum and first reform package debates under Verhofstaden I. In such cases political scientists are often tempted to judge that self-interested act-contingent motivations prevailed (see for instance Buelens, 2000). However, strictly speaking this is a conclusion one cannot draw, since there is no 'smoking gun' evidence to reject the alternative hypothesis that principled motivations dominated. In this chapter I have indicated that some traces show that the parties (at least partially) acted out of principle. However, I cannot rule out the alternative hypothesis, that these parties acted out of act-contingent motivations, as equally plausible traces were found to support this interpretation of the events. Nevertheless, the type of debates in which principled motivations may have played a role are themselves telling: they are all in the direct democracy or ballot structure realm. When it comes to the proportionality of the electoral system, it seems that there was little room for either ideology or principle.

C. Public dissatisfaction. The Dehaene II case was selected, among other reasons, as an excellent case in which to check for traces of the impact of public dissatisfaction. Indeed, Dehaene II was faced with one of the largest crises in recent Belgian political history, the Dutroux crisis (cf. Deschouwer, 2009:12). There is substantial evidence for the impact of the public dissatisfaction ensuing from the Dutroux crisis on the Dehaene II reforms. The government parties were reluctant, but the fact that the government had to endure blow after blow made it virtually impossible to leave things as they were. However, as the Dehaene II case also shows, it matters who is in charge and how the leaders (re)act. The Dehaene
government was composed of non-reformist established parties under a centralized leadership. This created relative government stability and prevented the crisis from bringing down the government. Dehaene’s CD&V and his personal leadership in particular played an important role, as he was able to avert crisis after crisis in the aftermath of the Dutroux case. Reformists within the CD&V were allowed to participate in the Room F talks, but their leeway was limited. Furthermore, the creation of the Group Langendries allowed the government to regain the initiative and make the threat of public dissatisfaction more manageable. Timing was also important. The government outflanked the opposition by calling back the CD&V reformers from the Room F meetings as soon as Verhofstadt returned as his party’s chairman. At the same time it announced a compromise in the Group Langendries. By doing so the government still showed a willingness to reform, even though it blocked the Room F talks. As a result of all these factors the crisis did not lead to major electoral reform, but only to a minor direct democratic reform.

6.4.3 Reform-level factors
A. Reforms towards a citizens’ democracy? Similar to the Austrian cases, the Belgian reform debate was characterized by strong expressions, such as the creation of a ‘citizens’ democracy’ and the ‘decline of democracy’ in the debates on the second Verhofstadt reform package (Verhofstadt, 1991, 1992; Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers, 2002:76). Yet, again, act- and outcome-contingent motivations played a more important role in the actual reforms. Nevertheless, unlike in the Austrian cases, some reforms that were genuinely in line with a citizens’ democracy were implemented. Granted, it is striking that the minor reforms conformed to the citizens’ democracy, while the one major reform, the second reform package enacted by the Verhofstadt government, did not. Yet conversely this also means that if one only looks at major electoral reform, the three reforms that were in line with a citizens’ democracy are ignored. Thus, general principles were less important than hoped for by many reformers, but they were more important than is generally assumed in major electoral reform studies.

B. Self-interested motivations. The Belgian cases have also shown that the motivations for supporting a specific reform can change. Sometimes it seems that act-contingent motivations are fairly stable, but, as the Dehaene II case showed, external shocks can change act-contingent motivations almost from one day to the next. This also applies to outcome-contingent motivations. Indeed, politicians in the main base their expectations of what is to their advantage on recent events, but what is considered a beneficial outcome can change very quickly.307 Regarding the broader study of democratic reform, this means that it is best to take into account the possibility of dynamic act- and outcome-contingent motivations. Another factor relating to outcome-contingent motivations is that hurting one’s opponents can be one such motivation. This was clearly the case with the second reform package implemented by Verhofstadt: the package deal was carefully drafted so as to protect the government parties at the expense of the opposition – in this case primarily the CD&V.

307For instance the electoral threshold was partly implemented to destroy the N-VA, but it only drove it to the CD&V. The ensuing CD&V-N-VA alliance later defeated the Verhofstadt II parties by large margins, precisely because of this alliance. Yet the most ironic example was probably the situation of the Flemish greens, who supported the implementation of the provincial electoral threshold in September and November 2002 and lost two (out of two) seats on 18 May 2003 due to this same threshold.
Reform even can be a relatively small price to pay to see one’s opponents suffer more. This was probably the case with the local and provincial citizen-initiated referendums implemented by Dehaene II. Certainly the Francophone liberals had act-contingent and/or principled motivations to support this, but due to the fact that they were part of a significant number of local executives the instrument could also be used against them. However, the main opponents of the Francophone liberals, the CDH and the PS, were even more vulnerable. Hence, relatively speaking the outcome was not too bad for the Francophone liberals. Briefly, it is not only a party’s own outcome-contingent motivations that can matter, but also those of their adversaries. Given that electoral reforms affecting proportionality are a zero sum game, their impact on opponents is almost automatically included in the analysis. However, in the wider study of democratic reforms, this is not the case. As the Belgian cases show, the self-interest of others may nevertheless be equally relevant in other domains of democratic reform.

C. The importance of package deals. It already became clear in the analyses of the Austrian cases that package deals might be used to ‘hide’ potentially unpopular measures. In the Verhofstadt case they mostly served to make sure ‘everyone is a winner’, apart from the main opponents of the government parties. Package deals also provide a second explanation for the large number of reforms in Belgium: due to the large number of government parties, a large number of reforms bound together in package deals needed to be implemented to make everyone a winner.

D. Reform debates: it is never finished. Lastly, the incomplete direct democratic reforms of Dehaene II and the enlargement of the electoral districts implemented by Verhofstadt I triggered further reform debates. This was especially the case regarding the latter reform, as the constitutional court judged the exceptional position of the B-H-V electoral district unconstitutional shortly after its approval, which in turn triggered new reform debates. Hence, as in Austria, implemented reforms contained the seeds of new reform discussions.

308 If one party wins a seat, another has to lose one (provided that the overall number of seats stays the same).
CHAPTER 7. THE NETHERLANDS

7.1 Introduction

The cross-case analysis in Chapter 4 highlighted two Dutch government periods, Kok II and Balkenende II. Kok II is a suitable case for examining the impact of political ideology, as it is the only government that shows no cartel breakdown and is not faced with public dissatisfaction, but does include a party with an ideology emphasizing democratic reform (in this case the postmaterialist D66). Additionally, the Kok II case also has a positive value for democratic reform. Moreover, the democratic reform that occurred included a major direct democratic reform, the (temporary) national referendum law of 2001. It is thus an excellent case for examining whether ideology played a role and if so whether and how a reform process that is driven by ideology differs from other reform processes. The Balkenende II case, on the other hand, is theoretically interesting because it is an extreme yet deviant case: it has a high value for political ideology and saw a high level of public dissatisfaction, yet no democratic reform took place. In this case, the impact of public dissatisfaction can be examined thoroughly. Before embarking on the analysis of the Kok II and Balkenende II reforms, I will first briefly sketch the Dutch party system and the Dutch coalitions in the 1989-2006 period, as this provides the background against which the reform debates occurred.

7.1.1 Dutch political parties

During the 1989-2006 period several new parties entered the stage (GroenLinks, the SP and the LPF), while the traditional parties suffered at the hands of a volatile electorate. Especially from 2002 onwards, the voting regularly shifted between parties. Although the Dutch party system has always been characterized by a high effective number of parties, in general one can distinguish between three party families: the Christian democrats, left-wing parties and the liberals.


Until 1977 there were three large Christian democratic parties, the Roman Catholic KVP and two Protestant parties, the ARP and the somewhat smaller CHU. However, (at least partly) due to a decline in the support for the KVP and the CHU related to the depillarization of Dutch society, the three Christian democratic parties united to form the CDA (Andeweg and Irwin, 2005:50-51). Apart from these three parties there have also been smaller Christian parties.310 The smallest, oldest and most persistent was the SGP, which during the whole of the postwar era held two or three seats in the Lower House (van der Horst, 2007:450-452). Additionally two other small Christian parties, the GPV and the RPF, were active in the 1989-2006 period. They merged in 2000 into the ChristenUnie. None of these was part of a government until 2007.311 During the 1989-2006 period the smaller Christian parties had fairly consistent electoral backing. The CDA on the other hand suffered (severe) losses in 1994 and 1998, but made an electoral comeback in 2002 (cf. Figure 7.1).

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309 A minor electoral reform also took place at the same time, a moderate version of the direct election of mayors.
310 To be precise: these were orthodox Calvinist parties (Andeweg and Irwin, 2005:50).
311 In 2007 the ChristenUnie was included in the Balkenende IV government.
2. **Parties on the Left.** The largest of the left-wing parties, the PvdA, is a fairly centrist social democratic party, which was part of about half of the Dutch postwar coalitions. It suffered various splits, which most notably led to the postmaterialist green party GroenLinks in 1989, which was a merger of four left-wing splinter parties, and the left-populist SP, which gained its first parliamentary seats in 1994. At the beginning of the 21st century this last party gradually moved away from its populist stances and became a socialist party. Throughout the 1989-2006 period the SP slowly but steadily increased its vote share. Groenlinks expanded its share of the votes in 1998, but thereafter hovered around 5%. The PvdA, on the other hand, experienced highly volatile electoral support: it lost badly in 1994 and 2002, but won impressively in 1998 and 2003 (cf. Figure 7.1).

3. **Liberal Parties.** From 1966 onwards the Dutch party system included two liberal parties, the conservative liberal VVD, which was founded in 1948, and the progressive or postmaterialist liberals of D66 (Inglehart, 1977:250, Andeweg and Irwin, 2005:54). The VVD was fairly successful in being part of the government. Although there was no VVD Prime Minister until 2010, which falls outside my research period, it was included in about half of the postwar governments (Van der Horst, 2007:450-452). D66 for its part was only in two coalitions before 1994, but was part of the government from 1994 onwards. Regarding electoral success, the VVD expanded its vote share until 2002, when it suffered significant losses, some of which it regained in 2003. D66, on the other hand, doubled its vote share in 1994, but thereafter slowly lost more and more support (cf. Figure 7.1).

![Figure 7.1 Electoral results](image)

Note: Only parties that at least twice got more than 5% of the votes are included.

312 The party also has a ‘communist’ wing, as the communist CPN was one of the four parties that merged to form GroenLinks. These four parties were the CPN, the PSP, the PPR and the EVP (Andeweg and Irwin, 2005:55).

313 In 1909 a group of communists was expelled from the PvdA, and founded the Dutch communist party CPN. The SP, in turn, was originally a CPN splinter group (Andeweg and Irwin, 2005:52).

314 It was included in the government in 1994, 1998 and 2003.
7.1.2 Dutch coalitions (1989-2006)
The timeframe of this study starts with a government that had a quite usual composition, as the Lubbers III government consisted of the CDA and the PvdA. Indeed, in the whole postwar era all governments included at least one Christian democratic party, complemented by either the PvdA or the VVD.315

In 1994, however, the PvdA, VVD and D66 forced the CDA into opposition and formed the Kok I government. This was truly an innovative coalition, as for the first time in the postwar era no Christian democratic parties were included. It was, however, not a cartel breakdown, as only D66 had been out of office since 1982. The Kok coalition was renewed in 1998, but lost much of its innovative appeal. In 2002 the Dutch party system was completely shaken up by the advent of the ‘maverick’ neo-liberal populist Pim Fortuyn (Andeweg and Irwin, 2005:16). Out of the blue his party, the LPF, won 26 seats in the 2002 elections and the coalition parties suffered heavy losses. However, as Fortuyn has been assassinated five days before the election, his party was leaderless. The LPF was included in the Balkenende I government together with the VVD and the CDA, but due to internal dissent in the LPF the government fell after only 87 days (Andeweg and Irwin, 2005:17). In the ensuing 2003 elections the LPF lost 18 of its 26 seats. Thereafter the situation mostly seemed to be back to normal, as the PvdA reclaimed many of its losses in the 2003 election (Andeweg and Irwin, 2005:235).316 A new Balkenende coalition was formed, including the CDA, VVD and D66.

To sum up, the timeframe of this research encompasses three different periods: a ‘business as usual’ government (Lubbers III), the innovative coalitions of Kok and the post-Fortuyn Balkenende governments, which again included the CDA.

7.2 Kok II: The ‘Night of Wiegel’ and the temporary referendum law

During the Kok II government period two reform processes occurred. First the government tried to introduce binding citizen-initiated referendums. This reform required a constitutional change, which was voted down in the Upper House by just one vote during the so-called Night of Wiegel.317 After this the government introduced a temporary referendum law (which did not require a constitutional change) and a moderate version of the direct election of mayors (cf. below).318

7.2.1 Reconstructing the debate
A. Historical roots of the debate. National referendums have been on the Dutch political agenda for a very long time. The first national referendums had been held as early as 1797 and 1798, during the founding process of the Netherlands (Steur, 2005:32). In the postwar era

315 Sometimes these parties were joined by smaller parties: DS'70 in 1971, the PPR and D66 in 1972 and D66 in 1981.
316 The PvdA got 45 seats in 1998 and 42 seats in 2003. However, from 2002 onwards all Dutch elections have been characterized by huge voter swings and only once, in 2003, has this been in favour of a traditional party. Hence this back-to-normal feeling was merely temporary.
317 The event was named after the only VVD senator who voted against the constitutional change, Hans Wiegel. By voting against it, he single-handedly killed the proposal as his vote was necessary to reach the two-thirds majority needed to approve the constitutional change.
318 I deliberately use the label ‘moderate version’, since direct election was optional and non-binding. Moreover, it was the municipal council which selected the two candidates (who were allowed to belong to the same party) on whom the voters were then to cast their vote.
the topic resurfaced in the 1960s, when D66 and the PvdA (albeit more reluctantly) favoured the introduction of national referendums. But because the VVD and the Christian parties opposed it, the referendum proposal failed. In the 1980s the subject appeared on the political agenda for a second time, when the ‘national referendum committee’, a citizen group, handed in a petition urging the introduction of referendums. Partly in response to this, the then Minister of the Interior Ed van Thijn (PvdA) set up a commission on political reform, the Commission Biesheuvel, in 1984 (Steur, 2005:56). This commission unanimously advised that national (non-binding) citizen-initiated referendums should be introduced. The government, however, was against this. Later, in 1989, the Lower House voted on a motion in favour of referendums.\(^\text{319}\) The PvdA, D66, PPR and PSP (two small parties which later became an important part of the green party GroenLinks) voted for the motion, while the other parties opposed it (Steur, 2005:56). The Kok I government, consisting of two proponents of referendums, the PvdA and D66, plus the VVD, included in the coalition agreement a section on introduction of a national and local referendums (Kok, 1994:24). After a long debate, parliament approved the first reading of a constitutional change, which would allow national referendums (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. 26.6.1997). The Upper House especially proved difficult to persuade, with in the end five VVD senators voting against the change. Nevertheless, given that it only required a simple majority, the first reading was approved.\(^\text{320}\) This then set the stage for the real debate and the more difficult hurdle: the second reading under the Kok II government, where a two-thirds majority in both Houses would be required to approve the constitutional change.

The direct election of mayors has also had a long history in Dutch politics. The Netherlands for a long time had a quite unique way of selecting its mayors. Traditionally the central government (and the national party headquarters) had a large role in the choosing of a mayor. Formally it was the Queen who appointed the mayor, based on a recommendation from a confidential committee composed of the local party leaders. This method of appointing mayors was deemed intricate and opaque (Andeweg and Irwin, 2005:177). The direct election of mayors was put on the agenda by D66 and was also already supported by the PvdA in the 1960s. However, once again the Christian parties and the VVD opposed the reform. Despite this rejection the topic stayed on the agenda in the 1980s. The direct election of mayors was also discussed by the Commission Biesheuvel mentioned above. In 1984 the commission advised against this (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal. 1984:19). Hans van Mierlo, the then party chairman of D66, however again called for the direct election of mayors in 1989. Partly in response to this yet another commission, the Commission Deetman, was set up (Denters, Van Dam and Korsten, 2000: 50). A subcommission headed by Ed van Thijn (PvdA) examined the direct election of mayors and advised that the role of central government should be further reduced by introducing the indirect election of mayors. This would mean that mayors would be chosen by the municipal council (Denters, Van Dam and Korsten, 2000: 50-51). However, Van Thijn himself was, ‘despite the report, in favour of the direct election of mayors’ (Van Thijn, 7.12.2009; see also Hooghiemstra, 3.3.1997). The report did not lead to reform: the CDA and the VVD opposed the indirect election of mayors. The Kok I government again put the topic on the agenda, but was very noncommittal about it.

\(^\text{319}\) This motion was based on the proposal from the Commission Biesheuvel (Steur, 2005:57)

\(^\text{320}\) In the Netherlands constitutional changes first have to be approved by simple majority in both Houses. They then have to be approved a second time by a newly elected parliament, by a two-thirds majority in both Houses.
The coalition agreement read: ‘it shall be examined whether a new way of selecting the mayor can lead to a higher legitimacy of the local executive’ (Kok, 1994:25). In practice, however, no reform was implemented. Unlike referendums, the direct election of mayors appeared to have stalled.

B. The initiation of the reform. The Kok II government agreement included both referendums and (a particular version of) the election of mayors.\footnote{It also included a sentence on changing the electoral system: ‘In order to strengthen the regional element and increase the visibility of candidates in the election of the Lower House, the government will introduce a bill in the Lower House based on established and new research’ (Kok, 1998:76). However, given that no bill was introduced and discussions on the topic were marginal, I will not discuss this here.} Regarding referendums, the coalition agreement stated that the ‘parliamentary discussion on the constitutional change [to allow referendums] (...) will be continued’. Immediately after the approval of the constitutional change, bills ‘to implement referendums at the national and the local level (...) will be introduced’. The precise form of referendums was not specified in the agreement, as it only mentioned that referendums had to be ‘abrogative’ (Kok, 1998:75).\footnote{An abrogative referendum is ‘a procedure to force a vote of the people on a law that has been passed by the legislature’ (LeDuc, 2003:39). Hence, it can only repeal existing legislation.} However, the bill on the constitutional change introduced earlier already specified some details. Referendums were to be binding, citizen-initiated and abrogative. In the first phase 40,000 people would have to sign a petition to start a referendum initiation procedure. Thereafter this number had to be increased to 600,000 within a given period of time. If both requirements were met, the actual referendum would be held. The referendum outcome would be valid if more than 30% of the electorate voted for the abrogation of the law (Kok and Dijkstal, 1996:4-5).\footnote{Comparatively speaking, both the initiation and the result requirements were very high (LeDuc, 2003:152; Qvortrup, 2005:127).} The coalition agreement was more explicit on the election of mayors. Article 61 of the municipal law was to be amended to allow the option of the limited direct election of mayors, somewhat confusingly called the ‘mayoral referendum’ (Kok, 1998:76). In practice this meant that the municipal council would have the option of suggesting two candidates for election by the citizens. The elected candidate would then be put forward to the Queen, who was not obliged to follow the suggestion and could appoint someone else (De Cloe, Te Veldhuis and Scheltema-de Nie, 2000:2).

C. Processing phase and votes. As mentioned earlier, the Kok II reform process took place in two phases. I will first discuss the attempts to enshrine referendums constitutionally. Then I will examine the process leading up to the temporary referendum law and the moderate version of the direct election of mayors.

1. The second reading of the constitutional change and the Night of Wiegel.\footnote{For an elaborate analysis and description of all the events leading up to, during and after the Night of Wiegel, see: Sap, 2003.} The Kok II government was formed on 3 August 1998 and it presented the second reading of the constitutional change to allow the legal introduction of referendums to parliament as early as 14 September 1998 (Kok and Peper, 1998). The bill was discussed in the Lower House on 9 and 10 February 1999 and was accepted on 11 February. The government parties D66, PvdA and VVD supported the constitutional change, but GroenLinks and the SP also voted ‘yes’.
## Table 7.1: Reform timetable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-reform phase</td>
<td></td>
<td>- D66 and the PvdA favour referendums and the direct election of mayors</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- The Christian parties and the VVD are opposed</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>- Ed van Thijn sets up the Commission Biesheuvel, which advises that referendums should be introduced, but not the direct election of mayors</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>- The Commission Deetman is established. It advises in favour of referendums, but against the direct election of mayors</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>- The Kok I government puts democratic reform in the coalition agreement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1994-1998</td>
<td>- First reading of a constitutional change to allow referendums is approved</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Direct election of mayors has stalled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform initiation</td>
<td>3.8.1998</td>
<td>- The Kok II government again puts democratic reform prominently in the coalition agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Referendums are to be constitutionally enshrined</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- The direct election of mayors is to be introduced</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reform process stage</td>
<td>14.9.1998</td>
<td>- Second reading of constitutional change to allow referendums introduced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Votes</td>
<td>11.2.1999</td>
<td>- Lower House approves the second reading (government + Groenlinks and SP)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>18.5.1999</td>
<td>- ‘Night of Wiegel’</td>
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<td></td>
<td>19.5.1999</td>
<td>- After lengthy debates, the bill is defeated by one vote</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- D66 leaves the government</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second reform process stage</td>
<td>31.5.1999</td>
<td>- ‘Healing agreement’ most importantly includes:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.9.1999</td>
<td>- Temporary referendum law</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Moderate version of the direct election of mayors</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- PvdA and VVD reach a compromise on electing mayors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Votes</td>
<td>26.9.2000</td>
<td>- Both bills are approved in the Lower House by a simple majority</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.2.2001</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final vote</td>
<td>10.7.2001</td>
<td>- The bills are approved by the Upper House. One VVD senator and the Christian parties vote against</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This meant that 113 out of the 150 MPs approved the constitutional change. Such overwhelming support was, however, less likely in the Upper House. First of all, the parties that voted in favour of the constitutional change in the Lower House only held 50 of the 75 Upper House seats – the absolute minimum needed to reach the required two-thirds majority. Secondly, the Upper House was not formally bound by the coalition agreement and was thus free to vote against the change. The then leader of the VVD party in the Lower House, Frits
Bolkestein, had already said during the Kok I government that he could not guarantee the support of the VVD senators (Sap, 2003:15). The VVD senators were indeed relatively independent. A group of five of them in particular was against referendums and had already made their opposition known during the first reading in 1998. In order for the constitutional change to go through all five senators had to vote in favour. After provincial elections were held on 3 March 1999, the government urged the senators to vote on the constitutional change before the new Upper House was sworn in. In the run-up to the vote in the Upper House the new D66 leader in the Lower House, Thom De Graaf, made clear that it would cause a government crisis if the Upper House did not approve referendums. However, it was uncertain that the five VVD senators would vote in favour of the constitutional change, as they made clear in the media (NRC, 18.5.1999). The Upper House discussed the constitutional change on 18 May 1999. During the debates, which lasted for more than 16 hours, all but one of the five changed their minds and decided to vote in favour. Despite the elaborate defence of the referendum by Minister of the Interior Bram Peper (PvdA), the pressure from VVD party leader Hans Dijkstal and a last minute plea by Prime Minister Kok (PvdA), in the end Hans Wiegel voted against the constitutional change. In doing so the proposal fell one vote short of the two-thirds majority needed.

2. THE TEMPORARY REFERENDUM LAW AND THE DIRECT ELECTION OF MAYORS. After this so-called Night of Wiegel, D66 decided to leave the government. On 25 May 1999, however, the D66 parliamentary party agreed to negotiate in an attempt to heal the breach within the cabinet and an agreement was reached on 31 May 1999 (De Boer, et. al., 1999.). This ‘healing agreement’ included, among other things, the introduction of a temporary referendum law mirroring the referendum procedures included in the proposed constitutional change. The only difference would be that referendums would not be binding and therefore did not require constitutional change. Secondly, the moderate version of the direct election of mayors (as outlined in the coalition agreement) would be implemented swiftly (Tweede Kamer de Staten-Generaal, 1999:4-6). Overall the referendum debate went fairly smoothly this time. There were some disagreements over the initiation and result requirements between the VVD on the one hand and the PvdA and D66 on the other, but the coalition was never in danger (Sap, 2003:112-114). The direct election of mayors was somewhat more contentious, as the

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325 The Dutch Upper House is indirectly elected (up to) three months after provincial elections are held by the members of the provincial legislatures (cf. Andeweg and Irwin, 2005:132). The election cycle does not coincide with that of the Lower House and only the Lower House is dissolved when constitutional change is accepted at the first reading. In practice this meant that the Upper House was still composed of the same senators as in 1998.

326 The members of the provincial legislatures elect the Upper House. The government parties (rightly) estimated that waiting until after the election of a new Upper House – which would occur in May 1999 – would greatly reduce the prospects of the second reading. After all, they knew that the parties that had voted in favour of the second reading in the Lower House, would be two seats short of the required two-thirds majority (Sap, 2003:22).

327 He considered even one VVD ‘no’ vote to be a reason to trigger a cabinet crisis (NRC, 18.05.1999).

328 The temporary referendum law would be in force from 1 January 2002 until 1 January 2005 and could also be extended by a simple majority. No referendum was held under the law, but in October 2004 the opposition and the labour unions joined forces to prepare a referendum petition on pension legislation. However, shortly after they announced this the government and labour unions reached agreement changing the legislation. Hence, the referendum was called off (cf. Koole, 2010:335-336).

329 The healing agreement also included reintroducing the same constitutional change that had been rejected by Wiegel (bill no 27033). This would then be voted on again in a first reading and would have to be approved a second time by the next government. In practice it was discussed at the same time as the temporary referendum law.
PvdA wanted to move to the indirect election of mayors (which would benefit the PvdA most), to which the VVD was opposed. After intense negotiations the parties reached a compromise on 12 September 2000 (Volkskrant, 13.9.2000, Boom, 14.9.2000). Shortly afterwards, on 26 September 2000, the bill on the election of mayors, bill no 25444, was voted on and approved in the Lower House. Somewhat later, the temporary referendum law (bill no 27034) was tabled in the Lower House and was approved on 6 February 2001. During the following discussion in the Upper House the two bills were discussed simultaneously. This time no difficulties occurred, as the temporary referendum law only required a simple majority. In the end one VVD senator, Leendert Ginjaar, voted against it (Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 10.7.2001:1691). The VVD approved the temporary referendum law ‘not because of the non-binding aspect, nor the abrogative aspect, but specifically because of the “temporary” aspect’ (Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 10.7.2001:1691).

7.2.2 Explaining the Kok II reforms and non-reforms

As the reconstruction of the debate reveals, two waves of democratic reform occurred, in the end leading to a temporary referendum law and a moderate version of the direct election of mayors. As we saw in Chapter 4, there was no cartel breakdown nor was there significant public dissatisfaction. Hence, this is an excellent case for analyzing the impact of postmaterialist parties on democratic reform. Furthermore, given that the second reading of the constitutional change to allow referendums failed because of just one vote, it is important to check to what extent this is best explained either by idiosyncratic or by more structural elements.

A. Assessing the act- and outcome-contingent motivations. As in the previous two chapters, I will begin by assessing the self-interest of the parties as far as the constitutional change to allow referendums, was concerned. Then I will check the self-interest regarding the temporary referendum law and the election of mayors.

1. Referendums. Although public dissatisfaction was low during the Kok II government, there may have been other act-contingent motivations to support referendums. To begin with, given that referendums empower citizens, it is easy to sell to the public. Supporting referendums conveys the message that one cares about citizen’s opinions. The SCP, a Dutch semi-public research institute that carries out social research, also frequently examined support for referendums. In September 1998 the SCP released a report that included survey information on the attitudes of the Dutch public towards referendums. No fewer than 80% of the respondents (fully) agreed that the introduction of referendums was desirable

330 He felt it was ‘wrong to hand in the same constitutional change that has been voted down in this government period’ (cf. footnote 328) (Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 10.7.2001:1691).

331 Eurobarometer data show that just 20% and 22% of the respondents in 1998 and 1999 were dissatisfied with the way democracy worked. In 2000 this even dropped to 17%. In the run-up to the 2002 election the number rose to 26%, which is still low even by Dutch standards (cf. EB 51; 52; 53; 54.1; 56.2).

332 At that time this was also illustrated by one particular poll. The survey asked 500 people whether or not they supported referendums. 249 of these were asked for extra information to know what it actually meant. However, once they got a standard explanation about what referendums were, they overwhelmingly supported them by 83% to 17% (Algemeen Dagblad, 9.3.1999). As a methodological side note: one should be cautious interpreting these results, as it is possible that the explanation contained a positive evaluation of referendums, which in turn may have triggered the positive reaction.

333 The SCP carries out independent research. It also presents reports and advice to the government, parliament and civic organizations (http://www.scp.nl/content.jsp?objectid=default:18832).
On 1 July 1999 the SCP released a further report, which again used the same numbers to show that support for referendums had risen significantly since 1972, from 62% to 80% (SCP, 1999:37). In other words, public support for referendums was very high. Yet these data remained fairly obscure. The 1998 report was available to politicians, but its results were not widely publicized in the media. Only on the occasion of the press release concerning the report of 1 July 1999 were the data widely cited in the media (cf. NRC, 2.7.1999; Trouw, 2.7.1999; Volkskrant, 2.7.1999). Nevertheless, in the run-up to the vote on referendums in 1998 (first reading) and 1999 (second reading) it was usual for the media to refer to referendums as something that the lay Dutch population supported (cf. Volkskrant, 4.3.1998; Hos, 27.2.1999; Algemeen Dagblad, 9.3.1999). On 26 February 1998 a poll conducted by Inter/View (now peil.nl) disclosed how those voting for the different parties judged the topic. It showed that support for referendums was highest among D66 supporters (96.2%) (Volkskrant, 4.3.1998). Support was lowest among those voting for the smaller Christian parties, but even a majority of these supported referendums (‘more than half of their voters support referendums’; Volkskrant, 4.3.1998). Most interesting was the number of VVD voters who (claimed to) support referendums: no fewer than ‘three quarters’ (Hos, 27.2.1998). To summarize: ‘in surveys, voters claim to want referendums’ (Hos, 20.5.1999). Most newspapers were also supportive of referendums, although they cautioned that turnout in local referendums held in the 1990s had been very low. Lastly, most parties included the referendum topic in their party manifestoes. One of the government parties, D66, wholeheartedly supported referendums in its manifesto (D66, 1998: 50). The PvdA did not mention the referendum in its manifesto (PvdA, 1998), which probably indicates that the topic was unimportant for the party. Lastly, the VVD explicitly mentioned that it agreed with referendums, but wanted ‘to limit the type of referendum to the abrogative referendum’ (VVD, 1998:4). The opposition parties were also divided: GroenLinks and the SP favoured referendums (GroenLinks, 1998:14; SP, 1998:3), but the Christian parties opposed them (CDA, 1998:24; RPF, 1998:10; GPV, 1998:48; SGP, 1998: 11). The CDA in particular was explicitly opposed: ‘tinkering with the constitution to allow referendums, stemming from the idea that engagement can be equated to voting is (...) unnecessary’ (CDA, 1998: 24).

For three parties the act-contingent motivations were thus unequivocally positive: GroenLinks, the SP and D66. Given the wide public and media support for referendums, most other parties had at least some positive motivations to support the issue. However, with regard to the Christian parties this judgment should be changed from ‘positive’ to ‘neutral’. After all, despite their preference for referendums many of those voting for the Christian parties did not

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334 The statement used was: ‘On some important issues voters should be allowed to vote in the so-called referendum.’ The subjects could choose between the following responses: fully agree, agree, disagree, fully disagree and don’t know (SCP, 1998:44).
335 The report only mentioned 1971 (50%), 1972 (62%) and 1998 (80%) (SCP, 1999:37).
336 An article in the Algemeen Dagblad spoke of referendums as ‘unknown but hugely popular’ (Algemeen Dagblad, 9.3.1999).
337 Unfortunately only the media reports of the survey are available. The original press release of Inter/View is no longer obtainable.
338 One newspaper even had a headline ‘The voter claims to want referendums, but often abstains in local referendums’ (Trouw, 20.5.1999).
339 The GPV was ‘in principle opposed to referendums’, and opposed all legislation that ‘undermined our representative democracy’. This was also the reason why the party opposed the constitutional change during the first reading (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1997:11).
vote for a different party in the 1998 elections, even though the Christian parties were against referendums. Therefore these voters clearly cared little about referendums. The PvdA took a position in the middle: it could benefit from the public and media support for the issue, but it did well in the 1998 elections despite the fact that its party manifesto remained silent about referendums. Hence their act-contingent motivations were only moderately positive. Lastly, the act-contingent motivations of the VVD were also moderately positive. In the Inter/View survey, those voting for the VVD overwhelmingly endorsed referendums (cf. above), while one should note that those VVD voters who opposed referendums but still voted for the party in 1998 at least knew that it was going to approve the second reading of the constitutional change as this was implicitly stated in the manifesto. Since these people still voted VVD in 1998, the party could safely approve the second reading.

Regarding the outcome-contingent motivations the picture was entirely different. The type of referendum that was to be implemented through the constitutional change was binding, citizen-initiated, abrogative referendums. They could only repeal existing legislation and therefore were mostly suited to be an anti-government instrument. A second important element was the initiation requirements. These were very high: first 40,000 signatures had to be gathered and then another 560,000 were needed to trigger a referendum. Hence, although citizen-initiated abrogative referendums first and foremost threatened government parties, the high requirements for initiating an actual referendum reduced its potential damage significantly. The high threshold for the actual outcome of a referendum further reduced the possible harm. Indeed, no less than 30% of the whole electorate had to vote against the legislation (regardless of turnout) for it to be abrogated. In judging the outcome-contingent motivations of the parties in the Dutch parliament both elements need to be taken into account. In practice, this means that parties, which in 1998 could reasonably expect to achieve office in the near future had negative outcome-contingent motivations. However, given the high initiation requirements, these negative motivations were comparatively moderate. Hence the CDA, PvdA, VVD and D66 had relatively moderate negative outcome-contingent motivations, as they had a reasonable chance of being in government in the near future. Conversely, parties that in 1998 could reasonably expect not to be in government in the foreseeable future had positive outcome-contingent motivations. Again, given the high initiation requirements, these were relatively moderate. Yet parties that could mobilize citizens had more positive motivations than those that were confined to a very specific and delineated voter group. Therefore the small Christian parties, the GPV, RPF and SGP, had only moderately positive outcome-contingent motivations, as their voters were mostly to be

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340 After all, governments that wanted to abrogate legislation could simply do this themselves. Hence, the abrogative referendum was first and foremost beneficial to citizen groups and opposition parties.

341 In fact it is the double number that as was recommended by the Commission Biesheuvel in 1984 (cf. Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1984).

342 This was also acknowledged in the parliamentary debates by several opponents of referendums. The opposition spoke of 'high thresholds' (Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 1999:5). The CDA, which opposed the legislation, made clear that it had 'no problem with the height of the thresholds' (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 10.2.1999:3359). Conversely, the opposition parties who supported the issue, GroenLinks and the SP, found that the thresholds severely weakened the referendum legislation and already complained about it during the first reading in 1997. They blamed D66 especially. Most notably, Oedayraj Singh Varma (GroenLinks) asked 'how will [D66] be able to sell this to its voters and how is it possible that it agrees to this?' (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 25.6.1997:6802).
found within the religious heartland of their parties. The SP probably had the most positive outcome-contingent motivations, as it was an activist party that was very adept at mobilizing. Lastly, GroenLinks took a position in the middle, as it was difficult for the party to estimate whether it had a reasonable chance of achieving office in the foreseeable future. Certainly its chances were higher than those of the smaller Christian parties and the SP, but they were far lower than those of any of the four parties mentioned above.

Table 7.2 Summary of motivations and votes concerning referendums

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Act-contingent</th>
<th>Outcome-contingent</th>
<th>Vote (LH)</th>
<th>Vote (UH)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PvdA</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VVD</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D66</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opposition</th>
<th>Act-contingent</th>
<th>Outcome-contingent</th>
<th>Vote (LH)</th>
<th>Vote (UH)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CDA</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GroenLinks</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPF</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPV</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SGP</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>113</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: LH = Lower House; UH = Upper House

Looking at Table 7.2, three questions arise. First, did act-contingent motivations transcend outcome-contingent ones in the case of the PvdA and the VVD? Second, why was the VVD internally split on the issue? Third, did act-contingent motivations play a crucial role for D66

Nevertheless their motivations were still positive. For instance, (opposition to) gay marriage was an issue that was very dear to these parties and was a suitable topic to have a referendum on. After all, it was very contentious in 1999 and there was a general feeling, even amongst proponents, that ‘society would still consider this to be a bridge too far’ (Algemeen Dagblad, 3.4.1998). With the help of the CDA, which was also against gay marriage, mobilization would have been feasible. Briefly for the smaller Christian parties citizen-initiated abrogative referendums could be an excellent check with regard to ethical issues. I also include one senator (Bierman), who was green-affiliated but had an independent seat. He was one of the last to be persuaded. His personal opinion was that the referendum legislation had to be more far-reaching. He had also supported the constitutional change in the first reading. He was thus not against referendums and could more easily be swayed (Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 18.5.1999: 1404; see also Van Es and Van der Malen, 19.5.1999; Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 3.3.1998:1039).
or was something else more important? Later these three questions will guide my further examinations of the Kok II case, but first I will discuss the other reforms, the temporary referendum law and the direct election of mayors.

2. THE TEMPORARY REFERENDUM LAW AND THE ELECTION OF MAYORS. On 31 May 1999, through the so-called healing agreement, D66, the PvdA and the VVD formally agreed to initiate democratic reform processes. Regarding referendums, the act- and outcome-contingent motivations had not changed dramatically since the ‘Night of Wiegel’. If anything, the SCP report that was widely published in the media on 2 July 1999 only stressed the act-contingent motivations to support referendums. Moreover, the negative outcome-contingent motivations were slightly reduced this time as the temporary referendum law was non-binding and, more importantly, temporary. Concerning the direct election of mayors, the act-contingent motivations resembled those relating to referendums. To start with, the reform was ‘easy to sell’ as it gave citizens more say. Additionally, all surveys held on the topic suggested that the Dutch citizenry was overwhelmingly in favour of the (direct) election of mayors. The SCP report mentioned earlier for instance showed that 71% of the respondents were in favour of a directly elected mayor.\(^{345}\) The media supported the measure and were even in favour of a more far-reaching direct election than that preferred by the Kok II government, as they found that the latter was only a ‘small step in the direction of directly elected mayors’ (Soetenhorst, 18.1.2000). Lastly most parties had discussed the topic in their party manifestoes. The PvdA, D66 and the SP were in favour of directly elected mayors (PvdA, 1998:7; D66, 1998:62; 1998:4). GroenLinks, on the other hand, preferred indirectly elected mayors (GroenLinks, 1998: 14). Most Christian parties were against elected mayors (CDA, 1998:30; SGP 1998:12; RPF, 1998:10), while neither the fourth Christian party, the GPV, or the VVD mentioned the topic (GPV, 1998; VVD, 1998).

The parties were also divided with regard to the outcome-contingent motivations. Traditionally the outcome-contingent motivations for supporting directly elected mayors are assessed at party level, by making an estimate of how many mayoral positions can be expected to be won or lost.\(^{346}\) However, this assessment does not take into account the intra-party (in this case the local) dimension. Local politicians, aldermen and mayors were likely to be damaged by directly elected mayors, since a directly elected mayor might acquire a stronger position (because he/she was elected and thus more legitimate). Additionally, if one wanted to become a mayor one had to go through a ‘risky’ election process. Therefore as far as the direct election of mayors was concerned, local interests of political parties might contradict their national interests. Given that it was the national leadership that decided on supporting or opposing legislation, it was crucial to assess the impact of local politicians on the national leadership. In 2000, immediately before the vote on the reform, the three traditional parties held 90% of the mayoral positions (covering 92.5% of the Dutch population).\(^{347}\) Hence the existing system benefited these three parties. Moreover, they were able to control the appointment process. However, the PvdA especially could do even better.

\(^{345}\) The original statement was ‘The mayor should be elected by the citizens of a municipality’. Respondents could fully agree, agree, disagree, fully disagree and don’t know (SCP, 1999:37).

\(^{346}\) For instance, Andeweg and Irwin (2005:176) reason this way when they state that ‘[a]s left-wing parties are strong in the cities, it should come as no surprise that they would prefer the mayor to be elected’.

\(^{347}\) Interestingly, the three parties controlled 90% of the mayoral positions, but represented less than half of the electorate in vote share (Andeweg and Irwin, 2005:176).
in the bigger (and more prestigious) cities, where it won the elections by large margins. The electorate was more left-leaning in these cities, which suggested that the PvdA had something to gain from the direct election of mayors (cf. Andeweg and Irwin, 2005:176; De Boer, et. al., 1999:14-17). At the same time the PvdA was also a party in which the local elites were influential at national level. As Van Thijn (PvdA) explains: 'it is too simple to say that there is friction between local and national elites. Many local elites were also national elites' (Van Thijn, 7.12.2009). The CDA on the other hand was very strong in rural areas and the (less prestigious) smaller cities and it probably could win even more of them as there were right-wing majorities in many of these municipalities and smaller cities. Add to this that in a large majority of the municipalities the CDA was larger than its main right-wing competitor, the VVD, and it becomes clear that the CDA also had something to gain (cf. De Boer, et. al., 1999:14-17). It also had something to lose, as it would have little chance against the PvdA in the bigger cities. The big loser in a pure direct election of mayors would be the VVD, as it would have little chance in the municipalities or the smaller and bigger cities (cf. Andeweg and Irwin, 2005:176; De Boer, et. al., 1999:88). The same is true for the smaller parties, GroenLinks, D66 and the SP. Lastly the small Christian parties, whose voters are highly concentrated, could benefit from the measure.348

However, the election of mayors as devised by the Kok II government was not a pure and simple direct election. In the first place the direct elections would be optional. There would also only be two candidates, selected by the local council, in addition to which the voter turnout had to cross a threshold equal to 30% of the electorate. Lastly, the results would not be binding and the municipal council had to suggest one or two candidates based on the outcome, between whom the national cabinet could then choose (cf. Kok and De Vries, 2001). Some have characterized this as the ‘worst of three worlds’, as it combines elements of the indirect election of mayors by the councils (advocated by the PvdA), the traditional appointment of mayors (advocated by the VVD) and the direct election of mayors (advocated by D66) (Steur, 2005:62). In practice this combination severely limited the (potentially negative) consequences of the direct election of mayors for the VVD and the CDA, but it also gave more power to the municipal councils (as the PvdA wanted), especially in the crucial early phase of the nomination process.350 With regard to the smaller parties, the motivations were pretty much the same.351 Table 7.3 summarizes the motivations concerning the temporary referendum law and the direct election of mayors.

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348 Although the difference from the existing situation would be minimal, as they already had mayors in most of their strongholds (Andeweg and Irwin, 2005:176).
349 If the election outcome was very clear, nominating one candidate would be enough. If the outcome was not clear, the two candidates would be ranked according to the result (cf. Volkskrant, 13.9.2000). Obviously if only one candidate was nominated, there would be little choice left for the national cabinet.
350 Because of this the media considered the PvdA the winner in the reform discussions. See for instance Boom, 14.9.2000, which simply had the headline ‘PvdA wins battle over mayor’.
351 Tellingly, D66 was largely absent from the final discussions on the actual form of the direct election. One newspaper described the position of D66 as follows: ‘D66 suspiciously looked from a distance at the fight between the PvdA and the VVD over mayors’ (Volkskrant, 13.9.2000).
Table 7.3 Motivations and votes for the 2001 reforms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Government</th>
<th>Temp. Referendum Law</th>
<th>Direct election mayor</th>
<th>Vote (LH)*</th>
<th>Vote (UH)*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Act</td>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>Act</td>
<td>Outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PvdA</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VVD</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>++</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>-</td>
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<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Act</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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<td>+/-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>GPV</td>
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<td>+/-</td>
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<td>+</td>
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<td>2</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|           |     |         |     |         | 113 | 37  | 48  | 27  |
|           |     |         |     |         | (76 required) | (38 required) |

* Both reforms were voted for on the same day and were approved by the same majorities. Note: -- strongly negative; - moderately negative; +/- neutral or mixed; + moderately positive; ++ strongly positive. LH = Lower House; UH = Upper House.

Looking at Table 7.3, again one gets the impression that in the case of the government parties, act-contingent motivations outweighed the outcome-contingent motivations. The only exception was the PvdA. Regarding the direct election of mayors the government parties acted against their (moderately) negative outcome-contingent motivations. I will now first discuss the position of the VVD, as this is crucial in explaining the failure of referendums during the ‘Night of Wiegel’. Subsequently I will consider the impact of D66. As I will show, a combination of the principles of D66 and the far-reaching damage control mechanisms outlined above can explain why in the case of the VVD and to a lesser extent the PvdA negative outcome-contingent motivations were overruled.

**B. The opposition within the VVD.** Democratic reform has mostly been studied at party level. However, as we saw above, the intra-party level is crucial to explain the Kok II reforms. As the historical reconstruction showed, the VVD was internally divided on referendums. Five

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352 I also include one independent senator (Bierman) who was loosely affiliated to the greens, cf. footnote 343.
senators threatened to vote against the second reading and one, Wiegel, eventually did. All these senators were relatively independent politicians. Four of them – all but Wiegel – were also end-of-career politicians. As then Minister of the Interior Peper (PvdA) recalled in a later interview: ‘The VVD party leadership (...) told me not to worry about Wiegel. (...) The other four senators were backbenchers who would most likely not be re-elected to the new senate, which was to be sworn in a month later’. This was crucial in the view of the VVD leadership, as ‘it was very likely that they [the five senators, KJ] would try to claim their spot in the limelight by opposing the legislation’ (Steur, 2005:73). The motivation ‘to shine one last time’ did not prevail for three of them. In fact, even the mere suggestion that this would be a motivation to vote against the constitutional change prompted one of the senators, Verbeek, to vote ‘yes’ (Van Es and Van der Malen, 19.5.1999). Two others, Van Graafeiland and Heijne Makkreel, refrained from voting ‘no’ because they did not want to be blamed for a government crisis. According to other VVD senators, Van Eekelen in the end voted ‘yes’ because (a) a ‘no’ vote would not make a difference and (b) they all hoped D66 would not risk causing a government crisis when only one senator voted against (Van Es and Van der Malen, 19.5.1999).

Table 7.4 Summary of the characteristics of the five dissident VVD senators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Vote</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Re-election chances</th>
<th>Backbencher?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan Verbeek</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wim van Eekelen</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John van Graafeiland</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henk Heijne Makkreel</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hans Wiegel</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To examine the motivations of the VVD politicians I will once again look at the impact of re-election, the desire to increase individual power, principles and ‘other’ factors.

1. **Re-election.** Re-election is unlikely to have played a role. After all, the Upper House is indirectly elected by the members of the provincial legislatures and the lists for ‘election’ to the new Upper House had already been drawn up. As mentioned before, it was precisely the lack of re-election prospects and the fact that four of them were clearly at the end of their careers that made the senators relatively independent. The only exception was Wiegel, but he had his own independent power base as ‘a lot of the Telegraaf readers, three quarters of the VVD supporters and his old friends within the party were on his side’ (Van Meriënoer, 1999:61).

2. **Individual Power.** The four senators who in the end voted yes were unlikely to play any role in politics afterwards. Only Wiegel had something to gain. By opposing referendums Wiegel did represent a faction of his party and could rally his power base. However, by opposing referendums he risked being further marginalized within his party, as the party leadership had invested a lot of time and energy in the reform. Hence, if his acts were a way to get more individual power it was a risky long shot.
3. Principles. Principles seem to have played a major role in the decision of the five senators. Initially all of them opposed referendums, as they feared they undermined decision making and were a threat to representative democracy (cf. Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 18.5.1999:1395-1396). Their fears were also exacerbated by the D66 party leader in the Upper House, Hesseling, who claimed that by approving the constitutional change the ‘door was opened for further changes’ (Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 18.5.1999:1396). Hence, approving the constitutional change would be only the first step that eventually could lead to full-scale citizen-initiated referendums.

4. Other factors. The stakes in the debate were very high, as D66 leader De Graaf had threatened to trigger a cabinet crisis if the constitutional change were to fail. The fact that the stakes were high attracted a lot of media attention. It was also an opportunity for Wiegel to live his ‘finest hour’ (De Graaf, 28.1.2009). However, it goes too far to only point to ‘vanity’ as an explanation, as Wiegel also acted consistently with his beliefs and previous positions on referendums (cf. Sap, 2003:8).

Media accounts of the decisive night tend to focus on the role of Hans Wiegel, but this overestimates Wiegel’s impact. The difficulties and the eventual failure of the constitutional change can be explained by a combination of contextual opportunities and individual motivations. The five dissident senators were empowered by the thin margin the proponents of referendums had in the Upper House and the relatively high hurdle (a two-thirds majority) that had to be overcome to pass the constitutional change (cf. historical reconstruction). They were also less susceptible to pressure from their party leadership, as the Upper House was not bound by the coalition agreement. Although a lot of pressure was put on the VVD dissidents, they were still more independent than was the case with their Lower House counterparts.

Individual factors, namely a combination of Wiegel’s willingness to be the only senator opposing the change and his principled objections to referendums, are further crucial elements in explaining the failure of the constitutional change. This explanation also highlights why the temporary referendum law and the moderate version of the direct election of mayors were approved. The VVD was still divided, but this time the contextual factors had changed as the bills only required a simple majority.

C. The peculiar role of D66. As mentioned above, D66 was the party that pushed for the inclusion of democratic reform in the coalition agreement (cf. Sap, 2003:15, see also Andeweg and Irwin, 2005:87). Interestingly, all the reforms advocated by D66 would disadvantage the party. Why did D66 support these reforms? To start with one can think of either act-contingent or principled motivations. Certainly, D66’s position was probably partly

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353 D66 senator Hesseling even mentioned this in his speech: ‘today there is no shortage of “media coverage”’ (Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 18.5.1999:1342).
354 Even the Dutch political scientist Philip van Praag, who claimed that ‘until now, Wiegel cared little about principles’, acknowledged that Wiegel had ‘an aversion to referendums’ (Van Praag, 20.5.1999).
355 As Thom de Graaf (28.1.2009), then D66 party leader, acknowledged, ‘During the coalition negotiations we agreed that all parties would apply maximum pressure on their Upper House fractions. I cannot say that this did not happen. This also is true for Dijkstal [then VVD leader, KJ]. It led to all sorts of conflicts within the liberal party, so I never blamed the VVD leadership’.
356 Originally the party actually demanded more far-reaching reforms (that were only likely to have more negative effects for the party), such as the direct election of the Prime Minister and a more majoritarian electoral system. This seems to be a recurring theme in the history of D66, as its first success, the abolition of compulsory voting, also hurt the party (Andeweg and Irwin, 2005:83).
due to act-contingent motivations, as these were positive. However, they were unlikely to be the whole story. After all, as Thom de Graaf explains:

Democratic reform has never been the decisive motivation to vote for D66. (...) A majority of the citizens approved of referendums and people understood that we wanted the direct election of the Prime Minister and mayors, but as you can see from the ups and downs of the party, other reasons prevailed when the party was successful. This had to do with the loss of credibility of the bigger parties or how charismatic our leaders were. (De Graaf, 28.1.2009)

Hence vote maximization is unlikely to have been a dominant motivation for the party. However, the act of supporting democratic reform may well have served another purpose. During the first Kok government it was difficult to see the added value of D66, as it was not very visible (De Boer, et. al., 1999:19). After the lost 1998 elections the party was in search of an identity.357 Democratic reform was an important part of this identity, as can be witnessed in the run-up to the Upper House debate on the second reading of the constitutional change, when D66 leader Hesseling stated: 'For thirty years now we [D66, KJ] have been told that we stand for nothing in particular. Finally, now we stand for something and now we will not back down. Referendums are a now or never issue'. (Sap, 2003:17). Indeed, the topic was so important to D66 that it was even prepared to leave the government if it was rejected. However, this cannot explain why D66 chose precisely democratic reform - and specifically referendums - to increase its visibility.358 Here principles most likely played a role. First of all, democratic reform fitted the postmaterialist ideology of D66. But this by itself is not sufficient. As De Graaf (28.1.2009) explains:

Even within D66 there are people who are not convinced of the necessity of democratic reform. It was a permanent debate and the direction of the party depended on the leader. Van Mierlo (...) thought the essence of the party lay in such proposals. (...) Another [D66] leader, Jan Terlouw, did not care about democratic reform.

De Graaf himself was strongly committed to the issue and believed that 'the essence of the party was its stance on the role of the citizen in the political system' (28.1.2009). Hence, the role of the leader was crucial in the emphasis on democratic reform. But why referendums? Here the other parties probably played a vital role. After all, at that time referendums and the election of mayors were the only democratic reforms that the PvdA and VVD allowed, as other democratic reform proposals were simply blocked before they were transformed into a bill.359 Hence, in this case it seems that the answer to the question of how to reposition D66 and give the party a distinct profile was influenced by the importance attributed to democratic reform by the leadership, while the other coalition parties determined the emphasis on referendums.

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357 After the 1998 elections the party held some profound ideological debates. For instance, in 1998 a group of young D66 radicals called 'Upheaval' managed to link the ideology of the party to 'social liberalism' (see also: Admiraal and Hesseling, 6.2.1999). Another example is the 1999 commission called ‘Future of the Party’, which had the aim of examining the future role of D66 in the party system (De Boer, et. al., 2000:38).

358 After all, in the early days of the party D66 was not a proponent of referendums (cf. Giebels, 27.5.1999).

359 An example of this is Memorandum 26957. The memorandum dealt with a new electoral system, but never resulted in any bills. The study on the direct election of the Prime Minister was never carried out.
D. Principle versus self-interest. The initiation of the reform debates, both on the two referendum discussions and on the election of mayors can be explained by the principled stance of D66 and the impact these principles had on its search for a distinct identity. It was D66 that had democratic reform included in the coalition agreement (Sap, 2003:15; Andeweg and Irwin, 2005:87). However, the support of the PvdA and the VVD was crucial. D66 demanded democratic reform in return for its participation in government. The VVD only ‘grudgingly approved’ the reforms (Sap, 2003:15). It achieved significant concessions, but was still divided over referendums. Empowered by the high procedural hurdles and the relative independence of the Upper House and driven by his principles combined with his personal characteristics, one VVD senator, Hans Wiegel, was able to veto the constitutional change to allow referendums. The procedural hurdles were lower in the case of the temporary referendum law and the direct election of mayors, as these only required a simple majority. The VVD was still divided and one senator opposed the two measures, but this time only the support of a majority of the VVD senators was needed for the package to pass. Support from the VVD for the temporary referendum law was not too difficult to achieve. With regard to the original referendum proposal the VVD had already been able to secure very high initiation and result requirements, which significantly limited the potential damage (Sap, 2003:21). The temporary referendum law was even less threatening, as it was non-binding and merely temporary – something explicitly mentioned by the VVD leader in the Upper House as a reason for supporting the bill (Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 10.7.2001:1691). Concerning the direct election of mayors the new situation would not be all that different from the old one, as the legislation would only be ‘a small step’ towards a genuine direct election of mayors (Soetenhorst, 18.1.2000). The PvdA for its part benefited most from this ‘small step’ and thus had outcome-contingent motivations to support the reform. One might object that the PvdA also had principled motivations to support the direct election of mayors. However, its preference for the indirect election of mayors by the local council (an outcome that would be in its own interests) over the genuine direct election of mayors (as mentioned in its party manifesto and supported by the Dutch citizens), suggest that outcome-contingent motivations dominated principled and act-contingent ones (cf. De Volkskrant 13.9.2000; Boom, 14.9.2000). The referendum debate, on the other hand, was not a priority for the PvdA. It focused more on socio-economic issues, as is also shown by the relative absence of Prime Minister Kok during the referendum debate: only when a government crisis was looming did he intervene (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 10.2.1999; Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 18.5.1999:1404-1405).

To sum up, it seems to have been first and foremost the case that the PvdA and VVD initially allowed the reforms to be included in the coalition agreement because they wanted to persuade D66 to join the government. The VVD was convinced into approving the reforms because the negative outcome-contingent motivations of referendums and the election of mayors were to be severely limited through damage control mechanisms. The PvdA on the

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360 The press even called the two measures merely ‘a dummy with a bow tie’ (NRC, 2.6.1999).
361 This is also acknowledged by Ed van Thijn (PvdA): the party ‘did not think democratic reform was that important’ (Van Thijn, 7.12.2009). Minister of the Interior Bram Peper also stated that ‘in reality, the introduction of referendums was just a minor issue’ (Steur, 2005:74).
other hand cared little about the referendum, but had something to gain on the election of mayors, a topic in which it did invest time and energy.

Table 7.5: Summary of the dominant motivations for the government parties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiation</th>
<th>Failure</th>
<th>Temporary referendum law</th>
<th>Direct election mayors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principle</td>
<td>D66</td>
<td>VVD</td>
<td>D66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td></td>
<td>VVD (dam. contr.)</td>
<td>PvdA VVD (dam. contr.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government stability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.3 Balkenende II: De Graaf and the short-lived Pechtold agenda

Balkenende II was selected because it is a deviant case: the government included the postmaterialist D66 and was faced with public dissatisfaction, but no reforms materialized. As I will show, at least one democratic reform, namely the direct election of mayors was actually very close to being implemented. The reform only failed at the final hurdle, the vote in the Upper House, due to the opposition of Ed van Thijn (PvdA) and the PvdA senate party in general. After this Minister for Democratic Reform, Thom de Graaf (D66), resigned because he felt that support for his other project, a large-scale reform of the electoral system, was also dwindling. De Graaf was replaced by Alexander Pechtold (D66), who initiated a bill on the lowering of the preference threshold and set up an expert commission and a Citizens’ Assembly on democratic reform. However, D66 left the government before any reform proposals could be brought to the vote.

7.3.1 Reconstruction of the debate

A. Historical roots of the debate. As I discussed in the historical reconstruction of the Kok II case, the direct election of mayors had already been on the political agenda for a long time. An optional non-binding version of the direct election of mayors was implemented in 2001 (cf. above). The Kok II government also approved the first reading of a constitutional change to allow the direct election of mayors (bill no 27551). The real hurdle, however, would come with the second reading. The Balkenende I government, which included the CDA, the VVD and the neo-liberal populist List Pim Fortuyn, agreed to implement the direct election of mayors – a demand of the LPF (Hippe, Lucardie and Voerman, 2003:32). On 5 September 2002 the government introduced a bill on the second reading of the constitutional change (bill 28509). However, the government fell on 16 October 2002 and new elections were called. The bill was placed on a list of bills in progress and the Lower House in its new composition after the 2003 elections had to decide whether or not to continue the legislative process.

362 It seems that the PvdA saw referendums as the price it had to pay to govern with D66, as the party leadership did not want to be in just a VVD-PvdA coalition (Steur, 2005:74). Moreover, as the topic was popular among the citizenry and the impact of the reforms would be limited this was a small price to pay.
The second important topic on the political agenda was large-scale reform of the electoral system. The Dutch electoral system in 2003 was list-proportional, with just one nationwide electoral district. The Lower House consisted of 150 seats and this de facto resulted in an electoral threshold of 0.67%.

Voters were allowed to cast only one vote, a preference vote for a candidate. The preference threshold was set at 25% of the electoral quota (i.e. 1/600th of the total number of votes cast).

Electoral reform to move towards a more majoritarian electoral system had been on the agenda for a long time. Again, it was D66 which first called for such a major electoral reform. As Andeweg and Irwin (2005:82) state: ‘since the 1960s, electoral reform has been an almost constant topic on the political agenda’. Indeed, after the founding of D66 in 1966 several attempts to implement a new electoral system were made. A first wave of reforms specifically aimed to strengthen the relationship between the outcome of the vote and the composition of the government. An advisory commission composed of the representatives of all the parties advised as early as 1969 that the ‘formateur’ (the architect of a government) should be directly elected and also that multiple electoral districts (instead of just one nationwide district) should be introduced combined with a list-proportional electoral system (Andeweg and Irwin, 2005:86). From the late 1970s onwards the discussion focused on bringing in some element of geographical representation (Andeweg, 2005:506). In 1990 the Commission Deetman recommended that a ‘mixed member proportional’ electoral system or a PR system with a small number of multi-member electoral districts should be examined (Andeweg and Irwin, 2005:86). A subsequent commission, the Commission De Koning, rejected both options in 1993 and proposed lowering the preference threshold from 50% to 25% of the electoral quota (Lucardie, Noomen and Voerman, 1994:16; see also Jacobs and Leyenaar, 2011).

The coalition agreement of the first Kok government included a section that stated that ‘changes to the electoral system in order to ensure a more direct connection between the voter and the elected’ would be ‘examined’ (Kok, 1994:24). Indeed, Minister of the Interior Jacob Kohnstamm (D66) presented three options: a modified district system, a variation of the German system and a mixed system. Although the government declared a preference for this last, the bill was not supported by a majority in the Lower House as the CDA and VVD opposed it (Andeweg and Irwin, 2005:86). The Kok II coalition agreement also included a statement on reform of the electoral system. It said ‘based on the results of the examination and alternatives that have been put forward previously, a proposal to change the electoral system will be introduced quickly’ (Kok, 1998:76). Minister of the Interior Peper (PvdA) introduced no fewer than six alternatives on 16 December 1999 (cf. Peper, 1999). Peper asked the Lower House to choose one of the alternatives, but there was little agreement on which proposal to choose and no bill was introduced (Andeweg and Irwin, 2005:86).

The end of the Kok II government also witnessed one of the most turbulent events in the recent political history of the Netherlands: the rise (and subsequent murder) of Pim Fortuyn. From the second half of 2001 onwards Pim Fortuyn increasingly mobilized discontent among...
voters (Andeweg and Irwin, 2005:16), who were worried by, among other things, the effects of immigration. His support rose swiftly in the opinion polls and as Eurobarometer data show was accompanied by a significant increase in dissatisfaction with the way democracy worked. However, five days before the election, on 6 May 2002, he was assassinated. The election saw a landslide, as Fortuyn's party, the List Pim Fortuyn (LPF), won 26 seats and all established parties, PvdA, D66 and VVD, lost heavily. As a result the LPF was included in the Balkenende I government, which tried to implement the direct election of mayors but fell after only 87 days - far too soon to complete its reform plans.

B. Reform initiation. The Balkenende II government was formed on 16 May 2003. It consisted of the CDA, VVD and D66. The CDA had refused to govern with the PvdA, while the VVD declined to govern with the smaller Christian parties. The LPF was judged too unstable and as a result only D66 was left as a viable option in the coalition. This was the first time D66 was to be part of a centre-right government. The party was able to include significant democratic reforms such as a new electoral system and the direct election of mayors in the coalition agreement (Hippe, Lucardie and Voerman, 2004:23; see also: Balkenende, 2003: 9-10). 

Table 7.6: Reform timetable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>D66 and left-wing parties favour a direct link between the voter and the composition of the government.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Christian parties and the VVD are opposed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Commission Deetman is set up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Commission De Koning advises against a new electoral system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kohnstamm (D66) introduces three alternatives, CDA and VVD opposed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Peper (PvdA) introduces six alternatives, but no agreement is reached on which to choose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The first reading of a constitutional change to allow the direct election of mayors is approved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summer and Autumn 2001</td>
<td>Pim Fortuyn becomes popular in opinion polls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dissatisfaction with government rises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.5.2002</td>
<td>Assassination of Pim Fortuyn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15.5.2002</td>
<td>Elections: established parties lose significantly, the List Pim Fortuyn wins 26 seats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>September – October 2002</td>
<td>Balkenende I government falls before any reform is discussed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform</td>
<td>16.5.2003</td>
<td>Balkenende II government aims to introduce a new electoral system</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

365 Studies have shown that Fortuyn both capitalized on and 'caused' discontent (cf. Van der Brug, 2003).
366 Additionally, D66 was able to secure the establishment of a commission on the direct election of the Prime Minister and the other parties also agreed to keep the temporary referendum law (Balkenende, 2003: 9-10).
### Reform process stage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27.11.2003</td>
<td>Initiation system and the direct election of mayors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12—13.12.2003</td>
<td>- Draft proposal on electoral system change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.10.2004</td>
<td>- PvdA party congress wants member consultation on the direct election of mayors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2004</td>
<td>- Cabinet agrees a proposal for an electoral system change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.10.2004</td>
<td>- PvdA member consultation results in preference for indirectly elected mayors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Vote

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.11.2004</td>
<td>- Bos pushes his parliamentary party to support constitutional change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- With the support of all but four PvdA MPs, the constitutional change passes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- De Graaf introduces a bill on the direct election of mayors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.2.2005</td>
<td>- Bill on electoral system change introduced</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Final vote

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22.3.2005</td>
<td>- Constitutional change fails due to opposition from PvdA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Reform initiation + process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21.12.2005</td>
<td>- Bill to lower the preference threshold from 25% to 12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.6.2006</td>
<td>- Bill discussed in the Lower House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.6.2006</td>
<td>- Government falls early</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Events playing at the society level are highlighted in light grey; the historical roots of the debate on the direct election of mayors can be found in the previous section.

C. Processing stage. The new cabinet used the bill already introduced under Balkenende I (bill no 28509) to hold the second reading on the constitutional change to allow the direct election of mayors. The change would eliminate the appointment of mayors by the government from the constitution. By doing so, a fully-fledged direct election of mayors would be possible, but equally a fully-fledged indirect election of mayors was an option. However, Minister of the Interior Thom de Graaf (D66) and part of the VVD preferred the direct election of mayors. The first step in achieving the direct election of mayors was to pass the aforementioned constitutional change. First this needed to be approved by the Lower House, where the support of (at least some part of) the PvdA was needed. The SP and GroenLinks also were in favour of the constitutional change, but even with their support the government would be five seats short of the required two-thirds majority (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 4.11.2004:1159; 1165). Thus, the PvdA was crucial. Within the party an intense discussion took place on the issue. Officially the PvdA was in favour of indirectly elected mayors (cf. PvdA, 2003:11). However, party leader Wouter Bos personally backed directly elected mayors (Hippe, Lucardie and Voerman, 2004:100; Schulte, 15.12.2003; see also: Koole, 2010:306). Yet he was rather isolated, as a significant section of the PvdA was against this. The local elites in the province of Groningen, where the PvdA is traditionally the strongest party, rallied against directly elected mayors. The issue was discussed at a party

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367 In the latter case, the local council would elect the mayor.
368 As is witnessed by the fact that on 9 November 2004 De Graaf introduced a bill in the Lower House to bring in the direct election of mayors (bill 29864).
congress on 12 and 13 December 2003 and it was decided that a consultation of the members would be conducted on the issue (Schulte, 15.12.2003; see also: Koole, 2010:307). The consultation took place in 2004. On 14 October 2004 it became clear that 30% of the PvdA members had voted, of whom 65% opposed directly elected mayors (De Volkskrant, 14.10.2004). Wouter Bos nevertheless wanted to vote in favour of the constitutional change, because he considered it to be unrelated to the direct election of mayors. He even threatened to resign when a majority of the PvdA Lower House party opposed the change (NRC, 15.11.2004; Koole, 2010:338). On 9 November 2004 all but four PvdA MPs approved the constitutional change and it secured the required two-thirds majority. However, the Upper House still needed to approve it.

In the meantime De Graaf also worked on a proposal for a new electoral system. His first draft was presented as early as 27 November 2003 (Memorandum, 29356/1; see: De Graaf, 2003). De Graaf wanted 75 MPs to be elected on a national list, while another 75 seats were to be distributed based on some 20 multi-member districts with 2 to 6 seats each. Voters were to have two votes, one for the national list and one for a district list. The results from the national list would determine the seat shares of the parties. Hence, in principle, the seat distribution would be as proportional as the existing electoral system. Lastly, candidates would only be allowed to appear on either the district or the national list and would be forbidden from featuring on both lists. In this way there would be no ‘safety net’ for candidates who failed to win a district seat (De Graaf, 2003:1). The proposal would not require a constitutional change, given that the assembly size would still be 150 and the principle of proportional representation would not be abandoned (Hippe, Lucardie and Voerman, 2004:32).

The reaction of the three biggest parties, the CDA, PvdA and VVD, was mixed. The CDA wanted 30 single-member districts, while the VVD was internally split: a part of the VVD wanted to keep the current system, while another faction of the party, headed most notably by party leader Van Aartsen, wanted to abolish it entirely and introduce 150 single-member districts – or a pure majoritarian electoral system (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2004:5, 12, 13; see also Hippe, et. al., 2005:23). Lastly, the opposition party PvdA wanted 75 single-member districts (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2004:8). The smaller parties, with the exception of D66, were unambiguously against the proposal (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2004:22, 24, 26, 29). De Graaf did not favour the alternatives advanced by the larger parties, but agreed to allow candidates to feature on both the national and a district list, the so-called double candidacy (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2004:52). Thereafter the VVD remained divided on the proposal, as witnessed at a party congress on 19 June 2004 (Moerland, 21.6.2004). In August the cabinet agreed a modified proposal, with double candidacy allowed. The bill was introduced in the Lower House on 3 February 2005 (bill no 29986, see De Graaf, 2005).

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369 Parties which captured a lower percentage of seats on the district lists than their vote share on the national list would be 'compensated', by receiving a larger number of the 75 national seats, so as to have a fully proportional result. Later I will discuss two exceptions to this general rule: the hypothetical situation where a party gets more district seats than it deserves based on its vote share of the national list and district seats won by regional candidates who are not associated with a party on the national list.
D. Final vote. Before the bill on the new electoral system was even discussed, the second reading of the constitutional change to allow the direct election of mayors was on the Upper House agenda. It debated the change on 22 March 2005. The vote proved to be difficult, as the PvdA spokesman on democratic reform, Ed van Thijn, had made it clear that he had two important reservations. First, he demanded that the supervision of the police force in the larger cities would remain unchanged. Second, he was opposed to a ‘big-bang scenario’ in which all mayors were to be elected directly in 2006 (Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 22.3.2005:860, see also Koole, 2010:349). During the debate De Graaf conceded on both points (Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 22.3.2005:921; 924). Van Thijn recalled ‘I thought both were substantive concessions’. He claims that he ‘was not able to convince the party [in the Upper House]’ (van Thijn, 7.12.2009). This is not corroborated by other accounts of the events, hence some ambiguity exists on what really happened behind the closed doors of the Upper House. What is clear is that within the PvdA party in the Upper House an overwhelming majority opposed the measure. Only four PvdA senators wanted to vote ‘yes’, but in the end they agreed to vote ‘no’ en bloc out of solidarity with their PvdA colleagues. As a result the constitutional change was defeated (Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 22.3.2005:939). This also had far-reaching consequences for the reform of the electoral system. De Graaf resigned the next day. His main reason was that his second reform project was also unlikely to succeed: ‘the VVD did not want to guarantee its support for the proposal regarding the electoral system’ (De Graaf, 28.1.2009).

E. The short-lived Pechtold reform agenda. D66 did not leave the government, but another healing agreement, the so-called Easter agreement (which again included democratic reform), had to be concluded before the government could resume work. As a result of the Easter agreement a new wave of reform commissions and a new proposal were initiated, all D66 demands. First, a so-called National Convention was set up. This was an expert commission, which was supposed to provide advice on democratic reform. Second, a ‘Citizens’ Assembly on the Electoral System’ was founded, in which 140 citizens debated the future of the Dutch electoral system (Pechtold, 2005). Lastly, a bill on lowering the preference threshold from 25% to 12.5% was introduced on 21 December 2005 (bill no. 30418). However, on 29 June 2006, just one day after the D66 reform proposals were discussed in the Lower House, D66 left the government on an issue unrelated to the reform agenda. At that time, the reforms were only in the early processing phase. The National Convention presented its report on 5

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370 In the larger cities the mayor co-supervised the police force (Breeman, Van Noort and Rutgers, 2008:128-129).
371 I found no other evidence supporting Van Thijn’s claim that he tried to convince his party. One account of the events stated exactly the opposite (cf. Roerink, 24.3.2005, who said that Van Thijn ‘strongly advised to vote no’). Another account left open whether or not Van Thijn advised for or against. It only stated that three senators, ‘including Noten’, were in favour, but that Van Thijn, Witteveen and Leijnse were holding the discussions. Yet even this account said that Van Thijn demanded extra concessions after De Graaf’s original compromises, but refused to resume the parliamentary debate as he ‘had made a decision’ – something that gave De Graaf no chance to negotiate on further concessions with his coalition partners and de facto blocked his way completely. Furthermore, the article also mentioned that Van Thijn refused to allow Wouter Bos to talk to the Upper House party to convince them to vote in favour (Remarque, 26.3.2005). All of this is also corroborated by other sources and makes Van Thijn’s claim unlikely (cf. Koole, 2010:351-352; Roerink, 24.3.2005).
372 The trigger for the government crisis was the Ayaan Hisi Ali affair. For a detailed overview of the events see: Lucardie, et. al., 2007:19-21).
October 2006, while the Citizens’ Assembly finished its work on 14 December 2006. None of the reports resulted in bills (Lucardie, et. al., 2007:28-29).

7.3.2 Explaining the Balkenende II non-reforms

A. Assessing the act- and outcome-contingent motivations

1. The De Graaf reform agenda. The De Graaf reform agenda focused on the direct election of mayors and electoral system change. Regarding the direct election of mayors, the situation had not changed dramatically since Kok II. The topic was still easy to sell and polling data still showed support for it. If anything, the events in 2002 - the rise and murder of Pim Fortuyn - only strengthened the feeling that there was a need for reform. Nevertheless, three things were somewhat different: new data were being published, the position of some parties had shifted and a new party, the LPF, had entered the government. The SCP published new data on the topic in September 2003. Additionally, the 2002/2003 National Election Survey (NKO) included questions on the direct election of mayors and a reform of the electoral system.

On at least two occasions it appears that this time it was the NKO data which guided the discussion rather than the SCP data. However, this did not change the act-contingent motivations, as the data again showed that there was significant support for the direct election of mayors. Regarding the party manifestoes, two parties changed their position. Although PvdA leader Wouter Bos was explicitly in favour of directly elected mayors, the PvdA party manifesto stated that ‘the mayor will be elected by the council’ (PvdA, 2003:11). Similarly, the SP now wanted an indirectly elected mayor (SP, 2003:8). Therefore for the PvdA and the SP the act-contingent motivations were no longer strongly positive but only moderately so. Lastly, in 1998 the LPF did not yet exist. The party was in a position that resembled that of D66: it was strongly in favour of directly elected mayors (cf. LPF, 2003). On the other hand, it had little to gain from the direct election of mayors as it was still too small to have a chance in mayoral contests.

As regards the change in the electoral system the act-contingent motivations were less clear. A new electoral system - especially one that was to be not as straightforward as the previous one - was difficult to sell to the public. Certainly, there was a feeling among political elites that the 2002 events indicated a need for reform. The dramatic rise of Pim Fortuyn and the

373 This is also clearly shown by the fact that the new Minister of Political Reform Etzo Nicolai (VVD) had already withdrawn Pechtold’s proposal to lower the preference threshold from 25% to 12.5%, because he deemed ‘clientelism instead of the protection of the public good is likely to prevail’ (Nicolai, 2006:1). The Citizens’ Assembly on the Electoral System later advised abolishing the preference threshold altogether (Lucardie, et. al., 2007:29).

374 I will not discuss the National Convention and the Citizens’ Assembly as they are not part of a specific reform discussed or voted on during the Balkenende II government - both were still in progress when the government fell.


376 Boris van der Ham (D66) stated that ‘67% of the Dutch population favours directly elected mayors’ (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 4.11.2004:1160). During the debate on the 2003 memorandum on a new electoral system De Wit (SP) stated that ‘at the last elections and in the polls on these elections it became clear that a minority of 42% of the Dutch is in favour of an electoral system with multiple districts’ (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2004:19). The SCP provided no data on the latter. It reported that 72% of citizens were in favour of the direct election of mayors - whereas the NKO gave 48.8% (agreed) and 19.4% (fully agreed) (SCP, 2003:162 versus NKO, 2002/2003).

377 This also makes sense because the SCP report was far less widely reported on (in only one newspaper), while even in this article support for the two issues was not mentioned (see Groen, 5.9.2003).
subsequent spectacular reverse in the fortunes of the PvdA under Bos were frequently mentioned during the parliamentary debate and there was a general agreement that the voters wanted a more ‘personalized’ system (cf. Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2004). That something was happening was also shown in the Eurobarometer data. In the second half of 2002, 32% of the respondents were dissatisfied with the way democracy worked. In early 2003 this dropped to 28%, but at the end of 2003 – when De Graaf’s proposals were tabled – the number rose to a record of 40% (cf. EB 58; EB 59; EB 60). However, in 2004 it dropped to 34% and in the first half of 2005 it declined further, to 29% (cf. EB 61; EB 63). Therefore by 2005 the ‘Fortuyn storm’ seemed to have passed. Surveys on a new electoral system were also somewhat ambiguous. During the debate it was mentioned twice that ‘42%’ of citizens supported the new electoral system (once by the SP and once by the LPF; Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2004: 17; 19). Both speakers used this as evidence that there was no majority in favour of the proposed change of the electoral system. However, the CDA speaker interpreted these figures differently, stating that ‘a substantial section of the people support the introduction of multiple electoral districts’ (Memorandum 29356/8:4). Therefore unlike the poll results on the direct election of mayors, data on electoral system change were ambiguous enough to suit both proponents and opponents of the proposal. The two largest parties, the PvdA and the CDA, as well as D66, included the introduction of multiple districts in their party manifesto (CDA, 2002:52; PvdA, 2002:11; D66, 2003:8). The two smaller Christian parties, ChristenUnie and SGP, explicitly opposed any change to the electoral system (ChristenUnie, 2003:16; SGP, 2003:6). No other party mentioned the topic (VVD, 2003; SP, 2003; GroenLinks, 2003). By synthesizing the direction of the reform, the Eurobarometer data, the survey data and the party manifestoes, one can distinguish between three groups of parties. The first group consisted of the parties which had moderately positive act-contingent motivations, namely the CDA, PvdA and D66. The second group of parties had mixed act-contingent motivations, i.e. the VVD, GroenLinks, SP and LPF. Lastly, the third group of parties had moderately negative act-contingent motivations, namely the smaller Christian parties SGP and ChristenUnie. However, by 2005 citizen dissatisfaction had faded somewhat, as is also witnessed by the number of respondents who stated that they were dissatisfied with democracy (which had declined from 40% to 29%). Correspondingly, the act-contingent motivations to support the change in the electoral system had waned by the time the second reading of the constitutional change to allow the direct election of mayors was voted on in the Upper House. As far as the act-contingent motivations were concerned 2003 was an extraordinary moment, while in 2005 there was the impression of a ‘return to normality’ (Andeweg and Irwin, 2009:261). 379

Numerous simulation data were available regarding the outcomes with the electoral system that De Graaf proposed. Indeed, even though Spies (CDA) claimed that all estimates about the impact of the proposal would be ‘merely speculations based on hypothetical situations’, during the parliamentary debate several parties (including the CDA) explicitly stated that they had run simulations based on De Graaf’s proposal (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2004: 17; 19). Both speakers used this as evidence that there was no majority in favour of the proposed change of the electoral system. However, the CDA speaker interpreted these figures differently, stating that ‘a substantial section of the people support the introduction of multiple electoral districts’ (Memorandum 29356/8:4). Therefore unlike the poll results on the direct election of mayors, data on electoral system change were ambiguous enough to suit both proponents and opponents of the proposal. The two largest parties, the PvdA and the CDA, as well as D66, included the introduction of multiple districts in their party manifesto (CDA, 2002:52; PvdA, 2002:11; D66, 2003:8). The two smaller Christian parties, ChristenUnie and SGP, explicitly opposed any change to the electoral system (ChristenUnie, 2003:16; SGP, 2003:6). No other party mentioned the topic (VVD, 2003; SP, 2003; GroenLinks, 2003). By synthesizing the direction of the reform, the Eurobarometer data, the survey data and the party manifestoes, one can distinguish between three groups of parties. The first group consisted of the parties which had moderately positive act-contingent motivations, namely the CDA, PvdA and D66. The second group of parties had mixed act-contingent motivations, i.e. the VVD, GroenLinks, SP and LPF. Lastly, the third group of parties had moderately negative act-contingent motivations, namely the smaller Christian parties SGP and ChristenUnie. However, by 2005 citizen dissatisfaction had faded somewhat, as is also witnessed by the number of respondents who stated that they were dissatisfied with democracy (which had declined from 40% to 29%). Correspondingly, the act-contingent motivations to support the change in the electoral system had waned by the time the second reading of the constitutional change to allow the direct election of mayors was voted on in the Upper House. As far as the act-contingent motivations were concerned 2003 was an extraordinary moment, while in 2005 there was the impression of a ‘return to normality’ (Andeweg and Irwin, 2009:261). 379

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378 The original statement was: ‘MPs should be elected in districts’. Again respondents could answer ‘fully agree’, ‘agree’, ‘disagree’, ‘fully disagree’ or ‘don’t know’ (NKO 2002/2003).

379 Under these normal circumstances, as Van Aartsen, who was a passionate proponent of electoral system change, stated, ‘no Dutch person is really interested in a new electoral system’ (Van Aartsen, 21.10.2010).
Additionally, one newspaper (NRC Handelsblad) and one weekly magazine (Vrij Nederland) published the 2003 electoral results for each of the 19 electoral districts (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2004:7, 19). Looking at these results, one could only conclude that based on the De Graaf proposal, which used multi-member districts, ‘CDA, PvdA and VVD would be assured of their seats’, as Dubbelboer (PvdA) stated. Dubbelboer used this observation to call for single-member districts. These would, however, benefit the PvdA and the CDA at the expense of the VVD, as the official simulations run by De Graaf’s department showed. De Graaf explicitly stated that ‘if we start from the results of the last three elections, contests in single-member districts would always be a contest between the CDA and the PvdA’ (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2004:35). Indeed, all three sources of information clearly showed that the PvdA and the CDA would benefit most from a new electoral system. The impact for the VVD would be uncertain as it depended on the size and the number of multi-member districts. What was also clear was that the smaller parties would be harmed by the new electoral system. It was however less easy to estimate to what extent they would suffer. Certainly, the smallest parties, D66, the ChristenUnie and the SGP, would be hurt most as they were unlikely to play a role in any district campaign. As far as the SP (which had 9 seats in 2003), GroenLinks (8 seats in 2003) and the LPF (8 seats in 2003) were concerned the situation was unclear. In response to an SP question on this matter, De Graaf replied ‘I can present you with simulations which show that your party [the SP, KJ] would get some 50% of your current total of seats from the regional districts’. The ‘medium’-sized parties were, however, not convinced. The SP still thought that the electoral system would result in ‘a two-party state’. GroenLinks believed that ‘the smaller parties will at best only play a supporting role,’ and the LPF thought the new electoral system would result in ‘a survival of the fittest’ (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2004:17, 34, 47).

When reading the debate one gets the feeling that the smaller parties reasoned as if there was no compensatory mechanism. Yet the vote for the national list would determine the party’s seat share. Only when (1) regional candidates who were not affiliated to any party on the national list won a district seat or when (2) a party won more district seats than the number of seats it was entitled to based on its national vote share, would there be less proportionality than under the 2003 electoral system (De Graaf, 2003:23). The second distortion was only likely to occur when opting for single-member districts (which, unlike the PvdA and the CDA, De Graaf did not), as De Graaf’s calculations showed (Tweede Kamer der Staten-

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380 She used this statement to counter the argument from the SP that smaller parties would suffer from the legislation. Later Spies (CDA) literally stated ‘we carried out numerous simulations’ (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2004:6). Interestingly, despite her earlier remarks, she did seem to have confidence in her own simulations.

381 The districts would be of a size to elect between two and six members, but depending on the number of the envisaged 20 multi-member districts that would elect two members this could be either a bad or a good proposal for the VVD. These details were, however, at the time unknown.

382 Again this number was highly dependent on the number and size of the multi-member districts. Certainly, in a district with six seats the fifth or sixth seat could be won by the SP, but these were most likely to be the least safe seats. In the smallest districts returning two and three members, the SP would have no chance at all.

383 On multiple occasions De Graaf had to explain that the overall seat share would be determined by the number of votes a party received on the national lists (cf. Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2004:34, 37).
Purely based on the mechanical translation of votes into seats, the multi-member districts system would thus be relatively neutral. However, a subtle psychological effect was likely to occur. The system was designed to force parties to campaign in the districts and fight for a personal mandate (De Graaf, 2003:4). However, as the smaller parties had little chance in such contests, they were likely to be less visible than the larger parties. This in turn could affect their vote share on the national list.

To sum up, the two largest parties, the PvdA and the CDA, would benefit most from the proposal – and they would even benefit more from a system where single-member districts replaced De Graaf’s multi-member districts. The VVD was in a difficult position, as the system would benefit them only in these multi-member districts that returned at least four or five members. Something that had not been decided. Hence, the single most important element that determined whether the new electoral system would be advantageous to the VVD was unknown at that time. The smallest parties, ChristenUnie, SGP and D66, could only expect the worst with the new system. Although less likely to suffer than their smallest counterparts, the medium-sized parties the LPF, GroenLinks and the SP could also expect negative results from the regional district campaigns.

Table 7.7a Motivations and votes regarding the direct election of mayors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Act</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Vote (LH)</th>
<th>Vote (UH)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CDA</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VVD</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D66</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PvdA</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>38 (4)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GroenLinks</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ChristenUnie</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SGP</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LPF</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Pro</th>
<th>Con</th>
<th>Pro</th>
<th>Con</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>141</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

384 Single-member districts would increase the likelihood of ‘surplus seats’, when parties won more district seats than they were entitled to based on their national vote share. Solving this problem would result in a less proportional outcome (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2004:36).

385 Although, as the German system shows, this is not by definition the case. Dubbelboer (PvdA) explicitly pointed to the German-style split-ticket voting (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 2004: 35). Nevertheless, compared to the 2003 system, De Graaf’s electoral system would make life more difficult for the smaller parties, as their national campaigns then had to compete with the district contests in which they had very little chance.
### Table 7.7b Motivations and votes regarding the change in the electoral system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gov’t</th>
<th>CDA</th>
<th>VVD</th>
<th>D66</th>
<th>Position in the debate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Act 2003</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>Moderately pro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act 2005</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Pro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position in the debate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opposition</th>
<th>PvdA</th>
<th>GroenLinks</th>
<th>SP</th>
<th>ChristenUnie</th>
<th>SGP</th>
<th>LPF</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Position in the debate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Act 2003</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act 2005</td>
<td>+/-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position in the debate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Other* in table 7.7a refers to two independent MPs. One was formerly affiliated to the SP, the other was formerly affiliated to the VVD. The ‘other’ in the Upper House column refers to an independent MP who represented the provincial parties.

2. **Pechtold’s lowering of the preference threshold.** I will finish this section by briefly examining the proposal to lower the preference threshold from 25% to 12.5%. There are few data available on whether citizens wanted such a reform and the media ignored the topic. Nevertheless, it was ‘easy to sell’ and it was also a harmless and somewhat elegant exit strategy to enable the CDA and the VVD to abandon the electoral reform discussions. Certainly, lowering the preference threshold would reduce the power of the national party leadership to decide who represented the party in the Lower House, but the impact would most likely be very limited. After all, calculations at the time showed that just one different candidate would have been elected based on this lower threshold (Tweede Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 28.6.2006:5519). Interestingly, all parties apart from the smaller Christian parties supported the bill during the parliamentary debate. Nevertheless, when D66 left the government, the bill was quickly withdrawn by the remaining government parties the CDA and the VVD. Thus the issue was removed from the political agenda altogether. This points to the fact that at least the CDA and the VVD did not genuinely support the proposal. Hence one should be cautious when assessing this reform, as it was aborted too early to examine the real preferences of the parties.

When looking at Table 7.7 and the Pechtold reform agenda, three questions arise. First, regarding the direct election of mayors, how can the PvdA shift between the Lower and the Upper House votes be explained? Second, the position of the VVD is also puzzling, as during the Balkenende II government the party actually promoted the direct election of mayors even though it was likely to be harmed by the measure. Why was this the case? Third, the peculiar – some might even call it ‘virtually masochistic’ – position of D66 is puzzling. With regard to both the direct election of mayors and the electoral system change, D66 was likely to suffer

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386 I did not find a single newspaper article that discussed the preference threshold in the Lexis-Nexis media archives.
the greatest losses. Why then did it support those measures? I will proceed by discussing these three questions. Finally, I will compare the impact of principles to the impact of self-interested motivations.

B. The internal struggles of the PvdA. It was clear from the beginning of the debates on the direct election of mayors that the PvdA was divided on the issue. In 2003 a majority at a PvdA party congress had already demanded that a consultation of the PvdA members should be held on the topic. The local elites in particular were against the introduction of the direct election of mayors. Van Thijn described the situation as follows: ‘a large part of the congress consisted of local elites. The local elites were divided into two groups. The old elites wanted the old system. The more modern elites wanted indirectly elected mayors. Wouter Bos was one of the few who supported directly elected mayors – and I personally sympathized with him’ (Van Thijn, 7.12.2009). Hence it was no surprise that the member consultation resulted in a preference for not implementing the direct election of mayors.

In the run-up to the actual debate in the Upper House, Minister De Graaf ‘had almost daily contact with Bos’ (De Graaf, 28.1.2009; see also Koole, 2010: 348). Bos also applied as much pressure as possible on the PvdA party in the Upper House (cf. Koole, 2010:349-350; this is also corroborated by De Graaf himself). Additionally, De Graaf visited Van Thijn at his house on the Saturday before the debate. De Graaf said he was willing to make concessions on Van Thijn’s most important reservations, but left with mixed feelings (Moerland, 9.4.2005). In the end, although Van Thijn found De Graaf’s concessions ‘satisfactory’, an overwhelming majority of PvdA senators, including among others Willem Witteveen, who was a co-author of the PvdA party programme in 1998 and 1999, and Jean Eigenman, substitute chairman of the Dutch Association of Municipalities, decided to vote against the constitutional change (Roerink, 24.3.2005; Remarque, 26.3.2005). As with the analysis of the ‘Night of Wiegel’, one can think of re-election, individual power and principled and other personal reasons to explain the motivations of the individuals within the PvdA senate party.

1. RE-ELECTION. In the case of the direct election of mayors, many local elites feared that their position was in danger, something also reflected in the outcome of the member consultation. However, the PvdA senators did put their own re-election at risk by voting against the constitutional change. After all, the party leadership would decide who should feature in the top part of the candidate list for the next Upper House election. Given that then party leader Wouter Bos had invested a lot of time and energy in trying to convince his party in the Upper House, voting against the change was likely to decrease their re-election chances. Hence, the re-election motives of the local elites probably played an important role, as they put pressure on the senators, but the senators’ own re-election chances did not play a part.

387 Regarding the electoral system change all parties apart from D66 acted in line with their outcome-contingent motivations.
388 Both acknowledge this. Ed van Thijn stated: ‘I had a meeting with De Graaf’ (Van Thijn, 7.12.2009), while De Graaf acknowledged: ‘The Saturday before the vote, I went to his [Van Thijn’s, KJ] house to discuss his reservations’ (De Graaf, 28.1.2009).
389 Unfortunately, as the senators decided to vote unanimously against the constitutional change, it is unknown who exactly opposed the constitutional change. All that is known is that an overwhelming majority of them opposed the change and that Eigenman and Witteveen were among the opponents.
2. **INDIVIDUAL POWER.** Similarly, individual power is unlikely to have been a motivation for the Upper House members to vote 'no'. As in the Kok II case, the senators were near the end of their careers and therefore relatively independent (most were over 57). Hence an increase in their individual power most likely played no role in the decision to oppose the constitutional change.

3. **PRINCIPLES.** Personally, Van Thijn was ‘in favour of the direct election of mayors’ (Van Thijn, 7.12.2009). Therefore, his own principles did not play a decisive role. There is less clarity as far as the other senators were concerned. Seven out of the 18 other senators had held office at local level, which may have shaped their thinking, but their personal convictions are not documented. However, the fact that such a large majority was opposed to the measure despite all the pressure applied on them, suggests that most of them genuinely disliked the idea of directly elected mayors.

4. **OTHER FACTORS.** For Van Thijn, discontent with the way the party leadership disregarded him also played an important role. He himself acknowledged that ‘what played a role was that I was set aside [by the party leadership] as if I was merely a backbencher. By a party leader who not for a second realized that I had been a party leader myself and who treated me as a political pre-school child. This angered me. It was not my main motivation, but it certainly did not help’ (Van Thijn, 7.12.2009). A second, more general, factor was that the PvdA was in opposition and did not want to help D66, ‘a splinter party without a right to existence’, as Van Thijn put it (Soetenhorst, 9.4.2005).

Again, the relative independence of the PvdA senators and the high threshold for pushing through a constitutional change empowered a group of individuals to obstruct the reform. Additionally, the senators were influenced by a large and vocal part of their party that opposed the reform for self-interested reasons, while in the case of Van Thijn personal feelings also played a part. These two elements apparently overruled Van Thijn’s own convictions. Whether or not his advice on voting to the other PvdA senators was positive or negative, even he concedes that his initial reluctance to approve the reform ‘released forces I could not control’ (Van Thijn, 7.12.2009). In such a hostile environment even lukewarm support – let alone lukewarm opposition, as was the case in the days before the debate - would not have been sufficient for the reform to succeed.

C. **A VVD U-turn?** A second party that was divided on the direct election of mayors was the VVD. It was split both on changing the electoral system and on the direct election of mayors. What is most surprising here is not the fact that the party included some opponents of reform despite the coalition agreement, but rather that at least some VVD politicians openly endorsed the reforms and even wanted to go further. After all, as Jozias van Aartsen, then VVD co-party leader and leader of the parliamentary party, pointed out, ‘the party has always officially been opposed to directly elected mayors’, it was also ‘not in favour of a new electoral system’.

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390 The ‘young’ Han Noten (47) was one the few to advocate the constitutional change. One account labelled the events as ‘Young PvdA politicians taunted by the old guard’ (Roorink, 24.3.2005).

391 One could note that the no vote would augment the position of the Upper House as it showed that it should be listened to and was not impotent. However, given that the PvdA was in opposition this was unlikely to increase the power of the PvdA senators. If anything it would be an incentive for the government to circumvent the Upper House as much as possible.

392 Own calculations based on www.parlement.com.
and had ‘always [been] opposed to referendums, which were blocked by Wiegel. The VVD also vetoed them during the coalition negotiations of Balkenende II’ (Van Aartsen, 21.10.2010). Nevertheless, some sections of the party did support the De Graaf democratic reforms. As De Graaf noted, the VVD ‘became more supportive starting from 1998, 1999, under the influence of prominent VVD politicians such as Van Aartsen and Opstelten’ (De Graaf, 28.1.2009). The role of Ivo Opstelten, then mayor of Rotterdam, could be seen in the fact that he headed a VVD commission on democratic reform. In its report of 2 July 2002 this was the first VVD commission to advise in favour of the direct election of mayors (Hippe, Lucardie and Voerman, 2003:175). 393 During Balkenende II it was Van Aartsen in particular who advocated the direct election of mayors. Dubbelboer and Van Thijn (both PvdA) explicitly point to Van Aartsen as the reason why the VVD was in favour of the direct election of mayors. 394 Indeed, Van Aartsen personally was in favour of directly elected mayors, referendums and a complete overhaul of the electoral system (cf. Volkskrant, 30.5.2005). Certainly Van Aartsen’s personal passion played a role, as convincing the unwilling parliamentary party members ‘took hours and hours’ (Van Aartsen, 21.10.2010) – without strong personal convictions such perseverance is difficult to summon up. He was helped by two other factors. First, Van Aartsen was supported by the coalition agreement. Indeed, the VVD officially favoured directly elected mayors, ‘but not warmly. Yet, it was included in the coalition agreement, so they had to. And I was very happy with that. I would not have been able to convince them otherwise’ (Van Aartsen, 21.10.2010). Second, Van Aartsen was aided by the rise of Pim Fortuyn, who was a fervent proponent of democratic reform. Van Aartsen could use the argument that embracing democratic reform was a way to regain the ground that the VVD had lost due to the rise of the LPF (cf. Volkskrant, 30.5.2005).

To sum up, the ‘switch’ by the VVD did not come entirely out of the blue: the party had always had a significant minority of supporters of democratic reform among its members. Empowered by the momentum of the LPF and the coalition agreement, Van Aartsen was able to convince his party to support some democratic reforms. However, the VVD remained divided and he was only able to secure support for the direct election of mayors, not for a change in the electoral system.

D. D66: the absence of self-interested motivations? As mentioned earlier in the Kok II case, De Graaf personally was strongly committed to democratic reform, which he considered to be the ‘essence of the party’ (De Graaf, 28.1.2009). There is no evidence that the fact that both

393 According to Van Aartsen, ‘the VVD party in the Lower House has always been more conservative than a significant part of the members. Especially the VVD democratic reform specialists were very conservative’. For instance, long before Balkenende II Frits Bolkestein, the VVD leader during the 1990-1998 era, called for the complete abolition of the preference threshold (Goslinga, 30.9.1995). Later the party’s political programme, the Liberaal Manifest (VVD, 2005:25), said that ‘mayors should be directly elected’. Hence, the image of a party in unison opposed to democratic reform has always been overstated: the party had some proponents of democratic reform, but these were rarely in dominant positions.

394 During my interviews with Van Thijn and Dubbelboer I asked them to talk about the unexpected u-turn of the VVD regarding democratic reform (without mentioning Van Aartsen). Van Thijn said ‘Jozias van Aartsen has always been a modern liberal’ (Van Thijn, 7.12.2009). Similarly, Dubbelboer answered the question with the following words: ‘it was no sudden shift. I had known Van Aartsen when he still worked at the Ministry of the Interior. Though he seems a bit like a regent, he is a real liberal’ (Dubbelboer, 3.2.2010). What is interesting here is not the fact that both equate being a modern liberal with supporting democratic reform, but that they instantly and without being prompted mentioned Van Aartsen.
measures would most likely damage his party’s interests influenced his behaviour. Indeed, all
his proposals were against the self-interest of his party and even he felt that focusing on
democratic reform was not likely to be electorally beneficial (cf. above). Yet others within
his party did worry about such things. The new electoral system especially was unpopular
within his party. Indeed, as De Graaf admits, “even within my own party people started to
worry that the new electoral system was difficult to explain to voters. (...) They were afraid
that the other parties would say: “D66 is to blame for the fact that you now have to vote with
two votes and that you have to get used to a new electoral system”” (De Graaf, 28.1.2009).
Indeed, on 9 March 2005 D66 parliamentary party leader Boris Dittrich secretly (and without
De Graaf’s knowledge) met with the parliamentary party leaders of the CDA, Verhagen, and
the VVD, Van Aartsen. During this meeting he suggested a deal in which the reform of the
electoral system would be traded for referendums. Dittrich feared that D66 would be harmed
by the new electoral system (Roerink, 24.3.2005; Remarque, 26.3.2005). This indicates the
importance of the personal convictions of De Graaf, but it also suggests that in the case of the
electoral system, self-interested motivations are less easily overcome than in other reform
debates.

E. Putting it all together: principle, self-interest and the role of individuals.
1. DIRECT ELECTION OF MAYORS. The personal convictions of De Graaf together with his
party’s ideology can explain the initiation of the second reading of the constitutional change
to allow the direct election of mayors. The constitutional change came very close to being
implemented, partly due to the investment in it and the support it got from De Graaf, Van
Aartsen and Bos. All three were convinced of the need for individual politicians to be
accountable. Certainly, all of them were initially helped by favourable act-contingent
motivations. In the case of Bos the outcome-contingent motivations were also positive, but
this was not the case for D66 and the VVD. Hence, principled motivations seem to have
played a role for at least Van Aartsen and De Graaf. The failure of the constitutional change
to allow the direct election of mayors can be explained by opposition within the PvdA,
combined with personal factors relating to Van Thijn.

2. THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM CHANGE. The electoral system change was initiated mostly
because of D66 and the personal convictions of De Graaf. However, it was the support of the
CDA, which seems to have been driven by outcome-contingent motivations, that was crucial
and which explains why this time there was a genuine bill on the table. The VVD, which
had little to gain from the proposal, vetoed the bill.

3. THE LOWERING OF THE PREFERENCE THRESHOLD. The lowering of the preference threshold,
was again initiated by D66. Yet this time principled motivations may well have been
complemented by act-contingent motivations. It was most likely that Pechtold tried to find an
elegant exit strategy, to dispose of the electoral reform topic without suffering too much

395 As was also confirmed by the polls at the time, which showed D66 with four or five seats (compared to the
six they had) (Hippe, et. al., 2006: 37)
396 Dittrich tried to trade the new electoral system twice. After the secret meeting on 9 March 2005 he also stated
on television that he was willing to forgo the electoral system in exchange for a general pardon for illegal aliens
(Moerland, 9.4.2005).
397 The CDA even supported De Graaf’s bill in 2005, when the act-contingent motivations were less favourable.
electoral and credibility damage. However, as there is no evidence to indicate that either principled or act-contingent motivations prevailed, both should be taken into account.

Table 7.5: Summary of the dominant motivations for the government parties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Constitutional change on mayors</th>
<th>Electoral system</th>
<th>Preference threshold</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Initiation</td>
<td>Failure</td>
<td>Initiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principle</td>
<td>D66</td>
<td>D66</td>
<td>D66</td>
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<tr>
<td>Act</td>
<td>D66</td>
<td>PvdA (+ personal elements)</td>
<td>CDA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td></td>
<td>CDA</td>
<td>VVD</td>
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7.4 Conclusion

7.4.1 Country-level factors: veto players in the Upper House

Unlike its Austrian and Belgian counterparts, the Dutch Upper House has significant veto power. After all, it is not bound by coalition agreements, is mostly composed of older and relatively independent politicians and does not have the same composition as the Lower House, given that its (indirect) election takes place at a different time to that of the Lower House. It is thus not ‘absorbed’, as Tsebelis (2002:12) would label it. Under such circumstances, getting a two-thirds approval in the Upper House is a cumbersome enterprise.

Yet there was an additional reason which made both the second reading of the constitutional change to allow referendums and the second reading to allow the direct election of mayors a tricky enterprise. In both cases the parties that were part of the government commanded only a simple majority, but were required to reach two-thirds. Especially in the case of the constitutional change to allow the direct election of mayors this was difficult, as it depended on the crucial support of a hesitant opposition party (the PvdA), with only its party leader and a small number of other supporters in position to convince a senate party that felt it represented the PvdA better than the leader. Indeed, partisan veto players mattered most in the Balkenende II case, as each of the three bigger parties (CDA, PvdA and VVD) played a role in the failure of at least one reform attempt. Finding a compromise that was acceptable to the bigger parties was difficult. In all cases reform was on the agenda because of D66, a party that made democratic reform its outright condition for joining the Kok II and Balkenende II governments. The bigger parties seem to have been satisfied with the system as it was and only wanted minor adaptations, such as indirectly elected mayors.

398 This does not necessarily mean that in principle he was against or indifferent to democratic reform, just that in all likelihood act-contingent motivations prevailed. However, there is no evidence to support or reject this claim, hence it is impossible to say which was most important.
Politicians' frustration with the veto players played a role, but only a minor one. For a long time the Dutch model of consensus government was cherished by many and only in 2002 did Pim Fortuyn and the LPF rage against a 'completely rusty self-satisfied political culture' (LPF, 2002:1). Certainly, VVD parliamentary party leader Van Aartsen was partially motivated by frustration with the veto players, as he believed that 'the Netherlands suffers from impotence to solve a number of important problems' because of 'the high number of consensus elements' (Van Aartsen, 21.10.2010). However, such frustration did not motivate the general Balkenende II reform agenda, as this was driven by the idea that the citizens wanted a more personalized system (cf. De Graaf, 2003). The frustration with veto players was not taken up over by the mainstream politicians and played no decisive role in the reform debates.399

7.4.2 Government-level factors
A. Cartelization. Andeweg and Irwin (2005:233) noted that 'in the Netherlands, the cartel has been less closed and less dominant than elsewhere'. Indeed, in Chapter 4 it already became clear that the Netherlands did not witness a full-scale cartel breakdown in the 1989-2006 period. Only in 1994 was there a minor cartel break-in, when D66 joined the Kok I government. Even in that case it was probably more the ideology of D66 than recartelisation efforts that drove the reform debates. After all, none of the democratic reform proposals advanced by D66 would have enhanced the position of D66 in the party system, but they did fit in with the ideology of D66.

B. Political ideology. Indeed, the Dutch cases are an excellent place to note the impact of political ideology, and specifically the impact of the postmaterialist D66. Democratic reform seemed to be in the 'genes' of D66. Unlike in the Belgian cases, the impact of ideology can be seen clearly. D66 would virtually always be harmed by the consequences of the reforms it proposed (outcome-contingent motivations) and even De Graaf acknowledged that focusing on democratic reform would hurt D66 electorally because the voters cared more about other things (act-contingent motivations). The party was not united in this principled stance. In the case of the new electoral system, a mixture of act- and outcome-contingent motivations even led parliamentary party leader Boris Dittrich secretly to try to trade a new electoral system for a more popular and less harmful reform: referendums.

However, the crucial question is: how far do you get when a cause only runs on ideology? As the Kok II and Balkenende II cases show, you will get started. Yet by itself one party’s ideology is not enough to reach the goal. D66 was only one small party and it needed the support of the other parties.400 For the two constitutional changes discussed in this chapter it even depended on support from the opposition parties. Under such circumstances the reform

399 Tellingly, Van Aartsen’s frustration led him to support a radical majoritarian electoral system, yet this idea was not shared by his party. In the end it was his VVD which even blocked the new electoral system.

400 Although interestingly democratic reform featured more prominently in the Balkenende II coalition agreement (when D66 had 6 seats) than in the Kok II agreement (when it had 24 seats). Hence, size by itself is not a sufficient explanation for the prominence of democratic reform. In 2003 the party was in a stronger bargaining position, had a more convinced and seasoned party leader and was helped by the Fortuyn upheaval, all of which are important complementary explanations.
process is highly vulnerable and thus prone to failure.\textsuperscript{401} Therefore when only political ideology is involved, the chances of democratic reform are slim.\textsuperscript{402}

C. Political dissatisfaction. Unlike in the Austrian and the Belgian cases, there was a fairly modest degree of political dissatisfaction in the Netherlands. Certainly, the rise of Pim Fortuyn shook things up. Never before in recent Dutch political history had electoral system change been so high on the political agenda. As Andeweg and Irwin (2005:232) put it, ‘the events of 2002 have given consideration of the reforms a greater urgency’. However, unlike in the Belgian Dehaene II case, the only tangible outburst of dissatisfaction was the 2002 election outcome. Hence, the 2002 shockwave did not last long enough to have an enduring impact on the reform debate. Indeed, dissatisfaction decreased from 2004 onwards. There was a general feeling that the citizens gave a signal, but in 2005 Andeweg and Irwin (2005:235) already noted that ‘it seems likely that the influence of “2002” will be relatively short-lived’. Thus the Fortuyn momentum probably increased the initial chances of the electoral system proposal, but did not last long enough to have an impact during the later phases of the reform process.

7.4.3 Reform-level factors
A. Self-interested motivations. Even without outbursts of genuine public dissatisfaction, citizens did have an indirect impact on the reform process. Political parties seem to have been motivated by act-contingent motivations on multiple occasions.\textsuperscript{403} It is probably no coincidence that the most popular reforms, referendums and the direct election of mayors, got the furthest. Outcome-contingent motivations also played an important role. This was most visible in the discussions on a new electoral system. The electoral system change would affect the seat shares of the parties and put the PvdA and the VVD on opposite sides. As soon as De Graaf outlined his detailed proposal, the VVD blocked it. Clearly the party deemed the proposal more harmful to itself than referendums or the direct election of mayors, which it did allow to go through.

B. The role of individual politicians. The Kok II and Balkenende II cases discussed above also highlight the role of individuals. Sometimes this role is underestimated, but at other times it is overestimated. As I showed earlier, De Graaf, Van Aartsen and Bos played crucial roles in the Balkenende II reform processes. If it had not been for Wouter Bos, the constitutional change to allow the direct election of mayors would already have been defeated in the Lower House. Without De Graaf’s personal conviction and stubborn persistence the electoral system proposal would probably never even have reached the stage of a bill. Lastly, Van Aartsen invested a lot of energy in persuading both the Upper and the Lower House VVD parties and it was his achievement that ‘the Upper House unanimously approved the constitutional change to allow the direct election of mayors’ (Van Aartsen, 21.10.2010). Leaders matter, because they are often the people who have to act as reform ambassadors.

\textsuperscript{401} This is also showed in the run-up to the Night of Wiegel. Originally, no fewer than six senators – five VVD and one independent GroenLinks-related - threatened to vote ‘no’, all of whom needed to vote in favour if the constitutional change were to pass (Cann, 15.5.1999).

\textsuperscript{402} Unless of course all government parties are populist or postmaterialist. To my knowledge, no such cases have occurred to date in established consensus democracies.

\textsuperscript{403} In the first debates on the direct election of mayors in 2001, Dölle (CDA) noted that ‘the minister has said that contemporary citizens are mature and well-informed. Which politician would dare to contradict this statement?’ (Eerste Kamer der Staten-Generaal, 4.7.2001:1612).
Only in exceptional circumstances are parties spared internal dissent over reform proposals. Indeed, even D66 was divided over the electoral system change. It takes bargaining skills, persuasion and a lot of time and energy to convince reluctant party members.

On the other hand, the role of individuals is sometimes overstated. This is particularly the case with Wiegel and Van Thijn. Both only played a role in the final part of the reform processes and their influence was limited to fairly small circles. Wiegel’s vote certainly was crucial in the defeat of the constitutional change to allow referendums in 1999. Yet on 18 May 1999, no fewer than six senators threatened to vote against. The most peculiar thing about the night 19 May 1999 is more likely the fact that the proposal was defeated by just one vote. In Van Thijn’s case, the media pointed to him as the single most important culprit for the defeat of the constitutional change to allow the direct election of mayors. However, he was not the only opponent of the reform. On the contrary, a large majority of the PvdA party in the Upper House opposed the constitutional change. At least one other political heavyweight there, Witteveen, was (also) radically opposed to the measure. Even if Van Thijn had advised his fellow members to approve the constitutional change, it remains to be seen whether the other senators would have followed his lead.

C. Damage control. Again damage control played an important role. First, in the past many reforms were referred to commissions or were ‘studied’ by the government. Both strategies were an excellent way of ‘kicking them into touch’ (cf. Van der Kolk, 2007). Second, as D66 had to bargain its way through the reform process, most reform proposals were half-hearted compromises, such as De Graaf’s proposal for a new electoral system and the optional non-binding direct election of mayors. The established parties were also able to increase the thresholds of some reforms significantly: the VVD was able to double the initiation requirements for the referendum proposal and the ensuing temporary referendum law was just that – temporary. A third and more subtle way of damage control was that the established parties preferred less harmful reforms over altogether more harmful ones, as was seen in 1998 when the PvdA and VVD began with referendums and abandoned other reform options such as the direct election of the Prime Minister and a new electoral system, and in 2005 when the CDA and the VVD only allowed the lowering of the preference threshold to be put forward and terminated the electoral system change. All in all, it seems that the fact the reform process was first and foremost driven by D66 made it more vulnerable to these kinds of damage control.
8. Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This study has analysed eleven democratic reform discussions during seven government periods in Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands. In this chapter I will present the main findings regarding the occurrence of democratic reform in consensus democracies (descriptive findings, mainly based on Chapter 4) and the determinants of democratic reform (causal findings, mainly based on Chapters 5, 6 and 7). As far as the descriptive findings are concerned, scholars have long believed democratic reform to be an exceptional and rare 'black swan' event. However, as this study has shown this is not the case. Democratic reform is a normal (and recurrent) part of politics. This thesis also highlighted important new elements, which will help to explain democratic reform in a better way. Most importantly, it was found that frustration with veto players can actually be a powerful driving force for democratic reform, while the role of individuals and damage control, both of which are often neglected in democratic reform studies, are important in explaining the actual success of a reform proposal.

In the following sections I will discuss the theoretical consequences of these main findings for the rational choice and sociological institutionalist approaches to democratic reform and answer the main question on the impact of elites versus the impact of the masses. The role of irrationality will also be explicitly addressed, as until now this has never been done on a systematic basis in democratic reform research. Overall, the rational choice explanation performs rather poorly. This observation even holds true with regard to (major) electoral reform. The sociological institutionalist approach, on the other hand, performs rather well. On the basis of this study it would seem that the rational choice approach is often overestimated, while the sociological institutionalist approach is often underestimated.

I will integrate all these findings in what I call an onion model. This model specifically addresses the question of why and when certain types of reform occur (together). The onion model will also be related to the explanatory factors that are founded at the country and government levels. As a result, this model is able to explain both the nature and the occurrence of democratic reforms. Finally, I will suggest how the study of democratic reform might be advanced further.

8.2 On the occurrence of democratic reform: descriptive findings

8.2.1. Is democratic reform a 'Black Swan' event?

Early work on electoral reform considered changes in electoral legislation and referendum provisions to be unlikely events. Against this background, the occurrence of major electoral reforms in four established democracies in the 1990s was a 'Black Swan' event: it was rare, had an extreme impact on the field and could be explained but not predicted (Taleb, 2007:XVIII). Subsequent studies added that minor electoral reform also had its 'Black

Katz (2005:74) summarizes the last element as follows: 'While it may be possible statistically to estimate the probability of reform in any particular year, it would appear that even the "peaks" in predicted probability will be so low as to leave accounting for specific instances in the realm of historical reconstruction rather than statistical prediction'.
Swan'. Indeed, one might expect a large number of minor electoral reforms, but empirically this was not the case (Katz, 2005:73).\textsuperscript{405} In the field of (both minor and major) direct democratic reform, the situation was the reverse. The consensus in this field was that direct democratic reform was so common that one could even speak of a ‘trend’ (Scarrow, 2001:661). As this study has shown, both claims need to be modified. When one systematically uses a detailed conceptual framework of democratic reform, reforms appear to be more common than the electoral reform literature maintains, but somewhat less usual than claimed by the direct democratic reform literature (cf. Chapter 4). In addition, more electoral reforms occur than direct democratic reforms. Mainly this is due to the simple fact that ‘the first step seems to be the hardest’: the initial introduction of referendum legislation is most difficult to achieve. Once referendum legislation is in place, further reforms happen more often.\textsuperscript{406} On the whole, even direct democratic reforms occur quite regularly. To sum up, it seems that democratic reform is actually more of a ‘White Swan’ (or regular) than a ‘Black Swan’ (or exceptional) event.

8.2.2 Democratic reform is a never-ending story
Democratic reform is not only a fairly regular event, it is also a recurrent one. In Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands, democratic reform appeared time and again. In his extensive study of major electoral reform Renwick (2010) offers an explanation for the recurrence of democratic reform on the political agenda. He suggests that once government parties introduce self-interested electoral reforms without being ‘punished’ for it at the next election, they adjust their view of what they can get away with. When political elites feel that voters care little about the ‘manipulation’ of the system, they will implement more self-interested reforms. This explanation may indeed be valid, but other factors may also be at work. This study suggests another explanation, which a fortiori is true for consensus democracies. The multiple reforms discussed in this study illustrate that democratic reforms often contain the seeds for new reform discussions. Given that democratic reforms are often compromises between a large number of parties, they generally do not satisfy the reformers’ original intentions.\textsuperscript{407} The reforms can also be flawed or may backfire. In all three cases reformers are likely to try to implement new reforms.\textsuperscript{408}

8.2.3 On the feeling that nothing happens
Although democratic reform occurs quite often, many country experts and pundits nevertheless have the feeling that there is a lot of talk about reform, but only very few (if any) actual reforms are implemented. Those that are implemented are often downplayed as trivial.\textsuperscript{409} Given democratic reform is routinely studied by consulting country experts and

\textsuperscript{405} In itself this would also be a ‘Black Swan’ event, as ‘the highly expected not happening is also a ‘Black Swan’ (Taleb, 2007:XVIII). Note that I refer here to the overall low number of minor electoral reforms as the event (as opposed to the non-occurrence of individual minor electoral reforms).

\textsuperscript{406} Regarding direct democratic reform, the overestimation of the occurrence of reform is due to the fact that Scarrow (2001) collapses all reforms in one country to one score for the whole 1971-1999 period, thereby obscuring the number of government periods in which no direct democratic reform takes place.

\textsuperscript{407} The Belgian Dehaene I and II reforms and the Dutch referendum discussion are illustrations of this.

\textsuperscript{408} The Austrian extension of the election cycle and the continuing Belgian discussion on the electoral district Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde after the constitutional court deemed part of the second reform package unconstitutional are examples.

\textsuperscript{409} Just as an example, Dutch pundits routinely find that the temporary referendum law is merely a ‘consolation prize’ or even completely ignore it (Steur, 2005:61; Rosema, 2009). Only Andeweg and Irwin (2005:87-88) see
asking them which reforms occurred in a given country, such a biased understanding of the occurrence and degree of democratic reform can have far-reaching consequences. Therefore, in this section I will elaborate on why country experts have such a biased understanding of the occurrence of democratic reform.

As I have shown earlier, the intuitive feeling that ‘nothing happens’ should be abandoned. Even in the Netherlands, the country where the fewest reforms occurred, some minor reforms and one major democratic reform were put in effect. How then to explain this underestimation of the occurrence of democratic reform? As was seen, in all three countries the original reform proposals were more substantial than the reforms that were actually implemented. Indeed, the Austrian Vranitzky II government first considered moving to a mixed-member system, but in the end only adopted a far more modest reform under Vranitzky III. During the Belgian Dehaene II government, the Group Langendries decided to introduce regional citizen-initiated referendums, but in the end only local and provincial citizen-initiated referendums were implemented. The Verhofstadt I reforms were also weaker versions of the original reform proposals. Lastly, the Dutch temporary referendum law introduced by the Kok II government was a deluted version of the original proposal voted down by the Upper House in 1999. Compared to the original proposals, these actual reforms were indeed far weaker. Yet from a comparative perspective, most of them were substantial. 410 Hence by taking the original reform proposal as a point of reference, it is easy wrongly to come to the conclusion that the actual reforms were unimportant or that nothing happened.

The underestimation of the occurrence and scope of democratic reforms by country experts and pundits is also something that is more likely to occur in consensus democracies. In such a setting democratic reforms tend to be a weaker version of the original proposals. Indeed, reformers in consensus democracies routinely have to adapt their proposals to convince their more conservative coalition partners. Virtually with no exception, these adaptations are inspired by ‘damage control’ and thus result in weaker reforms. The more coalition partners there are to negotiate with, the higher the chance that a proposal will be diluted. Given that in consensus democracies more parties are included in the government, reforms will probably be weaker versions of the original. Hence the incorrect intuitive feeling that ‘nothing happens’ is even more likely to exist in consensus democracies.

8.3 On the explanation of democratic reform: causal findings

In this study I have examined the determinants of democratic reform at three different levels: the country, government and reform levels. In this section I will discuss the main findings regarding the determinants at these three levels, based on the expectations outlined in Chapter 2. An overview of the expectations and whether or not they were falsified in this study can be found in Table 8.1.

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410 This bias in judging the significance of a reform by comparing it to the original proposal is also one of the reasons why country experts disagree on what they consider to be the total number of reforms in a given country. In some cases two scholars from one and the same country will have different lists of reforms (cf. Pilet, 2007a versus De Winter, 2005; see also Jacobs and Leyenaar, 2011 on electoral reform).
8.3.1 Country-level factors: veto players

In Chapter 2, a distinction was made between partisan and non-partisan veto players. As non-partisan veto players played virtually no role in the eleven reform processes examined in this study, I will focus on partisan veto players in this section.\textsuperscript{411} Partisan veto players did play a significant role. The theoretical expectation guiding my analysis of partisan veto players was that \textit{the more veto players there are, the less likely it is that democratic reforms will occur}. Overall, one should thus see less democratic reform in countries with a higher number of parties in the government. This expectation, however, has to be rejected.

To start with, in the \textit{cross-case analysis} I found that Belgium witnessed (by far) the most democratic reform. It seemed that a high number of veto players was actually related to more democratic reforms. However, by itself this finding proves very little. First, one could argue that it is merely a consequence of the exceptional Belgian case. Second, the objection can be raised that an analysis based on just three countries is by itself too limited to provide a well-substantiated test of the expectation merely through a cross-case comparison. This objection can, however, be addressed by carrying out within-case analyses. In doing so I have empirically assessed whether veto players played a role in the actual reform processes. The within-case analyses also provided an excellent opportunity to check and refine the causal mechanism through which the veto player explanation is likely to work. Rahat (2008a:270), who also found that higher numbers of veto players are actually associated with more reform, summarized this causal mechanism as ‘power dispersion’. The more partisan players there are, the more parties can work together with others to nullify the power of a particular party that threatens to veto a reform.\textsuperscript{412}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{411} Only the Dutch Upper House played an important role in two reform discussions, but the mere fact that it was a veto point needs to be complemented with other explanations for the failure of reform. In both cases the independence of the Upper House was a necessary but not a sufficient explanation for the failure of the reform. The Belgian constitutional court played a role in the second reform package of Verhofstadt I, but it only struck out a part of the package after it had already been implemented.

\textsuperscript{412} This would mean that veto players actually have no veto power and therefore it somewhat stretches the notion of veto players (cf. Chapter 2).
\end{footnotesize}
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>COUNTRY</strong></td>
<td>Veto players</td>
<td>E1. The more veto players there are, the less likely it is that democratic reforms will occur.</td>
<td>X Falsified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cartel status</td>
<td>E2. The more a government cartel is replaced by a new cartel, the more likely it is that democratic reforms will occur.</td>
<td>V Mainly corroborated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Political ideology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Populism</td>
<td>E3. The greater the impact of a populist party within a government, the more likely it is that democratic reforms will occur.</td>
<td>X Mainly falsified (but few cases)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Postmaterialism</td>
<td>E4. The greater the impact of a populist party within a government, the more likely it is that direct democratic reforms as well as reforms towards a more personalized electoral system will occur.</td>
<td>X Mainly falsified (but few cases)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>E5. The greater the impact of a postmaterialist party within a government, the more likely it is that democratic reforms will occur.</td>
<td>X Mainly falsified (but few cases)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>E6. The greater the impact of a postmaterialist party within a government, the more likely it is that direct democratic reforms as well as reforms towards a more proportional electoral system will occur.</td>
<td>? Mixed (but few cases)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public dissatisfaction</td>
<td>E7. The higher the public dissatisfaction, the more likely it is that democratic reforms will occur.</td>
<td>V Corroborated</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>REFORM</strong></td>
<td>General expectation</td>
<td>E8. Outcome-contingent motivations are more dominant in reform debates than act-contingent and principled motivations.</td>
<td>X Mainly falsified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outcome-contingent motivations</td>
<td>E9. The more outcome-contingent motivations dominate the reform debate, the more likely it is that democratic reforms will occur.</td>
<td>V Mainly corroborated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Act-contingent motivations</td>
<td>E10. The more act-contingent motivations dominate the reform debate, the more likely it is that minor democratic reforms will occur.</td>
<td>V Mainly corroborated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Values</td>
<td>E11. Values associated with representativeness play a greater role than the values associated with accountability.</td>
<td>? Mixed (but few cases)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>E12. The more values dominate the reform debate, the less likely it is that democratic reforms will occur.</td>
<td>V Corroborated (but few cases)</td>
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The within-case analyses have revealed two things about the role of partisan veto players. First, they have confirmed the proposition that there being more partisan veto players leads to more democratic reform. The positive relationship between veto players and the number of reforms is not merely an artefact of Belgian exceptionalism. However, this positive relationship was not due to ‘power dispersion’. During the eleven reform debates that have been analysed in this study, multiple reforms were vetoed, but the government party that proposed them did not seek alternative majorities (i.e. including some opposition parties and excluding some government parties) to implement democratic reform. Why is this so? As the Belgian Verhofstadt I reform discussions have illustrated, parties generally considered democratic reform to be too important to allow it to be passed with alternative majorities. Attempting to implement democratic reform by finding an alternative majority would most likely have been seen as an extremely hostile act and would have provoked a government crisis. While power dispersion as a causal mechanism is not an impossibility, it did not play a role in the reform discussions examined here.

Second, the within-case analyses did suggest a different causal mechanism. Veto players are generally seen as barriers to reform (cf. Blau, 2008; Hooghe and Deschouwer, 2011; Rahat and Hazan, 2011). Yet veto players are also a catalyst of reform. As the within-case analyses in this study have highlighted, in a high number of cases frustration with the veto players inspired political elites to turn to democratic reform. This frustration took three forms: frustration with the lack of government turnover, frustration with the high degree of party fragmentation and frustration with the impotence of grand coalitions. The first form is best illustrated by the motivations of the Belgian reformer Guy Verhofstadt (Open VLD). It was frustration with the veto power of the CD&V and the PS that drove Verhofstadt to embrace democratic reform (cf. Verhofstadt 1991, 1992). Others, such as Prime Minister Dehaene in Belgium, exemplify the second frustration. Dehaene was worried about the high party fragmentation and the difficulties this implied for governing the country (Dehaene, 1999: 139). In Austria the third form of frustration prevailed, as the two main parties, SPO and ÖVP, were worried about the inability to govern efficiently when they were in a grand coalition (Poier, 2009: 11). In all these instances, veto players forced the constant watering down of their own proposals through compromises. Politics is always the art of the

413 Other illustrations of this reluctance to seek alternative majorities can also be found. For instance, with the Balkenende II electoral system proposal the CDA, D66 and the opposition party PvdA could well have pushed through a new electoral system, but when the government party VVD vetoed the proposal the minister for democratic reform, De Graaf, knew he did not have a chance, did not seek an alternative majority by involving the PvdA and resigned.

414 One could think of instances where it is explicitly agreed upon in the coalition agreement that parties are allowed to find an alternative majority.

415 In the Netherlands, this sentiment was less widespread, but was still the main motivation for Van Aartsen (VVD) to support radical democratic reforms. Van Aartsen (21.10.2010) formulated this feeling as follows: politicians in the Netherlands ‘are impotent and cannot solve a number of important problems. We are such a complex country with such a high number of consensus elements (...) and all of this has significant downsides.’

416 One could formalize this as follows: it is the frustration with consensus democracy that drives consensus democracies to implement democratic reform. Shugart (2008) has noted before that ‘anomalies’ or ‘inefficiencies’ typical of majoritarian democracies, such as lopsided majorities and hung parliaments, are important drivers for electoral reform in these countries. It seems that in consensus democracies the ‘inefficiency’ is related to partisan veto players (translated into a lack of government turnover, grand coalitions and/or party fragmentation).
possible. The fact that in consensus democracies often very little is possible seems to have been an important catalyst of democratic reform.

8.3.2 Government-level factors

1. Cartel breakdown. In Chapter 2 I stated that the more a government cartel is replaced by a new cartel, the more likely it is that democratic reforms will occur. The empirical analyses in this study mainly corroborated this expectation. In the cross-case comparison in Chapter 4 I found that five out of the 15 government periods showed cartel breakdowns or cartel break-ins. Democratic reform occurred during three of these government periods. Given that democratic reform happened in nine out of the 15 government periods included in the whole cross-case comparison, this was not a spectacular finding. However, there are reasons to expect that cartel breakdown is more of a trigger for reform debates than a determinant of actual reforms. After all, in consensus democracies a full-scale cartel breakdown is very unlikely. At best one can expect a partial breakdown. In these cases, some parties that were part of the previous cartel will be included in the new government. These parties can be expected to block many reform proposals. The within-case analyses of two of the government periods that experienced a partial cartel breakdown indeed suggests that this is what happens. The Belgian Verhofstadt I government in particular is revealing in this respect. There was a clear will amongst the liberal and green parties to implement democratic reform. However, the social democrats vetoed many of the reform proposals, such as national referendums, and also the direct election of mayors and more far-reaching changes to the national electoral system. The Austrian Schüssel I case pointed to two other things. First, cartel breakdown does not necessarily have to lead to democratic reform. The existing Austrian system actually suited the FPÖ well: the Austrian electoral system benefited the party slightly and the Volksbegehren legislation allowed it to attack the government when it was in opposition (Müller, 1999; 2006b). The introduction of full-scale citizen-initiated referendums could harm the party. In 1999, the FPÖ moved from being in a pariah position to being a potential government partner. This newly acquired status also meant that the need to reform the system was strongly reduced. Second, the Schüssel I case also pointed to the fact that cartel breakdown can have an impact on many things and does not necessarily only lead to democratic reform (see also Katz and Mair, 2009). For instance, the Schüssel I government removed many SPÖ-affiliated people from the corporatist bodies. Hence cartel breakdown did play a part, but this did not manifest itself in democratic reform debates.

2. Political ideology. Regarding the impact of political ideology, I expected that the greater the impact of a populist or postmaterialist party within a government, the more likely it is that democratic reforms will occur. This was generally not the case. In the 1987-2008 period six governments included a populist or postmaterialist party. As the cross-case analyses have highlighted, three of these governments implemented democratic reforms. In the country chapters I examined four of the six government periods that contained a postmaterialist and/or populist party. Schüssel I contained the FPÖ, a populist party. Verhofstadt I included the Open VLD, a moderately populist party, and ECOLO and GROEN!, which were both postmaterialist. Lastly, Kok II and Balkenende II included the

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417 Indeed, only in the Verhofstadt I case a majority of the government parties had traditionally been excluded from the government. The green parties entered government for the first time, while the liberal parties had been in opposition for 11 years. Yet even in the Verhofstadt I government there were remnants of the old cartel in the form of the two social democratic parties.
postmaterialist party D66. The qualitative analyses have highlighted four interesting aspects regarding (1) the nature of populism and postmaterialism as ideologies or merely as a strategy; (2) the impact of ideology on different types of democratic reform and (3) the direct and (4) indirect impact of ideology. 418

1) Ideology versus strategy. Some scholars have argued that populism is merely a strategy and not an ideology (cf. Wendt, 2009; see also Jacobs 2010). In that case populist parties are said to support democratic reform not because of ideological but out of self-interested or strategical reasons. One could make a similar argument as far as postmaterialism is concerned. Populist or postmaterialist rhetoric supporting democratic reform can merely be a means to get into government or advance one’s own interests. 419 It could also be that populism is more often used as a strategy than postmaterialism is. It is too early to tell whether there is a difference between populist and postmaterialist parties, as the number of such parties included in this study was too limited to allow definitive judgments. Nevertheless, some observations can be made about the individual parties.

In the case of the Austrian FPÖ, populism indeed seems to have been more of a strategy than an ideology. The FPÖ abandoned most of its democratic reform pledges apart from citizen-initiated referendums. However, as I have shown in Chapter 5, there is evidence that the FPÖ only supported this as a symbolic measure and probably never actually intended to implement it. The Schüssel I government obstructed its own legislation as much as possible. However, with regard to the moderately populist Open VLD it cannot be ruled out that Verhofstadt acted out of principle in some of the reform discussions. The three postmaterialist parties studied in the country chapters, ECOLO, GROEN! and D66, mainly - but not always - acted in accordance with their ideology. Of these three, D66 was the most attached to democratic reform on principle. There are even reasons to believe that ideological motivations dominated self-interest in the case of D66, as their party leader Thom de Graaf did not believe he was going to win votes by supporting democratic reform. However, both Belgian green parties also used democratic reform to advance their self-interest, although they also advocated reforms for which they could have been motivated by their ideology. Whether populism and postmaterialism acted as an ideological foundation for democratic reform or merely as a strategic tool is a matter of empirical assessment. It cannot be determined a priori (as is often done in the populism literature, cf. Mudde, 2004; Jagers and Walgrave, 2007; Wendt, 2009).

2) Are electoral systems immune to ideology? Regarding the (proportionality of the) electoral system, ideology played virtually no role. Self-interest generally trumped ideology when it came to democratic reforms concerned with proportionality. The only case where ideology did play a role in discussions over a change in the electoral system was Balkenende II. Yet even in that case the postmaterialist party (D66) was internally split on the issue.

418 The causal mechanism through which ideology may work is twofold. First, politicians belonging to a postmaterialist or populist party can be expected to adhere to this ideology. In this case they will try to implement reforms, because they are connected to them on principle. Second, politicians who are not on principle attached to the ideology of a party can still feel that they have to act according to that ideology, because their voters care. Not implementing democratic reform could result in losing voters or credibility. In this case politicians reason in a more self-interested way. Which of these two prevailed will be discussed later in section 8.3.3, where I assess the impact of principle versus that of self-interest.

419 Interestingly, one should note that postmaterialist parties often get the benefit of the doubt, while the reverse applies to populist parties.
3) The direct impact of ideology. The Dutch Kok II and Balkenende II cases have provided an excellent opportunity to assess the impact of ideology in its purest form, given that they included the postmaterialist D66. Of all postmaterialist or populist parties, D66 attached most importance to its ideology as a foundation for democratic reform. As the analyses of these two government periods have shown, political ideology can be an important catalyst in getting democratic reform on the government agenda. However, in consensus democracies coalition governments are the norm and populists and/or postmaterialists only rarely have a majority in the government. In most cases reformers are a minority, faced with a majority of more conservative political elites. In such cases the democratic reform process is highly vulnerable and prone to failure. Even if reforms do reach the finishing line, as in the Kok II case, significant concessions have had to be made that reduce the impact of the reform.  

4) The indirect impact of ideology. In this study I have mainly focused on the political ideology of government parties. However, in the Dehaene II case, ECOLO, GROEN! and the Open VLD, while still in opposition, did have an impact on democratic reform. If a government is under siege by public dissatisfaction and reformist opposition parties, it may implement reform as a response, even if it is convinced that the opposition populist or postmaterialist parties are first and foremost populist or postmaterialist because of strategic rather than ideological motivations. Interestingly, it seems that the type of reform implemented in such cases is merely minor democratic reform. I will return to this later in section 8.5.

3. Public dissatisfaction. In the democratic reform literature, public dissatisfaction is frequently mentioned as the trigger that initiates democratic reform (cf. Dalton, 2004; Bowler, Donovan and Karp, 2006; Norris, 2011). One can thus expect that the higher the public dissatisfaction, the more likely it is that democratic reforms will occur. I first found in the cross-case analyses that public dissatisfaction indeed seems to matter. In six government periods public dissatisfaction was high and in five of these cases democratic reform took place. Subsequently I examined three of these periods in the country chapters. In two, Dehaene II and Vranitzky III, democratic reform was implemented, while no reforms occurred in the third case, Balkenende II. The three cases present useful information on the causal mechanism and the type of reforms that dissatisfaction may lead to. I will start with the causal mechanism. In the literature there is little understanding of precisely how public dissatisfaction works. Renwick (2010:167) has outlined how democratic reform processes driven by elite-mass interaction are likely to operate, but he mainly focused on the elite side. The within-case analyses provided an excellent opportunity to examine the mass-side of the process. In Chapter 4, I used the Eurobarometer data as an indicator of public dissatisfaction. Obviously, by themselves the Eurobarometer surveys are unlikely to have an impact on political elites, as it is doubtful that they follow the Eurobarometer series closely. The Vranitzky III, Dehaene II and Balkenende II cases highlight ways in which dissatisfaction becomes tangible to politicians. A first (and relatively rare) way that public dissatisfaction can manifest itself is through large-scale demonstrations such as the White March under Dehaene II. A more common expression of dissatisfaction is an unexpected election outcome.

420 These observations also hold true for the Verhofstadt I reforms that were driven by political ideology (the failure of national referendums and the first reform package).

421 None of the politicians I interviewed mentioned the Eurobarometer series when I asked them on what they based their judgment of whether or not there was public dissatisfaction.
in which the traditional parties suffer severe losses, such as the Belgian Black Sunday election and the Dutch 2002 election when the LPF out of the blue won 26 seats (out of 150). There are two other elements that politicians seem to relate to public dissatisfaction, namely corruption scandals and a widespread narrative on a crisis of democracy in the media. Both can be seen more as causes of public dissatisfaction than indicators or effects of it. Whether they are causes, effects or mere indicators seems to matter little to politicians, as they consider them all without distinction to be related to public dissatisfaction. All four ‘signs’ of public dissatisfaction increase politicians’ act-contingent motivations to support reform. Equally, they make it more difficult for conservative politicians to block democratic reform proposals. From then on it matters who is included in the government. As the Balkenende II case suggests, when reformist parties are part of the government they can push for large-scale reform. When the government consists of non-reformist parties only mainly minor (symbolic) reforms will be implemented. The Dehaene II case shows that if there have been outbursts of dissatisfaction before, this increases the impact of follow-up outbursts. The more outbursts there are, the less a non-reformist government can refuse to implement reform. However, two observations must be made here. First, as both the Balkenende II and the Dehaene II cases have shown, relatively severe and lasting outbursts of dissatisfaction are needed to trigger relatively minor reforms. Second, as was seen in the Vranitzky III case, relatively moderate public dissatisfaction can be used by political elites to implement limited reforms that benefit them. This is, however, a risky endeavour, as such actions may further increase public dissatisfaction. Even the Vranitzky III reform package included a symbolic measure to appease the public. It thus remains to be seen whether the ‘abuse’ of public dissatisfaction to advance the self-interest of government parties is an exception or the rule. To sum up, there seems to be a positive relationship between public dissatisfaction and democratic reform. The impact of public dissatisfaction was also the most consistent finding in the cross-case analyses. This was corroborated by the within-case analyses, which revealed that even in the one deviant case, Balkenende II, major reform discussions were triggered by public dissatisfaction (cf. for instance Volkskrant, 25.11.2003; Remarque, 26.3.2005; Memorandum 26957). Overall, the impact of dissatisfaction is modest but consistent.

8.3.3 Reform-level factors

In the theoretical chapter I have focused on self-interest (in the form of act- and outcome-contingent motivations) and principles to explain the occurrence of democratic reform. However, the within-case analyses have revealed two other important elements: damage control and the role of individual politicians. Hence, even though I had no prior expectations regarding their impact, I will discuss these elements in this section as well.

1. PRINCIPLE VERSUS SELF-INTEREST. Following Reed and Thies (2001), I have distinguished between act-contingent and outcome-contingent self-interested motivations in this study. Given that in the majority of democratic reform studies outcome-contingent motivations are

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422 Elections and demonstrations, on the other hand, can be seen as effects or indicators of public dissatisfaction.
423 In the Netherlands the degree of dissatisfaction was not sufficient to lead to reform. Indeed, democratic reform lost momentum because public dissatisfaction appeared to be short-lived (cf. Andeweg and Irwin, 2005).
424 The degree of dissatisfaction seems to matter here. Most likely only moderate dissatisfaction can be used and only limited reforms are possible. In the only study that considered this proposition thus far, Renwick (2010:244) found that as far as major electoral reform is concerned, there is ‘little evidence that popular opinion can be manipulated far by strategic actors pursuing private ends’. The findings of this study are in with Renwick’s conclusion.
deemed most important (cf. Boix, 1999; Benoit, 2004; Colomer, 2004; Bowler, Donovan and Karp, 2006), I expected that outcome-contingent motivations are more dominant in reform debates than act-contingent and principled motivations. This was, however, only rarely the case: the in-depth analyses of the eleven reform discussions examined in this study seem to contradict this expectation. In just one case, the second reform package implemented by the Belgian Verhofstadt I government, was the reform debate driven only by outcome-contingent motivations. In the remaining reform discussions other motivations prevailed or played an equally important role. In most cases these were act-contingent or principled motivations, such as values and ideology. For some parties principles were distinct from act-contingent motivations, but in a substantial number of instances both incentives pointed in the same direction. This makes it very difficult to assess which of the two prevailed. Moreover, virtually every position a party takes can be 'covered' by one principle or another (cf. Chapter 2), which makes it even more difficult for researchers to assess whether principles or self-interested motivations predominated. Nevertheless, in a few cases the impact of principles was distinguishable from the impact of self-interest. All in all, principles played a (limited) role, mainly during direct democratic reform discussions. The electoral system in particular was a battleground from which principled motivations routinely retreated 'with a bloody nose' (cf. Kellner, 1995). Moreover, the few reform discussions in which outcome-contingent motivations played a role had a considerably greater chance of leading to actual reforms: four out of five of such instances resulted in democratic reform. The expectation that the more outcome-contingent motivations dominate the reform debate, the more likely it is that democratic reforms will occur was thus mainly corroborated. Furthermore, three of the four successful reforms were major reforms. Sometimes act-contingent motivations also played a role, but if this was the case these motivations where the basis for minor features in reform packages that included both major and minor elements. A good example of such a mixed reform was the Vranitzky III reform package. Outcome-contingent motivations led the parties to implement a change in the electoral system (a major reform), while act-contingent motivations led them to also include a lowering of the preference threshold (a minor reform). This seems to be a more general pattern: act-contingent motivations dominated when minor reforms were on the table, but played little role when it came to major democratic reforms. The expectation that the more act-contingent motivations dominate the reform debate, the more likely it is that minor democratic reforms will occur was thus also mainly corroborated. Finally, values appeared in only a few cases and they hardly ever took the

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425 Some tools to distinguish between principle and self-interest are available. First of all, one can check whether the (invoked) principle is against self-interest. As mentioned earlier, principle was only very rarely contrary to act-contingent motivations. Yet sometimes this was the case, most notably in the Dutch Balkenende II government, where Thom de Graaf (D66) was clearly driven by values at the expense of self-interest. Second, one can examine whether politicians’ actions were consistent with their prior positions. For instance, the principled motivation of Hans Wiegel (VVD) to oppose the introduction of referendums during the Dutch Kok II government was in line with his previous voting behaviour and statements about his position on referendums. The FPÖ in the Austrian Schüssel I government, on the other hand, acted against their prior actions and statements. In that case self-interest clearly was dominant over principle. Third, one can check whether the invoked principles are in line with the ideology of a party. A good example of this is the second reform package implemented by the Belgian Verhofstadt I government, where both the Open VLD and the green parties’ actions were inconsistent with their ideology.

426 I use the qualification ‘mainly corroborated’ as act-contingent motivations were indeed generally linked to minor (not major) democratic reforms. However, in a significant minority of the cases (three out of eight), the act-contingent motivations were not sufficient to successfully implement reform.
same form. Moreover, when values did surface, there were often act-contingent motivations present as well. At times when there was significant frustration with the veto players, the value of accountability played a role. However, a lack of accountability was only a trigger for reform debates. Accountability issues by themselves were hardly ever enough to lead to actual democratic reforms. The value of representativeness, on the other hand, was often a conservative force. For instance, De Graaf’s electoral system proposal met with fierce resistance because it threatened to impair the representativeness of the electoral system.

Principles played a bigger role as far as direct democratic reform is concerned. For instance, in the case of the Kok II government D66 advocated citizen-initiated referendums that could be triggered by a minority of the people and that could lead to a repeal of existing legislation even when less than 50% of the electorate + 1 voted against it. There is also some evidence that D66 favoured referendums more out of principled than self-interested motivations — although that D66 acted to some degree according to its self-interest cannot be rejected. As regards ballot structure reforms it is even more difficult to make a distinction between act-contingent and principled motivations. In virtually all cases both pointed in the same direction. Therefore no definite answers can be provided concerning the impact of principles in debates on reforms of the ballot structure.

To sum up, the evidence regarding the expectation that values associated with representativeness play a greater role than the values associated with accountability is mixed. Sometimes representativeness dominated, while at other times accountability did so. Overall however, there were only a few cases in which these values played an important role. Generally they were a background feature or coincided with self-interested motivations. On the rare occasions when they were distinguishable from self-interested motivations, this was not enough to push through actual reforms. Hence, based on these few cases, the expectation that the more values dominate the reform debate, the less likely it is that democratic reforms will occur seems to be valid.

2. DAMAGE CONTROL. In most reform debates self-interested motivations could be seen in the form of damage control. In these instances the conservative section of the political elites were unable to block reforms proposals advanced by the reformist section, but in most cases they were able to introduce (often very subtle) damage control elements. They also vetoed or stalled more far-reaching reforms through the use of expert commissions and only allowed reforms that had less impact. All in all, it seems that a significant part of the political elite acted on the basis of ‘better safe than sorry’.

3. THE ROLE OF INDIVIDUALS. To paraphrase George Orwell, in democratic reform (as in most other policy domains), although all politicians are equal, some are definitively more equal than others. Often the assenting votes of all MPs of a given party are needed to pass a reform, but some politicians are more important to the reform process because they exert substantial

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427 This was most importantly the case when the grand coalition returned in Austria in 1987. Additionally, individual politicians such as Verhofstadt and Van Aartsen also pointed to a lack of accountability.

428 To a certain degree this was mainly emphasized by parties that were likely to lose from the measure, such as GroenLinks and the SP. Yet there was also a general feeling that proportionality was sacrosanct within the parties that would benefit (cf. Andeweg and Irwin, 2005:230-232).

429 Interestingly, it seems that politicians with a populist background emphasize referendums as a tool to increase the accountability of the government, while politicians with a postmaterialist background interpret referendums as a means of safeguarding the representativeness of the government.
influence over how their fellow MPs decide to vote. This is very much the case with
democratic reform, as it is a complex and fairly technical issue (cf. Renwick, 2010).
Moreover, a willingness to devote time and energy to lengthy negotiations is needed as well
as bargaining and persuasion skills. Not surprisingly then, in most of the reform debates a
relatively small number of politicians who were experts on the topic dominated the
discussions.

A second observation on the role of individual politicians is related to how we perceive and
analyse political parties in the democratic reform process. In the field of electoral reform,
parties are sometimes considered to be unitary actors. In the field of major electoral reform
this is even more the case, as parties are first and foremost seen as seat-maximizers (cf.
Benoit, 2004). Divergent interests within a party can exist, but this is thought to be an
unimportant exception rather than the rule (cf. Blais and Shugart, 2008:195). In the eleven
reform debates discussed in this study this was actually rarely the case. Even if one interprets
the unitary actor thesis merely as ‘a (single) policy position reached after a decision-making
process within a party’, the empirical record of the unitary actor thesis remains weak. Parties
were often strongly divided internally or switched position during the reform process. In
short, considering parties as unitary actors in all likelihood leads to the overlooking of
important differences within parties and therefore biases the findings.

8.4 Theoretical implications of this study

What do these findings mean for the theories applied when studying democratic reform? I
will begin by answering the main research question of this study, the question of who matters
most: elites or masses. After that, I will discuss the implications of this study for the rational
choice and sociological institutionalist approaches.

8.4.1 Elites or masses?
To answer the main research question of this study, I use Renwick’s distinction between
reform through elite majority imposition and reform through elite-mass interaction. In the
former political elites dominate, while in the latter the public plays an dominant role. I also
briefly discussed a third type of reform process, namely elite settlement (cf. Chapter 2). In
such cases democratic reform is implemented on the basis of a broad consensus among the
eites (Renwick, 2010:12). With regard to major electoral reform, Renwick (2010:87) found
that half of the reforms were achieved through elite majority imposition. Based on the
extensive cross-case analysis in Chapter 4, it became clear that public dissatisfaction had the

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430 Regarding the political party as a unitary actor, see also Laver and Schofield, 1990; Strom, 1990:569; Black,
2008.

431 This can for instance be witnessed in the following four examples. First, it is shown by the difference in the
voting behaviour of the VVD, SP, GroenLinks and the PvdA between the Upper and Lower House votes during
the Dutch Kok II and Balkenende II governments. Second, a similar situation occurred during the Austrian
Gusenbauer case, when the green party switched its position on the reform package in the Upper House. Third,
some members of the Verhofstadt I government parties were opposed to the second reform package and a few
were allowed to abstain or even vote against the bill. Fourth, the Vranitzky II attempt to introduce a more
majoritarian electoral system was blocked by the government parties’ MPs.

432 Parties themselves may also switch position when a leadership change occurs, e.g. the Open VLD when
Herman de Croo replaced Verhofstadt in 1995 and, more historically, D66 during the 1970s and 1980s, when Jan
Terlouw replaced Hans van Mierlo.

433 Rahat (2008:266) comes to a similar conclusion on major electoral reform in Israel.
best ‘track record’ of the three government level variables. Indeed, democratic reforms occurred in all but one government period during which there was significant public dissatisfaction. Most of these reforms were minor, an observation that will be elaborated in section 8.5. The follow-up question then is: do politicians make use of public dissatisfaction to further their own ends? If this is true one would expect many reforms through elite majority imposition and only a few genuine reforms through elite-mass interaction. The eleven democratic reform processes that have been examined in the in-depth part of this study are described in Table 8.2. Two reform discussions are of particular interest here, namely the Vranitzky III major electoral reform and the Dehaene II minor direct democratic reforms. Both occurred during periods of public dissatisfaction. In the Dehaene II case the reforms were implemented mainly through elite-mass interaction. In the Vranitzky III case, however, the reforms followed the elite majority imposition route. As mentioned earlier, the Vranitzky III reforms were modest, which suggests that if elites make use of public dissatisfaction to further their own interests, they are constrained in what they can do.

A second interesting finding revealed by Table 8.2 is the high number of (minor) democratic reforms and reform attempts through elite settlement. Renwick (2010:12) found no major electoral reforms through elite settlement. Yet in five of the eleven reforms or reform attempts in this study an element of elite settlement was present. How to explain the high incidence of reforms or reform attempts through elite settlement? The analyses in this study suggest at least three (potentially complementary) explanations for the high incidence of these reforms. First, parties often have act-contingent motivations to initiate (or to allow) reforms that empower citizens. Second, given the high procedural barriers to reform, government parties often have to find support from opposition parties. Third, it is noteworthy that all of the five (attempted) reforms were either direct democratic reforms or minor electoral reforms (neither of which Renwick studied).

Without a doubt political elites are still the dominant actors in the reform process. Nevertheless, as far as democratic reform in general is concerned, reform through elite-mass interaction is (even) more likely than in cases of major electoral reform, as minor electoral

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434 It is important to note that these eleven reforms are merely a purposefully chosen sample (not a random sample) from the 15 government periods in Chapter 4. For instance, I only selected three of the six government periods in which public dissatisfaction occurred. As a result, no descriptive inference can be drawn based on the study of these cases.

435 However, this is only part of the story. In the Vranitzky III case the reform package included a (symbolic) reform to appease the media and the public, while the other reforms were only moderately advantageous to the government parties. The explanation for the relatively weak content of the reform package is partially that the two parties could not agree on more far-reaching reforms (an elite element), but most likely also partially because they felt that implementing more far-reaching reforms would be risky given that public dissatisfaction was growing (a mass element). In short, the masses played a (mostly indirect) role in the Vranitzky III case as well.

436 Again, given that the eleven (attempts to) reform discussed in the country chapters are not a random sample, one should not use them to draw descriptive inferences regarding the occurrence of democratic reform. What matters here is the mere fact that elite settlement occurred at least five times, which by itself is quite unexpected as none of the major theories on democratic reform anticipates this.

437 This element played an important role in for instance the original discussions on the lowering of the preference threshold proposed by Pechtold in the Dutch Balkenende II case and the first reform package of the Verhofstadt I government.

438 This was for example the case in the Dutch Kok II and the Austrian Gusenbauer reform discussions.
reforms and direct democratic reforms are often less threatening to political elites than major electoral reforms (cf. infra). Moreover, the impact of the masses is also visible in the important role act-contingent motivations play. Lastly, both these elements carry more weight in consensus democracies, in which political elites are more vulnerable to the opinions of voters because of the proportional electoral system.

Table 8.2 Summary of the eleven reforms and their theoretical characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reform content</th>
<th>Succeeded?</th>
<th>Type of reform process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vranitzky III Lowering preference threshold + three-tier system + electoral threshold 4%</td>
<td>Success</td>
<td>Elite majority imposition (but mass element)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schussel I Postal voting + national citizen-initiated referendums</td>
<td>Failure</td>
<td>[Elite settlement]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gusenbauer Lowering voting age + postal voting + extension election cycle</td>
<td>Success</td>
<td>Elite majority imposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dehaene II Local citizen-initiated referendums</td>
<td>Success</td>
<td>Elite-mass interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verhofstadt I National referendums Lowering preference threshold + higher gender quota + enlargement electoral districts + reintroduction list of reserves + electoral threshold 5%</td>
<td>Failure</td>
<td>[Elite majority imposition]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verhofstadt I Local citizen-initiated referendums</td>
<td>Success</td>
<td>Elite settlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verhofstadt I Local citizen-initiated referendums</td>
<td>Success</td>
<td>Elite majority imposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kok II National citizen-initiated referendums</td>
<td>Failure</td>
<td>[Elite majority imposition (with an element of elite settlement)]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kok II Local citizen-initiated referendums + Temporary referendum law + election of mayors</td>
<td>Success</td>
<td>Elite majority imposition (with an element of elite settlement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balkenende II New electoral system + direct election mayors + lower preference threshold</td>
<td>Failure</td>
<td>[Elite-mass interaction with elite majority imposition element]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note: Reform process of failed reform attempts is based on the situation at the time of failure. Processes are shown in brackets.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.4.2 The rational choice approach
1. RATIONALITY IN THE ELEVEN (ATTEMPTS TO) REFORM. The rational choice approach maintains that (a coalition of parties) will implement democratic reform when (a) they have a majority to do so and (b) the outcome of these reforms maximally benefits them. To enable this political elites are expected to be active information seekers (Benoit, 2004:379). Furthermore, it is also important to note that rational choice theorists ‘equate rationality not
simply with reason but with optimality’ (Hindmoor, 2006:190). People implement actions that are the best possible given the knowledge and time they have. In the study of democratic reform, optimization has mainly been understood as outcome-related optimization (cf. Benoit, 2004; Rahat, 2008:17-21). When analysing electoral reform in majoritarian democracies rational choice may be a powerful theory (cf. Blais and Shugart, 2008; but see Renwick, 2010, Chapter 1), but for democratic reform in consensus democracies it performs less well. Table 8.3 summarizes whether politicians (1) were driven by outcome-contingent motivations, (2) aimed to optimize their benefits, (3) were active information seekers and (4) did not act irrationally. As the table shows, no (attempt to) reform fully complies with the rational choice expectation.\(^{439}\) On the contrary, other motivations prevailed in a majority of cases. Furthermore, political elites virtually never optimize, but instead often satisfice (cf. Renwick, 2010). Political elites did actively seek information in a majority of the cases: they made use of existing simulations and set up commissions to gather and list all the available information. However, the latter also served a different purpose, namely delaying the reform process (cf. Andeweg and Irwin, 2005:231). Lastly, in a substantial number of cases reform discussions involved elements of irrationality. Given that up to now irrationality has never been studied systematically in the field of democratic reform, I will devote the next section to it. Then, I will suggest how the rational choice approach can be adjusted to better fit consensus democracies.

2. THE IMPACT OF IRRATIONALITY.\(^{440}\) In this section I will discuss whether the participants in the reform process behaved as rational actors – which is one of the assumptions of the rational choice approach. Generally scholars feel that irrational decisions are ‘rare’ (Blais and Shugart, 2008:200). However, in a number of electoral reform studies anecdotal evidence has been presented that actors often act irrationally. In virtually all of these cases, such irrational decisions played a vital role in the adoption of reform.\(^{441}\) Yet such irrationality is seen mainly as part of the ‘error’ or unpredictable idiosyncracies that go with the reform process (cf. Katz, 2005:74). As a result, even though there is substantial evidence that irrationality plays a role in the reform process, scholars have been very slow in incorporating it into their explanations.

It is certainly true that irrationality makes reform unpredictable, as one does not know when exactly a politician will act irrationally. However, this does not mean that there are no patterns in irrationality or that irrationality cannot be scientifically studied. Based on an assessment of the prevalence of 14 forms of irrationality described by Sutherland (1992) (cf. Chapter 2), I find that democratic reform is particularly vulnerable to four forms of

\(^{439}\) The Verhofstadt I second reform package came, however, very close: the parties were mainly driven by outcome-contingent motivations, tried to optimize their gains at the expense of the Christian democrats and were active information seekers. Some irrational elements regarding the Flemish greens prevent this reform from fully complying into the rational choice expectation, as they were overconfident and misinterpreted the evidence. Nevertheless, the rational choice approach performs well in this case.

\(^{440}\) As a reminder, irrationality is defined here as any decision ‘that is not the best that could have been reached in the light of the evidence, given the time constraints that apply’ (Sutherland, 1992:7). It should be stressed that this definition differs from the common pejorative interpretation of the term. In Sutherland’s definition irrationality need not be bad. For instance, ‘better safe than sorry’ can be very sensible advice to adhere to.

irrationality: overconfidence, misinterpretation of the evidence, ignoring the evidence and, to a lesser extent, being driven by emotions such as ambition and vanity.\textsuperscript{442} It thus seems that democratic reform discussions are prone to specific forms of irrationality, mainly those related to the interpretation of evidence with regard to the consequences of reform. This is paradoxical: parties invest a lot of time and energy in gathering information, but once they have this information they often ignore or misinterpret it. Given that time and energy are frequently scarce goods, this makes little sense. Furthermore, as democratic reforms are redistributive, because they change who has which degree of power in the decision-making process, one would expect parties to be more diligent in interpreting the information (cf. Benoit, 2004:366, 379). How to explain this paradox? It may well be quite straightforward. Democratic reform is virtually always a complex matter. For instance, concerning electoral reform, Taagepera (2007:VII) noted that ‘[e]ven for mature democracies, prediction becomes unmanageable when electoral rules are rather complex’. In such complex matters people tend to take shortcuts and are less diligent than might be expected. Indeed, ‘[e]verybody is irrational some of the time, and the more complex the decisions to be taken, the more irrational they are’ (Sutherland, 1992:3). To sum up, even though democratic reform has been considered to be a subject \textit{par excellence} in which rationality prevails, it may actually be very prone to irrationality instead.

3. A RATIONAL CHOICE APPROACH TO DEMOCRATIC REFORM IN CONSENSUS DEMOCRACIES.

Based on the evidence presented earlier, the rational choice approach to democratic reform does not correspond with the facts. When confronted with the critique that their models are unrealistic, rational choice scholars often reply that they still perform well when it comes to the overall accuracy of their predictions (Hindmoor, 2006). Hence, to carry out a fair test of the rational choice approach to democratic reform, one should not only look at how realistic its foundations are, but also at how accurate its predictions are.\textsuperscript{443} Two kinds of inaccurate predictions can be thought of: the rational choice approach may predict reform when no reform occurs (so-called false positives) and/or fail to predict reforms that do occur (so-called false negatives).\textsuperscript{444} If outcome-contingent optimization played a role one should see three general trends in democratic reform.\textsuperscript{445} First, there should be electoral reforms in the direction of a less proportional electoral system (as this would protect the established parties from newcomers), but not towards a majoritarian electoral system (as this would be too risky) (Colomer, 2004; Renwick, 2010). Second, electoral reforms should be found that strengthens the role of politicians and reduces the role of citizens in the allocation of seats to individual candidates.

\textsuperscript{442} As mentioned in Chapter 2, the 14 forms of irrationality are the availability error (judging by the first thing that comes to mind); obedience; conformity; behaving according to group membership; misplaced consistency; the misuse of rewards and punishments; emotion (in particular ambition and vanity); ignoring the evidence; distorting the evidence; making the wrong connections; mistaking the cause; misinterpreting the evidence; making misplaced bets; overconfidence.

\textsuperscript{443} I use the term ‘prediction’ loosely here. It should be interpreted as an expectation based on a given theory.

\textsuperscript{444} I borrow the labels ‘false positives’ (also called type I errors) and ‘false negatives’ (also called type II errors) from the statistical jargon (cf. Carlson and Hyde, 2003:389). Traditionally both types of error refer to predictions based on samples for a given population. I use the terms here in the context of theoretical predictions, which is why I do not label them type I and type II errors.

\textsuperscript{445} I limit myself to the four dimensions of democratic reform examined in the country chapters, namely the proportionality of the electoral system, the ballot structure, the introduction of referendum legislation and reforms of the initiation requirements (cf. Chapter 4).
### Table 8.3 Summary of the rationality of the eleven reforms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reform</th>
<th>Outcome-driven</th>
<th>Optimize</th>
<th>Info seeking</th>
<th>Absence of irrationality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vranitzky III</td>
<td>Lowering preference threshold + three-tier system + electoral threshold 4%</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schüssel I</td>
<td>Postal voting + national citizen-initiated referendums</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gusenbauer</td>
<td>Lowering voting age + postal voting + extension election cycle</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaene II</td>
<td>Local citizen-initiated referendums</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verhofstadt I</td>
<td>National referendums</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First reform package</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Second reform package</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kok II</td>
<td>National referendums</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Temporary referendum law + election of mayors</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Yes + No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balkenende II</td>
<td>New electoral system + direct election mayors</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Yes + No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower preference threshold</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Reforms in italics are failed reform attempts.

**Coding:**
- **Outcome-driven:** evaluation based on the within-case analyses
- **Optimize:** the option chosen was the best option on the table for the coalition of parties that wanted to implement reform (includes also the option of non-reform)
- **Info seeking:** based on usage of (a) setting up of commissions, (b) simulations based on prior election results, (c) comparisons with other countries in parliamentary debates; occurrence of one of the three qualifies as a 'yes'
- **Irrationality:** evaluation based on within-case analyses using the 14 forms of irrationality as listed by Sutherland (1992).
Third, one should see direct democratic reforms towards government-sponsored referendums with few restrictions (as this grants governments the freedom to use ‘plebiscites’) and the restrictions or wholesale abolition of citizen-initiated referendums (as this potentially threatens governments) (Qvortrup, 2005:163).

The first prediction generally holds true in the cases that I studied: Belgium and Austria implemented a (fairly low) electoral threshold and the Netherlands tried to introduce a (slightly) more majoritarian electoral system. The second prediction, regarding the seat allocation to individual candidates, does not apply and is vulnerable to producing false positives. Only one electoral reform, the second reform package implemented by the Belgian Verhofstadt I government, strengthened the role of political parties. The third prediction, related to direct democratic reform, produced most false positives. In none of the reform discussions did I see moves towards government-sponsored referendums and only one very minor reform element limited the role of citizens in the reform process. Additionally, the rational choice approach also yielded many false negatives. In all countries reforms that opened up the ballot structure to citizen influence occurred and in Belgium and the Netherlands citizen-initiated referendums were implemented. In short, only as far as the electoral system is concerned does the rational choice approach perform well. Yet even regarding this dimension of electoral reform the reforms are far more limited than one would expect on the basis of the pure rational choice approach.

This does not mean that the rational choice approach as such is ill-suited to the study of democratic reform in consensus democracies. Given that the context is different in consensus democracies, rationality manifests itself differently there. This disparity is most notable in the impact of (the perception of) public opinion. Parties seem to be very aware of the fact that they are more vulnerable to (even fairly small) vote swings and take what they perceive as the ‘will of the voters’ into account. One of the recurrent themes in the eleven (attempted) reforms examined in the country chapters is that the impact of self-interest can be seen in damage control. Virtually all successful reforms were less far-reaching than their original proposals. Sometimes the reforms seemed little more than symbolic gestures. Secondly, and related, the role of act-contingent motivations is far more important – even when public dissatisfaction is low. In all but the Verhofstadt I reform discussions act-contingent motivations played an important part. To sum up, in consensus democracies it is less easy to block reforms and it is easier to initiate reforms that look good to the public. Hence, a rational choice approach to democratic reform in consensus democracies should include damage control and act-contingent motivations.

8.4.3 The sociological institutionalist approach

The sociological institutionalist approach to democratic reform maintains that institutions fit the societies in which they are located (cf. Lijphart, 1984). In the eyes of a sociological

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446 The Belgian 2002 reintroduction of the list of reserves, which had been abolished only shortly before.
447 This was the 1999 Belgian introduction of local citizen-initiated referendums for which rather than 10 of the electorate, 10% of the population had to sign a petition in order to trigger a local referendum. Nevertheless, overall this reform increased the impact of the citizens on the referendum process as it reduced the outcome requirement from 40% to 10% and obliged the political elites to hold a referendum once 10% of the electorate had signed a petition asking them to do so.
448 This was most evidently the case in the lowering of the Austrian preference threshold in 1992 and the (failed) attempt to lower the preference threshold during the Balkenende II government.
institutionalist democratic reform is a way to adapt to or counter changes within the society. Typically, democratic reforms are said to occur at times when societal changes manifest themselves through a crisis, resulting in 'stormy political times' (Bogdanor, 1988; Rahat, 2008:23). However, Rahat (2008) criticizes the sociological institutionalist approach on two grounds. First, he contends that the notion of crisis is too vague to be studied scientifically. Often a crisis is something that is used to explain a reform afterwards, ignoring the fact that many similar crises did not result in any reforms. This is the Achilles heel of the sociological institutionalist explanation as it is the crisis that triggers the whole reform process. The second critique of sociological institutionalism is that it tends to overemphasize the weight of societal changes. In practice such long-term developments do not seem to be sufficient to explain reform (Rahat, 2008:24).

Rahat's assessment of sociological institutionalism has been based on a survey of studies of major electoral reform. However, given that my study includes minor electoral and direct democratic reforms, it makes it possible to check whether the sociological institutionalist explanation is valid for democratic reform in general. Consensus democracies provide fertile soil for the sociological institutionalist explanation, as politicians in such a setting are more vulnerable to public pressure because of the proportional electoral system. Hence, they constitute an excellent context in which to broadly examine Rahat's criticisms. I will do so in the first part of this section, after which I will assess the strength of the sociological institutionalist approach with respect to democratic reform in consensus democracies.

1. The vague notion of crisis. The fact that the idea of 'crisis' remains vague in the sociological institutionalist explanation may make it difficult to study crises scientifically, but it is not necessarily an incorrect description of reality. As I noted in the discussion of the impact of public dissatisfaction, it is politicians who implement reform and therefore those studying democratic reform need to find out what politicians consider to be a crisis. To a certain extent this means that an irreducible element of idiosyncracy and vagueness will always remain because some politicians will consider some events crises while others will not. However, as I discussed earlier in the section on public dissatisfaction, four types of event lend themselves to being seen as evidence of an existing crisis. In the field of electoral reform most attention is given to 'anomalous' election results as evidence of a crisis (cf. Shugart, 2001; 2008). Yet this is just one type of event that can be considered to be a crisis. Corruption scandals, a widespread media narrative on a crisis of democracy and (relatively rare) large-scale demonstrations demanding good governance are also events that can be seen as crises by politicians. Moreover, as the analysis of the Dehaene II government has shown, the more often such events occur, the more likely are politicians to 'feel' that there is a crisis.

2. On the importance of societal changes: major crises but minor reforms? Significant public dissatisfaction - either as a cause or an effect - is related to all four types of event that can be interpreted by politicians as 'crises'. Hence, looking at dissatisfaction with 'the way democracy works nowadays' is good way to explore when reform may have

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449 For instance, Alan Renwick mapped the impact of societal pressure in his discussion of reform through elite-mass interaction, but even he omitted to discuss the notion of 'crisis' (Renwick, 2010:167). Without insight into the concept of crisis, one does not know when reform through elite-mass interaction occurs.

450 This, however, does not mean that there is significant public demand for democratic reform. Surveys often indicate that citizens want more say in the decision-making process (cf. Dalton, 2004), but rarely, if ever, is democratic reform a priority for them (cf. Renwick, 2010).
been the result of societal pressure. This brings me to Rahat’s second critique of sociological institutionalism, namely that societal changes by themselves at best play a minor role in explaining reform. If one interprets ‘societal changes’ as broad and pervasive value shifts this statement is probably true, as such changes are too gradual to have a short-term impact. However, as this study has shown, the intervening variable that sociological institutionalists invoke, dissatisfaction with ‘the way democracy works nowadays’, may be more fruitful (Dalton, 2004). In the cross-case analyses in Chapter 4 I found that democratic reforms occurred in no fewer than five out of the six cases in which significant dissatisfaction was present. The within-case analyses confirmed this finding and linked dissatisfaction to the four types of crisis mentioned earlier. Four of the five reforms were minor, which probably explains why this pattern has remained unnoticed thus far.

The importance for democratic reform of societal changes is also related to the scope of the reforms. The original sociological institutionalist prediction was that large-scale societal outbursts would give rise to large-scale reforms. At first sight this does not seem to be the case. The cross-case and within-case analyses have shown that large outbursts caused only incremental reforms. However, as public dissatisfaction persists and other crises erupt, more reforms are likely to occur. In Belgium and Austria, where dissatisfaction continued throughout the 1990s, multiple consecutive reforms were implemented. Therefore persistent dissatisfaction can gradually change a system.

3. THE SOCIOLOGICAL INSTITUTIONALIST APPROACH TO DEMOCRATIC REFORM IN CONSENSUS DEMOCRACIES. I will now discuss the potency of the sociological institutionalist approach. I will assess whether the approach produces a high number of false positives and/or false negatives and examine the strength of the empirical relationship between public dissatisfaction and democratic reform. The number of false positives (government periods that showed a high degree of public dissatisfaction but no reform) is very low. Only in the case of the Dutch Balkenende II government did significant dissatisfaction not coincide with democratic reform. Moreover, as the within-case analyses have shown, even in this case public dissatisfaction played an important role. All in all the impact of public dissatisfaction is consistent. The number of false negatives (the government periods during which reforms occurred despite the absence of public dissatisfaction), on the other hand, is relatively high. Reforms were implemented during four government periods when there was no public dissatisfaction.

Unlike rational choice, the sociological institutionalist approach makes no predictions of the direction of reform. However, it does contain an expectation regarding the scope of reform. As mentioned earlier, sociological institutionalists originally predicted large-scale reforms as a response to large-scale societal changes. Empirically this does not seem to be correct. The sociological institutionalist approach rightly predicts the number of reforms, but it overestimates the scope of the implemented reforms.

To conclude, as is shown by the high number of false negatives resulting from both the rational choice and the sociological institutionalist approach, democratic reform is a

451 Reforms can occur to ‘adapt to or counter’ societal changes (cf. Rahat, 2008:23). Hence, in contrast to the rational choice assessment, I only assess the number of reforms, not their direction.
phenomenon driven by equifinality. Indeed, some of the time democratic reform is best explained by the sociological institutionalist approach, while at other times a rational choice approach works best. Of the two the sociological institutionalist approach performs in the most consistent way, as it has the lowest number of false positives. The rational choice approach to democratic reform should be adapted to account for act-contingent motivations and damage control, while the sociological institutionalist approach needs to be modified as far as its main independent variable (crises and public dissatisfaction instead of societal change) and the scope of its impact (minor reforms instead of major reforms) are concerned.

8.5. Patterns of democratic reform: the onion model

In this concluding chapter I have mentioned several times that there seems to be a pattern to why political elites implement which types of democratic reform. Previously, such patterns have gone unnoticed, as only very few researchers examined minor and major electoral and direct democratic reform. This does not mean that they did not look for patterns. Indeed, research into which types of reforms occur is quite common. Most scholars focused in particular on the direction of electoral reform and examined whether there is a general trend towards more proportionality (cf. Boix, 1999; Colomer, 2005; Renwick, 2010; Renwick, 2011). Very recently attention has also been paid to the question of whether there is a general trend towards more personalization (Karvonen, 2010; Renwick, 2011). The main focus in the field of direct democratic reform has also been on the direction of the reforms. Here scholars have examined whether direct democratic reform has transferred power to citizens (Scarrow, 2001; Scarrow, 2003; Qvortrup, 2005). Similarly, in the only systematic cross-case study of democratic reform per se, Cain, Dalton and Scarrow (2003:13) observed that there was a trend towards being more open to citizen participation. All these accounts rightly implied that democratic reform was a so-called ‘White Swan’ event, a regular event that exhibits patterns. Yet the studies are all very limited in scope. With very few exceptions, these scholars did not take the impact of the ‘starting point’ (consensus democracies versus majoritarian democracies) into account. Nor did they include the consequences of equifinality. Indeed, there is no reason to expect that reforms driven by public opinion would be in the same direction as those driven purely by the self-interest of political elites. Moreover, the existing studies have difficulties with the occurrence of two specific types of reform: ballot structure reforms and reforms that have a mixed nature meaning that they make the system

452 With only one exception, the Schüssel I government, the rational choice approach produces false negatives that can be explained by the sociological institutionalist approach and vice versa. This finding echoes Renwick’s distinction between reform through elite majority imposition (rational choice) and elite-mass interaction (generally sociological institutionalism).

453 Given that I have already presented multiple examples concerning this in prior chapters, it will suffice here to give the most eye-catching example, that relating to a reform of the proportionality of the electoral system. In majoritarian democracies the vested interest is to keep first-past-the-post (cf. Blais, 2008). Only in unusual circumstances (when radical third parties threaten to become dominant) can one expect a move towards a more proportional electoral system (cf. Boix, 1999; Colomer, 2004). However, in proportional electoral systems one would expect moves towards (slightly) less proportionality as this will protect the dominant parties from newcomers.

454 It is far more plausible to expect that reform through elite-mass interaction generally gives citizens more say, while reforms through elite-majority imposition can be expected to suit the governing parties. Sometimes the latter may imply giving citizens more say, but it can also mean limiting the impact of citizens.
both more open and more closed to citizens (cf. Renwick, 2011). A model describing and explaining the occurrence of democratic reform should thus include (1) patterns, (2) different starting points, (3) equifinality and (4) an explanation for previously unaccounted findings. Based on the empirical results of this thesis I will provide such a model, the onion model, in the following sections.

8.5.1 The general principles of the onion model

The eleven reform debates presented opportunities to get an insight into how political elites themselves judge the impact of the eight types of reform included in this study. To begin with, it seems that political elites rank reforms according to their impact and as a consequence their degree of threat or opportunity. Indeed, a reform that is deemed to have a great deal of impact will be vehemently opposed if it threatens a party. However, a high-impact reform will provide a greater opportunity to parties that will benefit from it. This is the foundation on which the onion model rests. In what follows, I will first offer a reconstruction of the political elites' ranking of the impact of specific types of reform based on the empirical analyses in the country chapters. Then I will elaborate on the relationship between (a) the degree of impact of a reform and (b) the threats and opportunities it poses, by linking the onion model to both democratic reform through elite majority imposition and through elite-mass interaction. Table 8.4 offers an overview of the impact rankings during the eleven reform debates analysed in this study.

In several instances it became clear that political elites deemed ballot structure less important than a change in the electoral system. Obviously, major ballot structure reform was considered to have a greater impact than minor ballot structure reform. This difference between minor and major applied to all four types of democratic reform.

455 The high occurrence of ballot structure reforms - and specifically the ones that lowered the preference threshold - is puzzling as they were all disadvantageous to the parties (versus rational choice), but at the same time did not significantly increase the fit between society and the institutions (versus sociological institutionalism).

456 The label ‘onion model’ refers to two important characteristics of the model, namely (1) that democratic reforms can be divided into layers according to the impact it is considered to have and (2) that the ‘heart’ (or most important type of reform) is buried beneath other less important layers.

457 This ranking is merely exploratory, given that the number of impact rankings is fairly low. After all, this study included 11 reform debates, but also eight types of democratic reform (a minor and a major version of each of the four dimensions).

458 In the Austrian Vranitzky III case political elites sacrificed ‘ballot structure’ in order to be able to change the electoral system slightly to their advantage. In the Belgian Dehaene I case the government conceded on the topic of ballot structure, but not on the other demands of the reformist opposition (cf. Rihoux, 1996). In the Dutch Balkenende II case, the De Graaf reform agenda (including the direct election of mayors and the change towards a new electoral system) was vetoed by the CDA and the VVD. Afterwards these parties did agree to reform the ballot structure.
Table 8.4 Summary of the impact ranking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content reform discussions</th>
<th>Impact ranking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vranitzky III Lowering preference threshold + three-tier system + electoral threshold 4%</td>
<td>Electoral system (major) &gt; Ballot Structure (minor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schussel I Postal voting + national citizen-initiated referendums</td>
<td><em>Not applicable</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gusenbauer Lowering voting age + postal voting + extension election cycle</td>
<td><em>Not applicable</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dehaene II Local citizen-initiated referendums</td>
<td>Citizen-initiated referendums (minor) &gt; Government-sponsored referendums (minor) and Ballot structure (major)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verhofstadt I - National referendums - Lowering preference threshold + higher gender quota - Enlargement electoral districts + reintroduction list of reserves + electoral threshold 5%</td>
<td>Electoral system (major) &gt; Citizen-initiated referendums (major) &gt; Ballot structure (minor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kok II - National citizen-initiated referendum - Temporary referendum law + election of mayors</td>
<td>Electoral system (major) &gt; Citizen-initiated referendums (major)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balkenende II - New electoral system + direct election mayors - Lower preference threshold</td>
<td>Electoral system (major), Citizen-initiated referendums (major): unknown* Citizen-initiated referendums (major) &gt; Ballot structure (minor)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The Balkenende II government embarked on a major change of the electoral system and had already blocked citizen-initiated referendums during the coalition negotiations. However, this does not mean it felt that the electoral system change had less impact than referendums.
The change in the initiation requirements of referendums (most importantly the shift from government-sponsored to citizen-initiated referendums) and the introduction of citizen-initiated or government-sponsored referendums were clearly seen as having more impact than changes in the ballot structure.\footnote{Two examples illustrate this. First, the Belgian Dehaene II government only conceded on changing the local and provincial citizen-initiated sponsored referendums after significant and repeated pressure from the opposition and public opinion. The Dehaene I government had already implemented major ballot structure reform. Second, in the second half of the Dutch Balkenende II government, D66 leaders Dittrich and Pechtold wanted the referendum on the political agenda. The other two government parties, the CDA and VVD, refused to do so, but did allow a reform of the ballot structure.} Moreover, both appeared to be intertwined. The introduction of government-sponsored referendums was regarded as having less impact than a change of the initiation requirements which resulted in the de facto shift from government-sponsored to citizen-initiated referendums.\footnote{I base this statement on a comparison between the Belgian Dehaene I and Dehaene II cases. The Dehaene I government introduced local government-sponsored referendums, while the Dehaene II government only agreed to introduce citizen-initiated referendums after significantly more pressure.}

The (proportionality of the) electoral system was clearly the most important aspect for nearly all political elites, which therefore seemed to be the 'heart' of democratic reform.\footnote{For instance, the Verhofstadt I government deemed a change in the proportionality of the electoral system more important than the introduction of referendums. The Kok I and Kok II governments judged the impact of citizen-initiated referendums (which was agreed to) lower than changes to the proportionality of the electoral system (which were deemed too threatening).} Based on these impact rankings, one can construct the following 'onion' (see Figure 8.1).

What matters most here is the general principle and the implications of the onion model, not the precise location of the specific types of reform in each of the layers. A precise location would require information on (far) more cases. Follow-up research on the onion model can (and should) also be complemented by including the other seven dimensions of electoral and direct democratic reform, which were left out of this study. Moreover, it may be that there is little distance between two given layers. In that case, it may well be possible to merge them. All of this is a matter of empirical assessment. In the following sections I will relate the onion model to the four country- and government-level independent variables examined in this study, in order to demonstrate how it can serve as a tool to structure explanatory analyses of democratic reform. I will also assess how the model relates to the rational choice and the sociological institutionalist approaches to democratic reform.
8.5.2 Elite majority imposition and the onion model

The traditional rational choice approach to democratic reform considers reform to be an act of maximizing the benefits of the outcome of democratic reform. According to this approach (a coalition of) political parties that has a majority in parliament imposes its will on a minority of political parties. In such cases of ‘elite majority imposition’, reformers can be expected to reason ‘inside-out’. After all, this would deliver most gains: the inner layers include the reforms that are perceived to have most impact and thus provide most opportunities to

\[ \text{Electoral system (major)} \]
\[ \text{Citizen-initiated referendums (major)} \]
\[ \text{Citizen-initiated referendums (minor)} \]
\[ \text{Government-sponsored referendums (minor)} \]
\[ \text{Ballot structure (major)} \]
\[ \text{Ballot structure (minor)} \]

Two types of reform were not discussed in relationship to other types, namely major direct democratic reforms regarding government-sponsored referendums and minor changes in the (proportionality of the) electoral system. I have therefore excluded them from the model.
reformers who are driven by outcome-contingent motivations. In practice one can expect that the majority of political parties will start by considering implementing those reforms from the inner layers that they deem most advantageous. If these reforms are impossible or unnecessary, they will try to implement a weaker version of it or move to the closest of the more outer layers that suits them best.

Based on this study it is also possible to relate such inside-out reasoning to two of the four country- and government-level independent variables. Indeed, one can expect that inside-out reasoning occurs when a cartel breakdown takes place or frustration with the veto players is high, as in both cases outcome-contingent motivations play a dominant role. A typical example of the inside-out reasoning is the second reform package implemented by the Verhofstadt I government. The traditionally excluded parties in this government wanted to consolidate their position after the partial cartel breakdown that brought them into office. The liberals first wished to implement wholesale electoral system change, but this reform had already been blocked during the coalition negotiations. In the end, after lengthy bargaining, a weaker major electoral reform, in the shape of a provincial electoral threshold and provincial electoral districts, was introduced.

8.5.3 Elite-mass interaction, elite settlement and the onion model

The traditional sociological institutionalist approach to democratic reform considers reform to be an act of adapting to or countering societal changes. When political elites are forced by societal pressures into implementing democratic reform, they can be expected to reason 'outside-in'. In such cases they will protect the heart, the inner layers, at all cost, even though they cannot fully ignore the act-contingent motivations. Only extreme pressure will result in such reforms as the introduction of citizen-initiated referendums at national level or changes to the (proportionality of the) electoral system. After all, such reforms pose the greatest threats to political elites: the inner layers include the reforms that are perceived to have most impact. In practice one can expect political elites to try to implement symbolic measures from the outer layers. When these are deemed insufficient to appease the public, reformers can move to more inner layers.

The two independent variables that are linked to this type of reasoning are political ideology and public dissatisfaction. When there is significant public dissatisfaction or and when ideological reforms are present, one can thus expect political elites to reason outside-in. It is mainly the ideological reformers who translate abstract public dissatisfaction into a specific demand for democratic reform. The democratic reforms implemented by the Dehaene II government are a typical example of the outside-in reasoning. Strongly calls for democratic reform were made by the liberals and the greens from 1991 onwards. As public dissatisfaction grew and crisis upon crisis erupted, the Dehaene I government first tried very modest reforms by implementing local government-sponsored referendums. The Dehaene II government wanted to expand this legislation to the provincial level, but while the process of
implementing provincial referendums was still going on, the Dutroux crisis erupted and under pressure from the Francophone liberals the government had to move to more far-reaching measures.

Outside-in reasoning is also likely to apply to reform through elite settlement. When (mostly ideological) reformists want to implement reform, they are often confronted with a reluctant conservative majority of the political elites. However, some reforms are difficult to veto, as such a veto may well be perceived as likely to lead to electoral punishment. If this is the case, the conservative elites are inclined to opt for a damage control strategy and will try to ‘settle’ for something less threatening. In such cases they will also tend to reason outside-in to minimize the damage. A typical example of such reasoning is the first reform package of Verhofstadt I. The liberals wanted a wholesale shift to an open list system. Obstructing all reform was difficult as the parties had act-contingent motivations for not doing so. In the end, the impact of the list vote was halved, not neutralized.

8.5.4 Mixed reform packages
The onion model also allows the structuring of the analysis of the mixed nature of some reform packages. In the case of both elite majority imposition and elite-mass interaction mixed reform packages are likely to occur, most frequently when there is some (but not extremely high) public dissatisfaction.

In the event of reform through elite-majority imposition, it may well be that political elites feel that blatant manipulation of the electoral rules might be considered ‘beyond the pale’ (cf. Renwick, 2010). In such cases they can be expected to add elements from the outer layers of the onion model, such as the ballot structure, to the reform package to appease the public. The reform of the Gusenbauer government is an example of this. The government wanted to increase the election cycle from four to five years, but feared this would be unacceptable. By including the lowering of the voting age and postal voting in the package it was able to divert the attention of the opposition, the media and the public.

Similarly, political elites may well use public dissatisfaction to advance their own interest and add elements from the inner layers to a package deal that also includes ‘symbolic’ measures from the outer layers. They may also wish to counter societal changes by introducing reforms from the inner layers. However, because there is significant public dissatisfaction other reforms also need to be included, to show that the government is taking public opinion into account. The reforms during the Vranitzky III government are a typical example of such mixed reasoning. The government used public dissatisfaction to implement reforms such as the introduction of an electoral threshold (which aimed to counter the influence of the fragmentation of the electorate), but also had to include the lowering of the preference threshold to appease the public and, most importantly, the media.

I found no empirical examples of mixed packages that were implemented through elite settlement. Theoretically one can conceive of a process in which conservative political elites demand reforms belonging to the inner layers (e.g. an electoral threshold) in exchange for reforms from the outer layers (e.g. the lowering of the preference threshold), but in such situations act-contingent motivations significantly weaken the position of the conservative political elites. Whether this means conservatives always have to give in, should be examined in future research. For now, it is too early to include this in the model.
8.5.5 An assessment of the onion model

Even though the onion model outlined above is merely a first step based on a limited number of reform discussions, it is nevertheless important to assess its usefulness according to the four criteria outlined earlier.

1. Patterns criterion.\(^{466}\) The first criterion deals with the occurrence of democratic reform. The onion model offers a systematic approach to democratic reform as such. It considers democratic reform to be a normal ‘White Swan’ event that can be analysed in a systematic way and makes it possible to formulate expectations about which types of democratic reform are likely to occur under a given set of circumstances.

2. Starting point criterion. The model is flexible with regard to the precise content and direction of reforms. The basic principles of the onion model can expected to be fixed, but the exact content of the layers and therefore the specific ranking of different reforms can be changed according to the setting of a political system. As a result, the onion model can be used for both majoritarian and consensus democracies. In both cases there will be ‘onions’ (or rankings of specific reforms), but the precise content of the onions may well be different. For instance, based on existing literature one can expect that major reforms of the electoral system are also at the heart of the ‘onion’ in majoritarian democracies (Blais and Shugart, 2008), but the rest of their ‘onion’ may well be different.\(^{467}\)

3. Equifinality criterion. As shown in sections 8.5.3 and 8.5.4, the onion model incorporates both the rational choice approach to democratic reform (inside-out reasoning and a focus on opportunities) and the sociological institutionalist approach to democratic reform (outside-in reasoning and a focus on threats). As a result, it is explicitly open to equifinality.

4. Unaccounted findings criterion. In the social reality, many reforms take the form of mixed packages that combine many different types of reform. Similarly, a high number of democratic reforms consists of or includes the lowering of preference thresholds. Both theoretical approaches struggle with the explanation for such reforms. As regards the mixed nature of package deals, the onion model provides a tool to analyse the composition of reform packages, as was shown in section 8.5.4. It does not consider these packages to be an anomaly, but sees them as normal. Specifically, one can expect a mix of inside-out and outside-in reasoning when there is some (but not extremely high) public dissatisfaction. In such cases mixed reform packages are likely to occur. Regarding the high occurrence of reforms that lower preference thresholds the onion model suggests that political elites judge such reforms to have little impact (and thus pose only a small threat to them). As soon as conservative political elites are confronted with public dissatisfaction or populist or postmaterialist politicians, they are likely to try to appease them by introducing reforms that lower the preference threshold.

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\(^{466}\) One could rightly say that this is the easiest criterion to pass, as virtually by definition all models are based on the assumption that the phenomenon under investigation exhibits patterns.

\(^{467}\) It should be stressed that the onion for majoritarian democracies can, but need not, by definition be different from the onion for consensus democracies.

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8.6 The direction of future research

In their seminal work, Cain, Dalton and Scarrow (2003:14) urged other scholars to devote more attention to electoral and direct democratic reforms. As far as electoral reform is concerned, this has certainly been followed up. From 2005 onwards, electoral reform research has increasingly become more established and substantial breakthroughs have been made (cf. Katz, 2005; Pilet, 2007a; Blais, 2008; Rahat, 2008; Renwick, 2010; Rahat and Leyenaar, 2011). However, the fields of direct democratic reform and democratic reform as an overarching concept have not made such significant progress. In this study I have argued that considerable advances can also be made regarding direct democratic reform. The best strategy for doing so is by combining electoral and direct democratic reform, as in practice they are often intertwined. This study further pointed to a number of theoretical, methodological and empirical ways to advance the study of democratic reform.

Theoretically, promising research subjects can be found in the impact of frustration with veto players, cartel dynamics, populism and postmaterialism, and the (in)direct impact of public dissatisfaction. On a more abstract level, both the rational choice and the sociological institutionalist approaches offer important points of departure for further research. With respect to the rational choice approach, the impacts of irrationality and act-contingent motivations seem too important to be neglected, as has often been the case in the past. Regarding the sociological institutionalist approach, the notion of crises that drive a significant number of democratic reform processes offers fruitful research possibilities. Lastly, as discussed earlier, the onion model outlined in the previous section is a useful tool for new research.

Methodologically the conceptual framework for democratic reform advanced in Chapter 3 provides many options for future research. In the largest part of this study I have only focused on four of the ten dimensions discussed in Chapter 3. Research into the remaining seven dimensions can further complete the picture of democratic reform. At first glance such research may seem virtually impossible (cf. Katz, 2005). Indeed, it requires a lot of work to gather datasets on all democratic reforms. However, as this study has shown, one need not be too pessimistic. Just as there are ways to carry out and manage a survey with more than 100,000 respondents, there are ways to assemble databases on democratic reform. Civil servants working at Ministries of the Interior proved to be important sources of lists for democratic reform. Often they had detailed lists available or could at least provide me with the information necessary to assemble a database. A second solution carrying out this seemingly Herculean task is to gather information on a limited set of countries. Even this can provide information on a medium number of cases, which then in turn can already be a good foundation for making an informed selection of cases (governments) that can be studied in-depth afterwards.

Empirically this study focused on fifteen government periods in Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands. Its findings can (and should) be tested against both earlier government periods and other countries. Scandinavian countries such as Sweden and Denmark are excellent to test whether the theoretical theses advanced in this study also are valid in other similar countries. Alternatively, one could check whether these theses hold true in majoritarian settings. Indeed, studies of democratic reform in majoritarian democracies are all too rare. Majoritarian democracies can be expected to be different. In all likelihood the content of the
layers of their onion model will be different from that presented in this study. However, just how different majoritarian democracies are remains to be examined. Lastly, the future is also likely to bring new cases of democratic reform. After all, as party fragmentation grows, new parties enter the stage and public dissatisfaction goes up and down, the pressure for reform will recur on a regular basis. Democratic reform is here to stay.
APPENDICES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY
Appendix 1. Operationalization of electoral reform

In this appendix I present the precise operationalization of electoral reform based on the five dimensions introduced in Chapter 3 (see also Jacobs and Leyenaar, 2011). Each dimension is discussed in more detail, followed by a summary presented in Table A.1.468

Referring to the first dimension, (the proportionality of) the electoral system,469 I mainly follow Lijphart, who calls any change from one to another of the three main sub-dimensions of electoral formulas (majoritarian, semi-proportional and proportional ones) a major change. Equally, a change in a specific formula that does not cause a shift to a different category can be called a minor electoral reform. With regard to the (average) district magnitude and the effective electoral threshold, the proportionality of an electoral system is also determined by the ratio of inhabitants to seats. I added two more subdimensions, namely redistricting and changes in the length of an election cycle. As far as redistricting is concerned, changes to the boundaries of the electoral districts fall in this category. Depending on the percentage of inhabitants that is affected redistricting can be regarded either as a minor or as a technical reform. I also include reforms to the length of the election cycle (e.g. from four to five years) in this dimension.470 Depending on the size of the increase or decrease such a reform can be regarded either as a minor or a technical one. Lastly, any electoral system change at all but the national level is considered a minor electoral reform at best (e.g. the introduction of a 10% electoral threshold at the local level is considered to be a minor reform rather than a major one).471

468 As a preliminary note, I would like to stress that both the operationalization of electoral reform and direct democratic reform are based on the current state of the art. Some elements of the operationalization will be more controversial while others are widely shared amongst scholars. Often the content of the dimensions resembled a Gordian knot. in such cases, cutting the Gordian knot was more important than the precise cut-off point. The main aim of the operationalization was to provide a tool to detect, categorize and compare democratic reforms (cf. Jacobs and Leyenaar, 2011).

469 As opposed to the proportionality of a specific election outcome, mostly calculated by the Gallagher index of disproportionality. As Lijphart (1994:140) shows in a longitudinal analysis: ‘as much as two-thirds of the variance in disproportionality is explained by the electoral system alone’.

470 Redistricting and the election cycle are both not included in Lijphart’s analyses even though they are important elements in the actual functioning of the electoral system (see for instance Katz, 2005; Handley and Grofman, 2008). Moreover in practice redistricting can have an important impact on the proportionality of an electoral system (e.g. by creating safe seats in majoritarian electoral systems; see also Farrell, 2011:203). This is not the case as far as the election cycle is concerned. The reason why I included it in this dimension is that it fits best here: after the votes are translated into seats, the length of the election cycle determines how long a party gets these seats. The election cycle is thus more related to the electoral system than to the choice a voter has (ballot structure), who is allowed to vote (inclusiveness), the number of layers a political system has (election levels) or the mere procedural aspects of an election (electoral procedures). Admittedly this is a somewhat negative selection criterion. An alternative could be to treat the election cycle as a separate dimension. However, based on this reasoning one risks to inflate the number of dimensions. Therefore I decided to include the election cycle in the electoral system dimension.

471 In federalized systems with significant competences for the regions, such as Belgium, Canada, Switzerland or the USA, changes of the electoral legislation at the regional level can be considered equal to national reforms. One can even examine these regional layers as cases when they have competences to change electoral or referendum legislation themselves (similar to the national level) (cf. Blais, 2008). In this study I opted to only examine the Belgian national level, mostly for practical reasons. Additionally, while the regional levels do have (some) competences, such as in the field of the local elections, these are fairly limited. Moreover, the most important discussions took place at the national level.
The second dimension, the ballot structure, includes all changes in ‘the nature and the degree of choice available to the voter in an election’ (Farrell, 2001:208; see also Rae, 1967). Traditionally this concerned the choice between different types of ballots. However, the ‘choice’ available to the voter does also include which candidates can be found on the list. The introduction of a gender quota law for example affects the composition of the candidate list. The ballot structure dimension in Table A.1 therefore includes reforms in ballot choice, and the choice of candidates. Regarding ballot choice, Norris (2002:3-4) distinguishes four types of ballot structures: candidate ballots, preference ballots (ballots for candidates within a party-list or lists), dual ballots (separate ballots in both single- and multi-member districts) and party ballots. The electoral formula influences the boundaries of the ballot structure. For instance an SMP electoral system always uses candidate ballots, while in list systems both preference and party ballots can be found (Norris, 2002:19). Especially in list systems there is ample room for maneuver, since they can range from an open to a closed list system. A wholesale shift from one category to another (e.g. from preference ballots to party ballots) that applies to more than 20 per cent of the electorate is a major reform. Shifts within a category are influenced by two other aspects: the number of votes people can cast and the impact of these votes on the actual election of candidates. Changes in these two aspects are minor or technical reforms.

Referring to candidate choice, I label the introduction of quotas that affect more than 20 per cent of the candidates on the list a major reform, while a lower percentage or a change in the existing quota system results in minor or technical reform. Quotas are used mostly to ensure a fair balance between male and female candidates (gender quota), but one can also think of other kinds of quota.

The third dimension, the inclusiveness of the electoral law, includes three sub-dimensions. First, it includes any expansion of the electorate by law. Although Lijphart did not consider these expansions, I regard them as major reforms if they enlarge the electorate by 20 per cent or more at the time of introduction. The enfranchisement of the working class and of women clearly fall in this category. If the change is less than 20 per cent but higher than 1 (for instance by lowering the voting age or enfranchising foreigners or citizens living abroad) it is a minor reform. A second sub-dimension concerns the voter registration requirements, which significantly influence the actual inclusiveness of the electoral legislation. I propose a subdivision between the costs attached to registration (free or not) and the role of the individual in the registration process (does the individual have to take the initiative or does the government automatically register voters). Any categorical change in voter registration is a minor electoral reform (e.g. from cost-free to non-cost-free), while any change that is not categorical is technical (e.g. lowering the burden of the registration by the individual, but still requiring him or her to take the initiative). A third and last sub-dimension of inclusiveness relates to whether or not voting is compulsory. The introduction (or wholesale repeal) of compulsory voting at the national level is a major reform given the number of (non)voters it affects, while changes in the legislation, such as in the sanctions, are minor or technical.

With regard to the fourth dimension, the election level, two different types of level matter. First, elections can include multiple layers (e.g. the (sub-)local, provincial or national layer) and second, public figures can be elected, such as a president, prime minister, mayors, judges etc. I follow Katz (2005:58) in labelling the introduction of the direct election of (national)
heads of state a major reform. Equally the introduction of the direct election of a new layer or type of public figure not at the national level is a minor electoral reform. Where this newly-introduced election only affects less than 1 per cent of the total population of a country, it is a technical electoral reform.

The fifth dimension, electoral procedures, includes all legislation on how and when elections are organized. As electoral procedures have no direct relation with the electoral system, or with the parties or candidates they are considered as either minor or technical. Many changes in electoral procedures cannot be measured quantitatively or, when it is possible, proper empirical analyses are lacking. Furthermore, there is no detailed empirical classifications of the electoral procedures. Currently I therefore opt to regard changes in electoral procedures as technical reforms. However, there is some data on types of electoral management body (EMB) (Massicotte, Blais and Yoshinaka, 2004). Such an EMB can have a wide variety of competences, such as for instance monitoring elections or supervising redistricting, all of which can be highly important. As Massicotte, Blais and Yoshinaka (2004:10) note, ‘[i]f the electoral machinery did not matter, there would be no need to send international election observers into developing democracies.’ The authors distinguish between at least two types of EMB (2004:83): either it is independent, or a government minister is in charge. Clearly a mixture is also possible. Any change from one of these three categories to another can be labeled a minor reform. A change within the categories can be termed a technical reform. Table A1.1 summarizes the five dimensions of electoral reform.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Minor</th>
<th>Technical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Proportionality</td>
<td>• Change in category of electoral formula</td>
<td>• Change within category of electoral formula</td>
<td>• Average district magnitude, effective threshold: X &lt; 1% change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Average district magnitude, effective threshold: X &gt; 20% change</td>
<td>• Redistricting: affecting X &gt; 1% of inhabitants</td>
<td>• Redistricting: affecting X &lt; 1% of inhabitants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Election cycle: X &gt; 1%</td>
<td>• Election cycle: X &lt; 1%</td>
<td>• Election cycle: X &lt; 1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ballot structure</td>
<td>• Ballot choice:</td>
<td>• Ballot choice:</td>
<td>• Ballot choice:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Type of ballot structure changes</td>
<td>* Number of votes : X &gt; 20% change</td>
<td>* Number of votes : X &lt; 20% change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Candidate choice</td>
<td>* Impact of votes: X &gt; 20% change</td>
<td>* Impact of votes: X &lt; 20% change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Introduction/repeal of quotas X &gt; 20% of the candidates</td>
<td>• Candidate choice</td>
<td>• Candidate choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Compulsory voting: yes or no</td>
<td>* Change in quota: X &gt; 20%</td>
<td>* Change in quota: X &lt; 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>* Introduction quota 1% &lt; X &lt; 20%</td>
<td>* Introduction quota X &lt; 1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Inclusiveness</td>
<td>• Expansion of the electorate X &gt; 20%</td>
<td>• Expansion of the electorate: 1% &lt; X &lt; 20% change</td>
<td>• Expansion of the electorate: X &lt; 1% change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Compulsory voting: yes or no</td>
<td>• Registration:</td>
<td>• Registration:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>* Cost: free or not</td>
<td>* Cost: lowering cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>* Individual or state</td>
<td>* Role individual: lowering burden for individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Compulsory voting: change in actual enforcement: yes or no</td>
<td>• Compulsory voting: other changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Election levels</td>
<td>• Introduction direct election president/prime minister</td>
<td>• Introduction direct election non-national public figures for X &gt; 1% of the electorate</td>
<td>• Introduction direct election non-national public figures for X &lt; 1% of the electorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Introduction new layer for X &gt; 1% of the electorate</td>
<td>• Introduction new layer for X &lt; 1% of the electorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Electoral procedures</td>
<td>• Change between EMB category</td>
<td>• All other changes in how and when elections are organized (?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: I added a ‘(?)’ to elements that cannot be established based on the existing literature.
APPENDIX 2. OPERATIONALIZATION DIRECT DEMOCRATIC REFORM.

In this appendix I present the precise operationalization of direct democratic reform based on the six dimensions introduced in Chapter 3. Each dimension is discussed in more detail, followed by a summary presented in Table A.2.

The first dimension, the introduction of referendums, is fairly straightforward. Any introduction of referendum legislation allowing national referendums can be considered a major reform. The introduction of referendum provisions at the non-national level (e.g. local referendums) can be considered a minor reform. Theoretically it is possible that the referendum legislation only applies to a subgroup of the population (e.g. cities with more than 50.000 inhabitants). This is likely to be extremely rare in practice. However, as it is my explicit aim to be able to incorporate as many practical reforms as possible, I include this theoretical possibility into the conceptual framework. To do so, I use Lijphart’s 20% criterion. If the introduction of referendum legislation applies to more than 20% of the population it is a major reform if the legislation deals with national referendums, and minor if it deals with non-national referendums. The introduction of national referendum legislation that only applies to less than 20% of the population (but more than 1% of the population) can be considered a minor direct democratic reform. The introduction of national referendum legislation that applies to less than 1% of the population, or the introduction of local referendum legislation that applies to less than 20% of the population can be considered as technical direct democratic reforms.

The second dimension consists of the initiation requirements. Referendums can be initiated by political elites (mostly the government), citizens or they can be mandatory (e.g. when it is required by the constitution) (cf. Smith, 1976:6; see also Butler and Ranney, 1994; Gallagher and Ulieri, 1996; Scarrow, 2003; Qvortrup, 2005). Four types of referendums can be thought of: government-sponsored referendums (in which case only a majority of the MPs can call for a referendum), minority-sponsored referendums (whereby a minority of the MPs can call for a referendum), citizen-initiated referendums (whereby citizens are allowed to call for a referendum) and finally mandatory referendums (whereby holding a referendum is obliged by the law). In practice, especially government-sponsored referendums and citizen-initiated referendums are subject to reform (Cf. Scarrow, 2003:48). Any change in the national-level legislation from one category to another can be considered a major direct democratic reform. Any change at the non-national-level can be considered a minor reform. Additionally, within the first three categories changes can occur in the amount of MPs or signatures required to allow for a referendum to be called. Again I use the 20% criterion here. Regardng national-level legislation this means that changes of 20% or more are considered minor reforms. All other changes within the categories are considered to be technical reforms.

For the third dimension, the subject requirements, I use the ‘typology of the subject matter of referendums’ by LeDuc (2003:33). LeDuc distinguishes between four categories of subjects that can be put to a referendum, namely constitutional issues, treaties and international agreements, sovereignty issues (e.g. municipal mergers) and public policy. The four categories are additive: a direct democratic reform can add the possibility to hold a referendum on e.g. constitutional matters to the already existing legislation. The first two
categories are necessarily confined to the national-level, but the last two can also be subject to local referendums. I consider each addition of a new category to existing national referendum legislation to be a major reform. Similar additions to referendum legislation at the local level is considered to be a minor direct democratic reform. Surely additions can be made within categories. For instance, a legislator may add a specific policy domain (e.g. environmental policy) to the list of public policy subjects that can already be put to a referendum. Such additions are always technical when they are added to non-national level legislation. It is however, very difficult to distinguish when such additions to national level legislation should be considered minor direct democratic reforms and when they are merely technical ones. It is possible to use the 20%-criterion based on the percentage of the total budget that the addition represents, but this strategy only works for the public policy category. Furthermore, sometimes ‘important’ policy domains only have a small budget. Hence, I suggest that the categorization of additions as minor or merely technical is best left at the discretion of the individual researcher.

The fourth dimension is the majority requirement dimension. Most referendum legislation explicitly mentions from what moment on a referendum outcome is valid and what is considered to be a ‘majority’. Qvortrup (2005:164-174) lists five types of majority requirements: qualified majority requirements (a specified percentage of the voters has to vote ‘yes’), eligible majority requirements (a specified percentage of the eligible voters has to vote ‘yes’), geographical requirements (a majority of the voters as well as a majority of the states/regions/provinces have to vote ‘yes’), turnout requirements (the turnout has to pass a certain threshold) and ethnic majority requirements (a majority of the voters as well as a majority of voters belonging to certain ethnic minorities have to vote ‘yes’). The latter three requirements can be combined with the former two requirements. I propose that any shift from one category to another (e.g. from qualified majority to eligible majority requirements) or addition/removal of geographical, turnout or ethnic majority requirements to existing qualified or eligible majority requirements can be considered a major direct democratic reform when the reform deals with national-level legislation. When this reform concerns non-national level legislation it is a minor direct democratic reform. Changes that remain within one category (e.g. the increase of the turnout requirement from a 25% to 40% turnout) are minor direct democratic reforms when they are a lowering or increase of 20% or more and apply to national level legislation. All other reforms are considered technical reforms. When a referendum result ‘has a majority’, it is important to establish what the government has to do with the result. Generally, two options are available: either a government is obliged to follow the result of the referendum (a binding referendum) or it is not (a non-binding referendum). Any reform from one category to the other can be labeled a major direct

472 For the sake of simplicity I only use the word ‘addition’. However, one can theoretically conceive of instances where topics are actually removed from the list of subjects that can be put to a referendum. Hence, the word addition should be interpreted as addition or removal.

473 This question seems to have a simple answer: 50% of the people + 1. However, in practice this is rarely if ever the case (cf. Lijphart, 1999:231). Even in straightforward ‘50% of the people + 1’ legislation, the definition of ‘the people’ is crucial: is it the electorate? The voters that voted in the referendum? The whole population? Qvortrup (2005:164) presents a striking example of this. In 1802 the Swiss people as a whole voted on the text of the Second Helvetic Constitution. 92,500 voters rejected it and merely 72,500 approved. Nevertheless, the constitution was ratified, as announced earlier, the 167,000 abstentions were considered to be yes-votes.
democratic reform when it deals with national level referendums or minor when it deals with non-national ones.

The fifth dimension concerns the inclusiveness of the referendum process. Sometimes the people who can vote in a referendum are similar to the ones who can vote in elections. However, as will become clear in the empirical section of this study, political elites quite often allow a wider range of voters to vote in referendums than in elections. Therefore, I explicitly include the inclusiveness dimension here as well. Similar to the inclusiveness dimension of electoral reform, I consider the expansion of the electorate, voter registration requirements, and whether or not voting is compulsory. The differentiation between major, minor and technical reforms is also similar to that of electoral reform (cf. supra).

The practical organization of referendums (referendum procedures) constitutes a sixth and final dimension of direct democratic reform. As with electoral procedures little has been written on this topic. In a unique book, Dangerous Democracy, Sabato, Ernst and Larson (2003) consider the impact of various elements of the practical organization of referendums. However, their assessment is partial and mostly focuses on the quality of such elements as voter handbooks or the number of referendum questions that appear on one ballot (Sabato, Ernst and Larson, 2003:188-189). Though neither of the two is insignificant, calling changes in legislation on referendum ballots or voter handbooks minor or major reforms, is taking it too far. However, there is one element of the referendum procedures that can be the subject of minor direct democratic reforms, namely the foundation of abolition of independent referendum bodies (cf. Van Praag, 2009). Such independent referendum bodies are similar to electoral management bodies and play an important role in the practical referendum process. Table A2.1 summarizes the six dimensions of direct democratic reform.
Table A2.1: Operationalization of direct democratic reform

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Minor</th>
<th>Technical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction of referendums</td>
<td>• Introduction at the national level (applies to X &gt; 20% of population)</td>
<td>• Introduction at the national level (applies to 1% &lt; X &lt; 20% of population)</td>
<td>• Introduction at the national level (applies to X &lt; 1% of population)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Introduction at the national level (applies to X &gt; 20% of population)</td>
<td>• Introduction at other than national level (applies to X &gt; 20% of population)</td>
<td>• Introduction at other than national level (applies to X &lt; 20% of population)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Initiation requirements</td>
<td>• Shift from one type of referendum to another (national)</td>
<td>• Shift from one type of referendum to another (non-national)</td>
<td>• Within a category: changes of X &lt; 20% (national)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Addition of a new type of referendum to existing legislation (national)</td>
<td>• Addition of a new type of referendum to existing legislation (non-national)</td>
<td>• Within a category: all changes at the non-national level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Subject requirements</td>
<td>• Addition or removal of category of subjects (national)</td>
<td>• Addition or removal of category of subjects (non-national)</td>
<td>• Changes within a category of subjects (non-national)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Changes within a category (1% &lt; X &lt; 20% at national level) (?))</td>
<td>• Changes within a category (X &lt; 1% at national level) (?))</td>
<td>• Changes within a category (X &lt; 1% at national level) (?))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Majority requirements</td>
<td>• Shift from one type of majority requirement to another (national)</td>
<td>• Shift from one type of majority requirement to another (non-national)</td>
<td>• Within a category: changes of X &lt; 20% (national)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Addition of a new type of majority requirement to existing requirements (national)</td>
<td>• Addition of a new type of majority requirement to existing requirements (non-national)</td>
<td>• Within a category: all changes at the non-national level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Shift from non-binding to binding (or the other way around) (national)</td>
<td>• Shift from non-binding to binding (or the other way around) (non-national)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Inclusiveness</td>
<td>• Expansion of the referendum electorate X&gt;20%</td>
<td>• Expansion of referendum electorate: 1% &lt; X &lt; 20% change</td>
<td>• Expansion of referendum electorate: X &lt; 1% change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Compulsory voting: yes or no</td>
<td>• Registration:</td>
<td>• Registration:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Cost: free or not</td>
<td>* Cost: lowering cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Individual or state</td>
<td>* Role individual: lowering burden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Compulsory voting enforced: yes or no</td>
<td>• Compulsory voting: other changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Referendum procedures</td>
<td>• Introduction of abolition of independent referendum body</td>
<td>• All other changes in how and when referendums are organized (?))</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: I added a '(?)' to elements that cannot be established based on the existing literature.
Appendix 3. Operationalization of cartel status

As discussed earlier, cartel status reflects whether or not and to what extent the government is composed of parties that are in the existing cartel. Though the concept is derived from Katz and Mair (1995, 2009); they themselves do not offer a clear operationalization of the concept. They merely present some fairly general guidelines. Based on these guidelines and on reasoning about its practical translations, in this section I offer a new index, which can serve as an operationalization of the degree of cartelization. I will start with the qualitative interpretation of a situation where a government is not fully composed of cartel parties. Three situations can occur: a wholesale cartel breakdown where none of the cartel parties are in government; a partial cartel breakdown, where some cartel parties are still in government and finally a cartel break-in, where a traditionally excluded party joins government as a junior partner. In consensus democracies where coalition governments are the rule, a complete cartel breakdown is very unlikely. Mostly, one or more parties are replaced by one or more other parties, while some remnants of the old cartel stay in place. The index should thus be able to reflect these three situations of cartel breakdown.

**The cartel and traditionally excluded parties.** Before one can build such a cartel status index, it is important to discuss the nature of cartel parties and traditionally excluded parties. Regarding the former, the most quintessential clarification is that the parties that form a cartel are not the same as the ones included in government. If there is a frequent turnover, the party cartel includes parties that are not part of government all the time, yet sufficiently so some of the time (cf. Katz and Mair, 2009: 757). A cartel party is thus a party that is or recently has been in the government. Regarding the concept of ‘traditionally excluded party’ it is important to note that when defined in a strict sense, one could advance that only parties that have never entered a government are traditionally excluded parties. However, in that case only very few parties would comply with this definition: new parties in government are often an exception. Only in their first government participation these parties would be labelled ‘traditionally excluded’. More importantly, a party that for instance once joined a government in the 1960s, but afterwards never re-entered the government can hardly be considered ‘an included party’. A more pragmatic index should therefore be built on a definition that allows for different degrees of exclusion. One can thus describe traditionally excluded parties as parties that have not been in government for a significant amount of time or have not been in government altogether. The longer the party is out of office, the more excluded it is. When translating this to the index, I set the minimum level of exclusion at three consecutive government periods. While establishing a threshold is always somewhat arbitrary, this choice can be legitimated by the argument that three consecutive government periods is longer than the common practice of ‘alternance in office’, whereby ‘the opposition’ replaces ‘the government’ after one or two government periods. Not participating in a government for a third consecutive time, points in the direction of exclusion. However, the number of ‘government periods spent in opposition’-criterion yields the problem of consecutive short government periods. Belgium, for instance, had ten governments in the 1978-1988 era. A threshold of three governments in this case would be fairly meaningless. Therefore, I translate the three government periods in its equivalent in years. Three complete consecutive government periods lasts 12 years. In practice, however, hardly any government finishes the whole period of office. It is probably better to count three years and eight months
for each government period. Therefore, a threshold of eleven years resembles the reality of three ‘full’ periods out of office more closely.

**Degree of exclusion: principles of the cartel breakdown weight.** To incorporate the degree of exclusion into the cartel breakdown index, I assign weights to the parties according to how long they were out of office. In assigning weights, one has (at least) three possibilities: a linear, a quadratic and an S-curve approach. One could adopt a *linear approach*: each extra term in the opposition equals a fixed increase in the weight (e.g. +0.1). However, not all terms in opposition are qualitatively equal: the difference between spending one or two terms in the opposition is not equal to the difference between spending two or three terms in the opposition. In addition the latter is not equal to spending 16 or 17 terms in the opposition. The linear approach would thus not translate the cartel reality adequately. As an alternative one could use a *quadratic approach*. However, this would mean the largest qualitative ‘jump’ would occur between zero and one term in the opposition. Although the largest qualitative jump is likely to occur somewhere in the beginning rather than say after 16 terms, it is unlikely that it occurs in the first term in opposition. It is more likely to occur after the second term in opposition. The third approach is thus to use an *S-curvilinear transformation*. In practice I assign the weight zero when a party only spent one or two terms in opposition. When a party spends three terms in opposition, it receives a weight 0.6, when it spends four or five terms in opposition, I give it a weight 0.75 and 0.875 respectively. Finally, when a party spends six or more years in opposition or when it has never before joined a government, the party receives a weight 1.

**Degree of impact.** A last building block regards the degree of impact a traditionally excluded party has in a new government. This determines whether I speak of a wholesale cartel breakdown, a partial breakdown or merely a cartel break-in. To measure the relative power of individual parties in a government coalition, I use a simple points model, whereby points are attributed to each type of mandate (cf. Dumont and De Winter, 1999; Reuchamps, 2007). The points are attributed in the following way:

- Prime Minister: 3 points
- Vice Prime Minister: 2 points
- Minister: 1 point
- State Secretary: 0.5 points

The sum of each party’s mandates, multiplied by the points attached to each mandate, is labelled the ‘power score’. I then multiply the power score for each party (which refers to the power a party has in the coalition) by the cartel breakdown weight (which refers to the parties’ degree of previous exclusion from the cartel), afterwards divide this number by the parties’ power score and add all these individual party scores.

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474 The Austrian Gusenbauer government extended the Austrian election cycle from four to five years in 2007. Since our Austrian time frame only lasts until 2007, I did not have to adapt the index calculation. A solution would have been to simply use four years and eight months to calculate the degree of exclusion.

475 The points differ from the original points model in the fact that ministers are scored 1 (as opposed to being regarded equal to vice-prime ministers), while state secretaries only score a 0.5 (as opposed to a 1 in the original model). This differentiation is done to take the differences in the weight of the different departments into account. Vice-prime ministers typically occupy the heavier departments (for a discussion of the different scoring systems, see: Reuchamps, 2007).
This results in a standardized cartel status index. One can summarize the above in the following mathematical formula:

\[ \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{n} (b_i M_i)}{M_i}, \text{ whereby } M_i = \sum_{j=1}^{n} (w_j m_{ij}) \]

with:
- \( M_i \) = the total number of mandates of a party, each mandate weighed for its impact
- \( b_i \) = the cartel breakdown weight
- \( m_{ij} \) = each individual ministerial or state secretary mandate a party has
- \( i \) = party; \( j \) = mandate
- \( w_j \) = the weighing factor for each type of mandate

**Interpretation of the index.** The index can vary from 0 to 1. However, in practice 1 is a very rare score in established consensus democracies. After all, this would mean all the parties in the government have been excluded from government for the past six or more government periods (the equivalent of 22 years in opposition) or are newly founded parties. A score of 0.5 means that half of the ministerial and state secretary mandates are occupied by a party that is in power for the first time ever or has been excluded for 22 years or more. Hence, a score higher than 0.33, can be considered a substantial breakdown in consensus democracies. A score higher than 0 but lower than 0.33 can thus be labelled a cartel break-in; while a score between 0.33 and 0.5 can be labelled a partial cartel breakdown. Scores higher than 0.5 can be labelled a wholesale cartel breakdown in consensus democracies, since the old cartel then lost its majority in the government.
**Appendix 4. Operationalization and Measurement of Party Ideology**

**General Principles**

Four sources can be used to gather data on party ideology, namely party platforms, expert assessments, interviews with party members and party documents.\(^{476}\) Given the focus of this study, namely a long-term analysis of (changes in) party ideology, party manifestoes seem best-suited, as analysing them is manageable but also results in sufficient data points, in this case one for each party for each government period (cf. Chapter 3). I gathered data on all parties that won at least 5% of the seats in two consecutive elections. Once a party was selected, all party manifestoes were analysed (even if the party received less than 5% of the seats in the election that followed).

**Coding and Application**

I carried out a hand-coding of the party manifestoes. The party manifestoes were examined regarding each of the core elements of populism and postmaterialism (cf. Table A4.1). I applied document-coding rather than line-coding. In practice this means I did not code all sentences in the document, only the relevant ones, i.e. the sentences that referred to the elements included in Table A4.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Postmaterialism *</th>
<th>Populism **</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Pluralism.</td>
<td>1. Anti-pluralism: the citizenry is a homogenous group, sometimes an exclusionist view is added</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Increasing individual liberties (a focus on the quality of life)</td>
<td>2. Anti-elitism: the citizens himself knows what is best for him/her, and needs not to be educated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Economy is not the primary concern</td>
<td>3. Anti-establishment: political parties, and by extension the whole establishment, is/are corrupt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Anti-law and order (e.g. prevention versus repression)</td>
<td>4. Opposition to intermediary structures: intermediary structures artificially subdivide the populous</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Source: Mudde, 2004; 2007

If a statement was found on an element, the party received a 1 (or -1, depending on the direction of the statement). If the element was prominent - when it was explicitly stated as a priority to the party – it scored 2 points for that element - or -2 depending on the direction of the statement (see figure 4.1). When elements were found that pointed both in the direction of populism/postmaterialism and its opposite, a score of 0 was attributed. Afterwards the scores on the four elements were added up.

**Interpretation of the Numbers.**

Given that all elements are equally important, a populist or postmaterialist party must satisfy the minimum requirement of at least scoring 1 on each of the four elements. This procedure also ensures that no party can be both postmaterialist and populist. When a party had a score higher than or equal to four and scored higher or equal to 1 on each element, it is labelled populist or postmaterialist respectively. Parties with a score of 4 were labelled moderately.

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\(^{476}\) For a discussion of the pro’s and con’s of the four sources of party ideology, see Mudde, 2000.
populist/postmaterialist. A score of 5 to 8 refers to a strongly populist or postmaterialist party.

Figure 4.1 Scoring scale for ideology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Salient non P or PM feature*</th>
<th>Non P or PM feature</th>
<th>No explicit statements</th>
<th>P or PM feature</th>
<th>Salient P or PM feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* P: 'populist'; PM: 'postmaterialist'

The scores were used in the cross-case analysis in which each government period received a score of 0, 0.75 or 1 depending on whether or not at least one (moderately) populist or postmaterialist party was included in the government (cf. Chapter 4). The data was also used as background information for the within-case analyses (Chapter 5, 6 and 7).

OVERVIEW OF THE POPULIST AND POSTMATERIALIST PARTIES

In total I found that seven parties were populist and five were postmaterialist (cf. Tables A4.2 and A4.3). With the exception of one party, Open VLD, all these parties are labelled as populist or postmaterialist respectively in most research (cf. Inglehart, 1977; Lijphart, 1999; Mudde, 2007). It is intriguing to note that the Open VLD has never been recognized as such. Therefore, I will now discuss the party in more detail.

In the early 1990s, the Open VLD was heavily influenced by its party leader Guy Verhofstadt. When Verhofstadt wrote his first Citizens’ Manifesto in 1991, this also marked a turn in the ideology (or at least discourse) of the party. The election manifesto published in 1991 was heavily influenced by the manifesto.

The election manifesto includes sentences such as “[the established parties] caused the country to collapse because of inexpert bungling and corruption to an extent that has never been witnessed before’ (PVV, 1991:1). This sentence is a clear example of anti-establishment sentiments. Afterwards the manifesto claims ‘[the Open VLD] takes the citizens seriously and does not leave them out in the cold’ (PVV, 1991:2). Anti-elitist sentiments are repeated throughout the manifesto: the citizen need not be educated, (s)he knows what is best for her/himself (cf. PVV, 1991:5, 30, 34, 35). The party was also explicitly anti-pluralist in the sense that it believes that the citizenry is a homogenous group. It is thus no surprise that it denounces politics where ‘[p]olitics is no longer a matter of citizens but of special interests’ (PVV, 1991:33). It adds that ‘the number of intermediary structures that has been set up in between the citizen and the state needs to be

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477 The most likely explanation is that the Open VLD never used the word ‘people’, but spoke of the ‘citizen’ (which they did considered interchangeable and added up to a non-pluralist homogenous group). However, if one looks at the definition of populism used here, it is clear that the terminology is not decisive: using the word ‘people’ is not a criterion to be labeled a populist party.

478 The election manifesto was less explicitly anti-establishment than Verhofstadt’s Citizens’ Manifesto (1991, Chapter 1). Regarding anti-establishment I gave the manifesto a 1.

479 As is also witnessed by the fact that the manifesto always speaks of ‘the citizen’, not of distinguished groups of citizens (e.g. PVV, 1991: 33-37).
reduced and (...) pillarization needs to be tackled' (PVV, 1991:14). The 1991 manifesto thus exhibits all four populist features.

In 1992 and 1994, Verhofstadt wrote an even more radical second and third Citizens' Manifesto, which inspired the 1995 election manifesto. Not surprisingly the 1995 manifesto is similar to the 1991 one as regards its populist discourse. However, after the 1995 electoral defeat, Verhofstadt resigned and was replaced by Herman De Croo. Under his leadership the Open VLD moved away from its more extreme populist positions (cf. Platel, 1996, Deweerdt, 1997). In June 1997, Verhofstadt became party chairman once again, however, he moderated his positions. The 1999 election manifesto still included the populist features, but none of them was prominent in the manifesto (VLD, 1999:72-75). During the Verhofstadt I government the populist discourse became ever less important. The 2003 manifesto can no longer be labeled populist, as especially the anti-establishment element was entirely absent (cf. VLD, 2003).

Table A4.2. Populist parties included in this study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Degree of populism</th>
<th>Time period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>AUSTRIA</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• FPÖ</td>
<td>Strongly populist</td>
<td>1986 onwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• BZÖ</td>
<td>Strongly populist</td>
<td>2005 onwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BELGIUM</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Vlaams Belang</td>
<td>Strongly populist</td>
<td>From 1991 onwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Open VLD</td>
<td>Strongly populist</td>
<td>From 1991 to 1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moderately populist</td>
<td>From 1999 to 2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE NETHERLANDS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• SP</td>
<td>Strongly populist</td>
<td>1989-2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• LPF</td>
<td>Moderately populist</td>
<td>2002-2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PVV</td>
<td>Strongly populist</td>
<td>From 2006 onwards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Information refers only to the examined time periods. As a result, the starting point varies by country.

\(^{480}\) The main difference is that the ‘citizen’ is now written as the ‘Citizen’ (cf. VLD, 1995).
Table A4.3: Postmaterialist parties included in this study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Type of postmaterialist party</th>
<th>Time period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Austria</strong></td>
<td>Die Grünen</td>
<td>Strongly postmaterialist 1986 onwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Belgium</strong></td>
<td>ECOLO</td>
<td>Strongly postmaterialist From 1987 onwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GROEN!</td>
<td>Strongly postmaterialist From 1987 onwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Netherlands</strong></td>
<td>D66</td>
<td>Strongly postmaterialist From 1989 onwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GroenLinks</td>
<td>Strongly postmaterialist From 1989 onwards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Information refers only to the examined time periods. As a result, the starting point varies by country.*
APPENDIX 5. PRIMARY SOURCES USED IN THE COUNTRY CHAPTERS

1) AUSTRIA

1. Official documents
1.1 Coalition agreements

1.2 Parliamentary minutes, bills and laws
26571-26612.
1.3 PARTY DOCUMENTS

FPÖ

Die Grünen

ÖVP
ÖVP. 1986. Österreich zuerst. Das Mock-Programm für eine Wende zum Besseren. 9p.

SPÖ

The party manifestoes were collected through the parties themselves. Especially regarding the FPÖ this was a difficult endeavor as sometimes there was no electoral manifesto. In those cases the party programme is used. Additionally the platforms or programs that existed were hard to find. I would like to thank Kurt Luther (Keele University), Franz Fallend (University of Salzburg), Jakob Michel (FPÖ) and Martin Graf (FPÖ) for their help in finding the documents listed above. Regarding the documents of the ÖVP, SPÖ and Die Grünen I would like to thank Andreas Lederer (ÖVP), Lisa Wewerka (University of Graz) and Michaela Sburny (Die Grünen) respectively.

Data before 1994 are missing. I used Luther (2006) and Heinisch (2008) to fill this gap. Based on these sources I consider the FPÖ to be strongly populist from 1986 onwards, which is also in line with existing research on populism (see most notably Mudde, 2007:305).

Data for 1994 and 1995 are missing. I used Dachs (2006) to address this shortcoming. Based on this source, I consider Die Grünen to be strongly postmaterialist.
2. Extracts from the EJPR yearbooks (in chronological order)


3. Interviews

Erhard Busek (04.08.2009) (ÖVP): chairman of the ÖVP in 1991 and served as Vice-Chancellor of Austria between 1991 and 1995. He was also Minister for Science and Research from April 1989 onwards. Between 1994 and May 1995, Busek was Minister for Education.

Peter Gerlich (24.2.2009): Professor of Political Science at the University of Vienna. Specialized in Austrian political parties.


Christoph Hoßinger (26.08.2009): Managing Partner and Scientific Director of the SORA institute. In charge of exit polls and other voter studies.

Andreas Lederer (06.08.2009) (ÖVP). Assistant of Fritz Kaltenegger, party leader from 2008 onwards.

Wolfgang Müller (11.02.2009): Professor in Democratic Governance at the University of Vienna. Specialized in Party Politics, Electoral systems and Austrian politics.

Klaus Poier (12.8.2010) (ÖVP): Electoral reform expert of the ÖVP. Participated in the Österreich Konvent on constitutional reform. Assistant Professor in Public Law at the University of Graz.


Peter Ulram (17.02.2009): Head of the department of political research at the private research institute Fessel GfK Austria.

Regarding the Austrian media analyses, I consulted the archives of the National Library in Vienna (for the Vranitzky and Schüssel government periods) along with the online databases of the Kronen Zeitung, Der Standard, Die Presse and Kurier, which together covered 65% of the written press market (Plasser, 2006:527). Below I list the articles used in this thesis.

Pink, Oliver. 13.4.2007. “Schlechte Noten für die Regierung” Die Presse.

2) BELGIUM

1. Official documents

1.1 COALITION AGREEMENTS


1.2 BILLS, REPORTS AND PARLIAMENTARY MINUTES

Below I list the bills and parliamentary minutes from which text was cited in the thesis. As regards the parliamentary bills, I consulted the online archives at www.dekamer.be.

Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers. 1997. 49K935/8. Wetsontwerp tot Wijziging van de Provinciewet. Wetsvoorstel om de Provincies te Democratiseren. Wetsvoorstel tot Wijziging van de Provinciewet van 30 April 1836 en van de Wet van 19 Oktober 1921 tot Regeling van de Provincieraadsverkiezingen. Wetsvoorstel tot Wijziging van de Provinciewet met het Oog op een Betere Informatie van de Provincieraadsleden. Wetsvoorstel tot Wijziging van Artikel104 van de Provinciewet teneinde de Voorzitter van de Bestendige Deputatie zijn Stemrecht te Ontnemen. Wetsvoorstel tot Wijziging...
van de Provinciewet. Wetsvoorstel tot Wijziging van de Provinciewet van 30 april 1836
teneinde de Oprichting van Verenigingen door de Provincies te Regelen. Verslag. 29p.
——. 1998. 49K1174/8. Wetsvoorstel tot Wijziging van de Artikelen 318 tot 323 van de
Nieuwe Gemeentewet betreffende de Gemeentelijke Volksraadpleging. Wetsvoorstel tot
Wijziging van de Artikelen 140-1 tot 140-6 van de Provinciewet. Verslag. 35p.
——. 2000. 50K667/4. Wetsontwerp tot Beperking van de Helft van de Devolutieve Kracht
ten Lijststemmen en tot Afschaffing van het Onderscheid tussen Kandidaat-
Titularissen en Kandidaat-Opvolgers voor de Verkiezing van de Federale Wetgevende
Kamers en de Raad van de Duitstalige Gemeenschap. Verslag. 11p.
——. 2002. 50K1806/8. Wetsvoorstel tot Wijziging van het Kieswetboek, de Wet van 4 Juli
1989 betreffende de Beperking en de Controle van de Verkiezingsuitgaven voor de
Verkiezingen van de Federale Kamers, de Financiering en de Open Boekhouding van
de Politieke Partijen, de Wet van 11 April 1994 tot Organisatie van de
Geautomatiseerde Stemming, evenals de Wet van 3 Juli 1971 tot Indeling van de Leden
van de Wetgevende Kamer in Taalgroepen en Houdende Diverse Bepalingen
Betreffende de Cultuurraden voor de Nederlandse Cultuurgemeenschap en voor de

Belgische Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers en Senaat. 2000a. 50K797/1. De Politieke
——. 2000b. 50K797/3. De Politieke Vernieuwing. (Referendum, Volksraadpleging,
Advies. 161p.
Mandaat. Tussentijds Verslag. 169p.

Belgische Senaat en Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers. 2000. 50K793/1. De Politieke
Vernieuwing. 27p.

Coveliers, Hugo, Eerdekens, Claude, Bacquelaine, Daniel, Van der Maelen, Dirk, Gerkens,
Muriel, and Jef Tavernier. 2002. 50K1806/1. Wetsvoorstel tot Wijziging van het
Kieswetboek, de Wet van 4 Juli 1989 betreffende de Beperking en de Controle van de
Verkiezingsuitgaven voor de Verkiezingen van de Federale Kamers, de Financiering en
de Open Boekhouding van de Politieke Partijen, de Wet van 11 April 1994 tot
Organisatie van de Geautomatiseerde Stemming, evenals de Wet van 3 Juli 1971 tot
Indeling van de Leden van de Wetgevende Kamer in Taalgroepen en Houdende Diverse
Bepalingen Betreffende de Cultuurraden voor de Nederlandse Cultuurgemeenschap en
voor de Franse Cultuurgemeenschap. 93p.

Grondwet. Herziening van Artikel 26 van de Grondwet. 3p.

Verherstraeten, Servais, and Pieter de Crem. 2002. 50K1806/1. Wetsvoorstel betreffende het
Wegnemen van Vermoedens van Partijpolitieke Bevoordeling bij de Wijziging van
Belangrijke Aspecten van de Verkiezing van de Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers en
de Senaat. 8p.
1.3 PARTY DOCUMENTS

CD&V

CDH

ECOLO

GROEN!

MR

*484 I would explicitly like to thank Ann-Sophie De Cloedt who provided scanned copies of the Belgian party manifestoes I was still missing. As these were scanned, sometimes the title was missing. In such instances I used the first sentence as the title.*
Open VLD

PS

Sp.a

Vlaams Belang

VU

2. Extracts from the yearbooks of *Res Publica* (in chronological order)

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3. Interviews


Filip Rogiers (22.06.2010): Journalist for the newspaper De Morgen. Author of a large number of articles on the White March and the Room F negotiations. From 2009 onwards: sp.a advisor.


I also used typescripts of interviews carried out by Pilet (2007a). Specifically, in the text I used the interviews with Jean-luc Dehaene (CD&V; 21.9.2005), Antoine Duquesne (Francophone liberals; 13.9.2005) and Charles Michel (Francophone liberals; 31.8.2005).

The interview guide can be found in Pilet, 2007a:258. The main difference between my interviews and Pilet’s interviews is Pilet’s exclusive focus on elite factors (rather than on public opinion) and the absence of questions on direct democratic reform. Nevertheless, the interviews still yielded a substantial amount of useful information as they covered the reform processes and gave insight in how the decision-making within the parties was carried out. I would explicitly like to thank Jean-Benoit Pilet for allowing me to use the interviews.

4. Media
For the Belgian media analysis I consulted the archives of Mediargus (Flemish newspapers) and Press Banking (Francophone newspapers). Below I list the articles used in this thesis.

Dobbelare, Bart, and Bart Brinckman. 27.4.2002. “Paars-Groen Bereidt Eigen Opvolging voor” *De Standaard*.
Otte, Anja, and Bart Brinckman. 3.1.2002. “Vervreemding’ Voerde Luc Willems van CD&V naar NCD” *De Standaard*.

3) THE NETHERLANDS

1. Official documents
1.1 COALITION AGREEMENTS

1.2 PARLIAMENTARY MINUTES, BILLS AND LAWS
The bills mentioned to in the Dutch chapter can be found at the online database of the Dutch Second Chamber (http://parlando.sdu.nl/). Below I list all official documents that I used in the thesis.


1.3 PARTY DOCUMENTS 

CDA


ChristenUnie


*The Dutch party documents were retrieved from the DNPP archives (http://www.rug.nl/dnpp/index).*
D66

GPV

GroenLinks

LPF

PvdA

RPF

SGP

SP

VVD
2. Extracts yearbooks of the Documentatiecentrum Nederlandse Politieke Partijen (DNPP)


3. Interviews


on democratic reform issues. Chairman of the Committee van Thijn (1992-1993) on the
election of the mayor.

4. Media
For the Dutch media analysis I consulted the archives of LexisNexis. Below I list the articles
used in this thesis.

Admiraal, Andor, and Dennis Hesseling. 6.2.1999. "De Sociaal-Liberale Vlag Moet Identiteit
D66 Benadrukkken" Het Parool.
Giebels, Robert. 27.5.1999. "Referendum Was Nooit Kroonjuweel" NRC Handelsblad.
Maken" Trouw.
Burgers Moeten er nog aan Wennen dat de Staat ze Minder Vertroetelt" De Volkskrant.
Hooghiemstra, Daniella. 3.3.1997. "Van Thijn Blijft 'een Hansje in Bessenland'" NRC
Handelsblad.
Boos" NRC Handelsblad.
NRC Handelsblad. 18.5.1999. "VVD Rekent met Val Kabinet-Kok ; Vijftal Senatoren Houdt
Verzet Vol" NRC Handelsblad.
Remarque, Philippe. 26.3.2005. "Ook gij, Boris ; Eigenlijk Kon er Dinsdagavond Niets
Misgaan in de Eerste Kamer" De Volkskrant.
Dagblad.
Soetenhorst, Bas. 9.4.1999. "Ik Vond het Vreselijk tegen te Stemmen'. 'Leeftijd Speelde Geen
Rol, Iedereen Was Moe" Het Parool.
-------. 20.5.1999. "Kiezer Zegt wel Referendum te Willen, maar Komt Lokaal vaak niet
Stemmen" Trouw.
Van Es, Gijsbert, and Kees Van der Malen. 19.5.1999. "Het Zat Vast op HansWiegel, en op
Niemand Anders ; Zestien Uur in de Eerste Kamer - Kroniek van een Aangekondigde
Crisis" NRC Handelsblad.

APPENDIX 6. INTERVIEW GUIDE

GENERAL OVERVIEW
Each interview guide included three types of questions: (1) general questions about the perception of public opinion and the media, (2) general questions about how a given party envisages the ideal role of citizens in the decision making process and (3) specific questions about individual reform debates.

THE QUESTIONS USED DURING THE INTERVIEWS
1. Public opinion and the media.
   - Do you think that the ordinary <enter nationality> is satisfied with <enter nationality> politics?
   - Has this changed in the 1986-2008 period?
   - How is this dissatisfaction (or satisfaction) tangible to politicians?
   - Let us move on to the media. Is there a “narrative of crisis of democracy” in the media?
   - Has this changed in the 1986-2008 period?
   - Are there any differences between different media?

2. Party positions
   - How would you describe the <enter number> main parties' ideologies?
   - What does the <enter party name> consider to be the ideal role of citizens in the decision-making process?
   - How does this translate into actual policy proposals?

3. Specific reforms
   The following questions are repeated for each individual reform
   - Could you describe how this reform came about?
   - Who were the main supporters of the proposal?
   - Which party supported which element in the package deal? (when applicable)
   - Why did others within the party disapprove of such a reform?
   - Was it easy to reach a compromise on the reform?
   - Was anything known about the possible effects of this law?
   - How would you estimate the media judged the (elements of) the reform?
   - How would you estimate public opinion judged the (elements of) the reform?
   - Was there a feeling amongst politicians that public opinion would care about the reforms?


Australia.


—. 2005. "It's Parties that Choose Electoral Systems (or, Duverger's Laws upside


Inglehart, Ronald. 1977. The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles among


Levine, Stephen, and Nigel Roberts. 2009. "I'd Like to Think we Have Had Some Influence: The Determinants of Electoral System Change in New Zealand." In ECPR Joint Sessions, Lisbon.


M2P. 2010. "Demonstration Database."


Schneider, Carsten Q., and Bernard Grofman. 2006. "It Might Look Like a Regression Equation... but it's not! An Intuitive Approach to the Presentation of QCA and Fs/QCA Results." In *Comparative Politics: Empirical Applications of Methodological Innovations*. Tokyo, Japan.


----- . 2010. "Veto Player Data."


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SAMENVATTING

Vanaf de jaren negentig vond een zogeheten tweede democratiseringsgolf plaats: in veel westerse democratieën werd referendumwetgeving geïntroduceerd (of gewijzigd) en werd de kieswet op significante wijze aangepast. In veel gevallen vond als het ware een democratisering van democratieën plaats. Zo werd er recent een referendum in Groot-Brittannië gehouden over een eventuele wijziging van het kiesstelsel en staat op het punt van dit schrijven (september 2011) een gelijkwaardig referendum gepland in Nieuw-Zeeland. Er worden niet alleen referenda over verregaande kieswetwijzigingen gehouden. De referendumwetgeving zelf is in tal van landen aangepast en daar waar er geen wetgeving bestond is deze in veel gevallen geïntroduceerd. In België bijvoorbeeld werd in 1999 een specifiek type lokaal referendum in de wet geïntroduceerd waardoor een gegeven aantal burgers via een petitie een referendum kan eisen over een lokaal thema. Tevens werd bepaald dat de stemmen van een referendum al geteld worden bij een opkomst van 10% in plaats van 40%.\textsuperscript{486} Deze bepaling maakte een referendum over de Antwerpse Lange Wapperbrug mogelijk en zorgde ervoor dat de stemmen ook daadwerkelijk geteld werden. Onder de oude regels had de gemeenteraad simpelweg kunnen weigeren een dergelijk referendum te organiseren en had men de stemmen niet geteld aangezien de opkomst slechts 34.75% van de Antwerpse kiezers bedroeg. Uiteindelijk was 59.24% van deze kiezers tegenstander van de brug en belandde de Vlaamse regering in een impasse die ongeveer een jaar duurde, aangezien een meerderheid van de Vlaamse politieke partijen voorstander van de brug was. Tot slot worden er ook tal van kleinere, maar niettemin significante, wijzigingen van de kieswet doorgevoerd. Een aantal voorbeelden hiervan zijn de Belgische introductie van een provinciale kiesdrempel in 2002, de verlaging van de Nederlandse voorkeursdrempel in 1997 en het verlengen van de legislatuur van de Oostenrijkse regering van vier naar vijf jaar in 2007. Ook deze hebben doorheen de tijd hun impact laten voelen, zoals onder meer duidelijk is uit het -tijdelijke- verdwijnen van de Belgische groene partij uit het Belgische parlement in 2003.


\textsuperscript{486} Er bestond namelijk al referendumwetgeving, maar deze ging er van uit dat de gemeenteraad het referendum initieerde dan wel dat de gemeenteraad groen licht gaf tot het houden van een referendum. Er konden dus al wel referenda gehouden worden, maar het zwaartepunt lag bij de gemeenteraad, niet de burger.
Een gebrek aan inzicht in hoe wijzigingen in de referendum- en kieswetgeving zich tot elkaar verhouden is een vierde en laatste lacune. Er is met name weinig kennis over waarom politici op bepaalde momenten referendumwetgeving introduceren en dit flankeren met een verlaging van de voorkeursdrempel, maar het kiesstelsel verder ongemoeid laten en vice versa.

Dit onderzoek tracht deze vier lacunes op te vullen. Ik maak daartoe een analyse van wat ik noem ‘democratische hervormingen’, een verzamelterm voor referendum- en kieswetswijzigingen. Ik kijk daarbij zowel naar significante (maar niet-fundamentele) als fundamentele hervormingen in drie consensus democratieën, namelijk Belgie, Nederland en Oostenrijk. Later zal ik ingaan op de tijdsperiode en de specifieke regeerperiodes die ik analyseer. Het interessante aan het combineren van referendum- en kieswetswijzigingen is dat men als onderzoeker geconfronteerd wordt met twee duidelijk verschillende verklaringen. Het onderzoek naar kieswetswijzigingen benadrukt vooral de rol van politici die in de eerste plaats hun eigenbelang nastreven, terwijl in het onderzoek naar wijzigingen van referendumwetgeving de nadruk eerder ligt op de rol van burgers. Volgens deze laatste verklaring zouden politici niet zozeer hun eigenbelang nastreven dan wel wijzigingen doorvoeren wanneer de legitimiteit van het politieke systeem in het gedrang is. De centrale vraag van dit onderzoek is dan ook: welk van deze twee benaderingen verklaart het best het succes of falen van democratische hervormingen? Drie andere theoretische tegenstellingen die ik onderzoek zijn de impact van eigenbelang versus principes, de positieve versus de negatieve impact van een steeds gefragmenteerder wordend partijstelsel en de positieve dan wel negatieve impact van een hoog aantal zogenaamde ‘veto players’. In hoofdstuk twee ga ik uitgebreid in op al deze tegenstellingen. In dat hoofdstuk presenteer ik tevens een analytisch kader om de studie van democratische hervormingen te structureren. Ik maak met name een onderscheid tussen landgebonden (het aantal ‘veto players’), regeringsgebonden (het aantal ‘nieuwe’ en/of populistische dan wel postmaterialistische partijen in een regering en de publieke onvrede), en hervormingsgebonden factoren (zoals de impact die een hervorming lijkt te zullen hebben).

In het derde, methodologische, hoofdstuk ga ik uitgebreid in op het onderzoekdesign. Dat design valt het best te omschrijven als een ‘embedded multiple case study design’. Dit komt er kort gezegd op neer dat ik meerdere regeerperiodes analyseer en dat ik deze beschouw verankerd in landen. Dit heeft als gevolg dat ik eerst landen selecteer en binnen deze landen regeerperiodes uitkies. Het grote probleem is in beide gevallen echter dat er geen overzicht is van het aantal democratische hervormingen. Daarom selecteer ik in de eerste plaats een set van drie landen die zoveel mogelijk op elkaar gelijken (in dit geval: consensus democratieën die al geruime tijd gedemocratiseerd zijn en min of meer vergelijkbare partijstelsels hebben). Ik kom na een uitgebreide selectieprocedure uit op Belgie, Nederland en Oostenrijk. Daarna ontwikkel ik een gedetailleerd conceptueel kader dat het mogelijk maakt om een overzicht te bieden van alle democratische hervormingen die plaatsvonden in deze drie landen. Omdat ik specifiek geïnteresseerd ben in de zogenaamde ‘second wave of democratic reform’ beperk ik me daarbij tot hervormingen die plaatsvonden in de tijdsperiode 1987-2008. Dit betekent dat ik in ieder geval één regeerperiode voor de start van deze ‘second wave’ mee in overweging neem. Op basis van deze dataset identificeer ik zeven regeerperiodes die bijzonder inzichtelijk beloven te zijn. Het gaat om regeerperiodes die divers zijn in alle opzichten. Soms faalden de hervormingsvoorstellen, soms haalden ze het wel. Soms bevestigden ze mijn initiële theoretische verwachtingen en soms niet. Soms ging het duidelijk om extreme
Tijdens de Vranitzky III regeerperiode wordt er een fundamentele kieswetswijziging doorgevoerd. Het lijkt hier dan ook te gaan om een klassieke kieswetswijziging gedreven door het eigenbelang van de betrokken politici. Dit is echter slechts een deel van het verhaal. De politici voeren daarnaast een significante kieswetswijziging door met als duidelijk doel het behagen van de media. Blijkbaar heeft men het gevoel dat het te risicovol is om enkel het eigenbelang te laten meespelen. De Schüssel I regering is interessant omdat ze alles in zich heeft om democratische hervormingen door te voeren, met name door de aanwezigheid van de FPÖ, een nieuwe partij in de regering die bovendien populistisch is. Er worden echter geen hervormingen doorgevoerd. Zoals mijn analyses aantonen, worden er wel wetsvoorstellen ingediend, maar enkel omdat de initiatiefnemers zeker weten dat de voorstellen geen enkele kans maken. De steun van de grootste oppositiepartij, de SPÖ, is immers vereist en deze partij keurt het voorstel af, met als gevolg dat ze moet verantwoorden aan de media waarom ze de burger niet meer macht wil geven. Hieruit blijkt dat democratische hervormingen soms een uitstekend onderwerp zijn om je tegenstander in een slecht daglicht te plaatsen. Tijdens de Gusenbauer regeerperiode worden tot slot hervormingen doorgevoerd zonder dat deze op theoretische gronden te verwachten is. Uit mijn onderzoek blijkt dat dit deels te wijten is aan de operationalisatie van mijn variabelen en deels aan een misrekening van de partijen. Zo maakt bijvoorbeeld de sociaal-democratische partij fouten bij het interpreteren van gegevens van de peilbureaus Fessel-GFK en SORA en gaan beide coalitiepartijen ervan uit dat zij zelf wel aan de macht zullen blijven, maar de andere coalitiepartij niet.

Ik onderzoek, zoals eerder vermeld, twee Belgische regeerperiodes, namelijk Dehaene II en Verhofstadt I. De regering Dehaene II voert een verregaande vorm van een lokaal en provinciaal referendum in waarbij burgers zelf een referendum kunnen eisen over een bepaald thema. Mijn analyses tonen aan dat de regering Dehaene II oorspronkelijk niet van plan was deze mate van verandering in de wetgeving door te voeren. Echter door de gebeurtenissen vanaf 1996, en dan vooral de Witte Mars, voelt de regering zich gedwongen om haar oorspronkelijke plannen aan te passen. De regering Verhofstadt I brengt de Belgische groene partijen voor het eerst aan de macht en staat onder leiding van de hervormingsgezinde liberaal Guy Verhofstadt. Er is dus alle reden om grootscheepse hervormingen te verwachten. Deze vinden ook plaats, maar hebben weinig te maken met de ideologische achtergrond van de partijen. Vooral een tweede hervormingspakket dat doorgevoerd wordt in 2002 is duidelijk geïnspireerd door eigenbelang.

Ook in Nederland wordt er tijdens de onderzoeksperiode volop over democratische hervormingen gedebatteerd in de Kamer. Tijdens de regeerperiode Kok II vindt onder meer een discussie plaats over een al dan niet gekozen burgemeester en een nationaal zogeheten 'correctief referendum. Tijdens de beroemde 'Nacht van Wiegel' op 18/19 mei 1999 sneuvelt de grondwetswijziging die dit mogelijk moet maken met het kleinste marginale verschil in de Eerste Kamer. Hier spelen duidelijk de persoon en overtuigingen van Hans Wiegel een rol, maar daarnaast is het eigenlijk verwonderlijk dat men slechts één stem tekort
komt. In tweede instantie voert de regering Kok II de Tijdelijke Referendumwet in, wat aantoont dat procedurele barrières met enige creativiteit vaak te omzeilen zijn. Tijdens de regering Balkenende II worden de meest substantiële hervormingsdiscussies gevoerd: er ligt namelijk een verregaande hervorming van het kiesstelsel op tafel. In eerste instantie is er een meerderheid te vinden voor het voorstel, mede omdat er op dat moment in Nederland een welhaast revolutionair klimaat heerst. Echter, naarmate deze sfeer weegt, keren de traditionele partijen weer terug naar hun oorspronkelijke conservatieve posities. Uiteindelijk sneuvelt de hervormingsagenda wederom in de Eerste Kamer, maar ook hier is het eerder opvallend dat de hervormingsagenda pas in deze Kamer sneuvelt. Beide Nederlandse debatten tonen aan dat gevestigde partijen er vaak alles aan doen om hervormingsvoorstel te verwerven of tegen te houden. Vooral als er geen publieke onvrede is, is het zeer moeilijk om hervormingen door te voeren.

In het laatste hoofdstuk van mijn onderzoek geef ik op basis van deze bevindingen een antwoord op mijn centrale vraag en kijk ik verder naar de toekomst. Het antwoord op de centrale vraag is tweeledig. Het lijkt er op dat significante en blijvende publieke onvrede (of de perceptie van onvrede) een voldoende voorwaarde zijn voor het succes van democratische hervormingsvoorstellen. Dit geldt echter niet voor fundamentele kieswetswijzigingen. Daar speelt het eigenbelang van politici een doorslaggevende rol.

Deze bevindingen integreer ik in een zogenaamd ‘onion model’. Dit eenvoudige model vertrekt van de bewering dat politici een rangschikking maken van de impact die bepaalde types hervormingen hebben. Gedwongen door publieke onvrede of door populistische en/of postmaterialistische partijen zullen politici hervormingen doorvoeren die weinig impact hebben, zoals een voorkeurstem meer gewicht geven of vrijblijvende lokale referendumwetgeving introduceren. Wanneer ze zich echter op hun eigenbelang richten, bijvoorbeeld wanneer ze na een lange periode in de oppositie weer aan de macht komen, zullen politici hervormingen doorvoeren die een grote impact hebben. Tot slot maakt dit ‘onion model’ het mogelijk een verklaring te bieden voor gemengde hervormingspakketten zoals de Vranitzky III hervormingen. Wanneer politici een hervorming willen doorvoeren die vooral hun eigenbelang dient, maar ze tegelijk vrezen dat dit de kiezer zal grieven, zullen ze symbolische hervormingen met een lage impact toevoegen aan de oorspronkelijke hervormingsvoorstellen.
CURRICULUM VITAE

Kristof Jacobs was born 10 September 1980 in Mortsel (Belgium). He received his secondary education at the Sint Gabriëlcollege in Boechout from 1992 to 1998 where he studied Latin and modern languages. From 1998 to 2002 he studied Communication Sciences and specialised in political communication. His MA thesis examined the communication policies of the European Union. From 2003 to 2004 he worked as an FWO-researcher at the University of Antwerp where he examined whether support of extremist parties is related to the quality of the local social fabric. In 2005 he briefly joined Groep C & Slangen, where he got an insight in the world of communication consultancy. In February 2006 he moved to the Radboud University of Nijmegen to work as a PhD. From 2008 onwards he combined his PhD work with a part time employment as a junior lecturer. Since 2010 he has been working as an Assistant Professor (Trainee) at the Political Science Department in Nijmegen.