POLITICAL ELITES AS EDUCATIONAL ELITES

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Abstract: Contemporary political elites are educational elites. In most western democracies, almost all incumbents in political office are highly educated. This paper documents to what extent political executives and legislatives in a number of Western European democracies are dominated by university graduates. With the use of primary and secondary data, we identify to what extent educational differences in political elites can be observed across Western European countries. Next, we want to understand why the higher educated are so dominant. We show how the connection between social milieu and the opportunities for a political career has weakened in the 20th century and how a university education became almost a *condition sine qua non* for recruitment for political office. Various *supply and demand* factors in the selection process have led to extraordinary large numbers of highly educated citizens among the political elites.

Work in progress, please do not quote without permission (draft version of a chapter of a forthcoming book on the rise of political meritocracy).

Changes in the composition of political elites provide a crucial diagnostic of the basic tides of history.

Robert Putnam (1976: 166)

1. From Aristocracy to Meritocracy

Contemporary political elites are educational elites. In most western democracies, almost all incumbents in political office are highly educated. Have a look, for example, at the Belgian federal cabinet-Di Rupo that was installed in December 2011. All thirteen new ministers had graduate diploma's *(licentiaat*). Several ministers had completed two studies, and at least three of them have a PhD degree. Eight of them worked at a university before embarking on a political career and two of them, Van de Lanotte and Magnette, were university professors when they entered the cabinet. Not only the political executive, but also the legislative branch, is dominated by the well-educated. More than 90% of the members of the 2010-Belgian federal parliament, for example, have a college (HOBU) or university degree.

This dominance of the well-educated in politics is a relatively modern phenomenon. During the 19th and a large part of the twentieth century, political elites were formed on the basis of class or property – ownership of land in agrarian societies, and capital in the industrial society. In The Netherlands, for example, members of the nobility and of the patrician class were disproportionately represented among ministers and members of Parliament far into the twentieth century (Van den Berg, 1983; Secker, 1991; Secker, 2000). Often they were better educated than the average citizen – the upper classes in general had a much better access to education – but this was not the prime source of their political power; that was based on status, land, or wealth.

In the information society, however, knowledge and information are the most important social and economic goods, and political power is increasingly concentrated not among the landed gentry, patricians or manufacturers, but among the well-educated professionals – the "symbolic analysts", "creative professionals" and all those other citizens with ample capacity to process information (Reich, 1991; Castells, 1997; Florida, 2004). Aristocracy, rule by the nobility, and plutocracy, rule by the wealthy, have given way to meritocracy, rule by the well-educated.

Aims

This paper has several aims. The major aim of this paper is stock-taking. We want to document to what extent political elites in Western European democracies are educational elites. We focus on members of parliament and cabinet members. Parliament is a good place to start, because parliamentary bodies are the 'supreme arena of partisan politics' (Aberbach et al 1981: 25). Parliaments play an important role in breeding cabinet ministers, even in those countries that do not require cabinet ministers to be in parliament during their tenure in the government. In the words of Aberbach et al (1981: 25): 'there is […] no more reliable arena from which to sample those who are likely to get to the very top of the political elite'. Executive offices consisting of prime ministers, or a president, and their ministers are to devise policy and oversee its implementations. We 'sampled' information on these politicians for five different Western-European parliamentary democracies, and we describe the educational profile of political elites in these executives and legislatives.

The stock-taking is based on various comparisons. First a cross-national approach: exploring the differences across various political entities. Do the educational levels vary from one political system to another? The second approach is a cross-arena approach. In the academic division of labor one normally studies either political parties, or cabinet ministers, or members of parliament. As a result much of the literature on political elites follows a rather compartmented approach by focusing on distinct political arenas. We try, however, to take these institutions simultaneously to examine if there are differences between executives and legislatives when it comes to education. The third approach is a longitudinal approach: Is there variation in time within and between countries?

We have selected five countries: the Netherlands, UK, Germany, Belgium, and France. We included countries that have been democratic for many decades and in which educational levels have to some extent translated into cleavage elements (Bovens and Wille forthcoming). We are aware that these countries differ with regard to important elements of the political system, namely in terms of the territorial organisation of the state (two federal countries, Belgium and Germany; a rather decentralised and regionalised country, the UK; and unitary and quite centralised states such as France, and to a lesser extent the Netherlands) and political system (majoritarian electoral system in the UK, versus more proportional representation in the others; presidential system in France, versus parliamentary in the others).

A second aim is to explore why education is important in the selection of members of the executive and legislative. Why have the higher educated become so dominant in these

European democracies? Which mechanisms produce this bias? We start with a more historical explanation. We show how the connection between social milieu and the opportunities for a political career has weakened in the 20th century and how university education became nearly an essential credential for being recruited to political office. Then we focus at the selection process to detect why education is a relevant factor in this process of merit recruitment. Various *supply and demand* factors in the selection process can explain the recruitment of an extraordinary large number of highly educated citizens in political office. Finally, we reflect on the consequences for representative democracy of the dominance of the well-educated in the executive and parliament.

Data

Our research design consisted largely of comparative case studies of the five countries. The evidence on the educational profiles of the cabinet ministers and MPs is drawn from different, primary and secondary sources which are summarized in the Appendix. Our practice throughout was to use the most recent available data that allow us to provide an indication of the educational backgrounds for legislatives and executives in the five different countries, after the most recent election and to compare these with previous periods. We partly rely on data collected by colleague researchers working on comparable projects. Our data are on some points still incomplete, provisional and subject to minor amendments.

Education levels

Education is a difficult variable, methodologically, to use in comparative and longitudinal research (cf. Bovens and Wille 2012). There is a wide variety in educational systems among Western democracies and, therefore, also in the classification of diplomas and the level of education. The international standard classification of education (ISCED) is currently the basic tool for describing and analyzing different levels of formal education in statistical research. The current version distinguishes no less than nine levels of education (UNESCO 2011). In most parts of this paper we have condensed these nine levels into three, rather crude categories: low, medium and high. Citizens with no formal qualifications at all, or who have been educated up to the primary level (did not complete primary education, primary, or first stage of basics), are considered to be *low educated*. Those with secondary education (lower secondary, upper secondary, and post-secondary non-tertiary) form the *middle educated* group. Citizens with a degree from tertiary education (first or second stage) belong to the

highly educated group. Most of the historical data on political elites are taken from secondary sources (see Appendix).

2. Stock-Taking: To what Extent are Political Elites Educational Elites?

The Netherlands: A Parliamentary U-curve and an Elitist Cabinet

In The Netherlands and, as we shall see, in many Western European countries (Gaxie & Godmer 2007: 111), the percentage of well-educated members of parliament in the past century and a half, roughly follows a u-curve. In the 19th century, when the nobility and the patrician class dominated Parliament, some 75 to 80% of the MPs in The Netherlands had a university degree (Van den Berg, 1983; Secker, 1991). As suffrage was expanded, this percentage declined substantially. In the decades after 1918, the year in which universal suffrage was introduced, the percentage of university graduates among members of Parliament (Second Chamber) averaged between 40 and 50%. It was not until the late fifties that this percentage started to rise, and since the late sixties some two-thirds of the members of Parliament have been university graduates (Secker, 2000: 292; Cotta, 2000: 514-516). From the nineties onwards, this group has been joined by another 25% who hold higher vocational (HBO) degrees and in the twenty-first century over 90% of all members of Parliament have college or graduate qualifications. The remainder mainly holds upper secondary vocational education diplomas, with one or two MPs who hold a secondary school diploma as their highest qualification. There are virtually no MPs who have only an elementary education (Van den Berg & Van den Braak, 2004: 75). For example, of the newly elected members of the 2012 Dutch Parliament, 91% have a college or graduate degree (HBO/WO) and 7% have medium (MBO/HAVO/VWO) educational qualifications. Most of the latter went to college too - but they never graduated, often because they became too involved in politics. Only two of the 150 members qualified as less educated.

Ministers in The Netherlands have always been extraordinarily well educated compared to the rest of the population, as can be observed from Table 1. Although a university education always has been important for a career as a political executive, the figures in Table 1 show that in the decades since WWII a graduate diploma has developed into a crucial credential for those who want to reach political office. At least 82% of all ministers have a graduate diploma, and between 93 and 97% belong to the well-educated.

<<Table 1 about here>>

Belgium: Increasing Discrepancies Between Electorate and Political Elite

The pattern in Belgium resembles the trends in The Netherlands. At the end of the 19th century the percentage of members of the federal Parliament with a university degree (WO) reached a peak of 74% (Verleden 2013: 16). After the socialists entered Parliament, this percentage started to decrease, and this decrease accelerated after the electoral reforms of 1919. The percentage of university graduates was at its lowest in 1958, with 40%. From the sixties onwards it started to rise again and in the 21st century the percentage of MPs with university degrees is between 75 and 80% (Verleden 2013: 16). Research by Van Droogenbroeck and Adriaenssens (2003), which covers the period 1936-2003, provides more details. According to their data, in 1936 about 45% of the MPs was university educated, 10% was medium educated, and 45% was low educated. After WWII, the percentage of the well-educated further declined, due to a rise in the percentage of medium educated. In the late sixties, the number of well-educated started to rise, and it accelerated at the end of the century. After the elections of 2003, 97% of the MPs qualified as well educated (HOBU/WO), and none of the MPs qualified as low educated (Van Droogenbroeck & Adriaenssens 2003: 52). In order to get a better view of the educational representativeness of the MPs, they controlled for the rise in educational qualifications of the electorate. The rise of the educational levels amongst the MPs has been much stronger than amongst the electorate, resulting in 'a dramatic decline in the representation of the low educated' (Van Droogenbroeck & Adriaenssens 2003:53). In 2003, 45% of the electorate in Belgium had only primary education, against 0% of the MPs, whereas only 8% of the electorate was university educated, against 80% of the MPs. This increasing discrepancy between electorate and MPs can be observed in all three party families in Belgium, the liberals, christian-democrats and social-democrats. However, before WWII this was quite different for the social-democrats, who showed virtually no discrepancy between educational levels of their electorate and their representatives.

The Belgian federal cabinet ministers have been even better qualified than the MPs. In the period 1948-1984, about 85% was university educated (Thiebault, 1991: 25-26**)**. In the most recent decade (2002-2012), starting with the Verhofstadt-cabinets, this percentage

further increased till almost 94%. More than 80 % of the 151 cabinet ministers had a master degree as their highest qualification, and another 10% had acquired a PhD.[1]

< Table 2 about here>>

The UK: More University Graduates, Less Oxbridge

In the UK, one can observe large differences in educational background between MPs of the Conservative and of the Labour party during much of the twentieth century (see figure 1). The Conservatives have always been rather well educated – for much of the past century the number of university educated varied between 50 and 70%. Labour MPs traditionally were far less well educated. Before WWII, the number of university graduates among Labour MP's was less than 20%. After WWII, their educational level has risen steadily till more than 70% in recent years. On the Conservative side, the figure has risen from an average of two thirds in the period 1945-74 to over 80% in recent years.

Figure 1 about here

With regard to the British cabinet members, we can observe three patterns on the basis of figure 2, which shows the number of university graduates in the British cabinets between 1895 and 2010. First, we again see an U-curve over time. In the late 19th century the cabinets were dominated by Conservative graduates from the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Between the twenties and the late fifties, the number of university graduates dropped substantively and varied between 30 and 50%. From the late fifties onwards, the number of university graduates has risen and ever since the nineties only one or two cabinet members do not have a university education. Secondly, as was to be expected given the figures for Members of Parliament, there are quite large differences between Conservative and Labour administrations. During most of the twentieth century, Labour cabinets on average contained less university graduates than Conservative cabinets. This ended with the Blair cabinets. Thirdly, the members of cabinets are, on average, higher educated than the backbenchers in Parliament.

<<Figure 2 about here>>

British MPs and ministers have become much better educated in the past 80 years. However, in one respect, they have become less of an educational elite. Since 1979, the main change in terms of educational background of MPs has been the rising proportion of members who graduated from non-Oxbridge universities. In 1979, 225 MPs elected from the 3 main parties had been to Oxford or Cambridge, which amount to 36% of these parties' MPs. After the 2010 election, 165 MPs elected from the 3 main parties (27%) had an Oxbridge background. A similar pattern seems to apply to the university graduates in the cabinets, as could also be observed from figure 2, but it remains to be seen whether this is a steady trend. David Cameron has re-established an academic dynasty at Number 10 that stretches back to before the start of World War II. With the exception of his immediate predecessor, Gordon Brown, every Prime Minister since 1937 who attended university was educated at Oxford. Seven in ten (69%) ministers attending the Cameron Cabinet, and half (50%) of all ministers, were educated at either Oxford or Cambridge. The proportion of Oxbridge educated Ministers attending Cabinet (69%) is higher than that of previous Cabinets under the Labour Prime Ministers, Gordon Brown (45% in 2007) and Tony Blair (16% in 1997). However, the proportion is lower than that for previous Cabinets under Conservative Prime Ministers, John Major (71% in 1992) and Margaret Thatcher (81% in 1979). (Sutton Trust 2010; 3).

France: More Graduates, Less Top Schools?

According to French constitutional theory, the 577 members of parliament are 'representatives of the nation', but in reality many of these members are unknown nation-wide. They are not visible in the national mass media and the media tend to focus on the French president (Dogan 2003). The French chambers (the National Assembly and the Senate) are considered among the weakest in Europe, since the constitution of the Fifth Republic restricted their legislative and scrutiny role (Costa et al 2012). Nevertheless, in France one can observe a similar U-curve with regard to educational levels, as in The Netherlands, Belgium, and the UK. In the second half of the nineteenth century, up to 75% of the French members of Parliament had a university degree. After the extension of suffrage, this percentage gradually declined and after WWII less than 40% was well educated (Gaxie & Godmer, 2007: 111; Best & Cotta, 2000: 497) This was largely due to the growth of the socialist and communist parties, who had many MPs with only basic or medium education. After the sixties this changed and nowadays between 80 and 90% of the members of the French National Assembly have a university degree.

<<Figure 4 about here>>

The executive is much more important and visible in France. As a result, representation has become an important issue for the executive in France. At every government reshuffle (*remaniement ministériel*), political leaders, journalists, or analysts assess the representativeness of members of government, weighing up whether groups or parts of the population defined by socio-demographical properties, ethnical criteria and/or political properties are represented in government (Behr & Michon 2012). An overwhelming majority of the members of the French government has attended university. Figures from Behr and Michon (2012: 5-6) indicate that between 1986 and 2012, more than 90% have obtained a university degree (compared to 80% between 1959 and 1984). A considerable part of the government members have attended the *Grandes Ecoles*, in particular Sciences Po and/or the ENA (*Ecole nationale d'administration*). Between 1986 and 2012, 36% of the members of government are graduates from the top schools, as against 20% between 1959 and 1984.

<Table 3 about here>

However, Behr and Michon (2012: 5-6) report a decreasing percentage of graduates from Sciences Po and/or the ENA in the last two governments of Fillon and Ayrault. According to them, the proportion of technocrats among the members of government, graduated from these top major schools is becoming smaller in recent years. This trend is likely to be related to the smaller share of higher civil servants in French government.

Germany: A Parliamentary U-curve and a Very Learned Cabinet

With regard to the German members of parliament, we see the familiar u-curve. In the 19th century, over 80% of the members of the Reichstag was university educated. This percentage gradually declined as suffrage expanded. The lowest numbers of university graduates, between 30 and 40 %, could be found in the Weimar era, when the Reichstag had large numbers of lesser educated representatives from Christian democratic, social-democratic, communist and national-socialist parties. For example, between 1920 and 1949, a majority of the SPD deputies (between 50 and 58%) and a substantial part of the Christian Democratic deputies (between 20 and 34 %) had only elementary education (Gaxie & Godmer 2007: 117-118). After WWII, the percentage of university graduates in these parties steeply increased

and the lesser educated have all but disappeared from the Bundestag. From 1949 to 1956, just over 45% of all MPs had an academic education. Since then the share of academics increased from election to election to 4 out of every 5 MPs (see Figure 5). In the last elected (2009) Bundestag, 80% of the 598 MPs have a higher education. 'The proportion of academics in parliament exceeds the share of academics in the population by about a factor of eight. For no other social characteristic are the figures for social representation compared to the population so disproportional' writes Wessels (1997: 84).

<< Figure 5 about here>>

The German government at the federal level consists of the chancellor, his or her deputy and several ministers, with an inner and a residual cabinet. The inner cabinet consists of the minister of foreign affairs, the minister of interior, and minister of economics, the minister of finance, justice and defense. The other ministers belong to the residual cabinet. Many of the positions are recruited from within the parliament which often serves as a point of entry for those higher offices. The German cabinet members have the highest educational qualifications in Western Europe. The (2008-2013) Merkel cabinet consists of 16 ministers who all have graduate diplomas, with the exception of Niebel who has a bachelor degree in Administration and Aigner, who has a professional degree in electrical engineering. No less than 10 ministers have a PhD-degree and 6 worked at a university, including the Chancellor, Angela Merkel, before embarking on a political career.

Comparison: The Parliamentary U-curve

In the five western European countries in our sample, the proportion of members of Parliament with a university education has roughly followed a 'U' curve. This is also reported by Gaxie and Godmer (2007: 111-113), as can be seen from figure 6 which in large part is based on their data. The proportion of university graduates was very high during the second half of the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the 20th century, less educated social groups entered parliaments due to the extension of suffrage and the rise of new political parties, particularly socialist and communist parties (Gaxie & Godmer, 2007: 111). During the first half of the 20th century, the proportion of deputies with university degrees decreased substantially in The Netherlands, Belgium, UK, France, and Germany.

<<Figure 6 about here>>

After WWII, the number of MPs with high educational qualifications in most countries increased again, first gradually and then sharply from the seventies onwards. Particularly the social democratic parties have seen rapid increases of the number of MPs with university degrees. A prime example is the British Labour party: 'Manual workers and trade union secretaries with low formal qualifications have been almost wholly replaced by graduates of public (i.e., private) schools and/or universities. After the general elections of 1997 and 2001, the percentage of manual workers in Labour's parliamentary party was the lowest in the party's history.' (Jun 2003: 173).

Gaxie and Godmer have also included Italy, Denmark, and Norway in their study. In these countries the percentage of university graduates follows a rather straight line. Italy has always had an elitist parliament in terms of education, whereas the Nordic countries traditionally have had far fewer members of Parliament with university degrees (Borchert & Zeiss, 2003: 93, 192, 306, 361).[2] Consequently, parliamentarians with low or medium educational levels are disappearing rapidly at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In some countries, such as Italy and The Netherlands, the proportion of elected national parliamentarians with primary degrees as their highest diplomas has always been low, and today they have disappeared almost completely. However, in most other European countries, between 30 and 40% of the parliamentarians used to belong to the least educated segment of the population. Nowadays, they are less and less numerous in France, Germany and the UK, and their numbers are declining quickly (Gaxie & Godmer, 2007: 109). The same is happening with medium educated MPs. In most Western European parliaments the proportion of MPs with university educations has currently reached levels of 80-90%. However, in countries with elitist educational traditions, such as the UK and France, we see a recent decline of the percentage of graduates from elite-universities or elite-schools.

Comparison: The Elitist Tradition of European Executives

The post-WWII European executive has always been higher educated than the legislative, as can be observed from figure 7 (Thiebault & Blondel, 1991), which provides some data on Western European cabinet ministers, from the post-war period through 1984.

<<Figure 7 about here>>

The percentage of university graduates among cabinet ministers varies between 60% in Ireland, till over 90% in Italy. This is far higher than the percentage for members of parliament in most countries, as we have seen. The Netherlands, together with Italy, Belgium, Luxemburg and France, was among the democracies with the largest percentages of university graduates in the Cabinet (Thiebault, 1991: 25-26). Elsewhere, the percentage of university graduates was 75% or less. Particularly in countries with a high proportion of ministers from socialist or social democratic parties, the less educated stood a larger chance of becoming a cabinet minister. After 1984, in most Western European countries, the number of university graduates among the ministers has increased substantially (Borchert & Zeiss, 2003: 192, 329, 360). In most governments in the countries in our sample, with an occasional exception, all ministers are (very) well educated.

3. From Ascription to Achievement: the Meritocratization of Politics

From Upper Class to Middle Class

The importance of educational credentials for the recruitment of political executive positions and members of Parliament has increased substantially in the past century. This can be seen as a mark of an emerging meritocracy. In the 19th century, higher education was accessible only to a very limited group of the population, and the level of education was just another indicator of social status (Aberbach et al., 1981; Cotta & Best, 2000: 508). While access to education was dependent on social status, the selection of a well-educated executive was tantamount to selecting ministers from the upper social strata.

<< Figure 8 about here>>

This strong link between social origins and educational attainments in The Netherlands is evident in Figure 8. The diagram shows that at first, university-educated ministers were mainly drawn from the upper classes. Of all the university-educated ministers in office in the period 1848-1888, 88% came from an upper class background, whereas 4% had a middle class background. In the period after WWII we see that differences in status between university-educated ministers disappeared: half of the ministers with an academic education originated from a middle class background; half came from a higher class background (highly educated ministers with a lower class background were, and still are, uncommon). The strong

increase in university-educated ministers in the period after 1940 is due to an increase in ministers coming from the middle class. *Achievement* became more significant for the political elite access than *ascription*.

<<Figure 9 and Figure 10 about here>>

In the UK we can observe similar trends: 'Historically, political leadership in Britain has been exercised by men of high birth and breeding. The effects of universal suffrage, organised mass political parties, increasing professionalization of political life and the decline of the landed interest have combined to erode the political influence of the aristocracy. There has been a gradual movement from prestige to meritocracy in recruitment to the political elite.' (Kavenagh & Richards 2003: 175). Figure 9 shows how since WWII, upper class ministers gradually disappeared from the cabinet – as did ministers with a lower class background. In Germany, the picture is less straightforward. Since WWII there is an increase of ministers from a working or middle class background, but the upper class maintains a presence in the federal cabinets – see figure 10.

Figure 11 helps to clarify the transformation of a political aristocracy into an educational meritocracy. Arrow (a) represents the impact of social origins on educational opportunities; arrow (b) represents the impact of educational achievement on access to elite posts. Thus, the indirect effect of social origins on ministerial recruitment is the product of (a) and (b) and decreased in the period 1888-1940. Arrow (c) represents the direct effect of social origins on the recruitment of ministers. If this effect is strong, then the recruitment for minister posts is biased towards members of upper classes, even if they have no educational attainment. For example: the percentage of ministers from the upper classes without a graduate degree in The Netherlands was 64% in the period 1848-1888 and even 77% in the period 1888-1918, but it has become 0% in the period 1967-1994.

<< Figure 11 about here>>

The pattern of ministerial recruitment changed because the increasing accessibility of higher education diversified the social composition of the pool of university graduates, thus weakening the direct effect of social origin on education (a). The greater accessibility of universities made tertiary education less socially exclusive and significantly enlarged the pool

of university-educated personnel available for political careers (Aberbach et al., 1981; Cotta & Best, 2000: 17).

Education has become a dominant political sorting mechanism in determining access to the political elite. Graduates from middle class backgrounds have as much opportunity for advancement in the political hierarchy as do upper class graduates, if not more. In the Dutch cabinets, for example, ministers are disproportionately drawn from the well-educated segment of the population; but when the professions of the fathers of the ministers are considered, the social origins of the current Dutch political executive appear to be predominantly middle class. The fathers of the Dutch Balkenende-IV ministers, for example, owned a grocery store or dress shops, two of them were cattle farmers, others were teacher, furniture maker, insurance agent, accountant, and another two were professional politicians. Similarly, among the fathers of the very well educated ministers in the Belgian Di Rupo government we find several professional politicians, a farmer, teacher, grain merchant, salesman, and a miner. Di Rupo himself, was the son of an immigrant worker, and three of his siblings were placed in an orphanage after the early death of his father.

For parliamentarians we see similar mechanisms at work. Data show a marked decline in the representation of the nobility, to a point that this group became non-existent or negligible in most European parliaments (Rush, 2007: 31). The post-war accessibility of tertiary education contributed to an *opening* of the parliamentary profession for a rapidly increasing number of graduates (Gaxie & Godmer, 2007: 125). Opportunity structures widened, especially in the second half of the twentieth century. This made it easier for certain political party members, coming from (lower) middle class sections of the population, to attain tertiary education and to become ready for a parliamentary career. As a result, a fast-growing number of would-be parliamentarians or political leaders held university degrees and were ready to compete within their political parties (whereas in previous periods their middle-class origins would have prevented them from entering either university or parliamentarian positions). At the same time, this trend also contributed to the *closing* of the political profession; an academic degree became a prerequisite for such a career (Gaxie & Godmer, 2007: 129).

Politics as a Vocation: The Professionalization of Politics

A long-term analysis of the recruitment of parliamentarians evokes a trend of political *professionalization*. MPs owe their position in Parliament in the first place to a political party. This has been the case since the beginning of party formation at the end of the 19th century. In

the period from 1900 up to WWII, characterized as a period of formation and consolidation of political parties in the democratic decision-making processes everywhere in European democracies, we witness the rise of a new type of delegate/MP: the career politician (Fiers & Secker, 2007: 141). The tasks of MPs increased and it became hardly possible to combine parliamentary activities with any other occupation. As a result, MPs in Europe became more and more paid party politicians; they received a salary comparable to the senior civil service (Fiers & Secker, 2007: 158). Parliamentarians became what Weber (1919) called *Berufspolitiker,* professionals who effectively live *for* and *off* politics.

The professionalization of politicians, in terms of recruitments paths and educational background, would not have been possible without the evolution of political parties (Fiers & Secker, 2007: 154). Starting at the beginning of the 20th century, political parties began to act as a representative of predefined interests and groups in society (Katz & Mair 1995). With the emergence and success of the *mass party,* with its motivation to appeal to large possible parts of the electorate, it was crucial for parties to have strong and influential representatives in key positions of the state system (Fiers & Secker, 2007: 154). In the period 1920-1960, the new mass political parties and interest groups provided the organizational environments and channels through which the well-educated graduates from the lower and middle classes could emerge as pivotal political figures (Cotta & Best, 2000: 516). They offered aspiring ministers a functional substitute for the prestige, skills and relationships previously derived from social status and high state office.

With the development towards *catch-all parties,* with their openness to a wider electorate, the ties to trade unions and predefined sectors in society became looser; this brought a stabilization in the recruitment of party officials. Electoral strategies became more competitive and the profile of the candidates became important. With the transformation into *cartel parties,* political parties became an integral part of the state itself, helped by the allocation of state subsidies (Katz and Mair, 1995). Politics has become more and more a profession in itself. The opportunity to prolong one's career in the party was extended. Party functionaries had a real chance to climb the ladder in politics.

This professionalization of politics also had an effect on the profile of politicians. The need for new skills, knowledge and know-how has contributed to an over-representation of public sector employees among MPs in all European parliaments, especially among left-wing parties. The proportion of former public sector employees is close to, or even greater than, 50% in the parliaments of Denmark, Finland, France, Germany and The Netherlands (Best and Cotta 2000; Cotta and Best 2007).

From Outsider Recruitment to Insider Recruitment

The shift in background and career lines of ministers and parliamentarians implied a shift in the access to political office from an *outsider recruitment system*, characterized by a high degree of lateral entry into the elite from outside careers and institutions, towards *an insider recruitment system*, which required a long apprenticeship within an institution as a prerequisite for admission to the political executive (Aberbach et al., 1981: 67). Insider recruitment systems ensure that political executives have political experience and will be more experienced and fully socialized into the norms of the political institutions. Outsider systems, on the other hand, provide the executive with fresh ideas. Insider recruitment systems maximize internal integration within the elite, whereas outside systems maximize integration of the elite and other parts of society.

Moreover, politics has become a full-time career. The professionalization of politics means less transferability of skills between politics and other careers (Kavenagh & Richards, 2003: 190). Specialization encourages political relevant *communication* and *networking* skills needed for professional politicians, but at the same time produces allegations of a narrowing of political outlook and experience.

4. The Supply and Demand of Higher Educated Political Candidates

How can the present and persisting dominance of the well-educated among political elites be explained? Political elites are subject to formal (and informal) selection processes. Before they are democratically elected, they are first selected. One approach to explaining the rise of an educational meritocracy is to consider the political recruitment process as any other job market and to look to *supply and demand* for candidates in *the political market place* (see also Norris, 1997: 209). The *supply side* of candidates is determined by the motivation and political capital of the candidates. By political capital we mean all the assets that facilitate political careers, which vary by party or political networks. The *demand* for candidates is produced by the qualities of the job and by the attitudes of "recruiters" to *get the right people on board*.[3]

The Supply Side: Educational Inflation

An obvious reason for the increasing numbers of the well-educated among political executives is the increasing supply of university graduates due to the enormous rise in level of education in the post-WWII decades. Because in most countries the number of seats in Parliament and the number of cabinet posts hardly increased since the 1960ies, the educational environment became more competitive. 'As the population becomes more and more educated, an ever increasing amount of education is required to arrive at the same relative position in the networks that, in turn, act to facilitate political engagement' (Nie, Junn & Stehlik-Barry, 1996: 131-132). This means that the relative position of the least educated has deteriorated substantially. The decline in participation of the less educated is therefore due to *educational inflation*. A secondary school diploma, which in the 1950s would have been quite an achievement, nowadays has little value in most political arenas, because there are so many university graduates to compete with. Similarly, the elitist character of an average university title has declined with its relative diffusion. This could explain the disappearance of the less educated in public office – they have simply been crowded out by the increasing number of the well-educated among their peers. As on the job market, their relative position has deteriorated; they increasingly find themselves at the end of the queue. In their research on successful and unsuccessful political candidates in the UK, Durose *et al* (2013: 260) cite a local councillor, who was an unsuccessful parliamentary candidate, reflecting on how her lack of higher education was used against her in the selection process:

> When I was trying to become a parliamentary candidate I was asked on more than one occasion what my qualifications were and they meant academic qualifications. One woman even said it was a real shame because one of the other candidates was a lawyer and another one had a PhD and although I seemed like a really nice woman I wasn't really [of] their calibre.

Apparently, the well-educated are in much higher demand on the political market. But why would this be the case in established democracies?

The Demand Side: Political Skills

Besley and Reynal-Querol (2011) find that democracies are more likely than dictatorships to select government leaders who have a graduate education.[4] Democratically elected leaders are around 20% more likely to be highly educated than leaders chosen in autocracies. Moreover, Hallerberg and Wener (2013) find that governments in new democracies have greater incentives to select technically competent leaders than their counterparts in established democracies. Apparently, different political regimes demand different

competencies of political leaders. What does the job of a political executive in an established democracy demand? Does it require specific skills or competencies?

A large part of the job of political executives in established democracies consists of *talking*: talking with other members of the Cabinet; talking with the legislature; with senior civil servants; with interest groups; or with party members. Moreover, in the last forty years, the role of the media in politics has greatly expanded in established democracies, thereby increasing the need for communication skills. Performances of political executives, whether at party conferences or ministerial visits to schools, that used to be given to a fairly small audience are currently witnessed by potential TV, radio, and Internet audiences. The opportunities to broadcast public performances have become much larger. The growing importance of the (new) media in the day-to-day life of politicians has a significant effect on the nature of the executive and legislative job and on the required relevant competencies. Public communication takes up more and more of executives' time resources (Blondel & Thiebault (1991); Kavenagh & Richards (2003);Norris & Lovenduski (1997). Ministers today, have to be much more concerned with media presentation of their policies, their departments and themselves. Against this background, it comes as no surprise that university graduates - lawyers and social scientists in particular - are dominant among the West European political executives **(**Blondel and Thiebault 1991; Dowding and Dumont 2009**)**. They have acquired a very high verbal proficiency, which is a very relevant skill if one is to be successful as a politicians (Bull (2012); Kwiatkowski, (2012)..

A university education, like the 'politics facilitating' professions and business experience, generates particular skills that can be usefully transferred into politics, and can make a valuable contribution to it, for example because of enhanced skills in verbal communication, presentation of a written argument, investigation, working autonomously and giving instructions (cf. Ranney 1965). *Mutates mutandis*, these skills also are needed to be successful as a member of Parliament (Gaxie & Godmer, 2007: 129).

The Demand side: Cadres that Clone

Another reason for a dominance of the higher educated seems to be the transformation of most political parties from mass parties into cadre or cartel parties (Koole, 1992; Katz & Mair, 1995). In earlier decades, mass parties, such as the Democrats in the US, Labour in the UK, and social-democratic and Christian-democratic parties on the European continent, used to recruit large memberships and would use those memberships to educate citizens, form policy platforms and mobilize voters (Edwards, 2005: 161). In addition, the mass parties

offered the less educated training for, and access to, political office. The modern cadre party, on the other hand, is a party of, and for, well-educated professionals. In 1999, for example, no less than 60% of the members of all Dutch political parties were well educated, and only 16% belonged to the least educated (Koole et al., 2000: 48). The well-educated were also much more active within the party, and almost two-thirds of them were members of a party committee, compared to less than half of the least educated.

The decline of mass organizations and the transformation of political parties into professional organizations have effectively closed major venues for the political education and political mobility of the least educated. As we saw, this is particularly the case for the Western European social democratic parties. Mass political parties, unions and fraternities had many active members with little formal education to whom they provided courses and trainings, as well as hands-on experience in discussing, lobbying, negotiating and running a meeting. Local activists could get 'on leadership ladders that could lead to responsibilities at district, state, and national levels' (Skocpol, 2004:10).

Co-optation mechanisms within parties are the single most important selection stage within political careers. Parties thus control access to a career in politics. Parties are 'the eye of the needle' (cf. Norris 1997, Wessels 1997) through which all recruitment takes place. In the cartel party, neither the voters nor the average rank and file members of political parties have much influence upon the composition of the list of candidates. The cadres in political parties determine which individuals can represent them in Parliament and in political offices.

Comparing the social background and political experience of political candidates with the members and voters of Dutch parties, Hillebrand (1992) concluded for the Netherlands that party members have higher levels of education than the electorate in general. Aspiring candidates high on the list are on average even more highly educated; and those elected are the best educated of all - almost all successful candidates have a university education (see figure 12). Comparable findings for the UK (Norris and Lovenduski 1997: 169) are presented in figure 13. Exploring the selection of German MPs, Wessels (1997: 88) finds similar patterns. Recruitment has become more narrow, concludes Wessels. These data confirm 'the law of increasing disproportion' at the top of the political hierarchy (Aberbach et al., 1981: 47).

<< Figure 12 and 13 about here>>

The Supply Side: Network Centrality

Nie et al. (1996: 45) argue that an important explanation for the dominance of well educated in politics is due to network centrality: 'Those with higher levels of formal education are substantially more likely to be found closer to the central nodes of politically important social networks, while those with less education are more likely to be found at the periphery.' There is a three-fold relation between education and social network centrality. A high level of educational attainment leads to high status occupations that involve a variety of managerial and supervisory responsibilities, which pull people towards the centre of social networks. Second, educational attainment leads to higher family incomes, which reinforces the centrality of university graduates in social and economic networks. Third, university graduates are much more likely to be members of voluntary organizations, which also reinforces their position in social networks that are relevant for political recruitment. University graduates are very prominent among the social elites that supply candidates for the political elites. Although Nie et al. focus on political engagement and forms of political participation such as voting, working on political campaigns and attending meetings, these explanations also appear relevant for occupying political office. In The Netherlands, ministers of the former Balkenende IV Cabinet, for instance, occupied, beyond their regular professional activities, on average 16 positions in voluntary associations and non-political organizations, which indicates an extremely high social network centrality. For the German top politicians Scheuch (2003: 121) has indicated how they accumute memberships in public bodies and associations, and how this tendency to move into a broker position between the various sectoral elites has increased further after unification.

The Supply Side: Different Pathways Into Politics

During much of the 20ieth century, local (elective) office and local parties served in most countries as training ground, assessment centre, and network for those aspiring to 'higher political office' - or more precisely: professional office (Borchert 2011b). In France, the vast majority of parliamentarians began their political careers in the local arena before being promoted to the national stage (Dogan 2003). Several positions, for instance of mayor or municipal officer, have always been compatible with holding a seat in Parliament. In Germany, the recruitment base for federal and state legislators is in local politics with both public office and party office serving as points of access. Also, in the UK these pathways have traditionally been facilitated through long-standing involvement within a political party

(or in the case of the Labour party, with a trade union) at the local level, for example as an activist, a party agent or councillor. For many - particularly older candidates and established politicians - political activism started at a young age sometimes encouraged by their parents' involvement in politics. These pathways provided less educated aspiring politicians 'on the job' training in political skills and offered them relevant work experience. This 'traditional' pathway into national politics is pictured in figure 14.

<< Figure 14 about here>>

A second career path distinguished in political recruitment, highlights the importance of paid employment in particular occupations as a pathway into the political elite. These 'politics facilitating' occupations, eg teaching, journalism, trade unions, civil service, generate particular skills that can be usefully transferred into politics, such as working autonomously, commanding authority, verbal communication, presentation of a written argument, scrutiny, and investigation. Careers in these occupations provide 'brokerage' (Norris and Lovenduski, 1997) for a political career and they too provided opportunities for less and particularly medium educated citizens to acquire relevant political skills and access to the political elites.

However, the literature on pathways into politics has highlighted the recent evolution of a third career path - the rise of the 'career politician' (King, 1981; Riddell, 1993; Cairney, 2007, Borchert 2003, 2011). Those with 'politics-facilitating' professions (from the second career path) are progressively side-lined and replaced with these 'professional politicians'. This is visible in the declining number of politicians from the teaching profession and the trade union movement.[5] In contrast, the 'professional politician' route into national politics is becoming progressively the norm.

Along this pathway, aspiring politicians first go to the university, during which they may get involved in some form of activism. This is then followed by working in a para-political occupation, for example as an aide to an MP or to a parliamentary group, as a special advisor or political assistant to a minister, or they work in party headquarters, for a think-tank or policy body, a lobby group, media organisation, or within an international political organization.[6] Specialisation in these jobs polishes political, communicating and networking skills. In France and Belgium this professional career path often runs through a *ministerial antechamber*. The number of members of the ministerial antechambers varies, but on average there are in France 300 official members (Dogan 2003: 55); in Belgium it was estimated that

there are 28 advisers for each minister (Pelgrims and Brans 2006: 16). The passage through these ministerial antechambers, *cabinets* as they are called in France and Belgium, is nowadays considered as a royal road to high public office. University graduates enter these political advisory positions, after they have finished their university education, with the clear intention of leaving them a few years later, hoping for a promotion in the state hierarchy, in a large public corporation or public institution (Dogan 2003). Figure 15 shows schematic these more professionalized pathways into politics.

<<Figure 15 about here>>

The rise of this third pathway into politics is clearly visible in the changing background of MPs. In Belgium, for example, the percentage of MPs who had previously worked for a union has gradually declined from about 10% in the 1970ies till almost zero in the past decade (Verleden 2013: 17). However, the percentage of MPs who had previously worked as an aide in parliament or in a ministerial cabinet rose steeply, from about 10% in the early 1970ies till about 35 % in 2010 (Verleden 2013: 18). Likewise, in Germany, the politicized bureaucracy, offers a great array of these professional stepping stone positions for aspiring politicians (cf. Borchert 2011*b*). And with regard to the UK, Durose *et al* (2013) report that many candidates and politicians commented how these professionalized paths helped them to either negotiate or circumvent the closed cliques and patronage of local politics as an important step on the path to standing for selection. However, this third, professional pathway is virtually inaccessible to aspiring politicians who did not enrol in college or graduate school.

5. From a Hereditary Elite to an Educational Elite and Back Again?

In the Western European democracies studied in this paper, hereditary patrician political elites have been replaced by meritocratic, educational elites in the course of the twentieth century. University-trained politicians took over the executive and legislative branches of government. The decline of social barriers as a result of emancipatory movements at the start of the 20th century (first the religious parties, later the social-democrats, and in the sixties the democratization process) opened up the ranks for political office and brought about a substantial change in the recruitment of ministers and members of Parliament. The

connection between social milieu and the opportunities for a political career weakened, and in the 20th century a university education became nearly an essential credential for being recruited to political office.

The end result is a somewhat less biased executive than before the introduction of general suffrage, but still a highly biased executive. Despite the impressive increase in educational qualifications in the past decades, the well-educated remain a minority in European advanced democracies. In 2011, according to Eurostat, 30% of the EU-27 workforce had low educational qualifications, 44% medium, and 25% was well educated. In Western Europe, the percentage of well-educated was only slightly higher. Even in these advanced democracies, citizens with primary and secondary level diplomas still account for at least two-third of the adult population. Nevertheless, they are virtually absent in the governments and parliaments. As a consequence, some voices may be much better heard in the political arena than others.

Two Faces of Political Meritocracy: Democratization and Professionalization

Two contradictory processes affect the selection of political executives: '*democratization'* and *'professionalization'* (Cotta & Best, 2000: 495). Whereas democratization refers to an extension of the social niches from which the political executives are drawn, professionalization refers to a restriction of the admission to the political arena through specific rules for access and reward. These trends are contradictory, since democratization is socially inclusive while professionalization is exclusive. Democratization resulted in an opening up of the political executive and the replacement of the old upper class elites by a university-educated middle class. Professionalization, on the other hand, meant the emergence of fully professionalized, highly educated politicians.[7]

Democratic politics has been professionalized in a slow but inexorable process. The most important result of this change was the 'academization' of the political elite. The rapid expansion of democracy and meritocracy had an effect opposite from the expectations—namely a large number of academics blocking the mobility of non-academics in the political arena. Accessing politics without an academic degree has become less and less likely. While theories of democracy seem to have made their peace with democratic elitism and the professionalization of politics, it is questionable whether less and medium educated citizens feel represented by a political field inhabited by political professionals

New Forms of Closure?

This rise of a political meritocracy may give rise to new forms of closure of the political elites. For example, Britain en France have both developed selective schools that play a large role in the stratification process, and also in the selection of political elites (Dogan 2003: 46; Gaxie & Godmer 2007: 126). Britain has developed an uncompromising highly-selective private system alongside a largely egalitarian non-selective state school system; and recent studies show a wider gap between the two systems that has increased since 1998, even though spending on schools has been increasing year on year since 1990 **(**UK Department of Education 2012**)**. It remains to be seen whether the trend towards recruitment from state schools and non-Oxbridge universities is steady. As we saw, the Cameron cabinet is dominated by ministers who have gone to elite schools and universities. Likewise, in France, there is unease about the admission to elite universities (or *grand ecoles*). Euriat and Thélot (1995) have investigated the social background of students in four of the most selective French schools and the results of their study shows that between 1950 and 1993, the proportion of students recruited in lower social classes has significantly diminished. This trend has generated public debates about improving the access to these elite universities. After WWII the student intake to the *grandes écoles* became more socially diverse, but in recent years the diversity seems to have decreased:

> The social elevator has stopped and the middle classes have tightened their stranglehold on the institutions that guarantee a passage into France's political and business elite. […] Richard Descoings, the director of Sciences: 'We used to have an aristocracy of blood. Now we have a new aristocracy of status conferred by success in getting into this school or that. In France, you crack the champagne when you get on to the admission list for one of the grandes écoles, not when you graduate.' (Source: Financial Times June 2010)

The political elite may, again, become a hereditary elite – but this time not an elite by birth but by education.

Appendix: data

We used a mix of primary and secondary sources to collect data on the education background of ministers and members of parliament in the countries The Netherlands, Belgium, the UK, France, and Germany. Information on the educational records was collected from biographies issued by the parliaments and government websites in the five countries. Additional information was used to complete the cases descriptions.

- In the *Netherlands*: the collection of the career data of ministers that were members of the cabinets in the period 1990-2012 and MPs in the period since 2004-2012 was conducted by the authors of this paper. The biographic material was collected from the website 'Parlement en Politiek' (www.parlement.com). Earlier data on the careers and background of Dutch ministers originate from Seckers' (1991) study. We used the long-term data of the Dutch MPs collected by Van den Berg (2007).
- For *Belgium*, Nic de Leu (University of Gent) has provided his data on ministerial profiles in Belgium which were coded according to the SEDEPE codebook. For the information on parliamentarians we used Van Droogenbroeck and Adriaenssens (2004) and data kindly provided by Frederik Verleden (2013).
- In the *UK:* data were retrieved from the House of Commons on www.parliament.uk and www.gov.uk. Most of the historical data were taken from Butler and Butler (2011) and from the Trust Sutton reports.
- For *France*, we have used data from Behr and Michon (2012) and Dogan (2003) for the government. The chapter on France from Best and Gaxie (2000) was the base for a first exploratory summary of the French parliament.
- For *Germany*, the information on the composition of the latest German parliaments was retrieved from www.bundestag.de and we used the information of Wessels (1997) on the composition of German parliament till 1994. Educational background information of current German ministers was collected from http://www.bundesregierung.de.

Moreover, we used international comparative data about MPs which were collected by Best & Cotta (2000) and Cotta and Best (2007). The empirical base for their research is the DATACUBE, a collection of data concerning the characteristics of national legislators in European countries. Data from the Thiebault and Blondel (1991) study on ministers were retrieved from the SEDEPE (Selection and Deselection of Political Elites) website.

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POLITICAL ELITES AS EDUCATIONAL ELITES: TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: Education Level of Cabinet Ministers in The Netherlands (%) (junior ministers excl.)

Education	1848-1888	1888-1918	1918-1940	1940-1946	1946-1967	1967-1994	1994-2007	2002-2012	Total
Graduate	58	58	69	83	84	85	82	85	72
College	15	35	31	14	12	8	13		18
Secondary	13	7	-	3	3	7	5		7
Primary	3	-	-	-	1	-	-		1
Unknown	11	-	-	-	-	-	-		2
Total (N)	100 (118)	100 (72)	100 (61)	100 (29)	100 (68)	100 (89)	100 (45)	100 (86)	100 (482)

Source: Secker (1991: 84) added with own calculations from *Parlement & Politiek* (www.parlement.com)

Table 2: Educational level Belgium cabinet ministers (junior ministers excluded) (abs.)

Education	Verhofstadt1	Verhofstadt2	Verhofstdt2b	Van Rompuy 1	Leterme 2	Leterme 1	Di Rupo1	total
Low				1	1	0		2%
Middle	1				1	1		3%
High level: *master or equivalent*	10	15	12	16	13	13	12	82%
High level *doctoral or equivalent*	2	2	3	1	1	1	4	13%
N=	14*	17	15	18	16	15	16	100%
*** information on 1 minister was missing**								N=111

Table 3: Educational background of French Ministers, 1986-2009 (%) (Source: Behr and Michon 2012)

Year		ENA	IEP	Major School	Top major school
1986	**Chirac**	32	34	46	48
1988	**Rocard**	17	20	37	42
1991	**Cresson**	22	30	46	50
1992	**Bérégovoy**	19	32	51	53
1993	**Balladur**	25	34	41	44
1995	**Juppé**	19	30	36	38
1997	**Jospin**	29	42	50	54
2002	**Raffarin**	17	36	39	46
2005	**de Villepin**	24	39	42	55
2007	**Fillon**	15	27	32	44
2012	**Ayrault**	15	25	18	40

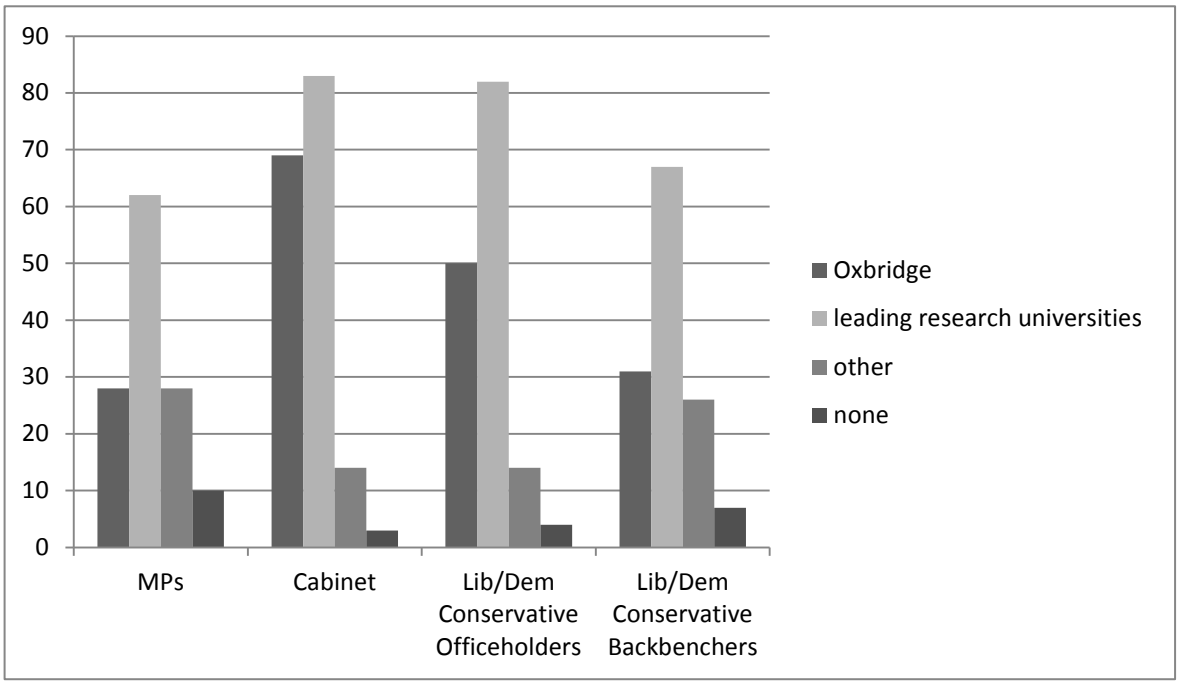
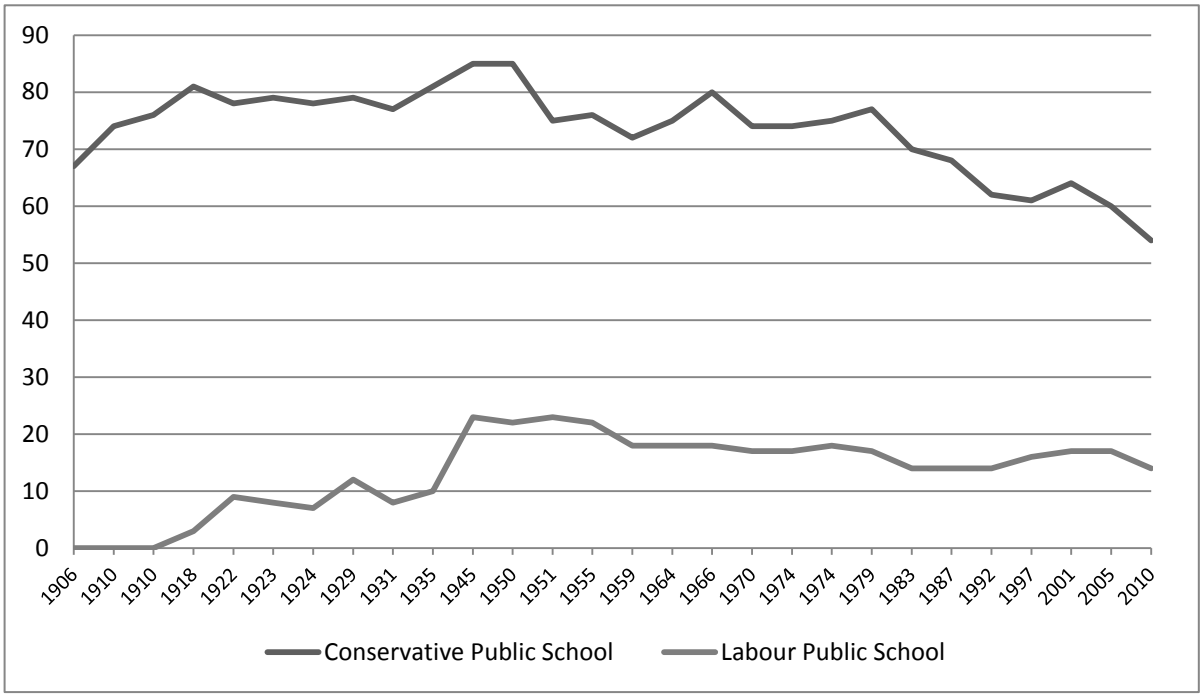


Figure 1: University Background of Ministers and MPs in the 2010 UK Parliament (%) (source: House of Commons)



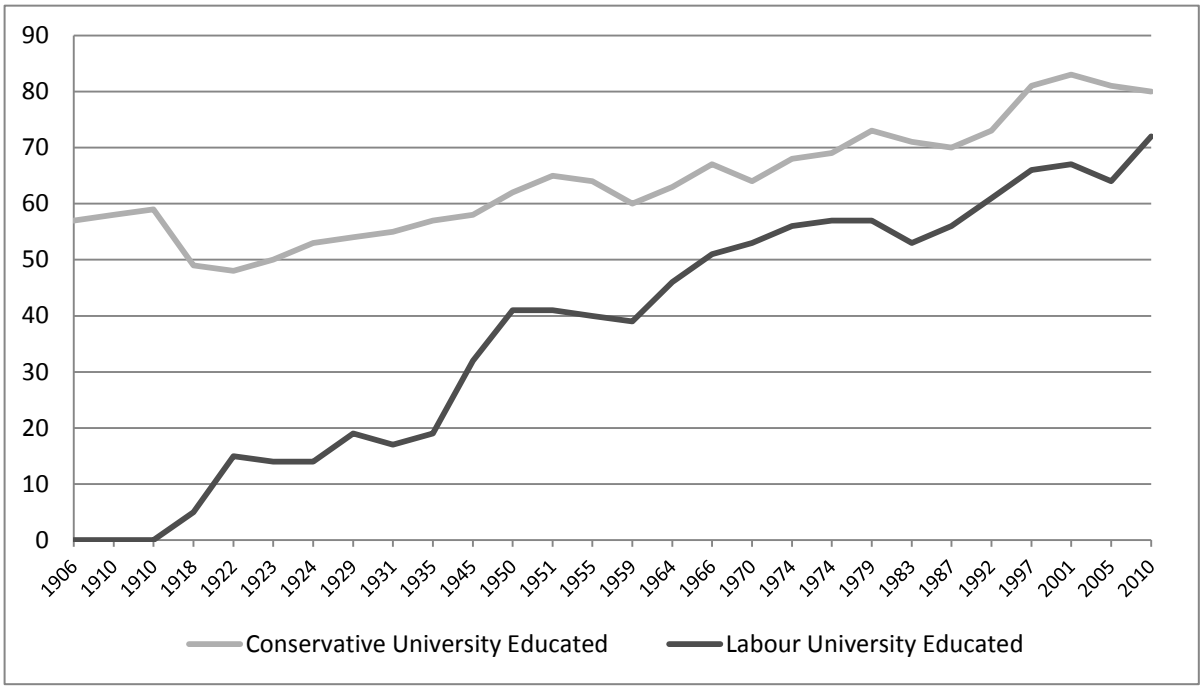


Figure 2: Education of MPs in the UK Parliament 1906-2005 (%) (source: Butler and Butler 2011)

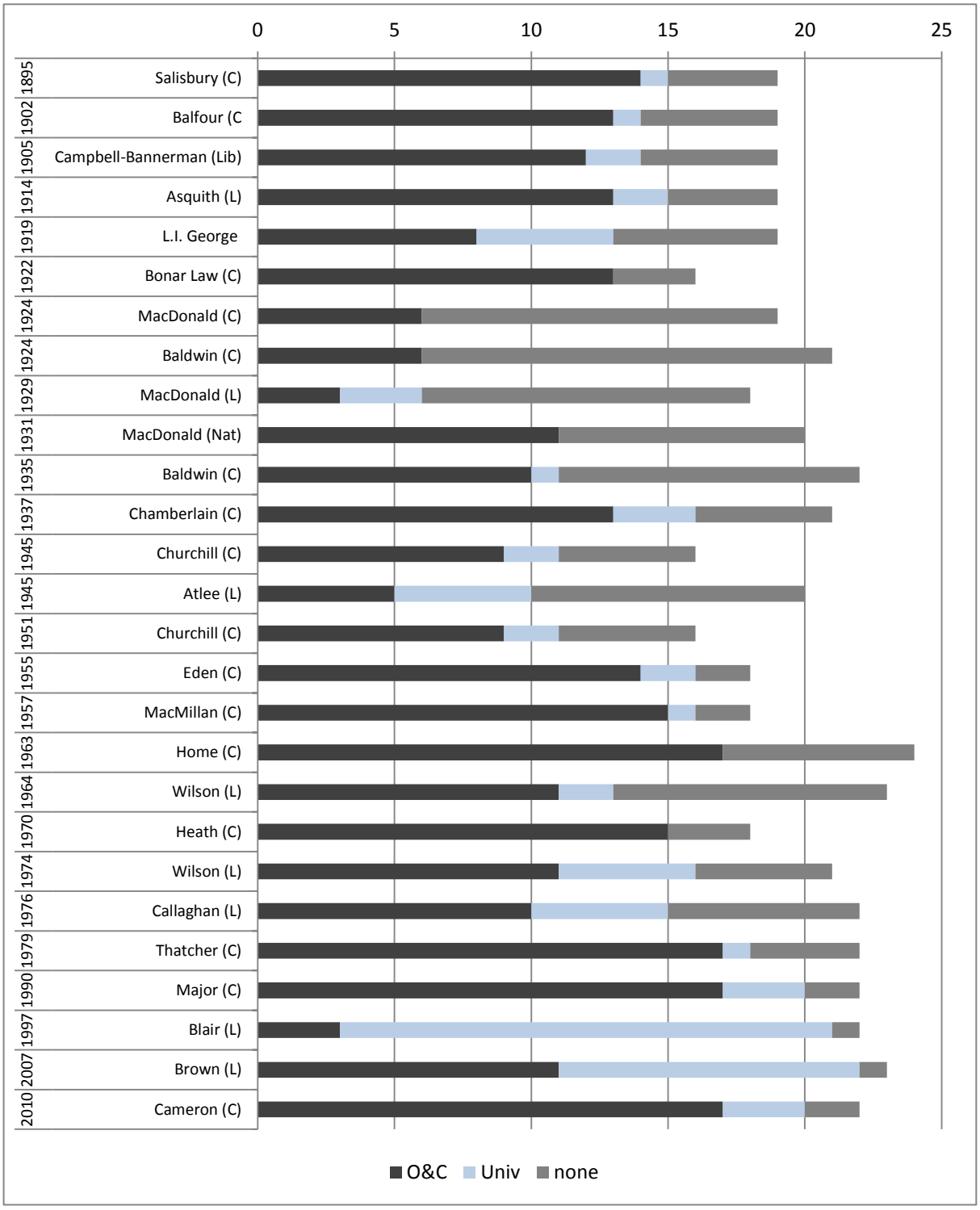


Figure 3: Educational Composition of British Cabinets 1885-2007 (source: Butler and Butler 2011)

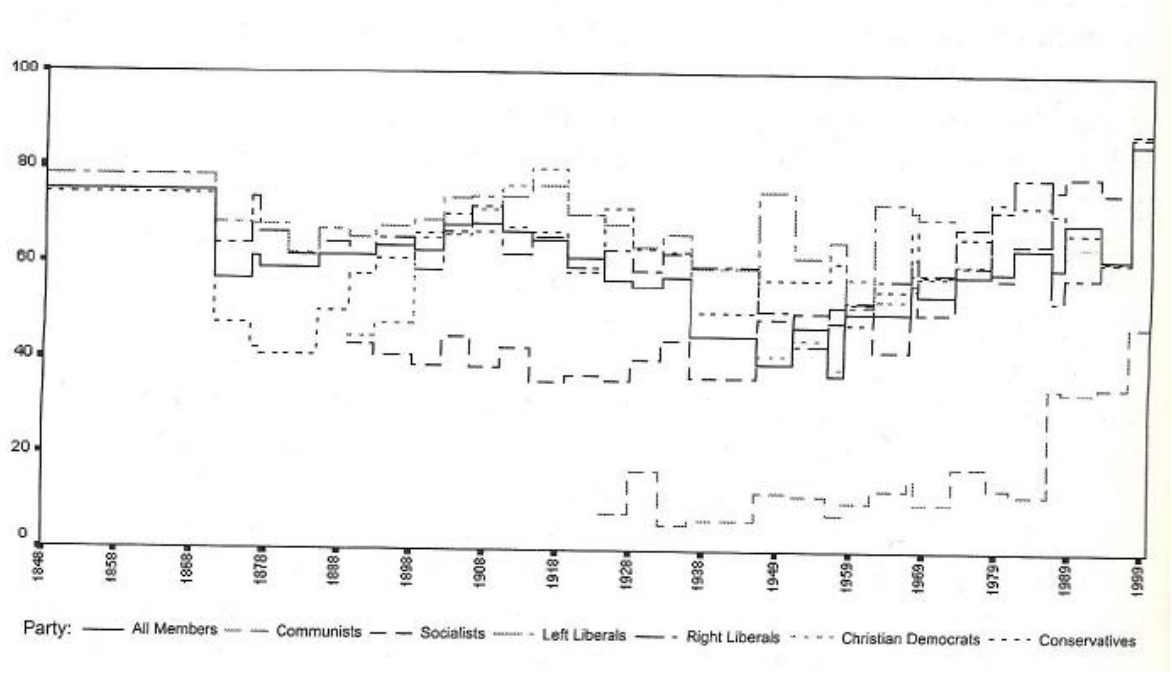


Figure 4: University Degree of French MPs 1848-1999 (source: Best & Gaxie 2000: 96)

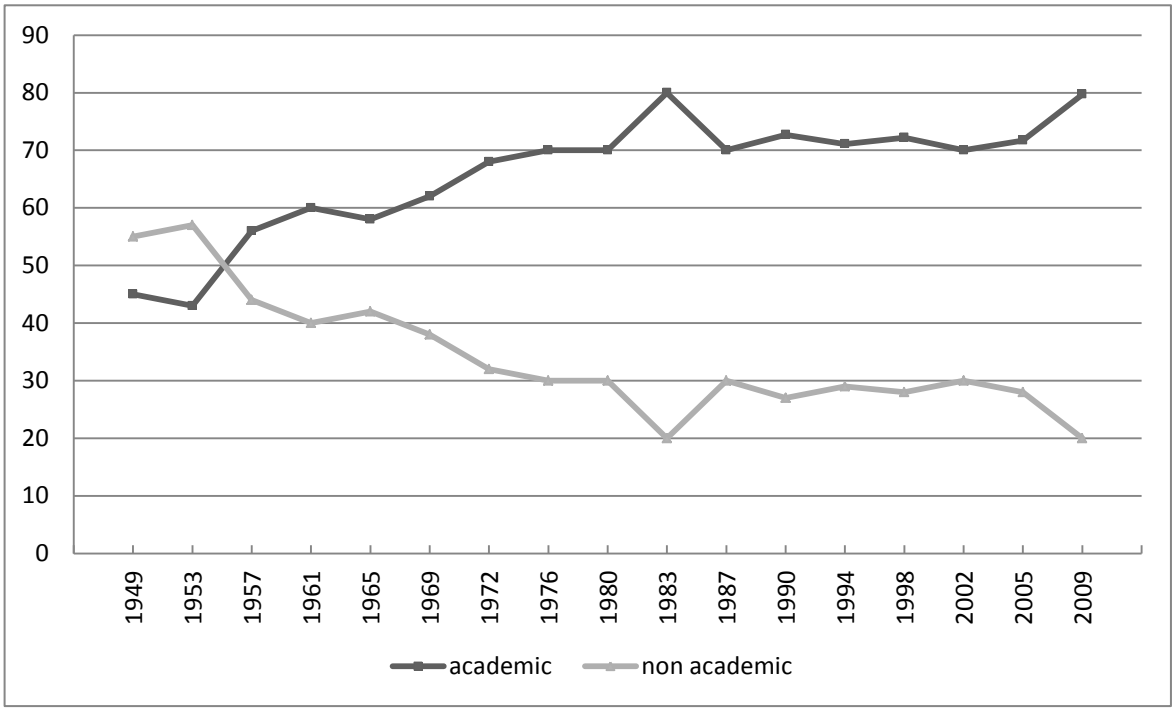


Figure 5: Education of German MPs, 1949-2009 (%) Source: Wessels (1997) added with own calculations from www.bundestag.de

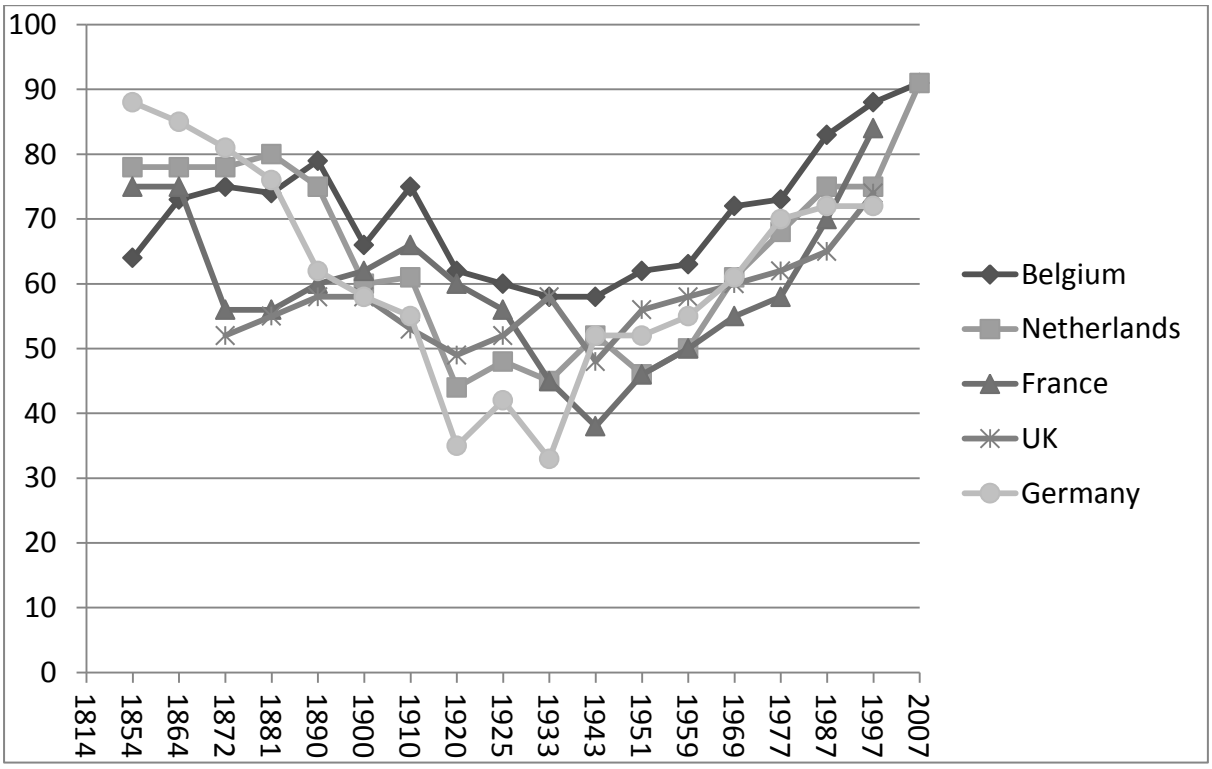


Figure 6: MPs with higher education since 1854 (source: Gaxie & Godmer 2007: 112, Belgium data: Verleden & Heyneman)

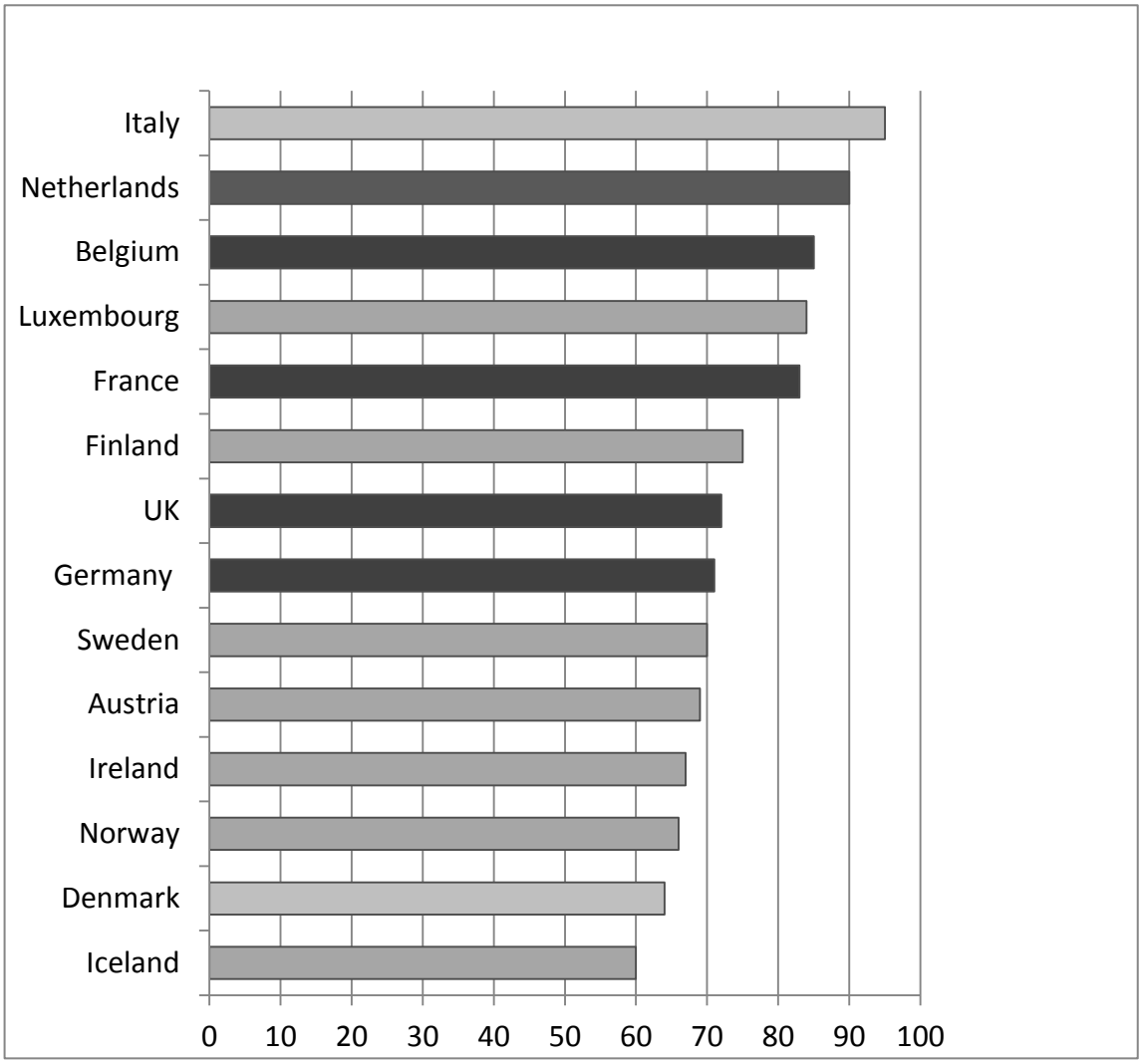


Figure 7: University-educated Cabinet Ministers by Country in period 1945-1984, %, sources: Thiebault and Blondel (1991).

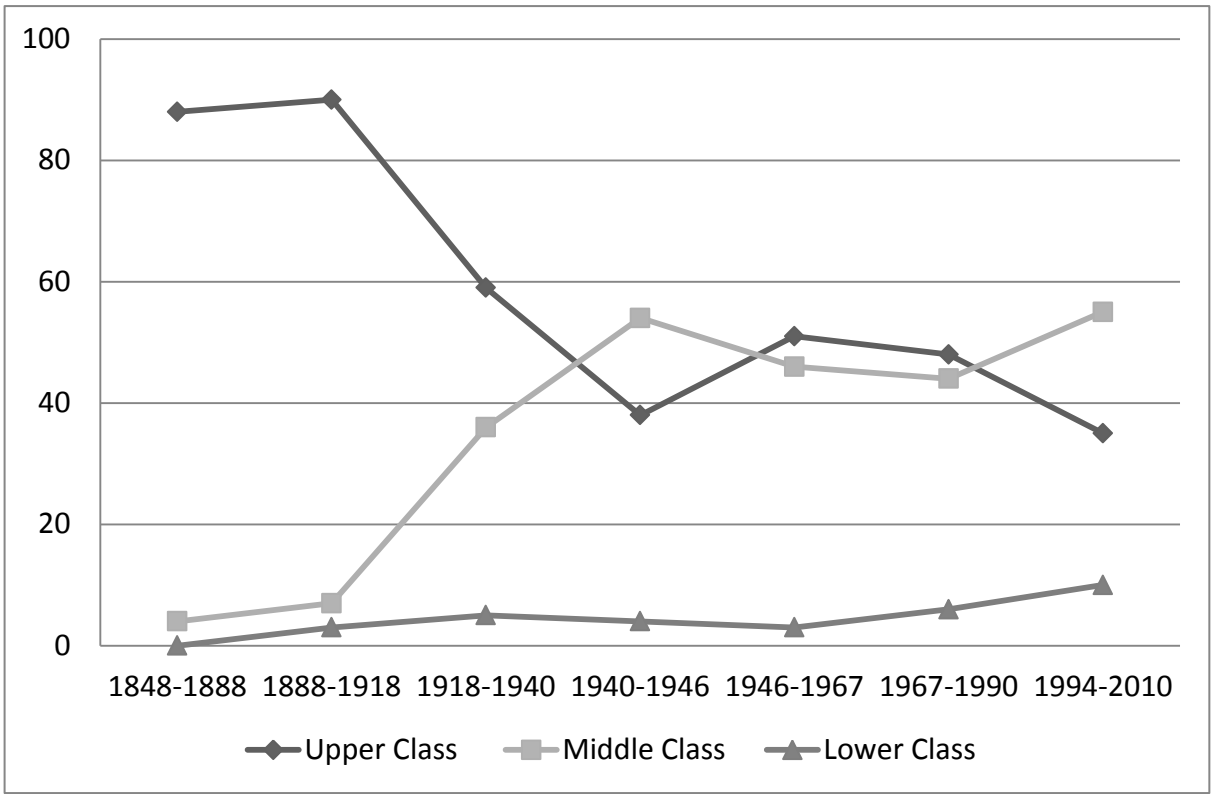


Figure 8: Social Background of Academically Educated Ministers, 1848-2007 (%)
Source: Secker 1991: 94; Parlement & Politiek (www. Parlement.com)

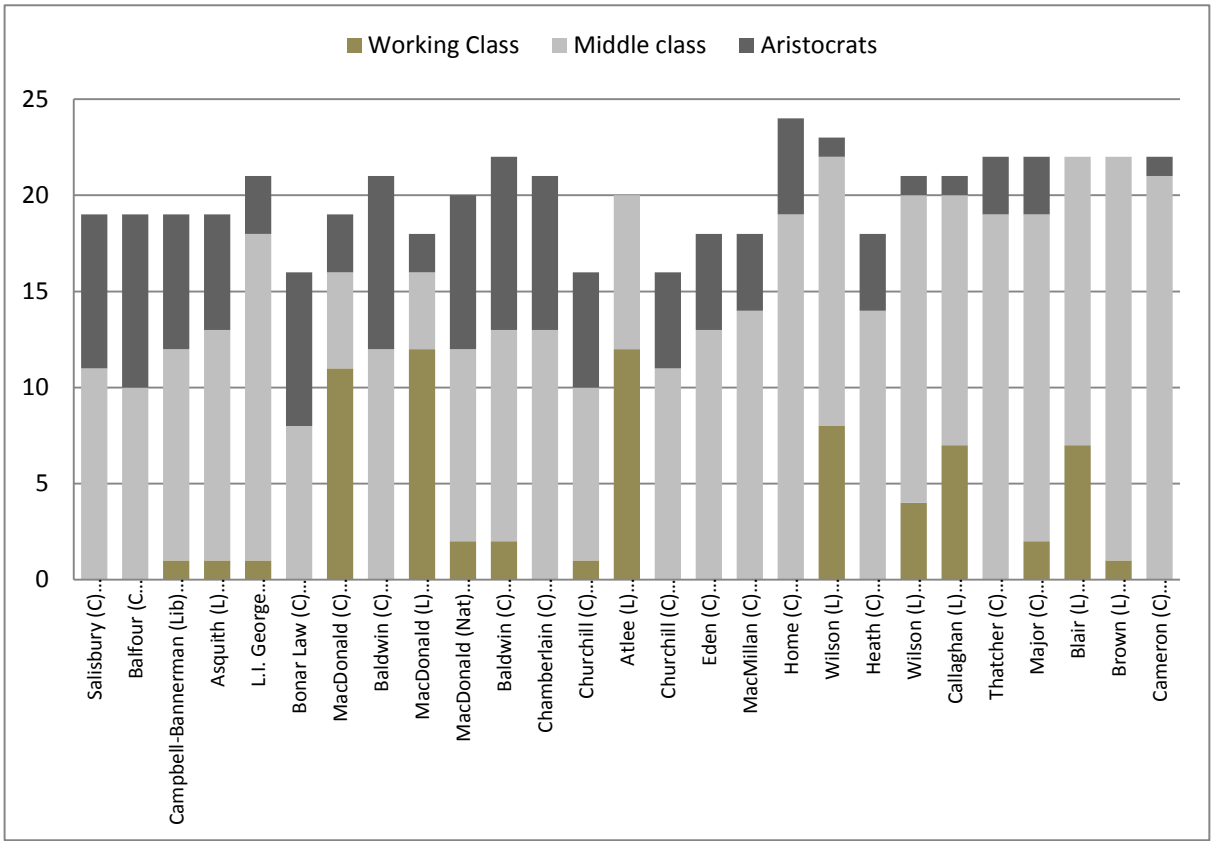


Figure 9: Social Composition of British Cabinets 1895-2010 (abs.) (source: Butler and Butler 2011)

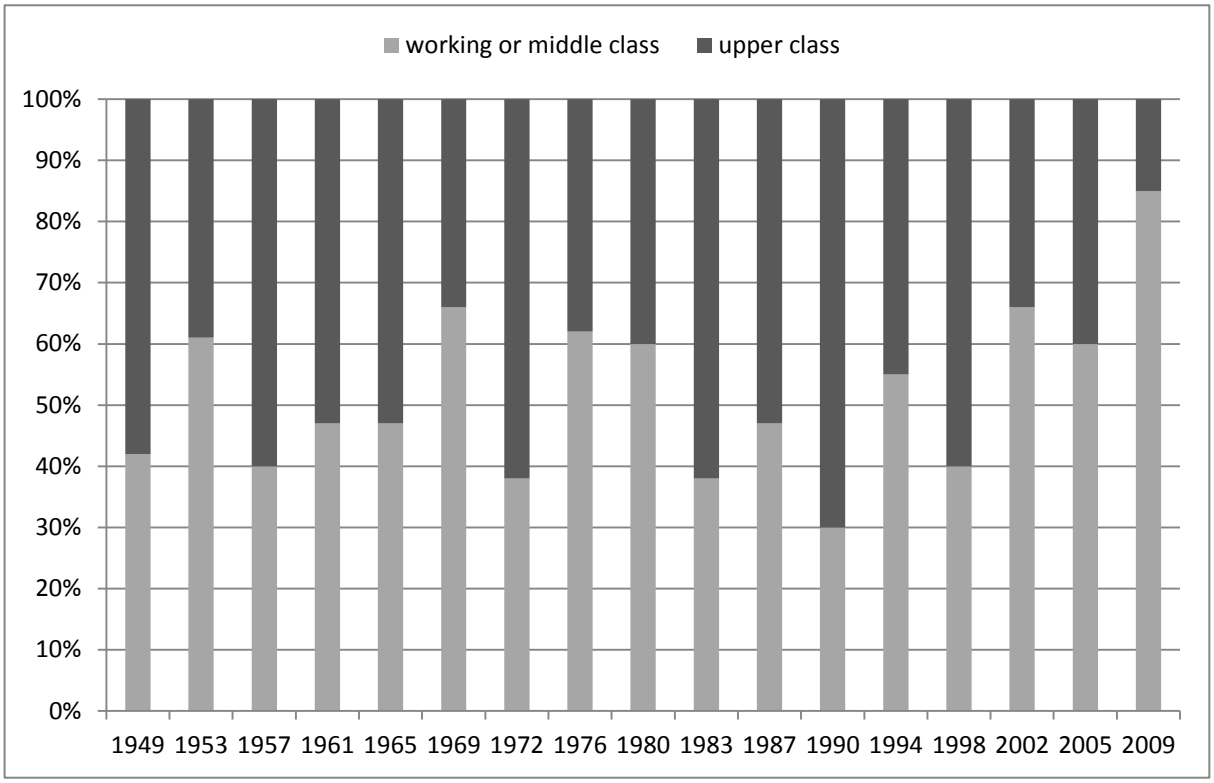


Figure 10: Social Classes of the highest Father's occupation of German Federal Government, 1949-2009 (%) (Source: Sharfenkamp and Dilger: 2012)

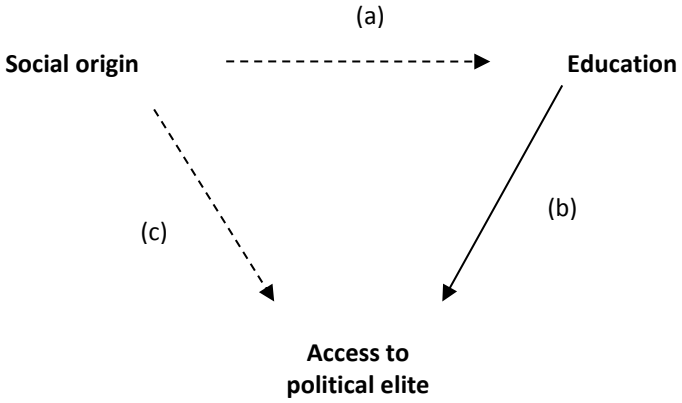


Figure 11: Social Origins, Education and Recruitment of Political Elites.(Figure adapted from Aberbach et al., 1981: 57).

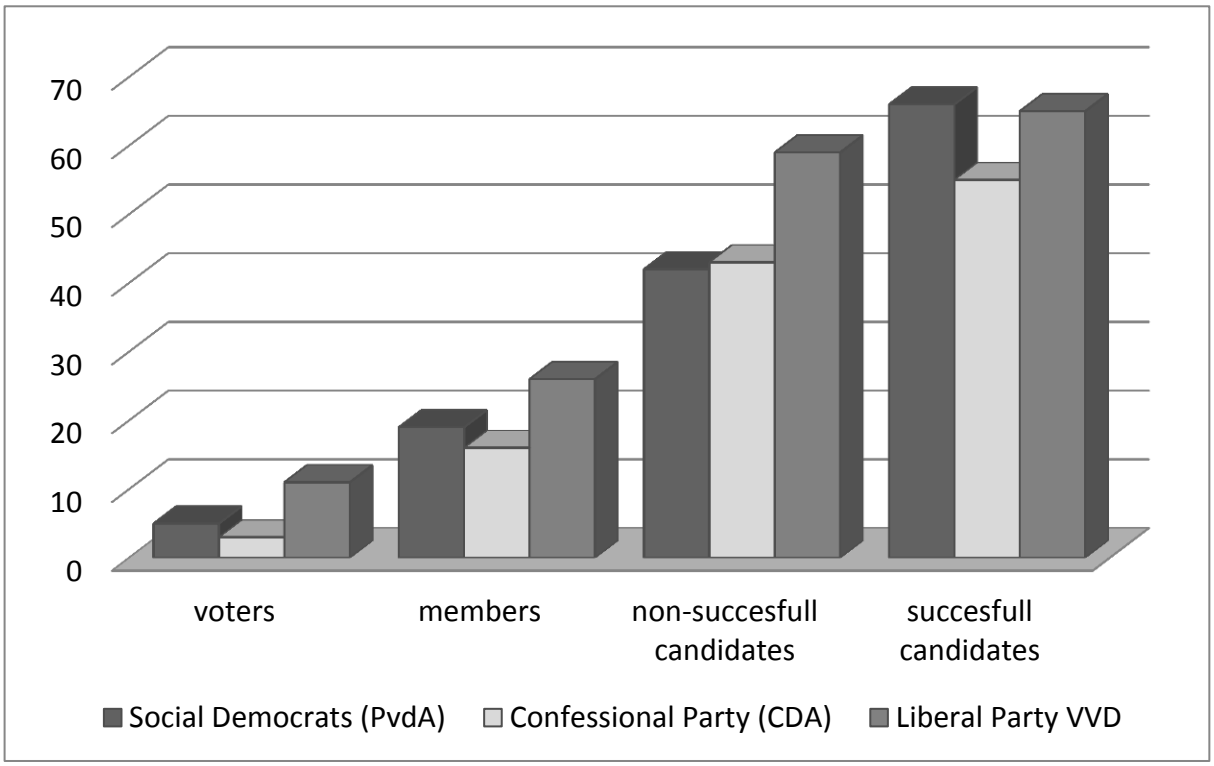


Figure 12: University education of voters, members, candidates major political parties in The Netherlands (source: Hillebrand 1992: 255)

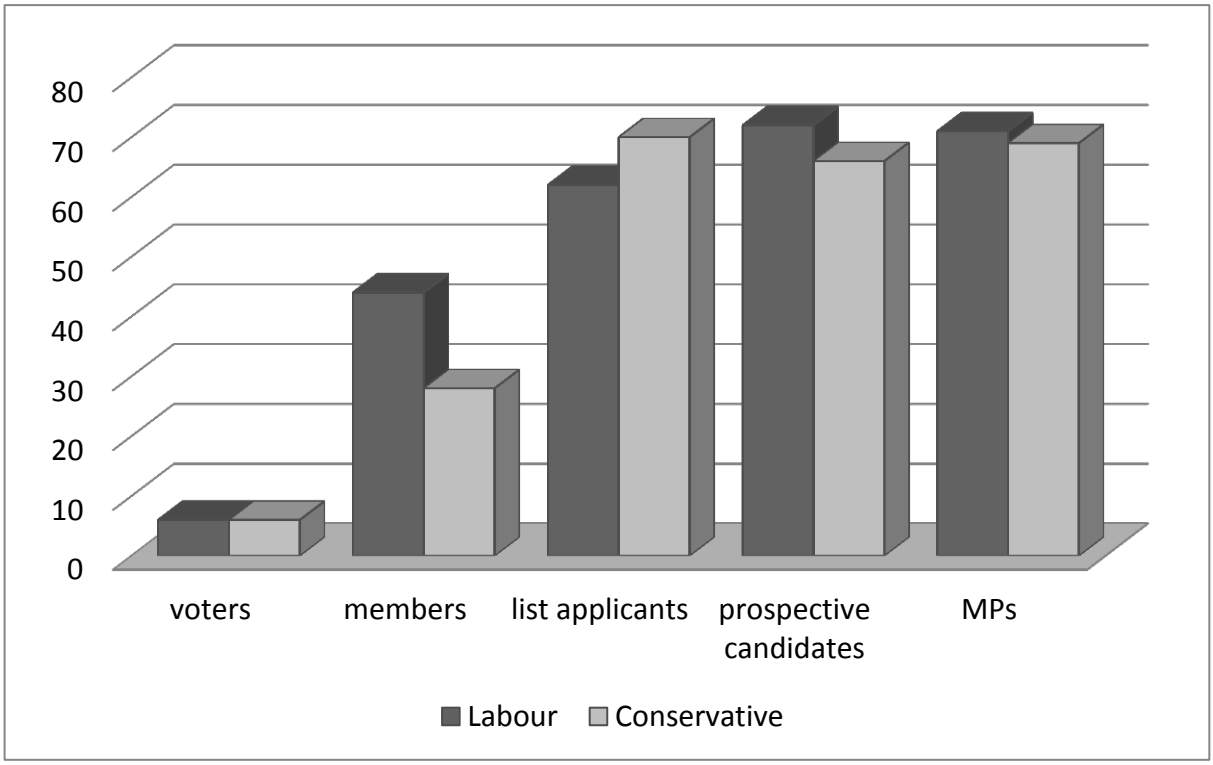


Figure 13: Graduate education of voters, members, candidates and MP for Labour and Conservative in the UK (source: Norris and Lovenduski 1997: 169)

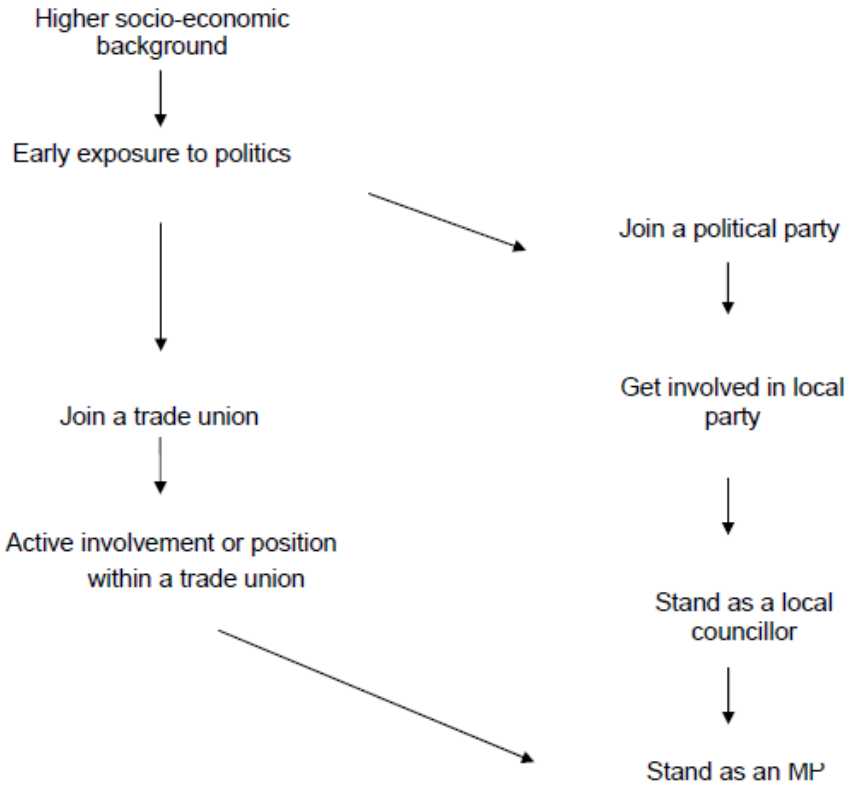


Figure 14: traditional pathway to politics (source: Durose *et al.* 2012: 252)

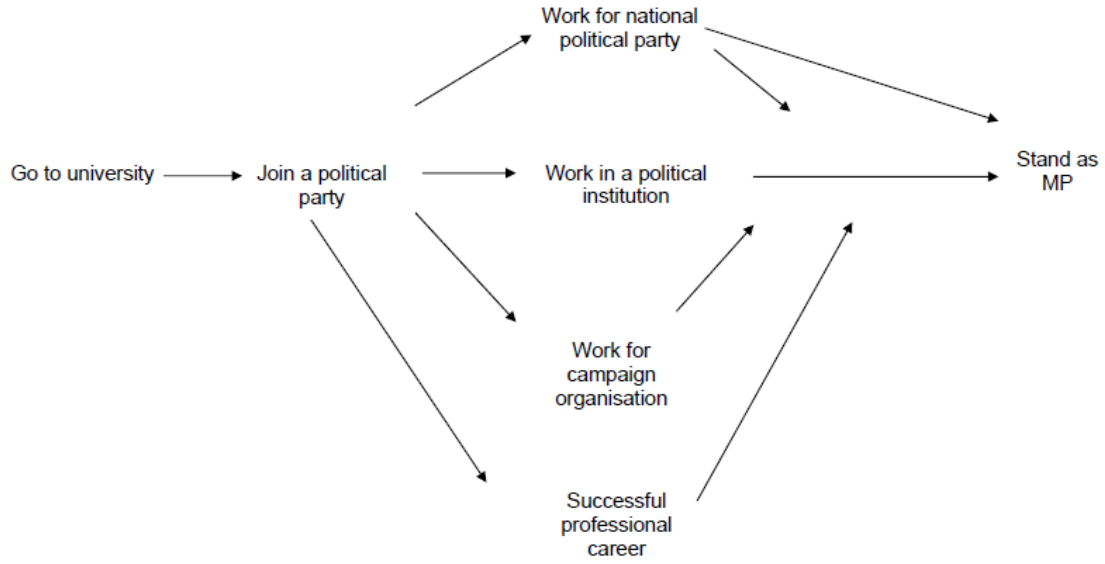


Figure 15: New professionalized pathway into politics (source: Durose *et al.* 2012: 259)

Notes

[1] Source: own calculations.

[2] The explanation of this Nordic exception lies in the numerical importance of parliamentarians with an intermediate education. Their proportion has increased in Denmark and Norway since the beginning of the 19th century. It reached high levels in the past decades. An intermediate education is regarded in this countries 'as a valuable resource producing the same legitimizing effect as university degrees do in other countries' (Gaxie & Godmer, 2007: 114).

[3] In comparative research one should take into account that varying features of the political system also influence the structure of opportunities in the political market place, affecting the selection of political executives.

[4] Their research presents robust evidence that political selection with respect to education differs between autocracies and democracies. The evidence is drawn from a wide range of countries over more than 150 years and is robust to a wide range of estimation methods, variable definitions, and subsamples.

[5] The change reflected both the decline in the size of union membership and influence of the unions, as well as the determination of Social Democratic/Labour parties to make a cross-social class appeal—at least in the UK and NL.

[6] Allen (2012) in reviewing this literature points out that an overall 'career politician' label can cloud key differences in the occupational experiences of successful candidates prior to election for example whether political experience is paid or unpaid, partisan or not.

[7] A similar pattern of democratization and professionalization can be found amongst the corporate elite in The Netherlands. In the past two decades, the old boys' network, which was dominated by the nobility and the patriciate, has given way to a loosely connected, internationally oriented, meritocratic network of highly educated professionals (Heemskerk, 2007).