

Marc Hooghe & Dieter Stiers

**A Tale of Two Regions:
An Analysis of Two Decades of Belgian Public Opinion**

Publius: The Journal of Federalism, accepted.

© Publius: The Journal of Federalism

Abstract: It has been assumed that a trend toward devolution within a federal country would be associated with a growing apart of public opinion, and the federal kingdom of Belgium is routinely cited as an obvious example in this regard. Since the publication of the seminal Billiet et al. (2006) article, more competences have been devolved toward the autonomous regions, and in this research note we update the expectation that this has led to a further growing apart of public opinion in the country. Based on both electoral studies (2009/2014/2019), and the European Social Survey (2002-2018) we investigate whether these institutional differences are associated with a growing apart of public opinion in the regions of Belgium. Our results suggest that while there are clear attitudinal differences between the two major groups in the country, these differences are stable throughout the three-decade observation period. Differences are becoming more outspoken, however, with regard to the preferred extent of federalism. Interestingly, however, the dynamics in public opinion in this regard do not follow the same pattern as electoral results would suggest.

More than a decade ago, Billiet et al. (2006) posed the question whether the federal country of Belgium still exists. This question found its origin in the observation that, at least with regard to the functioning of the political system and the political elite, the French and the Dutch language part of the country have continued to diverge, with a result that there seems to be not all that much in common anymore between the two largest language groups in the country. Since the publication of that article, however, the stability of the Belgian political system has further deteriorated (Deschouwer and Reuchamps 2013). In 2007, 2010 and 2019 the country was confronted with lengthy coalition talks, and the prevailing impression is that it has become increasingly difficult to form a stable government coalition at the federal level (Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2015). The goal of this research note is to provide an update to the Billiet et al. (2006) article: are there indications for a divergence of public opinion in the two major language communities of the country? If so, that could offer at least a partial explanation for the endemic political instability of the country during the past decade. The research question has a broader theoretical relevance, given the ongoing debate about the prospects for stable federal systems (Medeiros, Gauvin and Chhim forthcoming; Swenden and Jans 2006). Belgium has two major subnational political entities, and this form of bipolar or dyadic federalism is seen as inherently problematic and potentially unstable (Burgess 2006; Duchacek 1988; Niessen et al. 2020). Examining the stability of public opinion in Belgium, therefore, also allows us to shed light on the broader question about the conditions for the stability of federal government structures, a question that is at the heart of federalism studies.

Back in 2006 Billiet et al. concluded that there is no clear answer to the question about a divergence of public opinion in the country: while for some attitudes and political preferences French and Dutch language communities within the country indeed seem to grow apart, for other, equally crucial attitudes, both communities tend to be remarkably similar. In the article, it was noted that inhabitants of the Dutch language community tend to hold on to distinct

Flemish identity, while for inhabitants of the Walloon region, the feeling of a Belgian identity remains most important. The authors, however, also note that processes of secularization tend to be present in both communities, with as a result that on related value dimensions, differences between the communities actually become smaller. Given this inconclusive evidence, Billiet et al. (2006, 930) closed with the prediction: “Consequently, it is to be expected that Flanders and francophone Belgium will grow further apart in the future.” As far as we know, however, the empirical validity of this forecast has not yet been investigated in the literature, and that is exactly what we want to do in this brief research note. The assumption of Billiet et al. is that, as more powers are transferred to the communities and the regions in the Belgian federal system, this will also be associated with more distinct political cultures among the population. On the elite level, there is abundant evidence that this is indeed the case: since 2007 almost every election in the country has led to lengthy negotiations, before parties finally succeeded in forming a government coalition (Deschouwer 2009; Hooghe 2012). It should not be taken for granted, however, that these deep divisions among the political elite of the country fully reflect the potential divergence within public opinion (Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2015; Reuchamps et al. 2017). While one can expect some form of correlation between the position of political elites and those of their voters, by no means it should be expected that elites fully reflect these popular preferences. While other studies have examined the impact of the process of devolution on specific preferences for constitutional arrangements (Dupuy, Verhaegen and Van Ingelgom 2021; Verhaegen et al. 2021), in this research note we adhere more strictly to the Billiet et al. (2006) framework by investigating more structural components of public opinion in the two major regions of the country.

From a theoretical perspective, there are a number of reasons to investigate the dynamics of public opinion within the Belgian federation. Ever since the 1960s, the country has implemented a number of constitutional reforms, granting ever more autonomy to the

regions and communities that make up this country (Dupuy et al. 2021). Within the literature on federalism, there is an ongoing debate about what might be the public opinion consequences of this protracted process of devolution (Swenden and Jans 2006). A first major expectation is that public opinion will follow institutional arrangements: to the extent that the different language groups in the country acquire more autonomy, it is also likely that they will develop a more distinctive public opinion (Anderson 2004a, 2004b; Erk and Anderson 2009; Dupuy et al. 2021). Other authors, however, have argued that implementing a federal system would be associated with a preference for the status-quo among the population. Bermeo (2002, 105), e.g., suggests: “In Spain and Belgium, federalization has held the growth of exclusive identities in check and stymied support for separatism.” While this statement is obviously no longer correct for the Catalan region in Spain, in the current research note we investigate its validity for current-day Belgium. The main reason to update the Billiet et al. (2006) findings, is the current political situation in the country, that is widely interpreted as a potential threat not only for the stability, but even for the future survival of Belgium as a sovereign state (Van Parijs 2018).

From a theoretical perspective, the federal system of Belgium offers an interesting case for further investigation. The political identities of the rivalling fractions within Belgium developed already in the 19th century, and continue to push the country in a centrifugal direction (Farhat et al. 2020). An important element to explain this threat of instability is that Belgium has only two major competing groups: the Dutch-language and the French-language group.ⁱ This form of dyadic or bipolar federalism renders it much harder to find a compromise, as the gain of one group is almost automatically perceived as a loss by the other, competing group (Burgess 2006; Horowitz 1985; Niessen et al. 2020). Other bipolar federal systems, like Lebanon, Cyprus and Northern Ireland, hardly stand out as examples of stability and peaceful coexistence (Noel 2005). If both communities indeed evolve in opposing directions, it will

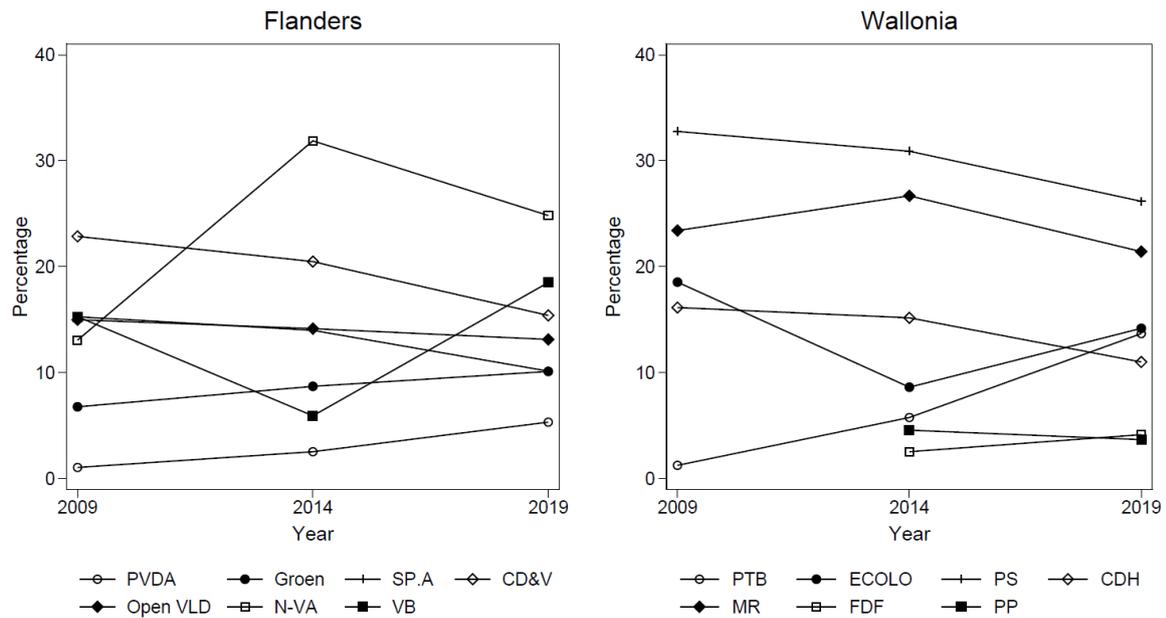
become more difficult to find sufficient common ground to find a compromise that is essential to achieve consociationalism. There is quite some empirical evidence that power-sharing arrangements can even lead to stronger support for secessionism (Lustick, Miodownik and Eidelson 2004; Erk and Anderson 2009). Earlier research has focused on the question whether Belgian political institutions still function according to a consociational power-sharing logic (Deschouwer 2006; Swenden and Jans 2006), but there is no recent analysis of trends in public opinion (Medeiros et al. forthcoming).

In this research note, we first review the theoretical literature on this topic, while providing some essential background on Belgium. Subsequently we present the data sources for our review of public opinion in the two major regions during the past decades. We close with some suggestions for further research.

Elections and Public Opinion

Recent election results in Belgium suggest that the two major regions of the country evolve in opposite directions. In Figure 1 we focus on the results for the regional parliaments, as the circumscriptions for these regional assemblies overlap most completely with the borders of the region. For the Walloon Parliament, this overlap is complete, while for the Flemish Parliament, 98.4 percent of all voters live in the Flemish Region, while the remainder 1.6 percent are the inhabitants of the bilingual region of the capital of Brussels that vote for a Dutch language political party.ⁱⁱ Belgium has two segregated party systems, as in principle voters can only vote for the parties that are active within their own language community (Billiet et al. 2006, 913). The question does remain, however, to what extent these positions of the political elite accurately reflect the positions of citizens (Medeiros et al. forthcoming).

Figure 1. Election Results for Flemish and Walloon Regional Parliament



Source: Ministry of the Interior.

The divergent trend is most clear when we compare the scores of regionalist and extreme right political parties. In the Flemish region, the joint electoral score of regionalist (N-VA) and radical right (VB) parties has strengthened substantially from 28 to 43 percent of the vote. In the Walloon region, on the other hand, regionalist (FDF) and radical right (PP) parties are virtually absent, and they never reach more than 5 percent of the vote. In the Walloon region, in contrast, leftist political parties clearly dominate the political scene (the combined scores of Socialists (PS), Greens (ECOLO), and Communists (PTB) total 43 percent of the vote). Finally, with regard to the Liberal party (Delwit 2017), we can observe that in both regions they account for ca. 20 percent of the vote (VLD in Flanders; MR in Wallonia). What the Figure makes clear is that the two regions clearly have a totally different dominant party: in Flanders the regionalist (N-VA) and radical right (VB) parties jointly obtain 43 percent of the vote, while in the Walloon region, progressive and leftist parties are equally dominant with ca. 45 percent of the vote. In both regions, the traditional centre party of Christian-Democrats has lost ground,

giving rise to respectively a left-wing trend in Wallonia and a right-wing trend in Flanders. The main question we want to answer in this analysis, however, is whether these diverging trends also imply that with regard to political attitudes these two regions evolve in different directions. Only if there would be a perfect congruence between voters and the party they vote for, we could assume that election results also can be used to detect mood swings within public opinion. We know, however, that this congruence is never perfect (Blais and Bodet 2006). Previous research indeed suggests that while regional governments in Belgium are slightly more successful in achieving congruence with the median voter, the difference with the federal level remains very limited (Van Haute and Deschouwer 2018). A very specific feature of Belgian federalism is that there are no national political parties anymore: there are only regional parties that compete simultaneously in regional and in federal elections (Deschouwer 2012). This means that at the level of the party elites, the focus is clearly on the own region and language community, and these parties do not necessarily wish to appeal to the entire country. This is important as we can assume that parties that do not limit themselves to just one ethnic group, are in fact important instruments to ensure the stability of divided societies (Horowitz 1985, 19).

The Belgian Case

Belgium is a federal country that is composed of regions and communities (for a historical review, see Deschouwer 2012; Hooghe 1991). Belgian federalism is characterized by two basic components: a rather strict linguistic segregation, and a strong emphasis on devolvement of competences to the regions and language communities. This means there is a rather strict language segregation in the country. In 1963 it was decided to implement a ‘linguistic frontier’ in the country, leading to an effective segregation between the two major language communities. North of that frontier, only Dutch is the official language, while in the South that

is French. The only exceptions to this rule are a few bilingual municipalities along both sides of the linguistic border, a German-speaking language area in the east inhabited by less than one percent of the population, and the bilingual area surrounding the Brussels Capital Region where about 10 percent of the population lives. This means that about 90 percent of the population lives in a quasi-monolingual region. (McAndrew and Janssens 2004). Within such a system of segregation, conditions are clearly present for the development of distinct subcultures. Especially taking into account a political socialization perspective, the assumption has to be that these two entities will develop in different manners (Verhaegen et al. 2021).

Second, as a result of the ongoing constitutional reforms, the regions and communities of the country received a much larger package of competences, ranging all the way from education, over public transport, to regional economy. Initially, these regional governments routinely followed the same party coalition as the federal government, with as a result that policy differences between the various governments in Belgium remained limited. Since then, however, the regions have developed their own coalition system, with as a result that more often than not these governments actually do not have the same coalition. The result is that, increasingly, the inhabitants of the different regions live in a different political context. This leads to favourable conditions for centrifugal public opinion trends in the two major regions of the country. Thus far, however, there is no systematic research on the question whether the diverging elections results of the two major regions also reflect diverging public opinion.

Data and Methods

Data

In order to investigate whether Walloon and Flemish public opinion have diverged since the publication of Billiet et al (2006), we rely on two different data sets. First, we use the Belgian samples included in the European Social Survey (ESS; 2002-2018) (European Social Survey Cumulative File, 2020). Second, we use data from three recent Belgian electoral studies in Belgium (BES) conducted after the last series of elections (2009-2019) (Dassonneville et al. 2014; PartiRep 2009). All in all, this allows us to cover a period of seventeen years, between 2002 and 2019. This timeframe allows us to pick up from the end of the study of Billiet et al. (2006), as their last analysis focuses on the elections in 2003 and we can update their findings for the period since then, thus avoiding an overlap with their seminal analysis.

Using these two different sources, we combine their strengths while addressing their respective weaknesses as well. We examine the differences between the regions using the data of the ESS, which have as main advantage that they include the exact same questions in every survey wave, and that it has been conducted over a period of almost twenty years – allowing for a robust measurement over a longer period of time. However, as its main disadvantages, it does not include questions that refer specifically to the Belgian context, and it is conducted at a fixed interval every two years. This means that it does not take into account election cycles. However, as we are interested in differences in political attitudes specifically, we think it is likely that these (differences in) opinions are more pronounced during an election period – when parties campaign, some of which explicitly emphasising different political cultures. Therefore, we rely on election studies that were conducted immediately after the elections of 2009, 2014, and 2019. Their main advantage is that they have been conducted right after three consecutive elections, allowing us to investigate differences right after electoral campaigns.

Furthermore, all three included the same question wording asking respondents whether they favour a stronger federalised or a stronger nationalised country – i.e., a question tapping into the core of the alleged differences between Flanders and Wallonia. Moreover, they have been conducted in the same manner, each time based on the official National Register of the citizens of Belgium. This means that the actual voter lists were used to draw a representative sample of both the Flemish and the Walloon region of the country.ⁱⁱⁱ As their main disadvantage, we only have access to three consecutive time-points for these data, and some questions have not been asked in exactly the same way, limiting the number of variables we can use in our comparison.

In order to assess whether public opinion in Wallonia and Flanders has developed in different ways, we follow the example by Billiet et al. (2006) and we concentrate on what are considered to be the main ideological cleavages within Belgian society: economic, ethical, and linguistic (Mabille, 2011). The economic cleavage is by no means typical for the Belgian political context, as it refers to the perennial debate about the preferred extent of government intervention to redistribute income across society (Zuelli and Scholz 2019). The ethical cleavage, too, has been deeply influential in Belgian political history, with a focus on a conflict between clerical and anti-clerical movements and parties, e.g., with regard to topics like education and abortion rights. Since the early 1990's, however, this particular conflict has been appeased (Hooghe 1990). As is the case in other European democracies, ethical conflicts since then have evolved mainly on an opposition between libertarian and authoritarian values, focusing most strongly on the topic of immigration and diversity – which we will focus on here (Kriesi et al. 2012). Finally, the linguistic conflict mainly deals with a preference for more or less regional autonomy, or even evolving into full competence for the linguistic regions of the country (Erk 2005). By focusing on these fundamental cleavages, our approach is different from recent studies, specifically focusing on preferences with regard to the federal structure itself (Dupuy et al. 2021; Verhaegen et al. 2021).

Method

To investigate differences in political attitudes between the two regions, we estimate a series of linear regression models including each time another dependent variable. Besides our generic control variables (see below), we include in each model an indicator for the region the respondent lives in and the year the survey was taken. Furthermore, to test whether there is a significant difference between the regions in the years respectively, we include an interaction between region and survey year. Furthermore, to take into account the clustering of respondents in surveys, we cluster the standard error by survey (i.e., by ESS round or by election survey, respectively). This method allows us to ascertain whether there are significant differences between the regions, and whether these differences change over time. To be able to interpret the results in a straightforward manner, we present the full tables including the results in the appendix, and plot the difference between the two regions by respective survey years in the figures included in the main text.

Some important notes need to be made about the figures we present below. First, as the different variables are measured on different scales, this would make it difficult to compare the differences between the indicators. Therefore, we rescaled all variables to range from 0 to 1 to allow for visual comparison. Second, depending on the difference between the two regions, the difference score might be either positive or negative. However, our main interest is in the (evolution in the) *size* of the difference between the two regions, so that for every variable the interpretation is that the closer to 0, the smaller the difference. Finally, as we are comparing the results from separate and independent samples, we cannot make strong claims about the evolution in public opinion, but only about the comparison between the two regions within every survey wave respectively.^{iv} Therefore, we present the results in scatters, including a dashed line to provide some sense of the overall pattern. The results here show the difference

between the two regions – the full figures showing the absolute levels in both regions respectively, are included in Table A7 of the Online Appendix.

In the next section, we first present each time our indicator of interest, and how it was measured in the different surveys and survey waves (more details are included in Table A1 in the Online Appendix). As already explained, we use these indicators between the two major regions of the country as dependent variables in models testing the difference between the two regions over the years. In these models, we also each time include some basic control variables. First, we include the basic socio-demographic controls sex, age, and educational level (see Table A1). Furthermore, we include a measure of the income of the respondent. As the way in which income was measured in the ESS changed between the 2006 and 2008 waves, we cannot include these in models including data from all years. Therefore, instead we include a measure of the respondent's own feeling about their household's income (from "very difficult" to "living comfortably"). In the election study of 2009, no income measure was included, so in the models using the recent national election studies we only include sex, age, and educational level as controls.

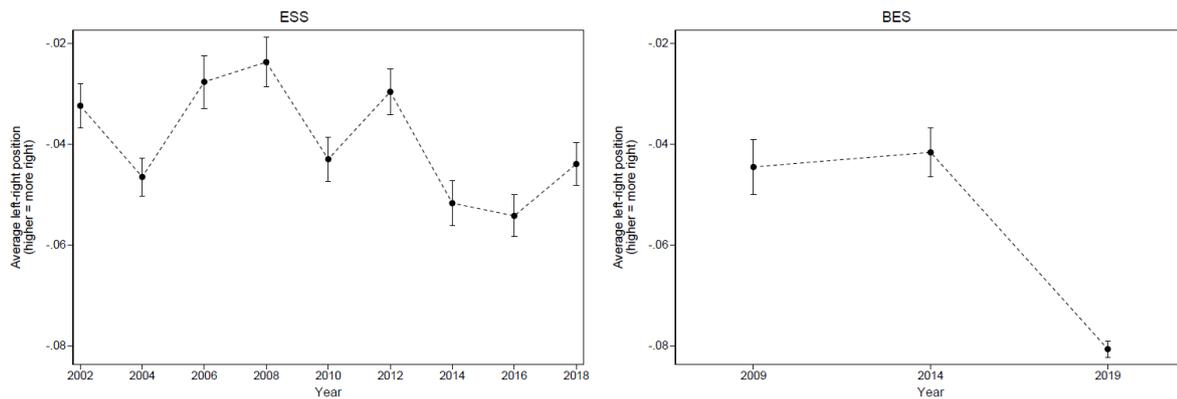
Results

General left-right ideology

As a first test, we include a general ideological left-right position of the respondent. The left-right continuum is an often used measure of the general ideological position of citizens as it has been shown that both citizens and political parties understand left and right in the same terms, making it suitable to make comparisons over time and between contexts (Dalton, Farrell, and McAllister 2011; Van der Eijk, Schmitt, and Binder 2006). It is also a standard measure in survey research, meaning it has been asked in a similar way in all surveys we use in this study. Hence, in all surveys, respondents were asked to position themselves on a scale ranging from

“left” (value 0) to “right” (value 10). The full results of the differences in this indicator are included in Table A2 of the Online Appendix, and here we focus on the differences between the regions, shown in Figure 2. Recall that all indicators of interest are recoded to range from 0 to 1.

Figure 2. Differences in left-right ideology between Flanders and Wallonia



Note: The figures depict the difference in attitudes between Flanders (reference category) and Wallonia based on linear regression models including an interaction between region and year. See Table A2 for the full results.

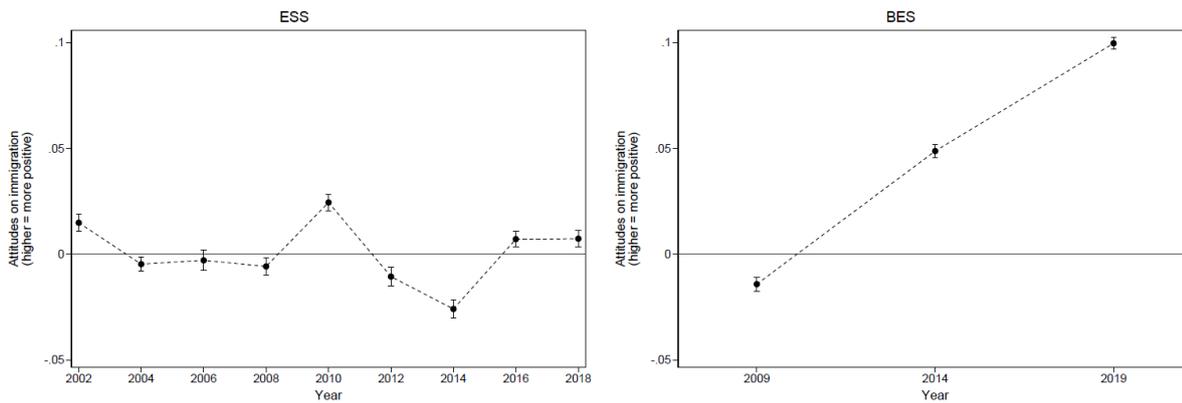
The results in Figure 2 lead to several conclusions. In all years under investigation, the difference is negative, and this implies that Walloon citizens always position themselves slightly more on the left side of the ideological spectrum than Flemish citizens (the difference in the ESS, for example, is on average about 0.04, or a difference of 0.4 on a 0-10-scale). This can also be seen at the negative coefficient of the region dummy in the full regression table (see Table A2). The fact that the years for which the different data sources overlap show similar differences between the regions provides some validation for the comparison between the different surveys. In the years covered by the ESS surveys, the differences seem to be rather stable, and while the interaction coefficients are significant, they are substantially small. Finally, looking at the most recent election study data available, the data suggest a sharp increase in the difference right after the 2019 election. As this is only one data point, it is too early to ascertain whether there is indeed a growing difference between Flemish and Walloon

citizens when it comes to general ideology. Looking at the pattern over the last seventeen years, it seems to be somewhat curvilinear, and future data points will have to show whether the change between 2014 and 2019 continues into the future. The general observation holds that Walloon public opinion is slightly more to the left than Flemish public opinion.

Attitudes about immigration

As a second important indicator, we include attitudes about immigration, as this has developed into a main political cleavage (Kriesi et al. 2012). An important note is that the attitudes about immigration have been measured in slightly different ways between the different data sources. In the ESS data, respondents were asked to rate three statements (whether immigrants are bad or good for the economy, whether the country's cultural life is undermined or enriched by immigrants, and whether immigrants make the country a worse or better place to live), which we combine in an index score. In the electoral survey data of 2009 and 2014, respondents were asked whether they believed immigration adds to the wealth of a country, and in 2019 a variant of the ESS battery was asked. We know from previous research, however, that items tapping a negative attitude toward immigrants tend to be highly correlated, almost inevitably leading to a single factor (Hooghe and Dassonneville 2018). Table A1 in the Online Appendix presents more details about the measures used in the different surveys and years; for every survey higher values denote a more positive attitude about immigration and immigrants. The full results of the regression models are presented in Table A3, and the differences between Flanders and Wallonia are displayed in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Differences in attitudes about immigration between Flanders and Wallonia



Note: The figures depict the difference in attitudes between Flanders (reference category) and Wallonia based on linear regression models including an interaction between region and year. See Table A3 for the full results.

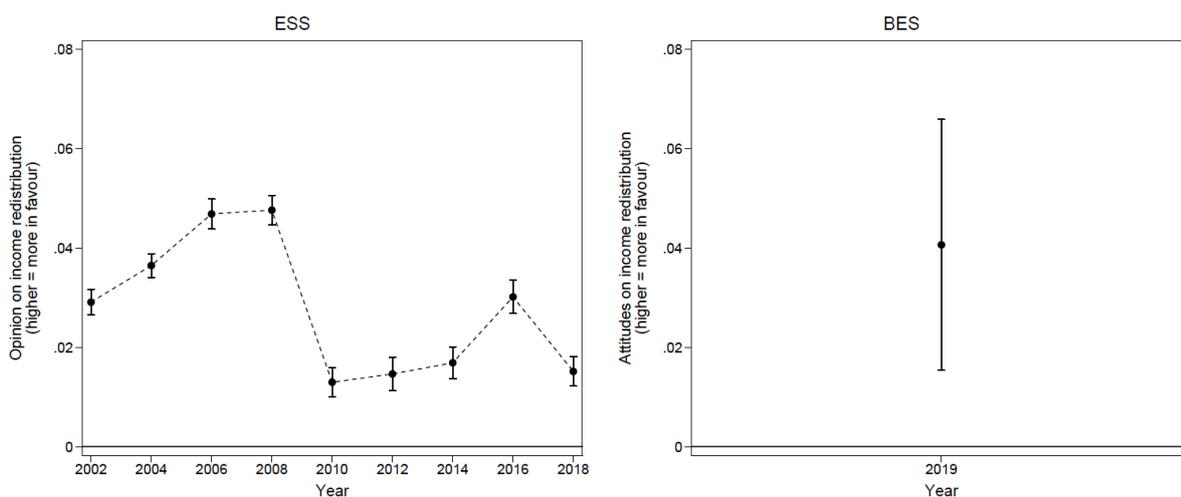
The results in Figure 3 show quite a fluctuating pattern. The data of the ESS do not show marked differences between the regions. In the ESS, the difference between the two regions is sometimes not significant, and it fluctuates as to which region shows the most supportive attitudes towards immigration. Furthermore, the differences, when significant, are rather limited. This is a rather surprising finding, because while there is a strong anti-immigrant political party in the Flemish region, this is completely absent in the Walloon region (see also Figure 1), leading to the stereotyping as if the Flemish population would be more strongly biased against immigrants than the rest of Belgium. In the most recent election study data, the difference becomes more substantial, and seems to be increasing. While future studies will have to show whether this is indeed an increasing trend, the conclusion from all survey years taken together is that, overall, there are no marked differences. This is also in line with previous studies indicating that while there is an important difference between both regions with regard to a vote for anti-immigrant political party, anti-immigrant sentiments themselves are remarkably similar (Coffé, Heyndels and Vermeir 2007). It is interesting, however, that the data from surveys gathered right after elections (i.e., PartiRep 2009, 2014, and CSES-Belgium 2019) seem to show more stable differences than those taken at other points in the electoral

cycle. As already mentioned, the anti-immigration discourse is more prominent among some Flemish parties, which might make this issue more salient around election times – somewhat polarising public opinion when elections are close. The exact causal relation between public opinion and the rhetoric of political parties, however, falls outside the scope of the current research note.

Economic redistribution

After investigating general ideology and attitudes about immigration, we turn to more specific political attitudes. First, we look at a measure of respondents’ attitudes about state intervention. More specifically, we use a measure of respondent opinions about whether the government should reduce differences in income. Higher values indicate more agreement that the government should intervene to reduce income differentials (see Table A1). Unfortunately, this question was not asked in the 2009 and 2014 election studies, but it was included in 2019. The full regression tables are included in Table A4; the differences between Flemish and Walloon respondents are displayed in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Differences in opinion about income redistribution between Flanders and Wallonia



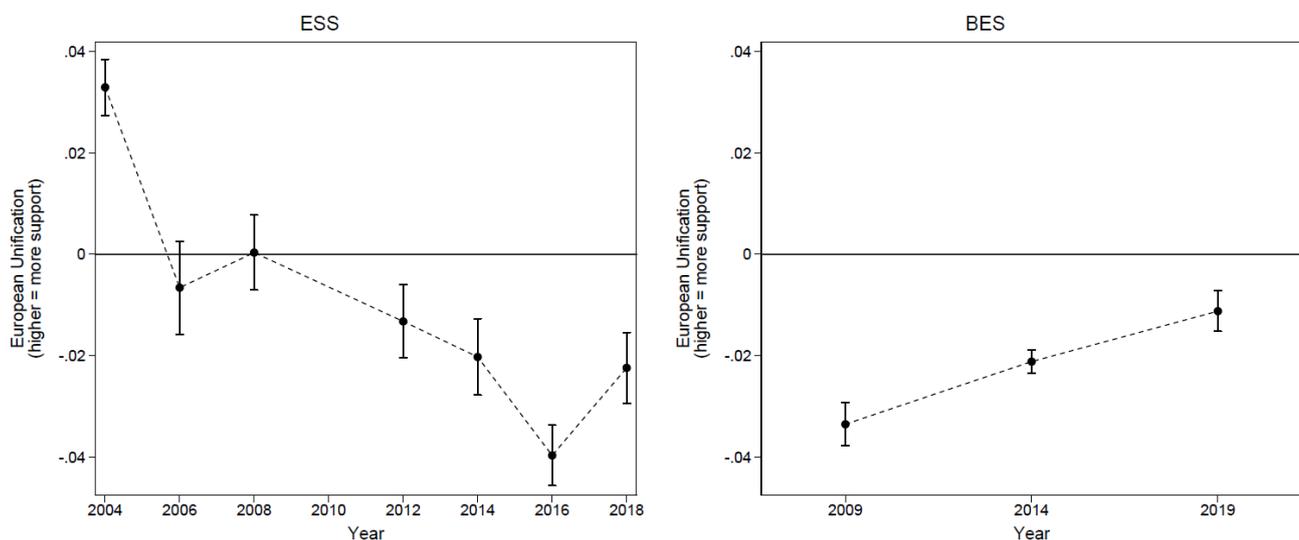
Note: The figures depict the difference in attitudes between Flanders (reference category) and Wallonia based on linear regression models including an interaction between region and year. See Table A4 for the full results. For the CSES-Belgium data, the question was only included in 2019. The result depicts the coefficient of the main effect of region from a model only including the 2019 data (see Table A4).

The results in Figure 4 show a stable positive difference, implying that Walloon respondents are, overall, more in favour of income redistribution than Flemish respondents. This is fully consistent with the previous observation that public opinion in the Walloon region tends to be slightly more on the left than public opinion in the Flemish region of Belgium (Figure 2). However, looking at the size of the differences, there is no evidence at all for a growing gap between the two regions in the years under study.

European integration

As a second more specific attitude, we look at opinions on European integration. In the ESS, respondents were asked whether they thought European integration should go further, or whether it had already gone too far (see Table A1). Higher values denote favouring more European integration. The full results are included in Table A5; the differences are displayed in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Differences in opinion about European unification between Flanders and Wallonia



Note: The figures depict the difference in attitudes between Flanders (reference category) and Wallonia based on linear regression models including an interaction between region and year. See Table A5 for the full results.

Figure 5 shows that at the beginning of the ESS surveys, Walloon respondents favour stronger European unification compared to Flemish respondents, but this seems to have reversed from 2012 on and the difference is rather stable since then. The pattern certainly does not suggest a growing gap between the regions.

Feelings of identity

After looking at several attitudes, we now focus on measures related to the Belgian federal structure specifically. First, we look at the geographical identity with which respondents identify most. In 2009 and 2014, respondents were asked which level they identify with most from a list of geographical entities, allowing to look at the distribution of the respondents of the two regions respectively (see also Table A1). In 2019, respondents were asked to what extent they identify with Europe, Belgium, and their region, on a 0-10 scale with higher values denoting a stronger identification. For this year, we look at the mean scores of all respondents for the different levels respectively. The results are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Feelings of identity of the respondents

	2009 (percent)		2014 (percent)		2019 (0-10 scale)	
	Flanders	Wallonia	Flanders	Wallonia	Flanders	Wallonia
Europe	9.47%	16.68%	8.31%	9.52%	6.494	6.726
Belgium	44.52%	55.58%	51.09%	60.38%	7.575	8.501
Francophone community	0.25%	4.10%	0.00%	4.86%		7.326
Flemish Community/region	25.58%	0.45%	21.29%	0.19%	7.540	
Germanophone community	0.00%	0.54%	0.00%	0.57%		
Walloon region	0.08%	10.35%	0.00%	10.48%		
Brussels region	0.33%	0.27%	0.00%	0.76%		
Province	5.56%	3.21%	6.02%	3.33%		
Municipality/city	14.20%	8.83%	13.29%	9.90%		

Note: Table lists the percentages of people feeling like they belong most to the respective geographical entities (2009 and 2014), or the mean scores of respondents on a 0-10-scale for different entities, with higher numbers denoting a higher extent of identification.

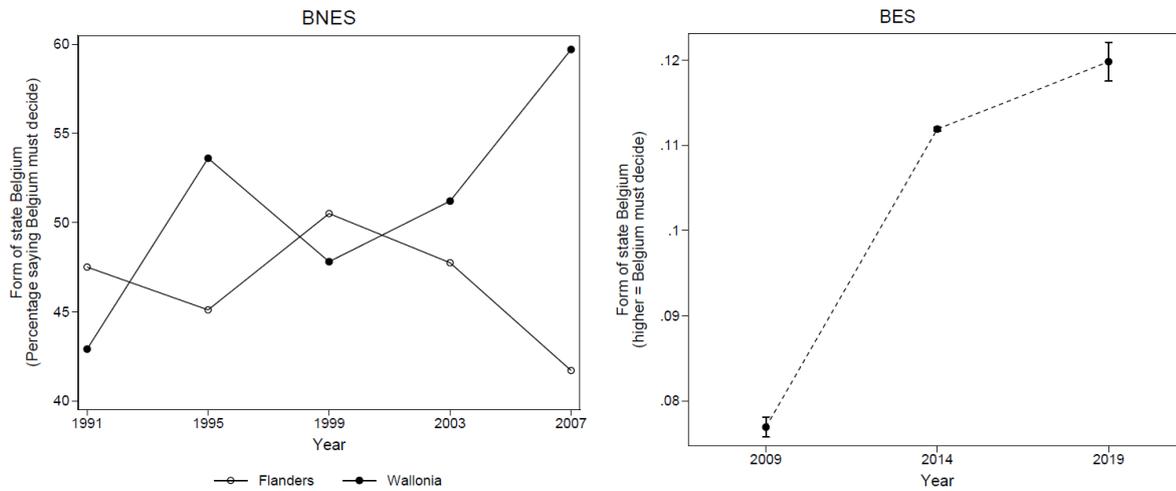
The results in Table 1 show that Walloon respondents identify, in general, more with the Belgian level than Flemish respondents. These latter are in their turn more likely to identify

with the regional level. These results are in line with those of Billiet et al. (2006) and show that this division seems to be prolonged in time.

Division of competences in the federation

Finally, we look at the core measure of this study: a direct indicator of the preferences of the respondents regarding the division of competences between the national level and the regions. It has become a standard item in election studies in Belgium to ask whether respondents feel like more competences should be transferred to the regional level, or whether the national level should receive full decision power. In the BNES, respondents are asked a direct trade-off question: whether they want Flanders/Wallonia to decide on everything by themselves (value 0) or Belgium to decide (value 10). We report the percentage of respondents responding 6 or higher on the scale, indicating a preference for more decision power on the Belgian level (Billiet et al. 1991; Billiet et al. 1998, Meersseman et al. 2001; Swyngedouw et al. 2009). In the BES, respondents were asked about their opinion about the distribution of powers between the different levels of government (lower again meaning more competences to the regions and less for the federal level) – see also Table A1 for more details. Hence, while the exact question format might be somewhat different, both question wordings measure respondent opinions on the Belgium federal system. An important note that needs to be made here is that the point of comparison differs between the survey years, as the period covers several reforms of state. However, the main interest is on the differences between the regions within the survey year relative to the point of comparison of that year. The full results are included in Table A6, and the differences are displayed in Figure 6. As a more general European survey, the ESS did not ask this question that is rather specific to the Belgian context.

Figure 6. Opinions and differences in opinion about division of competences between Flanders and Wallonia



Note: The left figure shows the percentage of respondents favouring more decision power on the Belgian level (i.e., scoring 6 or higher on the 0-10-scale). The right figure depicts the difference in attitudes between Flanders (reference category) and Wallonia based on linear regression models including an interaction between region and year. See Table A6 for the full results.

The results in Figure 6 show that, overall, Walloon respondents are more in favour of a stronger Belgian level than Flemish respondents. As the difference is sometimes larger than 1 point on a 0-10 scale, this is quite substantial. Looking at the evolution of the difference, it seems to become somewhat larger in more recent years. However, with the data at hand, no strong conclusions regarding the evolution over time can be made.

Taken together, these results do not show support for significantly increasing attitudinal differences between the two regions. The only indicator that indicates an increasing gap is attitudes about immigration, but it is too early to tell whether this increase will persist the years to come. Whereas the figures showed the differences between the regions, we also looked at the absolute levels of the indicators in both regions. The results are included in Table A7 in the Online Appendix. These results show that, even though the levels of the different variables fluctuate, they fluctuate rather equally in both regions, with as a result that the existing differences remain largely the same. Public opinion moods tend to evolve in a similar manner

in the two regions. Hence, based on these results, we cannot conclude that, looking at political attitudes of their respective inhabitants, the two Belgian regions under investigation are drifting further apart, as was predicted by Billiet et al. (2006, 930).

Conclusion

The main goal of this research note was to provide an update to the findings published by the Billiet et al. team in 2006. Apparently, public opinion does not change all that quickly. In line with the findings from that article, we can still conclude that there are strong similarities between public opinion in the two major regions, despite an apparent divergence at the level of the political elite (Medeiros et al. forthcoming). Public opinion did not grow further apart, but there was no convergence either as differences remain stable. To phrase it differently: apparently, it is not all that easy to deliberately change basic political attitudes of the population. The old saying that stateways cannot change folkways apparently also applies to federalism: while regional political elites may try to change public opinion in order to strengthen their basis of power, the least we can say is that thus far they have not been very successful in this regard.^v It falls outside the scope of the current paper to determine the causes for this lack of further convergence. One might speculate, however, that the structural differences between the two regions simply are too limited to lead to huge differences in public opinion. The two regions obviously share the same constitutional order, and both are strongly influenced by the process of European integration. For the economy too, we can observe differences, as according to the Ministry of Finance, the average income in Wallonia is ca. 12 per cent lower than the average income in the Flemish region. As for the past two decades, both regions have experienced the same economic growth; this gap has just remained constant. This means that, structurally, there are differences between both regions, but these differences

remain stable. This could be one of the main reasons why the differences in public opinion, too, do remain rather stable. It would therefore be erroneous to use the example of extremely different societies (economically and politically), like e.g., the former German Democratic Republic and West Germany, to try to predict the future public opinion trends in a federal country where structural differences, all in all, remain limited.

Where we do observe both regions growing apart is in their preferred option with regard to the political structure of Belgium (Dupuy et al. 2021; Verhaegen 2021). This is of course a key question, which most likely has a strong effect on the degree of loyalty to the Belgian federal system. Rather surprisingly, however, this gap is caused, not by the fact that there is by now more support for devolution, but because in at least one region, the feeling has grown that devolution has gone too far, so that an increasing part of the Walloon public opinion now seems to be in favour of moving back to a more unitary state. Theoretically, this is an interesting observation, as contrary to expectations about a centrifugal trend, we do not find any evidence for an increased preference for devolution. This is also in line with previous research (Verhaegen et al. 2021). In fact, we find totally the opposite phenomenon, as among Walloon public opinion there is a centripetal trend, as support for the central government seems to grow stronger over time. The current analysis does not allow us to explain this trend. One of the elements could be that, all things considered, citizens of the Walloon region tend to have more confidence in the federal institutions (that are almost equally composed of Dutch and French speakers), than in their own region institutions (Hooghe and Van Haute 2014). As such, they are better off with a federal government than with their own regional government. One might also speculate that there is some fear of being “left behind,” as Wallonia is a weaker economic actor within the Belgian federation. If the country would fall apart, this would threaten the economic position of Wallonia. Overall, there is a bitter irony in this observation. The distance between both public opinions is growing larger, not because one region wants

more autonomy than the other, but because one region does not want autonomy, and wants to return to a stronger unitary system. The end result, however, does remain that because of this increased distance the federation becomes more fragile. Or in this case too, apparently you cannot always get what you want.

References

- Anderson, Cameron. 2009. Institutional Change, Economic Conditions and Confidence in Government: Evidence from Belgium. *Acta Politica* 44 (1): 28-49.
- Anderson, Lawrence. 2004a. The Institutional Basis of Secessionist Politics: Federalism and Secession in the United States. *Publius. The Journal of Federalism* 34 (2): 1-18.
- Anderson, Lawrence. 2004b. Exploring the paradox of autonomy: federalism and secession in North America. *Regional & Federal Studies* 14 (1): 89-112.
- Bermeo, Nancy. 2002. A New Look at Federalism. The Import of Institutions. *Journal of Democracy* 13 (2): 96-110.
- Billiet, Jaak, Bart Maddens, and André-Paul Frogner. 2006. Does Belgium (Still) Exist? Differences in Political Culture between Flemings and Walloons. *West European Politics* 29 (5): 912-932.
- Billiet, Jaak, Marc Swyngedouw, André-Paul Frogner, Anne-Marie Aish, et al. 1991. General election study Belgium: Codebook and Questionnaire. Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve: ISPO/PIOP.
- Billiet, Jaak, Marc Swyngedouw, André-Paul Frogner, Anne-Marie Aish, et al. 1998. 1995 General election study Belgium: Codebook and questionnaire. Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve: ISPO/PIOP.
- Blais, André, and Marc Bodet. 2006. Does Proportional Representation Foster Closer Congruence Between Citizens and Policy Makers? *Comparative Political Studies* 39 (10): 1243-1262.
- Burgess, Michael. 2006. *Comparative Federalism: Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge.
- Caluwaerts, Didier, and Min Reuchamps. 2015. Combining Federalism with Consociationalism: Is Belgian Consociational Federalism Digging its Own Grave? *Ethnopolitics* 14 (3): 277-295.
- Coffé, Hilde. 2005. Do individual factors explain the different success of the two Belgian extreme right parties? *Acta Politica* 40 (1): 74-93.
- Coffé, Hilde, Bruno Heyndels, and Jan Vermeir. 2007. Fertile grounds for extreme right-wing parties: Explaining the Vlaams Blok's electoral success. *Electoral Studies* 26 (1): 142-155.
- Dalton, Russell J., David Farrell, and Ian McAllister. 2011. *Political Parties and Democratic Linkage. How Parties Organize Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dassonneville, Ruth, Eva Falk Pedersen, Annika, Grieb, and Marc Hooghe. 2014. *Belgian Election Panel 2009-2014: Technical Report*. Leuven: Centre for Citizenship and Democracy.
- Delwit, Pascal. ed. 2017. *Du parti libéral au MR : 170 ans de libéralisme en Belgique*. Bruxelles : Éditions de l'Université libre de Bruxelles.

- Deschouwer, Kris. 2006. And the peace goes on? Consociational democracy and Belgian politics in the twenty-first century. *West European Politics* 29 (5): 895-911.
- Deschouwer, Kris. 2009. Coalition Formation and Congruence in a Multi-layered Setting: Belgium 1995-2008. *Regional & Federal Studies* 19 (1): 13-35.
- Deschouwer, Kris. 2012. *The Politics of Belgium*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Deschouwer, Kris, and Min Reuchamps. 2013. The Belgian Federation at a Crossroad. *Regional & Federal Studies* 23 (3): 261-270.
- Duchacek, Ivo. 1988. Dyadic Federations and Confederations. *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 18 (2): 5-31.
- Dupuy, Claire, Soetkin Verhaegen, and Virginie Van Ingelgom. 2021. Support for Regionalization in Federal Belgium: The Role of Political Socialization. *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 51 (1): 54-78.
- Erk, Jan. 2005. Sub-state nationalism and the left-right divide: critical junctures in the formation of nationalist labour movements in Belgium. *Nations and Nationalism* 11 (4): 551-570.
- Erk, Jan, and Lawrence Anderson. 2009. The Paradox of Federalism: Does Self-Rule Accommodate or Exacerbate Ethnic Divisions. *Regional & Federal Studies* 19 (2): 191-202.
- European Social Survey Cumulative File, ESS 1-9. 2020. Data file edition 1.0. NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data, Norway - Data Archive and distributor of ESS data for ESS ERIC. doi:10.21338/nsd-ess-cumulative.
- Farhat, Nadim, Ward Vloeberghs, Philippe Bourbeau, and Philippe Poirier. 2020. Transforming Unitary States into Federations: Path-Dependent Construction of Political Identities in Belgium and Lebanon. *Publius. The Journal of Federalism* 50 (4): 593-619.
- Hooghe, Liesbet. 1991. *A Leap in the Dark. Nationalist Conflict and Federal Reform in Belgium*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Hooghe, Marc. 1990. De liberalisering van abortus als strijdpunt in de Belgische politiek, 1971-1990. *Res Publica* 32 (4): 489-509.
- Hooghe, Marc. 2012. The Political Crisis in Belgium (2007-2011). A Federal System without Federal Loyalty. *Representation* 48 (1): 131-138.
- Horowitz, Donald. 1985. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Huyse, Luc. 1981. Political Conflict in Bicultural Belgium? In: *Conflict and Coexistence in Belgium. The Dynamics of a Culturally Divided Society*, ed. A. Lijphart, 107-126. Berkeley: University of California.
- Kriesi, Hanspeter et al. 2012. *Political Conflict in Western Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Lijphart, Arend. 1977. *Democracy in Plural Societies*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Lijphart, Arend. ed., 1981, *Conflict and Coexistence in Belgium. The Dynamics of a Culturally Divided Society*. Berkeley: University of California.
- Lustick, Ian, Dan Miodownik, and Roy Eidelson. 2004. Secessionism in Multicultural States: Does Sharing Power Prevent or Encourage It? *American Political Science Review* 98 (2) : 209-229.
- Mabille, Xavier. 2011. *Nouvelle histoire politique de la Belgique*. Bruxelles: Crisp.
- McAndrew, Marie, and Rudi Janssens. 2004. The Role of Schooling in the Maintenance and Transformation of Ethnic Boundaries Between Linguistic Communities: Contrasting Quebec and Belgium. *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 26 (3): 61-83.
- McCulloh, Allison. 2014. *Power-sharing and Political Stability in Deeply Divided Societies*. Adingdon: Routledge.
- Meersseman, Erik, Jaak Billiet, Astrid Depickere, and Marc Swyngedouw. 2001. 1999 General election study Flanders - Belgium. Codebook: questions and frequency tables. Louvain: ISPO.
- ISPO/PIOP. 2004; General Election Study Belgium, 2003. Leuven/Louvain-La-Neuve: ISPO/PIOP.
- Medeiros, Mike, Jean-Philippe Gauvin, and Chris Chhim. forthcoming. Unified voters in a divided society: Ideology and regionalism in Belgium. *Regional and Federal Studies*, in press.
- Niessen, Christoph, et al. 2020. When Have Dyadic Federations Succeeded and When Have They Failed? A Comparative Analysis of Bipolar Federalism Around the World. In: *Federalism and National Diversity in the 21st Century*, eds. A.-G. Gagnon and A. Tremblay, 41-72. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Noel, Sid. ed., 2005. *From Power Sharing to Democracy. Post-Conflict Institutions in Ethnically Divided Societies*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- PartiRep. 2009. Belgian Election Study 2009. Codebook. Brussels/Leuven/Antwerp: PartiRep (www.partirep.eu).
- Reuchamps, Min et al. 2017. Reforming Belgium's Federalism: Comparing the Views of MPs and Voters. *Government and Opposition* 52 (3): 460-482.
- Swenden, Wilfried, and Maarten Jans. 2006. 'Will it stay or will it go?' Federalism and the sustainability of Belgium. *West European Politics* 29 (5): 877-894.
- Swyngedouw, Marc, Nathalie Rink, Koen Abts, Dimitry Poznyak, André-Paul Frogner, and Pierre Baudewyns. 2009. Belgian General Election Study 2007. Codebook: Questions and Frequency tables. Leuven: ISPO-PIOP.

- Van der Eijk, Cees, Hermann Schmitt, and Tanja Binder. 2005. Left-Right Orientations and Party Choice. In: *The European Voter. A Comparative Study of Modern Democracies*, ed. J. Thomassen, 167-191. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Van Haute, Emilie, and Kris Deschouwer. 2018. Federal reform and the quality of representation in Belgium. *West European Politics* 41 (3) : 683-702.
- Van Parijs, Philippe. 2018. *Belgium. Une utopie de notre temps*. Bruxelles : Académie Royale.
- Verhaegen, Soetkin, Claire Dupuy, and Virginie Van Ingelgom. 2021. Experiencing and supporting institutional regionalization in Belgium: a normative and interpretive policy feedback perspective. *Comparative European Politics* 19 (2): 248-275.
- Zuell, Cornelia, and Evi Scholz. 2019. Construct Equivalence of Left-Right Scale Placement in a Cross-National Perspective. *International Journal of Sociology* 49 (1): 77-95.

Appendix

Table A1: Variables in the analyses

General left-right ideology

Both data sources: Respondents were asked to indicate their own position on a scale ranging from 0 (“political left”) to 10 (“political right”).

Attitudes about immigration

-ESS: Respondents were asked to answer three items:

-Would you say it is generally bad or good for [country]'s economy that people come to live here from other countries?

-And, using this card, would you say that [country]'s cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries?

-Is [country] made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?

We expect the answers to these questions to measure one underlying attitude about immigration, which we test with a factor analysis:

Immigrants...	Factor loading
Bad/good for country's economy	0.723
Undermine/enrich culture country	0.714
Make country worse/better place to live	0.717
Eigenvalue	1.547
Cronbach's Alpha	0.797

The results show that there is a strong latent factor. We construct the variable attitudes about immigration as an index score.

-BES: we rely on different measurements of attitudes about immigration:

-PartiRep 2009: Respondents' opinion about the question the statement “immigration contributes to the wealth of our country”. Respondents could answer on a 1-5-scale ranging from “totally disagree” to “totally agree”.

-PartiRep 2014: Respondents could indicate whether they thought immigrants take advantage of the welfare society in Belgium, or whether they add to it, on a scale ranging from 0 (“take advantage”) to 10 (“add to it”).

-CSES-Belgium 2019: Respondents were asked an alternative to the ESS battery of questions (the last item stating whether immigrants increase crime), of which we made an index score as the answers load on a latent factor (see factor analysis below).

Immigrants...	Factor loading
Bad/good for country's economy	0.580
Undermine/enrich culture country	0.787
Decrease/increase crime	0.774
Eigenvalue	1.554
Cronbach's Alpha	0.787

Economic redistribution

-ESS: Respondents were asked: "please say to what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels" and they could answer using a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

European unification

-ESS: Respondents were asked to indicate whether they thought European unification should go further or whether it had already gone too far on a scale from 0 (already gone too far) to 10 (should go further).

-BES: Respondents were asked to indicate whether they thought European integration should be pushed further or whether it has already gone too far on a scale ranging from 0 (has already gone too far) over 5 (is good the way it is) to 10 (should be pushed further).

Identity

-BES: we rely on different measurements of attitudes about immigration:

-PartiRep 2009 and 2014: Respondents were asked to which cultural or geographic entity they feel like they belong the most, choosing from: Europe, Belgium, French-speaking Community of Belgium, Flemish Region or Community, German-speaking Community of Belgium, Walloon Region, Brussels Region, [your province], [your city or town].

-PartiRep 2014: Respondents could indicate whether they thought immigrants take advantage of the welfare society in Belgium, or whether they add to it, on a scale ranging from 0 ("take advantage") to 10 ("add to it").

-CSES Belgium 2019: Respondents were asked to indicate for the Belgian, Regional, and European level to what extent that identity was applicable to them on a scale ranging from 0 “not at all” to 10 “very strongly”.

Competences

-BNES: Respondents were asked: “The form of government that the country should have is still a matter of discussion. Some think that “Flanders and Wallonia must each be able to decide over everything by themselves”. Others think that “Belgium, Flemish and Walloons together, must be able to decide about everything”. Where would you place yourself on the scale?” Respondents could answer on a scale ranging from (“[Region] must decide everything”) to 10 (“Belgium must decide everything”). We report the percentage of respondents answering 6 or higher for the regions separately respectively.

-BES: Respondents were asked: “There is currently a lot of debate regarding the proper distribution of powers between the federal and regional levels of government. Some people think that more powers should go to the regions and communities. Other people think that more powers should go to the federal state. Where would place your opinion on a scale ranging from 0 to 10, where 0 means that Regions and Communities should have all the competences, and 10 means that all the competences should be attributed to the federal State? The value 5 means that you agree with the current situation.”

Control variables

-*Sex*: Sex of the respondent: 0=male; 1=female.

-*Age*: Age of the respondent (in years).

-*Educational level*: Educational level of the respondent. Divided into three categories: low (none, primary, lower secondary education); middle (higher secondary education); high (post-secondary education).

-*Income*: Income of the respondent. In the ESS satisfaction with one’s income on a 4-point scale ranging from “very difficult on present income” to “living comfortably on present income”.

-*Region*: Region in which the respondent lives: 0=Flanders; 1=Wallonia.

Table A2: Full models of differences in general political ideology by year

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	ESS		BES	
Sex (ref.=male)	-0.022*** (0.004)	-0.022*** (0.004)	-0.024* (0.005)	-0.024* (0.005)
Age	0.001*** (0.000)	0.001*** (0.000)	0.001* (0.000)	0.001* (0.000)
Education (ref.=low)				
Education: Middle	0.016** (0.004)	0.016** (0.004)	0.007 (0.019)	0.007 (0.019)
Education: High	0.010** (0.002)	0.009** (0.002)	0.014 (0.019)	0.015 (0.020)
(Satisfaction with) income	0.010* (0.003)	0.010* (0.003)	---	---
Region (ref.=Flanders)	-0.039*** (0.003)	-0.032*** (0.002)	-0.055* (0.011)	-0.045*** (0.001)
Year (ref.=first survey year)				
Second survey year	0.005*** (0.001)	0.009*** (0.000)	0.047*** (0.001)	0.045*** (0.001)
Third survey year	0.010*** (0.001)	0.008*** (0.000)	0.034* (0.004)	0.049** (0.003)
Fourth survey year	0.012*** (0.001)	0.009*** (0.000)		
Fifth survey year	0.013*** (0.001)	0.016*** (0.001)		
Sixth survey year	0.023*** (0.001)	0.022*** (0.001)		
Seventh survey year	0.023*** (0.001)	0.030*** (0.001)		
Eighth survey year	0.014*** (0.001)	0.020*** (0.001)		
Ninth survey year	0.013*** (0.001)	0.017*** (0.001)		
Region X 1 st survey				
Region X 2 nd survey		-0.014*** (0.000)		0.003** (0.000)
Region X 3 th survey		0.005*** (0.000)		-0.036*** (0.001)
Region X 4 th survey		0.009*** (0.000)		
Region X 5 th survey		-0.011*** (0.000)		
Region X 6 th survey		0.003** (0.001)		
Region X 7 th survey		-0.019*** (0.000)		
Region X 8 th survey		-0.022*** (0.000)		
Region X 9 th survey		-0.012*** (0.000)		

Constant	0.454*** (0.006)	0.452*** (0.007)	0.470*** (0.006)	0.465*** (0.010)
<i>N</i>	13847	13847	5364	5364
<i>R</i> ²	0.021	0.022	0.036	0.038

Note: Entries are unstandardised OLS coefficients, standard errors in parentheses. Standard errors are clustered by year. Significance levels: *: $p < 0.05$; **: $p < 0.01$; ***: $p < 0.001$.

Table A3: Full models of differences on attitudes on immigration by year

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	ESS		BES	
Sex (ref.=male)	-0.013*	-0.013*	-0.009	-0.009
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Age	-0.001***	-0.001***	-0.001*	-0.001*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Education (ref.=low)				
Education: Middle	0.030***	0.030***	0.031	0.030
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.010)	(0.009)
Education: High	0.094***	0.095***	0.130*	0.129*
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.015)	(0.014)
(Satisfaction with) income	0.032***	0.032***	---	---
	(0.003)	(0.003)		
Region (ref.=Flanders)	-0.000	0.015***	0.039	-0.014**
	(0.004)	(0.002)	(0.032)	(0.001)
Year (ref.=first survey year)				
Second survey year	-0.004***	0.002**	-0.147***	-0.178***
	(0.001)	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)
Third survey year	0.022***	0.027***	-0.106**	-0.156***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.004)	(0.003)
Fourth survey year	0.034***	0.040***		
	(0.001)	(0.000)		
Fifth survey year	-0.003*	-0.006***		
	(0.001)	(0.001)		
Sixth survey year	0.007***	0.014***		
	(0.001)	(0.001)		
Seventh survey year	0.003*	0.017***		
	(0.001)	(0.001)		
Eighth survey year	0.030***	0.032***		
	(0.001)	(0.001)		
Ninth survey year	0.054***	0.056***		
	(0.001)	(0.001)		
Region X 1 st survey				
Region X 2 nd survey		-0.020***		0.063***
		(0.000)		(0.000)
Region X 3 th survey		-0.018***		0.114***
		(0.000)		(0.001)
Region X 4 th survey		-0.021***		
		(0.000)		
Region X 5 th survey		0.010***		
		(0.001)		
Region X 6 th survey		-0.025***		
		(0.001)		
Region X 7 th survey		-0.041***		
		(0.000)		
Region X 8 th survey		-0.008***		
		(0.001)		
Region X 9 th survey		-0.008***		
		(0.000)		

Constant	0.422*** (0.007)	0.419*** (0.007)	0.526** (0.020)	0.552** (0.018)
<i>N</i>	14238	14238	6042	6042
<i>R</i> ²	0.109	0.110	0.119	0.127

Note: Entries are unstandardised OLS coefficients, standard errors in parentheses. Standard errors are clustered by year. Significance levels: *: $p < 0.05$; **: $p < 0.01$; ***: $p < 0.001$.

Table A4: Full models of differences on attitudes on income redistribution by year

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	ESS		BES
Sex (ref.=male)	0.032*** (0.005)	0.032*** (0.005)	0.067*** (0.013)
Age	0.001*** (0.000)	0.001*** (0.000)	0.001** (0.000)
Education (ref.=low)			
Education: Middle	-0.009 (0.006)	-0.010 (0.006)	-0.046* (0.020)
Education: High	-0.050** (0.011)	-0.051** (0.011)	-0.123*** (0.018)
(Satisfaction with) income	-0.042*** (0.002)	-0.042*** (0.002)	---
Region (ref.=Flanders)	0.028*** (0.005)	0.029*** (0.001)	0.041** (0.013)
Year (ref.=first survey year)			
Second survey year	-0.027*** (0.000)	-0.030*** (0.000)	
Third survey year	0.001* (0.000)	-0.005*** (0.000)	
Fourth survey year	0.004*** (0.000)	-0.002** (0.001)	
Fifth survey year	0.013*** (0.001)	0.018*** (0.002)	
Sixth survey year	0.008*** (0.001)	0.013*** (0.001)	
Seventh survey year	0.009*** (0.001)	0.014*** (0.002)	
Eighth survey year	0.023*** (0.001)	0.023*** (0.002)	
Ninth survey year	0.015*** (0.002)	0.020*** (0.002)	
Region X 1 st survey			
Region X 2 nd survey		0.007*** (0.001)	
Region X 3 th survey		0.018*** (0.000)	
Region X 4 th survey		0.019*** (0.001)	
Region X 5 th survey		-0.016*** (0.001)	
Region X 6 th survey		-0.014*** (0.001)	
Region X 7 th survey		-0.012*** (0.001)	
Region X 8 th survey		0.001 (0.001)	
Region X 9 th survey		-0.014*** (0.001)	

Constant	0.719*** (0.011)	0.719*** (0.011)	0.738*** (0.030)
<i>N</i>	14552	14552	1729
<i>R</i> ²	0.052	0.052	0.063

Note: Entries are unstandardised OLS coefficients, standard errors in parentheses. Standard errors are clustered by year. Significance levels: *: $p < 0.05$; **: $p < 0.01$; ***: $p < 0.001$.

Table A5: Full models of differences on attitudes on European unification by year

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	ESS		BES	
Sex (ref.=male)	-0.019*	-0.019*	-0.028**	-0.028**
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Age	-0.001*	-0.001*	-0.000	-0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Education (ref.=low)				
Education: Middle	0.006	0.005	0.024*	0.023*
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Education: High	0.068***	0.067***	0.130**	0.129**
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.005)
(Satisfaction with) income	0.037***	0.037***	---	---
	(0.005)	(0.005)		
Region (ref.=Flanders)	-0.009	0.033***	-0.023	-0.034***
	(0.007)	(0.002)	(0.007)	(0.001)
Year (ref.=first survey year)	---	---		
Second survey year	(ref.)	(ref.)	-0.059***	-0.065***
			(0.000)	(0.000)
Third survey year	-0.020***	-0.005***	-0.012*	-0.021*
	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Fourth survey year	0.039***	0.051***		
	(0.000)	(0.000)		
Fifth survey year	---	---		
Sixth survey year	0.029***	0.045***		
	(0.001)	(0.001)		
Seventh survey year	0.003**	0.022***		
	(0.001)	(0.001)		
Eighth survey year	-0.000	0.025***		
	(0.001)	(0.001)		
Ninth survey year	0.058***	0.078***		
	(0.001)	(0.001)		
Region X 1 st survey		---		
Region X 2 nd survey		(ref.)		0.012**
				(0.000)
Region X 3 th survey		-0.040***		0.022***
		(0.002)		(0.000)
Region X 4 th survey		-0.033***		
		(0.001)		
Region X 5 th survey		---		
Region X 6 th survey		-0.046***		
		(0.001)		
Region X 7 th survey		-0.053***		
		(0.001)		
Region X 8 th survey		-0.073***		
		(0.000)		
Region X 9 th survey		-0.055***		
		(0.001)		

Constant	0.448*** (0.014)	0.433*** (0.016)	0.510** (0.024)	0.515** (0.023)
<i>N</i>	11221	11221	5966	5966
<i>R</i> ²	0.056	0.058	0.063	0.063

Note: Entries are unstandardised OLS coefficients, standard errors in parentheses. Standard errors are clustered by year. Significance levels: *: $p < 0.05$; **: $p < 0.01$; ***: $p < 0.001$.

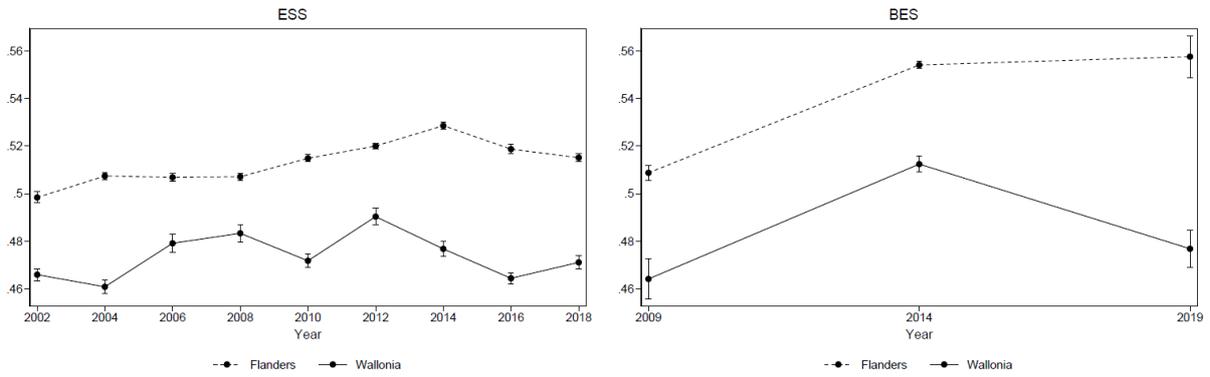
Table A6: Full models of differences on division of competences by year

	(1)	(2)
	BES	
Sex (ref.=male)	-0.001 (0.006)	-0.001 (0.006)
Age	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Education (ref.=low)		
Education: Middle	0.001 (0.006)	0.001 (0.006)
Education: High	0.020 (0.009)	0.020 (0.008)
(Satisfaction with) income	---	---
Region (ref.=Flanders)	0.101* (0.014)	0.077*** (0.000)
Year (ref.=first survey year)		
Second survey year	0.026** (0.001)	0.009** (0.000)
Third survey year	0.040** (0.002)	0.021* (0.003)
Region X 1 st survey		
Region X 2 nd survey		0.035*** (0.000)
Region X 3 th survey		0.043*** (0.000)
Constant	0.405*** (0.000)	0.417*** (0.006)
<i>N</i>	5895	5895
<i>R</i> ²	0.044	0.045

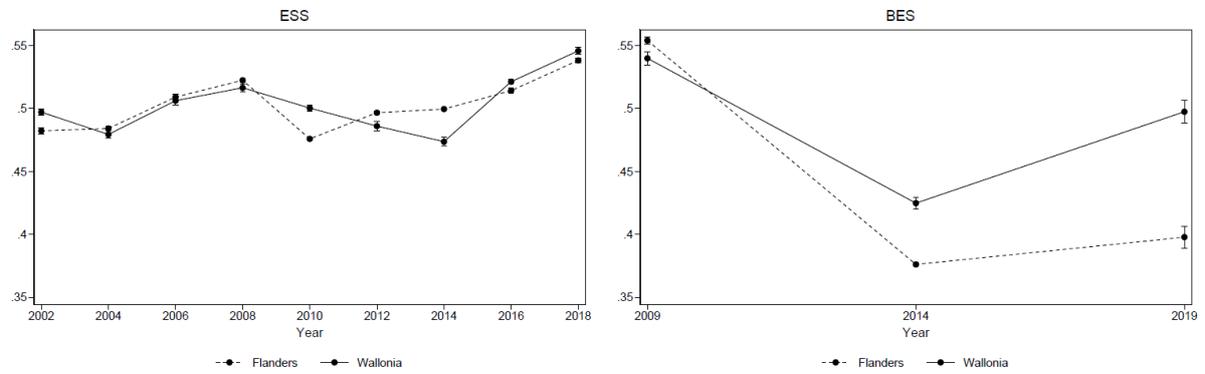
Note: Entries are unstandardised OLS coefficients, standard errors in parentheses. Standard errors are clustered by year. Significance levels: *: $p < 0.05$; **: $p < 0.01$; ***: $p < 0.001$.

Table A7: Figures showing the absolute levels in support for both regions respectively

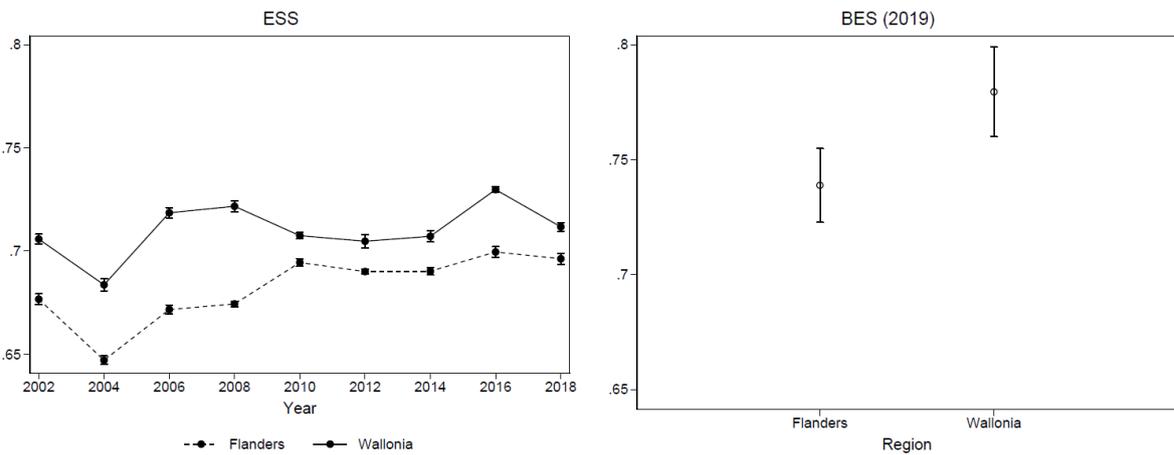
Left-right



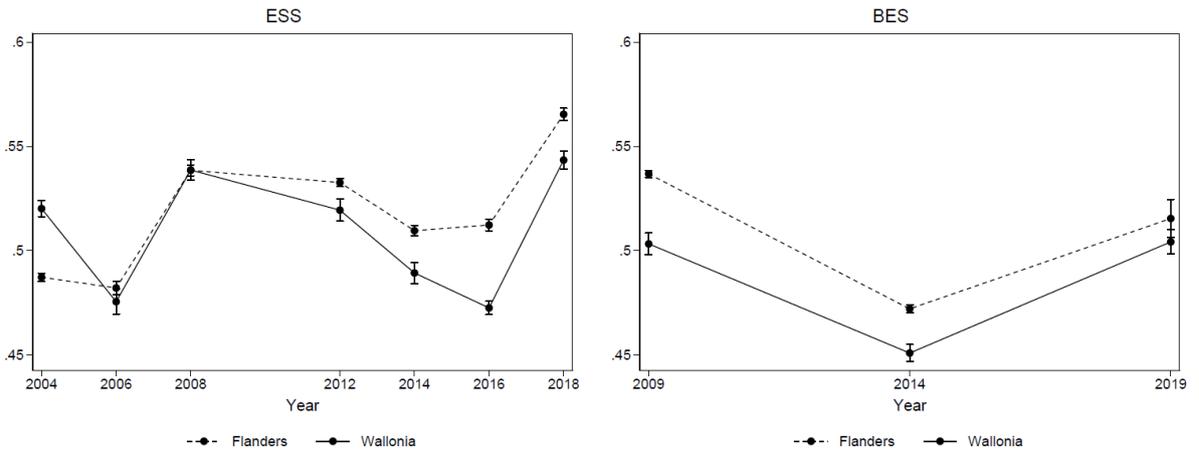
Immigration



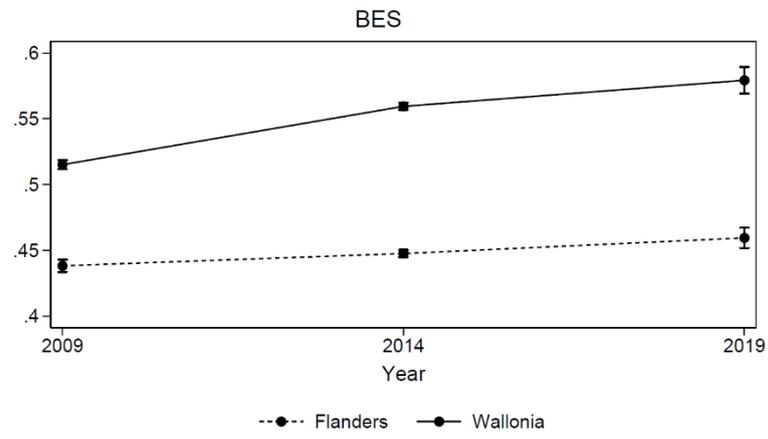
Redistribution



EU-unification



Competences



NOTES:

ⁱ. For the time being, we leave aside the much smaller German language group in the Eastern part of the country, as it counts less than 1 per cent of the total Belgian population. For further details, see Dupuy et al. (2021).

ⁱⁱ. In 2014 and 2019 elections for the Federal parliament of Belgium were held on the same day as the elections for the regional parliaments, and it can be assumed that this simultaneity strengthens a tendency toward congruent voting. Among the respondents of the 2014 and the 2019 elections studies, resp. 11.59 and 13.35 per cent did not vote for the same party in the federal and the regional elections.

ⁱⁱⁱ. In all three election studies, the sample was restricted to the Walloon and the Flemish region, that together account for 90 % of the Belgian population. The bilingual region of the capital Brussels (10 % of the population) is not included in these surveys. Belgian legislation does not allow the National Register to record information on the preferred language of the inhabitants, so for fieldwork it is not obvious in what language a survey in Brussels could or should be administered.

^{iv} To be able to present the best possible comparison, we also use all available observations in every model respectively. Hence, the number of observations differs between the different dependent variables.

^v. It remains to be investigated whether similar conclusions also hold for the region of Brussels and the German language community of Belgium.