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EDITORIAL

Politics of the Low Countries Inaugurates the State of the Profession Section and a New Format for PhD Reviews

*Audrey Vandeleene, Maurits J. Meijers, Luana Russo & Min Reuchamps**

Over the past five years, the journal *Politics of the Low Countries* (PLC) has published original research articles (two of which are featured in this issue), research notes and literature reviews as well as PhD reviews. With this issue, PLC inaugurates a new section, entitled 'State of the Profession', and a new format for PhD Reviews. In this short editorial, we are delighted to present the readers these two promising sections.

1 State of the Profession

In the realm of academia, we often find ourselves immersed in the pursuit of knowledge, delving deep into our specialised fields of study and navigating the intricacies of our own academic institutions. Yet, it is crucial to remember that we are not isolated in our scholarly endeavours. We are part of a broader community, shaped not only by universal academic concerns but also by the unique landscapes and dynamics of our own countries and regions.

The Editorial Board of PLC, a journal dedicated to exploring the political landscapes of Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, recognises the importance of acknowledging and engaging with both the commonalities and distinctions that shape the academic experiences of scholars in these neighbouring countries.

To bridge this gap and foster a deeper sense of community among academics in the BeNeLux region, we are introducing a new section in our journal: 'State of the Profession'. This section aims to provide a platform for colleagues to discuss matters related to being an academic, encompassing both universal themes and specific national concerns.

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In State of the Profession, we will delve into broader academic discussions that transcend borders. We will explore topics such as the challenges and opportunities presented by digitalisation, the evolving role of universities in society, the ethics of research and publication, and the ongoing debates surrounding diversity and inclusion in academia. These themes are not confined by national boundaries, and we believe that a shared dialogue can enrich our understanding and responses to these crucial issues.

Additionally, State of the Profession will serve as a forum for addressing the specific academic matters that pertain to Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. While we share many commonalities, each country has its own unique higher education system, research infrastructure and academic culture(s). Our scholars often grapple with challenges and opportunities that are distinct to their respective nations.

For example, the intricacies of academic funding, the dynamics of university governance and the interactions between academia and politics can vary significantly from one country to another. By opening a space for discussion on these national matters, we hope to shed light on the experiences of our colleagues across borders and stimulate a cross-pollination of ideas and insights.

We believe that State of the Profession has the potential to foster collaboration and mutual understanding among scholars in the BeNeLux region. Too often, valuable insights and experiences remain confined within national borders, limiting our collective growth and impact. Through this section, we aim to break down these barriers and encourage an open exchange of knowledge and ideas.

We invite scholars, educators and researchers from Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and beyond to actively participate in this dialogue. Share your perspectives, challenges and innovations. Engage with your peers across the region, and together, let's strengthen our academic community.

We hope that the section 'State of the Profession' will be more than just a new section in our journal, but that it will help in fostering a vibrant and interconnected academic community in the low countries. We look forward to the insightful discussions and collaborations that will emerge from this endeavour, as we continue to explore the political landscapes of our countries and the shared journey of academia.

2 New Format for PhD Reviews

We are excited to introduce a new format for the PhD Reviews section of PLC. In our previous format, an independent reviewer summarised the main contribution of the PhD dissertation and offered a critical appraisal. While this approach has served us well over the years, we are constantly seeking ways to enhance the quality and relevance of the content we deliver to our readers.

As a result, we are now calling for PhD reviews to be published in our upcoming issues, featuring a twofold structure that we believe will provide a more comprehensive and insightful perspective on the doctoral research being conducted in Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands in the various subfields of political science research.

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The new format consists of two key components:

– PhD Summary (approximately 1,000 words): This section will be authored by the PhD candidate themselves. It offers an in-depth summary of their thesis, highlighting its main points and contributions. This change allows the author to provide a first-hand account of their work, offering unique insights and perspectives.
– PhD Review (approximately 500 words): A critical review of the PhD thesis authored by a reviewer the PhD candidate proposes. While the reviewer cannot be the supervisor, reviewers are often members of the doctoral jury. This review will focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis and its contribution to the existing literature. By separating the summary and review components, the reviewer can dedicate their attention to a thoughtful critique of the work, providing a more to-the-point assessment.

One key benefit of this new format is that both the PhD Summary and the PhD Review will be published as two separate articles. This means that the summary of the PhD can be cited independently from the review, enhancing the accessibility and usability of the content for researchers and scholars in the field.

We believe this new format will not only enhance the depth and quality of our PhD reviews but also provide a platform for emerging scholars to present their doctoral work in a more straightforward and engaging manner. We look forward to receiving many proposals and sharing these insightful reviews with our readers.

With a new section titled 'State of the Profession' and a new format for PhD reviews, the journal PLC wants to follow as closely as possible the most recent developments in the field and above all to offer a comprehensive appraisal. The publication of articles in these two sections, next to original research articles, research notes and literature reviews – often bundled in special issues –, seeks to perpetuate PLC's position as the reference journal for anyone who wants to follow and understand political dynamics in the low countries.

ARTICLES

Assessing Basic Income Feasibility Political Parties' Positions on the French-Speaking Belgian Scene

*Floriane Geels**

Abstract

Social protection systems are under growing pressure and face many challenges. Some argue that a universal basic income (BI) has the potential to transcend political cleavages and offer the ground for a welfare reform. While previous literature has increasingly tackled BI's feasibility, ground-based research is still scarce. This study intends to fill this gap by considering the positions of five French-speaking Belgian parties (PTB, PS, Ecolo, Les Engagés and MR) on BI. Through a qualitative in-depth analysis of semi-structured interviews and grey literature, the article shows that BI proposals coming from liberals, democrats and ecologists are representative of the left-right cleavage. This is explained by the multidimensionality of the 'basic income' concept but also by diverging visions on work and society. By studying concrete parties' positions, this article reveals the barriers and ways forward the path to BI's strategic political feasibility in Belgium.

Keywords: basic income, parties, political feasibility.

1 Introduction

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the course of our lives has been thoroughly shaken. In Belgium, amid the first coronavirus 'wave', in spring 2020, the number of employed people benefitting from temporary unemployment allowance has reached the unprecedented rate of 40 per cent while half of the self-employed workers asked for a compensating allowance (*Banque Nationale de Belgique*, 2021, p. 198). In this context, the public contributions have greatly counterbalanced the national revenue loss of households, firms and public authorities, which are estimated at 41 billion euros by Belgium's National Bank (2021, p. 73). At the same time, more and more people had to turn to public assistance or charities to be able to cope with the lack of income. The Belgian Red Cross has, for example, seen a rise of 32 per cent of their food aid distribution to meet the exploding demand (*Croix-Rouge de Belgique*, 2021). These exceptional

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circumstances have raised important questions about Belgium's social protection system and how to make it more resilient to exterior shocks such as pandemics. Among others, the possibility of implementing a universal and unconditional basic income (BI) has been brought up as a potential solution.

The return of this proposal only confirms what appears to be the growing, although cyclical, attention towards BI projects. Indeed, debates about unconditional BI have significantly come back on the scene the last few years. BI, a cash income paid to all members of a political community, regardless of their revenues and without conditions, is, under its canonical form, commonly defined with three unconditionalities (Dumont, 2022; Van Parijs & Vanderborght, 2017). It is universal (every adult in a community gets the same amount), unconditional (no work conditions or restrictions) and individual (the income is given to one person rather than to a household). In Belgium, political parties lingered before taking a clear stance on the topic even though theoretical and philosophical discussions have been highly inspiring. Indeed, BI is an ambiguous theme: it is divisive across the population, within political wings and parties, and yet gathers support from opposed political sides.

Debates about BI's potential effects and benefits in the literature include seemingly contradictory arguments. BI is said both to facilitate the exit of the labour market (Calnitsky, 2017) and the power to say no to jobs (Widerquist, 2013); and to encourage labour market participation by removing unemployment and poverty traps (de Basquiat & Koenig, 2014; Friedman, 2013). It is advocated for its emancipatory power, especially for women (Whithorn, 2013), but at the same time criticised for its potential gendered effect, pushing back women in the household unquestioning the gendered division of care (Eydoux, 2017). Proponents of BI insist on the freedom and the real opportunities it provides to individuals (Van Parijs, 1991; Van Parijs & Vanderborght, 2017), whereas opponents pretend it is only a way of unravelling social security and abandoning citizens to self-subsistence (Alaluf, 2014). On another dimension, it is both said to lead the path towards a non-productivist, frugal society (Pinto, 2020) and to encourage consumerist behaviours (Ackerman & Alstott, 2008). Ultimately, it is impossible to assess the real effects BI would have as it has never been implemented under a pure form. It is, therefore, not surprising that a wide range of arguments are used in the political debate.

In this article, the author scrutinises the positions of five main political parties of the French-speaking part of Belgium on BI: the liberals (*Mouvement réformateur*, MR), the socialists (*Parti Socialiste*, PS), the greens (Ecolo), the far left (*Parti du Travail belge*, PTB) and the democrats (*Les Engagés*, former Christian democrats, *cdH*). This study intends to answer the following research question: *what do the different positions of the main French-speaking Belgian parties regarding BI tell us about its strategic feasibility?*

The author first conducts a review of the existing literature and presents the driving theoretical concept of this article: the strategic feasibility of BI. The second section offers the opportunity to clarify the methodology and justifies the case study by contextualising the Belgian political and institutional scene. In the analysis section, the author uncovers each party's position on BI and investigates

how these positions are still telling of the left-right cleavage. The article shows that not only are the liberal, democrat and green BI proposals informed by very different visions, but also that PS, PTB and Ecolo, behind the BI debate, take common stances on alternative social reforms. Finally, the author draws conclusions on the strategic feasibility of BI in Belgium, summarises the main takes of the current study and touches upon potential future research developments in the last section.

2 Theory

This section first presents the theoretical framework of the research by detailing the concept of strategic political feasibility of BI. Then, a review of the BI literature is conducted.

2.1 Strategic Feasibility of BI

The author's theoretical frame is drawn from De Wispelaere and Noguera (2012) as they designed an analytical framework of the political feasibility of BI (see Table 1). They start from two assumptions: first, politics involves agency and political power. It means that policy entrepreneurs with different resources try to influence political outcomes, addressed at either *discrete* (easily identifiable actors such as policymakers, bureaucrats or social movement elites) or *diffuse* agents (typically, the 'public'). This constitutes the first dimension of their typology. Second, politics happens in a constrained environment, both before and after the implementation of the policy. Constraints affecting the probability of a measure, namely BI here, being implemented are *prospective*, whereas background conditions influencing the functioning of the policy once instituted are *retrospective*. These two axes combined allow for a multidimensional typology designating four types of political feasibility: strategic, institutional, psychological, and behavioural. The author uses the strategic feasibility here: it combines discrete agents, political parties in this case, with prospective constraints, as the study concerns parties' positions on a potential future implementation of BI.

Table 1 ***Typology of political feasibility, adapted from De Wispelaere and Noguera (2012, p. 21)***

	Prospective constraints (before implementation)	*Retrospective constraints* (after implementation)
Discrete agency (easily identifiable)	**Strategic feasibility**	Institutional feasibility
Diffuse agency (dispersed actors)	Psychological feasibility	Behavioural feasibility

According to the authors, strategic feasibility implies the search for a strong BI coalition, as the simple enumeration of individual support is not enough. Two obstacles threaten this type of feasibility: the risk of cheap support and of counterproductive support. Support for BI can be cheap following two meanings: it can be of no concrete worth because emanating from marginalised actors with little political power, and/or it can be weak and easily abandoned once the actor is

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in power, because it has a high political opportunity cost. The fact that support can be counterproductive refers to the existence of a potential 'first-mover disadvantage' repelling some political groups to take a positive stance because opposed ones already endorsed the proposal (de Wispelaere & Noguera, 2012, pp. 21-24).

These theoretical insights will drive the author's analysis, the agents the author is concerned with here are parties. The puzzle of cheap and counterproductive support will offer useful criteria to conclude about the strategic feasibility of BI in the Belgian context. The development of this article thus intends to assess whether such obstacles do exist in relation to political parties in Belgium, and how it affects the probability of different types of BI being implemented.

2.2 Review of the Literature

Increasing numbers of studies are considering the political feasibility of BI, and many of them are based on the theoretical framework just touched upon, which was the reason for the BI literature to take a more concrete turn. Examples of research investigating the politics of BI, with or without the mentioned typology, are numerous. Perkiö (2021) uses the strategic feasibility combined with an ideational institutionalist perspective to examine the framing of the BI theme in the Finnish context and confirms the thesis of cheap support from agents advocating for BI. The authors of the book *Experimenting with Unconditional Basic Income, Lessons from the Finnish BI Experiment 2017-2018* (2021) elaborate on the four types of political feasibility to make the conclusive claim that, under current circumstances, a genuine BI scheme has low chances of being implemented in the near future in Europe (Kangas, 2021, for a brief review, see Geels, 2022). Many other publications approach the same issue through the lenses of the policy and political learnings from on-the-ground experiments, in Barcelona (García, 2022) or the Netherlands (Roosma, 2022). The feasibility question of BI is also analysed at length in the British context in Martinelli's report (2017). Another study, concerning the Belgian situation this time, explores the strategic and psychological feasibility of various BI proposals in Belgium by uncovering "the political constituencies and coalitions that may be mobilised in favour of —or against — different models of BI in the Belgian welfare state" (Laenen et al., 2022, p. 3). The international level is also scrutinised in different studies. Shanahan et al. (2019) use, for example, the same framework and Vlandas (2019) delves into the individual support for BI in Europe. Alternatively, some authors inspire themselves from the typology to design their own framework and infer on the feasibility of BI (see, for example, Torry, 2019), while others prefer to complement it with other bodies of literature on institutions and political parties (see Chrisp, 2020).

I follow this perspective: if the framework surely provides a strong analytic basis, it still needs to be complemented by other concepts and bodies of literature. The notion of *multidimensionality* of BI is key to our understanding of political debates. When analysing political parties' positions on BI, one has to bear in mind that these positions relate to different forms, and dimensions of BI. Indeed, BI is better understood as a family of schemes than as a ready-made policy. De Wispelaere and Stirton (2004) help us differentiate between proposals by highlighting seven dimensions along which BI can vary, and Laenen and colleagues (2022) complement

this frame by adding four others. I will use six of these fourteen dimensions to inform my analysis: universality, conditionality, adequacy, accumulation, financing, and integration. They will be detailed in the analysis part. Depending on how these dimensions are associated, the presumed effects will differ extensively. In addition to this element, it is useful to combine the BI literature with other political science research bodies, as I will now turn to.

It has been argued that BI was 'neither left nor right', as it is difficult to classify a welfare policy on the political spectrum (Chrisp & Martinelli, 2019). Some claim that it could be a "compromise between protective and productive elements of social security" (Martinelli, 2017, p. 6). However, other pieces of literature nuance this claim, admitting that the left-right divide might well be at stake: "Basic income may be neither left nor right on the *economic* dimension but not on the *cultural* dimension" (Chrisp, 2020, p. 66). This cultural dimension refers to particular welfare policies preferences, linked to values and cultural identities. BI can actually be understood as an '*either* left or right' policy (my emphasis, Chrisp, 2020, p. 47). The concept's amplitude has been highlighted in many analyses. Indeed, Vandamme (2021), Eydoux (2017) or Allègre (2017) insist on the fact that there are at least two ideal types of BI. One pole is neoliberal, the other includes both social-democrat and social-ecologist versions.

Several researches have also demonstrated that left-wing voters were statistically more likely to be in favour of BI (Chrisp & Martinelli, 2019). Studies based on the European Social Survey tend to point at similar results at the European level (Roosma & van Oorschot, 2020; Vlandas, 2019). Empirical studies show that the traditional left-right cleavage does not seem to inform BI's support in some national contexts, such as in the UK or Finland; in Belgium, left-wing voters are more supportive of all types of BI than their right-wing counterparts (Laenen et al., 2022). Several political science theories might help clarify the links between parties' positions, voters' preferences and policy setting. While the *vote-seeking* (Storm, 1990) strategy of parties might explain the ecologists' position, it fails to justify PS's position: socialists are not following their voters' inclination towards BI, as will be detailed further. The fact that we witnessed an intensified debate on the political scene following some "policy entrepreneurs" (Mintrom, 1997) such as the socialist and liberal parties' presidents might, on the other side, indicate a *policy-seeking* behaviour. Most francophone parties were pushed to take a stance on the BI theme. Beyond party behaviours, one has, in addition, to acknowledge the importance of the context. Indeed, it is needed in understanding complex phenomena such as parties' positions on social policies, to consider institutional and historical contexts (Chrisp, 2020).

There is a whole research field, at the juncture of party politics and BI literature, waiting to be explored. As Chrisp (2020, p. 49) mentions: "there is a need for a systematic, comparative approach to explain political support and opposition to basic income.... Specifically, insufficient attention has been given to the role of political parties in basic income research." This is what the author intends to do in the present research. The author argues that party ideology matters, and that the left-right divide is a relevant analytical line to understand the BI debate in the Belgian context. A cleavage can be defined as the opposition between political

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parties arising in a national setting (Delwit, 2021a, p. 7). The author here draws the line between the left and the right in a multidimensional perspective, as different types of divisions are interwoven (Delwit, 2021a, p. 9). The socio-economic division (or the class conflict) is, of course, decisive, but positions about the state's role, the neoliberal economic system and inequalities will also be part of the analysis, illustrating the *cultural* dimension of the aforementioned traditional cleavage.

3 Case Selection and Methodology

3.1 Case Selection

Belgium is an interesting case study to investigate the political feasibility of BI through the lens of francophone parties' positions for both contextual and institutional reasons. On the one hand, the BI idea has inspired proposals and discussions for decades by eminent public figures, be they academics or politicians, especially on the French-speaking side. The theme often resurfaces on the public scene and has led political actors to position themselves in the past few years. On the other hand, two main characteristics make the institutional context worthwhile to consider in the analysis, as they influence the BI debate. First, political parties have a decisive and institutional role in the Belgian system. Then, Belgium's complex institutional structure and the hybrid nature of its social protection system (gathering both assistance and insurance mechanisms, see for example Dumont, 2022) make BI a stimulating proposal.

3.1.1 Belgium's Particratic System

Belgium has at times been described as an ideal type of particracy, for example, an institutional and political system dominated by political parties (Delwit, 2008). Therefore, studying parties' positions on BI, as *agents* influencing political outcomes (de Wispelaere & Noguera, 2012), is an unavoidable step in the comprehension of its strategic feasibility. It also means that, so long as parties do not have a clear position on BI, the measure is less likely to be brought on the policy-setting agenda (influence of the *prospective* constraints). More specifically, the study focuses on the francophone parties. The reason behind this analytical choice is simple: that side of the linguistic frontier is the most vivid on the BI topic. Since the beginning of 2022, an upsurge of the theme has been witnessed on the media scene, while both individual personalities and parties have remained silent on BI in Flanders.

The author considers here major parties in terms of electoral representations of the French-speaking situation. Three of them are a part of the federal majority, and hence have stronger political power regarding policy implementation: PS, MR and Ecolo. At the 2019 federal elections, the PS obtained 32.3 per cent of francophone votes, the MR got 22.6 per cent and Ecolo 21 per cent. The PTB is the strongest francophone party of the opposition with 12.9 per cent of francophone votes. *Les Engagés* has been recently created and was not the identity of the party competing for these elections, but its predecessor, the *cdH* had 8 per cent. The author leaves aside Défi, a centre-right party because it has only two parliamentary seats at the federal level and used to be a member of the MR (under the name *FDF*).

One has to note that the party *Les Engagés*, former Christian democrats, is the result of a process of political repositioning and programmatic reform, which took place between 2020 and March 2022. This implies that the working documents of the party under its new form are still scarce, although its manifesto, officially approved in May 2022, includes relevant elements for the present analysis. *Les Engagés* has undergone no electoral campaign, nor does it have an electoral programme *stricto sensu* yet and is still undergoing a process of organisational change. This might somewhat limit the comparative work here. However, the author still intends to include the position of this renewed centrist party in the analysis, as it is already visible on the media and political scene.

The readiness of parties to take a stance might, in addition, depend on their internal structure. The PS and the MR are traditionally hierarchical with a delegation organisation. Informally, within the PS, main political orientations are determined at the 'G9' composed of eminent party officials (Delwit, 2021b), while the MR is characterised by the predominance of its President (Legein, 2018). The PTB is characterised by a 'democratic centralism' (Delwit, 2016) where members are subordinated to the organisation, although very active. To the contrary, the party members of Ecolo, a bottom-up political tradition movement, have an essential role in the internal decision-making process. *Les Engagés* presents itself as a 'positive, citizen-based and participative political movement' (*Les Engagés*, 2022b). It has been claimed (Legein, 2018) that higher intra-partisan democracy might favour the agenda setting of the BI proposal. It tends to be verified in Ecolo's and *Les Engagés*' cases. Yet, the political power and influence of the PS's and MR's presidents seem to have an impact on the salience of the BI theme within the francophone political and media arena. In this case, the high level of intra-partisan hierarchy might in fact influence the party towards a more favourable official position on BI.

Studying parties' positions as unified in this article does not mean that there are no internal dissensions. Paul Magnette, PS's leader at the time of writing (since 2019), declared in 2016 that BI was 'in the direction of history' (Tassin, *La Libre*, 2016) and could lead to an increased universalisation of social allowances (Magnette, *interview*, 2022), although his party remained opposed to BI. Parties' presidents can be 'policy entrepreneurs', influencing other discrete or diffuse agents, and analysing their personal position thus helps study BI feasibility.

Besides, within the neo-corporatist (Schmitter, 1974) Belgian system, trade unions are institutionally strong actors. While empirical studies are still lacking, most pieces of literature underline trade unions' traditional opposition to BI. The "strong labourist philosophy inherent to most unions" seems to repel them from the condition-free nature of BI (de Wispelaere & Noguera, 2012, p. 23) and its individual characteristics might threaten their institutional position and negotiation power (Vanderborght, 2006; Vlandas, 2019). As these structures have been historically tied to political parties in Belgium, their reticence towards BI could influence the parties, especially in the socialist case. However, the links between parties, trade unions and their positions on BI would require an article by itself. For the purpose of analytical clarity, the author will thus keep the focus on political parties here.

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3.1.2 Belgium's Social Protection Regime

Belgium's social protection regime is historically contributory, or Bismarckian (Esping-Andersen, 1990), meaning that a big share of public policies is financed through workers' contributions. But assistance mechanisms have been added along the years: some social allowances are financed through taxes and granted to people in need, no matter their contribution (Dumont, 2022). Thus, from insurance-based, the regime has turned out to be hybrid, social contributions amount now for less than 60 per cent (SPF Sécurité sociale, 2021b) of the financing of the system. The remaining 40 per cent are funded through public contributions (state subsidies, VAT receipts). Researchers (Zamora, 2019) as well as field organisations (*Collectif Solidarité contre l'exclusion*, 2018) have denounced this drift away from contributory logic, claiming that social assistance cures the symptoms rather than the causes of social and economic exclusion. This phenomenon influences the debate on BI, as parties do not perceive this evolution equally (see *infra*).

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Types of Sources

The present study is based on a qualitative analysis of grey literature materials produced between 2017 and 2022, such as election programmes, publications of parties' research centres, press interventions and conferences. In addition to this review, the author conducted interviews with party leaders or members in 2022. To do so, the author contacted by email 'relevant' party members on the BI theme, meaning either in charge of social protection topics or having a high position within the structure and thus interviewed two parties' presidents: George-Louis Bouchez for the liberals, at the party's headquarters in Brussels on the 4th of March, and the socialists' leader Paul Magnette, at the PS's headquarters in Brussels on the 3rd of May. For *Les Engagés*, the author met Laurent de Briey, who was responsible for the programmatic renewal campaign of the party, in Namur on the 15th of March. Concerning the Greens, the author had a conversation with Marie-Colline Leroy, chairwoman of the social affairs committee of the house of representatives. The interview was conducted online on the 8th of February. These discussions lasted between 50 minutes and 1 h 20 minutes and were all in French. Unfortunately, after different trials, nobody from the PTB accepted to meet the author, their refusal is itself indicative of the salience of the BI theme within their party.

The 2017-2022 period is especially interesting because although the BI debate seems cyclical, it is during this time frame that we acknowledged official positioning of the parties in addition to individual accounts. The five-years-frame allows at the same time to provide the picture of a small temporal window (in comparison to decades of BI discussion) and to consider the latest evolution of the fast-evolving media and political scene. It also permits collecting both pre-electoral, more long-term programmatic documents, and electoral programmes (Belgium's federal elections were held in 2019).

3.2.2 Design and Analysis Methods

The conferences, TV interviews and debates were selected because they concerned BI or were related to parties' positions on social protection. The grey literature (election programmes, research centres' publications, internal documents) was analysed through a careful and systematic content examination. The interviews were semi-directive. An interview grid common to all interviews was designed and included six themes: the interviewee's personal position on BI, the main arguments behind the party's position, the internal dynamics (potential dissent or debates on the proposal), the link between BI and other social policies, the interviewee's opinion on the political feasibility of BI and the influence of the party's position on BI within the broader political landscape. As interviews were informed by the grey literature review, more precise questions were added to consider each party's specific position and proposals. For instance, the author asked G-L. Bouchez how he ended up with his BI proposal, and P. Magnette why his party still highly favoured the insurance principle. In sum, the grid constituted the basis, but the interviews were conducted like conversations, with follow-up questions directly linked to the interviewee's answer rather than sticking to the predefined order of the grid questions.

4 Analysis: Parties' Positions in the Polarised BI Debate

After an overview of parties' positions informed by different dimensions, this section will explore the logic behind these positions. Two factors can help understand them: the persistence of the left-right cleavage and diverging lines on productivism. Then, the author indicates how three leftist parties converged on social protection themes despite their disagreements about BI, illustrating how the BI debate had to be crossed with discussions on welfare reforms.

4.1 Understanding Concrete Positions

4.1.1 Overview of Positions

This section explores the parties' concrete proposals and political lines about BI. One must note first that, although the BI theme has become salient on the public stage, the parties are still implicated in the debate to varying degrees, implying some asymmetries in terms of arguments and treatment of the topic. Second, the positions can be formal or implicit, as the author exposes during the argument.

First, on the left side, the objective of the PS and the PTB is to reinforce the Belgian social protection system to "sustain the contribution-based funding" (PS, 2019, p. 17; PTB, 2019, p. 193). They defend the rising of all social benefits above the poverty line (1.085€ for an isolated person,[1] *SPF Sécurité sociale*, 2021a) and a lifting of the minimum wage. The PS and the PTB also oppose the increasing conditionality and controlling tendency of the current system and want to strengthen the insurance logic. The PS has expressed its opposition to a general BI but is working on a proposal of youth BI. The PS's leader, Paul Magnette, has indeed advanced in early 2022 the idea of an income granted to the 18 to 25 year-olds that

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would not suppress current unemployment leaves or social minimums but rather complement them (Hermann, *L'Avenir*, 2022; Magnette, *interview*, 2022). While representatives of the PTB have declared that the proposal could be 'interesting', they reckon 'the core fight is to defend social security' and to bring back the question of wealth repartition on the table (Mugemangango, *Colloque Picardie Laïque*, 2021).

Then, Ecolo is in favour of a youth BI, as short-term feasible 'political objective', potentially the first step of an incremental strategy (Legein, 2018), while a truly universal BI without age condition, as the sixth pillar of our social protection system is the desirable long-term goal. It intends to fill the gaps of the current insurance system (Ecolo, 2017; Leroy, *interview*, 2022). The youth BI, between 460 and 600€ per month, would be granted to young people from 18 to 26 years old, without any conditions of work, studies or resources. Their proposal is inspired by the idea of Ecolo's former co-President, Philippe Defeyt, defending a monthly allowance of 600€ (300€ under 18 years of age) without conditions (Defeyt, 2017).

The liberal George-Louis Bouchez, President of the MR at the time of writing (elected in 2019) is another personality fuelling the discussions about BI. In his book *L'aurore d'un monde nouveau* (2017), Bouchez proposes a 'social dividend', of 1000€ for the people aged 18-67 and of 1600€ for those aged above 67 years. This allowance would replace all current social and contributory benefits except for assistance to disabled people and 'big risk' health care (surgery, hospitalisation, radiographies, etc.). The official position of the party, however, is not yet clear-cut. The party is having internal discussions about the programme for the 2024 federal elections and will have a vote in October 2022 to establish the line about BI. Regarding the chances of the BI proposal being endorsed, Bouchez states that "if I should do an estimate, I would say the odds are 50-50" (Bouchez, *interview*, 2022).[2]

Finally, *Les Engagés* is not in favour of an unconditional BI but supports the idea of a participation income, for example an income conditioned on the beneficiary's contribution to society (Atkinson, 1996). The party, deeply attached to reciprocity, insists on the fact that the system should maintain the contributory principle (De Briey, *interview*, 2022). The proposal is to grant 600€ taxable to every major resident under conditions of a contribution to society (working, voluntary or associative activities, care, etc.).

We already realise that, in contrast to theoretical assumptions from De Wispelaere and Noguera (2012), we do not observe 'a first-mover' disadvantage here, as three parties from various ideological stances endorsed a version of the BI idea. Neither are these actors marginalised. These elements could be encouraging regarding BI strategic feasibility.

4.1.2 The Multidimensionality of BI in the Belgian Debate

The previous section indicated that BI proposals could change along different dimensions (designed by de Wispelaere & Stirton, 2004; Laenen et al., 2022), among which six are useful for the present analysis. *Universality* refers to who is entitled to benefit from a BI: while Ecolo's short-term proposal, as well as the idea advanced by the PS's President are only targeted at the youth (categorical BI), the MR's President's and *Les Engagés*' versions of BI are universal. It is interesting to

note that there seems to be a consensus regarding beneficiaries' nationality: all proposals concern all permanent and legal residents on the Belgian soil (without requirements of duration of stay on the territory). Second, relating to *conditionality*, only the participation income of *Les Engagés* is conditional on a contribution to society. Then, on the *adequacy* dimension, covering the level of benefit, we realise that only Bouchez's BI is of a more consistent amount, while the others remain at a modest level. The *accumulation* criteria help us show that Magnette's form of youth BI is the only one that would not be combinable with other earnings from work or social benefits as it intends to fill the gaps of the current system. On the *financing* side, while the liberal BI of Bouchez is mainly financed by the suppression of most social benefits and by taxing the BI, the versions of *Les Engagés* would be financed by replacing some benefits, the taxation of this income and an environmental tax and Ecolo would finance its youth BI by a redirection of current resources. Finally, on the dimension of the *integration* within broader welfare policies, only Bouchez's proposal aims at replacing almost all current social benefits.

Against the background of these dimensions, one realises that parties are referring to distinct poles of BI: the proposals are informed by different ideological perspectives.

4.2 Explaining Parties' Positions

4.2.1 The Left-Right Cleavage at Play

Three parties, via some eminent members' proposal or official position, are vocal proponents of BI. However, the previous section showed that each party was combining different dimensions in their proposal. This changes the perspectives behind the idea. How do these different dimensions reflect opposed visions on the organisation of society and are, ultimately, illustrative of the left-right cleavage? We will see that Ecolo's and *Les Engagés'* versions can be qualified as social democrat whereas MR's version belongs to the neoliberal pole, according to the three axes.

The first concerns Belgium's welfare state and the *integration* dimension (and indirectly, the financing). Bouchez's version finds its roots in the liberal thinking that the role of the state should be minimal. Too much state's implication in people's lives would diminish individual freedom, so the idea is to grant a BI to every resident, then each one is responsible for his or her own care and life plan. Bouchez argues that it would contribute to economic growth and face new societal mutations (*RTBF*, 2017a). The idea is not only to extremely simplify public insurance and assistance mechanisms, but also to reduce 'bureaucracy' and 'state control' to the minimum. The underlying rationale is that the individual should be autonomous and self-sufficient in a meritocratic society. "We thus give back freedom to the individual to follow training, to change job, to be an entrepreneur." (Bouchez, *Le Libre débat*, 2020). Besides, the insurance logic is, in his view, not needed and not maintainable due to current societal evolution (ageing population, increasing debt level or mass unemployment), while BI could maintain the overall level of well-being through taxation (Bouchez, *Colloque Picardie Laïque*, 2021).

By contrast, the generalised BI put forward by Ecolo is seen as an income floor, other social benefits would be maintained as well as the general structure of the

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welfare state. The idea here is to add a protecting tool to the system, which would make it better equipped to face ongoing challenges such as labour market changes, new forms of interpersonal and familial organisations, new career aspirations or work-life balances. It would also 'fill the gaps' by providing financial protection to the youth that usually falls outside the scope of other social protection schemes (Leroy, *Colloque Picardie Laïque*, 2021; Leroy, *interview*, 2022). Hence, the justification is to offer the opportunity to individuals to emancipate themselves in meaningful activities, in or outside the labour market. The state would here still have the role of accompanying people (Ecolo, 2017), "It is an emancipatory project, it is part of Ecolo's DNA" (Leroy, *interview*, 2022). *Les Engagés*' proposal is a way to complement the welfare system too, but the state also endorses the paternalistic role of pushing individuals towards participation through the contribution-based scheme. This taxable income would be an "investment of the state to favour everybody's participation" (*Les Engagés*, 2022a, p. 152).

The PS argues that for a BI to be affordable, it would need to cut on all other social benefits and public services, this "Trojan horse into welfare state" (Di Rupo, *Le Soir*, 2016) is then unacceptable for a party that has long fought for social protection. Besides, the PS has always defended a perspective of accompaniment of social welfare recipients, "with the objective to bring back mutual trust, to make a project with the accompanied person" (PS, 2019, p. 22). Yet, the party leader advanced the youth BI idea. There might be here a phenomenon of weak support, as the political opportunity cost of this youth BI might be high in the party wherein "we are very committed to the insurance principle, it is difficult to enter BI's philosophy" (Magnette, *interview*, 2022).

Then, the second element differentiating both sides relates to the labour market and working conditions. The MR favours a free and flexible market. In this perspective, the BI is a way to facilitate a labour market with fewer regulations and social conventions. Bouchez claims that the BI would have positive impacts on employment: it would ease changes in careers, training, entrepreneurship, and so on. It is interesting to note the MR's President assesses that "it is possible that the wages would be diminished, but the money in people's pocket would stay the same" (Bouchez, *Allocation universelle, un revenu de liberté?*, 2021). BI would also sustain the 'collaborative' economy, in a 'flexibilisation' perspective. "Uber is not the problem. The problem is the complexity of our labour law" (Bouchez, *idem*, 2021). It is the best way to avoid unemployment traps, provide incentives to work and 'activate' people, deemed to be idle under the current system by MR's President: "It is the current social system that encourages idleness, there is no mechanism to favour small jobs or volunteer." (Bouchez, *Allocation universelle, un revenu de liberté?*, 2021). The MR insists a lot on the importance of labour market activities, even under other forms than stable and full-time employment. When Bouchez affirms that this amount would grant people the real freedom to do something else (*adequacy* dimension), it is still mainly to favour other, often less protected forms of labour. This BI proposal is the only one getting close to a 'full BI' scheme, which might decrease its feasibility and acceptance.

The PS and the PTB fear a decrease in salaries, a worsening of working conditions, and an increase in precarious work, that the liberal version of BI might

cause: "Wages would be pulled down and we would go towards a weakening of employment" (Daerden, *RTBF*, 2017a). Ecolo, in its advocacy of BI, emphasises that it could favour entrepreneurship but also the importance of the 'autonomous sphere'. André Gorz's notion (2013), mentioned in a Ecolo's internal document (2017), is as a tertiary zone, outside the market and the state, where people can flourish in non-pecuniary activities (voluntary work, caring for close ones, engaging in ecological projects, etc.). This would, in turn, pave the way towards more sustainable modes of living and rebuild a strong sense of solidarity. Besides, relating to the labour market, Ecolo defends its BI proposal in addition to other regulations. They would maintain minimum wage legislation, workers' protection and keep fighting against precariousness.

Third, at the core of their defence of BI, Ecolo, *Les Engagés* and the MR have ultimately different ideological rationales. The liberal party is concerned by formal freedom, or "equality of opportunity" (MR, 2019) and BI is precisely a means to offer each citizen the same chance in life, by granting the same amount. However, this casts aside one of the dearest themes of the left: real freedom (in Van Parijs' sense, 1995), and the fight against inequalities. It is enlightening to observe that socio-economic inequalities are never mentioned by party representatives of the MR in the documents and interviews analysed. On the opposite end, Ecolo has been insisting that their BI proposal should be coupled with other public policies in order to establish a general social protection scheme reducing inequalities as much as possible. At the centre, the participation income of *Les Engagés* is part of a political programme of 'regeneration', questioning the socio-economic and civic organisation. It stands on other theoretical grounds and normative justifications (for example, Atkinson, 1996). It is not individual freedom or autonomy that is emphasised but the importance of the contribution to society, making the community prevail over the individuality, in a "new social contract" highlighting civic responsibility: "There is a social sense to recreate" (de Briey, *interview*, 2022; *Les Engagés*, 2022a).

We acknowledged in this section that diverging BI versions led to different expected effects. These arguments reflect claims made in the academic literature. Birnbaum and De Wispelaere (2021) stress the danger of the "exit trap for precarious workers", while Calnitsky (2020) emphasises the fact that too small an amount would at the end be a subsidy for employers, further deregulate the labour market and worsen work conditions. This is a risk, but it is not inherent to BI, rather to the concrete form it would take. If the amount is too small and suppresses most social allowances, people might be forced to accept any job, no matter the wage and the conditions. Proposals such as Friedman's (2013) or Murray's (2012) could indeed threaten social systems. Nonetheless, other scholars argue that a social-democrat version rather than supplanting welfare regime might improve it (Van Parijs & Vanderborght, 2017). It could meet new social risks linked to the transition to a post-industrial model, such as labour market precarity, poor health insurance or wage polarisation (Martinelli, 2017).

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4.2.2 The Question of Productivism

In addition to the traditional ideological cleavage and its impact on parties' positions, other factors influence the BI theme. The relations to the work ethic are not the same across the political spectrum, and they help understand why some parties are keener than others to support BI.

The PS is at the centre of the socialist pillar and has a strong electoral penetration in modest socio-economic categories (Delwit, 2021b). The integration of the poorest of society through the defence of social security is central, and work is one of the main channels of integration and a stringent priority of the party. Economic growth is also still an objective (PS, 2019, p. 121). The importance of contributing to society is thus endorsed by the PS through the prism of employment, without really questioning the capitalist economic system. One can find her role into society by working: "the heart of social protection's philosophy is that we work, and by working we contribute and create social rights. We are labourist." (Magnette, *interview* 2022). This explains their commitment to the "guarantee of employment for everybody" (PS, 2019, p. 124) and their general opposition to BI, "A universal allowance would break the link to employment and create a class of forgotten people living with 600 euros" (Onkelinx, *RTBF*, 2017b).

As Marxist party, the PTB is even more deeply engaged in the socio-economic cleavage of labour versus capital. This means that labour and workers are central in their political agenda: "The society is nothing without its workers…. Employment remains the most important leverage to get out of poverty and isolation" (PTB, 2019, pp. 5, 33). However, the party insists on the fact that it should be stable and decent jobs rather than part-time or 'flexi-' jobs. The party is labourist in the sense that employment still constitutes the main pillar of the economic but also social organisation. Yet, the capitalist economic system is deeply questioned and the importance of wealth repartition and balance of power between labour and capital are raised in a classist vision. The consequences of capitalism are tackled by the PTB: the flexibility and competitive logic of neo-liberalism are deemed to have deleterious effects on health (PTB, 2019, p. 14), the environment (p. 48), gender relations (p. 190) and global relations of exploitation (p. 245).

In addition to this, both the PS and the PTB have strong ties with the socialist trade union, which is opposed to the BI idea, influencing the two leftist parties' positions. Indeed, the historical alliance between the socialist party and union pushes the PS to consider the trade union's reluctance towards the unconditional and universal nature of BI. The PS President exposes that there is a strong internal agreement to maintain the insurance nature of the system, but the party is working with unionists and mutualists to move in the direction of a greater universalisation (Magnette, *interview*, 2022). The PTB is also tied to the union's disapproval, in light of the increasing mutual influence (Delwit, 2021b) between the two organisations (a growing share of The General Labour Federation of Belgium (*Fédération Générale du Travail de Belgique* in French) social base are also PTB activists).

Now, as far as Ecolo's position is concerned, contributing to society also is of paramount importance, but working is only one way of doing so. In this perspective, BI becomes a tool enabling citizens to engage in socially (and individually) useful activities that do not relate to the labour market. For the party: "Basic income

allows for more freedom by easing back and forth [between classical employment and other forms of activities] and offers an answer to these new aspirations." (Ecolo, 2017, p. 8). The party places its BI proposal within a broader "post-capitalist and post-productivist" perspective. Ecolo clearly states that "the pursuit of economic growth as we know it is neither desirable nor even possible" (Ecolo, 2017, p. 10). BI can, according to them, lead the way towards other, greener models of society and modes of living: "BI allows for a reduction of working time to spend time to other activities and attain a better alliance between professional and private life" (Leroy, *interview*, 2022). *Les Engagés* contends that "infinite growth is not sustainable" and that prosperity should be measured with other indicators than GDP to take into account natural resources and human well-being (*Les Engagés*, 2022b). Their project aims at reaching an economy of quality, local and digital, which would be more respectful of the living and provide meaningful jobs. Their participation income is inscribed in this perspective: the participation of each one of us makes "employment a key point of the society's regeneration" (*Les Engagés*, 2022b), but participation is also about associative commitment for the centrist party (*Les Engagés*, 2022a, p. 153).

It is noteworthy to outline that the MR is open to challenge the value of work-employment in a broader context. Bouchez himself mentions that "there is a big difference between work and employment" (Bouchez, *Le Libre débat*, 2020). However, what stands out is the importance of favouring different forms of pecuniary activities contributing to economic growth, rather than favouring a tertiary sphere that would escape capitalistic logic: "We have nowadays many people contributing to economic growth without taking part of 'the loop' … with actions non-materially evaluated." (Bouchez, *interview*, 2022).

These views echo different pieces of literature. Some address the presumed flaws of BI: it would encourage indolence and give money to 'Malibu surfers' (an expression first used by John Rawls in a controversy with Van Parijs, 1991). Another way of framing this argument is to emphasise the importance of reciprocity in our society. This has been theorised by Marcel Mauss (2012) in his famous essay about gift and counter-gift. The objection against BI on the ground of reciprocity has also been voiced by Atkinson (1996), with his participation income. On the contrary, Pinto (2020) promotes BI as an individual form of autonomy in a post-productivist society and Van Parijs and Vanderborght (2017) underline how BI would help free the individual from the obligation of work.

4.3 BI and Welfare Debates

Until here, the article has shown that there are strong divergences between Bouchez's, *Les Engagés'* and Ecolo's BI proposals, informed by contrasted doctrinal positions on societal issues. However, as already touched upon, BI proposals only make sense in the broader debate about the welfare system and policies. It is important to note that, despite their different positions on BI, leftist parties share a strong attachment to social protection.

These convergences between the PS, the PTB and Ecolo concern dimensions that are strongly related to BI. Although the measures analysed in this section are not *stricto sensu* BI proposals, they are still part of the debate on social protection

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and welfare politics. They are worth considering for two reasons: first, as already outlined, the context matters. The BI proposal is not a 'key on hand' solution. Many of its advocates insist that it should rather be regarded as one policy among others and that it should be accompanied by a package of other measures (such as investment in public services, regulation of working time, etc., Pinto, 2020; Whithorn, 2013). Second, side measures are also considered by BI proponents: these reforms might lay foundations for an unconditional income. The non-negligible role of these side measures, as well as the importance of seizing opportunities have been highlighted in the literature (Grapperon, 2021; Van Parijs & Vanderborght, 2017).

Ecolo thus supports social reforms in addition to the implementation of a BI, whereas the PS and the PTB contend that the system should be reformed without it. Here, three policies are being investigated: the working time reduction policy, the individualisation of social rights and their automatic guarantee.

Even if the parties have diverging views on the value of work, understood as employment (see *supra*), the distribution of available employment through working time reduction is a key parameter for the PS, the PTB and Ecolo. While the latter is in favour of the reduction of working time down to four days, on a voluntary basis (Ecolo, 2021a), the PS asks for 32 hours a week without salary drop (PS, 2019, p. 121) and the PTB for 30 hours a week (PTB, 2019, p. 12).

Then, the three parties are in favour of the individualisation of social rights and benefits. The PS still wants to consider principles of equity and avoid unemployment traps: "The difficulty is to combine the principle of individualization of social rights, suppressing different status (household head and cohabitant) and to take into account household's revenues" (Magnette,*interview*, 2022) Ecolo is also in favour of such a measure, as their proposal is to "suppress the cohabitant status and move forward the individualization of rights" (Ecolo, 2021b). Leroy insists: "We should stop making people dependent upon a family scheme from the 19th century" (*interview*, 2022).

The same goes with social benefits being automatically granted: the PS is in favour of such a measure, deemed to enhance take up rates by potential beneficiaries and ease bureaucratic procedures and pressure on recipients. The two other parties have similar positions: "The automation of social rights helps fighting against non-take ups" (Ecolo, 2019, p. 89). "We implement an automatic guarantee of social rights" (PTB, 2019, p. 110).

Thus, similar objectives are aimed for but the means to achieve them differ from one party to the other. BI would provide depth to such considerations according to Ecolo, while the PS and the PTB assess that it is more efficient to reform our current system, "an extraordinary invention, a social protection to the needy" (Onkelinx, *RTBF*, 2017b).

In comparison, *Les Engagés* "invites to individualize social rights" in its manifesto (2022a, p. 143; de Briey, *interview*, 2022) but did not take a stance on the other policies.

Building on the analysis just exposed, the findings are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2 *Positions of parties on BI and related social measures*

Political proposals		PTB	PS	Ecolo	Les Engagés	MR
Basic income schemes	Proposal	/	Youth BI (President's proposal)	Youth BI (Short run) Generalised BI (Long-Run)	Participation income	Social dividend (President's proposal)
	Type of BI (full/partial)	/	Partial	Partial	Partial	Full
	Dimensions of BI	/	Targeted	Targeted	Universal	Universal
			Unconditional	Unconditional	Conditional on participation	Unconditional
			Modest amount	Modest amount	Modest amount	Consistent amount
			Complementing current schemes	Complementing and adapting current schemes	Complementing and adapting current schemes	Replacing current schemes
Related social policies	Individualisation of social rights	Favourable	Favourable	Favourable	Favourable	Not favourable
	Automatic guarantee of social rights	Favourable	Favourable	Favourable	Unclear	Conditionality
	Work reduction	Yes, 30 h/week	Yes, 32 h/week	Yes, 4 days/week	No, chosen working time	No, 38 h/week in flexible schedule
	Social and unemployment allowances at poverty line	Favourable + rise of the minimum wage (14€ /h)	Favourable, 110% of the poverty line	Favourable	Differentiating assurance and assistance mechanisms	Only parental leaves and handicap allowances
Rationales		Strengthening protection system	Strengthening and adapting protection system	BI as emancipatory tool	BI for enhanced participation	BI for more individual freedom

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5 Conclusion

This overview of the positions of five French-speaking Belgian political parties on unconditional BI has pointed at the persistent relevance of the left-right cleavage. Indeed, classical themes provoking divisions between the left and the right wings of the political spectrum are also percolating the BI debate. BI, rather than transcending political divisions, is underlining them. If BI is advocated for simultaneously by liberals, democrats, and ecologists, it is the amplitude and the multidimensionality of the notion that creates the illusion of a common defence.

More precisely, the MR's President argues for a neoliberal BI replacing the current social system, deemed to avoid inactivity traps and to be better adapted to contemporary mutations. We have seen that the PS and the PTB reject this type of BI proposal because of a work ethic and by fear of the dismantling of the social protection system. Their labourist perspectives, adding the labour-capital issue in the case of the PTB, as well as their close and historical links to the socialist trade union impede them to embrace such unconditional proposal. However, the PS seems increasingly open to the universalisation of social security. *Les Engagés* refuses the unconditional character of BI as well, but proposes a participation income integrated in the current system, in a standpoint emphasising citizens' contributions to society. Ecolo pushes for a modest BI too, in the perspective of complementing the social system and emancipating the individual, questioning the centrality of employment in our lives, and opening the way towards a more sustainable society. Thus, the main themes making the three proposals irreducible, and replaying the left-right divide are the following: first, the MR upholds a position with minimal state intervention and the removal of almost all social benefits whereas the other parties advocate for a reinforcement of the established system, with (Ecolo, *Les Engagés*) or without (PS, PTB) BI. Second, Bouchez's proposal is thought to promote a flexible, less protected labour market, where workers' adaptability prevails over their social rights. On the other side, Ecolo's proposal explicitly wants to avoid further precariousness and insists on activities outside the market sphere. The participation income of the democrats also stresses the importance of the contribution, through work or other occupations, and the economic system is to be rethought to respect people's and nature's limits. Finally, the philosophy underlying the three proposals is different: equality of opportunities on the right, personal emancipation within a frame of fighting against inequalities on the left and contribution to society in the centre.

We have also seen that BI is to be considered within the broader frame of welfare politics, and that side measures, as well as visions on social protection are at stake in this debate. The left, despite their disagreement on BI do agree on three social policies to improve the system: the reduction of working time, the individualisation, and a more automatic guarantee of social rights. The centre is more reluctant on these elements, and the liberals oppose them.

What does all of this tell us about the strategic feasibility of BI in Belgium? If we go back to the obstacles De Wispelaere and Noguera (2012) identified, the picture might look less unfavourable to BI than it seems at first sight. First, because parties and personalities supporting BI proposals are not marginalised. Ecolo has

turned out to be central, especially in regional Parliaments and is part of governing majorities of the federal and federate levels. We have seen that parties' leaders are active on the BI theme, and that the whole political scene was shaken by debates about various BI proposals. This can reverse the argument of the political opportunity cost of BI: if it is still a divisive topic, it seems now to be more politically costly not to have a position than being favourable. The analysis also showed that the authors' final obstacle to strategic feasibility, the 'first-mover disadvantage' does not appear to have a strong impact here, as opposing political groups have endorsed the BI idea, although under different modalities. BI has crystallised debates, and if we take into account cognates and 'steps to' BI, many parties could agree on a proposal. What we observe is that a full BI scheme has little chance to be implemented, but partial schemes could possibly make their way in Belgium. However, even for a partial BI scheme, the road would be long and tedious. It would require first a governmental agreement mentioning BI and most likely starting by the opportunity of *experimenting* a form of BI, following the 'gradual strategy' (Chrisp, 2020, p. 241). More importantly, the Dutch-speaking side of Belgium does not seem to be ready to discuss, even less implement, BI proposals. Knowing that social policies are still mainly a federal competence, this further complicates the political feasibility of BI in Belgium.

This article is only a first step in understanding Belgian political parties' positions on BI. The goal here was to take an exploratory path towards the strategic political feasibility of BI in a specific national context. Three directions for future research could be considered: the study of the positions of Dutch-speaking Belgian political parties and also of trade unions, the salience of the BI theme within broader social reforms and the internal dynamics of parties.

To widen the perspective, one might reflect on the lessons on strategic feasibility to be withdrawn from the Belgian case. First, in plurality voting systems characterised by a high number of political parties, the first-mover disadvantage seems less likely to happen, as the study showed, whereas one might presume that majoritarian voting systems might well face this obstacle. Then, the BI concept is never univocally adopted, each proposal is a combination of different dimensions, one should thus pay attention to the concrete version proposed and the politicisation that accompanies the process. To conclude, one should always care for re-inscribing the BI debate within a broader context and analyse it in the light of the evolution of social protection regimes. The Belgian case showed that accompanying measures and positions on other societal stakes should be regarded as equally important in understanding the strategic political feasibility of BI. BI is not overcoming ideological divisions but can most definitely help understand them in a comprehensive frame.

Notes

1 With the poverty threshold at 60 per cent of median net income, people beneath that line are at risk of monetary poverty.

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2 The BI idea was not endorsed at the Congress held in October 2022, but a proposal of 'guaranteed but capped social aid' was advanced (Bruckner, *Bx1*, 2022). However, in view of the uncertain status of this proposal as it is not part of an official programme yet, we will leave the analysis aside.

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Using Process-Tracing to Evaluate Competing Accounts of Proportional Representation in Belgium*

*Nina Barzachka***

Abstract

Analyses of the historical origins of proportional representation (PR) in Belgium have helped shed light on the origins of electoral systems in Western Europe. Nevertheless, debates over what exactly led to the introduction of PR in Belgium persist. Was it electoral threat, Left existential threat or a combination of these two factors? This article applies the completeness standard for process-tracing and employs theoretical insights from the institutional change literature to evaluate these explanations. It re-examines the historical sources used by the extant scholarship of the Belgian case. It finds that both extra-institutional threat and electoral threat fluctuated over time, interacted with one another and mattered during different points of the electoral system reform process. In 1899, when pure PR was finally introduced, both of these factors played a role.

Keywords: proportional representation, Belgium, institutional change, electoral threat, extra-institutional threat, protest mobilisation.

The introduction of proportional representation (PR) in Belgium has a special place in the electoral system reform literature. Not only is Belgium the first country to adopt PR for national legislative elections, but the Belgian case appears as a conspicuous exception to the conventional wisdom that dominant political parties prefer majoritarian electoral systems. PR in Belgium was introduced in 1899 by a coalition of moderate Catholics and progressive Liberals, when the Catholic Party held 112 of the 152 seats the Chamber of Representatives (Barthélemy, 1912; Pilet, 2007). The Belgian case has re-vitalised research into the origins of PR and re-ignited methodological discussions about good historical analysis (Boix 2010; Kreuzer, 2010). Consequently, much progress has been made in understanding electoral system reform in Western Europe.

Nonetheless, there is little consensus as to why exactly Belgium adopted PR. Several explanations exist: Left electoral threat (Boix, 1999, 2010; Rokkan, 1970); Left existential threat (Ahmed, 2013); and the interaction between electoral and

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extra-institutional threats (Barzachka, 2014). Recently, Emmenegger and Walter (2019) have put electoral threat back in the spotlight. Combining historical research with election data analysis, they argue that the Catholic Party introduced PR because it was vulnerable to high electoral threat from Liberal-Socialist cartels. Which account best explains the Belgian case?

Process-tracing, with its focus on temporal sequences, carefully constructed narratives and counterfactual analysis, can help evaluate rival explanations of single case studies (Beach & Pedersen, 2013; Bennett & Checkel, 2015; Brady & Collier, 2010; George & Bennet, 2005; Mahoney, 2012; Tannewald, 2015). The present article re-examines the recent scholarship on PR in Belgium. It applies the completeness standard of process-tracing (Crasnow, 2017; Waldner, 2015a; 2015b) and uses theory-guided process-tracing (Falleti, 2016) based on insights from the institutional change literature (Campbell, 2004; Mahoney & Thelen, 2010, 2015).

The article is a replication study. It scrutinises the main historical sources used by these accounts – parliamentary transcripts, participant memoirs and contemporaneous academic research, checking for errors, inconsistencies and/or omissions and paying careful attention to the sequencing of events. To corroborate the review of the well-known primary and secondary sources on the subject (Appendix I), it supplements the analysis with new evidence from 1899 newspapers, from the archives of the Royal Library of Belgium. These sources show the significance of the June 1899 demonstrations.

In Belgium, electoral threat (including threat from Liberal-Socialist cartels) and extra-institutional threat fluctuated and mattered at different points of the electoral system reform process. Over time, these variables interacted and influenced office-holders' preferences for different electoral systems. When in 1899, Catholic politicians finally agreed on a solution – a mixed electoral system designed to reinforce Catholic dominance – high extra-institutional threat from the Socialists and the Liberals stopped the reform. Concerned about civil unrest and equal universal male suffrage and after exhausting all other options, the Catholics compromised, adopting PR in all districts. Both increasing electoral threat and high extra-institutional threat shaped this outcome.

The recent literature on PR in Belgium 'reads history forward' (Capoccia & Ziblatt, 2010, p. 943). Nevertheless, it has inconsistencies and/or omissions that need correction. The present article seeks to rectify these problems.

1 The Evolution of the Electoral System Change Scholarship

1.1 Left Electoral Threat

The classic explanation of electoral system reform in Western Europe is that Conservative and Liberal parties introduced PR as protection from rising Left electoral threat – the possibility of losing elections to Socialist parties (Boix, 1999; Rokkan, 1970). This hypothesis treats parties as unitary actors and cannot explain the Belgian case.

Subsequent scholarship is more nuanced. Blaise et al. (2004) show that PR was introduced because of democratisation and the disproportional effects of existing

majoritarian systems, not Left electoral threat. Penadés (2008) elucidates the electoral system preferences of Socialists parties. Calvo (2009) highlights the emergence of multi-party races as suffrage was extended. Notably, Kreuzer (2010) recommends a forward-looking, historically sensitive approach that examines intra-party divisions and cross-party alliances. In response, Boix (2010) re-analysed the evidence from his 1999 article, demonstrating that electoral threat remains important after these factors are considered.

1.2 Left Existential Threat

Ahmed (2010, 2013) embeds electoral system change in Western Europe and the United States in the process of democratisation. She argues that PR in Belgium was introduced in response to high Left existential threat, defined as the electoral viability of the Socialist Party and its ideological radicalism, including its propensity to use extra-constitutional measures such as mass demonstrations or revolutionary actions.[1] The author examines intra-party divisions and cross-party alliances. She observes that most countries transitioned to PR from majoritarian systems with single-member districts (SMDs) and multi-member districts (MMDs), not from single-member district plurality (SMP).[2] Therefore, SMP and PR represent different means of Left containment.

The Belgian case does not fit well in this account. First, Ahmed cites Marks et al.'s (2009) analysis of Left-Party radicalism when operationalising Left existential threat. While Marks et al. classify the Belgian Workers' Party (BWP) as moderate, Ahmed considers it radical, without explaining the re-classification. However, after universal male suffrage (with compulsory voting and plural voting) was adopted in 1893, the Socialists moderated their position (Liebman, 1979; Polasky, 1992, pp. 454-455; Vandervelde, 1925). Ahmed (2013, p. 169) cites Polasky (1992, p. 452) to show that the Socialist leader Emile Vandervelde was more radical than his predecessor but Polasky (pp. 454-455) writes that Vandervelde was a moderate who, after 1894, embraced parliamentary channels to implement reform. Second, Ahmed examines the failed electoral system reform proposals of 1893, 1894 and January 1899 but excludes the last phase of negotiations, when pure PR was finally adopted (June 1899 to 24 November 1899).

1.3 Interaction between Extra-Institutional Threat and Electoral Threat

Barzachka (2014) argues that incumbents' preferences for electoral systems are shaped by their perceptions of two distinct factors – electoral threat (the possibility of losing elections) and extra-institutional threat to the regime (the possibility of being ousted from power through mass protests, civil unrest, etc.) The article compares seven cases from nineteenth-century Belgium and two cases from post-communist Bulgaria. Focusing on actors' perceptions of threats allows cross-regional generalisation because different factors could influence perceptions in different contexts. Threats could come from various parties, coalitions or factions, not necessarily from the Socialists.

In Belgium, Catholic office-holders' perceptions of electoral and extra-institutional threats varied over time, shaping their motives (seat-maximisation or tactical seat loss) and electoral system preferences

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(majoritarian system with MMDs; majoritarian system with SMDs; mixed systems; or pure PR) during different periods. Deputies from different Catholic factions perceived electoral threat differently and preferred different solutions. The article underscores that Vandenpeereboom's 1899 mixed system bill, a flagrant seat-maximising endeavour, would have passed, had it not been for the rapidly rising extra-institutional threat from the unified opposition. The Catholics engaged in tactical seat loss – choosing to lose some seats (without relinquishing legislative majority) to stop the civil unrest. They introduced pure PR because they faced high extra-institutional threat and low electoral threat.

This account correctly identifies the levels of extra-institutional threat in all seven cases and the levels of electoral threat in five cases. It correctly emphasises that, in 1899, incumbents traded a relatively small loss in the electoral arena for a substantial gain in the regime transition arena. It operationalises electoral threat as total seats gained by the Catholic Party and relies on aspects of contemporaneous sources that emphasise its dominant position. Consequently, it considers electoral threat to the Catholic Party in 1899 as low. However, analysis of the results of 1896 and 1898 partial elections at the *district level* shows that the Catholic Party won the large, urban MMDs with a slim majority. Many Catholic leaders feared that the Socialist-Liberal alliances in those districts could cost them future elections (Emmenegger & Walter, 2019).

1.4 Back to Electoral Threat

Emmenegger and Walter (2019) contend that PR was adopted in Belgium because the Catholic Party faced increasing electoral threat from Liberal-Socialist cartels in the large urban MMDs. The majoritarian electoral system awarded all seats in the district to the party that eked out a simple majority. Seven districts, ranging from 18 seats (Brussels) to six seats (Leuven and Mons) were endangered. If the Catholics lost several of these districts, they could lose their majority. The account offers robust empirical support to Boix (2010) and fits the growing electoral reform literature on internal party divisions and political geography (Cox et al., 2019; Leemann & Mares, 2014; Schröder & Manow, 2020; Walter & Emmenegger, 2019).

While Emmenegger and Walter highlight the importance of electoral threat, they do not fully consider the role of extra-institutional threat. The authors acknowledge that in June 1899, the government's mixed electoral system proposal faced significant obstruction by the Liberals and the Socialists in the Chamber (Emmenegger & Walter, 2019, p. 448). However, they do not mention that the opposition organised mass demonstrations in Brussels and other cities to impede the bill. Immediately before the protests started, the Catholic office-holders had enough votes to introduce Vandenpeereboom's seat-maximising, mixed electoral system (Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, pp. 114-117). The authors do not examine how the extra-institutional threat contributed to the adoption of pure PR in November 1899. Without the extra-institutional pressure, the electoral system reform outcome would have been very different.

2 Using Theory-Guided Process-Tracing to Evaluate Competing Explanations

Process-tracing represents an important tool for hypothesis/theory testing[3] in single case studies (Beach, 2016; Beach & Pedersen, 2013; Bennett, 2010; Bennett & Checkel, 2015; Brady & Collier, 2010; Crasnow, 2017; Falleti, 2016; George & Bennett, 2005; Hall, 2003; Kreuzer, 2016; Mahoney, 2012; Tannenwald, 2015; Waldner 2015a; 2015b). Evaluating rival causal explanations can be resolved by process-tracing that is complete, consistent, coherent and theoretically informed.

Process-tracing is the "method [that] attempts to identify the intervening causal process – the causal chain and causal mechanism – between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependent variable" (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 206), "the use of evidence within a case to make inferences about causal explanations of that case" (Bennett & Checkel, 2015, p. 4) or "the temporal and causal analysis of the sequences of events that constitute the process of interest", where the *order* of events "is causally consequential" (Falleti, 2016, p. 457).

The present analysis relies on inference-based and narrative-based process-tracing.[4] Researchers using inference-based process-tracing identify additional events, facts and counterfactuals from the case. Based on this information, they construct hoop tests, smoking-gun tests, straw-in-the-wind tests and/or doubly decisive tests to evaluate competing hypotheses. Hoop tests are necessary but not sufficient conditions for affirming causal inference. Passing a hoop test increases confidence in the hypothesis but does not confirm it. Failing a hoop test eliminates the hypothesis. Straw-in-the-wind tests are neither necessary nor sufficient for affirming causal inference. Passing them slightly bolsters the hypothesis, while failing slightly undermines it (Beach, 2016; Beach & Pedersen, 2013; Bennett, 2010, p. 210; Collier, 2011, p. 825; Mahoney, 2012; 2015; Van Evera, 1997, pp. 31-32; Waldner, 2015a; 2015b). For researchers who use narrative-based process-tracing, a well-constructed narrative, based on a holistic understanding of the case, is better at evaluating competing arguments than inference-based analysis, which uses discrete pieces of evidence (Crasnow, 2017).

Both process-tracing variants examine alternative hypotheses and counterfactual scenarios, derived from theory and/or empirical analyses. They take sequencing seriously and share the standards of completeness, consistency and coherence.

2.1 The Process-Tracing Standards: Completeness, Consistency and Coherence

2.1.1 Completeness

Excellent knowledge of the case and the inclusion of all relevant facts are pre-conditions for uncovering causal inferences and testing competing hypotheses (Beach, 2016; Beach & Pedersen, 2013; Bennett, 2010; Bennett & Checkel, 2015; Capoccia & Ziblatt 2010, p. 943; Collier, 2011; Hall, 2012; Mahoney, 2012; Ricks & Liu, 2018; Trampusch & Palier, 2016). Completeness is important because if the narrative begins too early, or ends too late, it risks incorporating irrelevant factors.

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If it starts late, ends early or leaves out important events, it risks omitting potential causal variables (Bennett, 2010), turning points or counterfactuals (Crasnow, 2017). Furthermore, an incomplete analysis could reach the correct conclusion for the wrong reasons.

Complete inference-based process-tracing must include a causal graph, event-history maps, descriptive inferences and causal inferences underlined by strong causal mechanisms (Waldner, 2015a, pp. 249-250). Complete narrative-based process-tracing must: accurately pinpoint the beginning and the end of the process; include all relevant events (Crasnow, 2017); correctly identify all potential causes; and construct a theoretically informed, generalisable account. The two approaches are complimentary.

2.1.2 Consistency

Consistency is the extent to which the causal mechanisms in a hypothesis/theory fits the empirical facts. To ensure consistency, researchers conducting narrative-based process-tracing must look for events that contradict the hypothesis/theory under evaluation or events that should have occurred if it were true but did not (Crasnow, 2017, p. 12). Consistency requires an excellent understanding of the case and commitment to considering all relevant evidence (Crasnow, 2017, p. 12). This recommendation also applies to inference-based process-tracing (Beach, 2016; Mahoney, 2012, 2015; Van Evera, 1997; Waldner, 2015a, 2015b).

2.1.3 Coherence

An account that is complete and consistent is also coherent and more credible. It must incorporate as many elements of the case as possible.

> Case studies contain so many potential points of fit – so many details that might not be able to be accounted for – that when they do all fit into an account, our confidence this account is a good one should be increased. (Crasnow, 2017, p. 12)

While this recommendation applies directly to narrative-based process-tracing, it resembles passing many difficult tests in inference-based process-tracing.

2.2 Process-Tracing Procedures for Evaluating Competing Arguments

The present article follows a set of eight consecutive procedures established in the process-tracing literature (Crasnow, 2017; Ricks & Liu, 2018; Trampusch & Palier, 2016; Waldner, 2015a). The sequence of steps begins with identifying the ontological and epistemological approaches of each account and concludes with an examination of their causal mechanisms. Table 1 summarises the sequence of procedures and their application.

The article adopts Waldner's conceptualisation of strong causal mechanisms or "invariant causal principles that generate the links between events" (Waldner, 2015a, p. 242), as opposed to 'mechanisms-as-events' (Crasnow, 2017; Mahoney, 2012, 2015). For example, to explain what causes fire, one should emphasise the

principle of combustion, not the striking of the match or the pouring of oil. Strong causal mechanisms are more easily generalisable to a large number of cases (Waldner, 2015a, pp. 224-243).

2.3 Constructing a Theoretically Informed Narrative

Electoral system reform is a type of institutional change. Following Renwick (2010) and Falleti (2016), the article identifies several propositions from the institutional change literature that guide the narrative of electoral system reform in Belgium.

The article assumes that there are three necessary but not sufficient conditions for change: an opening for change must emerge (the old institution must be discredited or removed); actors must identify an alternative (Blyth, 1997; Campbell, 2004); and they must have the capacity to adopt it. Systematically thinking how electoral or extra-institutional threats influence these conditions helps determine the importance of each threat and explain why and when it mattered. The processes through which these conditions emerge could develop simultaneously or sequentially and could interact. A serious problem with an existing institution could prompt a search for alternatives. The opening could result from an exogenous shock (Pierson 2004) or emerge gradually (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010, 2015).

Table 1 Process-Tracing Procedures for Evaluating Competing Arguments

Procedures	Description	Application in Present Article
1. Identify the Ontology	- establish whether the ontological orientation of each account is probabilistic or deterministic - clarify own ontological assumptions (Hall, 2003; Trampusch & Palier, 2016)	- the three accounts share a deterministic ontology and assume that actors have some power to shape the institutions that constrain them - the present article adopts a deterministic ontology
2. Establish the Epistemological Approach	- specify whether each account is deductive or inductive; many studies combine elements of both approaches (Trampusch & Palier, 2016) - identify epistemological assumptions (Trampusch & Palier, 2016)	- the three accounts follow a deductive format, yet their arguments are based on a detailed understanding of the case - the same applies for the present article
3. Specify Testable Hypotheses/ Theories	- identify testable theories/ hypotheses *a priori* (Beach, 2016; Crasnow, 2017; Hall, 2012; Mahoney, 2015; Ricks & Liu, 2018; Trampusch & Palier, 2016; Waldner, 2015a) - consider multiple causal factors working together (Zacks, 2017)	- three hypotheses are tested here: – Left existential threat – interaction b/w electoral and extra-institutional threat – electoral threat

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Table 1 (Continued)

Procedures	Description	Application in Present Article
4. Construct Timelines	- create a timeline of all relevant events (Waldner, 2015a) - compare it to the timelines of rival accounts to find omitted events (Waldner, 2015a)	- Appendix I cross-references the available primary and secondary sources - Appendix II creates a timeline based on the sources in Appendix I - Appendix II reconstructs the timelines of the rival accounts and compares them to the first timeline
5. Write the Narrative	- a complete and coherent narrative, is more compelling (Tannenwald, 2015) and credible (Crasnow, 2017) - the narrative should be theoretically informed (Crasnow, 2017)	- the narrative re-examines the historical sources of the three accounts and includes new evidence from the historical press - the narrative of this article is chronological and structured around insights from the institutional change literature
6. Construct Causal Graphs and Event-History Maps	- create causal graphs and event-history maps for each argument (Ricks & Liu, 2018; Waldner, 2015a) - compare the graphs to the timelines and narratives of their accounts and to each other - if timeline is incomplete, examine how the missing evidence fits with the account	- Appendix III compares the causal graphs and event-history maps of each account
7. Identify Alternative Choices, Events and Outcomes	- evaluate timelines, narratives, causal graphs and event-history maps to identify counterfactuals (Ricks & Liu, 2018) and create causal mechanism tests (Waldner, 2015a) - excellent understanding of the case and willingness to consider evidence that could undermine one's hypothesis are necessary (Crasnow, 2017; Ricks & Liu, 2018)	- the two inference-based tests below rely on counterfactuals derived from the narrative: - explaining the timing of PR adoption explaining why the 1899 Mixed System Bill was withdrawn
8. Examine Causal Mechanisms	- for each argument, identify strong causal mechanisms that are generalisable (Waldner, 2015a)	- mechanisms include: - concern about existential threat - offensive and defensive seat-maximisation, tactical seat loss, 'playing-it-safe' - seat-maximisation

Institutional change is contested. The winners from the *status quo* defend it; the losers seek reform. Actors could have conflicting goals or remain indifferent. The outcome could be unintended (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010, 2015). The article examines how actors' initial preferences emerge and whether they shift and if so, why and when. It also analyses actors' coalition-building efforts. Stasis occurs

when actors do not believe reform is necessary or disagree about the alternatives. Change happens when the factors promoting reform prevail over those protecting the extant institution.

The narrative considers how the structural, cultural and institutional contexts influence actors (Greener, 2005). Institutions may influence cultural norms or strengthen *status quo* supporters (Capoccia, 2015). Interests *and* norms influence actors' perceptions of how existing institutions function and whether reform is needed. They also influence institutional innovation and selection (Blyth, 1997; Campbell, 2004; Hall 1993, 2010). The article also examines agency – how political entrepreneurs identify problems with extant institutions and propose solutions (Campbell 2004); how they use discourse to develop and disseminate their ideas and build coalitions to remove or alter *status quo* constraints (Schmidt 2010); and how their opponents do the same.

3 The Narrative: Electoral System Reform in Belgium

3.1 The Institutional Status Quo

Originally, Belgium's two-ballot majoritarian system (MR) was used in 32 MMDs and 9 SMDs. The 1831 Constitution contained a provision that one deputy must represent every 40,000 inhabitants. Consequently, the more populous districts elected more than one representative. Elections for half of the Chamber of Representatives took place every two years. The franchise was highly restricted and inscribed in Article 47 of the Constitution. This was a major obstacle to suffrage reform because the Constitution could only be revised by a 2/3 majority in a Constituent Assembly (Barthélemy, 1912; Delfosse, 2004, p. 184; Gilissen, 1958, pp. 91, 123; Mahaim, 1900, p. 82; Pilet, 2007, p. 23; Stengers, 2004, pp. 256-257).

3.2 Actors

From the 1830s to the 1880s, Belgium had a two-party system. The Liberal Party, which espoused secularism and represented wealthy industrialists, was strong in the urban centres of Wallonia, while the Catholic Party was strong in rural Flanders. Nevertheless, the Catholics also obtained seats in some urban Walloon districts and Brussels. The Liberals had strongholds in the Flemish cities of Ghent and Antwerp. Until the 1880s, the electoral system allowed both parties access to office. The Liberals were in power from 1847 to 1854; 1857 to 1870; 1878 to 1884. The Catholics governed between 1856 and 57 and 1870 and 1878 (Devresse, 1990, p. 27; Gilissen, 1958, pp. 102-117).

Both parties were internally divided. The Liberal Party included doctrinaires, who opposed franchise extension, and progressives/radicals, who supported it. The Catholic Party had a conservative/reactionary faction, which supported the Church's active involvement in politics and society and a moderate bloc. The BWP (the Socialists) emerged in the 1880s, entering parliament in 1894 (Collier, 1999, p. 91; Devresse, 1990, p. 39-45; Gilissen, 1958, pp. 102-117; Linden, 1920, p. 269).

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3.3 No Opening for Change, No Clear Alternative (1860s-1870s)

Initially, PR was a novel, elitist concept endorsed by a few forward-thinking Liberal and Catholic politicians, including Count Goblet d'Alviella, a Liberal. Early attempts to introduce PR (in 1866, 1871 and 1878) failed because there was no opening for institutional change. Most politicians expected to benefit from the vagaries of the existing electoral system and opposed reform (Goblet d'Alviella, 1900). Furthermore, they had a poor understanding of the alternative – PR (Hare). Some impetus for change came when, in 1878, Victor d'Hondt developed a new method for transferring votes into seats that was easier to understand than Hare's (Barthélemy, 1912, pp. 533-535). However, it was not until problems with the current electoral institutions became obvious that PR was seriously considered.

3.4 No Opening for Change, Alternative Clarified (1880s)

During the 1880s, the constraints of existing electoral institutions gradually began to erode but did not disappear. The forces of institutional reproduction (seat-maximisation under the *status quo* system and limited understanding of alternatives) were stronger than the forces of institutional transformation (increasingly disproportional results, the emergence of a Socialist Party and electoral system innovation).

At the time, Belgium was the fastest industrialising country in the world. Due to population shifts, the district magnitude of the industrial centres in Wallonia increased, according to the aforementioned constitutional provision (Barthélemy, 1912, p. 513). The overall effect was the overrepresentation of the small rural Flemish districts and the underrepresentation of the large urban constituencies. The system was beginning to favour the Catholics, though both parties hoped to use it to their advantage (Barthélemy, 1912, p. 534; Cameau, 1901 pp. 51-53; Dupriez, 1901, p. 157; Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, pp. 43-60; Van der Smissen, 1920, p. 342; Woeste, 1927, p. 369).

Progressive Liberals and moderate Catholics who suffered losses under the *status quo* wanted PR but did not have majority to implement reform (Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, pp. 43-60). Instead, they focused on simplifying and disseminating the idea. The *Reformist Belgian Association for Proportional Representation* (RBAPR), established in 1881, issued brochures and organised lectures and mock elections. In 1888, RBAPR unsuccessfully proposed a PR bill based on a refined version of D'Hondt's method (Barthélemy, 1912, pp. 533-535; Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, pp. 49-60). A clear alternative that would facilitate future change emerged.

Industrialisation also undermined the *status quo* by creating a large working class and a Socialist Party without legislative representation. The Socialists adopted an extra-institutional strategy for the improvement of working conditions, wage increases and universal male suffrage. The 1886 mass workers' protests precipitated the 1887 unsuccessful constitutional reform proposal of the progressive Liberals. Yet, by the time PR (d'Hondt) was discussed in the Chamber in 1888, the extra-institutional threat had abated. The bill failed because the majority of both parties and even Prime Minister (PM) Beernaert, a moderate Catholic and a founding member of RBAPR, did not think PR was necessary[5] (Liebman, 1979 p. 83; Vandervelde, 1925, pp. 37-41). Most actors did not find problems with the

status quo and had limited interest in reform. It was not until the Socialists started to demonstrate again for universal male suffrage that an opportunity for change appeared.

3.5 Extra-Institutional Threat Destabilises the Status Quo, No Capacity to Implement PR (1890-1893)

Between August 1890 and February1892, the workers mobilised three times to demand the right to vote. The strikes and demonstrations garnered between 80,000 and 200,000 participants each time (Devresse, 1990, p. 44; Gilissen, 1958, p. 21; Liebman, 1979, p. 86; Polasky, 1992, pp. 454-455; Strikwerda, 1997, pp. 91-95). The progressive faction of the Liberal Party, led by Paul Janson, a long-time universal male suffrage advocate, called for constitutional reform. While the reactionary Catholics and doctrinaire Liberals opposed universal male suffrage, some moderate Catholics had started to believe that it might be necessary to appease the Left. Beernaert managed to persuade the king and moderate Catholics to reform the Constitution. After the February 1892 miner's strike, the Chamber voted to take up the constitutional reform bill sponsored by Janson (Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, pp. 63-66; Van der Smissen, 1898, p. 559; Vandervelde, 1925, p. 45).

The moderate Catholics needed to placate the Socialists and defend their seats in the large urban districts. Consequently, Beernaert proposed the following measures: universal male suffrage; plural voting (which gave up to two additional votes to wealthier and more educated men); compulsory voting; PR (d'Hondt). The last three measures were electoral threat safeguards (Frère-Orban, 1895; Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, pp. 64; Mahaim, 1900, p. 387; Vandervelde, 1925, p. 43).

The moderate Catholics were concerned about high electoral threat to the party *and* their faction/themselves (consistent with all three accounts). They also worried about the immediate high extra-institutional threat from the Left (consistent with the Left threat and the interaction accounts). The fact that the Constituent Assembly passed the reform only after the Socialist held another mass strike in the spring of 1893 is further evidence of that (Cameau, 1901, pp. 107-8; Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, pp. 64-69; Mommaert, 1900, pp. 88-91; Van der Smissen, 1898, pp. 563).

The first three elements of Beernaert's proposal were adopted, but PR was so controversial that the PM withdrew it. The reactionary Catholics from the small rural Flemish districts were not directly threatened by Liberal-Socialist alliances. Both reactionary Catholics and doctrinaire Liberals thought PR was too complex and unnecessary and disapproved of Beernaert for allowing the adoption of universal male suffrage. Beernaert and de Smet de Naeyer, another moderate Catholic and RBAPR member, prevented the inclusion of the electoral system in the constitution, which would have become a major obstacle to future reform (Cameau, 1901, p. 108; Dupriez, 1901, p. 160; Frère-Orban, 1895; Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, pp. 66-69; Van der Smissen, 1898, p. 562; Van der Smissen, 1920, p. 377).

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3.6 Disagreements over Alternatives, No Capacity to Implement Preferences (1894)

Uncertainties about the effects of the new electoral rules prompted Beernaert to attempt reform again before the 1894 legislative elections. His bill for a mixed system (PR in the 32 MMDs and the extant majoritarian system in the 9 SMDs) was opposed by Charles Woeste, a prominent reactionary Catholic, who disliked Beernaert and proposed a different solution – dividing the MMDs into SMDs. Woeste (from Aalst, a Flemish four-member district[6]) and other representatives from the small, rural, Flemish constituencies preferred redistricting into SMDs because they did not face electoral threat from Liberal-Socialist cartels (Woeste, 1898, pp. 18-19) and because SMDs seemed more straightforward (Van der Smissen, 1920, pp. 354-355). Elected in Tielt, a two-member constituency in Western Flanders, Beernaert, nevertheless, was concerned about Liberal-Socialist cartels in the large urban MMDs (Cameau, 1901, pp. 110-111; Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, pp. 69-74). Finally, many representatives who expected to continue winning under the existing system did not want change (Cameau, 1901, pp. 110-111; Dupriez, 1901, p. 162; Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, p. 74). Beernaert resigned after his bill failed (Barthélemy, 1912, p. 358; Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, p. 77). Two other PR initiatives were rejected for similar reasons (Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, pp. 78-83).

The historical record shows that office-holders were not concerned about Left extra-institutional threat at this time. Once in the legislature, the Socialists were satisfied with the constitutional revision, moderated their position and, having expected success under universal male suffrage, vowed to continue working for the abolition of plural voting through parliamentary channels. The extra-institutional threat remained low until June 1899 (Collier, 1999; Liebman, 1979; Polasky, 1992, pp. 454-455; Vandervelde, 1925).

The analysis is consistent with the explanations that underscore electoral threat and the interaction between electoral and extra-institutional threats. The 1894 reform is inconsistent with Ahmed's (2013) argument. The author does not mention the mixed electoral system and argues that Left existential threat was high because the Belgian Socialists were electorally viable and ideologically radical. While the evidence supports the electoral viability claim, it contradicts the claim about their ideological radicalism (see Marks et al., 2009).

In 1895, a mixed system (including PR) was adopted for local elections (Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, pp. 89-92). It took another four years before electoral system reform at the national level was introduced in 1899. This hiatus provides the first plausible counterfactual – that if Left existential threat had remained high, PR would have been adopted sooner (see Test 1).

3.7 The Status Quo Becomes Unsustainable, No Agreement on the Alternative (1894-1899)

The combined effects of plural voting, compulsory voting and a majoritarian electoral system with districts of various sizes protected the Catholic Party from the Left electoral threat in the first elections under universal male suffrage in 1894. The Catholics gained 12 seats (from 92 in 1892 to 104 in 1894). Their seat share increased to 111 in 1896, and to 112 in 1898. The Socialists won 28 seats in 1894 and 1896 and 27 in 1898. The Liberal Party went to the brink of extinction from 60

seats in 1892 to 20 in 1894 and 13 in 1896/8 (Stengers, 2000, pp. 135-136, 2004, pp. 259-260). The aggregate results seem to indicate that the electoral threat to the Catholic Party was low.

Examining district-level results, however, reveals a more complex picture. The total Catholic vote share was declining. Catholics in the small MMDs and the SMDs in rural Flanders, indeed, faced low electoral threat from the Socialist-Liberal cartels. Nevertheless, electoral threat was rising for Catholics in the large, urban, MMDs, who competed against Socialists-Liberal cartels (Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, pp. 84-85, pp. 92-93, pp. 96-99; Mahaim, 1900; Stengers, 2000, pp. 136-137, 2004, pp. 259-260). They were especially vulnerable in Brussels (18 seats), Antwerp (11), Liège (11), Ghent (9), Charleroi (8), Leuven (6) and Mons (6). When discussing the motives behind the 1899 mixed system proposal, Barthélemy explains that, "in five of these districts, the anti-clericals were sure, by their union, to take the total number of seats and the same result was probable in the other two" (Barthélemy, 1912, p. 540).

In 1894, the Socialists won all of the seats in Charleroi and Mons. A cartel won Liège, where six seats went to the Socialist and five to the Liberals (Stengers, 2000, p. 135). The 1896 election in Brussels was very close.

> [O]ne could have calculated that without the support at the second ballot of some thousand or so conservative liberals, having together fifteen thousand votes for the Catholic list, and the blanc vote of many thousands of others, the Catholics would have been defeated. (Stengers, 2000, p. 137)

An upcoming census was expected to increase the size of the MMDs. Furthermore, many Catholic politicians were concerned about the future of the Liberal Party and did not want to see the Socialists as their only opposition. While in 1896, the moderate Catholics won Brussels and other key MMDs, their future control of these constituencies was uncertain (Stengers, 2000, pp. 136-137).

The highly disproportional results outraged the Liberals and the Socialists, worried moderate Catholics and delegitimised the electoral system. An opening for change appeared.

Several solutions were discussed before pure PR. During these deliberations, actors' preferences aligned with their varying perceptions of electoral threat and their beliefs about the applicability of each system to Belgium (Cameau, 1901, pp. 118-119; Dupriez, 1901, pp. 163-164; Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, pp. 94-106; Stengers, 2000, p. 137; Woeste, 1933, pp. 153-160).

3.8 Alternative I: Redistricting into SMDs (January 1899)

In January 1899, Charles Woeste, an influential reactionary Catholic and outspoken supporter of redistricting into SMDs convinced the king to support this measure. The king issued a statement that SMDs and PR are equivalent alternatives to the *status quo*. PM de Smet de Naeyer, who preferred PR at the run-off elections and agreed to divide the Brussels constituency in two, but strongly opposed SMDs, resigned (Dupriez, 1901, p. 164; Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, pp. 104-106; Woeste, 1933, pp. 153-160). Vandenpeereboom, a reactionary Catholic, became PM in

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January 1899. Woeste continued to unsuccessfully advocate for SMDs, antagonising much of the Chamber and his party (Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, pp. 106-108; Woeste, 1933, pp. 161-163).

Interestingly, between 1896 and 1899, Woeste did not seem worried that the cartels would threaten the Catholic majority. He thought that the Socialists and the Liberals have conflicting economic interests (Woeste, 1933, p. 138, 1898, p. 8) and believed that the two-ballot majoritarian system protected the Catholics (Woeste, 1933, pp. 87-89, pp. 141). Woeste wanted to preserve it, while introducing SMDs. According to him,

> The king did not appear reassured on the subject of the 1900 elections. This last fear seemed exaggerated; the status quo was not as menaced as one said. It did not seem plausible that we would lose at the same time Brussels, Nivelles, Antwerp and Philippeville. (Woeste, 1933, p. 155)

Woeste thought that PR would benefit the Christian-Democratic wing, led by Daens who challenged him in Aalst (Woeste, pp. 16, 40, 68, 84-88).

Neither group could implement its preference. However, each succeeded in impeding the adoption of the reform their opponents preferred. The stalemate deepened, the *status quo* persisted, but the problem with the extant system was not resolved.

3.9 Alternative II: Vandenpeereboom's Mixed System Bill (April to June 1899)

Vandenpeereboom consulted the Catholic parliamentary group. Beernaert and his allies wanted PR in the urban MMDs; Woeste and his clique demanded SMDs; many were undecided and some did not want change. Vandenpeereboom met separately with each faction before unveiling, in April 1899, a mixed system bill. The bill introduced PR in only seven large MMDs, divided the two-member districts into SMDs, and made no change in medium-sized MMDs (Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, p. 110; Woeste, 1933, p. 162-163). The Socialists and both progressive and doctrinaire Liberals understood that the reform would strengthen Catholic dominance and vehemently opposed it (Barthélemy, 1912, pp. 539-540; Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, pp. 111-114; Mahaim, 1900, p. 83; Vandervelde, 1925, p. 51).

Yet, the warring Catholic factions had reached a compromise. Even moderates like Beernaert and de Smet de Naeyer supported the proposal. On June 27, a procedural vote to set the discussion date (88 for; 16 against; and 11 abstentions) indicated that the bill would pass[7] (Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, pp. 114-117). Incumbents were finally capable of implementing a solution.

The parliamentary transcripts of June 27-29 describe vivid scenes of opposition representatives hurling colourful insults, playing musical instruments, throwing paper balls at the Catholics and even fighting[8] (Barthélemy, 1912, p. 541; Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, p. 114-117; Mahaim, 1900, p. 84; Vandervelde, 1925, p. 52). Emmenegger and Walter (2019) argue that this is why the bill failed, without mentioning the strong extra-institutional pressure outside the Chamber.

Historical press accounts[9] show that the obstruction inside parliament would not have stopped the passage of the bill, without coordinated extra-institutional

pressure from the streets – mass demonstrations, demanding equal universal male suffrage. The extra-constitutional threat escalated dramatically between June 28 and July 1. The government was prepared for this, having called the national guard and the gendarmerie to Brussels and established a security perimeter around the legislature in late June.[10]

Parliamentary transcripts reveal that the Socialists deliberately used the extra-institutional threat to block the reform. For instance, on 29 June, Defnet, a Socialist, proclaimed:

> Either you withdraw your bill or you are going to create riots in Brussels and all of our big cities…It is time: withdraw your bill! If not, the duel between you and the people will intensify further. The demonstrations will continue and become more numerous.[11]

After the legislative debates ended, the Socialists and Liberals joined the crowds outside. Mounted police were dispatched and several people were wounded, as the country came close to a civil war (Barthélemy, 1912, p. 540-541; Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, pp. 117-118). "[I]n Brussels, it came to a real riot, with, in the center of the city, the beginning of barricades, and gardarmes charging with sabers drawn" (Stengers, 2000, p. 137).

On 30 June 1899, *Le Peuple* (the daily Socialist newspaper) described the previous night in Brussels as "bloody" and "revolutionary".[12] *Le Courrier de Bruxelles* (a major Catholic Party newspaper) suggests that office-holders felt seriously threatened:

> The real nature of the movement led by the Socialists became obvious last night. It cannot be denied anymore: it is not a political, legal, constitutional movement, but a revolutionary push that would blow away all of our institutions.[13]

Le Peuple's third special edition for July 1 shows that incumbents began to moderate their positions in direct response to the revolutionary threat:

> At 3:15 am, it was announced to us that the Chamber had suspended its public meeting to deliberate in secret on the situation, Mr. Vandenpeereboom has made a declaration, allowing us to believe [in] the motives of appeasement. At this moment, the Left deliberates on the conditions of peace.[14]

While politicians and party newspapers are likely to exaggerate the blame of their opponents and minimise their own, triangulating primary and secondary sources reveals that the spiking extra-institutional threat began shifting actors' preferences.

Vandenpeereboom agreed to suspend the bill and consider amendments. The Chamber approved. While some Socialists wanted to continue protesting, Vandervelde and six other Socialists asked their supporters to stop (Barthélemy, 1912, p. 541; Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, pp. 118-120). Yet, an alternative was not found and the opening for change remained. This episode provides the second

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counterfactual, the possibility that without extra-institutional threat, the mixed electoral system bill would have been adopted (Test 2).

3.10 Alternative III: Pure PR Adopted (July to November 1899)

The road to pure PR in Belgium was convoluted. Proponents of different electoral systems fought each other and *status quo* defenders, and sought support (or at least abstention) from their undecided colleagues.

In July, the government created a 16-member commission (including Beernaert, de Smet de Naeyer, Woeste and Vandervelde) to examine possible solutions. The commission debated and rejected four alternatives: redistricting into two-member districts (13 against, Woeste abstained); the Socialist proposal for an electoral reform referendum (11 against, 5 for); pure PR (8 against, 7 for, 1 abstention) and Vandenpeereboom's mixed system bill (8 against, 8 abstentions). No agreement was possible and Vandenpeereboom stepped down (Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, pp. 122-126; Woeste 1933, pp. 169-197).

De Smet de Naeyer became PM again and introduced a bill for pure PR (d'Hondt) (Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, p. 126; Woeste, 1933, p. 171). The Liberals supported PR, but the Socialists demanded an electoral system referendum and – if not – the abolition of plural voting (equal universal male suffrage). Vandervelde unsuccessfully sponsored a bill to revise Art. 47 of the Constitution. Some Socialists (Vandervelde, Bertrand, Heupgen) supported PR, if accompanied by equal universal male suffrage. These demands and incumbents' memories of past protests heightened their views of extra-institutional threat. Many other Socialists (e.g. Defuisseaux) opposed PR for seat-maximisation reasons (Barthélemy, 1912, p. 544; Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, pp. 129-134; Woeste 1933, pp. 172-173).

The Chamber debated the government's bill between 12 September and 24 November. Catholic deputies from the small MMDs, protected their constituencies from redistricting. SMD supporters in the Senate exerted pressure. The Socialist proposed another referendum. Several redistricting proposals were rejected. Albert Nyssens, a Catholic PR proponent, sponsored a *quorum* amendment to the government's bill that garnered support from some radical Socialists and reactionary Catholics, including Woeste. The radical Socialists wanted to eliminate the need for Liberal-Socialist cartels in the urban MMDs, the conservatives – to derail PR. The adoption of Nyssens' proposal would have undermined the government bill and deepened the stalemate. The debates in the Chamber were heated. Schollaert, himself a Catholic PR opponent, asked Nyssens "to withdraw his proposition, so as to not help the opposition open a crisis from which no one saw an exit" (Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, pp. 138). Nyssens consented (Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, pp. 138).

The Chamber passed the bill for pure PR for national legislative elections in Belgium on 24 November by a slim majority (70 for, 63 against and 8 abstentions). Its supporters were 5 Liberals and 65 Catholics, including previous PR opponents who voted in favour because they thought it was the only feasible option, preferable to the abolition of plural voting, or a further escalation of the crisis. This preference change highlights the importance of the elevated extra-institutional threat. And while pure PR meant that the Catholic Party would relinquish some seats to the

opposition, the party would not lose power. The Senate approved the bill on 22 December (61 for, 26 against and 6 abstentions). The law was promulgated on 30 December (Goblet d'Alviella, 1900, pp. 138-140).[15]

4 Using the Narrative to Assess the Relative Importance of Threats

The theoretically informed narrative shows *how* and *when* perceptions of extra-institutional threat and electoral threat influenced the adoption of PR in Belgium.

The high extra-institutional threat created an opening for change in 1893. Yet, because that threat subsided by 1894 and because incumbents were not able to implement their preference, the 1894 reform failed. Increasing extra-institutional threat blocked Vandenpeereboom's mixed bill in the summer of 1899. In the fall of 1899, many Catholic politicians were concerned about the possibility of another escalation. The potential crisis caused many Catholics to change their preferences to full PR in November, according to the logic of tactical seat loss.

The electoral threat and the growing disproportionality[16] helped open a window for change in 1893, and in 1899. They also shaped the initial preferences of actors and blocked Woeste's 1899 SMD bill when de Smet de Naeyer resigned.

5 Inference-Based Testing

5.1 Test 1 (Straw-in-the-Wind): Does the Account Explain the Timing of PR Adoption?

5.1.1 Left Existential Threat

If left existential threat had been constantly high between 1893 and 1899 because the Socialists were ideologically radical, PR for national elections could have been adopted earlier during this period. The empirical evidence weakens the thesis (Fig. 3, Appendix III).

5.1.2 Interaction between Threats

In this explanation, between 1894 and 1899, incumbents viewed both the extra-institutional and electoral threats as low. The extra-institutional threat was indeed low until June 1899, consistent with the timing of PR adoption (Fig. 11 and Fig. 13, Appendix III).

The account correctly identifies electoral threat perceptions in the case of five of the seven reform proposals. Yet, the 1896 and 1898 elections became a source of concern, especially for the moderate Catholics. The 1899 mixed system proposal and the pure PR bill were motivated by perceptions of increasing electoral threat, which partly weakens the explanation (Fig. 11 and Fig. 13, Appendix III).

5.1.3 Electoral Threat

The electoral threat from Socialist-Liberal alliances increased during the 1894-1899 period but electoral reform was not proposed sooner because the Catholics preferred different alternatives and could not agree on a solution. The 1896 and

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1898 partial elections impacted the reactionary faction (from small rural Flemish constituencies) and the moderate faction (from large urban MMDs) of the Catholic Party differently (Emmenegger and Walter, 2019, pp. 443-444). The test supports the *narrative* of the electoral threat account (Fig. 18, Appendix III).

5.2 Test 2 (Hoop): Does the Account Explain Why Vandenpeereboom's 1899 Mixed System Bill, Which Had Enough Legislative Support, Was Withdrawn?

5.2.1 Left Existential Threat

The bill was blocked by mass protests. Had the episode been included, it would have bolstered the argument but is missing from the account (Fig. 4, Appendix III).

5.2.2 Interaction between Electoral and Extra-Institutional Threats

The account examines the episode. It shows that the bill would have passed when there was no extra-institutional threat, but was withdrawn after the extra-institutional threat escalated. The protests added a new dimension to the negotiations, creating a two-level game and encouraging tactical seat loss. The account passes the test (Fig. 13, Appendix III).

5.2.3 Electoral Threat

Evidence that elevated extra-institutional threat in June 1899 stopped the passage of Vandenpeereboom's mixed system bill is inconsistent with this account. Elevated electoral threat did motivate many Catholic deputies who agreed to vote for the proposal. If electoral considerations had been the only cause, the mixed system would have been adopted because the bill had garnered enough votes. The authors argue that the bill was rejected because "both of the Catholics' wings still believed their preferred option to be possible" (Emmenegger & Walter, 2019, p. 448) and omit the extra-institutional threat (Fig. 22 and Fig. 24, Appendix III).

6 Conclusion

This article makes several contributions to the literature on electoral system reform. Methodologically, it uses theoretically informed process-tracing to evaluate rival explanations of the introduction of PR in Belgium. It demonstrates that the narrative-based and the inference-based approaches to process-tracing are important and complementary tools for hypothesis/theory testing. When applied systematically, both approaches can help evaluate competing explanations. All three accounts examined here (Ahmed, 2013; Barzachka 2014; Emmenegger & Walter, 2019) consider intra-party divisions and Liberal-Socialist cooperation. The Left existential threat and the interaction account underscore the context of democratisation and the extra-constitutional dimension. The most recent account highlights the importance of electoral threat and political geography. This article acknowledges and builds on to the strengths and contributions of this literature.

Yet, the article also finds that all three accounts have weaknesses. The Left existential threat explanation of the Belgian case is incomplete (it excludes the

period of June 1899 to November 1899) and inconsistent (the Left existential threat decreased between 1894 and June 1899, which contradicts the theory). These problems undermine the coherence of the account. The interaction account is complete and consistent in five of the seven cases. It is inconsistent regarding electoral threat in the two 1899 episodes, but consistent regarding extra-institutional threat in all episodes. The electoral threat account is correct and consistent when it comes to electoral threat from Socialist-Liberal cartels (which explains office-holders' preferences). However, it is incomplete because it excludes the extra-institutional dimension in 1899 (and cannot accurately explain why the 1899 mixed system bill was rejected). The account's incompleteness undermines its coherence.

Empirically, this article finds that both electoral threat and extra-institutional threat mattered for the introduction of PR in Belgium. It accomplishes that by using theoretically informed process-tracing, focusing on event-sequencing and examining how events unfolded in the summer and fall of 1899, both inside and outside of the parliamentary arena. In the late 1890s, many (but not all) Catholic politicians thought that the electoral threat to their party was increasing because of the high uncertainty surrounding elections in the large urban MMDs. This explains why Vandenpeereboom's bill introduced PR only in those contested districts. Office-holders' perceptions of electoral threat made them consider electoral system reform, thereby creating an opening for change. The article confirms the importance of extra-institutional threat in blocking the controversial proposal and in pushing incumbents to change preferences towards pure PR in the fall of 1899. It shows that tactical seat loss could also occur if the perceived electoral threat is rising, uncertainty about the outcome of elections is high and extra-institutional pressure endangers regime stability and incumbent status. Additional tests, derived from theory, new interpretations of historical sources and/or new evidence could confirm or undermine these findings. The bibliography and Appendix I aim to increase data transparency (Moravcsik, 2014) and facilitate such research.

The third contribution of the article is theoretical – integrating the literatures on institutional change and electoral system reform allows a systematic analysis of the complete *process* (the series of attempted and implemented reforms) that led to PR adoption in Belgium. Future research should continue to explore the connections between the two literatures as this could provide new insights about institutional change and electoral reform in other contexts, including electoral system change during democratisation in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia.

Notes

1 The concept does not distinguish clearly between short- and long-term Left electoral threat *and* Left extra-institutional threat.

2 A single-member district (SMD) is a constituency that elects one member of parliament. A multi-member district (MMD) is a constituency that elects more than one dep-

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uty. Single-member district plurality is an electoral system, also known as 'the first-past-the-post system', in which the candidate that wins the most votes wins the single seat in that district.

3 Büthe (2002) argues that process-tracing allows hypothesis generation, but not testing. Gerring (2007) adopts an intermediary position on the issue.

4 See Bates et al. (1998) for analytic narratives, Hall (2003) for systematic process analysis and Kreuzer (2016) for Bayesian process-tracing.

5 Annales Parlementaires: Séance du 24 janvier, 1888. Bruxelles, Belgique: Chambre de Représentants, p. 423.

6 Session de 1894-1895: Liste des membres de la Chambre, 1894. Bruxelles, Belgique: Chambre de Représentants.

7 Annales Parlementaires: Séance du 27 juin, 1899. Bruxelles, Belgique: Chambre de Représentants.

8 Annales Parlementaires: Séance du 27 juin, 1899. Bruxelles, Belgique: Chambre de Représentants; Annales Parlementaires: Séance du 28 juin, 1899. Bruxelles, Belgique: Chambre de Représentants; Annales Parlementaires: Séance du 29 juin 1899. Bruxelles, Belgique: Chambre de Représentants.

9 They provide a contemporaneous view from a different perspective and new evidence, against which the well-known historical sources and the recent explanations could be compared.

10 Annales Parlementaires: Séance du 27 juin, 1899. *Le Courrier de Bruxelles*, 27 June, 1899, p. 1; *Le Peuple*, 27 June, 1899, La zone néutre en état de siege, p. 1; *Le Peuple*, 29 June, 1899, Interpellations sur les brutalites de la Gendarmerie: Situation révolutionnaire, p. 1.

11 Annales Parlementaires: Séance du 29 juin 1899. Bruxelles, Belgique: Chambre de Représentants.

12 *Le Peuple*, 30 June, 1899. Interpellations sur les brutalites de la Gendarmerie, p. 1.

13 *Le Courrier de Bruxelles*, June 30, 1899. p. 1.

14 *Le Peuple*, 1 July, 1899. Du sang! p. 1.

15 Annales Parlementaires: Séance du 24 novembre, 1899. Bruxelles, Belgique: Chambre de Représentants, pp. 51-67.

16 Leemann and Mares (2014).

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STATE OF THE PROFESSION

The University in Crisis: Why (Neoliberal) Diversity Is Not the Answer

*Dounia Bourabain**

Abstract

The academic profession is often perceived as the epitome of meritocracy, while Critical Diversity and University scholars have demonstrated how it continues to grapple with gender and racial inequality across all levels. This article delves into the challenges of inequality in academia, particularly in the context of Belgian universities, and proposes a transformative approach to address these issues. Based on my previous work, I discuss how Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion (DEI) policies are misused and serve as a smokescreen to achieve the neoliberal interests of universities while remaining largely non-performative. Even more, EDI policies are introduced to bypass power, rather than change the power structures that continue to reproduce gender and racial inequality in academia. Using a praxis of hope, I move beyond identifying the problem by proposing the 'University of the Common' as an alternative academic system that goes beyond superficial diversity, aiming to create a university founded on social justice and in service of the common good. Key features include decolonizing knowledge, promoting antiracist feminist governance, and fostering a collective effort by academics to build an equitable university.

Keywords: diversity, gender equality, academia, policy, decolonization.

The academic profession is often held up as the epitome of a meritocratic profession in which one is judged only by one's performance, achievements and merit. Anyone regardless of their gender, race or class should be able to climb the academic ladder. However, universities are challenged with a lack of diversity among their faculty. When it comes to gender, universities deal with a persistent 'leaky pipeline'. The leaky pipeline refers to the decline of women scholars in top positions. In Belgium, the majority of university graduates are women, but this majority already disappears at the lowest academic level. More specifically, 48% of doctoral students are women, which remains relatively the same at the postdoctoral level with 46%. The issue emerges at the transition to the level of professors, where we observe a sharp decline to only 29% women professors (European Commission, 2021). In addition, as in other European countries, several cases of sexual harassment and racism have come to light at Belgian universities. In 2021, whistle-blowers

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published a story in a Flemish newspaper about the sexual harassment they experienced at the hands of a professor at their university. Although more than 23 complaints were filed by women scholars and students about the same professor over the course of ten years, the university launched an internal investigation only after being pressured by the national body on gender equality. At the same time, professors got caught making racist comments about their students in both formal and informal conversations. The hazing death of black student Sanda Dia in 2018 also raised the issue of racism in universities. The question, then, is how universities deal with this crisis of 'diversity', or more accurately, the crisis of sexism and racism. By presenting my theory of the university as a *neoliberal diversity complex*, I first explain how universities' current diversity strategies are failing or rather aiming to fail. I then demonstrate that this is an issue that we, academics of all disciplines, should be concerned with and how we can collectively create a university that is welcoming to all.

1 The Neoliberal Diversity Complex

With the democratisation of higher education, universities have profiled themselves as gender-free, race-free spaces that serve as the great equaliser in society. Initially, gender and racial disparities were mostly understood through individual-merit explanations in the sense that men outperform women and white researchers outperform researchers racialised as non-white in terms of, among others, publication and citation rates, which serve as the most important indicators of scholarly potential. While the belief in these individual-merit explanations has not disappeared, there is increased policy-level attention to achieving diversity, and especially a gender balance, at all academic levels. This follows from the European Union's advice, which starts from an economic-instrumental rationale of how a gender balance is beneficial for the university to improve human capital and avoid wasting talent. However, they give little attention to the structural and cultural barriers caused by unequal power relations in the university. As a result, we see a shift where universities are now trying to create an image of themselves as inclusive and diversity-oriented institutions that are committed to tackling the leaky pipeline, mostly in terms of gender while disregarding race.

Flemish universities only started committing to tackling gender inequality in 2012, following a new decree requiring gender balance on boards and management structures. Over the past decade, Flemish universities have introduced gender and diversity plans, hired diversity officers and established diversity offices and complaints service points. At every university, the (in)famous Gender/Diversity Week is organised, and, across campus, various awareness campaigns on issues such as sexual harassment are put front and centre. At first glance, these diversity measures seem to show universities' commitment to eliminating inequality. But instead, these measures serve as a smokescreen as they are largely non-performative and achieve the opposite.

Flemish universities in Belgium developed a paradoxical climate where they work on a culture that is completely absorbed by Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), while at the same time, their policy measures are largely ineffective. That is because materialising their commitment into a variety of EDI policy measures primarily serves the university's private neoliberal interests. With the Bologna process, universities have entered a competitive market system in which they have to attract students and staff from the same pool (Curaj et al., 2012). This led universities to seek ways to make themselves unique. Therefore, the story of EDI has been used by Flemish universities as a marketing tool to attract new students and staff. EDI acquired a commercial value where universities engage with these topics, as it is good for business. Working on EDI, then, emanates from business-related rather than justice-related goals. This is reflected in policy documents where universities refrain from talking about inequality by using a 'language of diversity'. This language of diversity is a form of 'happy talk' that suggests that diversity is positive and beneficial for everyone within the institution. It is portrayed as something fun and nonthreatening. This seemingly small change of words has large consequences for the possibility to tackle inequality as it allows universities to 'bypass power' (Mohanty, 2003, p. 193). By not calling the problem by its name – that is, by not calling it sexism or racism – change can be kept superficial. In my research, many women scholars pointed out the risk of this culture as it exacerbates victim-blaming rather than making racism and sexism more discussable. This was clearly evidenced in their experiences with the complaints service points. The establishment of these offices has been heavily advertised in the media to build a good image for the university to the outside world. On the inside, however, many women who filed a complaint at these offices have not received the right support, never heard back about the next steps of the procedure, and some were even told to keep quiet about their cases and move on. Their complaints end up in the "complaint graveyard" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 91) where they get hidden in a drawer or even disappear entirely from that drawer. Therefore, the construction of this neoliberal diversity culture leads to 'managing' inequality, by making it invisible rather than reducing it.

As advised by the European Union, to achieve a gender balance Flemish universities focus on fixing glitches at different academic stages. They mostly pay attention to the recruitment and promotion process which they aim to make more gender-conscious. While I agree that it is important to pay attention to formal settings and practices, it is equally important to recognise that inequality is produced and reproduced in the context of everyday interactions with peers, students and other faculty. As my previous workdemonstrates, the exit of women scholars from academia is due to an accumulation of seemingly banal and mundane inequality practices that happen in interactions on the work floor. One of the most pertinent interactions that highly contribute to women leaving or staying in academia is those with their supervisors. The relationship between supervisors and their doctoral supervisees is aimed at preparing them in acquiring the right knowledge, skills and values of an independent scholar. These developmental relationships should support early-career academics in learning the rules of the game. Women academics, however, get excluded from academic opportunities such

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as project writing and networking compared to their male counterparts. What I observe is how supervisors 'clone' themselves in which they (un)consciously privilege those who look like them because they would have the same abilities and especially the same ambition to build an academic career. As most supervisors are still predominantly men, they tend to engage less with their women supervisees in giving them the access and knowledge to land, for example, a postdoctoral position, while they work well in advance with their men supervisees to get into those same positions. While women are already disadvantaged by supervisors who tend to clone themselves, women experience additional barriers due to the current superficial diversity culture. One of the most perverse effects of this superficial diversity culture is how women scholars' work and achievement are devalued by supervisors and peers arguing that their success is thanks to their gender and not their merit. The perceived diversity culture is now being used *against* women scholars instead of in favour of them.

The neoliberal diversity complex ultimately leads to and induces the belief that racism and sexism no longer exist within the university. Women scholars who actively resist this culture by openly sharing their experiences get reprimanded by their peers and other faculty who (un)consciously reproduce the status quo. Therefore, I argue it is incorrect to talk about women scholars 'leaking out' of academia. Instead, they are being 'pushed out' due to the constant sexist and racist struggles they endure which remain invisible due to the happy diversity narrative (Tuck, 2012).

2 The University of the Common: A Praxis of Hope

> The real political task is to criticize the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent, and to criticize them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked so that we can fight them. (Ball, 1994, p. 27)

To combat racism and sexism, we need more than the glossy EDI policies that universities currently hide behind. What we need, instead, is to rebuild a university that breaks with the current neoliberal, patriarchal, racist and colonial foundations. Some might say that this project is impossible as racism and sexism are part of the DNA of Global North institutions. I, however, start from a praxis of hope, by looking for the cracks that crises offer us in reshaping relationships, structures and entire organisations. If we look at the recent global pandemic, we have seen how universities are able to quickly adapt to a new reality by completely re-shifting their operations. So, if universities would acknowledge that sexism and racism too are crises, we can actually build an alternative academic system that is for all of us.

This alternative academic system is what I call the 'University of the Common'. With this notion, I want to show, above all, that we should not aim at a university that is solely 'inclusive' and 'diverse'. We need to reject the idea of 'inclusion' and 'diversity' which are superficial as they only bring marginalised academics into structures that are not built for them. Achieving gender or racial balance does not

mean that we have achieved a culture that truly reflects gender and race equality. It does not touch upon dismantling the exclusionary structures upon which the university is built. At the University of the Common, we should, therefore, not be concerned with how to diversify spaces that are already masculine and white, but be concerned with creating spaces that start from a foundation of social justice. With the notion of common, I also want to point out that the university must be in the service of society, of the public and, thus, of the common good, and not in the service of the institution's capitalist private interests. To achieve this alternative university, I believe there are three key features we should work on: 1) decolonising, 2) antiracist feminist governing and 3) collectivising.

First, with decolonising I refer to the deconstruction of the hierarchy of knowledge and the knower that privileges white masculine thinkers. It is about challenging the current power structures that determine what credible research is, how it needs to be produced and who can produce it (Bhambra, 2018; Mignolo, 2007). This does not mean that we have to completely eliminate the current standards of knowledge production; rather, it is about creating a knowledge system that "is open to epistemic diversity" (Mbembe, 2015, p. 19). In Flemish universities and Global North universities in general, it is also about re-centring phenomena such as racism in understanding how it has shaped the world today. Like racism, sexism and other systems of inequalities have largely been neglected within the traditional Global North academic canon. Still, these traditional worldviews remain to be considered universally applicable. Therefore, it is crucial to centre the work of racialised and women academics, as their knowledge and experience allow them to make the invisible visible.

Second, antiracist, feminist governing is a form of governance that starts from public instead of private interests, translating values of community, empowerment and care (work) into leadership that is collaborative, transparent and equitable (Hil et al., 2021; Liu, 2021). Today, university governance is called democratic because elections are organised for the university administration. However, apart from these elections (which sometimes even exclude non-tenured, temporary and non-academic staff), there are very few ways to incorporate the needs and ideas of staff on how they would build a better university. We, therefore, need shared governance (governance of the common) where power is redistributed among everyone, staff and students included, to minimise administrative management and top-down decision-making.

And third and, most importantly, it is up to us, academics, to achieve the University of the Common. Our responsibility is to show transversal solidarity to our students, personnel and colleagues. Isolated individuals who dare to resist risk losing their careers as they are easier to mute or take out. Radical change, therefore, requires more than the resistance of a few. It should be driven not only by those marginalised by racism and sexism but also by those who enjoy the privileges of the same systems. Especially with the neoliberalisation of the university, the majority of academics risk experiencing exploitation and power abuse. If we become aware of the interconnectedness and interdependence of the struggles of different groups within the university, we can collectively defy the current patriarchal, racist, capitalist system and build a university that is *truly* equal.

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Doing Political Science on the Eve of Destruction: Why I Decided to Leave Academia

*Ramon van der Does**

Abstract

The current human condition knows no precedent. Our species' history is replete with societies crumbling and ecosystems collapsing. But never before has human existence itself been this clearly on the eve of destruction. What does this mean for political science? In this piece, I argue why now more than ever political scientists ought to reflect on the question how they are to spend the 80,000 hours of their careers and explain my own choice to quit academia and do political science outside of the university.

Keywords: climate change, ecological crisis, political science profession.

The current human condition knows no precedent. Our species' history is replete with societies crumbling and ecosystems collapsing. But never before has human existence itself been this clearly 'on the eve of destruction', as Barry McGuire might put it. The growing strain on the possibility of human (and non-human!) life on our planet due to ecological degradation and climate change poses a fundamental challenge to how we have arranged our societies, politics and daily lives. Clearly, things need to change if we still want there to be a place for *Homo sapiens* and a host of other species on planet earth in the not-so-distant future. This was the backdrop against which I decided to quit academia – because I wanted to, not because I had to.

1 80,000 Hours

A big chunk of our lives is dedicated to our professional careers –some say as many as 80,000 hours.[1] What should we do with all that 'contracted time', as time-use researchers call it? *What kind* of work should we be doing and *how* should we spend our time on the job? These are vital questions not only because all those hours spent at work shape the rest of our own and other people's lives but also because there seems to be only limited time left to turn the tide and fundamentally reshape our societies to avert further ecological and climate disaster.

I do not see why political scientists would be exempt from regularly confronting themselves with the deeply ethical and personal question of what they should do with some 80,000 hours. Perhaps they should even be particularly concerned by it,

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as it is arguably their task to help people understand the political and social challenges humanity is facing and to come up with potential solutions. That being my own conviction, I struggled with this question for quite some time and more and more so as my PhD journey was drawing to a close.

2 Between Lifeworld and System

But this is not just about me. For any political scientist, the question soon becomes: what should I be doing at *university*, and should I be doing that in an academic environment at all? That depends on one's view of academia.

On the one hand, I have always viewed the university as a place very much akin to what Habermasians might call the *lifeworld*; a place of free-floating ideas and reflection, well-suited for understanding our present condition and for coming up with the blueprints of tomorrow's societies. Whereas in other places in our Western societies there is often little time for thorough reflection (Ercan et al., 2019), the university is an exceptional environment in that it offers the potential for generating radically new ideas and ways of understanding.

On the other hand, the university, as I know it, has also been usurped for a large part by the *system* (to stick to Habermasian terminology). And that system is of course a *capitalist* system. Its 'colonising' of the university is perhaps most clearly visible in pressures to attract research grants and students to remain 'profitable' and in mounting competition for academic positions. Even though the system's functioning depends heavily on innovations coming from places like the university, it thus also creates the kind of perverse incentives that undermine the workings of the university on which it so much depends, for example, through temporary working conditions and publication targets. As Nancy Fraser (2022) might put it, the capitalist system is devouring the university and thereby some of the very conditions on which it depends for its own functioning.

Certainly, I am simplifying things here, not in the last place by talking about 'the university' in the singular. Yet, I feel that most political scientists will quite easily recognise this tension between the lifeworld-like ideal of a university and the imperatives imposed by the capitalist system. It is the latter that has played an important part in pushing me away from university. But why leave? Is it not the responsibility of a political scientist to change the university from within, carving out spaces in which critical reflection and radical reimagination can flourish and, ultimately, halting the colonisation of the university by the system?

4 Playing the Academic Game

Let me first say that my workplace over the past years in many ways did come close to the lifeworld-like image of the university. Yet, staying at the university would mean leaving that niche and building a career in the wider world of academia. That would inevitably involve devoting a substantial amount of time and energy to the standard operations of an academic today: teaching, writing grant proposals, and doing peer-reviewed research. Now, I quite enjoy all of those 'operations', or in

gaming language, the 'core mechanics' of academia, that is, "the basic actions that players perform again and again" (Lerner, 2014, p. 74). What I was afraid of is getting lost in the game and losing sight of why I would want to keep playing it: trying to help understand and address the pending ecological crises (in my case, from the perspective of political science).

In my experience, it is easy to get drawn away from such an objective when most of the routines are aimed at keeping the institution operating according to the system's imperatives rather than at addressing societal challenges per se. For example, as peer-reviewed publications continue to be viewed as the prime "points" or "status indicators" (cf. Lerner, 2014) in the academic game, it seems difficult to devote a substantial portion of one's time to writing for policymakers or the wider public. If one can stay in academia (and that is by no means guaranteed), the easier option is to just stick to academic publishing and earn the kind of points that will lead to rewards in the academic game. This puts a clear strain on translating academic insights into practical and accessible advice for real-world change. After all, we only have so many hours to spend during our careers.

The space and time required for undertaking such activities in the margin of the academic game would become even more limited, I imagined, were I also to attempt to incrementally change the university from within, trying to alter the 'rules of the game', so to speak. There is most certainly a place for that, and I applaud all those engaged in fighting for a more lifeworld-like university! Nevertheless, to me, staying in academia to both make it more directly relevant to addressing societal challenges *and* inform public debate by translating peer-reviewed research into practical advice seemed like an unnecessarily complicated and indirect way of trying to attain my objectives. If my professional goal is to inform public debate and policy in an accessible fashion about how we can understand and address the pending ecological crises from the perspective of political science, then would it not make more sense to focus on that *directly*, without being held back by the aforementioned logics and system imperatives plaguing the academy?

5 Doing Political Science in a Limited World

In many ways, entertaining such questions is most definitely a luxury, something that only makes sense if the political scientist can cut their ties with academia and still survive in a capitalist society. But for those who have the means and opportunity to do so, the current human condition, in my view, makes it necessary for them to consider whether their time and energy is best spent within the walls of universities. If there are more direct and effective ways of turning sound research into practical use to help humanity redirect its politics and societies in a more sustainable direction, political scientists ought to change their ways accordingly.

In a limitless world, we could easily study any question purely out of academic interest. Unfortunately, that is not the world we live in. The world we live in is biting back at humanity for exceeding "the limits to growth" (Meadows et al., 1972) and is demanding new ways of social and political organisation to bring the world back into balance. Many times, then, I have not only wondered whether *I* should

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leave the university; I have also frequently wondered whether others too *would* and *should* do political science outside of the academy. What would that mean for the role that political scientists would play in our societies? And what would that mean for how well we could address the political challenges ahead?

Note

1 For a similar reflection in relation to democratic theory, see van der Does (2022).

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PHD SUMMARY & REVIEW

Summary: Searching for a Democratic Equaliser: How Citizenship Education Moderates Inequalities in Internal Political Efficacy

*Joke Matthieu**

Inclusiveness is a crucial pillar in democratic decision-making processes. This pillar rests on the equal political opportunities principle, which posits that every citizen should have an equal chance to influence political decisions. This democratic principle stands, however, in strong contrast to the inequalities among those politically active. One of political science research's most stable and reliable findings is that privileged citizens participate more politically. Especially educational attainment is one of the best predictors of political participation (Willeck & Mendelberg, 2022). Scholars traditionally explain this by differential levels of resources (Verba et al., 1995). Due to disparities in resources such as time, money and cognitive sophistication, people have different barriers to taking up their civic rights. Education is traditionally believed to lower these barriers and increase the knowledge and skills necessary for political action. However, this reasoning fails to explain why political participation levels, especially among youngsters, have decreased in the past century while educational levels have risen drastically (Willeck & Mendelberg, 2022). It also fails to explain the persistent gender gap in political ambition, while women outperform their male counterparts academically in high school and university (Matthieu, 2023).

Differential individual resources seem to be only part of the explanation. To understand how inequalities in political action are reproduced across generations, this PhD research argues that we must also consider inequalities in the psychological drivers of political action, especially one's internal political efficacy (IPE), which is considered pivotal for political action (Levy & Akiva, 2019). IPE refers to individuals' beliefs and self-confidence about their abilities to understand and engage with politics (Beaumont, 2010). Research shows how people's beliefs in their political capabilities mediate future political participation (Grasso & Smith, 2022; Levy & Akiva, 2019; Pfanzelt & Spies, 2019). Firstly, this PhD research aims to theorise and empirically test how class and gender inequalities in IPE emerge among Flemish senior high school students and how these inequalities intersect. Secondly, this research aims to theoretically and empirically examine citizenship education's potential as a democratic equaliser for inequalities in IPE. Lastly, citizenship education as a

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democratic equaliser is studied while considering the Flemish-tracked education system, which perpetuates social class inequalities.

Based on the results of multilevel models estimated on data collected in 2016 to test the Flemish cross-curricular attainment targets of citizenship education among senior high school students, the empirical papers of this PhD show significant inequalities in IPE due to differential political home environments, educational tracking and gender while controlling for students' civic knowledge (Chapter 4; Matthieu & Junius, 2023). Even when students score similarly on a civic knowledge test, not growing up in a politically stimulating home environment, going to a lower status track and being female negatively affect one's confidence in a political setting. Furthermore, these inequalities intersect with each other. The research results show how gender inequality in IPE is the largest in the most politically resourceful environments, which is contradictory to a traditional resource-based explanation (Chapter 7).

The results also conclude that citizenship education has the potential to be a democratic equaliser for those students not growing up in a politically stimulating home environment (Chapter 4; Matthieu & Junius, 2023). When looking across educational tracks, however, citizenship education's compensating effect is much more articulated in the academic track compared to the technical and vocational tracks. Furthermore, students from technical and vocational tracks report lower access to these citizenship education opportunities. These students are potentially deprived twice (Chapter 5).

Regarding gender inequalities in IPE, an intensification of gender inequalities in IPE is found due to more citizenship education. This means gender inequality in IPE increases when students receive more citizenship education, and this is most articulated for active types of citizenship education. This PhD pleads for more critical political socialisation, which researches gendered political socialisation processes and contributes to this aim by showing how vital gender role attitudes are in political socialisation processes. Progressive gender role attitudes explain away the intensification effect of citizenship education. When female students believe that, for example, both men and women are equally capable of being political leaders, their IPE levels are higher, but there is also no intensification of gender inequalities due to citizenship education (Chapter 6).

The results of this PhD show that citizenship education is not only a potential democratic equaliser to compensate for the lack of politically stimulating environments but also the potential reproducer and intensifier of persistent inequalities within a democracy. These results are insightful for scholars and policymakers aiming to increase the inclusiveness of our political system and how citizenship education does and does not contribute to this democratic goal.

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Review: Searching for a Democratic Equalizer. How Citizenship Education Moderates Inequalities in Internal Political Efficacy (PhD by Joke Matthieu, Vrije Universiteit Brussel)

*Silvia Erzeel**

Gender and social inequalities in internal political efficacy have long been persistent challenges in the domain of political engagement. Joke Matthieu's PhD thesis addresses the critical question of why these inequalities endure and examines avenues for enhancing young people's internal political efficacy.

In her PhD thesis, she focuses on the role of citizenship education in moderating inequalities in political efficacy among senior high school students in Flanders. The article-based dissertation comprises four original empirical papers, complemented by separate introductory, theoretical, methodological and concluding chapters. While each chapter features as a strong standalone paper, the collective work is much more than the sum of its paper-parts. It scrutinises established theories and introduces an innovative and timely re-evaluation of how gender, social class and status, and education structure young people's political engagement. The manuscript is moreover written in a fluent and accessible manner, appealing to both academics and practitioners.

Of all the strong points, I would like to highlight three in particular.

The first strength is Joke Matthieu's nuanced critique of the conventional resource model used to explain gender and social disparities in political efficacy. Rather than attributing these disparities solely to a lack of resources or skills, Matthieu's research contends that social status and people's sense of entitlement play pivotal roles in determining how they perceive their place in the political sphere. These fresh perspectives are sure to inspire numerous future studies.

Secondly, the dissertation challenges the role of citizenship education as a democratic equaliser in internal political efficacy. It underscores that the effectiveness of citizenship education hinges on how it is embedded in a school environment and how it resonates with existing (gender) norms. While citizenship education may mitigate inequalities for some groups, it could exacerbate inequalities for others. This revelation calls for a more nuanced and comprehensive examination of how citizenship education can genuinely work to the benefit of all.

A third notable strength is Matthieu's adoption of an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from diverse academic fields, including political science, sociology, gender studies and education studies. Her engagement with emerging research on gendered political so-

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cialisation provides novel insights into the endurance of gender inequalities in political engagement, even within politically resourceful contexts.

As expected, the dissertation does have some limitations, which the researcher acknowledges and discusses. Notably, the use of correlational data restricts the ability to establish causality, and the dataset's focus on Flanders limits generalisability to other regions and countries. Nonetheless, Matthieu suggests that future research can address these limitations, e.g. through comparative analyses or experimental research.

In conclusion, Joke Matthieu's dissertation is essential reading for anyone interested in political socialisation, political engagement and citizenship education, particularly in the context of promoting gender and social equality in democratic learning. By challenging conventional ideas and theories, emphasising the complex interplay of social factors, and adopting an interdisciplinary approach, the dissertation makes a substantial mark in the field and offers many valuable avenues for future research and policy development in this area.

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Summary: Political Legitimacy and Under-representation: How Do Citizens Evaluate the Political System?

*David Talukder**

The erosion of political support (Dalton, 2004) as well as the decline in citizens' trust in governments and institutions (Bedock, 2017; Dalton, 1999, 2004; Norris, 2011; Pharr et al., 2000) is one major challenge for representative democracy. Indeed, scholars argue that support for democracy as a political regime is declining (Foa et al., 2020; Foa & Mounk, 2017), which questions to what extent representative democracies are able to resist democratic backsliding. Building on this literature, the doctoral thesis aimed at providing a better understanding of citizens' evaluation of the political system while engaging with recent scholarships linking unequal representation and citizens' political attitudes (Ezrow & Xezonakis, 2011; Marié & Talukder, 2021; Mayne & Hakhverdian, 2017; Reher, 2016).

The doctoral thesis investigated the question of (under-represented) citizens' evaluation of the political system through a different use of the traditional theoretical framework developed by David Easton (1965). The 'systemic approach of the political system' was preferred given its capacity to divide the political system into three distinct facets: *input* (the processes by which demands for public policy are absorbed), *throughput* (the procedures by which demands result [or do not result] in public policy) and the output (the policies adopted by the political system) as developed in the works of Scharpf (1999) and Schmidt (2013). However, instead of looking at the political system and its three components from an external point of view, the research studied each dimension from a citizen point of view. Using the EoS RepResent Panel (Michel et al., 2023), the research examined citizens' evaluation of the *input*, *throughput* and *output* of the political system and the determinants of citizens' evaluation of these three facets of the political system. Additionally, building on the literature on unequal representation and the limited existence of studies investigating under-represented citizens' evaluation of the political system, the thesis focused on under-represented groups' evaluation of the political system as well.

The empirical results of the doctoral dissertation underlined three sets of elements that contribute to the literature on political dissatisfaction and political under-representation. First, the research allowed to identify a number of under-represented groups of citizens both in terms of descriptive and substantive representation in Belgium. Beside the identification of descriptively under-represented groups, the research highlighted the existence of measurement sensitivity when it comes to the operationalisation of substantive representation (see Talukder, 2023).

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Second, the research tested to what extent the distinction between the *input*, *throughput* and *output* matters for citizens. Using a latent profile analysis (LPA), the dissertation demonstrated that such a distinction makes sense and it uncovered six types of profiles among citizens when it comes to the evaluation of the political system. The results show that a significant portion of citizens distinguishes between the three dimensions and that some profiles of citizens tend to be dissatisfied by one or two dimensions of the political system. Under-represented citizens tend to belong to the most negative profile when it comes to the evaluation of the political system.

Third, the research analysed carefully the determinants of citizens' evaluation of the *input*, *throughput* and *output* of the political system and identified determinants based on the literature. A key element of those analyses shows that under-represented groups of citizens (i.e. women, citizens with lower level of formal education and citizens disadvantaged in terms of working conditions) tend to be less satisfied than their fellow citizens. However, and most importantly, the results show that the determinants of *input*, *throughput* and *output* do not differ for under-represented groups of citizens. Their negative evaluation of the political system is mainly linked to lower scores on the determinants of each dimension.

Finally, the dissertation showed that three sets of variables are decisive to explain citizens' evaluation of each dimension of the political system: political interest, the perception of political actors/institutions and opinion congruence. Political interest is significantly associated with each dimension of the political system and it almost entirely absorbs the effect of belonging to an under-represented group. The dissertation hence argued that any future study interested in assessing the legitimacy of the political system, including the feeling of being represented, should consider including this variable in its analyses.

The results of the various analyses showed that a negative assessment of elected representatives and/or the perception that institutions are biased in favour of certain citizens tends to contribute to a negative assessment of the various dimensions of the political system's legitimacy. It is important to take these factors into account when studying solutions aimed at improving citizens' perception of the legitimacy of the political system. Improving the accessibility of decision-making processes to the public and questioning the moral and ethical qualities of elected representatives would help improve citizens' perception of the legitimacy of the political system.

Congruence with the decisions taken by the government is the third key variable significantly associated with the evaluation of each dimension of the political system's legitimacy. Citizens tend to evaluate the political system more positively when the decisions taken align with their own position. While some might argue that congruence and/or outcome favourability is the main determinant, the results show that even when citizens share the government's positions, the other variables continue to be significantly associated with their evaluation of the political system.

As a conclusion, the research aimed at providing a better understanding of citizens' and under-represented citi-

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zens' evaluation of the political system. Using survey data, the doctoral dissertation provided a useful contribution to the literature on democratic dissatisfaction and allowed to better grasp the determinants of each dimension among (under-represented) citizens. The research mobilised rich data collected by the EoS RepResent consortium in Belgium. However, one can question to what extent the results can be extended to other countries, specifically given the characteristics of the Belgian political system. Additionally, the use of survey data does not allow demonstrating strong causal mechanisms, yet it provides a basis for further studies. Further research needs necessarily to be comparative and should investigate to what extent the results found in the case of Belgium are corroborated in multiple countries. The aim would be mainly to determine, using comparative data, if citizens *effectively* make a distinction between *input*, *throughput* and *output* and to grasp their determinants in different institutional settings.

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Review: Political Legitimacy and Underrepresentation: How Do Citizens Evaluate the Political System? (PhD by David Talukder, Universite Libre de Bruxelles)

*Roberto Foa**

Across the world, citizen evaluations of democracy are low and deteriorating. Public opinion surveys on satisfaction with democracy reveal long-term declines in regions such as Latin America, Southern Europe and the United States, while trust in politicians, political parties and the media have also fallen in many countries. Yet, thus far, relatively few studies have investigated how democratic dissatisfaction is distributed across specific aspects of institutional performance, such as perceived fairness in representation, procedural efficiency, or levels of congruence between political outputs and public preferences.

By filling this gap, David Talukder's doctoral dissertation, *Political Legitimacy and Underrepresentation*, offers a valuable contribution to the literature. In his study, Talukder goes beyond generic assessments of democracy in order to examine specific facets of its functioning, such as whether respondents feel their views are represented politically, whether the democratic process is perceived as efficient, and whether citizens are satisfied with the resultant policy outcomes. Applying Vivien Schmidt's threefold subdivision of democratic legitimacy into *input*, *throughput* and *output* components – that is, the degree of citizen satisfaction with how their preferences are represented, how policy is made and, finally, with the policies themselves – Talukder helps us to better understand the bases of contemporary democratic discontent. As a result, a clear strength of this thesis is the care and attention that is given to the task of conceptualising political legitimacy and operationalising each element of this framework with appropriately chosen survey indicators.

Doing so offers valuable insights into current debates. In recent years, for example, some scholars have dismissed fluctuations in satisfaction with democracy as a product of merely short-term economic factors (such as cyclical unemployment) or individual partisanship (the 'winner-loser gap'), rather than as a meaningful measure of how citizens evaluate democratic institutions *per se*. This leaves us unable to know whether the solution to declining satisfaction lies in the reform of democracy itself – such as via decentralisation, quotas or the greater use of referenda and citizen assemblies – or in addressing non-political causes of social discontent, such as relative deprivation or spatial inequalities.

In his work, Talukder finds evidence that satisfaction with democratic outputs relates to partisanship (having

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voted for a majority party) and economic well-being, but also that satisfaction overall is strongly tied to a person's intrinsic evaluation of democratic institutions – such as perceptions of the representative process (inputs) or of the transparency and efficiency of the political system (throughput). While broader social grievances may play a role in democratic discontent, this suggests that it can also be reduced through political reforms - such as implementing higher levels of legislative transparency or standards for integrity in public life.

Another set of policies that are widely touted as a solution to the democratic legitimacy deficit are those aimed at making political actors more representative of society with respect to identity categories such as age, gender, ethnicity or social class. In his work, Talukder also conducts extensive analysis of how underrepresentation affects democratic legitimacy and whether groups inadequately mirrored within the political elite become politically disaffected as a result. Surprisingly, perhaps, less evidence is found to support this idea. Instead what appears to matter more is political and ideological representation: that is, the feeling that one's voice is heard and reflected in the views of public figures and that political life offers a narrative worth following with interest. In an age of populist mobilisation, such findings offer a useful reminder that democratic health depends upon the representation in public life of a full spectrum of political opinions, and cannot be achieved through diversity of group representation alone.

These are rich observations, which reflect important contributions to current debates over the causes of democratic dissatisfaction and how they may be redressed through suitable policy reforms. As such, this thesis provides a valuable addition to works exploring the understanding of democratic attitudes and the challenge of revitalising democratic legitimacy worldwide. It exhibits an impressive synthesis of theoretical rigour, precise operationalisation and methodological innovation: and demonstrates that Talukder is an emerging scholar with the potential to make significant contributions in the future to political behaviour, political psychology and comparative politics.

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Summary: Unravelling a Mystery: The Influences of Deliberative Minipublics on Public Decision-Making

*Julien Vrydagh**

Minipublics are a popular democratic innovation to address the democratic malaise. These deliberative participatory processes involve randomly selected lay citizens who engage in a structured deliberation and exert a public influence (Setälä & Smith, 2018). Their implementation in the past decade has mushroomed in Belgium and abroad, to the point that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) optimistically describes their proliferation as a 'deliberative wave' (OECD, 2020). The optimism surrounding the rise and success of minipublics is, however, dependent on their impact on policymaking: minipublics must exert influence on public decisions to be a credible solution to the democratic crisis. Otherwise, they dissolve into tokenism, discrediting themselves and causing frustration among participants and the broader public. Despite its importance, minipublics' impact remains somewhat enigmatic – a 'black box' in the field of democratic innovations. My PhD thesis sought to disentangle the different influences of minipublics on policymaking, how to measure them and clarify what we can expect from them.

The PhD thesis starts with a comparative analysis of minipublics' purposes in theory and practice. Drawing from a thematic analysis of the stated justification in the public reports of fifty-one minipublics held in Belgium between 2001 and 2021, the findings show that influencing policymaking is their most common purpose, further stressing the need to study their impact more closely. The analysis also reveals important discrepancies between theory and practice, as the latter tends to have much higher expectations. This finding suggests the formation of a *minipublic bubble* which inflates their actual potential to solve problems. This minipublic bubble is problematic because it is destined to burst and lead to the discredit of minipublics, as people will witness that society's problems persist and worsen in parallel to and despite the proliferation of minipublics.

The PhD thesis next introduces a new analytical framework to measure minipublics' influence on policymaking. Previous studies mainly relied on a *congruency approach*, which assumes that there is an impact if there is a textual correspondence between a minipublic's recommendations and public policy documents. The congruency approach is, however, unsatisfactory because it lacks transparency, relies on a simple textual correlation to infer an impact and implies that the minipublic takes place in a political vacuum. I therefore developed a sequential impact matrix (SIM) which integrates the initial preferences of decision-makers

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into the measurement of a minipublic's impact. Considering the relationship between decision-makers' agenda and a minipublic's recommendation allows for distinguishing five types of influences, namely continuous, enriching, innovating, shifting and inhibiting (see Table 1). The SIM moreover relies on a mixed method to triangulate the findings of the desk research with interviews of key actors involved in the follow-up of a minipublic.

Figure 1 An overview of minipublics' influences

T0	T1	T2	Kinds of uptake	Kinds of influence
A	A	A	Uptake	Continuous influence
		a	Partial uptake	Limited continuous influence
		B or o	No uptake	No influence
a	A	A	Uptake	Enriching influence
		a	partial uptake	limited enriching influence
		B or o	No uptake	No influence
o	A	A	Uptake	Innovating influence
		a	Partial uptake	Limited innovating influence
		B or o	No uptake	No influence
B	A	A	Uptake	Shifting influence
		a	Partial uptake	Limited shifting influence
		B	No uptake	No influence
		o	Uptake	Inhibiting influence

[A] = a preference; [a] = part of the preference A; [B] = a different preference; [o] = no preference

I applied the SIM to the citizens' panel (Make Your Brussels – Mobility) initiated by the Brussels Regional Parliament in 2017 in preparation of the Good Move Plan – a ten-year plan defining regional and municipal mobility policies. The SIM (see Figure 1) reveals a more precise and nuanced measurement of a minipublic's impact. It indicates that the citizens' panel exerted a significant influence on the Good Move Plan, but the majority of the adopted recommendations were in line with the official agenda of decision-makers. The panel did not put forth recommendations that conflicted with the government's agenda, and policymakers showed less enthusiasm for adopting proposals suggesting something entirely new. The interviews, however, indicate that all absent or partial uptakes are not the result of an instrumental or partisan strategy by decision-makers, as they may also have sound reasons for amending or rejecting them, such as contradicting or legally unfeasible recommendations.

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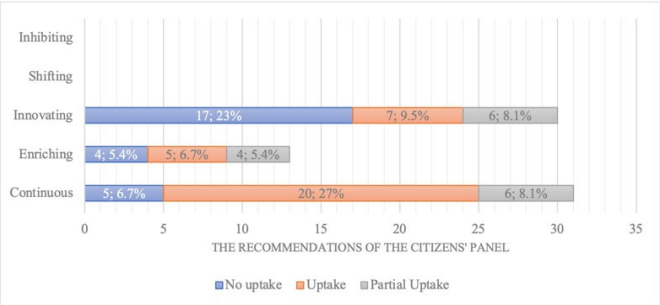
Figure 2 The results of the SIM analysis of the citizens' panel



Moreover, the combination of the SIM with interviews reveals a subtle yet important distinction between the citizens' panel impact on policymaking and its political influence on decision-makers. Interviewees viewed the citizen resolution as a set of general political directions and principles, rather than considering recommendations individually. Minipublics are thereby considered as a sort of sophisticated poll which gives policymakers an indication of the responsiveness of their policy project to the expectations of a group of informed and diverse citizens. When policymakers discovered that the citizen panel supported an ambitious reform, they used the citizen resolution to convince the opposition of the need to reform mobility, serving as a trigger for the losing side to shift their preferences and accept the political outcome. Had the citizen panel formulated a resolution in favour of the status quo, it is unlikely that policy- and decision-makers would have dared to propose such a reforming mobility plan, nor is it likely that other political parties would have ratified it. The case study indicates that minipublics can exert a more diffuse influence that weakens or reinforces existing political preferences, thereby creating political winners and losers.

Lastly, I examined what we can expect from minipublics' impact on public policy. I first delved into the actual potential of minipublics to effect large-scale policy changes by conducting a comprehensive review of the literature on public policy and policy change. The analysis confirms the assumption behind the SIM: minipublics can only expect to generate a non-incremental policy change if their recommendations align with the agenda and preferences of decision-makers. The 'communicative power' emanating from a minipublic's reasoned and inclusive deliberation is unlikely to overcome the psychological, substantial, procedural and political obstacles that condition decision-makers. The literature review warns us against any indication that a minipublic single-handedly effected a substantial policy change. Not only must problem, policy and political streams converge in a policy window that must, in turn, be converted into public decisions by policy entrepreneurs, but such policy changes are the result of long-term processes that involve a multitude of individual and collective agents in advocacy coalition

frameworks. These arguments invite us to reconsider the outstanding political achievements of some high-profile minipublics, such as the Irish Citizens' Assembly which led to the adoption of same-sex marriage (Farrell & Suiter, 2019). We must assess such achievements in the light of the broader political and policy context, as well as in combination with the other actors and organisations setting the stage for such groundbreaking decisions both in the short (e.g. elected representatives) and long term (e.g., scientists, civil society organisations).

Hence, a minipublic occupies a small spot in the gigantic constellation of policymaking and politics, and any non-incremental public decisions require a delicate and rare 'alignment of the stars'. Minipublics are thus neither necessary nor sufficient for such outcomes. Yet, it does not mean that they are useless: they can either contribute or trigger a policy change, helping open a policy window or policy entrepreneurs to spur the reform. However, for minipublics to produce *legitimate* policy changes, we must look at the alignment between their recommendations, public opinion and decision-makers' agenda. Legitimate political outcomes can only occur when the broader public supports a minipublic's recommendations. I therefore claim that we should opt for less but grander minipublics. Convening a long and large minipublic is more likely to capture the public and political attention, attracting media and public opinion, taking the time to involve stakeholders and political parties, so that its recommendations are likely to generate a broader public influence and be used as a resource by the actors outside the policy subsystem to question and change existing power structures and policy decisions.

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Review: Unraveling a Mystery: The Influences of Deliberative Minipublics on Public Decision-making (PhD by Julien Vrijdagh, University of Stuttgart)

*Christoph Niessen**

In 'Unraveling a Mystery: The Influences of Deliberative Minipublics on Public Decision-making', Julien Vrydagh takes the reader on a stimulating journey through three critical questions surrounding the increasing use of deliberative minipublics worldwide: (1) How do organisers justify the use of minipublics? (2) What is minipublics' influence on policymaking? (3) And what usage and influence can and should they have? Since the thesis is article based, the three questions are addressed in separate chapters, which are set up as standalone pieces. Yet, Dr Vrydagh ties them nicely together – both in the introduction and the conclusion as, *in a nutshell*, he examines (1) what minipublics are said to do, (2) what they do and (3) what they should do. Thereby, he performs an impressive triangular balancing act between empirical political science, engagement with the work of practitioners and political theory.

The Purposes of Minipublics in Practice and Theory

In the first chapter, he departs from a very nice intuition when wondering about the actual match between political theory and political praxis in the justification of minipublics. Put differently, do those who theorise minipublics and those who put them into practice have the same view and objectives? The question is not only relevant scientifically but also has very concrete implications for practitioners. The idea to examine this question by looking at the reports formulated by minipublics is empirically original. The amount of collected data is impressive. The thematic analysis is well conducted.

While he discusses the limitations of his data thoroughly, the critical reader will wonder a bit about the statute of minipublic reports as main data source. In particular, one may question whether some functions are left out of these reports because organisers focus on what seems essential to them to convince politicians to act upon the formulated recommendations – inflating inclusion and will-formation justifications, while deflating decision-making justifications. That being said, I agree that final reports remain minipublics' main public documentation and, as such, have an important (per)formative function.

* Christoph Niessen, Christoph Niessen, FWO Research Fellow, University of Antwerp.

The Influence of Minipublics on Public Decisions

The second chapter, which is co-authored with his supervisor, Prof. Didier Caluwaerts, makes an original contribution to assessing minipublics' influence on policymaking – conceptually, methodologically and practically. The sequential approach they propose for the assessment is not only theoretically sound but also useful for visualisation. Their argument regarding the necessity of data triangulation when assessing minipublics' influence is well taken and justified vis-à-vis the lack thereof in existing approaches.

In the sequential approach, minipublics' influence is defined as the set of preferences (z), which result over time (T) from the interaction between a minipublic's recommendations (Y) and politicians' initial preferences (X) (see Figure 1). In this respect, a further differentiation might be worth considering between the set of preferences politicians share with the minipublic, but which they had already before (ii), and those set of preferences politicians developed based on the recommendations of the minipublic (iii). While the former could be deemed 'coincidence', the latter can certainly be considered 'influence'.

Managing Expectations

The third chapter, finally, by looking at what minipublics can and should do, adds an interesting normative opening to the two preceding empirical chapters. Dr. Vrydagh comes to the sobering conclusion that, as small-scale processes, most minipublics have only a limited capacity for bringing about large-scale policy change. Elaborating on Lafont's (2019) critiques on minipublics' accountability, he identifies the potential mismatch between minipublics and public opinion as a serious drawback on their legitimacy.

While the attempt of the chapter to go beyond an idealist account of minipublics is stimulating, one may wonder if some of the critiques would not need to be put into perspective. In particular, when minipublics are set up as small-scale processes, as most admittedly are, it seems logical that they only have small-scale effects. However, this is not a necessity and a properly institutionalised minipublic with a sufficient number of participants and time may actually be able to perform larger-scale functions and effects. Similarly, while the critiques of minipublics' legitimacy are to be taken seriously, the same critical standards should also be applied to the two other sources of political legitimacy that are considered: public opinion and elected politicians. One may indeed wonder if public opinion, as such, exists and how legitimate non-reflected public opinion is. Equally, the legitimacy of politicians who are elected with decreasing turnouts, based on programmes that they only partially implement, to take decisions that, albeit relying on electoral accountability, result from a poorly deliberated, aggregative, short-term rationale, is to be put under comparable scrutiny.

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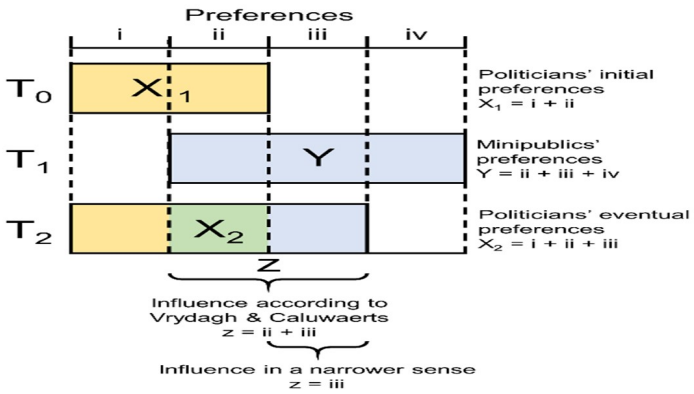
Figure 1 *Rethinking 'influence' in the sequential approach to minipublics' impact*



This is even truer when considering the relative novelty and ongoing development of minipublics, compared to the relatively established and matured stage of electoral representative democracy.

Conclusion

Taken together, the PhD of Julien Vrydagh stands out by the topical relevance of the questions it raises, by the conceptual novelty of the frameworks it uses to answer them, as well as by the rigour of the empirical analyses. The combination of empirical political science and political theory is original and refreshing, even if some of the theories in Chapter 3 deserve further consideration. While it speaks to the literatures on democratic innovations and deliberative democracy in the first place, it also contributes in a broader sense to the scholarship on democratic fatigue, reform and legitimacy.

Summary: Homo, Hunter-Gatherer, Habermas: An Inquiry into Deliberation

*Ramon van der Does**

Many political theorists and pundits deplore the way people talk politics. Arguably, elites and ordinary citizens alike tend to shy away from deliberation, that is, respectful political talk marked by a give-and-take of reasons. A fundamental reason why people supposedly do not deliberate is that it goes against human nature. This view of deliberation vis-à-vis human nature has so far received little scrutiny but has had major implications for how we think about what deliberation requires. It has led some to argue that interventions to promote deliberation are futile (Achen & Bartels, 2016) and others to maintain that deliberation requires institutional tinkering and corrective pedagogy (e.g. Rosenberg, 2014).

But is it really true that people are naturally inclined to refrain from deliberation? What if it is not? What if, say, people are instead predisposed to spontaneously engage in deliberation, if only under certain conditions? My thesis critically engages with these questions from both a theoretical and an empirical perspective.

Theoretically, I ground our understanding of deliberation and human nature in the existing literature on human evolution, in particular work in the field of evolutionary psychology. I start by drawing attention to the emerging consensus in the social behavioural sciences that understanding human nature means understanding human evolution (Chapter 1) (Scott-Phillips et al., 2011). Human nature is best thought of, then, as the product of a process of natural selection that occurred over the long stretch of human evolutionary history when people lived as (semi-)nomadic hunter-gatherers until some twelve thousand years ago. Specifically, in the context of social behaviour, human nature encompasses the set of evolved psychological mechanisms we have in our brains because they improved our distant ancestors' odds to survive and/or reproduce (Lewis et al., 2017).

In Chapter 2, I go on to suggest that the human brain might also contain an evolved psychological mechanism specific to deliberation. I put forward the 'group hypothesis', which holds that deliberation formed an adaptive response to the problem of intra-group political disagreements, a problem recurrently encountered by our distant hunter-gatherer ancestors. I expect that when people today disagree about politics with others from their ingroup, they will still become inclined to deliberate. Conversely, I expect that disagreements over political decisions involving people from an outgroup (i.e. inter-group disagreements) will reduce people's propensity to deliberate.

Empirically, the dissertation relies on diverse sources of data to test these expectations. In Chapter 3, I start by

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probing the plausibility of the premise that deliberation prior to political decision-making was indeed the default way to deal with intra-group political disagreements among our ancient ancestors. I do so by means of a cross-cultural analysis of political talk in thirty-four historic hunter-gatherer societies, which form the closest proxy to how humankind must have lived for most of the species' past (cf. van Vugt et al., 2008). Based on the analysis of ethnographic materials retrieved from the electronic Human Relations Area Files World Cultures, the results suggest that in the majority of hunter-gatherer cultures there is evidence of people talking before they make political decisions and that there is also some evidence that such talk in cultures in different parts of the world involves reasoning and/or respect. However, overall, the available materials offer too few details on decision-making to draw firm conclusions about the group hypothesis.

I then move on to mass societies. In Chapter 4, I concentrate on deliberation among national political representatives. Following the group hypothesis, I expect that representatives' propensity to deliberate prior to making decisions will increase the more those decisions are to be made *for* as well as *by* people from the same group. By contrast, the more a society and/or its politics become fragmented, the lower the odds will be that representatives will deliberate. Based on data from 174 countries (1945-2021), I find that the tendency of representatives to deliberate drops the more fragmented a society becomes, lending support to the group hypothesis. However, against the hypothesis, I also find that this tendency is unaffected by changing levels of division among representatives themselves.

Chapter 5 turns to political talk among ordinary citizens. It relies on an experimental approach to manipulate group membership, allowing for a comparison between political talk in response to intra- and inter-group political disagreements. Based on two experiments conducted with Honorata Mazepus among Polish citizens, we do not find supporting evidence for the group hypothesis: participants who imagined talking to someone from their ingroup were not more likely to deliberate than participants who imagined talking to someone from an outgroup.

In Chapter 6, I examine whether the limited support for the group hypothesis in Chapters 3 to 5 might be the result of neglecting potential gender/sex differences. Based on a re-analysis of the gathered empirics, I do not find clear signs of average differences between women/females and men/males in their propensity to deliberate in response to cues of intra- or inter-group political disagreements. That said, much uncertainty still remains with regard to a potentially evolved sexed psychology of deliberation and we should, therefore, be careful in reading too much into the findings.

In the Epilogue, I end by underlining the need for political theorists and practitioners working on deliberation to reconsider the assumptions they tend to make about human nature.

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Review: Homo, Hunter-gatherer, Habermas: An Inquiry into Deliberation and Human Nature (PhD by Ramon van der Does, Université catholique de Louvain)

*Florian van Leeuwen**

The dissertation asks a simple but important question – why do people deliberate? The dissertation is well-written and includes both a thorough theoretical analysis and different empirical methods, which demonstrates ambition and innovation. It does not give a definitive answer to the main question, but maybe that is just because simple questions do not imply easy answers.

The dissertation takes an evolutionary approach to political science, an approach introduced about twenty years ago. The main theoretical chapter shows that the theoretical toolkit is workable; the evolutionary analysis of political behaviour is feasible. This tacitly demonstrates that handwaving remarks such as 'evolution is irrelevant for current behaviour' or 'we do not know how ancestral humans lived' have expired. The theoretical argument for the group hypothesis is elaborate and, in my view, persuasive.

Three empirical chapters each use a different method to test the key hypotheses. Such methodological diversity requires effort and skill and is commendable. While each of the empirical studies has limitations, each also contains critical reflection on the limitations and attempts to make improvements. For example, Chapter 5 reports an experiment that tests the group hypothesis with a sample of Polish internet users. The results did not support the group hypothesis, but there was doubt if the manipulation had worked as intended. The experiment was performed again, with an improved manipulation, which showed similar results. Arduous to perform but also characteristic of science.

With the benefit of hindsight, I think that the two main limitations of the dissertation relate to hypothesis testing. First, it lacked a well-formulated alternative theory or hypothesis. Each empirical chapter tested the group hypothesis. We might have learned more if each chapter had tested it against an alternative hypothesis grounded in standard theory about deliberation. Even if neither hypothesis would receive much support, we could evaluate which was supported more. Second, the empirical tests were not performed on the most suitable data. None of the tests involved measures or observations of face-to-face deliberation among citizens (an unfortunate consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic). Also, I expected the analysis of ethnographic records to provide more insight about deliberation among hunter-gatherers. Surprisingly, one of the findings is that among ethnogra-

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phers there may have been a lack of interest in political decision-making. Neither of these limitations is easily addressed and both invite reflection on how to study the relation between human nature and politics.

Finally, I think the dissertation makes three important contributions. First, it provides evidence that deliberation was widespread among hunter-gatherers and, hence, occurred in the absence of modern political institutions. Second, the findings show no gender difference in deliberation. Third, the findings provide little support for the group hypothesis. One possible interpretation is that our tendencies for deliberation might be less geared towards exclusion than is implied by the group hypothesis. Perhaps human nature does not specifically block deliberation among people from different groups.

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ARTICLE

Appendix Using Process-Tracing to Evaluate Competing Accounts of Proportional Representation in Belgium*

*Nina Barzachka***

Abstract

Analyses of the historical origins of proportional representation (PR) in Belgium have helped shed light on the origins of electoral systems in Western Europe. Nevertheless, debates over what exactly led to the introduction of PR in Belgium persist. Was it electoral threat, Left existential threat or a combination of these two factors? This article applies the completeness standard for process-tracing and employs theoretical insights from the institutional change literature to evaluate these explanations. It re-examines the historical sources used by the extant scholarship of the Belgian case. It finds that both extra-institutional threat and electoral threat fluctuated over time, interacted with one another and mattered during different points of the electoral system reform process. In 1899, when pure PR was finally introduced, both of these factors played a role.

Keywords: proportional representation, Belgium, institutional change, electoral threat, extra-institutional threat, protest mobilisation.

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