



Belgium: the State of the Federation

6 February 2026

A joint organisation of the two Belgian political science associations
Vereniging voor Politieke Wetenschappen
Association belge francophone de science politique

Detailed program

Location: Meerminne, Sint-Jacobstraat 2-4, 2000 Antwerpen

*Organizing team – Department of Political Science, University of Antwerp
Laura Jacobs, Petra Meier, Peter Thijssen, Stefaan Walgrave & Evelien Willems*

Registration – 09:00 – 09:30 – Meerminne entrance hall

Coffee and tea are available

Panel session instructions

Each paper is scheduled for at least 30 minutes: 15 minutes for the presentation, followed by 15 minutes of discussion. The discussion will be opened by one other paper presenter and/or co-author attending the conference, after which the floor will be opened to the audience. Panel chairs will coordinate in advance with all presenters to divide discussant roles among panel members.

Please circulate your papers (in English) to your panel chair by Monday, 2 February 2026 at the latest; they will forward them to all panel members so they have time to prepare comments and questions. The email addresses of all panel chairs are listed at the end of this program.

We are aware that colleagues and students are attending the conference without presenting or discussing a paper. Welcome after registering!

Parallel session 1 – 09:30 - 11:30

Panel 1 – Youth politics – Room M.101

Chair: Ruud Wouters

Paper	Authors
Trusting Parents – Trusting Children? Differences in the Structure and Level of Institutional Trust between Belgian Adolescents and their Parents	Linde Stals Silke Goubin
For what democracy? Study of the normative framework, perceptions of democracy, and civic education practices in the youth sector in French-speaking Belgium	Manon Vandepaer
Being a Young Representative in the Spotlight: The Pressures of Online Visibility on Young MPs	Hannah Oorts Eline Severs Elly Mansoury Kevin Meyvaert
"Rethinking Political Knowledge Across Generations: Broadening Our Understanding of What Young Citizens Know"	Matthias Van Campenhout

Panel 2 – Coalition politics – Room M.102

Chair: Stefaan Walgrave

Paper	Authors
Towards authoritarian neoliberalism in Belgium? A critical analysis of the De Wever’s coalition agreement (2025)	Zoé Evrard Damien Piron
Thematic and ideological divergence in Belgium’s subnational coalition agreements (1992-2024)	Ward Maréchal
“This is the land of my forefathers”: Identity, Collective Memory & Territorial Preferences	Lorena Ortiz Cabrero

Panel 3 - Democratic innovations – Room M.105

Chair: Peter Thijssen

Paper	Authors
Sustaining Influence: The Legislative Fate of Recommendations made in the Permanent Bürgerdialog in East Belgium	Pieter Velghe Iphigénie Koutsougeras Cecilia Baglietto Rebecca Gebauer Min Reuchamps
Mainstream Parties’ Use of Democratic Innovations For Internal Reform: A Highway to Revitalization, Des-intermediation or Technocratization?	Thomas Legein
Digital Governance and Citizen Participation in Belgium: Lessons from Louvain-la-Neuve’s Local Democracy Practices	Nixon Doudoute
The Macro-political Impact a Permanent Citizen Deliberation: Evidence from Eastbelgium	Christoph Niessen Ann-Mireille Sautter Rebecca Gebauer Cecilia Baglietto Jehan Bottin Stefano Camatarri Pieter Velghe Min Reuchamps

Panel 4 – Party politics – Room M.106

Chair: Laura Jacobs

Paper	Authors
Issue Ownership and Niche Party Longevity in Powersharing Democracies	Timofey Agarin Henry Jarrett
Belgium features federalism and populism, but how are both linked? Invitation to reflect on how to study relations between federalism and populism	Peter Bursens Petra Meier
Du Parti Libéral au PRL : quelle trajectoire idéologique du libéralisme ? Analyse des discours doctrinaux du Parti Libéral entre 1945 et 1996.	Barnabé Gillet
Who are they choosing? Party members' preferences in candidates	Audrey Vandeleene Jana Schwenk Emilie van Haute

Panel 5 – Political communication – Room M.107

Chair: Jonas Lefevere

Paper	Authors
Playing the Crowd	Yannick Léonard
The Impact of Parties' Group Appeals on Citizens' Group Attitudes	Ambroos Verwee Jonas Lefevere
Claiming groups, generating engagement: Social group appeals in politicians' Facebook posts	August De Mulder Evelien Willems
The Appeal of Appeals: Testing Affective and Rational Mechanisms behind Social Group, Policy, and Substantial Social Group Appeal	Jasmien Luypaert Anna Kern

Plenary session - 11:30 - 12:15

Room M.101

PLC launch session

Editors Maurits Meijers and Audrey Vandeleene officially launch *Politics of the Low Countries* as a *Diamond Open Access* journal with Radboud University Press and discuss the importance of research on the BeNeLux countries in their own right.

The Politics of Belgium: third and best edition (so far)

Kris Deschouwer reflects on a time when convincing a publisher to accept a book on Belgian politics was extremely difficult. A first edition of *The Politics of Belgium* only saw the light of day in 2009, after long and difficult negotiations. And now we are ready for a third edition with an enlarged and very much improved team of authors.

The Oxford Handbook of Belgian Politics: book presentation

Editors Petra Meier and Min Reuchamps present *The Oxford Handbook of Belgian Politics*, a comprehensive volume co-edited with Marleen Brans and Emilie van Haute, featuring 41 chapters on the polity, policies, and politics of Belgium.

Lunch - 12:15 - 13:00

Meerminne entrance hall

Parallel session 2 - 13:00 - 15:00

Panel 6 - Electoral and non-electoral participation – Room M.101

Chair: Matthias Van Campenhout

Paper	Authors
Second-Order Thinking? (Changes in) Individual-Level Voting Motives in Belgian Local and National Elections	Amber Voets Raf Reuse
Protest and Politicization in the Hybrid Media Arena	Ruud Wouters Evelien Willems
Joint lists, splitted votes? An analysis of voting behaviour for pre-electoral coalitions (PECs), based on individual-level ballot data	Bram Wauters
Online presence of local lists: an analysis of the 2024 local elections in Wallonia and Brussels	Caroline Close Lucas Kins Simon Geshef

Panel 7 – Polarization I – Room M.102

Chair: Julie Sevenans

Paper	Authors
Polarising alone? Understanding the complex relationship between social embeddedness and affective polarisation in Belgium and the UK	Kamil Bernaerts Nino Junius
The Polarizing Effect of Political Attacks: How Elite Discourse Fuels Affective Polarization	Ine Goovaerts Pauline Grippa Caroline Close
Polarisation regarding Sexuality Education: Public Opinion Towards Sexuality Education in Belgium	Lise Rosquin Cecil Meeusen Nina Van Eekert Tara De Laet Kristien Michielsen
From Theory to Context: Place Identity, Place Resentment, and Polarization in and Beyond Belgium	Lien Smets

Panel 8 – Representation I – Room M.105

Chair: Petra Meier

Paper	Authors
Gender Quota, and Intersectional Presence and Power. The Politics of Prototypicality	Robin Devroe Karen Celis
Why do you (not) run (anymore)? Exploring the triggers and barriers of candidates' political ambition in Belgium	Zoë Lardinois
LGBTQIA+ issues in Belgium: A Longitudinal Analysis of Party Manifestos	Romain Biesemans
Understanding the Gender Gap in Political Ambition: The Role of Informal Encouragement	Aloïsa Pilloy

Panel 9 – Representation II – Room M.106

Chair: August De Mulder

Paper	Authors
Settling the Issue of Measuring Public Issue Salience? Evidence from a Multidimensional Vignette Experiment	Jonas Lefevere Tijs Laenen Stefaan Walgrave
Left, Right and Gendered? The effects of Politicians' Self-Representation on Ideological Position Stereotypes	Lisa Miller Elise Storme Robin Devroe Bram Wauters
The paradox of presence: Testing the negative role model effect of harassment towards MPs on their staff	Anne Van Bavel
"From party lines to personal strategies: Understanding incivility in political actors' social media communication in Belgium"	Awenig Marié Lucas Kins Caroline Close

Coffee break – 15:00 – 15:15
Meerminne entrance hall

Parallel session 3 - 15:15 - 17:15

Panel 10 – Public opinion – Room M.101

Chair: Yannick Léonard

Paper	Authors
Love the Way You Lie: Citizen Perceptions of Political Disinformation and its Effects on Democratic Attitudes	Maurits Meijers Daniel Polman
"Belgians Aren't Warmongers!" – Unpacking Defense Policy Elites' Discourse on Public Opinion in Belgium	Marion Jacques
Public responsiveness and the macro-origins of immigration opinions in Belgium	Steven Van Hauwaert Federico Vegetti
How (statistical) polling information and (episodic) emails from individual constituents jointly influence politicians' personal opinions, public opinion perceptions, and policy intentions	Bart Maes Julie Sevenans Stefaan Walgrave

Panel 11 – Polarization II – Room M.102

Chair: Ine Goovaerts

Paper	Authors
Curbing Citizen Violence Against Politicians	Bjarn Eck Damien Bol Diane Bolet
Assessing Moral Hierarchies through the Shades of Intolerance: A Comparative Analysis of Political Discourse in Belgium and the United States related to migrants and LGBTQIA+ communities	Caterina Mosca Jeremy Dodeigne
Who (dis)likes whom: examining the poles of affective polarization through open-ended survey responses in Belgium	Ambroos Verwee Henry Maes Lien Smets Eline Severs
When conflict pays off: Investigating the drivers of engagement on X in Belgium	Lucas Kins Caroline Close

Panel 12 - Politics of deliberation and expertise – Room M.105

Chair: Evelien Willems

Paper	Authors
Who’s Heard in Parliament? Explaining Expert Selection in Belgian Parliamentary Hearings (2003–2023)	Janne Ingelbeen Bram Wauters Stine Hesstvedt Johan Christensen
Powerful Questions about Power”: The Perceptions and Role of Public Participation Professionals in Managing Expertise in Mini-publics in Europe,	Cecilia Baglietto
Who deliberates, Who Doesn’t: An Intersectional Analysis of willingness to deliberate	Olivia Gheyselinck

Panel 13 – Policies – Room M.106

Chair: Christoph Niessen

Paper	Authors
On the right track? Appraising twenty-five years of railway reforms in Belgium (1999-2024)	Damien Piron Yanis Tambour Tom Frénéa
Financialized governance and the transformation of the state	Loris Gathy
“A plural Belgian police system? Analysis of integration mechanisms related to information and staff exchanges”	Yanis Tambour
Belgium’s Sub-State External Relations and the Emergence of Multilevel Diplomacy. 2026: Quo Vadis?	Edouard Xia

 **Optional drinks at a bar closeby – 17:15 - ...** 

Members of the organizing team will guide those up for some after-work talk to a cozy bar close to the university.

Panel chairs – contact details:

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Thank you for your participation!

