

Chapter 4

Federalism and Solidarity in Belgium: Insights from Public Opinion

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Introduction

In 1981, Arend Lijphart wrote: “What is remarkable about Belgium is not that it is a culturally divided society—most of the countries in the contemporary world are divided into separate and distinct cultural, religious or ethnic communities—but that its cultural communities coexist peacefully and democratically. The prospects for the Belgian consociational experiment must be regarded as highly favourable. Belgium can therefore serve as an extremely valuable and instructive example for other divided societies” (Lijphart, 1981, 1). This observation may have seemed valid in 1981; however, in 2011, international media announced the imminent breakup of Belgium as the country reached the world’s record for the longest time needed to form a government after elections. The Belgian federal elections of 2010 were followed by a political deadlock and institutional crisis, culminating in 541 days of difficult negotiations, mostly on a sixth reform of the state, before a new federal government was installed.

Based on the rhetoric of politicians and media, one could conclude that the gap between Flemings and Walloons is bigger than ever. Belgium appears to be in a deadlock because most representatives of the two main language communities—Flemings and Walloons—do not agree about where Belgium’s fairly unique ethno-federal system should go (Roeder 2009). In the end, Belgium may also be a painful illustration of the paradox of federalism, stating that self-rule has a potential to both accommodate and exacerbate ethnic divisions (e.g., Erk & Anderson 2009). On one hand, granting more autonomy to different ethno-linguistic groups can be a way

to manage ethno-linguistic conflicts peacefully. On the other hand, this recognition may strengthen and consolidate the identities of these groups and hamper intergroup interactions that may be necessary for the federal shared rule that coexists with the self-rule of the constituent groups. In the long run, federalism may also provide nationalist parties with tools to completely hollow out the constitutionally enshrined elements of shared rule (Riker 1964). To the extent that the federal shared rule encompasses interregional transfers that reduce income inequality, its hollowing out may endanger redistributive policies. In other words, there may be a trade-off between politics of ethnic recognition and interethnic redistribution (e.g., Banting and Kymlicka 2006).

Interestingly, on the level of solidarity, this last logic is diametrically opposed to the way Émile Durkheim and many of his modern cosmopolitan interpreters (Alexander 2006; Van Parijs 2011) expected solidarity to evolve in modern states. In *Division of Labour*, Durkheim foresaw an evolution from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity. This is an evolution from solidarity based on the strength of in-group commonality to a solidarity based on the complementarity of exchanges among different individuals. After a cursory review of *Division*, it might seem that this solidarity process is solely a structural phenomenon anchored in an expanding division of labour. Organic solidarity in Western industrialized societies is a *fait social*, related to that other French term *fait accompli*. However this exclusively structuralist interpretation does not take into account the importance of emotive reactions and symbolic interpersonal exchange in the later work of Durkheim (e.g., Gane 1992; Thijssen 2012, 2016). Each of Durkheim's structurally imposed forms of solidarity can ultimately be linked to subjectively based emotions and cognitions. Moreover, the notion of division of labour does not only refer to distinctive roles and positions in the labour sphere but also to other spheres such as

leisure or consumption. Hence, it still makes sense to use Durkheim's typology to differentiate solidarities in contemporary societies and to link them with distinctive forms of identity. After all, the problematization of identity is a relatively new phenomenon that may just be a correlate of more deep-seated solidarity emotions and behaviour (Stråth 2017). Identification with the *conscience collective* is instinctive and quasi-automatic, just like cogs in a machine; therefore, Durkheim called it mechanical solidarity. By contrast, the functional interdependence and intersubjective empathy involved in organic solidarity leads to a much more reflexive form of identification that is strengthened by a strong education system and a vigorous civil society. Hence, the so-called paradox of federalism could be translated in Durkheim's terms, in the sense that federalism could lead to a regression of the modern evolution of solidarity, from organic back to mechanical solidarity (Thijssen 2012). In other words, the paradox of federalism implies a reciprocal relationship between deepening institutional federalization (the transfer of ever-more-autonomous competences to the regional ethno-linguistic governments) and increasing "mechanical solidarity in ethnolinguistic substate entities" and decreasing "organic solidarity between ethnolinguistic substate entities."

The deepening institutional federalization seems to receive support among Belgium's elites. In this chapter, we evaluate whether such sentiments also are evident among members of Belgium's general public. Most of the research dealing with the problematic link between territorial models that guarantee a parity of esteem between different ethno-linguistic groups and public solidarity have looked rather one-sidedly at interregional exchanges (so-called "solidarity streams") at the macro level, particularly in terms of social security benefits. However, as Van Parijs (2011, 194) has noted, micro-level public emotions and behaviours underlying redistributive exchanges have been largely neglected. Although public opinion research has often

found a strong congruence between the issue positions of elites and the public on the aggregate level, this may not necessarily be the case for so-called community-based issues (Page and Shapiro 1983). While elites in the consociational tradition used to be pacifiers of community differences (Lijphart 1981), in recent years they have more and more chosen a confrontational majoritarian stance on community-related issues despite the constitutionalization of consociational mechanisms (Sinardet 2010). In the former situation, elites might overestimate the public's ignorance; in the latter case, they might overestimate the public's militancy. In both situations, there is a fair chance of a significant incongruence between elites and the public.

Therefore, we study the reciprocal relationship between the continuing process of devolving competences to the ethno-linguistic subgroups in Belgium and the strengthening of ethno-linguistic identifications (substate mechanical solidarity) and decreasing intergroup encounters and communication (state organic solidarity). This is an innovative question. First, only limited attention has been given to the second organic factor in Belgium because of the unavailability of suitable data. As far as we know, this study is the first to take into account the cognitive and affective dimensions of interregional encounters in Belgium. Second, to evaluate the contra-productive effects of federalism, existing research has focused on a very exigent dichotomous criterion; namely, that ethno-federalization may ultimately lead to complete disintegration. However, by looking at public opinion data in relatively young federations such as Belgium, one can gain insight into the early and intermediate consequences of the federalization process. We specifically will evaluate public support for further devolution of competences to the separate regional governments. This is an interesting continuous alternative for the dichotomous "secession criterion." Moreover, if we were to use the secession criterion, the Belgian case would be closed very quickly. In Belgium, there is no substantial proof for the

secession-inducing effect of federalism at the level of public opinion because only about 10 percent of Belgians favour separatism. However, this does not exclude that Belgians might want further devolution. To answer our research questions, we will primarily use a unique data set assembled in 2007 by the two Belgian quality newspapers, the French-speaking *Le Soir* and the Dutch-speaking *De Standaard*, which could shed new light on the evolution of organic solidarity. If similar indicators are available in other public opinion studies (e.g., ISPO-PIOP and PartiRep), we will also use them to gain insight in evolutions over time. However, given that we do not have panel data at our disposal, our causal claims regarding the longitudinal effects of past federalization are a little speculative.

In what follows, we give an overview of the Belgian federalization process, specify our hypotheses, present our data and the indicators for our concepts of solidarity, and then present and discuss our results.

The Belgian Federation

Belgium became a full-fledged federal state in 1993. The first article of the Constitution, which had stated that Belgium was composed of nine provinces, was amended to say: ‘Belgium is a federal state which consists of communities and regions’ (Deschouwer 2009). Belgium’s transformation from a unitary state into a federation was the result of a long incremental process that took several decades (De Winter 2014; Deschouwer 2013; Sinardet 2010; Delmartino 2010, Bursens 2009; Dumont 2006; Deschouwer 2005).

The Belgian federation is an example of federalization by disaggregation, as opposed to federal systems that emerge from the aggregation of existing states or territories, such as

the Swiss and U.S. federations (Swenden, Brans, and De Winter 2006). Authors also refer to these two forms as “holding together” versus “coming together” federalism (Stepan 1999; Deschouwer 2009). Granting autonomy in a number of substantial areas is supposed to mitigate the autonomy claims of nationalists by removing some of the perceived threats to their existence as a group. Self-government enables them to protect and promote their own culture and values (Martinez-Herrera 2010). However, what distinguishes Belgium from some other “holding together” federations, such as Spain and the United Kingdom, is that the sub-state units had no history of their own before the birth of the Belgian state. Unlike the Basque Country and Scotland, for example, Belgium’s regions and communities did not exist before Belgium was created in 1830 (Deschouwer 2009).

The Belgian Federal System

Contemporary Belgium is also the only federation that has created different types of federated entities on the same territory: three territorially based regions (i.e., Flemish, Walloon, and Brussels) and three culturally based and language-based communities (i.e., Flemish, French-speaking, and German-speaking). This is the consequence of a historical compromise between the demand of the Flemish movement for cultural autonomy and that of the Walloon movement for more autonomy on economic matters. The communities are mostly competent for culture, media, education, health policy, assistance to individuals, use of language, and international cooperation (within the limits of their competences). The regions are mostly competent for regional development planning, housing, environment, rural development and nature conservation, agriculture, employment, economy, water policy, energy policy, public works and transport, subordinate authority, and international cooperation (within the limits of their competences).

The borders of the regions and communities have been based on those of the language areas, through which language use is officially regulated. There are four language areas (three unilingual and one bilingual): a Dutch-speaking area, which overlaps with the Flemish region; a French-speaking area, which overlaps with the Walloon region minus the German-speaking community; a German-speaking area, which overlaps with the German-speaking community; and a bilingual (French/Dutch) area, which overlaps with the Brussels region. In every language area, only the official language(s) can be used in administration, education, and justice. The borders of these language areas have been fixed since 1963 through the establishment of a linguistic borderline, mostly to protect the Dutch-speaking area from frenchification. The officially bilingual Brussels region is actually an overwhelmingly French-speaking city geographically located in Flanders.

The Belgian system is thus based on territorial unilingualism (except in Brussels). However, some exceptions exist within the three unilingual areas (Sinardet 2010). Sixteen communes (of which six border the Brussels region) with significant linguistic minorities enjoy “language facilities”; that is, inhabitants have the right to communicate with the authorities or have primary school organized in a language other than the official language (i.e., French in some Dutch-speaking communes, Dutch in some French-speaking communes, German in some French-speaking communes, and French in some German-speaking communes). The institutions of federal Belgium are both a product and a pacemaker of (political) identity construction: “they created permanent boundaries that gave additional subjective meaning to cultural markers and/or territory in addition to favoring identity politics” (Lecours 2001, 63).

Although Belgium consists of three regions, three communities, and four language areas, the dynamic in the federal arena is largely bipolar, based on the two main language communities of Dutch-speakers and French-speakers, which form respectively around 60 percent and 40 percent of the total population of 11 million Belgians. This bipolarity is externalized on different levels. In the federal parliament and government, a number of consociational devices, obliging power-sharing in institutional matters, were introduced in 1970. All MPs have to belong to either the Dutch or French language group, a number of “special majority laws” can only be passed by a majority in both language groups, an “alarm bell procedure” protects one language group from being dominated by the other, linguistic parity is guaranteed in the council of ministers (i.e., the federal government with the exception of secretaries of state), which also decides in consensus. In terms of the party system, Belgium is also a unique federation; there are no national parties of importance because the three traditional parties split along language lines between 1968 and 1978. For elections, two electoral colleges based on the language communities were created to elect members of the Senate and the European Parliament. For the Chamber of Representatives, most electoral districts do not cross the borders of the regions. This leads to federal elections being in fact “community elections.” “Community” parties compete with parties of the same community for “community” voters through “community” campaigns in “community” media. After election day, however, two “community” election results have to be put together to form one federal government (Sinardet 2010).

Although the Belgian system and practice of consociational democracy and federalism were supposed to lead to political pacification between the communities, the bipolar institutional characteristics are, instead, incentives that foster political conflict. Due to the way the party and electoral systems are organized, parties only compete for votes within their own language

community; therefore, they are not incited to take into account or be accountable to voters of the other language group. This stimulates taking polarized positions on community issues and consequently also the creation of homogenous fronts of Dutch-speaking and French-speaking politicians on these issues, which leads to still more issues being framed in a community dimension.

Institutional explanations can therefore largely account for community conflicts being much more salient among political elites than among the Belgian population. Indeed, public opinion research shows that community issues generally score among the lowest as vote-determining issues among Dutch-speaking as well as French-speaking voters (Deschouwer and Sinardet 2010). Also the number of separatists remains limited to about 10 percent in the Flemish region and 4 percent in the Walloon region (Billiet, Maddens, and Frogner 2006). Research on ethno-territorial identity feelings shows a majority of citizens still identifies with Belgium and does not at all consider Flemish or Walloon/Francophone identity on one hand and Belgian identity on the other to be mutually exclusive (Deschouwer and Sinardet 2010).

As well as being unique for the absence of national political parties, Belgium is unique in comparison to other federal—also multilingual—countries for the absence of a national public media structure. The bipolarity of Belgium's political system is also reflected in its media system. In most other federal—also multilingual—countries, at least some kind of overarching media structure exists, which unites broadcasters of the different communities or other federated entities. Also quite unique in an international context—and obviously linked to the previous—is that in the agreement between the regional governments and the broadcasters, enumerating the obligations of the latter, there are explicit references to stimulating the cultural identity of the concerned language community but no references to the federal context. In most

other federal countries, broadcasters are instructed to also disseminate national culture and stimulate national cohesion. Together with the bipolarity of the Belgian political system, the media dynamic contributes to hindering the existence of a federal public sphere. Media tend to reinforce the political consensus in their own language community instead of being a platform for federal debate (Sinardet 2013).

However, the linguistic divide has also been instrumentalized by the political elite for other partisan or ideological goals (Sinardet 2012). Regionalism and federalism in Belgium have always been linked to the socio-economical left–right divide and, to a lesser extent, to the philosophical divide between Catholics and liberals. As Huyse (1981, 124) explains, the gain of importance of the community issue from the 1960s onward can in part be explained by how pacification of the other two main divisions in Belgian political life, which had occurred in the years after the Second World War through consociational pact-making, was not as complete as it might have seemed. In both the North and the South, strong factions within both majority groups (Catholics in Flanders and socialists in Wallonia) opposed the status quo that had taken form in pacts. Instead, they found in regional and cultural ideas “new, more compelling instruments for the diffusion of their clerical/anticlerical or socioeconomic blueprints,” leading Huyse (1981, 124) to conclude that “the federalist idea became more attractive to more people in the 1970s not strictly for linguistic or cultural or ethnic reasons, but because it bears the promise of the ultimate achievement of socialism in Wallonia and of a sort of Catholic model of societal harmony in Flanders.” In this sense, one can historically read the federalization of Belgium as a division of power between the dominant Christian-Democratic party in the North and the dominant Socialist party in the South. Together with substate nationalist parties, these

two parties were the main driving forces behind the process of federalization through which they strongly reinforced their dominant position.

Belgium's federalization is also a clear example of the dynamic described in the federal paradox. The creation of communities and regions in 1970 was seen by some political actors as a way to pacify community relations, while others considered it a first step towardz greater regional autonomy. Clearly autonomy has prevailed over pacification. There has been pacification, but not for the long term. This can be illustrated by the period of political crisis between 2007 and 2011. Although Belgium had already broken its own record of government formation length after the federal election of June 2007, four years later Belgium broke the world's record when a federal government was formed 541 days after the 2010 federal election. Consequently, the media speculated about a possible split of the country. The francophone press pointed to Flemish nationalism and separatism as the cause of the crisis; the Flemish press blamed francophone politicians for their stubborn refusal to talk about further institutional reforms.

Belgium, Federal Paradox, and Solidarity

The purpose of this research is to discover how different forms of solidarity and identity in Flanders and Wallonia affect citizens' preferences about the future degree of autonomy for the substate entities after the completion of a long federalization process. Our point of departure is the paradox of federalism, which assumes that granting autonomy to ethnolinguistic groups may strengthen the identities of these groups and hamper intergroup interactions. This could especially be the case in the Flemish region, which used to be poor and discriminated against but is now the most prosperous region. Hence, Flemish nationalist parties

renounce the so-called excessive “solidarity streams” flowing toward the Walloon region.

However, according to the Durkheimian cosmopolitans, higher education might be an effective restraint on the subnational tendency of self-absorption because it can enlighten citizens’ self-interest. Alternatively, we expect lower levels of education to correlate with stronger support for granting further autonomy to subnational entities.

H0a: Flemings are more supportive of devolving additional competences to the regional governments than are Walloons.

H0b: Higher-educated Flemings and Walloons are less supportive of devolving additional competences to the regional governments than are lower-educated Flemings and Walloons.

Furthermore, it is interesting to link the literature on federalism, which neglects the importance of processes of reciprocal recognition and public opinion, to the rich sociological tradition of solidarity research. Measuring solidarity at the micro-level is a challenge, however, especially if one is interested in the attitudinal basis of both the mechanical and the organic component. As mentioned above, Belgian research has focused rather exclusively on national and subnational group identification, which is an important component of mechanic solidarity. This story of territorial identities in Belgium is quite complex because many people combine national and subnational identities. The Belgian identity coexists with a strong Flemish identity in the North and with a weaker Walloon identity in the South. This situation is further complicated by the existence of a Brussels identity in the Brussels Capital Region and a German-speaking identity in the German-speaking area (Lecours 2001). Yet, due to the progressive federalization process spread out over the last forty years, maybe this multi-dimensional identity has been tilting more and more toward the sub-regional pole. In this respect, it is probably better to look at the evolution of the institutional level one identifies the most with in order to assess the paradox of federalism in Belgian public opinion.

H1a: Identification with the substate regional community has become stronger over time.

H1b: Belgians who first and foremost identify with a substate community want more competences to be devolved to the regional governments.

However, if one wants to understand the shift in identifications, it makes sense to link them with the status of organic solidarity; notably, intergroup contact and encounter seem to be crucial because interaction is usually a fruitful breeding ground for mutual recognition and empathy (Thijssen 2012). Many commentators have stated that Flanders and Wallonia are drifting farther apart and increasingly turning into two separate societies (Billiet et al. 2006), but usually this observation is based solely on differences in elite and mass-media discourse. In this respect, it is very interesting to look at the state of organic solidarity in Belgium. Of course, as many commentators on Durkheim's work have concluded, it is more difficult to measure organic solidarity, independently from mechanical solidarity. Nevertheless, the work of the socio-psychologists Allport and Pettigrew provide the missing link. The "intergroup contact theory," introduced by Allport in *The Nature of Prejudice* in 1954, states that intergroup contact typically diminishes intergroup prejudice (Pettigrew 1998). The idea is that intergroup contact facilitates learning about each other. If this new knowledge corrects negative views of the other group, this should in turn reduce prejudice. In Belgium, Flemings are typically portrayed as intolerant and racist, while Walloons are depicted as lazy and unwilling, or even unable, to learn Dutch. Increased contact between Flemings and Walloons could reduce these prejudices and foster organic solidarity. Physical contact and information acts as a mediator between intergroup contact and diminishing prejudice. The mutual empathy arising from this process is the very foundation of organic solidarity between groups (Pettigrew 1998; Pettigrew and Tropp 2008). We will investigate the state of organic solidarity in Belgium by assessing both an affective and a cognitive component of intergroup contact.

First, we will investigate the role of intergroup communication and mass media as providers of information about the other community. This is a cognitive component enabling indirect intergroup contact. Of course, sufficient mastery of each other's language is an important factor in this respect, as linguistic diversity between Flemings and Walloons is expected to negatively affect solidarity by making communication more laborious (Van Parijs 2011). But perhaps the recognition of subnational communities involved in federalization has a similar effect. The fact that the Belgian media are completely segregated along linguistic lines is crucial in this respect. The three communities each have their own newspapers, television broadcasts, and radio stations. Virtually no francophone newspapers are read in Flanders, and no one there watches francophone Belgian television channels anymore. *Mutatis mutandis*, very few Walloons or francophone Brussels residents follow the Flemish media (Billiet et al. 2006).

H2a: The knowledge of each other's language and media supply (cognitive organic solidarity) has decreased over time.

H2b: Those Belgians who have knowledge of the other community's language and media supply want less devolution of further competences to the regional governments.

Second, the affective component highlights the empathic element in intergroup relations and encounters. Intergroup relations may facilitate understanding of the other group's perspective and foster empathy with each other's concerns. These insights can strengthen the public support for federal shared rule and slow down the urge for increasing self-rule of the constituent groups, as they correct mutual negative prejudices (Pettigrew and Tropp 2008). Applied to Belgium, friendship between Flemings and Walloons could reveal that differences between both groups are less impressive than some politicians tend to claim, which might positively affect support for living together in one state. Moreover, we will not only look at

intergroup relations but also at the behavioural consequences of these relations. How often do Flemings and Walloons actually encounter each other?

H3a: The number of intercommunity relations and encounters (affective organic solidarity) has decreased over time.

H3b: Those Belgians who have relations or regular encounters with members of the other ethno-linguistic group want less devolution of further competences to the regional governments.

Research

Research Design

To test our hypotheses, we mainly use data from a representative survey conducted by TNS Dimarso during 5–26 February 2007. This data set was collected for a joint project on the Belgian community issues by the high-quality newspapers *De Standaard* (Dutch-speaking) and *Le Soir* (French-speaking). Altogether, 1,809 Belgians aged sixteen or older were interviewed by CATI methodology; of these, 1,165 respondents were from the Flemish region and 644 from the Walloon region. This data set is unique because, as far as we know, it is the only one that contains reliable information on intercommunity encounters. Moreover, it is the first time that these data were made available for academic use. As far as possible, we will compare the TNS data of 2007 with the Belgian election studies (ISPO-PIOP and Partirep) that are usually used for these purposes.

Variables

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable is the desired degree of policy autonomy for Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels. We computed this variable by taking the sum of seven dichotomous variables, based on the following questions:

Should Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels decide autonomously about (1) pensions, (2) reimbursement of medicine expenses, (3) the military, (4) employment, (5) crime, (6) prisons, and (7) traffic.

The dependent variable ranges from 0 (no autonomy in any of the policy areas) to 7 (autonomy in all the policy areas). The issue areas listed above are some important competences of the federal authorities. Pensions and the reimbursement of medicines are part of the social security system, often seen as the institutional expression of solidarity (Béland and Lecours 2008). Their complete regionalization would put an end to solidarity between Flemings and Walloons in its most material form. The competences covering crime, prisons, and the military represent the oldest and most basic function of a nation-state; namely, the protection of its citizens. The regionalization of these core functions would undermine the very nature of Belgium as a state. Considering this, our dependent variable seems an acceptable indicator for more or less presence of secessionist aspirations.

A simple comparison of the means for both groups shows some surprising results. The mean desired degree of policy autonomy is 2.60 for Flemings and 2.96 for Walloons. Keeping in mind that the range of the dependent variable is between 0 (no autonomy in any of the policy areas) and 7 (autonomy in all the policy areas), both means are quite low. The difference is small but nevertheless significant. Contrary to hypothesis 0a, and completely contrary to the

dominant political perception in the Belgian political debate and to the positions of the main political parties, these numbers indicate that Walloons want more policy autonomy than Flemings.

Table 4.1 shows the proportion of Flemings and Walloons for each category of the dependent variable. In general, the distributions for both groups follow a similar pattern. When taking a closer look, smaller differences between Flanders and Wallonia become clear. Some 37.5 percent of the Flemings do not want to give supplementary autonomy to Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels on any of the seven policy issues mentioned in the questionnaire, which is more than the 33 percent for Wallonia. At the same time, more Walloons than Flemings seem to favour complete autonomy for the substate levels. About 19.9 percent of the Walloons want policy autonomy in all areas mentioned in the questionnaire, which is the case for only 15.1 percent in Flanders.

<insert Table 4.1 near here>

Since we constructed the dependent variable by taking the sum of seven questions about different policy areas, the value indicates about how many of the policy areas the respondents want Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels to decide autonomously, not about which areas. Table 4.2 compares the proportions of Flemings and Walloons wanting policy autonomy for each area. The results indicate that the preferences of Flemings and Walloons are not as incompatible as often thought. The last column in the table shows whether the difference in proportion between Flemings and Walloons is statistically significant. In three of the seven policy areas, Flemings

and Walloons have significantly different preferences. More specifically, more Walloons than Flemings want the subnational levels to decide autonomously about the military, crime, and traffic issues. The biggest difference is observed concerning traffic issues. Whereas 50.5 percent of the Walloons want policy autonomy in this area, only 36.1 percent of the Flemings favour autonomy. Compared to the other four policy areas, the regionalization of these three domains will probably have less redistributive effects. It remains to be seen, however, if this commonality really explains the choice pattern.

<insert Table 4.2 near here>

Independent Variables: Symmetrical Analyses

Mechanical Solidarity

Respondents were asked which identity is the most important for them: the subnational (Flemish or Walloon), Belgian, or European identity. The group of primary affiliation can be interpreted as an indicator of the extent to which mechanical solidarity prevails within Belgium; Flanders or Wallonia; or Europe.

Table 4.3 shows significant differences between the proportions of Flemings and Walloons in each category. The biggest difference is observed with respect to the subnational identity. Fully 34.7 percent of the Flemings feel Flemish in the first place, while only 9.7 percent of the Walloons have a strong Walloon identity. However, the Belgian identity scores best in both groups, although significantly more Walloons than Flemings feel Belgian in

the first place. Finally, the European identity is the most important for 21.2 percent in Flanders and for 31.7 percent in Wallonia.

<insert Table 4.3 near here>

These results are consistent with previous research on multiple identities in Belgium. Deschouwer and Sinardet (2010) found that Belgians have been answering the identity question in more or less the same way since 1991. Figure 4.1 shows the evolution of the answers for Flemings and Walloons between 1991 and 2009. We have to take into account that the addition of the category “Europe” in 2009 means a decrease of the proportions in all other categories. The same logic applies to our own results. Our variable has three categories, while in the figure below more (only in 2009) possibilities are given.

<insert Figure 4.1 near here>

In both Flanders and Wallonia, the Belgian identity has scored highest over the past two decades. Despite what media and politicians proclaim, most Belgians feel Belgian in the first place. Although in general we see similar results for Flemings and Walloons, there are some important differences. The proportion of Walloons feeling Belgian in the first place has always been higher than the proportion of Flemings, which is the case for our results as well. The same goes for the European identity; more Walloons than Flemings indicate Europe as their primary

group affiliation. Finally, the difference between Flemings and Walloons is the largest in their regional identification. Historical explanations can account for the stronger Flemish versus the weaker Walloon identity. While the Flemish identity has its roots in the Flemish movement as a means to gain linguistic and cultural freedom, Walloons still seem to struggle with the recognition and promotion of a distinct Walloon identity. Regional identity is also a more complex matter in the South of Belgium than in the North. While the Flemish region and community have been merged, leading to the political promotion of one Flemish identity, a Walloon regional identity gets competition from a francophone alternative, uniting Walloons and French-speakers in Brussels within the French-speaking community.

Organic Solidarity

The indicators for organic solidarity deal with intergroup contact and the cognitive resources that enable these encounters. Unfortunately, no longitudinal data are available in this respect. However, by comparing different indicators in different age groups, we can get some rudimentary insight into the evolution. Because most of the people below forty-five years of age have always known a territorial regime that guarantees substantial regional autonomy, according to the logic described in the literature on the federal paradox we may expect them to have fewer intergroup contacts and fewer cognitive resources that support those contacts.

We will first focus on the cognitive component of organic solidarity by determining the active mastery of the other community's language and usage of its media outlets (see Table 4.4), measured by respondents' self-assessment. With respect to mastery of the other community's language, Flemish respondents definitely score much better than Walloons in every age group. This can be explained by differences in education, which is one of the primary competences of

the communities. In the Flemish education system, French is taught as a second language after Dutch, both in primary and secondary school. In the francophone education system, however, offering Dutch in primary school is not mandatory. In secondary school, pupils have to choose a second language next to French, but Dutch is again not compulsory. Pupils can choose between Dutch, English, or German as their second language. Interestingly, the three groups aged below forty-five score no worse than the older age groups. On the contrary, in both Flanders and Wallonia, the share of respondents claiming a good knowledge of the other community's language is larger in the youngest age groups. In other words, hypothesis 2a is not confirmed because knowledge of the other community's language has not declined during federalization. In fact, there is a slight tendency among Flemings and a marked tendency among Walloons for younger people to claim more knowledge of the other community's language than older people.

<insert Table 4.4 near here>

In order to evaluate attention to the other community's media, we constructed a summated scale using five questions ($\alpha = 0.78$). Respondents were asked how often they:

- watch Belgian francophone/Flemish television?
- listen to a Belgian francophone/Flemish radio station?
- read Belgian francophone/Flemish newspapers?
- read Belgian francophone/Flemish magazines?

- surf to Belgian francophone/Flemish websites?

Francophone respondents were asked about their use of Flemish media, and vice versa. The response categories for each of the four questions range between 1 (less than annually or never) and 5 (daily or almost daily). This implies that the global range of the new variable is between 5 and 25. Overall, Flanders' mean sum score of 9.1 is significantly higher than Wallonia's 7.1, but, given the range of the variable, both values are low. Again, we find no confirmation for hypothesis 2a because the groups aged below forty-five also score better in terms of mutual media attention than the older age groups in both Flanders and Wallonia.

The affective component taps the intensity of personal relations between Flemings and Walloons. Respondents were asked, therefore, whether they have friends from the other community and also how often they visit people and places in the other community. Table 4.5 shows the results. Some 44.1 percent of the Flemings have francophone friends, while no less than 63.8 percent of the Walloons say they have Flemish friends. This difference is statistically significant. However, both proportions are higher than we had expected. Hence, it is possible that social desirability may be at play here. Nowadays, having an extensive social network is a desirable attribute because social capital is a scarce resource (Putnam 2000). However, there is no reason to expect that this bias—declaring more friends than one actually has—is stronger in Wallonia than in Flanders. Furthermore, we again do not see a systematic pattern of fewer friendships in the groups under age forty-five.

<insert Table 4.5 near here>

Similar results pop up with respect to the number of times the other community is visited. Again, this behavioural measure of affective organic solidarity is calculated by a summated scale based on three items ($\alpha = 0.64$):

How often do you visit Flanders/Wallonia to (a) spend your holidays or pass your spare time, (b) visit family, friends or acquaintances, and/or (c) go shopping?

Flemish respondents were asked how often they visit Wallonia, and vice versa. The answers range between 1 (less than annually or never) and 4 (one or several times a week). Consequently, the summary scores range from 3 to 12. A comparison of the means for both communities shows that Walloons visit Flanders more frequently than vice versa. Flanders scores 4.1 while Wallonia scores 4.4. The difference is small but statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). However, we also find that, overall, the younger age groups do not score lower than those aged forty-five or older. Consequently, hypothesis 3a is not confirmed either; that is, the number of intercommunity relations and encounters (affective organic solidarity) has not substantially decreased during the genesis of Belgian federalism.

Asymmetric Analyses: Negative Binomial Regression

Because our dependent variable contains “over-dispersed” count data, we use a negative binomial regression (with log link) to predict its values. Table 4.6 shows the results of the regression analyses. The dependent variable equals 0 when a respondent wants no further autonomy for the regional governments on all seven policy domains, while it equals 7 if a respondent wants subnational autonomy on all seven policy domains. We add the independent variables in four cumulative steps. The first model shows the effects of the socio-demographic

variables, inclusive region. In a second step, we add the variable interaction of higher education and region. The third model includes subnational identification, which we use as the indicator for mechanical solidarity. Finally, in the fourth and fifth step, we complete our models with the indicators for organic solidarity, by adding cognitive and affective factors respectively. The test for multicollinearity showed no highly correlated variables.

<insert Table 4.6 near here>

Model 1: Socio-Demographic Variables

To make the model easier to interpret, we dichotomized the variables age and education, which did not appear to have an influence on the findings. The variables sex, age, and level of education all have non-significant effects on the dependent variable whatever the categorization format. Interestingly, the effect of region is significant and negative. This means that Walloons are more in favour of granting additional autonomy to the subnational communities than are Flemings. These results again reject hypothesis 1 that we derived from the paradox of federalism literature. Considering the media discourse and the popularity of the Flemish nationalist party, the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (N-VA), one could expect Flemings to favour regional autonomy more than Walloons. However, it appears to be just the opposite. In this regard, there is a clear discrepancy between citizens and politicians. Walloons who favour more regional autonomy can be considered as an “unserved audience,” given that no francophone political parties explicitly campaigned for such autonomy in 2007 (Deschouwer and Sinardet 2010), while Flemings who support more autonomy can be regarded as an “overserved audience.”

Model 2: Education and Enlightened Self-Interest

The findings of our second model point out that education has a distinct effect in both Belgian regions. This time the sign of the effect runs in the hypothesized direction (0b). Higher educated Belgians are less in favour of transferring additional competences to the subnational governments ($B = -0.47^{**}$). Nevertheless, the conditional effect of higher education is not significant in Flanders ($B = -0.47 + 0.59 = 0.12$), while it is remarkably strong in Wallonia ($B = 0.13 - 0.59 = -0.46^{**}$). Figure 4.1 (earlier) shows the predicted degree of policy autonomy by region and level of education. The difference between lower- and higher-educated Flemings is indeed very small, while the effect of education is considerable for Walloons. In other words, the finding that Walloons are more in favour of regional autonomy is mainly caused by the lower-educated residents of this region.

Model 3: Mechanical Solidarity

Those whose most important identity is Flemish or Walloon differ significantly from those with a Belgian or European identification. A strong subnational identity leads to a stronger wish for additional subnational autonomy, as shown in Figure 4.2. Here, we do find proof for a hypothesis that is directly linked to the paradox of federalism. Importantly, this positive relation between a strong subnational identity and the desire for further devolution of competences does not necessarily imply a vicious circle toward ever more federalization. This is only possible if indeed ever more Belgians would consider their subnational identity to be the most important. However, according to our data and previous research on identities, regional identification has not substantially increased throughout Belgium's federalization.

<insert Figure 4.2 near here>

Models 4 and 5: Organic Solidarity

Having friends across the language border appears to diminish the demand for more devolution of competences ($B = -0.18^{**}$). This confirms the expectation stated in hypothesis 3b. More affective relations between Flemings and Walloons decrease the wish for further subnational autonomy. However, the cognitive component of organic solidarity—more specifically, language knowledge and media attention—does not seem to have a significant effect on the wish for more autonomy.

Conclusion

Recently, attention has been given to a paradoxical side effect of federalism; namely, that it could lead to a devolutionary spiral in which recognition of territorial singularity tends to strengthen intra-communal solidarity and weaken inter-communal solidarity. Hence, ethno-linguistic groups become increasingly assertive, and, as a result, ever more competences will be transferred to the subnational communities, thereby ultimately hollowing out the *raison d'être* of the overarching federation. We have argued that this so-called paradox of federalism could be framed in a much broader discussion about the tension between the politics of recognition and the politics of redistribution, which ultimately boils down to the classical binary pointed to by Durkheim; namely, pre-modern mechanical solidarity versus modern organic solidarity.

Empirically, this paradox is supported by the fact that federalism provides elites with necessary tools for completely hollowing out the constitutionally enshrined elements of shared rule. Hence, most research has studied this phenomenon only by looking at institutional settings,

the position of nationalist parties, or elite discourse. However, because we believe that the paradox of federalism is also inextricably bound up with the consolidation of distinctive ethno-linguistic public spheres, it makes sense to look at this process at the level of public opinion as well. It is very plausible that, in this respect, elite discourse is not congruent with public opinion. After all, this incongruence is often considered to be a crucial ingredient of traditional consociational politics in the sense that “overarching cooperation at the elite level can be a substitute for cross-cutting affiliations at the mass level” (Lijphart 1968, 200). However, it is possible that we should turn around Lijphart’s initial observation. Perhaps fierce inter-communal political competition at elite level is sometimes a threat to initial cross-cutting affiliations at the mass level.

Belgium is an interesting case because it was in a deadlock between 2007 and 2011 due to the disagreement of elite representatives of the two main language communities about where the federal system should go. The agreement on a sixth state reform in October 2011 permitted the country to have a government again, but it is unclear how long this pacification can last, given amongst other factors the continued success of the Flemish-nationalist and separatist party N-VA.

Nevertheless, and quite in contrast to the assumptions in mainstream political and media discourse, our research points out that the deadlock among elites was not at all reflected in the public. Based on a unique data set from 2007, the year when the political crisis started, we learned that Walloons are actually stronger adherents of additional devolution than Flemings, a mirror image of the situation among elites. While intra-communal identification indeed has positive effects on the wish for further devolution, and inter-communal encounters have the expected negative effect, we do not find that each of these factors has substantially changed

during the federalization process. Obviously, things could have changed in recent years. In this respect, some indications already are present in the Partirep survey following the 2009 regional elections, where Flemish respondents were slightly more in favour of autonomy than their Walloon counterparts (Deschouwer and Sinardet 2010). This might be attributed to the fact that the question was asked in a different way, but it could also point to an evolution in attitudes on this matter. However, also in 2009, the most striking remains the incongruence between public opinion and elite discourse. Still almost half of Flemish voters do not favour more regional autonomy, in contrast to four out of ten Walloon voters who do support this. In both cases, 40 percent to 50 percent of the voters did not see their opinions reflected by their political elites.

One possible explanation for this incongruence is the split of the political parties and the consociational way the federal system was organized, which strengthened the significance of the linguistic cleavage for the elites. Also, political elites are, more than the public, confronted on a daily basis with the functioning of political institutions they might find unsatisfactory. Calls for institutional reform, therefore, originate mostly from the elite level. A call for more autonomy can also be linked to other ideological and party interests and, in a partitocracy such as Belgium, to an increase in political and administrative mandates, with certainly the dominant parties in each region having much to gain by creating and reinforcing a political level at which they can maximize their power and/or reinforce their ideological (left or right) position.

The question is then why nationalist and even separatist parties, such as the N-VA, have done so well in recent elections. Concerning separatism, the N-VA knows this is a minority position among Flemish voters, which is the main reason why it has been advocating the less radical and more vague “confederalism,” which in Belgian political discourse has come to mean

a form of more strongly defederalized Belgium. More generally, the N-VA has understood the lack of interest among large parts of the electorate for autonomy in its pure form and has been able to link autonomy to socio-economic and immigration discourse, focusing on the fact that Flemish voting results are more right-wing than those in Wallonia, resulting in policies that are (too) left-wing at the federal level. The N-VA went so far in presenting autonomy not as a goal in itself but as a means to conduct other policies (such as lowering taxes) that, in the 2014 election campaign, it even left open the possibility to participate in a federal (right-wing) government without further state reform in the short term.

Combined with the fact that the position of Brussels—institutionalized as the third region next to Flanders and Wallonia but at the same time also as a meeting point between both large language communities—makes an actual split very difficult, the disappearance of Belgium is not likely in the near future. However, given the way the federal and party systems are organized and the continued success of nationalist parties, one can expect tensions and conflicts to reappear regularly even though they are not always a reflection of concerns among public opinion. An analogy could be made with Belgium's budget situation. Belgium is a state with extensive public debt; nevertheless, it is usually regarded as a rather stable economic member of the European Union. One reason for this is that much of the debt is domestic, in the sense that the public deficit is easily counterbalanced by the accumulated private savings of the Belgians. In the same way, one could say that on the exterior, as it shows from elite and media discourse, Belgium may appear to be completely divided; however, Belgian society generally does not reflect such a division.

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Table 4.1**Desired Degree of Policy Autonomy for Flanders and Wallonia (%)**

Degree of policy autonomy	Flanders	Wallonia	Belgium
0 – No autonomy	37.5%	33.0%	35.9%
1	8.3%	10.7%	9.2%
2	10.0%	8.9%	9.6%
3	8.7%	6.5%	7.9%
4	7.7%	6.5%	7.3%
5	6.4%	3.9%	5.5%
6	6.3%	10.6%	7.8%
7 – Complete autonomy	15.1%	19.9%	16.8%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: TNS Dimarso (2007).

Table 4.2**Proportion of Flemings and Walloons Wanting Autonomy in Seven Different Policy Areas**

	Flanders	Wallonia	Significant difference (p<0.05)
Pensions	41.2%	38.7%	No
Reimbursement of medicines	38.8%	39.3%	No
The military	23.9%	31.9%	Yes
Employment	50.4%	48.7%	No
Crime	34.5%	46.8%	Yes
Prisons	35.9%	40.2%	No
Traffic issues	36.1%	50.5%	Yes

Source: TNS Dimarso (2007).

Table 4.3**Percentage of Respondents Feeling Flemish/Walloon, Belgian, or European in the First Place**

First choice	Flanders	Wallonia	Belgium
Flemish/Walloon	34.7%	9.7%	25.8%
Belgian	44.1%	58.7%	49.3%
European	21.2%	31.7%	24.9%
N	1,160	641	1,801

Source: TNS Dimarso (2007).

Table 4.4**Cognitive Component of Organic Solidarity in Flanders and Wallonia**

	Age	15–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+
Language mastery (% respondents)	Flanders	82.5	76.4	75.5	74.8	79.2	74.6
	Wallonia	42.4	31.7	37.9	23.2	32.9	28.5
Media usage (mean sum score)	Flanders	10.5	9.4	8.7	8.5	8.4	9.4
	Wallonia	7.4	7.8	7.1	6.9	6.8	6.4

Source: TNS Dimarso (2007).

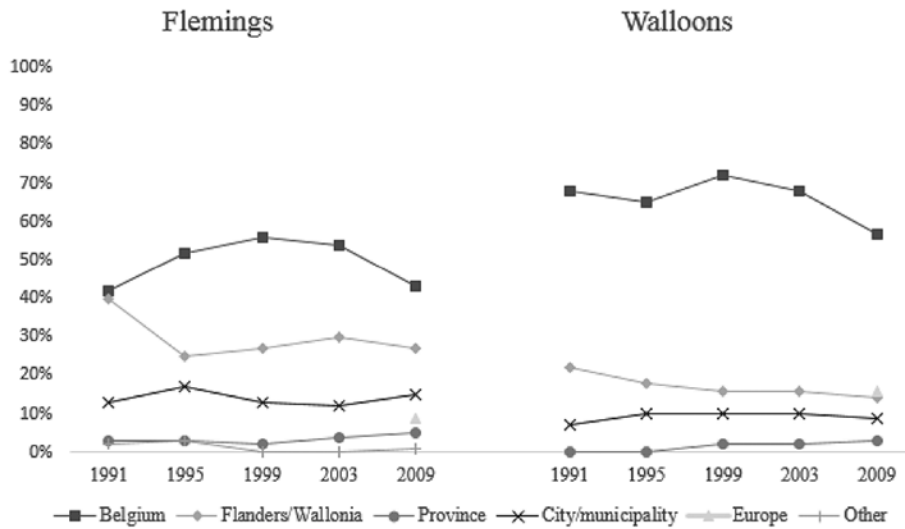
Table 4.5**Affective Component of Organic Solidarity in Flanders and Wallonia**

	Age	15–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+
Having friends (% respondents)	Flanders	48.4	31.9	45.6	39.6	43.2	52.8
	Wallonia	55.6	68.3	62.1	67.9	61.2	66.4
Visit frequency (mean sum score)	Flanders	3.9	4.1	4.2	4.1	4.1	4.0
	Wallonia	4.4	4.7	4.5	4.5	4.4	4.1

Source: TNS Dimarso (2007).

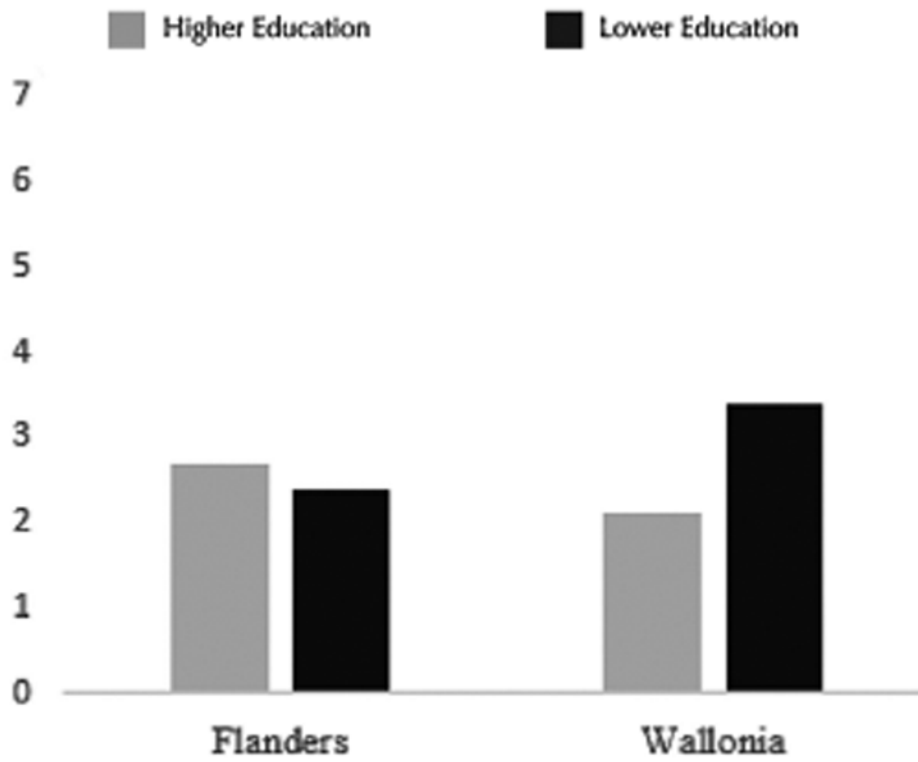
Figure 4.1

Evolution of Belgians' Primary Identification between 1991 and 2009



Source: Deschouwer and Sinardet (2009).

Figure 4.2

Predicted Count of Policy Autonomy by Region and Level of Education

Source: TNS Dimarso (2007).