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INFLUENCE OF INTERACTION ON BELGIAN IDENTITY FORMATION:

**Application of Allport's Intergroup Contact theory
on Dutch and French speaking interaction.**

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Introduction

This is a paper about Belgian identities on different levels and how these are influenced by interaction. When an outsider looks at Belgium they are often confused and perplexed, and may think that the situation is bleaker than it actually is, as such:

“Belgium is not a nation, it’s an artificial creation. [...] The truth is there are two parts of Belgium, they speak different languages, they dislike each other intensely, there’s no national TV station, there’s no national newspaper – Belgium is not a nation.”
(Guardian News, 2018)

This is a quote by Nigel Farage, former leader of the UKIP party, in the European parliament in 2018. Belgium was here used to make the claim that only small states like to move their competences to the European Union, as they are not able to resolve their issues themselves. While I will touch further upon Belgium in relation to the European Union at a later point, what I wanted to address from this quote is that Farage is far from the only one to think that Belgians are not at all united and that the Flemish and the Francophones dislike, even hate one another. Some do indeed believe that ‘Belgians’ do not really exist, that only regional identities do and that people from either region would be better off if Belgium were divided, with the Flemish part to return to the Netherlands and the Walloon part to reattach itself to France (Deschouwer, 2012; The Economist, 2007).

One of these people, the Dutch far right politician Geert Wilders, once wrote: “In our hearts we were never separated, we belong together. The Netherlands has to hold the Flemish lion by the chest and say: ‘Welcome home, we never forgot you’.” (Vandermeersch, 2015, p. 24), implying that both the Flemish and the Dutch still feel a certain kinship with each other even after almost two centuries of independence which Wilders states was a historical blunder, invented by foreign diplomats (Wilders & Bosma, 2008) to create a ‘tampon country’ to avoid war between the European powers (Saint Paul, 2008). In this way it almost sounds as if Flanders is a metaphorical Eastern-Germany which will at some point be reunited with West-Germany, the Netherlands in this case.

This argument for Flanders to leave its French speaking counterpart and to re-join with the Netherlands is not as convincing when you take into account that the territories of Belgium have this “shared history” with a lot of nations in Europe. The provinces of Belgium together with the Netherlands were under Spanish occupation from 1556 onwards until the start of the

80-years war, when the latter fought for their independence and the Belgian territories remained under Spanish rule for a total of about 150 years. This was followed by Austrian rule under the Habsburg monarchy. Which was then followed by French rule for two short but influential decades to finally be under Dutch rule for a mere 15 years from 1815 to 1830 (Saint Paul, 2008, p.1155). Thus according to this idea of shared past under same territorial rule, the French, Austrians and Spanish would have a greater claim than the Netherlands. Despite this, no separatist party is even represented in the chamber on the French speaking side of Belgium. With the only party supporting the idea of Reattachment, reconnecting Wallonia with France, being the “Rassemblement Wallonie-France”, which since 2007 only receives less than half a percent of the total Francophone vote (Sinardet, 2009).

Instead of seeing Belgium as a potential extension of France and the Netherlands there is also the idea of Belgium in the negative: namely as a country that is neither the Netherlands nor France (Saint Paul, 2008, p. 1155) This also implies that the Belgian identity does not really exist, which is not really true. Belgians do have a common history and shared culture (Deschouwer, 2012). One of Belgium’s strong identity markers would be beer, with more than 300 different kinds, chocolate and of course the famous “French” fries of which the hatred for the adjective is something most Belgians could also unite under. Besides food, Belgians were united in the past under Catholicism, have a common history of being oppressed by neighbouring countries, are united under a king, albeit not respected by all, and finally united in not taking themselves too seriously (Van De Craen, 2002).

I do not deny that separatists exist in Belgium, especially in these current times of political unrest and feelings of anti-establishment, which is also why my research is relevant: to see just to what extend these feelings of separatism are linked to identity and interaction. Especially since according to the “Grand Baromètre” or “De Grote Peiling” (a survey by IPSOS), more than one third (37%) of the Flemish is in favour of separatism if a referendum on the matter were to be held (Solimando, 2019; Spoormakers, 2019). In addition to that, during last elections almost half of the Flemish voted for Vlaams Belang or N-VA (Maddens, 2019), both parties of which an independent Flanders is at least mentioned as being part of their agenda if not openly campaigned for. However, that same survey points that only 8% of Flemish individuals voted for Vlaams Belang with an independent Flanders as motivation and 26% of Flemish even wished to return to a unitary Belgium (Van de Calseyde, 2019). The matter is thus not as easy as it seems.

If language is truly the main and only factor which unites a people and creates identity, splitting up Belgium into its two respective parts would be the most logical solution. In the two

cases of greater-Netherlands and Rattachisme the question is thus: “Is there truly less common history and shared culture between the Flemish and French-speakers than between these regions and their neighbouring countries?” While social cleavages do exist in Belgium, how far are they reinforced by people’s own ideas, politicians and the media’s influence to the extent to which they are the true artificial part of Belgium? Are they really two completely separate people that would love nothing more than to split up their country?

My research question in this paper is the following: does interaction between Flemish and Francophone individuals have a positive influence on Belgian identity? Based on the literature I will look at how people perceive their Belgian identity and their more regional and linguistic identities; in addition to looking at interaction, or lack thereof, with the other side of the linguistic barrier and finally, how this influences these ‘Belgian’ identities. Based on this my main hypothesis is that individuals who have more interaction with people from the other side of the country tend to feel more Belgian. I will also look at what role language plays in identity formation and feelings towards the other side, suspecting that if language is a barrier between people, it will also be a barrier between them and feeling Belgian. To find an answer to these questions I use a dataset of 569 respondents from a survey held from the 13th of April to the 4th of May 2020. This survey contained a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions linked to the identities of the respondents, their opinion about the people on the other side of the linguistic barrier and their interaction with said people.

My findings are that while it is debatable to what extent Allport’s conditions are met in Belgium, there does seem to be a strong level of Belgian identification which is not receding unlike what Flemish nationalists and populists claim (Sinardet et al., 2017). This Belgian identity is however combined with regional and even supranational identities as we have found that there is also a strong representation of regional and European identities in our respondents. When Allport’s conditions are met we see that contact has a positive effect on Belgian identity, while the slight opposite is true when one does not take these into account. We have also found that there is not as much differences between the linguistic groups as one would expect. Notably, the lack of differences in the self-placement on the political scale and the overwhelming support for refederalisation of respondents. We found a significant effect for the influence of interaction on Allport’s conditions, a significant impact of these conditions on Belgian identity and a significant effect of Belgian identity on the division of competences.

The paper is structured as follows: I will start with my literature review where I discuss Belgian identities on different levels, rooted in history and strongly reinforced by cleavages on the historical, political and linguistic level. Next, I will look at Allport’s intergroup contact

theory and how these apply to the Belgian context. The literature review is followed by my empirical research, where I look at Belgians, both French and Dutch speakers and their various identities in relation to interaction, language and politics. To finally end with my conclusion.

Literature Review

The interesting thing about Belgian identities is that the issues regarding the Flemish, Walloon and the perception of lack of obvious Belgian identity did not appear after the independence in 1830, but only really came to light in the beginning of the 20th century (Van De Craen, 2002). It became apparent with a letter from the socialist politician Jules Destrée written in 1912 in which he states:

“Allow me to tell you the truth, the great and horrifying truth: There are no Belgians. [...] The people that live in these diverse regions are as diverse in spirit as their countrysides. A farmer from the Kempen region and a Walloon labourer are two different parts of humanity. Both have you as a king, Sire; but a community of political existence is not enough to make them alike.” (Destrée, 1912, p. 4)

While the first sentence is what most people remember of this letter, there are other parts which will be brought up further in this paper as it is very noteworthy to what degree this letter that has been written more than 100 years ago is still very relevant today. In a similar vein Saint Paul (2008) states that Belgium has been looking for a national identity ever since 1830. It is first and foremost a diverse territory that has distinguished itself since centuries on the matters of history, geography, language and cultural traditions in addition to having different dialects every 30 to 50 km.

What are Belgian identities?

Saint Paul (2008) claims that Belgians tend to be rather attached to the regional, meaning here provincial or even local, history or events creating a very local, regional identity. With globalisation and the creation of intra-national organisations such as the European Union together with the diminishing of the nation states, the role of the more regional identities is on the rise again (Van De Craen, 2002). In this way in Belgium there is the Flemish region, the Walloon region and Brussels, the capital of Belgium, which is its own region in the middle of Flemish Brabant (Deschouwer, 2012).

Next to these regions Belgium is also fragmented into a Flemish, French and German speaking community, with again Brussels as bilingual capital in the middle (Saint Paul, 2008). Brussels is already interesting with regards to the fact that it does not fall under either the traditional Flemish or the Walloon group identities anymore (Janssens, 2018). It is also the capital of the European Union and the holder of the NATO headquarters, making it quite important not just on the European level but on a world scale (Deschouwer, 2012). Indeed Brussels and Belgium have quite the strong relation with the European Union leading to Belgians taking a European identity almost for granted (Van De Craen, 2002).

Besides these regional and supra-national identities, Belgium also has ten provinces which used to be the nation's territorial building blocks. Although their importance and relevance has been greatly reduced due to the new meso-level governments of the regions. Despite them being less relevant they are still traditional structures, rooted in history and thus hard to abolish (Deschouwer, 2012). In this paper we will discuss the most common geographical identities in Belgium: the national, regional and European identities, but also look at identities which are not as often discussed such as provincial and urban identities and linguistic identities.

Belgian Identity

When it comes to the people inhabiting Belgium, "their historical ties and shared cultural background, a kind of intercultural togetherness, does exist despite political frictions" Van De Craen (2002, p. 6). Saint Paul (2008) states that while Belgium's history is short and extremely complex, it is not actually taught that in depth in Flemish or Walloon schools which leads to all Belgians having only a very vague idea of their country's past. As mentioned in our introduction there are people that strongly believe that Belgium will fall apart in the next few decades, that it should not have existed in the first place, if these people are right then Belgium is likely not the only European country (Van De Craen, 2002).

In similar vein Thijssen et al., (2015) mention that Flemish and Walloons have a "*living together*-past, but that this was a kind of "*living apart-together*"-relation due to territorial, managerial, linguistic and mediational segregation. In this way they claim that Flemish and Walloons rather come occasionally and with intension in contact unlike the contact between Belgians and migrants which is rather one of "*living together, apart.*" (Thijssen et al., 2015, P. 135). Deschouwer (2012) distinguishes between cleavages on the linguistic, political and socio-economic levels. Interestingly enough, the division between Flemish and Walloons does

not only have negative sides: both Van De Craen (2002) and Deschouwer (2012) stress that the Belgian ability of reaching compromise between its people on the political level and its legal organisation could be an example for many countries, and supra-national organisations such as the European Union.

Regional identities

Flanders and Wallonia

Today, the question of identity immediately makes us think of culture and social identities. In these days where globalisation brings cultures closer there is a tendency to homogenise them, which leads to a counter movement of strong desire to affirm one's nationality, cultural traditions and identities (Saint Paul, 2008). In the past Flanders used to be largely agricultural and catholic and Wallonia used to be mainly industrial, quite liberal and individuals for religion was not that important anymore (Destrée, 1912). A big issue for these feelings of regionalism is that while freedom of language is part of the Belgian constitution, in reality the language of all administration, politics and law used to be in French. The people in the south spoke French and the middle class and elites in Flanders as well. This led to a socio-political struggle and the rise of the Flemish movement, enhanced by the social border between the industrial south and this agrarian North (Van De Craen, 2002). Indeed, a short summary of Wallonia's history is that it was born out of a wedding of coal and iron, with great economic and social upheaval consisting of a rich industrial period, the Walloon movement, imported workers to work in the mines and then the industrial decline that followed the second world war (Saint Paul, 2008, p. 1156). This decline of the coal and steel industry in Belgium made economic activity move to Brussels and Flanders (Deschouwer, 2012).

Which has made Flanders the economically dominant region of Belgium. With as consequence the rise of more nationalistic feelings (Van De Craen, 2002). In last election, the Vlaams Belang, the most far right wing party in Flanders that supports Flemish independence has had the biggest growth of all the parties (Santens, 2019). With this the debate on the future of Belgium has once again been opened. The core business of the Vlaams Belang is the Flemish autonomy, meaning that the good results they are having is immediately taken as a signal for more Flemish autonomy (Deschouwer & Sinardet, 2010, p. 75). Some may claim that the reasons for voting this way is not necessarily due to wanting to split up the country, that it is rather feelings of anti-establishment (Henry et al., 2015). Maddens (2019), disagrees stating that those who wish to maintain the existence of Belgium, and find this truly important would

not have voted for Vlaams Belang or N-VA. Maybe it is this “truly important” part that needs to be stressed here considering that Swyngedouw & Rink's (2008) research on the “Flemishness” or “Belgianess” of Flemish individuals has found that only 2% of the Flemish electorate wanted the partition of Belgium *and* found this to be truly important. They would disagree with Maddens considering they discovered that even within the voters for certain parties there are also big distinctions in their reasoning for voting for said parties. In this way 17% of people voting Vlaams Belang even supported going back to a unitary Belgium which is almost one fifth of their electorate.

While this research is more than a decade old and it could be said that the political situation has changed much, 2008 was a time with a lot of political turmoil as well, with the country going from one communitarian crisis to the other. Especially with the troubles to form a government and the discussions surrounding Brussel-Halle-Vilvoorde (Swyngedouw & Rink, 2008). Just like the elections of last May (Solimando, 2019; Spoormakers, 2019), there were polls claiming that 40% of the Flemish individuals wanted to split up the country, other polls brought this back to 12% but ultimately the numbers were interpreted as enormous support for an independent Flanders or at least a confederal Belgium with a higher autonomy for Flanders (Swyngedouw & Rink, 2008). This anti-establishment voting is often misunderstood by Walloons leading to them believing the Flemish is more radical right-wing and racist than the Flemish truly are (De Jonge, 2020). In any case for the two main language groups in Belgium the case might really be that Flemish and Francophones differ but feel Belgian nonetheless.

Brussels

Speaking about the people of Brussels Destrée (1912, P. 6) referred to them in his letter to the King when he spoke of two kinds of Belgians, the first one being the state officials and the second one the “*Bruxellois*” which he described as being “an uninteresting race which seems to have combined the negative aspects of both races while losing their qualities and speaking an incomprehensible jargon.” It must be noted that in those days the meaning and connotation of the word “race” was not the same as it is today. In those times it is closer to a synonym of family and community without excluding all consideration of ethnicity and biology (Lanneau, 2012).

Now, a 100 years later, Piet Van De Craen (2002) states that it is very obvious that the population in Brussels does not simply consist of a combination of the two traditional language groups anymore, but has an influence of international migration making it a true multicultural

and multilingual city (Janssens, 2018). Indeed, one century ago the situation was completely different with Brussels seemingly supporting Flemish predominance with the Walloons considering themselves vanquished from the city (Destrée, 1912). Today, it is not really clear how much of its population is French and Dutch speaking as there are no censuses anymore since 1947, effectively forbidden due to fears that the French-speaking would take over the city again (Van De Craen, 2002).

However, for (Janssens, 2018) seeing this city as a living place of a homogeneous group of people with a shared history, culture and language is something that belongs in the past and simply is not the case anymore. The question is whether this lack of history, culture and shared language stops these people from developing their own urban identity as people living in Brussels. According to Sinardet et al. (2017) this increased multicultural and socio-demographic composition of Brussels makes it so that it does not simply fall under either of the two Belgian language communities anymore but that they are effectively developing their own Brussels identity or community.

European Identity

The creation of the European Union (EU) was preceded by a vast economic and political change following the ending of the second world war. The creation of the EU was for many a sign that nation states' role in Europe is diminishing (Van De Craen, 2002). For Belgians however membership to the EU has always been rather self-evident, whether Belgium should or should not be part of the EU is never really discussed, as there is simply no need. Linking the Belgian economy to a larger market is only logical in the eyes of politicians and citizens alike (Deschouwer, 2012). In similar vein Van De Craen (2002) states that one of the EU's main challenges is to create cultural and linguistic policies that take into consideration the diversity of member, while still furthering the European project (Van De Craen, 2002).

The question is whether we really have to be similar to be European? After all, the motto of the European Union is "United in diversity" not "*In spite of diversity*". This motto is close to the Belgium motto of: "L'union fait la force" or "Eendracht maakt macht" meaning "In union we find strength" (Jaumain, 2019) Belgium has shown that it can successfully neutralize socioeconomic and linguistic conflicts (Van De Craen, 2002), it remains to be seen whether the European Union can as well. It is clear that as Belgium has no natural resources and is quite small with an economy that is very dependent on the rest of the world (Deschouwer, 2012), being "*European*" can only play in Belgians' favour.

Other identities: Provincial, Urban and linguistic identities.

According to Saint Paul (2008, p. 1156) historically Walloons do not differ that much from Flemish individuals, as in that despite being imposed by the French to speak the same language, both Flemish and Walloon villages are very attached to a rich amount of local traditions and cultures that have never really been unified. Till 1976 Belgium used to be divided into 2359 municipalities which were merged together into 589 municipalities nowadays (Deschouwer, 2012). Quite a few of these cities and municipalities have their own identities as well. How these are seen depends on the scale of the identities of the people that are being interacted with. for example: an urban identity, or provincial identity would never be brought up in a casual conversation about where one is born between an American and a Belgian. However between two Flemish people from the same province it might, as they are probably able to understand what this identity means. In this way two Flemish people from West-Flanders might discuss being a “Bruggeling” or “Kortrijkenaar”, people from Bruges and Kortrijk respectively.

Of course these two Flemish individuals could also identify with their province, as West-Flemish individuals. Which is something they would likely use to describe themselves when talking to another person also from Flanders, but from another province. Or they could identify not with the regional aspect of the West-Flemish identity but rather the linguistic aspect by being users of the West-Flemish dialect. Indeed these different languages and dialects lead to strong feelings of self-identification (Saint Paul, 2008).

Already in 1912 Jules Destrée (P. 5) stated that “a proof of more weight and decisiveness than the duality of the kingdom, even more incontestable than that which can be deduced from the ground, the landscapes, the activities, the temperaments and beliefs, is the language.” The linguistic border in Belgium, without taking into account the artificial and political creation of it, came to be somewhere in between the 4th and 7th century (Saint Paul, 2008). The interesting part about the language history of Belgium is that in the mid-19th century the division of the language situation was as follows: in the north of the country, most people spoke Flemish, in the southern part, varieties of Walloon and Picard and in the urban centres, only the upper stratum of these two Belgian regions spoke rudimentary standard French, as these individuals constituted the political class, they determined the cultural choices in the early foundation of the country (Zolberg, 1974).

This points towards the fact that early language issues were actually class-issues in disguise. In 1839, the Flemish founded in Ghent a society named “De taal is gansch het volk”

translating to: “Language is all the people”, stressing that language is an essential characteristic of what a people consist of (Destrée, 1912). However the “*Flamingants*” in those days were not really asking for unilingualism, but rather for bilingualism (Zolberg, 1974). To this the reaction of the Walloons was one of contempt. As seen by Destrée when he refers to it with an analogy comparing Wallonia to Alsace-Lorraine, with every city name translated into the Germanic language as a “needle in the eye” leading to irritation and exasperation of a people having to live with the “injustice” (Destrée, 1912).

Faced with such a dramatic reaction, it is understandable that the Flemish felt slighted, being denied the middle ground of bilingualism. Following this the “In Vlaanderen Vlaamsch” which translated to “In Flanders Flemish” and used to mean the request for more availability of Flemish in public services, changed to “Flemish only” a demand to remove all the French (Zolberg, 1974). Van De Craen (2002), maintains that language policy should aim for individual pluralism by promoting multilingual education which would increase citizenship, communication and tolerance for one another. The role of language in interaction on Identity brings us to Allport’s Intergroup Contact Theory

Allport’s Intergroup Contact Theory

The interdisciplinary aspect of my essay is a sociological one as we will attempt to use Allport’s intergroup contact theory to look at Flemish-Francophone relations and the correlation with identity formation. This with the aim of looking at how Belgian identities and their formation are influenced by interaction with people of the other side of the linguistic barrier. we will first explain what Allport’s intergroup contact theory is, followed by how it could apply to Belgian society.

What is intergroup contact theory?

Allport specified the conditions intergroup contact needed to fulfil to reduce prejudice. This theory was mainly used in settings of racial desegregation and integration in schools (Pettigrew, 1998). However there has also been attempts to apply it to the case of the unification between West and East Germans (Rippl, 1995), in relation to intergroup contact between age groups (Choi & Jarrott, 2020) and with regards to sexuality and transgender individuals (Walch et al., 2012). In short Allport said that intergroup contact would only lead to positive effect if

the four key conditions were met namely: equal status, common goals, intergroup cooperation and support of authorities, law, or custom (Pettigrew, 1998).

Now I will go more in depth on these four key conditions. Equal status refers to the condition that within the situation it is important that all parties receive equal treatment and also perceive this as such. Common goals would refer to the key condition that parties work together in an active goal-oriented effort so that both sides need each other to achieve their goal. The next key factor is intergroup cooperation, meaning that both parties are required to put an interdependent effort without getting into competition with one another. Lastly there is support of authorities, law, or custom which means that if the authority supports the interaction between the parties intergroup contact will show more positive effects.

Some research also includes the condition of friendship as a fifth additional requirement that needs to be met (Choi & Jarrott, 2020; Rippl, 1995). Indeed, Pettigrew (2016) stressed that friendship between two individuals from the same group tend to improve the attitudes these individuals have towards each other's groups. As during inter group contact you have an in-group who believes themselves to be very diverse individuals, and an outgroup who is considered very similar we see an effect of stereotypes that need to be overcome and challenged through contact (Walch et al., 2012). Of course besides Allport theory the group threat theory is important to be taken into account. It is based on the works of Herbert Bloomer (Quillian, 1995) and stresses the negative effects of contact, by which underlying existing tensions and animosity are strengthened by contact due to feelings of threat and competition (Thijssen et al., 2015). While taking these into account this paper will focus on Allport's original four requirements to improve relations after inter-group contact.

Application to Belgian context?

While there have been many crises and issues on all levels throughout the existence of Belgium it is in fact not true that its people can't stand each other. Unlike Allport's original theory Walloons and Flemish people are not discriminating or interacting with one another like countries with true ethnic tensions. Indeed, Van De Craen (2002) stresses that seeing the Belgian political system with its regions, communities and federal level as just a compromise is ignoring that to get to that point, whether the linguistic, political or economic, none of the underlying issues has led to killings. Especially when comparing the Belgians to other European nations such as Ireland, former Yugoslavia and the Basque country, which cannot

claim such a record. We will thus see to what extent these Allport requirements are met in current Belgian society between the Dutch-Speakers and French-Speakers.

Allport: Equal group status in the situation: Are Walloons and Flemish individuals equal?

“In order for a political nation formed of two distinct people to continue existing harmoniously and grow towards communal prosperity, it is important that neither of those people be hurt or believe being hurt, for the other’s profit” (Destrée, 1912, p. 7). Wise words, but this begs the question: “Do Belgians consider themselves equal or rather treated equally?” When it comes to politics, Belgium is a consociational democracy (Deschouwer, 2012; Sinardet, 2010), this means that all decisions taken on issues which are essential for Belgium, are to be taken by way of consensus between the Flemish and the Walloon representatives (Sinardet, 2010). Another possible level where Walloons and Flemish could be unequal is on the economic level. Due to a high unemployment rate in Brussels, due to the fact that bilingualism is often required in addition to English, which a lot of Belgians are not that proficient in (Deschouwer, 2012). This in addition to the decline of the coal and steel industry in Belgium means that Wallonia and Brussels are poorer than Flanders (Deschouwer, 2012). Another inequality issue that might be brought up is language learning in the education system. Even though proposals have been made to change it, Dutch is still not compulsory in secondary school in Wallonia (Blondin & Chenu, 2013), which causes friction considering French is compulsory for Flemish students since 5th year of primary school (Van De Craen, 2002).

Allport: Common goals: Do Walloons and Flemish share the same goals?

Destrée claimed in 1912 that besides the traits that are inherent to all inhabitants of western Europe one will quickly notice the differences between the two “people” inhabiting Belgium, according to him: the Flemish are slow, opinionated, patient and disciplined; the Walloon is sharp, perpetually a rebel in the face of authority. The sensibilities are different as well, such ideas, such stories, what makes the other enthusiastic, leaves the other indifferent, or might even make them afraid (Destrée, 1912). This statement is of course riddled with stereotypes that are now a century old. But it leaves one to wonder just to what degree the differences between Walloons and Flemish individuals are inherent. I will not attempt to seek whether there is some truth to “Walloon laziness” or “Flemish arrogance”, but rather whether there is something inherently different about the goals we have set for ourselves in our country as in our nation. The people in Belgium themselves sometimes wonder, with a touch of

humorous self-deprecation, about their country's own continued existence and survival (Saint Paul, 2008, p. 1156), but is this survival one of their common goals? On the individual level we would argue that most individuals just wish to be happy in life. Which is likely something that Walloons and Flemish individuals share.

Allport: Intergroup cooperation: Do Walloons and Flemish work well together?

In a similar way as the other two variables we expect that on the individual level Walloons and Flemish would work well together. Although on a political level this might be another story. According to Van De Craen (2002) the language issues are the reason for the creation of the federal state in Belgium in the beginning of the 20th century. If Walloons and Flemish truly worked well together would there have been a need for a federal state? On the other hand the structure has been created as such to enable Walloons and Flemish to work better together (Deschouwer et al., 2015).

Allport: Support of authorities, law or custom: Institutional support

One should hope that Belgians are all treated the same way, no matter which language they speak. However this may differ with regards to institutions that are not the same in both regions. One of these examples is media, De Jonge (2020) states that the Belgian party system and media are divided over the language group meaning that the political parties campaign solely in their respective language communities while the media has a French and Dutch speaking system. So while Farage's quote I started with is quite ignorant he does have a point when he states that: "there's no national TV station, there's no national newspaper" (Guardian News, 2018) This leads to the reality of the political situation in Belgium being hard to judge as it is often strongly framed and influenced by the media (Sinardet & Reuchamps, 2009). The Flemish broadcasting (VRT) itself in the past enforced an agenda to promote Flemish identity and culture with as goal the Flemish emancipation, while no such nation-building project was present on the Francophone side (Sinardet, 2013).

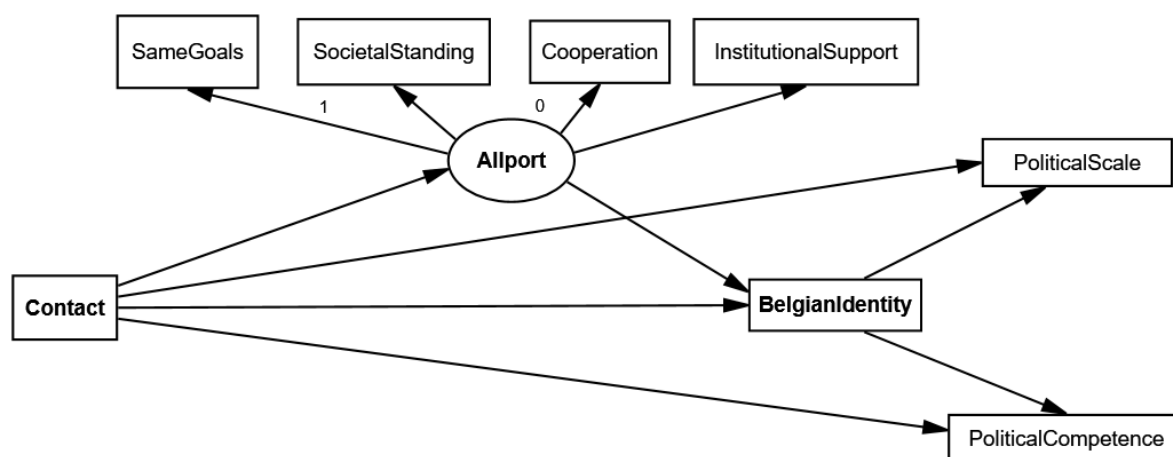
According to Sinardet (2012) the creation of a public sphere is a necessary condition for democratic participation, especially when a lot of political decisions are taken on a transnational level for the sake of democratic legitimacy. If it is already an issue on the transnational scale what can be said about Belgium? Is it not a legitimate democracy due to this lack of public sphere? There is some hope to get the people from both sides interested in what the others are doing. The program "Un oeil en Flandre" literally "an eye in Flanders" is a

Francophone program that looks at three issues that have gotten media attention in Flanders every week (DaarDaar, 2020). DaarDaar itself is an internet site on which Flemish media is translated into French with as main goal to allow a non-Dutch speaking public to better understand the Flemish society, by giving them access to the debates that are being held in the media of the north of the country (DaarDaar, n.d.). Another initiative showing that there are attempts being made to close this gap between the Flemish and Walloons.

Conclusion – Literature review and conceptual model

Our main takeaway from the literature is that despite popular belief, there is indeed a Belgian identity present in the different identifications of the people of Belgium, but that this is very much combined and not mutually exclusive with varied other forms of geographical, linguistic and cultural identification. This despite the literature casting doubt on whether the Allports requirements are truly met in Belgium. Based on this literature on Belgian identity, Contact, Politics and Allport we came up with the following conceptual model represented below:

Conceptual Model – Contact on Belgian identity



Following this model we will introduce our hypotheses. Our main research question is whether contact has a significant effect on Belgian identity, and to what degree Allports requirements play a role in this interaction. This leads us to the following two hypotheses:

Hypothesis one: Individuals that have more interaction with people on the other side of the linguistic barrier feel more Belgian.

Hypothesis two: If Allports' conditions are met, interaction between Francophones and Flemish individuals has a greater effect on Belgian identity.

These hypothesis relate to our main three variables: contact, Allport and Belgian identity. We strongly base ourselves on the research of Thijssen et al. (2015). They found that increased contact between Walloons and Flemish individuals leads to a decrease in regional identification and thus conclude that these feel more Belgian (Thijssen et al., 2015). However they do not look at the effect of contact on the national identification in their model, rather assume that decreased regional identification must mean increased national identification. The

also look at the effect of contact, regional identity on political competences and have found that increased contact reduces the desire to regionalise competences as a direct effect but also as an indirect effect through decreased regional identification. Based on this, as we use national identification we can assume similar results leading to our following hypothesis:

Hypothesis Three: Someone with a higher degree of Belgian identity will be in favour of moving more competences to the federal level.

Literature has also shown that individuals and politicians (Sinardet & Reuchamps, 2016) that support regionalising competences are rather on the right of the political spectrum. We shall turn this around leading to our following hypothesis:

Hypothesis four: There is a relation between Belgian identity and the position on the political scale: Someone with a higher level of Belgian identity will be more left on the political scale.

The four previous hypotheses will all be looked at in the part of our structural equation model, where we will seek to what extent these variables influence one another. To lead to that point we will introduce the variables in our research that will be used for this model in addition to some variables that were interesting but were not used due to not fitting the model quite well. This leads us to our fifth hypothesis:

Hypothesis Five: There is not that much difference between Francophone and Dutch speaking individuals when it comes to Belgian identity, and the factors that are related to this.

In our introduction we asked “Are Belgians truly divided into two different people?” and with this in mind we will attempt to investigate most variables by language group or region to see whether there is a significant difference between French-Speakers and Dutch-Speakers.

Empirical Research

In this Empirical part we will first go over my methodology which is strongly based on the methods used by (Thijssen et al., 2015) in their research on Walloon-Flemish contact, identities and position in regards to the division of competences. We will first explain the reasoning behind using a survey as a scientific method with the pros and cons attached to it. In addition to explaining the data gathering method. Following this we will go over the question blocks starting with the demographics, the different identities, the political aspect, the level of contact, opinions to finally end with a structural equation model which will give us the results

of each of these different hypothesis and answer our research question: Does interaction between Flemish and Francophone individuals have a positive influence on Belgian identity?

Methodology

Reasoning

To gather the data we created a survey translated in both French and Dutch, composed of thirty questions both qualitative and quantitative. The reasoning behind using a survey as a research method is that we required a lot of quantitative data on a decent amount of individuals to have significant and trustworthy results in an attempt to make statements about the Belgian population. When doing research on identity, especially the varied Belgian identities, we attempted to retrieve data on at least 100 individuals belonging to each language group, both French speakers and Dutch speakers. The reasoning behind also using more qualitative questions is that it would give me more context behind certain more abstract questions asked. Especially the questions related to Allport, which some individuals mentioned being frustrated by due to only being able to give their opinion in the form of a single number. The lack of context, and explanation for certain individuals responding in a certain way was for one of the biggest drawback of a solely quantitative method. However, with a more qualitative method such as interviews, we would have lacked the more quantitative advantage of numbers, which was more important. Thus we decided to combine both methods basing ourselves on Gilbert & Stoneman (2016)'s "Researching Social life" for the more qualitative aspects.

Data Gathering

The questions in the survey were related to individuals characteristics such as gender, living place, how many languages individuals speak and to what degree. Followed by questions about personal politics: how do they feel about the current competence distribution in Belgium and their feelings about both Francophone and Flemish political parties?. Further we delve more in depth about individuals' identities making a distinction between identity from the national level all the way to the level of cities and village attachments. Making sure to allow for all possible overlapping combinations of identities that are currently present in Belgium. This way we avoided excluding people from Brussels, the German-Speaking community or other complex overlapping Belgian identities.

The questions about contact were some of the most important as these are linked to the independent variable of our main research question. Questions linked to how often and where

exactly individuals in this country come in contact with one another and how often. The questions related to opinions were the more qualitative aspect of the research, to ensure that individuals were not obliged to answer questions in a too narrowed way. The survey was published and distributed on April 13th and closed on May 4th. In this timespan of three weeks we were able to gather 569 respondents from all over the country by sharing the survey over social media with a combination of using the snowball technique by asking individuals to share the survey with their friends and family. This way we were able to get 265 Dutch speakers and 304 French speakers with a ratio of 46.57% and 53.42% respectively.

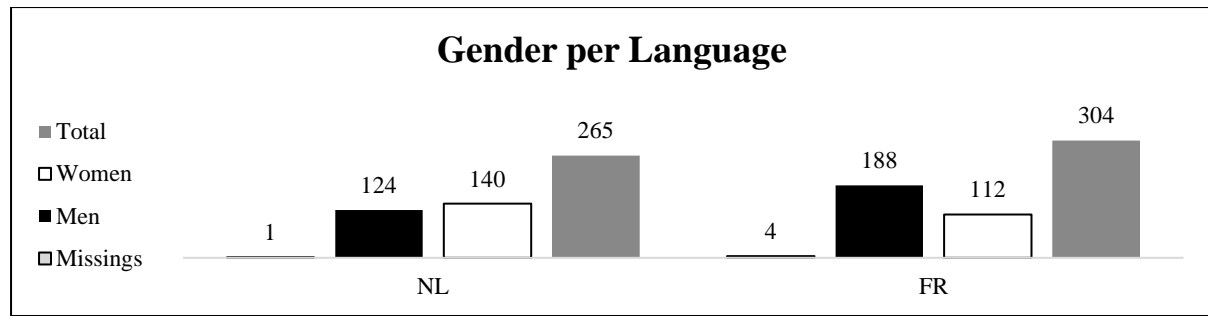
Socio-demographics

Going over the results we will first start with the demographics of the respondents consisting of N=569 individuals. Starting by looking at the divisions based on language groups, gender, age, education and where the different respondents can be situated in the regions and provinces before focussing on their language capabilities. The biggest issue during the data gathering was trying to maintain an equal ratio between French and Dutch speaking respondents. As the author of this paper is born in Flanders with most acquaintances living in the Flemish region it was initially suspected there was going to be a lack of Brussels and Walloon respondents to keep the ratio of Flemish and Francophone individuals preferably even, if not, at least according to the current Belgian demographics of about 60% Flemish, 30% Walloons and 10% people from Brussels (Statbel, 2020). Due to one Facebook group with 4000 Francophone students being extremely helpful, the amount of respondent increased from 80 to 260 in two days' time. This at the cost of a ratio of 25% and 75% for Flemish and francophones respectively. This slight issue was solved with extensive promotion in more Dutch speaking circles. In the end the respective language groups in the survey consist of 252 Dutch speakers and 312 French speakers.

Gender

Looking at gender per language, I have 4 missings for the French speakers and one for the Dutch speakers.

Bar graph 1: Gender per Language



we can see that for the Dutch speakers there is a difference between men and women of only 16 individuals. For French speakers the difference between men and women is greater, with 76 more men.

Age

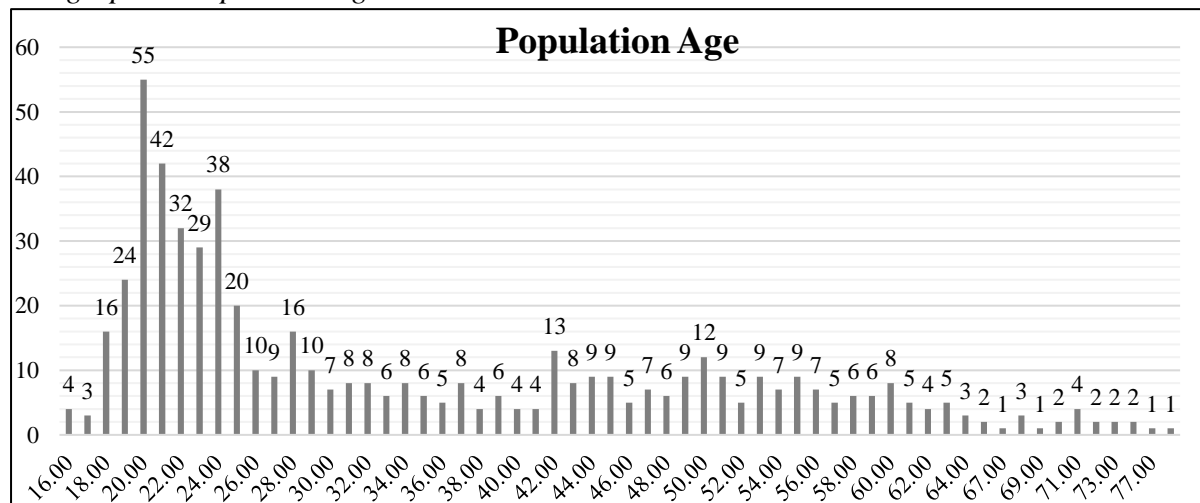
Going over to the age of the population with its descriptive statistics in table 1. The mean is 34.27 and the standard deviation is 15.29. Using the rule of thumb for skewness and kurtosis as given by McNeese (2016) the data is moderately skewed towards the right.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of age

Mean	34.27	Minimum	16.00
Median	28.00	Maximum	78.00
Mode	20.00	Skewness	0.82
Std. Deviation	15.29	Kurtosis	-0.53

There is thus a moderate over-representation of younger individuals which can be seen in bar graph 2. This over-representation can be explained by the data gathering method used. As the author of the paper is quite young, the first respondents reached by the distribution of the survey are also on the younger side, leading to this age bias as seen in bar graph 2.

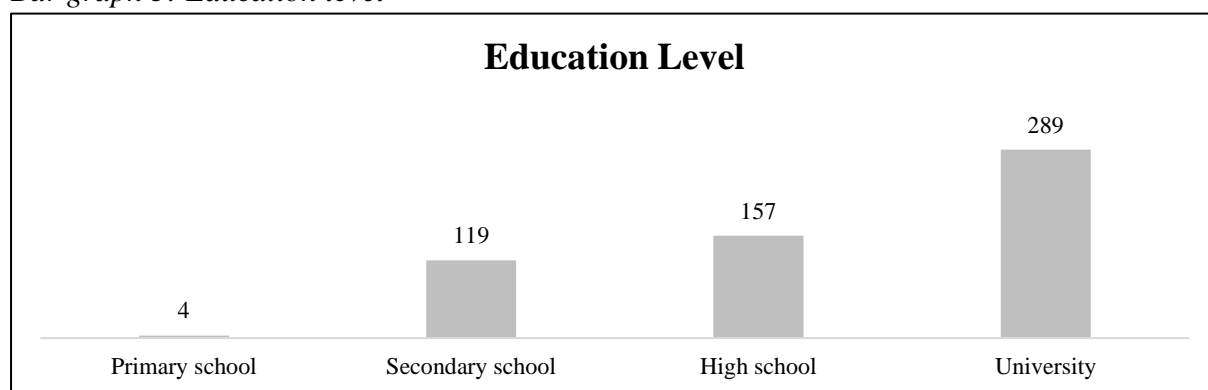
Bar graph 2: Population age



Education

To measure education levels, we asked respondents what their highest attained education level was on a scale from primary school (1), secondary school (2), high school (3) and university (4). The mean of this variable is 3.28 and the standard deviation is 0.816. It is notable that more than half of the respondents has a university education. Four individuals have not finished secondary school yet, as they are only 16 years old. The distribution of level of education can be seen in *graph 3*:

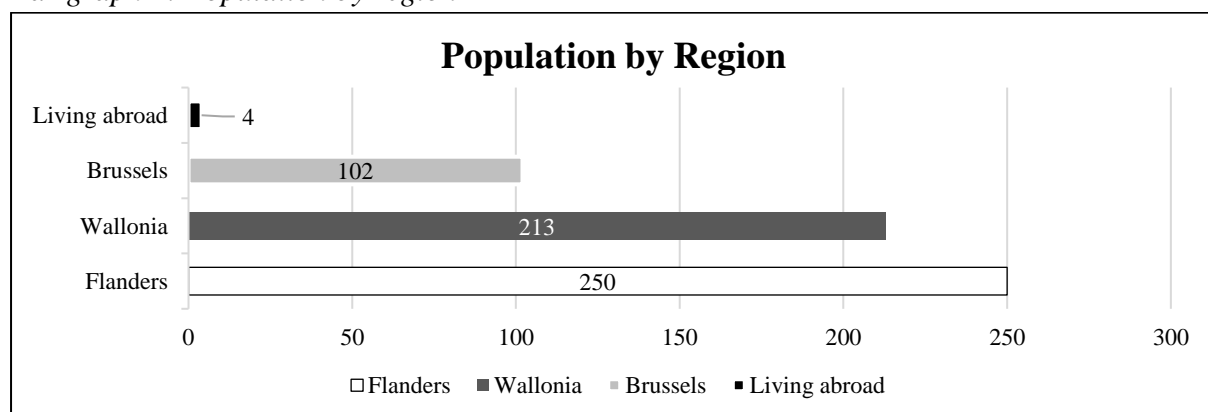
Bar graph 3: Education level



Region and provinces

Looking at where our respondents live, we can see the distribution of the respondents divided over the different regions in the following bar graph:

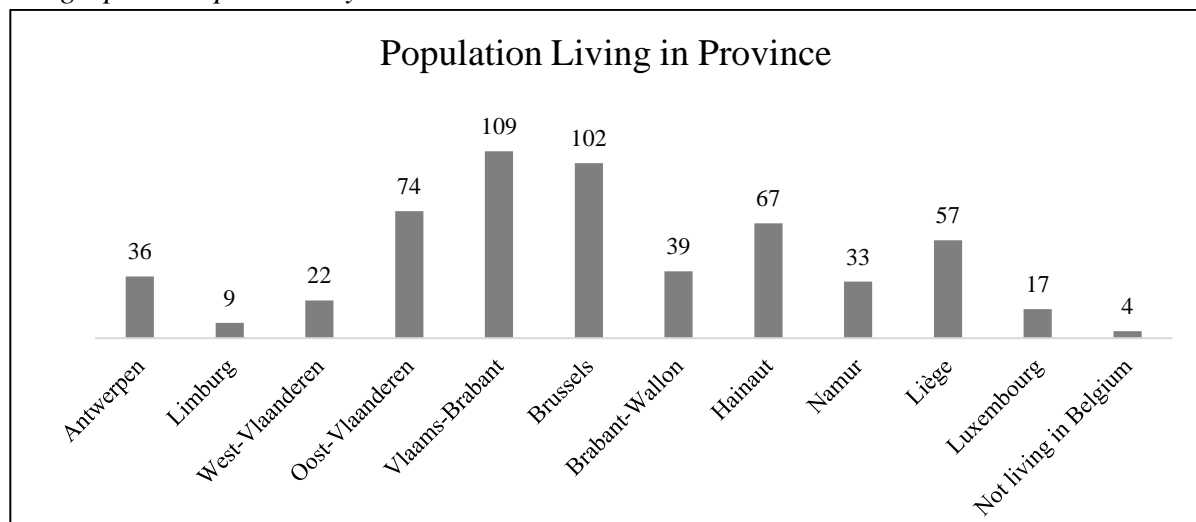
Bar graph 4: Population by region



Percentage wise 17.9% of the respondents live in Brussels, 37.4% of the respondents live in Wallonia, the biggest amount of respondents live in Flanders with a percentage of 43.9% and lastly 0.7% of individuals live abroad. An issue that needs to be mentioned with regards to

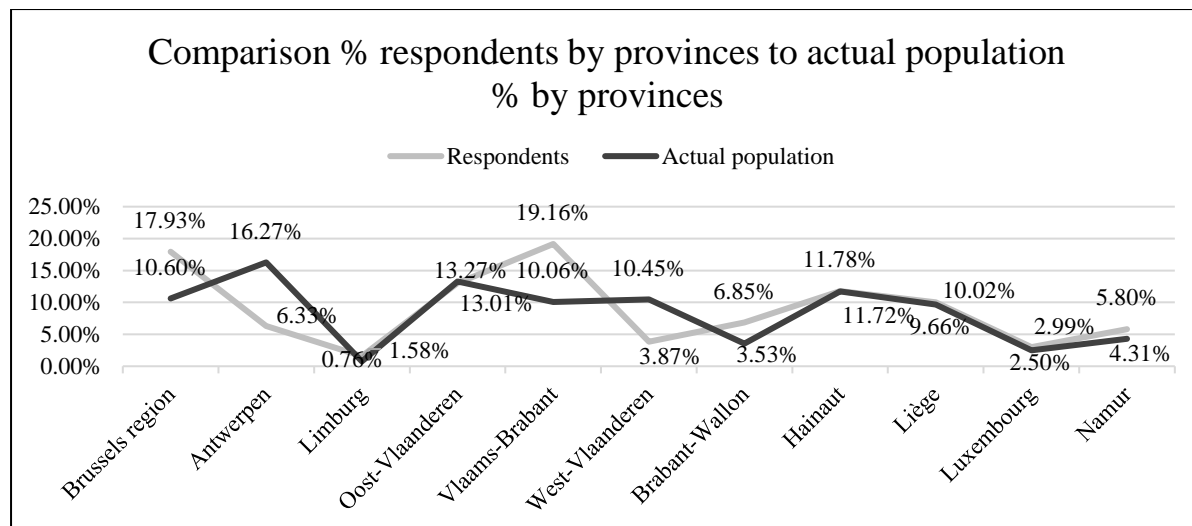
the different regions was that the author made the mistake of underestimating the amount of individuals from Brussels that would fill in the survey. While well aware that Brussels is not a province, but a region of its own, nothing was done to accommodate this when asking for provinces individuals lived in. This did not only lead to anger and discontent from some provinces individuals lived in. This did not only lead to anger and discontent from some individuals further in the survey were they could voice their opinions on the matter. It also led to a bigger problem, due to not having asked the question in which regions individuals lived, this was created based on the provinces respondents stated they lived in. About ten to fifteen respondents had put Flemish-Brabant as a province despite actually living in Brussels. The dataset was manually corrected to fix this issue. The division of respondents based on their provinces can be seen in Graph 5.

Bar graph 5: Population by Province



An issue with the provinces was the way they were indicated by individuals. There are ten provinces *and* Brussels, however respondents wrote these in such different manners that when doing an initial frequency analysis we had 45 different provinces. Had we employed a dropdown method instead of a fill in tab, this problem could have been avoided. Looking at the graphical representation above the provinces of Flemish-Brabant and East-Flanders seem to be quite over represented compared to the other provinces, while Limburg and Luxembourg seem quite underrepresented. We need to compare these statistics to the actual population (Statbel, 2020) to make sure this is actually the case. This is done in the graph below:

Graph 6: Comparison of percentages between respondents and actual population.



From this graph we notice that we have an over representation of respondents from Brussel, Flemish-Brabant and Walloon-Brabant. There is a very obvious underrepresentation for Antwerp and West-Flanders. All the other provinces are represented quite well compared to the actual population.

Language levels

Looking at the language levels based on the methodology we asked individuals how high they would rate themselves in their ability to speak Dutch, French, English, German and three other potential languages they could fill in themselves. We will briefly go over the results of the four main languages and then focus on French-Dutch bilingualism. The measurement scale is explained in the following table:

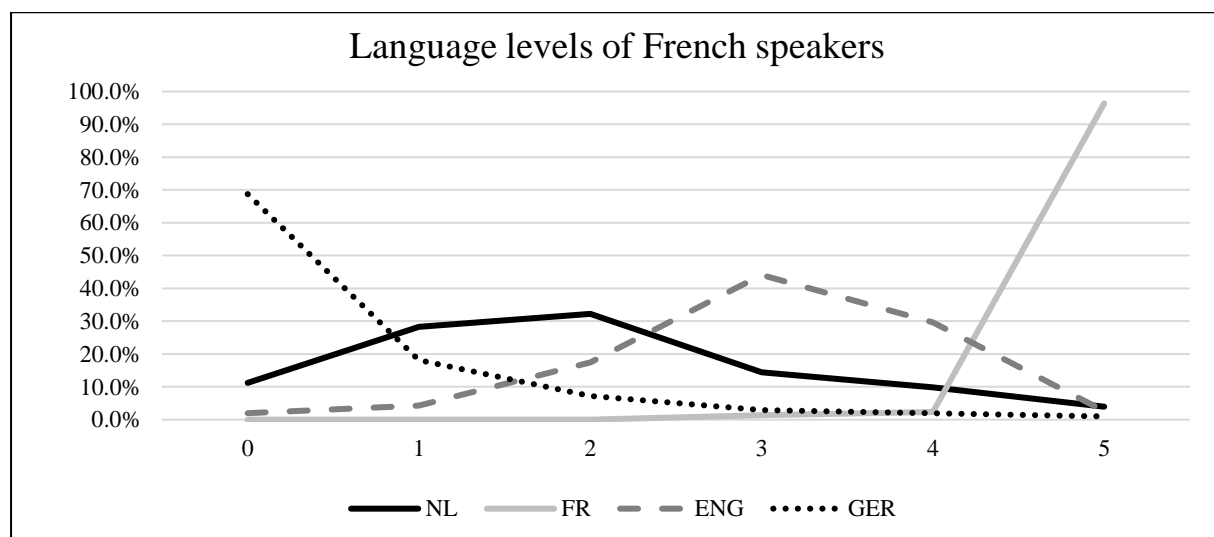
Table 2: The measurement level for linguistic abilities

0	I do not speak this language.
1	Beginner: Basic notions of this language, able to say a few sentences and introduce myself. Intermediate: Able to hold a conversation on daily topics and interact relatively well with native speakers.
2	More than intermediate: Able to express myself fluently on complicated matters.
3	Advanced: I rarely make mistakes in this language. I can talk on technical/academic level without issues. An accent can still be present, but it is barely noticeable.
4	I am a Native speaker or close to being a native speaker.

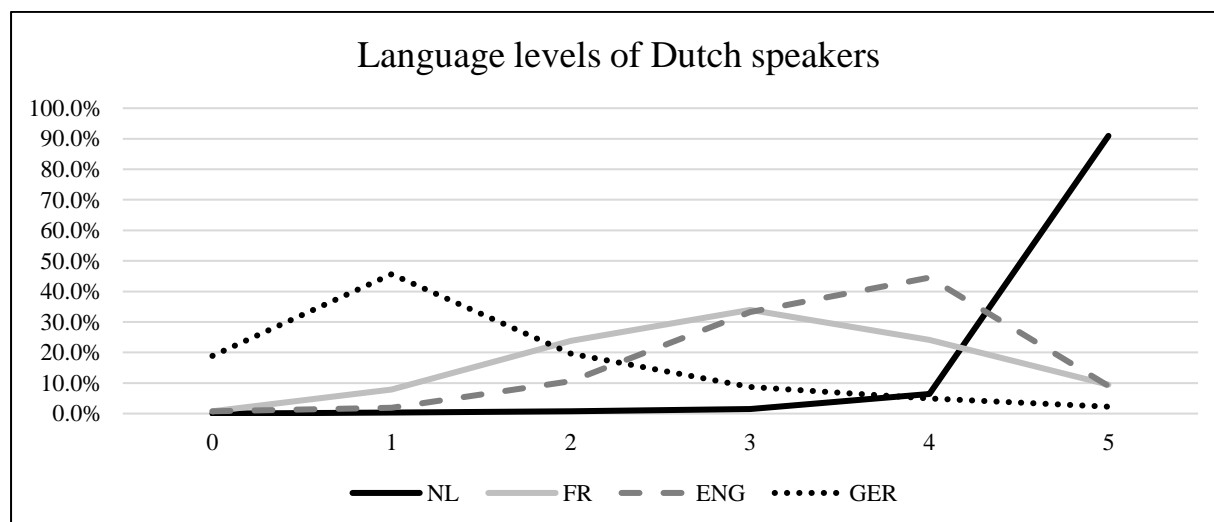
This measurement scale was partially based on the research into bilingualism by Dewaele and Sia (2006) and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), more specifically on the scales for spoken production and spoken interaction (Europass, 2013). Unlike Dewaele and Sia (2006) we focussed solely on the speaking aspect and not on listening or reading comprehension as we considered the speaking aspect the most important factor that

might influence interaction. The measurement levels used clearly distinguish non-speaker from speaker (0-1), and then further distinguished intermediate speaker (1-2) from proficient speaker (3-5). A mistake when researching bilingualism is the idea that “bilinguals have or should have equal and perfect fluency in each of their languages.” (Grosjean, 2008, P. 133). Individuals could already consider themselves proficient when they are able to use the language without issues in their daily lives (Dewaele & Sia, 2006). To make a clear distinction we considered that from level 3 onwards an individual masters the language enough to not be afraid to speak the language with others and in their daily lives (Grosjean, 2008), although this may vary from individual to individual. The language levels of French and Dutch speakers are summarised in the graphs below:

Graph 7: Language levels of French speakers



Graph 8: Language levels of Dutch speakers

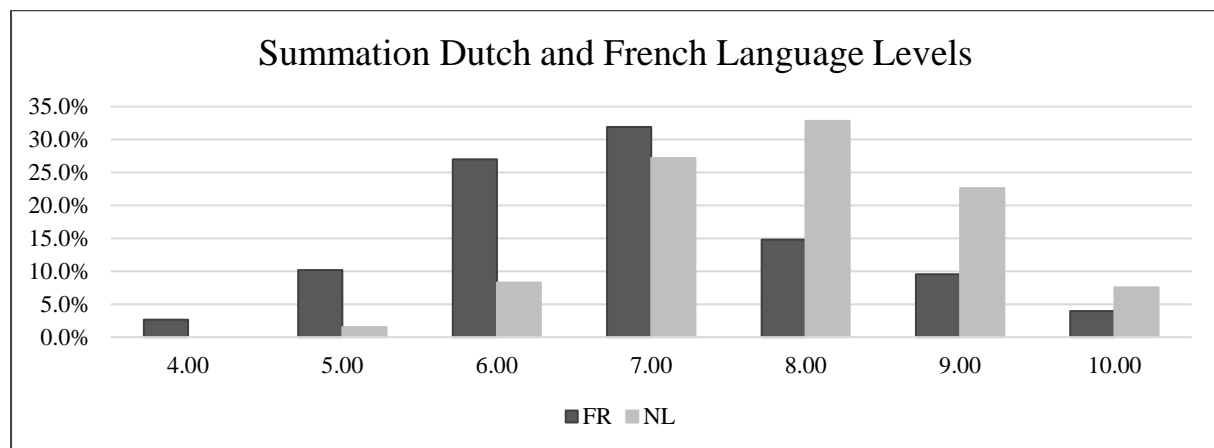


When looking at German it is clear that both the French speaking and Dutch speaking group do not really have a mastery of this language. We suspect that the slight higher number in Dutch speaking individuals is due to the close proximity of the language families (Blondin & Chenu, 2013). Some respondents put in their extra answer space that they were able to interact with German speakers, by merely speaking Dutch slowly, if they spoke German slowly in return. Looking at English it is notable that both the French speaking and Dutch speaking group speak this language better than each other's respective languages. This is understandable with the current importance of English in schools and our more globalised society (Janssens, 2018).

Finally when looking at French and Dutch we notice that the amount of Dutch speakers unable to speak French is significantly lower than the amount of French speakers unable to speak Dutch. This is easily explained by the education system, which is a competence decided by the language communities (Deschouwer, 2012). Brussels is a special case as it is mostly Francophone but Dutch is obligatory in Brussels schools (Janssens, 2018). The distinction between the Flemish who learn French from early on in primary school and the French-speaking who get the choice between English *or* Dutch (Blondin & Chenu, 2013) is very obvious from these graphs. There are two distinct hills for English and Dutch for the French speakers, while the hills for French and English, in the Dutch speaking graph coincide more.

This is part of the frustration for Flemish individuals, to be expected to learn French but that for the French speakers, Dutch is merely an “option” (Van De Craen, 2002). This frustration was also already apparent a century ago. To support his claim that Belgians did not exist Destrée used the annual statistics of 1900 pointing out the huge amount of individuals in Belgium that only spoke one language. The enormity of these numbers, compared to the number of bilingual and trilingual individuals are a definite proof for him that “there are in Belgium, Walloons and Flemish but no Belgians” (Destrée, 1912, p. 5).

In a same vein Deschouwer (2012) mentions that French-Dutch bilinguals that *In addition to that* are also able to speak English are still quite rare. To see to what extent an individual is bilingual we make a summation of respondents' levels of French and Dutch. This way there would be no confusion between which of the four languages one is bilingual or trilingual. The summation of these two variables gives a scale from 0-10, with 8-10 being considered bilingual, as the second language is at least at a level of 3. The results are below:

Graph 9: Summation of Dutch and French Language levels

After performing an independent samples T-test we can say that the means of levels of bilingualism for the different language groups, 6.90 and 7.89 for French speakers and Dutch speakers respectively, differ significantly. Indeed, the amount of Dutch-speaking individuals that is bilinguals is almost twice the size of the level of French-speakers who could be considered bilingual. We already mentioned that this distinction between Flemish individuals being expected to be bilingual from secondary school onwards, but Walloon individuals not being expected to do the same is part of the frustration of Flemish nationalists. We can however see that there is a vast improvement compared to the unilingualism of a century ago, even if there is a difference in the levels of bilingualism; the amount of individuals that is able to hold a simple conversation has vastly increased. This should aid interaction between francophones and Dutch-speakers when it takes place. We will now go to our results for our political variables, to see what the political attitudes are of respondents and what the differences and similarities are between the language groups.

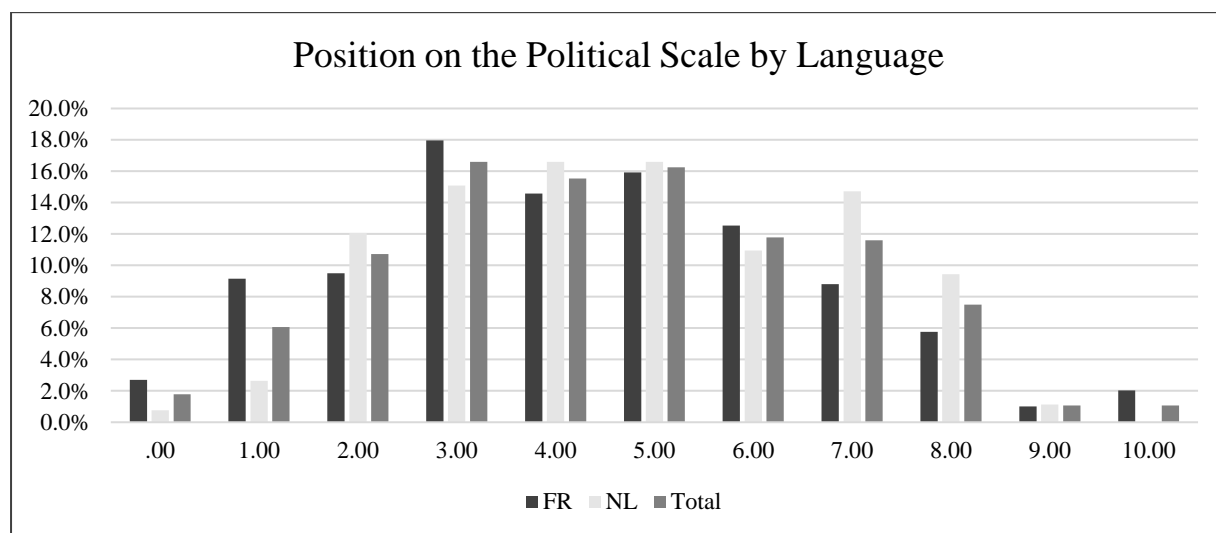
Politics

According to Thijssen et al. (2015) the evolution of “ethno-territorial” identities and preferences for certain political matters such as the division of competences is often also linked to broader political preferences and a number of classical sociodemographic variables such as age, gender and level of education. We have already gone over our sociodemographic variables in the previous section, now we will go over the three political matters respondents were asked, namely: how they would place themselves on a political scale, what their opinion is on all political parties represented in the Belgian government and lastly how they believe the political competences should be divided over the different governmental levels.

Political scale

We asked respondents their political position by asking: “*How would you place yourself on a political scale going from extreme left (0) to extreme right (10)?*”. The results for each language group are summarised in the following graph:

Graph 10: Position on the political Scale by Language



Doing an independent samples T-test we conclude that there is no significant difference (p-value: 0.018) between the means for French speakers (4.33) and Dutch speakers (4.76) when it comes to their position on the political scale. These results might come as a surprise when one considers the elections where we saw a strong difference in regards to how the language groups voted, with Wallonia voting more left wing and Flanders voting more right wing (Van de Calseyde, 2019). However, we can see that there are about 15% of Dutch speaking respondents in addition to about 10% of these respondents having answered 7 or 8, which while not extreme right is still on the right side of the political scale. That is almost a quarter of the Dutch speaking respondents considering themselves right wing. Just not extreme-right.

Interestingly, while there are no Dutch speaking respondents placing themselves extreme right (9 & 10), 3% of French speaking individuals indicated themselves as such. When we combine this with the amount of French speakers that voted 7 (8.8%) and 8 (5.8%), we get a total of 18% which is almost one fifth of the French speaking respondents being more right-wing. Considering respondents were asked to give themselves a score, their subjective positioning may not correspond with their objective positioning (Dalton, 2020). An individual placing himself on 7 may be considered extreme right by other individuals, and thus ‘*should*

have indicated' 10 in their eyes. Objective placement is not actually that important, what is important is how this translates into voting choices (Dalton, 2020).

Political parties

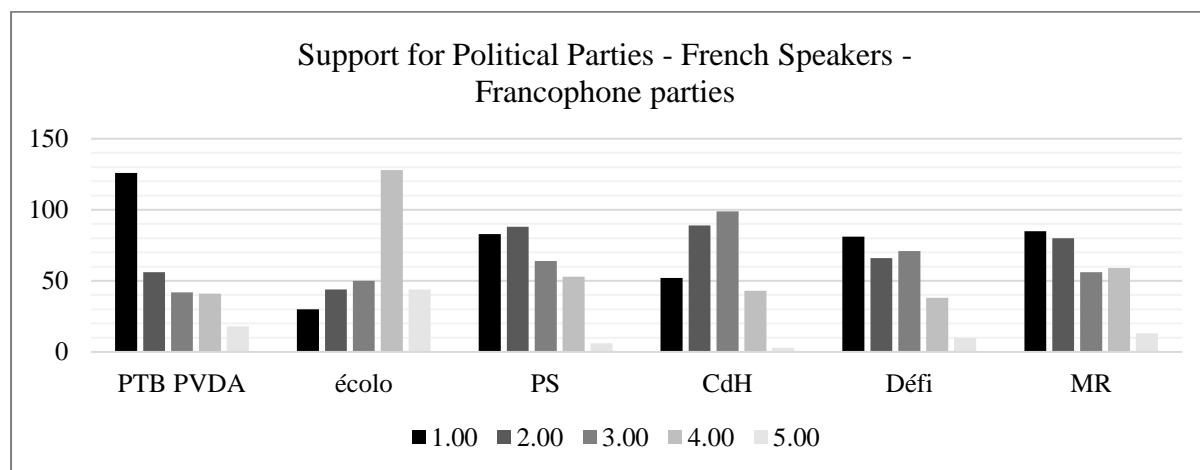
The support for the political parties was asked with the question: “How do you feel concerning the following political parties?” The results are difficult to compare to the elections as we did not exactly ask respondents to give a vote to their preferred party, but rather to give all parties a score. The measurement scale is summarised in the table below:

Table 3: Measurement scale of question on political parties.

1	I do not support this party at all
2	I do not support this party, except one or two topics on which I am neutral or agree.
3	I am completely neutral, with regards to this party
4	I support this party except one or two topics on which I am neutral or disagree.
5	I support this party completely
-1	I do not know the party (well), or do not know what they stand for.

First, we shall look at the support for the parties by the two language groups for each other’s respective political parties. Then we will look how respondents rated parties they could not vote for. The results of the respondents are shown below:

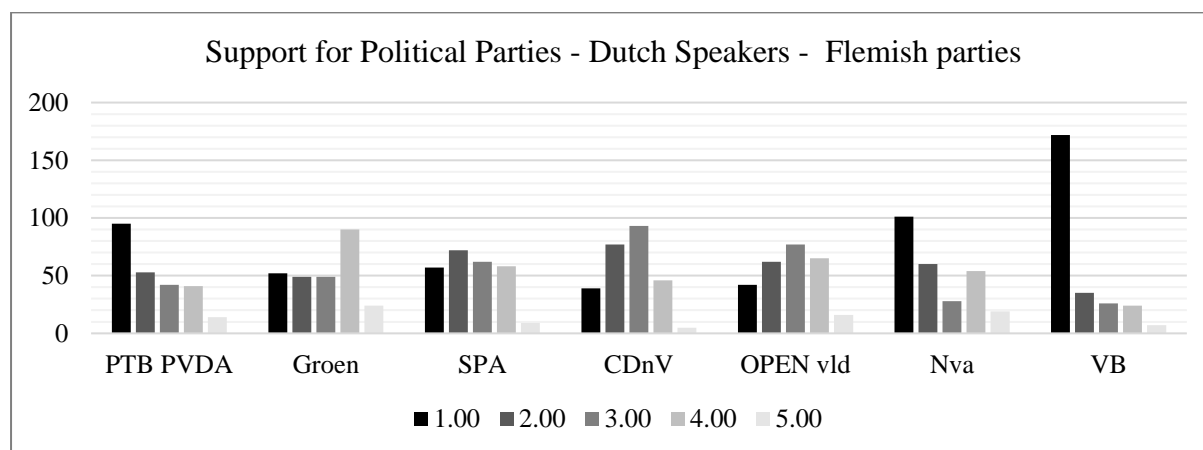
Graph 11: Support for political parties, French speakers on Francophone parties.



We immediately notice that the support for the workers party, PTB-PVDA, is quite low with 126 respondents stating they do not support this party at all and only 18 people who completely support this party. The party with the most support is écolo, the green party, with 44 respondents supporting it completely and 128 parties supporting it except on some levels.

When looking at the more traditional parties, the PS, the CdH and MR, we notice that their support is quite low, even though for CdH, most respondents tend towards neutrality. DéFi, formerly known as FDF, is a party that is linked more to the Brussels region (Jaumain, 2019), which could explain part of its lower support. Going over to the results for the Dutch-speakers in the graph below:

Graph 12: Support for political parties, Dutch speakers on Flemish parties.



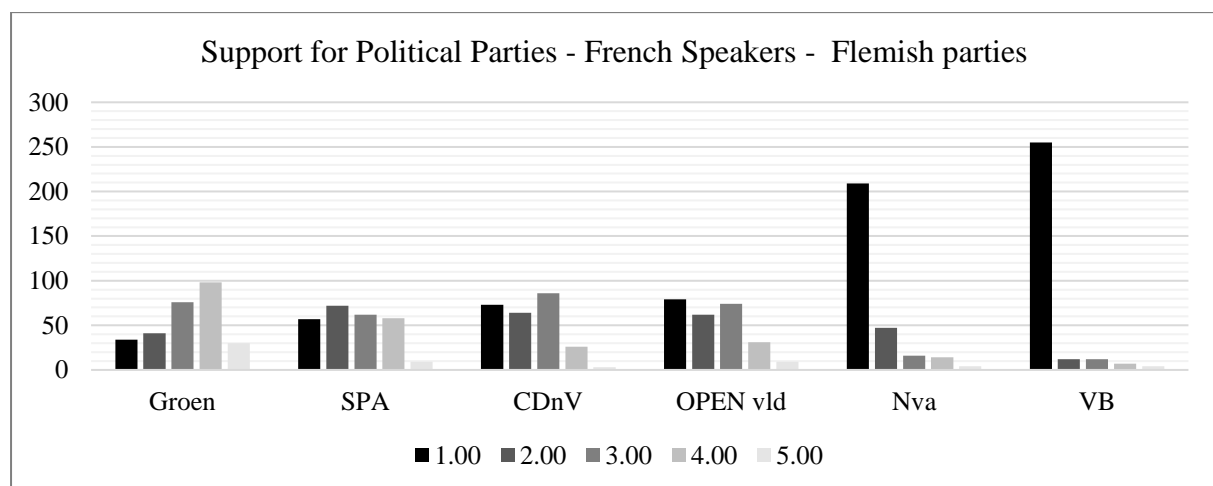
From this graph it is clear that the Vlaams Belang (VB), is not really supported by the Dutch-speaking respondents, with 172 individuals stating they do not support this party at all. Groen, the Green party on the Flemish side, seems to be the only party with obvious support having 24 individuals supporting it completely and 90 individuals supporting it except on some matters. For the other parties there seems to be a lack of clear support, with the Nva and PTB-PVDA rather leaning towards not being supported. The traditional parties, SPA, CDnV and Open VLD are not doing well either with most people being neutral or leaning towards no support. This is not surprising considering these traditional parties are seen as living in the past or not considered credible and trustworthy anymore (De Vadder, 2020).

What is interesting is that just like the political scale in previous section, this does not really reflect the most recent elections. There are only 31 respondents that support, or conditionally support the Vlaams Belang, amounting to 11.70% of our respondents. While the Vlaams Belang supporters consisted of 18% of the total Flemish population during the 2019 elections (Santens, 2019). There are three possible explanations as to why this may be: the first one is that it is because the sample has an overrepresentation of younger individuals, who tend to be more progressive (Dalton, 2020). However in Flanders there has also been a surge of right-wing in the younger generation with right wing conservative student-organisations such as KHVH and “Schild en Vriend” gaining more members (Cools & Dekeyser, 2018).

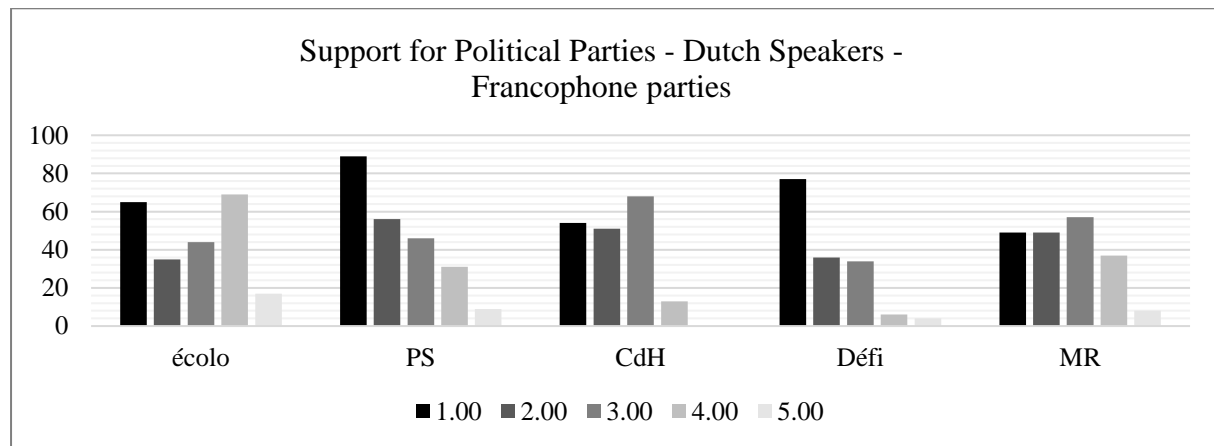
A second explanation might be that we missed the right wing Flemish voter by going about our distribution the wrong way. We initially suspected that with a survey looking at “Belgian” identity it might potentially be complicated to reach more right-wing nationalistic individuals that would not consider themselves to be Belgian in the first place. Even though their Flemish identity is a “Belgian identity” as well. A last explanation could be that despite having voted for the Vlaams Belang during the election it is not the party of preference of these people, but merely part of strategic voting (Verthé et al., 2015) or an anti-establishment vote (Henry et al., 2015) and that the actual support for the Vlaams Belang is way lower than we would expect, as seen in this graph.

We have also asked respondents to state how they felt about parties they could not vote for, in order to see to what degree individuals were informed on parties that are represented on the federal level. The results of the Dutch opinion on francophone parties and the Francophone opinion on Flemish parties can be seen below:

Graph 13: Support for political parties, French speakers on Flemish parties.



From this graph it is very obvious that the Nva and Vlaams Belang can not count on any support of Francophones. More than 200 and 250 respondents respectively, stated they do not support those parties at all. Which makes sense considering both parties solely focus on the improvement of the Flemish vis a vis their Francophone counterparts in Belgium (Jaumain, 2019). For the other parties the results seem quite similar to what the Dutch-speaking respondents answered: Groen is lightly supported, and the traditional parties were neutral and rather negatively supported.

Graph 14: Support for political parties, Dutch speakers on Francophone parties.

Unlike the other graphs, while there is still a strong amount of respondents in favour of the green party, *écolo*, there is also strong representation against the party with 65 respondents stating they do not support the party at all. That is 13 more individuals than the amount of Flemish individuals against the Flemish green party. The PS and *Défi*, seem to receive the strongest negative support, while individuals mostly seem neutral or negative when it comes to MR and CdH.

Since a government in Belgium automatically means a coalition government it often takes a lot of time to be formed (Deschouwer, 2012; Verthé et al., 2015). A prime example of this would be after the federal elections in June of 2010 where the people of Belgium went 541 days without a federal government, breaking the world record of the longest duration to form a government. In addition to the governments taking a long time to be formed the survival rate is not very high (Deschouwer, 2012). It must be said that the fact that not all parties have equivalents on both sides of the linguistic barrier does not simplify matters (De Jonge, 2020).

The fact, that one can not vote for parties in the other region, does not help. However if this were the case, the risk that the Flemish, who are a majority in the country, would politically overpower the Walloons would pop up once more. Which is an issue brought up already in Destrée (1912)'s letter to the king, frustrated by the fact that the Catholics had won a majority in the government once more due to the religious, but especially majoritarian Flemish (Van Ginderachter, 2012). This difference of political support lead to Destrée proposing to split the country in 1912, but in current times right wing parties, such as the Nva and VB, also like to use this troublesome coalition making as an argument to simplify the system with proposals of a Swiss system (Noels, 2019), confederalism or regional independence (De Monie, 2019). To what extend are these proposals supported by the respondents, however?

Division of political competences

The questions of the political competences were based on both the research by Thijsen et al. (2015) and Swyngedouw & Rink (2008) asking the question: “Concerning the division of competences in Belgium, should we; return to unitarism (1), re-federalise (2), leave everything as it is (3), de-federalise (4), move towards separatism (5) or another proposition? (6)” the results are summarised in the following table:

Table 4: Regarding the division of political competences in Belgium what should be done?

	Frequencies	Percentages
Back to Unitarism: Bring all competences back to the Belgian level	142	24.96%
Re-federalise: Bring some competences back to the Belgian level	258	45.34%
Leave everything as it is: Do not change any competences	27	4.75%
De-federalise: Give more competences to the regions	44	7.73%
Towards separatism: All competences to the regions	29	5.10%
Another proposal?	69	12.13%
Total	N=569	100.00%

Swyngedouw and Rink (2008) state that the answers of the respondents differ quite noticeably depending on what is, and is not added as an option in the question related to the division of competences. To resolve this we added the possibility for individuals to add their own proposals if they felt the other answers did not quite match what they believed the division of competences and related should be. This did require recoding afterwards as the sixth measurement level on the scale would normally indicate something that is beyond confederalism or separatism, which is not really possible. When studying the proposals given by individuals, we used coding as advised by Gilbert & Stoneman (2016) and (Stuckey, 2015) to group these answers into different categories, partially based on the research by Swyngedouw and Rink (2008). The codes recoded into the data are the following:

Table 5: Codes recoded into the data file.

Primary codes	secondary codes
1 Return to Unitarism	
2 Re-federalise	
3 Change nothing	De-federalise and re-federalise
5 All competences to regions	Confederalism Split up Reunite with the Netherlands/France/Benelux

The first five codes used were “a priori-codes” (Stuckey, 2015): answers which fall under the already proposed answers: “Go back to unitarism”, “re-federalise”, “leave

everything as it is” and *“go towards separatism”*. We did not include *“De-federalise”* (4) seeing as none of the answers given fell under that code. Some emerging primary codes include: *“Missing”*, *“Changing the levels of government”*, *“The swiss model”*, *“moving competences to the European Union”* and *“more direct democracy”*. These are summarised in the following table and were recoded as missings due to not fitting into the measurement model:

Table 6: Codes recoded as missings.

Primary codes	secondary codes
-1 Missing	Change nothing to competences but other proposal
-2 Changing the levels of government	Remove the communities, more strength to the regions Remove provinces Strengthen the provinces level
-3 Swiss model	Remove the communities, more strength to the regions Confederalism-light
-4 Moving competences to Europe	After becoming unitary again After regionalising/splitting up
-5 More direct democracy	

Less than ten respondents answered that they had no opinion, or not enough information to answer this question. Other respondents gave proposals that were not immediately related to the competences such as making sure everyone is bilingual, or giving more power to the king, these were recoded as missings as well. The code *“changing the levels of government”* was added after the creations of the codes as an umbrella for individuals who believed the provincial level should be removed, or strengthened in exchange for removing the communities or regional levels of government.

There were three respondents vouching for the Swiss model, the idea that Belgium could learn something from Switzerland. Another code that came up often was the idea of moving competences to the European Union. Although, there is a distinction to be made: some answers mentioned first splitting up Belgium into its region and moving federal competences completely to the European Union, thus advocating a federal European Union. Others proposed to return towards unitarism and then move “problematic” competences to this supranational level. A last code to describe some answers is the idea of direct democracy, a lot of answers actually stated the system needs to be simplified with more of a say for citizens, the answers that fall under this label advocated a complete change of the current system, a “revolution” almost, to then replace it by different proposals of more direct democracy.

After the categorisation of the different proposals given by the 6th measurement level, I thus recoded these to fall under the original 5 levels they are closest to, or as missings. Giving the following frequency tables:

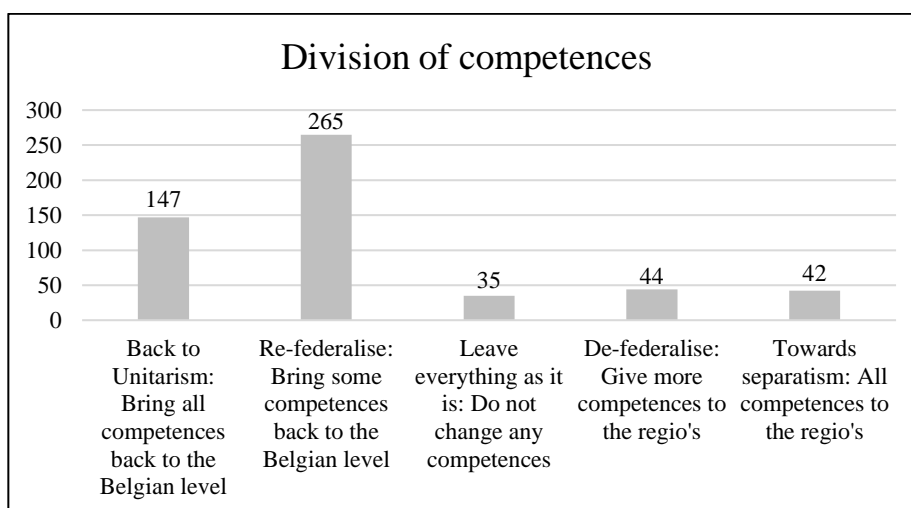
Table 7: Support for the division of competences over different levels

Division of competences	Frequency	Percent
Back to Unitarism: Bring all competences back to the Belgian level	147	25.83%
Re-federalise: Bring some competences back to the Belgian level	265	46.57%
Leave everything as it is: Do not change any competences	35	6.15%
De-federalise: Give more competences to the regions	44	7.73%
Towards separatism: All competences to the regions	42	7.38%
Total	533	93.67%

Table 8: Missings

Missings	Frequency	Percent
Missing N/A	14	2.46%
Change levels of government	10	1.76%
Swiss model	3	0.53%
Moving competences to Europe	5	0.88%
Direct democracy	4	0.70%
Total	36	6.33%

Graph 15: Support for the division of competences over different levels



Looking at the results of the division of competences we can see that there is not that much support for separatism and confederalism. Only 42 respondents indicated they wished all competencies to be regionalised. 44 individuals wished that some competencies be returned to the regions but not all. These groups are very small compared to the 265 individuals who wished to re-federalise and the 147 individuals who wished to bring most competences back to the Belgian level. It is important to note that the support competence division such as

separatism and in this case, unitarism, is very dependent on the current affairs and issues the country is going through (Spoormakers, 2019). For example, when the issue of the social benefits is mediatised, and the transfers from Flanders to Wallonia, are being discussed, the support for regionalising competences tends to go up (Van De Craen, 2002).

In this way the author suspect that the current COVID-19 pandemic might have been a factor to take into account when looking at the results of the competence distribution. There have been voices that are in favour of re-federalising healthcare, such as notably Maggie De Block, the current health minister of Belgium (Paelinck, 2020) in addition to most of the Francophone parties (Chardon, 2020). Other voices seem to state that re-federalising is naïve (Brinckman, 2020), and that regionalising the competence would be the better solution (Paelinck, 2020). Some, such as Sinardet, states that the pandemic has been handled surprisingly well, with the regions putting the same measures in place and thus working quite well together (Royen, 2020). It is thus unclear to what degree it might have influenced the responses, if it did.

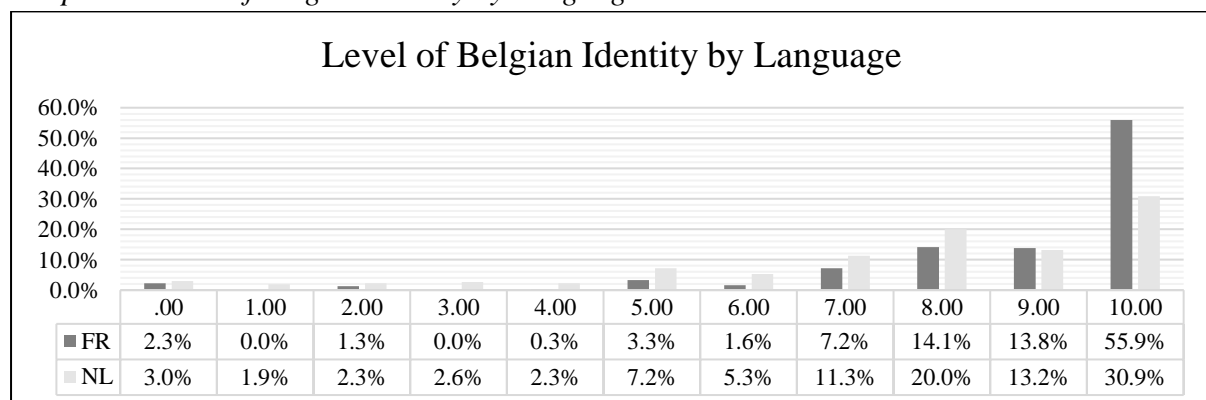
Identity

For identity, we asked the question: “*How European / Belgian / Flemish / Walloon / Brussels do you feel on a scale from 0 (not at all) to 10 (completely)?*” We will start by going over Belgian identity which is our main dependent variable in our research. Following this we will look at the regional identities and the European identity levels.

Belgian identity

Considering we mentioned in the literature that there is an obvious lack of Belgian identity the results of our question on Belgian identity might be quite surprising:

Graph 16: Level of Belgian identity by Language.



Indeed, we immediately notice that most respondents are concentrated on the right side of the graphical representation. The score for the identity levels below five never reaches above 3%. With 3.9% of Francophones and 12.1% of Flemish respondents indicating they feel less than 5 on the scale. From the graphical representation itself we do not immediately notice a big difference between Francophone and Flemish individuals. Only when asking whether respondents feel completely Belgian is there a difference of 20%.

Table 9: Mean and Standard Deviation of Belgian Identity by Language

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
French Speaking	304	8.78	2.05
Dutch Speaking	265	7.58	2.62

To investigate whether these differences are significant we applied an independent sample T-test and we can see from the table below that the difference is significant.

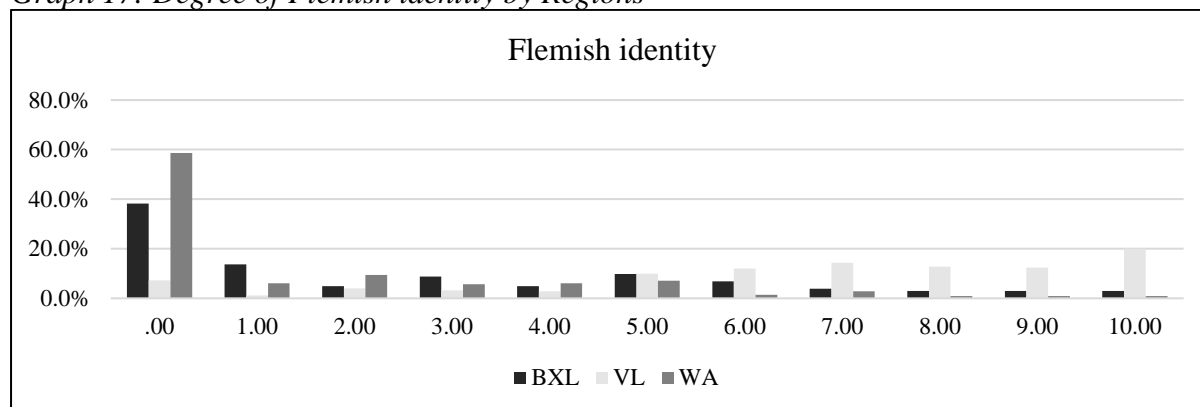
Table 10: Independent sample T-test: Belgian identity by Language

T-test for Equality of Means	Sig. (2-tailed)
5.966	0.000

Regional identities

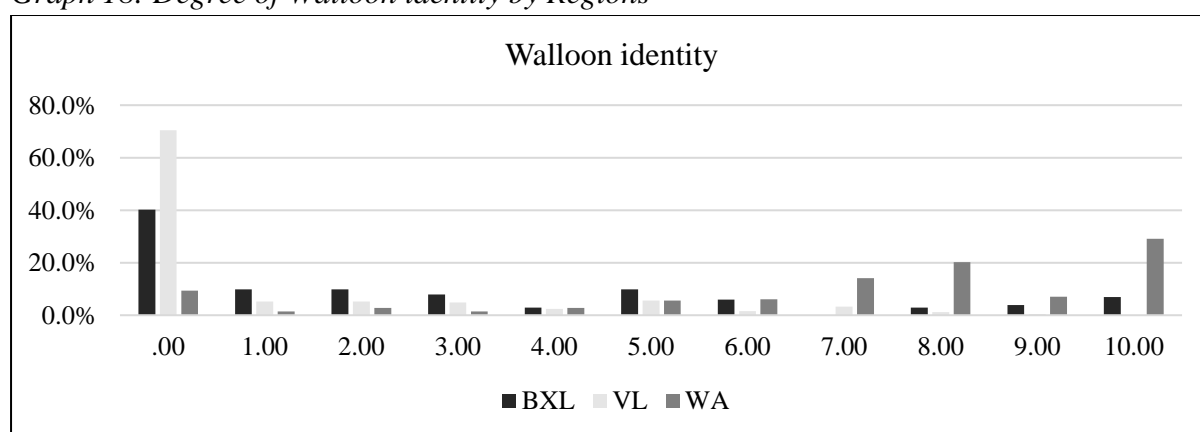
While for all the other graphs we have mostly compared the two different language groups, for these regional identity graphs we compared the different regions, as to take into account the Brussels identity that was discussed in the literature review. In addition we also considered it might be interesting to see to what degree respondents might still feel a certain degree of Flemish identity, due to the geographical position of Brussels, or Walloon identity due to the shared language. We see the results for the degree of Flemish identity below:

Graph 17: Degree of Flemish identity by Regions



We can see that 20% of the Flemish respondents has a strong Flemish identity and that the other measurement levels between 5 and 9 also correspond to each between 10-15% of the Flemish respondents respectively. What is quite interesting is that only 60% of the Walloons and 40% of the Brussels respondents indicated that they do not identify at all with the Flemish identity. There is thus 40% of Walloons and 60% of Brussels respondents that identifies at least a little with Flemish identity. A likely explanation for Brussels is that these are Flemish individuals who went to work and/or live in Brussels. A quick analysis of the extra answers given in the question “Do you have anything to add about these questions about identity” reveals that some people selected Flemish as an extra identity because they were born or lived in Flanders, had Flemish family or origins, or are simply interested in Flemish culture. The Level of Walloon identity is summarised in the graph below:

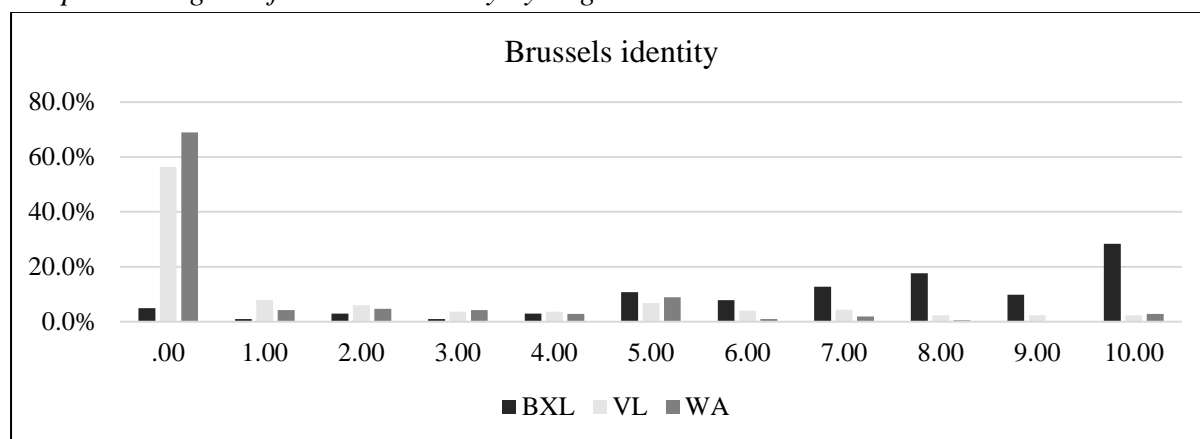
Graph 18: Degree of Walloon identity by Regions



From this graph we clearly see that there is also quite the strong Walloon identity, with 30% of the Walloon respondents having answered they identify completely with the identity. A light difference with the Flemish identity graph is the fact that the spread over the following

measurement levels is not as even. When we compare how the other regions feel this Walloon identity we see that 70% of Flemish and 60% of Brussels individuals indicated they have no Walloon identity at all. The Flemish respondents who indicated they had some Walloon identity, did not add an explanation for this. We suspect this will be due to similar reasons as Walloon respondents that indicated some level of Flemish identification. That respondents who live in Brussels feel quite Walloon can again be explained by Walloons having come to live or work in Brussels.

Graph 19: Degree of Brussels identity by Regions



Looking at this graph we see that there is quite a strong Brussels identification for respondents living in Brussels and not that many of them indicating they feel a low level of Brussels identity. We already mentioned in the section on identity that a true Brussels identity is developing as it is not enough to simply see it as a combination of the linguistic groups in Belgium anymore (Janssens, 2018; Sinardet et al., 2017). This proves that this is indeed the case. Looking at people living in Flanders we see that about 55% of Flemish and about 70% of the Walloons do not identify with the Brussels identity. As we mentioned in the previous two paragraph we suspect these are individuals who have come to live or work in Brussels. In the table below we find the summary of the means for each region and identity:

Table 11: Means and Standard deviations for Regional Identity by Region

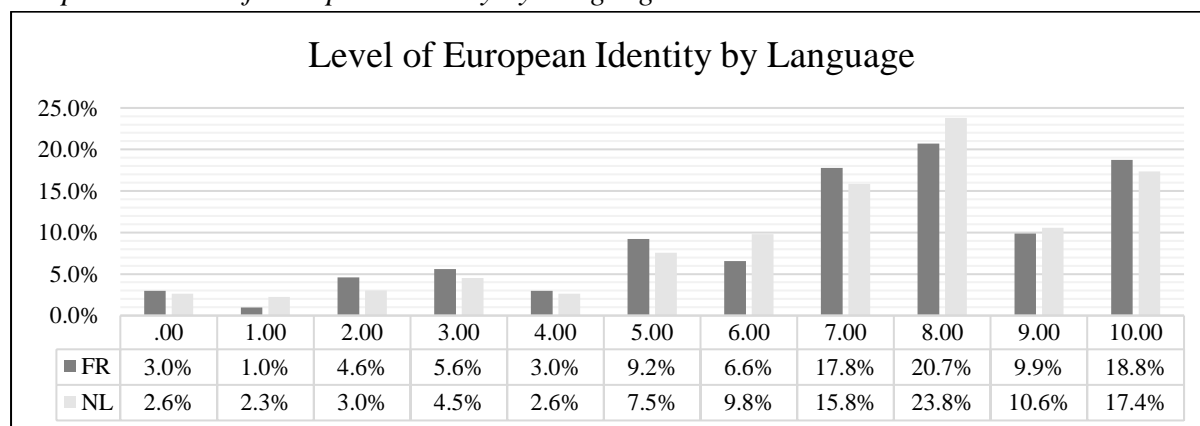
		Flemish identity	Brussels Identity	Walloon Identity
Flemish	Mean	6.67	1.99	1.13
	Std. Deviation	2.93	2.91	2.11
Brussels	Mean	2.67	7.25	2.76
	Std. Deviation	2.99	2.75	3.26
Walloon	Mean	1.55	1.33	7.02
	Std. Deviation	2.34	2.43	3.12

From this table it is quite notable that of all the regional identities the mean of the Flemish identity is the lowest, with 6.67 compared to 7.25 and 7.02 for the Brussels and Walloon identity respectively. This is strange considering we expected the Flemish to have a stronger regional identity, seeing as they are the only region with separatist parties (De Jonge, 2020). Interesting is also that the Brussels identity is the strongest of the three regional identities.

European Identity

We already discussed in our literature review that the European Identity is something very self-evident to most Belgians, never really questioned (Deschouwer, 2012). The question is not whether Belgians identify as European, but rather to what extent do Belgians identify as European. Some respondents commented that they felt European on a geographical level and not an identification with the European Union. However it will be hard for us to distinguish this matter, as we simply asked the level of “European identity”.

Graph 20: Level of European Identity by Language.



This graph supports what we have stated earlier. Only 2.6% and 3% of the Dutch speakers and French-speakers respectively does not consider themselves European at all. Interesting to note is that there does not seem to be a lot of difference between the linguistic groups on the matter of European identity.

Table 12: Mean and Standard Deviation of European Identity by Language

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
French speaking	304	6.91	2.62
Dutch speaking	265	6.99	2.54

While these means are very similar we shall still analyse these with an independent sample T-test to see whether they are significant. The results are seen below:

Table 13: Independent sample T-test: European identity by Language

t-test for Equality of Means	Sig. (2-tailed)
-0.37	0.71

The P-value (0.71) is higher than 0.05 and thus these means are not significantly different. The level of “Europeanness” of French and Dutch speaking respondents is very similar.

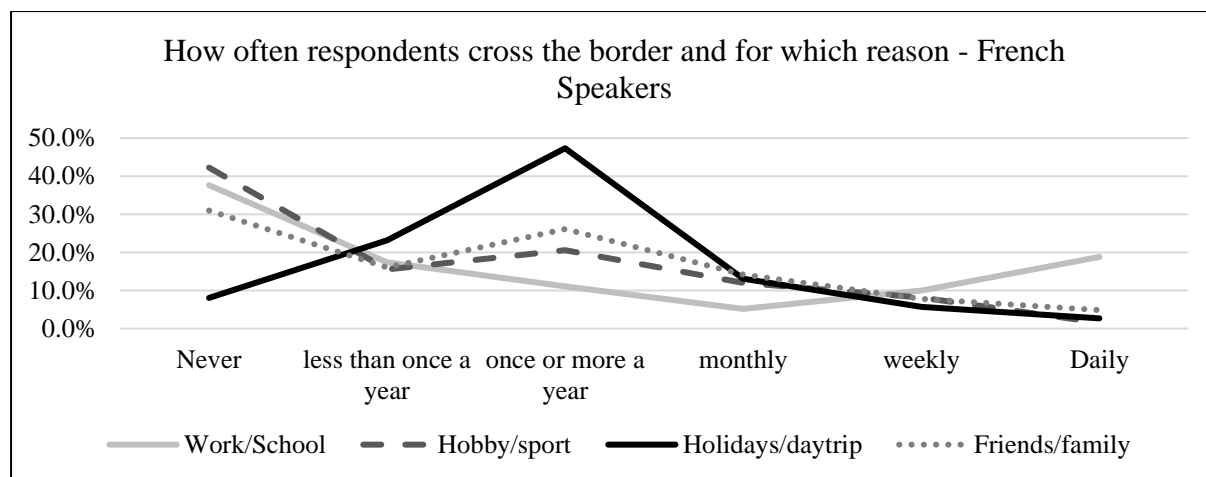
Contact

Contact is our main independent variable in our research. Our main hypothesis states that if contact between Flemish and Walloons increased their Belgian identity should increase as well. There are very different ways individuals can be in contact with one another. We distinguish three main forms of contact namely: Contact by crossing the linguistic border, contact by personal interaction and lastly contact by media interaction. Each of these still has some sub-variables such as where this contact takes place and/or for which reason. The combination of these variables forms our latent variable “Contact” which will be used in our structural equation model.

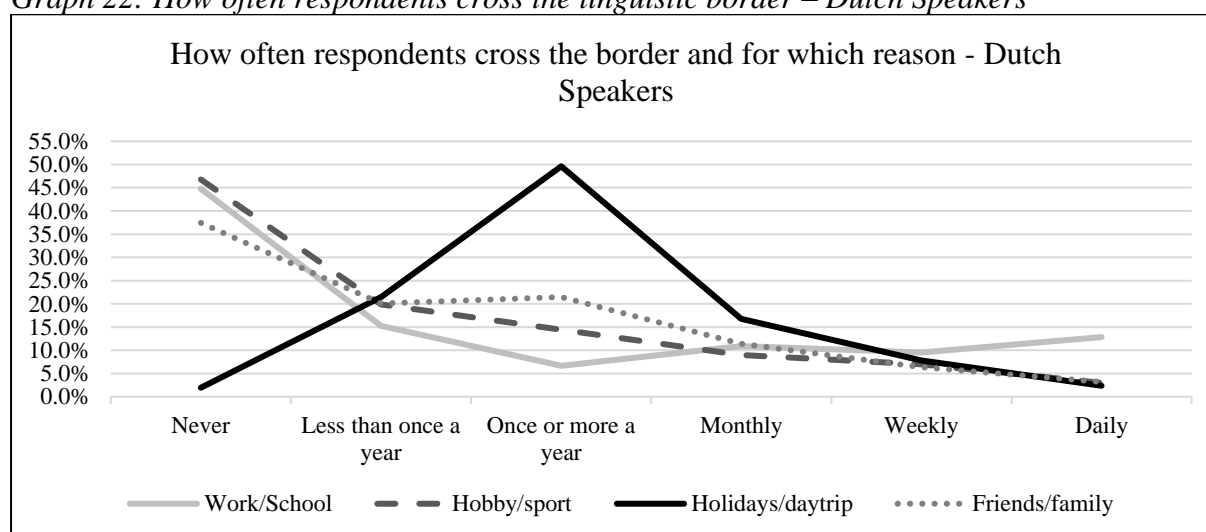
Cross border contact

Our variables to look at cross border contact have been strongly based on the research of Thijssen et al. (2015). This variable was asked with the following question: “*How often do you cross the border for the following reasons? Work/School/Uni – Hobby/Sport – Holiday/Daytrip – Friends/Family* on a scale from 0 (*never*) to 5 (*daily*). The levels between 0 and 5 could be considered somewhat ambiguous so these are defined as “*Less than once a year*” (1), “*Once or more a year*” (2), “*Monthly*” (3), “*Weekly*” (4). Thijssen et al. (2015) limited their research to whether individuals crossed the border for holidays, to visit friends or to go shopping. There might be some overlap, for example: you could go shopping and consider that a holiday, which is why daytrips and holidays were combined. Besides this the author found that there is a lack of representation of the individuals who cross the border for work or education. Taking this into account gives us the following two graphs:

Graph 21: How often respondents cross the linguistic border – French Speakers



Graph 22: How often respondents cross the linguistic border – Dutch Speakers



Another difference with Thijssen et al. (2015) is that they did longitudinal research with data sets from 2007 and 2014. As we have only one data set we cannot do this. However we could compare our results: in general, the interregional contacts decreased. Crossing borders for holiday more than once a year decreased from 55.6% to 48.2% for Walloons and 53.6% to 41.2% for Flemish individuals. Visiting friends decreased from 34.2% to 19.1% for Walloons and 24.5% to 17.3% for Flemish respondents (Thijssen et al., 2015).

Adding up the percentages of the individuals that crossed the border once a year or more for the categories of holidays and friends and families enables us to compare these results of 2014 with ours in 2020. We found that 76.56% of Dutch speaking respondents and 68.79% of Walloon respondents crossed the border for holidays, an increase of 35.36% and 20.59% respectively. For visiting friends we calculated 42.47% for Dutch speakers and 52.99% for French speakers, an increase of 25.17% and 33.89% respectively. It is important to take into

account that we included the Brussels respondents in these calculations, which makes our comparison not completely equal.

A factor that likely also plays a role is the amount of individuals that lives close to the linguistic border. The lack of West-Flemish and Antwerp representation, provinces further from the linguistic border might explain this huge increase in interaction. Not all of this difference is explained by sampling issues, it is thus fair to say that there has been an increase in cross border interaction since 2014. A last distinction with Thijssen et al. (2015) is that they use this as sole interaction variable while it is perfectly possible to cross the border but not interact with individuals on the other side of the border which brings us to our following variables.

Personal contact

While someone must have crossed a border to have Walloon-Flemish interaction, we still considered it a good idea to inquire to what frequency this interaction took place. This was asked with the following question: “How often do you interact with Dutch-speakers/French-speakers during the following occasions: *Work/School/Uni – Hobby/Sport – Holiday/Daytrip – Friends/Family* on a scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*daily*). Here the levels between 1 and 5 correspond to “*Rarely*” (2), “*Sometimes*” (3), and “*Often*” (4). We also added a clarification to interaction as the following: “Interaction is seen as verbal and non-verbal communication with someone in person or online, by for example E-mail or mobile communication.” The Descriptive statistics of this variable are seen below:

Table 14: Descriptive statistics of Cross border variables

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Work/School/Uni	French Speaking	283.00	3.04	1.59
	Dutch Speaking	232.00	3.32	1.52
Hobby/Sport	French Speaking	256.00	2.00	1.10
	Dutch Speaking	215.00	2.28	1.34
Holiday/daytrip	French Speaking	279.00	2.28	0.90
	Dutch Speaking	251.00	2.80	1.00
Friends/family	French Speaking	270.00	2.42	1.35
	Dutch Speaking	244.00	2.74	1.44

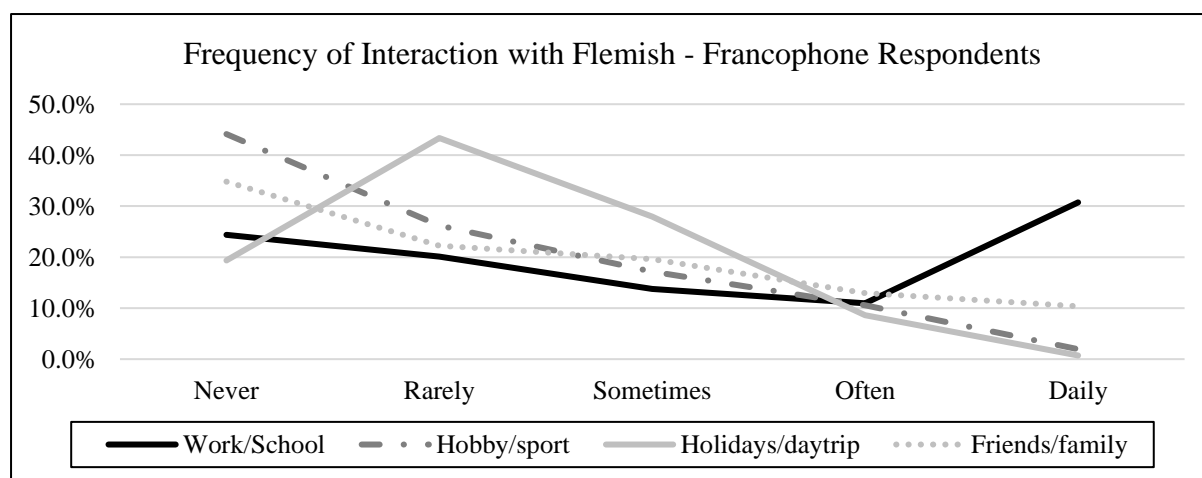
The majority of the variables seem to have a mean between 2 (Rarely) and 3 (Sometimes), except for work and school where the means of both French and Dutch speakers is between 3 (sometimes) and 4 (often). We use a T-test to see whether these means differ significantly:

Table 15: Independent Samples T-test – Personal contact

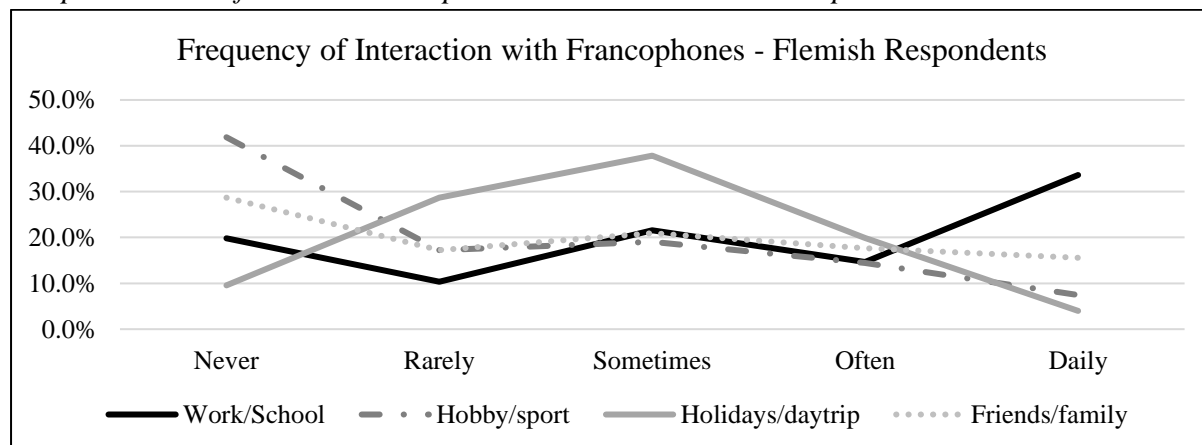
	t-test for Equality of Means	Sig. (2-tailed)
Work/school	0.158	0.040
Hobby/Sport	0.000	0.013
Holiday/daytrip	0.166	0.000
Friends/family	0.177	0.009

According to the T-test all means differ significantly, meaning the perceived frequency that Dutch-speakers interact with French-speakers is meaningful. The graphical depiction of the distribution is seen below:

Graph 23: How often Francophone respondents interact with Flemish people



Graph 24: How often Flemish respondents interact with Francophones



A very obvious factor to take into account here once more is the role of Brussels. A big majority of the Flemish interaction with Francophones likely corresponds to interaction with individuals from Brussels in Brussels or Flanders. To measure this we asked respondents to indicate where this interaction most often takes place, with the results summarised in the following table:

Table 16: Where interaction takes place according to Language:

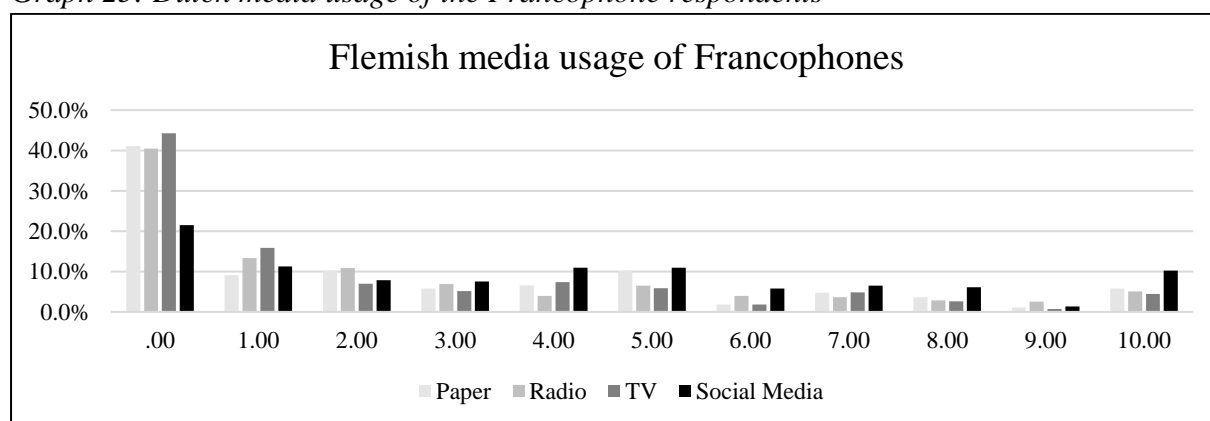
	Flanders	Brussels	Wallonia
French Speakers	163.00	168.00	83.00
Dutch Speakers	127.00	151.00	88.00

We can see that there is almost half the amount of respondents less that indicated Wallonia as meeting place for interaction. This lack of interaction on the Walloon part is strange considering our earlier statistics, where they were slightly more likely to be Belgian. This might support Thijssen et al. (2015) second hypothesis that more interaction would lead to stronger ethnic-regional identification. The is the opposite of our hypothesis. It will be interesting to see how this plays out in our structural equation model.

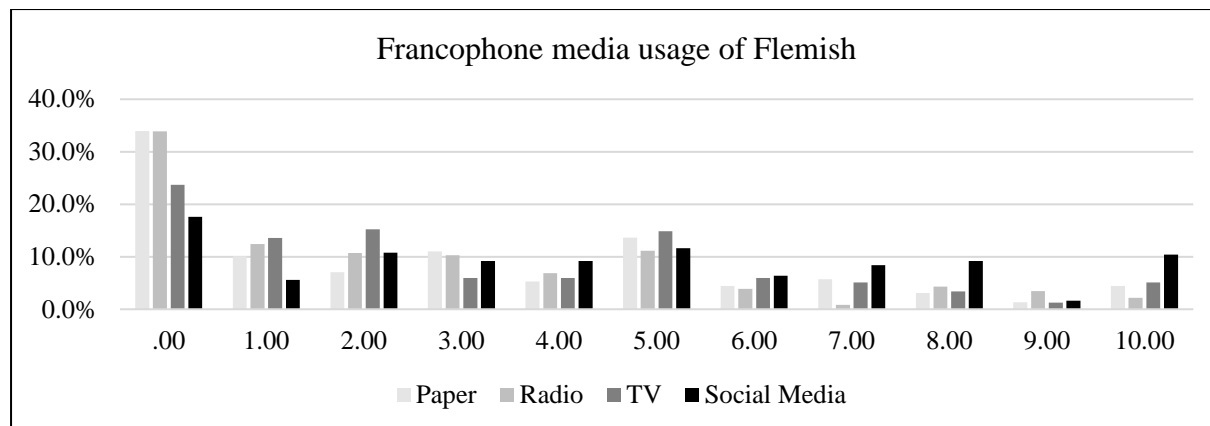
Media contact

An important part of interaction is also how often one interacts with the media on the other side of the linguistic barrier. Sinardet (2013) talks about how the media in Belgium are divided over the communities and that this lack of public sphere may lead to a democratic deficit as the entire population is not equally informed over the same matters. We asked to what extend Francophone/Dutch-speaking respondents interacted with Francophone/Flemish media with the following question: “To what degree do you come in contact with Francophone/Flemish news/publicity/entertainment while using any of the following media: Newspaper/Radio/Television/Social Media on a scale from 0 (never) to 10 (daily)?” The results are seen in the graphs below:

Graph 25: Dutch media usage of the Francophone respondents



Graph 26: Francophone media usage of the Dutch-speaking respondents



We notice a similar spread for both the graphs with some small differences. One of them would be in the amount of people that do not interact with newspapers and radio in the other language at all. With about 30% of Dutch-speaking respondents not interacting with traditional Francophone media compared to 40% of Francophones with Dutch-media. The descriptive statistics are seen below:

Table 17: Descriptive statistics of Media Contact variables

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Newspaper	French Speaking	275	2.65	3.10
	Dutch Speaking	227	2.94	2.98
Radio	French Speaking	277	2.49	3.07
	Dutch Speaking	233	2.64	2.81
Television	French Speaking	271	2.21	2.90
	Dutch Speaking	236	3.20	2.94
Social media	French Speaking	293	3.92	3.29
	Dutch Speaking	250	4.39	3.24

Most of the means seem to be between 2 and 3 which is not that often. Social media, which makes our world more connected and smaller does seem to have a good influence as the means are closer to 4 for both Francophones and Dutch speakers. We will now see whether those differences are significant.

Table 18: Independent Samples T-test – Media contact

	t-test for Equality of Means	Sig. (2-tailed)
Newspaper	-1.052	0.293
Radio	-0.552	0.581
Television	-3.837	0.000
Social media	-1.672	0.095

Interestingly, only the media on television usage is significantly different for the two language groups. We suspect this can be partially explained by the influence of France’s linguistic protectionism when it comes to movies (Danan, 1991). Belgians are able to enjoy

French movies or Hollywood movies dubbed in French, while the same desire to dub movies does not exist in Flanders and the Netherlands. Danan (1991) does point out that in Belgium most movies are distributed with subtitles in both Flemish and French, this is thus just a potential explanation. So while Francophones may not have been in contact with Dutch traditional media as Dutch-speakers with Francophone traditional media, on social media there has been some more interaction. Social media effectively negates geographical distance and should theoretically bring people closer together.

Latent Variable Contact

Due to very different results on these variables we used a factorial analysis to reduce the model into one latent variable: “*Contact*”. The factor analysis takes into account to what extend each individual variable plays a role in the finished variable, unlike the means method or summation method, which assumes that each variable has the same influence in the latent variable. The descriptive statistics of our variable are the following:

Table 19: Descriptive statistics of Latent variable - Contact

N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
569.00	-1.89	3.70	0.00

While the amount of explained variance of each variable will be statistically accurate, the main critique of this method is that the variable becomes hard to interpret. The scale of this variable goes from -1.89 to 3.70, and we can assume that the closer a respondent is to 3.70, the higher it scores on the contact variables, and thus has more intra-regional contact.

Opinion

On the variables related to opinion we first look at how different respondents consider the Flemish and Walloons to be from the neighbouring people speaking the same language. Following this we look at how respondents replied to Allports variables. The combination of these Allport variables will be used in our Structural equation model.

Differences Regions and Neighbouring peoples

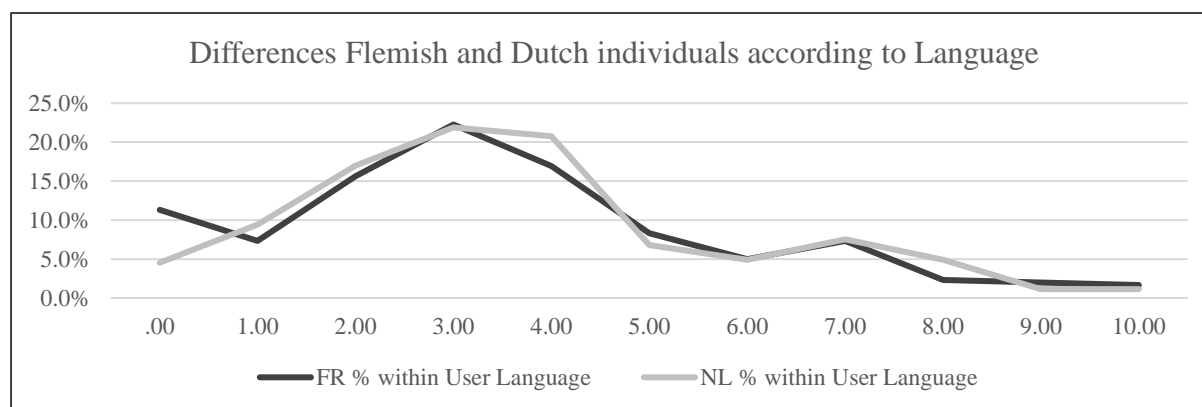
In my introduction we started by discussing the idea of a greater-Netherlands and re-attachment to France for Wallonia. This idea was also proposed by some individuals on the question of the division of competences. Now we will see to what extend respondent themselves believe they, and people across the linguistic border, differ from neighbouring countries.

The question asked to find an answer to this matter is the following: “How different do you consider the Flemish/Walloons to be from the Dutch/French?” on a scale from 1 (Not at all similar) to 10 (Completely similar). The results are seen below:

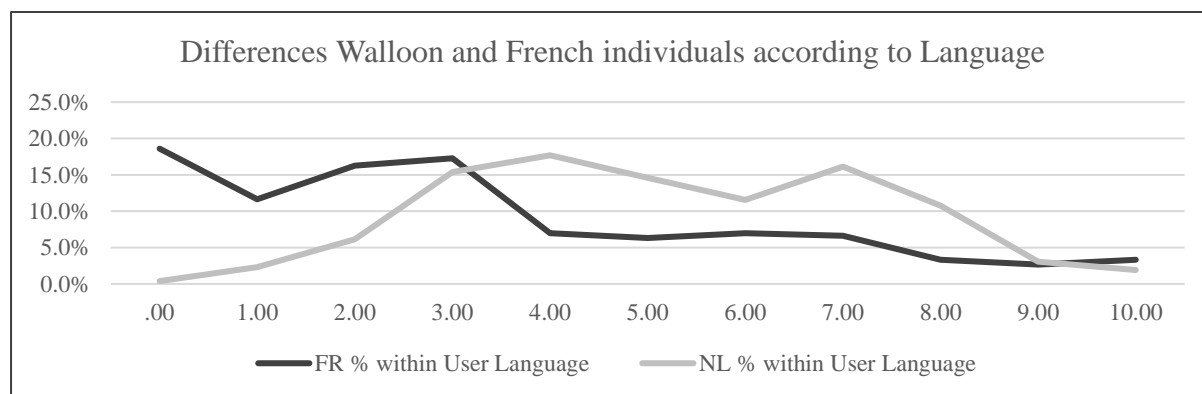
Table 20: Descriptive statistics of the difference between Flemish/Walloons and Dutch/French by Language.

		Mean	Std. Error
How different are FL and NL from each other?	French-speaking	3.477	0.132
	Dutch-speaking	3.688	0.141
How different are WA and FR from each other?	French-speaking	3.289	0.145
	Dutch-speaking	5.200	0.155

Graph 27: Differences between Flemish and Dutch individuals according to Language



Graph 38: Differences between Walloon and French individuals according to Language



From this graph we can interpret that while Dutch and French speakers both have quite a similar idea about how much Flemish people differ from Dutch individuals, there does not seem to be the same agreement when it comes to the difference between Walloons and French individuals. The question now is whether this difference between the two groups

is significant for which we used a multivariate analysis of variance. This gave us the following results summarised below:

Table 21: Pairwise comparison between Flemish/Walloon and Dutch/French

	F	Sig.
How different are Flemish and Dutch people from each other?	1.203	0.273
How different are Walloons and French people from each other?	81.501	0.000

There is a significant difference in how the different language groups believe Walloons differ from the French. The means of the French speakers (3.289) is thus significantly lower than that of the Dutch speakers (5.200), meaning that Dutch speakers in Belgium believe their southern counterparts to be more similar to the French, than French speaking people in Belgium actually consider Walloons to be.

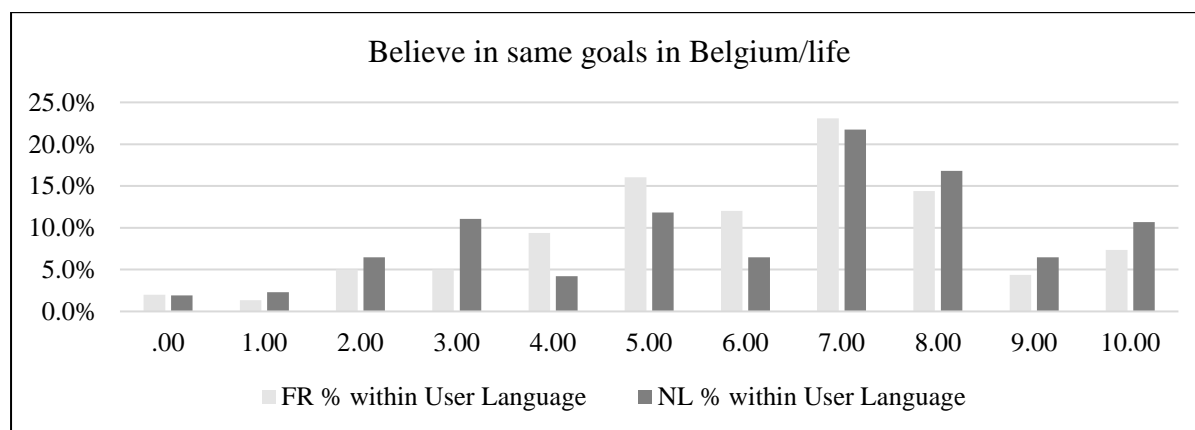
Variables based on Allport:

The following variables are based on the requirements that according to Allport need to be met to improve ethnic relations. The question was made broad to give respondents the freedom to answer how they see fit and then having the opportunity afterwards to clarify their answer. These answers were coded to see what the similarities and differences are and explain why some respondents answered the way they did.

Allport: Do Flemish and Walloons have similar goals?

The following question was asked: “As an individual in this country, do you believe you have the same goals as people on the other side of the linguistic barrier? With a scale going from “Not at all” (0) to “Absolutely” (10)” The results are summarised in the following graph:

Graph 29: Believe in same goals in Belgium/life by Language



While there are some differences between Francophones and Dutch-speakers this seems to be quite irregular. The distribution seems to be quite unevenly spread and slightly skewed towards the left. We shall see whether there is significant differences between the Flemish and Francophone perspective on their goals:

Table 22: Descriptive statistics of Same Goals between Walloons and Flemish

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
French Speaking	299.00	6.06	2.29
Dutch Speaking	262.00	6.15	2.60

Table 23: Independent Samples T-test – Same Goals by Language

t-test for Equality of Means	Sig. (2-tailed)
-0.46	0.65

According to the results there is thus no significant difference between French and Dutch-speakers, despite the ambiguous way the question was asked. Quite a few respondents answered that they were unsure to what goals we were referring and on what level. The main distinction was in whether people saw goals as individual or as general goals of the population. The conclusion from the coding of these answers is that on the political level there is a general agreement that Flemish and Francophones do not share the same goals. Respondents with a high answer clarified that their answer does not take into account politics or specified that if “goals” referred to the political level their answer would be lower. The matters on which respondents were mixed consist of the concept of culture and worldview/mentality. Some stated that there was a different culture and a complete different mentality, leading to different goals in life. Others state that these cultures are quite similar and that the world view does not differ much leading to similar goals in life. On the individual level, respondents mostly agreed that Belgians have the same basic requirements in life: they all want what is best for themselves, be happy, have a good job, a family, and a home.

Allport: Supported by institutions/authorities?

To see to what extent Flemish and Francophones believe the interaction between themselves is supported by the current institutions the following question was asked: “*On a scale from “Not at all” (0) to “Absolutely” (10) do you believe the following institutions: The media/the government/Political Parties/The Education System, support (a good) interaction between Flemish and Walloons?*” The descriptive statistics are seen in the table below:

Table 24: Descriptive statistics of Media Contact variables

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The Media	French Speaking	304.00	3.10	0.12
	Dutch Speaking	265.00	3.35	0.13
The Government	French Speaking	304.00	2.86	0.12
	Dutch Speaking	265.00	2.75	0.12
Political Parties	French Speaking	304.00	2.50	0.11
	Dutch Speaking	265.00	2.15	0.11
The Education System	French Speaking	304.00	3.22	0.13
	Dutch Speaking	265.00	3.62	0.15

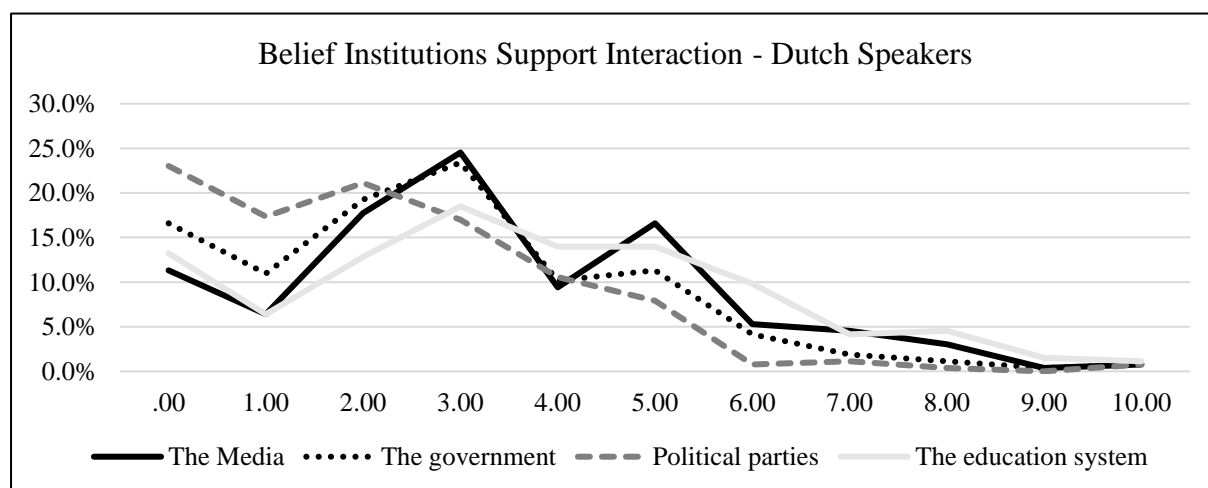
All means are on the left of the measurement scale varying between 2.12 and 3.62. This shows that there is a strong belief in the population that the institutions do not promote good interaction between Flemish and Walloons. To check whether there are significant differences between the Flemish and Francophone means a T-test is used:

Table 25: Independent Samples T-test – Support interaction

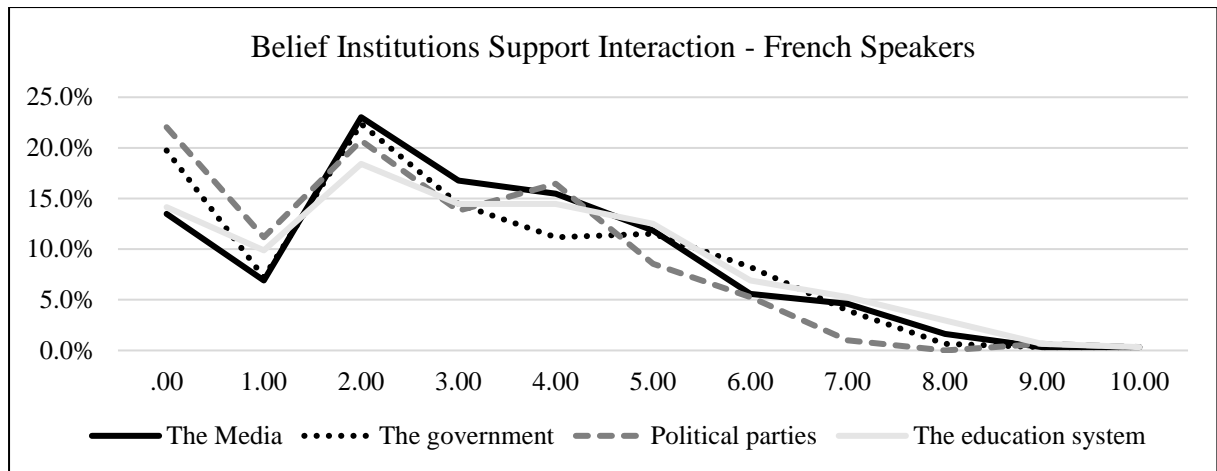
	t-test for Equality of Means	Sig. (2-tailed)
The Media	-1.425	0.155
The Government	0.629	0.530
Political Parties	2.158	0.031
The Education System	-2.085	0.037

There is no significant differences between the French speaking and Dutch speaking respondents on whether or not the media and the government support good interaction. There is however a difference in how much people perceive the political parties and education system support the interaction. We see how these differ in the following two graphs:

Graph 30: Belief Institutions Support Interaction – Dutch Speakers

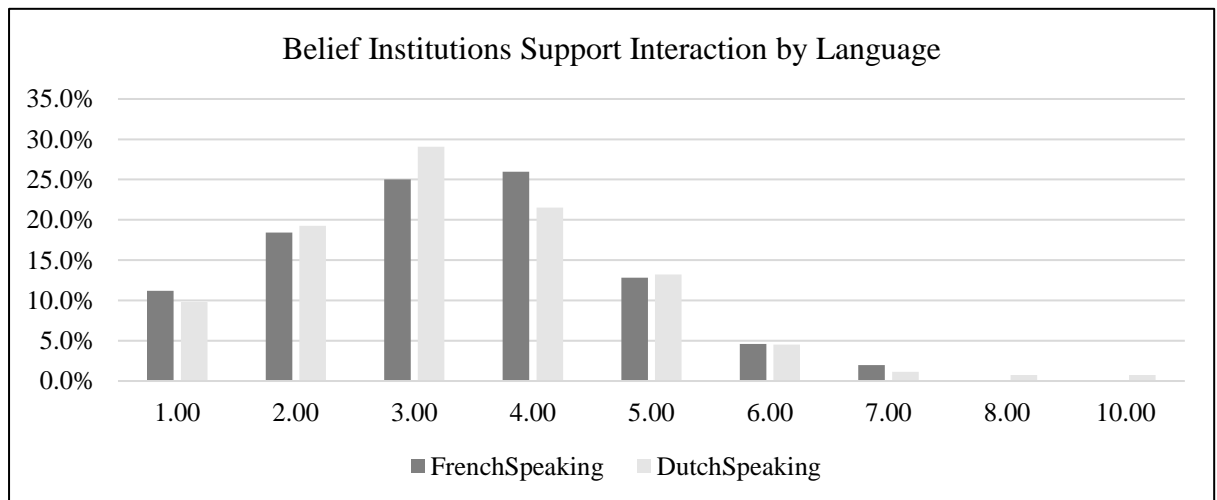


Graph 31: Belief Institutions Support Interaction – French Speakers



One of the first matters that must be noted is that no respondents, apart from some outliers, has indicated even one institution as fully supporting the interaction between Walloons and the Flemish. It is as if 8 is the maximum any respondent would rate the institutional support. In order to see how the support of institutions is in general, these variables were summed up and then recoded to regain a measurement scale of ten. The distribution is seen below:

Graph 32: Total Level of the Belief that Institutions Support Interaction



For this recoded variable there does not seem to be a great distinction between Francophones and Dutch Speakers anymore. As proven by the following T-test:

Table 26: Independent Samples T-test – Institutional Support

t-test for Equality of Means	Sig. (2-tailed)
-0.29	0.77

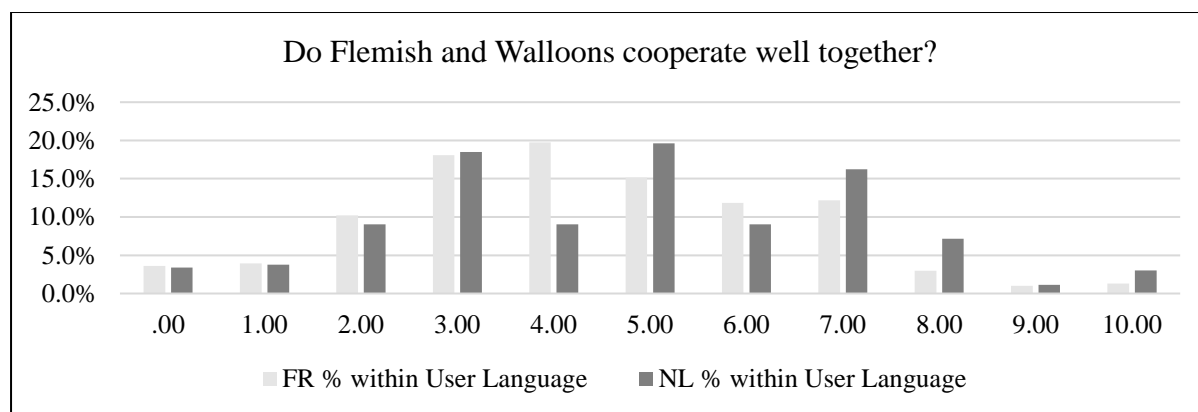
While it was asked how much institutions support interaction, the author did not look into what degree respondents believe the institutions hinder interaction and cooperation

between the linguistic groups. This is touched upon by the respondents themselves, on the question where they could clarify their answer. A lot of respondents refer to the division between the two groups being magnified by the media, the politicians and their political parties in addition to mentioning the fact that the regions are barely taught about one another in school, apart from the historical issues of the past. So in short: at best the institutions refer to the other region in a neutral and objective way, at worse a black picture is painted.

Allport: Do Flemish and Walloons Cooperate well together?

The third Allport variable looks into cooperation. This was asked with the question: “On a scale from “Not at all” (0) to “Absolutely” (10), do you believe that Flemish and Walloons work well together?”. This question is quite broad and it is thus again interesting to see how respondents clarified their answers. From the coding of these answers we could see that the main factors that played a role were the political level and the individual level. No matter what respondents answered on the scale of 1 to 10, they all agreed that there was a lack of cooperation on the political level. On the individual level other factors such as: “having a similar mindset”, “same goals”, “language”, “letting go of stereotypes” and “being open-minded” were important matters mentioned with regards to whether the two groups cooperate well together. The results are seen in the following table:

Graph 33: Level of belief in French and Flemish cooperation.



From this graph the only clear difference seems to be on the 4th measurement, where there is a 10% difference between the two groups. The means are 4.35 and 4.77 for French speakers and Dutch speakers respectively. An independent samples T-test was used to see whether these means are significantly different from one another.

Table 27: Independent Samples T-test – Cooperation

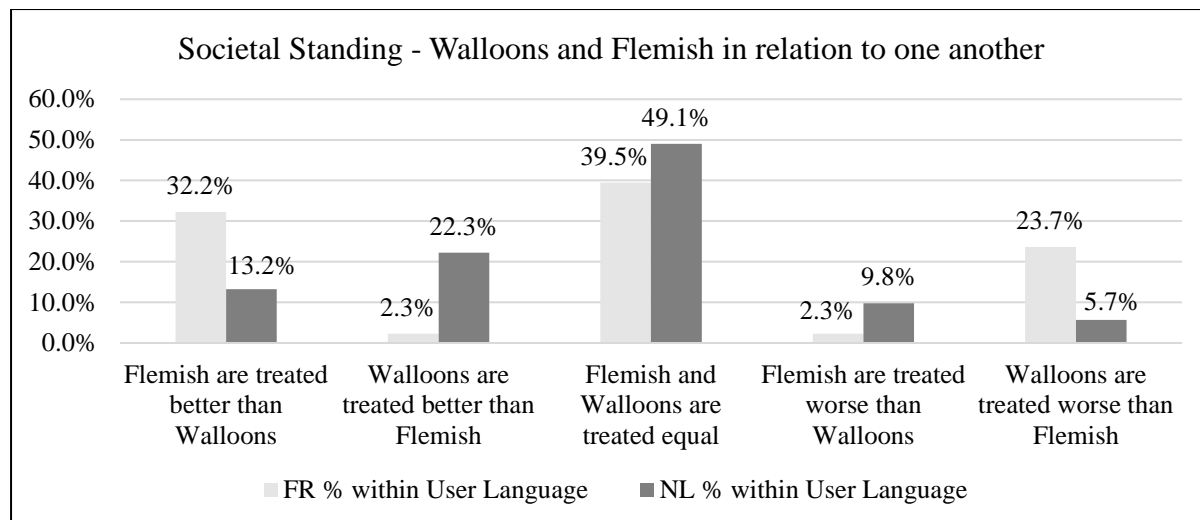
t-test for Equality of Means	Sig. (2-tailed)
-2.28	0.02

The P-value of 0.02 is smaller than 0.05 and thus the means are significantly different. French speakers perceive a significant lower level of cooperation than Flemish individuals. It is not immediately distinguishable from the answers given where exactly the difference may lie. The Flemish respondents raised the issue of language and how it influences communication at a significant higher rate than the Francophone respondents. The author suspects that the lack of cooperation in politics weights more for Francophones than Flemish individuals. For example: the Flemish support for anti-establishment parties, leading to high voter support for the Vlaams Belang leads to, according Henry et al. (2015), the misconception that the Flemish are more distrustful and racist than Walloons. Considering that quite a few respondents indicated that a similar mindset and letting go of stereotypes is important to cooperate well together, this could partially explain this difference.

Allport: Are Flemish and Walloons treated equally?

The question societal standing was asked in the following way: “*How do you see the position of Walloons and Flemish vis-à-vis one another?*” There is something that needs to be taken into account regarding the measurement scale of this variable. It could be said that the option “Flemish are treated better than Walloons” and “Walloons are treated worse than Flemish” is the same. However this is not the case. The distinction is in what is perceived to be the norm. In the first example the Walloons are the norm and the Flemish are privileged, in the second example the Flemish are the norm and the Walloons face a form of discrimination. We will go more in depth on what respondents indicated these forms of discrimination or privilege to be after going over the results which are summarised in the following graph:

Graph 34: Societal Standing by Language



It is interesting to note that there is almost a 10% difference between the amount of Flemish and Francophones that believe that they are treated equally in Belgium. For the other answers it must be said that it is not easy to see one’s own privilege, which is why we see a lower response rate for when regions have to indicate themselves as being treated better than others. When we look at which people are treated worse we see once more that the numbers for “Own region treated worse than the others” is higher than the opposite. A possible explanation is that people simply do not know how the other is treated. The matters respondents brought up to justify their answers relate most to the different population percentages and the role these different population percentages play in politics. Some Walloon respondents mentioned that the Flemish have more to say politically as they are the majority. Some Flemish respondents state that it is unfair that Walloons have an equal amount to say in parliament despite being a minority. Other reasons brought up are the economic transfers, cultural differences and past history. Interesting are the descriptive statistics of this variable:

Table 28: Descriptive statistics of Societal Standing

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
French Speaking	304.00	2.83	1.50
Dutch Speaking	265.00	2.72	1.00

These need to be interpreted with knowledge of what the measurements mean exactly as the spread of the respondents is not the same. This is seen in the standard deviation. As both “Walloons are treated better than Flemish” and “Flemish are treated worse than Walloons” are favoured by the Flemish, answers 2 and 4 respectively, the standard deviation is 1. The Standard deviation of the Francophones is bigger as they favour answers 1 and 5 respectively. To

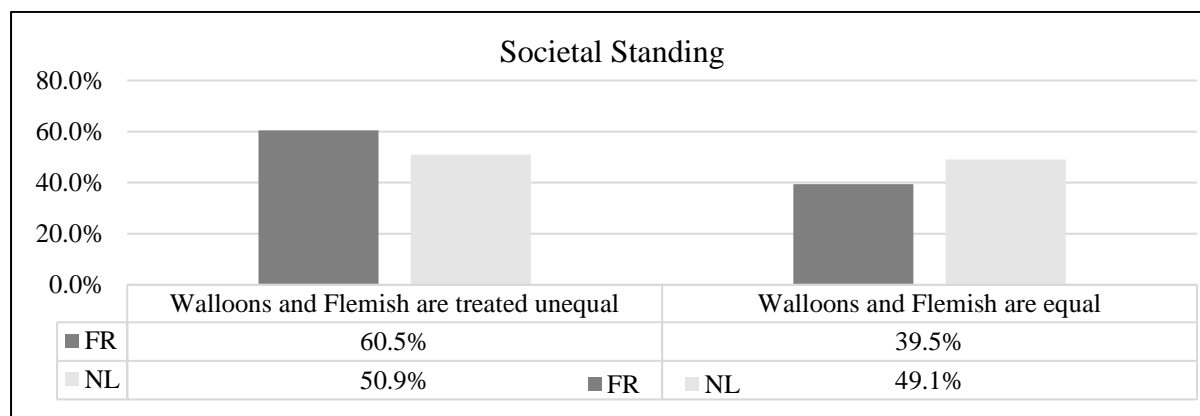
see whether there is a difference between the two “spreads” we use an independent samples T-test of which the results are the following:

Table 29: Independent Samples T-test – Societal Standing

t-test for Equality of Means	Sig. (2-tailed)
0.99	0.32

Thus despite the spread not being similar, this does not affect the mean and the T-test shows these are not significantly different between French speaking and Dutch speaking respondents. To use this variable in our Structural equation model it has to be recoded into a dummy variable with 0: Flemish and Walloons are treated differently and 1: Flemish and Walloons are treated equally. Making the distribution look as following:

Graph 35: Recoded Societal Standing by Language

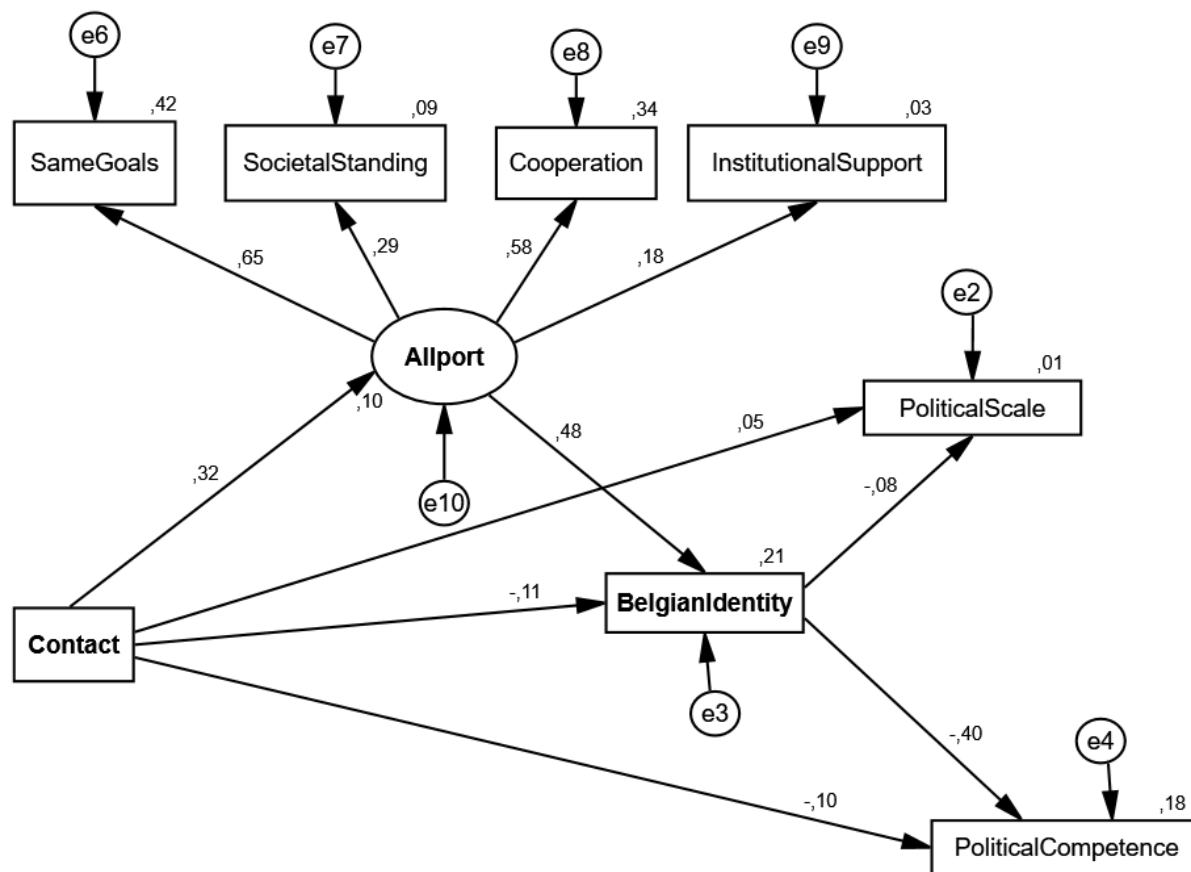


We expect that when the degree of belief that Flemish and Walloons are equal, individuals feel more Belgian. This variable together with the previous three Allport variables will be combined in the latent variable “Allport” in our structural equation model in the next section below.

Results of the Structural Equation Model

Now, after having discussed all these variables we will use a Structural Equation Model (SEM) to calculate the direct and indirect effects of Contact on Belgian identity. This method is also used by Thijssen et al. (2015) to look at contact on regional identity and on the division of competences. We will be able to compare the variable of the division of competence with theirs. The Structural Equation model is seen below:

Structural Equation Model – Contact on Belgian Identity



Variables

- SameGoals*: Not at all similar goals (0) – Same goals (10)
- SocietalStanding*: Walloons and Flemish not treated equally (0) – Flemish and Walloons equally treated (1)
- Cooperation*: Do not cooperate well together (0) – Cooperate well together (10)
- InstitutionalSupport*: No support (0) – Support completely (10)
- Contact*: Factor analysis from -1.89 – 3.70
- Belgian identity*: Do not at all feel Belgian (0) – Feel completely Belgian (10)
- PoliticalScale*: Extreme Left (0) – Extreme right (10)
- PoliticalCompetence*: Towards Unitarism (1) – Towards Separatism (5)

The model fit of our SEM has a Chi-Square of 61.330 with 17 degrees of freedom. The model fit is satisfactory with CFI (0.88) and RMSEA (0.068). Ideally CFI should be above 0.9 (Awang, 2015). The RMSEA is below 0.08, this means that while not ideal, we will keep our model. To take into account the different measurement scales the standardised model was used. Looking at our estimates we see that the effect of Contact on Allport is significant, as is the effect of Allport on Belgian identity and Belgium identity on political competence. Meaning that Allport’s requirements do have a significant influence on Belgian identity, with for every increase of one unit for our latent variable “Allport”, Belgian identity increases with 0.48. The standardised regression weights are summarised in the table below:

Table 30: Standardised Regression Weights and Significance

Standardised Regression Weights	P-value
BelgianIdentity <--- Contact -,113	0,014
BelgianIdentity <--- Allport ,477	6,522 ***
SameGoals <--- Allport ,647	
SocietalStanding <--- Allport ,293	5,097 ***
Cooperation <--- Allport ,581	7,633 ***
InstitutionalSupport <--- Allport ,182	3,346 ***
PoliticalScale <--- BelgianIdentity -,076	0,073
PoliticalScale <--- Contact ,048	,252
PoliticalCompetence <--- Contact -,102	0,010
PoliticalCompetence <--- BelgianIdentity -,405	-10,293 ***

To truly answer our research question we need to compare the direct effects and indirect effects of contact on Belgian Identity. While the direct effect of contact on Belgian identity is -0.11 meaning that for every 1 increase in our latent variable contact, Belgian identity decreases with 0.11. Although this effect is not significant, it goes against our hypothesis that more interaction leads to a greater national identification. However, looking at the indirect effect of Contact on Belgian identity, through Allport, we see that for every 1 increase in contact, Belgian identity increases with 0.366, showing that Allport's conditions positively influence the effect of interaction on Belgian identity.

Looking at our latent variable "*Allport*", we see that the perception of having similar goals and how well individuals are able to cooperate plays a significant role in our latent variable with 0.65 and 0.58 of variance explained. The perception of being considered equal and the perception of institutional support play less of a role with 0.29 and 0.18 of the variance explained respectively.

Lastly, in a similar way as the direct effect of contact on Belgian identity, more contact seems to increase our political scale variable with 0.05 meaning that for every one unit increase in contact, individuals become 0.05 more right-wing. This is not significant. However, while we do not reject our hypothesis that more contact would lead to individuals being more left-wing, it is not confirmed either. The effect of Belgian identity is significant on the division of competences meaning that for every 1 unit increase in feeling more Belgian, there is a 0.40 increase in support for refederalising/going towards unitarism. This confirms our hypothesis that Belgian identity positively influences a desire to return competences to the Belgian level.

Conclusions

We started this paper by discussing perspectives of Belgium from the outside, whether as an artificial creation, a state that is bound to fall apart, or that shouldn't have existed in the

first place. We can now safely say that this is far from the truth. People in Belgium do feel national identity, and even feel it quite strongly. This is however not mutually exclusive with the many other forms of regional identities Belgians have, whether regional, urban, European or linguistic. While the existence of a national identity is confirmed we can not deny that there are some divisions in Belgian society.

Using Allport's requirements we found that when it comes to cooperation, Belgians believe Walloons and Flemish do not cooperate well together at all on the political level. Unlike on the individual level where there is no issue. Looking at whether Belgians have the same goals, which was deemed quite important to be able to cooperate well together, a similar discussion arose: *On the political level?* or *on the Individual level?*. With most people stating that they cooperate quite well with people on the other side of the linguistic border, unless we are talking about politics, in which case respondents answered very low rates. Whether they consider themselves equal in society, both Dutch-speaking and French-speaking respondents estimated themselves victim of the fact that Flemish people are the majority in the country as they represent 60% of the population. The Walloons claimed that the Flemish having more power due to their numbers. The Flemish in their turn claimed the Walloons are privileged for still having the same amount of power, despite being in lower numbers.

The last Allport requirement is whether interaction between Flemish and Walloons is supported by the authorities, laws or customs. It is alarming to what degree respondents indicated the lack of support of the media, the government, the educational system and political parties. When it comes to politics a significant relationship was the effect of Belgian identity on the division of competences. People that felt more Belgian were more likely to wish to return competences to the federal level. Further, our research has proven that when the variables of Allport are met, interaction has a significant positive effect on the fostering of Belgian identity. regretfully, for the direct effect, the opposite is true, as this variable seems closer to confirming threat theory; namely that more interaction leads to less national identification, and more regional identification.

A last matter is that on most variables, Dutch and French speakers did not actually differ as much as expected. Especially the political scale variable was surprising, considering the recent elections. What emerged from my research is the paradox between people getting along rather well with one another on the individual level but not at all on the political level. However, this political level is supposed to represent the individuals in the nation.

When I asked the question "To what extend are these divisions artificial, created by those in power", I did not expect this to actually be the case. Especially our Allport variable of

institutional support showed that individuals perceived almost no support from the main institutions. Who knows to what extent the people in Belgium would get along if more common projects were put in place to enable people to actually interact with one another? Maybe this could lead to us not living “*Apart together*” (Thijssen et al., 2015) anymore but truly “*together-together*”? Who knows what the coming year hold for the future of Belgian identity, which in one decade will celebrate its 200th anniversary? Will Belgian identity have continued to improve? Will parts of Belgium have re-attached to neighbouring countries, or other varied futures separatists envision for Belgium have come true?

This begs further research on a number of levels. The author believes it would be beneficial to include a number of other potential requirements for intergroup contact, such as “friendship-potential”. Further, it would be interesting to see to what regards individuals believe institutions work against a good interaction, instead of merely asking whether there is support. Lastly, the author believes that based on the whole section on the similarities between Belgium and the European Union, both wishing to unite people with diverse cultures and different languages, it should be possible to apply our research to a more European context. This would enable us to see to what extent Allport’s requirements are met on the level of national peoples in Europe.

Annex

Table of contents:

- Survey questions: French and Dutch.
- Excel document:
 - Qualitative answers: Competence, identity and Allport
- SPSS Dataset
- SPSS Syntax

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