Belgian identity politics:

At a crossroad between nationalism and regionalism

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Jose Manuel Izquierdo

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ABSTRACT

The cultural-linguistic divide that separates Belgium's two main ethnic groups, the Walloons and the Flemings, has contributed to a national identity crisis. The tension between the groups is often blamed on their cultural-linguistic differences. However, the political parties have also influenced Belgian identity. There are historical, political, and economic factors that have provided the political parties substantial influence over national identity in Belgium. Since the parties are regionally based, the regions have affected territorial identity. Consequently, attachment to the nation has significantly declined among Belgians. Political party power is all too often ignored. This key factor is usually overshadowed by the fact that Belgium's citizens speak three different languages. While language has certainly been a divisive issue in Belgium, political parties also contribute to identity formation in Belgium. This study investigates the history, regions, politics, and economy of Belgium that have provided, and continue to provide, the opportunities for political parties to mobilize regional identity.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Saturday service in a church in Brussels in 2007. It happens to be July 21, the Belgian National Day. On this day in 1831, Leopold I swore allegiance to the Constitution of the Kingdom of Belgium and was proclaimed the first King of the Belgians. A crew for a Belgian television station is filming the service to cover Belgium's independence day. Outside the cathedral the camera crew stops Yves Leterme, the former leader of the Christian Democratic and Flemish political party of Belgium who was expected to become the next prime minister of the Kingdom. The reporter asks him if he knows what is being celebrated on July 21st. His response: "the proclamation of the Constitution" (*BBC News* 2007). Wrong! The reporter corrects him and asks him to sing the Brabançonne, the national anthem of Belgium. He cheerfully begins singing La Marseillaise, the national anthem of France. The reporter reminds him that he is singing France's anthem and asks him if he knows the Brabançonne. Leterme's reply: "Oh I don't know" (*BBC News* 2007). Two years later he is elected to become the forty-eighth Prime Minister of Belgium. That day a reporter also asked the Minister-President of the Walloon Region, Rudy Demotte, what was celebrated on July 21. He attributed the celebrations to a supposed battle won by the Belgians. Even the Prime Minister (PM) of the Belgian Parliament, Guy Verhofstadt, could not answer why it was the national day of Belgium. On Belgium's national day, its political leaders could not answer seemingly basic historical facts about their country.

Research Questions

In 2011, Belgium lacked a functioning federal government for 541 days, well above Iraq's previous record of 249 days (Waterfield 2011). There was talk of partitioning the country along linguistic boundaries due to a supposed cultural-linguistic divide. The cultural-linguistic divide between the Dutch-speaking northern half in Flanders and the French-speaking southern half in Wallonia has certainly contributed to Belgium's current identity crisis. It is, therefore, not surprising that its citizens have had difficulty defining a Belgian identity. Nevertheless, too much importance has been placed on the cultural and linguistic differences in discussing the Belgian identity crisis. Current research on national and regional identity in Belgium argues that the political parties of Belgium have actually contributed much more to the identity crisis. The history, politics, and economy of Belgium granted the parties considerable power in shaping identity in the regions of Belgium.

This study seeks to investigate the construction of national and regional identity in Belgium through the lens of political geography, which is the intersection of political science (power, politics, and policy) and geography (space, place, and territory) (Jones, Jones, and Woods 2004), with a special focus on national identity. This thesis will contribute to the literature on identity politics and nationalism in Belgium, arguing that the political parties are the driving force behind an identity crisis based on cultural-linguistic differences. I investigate the following research questions:

How do political parties present and reproduce national and regional identities in Belgium?

1. How have the history, politics, and economy of Belgium contributed to the increasing political power and influence of political parties?
2. How is Belgian national identity described, displayed, and promoted on websites of political parties?

Rationale

Politicians in Belgium increasingly discuss the partitioning of the country (RT 2011a, 2011b), and national identity has become a pressing topic. However, it is difficult for the country's leaders and citizens to conceptualize a Belgian identity. Regionalism is very strong in Belgium, which permeates its national politics. The history, politics, and economy of Belgium have contributed to a system in which the political parties are set up along cultural-linguistic boundaries and where political compromise is rare. A lack of compromise, a dysfunctional political system, and a cultural-linguistic divide have contributed to a call for the partition of the country into separate independent countries. In addition, some Belgian politicians have stated that Belgians do not exist (van de Craen 2002) and that the only factors that unite the Kingdom are the "king, the national football team and certain brands of beer" (Rennie 2006, n.p.). These sentiments seem widespread, and the idea that Belgium is an unnatural and artificial state is common in Belgium (Traynor 2007). Even PM Leterme insinuated that when he said that Belgium is "an accident of history [with] no intrinsic value" (Rennie 2006, n.p.).

At the root of Belgium's issues is the immense power of political parties. This power has, if not created, exasperated the cultural-linguistic divide that separates the Dutch-speaking Flanders and the French-speaking Wallonia. The further the divide grows between Flemish and Walloon identities, the weaker national identity in Belgium becomes. If the European Union (EU) wants to embrace a cosmopolitan identity (Delanty 2005), how can its "capital," Brussels, also be the capital of a country in which there are so many cultural tensions? A partitioned Belgium, at the "heart" of Europe, cannot bode well for an EU that embraces unity, cooperation, and suprantionalism (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The End of the Belgian Nation?
Source: Time 2007.

This thesis studies the influence of political parties on national identity in Belgium. Scholars suggest that the political parties in Belgium are contributing to the Belgian identity crisis (Jagers and Walgrave 2007; Walgrave, Soroka, and Nuytemans 2007). Figure 2 shows a map of Belgium divided into Flanders in the north and Wallonia in the south. Superimposed on this map are the leaders of the political parties that received the most votes in the 2010 federal elections: Bart de Wever of the New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) heading toward Flanders, and Elio Di Rupio of the Socialist Party (PS) toward Wallonia. Di Rupio is holding a serving of fries while de Wever is carrying a pot of mussels. The combination of mussels and fries (*moules-frites*) is considered the national dish of Belgium. Yet the leaders of the parties from Flanders and Wallonia are dividing what is essentially Belgian. This ties into the arguments of Jagers and

Walgrave (2007) and Walgrave, Soroka, and Nuytemans (2007) that Belgian political parties and their leaders are driving a wedge between the regions and the Belgian people, using cultural differences to increase the divide between Flemings and Walloons.

Figure 2: Elections in Belgium: The End of Mussels and Fries.
Source: Placide 2010.

The idea of partitioning Belgium's national dish is symbolic, of course. It represents the devolution process in which the federal government continues to transfer former federal powers to the regions and communities. As the devolution process has continued, national identity in Belgium has gradually lost prominence. National identity has given way to regional identity as the main source of territorial identity for Belgians. Thus moules-frites represents what used to be Belgian and is now increasingly divided amongst the regions and communities. The political parties of Belgium and their respective leaders are creating an identity divide between Flemings and Walloons. I argue that this political divide has contributed to the crisis of national identity in Belgium by politicizing the cultural-linguistic differences between the regions.

Structure of Thesis

This thesis project investigates the construction of national identity of Belgians by addressing the overarching question: **How do political parties represent and produce national and regional identities in Belgium?** The secondary questions address the parties' influence on identity, how that influence manifests itself today, and what that indicates about the future of Belgian identity. First, I investigate how the history, politics, and economy of Belgium contributed to the increasing power of political parties. A historical overview of the processes that influenced the current political system provides insights into how and why the political parties became powerful. In addition, I study how Belgian national identity is described, displayed and promoted on political websites. These websites contain the parties' official political platforms, thereby providing an insight into the parties' views on Belgian identity and how they project those beliefs.

Figure 3: Map of Belgium within Europe.
Source: WorldAtlas 2011.

Figure 4: Map of Belgium.
Source: WorldAtlas 2011.

I will provide a short history of Belgium, followed by politics and economics, national identity, regional identity, and political parties. There is also a section on elite theory that investigates how political leaders gain, maintain, and exercise their influence on many aspects of society, including identity. The chapter on methods describes data collection, coding, and analysis. I thereafter analyze the coding results and interpret the data on the websites of the four political parties in Belgium with the highest number of seats in the European, federal, regional, and comminutal parliaments. I conclude that the evidence presented in the literature review and the website analyses helps us think beyond the cultural-linguistic divide as a cause of Belgium's identity crisis.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

History

What is now known as Belgium never existed prior to its independence in 1830 (Arblaster 2006). Much of the area within present-day Belgium was owned or administered by varying European powers, such as the French Empire and the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Yet other large areas of present-day Belgium were never owned or administered by other European powers. In fact, the Prince-Bishopric of Liège, which roughly corresponds to the present-day province of Liège, was independent for close to 1,000 years (Blom and Lamberts 2006). Since its independence, Belgium has always been an experiment in nation-building. It was formed by joining two culturally and linguistically distinct groups of people: the Dutch-speaking north in what would later be called Flanders (its people called Flemings and its culture called Flemish), and the French-speaking south, which would later be called Wallonia (its people and culture referred to as Walloon). A small territory of German-speaking people would be added to Wallonia after World War I as part of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 (Blom and Lamberts 2006).

The Kingdom of Belgium was created in 1830 as a unitary, centralist state. It gained its independence from the Kingdom of the Netherlands through revolution mostly as a result of religious and economic grievances against the Dutch monarch (Blom and Lamberts 2006). Although the new country was unofficially bilingual (with French and Dutch), French became the de facto language (Farrell and van Langenhove 2005: Deschouwer 2009). The Dutch-speakers, nevertheless, worked hand-in-hand with the French-speakers to establish legitimacy as a new nation so that the Netherlands would recognize Belgian independence. This period is called the period of ‘unionism’ (Deschouwer 2009, 23).

During the mid-1800s, a Flemish Movement was born out of the desire of Dutch-speakers to have their language and linguistic rights acknowledged by the Belgian state and the French-speaking elites (Lecours 2005). This set the stage for the creation of a bilingual state with a predominantly Dutch-speaking north and an overwhelmingly French-speaking south. The capital of Brussels, although entirely surrounded by Flemish culture and Dutch language, remained an exclave of the French-speaking lands to the south. The border between Flanders and Wallonia has changed slightly with each state reform since 1970, and the French influence in Brussels has expanded beyond the city into neighboring Dutch-speaking communities. As more French-speakers move to the Brussels suburbs they are demanding more access to services in French, even though the Brussels suburbs officially lie within the monolingual Dutch-speaking region of Flanders. Nevertheless, the language areas of Belgium have largely stayed the same (Figure 5).

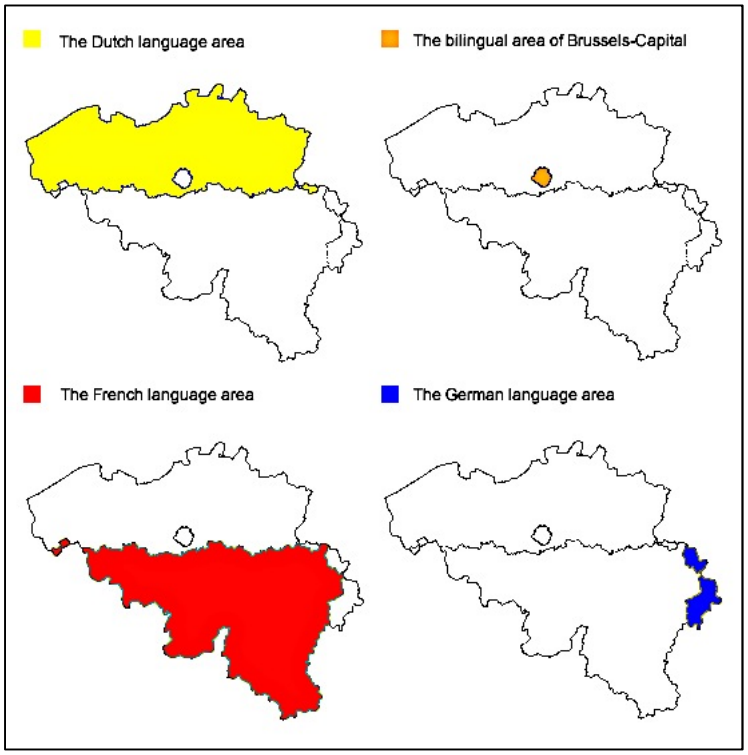

Figure 5: Language Areas in Belgium.
Source: Van Droogenbroeck 2011.

The Flemish Movement began to resemble a political movement during World War I (Lecours 2005). A committee of Dutch-speaking Belgian soldiers founded the *Frontbeweging*, or Front Movement, to address the controversy over having French as the official language of the Belgian Army (Arblaster 2006; Blom and Lamberts 2006). Many Dutch-speaking soldiers resented that they were unable to receive training and instructions in their native language since the vast majority of army officials only spoke French. The Frontbeweging promoted the use of Dutch in the army, but the movement's efforts were unsuccessful because the Belgian government was preoccupied with the war. By the elections of 1919, the Front Movement had become a political party and was renamed the *Frontpartij*, or Front Party. When World War II started, the Front Party had split into several Flemish political parties, but Flemish nationalism continued within the successor parties. Additionally, by WWII there were separate Flemish and Walloon regiments within the army. During WWI and WWII the German policy of *Flamenpolitik*, or Flemish policy, was initiated (Arblaster 2006; Blom and Lamberts 2006). The occupying Germans sought to separate Flanders from Wallonia into distinct units so that Flanders could join Germany under the idea of Pan-Germanism. Only Flanders could join Greater Germany because of its use of the Dutch language. Many Flemish nationalists welcomed German forces and collaborated with them since the Nazis had promised more rights for Flemings. When German authorities released Flemish prisoners of war (POWs) during WWII, but not Walloon POWs, support for the Germans grew in Flanders. Flemish POWs were released because they were considered German according to Pan-Germanic ideology. After WWII many Flemish nationalists were prosecuted as collaborators to the Nazis by the Belgian government.

In Wallonia, the *Parti Rexiste*, or Rexist Party (also known as Rex), also aligned and collaborated with the Nazis during WWII because the party agreed with the Nazi ideologies of

fascism and anti-communism (Blom and Lamberts 2006). This party, however, did not embrace a Walloon nationalist ideology. A Walloon Movement emerged in the late 1800s as a response to the growing regionalism in Flanders. Contrary to its Flemish counterpart, the Walloon Movement never adopted the notion of a Walloon nation (Lecours 2005). This set the stage for future political struggles between the regions along ethno-linguistic divides. The Flemish Movement, fueled by a desire to express its cultural-linguistic rights as a Flemish nation, pushed for more autonomy from the Belgian state. By the 1960s, Flanders had surpassed Wallonia economically. Consequently, the "Flemings wanted political power to match their new economic power [and] the Walloons wanted political power to counter their economic decline" (Saey, Kesteloot, and Vandermotten 1998, 175). In the 1970s, the federal government approved the decentralization and devolution of its powers to the regions to prevent violence during turbulent political times. Further constitutional reforms in 1980, 1988, and 1993 completed Belgium's transformation from a unitary state—where the central government rules as single unit—into a full-fledged federation—where a central government shares power with its subnational entities (De Rynck 1996).

Federalism is the dynamic formation of government with separate or autonomous political units (or units with some claim to autonomy). These units "mutually agree to merge to create a State with a single sovereign central government" but agree to retain some degree of subnational autonomy (Dikshit 1971, 98). In this type of state, a federation, the governmental powers are divided between the federal, or central, government and the sub-federal units of governments (states, provinces, departments, or regions). The federal government has jurisdiction over all matters that affect the nation as a whole while the sub-federal governments have jurisdiction at the regional level. At its core, federalism is a formal agreement between

political units that has a written constitution, which requires cooperation between the units to alter or abolish the constitution and the union (Dikshit 1971).

Confederalism is a 'loose linking' of political units usually for military or economic purposes (Dikshit 1971). Confederations have weak central governments that are dependent upon the regional governments (Dikshit 1971). Therefore, in a confederation, the central government is subordinate to the subnational governments. Although Canada and Switzerland may refer to themselves as confederations, no true confederations exist today. While Belgium is still regarded by political scientists as a federal state, with each new constitutional reform (the latest in 2011) the state is beginning to resemble a confederation. The Belgian Federal Government has weakened with each devolution of power to the regions and communities, and almost any legislative or executive power is at the mercy of the regions and communities. Since the political units in a federation are bound by a constitution, the political units cannot unilaterally secede. By contrast, in the loose alliance formed in a confederation, partitioning Belgium may be an option as the political units are no longer constitutionally bound.

Federalization was regarded a temporary fix by federal and regional political leaders, including the monarchy, until the further decentralization of federal powers (Lecours 2005). In the 1970s, Belgium's state powers were devolved into three regions, three communities, and four language areas (Figure 5; Figure 6) (De Rynck 1996; Deschouwer 2009; Ladrech 2010). To this day, political parties in Flanders demand more devolution of federal powers that could turn Belgium into a confederation, even though Belgium is already one of the most decentralized states in Western Europe (Ladrech 2010). If Belgium's history is any indication, state reforms will continue to be used as political tools to resolve disputes and disagreements between Flemish

and Walloon parties. The more the Belgian Federal Government transfers powers to the sub-federal units, the more a Belgian confederation becomes a reality.

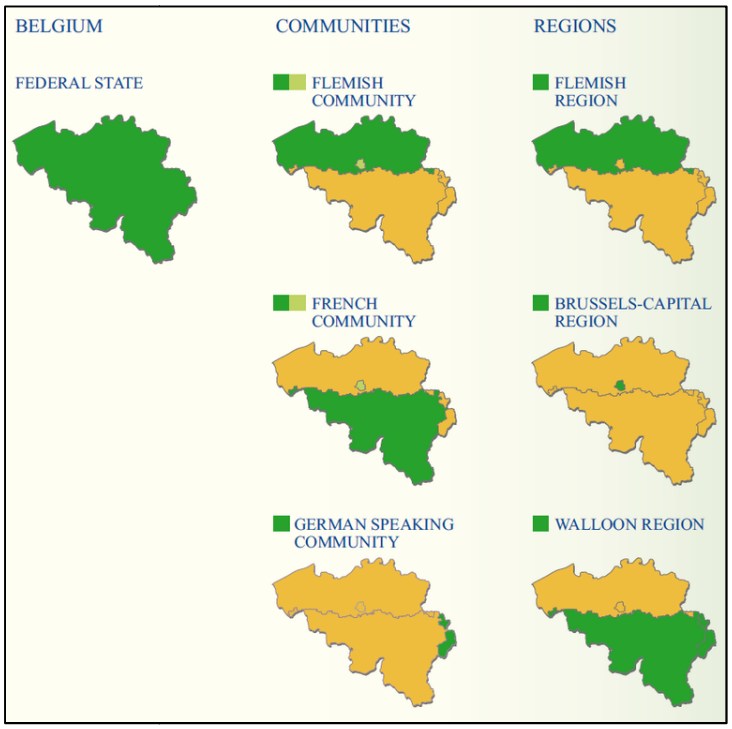

Figure 6: Administrative Divisions in Belgium (Federal, Communities, and Regions).
Source: European Union 2011.

Politics and Economics

After the constitutional reforms that began in the 1970s, the regions and communities took over traditional roles of the federal government, including international policy-making and treaty-making (Lachapelle and Paquin 2005). In fact, Flanders and Wallonia are well-known subnational entities in international relations. Foreign states tend to forge economic and trade treaties with Belgian regions rather than the Belgian state (Lachapelle and Paquin 2005). Even at the supranational level, Belgium is the only state within the EU that requires subnational entities (the parliaments of the regions and communities) to ratify EU treaties as well as the national

government (Flemish Department of Foreign Affairs 2014). Former Minister-President of Flanders, Luc Van den Brande, made Flanders well known internationally during his time in office in the 1990s through the region's foreign policy (Lachapelle and Paquin 2005). He promoted Flemish exports and arranged the ratification of several trade treaties during his time in office. Van den Brande managed to put Flanders 'on the map,' but many Walloons noted that an "arrogant, anti-Walloon" image was portrayed to the international community (Lachapelle and Paquin 2005, 83). Nevertheless, Flanders continues to promote itself independent of Wallonia and Belgium as a whole. The Flanders region has agreements with the Netherlands and South Africa to promote and market their shared cultural and linguistic experiences (SASNEV 2012). The Netherlands has even established a Flemish-Dutch house in Dutch embassies to promote their shared culture (Lachapelle and Paquin 2005).

Aside from the pronounced role in foreign affairs, the constitutional reforms involved the devolution of the following federal roles to the regions and communities: public investment, economic development, housing planning, land use, some energy and employment roles, arts and culture, education, tourism, public transport, public works, area development planning, and industry and research (in which the federal government has little input) (Deschouwer 2009, 189; Ladrech 2010, 105; Swenden 2010, 19). The roles were divided between the regions and communities; the regions were granted authority over territory- or land-related issues while the communities were granted people- or group-related issues (De Rynck 1996). Many of the devolved responsibilities are essential to economic development (Swenden 2010). While the regions and communities enjoy control of their economic policies, the federal government has maintained authority over matters relating to labor markets, wage bargaining, price policies, social security policies, defense, and taxation (Lecours 2005; Deschouwer 2009). Flemings have

fiercely advocated for the decentralization of social services and wage bargaining (Lecours 2005). They contend that the regional governments should administer and manage social services instead of the national government. The devolution of these federal competences would allow Flanders to manage its own social services. Wallonia would benefit from lowering wages to attract businesses and stimulate economic growth and employment (Rusinek and Tojerow 2011). Most Walloons, however, are opposed to further decentralization because Wallonia receives much of its federal funding from taxes paid in Flanders (Lecours 2005). In other words, Flanders pays more in federal taxes than it receives in services from the federal government while the opposite is true for Wallonia. If the provision of social services were devolved to the regions, Wallonia would not be able to fund its social services.

Figure 7: The Belgian Political Structure.
Source: Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles 2014.

The devolution of most federal powers to the regions, communities, and language areas has created a complex and unique political structure (Figure 7). This complexity has contributed to the *problème communautaire*, or community problem, wherein the regions, communities, and language areas advocate only on the behalf of its people and not the Belgian people in general

(Lecours 2005, 142). The devolution of federal powers and the problème communautaire have contributed to a complex political system. It is complex because the federal government is on equal footing with the regions and communities, there is no hierarchy, and their competences rarely overlap (Lecours 2005). The regions and communities are autonomous from the federal government, and federal laws can only overrule regional or community laws with the unanimous consent of the regions and communities (De Rynck 1996). Each of the parliaments of the three regions and the three communities, along with the federal government, must find common ground to govern the Belgian state. The Flemish Region and Flemish Community merged in the 1980s to form one Flemish Parliament; thus there are six parliaments (the Flemish Parliament, Walloon Region Parliament, French Community Parliament, Brussels-Capital Region Parliament, German-speaking Community Parliament, and Belgian Federal Parliament) (Deschouwer 2009). These six parliaments must reach consensus to govern the country. Each of the six parliaments also has to reach consensus amongst the political parties that govern each parliament. Such a political structure is, indeed, complicated. Thus Belgium is a *consociational democracy* in which the six governments share power at the central level, and each government has veto power (Deschouwer 2009, 71).

The complexity of this political structure was evident during the 2007-2011 political crisis in Belgium when the various sub-federal governments of Belgium failed to form a federal government. For 541 days Belgium endured political instability without a functioning federal government (Waterfield 2011). The Flemish political parties used the power of veto as a political tool to demand state reform. In order to increase the devolution of federal powers to the regions and communities, the Flemish Parliament blocked the formation of a coalition federal government through vetoes. The political détente ended when King Albert II allowed further

devolution of, mostly economic, powers and encouraged the other parliaments to agree to the state reform.

After the constitutional reforms in the 1970s, there was no longer a need for national political parties. Since the subnational entities had more governance control, it made more sense to form political parties along linguistic borders. Therefore, the parties aligned themselves along Flemish, Francophone, and Germanophone identities (Billiet, Maddens, and Frognier 2006). It would make it easier to govern the Flemish region, for example, if the political parties representing Flanders only campaigned and focused their efforts in Flanders. Although Belgium is a relatively small country, the social distance between the parties widened considerably. Since the 1980s, after several more constitutional reforms were passed and the federal government devolved even more of its powers, disagreements between parties made it difficult to agree on national issues. As Urwin (1970, 336) put it, "[s]patial segregation of groups offers an opportunity for limited contact, thereby lessening possibilities of conflict, but, if unresolved, it also encourages demands for political autonomy." Further constitutional revisions through the late-1980s and early-1990s granted even more political autonomy to the regions.

State reforms created a unique political system in Belgium. In several EU committees, Belgium is the only member state that sends two delegates who represent the Flemish and French communities (Billiet, Maddens, and Frognier 2006). In addition, each region and community has its own television stations, radio stations, and newspapers. Belgium has only one major national newspaper, *Metro*, which has a Dutch- and French-language version, but they do not share content (Billiet, Maddens, and Frognier 2006). Very rarely do media outlets from one region report on the politics of another region; therefore, Flemings know little about culture and politics in Wallonia and vice versa (Billiet, Maddens, and Frognier 2006). Two different cultures have

emerged with a decline in interregional mobility (for work, relationships, vacations), with the exception of Flemings and Walloons who commute to Brussels for work (Billiet, Maddens, and Frognier 2006).

Belgian society developed into a three-pillared system as a result of the constitutional reforms that were implemented during the second half of the twentieth century. Catholics, Socialists, and Liberals are represented in this system. This division contributed to the creation of three sets of universities: Catholic, freethinking, and neutral state universities (Frognier and De Winter 1991). The language differences also contributed to divisions between universities within the same pillar. For instance, the Catholic University of Louvain/Leuven (in Flanders) was split into two separate institutions: a Dutch-speaking Catholic university (which remained in Leuven, Flanders) and a French-speaking Catholic university (which was built in the planned city of Louvain-la-Neuve, Wallonia). Today each pillar, community, and province has its own university with its own identity (Frognier and De Winter 1991).

With the introduction of constitutional reforms in the late-twentieth century, regional differences increased. The political parties were now regional, not national. The dominant political parties in Flanders and Wallonia began to solidify their position through alignment with the identities of their respective regions. Thus, being a Walloon was dependent on being a member of the Socialist Party, and being a Fleming was dependent on being a member of the Christian Democrats. The parties used the term 'ethnic communities' to refer to the political parties. According to Martiniello (1993), "an ethnic community is not a shared culture but rather a feeling of 'being a member,' a self-consciousness of belonging" (241). An ethnic Walloon became defined by membership in the Socialist Party, and an ethnic Fleming became defined as a Christian Democrat.

The state reforms in the last sixty-five years enabled political parties to increase their power. The state reforms, which transferred most of the federal roles of governance to the regions and communities, increased the influence of regional parties over most political, social, and economic matters. Political parties increased their control over services "from birth to death." The control over government services by political parties could also increase the parties' influence on national and regional identity formation.

Nationalism and National Identity

National and regional identities are a key issue in Belgian politics. But what is identity? Identity is about "belonging" (Smith and Wistrich 2007, 10), including individual and collective identity. Individual identity is the personality and physical and non-physical qualities of an individual (Groebner 2001), including sex, income, and skin color. Collective identity includes race, religion, language, culture, and historical events (Smith and Wistrich 2007, 2). For the purposes of this thesis, only collective identity will be examined because the thesis investigates how political parties may influence national and regional identity (group or collective identity) instead of individual identity. Stuart Hall (2000) argues that identity is a process of identification, and it is under constant change. Additionally, Boyarin and Boyarin (1996) argue that group identity has traditionally been thought of as the product of a "common genealogical origin" or a "common geographical origin" (Boyarin and Boyarin 1996, 74). In the case of Belgium, group identity is a product of the historical processes that shaped the political landscape. Hall (1996, 4) states that "identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture," although he believes that identity is more about the "process of becoming rather than being."

Personal experience, which is a component of identity, "is framed by politics, economics, and bureaucracy with local and regional differences" (Crow 1996, 2). Geography and identity, as Hooson (1994) states, "are inextricably tied up with each other" (11). Identity issues are difficult to separate from geographic aspects of the nation and the region in Belgium. Furthermore, personal experiences are "built through processes of representation, political action, and uneven economic development," and neither can be represented without concern for history or historical development (Crow 1996, 2), Of particular importance to this thesis are the political and historical aspects of identity in Belgium. I argue that the political parties of Belgium have helped shape national and regional identities, and it is important to understand the historical context within which these processes took place. The politics, economics, history, and, of course, geography of Belgium have helped shape national and regional identity.

Flemish philosopher Lode Claes characterized Belgium as an "identity of non-identity" (Belien 2005, 341). A new group of intellectuals and artists known as 'neo-Belgicists' have argued that the Belgian flag "does not represent anything" and Belgium "is nothing" since it does not have a national identity (Belien 2005, 342). The state never promoted a unified identity that both Flemings and Walloons could identify with. Belgian politicians saw the decentralization of federal powers as a temporary means to appease both sides and keep the state intact. Yet the devolution of power has created an even greater divide between the regions while strengthening regional identities.

States that promoted a national identity used history and geography courses in state-sponsored education to promote their message (Weber 1976; Hobsbawm 1992; Hooson 1994; Lowenthal 1994; Sandner 1994; Geary 2003; Judson 2006; Woolf 2006). They used history to create a common background for the nascent nations and geography to situate the nations within

politically and territorially defined borders. Whether the common background was real or invented, a common history provided legitimacy for the nation and contributed to a common national identity. Likewise, defined borders created an "us" versus "them" mentality. Nationalism encouraged nations to "reshape geographical images and historical memory" in order to further their claims (Lowenthal 1994, 15). Nation-states used the education system to shape national identity. Sandner (1994) explains that the school system was used "to transfer concepts, meaning and consciousness of national unity 'down' to the people" (72). Schools were powerful agents of acculturation and socialization through the indoctrination of nationalist ideologies (Weber 1976; Judson 2006).

Nationalist ideologies are generally composed of "stereotyped versions of 'national history'" and myths of natural cultures (Coakley 2004, 534). These ideologies can be found in literature, theater, music, folklore, sports, rituals (processions, parades, marches, funerals, commemorations, inauguration ceremonies, swearings-in and other public ceremonials), and symbols (flags, anthems, and emblems, public monuments and buildings, coins, postage stamps, passports, place names, military uniforms, and even national airlines) (Coakley 2004, 535). Coakley (2004) calls these ideologies the myth of origin and claims that each ideology "is an essential ingredient in any nation's self-conception" (542).

Political parties in Belgium create and disseminate a myth of origin for Flemings and Walloons. The Flemish, French, and German-speaking communities regulate education in Belgium. In turn, the political parties with the largest representation in the parliaments of the communities establish education regulations. Therefore, the ruling parties in each community have the power to influence the course content in public schools. Parties do not necessarily influence the curriculum, but as Weber (1976) and Judson (2006) argued, schools would be

powerful agents to influence the construction of a Flemish or Walloon myth of origin and identity. Whether or not political parties have used schools for this purpose, Flemish parties have contributed more to a Flemish nationalist ideology than have Walloon parties. This is evidenced by a strong Flemish identity and a general consensus among Flemish parties of what it means to be Flemish. A Walloon identity is hard to define, even amongst Walloon parties. According to their websites, however, neither side has been successful at contributing to a Belgian nationalist ideology. The Flemish parties, for the most part, agree there is no such thing as a Belgian nation, while the Walloon parties have a hard time distinguishing a Walloon identity from a Belgian identity.

Regionalism and Regional Identity

Regional identities in Belgium are strong and powerful, and they influence federal affairs. For instance, cabinet positions in the federal government have duplicate ministers to administer social services (Norman 2006). The communities of Belgium are constitutionally defined areas where education, culture, and social welfare are administered by Dutch-, French-, and German-speaking communities (Deschouwer 2009). Even within the EU, Belgium is the only member state that sends delegates from each community to represent the interests of Belgium. In the European Science Foundation, for example, Belgium is the only country to be represented by two delegates (Billiet, Maddens, and Frognier 2006). Belgium is also the only country in the EU that has two national coordinators that lead data acquisition for the EU (Billiet, Maddens, and Frognier 2006).

The process of nation-building in Belgium ultimately rests with the regions (Figure 8) (Billiet, Maddens, and Frognier 2006), which is problematic. The regions have failed to create a

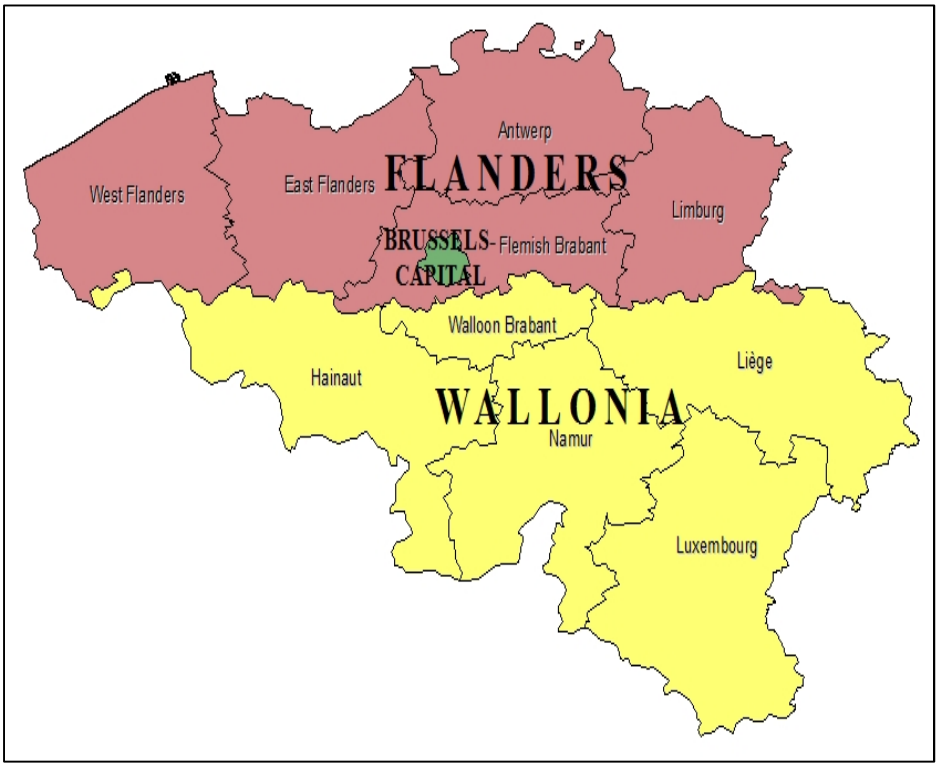

Figure 8: Belgium and Its Regions (with Provinces).
Source: Global Administrative Areas 2012.

multinational Belgian identity since each region aims to elevate its regional identity. Hooghe (1991) identifies different roots for each region's identity. Flanders' identity is rooted in "cultural deprivation" while Wallonia in "economic deprivation" (15). Before the constitutional reforms, people in positions of power spoke French. Politics and business were conducted in French. If one did not speak French, access to channels of economic and political power influence was limited or nonexistent. Dutch-speakers who were trying to get into politics felt culturally deprived since they lacked the necessary French cultural capital to participate. To be a Fleming was a disadvantage as no accommodations were made for Dutch-speakers. Therefore, Flemings had to learn French before they could participate in the politics of Belgium. Meanwhile, when Flanders overtook Wallonia in gross domestic product (GDP) and income in the middle of the

twentieth century, Walloons had little influence on economic policy. Before these issues arose, the Flemish and Walloon nations did not exist. People spoke Dutch in an area that used to be part of the historic County of Flanders, even though that county only makes up a small portion of the Flanders Region that exists today. Hooghe (1991) claims that the Flemish nation, encompassing all Dutch-speaking Belgians, did not appear until Dutch speakers demanded access to channels of economic and political power in their native language. Wallonia, on the other hand, never developed a Walloon nation as strong or politically powerful as a Flemish nation.

Piet van de Craen (2002) also insists that regional identities "did not emerge until the beginning of the twentieth century" (25). He describes the defining moment in 1912 when a Walloon politician, Jules Destrée, wrote to the king stating "there are no Belgians…. No, Majesty, there is not such a thing as a Belgian soul" (van de Craen 2002, 25). He further elaborates on regional identities by referring to a quote by Pierre Wigny, Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1958 to 1961: "Belgium is the only country in the world where various oppressed majorities coexist, three groups that each have a certain supremacy and that feed an inferiority complex" (van de Craen 2002, 25).

Even though most of Western Europe remains dominated by centralized states, regionalism is on the rise (Fitjar 2010). Regionalism, as described by Fitjar (2010), is the "politicization of regional identity" in which political issues are framed around regional identity (5). The rise of regionalism in Belgium contributed to constitutional reforms in which many of the federal powers were devolved to the regions in a process of federalization. But federalization has transformed what used to be linguistic borders into quasi-national borders (Ceuppens and Foblets 2007). Regional identities have thus supplanted a Belgian national identity. The process

of federalization has given greater political power to political parties in Belgium. This increase in power has allowed the parties to influence regional identity formation.

Political Parties

Belgium does not have national political parties today. The national parties that used to exist, or traditional political parties as they are called by politicians, were established in the nineteenth century (Deschouwer 2009). These parties were the Christian democratic, liberal, and socialist parties. Today, each traditional party is separately represented in Flanders and Wallonia; thus there are six traditional parties. Political parties in Belgium elect party members to political candidacy, they exert power over various social, economic, and cultural organizations, and they have "a strong grip on public administration" (Deschouwer 2009, 73). The political parties discussed in this thesis are the Christian Democratic and Flemish party (CD&V) and the New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) in Flanders and the Reformist Movement (MR) and the Socialist Party (PS) in Wallonia. The selection of these parties is discussed in the methods section.

The Christian Democratic and Flemish party (*Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams* or CD&V) became the Christian People's Party in 1945. Leaders from the former Catholic Party, several Christian social organizations, and a large group of young people in Flanders helped establish the Christian People's Party, which would later become the CD&V (CD&V 2013). Although the party has the word 'Christian' in its name, the party claims to be a "genuine people's party" where believers and non-believers can unite "to build a better world" (CD&V 2013). CD&V has advocated for a Belgium with free public education, equality, independence for the Congo, cultural and linguistic autonomy, and an end to the unitary state. After the 1999 elections, when the party was not represented in the Flemish or Federal governments for the first

time, the party rebranded itself. It aimed to make Flanders world-class and to "enrich the welfare state to a state of well-being" (CD&V 2013). In the year 2000, the party adopted the new name *Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams* (Christian Democratic and Flemish). Within five years the CD&V had received the highest percentage of votes in Flanders. The CD&V claims that the political crisis in Belgium stems from linguistic tensions that "remain as a sword of Damocles hanging over the federal coalition" (CD&V 2013).

On the other side of the political spectrum in Flanders is the conservative New Flemish Alliance (*Nieuw-Vlaams Alliantie* or N-VA). The N-VA was formed in 2001 when the People's Union in Flanders, itself formed in 1954, split into different parties. The N-VA considers itself a democratic Flemish nationalist party "which advocates for an independent Flanders as a Member State of the European Union" (N-VA 2013). It aims to fight for the Flemish public interest. The party promotes domestic policy in Flanders, Flanders and the EU, and Flemish society (through democracy, policy, media, and politics). Within a decade of its formation, the party gained the most seats in the combined federal, Brussels, and European parliaments to become the largest party in the country.

In Wallonia, the Reformist Movement (*Mouvement Réformateur* or MR) is the biggest conservative party in the region. It owes its origins to the Liberal Party that was formed in the nineteenth century (MR 2013). The party considers itself a center-right conservative-liberal party. It inherited the following objectives from the Liberal Party: religious tolerance, respect for individual freedoms, the support for a market economy, and commitment to a secular education. By 2002, the party changed its name to the Reformist Movement advocating the accountability, consistency, and efficiency of government. Although the party mentions Wallonia and

Francophone Belgium on its website, the objectives are directed mostly at Belgium and its federal government.

Finally, the Socialist Party (*Parti Socialiste* or PS) is the left-wing counterpart in Wallonia. The origins of the party can also be found in the nineteenth century (PS 2013). By 1945 it had become the Belgian Socialist Party which advocated for free public education and the establishment of social security. In the late 1970s the party adopted its current name. The party primarily addresses socio-economic issues, including support for social security and opposition to privatization and federalization. In addition, the party "reaffirms its commitment to a true community based on parliamentary democracy, human rights and the welfare state" (PS 2013). Like the MR, the PS focuses on Belgium rather than just Wallonia.

Due to the constitutional reforms that devolved federal powers to the regions, a system of *pillarization* developed. Pillarization, according to Méndez-Lago (2004), is defined as "the construction of parallel organizational structures performing similar social, cultural and political tasks" (192). In this system, each of the main political parties provided services to its constituents (Deschouwer 2009). Therefore, each political party controlled its own trade unions, cultural associations, hospitals, health insurance, schools (including universities), and even banks. As a result, there were two or three 'pillars' of each social service in most areas of Belgium. This pillarization helped the parties become powerful in the regions by controlling access to services from 'the cradle to the grave.' The parties began to "exercise direct or indirect control over important spheres of citizens' lives" (Méndez-Lago 2004, 192). They controlled education within their respective regions and had the power to dictate what kind of Belgian identity would be disseminated in school textbooks (Deschouwer 2009). Regional identity was promoted more heavily than national identity, if a national identity was promoted at all (Varin

2006). The power of the political parties and their leaders increased with every constitutional reform. Elite theory helps explain the strong influence of political parties on identity formation.

Elite Theory

The elites (the political parties) in Belgium have helped shaped national and regional identities. Judson (2006) argues that elites in the Hapsburg Empire shaped national identity during the eighteenth century in what became Austria. After losing some social and political privilege due to the increasing centralization of the empire, the elites united against the monarchy by using the term 'nation,' as in "we the nation." They only had the values of the nobility in mind, disregarding the rest of the so-called nation. This is similar to what is happening in Flanders where the elites (leaders of the political parties) only have the values of Flemings in mind rather than the values of Belgians. This is where elite theory helps clarify my argument.

The basic premise of elite theory is that "all modern societies are dominated by the leaders (called *elites*) of large bureaucratically structured organizations" (Domhoff 2005, original emphasis). These organizations can be corporate, nonprofit, or governmental. The leaders of these organizations are powerful because, according to this theory, they have access to resources, information, and networks that allow them to make policies that benefit the organization and their leaders (Domhoff 2010). The elites become political actors, but the political actors need not have executive, legislative, or judicial powers to take part in the management of society's polity (Martiniello 1993). Ethnic elites are people who "have reached a significant degree of success" and can influence the behavior of other members of their own ethnicity (Martiniello 1993, 243). The power of ethnic elites "is conceived as the ability of an ethnic collectivity as a group to

control results related to issues affecting its interests" (Martiniello 1993, 243). In Belgium, for example, Flemish parties have argued that Flemings must be protected through political action (De Witte 2006).

Elite theory stands in contrast to pluralism, state autonomy, and Marxism. Pluralism believes that there are many centers of power (Domhoff 2005). This fails to adequately describe the political situation in Belgium. While there are different ethnic groups within Belgium, they only exercise power within their respective regions. At the federal level in Belgium, Flemings and Walloons rarely agree, and as a result, each of the ethnic groups has little power over federal matters. The theory of state autonomy, meanwhile, asserts that power lies in the government, or the state, because it controls the military (Domhoff 2005). This is even further from the reality in Belgium. In Belgium, outside of military actions, regions are responsible for foreign affairs (Deschouwer 2009). The state has very little authority in Belgium, even if it controls the military. Finally, Marxism states that power is tied to capitalism. The owners of the means of production exercise power over the workers (Domhoff 2005); in other words, power is tied to social class. This theory does not apply to Belgium because the Socialist Party (PS) and the Christian Democratic and Flemish party (CD&V), which have significant support within Belgium, embrace a political ideology that aims to dismantle or reduce the political and economic influence of owners of the means of production via government-owned corporations.

Elite theory stresses that elites and non-elites are interdependent since non-elites can counter some of the power of elites when they disagree on an issue. However, Domhoff (2005) argues that this theory does not include class conflict to understand the power relationship between organizations and the working class. Other sociologists would argue that while class conflict may be needed to analyze power structures in the United States, it does not necessarily

work in other societies. The sociologists Clark, Lipset, and Rempel (1993), building on the previous works of Clark and Lipset (1991), Hout, Brooks, and Manza (1993), and Pakulski (1993), argue that class conflict is irrelevant for the study of power relationships in Belgium. The reasoning they give for this is that the rise of regional and ethnic-based parties has increased voting based on ethnic and regional identities instead of class affiliation. Members of social classes unite as cultural voting blocks rather than voting along socio-economic lines. Even in cases when voters choose a party based on economic issues, those voters tend to seek enhanced economic freedoms through less taxation rather than actual power. Clark, Lipset, and Rempel (1993) posit that the political significance of social classes has been substantially reduced since the 1950s due to increasing influence of parties and unions in political processes. Social classes no longer adequately explain the social and political processes behind power.

Belgium has one of the highest rates of working class populations in Western Europe where workers are least likely to vote based on class (Urwin 1970). Several studies show that religion and language are the most important voting factors followed by class (Lijphart 1979). This same pattern emerged in Canada, South Africa, and Switzerland, the other three countries that were analyzed by Lijphart (1979). Religion's influence on voting can be attributed to what Lijphart (1979) calls the "'freezing' of past conflict dimensions in the party system" (442). In other words, the political parties in Belgium were based on religious ideology, and voters continue to support the party even if some of the party's aims are at odds with their beliefs. From 1945 until 1999, the two largest parties were the Christian Democrats and the Socialists (Magalhães 2006). While the political platforms of both parties changed over that period, the religious ideologies did not (Christianity for the Christian Democrats and secularism for the Socialists), and the voters remained more loyal to the religious aspect rather than the political

ones. Regardless of growing secularization in Belgium, religious ideology is still the strongest influence on voting behavior (Billiet, Maddens, and Frognier 2006).

Language came in as the second most important voting factor, albeit a very close second. Language influences party choice in countries that are linguistically heterogeneous (Lijphart 1979). Religion, as a voting factor, scored higher because Belgian voters have the ability to express their linguistic interests through the regional political structures. Since the regions have substantial autonomy in language matters, voters do not feel the need to vote along linguistic lines at the federal level (Lijphart 1979). Unlike Poland, where religious identification helped unite Polish nationalism under the Catholic faith, religious identification is divided between northern Catholic Flanders and southern mostly secular Wallonia (Linz 2006). Lijphart (1979) found that social class only influences party choice in the absence of religion and language.

Belgium, since its independence in 1830 from the Netherlands, has been ruled by elites. At the time of its creation, the elite were united under the cause of independence. The elite were Flemings and Walloons, and Belgium was ruled by a "transethnic" elite (Covell 1993, 67). Initially the elite spoke French, but once independence was secured, Flemings aimed to secure rights for the Flemish language and Flemish elite. The demand for linguistic diversity translated into the need for political decentralization, which necessitated the formation of new elites to tackle constitutional revisions (Covell 1993). During the constitutional revisions of 1988, the negotiators "were representatives of political parties, and their agendas included the institutional *and* political agendas of the parties, as well as their own personal attitudes and ambitions" (Covell 1993, 70, original emphasis). The new constitutional revisions thus reflected the will of the political parties and the ethnic elites.

The political parties, especially Flemish parties, have declared that Flemings and Walloons are distinct ethnic groups (Martiniello 1993). According to elite theory, the leaders of political parties are the elites. Because the parties consider Flemings and Walloons to be ethnicities, Martiniello (1993) calls these political leaders 'ethnic elites.' The ethnic elites set political agendas and shape and construct a collective identity that serves "to promote and defend the ethnic community's interests, notably through their relations with the state and the polity" (Martiniello 1993, 244-245). Breuning (2007) calls this an "ethnopolitical agenda" (102). Electoral victories reaffirm the legitimacy and existence of ethnic groups and their ethnopolitical agendas. For example, all of the Walloon parties with seats in the parliaments agree that a Walloon identity cannot exist without a Belgian identity. Meanwhile, the Walloon parties that advocate the idea that a Walloon identity is essentially a French identity and that a Belgian identity does not exist have yet to have a single party member elected to any of the Belgian parliaments.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Qualitative methods are best used when the aim is to "describe and understand social phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them" (Boeije 2010, 11). These methods help us understand human environments, individual experiences, and social processes (Winchester and Rofe 2010). In fact, the two most fundamental research questions that qualitative researchers study deal with "social structures and individual experiences" (Winchester and Rofe 2010, 5). My research questions focus on the influence of political parties in Belgium over national and regional identities. By qualitatively analyzing the websites of political parties, I analyze overt and hidden messages within the texts to determine the kinds of identities that the parties are promoting.

This thesis investigates how Belgian political parties represent national and regional identities and how the messages are conveyed on their websites. The thesis studies how political parties represent national and regional identity, not how Belgians feel about the identities presented by the parties. Initially, this thesis investigated how Belgians defined national and regional identities. I planned to travel to Belgium and conduct surveys and interviews to gauge public opinions on territorial identity. However, due to time and financial constraints, travel to Belgium for fieldwork was impossible. Therefore, this research analyzes the representation of national and regional identity in Belgium through political party websites.

I conducted content and discourse analysis of the websites of the four largest political parties in Belgium, which will be discussed in further detail. These methods of analysis will help me identify statements and themes that may influence the construction of national and regional identities in Belgium. I conducted four case studies, one for each of the four websites I analyzed. While it is not a methodological choice, a case study is "a choice of what is to be studied" (Stake

2005, 443). The case study is defined by the "interest in an individual case" (Stake 2005, 443). According to Stake (2005), a "case study is both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry" (444). In my research the case studies are the four websites of the largest political parties in Belgium. The rationale for choosing the four websites I analyzed is discussed in the section on data collection and selection.

Ideally, I would have conducted interviews with politicians in Belgium. However, there were issues of cost and travel constraints. A second best option was to use the Internet. Markham (2004) states that the Internet "provides new tools for conducting research, new venues for social research, and new means for understanding the way social realities get constructed and reproduced through discursive behaviors" (95). While the bulk of internet research is concerned with the study of online behavior, the study of human behavior in general can also be achieved via this research method (Mann and Stewart 2000). Additionally, online documents are "easily accessible, free, and contain information that would take an investigator enormous time and effort to gather otherwise" (Merriam 2009, 155). Internet research eliminates cost and time barriers of travel, which is one of the "most powerful advantages" for qualitative researchers to use the Internet (Mann and Stewart 2000, 20).

I identified key themes, which can "draw a picture of the presuppositions and meanings that constitute the cultural world of which the textual material is a specimen" (Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori 2011, 530). I included complete websites because an "analysis of textual data is more effective and reliable if the text of the whole [document] is available" (Mann and Stewart 2000). Content analysis, as defined by Neuendorf (2002), is the "systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics" (1). It can be further defined as counting frequencies, sequences, or locations of words and phrases" (Weitzman 2000, 806). I used content

analysis to identify how often statements, phrases or words were used and in what context, and how those texts related to my research questions.

Discourse analysis "offers insights into how particular knowledge becomes common sense and dominant, while simultaneously silencing different interpretations" (Waitt 2010, 217). Additionally, discourse analysis allows researchers to understand the "ways in which issues and spaces are framed through this textual form of discourse…, as this is the most empirically observable aspect of language's impact on, and constitution of, the social world" (Dittmer 2010, 275). Furthermore, Peräkylä and Ruusuvuori (2011) define discourse analysis as the "many different approaches of investigation of written texts (and of spoken discourse as well" (530). Discourse analysis is not just the linguistic analysis of a text, though. It is also "'oscillating' between a focus on specific texts and a focus on… the 'order of discourse,' the relatively durable social structuring of language which is itself one element of the relatively durable structuring and networking of social practices" (Fairclough 2003, 3). Finally, Fairclough (2003) adds that "[d]iscourses include representations of how things are and have been, as well as imaginaries — representations of how things might or could or should be" (207).

Dittmer (2010) acknowledged that discourse analysis is "notoriously difficult" when conducted for the first time (279), (Dittmer 2010; Waitt 2010). There are many ways to conduct, and different types of, discourse analysis (Waitt 2010). Nonetheless, discourse analysis is a well-established and important tool for human geographers (Waitt 2010). Of the different types of discourse analysis, there are three main approaches: textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice (Dittmer 2010). I used the first two approaches in my analysis. The first approach analyzes word choice and grammar to try to understand the content of the language. For example, are the word choices utilized by the N-VA on its website indicating a stance against or

in favor of immigration? The second approach studies the context of the language (Dittmer, 2010). The context of the language is very important because "it is the interweaving of words and phrases in different contexts that gives them their sense" (Parker 1999, 2). For example, the word 'independence' could be used to either announce events to celebrate Belgian independence on Belgian National Day, or it could be used to promote Flemish independence. Thus the context is highly important.

Data Collection and Selection

I initially planned to use ATLAS.ti, an analysis software, to code, organize, and analyze the data. Some of the benefits of using analysis software include: managing large quantities of data, convenient coding and retrieving, and comprehensive and accurate text searches, among others (Peace and van Hoven 2010, 308). Time constraints and a lack of experience with the software made it difficult to use ATLAS.ti. Peace and van Hoven (2010) mention that the kind of software used depends on "your current skill level and the amount of time you have to learn new skills" (299). Additionally, they advise that one should consider all the arguments for and against using analysis software seriously before deciding to invest time in learning how to use a new software program. I tried several times to use ATLAS.ti but found it difficult and uncomfortable. It would have taken much longer to learn how to use this software than it did by conducting the data collection and analysis by hand. I decided to conduct analysis by hand. I typed the website information in Word document, printed the document, cut the individual quotes from the websites, coded the quotes with markers and highlighters, sorted the quotes, and analyzed the data. Weitzman (2000) argues that "the process of spending endless hours sitting on the floor

surrounded by piles and piles of paper led [researchers], by necessity, to a very rich and thorough familiarity with their data" (816).

Table 1: Flemish Political Parties in Belgium, 2013.

Flemish Name	Acronym	English Name
Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams	CD&V	Christian Democratic and Flemish
Groen	(None)	Green
Libertair, Direct, Democratisch	LDD	Libertarian, Direct, Democratic
Nieuw-Vlaams Alliantie	N-VA	New Flemish Alliance
Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten	Open Vld	Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats
sp.a: Socialistische Partij Anders	sp.a	Different Socialist Party
Vlaams Belang	VB	Flemish Interest

Source: Portal Belgian Government 2014.

Table 2: Francophone (Walloon or French Community) Political Parties in Belgium, 2013.

French Name	Acronym	English Name
Centre Démocrate Humaniste	CdH	Humanist Democratic Centre
Ecolo	(None)	short for *écologiste* (environmentalist)
Fédéralistes Démocrates Francophones	FDF	Francophone Democratic Federalists
Mouvement Réformateur	MR	Reformist Movement
Parti Socialiste	PS	Socialist Party

Source: Portal Belgian Government 2014.

I conducted content and discourse analysis of the websites of Belgian political parties in order to determine what each party considers to be the desired traits of national and regional identities in Belgium. Of more than thirty political parties, only twelve (seven Flemish and five Francophone) won seats in the federal, regional, and communital parliaments during the last major elections in Belgium in 2010 (Portal Belgian Government 2014) (Tables 1 and 2). I selected two parties from Flanders and two from Wallonia with the most seats in the Belgian parliaments (Table 3). I decided to analyze the websites of the four parties with the highest number of seats in the Belgian Federal Parliament, the Brussels Parliament, and the European Parliament. I chose not to count the number of seats in the Walloon, French Community, and Flemish parliament. Since the Flanders Region Parliament and the Flemish Community

Parliament were merged into one Flemish Parliament, the number of available seats were reduced to account for redundancy. In the South, however, the Walloon Region and the French Community maintain separate parliaments. Therefore, francophone Belgians have a larger representation in their region and community than the Flemings do in Flanders. If I were to include the regional and community seats, Wallonia would be overrepresented.

Table 3: Number of Seats in the Belgian Parliaments by Political Party.

Political Parties	Chamber of Representatives	Senate	Flanders/ Wallonia	French Community	Brussels Parliament	European Parliament
CD&V	17	7	31	N/A	3	3
Groen	5	2	7	N/A	2	1
LDD	1	0	6	N/A	0	1
N-VA	27	14	17	N/A	1	1
Open Vld	13	6	22	N/A	4	3
sp.a	13	7	19	N/A	4	2
VB	12	4	19	N/A	1	1
CdH	9	4	13	16	11	1
Ecolo	8	5	13	17	16	2
FDF	3	0	0	2	11	0
MR	15	8	19	23	13	2
PS	26	13	29	33	21	3

Source: Portal Belgian Government 2014.

The two political parties in Flanders with the most seats in the Belgian Federal Parliament (the Chamber of Representatives and the Senate), the Brussels Regional Parliament, and European Parliament combined are the Christian Democratic and Flemish (CD&V) with 30 seats and the New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) with 43 seats, while in Wallonia the Reformist Movement (MR) had 38 seats and the Socialist Party (PS) had 63 (Table 4). Both sets of parties represent opposite ends of the political spectrum in their respective regions. The CD&V in Flanders and the PS in Wallonia can be categorized as left-wing political parties, and the N-VA in Flanders and the MR in Wallonia can be labeled as right-wing political parties. While the left-

wing parties of Flanders and Wallonia may agree on political ideology, they differ on what it means to be Belgian. The same can be said for the N-VA and the MR.

Table 4: Number of Seats in Non-Regional/Community Parliaments and Regional/Community Parliaments.

Political Parties	Total Number of Seats in Chamber of Representatives, Senate, Brussels Parliament, and European Parliament	Total Number of Seats in Walloon Parliament and French Community Parliament or Flemish Parliament
CD&V	30	31
Groen	10	7
LDD	2	6
N-VA	43	17
Open Vld	26	22
sp.a	26	19
VB	18	19
CdH	25	29
Ecolo	31	30
FDF	14	2
MR	38	42
PS	63	62

Source: Portal Belgian Government 2014.

The media often argues that the political divide in Belgium is created by cultural-linguistic differences, but the literature suggests otherwise. The literature review of this thesis suggests that the rise of regional identity and the decline of national identity in Belgium have more to do with the increasing influence of political parties (the elites). Political parties used cultural and linguistic differences between Flemings and Walloons to increase their power and influence. The literature suggests that the political parties significantly influence national, and regional, identity formation. If this is true, an analysis of the websites of the most powerful parties in Belgium can shed light on Belgian identity formation.

For the content analysis, I counted major words, phrases, and statements (henceforth referred to as the texts) for each website. “Major” refers to words with importance that political

parties would like to transmit to their audiences. For example, on the MR's website, one of the headlines is "The middle class is not a fiscal punching bag" (MR 2014). The major words and phrases in this headline that would be of importance are "middle class" and "fiscal." Therefore, not every single word (the, is, a, etc.) was counted. The phrase "punching bag" is important for describing the tone of the message (in this case a negative tone), which will be further discussed in the coding evaluation section.

All the texts were typed up verbatim, including punctuation. The content of all four websites was in French and Dutch, and I made every effort to ensure that the translations transferred as much of the cultural context as possible into English. For instance, in one of the news articles under the 'Justice' tab in the MR's website the word "Ubuesque" is used. This word describes something or someone who is similar to the fictional character named Ubu from French novels. Essentially, it means grotesque, but without the cultural context it would just have been translated as Ubuesque. Furthermore, only texts with actual content were counted. For example, the tab titled 'our people' on the CD&V's website was not be counted, but the content within that section was analyzed. The phrase "our people" has little significance until one clicks on that tab and it takes the online visitor to a section that details who "our people" are. In this case, the people in question are the leaders of the party. Without that information "our people" could have easily been interpreted to mean Belgian or Flemish people. This method of coding focused the analysis on relevant text and decreased the amount of data.

Coding

Coding is the process by which key themes are identified and organized through descriptive or analytic codes (Cope 2010). I use descriptive codes, which are category labels, and

analytic codes, which are "thematic, theoretical, or in some way emerge from the analysis" (Cope 2010, 281). The analytic codes emerged from the analysis of the descriptive codes. Although descriptive coding, essentially content analysis, is a quantitative method, analytic coding is purely qualitative. Combining qualitative with quantitative methods provides "both the individual and the general perspective on an issue" (Winchester and Rofe 2010, 17). The analytic coding is most important because analytic codes "typically dig deeper into the processes and context of phrases or actions" (Cope 2010, 283).

I coded the texts of the four websites. Each text was tallied once. Words, phrases, and statements that were thematically related were grouped together. For example, the phrases "the people," "citizens," and "Belgians" could be grouped together, but only if they were contextually relevant. An article on the N-VA's website refers to "the people of Scotland" (N-VA 2014). Obviously in this case "the people" would not be included. The goal was to group the texts into as few themes as possible while maintaining the meaning of each text. The categories "should be responsive to the purpose of the research…., should be exhaustive…., [and] should be mutually exclusive" (Merriam 2009, 185).

I used several tools to translate the websites. I am fluent in French as I took courses in French for ten years and attended a Walloon high school in Amay, Belgium, from 2001 to 2002. I used a French-English dictionary (Steiner 1988), Google Translate (2014) and Bing Translator (2014) when necessary. While attending school in Amay from 2001 to 2002, I also learned Dutch, although my reading and writing abilities in Dutch are at the novice level. Therefore, when coding the Flemish websites I used two Dutch-English dictionaries (Gilbert and Quist 1994; Osselton 2003), as well as Google Translate and Bing Translator. I used two online translator tools and two dictionaries for the Flemish websites to ensure a nuanced translation of

the texts. Online translators, also known as machine translations (MTs), can save time and effort translating texts (Wilks 2009). Rather than browsing through dictionaries to translate individual words, MTs can translate large texts in an instant. Additionally, MTs are cheaper than hiring a professional translator or purchasing dictionaries. MTs also have the added benefit of translating in multiple languages, whereas dictionaries and translators usually only cover one language. On the other hand, accuracy is not consistent with MTs. MTs generally translate individual words rather than translations of phrases. The biggest problem is that translations performed by MTs lose context and the meanings of phrases and statements may be unnatural or outright wrong. This is why I chose to use multiple translation tools. The use of multiple translation tools reduces the chance of misrepresentation.

Jagers and Walgrave (2007), in a study of Belgian politicians in the media, state that "[i]nterpreting attitudes is a delicate matter" (339). Nevertheless, I interpreted attitudes within each text and evaluated them for their tone: positive, negative, or neutral. For the content analysis only explicit understandings of the texts were used. In the discourse analysis I delve into the suggested or implied meaning of each text. Similar themes received high tally marks, but this tended to give the impression that such words were used in a positive manner. The EU received the second highest tally in the N-VA analysis. Yet the N-VA's website casts the EU in a very critical and often negative light. The N-VA asserts that it is "concerned" about the enlargement of the EU and is "not in favor of Turkish membership" of the EU (N-VA 2014). The EU is mentioned positively by claiming that the "N-VA wants to make Flanders a Member State in Europe" after its proposed independence (N-VA 2014).

Several themes were especially important to understanding Belgian identity. These include the Belgian state, the monarchy, the federal administrative divisions, autonomy and

independence, the people and citizens, immigration and foreigners, the EU, and the economy. Any reference to Belgium as a state, such as the terms Belgium, the state, the kingdom, the federal government, Belgian Parliament, and Brussels (in the context of the federal government) were grouped into the theme of the Belgian state. This theme indicates if political parties encourage and promote national identity.

Several leaders and politicians in Belgium have noted that the monarchy unites Flemings and Walloons as Belgians (van de Craen 2002; Rennie 2006; Traynor 2007). Therefore, I investigate the focus on the monarchy by the four political parties. If the monarchy is rarely mentioned, what does that mean for Belgian national identity? The analysis indicated that the monarchy was rarely, if at all, mentioned by the four parties. Most mentions of the monarchy are informational, as in the various articles or references mentioning the new King of the Belgians, Philippe. One of the few references indicating a position on the monarchy is in the N-VA's website in which the party promotes the idea of an independent Flanders with King Philippe remaining as the head of state. What aspects of Belgian society are left for all Belgians to lay a claim to as part of their national identity? According to the four websites, not much is left as a defining Belgian national identity. Or at the very least, these four political parties have made no effort to define it.

References to the regions, communities, and language areas in the websites are significant as well. The greater the content on this theme on a website, the greater the likelihood that that political party will be more in favor of autonomy than a political party with few references to this theme on its website. The themes of autonomy, competences, devolution, and state reform were grouped. It is expected that the political parties with the most positive references to increased autonomy will have a stronger regional identity than the political parties

with fewer references to autonomy. Likewise, I predict that calls for independence come from political parties that promote the strongest regional identity. Terms that were included in this grouping include independence, partition(ing), divide, separate, split off, and break away. Again, I ensured that only relevant texts were included. The N-VA wrote articles related to other separatist movements in Europe, such as the Scottish independence movement. For obvious reasons this would not be included in this category unless it specifically mentioned Belgium or its people.

People are crucial to the concept of identity. It is, therefore, important to analyze how the political parties address the people of Belgium and who they are including/excluding from that definition. For the content analysis, unless a specific ethnic group was mentioned (Flemings or Walloons), it was quite difficult to determine who was included in the definition. But in the discourse analysis, it was easier to discern the suggested target audience. Citizenship is also meaningful when discussing national identity. The websites for the N-VA and the CD&V, for instance, discuss this topic in detail. They tend to focus on how best to administer and provide citizenship to immigrants. In addition, the category of immigration directly ties into the category of citizenship. Nevertheless, there is enough of a distinction that this category can be a distinct and separate category from the citizenship category. For example, the websites for the N-VA and the CD&V tend to take a more positive or neutral approach to citizenship, but it turns quite negative in regard to immigration. The CD&V promotes integration policies that include Dutch lessons and social orientation in order to become a citizen, but also states that immigrants "[m]ust leave our land because they exploit our social security system" (CD&V 2014).

Regional identity, as has been discussed in the literature review, has been influenced by the economy. The N-VA claims that Flanders contributes more in tax revenue for social services

than Wallonia, yet Walloons receive more services than Flemings. Economic factors play an important role in the political platform of all four of the parties. In fact, the bulk of the information found in the websites ties in directly with the economy. And, as has been argued in the literature review, Flanders is more keen on partitioning Belgium because of its economic strength whereas politicians in Wallonia have acknowledged that if Belgium were to split the most economically viable path for Wallonia would be to join France. The tax revenue in Wallonia could not support its current budget for social services if it were to be independent.

European identity is a curious indicator. Surveys conducted by the EU have shown that respondents who are more attached to their national identity are more likely to have a higher attachment to a European identity than respondents who are more attached to their regional identity (European Union 2010). For example, according to the survey, national attachment in Ireland is high as is attachment to the EU. Websites that mentioned the EU in a negative tone might show that the political parties promote regional identity more than a national identity. A category on national identity was included as well. This category consisted of texts that specifically mention what it means to be Belgian, Flemish, or Walloon. For example, the N-VA website states that all Flemish residents should understand and speak Dutch because "without a good knowledge of Dutch… Flanders is impossible" (N-VA 2014). This statement clearly states what it means to be Flemish; there is no ambiguity about it. Accordingly, any texts that explicitly dealt with national or regional identity were included in this group.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS

Content Analysis

I analyzed the content of websites of four Belgian political parties: the CD&V, N-VA, MR, and PS. My main objective was to count the number of times each political party used key words or phrases (see Table 5) to determine the platforms of each party. I took the context of each word and phrase into consideration. For example, some websites used the terms federal, national, or Belgian government to refer to the state government. Those words could be counted as the same theme. Meanwhile, the word "work" could be used in the context of "let's work together for Belgium" but has nothing to do with jobs or employment issues in Belgium. As such, work in that context would not be counted with jobs and employment. I conducted an analysis of the websites' sections on the parties' history to investigate if their political platforms have changed since their beginnings.

After analyzing the websites of the CD&V, N-VA, MR, and PS, I found clear differences in approaches to Belgium's future. The CD&V used the terms Flanders, Flemish, and Flemings much more than any other terms, a total of 38 times, although not as much as the N-VA, which used these terms 65 times. The CD&V also mentioned jobs, work and employment, mobility, Brussels, and Europe and the EU (Table 5). Further analysis of the texts highlighted that the key focus of the CD&V is Flanders and its people. The party makes it very explicit that only Flanders and the Flemings are important to Belgian identity. Wallonia and the Walloons are never mentioned, nor Belgium. The ideology of the CD&V is centered on a Flemish identity. While the website mentions reform, budgets, the economy, health, energy, migration, and education, the CD&V's main objective is to maintain a strong, independent Flemish identity.

Table 5: *Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams* Website Content Analysis.

Words Used	Number of Times Words Used
Flanders/Flemish/Fleming	38
Jobs/Work/Employment	15
Mobility	12
Europe/EU	12
Brussels	10
Environment/Nature	8
Dialogue	7
Education/Schools/Teachers	7
People/Public	6
Reform	4
Energy	4
Federal/National	4
Belgium	3
Budget	3
Economy	3
Health	3
Migration	3
Wallonia	0

Source: CD&V 2014.

Table 6: *Nieuw-Vlaams Alliantie* (N-VA) Website Content Analysis.

Words Used	Number of Times Words Used
Flanders/Flemish/Flemings	65
Europe/EU	11
Independence/Flemish Nationalism/Autonomy	10
Federal/National	10
Belgium	9
Reform	6
Brussels	4
Confederation	3
Wallonia/Francophone Belgium	3
Education	2
Progress	2
Change	2
Socialism	1
Taxes	1
Budget	1
Economy	1

Source: N-VA 2014.

The N-VA focused more on Flemish identity than the CD&V. The N-VA used the terms Flanders, Flemish, and Flemings almost twice as often as the CD&V (65 vs. 38 times) (Table 6). Although the party claims that its main objective is more regional autonomy, eventually paving the way toward full independence, this was not reflected on its website. There were as many mentions of the federal/national government and Europe and the EU as about independence, Flemish nationalism, and increased autonomy. Granted, the section on autonomy was longer than any section on Europe or the EU, but the terms I was looking for were not used as much. There is a noticeable lack of other policies of the N-VA on its website, such as economic policies, foreign affairs, healthcare, or education. Its main focus seems to rest solely on Flemish identity and little else.

Table 7: *Mouvement Réformateur* (MR) Website Content Analysis.

Words Used	Number of Times Words Used
Liberalism	39
Belgium/Belgians	13
Brussels	13
Federal/National	11
Francophones/French Community	10
Reform	8
Walloon/Wallonia	8
Economy	6
Work	4
Education	3
Future	3
Europe/EU	3
Budget	2
Energy	2
Regions/Regionalism	2
Progress	2
Autonomy	1
Flemish/Flemings/Flanders	1

Source: MR 2014.

The MR in Wallonia predominantly disseminated ideas about liberalism (Table 7). Similar to the N-VA, little was mentioned about policies (the economy, jobs, education, and energy). The party attacked socialism and the socialist parties in Belgium while hailing liberalism as the best choice for Belgium. Wallonia and Walloons were only mentioned in passing without encouraging a Walloon culture, identity, or autonomy. In fact, the party claims that "strategic cooperation must go beyond the too narrow institutional framework of the Federation" in which only issues pertaining to Wallonia are tackled (MR 2013). The MR aims to work for the greater good of Belgium rather than just one of its regions. The PS also mentioned little about Wallonia or Walloon identity (Table 8). The PS promoted socialism and decried liberalism, the opposite of the MR. The PS and MR focus more on the economic restructuring of Belgium than on Walloon identity.

Table 8: *Parti Socialiste* (PS) Website Content Analysis.

Words Used	Number of Times Words Used
Socialism	27
Employment/Jobs/Work	21
Brussels	10
Labor Unions/Workers' Movements	9
Federal/National	9
Walloons/Wallonia	9
Europe/EU	8
Reform	8
Economy	8
Belgium	6
N-VA	4
Wealth	3
Capitalism	2
Regions and Communities	2
Autonomy	1
Flanders/Flemish/Flemings	1

Source: PS 2014.

While the political parties in Belgium may be separated by language, almost every party has an ideological corresponding party in the other language area. For example, the MR in the French language area and the N-VA in the Dutch language area share the same basic political ideology of conservative liberalism. These two parties are classified as center-right parties on the political left-right spectrum. The PS and the CD&V share many similarities with regard to their political positions as well. Both parties aim to bolster the "welfare state" by protecting and enhancing social services such as pensions, health care, and unemployment benefits. And so there are 'left-leaning' and 'right-leaning' parties in power in both Flanders and Wallonia. Yet even though the left- and right-leaning parties in each region may oppose each other politically, when it comes to the issue of national and regional identities these parties on opposite sides of the political spectrum mostly agree.

In Flanders, the CD&V may push for a bigger government and higher taxes for the wealthy to pay for social services while the N-VA may advocate for a smaller government with lower taxes, two fundamentally opposing political ideologies, yet they generally agree that a Flemish identity has to be clearly defined. Additionally, the parties generally agree that there is no Belgian national identity because a Belgian nation does not exist. Their websites make it clear that they are the parties of the Flemings and have a desire to advance only Flemish interests. They promote the idea that in order to be a Fleming one must speak not Dutch but Flemish, undeterred by the fact that Flemish is not a distinct language. The differences between the Dutch spoken in the Netherlands and in Belgium are similar to the differences in British English and American English. But in the interest of promoting a Flemish identity, both parties refer to the language as Flemish rather than Dutch. In addition, the word 'Flemish' is attached to other words

to reinforce the concept of a Flemish identity. For example, both parties refer to Flemish education, the Flemish energy sector, the Flemish budget, etc. (Figure 9).

Meanwhile, in Wallonia the PS is in favor of a large government with higher taxes on the wealthy and the MR is in favor of the opposite, but they can agree that Wallonia cannot survive outside of Belgium. This could be why their websites rarely, if at all, talk about a Walloon nation or a Walloon identity. Almost any topic discussed on their websites is either explicitly about Belgium, or the targeted audience is not defined. They mention education, the energy sector, immigration, and employment, but never in the context of Walloon education, a Walloon energy sector, a Walloon budget, etc. Even the promotion of the French language, as the Flemish parties do with Dutch, is not prominent on their websites.

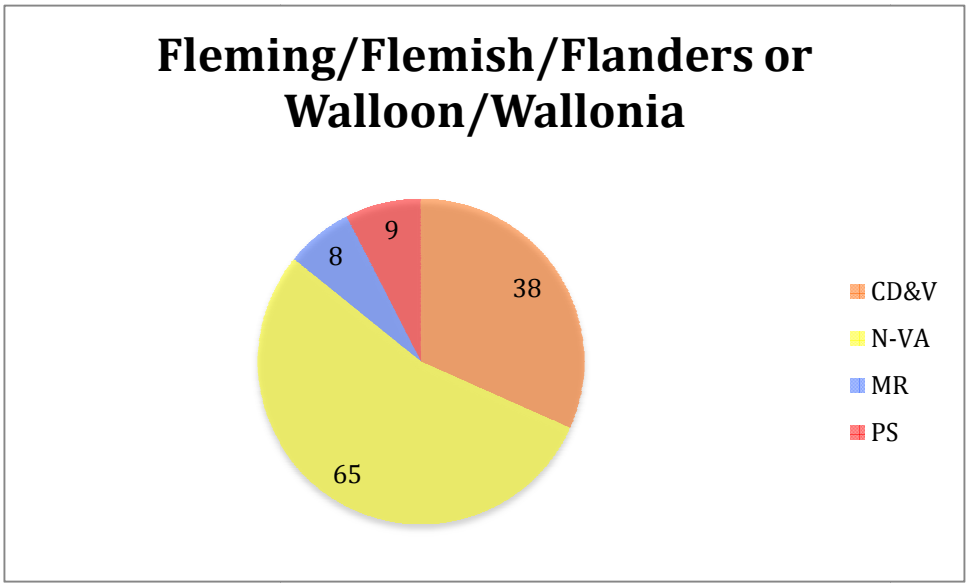

Figure 9: Number of Times Flanders/Flemish/Flemings or Wallonia/Walloon Used.

Regardless of their political ideologies, it is clear what the main goals of each party are. The Flemish parties overwhelmingly focus on Flanders, Flemings, and other Flemish interests.

As a whole, the CD&V and the N-VA want to increase Flemish autonomy. The Walloon parties focus on social and economic systems that would be better for Belgium, socialism by the PS and conservative liberalism by the MR. Because social services in Wallonia are in large part funded by Flanders through the redistribution of tax revenue, Walloon parties have tended to oppose further autonomy. This could result in less tax revenue for Wallonia. The websites of the PS and the MR mention little about increasing autonomy for the regions and communities. In fact, when state reform is mentioned it is usually in favor of reversing the trend of the devolution of federal powers toward a more centralized federal government. This system would ensure the funding of social services in Wallonia. Flemish political parties claim that Flanders is unfairly burdened with financing Wallonia's social services, but the Flemish parties analyzed devoted little space to the economy and taxes. In fact, the Walloon parties discussed this topic two to four times more than the Flemish parties (Figure 10). Likewise, the Walloon parties generally mentioned state reform more often.

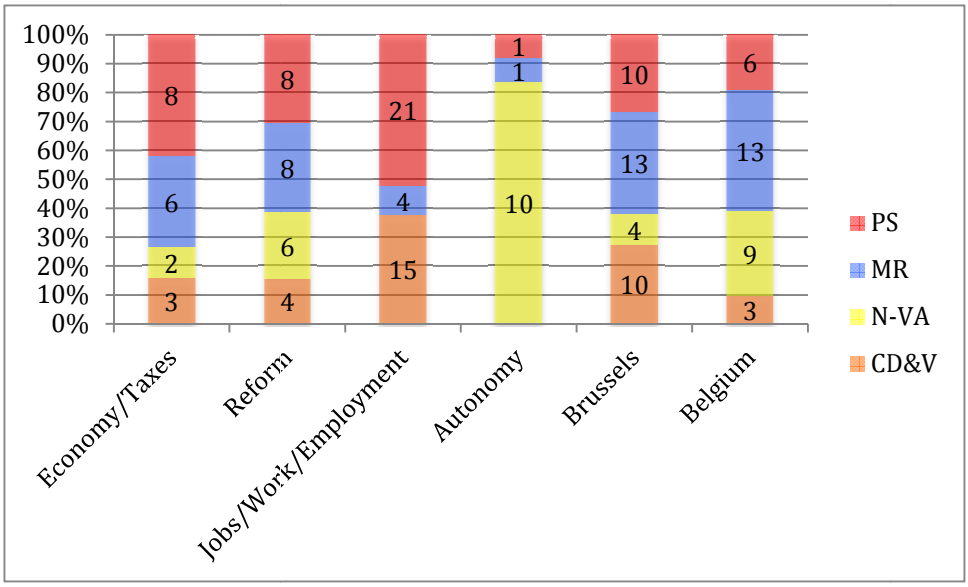

Figure 10: Number of Times Key Words Are Used.

Discourse Analysis

The website for the CD&V clearly outlines the party's ideology. The party aims to provide social services to everyone. But who is included when the party claims to promote the welfare and prosperity of all people? The party reiterates that its main goal is to promote Flanders by strengthening each Fleming. The website does not use the words Belgians or Walloons. There is no room for non-Flemings in the CD&V's vision for Belgium's future, which is evident in the section on asylum and migration. The party claims that all immigrants must leave Flanders because they allegedly exploit the social security system. Furthermore, the party finds it disconcerting that Islamic education is on the rise. Although the use of the Flemish language is mentioned as essential to Flemish identity, surprisingly, this message is not as prominent as would be expected. Additionally, the CD&V advocates more autonomy for Flanders and further federalization of the Belgian state.

The CD&V states on its website that it is a Flemish party. The party prioritizes the "welfare and prosperity of every Fleming," and the website claims that responsibility lies with all Christian Democrats to ensure this (CD&V 2014). The phrase "welfare and prosperity of every Fleming" is used on multiple occasions. This theme is repeated in other sections of the website. For example, one of the aims of the party is to strengthen Flanders "by strengthening every Fleming" (CD&V 2014). The website makes it clear that the CD&V advocates only on behalf of Flemings. By presenting inflammatory language against immigrants, particularly Muslim immigrants, the party presents an exclusionary identity. For instance, in the section on asylum and migration, the party urges Flemings to help prevent "the radicalization among young people… [in] the Muslim community" (CD&V 2014). No other immigrant community is mentioned.

The party adds that "Christian Democrats are not narrow-minded or bigoted Flemings but open minded with discernment about who should and should not be Fleming" (CD&V 2014). This message is at odds with the party's anti-immigrant stance. The party defines what constitutes a Fleming: a Fleming can be fluent in other languages for business purposes, but a Fleming should only speak Dutch at home. Therefore, immigrants who speak Dutch but whose primary language is foreign are not considered Flemings. In this case, regional identity begins to resemble citizenship because the government, via the political party in charge, has the 'power to grant' it rather than a characteristic that one self-identifies with. Smith and Wistrich (2007) argue that identity is about "belonging" (10). But with the CD&V it is not the individual who decides if he or she belongs. For instance, an Algerian-born immigrant who was raised in Flanders and speaks Dutch fluently may self-identity as a Fleming. But the CD&V would not consider her a Fleming if she primarily used Arabic at home or school. She would only be considered a Fleming by the CD&V when she uses Dutch as her primary language. On the other hand, a Moroccan-born immigrant who does not self-identify as a Fleming, but who nonetheless uses Dutch as his primary language at work, school, and home, would be considered a Fleming by the CD&V. One can enter this exclusive group if one primarily speaks Dutch at school, home, and work. This requirement cannot be negotiated.

The CD&V advocates for a voluntary integration program for immigrants to Flanders as opposed to the N-VA's proposed mandatory program. Although the CD&V prefers that immigrants choose to join the program rather than be forced, the CD&V maintains that a Flemish identity can be maintained and strengthened only through integration. The integration program teaches the Dutch language to immigrants so that they can speak, understand, read, and write Dutch fluently at the A2 level. Additionally, the program teaches immigrants about aspects of

Flemish society. Any Belgian citizen residing in Flanders is officially classified as a Fleming by the federal government, while non-Belgian citizens are classified as foreigners even if they are legally residing in Flanders (Portal Belgian Government 2014). The exception is with Walloons living in Flanders; in this case they retain their classification as Walloons. And vice-versa, the same is true for Wallonia. Yet the major Flemish political parties agree that an integration program is essential for immigrants to truly become Flemish. But there is a clear difference.

The CD&V focuses on the individual's choice of becoming a Fleming. Once an immigrant decides to join an integration program, he or she has chosen to begin the process of identification that Stuart Hall (2000) discusses. Hall (1996) argues that identity is about "the process of becoming rather than being" (4). This process uses the resources of history, language, and culture, all of which are under constant change (Hall 1996, 2000). Therefore, according to Hall's explanation, a Fleming never ceases the process of becoming a Fleming. Because the process of identification uses resources that are constantly changing, the identity changes as well. In the case of immigrants, the process of identification can become more apparent since immigrants must navigate two histories, languages, and cultures. In the case of the CD&V, the party believes that the process of becoming a Fleming depends on mastering the Dutch language and completing a voluntary integration program. Because the party is in charge of the content of the integration program, essentially it is the party that defines Flemish culture and identity for immigrants. Nevertheless, attending an integration program is voluntary, so becoming a Fleming, as it is defined by the CD&V via an integration program, rests with the individual. The N-VA makes that choice for immigrants. Under the N-VA's proposal, by virtue of residing in Flanders an immigrant would be forced to join an integration program. Since completion of the integration

program would grant Flemish citizenship, the process of Flemish identification would be forced onto the immigrant. However, actual identification would depend on the individual.

The N-VA, on the other hand, explicitly states that it favors Flemish independence. The section on state reform notes that Belgium is made up of two different democracies that grow further apart. The party claims that Flanders and Wallonia have different visions on almost every political topic. The website also alleges that Francophones pose a financial burden on Flanders because Walloons receive more funding for social services and pay less taxes than Flemings. In addition, it is claimed by the N-VA that Flemings have fewer rights and privileges than French-speakers, though what those rights and privileges are is not specified. The leaders of the party call for a clear distinction between Flemings and Francophones in all matters of the state, especially in economic matters. The party also wants to make a clear distinction between Flemings and immigrants. The party claims that "illegal aliens" are benefiting from social services in Flanders. The N-VA demands power to regulate immigration at the regional level. Finally, the N-VA advocates for a confederate Belgium, which would be a loose alliance between the regions. This loose alliance would allow Flanders to unilaterally decide its status within Belgium. Only then can Flanders finally pave the way for independence.

I coded more data from the N-VA's website than the other three party websites because the N-VA website was rich in discourses on identity formation and reproduction. The N-VA's section on "Asylum, Migration and Integration" devotes considerable space to immigrant students whose native language is not Dutch. The party, no doubt, understands the influence of the education system on nationalism as described by Weber (1976), Hobsbawm (1992), Hooson (1994), Lowenthal (1994), Sandner (1994), Geary (2003), Judson (2006), and Woolf (2006). This section argues that immigrant children who communicate in their native languages at school

are detrimental to Flanders and Flemish identity. The website explains that the Dutch language is "key to integration and participation" in a Flemish society (N-VA 2014). The party clarifies that learning foreign languages is "the best guarantee for a bright future," but it also emphasizes that Dutch must come first and foremost (N-VA 2014). Older foreign students who speak Dutch well but nonetheless choose to use another language at school should be "rapped over the knuckles, whether they are doing it in Swedish or Berber" (N-VA 2014). In addition, the website asks: "Do we want 'Greek children' playing with 'Greek children' and 'Bulgarians' with other 'Bulgarians' in Flemish schools? Would it not be better for Flemish children to play with Flemish children…" and until those foreign children master the Dutch language, should the party "treat those children as foreigners?" (N-VA 2014).

It is interesting to note that the party frowns on *immigrant* children speaking in other languages, but it promotes *Flemish* children learning other languages. In other words, it is okay for Flemings to speak multiple languages, but immigrants should learn to speak Dutch. Then, and only then, can they begin to learn other languages. That way one's identity is only a Flemish identity and other languages learned are merely an added skill and not a characteristic of an identity. Compared to the CD&V, the N-VA places much more emphasis on the ability to speak Dutch as a defining, non-negotiable characteristic of Flemish identity. Unless one masters the language, an immigrant can never be a true Fleming regardless if he or she self-identifies as one. In contrast, under the N-VA's proposed mandatory integration program, the Flemish Government would consider an immigrant a Fleming after completion of the program even if said person did not self-identify as a Fleming. Under this scenario, Flemish parties would have significantly more influence over regional identity.

The N-VA believes that the Dutch language should belong to everyone who lives in Flanders. As the website states, "[o]ur language should not be considered as the hallmark of an ethnic group" (N-VA 2014). The party claims that students who live in Flanders who do not speak Dutch are making a "choice" to live in a system of apartheid. The party adds that this is not the party's choice. The party reasons that everyone learns Dutch in Flemish schools. This language serves as a bridge between the many ethnicities of the students that helps the community of children grow to later "constitute a society," a Flemish society (N-VA 2014). By choosing not to speak Dutch at school, particularly in the playground, these students are choosing a system of apartheid where they only befriend and speak with members of their own linguistic communities. The party notes that it is "not asking newcomers to throw away their identities or give up their faiths at the border," but they do ask for "citizenship" (N-VA 2014). By citizenship the party means that newcomers must learn Dutch and be gainfully employed. Knowledge of Dutch, after all, is crucial, as the party writes on its website. They ask that "'new' and 'old' Flemings make way for a society where we Flemings come together with Dutch as a common language" (N-VA 2014).

The N-VA asserts that in no other "European country is the attitude towards migration as negative as in Belgium" (N-VA 2014). One example is how the N-VA chooses to describe undocumented immigrants in Flanders as "illegal criminals" who are deemed "unacceptable" (N-VA 2014). The fact that the party acknowledges that its comments on immigration are negative, and yet it unabashedly promotes them, sends a clear message. The N-VA views immigration as detrimental to Flemish identity. It feeds into the 'us' versus 'them' mentality as the party labels undocumented migrants as illegal and criminal. And yet by learning and mastering the Dutch

language, would they be considered Flemings? It is unclear on the website whether Flemish identity would be conferred upon undocumented immigrants who become fluent in Dutch.

On the other side of the linguistic divide are the Walloon parties. The Walloon party websites analyzed in this thesis provide little information how national or regional identity is presented or reproduced by the political parties. This is perhaps due to the Walloon Movement's unsuccessful attempts at forging an identity to which all French-speaking Belgians could identify with. The MR's website mentions Belgium and its regions the least of the four websites. The website spreads a message of conservative liberalism by explaining its benefits as opposed to socialism. The website provides few examples of how these ideologies will directly benefit Belgium or Wallonia; rather, the focus is on how conservative liberalism is better for society in general. The ideologies are touted as good for all humanity rather than just Belgians or Walloons. The websites praises a modern federal Belgium. The idea is that the MR can only implement the conservative-liberal policies it seeks to pursue in a federal Belgium.

Much like the MR, the PS did not address specific issues that affect Belgium. The PS mainly promotes the values of socialism placed in the context of solidarity, fraternity, equality, justice, and liberty. The website provides a future of socialism, but no vision of Belgium's or Wallonia's future. The PS uses terms like 'the public,' 'the people,' 'society,' and 'humans' to explain its political ideology. The only use of the word 'Walloon' is an adjective and not a noun (e.g., Walloon Parliament or Walloon government). For example, one of the values of the PS is fraternity. Explaining this value, the party writes that "[t]he fraternity is this feeling that causes us to look at all humans as our brothers, whatever their social, cultural or geographical background" (PS 2014). Likewise, the party claims that society should be based on a desire "to build a more just and humane society where the public interest takes precedence over

individualistic interests" (PS 2014). Nothing is said about what should constitute a Walloon or Belgian identity.

The MR follows a similar path as the PS, although with a different political ideology of course. Just like the PS only used the word 'Walloon' to explain which parliament or government the party was referring to, the MR website uses the word 'Belgian' to talk about the Belgian federal government or the Belgian Parliament rather than to represent or promote a Belgian identity. Most of the MR's website focuses on desirable values in a conservative liberal society, such as free individuals, property rights, a free market economy with free trade, a free society, reform, and conservatism. Yet just like the PS, the word 'society' is used extensively rather than "a free Wallonia" or "a conservative liberal Belgium."

The Walloon Movement was not as successful in selling the idea to the public that a strong Walloon identity existed. The only factor that seems to unite Walloons is the French language. Nevertheless, the PS and the MR place no emphasis on speaking French. What characteristics, then, form part of a Walloon identity? This is unclear from analyzing the websites for these two parties. The consensus among Walloon parties is that Wallonia cannot survive without Flanders. The economic repercussions of an independent Wallonia are clear to the political parties. Perhaps that is why the parties make no effort to distinguish between a Walloon and a Belgian identity. Without Belgium there can be no Wallonia.

During the last federal and regional elections in Belgium in May 2014, the N-VA had the biggest electoral victories. Not only did the party maintain its lead with the most seats in the federal and regional parliaments, but it also had the largest increase in the number of seats won. For example, in the regional election the N-VA won 27 seats, increasing its number of seats from 16 to 43 (Flanders 2014). The party with the second highest seat change in the regional elections

was the MR with only an increase of six seats, going from 19 to 25 seats. In the federal elections the N-VA also won the most seats with an increase of six seats from 27 to 33. PM Di Rupio will remain the prime minister until a new federal government can be formed. It is expected that N-VA party leader Bart De Wever will succeed Di Rupio as prime minister of Belgium. Should this happen, the process of national identity formation in Flanders could be affected because the N-VA does not recognize a Belgian identity. Additionally, regional identity in Flanders might be more aligned with the N-VA's ideology. Furthermore, with the N-VA in power at the federal level, calls for further autonomy and a confederate Belgium are sure to come. The N-VA has been waiting for its moment to take the spotlight at the national level, which the CD&V held for several decades before Di Rupio's term.

Federalization and regionalization processes have had significant influence in the formation of regional identity. After all, it was the political mobilization of elites within Flanders that created the myth, which is how Coakley (2004) describes it, of a Flemish identity. There were no Flemish literature, Flemish music, or Flemish symbols before then. The cultural aspects of Flanders were devised by the elites to legitimize their demands for cultural capital to participate in the political process (Billiet, Maddens, and Frognier 2006). Without the mobilization and influence of Dutch-speaking elites, the people living in what is now Flanders identified with their villages, towns, cities, or historic counties. The Dutch-speaking elites crafted an identity that other Dutch-speakers could identify with. As Martiniello (1993) said, an ethnic community does not have to share a common culture, but members must feel a belonging to the community. Of course, language alone would not suffice to convince Dutch-speaking Belgians that they were members of the so-called Flemish ethnicity. If anything, it tied them more to the Netherlands. And since there were various cultures within northern Belgium, it became

necessary to construct a Flemish identity that would set Flemings apart from French-speaking Belgians and their neighbors in the Netherlands, while at the same time uniting the various Dutch-speaking Belgian people.

The political parties of the early twentieth century influenced regional identity through the three-pillared system that developed in Belgium. As Frognier and De Winter (1991) explained, through this system the parties essentially controlled all aspects of life from birth until death. The socialists were in control in Wallonia, the Christian Democrats in Flanders, and the liberals in the Brussels area. Therefore, to be a Walloon was to be a socialist and to be a Fleming was to be a Christian Democrat. The influence of the three traditional parties in Belgium has declined. Instead of the domination of one party in each region, there are now multiple parties that have to share power. Thus political parties currently do not exert as much influence on regional identity as when the traditional parties ruled. The political influence has slightly shifted to national identity (Méndez-Lago 2004). The Flemish parties tend to define Belgian national identity as non-existent. The Walloon parties seek to redefine national identity since most Walloon parties wish to avoid the partitioning of Belgium.

While Belgian political parties no longer influence regional identity as much as they once did, they still have significant leverage. For instance, before the state reforms of the late 1900s, Flemish identity was tied to the party ideology of the Christian Democrats. Accordingly, regional identity in Flanders was tied to Christianity (initially to just Catholicism), democracy, traditional values, and the welfare state. Now, Flemish parties focus on two aspects that define Flemish identity: speaking Dutch (or Flemish as they like to call it) and more autonomy. About 80 percent of the members of the Flemish parliament are either in favor of an independent Flanders or of Flanders within a Belgian confederacy (Flanders 2014). The remaining 20 percent want to

maintain a Belgian federation (with some minor improvements), or they prefer that Flanders joins the Netherlands, although there is very little support for this option.

In Wallonia, regional identity was initially tied to social liberalism, social justice, socialism, and secularism. Today Walloon identity is based on the French language and the idea that Wallonia and Walloons belong within an unpartitioned Belgium. Yet it is difficult for Walloon parties to describe a Belgian national identity. The current PM, Elio di Rupo of Wallonia, recently could only think of the national soccer team, winning a Nobel prize (courtesy of the Belgian physicist François Englert), and the Belgian singer-songwriter Stromae as contributing to national pride in Belgium (Robinson 2014). Only two parties in Wallonia, the Walloon Rally (*Rassemblement wallon*) and the Wallonia-France Rally (*Rassemblement Wallonie France*) advocate for an independent Wallonia or for Wallonia to join France. However, neither of these parties has managed to win a seat in the Belgian parliaments (Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles 2014).

I have used Domhoff's (2005) concept of elite theory to investigate the influence of political parties in Belgium. Used in conjunction with Martiniello's (1993) definition of ethnic elites, it becomes clear how elites in both Flanders and Wallonia used the myth of a Flemish or Walloon culture to gather support and legitimize these ethnicities. Once legitimized, the elites manufactured an identity for each to suit the needs of the ruling parties. As the three traditional parties began to decline in their regions of strength (Christian Democrats in Flanders and Socialists in Wallonia), the traditional parties had to agree on a new identity with the parties gaining political strength. Nevertheless, the main parties found it easy to cooperate on identity issues (Ceuppens and Foblets 2007). Parties that do not share the same ideas for a regional identity have had a very hard time winning seats in elections. While this does not mean these

parties have not won seats because they do not share the ideas for a regional identity as the main parties, it is interesting to note this connection. The Walloon Rally and the Wallonia-France Rally, for example, believe that Wallonia should be separate from Belgium. This belief is at odds with the major parties. Even though they share many political ideologies as the main parties, such as the support for socialism, they have yet to win a single seat in any of the Belgian parliaments. On the other hand, support for parties in Flanders that promote a unified Belgium remains quite low.

The influence of political parties in Belgium on identity has declined after the constitutional reforms during the second half of the twentieth century. For example, regional identity in Wallonia was strongly tied to the ideals of socialism before the first state reform in 1970 since the Socialist Party was the ruling party. Today, identity politics center on issues related to language and the future of Belgium. The websites of the four political parties analyzed in this thesis indicate this. Within each region, the parties disagree on most political issues (the economy, taxes, the environment, health care, education, budgets, etc.), but there is also some agreement. In Flanders, agreement lies in the belief that a strong Flemish identity is crucial to the prosperity of Flanders. As such, the CD&V and the N-VA agree that Dutch, and only Dutch, must be spoken in Flanders. In addition, both parties look upon immigrants unfavorably because they believe that Flanders must be Flemish and immigrants are not regarded as Flemings. In Wallonia, the ruling parties agree that Belgian identity is integral to Walloon identity. The websites of the parties that I analyzed seldom speak of a Belgian or a Walloon identity. It is as if they are inseparable. In other words, without Belgium there can be no Wallonia and thus no Walloon identity. And without Wallonia, Belgium would cease to exist since Flanders wants to

be independent. Therefore, the Walloon parties do not describe a future for Belgium or for Wallonia; it is implied that such a future must include Walloons and Belgium.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The political science literature has suggested that political parties and their leaders significantly influence national identity. In Belgium, where the political parties are divided along ethno-linguistic lines, the political parties influence regional identity as well. The influence over national and regional identities, where national identity has been overtaken in importance by regional identities, has created a wedge between the Dutch-speakers in Flanders and the French-speakers in Wallonia. The political parties, especially in Flanders, argue that the cultural-linguistic divide has caused irreconcilable differences between the two regions. I argue that the political parties have used cultural and linguistic differences to push for state reforms that have allowed the parties to further empower themselves. Despite tensions related to a cultural-linguistic divide, political parties and their elites played an important role in regional identity-building. Through their respective websites, I analyzed the production and representation of Belgian national and regional identities by political parties. The rise of the N-VA, for example, could contribute to unfavorable policies toward immigrants and a xenophobic foreign policy. The regions already engage in foreign policy. If further federalization devolves immigration controls to the regional governments, what would that mean for Flanders, Wallonia, and Belgium as a whole? Flanders would be poised to become even more politically distinct from Wallonia. Further political distance between the regions can increase the likelihood of a partitioned Belgium.

Blom and Lamberts (2006) agree that religious and economic grievances against the Dutch king at the time, King William I, contributed to the Belgian Revolution. Today, economic grievances continue to plague Belgian politics, but these grievances are directed at the regions instead of the monarchy. After independence, the grievances came exclusively from Flanders.

Flemings wanted to have the Dutch language officially recognized. By World War I the Flemish Movement, which had begun mostly as a cultural movement, officially became a political movement as it was organized into an official political party. Once Dutch became an official language in Belgium in 1921, the Flemish Movement became less active and vocal as it had achieved its main goal. During World War II, interest in the movement increased once more due to promises made by the Nazis of greater rights for Flemings. Flanders became the economic engine of Belgium in the middle of the twentieth century, surpassing Wallonia's economic output. Wallonia's pre-WWII economy relied significantly on heavy industry fueled by coal and iron. After WWII, heavy industry declined and so did Wallonia's economy. Thereafter, Walloons wanted more influence in economic matters. But they were no longer the politically or economically dominant group in Belgium. Beginning with the first state reform in 1970, the Flemish and Walloon movements saw advantages in the devolution of federal roles. Flanders could demand more cultural autonomy while Wallonia could press for more economic autonomy. By the state reform of 1993, Flanders had achieved cultural autonomy and sought economic autonomy. During this period, political parties in Wallonia underwent a political shift. They no longer wanted more devolution of federal roles. If Flanders was allowed to keep more of its tax revenues through the devolution of taxation powers, it could leave a deficit in the Walloon budget.

The history of Belgium is filled with clues that help one understand why federalization was inevitable. The imposition of the French language on Dutch-speakers, who have been the majority in Belgium since its independence, was, in my opinion, a political mistake. Maybe if Dutch-speakers had been a minority it would have been different, but Dutch-speakers were, and continue to be, the largest segment of the population in Belgium. This made it harder for the state

to legitimize French as the official language. Second, the economic reversal that Wallonia and Flanders underwent in the middle of the twentieth century set the stage for a demand for state reform. Wallonia had maintained its politically and economically elevated status within Belgium initially as a result of the use of French. When Dutch was introduced as the second official language of Belgium, Dutch-speakers could participate in the political process. This participation diminished the political power of Walloons. Wallonia may have lost some of its political strength when Flemings could participate in the political process, but it continued to be economically superior. As Flanders overtook Wallonia in economic strength, Wallonia's economic superiority declined significantly. Since Flemings represented the largest segment of the population, they elected more officials to the federal parliament. Therefore, Wallonia's political and economic influence declined. The historical events that transpired in Belgium helped create the political setting necessary for strong regional political parties. The stronger the parties became the more state reforms were needed. Consequently, more state reforms contributed to further autonomy for the regions, and ushered in an era of increased regionalism and a decline in nationalism.

As Lecours (2005) states, national leaders considered the state reforms that established the federalization of Belgium as temporary. The leaders failed to realize that autonomy cannot be unilaterally revoked or repealed by the federal government. Dikshit (1971) argues that sovereignty is transferred from the unitary state to subnational political units during the federalization process. As such, there was no recourse for the Belgian state to rescind the powers that it had devolved to the regions and communities. Once the process of federalization had begun, regional autonomy became permanent. The federal government would have to obtain consent from the regions and communities to reclaim its former powers. The regions and communities had increased their autonomy to their advantage and intended to maintain political

power. If any thing, they wanted even more autonomy. And that is exactly what they would receive.

Dikshit (1971) posits that in a confederation the central government is weak and relies heavily on the subnational units for legitimacy. With fewer and fewer powers, the Belgian federal government becomes weaker and relies more on the regions and communities every time there is another state reform. Deschouwer (2009) envisions a confederate Belgium in the not-so-distant future. As it stands, the federal government maintains only several key roles within Belgium, mainly taxes, social security, and the military. Due to the veto powers of the subnational units, the regions and communities can demand more devolution of federal powers. As Waterfield (2001) noted, this political tool was used to the advantage of Flemish parties during the 2007-2011 political crisis. The Flemish parties prevented the formation of a federal government in order to receive more regional autonomy. It is only a matter of time before the Flemish parties use their veto power again to increase Flanders' autonomy. Ever since the first state reform in 1970, Belgium has undergone further state reforms approximately every decade (1970, 1980, 1988-1989, 1993, 2001, 2011) (Portal Belgian Government 2014). If the trend continues, Belgium will be due for more reforms within the next decade.

Further reforms will no doubt transform Belgium into what Dikshit (1971) terms a loose linking of political units (regions and communities). Once the federal government is subordinate to the regions and communities, Belgium becomes a confederacy. As the Flemish parties demand the devolution of federal roles that deal with taxation and social security, the only major power of the federal government will be the military. The problème communautaire, as Lecours (2005) called it, threatens to further weaken the federal Belgian state as well. As previously described, the problème communautaire is when each region and community focuses on itself without a

regard for the country as a whole. With this problem, politicians and voters will place more emphasis on funding the regions and communities while choosing to send less tax revenues to the federal government. Additionally, the pillarization of Belgium (Méndez-Lago 2004), although weakened, continues to influence Belgian society. Furthermore, the unanimous consent that De Rynck (1996) describes, which is needed for any federal laws to overrule or repeal regional or community laws, makes it more difficult for the federal government to regain its former powers. After all, the devolution of federal powers was just meant to be temporary. Finally, the consociational democracy (Deschouwer 2009) makes it more likely for Belgium to become a confederation. Within this type of democracy, the regions and communities have the capacity to veto legislation for political gain. Flemish parties desire more autonomy, and they have had considerable success receiving more autonomy through state reforms by using vetoes. Therefore, it seems likely that the parties will use veto power to demand more devolution of federal competences.

The rise of regionalism in Europe (Fitjar 2010) has the potential to shape regional and national identity in Belgium. This is especially true for regions that are advocating independence. Scotland and Catalonia are seeking to become independent states (Somaskanda 2013). Both have scheduled an independence referendum for late 2014. Flanders is keeping a close eye on the situation. If Scotland and Catalonia peacefully achieve independence, leaders in Flanders are prepared to follow suit in Belgium. Because Flemings hold a political and demographic majority in the country, Flanders could have the political leverage to schedule an independence referendum. If such a referendum takes place, Belgium is sure to be partitioned.

Brussels is one of the biggest issues that arises in talks about the partitioning of Belgium. Brussels is constitutionally bilingual using French and Dutch. Even so, a recent survey indicated

that over 63 percent of Brussels' residents are native French speakers and less than 20 percent native Dutch speakers (Marnix Plan 2014). Brussels is surrounded by Dutch-speaking Flanders. In addition, more French speakers have moved into Brussels' suburbs in Flanders. French speakers are the majority in some areas, which would complicate the situation of Brussels even more in a post-partitioned Belgium. Party leaders have proposed that Brussels would join an independent Flanders, Brussels would join Wallonia (though this option is the least popular as Wallonia would most likely join France and Brussels residents are mostly opposed to this), and Brussels would become an independent city-state. The 2007-2011 Belgian political crisis, a period of political instability where the country was left with no federal government several times (the longest period was 541 days), showed how difficult it can be for the French- and Dutch-speaking parties to reach a compromise. Thus it seems unlikely that there will be an easy solution to the status of Brussels.

The main aim of this thesis was to understand how political parties represent and reproduce national and regional identity in Belgium. This process depends on the region and its respective parties. In Flanders, Flemish parties have represented Flemish identity as a distinct identity. Although neither the N-VA nor the CD&V presented a Belgian identity, mostly because the general consensus among these parties is that there is no such thing as a Belgian nation, the parties emphasized that Flemings have a distinct identity that is not a part of a so-called Belgian identity. Because of the lack of a Belgian identity among the Flemish parties, Flemish identity has become a quasi-national identity for Flemings. This Flemish national identity is prominently displayed on the CD&V and the N-VA's websites. The main characteristics of this identity, according to the parties, are the Dutch language (or Flemish as they prefer to call it) and the

territory that is called Flanders. Anti-immigrant sentiments are displayed on the websites, though the degree varies between the parties.

In Wallonia, on the other hand, the PS and the MR make no effort to distinguish between a Walloon identity and a Belgian identity. Not even the French language seems to take a prominent role in Walloon identity. The main objective of these two parties' websites is to disseminate the virtues of either socialism or liberal-conservatism. Neither Walloon identity nor Belgian identity is presented. The Walloon parties favor maintaining a federal Belgium, yet there are no efforts by the parties to promote a national identity for the federation. Without either side presenting a Belgian national identity, regionalism has thrived, especially in Flanders. Regionalism has contributed to the idea that Flemish culture must be preserved through increased autonomy, which could eventually pave the way for a confederate Belgium. In a confederate Belgium, the country would undoubtedly be partitioned and Flanders would become an independent state.

The second research question asked how the history, politics, and economy of Belgium contributed to the increasing political power and influence of political parties. As previously stated, the exclusion of Dutch-speakers from the political process contributed to the formation and rise of the Flemish Movement. This movement became a political movement that managed to acquire rights for Dutch speakers. Part of the movement was uniting Dutch-speaking Belgians under a Flemish identity. Of course, there was no single Flemish identity, so the parties that were formed from the Flemish Movement had to construct an identity to unite all Dutch-speaking Belgians. Under a Flemish identity, the Flemish parties gained political power followed by economic power. The history, politics, and economy coalesced to increase the power of Flemish and Walloon parties.

Finally, the way in which the political parties describe, display, and promote a Belgian national identity on their websites is quite similar. None of the websites analyzed in this thesis define the term 'national identity.' The Flemish parties claim that it does not exist. While the Walloon parties do not make such a claim, they also do not argue for the existence of a Belgian national identity. Meanwhile, regional identity presented on the party websites markedly differs between the regions. The Flemish parties clearly define what it means to be a Fleming. The most important factor to this Flemish identity is the Dutch-language. The Walloon parties, on the other hand, do not define what it means to be a Walloon. For Flanders this has helped Flemish parties promote regional identity such that attachment to a Belgian national identity has either diminished or disappeared. For Wallonia it means that Walloon parties have had difficulty in promoting the idea of a Walloon identity separate from a Belgian identity. It comes as no surprise then that support for partitioning Belgium is substantially greater among Flemish voters than among Walloon voters.

So what does this mean for national identity in Belgium? As political parties in Flanders have pushed for more autonomy, regional identity in Flanders has become a national identity of sorts for Flemings. In Wallonia, the parties have experienced difficulty defining a Belgian identity. If there is no clear distinction between a Belgian and a Walloon identity, besides the obvious distinction of language use, Walloon parties have the potential to make national identity less relevant as well. Walloons will have a difficult time identifying with the Belgian nation if Walloon identity is not a distinct identity because Flanders is within the Belgian nation. If national identity is not defined, what future does Belgium have? With the upcoming referenda in Scotland and Catalonia, as well as the Flemish parties' support for more autonomy, the future of the Kingdom of Belgium looks bleak. It may be that a Belgian national identity, as mythical as it

may be, may be what is needed to keep Belgium united. The problem is how can such an identity be forged when the political parties have a strong influence on identity formation in Belgium? These questions can be better addressed by future scholarly work on the topic of identity politics in Belgium.

Regional identity is place-driven. For example, Flemish parties argue that the Dutch language is the key uniting factor of Flemish identity. If this were truly the case, then there would be no difference between a Flemish identity in Belgium and a Dutch identity in the Netherlands. Essentially, this identity is tied to place: Flanders. This is even more evident for Brussels. Even though Brussels is separated from Flanders, Flemish parties link the identity of Flemings in Brussels to Flanders. In other words, although Flemings in Brussels are located outside Flanders, their identity is ultimately linked to the Flemish homeland of Flanders. Place plays an important role in Belgian identity politics because much of the myths of Flemish and Walloon identities have been tied to territory in addition to language.

With the current events taking shape later this year in Scotland and Catalonia, these topics have the potential for some interesting research. For instance, the following questions could be asked and answered: How will Scottish and Catalan independence affect politics in Belgium? Can more state reforms transform Belgium into a confederacy? How would identity politics take shape in a confederate Belgium? How would independence for Flanders alter Flemish identity? If Belgium were partitioned, would a Walloon identity cease to exist if Wallonia were annexed to France? What would the partition of Belgium mean for the German speakers of Wallonia? What political situation would be best for Brussels? And thinking more broadly, what would a partitioned Belgium mean for the European Union, whose mission is to unite rather than divide nations based on one European identity? I also recommend a study of the

reception of discourses of political parties on national and regional identity by the public. This would add a more rich and nuanced understanding of identity formation in Belgium.

The events of July 21, 2007, when several politicians could not explain the significance of the Belgian National Day, made headlines at the time. Yet the scandal did not affect the politicians' careers. Yves Leterme, who famously sang the French national anthem when asked to sing the Belgian national anthem, became the next prime minister of Belgium two years later. There was little mention of his mistake once in office. This does not come as a surprise considering his term in office as prime minster was during the Belgian political crisis that lasted four years. Although the politicians' mistakes became fodder for news organizations, there was not much uproar from the general public. After all, many Belgian politicians have proclaimed that Belgium as a nation does not exist. An uncertain future awaits Belgium in the coming years. If the Belgian nation survives attempts to be partitioned, it will be interesting to see what form of political system develops in place of its already complex political structure. If an independent Flanders does not come about soon, a confederate Belgium could likely emerge. In this case, a confederate Belgium would probably not be conducive to national identity formation. Regardless of the future that awaits Belgium, its present identity crisis will continue to shape the country's identity formation and its political system. Whether that identity crisis is real or fabricated by political parties, as I have argued, seems irrelevant if the populace believes it. As long as the majority of voters in Flanders believe in a Flemish identity and keep voting for parties that advocate for an independent Flemish nation, Belgium will continue to have difficulty with defining its national identity.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: ***Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams*** **(CD&V) Website**

www.cdenv.be — CD&V

"In deze moeilijke omstandigheden heeft deze regering het schip op koers gehouden.

Koen Van den Heuvel, Radio 1, 18 februari 2014

ZOEKEN

IN WELK VLAANDEREN WIL U LEVEN?

Het kan!

Economische groei zonder sociale afbraak

home | onze partij | inhoud | onze mensen | nieuws | contact | doe mee | mijncdenv

Vlaanderen verbeelding werkt

DIALOOG | IN HET NIEUWS

NIEUWE HUISSTIJL VOOR VLAANDEREN GELANCEERD

Na de lancering van een nieuw logo op 5 juli 2013 en een nieuwe internationale huisstijl op 17 januari 2014, lanceerde Vlaams minister-president Kris Peeters op maandag 24 februari 2014 de huisstijl voor de binnenlandse communicatie van de Vlaamse overheid.

Lees meer

CD&V-ACTIE WARMVLAANDEREN LEVERT 30 000 EURO OP

OOSTERWEEL: DE BESTE BESLISSING VOOR ELKE VLAMING EN ELKE ANTWERPENAAR

Vertel het ons hier

IN WELK VLAANDEREN WIL U LEVEN?

#welkvlaanderen

Volg het hier online

ONTVANG ONS PLAN | KAMER | VLAAMS PARLEMENT

Appendix B: ***Nieuw-Vlaams Alliantie*** **(N-VA) Website**

www.n-va.be — Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (N-VA)

persberichten FR DE EN

NVA
DENKEN.DURVEN.DOEN.

ZOEKEN

home | wie is wie? | standpunten | nieuws | agenda | contact | WORD LID

Herbekijk De Zevende Dag met Jan Jambon over de federale kieskring

Lies Jans en Helga Stevens stellen nieuwe brochure voor: een beperking mag geen handicap zijn

Ontdek onze 25 verbintenissen voor Verandering

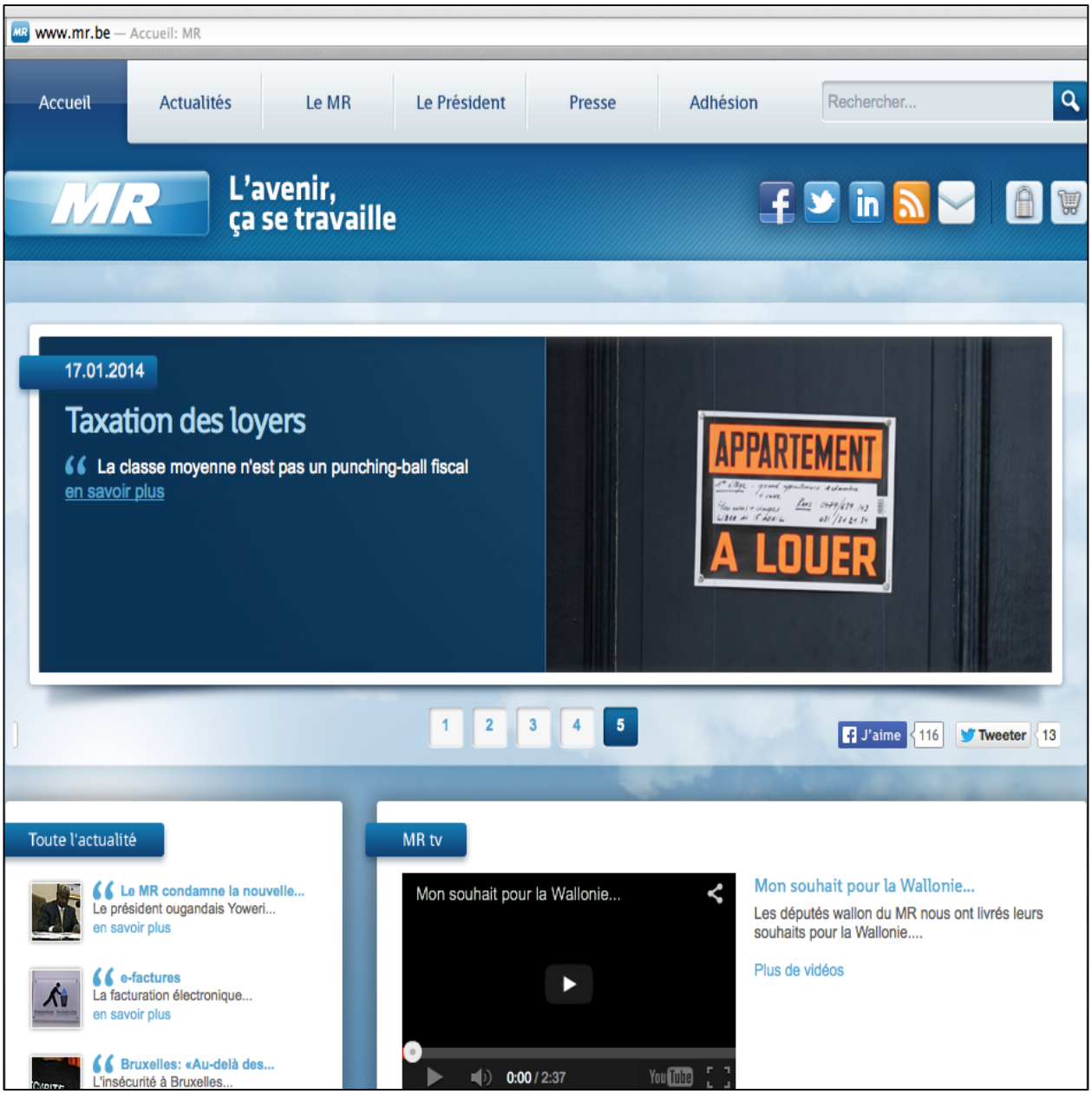
Een beperking mag geen handicap zijn. De visie van de N-VA.

Definitieve congresteksten 'Verandering voor Vooruitgang'

Feit of fictie?

De N-VA houdt stellingen en uitspraken van politici, journalisten en anderen tegen het licht en checkt het waarheidsgehalte ervan

Appendix C: ***Mouvement Réformateur*** **(MR) Website**



Appendix D: *Parti Socialiste* (PS) Website

www.ps.be — Accueil - PS - Parti Socialiste

Le site du Parti socialiste utilise des cookies pour améliorer la navigation. L'utilisation de ce site confirme que vous acceptez les cookies. En savoir plus OK

Abonnez-vous à notre NEWSLETTER | La boutique PS

PS.be

PS TV JEV

PS ACTUS CONTACT NOS IDEES ADHERER A- A+ Recherche

14 février 2014

Pour la Saint-Valentin, le PS distribue 100.000 coeurs en chocolat dans 60 endroits en Wallonie et à Bruxelles

Lire la suite

Email +1 Tweet 2 J'aime 62

ACTUALITÉ

Familles 25 février 2014
Les deux parents auront la possibilité de transmettre leur

Internet 20 février 2014
Présentation du système pour smartphone

COMMUNIQUÉ

Jeunesse 21 février 2014
Les Jeunes Socialistes fêtent leurs 50 ans !

Saint-Valentin 13 février 2014
Le PS distribue 100.000 cœurs en chocolat.

Toutes les actualités

AGENDA

févr 14 EXPO
Exposition "Affiches politiques du mouvement socialiste de 1899 à 1933" à Bruxelles, du 03 au 28 février.

avril 27 FÊTE
Le Centre d'Action Laïque de Mouscron a le plaisir de vous inviter à la 43ème Fête de la Jeunesse Laïque.

Tous les évènements

VITA

José Izquierdo grew up in the Reno-Sparks area in northern Nevada where he graduated from Edward C. Reed High School in 2003. As part of a cultural exchange program with his local Rotary Club, from 2001 to 2002 he lived and attended high school in Amay, Belgium, which is when his interest and love of that country developed. He attended the University of Nevada, Reno, from 2003 to 2006 before deciding to take a break from school to travel. After moving to San Antonio, Texas, in 2007, he continued his studies in 2010 at San Antonio College. José then completed his final coursework at the University of Texas at San Antonio from 2011 to 2012 where he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Geography.

The author's initial interest was in animal science and veterinary medicine. In fact, some of the first jobs he had included working at a zoo, two veterinary clinics, and a pet store. However, after years of traveling the world he found his interest and passion for geography, specifically cultural geography. Thirty countries later, he is confident that pursuing a degree in geography was the right decision.

José began the master's program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in 2012 under the advice of Dr. Micheline van Riemsdijk. His coursework focused on cultural geography and European history. During his two years at UTK, he worked as a teaching assistant for two geography courses and as a research assistant on a project for the Institute for a Secure and Sustainable Environment.

José remains interested in traveling the world. He would like to work either for the United States federal government or the European Union in a position where he can use his geographic skills and travel, of course. He hopes to visit all the countries of the world and experience as many of the world's cultures as possible.