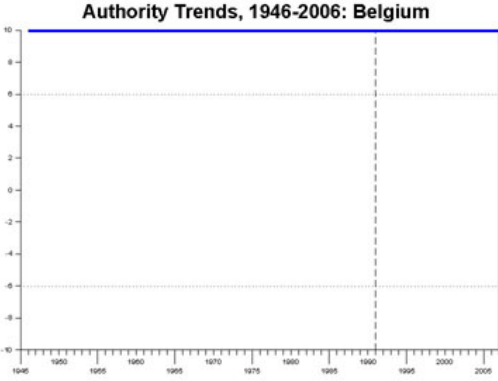


Polity IV Country Report 2006: Belgium

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2005</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2006</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Polity:</td> <td>10</td> <td>10</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>10</td> <td>10</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td colspan="3">62</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td colspan="3">No</td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2005	2006	Change	Polity:	10	10	0	Democ:	10	10	0	Autoc:	0	0	0	Durable:	62			Tentative:	No			
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Durable:	62																								
Tentative:	No																								
SCODE	BEL	CCODE	211	Date of Report	17 September 2007																				
Polity IV Component Variables																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
3	3	4	7	5	5																				
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)																									
End Date		30 June 1853		Begin Date																					
				1 July 1853																					
Polity Fragmentation: No																									
Constitution	1831 (1971, 1993)																								
Executive(s)	Belgium has had no executive government since Prime Minister Guy Verhostadt (VLD) resigned on 11 June 2007 following his party's defeat in June 2007 elections																								
Legislature	<p>Bicameral:</p> <p>Chamber of People's Representatives (150 seats; proportionally elected; most recent elections, 10 June 2007)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Christian Democrats and Flemish (CDV): 30 Reformist Movement (MR): 23 Socialist Party (PS): 20 Open VLD: 18 Flemish Interest (VB): 17 Socialist Progressive Alternative-Spirit (SPA-Spirit): 14 Democratic and Humanist Centre (CHD): 10 Other parties: 18 <p>Senate (71 seats; 40 directly elected, 31 indirectly elected; most recent elections, 10 June 2007)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CDV: 9 MR: 6 VB: 5 Open VLD: 5 SPA-Spirit: 4 PS: 4 Other parties: 7 																								
Judiciary	Supreme Court of Justice																								

Narrative Description:

Executive Recruitment: Competitive Elections (8)

Belgium is a parliamentary system in which the king, Albert II, is the nominal head of state. The prime minister is appointed from among the leaders of the ruling party, or coalition, in the parliament. The parliament is formed through transparent and fair competitive elections, and a system of proportional representation assures a coalition rule. Following legislative elections on 18 May 2003, and nearly two months of difficult negotiations, a coalition government was finally sworn in on 14 July (coalition partners include VLD, PS, MR, and SPA/Spirit parties). Prime Minister Verhofstadt announced in February 2004 that he was taking over leadership of the VLD, following the threat by party president De Gucht's to withdraw the party from the ruling coalition in protest over plans to allow non-EU foreign residents to vote in local elections. De Gucht was subsequently replaced as party president by Dirk Sterckx. Verhofstadt's coalition government resigned on 11 June 2007 following their defeat in legislative elections. The leader of the largest party, Yves Leterme of the Christian Democrats and Flemish (CDV) remained unable to form a ruling coalition through mid-December 2007, leaving Belgium without a government for more than six months.

Executive Constraints: Executive Parity or Subordination (7)

The Council of Ministers (Cabinet), led by the Prime Minister, holds office as long as it retains the confidence of the lower house of the Parliament. Parliament exercises a considerable degree of authority over the executive branch, mainly through directly elected committees that exercise the final review of all proposed legislation. However, the Cabinet may use the king's power of dissolution to force elections if Parliament proves too obstructive. Either house, or both, may be dissolved by the executive branch. The judiciary is independent.

Political Participation: Institutionalized Open Electoral Competition (10)

Despite the cultural fragmentation of Belgian society, Belgium has established an institutionalized system of democratic political competition. Belgian political parties have traditionally split along linguistic and cultural lines: the Dutch-speaking Flemish in the north of the country (6 million); the French-speaking Walloons in the south (3.5 million); and the largely Francophone citizens residing in Brussels (1 million). During the 1960s and 1970s, the nation was beset by disagreements between the French- and Dutch-speaking populations that were founded in part on the conservatism of Flanders and the predominantly socialist outlook of Wallonia. The differences were eased greatly by the adoption of amendments in 1993 to the Constitution that divided power among Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels. However, the Dutch-speaking parties in Flanders, the wealthiest part of the country, continue to demand wider political and economic powers for their region. While the French-speaking Walloons have indicated that are prepared to enter a "dialogue" with the Flemish parties on devolution of power, they have insisted that the federal state must remain intact. Tensions between the groups increased through 2006 in parallel with rising racial tensions centered on immigration, naturalization, and the "Islamisation of Europe." On 13 December 2006 the tensions were dramatized in a fake news report on French-language RTBF television that claimed Flanders had declared independence and were forcing French-speakers out of the "country."

Note: The centrist coalition government led by Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt was soundly defeated in 10 June 2007 legislative elections and he resigned on June 11. The leader of the largest of eleven parties that won seats in the Chamber of Representatives, Yves Leterme of the Christian Democrats and Flanders (CDV), was charged with forming a ruling coalition but remained unable to do so through mid-December 2007, leaving Belgium without a government for a modern record of more than six months. Talks have been complicated by Leterme's campaign advocating greater autonomy for Flanders. The growing polarization of Belgian politics was symbolized by the November 7 committee motion to vote on the so-called Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde (BHV) issue seeking to abolish bi-lingual rights in Flemish suburbs of Brussels. This motion was viewed as a violation of the decades-old "Belgian pact" under which the two languages groups avoided holding straight sectarian votes.