



## Belgium — Va-PoReg Country Report

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02/07/1831 Start (Monarchical) Electoral Oligarchy: On 10/04/1830 Belgium proclaimed its independence from the Netherlands. From 08/25/1830 until 07/21/1831 the Belgium Revolution took place. On 02/07/1831 Belgium became the Kingdom of Belgium. On 04/19/1839 independence was recognized by the Netherlands. As parties emerged, initially beginning as representative clubs, the king's sway over cabinet formation and policy experienced a consistent decline. Subsequent to 1848, the monarch managed to dismiss the prime minister only on two occasions (in 1871 and 1884), despite the prime minister enjoying parliamentary support (Trefs 2010: 271). While the 1893 electoral reforms in Belgium were progressive for their era and marked a departure from more elitist voting systems, the plural voting system meant that it was not a full democracy in the sense that we understand today. The principle of 'one person, one vote' was not yet realized, and significant segments of the population, including women and those without property or certain educational qualifications, were either excluded or had limited influence compared to wealthier and more educated males. All datasets including the one's with a separate category for ruling monarchies like AF classify Belgium from 1900 on as a democracy or semidemocracy. Va-PoReg disagrees and classifies the regime as an electoral oligarchy, which can, however, be viewed as the historical predecessor of democracy. LIED as well as V-Dem's PCLI code political liberties as present for this period. From 1900 to 1907, according to the Polity5 indicator the executive faced substantial limitations on decision-making power. Since 1908, based on Polity5's assessment, during this period, the executive was either equal to or subordinate to other institutions, demonstrating strong constraints on decision-making authority. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. According to our observations, multiparty legislative and executive elections were present during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED.

08/04/1914 End (Monarchical) Electoral Oligarchy/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Germany, Constitutional Monarchy]: As part of the Schlieffen Plan to attack France, Germany invaded Belgium in August 1914, and a significant portion of the Western Front fighting during World War I took place in the western regions of the country.<sup>1</sup> According to LIED multiparty executive and legislative elections were held in 1914, from 1915 onward no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. LIED classifies political liberties as absent for this period. According to V-Dem's PCLI political liberties were ambiguous from 1914 to 1917 and somewhat present in 1918.

11/11/1918 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Germany, Constitutional Monarchy]/Start (Monarchical) Electoral Oligarchy (Patriarchal): In 1919 a new electoral law enacted universal equal and secret suffrage for men. However, the enfranchisement of women was prevented by Liberals and Socials because they feared a majority of women would vote for the Catholics (Trefs 2010). Universal census suffrage for all men aged 25 and above had been introduced in 1893. Depending on education and amount of taxes paid, males could cast between one and three votes. Widows were also allowed to vote but lost their voting rights after remarrying. Universal male suffrage was introduced in 1918.<sup>2</sup> The governmental power alternated between different parties and coalitions, indicating competitiveness, but the coalitions were often challenged by crises, governments and prime ministers regularly resigned, hence the governments tended to be very unstable.<sup>3</sup>

Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. The country held competitive elections during this time (LIED). Moreover, the elections were clean, free and fair (V-Dem CEI, V-Dem EF&FI). According to LIED political freedoms were present until 1932 and V-Dem's PCLI codes political freedoms as present for the whole regime period. As per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was on par with or below that of other branches, reflecting executive parity or subordination. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

05/28/1940 End (Monarchical) Electoral Oligarchy (Patriarchal)/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Germany, Right-Wing (Fascist) Autocracy]: On this date, King Leopold III surrendered to the German forces, who had invaded Belgium on 05/10/1940. The invasion resulted in the deaths of 40.690 Belgians, more than half of whom were Jews, during the occupation and Holocaust. Following the surrender of the Belgian army, the Germans created the *Militärverwaltung in Belgien und Nordfrankreich*, a military administration covering Belgium and two French departments. The German-speaking region of Eupen-Malmedy was annexed. The Committee of Secretaries-General, which had been appointed by the Belgian government before going into exile, was responsible for implementing the demands of the military administration. In 07/1944, the military administration was replaced by a civilian government and day-to-day administration was delegated increasingly to Belgian civil authorities.<sup>4</sup> According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period. Moreover, political liberties are indicated as absent by LIED. V-Dem's PCLI interprets them as not really present during the German occupation. Belgium was liberated by the Allies from September 1944 to February 1945.<sup>5</sup>

09/04/1944 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Germany, Right-Wing (Fascist) Autocracy]/Start (Monarchical) Electoral Oligarchy (Patriarchal): On this date the German occupation of Belgium ended.<sup>6</sup> According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held in 1944, from 1945 onward multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. During this time elections were still competitive (LIED). V-Dem's CEI scores full electoral cleanliness since 1947. Furthermore, since 1947 the overall election conditions were free and fair (V-Dem EF&FI). According to LIED and V-Dem's PCLI political freedoms have been resurged after 1946. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive was subordinate to or held equal power with other institutions, indicating executive parity or subordination. In 1948 universal suffrage for women was introduced.<sup>7</sup> For the year 1945, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. For the rest of the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive.

06/26/1949 End (Monarchical) Electoral Oligarchy (Patriarchal)/Start (Monarchical) Liberal Democracy: On this date, the first parliamentary election in which women participated took place.<sup>8</sup> On 03/12/1950 the Belgium monarchy referendum took place. Questionable was whether King Leopold III. should return to the country after his time abroad and resume his rights and duties as a monarch. 57.68% voted in favor of the Kings return.<sup>9</sup> Belgium is a parliamentary (Monarchical) democracy with a bicameral system, consisting of the Senate and the Chamber of Representatives. Belgium has a multi-party system. The Belgian monarchy is predominantly ceremonial, though the king maintains constitutional authority to moderate the government formation process.<sup>10</sup> While the King acts as head of state, the Prime Minister is the head of government.<sup>11</sup> The parliament is fragmented into (relatively) many parties, necessitating large coalitions for governing majorities. The coalitions tend to be instable, there are frequent changes in constellations, often within the same year. However, transitions occur constitutionally and non-violent.<sup>12</sup> This political complexity stems from the country's gradual transformation into a federal state, formally concluded in 1993, which granted high autonomy to the regions and institutionalized the linguistic divide. The subsequent fragmentation of the party system resulted in periods of extreme instability, notably the 541-day government formation deadlock

between 2010 and 2011.<sup>13</sup> Elections are generally free and fair, and the political landscape is fragmented but broadly diversified. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. Since 1949, LIED has categorized elections as competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI and CEI have consistently scored Belgian elections as free, fair and clean ever since. Freedom of the press, freedom of religion and freedom of assembly are generally guaranteed. Belgium's judiciary is independent, and equal treatment is guaranteed.<sup>14</sup> In the FH database, Belgium is listed for the whole regime period as free.<sup>15</sup> As per FH's classification for this regime period since 1972, the country is considered free with a score ranging from 2 to 4, which we also interpret as free in our framework. LIED and V-Dem's PCLI classify political liberties as present. Based on Polity5's assessment, during this period, the executive was either equal to or subordinate to other institutions, demonstrating strong constraints on decision-making authority. During this regime period, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also comprehensive. Federal elections took place on 05/26/2019, alongside the European and regional elections. All 150 members of the Chamber of Representatives were elected from eleven multi-member constituencies. The right-wing Vlaams Belang (VB) experienced a resurgence in Flanders, and along with the New Flemish Alliance (N-VA), parties advocating Flemish separatism and nationalism secured nearly 50% of the vote in Flanders. The Belgian coalition of N-VA, CD&V, MR, and Open VLD lost over a quarter of its seats, marking the most significant government punishment in 20 years. Furthermore, the far-left Workers' Party of Belgium (PVDA-PTB) and the green Ecolo party made gains in Wallonia. Overall, traditional parties faced losses in both regions.<sup>16</sup> This trend continued in the 2024 federal elections, with the right-wing Flemish separatist parties New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) and Vlaams Belang (VB) winning first and second place. Followed by the Wallonian Movement for Reform (MRV) and Socialist Party in Wallonia (PS). The Worker's Party of Belgium (PVDA-PTB) continued their upwards trend coming in fifth.<sup>17</sup>

(Monarchical) Liberal Democracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources (Redslob 1918, Woyke 2009)

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belgium#Independent\\_Belgium](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belgium#Independent_Belgium)

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal\\_suffrage#cite\\_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_suffrage#cite_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.chisols.org/narratives.html>, see narratives for version 5.0, Belgium\_R: 1-2, Belgium\_V: 1

<sup>4</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German\\_occupation\\_of\\_Belgium\\_during\\_World\\_War\\_II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_occupation_of_Belgium_during_World_War_II)

<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belgium#Independent\\_Belgium](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belgium#Independent_Belgium)

<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German\\_occupation\\_of\\_Belgium\\_during\\_World\\_War\\_II](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_occupation_of_Belgium_during_World_War_II)

<sup>7</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal\\_suffrage#cite\\_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_suffrage#cite_note-centralasiainstitute.org-37)

<sup>8</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1949\\_Belgian\\_general\\_election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1949_Belgian_general_election)

<sup>9</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1950\\_Belgian\\_monarchy\\_referendum](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1950_Belgian_monarchy_referendum)

<sup>10</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/country/belgium/freedom-world/2023>

<sup>11</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics\\_of\\_Belgium](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Belgium)

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.chisols.org/narratives.html>, see narratives for version 5.0, Belgium\_R, Belgium\_V.

<sup>13</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State\\_reform\\_in\\_Belgium](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_reform_in_Belgium);  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2010%E2%80%932011\\_Belgian\\_government\\_formation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2010%E2%80%932011_Belgian_government_formation)

<sup>14</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/country/belgium/freedom-world/2023>

<sup>15</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/country/belgium/freedom-world/2024>

<sup>16</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019\\_Belgian\\_federal\\_election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019_Belgian_federal_election)

<sup>17</sup> <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/BE/BE-LC01/election/BE-LC01-E20240609/>

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