



French big brother is watching Belgium: how French newspapers covered Belgian political crises

Maëla Guillaume-Le Gall¹ · Axel Humbert-Labeaumaz^{2,4}  · Anaïs Augé² · Laura Pascolo³ · Min Reuchamps²

Accepted: 18 November 2025
© The Author(s) 2025

Abstract

Belgium and France, neighboring countries, share historical and linguistic ties, with approximately 40% of Belgium's population speaking French. Yet, Belgian politics and tensions between its two main linguistic, French- and Dutch-speaking, communities often remain complex to French observers. This study investigates how French newspapers framed Belgian political crises within the context of Belgium's political tensions. Drawing on the cultural proximity thesis, this article analyzes 252 articles from four French newspapers—Le Monde, Libération, Le Figaro, La Voix du Nord—covering two political crises. The first (2010–2011) resulted in a record 541 days without a government, while the second (2018–2020) led to nearly two years of deadlock. We examine causality and attribution patterns in media narratives to explore biases and representations of the crisis. Our findings show that French media highlight partisan conflicts and cultural divides as the root causes of these crises, often depicting Flemish parties, particularly the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (N-VA), as more confrontational. French-speaking figures are portrayed as stabilizers, reinforcing Francophone-favorable narratives. This research contributes to studies on foreign news coverage by applying Critical Frame Analysis to non-violent political crises, highlighting how cultural ties shape media framing beyond linguistic accessibility.

Keywords Belgium · France · Media framing · Political crisis · Cultural proximity · Critical frame analysis

Extended author information available on the last page of the article

Published online: 14 January 2026



Introduction

Belgium and France share a geographical, cultural and—partly—linguistic proximity. Because of this manifold proximity, for quite a few—francophone—Belgians, France is considered as a big brother (Yakemtchouk 2010). Nevertheless, Belgian politics and particularly the relationship between Belgium’s two main linguistic communities—French-speakers and Dutch-speakers—remains complex and often opaque to foreign observers (Caluwaerts and Reuchamps 2022), including the French big brother. This complexity is reflected in the federalization of Belgium resulting in intricate institutional structures (Deschouwer 2012), as well as in the linguistic community conflict, which has resulted in the coexistence of two distinct media spheres—Dutch-speaking media on one side and French-speaking outlets on the other (Dandoy et al. 2013). For French audiences, despite their proximity and feeling of closeness, not to say brotherhood with Belgians, these linguistic divisions coupled with Belgium’s political complexity raises both curiosity and incredulity. This article seeks to explore this special relationship by studying how the French media portray Belgium when it attracts international attention, that is, when it undergoes a political crisis, which constitutes “critical discourse moments” (Carvalho 2008).

Drawing on theories of foreign news coverage, this study focuses on the concept of cultural proximity, which posits that countries with shared cultural ties are covered more often, and more positively, than those that are culturally distant (Zaharopoulos 1990; Straubhaar 1991). Cultural proximity can arise from geographical closeness, as with a neighboring country, but it may also be linguistic or historical such as former colonial ties, or stem from shared religion or common ethnic backgrounds (Sakurai 2017). Beyond the geographical and historical ties between the two countries, France and the French-speaking part of Belgium share a particularly close cultural connection, rooted in their common language (Yakemtchouk 2010). In this context, we ask: *How does cultural proximity influence media coverage? And more specifically how do French newspapers frame the causes and assign responsibility for the Belgian political crisis?* We hypothesize that French media coverage reflects a perspective attributed to the Francophone community, privileging narratives that assign primary responsibility to the Flemish side rather than presenting contrasting viewpoints from Belgium’s two distinct media spheres.

In order to test our hypothesis, we analyze two major periods of governmental instability in Belgium:

- the 2010–2011 crisis, characterized by record-breaking government formation negotiations leading to the sixth state reform (Govaert 2012), and
- the 2018–2020 crisis, initiated by the N-VA’s (Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie)¹ withdrawal from the coalition, which was resolved in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic (Sägesser 2020).

¹ Belgian parties can be regrouped by political families in which there is one Dutch-speaking party and one French-speaking party that can be presented as follows: Christian-Democrats (CD&V and cdH), Greens (Groen and Ecolo), Liberals (OpenVLD and MR), Regionalists (N-VA and DéFI), Radical Left (PVDA/PTB), Radical Right (VB and PP), Social-Democrats (SP.a/Vooruit and PS).



Our study is based on a Critical Frame Analysis (Fischer and Forester 1993; Dekker 2017) of 252 newspaper articles published in *Le Monde*, *Libération*, *Le Figaro*, and *La Voix du Nord*. We examine how these outlets attribute causality and responsibility for these non-violent conflicts, and whether they emphasize voices from one linguistic community over the other. By identifying the causes and responsibilities reported in the French newspapers, we aim to understand whether cultural proximity (Straubhaar 1991) influences how the French media covered the Belgian political crises.

This paper is structured as follows: The next section presents the theoretical framework focusing on cultural proximity, framing, and media coverage analysis. Section “Data and methods” contextualizes the two political crises, while also detailing our data collection methods and analytical approach. Section “Findings” presents the results, shedding light on how French newspapers framed the crises, both explicitly and implicitly, in terms of causes and responsibilities. Finally, section “Discussion” discusses the broader implications of these findings for literature on cultural proximity and political and media framing.

Cultural proximity in foreign news coverage

The existence of two distinct media spheres in Belgium follows the country’s federalization, itself a response to persistent conflicts between the two main linguistic communities. After the first state reform in 1970, regions and communities were established (Deschouwer 2012), they received more and more competences, and 1993 marked the year where Belgium became officially a federal state. The federalization also led to the fragmentation of political parties and media organizations along linguistic lines, producing a bipolar distribution of power (Reuchamps 2013a). An example of that is the reaction against the threat of far-right populist parties with the *cordon sanitaire*. This agreement was concluded in Belgium in 1989, between all the mainstream parties, to exclude a right-wing populist party from any governing coalition: Vlaams Block (VB, which is nowadays called Vlaams Belang) (Biard 2021). This strategy also applies to media in Francophone Belgium, meaning that far-right parties can not have access to live TV shows and journalists must contextualize their statements. But in Flemish media, even if far-right politicians are less represented than other parties according to their electoral results, such a formal *cordon sanitaire* does not exist. Foreign media must have this separation of two media spheres in mind when covering the news in Belgium.

Foreign news coverage is shaped by a variety of factors, including journalistic routines, audience expectations, and the intrinsic characteristics of events themselves (Galtung and Ruge 1965). Among these, cultural proximity—the focus of this study—suggests that media are more likely to cover events and provide more favorable perspectives on countries with which they share cultural, linguistic, or historical ties (Zaharopoulos 1990; Sakurai 2017). This perspective is particularly relevant in the context of a cross-border reporting between linguistically connected regions.



Cultural proximity not only influences which foreign events are considered newsworthy, but also shapes how they are framed, interpreted, and prioritized within national media discourses.

Galtung and Ruge's (1965) seminal work on foreign news structure first identified *cultural proximity* as a key determinant of foreign news *selection*. Events occurring in countries that are geographically close or culturally similar to the audience are more likely to be deemed newsworthy. Building on this, Straubhaar (1991, 2007) argued that both audiences and media organizations naturally gravitate toward content that is culturally familiar, reinforcing linguistic and ideological bonds within transnational communities. These dynamics often lead to asymmetrical visibility of foreign nations, where culturally proximate countries are covered more extensively than distant or culturally distinct ones. As part of the question of news selection, *linguistic proximity* emerges as a crucial component of cultural proximity. When foreign journalists speak the language of the country they cover, or when that country produces news in the journalist's language, they gain easier access to local sources and institutions, which can in turn shape both the selection and depth of coverage.

Beyond the question of *what* is covered lies the issue of *how* events are presented. Framing theory provides a useful lens for understanding how cultural proximity shapes interpretation in foreign news coverage. According to Entman (1993), "to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text." In this sense, framing involves choices about what to emphasize, what to omit and how to present information. Fillmore (2006) adds that frames are coherent scene-like structures of conceptual elements and relations, that help people make sense of the world. In the case of textual analysis, frames are visible through specific word choices, metaphors or narrative structures that organize the discourse according to a particular viewpoint (Greco Morasso 2012). Foust and Murphy (2009) insist on the ideological function of framing, showing how the arrangement of concepts within a frame can subtly promote certain values or perspectives (e.g. the depiction of the COVID-19 pandemic through expressions related to the economy, rather than as a public health issue). Through framing, media outlets emphasize particular elements of an event, thereby shaping audience perceptions by promoting specific problem definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations, and proposed solutions.

Research on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has significantly contributed to understanding the relationship between cultural proximity and the framing of foreign news coverage in times of crisis: studies have highlighted a bias in Western media, particularly in the U.S., where coverage tends to be more favorable toward Israel than Palestine (Dunsky 2008; Friel and Falk 2007; Viser 2003). In his study of The New York Times' coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Viser (2003) demonstrates that U.S. journalists based in Israel had greater access to Israeli sources through English-language Israeli newspapers. His analysis shows that American reporters used up to 2.4 times more Israeli than Palestinian sources, contributing to a one-sided narrative that reported Israeli deaths more frequently and in greater detail than Palestinian ones.



Viser (2003) also shows that, beyond the selection bias linked to linguistic sourcing, the framing of news coverage also differed markedly. Stories were more likely to receive a prominent placement in U.S. newspapers when Palestinians, rather than Israelis, were the perpetrators of violence, while only a small proportion of articles identified Palestinian victims by name or provided additional details about their deaths. He attributes these patterns to *cultural proximity*: although Israel is geographically distant from the United States, it is culturally closer to both American readers who share its Western values, and U.S. political elites, whose broad consensus on foreign affairs is reflected in national media coverage. Conversely, Arabic media outlets have been found to favor Palestinian perspectives. Elmasry et al. (2013), in their study of Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya media coverage during the 2008–2009 Gaza conflict, showed that both media outlets emphasized Palestinian voices, often depicting Palestinian casualties and grief, while giving more prominence to Palestinian sources. This contrast illustrates how cultural proximity shapes divergent framing of the same conflict: while the U.S. and Western media align with Israel through shared cultural values and historical affinities, Arab media reflect their own cultural proximity to Palestine, emphasizing regional identity.

The bias related to cultural proximity has been extensively studied in the context of violent conflicts. Yet its application to less violent or non-violent crises remains underexplored. A notable exception is the study by Vertommen et al. (2012), which examines how foreign correspondents cover Belgian political crises through a comparative analysis of linguistic elements. The authors found significant differences between French and Dutch newspapers, compared with British and German coverage, in terms of the level of detail, framing and sourcing practices. French correspondents provided more detailed accounts but less contextualization, assuming that their readership was already familiar with Belgium's linguistic and geographical divisions. Regarding the core issue of the Brussel-Halle-Vilvoorde (BHV)² dispute, French newspapers emphasized linguistic minority rights affecting the Francophone community, while Dutch newspapers focused on the principle of equality central to Flemish concerns. French outlets employed a “strategy of quantification,” highlighting the number of Francophones in BHV, whereas Dutch correspondents referred to legal aspects such as the Constitutional Court decree and the “facilities” granted to Francophone citizens.³ These contrasts reveal how distinct media spheres advance divergent perspectives shaped by linguistic and cultural identities.

Although Vertommen et al.'s (2012) study was based on a limited corpus of 48 articles over a short ten-day period during the fall of the Belgian government, its findings provide a valuable starting point for the present research. By expanding the analysis to a broader dataset encompassing two protracted crises ($N=252$ articles), our study aims to offer a more comprehensive understanding of how cultural prox-

²Brussel-Halle-Vilvoorde (BHV) is a “Bilingual electoral and judicial district that comprised the Brussels-Capital Region and the Flemish periphery of Brussels” (Vertommen et al. 2012, p. 125). The debate on BHV can be shortly summarized by an issue of electoral constituencies between French-speaking and Dutch-speaking communities.

³The 2003 Constitutional Court Decree says that BHV is contrary to the equality principle.



imity influences the long-term construction of media narratives and the framing of political responsibility.

Applied to the Franco-Belgian context, this broader literature suggests that French newspapers are likely to interpret the Belgian political crisis through a Francophone lens. Given France's strong linguistic and cultural ties with the French-speaking part of Belgium, French coverage may reflect a broader conceptualization related to the Francophone community, emphasizing the perspectives and grievances of French-speaking Belgians while attributing greater responsibility for political deadlock or instability to Flemish actors. In doing so, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how cultural proximity shapes cross-border news framing within shared linguistic and cultural spaces.

Data and methods

Case selection

Belgian politics, as viewed through the lens of French newspapers, offers a compelling case for exploring how cultural proximity influences foreign news coverage, especially in contexts of political crisis.

Belgium and France share a deep historical trajectory, from Belgium's incorporation into France after the French Revolution and the Empire period, to their mutual participation in the colonization of Africa, as well as their involvement in both world wars and their roles as founding members of the European Union (Yakemtchouk 2010). The two countries are not only neighbors geographically but above all share a profound cultural and linguistic proximity, with around 40% of Belgium's population speaking French.⁴ We can compare this special relationship with the one associating Dutch-speaking Belgium (Flanders) and the Netherlands, in which context Belgium is viewed as a *little brother* (Vertommen et al. 2012, p. 129). Similarly, we can here speculate that France may be considered to be Belgium's *big brother*.

Belgium has complex institutional structures: the country is organized around a bipolar distribution of power (Reuchamps 2013a). This system is characterized by overlapping and non-hierarchical divisions, with six substates: the Flemish-, French- and German-speaking Communities, and the Regions of Flanders (which merged with the Flemish Community to form a single Flemish substate), Wallonia, and Brussels-Capital. In this article, we use the terms "Dutch-speaking" and "French-speaking" to refer to the two main language communities (Dassargues et al. 2014). In contrast, Belgium's German-speaking Community may not represent a particularly prominent language community ("the smallest federal entity in the world", Niessen 2021, p. 1026), and thus this community is not included in our analysis.

⁴There are 4,6 M inhabitants in Wallonia and Brussels Capital, out of 11,4 M inhabitants in Belgium. "La langue française dans le monde" by the International Organization for La Francophonie (2022), [URL : https://www.francophonie.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Rapport-La-langue-francaise-dans-le-monde_VF-2022.pdf].



The linguistic question that has been raised since the origin of Belgium has gradually turned into a community conflict (Leton and Miroir 1999). This is reflected in the media landscape, where two separate public spheres coexist with the Dutch-speaking and French-speaking public media addressing respectively a Dutch-speaking and a French-speaking public (Temmerman and Sinardet 2008). Dandoy et al. (2013) further describe a media “impermeability” between the two communities, noting that “the media in Belgium are first and foremost concerned with the politics of their own community” (p. 201). This separation leads to the amplification of the political consensus within each community (Sinardet 2013, p. 327). According to Lits (2012), the media coverage of the other community mirrors foreign press coverage, often based on simplifications and stereotypes. These characteristics of the Belgian media system are crucial to consider the news coverage regarding Belgium in French newspapers. Vertommen et al. (2012) suggest that the French press tends to rely more on French-speaking sources, neglecting to balance their viewpoint by relying on sources from the Flemish press.

While the complexity of Belgium’s political system and its community divisions are often highlighted in any presentation of Belgian politics (Deschouwer 2012), a period of crisis is a particularly salient moment to capture this external viewpoint. Our study focuses on the French newspaper coverage of the two most recent political crises in Belgium: the 2010–2011⁵ crisis and the 2018–2020 crisis.

The first crisis lasted 541 days, from the federal legislative elections of 13 June 2010 to the installation of the Di Rupo government on 6 December 2011. This is a record in Belgian national history and even in the world, as no national government has been interrupted for such a long period of time (Govaert 2012). The negotiations between the Flemish and Francophone parties, in disagreement over community issues, bogged down until they became a regime crisis that led to the sixth reform of the state (Reuchamps 2013b).

The second crisis started on 9 December 2018 when the Flemish nationalist ministers of the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (N-VA) broke away from the government coalition to protest against Belgium’s adoption of the United Nations agreement on migration in Marrakech. This led to the resignation of the then Prime Minister Charles Michel’s government on 18 December 2018, five months before new elections were due in May 2019. Still the elections did not make it easy to form a coalition government, and the crisis deepened. A majority government was only appointed in October 2020 with the nomination of the De Croo government, marking the end of a 22-month political crisis. The political crisis of 2018–2020 is described by Sägesser (2020) as “longer and deeper”, deeply affecting the political system and institutions. Indeed, this time, the crisis was not the result of a simple disagreement on institutional reforms, but of a weakening of the traditional parties and a growing ideological incompatibility between the majority formations in the North and in the South of the country (Faniel and Sägesser 2020).

⁵ We will refer to this crisis as “2010–2011 crisis” since these dates refer to the fall and rise of the former and new governments. However, our data collection encompasses a month before and after the starting and ending of the political crisis, therefore ending in January 2012 for this first case.



Data

Given the extended duration of these two political crises, the French news coverage was substantial, comprising a total of 252 articles. The corpus includes all articles published by four French newspapers: *Le Monde*, *Libération*, *Le Figaro*, and *La Voix du Nord*. *Le Monde*, *Libération*, and *Le Figaro* are major national daily newspapers with differing editorial lines: the editorial line of *Le Monde* is center-left, *Libération* is left-leaning, and *Le Figaro* is right-leaning. *La Voix du Nord*, a regional daily distributed in the northern region of France, was also included due to its geographical proximity to Belgium, which is a key factor in understanding French newspaper coverage of Belgian politics.

These articles were organized into two main corpora: the first corpus focuses on the 2010–2011 crisis, and the second one on the 2018–2020 crisis. The collection of articles for the first corpus began on 13 May 2010, one month before the federal legislative elections of 13 June 2010. This period therefore includes the electoral campaign, which highlights the tensions that were building up prior to the political crisis. The collection of articles ended on 6 January 2012, one month after the swearing-in of the new Belgian Prime Minister Elio Di Rupo, a period when French newspapers were still looking across the border, doubting the durability of the new Belgian executive member. Regarding the second corpus, the collection started on 8 November 2018, one month before the resignation of Michel II government, and ended on 3 November 2020, one month after the appointment of the De Croo government. All the articles covering Belgian politics published during these two periods in the four newspapers are included in the corpus (Table 1).

Our corpus consists of 252 articles in total, with 175 articles for the first crisis and 77 for the second. Although the second crisis lasted longer (20 months), it received less coverage than the first crisis (18 months). This discrepancy can be explained by the concept of “media fatigue” in protracted conflicts, where initial interest is followed by a decline in coverage, only to be renewed later (Gerner and Schrodt 1998, p. 19). It is important to note that, despite the decreasing number of articles during the second crisis, these articles were longer on average, with a difference of approximately 130 words per article.

Table 1 Composition of the corpus

Crisis	Number of articles published				
	Le Monde	Le Figaro	Libération	La Voix du Nord	Total
2010-2011	100	31	25	19	175
2018-2020	40	12	9	16	77
Crisis	Number of words by article				
	Le Monde	Le Figaro	Libération	La Voix du Nord	Average
2010-2011	634	547	755	400	584
2018-2020	936	651	695	575	714,25



Methodological framework

The articles from the two corpora were analyzed using Critical Frame Analysis (CFA) to explore the French media coverage of Belgian politics and the messages they communicated to their readership. CFA emerged from the constructivist turn in political science during the 1990s and the rise of frame analysis (Fischer and Forester 1993; Dekker 2017). It was developed in a research project aiming at evaluating how problems were represented and solutions proposed in European gender equality policies (Meier 2008; Verloo 2005). CFA allows for an in-depth understanding of both implicit and explicit interpretations of political events by highlighting how problems are framed and how solutions are presented (Meier 2008). This method focuses on three primary frameworks: diagnostic (the nature of the problem), prognostic (the articulation of the problem and potential solutions), and roles and responsibilities (who is seen as responsible and what actions are suggested) (Verloo 2005; Dekker 2017; Pascolo et al. 2021). This approach, which is derived from social movement theory and gender politics theory (Verloo 2005), has not been previously applied to the study of cultural proximity in foreign news coverage. We believe CFA can offer a systematic and comprehensive way to analyze the frames (Entman 1993; Fillmore 2006) identified in newspaper articles, enabling us to highlight the responsibility given to certain actors: institutions, political parties, language communities. We also consider the linguistic backgrounds of journalists, sources, and individuals quoted in the articles, as this information can provide relevant insights into the framing process.

The coding process began with a first reading of all the articles. For each article, we coded key dimensions to guide our Critical Frame Analysis. These include: diagnosis (the nature of the problem as presented), causality (the factors identified as causing the problem) and attribution (the actors or groups considered responsible). An initial coding was performed on the 175 articles from the first crisis, and all relevant elements within the categories were identified and enlisted. From this initial coding, sub-categories emerged inductively based on specific occurrences in the articles, rather than applying predefined categories. The first corpus was then re-coded using these sub-categories, forming a structured coding grid. This coding grid was retained for the second crisis to ensure comparability, as no significant new categories emerged. The coding scheme is provided in Appendix Tables 4 and 5.

Table 2 Quoted sources in French newspapers

Quoted source	Crisis 2010–2011	Crisis 2018–2020
French-speaking media	46	17
Dutch-speaking media	17	6
French-speaking politician	64	35
Dutch-speaking politician	60	29
French-speaking expert	24	30
Dutch-speaking expert	20	10
Number of articles	175	77



Findings

The Francophone side whispers to French newspapers

In this section, we examine two key elements of the French newspaper coverage: first, the media sources quoted in the articles; second, the identities of the people who have been cited, especially experts and politicians, as shown in Table 2.

When analyzing the sources cited by the French newspaper articles included in our corpus, a clear tendency emerges: they predominantly quote French-speaking sources. Among the French-speaking media sources typically referred to are *Le Soir*, *La Libre Belgique*, and *RTBF*, while Flemish media such as *De Morgen*, *De Standaard*, *De Tijd*, and *Het Laatste Nieuws* are quoted far less frequently. Across both crises, French-speaking sources were cited almost three times more often than Flemish sources. This difference is statistically significant: a chi-square test confirms a strong overrepresentation of French-speaking media in both crises ($\chi^2 = 13.35$, $p < 0.001$ for 2010–2011; $\chi^2 = 5.26$, $p = 0.022$ for 2018–2020).

Looking at the political figures quoted from both sides, the disparity is smaller. During the first crisis, 64 French-speaking politicians were quoted compared with 60 Dutch-speaking politicians. During the second crisis, 35 French-speaking politicians versus 29 Dutch-speaking politicians were referred to. The chi-square test confirms that these differences are not statistically significant, suggesting a balanced treatment when it comes to political voices. However, most of the Dutch-speaking politicians who were quoted came from the same political party: during the first crisis, 32 out of the 60 Dutch-speaking politicians were from the N-VA, and during the second crisis, two-thirds of the Dutch-speaking politicians (19 out of 29) were from the same party: the N-VA.

The disparity in quotations from experts is noticeable during the second crisis, with 30 French-speaking experts cited compared with 10 Dutch-speaking experts, whereas during the first crisis, the difference was less marked, with 24 French-speaking experts who had been quoted versus 20 Dutch-speaking experts. This gap is statistically significant in 2018–2020 ($\chi^2 = 10.0$, $p < 0.01$), but not in the earlier period, pointing to a growing asymmetry in expert sourcing over time.

We also investigated the backgrounds of the journalists writing these articles, most of whom are either French-speaking Belgians or French expatriates living in Brussels. Notably, Jean-Pierre Strobaants, a French-speaking Belgian journalist, authored 116 articles in *Le Monde*, nearly half of the articles included in the overall corpus.

Overall, the findings suggest that French newspapers show a distinct bias toward the French-speaking side of Belgium, both in terms of the media sources they rely on, and the experts they cite. This bias is, however, less explicit when it comes to the political figures who have been interviewed by journalists during both crises.



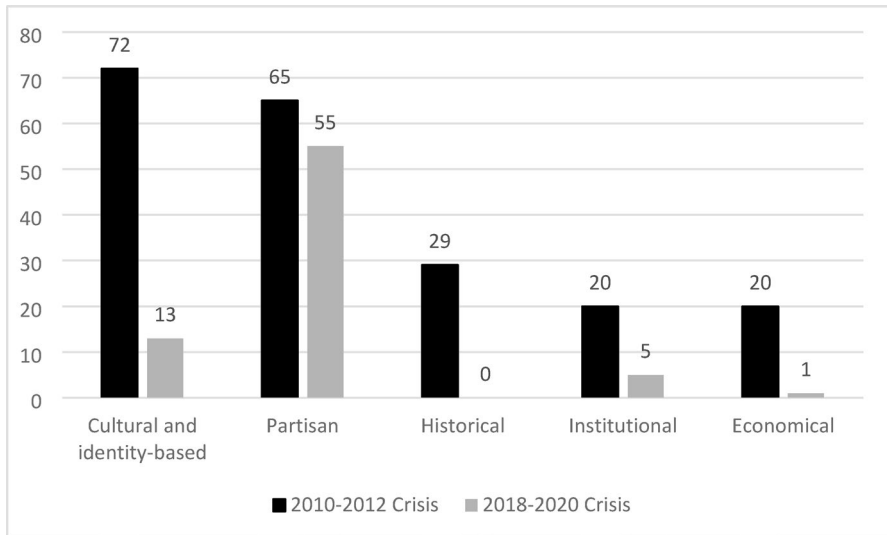


Fig. 1 Causes of the crisis

A framing favorable to Francophones

Causality of the crisis

An explicit bias can be observed in the quantitative indicators of journalists' sources. Yet we can also identify an implicit bias in the framing used to describe Belgian events. Figure 1 summarizes our findings regarding the causes of the two crises, as reported in the articles included in our corpus. These causes were divided into five categories: cultural and identity-based, partisan, historical, institutional, and economic, following our data-driven analysis.

Looking at the two crises jointly, partisan factors—related to political parties—emerge as the primary causes of the crises identified in our corpus, appearing in half of the 252 articles. This is particularly evident during the second crisis, when over 70% of the articles highlight partisan factors, compared with the first crisis, when these factors were mentioned in 41% of the articles. This difference in emphasis is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 23.84, p < 0.001$). The second crisis, triggered by a coalition breakdown, contrasts with the first, which followed an election, further emphasizing partisan conflicts. Narratives were related to the inability or unwillingness of political parties to form a coalition. *Libération* described the 2010–2011 crisis as a “double triumph for the two most divergent political formations”.⁶ The N-VA and its negotiation stance were often blamed, as evidenced by *Le Figaro* article stating, “the intransigence or prevarication of the Flemish nationalist party, ill at ease in its posture

⁶Translations of the articles are our own (unless specific mention), we provide the original text: “les dernières élections se sont soldées par un double triomphe pour les deux formations politiques les plus divergentes qui soient”. *Libération*, 07/08/2010, “La Belgique : stop ou encore ?”.



as a state party and as a group that has to make compromises”.⁷ We also find this idea in quotes from experts, such as Benjamin Biard in *La Voix du Nord*: “With the weakening of the traditional forces, the electoral equation is becoming more complex, with different parties making exclusive demands”.⁸ The left-right division between the North and the South of the country is also described as irreconcilable, as *Libération* noted: “Left-wing parties barely exceed 21%...” in Flanders, whereas in Wallonia: “the left dominates with 64.5% of the vote”, concluding: “In other words, in addition to the community divide, the political schism is at least equally significant”.⁹

Besides this partisan cleavage, the French newspapers highlight a growing divide between the Dutch-speaking and French-speaking communities, emphasizing cultural and identity-based causalities to explain the origins and persistence of the crises. During the 2010–2011 crisis, this explanation is mentioned in 72 out of 175 articles. One recurring issue was the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde (BHV) district, which became emblematic of the irreconcilable “identity gap” between the two communities.¹⁰ *Le Monde* reported that, for the Flemish community, BHV is seen as “a territory that must be defended [...] against the ‘francization’ that threatens identity and language”.¹¹ The divide between cultures and identities is presented as being so deep that French newspapers did not hesitate to use headlines like “Flanders has become a nation state” (*Le Monde*).¹² This alarmist title reflects Flemish independentists’ views, framing the situation as an identity crisis. It attributes responsibility to the Dutch-speaking community, portraying them as the primary force driving Belgium to tear itself apart. In contrast to the first crisis, cultural factors were less prominent during the second, appearing in only 13 of the 77 articles, a significant decline ($\chi^2 = 13.01, p < 0.001$).

Historical, institutional, and economic explanations were marginal or absent to explain the second political crisis. During the first crisis, these causal factors were more frequently cited, although still far less frequently than partisan or cultural/identity-based causes. The historical cause was often used to provide context, as demonstrated by an article from *La Voix du Nord*: “Belgium is on the verge of tearing itself apart, as a victim of the old confrontation between French and Dutch speakers

⁷ “la négociation s’est enlisée et s’est bloquée face à l’intransigeance ou aux tergiversations du parti nationaliste flamand mal à l’aise dans une posture de parti d’État et de formation ayant à nouer des compromis”. *Le Figaro*, 27/09/2010, “La Belgique face à son avenir”.

⁸ “Avec cet affaiblissement des forces traditionnelles, l’équation électorale devient plus complexe avec des exclusives posées par différents partis”. *La Voix du Nord*, 22/11/2019, “Une équation électorale complexe”.

⁹ “Au nord, [...] les partis de gauche y dépassent à peine 21%... Au sud, [...] une gauche dominante avec 64,5% des voix. Autrement dit, à la coupure communautaire s’ajoute un schisme politique au moins aussi important”. *Libération*, 14/06/2010, “La Belgique à plat régime”.

¹⁰ “De fait, tous les partis flamands veulent en finir avec les droits des francophones belges en Flandre. D’une part en scindant l’arrondissement électoral et judiciaire de Bruxelles-Hal-Vilvoorde (BHV) [...]. D’autre part, en supprimant à terme les « communes à facilités »”. *Libération*, 06/12/2011, “La Belgique gagne un sursis mais ne perd pas en divisions”.

¹¹ “ce territoire qu’il convient de défendre. Contre la « francisation » qui menacerait l’identité et la langue de cette zone”. *Le Monde*, 07/09/2010, “À Zaventem, les Flamands rêvent de s’émanciper de Bruxelles la bilingue”.

¹² *Le Monde*, 9/07/2010, “La Flandre est devenue un État-nation”.



since the creation of the Belgian state in 1831”.¹³ Given the significant differences between the Belgian and French political systems, one might have anticipated that France would attribute its neighbor’s instability to its complex institutional system, as illustrated by the headline in *Le Figaro*: “Federalism does not work!”.¹⁴ Surprisingly, the institutional factor was referred to only sporadically, appearing in only 25 out of 252 articles.

To summarize, during the first crisis (2010–2011), the causes were largely framed through a combination of cultural and partisan factors, with an emphasis on the cultural and identity-based divides between the Dutch-speaking and French-speaking communities. In contrast, the second crisis (2018–2020) was predominantly framed through partisan explanations, highlighting the difficulties in the coalition formation and political party conflicts. However, when examining the responsibility attributed to different parties, we will see that the blame consistently falls more heavily on one community over the other.

Attribution of responsibilities for the crisis

Our results regarding the attribution of responsibilities for the two crises, as summarized in Table 3, reveal a clear trend in French newspapers: the responsibility for both crises is predominantly attributed to Flanders. The Dutch-speaking side is blamed in 130 out of 252 articles, while the French-speaking side is only blamed 3 times ($\chi^2 = 121.3$, $p < 0.001$). However, it is important to note that it is not the Dutch-speaking community as a whole who is blamed; instead, the focus is on the political parties or specific politicians representing such parties.

During the 2010–2011 crisis, responsibility was shared between Dutch-speaking parties and Dutch-speaking politicians, with both groups blamed in 83 out of 175 articles. A closer look at the parties and politicians being referenced in the articles shows that the N-VA is cited in 37 out of the 41 articles mentioning the responsibil-

Table 3 Responsible for the crisis

Responsible for the crisis	2010–2011 crisis	2018–2020 crisis
Dutch-speaking parties	41	35
Dutch-speaking politicians	43	7
Dutch-speaking people as a whole	4	1
French-speaking parties	1	1
French-speaking politicians	0	1
French-speaking people as a whole	0	0
Parties from both sides	8	10
Politicians from both sides	3	0
Belgians as a whole	2	0

¹³ “La Belgique est au bord de la déchirure, victime du vieil affrontement entre francophones et néerlandophones depuis la création d’un État belge en 1831”. *La Voix du Nord*, 30/04/2010, “Crise linguistique en Belgique”.

¹⁴ *Le Figaro*, 16/06/2010, “Le fédéralisme, ça ne marche pas !”.



ity of the party, while other parties like CD&V are quoted in 13 articles and Open VLD in 4. Similarly, the current Belgian Prime Minister (since 2025), Bart De Wever (N-VA), is singled out in 37 out of 43 articles naming specific politicians, while other politicians such as Yves Leterme (CD&V), Vic Van Aelst (N-VA), Karel De Gucht (Open VLD), and Alexander De Croo (Open VLD) are less frequently mentioned. Bart De Wever and his party, N-VA, appear as the main responsible figures for the first crisis in French media coverage.

This trend continues during the 2018–2020 crisis, although some changes can be observed in the way responsibility is framed. The French newspapers keep targeting political parties, and very widely those from the North of the country: N-VA is named as the main cause of the crisis in every article that mentions the responsibility of the party—in 34 of the 35 articles.

While N-VA remains a central figure blamed for the crises, the focus on political parties shifts slightly. This time, it is primarily the Flemish political parties that are blamed (35 out of 77 articles), with fewer articles targeting individual politicians and especially BDW (7 out of 77). This change in attribution—from individuals to parties—is also statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 12.53, p < 0.01$). This shift may reflect a greater emphasis on internal conflicts within the parties rather than focusing solely on specific individuals. For example, an article from *Le Monde* focuses on the difficulties in forming a coalition by mentioning the parties' interests or conflicts: "The N-VA alone, which refuses to cohabit with the PS and the francophone Greens, has the key to a solution... or its blockage".¹⁵ A significant event during this second crisis was N-VA's rejection of the Marrakesh Pact in December 2018, which is widely considered to have triggered the collapse of the government. This event is cited as the primary cause in several articles, such as *Libération* which used the headline: "How the Marrakesh Pact caused the Belgian government to implode". 14 out of 20 articles published between December 5 and December 21 (in 2018) revolved around this issue, reinforcing the idea that N-VA is a major actor responsible for the crisis. Interestingly, the responsibility of the parties from both sides is frequently presented to French readers—10 out of 77 articles—as the crisis evolves ($\chi^2 = 4.51, p < 0.05$).

These results are in line with the way political figures are portrayed in French newspapers. In the 2010 federal elections, Bart De Wever and Elio Di Rupo appeared as the two major winners, yet their portrayals could not be more different. *Libération* describes Bart De Wever as advocating for "identitarian-nationalism, reminiscent of pre-war Europe",¹⁶ and *Le Monde* attributes him the "virus of nationalism".¹⁷ The lexicon attributed to the Dutch-speaking politician depicts an aggressive charac-

¹⁵ "La N-VA, qui refuse la cohabitation avec le PS et les Verts francophones, détient seule la clé d'une solution... ou de son blocage". *Le Monde*, 15/06/2019, "Un imbroglio politique qui menace l'avenir de l'État belge".

¹⁶ "De Wever milite pour un nationalisme identitaire, qui rappelle l'Europe d'avant-guerre". *Libération*, 14/06/2011, "La N-VA assume son refus de la démocratie".

¹⁷ "Il porte le virus du nationalisme que lui ont transmis ses parents". *Le Monde*, 15/06/2010, "Le nouvel homme fort de la Flandre a pris sa revanche".



ter: Bart De Wever does not engage in dialogues but “castigates”¹⁸ (*Le Monde*) and “torpedoes”¹⁹ (*Le Figaro*). His appearance is also mocked on several occasions: a “round appearance”²⁰ (*Le Figaro*), a former “chubby boy”²¹ (*Libération*) with “extrakilos and old-fashioned hairstyle”²² (*Le Monde*).

The adjectives attributed to the Dutch-speaking leader, Bart De Wever, contrast with the eulogistic depictions of the francophone leader, Elio di Rupo. *La Voix du Nord* shares a particularly glowing picture of him, the socialist is described as “the savior of Belgium”,²³ “the peacemaker of relations between Dutch and French speakers”²⁴. The courageous character of the Walloon socialist is highlighted: “this son of immigrants”²⁵ who has been able to “stand up in adversity”²⁶ and who has done “brilliant studies”²⁷ (*La Voix Nord*). Thus, if Elio Di Rupo appeared as the Walloon savior, Bart De Wever was his negative counterpart: the Flemish torpedo.

Similarly, during the 2018–2020 crisis, a positive image is painted of Sophie Wilmès, the French-speaking Prime Minister, whom *Le Figaro* describes as someone who “walks on three legs: firmness, calm and empathy [...]. She really has a great screen presence. She reflects Belgianness and that is her strength”.²⁸

While the second crisis (2018–2020) shifts the focus from cultural to more partisan causes, the analysis of attribution reveals that the blame is still predominantly placed on the Dutch-speaking N-VA party but less on politicians. During both crises, the French newspapers included in our corpus show a tendency to sympathize with French-speaking politicians, reinforcing an editorial stance that may closely align with the Francophone views.

¹⁸ “Bart De Wever, le leader des nationalistes flamands, a bien esquissé un rapprochement avec le PS après l’avoir invectivé durant plusieurs années”. *Le Monde*, 27/10/2019, “Sophie Wilmès, nouvelle première ministre belge face à une situation plus complexe que jamais”.

¹⁹ *Le Figaro*, 08/07/2011, “Bart de Wever torpille le compromis belge”.

²⁰ “Tout dépend maintenant de Bart De Wever, aussi rond dans les formes qu’il est carré en politique”. *Le Figaro*, 06/07/2011, “Belgique : médiation de la dernière chance”.

²¹ “Personne n’aurait parié un centime sur ce garçon joufflu lorsqu’il a pris la tête de la Nieuw-Vlaams Alliantie (N-VA - Nouvelle alliance flamande)”. *Libération*, 14/06/2010, “Le triomphe du «Flamingant»”.

²² “C’est avec ses kilos superflus et sa coiffure démodée que cet Anversois de 39 ans, père de quatre enfants, a conquis l’opinion flamande”. *Le Monde*, 15/06/2010, “Le nouvel homme fort de la Flandre a pris sa revanche”.

²³ *La Voix du Nord*, 5/12/2011, “Elio Di Rupo, le sauveur de la Belgique et du nœud papillon”.

²⁴ “Un pacificateur entre francophones et néerlandophones”. *La Voix du Nord*, 27/11/2011, “Elio Di Rupo, socialiste, francophone, et pacificateur”.

²⁵ “Fils d’immigré italien”. *La Voix du Nord*, 5/12/2011, “Elio Di Rupo, le sauveur de la Belgique et du nœud papillon”.

²⁶ “Elio Di Rupo se révèle dans l’adversité”. *La Voix du Nord*, 5/12/2011, “Elio Di Rupo, le sauveur de la Belgique et du nœud papillon”.

²⁷ “Après de brillantes études”. *La Voix du Nord*, 27/11/2011, “Elio Di Rupo, socialiste, francophone, et pacificateur”.

²⁸ *Le Figaro*, 24/03/2020, “Sophie Wilmès, la première ministre belge passée de l’ombre à la lumière”.



Discussion

This study set out to explore the causes of the Belgian political crises and identify those responsible for such crises, as portrayed by the French newspapers included in our corpus. Our aim was to understand how French newspapers framed the Belgian political situation and reflected the linguistic and cultural divisions between the Dutch-speaking and French-speaking communities in Belgium.

Shared language, a key dimension of cultural proximity, means that French journalists have easier access to sources in the French-speaking part of Belgium. While during the 2010–2011 crisis French newspapers quoted French- and Dutch-speaking politicians and experts in roughly equal proportions, French-speaking sources were cited more frequently than their Dutch-speaking counterparts during the 2018–2020 crisis. Even so, Dutch-speaking sources were not entirely neglected, as 10 Dutch-speaking experts and 29 Dutch-speaking politicians were quoted, compared with 30 French-speaking politicians and 35 experts. This indicates that, while the French newspapers included in our corpus tend to favor Francophone voices, there was still an effort during the first crisis to include Dutch-speaking sources. This finding challenges the hypothesis that French journalists' proximity to the French-speaking community of Belgium is merely due to language skills or translation issues. It aligns with the work of Vertommen et al. (2012), who demonstrated that journalists in Belgium start and shape their coverage from one side (either the Dutch- or French-speaking side) but then attempt to adjust this with perspectives from the other side.

Although journalists rely partly on sources from both linguistic communities, coverage tends to emphasize political and cultural factors as the main causes of the crises, with the Dutch-speaking side predominantly portrayed as responsible. This framing suggests that the French press aligns with the perspectives of the Francophone community due to shared cultural ties, reflecting the cultural proximity thesis, which extends beyond mere source access facilitated by a common language. These findings are consistent with research on other conflicts, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Dunsky 2008; Friel and Falk 2007; Viser 2003), which similarly highlights how cultural proximity shapes media framing. In the Belgian context, Vertommen et al. (2012) have shown that Dutch- and French-language newspapers tend to present more favorable portrayals of the community with which they share a linguistic and cultural affinity. We also observed that the French press replicates the patterns identified by Lits (2012) in Belgium, where coverage of the other linguistic community often resembles that of the foreign press—characterized by simplifications and stereotypes.

Moreover, the portrayal of Bart De Wever as the “torpedo” or through other negatively charged superlatives in our corpus (*Le Monde*, *Libération*, *Le Figaro*, *La Voix du Nord*) likely reflects the *cordon sanitaire* characteristic of the Belgian French-speaking media sphere. In effect, since the 1990s, the southern part of the country (Wallonia) has restricted coverage of far-right parties and politicians—whether French- or Dutch-speaking—requiring journalists to include context, criticisms or



opposing viewpoints whenever such movements are mentioned (Biard 2021). In contrast, in the North of the country (Flanders), far-right parties face far fewer obstacles to media representation, and Bart De Wever appears as a much less controversial figure than in the South.

Alternative explanation for the prominence of polemical statements from Dutch-speaking politicians in the French newspapers could be attributed to the journalistic tendency to amplify events and create sensational narratives (Galtung and Ruge 1965). In seeking to make the crisis more dramatic and interesting to readers, French newspapers may exaggerate the tone or impact of statements, particularly those from controversial figures like Bart De Wever.

Conclusion

This article explored the cultural proximity thesis in foreign media coverage of non-violent conflict. This focus is particularly relevant in light of the media's central role in shaping representations of foreign countries and in structuring the formation of public opinion about them. Focusing on the ties between two neighboring countries, Belgium and France, our Critical Frame Analysis highlights how the French media portrayed governmental crises, with a focus on the causes of and responsibilities for the two crises. French media tend to hold political parties in Flanders, especially N-VA and its leader Bart De Wever, accountable for the failure to compromise. Although sensationalism in foreign news coverage can play a role, we argue that this framing of the crisis is better understood through the cultural proximity between France and the French-speaking community of Belgium, which goes beyond a simple shared language.

However, these conclusions should be nuanced by a few limitations. While Critical Frame Analysis helps identify implicit and explicit framing of the crises, it remains challenging to fully characterize a Francophone perspective without analyzing the Flemish 'version' of the crisis. Future research should adopt a comparative approach, focusing on Belgian articles from both the French-speaking and Dutch-speaking press, to identify the frames that prevail within each community. By examining these frames, the results may reveal a more nuanced picture of news coverage. Furthermore, a theoretical framework analyzing bilateral relations between the French-speaking and Dutch-speaking communities could be another relevant avenue for future research. Such an approach would offer deeper insights into the complex relationship between these neighboring countries, united by a shared history and a common future as European partners.

Appendix

See Tables 4 and 5.



Table 4 Coding scheme for causality category

Causality	Content	Example
Cultural and identity based	Articles that analyze the crisis through the lens of culture and identity, highlighting the growing divergence between the two communities: disagreements over the BHV district, the contrasting expressions of identity	Flanders has become a nation state. <i>La Flandre est devenue un État-nation.</i> Le Monde, 02/08/2010, “La Flandre est devenue un État-nation”
Partisan	Articles that explain the crisis with a widening ideological divide between the two communities. This “political schism” portrays Flemish- and French-speaking individuals irreconcilable, unable to sit at the same negotiating table	A double triumph for the two most divergent political formations. <i>Un double triomphe pour les deux formations politiques les plus divergentes qui soient.</i> Libération, 08/07/2018, “La Belgique, stop ou encore ?”
Historical	Articles that explain the crisis by historical event of community tensions: French historically considered as “language of the elites”, the consequences of the two world wars, Royal Question of 1950, the rejection of French-speaking branch of University of Leuven, the end of unitary parties, etc	Belgium is on the edge of tearing itself apart, victim of the old confrontation between French and Dutch speakers since the creation of the Belgian state in 1831. <i>La Belgique est au bord de la déchirure, victime du vieil affrontement entre francophones et néerlandophones depuis la création d’un État belge en 1831.</i> La Voix du Nord, 30/04/2010, “Crise linguistique en Belgique”
Institutional	Articles that explain the crisis by the nature of the Belgian institutional system, described as chronically unstable and inefficient: compulsory voting, the proportional system, federal organization presented as explanatory factor of the Belgian political deadlock	The Belgian electoral system leads relentlessly to unnatural coalitions that only produce policies that are, if not antinomic, at least, incoherent. <i>Le système électoral belge débouche implacablement sur des coalitions contre-nature qui n’accouchent que de politiques sinon antinomiques, du moins incohérentes.</i> Libération, 07/08/2010, “La Belgique stop ou encore ?”
Economical	Articles that explain the crisis in terms of divergent economic developments. The economic gap between the two communities and high level of public debt can drive them apart and stir up political resentment between the two. The Wallon region is sometimes described as being at the receiving end, and the Flemish region as guardian of the economic sustainability of the country	At the root of the crisis: the richer Flemings in the North (60% of the population) feel they are paying for the poorer French-speaking people in the South. They are accused of not making the necessary efforts to recover economically. <i>À l’origine de la crise : les Flamands au Nord (60% de la population), plus riches, ont le sentiment de payer pour les francophones, plus pauvres, au Sud, accusés de ne pas faire les efforts nécessaires pour se redresser économiquement.</i> La Voix du Nord, 09/10/2011, “Le royaume en passe de sortir d’une crise politique d’une durée record”

Author contributions MGG: conceptualization, investigation, methodology, project administration, writing—original draft, review and editing. AHL: writing—review and editing, project administration. AA: review and editing. LP: conceptualization, investigation, methodology, project administration, writing—original draft. MR: conceptualization, investigation, methodology, project administration, supervision.



Table 5 Coding scheme for attribution category

Attribution	Example
Dutch-speaking people as a whole (parties, citizens, politicians)	Belgians could be called to the polls again, with a risk of further radicalization of the Flemish electorate <i>Les Belges pourraient être à nouveau appelés aux urnes, avec un risque de radicalisation accrue de l'électorat flamand</i> Le Monde, 6/09/2010, "Oui, il faut se préparer à la fin de la Belgique"
Dutch-speaking parties	On December 9, the NVA decided to scuttle the ship and quit the government. <i>Le 9 décembre, la NVA décide de saborder le navire et quitte le gouvernement</i> Libération, 19/12/2018, "En Belgique, le « pacte de Marrakech » au cœur de la crise"
Dutch-speaking politicians	Bart De Wever, advocates for the "evaporation" of the country on the eve of negotiations on institutional reform. <i>Bart De Wever, prône « l'évaporation » du pays à la veille des négociations sur la réforme des institutions</i> Le Monde, 15/06/2010, "Le nouvel homme fort de la Flandre a pris sa revanche"
French-speaking as a whole	(None were found)
French-speaking parties	A first round of negotiations began on Saturday but faced the persistent refusal of the French-speaking PS led by Paul Magnette to ally itself, even for a limited time, with Bart De Wever's NVA. <i>Une première négociation commencée samedi a buté sur le refus persistant du PS francophone dirigé par Paul Magnette de s'allier, même pour une durée limitée, à la NVA de Bart De Wever.</i> Le Monde, 16/03/2020, "Confrontée au coronavirus, la Belgique trouve un accord politique inédit"
French-speaking politicians	The Prime Minister [Charles Michel] may have seen this government crisis as an opportunity. <i>Le Premier ministre [Charles Michel] a pu voir dans cette crise gouvernementale une opportunité.</i> Libération, 19/12/2018, "En Belgique, le « pacte de Marrakech » au cœur de la crise"
Belgians as a whole	Dutch and French speakers stall reform of the kingdom's institutions <i>Néerlandophones et francophones paralysent la réforme des institutions du royaume</i> Le Monde, 6/10/2010, "Duel politique « à coups de gourdin » en Belgique"
Both Dutch- and French-speaking political parties	The ten parties of the ultra-minoritarian coalition led by Prime Minister Sophie Wilmès, who enjoyed a short honeymoon period due to the pandemic, did not renew their pact. <i>Les dix partis de la coalition ultra minoritaire conduite par la première ministre, Sophie Wilmès, qui a bénéficié d'une courte lune de miel due à la pandémie, n'ont pas renouvelé leur pacte.</i> Le Monde, 1/07/2020, "En Belgique, la fin de la trêve politique relance les débats sur la mise en place d'un gouvernement"
Belgian politicians from both sides	This crisis could be a matter for politicians. <i>Cette crise serait donc une affaire entre hommes politiques.</i> La Voix du Nord, 30/04/2010, "Crise linguistique en Belgique : « À Menin, il n'y a aucun problème avec les francophones »"

Data availability No datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

Declarations

Competing interests The authors declare no competing interests.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative



Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

References

- Biard, B. 2021. La lutte contre l'extrême droite en Belgique: II. Cordon sanitaire médiatique, société civile et services de renseignement. *Courrier hebdomadaire du CRISP* 2524–2525:5–78.
- Caluwaerts, D., and M. Reuchamps. eds. 2022. *Belgian Exceptionalism: Belgian Politics between Realism and Surrealism*. Routledge.
- Carvalho, A. 2008. Media(ted) discourse and society. *Journalism Studies* 9(2):161–177.
- Dandoy, R., D. Sinardet, and J. Lefevre. 2013. Médias et fédéralisme. Analyse de La couverture médiatique Lors des élections régionales de 2009. In *Le fédéralisme belge. Enjeux institutionnels, acteurs socio-politiques et opinions publiques*, 179–204. Academia/L'Harmattan.
- Dassargues, A., J. Perrez, and M. Reuchamps. 2014. Les relations Entre langue et politique En belgique: Linguistiques Ou communautaires ? *Revue Internationale De Politique Comparée* 21(4):105–128.
- Dekker, R. 2017. Frame ambiguity in policy controversies: Critical frame analysis of migrant integration policies in Antwerp and Rotterdam. *Critical Policy Studies* 11(2):127–145.
- Deschouwer, K. 2012. *The politics of belgium: Governing a divided society*. 2nd ed. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dunsky, M. 2008. *Pens and swords: How the American mainstream media report the Israeli–Palestinian conflict*. New York: Columbia University.
- Elmasry, M. H., A. E. Shamy, P. Manning, A. Mills, and P. J. Auter. 2013. Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya framing of the Israel–Palestine conflict during war and calm periods. *International Communication Gazette* 75(8):750–768.
- Entman, R. M. 1993. Framing: Towards clarification of a fractured paradigm. *McQuail's reader in mass communication theory*, 390–397.
- Faniel, J., and C. Sägesser. 2020. La Belgique entre Crise politique et Crise sanitaire (mars-mai 2020). *Courrier Hebdomadaire Du CRISP* 2(2):5–46.
- Fillmore, C. 2006. [1982]. Frame semantics. In *Cognitive linguistics: Basic readings*, ed. D. Geeraerts. 373–400. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Fischer, F. and Forester, J. 1993. *The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning*. North Carolina, US: Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1220k4f>
- Foust, C.-R., and W.-OS. Murphy. 2009. Revealing and reframing apocalyptic tragedy in global warming discourse. *Environmental Communication* 3(2):151–167.
- Friel, H., and R. Falk. 2007. *Israel–Palestine on record: How the new York times misreports conflict in the middle East*. London and New York: Verso.
- Galtung, J., and M. H. Ruge. 1965. The structure of foreign news: The presentation of the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus crises in four Norwegian newspapers. *Journal of Peace Research* 2(1):64–90.
- Gerner, D. J., and P. A. Schrodt. 1998. *The effects of media coverage on crisis assessment and early warning in the middle East. Early warning and early response*. New York: Columbia University Press-Columbia International Affairs Online.
- Govaert, S. 2012. Les négociations communautaires et La formation du gouvernement Di Rupo (juin 2010-décembre 2011). *Courrier Hebdomadaire Du CRISP* 2144(19–20):5–85.
- Greco Morasso, S. 2012. Contextual frames and their argumentative implications: A case study in media argumentation. *Discourse Studies* 14(2):197–216.
- Leton, A., and A. Miroir. 1999. *Les conflits communautaires En Belgique*. Presses universitaires de France, Perspectives internationales.
- Lits, M. 2012. Les médias francophones En belgique: Enjeux identitaires. *Alternative Francophone* 1(5):55–66.
- Meier, P. 2008. Critical frame analysis of EU gender equality policies: New perspectives on the substantive representation of women. *Representation* 44(2):55–167.



- Niessen, C. 2021. Federalization in the slipstream: How the German-speaking community of Belgium became one of the smallest federal entities in the world. *Nations and Nationalism* 27:1026–1046.
- Pascolo, L., D. Vermassen, M. Reuchamps, and D. Caluwaerts. 2021. The changing dynamics of Belgian federalism: is there a reversal of the paradox of federalism? In Caluwaerts, D., Reuchamps, M. (2021). *Belgian Exceptionalism: Belgian politics between realism and surrealism*, (pp. 169–186). London: Routledge.
- Reuchamps, Min. 2013a. Structures institutionnelles du fédéralisme belge. In: Régis Dandoy, Geoffroy Matagne & Caroline Van Wynsberghe, *Le fédéralisme belge: Enjeux institutionnels, acteurs socio-politiques et opinions publiques*. Louvain-la-Neuve, Academia-L'Harmattan, 29–61.
- Reuchamps, M. 2013b. The current challenges on the Belgian federalism and the sixth reform of the state. In *The ways of federalism in Western countries and the horizons of territorial autonomy in Spain*, ed. A. López-Basaguren, and L. Escajedo San-Epifanio. 375–392. Heidelberg: Springer.
- Sägesser, C. 2020. La formation du gouvernement de Croo (mai 2019 - octobre 2020). *Courrier Hebdomadaire Du CRISP* 26(26–27):5–86.
- Sakurai, T. 2017. Cultural factors in the flow of international news: A review of the literature. In SHS Web of Conferences (Vol. 33).
- Sinardet, D. 2013. How linguistically divided media represent linguistically divisive Issues. *Belgian TV Debates on Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde*. *Regional & Federal Studies* 23(3):311–330.
- Straubhaar, J. D. 1991. Beyond media imperialism: Asymmetrical interdependence and cultural proximity. *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 8(1):39–59.
- Straubhaar, J. D. 2007. *World television: From global to local*. Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Temmerman, M., and D. Sinardet. 2008. Political journalism across the Language border: Communicative behaviour in political interviews by Dutch-and French-speaking journalists with Dutch-and French-speaking politicians in federal Belgium. In *Multilingualism and applied comparative linguistics: vol. 2: cross-cultural communication, translation studies and multilingual terminology*, Cambridge Scholars.
- Verloo, M. 2005. Mainstreaming gender equality in europe: A critical frame analysis approach. *The Greek Review of Social Research* 117:11–34.
- Vertommen, B., A. Vandendaele, and E. Van Praet. 2012. Towards a multidimensional approach to journalistic stance. Analyzing foreign media coverage of Belgium. *Discourse Context & Media* 1(2–3):123–134.
- Viser, M. 2003. Attempted objectivity: An analysis of the New York times and Ha'aretz and their portrayals of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. *Harvard International Journal of Press-Politics* 8(4):114–120.
- Yakemtchouk, R. 2010. *La Belgique et Le france: Amitiés et rivalités*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Zaharopoulos, T. 1990. Cultural proximity in international news coverage: 1988 US presidential campaign in the Greek press. *Journalism Quarterly* 67(1):190–194.

Publisher's note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Maela Guillaume-Le Gall is a PhD candidate in Sociology at the University of Oxford, in Nuffield College. Her research focuses on political mobilization, social and territorial inequalities, and processes of segregation.

Axel Humbert-Labeaumaz was research intern at UCLouvain, Institute of Political Science Louvain-Europe (ISPOLE), Belgium, and master student at École Normale Supérieure de Lyon & Sciences Po Lyon. He currently is administrative research assistant at Université Catholique de Lille, France.

Anais Augé is FNRS research fellow and lecturer at the University of Louvain. Her fields of research include political discourse analysis and argumentation, with a specific interest in public reception, metaphor, and environmental debates.

Laura Pascolo was PhD student & assistant at UCLouvain, Institute of Political Science Louvain-Europe (ISPOLE), Belgium. She is currently Project Manager UNIVERSEH-European Universities alliance at University of Namur.

Min Reuchamps is professor of Political Science at UCLouvain, Institute of Political Science Louvain-Europe (ISPOLE), Belgium.



Authors and Affiliations

Maela Guillaume-Le Gall¹ · Axel Humbert-Labeaumaz^{2,4}  · Anaïs Augé² · Laura Pascolo³ · Min Reuchamps²

✉ Maela Guillaume-Le Gall
maela.guillaume--legall@nuffield.ox.ac.uk

Axel Humbert-Labeaumaz
axel.humbertlabeaumaz@gmail.com

Anaïs Augé
anais.auge@uclouvain.be

Laura Pascolo
l.pascolo1@gmail.com

Min Reuchamps
min.reuchamps@uclouvain.be

¹ Sociology Department, Nuffield College, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

² Université catholique de Louvain (UCLouvain), Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium

³ Université de Namur, Namur, Belgium

⁴ LITL, Université Catholique de Lille, Lille, France

