10

VOTING FOR 'THE OTHER SIDE'? THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE BRUSSELS CAPITAL REGION

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10.1 Introduction

How should democracy be organized in countries that are deeply divided along ethnic, linguistic or religious lines? For decades, this question has sparked a fierce debate between two camps of constitutional engineers. Scholars following Lijphart's consociational model argue that deeply divided societies require a political system that institutionalizes conflict lines and turns ethnic, linguistic or religious identities into "constructive elements of a stable democracy" (Lijphart, 1977: 42). Consociational democrats therefore follow a logic of separation in which voters, as bearers of ascriptive (ethnic, religious, linguistic...) identities, are supposed to support a party of their own ethnic bloc (so-called *co*-ethnic voting) and political parties are expected to seek votes among *co*-ethnic voters ('*co*-ethnic vote-seeking'). The traditional examples are Northern Ireland, Burundi, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Belgium.

Centripetal democrats, in contrast, claim that divided societies are best served by electoral institutions that bring groups together and foster overarching identities (Horowitz, 1985, 1991; Reilly, 2001). They advocate institutions that encourage "inter-communal moderation by promoting multi-ethnic political parties, cross-cutting electoral incentives and intergroup accommodation" (Reilly, 2012: 260). Ethnic conflict management is thus achieved by building institutions that foster *cross*-ethnic voting and require political candidates to seek cross-community support, i.e. *cross*-ethnic vote-seeking (Horowitz, 1997; McCulloch, 2013). This model can be found amongst others in Fiji, Sri Lanka, Nigeria and South Tyrol.

In this enduring debate between consociational and centripetal democrats, the case of the Brussels Capital Region (BCR) in Belgium constitutes an interesting anomaly. After all, contrary to Flanders and Wallonia, it is possible in

the BCR to engage in cross-ethnic voting¹. In the officially bilingual region of Brussels, both French-speaking and Dutch-speaking parties field candidates, and voters are able to cast votes for parties from the other ethnolinguistic group. Hence, the BCR constitutes an interesting case to explore cross-ethnic voting in “the most perfect example of a consociation” (Lijphart, 1981: 8).

However, despite the theoretical possibility of Brussels voters to engage in cross-ethnic voting, little is known empirically about whether they actually do so. Our central question is therefore to what extent voters in the BCR cast votes for parties of the other linguistic group. In this chapter, we show that a fair number of voters do vote for ‘the other side’. More specifically, we find that French-speaking voters in Brussels find their way to right-wing conservative Flemish parties, and that this is due to the party offer within their linguistic group. Right-wing francophone voters, who arguably feel ‘unserved’ by the parties on their side of the linguistic divide, cross-linguistic boundaries to vote for Flemish right-wing parties.

In the remainder of this chapter, we first discuss the consociational nature of the Brussels political system. Then we focus on the previous literature on cross-ethnic voting, before outlining the methods and the results.

10.2 Consociationalism in the BCR: *Compromis à la belge*

In Belgium’s consociational structure², the BCR—officially created in 1989—has always occupied a particular position and status. The Brussels political model is based on the pacification of conflicts between the Flemish and the French language community (Janssens, 2018b). Language is an ethnic marker but unlike the two other unilingual regions in Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia), the Brussels region is officially bilingual (and, in reality, even multilingual). The French speakers currently constitute a majority (80–85%) in the Brussels region, but before its ‘Frenchification’, Brussels has always been a primarily Dutch-speaking region (Janssens, 2018a; Witte & Van Velthoven, 2010). In Brussels (and Belgium), the ethnolinguistic cleavage mainly dominated the political scene from the 1950s to the 1980s. Nevertheless, the Brussels consociational model has largely managed to capture and absorb the tensions between both language communities, and frictions did never really turn violent.³

The BCR should not only be understood as a constituent region but also as a microcosm of the federal consociational system (Cochrane et al., 2018: 53). Exemplary of consociational power-sharing in Belgium, the Brussels Parliament consists of two linguistic groups (Dutch/French) and reserves 17 out of its 89 seats for Dutch-speaking politicians. Moreover, the double majority rule and the ‘alarm bell’ procedure also protect the Dutch-speaking minority. At government level, the Dutch speakers are entitled to at least two ministerial positions and have *de facto* veto power (Coffé, 2006: 101). Central to its decision-making procedure are the principles of collegiality and consensus. All these mechanisms of minority protection, however, have substantially modified proportional representation

in the Brussels region (Bodson & Loizides, 2017). Hence, the Dutch-speaking minority in Brussels is overrepresented at parliamentary and governmental levels (so-called protective disproportional representation) (Bodson & Loizides, 2017: 87, Cochrane et al., 2018: 69).

This Dutch overrepresentation at the Brussels regional level, however, cannot be separated from the protective mechanisms granted to the French-speaking minority at the federal level. Furthermore, the Brussels' system combines a proportional list design with flexible lists, optional preferential voting and legally binding gender quotas. Voters can cast a vote for an entire party list or give one or more preferential votes to candidates on a list, but voting for (candidates on) different lists is not allowed.

Contrary to the two other regions in Belgium, both Dutch-speaking and French-speaking parties can field candidates in Brussels.⁴ This means that it is the only region in Belgium where cross-ethnic voting and vote-seeking are theoretically possible.⁵ Dutch-speaking voters in Brussels can vote for French-speaking parties if they so desire, and vice versa. The language group to which voters belong is, moreover, not fixed. Since there is no sub-nationality or linguistic nationality, voters are free to choose their language group at each election (Deschouwer, 2012; Pilet, 2005). Voters first have to indicate whether they want to vote for a Flemish or francophone list and only thereafter can they cast their vote for a specific party (Janssens, 2018b).

For candidates on party lists, the language choice is more stringent: candidates have to register on a list for either the Dutch or the French language group. The language in which the elected candidate takes the oath defines his or her language group and this choice is irreversible (Deschouwer, 2012). However, the oath has been broken several times in the past (Witte & Van Velthoven, 2010). In 1971, for instance, Rassemblement Bruxellois placed candidates with a Dutch identity card that supported the FDF program on the Dutch-speaking list. These so-called faux Flamands or Flamands modérés were thus able to block the protection mechanisms for the Dutch-speaking minority.⁶ Furthermore, newly formed political parties also need to register as belonging to either the Dutch-speaking or French-speaking language group. This means that, despite the bilingual nature of the region, 'bilingual parties' do not exist⁷, but voting for a party of the other linguistic group is possible. Therefore, we will describe 'cross-ethnic voting' in greater detail in the next section.

10.3 Cross-ethnic voting

Cross-ethnic voting refers to the process whereby voters in deeply divided societies electorally support parties from other ethnic (or in Belgium: ethnolinguistic) groups (Reilly, 2020: 2–3). It is believed that such cross-ethnic voting would incentivize politicians to adopt moderate positions and policies and would as a result induce political stability. However, theory and empirical results on cross-ethnic voting are often contradictory. After all, the theoretical assumption

that parties in systems that allow for cross-ethnic voting and vote-seeking, will moderate their position to attract voters from the other ethnic groups (Horowitz, 1985, 1991; Reilly, 2001, 2020), is widely discussed. Hulsey (2010) and Touquet (2011), for instance, demonstrated that cross-ethnic appeals and moderation toward voters from the other ethnic group(s) can be costly strategies for political parties. Hence, it is hardly surprising that the majority of voters in deeply divided societies cast votes for co-ethnic, rather than cross-ethnic, parties and candidates (Chauchard, 2016; Coakley & Fraenkel, 2017; Horowitz, 2000, Lijphart, 2004; O'Leary, 2013).

Although some voters do support parties from other ethnic groups, this cross-ethnic voting most likely occurs in majoritarian elections where voters are left with fewer parties on each side of the ethnic divide, and where crossing the ethnic divide increases party offer and choice (Horowitz, 1991; Stojanović & Strijbis, 2019). Proportional elections, in contrast, favor co-ethnic voting because there is much party offer on voter's own side of the ethnic cleavage (Horowitz, 1991; Reilly, 2012). Moreover, voters who do cross the ethnic divide in the electoral arena are more likely to do so when parties have consistently held moderate positions (Garry, 2014). A party that previously presented itself as a defender of its ethnic group's interests but now moderates its position might win more votes within its own ethnic bloc (McGlinchey, 2019) but might be less credible as an ethnic catch-all party for the voters of the rival group (Garry, 2014). Garry (2014) further argues that voters' tendency to support parties from 'the other side' is based on the perceived ability to perform well in terms of representing all groups in society. In that sense, ethnic catch-all parties, i.e. parties that explicitly adopt moderate positions on ethnic issues, would benefit more from cross-ethnic voting than their radical counterparts. Whereas the former moderate their policies (and avoid extreme positions) to appeal to a broad array of interests, the latter appeal to voters on the basis of their ethnic identification and maximize votes by adopting more extreme positions than their co-ethnic competitors (Horowitz, 1985).

10.4 The 2019 elections in Brussels

In this chapter, we study patterns of cross-ethnic voting in the regional elections of May 26, 2019 in Brussels. Regional elections are held every five years in Belgium, and since 2014, they have been concurrently organized with federal and European elections.

One of the main characteristics of the party system in Brussels is that it is highly fragmented. In the parliament of the BCR, 14 parties are represented. They belong to several party families, including the radical left (PTB, PVDA), greens (Ecolo, Groen), social democrats (PS, one.brussels-sp.a), Christian democrats (cdH, CD&V), liberals (MR, Open VLD), regionalists (DéFI, N-VA) and the radical right (Vlaams Belang). In addition, two single-issue parties, DierAnimal and Agora, also each won one seat in 2019. The strength of the different parties varies, as shown in [Table 10.1](#). Socialist and liberal parties in

both language groups and the regionalist party FDF in the French-speaking group, have been traditionally strong in the Brussels region, and continue to be. However, the 'clear winners' in the Brussels elections of 2019 were the green parties (especially Ecolo which obtained 15 seats in 2019 compared to 8 seats in 2014, but also Groen) and the radical left party PTB in the French-speaking group (Reuchamps et al., 2020: 346). The major losses were shared by the traditional parties on both sides of the left-right spectrum, including the socialist, liberal and Christian democratic parties. These results mirror trends found at the federal level in Belgium and in other regions as well (Pilet, 2021; van Erkel et al., 2020). After the election, a center-left coalition government was formed in Brussels, consisting of PS, Ecolo, DéFI, Groen, Open VLD and one.brussels-sp.a.

Of the 14 parties that are represented in the Brussels parliament, 3 most clearly articulate the interests of their own ethnolinguistic bloc: DéFI, N-VA and Vlaams Belang. DéFI and N-VA are 'regionalist' parties in the sense that they originated on the center-periphery and organize to represent "geographically concentrated peripheral minorities (...) by demanding recognition of their cultural identity" (Türsan, 1998: 19). DéFI (before: FDF) grew out of the movement of francophones in Brussels, which defended the French language and the rights of French speakers in Brussels (van Haute & Pilet, 2006). The party competed for the first time in the 1965 general elections and quickly became, and remained, an important electoral player in Brussels. The party does not argue in favor of secession but supports a federal structure with a strong status for Brussels (van Haute & Pilet, 2006). Ideologically speaking, it is considered to be center-right on socioeconomic issues, but center-left on cultural 'new politics' issues such as lifestyle politics, identity and migration (Pilet, 2021; Walgrave et al., 2020b).

TABLE 10.1 Percentage of seats in the Parliament of the Brussels Capital Region, by party

<i>Language group</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Number of seats</i>	<i>Percentage of seats</i>
French-speaking	PS	17	19.1
	Ecolo	15	16.9
	MR	13	14.6
	PTB	10	11.2
	DéFI	10	11.2
	cdH	6	6.7
Dutch-speaking	Groen	4	4.5
	Open VLD	3	3.4
	One.brussels-sp.a	3	3.4
	N-VA	3	3.4
	CD&V	1	1.1
	Vlaams Belang	1	1.1
	Agora	1	1.1
	PVDA	1	1.1
	DierAnimal	1	1.1
Total		89	100

Note: Percentages reflect the distribution at the start of the legislative term in 2019.

The Dutch-speaking N-VA was created in 2001. It is linked with the Flemish movement and articulates the political interests of Flanders and the Flemish language. N-VA initially struggled to meet the 5% electoral threshold in Belgium but recovered and became one of the major parties in Flanders, although its success in Brussels remains somewhat more limited (van Haute & Pilet, 2006; van Haute et al., 2018). The party aims to establish an “independent republic of Flanders”, which should develop as a result of “a gradual process of disappearance of the Belgian state” (van Haute et al., 2018: 959). N-VA is furthermore a right-wing conservative party on both the socioeconomic and cultural dimensions (Pilet, 2021; Walgrave et al., 2020b).

Vlaams Belang, finally, is a populist radical right party that combines elements of nativism, authoritarianism and populism in its ideological program (Mudde, 2007). The party promotes Flemish secession and the immediate creation of an independent Flemish state (van Haute et al., 2018). Despite its electoral successes in Flanders, the party is weaker in Brussels. As a result of the *cordon sanitaire* (see [Chapter 5](#) in this volume), the party is never invited to become part of a coalition government.

10.5 Data and methods

For our exploration of cross-ethnic voting in the BCR, we rely on the EOS RepResent voter survey organized in Brussels at the occasion of the 2019 regional elections (Walgrave et al., 2020a). The EOS RepResent survey is a panel survey that was conducted among a representative sample of citizens in the Brussels, Flemish and Walloon regions at the occasion of the 2019 regional, federal and European elections. The organizing body of the survey was EOS RepResent, a research consortium funded by the FWO/FNRS Excellence of Science program, involving the Universiteit Antwerpen, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Université libre de Bruxelles, KULeuven and Université catholique de Louvain. The EOS RepResent interuniversity team was responsible for the development, organization, and supervision of the survey.

The survey consisted of one pre-electoral and one post-electoral wave organized around the elections of May 26, 2019. The first wave involved 7,351 online interviews with eligible voters, of which 1,028 were in Brussels. The sample was intended to be representative of the voting-age population in terms of gender, education, age and party choice. In the final sample, higher educated voters, and age-groups between 45 and 65, were slightly overrepresented (van Erkel et al., 2020), and as is often the case in Brussels surveys, Dutch speakers were underrepresented due to difficult sampling conditions. Respondents who were successfully contacted in the first wave were asked to participate in the follow-up online survey conducted immediately after the elections. The second wave included a sample of 3,971 respondents, of which 510 in Brussels. The response rate for this second wave was 53.3% in total and 49.6% in the Brussels region specifically. The two consecutive waves ran from April 5, 2019 until June 18, 2019. The pre-electoral waves

gathered information on voters' sociodemographic background, their political resources, political engagement, ideological viewpoints, attitudes toward representation and democratic resentment, voting intentions etc. The data gathered in the weeks following the election focused on respondents' actual voting behavior (Walgrave et al., 2020a).

Our main interest in this chapter is voters' support for parties on the other side of the ethnolinguistic divide; hence, French-speaking voters' support for Flemish parties and Dutch-speaking voters' support for francophone parties in Brussels. In order to measure party support, we rely on two survey questions. The first question asked voters to indicate their vote intentions in the pre-electoral wave: "If there were elections for the Parliament of Brussels today, for which party would you vote?". The second question asked voters to indicate their actual vote choice in the post-electoral wave: "For which party did you vote for the Parliament of Brussels during the regional elections of 26th May 2019?". The answer categories were the same for both questions. Respondents could indicate their preferred party from a list of 14 parties and a general category of 'other parties', or they could indicate that they voted 'blank or invalid', 'did not vote', 'cannot vote' or 'do not remember'. The Flemish parties included CD&V, Groen, N-VA, Open VLD, PVDA, one.brussels-sp.a and Vlaams Belang. The francophone parties included cdH, DéFI, Ecolo, MR, Parti Populaire, PS and PTB. Although both survey questions are widely used in voter survey research, each question also comes with some limitations. Voting intentions do not measure actual voting behavior, whereas questions on vote choice suffer from recall problems (Dassonneville & Hooghe, 2017). By considering the answers of voters on both survey questions, we conduct a mutual robustness check.

In our measurement of cross-ethnic voting, respondents' voting intentions and vote choice are linked to their own language. The latter is measured by looking at the language respondents used to complete the survey. At the start of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate their preferred language (either Dutch or French). We consider this survey question to be a proxy for the language voters are most fluent in. Ideally, we would have used a more informative question with a more direct measurement of the language(s) voters speak on a regular basis and/or their linguistic identities, but unfortunately, such a question was not available in the survey. We also cannot rely on official language registration data because voters do not have to register in advance, and they can change language groups at each election.

Later in the chapter, we will also run multivariate analyses to explain cross-ethnic voting patterns in Brussels. For these analyses, we included two explanatory variables, out-group attitudes and left-right self-placement. Voters' out-group feelings are measured on a 0–100 scale using the following survey question: "Could you use the scale below to indicate how you feel about the [other ethnolinguistic group]? (0–50 = not very favorable, 50 = neutral, 50–100 = very favorable)". Left-right placement is measured on a continuous 0–10 scale by considering respondents' answers to the following question: "In politics, people

often talk of ‘left’ or ‘right’. Can you place your own convictions on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 meaning ‘left’, 5 ‘in the centre’ and 10 ‘right’?”.

Finally, the multivariate models include control variables. Age is measured as a continuous variable. Respondents’ sex (female = 1) and educational attainment (recoded to three categories: ‘no or lower education’, ‘secondary education/high school’ and ‘higher education’) control for sociological vote determinants. Three scale variables (political interest, political trust and satisfaction with policy) control for differences in political attitudes and opinions. Political interest is measured by asking respondents how interested they are in politics in general with a scale ranging from 0 (‘not interested at all’) to 10 (‘extremely interested’). Political trust was measured by asking respondents to indicate on a scale ranging from 0 (‘absolutely no confidence’) to 10 (‘complete confidence’) how much trust they had in four institutions: political parties, the federal parliament, politicians and the European Union (sum scale with Cronbach’s $\alpha = .927$). Finally, political satisfaction is measured by considering to what extent they are satisfied with the policies implemented by the government of Brussels on a scale ranging from 0 (‘very unsatisfied’) to 10 (‘very satisfied’).

10.6 Cross-ethnic voting in Brussels

Even though Brussels voters have the opportunity to cast a vote for a party from the other ethnolinguistic group, the BCR’s proportional representation (PR list) electoral system does not give them a lot of institutional incentives to do so. After all, its system is predominantly based on an electoral logic of separation, whereby Brussels voters are supposed to vote for a party of their own ethnolinguistic bloc.⁸

Despite the lack of institutional incentives, and despite the consociational nature of Brussels electoral institutions, we see that a fair number of voters do indeed cross the linguistic divide. Table 10.2 shows that about 11.6% of all French-speaking respondents intended to vote for a Dutch-speaking party (wave 1 of the EOS survey), and that about 10.4% actually did so in the voting booth (wave 2). Moreover, and even though we should be careful drawing conclusions on the Dutch-speaking side due to the low N, we find that 28% of the Dutch speakers had a pre-electoral intention to vote for French-speaking parties, and in the end, about 15.8% actually did cast a cross-ethnic vote. Even though Table 10.2 supports previous studies’ findings that cross-ethnic voting is rare compared to co-ethnic voting, the result that cross-ethnic voting does take place is strong and statistically significant. The conclusion is therefore that cross-ethnic voting not only theoretically *can* but also empirically *does* take place in the BCR, even if the political infrastructure is conducive to institutionalizing ethnolinguistic differences, rather than mitigating them.

The willingness to engage in cross-ethnic voting might be surprising, but we should bear in mind that voting across linguistic lines has been made ‘costless’ in Brussels. Due to the system of fixed allocation of seats between both language groups (17 seats are reserved for Dutch speakers, 72 for French speakers),

TABLE 10.2 Number and percentage of Brussels voters engaging in cross-ethnic compared to co-ethnic voting

	<i>Wave 1 (pre-electoral intention to vote)</i>		<i>Wave 2 (post-electoral actual vote)</i>	
	<i>Dutch-speaking voter</i>	<i>French-speaking voter</i>	<i>Dutch-speaking voter</i>	<i>French-speaking voter</i>
Dutch-speaking party	36 (72.0%)	89 (11.6%)	16 (84.2%)	41 (10.4%)
French-speaking party	14 (28.0%)	679 (88.4%)	3 (15.8%)	352 (89.6%)
Total	50 (100%)	768 (100%)	19 (100%)	393 (100%)
	N = 818; $\text{Chi}^2 = 132.337$; $\text{DF} = 1$; Cramer's V = .402; $p > .001$		N = 412; $\text{Chi}^2 = 82.755$; $\text{DF} = 1$; Cramer's V = .448; $p > .001$	

Note: Gray shades indicate cross-ethnic voting.

voting for a party of the other group does not come at an electoral cost for one's own group. This might explain why some—often highly educated—voters have voted for the other linguistic group, especially when there was a fear that radical parties could block the institutions.

Table 10.2 only gives us an indication of whether cross-ethnic voting takes place, but it does not give us a conclusive answer to the question of which parties benefit most from it. Previous literature would have us expect that ethnically (or ethnolinguistically) moderate parties would benefit most from cross-ethnic votes, whereas parties that explicitly claim to represent their linguistic group's interest will be less successful in attracting votes from the other side. We therefore also disaggregated the results by parties (Table 10.3).

Because of the low number of respondents, the results for Dutch-speaking voters are not conclusive. The results on the francophone side, however, are much more interesting. Table 10.3 shows that few voters (intend to) cast a vote for ethnic catch-all parties, such as the socialist party one.brussels-sp.a, the liberal party Open VLD or the Christian democratic party CD&V. However, and most interestingly, the table also reports that 6.4% ($n = 49$) of the French-speaking respondents intended to vote for the Flemish N-VA and Vlaams Belang in the months before the election, and that 6.9% actually did so in the voting booth. Most French speakers who engage in cross-ethnic voting thus vote for right-wing Flemish nationalist parties. This disconfirms previous findings (Chauchard 2016; Horowitz, 2000) that voters who engage in cross-ethnic voting will support parties that explicitly position themselves as ethnic catch-all parties, or in the absence thereof, will support parties that do not explicitly present themselves as ethnic outbidders. We rather find that they vote for parties that position themselves as defenders of the other linguistic group's interests.

The paradoxical finding that a significant number of French-speaking voters support parties that explicitly aim to undermine francophone interests begs the question of *why* French-speaking voters in Brussels decide to vote for these parties.

TABLE 10.3 Number and percentage of Brussels voters engaging in cross-ethnic voting by party

		<i>Wave 1 (pre-electoral intention to vote)</i>		<i>Wave 2 (post-electoral actual vote)</i>	
		<i>Dutch-speaking voter</i>	<i>French-speaking voter</i>	<i>Dutch-speaking voter</i>	<i>French-speaking voter</i>
French-speaking parties	cdH	3 (6.0%)	29 (3.8%)	1 (5.3%)	21 (5.3%)
	DeFI	2 (4.0%)	133 (17.3%)	1 (5.3%)	79 (20.1%)
	Ecolo	5 (10.0%)	189 (24.6%)	0 (0%)	74 (18.8%)
	MR	2 (4.0%)	149 (19.4%)	0 (0%)	71 (18.1%)
	PP	1 (2.0%)	25 (3.3%)	0 (0%)	6 (1.5%)
	PS	1 (2.0%)	90 (11.7%)	1 (5.3%)	57 (14.5%)
	PTB	0 (0%)	64 (8.3%)	0 (0%)	44 (11.2%)
Dutch-speaking parties	CD&V	9 (18.0%)	9 (1.2%)	4 (21.1%)	3 (.8%)
	Groen	6 (12.0%)	14 (1.8%)	2 (10.5%)	3 (.8%)
	N-VA	10 (20.0%)	37 (4.8%)	4 (21.1%)	18 (4.6%)
	Open VLD	2 (4.0%)	9 (1.2%)	1 (5.3%)	4 (1.0%)
	PVDA	0 (0%)	1 (.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	one.	7 (14.0%)	7 (.9%)	4 (21.1%)	4 (1.0%)
	brussels-sp.a				
	Vlaams Belang	2 (4.0%)	12 (1.6%)	1 (5.3%)	9 (2.3%)
Total		50 (100%)	768 (100%)	19 (100%)	393 (100%)
		N = 818; Chi ² = 174.886; df = 13; Cramer's V = .462; p = .000		N = 412; Chi ² = 120.760; df = 12; Cramer's V = .541; p = .000	

Note: Gray shades indicate cross-ethnic voting.

One potential explanation is out-group attitudes. We can expect evaluations of the other linguistic group (and their leaders) to shape voters' choices in the polling booth (McNicholl, 2018). The more voters trust 'the other side' and their representatives, the less hesitation they will demonstrate to support cross-ethnic parties and candidates. As such, more *positive out-group evaluations* can be expected to increase the propensity to engage in cross-ethnic voting.

The second potential explanation is party offer. In a context of partisan dealignment (Dalton, 2019), it is likely that some French-speaking voters are unsatisfied with the party offer within their own ethnic bloc and that such 'unserved' voters consider voting for a party from the other group. For instance, a francophone right-wing voter in Brussels might consider voting for a Flemish right-wing party because there simply is no right-wing party at offer within the French-speaking group. Even though no less than seven French-speaking parties compete for the support of the voter, the ideological variation on the right side of the political spectrum is relatively limited. The only party that explicitly positions itself on the right side of the center is MR, but this party is only right-wing on economic issues, and much less on cultural, 'new politics' issues such as lifestyle politics, identity and migration. Since there is no real culturally right-wing party on offer on the French-speaking list,

right-wing Flemish N-VA and Vlaams Belang, despite their anti-francophone and secessionist stance, seem to benefit the most from campaigning in both languages in Brussels.

Both expectations are confirmed by Table 10.4. The table analyses the determinants for a cross-ethnic vote among French-speaking voters in Brussels. The results confirm that cross-ethnic voting among French-speaking voters is inspired by ethnolinguistic considerations, but only to a limited extent. French-speaking voters with positive attitudes about Dutch speakers tend to vote significantly more often for Flemish nationalist parties. However, the table also shows that ideological concerns (in particular left-right self-placement) are much more strongly related to a vote for Flemish nationalist parties. Voters' choice is rather inspired by the ideological fault line, as is clear from the fact that left-right self-placement is the determining factor of a vote for N-VA or Vlaams Belang. These results suggest that right-wing francophone voters find their way to right-wing Flemish parties because of their ideological stance.

A final explanation, which the data do not allow us to test empirically, could also be that Brussels voters can also cast a cross-ethnic vote for strategic reasons, for instance, to keep a party from the other bloc out of power (Verthé et al., 2017). The Brussels coalition is often a coalition of moderates. It can be expected that other Flemish parties will seek cross-ethnic votes to stop right-wing Flemish parties from becoming all too powerful in the small Dutch-speaking group. They can do so by convincing francophone voters of their own program or conducting a campaign *against* the right-wing Flemish parties by trying to get votes from francophone voters who *fear* the electoral success of such parties within the Flemish college (Pilet, 2005). In that sense, they would encourage strategic voting on behalf of the

TABLE 10.4 Binomial logistic regression model predicting a francophone cross-ethnic vote for Flemish nationalist parties (N-VA and Vlaams Belang)

		<i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>Sign.</i>
Constant		-6.236 (1.555)	.000
Sex	Male	REF	
	Female	-.715 (.612)	.243
Education	None or lower education	REF	
	Secondary education	-1.361 (.911)	.135
	Higher education	-.311 (.729)	.669
Age		-.014 (.016)	.392
Political interest		.110 (.114)	.334
Political trust		.069 (.133)	.605
Satisfaction with Brussels government policies		-.122 (.118)	.304
Attitude toward other linguistic group		.021 (.011)	.046
Left-right self-placement		.452 (.131)	.001
<i>Nagelkerke R²</i>		25.7%	
		N = 768	

francophone voters to diminish the risk of an electoral victory for right-wing parties within the small Flemish college. Furthermore, voters should be more willing to express support for a non-co-ethnic candidate who is endorsed by one of their own co-ethnic politicians (Arriola et al., 2017).

10.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, we focused on voting patterns in the BCR, an institutional anomaly in the Belgian political structure. Politics in Brussels is organized around the recognition of two linguistic groups, even though both voters and politicians are given the opportunity to engage in cross-ethnic voting and vote-seeking. Our results show that voters do indeed use this opportunity: about 10–11% of all voters do cast a vote for a candidate of the other linguistic group, and the parties most benefiting from cross-ethnic votes are Flemish right-wing conservative parties. Moreover, our data find that a francophone vote for a Flemish nationalist party is primarily driven by out-group attitudes and ideological self-placement. French speakers voting for the other side are generally more positive about the out-group and are generally more right-wing. The latter finding suggests that at least part of the francophone electorate feels ‘unserved’ by the francophone parties in Brussels. Even though this finding is interesting, qualitative follow-up research should reveal why French-speaking voters feel attracted to parties that explicitly defend the Dutch speakers’ interests.

Even though the motivations of voters are still unclear, what our results do show, however, is that a logic of separation (members from one segment must be represented by MPs belonging to the same segment) is not a *conditio sine qua non* to turn a divided society into a stable democracy. Even though cross-ethnic voting does take place, the BCR is quite stable. After all, it has a balanced government, the coalition is rather stable and there are relatively few protests against the Brussels government. Despite its complex institutional setup, the Brussels system is sustainable and well functioning.

Notes

- 1 Throughout the chapter, we systematically use the term ‘cross-ethnic voting’ since it is a reference concept in the international literature on ethnic conflict management. However, in the context of Brussels, it is important to point out that cross-ethnic voting refers to the process whereby voters electorally support parties from other *ethnolinguistic* groups.
- 2 For a more in-depth review of Belgium as a consociational democracy, see Chapter 9.
- 3 Except maybe for the grim atmosphere during the Marsen op Brussel in 1961 and 1962, and the Louvain crisis in May 1968.
- 4 That is why in Brussels, most candidates campaign and publish manifestos in both official (and sometimes even other) languages (Jarrett, 2016; Pilet, 2005). Given that roughly 80% of voters in Brussels are francophone, cross-ethnic campaign strategies are particularly interesting for Flemish parties. Even a small share of cross-ethnic votes can thus hugely impact the electoral results within the Dutch-speaking college. Flemish parties therefore make specific appeals to the francophone and other (non-Belgian) communities (Jarrett, 2016).

- 5 In the past, cross-ethnic vote-pooling has sometimes been seen as controversial. Before 2011, the Brussels Capital Region did not constitute a separate electoral district but formed the central electoral district of 'Brussel-Halle-Vilvoorde' (BHV) that was composed of 19 communes of the bilingual Brussels region and 35 communes of the province of Flemish Brabant in the unilingual Flemish region. This district crossed the language border and led to recurring conflicts between both language groups (Deschouwer, 2012; Sinardet, 2010), putting pressure on the country's stability. An agreement was only found in 2011. The agreement included the splitting of the BHV district into a unilingual Dutch-speaking district of Flemish Brabant and a bilingual Brussels Capital district, as well as 'special modalities' for the French-speaking citizens in the six municipalities with language facilities surrounding Brussels (Goossens, 2017). Hence, since 2011, the possibility for cross-ethnic vote-pooling remains only possible in the Brussels region.
- 6 Eleven of them got elected in the 'Agglomeratieraad' in 1971.
- 7 However, the party Pro Brussels, founded in 2008, claims to be Belgium's first translinguistic party (Euractiv, 2009; Jarrett, 2016). During the 2009 and 2014 regional elections in Brussels, the party submitted both French and Dutch language group lists, but no one was ever elected at the regional level. A list needs to gather at least 5% of the votes within its language group (Cochrane et al., 2018: 78).
- 8 Other institutions, such as Alternative Vote and Single Transferable Vote, are generally believed to foster more cross-ethnic voting.

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