

Belgium

Ethnicity in Belgium

Group selection

Belgium is divided along linguistic fault-lines, and the workings of public policy reflects the divisions (³⁵⁴, 33). This coding differentiates between three distinct groups that are defined on linguistic lines: the Dutch-speakers (60 percent, ³⁵⁵), mostly Flemish and concentrated in the northern half of the country (**Flemings**), the French-speakers (40 percent, ³⁵⁶), dominantly Walloon and located in the southern half of Belgium (**Walloons**), and a small group of German speakers (less than 1 percent, ³⁵⁷, **Germans**) in the eastern cantons of Wallonia. This linguistic diversity is accommodated in a complex political system.

³⁵⁴ [Erk, 2008]

³⁵⁵ [Central Intelligence Agency, 2014]

³⁵⁶ [Central Intelligence Agency, 2014]

³⁵⁷ [Central Intelligence Agency, 2014]

Power relations

1946-1969

The Belgian state was formed in 1830 by a Francophone elite. “The expectation at the time was that Belgium would gradually become a French-speaking state” (³⁵⁸, 32). However, due to the persistence of various Flemish dialects in the northern half of the country, tensions began to emerge to the point where the growing Flemish movement started to demand the recognition of the cultural distinctiveness of Flanders. This “Flemish nationalism continued to gain strength during the interwar period and managed to win certain concessions from the Belgian state” (ibid). During the 1950s, the situation deteriorated and brought the Belgian state to a standstill. Only a complete reform of the political system appeared to be a way “out from the impasse” (ibid). Until these reforms, the French-speakers are coded as “senior partner” and the Dutch-speakers as “junior partner”. The German speakers are “politically irrelevant”.

³⁵⁸ [Erk, 2008]

1970-1972

In 1970, the Belgian unitary state came to an end, after reforms that recognized the cultural duality of the state. Ever since, the two major linguistic groups have equally shared the political power on the national level, and are therefore both coded as “senior partner”. The German speakers are “politically irrelevant”.

1973-1979

The German-speaking cantons in the east were granted internal rule in 1973, with their own parliament in the capital of Eupen, supervising the regional government and controlling linguistic and cultural matters. The German-speakers are therefore coded as having regional autonomy.

1980-2021

In 1980, the Flemish and Walloon Regions obtained regional autonomy with the establishment of regional executives. The process of federalization continued over the years, leading to ever more rights for the regions.

The first article of Belgium's constitution defined Belgium as a federal state composed of communities and regions. Thus, the allocation of power occurs along two lines: First, along the language and culture in the broader sense. Based on this, there are three official languages in Belgium: Flemish, French and German. Accordingly, the three communities (Flemish, French and German) have powers on cultural issues such as language use, education, health policy, social welfare, etc. Second, the power is distributed historically along the economic interest. This resulted in the establishment of three regions namely Flemish, Walloon and the Brussels Capital Region. These regions have legislative and executive powers in issues such as economy, agriculture, water policy, housing, energy, transport, foreign trade etc.

The German speaking community belongs to the Walloon region (³⁵⁹). Therefore, regardless of the German community's competences in language and cultural-related issues, the German-speaking community does not have regional autonomy in terms of territoriality and executive powers. Consequently, Germans are coded as not having regional autonomy, as opposed to the Flemish and Walloon regions. In addition, the federal government reflects the overall composition of the federal state. It is limited to 15 ministers shared equally between Dutch and French speakers (³⁶⁰).

There are pronounced tensions between the Flemish and Walloons. In 2010-2011 Belgium did not have an elected government for 589 days because the opposing Flemish and Walloons were unable to agree on policy issues and form a governing coalition following national elections (³⁶¹).

³⁵⁹ [Belgium, 2020]

³⁶⁰ [Belgium, 2020]

³⁶¹ [The Washington Post, 2013]

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Political status of ethnic groups in Belgium

From 1946 until 1969

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Flemings	0.59	JUNIOR PARTNER
Walloon	0.4	SENIOR PARTNER

From 1970 until 1972

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Flemings	0.59	SENIOR PARTNER
Walloon	0.4	SENIOR PARTNER

From 1973 until 1980

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Flemings	0.59	SENIOR PARTNER
Walloon	0.4	SENIOR PARTNER
Germans	0.01	POWERLESS

From 1981 until 2021

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Flemings	0.59	SENIOR PARTNER
Walloon	0.4	SENIOR PARTNER
Germans	0.01	POWERLESS



Figure 54: Political status of ethnic groups in Belgium during 1946-1969.

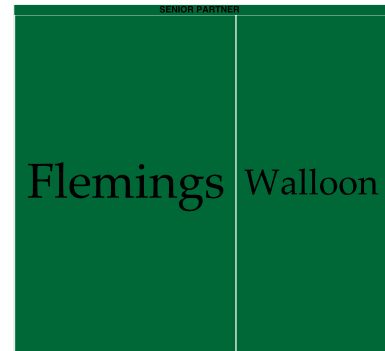


Figure 55: Political status of ethnic groups in Belgium during 1970-1972.

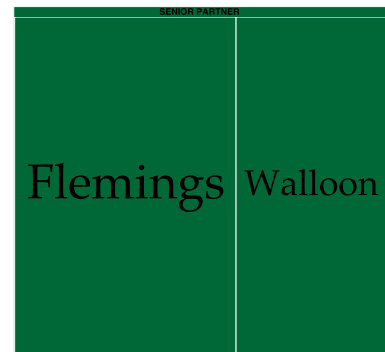


Figure 56: Political status of ethnic groups in Belgium during 1973-1980.

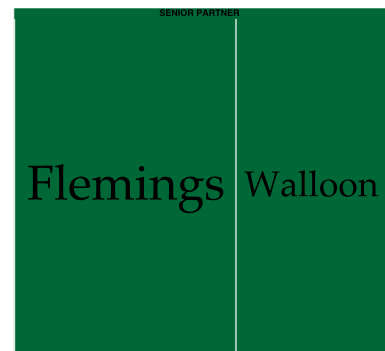


Figure 57: Political status of ethnic groups in Belgium during 1981-2021.

Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Belgium

From 1946 until 1972

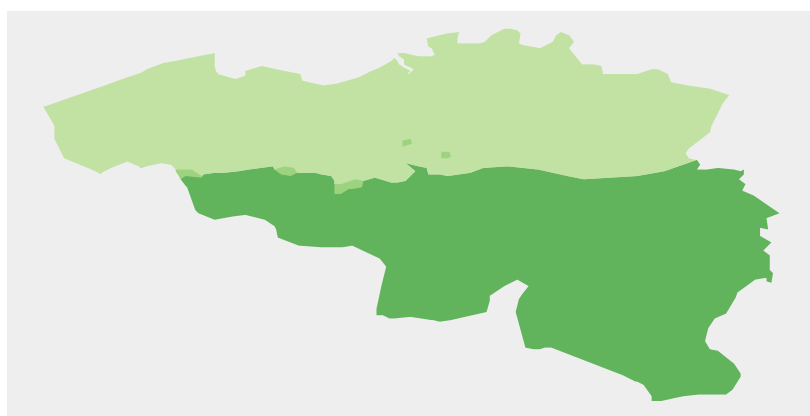


Figure 58: Map of ethnic groups in Belgium during 1946-1972.

Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■ Walloon	15 723	Regional & urban
■ Flemings	13 825	Regional & urban

Table 24: List of ethnic groups in Belgium during 1946-1972.

From 1973 until 2021

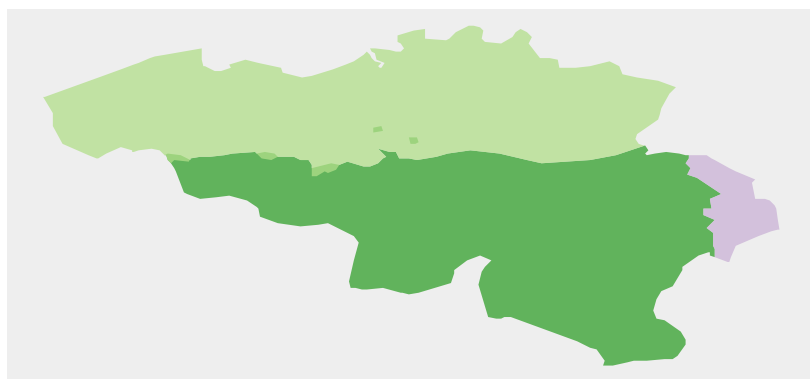


Figure 59: Map of ethnic groups in Belgium during 1973-2021.

	Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■	Walloon	15 723	Regional & urban
■	Flemings	13 825	Regional & urban
■	Germans	1152	Regional & urban

Table 25: List of ethnic groups in Belgium during 1973-2021.