

Experts or politicians: who should decide? The reconfiguration of political legitimacy during covid-19 in Belgium

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In the aftermath of the pandemic outbreak, Belgium faced an important public controversy about the role of experts and the importance of scientific knowledge in the decision-making process. Roughly speaking, it was a matter of whether politicians or experts should take the lead in such a disruptive context. Both options are rooted in divergent conceptions of how democracy should work, notably when coping with extraordinary circumstances and epistemic uncertainties (Farrelly 2015; Mey & Ladegaard 2015). In discussing the grounds upon which stakeholders are (not) authorized to decide, this debate was thus part of a broader questioning, even reconfiguration, of the political. Through a qualitative discourse analysis conducted from a critical perspective (Antaki et al. 2003), this paper seeks to delve in depth into this issue by studying how political legitimacy was (re)configured across the 1st year of pandemic in Belgian media outlets. Doing so, this study will focus on two main questions: (i) the construction of experts' / politicians' identity (*how were these two groups presented as (non) legitimate actors regarding the handling of the pandemic? to what extent were they differentially constructed?*); (ii) the role played by knowledge in these constructions (*which place, role and definition are attributed to knowledge in such discourses?*).