Voting behavior, identity, autonomy, solidarity and interregional contact

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Belgian politics are largely driven by identity feelings, autonomy preferences and solidarity claims, with intermingled interregional contact. The results of the 2019 federal and regional elections have as usually been interpreted differently by (Flemish) political parties, journalists and political scientists. In Flanders, some claim that the victory of the VB was a clear call for confederalism (Bart De Wever) and the defeat of the N-VA as a sanction for putting state reform on hold for 5 years (Bart Maddens). Many pointed to the saliency of the immigration problématique (Tom Van Grieken). Others blamed the poor performance of the incumbent federal and Flemish government, in terms of policy outputs as well as decision-making style ("kibbelkabinet"). These dynamics are key to understand elite behavior but they might also explain citizens's voting behavior. In this chapter, we will empirically test how these variables influenced voting behavior in the multi-level elections of 2019 in the Belgian context in a longitudinal perspective. Hereby, we build on a rich research tradition regarding the evolution of identities and autonomy preferences in Belgium (e.g. Deschouwer, De Winter, Reuchamps, Sinardet & Dodeigne, 2015). In this tradition so far, however, the study of solidarity claims and interregional contact has been kept apart even though some recent empirical studies have investigated the impact of interregional contact on support for further devolution (Thijssen, Sinardet & Dandoy, 2015; Thijssen, Arras & Sinardet, 2018). Interregional contact indicators and solidarity claims will therefore be integrated into the analysis. Solidarity will be measured based on the deservingness question as well as on the question regarding 'differences between Flemish and Walloon people'. As we are trying to explain shifts in voting behavior (gains/losses), we will compare the snapshot data of the EOS survey with data collected within the Partirep I & II surveys (2009 & 2014). Have the attitudes, positions and saliency perception changed significantly over the past 10 years (attitudes vis-à-vis state reform, and (sub)identity, solidarity claims, interregional contact as well as outsider groups (immigrants))?