

## BELGIUM

Polity5 regime codes:

fac	scode	polity	pers	bmon	bday	byear	emon	eday	eyear	exec	exconst	polcomp
0a	BEL	-88	1	10	4	1830	7	20	1831	-88	-88	-88
0b	BEL	-4	16	7	21	1831	8	11	1847	2	3	4
1X	BEL	4	61	8	12	1847	11	14	1908	6	5	6
1Xa	BEL	6	6	11	15	1908	10	14	1914	6	7	6
1Xb	BEL	-66	4	10	15	1914	11	10	1918	-66	-66	-66
1Xc	BEL	6	22	11	11	1918	5	15	1940	6	7	6
1Xe	BEL	-66	4	5	16	1940	9	2	1944	-66	-66	-66
1O	BEL	8	7	9	3	1944	7	16	1951	8	7	8
1Oa	BEL	9	19	7	17	1951	5	28	1970	8	7	9
1Ob	BEL	10	17	5	29	1970	6	9	2007	8	7	10
2X	BEL	8	12	6	10	2007	99	99	9999	8	7	7

PITF Problem Events: none

**0a)** October 4, 1831 (declaration of independence; provisional government) – The territory that is now Belgium was known as the Southern Netherlands and was controlled by the Austrian Empire until it was annexed by France following the French Revolutionary Wars in 1794. Following the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, the Congress of Vienna attempted to create a stronger buffer state against France by uniting the Southern Netherlands with the northern United Provinces of the Netherlands as the United Kingdom of the Netherlands. Resentment by the French-speaking and Roman Catholic population in the south (Wallonia) toward control by the Dutch ignited on August 25, 1830, into full scale rebellion. A National Congress and provisional government were established under the leadership of Charles Latour Rogier and a declaration of independence was issued on October 4, 1831.

**0b)** July 21, 1831 (constitutional monarchy established) – A constitution was adopted on February 7, 1831; however, the Dutch monarchy continued to fight against Belgian independence. Belgium was supported by the French and it was French forces that prevented the Dutch from regaining control. The other European powers, fearful that Belgium would become a republic or be annexed to France, pressured for the establishment of a monarchy in Belgium under the rule of Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg and this was accepted by the provisional government of Belgium. King Leopold I took the oath as constitutional King of the Belgians on July 21, 1831. A government was selected by a small inner circle of landed and economic elites and Catholic clergy. Belgian independence was formally recognized by the Treaty of London in 1839. Royalists (Unionists) dominated the government until the mid-1840s when the Liberals began to organize an effective opposition. The Liberal Party, led by Charles Rogier, was established in 1846 and won parliamentary elections in 1847.

**1X) Date of Change to Factional-Democratic:** August 12, 1847 (parliamentary elections)

### Brief Explanation of Change To:

Between 1831 and 1847 the institution of the parliament existed mainly pro forma. The King, abetted by the Unionist elites, appointed and presided over the Government. The reformist movement sweeping Europe at the time contributed to increasing support for the Liberals in Belgium, who had grown in strength over the preceding decade by making demands for electoral reform. The Liberals organized a congress and established the Liberal Party in 1846. The

election of August 12, 1847, for the first time gave a majority to the Liberals over the Unionists. An elite compact of sorts was reached whereby the government administered domestic affairs and the monarchy controlled the military and external affairs. Domestic affairs were dominated by the Walloons; the Dutch-speaking population of Flanders was effectively barred from political participation by language restrictions. Liberals and Catholics alternated in leadership of the government from 1847 until 1884, after which the conservative Catholics maintained control up to the onset of the Second World War. In 1885, King Leopold II (who had succeeded his father following his death in 1865) established the Congo Free State, a private kingdom over which he gained control in a series of exploits beginning in 1877 and finalized at the Berlin Conference that had been convened in November 1884 to resolve the Congo Crisis among competing imperial powers. The Congo Free State became Belgium's main trading partner and, also, its greatest embarrassment as the brutal conduct of Belgian authority in the territory gained notoriety. Popular pressure increased for limiting the power and wealth of the monarchy and for widening the political franchise to include universal manhood suffrage, which was finally implemented in 1893. The (socialist) Belgian Workers' Party was founded in 1885 and soon overtook the Liberals as the main opposition party.

### **Identify Main Factions:**

- *Royalists* — The Unionist government represented the interests of the landed aristocracy and was supported by the conservative Catholic Party that represented the interests of the French-speaking Catholic population of the southern Wallonia region.
- *Liberals* — The Liberals were drawn mainly from the French-speaking intellectual and skilled/trade classes that favored republican administration and limitations on the monarchy.
- *Flemish* — The Dutch-speaking population of the northern Flanders region was restricted in their political participation by the domination of government and economic interests by the French-speaking Walloons, mainly through language restrictions and economic discrimination. During the German occupation of Belgium in World War I, a Council of Flanders was established in an attempt by the Germans to curry favor and the Council proclaimed an independent state of Flanders on December 22, 1917.

### **Changes within Factional-Democratic Period:**

**1Xa)** November 15, 1908 (parliament exerts authority over the monarchy) – King Leopold II's despotic rule over the Congo Free State contributed to rising popular pressures to exert republican control over the monarchy. In the early 1900s, the King began to transfer royal properties to the state. Parliament acted to annex the Congo Free State and take over its administration as the Belgian Congo on November 15, 1908. King Leopold II died on December 17, 1909, and was succeeded by his son, Albert I. King Albert I was the first Belgian monarch to take the oath of office in both French and Dutch.

**1Xb)** October 14, 1914 (foreign occupation) – Belgium had been originally established as a neutral country and its neutrality had been guaranteed by the major European powers. At the onset of the First World War, Germany requested the right of transit for its troops so that they could attack weaknesses in French defenses; that request was refused by King Albert I and, consequently, German forces invaded Belgium on August 4, 1914. The Belgian government fled into exile to Le Havre in France and was replaced by a German occupation administration

on October 14, 1908. King Albert I continued to command Belgian armed forces and a small portion of Belgian territory through the course of the war.

**1Xc)** November 11, 1918 (end of foreign occupation) – Catholics, Liberals, and Socialists formed a government of national solidarity after the German occupational administration vacated the country following the German capitulation and Armistice signed on November 11, 1918. Although King Albert I favored broad governmental reforms and an expansion of political franchise to include the Flemish, vast reconstruction necessitated by the breadth of the devastation that Belgium suffered during the war preoccupied both the monarch and the government during the period following the armistice. Recovery was further complicated by the Great Depression and the accidental death of the highly popular king on February 17, 1934. Albert I was succeeded by his son, King Leopold III.

**1Xd)** May 16, 1940 (foreign occupation) – German military forces invaded Belgium on May 10, 1940, causing the government to flee, first to France and, later, to London; the whole of the country was under occupation by May 16. King Leopold III remained to command the Belgian armed forces. A political crisis occurred when the King abruptly surrendered to the vastly superior German forces on May 28, 1940, after taking heavy losses during the defense of Dunkirk and without consulting the exiled Belgian government. This crisis marks the end of independent executive authority by the Belgian monarchy. The King remained in Belgium during the German occupation raising suspicions of collaboration; the Belgian government-in-exile requested Prince Charles to act as Regent in his stead. Although exonerated by a board of inquiry following the war, King Leopold III remained in exile in Switzerland for six years after the liberation of Belgium.

**2O) Date of Change from Factional-Democratic:** September 3, 1944 (liberation)

**Brief Explanation of Change From:**

Brussels was liberated from German military occupation by Allied forces on September 3, 1944, and the government returned from exile with the first meeting of Parliament taking place on September 19. On the following day, Parliament officially established Regency under Prince Charles. Belgian politics was purged of collaborationist elements, particularly the fascist Rexist Party. The experience of the Second World War led to greater cooperation between the leading political parties; whereas, the rebuilding of Europe following the war contributed to an economic shift in the northern region away from agriculture and toward service occupations. The “Royal Question” of whether King Leopold III should be allowed to return and resume his prerogatives strongly divided the country in the years following the war, with Socialists, Liberals, and Communists opposed and the majority Christian Social (Catholic) Party in favor. A public referendum was held on March 20, 1950, with nearly 58% approving the King’s return. Reflecting Flemish disdain for the republic government, the vote in Flanders was strongly in favor, whereas the vote in Wallonia was strongly opposed. The King’s return to Belgium on July 22, 1950, only exacerbated social tensions and civil discord, leading to the King’s abdication on July 16, 1951, in favor of his son, Baudouin, who was crowned King Baudouin I the following day.

**Changes within Democratic Period:**

**10a)** July 17, 1951 (coronation of new monarch) – The abdication of King Leopold III and the coronation of the young King Baudouin I on July 17, 1951, appeared to calm the population and allow it to focus on economic recovery. The greater economic integration of Western European countries organized by the U.S. Marshall Plan altered the relative fortunes of the industrial, but isolated, Wallonia region and the northern Flanders region, which encompassed the predominately French-speaking capital, Brussels, and enjoyed greater access to coastal trade. Political differences between the north and south were evident in the “Royal Question” of the late 1940s and early 1950s and, also, in the “Schools Question” in the 1950s over whether the state should favor State (public) schools or provide equal support to “free” (mainly Catholic, private) schools. These differences increased in the early 1960s as economic austerity policies were seen to affect the workers in the industrial region more harshly than the new “clerks” in the north. The shifting fortunes of the regions energized the “Linguistic Question” on elevating Flemish (Dutch) to an equal status to the French language; this, in turn, initiated debate over greater regional autonomy and adoption of a federal structure for Belgium. The Linguistic Question dominated politics through the 1960s. The federal option was promoted mainly by the Walloon nationalists in the early 1960s but was rejected in favor of maintaining a unified government. A “linguistic frontier” was implemented in 1963 dividing Belgium into a Flemish-language Flanders, French-language Wallonia, and a multilingual Brussels; however, this formal recognition only fueled the larger issue of political status. It was further agreed, in 1968, that number of ministers, diplomatic corps, and armed forces should be equally split between Flemish- and French-speakers. In 1969, a law was enacted by which all bills in parliament would require a two-thirds majority in both houses for passage into law, thus requiring some cross-lingual support (the Flemish-speaking population constituted 60% of the population at this time). In 1970, a series of constitutional amendments were proposed that would, among other things, create Cultural Councils for each of the two main linguistic groups and would require candidates for office to declare publicly to which group they belonged; these amendments were finally passed on July 19, 1971.

**10b)** July 19, 1971 (constitutional amendments) – The establishment of formally demarcated linguistic divisions and constitutional guarantees of cultural autonomy and equality with the passage of a series of constitutional amendments in July 1971 appears to have defused much of the tension between Belgium’s main constituent groups. However, the formalization of these divisions also tended to reorganize Belgian society in conformance with the linguistic divisions.

**2X) Date of Change to Factional-Democratic:** June 10, 2007 (general election)

**Brief Explanation of Change To:**

Belgium held a general election on June 10, 2007, which resulted in a dramatic defeat for the center-left coalition led by Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt (VLD). Yves Leterme, leader of the opposition Christian Democratic and Flemish (CDV) party, had campaigned for constitutional amendments granting greater autonomy for the more-wealthy, Dutch-speaking region of Flanders. With the CDV emerging as the largest party, Leterme was asked by the King to form a

government. However, the country was deeply divided on the autonomy issue and, particularly, on the issue of separating French-speaking Brussels from Dutch-speaking Halle and Vilvoorde (the so-called BHV issue) and Leterme was repeatedly unable to form a majority coalition. Verhofstadt was asked to continue leading the government in, first, a transitional, and, then, an interim capacity; under his guidance, a ruling coalition was finally formed in February 2008 after the radical-nationalist New Flemish Alliance (NVA) withdrew from the coalition talks. Verhofstadt finally handed over the premiership to Leterme on March 20, 2008; the ruling coalition included the leading Flemish parties: CDV and VLD, supported by centrist Francophone parties (MR, PS, and CDH). The new coalition government lacked a coherent agenda, however, and appeared to be maintained primarily by (temporarily) forestalling the most sensitive issues dividing the country.

### **Identify Main Factions:**

- *Flemish Community* — The Flemish (Dutch-speaking) Community has generally favored greater regional autonomy and has come to support neoliberal economic reforms in recent years. The primary Flemish political parties are the *Flemish Liberals and Democrats* (VLD), the social conservative *Christian Democrats and Flemish* (CDV) and the Flemish-nationalist *New Flemish Alliance* (NVA), although the *Flemish Socialists* (SP.a) party and the *Groen!* (Green) Party also maintain a small degree of support. The *Flemish Interest* is the foremost nationalist party in Belgium, and despite its electoral success, has been consistently blocked from power by a *cordon sanitaire* maintained by the mainstream political parties due to the party's anti-immigration and radical Flemish-supremacy platforms.
- *Francophone Community* — The French-speaking community has generally opposed Flemish autonomy and has come to support democratic socialist reforms in recent years. The primary Francophone parties are the liberal Reformist Movement (MR), the French nationalist Democratic Front of Francophones (FDF), the social-democratic Francophone Socialists (PS), and the Humanist Democratic Centre (CDH).
- Other Minor Factions:
  - German-speaking Community* — The German-speaking Community maintains some regional autonomy but is politically much weaker than the Flemish or Francophone Communities. As a minority group German-speakers receive substantial constitutional protections.