

# The Influence of Consociational Democracy on the Rise of Radical Right Populism Case study of Belgium

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Consociationalism is a power-sharing arrangement often recommended to divided societies to avert inter-group conflict and induce stability. The consociational theory has been described by Arend Lijphart following the observation of the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria and Switzerland. Based on the example of stable consociational democracies, the arrangement has been prescribed to several states with plural societies all over the world. The consociational structure has also been widely criticised for its potential effect to strengthen divisions and facilitate separatist movements. Among the recent arguments challenging the theory, scholars have linked consociational systems to the rise of radical right populist parties. Populism is increasingly present in Europe, mainly manifesting itself on the radical right side of the political spectrum. The phenomenon is often viewed negatively and associated with attack on the liberal establishment of the state, nativism and demagogue rhetoric. The theories suggesting a correlation between consociational democracies and the success of radical right populist parties could have significant implications for the application of the consensus-based arrangement in prospect. This paper seeks to answer whether these theories are generally applicable through the case study of Belgium. It follows the theory-testing single case study approach and applies the process tracing method to reach the conclusion. Belgium is chosen because despite the country's consociational nature, the radical right populist party is in decline. The study examines the consociational theory and compares its features against contemporary Belgium to determine whether the country can still be considered a consensus democracy. Furthermore, it defines the populist ideology and analyses the Belgian radical right populist party's performance. Lastly, it concludes that Belgium is still consociational and other factors need to be taken into account for the rise of radical right populist parties.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND

Consociationalism is a form of democracy seeking to reconcile societal segmentations. It is defined as an accommodative arrangement in which all significant groups in a plural society are included in legislative and executive institutions and the power is shared. It promotes proportional representation and segmental autonomy (McGarry & O'Leary, 2009, p. 16). The theory has been first described by Arend Lijphart in the 60s following his observation of power-sharing in multiple western European plural societies. Since then, the political arrangement has been recommended for divided societies all over the world to prevent political violence through democratic means. As Younis (2011) notes, the consociational arrangement accepts that the segmental divisions and the conflict stemming from that are natural part of the country. "By embedding communal identities into the political system, consociationalism assumes that these identities will always be the most important constituent political identities in a divided society" (Younis, 2011, p. 1). Consociational democracies are thought to be stable and function properly despite internal divisions. Common examples of consociational states include Belgium, Switzerland, India and Lebanon. Consociationalism, or in other words, consensus democracy is often contrasted with majoritarian systems. It has not only been recommended to plural societies but also for post-conflict situations such as Northern Ireland, Bosnia and South Africa (Bormann, 2011, p. 6). Because of its potential to make divided societies stable, the theory received significant attention from scholars, many calling on the theory's shortcomings on certain areas. Recent arguments claim a correlation between consensus systems and the rise of radical right populism. This paper will focus on the practical application of these arguments through the case study of Belgium to bring attention to their potential limitation.

There are several heterogeneous states with deep divisions which often leads to instability and internal tensions. The consociational theory seeks to address these tensions and build stable democracies but the results are debatable. The arrangement has received considerable criticism and countries that have recently tried to implement the structure were seen as failures. Several scholars are opposing the consociational arrangements pointing out the inadequacies of the theory. Plural states that have tried to implement the structure but did not succeed offer substantial grounds for their arguments. The case of Cyprus is a notable example of the failure of consociationalism to provide remedy for a thoroughly divided society (Angelov, 2004). The fundamental building blocks of the theory are also seen as problematic by some. Granting segmental autonomy, which is an

essential element, is often viewed as an effective way to accommodate political conflict but scholars argue that on the long run, intersegmental conflict accommodation becomes increasingly difficult (Caluwaerts & Reuchamps, 2015, p. 277). Taylor (2009) highlights that the accommodative style fails to retain and mitigate the significance of the different segments and leaves the essential problem intact (Taylor, 2009, p. 310). On the contrary, consociationalism has been successful in many cases, for example in Northern Ireland. Thanks to the arrangement, the region is stable after 30 years of violent conflict (Jarrett, 2018, p. 35).

The Belgian consociational structure is also often praised for its success in resolving the internal tensions and allowing the country to prosper, despite of its deep divisions. Although the theory might not be universally applicable, it still has valid, measurable and positive effects in many cases. Lijphart revised his earlier study in 2018 and found that “consensus democracies score a great deal higher with regard to variables measuring democratic quality (such as political equality, women’s representation in legislatures and cabinets, and voter participation) than majoritarian democracies, while scoring at least as well as—in fact, slightly better than—majoritarian systems on government effectiveness, as measured by macroeconomic performance indicators and the control of violence.” (Lijphart, 2018, p. 6). Despite the throughout criticism, he continuously emphasizes that consensus democracy is preferable to majoritarian systems. The willingness to compromise can make democracy possible and effective in plural, divided societies. Divided societies are in complex situation and many have post-conflict environments which makes it even more difficult. Consociationalism offers a way with considerable potential which is why the theory should not be casted away because of the criticism. It might be a concept that requires certain environments to be viable but as there is no universal and ultimate model for divided societies, it can still be a highly successful method.

The latest arguments regarding the consensus structure were claiming to find a correlation between consociationalism and the rise of radical right populism. Populism is not a new phenomenon in Western European democracies, but the recent continent-wide developments have sparked renewed scholarly interest on its causes and effects. Populism is often associated with negative traits and generally manifests itself on the right-wing of the political spectrum. Cas Mudde (2019) notes that radical right populism, as it is commonly associated with authoritarianism and anti-immigration, is often considered to be a negative development opposing the current establishment and bringing into question the essential traits of liberal democracy (Mudde, 2019). Much has been written on the influence of populist radical right parties on policy-making and political participation but the impact

of the decision-making process on the rise of populism is a rather under researched field in comparison. There seem to be a generally accepted notion that non-majoritarian systems support the rise of radical right populism. Consociationalism has been thoroughly criticised recently shedding light to its potential negative implications. Several scholars have argued that consensus democracies are conducive to populist parties. In this paper the case of Belgium is brought to the fore to show that this argument may have some limitations. Despite being generally categorized as a consociational democracy, the influence of the radical right populist party has been declining in Belgium. Many factors may have to be included to account for this phenomenon. Of course, a counter-example cannot refute the general theory, but it may alert us to look at other aspects of the decision-making process that could account for the rise of populism.

## 1.2 RESEARCH AIM

The aim of this research is to test the relevance of established theories on the rise of radical right populist parties in consociational systems to help cast doubts on what is seen as the negative aspect of consociationalism. The research sets out to explore the correlation between consociationalism and the rise of radical right populist parties in practice through the case study of Belgium.

## 1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this research are to outline the consociational structure, define radical right populism and review the established theories on the correlation of the two. The theories will be applied through the case study of Belgium.

The research's main aim is to analyse whether the theories claiming the correlation between consensus systems and the rise of radical right populist parties are valid when applied on the case of Belgium.

## 1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To achieve the aim and the objectives of this research one main research question and three supporting sub-questions have been formulated. The main research question is the following: Does the consociational arrangement always support the rise of radical right populist parties? The first sub-question concerns how consociationalism progressed in Belgium over time. The next sub-question is to investigate whether contemporary Belgium is still a consociational country. Lastly, the



third sub-question examines how the electoral support for the Belgian radical right populist party (VB) developed.

### 1.5 THEORETICAL RELEVANCE AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES

The consociational power-sharing structure is often recommended to divided societies all over the world and is often criticised for its potential shortcomings. The theories that claim to find a link between the rise of radical right populist parties and the consensus system bring light to another probable ‘negative’ of the consociational theory. It is important to understand how these theories play out in practice and whether they are generally applicable because the power-sharing arrangement is the sole proven theory to maintain stable democracy in divided societies. For this research, Belgium’s case is chosen as it appears to contradict the theories.

Upon considering whether contemporary Belgium still exhibits the consociational features, it is expected that the theories on the correlation of consociationalism and the success of radical right populist parties will be refuted. It is important to understand the implications of consociational systems in order to reconsider whether it is to be recommended to certain divided societies.

### 1.6 RESEARCH METHODS

In order to answer the research question, theoretical research was conducted. The study focuses on the empirical manifestation of a theorized process to determine whether the causal link exists and in place in an actual case. Through the case study of Belgium, the paper aims to identify if there is a general correlation between consociational democracy and the rise of radical right populist parties. For this purpose, the theory-testing single case study approach was chosen. Within this manner, the process tracing method was selected as the most appropriate way to arrive at the answer for the research question. The process tracing method, as Beach (2017) notes, is used for tracing causal mechanisms using detailed analysis of how the causal process appears in an actual situation. It is applied to shed light on how causal mechanisms linking causes to effects play out in actual cases. Beach states that the analytical added value of the method is that “it enables strong causal inferences to be made about how causal processes work in real-world cases based on studying within-case mechanistic evidence” (Beach, 2017, p. 1). The method is only used for single case studies because tracing process is only possible within one case to properly identify the potential intrusions of the causal mechanism. For this reason, a single case, the case study of Belgium was preferred to examine how the theories work out in an actual case.

Ulriksen and Dadalauri (2016) contend that single case studies can offer vital inputs to theory-testing in social sciences. The major asset of the method is its ability to provide in-depth and testable substance to causal explanations which then can be further explored (Ulriksen & Dadalauri, 2016, p. 223). Gerring (2007), however, points out the potential downside of single case studies. He notes that a single case study is often biased towards case selection, associated with loosely framed theories which do not suggest general contentions and only offers weak empirical leverage (Gerring, 2007, p. 6). Considering the possible disadvantages, the case for this paper was carefully selected to avoid biases. Belgium was chosen because it is one of the four countries based on which the consociational theory was formulated, often referred to as a prototype of the arrangement. Looking at the country, statistics clearly show that the radical right populist party (Vlaams Belang) is in decline which is contradictory to what the theories suggest. The other three countries (the Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria) all experienced rising radical right populist parties and seemed to confirm the correlation the theories established. Therefore, the case of Belgium was selected on the basis of deviation from the theories. The aim of the research is not to contradict the established theories but to show their potential limitation.

In order to ensure that the employed theories point to the same direction and are not loosely framed, they were examined in depth and the general pattern was deducted in detail. Each element of the theories that relate to consociational features and presumes the rise of radical right populist parties was analysed and their presence was investigated in contemporary Belgium. Addressing the issue that a single case study can only offer weak empirical leverage, this paper attempts to alert to study other potential structural features that could be accountable for the rise of radical right populism. As Beach (2017) argues, findings from single case studies are valuable and through comparative methods with other causally similar cases, they can be used to enable generalizations and establish theories (Beach, 2017, p. 2).

For this paper, an in-depth case study was conducted heavily relying on qualitative research. Secondary data was used in the form of academic sources, journals and institutional data. The theories were subtracted from academic papers and the case study was supported by institutional data from the official site of the Belgian government and journals discussing the performance of the radical right populist party. Primary data was used through the observation of the development of consociationalism in contemporary Belgium and the performance of the radical right populist party. Both qualitative and quantitative data was necessary. Considering the subject of the project, carrying out a survey would not have contributed to answer the research question. Surveys provide statistics

from or about a specific group of people to describe, compare or explain their knowledge, behaviour and attitude. The information required for this paper does not concern generalized, quantitative data thus no surveys were conducted. Similarly, interviews were also unnecessary because the vital information for providing the answer was through comparing the theories against an actual case. Upon consulting the available literature on the topic, an interview was deemed redundant because it was evident that the primary and secondary data will allow the paper to reach its aim.

Since the project heavily relies on already existing data, the credibility and reliability of the sources are essential. The most important building block is Lijphart's consociational theory, which is explored in great detail. Additional scholarly works on the topic are also discussed to avoid relying solely on one source but Lijphart's theory is accepted as a basis. Although there are counter-arguments, Lijphart's work still enjoys significant scholarly recognition and is an influential theory. Furthermore, in order to define concepts and ideologies, multiple scholarly works were reviewed discussing different angles which ensures that the conclusions deducted are the least biased. Attention is also paid to the timeliness of the sources to guarantee that they are reliable for the examined time period.

## 1.7 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

This paper will unfold in 6 sections, starting with the conceptualization of consociational democracy based on Arend Lijphart's work. Each element of the consociational theory will be analyzed and interpreted. In the following chapter, the radical right populism will be defined. Thereafter, findings from the literature review will be presented claiming that there is a correlation between the two, linking the rise of radical right populism to non-majoritarian systems. Then the case study of Belgium will be introduced. Firstly, a chapter will give a historical overview of the consociational nature of the country and introduce the Belgian radical right populist party, the Vlaams Belang (VB). After analyzing the party's performance, the following chapter will focus on demonstrating contemporary Belgium as a consociational democracy. To conclude, the final section will give a detailed account on the potential limitation of the theories linking the rise of radical right populism to consociational systems.

## 2. CONSOCIATIONAL DEMOCRACY

Democracy comes in many forms and there are several different recognizably democratic institutional arrangements. O'Donnell (1994) notes that numerous scholars have repeatedly pointed out that a typology of democracy is necessary because different conditions call for different measures for the same ideal in mind (O'Donnell, 1994, p. 55). One generally recognized categorization was proposed by Arend Lijphart. He examined the working of democracy in the Netherlands in the 1960s because it contradicted the previous dichotomous notion of structural functionalism developed by Gabriel Almond. Almond studied the connection between stability and political and social culture and concluded that political stability requires a homogeneous cultural and social structure (Almond, 1956, p. 393). This view is built on the notion that the structures are functionally interrelated and the social structure directly affects the political system; therefore, divided societies cannot be politically stable. It assumes that to have a politically stable system, the other structures (cultural, social) also have to be stable and homogeneous.

Lijphart began to study the functioning of democracy in the Netherlands because the country was politically stable despite its plural society. He formulated the concept of consociational democracy characterized by both internal divisions and political stability (Lijphart, 1977), after which he distinguished two distinct models, the majoritarian and the consensual democracy (Lijphart, 1984). In majoritarian systems, the numerical majority defines the rule. Sectorally determined majorities don't change over time. The system denies representation to all minorities which makes it significantly difficult, if not impossible, in divided societies. The two contrasting styles of democratic decision-making became generally accepted, permitting the classification of most Western European countries to either of the two. The features and patterns associated with both types of democracy were widely researched allowing further scholarly work on their potential effect on the performance of different political stances.

In this chapter, the concept of Lijphart's consociational theory will be outlined. Lijphart's concept has been redefined multiple times and reformulated beyond of the extent of the original idea. The core definition of consociationalism will be extracted from Lijphart's four pillar structure. His consociational theory is not undebated, but it is beyond the scope of this paper to include all arguments and criticism against it. It is important to note that researchers attempting to analyse certain cases in consociational terms have found inconsistencies which led to a debate among

scholars on what cases belong under the consociational theory. It is not to say that the theory is incomplete, or incorrect but perhaps certain features require complex and less general conditions.

The theory of consociationalism was developed to provide a way in which segmented societies can achieve and maintain stable democracy. Lijphart (1977) labels consensus democracy as a structural precondition for the consociational system. Bormann (2011) defines consociationalism as “a complex set of rules and norms that is supposed to enable democratic governance and peaceful coexistence of different social segments in plural societies” (Bormann, 2011, p. 1). Lijphart’s first model of consociational democracy has gained widespread popularity. Halpern (1986) accounts this attention to the fact that maintaining stable democracies in divided societies is a serious and timely issue and Lijphart, for the first time, did not view it as an unsolvable problem. His theory was a meaningful departure from accepted political theories and provided an answer to a difficult problem. Lijphart introduced ‘elite behaviour’ as a new variable which gave great promises to the theory’s application (Halpern, 1986, p. 184). After comparing several states on the globe based on the first formulation of the theory, Lijphart delineated consociational democracy in terms of four characteristics. These characteristics are linked through a structural cause and effect chain. The first and most important pillar concerns the government formation. In a consociational system, the government is made up by a grand coalition with political leaders from all significant segments of the plural society (Lijphart, 1977, p. 25).

## 2.1 PLURAL SOCIETIES

The fundamental building block of Lijphart’s consociational theory is the existence of plural societies. Plural societies are divided along deep cultural, religious, ideological, regional, linguistic, cultural, racial or ethnic segmental cleavages. In these societies, the public loyalty follows the divisions and is fragmented according to the representative groups (Lijphart, 1984, p. 22). According to Lustick’s definition (1979), a society is divided if “ascriptive ties generate an antagonistic segmentation of society, based on terminal identities with high political salience, sustained over a substantial period of time and a wide variety of issues” (Lustick, 1979, p. 325). He highlights that the groups have to be clearly defined with sharp and unchangeable boundaries (Lustick, 1979, p. 326). The plural nature of society can stem from multiple and different divisions making it harder to agree on its definition. Steiner (1981) contested the notion of plurality in his review of Lijphart’s work, arguing that no society is perfectly plural thus the degree of pluralism should be determined, instead of establishing two distinct categories (Steiner, 1981, p. 341). In his reply, Lijphart outlined the four dimensions that could evince societies with high degree of pluralism. He laid out the following conditions for a

pluralist society: it should be possible to identify the segments which the society is divided into and mark off the size. Additionally, there should be perfect conformity between the segmental boundaries and the boundaries between political, social and economic organisations. Lastly, the elections should count as a segmental consensus because voting support should not change as the parties and the segmental loyalties coincide (Lijphart, 1981, p. 356). Consociational democracy, by its nature, also makes a plural society more plural because it identifies the divisions explicitly and turns them into constructive parts of a stable society (Lijphart, 1977, p. 43).

## 2.2 COALITION CABINET

The other essential part of the first attribute relates to the government, stating that it shall be a grand coalition cabinet. As Halpern (1986) defines, a grand coalition represents all considerable segments intersecting in the government as opposed to the traditional 'government versus opposition' pattern. He explains that 'government versus opposition' is an example of the minimum winning coalition (Halpern, 1986, p. 184). It is a theory developed by William Riker (1962), maintaining that coalition is formed to reach the minimum majority and not more than that. The principle is the following: "In n-person, zero sum games, where side-payments are permitted, where players are rational, and where they have perfect information, only minimum winning coalitions occur" (Riker, 1962, p. 32). Parties will resist the inclusion of 'unnecessary' parties in the coalition because it could reduce each parties' share of ministers in the cabinet (Riker, 1962, p. 33). In other words, the participants create a coalition just as large as they believe is sufficient for winning.

Lijphart uses Riker's game theory as a basis because it specifies the conditions for minimal winning coalitions which implies the conditions for other types of coalition formation as well. Riker mentions the 'information effect' as a factor that could lead to a larger coalition than necessary. Additional parties might be included in the coalition as a guarantee if one of the other coalition member's loyalty is dubious. The zero-sum condition prescribes that the common advantages are disregarded, and the participants only focus on the direct conflict (Riker, 1962). Lijphart (1977) states that if common advantages are considered, the zero-sum and the size principle do not apply. He asserts that in political systems which are divided and have potentially hostile population segments, all decisions are perceived as having high stake. He describes grand coalitions as the most appropriate in plural societies because the political stakes are often very high. The majority-versus-opposition pattern wishes for a competitive style where the outcome is unsure but in a plural society that would increase anxiety among the participants hence it is to be avoided (Lijphart, 1977, p. 27).

### 2.3 MUTUAL VETO

In the second place, Lijphart notes the mutual veto instrument, which represents a negative minority rule. The presence of minorities in grand coalitions gives them a chance to present their position with the highest potential, nevertheless they may still be outvoted by the majority. Therefore, to ensure their political protection, the veto right is necessary. It gives minorities the power of self-protection. Its mutuality resolves the foreseeable issue that is likely to result from its unrestrained usage. It deters the minority of using its veto right too often, which could lead to deadlock, because it could be turned against its own interest. Furthermore, Lijphart asserts that mutual veto does not necessarily have to be a formally agreed rule but can also be an informal, unwritten practice as in the Netherlands or Switzerland (Lijphart, 1977, p. 36).

### 2.4 PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

The third feature of a consociational democracy is proportionality, as the principle of standard political representation to eliminate the majority-minority confrontation in decision-making. Lijphart defines it as a neutral and impartial standard of allocation which works contradictory to the majoritarian rule. Proportionality concerns the allocation of civil service appointments and government subsidies among the different segments. It is closely interconnected with the grand coalition principle because proportional distribution can be best ensured if all groups participate in the bargaining process. Steiner (1971) interprets the proportionality principle as follows: "All groups influence a decision in proportion to their numerical strength" (Steiner, 1971, p. 63). In this notion, it refines the concept of grand coalition and prescribes that all segments should be, not only represented but, represented proportionally. Bormann (2011) points out that several statistical studies measuring consociationalism have resorted to equal it with proportional representation, but it is important to note that the proportional electoral system does not directly imply consociationalism (Bormann, 2011, p. 8). Though, most scholars accept Lijphart's concept and regard proportionality as one of the basic elements, others such as Armingeon excludes this feature (Armingeon, 2002, p. 82). Lijphart also mentions two deviations of the proportionality principle: the overrepresentation of minorities and the parity of representation. The two have opposite effects but are meant to provide an additional protection to small segments. Minorities can be overrepresented to such an extent that they reach an equal status with the majority. Parity of representation is primarily advantageous in societies which are divided into two segments of unequal size because proportionality would only signify the strength of each groups numerically (Lijphart, 1977, p. 40).

## 2.5 SEGMENTAL AUTONOMY AND FEDERALISM

As the final element, Lijphart describes segmental autonomy and federalism. Segmental autonomy allows the minority to rule over the area of its exclusive concern. It increases the plural nature of plural societies by delegating rule-making power to each segment. Lijphart points out that the federal and consociational theory coincide in a number of points. The fundamental aspect of federalism is to grant autonomy to the constituencies of the state which is parallel to what the consociational theory seeks to achieve. Besides, he mentions that smaller constituent parts are overrepresented in the federation chamber which links back to the proportionality principle (Lijphart, 1977, p. 43).

Lijphart's theory is based on observation and the features he outlines are constantly in a dynamic, the theory is evolving with the systems. Following the principle, countries with plural societies can achieve political stability and democracy without violence. Consociational democracies are in contrast with majoritarian systems where the numerical majority defines the rules and policies. The four attributes of consociationalism can be explained through their structural cause and effect chain. The crucial condition for the concept is the existence of plural societies for which Lijphart outlines the conditions to measure plurality. Following Riker's game theory, Lijphart concludes that grand coalition cabinets are the most appropriate form of governance for plural societies. Furthermore, the existence of mutual veto is a vital part of the theory to ensure that minorities are protected, and unrestrained usage of the veto right is deterred. To foster the elimination of the majority-minority confrontation, proportional representation is used as standard allocation of civil service appointments and government subsidies. Lastly, Lijphart mentions segmental autonomy and federalism as the final element of the theory. In a consociational democracy, each segment has rule-making power to govern over its exclusive areas of concern. To conclude, the theory of consociationalism has been well-defined and detailed allowing the concept to be studied to a greater extent. There are several established theories that link the rise of radical right populist parties to the consociational features of a country. In the following, the theory of radical right populism will be analysed, followed with the examination of the arguments suggesting a correlation between the success of these parties and the features of consociational systems. Then the case study of Belgium will be introduced to shed light on the possible limitations of the theories establishing the correlation.



### 3. RADICAL RIGHT POPULISM

The current, intensive rise of populism in the Western hemisphere drew significant scholarly attention. Several studies set out to examine its features, causes and potential consequences. There are numerous studies that find a positive correlation between consociationalism and the rise of radical right populism. This connection could have important consequences for the subsequent evaluation of consociationalism and its future application. However, focusing on the example of Belgium, this study will argue otherwise. Populism itself is not a new phenomenon. According to Urbinati (2019), it was brought along with the process of democratization (Urbinati, 2019, p. 111). Pelinka (2013) notes that populism, as a term to classify movements expressing disappointment with the established system, can be observed from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Pelinka, 2013, p. 4). The element that stands out in today's time is its intense and concurrent appearance in most constitutional democracies. As it will be demonstrated in this chapter, the essence of populism can manifest itself on both sides of the political spectrum, though, in Western European democracies it is mainly exhibited on the far-right. Therefore, after populism is conceptualized, this paper will only concern its radical right manifestation because it is more practical considering the current trends.

#### 3.1 POPULISM

Giving an exact definition of populism has been notoriously difficult, despite its long existence, its concept has inspired much debate. There is no exact consensus among scholars on which parties belong under the category (Akkerman, 2003, p. 147), but it still seems easier to label a party populist than giving it a definition. As Laclau (2005) puts it, "a persistent feature of the literature on populism is its reluctance or difficulty in giving the concept any precise meaning" (Laclau, 2005, p. 3). Taggart (2002) points out that the elusiveness of its concept makes it hard for scholars to define it (Taggart, 2002, p. 66). There are also substantial discussions on the nature of populism, dividing scholars into two big groups. Some regard populism as a problem, such as Issacharoff (2018) who contends that populist governments are essentially 'ruling against the state' (Issacharoff, 2018, p. 454). This notion was most the prevailing up until the twenty-first century (Taggart 2000; Mény and Surel 2002), while recently it has also been seen as a way to restore the democratic ideals. The purpose of this chapter is to put forward the core concepts of populism and choose one for further application. It will provide a concise overview of the different approaches conceptualizing the phenomenon. Drawing on the recent developments, populism will be regarded as a thin-centred ideology. Afterwards, the features that place the contemporary form of populism to the far-right of the political spectrum will be analysed.

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### 3.1.1 CONCEPTUAL DIFFICULTY OF POPULISM

Pelinka (2013) originates the lack of clarity on the definition from the conceptual weakness of populism. He argues that “populism is a general protest against the checks and balances introduced to prevent the people’s direct rule” (Pelinka, 2013, p. 3). The problem arises when one needs to define who belongs to ‘the people’ because populism tends to build on the debatable precondition of the self-evidence of the people. This is where its conceptual weakness is identified (Pelinka, 2013, p. 4). As Stanley (2008) recapitulates it, populism “has been described variously as a pathology, a style, a syndrome and a doctrine” (Stanley, 2008, p. 95). There is also another dimension that concerns populism’s relationship to democracy. Taggart (2004) for instance, in contrast to the general argument that populism threatens democracy, analyses populism as a way to expose the shortcomings of representative democracy and potentially amend it (Taggart, 2004, p. 269), while other approaches regard it as a technique of politics.

Tarchi (2002) contends that populism refers to a mobilization that is characterized by a certain style of communication. He states that it is centred around a particular personality who is said to speak on behalf of common people (Tarchi, 2002, p. 126). Abts and Rummens (2007) underpin this notion by stating that populists use simple, direct language and offer one-dimensional solutions to complex problems. This appeals to a broad range of people, while condemning the intellect of the elites (Abts & Rummens, 2007, p. 407). Although doubts were raised whether populism has any analytical utility because of its vagueness, recent developments show that a certain set of clearly defined, distinct ideas can be attached to the term. Drawing on the latest advancements, populism, though limited, can be regarded as an ideology.

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### 3.1.2 POPULISM AS A ‘THIN-CENTRED’ IDEOLOGY

The foundation of the view for this essay comes from the definition offered by Margaret Canovan because she rejects searching for a general theory of populism and instead, stresses the diversity and multiplicity of the phenomena and derives conclusions through comparison. As Akkerman (2003) notes, Canovan’s work is regarded as the classical study on populist ideology (Akkerman, 2003, p. 148). Canovan (1999) arrives at the following statement: “Populism in modern democracies is best seen as an appeal to ‘the people’ against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of the society” (Canovan, 1999, p. 3). She views it as a political redemption against the broken promises of the representative system. In this notion, populism is seen as an attempt to change the current political structure. Canovan perceives it as a ‘shadow’ that accompanies democracy (Canovan, 1999, p. 16). According to Arditi (2004), her theory draws from

Michael Oakeshott's statement that political modernity is the interaction of two different styles of politicism, the politics of faith and the politics of scepticism. Canovan calls the former the redemptive, the latter the pragmatic way of democracy and places populism in the gap between them. Arditì notes that through this relation, populism is internal to democracy (Arditi, 2004, p. 135). Taggart (2000), after examining the history of populism, came to a resembling conclusion. Similarly to Canovan, he asserts that populism signposts the health of the representative system and by its rise, populism indicates a problem (Taggart, 2000, p. 115). However, according to Akkerman, Taggart's claim describes an ideal type of populism (Akkerman, 2003, p. 148). Yet, there are further scholarly arguments holding similar views as Canovan, referring to populism as a shadow of democracy. Others also call attention, such as Mény and Surel (2002), that it indicates problems of the malfunctioning of the connection between the citizens and the government (Mény & Surel, 2002, p. 15). As Arditì (2004) summarizes, "populism arises as a response to an asymmetry brought about by an excess (of pragmatism) and a deficit (of redemption)" (Arditi, 2004, p. 138).

Populist leaders are building on the voice of common people to challenge the legitimacy of the existing arrangements. Canovan (2002) later defines it, in a similar vein as Michael Freedman (1998), as a thin-centred ideology (Canovan, 2002). It is thin-centred because it concentrates only on specific key concepts without offering a comprehensive vision. It has its limitations and does not provide a complete theory of society but the ideas it conveys interact with established traditional ideologies. As Akkerman (2003) puts it, the "populist ideology in the strict sense is lacking, but some of the recent publications about populism make clear that it is possible to discern an ideological family with a recognizable morphology" (Akkerman, 2003, p. 149). Abts and Rummens (2007) state that as an ideology, populism is concerned with the structure of power in society. They identify three features which repeatedly appear in the theoretical literature on populism (Abts & Rummens, 2007, p. 408). In the following, these three major components of populism will be discussed to demarcate the essential concept.

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### 3.1.3 DUAL DIVISION OF SOCIETY, ANTAGONISTIC ACTORS

The first pillar is the antagonistic relationship between the people and the elite. Cas Mudde (2004) argues that in the populist view, society is divided in two homogeneous groups which are hostile to each other and act as adversaries. It assumes a constant confrontation between the 'corrupt elite' and the 'pure people' and maintains that politics should be the manifestation of the common will of the people (Mudde, 2004, p. 543). Schedler (1996) holds that in the populist view, there is an alleged gap between the values and opinion of the masses and the elites. The system is criticised because

the elites are seen as representing only their own interests and enjoying privileged status without being accountable to the people (Schedler, 1996, p. 291). On a parallel note, Mair (2002) observes the declining representative role of political parties, while finds that the institutional and procedural functions are increasing (Mair, 2002, p. 83). As the representation loses its essence, the distance between the elite and the common people increases. Mair's findings seem to give credit to the reasons behind the first component of the populist ideology. Taggart (2000) further amplifies this notion by arguing that parties and parliaments are perceived as redundant complications and unnecessary intermediary structures. In contrast, the populist idea is to promote simplicity and have a direct linkage between government and governed (Taggart, 2000, p. 3). Abandoning or reshaping the conventional representative structure could potentially bring a more direct connection, and thus could bridge the gap that is allegedly between the elites and the people.

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#### 3.1.4 RESTORATION OF POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY

The second element is the endeavour to re-establish popular sovereignty by highlighting the general will of the people as the main drive of politics. The principle of popular sovereignty is closely related to the democratic ideal. Laycock (2005) defines popular sovereignty as the “rule by citizens over as much of their collective public life as possible” (Laycock, 2005, p. 127). In Kalyvas's (2005) understanding, the sovereignty of the people requires that the people create the arrangements themselves through which they are governed. The people determine the government structure and the juridical and political identity of their community (Kalyvas, 2005, p. 226). Beckman (2019) states that popular sovereignty implies that people are above the law. He explains that the will of the people is regarded as the supreme authority and this authority cannot be properly exercised by only participating in the making of collective decisions (Beckman, 2019, p. 2). In other words, Post (1998) explains that the state has to be subordinated to the will of the people to ensure popular sovereignty based on its superiority to the established legal and political systems (Post, 1998, p. 437).

Abts and Rummens (2007) argue that populism tries to give back the power to the people and that is why populists prefer more direct modes of democracy such as referenda and majority rule (Abts & Rummens, 2007, p. 408). Political parties are deemed to absorb, and not transmit, the will of the masses. The populist ideology views this process as the malfunction of representative democracy and attempts to amend it by rectifying the ‘middle arrangements’. Kitschelt (2002) emphasizes the populist aim to halt intermediaries and bring those in power closer to the ordinary citizens. He views populism as “an expression of dissatisfaction with existing modes of organized elite-mass political intermediation” (Kitschelt, 2002, p. 179). Taggart (2000) notes that populism stresses the demand

for the people's will and decision to be the central feature of politics (Taggart, 2000, p. 91). Yack (2001), in the populist view, defines people as 'the master' of the state (Yack, 2001, p. 527). Populist leaders do not want to represent people but present their own voice as they are one of them. They stress the view that the decisions taken have to be the clear consequence of the people's will. In this notion, Abts and Rummens (2007) also understand the ideology as an "attempt to achieve an immediate identity of governed and governing" (Abts & Rummens, 2007, p. 408). The core of the popular sovereignty principle provides populists with the visible foundation for their 'attack' on the establishments of the state. Populism pursues the concept of popular sovereignty even if constitutional checks have to be altered. Following Laycock's (2005) analysis, while undermining legal institutions, populist leaders are able to present themselves as the rescuers of democracy because they are aiming give back the power to whom it belongs, to the people (Laycock, 2005, p. 127).

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#### 3.1.5 THE HOMOGENEOUS UNITY OF PEOPLE

The third characteristic is connected to the monolithic interpretation of the people. Canovan (2002) argues that subtracting the essential will of the people is possible because they are considered as a homogeneous group. They are not seen as individuals forming heterogeneous social groups with various values and needs, but as a collective body with shared identity. This homogeneous unity is able to have a common will and express this will and make decisions (Canovan, 2002, p. 34). The differences are harmonically combined creating an 'organic whole' as the people. Mondon (2015) points out that the people can be defined in several, even contradictory ways. The borders are often vaguely drawn and fluid to allow inclusion and exclusion depending on what the populist leaders regard as harmful for democracy (Mondon, 2015, p. 145). Abts and Rummens (2007) point out that the supposed unity also acts as a factor nurturing hostility towards those who do not fit and hence endanger the harmony of the homogeneity (Abts & Rummens, 2007, p. 409).

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#### 3.1.6 POPULISM ON THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM

Populism does not classify itself on the political spectrum into the Left or Right dichotomy. Following on its view as a thin-centred ideology, it does not prescribe what the homogeneous identity of the people actually is. Abts and Rummens (2007) contend that populist movements require additional completion with beliefs and values that give substance to the presumed unity. They recognise two paradigmatic options. Left-wing populism would define the two antagonistic groups in socio-

economic terms as the working class being exploited by a bourgeois elite. The rightist version is to categorize people by (ethnic) nationality (Abts & Rummens, 2007, p. 409).

It is evident that populism can manifest itself both on the left and on the right side of the political spectrum, however in Western Europe it has mainly been observed on the political right. Consequently, the literature on populism is largely dominated by right-wing populism. In the following, the general traits of radical right populism will be examined, along which the radical right populist party in Belgium will be identified hereinafter.

### 3.2 THE RADICAL RIGHT POPULISM

The radical right populist parties and movements have been increasingly successful continent-wise. Piero Ignazi (2003), after analysing the extreme right parties in Western Europe, contends that there are two ways for a party to be counted as radical right. It either has to refer to one of the traditional far-right schools of thought (Fascism, Nazism, Nouvelle Droite) or oppose the established system (where the system is understood as the institutional arrangements and values of liberal democracy). The parties which promote the latter but reject the former are termed the new 'post-industrial extreme right' (Ignazi, 2003, p. 27). According to Betz and Johnson (2004), contemporary right-wing populism presents a considerable challenge to liberal democracy and its proponents because it directly targets its values and institutions. The aggressive populist discourse aims at fundamentally changing the established system. They contend that these parties effectively shape the public debate on a number of important issues by displaying themselves as the champions of 'true democracy'. These issues primarily concern immigration, citizenship, security and law and order (Betz & Johnson, 2004, p. 313).

#### 3.2.1 PRESERVATION OF THE IDENTITY

The radical right populist parties utilise traditional economic concerns, but they put the questions of identity on the top of the agenda. Dewinter (2000) claims that the importance of culture and values has been increasing and the radical right populism intensively presented itself as the defender of diversity against universalism (Dewinter, 2000, p. 14). Mondon (2015) calls these parties populist nativists to stress what he views as the core of their program. Nativism here is understood as the desire to return and restore indigenous practices and cultural forms. He highlights the anti-immigration discourse as one of the crucial features of the contemporary radical right populism. The nativist rhetoric constitutes a sophisticated form of exclusion towards those who are perceived as outsiders. The immigrants are seen as agents of a plot aiming to replace the autochthonous

population by bringing in a new culture or a multicultural mixture where the original population is degraded. Besides, Mondon argues that the populist discussion prevents any form of sympathy towards the immigrants by distorting their background and personality. Their negative impact is exaggerated while the value they bring to the society is ignored and downplayed. They are regarded as an alien mass (Mondon, 2015, p. 144).

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### 3.2.2 EXCLUSION OF OTHERS

Betz and Johnson (2004) argue that the ideological validation for marginalization to secure the preservation of identity comes from Taguieff's logic of 'differentialist racism'. It turns the difference of a group into an absolute and emphasizes its incompatibility rather than inequality. To protect the identity, the purity of the group has to be preserved and exclusion is justified on the general demand of the right to difference. As Betz and Johnson (2004) quote Lega Nord, according to the radical right populist ideology "those who fight for the survival of their nations represent the camp of the diversity of cultures, true tolerance, and freedom whereas the America-like multiculturalism represents the camp of uniformity, deracination, and enslavement" (Betz & Johnson, 2004, p. 317). Regardless of the radical ideas it conveys and the language it employs in confronting its opponents, radical right populism tends to avoid being labelled as racist.

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### 3.2.3 APPEAL TO THE COMMON PEOPLE

Betz and Johnson (2004) argue that by playing on the common sense of ordinary people, the radical right populist parties can counter the concerns of racism and right-wing extremism. They cite the program of the Belgian Vlaams Blok: 'Our party program and our position on foreigners have nothing to do with extremism or racism, but everything with healthy common sense (*gewoon gezond verstand*).' Populist parties impel the sentiment of unfairness caused by the equal treatment of the potentially harmful immigrants and the local population and claim to give voice to what the majority thinks. Through demagogue rhetoric, they promise alternatives and remedies which lend legitimacy to their attempt to change the established political system. The system is condemned for its exclusion of ordinary citizens by the political parties and the dominant elite (Betz & Johnson, 2004, p. 315). It is important to note that the excessive media coverage on populist ideas significantly helped its appeal to various layers of society. Kallis (2013) points out that the social and political influence of the populist position on immigration in Europe is highly disproportionate to the actual level of the extreme right parties' electoral support (Kallis, 2013, p. 236). Still, the general growth in their support across Europe is undeniable.

In conclusion, populism is to be understood as a thin-centred ideology that positions itself against the established system. Populism appears when there are representational problems and tension at the core of constitutional democracies. It signals malfunction and attempts to change the system. The 'ideology' presupposes the dual division of society with antagonistic actors being the elite and the people. It seeks to restore popular sovereignty and "rescue" democracy through giving the power back to the people. The major component is the homogeneous group of people with collective body and shared identity. Populists can draw the borders of the group vaguely, giving way to the inclusion and exclusion of certain groups. Hostility is projected towards those who do not fit in and are considered 'outsiders' endangering the harmony of homogeneity. Populism can emerge on both continuum of the political spectrum, but it is far more common on the right-side in Western European democracies. The radical right populism manifests itself in nativism, exclusion and appeals to people through demagogue rhetoric. The preservation of identity is on the top of the agenda as right-wing populists claim to be the defenders of diversity against multiculturalism. Outsiders are perceived as threats and group differences are turned into an absolute, which signals incompatibility. The populist rhetoric builds on the common sense of people, playing on the perceived unfairness of treating immigrants equally to the local population. The following chapter will introduce the theories that seek to affirm the correlation between the consociational features and the success of radical right populists. This will be followed by the case study of Belgium.



#### 4. CONSENSUS DEMOCRACY AND THE RISE OF RADICAL RIGHT POPULISM

This chapter will explore the theories on whether the institutional framework of consociational democracies has a traceable link to the rise of radical right populism. There seem to be a general observation according to which consensus democracies are conducive to radical right populism. In the following, the characteristics of consociational systems will be examined in light of the features attributed to the contemporary radical right populist ideology. The difference between consensus democracy and consociational democracy is of minor relevance for the purpose of this paper because they both refer to Lijphart's consensual model (1999) and most of their characteristics overlap. As Bogaards (2000) notes, by creating the concept of consensus democracy in the 1980s, Lijphart rephrased his normative typology into an empirical one (Bogaards, 2000). On the account of the slight conceptual deviation, Lijphart (1999) notes that consensus democracy is concerned with the protection of minority rights in all democracies and consociationalism is concentrated on plural societies. Consequently, consociational democracy is regarded as a sub-category of consensus systems (Lijphart, 1999).

The theories that link the support of radical right populist parties to the features of consociational democracy indirectly evoke the question on how democratic the consociational model is. If the appearance of populism is to be understood to signpost the failure of representative democracy, the initial intention of consociationalism -that is to achieve democratic stability- is challenged because of the notion that it provides fertile ground for an ideology that appears when the democratic health of a system is in question. The abundance of the potential correlations, that will be put forward in the following, could suggest that populism will inevitably rise in these countries which could lead to the reconsideration of the advantages of consociationalism. After reviewing these theories, the case of Belgium will be introduced as it contradicts them because the electoral success of the radical right populist party was actually diminishing. Deschouwer (2006) remarks that Belgium "has long been considered a copybook example of consociational democracy" (Deschouwer, 2006, p. 895) which will lead to the central question this paper seeks to answer. In the following, four aspects of the theories will be detailed namely: the question of accountability, cartelization and complexity, the consequences of grand coalitions and the federal dimension of consociationalism. Additional arguments will follow.

#### 4.1 THE QUESTION OF ACCOUNTABILITY

The primary concern that consensual measures could lead to anti-establishment protests is originated from Rudy Andeweg. He asserts that the inclusiveness comes at the expense of accountability. After examining Lijphart's work, he contends that consociational democracies might evoke the rise of anti-system parties because of the system's weakness on accountability stemming from the emerging confidence gap between the rulers and the ruled (Andeweg, 2001, p. 123). He is not alone with this anticipation. Several other scholars have drawn attention to the problem of accountability in consensual systems. Political accountability is a complex phenomenon and its conceptualization has undergone significant changes throughout the years. Lindberg (2009) notes that when Schmitter and Karl in 1991 stated that accountability is the central feature of democracy, it brought about indifference and even occasional hostility (Lindberg, 2009, p. 1). Later Grant and Keohane (2005) contended that in a representative democracy, it is essential that those who govern are held accountable to the governed. They mention John Locke's theory on the superiority of representative democracy derived from the notion that accountability is feasible only when the government and the governed are separated. They outline the concept as follows, accountability "implies that some actors have the right to hold other actors to a set of standards, to judge whether they have fulfilled their responsibilities in light of these standards, and to impose sanctions if they determine that these responsibilities have not been met" (Grant & Keohane, 2005, p. 29). This very accountability is questioned in consensus democracies.

Papadopoulos (2003) also observes its problematic notion in systems that leave room for bargaining. He argues that bargaining and negotiation between the representatives of interests reduces accountability mechanisms and decreases the safeguard for elite responsiveness (Papadopoulos, 2003, p. 489). In divided, plural societies deliberation and bargaining are essential functional requirements, however they do not necessarily take place between the voters and elites but between the elites themselves. Consociationalism ensures democratic stability by allowing space for negotiations and dialogue between the major interests. The society is pillarized and each pillar group has its own elites who represent them. As the interests are settled, and the outcome is the input of various parties on an approximately equal level, it is harder to determine who is accountable for the results. The negotiated policy might be far from what the groups expected, and as changing groups is not possible, they are "stuck" with the result. This makes the political process increasingly distant and opaque for voters leading them to question the system. If the accountability in the system becomes questionable, it is inevitable that parties which oppose the establishment become

attractive to the masses who feel that their potential influence on decisions that fundamentally affect them is lost or in danger.

#### 4.2 CARTELIZATION AND COMPLEXITY

Katz and Mair (1995) point out another feature of consensus system that brings accountability into question. They observe that the highly coalescent style of politics and the inter-party collusion facilitates the formation of a new type of party system, the cartel party democracy. Cartelization means that parties turn into “partnerships of professionals, not associations of, or for, the citizens” and they no longer fulfil their role as channels of communication between the state and the society (Katz & Mair, 1995, p. 22). Political opponents regard themselves as professionals who will have to work together and who are driven by the same desires. Parties become so closely connected to the state that they cease to make demands on it on the behalf of the citizenry but make demands themselves on the ‘party state’. It leads to an increasingly complex and remote political process for voters to navigate in. In consociationalism no major party is left out and, as Katz and Mair argue, it leads to the loss of fear of ‘being thrown out of office’ by the voters which was seen as crucial incentive to be responsive to the citizens. The parties limit the costs of competition and protect themselves from the consequence of electoral discontent which fundamentally contradicts the core function of elections: to provide feedback. Electoral results are less likely to have an influence on government action as party programmes are harmonised towards an agreed goal. The failure of elections to provide response from the society to the government leads to the question of accountability. This is the context where Katz and Mair identify fertile soil for the radical right populist ideology to form an attractive criticism of the established system. By misusing their control of the state, to generate resources that are shared among themselves, the political elites offer an apparent surface for the populist parties to attack the existing arrangements. These parties then gain great support from their presumed ability to break these arrangements (Katz & Mair, 1995, p. 24).

The dissatisfaction with the lack of accountability, according to Papadopoulos (2003), can also increase the citizens’ wish to reduce complexity, leading to a search for charismatic alternatives. He mentions that as politics become personalized and dramatized by mass media, it enhances the support for radical right populist leaders (Papadopoulos, 2003, p. 488). These leaders tend to build strong connection between their personality and their program, giving the electorate a face to vote for. Nai and Coma (2019) call attention to the usual association of populists with qualities of charisma and leadership. They argue that populists are more likely to demonstrate charismatic traits than

other candidates, as it is particularly useful in demagogic communication (Nai & Coma, 2019, p. 1343). Barr (2009) notes that populists use demagogy to cover the breaches between the reality and their messages (Barr, 2009, p. 32). In addition, Rooduijn (2015), on a similar note as Papadopoulos, also remarks the dissatisfaction leading to the electoral success of radical right populist parties as these parties effectively present themselves to be outside of the established system. The system is regarded as complicated and incomprehensible and, in this light, the populist alternative becomes appealing (Rooduijn, 2015, p. 5).

#### 4.3 THE CONSEQUENCES OF GRAND COALITION CABINETS

Another link between consociational systems and the rise of radical right populist parties stems from the aspect of government formation. A fundamental attribute of consociational democracy is that the cabinet is made up of a grand coalition. To form a coalition, parties need to negotiate, bargain and approximate their programmes. Rooduijn (2015) pinpoints that convergence is almost the inevitable effect of coming into a grand coalition because the parties have to make compromises. As he defines, convergence “means that centre–left parties become less left-wing and centre–right parties become less right-wing” (Rooduijn, 2015, p. 6). The readiness to compromise is an essential factor in political decision-making in consensus systems. This compromise is what Herbert Kitschelt denotes as a cause for the success of radical right populist parties. Kitschelt (2002) highlights that programmatic convergence between parties leaves an open space for underrepresented groups to choose a new participant. He contends that because the established parties do not offer alternatives to the electorate, defecting from them does not raise much costs. If the dominant moderate left and right parties converge in the middle, he argues, anti-statist populist parties will be on the rise taking advantage from the unoccupied gap. He states that the electoral success of radical right populist parties primarily depends on the degree of convergence among the established parties (Kitschelt, 2002, p. 187).

Similarly, Abedi (2002) also notes the beneficial situation for anti-establishment parties originating from the close positioning of the major parties on the left-right scale. He puts forward the notion that “the establishment parties are seen as components of a basically undifferentiated political class” (Abedi, 2002, p. 553), hence the electorates will face similar policy results regardless of who they vote for. The convergence toward centrist positions disables the parties to have an identity that differentiates them from their competitors in the eyes of the voters. This will lead to the electorate being more inclined to blatantly different policy initiatives that the anti-state parties promote. It

seems evident that grand coalitions enhance the support for radical right populist parties who base their arguments criticising the result of the fundamental element of consociationalism. All these findings indirectly relate back to the representational problem of parties and their perceived unresponsiveness.

#### 4.4 THE FEDERAL DIMENSION OF CONSOCIATIONALISM

Yet another research demonstrates the same link from a different viewpoint. Hakhverdian and Koop (2007) carried out a research establishing a connection between the radical right populism and the institutional features of consociationalism. They focused much attention on the federal-unitary dimension of consociationalism which is often overlooked in other empirical scholarly works. This dimension concentrates on the division of power between political institutions. They found strong statistical evidence suggesting that federal states show higher support for radical right populist parties. From the examined cases 89% were correctly classified (Hakhverdian & Koop, 2007).

The federal dimension has additionally been mentioned by Papadopoulos who points out its complexity which brings responsiveness and accountability into question (Papadopoulos, 2003, p. 481). Likewise, Taggart (2000) also makes a connection between the growing complexity of the government structure and the masses' desire for simplicity which provides the central argument, together with directness, to the populist rhetoric (Taggart, 2000, p. 3). The opacity and the intricacy of the system makes it hard for the electorate to navigate and puts additional obstacle in front of those who want to be actively engaged. The problem of the loss of accountability and responsiveness leads to the citizenry doubting their influence on policy outcomes. Taking into account all that, Hakhverdian and Koop conclude that federalism "has the potential effect of breeding populist support once the societies have become depolitized" (Hakhverdian & Koop, 2007, p. 418). The federalist dimension is a crucial component of Lijphart's consociational theory and the research connecting it to the rise of populism from multiple angles seems straightforward.

#### 4.5 ADDITIONAL ARGUMENTS

Furthermore, there are other claims regarding the presumed correlation, but they largely draw from the arguments mentioned above and are more focused on the general factors in Western European representative democracies and thus are less useful for this purpose. Taggart (2004), for example, links the tensions that arise from the contradictions of democratic ideals and the reality of representative systems to provide a fertile breeding ground for populism (Taggart, 2004, p. 269).

The consociational arrangements seem to advance the loss of representation of political parties, although it is a notable phenomenon continent wise. Rooduijn (2005) points at the increased electoral volatility, which is virtually present in all Western European countries, as a factor helping the rise of radical right populist parties (Rooduijn, 2015, p. 7). As Kitschelt (2002) mentions that the established parties, by not presenting any alternatives to the voters, make party disloyalty worthwhile. Rooduijn (2005) designates this disloyalty as a crucial contributing factor for the success of radical right parties as it logically comes from the notion that if voters stay loyal to their traditional parties, who would vote for the newly emerged populists? (Rooduijn, 2015, p. 7).

The above-mentioned arguments clearly show that the presence of consociational systems correlates with the rise of radical right populist parties. There are several structural conditions that advance and facilitate the spread of the populist ideology in consensus democracies. Negotiations and bargaining are fundamental decision-making processes of consociationalism. The negotiated policy might be far from what was expected by the voters and there is no clear line of accountability, the political process is increasingly seen remote and complex. As parties become closely connected and converge towards centrist positions to form grand coalition cabinets, election results will have little influence on government action. The compromises leave an open space for underrepresented groups who will become gradually inclined to accept ideas promoted by radical right populist parties. Based on these reasonings, it could be expected that concrete examples will support these theories. Yet, this is not necessarily the case. Lijphart developed his consociational concept based on four smaller European democracies namely, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium and the Netherlands. These countries were then regarded as the classical cases of consociationalism. Radical right populist parties have been present in all of these countries, however in a particular case, they were in decline instead of rising. The next chapter will introduce the case of Belgium, exploring the possible reasons for this phenomenon. This paper expects to find that Belgium might not be that consociational after all. Another possibility is that there are different institutional arrangements that should be accounted for the rise of the radical right as consociationalism is not comprehensively related.

## 5. CASE STUDY: BELGIUM

Belgium has been widely considered and accepted as a consociational system, in fact Lijphart developed the theory of consociationalism based on observing Belgium, among other countries. Belgium's consociational nature is beyond doubt however, there is no consensus on to what extent these features are exhibited in contemporary Belgium. Considering the arguments establishing a correlation between the rise of radical right populist parties and consociational systems, one would expect to see the Belgian far-right populist party (Vlaams Belang) on the rise. Belgium is brought to the fore because, contrary to the logical anticipation, the party has been experiencing a downward electoral spiral. This paper will focus on the period between 2004 and 2014. The time frame has been chosen deliberately. 2004 marks the year when the Vlaams Belang has been formed, after its predecessor, the Vlaams Blok had been dissolved as the consequence of a court ruling against the party's violation of the anti-racism law. 2014 signifies the last federal election held before the European migrant crisis has escalated, giving a significant blow to the radical right parties in virtually all European countries.

The case of Belgium, as it shows contrary to the theories establishing a correlation between consociational systems and the rise of radical right populist parties, is an atypical example. It highlights the limitation of the established theories. Belgium has been the prototype of consociationalism, but the Belgian radical right populist party is on the decline. In light of this anomaly, this paper argues that the consociational structure does not have direct correlation to the rise of radical right populist parties. Based on this proposition, the case study of Belgium is expected to reveal important implications of the theories that have not been exposed in prior research. The in-depth analysis will focus on the consociational features exhibited in contemporary Belgium and the performance of the radical right populist party.

This chapter will introduce the case of Belgium starting with a brief historical overview on its plurality and its consociational nature. In order to understand the country's political system today, it is indispensable to consider, however briefly, its history. Then the radical right populist party in Belgium, Vlaams Belang, will be presented and its electoral performance on the federal elections between 2004 and 2014 will be analysed.

## 5.1 HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

As mentioned earlier, Lijphart developed his consociational theory based on observing four European countries, including Belgium. The first systematic study on Belgium as a consociational democracy, according to Deschouwer (2006), was carried out by Huyse in 1971. Huyse, after examining the period between 1944 and 1961, came to the conclusion that a new era has begun for Belgium. He found the old, religious cleavages to be reconciled and interchanged by the ethno-linguistic tensions (Deschouwer, 2006, p. 900). The pillarization of the Belgian society before the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century was along the divisions between Catholics, Socialists and (relatively weak) Liberals which cut through all phases of life. Deschouwer (2006) notes that the Catholic, Christian Democrat Party has always been stronger in the Dutch-speaking, northern part (Flanders) while the Socialist Party was more influential in the French-speaking, southern part (Wallonia). He contends that the grand coalition of the two major pillarized parties, to some extent, was also a grand coalition between the two major language groups. Following on this line, he argues that the ethno-linguistic division is not a completely new move from the previous religious cleavages (Deschouwer, 2006, p. 901).

If we look at the modern Kingdom of Belgium today, it is a federal state with three official languages: Dutch, French and German. In Belgium's steady process to federalization, consociationalism is sometimes seen as reaching its goal. It is important to note that Lijphart (1977) himself stated that consociationalism is a passing phase, the success of the system makes it superfluous over time. He sees the success in the diminution of plural division which will then lead to less close elite cooperation (Lijphart, 1977, p. 2). In 2002, Deschouwer argues that Belgium is still very much divided (Deschouwer, 2002, p. 121). In the following, a brief history of contemporary Belgium will be discussed, highlighting two key events, the establishment of institutional conventions and the constitution of 1993. Throughout its history, Belgium has witnessed the dominance of French-language and the Flemish struggle for recognition that eventually lead to the linguistic divisions of today.

In his article, Beaufays (1988) provided a concise overview of the foundation of Belgium. After several internal and external challenges, the State of Belgium, as a unitary state, was first constituted in 1830. It was preceded by the occupation by Austria and the annexation by France and Napoleon. After Napoleon's defeat, the major European powers decided to include Belgium under the Kingdom of the Netherlands. It was followed by fifteen years of endeavour for centralization. The revolution of 1830, which eventually led to the foundation of the country, was evoked by the francophone



Catholic bourgeoisie who intended to challenge the superiority of the Dutch language and rejected the Calvinism in Belgium. The Catholic Flemish lower bourgeoisie prioritized Catholicism and supported the movement. The bourgeoisie that came into power managed to establish a unitary French-speaking state aiming to abolish all dividing factors. This solution seemed desirable both internally, to achieve unification and maintain stability, and externally, to make it acceptable for the major powers. The French-language was considered as a way to unify the population, while the Dutch-language symbolized fragmentation. The centralized, unilingual system that was meant to ensure the dominant power of the bourgeoisie did not last long. Fifteen years later the Flemish bourgeoisie, who was more Flemish than Catholic then, successfully united the northern populations under the Dutch-language. As Beaufays describes it, most of the internal struggles in Belgium can be characterized by the conflict between the two bourgeoisie. Through the mid and late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the linguistic division was increasingly recognized leading to the establishment of institutional conventions in the 1970s. It was a major change as this form shows a great resemblance to federalism, although, without the participation in major decision-making being ensured (Beaufays, 1988).

As Deschouwer (2006) notes, after the linguistic borders were finalized in 1963 (dividing the country into a Dutch-speaking, a francophone, and a bilingual area), the reforms of 1970 clearly established the linguistic division at the elite level. All members of the Belgian parliament belong to either the Dutch-speaking or the French-speaking language group and are meant to be representative of the language group. The division of the parliament led to the adoption of new rules in the decision-making process. A high threshold was established in order to impede the further federalisation of Belgium. Decisions on constitutional changes related to the institutional character of the state required double majority. Double majority means the two-thirds of all members and the majority in each language groups. Furthermore, a special instrument, the alarm bell procedure was introduced to provide an additional protection to the French-speaking minority. The alarm bell could be activated when a quarter of the MPs of a language group identify a proposal to be potentially disadvantageous for them (Deschouwer, 2006, p. 902). This procedure ensures that the demographic majority of the Dutch speakers does not threaten the interest of the Francophones. Referring back to the proportionality principle of Lijphart's consociational theory, the alarm bell device shows what Lijphart termed as a deviation of the principle, it demonstrates the overrepresentation of the minorities. The Dutch-speaking group requires one-quarter of the French votes and likewise, the French speakers also need at least one-quarter of the Dutch speakers to agree in order to reach the 50 percent majority to accept a proposal. By this way, the demographic

minority - the French speakers - reaches equal status with the majority group. In the Belgian government, the number of ministers from the two language groups has to be equal, with the only exception being the prime minister who is not counted. As Deschouwer argues, these reforms were meant to contain the linguistic tensions and keep away from attempts of further federalisation. The vision of a federal Belgium was only desirable by radical regionalist parties (Deschouwer, 2006, p. 903). The linguistic division of the parliament also introduced the obligation to cooperate between the groups bringing about a political structure that is built on compromise rather than competition.

The following events eventually led to the second major change, the new constitution in 1993 that established Belgium as a federal state. The evolution towards the federal state was characterised by what Deschouwer (2006) calls the “classical Belgian way, by letting the tension build up and then finally opting for compromise” (p.903). The reforms and agreements came in the effort to keep the system working without a clear consensus on what the end point should be. He accounts the complex, hybrid construction of the Belgian federalism to these ‘crises solutions’ (Deschouwer, 2006, p. 904).

It is evident that up until the early 1990s Belgium clearly exhibits the consociational features that Lijphart outlined. As further research on the theory shows that there are significant links between the consociational structure and the success of radical right populist parties one could anticipate seeing the Belgian radical right populist party to be on the rise. Nevertheless, the case of the Vlaams Belang shows the opposite. In the following section, the Belgian radical right party and its electoral performance between 2004 and 2014 will be presented.

## 5.2 THE BELGIAN RADICAL RIGHT POPULIST PARTY

Vlaams Blok (Flemish Block), the predecessor of the Vlaams Belang – the contemporary Belgian radical right populist party - was founded in 1979. As Coffé notes (2005), the Vlaams Blok started as one of the most successful extreme right-wing parties in Europe. The party was quick to adapt to its political and social environment and through the populist rhetoric, it presented itself as a possible, serious candidate for government (Coffé, 2005, p. 206). Primarily, the Vlaams Blok positioned itself as a nationalist party striving for Flemish independence but as Pauwels (2011) depicts, after the mid 1980s it gradually turned into a modern radical right populist party. Its agenda was focused on nativism and the fight against the elite and for strong law and order (Pauwels, 2011, p. 61). According to Mudde (2000), the party’s programme was elaborate, and the message was clear. The Vlaams

Blok considered the ethnic community to be the basic organizing unit of people and promoted the idea that, as Mudde puts it, “each ethnic community should live according to its own nature, that is, they should live separately in their own states” (Mudde, 2000, p. 115). For Belgium, it meant that the multinational state was rejected. Furthermore, the party perceived immigrants as a threat and burden for the ethnic community. It advocated the belief in family and put a strong emphasis on ethical values. It stated that the economy should support the community and rights should be granted only if obligations for the ethnic community are met. The populist, anti-establishment elements of the party’s ideology and its view on democracy were all centred around its core advocacy of ethnic nationalism (Mudde, 2000, p. 115).

Erk (2005) describes that, despite the fact that Vlaams Blok started with an anti-Francophone message, it had also gained support from the Francophone Bruxellois (Erk, 2005, p. 497). Pauwels (2011) mentions that the party won all the elections held between 1985 and 2004 with up to 24 per cent of the votes. In spite of its success however, the party remained isolated from the Belgian political arena. It was viewed as a threat to liberal democracy and all the other parties agreed not to cooperate and exclude it from coalition formation under any circumstances. This agreement is known as the “cordon sanitaire” (Pauwels, 2011, p. 61). For the Vlaams Blok, it meant that the only way to obtain parliamentary control was to gain at least 50 percent of the votes which is near impossible.

Coffé (2005) explains that the party’s sole choice was to adapt to the circumstances and turn down its message. The party effectuated changes through rewriting its ideological texts and keeping a less radical profile, presenting itself more as a right-conservative party (Coffé, 2005, p. 206). The cordon sanitaire was not the only hurdle the party was facing, there were other occasions that have led to the adjustment of its message. In 2001, the Vlaams Blok had to modify its program because according to the rules for party financing, it was not aligned with the European Treaty on Human Rights (Coffé, 2005, p. 214). The party was also brought to court on charges of violating the anti-racism law and was found to be in breach of the law by the Court of Cassation in 2004 (Coffé, 2005, p. 215). The hostile social and political environment and the court ruling forced the party to alter its message and eventually to dissolve and re-establish itself as the Vlaams Belang.

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#### 5.2.1 VLAAMS BELANG

According to Erk (2005), the court’s decision was expected by the Vlaams Blok and the party exploited the media attention to introduce its rebranded ideology. The new party, Vlaams Belang

(VB), was launched five days after the ruling and became the official heir of the Vlaams Blok (Erk, 2005, p. 493). Although less radical than its predecessor, the party kept the core nativist message and increasingly presented itself as a modern populist radical right party. In the following, the party's agenda will be briefly analysed on the basis of the established features of radical right populism.

Through its strategy and rhetoric, the Vlaams Belang exhibits most components of the radical right populist ideology. The party's unexpected initial success and sharp decline and its radical rhetoric attracted significant scholarly attention. The VB is generally associated with the dominant frames of right-wing populism identified in this paper. The party seeks to construct an identification with an 'in-group' and strengthen this link by excluding the 'out-groups'. It aims to present itself as the voice of the people, the voice of the 'silent majority'.

One of the key characteristics of radical right populist parties is the focus on the preservation of identity. According to Moufahim, Reedy and Humphreys (2015), the new party exploited the 'accepted' Flemish values that were stemming from the widely respected Flemish social movements. The VB introduced itself as an organisation fighting to protect the Flemish national identity, the Dutch language and culture and the traditional moral values of Western civilisation (Moufahim, Reedy, & Humphreys, 2015, p. 98). The Flemish nationalism is constructed through the identification of a set of enemies. The exclusion and the 'othering' strategy are basic devices of the populist right-wing ideology. The party employs a harsh rhetoric against foreigners, the political elite and the Walloons. In 2006, the party stated the following:

We live in a country where prosperity, employment and even the territory of the Flemish majority are fundamentally damaged by the political aggression of the Walloon minority, and in spite of this, there is not one single brave politician in the 'traditional' parties who will challenge the cordon, a sanction which was rejected by 1 in 4 Flemish voters. (Moufahim, Reedy, & Humphreys, 2015, p. 98).

The VB criticizes the establishment through condemning the old parties for their mismanagement and attacks the current system by stressing the corruption of the elites. The corruption is then, as Moufahim et al. (2015) argue, linked to the perceived problems stemming from immigration. In 2004, the VB stated that "those parties holding power do not want to 'disturb' their 'new electorate'. Consequently, there is a series of gross injustices, which put a category of 'citizens' above the law at the expense of others" (Moufahim, Reedy, & Humphreys, 2015, p. 98). The party presents itself and its supporters as victims of unfair treatment and discrimination against the 'newly arrived citizens'. The immigrants coming from Islamic cultures are viewed as hostile enemies and Islam is framed as

an aggressive, degraded civilization that threatens the Christian Europe (Moufahim, Reedy, & Humphreys, 2015, p. 101). By employing this narrative, the VB aims to negatively other the 'foreigners' and the political adversaries who do not discriminate them. Bhattacharya and Elsbach (2002) state that the negative representation is hoped to increase the positive identification with the party although, they find it to raise serious ethical problems. As the 'othering' process becomes a powerful rhetorical tool, it offers people a way to enhance their self-concept by longing for religious and ethnic homogeneity (Bhattacharya & Elsbach, 2002, p. 28).

Nevertheless, that it is less radical than its predecessor, it is evident that the Vlaams Belang is a far-right populist party. As the theories suggest, being a Belgian party and Belgium being a consociational democracy, the party should be in a favourable position and perform successfully in elections. The next section will analyse its election results between 2004 and 2014.

### 5.2.2 ELECTION RESULTS

During the examined ten-year period, Belgium had three federal elections. Contrary to the expectations, instead of rising, the Vlaams Belang lost a significant percentage of its electorate. After its take-off, the party started strong, gaining 24 percent of the votes on the regional elections in 2004 but the success did not last long. In 2007, the party experienced its first defeat in the federal elections however, Pauwels (2011) argues that the setback was modest compared to previous elections. In 2010, due to the fall of the federal government over linguistic debates, elections were held again which confirmed the downward spiral of the Vlaams Belang. The party's share of votes further declined, it lost over 35 percent of the votes of the previous election (Pauwels, 2011, p. 61). The elections of 2014 once again confirmed the decline of the party as it only managed to gain 3.7 percent of the votes which is a significant decrease from the 7.8 percent it received in 2010. Table 1 presents the federal election results of the VB in the examined years.

Year	Percentage of Votes	Percentage of electoral swing
2007	12%	+ 0.40%
2010	7.8%	- 4.23%
2014	3.67%	- 4.09%

**Table 1** - Election Results of Vlaams Belang 2007-2014 in Federal Parliament

*Note.* Data retrieved from "Election Results-Belgium Totals", Election Resources on the Internet (2007-2014), Source: ElectionResources.org

The outcomes of the three elections held in the studied period clearly indicate the decrease of support for the party. The several defeats of the VB came as a surprise to many and instigated numerous scholars to study the electoral failure of radical right populist parties. In many cases the reason lies in the changes and compromises these parties had to make or in the internal crises they suffered. However, it is not applicable for the Vlaams Belang. Pauwels (2011) states that over the years, the strong organizational characteristics of the party did not change much and the party stayed consistent in its forced status as the opposition. Its message was coherent, and the party leaders did not engage in concessions (Pauwels, 2011, p. 62). Furthermore, Art (2008) notes that the party has never suffered from factionalism. The party puts a strong emphasis on loyalty and only includes solid and devoted members who work for the same basic goals (Art, 2008, p. 433). Nevertheless, it is interesting, for the purpose of this paper it is irrelevant to further investigate the causes of the VB's decline.

Belgium is often mentioned as a prototype of consociationalism, it was one of the countries Lijphart observed to formulate the consociational theory. The plural society of Belgium is divided along ethno-linguistic lines which follow the previous religious cleavages. Historically, the division was based on religious differences and the pillarization of the society followed the divisions between Catholics, Socialists and Liberals. The reforms of 1970 solidified the linguistic divide on the elite level and established a structure that greatly resembles federalism. The proportionality principle of consociationalism appeared through the introduction of the alarm bell procedure to protect each language groups. As the political structure developed, the parties became obliged to cooperate with each other to keep the system running. It is beyond doubt that Belgium is consociational on all accounts until the 1990s which allows the expectation, based on the theories, that the radical right populist party will rise. The Belgian Vlaams Belang has its roots in the previously successful extreme right party, Vlams Blok, which built its campaign around the ethnic community and fought for Flemish independence. Despite the party's success, it was labelled racist and was viewed as a threat which disabled it from taking part in coalitions. The Vlaams Belang as its successor, kept the core nativist message and presented itself as a modern radical right populist party. It condemns the old parties for their mismanagement and focuses on identity preservation through the exclusion of others. Upon analysing the election results, it is clear that the support for the VB was significantly decreasing. The downward spiral, which does not originate from changes in organizational characteristics or opposition status, signals that the theories establishing correlation between consociational systems and the rise of radical right populist parties have some limitations when practically applied. In the following, contemporary Belgium will be examined in light of the components of Lijphart's consociational theory. The next chapter will analyse to what extent the

specific features that were previously linked to the success of radical right populist parties are still present in the country.

## 6. CONSOCIATIONALISM IN CONTEMPORARY BELGIUM

Consociationalism is a theory that has been created through observations with features that are constantly evolving. The previous chapter showed that up until the early 90s, Belgium has clearly exhibited most of the characteristics Lijphart (1977) described in his theory of consociationalism. The theories that link consociational systems to the rise of radical right populist parties suggest that the Vlaams Belang, Belgium's radical right populist party, should be electorally successful. However, these theories in practice show some limitations when looking at the case of Belgium because the VB is declining in the examined period. This chapter will analyse the evolution of consociationalism in Belgium in the first decade of the year 2000. It will focus on the specific consociational features that were linked to the success of radical right populist parties and their contemporary presence in the country.

Considering the performance of VB, if the analysis finds that Belgium is still consociational on the specific features, the validity of the theories that link the success of radical right populist parties to consociationalism becomes limited. The analysis will unfold in two parts: firstly, the four attributes that Lijphart delineated to represent consociationalism will be compared against the Belgian system in the examined period, the second part will concentrate on the key features deducted from the theories that claim a correlation between consociationalism and the rise of radical right populism.

### 6.1 CATEGORISATION BASED ON LIJPHART'S CONSOCIATIONAL THEORY

Although Lijphart developed his theory based on the observation of Belgium, amongst other countries in the 60s, it does not indicate that the country is still consociational or if it is to the same extent. The four essential characteristics which Lijphart (1977) described to indicate consociational systems are the presence of plural society and coalition government, the possibility of mutual veto, proportional representation, and segmental autonomy and federalism.

#### 6.1.1 PLURAL SOCIETY AND GRAND COALITION

The existence of plural societies is the fundamental building block of Lijphart's theory. Though the emphasis is now more on the linguistic divisions than on the previous religious cleavages, Belgium still seems to fulfil all the four dimensions he outlined to demonstrate the presence of high degree

of pluralism in society. There are two identifiable segments with determinable size: Wallonia and Flanders. There is an accommodation between the segmental boundaries and the boundaries between political, social and economic organisations. The executive power is shared among the representatives of the segments and coalition formation is the only way for parties to gain power. Grand coalition cabinets have often been the style of the Belgian federal government. Prior to the 2007 elections, the purple coalition of the Verhofstadt II Government comprised of Flemish and Francophone liberals, the Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten (VLD), Mouvement Réformateur (MR) as well as socialist parties Sociakistische Partij Anders (Sp.a), Parti Socialiste (PS) (Pilet & Haute, 2008, p. 547). Given the heterogeneous character of the country, it is evident that Belgium can only be governed through coalitions. The cabinets through the examined period, with the exception of 2014, have been composed of both liberal and socialist parties from the two regions as displayed in table 2.

Year	Coalition Members			Political Affiliation
	<u>Center</u>	<u>Center-Right</u>	<u>Center-Left</u>	
2007	CD&V	Open VLD, N-VA, MR, FDF,	CDH	Center-right
2010	CD&V,	Open VLD, MR	Sp.a, PS, CDH	Center
2014	CD&V,	Open VLD, MR, N-VA		Center-right

**Table 2** - Composition of the Federal Cabinet over time.

*(French-speaking parties are written in green)*

*Note.* Data retrieved from "Belgium Forms Coalition Government Ending Standoff", Castle, S. (2008). New York Times  
 "Belgium to have new government after world record 541 days" Waterfield, B. (2011). The Telegraph  
 "Belgium's 'kamikaze coalition' to be sworn in 138 days after elections", Cendrowicz, L. (2014). The Guardian

The three self-governing regions of Belgium (Wallonia, Flanders and Brussels-Capital Region) all have their own legislative and executive branches; their own parliament and government. The parliaments can issue decrees or ordinances which have the same force of law as the federal laws for the whole country. The federal law does not have primacy over the regional decrees and ordinances and if the two comes into conflict, the Constitutional Court decides. Furthermore, the regions have their own social and economic organisations. The regional governments have their own ministries for administration and budget to provide the necessary financial resources (European Commission, 2019). The functional decentralization of Belgium corresponds to neo-corporatism



which is an essential attribute of consociational societies (Van Wynsberghe, 2011, p. 8). Table 3 shows the structure of the Belgian political institutions.

<b>Federal Level</b>	Monarchy, Federal Parliament, Federal Government				
<b>Regional Level</b>	Walloon Region		Brussels Capital Region		Flemish Region
	Parliament, Government		Parliament, Government		Parliament, Government
<b>Community Level</b>	German speaking community	French speaking community	Joint Communal Commission		Dutch speaking community
			French Communal Commission	Dutch Communal Commission	
	Parliament of German speaking Community	Parliament of French Community			

**Table 3** Structure of the Belgian Political Institutions

Adams (2014), referring to Stephen Holmes, states that federal politicians are primarily representatives of their respective regions, resulting in the effect that the political elite do not necessarily have a 'Belgian identity' and mindset (Adams, 2014, p. 294). The lack of 'common identity' is a contributing factor to the high fragmentation of the Belgian part system. This structure further enforces the plurality of the Belgian society.

#### 6.1.2 MUTUAL VETO

The mutual veto instrument is the second characteristic that Lijphart attributed to consociationalism. It is a negative minority rule that ensures the minority's political protection. According to Lijphart's concept (1977), it does not necessarily have to be a formal, written rule but can also be manifested as a customary law.

Modern-day Belgium, as Sinardet (2010) notes, have three protection mechanisms to safeguard the security of the minority (based on the linguistic divisions): two on the legislative level and one on the executive level. Probably the most important, and the one that is most often considered to be a de facto veto right, is the 'alarm bell procedure'. Although since its introduction in the 1970s it has only

been used twice, it is still an important feature of Belgian politics (Sinardet, 2010, p. 354). The essence of the alarm bell procedure has not changed; it can be invoked if one of the communities considers a bill to infringe its rights. Three-quarters of lawmakers from the language group have to sign up to the motion which will suspend the parliamentary procedure giving thirty days for the Council of Ministers to consider the issue, reach consensus and amend, if necessary. The alarm bell instrument is subject to significant controversy regarding its implication, as there is no clear notion if it is a reconciliation procedure or a veto right. Sinardet (2010) points out that, although the procedure can continue after the thirty-day freeze, it is unlikely and politically unrealistic that it will result in adoption. He explains that if the Council of Ministers is in disagreement on an alarm bell matter, the government majority has a very low chance at survival and the proposal will not get voted and will be sent back to the negotiating stage when the next government is formed (Sinardet, 2010, p. 354).

Furthermore, Sinardet argues that the procedure is most often considered as a 'dissuasion mechanism' because, as it threatens its existence, any government will aim to avoid its usage (Sinardet, 2010). It is there to ensure that it will not be used and deter the groups from potentially abusing their position. Regardless of the controversy surrounding its practical implications, it is clear that the alarm bell procedure is a strong consociational feature. Deschouwer (2006) notes that it does not only ensure the protection of the Francophone minority but also protects the Flemish majority because if all Francophone members and a few Flemish members vote in favour of a proposal, it would be adopted (Deschouwer, 2006, p. 902). The alarm bell procedure entails that at least quarter of the members of the language group has to be convinced to not have the proposal outvoted. The resolution is to be achieved through negotiation and not by simple majority. This notion implies what Lijhart termed as a deviation from the principle because the demographic minority reaches a status equal to the majority group.

From the two precedents of the actual usage of the alarm bell procedure, the second is of crucial importance for this paper in regard to the lingering questions around the consensus nature of the country. It is connected to the crisis of the Brussels-Capital Region (Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde 'BHV') area. The BHV crisis meant a rupture to the consociational political tradition in Belgium because the Flemish openly followed and pushed for a majoritarian logic. The debate signals the limitations of the consensus system in contemporary Belgium. The concern of the BHV region was a crucial topic during the long and difficult process of government formation in 2007, when the country was without government for 194 days. As described by Vogl and Hüning (2010):

BHV is an electoral district which consists of the municipalities of bilingual Brussels and of the eastern half of the Dutch-speaking province of Flemish Brabant. The existence of BHV allows French-speaking voters living in the Flemish province of Brabant to vote for candidates of French-speaking parties, something which is not possible in the rest of the Flemish Region. (Vogl & Hüning, 2010, p. 241).

The Flemish aimed to split the region in two and unite the Flemish Brabant province into one electoral district. The split would result in the Francophone voters living in Brabant losing their right to vote for French-speaking parties. Vogl and Hüning (2010) note that the Flemish politicians argue for these measures on the basis of the emancipation of the Dutch language. 'Mixed regions' supposedly attract Francophones and help the spread of French in Flanders which could result in Dutch becoming a second-class language. Besides, others see it as a necessary action to maintain linguistic homogeneity (Vogl & Hüning, 2010, p. 241).

The debate contained several elements that contradict and deny the consociational character of the Belgian system. Sinardet (2010) explains that the issue came to the fore first in 2003 when Flemish majors announced to boycott the European elections if the BHV area was not split. Relying on a misinterpreted ruling from the Constitutional Court, the mayors argued that splitting the area is solely the implementation of the judicial decision and emphasized that it should not be the subject of compromise with Francophone parties. The Flemish media and the new leader of the Christian-Democratic and Flemish (CD&V) party further enhanced this view and the majoritarian logic played out even more when the CD&V and the New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) called for a unilateral vote instead of signing a declaration. The CD&V-N-VA won the regional elections and stated that federal MPs will submit a proposal of the split. As they could not reach an agreement, the issue was put on hold and returned again in 2007. CD&V-N-VA pointed to the split as a condition for government participation and the formation gained the highest percentage of votes. Among growing tension, the proposal was put to vote in the Chamber Commission and collectively blocked by the French speaking-parties. The Flemish voted for the bill and the Francophone politicians collectively left the room resulting in a political crisis that left the country without government. The CD&V-N-VA managed to legitimize their government participation, but the French parties were expected to introduce a procedure to delay the BHV negotiation which they decided not to. They could not reach a solution and slowly it became clear that the CD&V had lost control over the majoritarian action in place. Sinardet (2010) recalls that statements before the voting showed that the unanimous Flemish vote held different approaches as CD&V stated to prefer a negotiated agreement. It was the first

precedent for a vote almost unanimously dividing the Flemish and the Francophones (Sinardet, 2010, p. 358). Belgium was in a crisis and political deadlock for 192 days without a federal government. This incident signals that the Belgian system still has deep roots in consociationalism. Even though the majoritarian logic can find its way, it cannot lead to solutions.

The other protection mechanism that Sinardet (2010) mentions on the legislative level is the special majority practice. It contains that in certain specific cases, related to the execution of constitutional principles in regard to institutional matters, an overall two-thirds majority and a double majority in both language groups are required (Sinardet, 2010, p. 354). This practice evidently signals the consociational way of decision-making through consensus between the parties.

On the executive level, he points to the linguistic parity of the Belgian cabinet. In accordance with the Constitution, many decisions coming from the government have to be deliberated in the Council of Ministers. Sinardet (2010) also takes into account the unwritten practice that decisions in the Council of Ministers are taken by consensus rather than by majority. It means that communities can exercise their veto right which is an additional protection following the consociational logic. Given the dominance of the executive over the legislative in Belgium, the significance of this practice is further enhanced. It is notable that the votes in the parliament are frequently the result of government consensus and as the government is dominated by majority political parties; there is no way the majoritarian concept could work (Sinardet, 2010, p. 354).

The minority protection mechanisms of contemporary Belgium clearly show the country's strong consociational nature on this account. The above detailed elements make it impossible for the majoritarian concept to work and enforce the obligation of decision-making by consensus.

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#### 6.1.3 PROPORTIONALITY

Lijphart's third feature is the principle of proportional representation, which is necessary to eliminate the majority-minority confrontation. It concerns the allocation of civil service appointments and the distribution of resources and government subsidies between the segments. Riedwyl and Steiner (1995) note that although, in political debates the concept of proportionality is assumed to be concrete, its exact definition is rarely discussed in political science (Riedwyl & Steiner, 1995, p. 357). Lijphart (1994) defined disproportionality as "the deviation of seat shares from vote shares" (Lijphart, 1994, p. 58). Therefore, in order to assess the proportionality of the Belgian electoral system, one has to look at the seats change in relation to the percentage of votes. The

changes in the percentages and seats are demonstrated in table 4 based on the election results from 2007 to 2014.

	CD&V	PS	Open Vld	VB	Sp.a	N-VA
2007	18.51%	10.88%	11.83%	11.99%	10.26%	Electoral coalition with CD&V
	30 seats	20 seats	18 seats	17 seats	14 seats	
2010	10.85%	13.7%	8.64%	7.76%	9.24%	17.4%
	17 seats	26 seats	13 seats	12 seats	13 seats	27 seats
2014	11.61%	11.67%	9.78%	3.67%	8.83%	20.26%
	18 seats	23 seats	14 seats	3 seats	13 seats	33 seats

**Table 4** Election Results of the main parties between 2007-2014

Note. Data retrieved from "Federal Elections", Belgique Portal Fédéral 2007-2014, Source: elections2007.belgium.be

The outcomes of the federal elections in the examined period well illustrate the high level of proportionality in Belgium. According to Bouhon (2017), proportional representation has always been a prominent feature of the Belgian political system. He states that it is one of the most notable aspects of electoral law and Belgium was the first to introduce such system worldwide (Bouhon, 2017, p. 2).

#### 6.1.4 SEGMENTAL AUTONOMY AND FEDERALISM

The last element is the segmental autonomy and federalism. Lijphart describes that the federal and consociational theory correspond in a number of points and complement each other. In his concept, it is a strategy to contain conflict as each segment gets exclusive rights to decide in questions that solely concern them. In the federal chamber, smaller constituent parts are overrepresented which also connects to the principle of proportionality.

The current federal state of Belgium was not an intentional process. Originally, limited self-autonomy was granted to contain the conflicts and endeavours for separation. As Caluwaerts (2011) notes, the Belgian system heavily depends on federalization to defuse clashes (Caluwaerts, 2011). The state structure became increasingly more complex as power was decentralized and further shared. Van Wynsberghe (2011) explains that there is no normative hierarchy between federal laws and federated decrees. They all have to abide by the Constitution, but in a potential conflict, there is no priority given. Each entity has their own prerogatives and exclusive power in the area of competence (Van Wynsberghe, 2011, p. 9).

The federal nature of the country is beyond doubt, however, the effect of this system on conflict management is gradually more questionable. It is generally considered successful but little research has been done on its long-term effect (Cameron, 2009, p. 310). In Lijphart's view (1977), self-rule is meant to recognize and turn the segments into building blocks of a stable democratic society (Lijphart, 1977, p. 42) but Caluwaerts (2011), considering the recent crisis of the Belgian system, points out its counterproductive effect. Decentralization also opens up a way to a self-reinforcing spiral of demands for self-determination and sovereignty. As federalism entrenches and institutionalizes the divisions, the emphasis on political conflicts and differences becomes an effective strategy to gain support (Caluwaerts, 2011, p. 5). The recent far-right separatist surges clearly signal the potential downside of granting autonomy. It is nevertheless evident that the federal aspect of the consociational theory is still reflected in contemporary Belgium.

On the basis of Lijphart's consociational theory, it can be concluded that Belgium today still exhibits the main attributes. As a result, Belgium is viewed as a consensual system.

## 6.2 FEATURES THAT ENHANCE THE RISE OF RADICAL RIGHT POPULIST PARTIES

In the following section, a detailed account will be given on the features that link consociational systems to the rise of radical right populist parties. It is established that, although consociationalism has gradually evolved in Belgium, its main characteristics are still very much present. Belgium is to be considered a consociational country which, according to the theories discussed in chapter 4, entails the rise of radical right populism. There are four key features deducted from the theories that will be examined namely, the question of accountability, cartelization, consequences of grand coalition cabinets and the federal dimension.

### 6.2.1 QUESTIONABLE ACCOUNTABILITY

Andeweg (2001) has brought attention to the system's weakness on accountability originating from the gap between the rulers and the ruled which could lead to the rise of anti-system parties. Political accountability is a complex phenomenon and it entails that actors have the right to hold other actors accountable for their responsibilities based on set standards. Several scholars highlighted its problematic nature in consensus systems as there is not always a direct link between outcome and initiative. Furthermore, there is no direct actor to hold accountable because the consequent policies are the result of bargaining and compromise. Looking at Belgium in the examined period, the subject of accountability comes very much to the fore. When a system's accountability is questionable, parties that oppose the established system will inevitably become more attractive to the masses.

Downs (1999) notes that according to an opinion survey published in the Brussels daily *Le Soir*, Belgian voters increasingly find voting too complex and the line of responsibility and accountability blurry. In contrast to traditional federations, regional political posts are viewed much higher than national ones. The federal structure of Belgium brought excessive complexity for the electorate. Downs (1999) points out that, although localizing elections is thought to make politicians more reliable and consistent, the remoteness of the political system often increases with the number of government forums (Downs, 1999, p. 109).

Capitalizing on the accountability problem, the radical right Vlaams Belang has been opposing the establishment. The traditional parties were criticized for their mismanagement and corruption. Despite the issue being present, it did not lead to a rise in the support for the far-right party. The potential reason is that the deep societal divisions and the regions' extensive prerogatives provide a line of accountability in the matters that are daily concerns to most. Downs (1999) argue that the Belgian consociational federal system offers multiple point for popular access and enhances public visibility over subnational issues. The institutional structure makes policies more flexible and diverse as they are customized to address regional problems. If demands are neglected at one level, they can be taken to another government in the system (Downs, 1999, p. 96). The exclusive powers of the regions include infrastructure, public housing, scientific research and external relations in all matters entrusted to the regions. Some other important powers such as external trade, taxation and economic policy are shared. Competences such as culture and education, person-related matters such as health policy and social welfare belong under the powers of the communities (European Committee of the Regions, 2019, p. 9). Most competences that concern the citizens daily life are among the powers of regional or community level entities making it more accessible and visible to the public. Downs (1999) mentions that federal systems are thought to promote democratic accountability through their institutional design. The legal embodiment of federalism changes the country's internal power relations and produces accountable representative governments. Accountability is secured through multiplied point for access and pressure (Downs, 1999, p. 94).

Moreover, a database on European public accountability mechanism, EuroPam, finds that Belgium has higher number of regulations on public procurement, public financing and freedom of information than the EU average, making the accountability line clearer (EuroPAM, 2017). According to the Sustainable Governance Indicators, Belgium receives a high score on executive accountability as well. The country has strong structural legislative-oversight powers and parties and individual MPs have access to significant resources. Trade unions and employers' organizations are well organised and work closely with the government and non-economic interest groups can also have considerable

influence on policy (SGI, 2018). In the Belgian structure, the division of power gives each individual and the community a measurable degree of control over decision-makers which contributes directly to democratic accountability. As Downs (1999) argues “the unemployed laborer in francophone Wallonia presumably senses a greater amount of control over public authority in federal Belgium thanks to institutions and rules that guard against Flemish dominance and exploitation in a system where Dutch-speakers previously have owned a virtual lock on the country's premiership” (Downs, 1999, p. 95).

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#### 6.2.2 CARTELIZATION AND COMPLEXITY

Cartelization in consensus systems concerns political parties turning into partnerships of professionals who no longer facilitate the communication between the state and the society and cease to make demands on behalf of the citizenry. This potential aspect of consociationalism closely relates to the accountability problem because in consociational systems, no major party can be left out and it leads to the decrease of fear of “being thrown out of office” which is a crucial incentive to be responsive to the citizens.

The Belgian parties are in a quite peculiar position in this respect. This aspect of consociationalism does not prevail because as Deschouwer (2006) argues, “there are no political elites accountable to the Belgian population” (Deschouwer, 2006, p. 908). The parties are so divided along the linguistic borders, the cartelization does not seem to be a reasonable possibility. Although some actors have to bridge the gap at the elite level, it does not induce a broader professional partnership because the society, the parties and the institutions are very neatly split. Van Haute and Wauters (2019) examined whether the recent societal changes have influenced the consociational nature of the Belgian parties. On the basis of three features, political mobilization, hierarchical party control of the subculture and organizational penetration, the research found that despite the deep changes, the fundamental attributes of pillar parties and their structure did not go under major transformation (Van Haute & Wauters, 2019, p. 8).

The argument based on decreased accountability also entails that charismatic leaders who oppose the established system will rise and politics will become more personalized providing a fertile ground for populism. During the examined period, Filip Dewinter could be considered as a prominent influential character but because of the language divisions, his weight is significantly lessened. Dewinter was the group chairman of Vlaams Belang between 1992 and 2013 and gained noteworthy



attention from the media over his outspoken anti-Islam agenda. His character soon became well known in Flanders but did not break through the linguistic divide.

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#### 6.2.3 FEDERALISM AND THE EFFECT OF GRAND COALITIONS

Federalism is a crucial component in the consociational theory, but this dimension is often overlooked in studies on the rise of populism. Nevertheless, there is strong statistical evidence suggesting that federal systems tend to be efficient breeding grounds for populism. Scholars trace it back to the complexity of the government system. Although the Belgian system is undoubtedly highly complex, it did not lead to the rise of populism in the examined period. Due the emergence of ethno-regionalist parties, the party system is overly fragmented in Belgium. Though, consensus system in theory facilitates the success of radical right populist parties, the emergence of a center-right party has the potential to attract the electorate who would normally vote for the radical right populist parties. In practice, the N-VA undermined the potential success of the radical right VB. The center-right party is socially more acceptable and has higher possibility to form a coalition. Parties on the edges of the political spectrum are generally in a disadvantageous position when it comes to coalition formation. As the result of the high fragmentation and the consociational nature of the country, wide support for the radical right populist parties is further prevented by making it impossible for a party to govern alone.

The federal structure also entails coalition cabinets and the fundamental attribute of consensus democracies is the grand coalition government. In the process of forming coalitions, parties tend to converge on the middle leaving an open space for underrepresented participants. It is contended that anti-establishment populist parties will take advantage of the gap and will be on the rise. Another argument is that the coalition parties are seen as an undifferentiated political class which will prompt the electorate to vote for a party that has an identity which clearly differentiates it. In the case of Belgium, the left is generally stronger in Wallonia while Flanders is dominated by right-wing political actors. The cabinets in the examined period were overwhelmingly center-right. Between 2007 and 2010, three government coalitions were formed with the leadership of CD&V. 2007 was an exceptionally difficult year in Belgian politics because this was the year when it became clear that Belgium is made up of two very different political landscapes. Pilet and van Haute (2008) point out that the elections indicated a slight move to the right in the electorate. The N-VA, the only party on the right of the political spectrum, withdrew from the CD&V-N-VA coalition in 2008 following the gridlock on the constitutional reform. This event demonstrates that parties do not

necessarily agree on compromises that could undermine their original orientation. The fact that the N-VA stayed a rather right than center-right party is probably to be responsible for the declining support for VB. N-VA successfully tapped into the open space left out by centrist parties providing a rightist, but less radical than VB, approach. It is also notable that the N-VA was seen as a potential coalition partner which further enhanced its appeal. In 2007, the cabinet coalition was clearly center-right as the Francophone Centre Démocrate Humaniste (CDH) was the sole center-left member in it (Pilet & Haute, 2008).

After the withdrawal of Open VLD from the coalition, Belgium had to hold early elections in 2010. N-VA and PS came out as the two winners consequently further supporting the divergent trend in the political landscape. As Abts, Poznyak and Swyngedouw (2012) argue, beside CD&V, VB was the biggest victim of the N-VA success. The political priorities of the regions were clearly drifting in contradictory directions which is well illustrated in the historic political crisis that followed the elections. Nevertheless, the center-right was in decline and the extreme right parties were defeated in both regions. The new government that was finally established was made up of three center-left (Sp.a, PS, CDH) two center-right (Open VLD, MR) and one centrist party (CD&V). The parties had to converge towards more centrist position to find the compromise but once again, the N-VA's success meant decline for the VB. The electorate in Flanders rather favoured a distinguishably rightist party but less radical than VB. The VB suffered 4.2% decline in votes and lost 5 seats (Abts, Poznyak, & Swyngedouw, 2012).

The next federal election on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May 2014 saw the N-VA as clear winner. André and Depauw (2015) highlight that the party again achieved to unite right-wing voters who previously supported VB. The Vlaams Belang experienced its worst result since 1987, losing half of its electoral support. The cordon sanitaire against the party left many of its followers displeased as the party had little chance to influence the government formation. In 2010, 6.7% joined the ranks of the N-VA and another 4.1% in 2014. The defeat of the radical right populist party is the reason why the N-VA increased its share, while all Flemish parties in government managed to expand their electoral support as well (André & Depauw, 2015). Reversely to the traditions, the federal coalition became largely influenced by regional coalitions. The result was a center-right cabinet including the N-VA, CD&V, Open VLD and MR. The significant losses of VB indicate that convergence and compromise do not necessarily provide an incentive for the electorate to vote for a radical right party if there is a socially more acceptable alternative. The fact that the N-VA was so successful to tap into the open space with a less radical program than the VB clearly led to the decline of the radical right populist

party. It also shows that even in the event of convergence between major parties, the electorate does not necessarily favour a far-right party.

Following the evolution of consociationalism in Belgium on the basis of Lijphart's theory, it can be concluded that contemporary Belgium is still a consociational democracy. The four dimensions that indicate plural society are fulfilled, the segments are clearly defined and there is an accommodation between segmental boundaries. The three self-governing regions have their own legislative and executive branches and the federal law does not have precedence over regional decrees and ordinances. The coalition principle is present as there is no other way to govern the country given its heterogeneous character. Belgium has three protection mechanisms in place to safeguard the minority's rights. The alarm bell procedure, the special majority practice and consensual decision-making process in the Council of Ministers further enhance the consociational nature of the country. Analysing the seat and the vote shares, the proportional representation is also evident. The last element refers to segmental autonomy and the current federal state of Belgium satisfies this condition. Considering the features that facilitate the rise of radical right populist parties, the accountability problem is present but because of the pillarization and regions' extensive prerogatives, it is not widespread. There are clear accountability lines in matters that are direct concern to most citizens. Similarly, the deep divisions between the two linguistic groups prevent cartelization and even if the elite has to bridge the gap occasionally, it does not induce broader professional partnerships. The convergence towards centrist position to form coalition exists but parties do not compromise if it undermines their original orientation. The emergence of a center-right party has the capability to undermine the potential success of the far-right populist parties. It is clear that contemporary Belgium is still consociational but as expected, looking at the decline of the VB, the features that are argued to facilitate the rise of radical right parties are absent or not extensive enough. This finding demonstrates that the theories presenting a correlation between consociational systems and the rise of radical right populist parties have some limitations. In the following, a conclusive section will explain the main results and provide the answer to the research question.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Considering the recent arguments on the correlation between consensus systems and the rise of radical right populist parties, this study examined whether the theories have a potential limitation through the case study of Belgium. Following the consecutive decline of the radical right populist party (VB) in the country, the paper sought to determine if contemporary Belgium can still be considered as a consociational democracy to shed light on the validity of the theories. Upon analysing the four features Arend Lijphart outlined in his consociational theory, it is evident that Belgium is still consociational because all aspects are present in the country as table 5 shows.

Consociational Features	Presence in Contemporary Belgium	
Plural Society and Grand Coalition	+	Wallonia & Flanders, Coalition Cabinets
Mutual Veto Instrument	+	Alarm Bell, Special Majority Practice, Linguistic Parity
Proportionality	+	Proportional Electoral System
Segmental Autonomy/Federation	+	Federal State

**Table 5** Consociational features and their presence in Belgium.

This finding indicates that the consociational elements are not necessarily facilitating the rise of radical right populist parties and other features and structural attributes should be taken into account. On the basis of the case study, the paper identified certain factors which could be accountable for the decline of the radical right populist party in a consensus system. Firstly, the emergence of a moderate/center-right party negatively influences the success of the radical right party because it offers a more viable alternative for coalition formation. Since coalition cabinets are the only way to govern in consensus systems, negotiations and bargaining are inevitable parts of the political life. Radical right populist parties are limited in their potential to negotiate and find compromise because it can easily undermine their essential programme. The electorate is discouraged from voting for parties that are unlikely to be in governing position. If a less radical but right-wing party appears, as N-VA in the case of Belgium, it is in a great position to take over the space the radical right populists seek to fill in. Populist parties are also in a disadvantageous situation because populism is an appeal to the people against the established structure and dominant ideas and in consociational systems the populist parties have no choice but to cooperate and stay inside this very structure to be in governing positions.

Addressing the specific elements of the theories that claim a correlation between the rise of radical right populist parties and consociational systems, the case of Belgium offers considerable aspects. Regarding the questionable accountability, Belgium shows that in federal systems where each segment has extensive autonomy to decide in matters of its exclusive concern, the accountability line is arguably clearer as the matters that concerns the citizens' daily life are often regional/communal competences. The Belgian federal structure offers multiple access points for citizens which enhances the public visibility of the decision-making process. Furthermore, the deep linguistic division hinders the close cooperation between politicians and thus avoids the problem of cartelization while also makes it harder for charismatic populist leaders to reach wider audiences.

To conclude, as the Belgian example shows, the consociational arrangement does not always support the rise of radical right populist parties. This finding can have important implications regarding whether the consociational structure is to be recommended for divided societies in the future. This is especially relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in the era of polarization. The consociational theory is the only concept so far that offers viable, confirmed solution for states with deeply divided, potentially hostile societies to stabilize and maintain democratic political system. If one accepts that consociationalism facilitates the rise of radical right populist parties, who essentially signal the malfunctioning of representative democracy, it becomes debatable whether the arrangement should be recommended and applied in divided societies with the aim of achieving stable democracy. If the power-sharing structure will eventually bring about the triumph of ideas that condemn and are against the establishment, its potential to bridge the divisions through elite cooperation is deemed to failure. This study reveals that the notion that consociational systems generally support the rise of radical right populist ideas has to be reconsidered. Although theoretically convincing, the theories claiming a correlation between the two shall consider the counter-example and look at other aspects of the decision-making process and government structure that could be accounted for the success of radical right populist parties.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1. STUDENT ETHICS FORM

European Studies Student Ethics Form

Your name:

Supervisor:

**Instructions:**

Before completing this form you should read the APA Ethics Code (<http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/index.aspx>). If you are planning research with human subjects, you should also look at the sample consent form available in the Final Project and Dissertation Guide.

- a. Read section 2 that your supervisor will have to sign. Make sure that you cover all these issues in section 1.
- b. Complete section 1 and, if you are using human subjects, section 2, of this form, and sign it.
- c. Ask your project supervisor to read these sections (and the draft consent form if you have one) and ask him/her to sign the form.
- d. Always append this signed form as an appendix to your dissertation. This is a knock-out criterium; if not included the Final Project/Dissertation is awarded an NVD.

**Section 1. Project Outline (to be completed by student)**

(i) Title of Project:

(ii) Aims of project:

(iii) Will you involve other people in your project – e.g. via formal or informal interviews, group discussions, questionnaires, internet surveys etc. (Note: if you are using data that has already been collected by another researcher – e.g. recordings or transcripts of conversations given to you by your supervisor, you should answer 'NO' to this question.)

If yes: you should complete the section 2 of this form.

If no: you should now sign the statement below and return the form to your supervisor. You have completed this form.

This project is not designed to include research with human subjects . I understand that I do not have ethical clearance to interview people (formally or informally) about the topic of my research, to carry out internet research (e.g. on chat rooms or discussion boards) or in any other way to use people as subjects in my research.

Student's signature 

Date 12<sup>th</sup> November 2019