

BELGIUM

Date of Elections: 8 November 1981

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held following the premature dissolution of Parliament on 5 October 1981. General elections had previously taken place in December 1978.

Characteristics of Parliament

The bicameral Parliament of Belgium consists of the Chamber of Representatives and the Senate.

The Chamber of Representatives is composed of 212 members elected for 4 years.

The Senate has 181 members, all of whom have 4-year terms; of these, 106 are directly elected, 50 are elected by the provincial councils (in the proportion of one for every 200,000 people) and 25 are co-opted by the remaining Senators. The King's sons or, if he has no sons, Princes of the Belgian Royal Family who are successors to the throne for their part become *ex-officio* Senators at the age of 18.

Electoral System

All Belgian citizens at least 18 years of age* who have resided for at least six months in the same community have the right to vote. Criminals are deprived of this right, while the rights of certain categories of persons, such as the insane and prisoners, are suspended as long as these remain in an incapacitated state.

Electoral registers are continually kept up to date in each district. Since voting is compulsory any unjustified abstention is punishable, penalties ranging from a fine to removal from the register. Proxy and postal voting are permitted for certain electors.

Any qualified elector at least 25 years old who resides in Belgium and is in full possession of his civil and political rights may be a candidate for the Chamber of Representatives. Candidates for the Senate must meet the same aforesaid requirements but be at least 40 years of age; popularly-elected Senators must furthermore belong to one of certain categories, among which former Minister or member of Parliament, holder of a university degree, high-ranking civil servant or retired military officer, owner of a large industrial concern and present or former Governor, member of a provincial council or Burgomaster.

Except for Ministers, no member of Parliament can simultaneously be designated by the Government to undertake a salaried function. Senators elected by provincial councils cannot belong to the assemblies which have elected them.

* See section *Parliamentary Developments*, p. 9.

Nomination of candidates for the Chamber of Representatives must be supported by 200 to 500 electors (depending on the size of the constituency), or three retiring members of Parliament, and be made between 23 and 22 days before the election; required support for popularly-chosen Senators is 100 electors, or three retiring members of Parliament. Nomination of indirectly-elected Senators must be made at the latest six days prior to polling day and be supported by at least five provincial councillors, and, for co-opted Senators, five days in advance, supported by at least 10 Senators.

Belgium is divided into 30 constituencies for Chamber of Representatives elections and into 20 for direct Senate elections. Voting takes place according to the party-list system, in a single ballot, with proportional representation in accordance with the d'Hondt method; remainders are distributed within each of the nine provinces. Vote-splitting is not provided for, but preferential voting is possible, as the elector may cast a nominal vote for the main candidate and for the substitute candidate of the list for which he is voting. Each individual candidate is regarded as constituting a separate list. Moreover, with the consent of the electors who sponsored them, candidates of a particular list may ally themselves with candidates nominally designated on lists submitted in other constituencies of the same province.

Substitute members who are chosen at the same time as popularly-elected members fill parliamentary seats which become vacant between general elections.

General Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

On 21 September 1981, the Government of Prime Minister Mark Eyskens (Social Christian Party) resigned and the November election date was set a week later; the legislative poll was thus scheduled more than a year before it was normally due.

Underlying causes of this premature dissolution were primarily the country's continuing economic problems (highlighted by a spiralling unemployment rate) and inter-community tensions.

Chief rivals of the Social Christians were once again the Socialist and Liberal parties, each of these with Flemish and Walloon sections. A total of 816 candidates appearing on 24 different lists were alone in the running for the 34 Brussels seats. In accordance with July 1981 constitutional amendments, 18-year-olds were eligible to vote for the first time.

On polling day, the centre Social Christians incurred considerable losses which were picked up especially by the Liberals and the Flemish *Volksunie*. No one party emerged as clear winner, as the Flemish and French-speaking Socialists won 61 Representatives seats, the same number as the Social Christians. The Liberals captured 52 seats. Overall results thus evidenced a further polarization of politics along regional and linguistic lines. Formation of a new Government took several weeks. On 14 December, it was announced that the Flemish and French-speaking Social Christian and Liberal parties had agreed to form a centre-right coalition, these groups together holding 113 of the 212 Representatives' seats. Prime Minister Wilfried Martens, a Flemish Social Christian, named his Cabinet on 17 December.

1. Results of the Elections and Distribution
of Seats in the Chamber of Representatives

Number of registered electors	6,878,141
Valid votes	5,919,250

Political Group	Votes obtained	%	Number of Seats
Christian Social Party			
– Flemish (CVP)	1,165,239	19.69	43 (– 14)
– Walloon (PSC)	398,342	6.73	18 (– 7)
Socialist Party			
– Walloon (PS)	742,898	12.55	35 (+ 3)
– Flemish (SP)	744,582	12.58	26 (=)
Liberal Party			
– Flemish (Freedom and Progress Party – PVV)	776,104	13.11	28 (+ 6)
– Walloon (<i>Parti Réformateur Libéral</i> – PRL)	487,337	8.23	24 (+ 9)
<i>Volksunie</i>	587,545	9.93	20 (+ 6)
<i>Front Démocratique des Francophones (FDF)/ Rassemblement Wallon (RW)</i>	247,637	4.18	8 (– 7)
Ecologists	259,254	4.48	4 (+ 4)
<i>Union démocratique pour le respect du travail (RAD-UDRT)</i>	160,819	2.72	3 (+ 2)
Belgian Communist Party	136,445	2.31	2 (– 2)
<i>Vlaams Blok</i>	66,426	1.12	1 (=)
Others	146,522	2.47	—
			212

2. Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats
in the Senate

Number of registered electors	6,878,141
Voters	6,502,428 (94.53%)
Valid votes	5,984,857

Political Group	Votes obtained	%	Number of directly- elected Senators	Number of Senators elected by Provin- cial Councils	Number of co-opted Senators	Total Number of Seats in Senate	Number of Seats held at Dissolu- tion	Number of Seats won at Previous Elec- tion
Christian Social Party								
C.V.P.	1,149,346	19.26	22	12	6	40	} 56	} 73
P.S.C.	414,738	6.92	8	6	2	16		
Socialist Party								
S.P.	732,136	12.83	13	5	3	21	} 52	} 53
P.S.*	755,510	12.62	18	9	4	31		
Liberal Party								
P.V.V.	780,429	13.04	14	6	3	23	} 43	} 27
P.R.L.	513,104	8.59	11	6	3	20		
<i>Volksunie</i>	576,079	9.79	10	5	2	17	11	
F.D.F.-R.W. . . .	253,673	4.27	4	1	1	6	15	
Ecologists	295,663	4.93	4	-	1	5	-	
U.D.R.T.- R.A.D.	164,130	2.74	1	-	-	1	-	
Communist Party	140,638	2.34	1	-	-	1	2	
Other lists	137,769	2.30	-	-	-	-	-	
			106	50	25	181	181	

* Including two R.P.W. members (1 provincial, 1 co-opted).

3. *Distribution of Senators according to Professional Category*

Teachers	38
Salaried clerks	27
Businessmen	26
Members of the legal profession	25
Social workers	13
Political party and trade union officials	7
Engineers and architects	7
Journalists	5
Doctors	5
Retired civil servants	4
Insurers	4
Farmers	3
Notaries	2
Manual workers	1
Others	6
No profession	8
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4. *Distribution of Members of Parliament according to Sex*

	Senate	Chamber of Representatives
Men	160	200
Women	21	12
	181	212

5. *Distribution of Members of Parliament according to Age Group*

	Senate	Chamber of Representatives
27-35 years	—	24
35-40	—	22
40-45	} 37	37
45-50		39
50-55	} 118	42
55-60		34
60-70	26	12
Over 70	—	2
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