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February 14, 2024

Belgium, the War and the Vote

Belgian Europeans Head to the Ballot Box
as Ukrainians Fight for Freedom:
How Will the War Shape their Vote?

Isabell Hoffmann & Catherine E. de Vries

Belgian residents, their political party preferences and attitudes towards key Ukraine policies

In February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion into Ukraine, profoundly altering EU policies and politics. The European Union and its member states have staunchly supported Ukraine in its defence.

The Belgian government, a seven-party coalition drawn from the centre-right and centre-left – has been vocal supporter of Ukraine and critical of Russia, closely following policies adopted by the European Union and NATO – organisations both headquartered Belgium. Material aid for Ukraine has been modest, proportionally similar to that from France and Italy and well below that of Germany and the Netherlands. Dissent has come from non-centrist parties that pose major threats to those in government at a federal election to be held on the same day as voting for the EU parliament. The strongest opposition is on the right in Flanders and left in Wallonia.

Against the backdrop of the upcoming European parliamentary elections, this report focuses on the correlation in Belgium between individuals' political party preferences and their stance on seven key Ukraine-related policy issues:

1. *Does the European Union need a common defence policy?*
2. *Should the EU support Ukraine by delivering weapons?*

3. *Should your country accept refugees from Ukraine?*
4. *Should the EU accept Ukraine as a member state in the coming years?*
5. *Should the EU become more energy independent of Russia even if that means prices are rising even further?*
6. *Do you think economic and financial sanctions on Russia are effective or ineffective?*
7. *Do you think the reconstruction of Ukraine will be an economic opportunity or an economic burden for the EU?*

For each question, we present the general distribution in Belgium, followed by a breakdown based on political party preferences. These insights are based on a survey conducted in December 2023, encompassing nearly 13,000 EU citizens. Our data is representative of the EU as a whole and specifically of Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, and Spain. In Belgium, we interviewed 1,112 citizens.

Belgians vote in federal elections along linguistic lines. Some 60% cast ballots for Dutch-speaking lists, mainly in Flanders, and 40% for French-speaking lists in Wallonia and in the Brussels Capital Region. Citizens in Brussels can vote in either linguistic ballot, with some 90% voting for French-language party lists in the last federal election, in 2019.

Belgium comprises four linguistic regions: the Dutch-speaking region, the French-speaking region, the bilingual region of Brussels-Capital and the German-speaking region. This means that there are no “national or federal” parliamentary seats. To avoid excessive complexity, we use in this presentation the terms Flanders and Wallonia. Except as far as PTB-PVDA is concerned, there are no national parties.

Please note

This report “Belgium, the War and the Vote” is part of **an eight-part series**.

Part 1

- *The War and the Vote*

delves into the correlation of political orientation and support for Ukraine policies in the EU as well as seven member states.

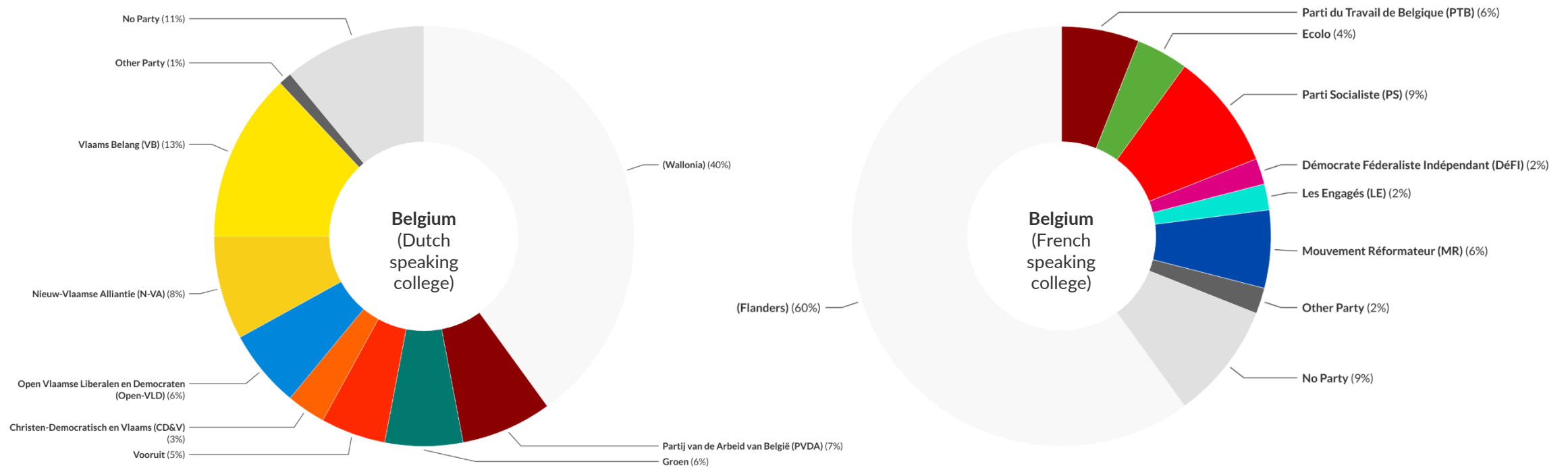
It is complemented by **seven country reports**, each focusing on political party preferences in correlation with the same Ukraine-related questions.

- ***Belgium, the War and the Vote***
- *France, the War and the Vote*
- *Germany, the War and the Vote*
- *Italy, the War and the Vote*
- *The Netherlands, the War and the Vote*
- *Poland, the War and the Vote*
- *Spain, the War and the Vote*

An overview:

1. *Which political party — if any — do you feel close to? General distribution (GD) in Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia)*
2. *Does the European Union need a common defence policy? First the GD in Belgium, then by political party preferences*
3. *Should the EU support Ukraine by delivering weapons? First the GD in Belgium, then by political party preferences*
4. *Should your country accept refugees from Ukraine? First the GD in Belgium, then by political party preferences*
5. *Should the EU accept Ukraine as a member state in the coming years? First the GD in Belgium, then by political party preferences*
6. *Should the EU become more energy independent of Russia even if that means prices are rising even further? First the GD in Belgium, then by political party preferences*
7. *Do you think economic and financial sanctions on Russia are effective or ineffective? First the GD in Belgium, then by political party preferences*
8. *Do you think the reconstruction of Ukraine will be an economic opportunity or an economic burden for the EU? First the GD in Belgium, then by political party preferences*

Belgium : Which political party – if any – do you feel close to?



December 2023

Belgium – Dutch speaking college

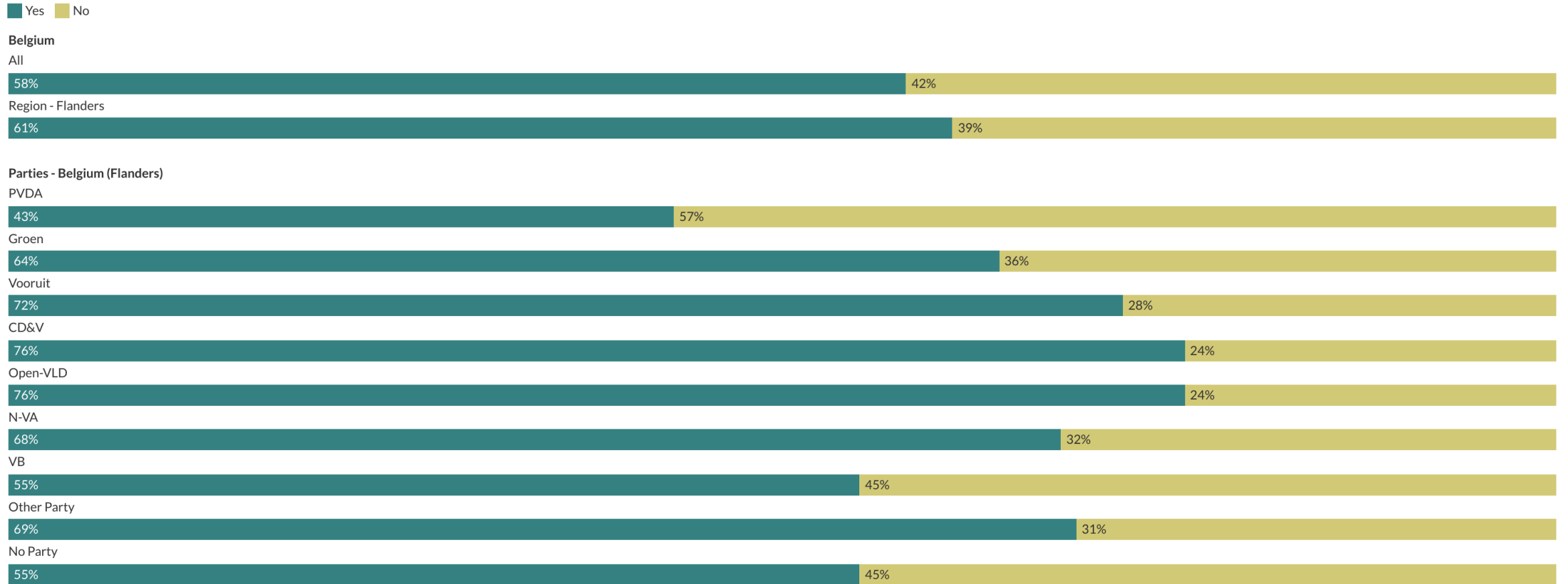
Belgium, Dutch speaking college: Does the European Union need a common defence policy? By political party preferences



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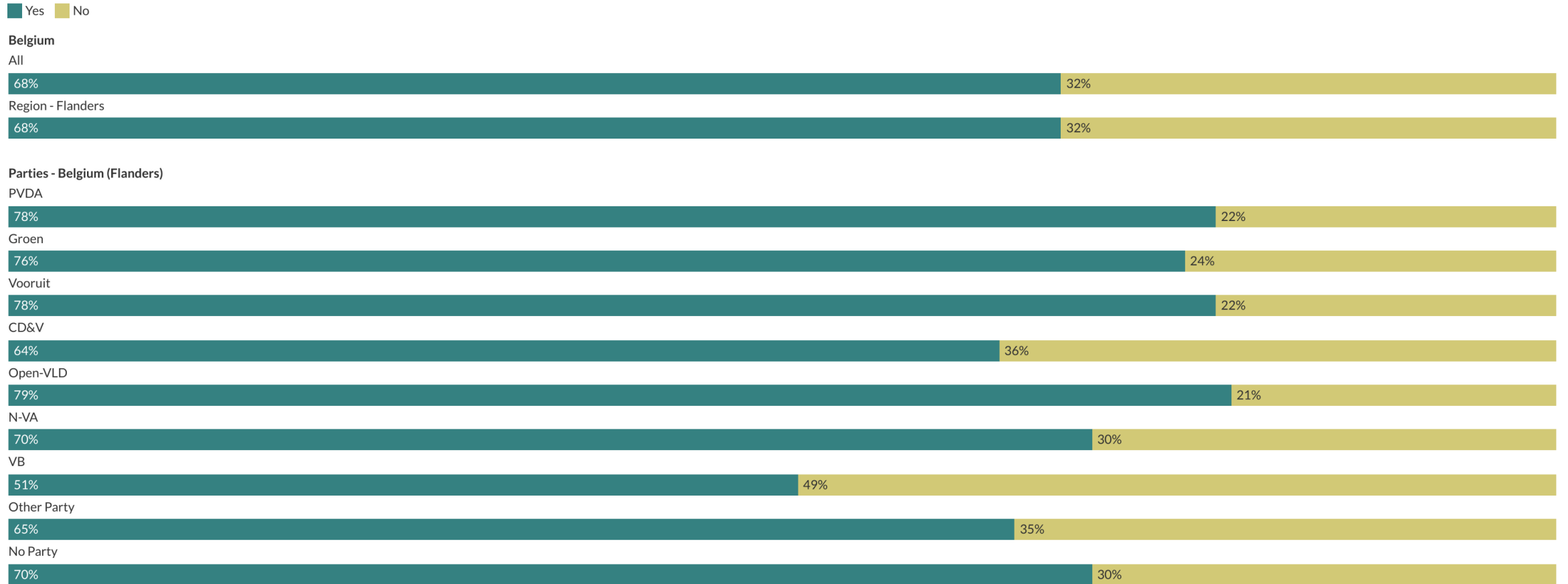
Belgium, Dutch speaking college : Should the EU support Ukraine by delivering weapons? By political party preferences



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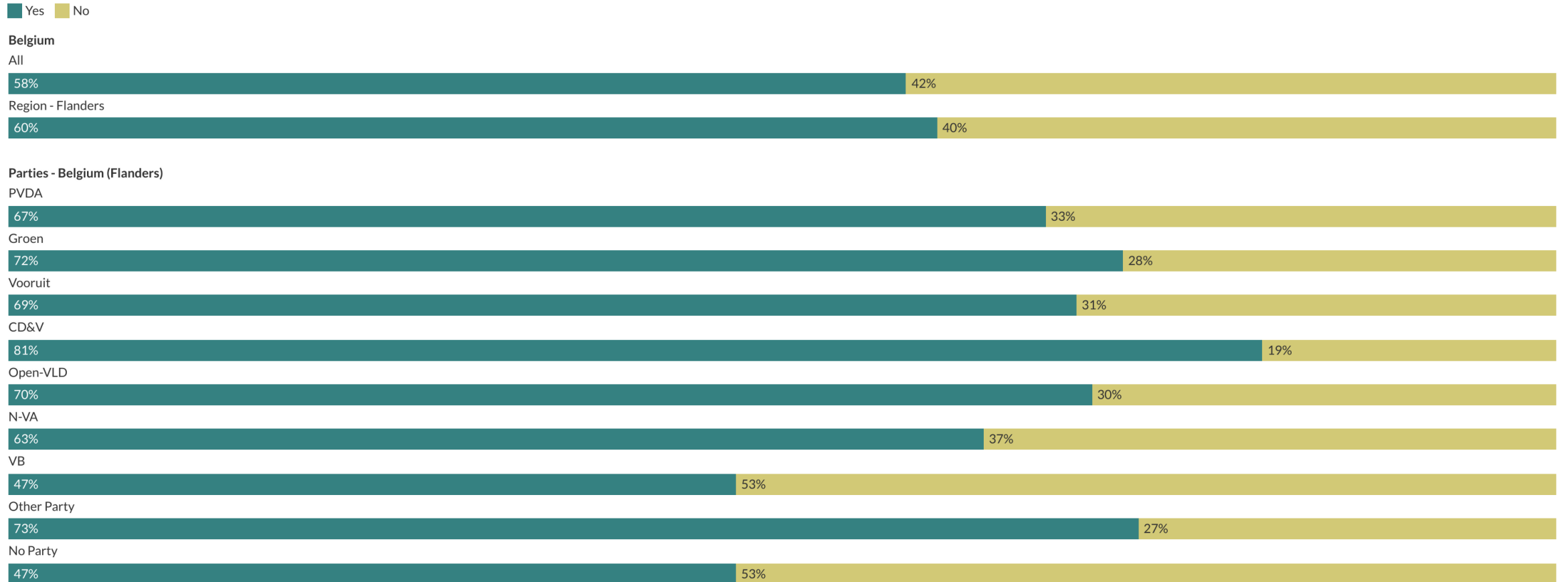
Belgium, Dutch speaking college : Should your country accept refugees from Ukraine? By political party preferences



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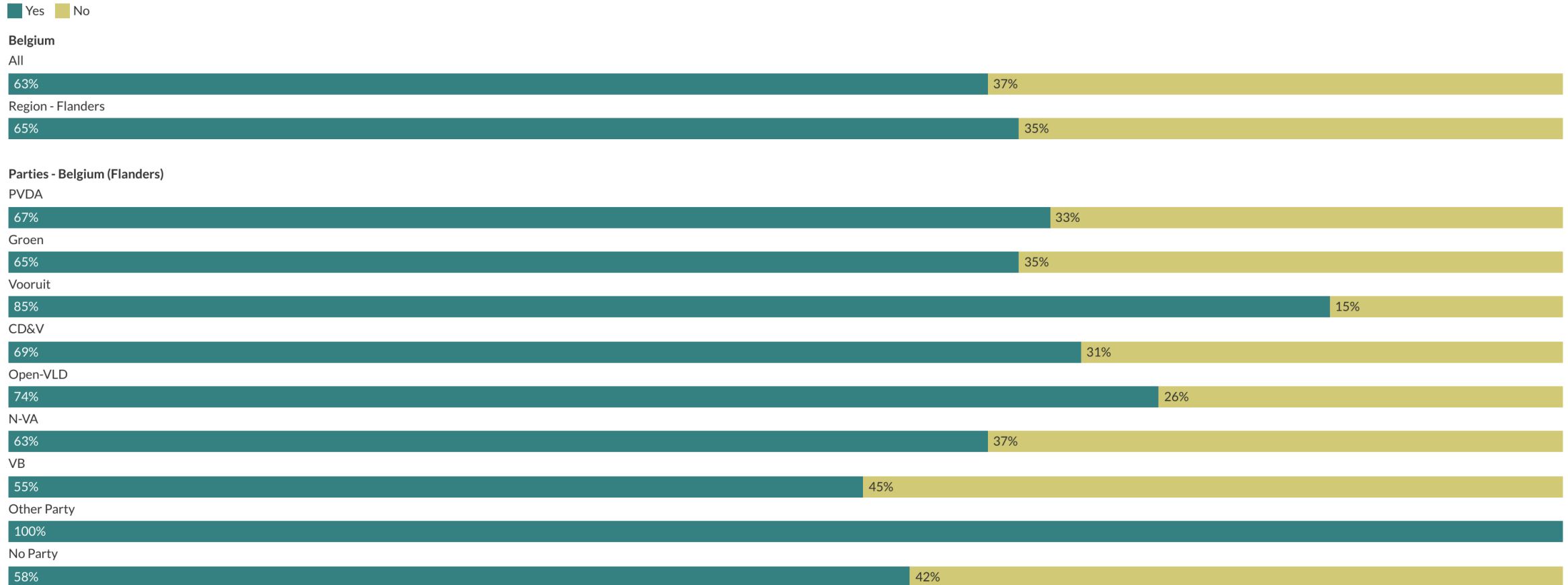
Belgium, Dutch speaking college : Should the EU accept Ukraine as a member of the EU in the coming years? By political party preferences



December 2023

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Belgium, Dutch speaking college : Should the EU become more energy independent of Russia even if that means prices are rising even further? By political party preferences



December 2023

eupinions | what do you think?

Belgium, Dutch speaking college : Do you think economic and financial sanctions on Russia are effective or ineffective? By political party preferences

Effective Ineffective Don't know

Belgium

All



Region - Flanders



Parties - Belgium (Flanders)

PVDA



Groen



Vooruit



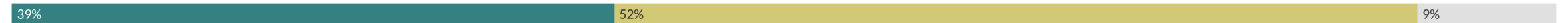
CD&V



Open-VLD



N-VA



VB



Other Party



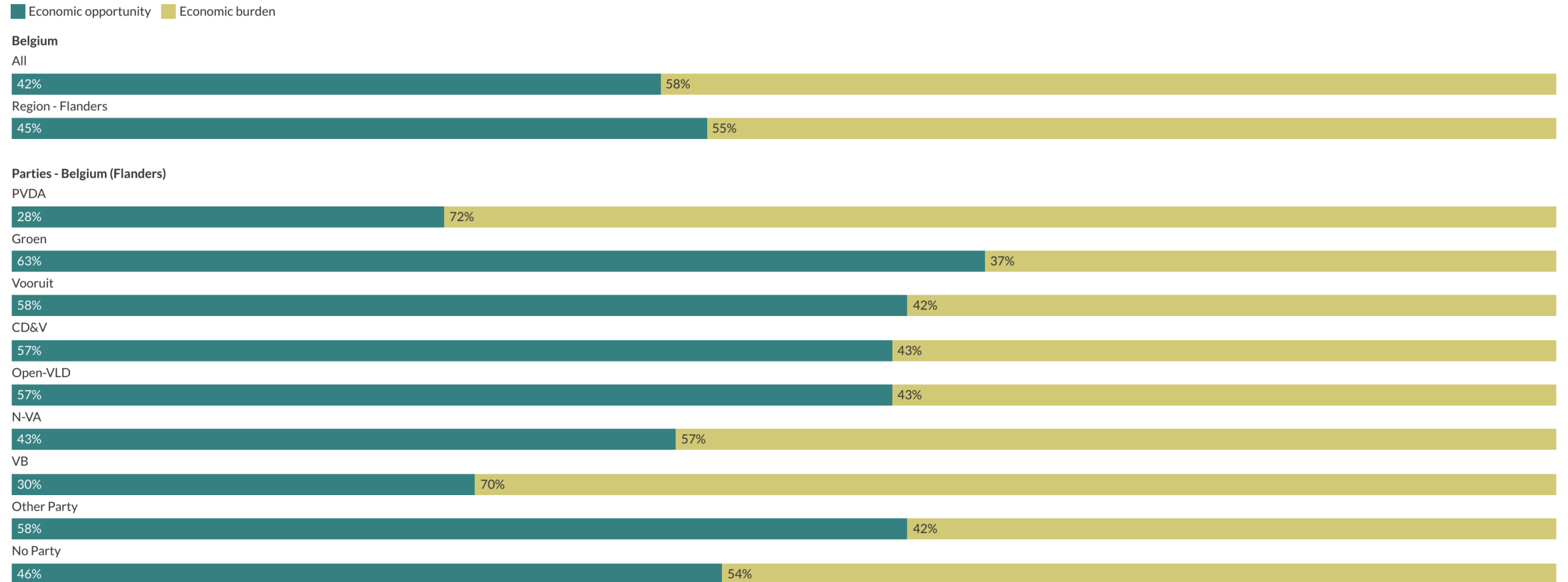
No Party



December 2023

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Belgium, Dutch speaking college : Do you think the reconstruction of Ukraine will be an economic opportunity or an economic burden for the EU? By political party preferences



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Belgium – French speaking college

Belgium, French speaking college : Does the European Union need a common defence policy? By political party preferences

Agree Disagree

Belgium

All



Region - Wallonia



Parties - Belgium (Wallonia)

PTB



Ecolo



PS



DéFI



LE



MR



Other Party



No Party



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Belgium, French speaking college : Should the EU support Ukraine by delivering weapons? By political party preferences

Yes No

Belgium

All



Region - Wallonia



Parties - Belgium (Wallonia)

PTB



Ecolo



PS



DéFI



LE



MR



Other Party



No Party



December 2023

eupinions | what do you think?

Belgium, French speaking college : Should your country accept refugees from Ukraine?

By political party preferences

Yes No

Belgium

All



Region - Wallonia



Parties - Belgium (Wallonia)

PTB



Ecolo



PS



DéFI



LE



MR



Other Party



No Party



December 2023

eupinions | what do you think?

Belgium, French speaking college : Should the EU accept Ukraine as a member of the EU in the coming years? By political party preferences

Yes No

Belgium

All



Region - Wallonia



Parties - Belgium (Wallonia)

PTB



Ecolo



PS



DéFI



LE



MR



Other Party



No Party



December 2023

eupinions | what do you think?

Belgium, French speaking college : Should the EU become more energy independent of Russia even if that means prices are rising even further? By political party preferences

Yes No

Belgium

All



Region - Wallonia



Parties - Belgium (Wallonia)

PTB



Ecolo



PS



DéFI



LE



MR



Other Party



No Party



December 2023

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Belgium, French speaking college : Do you think economic and financial sanctions on Russia are effective or ineffective? By political party preferences

Effective Ineffective Don't know

Belgium

All



Region - Wallonia



Parties - Belgium (Wallonia)

PTB



Ecolo



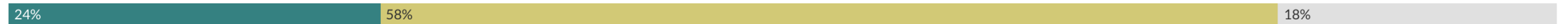
PS



DéFI



LE



MR



Other Party

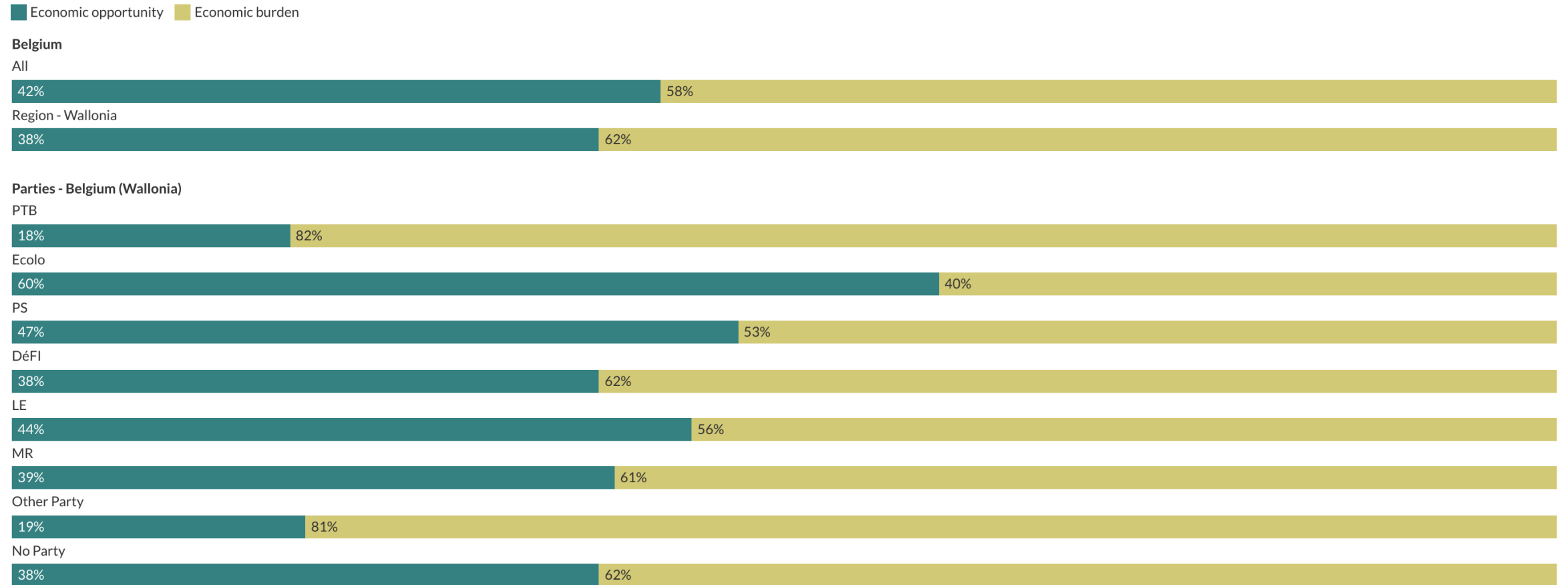


No Party



December 2023

Belgium, French speaking college : Do you think the reconstruction of Ukraine will be an economic opportunity or an economic burden for the EU? By political party preferences



December 2023

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Conclusions

As EU citizens prepare for the upcoming European Parliament elections in June, closely followed by the nomination of a new European Commission, our aim in this country report was to assess public sentiment and explore more deeply how Ukraine-related policies intersect with party preferences in Belgium.

In summary, our findings are as follows:

- Those who support parties on the centre left, support Ukraine policies strongest.
- Support tends to be higher in the political centre than on either end of the political spectrum.
- Overall support is strongest among supporters of parties in government than those favouring the opposition.

An analysis of each graph shows the following patterns:

- **European Defence Policy:** A vast majority of Belgians favour a common European defence policy – around 86% – with no significant difference between Flanders and Wallonia, despite the general political spectrum among French-speakers being substantially to the left of Dutch-speaking compatriots. Support for common European defence diminishes on the right in Flanders, with supporters of the Flemish separatist Vlaams Belang 22% opposed and the francophone Workers Party PTB 25% against. Opposition is weaker among sympathisers of the PTB's Dutch-speaking wing PvdA (16%), while among the two environmentalist parties in the federal government, opposition to common European defence is stronger among sympathisers of the French-speaking Ecolo (16%) than Dutch-speaking Groen (9%).

- **Weapons Delivery:** A 58% majority of Belgians favour sending EU arms to Ukraine, not far short of the 60% high seen in March 2022. Opposition to sending EU arms concentrated among supporters of the PTB in Wallonia (70%) and PvdA in Flanders (57%). Indeed, the Workers Party, the only single entity represented in both French- and Dutch-speaking seats, is the only party whose sympathisers are majority opposed to sending arms. Heavily criticised for refusals to back parliamentary condemnations of Russia's invasion, its leaders do condemn Russian actions but also NATO expansion and call for peace talks rather than a military solution. Overall, Belgians' 58% support for weapons deliveries has been fairly steady as the war has progressed. Scepticism is also marked among sympathisers of the environmental parties (36% in both Flanders and Wallonia) and those of the Vlaams Belang (45%), whose leaders have said that sending advanced weaponry could leave Belgium itself exposed to dangers.
- **Refugee Acceptance:** Support in Belgium for accepting Ukrainian refugees is a little below the EU average (71%) and has dropped, to 68% in both Flanders and Wallonia in December from an overall high of 84% just after the invasion, and from 76% in September 2023. Support for refugees is strongest in the centre, notably among French-speakers supportive of DÉFI (92%) and Les Engagés (90%), neither of which is currently in government, and in Flanders among those who feel close to the coalition parties Open-VLD (79%) on the centre-right and Vooruit (78%) on the centre-left. Opposition to taking in refugees on the French-speaking left and centre-left – PTB (47% against) and Socialist Party (33% against) – is offset by support in Flanders from those parties' Dutch-speaking equivalents, the PvdA and Vooruit (both only 22% against). In Flanders, opposition to refugees is highest on the right among supporters of Vlaams Belang (49% against), but also among those favourable to the Christian Democrat CD&V (36% against), which is part of the governing federal coalition.

- **EU Membership for Ukraine:** Belgians (58%) favour EU membership for Ukraine, with Dutch-speakers (60%) a little warmer to the idea than French-speakers (56%). Supporters of only two main parties oppose such an expansion of the bloc – the PTB on the left in Wallonia (57% against) and Vlaams Belang on the right in Flanders (53%). As an example of how views on Ukraine do not divide clearly along party lines, however, fully 47% of those who support Vlaams Belang favour Ukraine's accession in the coming years, despite the firmly expressed opposition of the VB leadership, while 44% of sympathisers of the French-speaking centre-right Reform Movement (MR) oppose bringing Ukraine into the European Union, despite MR ministers' support for this EU policy.
- **Energy Independence:** Support for reducing energy imports from Russia at the expense of high fuel bills is weaker in left-leaning Wallonia (61%) than in right-leaning Flanders (65%). Again, opposition is concentrated on the Walloon left and Flemish right, again in parties seen as strong electoral challengers to those currently in the federal government. Among French-speakers, supporters of the PTB are evenly split on the issue, Ecolo (63%) and Socialists (66%) favour cutting Russian imports, as do even bigger majorities on the centre-right. In Flanders, Vlaams Belang sympathisers are only narrowly in favour (55%), while backers of the centre-left Vooruit are the most supportive (85%).
- **Effectiveness of Sanctions:** Lingering belief in the efficacy of sanctions against Russia has slumped among Belgians, as it has across Europe, although three times as many Dutch-speakers (30%) as French-speakers (10%) see economic sanctions as effective. Only one Belgian party, the Flemish centre-right CDV, can point to a majority of its sympathisers agreeing with the view that sanctions have been effective – 60% of them do, against 30% who disagree. French-speakers are sceptical across the board, from the PTB (6%) and Ecolo (4%) to MR (10%).

- **Reconstruction of Ukraine:** The view of 58% of Belgians that the reconstruction of Ukraine will be an economic burden is particularly strongly held among those favouring opposition parties on the left and right in both Wallonia and Flanders, while majorities of Dutch-speakers in the centre and environmentalists on both sides of the linguistic divide see an economic opportunity in the post-war rebuilding of Ukraine. Only 18% of PTB, 28% of PvdA and 30% of VB supporters agree with that positive outlook, as do just 38% of sympathisers of the coalition member MR. On the other hand, 63% of Groen and 60% of Ecolo supporters see opportunity, as do majorities who favour Flanders' Vooruit (58%), Open-VLD and CD&V (both 57%).

About eupinions

eupinions is an independent platform for European public opinion. We collect and analyse data on European public opinion and comment on what Europeans think about current political issues and megatrends.

Every quarter, we collect samples from each EU member state in 22 languages. Our data is representative with regard to age, gender, education and country/region.

eupinions is a Bertelsmann Stiftung project. The data is collected by Latana.

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Methodology note

The samples analysed in this report were drawn by Latana in December 2023 (n=13,299) across all 27 EU member states. Our samples take into account current population distributions with regard to age (16–70 years), gender and region/country. In order to obtain census representative results, the data were weighted using the most recent Eurostat statistics.

Any references to differences between countries in the report pertain only to the seven countries with sufficiently large sample sizes: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Spain.

Given the sample size and design-effect considerations, the margin of error is 0.9% at a confidence level of 95%.

Thank you!



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