

Culture Conflict and its Consequences for the Legitimation Crisis

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The notions of 'political culture' and of 'legitimacy' are no longer unproblematic, but the subject of discussions that question their very usefulness (Topf, 1989). It is not the aim of this article to address the many theoretical issues raised by those discussions. The focus of this article is the empirical analysis of some recent political developments in Flanders, that have been interpreted as a "protest", that are widely perceived as indicative of a loss of legitimacy of the political system, and that have been explained on the basis of shifts in political culture¹. Yet, before embarking on such an analysis it is necessary to indicate which options we take with regard to some of the main theoretical issues involved. Needless to add that some of these options are theoretically grounded, while other are simply forced upon us by the available data.

I. Civic culture

The conventional notion of political culture has been strongly influenced by Parsonian sociology and by the empirical and theoretical analysis in Almond and Verba's *The Civic Culture* (1963). In this tradition culture is seen as differentiated from action systems and practices, and as constituted by symbols and patterns of symbols: meanings, informations, beliefs, representations, values, etc. We shall maintain this analytical distinction in our analysis. Political actions (for instance, non voting) will be considered as possibly influenced by political culture or values, but not as indicating political culture in any direct sense. As 'action' political behaviour can be influenced by many factors besides political culture, and can therefore not serve as an indicator of political culture. This implies that the latter can not be "read" from observable political behaviour, but only from symbolically mediated reflection about such action. The specification of this theoretical option also allows us to point towards one of the limitations of our analysis. In order to observe culture we rely, as many other investigators of political culture do, on survey analysis, specifically the 1991 Flemish voter's study (Carton et al., 1993). It is possible that other research methods, such as the ethnography of discourse or focus group interviews, would yield more insights.

The conventional notion of political culture is further specified as "civic culture" (Almond & Verba, 1963). At the level of the polity this refers to a balance between responsiveness and efficacy of the system. At the level of the individual

1 Ackaert & De Winter, 1993; Billiet, 1993; Billiet, Swyngedouw & Carton, 1993; Elchardus, Deschouwer, Pelleriaux & Stouthuysen, 1993; Elchardus, 1994: chapter 4; Huysse, 1994.

citizen this is seen as involving a delicate combination of belief in the efficacy of personal participation, a willingness to participate and an absence of political cynicism, with a readiness to accept representation, a respect for the rules of the game, and a measure of deference towards the political elite. The required attitude is far from evident: the citizen must believe in the efficacy of his or her participation, yet not demand too much participation and leave sufficient scope for the elite to conduct the complex business of politics. Political culture as civic culture thus comprises different, seemingly contradictory elements: belief in the efficacy of political participation or absence of feelings of political powerlessness and cynicism on the one hand, an element of loyalty, and deference to authority on the other. One of the goals of this article is to gauge the extent to which this notion of civic culture is still relevant to understand the perceived symptoms of a legitimization crisis.

II. Legitimacy according to procedural and substantive conceptions of democracy

The notion of legitimization is even more problematic than that of political culture. The legitimization crisis was a relatively popular topic in the seventies and early eighties (Müller, 1988). The resulting literature is much more explicit about the causes of such crises than about the way in which they become visible. Apparently a lack of legitimacy can express itself in a great variety of ways: lack of participation, protest voting, lack of compliance with the law, tax evasion, an increase in anti-government demonstrations, political terrorism, rejection of crucial democratic values such as individual freedom, etc. Theoretical attention has been focused on the causes of those symptoms, rather than on their specific meaning. This need not really surprise us. The discussions about legitimization have been primarily concerned with the philosophical foundations of democracy, rather than with the specific forms the rejection of those foundations could take. The core discussion has opposed what Michael Walzer has recently called "Liberalism 1" to "Liberalism 2" (1994): proponents of a purely procedural (or formal-functional) conception of democracy to proponents of a more substantive conception of the good society. In sociology the former position is associated with Niklas Luhmann, the latter with Jürgen Habermas and Robert Bellah².

The meaning that is given to the symptoms of crisis depends in part on the position taken with regard to the issue of procedural versus substantive conceptions of democracy. If one takes an extreme procedural position, the notion of legitimacy becomes largely meaningless because liberal democracy can then be considered as essentially a procedure to adapt to any set of expectations and their corresponding notion of legitimacy, that might arise in the citizenry (Rufin, 1994, chapter 8). When one takes a substantive view of democracy and, for instance, sees the nation as implying popular sovereignty (Schnapper, 1994) or a set of core values (Bellah et. al., 1991), then a political attack on those values can be regarded as a legitimization crisis. While for procedural conceptions of legitimacy the symptoms of crisis are less easy to define, participation in the procedures themselves, for instance participation in the elections, is frequently regarded as a sym-

² Secondly this literature has dealt with tensions or contradictions between the differentiated economic and political systems, leading to democratic overload, according to liberal inspired authors (Crozier, Huntington & Watanuki, 1975), to a fiscal crisis of the state according to marxian inspired authors (O'Conner, 1973).

bolic expression of the necessary acceptance of the procedures and of trust (Milbrath & Goel, 1977; Luhmann, 1979). For substantive approaches, deligitimation occurs when movement or parties call into question the values that are implemented by or dominant in the existing political system (e.g. Habermas, 1973).

Those are in fact also the definitions of the symptoms of a legitimation crisis one encounters in contemporary journalistic and political discourse. Recently in Belgium politicians and journalist have presented two political developments as symptoms of such a crisis or as expressions of a so called "protest vote". First the rising non-participation which, under the Belgian legislation that makes voting obligatory, expresses itself as non participation, a non vote (returning an unused voting bulletin) or a purposefully invalid vote. Secondly, the rise of parties that are explicitly anti-political or that are perceived as calling into question core values of our society and polity, and that are therefore regarded as expressing a protest against the political system. This is the case for the "libertarian" party ROSSEM, which was formed in view of the Parliamentary elections of 1991, obtained 5.2% of the vote in Flanders, but had disappeared by the time of the 1995 elections. The second case to which this diagnosis is applied is the extreme right wing or Populist-Right wing party VLAAMS BLOK, which from the elections of 1981 to the elections of 1995 has climbed from under 2 to over 12% of the Flemish vote. While the success of ROSSEM was a factor in fuelling the public debate about a legitimation crisis, that party turned out to be too volatile and ephemeral a symptom to make analysis sensible. We shall therefore focus on both the non-participation and the extreme right wing vote as possible symptoms of a legitimation crisis. Again we should draw attention to the partially of this approach which focuses on specific electoral expressions of the legitimation crisis, to the exclusion of other political actions (such as demonstrations, strikes and petitions), everyday behaviour or such symptoms of delegitimation as tax evasion. Furthermore we

Figure 1: Non-participation in the Belgian national elections (1946-1995)

Source: J. Ackaert, Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken

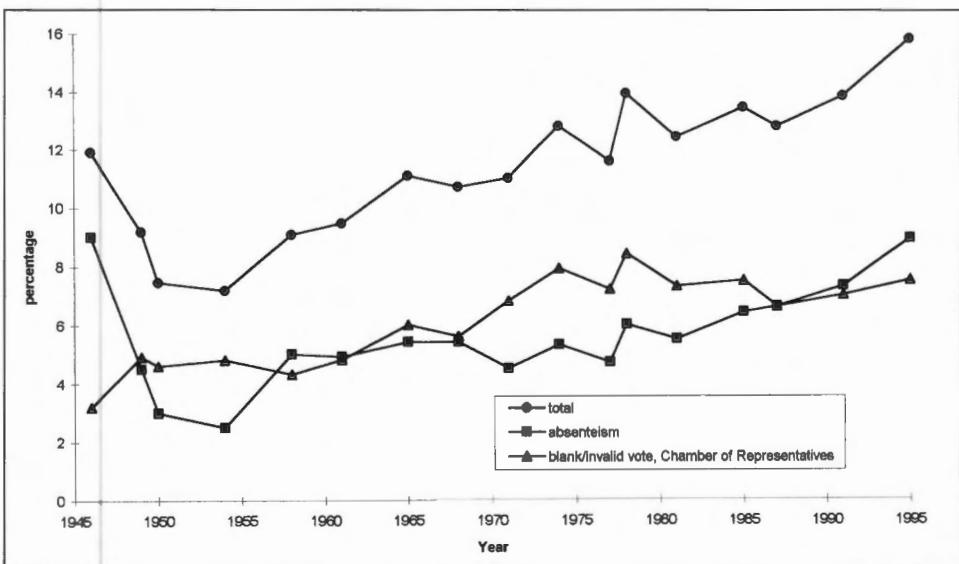
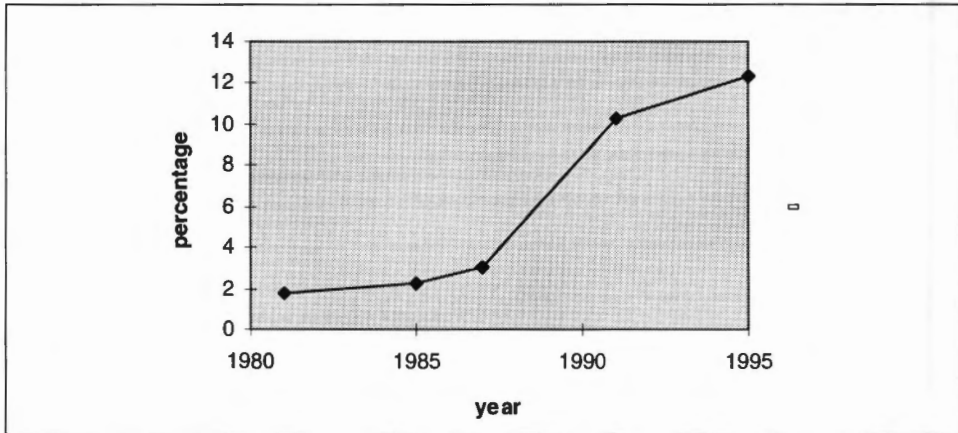


Figure 2: Extreme-right wing votes (Vlaams Blok) in Flanders (1982-1995)



should emphasise that our goal is certainly not a sociography or an attempt at exhaustive explanation of either non-participation or a vote for the extreme right. We want instead to empirically investigate whether these forms of political action can indeed be linked to a legitimisation crisis, and how they are related to shifts in political culture.

III. Signs of a growing legitimacy crisis

When non-voting and voting for an extreme right wing party are taken as symptoms of a legitimisation crisis, one can indeed, as many political commentators do, conclude that the legitimisation crisis has been growing over the last decades (see Figures 1 & 2).

The non-participation figures pertain to the whole of Belgium, and not to Flanders alone. Non-participation is higher in the French speaking part of the country, and especially in the capital region of Brussels, than in Flanders. Yet, it is rising in the three regions.

IV. Legitimacy, protest and civic culture

When searching for an explanation of the growing legitimisation crisis on the basis of political culture, the first question to ask is whether the alleged symptoms of crisis are at all related to the conventional notion of political culture, the so called civic culture hypothesis. The voters study of 1991 comprised a scale of political powerlessness or political cynicism (see appendix 1) which can be taken as an indicator of the extend to which people belief in the political efficacy of their participation. The other element of the civic culture -compliance, passivity and deference- has not been measured directly. Yet, there is a possible proxy indicator that can be used. This proxy is based on the assumption that practising

Catholics³ are more deferential towards elites and authority than non-practising Christians and secular humanists (Elchardus, Deschouwer, Pelleriaux & Stout-huysen, 1993; Elchardus, 1994b). If the civic culture hypothesis is still relevant to explain contemporary symptoms of a legitimation crisis, we should find that the probability of non-participation and a vote for the extreme right, increases as the feeling of political powerlessness increases and the deference for authority decreases. The civic culture hypothesis should however be correctly understood. Technically speaking it does not predict an additive effect of those two conditions, but an interaction effect: symptoms of a legitimation crisis are predicted to be maximised when powerlessness or cynicism is high and deference low; they are predicted to be minimised when powerlessness or cynicism is low and deference is high.

Table 1:

Delegitimation and the combination of political cynicism and deference⁴

	low political cynicism	average political cynicism	high political cynicism	total %
practising catholic	3 % Vlaams Blok 2 % non-particip.	3 % Vlaams Blok 2 % non-particip.	6 % Vlaams Blok 13 % non-particip.	4 % Vlaams Blok 6 % non-particip.
others	8 % Vlaams Blok 1 % non-particip.	12 % Vlaams Blok 4 % non-particip.	14 % Vlaams Blok 14 % non-particip.	12 % Vlaams Blok 7 % non-particip.
total %	7 % Vlaams Blok 1 % non-particip.	10 % Vlaams Blok 4 % non-particip.	14 % Vlaams Blok 12 % non-particip.	10 % Vlaams Blok 7 % non-particip.

It is clear from table 1 that political cynicism or feelings of political powerlessness seriously increase the probability of non-participation and a right-wing vote. The role of deference to authority can be less clearly established. The probability of a vote for the extreme right is, as predicted, higher when feelings of political powerlessness are combined with a religious self-definition that is considered to lead to less deference to authority. The same does however not hold for non-participation. It is possible that non-participation is considered a less "strong" or less radical expression of protest against established politics, so that deference to authority does not really constitute a brake. A vote for the extreme right in 1991 could, on the contrary, be considered by many people as a strong, radical statement and, as a consequence, be inhibited by deference to authority. One should keep in mind that non-participation and a vote for the extreme right are not measured independently of each other. They are alternatives between which voters have to choose. It is therefore plausible to interpret table 1 to mean that feelings of political powerlessness or political cynicism are expressed in a "protest vote" which is more likely to be channelled towards "exit" or non-participation when deference for authority is high, towards a more radical "voice"-option -a vote for the extreme right- when deference to authority is low. We come back to this hypothesis in section 7.

3 Practising Catholics are defined as Catholics who attend Mass more than once a month.

4 Non-participation is henceforth defined as: returning a blank voting bulletin, purposefully invalidating the voting bulletin, or not going to vote for other reasons than sickness, professional duty or travel.

It is however also possible that religious self definition is not a fully adequate measure of deference to authority. Due to the use of a proxy-variable, the validity of which can be doubted, the interpretation of table 1 can not be unambiguous. Still, the findings indicate that the civic culture hypothesis can not be as readily dismissed as for instance Richard Topf suggests (1989:68) when he writes that "the conventional notion of political culture has served its term" and can now be forgotten. Topf reaches that conclusion for Britain, but on the basis of inadequate (additive) testing of the hypothesis. The civic culture hypothesis still seems relevant to understand the distribution of non-voting and the extreme right wing vote in Flanders, yet the effects of the feelings of political powerlessness and deference to authority that are observed, are moderate. They suggest that even under more optimal measurement conditions that hypothesis can hardly be expected to explain a great deal of the observed symptoms of the legitimization crisis.

That observation seems rather obvious in the light of the contemporary sociology of culture. The present state of the art in that specialty suggests that one needs to link the conventional notion of political culture to broader changes in value orientations in order to understand its effects on political participation and voting. It is indeed by no means certain that the probability of non-participation and an extreme right wing vote, can be directly related to the civic culture, i.e. to the feelings of powerlessness and deference to authority. It is on the contrary more likely that these specific attitudes are part of broader value-orientations or sub-cultural patterns, and can only be correctly understood when analysed in the light of the cultural patterns to which they belong.

The conventional notion considers political culture as a specialised part of culture, comprising the meanings, values and beliefs that "make sense" of citizenship and political participation, and that orient actions towards the political organisation of society, such as respect for the constitution and the law or a readiness to participate. The idea that one can consider political culture as a specialised part of culture, frequently leads to an instrumental approach in which political culture is seen as a tool for fine tuning the participation of the citizen (Verba, Nie & Kim, 1978: 301). This easily leads to a rationalistic bias. That tendency has become more pronounced as some authors have recently tried to describe the fine tuned political culture that they deem appropriate for multicultural political systems. They propose that the political culture that orients the citizens, should be radically divorced from all other feelings of identity and cultural specificity (Ferry, 1991; Costa-Lascoux, 1992), an attitude for which Jürgen Habermas has coined the apt expression "constitutional patriotism" (1994). Whatever the instrumentality of such a notion of political culture, it flies in the face of much of the empirical analysis of culture which highlights the limited rationality of action (Swidler, 1986), and especially the mixture of emotional, cognitive and ethical elements that is always present in the culture or the moral order by which political arrangements and political positions are given meaning and on the basis of which people conduct politics (Bellah, 1986, Topf, 1989; Schnapper, 1994; Taylor, 1991, 1994). We should therefore investigate whether the orientations implied by the civic culture are part of a more encompassing alignment of value orientations, that can give rise to different (political) cultures, some of which might find expression in non-participation and the extreme right.

V. A new alignment of value orientations

In order to do so it is necessary to look at the issues that have been prominent in the recent political agenda. The two attitudes that are relevant for the civic cul-

ture hypothesis -feelings of political efficacy and deference to authority- have been rather important political issues during the second half of the eighties and the first half of the nineties. During that decade, various parties have tried to induce and exploit an anti-political mood, they have highlighted political corruption and have appealed to the feelings of political cynicism. Certainly the extreme right but also segments of other parties, have expressed worries about the decline of traditional values, about too much permissiveness and the decline of traditional forms of authority. This has been related to an emphasis on crime, and law and order. This has, of course, not only been observed in Flanders, but in different European countries and in North-America (Aaron et al., 1994; Dionne, 1991; Hunter, 1991; Ignazi, 1992; Minkenberg, 1992; and various other contributions in Ignazi & Ysmal, 1992).

The issues, that are directly related to the civic culture, were part of a larger set of issues and conflict matters that have occupied the political agenda of the last decade. Many of those themes were popularised by the Green parties and somewhat later by the Populist- or extreme right wing parties. The issues emphasised by the Greens can more or less be grouped under the familiar heading of post-materialist concerns and positions. The populist Right has not only reacted to those, but has put different matters on the political agenda as well. Their most important theme, up to now, has been the presence of ethnic minorities, the so called "migrants". In Flanders it is clearly this issue that has enabled the extreme right to transform itself into a significant populist Right-wing party. Economically the agenda of the decade has been characterised by a sharp conflict between *laissez-faire* or neo-liberal policies, and elements of Social Darwinism on the one hand, a defence of solidarity or, more concretely, the welfare state and the social security system, on the other.

If there are politically significant value orientations, then these should concern attitudes that are pertinent for the various issues that have occupied the political agenda. These value orientations should in fact allow one to predict the position people will take on those issues. Looking at the latter, the relevant value dimensions seem to involve postmaterialism versus materialism, libertarianism versus authoritarianism, ethnocentrism or racism versus tolerance, social solidarity versus utilitarian individualism or Social Darwinism, feelings of political efficacy versus feelings of political powerlessness or political cynicism, traditionalism versus modernism.

The Flemish Voters' Study of the 1991 General Election enables us to not only measure the feelings of political efficacy or powerlessness, but also most of the other relevant value orientations.

- Individualism versus solidarity. Individualism is understood here as the doctrine according to which each individual is allowed to pursue one's interest or pleasure, without much regard for the implications of that attitude on others. That attitude is seen as also implying that everybody should care for oneself and that those unable to do so are failures (Social Darwinism).
- Ethnocentrism versus tolerance. Ethnocentrism stands for negative attitudes towards "migrants" and ethnic minorities that are perceived as different (in Flanders these are mainly people of Moroccan and Turkish origin). The scale used, measures negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities, not just racism. The proportion of people with racist attitudes is estimated at about 10 to 15%. The negative attitudes of most people derive from the fear that the "migrants" are taking their jobs, are destabilising the social security system

and are getting too much government attention (50 to 75% of the electorate tends to hold such views).

- Authoritarianism versus more democratic relationships. Authoritarianism stands for an emphasis on obedience, respect for authority in general and, to some extent, belief in the political benefits of a "strong leader".
- Materialism versus post-materialism ⁵.

The analysis of the relationships between those attitudes and the feelings of political powerlessness, shows that they are strongly interrelated. Empirically there is a clear alignment of attitudes in which utilitarian individualism, authoritarianism, ethnocentrism, political cynicism and materialism go together and are opposed to solidarity, non-authoritarianism, tolerance, belief in political efficacy and post-material values. A factor analysis of the five scales that measure the different value orientations, yields only one factor with an eigenvalue greater than one (equal to 2.4). This factor explains about 49% of the total variation ⁶. This means that we should consider feelings of political efficacy (and civic culture) as part of a broader, more encompassing alignment of values and attitudes. It might therefore be very misleading to directly relate a specific political behaviour (in casu non-participation and voting for the extreme right) to a specific attitude or value-orientation (in casu ethnocentrism, political cynicism, authoritarianism, etc.).

As a cultural phenomenon this alignment is, strictly speaking, not really new. Only its political relevance is new, in the sense that people with extreme positions on this alignment are likely to vote for the new parties: the Greens (AGA-LEV) on the one hand, the extreme right (VLAAMS BLOK) on the other (Elchardus, 1994, chapter 6; Elchardus, 1994c). We shall therefore refer to this alignment as the "new alignment". We furthermore adopt the convention of calling the ethnocentric, individualist, authoritarian, politically cynical and materialist side of the alignment the New Right, the opposite position the New Left.

From the emergence of a new cleavage, quite directly related to positions concerning cultural and ethical issues, one should certainly not conclude that the old Left/Right-cleavage is losing its relevance (as many authors claimed in the eighties, e.g. Schmitt, 1989; Minkenberg & Inglehart, 1989; Kitcheld & Helleman, 1990). As a matter of fact, the "new" and the "old" Left/Right-cleavages exist alongside each other. Both influence the electoral behaviour and constitute important dimensions of the political space (Elchardus, 1994c). The new cleavage does however play a more important role in the legitimization crisis than the "old" Left/Right-divide. For that reason it is the focus of this article.

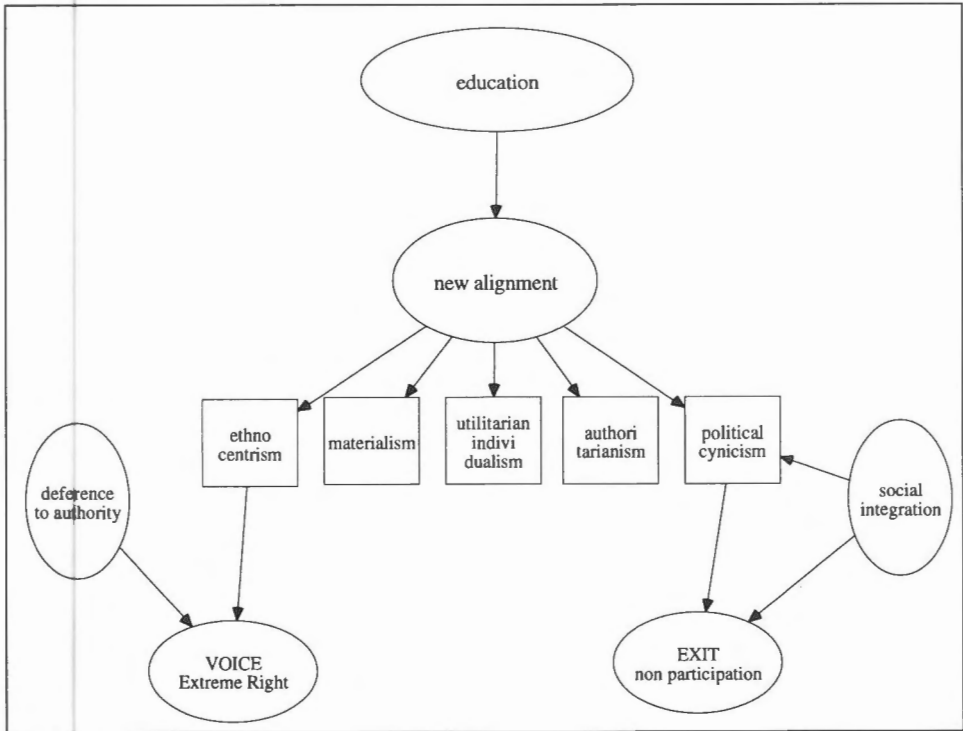
VI. Culture conflict and political protest

In order to further explore the relationship between the new alignment and the symptoms of the legitimization crisis, we looked, on the one hand, at the factors that influence the individuals' position on the alignment and, on the other, at the way in which the alignment influences the symptoms of the legitimization crisis. We refrain from describing in detail the different steps that led to the mo-

⁵ Those scales are measured as additive scales as indicated in Billiet, 1993b; Billiet & De Witte, 1993, except for utilitarian individualism which is based on a sum-score of items V27.1 to v27.4 included (see Billiet, 1993 & Carton et.al., 1993).

⁶ For other analyses of this alignment see, Elchardus, 1994: chapter 6; Elchardus, 1994c.

Figure 3: synoptic presentation of the delegitimation-model



del we present and interpret here. The technical detail concerning that structural model is presented in appendix 2. Figure 3 summarises the main conclusions.

When investigating the characteristics that influence the position people take on the alignment, education emerges as the main determinant, far more important than, and overshadowing factors related to a weak socio-economic position. Education appears as such an important determinant that one is tempted to see the alignment as the cultural expression of educational inequality. If this interpretation is correct, then the rising number of non-participants and the rise of the extreme right should be related to a sharpened and intensified cultural and moral conflict between categories of people distinguished on the basis of their diploma⁷. It does not seem wholly appropriate to describe these categories as "classes" for, as the observed alignment of value orientations illustrates, educa-

7 Topf, 1989 reaches a similar conclusion for Britain. The conclusion drawn here should be supplemented by the observation that on the familiar, "socio-economic" Left/Right-cleavage, higher education is accompanied by a shift to the right or to the inegalitarian position (Elchardus, 1994c). People with low levels of education are therefore opposed to people with high levels of education along two dimensions: both on the "old" Left/Right-cleavage and on the new alignment.

tion does not only indicate different life chances, but also different relations to the cultural and moral materials that are used to perceive the world, foster an identity, give meaning to one's position in society, and orient one's political behaviour. In that sense the conflict uncovered is, sociologically speaking, as much related to life style as to class.

The symptoms of the legitimization crisis are rather strongly related to the new alignment and are clearly an expression of the rightist position on that alignment. In the 30% of the population with the most leftist position on the alignment we find 8% protest votes (5% VLAAMS BLOK and 3% non-participation). Of the people belonging to the 30% of the population with the most rightist position, one in four voters opted either for a non vote (11%) or a vote for the Vlaams Blok (14%). This observation lends credibility to the view that both non-participation and a vote for the extreme right can be viewed as different, albeit related expressions of a similar political culture.

Table 2:

Delegitimation and the new alignment

Left position	Centre position	Right position
5% Vlaams Blok	11 % Vlaams Blok	14 % Vlaams Blok
3 % non-participation	7 % non-participation	11 % non-participation

The New Left/Right alignment describes a new political cleavage and draws attention to some of the issues around which the cultural conflict between the higher educated and the lesser educated is taking shape. The New Right position on this alignment appears as an expression of opposition against the educated elite's definition of appropriate value orientations. When the latter are formulated by the educational elite itself, as in the case of the value-dimensions measured on the basis of survey questions, they sound like "tolerance", "solidarity", "democratic relationships", "belief in political efficacy" and "post-materialist concerns". The position of the people with low levels of education then becomes: "intolerant", "ethnocentric" or "racist", "authoritarian", "politically cynical", "individualist", and "materialist". Such a description of the conflict is clearly biased in favour of the educational elite's point of view.

Because it concerns value orientations, it is not easy to give a neutral formulation of the conflicting positions. One should also keep in mind that the observed alignment captures cultural materials that are evolving, sensitivities and ways of speaking that can be elaborated by various actors, such as cultural entrepreneurs, social movements, and political parties. Of course the influence such groups can have, depends, among other things, on the way in which the values, beliefs, meanings, and information that are diffused, dovetail with the everyday experience of the people concerned. It is quite clear that those conditions play a role in the cultural conflict as the observed alignment expresses it. A more neutral description of the elite's position, would describe their options as: a rejection of ethnicity as a basis for political organisation, belief in solidarity, despite inequality (maybe even instead of policies effectively pursuing equality), rejection of authoritarian relationships in favour of reflexivity and critical discourse, belief in political efficacy and participation based on civic culture, post-materialist concerns and low regard for materialist concerns. The opposition to such values can in part be understood on the basis of the cultural, social and economic means at

the disposal of the less educated. It is simply more difficult for them to believe in a benign world and in solidarity (Elchardus, Derks, Glorieux, Pelleriaux, 1995). Materialist concerns are often more pressing for them. Reflexivity and critical discourse usually means that they will lose the argument. Those are in fact the values against which they have been measured at school, and found lacking. Authority, unambiguous definitions of rights and duties, can therefore seem more just, and predictable than reflexivity and critical discourse. Political cynicism appears as a rather realistic estimate of their political influence. An ethnic definition of identity, just like a traditional definition of virtue, has at least the merit of being familiar and of creating the impression that borders are still possible in a world where globalisation often means the loss of a job. The alignment and the culture in which it is embedded both reflect, interpret, and represent a set of conditions and the way meanings and values are mobilised in responding to them.

Looked upon in this way the so called protest vote appears as one kind of response. It appears to express a rejection of a set of values that is perceived as threatening and demeaning. Because both non-participation and a vote for the extreme right are quite strongly related to the new alignment, it makes sense to consider them as an expression of the cultural conflict described by that alignment. Because non-participation and a vote for the extreme right are political actions, this should not be interpreted to mean that they can be exhaustively understood in terms of the new alignment. A proper interpretation of our findings is that this alignment constitutes one of the important keys to a more adequate cultural understanding of the electoral behaviour that is interpreted as a sign of a legitimisation crisis.

VII. Channelling the protest towards "voice" and "exit"

If that diagnosis is correct, it becomes important to explain why in some cases the protest expresses itself in extreme right wing votes, in other cases in non-participation. The latter can be considered the "exit" option, the former "voice". The exit option is chosen by people for who the feelings of political powerlessness predominate. The voice option is taken by people for who the anti-migrant sentiment predominates. On the basis of this observation one could, as Georgi Verbeeck & Hans De Witte (1995) do, argue that the non-participation is an expression of political protest, while a vote for the extreme right is an expression of a value option. Such a conclusion does however give an exaggerated importance to the statistical fact that of different attitudes that are all strongly interrelated, political powerlessness is somewhat more strongly related to non-participation, and ethnocentrism to a vote for the extreme right. Taking into account the strong relationships between the different components of the new alignment, it seems

Table 3:

non-participation for the elections and the combination of political cynicism and social non-participation

	low political cynicism	average political cynicism	high political cynicism
member of at least one assoc. association	0%	3%	11%
no memberships	2%	4%	16%

more correct to interpret the non-participation and the vote for the extreme right as different expressions of the same oppositional culture.

Both these expressions are influenced by other conditions, besides the position on the new alignment. In our model we did not try to include all the relevant factors, but focused on two themes that have played an important role in the conventional theory of political culture: the civic culture hypothesis, and the relation between social integration and civic culture (Putnam, 1993).

"Exit" is further increased by a lack of social integration which we measured as non-participation in associational life (see Table 3). This confirms the old Durkheimian hypothesis which sees in politics a reflection of social life and in political non-participation a reflection of social non-participation. A lack of social integration, measured as the absence of membership in associations, increases the likelihood of non-participation in politics⁸. Among the persons who belong to the one third of the electorate which feel the most powerless and who hold no memberships in associations 16% did not participate. In the case those people do hold at least one membership, this percentage drops to 11. When this effect of social integration or social participation is looked at more closely, it turns out to hold for the people with relatively low levels of education. Apparently prolonged education promotes social integration and can serve as an alternative for participation. For less educated people other means of social integration, particularly associational life, do make a difference.

Table 4:
extreme right wing votes (Vlaams Blok) by attitudes towards
immigrants and deference

	low ethnocentric attitude	average ethnocentric attitude	high ethnocentric attitude
practising catholic	1%	4%	9%
other	3%	10%	23%
low authoritarian attitude	2%	12%	31%
average authoritarian attitude	4%	9%	21%
high authoritarian attitude	3%	5%	15%

In the case of "voice" the civic culture hypothesis seems to play an important role. The extent to which feelings of ethnocentrism or racism are translated into a vote for the extreme right is strongly mediated by deference to authority. In table 4 we show these effects on the basis of two different proxy-variables for deference for authority, the first is based on religious self-definition, the second on the authoritarianism scale. We assume that authoritarianism is associated with respect for authority and authority figures. The probability of a vote for the Vlaams Blok increases as people's attitudes towards migrants become more negative. But, at each level of ethnocentrism we see that the probability to vote for the extreme

⁸ Ackaert & De Winter (1993:76) do not find such an effect of social isolation. The difference between their and our finding might be due to differences in model specification, but is more likely due to the choice of indicator. They measure social isolation as feelings of loneliness, we emphasize social participation in associational life.

right is much lower for practising Catholics than for other religious groups, and much lower for people with authoritarian attitudes than for other people. Of the people that belong to the one third of the population with the most ethnocentric outlook and that are practising catholic, 9% voted for the Vlaams Blok. Of the people with the same degree of ethnocentrism, but that are not practising Catholics, 23% did so. Of the people that belong to the one third of the population that are most ethnocentric and the one third that are most authoritarian, 15% voted Vlaams Blok. Of the people that belong to the one third that is the most ethnocentric and the one third that is the least authoritarian, 31% did so. Other things being equal, a deference for authority, decreases the chance of "voice". At equal levels of the feeling of political powerlessness, it somewhat increases the probability of "exit" or non-participation.

VIII. Summary and conclusions

Our analysis indicates that it is correct to interpret non-participation and a vote for the extreme right as at least partly due to a legitimation crisis. Even though the conventional notion of civic culture has not lost its relevance in understanding this crisis, it can no longer adequately explain it. That crisis rather seems to be the expression of a new alignment of values. This alignment describes a deep cultural cleavage that divides the higher from the less educated. This cleavage also expresses itself politically. People who hold pronounced positions on this alignment are more likely than others to turn away from the established, "traditional" parties. People with the values and attitudes typical of the "progressive" or "new left" side of the cleavage, vote disproportionately for the Greens. People with the values and attitudes typical of the "conservative" or "new right" side of the cleavage, opt disproportionately for non-participation and for the extreme right. One should therefore look upon this cleavage as a source of political change.

In the recent political debate in Flanders, non-participation and the extreme right have been regarded as symptoms of a legitimation crisis, and of political protest. It seems right to do so, because both forms of political action are influenced by a set of common value-orientations that are opposed to the value orientations associated with established politics and the educated elites. The difference between the two expressions of cultural opposition or political protest can be understood as a choice for either an "exit" or a "voice" option. People select the "exit" option when they feel especially politically powerless and when other crucial value conflicts, such as the attitudes toward ethnic minorities, are somewhat less salient for them. The "exit" option is further stimulated by a lack of social integration, as well as by deference to authority which makes the more radical "voice"-option look too daring. The "voice"-option is chosen by people for which the value conflict over the position of "migrants" is the most salient issue. The extent to which ethnocentrism translates itself in "voice" or a vote for the extreme right, is however strongly determined by deference to authority. Identities and attitudes indicative of the latter, decrease the proportion in which ethnocentrism translates into a vote for the extreme right with a quarter to a third.

While our findings suggest an interpretation of non-participation and the extreme right, they do not give us a verified explanation for the rise of those phenomena over the past decades. It is of course this rise which has fuelled the diagnoses that our political system is in the midst of a legitimation crisis. One easy way to explain this rise would be to say that feelings of political powerlessness and ethnocentrism have increased. We do however have no data to document

such a rise. A strong increase of feelings of ethnocentrism and political cynicism, is moreover, not very plausible. In Great Britain where data relevant for the civic culture hypothesis have been collected since 1959, feelings of political powerlessness or cynicism have always been rather high and have increased less than is usually assumed (Topf, 1989:56). One should not confuse the rise of feelings of ethnocentrism and political powerlessness, with the rise of the political relevance of such feelings. When searching for an explanation for the growing political salience of feelings of powerlessness and ethnocentrism, and their expression in non-participation and a vote for the extreme right, it seems far more plausible to focus attention on the growing cultural conflict between the higher and the less educated and on the expression of that conflict in a new alignment of values.

The long term causes of the symptoms of a legitimation crisis seem to be the growing economic and cultural gap between the higher and less educated, and the ensuing growth of a conflict in which cultural and social-economic differences are strongly linked. The different expressions of this conflict, non-participation and a vote for the extreme right, can be understood as respectively a weaker "exit" and a more radical "voice" response to the withdrawal of loyalty from the established political system. The exit option is, especially among the less educated, further stimulated by demographic and other developments that decrease social integration and participation in associational life. The voice option is further stimulated by de-traditionalisation, the steadily diminishing number of practising Catholics, and the decline of deference towards authority.

Appendix 1: Scale for political cynicism (Carton et. al., 1993)

Likert items (1=completely agree / 5=completely disagree):

v72.1: There's no sense in voting; the parties do what they want to do anyway. (49 % agrees)

v72.3: Parties are only interested in my vote; not in my opinion. (67 % agrees)

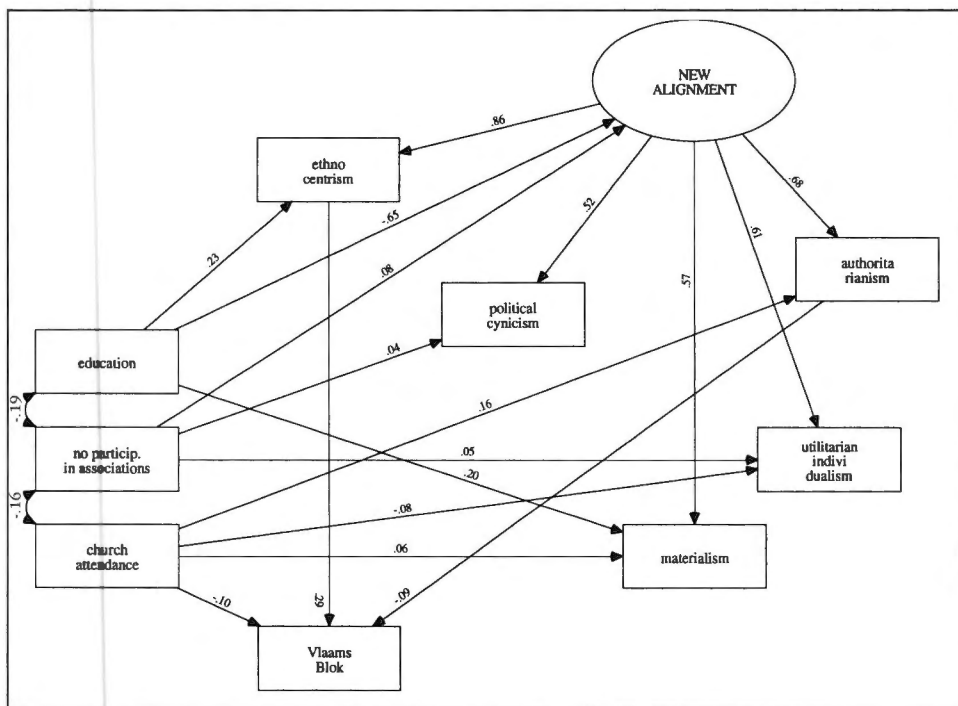
v72.5: So many people vote in elections that my vote doesn't make any difference. (23 % agrees)

Cronbach alpha.71

Appendix 2: Structural Models⁹

Amos (analysis of moment structures) procedure (Arbuckle, 1988).

Model 1: extreme right (Vlaams Blok) votes

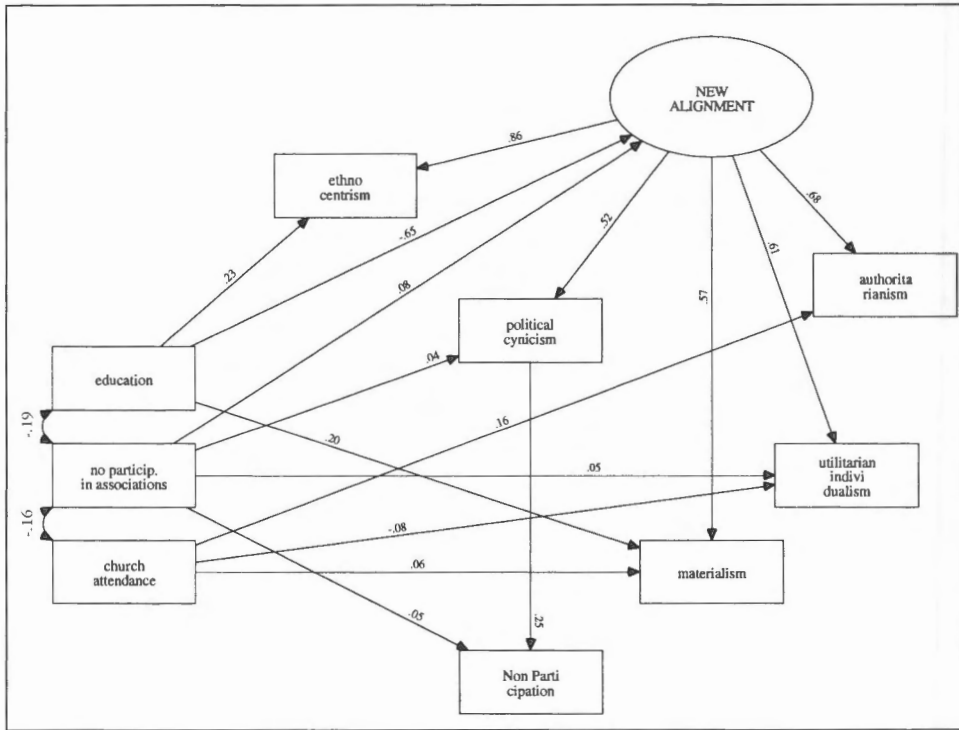


N=2691

Chi-square = 21.0	Degrees of freedom = 16	Probability level = .178
RMR = .012	GFI = .998	AGFI = .995

9 For reasons of clarity, the error terms have not been depicted in the graphical representation of the models. All correlations between error terms have been fixed to zero, except the error terms for the variables "political cynicism" and "materialism" (correlation -.11).

Model 2: Non-participation in the elections



N=2691

Chi-square = 19.12	Degrees of freedom = 17	Probability level = .332
RMR = .012	GFI = .998	AGFI = .996

Squared Multiple Correlations:

Model 1 & 2:
 New Alignment .46
 political cynicism .29
 ethnocentrism .53
 authoritarianism .49
 materialism .22
 individualism .39

Model 1:
 Vlaams Blok .08

Model 2:
 non-participation .07

Abstract

Our analysis indicates that it is correct to interpret non-participation and a vote for the Extreme Right as at least partly due to a legitimization crisis which seems to be the expression of a new alignment of values. This alignment describes a deep cultural cleavage that divides the higher from the less educated. People who hold pronounced positions on this alignment are more likely than others to turn away from the established, "traditional" parties. People with the values and attitudes typical of the "progressive" or "new left" side of the cleavage, vote disproportionately for the Greens. People with the values and attitudes typical of the "conservative" or "new right" side of the cleavage, opt disproportionately for non-participation and for the Extreme Right.

In the recent political debate in Flanders, both non-participation and the Extreme Right have been regarded as symptoms of a legitimization crisis, and of political protest. The difference between the two expressions of cultural opposition or political protest can be understood as a choice for either an "exit" or a "voice" option. People select the "exit" option when they feel especially politically powerless. The "voice"-option is chosen by people for which the value conflict over the position of "migrants" is the most salient issue.

The long term causes of the symptoms of a legitimization crisis seem to be the growing economic and cultural gap between the higher and less educated, and the ensuing growth of a conflict in which cultural and social-economic differences are strongly linked.