

Media Note
Analysis of the NotLikeUs panel survey
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Topic 4: Politically apart, or closer than ever ? Flemish and Walloon voters’ political preferences and left-right self-placement in 2024

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INTRODUCTION

Flemish and Walloon voters are often depicted as very different political ‘animals’. Walloon voters would be more leftist compared to Flemish voters, especially on economic matters. Conversely, Flemish voters would support right-wing policies, in both the economy and on socio-cultural issues. In 2019, the performances of the radical left (PTB) in Wallonia, and that of the radical right (VB) in Flanders reinforced perceptions of their differentness. The 2024 electoral breakthrough of the MR and of Les Engagés in Wallonia suddenly challenged the Walloon voter stereotype. Questions rapidly arose regarding the presumed ‘right-wing turn’ in Wallonia. In Flanders, the N-VA did manage to remain the largest party, although the VB reached one of its highest scores in recent history. The centre-left party Vooruit, and the radical-left party PVDA increased their electoral support compared to 2019 (around +3 to +4 percentage points). Flemish voters, contrary to Walloon ones, would have moved more to the centre, but also to the left.

These interpretations, however, are based on vote choice rather than on voters’ attitudes and ideological or policy preferences. Vote choice depends heavily on the political *supply* – which is quite different in the two regions, notably due to the absence of a strong radical-right party in Wallonia. **This note investigates the extent to which interpretations of the 2024 June 9th election are verified when we look at voters’ political preferences, and ideological placement on the left-right scale.** This note also follows up the analyses conducted in 2019, which already nuanced the supposed differences in policy preferences between the two regions (Walgrave et al. 2019)¹. More specifically, this note aims to:

- (1) Identify the differences and similarities in terms of ideological positions² between Flemish and Walloon voters in 2024;
- (2) Explore the extent to which these positions have moved between 2019 and 2024, in the two regions;
- (3) Depict the ideological profiles of the major parties’ electorates with regards to these positions in 2024, and compare them to the 2019 ideological profiles.

In summary :

- (1) Our findings confirm that, **on average, Walloon and Flemish voters are not that far apart regarding their political preferences**, with a majority of voters in the two regions wanting the government to have a role in the economy, and preferring that migrants adapt to European culture. On the issue of State reform, the Flemish electorate prefers keeping the status quo whereas Walloon voters are somewhat more in favour of giving more power to the Federal government. With regards to left-right self-placement (in general, on the economic dimension, and on the cultural dimension), voters in Wallonia and Flanders are also very close to each other.
- (2) Moreover, our findings display, **on average, no or only limited shifts among Flemish and Walloon voters between 2019 and 2024**. For opinions on government intervention in the economy, we see a – very small – shift in Flanders to the right; but no such shift appears in Wallonia. With regards to general left-right placement and opinions on the integration of immigrants, the average scores in both regions remained stable between 2019 and 2024.
- (3) **However**, while the average scores did not move much across regions and election years, several **interesting patterns and shifts between 2019 and 2024 do appear when we**

¹Walgrave S. et al. (2019). “Vlamingen en Walen stemden voor verschillende partijen maar verschillen minder van mening over het beleid dat ze willen”, Nota op basis van de RepResent-studie1, 4 juni 2019.

² We use the term “ideological positions” as a summarizing term to refer to voters’ self-placement on left-right ideological scales, as well as to policy preferences with regards to government intervention in the economy, integration of immigrants, and State reform.

zoom in on the different party electorates, with some electorates scoring more to the right whereas others scoring more to the left, depending on the electorate and specific ideological position we look at. Below, we delve deeper into these shifts between 2019 and 2024. Overall, **different explanations** may account for these shifts within party electorates: while it could be that the voters of these parties may have **actually changed their positions** on the items we study, it could also be that the **composition of these electorates has changed due to vote switching**, thereby altering the scores per party electorate.

METHOD AND DATA

We leverage data of the NotLikeUs (NLU) survey, a 3-wave panel survey that surveyed the same sample of respondents multiple times over the duration of the 2024 election campaign. The survey relies on an online quota sample, which allows for relatively short field work periods. Wave 1 surveyed a large sample of 7507 respondents (February/March 2024); wave 2 surveyed 6733 respondents in the final weeks of the campaign (May/June 2024); wave 3 surveyed 5441 respondents after the elections (June 2024).

We base our analysis on the sample of Flemish (N=2781) and Walloon (N=1333) respondents that participated in wave 2 and wave 3 in 2024.

We present weighted analyses, which adjust the sample distributions so that the distribution matches that of the region's population in terms of age, gender, education level, and vote choice in the 2024 federal elections. The vote choice weight was included to correct for the deviations in the distribution of electoral preferences: in Flanders, the raw sample overrepresented voters of Groen and Vooruit, and underrepresented Vlaams Belang voters, and in both regions voters that cast a blank/invalid vote, and people that abstained in the elections were underrepresented.

The questions used to measure political preferences and left-right self-placement were asked during wave 2 of the panel survey – meaning, during the campaign, in the weeks preceding the June 9th elections. In order to examine these preferences across party electorates, we use voters' 2024 reported voting choice (wave 3 of the panel, post-election). In order to compare 2024 to 2019, we use data from the 2019 RepResent panel survey implemented by the same research consortium (campaign wave for preferences; post-electoral wave for voting choice).

I. IDEOLOGICAL POSITIONS IN FLANDERS AND WALLONIA IN 2024

We tap into voters' ideological positions by focusing on two different kinds of questions. First, we rely on respondents' self-placement on three left-right scales and second, we delve into respondents' answers to three specific questions that capture their positions on three important policy issues (i.e., government intervention in the economy, migration, state reform).

Measuring left-right self-placement

In order to explore the left-right leaning of the respondents, we use the classical self-placement question on a scale from 0 to 10: "In politics, people often talk about "left" or "right". Can you place your own convictions on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 meaning "left", 5 "in the centre", and 10 "right"?"

Nevertheless, “left” and “right” can have different meanings. A crucial distinction is between the *economic* understanding of these notions and the *cultural* meaning. Therefore, in the 2024 questionnaire, the respondents were asked to place themselves on the left-right scale on these two different dimensions. The questionnaire included a brief text explaining these differences (see below; see Dutch and French formulations in Appendix).

*In politics, we often talk about "left" and "right", but "left" and "right" can have different meanings. A particular distinction is made between the "economic" left or right and the "cultural" left or right. People and political parties can be economically on the left and culturally on the right, and vice versa. On the one hand, **the so-called "economic" left or right** refers to the extent to which the government should intervene in the economy and ensure redistribution. Parties that position themselves on the left economically generally want wealth to be distributed more equally and believe that the government should play a major role. On the other hand, parties on the economic right emphasize the importance of individual responsibility and the free market. On the scale below, can you **indicate where you are** on the left-right economic axis, with 0 being the leftmost position and 10 being the rightmost position?*

*On the other hand, the so-called "cultural" left or right refers to issues such as climate, immigration, diversity and crime. A party that positions itself on the left culturally usually wants strong climate policies, strives to promote multiculturalism and wants to be less repressive when it comes to crime. A party that is culturally right-wing generally considers the climate to be less important, proposes a strict migration policy and wants a harsh criminal policy. On the scale below, can you **indicate where you are** on the left-right cultural axis, where 0 is the leftmost position and 10 is the rightmost position?*

Overall, the data indicates that the three variables measuring respondents’ left-right self-placement are highly correlated (i.e., general, economic, and cultural). The more a respondent places her/himself to the left (or right) on one axis, the more s/he will place her/himself to the left (or right) on the other axis. The general left-right self-placement does hence highly and equally *correlate* with the economic left-right self-placement and with the cultural left-right self-placement (Pearson correlation coefficient = 0.8). The economic and cultural self-placement overall correlate between each other, although to a lower extent (Pearson correlation coefficient = 0.6), meaning that they do capture different aspects.

Average left-right placement

Table 1 displays the average left-right self-placement of Walloon and Flemish voters in 2024. The average *general* left-right self-placement in Flanders is 5.4 and in Wallonia, it is 5.3. This difference between the two regions is small and is not statistically significant.³

Regarding the economic left-right self-placement in 2024, Walloon voters on average scored slightly more to the left (5.0) than the Flemish voters (5.2). The difference is statistically significant, although it is very small. On the cultural left-right dimension, their scores are pretty similar and not significantly different from each other.

Table 1: Left-right self-placement in 2024, Flanders & Wallonia, weighted average scores

	Flanders ‘24	Wallonia ‘24	Statistically significant?
General left-right (0-10)	5.4	5.3	No
Economic left-right (0-10)	5.2	5.0	Yes
Cultural left-right (0-10)	5.5	5.4	No

³ When a difference is statistically significant, it means that there is little chance that the difference between the two groups/samples is due to chance.

We can summarize that, in terms of how they position themselves **on the ideological spectrum, the Flemish and Walloon electorates do not differ very much**. We only find a difference regarding the economic left-right dimension, yet with 0.2 points on a scale ranging from 0 to 10, this difference is small.

Measuring policy preferences

We delve deeper into respondents' ideological positions by looking into the answers to three policy questions that are used to capture respondents' preferences on (see Dutch and French formulations in Appendix):

- a. Government intervention in the economy: "Some people think that the government must intervene as little as possible in the economy. Other people think that the government must intervene as much as possible in the economy. Where would you place your own convictions..." [From 0 ("The government should intervene as much as possible") to 10 ("The government should intervene as little as possible")]
- b. Migration: "Some people think that non-western immigrants must be able to live in Europe while preserving their own culture. Others think that those immigrants should adapt to the European culture. Where would you place your own convictions..." [From 0 ("Migrants should be allowed to keep their own culture" to 10 ("Migrants should adapt to European culture")]
- c. State reform: "Some people think that the regions and communities should have more power. Others think that the Federal State should have more power. Where would you place your own convictions..." [From 0 ("Federal State should have more power") to 10 ("Regions should have more power")]

These three policy issues are usually quite central in determining voting behavior in Belgium. They are connected to three central cleavages, namely: the socio-economic cleavage; the socio-cultural or the "winner vs loser of globalization" cleavage; and the centre-periphery cleavage (or community cleavage).

For the first two items, a higher score indicates a more *right-wing* placement; whereas a lower score indicates a more *left-wing* placement. For the third item, a higher score indicates a decentralization or *regionalist* perspective, whereas a lower score indicates support for more re-federalization of competencies.

Average policy preferences

Table 2 presents the *average* preference of Walloon and Flemish voters over the three policy issues described above. Regarding the issue of government intervention in the economy, the average preference of both Walloon and Flemish voters is **centre-left**, meaning moderately in favour of government intervention in the economy. While Walloons are slightly more to the left than Flemish voters on the issue, and the difference is statistically significant, the difference is fairly small (score 3.6 versus 4.3 respectively). This also aligns with the small difference in the economic left-right ideological placement (see above).

Regarding the issue of the integration of immigrants, the average preferences of Flemish and Walloon voters are very close (no statistical difference). With averages of 7.0 and 7.2, the average preference in the two regions is clearly on the right. Moreover, Flemish voters do not appear more rightist than Walloon voters on this issue. Again, this aligns with the absence of a statistical difference in the cultural left-right placement among Walloon and Flemish voters (see above).

Finally, the differences between Flemings and Walloons are largest when looking at the State reform issue. Although the difference is again quite limited (a 1-point difference on the 11-point-scale), it is significant: the average Flemish voter tends to adopt a centrist position – therefore, around a *status quo* scenario – whereas the average Walloon voter tends to be slightly more in favour of giving more power to the Federal State.

Table 2: Policy preferences in 2024, Flanders & Wallonia, weighted average scores

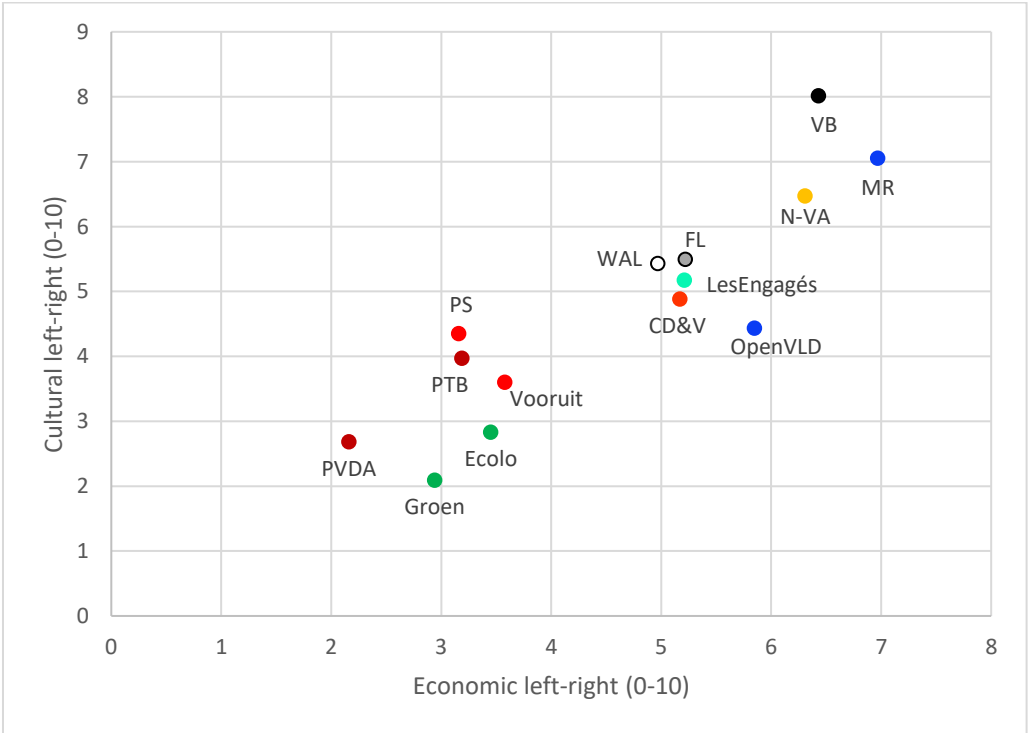
	Flanders '24	Wallonia '24	Statistically significant?
Government intervention in the economy (0-10)	4.3	3.6	Yes
Integration of immigrants (0-10)	7.0	7.2	No
More power to Federal state vs. Regions (0-10)	5.0	4.0	Yes

We can state that **also in term of policy preferences, the differences between Flemish and Walloon voters remain rather limited**. In terms of government intervention in the economy, Walloon voters are slightly more in favour of government interventions than Flemish voters, but the difference is rather small, and both groups are situated on the left side of the scale. We detect the clearest difference between voters from the two regions regarding their preferences for **State reform**. While Flemish voters prefer on average the status quo, Walloon voters are somewhat more in favour of giving more power to the Federal level.

Average ideological placement by the different electorates

Next, we visualize voters’ ideological positions on the left-right economic and cultural dimensions per **party electorate** in 2024, in Flanders and Wallonia. To this end, we use respondents’ answer to the question “Which party did you vote for at the federal level?”, available in wave 3 (post-election). More specifically, Figure 1 displays each electorate’s average score on the economic dimension (x-axis) and the cultural dimension (y-axis).

Figure 1: Ideological placement of party electorates – Flanders & Wallonia, 2024



First of all, the *average* self-placement of all Flemish and Walloon voters together on both dimensions are remarkably close to each other, as clearly shown on the graph (and as shown in Table 1 above). Voters of the (former) Christian-democrats are the closest to these averages, hence confirming their ‘centrist’ identity. For the other parties, we see a clear left-right divide, on both dimensions.

Moreover, the ideological space seems more ‘spread out’ between electorates in Flanders than in Wallonia. Remarkably, leftist party voters in Wallonia seem to place themselves on average more to the right than their Flemish counterparts (i.e., the electorates of their sister parties), on both dimensions, with an exception of Vooruit voters appearing more to the right on the economic dimension than PS voters. Yet importantly, some of these differences are significant while others are not. First, **PTB voters place themselves significantly more to the right than PVDA voters**, on both dimensions. Second, **Ecolo voters place themselves significantly more to the right than Groen voters on the socio-cultural dimension** (but not significant for socio-economic dimension). Third, **PS voters place themselves significantly more to the right than Vooruit voters on the socio-cultural dimension**. The difference between Vooruit and PS voters on the socio-economic dimension just misses significance. Furthermore, MR voters place themselves significantly more to the right than Open VLD voters, on both dimensions. Interestingly, **MR voters also appear more rightist than those of N-VA**, and this is again significant for both dimensions.

Lastly, the difficult government formation which is sometimes imputed to disagreements between the MR and Vooruit seems to be reflected in the wide gap between the electorates of both parties.

II. CHANGES IN IDEOLOGICAL POSITIONS BETWEEN 2019 AND 2024

Average ideological positions in 2019 and 2024 in Flanders and Wallonia

In this section, we compare voters’ preferences in 2024 to those of 2019, with regards to some of the items above. Specifically, we focus on the average self-placement on the *general* left-right scale, as well as average positions regarding government intervention in the economy and the integration of immigrants. We focus on these items because the items on State reform, and the economic and cultural left-right dimensions were not asked in 2019. This analysis allows for a general comparison of ideological positions between the two elections. **We nevertheless need to be cautious, as the 2019 and 2024 samples do not include the same respondents: we do not measure changes at the individual level, but only at the aggregate level.** Table 3 contains the results for Wallonia and Table 4 for Flanders.

Table 3: Ideological positions in Wallonia, 2019 and 2024, weighted average scores

	2019	2024	Statistically significant?
General left-right (0-10)	5.0	5.3	No
Government intervention in the economy (0-10)	3.8	3.6	No
Integration of immigrants (0-10)	7.2	7.2	No

Table 4: Ideological positions in Flanders, 2019 and 2024, weighted average scores

	2019	2024	Statistically significant?
General left-right (0-10)	5.5	5.4	No
Government intervention in the economy (0-10)	4.1	4.3	Yes
Integration of immigrants (0-10)	7.1	7.0	No

As both tables show, **average ideological positions remained rather stable in both regions.** The only significant difference that we can observe is on the issue of government intervention in the economy in Flanders. Where Flemish voters were slightly more in favour of government interventions in 2019 (with a score of 4.1), they are found slightly more at the centre of the scale (4.3) in 2024, although the change is very small and they can still be described as having a centre-left position on the issue. Moreover, **while the average left-right score among Walloon voters is a bit more on the right side of the scale in 2024 (5.3 vs. 5.0), the difference is not significant, hence running counter to the proclaimed right-wing turn in Wallonia.**

We can hence conclude that, **at least regarding these three items, both Flemish and Walloon voters on average seem to have rather stable positions. There is however less stability when we distinguish between different party electorates** – something that we do in the next section.

Average ideological positions in 2019 and 2024 by party electorates

We use again the question “*Which party did you vote for at the federal level?*” to determine respondents’ vote choice. Given that we also asked this question in the 2019 survey, we can compare voters’ average preferences and placement in 2019 with their preferences and placement in 2024. Again, **it is important to keep in mind that we only present scores on the aggregated level, as the 2019 and 2024 samples do not include the same respondents.**

In Flanders, we see that while the general left-right self-placement did not change significantly when considering all voters, **significant shifts are visible in almost all electorates** except for the electorates of CD&V and N-VA. **PVDA, Groen, Vooruit but also Open VLD voters perceive themselves more on the left in 2024 as compared to 2019. The electorate of VB perceives itself more on the right (7.7) as compared to 2019 (6.9).** Overall, the left-right divide appears clearly from the scores: the different electorates perceive themselves in line with how the political parties are placed in the table (most left-wing parties on the left to most right-wing parties on the right).

Regarding preferences for the government’s intervention in the economy, a left-right divide is also visible in 2024, with scores gradually increasing the more we move to the right. Indeed, average preferences of PVDA, Groen and Vooruit voters score between 3.4 and 3.8; N-VA and VB voters are the most right-wing on the issue (4.7 and 4.6), with Open Vld voters (4.5) and CD&V voters (4.3) in between. Yet overall, the divide is not that wide, with a maximum of 1.3-point gap between the lowest and highest scores. Moreover, on the left-wing side, the electorates of Groen and Vooruit (s.pa in 2019) did not change regarding this issue. Only **PVDA voters show more left-wing preferences** in 2024 than in 2019. **The electorates of CD&V, Open VLD, N-VA and VB, by contrast, all show more right-wing preferences** in 2024 as compared to 2019.

Table 5: Party electorate profiles – Flanders, 2019-2024, weighted average scores

		Party electorates in Flanders							Flanders
		PVDA	Groen	Vooruit	CD&V	Open VLD	N-VA	VB	
General left-right self-placement (0-10)	2024	2.4	2.5	3.3	5.1	5.1	6.6	7.7	5.5 <i>N=2 770</i>
	2019	3.0	3.6	3.9	5.4	5.6	6.8	6.9	5.5 <i>N=1 863</i>
Government intervention in the economy (0-10)	2024	3.4	3.7	3.8	4.3	4.5	4.7	4.6	4.3 <i>N=2 755</i>
	2019	4.4	3.7	3.8	3.8	3.9	4.2	4.0	4.1 <i>N=1 861</i>

Integration of migrants (0-10)	2024	5.2	4.6	5.9	6.5	6.4	7.6	8.6	7.0 <i>N=2 754</i>
	2019	5.9	5.9	7.0	7.0	7.2	7.6	7.6	7.1 <i>N=1 863</i>

Note: Significant differences between 2019 and 2024 per party electorate are marked in bold.

Regarding the **migration** issue, a **left-right divide** again appears, between the most leftist party voters (PVDA at 5.2; Groen at 4.6), centre-left and centre-right (around 6-6.5 for Vooruit, Open Vld, CD&V), and rightist ones (N-VA, VB: 7.6 and 8.6). The gap between electorates is wider on this issue (4 points between Groen and VB) than on the socioeconomic issue (1.3 points between PVDA and N-VA). Notably, **most party electorates show more leftist preferences** in 2024 compared to 2019, **except N-VA voters** (stable preferences) **and VB voters** (+1 point to the right).

Summarizing this, we see that across all three items, **the average scores of most leftist voters generally moved more to the left or remained stable; whereas the average scores of most rightist voters generally moved more to the right or remained stable**. For the voters of parties in the centre, it depends on the item we look at: while average scores moved more to the left on the left-right self-placement and on the migration issue, they moved more to the right on government intervention in the economy. Importantly, there may be **different explanations** for the shifts that we see here. While it could be that the electorates of these parties may have actually changed their average positions on these items, it could also be that the composition of these electorates has changed due to vote switching (see Conclusions).

Next, in Wallonia, only **MR voters** perceive themselves as **more rightist** in 2024 (+0.5 points) than in 2019, and **Ecolo voters** perceive themselves as **more leftist** (-1.3 points). The self-placement on the left-right scale of the other parties' voters remains stable. Overall, a left-right divide is again visible.

With respect to preferences regarding government intervention in the economy there is little variation between party electorates: scores vary between a minimum of 3.1 (PS) and a maximum of 3.7 (MR, LE) in 2024. The left-right divide is slightly less marked than in Flanders, and a **relative consensus** seems to exist over the idea that the government needs to intervene in the economy. For the **left-wing parties PTB, Ecolo and PS**, average preferences are **more leftist** in 2024 than in 2019. The largest change is observed for Ecolo voters: they were in fact the most 'rightist' on the issue in 2019 (4.1), but they appear as the second most leftist in 2024 (3.3).

Table 6: Party electorate profiles – Wallonia, 2019-2024, weighted average scores

		Party electorates in Wallonia					Wallonia
		PTB	Ecolo	PS	L.E.	MR	
General left-right self-placement (0-10)	2024	3.9	3.1	3.3	5.4	7.2	5.3 <i>N=1 320</i>
	2019	4.0	4.4	3.6	5.4	6.7	5.0 <i>N=1 315</i>
Government intervention in the economy (0-10)	2024	3.4	3.3	3.1	3.7	3.7	3.6 <i>N=1 316</i>
	2019	3.9	4.1	3.6	3.9	3.6	3.8 <i>N=1 317</i>
Integration of migrants (0-10)	2024	6.4	5.2	7.0	6.9	8.1	7.2 <i>N=1 318</i>
	2019	7.1	6.7	6.9	6.7	7.7	7.2 <i>N=1 317</i>

Note: Significant differences between 2019 and 2024 per party electorate are marked in bold. The electorate of DéFI is not included because the N was too low in the sample.

On the migration issue, **MR voters** have a **strong right-wing stance**. With a score of 8.1, they come fairly close to VB voters (scoring 8.6) in 2024. Les Engagés and PS voters then follow (around 7.0 – which is higher than the average placement on this issue among voters of their ‘sister’ party – CD&V and Vooruit— in Flanders). Ecolo and PTB voters hold the most leftist preferences (5.2 and 6.4), although higher (more rightist) than their sister party in Flanders (4.6 and 5.2). **Only the preferences of Ecolo voters have changed significantly (to the left)** in comparison to 2019. In 2024, the **ideological gap** on the migration issue (between the most leftist and most rightist average views) is wider among Flemish party voters than among Walloon party voters – but we can observe in Wallonia a widening in 2024 (2.9-point gap) compared to 2019 (1 point).

To summarize, **shifts between 2019 and 2024 per party electorate are somewhat less prevalent in Wallonia than in Flanders, but when shifts occur we do again see that the average scores of leftist parties moved more to the left**. On the centre-right (Les Engagés) and right-wing side (MR), only one significant shift appeared, where MR voters placed themselves more to the right on the general left-right scale. Again, different explanations may account for this (i.e., actual movement among the electorates, and/or changes in composition of the electorates due to vote switching).

CONCLUSIONS

Our analysis of the NotLikeUs panel survey data gives us some insights into the political preferences and ideological self-placement of Flemish and Walloon voters in 2024, and on how those have evolved since 2019. More specifically, this note aimed to:

- (1) Identify the differences and similarities in terms of ideological positions between Flemish and Walloon voters in 2024;
- (2) Explore the extent to which these positions have moved between 2019 and 2024, in the two regions;
- (3) Depict the ideological profiles of the major parties’ electorates with regards to these positions in 2024 and compare them to the 2019 ideological profiles.

With regards to (1), much like in our 2019 note (Walgrave et al. 2019)⁴, our findings indicate that, **on average, Walloon and Flemish voters are not that far apart from each other in certain policy areas**, which contradicts the often-held perceptions of stark differences between both electorates. It seems that the political supply in the two regions tends to exacerbate differences. **Both public opinions are situated on the centre-left when asked about whether the government should intervene in the economy, and on the right when asked about whether non-Western migrants should adapt to European culture**. Only a small difference appears when we look at economic preferences, with Walloon voters leaning somewhat more toward government intervention in the economy than Flemish voters. A somewhat more substantial difference is observed when it comes to the issue of state reform. Walloon voters lean somewhat more towards federalism, while Flemish voters show, on average, a preference for keeping the status quo (neither the federalist, nor the regionalist stance). Additionally, when we look at Flemish and Walloon voters’ left-right placement, we again see that they are very close to each other. This applies not only to the general left-right placement, but also to the more specific socio-economic and socio-cultural dimensions.

⁴Walgrave S. et al. (2019) “Vlamingen en Walen stemden voor verschillende partijen maar verschillen minder van mening over het beleid dat ze willen”, Nota op basis van de RepResent-studie1, 4 juni 2019.

Regarding (2), the findings show, on average, no or only limited shifts among Flemish and Walloon voters between 2019 and 2024. Only for opinions on government intervention in the economy, we see a – very small – shift in Flanders to the right; but no such shift appears in Wallonia. With regards to general left-right placement and opinions on the integration of immigrants, the average scores in both regions remained stable between 2019 and 2024. Therefore, both **the perception that Walloon and Flemish electorates are very different from each other in terms of their ideological positions, and the perception that they turned more alike in the 2024, seem a bit overstated: they actually were, on average, already fairly similar** in 2019 and this did not change much over the past years, at least not for the items that we studied. Hence, these findings underscore the importance of considering both vote choice and underlying voter attitudes to understand the evolving Belgian political landscape. One other important aspect to take into account, which we did not investigate here but which will be done in an upcoming media note, is the role of issue salience (i.e., the importance voters attach to certain issues). From previous research, we already know that the importance voters attach to certain issues can drive electoral outcomes, and that issue salience varied more between the Flemish and Walloon electorates in 2019 than differences in their issue positions (Walgrave et al., 2019; 2020)⁵.

Finally, with regards to (3), we do see **many interesting patterns and shifts when we zoom in on the different party electorates**. First, in terms of left-right self-placement on the economic and cultural axes in 2024 (Figure 1), three groups seem to emerge: left-wing electorates (PTB-PVDA, PS-Vooruit, Ecolo-Groen), right-wing electorates (VB, N-VA, MR) and centrist electorates (CD&V, Les Engagés and Open VLD). Interestingly, we do see that leftist party voters from PTB, Ecolo and PS in Wallonia place themselves more to the right on the cultural dimension as compared to the voters of their ‘sister parties’ in Flanders (PVDA, Groen and Vooruit). Also on the economic dimension, PTB voters place themselves more to the right than PVDA voters. Moreover, also MR voters place themselves more to the right on both dimensions as compared to the voters of Open VLD, as well compared to the voters of N-VA.

Second, in terms of movements between 2019 and 2024, in Flanders, voters of PVDA, Groen, Vooruit and Open VLD appear more leftist on the general left-right scale; whereas voters of VB appear more rightist. On the issue of government intervention in the economy, PVDA voters scored more leftist, whereas CD&V, Open VLD, N-VA and VB voters scored more rightist. On the issue of integration of immigrants, PVDA, Groen, Vooruit, CD&V and Open VLD voters appear more leftist, whereas VB voters appear more rightist. This latter finding is interesting in light of previous research showing that, at the party level, Vooruit and CD&V moved more to the right on the migration topic.⁶ Hence, the electorates of these parties did not seem to follow this shift.

In Wallonia, voters of Ecolo have a more left-wing stance on the general left-right scale in 2024 as compared to 2019, whereas MR voters placed themselves more to the right. For government intervention in the economy, there is generally little variation between the Walloon electorates, but PVDA, Ecolo and PS voters did move more to the left in 2024. Lastly, regarding the issue on migration, all electorates remained fairly stable, with only Ecolo voters moving more to the left.

Overall, we can **conclude** that, when looking at the Flemish and Walloon electorates *as a whole*, average positions among the voters of both language groups did not change much between 2019 and 2024 – at least not for the items that we examined. This is different when looking at the

⁵ Walgrave S., van Erkel P., Jennart I., Lefevere J., Baudewyns P. (2020). How issue salience pushes voters to the left or to the right. *Politics of the Low Countries*.

⁶ Jacobs L., & Walgrave S. (2024, VRT NWS). De Stemtest leert: Vooruit en CD&V zijn op vlak van migratie het meest opgeschoven naar rechts. <https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2024/04/29/de-stemtest-leert-vooruit-en-cd-v-zijn-op-vlak-van-migratie-het/>

separate party electorates, where several shifts appeared between 2019 and 2024. Importantly, **different explanations** may account for these shifts, which need further investigation. First, it could be that the electorates of the different parties **changed their opinions or positions** on these items. Second, the **composition of the different party electorates has also changed** due to vote switching between the 2019 and the 2024 elections, thereby most likely altering the average scores per party electorate (see also vote switching note of 6/09).

Appendix

Survey questions – Dutch & French formulations

Variable	NL	FR
Vote choice	<p>Op welke partij heeft u gestemd bij de afgelopen verkiezingen op zondag 9 juni voor het Federaal Parlement?</p> <p>[CD&V, Groen, N-VA, Open VLD, PVDA, Vlaams Belang, Vooruit, Anders, Blanco of ongeldig, Zeg ik liever niet]</p>	<p>Pour quel parti avez-vous voté à la Chambre des Représentants lors des dernières élections du dimanche 9 juin ?</p> <p>[DéFI, Ecolo, Les Engagés, MR, PS, PTB, Autre, Blanc/Invalide, Je préfère ne pas le dire]</p>
Government intervention in the economy	<p>Hieronder vindt u enkele stellingen. Kunt u voor elke stelling aangeven wat uw mening hierover is?</p> <p>Sommigen vinden dat de overheid zo weinig mogelijk moet ingrijpen in de economie. Anderen vinden dat de overheid zo veel mogelijk moet ingrijpen in de economie.</p> <p>[Scale from 0 = “De overheid moet zo weinig mogelijk ingrijpen” to 10 = “De overheid moet zo veel mogelijk ingrijpen”] [reversed scale in the analyses]</p>	<p>Ci-dessous, vous trouverez une série de propositions. Pouvez-vous indiquer dans quelle mesure vous êtes d'accord avec les propositions suivantes ?</p> <p>Certaines personnes pensent que le gouvernement doit intervenir le moins possible dans l'économie, d'autres pensent que le gouvernement doit intervenir autant que possible dans l'économie.</p> <p>[Scale from 0 = “Le gouvernement doit intervenir le moins possible” to 10 = “Le gouvernement doit intervenir autant que possible”] [reversed scale in the analyses]</p>
Integration of migrants	<p>Sommigen vinden dat mensen met een niet-westerse migratieachtergrond in Europa moeten kunnen leven met behoud van hun eigen cultuur. Anderen vinden dat zij zich moeten aanpassen aan de Europese cultuur.</p> <p>[Scale from 0 = “Volledig eigen cultuur kunnen behouden” to 10 = “Volledig aanpassen aan Europese cultuur”]</p>	<p>Certains pensent que les immigrés non-occidentaux doivent pouvoir vivre en Europe tout en conservant leur culture d'origine. D'autres pensent que ces immigrés doivent s'adapter à la culture européenne.</p> <p>[Scale from 0 = “Garder totalement sa propre culture” to 10 = “Totalement s'adapter à la culture européenne”]</p>
State reform	<p>Sommigen vinden dat de regio's en gemeenschappen meer macht moeten hebben. Anderen vinden dat de Federale staat meer macht moet hebben.</p> <p>[Scale from 0 = “Meer macht naar regio's en gemeenschappen” to 10 = “Meer macht naar de Federale staat”] [reversed scale in the analyses]</p>	<p>Certains pensent que les Régions et les Communautés doivent avoir plus de pouvoir. D'autres pensent que l'Etat fédéral doit avoir plus de pouvoir.</p> <p>[Scale from 0 = “Plus de pouvoir aux régions et communautés” to 10 = “Plus de pouvoir à l'Etat fédéral”] [reversed scale in the analyses]</p>

General left-right self-placement	In de politiek worden de termen ‘links’ en ‘rechts’ vaak gebruikt. Kan u uw eigen opvattingen plaatsen op een schaal van 0 tot 10, waarbij 0 ‘links’, 5 ‘in het centrum’ en 10 ‘rechts’ betekent?	En politique, les termes ‘gauche’ et ‘droite’ sont souvent utilisés. Pouvez-vous situer vos propres opinions sur une échelle de 0 à 10, où 0 signifie ‘gauche’, 5 signifie ‘au centre’ et 10 signifie ‘droite’?
Economic left-right self-placement	<p>Met ‘links’ en ‘rechts’ worden vaak verschillende dingen bedoeld. Vaak wordt een onderscheid gemaakt tussen ‘economisch’ links of rechts, en ‘cultureel’ links of rechts. Mensen en partijen kunnen economisch links zijn, en cultureel rechts, maar ook omgekeerd.</p> <p>Bij economisch links of rechts gaat het over de mate waarin de overheid moet ingrijpen in de economie en voor herverdeling moet zorgen. Links-economische partijen willen meestal dat rijkdom gelijk wordt verdeeld en vinden dat de overheid een grote rol moet spelen. Aan de andere kant benadrukken rechts-economische partijen het belang van individuele verantwoordelijkheid en de vrije markt.</p> <p>Kunt u op de onderstaande schaal aangeven waar u uzelf positioneert op de economische links-rechts as, waarbij 0 de meest linkse positie is, en 10 de meest rechtse?</p>	<p>‘Gauche’ et ‘droite’ peuvent avoir des sens différents. On fait particulièrement la distinction entre la gauche ou la droite ‘économique’ et gauche ou la droite ‘culturelle’. Des personnes et des partis politiques peuvent être économiquement à gauche et culturellement à droite, et vice versa.</p> <p>D’une part, la gauche ou la droite dite ‘économique’ se réfère à la mesure dans laquelle le gouvernement devrait intervenir dans l’économie et assurer la redistribution des richesses. Les partis qui se positionnent à gauche économiquement souhaitent généralement que les richesses soient réparties plus équitablement et estiment que le gouvernement devrait jouer un rôle majeur. En revanche, les partis qui se positionnent sur la droite économique soulignent l’importance de la responsabilité individuelle et du marché libre.</p> <p>Sur l’échelle ci-dessous, pouvez-vous indiquer où vous vous situez sur l’axe économique gauche-droite, 0 étant la position la plus à gauche et 10 la plus à droite ?</p>
Cultural left-right self-placement	<p>Met cultureel links of rechts wordt verwezen naar kwesties zoals klimaat, migratie, diversiteit en criminaliteit. Een links-culturele partij wil doorgaans een ingrijpend klimaatbeleid, streeft naar multiculturaliteit en wil criminaliteit minder repressief aanpakken. Een rechts-culturele partij vindt klimaat doorgaans minder belangrijk, stelt een streng migratiebeleid voor, en wil een hard criminaliteitsbeleid.</p> <p>Kunt u op de onderstaande schaal aangeven waar u uzelf positioneert op de culturele links-rechts as, waarbij 0 de meest linkse positie is, en 10 de meest rechtse?</p>	<p>D’une autre part, la gauche ou la droite dite ‘culturelle’ se réfère à des questions telles que le climat, l’immigration, la diversité et la criminalité. Un parti qui se positionne à gauche sur le plan culturel souhaite généralement des politiques climatiques radicales, s’efforce de promouvoir le multiculturalisme et veut être moins répressif en matière de criminalité. Un parti qui se positionne culturellement à droite considère généralement que la lutte contre le changement climatique est moins importante, propose une politique migratoire stricte et souhaite une politique criminelle sévère.</p> <p>Sur l’échelle ci-dessous, pouvez-vous indiquer où vous vous situez sur l’axe culturel gauche-droite, où 0 est la position la plus à gauche et 10 la plus à droite ?</p>