

## "The Belgian Tetris 3.0: how metaphors can differently influence the Flemish and Francophone political minds"

Perrez, Julien ; Randour, François ; Dodeigne, Jérémy ; Reuchamps, Min

### ABSTRACT

Belgian federalism is all about identity/community divide: media system, party system, government formation, etc. This has caused many political gridlocks over the past years, and even decades. The identity cleavage appears to remain at the top of the agenda with the success of the N-VA. Yet, something has changed with the new leader: its discourses changed: they are nationalist not with flag, but with calculator (expliquer: prendre metaphor du Junkie). This change is also part of the re-born of N-VA (see Beyens, Stefanie, Kris Deschouwer, Emilie van Haute, and Tom Verthé. 2015) This explains the importance of discourse in the way to describe Belgian federalism. Indeed, federalism is always a matter of representations and representations are determined by discourse (Burgess 2005). This aspect remains rather understudied despite its importance as illustrated in the example of N-VA. The objective of this paper is precisely to tackle this issue through one aspect, namely the impact of metaphors on citizens' representations and preferences vis-à-vis regional autonomy. Although this aspect a lesser-known branch for political scientists, the central role of metaphors on our understanding of abstract domains of experience has become a key issue in cognitive science since the development of Lakoff & Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory (1980, xxx). According to this theory, metaphors should not be regarded as mere conceptual devices in terms of which we perceive our environment. conceptual tools

### CITE THIS VERSION

Perrez, Julien ; Randour, François ; Dodeigne, Jérémy ; Reuchamps, Min. *The Belgian Tetris 3.0: how metaphors can differently influence the Flemish and Francophone political minds*. RaAM 2018 conference: metaphors across contexts and domains: from description to application (Hong Kong, du 27/06/2018 au 30/06/2018). <http://hdl.handle.net/2078.1/212044>

Le dépôt institutionnel DIAL est destiné au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques émanant des membres de l'UCLouvain. Toute utilisation de ce document à des fins lucratives ou commerciales est strictement interdite. L'utilisateur s'engage à respecter les droits d'auteur liés à ce document, principalement le droit à l'intégrité de l'œuvre et le droit à la paternité. La politique complète de copyright est disponible sur la page [Copyright policy](#)

DIAL is an institutional repository for the deposit and dissemination of scientific documents from UCLouvain members. Usage of this document for profit or commercial purposes is strictly prohibited. User agrees to respect copyright about this document, mainly text integrity and source mention. Full content of copyright policy is available at [Copyright policy](#)

# **The Belgian Tetris 3.0**

## **How metaphors can differently influence the Flemish and Francophone political minds**

**Jérémy Dodeigne<sup>1</sup>, Julien Perrez<sup>3</sup>, François Randour<sup>2</sup> & Min Reuchamps<sup>2</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup>University of Namur (Unamur)*

*<sup>2</sup>University of Louvain (UCLouvain)*

*<sup>3</sup>University of Liege (ULg)*


**Belgium: The State of the Federation**

**21 December 2017**

# Introduction

- What political impact(s) could this metaphor have on the people to which it is addressed.
- Crucial question in CL
  - CMT (Lakoff & Johnson 1980)
  - Metaphors have the ability of highlighting and hiding specific aspects of a target concept
  - “it is often claimed that the use of metaphor is particularly necessary in politics, since politics is an abstract and complex domain of experience, and metaphors can provide ways of simplifying complexities and making abstractions accessible.” (Semino 2008:90)
- **Framing**
  - “[...] select[ing] some aspects of a perceived reality and mak[ing] it more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the described item” (Entman, 1993: 52)
  - “Metaphor helps construct particular aspects of reality and reproduce (or subvert) dominant schemas (Koller 2009: 121)

Du. “Normale partijen die een staats hervorming willen enzovoort die willen eigenlijk hetzelfde als we zo zeggen een ernstige *LAT relatie* in dit land.” (PBN, M5, 3130-3131)’



c'est comme dans un *ménage*, on ne règle jamais les solutions une fois pour toutes. On se *marie, ou en vit ensemble*, peut importe, à 20 ans, puis on a des enfants, puis les enfants deviennent grands, puis le bonhomme fait sa crise de la quarantaine, puis on se dit que tout compte fait, on se dit que c'était quand même pas si mal et puis rien, et puis entre, temps, madame est ménopausée et puis... (...) puis.... Puis elle a perdu son job, puis les enfants se sont mariés, voilà que la maison est trop grande... les situations évoluent et je ne pense pas qu'on va rêver d'avoir une situation immuable. (PBF, B8, 1968-1977).

L2: “het is vergelijken met dat *huwelijk* he. De Belgische staat is een *gearrangeerd en geforceerd huwelijk* geweest.” (2263-2266) (...)

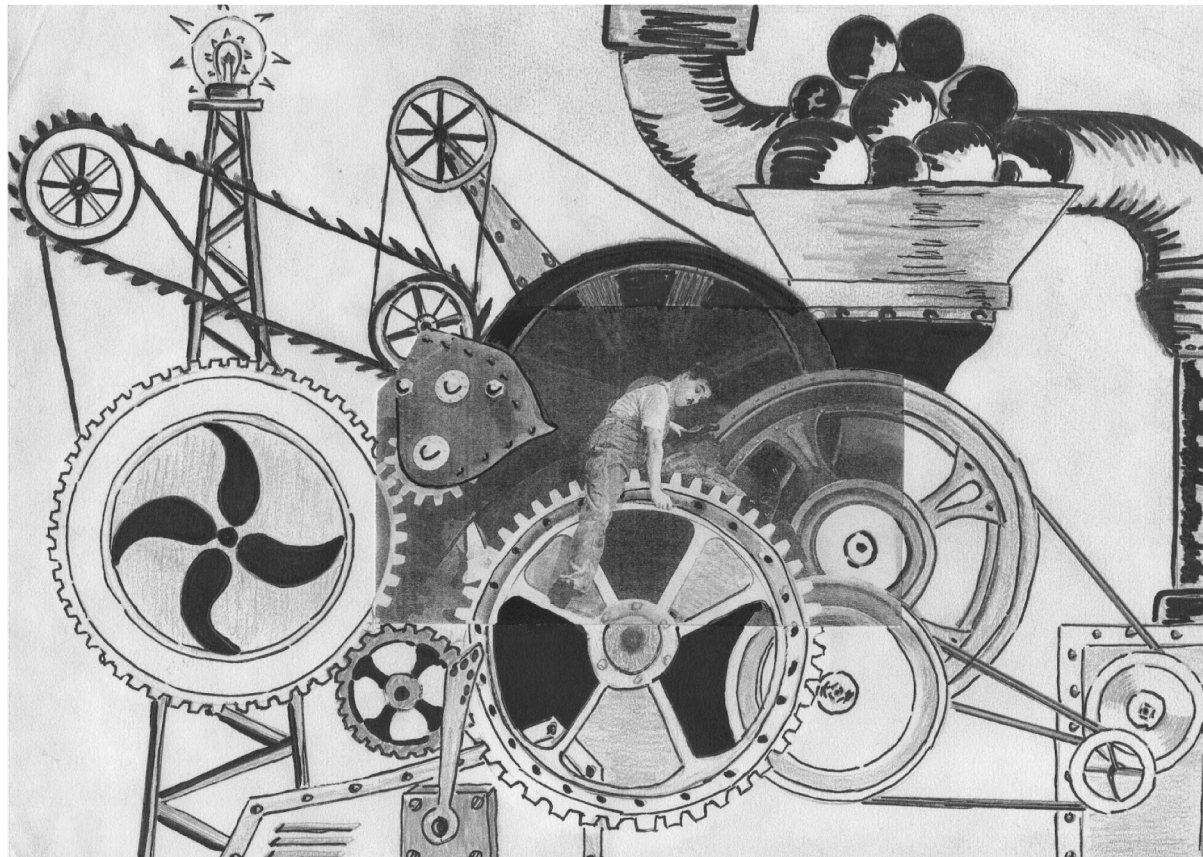
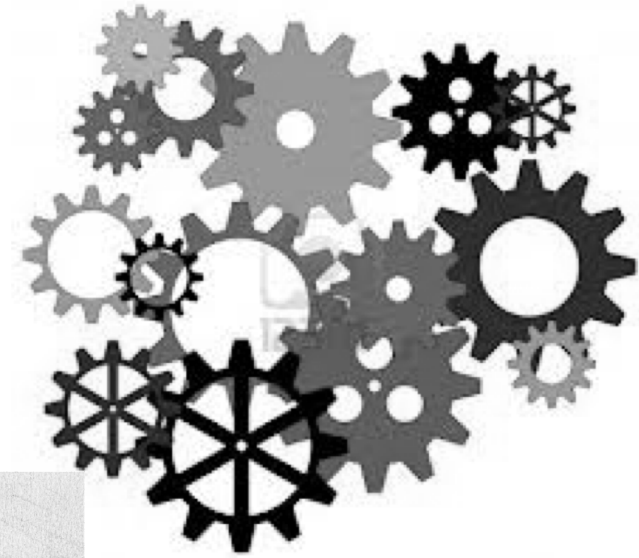
L6: “het is inderdaad een *gearrangeerd huwelijk* en het is *gearrangeerd* door de internationale gemeenschap” (2268-2269) (...)

L6 : “een *gearrangeerd huwelijk* kan ook ontbonden worden, zo moeilijk is dat allemaal niet. Het moet gewoon erkend worden door de internationale gemeenschap.” (2279-2280)

L2 : “ja maar dat *is getrouwd voor goede en kwade dagen* en wij zijn nu in kwade dagen.” (2281-2282)

L6 : “maar bij een *gearrangeerd huwelijk* is het niet *in goede en kwade dagen* vrijwillig, maar is het verplicht in *kwade dagen*. (...) ik hoop toch dat we zover zijn *dat huwelijken niet meer verplicht* zijn ofwel?” (2283-2287)

Fr. *On a coupé le citoyen du fonctionnement d'une espèce de mécanisme, de machine folle lancée sur elle-même.* (PBF, B8, 839-840)



Du. “Maar ik denk dat je kunt concluderen dat het federalisme zoals het nu is dat het niet *werkt*” (PBN, N4, 3318-3319)



# Research design: Tetris Metaphor

## 2 experiments (Online, limeSurvey protocol)

- Experiment 1 (2013): 4 conditions
- Experiment 2 (2014): 3 conditions

## Participants

- 1 y. Bachelor students at the UCL and ULg

# Research design: Tetris Metaphor

## Main results

- Effect of the **text** on the citizens' **representations** of Belgian federalism (Perrez & Reuchamps 2015; Dodeigne, Perrez & Reuchamps submitted)
  - Institutional descriptive schemes prevail over identarian ones
- Impact of the **metaphor** on the citizens' **preferences** (Dodeigne, Perrez & Reuchamps submitted)
  - The Tetris metaphor does matter and boosts participants' autonomist preferences
- **Mediating effect of political knowledge** (Dodeigne, Perrez & Reuchamps submitted)
  - Autonomist effect greater for participants with lower political knowledge



# Research design: Tetris Metaphor

## Experiment 3 (Online, limeSurvey protocol) | 2017

- 4 conditions

### Participants

- Representative sample (region, sex, education level) of Belgian citizens
  - 500 French-speaking citizens
  - 500 Flemish citizens

# Research design: Tetris Metaphor

## Research questions

- Framing effect
  - Does the presence of an explicit metaphorical mapping influence the citizens' preferences towards more autonomy or more union?
- Aptness effect
  - Is there a difference between different metaphorical mappings (Tetris vs. Divorce)?
- Cultural effect?
  - Do the citizens' preferences vary according to their region?



## The Belgian tetris

From 1831 to 1970, Belgium came down to the central state, the provinces and the municipalities. Except for the prerogatives attributed to the local authorities, the State was taking care of everything. In 1970, the constituent power created new institutions: communities and regions. And every state reform has been the occasion to take competences from the state (from there on called the federal state) to attribute them to federal authorities. **This is the big Belgian Tetris, where we see the upper floor that is falling apart (decomposing) , block by block,** at the benefit of other authorities. In certain cases, the legislator is transferring homogeneous **blocks** (like education, attributed to the communities in 1989). In other cases, it is only transferring some elements of a competence (it's the case of the tax system: the federal state remains competent but assigned certain prerogatives to the federal entities). From now on, we therefore make a distinction between three types of competences. The ones that are exclusively exercised by the federal state (like Defense, for example). The ones that are exclusively exercised by the Regions and Communities (Education, Town planning, Public works, and so on). An the ones for which each power has a possibility of intervention. In the domain of employment, for instance, the (federal) State is competent for certain domains (unemployment legislation, for instance) and the Regions are competent for other ones (training courses of unemployed people).

## The Belgian divorce

From 1831 to 1970, Belgium came down to the central state, the provinces and the municipalities. Except for the prerogatives attributed to the local authorities, the State was taking care of everything. In 1970, the constituent power created new institutions: communities and regions. And every state reform has been the occasion to take competences from the state (from there on called the federal state) to attribute them to federal authorities. **This is the big Belgian divorce**, where we see the federal state that is decomposing, piece by piece, at the benefit of other authorities. In certain cases, the legislator is transferring homogeneous competences (like education, attributed to the communities in 1989). In other cases, it is only transferring some elements of a competence (it's the case of the tax system: the federal state remains competent but assigned certain prerogatives to the federal entities). From now on, we therefore make a distinction between three types of competences. The ones that are exclusively exercised by the federal state (like Defense, for example). The ones that are exclusively exercised by the Regions and Communities (Education, Town planning, Public works, and so on). And the ones for which each power has a possibility of intervention. In the domain of employment, for instance, the (federal) State is competent for certain domains (unemployment legislation, for instance) and the Regions are competent for other ones (training courses of unemployed people).

## Neutral version: The Belgian ~~tetris~~ federalism

From 1831 to 1970, Belgium came down to the central state, the provinces and the municipalities. Except for the prerogatives attributed to the local authorities, the State was taking care of everything. In 1970, the constituent power created new institutions: communities and regions. And every state reform has been the occasion to take competences from the state (from there on called the federal state) to attribute them to federal authorities. ~~This is the big Belgian Tetris, where we see the upper floor that is falling apart (decomposing), block by block, at the benefit of other authorities. In certain cases, the legislator is transferring homogeneous blocks (like education, attributed to the communities in 1989).~~ In other cases, it is only transferring some elements of a competence (it's the case of the tax system: the federal state remains competent but assigned certain prerogatives to the federal entities). From now on, we therefore make a distinction between three types of competences. The ones that are exclusively exercised by the federal state (like Defense, for example). The ones that are exclusively exercised by the Regions and Communities (Education, Town planning, Public works, and so on). An the ones for which each power has a possibility of intervention. In the domain of employment, for instance, the (federal) State is competent for certain domains (unemployment legislation, for instance) and the Regions are competent for other ones (training courses of unemployed people).

# Tetris 3.0: Groups' composition

			Scenario 1 – Control	Scenario 2 – Neutral	Scenario 3 - Tetris	Scenario 4 - Tetris
<b>N</b>	FL	500	125	125	125	125
	WA	500	125	125	125	125
	Total	1000	500	500	500	500
<b>Gender (% Male)</b>		50,6%	50%	50,8%	50,8%	50,9%
<b><i>Education</i></b>			In all scenarios, there is an equal repartition regarding Education (70,8 % - 17,8 % - 11,4 %)			
<b><i>Age</i></b>			In all scenarios, there is an equal repartition regarding diplomas (23,6 – 39,5 - 36, 9)			

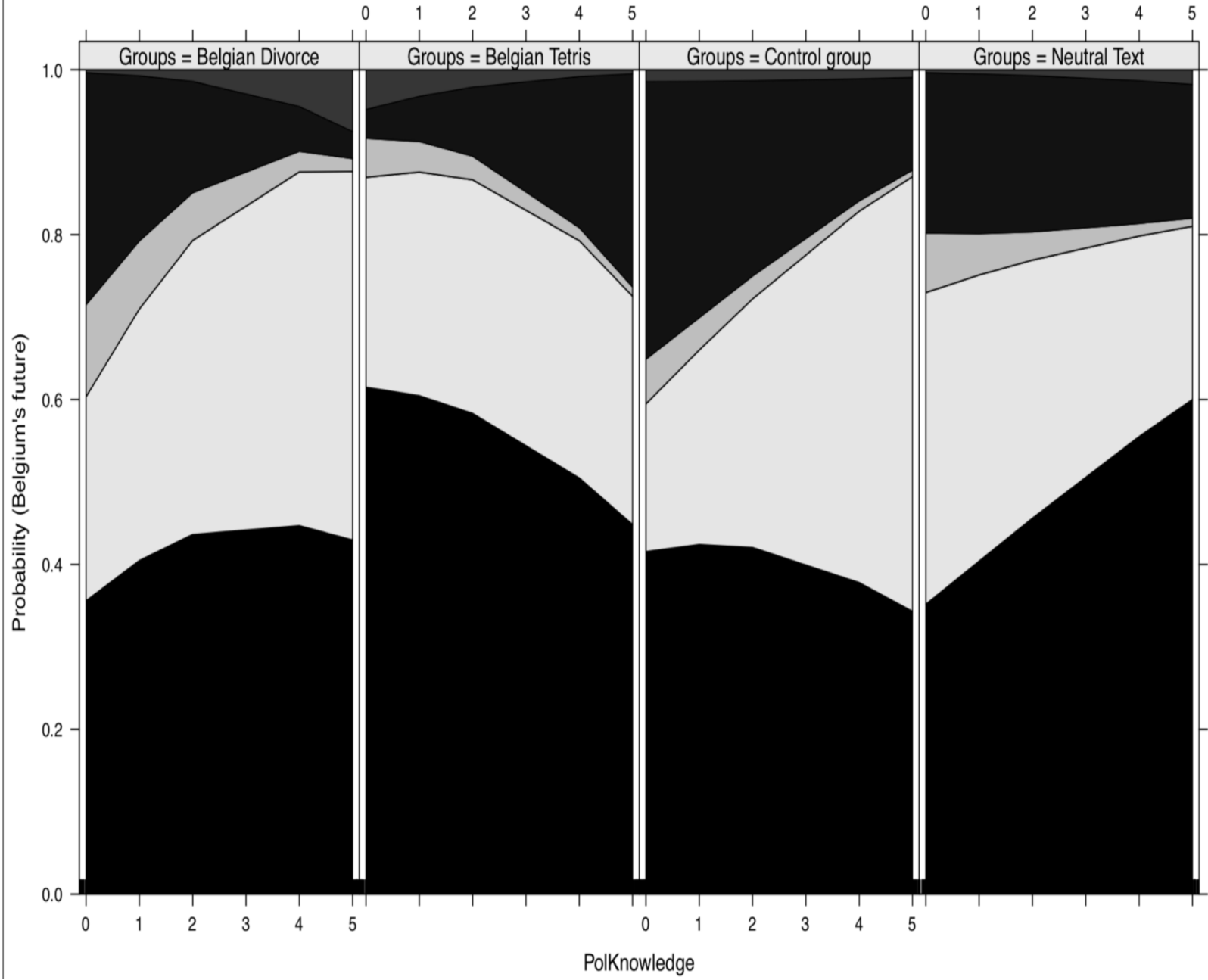
*Representative for the different scenario according to Walloon/Flemish, Gender, Region, Diploma and Age*

French-speaking voters	Unitary vs. More federal	Unitary vs. Status quo	Unitary vs. More regional	Unitary vs. Splitting
<i>Reference category= control group</i>				
Neutral Text	0.91 (0.80)	0.45 (1.12)	-0.38 (0.80)	-1.18 (1.56)
Belgian Tetris	-0.04 (0.82)	-0.53 (1.09)	<b>-2.66***</b> (1.01)	0.80 (1.22)
Belgian Divorce	0.48 (0.79)	0.88 (1.01)	-0.02 (0.76)	-1.18 (1.41)
Political Knowledge	0.25 (0.18)	-0.34 (0.29)	-0.18 (0.20)	-0.05 (0.32)
Neutral Text   Political Knowledge	<b>-0.48**</b> (0.24)	-0.16 (0.37)	0.04 (0.26)	0.25 (0.46)
Belgian Tetris   Political Knowledge	-0.17 (0.24)	0.12 (0.37)	<b>0.65**</b> (0.31)	-0.34 (0.40)
Belgian Divorce   Political Knowledge	-0.17 (0.24)	-0.09 (0.36)	-0.29 (0.30)	0.60 (0.42)
Constant	<b>-1.84**</b> (0.73)	<b>-1.91*</b> (1.01)	<b>-0.98</b> (0.75)	<b>-2.62**</b> (1.25)
Identities		√ (***)		
Political Interest		√ (*)		
Income		√		
Age		√		
Education		√ (**)		
Gender		√		
Observations	500	500	500	500
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,179.59	1,179.59	1,179.59	1,179.59
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01			



# Belgium's future (French-speaking participants)

- Splitting Belgium
- More regional powers
- Status Quo
- More federal powers
- Unitary Belgium

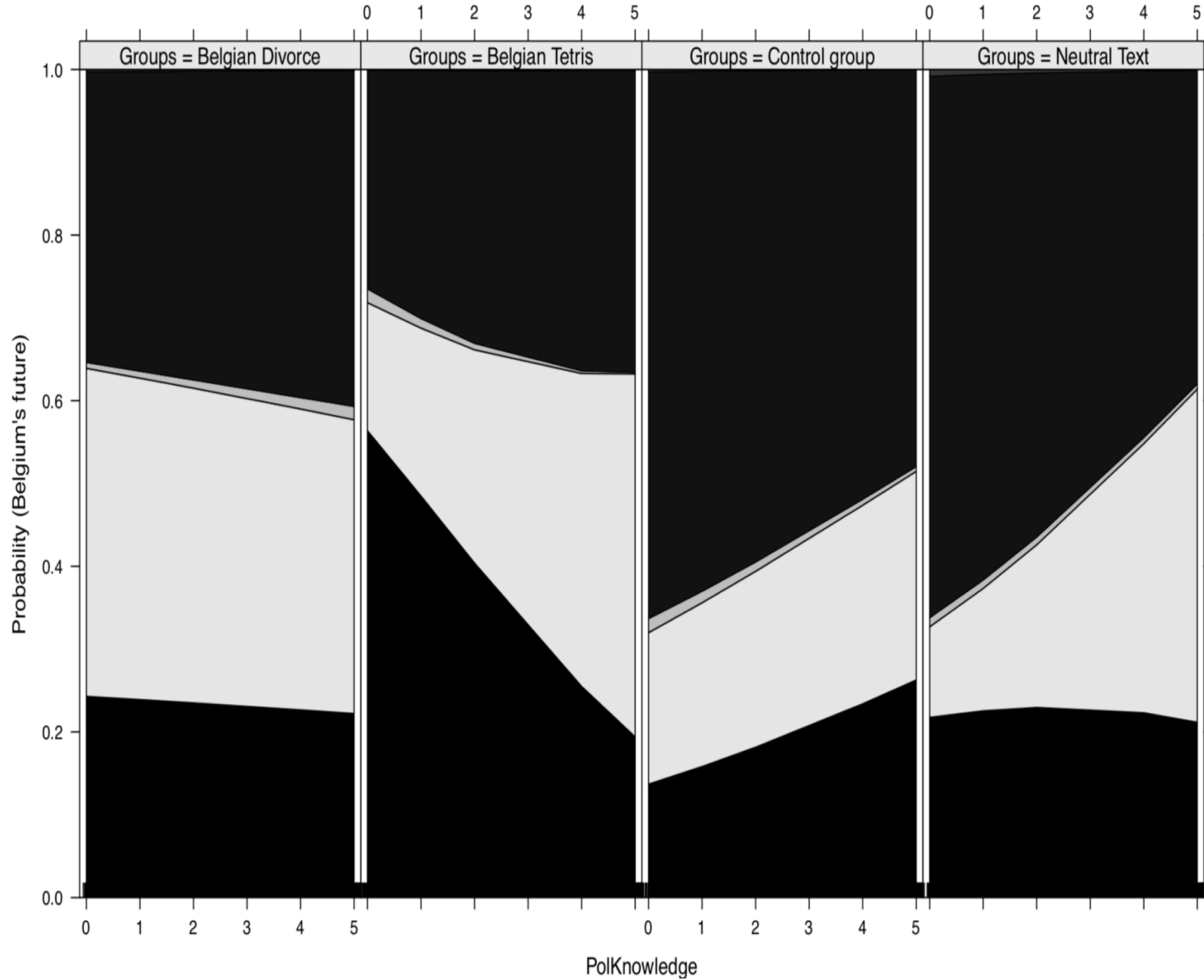


Dutch-speaking voters	Unitary vs. More federal	Unitary vs. Status quo	Unitary vs. More regional	Unitary vs. Splitting
Reference category= control group				
Neutral Text	-0.98 (1.43)	-0.90 (1.33)	-0.47 (1.28)	0.56 (1.52)
Belgian Tetris	-1.58 (1.45)	-1.43 (1.29)	<b>-2.33*</b> (1.31)	-2.29 (1.60)
Belgian Divorce	0.20 (1.34)	-1.43 (1.40)	-1.21 (1.24)	-0.57 (1.58)
Political Knowledge	-0.07 (0.26)	-0.35 (0.27)	-0.19 (0.23)	-0.42 (0.32)
Neutral Text   Political Knowledge	0.33 (0.37)	0.24 (0.38)	0.09 (0.34)	0.06 (0.43)
Belgian Tetris   Political Knowledge	0.49 (0.37)	0.13 (0.39)	0.47 (0.34)	<b>0.75*</b> (0.43)
Belgian Divorce   Political Knowledge	0.06 (0.35)	0.52 (0.38)	0.24 (0.33)	0.30 (0.43)
Constant	-0.18 (1.08)	0.93 (1.07)	0.48 (1.00)	-1.06 (1.37)
Identities		√ (***)		
Political Interest		√		
Income		√		
Age		√		
Education		√(*)		
Gender		√(*)		
Observations	500	500	500	500
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,044.35	1,044.35	1,044.35	1,044.35

\*p < 0.1. \*\*p < 0.05. \*\*\*p < 0.01

# Belgium's future (Dutch-speaking participants)

- Splitting Belgium
- More regional powers
- Status Quo
- More federal powers
- Unitary Belgium



# THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

[Jeremy.dodeigne@unuamur.be](mailto:Jeremy.dodeigne@unuamur.be)

[Julien.Perrez@uliege.be](mailto:Julien.Perrez@uliege.be)

[francois.randour@uclouvain.be](mailto:francois.randour@uclouvain.be)

[Min.Reuchamps@uclouvain.be](mailto:Min.Reuchamps@uclouvain.be)

# References

- Perrez & Reuchamps (2015), The “Belgian Tetris” Assessing the political impact of metaphors on citizens’ representations of Belgian federalism. *Metaphor and the Social World*, 5 (2), 223-244.
- Dodeigne, Perrez & Reuchamps (under review), Changing your political mind: The impact of a metaphor on citizens' representations and preferences for federalism. *Regional and Federal Studies*.