

BELGIUM

Date of Elections: 13 October 1985

Purpose of Elections

Elections were held for all the directly elected members of Parliament following the premature dissolution of this body on 3 September 1985. General elections had previously taken place in November 1981.

Characteristics of Parliament

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

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

The Senate has 183 members, all of whom have 4-year terms; of these, 106 are directly elected, 51 are elected by the provincial councils (in the proportion of one for every 200,000 people) and 25 are co-opted by the remaining Senators. The King's sons or, if he has no sons, Princes of the Belgian Royal Family who are successors to the throne for their part become *ex-officio* Senators at the age of 18.

Electoral System

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

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

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

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

Nomination of candidates for the Chamber of Representatives must be supported by 200 to 500 electors (depending on the size of the constituency), or three retiring members

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

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

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

General Considerations and Conduct of the Elections

On 16 July, the centre-right coalition Government (comprising the four Flemish and French-speaking Christian Social and Liberal parties) in power since 1981 and headed by Prime Minister Wilfried Martens (CVP) submitted its resignation. Although King Baudoin declined to accept the resignation the Prime Minister announced, two days later, that general elections originally scheduled for 8 December 1985 would be moved up to 13 October. Parliament was dissolved on 3 September.

A total of 3,582 candidates and 14 parties contested the 318 parliamentary seats at stake. Economic issues were in the forefront of the campaign. The coalition parties stood on the Government's record and advocated the continuation of its strict austerity proposals, which had reduced inflation and stabilized the country's trade balance. The socialist opposition countered by focusing on the high unemployment rate and the decline in the citizens' purchasing power, and put forth a package of measures designed to ease the effects of austerity.

On polling day, the governing coalition retained power, increasing its majority in the Chamber of Deputies by two seats to 115. Minor parties incurred losses. On 16 October, Mr. Martens was requested by the King to form a new Government. He did so on 28 November, together with the same partners as the outgoing coalition.

Statistics

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

Number of registered electors	7,001,297
Voters	6,552,351 (93.6%)
Blank or void ballot papers	487,936
Valid votes	6,064,415

Political Group	Votes obtained	%	Number of Seats
Christian Social Party			
– Flemish (CVP)	1,291,595	21.3	49 (+6)
– Walloon (PSC)	482,559	8.0	20 (+2)
Socialist Party			
– Flemish (SP)	883,065	14.6	32 (+6)
– Walloon (PS)	834,488	13.8	35 (=)
Liberal Party			
– Flemish (Freedom and Progress Party – PVV)	650,604	10.7	22 (–6)
– Walloon (<i>Parti Réformateur</i> <i>Libéral</i> – PRL)	619,932	10.2	24 (=)
<i>Volksunie</i>	477,408	7.9	16 (–4)
Greens			
– Flemish (Agalev)	226,998	3.7	4 (+2)
– Walloon (Ecolo)	152,481	2.5	5 (+3)
<i>Front démocratique des</i> <i>francophones</i> (FDF)	72,361	1.2	3 (–3)
<i>Vlaams Blok</i>	85,330	1.4	1 (=)
RAD/UDRT	69,770	1.2	1 (–2)
Belgian Communist Party (KPB/PCB)	71,683	1.2	— (–2)
Others	146,681	2.3	— (–2)
			212

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

Voters	6,550,579
Blank or void ballot papers	557,506
Valid votes	5,993,073

Political Group	Votes obtained	%	Number of directly- elected Senators	Total number of Seats
Christian Social Party				
CVP	1,259,244	21.0	25	42
PSC	475,322	7.9	10	18
Socialist Party				
SP	867,305	14.5	16	28
PS	832,743	13.9	18	33
Liberal Party				
PVV	638,639	10.7	11	19
PRL	588,284	9.8	13	23
<i>Volksunie</i>	485,241	8.1	8	12
Agalev	228,918	3.8	2	3
Ecolo	163,357	2.7	2	3
FDF	69,619	1.2	1	2
<i>Vlaams Blok</i>	90,121	1.5	—	—
RAD/UDRT	73,054	1.2	—	—
KPB/PCB	70,954	1.2	—	—
Others	150,272	2.5	—	—
			106	183

3. Distribution of Members of Parliament
according to Sex

	Senate	Chamber of Representatives
Men	162	196
Women	21	16
	183	212