

RESEARCH OUTPUTS / RÉSULTATS DE RECHERCHE

Who feels resentful?

Feitosa, Fernando; Baudewyns, Pierre; Pilet, Jean Benoit; Talukder, David

Published in:
Bitter-Sweet Democracy?

DOI:
[10.11647/OBP.0401.03](https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0401.03)

Publication date:
2024

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (HARVARD):
Feitosa, F, Baudewyns, P, Pilet, JB & Talukder, D 2024, Who feels resentful? in *Bitter-Sweet Democracy?: Analyzing Citizens' Resentment Towards Politics in Belgium*. Open Book Publishers, pp. 61-89.
<https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0401.03>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

BITTERSWEET

DEMOCRACY?

ANALYZING
CITIZENS'
RESENTMENT
TOWARDS
POLITICS
IN BELGIUM

EDITED BY LOUISE KNOPS, KAREN
CELIS, VIRGINIE VAN INGELGOM,
HEIDI MERCENIER AND FRANÇOIS
RANDOUR



<https://www.openbookpublishers.com>

©2024 Louise Knops, Karen Celis, Virginie Van Ingelgom, Heidi Mercenier,
and François Randour (eds)

Copyright of individual chapters is maintained by the chapter's authors



This work is licensed under an Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0). This license allows you to share, copy, distribute and transmit the text; to adapt the text for non-commercial purposes of the text providing attribution is made to the authors (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work). Attribution should include the following information:

Louise Knops, Karen Celis, Virginie Van Ingelgom, Heidi Mercenier, and François Randour (eds), *Bitter-Sweet Democracy? Analyzing Citizens' Resentment Towards Politics in Belgium*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0401>

Copyright and permissions for the reuse of many of the images included in this publication differ from the above. This information is provided in the captions and in the list of illustrations.

Further details about CC BY-NC licenses are available at
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

All external links were active at the time of publication unless otherwise stated and have been archived via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine at <https://archive.org/web>

Any digital material and resources associated with this volume will be available at
<https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0401#resources>

ISBN Paperback: 978-1-80511-290-7

ISBN Hardback: 978-1-80511-291-4

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-80511-292-1

ISBN Digital (EPUB): 978-1-80511-130-6

ISBN HTML: 978-1-80511-295-2

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0401

Cover design: Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpal

3. Who feels resentful?

*Fernando Feitosa, Pierre Baudewyns,
Jean-Benoit Pilet & David Talukder*

Abstract: This chapter investigates the groups of the population that harbor feelings of resentment. Utilizing data from the 2021 RepResent cross-sectional survey, we explore the distribution of resentment across five dimensions: gender, age, education, vote choice, and region of residence. The findings indicate significant variations in resentment levels among different age groups, but in an unexpected direction. Specifically, resentment is highest among the middle-aged population rather than younger individuals. Additionally, there are remarkable differences across vote choices, with protest voters exhibiting higher levels of resentment compared to other voters. However, no substantial differences are observed when considering gender, educational levels, or regions of residence. These results contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between marginalized individuals and protest voters and a sense of exclusion from the political system.

Introduction

As elaborated earlier in this book, political resentment is a major issue in contemporary democracies. However, political resentment is unlikely to be equally distributed within societies. First, one might suppose that a sense of exclusion should be particularly felt by the traditionally and historically marginalized. Second, given the prevalence of resentment-related attitudes among supporters of protest parties, these individuals should exhibit higher levels of political resentment compared to supporters of other parties. Third, the greater electoral support for protest

parties in Flanders compared to Wallonia suggests that resentment may be more pervasive in the former region.

This chapter explores these inequalities in the distribution of political resentment. By carefully examining the distribution of resentment along five dimensions (gender, education, age, vote choice, region of residence), we aim to contribute to our understanding of the nature and origins of political resentment. Additionally, our findings can help to inform initiatives aimed at addressing and reducing individuals' sense of exclusion from the political system. Note that our examination of the relationship between these five factors and resentment relies on the established terminology utilized in previous research (e.g., see Celis & Childs, 2012; Mayne & Peters, 2023). Our use of the terms does not entail adopting a normative position regarding the various social groups they represent, nor does it seek to further stigmatize or essentialize groups who may already be in structurally disadvantaged positions. We are mindful of the power differentials between the different sociological groups we speak about in this chapter. Our objective in this chapter is first and foremost to describe the distribution of resentment across the Belgian population, along a limited set of socio-demographic variables.

The investigation of data from the 2021 RepResent cross-sectional survey reveals that individuals who tend to experience underrepresentation do not necessarily harbour a sense of resentment, in the way we define it in this book. Specifically, no significant differences in levels of resentment are observed between genders. Additionally, the disparity in resentment levels between individuals with lower and higher levels of education is relatively modest. Age emerges as a significant factor, but younger individuals, who tend to be less politically represented, display lower rather than higher levels of resentment compared to middle-aged citizens. Voters who support protest parties — the Parti du travail de Belgique (PTB), the Partij van de Arbeid van België (PVDA), the Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (N-VA), and the Vlaams Belang (VB) — exhibit higher levels of resentment compared to voters of other parties. Yet, resentment is not higher in Flanders compared to Wallonia.

This chapter is structured as follows: first, we provide a theoretical framework that explains the potential connections between resentment and the various factors examined in this chapter. Next, we discuss the data

and the methodology employed to test these relationships. Following the presentation of the main findings, we delve into additional analyses that examine the relationships with an emotion-based resentment measure. We conclude the chapter with a discussion of the scholarly implications of our findings.

Gender, age, and educational differences in political resentment

While there is a paucity of studies focusing on inequalities in political resentment, existing literature on citizens' attitudes towards politics, democratic dissatisfaction, and political underrepresentation offers valuable insights. Specifically, empirical evidence demonstrates that women comprise, on average, only 32.8% of Members of Parliament (MPs) in the Americas and 31.2% of MPs in Europe (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2022). Furthermore, individuals aged 30 or below constitute less than 2.8% of MPs, despite representing a relatively large proportion of the overall population. Note that while elections inherently involve the selection of a political elite from among the citizenry, these inequalities in political representation are concerning as inclusion remains an important democratic goal (Broockman, 2013; Mansbridge, 1999; Sobolewska, et al., 2018).

Individuals with lower levels of education are also underrepresented among elected politicians. While comprehensive global data on the educational background of MPs are not available, several studies have demonstrated that MPs in various European countries, such as Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, the UK, France, and Italy, tend to hold university or higher education degrees (Talukder, 2022; Hakhverdian, 2015). This observation has led many to perceive political elites as a distinct social class that may be disconnected from the experiences and challenges faced by those who did not have the opportunity to go into higher education (Noordzij, et al., 2021).

Women, individuals with lower educational levels, and younger citizens are therefore descriptively less represented in politics than their counterparts. In other words, the proportion of politicians among those groups is lower than among men, individuals with higher educational levels, and older citizens. But in addition to a poor

descriptive representation, women, individuals with lower educational levels, and younger citizens encounter difficulties in having their ideas and interests represented in parliament. Numerous studies have demonstrated, for instance, that representatives tend to prioritize the interests of socio-economically advantaged citizens over those who are socio-economically disadvantaged (Giger, et al., 2012; Lupu & Warner, 2022; Rosset, et al., 2013; Rosset & Stecker, 2019), pointing to a systemic substantive underrepresentation of the latter group.

One of the consequences of political underrepresentation is a sense of resentment. Individuals who are objectively excluded from politics, or not as well represented as their counterparts, may feel left out by the political elite, and develop resentful feelings. The existence of a relationship between political underrepresentation and political resentment seems plausible as well, when considering that lower levels of representation often lead to lower levels of attitudes such as support for democracy (Ezrow & Xezonakis, 2011; Mayne & Hakhverdian, 2017) and trust in parliament (Marié & Talukder, 2021) —a combination that is closely linked to political resentment. Moreover, researchers have shown that marginalized individuals often express lower levels of satisfaction with democracy compared to their socio-economically-advantaged counterparts (Bègue, 2007; Braconnier & Mayer, 2015; Ceka & Magalhaes, 2020; Talukder, 2022), and that they tend to harbour more negative evaluations of the political elite, explaining their support for reforms aimed at promoting participatory tools (Bowler, et al., 2007; Coffé & Michels, 2014; Talukder & Pilet, 2021; Webb, 2013) or those associated with stealth democracy (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002).

The link between political underrepresentation and political resentment has been more directly discussed by Stoker (2019, p. 145). Stoker has argued that factors like disconnection from a global and knowledge-based economy, recent changes in social structures, and political alienation can all create conditions that foster the emergence of resentment. Interpreted together, the literature therefore seems to support the idea that women, individuals with lower levels of education, and younger citizens are more susceptible to experiencing resentment than their counterparts.

Our first hypothesis is, consequently, that:

H1: Women, those with lower educational levels, and younger citizens display higher levels of political resentment than their counterparts.

While it seems reasonable to anticipate a relationship between gender, in particular, and political resentment, the strength of this relationship seems to vary depending on an individual's perception of political underrepresentation. Individuals who are unaware of their underrepresentation or who feel adequately represented should exhibit a weaker connection between their gender and political resentment. By being oblivious to or rejecting the disparities in representation, these individuals may not perceive a direct correlation between their gender and their feeling of resentment. On the other hand, individuals who recognize the underrepresentation of their gender may be more likely to experience stronger feelings of resentment. Their awareness and recognition of the disparities in representation expose them to the realities of gender-based discrimination or systemic biases, leading to a heightened sense of exclusion.

Our second hypothesis is therefore that:

H2: Perceived underrepresentation moderates the relationship between gender and political resentment.

The relationship between gender and resentment seems to be further nuanced by education. In social-psychological theory, it is widely recognized that individuals have multiple identities that shape their self-perception. Specifically, individuals possess a diversity of personal identities that reflect unique traits and self-characterizations, relational identities that pertain to their social roles and relationships with others, and collective identities that arise from shared characteristics or ascribed attributes within a group (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Ashmore, et al., 2004; Brewer & Gardiner, 1996; Sedikides & Brewer, 2001).

The combination of multiple personal, social, or collective identities gives rise to diverse perspectives and outcomes among individuals. For example, individuals who identify with both sexual and racial/ethnic minority groups often experience a unique set of challenges and adaptations related to the simultaneous development and expression of these identities (Crawford, et al., 2002). When it comes to gender and education specifically, a higher educational attainment may contribute to a greater sense of integration within the political system for women

who obtained it compared to those with low levels of education. Similar dynamics should apply to men; however, due to their privileged position, education should have a lesser impact on their sense of exclusion. As a result, education should contribute to varying levels of the gender gap in representation.

Our third hypothesis therefore posits that:

H3: Education moderates the relationship between gender and political resentment.

Vote choices and regional variances in political resentment

In addition to disparities in resentment across gender, age, and education, vote choice and regional residence may also contribute to varying levels of this political attitude. The literature suggests that individuals who harbour dissatisfaction with the political system, a correlate of political resentment, tend to align their vote choices with protest parties. For instance, Goovaerts and colleagues (2020) have found that supporters of the PTB-PVDA, two far-left parties, and the VB, a far-right party, generally express higher levels of discontentment with the political system compared to voters of other parties. A similar trend can be observed with the N-VA and the Green parties. Although not considered radical parties, they have still managed to attract protest voters (Hooghe, et al., 2011; Rihoux, 2003; Hino, 2012; van Haute, 2016).

The emergence of these parties as viable options for protest voters can be partially explained by their reliance on a discourse that taps into their feelings of dissatisfaction with the political system. In Figures 1 and 2, we present examples of the rhetoric employed by these parties, which serves this purpose. Figure 1 showcases a tweet from the PTB, highlighting the notion that the government prioritizes the interests of the economic elite when it comes to wealth redistribution, thereby neglecting those who face economic hardships. Meanwhile, Figure 2 displays a tweet from the VB, suggesting that the government is advocating for increased labour immigration despite the prevailing economic challenges in the country. Both messages have the potential to strike a chord with individuals who hold grievances against the system, feeling excluded from it.

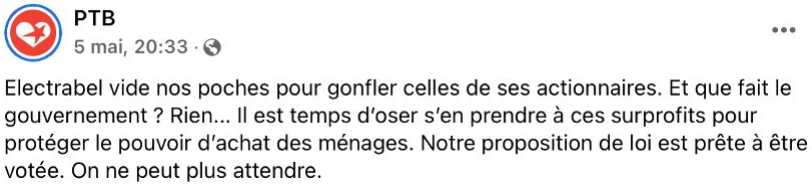


Fig. 3.1 Resentment-inducing discourse by the PTB-PVDA.

Note: The English translation reads as follows: 'Electrabel [a company that sells electricity] empties our pockets to inflate those of its shareholders. And what does the government do? Nothing... It is time to dare to attack these excess profits to protect the purchasing power of households. Our bill is ready to be voted on. We can't wait any longer.'



Fig. 3.2 Resentment-inducing discourse by the VB.

Note: The English translation reads as follows: 'Despite rising energy poverty, sharply declining purchasing power and the alienation of cities and villages, this purple-green government wants to initiate even more labour immigration. Stop this and think of our people first!'

Following this logic, our fourth hypothesis therefore proposes that:

H4: Voters of protest parties (i.e., PTB-PVDA, N-VA, VB, Green) exhibit higher levels of political resentment compared to voters of other parties.

If resentment is higher among supporters of protest parties, this political attitude should be more prevalent in Flanders than in Wallonia. Belgium is commonly regarded as a deeply divided society with two distinct party systems (Sinardet, 2012; Van Haute & Wauters, 2019). Notably, protest parties like the VB and the N-VA have a significant presence in Flanders, while their representation in Wallonia is limited. This disparity in the electoral support of protest parties between Flanders and Wallonia is indicative that levels of resentment may vary between the two regions. Specifically, individuals residing in Flanders may experience higher

levels of resentment compared to their counterparts in Wallonia (although Walgrave, et al., 2020, present an alternative perspective).

Our fifth and final hypothesis is then that:

H5: Political resentment is higher in Flanders than Wallonia.

Data

To investigate the differences in levels of political resentment among individuals, we utilize data from the 2021 RepResent cross-sectional survey. This survey includes a unique set of questions designed to assess individuals' resentment towards politics. Specifically, respondents in this survey were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements: 'What the government decides is often worse than what I hoped for'; 'I am generally disappointed with Belgian politics'; 'I get angry when I think about politics'; 'Most politicians do not take citizens seriously; they rather treat us as children'; 'Politics is usually better for others than for people like me'; 'Elections do not matter; everything is decided beforehand'; 'The Belgian political system has been malfunctioning for a long time'. Two points should be made about these questions. First, they address the same underlying concept of political resentment. Indeed, not only is the Cronbach's alpha coefficient relatively high (.88), but a principal component analysis conducted on these items yields a single index. Second, the inclusion of an item asking respondents to evaluate whether politics is usually more beneficial for others than for people like themselves allows for the creation of a resentment index that captures a sense of group exclusion from politics.

To construct the index that will be used in the analysis, we initially transform the original responses to a -5 to +5 scale, assigning a value of 5 to the most extreme expression of resentment. Next, we compute an additive index of resentment by summing individuals' scores on the transformed -5 to +5 scale. The scores on this scale range from -35, representing the lowest level of resentment, to +35, indicating the highest level of resentment. As Figure 3 shows, citizens in our sample harbour a relatively moderate degree of resentment, with a mean value of 8.97 and a standard deviation of 15.02. However, it is notable that there is a greater number of individuals with high levels of resentment compared

to those with low levels of resentment, which is consistent with the widespread democratic dissatisfaction discussed in the literature.

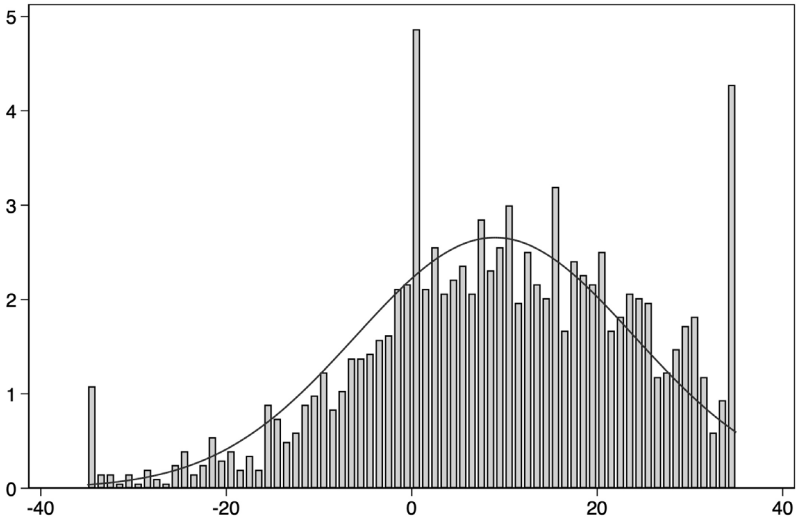


Fig. 3.3 Distribution of resentment index in the data.

Note: The index is created by summing individuals' responses to the seven resentment questions. In this index, a score of 35 represents the highest level of resentment, and -35 the lowest level.

When it comes to the five individual-level characteristics examined in this study, they are coded as follows: First, individuals identifying as men are coded as '0', while those identifying as women are coded as '1' (refer to Appendix 1 for descriptive statistics). Individuals with no schooling or only primary education are coded as '1'; those with incomplete secondary education are coded as '2'; those with complete secondary education are coded as '3'; those with tertiary education (not university) are coded as '4'; and those with university experience are coded as '5'. Residents of Flanders are coded as '0', while residents of Wallonia are coded as '1'. Age represents a continuous variable, while vote choice consists of a categorical variable with six different response options for respondents in Wallonia (cdH/Les Engagés, Ecolo, DéFI, MR, PS, and PTB), and seven options for respondents in Flanders (CD&V, Groen, N-VA, Open VLD, PVDA, Vooruit/SP.A, and VB).

To assess the moderating role of perceived underrepresentation, we utilize a unique battery of questions that gauges perceptions of women's and men's representation in politics. Our measure of perceived representation ranges from -10 to +10 (refer to Table 3.1). Individuals who believe that women are significantly *over*represented while men are significantly *under*represented are coded as +10. Conversely, those who perceive women as significantly *under*represented while men as significantly *over*represented are coded as -10. Individuals who perceive an equal level of representation of women and men are coded as 0.

Table 3.1 Possible values on the perceived representation index.

		Women				
		Very under	Under	Neither, nor	Over	Very over
Men	Very under	0	+1	+3	+6	+10
	Under	-7	0	+2	+5	+9
	Neither, nor	-8	-4	0	+4	+8
	Over	-9	-5	-2	0	+7
	Very over	-10	-6	-3	-1	0

Note: The index ranges from -10 to +10, with +10 representing the belief that women are *over*represented and men are *under*represented, and -10 representing the belief that women are *under*represented and men are *over*represented.

Method

We conduct multivariate linear regressions to examine the correlation between the five individual-level characteristics and political resentment. We chose this analytical approach because it allows us to isolate the impact of each independent variable (gender, education, age, vote choice, and region) on our dependent variable (resentment). To mitigate the potential underestimation of the impact of gender, age, education, and region on resentment, we employ two separate models. In Model 1, a subset of the independent variables is included (gender, age, education, and region), while in Model 2, all five independent variables are included (gender, age, education, region, and vote choice). In both models, age is included as a squared term to allow for

curvilinear relationships. Model 2 is conducted separately for Flanders and Wallonia, as vote choice differs between these regions.

To examine the potential moderating effects of perceived representation and education on political resentment, we conduct additional tests using Model 1. For perceived representation, we include an interaction term between gender and the relative representation scale. For education, we include an interaction term between gender and education levels. To aid in the interpretation of the findings, we concentrate on estimated resentment levels in this chapter. The coefficients related to this are presented in tabular form in the Supporting Information.

Results

Figure 3.4 presents the estimated levels of resentment based on the multivariate linear regressions including gender, education, age, and region (Model 1). The figure reveals that both men and women exhibit a relatively mild degree of political resentment, with no significant difference between them. Although it cannot be demonstrated in this research, the absence of significant differences between men and women in terms of political resentment could be associated with the presence (though in low levels) of women elected politicians within all the parties of the political spectrum. Moreover, even if women's levels of resentment are equal to those of men, they could still be sufficient to drive change in the political system, facilitating meaningful progress towards more women's representation in parliament. Our results should also be read against the fact that not all emotions are legitimized in the same way across all gender groups or expressed in the same ways; resentful expressions may vary across society which may nuance the interpretations and findings we provide here (see for example Dittmar, 2020).

Figure 3.4 also reveals a minimal disparity in resentment levels between the least and most educated individuals, with only a 3.83-point difference on the resentment index (the least educated scoring 11.14 and the most educated scoring 7.30). In contrast, there is a notable variation in resentment across different age groups. While individuals aged 18 demonstrate a very low level of resentment (2.46), those aged 58 exhibit

a moderate level (10.81). Furthermore, resentment undergoes significant changes as we move towards older age groups, with individuals aged 88 showing similar levels of resentment as the youth. These results challenge our initial expectations regarding age differences in resentment, as they reveal that younger individuals are actually less resentful than some of their older counterparts.

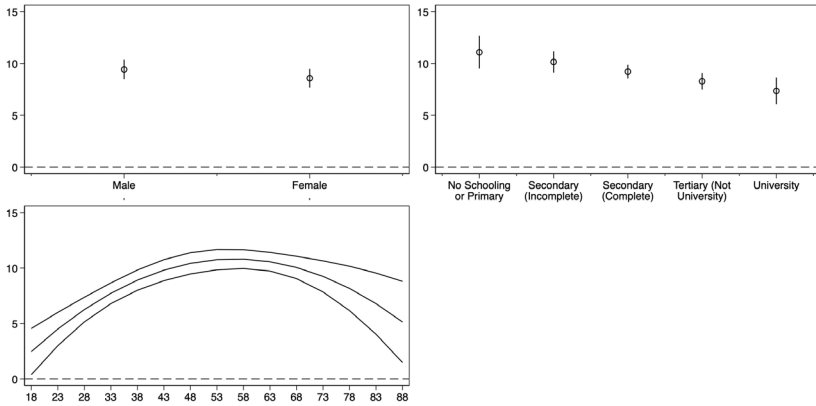


Fig. 3.4 Estimated resentment across gender, education, or age groups.

Note: Estimates based on Model 1 (excluding vote choice). 95% confidence intervals are reported. See the results in tabular format in Appendix 2.

As anticipated, women tend to experience greater resentment when they perceive a negative bias against women in politics compared to when they perceive no bias or even a positive bias. This can be observed in the left panel of Figure 3.5, where a shift from -10 (underrepresentation of women, overrepresentation of men) on the relative representative scale to 0 (equal representation of women and men) is associated with a decrease of 4.30 points on the resentment index (from 11.94 to 7.64) among female respondents. Likewise, a shift from 0 to +10 (overrepresentation of women, underrepresentation of men) is associated with a further decrease of 4.31 points (from 7.64 to 3.33). Despite these variations, the difference between men and women is statistically significant only when there is an overrepresentation of women and underrepresentation of men. In this case, women exhibit significantly lower levels of resentment compared to men.

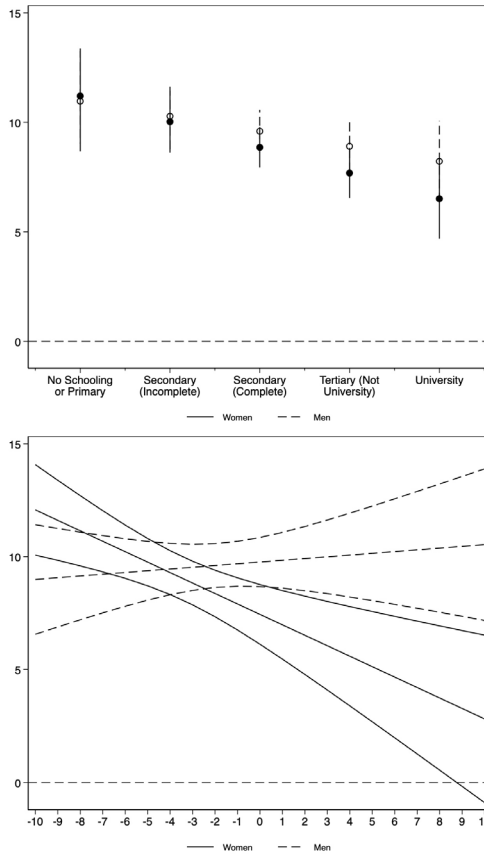


Fig. 3.5 Estimated resentment of women and men by representation perceptions (top) and education levels (bottom).

Note: Estimates based on Model 1 (excluding vote choice). 95% confidence intervals are reported. In the left panel, -10 indicates the underrepresentation of women and overrepresentation of men, while 10 signifies the overrepresentation of women and underrepresentation of men. See the results in tabular format in Appendix 3.

The top panel of Figure 3.5 highlights, in turn, that women with higher educational levels display lower levels of resentment in comparison to women with lower levels of education. Specifically, there is a notable (though statistically insignificant) decrease in resentment from 11.13 to 6.69 among female respondents. However, the anticipated gender gap is not more pronounced among individuals with low levels of education. This indicates that education does not lead to varying levels of a gender gap in resentment.

Turning to vote choices, Figure 3.6 reveals significant variations in resentment among supporters of parties. Specifically, in Flanders, supporters of Open VLD (2.18), CD&V (3.25), Groen (3.30), and Vooruit/SPA (5.38) exhibit relatively low levels of resentment. In contrast, N-VA (11.72), PVDA (12.78), and VB (16.36) voters demonstrate higher levels of resentment. These findings confirm our expectations regarding the relationship between vote choice and resentment. More specifically, resentment tends to be higher among supporters of parties that attract protest voters. However, our expectation regarding Groen voters is not confirmed. Despite the party's appeal to protest voters, Groen supporters do not differ significantly in terms of political resentment from supporters of liberal, socialist, and Christian-democratic parties (refer to Chapter 6 for tests on the link between policy congruence and resentment).

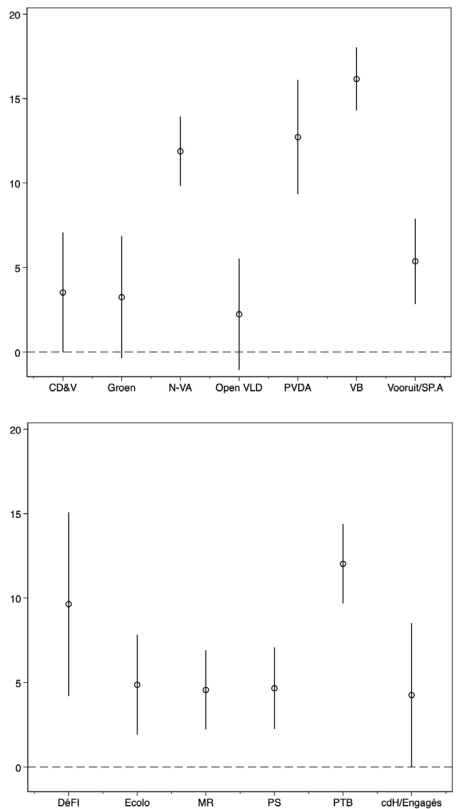


Fig. 3.6 Estimated resentment across vote choices.

Note: Estimates based on Model 2 (including vote choice). 95% confidence intervals are reported. See the results in tabular format in Appendix 2.

Similar patterns are observed in Wallonia. Political resentment is higher among PTB and DéFI voters compared to voters of the three most established parties in the Walloon party system (MR, PS, and cdH/ Les Engagés), as well as among Ecolo voters. These findings validate the PTB's ability to attract voters who harbour resentment. More importantly, they confirm that voters of protest parties in Wallonia exhibit higher levels of resentment, though Ecolo voters show similar levels of resentment as voters of other parties. In this sense, it appears that protest voters not only have higher levels of distrust in politicians and democratic discontent, but they seem to experience a profound sense of exclusion from the political system. Substantively, this finding suggests that the message associated with protest voting may be related to this sense of exclusion in addition to a distrust of politicians or general democratic dissatisfaction. Note that the limited number of DéFI voters in the sample cautions against drawing conclusions about the observed resentment levels among these voters.

While protest voters are more resentful than their counterparts, Figure 3.7 demonstrates that resentment levels are remarkably similar between residents of Flanders (9.56) and Wallonia (8.39). In other words, despite the prevalence of protest parties in Flanders, Flemish citizens are overall no more resentful than Walloon citizens. Our expectation regarding a regional difference in political resentment is therefore disconfirmed.

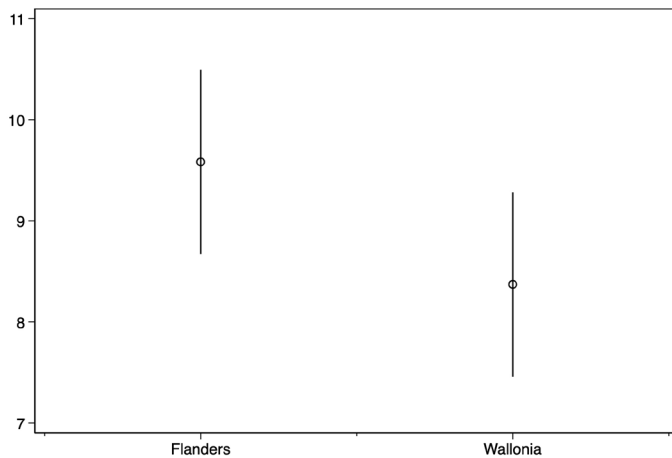


Fig. 3.7 Estimated resentment across regions.

Note: Estimates based on Model 1 (excluding vote choice). 95% confidence intervals are reported.

Robustness check using individuals' feelings about politics

Although our focus in this chapter has been on a measure of resentment that combines cognitive and affective dimensions, we also investigate disparities in resentment using an alternative measure based on an emotion index. This index draws on individuals' responses to the question, 'When you think of Belgian politics in general, to what extent do you feel each of the following emotions: Anger, Bitterness, Anxiety, Fear.' Similar to the resentment index, we recode the responses on a scale ranging from -10 to +10. For instance, individuals who experience a high level of anger are coded as +5, while those who do not feel any anger are coded as -5. By recoding the responses, our emotion index captures values between -20 (indicating the lowest levels of emotions) and +20 (indicating the highest levels of emotions).

We find a striking similarity between the analyses conducted using our resentment index and our emotion index. Specifically, women are not more emotional than men, and the middle-aged exhibit higher levels of emotion compared to both the youth and the elderly (see Appendix 4). This is important to highlight given gender-based stereotypes on who expresses emotions in society and the broader fact that gender roles define which emotions are suitable to express, and which are not, and crucially by whom. The only notable difference is that education is now found to be insignificantly associated with emotion, whereas in our main findings, it showed a significant but marginal association with resentment.

The findings pertaining to vote choice follow a similar pattern. Supporters of N-VA, PVDA, and VB in Flanders, as well as DéFI and PTB supporters in Wallonia, tend to score higher on the emotion index compared to supporters of other parties (see Appendix 5). Furthermore, residents of Flanders and Wallonia do not significantly differ in terms of their emotions (see Appendix 6). These results provide reassurance that the lack of substantial findings for gender and region, the weak findings for education, and the strong findings for age and vote choice are not driven by our use of the resentment index. They persist even when we utilize an alternative measure of political resentment.

Discussion and conclusion

This chapter examined whether resentment is unequally distributed among the Belgian population. Our investigation revealed significant variations in resentment levels based on age and vote choices. Specifically, we identified a curvilinear relationship between political resentment and age, with resentment peaking around the age of 50. Furthermore, our findings indicate that supporters of N-VA, PTB-PVDA, and VB tend to display higher levels of resentment compared to supporters of other parties. Surprisingly, women and residents of Flanders do not display higher levels of resentment than their counterparts, and the differences in these levels across education groups are relatively limited. Moreover, moderation tests reveal that the effect of gender on resentment is significant when women are perceived as overrepresented and men as underrepresented in politics, but not when the opposite scenario is observed. In contrast, education does not influence the association between gender and resentment.

By identifying who feels resentful along a set of socio-demographic variables, this chapter hopes to inform collective efforts to understand and respond to the resentment expressed across the population. It seems particularly important to address the middle aged and individuals who vote for protest parties as they harbour more resentment than their counterparts. One of these efforts may be direct democracy initiatives. By allowing citizens to have a more active role in decision-making and policy formulation, these initiatives have the potential to contribute to a greater sense of ownership and inclusion within the political system (refer to Chapters 5 and 8 of this book for a related discussion).

In contrast, the absence of a (strong) connection particularly between gender and resentment opens up important questions about who is allowed to express resentment, and suggests that different social groups may choose different affective repertoires to express their dissatisfaction with politics. While this finding may cast doubt on the efficacy of diversity policies aimed at augmenting the number of women MPs to reduce resentment, from a normative standpoint, diversity should be valued for its intrinsic worth. Consequently, even when women do not perceive themselves as more excluded than men, it is still relevant to undertake initiatives that address and mitigate inequalities in political representation.

Since our study focuses on Belgium, it is important to emphasize that our findings may not necessarily generalize to other political contexts, nor to other socio-demographic variables which were not included in our analysis. Therefore, future research could explore the extent to which the individual-level factors examined in this study correlate with resentment in different political contexts. By conducting cross-contextual investigations and studying resentment across more diverse social groups of citizens, we would gain a more comprehensive understanding of the distribution of resentment, including whether the observed levels of resentment among marginalized groups and protest voters are exclusive to Belgium or not. Such research endeavours will increase our understanding of inequalities in political resentment and how we can reduce it in the population.

References

- Andersen, S. M., & Chen, S. (2002). 'The relational self: An interpersonal social-cognitive theory.' *Psychological Review*, 109, 619–645. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.109.4.619>
- Ashmore, R. D., Deaux, K., & McLaughlin-Volpe, T. (2004). 'An organizing framework for collective identity: Articulation and significance of multidimensionality.' *Psychological Bulletin*, 130, 80–114. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.130.1.80>
- Bègue, M. (2007). *Le rapport au politique des personnes en situation défavorisée: Une comparaison européenne: France, Grande-Bretagne, Espagne*. PhD Thesis, Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris. ParisTech Research Repository, <http://www.theses.fr/2007IEPP0047/document>
- Best, H. (2007). 'New challenges, new elites? Changes in the recruitment and career patterns of European representative elites.' *Comparative Sociology*, 6(1–2), 85–113. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156913307X187414>
- Bowler, S., Donovan, T., & Karp, J. A. (2007). 'Enraged or Engaged? Preferences for Direct Citizen Participation in Affluent Democracies.' *Political Research Quarterly*, 60(3), 351–362. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912907304108>
- Braconnier, C., & Mayer, N. (2015). *Les inaudibles: Sociologie politique des précaires*. Paris: Presses de Sciences Po. <https://doi.org/10.3917/scpo.braco.2015.01>
- Brewer, M. B., & Gardiner, W. (1996). 'Who is this "we"?' Levels of collective identity and self representations.' *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71, 83–93. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.71.1.83>

- Broockman, D. E. (2013). 'Black Politicians Are More Intrinsically Motivated to Advance Blacks' Interests: A Field Experiment Manipulating Political Incentives.' *American Journal of Political Science*, 57(3), 521–536. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12018>
- Ceka, B., & Magalhaes, P. C. (2020). 'Do the Rich and the Poor Have Different Conceptions of Democracy? Socioeconomic Status, Inequality, and the Political Status Quo.' *Comparative Politics*, 52(3), 383–412. <https://doi.org/10.5129/001041520X15670823829196>
- Celis, K., & Childs, S. (2012). 'The substantive representation of women: What to do with conservative claims?' *Political Studies*, 60(1), 213–225. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2011.00904.x>
- Coffé, H., & Michels, A. (2014). 'Education and support for representative, direct and stealth democracy.' *Electoral Studies*, 35, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2014.03.006>
- Cramer, K. J. (2016). *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Crawford, I., Allison, K. W., Zamboni, B. D., & Soto, T. (2002). 'The influence of dual-identity development on the psychosocial functioning of African American gay and bisexual men.' *Journal of Sex Research*, 39(3), 179–189. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224490209552140>
- Dalton, R. J. (2004). *Democratic Challenges, Democratic Choices: The Erosion of Political Support in Advanced Industrial Democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199268436.001.0001>
- Dittmar, K. (2020). 'Urgency and ambition: the influence of political environment and emotion in spurring US women's candidacies in 2018.' *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, 3(1), 143–160.
- Ezrow, L., & Xezonakis, G. (2011). 'Citizen satisfaction with democracy and parties' policy offerings.' *Comparative Political Studies*, 44(9), 1152–1178. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414011405461>
- Giger, N., Rosset, J., & Bernauer, J. (2012). 'The poor political representation of the poor in a comparative perspective.' *Representation*, 48(1), 47–61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2012.653238>
- Goovaerts, I., Kern, A., Van Haute, E., & Marien, S. (2020). 'Drivers of Support for the Populist Radical Left and Populist Radical Right in Belgium: An Analysis of the VB and the PVDA-PTB Vote at the 2019 Elections.' *Politics of the Low Countries*, 2(3), 228–264. <https://doi.org/10.5553/PLC/258999292020002003002>
- Hakhverdian, A. (2015). 'Does it matter that most representatives are higher educated?' *Swiss Political Science Review*, 21(2), 237–245. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12166>
- Han, K. J. (2016). 'Income inequality and voting for radical right-wing parties.' *Electoral Studies*, 42, 54–64. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2016.02.001>

- Hibbing, J. R., & Theiss-Morse, E. (2002). *Stealth Democracy: Americans' Beliefs About How Government Should Work*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511613722>
- Hino, A. (2012). *New Challenger Parties in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203130698>
- Hooghe, M., Marien, S., & Pauwels, T. (2011). 'Where do distrusting voters turn if there is no viable exit or voice option? The impact of political trust on electoral behaviour in the Belgian regional elections of June 2009.' *Government and Opposition*, 46(2), 245–273. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2010.01338.x>
- Lefevere, J., Van Dijk, L., Walgrave, S., Celis, K., DeschouwerK., Marien, S., Pilet, J.B., Rihoux, B., Van Haute, E., Van Ingelgom, V., Baudewyns, P., Verhaegen, S., De Mulder, A. (2021). RepResent Cross Sectional Survey Fall 2021. DANS, <https://doi.org/10.17026/dans-zkg-rftw>
- Lupu, N., & Warner, Z. (2022). 'Affluence and congruence: Unequal representation around the world.' *Journal of Politics*, 84(1), 276–290. <https://doi.org/10.1086/714930>
- Mansbridge, J. (1999). 'Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent "Yes".' *Journal of Politics*, 61(3), 628–657. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2647821>
- Marié, A., & Talukder, D. (2021). 'Think like me and I will trust you. The effects of policy opinion congruence on trust in the parliament.' *Politics of the Low Countries*, 3, 58–287. <https://doi.org/10.5553/PLC/.000026>
- Mayne, Q., & Hakhverdian, A. (2017). 'Ideological congruence and citizen satisfaction: Evidence from 25 advanced democracies.' *Comparative Political Studies*, 50(6), 822–849. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414016639708>
- Mayne, Q., & Peters, Y. (2023). 'Where you sit is where you stand: education-based descriptive representation and perceptions of democratic quality.' *West European Politics*, 46(3), 526–549. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2022.2071044>
- Noordzij, K., de Koster, W., & van der Waal, J. (2021). "'They don't know what it's like to be at the bottom": Exploring the role of perceived cultural distance in less-educated citizens' discontent with politicians.' *British Journal of Sociology*, 72(3), 566–579. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12800>
- Norris, P. (2011). *Democratic Deficit: Critical Citizens Revisited*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511973383>
- Pitkin, H. F. (1967). *The Concept of Representation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Rihoux, B., (2003). 'La percée d'Ecolo au 13 juin 1999 : un effet dioxine et des électeurs moins «verts» ?' In Frogner, A.-P. & Aish, A.-M. (eds.). *Elections: la rupture?* (pp. 44–53). De Boeck.

- Rosset, J., Giger, N., & Bernauer, J. (2013). 'More money, fewer problems? Cross-level effects of economic deprivation on political representation.' *West European Politics*, 36(4), 817–835. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2013.783353>
- Rosset, J., & Stecker, C. (2019). 'How well are citizens represented by their governments? Issue congruence and inequality in Europe.' *European Political Science Review*, 11(2), 145–160. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773919000043>
- Sedikides, C., & Brewer, M. B. (2001). *Individual Self, Relational Self, Collective Self*. New York: Psychology Press.
- Sinardet, D. (2012). 'Is There a Belgian Public Sphere? What the Case of a Federal Multilingual Country Can Contribute to the Debate on Transnational Public Spheres, and Vice Versa.' In Seymour, M. & Gagnon, A.-G. (eds.). *Multinational Federalism* (pp. 172–202). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137016744_9
- Sobolewska, M., McKee, R., & Campbell, R. (2018). 'Explaining motivation to represent: How does descriptive representation lead to substantive representation of racial and ethnic minorities?' *West European Politics*, 41(6), 1237–1261. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2018.1455408>
- Stoker, G. (2019). 'Relating and Responding to the Politics of Resentment.' *Political Quarterly*, 90, 138–151. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12576>
- Talukder, D. (2022). *Légitimité politique et sous-représentation : comment les citoyens évaluent-ils le système politique*. PhD thesis, Université Libre de Bruxelles. ULB Research Repository.
- Talukder, D., & Pilet, J.-B. (2021). 'Public support for deliberative democracy. A specific look at the attitudes of citizens from disadvantaged groups.' *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13511610.2021.1978284>
- Van Haute, E. (2016). *Green Parties in Europe*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315585932>
- Van Haute, E., & Wauters, B. (2019). 'Do Characteristics of Consociational Democracies Still Apply to Belgian Parties?' *Politics of the Low Countries*, 1(1), 6–26. <https://doi.org/10.5553/PLC/258999292019001001002>
- Vidal, G. (2018). 'Challenging business as usual? The rise of new parties in Spain in times of crisis.' *West European Politics*, 41(2), 261–286. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2017.1376272>
- 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*, 2(3), 320–353. <https://doi.org/10.5553/PLC/258999292020002003005>
- Webb, P. (2013). 'Who is willing to participate? Dissatisfied democrats, stealth democrats and populists in the United Kingdom: Who is willing to participate?' *European Journal of Political Research*, 52(6), 747–772. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12021>

Supporting Information

Appendix I. Descriptive statistics of variables in the analysis

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	N
Political Resentment	8.97	15.02	-35	35	2,035
Gender	0.52	0.50	0	1	2,031
Education	3.25	1.01	1	5	2,035
Age	49.70	16.76	18	90	2,035
Vote Choice (Flanders)	4.49	1.90	1	7	760
Vote Choice (Wallonia)	3.70	1.31	1	6	609
Region	0.50	0.50	0	1	2,035
Perceived Representation	-2.64	3.65	-10	10	1,823
Emotions	3.40	8.87	-20	20	2,035

Note: Data comes from the 2021 RepResent cross-sectional survey.

Appendix 2. Association between political resentment and the five variables (gender, education, age, vote choice, and region)

	DV: Political Resentment		
	Model 1	Model 2 (Flanders)	Model 2 (Wallonia)
Gender	-0.851 (0.672)	-0.930 (1.057)	-1.099 (1.184)
Education	-0.936** (0.327)	-1.188* (0.496)	0.163 (0.615)
Age	0.641*** (0.124)	0.418* (0.196)	0.698** (0.215)
Age squared	-0.006*** (0.001)	-0.004 (0.002)	-0.006** (0.002)
Region	-1.212 (0.659)		
Groen (ref: CD&V)		-0.283 (2.586)	
N-VA (ref: CD&V)		8.355*** (2.068)	
Open VLD (ref: CD&V)		-1.293 (2.451)	
PVDA (ref: CD&V)		9.199*** (2.515)	
VB (ref: CD&V)		12.639*** (2.076)	

Vooruit/SP.A (ref: CD&V)		1.846 (2.216)	
Ecolo (ref: DéFI)			-4.770 (3.174)
MR (ref: DéFI)			-5.076 (3.004)
PS (ref: DéFI)			-4.979 (3.025)
PTB (ref: DéFI)			2.393 (3.028)
cdH/Les Engagés (ref: DéFI)			-5.376 (3.511)
Constant	-3.147 (3.080)	-2.553 (5.212)	-7.995 (6.181)
<i>N</i>	2031	760	608
<i>R</i> ²	0.029	0.157	0.073

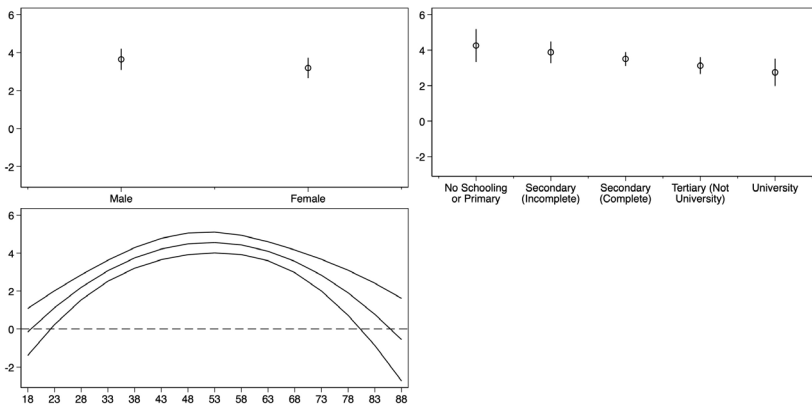
Note: The estimates presented in this table are based on linear regressions, with standard errors indicated in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Political resentment is measured by means of an index derived from the summation of individual responses to seven resentment items. Scores range from -35, representing the lowest level of resentment, to +35, representing the highest level of resentment. Gender is coded as '1' for female and '0' for male. Education is categorized into five levels, with '1' indicating no schooling or only primary education, and '5' corresponding to university education. Region is coded as '0' for Flanders and '1' for Wallonia. The reported effects of the socio-demographic variables in columns three and four may be underestimated due to the inclusion of vote choice in the models.

Appendix 3. Association between gender and political resentment moderated by perceived representation or education

	DV: Political Resentment	
	(1)	(2)
Gender	-2.318** (0.877)	0.725 (2.215)
Perceived representation	0.077 (0.139)	
Gender* Perceived representation	-0.540** (0.194)	
Education	-1.446*** (0.351)	-0.686 (0.468)
Gender* Education		-0.487 (0.652)
Age	0.657*** (0.129)	0.645*** (0.124)
Age squared	-0.006*** (0.001)	-0.006*** (0.001)
Region	-1.360* (0.693)	-1.205 (0.659)
Constant	-1.103 (3.257)	-4.037 (3.303)
<i>N</i>	1819	2031
<i>R</i> ²	0.038	0.030

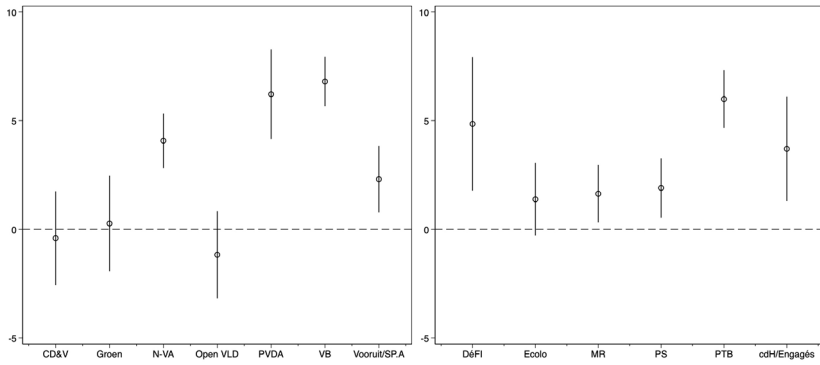
Note: The estimates presented in this table are based on linear regressions, with standard errors indicated in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Political resentment is measured by means of an index derived from the summation of individual responses to seven resentment items. Scores range from -35, representing the lowest level of resentment, to +35, representing the highest level of resentment. Gender is coded as '1' for female and '0' for male. Perceived representation ranges from -10 to +10, with +10 representing the belief of women being overrepresented and men being underrepresented, and -10 representing the belief of women being underrepresented and men being overrepresented. Education is categorized into five levels, with '1' indicating no schooling or only primary education, and '5' corresponding to university education. Region is coded as '0' for Flanders and '1' for Wallonia.

Appendix 4. Estimated emotion across gender, education, or age groups



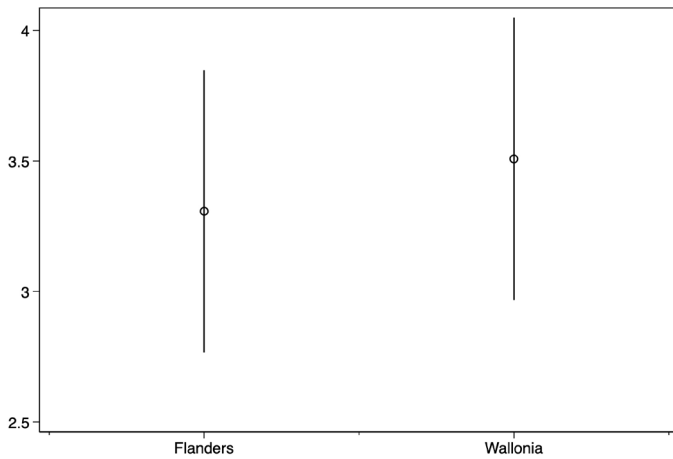
Note: Estimates based on Model 1 (excluding vote choice). 95% confidence intervals are reported. See the results in tabular format in Appendix 7.

Appendix 5. Estimated emotion across vote choices



Note: Estimates based on Model 2 (including vote choice). 95% confidence intervals are reported. See the results in tabular format in Appendix 7.

Appendix 6. Estimated emotion across regions



Note: Estimates based on Model 1 (including vote choice). 95% confidence intervals are reported. See the results in tabular format in Appendix 7.

Appendix 7. Association between political resentment, measured by individuals' emotions and the five factors (gender, education, age, vote choice, and region)

DV: Political Resentment (Emotions)			
	Model 1	Model 2 (Flanders)	Model 2 (Wallonia)
Gender	-0.449 (0.398)	-1.285* (0.642)	1.016 (0.668)
Education	-0.377 (0.194)	-0.336 (0.301)	-0.067 (0.347)
Age	0.419*** (0.073)	0.267* (0.119)	0.270* (0.121)
Age squared	-0.004*** (0.001)	-0.003* (0.001)	-0.002 (0.001)
Region	0.201 (0.391)		
Groen (ref: CD&V)		0.671 (1.570)	
N-VA (ref: CD&V)		4.480*** (1.256)	
Open VLD (ref: CD&V)		-0.766 (1.488)	
PVDA (ref: CD&V)		6.618*** (1.527)	
VB (ref: CD&V)		7.202*** (1.260)	

Vooruit/SP.A (ref: CD&V)		2.711* (1.346)	
Ecolo (ref: DéFI)			-3.470 (1.790)
MR (ref: DéFI)			-3.213 (1.695)
PS (ref: DéFI)			-2.949 (1.706)
PTB (ref: DéFI)			1.141 (1.708)
cdH/Les Engagés (ref: DéFI)			-1.148 (1.981)
Constant	-5.045** (1.828)	-4.102 (3.165)	-2.811 (3.487)
<i>N</i>	2031	760	608
<i>R</i> ²	0.021	0.125	0.074

Note: The estimates presented in this table are based on linear regressions, with standard errors indicated in parentheses. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Political resentment is measured by means of an index derived from the summation of individual responses to four emotion items. Scores range from -20, indicating the lowest levels of emotions, to +20, indicating the highest levels of emotions. Gender is coded as '1' for female and '0' for male. Education is categorized into five levels, with '1' indicating no schooling or only primary education, and '5' corresponding to university education. Region is coded as '0' for Flanders and '1' for Wallonia. The reported effects of the socio-demographic variables in columns three and four may be underestimated due to the inclusion of vote choice in the models.

