

Belgium features federalism and populism, but how are both linked?

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Summary

This chapter analyses the electoral success of *Vlaams Belang (VB)*, the main Belgian Populist Radical Right Party against the background of Belgian federalism. It finds that typical characteristics of Belgian federalism have resulted in complexity and tense political relations, which are exploited by PRRPs such as VB. Belgium's territoriality, asymmetric implementation of shared and self-rule, exclusivity of competences and far-reaching policy autonomy (without equivalent fiscal autonomy), and absence of state-wide parties, all lead to political antagonism between the two main language communities as well as to a highly complex (and therefore not always effective) political system. This offers a fruitful context for VB as a PRRP whose core mission is to show the people that the elites are not responsive and only serve their own interests. The chapter also shows that other features of the Belgian political system, such as its consociational nature, additionally offer arguments and opportunities for PRRPs.