



POLITICAL FINANCE IN THE DIGITAL AGE: A CASE STUDY OF BELGIUM

February 2023

Gunther Vanden Eynde

1. LEGAL FRAMEWORK: WHAT WE DO NOT UNDERSTAND, WE FEAR

In many European democracies, laws limiting campaign spending or prohibiting the use of a number of campaign instruments are a common practice (Gibson 2020: 51 and 215; Lilleker, Tenscher and Štětka 2015: 753). This is also the case in Belgium, where electoral campaign regulations fall under a federal mandate regardless of the nature of the election. The Federal Act of 4 July 1989 on the Limitation and Oversight of Election Expenses Incurred for the Election of the Federal Chambers as well as on the Financing and Open Accounting of Political Parties regulates federal elections. European and regional elections are both regulated by a separate federal act of 19 May 1994. Local elections, on the other hand, fall under a regional mandate. During the official campaign period for all elections (local, regional, federal and European), a strict spending cap limits campaign spending. Furthermore, advertisements on both radio and television are banned, as is the distribution of small gifts, the use of commercial billboards and the conduct of commercial campaigns over the phone (Federal Act of 1989: articles 2 and 5; Federal Act of 19 May 1994: articles 2 and 5).

In 2007 online social networks and digital ads were still far from mainstream. Even the United States was still a year removed from the Obama campaign of 2008, which is generally seen as a benchmark when it comes to the successful use of social media in electoral campaigns (Bimber 2014; Spierings and Jacobs 2014). It is in this context that the Belgian legislature decided to amend the above-mentioned federal act of 1989, adding online ads to the list of prohibited campaign instruments during the official campaign period for all elections (at the time, three months prior to election day). However, audiovisual

In many European countries, laws limiting campaign spending or prohibiting the use of a number of campaign instruments are a common practice, including in Belgium.

content (even when made by commercial providers) on candidates' personal websites and party websites was allowed (Chambre des Représentants de Belgique 2007a: 5; 2007b: article 5). This amendment was rushed through parliament to make sure that it would enter into force by the beginning of the official campaign period for the 2007 federal parliamentary elections, which started on 24 March (Chambre des Représentants de Belgique 2007a: 3). During this official campaign period, restrictions apply regarding campaign spending and the use of certain campaign tools (Federal Act of 1989: article 5).¹ The rationale for this amendment, as mentioned in the parliamentary proceedings, was the great number of unknowns regarding the use and influence of this specific online campaign tool (Chambre des Représentants de Belgique 2007a). Due to these restrictions on the use of digital ads, the digital toolbox for parties and individual candidates was limited to websites and emails. Again, the only exception was for local elections. Although online ads have never been banned at the local level, they have not been very popular at that level so far (see e.g. Vanden Eynde et al. 2019).

In 2013, however, the Federal Act of 4 July 1989 was amended again, and the restriction regarding online ads was removed by article 9 of a federal act of 22 November 2013 (Chambre des Représentants de Belgique 2013b). In contrast to the prior amendment, which was rushed through parliament in order to be in force for upcoming elections, the 2013 amendment was not applied to the 2014 concurrent elections and entered into force only on 1 January 2015 (Chambre des Représentants de Belgique 2013b: article 37). The rationale mentioned in the parliamentary proceedings read as follows: 'The difference (from offline political ads) can no longer be justified in today's technological context'² (Chambre des Représentants de Belgique 2013a: 8). These restrictions have also been lifted in legislation concerning both European and regional elections. Consequently, the official campaign period for the concurrent elections in 2019, which started four months prior to election day, was the first in which both political parties and candidates were allowed to use (targeted) online political ads as part of their campaign for European, federal or regional parliamentary elections. Whether this new tool found itself immediately on an equal footing with more traditional campaign instruments is the focus of the next section.

The current legislation in Belgium allows both political parties and candidates to use (targeted) online political ads as part of their campaign for European, federal or regional parliamentary elections.

2. DIGITAL CAMPAIGN EXPENDITURES IN BELGIUM: THE NUMBERS

As part of the research for this case study, data was collected on campaign spending for the different political parties that participated in the 2019

¹ In 2007 federal elections did not take place upon the dissolution of the legislative assembly as foreseen (24 June 2007) but a few weeks earlier, on 10 June 2007, because of a parliamentary declaration to amend the Constitution and the constitutional procedure which follows such a declaration (Chambre des Représentants et Sénat de Belgique 2007: 4). That is why the official campaign period was shorter than the three months foreseen in article 4 of the Federal Act of 1989 (since 2014 the official campaign period has started four months prior to election day).

² Translated from Dutch to English by the author.

elections and had at least one seat in one of the federal or regional parliaments during the 2014–2019 legislature—that is, the Flemish socialists (sp.a, now Vooruit), the Flemish Christian Democrats (CD&V), the Flemish liberals (Open Vld), the Flemish nationalists (N-VA), the Flemish far right (Vlaams Belang), the Flemish Greens (Groen), the Walloon socialists (PS), the Walloon Christian Democrats (cdh, now les Engagées), the Walloon liberals (MR and Défi), the Walloon far right (Parti Populaire), the Walloon greens (Ecolo) and the unitary far-left party (PVDA-PTB). Table 2.1 summarizes the digital campaign spending of these parties both in absolute numbers (in euros) and as a percentage of their total campaign budget.

The Belgian party system is organized regionally, with the Flemish parties competing in Flemish-speaking constituencies and the Walloon parties in French-speaking constituencies. However, both Flemish and francophone parties compete in the bilingual constituency of Brussels. The far-left party (PVDA-PTB) is the only unitary party competing in both French and Flemish constituencies. Table 2.1 is therefore divided into different rows for Flemish, Walloon and unitary parties.

An analysis of campaign spending on the part of Belgian parties makes it clear that investments in more traditional tools still dominate. Only a little over a quarter of the total campaign expenditure of all parties together was spent on online ads. When looking at the Flemish and Walloon parties separately, the numbers change to 31 per cent and 23 per cent respectively. There are, however, three exceptions to this general trend. The Flemish far-right party (Vlaams Belang) is the clear leader, having spent almost 61 per cent of its total campaign budget on online ads on social media, leaving the other parties far behind. The Walloon liberals (MR) follow relatively closely, having spent 52 per cent of their total campaign expenditure on online ads, while the Flemish socialist party (sp.a., now Vooruit) also stands out, at 44 per cent. Additionally, Table 2.1 makes clear that only a marginal part of each party's budget was spent on the creation of an election-specific website or webpage.

Turning to the candidate level (Table 2.2), the dominance of traditional campaigning is even more striking. Here, only 16 per cent of all 2019 campaign expenditures went to (targeted) online ads. Furthermore, this innovative tool seems much more popular among Flemish candidates, who spent 20 per cent of their overall budget on this type of advertising, compared with just below 6 per cent for their Walloon counterparts. Similar to the Flemish far-right party at the party level (Table 2.1), the Flemish far-right candidates stand out at the candidate level. Together, they spent 47 per cent of their campaign budgets on ads on social media, significantly more than the other parties' candidates. The Flemish nationalist candidates find themselves in second place, having spent 19 per cent of their financial resources on online ads. Third place goes to the Flemish Christian Democrats (15 per cent), with the Flemish liberals (14 per cent), the Walloon far right (13 per cent) and the Flemish Greens (10 per cent) following suit. With only 9 per cent of their total budget dedicated to online ads, the tool does not seem very popular among the Flemish socialist candidates. This stands in stark contrast to the popularity of the instrument among the

In the 2019 Belgian elections, political parties spent around a quarter of their total campaign expenditure on online ads.

Table 2.1. Digital campaign spending during the official campaign period in 2019—party level

Political party	Website, in EUR	% of total	Online ads, in EUR	% of total
Flemish parties				
Christian Democrats	41,322	4.13	160,753	16.09
Greens	255	0.03	222,968	24.80
Flemish nationalists	12,040	1.21	151,209	15.18
Liberals	39,428	3.99	267,154	27.04
Socialists	0	0.00	441,289	44.58
Far right	8,222	0.83	601,502	60.82
Subtotal	101,267	1.73	1,844,875	31.48
Walloon parties				
Christian Democrats	38,620	4.63	142,764	17.12
Greens	11,368	1.74	106,846	16.38
Far right	5,000	1.79	72,475	25.90
Liberals (MR)	20,000	2.65	393,071	52.04
Liberals (Défi)	26,569	2.73	58,710	6.04
Socialists	1,411	0.16	248,611	28.80
Subtotal	102,968	2.36	1,022,477	23.47
Unitary parties				
Far left	27,446	3.03	103,334	11.42
Total	231,681	2.08	2,970,686	26.71

Source: Mandatory campaign spending declarations (not publicly available). Author's own data collection and calculations.

Flemish socialist party (Table 2.1), and the same goes for the Walloon liberal (MR) candidates. They spent only 4 per cent of their campaign budgets on online ads, compared with 52 per cent at the party level. The candidates from the other Walloon parties also spent a very small part of their budget on online ads. Candidates from the far-left unitary party (PVDA-PTB) do not have a tradition of individual campaigning, which is reflected in their reported zero spending. Table 2.2 also shows that individual candidates spent very little on an election-specific personal website or webpage.

Although the results of the 2019 concurrent elections fall outside the scope of this case study, the massive electoral gain of the Flemish far-right party should be mentioned. Compared with the 2014 concurrent elections, they obtained 15 extra seats at the federal level (the federal Chamber of Representatives

Table 2.2. Digital campaign spending during the official campaign period in 2019—candidate level per party

Political party	Website, in EUR	% of total	Online ads, in EUR	% of total
Flemish parties				
Christian Democrats	18,872	0.70	418,893	15.01
Greens	610	0.40	14,445	10.16
Flemish nationalists	57,231	1.23	888,916	19.02
Liberals	14,761	0.50	426,769	13.66
Socialists	5,806	0.30	164,128	9.26
Far right	304	0.01	1,050,738	47.32
Subtotal	97,584	0.70	2,963,889	20.13
Walloon parties				
Christian Democrats	251	0.02	96,399	8.55
Greens	145	0.10	6,547	5.37
Far right	0	0.00	5,394	12.79
Liberals (MR)	1,921	0.09	83,798	4.08
Liberals (Défi)	1,008	0.70	13,000	9.08
Socialists	23,870	1.25	96,490	5.05
Subtotal	27,195	0.50	301,628	5.59
Unitary parties				
Far left	0	0	0	0
Total	124,779	0.60	3,265,517	16.23

Source: Mandatory campaign spending declarations (not publicly accessible). Author's own data collection and calculations.

consists of 150 seats), 17 at the Flemish level (the Flemish Parliament consists of 124 seats) and 2 at the European level (Belgium has 21 seats in the European Parliament). As soon as it became known that they had spent a large part of their campaign budget on social media ads—compared with the other parties competing in the 2019 elections—the public became convinced that their success was entirely due to the use of these (targeted) online ads. However, there is currently no scientific proof to support this idea because the research that specifically looks into the effect of online spending during the 2019 concurrent elections in Belgium is ongoing and the results are expected to be published by mid-2023. Furthermore, the hypothesis neglects the fact that the Flemish far-right party also spent almost half of its campaign budget on more traditional campaign tools. Nevertheless, the success of the far-right party

and the ensuing popular belief are part of the context in which the legislative initiatives that will be discussed in the next section came into being.

The members of the Federal Parliament have urged the federal government to plead at the European Union level for a code of conduct for sponsored political ads on popular social media platforms.

3. REGULATING DIGITAL CAMPAIGNING AND DIGITAL CAMPAIGN FINANCING INITIATIVES IN THE BELGIAN CONTEXT

The societal debate on the use of political ads on the Internet in general and on social media specifically has not escaped the attention of the Belgian federal and regional parliaments. However, most of the initiatives in this context have been proposed by members of the Federal Parliament. This is not surprising, as the federal level is responsible for the regulation of electoral campaigns for the European, federal and regional parliaments (see Section 1 for details). Local elections are covered by mandates at the regional level.

The first federal legislative initiative dates back to 6 October 2020 and was launched by six members of parliament (MPs) from the Walloon Socialist Party. They argued that there was no justification for banning political ads in cinemas or on television and radio during the official campaign period while ads on the Internet and in the press (i.e. newspapers and magazines) were permitted. Therefore, they proposed a ban on all commercial ads—both offline and online—during the official campaign period, which lasts four months. The initiators specified that flyers and leaflets handed out or distributed by the postal service do not fall under the proposed restrictions (Chambre des Représentants de Belgique 2020). It should be noted that the aforementioned 2013 decision to lift the ban on online political ads was taken based on a similar argument as the one used here to propose a total ban on both online and offline advertising (see Section 1). The proposed total ban makes this legislative proposal much more radical than its predecessor (Chambre des Représentants de Belgique 2007b), which banned online ads only. This initiative is currently part of a larger debate in the committee on institutional reforms in the Federal Parliament.

A second initiative that cannot be neglected is a resolution adopted by the Federal Parliament on 6 May 2021 that stresses the need for more transparency and accountability on the part of social media and other platforms dealing with online content and information. Regarding the specific issue of online political ads, the members of the Federal Parliament point to the vulnerability of the younger target audience especially with respect to the technique of microtargeting. They urge the federal government to plead at the European Union level for a code of conduct for sponsored political ads on popular social media platforms. This code of conduct should ensure that the identity of the actor behind a pushed and/or sponsored message is made public to the individuals receiving these posts (Chambre des Représentants de Belgique 2021a). This initiative seems to indicate a desire to transfer the responsibility for regulating online political ads to the supranational EU level.

The third initiative turns away from the official campaign period by specifically proposing an annual spending cap of EUR 1 million per political party (including their MPs and party personnel) on all political information dissemination activities and political ads, both online and offline. The spending cap mentioned in this legislative proposal would not apply during the official campaign period since Belgian campaign spending regulation already specifies and imposes a spending limit for both parties and candidates during that period. The initiators of the proposal, MPs from the Flemish and Walloon greens, argue that the proposed spending cap is necessary for three reasons. Firstly, it would help create a more level playing field between those parties that have a lot of financial resources and those that do not. The initiators stress that this objective was also behind the introduction of a spending cap during the official campaign period. Secondly, the MPs in question argue that, if passed, the proposal would put an end to the increasing amount of financial resources spent on social media and other online and offline ads by (certain) political parties outside the official campaign period. Finally, the MPs pushing the proposal point to the relationship between microtargeting and the development of online echo chambers; the latter limit the exchange of (conflicting) ideas, which is of paramount importance to the democratic process (Chambre des Représentants de Belgique 2021b). Like the first initiative discussed in this section, this legislative proposal is currently also part of the larger debate in the committee on institutional reforms in the Federal Parliament.

The last initiative is taking place at the regional level, in Wallonia. As already mentioned in Section 1, local elections (i.e. in municipalities and provinces) fall under the mandate of the regions in Belgium. Consequently, local campaign regulations differ from region to region. Electoral campaigns at the Walloon level face similar restrictions as campaigns for European federal and regional elections. During the official campaign period, which starts three months prior to election day, ads are prohibited on both radio and television, and the same goes for the distribution of small gifts, the use of commercial billboards and commercial campaigns over the phone (Parlement de la Wallonie 2004: article L4130-4). In May 2022 the Walloon Government agreed on a draft law to amend the Democracy Code. Among other changes, the government proposes limiting campaign spending committed to targeted messages on the Internet to 50 per cent of the total amount of money a candidate or a party is allowed to spend according to their respective spending limit. The Walloon Government argues that this restriction is necessary to protect the personal data of citizens, as paid messages on social networks are often aimed at collecting recipients' personal information, according to the initiators of the amendment. Furthermore, the Walloon Government argues that the proposed measure is necessary to limit the spread of fake news, as this phenomenon is deemed to threaten the liberty of the population as well as democratic institutions.³ This draft law will be sent to the Council of State and then to the Walloon Parliament, where it will be discussed and possibly adopted.

An initiative by the MPs from the Flemish and Walloon greens proposes an annual spending cap of EUR 1 million per political party on all political information dissemination activities and political ads, both online and offline.

³ The draft law and the comments on the proposed amendments are not publicly available because the government still has to receive the advice of the Conseil d'Etat (Council of State). The author is in the possession of both documents. Also see Tassin (2022).

While discussions on regulating online campaigning are rife in Belgian politics and society, politicians are turning to the EU for new legislative initiatives on targeted political messages on the Internet.

4. CONCLUSION

The societal debate on regulating political messages on social media platforms is ongoing at all levels of Belgian politics. However, the initiatives discussed in this case study suggest that Belgian politicians are turning to the EU for new legislative initiatives on (targeted) political messages on the Internet. After all, the resolution of the federal Chamber of Representatives of 6 May 2021 is the only initiative which has been adopted by the Federal Parliament so far. It is true that the other federal initiatives are still being discussed in the relevant committee; however, the fact that their initiators belong to different parties of the governmental coalition seems to indicate a lack of agreement on the issue within the majority. The probability that these federal legislative proposals will be adopted is therefore rather small. The contrary is true for the initiative by the Walloon Government, as all parties in the Walloon governmental coalition seem to support the draft law. However, the impact of this legislation will be limited to local electoral campaigns in the Walloon region.

Key takeaways:

- In Belgium, spending on traditional campaign tools exceeds spending on online tools in most cases. However, some political parties have recently spent large amounts of financial resources on their online communications, which may incentivize others to follow suit.
- In Belgium, the main approaches (some are still under discussion) to regulating party spending on digital campaign tools are (a) banning all political ads during election campaigns; (b) placing spending caps on online advertisements; and (c) advocating for an EU-level code of conduct for sponsored ads on social media platforms.
- At the same time, there are diverging political views over these approaches, and some may not materialize.

REFERENCES

Bimber, B., 'Digital media in the Obama campaigns of 2008 and 2012: Adaptation to the personalized political communication environment', *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 11/2 (2014), pp. 130–50, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2014.895691>>

Chambre des Représentants de Belgique [Chamber of Representatives of Belgium], Proposition de loi modifiant la loi du 4 juillet 1989 relative à la limitation et au contrôle des dépenses électorales engagées pour les élections des Chambres fédérales, ainsi qu'au financement et à la comptabilité ouverte des partis politiques [Act Amending the Act of 4 July 1989 on the Limitation and Oversight of Election Expenses Incurred for the Election of the Federal Chambers as well as on the Financing and Open Accounting of Political Parties], Doc 51 2996/003, 22 March 2007a, <<https://www.dekamer.be/doc/flwb/pdf/51/2996/51k2996003.pdf>>, accessed 8 December 2022

- , Proposition de loi modifiant la loi du 4 juillet 1989 relative à la limitation et au contrôle des dépenses électorales engagées pour les élections des Chambres fédérales, ainsi qu'au financement et à la comptabilité ouverte des partis politiques [Act Amending the Act of 4 July 1989 on the Limitation and Oversight of Election Expenses Incurred for Elections to the Federal Chambers as well as on the Financing and Open Accounting of Political Parties], Doc 51 2996/004, 22 March 2007b, <<https://www.dekamer.be/FLWB/PDF/51/2996/51K2996004.pdf>>, accessed 8 December 2022
- , Proposition de loi modifiant la loi du 4 juillet 1989 relative à la limitation et au contrôle des dépenses électorales engagées pour les élections des Chambres fédérales ainsi qu'au financement et à la comptabilité ouverte des partis politiques et modifiant le Code électoral [Act Amending the Act of 4 July 1989 on the Limitation and Oversight of Election Expenses Incurred for Elections to the Federal Chambers as well as on the Financing and Open Accounting of Political Parties and Amending the Electoral Code], Doc 53 2972/001, 24 July 2013a, <<https://www.dekamer.be/doc/flwb/pdf/53/2972/53k2972001.pdf>>, accessed 8 December 2022
- , Proposition de loi modifiant la loi du 4 juillet 1989 relative à la limitation et au contrôle des dépenses électorales engagées pour les élections des Chambres fédérales ainsi qu'au financement et à la comptabilité ouverte des partis politiques et modifiant le Code électoral [Act Amending the Act of 4 July 1989 on the Limitation and Oversight of Election Expenses Incurred for Elections to the Federal Chambers as well as on the Financing and Open Accounting of Political Parties and Amending the Electoral Code], Doc 53 2972/006, 22 November 2013b, <<https://www.dekamer.be/doc/flwb/pdf/53/2972/53k2972006.pdf>>, accessed 8 December 2022
- , Proposition de loi modifiant la loi du 4 juillet 1989 relative à la limitation et au contrôle des dépenses électorales engagées pour l'élection de la Chambre des représentants, ainsi qu'au financement et à la comptabilité ouverte des partis politiques, en vue d'interdire la publicité commerciale à des fins de propagande politique dans les médias [Act Amending the Act of 4 July 1989 on the Limitation and Oversight of Election Expenses Incurred for Elections to the Federal Chambers as well as on the Financing and Open Accounting of Political Parties with a View to Prohibiting Commercial Advertising for the Purposes of Political Campaigning in the Media], Doc 55 1553/001, 6 October 2020, <<https://www.dekamer.be/doc/flwb/pdf/55/1553/55k1553001.pdf>>, accessed 8 December 2022

- , Résolution visant à renforcer la transparence et la responsabilité des plateformes et médias sociaux quant aux contenus et aux informations en ligne [Resolution to Strengthen the Transparency and Accountability of Social Media and Social Platforms in Terms of Their Online Content and Information], Doc 55 1947/004, 6 May 2021a, <<https://www.dekamer.be/doc/flwb/pdf/55/1947/55k1947004.pdf>>, accessed 8 December 2022
 - , Proposition de loi modifiant la loi du 4 juillet 1989 relative à la limitation et au contrôle des dépenses électorales engagées pour l'élection de la Chambre des représentants, ainsi qu'au financement et à la comptabilité ouverte des partis politiques, en vue d'instaurer un plafond de dépenses pour l'information, la propagande et la publicité [Act Amending the Act of 4 July 1989 on the Limitation and Oversight of Election Expenses Incurred for Elections to the Federal Chambers as well as on the Financing and Open Accounting of Political Parties with a View to Establishing a Spending Limit for Information, Campaign Publicity and Advertising], Doc 55 2371/001, 7 December 2021b, <<https://www.dekamer.be/doc/flwb/pdf/55/2371/55k2371001.pdf>>, accessed 8 December 2022
- Chambre des Représentants et Sénat de Belgique [Chamber of Representatives and Senate of Belgium], Commentaire et recommandations de la Commission de contrôle concernant l'interprétation de la loi du 4 juillet 1989 relative à la limitation et au contrôle des dépenses électorales engagées pour les élections des Chambres fédérales, ainsi qu'au financement et à la comptabilité ouverte des partis politiques, Doc 51 3115/001 (Chambre) [Chamber of Representatives] 3-2449/1 (Sénat) [Senate], 30 April 2007, <<https://www.dekamer.be/FLWB/PDF/51/3115/51K3115001.pdf>>, accessed 8 December 2022
- Gibson, R. K., *When the Nerds Go Marching In: How Digital Technology Moved from the Margins to the Mainstream of Political Campaigns* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), <<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195397789.001.0001>>
- Lilleker, D. G., Tenscher, J. and Štětka, V., 'Towards hypermedia campaigning? Perceptions of new media's importance for campaigning by party strategists in comparative perspective', *Information, Communication & Society*, 18/7 (2015), pp. 747–65, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2014.993679>>
- Spierings, N. and Jacobs, K., 'Getting personal? The impact of social media on preferential voting', *Political Behavior*, 36/1 (2014), pp. 215–34, <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-013-9228-2>>
- Tassin, S., 'La Wallonie limite les dépenses électorales sur les réseaux sociaux' [Wallonia limits election spending on social media], *La Libre*, 4 May 2022, <<https://www.lalibre.be/belgique/politique-belge/2022/05/04/la-wallonie-limite-les-depenses-electorales-sur-les-reseaux-sociaux-R2OEFM-CZCBG27FPY5DIMBHSL6Y>>, accessed 8 December 2022
- Vanden Eynde, G., Put, G.-J., Maddens, B. and Muyters, G., 'Paid digital campaigning during the 2018 local elections in Flanders: Which candidates jumped on the bandwagon?', *Politics of the Low Countries*, 1/3 (2019), pp. 227–36, <<https://doi.org/10.5553/PLC/258999292019001003005>>
- Parlement de la Wallonie [Walloon Parliament], Code de la démocratie locale et de la décentralisation [Code on local democracy and decentralization], 22 April 2004, <<https://wallex.wallonie.be/files/medias/10/CDLD.pdf>>, accessed 15 December 2022

Laws

Federal Act 1989-07-04/34, Loi relative à la limitation et au contrôle des dépenses électorales [engagées [pour l'élection de la Chambre des représentants]], ainsi qu'au financement et à la comptabilité ouverte des partis politiques [Act on the Limitation and Oversight of Election Expenses (Incurred for the Election of Federal Chambers) as well as the Financing and Open Accounting of Political Parties], *Moniteur belge* [Official Gazette of Belgium], 29 July 1989, p. 12715, <https://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/cgi_loi/change_lg.pl?language=fr&la=F&cn=1989070434&table_name=loi>, accessed 8 December 2022

Federal Act 1994-05-19, Loi relative à la limitation et au contrôle des dépenses électorales [engagées [pour l'élection du Parlement européen]] [Act on the Limitation and Oversight of Election Expenses (Incurred for the Election of the European Parliament)], *Moniteur belge* [Official Gazette of Belgium], 25 May 1994, p. 14105, <<https://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/eli/loi/1994/05/19/1994000273/justel>>, accessed 15 December 2022

Federal Act 1994-05-19, réglementant la campagne électorale, concernant la limitation et la déclaration des dépenses électorales [engagées [pour les élections du Parlement Wallon, Parlement flamand, du Parlement de la Région de Bruxelles-Capitale et du Parlement] de la Communauté Germanophone, et fixant le critère de contrôle des communications officielles des autorités publiques] [Act on the Limitation and Oversight of Election Expenses (Incurred for the Election of the Walloon Parliament, the Flemish Parliament, the Parliament of the Brussels Capital Region and the parliament of the German-speaking community) as well as on the oversight criteria for the official communication of public authorities], *Moniteur belge* [Official Gazette of Belgium], 25 May 1994, p. 14101, <<https://www.ejustice.just.fgov.be/eli/loi/1994/05/19/1994000287/justel>>, accessed 15 December 2022

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gunther Vanden Eynde is a researcher at the KU Leuven Public Governance Institute (Belgium) and a research fellow at the Research Foundation Flanders. He is a doctoral candidate in political science, and his research focuses on political finance, campaign spending and the social media campaigns of political parties and their candidates. His work has been published in *Politics of the Low Countries*, *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* and *Online Information Review*. He is also active as an expert on the parliamentary control committee on party and campaign finance (Belgian Federal Parliament).

Contributors

Yukihiko Hamada is a Programme Manager for Money in Politics within the Electoral Processes Programme at International IDEA.

Khushbu Agrawal is a Programme Officer for Money in Politics within the Electoral Processes Programme at International IDEA.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The original research by the author is supported by the Research Foundation Flanders under PhD grant number 11H1920N. We are grateful to Therese Pearce Laanela for her careful reading and valuable comments. Editorial support was provided by Lisa Hagman and Curtis Budden.

ABOUT THIS SERIES

This case study on Belgium was drafted between September and December 2022 and is part of International IDEA's 'Political Finance in the Digital Age' project, which collects empirical information about the ways countries adapt to and cope with political finance challenges associated with digitalization. Through the project, members of political finance oversight agencies and civil society organizations, political party officials and legislators can learn about good practices and lessons learned from various countries that can help them devise and implement political reforms to protect the integrity of political processes and institutions against existing and emerging digital risks.

ABOUT INTERNATIONAL IDEA

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) is an intergovernmental organization with 34 Member States founded in 1995, with an exclusive mandate to support and advance democracy worldwide.

What we do?

We produce comparative, policy-friendly knowledge and provide technical assistance on issues relating to elections, parliaments, constitutions, money in politics and political representation, all under the umbrella of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. We assess the performance of democracies around the world through our unique Global State of Democracy Indices and reports. Our work is expanding to address issues related to climate change and democracy.

We use our knowledge to provide technical assistance and expert advice to governments and civil society around the world. We publish books, databases, and primers annually in several languages on topics ranging from voter turnout to Indigenous Peoples' rights in constitution-building. Gender equality and inclusion are mainstreamed in all our work.

We engage in conversations and convene agenda-setting dialogues and partner with like-minded organizations, including the African Union, the European Union and the United Nations, to achieve greater impact.

Where we work?

Our headquarters is in Stockholm, and we have regional and country offices in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean. International IDEA is a Permanent Observer to the United Nations and is accredited to European Union institutions.

<https://www.idea.int>

© 2023 International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance

International IDEA publications are independent of specific national or political interests. Views expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent the views of International IDEA, its Board or its Council members.

The electronic version of this publication is available under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 (CC BY-NC-SA 3.0) licence. You are free to copy, distribute and transmit the publication as well as to remix and adapt it, provided it is only for non-commercial purposes, that you appropriately attribute the publication, and that you distribute it under an identical licence. For more information visit the Creative Commons website: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0>.

Design and layout: International IDEA



International IDEA
Strömsborg
SE-103 34 Stockholm
SWEDEN
+46 8 698 37 00
info@idea.int
www.idea.int