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Individualism, nationalism, ethnocentrism and authoritarianism

Toharudin, Toni

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Chapter 1

The Purpose of the Study

1.1 Background

The human population on the globe is divided into several thousands of national groups, i.e. people who speak the same language or dialect and share common customs and traditions, as well as a common history. Sometimes, these national groups share a common racial identity and religious background. Of these thousands of national groups, only a few hundred possess their own states. The Swedish, Dutch, French, German, and Italian national groups, for example, live in nation-states of their own. Most other majority share a state with other national groups, as the Québécois (French-speaking residents of Québec Province) share Canada with English-speaking Canadians and the Belgian-Flemings who speak Dutch share Belgium with the Belgian-Walloons who speak French.

One of the most prolonged and serious of Belgium's internal problems has been the tension between the French-speaking Walloons of southern Belgium and the Flemish-speaking inhabitants of the north. The difficulties stem back to 1921, when a language law divided Belgium into two linguistic sectors. Flemish, a form of Dutch, was recognized as the official language of the provinces of East and West Flanders, Antwerp, and Limburg, and the eastern part of Brabant; French became the language of western Brabant and the remaining provinces; the capital city of Brussels remained bilingual. The rivalry between the two language groups culminated, in 1961, in a 'march on Brussels' by 63,000 Flemish. The Walloons and the Flemish have been concerned with political and economic, as well as cultural, differences, and in 1961 and 1962 they demanded the autonomy of both Flanders and Wallonia within the Belgian state.

At that time, Prime Minister Theo Lefèvre opposed such a solution to the Flemish-Walloon conflict, declaring that there is 'one economy, one society, one Belgian nation'. The opinion of his coalition government was that the main reasons for the existing tensions were excessive centralization, insufficient economic investment in the Walloon area (where industry and coal mining had declined), and linguistic differences. To meet the linguistic problem a 'language frontier' bill, which drew a linguistic border between the Flemish- and French-speaking areas, was passed by the legislature in 1962. The bill transferred to Wallonia two largely Flemish towns and several French-speaking villages formerly under Flemish rule. Brussels remained bilingual, as did the University of Louvain in Flemish territory. Flemish was formally recognized as the official language in Flanders, as was French in Wallonia, and the rights of the minorities in each region were guaranteed.

On April 6, 1962 the government set up a 'political working group' to examine Flemish-Walloon problems. The eventual goal of the group was to draft legislative principles

and recommendations to be used in a constitutional reform to establish better relations between the two regions.

Despite these government measures, however, a new riot broke out in Brussels on October 14, 1962. The riot was provoked by Flemish demonstrators demanding that bilingualism was made effective in Brussels, that the government encouraged economic expansion in the Flemish provinces, and that Flemish replaced French as the main language of business in Belgium.

As a result of the successive constitutional reforms, the Belgian nation has met competition from the Walloon and Flemish entities. The Flemish government, in particular, has pursued a genuine policy of nation building, aimed at creating a Flemish national consciousness.

1.2 Nationalism, individualism, ethnocentrism and authoritarianism

When national groups within a nation-state are treated equally, i.e. the absence of discrimination based on race or national origin, they usually share that state in peace. An important condition for the successful sharing of nations is civic equality, which is usually secured by representative democracy. In successful nation-states, where ethnic and national groups benefit from equality, groups can share a common sense of belonging called *patriotism*, or national pride.

However, where these conditions are not met—where one national group dominates the political and economic life of a nation-state to the exclusion of other national groups—nationalist and ethnocentric resentment can simmer and explode. In this sense, nationalism and ethnocentrism can be dangerous emotions because they assert a claim to territory on behalf of one national group that may be resisted by another group that believes it has an equal right to be there. Extreme nationalism in such a way may lead to fascism.

Fascism as a modern political ideology seeks to regenerate the social, economic, and cultural life of a country by basing it on a heightened sense of national belonging or ethnic identity. Fascism rejects liberal ideas such as freedom and individual rights, and often presses for the destruction of elections, legislatures, and other elements of democracy. Despite the idealistic goals of fascism, attempts to build fascist societies have led to wars and persecutions that caused millions of deaths. As a result, fascism is strongly associated with right-wing authoritarianism, fanaticism, racism, totalitarianism, and violence.

In a longitudinal study (Billiet, Coffé and Maddens, 2005), nationalism was related to ethnocentrism, i.e. a negative attitude towards foreigners and immigrants. The background of relating both concepts was the voting behavior in Flanders in favor of the extreme right-wing

party Vlaams Blok. In the 1991 General Elections for the Federal Parliament, Vlaams Blok obtained 9.3% of the Flemish vote. This number rose to 11.3% in 1995, 14.7% in 1999, and 17.1% in the 2003 General Elections. The party even obtained 22.8% of the Flemish vote in the 2004 elections for the Flemish Parliament, and became the largest political party in Flanders (Fraeys, 2004). Vlaams Blok was convicted for racism by a Belgian court in 2004. In the June 2007 general election, the Christian Democratic Party (CDV) and the New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) made a tremendous rally winning the majority of chairs in the Chamber of Representatives for the joint Flemish parties. Consequently the Liberals and Socialists now were the minority in the Parliament. Various political leaders would rise and fall as they tried to unite the country, but the ethnic and language barriers proved to be an unrelenting adversary. CD&V leader Yves Leterme tried to form a new joint government and failed to do so. Even winning elections did not prove enough to remain in power. Although Prime Minister Verhofstaat posted his resignation after his party lost parliamentary control, he remained to hold the government and Belgium together with a temporary cabinet. In March of 2008 the Christian Democrats and Liberals as well as the Socialists agreed to structure another joint government led by Yves Leterme, but allegations of discredit caused him to resign. In December 2008, Herman Van Rompuy was appointed as head of government by King Albert II. Rompuy previously held the position of Speaker of the Chamber of Representatives. Astonishingly Leterme would hold a position again (Alvarez-Rivera, 2010). “Van Rompuy remained in office until November 2009, when he was chosen president of the European Council; former Prime Minister Yves Leterme - who had served as foreign minister in Van Rompuy's cabinet - then formed a second coalition government composed of the same parties represented in the previous cabinet. However, in April 2010 Open VLD - the Flemish Liberals - pulled out of the government over the future of the Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde electoral constituency, and Leterme resigned after only five months in power” (Alvarez-Rivera, 2010).

A core issue in the ideology of the Vlaams Blok is the preference for an ethnic national state, in which ‘nation’ is conceived as a ‘biologically-defined ethnic community’ (Spruyt, 1995). The party also stresses that this ethnic state should be mono-cultural and mono-racial. Billiet *et al.* (2005) found a moderate and rather constant correlation across time between nationalism and ethnocentrism among the Flemish. Although they supposed that ‘citizens who strongly identify with their nation develop a negative attitude towards foreigners’ (p. 3), they did not analyze this issue further. Particularly, they did not answer the question whether indeed nationalism leads to ethnocentrism, or ethnocentrism leads to nationalism, or whether both effects operate simultaneously in a reciprocal causal relationship.

In another study by Billiet (1995) on the relationships between church involvement, individualism, and ethnocentrism among Flemish Roman Catholics, it was found that individualism, defined as ‘unrestrained striving for personal interests’, had a strong direct

effect on ethnocentrism, while church involvement only had a small direct effect on ethnocentrism.

The above results were obtained in cross-sectional research with the data collected in one measurement only. Disadvantages of cross-sectional research are that the autoregressive effects and directions of cross-effects between the variables (e.g. whether the effect is from individualism towards ethnocentrism, or in the opposite direction, or both) is even more difficult to assess empirically than in longitudinal research.

In fact, based on a heightened sense of nationalism, ethnocentrism, and individualism, the followers of the Vlaams Blok have cultivated their focus on authoritarianism. The common features of authoritarianism among the followers of the Vlaams Blok are conservatism, a myth of ethnic or national renewal, and a conception of a nation in crisis. On the basis of these characteristics, the followers of the Vlaams Blok have strived for the creation of a new type of total culture in which values, politics, art, social norms, and economic activity are all part of a single organic national community, being different from Wallonian culture. Besides that, the followers of the Vlaams Blok place great value on creating a renewed and unified national or ethnic community and are hostile to most other ideologies. Finally, they tend to define the Flemish nation as a nation-state, i.e. the Flemish region and people with the same borders.

1.3 Continuous Time-Structural Equation Modeling

Although nationalism (N), ethnocentrism (E), individualism (I), and authoritarianism (A) in Flanders have been the subject of several studies, a longitudinal analysis has not been performed on all four concepts simultaneously nor have their relationships and the direction of their relationships been studied in continuous time.

The reason for continuous time analysis is that equal auto and cross-lagged effects found in discrete time do not guarantee at all that the underlying continuous-time effects are equal. The effects found in discrete time in fact are part of an ongoing process. Equality at a single point in time may be consistent with quite different cross-lagged effect functions across time. For example, cross-lagged effects, although having equal values at one specific point in time, may have quite different values across time and different maxima at different points in time. For instance, for an observation interval of, say, 4 years in the General Election Study, the cross-lagged effects from I to E and from E to I could be found to be equal, but the cross-lagged effect functions, estimated on the basis of this same interval in continuous time, could show for a shorter interval the effect of I on E to be larger than of E on I and for a longer interval the converse to be true.

1.4 Research Objectives

Although individualism (I), nationalism (N), ethnocentrism (E) and authoritarianism (A) have been extensively discussed in amongst others the political, philosophical and sociological literature, analyses of their interdependencies are still scarce. Therefore, the main purpose of this thesis is to present an empirical analysis of these interdependencies on the basis of the General Election Study for Belgium in 1991, 1995 and 1999. For that purpose we shall apply a structural equation modeling (SEM) approach, since the notions of I, N, E and A are latent variables or theoretical constructs that cannot directly be observed. Empirical analysis therefore requires operational definitions or correspondence statements that relate each theoretical concept to a set of observable indicators. Since SEM is made up of a measurement model that relates the latent variables to their indicators and a structural model that describes the interdependencies among the latent variables, this type of model is particularly suitable to analyze the interdependencies among I, N, E and A. As mentioned above, the data set is made up of repeated measurements or panel data. I shall apply a continuous time modeling approach to take this feature of the data into account.

The objectives of this thesis are:

1. On the basis of literature reviews I present:
 - a. Definitions and descriptions of the four key concepts of individualism, nationalism, ethnocentrism, and authoritarianism.
 - b. Indicators of each latent variable (I, N, A and E).
 - c. A comprehensive conceptual structural model between individualism, nationalism, ethnocentrism and authoritarianism.
2. On the basis of the General Election Studies in Belgium in 1991, 1995 and 1999:

I estimate the comprehensive structural model between individualism, ethnocentrism, nationalism, and authoritarianism in continuous time.

1.5 Overview of the Thesis

This thesis consists of seven chapters. As a background for the conceptual and especially the empirical analysis, Chapter 2 presents a brief overview of the Belgian Political System. A brief history of Belgium, the structure of the Belgium State, the multiparty system, the electoral system and also the Flemish community and Flemish regions are discussed. Chapter 3 details a conceptual model of the dependencies and interdependencies between individualism, ethnocentrism, nationalism and authoritarianism. It presents a comprehensive literature review of the definitions and interdependencies among the constituting variables that will serve as input to the conceptual model to be tested in subsequent empirical chapters. Chapter 4-6 are the empirical chapters based on panel data collected from 1274 subjects in Flanders in the years 1991, 1995 and 1999. Chapter 4 deals with the issue of measuring authoritarianism with different sets of items in a longitudinal study. A series of

congenericness tests as proposed by Jöreskog (1971, 1974) are performed to find out which of the items in the three waves can be considered to measure the same latent variable and can therefore be used in a longitudinal study to assess the development of authoritarianism over time. Chapter 5 presents a longitudinal analysis of individualism, nationalism and ethnocentrism. Particularly, their interdependencies and the directions of their relationships are studied in continuous time using the approximate discrete and the exact discrete models. Individualism and ethnocentrism are found to be connected in a moderately strong feedback relationship with the effect from Individualism towards ethnocentrism somewhat stronger than that in the opposite direction. Both individualism and ethnocentrism have small effects on nationalism. Chapter 6 extends the analysis presented in Chapter 5 to all four key variables presented in the conceptual model in Chapter 3. The exact discrete model is estimated by the LISREL program with all four concepts handled as latent state variables that influence each other continuously across time. All parameters in the SEM model are shown to be identified for this case with three time points. In the four variable models the role of nationalism is different from what we expected. It turns out that nationalism has no significant influence on authoritarianism, and that there is a reciprocal relationship between ethnocentrism and authoritarianism. Moreover, the effect from ethnocentrism on authoritarianism is somewhat stronger than the effect from individualism on authoritarianism. Chapter 7 summarizes the study and its main findings. Moreover, it presents conclusions and implications as well as suggestions for future research.

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