

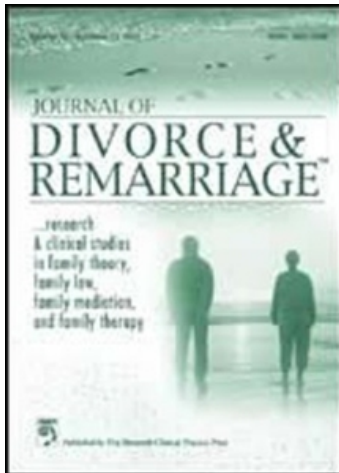
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### Cross-Regional Divorce Risks in Belgium: Culture or Legislative System?

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## **Cross-Regional Divorce Risks in Belgium: Culture or Legislative System?**

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*Cross-national research is by definition carried out between different countries. Looking at country differences often results in common and diverse sets of divorce risks. This article uses a cross-national research perspective on divorce risks within a single country. Belgium is a special case in this respect. The division of the country in two regions with a different language and a quite different historical background often frightens researchers to include the country in large-scale international comparisons. We argue that Belgium is an interesting test case in international perspective since it combines—in a quasi-experimental setting—two important explanatory conditions for divorce risks on the macro level. First, Belgium is a unitary country with a single social security system, similar labor market characteristics, and a single family policy. Second, whereas the institutions between the northern and the southern part are similar, Belgium is culturally divided in a rather Catholic northern part (Flanders) and a secular southern part (Wallonia). This division is often referred to as a northern (Scandinavian) and a southern (Spain, Italy) cultural pattern. This means that when studying divorce patterns, we have the opportunity to examine the net effect of cultural determinants because of the similar feature of the*

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*institutional setting of both the Walloon and the Flemish part of the country.*

*KEYWORDS* divorce, divorce risk, Belgium, comparative research, Cox regression

The spectacular increase in divorce rates in recent decades in Western Europe has been scrutinized by many social researchers. In understanding these patterns of family dissolution and other demographic behavior, both structural and cultural macrodeterminants have been central and coexistent. In this article, we focus on the influence of cultural and religious attitudes on partnership dissolution. Whereas previous research on divorce likelihood focused on individual (Jalovaara, 2002; Kalmijn, de Graaf, & Poortman, 2004) and couple-level (Raeymaeckers, Snoeckx, & Mortelmans, 2006) socioeconomic or couple-related relational determinants (Cohan & Kleinbaum, 2002; Rogers, 2004; Snoeckx, Raeymaeckers, & Mortelmans, 2006; Wagner & Weiss, 2006), we examine the influence of macrocultural characteristics and microdeterminants. More specifically, we focus on the differences in divorce proneness between the regions of Flanders and Wallonia in Belgium.

The French-speaking and Dutch-speaking parts of Belgium present an interesting case to look at the relative influence of cultural and religious determinants on divorce behavior. The two regions can be considered a microsetting of Europe's geographical pattern of cross-national differences in cultural and religious values. As in the well-known yin-yang symbol, part of Europe's Latin culture is present in the northern Flemish part of the country and the southern Walloon region is culturally more related to the Protestant and more progressive northern part of Europe. The uniqueness in this setting comes from the unitary Belgian state structure holding both cultures together with a unified welfare system and a central divorce law. This one-country, two-regions setting provides a unique opportunity to analyze the net effect of cultural macrodeterminants on divorce behavior.

## THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN EXPLAINING DEMOGRAPHIC BEHAVIOR

In this article, we join a demographic research tradition in which the impact of values on behavior is studied (Clarkberg, Stolzenberg, & Waite, 1995; Kalmijn et al., 2004; Lesthaeghe & Meekers, 1986; Moors, 1996; Thornton, Alwyn, & Camburn, 1983). We agree with Surkyn and Lesthaeghe (2004) that a cultural shift is by no means the only factor responsible for demographic transitions but "a non-redundant factor in sustaining a long-term demographic trend through periods of slower and faster economic growth

alike" (p. 53). Cultural and religious traditions have a long-term influence on people's life course decisions and behavior (Inglehart & Norris, 2003). Earlier research has shown the importance of cultural values as an explanatory factor for the differences in divorce likelihood between the Scandinavian countries (being Europe's forerunners on divorce) and the southern European countries and Ireland (Ester, Halman, & Moor, 1993). Even though, from 1965 onward, the European countries have been reaching more convergence and coming closer to the Scandinavian demographic patterns (Ester et al., 1993; Lesthaeghe & Meekers, 1986), there still remains a clear geographical pattern in divorce figures (Council of Europe, 2002). Southern European countries like Italy, Spain, and Greece show significantly lower divorce rates than countries in the northern region like Lithuania, Estonia, and Denmark (Eurostat, 2004). The Eurostat researchers note that, taking the divorce rates of Ireland, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic—the former Roman Catholic and the latter atheist in general—into account, religion also has an important influence, interrelated with this geographical north–south pattern (Eurostat, 2004). This is an indication of the findings of Inglehart and Baker (2000), who argue that cross-cultural differences linked with religion are being transmitted through cultural and educational institutions, and through the shared experience of the people of a nation. In explaining the national differences in value patterns across Europe, Gundelach (1994) agrees with them by emphasizing that values are influenced by the specific institutional characteristics that exist in different nations.

In an article on the persistence of traditional values despite modernization, Inglehart and Baker (2000) describe how modernization processes across the world and the European continent cause cultural and religious value changes and show how path-dependent these cultural values are. By mapping 65 societies into two dimensions (traditional/secular-rational and survival/self-expression), and combining those with economic zones (based on annual per-capita gross national products), the structure of the labor force (percentage of labor force in industrial and service sector) and the historical cultural heritage, they show how a society's cultural and religious traditions continue to affect cultural values, even when taking the influence of economic determinants into account. Industrialization and postindustrialization cause value changes in accordance with the traditional/secular-rational and survival/self-expression dimensions, but historical tradition and especially religious heritage remain to influence the rank of societies on those dimensions. Historically, Protestant societies, for example, mostly situated in the northern part of Europe, obtain a higher score on the survival/self-expression scale than all of the Roman Catholic societies, situated in central and southern Europe, even when controlling for economic determinants. Former communist societies rank higher on the traditional/secular-rational dimension, whereas historically Roman Catholic societies show relatively traditional values, giving proof again of the persisting influence of path-dependent cultural zones (Inglehart &

Baker, 2000; Inglehart & Norris, 2003). As Inglehart and Baker (2000) state, this indicates that economic development brings convergence in national value systems, although long-established cultural zones persist two centuries after the beginning of the industrial revolution. Modernization theories are thus partly right, but belief systems and traditions seem to be highly path-dependent.

## THE CASE OF BELGIUM

Differences and similarities in behavioral outcomes between regions can be looked on in a European context, but also on the level of a single country. For Belgium, France, and Switzerland, Lesthaeghe and Neels (2002) analyzed the cultural path dependency and similar spatial pattern of the first and second demographic transition, respectively, producing different behavioral outcomes: a strong population growth, a decline of the age at first marriage, and birth control on the one hand; and a dramatic decline of marriage rates, a sharp increase of divorces, and a fall in (marital) fertility rates on the other (Lesthaeghe & Neels, 2002; Zwaan, 1993). Apparently, the cultural barriers at the end of the 19th century remained influential until the 1960s. As a consequence, the spatial pattern of the determinants of the first value shift (first demographic transition) strongly influenced the spatial pattern of the second value shift (second demographic transition), which can be linked to the behavioral outcomes of the latter. In this perspective, the second demographic transition is a continuation of the first, in spite of their different and sometimes contrasting behavioral outcomes (Lesthaeghe & Neels, 2002).

When looking at Belgium, we expect to see regional differences in divorce behavior that can be attributed to cultural differences and barriers underpinned by different regional historico-cultural continuities. Given the different early regional economic developments in the northern and southern part of Belgium, and the regional division of competencies with regard to cultural matters and education, it would not be surprising that differences in divorce behavior could be traced to the different economic and cultural history of Flanders and Wallonia. Before taking a look at the divergences in divorce proneness and other relational characteristics between the northern and southern part of Belgium, we present a short overview of the historical and political situation in Belgium. In doing so, we provide a general framework to fully understand the regional disparities and their impact on divorce behavior.

Belgium's history is characterized by remarkable different regional developments, consisting of a Catholic northern (Flanders) and an atheist southern part (Wallonia and Brussels) with different spheres of influence. Flanders belonged to the German part of Europe. Wallonia resided in the Latin part. Belgium has always been under the influence of foreign powers like Spain (1555–1713), Austria (1713–1794), France (1794–1815), and The

Netherlands (1815–1830). Especially during those final two periods, strong economic development took place. When Napoleon came to power (1795), Belgium became part of the French empire, and industry took off, especially in the southern part of the country. British immigrants smuggled machines into Belgium and erected factories, and Wallonia became one of the most industrialized regions in the world. In Flanders, only the city of Ghent profited from these economic developments (Baetens & Bauters, 1984; De Brabander, 1984; Gaus, 1996). Later, under the rule of the Dutch King William I (1815–1830), industry was supported by infrastructural developments and financial assistance to entrepreneurs. However, these advantages were especially favorable for industrialists in Ghent and Wallonia, thereby causing dissatisfaction and opposition in the rest of Flanders, where non-mechanized industry could hardly meet the new competition. This rural opposition was supported by the Catholic Church, as their power was to be limited by the Protestant king. Politically, Catholics formed a union with young Liberals, thereby inspiring an anti-Dutch, anti-Protestant movement that ultimately led to the collapse of the United Netherlands and to the new independent state, Belgium. In the next decades, the Belgian economy grew fast and the first Industrial Revolution took place, establishing Belgium as the “second most important industrial power” of that time (Baetens & Bauters, 1984). However, within the boundaries of the unitary Belgian state, the linguistic borders always remained a cultural demarcation line, resulting in important disparities with regard to the measure of secularization and birth control (Lesthaeghe & Neels, 2002). The enlightened ideas stemming from the French Revolution were more widely spread in the southern part of the country than in Roman Catholic Flanders.

After World War II, the Belgian state structure evolved from a unitary state to a federal state where the central federal authority weakened and important responsibilities for employment, education, and welfare were transferred to two different types of regional authorities: communities and regions. First, communities (three in total: the Flemish Community, the French Community, and the German-speaking Community) have competences on person-related matters. At this level, policy measures are taken on cultural matters (theater, libraries, etc.), education, the use of languages, and matters relating to the individual that concern on the one hand health policy (curative and preventive medicine) and on the other hand assistance to individuals (protection of youth, social welfare, aid to families, immigrant assistance services, etc.; Federal Government, 2006). Next, the regions (also three, but geographically different from the communities: the Flemish Region, the Brussels-Capital Region, and the Walloon Region) execute responsibilities on territorial competences. Their power extends to economic matters, employment, agriculture, water policy, housing, public works, and others (Federal Government, 2006).

An exception crucial for this article is the domain of family law. The divorce legislation, which is rooted in the French “Code Napoléon” from

1804 (Senaeve, 2004) remained on the central level (together with tax policy, national defense, foreign affairs, and the social security legislation). In this way, the Belgian situation forms a unique natural experiment because it combines a joined divorce legislation and different macrocharacteristics, in the heart of the border area between the Latin and German parts of Europe. Our central hypothesis is that, despite the central (and liberal) divorce legislation, the historical regional disparities in Belgium have a long-term effect on the opinions and culture in Wallonia and Flanders, resulting in different demographic behavior and, more specifically, distinct divorce figures. The fact that the Belgian state structure was highly influenced by this historical regional dichotomy, thereby shifting competencies to the regions and producing Walloon and Flemish institutions, endorses this hypothesis.

### BELGIUM'S REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN DIVORCE BEHAVIOR

Belgian divorce rates are among the highest in Western Europe, almost drawing level with the northern forerunners like Denmark (Eurostat, 2004). Belgian divorce rates have quadrupled over the last 30 years. However, if we look closer at the divorce figures, we notice there is quite a difference between the regions of this highly federalized state. Earlier research (Snoeckx et al., 2006) already indicated that the mere fact of being Flemish, compared to being an inhabitant of Brussels or Wallonia, significantly reduces the risk of divorce, and this remains the case when sociodemographic, relational, and fertility characteristics are taken into account. The 2002 divorce figures from the Belgian National Institute for Statistics also confirm this regional division: Per 100,000 inhabitants, 263 divorces took place in Flanders. For Wallonia and Brussels, this number rose to 283 and 550, respectively. The number of divorces is twice as high in the Capital region compared to the other regions (Algemene Directie Statistiek en Economische Informatie, 2005). However, it should be noted that a distortion appears because marriages of Belgian citizens who marry abroad are registered in the Brussels Capital Region. Looking at Belgian divorce figures from recent decades (Algemene Directie Statistiek en Economische Informatie, 2005), one notices that since 1970 the proportional divorce rate in Flanders, in comparison with the other Belgian regions, has been the lowest. Jacobs (2000) comes to the same finding: Belgium's high divorce rates can primarily be attributed to the divorce figures of Brussels and Wallonia.

The dichotomy between the northern and southern parts of Belgium also reveals itself in the differences with regard to the relational value system. The Flemish adhere more to a relational homogamous orientation with regard to religious and political opinions and social background. This religious orientation is not surprising, given the fact that 41% of the Flemish find religion (quite) important, whereas this applies for only 29% of the Walloons. With

regard to church attendance, only one out of six Flemish residents never goes to church; for Wallonia this is one out of four. When looking at the actual relational design, Flemish inhabitants seem to stick more to the traditional family culture, according to Van den Troost (2000). More than half of the Flemish (54%) have a lot of contact with their family, but hardly meet their personal friends apart from their partner, compared to 39% of the Walloon inhabitants.

## HYPOTHESES

In this article, we examine whether the regional differences in divorce proneness can be explained by specific characteristics that can be attributed to Flanders and Wallonia. Likewise, we examine to what extent the specific composition of the two regions accounts for the regional divorce effect. We estimate two different models where microdeterminants, macrovariables, and their interaction effects play together. First, we interpret the different ways in which microdeterminants affect the divorce risk across the regions or cohorts. Second, we examine whether the regional effects disappear by introducing macrovariables that can account for the differences in divorce proneness across the regions. On the one hand, the dichotomy in divorce rates and other relational characteristics should reflect itself in the regional interaction effects of the microdeterminants. On the other hand, the macro-clustering effect should be reflected in the effects of the different macrovariables. In the following, we briefly describe some relevant microdeterminants and how we expect their effects to be different across the regions. Afterwards, we elaborate on the macrodeterminants.

### Microdeterminants

The microlevel predictors are expected to affect the divorce risk according to the wider sociocultural context (Wagner & Weiss, 2006). Therefore, we present some explanations of how these microeffects are influenced by characteristics typical of the composition of the different regions.

The first richly illustrated risk factor that can vary due to the different composition of the regions is the intergenerational divorce factor (Amato & Booth, 1991; Dronkers & Härkönen, 2008; Kitson, Babri, & Roach, 1985; Wagner & Weiss, 2006; Wolfinger, 2005). Different mechanisms have been put forward to account for this intergenerational divorce effect, from which the most recent and popular approach concentrates on the socialization or role model explanation (Engelhardt, Trappe, & Dronkers, 2002; Greenberg & Nay, 1982; Traag, Dronkers, & Vallet, 2000). As Engelhardt et al. (2002) mention, there are interactions between these different mechanisms (e.g., economic and stress arguments), and they could succeed each other over time. If the sociocultural barriers to divorce are low, the divorce cycle will

weaken. Thereby, we believe that the effect of parental divorce will be weaker in less traditional societies where the barriers to divorce are lower.

In a traditional society where marriage is highly institutionalized and the barriers to divorce are high, the effect of premarital cohabitation will also be stronger. Premarital cohabitators are a more selective group in such a society (selection hypothesis). Partners who choose to be in a cohabitational relationship have a distinct set of characteristics. They have less conventional and more progressive values and their unions are characterized by a more heterogeneous composition concerning religion and age (Amato, Johnson, Booth, & Rogers, 2003; Axinn & Thornton, 1992; Brown & Booth, 1996; Bumpass, Sweetser, & Cherlin, 1991; Cohan & Kleinbaum, 2002; Kalmijn et al., 2004). In addition, premarital cohabitation will be more strongly correlated with the divorce risk in traditional societies, causing different effects across Flanders and Wallonia.

Another predictor of divorce that can vary across the regions is the presence of children. Married couples with young children have considerably more chance of survival than childless couples (Härkönen & Dronkers, 2004; Kalmijn et al., 2004; Kitson et al., 1985; Parsons, 1956; Tzeng & Mare, 1995; Wagner & Weiss, 2006; White, 1990). We believe this marital stabilizing effect should be stronger when the divorce barriers are high because in less traditional societies—where divorces occur more frequently—a culture and policy will emerge that makes it easier for one-parent or newly composed households to raise their children.

If there is a traditional sociocultural context with high divorce barriers, the role of resources (e.g., educational level, income level) becomes greater in affecting the divorce risk. More resources are necessary to overcome the high costs of divorce. In a traditional society, partners who divorce must have relatively high educational attainment, high incomes, and a low risk of unemployment to overcome the high divorce barriers. Moreover, in the case of a marriage with children, a single parent needs a lot of resources when living in a traditional society with a policy that does not facilitate divorce.

The disparities in divorce proneness across Flanders and Wallonia can be explained by the different effects of the microlevel determinants that vary in accordance with the distinct regional characteristics. We expect the effects of microvariables like parental divorce, premarital cohabitation, presence of children, income, employment, and education to be stronger in the more traditional Flanders than in Wallonia.

## Macrodeterminants

Bearing in mind Durkheim's (1951) maxim that a society is more than the sum of its parts, we also want to examine whether macrocharacteristics, on the level of the two regions, show a straightforward effect on the risk of divorce. People live together, interact, are part of larger communities, and act in different institutions. In that way, it would not be surprising that a life

decision like divorce—just like Durkheim's anomic suicide—is influenced by the characteristics of the social environment. The cultural or religious orientations of a country, for example, have an influence on the divorce decision of individuals, regardless of their own orientation. Therefore, we expect that the divorce disparities between Flanders and Wallonia can be explained by varying regional macrocharacteristics. As stated earlier, the divorce legislation is still equal across both regions, forming a unique case to test whether other structural (e.g., income, employment) and cultural (e.g., religion, postmaterialism) regional characteristics influence the divorce risk.

In our models, we introduce cultural and structural macrovariables examining to what extent they explain the divorce differences across the regions. Building on the historico-cultural and religious background of the two regions, we expect religion to play an important role. Therefore we introduce five religious macrodeterminants: the importance of religion, the belonging to religious organizations, the attendance of religious services, the number of religious persons, and the number of Catholic votes. The higher the scores on each of these variables, the lower we expect the divorce proneness to be in that region. Other cultural macrodeterminants are the level of justification of divorce and the level of postmaterialism. Based on the cultural determinants of Lesthaeghe's second demographic transition (Lesthaeghe, 1995; Lesthaeghe & Neels, 2002) and Inglehart's "Silent Revolution" (Ester et al., 1993; Inglehart & Norris, 2003), we expect the measure of justification of divorce and the measure of postmaterialism in a region to have a positive effect on the regional divorce differences.

We also include structural macrodeterminants in our models. In line with Surkyn and Lesthaeghe (2004), we believe that culture is not the only factor responsible for changes in demographic behavior. Therefore, we also incorporate two structural determinants in our models: the height of socioeconomic status and the height of income. We expect the overall height of socioeconomic status and income level on a regional level to have a positive impact on the divorce risk, given the fact that richer societies with well-educated and working inhabitants are more likely to have a policy that makes it financially easier for individuals to break up a relationship.

Analogous to the nesting of individuals in social environments, time circumstances are decisive elements in individual life decisions. Tolerance toward divorce decisions has changed over time, the economic independence of women (female employment) has increased, and policy measures that facilitate divorce decisions have emerged (Rogers & Amato, 1997). These changing time circumstances are empirically funded with the well-known steep rise in divorce rates since the early 1960s, which continued during the 1970s and slowed down a bit during the 1980s (Teachman, 2002). To control for these changing attitudes toward divorce, we incorporate four marriage cohorts (before 1960, during the 1960s, during the 1970s, and after 1980). The division into four groups results in an almost equal number of individuals in each cohort, as can be seen in Appendix A.

## METHOD AND DATA

### Procedure

Based on the theoretical framework concerning the importance of cultural and religious factors in explaining demographic behavior, and on the empirical studies on the difference in divorce figures and other relevant characteristics between the Belgian regions, we want to unravel the regional effect in our models by introducing micro- and macrodeterminants, as well as some of their interactions. The structure of this analysis is double. First, a basic model with the regional variable is estimated, controlling for individual characteristics. Using this model as a baseline, we introduce interaction effects of these individual determinants with the marriage cohort variable and the regional variable. Next, we add the macrovariables to examine whether they can account for the regional divorce differences.

Second, we turn the sequence of the analysis upside down: The basic model with individual determinants will then be elaborated by first introducing the macrovariables. Afterward, interactions between significant macrovariables and individual determinants are added. Thereafter, we test whether an additional regional or cohort effect can still be recognized and whether the interaction effects between the individual characteristics and these two variables become significant. By doing so, we introduce a double control for our hypothesis: If adding the regional variable does not improve the model after introducing micro- and macrolevel variables, this indicates that the macrovariables can account for the regional differences.

### Method

The data for the analysis come from the Panel Study of Belgian Households (PSBH). This panel study followed both individuals and households from 1992 until 2001. The total database provides 11 waves on a representative sample of the Belgian population, covering a broad range of socioeconomic topics, as well as themes relating to family sociology. The prospective structure of the data set surpasses the main share of biases in retrospective and in particular cross-sectional studies.

The most appropriate method to use is a variant of survival analysis, particularly Cox's proportional hazards technique. Cox regression models can handle both time-constant and time-varying explanatory variables (Allison, 2000; Kleinbaum, 1996). The technique assesses the effect of a set of explanatory variables on survival or event times. For this article, we estimate the effect of a set of explanatory variables (described in more detail in the next section) on the occurrence and timing of divorce. Unfortunately, information about mere union dissolution is not available in the PSBH data, so we can only measure the official divorce proneness. By using Cox regressions we

take into account the differences in duration of marriage (our time-dependent covariate) and the right censoring of the dependent variable (spouses could still experience marriage dissolution after the panel study has taken place).

The starting point for our analysis is the year of the first survey wave (1992), being equal for all participants. The basic unit of the file is the individual, and more specifically the individual who was married at the time of entering the panel study in Wave 1. Second or higher order marriages are excluded from the analysis, taking into account the specific divorce dynamics for this subgroup (Cherlin, 1996). For our time-dependent covariates, we use lagged covariates to account for the correct causal ordering. For these covariates, we take the value of  $x_{t-1}$ ,  $t$  being the event hazard time, introducing a 1-year lag.

## Data

The basic data set contains 3,911 individuals who were married in the first wave (1992). Each person at risk was followed throughout the full length of the panel study, where possible, and in case of attrition, the timing variable got the score of the wave of attrition, and the event was coded zero. The problem of attrition is a drawback to panel studies, especially when this is selective and certain subgroups are more inclined to drop out. We are aware of the extreme amount of censoring ( $n = 3,756$ ). Therefore an additional set of respondents was integrated in the panel study from Wave 7 (1998) until the end. However, it is crucial for our research design to follow the same subset. A total of 165 individuals did break up their marriage through the course of the follow-up, meaning that only 4% was not censored. The small amount of divorces in the sample size is also observed for other European panel studies (Burkhauser, Duncan, Hauser, & Berntsen, 1991; Jarvis & Jenkins, 1999; Poortman, 2000).

The dependent variable is composed of the event and the number of years the individual was in the sample until the event occurred. The event is a legal divorce or a separation, and takes on value 1 if it occurs and 0 for the censored individuals who remained married or left the panel study prematurely. The timing variable refers to the wave in which the divorce occurred or the censoring wave, and ranges from 1 to 11.

For the explanatory variables, we distinguish between micro- and macro-determinants. Their percentages, frequencies, and means are shown in Appendix A and Appendix B. The individual variables consist of demographic background, and relational and fertility characteristics. The dummy variable of region plays an important role and consists of two categories, Flanders ( $n = 1,947$ ) and Wallonia + Brussels ( $n = 1,964$ ), whereby the latter is the reference category. This twofold division had both theoretical and pragmatic reasons. Theoretically, as earlier stated, the linguistic border (under which Wallonia and Brussels co-reside) forms a cultural demarcation line, marked by important disparities with regard to fertility control and

secularization. Pragmatically, the number of divorces for Brussels in our data set ( $n = 20$ ) is too low to perform separate analyses. Furthermore, we include two educational dummies (reference category = lower secondary education) and an employment dummy (reference category = employed). The frequency table shows that there is almost an equal number of employed ( $n = 1,949$ ) and unemployed ( $n = 1,886$ ) people in our sample. The household income variable contains six categories with the lowest category being 1,000–1,499 Euro and the highest one being more than 5,000 Euro (less than 1,000 Euro is the reference category). A dummy variable, parental divorce, takes on the value of 1 if the individual experienced a parental divorce and 0 if he or she did not. Apparently 529 people out of 3,911 witnessed a parental divorce.

Variables that refer to the couple characteristics are premarital cohabitation and age at marriage. For premarital cohabitation, no premarital cohabitation forms the reference category. Appendix A shows that 404 respondents did live together before getting married. Age at marriage was constructed with information on age and the year of marriage that was directly obtained from the respondents. The final two variables refer to the fertility history of the couple: number of children and age of youngest child. The reference category of the dummy variable number of children is less than three children; the reference category for age of youngest child is 0 to 3 years.

Our macrolevel variables are taken from the data from the European Value Study (EVS) of 1990. The EVS covers nearly all European countries and is one of the most extensive data collections on opinions and ideas concerning work, religion, morals, politics and society, relationships, and parenting. The used methodology has become an important standard in the international comparative research on norms and values (Ester, Halman, & Moor, 1994). By combining the 1990 EVS macro variables with the 1992 to 2001 PSBH time-dependent individual covariates, we maintain the correct causal order between values and behavior.

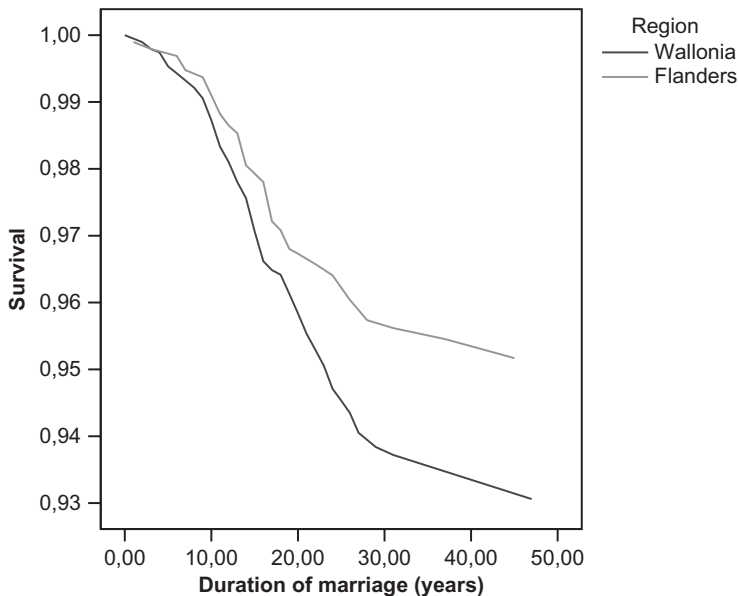
To obtain the macrolevel variables, we created eight clusters by introducing four marriage cohorts for Flanders and Wallonia: one group of spouses that got married before 1960, another group during the 1960s, a third group during the 1970s, and a final group that got married during the 1980s or later. By combining these groups with the corresponding macrocultural value indicators from the EVS, we can control for the clustering of individuals in these higher hierarchical entities and how these can hold responsible for the differences in divorce proneness. The values of these variables are obtained by taking the percentages of the extreme categories of the corresponding variables in the EVS study. The categories, frequencies, and values can be found in Appendix B. We are aware of the small number of clusters. To obtain some statistical power, we prefer fewer clusters containing a larger number of observations. A division into provinces, for example, leads to a very small number of valid observations per cluster and is less appropriate to test whether our theoretical assumptions concerning regional effects are correct.

The following macrovariables, which are different for the eight combinations of two regions and four cohorts, are introduced in the models: the importance of religion, belonging to religious organizations, attendance of religious services, number of religious persons, number of Catholic votes, level of justification of divorce, level of postmaterialism, height of socioeconomic status, height of income, and unemployment rate. The latter variable originates from Gaus (1996), not from the EVS data.

## RESULTS

Figure 1 depicts the survival function of marriages for Flanders and Wallonia. The Flemish marriages tend to last longer in Flanders than the Walloon ones. By introducing micro-, macro-, and interaction effects, we want to explain the disparities between these two lines.

The result of the first set of analyses is shown in Table 1. We used stepwise models, first introducing only our regional variable, followed by individual determinants, interaction effects with cohort and region, and macrovariables. The bottom line of the table shows the decline in  $-2$  log likelihood as the model gets more extended. As explained earlier, the purpose of this stepwise structure is to explain the regional effect by introducing parameters that take into account the regional divorce differences.



**FIGURE 1** Marriage survival per region.

**TABLE 1** Micro-, Interaction, and Macroeffects (Exponents of Betas) on Divorce Proneness, Stepwise Cox Regression (Wald)

Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Region	0.70*	0.69*	0.71*	0.37***	16.77
Tertiary education		1.66*	1.73*	1.79*	1.78*
Employment		0.44***	0.43***	0.42***	0.43***
Income: 3,000–4,999 Euro		0.25**	0.25**	0.29*	0.29*
Income: >5,000 Euro		0.07*	0.07*	0.08*	0.08*
Age at marriage		0.95*	0.95*	0.95*	0.95
Premarital cohabitation		3.43***	0.01	0.01*	0.008*
Age youngest child					
No children		0.03***	0.03***	0.02***	0.01***
3–6 years		0.37**	0.40**	0.44*	0.44*
6–12 years		0.13***	0.13***	0.13***	0.12***
12–18 years		0.03***	0.03***	0.04***	0.04***
>18 years		0.01***	0.01***	0.00***	0.00***
Number of children >3		0.39***	0.38**	0.35**	0.36**
Parental divorce		2.57***	2.62***	2.62***	2.59***
Marriage cohort 1961–1970		25.455***	25.10**	23.65**	6.90
Marriage cohort 1971–1980		155.236***	152.18***	140.30***	29.83**
Marriage cohort after 1980		343.300***	255.72***	244.99***	34.71**
Cohort* premarital cohabitation			4.35*	4.99**	4.47*
Region* premarital cohabitation				3.40**	2.69*
Region* No children				3.49**	6.00***
Region* Age child >18 years				4.75*	8.23**
Number of religious persons					0.84*
–2 log likelihood <sup>a</sup>	2435.98	1929.02	1920.38	1905.08	1899.72

<sup>a</sup>The  $R^2$  is not shown. The focus of the model lies within the relative importance of the determinants, not in their explanatory power toward the dependent variable.

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

A first observation concerns the significant effect of region (0.70;  $p < .05$ ) in Model 1. The mere fact of being Flemish reduces the chance of getting divorced compared to being Walloon. Model 2 shows that this effect remains the same when background, relational, and fertility characteristics are added. Notice the strong effects of the marriage cohorts. As elaborately shown in international literature, older marriage cohorts tend to divorce significantly less than the younger ones. However, it should be noted that the cohort effects are probably overestimated due to the fact that marriages of older cohorts are initially more likely to survive within the data set. The other effects are also generally in line with expectations: high education (1.66;  $p < .05$ ), premarital cohabitation (3.43;  $p < .001$ ), and parental divorce (2.57;  $p < .001$ ) increase the chance of getting divorced; being employed (0.44,  $p < .001$ ), having a high income (0.25,  $p < .01$ ; 0.07,  $p < .05$ ), marrying at an older age (0.95;  $p < .05$ ), and having more than three children (0.39,  $p < .001$ ) significantly reduce the likelihood of divorce. The negative effect of the age of children variable can probably be explained by the connection

with the duration of marriage; the age of the children usually will be higher as the marriage lasts. It also confirms findings of Hiedemann, Suhomlinova, and O'Rand (1998) and Snoeckx et al. (2006) concerning the decreasing pressure of upbringing on the relation between spouses as the children get older.

As the cohort effects in our model are very strong, we introduce cohort interaction effects in a third step to examine whether they can account for the divorce differences. The results show that getting married in an older marriage cohort and having lived together before marriage (4.35,  $p < .05$ ) increase the likelihood of divorce, which is not very surprising when bearing in mind the selection hypothesis (Amato et al., 2003; Axinn & Thornton, 1992; Brown & Booth, 1996; Bumpass et al., 1991; Cohan & Kleinbaum, 2002; Kalmijn et al., 2004). Those few couples in the oldest cohort who lived together before marriage must have had more liberal (and thus more prodivorce) attitudes than the majority of the other couples of their generation who started living together after marriage. Other cohort interaction effects that we tested were tertiary education ( $p = .09$ ), age at marriage ( $p = .07$ ), and the presence of children ( $p = .08$ ), but they were not significant after their inclusion in the equation.

Model 4 shows the introduction of the regional interaction effects. If the effects of the individual determinants differ across the regions, it indicates regional differences in divorce processes. Apparently, some determinants seem to affect the divorce risk in different ways across the two regions. Spouses in Flanders who lived together before marriage (3.40,  $p < .01$ ), have no children (3.49,  $p < .01$ ), or have children older than 18 years (4.75,  $p < .05$ ) have a higher probability of divorce than comparable couples in Wallonia. The first result fits also into a selection hypothesis: Flemish couples who lived together before marriage must have more liberal attitudes about marriage and divorce than the comparable Walloon couples, for whom living together before marriage is more normal. In the same way, Flemish couples without children will have more liberal attitudes than the comparable Walloon couples, because childlessness is less common among the former than among the later. The stronger cultural aversion against divorce in Flanders makes it less probable that couples with young children divorce. As a consequence, Flemish couples with adult children will divorce more often than comparable Walloon couples, who divorce more often when they have young children. However, the regional main effect continues to significantly affect the chances of getting divorced; the individual and cohort and region interaction effects are only able to explain a part (from 0.71–0.37) of the effect of region.

In a final step, all macrovariables are added to examine whether they can fully explain the regional effect, but only the number of religious persons has a significant effect. Notice the decreasing effects of the marriage cohorts in the final column; the effect of the retained macrovariable is partly a cohort effect. The number of religious persons in a region also has a significant negative net effect on the divorce risk. The number of Catholic

votes and the measure of attendance of religious services are not included into the equation, based on the insignificance of the Wald statistic of their parameters. Yet the most important conclusion of this final model is the disappearance of the significant regional effect due to the addition of a cultural macrovariable. This means that the divorce differences between Flanders and Wallonia can be explained by the regional and cohort differences in religious beliefs. Moreover, the  $-2$  log likelihood ratio of this model shows the best fit.

As mentioned earlier, we reverse the story in our second set of analyses. Considering the power of the macrovariables to account for the regional effect, we start with introducing them to see whether a regional effect can still be observed. Before doing so, our standard basis model is constructed. The first column (model 1) in Table 2 shows that the effects are similar to the ones in the first model of our first set of analyses.

In a second step, all the macrovariables are introduced. Based on the Wald statistic, only the number of religious persons is a significant parameter. The higher the value of this variable, the lower the divorce chances of couples living in that region. This forms an indication of the influence of cultural and religious determinants on people's divorce behavior.

In a third and fourth step, we added regional and cohort effects and interactions between these two parameters and microdeterminants. However, in accordance with our expectations, the stepwise model selection removes

**TABLE 2** Micro-, Macro-, and Interaction Effects (Exponents of Betas) on Divorce Proneness, Stepwise Cox Regression (Wald)

Variables	Model 1	Model 2
Tertiary education	1.71*	1.66*
Employment	0.45***	0.44***
Income: 3,000–4,999 Euro	0.26**	0.25**
Income: >5,000 Euro	0.08*	0.07*
Age at marriage	0.95	0.95*
Premarital cohabitation	3.52***	3.44***
Age youngest child		
No children	0.03***	0.03***
3–6 years	0.34**	0.37**
6–12 years	0.12***	0.13***
12–18 years	0.03***	0.03***
>18 years	0.01***	0.01***
Number of children > 3	0.40***	0.39***
Parental divorce	2.38***	2.57***
Marriage cohort 1961–1970	25.46**	21.93**
Marriage cohort 1971–1980	152.19***	130.45***
Marriage cohort after 1980	323.97	275.73***
Number of religious persons		0.98*
$-2$ log likelihood	1933.85	1928.50

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

the regional effect, thereby clearly indicating that this effect does no longer makes any difference in predicting the risk of divorce. Neither cohort effects nor interaction effects of microdeterminants with region or cohort are retained in the Cox regression. When looking at the variables not included in the regression, we find supportive evidence for the disappearance of the regional effect when macrocharacteristics are taken into account: The significance of the regional variable amounts to 0.44. The main conclusion is that the differences in divorce likelihood across the two Belgian regions are not caused by the different composition of the inhabitants, but can be attributed to different regional cultural characteristics.

## CONCLUSION

The Belgian case lends itself to use a cross-national perspective within one single country, because the unique opportunity exists to analyze the net effect of different regional characteristics on divorce behavior, centrally regulated by one national divorce legislation. In this article, we join a demographic research tradition in which the impact of cultural and religious values on behavior is emphasized, without neglecting the influence of structural conditions. Following earlier research on the explanatory power of macrocultural values on diverging divorce risks from a European perspective (Ester et al., 1993) and the cultural path dependency of the first and second demographic transitions in Belgium, France, and Switzerland (Lesthaeghe & Neels, 2002), we give a culturally colored interpretation of the differing Walloon and Flemish divorce risks in Belgium.

To explain these regional disparities, we estimate the impact of both micro- and macrodeterminants and their interaction effects by using a two-fold stepwise strategy. Our first analysis takes the model with the regional variable as a starting point and examines whether and to what extent this regional effect can be explained by micro-, interaction, and macrodeterminants. In line with previous research (Snoeckx et al., 2006), the regional effect continues to influence the divorce risk when controlling for micro-background, relational, and fertility characteristics. As expected, some microdeterminants affect the divorce risk differently according to the regional context (Wagner & Weiss, 2006); the interaction effects show the varying divorce processes in Flanders and Wallonia. These interaction effects can be explained by the stronger selection effect of living together in Flanders, where it is less normal and thus reflects a more liberal attitude toward marriage and divorce, or where Flemish couples without children will also have more liberal attitudes than the comparable Walloon couples. The stronger aversion against divorce in Flanders explains the other significant interaction effects of children older than 18 years. Flemish couples with

children will postpone their divorce more often than comparable Walloon couples, who divorce more often when they have still young children. The final step in our analysis introduces macrodeterminants to explain the remaining divorce differences between the two regions. The nonredundant influence of cultural traditions on people's life decisions, as shown by Ester et al. (1993) and Lesthaeghe and Neels (2002) also applies for the Belgian case because the religious tradition in the Flemish region is an important factor for the different regional divorce numbers.

On the one hand, the cultural yin–yang pattern of this country, with a southern European Latin culture in the northern Flemish region and a northern European progressive culture in the southern region of Wallonia, remains very specific. On the other hand, the Belgian test case is very relevant to an international perspective because it shows the net effect of cultural and religious traditions on divorce behavior. We believe the Belgian case adds value to the existing research tradition on divorce behavior. Further research should take advantage of this peculiar Belgian case instead of treating it as an anomaly.

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**APPENDIX A** Descriptive Information on the Microlevel Determinants for Belgium: Flanders and Wallonia

Variables	Categories	Belgium		Flanders		Wallonia	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Divorced	Yes	165	4.2	69	3.5	96	4.9
	No	3,746	95.8	1,878	96.5	1,868	95.1
Region	Flanders	1,947	49.8				
	Wallonia - Brussels	1,964	50.2				
Lower secondary education		1,718	45.4	948	49.9	770	40.8
Higher secondary education		1,041	26.6	521	27.5	520	27.6
Tertiary education		1,023	26.2	428	22.6	595	31.6
Employment	Works	1,949	49.8	979	51.0	970	50.7
	Does not work	1,886	48.2	942	49.0	944	49.3
Income	< 1,000 Euro	303	7.7	180	9.24	123	6.26
	1,000–1,499 Euro	822	21.0	406	20.9	416	21.2
	1,500–1,999 Euro	731	18.7	399	20.5	332	16.9
	2,000–2,499 Euro	661	16.9	311	16.0	350	17.8
	2,500–2,999 Euro	617	15.8	324	16.6	293	14.9
	3,000–4,999 Euro	686	17.5	294	15.1	392	20.0
Parental divorce	> 5,000 Euro	91	2.3	33	1.7	58	3.0
	Yes	529	13.5	190	9.8	339	17.3
Duration of marriage	No	3,382	86.5	1,757	90.2	1,625	82.7
		28.5		28.7		28.4	
Age at marriage		23.9		23.8		24.2	
Premarital cohabitation	Yes	404	10.3	149	7.9	255	13.7
	No	3,333	85.2	1,733	92.1	1,600	86.3
Presence and age of children	No children	1,563	40	39	2.0	54	2.8
	0–3 years	93	2.3	797	40.9	766	39.0
	3–6 years	275	7.0	128	6.6	147	7.5
	6–12 years	601	15.4	284	14.6	317	16.1
	12–18 years	626	16.0	311	16.0	315	16.0
	>18 years	753	19.3	388	19.9	365	18.6
Number of children	Less than three	3,394	86.8	1,702	87.4	1,692	86.2
	More than three	517	13.2	245	12.6	272	13.8
Marriage cohort	Married before 1960	1,081	27.6	538	27.6	543	27.6
	Married during the 1960s	745	19.0	382	19.6	363	18.5
	Married during the 1970s	887	22.7	455	23.4	432	22.0
	Married after 1980	1,198	30.6	572	29.4	626	31.9

**APPENDIX B** Descriptive Information on the Macrolevel Determinants for the Different Clusters

	Flanders <1959 ( <i>n</i> = 538)	Flanders 1960–1969 ( <i>n</i> = 382)	Flanders 1970–1979 ( <i>n</i> = 455)	Flanders 1980– ( <i>n</i> = 572)	Wallonia <1959 ( <i>n</i> = 543)	Wallonia 1960–1969 ( <i>n</i> = 363)	Wallonia 1970–1979 ( <i>n</i> = 432)	Wallonia 1980– ( <i>n</i> = 626)
Importance of religion (very important)	34.2	15.2	16.3	9.6	24.75	22.25	13.65	11.35
Belonging religious organizations (belong)	23.9	15.2	16.3	9.6	14.25	16.95	8.8	6.1
Attend religious services (>once a week)	21.9	6.9	3.4	2.3	16.1	5.65	2.6	1.2
Number of religious persons (religious person)	89.1	86.4	81.7	76.6	69.9	57.2	57.6	56.5
Number of Catholic votes (high)	47.8	35.5	23.1	18.5	18.75	15.95	16	13.8
Justification of divorce (never justified)	36.4	24.2	19.4	13	27.85	15.35	8.5	11.9
Postmaterialism (12 items) (postmaterialist)	5.1	13.9	17	20.4	10.9	14.05	11.8	21.75
Postmaterialism (4 items) (postmaterialist)	15.3	20.2	23.9	36.7	3.6	17.25	16.65	26.5
Socioeconomic status (high) Income (10 categories) (high)	91.7 3.3	58.2 4.8	24.0 15.5	15.0 9.5	88.5 4	55.8 16.65	26.45 12.95	17.15 8.8
Income (4 categories) (high) Unemployment rate (percentage unemployment)	10.8 3.6	29.3 1.8	47.5 9.6	47.3 8.0	19.3 2.65	33.65 2.75	46.9 11.1	34.6 15.15