

Variation in **political metaphor**:  
A **diachronic study** of metaphor use in TV debates about Belgian federalism

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# Structure of the talk

1. Context of the research project
2. Theoretical background
3. A short introduction to Belgian politics
4. Objective of the paper
5. Corpus and method
6. Results
7. Conclusion

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# Research project – ADAPOF – Metaphors in the context of Belgian federalism

**A focus on Production:** Variation in metaphor use in various kinds of Belgian political discourses: *Who uses a metaphor, when and why?*

**Parliamentary discourse**  
(cf. Heyvaert 2019)

**Citizen panels**  
(cf. Perrez & Reuchamps  
2014, 2015)

**Television debates**  
(cf. Randour et al.)

**A focus on Reception:** *How can a metaphor influence citizens' representation of Belgian federalism: the 'Tetris' Metaphor* (cf. Reuchamps et al. 2018)

# Research project – ADAPOF – Metaphors in the context of Belgian federalism

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(cf. Randour et al.)

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# Metaphors in political discourse

- Metaphors play a central role in our understanding of political concepts and processes
  - **Lakoff (1996) *Moral Politics***
    - Strict-father and nurturant parent models
  - **Musolff (2004, 2008, 2010, 2016, 2017)**
    - Metaphors in debates about of the European (de)construction
    - Metaphorical scenarios
  - **Charteris-Black (2004, 2011)**
    - Persuasive power of metaphors in the speeches of major UK and US politicians
  - **Goatly (2007)**
    - Ability of metaphors to carry ideologies
  - **Semino (2008)**
    - *“It is often claimed that the use of metaphor is particularly necessary in politics, since politics is an **abstract** and **complex** domain of experience, and metaphors can provide ways of simplifying complexities and making abstractions accessible”*
    - **Federalism**

# Metaphors in Belgian political discourse

## Citizens do use metaphors when talking about federalism

### BELGIAN FEDERALISM IS A MACHINE

« On a coupé le citoyen du fonctionnement d'une espèce de **mécanisme**, de **machine folle lancée sur elle-même**. » (PBF, B8, 839-840)

“The citizen has been cut from a sort of **mechanism**, of **cranky machine spinning around**”

### BELGIAN FEDERALISM IS A CONSTRUCTION

Mais, ce que je voudrais, si on doit encore **aménager** cette fois-ci le fédéralisme tel qu'il a été **construit** progressivement, c'est qu'à un moment donné, on se dise que ça s'arrête, c'est fini (PBF, D8, 3897-3898)

« if we have to **rearrange federalism** as it has progressively **been built up**,... »

### BELGIAN FEDERALISM IS A COMPANY

« hoe werkt een staat, een beetje **zoals een bedrijfsleider** over zijn bedrijf ». (PBN, K4, 1232-1233)

how does a state work, **a bit like a ceo**...

### BELGIAN FEDERALISM IS A LOVE RELATIONSHIP

“Si l'on compare avec un **ménage**, certains **ménages se marient** avec **contrat de mariage**, d'autres pas,» (PBF, B1, 188-190)

If we compare this to a **couple**, some **couples get married under a wedding contract**, others don't...

# Deliberate metaphor theory (DMT)

Steen 2008, 2015

- Metaphors in **language**
- Metaphors in **thought**
- Metaphors in **communication**
  - Metaphors that are used **as metaphors** to achieve a **communicative goal** in a given discourse (deliberate metaphors) (Reijnierse et al. 2017, Steen 2015)
  - “A metaphor is potentially deliberate when **the source domain of the metaphor is part of the referential meaning of the utterance** in which it is used.” (operational definition, Reijnierse, 2017)
- Identification issues
  - Reconstructing the speakers’ intentions a posteriori
  - Assuming the comprehension processes going on in the receivers’ mind
  - **Potentially** deliberate metaphors

# Deliberate metaphors in political discourse?

## ORGANIZATION IS PHYSICAL STRUCTURE POLITICAL SYSTEMS ARE BUILDINGS

FR. Je crois que c'est un problème qui représente toute la difficulté de la **construction** d'un État fédéral où il faut à la fois trouver des frontières et respecter les gens et il faut réussir à trouver, entre ces deux éléments, un équilibre. *(Philippe Moreaux, PS, 18/02/90)*

EN. I believe it's a problem which is typical of the difficulty of **constructing** a federal state, where we both need to find borders and to respect the people and we need to find a balance between these two elements. *(Philippe Moreaux, PS, 18/02/90)*

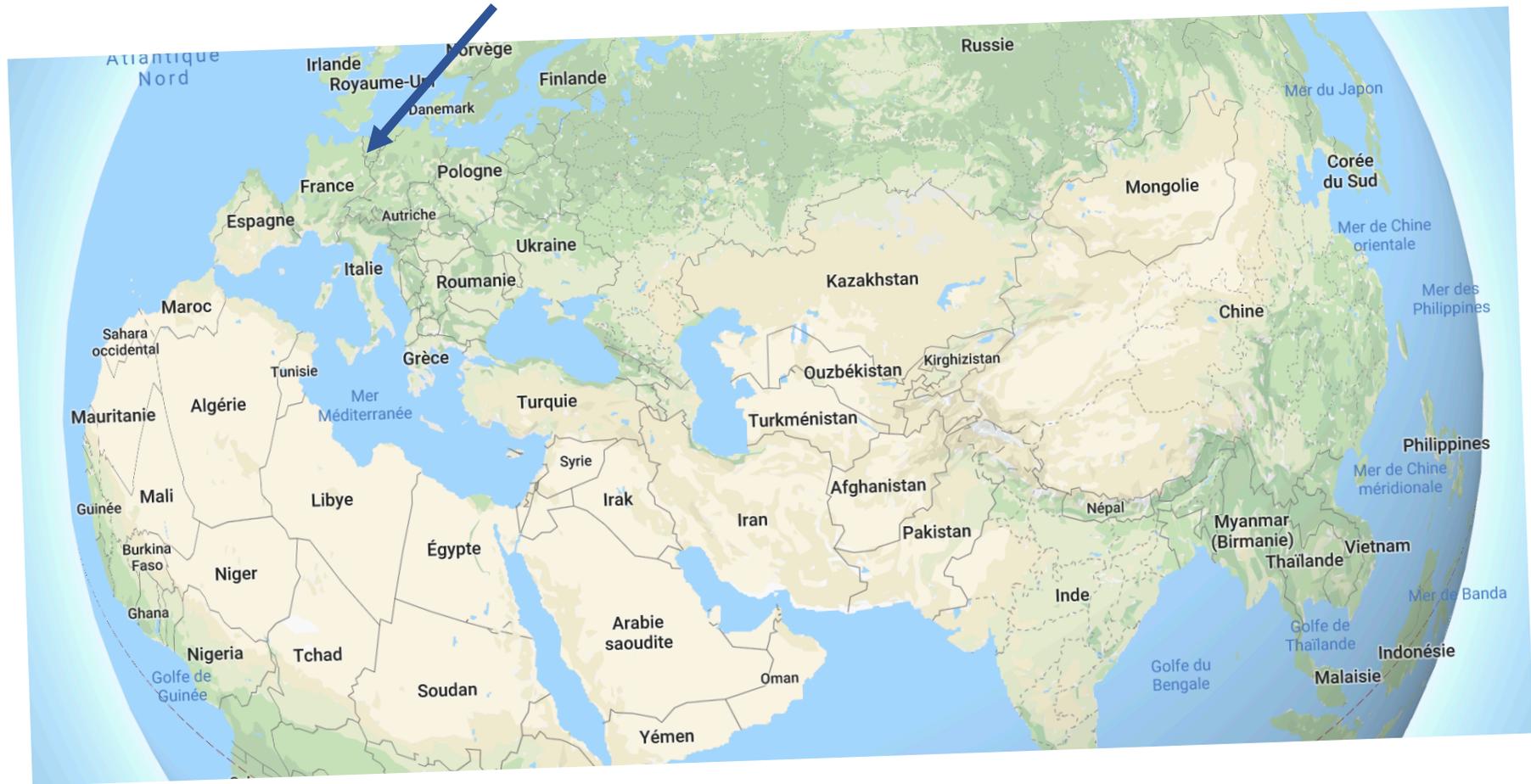
FR. Je pense que Melchior Wathelet a raison sur ce point-là, un stop institutionnel est nécessaire, je pense qu'on ne peut pas **construire** une **maison** si l'**architecte** change les **plans** toutes les semaines. *(Jean-Charles Luperto, PS, 20/02/2005)*

EN. I think Melchior Wathelet is right about this, an institutional stop is necessary, I think one cannot **build** a **house** if the **architect** is changing the **plans** every week *(Jean-Charles Luperto, PS, 20/02/2005)*

=> Political metaphors “serve primarily as a means to **change meanings**, and hence, to **change social** and **political attitudes**” (Musolff 2016: 136)

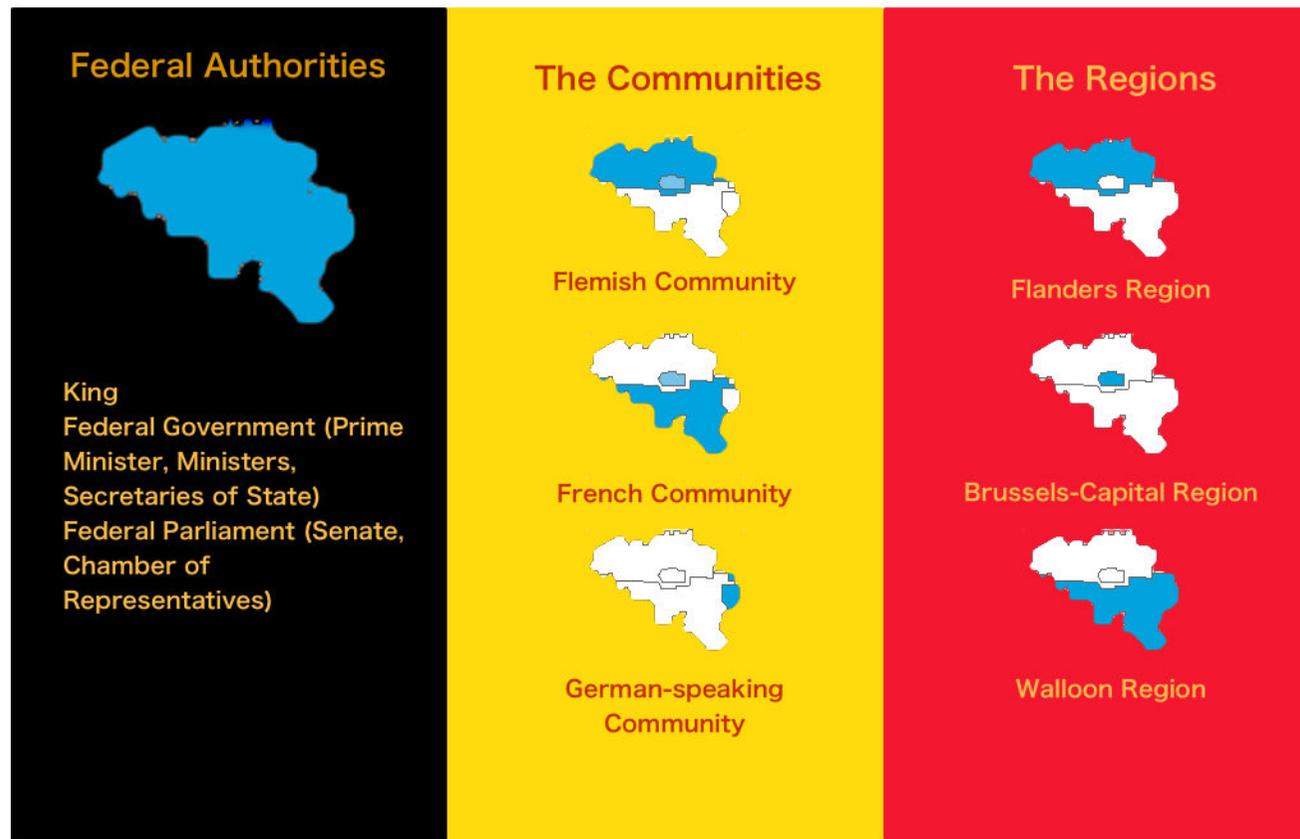
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# Belgian politics in 3 slides

## Federal Structure of Belgium



# Belgian politics in 3 slides

- **A never ending and ongoing political transformation**

- From a **unitary** country to a **federal country**

- Art 1 of the Constitution: *'Belgium is a federal state composed of communities and regions' (3 regions and 3 communities)*

- **A process of six States reforms: 1970, 1980, 1988-89, 1993, 2001, 2013**

- 2007-2011: unprecedented political crisis

- 06/2010 – 12/2011: 541days to form a federal government

- **Main cleavages : diverging views on the future of the state**

- In simple words, when Flemish political parties have homogeneous positions on the necessity to reform the Belgian state, this is less the case for French speaking parties (cultural vs. economical divides)

- The question of **financial transfer** from Flanders to Wallonia and more economical autonomy for Flanders

- The question of Brussels: which territory with what financial mechanisms

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# Objective of this paper

- Analysing the progressive – albeit not without political tensions – **transformation of Belgium's political system** by analysing the **use of metaphors** in Belgian political discourse
- Undertakes a systematic analysis of the use of metaphors by Belgian politicians during *television debates* from the 1980's until now.
- A contribution to two main research fields:
  - **From a linguistic perspective: a better understanding on the use of metaphors in political discourse**
  - From a political science perspective: a better understanding on the framing by political actors of the evolution of the Belgian State

# Objective of this paper

- **From a linguistic perspective: a better understanding on the use of metaphors in political discourse**
  - Which **frames** are used to describe Belgian federalism?
  - To what extent does metaphor use **evolve over time**?
  - Is there variation among the **political actors** producing these metaphors?
    - Gender (see for instance Ahrens & Lee 2009, Semino & Koller 2009)
    - Political affiliation
  - To what extent does metaphor use vary according to the specific **political context** in which they are produced (state's reforms, elections,...)?
  - To what extent is the distinction between **deliberate** and **non-deliberate metaphors** relevant for political discourse analysis?
  - (Cultural variation?)

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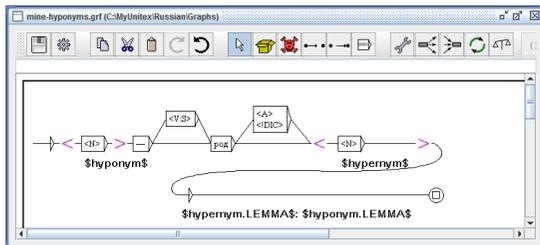
# Corpus

- TV debates | RTBF – Mise au Point (VRT - De Zevende Dag)
  - Weekly political programs broadcasted by the public TV channels
  - **Sample selection:** Only television debates that deals specifically with questions on the development and *evolution of Belgian federalism*
  - **80 debates** in total (RTBF: 80 | VRT: 47) > **15 hours** (RTBF: 9 | VRT: 6)
  - Period: from 1967 until 2016 (mainly 1980 to 2016)
  - RTBF-corpus: **906.237 words**
- **Political actors**
  - Belgian **politicians** from both communities (MPs, Ministers and officials from political parties)
  - **Journalists**
  - Members of the **civil society** (Professors, artists,...)
- **Audience**
  - **Primary audience:** other political actors during the debates
  - **Secondary audience:** citizens
- Oral (but retranscribed) and formal form of political discourse



# Method

- **Semi-automatic** method for **metaphor identification**
  - Makes it possible to deal with large corpora



**Onomasiological profiles** (cf. Geeraerts, Grondelaers & Speelman 1999)  
*of potential frames*

**Battle**  
**Disease**  
**Construction**  
**Relationships**

**Body**  
**Machine**  
**Sport**  
**Nature**  
**Container**  
**Movement/destination**

**60%** of the dataset

# Method

- **Potential metaphorical contexts**
  - Check the metaphorical status
  - Check the relevance of the target domain
- **Metaphor analysis**
  - **MIPVU** (Steen 2008, Steen *et al.* 2010)
    - Linguistic level (direct vs. Indirect)
    - Conceptuel level (novel vs. Conventional)
    - Communication level (deliberate vs. Non-deliberate)
  - **External paramaters**
    - (Political) actor
    - Gender
    - Date/Time
    - ...

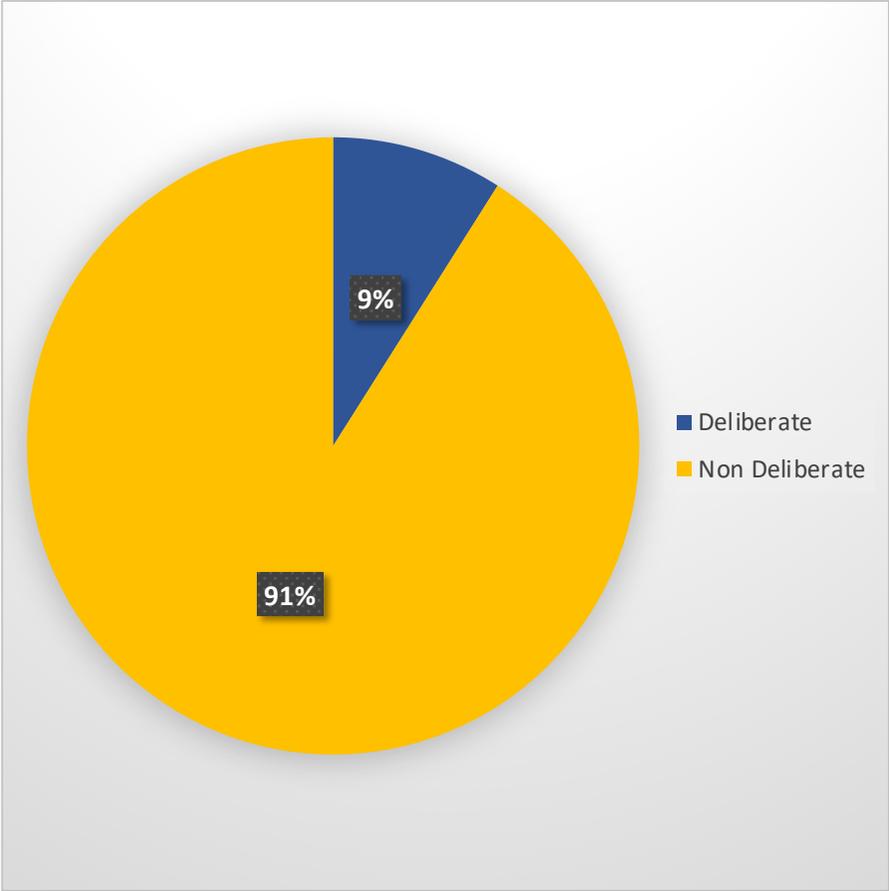
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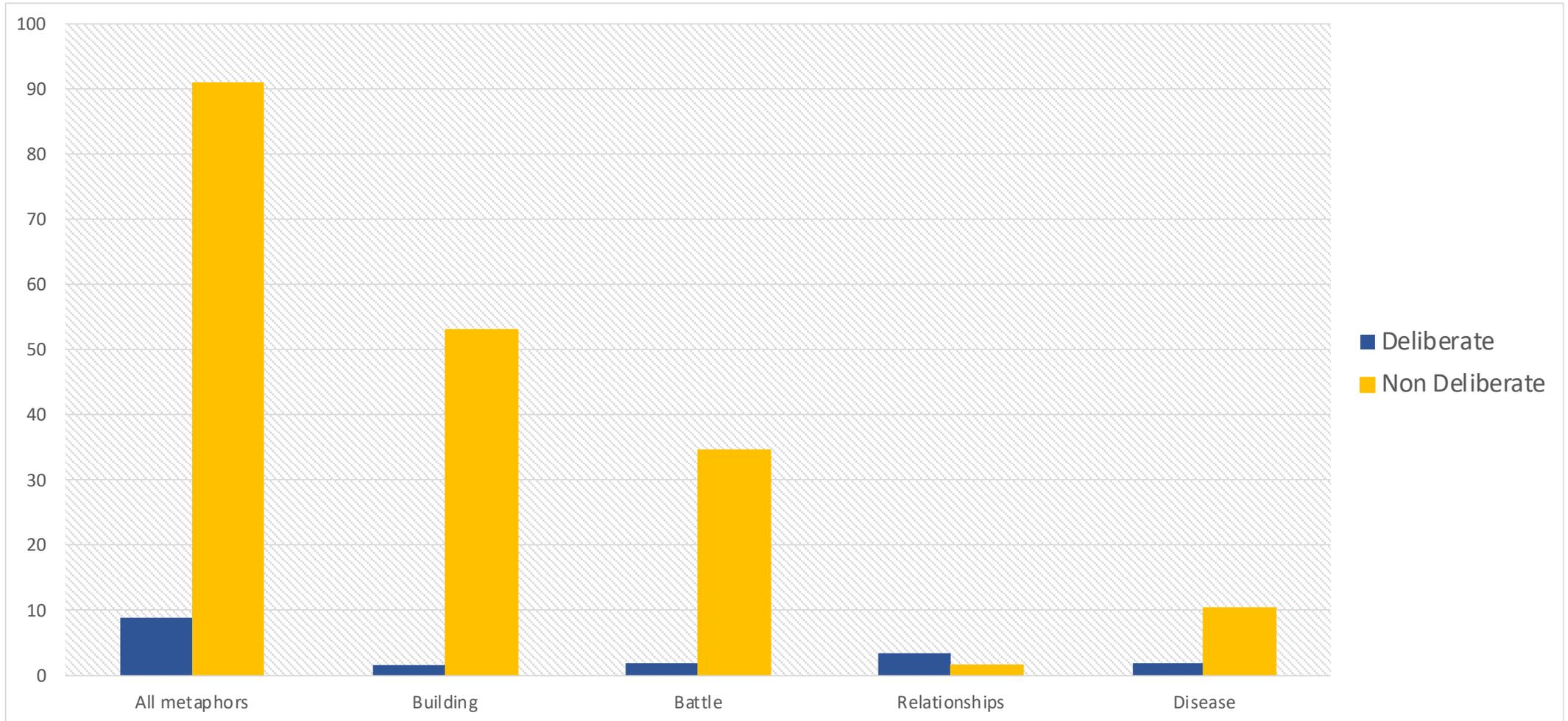
# Results | General tendencies

SOURCE DOMAINS	POTENTIAL METAPHORICAL CONTEXTS	CONFIRMED METAPHORICAL CONTEXTS	TARGET DOMAIN: BELGIAN FEDERALISM
BATTLE	838	758	690
DISEASE	489	61	51
CONSTRUCTION	1506	1432	1035
RELATIONSHIPS	1102	99	95
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4855</b>	<b>2350</b>	<b>1871</b>

# Results | Deliberate vs. Non-deliberate



# Results | Deliberate vs. Non-deliberate per frame



# BELGIAN FEDERALISM IS A LOVE RELATIONSHIP/FAMILY

## Non-deliberate

FR. Que deviendrons Bruxelles et la Wallonie en cas de **divorce** belge (*Journaliste, RTBF, 13/12/2006*)

EN. What will Brussels and Wallonia become in case of a Belgian **divorce**? (*Journalist, RTBF, 13/12/2006*)

## Deliberate

FR. Si on a dans sa propre sa **famille**, si on a deux enfants et que les deux **enfants** ont une autre **maladie**, on ne donne pas le même **médicament**. Ça c'est la plus importante question. (*Geert Lambert, Spirit, 13/12/2006*)

EN. If you have in your own **family**, if you have two **children** and the two **children** have a different **disease**, you don't give the same **medicine**. That's the most important question. (*Geert Lambert, Spirit, 13/12/2006*)

# BELGIAN FEDERALISM IS A DISEASE

## Non-deliberate

FR. FR. Mais pour l'instant, on a un peu l'impression d'être dans une situation de **coma**, de blocage, je le vois au parlement fédéral. *(Zoé Genot, Ecolo, 20/02/05)*

EN But for the time being, we have the impression of being in a situation of **coma**, of deadlock, I can see that at the federal government *(Zoé Genot, Ecolo, 20/02/05)*

## Deliberate

FR. A1 : Abrégeons les **souffrances** ?

PHG : Alors. Il y a deux pratiques : il y a la pratique flamande qui consiste à **euthanasier** la Belgique et il y a la pratique francophone qui consiste à pratiquer contre toutes évidences un **acharnement thérapeutique**.

*(Paul-Henri Gendebien, RWF, 12/09/2014)*

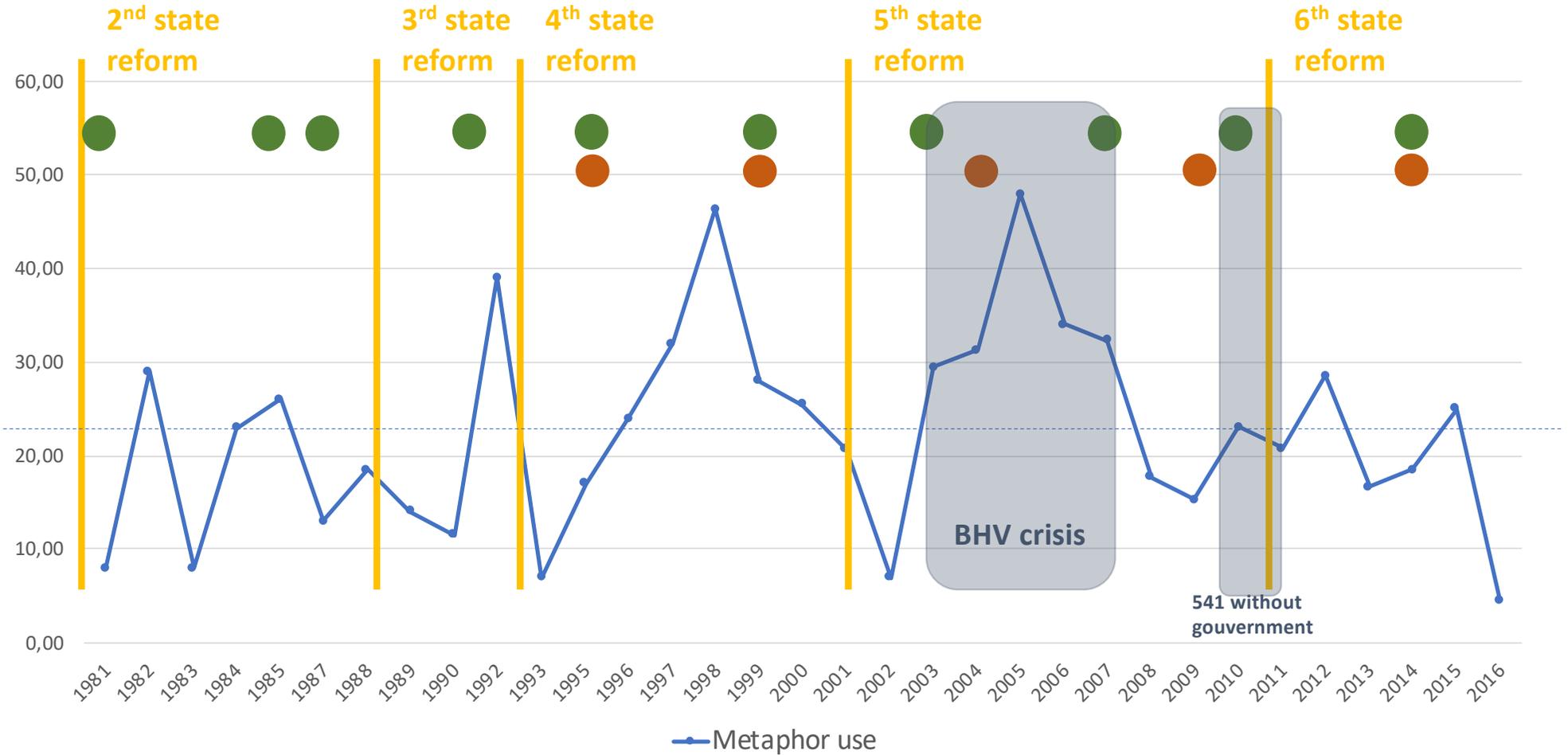
EN. A1: Should we put an end to Belgium's **sufferings**?

PHG: So, there are two practices: the Flemish one consisting in **practising euthanasia** on Belgium and the francophone one obviously consisting in practising a **heroic treatment**.

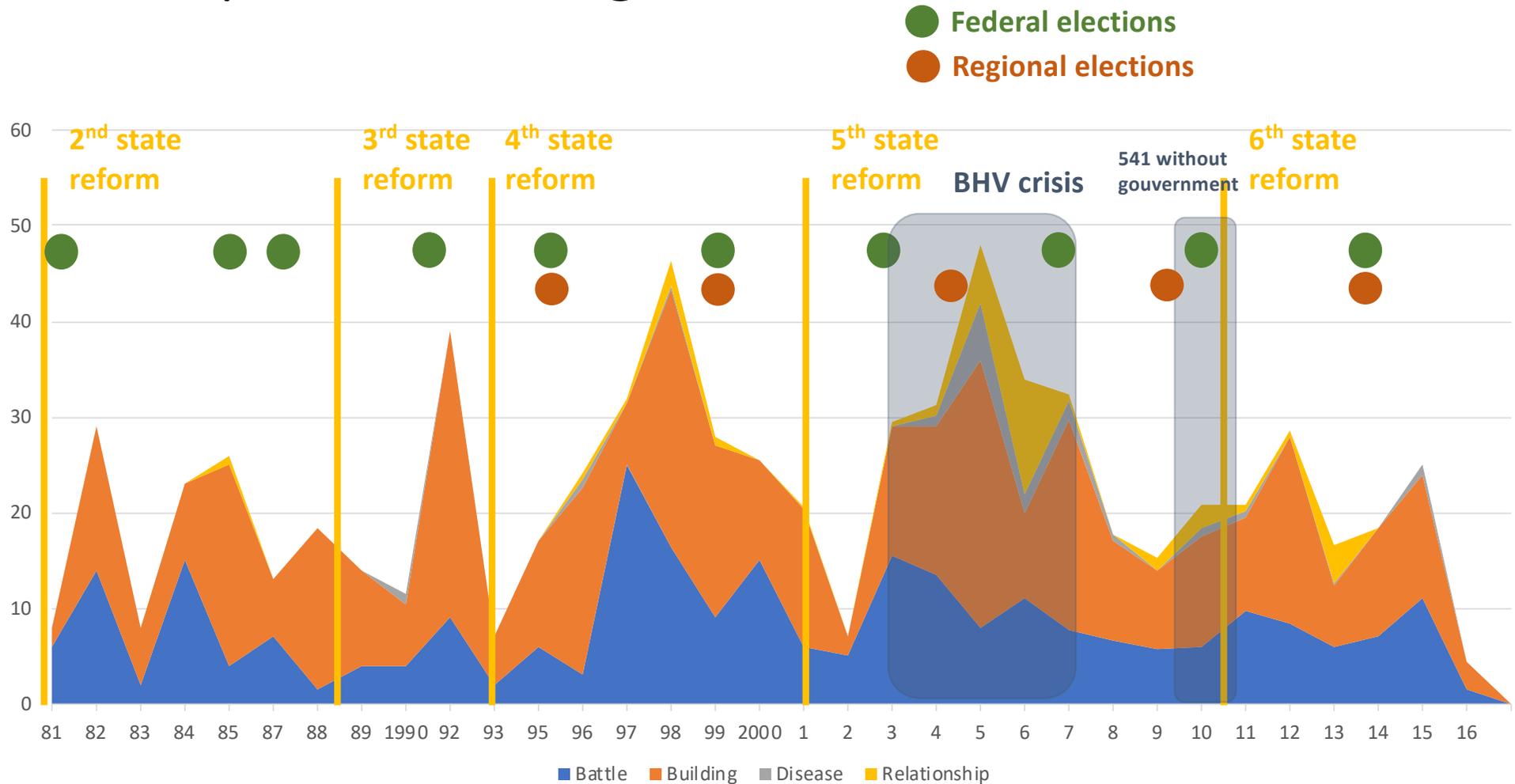
*(Paul-Henri Gendebien, RWF, 12/09/2014)*

# Metaphor use through time

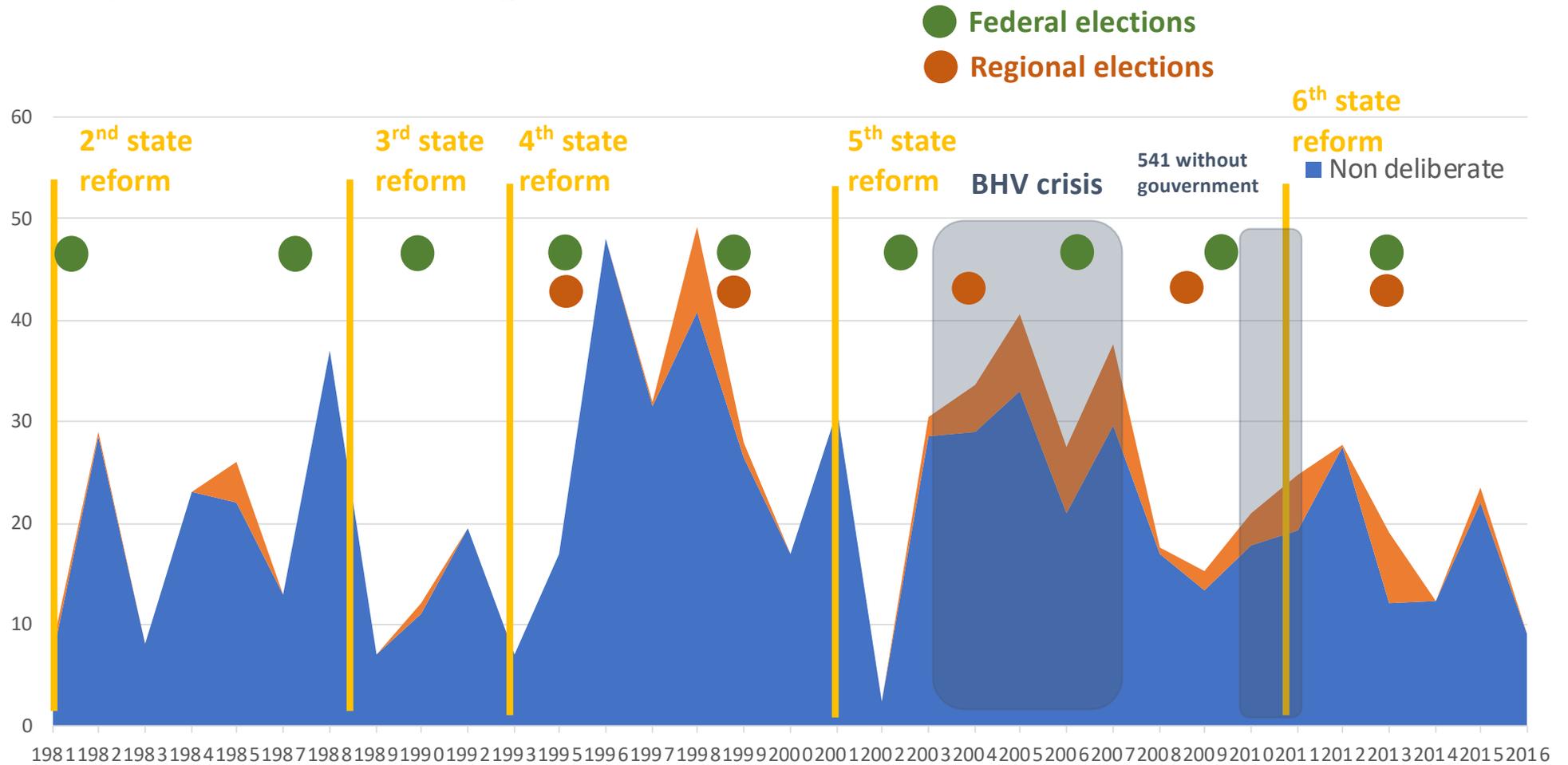
- Federal elections
- Regional elections



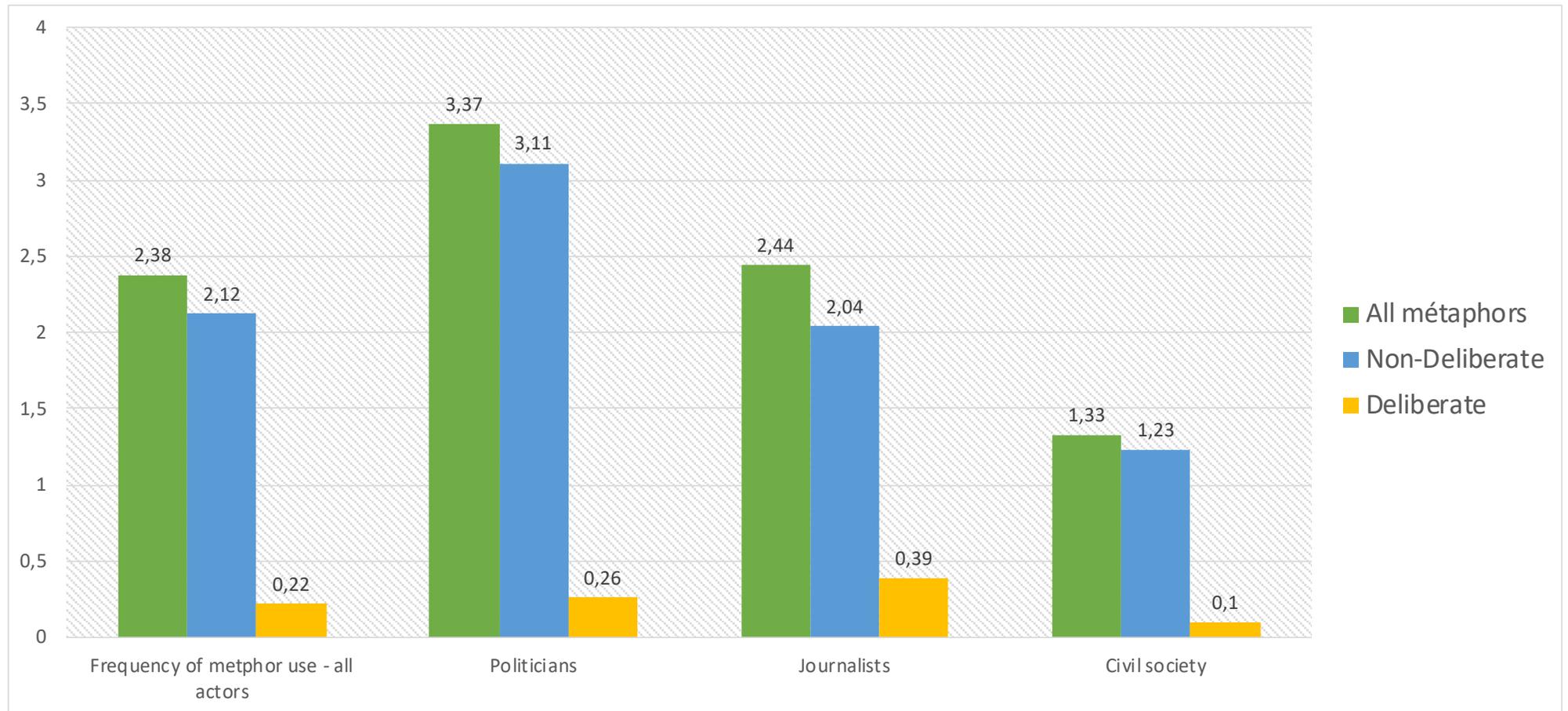
# Metaphor use through time: which frame?



# Metaphor use through time: deliberate vs. non deliberate



# Metaphor use per political actor

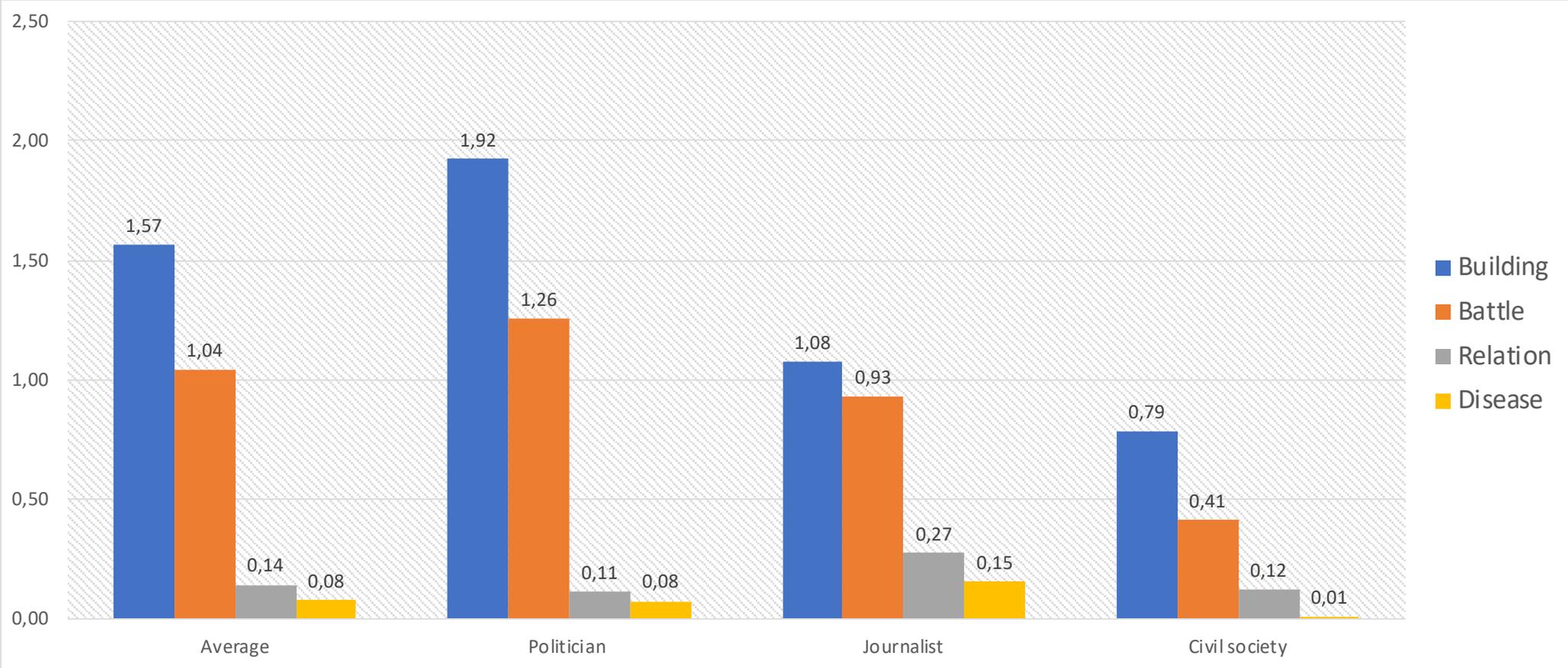


## BELGIAN FEDERALISM IS A LOVE RELATIONSHIP/FAMILY

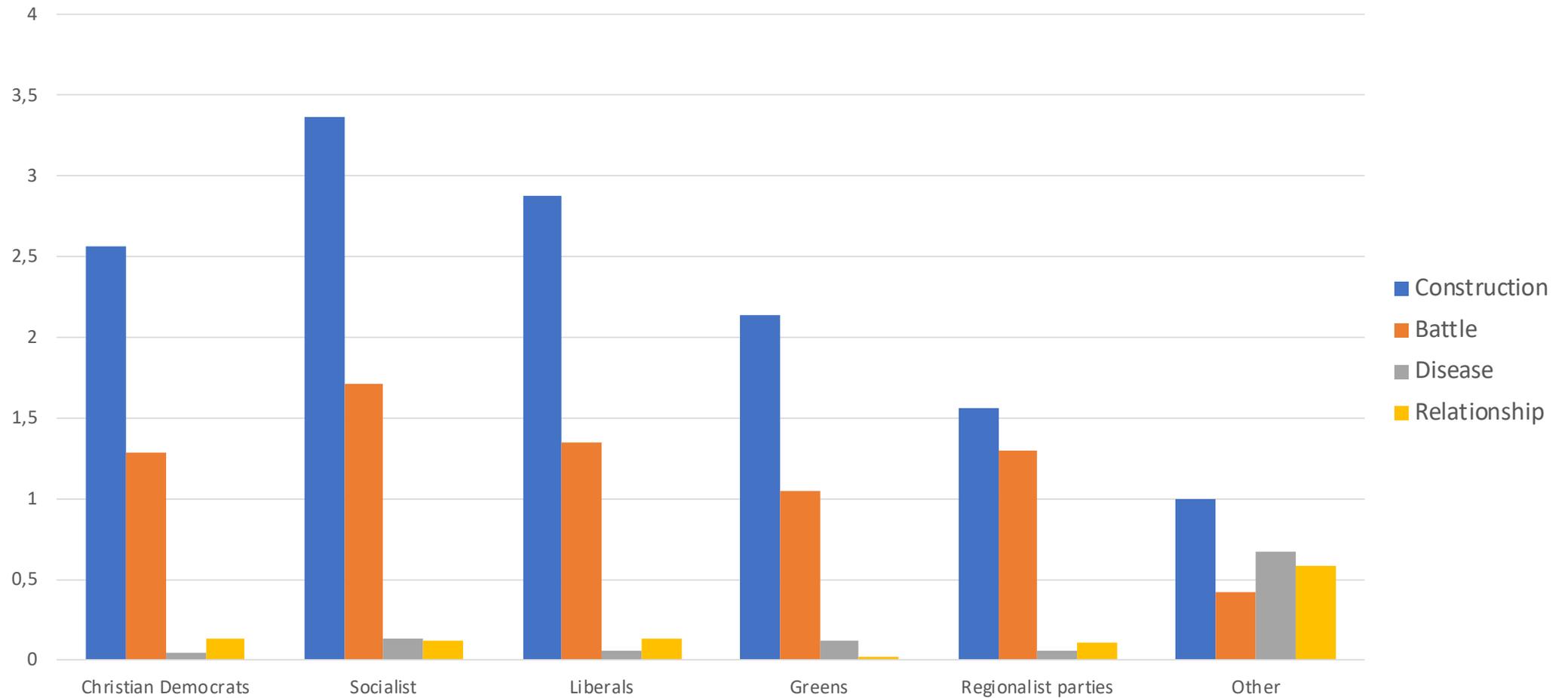
FR. Je voudrais poser une question à monsieur Voorhamme. Vous dites et vous venez de dire et vous pensez la même chose tous les trois je crois "les francophones ont peur". C'est ce que vous dites, c'est l'analyse que vous avez, c'est un refus par la peur. Alors est-ce qu'il est anormal d'avoir peur quand dans un **couple un** des **deux** sent qu'**il** va **se faire larguer** par **l'autre**? Est-ce que c'est, ou alors la question que je vous pose c'est, est-ce que vous tenez encore au **couple** ou bien est-ce que vous estimez effectivement que les visions sont tellement différentes qu'il faut dépasser ce stade-là?(*Journaliste, RTBF, 14/03/1999*)

EN. I'd like to ask a question to mr Voorhamme. You claim and the three of you just said the same thing, I think « the francophones are afraid ». It's what you're claiming. It's your analysis, a refusal out of fear. So, is it unusual to be afraid when in a **couple one of the two** (partners) is feeling **s/he will get dumped** by **the other**? So the question I'm asking is: do you still care about the **couple** or do you think the visions are so different that we should go beyond that?  
(*Journalist, RTBF, 14/03/1999*)

# Metaphor use per actor: frames



# Zoom on politicians: variation in the use of frames?



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# Main tendencies

- Variation
  - Variation over time
    - Political context?
      - Period of political crisis > greater variety fo frames
  - Variation per political actor
- Relevance of deliberate metaphors
  - Higher frequency in periods of crisis
  - Greater use by the journalists
  - // Communicative functions in such context

# Further work

- Complete the analysis > other frames(body, machine, sports, container, nature, movement)
- Quantative analyses > regressions
- Qualitative > tracing individual metaphors
- Expand these analyses to the VRT-corpus

Thank you for your attention 😊

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