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## **The Monarchy as a Factor of Political Support: The Impact of the 1999 Royal Wedding in Flanders, Belgium**

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## The Monarchy as a Factor of Political Support: The Impact of the 1999 Royal Wedding in Flanders, Belgium

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### Abstract

This article investigates the relationship between royalist feelings and diffuse political support at the time of a royal wedding. It takes Walter Bagehot's view on the role of the monarchy as a point of departure. A multivariate analysis of the data of the 1999 election survey in Flanders corroborates Bagehot's contention that royalist feelings are closely related to diffuse political support for the political system: monarchists are more inclined to trust the political authorities, to identify with the political community, and to be satisfied with the way democracy works. Royalism also coincides with a low level of education and an authoritarian attitude. Contrary to what is assumed by Bagehot, the impact of a major royal event on public opinion is only marginal. The wedding of the Belgian crown prince caused a brief upsurge of royalist feelings, but did not affect diffuse support for the political system. There are some indications that royalist feelings are partly dependent upon the agreement with the political profile of the monarch. The hypothesis that this is particularly the case amongst the politically sophisticated was not confirmed.

### 1 Introduction

Commenting upon the scarcity of sociological or psychological studies about the British monarchy, Michael Billig wrote in 1992: "Royalty is not an approved socio-psychological phenomenon. This adds to the strangeness of the matter" (1992: 2). Almost a decade later socio-psychological research about the monarchy is still relatively scarce, while the public interest in royalty seems to be ever growing. Just as most intellectuals (Nairn 1994), social scientists tend to deny or ignore the political significance of the phenomenon. Royalty is considered to belong to the realm of folklore or mass entertainment. This assumption contrasts sharply with the traditional view, coined by Walter Bagehot, that the monarchy is an essential source of political support. This article derives some specific hypotheses from Bagehot's classic approach and tests them on the basis of the 1999 election survey in the Flemish part of Belgium. By a fortunate coincidence, the fieldwork for this survey took place at the time of the royal wedding between the Belgian heir to the throne, Prince

Filip, and Mathilde d'Udekem d'Akoy, on 4 December 1999. The data thus offer a unique opportunity to test Bagehot's famous contention that a royal event is a major generator of royalist feelings. Finally, the article also explores a more political approach to monarchy, based on the assumption that citizens support the monarch to the extent that they agree with his or her political position.

### 1.1 The Bagehot model

The British economist and political analyst Walter Bagehot (1826-1877) is generally considered as the founding father of modern constitutional monarchy. His description in *The English Constitution* of the three basic rights of a monarch – the right to be consulted, to encourage and to warn – is still a standard quotation in textbooks on constitutional law. Yet the more interesting and arguably more relevant part of Bagehot's analysis, in which he discusses the impact of the monarchy on the public attitudes towards the political system, is referred to much less. At the heart of Bagehot's analysis is a fundamental distinction between what he calls the 'dignified' and the 'efficient' parts of the institutions. The former serve to "excite and preserve the reverence of the population" for the institutions, while the latter involve the actual functioning of the institutions. A government gains authority through the dignified parts and employs its power through the efficient parts (1867: 4). Even though the dignified parts are generally scorned by the intellectuals and considered useless or irrelevant, they are "necessarily the most useful (...) for they are likely to be adjusted to the lowest orders" (idem: 7). As these "lowest orders", i.e., the vast majority of uneducated citizens, do not comprehend the efficient parts of the constitution, it is only through the dignified parts that they can become attached to it and that the institutions obtain legitimacy, to use a more modern term.

The constitutional monarch fulfils this legitimizing function particularly well because his or her role is both comprehensible and entertaining. The notion of a single person ruling the nation is easy for the illiterate masses to understand. "The action of a single will, the fiat of a single mind, are easy ideas: anybody can make them out, and no one can ever forget them" (idem: 30). The intellectuals know that this 'easy' notion of government is false and obsolete, but for the uneducated, the monarchy "acts as a disguise" (idem: 48). It is a smokescreen that hides the real and complex business of politics. This focus on a single ruling monarch renders the business of politics not only understandable but also entertaining, at least as long as the focus is primarily on the personal actions of the monarch. "Royalty," argues Bagehot, "is a government in which the attention of the nation is concentrated on one person doing interesting actions" (idem: 35). And it is obviously not the political

actions of the monarch that the masses find 'interesting', but rather those that are related to his or her family life. Hence the importance that Bagehot attaches to the "nice and pretty events" related to the royal family, which "bring down the pride of sovereignty to the level of petty life" (idem: 34-35). In Bagehot's view, this perfect fusion of the institution of the monarchy and the person of the monarch is one of the keys to its success. A final reason why the monarchy manages to capture the masses so effectively is the mysticism by which it is surrounded. This mystery can only be preserved if the crown is not contentious and is perceived to be above the parties. Therefore, the monarch must remain aloof from ordinary political business and "should not be brought too closely to real measurement" (idem: 40). Only in this way can he remain immune from the "enmities and desecration", which might unveil the mystery and break the spell.

Translated into modern scientific terms, Bagehot essentially argues that the monarchy generates diffuse support for the political system amongst the illiterate masses; diffuse support in the sense of "a reservoir of favourable attitudes or good will that helps members to accept or tolerate outputs to which they are opposed or the effects of which they see as damaging to their wants" (Easton 1965: 273; 1975: 443). Bagehot's approach implies that this diffuse support is developed via two different channels. A knowledgeable minority develops support on a rational basis, i.e., through an understanding of the way the institutions actually function. But the vast majority supports the institutions on an irrational basis, i.e., on the basis of a reverence for the monarch as a person and a belief that it is he or she who actually governs the country. However unpopular the policy outputs of the incumbent government are, they are accepted because it is still, after all, 'his (or her) majesty's government'.

In the fifties, the Bagehot model was resuscitated in Shils and Young's (1953) controversial account of the 1953 coronation ceremony in Great Britain. The authors described the coronation as a ritual event, an "act of national communion" through which "the sacred values" that hold society together are solemnly reaffirmed. In the same vein as Bagehot, they argue that the monarchy functions as a deflection of the hostility engendered by the obligation to submit to those moral values. Its political powerlessness provides the royalty with a protection against this hostility and allows it "to bask in the sunshine of an affection unadulterated by its opposite" (Shils & Young 1953: 77), while the aggressiveness is channelled into the political arena.<sup>1</sup> But at the same time – and this is the crucial point – the aggressiveness "is in its turn ameliorated and checked by the sentiments of moral unity which the Crown helps to create." In this way the monarchy manages to "lessen the antagonism of the governed towards the reigning government" (idem: 77-78) and thus to buttress its legitimacy. Shils and Young also elaborate on Bagehot's notion that

it is particularly the events and theatrical elements that captivate the masses and generate reverence for the monarchy and hence support for the government. The authors compare the coronation event with a religious rite through which faith in God is restated and renewed (*idem*: 67).

In his sharp rebuttal of Shils and Young's analysis, Birnbaum (1955) correctly points out that the authors do not provide any empirical evidence for their bold contentions about the role of the monarchy. According to Birnbaum, Shils and Young grossly overestimate the political and societal relevance of the monarchy, as if unaware that the monarch's function and status have changed dramatically since Bagehot's time.

Yet, subsequent empirical studies have provided some fragmentary support for the views of Bagehot and of Shils and Young. A first testable hypothesis implicit in Bagehot's model is that the attachment to the monarchy correlates with education and political sophistication. Monarchy, according to Bagehot, appeals particularly to the 'imperfectly educated', who have little knowledge about the 'efficient' parts of the constitution and will be most susceptible to a reverent attitude towards the monarch, coupled to the 'easy' belief that it is he or she who actually governs. While the relationship between royalism and political sophistication has, to our knowledge, never been explicitly investigated, survey research in Great Britain confirms that the less educated tend to be more in favour of the queen, although the differences are comparatively small (Rose & Kavanagh 1976: 554) and disappear when age is controlled for (Blumler et al. 1971). In Belgium, the relationship between royalism and education was found to be small and inconsistent (Maddens 1991: 140).

A key argument of Bagehot, which is also implicit in Shils and Young's reasoning, is that the average citizen does not realize that the monarchy is merely a figurehead without real political power. At first sight, this contention is not borne out by survey research. Both the British and the Belgian citizens appear to rate the political importance of the monarch on average considerably lower than that of the prime minister and the MPs (Rose & Kavanagh 1976: 551; Maddens 1990: 59-61; Dewachter & Das 1991: 157). Yet, the Belgian monarchy survey also indicates that a considerable minority has a deviating view. In response to an open question about the reasons for their support or lack of support for the monarchy, 8.1 per cent of the respondents argued that a king is needed in Belgium because somebody "has to be in charge" or has to "rule the country", thus clearly intimating a belief that it is the king who actually governs the country. Moreover, it was the less educated respondents in particular who answered in that way (Maddens 1991: 151-158).

There is also some empirical support for the thesis that the attachment to the monarch generates diffuse support for the political system. This diffuse support can be considered to consist of three components: support for the political regime, support for the political community, and support for the

political authorities as normally expressed in a certain degree of trust (Easton 1965; 1975: 445-446). With regards to the first variable, Rose and Kavanagh (1976: 560-561) show that royalists are more positive towards the British political system and more willing to comply with the laws. With regard to the second component, i.e., the support for the community or the sense of national unity and solidarity, British supporters of the queen appeared to be somewhat more ready to see Britain playing a leading role in the world, though not showing a higher degree of social solidarity (*idem*: 564-565). Belgian royalists were found to identify more with the Belgian political community than with the regions (Maddens 1991: 147-149). Some evidence to the contrary for the thesis of a link between royalist feelings and political support is presented by Blumler et al. (1971: 161-162). These authors find no significant relationship between the attitudes towards the monarchy and either the confidence in the political system or the trust in the political authorities.

In Bagehot's view, the attachment of the populace to the monarchy should be considered as a form of uncritical deference to an external authority. Taking the argument a step further, Rose and Kavanagh hypothesize that royalist feelings might coincide with a deferential attitude towards authority in general, i.e., with an authoritarian attitude. This hypothesis is corroborated by their finding that British royalists are more inclined to believe that "some people are born to rule" and that "gentlemen" and "the most educated" are most fit to govern. Similarly, monarchists have a tendency to have confidence in political authority on a mystical or irrational basis. However, the authors find no evidence of a relationship between royalism and the strict adherence to the common standards of morality (Rose & Kavanagh 1976: 565-566), which is normally considered a component of an authoritarian attitude. Evidence that royalists have more deferential leadership preferences is also presented by Blumler et al. (1971: 162).

Nevertheless, Blumler et al. also show that citizens may combine royalist feelings with a certain resentment regarding the remoteness and the formality of the monarch's position, indicating that even the monarchy is not entirely exempt from hostility to authority (1971: 158). Billig's study of commonplace beliefs about the British royal family qualifies Bagehot's notion of deference towards the monarchy in yet another respect. However intense the royalist feelings of ordinary people are, they often go hand in hand with a mocking attitude and a general lack of respect. In this way, according to the author, the unprivileged come to terms with their own position of ordinariness in relation to extra-ordinary wealth (1992: 13-14).

Bagehot's emphasis on the close link between the attitude towards the monarchy as an institution and the monarch as a person would appear to apply a fortiori to present-day monarchy. Indeed, as argued by Nairn (1994: 43, 46), the almost obsessive focus on the personality of the monarch in the media

eclipses the institution from popular view and makes it almost impossible to criticize the monarchy without appearing to have a personal grudge against the monarch. Survey research in Great Britain (Rose & Kavanagh 1976: 553) and Belgium (Maddens 1991: 160) supports the thesis that the attitude towards the monarch and the monarchy are closely intertwined. On the other hand, the Spanish case shows that both attitudes can to a certain extent be independent of one another. Survey research in Spain shows that the immense popularity of the present king Juan Carlos does not automatically translate into an unqualified acceptance of the monarchy as an institution. This is due to the relatively recent nature of the present monarchy in Spain and to the fact that even the republicans appreciate the way the present monarch facilitated the transition towards democracy in the 1970s and opposed the 1981 military coup (Cazorla Pérez 1990: 277-278; García del Soto 1999: 130, 208-209).

Bagehot, and especially Shils and Young, highlight the role of events as a catalyst of both reverence for the monarchy and thus, indirectly, support for the political regime. Nowadays, royal events undoubtedly captivate an even vaster audience than in the 1950s, let alone the nineteenth century. But do these mega-events also have a significant impact on public opinion in general and the attitudes towards the monarchy and the political regime in particular? Or are they just, as Birnbaum (1955: 19) suggests in his rebuttal of Shils and Young, a pleasant diversion for the populace, without important political or societal relevance? Shils and Young's view is echoed in the more recent literature on media events. Dayan and Katz assume that media events, of which a royal event can be considered a case in point, create an upsurge of fellow feeling, connect the centre and periphery of society and offer and confirm shared membership in a national or international community. In addition, media events are considered to socialize citizens to the political structure of society and to reinforce the status of leaders (1992: 196-197; 201). Some empirical support for these contentions can be found in Blumler et al.'s analysis of the attitude changes on the occasion of the 1968 investiture of the Prince of Wales (1971: 163-166). Their findings indicate that the investiture ceremony sparked a profound emotional commitment to the monarchy, which citizens were eager to communicate to one another and which involved a reaffirmation of fundamental values like family solidarity and national pride. Also, support for the political system was shown to have increased on the occasion of the ceremony (idem: 170).

Ziegler's analysis of the British mass observation data, collected on the occasions of several royal events, shows that the initial public reaction to such an event is usually one of indifference and even slight disapproval. However, as the event approaches, the citizens gradually become involved and the enthusiasm increases to culminate on the day of the event (Ziegler 1978: 83, 99, 192). It thus seems reasonable to expect that royalist feelings, and hence

diffuse political support, will gradually increase during the run-up towards the event and decline afterwards.

## 1.2 The political model

A key tenet of the Bagehot model is that reverence for the monarch is largely due to his or her impartiality, i.e., his or her not being involved in the 'dirty business' of partisan politics. Whether or not the monarch is really impartial is obviously not at issue here. What matters is that he or she is perceived to be so. But to what extent is this the case? In the 1970s, 70 per cent of the British perceived the queen as a conservative voter, against 4 per cent as a labour voter and 15 per cent who did not know (Rose & Kavanagh 1976: 551). The 1990 monarchy survey in Belgium showed that the then king, Boudewijn, was considered to be a Christian-democrat by 74.2 per cent, while only 11.1 per cent refused to answer (Maddens 1990: 104-109). It thus appears that most citizens are not afraid to put a partisan label on the monarch and that there is a fairly broad consensus about his or her party preference.

These findings do not merely raise doubts about the perceived impartiality of the monarch, but also suggest an alternative approach to explaining royalist feelings. It might be hypothesized that the citizens support the monarch to the extent that they agree with his or her perceived partisan affiliation and political stances, in the same way as the preference for any politician is co-determined by these factors. A related hypothesis is that this political model will apply particularly to the citizens with a high political sophistication. While the unsophisticated might be considered to defer to the monarch irrespective of his or her political or ideological views, as implied in the Bagehot model, it is reasonable to assume that the citizens with a higher sophistication will be more inclined to take these views into account when evaluating the monarch. This might also be due to a more accurate perception of these views and of their partisan nature.

A test of the political approach obviously requires detailed information about the political and ideological profile of the monarch. Since the Second World War the Belgian royals have generally been considered to be devoted Catholics. Former king Boudewijn was associated with the charismatic movement in the Catholic church, as is his brother, the present king, Albert (Bracke 1998: 91-92; Neuckermans & Van den Driessche 1995: 77-80). In 1990 Boudewijn caused a constitutional crisis by refusing to sign a bill that depenalized abortion, stating that he could not reconcile this with his conscience. It thus comes as no surprise that the largest number of royalists can be found among churchgoing Catholics (Maddens 1991: 143-147). As a result of the overt stance taken on the abortion issue, it is also to be expected that royalist feelings will tend to coincide with a cultural conservative attitude.

The Belgian king is a powerful symbol of national unity in a divided country. King Boudewijn, who had long been sceptical about the reform of the Belgian state, eventually endorsed the federalization process (Gerard 1998: 130-131; Van den Wijngaert et al. 2000). But at the same time, both he and his successor have on various occasions explicitly denounced "overt or hidden separatism" and have expressed their disapproval of politicians who try to push the Flemish/Walloon conflict to extremes (Maddens & Vanden Berghe forthcoming). As already mentioned above, survey research has shown that the support for the monarch is considerably stronger among citizens who identify with Belgium rather than with the regions (Maddens 1991: 147-149). While the Bagehot model assumes that the reverence for the monarch causes the citizens to identify with the nation, the direction of causality is reversed in the political model.

In their regular public addresses, the Belgian monarchs have increasingly portrayed the Belgian nation as a multicultural society, i.e., as a crossroads of different cultures that manage to live together harmoniously. This notion of multiculturalism applies not only to the relationship between the Flemings and the Walloons, but also to the relationship between autochthonous Belgians and Belgians of foreign origin. The monarchs have repeatedly taken an explicit stance in favour of the integration of immigrants and against racism and intolerance (Maddens Vanden Berghe forthcoming). In addition, the fact that the current monarch never consulted with the leader of the extreme right party, Vlaams Blok, after the elections clearly expresses his disapproval of this party. On the basis of the political model, it is thus to be expected that support for the monarch will coincide with a positive attitude towards foreigners.

## 2 Data and measurements

The fieldwork for the 1999 Flemish general election survey (Meersseman et al. 2001) took place between October 1999 and March 2000.<sup>2</sup> Thus, most of the 2179 interviews were conducted during the run-up and the immediate aftermath of the royal wedding between the Belgian crown prince Filip and Mathilde d'Udekem d'Akoy, on December 4. This enables us to track the evolution of the attitude towards the monarchy at the time of a major royal event. The data allow us to test most of the hypotheses outlined above. The only essential information lacking concerns the perceived political power of the Belgian monarch and his perceived partisan position.

### 2.1 Response variables

The ISPO survey contains two items that measure royalist feelings. The first item is derived from the aforementioned British monarchy survey (Rose & Kavanagh 1976: 552) and was also included in the Belgian 1990 monarchy survey.<sup>3</sup> Respondents were asked: "Some people say that Belgium needs a king, others feel that a king is not needed in Belgium. Which opinion is closest to your own?" A second item measures the extent to which the respondents trust the king and is included in a series of items measuring the trust in sixteen political and societal institutions. Respondents were asked to indicate their degree of trust in each of these institutions on a five-point scale, ranging from having 'a lot of trust' to having 'very little trust'. While the second item explicitly refers to the person of the present king, the first item is merely about the need of 'a' king and can thus be considered to tap the attitude about the monarchy as an institution.

### 2.2 Predictor variables

*Time of interview* - A chronology of the royal wedding, along with the number of interviews held each week, is given in Table 1. The news of the royal wedding was broken in two newspapers on September 8 and was officially confirmed by the royal palace two days later. During the run-up to the actual wedding, on December 4, a number of smaller events were staged. On October 21, Prince Filip and his fiancée started a tour of the ten Belgian provinces, four of which were visited before the wedding and six afterwards. The palace labelled these visits 'joyful entries', a term that somewhat erroneously refers to the medieval ceremony by which cities accepted the authority of a new king. On November 13, one thousand 'ordinary' citizens from all sections of the population were invited to an engagement party at the royal palace in Laken. On October 19 the euphoria about the wedding was disturbed by allegations in the press, on the occasion of the release of a book about the life of queen Paola, that king Albert has an illegitimate daughter by the name of Delphine Boël (Deweerd 2000: 236). In his traditional Christmas address to the nation, on December 24, the monarch alluded to these allegations, mentioning the crisis that the royal couple had been through thirty years earlier.

In order to test the hypothesis of a gradual increase of royalist feelings during the run-up towards the event and a gradual decline afterwards, two truncated period variables were created: one ranging from October 1 to November 4 (the wedding day) and another one, ranging from November 5 to February 29.<sup>4</sup>

Table 1 : Chronology of the royal wedding and the ISPO survey in Flanders

| Period (1999-2000)          | No. of Interviews | Events   |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|--|
| Sept.                       | 2                 | Sept. 10 : Announcement of royal wedding   |
| Week -9 (Oct. 2 - Oct. 8)   | 41                |  |
| Week -8 (Oct. 9 - Oct. 15)  | 102               |  |
| Week -7 (Oct. 16 - Oct. 22) | 155               | Oct. 19 : News about alleged illegitimate daughter of Albert II<br>Oct. 21 : "joyful entry" in Luxembourg              |
| Week -6 (Oct. 23 - Oct. 29) | 151               | Oct. 25 : "joyful entry" in West Flanders<br>Oct. 28 : "joyful entry" in Walloon Brabant                               |
| Week -5 (Oct. 30 - Nov. 5)  | 176               | Nov. 4 : "joyful entry" in Flemish Brabant   |
| Week -4 (Nov. 6 - Nov. 12)  | 218               |  |
| Week -3 (Nov. 13 - Nov. 19) | 228               | Nov. 13 : engagement party   |
| Week -2 (Nov. 20 - Nov. 26) | 167               |  |
| Week -1 (Nov. 27 - Dec. 3)  | 183               |  |
| Week 1 (Dec. 4 - Dec. 10)   | 158               | Dec. 4 : Royal wedding   |
| Week 2 (Dec. 11 - Dec. 17)  | 110               |  |
| Week 3 (Dec. 18 - Dec. 24)  | 74                |  |
| Week 4 (Dec. 25 - Dec. 31)  | 62                | Dec. 24 : Albert mentions crisis in marriage in traditional Christmas address  |
| Week 5 (Jan. 1 - Jan.7)     | 45                |  |
| Week 6 (Jan. 8 - Jan. 14)   | 53                |  |
| Week 7 (Jan. 15 - Jan. 21)  | 41                | Jan. 18 : "joyful entry" in Liège  |
| Week 8 (Jan. 22 - Jan. 28)  | 50                | Jan. 24 : "joyful entry" in Antwerp  |
| Week 9 (Jan. 29 - Febr. 4)  | 38                |  |
| February                    | 73                | Feb. 9 : "joyful entry" in Hainaut   |
| March                       | 31                | March 1 : "joyful entry" in East Flanders<br>March 8 : "joyful entry" in Namur<br>March 23 : "joyful entry" in Limburg |
| April                       | 2                 |  |

*Political sophistication* - This variable is conceived as consisting of two closely interwoven components: political knowledge and interest in politics (Neuman 1986: 52-57). The survey contains eight political knowledge items, on the basis of which a single knowledge score was computed, and three items<sup>5</sup> measuring interest in politics (about interest in politics in general, following political news in the media and discussing politics with friends), yielding a scale with a reliability of Cronbach's  $\alpha = .77$ .

*Attitude towards immigrants* - The ISPO survey contains eight items measuring the attitude towards Turkish and Moroccan immigrants. Three of the items

express a feeling of being threatened by immigrants in the areas of culture and customs, employment and social security; three others deal with rivalry in the labour market, limitation of the political rights of immigrants, and mistrust of immigrants; the remaining two indicators deal with restrictions on the settlement of immigrants in Belgium. All indicators express unfavourable feelings towards immigrants. The construct has a very high alpha reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .90$ ).

*Authoritarianism* - This concept refers to a cluster of nine sub-syndromes (Adorno et al. 1950), among which strict adherence to conventional values and norms, uncritical subjection to and an uncritical attitude towards moral authorities, and authoritarian aggression towards norm violators may be considered crucial. The last two sub-syndromes are considered to be responsible for the tendency of authoritarian people to define themselves in sharp contrast to other social or ethnic groups (contra-identification). The survey contains five items - measuring the attitude regarding authority in the family, the attitude towards immoral people, the belief in strong leadership, the belief in a leading national vanguard and the position on the issue of criminals' rights - that yield a moderately reliable authoritarianism scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .69$ ).

*Ethical conservatism* - A scale of ethical conservatism was constructed on the basis of three 11-point scales measuring the position on the issues of abortion and euthanasia, with a reliability of Cronbach's  $\alpha = .71$ . Respondents were asked whether they felt that abortion and euthanasia were acceptable in two different circumstances.

*Social solidarity* - Social solidarity can be considered as the reverse of utilitarian individualism, which involves unrestrained striving for personal interests and success without taking others into account (Elchardus & Heyvaert 1990). The latter attitude was measured by four items in the ISPO-survey, involving statements about the rejection of solidarity and that striving for money, power, personal success and personal pleasure should take precedence over the care for other people. These items yielded a scale with a reliability of Cronbach's  $\alpha = .77$ .

*Belgian community support* - A first component of the diffuse support for the Belgian political system is the support for the Belgian political community. This support is measured on the basis of a scale that integrates two closely intertwined attitudes: the extent to which the respondents identify with either Flanders or Belgium on the one hand, and their position on the issue of Flemish autonomy on the other. With regards to the first attitude, respondents

were asked which political entity they identify with in the first place and whether they prefer a dual or an exclusive Belgian or Flemish identity. The four items about Flemish autonomy concern the desired degree of Flemish autonomy (11-point scale), the splitting up of the federal social security system and Flemish independence (two items). These six items yielded a scale with a reliability of Cronbach's  $\alpha = .80$ .

*Regime support* - A scale measuring the support for the political regime, i.e., the second component of diffuse support, was constructed on the basis of two items: the standard Eurobarometer item which asks the respondents whether they are, generally speaking, satisfied with the way democracy works in Belgium and a similarly worded item about the way politics works in Belgium.

*Trust in the political authorities* - Five of the 16 aforementioned trust-items (trust in political parties, trust in the government, trust in parliament, trust in the European parliament and trust in the preferred political party) were included in a scale that can be considered to measure the trust in the political authorities as the third component of diffuse political support (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .85$ ).<sup>6</sup>

*Demographic variables* - The variables were: age (quantitative), gender, church involvement (non-religious respondents, humanists, marginal Catholics, irregular churchgoers and regular churchgoers), education (lower, lower secondary, higher secondary, higher non-university, university), and occupation (executives-professionals, white-collar workers, self-employed, skilled blue-collar workers, unskilled blue-collar workers, no occupation).

### 3 Analysis

#### 3.1 The attitude towards the monarchy

A majority of 54 per cent believed that a king is necessary in Belgium, while 20.7 per cent did not think so and 25.3 per cent had no opinion.<sup>7</sup> 43.1 per cent said they had much or very much confidence in the king against 17 per cent with no confidence and 39.9 per cent who took a middle position (Table 2). The level of trust in the king is considerably higher than the level of trust in the political authorities: 19 per cent said they trusted the parliament, 18.9 per cent the European parliament, 17.2 per cent the government, and a mere 8.4 per cent the political parties. The preferred political party, on the other hand, has a trust score of 48.5 per cent, which is comparable to that of the monarch.

The data confirm the expectation that the attitudes towards the king as a person and towards the monarchy as an institution are intimately related (Table 2). Only a marginal 2.7 per cent of the population combines a negative stance about the monarchy as an institution with a positive attitude towards the present king, something that is more common in Spain. About the same number (2.8 per cent) distrusts the present king while maintaining a belief in the monarchy as an institution.

Table 2. Bivariate relationship between the belief in the necessity of the monarchy and the trust in the king : vertical percentages (1999 General Election Survey Flanders: ISPO)

|                     | Needed        | No opinion     | Not needed     | Total |
|---------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|-------|
| (very) much trust   | 63.4          | 24.2           | 13.3           | 43.1  |
| In between          | 31.4          | 59.3           | 38.2           | 39.9  |
| (very) little trust | 5.3           | 16.5           | 48.5           | 17    |
| N (=100%)           | 1021<br>(54%) | 479<br>(25.3%) | 391<br>(20.7%) | 1892  |

Chi-square (X<sup>2</sup>) = 592.79; df = 4; p < .0001; Cramer's V = .396.

#### 3.2 The impact of a major royal event on royalist feelings

If it is true that Bagehot's "nice and pretty events" are important triggers of royalist feelings amongst the population, we would expect the support for the monarchy to be higher during an eventful period than during a more neutral one. However, this expectation is not borne out by the data. A comparison with the results of the 1995 general election survey (ISPO/PIOP 1998), which were also included the trust item, indicates that the trust in the monarch was lower in 1999 than in 1995. The number of citizens that trust the king more or less has dropped from 50.7 per cent in 1995 to 43.1 per cent in 1999, as is shown in Table 3.<sup>8</sup>



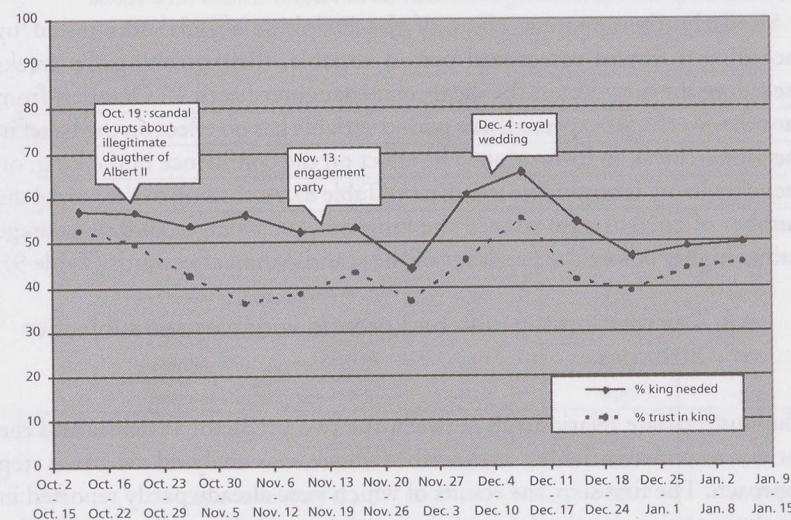
Table 3. Belief in the necessity of a king in 1990 and 1999; trust in the king in 1995 and 1999: vertical percentages (1990 monarchy survey Flanders; 1995 and 1999 General Election Survey Flanders: ISPO)

|                             | 1990 | 1999 |
|-----------------------------|------|------|
| King is needed              | 62.1 | 54   |
| No opinion                  | 14.9 | 25.3 |
| King is not needed          | 23   | 20.7 |
| N (=100%)                   | 993  | 1892 |
|                             | 1995 | 1999 |
| (very) much trust in king   | 50.7 | 43.1 |
| In between                  | 36.5 | 39.5 |
| (very) little trust in king | 12.8 | 17.2 |
| N (=100%)                   | 2029 | 2179 |

A comparison with the 1990 monarchy survey (Maddens 1991) shows that the number of Flemish citizens who believed that a king was necessary in Belgium dropped substantially from 62.1 per cent in 1990 to 54 per cent in 1999. Yet the citizens appear to have become more indifferent rather than more republican, as the number of anti-monarchists has also declined slightly. Thus, either the royal wedding had a negative impact on royalist feelings or, which is more likely, it was not able to reverse the apparent decline of royalist feelings in Flanders.

Still, the royal wedding does appear to have had a short-term impact on royalist feelings. Figure 1 shows the weekly<sup>9</sup> changes in percentages of those who believed a king to be necessary and trusted the king, controlled for the background covariates.<sup>10</sup> The number of citizens who believed a king to be necessary increased to 60.6 per cent in the week preceding the wedding and to 65.5 per cent in the immediate aftermath. However, a mere two weeks after the marriage it had dropped again to the normal level of 54 per cent. The trust variable shows a similar pattern: trust increased in the week preceding the wedding (45.8 per cent), peaked in the first week after the wedding (55.1 per cent), and then dropped rapidly to a normal level (41.2 per cent) in the second week after the wedding. It thus appears that the impact of the wedding is limited to a relatively small and very short upsurge of royalist feelings. Moreover, it is only the actual wedding ceremony that appeared to boost royalism, as neither the 'joyful entries' nor the engagement party appear to have had an impact. In the wake of the latter event, royalist feelings even showed a slight dip. The graph clearly provides little support for the hypothesis that the build-up of momentum leading to the wedding would coincide with a gradual increase of royalist feelings, followed by a gradual decline afterwards.

Figure 1: Percentage believing a king to be needed and trusting the king, by week, controlled for gender, education and church involvement.



Interestingly, trust in the monarch shows a substantial decline of about 16 percentage points in the second half of October, i.e., from 52.6 per cent in the first half of October to 36.3 per cent at the beginning of November. This drop is probably due to the scandal about the monarch's alleged illegitimate daughter that erupted on October 19. After the brief upsurge on the occasion of the actual wedding, the trust dropped to a level well below that registered at the beginning of the period investigated. This finding suggests that the scandal, which was raked up on the occasion of the monarch's Christmas address, may have had a more lasting impact on the confidence in the monarch than the wedding ceremony.

The statistical significance of these effects was tested via a multivariate logistic model controlling for a number of background variables.<sup>11</sup> This analysis confirms that the initial hypothesis of a gradual increase and decline of royalist feelings has to be rejected. Neither the pre-wedding nor the post-wedding truncated period variable has a significant effect on the monarchy variables. In order to capture the brief upsurge of royalist feelings at the time of the wedding, a categorical variable was created that distinguishes a pre-wedding period (until November 26), a wedding period (November 27 to December 10) and a post-wedding period (from December 11 onwards). The effect of this categorical period variable on both the need variable and the trust variable were found to be statistically significant (Tables 4 and 8). In the wedding period, the percentage of respondents that believed a king to be necessary increased by 8.7 per cent (Table 5) and the percentage that trusted

the king by 7.5 per cent (Table 9), controlling for the relevant background variables.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, the apparent effect of the Delphine scandal was tested by including a second categorical period variable, distinguishing the weeks preceding the news about the illegitimate daughter (until 15 October) from the other weeks. As expected, this period variable has no effect on the belief in the monarchy as an institution. The effect on the confidence in the king, on the other hand, is borderline significant (Table 8). According to the model the number of citizens who trusted the king was, on average, 10.8 percentage points higher before the breakout of the scandal than afterwards (Table 9).

### 3.3 The relationship with background variables and subjective attitudes

The multivariate relationship between the two predictor variables and the various response variables, as described above, was analysed via a two step approach. The first step, the results of which were already partly reported in the above section, involved the estimation of the total effects of seven objective background variables, i.e., age, occupation, gender, level of education, church involvement and the two period effects. Age and occupation could be omitted from both models, gender only from the trust model. In the second stage of the analysis, the effects of the various attitudinal variables were estimated, along with the net effects of the relevant background variables.<sup>13</sup>

Table 4. Most appropriate logit model for the belief in the necessity of a king in Belgium and the predictors church involvement, education, gender and time of the survey (1999 General Election Survey Flanders: ISPO)

| Predictors               | L2     | Df | P      | L <sup>2</sup> /df |
|--------------------------|--------|----|--------|--------------------|
| Intercept                | 103.67 | 2  | <.0001 | 51.83              |
| Church involvement       | 114.76 | 8  | <.0001 | 14.35              |
| Education                | 52.65  | 8  | <.0001 | 6.58               |
| Gender                   | 26.09  | 2  | <.0001 | 13.05              |
| Time of survey (wedding) | 12.35  | 4  | .0150  | 3.09               |

Likelihood ratio Chi-square (L2) = 314.28; df = 270; p = .033

G2 = 320.05; df = 24; p = 0,000

Table 5. Net effects on the belief in the necessity of a king in Belgium, estimated in a logit-model with church involvement, education, gender and time of the survey as predictors (1999 General Election Survey Flanders: ISPO, population N = 1868)\*

| Predictors**                    | Does Belgium need a King? |       |            |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------|-------|------------|
|                                 | yes                       | no    | No opinion |
| Mean %                          | 54.0%                     | 20.7% | 25.3%      |
| Church involvement              |                           |       |            |
| No religion (15.0)              | -23.6                     | +16.7 | +6.9       |
| Free thinking (humanists) (9.4) | -15.1                     | +7.2  | +8.0       |
| Marginal Christians (35.2)      | -1.3                      | -3.0  | +1.7       |
| Irregular churchgoers (22.9)    | +6.2                      | -3.6  | -2.6       |
| Regular churchgoers (17.5)      | +16.2                     | -6.8  | -9.4       |
| Education                       |                           |       |            |
| Lower (25.2)                    | +4.2                      | -6.8  | +2.7       |
| Lower secondary (22.1)          | +2.9                      | -4.1  | +1.2       |
| Higher secondary (30.9)         | +3.0                      | -0.1  | -2.9       |
| Higher education (16.3)         | -11.6                     | +11.7 | -0.1       |
| University degree (5.5)         | -13.5                     | +13.8 | -0.2       |
| Gender                          |                           |       |            |
| Men (48.6)                      | -4.0                      | +5.0  | -1.2       |
| Women (51.4)                    | +3.8                      | -5.0  | +1.2       |
| Time of survey                  |                           |       |            |
| Pre-wedding (58.9)              | -0.9                      | -5.2  | +1.4       |
| Wedding (15.9)                  | +8.7                      | -2.9  | -5.2       |
| Post-wedding (25.2)             | -3.5                      | +3.1  | +0.4       |

\* The effects are expressed as percentage point deviation from the mean

\*\* The percentage of respondents in each category between brackets.

Table 6. Most appropriate logit model for the belief in the necessity of a king predicted by the social background variables and a set of the attitudinal predictors (1999 General Election Survey Flanders: ISPO)

| Predictors                           | L2    | df | P       | L2/df |
|--------------------------------------|-------|----|---------|-------|
| Intercept                            | 66.84 | 2  | < .0001 |       |
| Church involvement                   | 74.42 | 8  | < .0001 | 9.30  |
| Education                            | 23.89 | 8  | .0024   | 2.99  |
| Gender                               | 8.17  | 2  | .0169   | 4.09  |
| Time of survey (wedding)             | 10.94 | 4  | .0272   | 2.74  |
| Regime support                       | 23.14 | 6  | < .0001 | 3.86  |
| Political sophistication             | 17.22 | 2  | .0002   | 8.61  |
| Trust in political authorities       | 26.50 | 2  | < .0001 | 13.25 |
| Community support                    | 61.52 | 2  | < .0001 | 30.63 |
| Authoritarianism                     | 17.53 | 2  | .0002   | 8.77  |
| Ethical conservatism                 | 16.56 | 2  | < .0003 | 8.28  |
| Political sophistication * education | 33.88 | 8  | < .0001 | 4.24  |

Likelihood ratio Chi-square (L2) = 3113.72; df = 3.580 ; p = 1.0

G2 = 696.46; df = 48; p = 0,000

Table 7. Additive effect parameters (log odds) of the attitudinal variables on the belief in the necessity of a king, controlled for the background variables (see Model in Table 6) (1999 General Election Survey Flanders: ISPO).

| Predictor                          | Need/no need | No opinion/no need |
|------------------------------------|--------------|--------------------|
| Regime support                     | +.2079***    | +.1643***          |
| Political sophistication           | -.3691***    | -.3703***          |
| Trust in political authorities     | +.2520**     | -.1045             |
| Community support                  | +.5394***    | +.2867***          |
| Authoritarianism                   | +.2288**     | -.0554             |
| Ethical conservatism               | +.3313***    | +.1848*            |
| Political sophistication*education |              |                    |
| Lower educated                     | +.3932*      | +.6154***          |
| Lower secondary                    | -.4652**     | -.7960***          |
| Higher secondary                   | -.0148       | -.0560             |
| Higher (not university)            | +.2339       | +.2864             |
| Reference: University degree       |              |                    |

\* p <= .5; \*\* p <= .01; \*\*\* p <= .001

Table 8. Most appropriate probit model for the trust in the king and the predictors church involvement, education, and time of the survey (1999 General Election Survey Flanders: ISPO)

| Predictors                 | L <sup>2</sup> | Df | P       | L2/df |
|----------------------------|----------------|----|---------|-------|
| Intercept                  | 38.20          | 2  | < .0001 |       |
| Church involvement         | 143.78         | 8  | < .0001 | 17.97 |
| Education                  | 82.32          | 8  | < .0001 | 10.29 |
| Time of survey 1 : scandal | 7.52           | 2  | .0232   | 3.76  |
| Time of survey 2 : wedding | 15.15          | 4  | .00521  | 3.79  |

Likelihood ratio Chi-square (L2) = 267.46; df = 174; p <= .0001

G2 = 338.03; df = 24; p = 0,000

Table 9. Net effects on the trust in the king estimated in a logit-model with church involvement, education, gender and time of the survey as predictors (1999 General Election Survey Flanders: ISPO, Flemish population N = 1868)\*

| Predictors**                    | Trust in the King |            |               |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|------------|---------------|
|                                 | (very) much       | in between | (very) little |
| Mean %                          | 43.1%             | 39.6%      | 17.3%         |
| Church involvement              |                   |            |               |
| No religion (15.0)              | -13.2             | +1.1       | +12.1         |
| Free thinking (humanists) (9.4) | -15.4             | +2.2       | +13.2         |
| Marginal Christians (35.2)      | -0.6              | +2.2       | -1.6          |
| Irregular churchgoers (22.9)    | +7.4              | -0.9       | -6.5          |
| Regular churchgoers (17.5)      | +12.2             | -5.7       | -6.5          |
| Education                       |                   |            |               |
| Lower (25.2)                    | +12.1             | -8.6       | -3.4          |
| Lower secondary (22.1)          | +0.1              | +4.9       | -2.8          |
| Higher secondary (30.9)         | -0.4              | +2.5       | -2.1          |
| Higher education (16.3)         | -15.9             | +5.6       | +10.3         |
| University degree (5.5)         | -13.5             | +2.6       | +10.9         |
| Time of survey 1                |                   |            |               |
| Pre scandal (6.5)               | +10.8             | +0.2       | +0.5          |
| Post scandal (93.5)             | -0.8              | -3.5       | -7.2          |
| Time of survey 2                |                   |            |               |
| Pre-wedding (58.9)              | -1.8              | +2.0       | -0.3          |
| Wedding (15.9)                  | +7.5              | -2.7       | -4.8          |
| Post-wedding (25.2)             | -0.8              | -2.6       | +3.4          |

\* The effects are expressed as percentage point deviation from the mean

\*\* The percentage of respondents in each category between brackets.

Table 10. Most appropriate logit model for the trust in the king predicted by the social background variables and a set of the attitudinal predictors (1999 General Election Survey Flanders: ISPO)

| Predictors                  | L <sup>2</sup> | Df | P      | L <sup>2</sup> /df |
|-----------------------------|----------------|----|--------|--------------------|
| Intercept                   | 98.99          | 2  | <.0001 |                    |
| Church involvement          | 78.02          | 8  | <.0001 | 9.75               |
| Education                   | 34.42          | 8  | <.0001 | 4.30               |
| Time of survey 1 : scandal  | 6.03           | 2  | .0491  | 3.02               |
| Time of survey 2 : wedding  | 16.18          | 4  | .0028  | 4.05               |
| Regime support              | 69.80          | 2  | <.0001 | 34.90              |
| Community support           | 43.9           | 2  | <.0001 | 21.95              |
| Authoritarianism            | 34.12          | 2  | <.0001 | 17.06              |
| Ethical conservatism        | 24.27          | 2  | <.0001 | 12.14              |
| Attitude towards immigrants | 19.69          | 2  | <.0001 | 9.85               |

Likelihood ratio Chi-square (L2) = 3722.96; df = 4.042 ; p = 1.0

G2 = 731.37; df = 34; p <= 0,0001

Table 11. Additive effect parameters (log odds) of the attitudinal variables on the trust in the king, controlled for the background variables (see model in Table 10) (1999 General Election Survey Flanders: ISPO)

| Predictor                           | Trust/no trust | In between/no trust |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Regime support                      | +.3279***      | +.1448**            |
| Community support                   | +.4525***      | +.1878**            |
| Authoritarianism                    | +.5238***      | +.2446**            |
| Ethical conservatism                | +.2876***      | +.0394              |
| Negative attitude toward immigrants | -.2698**       | -.3811***           |

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

On the basis of the Bagehot model, it was hypothesized that royalist feelings would be most intense amongst the citizens with a low level of education and a low degree of political sophistication. Education does appear to be significantly related to both the belief in the necessity of the monarchy and the trust in the king. The total effects, controlling for the other relevant background variables, are shown in Tables 5 and 9 respectively. The number of monarchists decreases substantially amongst the citizens with a higher non-university education (-11.6) and those with a university degree (-13.5). Similarly, the level of trust in the king drops with 15.9 amongst those with a higher non-university education and with 13.5 amongst those with a

university degree. The trust in the king increases sharply amongst the citizens on the lowest educational level (+12.1).

The effect of political sophistication is limited to the belief in the monarchy as an institution, the confidence in the king being unaffected by this variable. As expected, the more citizens are interested in and know about politics, the more they are convinced that a king is not needed (Tables 6 and 7). However, this effect depends to a substantial degree on the level of education, as indicated by the significant interaction effect in Table 6. Table 12 shows a simple cross-tabulation of the belief in the necessity for a king by political sophistication (higher and lower half of the population), according to level of education. It shows that a high level of political sophistication is only related to a lower support for the monarchy amongst the highly educated citizens. In the other three categories, royalist feelings appear to be more or less 'immune' from political sophistication, as the percentage of royalists remains more or less constant. Perhaps it takes a certain amount of critical sense, learned at the higher levels of education, for the politically interested to start questioning the monarchy. Yet in all categories, the highly educated sophisticates included, a plurality supports the monarchy. It can also be seen that, with the notable exception of those with the lowest level of education, the politically sophisticated citizens are generally less inclined to give a 'no opinion' answer and are thus more polarized with regard to the monarchy.

Table 12. The belief in the necessity of the monarchy by political sophistication (two levels) and level of education : vertical percentages (1999 General Election Survey Flanders: ISPO)

| Education          | Lower |      | Lower secondary |      | Higher secondary |      | Higher/university |      |
|--------------------|-------|------|-----------------|------|------------------|------|-------------------|------|
|                    | Low   | High | low             | high | Low              | high | Low               | High |
| Political sophist. |       |      |                 |      |                  |      |                   |      |
| Needed             | 63.9  | 59.1 | 54.4            | 56   | 56.3             | 52.5 | 46.5              | 39.9 |
| No opinion         | 23.3  | 31.3 | 34.7            | 16   | 27.7             | 19.5 | 29.2              | 23.7 |
| Not needed         | 12.8  | 9.6  | 10.9            | 28   | 16               | 28.1 | 24.5              | 36.5 |
| N (=100%)          | 332   | 145  | 241             | 176  | 298              | 582  | 167               | 249  |

As argued above, the Bagehot model implies that royalist feelings will coincide with a strong diffuse support for the political system. More specifically, royalists will tend to support the political regime, to trust the political authorities and to have a strong identification with the political community. As suggested by Shils and Young, the latter relationship may also imply a higher sense of social solidarity amongst royalists.

The analysis confirms that royalists are characterized by a high degree of diffuse political support for the political system (Tables 6, 7, 10 and 11). Citizens who trust the political authorities are substantially more inclined to believe that a king is needed.<sup>14</sup> As far as Belgian community support is concerned, the larger the citizens' affiliation with the Belgian nation, the more they feel that Belgium needs a monarchy and the more they trust the king. From Bagehot's perspective, it is the attachment to the monarch that causes the citizens to identify with the nation that he or she symbolizes. Royalist feelings are also significantly related to the third component of diffuse political support, i.e., support for the political regime. As expected, monarchists are more satisfied with the way democracy and politics work in Belgium. On the other hand, the expectation that royalist feelings go together with a strong sense of social solidarity is not borne out by the data, the latter variable having no significant effect on either of the two monarchy variables.

Bagehot describes the attitude towards the monarchy amongst the masses as a form of uncritical deference to an external authority. In the same vein, as explained above, Rose and Kavanagh suspect that the stronger support for the political system amongst royalists may be related to a more general tendency towards authoritarianism in this group. Our analysis confirms this suspicion: the more the citizens are attached to the monarchy, the more they also tend to adopt a authoritarian attitude (Tables 6, 7, 10 and 11) in the sense that they favour strong leadership and are intolerant towards those who violate the norms.

On the basis of the more political approach, it can be expected that royalist feelings will be more intense to the extent that the citizens have a similar political and ideological profile as the monarch. As explained above, the Belgian king is generally considered to be a devoted Catholic and to be someone who takes a conservative position on ethical issues. Also, he combines a strong stance in favour of national unity with a multicultural and anti-racist position. It has already been shown that royalist feelings increase substantially amongst those citizens who share the monarch's strong attachment to Belgian unity. However, viewed from a political perspective, it is the support for Belgium that causes the citizens to endorse the monarchy, rather than vice versa.

Tables 4 and 8 show that church involvement has a high total effect on both the belief that a king is needed and the trust in the king. The percentage of monarchists rises with 16.7 per cent amongst the regular churchgoers and drops with -23.6 per cent and -15.1 per cent amongst the citizens without religious conviction and the humanists, respectively, controlling for the other relevant background variables (Table 5). Similarly, the degree of trust increases sharply in the first category (+12.2 per cent) and declines in the latter two (-13.2 and -15.4 per cent, respectively) (see Table 9). The intermediate categories (marginal Christians and irregular churchgoers) have a smaller

effect. The sharp difference in royalist feelings between the regular and the irregular churchgoers suggests that the strong link between royalism and church involvement might also to a certain extent be traced back to a more general attachment to traditional practice amongst royalists and churchgoers, apart from religious conviction as such. However this attitude of 'traditionalism' was not measured in the ISPO-survey.

As indicated by the second stage of the analysis, part of the total effect of church involvement can be accounted for by the fact that churchgoers share the monarch's position of ethical conservatism. This attitude has a medium effect on the two components of royalism, in the sense that an ethically conservative position coincides with a royalist attitude (Tables 6, 7, 10 and 11). At the same time, the effect of church involvement is substantially reduced.

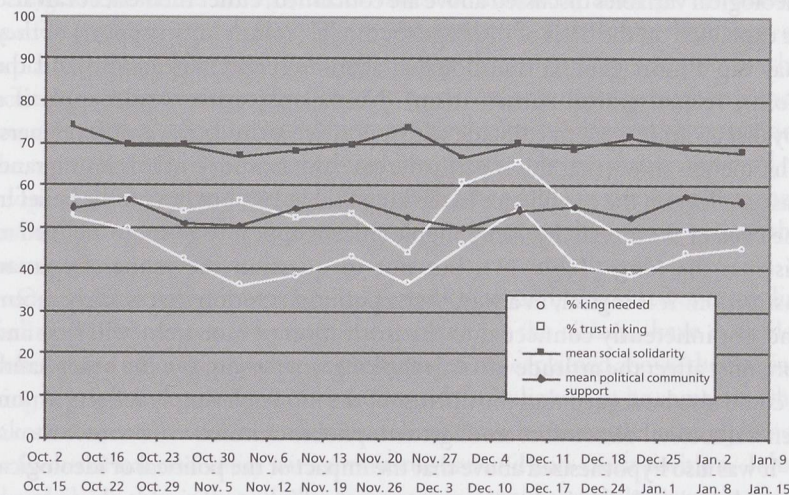
Assessing the relationship between the attitude towards the immigrants and royalism provides a crucial test of the political model. As far as the political and ideological variables discussed above are concerned, either their effect can also be explained on the basis of the Bagehot model (community support) or they may tap a more general traditionalist attitude (church affiliation and the closely related ethical conservatism). Neither objection would apply if a royalist attitude were to coincide with a positive attitude towards foreigners. The analysis shows that this is partly the case: the attitude towards immigrants has an effect on the confidence in the king (Table 10), but not on the belief in the need of the monarchy. Xenophobic citizens appear to be more inclined to distrust the king (Table 11), but not to question the monarchy as an institution. It is logical, in a way, that a political position that is fairly recent and not inherently connected to the institution of monarchy will first and foremost affect the attitude towards the king as a person. On the other hand, it could also be argued that the distrust of the monarch simply reflects a more general societal discomfort amongst xenophobic citizens.

It was also hypothesized above that the impact of the political or ideological variables might be limited to the citizens with a higher political sophistication, as the less sophisticated would probably take a pro-royalist stance irrespective of the monarch's political position. In that case, we should find a statistically significant interaction effect between the political variables and political sophistication. However, this proved not to be the case. The above reported relationship between royalist feelings and political attitudes apparently does not differ according to political sophistication.

### 3.4 The impact of a royal event on diffuse political support and social solidarity

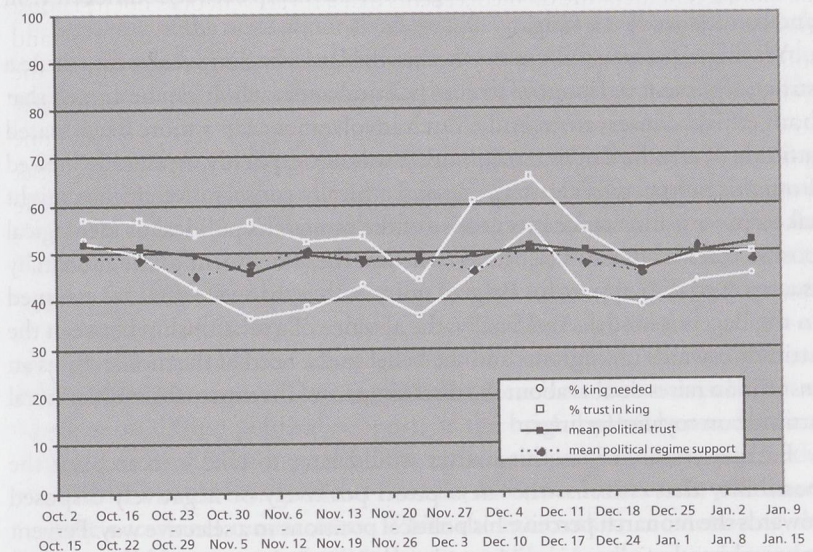
As discussed in the introduction, it is assumed both by Shils and Young and in the more recent literature on media events that a royal event does not just boost royalist feelings, but also has a major 'spin off' effect on social cohesion and political support in society. Figures 2 and 3 show a week-by-week plot of the average values of the three political support variables and the social solidarity-variable, controlled for the relevant background variables. It is clear that none of the four variables is substantially affected by the royal event. There is no peak at the time of the royal wedding, neither is there a gradual increase before the event nor a decline afterwards.

Figure 2: Percentage believing a king to be needed and trusting the king, by week, controlled for gender, education and church involvement.



A statistical test of these preliminary findings is provided by a number of regression analyses with as response variables support for the Belgian political community, trust in the political authorities, support for the political regime and social solidarity, and as predictors the relevant background variables and the period-variables.<sup>15</sup> The analysis confirms that the levels of political trust, regime support and social solidarity did not change significantly on the occasion of the wedding. Neither the truncated period variables, nor the categorical period variable (pre-wedding, wedding, post-wedding) had a significant effect. The only exception is the level of community support, which appears to have been slightly higher in the post-wedding period than in the wedding period (categorical variable), but this effect has only borderline significance.<sup>16</sup>

Figure 3: Figure 2 and mean political trust (controlled for age, occupation, education and church involvement) and mean political regime support (controlled for age, education and church involvement), by week.



## 4 Summary and discussion

This research corroborates Bagehot's intuition that royalist feelings are closely related to diffuse support for the political system. Citizens who support the monarchy as an institution and trust the king as a person are more inclined to be satisfied with the political regime and to support the political community. They also have more confidence in the political authorities. Also in line with the Bagehot model are the findings that a pro-royalist stance tends to coincide with a deferent attitude towards authority, a low level of education and, albeit less consistently, a low level of political sophistication. In addition, the analysis confirms that attitudes towards the king as a person and the monarchy as an institution are closely intertwined.

On the other hand, the data also provide some support for a more political approach to royalism, based on the notion that support for the monarchy is founded on the agreement with the political profile of the king, rather than on deference towards authority or awe for the mystery surrounding the monarch. The strongest correlates of royalist feelings are related to issues on which the Belgian monarchs have adopted a strong political profile, i.e., the community issue and the ethical issue. The Belgian monarchs share with their supporters

a strong attachment to Belgian unity and a conservative stance on ethical issues, related to a strong affiliation with the Catholic church. Also, the strong pro-immigrant and anti-racist position, which the monarchs have recently taken, appears to be reflected in a negative relationship between ethnocentrism and confidence in the king.

Yet there is some doubt as to whether the latter findings really constitute a strong argument in favour of a more political approach. It can be argued that both ethical conservatism and church involvement tap a more deep-seated attitude of attachment to tradition that was not explicitly measured. Viewed from this perspective, churchgoing and ethically conservative citizens might take a pro-royalist stance irrespective of the monarch's political or ideological position. It also remains to be seen whether the attachment to the monarchy is a result of the support for Belgian unity, rather than vice versa, as assumed in the Bagehot model. And finally, the absence of a relationship between the attitude towards immigrants and the belief in the need of the monarchy as an institution raises doubts about the direct impact of the monarch's multicultural attitude on royalist feelings.

Further research into this matter would have to take into account the possibility that citizens who are a priori positively or negatively disposed towards the monarch perceive his political positions in a selective way. Fervent monarchists, for instance, might project their own views onto the figure of the king. Unfortunately, data on the perceived positions of the monarch were not available for this research. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to expect that the highly educated and politically sophisticated citizens have a more accurate view of the monarch's political position and are thus more inclined to take these into account when assessing the monarchy. Conversely, the poorly educated citizens with a low level of political sophistication might conform more to the Bagehot model and show an unconditional reverence for the king. However, no support was found for this hypothesis as none of the predictor variables in the model significantly interacts with political sophistication.

The ISPO-survey, carried out at the time of the 1999 royal wedding, provides a unique opportunity to assess the impact of a major royal event on royalist feelings, diffuse political support and social solidarity. The hypothesis that there would be a gradual increase of royalist feelings in the run-up to the event, and a gradual decrease afterwards, had to be rejected. Instead, the event appears to cause a very brief, though substantial, upsurge of royalism, starting about a week before the event and subsiding shortly afterwards. The research thus suggests that royal events have ceased to be major generators of royalist feelings, as they appear to have been in Bagehot's time. Nowadays, the impact of an event is simply too short-lived to be able to account for the popularity of the monarchy in the long run. This finding seems to concur with Billig's notion that the interest in royalty is not tidal, i.e., it is not determined by a

calendar of ceremonial occasions, but rather sustained on a daily basis by the popular press and its continuous focus on royalty (Billig 1992: 5-7). Our finding that the popularity of the monarch as a person is very fickle and fluctuates in response to the media is also more or less in line with this notion. The breaking of the news about an alleged illegitimate daughter immediately led to a sharp decline of confidence in the king. On the other hand, the opinion about the monarchy as an institution appeared to be unaffected by this scandal.

It is assumed in the literature that media events, of which a royal wedding is an excellent example, have a major spin-off effect on diffuse political support and social cohesion. Yet the analysis shows that neither the support for the Belgian political community, nor the trust in the political authorities, nor the support for the political regime nor the feelings of social solidarity increased on the occasion of the royal wedding. These findings may shed some light on the difficult matter of the causal connection between royalist feelings and diffuse political support. They suggest that there is no direct causal effect of royalism on diffuse political support, as the brief royalist boom does not coincide with a similar increase of the various support components. On the other hand, it could be argued that there is a difference between the permanent and the occasional monarchists. While the monarchist conviction of the former could be a source of political support, this is hardly to be expected of the latter, whose royalist stance is probably nothing more than an ephemeral and emotional response to the wedding, or even a response that is considered socially desirable under the circumstances. Distinguishing these various types of monarchists, however, would require further research on the basis of panel data.

## Appendix

*Construction of scales used in the analysis\**

|   | Factor loadings |
|---|-----------------|
| <b>Political Sophistication</b>   |                 |
| Political knowledge (score on 8 knowledge items).   | .70             |
| Are you very interested in politics, or are you not at all interested?  | .85             |
| How often do you follow the political news on the radio, television or in the newspaper?  | .78             |
| When you are with friends, do you discuss politics?   | .75             |
| Cronbach's $\alpha$ : .77   |                 |
| <b>Attitude towards immigrants**</b>  |                 |
| Guest workers are a threat to the employment of Belgians.   | .79             |
| Guest workers come here to take advantage of our social security system.  | .84             |
| Muslims are a threat to our culture and customs.  | .69             |
| If the number of jobs decreases, the guest workers should be repatriated.   | .82             |
| The participation of immigrants in any political activity in Belgium should be forbidden.   | .77             |
| In general, immigrants cannot be trusted.   | .81             |
| Belgium should not have allowed guest-workers into the country.   | .72             |
| The conditions for foreigners to become a Belgian should be more strict.  | .73             |
| Cronbach's $\alpha$ : .90   |                 |
| <b>Authoritarianism</b>   |                 |
| Obedience and respect for authority are the two most important virtues children have to learn.  | .72             |
| Most of our problems would be solved, if we could somehow get rid of the immoral, crooked people.   | .61             |
| What we need are strong leaders who tell us what to do.   | .71             |
| In every nation there is a national devoted vanguard, which leads, and a docile mass.   | .63             |
| These days, criminals have too many rights.   | .64             |
| Cronbach's $\alpha$ : .69   |                 |
| <b>Ethical conservatism</b>   |                 |
| In your opinion, to what extent is it acceptable for a woman to have an abortion if she wishes to? (11-point scale)                                     | .75             |
| Suppose a doctor can stop someone's suffering by giving the person an injection at his/her own request. How acceptable is this to you? (11-point scale) | .87             |
| Suppose a doctor can stop someone's suffering by stopping the medical treatment. How acceptable is this to you? (11-point scale)                        | .78             |
| Cronbach's $\alpha$ : .71   |                 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>Utilitarian individualism</b>   |     |
| Humanity, brotherhood, solidarity are all nonsense. Everybody has to take care of himself first and defend his own interests.  | .77 |
| What counts is money and power; the rest is just hot air.  | .73 |
| Striving for personal success is more important than providing for good relations with your fellowman  | .78 |
| People should always pursue their personal pleasure, and shouldn't think too much about others.  | .80 |
| Cronbach's $\alpha$ : .77  |     |
| <b>Community support</b>   |     |
| Which group do you consider yourself to be a member of in the first place? (Belgium/Flanders/community or city)?   | .85 |
| Do you consider yourself only as a Fleming/more Fleming than Belgian/ as much Fleming as Belgian/more Belgian than Fleming/only as a Belgian?  | .69 |
| Some think that Flanders must be able to decide everything itself. Others think that Belgians, Flemings and Walloons together, must be able to decide about everything. What is your opinion? (11-point scale) | .76 |
| The social security system should be split up (federalized).   | .68 |
| Flanders has to become independent.  | .81 |
| Flanders should be autonomous even against the will of the majority.   | .70 |
| Cronbach's $\alpha$ : .80  |     |
| <b>Regime support</b>  |     |
| In general, how satisfied are you with the way politics works in Belgium? (4-point scale)  |     |
| In general, how satisfied are you with the functioning of democracy in Belgium? (4-point scale)  |     |
| Pearson r : .45  |     |
| <b>Trust in political authorities</b>  |     |
| Do you trust the political parties?  | .78 |
| Do you trust the government?   | .90 |
| Do you trust parliament?   | .90 |
| Do you trust the European parliament?  | .73 |
| Do you trust your preferred political party?   | .65 |
| Cronbach's $\alpha$ : .85  |     |

\* All items are 5-point scales, unless stated otherwise.

\*\* This battery of items was introduced as follows: "The following questions concern immigrants, by which we mean primarily Turks and Moroccans."



## Notes

1. Jones (1964: 229) develops a very similar argument from a psycho-analytic perspective. In his view, the monarchy involves a decomposition of the figure of the ruler into two different persons, one untouchable, sacrosanct and irremovable, the other vulnerable to criticism and doomed to be eventually expelled from power. This decomposition alleviates the aggressive potentialities in the relationship between the governed and the governing.
2. These data were made available by the ISPO, Interuniversity Centre for Political Opinion Research, sponsored by the Federal Services for Technical, Cultural and Scientific Affairs. The data were originally collected by Jaak Billiet, Marc Swyngedouw, Astrid Depickere and Erik Meersseman. Neither the original collectors of the data nor the Centre bear any responsibility for the analysis or the interpretations presented here.
3. This item was included in the written part of the questionnaire, which the respondents had to complete and return by mail immediately after the oral part. The sample size for this written part of the survey was 1951 (Meersseman et al. 2001: 12).
4. The days outside the defined period are coded zero, the days within the period are coded from 1 onwards. The authors wish to thank dr. Jarl Kampen for suggesting this procedure.
5. All items used to construct the scales are five-point items, unless stated differently. For all scales, except the scale for political regime support, the factor scores of the first principal component were used. The factor loadings and further technical details about the scales are given in the Appendix.
6. A factor analysis shows that these five items constitute a latent variable that can be distinguished from the trust in more traditional institutions such as the church and the king or the trust in non-political institutions such as the police and the legal system.
7. For all analyses reported in this article, the ISPO 99 data were weighted according to age, gender, education and voting behaviour 1999 (Meersseman et al. 2001: 16-17).
8. The 1995 ISPO data were weighted according to age, gender and voting behaviour 1995.
9. At the beginning and at the end of the period investigated, some weeks had to be merged in order to obtain enough respondents per period. This was the case with the weeks from Oct.2 to Oct.15, Dec.18 to Dec.31, Jan. 1 to Jan. 21, and Jan. 22 to Febr. 28. The N's in Figure 1 are as follows, for need : Oct.2-Oct.15: 126, Oct.16-Oct.22: 135, Oct.23-Oct.29: 142, Oct.30-Nov.5: 170, Nov.6-Nov.12: 198, Nov.13-Nov.19: 200, Nov.20-Nov.26: 135, Nov.27-Dec.3: 167, Dec.4-Dec.10: 131, Dec.11-Dec.17: 91, Dec.18-Dec.31: 109, Jan.1-Jan.21: 111, Jan.22-Febr.28: 133; for trust : Oct.2-Oct.15: 139, Oct.16-Oct.22: 148, Oct.23-Oct.29: 157, Oct.30-Nov.5: 184, Nov.6-Nov.12: 212, Nov.13-Nov.19: 217, Nov.20-Nov.26: 160, Nov.27-Dec.3: 187, Dec.4-Dec.10: 157, Dec.11-Dec.17: 112, Dec.18-Dec.31: 139, Jan.1-Jan.21: 136, Jan.22-Febr.28: 174.

10. I.e., the background variables that are shown to have a significant effect on need and trust: gender, level of education and church involvement for need and level of education and church involvement for trust. In this way, random sample fluctuations were accounted for.
11. A multinomial logistic model was applied, using the SAS-CATMOD-procedure, with need (three categories) and trust (three categories) as dependent variables and as independent variables: age, gender, church involvement, level of education, occupation and period of survey. Age and occupation could be omitted from both models. Gender could be omitted from the model for trust. The L2/df ratio is used as a rough measure for the explanatory power of the predictor variable.
12. Instead of the additive parameters provided by the SAS-CATMOD-procedure, we report the deviations from the grand mean, which are easier to interpret. The additive parameters are first transformed into multiplicative parameters via a SAS-programme developed by Billiet. They are then transformed into cell percentages via an iterative proportional fitting procedure applied to the tables in which the observed marginals are maintained. This is done with the WEIGHT-software, developed by Hajnal (1995). The methodology is described in Swyngedouw (1989: 187-190) and is based on a procedure developed by Kaufman and Schervish (1986; 1987).
13. The attitudinal variables are included as quantitative variables. The additive effect parameters are reported, expressing the average increase in the log odds of the dependent variable per unit change in the scales. For practical reasons, only the parameters of the attitudinal variables are reported in Tables 7 and 11.
14. Including the political trust variable in the model predicting the trust in the king yields an extremely high effect. It has to be taken into account, however, that the latter relationship is most probably artificially inflated because the items used to construct the trust in the political authorities variable and the item about the trust in the king formed part of the same battery of trust items. It was therefore decided to omit the political trust variable from the trust model. As a result of this omission, the effect of regime support on the confidence in the king increases substantially.
15. Significant control variables in the regression for Belgian community support: age, church involvement; for trust in the political authorities: age, occupation, education, church involvement; for political regime support: age, education, church involvement; for social solidarity: occupation, education, church involvement.
16. Unstandardized Parameters : pre-wedding =  $-.06$  ( $df=1$ ,  $p=.21$ ), wedding =  $-.07$  ( $df=1$ ,  $p=.029$ ), post-wedding = reference.

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