

BATTLEFIELD ANTWERP

How Socialists Lost City Hall

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This contribution is an analysis of the 2012 local elections in Antwerp. Some of the many explanations for the Sp.a/CD&V City List's poor performance are examined critically and found wanting: the inner city is not left-wing; immigrant communities did not vote exclusively for the Left Party (PVDA+) and it is unlikely that an Sp.a/Green alliance would necessarily have defeated victor, and now Mayor, Bart De Wever of the Flemish nationalist N-VA. In spite of a good campaign and good results compared with its performance elsewhere in the major cities, the Sp.a's current party model in Antwerp is under review because it appears no longer capable of conducting a grass-root campaign effectively. It is argued here that if the party is to win elections, its campaigns must target the grass roots and be marketing-driven.

DOES THE INNER CITY VOTE FOR THE LEFT AND THE SUBURBS FOR THE RIGHT?

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Without research this question cannot properly be answered since there is no single district that is entirely inner-city, or *intra muros*, which most Antwerp residents consider to be the area within the ring road and on the right bank. The district of Antwerp (20 to 24% *extra muros*) also includes the left bank; the districts of Borgerhout (33% *extra muros*) and Berchem (63% *extra muros*) have a significant number, if not the majority, of voters outside the walls.¹ So there is little point in talking about an inner or outer city. So should we then distinguish between left-wing and right-wing districts and ignore that unfortunate distinction, so popular with election analysts, between Antwerp within and without its walls? It appears that when analysing Antwerp's municipal election results one is sometimes forgetting that there is such a thing as the political centre in between left and right. Let us first look at the results from the perspective of 'left-centre-right'. Table 1 provides a start.

This division naturally raises the controversial question of whether the Sp.a/CD&V City List should be regarded as a centre grouping. The answer is clearly yes. CD&V is still more than simply an umbrella for the Christian Employers Organisations. And former Mayor Patrick Janssens' book *Voor wat hoort wat* [*You get nothing for nothing*] made it quite apparent that he was not trying to create a left-wing cartel.

So what should we note? The first thing is that where the Sp.a and the CD&V did not collaborate, the centre was marginalised. Next, whereas the majority in the town as a whole can be regarded as being in the political centre, there are different divisions in the districts. In the district of Antwerp there are clearly three blocs (left-centre-right). The Berchem and Hoboken districts are polarised between left and right. Borgerhout is clearly left-wing but with a strong right-wing bloc. In Berendrecht-Zandvliet-Lilli (B-Z-L) there is no left-wing and the electorate is divided between the right and the centre. In Deurne, Merksem, Wilrijk and Ekeren a right-wing bloc has almost an absolute majority but

Table 1: Election results for the city of Antwerp (town council) and by district (district councils) divided between left, right and centre*.

District/town		left	right	centre	Total	sp.a's share	Cartel name
Town	%	15,9	43,3	28,6		28,6	SP.a CD&V (City List)
	Seats	8	25	17	55		
Antwerp	%	23,5	37,5	29,6		29,6	SP.a CD&V (City List)
	Seats	8	12	10	33		
Berchem	%	40,9	43,7	7,8		34,8	SP.a Green
	Seats	10	11	2	25		
Borgerhout**	%	53,2	29,9	7,8		36,1	SP.a Green
	Seats	13	8	2	25		
Wilrijk	%	31,0	46,3	9,0		16,3	SP.a
	Seats	6	12	2	23		
Hoboken **	%	37,2	40,7	6,1		20,8	SP.a Green
	Seats	9	9	1	23		
Deurne	%	33,7	45,4	5,5		23,9	SP.a Green
	Seats	10	14	1	29		
Merksem	%	27,2	47,6	8,1		22,5	SP.a Green
	Seats	7	12	2	25		
Ekeren	%	25,6	47,9	8,0		14,6	SP.a
	Seats	5	10	1	19		
B-Z-L	%		38,6	32,0		32	SP.a/Green CD&V/Open-VLD
	Seats		6	5	15		

* Only includes parties with at least one seat (i.e. of any political relevance). The extreme right-wing Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest) party is omitted. Left-wing: Sp.a, Sp.a-Groen, PVDA+; Right-wing: N-VA, Open VLD; Centre: CD&V, SP.A-CD&V City List. B-Z-L: Berendrecht – Zandvliet – Lillo (rural area north of Antwerp adjoining the harbour). Beside the city of Antwerp, there exist the district of Antwerp.

** Borgerhout: PVDA+= 17,1%; Hoboken PVDA+=16,4%

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between a quarter and a third of the voters are left-wing. Deurne and Merksem were bulwarks of the extreme right-wing Flemish Interest [Vlaams Belang] in 2006. In Ekeren in 2012 the Flemish Interest and the Open VLD Liberals were wiped out by the moderate Flemish nationalist N-VA. In Wilrijk rather surprisingly the Liberals have held onto their position.

Let us be quite clear about it: the notion of a left-wing inner city and the right-wing suburbs is simply misleading. There is only one left-wing district and that is Borgerhout.

REDISTRIBUTION ON THE RIGHT

The redistribution of right-wing seats clearly went further in the province of Antwerp than in the other provinces. It is no coincidence that the extreme right VB (Flemish Interest) has always had most support in the province of Antwerp and the redistribution had its greatest impact in the VB's home base, Antwerp City. In a sense, the Socialist/Christian democrat City List became a victim of the successful *cordon sanitaire* which the parties had imposed on the VB. The N-VA offered an alternative to Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest) supporters that was unaffected by the *cordon sanitaire* but still sufficiently anti-immigration. The previously ever-loyal VB voters changed their coats without much apparent difficulty. Furthermore, it was almost inevitable that a proportion of the centre-right voters who supported Patrick Janssens (Sp.a) against Filip Dewinter (VB) in 2006 would also go over to Bart De Wever and the N-VA in 2012.

It is therefore not surprising that the N-VA's electoral map in Flanders looks like a carbon copy of the Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest) map from the period 1995-2007. It raises a crucial question about the future: whether the N-VA can continue to grow outside the province and city of Antwerp and follow the example of the VB which expanded out from Antwerp in the direction of Ghent and Brussels. The results of the 2012 provincial elections show that the N-VA has expanded rapidly in the province of Antwerp but in Flanders as a whole it has not done much more than maintain the status quo since the federal elections of 2010. In contrast, between 1991 and 2004, the Vlaams Blok/Belang (Flemish Bloc/Interest)² was able to make gains in every election at every level.

DIVISIONS ON THE LEFT

It is constantly claimed in the press that (then Mayor) Patrick Janssens might have been able to beat (now Mayor) Bart De Wever if he had not shifted towards the centre by allying with the Christian Democrats, but instead had moved in the other direction by making an alliance with the Greens. The success of the Sp.a-Green cartel in Ghent is produced as evidence.³

However, the results of the district council elections suggest otherwise. In three districts, the Sp.a and Green did in fact collaborate in both 2006 and 2012. And the outcome? In Merksem a loss of 5.1 percentage points or 18% of the voters; in Borgerhout 6.4 fewer percentage points or 15% fewer votes; and in Deurne a drop of 7.5 percentage points or 24% fewer voters. Also in the other districts support for the individual Sp.a and Green electoral lists was consistently lower in 2012 than in 2006. Only in Ekeren was the status quo maintained, and that is a district where the Left party (PVDA+) only attracted 2.7% of the vote. If one studies the results of the PVDA+, it is hard to avoid the impression that, with the possible exception of Merksem where it only won 4.7% of the vote, its success had its impact on the support for the Sp.a and Greens, both together and separately. There are other arguments to support the notion that a move to centre-left would not necessarily have led to a Janssens victory. Whereas in 2006 all left wing voters, from centre-left to the radical-left, supported Janssens against Dewinter, this clearly did not happen in 2012. Well-known figures from the art world either stood for the PVDA+ or publicly supported it; even an elected member of the Sp.a became one of their candidates. It is highly unlikely that this did not attract some of Janssens' previous supporters to the PVDA+. In the three districts where the Greens campaigned separately (Antwerp, Ekeren and Wilrijk) and in the city of Antwerp, they were very successful.

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Left-wing voters simply spread their votes across the various possible parties and did not regard a strategic vote for the 'City List' to keep out De Wever as a worthy alternative.

THE IMMIGRANT VOTE

While nobody dares to state publicly that pre-election opinion polls by telephone and over the internet are credible and reliable, oddly enough they suddenly do become credible when applied to the Greens. The Greens, we are told, did worse than expected (by the same polls that did not see the success of the PVDA+).⁴ Even though in retrospect it turned out that one of the two last minute polls was closer to the actual outcome than the other, such surveys are still of little use because at the moment of publication (just before the elections) this is still not clear. They give little guidance to either voters or politicians. Nevertheless, it is generally assumed that both the Greens and the City List cartel lost immigrant votes to the PVDA+ whose success is thereby reduced to 'the immigrant vote'. Note that this kills two birds with one stone. It marginalises the PVDA+ to the status of an immigrant party, and marginalises the immigrant vote to the extreme left.

Of course, Janssens lost some immigrant support compared with 2006. We do not need research to see that. After all, the battle was no longer against Dewinter and the anti-immigrant Flemish Interest [Vlaams Belang] and while in office Janssens had forbidden the wearing of the head scarf in public functions. Both these factors played a part, although it did not mean that no immigrants supported Janssens and that all PVDA+ supporters are immigrants.

There are further indications to support this. Research shows that among second generation Moroccan and Turkish voters, between 70% and 80% voted for Patrick Janssens in 2006 and that around 33% and 65% respectively voted for a candidate of ethnic origin (Swyngedouw et al, 2010). In Antwerp the Belgian natives very rarely votes for ethnic candidates. Furthermore, many ethnic minority voters go for so-called block-voting, whereby they give a preference vote for every candidate on the list of the same ethnic origin. We can therefore assume that ethnic candidates are elected mainly, though not exclusively, because of the immigrant vote.

Jan Hertogen, a sociologist and activist, has calculated the percentage of elected representatives of immigrant origin per list, both for the districts and the city as a whole, using the rather unreliable system of name recognition. Nevertheless, it does provide some indication.

Table 2: Percentage estimate per electoral list of elected district and city councillors of ethnic origin in the districts and for the city of Antwerp as a whole.

% seats	Open VLD	N-VA	VB	Sp.a+cartel	CD&V	Green	PVDA+	Other	Total
Antwerp		11%		40%		40%	67%		27%
Berchem				22%					8%
B-Z-L									0%
Borgerhout		29%		56%	50%		25%		36%
Deurne		15%		43%			67%		24%
Ekeren				0%					0%
Hoboken				60%			50%		22%
Merksem		9%		17%			100%		12%
Wilrijk				25%			0%		4%
Total Districts	0%	7%	0%	36%	9%	22%	47%		17%
City Antwerp	0%	9%	0%	35%		25%	50%		20%

* Example: 11% of the N-VA elected councillors for the Antwerp district are of ethnic origin. Sp.a and Green has formed cartel lists in 6 districts, but not in the districts of Antwerp, Ekeren and Wilrijk. Name recognition method employed.

Source: Jan Hertogen BUG 175, November 2012.

Expressed in relative percentage terms, the Left Party PVDA+ has the most immigrant councillors (between 25 and 100% of all the elected) but in absolute terms (number of voters), more immigrants voted for the Sp.a-CD&V cartel of Social Democrats and Christian Democrats. At the city level this meant 8% for the PVDA+ and 28% for the cartel's City List, about 3.5 times as many. Naturally this is no hard evidence, but as indicative figures they are a sufficiently strong reason to assume that the PVDA's success was not exclusively due to the immigrant voter. Sp.a and the Greens were able to attract a very significant level of immigrant support in October 2012.

URBAN RENEWAL ONLY IN THE INNER CITY?

It is striking that after the elections there were suddenly complaints that between 2006 and 2012 urban renewal only took place in the Antwerp district. Of course it is true that the new MAS [Museum Aan de Stroom/museum at the river] museum is located there and that the renewal of the surrounding old harbour district attracted a great deal of media attention. But the upkeep and construction of public spaces happens to be one of the few powers that were passed down to the district councils. Considerably more money has been made available to the districts for public works than before 2006. Furthermore, there is also the District Development Fund in which the city matches district investments Euro for Euro. Larger projects are, where possible, financed with European money (for example, the renewal and street reconstruction of the shopping street Drie Koningenstraat in Berchem).

So it is by no means clear that resources allocated to the districts for public works have gone disproportionately to the inner city, i.e. the Antwerp district. I am not aware of any complaints from any district that the formula used for distributing resources is unfair or that the city has discriminated against the districts in any way. A quick hunt through the Flemish press archives produced no hits that could be read as complaints from district councils that they had been disadvantaged in their plans for the public space. Admittedly, not every project was completed before October 2012, but that is equally true for the Antwerp inner city district.

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WAS THE CARTEL'S CAMPAIGN CONDUCTED BADLY?

Only compared with Ghent, where the Sp.a-Green cartel did very well, was the Antwerp result rather poor. Table 3 compares Antwerp with other major cities in Flanders and shows the differences in percentage points and losses and gains in percent. These figures are the most relevant because they show how many voters the Sp.a has lost or gained since 2006.

The first observation is that Ghent is an exception among the major centres. The second is that the Antwerp City List of Social Democrats and Christian Democrats is still among the five highest Sp.a scores in the Flemish major cities. The third is that, except for Ghent and Bruges, the Sp.a lost votes in all of them. The unweighted average for Sp.a voters in 2012 was 23.1% which, in comparison with 2006 meant a loss of a good 23.3% of its electoral support in the major cities. The great leap forward in 2006 was cancelled out and the Sp.a is back to where it was in 1994 and 2000.⁵

A closer look at Sp.a's win in Ghent shows that compared with the Sp.a-Spirit cartel in 2006, the Sp.a in 2012 gained 44%. But compared with the total of Sp.a-Spirit together with the Greens, that gain is reduced to 4.1%. The real success of the Sp.a in Ghent is that the cartel with Green in 2012 did not lead to a net loss of voters although the increase was modest. In contrast, the Sp.a's losses in Antwerp were certainly real. Compared with the sum total of Sp.a-Spirit and the 'Flemish Cartel' CD&V/N-VA in 2006, it lost a net 38.5% of its voters in 2012.

In summary, Sp.a suffered a serious setback in Antwerp but compared with the other regional cities it did not do badly. In the results table, Antwerp came 5th out of 13. The quality of what was achieved

Table 3: Sp.a results in October 2012 (in cartel or alone) for the 13 regional centres in Flanders compared with the local elections of 2006.

City	Electoral list	% 14-10-2012	+/- percentage points	+/- percent
Antwerp	Sp.a-CD&V City List	28,6	-6,7	-19%*
Mechelen	Sp.a	18,2	-1,8	-9,00%
Turnhout	Sp.a	11,4	-5,3	-22,7%
Roeselare	Sp.a	14,2	-1,6	-6,70%
Ostend	Sp.a	32,1	-13,6	-29,8%
Bruges	Sp.a	26,8	+2.5	+9,30%
Hasselt	Helemaal Hasselt	33,0	-15,3	-31,7%
Genk	PROgenk	16,8	-6,8	-28,8%
Aalst	Sp.a	16,4	-2.8	-14,6%
Ghent	Sp.a-Groen	45,5	+13,9	+44,0%*
St-Niklaas	Sp.a-Groen	25,7	-9,7	-27,4%
Leuven	Sp.a	31,4	-6,7	-17,6%

* If we add in Antwerp the results of the cartels, Sp.a–spirit and CD&V/N-VA for 2006 then a loss of 17.9 percentage points or 38.5% is showing up. In Ghent, when comparing with the sum of Sp.a-Spirit and the Greens in 2006, there is a gain of 1.8 percentage points or 4.1%.

under Janssens - acknowledged by friend and foe - and the election campaign will certainly have played a part.

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Nevertheless, the question must be asked whether the cartel's campaign itself did not contribute to its losses. A number of reasons have been suggested. Firstly, that the City List cartel was very late in starting its campaign. Bart De Wever and the N-VA had the field to themselves for several weeks before the elections. This argument may not hold much water but an unbelievable amount has been written and said about Janssens and the City List and their failure to mount a campaign.

Secondly, that the campaign was actually no more than Patrick Janssens magazine⁶, which appeared a few weeks before the election. This is partly true. But there were also numerous debates and interviews with him and other candidates as well as the limited campaigns conducted by others such as the notable YouTube films of Marc Van Peel (CD&V) which attracted a great deal of media attention in the final week before the elections. It is striking that the campaign for the Antwerp city council was mainly played out in the national media. Advertising was hardly needed since the two main protagonists were constantly in the media. Of course, there were problems with the Sp.a's campaign and its personnel. The fact that one of the Sp.a aldermen only received a miserable, for Antwerp, 991 preference votes speaks volumes.

Two factors, however, warrant closer attention.

1. The programme of what the City List (Sp.a-CD&V) would do when re-elected boiled down to 'we'll carry on doing what we are already busy doing'. Of course, there was an Sp.a programme that could be downloaded from the internet. But anyone who took the trouble to look at 2006 would have found Janssens' fully worked-out programme, *Het beste moet nog komen* [*The Best is yet to Come*], containing concrete answers on every aspect of policy. It was an ambitious programme that aroused

genuine enthusiasm. In 2012, there was the pre-campaign book *Voor wat hoort wat* [You get nothing for nothing] which defends a policy of getting those receiving unemployment benefit back to work. *The Sp.a campaign pays relatively little attention to concrete plans for the future*. ‘Proof of the pudding’ was the only guarantee offered for more of the same which certainly did not have the same impact as the 2006 campaign. It is however a general wisdom in campaigning that “you win elections with what you are going to do, not with what you have already done” (the last one is taken for granted).

2. A grass-roots campaign by the Sp.a hardly existed. There were few if any house-to-house visits; little if any presence in the city’s market-places. There were no public meetings, no party get-togethers related to the elections, no striking recruitment drives or cultural activities; and there were relatively few party posters hanging in people’s front windows. The situation in the stately belle-époque Cogels-Osylei near the Berchem railway station is a case in point. In 2006 it was full of posters with ‘Patrick’ [Janssens]. In 2012, a week before the elections, there were virtually no posters of the City List or its candidates to be seen. In 2012, the cultural world, which in 2006 had stood *en masse* behind Patrick Janssens, was either absent or supported the left party PVDA+ or the Greens.

Both elements are in complete contrast to the N-VA. It is absolutely clear what Bart De Wever stands for. ‘The city does not belong to everybody’⁷, ‘the automobile is wrongly condemned’⁸, ‘criminality and certainly drugs will be dealt with mercilessly’⁹ and ‘foreigners must adapt to our society and, in particular, learn to speak Dutch’¹⁰. Whether you agree or disagree, the message is certainly clear. The national campaign conducted by the N-VA ran perfectly because of the (disproportionate) attention which the media gave to the person of De Wever and the party. But above all, as well as de Wever’s carefully planned national campaign, there was a strong local grass-roots campaign. House to house visits (learned from Sp.a Minister Johan Vande Lanotte, according to the newspaper *De Morgen*), a range of memorable public events and, what was most striking, an unbelievable number of posters of De Wever, the N-VA and its local candidates in the windows and facades of private houses.

THE ANTWERP SP.A PARTY ORGANISATION: THE CRUCIAL EXPLANATION?

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Could Patrick Janssens have conducted a grass-roots campaign even if he had wanted to? We believe not, and it has everything to do with the sort of party that the Antwerp Sp.a has become in recent years. Janssens has never made a secret of the fact that he no longer believes in the mass party that the Sp.a once was. This reflects current social changes. Not only are all parties losing members, but the function of a political party has changed entirely under the influence of the mass media and the new media. The mass party was necessary when politicians did not have direct access to the voter and had to spread their message through activists and party members. In the mid-1980s this model reached a high point but subsequently went into decline. It had been necessary to be able to mobilise and indeed demobilise on a massive scale. With the arrival of the mass media this changed. A political campaign has increasingly taken on the characteristics of a marketing-based publicity campaign. Janssens, as an ex-marketing man, appreciated this as no other.

Under a previous Antwerp Socialist Mayor, Bob Cools (1983-1994), the rule was ‘whoever controls the party, controls the city’. There was an antiquated but active party, and no sign of a modern party and campaign organisation. Today we have almost the opposite: an extremely up-to-date campaign organisation, but little or no party structure. It is an understatement to say that the life of the Antwerp Sp.a is impoverished. Members and activists are involved in little or nothing, there is no culture of debate, local district branches might still exist but compared with ten years ago they are hardly, if at all, active. Most of the district branches are dying or dead. The activities of some branches are limited to an annual general meeting; for some, the new year’s reception is actually the most important political event of the year. It is revealing that the party programme for the local elections was the work of a few closed committees.

Such a situation has consequences. The most important is that the members and activists can no longer function as the party's antennae. Whereas in 1986-87 the young socialists of the time could meet burgomaster Cools and warn him of the threat posed by the extreme right Vlaams Blok [Flemish Bloc] because of the open racism that was rife in working-class districts - a warning that he dismissed as irrelevant - in 2012 the Sp.a received no warning that the Left Party PVDA+ was making inroads into various districts. Local concerns are no longer being heard. The electorate do not take the district councils seriously (cf. Dierickx, Doctoral Thesis, UA). Opinion polls are not a substitute. A town monitor is a policy instrument not a political instrument. There is no local interaction with other political organisations. The political education that the party once offered is now left in the hands of the (predominantly liberal-conservative) media. This in turn leads to a shrinking recruitment pool for new party personnel and supporting professionals. There is the further danger that the party leadership ends up in splendid isolation with no-one around to question it. And finally, a political philosophy question: who is there to monitor the party leadership between elections?

Is one solution then a return to the mass party of the 1980s? That seems to me to be neither realistic nor desirable. But if a party wants to build a reserve of activists who can be mobilised when necessary, it will have to develop modern channels of participation that make discussion and meaningful input possible. In a city like Antwerp it must be possible to set up high-quality debating societies on political themes; to stimulate moderated participation in party affairs through the social media; to organise local party campaign teams in support of, and within the framework of a modern marketing election campaign. Participation need no longer mean long-term, all-embracing party involvement, but rather temporary and repeated participation in causes and activities that interest the particular members concerned. Neither do they always have to be highbrow activities. Some members are more comfortable doing practical organisation work than with a political debate. Not everything in a political party needs to be professionalised. A pool of available volunteers will become increasingly important if billboard displays are banned¹¹, if compulsory voting is not enforced or is actually abolished¹², or if the restrictions on the funding of political campaigns continue.¹³

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The ultimate question is naturally whether the City List of Social Democrats and Christian Democrats might have defeated De Wever and the N-VA with such a modern party organisation at its disposal. Probably not. The neo-liberal (judging by the anonymous press advertisement by so-called employers¹⁴), conservative, nationalist and ethnocentric (ex-members of Vlaams Belang) electoral coalition which De Wever forged would not have been affected by it. And it remains the question whether the PVDA+'s attraction would be easy to counter in a period of crisis and whether the Sp.a can afford to ignore the Greens if it is to present a credible policy for urban mobility and milieu protection. Nevertheless, Obama and his supporters will bear witness that without the grass-roots campaign in the US swing states, the White House would now have had a different occupant.

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Translation: Chris Emery.

Endnotes

- 1/ The city of Antwerp in figures: <http://www.antwerpen.buurtmonitor.be/>.
- 2/ When convicted on the basis of discrimination in 2003 the Vlaams Blok [Flemish Bloc], changed its name to Vlaams Belang [Flemish Interest].
- 3/ Note that in Ghent, Daniel Termont and the Sp.a did not repel the centre voter by allying with the Greens, in spite of the efforts of the N-VA to brand them as left-wing extremists. It is therefore too simplistic to label the Sp.a-CD&V cartel in Antwerp as 'right-wing' and the Sp.a-Green cartel in Ghent as 'left-wing'. Locally the leading candidate plays a decisive role in how the list is perceived. From that perspective, local Sp.a-Green cartels seem to me to offer a better chance throughout Flanders.
- 4/ The VRT-*De Standaard* poll gave the N-VA a lead of around 10 percentage points over the Sp.a-CD&V City List; the *Gazet van Antwerpen* (GvA) gave them a lead of 0.8 percentage points. Although the two polls were conducted at different times, this was not made clear and both were published a week before the elections in October 2012. Both polls gave the PVDA+ about 3.1%, 'just not enough votes for a seat on the council' concluded the GvA (6 October 2012).
- 5/ See Ackaert, J., *De Socialisten te velde, Samenleving en politiek*, September 2012, p. 5.
- 6/ The City list of Sp.a-CD&V main campaign element was a magazine posted in each letterbox of the city with the title "Patrick", the sitting mayor of Antwerp.
- 7/ This is a reaction against the official city slogan at that moment "the city belongs to everybody".
- 8/ This is at odd with the city policy of reducing parking places in public areas.
- 9/ N-VA claims with this that the city policy towards criminality and drugs was too soft.
- 10/ N-VA claims that new arrived immigrants were not hard enough pushed to assimilate by the sitting coalition.
- 11/ A decision taken by the ruling coalition before the elections of 2012 but rejected by court after complaints by small parties.
- 12/ In Belgium voting is still compulsory, but no fines are given if one does not show up.
- 13/ In Belgium strict limitation of campaign budgets are in force.
- 14/ Some days before election day a group of anonymous persons claiming they were employers issue an advertisement in support of the N-VA and De Wever in the newspapers.

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- Richard McGregor, "A busy day in the regional pod of President Obama's campaign HQ in Chicago", *Financial Times*, September 14, 2012.