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Vlaams Blok and the Flemish Local Elections of 8 October 2000: A Postscript

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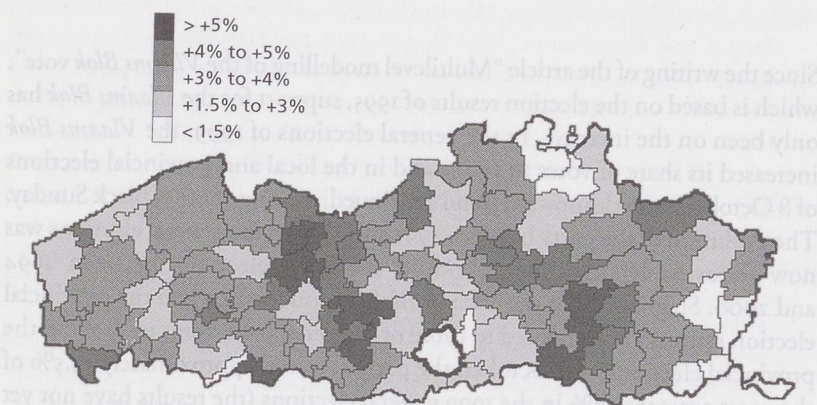
Since the writing of the article "Multilevel modelling of the *Vlaams Blok* vote", which is based on the election results of 1995, support for the *Vlaams Blok* has only been on the increase. In the general elections of 1999, the *Vlaams Blok* increased its share of votes to 15.4% and in the local and provincial elections of 8 October 2000 the upward trend continued, causing another black Sunday. The evolution of the party between 1995 and 1999 in the general elections was now followed by a similar trend in the local elections between 1994 and 2000. Stagnation for the *Vlaams Blok* is found only when the provincial election returns are compared to those of the general elections of 1999. In the provincial elections of 8 October, the party received approximately 14.5% of the votes against 15.4% in the 1999 general elections (the results have not yet been officially provided by the minister). However, Deschouwer (2000) showed in the 'election show' of the television channel vrt, that the *Vlaams Blok* traditionally scores somewhat less in local and provincial elections than in general elections. In Brussels the *Vlaams Blok* also gained, but to a relatively smaller extent than in Flanders. At the same time, the already less successful *Front National*, though still scoring 6.5% in Charleroi, lost dramatically in both Brussels and Wallonia. This is sometimes called the Belgian paradox: whereas the wealthy Flanders is confronted with a large extreme right-wing electorate, in the less economically prosperous Wallonia the importance of the party decreased.

In Antwerp, where the foreign press had come together to inform themselves about the evolution of 'Dewinter's party', the *Vlaams Blok* unexpectedly gained another 5%. This meant that not less than one out of three inhabitants in the Flemish capital voted for the extreme right-wing party. Philip Dewinter, chairman of the Antwerp faction, received 50,000 preferential votes, leaving all other politicians far behind. The *Vlaams Blok* saw its greatest increase in votes in Beveren, the electoral district geographically west of Antwerp, and there were also considerable increases in the other municipalities in the Antwerp circle. As well as in Antwerp, the *Vlaams Blok* has now become the largest party in Mechelen, Boom and Kapellen.

To find out the evolution of the party for the whole region of Flanders, we should compare the general election results of 1999 to those of 1995, as at the

local level the *Vlaams Blok* did not participate in every community. Figure 1 shows in which electoral districts the *Vlaams Blok* gained and to what extent. It shows that the gains were high throughout the region. Particularly in the province of East-Flanders, in the cities of Gent and Aalst, the party gained strongly, as well as in parts of Flemish Brabant.

Figure 1 Evolution of *Vlaams Blok* voting in the general elections 1995-1999.



There is only one district where the *Vlaams Blok* lost votes: in Hoogstraten on the Dutch border (a loss of 0.8% dropping to a share of 11.4%). In the neighbouring city of Turnhout, the party gained only 0.5%. Furthermore, stagnation for the *Vlaams Blok* is found in Maasmechelen, Tongeren and Voeren, again on the Dutch border. In the local elections of 2000, held in Vilvoorde, where former prime minister Jean-Luc De Haene made a bid to become mayor, the extreme right-wing party lost slightly (-0.1%). This was probably due to internal conflicts that the *Vlaams Blok* faction had faced and which caused a split in May 2000 (De Morgen 2000b).

The differences between municipalities in *Vlaams Blok* voting as they were analysed in our article 'Multilevel modelling of the *Vlaams Blok* vote' stay quite similar, although on a higher level. We found that variation in *Vlaams Blok* voting between municipalities was partly explained by the presence of ethnic minorities. Because the *Vlaams Blok* gained almost everywhere in Flanders, it seems plausible that this effect of the number of ethnic minorities stayed the same. Our finding that the unemployment level, and also changes in this level, did not contribute significantly, seems to be confirmed too, as in Maasmechelen, the city with the highest unemployment level in Flanders, the *Vlaams Blok* hardly gained.

However, the success of the *Vlaams Blok* in the surroundings of Antwerp, and also in the provinces, can hardly be explained in terms of the presence of

ethnic minorities; there are no large immigration populations in those areas. This is also the reason why we found a significant variance component in multilevel modelling of extreme right-wing voting between municipalities, after we controlled for the contextual characteristics. So why does the *Vlaams Blok* rhetoric find its way in these regions?

The results of our multilevel analyses showed that it is not surprising that the *Vlaams Blok* also managed to attract voters in the regions with less immigrants. We found that there is some small variation between the Flemish municipalities in the attitudes affecting extreme right-wing voting (unfavourable out-group attitude, Flemish nationalistic attitude and political dissatisfaction), but that the presence of ethnic minorities did not affect these attitudes. Thus, in those communities where almost zero per cent of the population are immigrants, immigrants are perceived almost as much a threat as in communities where more than 15% of the population are non-native inhabitants. This is another explanation for the gains of the *Vlaams Blok* all over the region. Mayer (1999) labelled this the paradox of extreme right-wing voting. Although people are more likely to vote for an extreme right-wing party in regions where more immigrants live, the unfavourable attitude towards immigrants is not affected by it (Lubbers & Scheepers 2000b). Extreme right-wing voting in the light of "Le syndrome de la peur" (Mayer 1993) is a possible explanation for the behaviour of the voters in those regions absent of immigrant, as is also suggested by Desmet (2000). A perceived threat of immigrants may be large when people have the feeling that they have more to lose. This could be an explanation for the fact that we found no effect, and in previous research a negative effect, of the unemployment level on voting for an extreme right-wing party (Lubbers and Scheepers 2000a; 2000b; 2000c). It could also explain the opposite evolution of the extreme right-wing in Brussels and Wallonia.

Hans De Witte (1998) gives an alternative explanation for variance between municipalities. De Witte suggests that the *Vlaams Blok* is spreading out from Antwerp, where the organization of the party has always been best. From this bastion it makes progress first and foremost in its surroundings as more and more local organizations are founded. The higher number of municipalities in which the *Vlaams Blok* participated in the elections is the proof. Already existing Flemish nationalistic organizations in every domain of society "give an excellent breeding ground in which we can flourish", according to party leader Frank Vanhecke (Groenedijk & La Porte 2000). This seems to be one of the main explanations for the difference in the success of the extreme right-wing between Flanders and, for example, the Netherlands and Wallonia. Although Flanders scores highest in most comparative research on exclusionism with respect to its unfavourable attitude towards immigrants (Scheepers, Gijsberts & Coenders 2000), this alone cannot explain the differences.

Because the party contested in more municipalities than in 1994, an overall increase in support for the *Vlaams Blok* is to be expected. The number of municipalities in which it was possible to vote for the *Vlaams Blok* increased from 142 in 1994 to 197 in 2000, which meant that 75% of Flemings could now vote for the party instead of 64% in the previous elections (De Morgen 2000a). But, this does not explain the increases in cities where the *Vlaams Blok* had already participated in 1994.

With its new campaign in the local elections under the slogan of 'being home' and 'boss in our own country', and showing pictures of a loving Flemish family, the *Vlaams Blok* had chosen a new, softer image.

This 'charm offensive', as the *Vlaams Blok* leadership described the new campaign strategy in order "not to emphasize the prejudice which exists against the *Vlaams Blok*" (Dewinter in documentary of Groenedijk & La Porte 2000), could have attracted more voters. For example, in the local elections in Antwerp, the *Vlaams Blok* leadership made a specific strategic move by bringing in the popular model Anke van der Meers, previously on the liberal VLD list of candidates (Groenedijk and La Porte 2000). This move drew the attention of the (foreign) press, but did not bring Van der Meers into the 'top 200' of candidates with most preferential votes.

Several ideas have been suggested to turn the rise in the support for the *Vlaams Blok*. Giving immigrants from outside EC-countries voting rights, as has been done in the Netherlands, for example, would probably decrease *Vlaams Blok* support. Probably, because the *Vlaams Blok* definitely will and already does use such intended measures in its campaigning. Another suggestion that has already been experimented with is the *cordon sanitaire*. Although it has not had its intended effect of turning the march of the *Vlaams Blok*, the same strategy will be followed by (the Antwerp) parties: no cooperation with the *Vlaams Blok*, in the hope that long-term isolation will cause frustration and conflicts within the party over the postponed realization of its programme. However, the *Vlaams Blok* has demonstrated that it can perform well in its underdog role (Geudens 2000).

Another suggestion has been to end compulsory voting (Desmet 2000). The question is whether this would be effective. Although extreme right-wing parties traditionally have a rather unstable electorate, Swyngedouw showed, by carrying out an exit poll at the voting offices of 8 October 2000, that the *Vlaams Blok* had the most stable electorate: not less than 95% had voted for the *Vlaams Blok* in previous elections. Already in 1995, the ISPO-data showed that the *Vlaams Blok* would not be the only party to suffer if compulsory voting was ended. Of the *Vlaams Blok* voters 42% indicated that they might stay at home if they were not obliged to go to the voting offices. But 40% of the liberal VLD voters and 36% of both the Christian CVP and social-democratic SP voters also said they might not vote. *Agalev* and the *Volksunie* seem to be the parties

that could profit from this idea, as only 25% and 28% of their voters, respectively, said they might choose to stay at home, probably because the electorates of these parties are somewhat higher educated. The percentages are likely to have changed, but in light of Swyngedouw's findings (2000) and our previous findings that not only the lowest educated and the lowest income categories voted for the *Vlaams Blok*, it is possible that the percentage of intended 'non-voters' among *Vlaams Blok* voters will have decreased rather than increased.

One of the Belgian Ecolo ministers has argued that it is about time the established parties and politicians as well as the media became tougher with Mister De Winter and his party. Indeed, it is often argued that the law in the Netherlands and in Germany has been more active in preventing the rise of the extreme right-wing (Donselaar 1995). However, the extreme right in Belgium is well trained to avoid justice; there is a *Vlaams Blok* summer school for young academics. Illustrative is Dewinter's reaction to a comment made by the interviewer in the previously cited documentary. When the interviewer said, "It is of course also dependent on the country in which you live; in the Netherlands it is prohibited to say 'Our own people first'", Dewinter reacted, "if we had been active in the Netherlands, we would in whatever way adjust in order to proclaim our messages without walking into the trap that would be set for us." There is still taboo and commotion around the extreme right-wing in the Netherlands and Germany. Whereas Dewinter can appear publicly without much commotion in Flanders, he was, for example, menaced by opponents of the extreme right-wing when he came to Amsterdam for a discussion programme.

A tougher approach to the *Vlaams Blok* does not imply that parties have to take stronger positions on *Vlaams Blok* themes such as immigration and criminality, as this could result in an emphasis of these themes, possibly making *Vlaams Blok* voting even more attractive (Lubbers & Scheepers 2000c). At the same time, a move by the political parties towards the centre, making them all look alike, would give extreme parties more space (Geudens 2000). Related to this is the tendency of social-democratic parties to appeal to the middle classes and higher educated, as has been researched by Kitschelt (1995). Illustrating this the chair of the *Vlaams Blok* faction in Mechelen remarked: "we do not have to expect anything of the SP anymore. They are yuppies with Rolexes and expensive cars. They look down on us" (Gollin 2000). The democratic parties must make renewed efforts to attract back the people who turned their back against them and went over to the *Vlaams Blok*.

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Resituating the Kantian Self: Self and Reason in Rawls's *The Law of Peoples*

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Abstract

In *The Law of Peoples* (1999), John Rawls's goal is to develop a theory of international justice that will be acceptable to both liberal and decent hierarchical peoples. His 'Law of Peoples' tries to extend the general idea of the social contract to a reasonably just 'Society of Peoples', and to describe a minimal moral threshold of decency. According to many critics, however, Rawls omits from his law of peoples, certain political principles and ideas that are necessary preconditions of a sound theory of international justice. In this paper we try to show that although all these critics deal either directly or indirectly with Rawls's idea of reason and his conception of the self, they lack a thorough analysis of both. Without such an analysis, this kind of criticism is not only unable to present a convincing argument against Rawls's theory of international justice, but it also loses sight of the fact that a valid argument against Rawls's theory has to start with his Theory of Justice and Political Liberalism.

1 Introduction¹

For those of us who are either professionally or personally interested in the works of John Rawls, the last year has been a very busy one. With the publication of the revised edition of *A Theory of Justice* (originally published in 1971) an English edition of the book has finally been made available, which attempts to incorporate all the revisions that have been made in the original text since 1975 and that were included in the more than 20 translations. Most of these revisions had already appeared in the German edition of 1975. A second book that has been published this year is *John Rawls: Collected Papers*. It contains almost all of Rawls's published papers, from his *Outline of a Decision Procedure for Ethics* (1951) to the interview Bernard Prusak held with Rawls in his hometown, Lexington in 1998. Together these papers show Rawls's remarkable body of thought about justice, liberalism, and political theory in general. Some of these papers can be seen as clarifications of parts of *A Theory of Justice* and *Political Liberalism*, while others cover different subjects, such as 'Fifty years after Hiroshima'. The third book to have been published is an extensive