

On the relation between gender and candidate selection: the case of Belgium

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Abstract

Since women representation in Parliament passes through women representation on electoral lists, candidate selection constitutes a central aspect of this general issue. Candidate selection processes vary a lot from one party to the other. The literature suggests that some features of this process may be in favour or in disfavour of female candidates, namely the degree of inclusiveness and centralisation of selectorates and the degree of complexity and institutionalisation of selection procedures. This paper focuses on the relations between these features of candidate selection and gender. Despite strong mandatory quotas valid for all political parties in Belgium, Belgian political parties still differ in terms of women's presence on their lists and in the Parliament. The paper analyses these variations on candidate selection mode and relates it to parties' situation in 2007 towards women at elections. The aim is to explain why some parties score better than others in terms of women's presence in their ranks, by sketching the general picture of a women-friendly candidate selection process. The research relies on data from party statutes and rules, as well as from interviews conducted among key Belgian politicians.

Introduction

Women are not better, but different. This assertion from a female Belgian politician reflects the combat towards an equal gender representation in political bodies. Since women representation in Parliament passes through women representation on electoral lists, candidate selection constitutes a central aspect of this general issue. Candidate selection processes can vary a lot from one party to the other, and some features of this process may be in favour or in disfavour of female candidates. The relation between candidate selection and gender is the focus of this paper.

Belgium is becoming more and more “women-friendly” (Meier 2012). Far reaching legislation has been adopted in the past in order to impose parity on electoral lists. All parties in Belgium face now the same legal obligation: half of the candidates have to be female and the first two candidates on the lists must be from different sex. Yet Belgian political parties still differ in terms of women's presence on their lists and in the Parliament. The paper analyses these variations on candidate selection mode and relates it to parties' situation towards women at elections.

Starting from the observation that Belgian political parties show different attitudes towards female candidates, this research seeks to explain why some parties have reached parity and why some lag behind. Ten political are analysed across two dimensions. First, characteristics of selectorates are considered. The literature suggests that the degrees of inclusiveness and centralisation may affect women's presence at elections. Second, the processes of selection are examined, looking at their degrees of complexity and institutionalisation. The final aim is to answer the question of what features of selection processes stand for in terms of influence on the women-friendliness of political parties. Both formal and qualitative data are mobilised. Party statutes and representation statistics are complemented by perceptions of key Belgian political actors regarding the feminisation of Belgian politics.

A gendered approach on candidate selection through the eyes of political parties

Importance of parties when studying gender and candidate selection

Political parties are the gatekeepers on the road to an elected assembly (Norris & Lovenduski 1995; Caul 1999; Cross 2008; Wiliarty 2010). Without support from a party, no aspirant can be elected. Through candidate selection processes parties reduce the pool of aspirants into a pool of candidates, or would-be deputies (Norris & Lovenduski 1995). Schattschneider argues that analysing this process is the best manner to observe the distribution of power within a party. “[T]he nature of the nominating procedure determines the nature of the party; he who can make the

nominations is the owner of the party.” (Schattschneider 1942) Parties constitute therefore a crucial actor to study in order to grasp mechanisms of candidate selection.

There is a need for studying parties from the inside, especially if one wants to understand the breadth of women’s presence in politics (Baer 1993). Parties are described as the pivotal actors in explaining women’s under-representation and the effectiveness of quotas in increasing women’s presence (Murray 2010) or even are they the barrier to increased female representation (Franceschet 2005). As Krook (2009b) puts forward, the onus for change lies with political elites, due to the power and discretion parties enjoy when selecting candidates.

Candidate selection is indeed a critical step to take before entering Parliament. In this respect, candidate selection procedures partly determine the composition of elected assemblies (Rahat 2007). Some seats can always be considered safe for some parties. By choosing who is going to pull the list, parties directly choose who will most certainly seat during the next legislature. Taken from a gender perspective, parties hold then the power to quasi-ensure equal representation in Parliament. Only unsafe seats would be up to the elections results. If the others are equally distributed, then parity in Parliament is almost guaranteed.

One way to encourage parties to care for parity is implementing electoral quotas. Actually, the only rule that nowadays really constrains political parties in their internal working is that of electoral quotas. Quotas force parties to select a certain proportion of female candidates to stand on their lists. From the 1970s onwards, quotas have spread all over the world, starting from Europe and then South-America (Krook 2009a). In order to make sure that enough women will be either part of the elected candidates or at least part of the lists, parties and legislators face different options, namely party quotas, legislative quotas or reserved seats. Party quotas are the less constraining method because it is up to the parties to decide whether or not they want to promote women as candidates on the lists. Legislative quotas are more restrictive in the sense that they are equally binding to all parties that run for an election. Parties as gatekeepers have hardly any direct power to influence these legal quotas. Their room of manoeuvre only consists in the way they implement the legislative quota. Another mechanism that assures women representation is reserved seats. This mechanism takes place parallel to the list formation because it reserves a certain number of seats to women even if no woman has gained enough votes to be elected.

Quotas are no without consequences on parties’ internal working. There is a need to adapt candidate selection procedures in order to recruit and select more women. Because of this forced political renewal, some men have had to step aside, leaving place to the new candidates (Murray 2010). Some still view those quotas as undemocratic since they imply the selection of newcomers, and possibly unqualified women (Krook 2009b). Nevertheless if legal quotas are mandatory to respect, parties still remain free about how to implement it into their own procedures, leaving place to a wide range of possible interpretations.

Quotas or other constraining mechanisms aiming at a better representation of both sexes in the political elite constitute a significant factor impacting on processes of candidate selection. Parties get transformed, what makes the study of gender and candidate selection through the eyes of political parties a fascinating field of research.

Research question and hypotheses

The paper brings together two fields of research: gender and political parties. It has been argued that works on political parties suffer from gender blindness (Murray 2010). However, the dynamic interaction between both could be fruitful, as the gender dimension can help understanding better what happens inside political parties, and research on political parties can add interesting insights to gender studies. The paper looks at political parties as a central unit of analysis, benefitting from gendered perspectives.

Aiming at understanding how women-friendly candidate selection processes would look like, the paper tests several hypotheses regarding characteristics of nomination procedures. Two dimensions are analysed, namely selectorates and processes.

First, I investigate who is in charge of the selection of candidates to legislative positions. Selectorates, the body that selects the candidates (Rahat & Hazan 2001), are often defined along two axes : the degree of inclusiveness – or how big is the selectorate – and the degree of centralisation – or how close to the national level the selectorate is.

According to its size, the selectorate can have multiple faces (Hazan & Rahat 2010). On one extreme of the spectrum, the party elites can select candidates. Party leaders are a small group of selectors, having a say in the process thanks to their position within the party. On the other extreme, party members are sometimes asked to participate, giving them the opportunity to voice their concerns and to influence the making of the lists. In some parties the voters themselves are called to vote (through open primaries). Party members and voters acquire a growing active role in the determination of the final list of candidates (Bille 2001). Between those two extremes – leaders and members/voters – different formulas exist such as a party agency specially constituted to select the candidates (e.g. a list committee) or a conference of delegates (chosen by members).

The inclusiveness of the selectorate is regarded as a major potential factor impacting on features of the political system, and on party organization in particular (Field & Siavelis 2008). The literature suggests that inclusive selectorates would prevent parties from ensuring representation of specific social groups within the pool of candidates (Rahat 2007). It seems easier for a more exclusive selectorate than for an inclusive one to make sure that enough women are present on the list, and at the place they wish. A large assembly of delegates or a poll among party members often aggregates votes to rank candidates. This system does not provide guarantees in this respect. Quotas or complex mechanisms of votes are then required.

The extent to which selectorates are close to the national level of the party is also a way of categorising selectorates (Hazan & Rahat 2010; Lovenduski & Norris 1993). Territorial centralisation is maximal when decisions are taken from one place for the whole party. Conversely the selection is decentralised or localised when the local instances of the party play a role, at constituency level or even lower (local level).

Next to inclusiveness, the degree of (territorial) centralisation would also impact on a party's ability to warrant parity (Rahat 2007; Norris 1997). Control over the selection process from the above ensures the party to have a global picture of who runs for elections. Decentralised selectorates would select without thinking beyond their own constituency, what would lead to fewer women put forward. Caul (1999) nuances this assertion. She has showed that centralisation impacts only slightly on the presence of women in elected assemblies. Selectorates that oversee the process must anyhow have the political will to promote equal representation; otherwise the effect would be inversed (Murray 2010).

Second, I analyse how selectorates actually work, by addressing questions of complexity and institutionalisation of the process. Candidate selection procedures enjoy varying degrees of complexity, when the selection does not occur at only one single moment by one single selectorate. Assorted, multistage and weighted candidate selection methods are distinguished by Hazan and Rahat (2010). The method is assorted when different selectorates select candidates, or when different rules apply for certain types of candidates (e.g. heads of list). The party ends up with a list where not all candidates come from the same selection process. The multistage method contains different selectorates who select the same candidates, successively. The weighted method weights the different selectorates' choices about the same pool of aspirants. All in all, it appears that multiple selectorates are usual (Rahat 2007) and that it is not easy to depict who holds the real power to decide : actors that pre-select, that adopt the final list or even actors holding the right to evoke the list (Vandeleene et al. 2013). Certainly all actors play some role (Norris & Lovenduski 1995).

Candidate selection processes entail formal and informal practices (Krook 2009a). Party statutes and rules may strictly specify how to conduct the selection process and who intervenes. On the other hand, some parties may rely on party habits and traditions. Various systems exist, ranging from the most institutionalised – everything is standardised and explicit – to the least, when actors enjoy a certain degree of freedom (Norris & Lovenduski 1995).

Complexity and institutionalisation may impact on the ease with which women gain access to the party, and to the lists. Institutionalisation in itself plays a role. The more institutionalised the selection process, the easier it is for outsiders to the party to perceive which steps take place when and which actors play a role (Norris & Lovenduski 1995). If the whole process is well detailed in party documents, newcomers such as most women are more likely to get a chance. The transparency helps understanding how it works. Opaque procedures favour insiders that are familiar to it. It also prevents from abuse of power from some selectorates who –

without rules – would rather select established candidates such as incumbents or active party members. However, Caul (1999) has proven that parties with low levels of institutionalisation tend to have gender-related rules, even if she expected the opposite.

The interaction between complexity and institutionalisation may affect the process' accessibility for newcomers. A complex selection process, but highly institutionalised, would not discriminate outsiders since they would be able to grasp the complexity through consulting written rules. However, if the process is complex and informal, only accustomed aspirants are in the position to get into the selection process. I hypothesize that complexity in itself is not problematic, but the non-institutionalisation of the process narrows the access for outsiders.

To sum up, this paper examines how candidate selection processes look like, by testing characteristics of these processes that would be in favour of a more equal representation of both sexes on lists and within elected assemblies. First, attributes of selectorates would have an impact. More exclusive selectorates (i.e. smaller groups of selectors) and more centralised selectorates (i.e. the closest to the national level) would be more likely to select women. Second, the nature of the selection process could have an influence. Institutionalised processes (i.e. formal rules), in particular if the process is complex, are expected to favour women, or at least not discriminate them.

Belgian political parties

Belgian political system

This paper studies ten Belgian political parties, at the time of the Belgian federal elections of 2007. Since Belgium constitutes a single electoral system, all parties are governed by the same electoral rules. Belgium is classified as a parliamentary democracy having a proportional representation electoral system with semi-closed lists. That is to say that all Belgian parties have to submit lists of candidates before the elections among which the voters can choose. The voters can either vote on the top of the list what means that they agree with the order chosen by the party or they have the possibility to pick out some candidates among a same list by casting a preference vote. Candidates are elected according to the D'Hondt system. In short, the higher a candidate is situated on a list, the more chances she has to be elected unless she has managed to win a large amount of preference votes, what makes her bypass candidates placed higher on the list. In sum, the order of candidates on the lists remains very important for getting elected (De Winter & Dumont 2000). At the federal level, voters can also indicate a preference vote of substitute candidates – i.e. candidates that will take the place of an effectively elected candidate if she does not take up his seat, for instance because she becomes member of government, or because

she prefers to keep her position at another electoral level (usually regional or European level).

Belgian political parties are rather free in composing their lists. Apart from some general rules such as nationality (the Belgian nationality is required to be eligible at the federal level), a minimum age to be on the lists (21 years old for the Chamber of Representatives) and not being deprived of one's civil and political rights, almost everyone can become a candidate (Banneux 2012). The only binding rule that applies to political parties is related to gender quotas. The first quota law was voted in 1994 and forced parties to have no more than two thirds of candidates of the same sex on the lists. Nowadays parties have to respect the 2002 gender quota act that stipulates that on each list the difference between the number of candidates of each sex must not be more than one. Moreover the first two candidates on each list cannot be from the same sex. This legislation has produced real effects at the federal level only since 2007 because of several transitory measures containing less strong obligations. At the time of the first renewal of the federal parliament (2003), the first three candidates of each list had to be from different sex, what often led to female candidates relegated to only the third position on the list. Legal quotas have had a dramatic effect on Belgian politics (Mateo Diaz 2002). Due to both laws, a significant larger share of women has reached parliament office. Before 1995, less than 10% of MPs were women, when by 2010 their proportion has nearly reached 40%.

Ten parties fall within the scope of this research. Table 1 shows them according to two characteristics: language and ideology. The Belgian political system is divided in two: Flemings (North) and Francophones (South) live under the same legislative system and must follow the same rules but yet function apart from each other as two parallel worlds (Billiet et al. 2006). In this respect one says sometimes that Belgium is composed of two democracies. Political parties have split apart in the late sixties and seventies (Dandoy & De Decker 2009) and now operate relatively independently in Flanders and in Wallonia with some overlap in the Brussels Capital Region, where parties from both communities compete to some extent. Besides, ideological differences also exist. Among the ten analysed parties, four are considered as leftist (Ecolo and Groen; PS and sp.a) while two are situated in the centre of the continuum (cdH and CD&V). Four are rightist, among which two are liberals (MR and Open VLD), one is nationalist (N-VA) and one belongs to far right (VB)¹.

¹ For more details on Belgian political parties' ideological positions, see Meier and Verlet (2008)

Table 1 : Belgian political parties

	Flemish parties	Francophone parties
Greens	Groen!	Ecolo
		<i>(Écologistes Confédérés pour l'Organisation de Luttes Originales)</i>
	Green	Confederate Ecologists for the Organisation of Original Struggles
Socialists	sp.a	PS
	<i>(socialistische partij anders)</i>	<i>(Parti socialiste)</i>
	Socialist party in a different way	Socialist party
Christian-democrats	CD&V	cdH
	<i>(Christen-Democratisch & Vlaams)</i>	<i>(Centre démocrate humaniste)</i>
	Christian-democrat & Flemish	Humanist democratic centre
Liberals	Open VLD	MR
	<i>(Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten)</i>	<i>(Mouvement Réformateur)</i>
	Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats	Reformist Movement
Nationalists	N-VA	
	<i>(Nieuwe Vlaamse Alliantie)</i>	
	New Flemish Alliance	
Far right	VB	
	<i>(Vlaams Belang)</i>	
	Flemish Interest	

Women in Belgian political parties

In order to get a better idea of where parties stand in terms of women's presence, this section presents the proportion of women (s)elected by/for the ten analysed political parties. The hypotheses will be tested on the basis of each party's position regarding women, tending more or less towards equality.

First, women's presence at legislative elections is scrutinised in all political parties. The analysis is based on two measures: the proportion of women on eligible places (that is the number of seats won by the party at the previous election) among all candidates on those places and the proportion of women that has reached the Parliament, among the total number of MPs of the party. Since the rest of the analysis concerns 2007 elections, the focus lies on these percentages. Nevertheless, proportions regarding the previous and the next federal elections enlighten 2007 results by showing on which trend each party lies. All percentages concern the lower

house (i.e. the Chamber of Representatives). Processes of candidate selection are different when selecting candidates for the Upper House (the Senate) – for most parties procedures are more centralised.

Table 2 : Percentages of women on eligible places and elected (Chamber)²

	2003		2007		2010	
	% eligible	% elected	% eligible	% elected	% eligible	% elected
Ecolo	36,4%	50,0%	50,0%	50,0%	50,0%	50,0%
Groen!	55,5%	/	/	50,0%	50,0%	40,0%
PS	36,8%	40,0%	40,0%	30,0%	40,0%	30,8%
sp.a	21,4%	39,1%	60,8%	42,9%	35,7%	46,1%
cdH	30,0%	25,0%	37,5%	40,0%	50,0%	44,4%
CD&V	36,4%	28,5%	36,4%	32,0%	36,0%	35,3%
MR	44,4%	41,6%	45,8%	34,8%	39,1%	33,3%
Open Vld	34,8%	36,0%	36,0%	33,3%	50,0%	46,1%
N-VA	37,5%	0,0%	36,4%	40,0%	40,0%	48,1%
VB	20,0%	22,2%	33,3%	41,2%	35,3%	33,3%

Table 2 shows that sp.a and Ecolo reach the threshold of parity on eligible places. The Flemish socialist party even puts more women than men on these places. However, when Ecolo stays at this level for the 2010 elections, the results of sp.a in 2007 look quite exceptional – since they show at least one fifth of female candidates on eligible places in 2003 and a bit more than one third in 2010. Groen has no eligible places in 2007 because of its rude electoral defeat at the previous elections (no single MP). Yet they reach parity on these places at both 2003 and 2010 elections. The Francophone liberals present nearly half women among their potentially eligible candidates. The proportions are approximately the same in the other two elections. The PS has 40% women on eligible places, and it stays quite stable over the years. After these five parties having passed 40%, there are four parties between 35 and 40%. cdH and Open Vld are on an ascending curve, and both reach parity in 2010. CD&V and N-VA – in cartel at these elections – stay stable in comparison with their own score in 2003. The Flemish nationalists of N-VA score higher than their ex-cartel-partner in 2010 (4

² Data from: Institut pour l'égalité des femmes et des hommes (Author : Bailly, N.), (2004), *La participation politique des femmes à l'issue des élections du 18 mai 2003*, Institut pour l'égalité des femmes et des hommes; Institut pour l'égalité des femmes et des hommes (Author : Bailly, N.), (2008), *La participation politique des femmes à l'issue des élections du 10 juin 2007*, Institut pour l'égalité des femmes et des hommes ; Institut pour l'égalité des femmes et des hommes, (2011), *La représentation politique des femmes à l'issue des élections du 13 juin 2010*, Institut pour l'égalité des femmes et des hommes ; www.elections2007.belgium.be

points of percentage). The far-right party (VB) scores the lowest at all elections, but still presents one third of women on eligible places in 2007.

Regarding the proportion of female MPs among all parties, the heads of the rankings stay similar (both ecologist parties and sp.a). Surprisingly, Vlaams Belang has more than 40% of female MPs, despite the fact that its score as regards eligible candidates was lower than the other parties. cdH and N-VA follow, with two-fifth of women among their ranks. Both show a higher proportion of elected than eligible women. About one third of MR, Open Vld, CD&V and PS's MPs were women. MR and PS loose ten points of percentage compared to the proportion on eligible places. Open Vld and CD&V fall by respectively 2,7 and 4,4 points.

Second, since the paper looks at candidate selection, it is interesting to go further than the proportion of women on eligible places. The proportion of women that parties have chosen as head of list is also an indicator of their attitude towards women. Only 2007 federal elections are analysed here, again for the Chamber.

Figure 1 : Percentage of women head of list (main and substitute lists for the Chamber)³

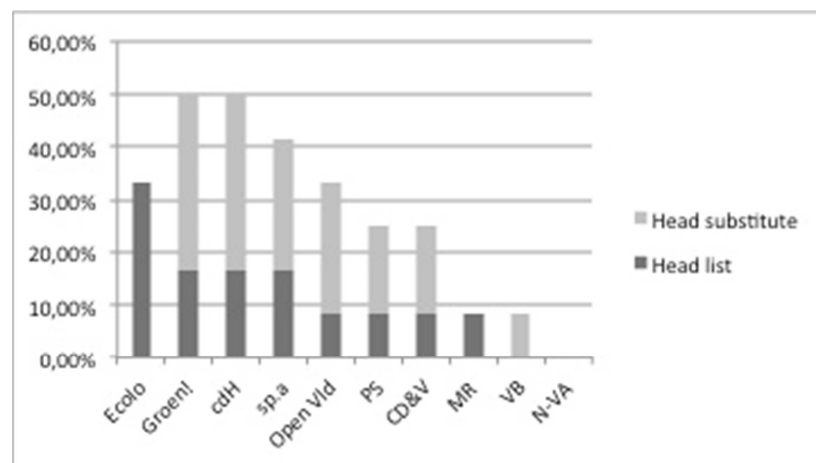


Figure 1 presents political parties ranked by decreasing percentage of women as head of list. Proportions of women heading the substitute list are shown in pale grey. Ecolo puts forward one-third of women on all heads of lists. Interestingly, all are on the main list – what makes 66,7% of female candidates on these highly visible places. Groen, cdH and sp.a have one-third female heads of list, but all let a great place to female candidates heading the substitute list. Groen and cdH have two-thirds female head of substitute list, and sp.a presents half female heads of substitute list. Open Vld, PS, CD&V and MR's selection processes give in 2007 the chance to head the main list to only one woman (16,7%). However, important differences emerge from the analysis of the substitute lists. Women pull half of Open Vld's substitute lists whereas

³ Data from Institut pour l'égalité des femmes et des hommes (Author : Bailly, N.), (2008), *La participation politique des femmes à l'issue des élections du 10 juin 2007*, Institut pour l'égalité des femmes et des homes ; www.elections2007.belgium.be

it decreases to one third for PS and CD&V⁴. The MR has no female head of substitute list. Finally, Vlaams Belang gives one top place to a female candidate, on a substitute list. N-VA, in cartel with CD&V, has in 2007 three candidates heading all substitute lists. No one was a woman.

To conclude on women's presence at elections among all ten parties, three groups emerge. First, both ecologist parties (Ecolo and Groen) plus sp.a and cdH show on average high proportions of women on eligible places, and in particular at the first place of the lists, as well as regarding elected women. Then, both liberal parties (MR and Open Vld) and PS and CD&V have average results regarding women's presence on their lists and in Parliament. Finally, VB and N-VA lag behind the other parties in this respect.

One would expect parties from the first group to better match the potential women-friendly profile sketched by the literature than parties from the second group. Parties from the third group are expected not to well match the model. The rest of the paper will now test the hypotheses on the basis of these three groups.

Analysis

This section portrays a women-friendly candidate selection process by contrasting women's presence on party lists and in Parliament – described above – with features of parties, selectorates and selection procedures. Data from party statutes and rules are used to answer the question⁵.

Party rules

Requirements regarding gender found in party statutes and rules are examined in the next paragraphs. First, general rules are analysed, such as parity within party leaders, parity on lists or the presence of an institutionalised women's section. Second, the analysis focuses on specific institutionalised quotas for selectorates. Information from these analyses enlightens each party's general attitude towards equal representation. Of course one must keep in mind that only formal rules can be analysed at this stage. More informal information will enlighten the conclusions in the discussion section, thanks to data from interviews among politicians.

⁴ CD&V candidates pulled in 2007 only three lists out of six, because three heads of substitute lists were given to N-VA candidates.

⁵ The following statutes have been analysed: Ecolo (October 2007), Groen (18 June 2005), PS (4 March 2007), sp.a (22 November 2002), cdH (18 May 2002), CD&V (May 2005), MR (24 March 2005), Open VLD (12 October 2004), N-VA (13 December 2008), VB (2004). All were in force at the time of the 2007 federal elections, or nothing related to gender or candidate selection has been changed in the earlier version (according to contacts with party officials).

General rules

Table 3 : Requirements related to gender in party statutes (2007)

	Parity in bodies	Expansion	Party top	Parity on lists	Women's section
Ecolo	Parity as a goal		1/2	mandatory (zipper)	
Groen!	Parity as a goal		/	goal (eligible places)	
PS	1/3 mandatory and parity as a goal	Yes	1/4	mandatory	Yes
sp.a	1/4 mandatory and parity as a goal	Yes	1/2	mandatory	
cdH	1/3 mandatory and parity as a goal	Yes	1/3	presence of women	Yes
CD&V	1/3 mandatory and parity as a goal + WS presence	Yes	1/3	goal	Yes
MR	/		/	/	
Open VLD	Parity as a goal		/	/	
N-VA	1/4 mandatory		5/19	/	
VB	/		/	/	

Table 3 summarizes the results of the analysis of party statutes and rules. Five criteria are used to evaluate parties: parity in party bodies and if bodies' composition can be expanded if the desired proportion is not met, parity on electoral lists, gender rules regarding party leaders and the presence of a women's section.

PS, cdH and CD&V impose at least one third of women in all party bodies, but settle parity as a goal. Besides, if a body does not consist of one-third women, its composition is expanded in order to reach the quota. CD&V's statutes guarantee the presence of someone from the women's section in all boards of the party (at all levels). The same rules as the four parties apply to Flemish socialists (sp.a) except that their quota is one-fourth women minimum instead of one-third. N-VA has also a one-fourth quota but does not specify that parity is a goal and does not foresee an expansion of the body. Open Vld and the two ecologist parties stipulate in their statutes that parity in all bodies is aimed. MR and VB do not have any requirements in this respect.

Ecolo and sp.a require parity among party leaders with the noticeable difference that Ecolo has a double presidency and that sp.a requires one man and one woman between the president and the vice-president. Both Christian-democrat parties impose at least one woman or one man between the party president and the two vice-presidents. Within the party council of N-VA (19 members), at least 25% is reserved to women, what makes five seats. At least one fourth of PS' leaders are guaranteed to one sex. If the president and the two vice-presidents are from the same sex, then a

third vice-president from the other sex is designated. Groen, MR, Open Vld and VB do not impose a quota for party leaders.

Even though law guarantees parity on lists, still five parties do not specify it in their statutes (all from the right of the ideological spectrum: MR, Open Vld, N-VA and VB). CD&V settles parity as a goal whereas cdH imposes the presence of women. Groen is the only party setting a parity goal for eligible places. Finally, three parties have a party quota similar to the legislative quota (PS, sp.a and Ecolo). Ecolo even forces all lists to respect the zipper principle – that is the strict alternation between men and women on the whole list.

Finally only three parties mention their women's section in their statutes: both Christian-democratic parties and PS. That does not however mean that the other parties do not have such a section. Actually most of them have a party section dedicated to women.

Quotas for selectorates

Party quotas valid for all party bodies have been described in the previous paragraphs. Before analysing characteristics of selectorates regarding inclusiveness and centralisation, this section focuses on specific party quotas oriented towards the composition of bodies selecting candidates.

According to the literature, equal representation of women is likely to ease women's presence on lists. The outgroup effect theory explains this relation (Niven 1998; Tremblay & Pelletier 2001). Members of the selectorates consider themselves as ingroup members. They evaluate outgroup members through stereotypes. Besides, they build together an image of a successful *homo politicus*, based on their own characteristics. On basis of these types of personality traits, they choose candidates among the pool of aspirants. Outside group aspirants may therefore take advantage of having people like them being part of the selectorate in order to increase their chances to be selected – they become thus part of the inside group. Cheng and Tavits (2011) confirm this hypothesis by highlighting that the gender composition of the selectorates matters to get a gender representative outcome. I come to the conclusion that quotas for selectorates may matter. I expect thus parties from the first group to have more gender rules than parties from the second, and the third.

Table 4 : Selectorates' types and role and requirements related to gender

	Proposition	Evocation	Adoption
Ecolo	Constituency list committee	Federation council (delegates)	Constituency assembly (members)
	Parity as a goal	1/3	
	AND constituency campaign board		
	Parity as a goal in all bodies		

Groen!	National AND constituency poll committees	/	Poll (members) AND National party board
			1/3 within delegates
	Parity as a goal in all bodies		
PS	(sub)constituency committee	Party board	(sub)constituency congress AND Poll (members)
		1/5 within delegates	
	1/3 mandatory and parity as a goal in all bodies		
sp.a	Constituency board	Party board	Constituency congress
		One WS delegate (consultative)	One WS delegate (consultative)
	1/4 mandatory and parity as a goal in all bodies		
cdH	Constituency special committee	National political board	Poll (members)
	1/3 within the presidency	One WS delegate	
	1/3 mandatory and parity as a goal in all bodies		
CD&V	Constituency board	General assembly (delegates)	Poll (members)
	1/2 within the presidency; 1/3 within regional delegates; 3 WS delegates	5 WS delegates; WS staff (consultative)	
	WITH regional section AND general assembly		
	1/3 mandatory and parity as a goal + WS presence		
MR		Electoral commission	Head of list
Open Vld	Constituency working group THEN Constituency board	/	Poll (members)
	Parity as a goal in all bodies		
N-VA	Constituency electoral college	National electoral college	Party council
	1/4 in all bodies		
VB	Party board	/	Party council

Table 4 shows all selectorates for the ten parties, categorised in three roles. Selectorates that propose make the first draft of the list (the model list); selectorates that adopt hold the final say; selectorates that evoke hold a more or less strong veto

right. Quotas or requirements for one specific selectorate are indicated in pale grey. General quotas for all party bodies are in dark grey – those have already been described in a previous section.

Some parties apply real quota for some bodies, which sometimes go further than quotas valid for all party bodies. Ecolo imposes a one-third quota within its federation council – a delegates' conference – organ that holds the power to reject a list and make it re-start from scratch. Groen sets a one-third quota within delegates being part of the national political board⁶. This body has the last word for the electoral lists. Delegates within PS' party board must not be more than 4/5 from a same sex. This quota is quite superfluous because the general party quota for bodies is of one-third and delegates form the vast majority of the board (apart from them, there are the party president and the secretary general). CD&V's constituency boards must respect one-third quota within regional delegates. Besides, the board presidency has a 50% quota. cdH constituency special committees also have to respect a quota within the presidency (one-third).

Next to quotas, some bodies must be composed by a certain number of members of the party women's section. It is the case in two sp.a bodies where one delegate from the women's section can seat, but with a consultative voice. One delegate from the women's section of cdH can seat within the national political. Finally CD&V reserves some seats to delegates from its women's section within all constituency boards and within the general assembly.

In short, all ecologist, socialist and Christian-democratic parties foresee some quotas/reserved seats for women within some selection bodies. Liberal parties as well as N-VA and Vlaams Belang do not mention any special quota, but one must keep in mind that Open VLD and N-VA have general rules applying to all party bodies. In conclusion, only two parties do not specify anything in terms of gender composition of selectorates (MR and VB).

In terms of groups, all parties from the first group (Groen, sp.a, Ecolo and cdH) have gender regulations (general and specific for selectorates). Groen scores a bit lower than the others, regarding general requirements. Parties from the second group (MR, PS, Open Vld and CD&V) also regulate in terms of gender, apart from MR that does not stipulate anything. Besides, Open Vld's regulations are weak. Within the third group, VB meets the expectations whereas N-VA scores better than expected (some requirements). To sum up, the general idea is confirmed even though some parties slightly either fall short or surpass expectations.

⁶ This board is also composed by several party leaders, at various level of power.

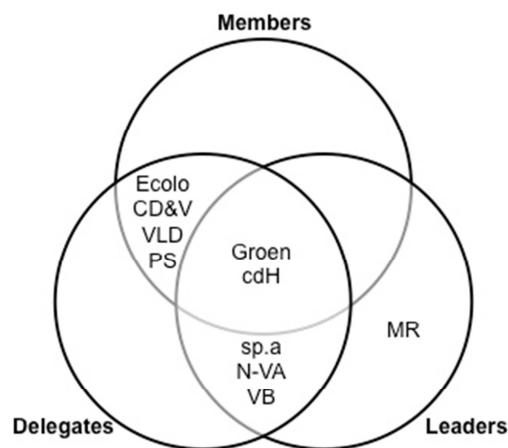
Who selects?

In the following sections I analyse characteristics of selectorates based on two dimensions: the degree of inclusiveness and the degree of centralisation.

Inclusiveness

In figure 2, parties are sorted according to the kind of selectorate that intervene in the selection process. “Leaders” is the most exclusive type of selectorate, “delegates” is less exclusive but still less inclusive than “members”, the most inclusive type of selectorate found in Belgian political parties.

Figure 2 : Degree of inclusiveness of selectorates



Most political parties in Belgium have more than one kind of selectorate that plays a role during the selection process. The hypothesis emerging from the literature suggests that the more inclusive the selectorate, the less women-friendly it is. Exclusive selectorates are expected to be able to impose equal representation on lists, on condition that it is their wish.

Francophone liberals (MR) have the most exclusive selectorate. Only leaders have a say in the process. This party was indeed expected to be quite exclusive because of a quite good proportion of women on eligible places (nearly the half). However, the analysis of the heads of lists has showed that only one female candidate headed a list for this party (both main and substitute list). Party leaders have apparently selected a good share of women, but not given them the first places.

Three parties select their candidates through the intervention of both delegates and leaders. This almost exclusive selection procedure takes place in sp.a, N-VA and VB. The Flemish socialist party was expected to have a quite exclusive selectorate because of its high scores of women's presence at elections. Conversely, both N-VA and VB are part of the third group – showing lower proportions of women. This quite exclusive process is surprising as regards to the hypothesis. Maybe other factors play

a role here, such as ideology – parties from the right being less women-friendly (Murray 2010; Norris & Lovenduski 1995; Krook 2009a; Caul Kittilson 2006).

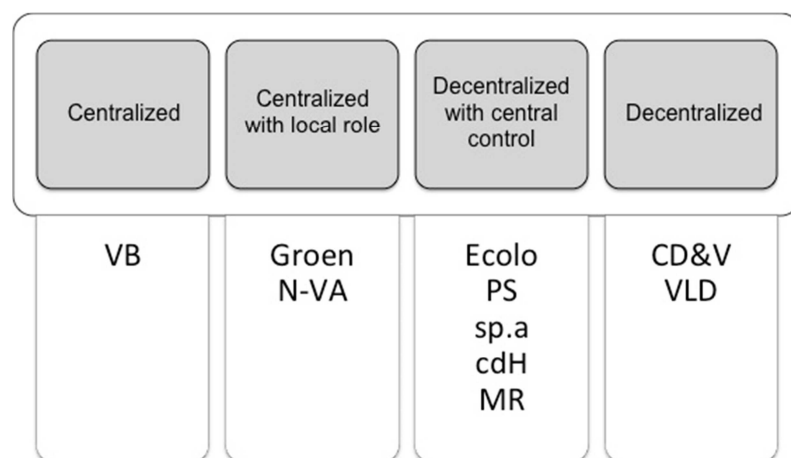
Ecolo, CD&V, PS and Open VLD have nearly totally inclusive selectorates. Both members and delegates participate in the selection. CD&V, PS and Open VLD were expected to be intermediate regarding inclusiveness because of their average scores concerning women's presence. Therefore, results do not really match expectations. But it is even more surprising for Ecolo, which enjoys a great female presence among its ranks. Again ideology may be related to this situation, since green parties are said in the literature to be women-friendly (Caul 1999).

Finally Groen and cdH's selectorates are of three kinds: leaders, delegates and members. This result is at odds with expectations from the literature, as explained above for Ecolo. For Groen at least, the explanation could be the same.

Centralisation

The second dimension characterising selectorates is the degree of centralisation. Centralised processes – close to the national level – should reflect parties having large proportion of women in their eligible/elected ranks, according to the literature. Conversely, decentralised processes – close to the local level – should be found in parties with low levels of women's presence.

Figure 3 : Degree of centralisation of selectorates



The first category in figure 3 contains only the far-right party VB, whose candidates are selected only at the national level. This configuration normally leads to high proportions of women, what is not the case for this party.

In the second category, candidates are selected at the national level, but more decentralised selectorates play a role, next to the central ones. Groen and N-VA belong to this level of centralisation. Concerning N-VA, the conclusion resembles the one that can be made for VB. The literature suggests that these parties should have decentralised processes. Nevertheless, Groen meets the expectations. The Flemish ecologists' lists are relatively highly feminised, what, according to the hypothesis, comes from the central control on the process.

Five parties fit into the third category. These parties' selection procedures occur at local level but the central level still holds a power of control. PS and MR are intermediate in terms of women's presence. This intermediate degree of centralisation of the selection process was thus expected. However, Ecolo, sp.a and cdH should be more centralised.

CD&V and Open Vld do not let the national level intervening in the process. The literature suggests that this situation would lead to low level of women's presence. Both parties belong to the second group in this respect. They have average proportions of women in their ranks (and both even less than the other two parties of this group). The hypothesis is here partly met.

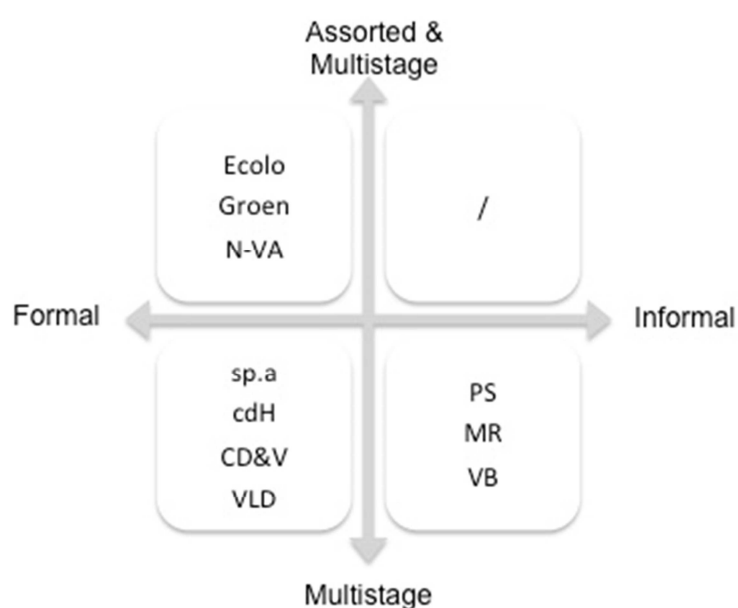
To conclude on both dimensions of selectorates, it seems that both hypotheses are sometimes met and sometimes not. Adding the ideological factor to the analysis helps understanding better why some parties deviate from the expectations. Parties at the right of the ideological spectrum (in particular VB and N-VA) tend to have more exclusive and centralised selection processes. Besides, it is not surprising that these parties show low levels of women's presence because they espouse less egalitarian ideologies (Caul 1999; Kunovich & Paxton 2005).

After having analysed who is in charge of the selection, the next section deals with the process itself. Two dimensions are presented: institutionalisation and complexity.

How do they select?

The interaction between the degree of complexity and of institutionalisation is expected to reflect the women's presence in parties. A complex but institutionalised selection process would not disfavour women whereas a complex but non-institutionalised process would be a disadvantage for these newcomers. But institutionalisation alone also plays a role. Literature suggests that non-institutionalised processes encourage insiders – i.e. men. Conversely, more formal processes do not disfavour outsiders. The ten parties are classified in figure 4 according to both dimensions.

Figure 4 : Complexity and institutionalisation of selection procedures



Three parties have quite complex and formal selection procedures. Ecolo, Groen and N-VA select their candidates through a multistage process. Moreover candidates are not all selected in the same way – the system is assorted. Candidates on eligible or strategic places⁷ are selected by more centralised selectorates (national list committees or national council) than candidates for other places on the list. The interaction between complexity and institutionalisation is crucial for these parties. Because their procedures are complex, an informal selection process would disfavour women. This is not the case because all three have formal rules regulating how candidates must be selected. Both ecologist parties have, next to the statutes, a specific document containing all details of the procedure. N-VA has dedicated a chapter of its statutes to “external elections: list formation”. The hypothesis is totally confirmed as far as ecologist parties are concerned but the nationalist party (N-VA) does not meet the expectations, being too formal and complex for the proportion of women in its ranks.

sp.a, cdH, CD&V and Open VLD also have formal procedures. In the four statutes, the process of selection is detailed, either in a specific chapter or in several articles. Their selection process is less complex because it is multistage but not assorted. Yet it stays quite complex (three or more steps). All parties meet the expectations, and in particular sp.a and cdH that were high-ranked according to women’s presence.

⁷ Next to eligible places, which are on the top of the list, strategic places include also the last place on the list – according to Ecolo’s statutes. The candidate that pushes the list is traditionally highly visible during the campaign.

The last three parties do not specify which rules apply to the selection of candidates with as much details as the other parties. The PS gives almost a free hand to more decentralised party bodies. The MR lets the heads of list composing the list by themselves, after having chosen them. The *Vlaams Belang* hardly describes the selection process in its statutes. This party was indeed expected to be informal. The other two were expected to be intermediate.

The analysis based on the second aspect of the selection process (the nature of the procedures) has revealed interesting results regarding institutionalisation. All parties from the first group apply formal procedures, as well as half of parties from the second group. VB, part of the third group, has informal procedures. Three parties however have surprising levels of institutionalisation if we look at the literature. MR and PS should have an average level of institutionalisation, and it is certainly not the case for the liberal party MR. Conversely, N-VA should have an informal process and is actually quite formalised when making its lists.

Discussion

Previous sections have focused on features of candidate selection processes according to data gathered in party statutes and rules. The aim was to test hypotheses regarding characteristics of the nominating process said to be more or less women-friendly. Degrees of inclusiveness and centralisation of selectorates and degrees of institutionalisation and complexity of procedures have been tested. Some conclusions could be drawn but it still seems that there is a need to go deeper in the understanding. Next paragraphs shed light on these conclusions thanks to interview data collected among Belgian politicians in 2006⁸.

The relevance of studying women-friendliness through the selection process and especially through selectorates is also emphasised by respondents. Selectorates are of high importance, in the words of a Christian-democrat, because the final power lies in their hands. More precisely, selectorates' composition in terms of gender is indeed an influencing factor. A male interviewee asserts that when you have a selecting body only constituted by men, there may be a tendency to select men. Hence, women's

⁸ The 40 interviews were conducted by a Belgian research team supervised by Petra Meier and Benoît Rihoux. This collaboration has led to the publication of a report entitled "*Belgian parties and gender equality: a slow but safe evolution? Analysis of the integration of the gender dimension in Belgian political parties*" (2007). This research, sponsored by the Belgian Institute for the equality of women and men, focused on recruitment and selection of candidates for eligible mandates as well as for party internal mandates. Interviews took place early 2006 among 40 Belgian politicians. In each party, one person of the president's *entourage* has been interviewed as well as one expert situated high up in the internal organisation of the party (e.g. the national secretary), one active woman within the party (e.g. the women's section president) and one complementary person (e.g. an MP). I have analysed full transcripts of the interviews thanks to QSR NVivo.

sections try to be represented among the selectorate. When choosing for delegates, women's sections can be very active in lobbying so that parity is reached among the selectorate. As a Flemish politician points out, women's sections need to be attentive to this point since there is no legislation about it. Furthermore, some women's sections try having a sufficient amount of women in the selectorate. Beyond a simple representative, quantity is of importance in order to be able to counterbalance men's positions, in case of vote. Finally, women representation among the selectorate passes also through a female presence at the general member polls in parties where these are held. One respondent tells that the women's section takes contact with female party members in order to be sure of their presence at general member polls (where only physically present members can vote). Also other respondents point the impact of gender on selection. A Christian-democrat says that if only men are selectors, they would select women that fit their profile. For instance, an old politician will choose a young woman who he can show up with in order to look young, trendy and attractive. Men will choose for women that do not endanger their own power. Men not willing to cede power to either women or young people will refuse a potential competitor. Nevertheless, even if a balanced selectorate seems more women-friendly, some say that men are not anti-women by definition. There exist positive oriented men and women haters. Even one adds that some men are more gender-friendly than some women.

Beyond selectorates' composition, women's presence within the party is relevant. In order to influence the party from the inside, women wish to be represented in the party's bodies. One interviewee concedes that what is important is to be where decisions are taken. For many respondents, women's own importance within the party is related to women's presence on top party positions. Women's visibility will attract and encourage women. As a green politician said, women have the responsibility to seduce women so that they will join the party and become candidate on a list.

After having sketched how women-friendly parties were from the inside, I analysed the relation between the degree of inclusiveness of the selectorates and women's presence within parties (at elections). The hypothesis emerged from the literature suggested that the more exclusive, the more women-friendly – if the small selectorate wish to. The second part of the assertion seems to demonstrate its great importance given the results. Parties with more exclusive selectorates are all right-wing parties and also parties with fewer women, apart from the Flemish socialist party. All other parties from the centre and the left rely on members to select candidates. Traditionally, these parties are more willing to support parity, to encourage women to stand and in the end to select them (Lovenduski & Norris 1993; Murray 2010).

Second, I tested if more centralised selectorates were more women-friendly than localised selectorates. A vast majority of parties have relatively decentralised procedures. Three parties select candidates more from the centre, among which two scored low at women's presence.

Yet even if these results contradict the hypothesis from the literature, interviewees tend to confirm the need for central control in order to guarantee women's presence. Keeping the whole picture in mind is crucial because – as an interviewee says – if only men are on the first places, the party can perfectly have no female MP at one election. In the Flemish green party, it has gone from suggestion to coercion in some constituencies to put a woman on the first place. A pro-active support for women is thus exercised top-down in some parties. A francophone green reports that she has proposed to introduce parity at the global level: the party would have to put female candidates on the head of list for half of the constituencies. However, this proposition is not in force because, according to her, each local section is free to decide. Localised level is described as not women-friendly. A female interviewee concedes that the local section has had to change mentality as a consequence of legal quotas. She relates that men were used to stay among themselves drinking beer. This very frustrating situation for women has changed after the quota act because men felt obliged to accept women entering their sphere. She affirms that local sections are the most chauvinist structures; they will take more time to feminise and modernise because they are far more conservative than the national level. In short, localised power would not assure women-friendliness. Interviewees agree with scholars' statements, even though facts from Belgian political parties do not entirely prove it.

Third and last, an institutionalised process is said to be more women-friendly than an informal process, in particular if the procedures are complex. All good parties in terms of women's presence have institutionalised selection processes. This completely confirms the hypothesis. However, some average parties select their candidates quite informally, and one party with fewer women in its ranks has surprisingly formal procedures (and even complex).

Information from the interviews is nuanced regarding the effect of institutionalisation on women-friendliness. In a green's opinion, a written profile and application can have a deterrent effect on women willingness to candidate. Women often do not trust themselves. Selectorates have then to approach candidates personally and encourage them by underlining their qualities. An interviewee concedes that because women are more modest, they would less spontaneously say that they would like to become MP or minister. It appears from the interviewees that selectorates have to go and convince women instead of letting them apply by themselves. If the process is too formal, women's reluctance to be self-recruited could play in their disfavour. Notwithstanding, beyond appearances of formality, a female respondent raises the informal character of the selection choices. She says that list formation appears to be a formal process when you look at it from far but when you get closer, it seems that not everyone has the same chances to get in. She affirms always having been disgusted by this system of elbowing one's way in.

Adding some information directly gathered among politicians helps acquiring a deeper understanding of how it really works. Interviews have learnt that selectorates' composition matter. No woman within selectorates may be in disfavour of female

candidates. Furthermore, a major argument from the interviews concerns the degree of centralisation of the selection process. The local level is said to be more chauvinist whereas a central look at the process would help ensuring a sufficient number of elected women.

Conclusion

Altogether Belgian political parties are women-friendly. No single party had in 2007 less than one-third women on the eligible places of its lists. Same proportions of female candidates have been elected in all ten parties. Yet differences exist between parties, since some manage to reach parity. The paper tries to explain why some parties score better than others in terms of women's presence in their ranks. It sketches the general picture of a women-friendly candidate selection process.

Three main hypotheses have been tested. First, women-friendliness would be higher if less people are involved in the process. Facts from Belgian political parties show the opposite. Parties having more women on eligible and elected places select their candidates through more inclusive procedures – i.e. the members participate. Second, when the national level has a say in the process instead of having the full power to decide in the hands of local instances, parties would reach higher levels of women's presence. The analysis of selectorates' localisation has not revealed such a relation. However, Belgian politicians have confirmed the hypothesis by saying that national level's intervention is crucial because local bodies tend to be more chauvinist and cannot have the whole picture in mind to ensure a global equal representation of both sexes. Third, if the process is formalised in detailed rules written in party statutes, outsiders – women – would get more chance to understand the process, and thus to manage to be selected. More women-friendly parties have indeed institutionalised procedures to build their electoral lists. Though, not all less women-friendly parties have informal procedures.

On the whole, this research can help answering the question of what selection modes stand for. Parties select their candidates according to certain rules – coming from party traditions or from the will of a party leader to change things. Yet they may think twice when opting for a certain type of selection process. It seems indeed that selection matters, not always in the direction expected after having read the literature. Further research should go further to test these hypotheses regarding features of selection processes, and try to explain why some features are more women-friendly than others.

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