

CANDIDATE SELECTION: EXPLORATIONS BEYOND THE SECRET GARDEN OF POLITICS

THE CASE OF BELGIUM

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ABSTRACT

Candidate selection is often described as “the secret garden of politics” (Gallagher & Marsh, 1988). This research confirms this scholarly statement and even adds that the garden is full of “muddy waters”. We have studied the case of Belgian legislative elections of 2007, in particular selection for the Lower House. Our analyses show that candidate selection processes involve multiple (mostly collective) actors. Requirements for aspirant candidates are less strong than in the previous decades. Candidate selection actors are therefore freer when taking their decision about lists composition. On the basis of a solid crosscheck of different sources of information, we have built a six-categories scale, ranking each Belgian party selection mode from the most exclusive to the most inclusive. Based on this scale, the paper asks the question of the importance of the mode of selection. Does candidate selection really matter? Our results confirm that selection matters in many respects. More exclusive selection modes favour more experienced candidates, and encourage candidates to adopt a representational focus on the constituency and party-at-large electorates. Conversely inclusive selectorates tend to select candidates being more congruent with their voters, in terms of self-positioning on the left – right scale.

INTRODUCTION

The moment when parties have to choose who is going to stand on their electoral lists is crucial. One of the *raisons d'être* of most political parties is to get as many of its candidates hold office in political institutions through the democratic mechanism of elections. Processes of candidate selection are thus considered as a key moment in the life of a political party. Previous empirical research indicate that Belgian parties do not follow the same path when selecting their candidates (De Winter, 1988). This research shows the same. One can wonder if these variations in the modes of candidate selection do matter. Does a specific mode of candidate selection affect other variables such as the type of candidate selected or the degree of mass – elite issue congruence?

This paper offers an exploration beyond “the secret garden of politics” (Gallagher & Marsh, 1988). After having depicted how candidate selection takes place in Belgian political parties, this research aims at discovering connections between candidate selection mode, candidate profile and issue congruence.

A first question concerns the kind of actors that are involved in the selection of candidates for the legislative elections in Belgium. On the basis of three types of sources, we have managed to identify different selectorates. First, we examined in detail party statutes that describe in a more or less extensive way processes of candidate selection and actors playing a role. Second, we have questioned candidates about who has had an influence on their selection. Finally, we crosschecked the information gathered with intensive consultation of both national and local press.

The paper is structured into two main parts. We first describe for each Belgian political party the specific process of candidate selection focusing on who select and how they select. Then the question of the outcome of the selection process is explored. We will see that while previously parties set strong requirements regarding characteristics of candidates, nowadays this is not anymore the case. Nonetheless, some requirements persist. The paper tests if actual candidates match with what their parties demand in their statutes. Based on this portrait of selectors, the second part focuses on the question of “does it matter?”. We explore the link between candidate selection modes and candidate profiles. Does the mode of selection impacts on the outcome of the process, i.e. the features, attitudes and behaviour of candidates running for election? In terms of data, we restrict our analyses on the 2007 federal elections for the Chamber of Representatives.

CONTEXTUALISATION

This first section presents some Belgian electoral system features relevant for candidate selection. Since 2003, the number of electoral constituencies for the elections of the House of Representatives has been set to eleven, comprising the ten provinces plus the large constituency Brussels-Halle-Vilvoorde. The 150 seats are allocated to the constituencies proportional to their number of inhabitants. District magnitude varies from four to twenty-two. In contrast, in the period between 1945 and 1993, the number

of constituencies was thirty, with district magnitude varying from two to thirty-three, electing a total of 212 deputies. In many parties, the old constituencies (congruent with the administrative level of the *arrondissement*, which we define in our paper as “subconstituency level”), continue to play an important role in the candidate selection process.

The method of allocating seats to candidates¹ underwent a moderate change in 2000, moving from a quasi-closed to a more open flexible-list PR system with multiple votes. However, in practice, the new system only modestly weakened the ‘iron grip’ of the parties on the selection of the actual deputies.²

While selectorates commonly think in terms of safe, marginal or hopeless places on the lists, the injection of some intra-party competition into the system made places high on the list a bit less safe. Still, for the main parties, the position of head of the constituency list is empirically an ultra-safe position, absolutely independent of one’s preference vote score. But also the election of other candidates ranked high on the list (until the third or fourth place) is usually safe. Hence, intra-party competition focuses on the last seat(s) allotted to a party. The candidates that are really competing with each other are those with marginal or “unsafe” list positions.

Regarding legal requirements in terms of candidate characteristics, since 1994 several national laws were passed that aimed at gradually implementing gender parity, making alternating gender ranking obligatory by 2007. Moreover, the 2002 law foresaw that from legislative elections of 2007 – i.e. the ones studied in this paper – the first two places of each list have to be occupied by persons of different sex. The effects of these laws were dramatic at all levels of election (Mateo Diaz, 2002; Meier, 2012) and thus also had an impact on candidate selection.³ The gender quota forced the parties to search for electorally appealing female candidates, which often posed a problem given the fact that

¹ Generally, the Belgian electoral system allows for two alternative ways of casting votes (for the House as well as the Senate): a list vote, endorsing the order of candidates on the list that is presented, and/or a preference vote. Every candidate whose number of preference votes reaches the eligibility figure (calculated by dividing the party’s total constituency vote by the number of seats it won, plus one) receives a seat. Usually, only candidates at the top of party lists are elected in this manner. If the head of the list receives fewer preference votes than the eligibility figure, list votes are added to his preference votes until the required figure is reached. This procedure is repeated from the top of the list downwards, until all the party’s seats have been allocated. However, if the list votes are depleted before all the seats have been assigned, then the remaining seats are given to those remaining candidates who have the largest number of preference votes. The 2000 reform decided that only half of the number of list votes cast for a party in a given constituency would be available to upgrade the preference votes of those high up on that party list.

² In spite of the fact that the incidence of preference voting increased from 16 per cent in 1919 to about six out of ten since 1995 (for the House), in practice this system operated as a closed list system, as voters hardly ever managed to alter the ordered list. At the 2003 general election, when preference voting peaked at 67 per cent, 17 deputies were elected ‘out of order’, i.e. bypassing candidates placed higher on the lists (15 in 2007). Of these, eleven would not have been elected under the old system.

³ While before 1995, the proportion of women in the Belgian House of Representatives was always below 10 per cent, in 1999, 24 per cent of deputies were women, 35 per cent in 2003, 37 per cent in 2007, and 39,3 per cent at the 2010 elections.

traditionally compared to men women tended to be less enthusiastic about being nominated for public office. In fact, male candidates tend to be self-recruiters, while women tend to be actively recruited by the parties to become candidates.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

PERSPECTIVES ON CANDIDATE SELECTION

If we accept the basis assumption that one main objective of political parties is to influence policies of a given polity by occupying elected public offices, candidate selection is a crucial operation of such an organisation. Candidates are indeed the only ones than can become an elected office holder. No one has become a deputy in the Chamber without ever having been a candidate. In this respect, we expect political parties to attach great importance to the selection of their candidates. These people will become a large part of the external image of the party; they will represent the party and talk in its name. All in all candidate selection is one the main task a political party has to realise.

Gallagher and Marsh (1988) have produced an influential work on candidate selection. According to them, candidate selection is “the secret garden of politics”. They mean that candidate selection is a process particularly difficult to understand from the outside. Political parties are reluctant to let outsiders look into their organisation. Our research – that aims at understanding how candidate selection processes occur in Belgian political parties – has frequently ran into this problem of opacity. Political parties do not seem to fully respect what their own statutes prescribe. Digging deeper than an analysis of formal rules is complicated, nor does it fully guarantee full comprehension. Twenty-five years later candidate selection seems still to remain a secret garden, also in Belgium (De Winter, 1980, 1988; Obler, 1974).

More recently Rahat and Hazan have investigated in depth and width the selection of candidates. A part of their seminal research is devoted to the development of a typology that categorises selectorates along different dimensions (Rahat & Hazan, 2001). The selectorate is the actor in charge of candidate selection. Selectors can be characterised following several analytical dimensions. The main ones are the degree of inclusiveness and of centralisation. The degree of inclusiveness measures the number of individual people constituting the selectorate. The most inclusive selectorate is composed by all citizens/voters willing to participate in the nomination of candidates. In Belgium, voters do not participate in candidate selection (and never have). The most inclusive selectorate in Belgium are thus the party membership. This process of selection gives due paying rank-and-file members the opportunity to voice their preferences, to influence, and sometimes even fully determine, the confection of the candidate lists. On the other extreme of the spectrum, the most exclusive selector is the party leader herself. While this is rare, sometimes we find exclusive selectorates comprising several party leaders. Between those two extremes, different formulas exist, such as a party agency specially constituted to select candidates (an “ad hoc committee” or a “list committee”). Another

in-between type of selectorate is when delegates of members have the possibility to decide on the lists (usually with a non-binding mandate).

Nevertheless candidate selection processes are often more complex than a process involving one (collective) actor. Often the selection does not occur at only one single moment by one single selectorate. Assorted, multistage and weighted candidate selection methods can be discerned (Hazan & Rahat, 2010). In the assorted method, different selectorates select candidates. The party ends up with a list where not all candidates come from the same selection process. Most often the difference is made between candidates for eligible places and other candidates, more exclusive selectors being more involved in the selection of the first ones. The multistage method involves different selectorates who select the same candidates, successively. Finally, the weighted method weights the different selectorates' choices among the same pool of aspirants.

Next to selectorates, candidates are of course the other important actor of the process. Parties themselves or legal rules can limit which citizens have the right to apply for candidacy. The pool of possible candidates can be more or less large, ranging from all citizens/voters to members fulfilling certain conditions (Rahat & Hazan, 2001). Being a member of the party since a certain period of time is for instance a classic condition required by parties, alongside the age of the candidate.

In short, candidate selection process is categorised as the most inclusive if all citizens can apply as aspirants and that a pool of voters selects candidates between the aspirants. The most exclusive process is conversely characterised by a selection by the party leader from within or even outside the party organisation, applying several formal and informal restrictive criteria.

LINKING CANDIDATE SELECTION MODE AND CANDIDATE PROFILE

This research aims at going beyond a comprehensive analysis of candidate selection. It starts an exploration beyond the secret garden of politics by linking candidate selection modes and candidate profiles. This area of research is mostly developed in gender studies. Many scholars have tried to understand the impact of a certain type of selection on for instance the number of women elected. Niven (1998) uses the outgroup effect theory to explain this impact. He argues that selectors form together an image of who is an ideal politician. They consider themselves as being able to define the characteristics of a successful *homo politicus*. On basis of these types of personality traits, they choose candidates among the pool of aspirants. In this respect, outside group aspirants may 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 selectorate matters to get a gender representative outcome. If we generalise from these results, the type of selectorate may therefore import for determining the outcome of the selection process in term of candidates' profiles.

The central question of this paper consists of testing if candidate selection modes have an impact of the type of candidate selected. Four characteristics of candidates will be

examined. The first three characteristics deal with “candidate profile” whereas the last one concerns issue congruence between candidates and voters.

First, we examine the impact of candidate selection mode on candidate seniority. We expect to find an association between the inclusiveness of the selectorate and candidates’ political experience. On the one hand, one can assume that a more inclusive selectorate would prefer candidates having a stronger political experience. If voters or members have the power to select candidates, there are chances that they will choose well-known and popular candidates, often incumbents, rewarding them for their previous commitment to the party and constituency. In this respect, a restrictive group of selectors may have a broader view on what kind of MPs the party may need in the next legislative term. They may give a chance to newcomers in order to rejuvenate the political class and transform them into experienced politicians. On the other hand, if we consider selectorates as old boys’ clubs (Cheng & Tavits, 2011), we could expect exclusive selectorates to choose candidates among aspirants that are similar to themselves. In this situation an inclusive selectorate would be innovative and open to outsiders whereas exclusive selectorates would rather co-opt well-known candidates having already proved their loyalty to the party and their capacity to catch votes. The first hypothesis is thus contradictory.

H1a: More inclusive selectorates select more experienced candidates.

H1b: More inclusive selectorates select less experienced candidates.

Second, we expect to find an association between the type of selectorate and the focus of representation of candidates. Candidates selected by a large pool of selectors i.e. voters or members may feel more accountable towards people that gave them the opportunity to run as a candidate. Their accountability is not only reached towards their party – through party leaders – but expand towards a more comprehensive group of people. Once in Parliament, MPs may feel that they not only have to represent their party but all individuals constituting the selectorate as well. In this respect, we expect inclusive selectorates to select candidates granting importance to represent a comprehensive group of people.

H2: More inclusive selectorates select candidates adopting a comprehensive view of people they represent.

Third, we may assume that the nature of selectorates may affect the way candidates would like to behave once elected, in terms of independence towards their party. Some scholars have already touched upon this topic. Rahat and Sheafer (2007) argue that democratisation of candidate selection encourages personalised politics. Opening up the range of selectors makes the party losing control on its own candidates. Candidates having to apply in front of a large selectorate would be tempted by populism and individualism. They may want to distinguish themselves from other aspirants, and may therefore drift apart from their party line. Kristjánsson (1998) describes Icelandic political parties – as a result of primary elections – as “umbrella organizations for individual politicians rather than highly disciplined organizations”. Exclusive selectorates may be able to keep control on their candidates’ behavior once elected. (Faas, 2003; Hix, 2004) Gallagher (1988) concludes that even a party agency may be enough to ensure party

cohesion: “it may not matter much, in this sense which party agency selects candidates, but it does matter that some party agency selects them.”

H3: More inclusive selectorates select more independent candidates.

Fourth, we hypothesize that there may be a link between candidate selection modes and mass – elites issue congruence. We expect candidates selected by an inclusive pool of selectors to be ideologically closer to voters. Persily (2001) argues that candidates inclusively selected pursue positions closer to the median voter. Hazan and Rahat (2010) agree, but note that this must be checked empirically. They assert that the more open the candidate selection process is, the more congruent candidates’ ideological stands will be with their voters’ opinions.

H4: More inclusive selectorates select more congruent candidates.

CANDIDATE SELECTION ACTORS

This section is articulated around the two main actors of the candidate selection process, namely selectors and candidates. First, it analyses who has selected candidates for the 2007 Belgian legislative elections. Based on a comprehensive exploration of candidate selection processes in eleven Belgian parties, we build a six-categories scale ranging from the most inclusive towards the most exclusive process. Subsequently each party is analysed separately. Second, candidates’ characteristics are examined on the basis of what party statutes require. These statutory requirements are then linked to the characteristics of actual candidates.

CATEGORIZING SELECTION MODES

Candidate selection seems not to be an uncompounded process. On the basis of an in-depth analysis of party statutes, newspapers and candidates’ answers to a post-electoral questionnaire, we have managed to get an overall picture of the process of candidate selection in each party for the 2007 general elections. In all parties, the process involves many actors of different kinds. All parties apply a multistage selection process, what certainly complicates the analysis. We have however built a 6 categories-scale into which all Belgian political parties fit. This scale is used in the second part of the paper that aims at linking candidate selection mode and candidate profile. The next paragraphs evoke the methodological steps we followed in order to end up with the 6-categories scale. Subsequently we will further specify in the particularities of the selection process for each party.

Eleven parties are taken into account in our research. First the four main ideological families are analysed, namely socialists, Christian-democrats, liberals and greens from each side of the Belgian “linguistic border”. In addition, next to these eight parties, three rightist parties are examined: the Flemish nationalist party Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (N-VA), the ultraliberal and populist Lijst Dedecker (LDD) and the Flemish-separatist far-right party (Vlaams Belang). The Francophone far right party (FN) has been excluded, as well as the small left “post-independist” party (Spirit) given the lack of relevance of these

parties in terms of electoral results, the lack of party statutes or the low number of respondents in the 2007 candidate survey.

Our exploration starts with a detailed analysis of party statutes in force in 2007. For each party, we have determined which actors are involved in the selection process. Name and/or function of actors have been depicted. In case of multiple actors, the composition of the assembly or the committee has been identified. Next, the decision-making level at which each actor operates was distinguished – being either national, constituency or sub-constituency level. We have ended up with a range of selectors categorized as more or less inclusive and more or less (de-)centralised. Since selectors may play a role at different times of the selection process, it is relevant to distinguish between the different steps of the full selection process. Three main phases have been found. The first phase concerns the actor holding the power to propose a list composition (the so-called *model list*). In the second phase we find the part of the selectorate that ratifies the final list of candidates to be presented at the elections – i.e. the selectorate that has the final word. Between these two phases is situated a third type of actor (but not present in all parties, and empirically scarcely used) that has the possibility to “evoke” the list. This power of evocation can vary from a clear-cut veto right to the power to make suggestions for modifications. However, in many parties processes are far more complex than this simplistic three-phase picture. Yet we have tried to categorize each party according to these categories. Finally, one has to take into account that some differences exist between constituencies, as in some parties the national party rules regarding candidate selection are complemented by constituency (or even subconstituency) party rules. Our final decision has taken these divergences into consideration. However, we built our typology on the definition of a single unique selection procedure for each party based on its empirical predominance, focusing on the two main phases, namely the proposition of the list and its adoption.

The phases and actors drawn from the statutes have been compared to answers from candidates to a post electoral questionnaire sent out in the aftermath of the 2007 Belgian federal elections (n=360)⁴. The Comparative Candidate Survey⁵ (included two multiple-choice questions: one concerning their main selector – being members, delegates, leaders or another actor – while the other asked the decision-making level – from subconstituency, over constituency to the national level (and other)). The analysis of respondents’ answers showed a surprising and worrying heterogeneity. Respondents from a same party and running in the same constituency gave different answers. In addition, some answers did not match at all with what could be expected according to the statutes. Some of these inconsistencies may be linked to the ambiguity of the

⁴ We sent out 1158 questionnaires to candidates for the 2007 House elections (including all effective candidates and a number of substitute candidates (*suppléants/opvolgers*) equal to the number of Representatives elected at the previous elections on a party list with a minimum of three for the new parties). The overall return rate was 35.1% and quasi-proportional in terms of elected and non-successful candidates.

⁵ See

http://www.comparativecandidates.org/sites/default/files/CCS_CandidateQuestionnaire_20070220.pdf

question asked. Some may have focused on the selectorates that compose the model lists, some on those that approve the model lists. In order to understand these inconsistencies, both local and national press has been consulted in the period running up to the June elections (from January to June 2007). When available, information produced by candidates has also been collected (e.g. from personal blogs). On the basis of this crosscheck of information, it has been possible to allocate a definite answer of the predominant selection mode in each party (see table 1).

Table 1: Candidate selection modes (four-variable table)

	Proposition		Adoption	
	Selectorate	Level	Selectorate	Level
Ecolo	party leadership	at constituency level	members	at constituency level
PS	party leadership	at subconstituency and constituency level	a party delegate conference	at constituency level
cdH	party leadership	at constituency and national level	members	at constituency level
MR	party leadership	at constituency and national level	party leadership	at constituency level
Groen!	party leadership	at constituency and national level	members	at constituency level
sp.a	party leadership	at constituency level	a party delegate conference	at constituency level
CD&V	party leadership	at constituency level	members	at constituency level
VLD	party leadership	at constituency level	members	at constituency level
NVA	party leadership	at constituency and national level	extended party leadership	at national level
LDD	party leader	at national level	party leader	at national level
VB	party leadership	at constituency and national level	extended party leadership	at national level

This four-variable table contains some non-discriminating and/or superfluous information. In order to be able to analyse parties on the basis of the candidate selection process, the next step aims at reducing this data to retain only discriminating information. The first column – the actor proposing the model list – does not discriminate among parties. All parties give the power to pre-select candidates to a small number of persons holding responsibilities at constituency level – exception made of the (small) Flemish ultraliberal party (LDD) that concentrates the proposition power in the hands of its founding President. Nonetheless, the level of power involved in the proposition stage discriminates. For some parties the national level plays a role next to the constituency level. This role consists mainly in choosing the heads of lists or at least choosing candidates for the eligible, safe places. Taking into account that party leadership plays a role in all parties at the proposition level, we will only consider variation regarding the decision-making level. Concerning the final approval of the list, the type of selectorate

perfectly coincides with the level of the decision. Approval by the members, a party delegates conference and the party leadership are always situated at the constituency level, whereas selection by the extended party leadership and the party leader occur only at the national level. The fourth column – the level of power of the adoption – is therefore superfluous. Given these considerations the four variables can be reduced to two variables without losing precious information (see table 2).

Table 2: Candidate selection modes (two-variable table)

	Proposition	Adoption
Ecolo	Party leadership at constituency level	members at constituency level
PS	Party leadership at subconstituency and constituency level	party delegate conference at constituency level
cdH	Party leadership at constituency and national level	members at constituency level
MR	Party leadership at constituency and national level	party leadership at constituency level
Groen!	Party leadership at constituency and national level	members at constituency level
sp.a	Party leadership at constituency level	party delegate conference at constituency level
CD&V	Party leadership at constituency level	members at constituency level
VLD	Party leadership at constituency level	members at constituency level
NVA	Party leadership at constituency and national level	extended national party leadership
LDD	Party leadership at national level	national party leader
VB	Party leadership at constituency and national level	extended national party leadership

Again some patterns appear when analysing the two-variable table above. Categories for proposition perfectly co-occur with categories for adoption. Only when members ratify the final list of candidates, the mode of proposition of the list varies across parties. Two patterns emerge: parties where the national level intervenes, and parties where the constituency level remains free from national interference. Splitting the category of members in two – and keeping the others alike – leads us to the final single variable table, summarizing the whole information into only six categories (Table 3).

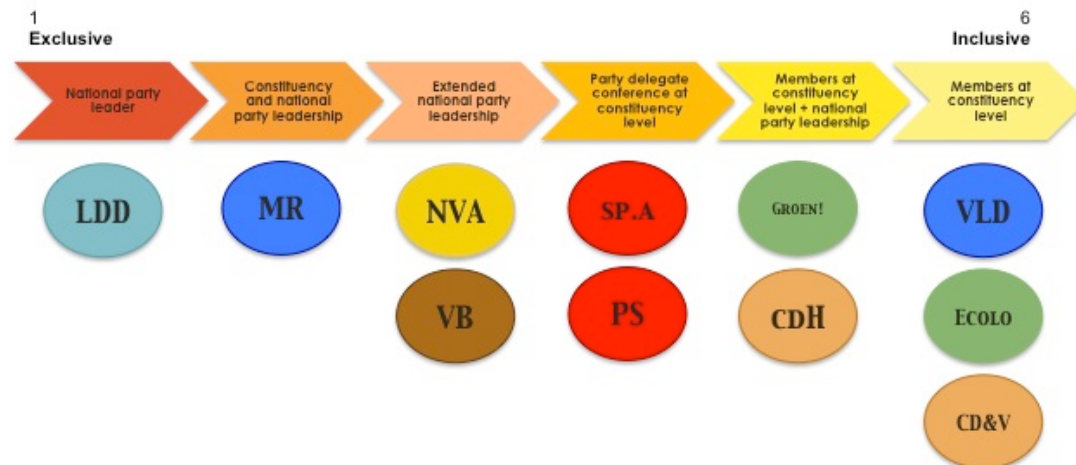
Table 3: Candidate selection modes (final table)

	Selection mode
Ecolo	Members at constituency level
PS	Party delegate conference at constituency level
cdH	Members at constituency level + national party leadership
MR	Constituency and national party leadership
Groen!	Members at constituency level + national party leadership
sp.a	Party delegate conference at constituency level
CD&V	Members at constituency level
VLD	Members at constituency level
NVA	Extended national party leadership
LDD	National party leader
VB	Extended national party leadership

These six candidate selection modes used by Belgian political parties for the 2007 federal elections follow an ordinal logic. Our reduction of variables on the basis of practice in 2007 allows us to combine Hazan and Rahat (2010) candidate selection dimensions of inclusiveness as well as centralisation into a single ordinal scale. The most exclusive selection mode is when one single leader selects. The LDD selected its candidates in a strongly exclusive way. This party was under construction at the time of running up of the 2007 federal elections (its leader was first kicked out by the Liberals, then by the N-VA upon which Dedecker decided to found his own party), what explains the highly non-institutionalized way of selecting its (or rather his) candidates. In this case we can more speak about recruitment rather than selection. He has to convince candidates to run for him rather than to select candidates among a larger pool of aspirants. The Francophone liberal party (Mouvement Réformateur, MR) fits a category (the second one) on its own. Its selectorates is rather exclusive, probably because of its cartel nature. In 2007 this party was made of four parties running together under the name of the MR-federation. This situation required a specific coordination between leaders from each cartel component where at the top of the federation an agreement was reached between the leaders of each component regarding the distribution of eligible places between the four components in six constituencies. The third category fits to two Flemish nationalist parties (N-VA and VB). Their selectorate is larger than a party executive but is not made of local sections' delegates. The party council includes presidents of provincial section, (old) MPs, provincial deputies or co-opted members, in addition to members of the party executive. Both socialist parties (*Parti Socialiste*, PS and *socialistische partij.anders*, sp.a) do not call on direct members participation, but select candidates through a rather inclusive selectorate, namely a conference of members' delegates. The larger the local section in terms of members, the larger the number of delegates sent to the conference.

Socialist parties constitute the fourth category. Groen! and cdH are part of the fifth category. Their selection process is slightly less inclusive given that national leaders have the right to “keep an eye” on and if necessary intervene with the selection process. Finally, the most inclusive selection mode is when constituency members ratify the list via a so-called “poll”. Three parties (VLD, Ecolo and CD&V) belong to this category.

Figure 1: six-category scale of candidate selection inclusiveness



SELECTION BY LEADERS

Only rightist parties belong empirically to this category. N-VA, VB, MR and LDD call neither on members nor on delegates to select candidates. Selectorates are composed by leaders in a more or less exclusive way, depending on parties.

The LDD is the most exclusive party in terms of candidate selection. This Flemish ultraliberal party was under construction in 2007. No party statutes were in force at the moment of its preparation for the 2007 elections. According to candidates' answers and to the press, the party president and founder⁶ has done most of the job of composing his party lists. His task consisted mainly in recruiting candidates rather than selecting them among a large poll of aspirants. He presented in person the list constituted in each constituency, two and sometimes just one month before the election (i.e. on the eve of the official deposit of the lists).

The MR is a special case, as it is a federation of several parties. This situation requires a centralized selection process and probably explains the absence of a poll. It is certainly risky to let members decide on the list composition since the size of the four components of the federation is different (with a predominance of the old Liberal party, PRL). Less than three months before election day, presidents of each component gathered to decide on the leading constituency candidates (heads of list). On the six lists to be made for the Chamber, one top position has been given to the leader of the FDF and another one to a member of the MCC. Each head of list has then been charged to compose her own list, under the supervision of presidents of the party components. Final lists have been presented two months before the elections.

⁶ The party in 2007 carried even his name: *Lijst Dedecker*.

The N-VA, the Flemish nationalist party was in 2007 still in cartel with the CD&V, the Flemish Christian-democratic party. Intense negotiations were held between parties' top leaders in order to decide on eligible places, the N-VA getting a more than fair amount – given its score at the previous elections – eligible or marginal places. Inside the N-VA, choices were made first at constituency level and then at national level. The constituency board composes a project of model list that is to be approved by the constituency council. Both organs are rather exclusive: they count only party leaders (mainly incumbents). The party council ratifies then the list by a simple majority. The party council is made up by the “enlarged” party leadership: national party leaders, constituency presidents and secretaries, all incumbents at regional and national level, the chief editor of the party newspaper, the general director, etc. If the party council does not agree on the list, the party executive takes the initiative to propose a new list to the council.

The *Vlaams Belang*, the Flemish far right party, also uses a rather centralised procedure. The party executive is responsible for the proposition of the list (to be decided by consensus). The constituency level (through the constituency executive) interferes in the process only by advising the national level. Both organs are highly exclusive: only party leaders and incumbents are part of it. The national party council adopts the final list by consensus. If they do not manage to decide by consensus, they can decide by a simple majority of votes. This council is similar to the N-VA council. Party leaders at national and constituency level, incumbents and even co-opted members (by two thirds) sit in this party council. The composition of VB lists started already five months before the elections.

SELECTION BY DELEGATES

Only the two socialist parties use this method of selection (PS and sp.a). This particularity could be due to their mass party hierarchical model of democracy by delegation. Especially in the PS this model may lead to “local barons” holding a considerable power. As detailed in the next paragraphs, the PS uses a more decentralised process than the sp.a where the national level can interfere (even if its power remains limited).

The francophone socialist party PS offers a lot of room for manoeuvre to constituency and even subconstituency leaders. The national party statutes hardly mention anything about candidate selection procedures. We have to further investigate the statutes of each *fédération*⁷ to fully understand the process. In theory a poll could be organized if the constituency congress⁸ decides to do so. However, while the PS remained for a long time the champion of holding a poll (De Winter, 1988), we have found no trace of the poll in the PS. In fact, by now a federal committee (i.e. at subconstituency level) composes the model list. Delegates, next to national party leaders that reside in the federation, are part of this committee. Members elect 35 delegates that have to represent all communes of the (sub)constituency. In the three constituencies containing several subconstituency *fédérations*, presidents of the *fédérations* decide together on the final model list. The

⁷ PS federations are subconstituency organisations corresponding to constituencies (federations) used before 1995. The number of federations varies from one to five federation(s) per current constituency.

⁸ A general conference of delegates, organized at constituency level

Congress constitutes the last step when delegates from local sections approve the list. Delegates⁹ have the right to vote only if their local section has gathered their general member assembly of before the congress. The different delegate congresses took place three months before the elections.

Flemish socialists (sp.a) have a slightly more centralised process than their francophone counterparts. Decisions taken at constituency level are subjected to the recommendation of the national party executive. The constituency board decides first on a model list: in 2007 this was done around three months before the elections. If the national executive does not agree with a list (e.g. because the list does not respect the party statutes or the party interests¹⁰), a commission of arbitration¹¹ is set up. In case of parity of votes, the constituency board decides. The national president enjoys an evocation right and can ask the national political executive to discuss the list. Finally, a constituency delegate conference is held (i.e. the congress). Each section can send one delegate per 200 members.

SELECTION BY MEMBERS

Among parties allowing their members to participate in the selection of candidates for legislative elections, two groups emerge. On the one hand, the national level does seem to have intervened in the process of Groen! and cdH. On the other hand, we have found no traces of a national intervention in the process for the Ecolo, CD&V and VLD.

Groen!, the Flemish ecologists, started their candidate selection very early¹². Already seven months before the elections the party leader announced at her New Years reception the names of the chief (i.e. eligible) candidates. Five months before the elections they organised an assembly where members had the possibility to confirm the choice of the party top about chief candidates in each constituency. This method is certainly highly centralised, which is quite unusual for this party cherishing the principle of “*basis-democratie*”. Afterwards a poll has been organised on the whole list, in each constituency.

The francophone Christian-democrats (centre démocrate Humaniste, cdH) use a three-step process. A special constituency committee¹³ prepares a model list. These special constituency committees were set up less than five months before the elections. The national political executive enjoys an evocation right that allows it to propose a model list, without the constituency special committee having any chance to appeal. Members ratify the model list by a majority of casted votes. If members do not agree on the list,

⁹ The size of the delegation for each local section depends on their number of members.

¹⁰ These two conditions are stipulated in the statutes.

¹¹ Six delegates from the national political board and six delegates from the constituency board compose the commission of arbitration. Both boards decide on who goes to the commission.

¹² This is probably linked to their poor electoral score in 2003 when they did not manage to capture a single seat in the House.

¹³ The special committee is made up by a delegation composed in function of half the amount of inhabitants and half the amount of party members. Committee members are appointed by constituency leaders. Consequently, we do not consider this committee as a delegate committee.

they can put a rank order amongst candidates and the final list is based on calculation of votes earned by each candidate. We have not found any occurrence of such re-ordering.

Ecolo has probably one of the most complex selection modes. The process is multistage as well as assorted, meaning that many actors are involved and that processes are different according to the type of place on the lists. Strategic (i.e. eligible and marginal) places are singled out. These places are, according to Ecolo's statutes, places being more eligible or visible during the campaign. An ad hoc committee (the federal list committee¹⁴) decides on the number and the localisation of the strategic places. The federation council (assembly of delegates at the national level) has to adopt the proposition made by this ad hoc federal list committee. In short, the selection process *per se* consists of two main steps. First, the constituency list committee decides on a model list. Second, the constituency assembly (i.e. open to all members) adopts the list by 2/3 of casted votes. If the list is rejected, the list committee has to propose a new list, still to be adopted by members but only by the absolute majority of votes. The federation council has an evocation right. This organ can invalidate the list – which would force the list committee to propose a revised list. According to the press, the process has been without problems. All Ecolo constituency assemblies approved the lists with more than 80%. Many were already held four months before election day.

Flemish Christian-democrats (Christen Democratisch & Vlaams, CD&V) use a decentralized selection process. Members intervene after a pre-selection by constituency leaders. The constituency board decides on a model list in consultation with sub-constituency leaders, and representatives of the party's three socio-economic factions. (De Winter, 1988; Smits, 1986) Members get then the possibility to approve the list through a poll. The decision about the model list occurred two months before the election and the poll took place nearly one month before election day. No trace of refusal by the members was found. A particularity of CD&V in 2007 was their cartel with the Flemish nationalists (N-VA). Due to this association of parties, the process was even more centralised than usual, in that leaders had to agree on the repartition of candidates of each cartel components for the eligible places (a cartel agreement that generously guaranteed one safe place to the N-VA in each of the six Flemish constituencies).

Lastly, Flemish liberals (Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten, VLD) use a three-step decentralized process. A working group¹⁵ prepares the selection by ranking candidates on a first draft of a model list. Aspirants excluded from this list, but that eventually may be added to the list if it were to be rejected by the members, are listed in alphabetical order at the bottom of the model list. The constituency board determines the final model list. Members are then called to vote in decentralised voting stations. If no majority is reached, the board calls a second vote. The board can either proposes the same list as before, or a modified list. Members have the possibility to vote on the model list or to re-order candidates. In this last case, the list is finally composed by counting which

¹⁴ This committee is composed by national party leaders, but cannot comprise candidates on strategic places.

¹⁵ This working group must be composed by at least half non-incumbents and at least half persons not being candidate. The constituency board, at the suggestion of the constituency chairperson, chooses working group members.

candidate has got the most votes for each place on the list. Nonetheless this situation does not seem to have occurred in 2007. Regarding the timing, the boards have decided three months before the elections. According to the statutes, the poll has to take place five weeks before the mandatory deposit of lists (occurring one month before election day).

All in all, even if five parties allow members to directly intervene in the selection of candidates for legislative elections, rank-and-file members do not seem to use this power to overthrow the model list. This suggests that leaders either at the constituency level only or at both constituency and national level that compose the model lists are the main decision-makers in constituting the lists. Yet one can consider that leaders – when preselecting candidates on a model list – keep in mind that members must agree on the list and eventually can reject and alter their elitist choice. The power of members to reject and alter the model list, and the fact that such rejection hardly ever occurs, may equally well indicate that the elites usually anticipate well their members' preferences.

What can be concluded after having detailed the real-world candidate selection processes in each party for the general elections (for the Chamber), is that every ideological family has approximately the same selection process. Greens and Christian-Democrats are inclusive. Socialists use delegate congresses. Rightist parties select in a rather exclusive way. Only liberals differ in this respect. The Flemish VLD tends to be inclusive¹⁶ while the Francophone MR tends to be exclusive. This difference can be explained by the cartel nature of the MR whereas the VLD consists of only one party.

REQUIRED CANDIDATE PROFILE

In the seventies, parties required a lot from their candidates. The socialist party in particular settled strong eligibility requirements to aspirants in order to be accepted as a candidate. Having been a member of the party for a certain period of time was demanded, next to being affiliated to the socialist trade union and mutual health insurance organisation (*mutuelle*). Aspirant candidates also had to be a subscriber to party's newspaper. The wife and children of candidates had to be enrolled in the socialist associations and the children have to be in state school rather than catholic schools. (Obler, 1974)

Nowadays such strong requirements do not exist anymore. This is partly linked to the phenomenon of depillarisation (Billiet, 1984; Jones, 2008). Citizens and *a fortiori* candidates do not feel anymore encapsulated in an ideological pillar “from the cradle to the grave” (Seiler, 1992). Parties have gradually taken some distance from their pillar organisations. This depillarisation of parties explains the fact that they have dropped this kind of requirements in the party statutes of the pillarized parties (Christian-democrats, socialist, and to a lesser extent the Liberals). Overall there are few pillar and other requirements stipulated in party statutes in 2007.

Only three main conditions appear in party statutes. These concern first the adherence to the party ideology and its electoral programme in particular. Second, in some parties candidates are required to keep close contacts with citizens on a regular basis. Third,

¹⁶ This can be due to their desire to become a “party of the citizen” (“*burgerpartij*”).

several parties require candidates not to pursue a career on their own at the sake of the party as a whole. Some other requirements were found in statutes but do not appear in enough parties in order to be relevant for our analysis. For instance, Ecolo's statutes stipulate that one of the essential personal characteristics of each candidate is to be well known. The next sections detail each condition and check if the conditions match with candidate profiles¹⁷.

RESPECT OF PARTY IDEOLOGY

Respect of party ideology is a condition settled out by most parties. Three clear groups appear. First, four parties do not mention any requirement in this respect (MR, LDD, PS, VLD)¹⁸. Amongst the others, we distinguished between on the one hand parties that require the respect of only the principles or the general party line, and on the other hand parties that specifically stipulate the respect of the party programme. Interestingly, all parties belonging to the less requiring group – principles – aim at members whereas parties referring to the programme address explicitly candidates. Groen!, VB and sp.a require that their members¹⁹ agree with the general goals of the party. N-VA, CD&V, cdH and Ecolo demand candidates to adhere to the programme, to defend it and for some to behave according to its recommendations. Both Christian-democratic parties even ask candidates to underwrite the programme when they apply as candidate. Ecolo asks to sign a charter where the candidate commits himself to defend the programme.

The candidate survey asked respondents whether they thought that « MPs should be able to vote in parliament independently of their party's position » (5-point scale, 1= strongly agree; 5= strongly disagree). We find a relatively strong association between this attitude and whether or not party statutes mention members' and candidates' duties to respect of the party program (Kendall's tau = 0.44***, n=391). Hence, candidates from parties with stricter programmatic statutory demands feel more bound by party discipline in Parliament.

KEEPING CONTACT WITH CITIZENS

The second condition – found in the statutes of four parties – is linked to various forms of contact with the citizens. Only socialist and Christian-democratic parties require this from their candidates or members. PS asks each member to maintain a close relationship with citizens. CD&V encourages MPs to aim at a maximal dialogue with the population. Besides all members have to be active in the organised social life. All candidates from cdH and sp.a are required to keep contact with the population through activities MPs may organise (information sessions, surgeries, etc.). Other parties do not mention anything in this respect.

Whether or not party statutes prescribe various types of “citizens contacts” does seem to have an effect on one of the various candidates’ “home style” role definitions (Fenno, 1978). Candidates from parties that prescribe “citizens contacts” do consider their role of

¹⁷ We use data from the same survey : CCS 2007.

¹⁸ For two of them it is no surprise since their statutes are short size wise (MR) or even nonexistent in 2007 (LDD). Statutes of PS and VLD are quite detailed; thus allowing them to include different kinds of requirements.

¹⁹ Groen! demands this from its MPs as well.

constituency service (=surgeries) as more important (on a 7 point scale from “not important” to “very important”) than candidates from parties that do not mention such requirement in their statutes (Kendall's tau = 0,182^{***}, n=376). Note that there is no significant relation with two other home style roles related to citizens contacts, such as “participation in the constituency’s socio-cultural life” and “listening to and informing citizens”.

AGAINST PERSONALIZED POLITICS

Finally some parties put constraints on a candidate centred campaign and/or a too personalised political activity. CD&V and PS demand that their MPs, when they defend publicly a position, do not engage into any form of personal propaganda. Ecolo, cdH and N-VA even stipulate conditions for candidates in this respect. Ecolo and cdH demand not to make personal advertising. N-VA stipulates that personal ambitions have always to be subordinated to the party interest. The six other parties do not impose anything on their candidates concerning personalisation.

The empirical analysis does not show a significant link between party statutes constraints on running a candidate-centred campaign and candidates’ answers on 11 point scale of campaign personalization (the « campaign norm », Zittel & Gschwend, 2008) i.e. « attract as much attention as possible for me as a candidate” (=0) vs. “attract as much possible attention for my party” (=10).

DOES CANDIDATE SELECTION MODE MATTER?

The next sections test our four hypotheses. We would like to explore which impact a given selection mode can have on candidate profiles. Three characteristics of candidates are tested: seniority, focus of representation and personalisation of the campaign. The second part focuses on the impact on the degree of congruence between candidates and voters.

CANDIDATE SELECTION AND CANDIDATE PROFILE

Concerning the hypotheses regarding impact of candidate selection modes on the profile of candidate, our inclusiveness scale is significantly related to the candidate characteristics mentioned in H1 to H3.

H1a: More inclusive selectorates select more experienced candidates.

H1b: More inclusive selectorates select less experienced candidates.

First, regarding the political experience of candidates, we find that parliamentary seniority (measured by the years candidates served as European, federal or regional MP) is significantly associated – kendall’s tau = - 0.15^{**}, n=333 – with the degree of inclusiveness of the selectorate (if we exclude the newborn party LDD, that evidently does not have incumbents on its lists). Hence, when the final approval of candidates involves the rank-and-file members, candidates tend to be less senior whereas when “elites” confirm the final list, candidates tend to have a higher seniority in terms of have

held elected offices in various legislative assemblies. This confirms H1b and disconfirms H1a.

The same finding holds for the effect of inclusiveness on party leadership seniority, calculated as the total number of years a candidate held a party office (from the local level to the top as national party leader) (kendall's tau = - 0.20***, n=330, excluding the newborn party LDD, that does not have party officers on its lists). Hence, when rank-and-file members have the final say in approving the lists, candidates tend to be more “junior” whereas when “elites” choose, lists are made of people having a longer experience both in legislative assemblies and in party office (parliamentary incumbents and long-lasting party office holders). Inclusive selectorates seem then to be more “inclusive” or innovative – i.e. recruiting less experienced candidates or even outsiders – while exclusive selectorates tend to include more “insiders” in terms of elective incumbency and “party apparatchiks”. This suggests that “elites” tend to “co-opt” candidates from a “closed circle” that are similar to their own profile, i.e. senior insiders in terms of party and legislative office holding.

H2: More inclusive selectorates select candidates adopting a comprehensive view of people they represent.

Regarding the impact of inclusiveness on candidates “focus of representation”, the candidate survey offered a wide variety of foci, that respondents could rank in terms of importance on a 7-point scale (1=not important at all; 7= very important). The analyses (compare means and rank correlation) indicate that the higher the exclusiveness of the selectorates, the more candidates indicate that representing the following types of voters is important: “own party voters in constituency” (spearman r = -0.14**, n=359); “all citizens in constituency” (spearman r = -0.14**, n=364) and “the party electorate at large” (spearman r = -0.24***, n=368). There was no significant relation with the other foci of representation, such as “all Belgians”, “all Flemings/Walloons/Bruxellois”, “members of a social group” and “voters that gave you a preference vote”.

The first two significant relations suggest that candidates selected by members care less about their constituents than foci that stretch beyond their electoral constituency, exception made for the party electorate at large, which is also significantly and negatively related to inclusiveness. So we cannot really confirm H2.

An alternative interpretation would be that when selectorates are more exclusive, candidates define their focus of representation more in terms of constituency or party-at-large electorates, and not in terms of broad “functional” categories (“all Belgians”, “all Flemish/Walloons/Bruxellois”, “members of a social group”).

H3: More inclusive selectorates select more independent candidates.

Regarding the choice candidates may have to make when a disagreement occurs between their own opinion, that of their voters and the party's stand, we recoded the three classical questions of how a Member of Parliament should vote in Parliament²⁰ into

²⁰ How should a Member of Parliament vote in Parliament: “An MP in a conflict between the constituency voters and of the party should follow: a) if the voters in his/her constituency have one opinion and his/her party takes a different position? “MP should vote according to his/her

three new trichotomous variables, each measuring the number of times they gave precedence to either their party (mentioned twice, once or not), their voters' opinion (mentioned twice, once or not) and their own opinion (mentioned twice, once or not).

The empirical association between the inclusiveness of selection mode and these new variables does not confirm our hypothesis: the more exclusive the selectorate is, the more candidates claim they would follow their voters' position compared to their party's or own opinion (kendall tau = - 0.145**, n=374). There is also a smaller correlation between inclusiveness and the tendency of candidates to follow predominantly their party's position (tau = 0.104*, n=374), indicating that the more inclusive the selectorate is, the more candidates claim they would follow their party's position.

CANDIDATE SELECTION AND MASS – ELITE ISSUE CONGRUENCE

H4: More inclusive selectorates select more congruent candidates.

In this part, we investigate the relationship between candidate selection modes and mass – elite issue congruence. In other words, does candidate selection mode matter in terms of substantive political representation, i.e. in terms of ideological, programmatic and issue representation? We indicated that in Belgium candidate selection modes are related to the type of candidates selected. What happens when we add citizens in the representational equation, and more specifically, when we investigate the ideological proximity that citizens might have vis-à-vis candidates running for elections? So far, not many research have been conducted on this subject. Hazan and Rahat (2010) seem to think that more inclusive is the candidate selection process, more congruent are voters and candidates. To verify this hypothesis, we calculated the degree of congruence of the self-positioning of candidates and voters on the left – right scale using two different surveys. Both surveys asked the participants to position themselves on an 11-points scale. The wording of the questions was slightly different but we do not take into account that marginal difference²¹. Unfortunately, we are not able to calculate mass – elite issue congruence on other dimensions due to a lack of comparability between both surveys. The survey used to determine voters' positions on the left – right spectrum is the European Social Survey, Round 4 (2008). The sample size in our case is 1679. Candidates' positions are based on the Comparative Candidate Survey (CCS) of 2007, and the sample size is 357.

We have thus calculated the degrees of congruence between voters and candidates on the left – right scale for each party. Each party's degree of congruence is the result, in

party's opinion" vs "MP should vote according to his/her voters opinion"; b) if his/her own opinion on an issue does not correspond with the opinion of the voters in his/her constituency? "MP should vote according to his/her own opinion" vs "MP should vote according to the opinion of the voters in his/her constituency"; c) if his/her own opinion on an issue does not correspond with his/her party's position? "MP should vote according to his/her own opinion" vs "MP should vote according to his/her party's opinion".

²¹ CCS wording was "In politics, people sometimes talk about the 'left' and the 'right'. Where would you place your own views on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means the most left and 10 means the most right?" ESS wording was slightly different: "In politics people sometimes talk of "left" and "right". Using this card, where would you place yourself on this scale, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?"

negative value, of the difference between the mean position of the party's electorate and the mean position of the party's candidates (for the 2007 federal elections). It means that, the closer to zero is the score, the more congruent on the left – right scale are voters and candidates.

Table 4: Degrees of congruence for each party

Flemish parties		Francophone parties	
CD&V/N-VA	-0.35	cdH	-0.39
VLD-VIVANT	-0.85	PS	-0.6
Vlaams Belang	-1.5	MR	-0.86
Groen!	-1.52	ECOLO	-1.1
sp.a/SPIRIT	-1.63		
LDD	-1.64		

Looking at the *spearman* correlation between our two variables, being the degree of congruence and the degree of inclusiveness of the selectorate, we find a significant positive correlation of 0.50. Using aggregate variables (n=10, number of parties included in our research²²), we find a non-significant Rho of 0.54 but considering the small number of cases we do take that result into account. The two variables are thus positively correlated meaning that the more inclusive is the selectorate, the more candidates and voters are congruent on the left – right scale. This seems to confirm the hypothesis expressed by Hazan and Rahat in their seminal work (2010).

Another measure of congruence tends to confirm our finding. In fact, when we run an ANOVA with the degree of inclusiveness on the degree of congruence, we find a quite strong adjusted R^2 of 0.34, meaning that our independent variable – the degree of inclusiveness of the selectorate – shares 34% of the variance with our dependent variable being the degree of mass – elite congruence on the left – right scale. However, due to the low number of cases, and more particularly to the fact that, within some categories of our independent variable, there is only one party represented, the assumption of equal variances in the population cannot be met. We have therefore to be very careful in our conclusion regarding the results of the ANOVA analysis. Yet, it seems that there is a significant difference in means of congruence in the categories of degrees of inclusiveness of the selectorate. In sum, the degree of congruence is related to the degree of inclusiveness.

²² Actually we have analysed eleven parties but cannot take the N-VA's specificities into account for this analysis because this party was in cartel with the CD&V in 2007. Both parties' respondents are merged in only one aggregate answer "CD&V/N-VA".

Number of obs = 357					
R-squared = 0.3495					
Root MSE = .383527					
Adj R-squared = 0.3402					
Source	Partial SS	df	MS	F	Prob > F
Model	27.7413014	5	5.54826027	37.72	0.0000
CSinclusi~s	27.7413014	5	5.54826027	37.72	0.0000
Residual	51.6295242	351	.147092662		
Total	79.3708256	356	.222951757		

It seems that we can confirm the question we asked above: candidate selection mode does matter for substantive representation. Moreover, the hypothesis expressed by Hazan and Rahat (2010) seems to be verified for the Belgian case. The more inclusive is the selectorate, the more congruent candidates and voters are. However, we are not able to answer the question whether a high degree of congruence is something important for parties and whether it has an impact on electoral performance. Of course, our research is clearly limited by several elements. First of all, we would need more cases, i.e. more parties, to build a proper measure of the relationship between our variables. Although the Belgian party system is the most fragmented in Western Europe, we are still limited in terms of units of analysis. The voter survey nor the candidate survey allows us to verify our results at the level of the eleven constituencies (De Winter, Swyngedouw, & Dumont, 2006).

Secondly, this research is also limited by our measure of the degree of congruence. We know that the left – right spectrum is relevant in calculating mass – elite congruence, but we cannot limit ourselves to that only dimension, although many scholars consider this as a “super issue” (Lutz, Kissau, & Rosset, 2012). Citizens cast their informed vote not only regarding the left – right dimension since other important issue dimensions rose up lately. For instance, the libertarian – authoritarian dimension cannot be fully covered by the left – right dimension on the voters’ side and on elites’ side (Thomassen, 2012). Thomassen argues that the libertarian – authoritarian “dimension is correlated with the left – right dimension at the elite level, but not at the mass level”. Another relevant dimension that has a significant impact on the degree of congruence is the European dimension as elites and voters have very different views on the subject, and these are not correlated with the left – right dimension (Costello, Thomassen, & Rosema, 2012). These limitations have to be considered for further research on the subject.

CONCLUSION

Our journey through the secret garden of politics has delivered some interesting results but did not meet all our expectations. We have noticed that Belgian political parties select their candidates for legislative elections quite differently. Half of them call on members to adopt the final list of candidates while two decide using members’ delegates. The rest – nearly all rightist parties – have a rather exclusive procedure, meaning that a more or less extensive leadership selects. Nonetheless it seems that totally inclusive processes are an illusion since no party gives full power to its members.

In fact, a smaller group prepares a model list on which members or delegates vote. Consequently degrees of inclusiveness are relative and maybe even misleading.

Next to candidate selection processes, the paper has examined the impact of selection modes on candidate profiles as well. We have observed that strong requirements settled out by parties no longer exist. Only three main conditions have been found in party statutes. Some parties ask and even require candidates to respect party general principles and/or the party programme. It seems that candidates match with this requirement. Candidates claiming to follow party position in case of representational conflicts are more abundant in parties requiring some kind of respect of the party line. Likewise parties whose statutes indicate that candidates have to keep contact with citizens include candidates attaching more importance to stay close to the population in terms of individual constituency service during their potential future mandate. However some party statutes contain requirements against personalisation of politics but these do not seem to affect candidate vs. party campaign norm, in the sense that candidates from these parties do not specifically claim having conducted a party-centred campaign.

The paper addressed the question of the impact of the candidate selection mode on candidates' profiles. We have tested four hypotheses. The first hypothesis contained two contradictory subhypotheses. In the end the H1b version was confirmed as our findings show that more exclusive selectorates tend to select more experienced politicians. Members and delegates seem to be more innovative than leader-centred selection. The second hypothesis is refuted. We expected inclusive selectorates to select candidate adopting a comprehensive view of people they represent. Our results show however that candidates claiming to represent constituency and/or party electorates are selected by more exclusive selectorates. Third, we assumed that inclusive selectorates were likely to select more independent candidates. Candidates exclusively selected tend to follow voters' position in case of conflict with party position. Candidates inclusively selected tend to follow party's position in case of conflict with voter's opinion and their own opinion. Our third hypothesis is not confirmed. Lastly our fourth hypothesis is confirmed since the more inclusive is the selectorate, the more congruent are candidates with their voters, on the left – right scale. Note that the degrees of association between candidate selection modes and the dependent variables, albeit statistically significant, are usually quite weak. This may suggest, that all in all, selection may matter, but not that much.

In sum, digging deeper into the “secret garden of politics”, it seems it is full of “muddy waters” given the discrepancy between party statutes, candidates' experiences, and newspaper reports. This situation could be explained by the fact that candidate selection is a complex process, with different stages varying in decisional impact. Furthermore there are sometimes different rules for eligible and non-eligible candidate on a same list. This creates large problems for case studies as well as comparative research on the effect of candidate selection due to variation in candidate selection procedures in terms of selectorates at different phases, and their impact.

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