

Yes we can?

Ethnic minority representation at the local level. The influence of political parties and electoral systems in Belgium and England.

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Introduction

After November the sixth, we will know if Barack Obama is reelected as president of the United States. As the first black U.S. president ever, Obama is probably one of the most successful examples of ethnic minority representation. However, in general, most representatives in our modern democracies disproportionately come from other sections of the population: they are predominantly white, well-educated and middle-class men (Meadowcroft, 2010; Norris and Lovenduski, 1993; Rallings et al, 2010, etc). Studies in North-America and Europe show that ethnic minorities are underrepresented in today's politics, notwithstanding their growing presence in our societies (Kymlicka, 1996; Togeby, 2008, Bird, 2003, etc.) There seem to be differences between countries regarding this representation however, with some countries – for instance Belgium and Denmark – obtaining far better ethnic minority representation than others (Bird, 2004; Togeby, 2008; Jacobs, 2000).

To explain this underrepresentation and the country differences in representation, several authors suggest to use the Political Opportunity Structure (POS) model (Bird, 2003; Koopmans, 2004). According to this model, the political environment creates opportunities for the representation of ethnic minorities. More specifically, four different issues are said to have an influence: the citizenship regime, the electoral system, the political party and the characteristics of the ethnic group (Bird, 2003; Kittilson and Tate, 2004; Koopmans, 2004; Koopmans and Statham 2000).

The influence of the citizenship regime and the characteristics of the ethnic group are already researched in depth (For instance Bird, 2003; Koopmans, 2004; Giugni and Passy, 2004; Statham et al, 2005, Berger et al, 2001; Fennema et al, 2000; Jacobs et al, 2004). Ethnic minority representation has been found to increase in multicultural citizenship regimes, where ethnic minorities are entitled to vote and easily obtain citizenship (Koopmans, 2004). Also a group's social capital, its size and concentration and its experiences in the homeland are said to be influential (Bird, 2003).

This article will build on this research by exploring the importance of political parties and electoral systems. Firstly, notwithstanding their important role as gatekeepers, the influence of political parties remains largely unexplored (Bird, Saalfeld and Wüst, 2011). Most studies are purely descriptive (Anwar, 2001) or focus on the influence of extreme-right parties (Kitschelt 1997; Kriesi *et al.* 2006; Sprague-Jones 2011; van der Brug and van Spanje 2009). Political parties are crucial however in determining who is elected for office (Caul and Tate, 2004, Saggar and Geddes, 2000) and it therefore seems indispensable to explore the relationship between political parties and ethnic minorities further by focusing on the experiences of those involved. Secondly, this article also focuses on the influence of the electoral system. It was already researched to some extent in a quantitative

way (for instance Bird, 2004; Togeby, 2008; ; Kostadinova, 2007; Shugart, 1994; etc.). This research showed that especially proportional systems (PR) are beneficial for ethnic minorities. It seems interesting to complement this quantitative research with a qualitative research, in order to get some insights in how these processes actually work. This article thus wants to explore how political parties and electoral systems influence the political representation of ethnic minorities.

This study is innovative in that it is based on an international comparative research. According to Bird (2003: 7): “There are very few studies that compare ethnic minority representation across countries or that address the underrepresentation of different groups within countries”. However, especially comparing across and within countries can help explore the influence of the political opportunity structure and its two dimensions we focus on. This article takes the challenge of doing this. It is based on a comparative qualitative research of one Flemish¹ and one British city. In these cities, interviews were conducted with respondents with relevant experiences in ethnic minority representation.

First, we will review the literature on political parties and electoral systems. Next, we set out the methodology of our research. Afterwards, the empirical analysis section explores the importance of political parties and electoral systems in influencing the political representation of ethnic minorities. A final section brings the findings together and discusses the implications of this study for future research.

¹ Flanders is a part of Belgium

1. The influence of political parties and electoral systems on the political representation of ethnic minorities

1.1 Political parties

According to Copus (2004) local government is party-based government. Both in England and in Belgium, the main actors in local politics are political parties (Copus, 2004; Buelens, Rihoux and Deschouwer, 2008). They are therefore crucial actors in the political representation of ethnic minorities. If local political parties do not put ethnic minorities on their lists, there can be no ethnic minority representation².

However, Copus (2004) states that English local parties are predominantly preoccupied with capturing control or securing representation in the council, rather than focusing on the needs of the community. Buelens et al (2008) confirm this for Belgium. In their survey of the chairmen and spokespersons of local political parties, they found that most major parties are very pragmatic in that they seek reelection or want to be part of the majority. Only the green and the Flemish nationalist party are more interested in their ideology. Furthermore, none of the parties stresses the importance of representation of specific groups (Buelens et al, 2008). There do not seem to be much differences between parties in this respect: "What (...) may appear surprising when comparing the views of the parties towards democracy, representation and the role of the party within them, is the considerable similarity of interpretation of these factors held by party people across the political spectrum. Such common ground develops from the shared experiences of party membership and from the holding of elected office, as well as from the interactions that the holders of elected office have with those they represent" (Copus, 2004: 17). This can be relevant for the representation of ethnic minorities, because if this is true, political parties in general will not do much to enhance the political representation of ethnic minorities. In other words, political parties will only be interested in ethnic minority candidates if this results in electoral success. Matland and Studlar (1996) point in this respect to the process of contagion. This is a process where one party encourages other parties to adopt its policies and strategies in a process of party competition. Only if one party nominates ethnic minority candidates and this results in electoral success, over time, the need to nominate ethnic candidates will be felt by virtually all parties.

Other authors however do see differences in the way parties deal with the representation of subordinated groups. They stress the importance of certain party characteristics - ideology, organizational structure or the presence of ethnic minorities within the party – to explain the party's

² Experiments with ethnic minority parties proved to be unsuccessful in the past. Ethnic minority representation is thus obtained through established parties (for instance Berger et al, 2001).

interest in the representation of women. (Caul, 1999). We tried to apply their findings to the representation of ethnic minorities.

First of all, ideology seems to be relevant. According to these authors, leftist parties support egalitarian ideologies and are more open to marginalized and powerless groups in society (Matland & Studlar, 1996). Therefore they will undertake more actions to improve the political representation of ethnic minorities. Rightist parties on the other hand, focus more on individualism and traditionalism and favour a limited role for the government. They are less open to group representation and thus to the representation of ethnic minorities (Girvin, 1988; Hyde, 1995). In addition, they are seen as less sympathetic to ethnic minorities in general, as they often support restrictive migration policies (Anwar, 2001). Especially extreme-right parties will be hesitant to put ethnic minorities on their lists. (Bird, 2003). In countries, where the extreme-right party is strong, they are seen as able to influence the behaviour of other parties towards ethnic minorities. On the one hand, they can hinder the adoption of ethnic minority candidates, as political parties fear to lose votes to the extreme-right party. On the other hand, they can also stimulate ethnic minority representation, as political parties want to make a stand against the extreme right party by adopting ethnic minority candidates (Eelbode, 2011).

A second factor of influence, is the organizational structure of a party. Centralized and institutionalized parties can make it easier for ethnic minorities to enter party politics (Matland & Studlar, 1996). If a party is highly centralized, party leaders have more control over who is nominated to run for the party (Caul, 2012). When they are committed to increase the number of ethnic minority candidates, they have the actual power to do so (Caul, 1999). Evidently, the vesting of greater power in non-committed party leaders work against ethnic participation (Caul, 1999). Furthermore, if a party is highly institutionalized, that is if the selection process is clear to both new and old candidates and if the formal institutions are transparent to all aspirants, the opportunities for ethnic minorities are enhanced (Czudnowski, 1975)). In non-institutionalized parties, party leaders can favour certain candidates, which are often people with a great 'personal political capital' (political status and resources). As ethnic minorities are often newcomers, they have less personal capital, which makes it harder for them to get selected (Guadagnini, 1993)

Finally, also the presence of ethnic minorities within the party can matter. Firstly, the structural inclusion of ethnic minorities within the party establishes long-lasting bonds between the party and the ethnic community. Therefore, contact is present not only during election periods. Secondly, more ethnic minorities at the higher party levels can improve their position in the recruitment process and

further the nomination of ethnic candidates, as they can approach suitable candidates in their community (Celis, Eelbode and Wauters, 2011).

1.2 Electoral systems

Besides the focus on political parties, this article also explores the influence of the electoral system on ethnic minority representation. According to Rae (1969) an electoral system exists of three dimensions: the electoral formula, the district system and the ballot structure.

Firstly, as a result of the electoral formula, which determines the way in which votes are translated into seats, we differentiate between proportional-, majority-, plurality- and mixed systems. Secondly, the district system deals with the size and number of electoral districts and thirdly, the ballot structure stipulates the options that an electoral system gives to voters (for instance: are they able to vote for individual candidates, for parties, for candidates of different parties etc). Most authors believe that proportional systems with semi-open lists facilitate the entry of ethnic minorities into elected office (for instance Bird, 2004; Togeby, 2008; ; Kostadinova, 2007; Shugart, 1994; etc.). There are several reasons for this: in proportional systems, political parties are able to put several candidates on their lists and as a result, there is room for new candidates without upsetting the incumbents. Furthermore, parties are able to put a whole range of candidates on their lists (young people, people from different neighbourhoods, ethnic minorities) instead of just one candidate. Next, there is also a higher turnover in proportional systems, which is beneficial for ethnic minorities, as they are often newcomers in politics. In addition, proportional systems often lead to multi-party systems, which are also seen as advantageous for ethnic minorities. On the one hand, there are more places to be distributed on the list (as there are more party lists). On the other hand, there is more party competition, which makes it interesting for parties to address the ethnic minority electorate (Meier et al, 2006; Togeby, 2008). In majority and plurality systems on the other hand, there is only one candidate per ward. This is often an incumbent, which is seen as disadvantageous for ethnic minorities (Meier et al, 2006; Taagepera, 1994).

However, according to Bird (2003: 15): “for ethnic minority groups, proportional representation alone (i.e. without preference voting features) may not be sufficient”. Preferential votes are indeed crucial for ethnic minorities. Research shows that ethnic minority candidates receive more preferential votes than other candidates³ (for instance Togeby, 2008; Jacobs, 2000; Jacobs and Swyngedouw, 2003; Taagepera, 1994). As a result, they are often able to “jump” over other candidates and to get elected. Their preferential votes are often a result of both ethnic⁴- and

³ If other factors are held constant

⁴ Votes from the same ethnic group.

symbolic⁵ voting (Jacobs and Swyngedouw, 2003). Given their number of preferential votes, it then becomes advantageous for political parties to include ethnic minorities on their lists (Bird, 2004).

Not all authors believe however, that only proportional systems are interesting for ethnic minorities. Also in majority systems, ethnic minority groups can obtain representation, if they are geographically concentrated within constituency boundaries. Ethnic minority candidates tend to be very successful in so-called ethnic-minority districts (Alonso and Ruiz-Rufino, 2007).

It is clear from the abovementioned literature, that not all authors agree on the influence of political parties and electoral systems. Some believe that political parties in general are not really interested in ethnic minority representation, except if this results in electoral success. Others think that not all parties are the same and point to the influence of certain party characteristics. Furthermore, some authors believe that proportional systems with semi-open lists are optimal for ethnic minority representation, while others also regard majority or plurality systems as valuable. This article builds on this rich body of literature by using interview data to explore how political parties and electoral systems influence ethnic minority representation. It also takes the interaction effect between these two issues into account.

⁵ Votes from other voters who want to give a signal pro ethnic minority representation.

2. Methods

This article focuses on the political representation of ethnic minorities at the local level. We expect this to be the optimal level for ethnic minorities representation. Firstly, both in England and in Belgium, ethnic minorities are entitled to vote at the local level. Secondly, ethnic minorities are often active in the local community (Jacobs, 1997).

As we want to focus on the lived experiences of those involved, this article uses data collected through case-study research between April and October 2011 on the political representation of ethnic minorities at the local level. It involves an analysis of semi-structured interviews with ethnic minority councilors, ethnic minority candidates, representatives of the ethnic community and party representatives in one Flemish (Rosie Town) and one English (Ada Town) city⁶.

As this article focuses on the influence of political parties and electoral systems, the case-study research is based on two countries with completely different electoral systems: Belgium and England. Belgium has a proportional system with semi-open lists (preferential votes are possible), in England the first-past-the-post system is present. In both countries, studies show that there is an underrepresentation of ethnic minorities at the local level (Khan, 2007; Messiaen, 2012). Although, it is impossible to control for all relevant characteristics in comparative case-study research, special care was taken to select two cities that were as similar as possible. This makes it possible to explore the possible importance of the electoral system in influencing the political representation of ethnic minorities. Firstly, both cities have a similar number of inhabitants and a similar proportion of ethnic minorities in the city⁷. Furthermore, also concerning the type of city, they are comparable. Both Rosie Town and Ada Town have well-known universities and colleges. However, they are not typical university cities, as they also own an important harbor and an industrial center. In addition, both cities have a rich cultural heritage. We chose not to select the capitals as research shows that both in London and in Brussels, there seems to be a specific flow concerning ethnic minority representation, with both cities obtaining a far better representation than in the rest of the country⁸ (Jacobs, 2000; Khan, 2007) .

Despite the similarities, there were inevitably some differences between the cities. Firstly, in both cities, different parties are in power. In Rosie Town, the social democratic party is in power for almost 25 years, whereas in Ada Town the conservative party has the majority. More specifically, the

⁶ We changed the names of the cities to guarantee the anonymity of this research. Respondents were explicitly guaranteed anonymity and the confidential use of data.

⁷ Rosie Town has about 248.000 inhabitants, with a proportion of more or less 20% ethnic minorities in the population. Ada Town has about 240.000 inhabitants, with a proportion of more or less 17,5 % ethnic minorities in the population.

⁸ It seems interesting to explore the reason for this in future research.

latest council elections in Rosie Town resulted in 17 seats for the social-democratic party and 11 seats for the liberal party (both present in the college of aldermen), with the opposition consisting of the extreme-right party (9 seats), the green party (6 seats), the Christian-democratic party (6 seats), the Flemish-nationalist party (1 seat) and one independent candidate. In Ada Town, on the other hand, the conservative party is in power with 26 seats, whilst the labour party (19 seats) and the liberal democrats (3 seats) are part of the opposition.

However, the most important difference is that the ethnic set-up in both cities is different. In Rosie Town, the majority of the ethnic community comes from one specific region in Turkey, but also smaller communities from Morocco, Tunisia, Ghana, Iran, China, Algeria, India, Congo, Nigeria, Pakistan and Cameroon are present. In Ada Town, on the other hand, the largest ethnic community comes from India, followed by communities from Pakistan, China and black Caribbean communities. The analysis will suggest that this difference can help explain the level of ethnic minority representation in both cities.

In the cities, qualitative, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with both ethnic minority councilors, ethnic minority candidates, representatives of the ethnic community and party representatives. We focused on councilors that held a seat in the local council at the time of the interviews⁹, candidates were selected from the lists of the former local elections¹⁰ and both party representatives and representatives from the ethnic community were selected through recommendations from the other respondents and political parties. On average, interviews lasted about 75 minutes and were guided by the same set of questions. Councilors were queried about their experiences with the political party, elections and representation. Ethnic candidates were asked to discuss their political party and the election process. The ethnic minority representative fielded more general questions about political parties and the representation of ethnic minorities, while party representatives were asked about the party and the selection process.

Interviews were collected, recorded, transcribed and analyzed using the grounded theory approach and Nvivo. As a method, grounded theory enables to systematically examine social phenomena and explain these through an inductively derived theory. We used Glaser's (1992) open coding approach rather than Strauss and Corbin's (1990) systematic coding approach.

⁹ For Rosie Town this was between april and august 2011, in Ada Town this was in October 2011.

¹⁰ In Rosie Town, these were the local elections of 2006. As in the Ada Town, each year 1/3 of the council is reelected, we checked the candidacy lists of the last four years (the fourth year, there are no elections). We thus focused on the lists of 2008, 2010 en 2011 (in 2009 there were no local elections)

3. Results

In this results section we will discuss how political parties and electoral systems influence ethnic minority representation. We will start this section by focusing on the role of political parties. In the second part we will focus on the influence of electoral systems.

3.1 How do political parties influence the political representation of ethnic minorities?

Political parties are crucial gatekeepers in the political representation of ethnic minorities. Both in England and in Belgium, they are the main actors in local politics and they therefore decide who will be elected and who will not (Copus, 2004; Buelens et al, 2008). In this part we will first discuss what political parties actually do to improve ethnic minority representation. Using the insights from the literature, we wonder if political parties are only interested in power or if certain party characteristics determine if they take specific efforts to enhance ethnic minority representation or not. In the next part, we will focus on the representation of ethnic minorities in the two cities itself and we will try to offer explanations for the differences in representation between parties. We will explore if there are certain party characteristics that lead to a better representation.

3.1.1 What efforts do political parties take to improve ethnic minority representation?

First we will explore what political parties actually do to improve the political representation of ethnic minorities. Parties can undertake different actions: 1) they can actively recruit ethnic minority candidates, 2) they can give them an eligible position on the list and 3) they can offer specific support to ethnic minorities. By focusing on this actions, we can investigate how important political parties find ethnic minority representation.

We questioned both ethnic minority candidates or councilors and local party representatives about the efforts parties take in this respect. For the first action, actively recruiting ethnic candidates, we found that most parties in Rosie Town made considerable efforts to attract ethnic minority candidates. The only party that did not do this was the extreme-right party. This is also clear from the electoral lists: with the exception of the extreme-right party, all parties included four or more ethnic candidates on their list.

Table 1: Number of ethnic candidates on the lists in Rosie Town

List	Number of ethnic minorities (from 51)
Social democratic list	6
Liberal list	4
Extreme right list	0
Green list	6

The parties differed however in how they searched for these candidates. Some parties found it easy to recruit ethnic minority candidates. The social democratic party for instance, stated that thanks to their tight relations with several ethnic minority groups in the city, they did not need to search for candidates, as they received many voluntary applications from the ethnic community anyway. Other parties had more trouble finding ethnic minority candidates. The green party used its handful of ethnic minority incumbents and contacted a political ethnic minority organization. The Christian-democratic party contacted ethnic minority organizations and mosques to find ethnic minority candidates and the liberal party searched among its own friends and acquaintances. Only the extreme-right party was not interested in putting ethnic minorities on its list. According to the party representative:

Interviewer: “did you try to find ethnic minority candidates?”

Respondent: “No. I need to say the truth. No, not specifically. I will be honest with you, it is hard enough as it is to put a list together” (Extreme-right party representative, Rosie Town)

The situation in Ada Town is a bit different. In this city, both the labour- and the conservative party contacted possible ethnic minority candidates in the past, but in general they made less efforts than their Belgian counterparts. Most of the ethnic minorities on the list, approached the political parties themselves and asked to stand as a candidate. The liberal democratic party on the other hand, claimed that it would like to have ethnic minorities on their lists, but it did not go actively looking for them. They turned down ethnic minorities in the past because these were found unsuitable (for instance because they were not familiar with the liberal democratic values or the practices of politics). As a result, if we look at the candidacy lists of 2008, 2010 and 2011, the number of ethnic minorities on the lists is very small¹¹.

Table 2: number of ethnic minorities on the lists in Ada Town

Year	Party	Number of ethnic minorities on the list (from 16)
2008	Labour party	1
	Conservative party	0

¹¹ I chose to show the absolute numbers, but even proportionally, the number of ethnic minorities on the English list is smaller than in Belgium.

	Liberal democratic party	0
2010	Labour party	0
	Conservative party	1
	Liberal democratic party	0
2011	Labour party	1
	Conservative party	1
	Liberal democratic party	0

Political parties can not only recruit ethnic minority candidates, they also need to give them an eligible position on the list or a district in which they have a chance to become elected. With the ranking on the electoral list and the choice of the ward, parties express their own preference of who should get elected (Jacobs, Martiniello and Rea, 2002). What an eligible position is, differs according to the electoral system. In the Belgium semi-open list system, parties receive seats in proportion to their number of votes. Each party makes up a list equal to the number of seats in the council¹². Some of these places are seen as more eligible than others, especially the first place, the last place and places two till four are said to be the good ones, because they are so-called visible places and (for places one till four) they can benefit from the list vote¹³. Also the number of seats won by the party in the previous election gives an idea about which places are eligible.

In the English first-past-the-post-system, candidates stand for particular wards. The candidates who gets the highest number of votes in a certain ward, wins. Traditionally, certain wards are said to have a specific political preference. As a result, political parties know which wards are ‘their wards’, which wards are ‘winnable wards’ and which wards belong to the other parties. It is clear that certain wards will be eligible wards and others will not.

If we first focus on Rosie Town, we can see that none of the ethnic minority candidates got one of the best places in the local elections of 2006 (see figure)

Table 3: Places ethnic minorities attained on the lists in Rosie Town

List	Places ethnic minorities attained
Social democratic list	10, 25, 36, 37, 44, 45

¹² The number of seats in the council depends on the size of the city.

¹³ In the Belgian electoral system, voters can give list votes (a vote for the whole list and its ranking) or name votes (votes for particular candidates). In the past, the list vote was more decisive, but in the local elections of 2006, the list vote counted for only ½, so only the first places benefited from this.

Liberal list	7, 12, 17, 19
Extreme right list	/
Green list	5, 8, 9, 15, 19, 21
Christian Democratic list	9, 23, 27, 37

Of all parties, the Green party gave the best positions on the list to ethnic minorities: they put three ethnic minorities in the top ten. However, none of these positions were one of the top positions. When we asked the respondents about their place on the list, most of them were not happy with it. They were disappointed about their place on the list, because they thought they deserved better or because they were not consulted. One respondent says:

“If I had been in the top 20, I could have had a 1000 more votes. It makes a difference in the Turkish community you know. Why? The lower you are on the list, the less votes you will have. They think it means that the party is dissatisfied with you. They think it means you do not work good enough”. (Ethnic minority councilor, Rosie Town)

In Ada town, the situation is not much different. In fact, all ethnic minority candidates (from 2008 till 2009) were put in wards that were known to be the other party’s safe seats.

“That is why I always have an argument with the labour party. They give the safe seats to their own people: their friends, family... And when there is no chance to win, they give it to the ethnic minorities. This (ward) is an Asian populated area, a very faithful labour ward, but all our councilors here are white. And if we want a ticket for this area, they sent us far away, to other districts, where there are no chances to win”. (Ethnic minority candidate, Ada Town)

It is clear, that both in Rosie and Ada Town, political parties are reluctant to give ethnic minorities eligible places. As we will see in the part about the influence of electoral systems, ethnic minorities managed to get elected anyway in Rosie Town (thanks to the proportional system with its open lists), but they failed to do so in Ada Town.

Finally, political parties can enhance the political representation of ethnic minorities, by offering ethnic minority candidates special support during the election process. Interviews revealed however that none of the parties provided specific training or support to ethnic minorities. Some respondents called the selection process overwhelming and stated that they had no idea what they had to do or what would happen.

“They did not prepare you for what was going to happen. It was a bit of a shock actually. I thought, okay, I will do it. I will see what happens. But I was not prepared. A quick picture, your name somewhere on the list. It was, how shall I put it, they left me without any support”.
(Ethnic minority candidate, Rosie Town)

Supporting ethnic minority candidates is crucial however, as they are often newcomers in politics and have little experience with its day to day practices.

Political parties can thus take specific efforts to enhance ethnic minority representation. To get a general overview of what parties actually do, we put the aforementioned actions in a table (see table 4). For each action¹⁴, we gave parties a – or a +, according to their efforts.

Table 4: actions political parties undertake to improve ethnic minority representation

Party	Searching for ethnic minorities	Putting ethnic minorities on the list	Giving ethnic minorities eligible places/safe districts	Offering support
Social democratic party	+	+	-	-
Liberal party	+	+	-	-
Christian-democratic party	+	+	-	-
Green party	+	+	+ -	-
Extreme right party	-	-	-	-
Labour	+ -	+ -	-	-
Conservative party	+ -	+ -	-	-
Liberal democratic party	-	-	-	-

Next, on the basis of the above table, we divided the political parties of both Rosie- and Ada Town into four archetypes. The first type, *the indifferent*s, did not make any efforts to improve ethnic minority representation. The second type, *the beginners*, made some efforts, but these efforts were rather limited. The third type, *the trainees*, did more than only putting ethnic minorities on the list. And the fourth type, *the advanced*, undertook all actions that can improve ethnic minority representation.

¹⁴ For reasons of clarity, we split the first variable into two new variables: searching for ethnic minority candidates and putting ethnic minority candidates on the list

Table 5: types of political parties according to the efforts they make to enhance ethnic minority representation

Type	Rosie Town	Ada Town
Indifferents (only -)	Extreme right party	Liberal democratic party
Beginners (+- till ++)	Social democratic party, liberal party, Christian-democratic party	labour party, conservative party
Trainees (++ +- till +++ +-)	Green party	/
advanced (++++)	/	/

Two things are clear from the above: 1) In general, political parties can do more to enhance ethnic minority representation and 2) there are not much differences between parties in this respect as most parties belong to the same type (*beginners*). Only the green party does slightly better than the rest, be it not superbe. These findings correspond with the expectations from Copus (2004) and Buelens et al (2008) that political parties are predominantly interested in power and do not care too much about the political representation of ethnic minorities. Despite the predictions of for instance Caul (1999) or Matland and Studlar (1996), party characteristics like ideology or organizational structure do not seem to be decisive in influencing the way in which parties behave towards ethnic minorities. There are only two exceptions to this rule: firstly, the extreme-right party confirms the expectations from the literature that extreme-right parties will be hesitant to put ethnic minorities on their lists (Bird, 2003). It is clear from the above that the extreme right party is not interested in ethnic minority representation and this could be explained by its ideology and its anti-migrant points of view. Secondly, also the different position of the green party can be explained by the finding that the green party is more preoccupied with its ideology than the other parties as Buelens et al (2008) found. This was also confirmed in the interviews. These two exceptions make us suspect that the classical divide between leftist and rightist ideologies is not important here. However, other divides, for instance between materialism and post-materialism (Kitschelt, 1986) seem relevant.

3.1.2 Explanations for differences in representation between parties

However, although political parties are more or less similar in the efforts they (do not) take to improve ethnic minority representation, table 6 and 7 show that particularly one party has a better

representation than the other parties: both in Rosie Town and in Ada Town, the social democratic party has the best representation of ethnic minorities.

Table 6: number of elected ethnic minorities by party in Rosie Town

Party	Number of elected ethnic minorities
Social democratic party	<u>4</u>
Liberal party	1
Christian-democratic party	0
Green party	1
Extreme-right party	0

Table 7: number of elected ethnic minorities by party in Ada Town

Party	Number of elected ethnic minorities
Labour party	<u>1</u>
Conservative party	0
Liberal democratic party	0

According to the literature, this is a more general trend (Berger et al, 2001; Messiaen, 2012; Steyvers, 2002, etc.). We investigated the cause for this in our two cities and found that this could be explained by the fact that certain ethnic minority candidates get more support than others. Here, certain party characteristics do come into play.

First of all, there is an ideological factor. In line with the findings of Jacobs, Martiniello and Rea (2002), we found that ethnic minority candidates were elected thanks to a mix of both ethnic and symbolic voting. Firstly, ethnic minorities tend to vote for ethnic minority candidates. However, they will rather vote for ethnic minority candidates on the lists of social-democratic parties than of other parties. This is especially clear in Ada Town. All respondents agree that the labour party is the most popular party in the ethnic community. The conservative party is seen as tough on immigration and as the party for the rich. The liberal democratic party is more or less ignored and the labour party is seen as softer on immigration and the party of the working class. As most ethnic minorities are working class people, they vote for labour. Most respondents admit however, that this is mostly a historical perception. The divide between the parties is less clear today and ethnic minorities keep supporting the labour party because their parents or grandparents did.

“They vote for labour simply because labour has the social democratic principles. Whether they happen or not is another matter. They don’t vote for the conservative party because it is a very capitalistic and very imperialistic party. But people are voting slightly differently now and I think that they young people will vote differently. So it is changing, people are beginning to look at the differences”. (Ethnic minority councilor, Ada Town)

These findings correspond with those of other studies (Bird, Saalfeld and Wüst, 2011; Norris and Lovenduski, 1993; Purdam, 2001; Rallings, 2010)

In Rosie Town, the preference for the social democratic party is less outspoken, but still present. Its socio-economic and cultural values appeal to ethnic minorities, but also in this town historical ties are important. Many ethnic minorities were bound to the socio-democratic party through the process of pillarization¹⁵, where the strong ties between ethnic minorities and social democratic unions resulted in support for the social democratic party.

However, respondents claimed that the link between ethnic minorities and social-democratic parties is diminishing recently, as ethnic minorities feel let down by these parties¹⁶.

The ideology of a party also influences the number of symbolic votes ethnic minority candidates get. According to Jacobs, Martiniello and Rea (2002: 5) this is voting “through which “autochthonous” electors wanted to make clear to the (mostly mainstream) parties of their choice that they supported the inclusion of politicians of immigrant descent in the political system”. They found that especially green and social-democratic voters tend to vote symbolically. This was also confirmed by our respondents in Rosie- and in Ada Town.

“I believe that the electorate of the social democratic and the green party is more open to positive discrimination. A green or a social democratic voter will more easily select an ethnic minority candidate. Whilst in my party (the Christian-democratic party) that is absolutely not the case”. (Party representative, Rosie Town)

A second factor of importance in explaining the support certain ethnic minority candidates get, lies in the issue of power. Respondents claim that ethnic minorities will support parties that are in power. As one respondents states:

¹⁵ In the Belgian system of pillarization, the society was divided into exclusionary ideological pillars each with its own network of related institutions (e.g. political parties, trade unions, schools and newspapers) (Deschouwer, 2009).

¹⁶ For instance, in Rosie Town, the social-democratic party could not prevent the ban on the veil.

“Turkish people seem to be opportunists, they seem to be very pragmatic. In essence, they want parties that quickly and thoroughly will defend their interests. They do not find opposition parties very interesting in this respect”(Ethnic minority candidate, Rosie Town).

As the social democratic party in Rosie Town is in power for nearly 25 years, this can help explain its popularity in the ethnic community. In Ada Town however, this does not seem to be relevant. There, the conservative party is in power, but does not have elected ethnic minorities. This could be explained by the fact that the conservative party is only in power for a short time yet. Perhaps a longer timeframe is needed to have a result. Also Jacobs and Teney (2009) found that ethnic minorities tend to support the party of the mayor.

A third factor of importance are the ties between political parties and the ethnic community. This is partly linked with the issue of power, as the party in power probably has the closest relationship with all the different communities in one city. Most respondents agree that the social democratic party has the most extensive bond with the ethnic community in Rosie Town and this already for a long time. This makes it for instance easier to select adequate ethnic minority candidates who are rooted in their community. Also in Ada Town the social democratic party is said to have the best relationship with the ethnic communities. Linked with this issue, is the presence of ethnic minorities within the party. According to Caul (1999) and Celis, Eelbode and Wauters (2011) more ethnic minorities within the party will further the nomination of ethnic candidates. We found proof for this in the interviews. Parties who have ethnic minorities within their ranks found it easier to select ethnic minorities than parties who did not. The reason for this were clear. Ethnic minorities within the party can encourage other ethnic minorities to stand as a candidate and as they are members of their community, they have a better knowledge about which candidates are suitable and which are not. Both in Rosie – and in Ada Town, the presence of ethnic minorities within the party was seen as relevant for the success of the social democratic party.

In this section, we wanted to explore how political parties influence the political representation of ethnic minorities. Firstly, we can conclude that most parties in Rosie- and Ada Town do not take much efforts to enhance the political representation of ethnic minorities. This was in line with expectations from the literature that political parties are predominantly preoccupied with issues of power and capturing control over the council, rather than with representing specific communities (Copus, 2004; Buelens, Rihoux and Deschouwer, 2008). We found that only the green party did slightly better, probably thanks to its post materialistic ideology. In general however, party characteristics like ideology or organizational structure do not seem to influence the actions political

parties undertake to enhance ethnic minority representation. We can thus not completely confirm the expectations from Caul (1999), Matland and Studlar (1996) et al.

If we look at the elected ethnic minorities however, certain party characteristics seem relevant in influencing ethnic minority representation, as in both towns, the social-democratic party has the best representation of ethnic minorities. First, we can see an influence of party ideology, as a social democratic ideology seems to attract ethnic minorities. Secondly, there is also a power issue: ethnic minorities seem to support ethnic candidates that are on the lists of parties which are in power. Thirdly, in line with the expectations from the literature, also the ties with the ethnic community and the presence of ethnic minorities within the party seem important. In contradiction to Matland and Studlar (1996) we found no prove of the importance of organizational structures.

3.2 How does the electoral system influence the political representation of ethnic minorities?

We already discussed above that especially social-democratic parties seem to have a better representation of ethnic minorities. If we look at tables 6 and 7 however, there is another striking insight: there seems to be a far better representation of ethnic minorities in Belgium than in England. This is probably a result of different issues.

Respondents for instance claimed that the citizenship regime in England became less multicultural after 9/11 and the following wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Distrust of ethnic minorities rose and having elected ethnic minority representatives became less important whilst being at war with foreign (Muslim) nations. In Belgium, this was less an issue as Belgium was not involved in the Iraq war and held a more critical stance towards it. There were also no terrorist attacks on Belgian territory.

Furthermore, also the characteristics of the ethnic group seemed relevant. Rosie Town and Ada Town have a different ethnic set-up. In Rosie Town, especially the Turkish community is very big and tied together, as it comes from the same region in Turkey. This is also reflected in the great number of Turkish candidates and councilors (five of the six ethnic minority councilors are of Turkish descent), The ethnic community in Ada Town on the other hand, is more divided. This could influence their political strength.

However, interviews revealed that also the electoral system was crucial in determining the political representation of ethnic minorities. As we discussed above, both in Rosie Town and in Ada Town, ethnic minorities got non-eligible places. However, whereas this obstructed ethnic minority representation in Ada Town, this was not the case in Rosie Town. Six ethnic minority candidates were elected anyway, even from the worst places on the list. The main reason for this was a combination

of the compulsory voting system and the high number of preferential votes¹⁷ they got, which enabled them to jump over the other candidates.

As a result, ethnic minority candidates on the one hand became an interesting factor for political parties to attract ethnic minority votes. As we discussed above, this resulted in the recruitment of ethnic minority candidates. It is interesting to point in this respect to the process of contagion. In the nineties, especially the green and later on the social democratic party started to show interest in the ethnic community. After the changing of the naturalization laws, which resulted in more ethnic minority voters, also rightist parties started to put ethnic minorities on their lists as they noticed that leftist parties managed to book electoral success with ethnic votes. This confirmed the expectations of Matland and Studlar (1996). However, several ethnic minority respondents criticize political parties in this respect. They believe that political parties are only interested in ethnic minority votes and do not give ethnic minorities a real voice. Furthermore, they claim that as a result, also non-suitable candidates are put on the lists. Candidates that disgrace the ethnic community¹⁸.

“It really was an insult to the ethnic community. If these people have to represent you, that is just embarrassing. In our community, there are people who are much better suited to represent us”. (ethnic minority candidate, Rosie Town)

On the other hand however, political parties also feel threatened by ethnic minority candidates. As they have proven to get elected even from impossible places on the list, they manage to endanger to position of autochtone incumbents.

“The tension is rising. In 2006, they saw what is possible and now they are afraid. Former autochtone aldermen will want to be as high on the list as possible, because they are afraid that ethnic minority candidates will jump over them and take their seat. They don’t want to go looking for a new job. (Ethnic minority councilor, Rosie Town)

Political parties in Rosie Town thus have mixed reactions towards the representation of ethnic minorities: on the one hand they can use their votes, but on the other hand incumbents do not want to lose their seats to new ethnic minority candidates. Putting them on the list, even on bad list positions, implies that they have a chance to become elected. Thanks to the power of preferential votes, non-eligible places actually do not exist.

¹⁷ As we discussed before, these preferential votes were probably the result of both ethnic – and symbolic voting and also the strong electoral campaigns of the ethnic minority candidates contributed to this.

¹⁸ Both the Socialists and Christian Democrats previously faced scandals over unsuitable candidates on their lists (for instance members of the Grey Wolves, an ultra-nationalist, neo-fascist Turkish organisation).

In Ada Town, on the other hand, the electoral system obstructs the representation of ethnic minorities. Ethnic minority candidates are put in unwinnable wards, and as their own electorate is absent there, they fail to get elected. However, Alonso and Ruiz-Rufino (2007) believed that if ethnic minority groups are geographically concentrated within constituency boundaries, they could obtain representation. In Ada Town, especially two wards can be seen as 'ethnic minority wards'. Traditionally, they are so-called safe seats of the labour party. However, for decades, all labour councilors in these two wards were white. As a result, some ethnic minorities got so fed up with the behavior of the labour party that they stood as an independent candidate. Also the conservative party tried to break the labour dominance by putting ethnic minority candidates on its list. However, none of these people were elected. Interviews showed that this has two reasons. Firstly, the ethnic set-up of the wards seems to matter. According to the respondents, the ethnic minority group is very diverse and some ethnic minority groups will not vote for other ethnic minority groups.

"The trouble is the ethnic candidates are a wide variety in a group of people. There could be an ethnic candidate who may be part of a rival group within that particular ethnic community and therefore they will not vote for that person. For instance, let's say an Indian candidate, it doesn't mean the Pakistani community will vote for that person. So there is no such a thing as an ethnic candidate, there is somebody with an ethnic background. But that doesn't necessarily assure any alliances one way or another. It's complex". (Ethnic community representative, Ada Town)

A second reason is the status as independent. Respondents claimed that local politics are dominated by political parties. Independent candidates are seen as powerless.

"I think that they would vote for what the party can offer. There are people who might vote for the candidate, but I think on the whole they vote for the party. Because they know an independent candidate can't do anything". (Ethnic minority councilor, Ada Town)

This emphasizes the importance of political parties in the English local politics as was also pointed out by Copus (2004). The fact that also the candidates for the conservative party failed to get elected, suggests that for ethnic voters, party ideology seems more important than ethnic voting. In other words, ethnic minorities would rather vote for a white labour candidate, than for an independent or conservative ethnic minority candidate. We could thus not confirm the expectations from Alonso and Ruiz-Rufino (2007). It is possible however that if the labour party would put ethnic minority candidates in an ethnic minority concentrated area, this would help to enhance ethnic minority representation. However as long as the labour party does not do this, the relevance of ethnic concentration remains unclear.

We can conclude that in line with the expectations from the literature, proportional systems with preferential voting seem optimal for ethnic minority representation. However, we also found that this resulted in the recruitment of less suitable candidates and a focus on votes, rather than on different voices in the political debate. We found no proof that plurality systems can enhance ethnic minority representation if ethnic minorities are concentrated within constituency borders. There seems to be an influence of party preference here. As labour still attracts most ethnic minority votes, it is possible that if the labour party put ethnic minority candidates in ethnic minority wards, this would enhance their representation. However if the conservative party does this, or if ethnic minorities come up as independents, this does not seem to happen.

4. Conclusion

This paper builds on the rich body of research on ethnic minority representation, by exploring two underexplored factors of the POS model: the influence of political parties and electoral systems. By means of an international comparative research, it tries to fill a gap in this body of literature, which often consists of one-country studies (Bird, 2003).

In this paper we explored how political parties and electoral systems influence ethnic minority representation. Data from semi-structured interviews in one Belgian and one English city show that in line with the expectations of Copus (2004) and Buelens et al (2008) political parties seem predominantly preoccupied with issues of power and capturing control over the council, rather than with the political representation of ethnic minorities. Most parties in Rosie (B)- and Ada Town (UK) do not take sufficient actions to enhance the political representation of ethnic minorities. In general, party characteristics like ideology or organizational structure do not seem to influence the actions political parties take, this in contradiction to the expectations of for instance Caul (1999), Matland and Studlar (1996) et al.

However, certain party characteristics do seem relevant in influencing the support a party gets from the ethnic community. First, there seems to be an influence of party ideology, as a social-democratic ideology seems to attract ethnic minorities. Secondly, we can also see an influence of power: ethnic minority candidates that are on the lists of parties in power, seem to get more support from the ethnic community. Thirdly, in line with the expectations from the literature, also the ties with the ethnic community and the presence of ethnic minorities within the party seem important. In contradiction to Matland and Studlar (1996) we found no prove of the importance of organizational structures.

For the electoral system, we could confirm the expectations from the literature that proportional systems with preferential voting seem optimal for ethnic minority representation. However, we also found that this resulted in the recruitment of less suitable candidates and a focus on votes, rather than on different voices in the political debate. A contagion effect seemed present, as the green party started to recruit ethnic minority candidates and the other parties followed after they spotted electoral success. We found no proof that plurality systems can enhance ethnic minority representation if ethnic minorities are concentrated within constituency borders as was expected by Alonso and Ruiz-Ruffino (2007). Instead, the ethnic-set up of these districts and the party for which ethnic candidates run, seem relevant. In this respect, we discovered an interaction effect between the electoral system, the party system and certain party characteristics. In the English first-past-the-post system (and its two-party system), party ideology seems to be more important than in

Belgium. The preference of ethnic minorities for the labour party is far more outspoken to the extent that it even prevails over ethnic bonds. Whereas in Rosie Town, also ethnic minority candidates from other parties manage to get elected, this is not the case in Ada Town (even in the past). This could be explained by the fact that the English system is more or less a two-party system and labour is seen as ethnic minority-friendly, whereas the conservative party is not.

This article illustrated the usefulness of small cases to understand the influence of political parties and electoral systems on ethnic minority representation. It offers a more in-depth study of these phenomena. However, since the findings of this article are based on the experiences of a small group of people involved, they can not be generalized beyond the cases studied in this research. More case studies are needed (in other cities, in other countries) to further our knowledge of the influence of political parties and electoral systems. Furthermore, concerning the electoral system, it seems interesting to explore the effect of compulsory versus non-compulsory voting systems. Next, as we investigate here the descriptive representation of ethnic minorities, as identified by Pitkin (1967), it seems interesting to also explore the influence of political parties and the electoral system on their substantive representation. Finally, also quantitative research projects could build on this study by considering to include some of the characteristics mentioned above in their statistical model.

However, based on these findings, we could suggest that political parties ought to invest more in their ethnic minority candidates. If they want to avoid losing the support of the ethnic community and if they really want to integrate ethnic minorities in our society, they will need to enhance the opportunities for ethnic minority representation.

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