Politics, Groups, and Identities

Left, right, left. The influence of party ideology on the political representation of ethnic minorities in Belgium

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DIALOGUE: INTERSECTIONALIZING EUROPEAN POLITICS: BRIDGING GENDER AND ETHNICITY

Left, right, left. The influence of party ideology on the political representation of ethnic minorities in Belgium

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The scholarly literature on ethnic minority representation often points to the "political opportunity structure" – particularly that of political parties – to explain the prevalence of ethnic minorities in elected politics. Informed by the literature on women in politics, this article examines how the ideology of political parties affects the representation of ethnic minorities. This article is based on a qualitative case study of 2 major Belgian cities and includes 33 semi-structured interviews with ethnic minority councillors, candidates, members of ethnic communities, and party representatives. Interviews were analyzed using the grounded theory approach. We found party ideology to affect the support parties received from ethnic minority voters and candidates; party ideology does not, however, influence party strategies to enhance ethnic minority representation. Overall, political parties do not seem to invest in their ethnic minority candidates and councillors.

Keywords: political party; ethnic minorities; political representation; ideology

Introduction

Since the end of World War II, the borders of most West European countries contain a growing number of ethnic minorities.[1] In the decades after the war, numerous foreign nationals came as "guest workers" to solve temporary labor shortages. As women and children also moved to Europe to accompany their husbands and fathers, the migrant population became a permanent phenomenon (Ireland 2000).

The politicization of ethnicity is a more recent phenomenon (Bird, Saalfeld, and Wüst 2011). Ethnic minorities have recently emerged as political actors due to more flexible laws on naturalization and enfranchisement which had as an effect that ethnic minorities nowadays make up a considerable part of the electorate. Ethnicity has also become politicized as the management of ethnic diversity fuels public debate. Within these debates, we increasingly hear that multiculturalism has failed (Huntington 1993; Scheffer 2007). The growing presence of extreme-right parties in several countries has also contributed to this apparent European "retreat from multiculturalism."

The representation of ethnic minorities is an important issue in light of this politicization of ethnicity. Ideally, elected assemblies in representative democracies mirror the composition of

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the population (Mansbridge 1999). In reality, elected assemblies often fall short of this ideal. A fairer representation of ethnic minorities, however, would seem to have several advantages: it could reduce the risk of (violent) conflict between minority and majority groups in society and increase the legitimacy and democratic character of the political system. It would also have symbolic importance, providing crucial access points for marginalized groups and facilitating the introduction of new group perspectives and interests into policy debates (Celis, Meier, and Wauters 2010; Bird, Saalfeld, and Wüst 2011).

These arguments in favor of greater political representation notwithstanding, ethnic minorities are generally under-represented in elected politics. A rich body of research points to the "political opportunity structure" (POS) to explain their low numbers; much of this research has focused on citizenship regimes, electoral systems, the characteristics of ethnic groups, and political parties as being crucial elements of the POS (Koopmans and Statham 2000; Bird 2003; Kittilson and Tate 2004; Koopmans 2004). Ethnic minority representation has been found to increase with electoral systems of proportional representation (Rae 1969), with multicultural citizenship regimes (Koopmans 2004), and with specific characteristics of the ethnic group (e.g. geographical concentration and high levels of social capital) (Bird 2003).

While the role of political parties is commonly considered as a key component of the POS (Bird 2003), it remains largely unexplored (Bird, Saalfeld, and Wüst 2011). Most studies that address the relationship between ethnic minorities and political parties limit their focus to the influence of extreme-right parties (Kitschelt 1997; Kriesi et al. 2006; van der Brug and van Spanje 2009; Sprague-Jones 2011). Political parties are however crucial gate keepers (Tossutti and Najem 2002). By deciding who can or cannot run for office, they consciously or unconsciously create all sorts of formal and informal barriers for ethnic minorities (Fennema et al. 2000). Parties also increasingly compete for the ethnic vote (Anwar 2001), balancing between attracting these "new" votes and not losing their traditional electorate to extreme-right parties (Claro da Fonseca 2011). Political parties are thus important to ethnic minorities and vice versa. Yet, we have little understanding of the relationship between ethnic minority representation and political parties (although there are exceptions, see, for instance, Messina 1989; Bird 2003, 2004; Frymer 2005; Kittilson and Tate 2005).

This article, therefore, turns to the extensive literature on the role of political parties in the representation of women, another social group that tends to be under-represented in political institutions. The political inclusion of women and ethnic minorities is often conceived as similar projects of breaking male and white dominance in politics. In the past research, researchers have treated their presence in politics jointly (Ross 1943; Norris 2004) or argued that the level of representation of one group reflects the level of representation of the other group (Taagepera 1994; Lijphart 1999; Norris 2004). Consequently, it is interesting to investigate if the party factors found relevant for women work in the same way for ethnic minorities. This article takes on this task by focusing on one particular characteristic of political parties – their ideology – as this has been the characteristic deemed most significant in influencing female representation (Kittilson 2013). Below we will examine whether a party's ideology affects the support from ethnic minorities as well as the party's strategy to enhance ethnic representation. However, although women and ethnic minorities have some shared characteristics, they also differ in some aspects (see above). Therefore, it seems interesting to investigate whether or not these differences influence the impact of party ideology.

The article is based on a qualitative research of two Belgian cities, Ghent and Antwerp. In these two cities, interviews were conducted both with ethnic candidates, councilors, and members of the ethnic community and party officials. In doing so, this study allows for an in-depth analysis of the importance of political parties in informing ethnic minority representation.

Before discussing the findings, we briefly review the literature on political parties and the political representation of women and discuss the data and methodology of our study. The concluding section highlights the implications of this study for social policy and future research.

Political parties and representation of groups: insights from gender studies

Women usually participate in party politics through established parties rather than setting up their own parties (Kittilson 2013). Certain party characteristics seem to favor the involvement of women. First, concerning the organizational structure of a party, centralized and institutionalized parties make it easier for women to enter party politics (Norris and Lovenduski 1993; Matland and Studlar 1996; Caul 1999; Kittilson 2013). Also, the level of candidate selection matters. As women are often active in the local community, this seems to be the optimal level for female candidate selection (Caul 1999). In addition, the factionalization of a party positively influences women's participation. If a party is in general hospitable to claims of organized factions, also claims for increasing women's representation have higher chances for success. If a party, in contrast, focuses on the individual, this becomes much harder (Wiliarty 2010; Kittilson 2013).

Second, the presence of women within the party is of relevance. Women at the higher party levels further the nomination of female candidates and enhance the perception that women can be in politics. This, in turn, encourages new women to join the party (Meier et al. 2006). Furthermore, not only individual women, but also networks are of crucial importance in the nomination process. Political parties often have internal women organizations that promote women for office (Norris and Lovenduski 1993; Leyenaar 2004; Htun 2005), defend female interests or gender equality (Kittilson 2013).

Third, and most importantly, the ideology of a party influences women's representation on both the demand and the supply side (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Kittilson 2013). On the one hand, a party's ideology influences the support it receives from voters and candidates. Although gender differences in party preference are more modest than other cleavages like class or religion, they have often proven to be significant (Inglehart and Norris 2000). In the first years after enfranchisement, women predominantly supported conservative parties for religious reasons (Duverger 1955; Lipset 1960; Inglehart and Norris 2000; Kittilson 2013). But as church attendance declined and women entered the workforce, their support shifted toward leftist parties (Inglehart and Norris 2000; Giger 2009). Women, more often than men, are employed in the public sector and tend to support social spending. Iversen and Rosenbluth (2006) also suggest that the independence women gained by entering the workforce resulted in higher divorce rates, increasing the chance that women would use social benefits and making it less likely that they would support parties advocating spending cuts. Furthermore, Inglehart and Norris (2000) argue that cultural differences between women and men in their value orientations and attitudes result in women's greater support for leftist parties.

Campbell (2006), however, warns against treating women voters as a monolith as other characteristics such as age, education, and ethnicity influence political behavior (Kittilson 2013). Age, for example, has been found to influence the voting behavior of women as younger women will rather vote for left parties than older women who used to support conservative parties (see above) (Norris 1996; Inglehart and Norris 2000). Furthermore, cross-national differences in the size and direction of the voting behavior of women exist. In Spain, for instance, women remain faithful to rightist parties and Belgian women tended to support leftist parties in the past (with the exception of the Christian Democratic Party that always attracted many female votes), but today more women than men support both the Liberal and the Christian Democratic Parties (Swyngedouw and Heerwegh 2009; Abts, Swyngedouw, and Billiet 2011).

Second, ideology also influences the strategies parties adopt to enhance women's representation. Leftist parties (Socialists and Greens) support egalitarian ideologies and are for ideological reasons more open to marginalized groups in the society (Matland and Studlar 1996). This "women friendly" stance resulted in the recruitment of more women, the placement of more women in winnable positions on their lists (Duverger 1955; Matland and Studlar 1996; Caul 1999; Kittilson 2006), and the promotion of women to their top echelons (O'Neill and Stewart 2009; Kittilson 2013). They are also more likely to adopt quotas for female representation. Rightist parties, in contrast, tend to favor individualism and limited roles for governmental rules and regulations; they are less open to considerations of group representation (Girvin 1988; Hyde 1995). In addition, they are said to cherish traditional family values and could therefore be prejudiced against women's representation (Norris and Lovenduski 1993).

However, several authors found the influence of party ideology on women's representation to be diminishing. Norris and Lovenduski (1993), for instance, argue that a leftist ideology no longer has a strong influence on women's parliamentary representation, which is also confirmed by Matland and Studlar (1996). Nowadays also rightist parties have made considerable efforts to promote women (Celis and Childs 2012; Htun 2005; Childs and Webb 2011; Kittilson 2013).

Furthermore, the traditional left–right divide – classifying political parties in "leftist parties" orientated toward the working class and "rightist parties" orientated toward the business interest – may be too simplistic to explain the political representation of women. Nowadays, new political cleavages have arisen around issues like environmental quality, minority rights, social equality, etc. According to Caul (1999) as a result, so-called new left parties may be more preoccupied with women's representation than old left parties.

In sum, the literature shows that especially in the past, party ideology mattered: women supported leftist parties and leftist parties tried to enhance the political representation of women (for instance, by including and giving women good places on their lists). Nowadays, however, the picture seems to be more nuanced and the influence of ideology on women's representation seems to be diminishing. We wonder if this is also the case for ethnic minority representation or women and ethnic minorities differ in this respect. We will thus research how party ideology influences ethnic minority representation and whether differences with the conclusions of women can be found.

As indicated above, women and ethnic minorities share some characteristics, but they also differ in some aspects.[2] More in particular, there are reasons to expect that – unlike for women – party ideology might remain a strong determinant for ethnic minority representation. While women are, for instance, distributed across different professions, many ethnic minorities still come from a working class background or are unemployed (for Belgium see, for instance, Departement WSE 2011). As a result, the traditional left–right divide might still be of importance to them resulting in ethnic minority support for leftist parties for socio-economic reasons. Furthermore, there is a chronological difference in the representation between women and ethnic minorities (Bird 2003). Women entered politics already in the middle of the twentieth century and consequently, their representation has been on the political agenda for a longer time. Ethnic minorities on the other hand only started to show up on the political scene at the end of the twentieth century (during the 1980s and 1990s). Therefore, it is possible that the evolution present for women (for instance, that first especially leftist parties enhanced their representation, but in time, all parties did this) is not yet at play for ethnic minorities. In addition, several authors claim that the political representation of ethnic minorities is seen as more threatening for the status quo than that of women (Kittilson and Tate 2004). Therefore, especially rightist parties (thanks to their own ideology or pressures from extreme-right parties) could be more hesitant to enhance their representation. As a result, the dynamics that diminished the influence of ideology on women's representation might not yet or to a lesser extent be at work for ethnic minority representation.

Methodology

This article is based on a qualitative case study of two Belgian cities, Antwerp and Ghent. We chose Belgium because of its proportional electoral system which is seen as advantageous for ethnic minority representation. Especially, its combination of compulsory voting and the possibility to give preferential votes should benefit ethnic minority representation as research has shown that ethnic minority candidates tend to receive more preferential votes than candidates in general and therefore manage to get elected even from non-eligible places on the list (Jacobs, Martiniello, and Rea 2002; Swyngedouw and Jacobs 2006; Jacobs and Teney 2009).

Furthermore, Antwerp and Ghent are the two largest cities in Flanders and both cities have a large ethnic minority population (20.5% of the population in Ghent and 42.1% in Antwerp). They constitute two typical cases through which we can identify key aspects of ethnic minority representation under typical circumstances. We choose large cities with a fairly big proportion of ethnic minorities, because research has shown that both the size of a city and the number of ethnic minorities in the population can positively influence the representation of ethnic minorities (Berger et al. 2001). In Ghent, the biggest ethnic group stems from Turkey (6.3% of the population) (Stad Gent 2013), while in Antwerp the Moroccan community constitutes the biggest group (8.4%) (Stad Antwerpen 2013). In both cities, smaller communities from Ghana, Tunisia, China, etc. are also present.

Although both cities have a history of Socialist party dominance, the local elections of 2006 (on which we focus in this article) were expected to be very tight in both cities. In Antwerp, a major battle occurred between the representative of the Socialist party and the representative of the extreme-right party which is traditionally strong in Antwerp. In Ghent, the opposition parties (and especially the green party) believed they could break the purple majority for the first time in many years. As a result, all parties had incentives at the time to include ethnic minorities and attract ethnic minority votes. After the elections, the Socialist however remained in power in both cities, together with the Liberal Democrats in Ghent and the Liberal Democrats and the Christian Democrats in Antwerp. The opposition consisted of the extreme-right party, the Green party, the Christian Democrats, and the Flemish Nationalist party in Ghent and the extreme-right party, the Green party, and the Flemish Nationalist party in Antwerp (Table 1).

For data collection, we used semi-structured interviews with ethnic minority councillors and candidates, with party representatives responsible for candidate selection, and with representatives from ethnic organisations. Thirty-three such "experts" were selected on the basis of their daily experience with the political representation of ethnic minorities. We interviewed all ethnic minority individuals occupying seats in the local council at the time of the interviews and one ethnic candidate from each party.[3] The interviewees also included one person for each party responsible for the candidate lists and civil society actors.

We asked the councillors, candidates, ethnic minority representatives, and party representatives different questions. Some subjects were treated more in-depth than others. Councillors

Table 1. Seats political parties obtained in Ghent and Antwerp at the local elections of 2006.

Party	*Ghent:* seats political parties obtained	*Antwerp*: seats political parties obtained
Socialist list	17	22
Liberal list	11	5
Extreme-right list	9	20
Green list	6	2
Christian Democratic list	8	6

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. Ethnic minority representatives 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. On average, the interviews lasted about 75 minutes.

Interviews were collected, recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using the grounded theory approach and Nvivo. The goal of this approach is to develop a theory that is grounded in systematically gathered and analyzed data. We used Strauss and Corbin's (1990) systematic coding approach rather than Glaser's (1992) open coding approach, thereby employing a more structured approach using multiple tools, questioning techniques, and analytical frameworks. More specifically, we followed the process of open, axial, and selective coding in a cyclic process of data gathering. First, we conducted a line-by-line analysis of the first interviews. Each line was coded resulting in a multitude of conceptual codes (open coding). Next, different codes were grouped together by using the constant comparative method resulting in a hierarchy of codes (axial coding). Codes or categories that needed further exploration were identified and a new round of data gathering was initiated (the case of Antwerp). This cyclic process was repeated for Antwerp and in the end we group all codes and categories together around the concept of "political representation of ethnic minorities" by using the coding paradigm (selective coding).

Results

In this results section, we present our findings about how a party's ideology influences the political representation of ethnic minorities. As appendix shows, the majority of the councillors in Ghent and Antwerp are from a leftist party which begs the question whether this is due to ethnic support (from voters and candidates) for leftist parties or to strategies leftist parties adopt to enhance ethnic minority representation (supply and demand). We will discuss both possibilities below. First, we will investigate if a party's ideology influences the party preference of ethnic minority voters and candidates. Next, we will focus on the influence of party ideology on the strategies parties adopt to enhance ethnic minority representation.

Support

To examine if a party's ideology influences the support from ethnic minorities, we asked three questions: Do ethnic minorities become members of the party? Do they tend to vote for the party? Do they put themselves forward as candidates for the party?

A first striking insight from the interview data is that none of the parties claim to have many ethnic minority members and none of party officials knew how many members had an ethnic minority background (see also Celis, Eelbode, and Wauters 2011).[4] Our respondents attributed minorities' lack of interest in party membership to their low socio-economic status and educational levels and lack of knowledge about Belgian politics (ER7 and CR1).[5] But more highly educated ethnic minorities do not participate in party politics either. They are either disillusioned and think politicians are only interested in ethnic minority votes and not in their adoption in parties or perceive integration into political parties to be extremely difficult. They perceive political parties as very closed institutions or believe that they have more career opportunities outside politics (ER9, ER12, PR26, and CR31). However, parties are losing members in general and seem to become less attractive for many people in recent years (Katz and Mair 1995; Dalton and Wattenberg 2000). The absence of ethnic minority party members could thus also be explained by this more general de-alignment (Celis, Eelbode, and Wauters 2011).

The interviewees nevertheless revealed that ethnic minorities tend to vote and become candidates for specific parties. In particular, the Socialist party is seen as the one that attracts the most votes.[6] This perception was confirmed in other studies in Belgium who all pointed to a strong tendency of ethnic minority voters to vote for the Socialist party (Sandri and De Decker 2008; Jacobs and Teney 2009; Teney et al. 2010; Jacobs and Delwit 2011). Respondents explain the ethnic voter preference for the Socialist party through a combination of pull and push factors.

The traditional socio-economic values of the Socialist party appealed to the immigrant working class (ER4, ER6, ER9, EC2, and CR2). So did its cultural values (the Socialist party supported voting rights for migrants and eased the naturalization law) though some respondents argued that the party could do more and often remained vague on its positions on certain issues (ER5, ER7, ER12, PR3, PR6, PR7, and CR1). In Ghent, the party voted against the ban on headscarves[7] in public office. In Antwerp, however, where the Socialist party supported the ban on the headscarf, this was said to alienate ethnic minorities (ER1, ER2, ER7, ER8, ER12, ER13, and CR2). Furthermore, the Socialists had begun showing interest in ethnic minority issues already in the 1990s, our respondents stated, and its efforts to establish ties with communities had paid off.

Ethnic minorities also supported the Green party because of its views on integrating immigrants, its contacts with ethnic communities, and its tradition of being interested in minority issues. On the other hand, the Green party lost support with its emphasis on post-materialistic issues like the environment. Many minorities are still preoccupied with "surviving" – with basic issues such as housing and employment – and tend to see the Green party's ideology as dreamy and distant to their own concerns (ER7, ER10, EC2, EC7, PR1, PR6, CR1, and CR2).

Most of the values and standpoints espoused by the rightist parties were perceived negatively by ethnic minorities. In principle, the Liberal party could attract the limited but growing numbers of the self-employed through its socio-economic values (ER6, ER12, EC2, PR1, PR3, PR6, and PR10). But in practice, its cultural values (the party opposed voting rights for migrants and supported the ban on the headscarf) turned off potential supporters. The Liberal party's focus on the individual also fit uneasily with the focus on family and community among many ethnic minorities (ER7, ER9, PR10, and CR2). Because of its values, the Liberal party does not have much contact with ethnic communities.

In contrast, the Christian Democratic Party attaches great importance to community. Respondents, however, were divided over the issue of religion. Some believed religion attracted ethnic minorities (ER13, EC3, EC5, and CR2); others were convinced that the Christian orientation of the party would alienate them, the majority of the ethnic minorities in our city being Muslim (ER13 and PR8). Party officials furthermore stressed that the Christian Democratic Party had poor networks among ethnic communities and had only recently begun showing interest in them. It thus remained rather unpopular (PR8 and PR9).

Not surprisingly, the extreme-right party was not seen as popular by the ethnic minority community, although some of its values (for instance, the emphasis on security) were said to attract a certain ethnic minority electorate (ER12, EC2, PR4, and PR5). However, some respondents suggested that the Flemish nationalist party is becoming more and more popular with ethnic minorities, because of its focus on nationalism (as ethnic communities are often also very nationalistic) and its security discourse (ER6, ER9, EC2, and PR6).

Alongside the ideological divide between left and right, the Belgian legacy of pillarization – a society divided into exclusionary ideological pillars each with its own network of related institutions (e.g. political parties, trade unions, schools, and newspapers) (Deschouwer 2009) – was said to influence minority support for political parties. In the past, the Socialist and the Christian Democratic pillars were particularly strong in the Belgian society. First generation immigrants, our interviewees argued, were politically socialized within these pillars. For instance, on

arrival in Belgium, trade unions were waiting for migrant workers at the airport to help them with all sorts of practicalities (ER6, ER7, ER8, and PR10). Analysis of our interviews showed, however, that only the Socialist party benefited from this "pillarization effect" as the Christian Democrats are predominantly strong in the countryside but not in the cities where most migrants live (ER6, ER12, and EC3). The effects of such pillarization are also diminishing as more and more ethnic minorities become self-employed, more highly educated, and consequently begin voting for other parties. Furthermore, the second generation might feel less bound to the Socialist party. But according to one respondent, a new kind of pillarization is emerging: by promoting socio-cultural projects against poverty and for integration, the Socialist party is reproducing its bonds with ethnic communities (PR10).

In contrast to voters, ethnic minority candidates did not have a clear ideological preference for the Socialist party. Although the Socialist party was the only party that claimed to receive voluntary applications from ethnic minority candidates, while the other parties had to actively search for them, respondents rather chose for this party for other reasons than its ideology (for instance, because it was in the party in power or because they knew people in the party). Ethnic minority candidates were as much attracted by the ideology of other (rightist) parties than of that of the Socialist party.

Overall, we can conclude that although ethnic minority members and candidates do not have a clear preference, ethnic minority voters tend to support leftist parties (and more specifically the Socialist party) in line with the expectations from the literature about women. Although Abts, Swyngedouw, and Billiet (2011) saw a shift in women's voting in recent years, the support of ethnic minorities for leftist parties seems to remain strong. However, several respondents argue that this will change over time, as more ethnic minorities are increasingly young, higher educated, or self-employed (ER5, ER6, EC1, EC2, and CR2). This would be a similar evolution as for women. Further research will have to show if other party characteristics as identified by Caul (1999) (for instance, organizational structure or presence of ethnic minorities within the party) also influence the support of ethnic minority members, voters, and candidates.

Party strategies to enhance the political representation of ethnic minorities

Ideology could also affect the strategies political parties employ to enhance the political representation of ethnic minorities. Possible strategies here include: (1) recruiting ethnic candidates; (2) giving them eligible positions on lists; (3) appointing them to top positions in the party; and (4) other measures to encourage the political representation of ethnic minorities, such as special support or training. These four strategies will be discussed in more detail below. Based on the literature on women's representation, we expect leftist parties to employ more of these strategies than rightist parties. On the basis of their ideology, we expect that parties will not only take measures that look good from the outside (so-called window-dressing measures), but also take measures that will effectively enhance representation.

Recruitment of ethnic candidates

In Ghent and Antwerp, in general, a small committee puts together a list of candidates, which is then approved through a vote held by the party administration and the party members. The size of this selection committee differs from party to party, but irrespective of its size, it has the main power to decide over the lists and thus to select ethnic minority candidates.

We expected leftist parties to have more ethnic minority candidates on their lists than rightist parties. This could be confirmed for past elections (1994, 2000), but in the 2006 local elections,

almost all parties – with the exception of the extreme-right party[8] – fielded quite a few ethnic minority candidates (Table 2).

The leftist parties have most ethnic candidates, but the difference with the rightist parties is smaller than we would expect. This may be explained by the enfranchisement of migrant ethnic minorities and the adoption of the *snel-Belg wet*[9] which suddenly turned ethnic minorities into a large pool of potential voters. Since the semi-open list system[10] allows for preferential voting and ethnic minority candidates are successful in attracting preferential votes, they can make a difference for parties.

Sometimes, however, parties were not very careful when selecting ethnic minority candidates. Both the Socialists and Christian Democrats had previously faced scandals over unsuitable candidates on their lists (for instance, members of the Grey Wolves, an ultra-nationalist, neo-fascist Turkish organization). Political parties were sometimes so eager to attract ethnic votes that they put whomever they could find on their lists. This of course upset the ethnic community, whose members felt political parties did not take them seriously.

> 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. (EC1)

We can conclude that leftist parties in the past recruited much more ethnic candidates than rightist parties, but that nowadays this difference is no longer outspoken. All parties now try to attract as many ethnic votes as they can. Unfortunately, this sometimes leads to situations where unsuitable candidates get selected.

Giving ethnic minorities eligible positions on the list

A second strategy parties can adopt to enhance the political representation of ethnic minorities is to give them eligible positions[11] on the list. Again, we expect leftist parties to grant ethnic minorities better positions on their lists. In order to determine if a place was eligible or not, we considered the number of seats won by a party in the previous local election. When deciding which seats were eligible and which were not, we also counted the last place on the list.

Tables 3 and 4 reveal that it is not the case that leftist parties give better places to ethnic minority candidates. Leftist and rightist parties give comparable positions to ethnic minorities, most of them being non-eligible. As a result, most respondents were unhappy with their place on the list. Some of them nevertheless got elected.

> Everybody who was elected did this on his own. If you know the logic of party politics and if you look at the positions ethnic minorities got, it becomes clear that none of them was meant to be elected. (ER6)

Table 2. Number of ethnic candidates on the lists.

List	*Ghent*: number of ethnic minorities (from 51)	*Antwerp*: number of ethnic minorities (from 55)
Socialist list	6	8
Liberal list	4	5
Extreme-right list	0	0
Green list	6	7
Christian Democratic list	4	7

Table 3.   Places ethnic minorities attained on the lists in Ghent.

Party	Number of eligible seats	Places ethnic minorities attained on the list	Number of eligible seats for ethnic minorities	Proportion of eligible seats for ethnic minorities (%)
Social democratic list	14	10, 25, 36, 37, 44, 45	1	6.7
Liberal list	11	7, 12, 17, 19	1	8.3
Extreme-right list	11	/	0	0
Green list	4	5, 8, 9, 15, 19, 21	0	0
Christian Democratic list	10	9, 23, 27, 37	1	9.09

When asked why ethnic minorities did not get better positions on their lists, most party representatives mentioned the difficulties of drafting representative lists that included incumbents, men and women, young and old, people from different neighborhoods, natives, and ethnic minorities. Those responsible for drafting the electoral lists often admitted to having other priorities than a fair representation of ethnic minorities: for example, the wishes of incumbents or representation for young people (PR1, PR2, PR3, PR4, PR5, PR6, PR7, PR8, PR9, and PR10). One Socialist party representative claimed that ethnic minorities do not need good positions on the list because they get elected anyway thanks to their preferential votes.[12]

In general, we can conclude that giving ethnic minorities a visible or eligible place was not a priority for most parties, regardless their ideology.

Ethnic minorities and top positions in the party

A third strategy political parties can adopt to enhance the political representation of ethnic minorities is to include them in the party's higher ranks. By doing so, a party shows that it believes in its ethnic representatives and that it invests in them. Furthermore, it offers a more sustainable guarantee for the inclusion of ethnic minorities. Again we expect that parties on the left will have more ethnic representatives in high position than parties on the right.

The situation in our two cities was disappointing. None of the parties had an ethnic minority chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, or treasurer. Only two parties had ethnic minorities in their upper ranks: a leader of the council party group among the Liberals and two aldermen[13] among the Socialists. Given the large proportion of ethnic minorities in the local population, many respondents perceived this as an affront.

Table 4.   Places ethnic minorities attained on the list in Antwerp.

Party	Number of eligible seats	Places ethnic minorities attained on the list	Number of eligible seats for ethnic minorities	Proportion of eligible seats for ethnic minorities (%)
Social democratic list	12	6, 8, 19, 22, 39, 43, 45, 50	2	15.4
Liberal list	10	15, 26, 29, 33, 35	0	0
Extreme-right list	20	/	0	0
Green list	6	5, 30, 40, 42, 43, 44, 54	1	14.3
Christian Democratic list	6	4, 6, 14, 23, 27, 36, 45, 54	1	16.6

Although the Socialist party in Ghent was the first in Belgium to have an ethnic minority alderwoman, the interviewees stressed that this was not to be consistent with the party ideology but because the party had to, given the candidate's number of preferential votes. Respondents further claimed that both she and her successor (also an ethnic minority) only got "harmless competences" and not those they had wanted (ER3, ER6, and CR1).

In Antwerp, on the other hand, the Socialist party choose not to appoint an ethnic minority alderwoman, despite her preferential votes. This upset the ethnic minority community to a great extent. In 2011, however, a vacancy appeared and an ethnic minority alderwoman was appointed anyway. However, many ethnic minorities believed this was too late.

Respondents state that it is difficult to climb up in the party as an ethnic candidate and point to rivalries within the party and nepotism. Sometimes decisions about certain functions (for instance, aldermen) are made in advance without consulting the ethnic minorities in the party. As ethnic minorities are often newcomers in the party, they do not have the necessary networks to gain access to higher positions (ER2, ER3, ER6, ER7, ER8, EC2, EC4, and CR1). In addition, some discrimination seems to be present as well. Respondents claim that capable ethnic minorities are often ignored, unless they fit in the mainstream idea of what constitutes a "good politician" (ER9 and CR2). As one party representative states:

> We can put someone on the list, to fill the list or because he comes from a certain community, but once he gets elected, it becomes a problem. If it is an ethnic minority, we fear that he will do something wrong. Because he is unfamiliar, unless he is fully integrated of course. At that moment, people think, okay, you delivered us votes, thank you, that was it. Once he gets elected, it starts to get tricky, we need to keep an eye on him, keep him under control, what is he going to do? We don't know… It is an advantage to be an ethnic minority to get on the list, but they day after, it is a disadvantage. (PR3)

Other respondents argue that as the presence of ethnic minorities in politics is a quite recent phenomenon, many of them do not have the necessary experience to get high-up positions (ER8, EC2, EC5, and PR7).

We can conclude that contrary to the expectations from the literature about women (O'Neill and Steward 2009; Kittilson 2013), both leftist and rightist parties are hesitant to appoint ethnic minorities to high positions.

Other measures

Finally, we examine whether political parties are taking other measures to enhance the political representation of ethnic minorities. For instance, they could be offering special support and training or establishing special groups for ethnic minorities within their parties. We would again expect leftist parties to be taking such measures more seriously than rightist ones.

Interviews showed, however, that this was not the case. None of the parties had special groups for ethnic minorities. Only the Greens offered some linguistic support; the other parties did not offer any special support (ER1, ER2, ER4, ER6, ER7, ER9, ER12, EC4, EC5, and CR1). This support could, however, be very important as ethnic minorities are often newcomers in politics and could benefit from some guidance.

> Parties must recognize that we need a political education. When I was elected, I had zero political experience and I just had to jump, join political debates, etc. While other people came from the youth branch of the party where they had learned a lot. Of course they were better than me… It is a problem for many ethnic minorities who get elected. (ER7)

The ideology of a party thus did not influence the support ethnic minorities received.

Conclusion

The literature on the political representation of women shows that in the past leftist parties had more elected female representatives than rightist parties because women tended to support leftist parties, which also adopted specific strategies to enhance the political representation of women (Kittilson 2013). Recent research, however, believes the influence of ideology of women's representation to be diminishing. In this article, we wonder if this is also the case for ethnic minorities, or if – thanks to the differences between women and ethnic minorities – party ideology plays an important role, with the traditional left–right divide still being of importance. In the two Belgian cities we studied, we found that: (1) contrary to the situation for women, a leftist ideology (and especially a Socialist one) is still a strong predictor for ethnic voter support (supply) and (2) although leftist parties were the first ones to care about ethnic minority representation, nowadays party ideology does not seem to influence the strategies parties adopt to enhance ethnic minority representation (demand). Leftist and rightist parties include approximately the same number of ethnic candidates on their lists (with the exception of the extreme-right party), give mostly non-electable places to ethnic candidates and hesitate to give ethnic minorities high positions within the party or take other measures to enhance their representation. Leftist parties tend to do a little better than rightist ones, but not to such an extent that we could say there is a clear influence of ideology. As a result, the higher number of ethnic minority representatives among leftist parties in Ghent and Antwerp seems to rather be the result of the voting behavior of ethnic minority voters than that of the active encouragement of leftist parties (instead of being the result of a combination of both as was found for women).

There can be several explanations for this. First, concerning the voter support many ethnic minorities still have a lower socio-economic status, which makes leftist parties a natural ally. Women, on the other hand, are more equally distributed across the working population.

Second, concerning the strategies parties adopt, the analysis showed that leftist parties (and especially the Socialist party) in any case receive the most support from ethnic minorities. It is possible that they do not feel the need to adopt additional strategies as they are already magnets for ethnic votes and candidates. Furthermore, most ethnic minority respondents claimed that all parties are driven by a kind of opportunism. They are said to be only interested in the ethnic vote to enhance their positions in the council. They do not seem to have ideological reasons to improve the political representation of ethnic minorities and therefore do not adopt any additional strategies. In addition, there is a lot of nepotism in most political parties. Respondents argue that incumbents and political networks within the party hinder the rise of ethnic minorities. Most politicians want to secure their own seats and hesitate to take measures to enhance the representation of newcomers. As a result, most of the respondents were disillusioned by political parties, sometimes to such a degree that they wanted to establish a separate "ethnic minority party."[14] They believed that political parties did not take ethnic candidates and councillors seriously and just wanted them to be "extras" (*figuranten*) or "people on display" (*vitrinefiguren*). The overall picture is thus quite negative. Most political parties do not seem to be interested in ethnic minorities.

We can see a difference between the representation of women and ethnic minorities here. Because, whereas most political parties make efforts to enhance the political representation of women, they are hesitant to do so for ethnic minority and rather constrain themselves to so-called window-dressing measures. One of the reasons for this could be that the representation of ethnic minorities is seen as more threatening than that of women as they have a more distinct group identity (Phillips 1995; Kittilson and Tate 2004). Furthermore, contrary to women, who make up half of the population, ethnic minorities are still *minorities.* They are perceived as a more dispersed or younger political force and as a result there seems to be less need to take their political representation into account (Phillips 1995; Bird 2003).

Since the findings of this article relate to the experiences of a small group of "experts" in ethnic minority representation in two Belgian cities, its findings cannot be generalized. We would need to conduct more case studies in different POSs (in cities with different majorities, in different countries, etc.) to further our knowledge of how party ideology influences the political representation of ethnic minorities. We would then be able to see if our findings are part of a broader trend or if there are intervening factors involved (for instance, whether a party is in the majority and the influence of country-specific factors like the electoral system). It would also be interesting to see if the other party characteristics identified by Caul (1999) – for instance organizational structure and the presence of peers in the party – also apply to ethnic minorities entering electoral politics.

Acknowledgement

Notes

1. We use the definition of the Flemish authorities. According to them, ethnic minorities are persons legally residing in Belgium – either with or without having Belgian nationality – and having at least one parent or grandparent born abroad. Furthermore, they are in a disadvantaged position because of their ethnic origin or their weak socio-economic situation.
2. It is important to note that these two social groups are not exclusive. How ideological dynamics impact upon the political representation of groups at the intersection of ethnicity and gender – whether, for instance, ethnic minority women benefit "double" from the leftist preoccupation with the promotion of diversity in terms of gender and ethnicity – has not been studied in this article. Intersectionality is an under-researched area in representation studies that deserves future study (Kittilson 2013).
3. Only for parties with ethnic minorities on the candidate list.
4. As private organizations parties are legally allowed to keep socio-demographic data on their members. On top of that, the local level is the most visible level of a party organization. Taking this into account, we would expect that local party secretaries would be able to give at least a rough estimate of the number of ethnic minorities in their local party. This was in practice, however, not the case.
5. ER = ethnic representative, EC = ethnic candidate, PR = party representative, CR = community representative.
6. This is mainly based on perception as hard data about voting behavior of ethnic minorities in Belgium are to a large extent lacking. An exception is formed by Teney et al. (2010) who have shown that ethnic minority people in Brussels seem to prefer socialist parties, but also the party of the incumbent mayor. As in our case, the mayor belongs to the socialist party, the assumption that ethnic minorities tend to vote mainly for the socialist party seems very plausible. Furthermore, there is no information about the relative or absolute value of ethnic minority voting on the total amount of (socialist) votes.
7. A very controversial policy issue aimed at prohibiting wearing a headscarf when executing a public function.
8. When we asked the extreme-right party why they did not have any ethnic minorities on their lists, they answered that they did not go looking for them. It was not something they really wanted; it was difficult enough to find people to fill the list. It seems quite normal that no ethnic candidates put themselves forward, as the extreme-right party program contains several points against immigrants.
9. This law (1 March 2000) made it easier for certain ethnic minorities to receive Belgian nationality.
10. Under the semi-open list system, candidates low on the list can still be elected if they obtain a large number of preferential votes. Several ethnic minority candidates managed to do this in the 2006 local elections.
11. Certain places on the list are seen as more eligible than others. The top 10 as well as the final 2 or 3 places are said to be good ones. The number of seats won by the party in the previous election gives an idea about which places are eligible.
12. Thanks to the proportional semi-open list system in Belgium, this is indeed often the case. Of the 14 ethnic minority councilors in Ghent and Antwerp, 10 were elected from non-eligible places.

13.   An alderman is someone who serves on the executive board of local government in Belgium ("schepen" in Dutch). They have specific responsibilities (for instance, education, city planning, etc.) and assist the mayor in governing the city.

14.   Overall, a separate party for ethnic minorities was perceived negatively by interviewees, as this would lead to segregation rather than integration.

15.   We did not include information about the cities, because respondents could then easily be recognized.

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Appendix. Overview of the respondents[15]

Name	Function	Ideology party
ER1	Councillor	Left
ER2	Councillor	Left
ER3	Councillor	Left
ER4	Councillor	Left
ER5	Councillor	Left
ER6	Councillor	Right
ER7	Councillor	Left
ER8	Councillor	Left

Appendix Continued.

Name	Function	Ideology party
ER9	Councillor	Left
ER10	Councillor	Left
ER11	Councillor	Left
ER12	Councillor	Right
ER13	Councillor	Right
EC1	Candidate	Left
EC2	Candidate	Left
EC3	Candidate	Right
EC4	Candidate	Right
EC5	Candidate	Left
EC6	Candidate	Left
EC7	Candidate	Right
PR1	Party	Left
PR2	Party	Left
PR3	Party	Right
PR4	Party	Right
PR5	Party	Right
PR6	Party	Left
PR7	Party	Left
PR8	Party	Right
PR9	Party	Right
PR10	Party	Right
CR1	Community	/
CR2	Community	/
CR3	Community	/