THE WHY OF CANDIDATE SELECTION

WHICH CRITERIA DO BELGIAN GREEN PARTY SELECTORS' USE WHEN CHOOSING CANDIDATES?

Audrey Vandeleene
Ghent University
Audrey.Vandeleene@UGent.be

Abstract

While the knowledge on *how* candidate selection happens begins to be rather organised, remarkably little attention has been paid to the selection criteria for candidates, "which one might have supposed was central" (King in Stark 1996, 124). Why do selectorates prefer some candidates and put others aside? What drives them? The dearth of knowledge of why some aspirants are chosen over others is puzzling when we consider the growing gap between citizens and elites together with the importance for the elected assemblies to be representative. This paper aims to investigate the informal selection criteria and questions on what basis political parties make their selection choices. Considering that selectorates may rely on individual characteristics of the candidates, but in a list system, that they might also want to 'balance the ticket', this research tackles criteria both at the individual and the aggregate levels. Based on the party strategic goals' framework (Sjoblom 1968), the competition between aspirants at the selection stage is expected to revolve around the criteria of acceptability, electability and competence, in that order of importance. I study the case of the Belgian francophone green party Ecolo, where the selection process involves both an exclusive and an inclusive selectorate. In-depth interviews with party selectors constitute the empirical basis of the analysis and deepen our knowledge as to whether some profiles of citizens are more likely to be selected, and thus face better chances to enter the parliament.

Introduction

When voters cast their ballot, they only get to choose within the menu defined by political parties (Rahat 2007). No other option is foreseen if they wish to taste something else. Hence the relevance of the study of who becomes a candidate is brought to the front stage. What kinds of profile do party selectors prefer and which citizens are let on the side already during the selection phase? While the knowledge on how the process of candidate selection takes place is rapidly evolving, empirical research on the candidacy stage of the selection process is critically lacking. Next to *how* candidates are selected, one should also worry about *why* candidates are chosen by political parties.

This paper studies the criteria used for candidate selection through the eyes of the party selectors themselves rather than by looking at formal criteria defined in the electoral law and/or in party statutes (see e.g. Rehmert 2020). So doing I enter the black box of the decision process of selectors and strive to uncover the rationale behind 'the choice before the choice' (Rahat 2007). Given the lack of theoretical foundations for candidate selection criteria, this research suggests to test whether the party strategic goals' model (Sjoblom 1968) usually applied to party leadership selection (Stark 1996) is also valid for candidates running for parliamentary office. In particular, the paper tests the relevance and the hierarchy between the three core selection criteria of acceptability, electability and competence.

Drawing on in-depth interviews with selectors in the Belgian francophone green party, I am able to demonstrate the relevance in this context of the criterion of acceptability. In the terms of the representational styles' framework (Katz 1997), it becomes clear that selectors have a strong preference for partisans and tend to reject trustees and to a lesser extent group delegates. This preference is particularly straightforward for candidates on realistic positions, namely the candidates who are the most likely to join the party's parliamentary faction.

The paper starts by establishing the state of knowledge on the candidacy stage of candidate selection processes before detailing the theoretical framework put to the test in this research. The empirical strategy is then presented with particular attention to the case selection and the techniques used for the interview data collection. I continue with the empirical findings rooted in my respondents' accounts of their experience as selectors. The last section sketches some concluding comments.

Theoretical framework

Candidacy as the first stage of the candidate selection process

Representation lies at the heart of our democratic societies (Mansbridge 1999). By selecting candidates for public office, political parties perform a linkage function between the citizens/voters and the political institutions (Lawson 1980). They are the gatekeepers who literally control the access to the Parliament, by offering to a subset of citizens the opportunity to represent the other citizens in the political arena. Parties hereby directly influence the representativeness of the elected assemblies (Matland and Montgomery 2003), but also their quality: what kind of legislators sit in the parliaments? In recent years, there is a growing literature on the mechanisms of candidate selection. A great share of the existing studies was initially descriptive or classificatory (e.g. Gallagher and Marsh 1988). The literature mostly tackled the selection processes by building typologies of selection modes or rules (e.g.

how institutionalised or bureaucratised are selection processes (Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2016)) and, in particular, typologies of actors. The key actors, labelled the 'selectorates' – the selecting bodies within parties, are analysed according to their degree of inclusiveness – their size – and their position in the party hierarchy, i.e. the level of centralisation of the decision (Rahat and Hazan 2001). Scholars also characterise the candidates by depicting the journey from being eligible to office, then aspirant, candidate and eventually MP (Norris and Lovenduski 1995). Yet most recent works turned explanatory and draw on those typologies to focus on the determinants of candidate selection and/or its consequences. Questions on why a party adopts a particular type of selection process or on how candidate selection affects representation, participation, accountability and political behaviour were already largely scrutinised (Cordero, Jaime-Castillo, and Coller 2016; Hazan and Rahat 2010; Shomer 2014; Siavelis and Morgenstern 2008).

The knowledge on how candidate selection happens and who selects begins to be rather established and organised. However, remarkably little attention has been paid to the candidacy stage, that was the first dimension of the fourfold analytical framework famously developed by Hazan and Rahat (2010) and according to the scholars, "the most brutal of dimensions because it has the potential to eliminate an overwhelming majority of the population from the pool of candidates" (Hazan and Rahat 2010:19). The question of the selection criteria for these candidates, "which one might have supposed was central" (King in Stark 1996:124) has mostly been neglected (but see some recent comparative research on the formal criteria, e.g. Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2019; Rehmert 2020). Why actually do the selectorates prefer some candidates and put others aside? What drives them? Some research investigates these choices indirectly by looking at the final outcome of the selection process (Put 2015; Vandeleene 2016) or at the rules constraining the selection's choices such as party or legislative quotas (Krook 2009; Reiser 2014; Vandeleene 2014; Wauters, Maddens, and Put 2014). In doing so, these works suggest that the criteria could be fully understood by analysing either the final slate of candidates or the rules in place. This paper aims at going deeper than the outcome of the process, by investigating the criteria set by selectorate prior to their selection choices. Next to the important but often quite limited formal selection criteria, this research explores the much more diverse informal criteria – the motives and preferences of the selectorates, to understand why candidates were chosen to run for office.

The criteria to select candidates could indeed first be formal, either at the state or the party level. All candidates have to meet the official requirements to be entitled to run for office, typically voting eligibility, nationality, age, residence or incompatibility with other offices (Hazan and Rahat 2010). The electoral law usually set some eligibility requirements that remain broad and do not deeply constraint parties' choice.

Beyond legal eligibility requirements, most parties set formal candidacy requirements (Gallagher and Marsh 1988) shedding light on who is wanted for or barred from standing as a candidate for the party (Rehmert 2020). Of course, just like the legislative constraints, the party formal criteria have a direct impact on the composition of the legislative assemblies, but to the extent that these are respected – as we know that political parties are 'judge and party'. As Sartori (1976:84) emphasized: "the rule maker and the rule addressee largely coincide", so parties may not always obey their own rules (Panebianco 1988), in particular when it comes to requirements for potential candidates (Galligan 2003).

3

Yet, they might write down in their statutes who may apply in the first place as a candidate and we do not have to dismiss the importance of the party documents as a starting point (Gauja, Scarrow, and Wright 2019).

A minimum length of party membership is a typical constraint set forth by parties (usually one or two years (Hazan and Rahat 2010)) to avoid opportunistic candidates and hereby ensure a greater degree of cohesion both in campaign times and in the parliament (Rehmert 2020). Having been a member for a certain period of time also ensures that candidates have been socialised into the party's way of functioning and are well integrated into the party, what can also be attested by other requirements, namely having had a position within the party or the collection of a certain amount of signatures of party members or elected representatives. The collection of signatures is also an indirect hint into the electoral popularity of the aspirant (Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2019). As a guarantee for party cohesion, parties may require aspirants to sign a kind of charter as a pledge of their loyalty toward their party and her values. As a proxy for that, parties may require candidates to be a member of one of the party ancillary organisation, like an union or a religious association, or even state a religious affiliation (Rehmert 2020).

Comparative research shows that among formal selection criteria the qualifications of the aspirants are frequent. Parties mostly formally measure to what extent the aspirant might possess the skills to become a good candidate and representative through her educational attainment (Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2019). Some parties may also ask a financial contribution to their aspirant candidates to cover some campaign costs and at least the settlement of any debts to the party (Ashiagbor 2008; Hazan and Rahat 2010).

Nevertheless, if one wants to understand what parties are looking for, research needs to go beyond the formal rules. Just like works on quota may be flawed if restricted to the formal party quotas (Reiser 2014), works on the selection criteria certainly benefit from a neo-institutionalist approach and should include the informal side of this critical choice. This paper therefore studies the selection criteria not based on party statutes but through the eyes of the party selectors themselves. So far, to the best of my knowledge, few openly asked party selectors why they chose the candidates they selected. Yet some research touched upon this question via large-scale surveys among decision-makers of candidate selection. De Winter and colleagues (2013) for instance asked local party selectors in Belgium what qualities of the candidates they took into account when drafting the lists, with selectors able to choose between several items grouped in four main categories (presented here in order of importance according to survey results): candidates' local embeddedness, their expertise or skills, their ideological or party embeddedness and their name recognition. They also investigated which equilibriums selectors were striving for on the list (gender, age, geography and socio-economic characteristics were the most selected items). Schindler (2020) surveyed selectors as well, both delegates and members, and came up with ideological congruence, effectiveness in the field of public relations, life experience outside the party, a high profile among the citizenry and persuasiveness in the candidate's speech as the most important criteria for German selectors. The fact that the aspirant was representing the position of the selector's local party group was also pointed out as relevant by Schindler (2020)'s respondents.

What I argue in this paper is that evidence is too scarce on what are the key selection criteria for candidates to analyse it in a quantitative way. We still need to uncover what selectors think and which criteria they spontaneously put forward without making them rank criteria in a fixed list set up by researchers. As repeatedly pointed out (Hazan and Rahat 2010; Rehmert 2020), empirical research on the candidacy stage of the selection process is critically lacking. Despite the decisiveness of candidate selection, little is known on the rationale behind the 'choice before the choice', i.e. the reasons behind the choice of political parties on candidates, which comes prior to the much well-known choice made by voters on Election Day (Rahat 2007). The dearth of knowledge of why some citizens are chosen over others to become candidates for legislative elections is puzzling when we consider the growing gap between citizens and elites and the lack of trust towards political parties (Best, Lengyel, and Verzichelli 2012). Research has shown that supply and demand are intertwined in candidate selection, so the requirements set by parties do directly shape who dares to apply – and we know that marginalised groups in politics are usually less self-recruited and therefore need encouragement from the party selectors (Bjarnegård and Zetterberg 2019; Dittmar 2015). The role of parties as gatekeepers able to set selection criteria on their own is therefore critical. Citizens' lack of trust in the representative institutions could contribute to the rise of a major democratic crisis (Norris 2011).

Research design

The purpose of this research is to understand the key choice impacting the process of political representation. The main research question unfolds as follows. **RQ1:"Which criteria do party selectors' use when choosing candidates?**". This broad question allows me to provide an open overview of the reasons put forward by selectors to explain why they prefer some candidates and put others aside. This question is furthered detailed in "**RQ2: What is the relative importance of the selection criteria?**" Hereby I tackle the prioritisation made by selectors between several criteria, as I suspect that the ideal slate of candidates does not exist, so critical choices have to be made between some yardsticks.

Given the lack of established analytical framework on the selection criteria for candidates, this paper's theoretical framework relies on a closely related strand of literature considered to be transferrable to the candidates' literature: the selection criteria for political leaders. This literature details how preferences are hierarchized when political actors have to choose individuals for major political tasks and can hence contribute to fill the lacuna of the current literature on candidates.

When importing hypotheses from works on the selection of party leaders (Kenig 2009; Pilet and Cross 2014), I remain aware that selection criteria might differ for candidates, selected in a list system as part of a group, unlike a party leader, de facto selected alone or at the most in pair. Party leaders also fulfil other political functions than candidates but I contend that the main factors driving the choices are likely to be similar. I also draw on the theoretical arguments retrieved from the literature on personalisation of politics and voting behaviour, which states that many voters cast their vote based on the candidates' individual traits more than on parties' characteristics (Karvonen 2010). Hence, parties may grant importance to the candidates' individual characteristics in order to boost their electoral appeal.

I suggest to test the strategic goals' model, originally created for party leaders, and adapt it to the candidates by specifying the characteristics candidates should exhibit in order to help their parties meet their goals. Sjoblom (1968) detailed three strategic goals for parties: to remain united, to win elections, and to implement policies, in that order of importance. Parties indeed need above all to be cohesive to be able to be electorally successful, and if successful on Election Day, the party is in a position to realise the electoral promises by enacting public policies. Stark (1996) translated the three goals into a tripod of selection criteria for party leaders. The first criterion, and the most important, is acceptability. This criterion is situated at the intra-party level: the candidate has to suit every selector. Second, selectors grant importance to electability, so being able to attract votes. Third, they consider the candidate's competence, so to what extent she is skilled in policy issues. Of course every candidate corresponds to several qualities at the same time to a larger or a more limited extent. When deciding on their selection criteria, selectors face major trade-offs between their internal, electoral and programmatic goals (Hazan and Rahat 2010). The theoretical expectation is that electability and competence are less valued by selectorates than acceptability. This is in line with Sjoblom (1968) and Stark (1996)'s model on party leaders (see Quinn 2016 for an empirical critique of the model), but was also confirmed in more recent research on electoral candidates. Schindler (2020) demonstrated for instance that the policy positions of the candidates and the congruence between the candidates' position and the local group's position were the most important criteria for selectors, before other decisive factors like electoral appeal or competence. This leads to the first hypothesis represented in fig. 1.

Figure 1: Hierarchically organised tripod of selection criteria
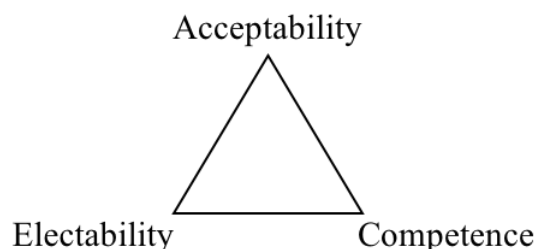
H1: Selectors' choice is based on the criteria of acceptability, electability and competence, acceptability being the most important selection criterion.

Like any research on candidate selection, it does not seem viable to deny the differences between electoral candidates in their chances to be elected to office. In SMD systems, one distinguishes between safe and non-safe seats. In list systems, a common terminology is realistic vs. unrealistic positions (Hazan and Rahat 2010). Both refer to the key question of how likely it is that the candidate sits in Parliament after the election. As Gallagher (1988:5) argued, it is plausible that selectorates would apply different criteria following the likelihood of the candidate's election. Just like parties apply assorted procedures for candidates with or without a chance to enter parliament (Hazan and Rahat 2010; Vandeleene 2016), they might make a difference between would-be deputies and the other candidates. For candidates on realistic positions indeed, the selection might make the election, or in other words, the choice made by selectors directly impacts the names of the representatives.

6

The second hypothesis specifies these projected differences in selection criteria according to the list position. The expectation is that the upper hand of acceptability over electability and competence will be stronger for candidates on realistic than on unrealistic positions because parties aim above all for cohesion within the future parliamentary group in order to avoid having to take disciplinary measures against MPs (Gherghina, Close, and Kopecký 2019). It seems indeed potentially more harmful for a party to face intra-party conflict in the parliamentary faction than in campaign times with a 'random' candidate deviating from the party line. Selectors are therefore expected to control the supply of their candidates more closely for the most prominent position to "assure certain behavioural patterns once in office" (Hazan and Rahat 2010:20). The candidates' electoral potential and competence might on the other hand be relevant for all candidates regardless of the list position.

H2: Selection criteria will differ according to the electability of the position: selectorates will value acceptability more for candidates on realistic than on unrealistic positions.

Empirical strategy

Case selection

This paper uncovers which criteria selectors use and how they prioritise some criteria over others in the most common electoral system, the list system, where the selection outcome is a group of candidates combining several characteristics. Belgium is a list PR system with multiple preference voting. Parties have to draft several electoral lists at the same time, one for each constituency and possibly one for each level of election when elections are simultaneous (what happened the last two regional and federal elections). District and party magnitudes vary widely since constituencies largely differ in size. Moreover, for most elections (not for regional elections in Brussels and for local elections), there is a so-called substitute list to be drafted next to the effective list, presenting candidates who will be entitled to sit only if an elected representative renounces her/his mandate during the term. At the regional and the federal level, Belgium still applies a flexible list system, often labelled a closed-list system in disguise (Crisp et al. 2013) given the extreme difficulty for candidates to break the list order and bypass candidates ranked higher on the list (1,41% of all regional and federal candidates from 1995 until 2014 according to Cogels 2020). The selectors remain extremely powerful in their determination of the future deputies when deciding on the list rank order – and this makes an analysis distinguishing between realistic and unrealistic positions even more relevant. In local elections in Wallonia, however, the system recently switched to an open list system, letting much more power to voters in the influence on candidates' individual election.

This research investigates candidate selection in a green party. Greens are a party family handling the processes of candidate selection in an inclusive way (Pilet, van Haute, and Kelbel 2015). Although the recent years have witnessed a shift from direct to indirect democracy (Rihoux and Frankland 2008), we still witness in green parties a situation where rank-and-file members have a say in the process while a more exclusive selectorate usually pre-selects the candidates (Detterbeck 2016; Vandeleene 2018). Besides, through their origins in social movements and the related importance of the principles of participation and inclusiveness in the nature of their organisation, green parties constitute first a rather extreme case for my research question since they favour collectivism over individualism (Müller-Rommel

2002). Accordingly, one does expect green selectors to pay particular attention to the list balance and refrain from using very personalised selection criteria (van Haute 2016). Second, the greens devote time and energy during the selection process to deliberation mechanisms and follow rather institutionalised and even formalised procedures. That means that it is more likely to find a report of an institutionalised deliberation on the selection criteria in this kind of party than in a party functioning more in a black box and/or according to weakly institutionalised practices. Third, green parties' attention for transparency eases the access to interviewees and strengthen the reliability of the collected data.

The green party studied in this paper is Ecolo, the Belgian French-speaking green party, founded in 1980 and which has known ups and downs in its electoral success, with recently a major defeat (at the 2014 regional and federal elections) where they lost many seats in the parliaments but also successes like the most recent elections in 2019 (Reuchamps et al. 2019). Over the last two decades, the party has heavily fluctuated between 4% and 20% of the seats in the federal and regional parliaments. The party is not part of the two major parties in French-speaking Belgium but competes for the third place and was able to join several governmental coalitions over the last legislative terms. This entails that the party is able to count on several realistic positions on most electoral lists and may even hope for some ministerial posts when times are good (just like the current period). In terms of candidate selection, this means that all selectors have to choose some candidates who might become MPs or minister. The stakes are thus high but uncertainly prevails at the time of candidate selection given the fluctuations in electoral success.

Interview data collection and analysis

I conducted individual interviews with party selectors. These interviews aim first at grasping how candidates are selected in the party in practice and which role assumed the interviewees, i.e. to what extent they were in the driving seat to select candidates, which kind of candidates this was and for which electoral level(s) and whether they experienced themselves being an aspirant and a candidate. The second and major layer of the interview tackles selection criteria. I started with a broad and general question of "what is a good candidate according to you?" before digging deeper in the selection criteria depending on the provided answers. If not spontaneously mentioned, I proceeded to ask about potential differences between candidates on (un)realistic positions.

To wrap-up the interview, I stimulated party selectors' answers by presenting them ten printed vignettes with one short sentence referring to one selection criterion. These vignettes operationalise the three theoretical selection criteria. Acceptability refers to candidate's behavioural traits, operationalised as the perceived representational style as trustee, partisan or delegate from one social group (Eulau et al. 1959; Katz 1997). I expect selectors to favour partisans, and especially for candidates on realistic positions. Electability is operationalised through three degrees of electoral popularity. Competence is proxied by the candidate's experience in and outside politics. I operationalised the criterion via three degrees of political experience and one non-political experience. The full wording of the vignettes is to be found in table 1. I asked the respondents which vignette(s) positively or negatively speak to them if they were to select a candidate with this characteristic.

Table 1: Vignettes presented to the interviewees referring to "I would (not) select a candidate who…"

Acceptability	Electability	Competence
loyally follows the party line	is very popular among voters	knows the political world very well and has a long political experience
follows her own ideas	receives an average number of preference votes	has a short experience in politics
represents the interests of a particular social group	is not a 'vote-catcher'	has no experience in politics
		can rely on a non-political professional experience

I interviewed so far seven respondents who were all involved in at least one recent selection process at the supralocal level (regional, federal and/or European). Most of them have also been active at the local level where they were also part of the selectorate. Even though the focus of this research does not lie on local elections, the point of comparison proved to be relevant for many interviewees who could rely on insightful examples from their local experience. All interviewees have also been candidate themselves (with a great variation from head of list to substitute candidate) and some could rely on a parliamentary experience. Being able to understand the other face of the coin by experiencing being the aspirant to a candidate position oneself was extremely useful to encourage respondents' reflection on the critical choices to be made by selectors. Some interviewees for instance openly declared having been disappointed not having been selected on a particular position at one selection process and reflected on why their profile did not fit the criteria of the selectors at that occasion. Regarding their socio-demographic profile, the respondents are politically active in various Belgian provinces with varying local contexts (in terms of party success or population characteristics, e.g. more rural or more urban). I had about the same number of women and men and from all age categories (in their thirties until their sixties). Details about the interviewees can be found in the appendix.

The interviews took place in February and March 2020, at various places (respondents' office, home or in a coffee shop). They lasted from 45 min to 1h15. All interviews, conducted in French, were recorded and entirely transcribed, either by the author or by job students[1]. The analysis of the interviews' transcribed texts has been undertaken according to a cross-sectional code and retrieve method in NVivo, starting with a categorisation of chunks of text into types of selection criteria combined with a later refining of categories, both during the coding process and afterwards (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). A systematic comparison of categories emerging from the data and the tripod of criteria developed in the literature helped deepen and improve our knowledge as to whether some profiles of citizens are more likely to be selected by parties (H1), and depending on the list position face better chances to enter the parliament at the expense of other profiles (H2).

---

[1] I would like to express my gratitude to Matthias Vandevoort and Brieuc Vandeleene who helped me with the transcription of the audio recordings.

Empirical findings

Before outlining the selection criteria brought forward by selectors and their relative importance, it seems necessary to briefly sketch the candidate selection process used in the party under study since this appears to impact the decision choices made by selectors. The interviewees indeed highlighted differences in the preferences of selectors depending on the kind of selectorate. Ecolo uses mainly a two-by-two-step process to draft the electoral lists (Vandeleene 2018). The process is assorted: candidates on the so-called strategic positions (the realistic positions) are selected according to other rules, and before, the remaining candidates on the list. The party calls on two types of selectorates: an exclusive selectorate (a list committee) preselects the candidates and draft a proposal before a members' assembly – an inclusive selectorate, approves – or not – the proposal. If the members reject the proposal, the list committee receives another opportunity to amend the list and make another attempt. The very last option if both selectorates cannot come to an agreement is to give all powers to the party rank-and-file members of the constituency who select candidates one by one in a plenary meeting (a vote is first organised for the first position, attributed to the candidate who gathered the most votes, then they move to the second candidate and so on and so forth). This system was actually in place in the party before they introduced the two-step process with the intervention of a more exclusive selectorate in the first place. The former system was experienced as too detrimental for candidates who may face severe public defeats and at the same time not strategic enough from the party perspective since no balance could be striven out between the selected candidates (Vandeleene and De Winter 2018).

The list committee is organised at the constituency level and composed of (representatives of) both the party central leadership and the party constituency leadership to foresee a balance between the party general strategy and a more fine-grained knowledge of the candidates who apply. These (about) five list committee members are first approved in their role by the members' general assembly and a particular attention seems to be given in the party to who is part of this selectorate.

"*We suggest people to them but they can say no and suggest other people, the members. That was also a discussion we had with the members, and it was also a bit tough because, for example, there were not many young people in the list committee. They were afraid, the young people, of not being represented enough.*" (E2)

Those who apply for candidacy are not entitled to be part of the selectorate in order to avoid being judge and party. Yet, they might be part of the selectorate for the other group of candidates on their own list. The second stage of the process indeed foresees a similar logic: a committee gathers first to draft a proposal of candidates for the non-realistic positions that has to be approved by all members. The heads of list (i.e. the first two candidates) are *de facto* part of the committee for the non-realistic positions, and candidates on non-realistic positions might be part of the committee for the realistic positions.

The candidate selection process in this party is rather formalised since most rules are written down in the party statutes or official documentation for candidate selection. It also seems to be institutionalised in the party habits given the relative homogeneity of the answers proved by respondents when asked about how the selection takes place.

10

Another institutional practice is directly related to the selection criteria definition. Before the list committee gathers, the members' general assembly holds a meeting where a set of selection criteria is determined.

"We can't just set up a list committee and say "you're on your own". Because in fact it is themselves who find the criteria and who come and say: "Here, we propose this." "Why?" "Because of this, this, this". And the members were not able to discuss the criteria. Do we need someone more to the left, more to the right or more collaborative, what? And so we went towards... We start by discussing with the members: What do we really want? What kind of candidate do we want? First, second, third place, the whole list. And after that, this is the workbook for the list committee and the list committee comes and says: "Here, I suggest that. You said that, that, that. Here is what I propose and why. And so we give the power back to the members, who have a proposal according to their criteria, in a way. And so they say: "yes... they have respected the criteria we gave them quite well. So it seems like a valid proposal." (E1)

The depth and the extent of this criteria's list may however vary depending on the constituencies. Yet most respondents refer to a mandate received by the members to draft a list according to members' wishes. An accountability mechanism is at play since the list committee is expected to defend its choices in front of the assembly and show how they managed to find candidates matching the criteria set.

Based on the literature, my **first hypothesis** is that selectors would grant importance to a different extent to different selection criteria. The party goals' model leads to three core selection criteria among which acceptability is foreseen as being the most significant, before electability and competence.

Acceptability refers to be party goal of unity. Selectors would above all strive to select candidates who would not harm the party unity. I theoretically connect this criterion to the representational styles' model. A candidate fostering unity is then a so-called partisan, or party delegate, as opposed to a trustee and to a lesser extent to a voters' delegate. All respondents spontaneously mentioned party unity among their own selection criteria before being prompted to do it. They all favour a partisan candidate over a trustee or even a delegate. The main reasons put forward are trust and respect. Selectors want candidates they trust and they expect candidates to show respect to the party and the people working for the party (both their co-partisans, the members, the campaign volunteers,…).

"*For Ecolo, that's an exclusion criterion, if it's not met: 'Follows the party line'.*" (E1)

"*It is also essential to be able to be able to count on the candidates. Not to wonder 'Oh, he's going to an interview, what will he say?' And that's a risk. Because that would be too big a worry.*" (E2)

Acceptability was operationalised by respondents in three ways: a candidate might prove its loyalty through her degree of party activism, through her respect to the party values and through her teamwork behaviour. First, party activism relates to the history of the aspirant in the party. If an aspirant has been active in the party for a long time, this serves as proof of her loyalty, but most importantly this testifies that the person has been socialized to the party culture. Selectors seems to be doubtful about newcomers who may join the party only to seek power and not more noble reasons, namely make the

11

party and its program successful. That is why the party foresees a specific procedure for what they call the opening candidates, or nonpartisan candidates. These are usually non party members who are selected on a list because of their own (mostly professional) profile that is considered to be relevant for the party and potentially attractive for voters. These require to be specifically accepted by the party members' general assembly. Beyond the formal rules, selectors report to double check the profile of these opening candidates to make sure that they are going to follow the party line and platform. While they thoroughly scan these candidates, they also tend to start only with candidates who seem to be close enough to the party ideas based on what they have done or said in the past. Some selectors even highlight the added value of these candidates who might bring additional ideas based on their own experience. The party selectors face thus a challenging trade-off when assessing nonpartisan candidates: they are not socialized in the party culture but may be an asset in terms of votes and of ideas. They usually solve that by setting clear rules for these newcomers.

"*When we go looking for opening candidates, what do we expect from them? Which freedom do we give them? What is the contract between them and the party, knowing that, if they are elected as open candidates, they are entitled to a certain freedom of speech, but to what extent?*" (E7)

Yet an extended party activism is not the panacea for aspirants. Having been there for 20 years will not be sufficient to be granted a list position if the aspirant is not able to showcase other qualities. Even if the involvement of aspirants in the party is often mentioned by selectors as selection criterion, this would not be a sufficient condition to be selected.

"*A place on the list is not a reward for services to the party.*" (E5)

What appears to be more relevant for selectors is the extent to which candidates will respect and defend the party platform and values. Hence, selectors may ask aspirants about their knowledge of the program to prevent unknowledgeable candidates interviewed in the media about the party priorities to harm the party image. If for most candidates the party positions are quite clear because they, for instance, contributed to the drafting of the party platform, it might not be the case for the candidates who got involved a little later in the process. These are thus expected to read and approve the party programme and commit to defend these positions during campaign time and in the parliament if elected. A scan is also usually performed on what the aspirants have done or said in the past, e.g. on social media, to make sure that this remains within the party lines.

Selectors bring an interesting nuance to the expected high ideological congruence between the party and the candidates in that they acknowledge that one cannot agree on 100% of the party program. What thus seems to matter most is the commitment to follow the line even if the personal opinion may diverge from the party opinion. Selectors do not want party internal disagreement to be public. Internal debate is recognized as healthy for the party but not if widely advertised.

"*We really want people to be very much aligned with green values and priorities actually. So that's the most important criteria.*" (E6)

A fine-grained knowledge of the party line is even expected from some selectors. They select candidates who are able to differentiate what is really key to the party, and then be able to remain firm on these core issues in debates and potentially in the parliament, and what is secondary, and work

towards a consensus with other parties on these minor points. They also underscore that the party program is vast and that a specialisation process is often at hand, with some candidates specializing in some issues and some others in other issues to guarantee a diversity on the interests, depending on the aspirants' own preferences or characteristics. Yet they dislike putting people into boxes, so all candidates are expected to be able to defend the entire party program and not a part of it only. Hereby they discard group delegates who would only represent the interests of one social group, and be seen as the representatives of this group, especially if they themselves belong to this group.

"*If you say: 'I only come to defend the... I only come for the independents, I'm only here for the...'. No, it's the programme as a whole. On the other hand, saying: "I want to work on this". OK, but that's not the same thing as following the interests of a single group.*" (E5)

"*As regards diversity, should we necessarily have someone who is identified as homosexual or as transgender or as coming from the Muslim community, or as... or should we have someone who we know will defend that cause? And so there is always a tension because at some point we put people in boxes. And what does that mean? It means that if we have a member, a candidate who is homosexual, do we present him as the one who will defend the homosexual cause? It's a bit complicated.*"(E7)

Being loyal to the partisans goes further than the ideology: selectors also point the need for candidates to be team-players. Next to the content, the form plays a role. Selectors prefer candidates who accept the party rules of conduct and promise to work for the team – the list and later the parliamentary group rather than for the development of their own career. For instance, selectors ask candidates to project themselves into their potential role as MP and as part of the parliamentary party group and assess to what extent they may fit in the group's way of working. Already during campaign time is teamwork important: candidates have to accept that some candidates are put forward by the party as the would-be MPs and that the remaining candidates have to support them. Campaign work is also media appearances where candidates must follow the party guidelines (e.g. whether or not to take up an invitation to go on television). For more experienced candidates, teamwork refers to a respect of the term limits, namely accepting not to stand another time if the limit is reached.

"*If you are elected, you are just a small cog in the wheel.*"(E3)

The preference for partisans goes hand in hand with a fear of trustees. Potentially divisive figures are avoided in the selection process. Nevertheless, this does not entail that the party rejects trouble-makers. Some selectors highlighted the importance for the party to remain united, what means including these trustees in the party. One suggested the importance of accompanying the potential trustees if they really want to become a candidate and eventually an MP, and another one outlined the importance of explaining to non-selected candidates why they did not fit the profile of a good candidate. At least, the party tries to avoid that trouble-makers leave the party if not selected to foster party unity.

"*I was going to follow the programme and I wasn't going to follow my personal opinion... I got sympathy!*" (E1, referring to his experience as a candidate)

"*The best way to burn a candidate is to say that there is a place where he is uncontrollable.*" (E3)

13

The acceptability criterion appears to be central to selectors' choice. Its importance and the fact that aspirants are aware of it might even prevent party disunity by discouraging aspirants to cause trouble, for instance if they are not granted at one election the list position they ambitioned, out of fear of appearing disloyal and not being selected again for the next elections. However, some selectors raised the point that candidate selection as such might be a reason for disunity, given the large number of disappointed aspirants, and their supporters. The centrality of the acceptability criterion is thus double in terms of consequences for the party as an organization.

> "*If indeed we have to make a choice that is not necessarily beneficial in the short term, but which strengthens the resilience of the party in the long term. And which, for example, makes it possible to give a clear message internally about certain, respect for certain principles, which give greater durability in the future.*" (E3)

> "*Let's say that the list committee, which chose the strategic candidates, didn't leave us a very, very united party, or local section. It was very complicated to do that ... There were very strong tensions. And so afterwards we had to fill in as much as we could behind ... as best we could to try to plug the gaps in the first choice.*" (E5)

Contrary to the acceptability criterion, the respondents did not unanimously mention **electability** as an important selection criterion, and some even had to be prompted to discuss the criterion. They were rather nuanced in the relevance of electability, referring to the low impact of preference votes in most elections in Belgium as well as the secondary importance of electoral popularity compared to other factors (chiefly being partisan). This might be specific to this party, being known as a party where list votes matter even more than preference votes. Selectors observed no major differences between candidates in terms of preference votes, beyond the candidates' general profile such as female candidates who are usually more popular than male candidates in this party. As a consequence, many interviewed selectors doubt the elector potential of an aspirant to be relevant.

> "*We rather try to... to disperse the power in the hands of as many people as possible. And so there you have it, of course we... All our candidates, they make an average number of preference votes.*" (E3)

Yet aspirants who they know will not be attractive for voters at all are usually not selected, as well as aspirants who would be extremely popular, out of fear of losing control on them. There would be thus a minimum level of electoral popularity required, and even a maximum not to exceed, but this does not constitute a major selection criterion.

> "*I would say that: 'is not a vote-catcher', that's a bit of a turn-off.*" (E3)

> "*A form of popularity, but one that is complementary. It's not... that alone is not enough.*" (E4)

> "*When you take very popular people, in fact, and only on that basis, you end up with difficult situations.*" (E6)

Nevertheless, the goal of the party remains to win elections, and that starts with gathering votes. Beyond drafting an attractive list (described as a diverse list), the candidates' individual characteristics also matter, and especially how they are able to convince voters to cast their vote for the party.

"*When the citizens will see that [this candidate] is on the list, they will just say 'what a good choice!'*" (E2)

How does electoral popularity play a role in candidate selection? Selectors mention both retrospective and prospective arguments. The selection is a retrospective reward for vote-catchers based on objective figures, but also a prospective anticipation of would-be vote-catchers based on a more irrational bet. On the one hand, the list committees examine previous electoral results, at local or supralocal level and identify vote-catchers and try to recruit them. Candidates may also themselves use their previous electoral scores as selling point to be selected on a good list position.

"*We started to identify people who scored well locally, women who scored well locally. We called them to convince them to come.*" (E5)

"*Those who can do it, they use it, as an argument. But most are more in the vein of a promise. 'I'll do a lot of votes, you'll see.' Rather than 'Look, I've done a lot of votes.'*" (E6)

On the other hand, for most candidates, there is hardly a track-record and selectors have to rely on other hints to make their choice. Popularity on social media is one indication, as well as how the aspirant is able to instil confidence with selectors, party members or the list committee. The aspirant's network and her capacity to build a network appear to be critical. This works positively especially when the network is different from the other aspirants, in order to broaden the popularity of the list as a whole.

"*We, we really thought he was going to be a hit in votes.*" (E1)

"*Sometimes it's betting. Of course you can't always know. Someone who has never had any experience, who hasn't run yet, well, you throw him in. We had disappointments with people we thought would bring in votes, but in the end it wasn't a great success.*" (E5)

"*Facebook, I think is very good, very good. It's a network, it's an indicator. To see how people react to one or the other's publications.*" (E2)

"*If he is a good candidate, but in a way, the assembly will, will nominate him without any problem, because this candidate will have already done his job of persuading by one means or another. Either by direct contact. Or by the way he presents himself. Either by having inspired confidence, and... by having shown in some way his eligible character...*" (E3)

"*It depends on which votes. For us, it's more like which votes, because if you bring back preference votes, votes that come from the network that all the Greens have, it's not interesting. On the other hand, if you bring back an average number of preference votes in a network that is not close to us. Well, that makes us gain votes in total.*" (E5)

"*It's votes in fact, which, tactically are targeted to be taken away from others, rather than added to our own.*" (E6)

Just like acceptability, the, yet nuanced, importance of electability holds consequences for the party. The electoral score of the list and of individual candidates play a major role in the evaluation of the success of the list committee's work. Selectors usually assess after the elections which kinds of profile gathered the most preference votes and if the balance of the list as a whole has been rewarded.

The third selection criterion resulting from the party strategic goals' model is **competence**. Selecting the most competent aspirants appears to be indeed a core priority for selectors who all naturally came with the nature of the candidates' looked-for competence. They distinguish between general competences and more specific competences for the campaign and for the job of parliamentarian. All candidates should be able to show some leadership, be charismatic, be team-players and above all be able to network. The latter seems to be central to the characteristics of an ideal candidate: candidates have to mobilise both the party members (who will help with the campaign, for instance) and voters (obviously to bring votes). They need this social capital that allows them to make efficient door-to-door canvassing or meet voters on markets and at events. Campaign competences also involve the ability to express oneself, especially in the media, as well as being able to hold a potentially tough debate. Selectors point that not everyone suits this profile of an ideal campaigner, and they sometimes have to make choices between good campaigners and good parliamentarians, individuals combining both being referred to as 'rare pearls'.

> "*There are also other criteria that will come into play, such as […] the ability to face up to possible attacks and so on. So to conduct a contradictory debate in the public space, which is not necessarily given to everyone.*" (E3)

> "*Being a good candidate does not mean being a good elected representative.*" (E5)

> "*It's not all about winning. Once we have won, we will have to manage.*" (E1)

The profile of ideal candidates includes characteristics of a good MP, since it always remains possible for any candidate to become elected if some level of individual voters' support is reached. The specific MP competences highlighted by respondents cover being polyglot, being able to understand and work on complex issues, to take a stand on all kinds of bills (even if they anticipate a balance in technical competences within the future parliamentary group) but also to engage with various stakeholders outside the parliament, and with other parties to reach consensus within the parliament. Good candidates should also be involved in the party life, what includes for instance managing conflicts in local sections if they occur. Some selectors mention that the skills might depend on whether the party expects to be in government or in opposition – where the former will require more networking skills and the latter more eloquence and assertiveness.

> "*There is the good capacity to create links and to meet so-and-so and therefore to be able to have a parliamentary question. Or ... good skills, for example, if you are in the majority. In the majority, you have to follow what the government says to do. It's ... So good skills are to go in the field. To federate the actors. To meet. To bring up the concerns without putting yourself forward.*" (E1)

The key question then for selectors is how to assess whether aspirants hold these skills. Selectors obviously refer to the aspirant's experience as an elected representative that forms a major evidence. The party will however not only rely on experienced candidates as less seasoned aspirants might also come to benefit the list. These might compensate their lack of experience with a non-political experience or with some experience within the party organization.

Incumbents might enjoy automatic reselection, unless they terribly failed in their first term. Yet formal selection criteria apply in this party as one cannot serve for more than two terms in the same

parliament, expect special exemption voted by the members' assembly. Having been in place for too long might thus be detrimental for a candidacy since turnover is valued. A long elected experience is yet a guarantee of efficiency. The fact that an MP is able to work from day one is valuable, especially if the party is part of the government. Incumbents already enjoy a network for instance. The greatest value of experienced candidates appears nevertheless to be their coaching capacity for the newcomers. Outgoing MPs can even help with the selection of the other candidates thanks to their charism and authority of MP who are sometimes better able to convince doubtful aspirants to run.

> "*It is clear that someone who has had a first mandate as a parliamentarian, unless the mandate was catastrophic, which can also happen, but if the mandate went well, it is almost certain that the list committee will say: 'This person has already acquired experience, a certain notoriety, recognition, and has built up networks.' And not to put him or her at the top of the list would be to say that he or she has done a bad job. That would be disqualifying.*" (E4)

> "*The natural candidates, people did not necessarily position themselves frontally [against them] by saying: 'I will run for the same position as this person' who is likely to be nominated as head of the list.*" (E3)

> "*The question is rather: if you have a good experience in politics. It is not whether it is long or short, but whether it is good. What you did was good. If you brought interesting things, if you made things progress.*" (E5)

> "*We know very well that when you are a representative, the first few years are a time of discovery. Discovering on your own, instead of taking a year, can take three years, so it's good to have someone there to coach and support the newcomers.*" (E2)

Less experienced aspirants are portrayed as a bet. Selectors consider their selection worthy (at least to avoid being flanked by a conservative party image) and even necessary but taking into account the risks of making an unfortunate choice. Selectors point the difficulty to be a politician nowadays. Newcomers might not know how to handle the political world, both in terms of strategy and to cope with its violence. Some do not dare to apply, doubting their own legitimacy to become a candidate.

> "*But then, the newcomers, how do we determine who is interesting and who is not?*" (E2)

> "*People who are perhaps a little more remote, but ... There is a part of the unknown, which makes them say: 'but I am not, naturally, spontaneously, I do not see ... what legitimacy I would have to stand as a candidate?'*" (E3)

> "*Political work is increasingly tough, it's increasingly, we are increasingly confronted with a certain amount of violence, with certain types of aggression, it's really difficult! What is required in terms of the amount of work, the number of hours spent on the mandate. We also have to make sure that it's possible for the private life of the candidates.*" (E2)

This necessary balance between expertise and renewal is sometimes found by selecting aspirants who enjoy a non-political professional experience. Selectors value the experience of aspirants active in various professional domains to increase the diversity on the list. This kind of profile proves to be relevant to vary from party apparatchiks who selectors could be tempted to select by way of ease: they

17

do not have to be recruited and their value is well-known. Yet having been professionally active outside politics attests of other kinds of skills which most selectors declare to value.

"*A non-political experience, a non-political professional experience, also shows that you can do something other than politics and often it gives, it shows the, not only the interests but the way of functioning and the way you can invest yourself in a profession, in a career, in issues as well.*" (E2)

"*We didn't want too many people to come from the machine, from the party apparatus in fact. This was also important for us, because it was often done in the past. These are easy choices. You know the person. You know his/her value. You've worked with him or her. But it's not actually the same job.*" (E6)

However, selectors contend that party insiders easily find their way in the selection process. This holds for instance both for an experience as local office holder or as political adviser for the party. The mechanism works both ways: the more a party member is involved in the party life, the better her chances to be known by selectors, but the more intense the party activity, the more natural it will become for this party member to figure out that a candidacy might be something to consider. Party insiders have had the opportunity to prove their value and they know how the party functions.

"*The list committee will indeed be attracted by activists who are involved, who are present, who work on dossiers, who come to general assemblies, who intervene in an interesting way and so on.*" (E4)

"*He works there on a daily basis, so they are much more familiar with the whole political apparatus. And so they feel: 'Why not me? It comes more naturally.' It's also people who are, in fact, closer to the corporate culture, the culture of Ecolo.*" (E3)

The competence criterion is as expected present in selectors' list of criteria but covers a diversity of realities and is often nuanced by selectors themselves who agree that aspirants might acquire the necessary skills later on. Candidates' competence is not equal to parliamentary experience, as selectors strive a balance between more or less experienced candidates and are keen on opening their lists to candidates with non-political practice to even more diversify the slates.

To wrap-up, the three criteria that were expected to be put forward by selectors were indeed very much present in their spontaneous accounts prompted by the simple question of 'what is a good candidate?'. To be complete, selectors also mentioned various socio-demographic characteristics of the candidates that obviously play a great role when drafting the lists. Gender, age, education, place of residency, ethnicity, philosophical preferences are part of the criteria used by selectors, but most often not as general criteria to be met by all aspirants, rather as criteria that a list should fulfil as a whole to mirror some kind of diversity.

The first hypothesis stated that acceptability would be more relevant for selectors than electability and competence. Based on the interviews, it indeed seems that being loyal to the party is a prerequisite to be selected, and appearing as a trustee or even as a delegate from a particular social group might even push back selectors. Electability is important but to a moderate extent as absolute vote-catchers might scare selectors who associate this type of profile to the trustee profile. Competence is valued but

given the necessary turnover in the eyes of selectors, aspirants who did not prove their qualities yet also face a chance. In other words, a balance is sought by selectors when it comes to electability and competence while a clear preference is avowed for acceptability.

The second hypothesis refines the first one and states that acceptability would be more central as selection criteria for candidates on realistic positions than on non-realistic positions, while electability and competence would be of similar importance across list positions. A first significant intake from the interviews is that, even though the party formally makes a difference between candidates on realistic and on non-realistic positions by most importantly entrusting different selectorates, selectors highlight that the candidates on non-realistic positions always have to be considered as if they could be elected. This holds in particular true in elections in Belgium with open lists (a recent change) but more generally in all kinds of electoral contests since flexible list systems always let the door open to particularly popular candidates to bypass higher ranked fellow candidates.

The empirical findings confirm the theoretical expectation that being a partisan is especially relevant for candidates on realistic positions, even presented as an implicit selection criterion. Selectors want to be able to trust the future MPs, what entails that they select for these positions people they know being loyal to the party, either based on their former elected experience or their level of involvement in the party life. When selectors are unsure about aspirants, they prefer to grant them non-realistic positions to start their socialisation process within the party – what may eventually lead to a realistic position in the future. Selectors mention the high risks of having deviant candidates on MPs seats.

> "*When we say 'follow the party line', it means being really green and aligned with ... our campaign priorities, aligned with our values and so on. We are very, very careful about that. We are very, very careful about that. We ... because mistakes have been made in the past.*" (E6)

> "*In fact we may not know him at all and he may not yet have carried out any action within Ecolo. No, the importance is also there. It's not at the assembly level, at the parliamentary level that we have to start diversifying the party.*" (E7)

So, which profile do we find on non-realistic positions? Following the selectors' accounts, it might either be trustees who showcase other relevant qualities (like being a vote-catcher) or partisans who were in excess for realistic seats. Yet the disappointment of not being selected for a realistic position might turn partisans off the list (and the party). Several selectors stressed the feelings of non-recognition or even humiliation of partisans who might not accept not being granted a non-realistic position or to work for the candidates on realistic positions (and will then run an individual campaign).

> "*The people who may be more troublemakers, who may be good candidates for the elections, it's not very serious if we have doubts about their ability to be a good parliamentarian because we know that, what matters to them, and they know it and they know that's why they are there, they don't necessarily have the ambition to be a parliamentarian, they have the ambition to sell the message of Ecolo and to convince people to vote.*" (E7)

> "*There are feelings of non-recognition. That's terrible. [...] Someone who thinks that in order to be recognised, he should have been in the first five elected representatives, and was*

offered the sixth place, well, he is not recognised and then a whole series of resentments or difficulties arise." (E4)

Selectors are much more nuanced or less unanimous when it comes to electability and competence. For both criteria, they admit that they can be acquired thus do not constitute a prerequisite, and they highlight the need of a balance of profiles on these matters, both among the realistic and the other positions. Some selectors argue that being a vote-catcher is critical to be granted a realistic position, but some other stress that one becomes a vote-catcher thanks to the list position and the inherent visibility of the position. Not so popular candidates might thus land high on the list, as well as on another list position. Being able to attract a lot of votes is not more of a prerequisite to be selected on a non-realistic position, since some of these candidates might be chosen on the basis of their personal profile nicely improving the list image. Reaching an healthy balance on the list is put forward as a more relevant criterion to produce an electorally attractive list than selecting individual vote-catchers.

"*That has never been a fundamental criterion. For example, [a current party minister] is put at the head of the list, but he doesn't really get many votes. In any case, he didn't get many votes in the past.*" (E6)

"'*Is not a vote catcher.' That's a bit of a turn-off. Especially for someone who is in a strategic position. I would say that, if he is not in a strategic position, I don't mean that we don't care, but ... almost. That is to say, it's someone who is going to be there so that ... we don't say that the list is not balanced.*" (E3)

The competence criterion is equally relevant for all kinds of list positions, even though as mentioned earlier, selectors look at other skills for would-be MP than for candidates who are meant to be active during the campaign. For both groups of candidates, there needs to be a balance of competences, be they thematic competences, styles or extent of political experience. Selectors anticipate on the future parliamentary group and foresee an healthy balance within the realistic positions, but also need different kinds of skills among the candidates on non-realistic positions to cover all campaign needs. Yet the personal trust between the selectors and the aspirants, fostered by the someone's involvement in the party, is pointed out as more important than the competences as such.

"*To make up the lists, I would say that they [the competence criteria] are not worth ... are not worth much more than half, I would say in proportion, than a whole series of criteria which are, which are more of a relational nature, perhaps even emotional. Not necessarily cronyism, but someone who is very active, who is very present, who we can see has interesting relationships with the members and so on. He's someone who will also be chosen, even if perhaps his skills in dossiers and things like that are weaker.*" (E4)

Conclusion

Why do party selectors choose some aspirants and let others aside? Based on in-depth interviews with selectors in the Belgian francophone green party, I was able to put the selection criteria derived from the strategic goals' model (Sjoblom 1968; Stark 1996) to the test. Only prompted by the question of what is in their eyes a good candidate, respondents discussed the major criteria they usually rely on

when drafting electoral lists. The fact that candidates could help the party to remain united, to win elections but also to implement policies were, as expected, at the heart of the reasons why aspirants were preferred over others.

There is no sufficient criterion to become a candidate but the interview findings report some criteria to be necessary. Being in line with the ideas of the party is key to be selected on a list. If selectors strive for a mix for the other characteristics of the candidates, they do not wish to vary on this criterion. It is important for the candidates to be loyal to the party ideology and electoral manifesto, and even more for candidates on the so-called realistic positions. The electoral attractivity of candidates is also valued, as well as their skills (both in campaign times and as would-be parliamentarians), but these criteria appear to be less straightforward in the necessary list of ideal characteristics of the candidates. In other words, some candidates might not be great vote-catchers or might not meet all the requirements in terms of campaign or MP competence without preventing their chances to be selected. An central intake from this paper is that the balance of profiles on the list is at least as important as the individual characteristics of all candidates. A good list is thus a list combining candidates with several degrees of political experience and various skills and socio-demographic profiles leading them to be appealing to voters as a whole. But if they are entitled to differ on electability and competence, all candidates should ideally work towards an united party, and outspoken trustees are avoided.

An important nuance to be brought is that all respondents belong to the same party. One can thus draw valid conclusions for this party, but must refrain from generalizing to other parties. It is indeed likely that the ecologist party culture, ideology and organizational mode (specifically in terms of who selects the candidates) are influential in the type of selection criteria brought forward by selectors. Unity and loyalty might for instance be especially valued in this kind of party, compared to more rightist parties letting more room for individualities. A necessary next step thus constitutes to add respondents from other parties to reflect a wider variety of preferences.

The electoral context may also impact the kinds of candidates seen as more or less attractive for different kinds of electoral positions. Selectors themselves made sometimes a difference between elections held in Belgium with a flexible or an open list system. The conclusions drawn in this research might thus differ if selectors were to handle in another kind of electoral environment. Future research should deepen our knowledge on selection criteria from the eyes of party selectors in systems with more or less party and voter influence on the names of the future MPs.

References

Ashiagbor, Sefakor. 2008. *Political Parties and Democracy in Theoretical and Practical Perspectives : Selecting Candidates for Legislative Office*. Washington: National Democratic Institute.

Best, Heinrich, György Lengyel, and Luca Verzichelli. 2012. *The Europe of Elites: A Study into the Europeanness of Europe's Political and Economic Elites*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Bjarnegård, Elin and Pär Zetterberg. 2016. "Political Parties and Gender Quota Implementation: The Role of Bureaucratized Candidate Selection Procedures." *Comparative Politics* 48(3):393–417.

Bjarnegård, Elin and Pär Zetterberg. 2019. "Political Parties, Formal Selection Criteria, and Gendered Parliamentary Representation." *Party Politics* 25(3):325–35.

Cogels, Maximilien. 2020. "Representation Amidst Candidates: The Balance of Electoral Lists A Longitudinal Analysis of the Belgian Political Parties." UCLouvain.

Cordero, Guillermo, Antonio M. Jaime-Castillo, and Xavier Coller. 2016. "Special Issue: Candidate Selection in Multilevel Democracies: America vs. Europe." *American Behavioral Scientist* 60(7).

Crisp, Brian F., Santiago Olivella, Michael Malecki, and Mindy Sher. 2013. "Vote-Earning Strategies in Flexible List Systems: Seats at the Price of Unity." *Electoral Studies* 32(4):658–69.

Detterbeck, Klaus. 2016. "Candidate Selection in Germany: Local and Regional Party Elites Still in Control?" *American Behavioral Scientist* 60(7):837–52.

Dittmar, Kelly. 2015. "Encouragement Is Not Enough: Addressing Social and Structural Barriers to Female Recruitment." *Politics and Gender* 11(4):759–65.

Eulau, Heinz, John C. Wahlke, William Buchanan, and Leroy C. Ferguson. 1959. "The Role of the Representative: Some Empirical Observations on the Theory of Edmund Burke." *The American Political Science Review* 53(3):742–56.

Gallagher, Michael. 1988. "Introduction." Pp. 1–19 in *Candidate Selection in Comparative Perspective: The Secret Garden of Politics*, edited by M. Gallagher and M. Marsh. London: Sage.

Gallagher, Michael and Michael Marsh. 1988. *Candidate Selection in Comparative Perspective: The Secret Garden of Politics*. London: Sage.

Galligan, Yvonne. 2003. "Candidate Selection: More Democratic or More Centrally Controlled?" in *How Ireland Voted 2002*, edited by M. Gallagher, M. Marsh, and P. Mitchell. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gauja, Anika, Susan E. Scarrow, and Jamie Wright. 2019. "Party Statutes as Political Roadmaps: What Do They Reveal?" in *ECPR General Conference*. Wroclaw.

Gherghina, Sergiu, Caroline Close, and Petr Kopecký. 2019. "The Dynamics and Dimensions of Intra-Party Conflict: Introduction to the Special Issue." *Party Politics* 25(5):649–51.

van Haute, Emilie. 2016. *Green Parties in Europe*. London: Routledge.

Hazan, Reuven Y. and Gideon Rahat. 2010. *Democracy within Parties: Candidate Selection Methods and Their Political Consequences*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Katz, Richard S. 1997. *Democracy and Elections*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Krook, Mona Lena. 2009. *Quotas for Women in Politics: Gender and Candidate Selection Reform Worldwide*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lawson, Kay. 1980. *Political Parties and Linkage. A Comparative Perspective*. London: Yale University Press.

Mansbridge, Jane. 1999. "Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent 'Yes.'" *The Journal of Politics* 61(03):628–57.

Matland, Richard E. and Kathleen A. Montgomery. 2003. *Women's Access to Political Power in Post-Communist Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Müller-Rommel, Ferdinand. 2002. "The Lifespan and the Political Performance of Green Parties in Western Europe." *Environmental Politics* 11(1):1–16.

Norris, Pippa. 2011. *Democratic Deficit: Critical Citizens Revisited*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Norris, Pippa and Joni Lovenduski. 1995. *Political Recruitment: Gender, Race and Class in the British Parliament*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Panebianco, Angelo. 1988. *Political Parties: Organization and Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pilet, Jean-Benoit, Emilie van Haute, and Camille Kelbel. 2015. *Candidate Selection Procedures for the European Elections*. European Parliament's Committee on Constitutional Affairs, Brussels.

Put, Gert-Jan. 2015. "All Politics Is Local: The Geographical Dimension of Candidate Selection. The Case of Belgium (1987-2010)." KULeuven.

Quinn, Thomas. 2016. "The British Labour Party's Leadership Election of 2015." *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 18(4):759–78.

Rahat, Gideon. 2007. "Candidate Selection: The Choice Before the Choice." *Journal of Democracy* 18(1):157–70.

Rahat, Gideon and Reuven Y. Hazan. 2001. "Candidate Selection Methods: An Analytical Framework." *Party Politics* 7(3):297–322.

Rehmert, Jochen. 2020. "Candidacy Eligibility Criteria and Party Unity." *Comparative Political Studies*.

Reiser, Marion. 2014. "The Universe of Group Representation in Germany : Analysing Formal and Informal Party Rules and Quotas in the Process of Candidate Selection." *International Political Science Review* 35(1):55–66.

Reuchamps, Min, Pierre Baudewyns, Régis Dandoy, Marta Gallina, and Christoph Niessen. 2019. "From a Green High Tide to Government Participation: The Successes of ECOLO and GROEN in the 2019 Belgian Elections." *Environmental Politics* 00(00):1–5.

Rihoux, Benoît and E. Gene Frankland. 2008. "Conclusion: The Metamorphosis of Amateur-Activist Newborns into Professional-Activist Centaurs." Pp. 259–88 in *Green Parties in Transition: The End of Grassroots Democracy?*, edited by E. G. Frankland, P. Lucardie, and B. Rihoux. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing.

Ritchie, Jane and Jane Lewis. 2003. *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Sartori, Giovanni. 1976. *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schindler, Danny. 2020. "More Free-Floating, Less Outward-Looking. How More Inclusive Candidate Selection Procedures (Could) Matter." *Party Politics*.

Shomer, Yael. 2014. "What Affects Candidate Selection Processes? A Cross-National Examination." *Party Politics* 20(4):533–46.

Siavelis, Peter M. and Scott Morgenstern. 2008. *Pathways to Power: Political Recruitment and Candidate Selection in Latin America*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Sjoblom, Gunnar. 1968. *Party Strategies in a Multiparty System*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Stark, Leonard P. 1996. *Choosing a Leader: Party Leadership Contests in Britain from Macmillan to Blair*. London: Macmillan.

Vandeleene, Audrey. 2014. "Gender Quotas and 'Women-Friendly' Candidate Selection: Evidence from Belgium." *Representation* 50(3):337–49.

Vandeleene, Audrey. 2016. "Does Candidate Selection Matter? A Comparative Analysis of Belgian Political Parties' Selection Procedures and Their Relation to the Candidates' Profile." Université catholique de Louvain.

Vandeleene, Audrey. 2018. "La Sélection Des Candidats Aux Élections Par Les Partis Politiques. L'exemple Du Scrutin Du 25 Mai 2014." *Courrier Hebdomadaire Du CRISP* 33(2398):5–40.

Vandeleene, Audrey and Lieven De Winter. 2018. "The Curious Stability of Candidate Selection Methods in Belgium in Times of Crisis." Pp. 49–65 in *The Selection of Politicians in Times of Crisis*, edited by X. Coller, G. Cordero, and A. Jaime-Castillo. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Wauters, Bram, Bart Maddens, and Gert-Jan Put. 2014. "It Takes Time: The Long-Term Effects of Gender Quota." *Representation* 50(2):143–59.

De Winter, Lieven, Silvia Erzeel, Audrey Vandeleene, and Bram Wauters. 2013. "Nationale Bemoeienis of Lokale Autonomie? Het Lijstvormingsproces Bij Gemeenteraadsverkiezingen." Pp. 93–122 in *Op zoek naar de kiezers: lokale partijafdelingen en de gemeenteraadsverkiezingen van Oktober 2012*, edited by K. Deschouwer, T. Verthé, and B. Rihoux. Brussels: ASP.

Appendix

Table 2: Interviewees' characteristics

Code	Gender	Age	Elected experience at the supralocal level	Candidate selection experience
E1	Male	59	Candidate but never elected	Extended and at several power levels
E2	Female	57	Candidate but never elected	Extended and at several power levels
E3	Male	46	Candidate but never elected	Limited and at several power levels
E4	Female	63	Head of list and representative	Extended and at several power levels
E5	Male	35	Substitute candidate and representative	Limited and at several power levels
E6	Male	34	Candidate but never elected	Limited and at several power levels
E7	Female	47	Candidate and representative	Extended and at several power levels