

**Popular Candidates and/or Party Soldiers?  
The Interactive Effect of Candidates' Vote-Earning Capacity and the Candidate-Party  
Congruence at the 2014 Belgium Elections**

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**ABSTRACT**

Political parties need to act as unitary actors in parliaments to implement their policy goals. The literature has acknowledged that candidate selection process is one of the most powerful tools for a party to achieve and maintain internal cohesion within the parliamentary group. Political parties that do not win election cannot develop their policy goals though. Candidate selection processes present thus two – potentially conflicting – objectives: vote-seeking strategy (recruiting 'popular candidates') and policy-seeking strategy (enlisting 'party soldiers'). The personalization of politics, where electoral campaigns are increasingly personal while eroding the role of issues and ideology in voting behaviour, enhances the tensions between parties' vote-seeking and policy-seeking strategies. According to some scholars, the former even prevails over the other which causes critical consequences for the functioning of parties in legislature and the broader democratic political systems. However, in line with more recent development in the literature, we argue that personalization is not necessarily a zero-sum game: political parties can balance tickets using both strategies. In that configuration, one strategy interacts with the other, rather than prevail over the other. Using an innovative and consistent measurement of candidate-party congruence, we test this interaction on the recruitment of candidates at the 2014 Belgian elections. Overall, our results prove that vote-seeking strategy matters but heavily depends on policy-seeking strategy. It demonstrates that parties use both strategies as a trade-off to balance their lists, even though vote-seeking strategy ultimately prevails for a substantial number of candidates studied. The results call for a more positive normative account of the personalization thesis. The later has the potential to keep voters, candidates and parties connected in the representation process.

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**\*\*\* *Work in progress – Comments very welcome* \*\*\***

## Introduction

Political parties need to act as unitary actors in parliaments to implement their policy goals. The literature has acknowledged that candidate selection process is one of the most powerful tools for a party to achieve and maintain internal cohesion within the parliamentary group (Gallagher and Marsh 1988; Hix 2004; Carey 2007; Hazan and Rahat 2010). Before implementing their policy programs, political parties need to win seats though. And to gain seats, parties must first win votes through the candidates they present. For that reason, candidate selection processes present two – potentially conflicting – objectives. Political parties' need to select electoral candidates that enable them (1) to win elections recruiting individuals with vote-earning capacity (i.e. *vote-seeking strategy* with *popular candidates*); but (2) furthermore need to enlist individuals with policy expertise and congruence with the party's ideology (i.e. *policy-seeking strategy* with *party soldiers*). Political parties that do not win election cannot implement their policies but parties in office without a homogenous parliamentary group cannot reach their policy goals either. In open and flexible-list systems, where voters can cast vote for individual candidates, this tension increases as parties selectorate responds to voters' behavior. Hence, André et al. (2015:2) states that “[a] preference vote is invariably also a vote for the party. To the degree that a candidate's preference vote-seeking will bring in voters who would not otherwise have voted for the party, the party will increase its vote share and possibly gain an additional seat [...] even at the price of legislative voting unity because breaking ranks with the party may help earn votes”.

These tensions are even more important in context of personalization of politics. McAllister (2007 : 585) stated that “personalization of politics will remain a—perhaps *the*—central feature of democratic politics in the twenty- first century”. Various scholars have shown that electoral campaigns are more candidate-centred while voters increasingly vote for individual politicians at the expense of issues and ideology (although the topic remain heavily debated in the literature). “At its core, the personalization hypothesis is primarily based on a notion about parliamentary democracy with its traditional emphasis on the role of collective and cohesive political parties” (Karvonen, 2010:3). In this respect, the literature on the personalization thesis has implicitly or explicitly strong normative claims. The most important, in our opinion, is that personalization *inescapably* entails the erosion of ideology, issues and collective identities. In the realm of candidate selection, it implies that personalization would lead to the prevalence of candidates' vote-earning capacity (popular individuals appealing to the voters) at the expense of party soldiers (congruent with the party's ideology). This has

important implication for the parties' capacity to work as cohesive blocks and, by extension, about the functioning of a legislature and of the broader democratic political systems.

However, different authors have argued that this is not necessarily a zero-sum game (Adam and Meier 2010; Karvonen 2007). After all, one candidate can present both virtues: being a popular candidate but still a party soldier. Furthermore, a balanced list of candidates can achieve this dual objective. This requires, however, to study 'who' is selected in the first place and whether policy preferences and/or vote-earning capacity are influential selection criteria. To our knowledge, this has never been systematically investigated on empirical grounds before. Our analysis focuses on Belgium where voters' use of preferential votes has been increasing over the last decades while party fragmentation and electoral volatility have greatly boosted intra and inter-party competition. Furthermore, combining innovatively different datasets (the Belgian candidate survey and the Party leadership surveys), we developed a fine-grained measurement of candidate-party congruence at the 2014 elections.

The paper is structured as follows. The first section develops the literature review on the rationales behind parties' criteria of candidate selection (vote-seeking and policy-seeking strategies). The second section introduces our hypotheses regarding the interactive effect of both strategies; the third section details our case study and methodology while the fourth section presents the results of our empirical analysis. We conclude on the normative implications of our results.

## **1. Parties' criteria in candidate selection: popular candidates and/or party soldiers?**

In representative democracies, two of the core research questions are: *who* are (s)elected and *how* are they (s)elected (Norris 1997)? The early interest for 'who' governs can be explained by the impact that the profiles of candidates have on a legislature, and even, on the broader sociopolitical system (Dahl 1961; Hibbing 1999; Pitkin 1967). MPs have the power to pass legislation and hold the government accountable. Therefore, as Andeweg and Thomassen (2010: 655) point out, "[t]he extent to which political parties are unitary actors is crucial both for political science and politics". Carey (2007) identifies three reasons why students of politics should care about party unity. First, the most important issues at stake are discussed and voted in parliaments, such as the budget, state reforms, international treaties, etc. Second, citizens gather information through political parties' policy stance. When the latter cannot provide a certain unity in MPs' legislative behaviour, citizens cannot rely on political parties' positions. Without parties acting as block, it becomes blurrier for citizens to know who is accountable for. The third point raised by Carey (2007) is that non-unity create volatile and uncertain coalitions

in the assembly: “[t]he internal cohesion, or party discipline, of political parties must be sufficient to enable them to implement their policy program” (Thomassen 1994: : 251).

***Party unity through homogeneity of policy preferences: the party soldiers***

The literature distinguishes different causes that explain variance in party unity, both at the macro and micro levels. With regards to macro-level, scholars have underlined the impact of several institutional factors (see the extensive literature review of Owens (2003)): electoral systems (Bräuninger et al. 2012; Carey and Shugart 1995; Hazan 2003; Sieberer 2006), the dichotomy between government *v.* opposition parties (Laver and Schofield 1998; Laver and Shepsle 1996), parties in parliamentary systems *v.* presidential system (Carey 2007; Diermeier and Feddersen 1998a; Shugart 1998), the federal structure (Desposato 2004; Mainwaring 1999), or modes of candidate selection (Carey 2007; Cordero and Coller 2015; Diermeier and Feddersen 1998b; Katz 1985; Sieberer 2006). With regards to micro-level determinants, Özbudun (1970), in his seminal book, identifies two pathways to party unity<sup>1</sup>.

On the one hand, parties use (the threat of) sanctions such as de-selection to *discipline* their MPs (see Aldrich (1995) or Cox (1997)). On the other hand, Özbudun (1970) argues, parties choose candidates that share similar policy preferences. According to Hazan and Rahat (2010: 9): “[c]andidate selection is a key variable in the process of eroding or sustaining party unity”. Indeed, the need for sanctions declines when MPs mostly share their party’s preferences. As Kam (2009) points out, screening candidates beforehand “allow party leaders to weed out candidates with uncongenial preferences” (Kam 2009: : 76). Party cohesion allows parties to entrench party unity *ex-ante*; whereas *party discipline* comes *ex-post*, in the assembly. As Hazan (2003: 3) states, “discipline starts where cohesion falters”. There is thus a clear incentive for the political parties’ selectorates to recruit the ‘good’ parliamentarians *ex-ante* to limit the allocation of costing party resources to discipline MPs *ex-poste*. As Ranney rightly claimed (1981: 103), “[i]t is therefore not surprising that the most vital and hotly contested factional disputes in any party are the struggles that take place over the choice of its candidates; for what is at stake in such a struggle, as the opposing sides well know, is nothing less than control of the core of what the party *stands for* and does”.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that Andeweg and Thomassen (2010) identifies two other pathways to party unity: party loyalty and division of labor. As Ceron (2015b) points out, these pathways are somehow related to party discipline. Party loyalty echoes a self-whipping behavior, where MPs somehow follow the party line because there would be a cost not to do so. Division of labor also points to party discipline.

### ***Selection criteria: the importance of candidates' vote earning capacity***

This led us to the second question: *how* are candidates selected? European political parties are the gatekeepers of parliamentary offices and candidate selection is one of their defining functions (Sartori 1976: 64). The focus on parties' strategies in candidate selection is therefore a central research area for political scientists. In Europe, patterns of legislative recruitment reflect long-term processes of transformation of representative institutions that have been evolving over the last decades (for cross-sectional and cross-temporal comparison, see (Best and Cotta 2000; Borchert and Zeiss 2003; Cotta and Best 2007). Overall, the 'typical' profile of the selected candidates for parliamentary offices present specific human and political capitals. The latter allow parties to recruit individuals with diverse and complementary attributes not only to win elections (vote-seeking strategy), but also to implement their policy objectives (policy-seeking strategy).

The importance of a candidate's vote-earning capacity depends on the electoral systems used though. In open-PR systems, votes are merged across all candidates on the same list to determine the number of seats allocated to each party. The literature has showed how candidates try and distinguish themselves from their co-partisan competitors to access parliamentary office (Carey and Shugart 1995). Indeed, voters cannot use ideological or party reputation as decisive "cognitive shortcuts" to differentiate candidates running under the same party label (Downs 1957). Therefore, intra-party competition becomes a critical electoral contest as candidates try and mobilize their personal traits and attributes to seduce the electorate<sup>2</sup>. Flexible-list systems are categorized between closed-list and open-list systems (Shugart, 2005: 47). Voters can cast their ballot for specific candidates (or for the list approving the order decided by the party), and those with the largest preferential votes will be attributed accordingly the seats gained by the party (as in open-list systems). Yet, in practice, candidates managing to alter the list's order are rare. Most party seats are allocated following the order candidates appear on the ballot (as in closed-list systems) (André et al. 2012; Beblavý and Veselkova 2014; Vandeleene et al. 2016). For that reason, the literature often considers flexible-list systems as being *quasi* closed-list systems. Nevertheless, recent studies have showed that flexible-list systems also create incentives to cultivate personal vote (Bräuninger et al. 2012). Although a large ratio of preferential votes might not affect the list order at *t-time*, a candidate can still send a clear signal

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<sup>2</sup> This is why "in these systems candidates will run more personal campaigns (Bowler and Farrell, 2011; Zittel, 2015), and – once elected – will do more constituency service (André and Depauw, 2013; Heitshusen et al., 2005), introduce particularized legislation (Crisp et al., 2004), and break from the party ranks more often (Carey, 2009; Sieberer, 2006)" (André et al. 2015).

to his/her party selectorate about his/her vote-earning capacity for future elections. Preferential votes thus matter in flexible-list system and parties pay attention to a candidate's vote-earning capacity despite their low probability of altering the list order. André et al. (2015: 2) explained this paradox: “[a] preference vote is invariably also a vote for the party. To the degree that a candidate's preference vote-seeking will bring in voters who would not otherwise have voted for the party, the party will increase its vote share and possibly gain an additional seat. There is ample evidence that voters' decision to vote (Adams and Merrill, 2003), as well as the party they vote for, can be affected by the candidates on offer (McDermott, 2009; Stone et al., 2010; Tavits, 2010)”.

In closed-list system, allocation of seats between candidates only depends on the order predefined by the party selectorate. This is the party leadership that has “virtually unrestricted control” over the choice of candidates enrolled on the list (Borchert 2011: 126). Ambitious candidates must, therefore, rely on their capacity to convince the party selectorate, not the voters. As a consequence, candidates and parties in closed-list systems tend to present a more collective and coherent message to the voters vis-à-vis their competitive parties (Kitschelt 2000). On the opposite, open and flexible list-systems both give incentive for the party selectorates to complementary develop vote-seeking strategies. As a result, the parties' selectorates not only need *popular candidates* who have the capacity to attract voters to their party (as voters may not have casted their ballot to that party without such appealing candidates); while they furthermore need *party soldiers* who have the skills, knowledge, and ideological preferences to implement the party's policy programme once in office, i.e. party unity (Hazan and Rahat 2010: 9). Hence, candidate selection is a subtle exercise which must satisfy potentially conflicting goals. Considering recent structural changes in Western democracies, this subtle exercise is under pressure as we develop below.

### ***Candidates' vote earning capacity amid time of personalization: popular candidates***

Scholars have argued that politics has become increasingly personalized over the past decades. According to (McAllister 2007), “personalization of politics will remain a—perhaps *the*—central feature of democratic politics in the twenty-first century”. The personalization thesis found its causes in the erosion of traditional partisan cleavages and ideologies in Western societies that have become loose determinants of voting behavior for an increasing proportion of the electorate (Mazzoleni 2000). Instead, voters respond to short-term electoral conditions and political events, causing greater electoral volatility between elections (Dalton et al., 2002). We cautiously note that politics has always been about the action of men and women in office

(Halldén 1998). Recruiting politicians appealing to the voters is, therefore, inherently part of candidate selection processes. According to the seminal contribution of Max Weber, charismatic leadership is even one of the pathways to the government's legitimacy. However, the personalization thesis has been arguably enhancing tensions between parties' vote-seeking and policy-seeking goals.

Adam and Meier (2010: 216) distinguished two consequences of the personalization thesis. On the one hand, the focus on individual candidates and political leaders become more important in voters' decision calculus at the expense of parties, institutions, or issues. On the other hand, processes of personalization make personal, non-political characteristics more salient. In this paper, we concentrate most specifically on the first dimension which has important normative implications about the functioning of parties and the broader democratic system. Indeed, "[a]t its core, the personalization hypothesis is primarily based on a notion about parliamentary democracy with its traditional emphasis on the role of collective and cohesive political parties" (Karvonen, 2010:3). In this respect, a large body of literature about the 'personalization thesis' makes – implicitly or explicitly – a key normative claim, namely: personalization would *automatically* entail the erosions of ideology, issues and collective identities. In the realm of candidate selection, it implies that personalization would lead to the prevalence of popular candidates (appealing to the voters) at the expense of party soldiers (congruent with the party's ideology). However, as rightly emphasized by Adam and Meier (2010: 220): "the process of electoral decision making is not a zero-sum game in which stronger candidate orientation necessarily means a loss of the normatively more significant issue and party orientation (see also Lass, 1995)". Likewise, Karvonen (2007) carefully reminded us that personalization is not necessarily eroding collective strategies, but rather interacting and transforming them.

Surprisingly, this has not been systematically investigated on empirical grounds. In their large literature review of empirical studies, Adam and Meier (2010: 220) show clearly that scholars mostly investigate how electoral campaigns, media reporting and commenting or voter's behavior have become more personalized (see also Holtz-Bacha et al. 1998). Yet, only one side of the normative assumption of the personalization thesis is assessed (greater emphasis on individuals) whereas the decline of ideology is simply assumed or not empirically verified. The latter requires an evaluation of 'who' is selected in the first place and whether ideological preferences remain a decisive selection criterion<sup>3</sup>. After all, one candidate can present both

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<sup>3</sup> Some scholars of legislative studies investigate how party unity is influenced by cohesion (i.e. internal homogeneity of preferences). However, this type of literature suffers from measurement indicator. For instance,

virtues: being a popular candidate but still a party solidier. Furthermore, a balance of candidates on the list can achieve this twofold objective. Some candidates can be more popular but more congruent than others and vice-and-versa. In other words the personalization thesis does not necessarily entail a zero-sum game but, on the opposite, can produce two main distinct outcomes. On the one hand, personalization lead to centered-candidate recruitment pattern where policy-seeking strategy has been relegated to a position of secondary importance. This affects and transforms parties themselves that are becoming media parties or minimal parties (Beyme, 1997; Wiesendahl 2001). On the other hand, personalization produce positive effects: parties react to process of personalization by paying attention to certain candidates' traits and attributes appealing to the voters (vote-seeking strategy) while they carry on valorizing the recruitment of parliamentarians with congruent preferences (policy-seeking strategy). The normative implications are important and need to be empirically assessed. To our knowledge, this has never been investigated before and this is the research objective of this paper. We develop in the next section our hypotheses.

## **2. 'Balancing the ticket': the interactive effect of party selectorates' vote-seeking and policy-seeking strategies**

When candidates' vote-earning capacity matters, parties' necessity to appeal to voters increases. As we have seen, this is the case in open and flexible-list systems. Although this strategy maybe be fruitful to win elections, it is not without consequence for the parties' capacity to act as a block once in office. This why parties tend to develop 'mixed' strategies through a variety of candidates. As summarized by Valdini (2006: 57): "the appeal of a balanced ticket to selectors is clear - by choosing candidates that belong to a variety of subgroups, party elites achieve two of their most important goals. First, they satisfy factions within the party, thereby ensuring their continuing commitment. Second, they cheaply and easily broaden the appeal of the list to the voters". Balanced lists reflect the parties' strategy to adapt and respond to voters' behaviour while complementary achieving their own internal policy goals.

In this respect, our two hypotheses are based on two assumptions about candidate selection processes. Firstly, we consider that party unity is more easily reached *before* elections

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some authors proposed to use roll-cast votes as an indicator which is problematic in various way (Spirling and Quinn 2010). Not only roll-cast votes are unmistakably high in most European democracies, with limited variance, while party unity in roll-cast votes are the result of factors other than cohesion. Other scholars suggested to develop content analysis of parliamentary speech (Bäck 2012; Proksch and Slapin 2011) or debates at party congresses (Ceron 2015a; Giannetti and Benoit 2009) However, such measurement does not fit our research purposes at they present ex-post behavior, except in the Case of debates at party congresses.



where parties can screen aspirants to parliamentary offices which reduces the cost of developing whipping and sanctions tools once MPs are *in office*. We thus consider that parties do pay attention to candidate-party congruence. Secondly, we argue that not all candidates on a list are equal as only a few candidates ultimately manage to access parliamentary office. It is the ‘realistic positions’ that constitute the real object of dispute in list systems (De Winter 1988). We therefore consider that the effect of parties’ strategies are observable between the candidates that just fill the list without a realistic prospect of entering the parliament and the candidates who have a real chance of accessing office.

In hypothesis 1, we expect that parties try and maximize the number of votes they can gain. A candidate’s vote-earning capacity is, therefore, a decisive asset that increases his/her probability to be selected on a realistic position<sup>4</sup>. In line with the concept of ‘balanced lists’, we expect parties to develop a trade-off between votes-seeking and policy-seeking strategies. Although a candidate’s vote-earning capacity always has a positive effect to emerge on a winnable position, the magnitude of his/her vote-earning capacity varies according to his/her congruence with the party. Candidates who are less cohesive with the party’s policy preferences must display higher vote-earning capacity to gain access to realistic positions and vice-and-versa for candidates more congruent. Therefore:

*H1: the marginal effect of candidates’ vote-earning capacity for being selected on a realistic position is always positive but decreases as his/her congruence with the party’s policy preferences increases.*

In hypothesis 2, we expect parties to complementary recruit candidates that enable them to form a sufficiently cohesive parliamentary group. This allows them to reach their policy goals (*ex-ante*) by limiting the need to allocate their resources to discipline their MPs (*ex-poste*). Parties can, however, afford having a proportion of less congruent candidates if this means winning more votes. Less congruent candidates still have a chance to be selected on realistic positions, but only when they exhibit high vote-earning capacities. In this respect, the effect of congruence should be maximal for the least popular candidates and minimal for the most popular candidates. In other words, we expect a positive marginal effect of party-candidate issue congruence<sup>5</sup> which declines as candidates’ vote-earning capacity increases.

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<sup>4</sup> In this paper, we are not interested in the determinants of their electoral popularity *per se* but rather in how parties respond to a known candidate’s vote-earning capacity.

<sup>5</sup> We expect the marginal effect of congruence to be ever positive, as parties have no reason to favour a less congruent candidate over a more congruent candidate when they present the same vote-earning capacity.

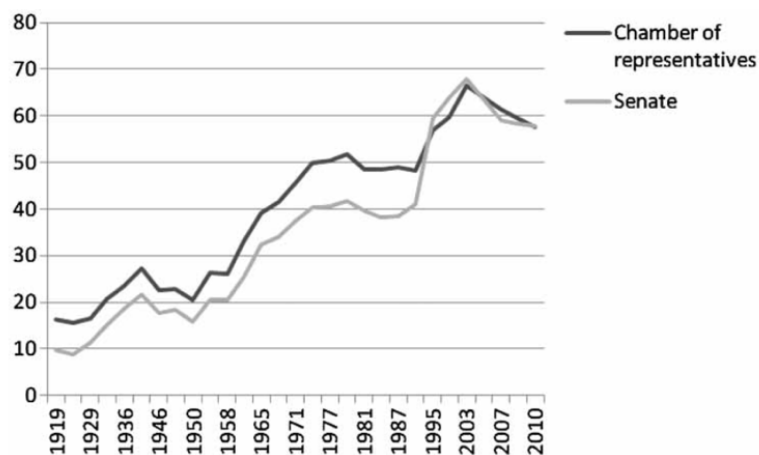
*H2: the marginal effect of congruence on being on a realistic position is always positive; this effect is, however, the strongest for candidates with lower candidates' vote-earning capacity and declines as this capacity increases.*

### 3. Data and Methods

#### *Case study and data*

We test our two hypotheses on the 2014 elections in Belgium for three reasons. Firstly, Belgium presents several characteristics of commonly acknowledged determinants of personalization (see above). The Belgian party system is amongst the most fragmented in Western Europe (attaining 9.1 'effective parties' in 1999, 7.8 in 2014). In combination with its 'electoral consociative features', this fragmentation boosts party electoral competition (Deschouwer 2009): since the 1980s, overall aggregate volatility surpassed usually the 10 percent level (De Winter et al. 2006). But among individual voters, post-vote shifting between two successive elections was about three times higher, with a peak of 41 percent in 2014 (Dassonneville and Baudewyns 2014). Secondly, the regional, federal and European elections were organized on the same day (for the second time since 1999). Because of the fixed duration of legislative terms, they represented key elections as they determined party's fate for the next five years. This meant that parties had to carefully consider – more than ever – the balance between vote-seeking and policy-seeking strategies. Thirdly, Belgium has a flexible list-system where the candidates' vote-earning capacity matters while the voters' use of preferential votes have been dramatically increasing since WWII although it plateaued and slightly declined in the early 2010s (see figure 1, André et al. 2009; Pilet et al. 2014). Belgium offers a natural empirical ground to assess how parties respond to voters' behaviour.

**Figure 1.** Voters' use of preferential vote in Belgium (1919-2010).



Source: André et al. 2009

Finally, from a heuristic viewpoint, the 2014 Belgian elections have seen the development of various data collection via the inter-university consortium PartiRep II<sup>6</sup>. This allows the consortium to survey candidates and party leaders on similar statements which allowed us to create a direct and reliable indicator of candidate-party congruence (see below). The first dataset used is the Belgian Candidates survey (BCS). The BCS includes all candidates at the regional, European, and federal elections, covering all parties having obtained at least one parliamentary seat in May 2014 (14 parties in total). This population covers 5.254 candidates from which 1.816 candidates answered the post-electoral questionnaire (i.e. 34.6%) (De Winter and Baudewyns 2015). We only used regional and federal candidates due to data availability and measurement issues. The second main database includes the party position on several policy issues collected via the party leadership survey (PLS) – developed in the framework of the Voting Aid Application (VAA)<sup>7</sup>. This survey was conducted before the beginning of the campaign more than two months before Election Day.

### ***Operationalization of variables***

#### *Realistic Position*

Our depend variable is built on Hazan and Rahat (2011: 13-14)'s basic of realistic positions which refers to “all those positions/districts that are seen at least as winnable before the elections”<sup>8</sup>. Our depend variable is a binary indicator which distinguishes candidates' on *realistic* and *unrealistic* position on the party list. Hazan and Rahat's concept is operationalized on past electoral results. Because of the strong electoral volatility at the 2014 Belgian elections, relying on past results introduce important measurement bias (see Dodeigne (2015) for comparison of operationalization of realistic position in case of high volatility). According to the various electoral surveys available during the 2014 campaign, it was clear that the Greens would not be able to reiterate their exceptional results of the 2009 Walloon regional elections while the N-VA would perform much better in Flanders. Candidates and parties anticipate and adapt when past unrealistic positions become increasingly realistic. An alternative option is to infer realistic positions based on electoral results obtained at election time. It is a fair proxy of parties and political observers' anticipation of their results, as projected during the 2014 campaign.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.partirep.eu/>, Consulted 10 April 2017.

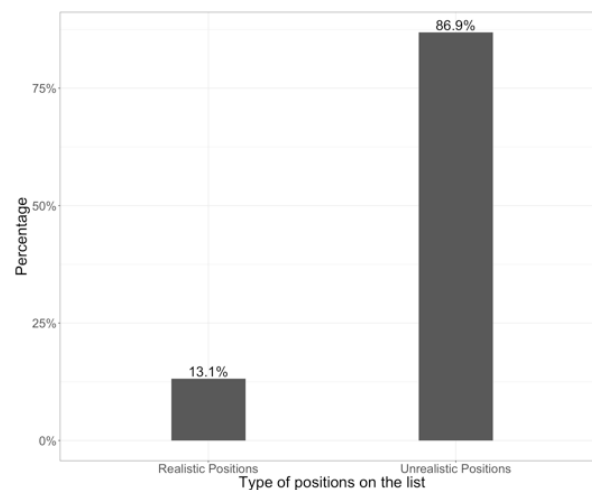
<sup>7</sup> The francophone parties are CDH, Ecolo, FDF, MR and PS, Flemish parties are CD&V, Groen, N-VA, Open-VLD, sp.a and Vlaams Belang

<sup>8</sup> On the opposite, unrealistic positions are “positions at the bottom of the list that have no possibility of being elected, nor in candidacies in those single-member districts in which rather than selecting candidates, the parties simply try to convince someone to stand in their name, with no chance of even giving a good fight”.

The allocation of realistic position on the list remains, however, technical. In a first step, we allocate realistic positions to candidates according to the party list order. For instance, if a party obtained four seats at election time, we consider the first four positions as the realistic positions<sup>9</sup>. The main reason is that preferential votes hardly alter the order of the list (see above). Yet, we must consider “list pushers” in Belgium, namely well-know key candidates at the bottom of the list. In that case, this position is traditionally treated by candidates and voters as realistic positions because of their vote-earning capacity. When there are such “list pushers”, the last position must be coded as a realistic position and the other top positions of the list are coded according to the remaining number of seats obtained by the party. This is also Put and Maddens (2013: 7)’s choice in their study of eligible positions in Belgium.

Overall, our final dataset contains 13.1 percent of realistic positions (figure 2)<sup>10</sup>. The latter reflects – in similar proportion – the overall availability of realistic positions for the entire population at the 2014 elections (5.254 candidates). Furthermore, our depend variable should not be considered as presenting rare events (which can bias estimates in logistic regression) because of the overall satisfying substantial “absolute” number of observations (129 out of the 978 observations).

**Figure 2.** Proportion of the binary depend variable “realistic position”.



Source: Realistic position based on Dodeigne (2015)

<sup>9</sup> Therefore, a candidate in the fourth position that would not be elected because another candidate makes an exceptional score in terms of preferential votes is still coded as a realistic position. The reason is simple: there was a clear signal from the party to be selected at a realistic position and the candidate must therefore be coded accordingly

<sup>10</sup> The original survey covers 1811 candidates, but missing values for certain variables decrease our final number of observations. In the original survey, 12.3 percent of all candidates have realistic positions.

### *Party-candidate issue congruence*

Our first main covariate of interest is the candidate-party congruence. Our operationalization is based on two datasets: the BCS and the PLS. On the one hand, in the BCS, candidates had to position themselves on 30 policy issues, of which 20 are strictly related to the election level they were running for (regional, federal or European). The remaining statements covered issues related to the two other levels of government. On the other hand, the same 30 policy issues were asked in the PLS for the development of the VAA, for which party leadership had to either “agree” or “disagree” on issue statements<sup>11</sup>. The response modalities in the PLS were different as candidates in the BCS could answer the issue statements of a 4-points scale ranging from “Totally disagree” to “Totally agree”, no middle category was shown to respondents. The BCS’s issue statements were thus recoded into binaries as in the PLS.

In addition, we include a weighting parameter for parties’ issue ownership as recommended by Rahat (2007) and Traber et al. (2014). Indeed, it is unlikely that parties pay attention to all policy issues when screening candidates’ preferences because of parties’ issue ownership. As Dolezal et al. (2014) point out, parties tend to emphasize certain issues that, on the one hand, are in line with the majority of the electorate and, on the other hand, are owned by the party. Therefore, we assume that parties screen most specifically candidates’ congruence on their ‘core’ policy issues (Bélanger and Meguid 2008). In a nutshell, policy congruence for Green candidates are paramount on environmental issues, but diverging opinion on other issues would be more acceptable as they are not their ‘core’ policy issues. Unfortunately, neither the PLS nor the BSC surveyed participants on issue ownership. As an alternative, we rely on voters’ perceptions of issue ownership (since both candidates and party selectorates respond to their behaviour) via the Voter Survey 2014 that was conducted on a representative sample of 2.019 Walloon and Flemish voters (PartiRep II). We use of the question “Which is the first party that spontaneously comes to mind when thinking about that topic?” surveying eight different topics: employment, environment, crime, immigration, economy, state reform, defence and taxes. We subsequently assigned a weight of party’s issue ownership for each policy statement. Overall, our measure of *party-candidate issue congruence* is estimated as follows:

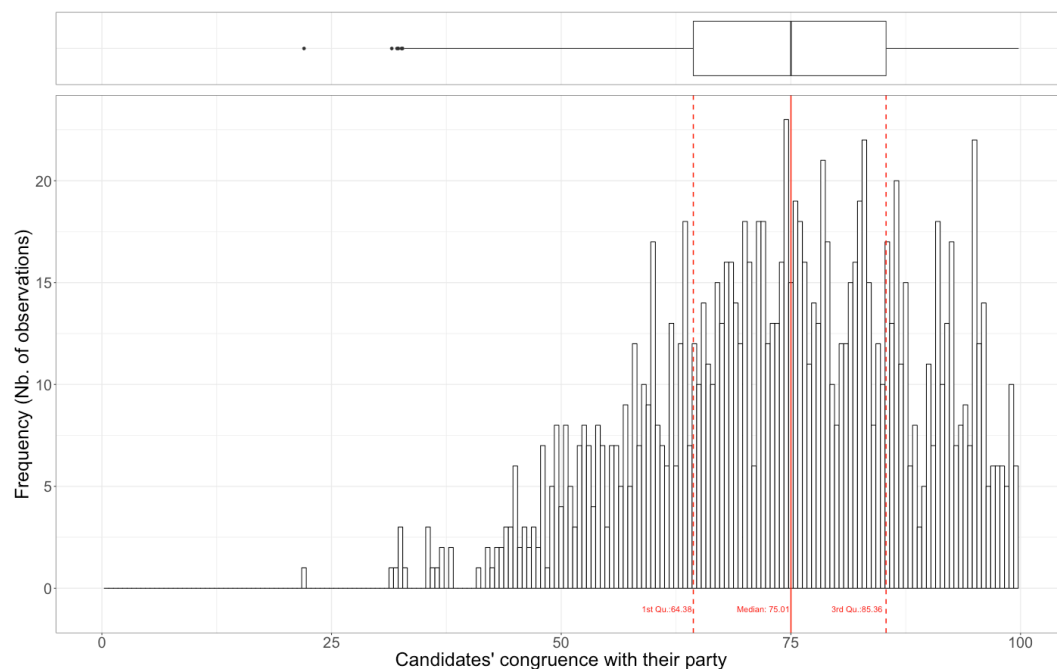
$$100 * \left( 1 - \frac{\sum_{j=1}^m |candidate\ position_{ij} - party\ position_{ij}| * issue\ ownership_{ij}}{\sum_{j=1}^m issue\ ownership_{ij}} \right)$$

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<sup>11</sup> The binary response is justified by the need to identify cleaving issues between parties in order to build the VAA.

For candidate  $i$  and issue statement  $j$ . We obtain a measure of issue congruence ranging from 0 to 100 percent, where a candidate having a score of 100 indicates a perfect match between his/her position and the ones of his/her party. Figure 3 shows that the median candidate has a congruence of 75.01 percent (red line on the figure), indicating that our indicator is centered on the right of the axis towards larger congruence. Half of all observations are covered between 64.38 and 85.36 percent of congruence (1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> quartiles illustrated by the dashed red lines and the box plot).

**Figure 3.** Distribution of party-candidate issue congruence (Histogram with boxplot)

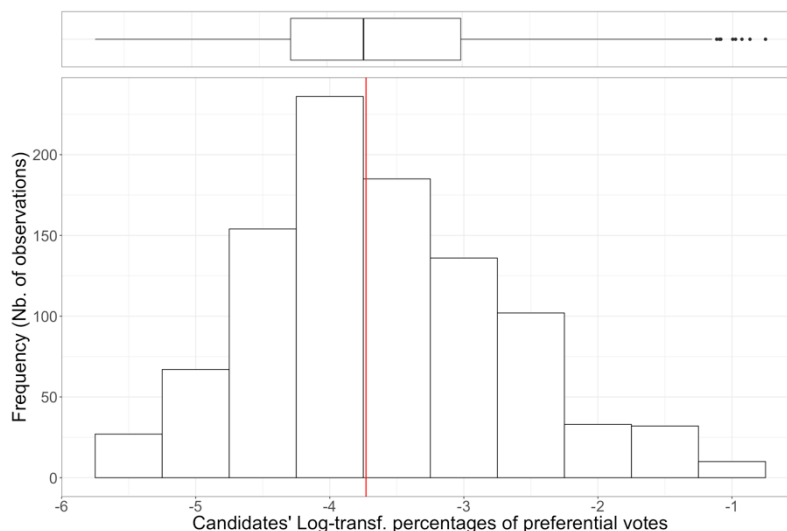


### *Candidates' vote-earning capacity*

The second main covariate of interest is a candidate's vote-earning capacity. In this respect, we cautiously remind the reader that we are not interested in the determinants of their electoral popularity *per se* but rather in how parties respond to it. Relying on past electoral behaviour, the parties' selectorate can directly estimate a candidate's vote-earning capacity. A straightforward conceptualization that comes to mind is, therefore, the percentage of preferential votes obtained at the latest elections (the 2009 regional and 2010 federal elections in the Belgian case). The main disadvantage is that a substantial number of candidates are 'rooky' candidates (71.7 percent, which can be explained by electoral reforms prohibiting dual candidacies across tiers of government (Dandoy et al. 2015). An operationalisation based on former elections would indicate missing values or a null vote-earning capacity. A reliable

option is to use the vote-earning capacity at the 2014 elections as a proxy of their popularity at the moment of candidate selection procedures. This solution permits to collect preferential scores for all candidates but with potentially endogenous measurement. Because both indicators have pros and cons, we duplicate the models based former and current elections to produce robust models. We used official data provided by the Belgian Minister of Home Affairs: we divided the absolute number of preferential votes a candidate received by the absolute number of preferential votes gained by the list. This percentage gives candidates' vote-earning capacity for his/her party list. Given the skewed distribution on the left (most candidates obtained a very low percentage of preferential votes), we log-transformed the variable (see figure 4).

**Figure 4.** Distribution of candidates' log-transformed percentages of preferential votes  
(Histogram with boxplot)



### *Control variables*

In line with the literature on legislative recruitment, we furthermore controlled for different variables relating to human and political capitals as well as structural variables on intra-party competition. Variables on human capital include age, gender and education. Variables on political capital include rookie candidates as well as former political experience at federal and regional levels. Intra-party competition is recorded via variables on effective candidates and successor, party magnitude and the effective number of candidates<sup>12</sup>. Finally, we controlled for

<sup>12</sup> Effective number of candidates: we need to control for intra-party competition in terms of preferential votes. A potential bias is that 10 percent of preferential votes that a candidate obtained on the list are not equivalent across lists. For instance, in a list where the 70 percent of all the preferential votes of the list are concentrated on a couple of popular candidates, achieving 10 percent is remarkable for a third candidate. On the opposite, on lists where the percentages of preferential votes are more equally distributed amongst candidates, 10 percent is not impression as

the varying response rate between assemblies and parties. Data was collected via the BCS, the Belgian database on political career (Dodeigne 2015) and official data from the Belgian Minister of Home Affairs (see summary in table 1).

**Table 1.** Summary of the operationalization of the variables

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Operationalization</b>	<b>Details</b>
<b>Dependent variable</b>		
Realistic position on the party list	Dummy variable	Event= realistic positions
<b>Main covariates of interest</b>		
Party-candidate congruence	Continuous variable	100 percent indicates fully congruent
Vote-earning capacity at former elections	Continuous variable	Log-transf. percentages of preferential votes
Vote-earning capacity at current elections	Continuous variable	Log-transf. percentages of preferential votes
<b>Control variables</b>		
<i>Political capital</i>		
Office XP	Dummy variable	Ref. = No regional or federal XP
Rookie	Dummy variable	Ref. = Rookie candidates
<i>Human capital</i>		
Age	Continuous variable	Ref. = List without elected officials
Gender	Dummy variable	Ref. = Male candidates
Education	Categorical variable	Ref. = University degree
<i>Intra-party competition</i>		
Effective candidates and successor	Dummy variable	Ref. = Effective candidates
Effective Nb. of candidates	Continuous variable	Min 3.3 - Max 41.4 (std 8.4)
Party magnitude	Continuous variable	Min 0 - Max 21 (std 4.2)
<i>Survey response rate</i>		
Parliaments and parties	Categorical variable	

#### **4. Results**

Before presenting the results of the logit regressions, it is worth underlying that Belgian parties did recruit congruent candidate as described in figure 3. The descriptive statistics clearly indicate that policy-seeking strategy is present during candidate selection candidate: the median candidate has 75 percent of congruence across 30 policy issues (i.e. the histogram is centred towards greater cohesion). There is, of course, a substantial variance across candidates which enables us to test our two hypotheses and assess how policy-seeking strategy interacts with vote-seeking strategy. Results of the logit regressions are presented in table 2. The baseline model presents the impact of human and political capitals on the probability of being selected

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the intra-party competition is less developed (see table 4 in the appendices for illustration). Therefore, we will create a measure of the effective number of candidates (ENC) on the list based on the distribution of preferential votes between candidates and use it to weight the preferential votes obtained.



on a realistic position of the list, the models 2 and 3 present the impact of the interactive effects of his/her party congruence and a candidate's vote-earning capacity based on two types of operationalization (at elections time and former elections). The three models present a very high model fit with AUC values between 91.3 and 95.8 percent while most of the control variables are significant (except for human capital). Furthermore, we observe that including the interactive effect substantially improves the model vis-à-vis the baseline model considering the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) and the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC). The latter provide "provides a simple, effective, and objective means for the selection of an estimated 'best approximating model' for data analysis and inference" (Burnham and Anderson, 2002: 3). It measures a trade-off between the quality of fit and the number of parameters in the model, lower values indicating better model. The AIC and the BIC's values show a statistically significant improvement with the inclusion of the interactive effects. Parameters in models 2 and 3 show robust significant findings. For the sake of parsimony, we only present results based on the third model that obtained the best AIC and BIC scores.

Regarding our first hypothesis (positive effects of vote-earning capacity but increasing as congruence decreases), both the individual and interactive terms are significant. As predicted by the concept of balanced lists, a candidate's capacity to bring back votes to the party has a statistically significant enhancing effect on the probability of being selected on a realistic position. The interactive term being negative, it furthermore indicates that this positive effect, however, decreases as the candidate-party congruence increases. In other words, we observe that the positive effects of vote-earning capacity are the most important for the least congruence candidate. It is still positive and significant for the most congruent candidates but the magnitude of the vote-earning capacity's effect has substantially eroded. This validates our first hypothesis.

Our second hypothesis (positive effects of congruence but declining as popularity increases) is also validated. As stated by Brambort et al. (2006), it is possible to have marginal effect of our independent variable to be different for substantively relevant values of the interactive variable but not for others. Therefore, following the procedure recommended by Brambort et al. (2006:74), we plotted the interaction to visualize the conditional effects. Figure 5 shows (1) how the marginal effect of the vote-earning capacity varies with the degree of candidate-party congruence; (2) how the marginal effect of congruence varies with a candidate's vote-earning capacity. The histogram at the bottom of the figure 5 displays the distribution of observations along the x-axis while the dotted line indicates a null effect of the marginal effect.

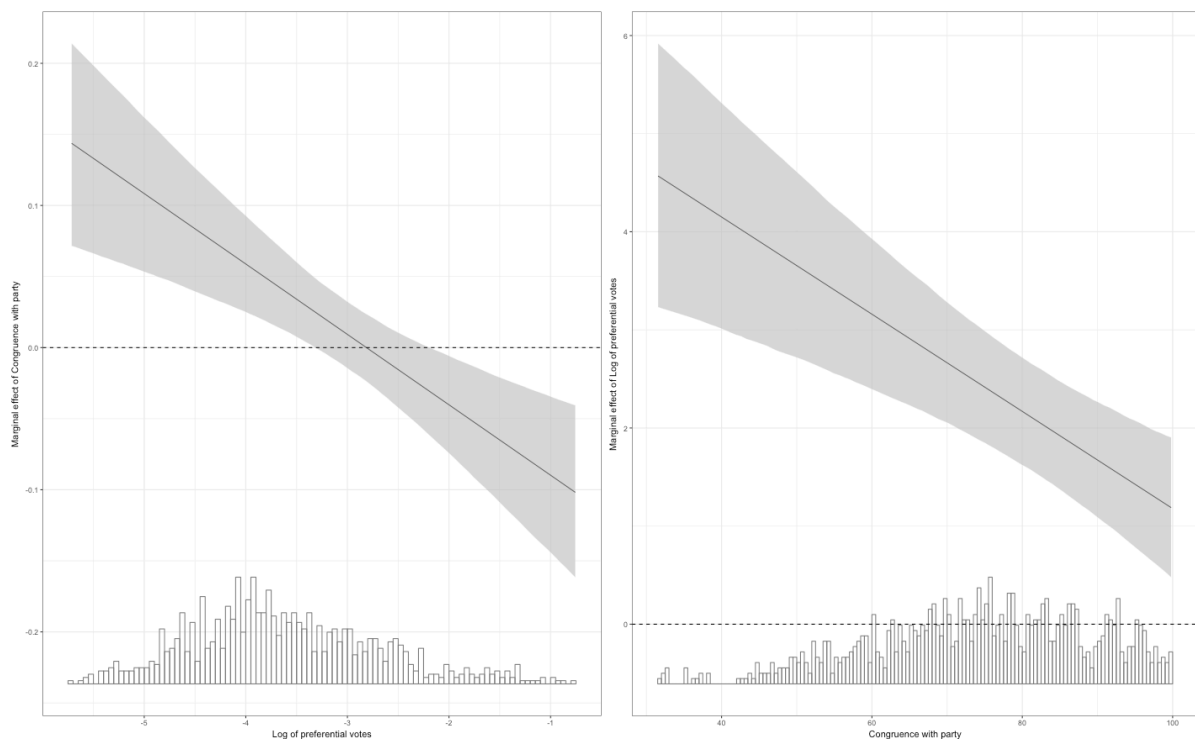
**Table 2.** Logistic regression on candidate selection on a realistic position of the party list

	<b>Baseline Logit Model</b>	<b>Logit Model 2 2009-2010</b>	<b>Logit Model 3 2014</b>
Candidate-party congruence		-.06** (.03)	-.14*** (.04)
Vote-earning capacity		2.45*** (.52)	6.14*** (1.05)
Congruence   Vote-earning capacity		-.02*** (.01)	-.05*** (.01)
Effective nb. of candidates	-.06*** (.02)	-.07*** (.02)	-.06** (.02)
Party magnitude	.18*** (.04)	.26*** (.04)	.45*** (.06)
Office XP	2.46*** (.30)	2.02*** (.32)	1.92*** (.34)
Successors	.61** (.29)	.39 (.30)	-.86** (.37)
Rookie	-2.45*** (.33)		-2.24*** (.37)
Male candidates	.39 (.26)	.32 (.27)	.37 (.30)
Age	-.02** (.01)	-.03** (.01)	-.03** (.01)
No diploma/primary	-.56 (.83)	-.45 (.88)	-.14 (.86)
Secondary	-.71 (.51)	-.35 (.52)	-.42 (.59)
Higher education	-.51 (.33)	-.44 (.35)	-.34 (.39)
Constant	-.57 (.66)	7.38*** (2.32)	18.03*** (3.54)
Survey controls	√	√	√
Observations	982	982	982
Log Likelihood	-226.73	-206.30	-166.89
Akaike Inf. Crit.	481.46	444.60	367.78
AUC	91.3	93.2	95.8

*Note:*\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. AUC of the ROC: 0.70-0.80 percent indicate a fair model fit, 0.80-0.90 percent indicate a good model fit, 0.9-1.0 percent indicate an excellent model fit

First of all, figure 5 clearly confirms that bringing more preferential votes is always a candidate's strong asset to emerge on a winnable position vis-à-vis other co-partisan aspirants: more popular candidate have consistently a greater probability of being selected on a realistic position. It furthermore confirms that these effects decrease when the degree of congruence increases. In other words, party selectorates can recruit less congruent individuals on strategic positions – and sometimes with very limited congruence with their party – *if and only if* they can bring back votes to the list. On the opposite, attracting voters is less important for the most congruent candidates. As an illustration, the beta of the variable vote-earning capacity is 4.57 for the least congruent candidate but only 1.2 for the most congruence candidate.

**Figure 5.** Marginal effects of congruence (left) and preferential votes (right)



*Note :* Data are marginal effects based on the logistic regression presented Table 2. The grey zone indicates 95% confidence intervals while the histogram at bottom presents the number of observations.

Secondly, figure 5 demonstrates the positive effect of congruence but only for certain values of vote-earning capacity. The positive effect stops when the confidence intervals cross the zero-dotted line. In other words, H2 is verified but only partially. Although being congruent with his/her parties is an advantage vis-à-vis co-partisan competitors during candidate selection, it is not the case for candidates who are particularly popular, i.e. when a candidate's preferential votes are between 3.6 and 11.3 percent of the list (which corresponds to log values of respectively -3.33 and -2.18 on figure 5). As a matter of fact, 11.3 percent of the list represents

a considerable achievement for a candidate as it is a vote-earning capacity five times greater than the median candidate at the 2014 elections (2.2 percent). In that case, parties cease to integrate candidate’s policy congruence when they recruit their future MPs: all other things being equal, the factor that matter most is their vote-earning capacity.

**Table 3.** Frequency of observations for marginal effect of congruence and preferential votes

	Marginal effect of congruence		Marginal effect of preferential votes	
	Nb. of candidates	Percentage of candidates	Nb. of candidates	Percentage of candidates
Positive	644	65.8	978	100
No effect	261	26.7	-	-
Negative	73	7.5	-	-
Total	978	100	978	100

The histogram of observations included at the bottom of the figure 5 permits to put this vote-seeking strategy in perspective though. Although candidates’ congruence has no effect for candidates exceptionally popular, the latter represent ‘only’ a quarter of all candidates studied (see table 3). In the meantime, about two thirds of the candidates take benefit of their greater congruence. For 7.5 percent of all observations, candidate-party congruence has even a negative effect which is puzzling as we expected mere positive effect. Because those 7.5 percent cover extremely popular candidates (some managed to concentrate 46.8 percent of all preferential votes on the list), the results invite us to proceed to a more qualitative analysis in the future. A first intuition here is that the party selectorate are being blinded by their vote-earning capacity: the latter led the selectorate to overlook candidate’s congruence which resulted in poor choices about candidate’s congruence. Because congruence is systematically negative, this ‘blind’ thesis is probably too naïve and unlikely. A second more realistic intuition rests upon the strategic behaviour of parties in context of the Belgian high party competition. A new hypothesis that should be verified is that the selectorates recruit on purpose a minor proportion of candidates who are less congruent on specific policy issues. With limited damage to their cohesion as these candidates represent a small proportion of their recruitment, parties can use this strategy to send signals of ‘openness’ or ‘renewal’ to non-partisan and/or volatile voters (who would not have voted for the party’s core policy otherwise).

Overall, this strongly confirms that congruence is a strong asset for the large majority of candidates but the null and negative effects congruence in some cases – even though it

remains limited in proportions of candidates studied – proved that personalization prevails over cohesion when candidates demonstrate a larger vote-earning capacity.

## **Conclusion**

In their race towards office, political parties must make decisive choices about candidate selection' criteria. While parties need candidates capable of attracting voters, they furthermore need political personal with homogenous preferences to implement their policy goals. Without electoral gains, no chance of accessing office; and without party unity, fewer prospects for implementing public policies. By screening their candidates during selection processes, parties have the ability to influence both dimensions using vote-seeking and office-seeking strategies. There is, however, quasi inevitable intra-party tensions as the 'perfect' list of candidates does not exist: some candidates are very popular but less congruent and vice-and-versa. Balancing distinct profiles on the lists, parties seek to take the 'best of the two worlds': they try and draft a list capable of winning elections but also implementing policy goals once in office. In context of personalization, this tension is arguably enhanced. Political parties respond to voters' behavior – making increasingly judgement on individuals instead of issues or ideology – which would result in vote-seeking strategy prevailing over office-seeking strategy.

The consequences of personalization of politics raised, therefore, critical normative question for the functioning of parties in legislature and our broader democratic systems. However, in this paper we argued that the normative implication of the literature on the personalization thesis is more often assumed, than empirically tested. In line with previous authors (Adam and Meier 2010; Karvonen 2007). We argue that increased candidate-centered campaign (producing vote-seeking strategy) does not necessarily lead to less emphasis on issues and ideology in the party's selection criteria (policy-seeking strategy). In other words, this no a zero sum-game and personalization rather interact with former parties' strategies (Adam and Meier 2010; Karvonen 2007).

To address this gap in the literature, we tested two hypotheses on the probability of candidates to be selected on realistic positions at the 2014 Belgian elections. The latter offers a heuristic interesting case considering the wide-spread use of preferential votes, and the strong party competition in the two Belgian party systems. Furthermore, our innovative use of three distinct datasets allowed us to develop a fine-grained measure of candidate-party congruence. Our descriptive statistics, firstly, show that the typical median Belgian candidate is substantially congruent with 75 percent of convergence on no less than 30 policy issues. Although we do not possess previous measurements from past elections to benchmark this percentage, this already

indicates that parties do pay attention to policy preference when drafting lists. There is however a substantial variance between candidates which allowed us to test how a candidate's vote-earning interact with this criterion.

Our first hypothesis was validated showing that a candidates' popularity unmistakably increased his/her probability to be selected on realistic positions (i.e. the one that virtually give automatic access to parliamentary office). However, our results show the least congruent aspirants will only be listed high on the list if they display a strong vote-earning capacity. Our second hypotheses give, on the opposite, more empirical support to the personalization thesis: although congruence matters for most candidates (two thirds of them), it does not make any difference to be – more or less – congruent as long as candidates bring back vote the list (one quarter of all candidates studied). In some extreme cases (7.5 percent of all candidates), parties even seem to recruit purposively candidates that are systematically less in line with party's main ideological stances but who are vote-earning "machines". Those candidates are capable of attracting voters that would not have voted for the party's main ideological stances otherwise. Overall, this proves that vote-seeking strategy matters but highly depend on existing policy-seeking strategy. It furthermore demonstrates that parties use both strategies as a trade-off to balance their lists, even though personalization tends to prevail in some specific cases.

Overall, even though our empirical findings are based on a single case, this paper contributes on two dimensions to the existing literature. On the one hand, fine measurement of candidate-congruence show that office-seeking strategy is an important criterion in candidate selection processes. Using party leadership surveys (increasingly developed in the framework of VAA in various countries) – and associated to existing Comparative candidate surveys – scholars of legislative studies and political parties could use more sophisticated and reliable indicator than the ones currently being used (see debates in Andeweg and Thomassen 2010; Ceron 2015). In some countries, we have the necessary data at our fingertips. This would allow us to replicate results on a cross-sectional and cross-longitudinal basis in the future. On the other hand, our results have important implications for the functioning of parties, legislatures and the broader democratic governanc. Our results presents a positive account of the personalization thesis of politics: although it can marginally affect party cohesion, parties overall take the 'best of the two worlds' balancing their lists. Far from vanishing the saliency of issues in politics, personalization of elections allows parties to draft cohesive lists. This has the potentially to keep voters, candidates and parties connected in the representation process.

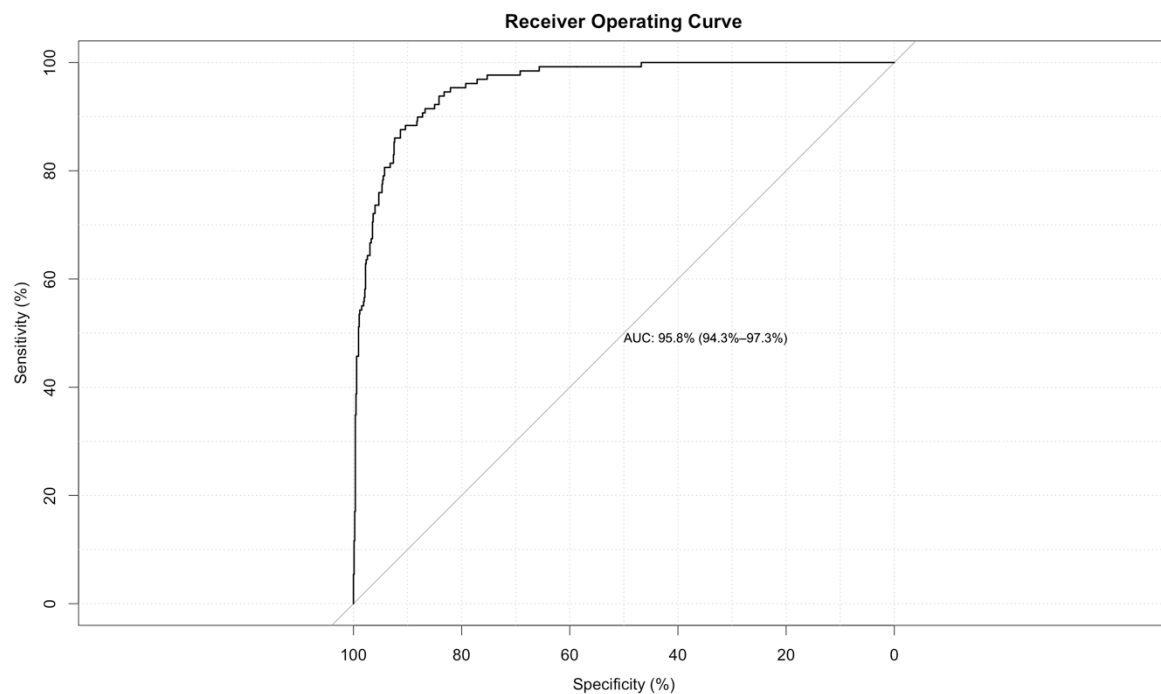
Overall, this proves that vote-seeking strategy matters but highly depend on policy-seeking strategy. It furthermore demonstrates that parties use both strategies as a trade-off to balance their lists, even though personalization tends to prevail for about one third of the candidates analysed. The results call for a more positive normative account of the personalization thesis of politics. Although it can marginally affect party cohesion, parties overall take the ‘best of the two worlds’ balancing their tickets. This has the potentially to keep voters, candidates and parties connected in the representation process.

## Appendixes

**Table 4.** Illustrative distribution of preferential votes in case of high (List A) and low (List B) concentration of votes between candidates.

<b>List A</b>		<b>List B</b>	
Candidates	Percentage of pref. votes by candidate	Candidates	Percentage of pref. votes by candidate
Candidate 1	37%	Candidate 1	18%
Candidate 2	27%	Candidate 2	13%
Candidate 3	10%	Candidate 3	11%
Candidate 4	5%	Candidate 4	9%
Candidate 5	4%	Candidate 5	10%
Candidate 6	5%	Candidate 6	10%
Candidate 7	6%	Candidate 7	8%
Candidate 8	3%	Candidate 8	8%
Candidate 9	1%	Candidate 9	6%
Candidate 10	2%	Candidate 10	7%

**Figure 6.** Model fit of logistic regression (2014)



*Note:* ROC and AUC estimated based on logistic regression (2014) from table X. AUC value can be interpreted as follows:  $AUC \leq 0.5$  useless ;  $0.7 \leq AUC < 0.8$  acceptable ;  $0.8 \leq AUC < 0.9$  excellent;  $AUC \geq 0.9$  outstanding.  $AUC \geq 0.9$  occurs rarely as this requires almost complete separation/ perfect classification.



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