Second-order electoral personalization. Intra-party preference voting in Belgium and the Netherlands

Nagtzaam, M.A.M.

1 Introduction

1.1 The personalization of politics

In a chapter entitled *The Personalization of Politics* in the Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior, McAllister (2007, p. 571) starts by stating that "in a trend that has been shared by all of the liberal democracies, politics has become increasingly personalized". However, not everyone would agree with this statement. There is no consensus on the existence and the degree of the personalization of politics. As Karvonen (2010, p. 106) puts it in the reflections of his comparative study on personalization of politics: "The kind of mixed results that this study has presented easily provokes the perennial debate about whether the glass is half empty or half full. Surely, both believers and sceptics will find evidence to support their views". But apart from whether you think of the glass as half empty or half full (or possibly even completely empty or completely full), no one would deny that the personalization of politics is a topic that receives a lot of attention in the media, in politics itself as well as in the academic world.

The basic assumption of the personalization hypothesis "is the notion that individual political actors have become more prominent at the expense of parties and collective identities" (Karvonen, 2010, p. 4). Different factors have been used to explain this process of personalization in the academic literature. Broadly speaking, it is argued that two developments have contributed to the personalization of politics: the weakened relationship between voters and parties and a process of 'mediatization' (Van Aelst et al., 2012). Dalton et al. (2002) argue that because of weaker ties between voters and parties, voters have to base their voting decisions on something else. One of the factors that have become more important is the candidate, resulting in more 'candidate-centred politics'. The mediatization process can be traced back to the introduction of television and is a process in which political actors are increasingly dependent on mass media. The way the mass media report on politics has a great influence on politics itself, for example, by depicting elections as 'horse-races' and focusing on the party leaders instead of the parties themselves (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999).

Political personalization has been studied in relation to institutions (e.g. Rahat & Sheafer, 2007), the media (e.g. Langer, 2007), governments (Hazan, 1996; Maddens & Fiers, 2004; Mughan, 1993; Poguntke & Webb, 2005), and elections (Aarts et al., 2011).

When it comes to electoral personalization, the argument is that votes are increasingly being influenced by candidate evaluations and less by political parties in general. The study of electoral personalization primarily looks at the impact of party leaders' popularity on their parties' electoral fortunes (Aarts et al., 2011; McAllister, 2007; Wattenberg, 1991). For example, because of the importance of television, and the fact that mass media see political leaders as the embodiment of their parties, the influence of political leaders becomes more important. The political leader is the most important person in the

party and since he or she is so visible, he or she has a lot of influence on the party. This type of personalization has been referred to as first order personalization (Van Holsteyn & Andeweg, 2012, p. 163). In addition Van Holsteyn and Andeweg distinguish 'Second Order Personalization' (2012, p. 163): "a preference for an individual candidate having to do with that person [being] embedded in a prior choice for the candidate's party". Balmas et al. (2014, p. 37) make a distinction between centralized personalization and decentralized personalization, which relates to the distinction between first- and second-order personalization. "Centralized personalization implies that power flows upwards from the group (e.g. political party, cabinet) to a single leader (e.g. party leader, prime minister, president). (…) Decentralized personalization means that power flows downwards from the group to individual politicians who are not party or executive leaders (e.g. candidates, members of parliament, ministers)". I will study second-order personalization.

1.2 Second-order electoral personalization

For the Netherlands, Van Holsteyn and Andeweg estimate that personalization embedded within a prior party choice is more widespread than leader personalization at the expense of parties. In a counterfactual thought experiment they found that roughly half of the voters are pure party voters and 9 per cent pure person voters. For the other 39 per cent "the choice of an individual politician within their party of preference clearly matters: (…) [they] indicate support for an individual politician, as long as (s)he does not leave their preferred party" (Van Holsteyn & Andeweg, 2010, p. 633). Other studies show that in the context of a single transferable vote system, compared to the findings of Van Holsteyn and Andeweg, an even larger number of voters consider the person to be more important than the party, although overall the party is still more important for voters (Curtice & Marsh, 2008; Marsh, 2007). Van Holsteyn and Andeweg (2010, p. 633) argue that "there is no reason to suspect that [their results show] a uniquely Dutch phenomenon, and to the extent that it can also be found elsewhere, personalization-within-parties considerably amends our understanding of personalization in politics".

In addition to the tension between first- and second-order electoral personalization (i.e. whether the process of personalization has an impact specifically on leaders of parties or on all candidates within a party), there is also a tension between the party and personal dimension of representation (J.M. Colomer, 2011). Results of elections, especially in proportional systems, are mostly discussed in terms of party competition. For example, in media coverage around elections constant updates on opinion polls predicting the election results for the parties are shown. The candidates who will enter parliament after the elections are of less interest.

Some studies in the 1980s already noticed this gap in the literature and paid attention to the intraparty dimension of electoral systems (Katz, 1980, 1985, 1986; Marsh, 1985). These studies focused mainly on a classification of preference voting systems and

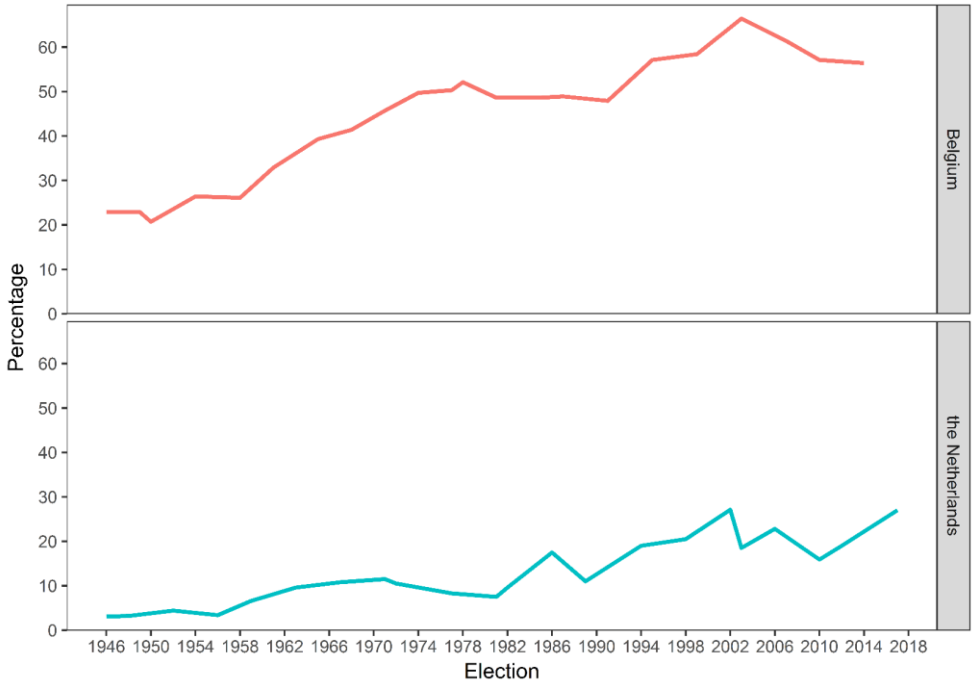
argued for greater attention to this phenomenon. In addition, the importance of other candidates was recognized (Manin, 1997). However, three decades later progress was limited: the personal dimension is still largely 'neglected' (J.M. Colomer, 2011) and candidates still receive "much less attention" (Karvonen, 2010, p. 41).

However, comparative research on preference voting is complicated, because electoral systems are not easily compared and because the phenomenon of voting for candidates differs per electoral system. There is not even consensus in the literature on how this phenomenon – voting for an individual candidate in an electoral system where voters have the opportunity to choose between different candidates from the same list - should be called. Terms which are used are "personal voting", "person voting", "preference vote", "intraparty choice" (see Karvonen, 2004) or "intraparty preference voting" (Katz, 1986). I will use the term 'preference vote' in this study[1].

Research on preference voting is relevant for various reasons. First, in terms of the personalization debate one could argue that if politics indeed has become more personalized, it is reasonable to think this also has an effect on other candidates than party leaders. If individual persons become more important, one may expect that intra-party competition also becomes more important, because voters do not only base their vote on party ideology but also on characteristics of the candidates, i.e. *all* candidates. This is supported by findings of Karvonen (2010, p. 63), who argues that "in those countries where the possibility of choosing between individual candidates has existed for a long time, the relative importance of individual candidates seems to have increased". This trend is for example visible in the Netherlands and Belgium (see figure 1.1). In the Netherlands, voters can only vote for candidates. Therefore, only votes for candidates other than the first candidate on the list are usually considered to be preference votes. In Belgium, voters have the option to cast a list vote, and therefore all votes for candidates are considered to be preference votes. Until the 1980s the percentage of preference votes in the Netherlands often stayed below 10 per cent, whereas during the most recent elections this has fluctuated around 20 per cent, with a peak in 2002 of 27 per cent (Van Holsteyn & Andeweg, 2012). After a small drop in percentage after 2002, in the most recent elections of 2017 yet again 27 per cent of the Dutch voters cast a preference vote. In Belgium, a much larger percentage of voters cast a preference vote nowadays compared to previous decades, with a peak of preference votes in 2003, when almost 70 per cent of the voters cast a preference vote (André et al., 2012). In recent elections the number of preference votes dropped slightly below 60 per cent. However, the increase in the use of preference votes did not lead to a dramatic increase of candidates being elected out of list order, but this issue will be explored later on in this study.

[1] Arguably the term intraparty preference vote would be even better; to emphasize the fact that it is an *intra*party choice. This would fit the argument that voting for a candidate within a party is a result of a sequential decision process, namely to first choose the party and then choose the candidate after the choice for a party has been made. However, for readability I use the shorter term preference vote.

Figure 1.1 Levels of preference voting in Belgium and the Netherlands



Source: Van Holsteyn & Andeweg (2012) and own calculations (the Netherlands) and Wauters & Rodenbach (2014) (Belgium).

Second, preference voting determines (or might determine) which candidates are elected. Depending on the electoral system voters have more or less influence on which candidates are elected to parliament. A recent study shows that in many countries the formal weight of preference votes has increased (Renwick & Pilet, 2016), making it easier for candidates to be elected based on their own electoral performance. Preference votes therefore have an important function in representative democracy. While political parties still perform an important role when it comes to how voters are represented in parliament, a more direct link between voters and candidates might help to improve the representativeness of democracy. Although more candidate-centred electoral systems seem to have a negative influence on voter turnout (Söderlund, 2017), research has shown that allowing voters some intraparty choice has a positive influence on voter satisfaction with democracy, since "such systems promote a greater sense of fairness about election outcomes among citizens" (Farrell & McAllister, 2006, p. 742). If a voter has the option to vote for an individual candidate he or she trusts to be a good MP, this might benefit the idea of a representative democracy. In the Netherlands the constitution states that MPs can vote '*zonder last*' (in English: 'without burden'): an MP cannot be forced (directly) by either a party or a coalition agreement to vote in a certain way. The constitution thereby states the importance of the role of an individual MP. This privilege for an MP is furthermore

guaranteed by the fact that if an MP would be removed from a parliamentary party group, the MP can keep his seat in parliament as an independent MP. Despite this constitutional strong position of MPs, parties still have a large influence on which candidates are elected. Preference votes could help voters to choose certain candidates, thereby reinforcing the representativeness of parliament.

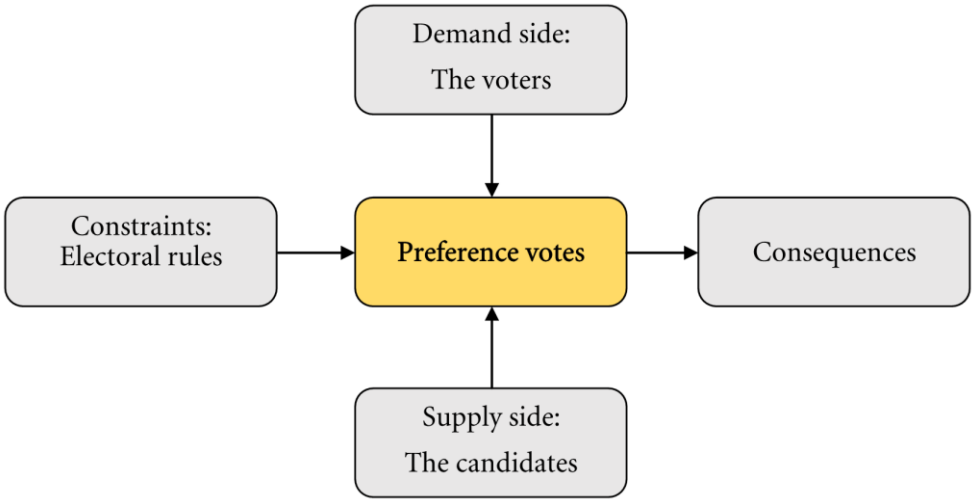
Third, preference votes might also have other consequences for the candidate, such as a better list position at the next election if the candidate performed well in terms of preference votes (André, Depauw, Shugart, et al., 2017; Crisp et al., 2013).

1.3 Research questions and overview of the book

The main research question of this book therefore is: what are the causes and consequences of preference voting? The existing literature is partly able to answer this question, but we do not know everything there is to know about preference voting yet. This study therefore is not an exhaustive study on preference voting, but a study that tries to build on what we already know about four different aspects of preference voting. I argue that there are three aspects that have an impact on the number of preference votes which are cast: constraints (i.e. electoral rules that dictate what voters can and cannot do), the demand side (the voters who cast a preference vote) and the supply side (the candidates who receive and compete for preference votes). In addition, preference votes might also have consequences for other factors. Figure 1.2 shows the relationship between these variables. To be clear, this figure is not included here to show a comprehensive causal model, but as an illustration of how the different aspects relate to each other. What the figure shows, in terms of causality, is that in three of the following chapters, preference votes will be the dependent variable and in one chapter (about the consequences) preference votes will be considered as the independent variable. In the remainder of this section the four different aspects will be introduced shortly. Chapter two, three, four and five all deal with one of these aspects, and these chapters all have their own theoretical and methodological foundation.

In **chapter 2** the constraints will be discussed. According to Marsh (1985, p. 370) "the most obvious incentive [to cast a preference vote] is the expectation that the preference vote will affect the allocation of seats". Only open preferential list systems - where preference votes determine which candidates are elected – have an effect that is this strong. There are many differences between electoral systems that allow preference voting, which makes comparative research on preference voting extremely complex (see for example Katz, 1986; Marsh, 1985; Van Erkel, 2017, p. 5; Van Holsteyn & Andeweg, 2012). What constitutes as a preference vote in one electoral system does not automatically constitute as a preference vote in another system. Electoral systems that allow preference voting share two important features. First, a voter can cast a vote for an individual candidate or several candidates and thereby influence which candidates are elected. Second, the total number of seats a party receives is based on the total number of votes for all candidates for that party

Figure 1.2 Overview of aspects discussed in the book



(Karvonen, 2011a). According to Karvonen (2011a) there are four dimensions of preferential list systems that influence preference voting. First, lists can be open or flexible. In an open list system the number of preference votes for a candidate is the only factor that determines which candidates are elected. In flexible list systems the order in which candidates are ranked on the list by their parties also influences which candidates are elected. Since preference votes have more impact in the former system, personal reputation is more important in these systems (Carey & Shugart, 1995, p. 421). Second, preference voting can be compulsory or optional. In some countries voters have the option to either cast a list vote or a preference vote. In these countries preference voting is optional: if a voter does not have a preference for a specific candidate or agrees with the order of the list determined by the party, he or she can simply cast a list vote, i.e. a vote not for a candidate but for the party. In other countries the option of the list vote is not available and therefore a voter must vote for a specific candidate. Third, a voter can have only one vote or more than one vote. According to Carey and Shugart (1995, p. 423) in systems where a voter can only cast a single vote, personal reputation is most valuable for an individual candidate[2]. The fourth dimension is whether there is a threshold for an individual candidate or not. Depending on the combination of these rules in a certain electoral system voters are

[2] Carey and Shugart (1995) also distinguish two other variables that have an influence on the value of personal reputation. These two are whether votes are pooled and district magnitude, but do not relate to Karvonen's dimensions. Personal reputation is less valuable in systems where votes are pooled, as is – by definition – the case in all preferential list systems, since in such a system the party also has an important influence on who and how many candidates get elected. The influence of district magnitude on the value of personal reputation depends on the other variables. In closed list systems the value of personal reputation declines as district magnitude increases, while in other systems the value of personal reputation increases while district magnitude increases (since there are more co-partisans to compete with).

constrained in their options to cast a preference vote. We do not know what the effects of these constrains are. For example, if a voter does not have the option to cast a list vote, and therefore has to vote for a candidate, we do not know what voters do when they do not have a candidate preference. Therefore, in the second chapter an experiment on the effects of variations in flexible list systems on preference votes will be presented. In this chapter I look at how the option to cast a list vote and the option to cast multiple preference votes influence the use of preference voting.

In **chapter 3** I look at the demand side of preference voting: the voter. In this chapter I focus on the question which voters cast a preference vote. Since studying preference voting is a relatively new field, an established set of explanations does not yet exist (Van Holsteyn & Andeweg, 2012, p. 172). However, André et al. (2012, 2013) provide a very useful framework for the analysis of which voters cast a preference vote. They distinguish three models that could explain preference voting. The first model is the resource model. The underlying idea of this model is that voters who have more resources, in terms of for example education or political knowledge, are more likely to cast a preference vote. The second model is the proximity model. This model is based on the idea that voters who had (direct or indirect) contact with a candidate are more likely to cast a preference vote. Finally, the identity model assumes that voters of underrepresented groups are more likely to cast a preference vote. In the third chapter I discuss these different sets of explanations in more detail. Furthermore, I will test these explanations in a different context, namely at the national level. While the models of André et al seem very promising in helping to explain preference voting, they are mainly tested at the local level elections in Belgium. Seeing that they would also have explanatory power at the national level and in different countries would increase their value. In addition, I add one explanation for preference voting. There is a tendency in the literature on voting behaviour to primarily look at positive motivations for a vote (Catt, 1996), in other words: it is assumed that a vote is cast to support the party or candidate for which the vote was cast. In chapter 3 I show that this is not always the case. Sometimes negative motivations could also play a role in casting a preference vote. More specifically I argue that some voters cast a vote for a candidate, not as a support for that candidate but because they do not want to support another candidate.

The third and last aspect that influences preference voting is discussed in **chapter 4**: the supply side. In this chapter I focus on the question of what determines the electoral success of candidates. Different studies have paid attention to this question (see for example Karvonen, 2011b; Maddens et al., 2006, 2007, 2010; Van Holsteyn & Andeweg, 2012; Wauters et al., 2010), especially the study of Van Erkel (2017) delves into this topic in great detail. He studies different factors that influence the electoral success of candidates, ranging from individual characteristics of the candidate, media and campaign factors and factors relating to the party such as the ballot position of the candidate. My main contribution to the literature on preference voting is that I consider the role of ideological differences between candidates of the same party and analyse whether they influence the electoral

success of candidates.

These three chapters should give an answer to the first part of the main research question (what are the causes of preference voting). **Chapter 5** deals with the second part of the main research question (what are the consequences of preference voting). Within the field of preference voting this area has received the least attention. There are only a few studies which look at the impact of preference voting on the political career of candidates (André, Depauw, Shugart, et al., 2017; Crisp et al., 2013; Folke et al., 2016). These studies suggest that there is an effect of preference voting on list position for the next election or on promotions to better political functions. In chapter 5 I argue that preference votes can have an influence in three different areas. First, I will discuss the most direct effect: whether preference votes actually help candidates to become elected. The other two effects are less direct, and cover two questions. First, whether the legislative behaviour of a candidate elected through preference votes is different from a candidate who is elected solely on the basis of the strength of his or her party? And second, what are the consequences of preference votes for the political career of a candidate? These questions are important, in the first place because so far it has not been clear whether preference votes have an effect beyond the outcome of the election. Moreover, if the findings indeed show that preference votes have an effect on the political career and/or legislative behaviour of individual candidates, this would give preference voting more weight beyond 'simply' who gets elected. In addition, this would underline the relevance of research on preference voting.

The advantage of this approach is that it combines many relevant aspects of preference voting, both in terms of causes and consequences. While some studies on preference votes combined two of the aspects discussed above (e.g. Van Erkel, 2017; Van Holsteyn & Andeweg, 2012), most studies focus on only one of the aspects. Bringing together these four aspects in the **conclusion** of this dissertation will be an important contribution of this study, because it gives the opportunity to connect these aspects and therefore give a more complete overview of the phenomenon of preference voting.

One important limitation of this study has to be mentioned. While I study both voters and candidates, it was not possible to link the two directly. For the Netherlands, which is one of my cases (see section 1.4), the data needed for that purpose is not available. While data is available to study which voters cast a preference vote and official records show the number of preference votes candidates receive, there is no data that provides the information to connect them. In other words, election studies in the Netherlands do not include the question 'for which candidate did you vote?' This is a limitation, because linking the two would give additional insight in the phenomenon. However, studying the two separately also provides new and valuable insights.

1.4 Case selection

Second-order personalization will be studied in two countries: Belgium and the

Netherlands[3]. According to Andeweg and Van Holsteyn (2011, p. 23) the Netherlands is "an ideal case to study second order personalization as only votes for candidates other than the candidate leading the list (…) are regarded as preference votes". Furthermore, the electoral system of the Netherlands is a flexible list system; the order in which candidates are ranked by the political parties also has an influence on which candidates are elected. Out of all systems where preference voting is allowed, a flexible list system is therefore a least-likely case for the manifestation of second-order personalization. There are incentives for a candidate to pursue a personal reputation, but these are very low since it is normally the party that influences which candidates are elected. Findings for systems that use a flexible list system are likely to be applicable to electoral systems where the incentive for intraparty competition are stronger.

Belgium is also often seen as an ideal case to study preference voting (see for example Van Erkel, 2017). The Belgian electoral system has an important advantage compared to the Netherlands for studying second-order electoral personalization. While in the Netherlands voters can only cast a vote for a candidate, in Belgium voters also have the opportunity to cast a party vote. In a sense, this makes a candidate vote in Belgium more valuable. In the Netherlands a vote for a candidate might also be a party vote. The Netherlands and Belgium therefore provide excellent case studies. This is especially the case when both countries are studied, because when it comes to preference voting the countries differ on important aspects relating to the electoral system. At the same time both countries have very similar political systems, allowing studying some of the consequences of these different aspects of the electoral system. I will turn to these differences relating to preference voting later on, but I will first reflect on the similarities of the two countries.

Belgium and the Netherlands share a history together: the current Belgian state emerged in 1830 when it separated from the Netherlands and in 1839 the terms of agreement were accepted by the Netherlands (Deschouwer, 2009, pp. 16–19). The political systems of Belgium and the Netherlands have many similarities. Both have a multi-party system with parties from the same party families present: Christian democrats, socialists, greens, liberals and right-wing populists. In addition, Belgium also has a regionalist party family (Andeweg & Irwin, 2009, pp. 56–66; Deschouwer, 2009, p. 92). These parties compete with each other in electoral systems that are based on the principle of proportional representation (Andeweg & Irwin, 2009, p. 95; Deschouwer, 2009, p. 106) and that can be classified as a flexible list system. Both the Netherlands and Belgium have a bicameral system, with a lower house (in the Netherlands called the *Tweede Kamer* and in Belgium

[3] I study second-order personalization at the national level. This does not mean that second-order personalization is only relevant at the national level (André et al., 2013; Hessing, 1985). However, the dynamics of second-order personalization at the local and national level are likely to be very different. An example of this is shown by Thijssen et al. (2017), who show that some explanations for preference voting, especially related to the proximity model, have a slightly different influence on local than on national elections. Therefore, the study of second-order personalization at the local level would deserve a study on its own.

called the *Chambre des représentants* / *Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers*) that consists of 150 members. In both countries no single party comes close to an absolute majority of seats, resulting in coalition governments consisting of multiple parties, which often take office after a long formation process.

There are also important differences between Belgium and the Netherlands. The most striking difference is the fact that Belgium is a federal state. The Belgian federal state is quite a complex one, with a mix of regions and language communities. The federation is a result of compromises and is "a rather special and unusual" one (Deschouwer, 2009, p. 42 see pp. 41-72 for more about this issue). Furthermore, there are differences related to the electoral systems of both countries. In Belgium, voting is compulsory (Deschouwer, 2009, p. 110), while in the Netherlands compulsory voting was abolished in 1970 (Andeweg & Irwin, 2009, p. 104). Another important difference is that in the Netherlands the country can be considered as a single electoral district for the distribution of seats. There are districts, but they perform an administrative function (Andeweg & Irwin, 2009, p. 96). However, in Belgium there are 11 districts (Deschouwer, 2009, p. 107). When it comes to preference voting there are also differences between Belgium and the Netherlands. There are two important differences in this regard: the list vote and the option to cast multiple preference votes. In the Netherlands voters are obliged to vote for a single candidate, while in Belgium voters may choose between casting a list vote or one or multiple preference vote(s). In the following two sections the Belgian and Dutch electoral system will be discussed in more detail.

1.4.1 The Belgian electoral system

The electoral system of Belgium is based on proportional representation. For the elections of the 150 members of the Chamber of Representatives the country is divided into 11 districts (*kieskringen*). These districts have a district magnitude ranging from 4 to 24[4]. At the district level a 5 per cent threshold exists. Within the districts seats are distributed using the D'Hondt method (De Winter, 2005, pp. 420–421). Voting in Belgium is compulsory, although there is no strict enforcement of this rule.

Belgian voters have two options when casting a vote: they can cast a list vote or a preference vote. With a list vote a voter endorses the order in which the candidates are ranked on the party list. With a preference vote they can support one or several candidate(s) from a party. Belgian voters can cast preference votes for multiple candidates, as long as all candidates for which they cast a vote belong to the same party (De Winter, 2005, p. 421). For the distribution of seats between parties casting a list vote or a preference vote has no effect: they all count as a single vote for a party. However, the difference has an effect on how seats are allocated to candidates.

[4] In the period analysed in this dissertation (2003-2014), the number of districts remained constant. However, in 2014 the districts Brussel-Halle-Vilvoorde and Leuven were abolished, and two new districts (Brussel-Hoofdstad and Vlaams-Brabant) were created.

Political parties present lists with two types of candidates: effective candidates and successor candidates. Only the effective candidates can be elected directly. The list of successor candidates is used if an elected candidate gives up his or her seat in parliament. The list with effective candidates has a maximum length of the number of candidates that can be elected in the district in which the list is presented. The list with successor candidates has a maximum length of half of the district size, with a minimum of six candidates. In addition to the length of the list, the electoral law also prescribes that each list of candidates should contain an equal number of male and female candidates (or that the maximum difference may be 1, in case of an uneven number of candidates). In addition, the first two candidates on a list may not have the same gender[5].

As an example of how seats are distributed within a party the election result of the PS in the district of Luik (Liège) (for the elections of 2014) are shown (see table 1.1). In the upper part the number of votes for the party is presented, broken down into the type of vote that was cast. In the second part the number of preference votes for all (effective) candidates are shown. The total number of votes cast for this party is 187,897 and the party won 5 seats. This means that a candidate needs 187,897 / 6 (= number of seats + 1) = 31,317 votes in order to get elected.

Half of the ballots that confirm the list order (of the effective candidates) are available to transfer to the candidates who did not reach the threshold[6]. There were 65,357 ballots with only a list vote and 9,367 ballots with only preference votes for successor candidates (i.e. by not voting for one of the effective candidates, they confirm the ranking of effective candidates): a total of 74,724 ballots. Thus, there are 37,362 votes available to transfer to effective candidates. These votes are transferred to candidates who need extra votes in order to reach the threshold, based on their list position. Since the first candidate already received enough votes, the first candidate on the list who benefits from the votes to be transferred is Julie Fernandez Fernandez. She received 15,959 preference votes; 15,358 short to reach the threshold (see column I). Thus, 15,358 votes are added to her votes, bringing her total number of votes to exactly the threshold (column II). 22,004 votes remain available (see column III) to transfer to other candidates. These votes will be transferred in the same way, until they are exhausted. The figures in column II show the number of votes for each candidate after adding the votes available for transfer. Based on these votes candidates are elected in the order of the number of preference votes (including the added list votes) they received. If two candidates have an equal number of votes, the list position is decisive[7].

[5] This rule was introduced in 2003, but only became fully effective in 2006. In 2003, as a transition rule it was stated that the first three candidates on the list should not be of the same gender.

[6] Before 2003 all votes that confirm the list order were available for distribution to the top candidates. In order to give voters more influence over which candidates are elected, this was changed in 2003 to half the votes that confirm the list order.

[7] The order in which the successor candidates are ranked is not discussed here. The method resembles the way the effective candidates are ranked, but is not explicitly discussed here because the successor candidates are not included in the analyses in this book.

Table 1.1 Example of distribution of seats within a party (Belgium)

Ballots with only a list vote	65,357	
Ballots with only preference votes for effective candidates	88,821	
Ballots with both preference votes for effective and successor candidates	24,352	
Ballots with only preference votes for successor candidates	9,367	+
Total number of votes for party	187,897	

Pos.	Candidate	Votes	I	II	III	IV
1	DEMEYER Willy	45,590	0	45,590	37,362	1
2	FERNANDEZ FERNANDEZ Julie	15,959	15,358	31,317	22,004	2
3	MATHOT Alain	20,523	10,794	31,317	11,210	3
4	FREDERIC André	11,242	11,210	22,452	0	5
5	LACROIX Christophe	15,628	0	15,628	0	
6	DUBOIS Nathalie	8,096	0	8,096	0	
7	SIMON Gil	7,546	0	7,546	0	
8	FAGNANT Carine	5,783	0	5,783	0	
9	CROCHET Pierre	5,734	0	5,734	0	
10	OMARI MWAYUMA Marie-Jeanne	5,166	0	5,166	0	
11	GOBLET Cécilia	5,747	0	5,747	0	
12	DELLEUZE Catherine	5,377	0	5,377	0	
13	JARFI Hind	5,504	0	5,504	0	
14	HAPPART Grégory	6,760	0	6,760	0	
15	DAERDEN Frédéric	30,484	0	30,484	0	4

I Number of list votes transferred to candidate in order to reach threshold.
II Number of votes after adding list votes.
III Number of list votes available to transfer to candidates lower on the list.
IV Order in which candidates are elected.

1.4.2 The Dutch electoral system

The Dutch electoral system is also based on the idea of proportional representation. In fact, the electoral system in the Netherlands can be considered as one of the most proportional electoral systems in the world.

Voters in the Netherlands can vote for a specific candidate, not for a party as such. According to Andeweg (2005, p. 494): "voters who have a preference for a party but not for any particular candidate usually cast their vote for the first candidate on the list, the so-called 'list-puller' (lijsttrekker). (…) All votes for other candidates lower on the list are known as preference votes (voorkeurstemmen), as they indicate a preference for a particular candidate over all other candidates on the list". However, as we shall see, votes for a candidate are primarily treated as votes for the party of that candidate.

The country is divided into 20 electoral districts (*kieskringen*)[8]. Political parties can present lists of candidates in each district. These lists may have a maximum of 50 candidates, or 80 if the party received more than 15 seats in the previous election[9] (Jacobs, 2018). Parties do not have to participate in each district: they can also present a list in only one or a few districts. In addition, a party can present different lists in different districts, but parties can also decide to present the same list in all districts. This has a few implications. Some parties may choose to put some 'regional' candidates on a list in a specific district. A party that participates in all districts and is able to put 30 candidates on all district lists, may for example choose to present the same top 25 candidates in all districts, but put different candidates on positions 26 to 30 in each district. This gives the party the advantage to present more candidates nationwide than the maximum would be if in all districts the exact same list would be presented, since the party can now present 25 + 5 * 20 = 125 candidates. In addition, a party may also vary the order in which they present their candidates in all districts.

Effectively, the country is treated as a single district when it comes to the distribution of seats to parties. The districts therefore primarily serve administrative purposes. To determine the number of seats for each party, first the total number of votes for all parties are counted. The total number of votes for a party are counted by adding up the votes for all candidates from a specific party. All party district lists are considered to be a single party. However, parties are allowed to combine all district lists at the national level. In that case all votes at the district level are combined into a national vote, and all district lists are considered to be a single party[10]. All parties that compete in more than one district make use of this option, since it increases the chance of winning more seats.

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[8] Before 2010 there were 19 districts.

[9] Before the election of 2010 the maximum number of candidates on a list was 30, or twice the number of seats obtained in the previous election with a maximum of 80 candidates for parties that received more than 15 seats in the previous election (Andeweg, 2005, p. 496).

[10] Parties that present the exact same list in all districts are automatically considered to be a single national party by the electoral law.

Based on the total number of (valid) votes at the national level, the electoral quota is calculated: the number of votes cast, divided by the number of seats of the Second Chamber (150). Since the only legal threshold to enter parliament is this electoral quota, a party that receives at least 0.67 per cent (100 per cent / 150 seats) of the votes, is guaranteed a seat. If a party crossed the threshold, the party receives a seat for each time it (fully) obtained the electoral quota. In practice, this will never lead to the full allocation of all 150 seats. The seats that remain after this process are allocated according to the D'Hondt system (Andeweg, 2005, p. 948)[11].

The distribution of seats within a party is done based on the order in which candidates appear on the list[12]. Only if a candidate exceeds the individual threshold he or she is elected regardless of his or her list position. In 1998 the threshold for an individual candidate to be elected out of list order was lowered to 25 per cent of the electoral quota. Before the elections of 1998 this threshold was 50 per cent of the electoral quota (Andeweg, 2005, p. 494). In practice, this means that a candidate needs somewhere around 15,000 to 17,000 votes to be elected on the basis of preference votes.

1.4.3 Period of analysis

For the Netherlands the study covers the period between 1998 and 2017, in which a total of 7 national parliamentary elections[13] were held. For Belgium the period of analysis runs from 2003 until 2014, in which a total of 4 national elections were held[14]. The reason to choose these periods is that for both countries the electoral rules with regard to preference voting are stable for this period. As discussed in the previous sections, in the Netherlands, since 1998 the threshold for individual candidates to be elected with preference votes is 25 per cent of the threshold for parties (the individual threshold was 50 per cent before 1998) (Renwick & Pilet, 2016, p. 136). In Belgium since the elections of 2003 the weight of the list vote is reduced: only half of the list votes are assigned to the (top) candidates on the list, instead of all (Renwick & Pilet, 2016, p. 139). In both countries these changes result in a higher chance for candidates to be elected out of list order (i.e. to be elected based on their own electoral performance, instead of based on the success of the party).

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[11] Until the elections of 2017 parties were allowed to participate in the elections as an alliance. For the distribution of seats the parties of an alliance were considered to be one party. Since the remainder seats are distributed according to the D'Hondt system, which favors larger parties, this increased the chances of an alliance for obtaining a 'remainder seat'.

[12] Formally, seats are distributed to party *district* lists. This means that a party receives a number of seats in each district and top ranked candidates in that districts are elected. If a candidate is elected in multiple districts, the candidate is elected in the district in which he or she received most votes. If in another district the candidate would also be considered elected, his or her seat would go to the next candidate on the list.

[13] Unless stated otherwise, the reader may assume that if elections are discussed in this book, election refers to the elections for the *Tweede Kamer* (with regard to the Netherlands) or the *Chambre des représentants / Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers* (with regard to Belgium).

[14] Appendix A.2 (page 156) contains some additional information about the period of analysis for both countries. The appendix shows all elections and all legislative periods that are included in the analyses in the coming chapters.